



Photo courtesy of University Archives

The improvements included relaxed regulations, better sanitary conditions and less solitary confinement.

The prisoners traditionally had been treated better by their captors during Christmas. Punishments were relaxed around mid-December of each year.

During Christmas 1966, the POWs were given material to make a crude Christmas tree, and several prisoners were allowed to sing songs on a tape.

On Christmas Eve, the prisoners were taken in turns to a room in which they were allowed to admire the tree and listen to the tape of some prisoners singing. One of those singers was Ray, who sang "Puff, the Magic Dragon."

In early 1969, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia organized a letter-writing campaign among several hundred families. The league flooded the North Vietnamese delegation at the Paris Peace Talks with telegraphic inquiries about the prisoners and missing men.

The league also sent letters and packages to the prisoners and publicized their plight among the American media.

Daughtrey said, "Our treatment changed drastically after they (the league) started publicizing our plight."

Ray, Blevins and Meyer also said they think the activities of the National League of Families made a noticeable difference in their treatment.

Families were allowed to send packages every two months and letters twice a month. Starting about 1965, prisoners were allowed to send one letter every two months. Letters were limited to six lines — going and coming.

How many letters and packages actually got to the prisoners is unknown.

Finally, in late January 1973, the prisoners learned that a peace agreement had been signed in Paris on Jan. 28.

The increased improvement in the treatment of the prisoners peaked Feb. 11, 1973, when the North Vietnamese served an eight-turkey dinner to the near 200 prisoners and issued everyone new clothing.

On the morning of Feb. 12, the first group of prisoners was taken by bus to the Gia Lam Airport and turned over to American authorities.

Daughtrey and Ray were among that first group of prisoners released Feb. 12, and Blevins and Meyer were released March 4.

Daughtrey, wearing braces on both his arms, was greeted by a crowd of about 500 well-wishers when he arrived in Colorado Springs, Colo., on March 5.



Photo courtesy of Texas Aggie

He was met by his family and now ex-wife. His current wife was one of the originators of the National League of Families.

Daughtrey, who was active in the Corps and intramurals while at A&M, returned to school at the University of New Mexico. He earned a computer engineering degree in 1975.

He now lives in Albuquerque, N.M., and works as an engineer for a major corporation.

Ray was honored March 4, 1973 in Conroe as a crowd of about 3,500 people packed the local high school stadium, waving American flags and holding up banners. At the ceremony, Ray was given a new Memorial Student Center leadership watch and a Class of '63 ring to replace those taken when he was captured in North Vietnam.

As a senior at A&M, Ray was a 2nd Wing executive officer in the Corps and was named Distinguished Student and Distinguished Air Force Cadet. He was active in the Student Conference on National Affairs and the Student Senate. He was also president of the MSC Council.

Ray, now a colonel in the U.S. Air Force, works for the Office of the Air Attache in the U.S. Embassy in Rome.

Blevins celebrated his release and his 34th birthday on March 7, 1973 at Hickman Air Force Base, Hawaii. He was reunited with his family at Wilford Hall USAF Medical Center in San Antonio.

Blevins, now living in Richardson, was active in the Corps and the Aggie Band. He earned a degree in mechanical engineering. He now works for a utilities company in Dallas.

Meyer, who lives in College Station, received a warm welcome from his wife when he arrived at Kelley Air Force Base on March 7, 1973.

He earned a degree in animal husbandry and was active in the Corps and the Saddle and Sirloin Club.

Meyer works for a local gas company.

After the four men returned to their families and regular life, they faced the problems of acquainting themselves with the cultural trends that had taken place during their absence, historical developments and, most of all, spending time with their families and friends.

Daughtrey, Ray, Blevins and Meyer stay in touch with each other and other POWs through a group called "Nam POWs."

The group meets every two years at different locations around the United States and continues a special fellowship formed long ago in a place where companionship was the difference between life and death.★

Elementary school students greet Maj. Norlan Daughtrey (left). Capt. James Ray (above) examines his new A&M senior ring. Maj. Al Meyer (below) is welcomed home by his wife.



Photo courtesy of Texas Aggie