

"Any One of the Prisoners Would Have Been Willing to Die for His Country": an Analysis of Prisoners of War Survival Narratives

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“ANY ONE OF THE PRISONERS WOULD HAVE BEEN WILLING
TO DIE FOR HIS COUNTRY”:
AN ANALYSIS OF PRISONERS OF WAR
SURVIVAL NARRATIVES

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Abstract

“Any one of the prisoners would have been willing to die for his country” (Chesley 68). This quote summarizes the unbreakable will of heroic American Prisoners of War (POWs). This paper explores the personal narratives of four POWs who were held captive during World War II and four who were held during the Vietnam War and seeks to determine how their discourse affects American ideologies of war. By examining these narratives through narrative criticism and Kenneth Burke’s Rhetoric of Rebirth, this analysis shows how POWs reveal the sociopolitical environments of the countries in which they are held by structuring their experiences under a common framework. While the four narratives concerning World War II shed light on the differences in captivity between different countries in the Axis Powers, the narratives from the Vietnam War rationalize American involvement in the conflict. Even though the Vietnam War was one of the most misunderstood and unpopular events in American history, this paper shows how personal POW accounts can justify and garner support for American intervention into foreign affairs. These survival narratives reveal a depth of human strength in the face of horrible circumstances that becomes an inspiration for audiences of this discourse.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“Because in a way becoming a prisoner in North Vietnam was like being killed” (McCain 12). These words of Senator John S. McCain III succinctly summarize his experiences with captivity as an American Prisoner of War (POW). McCain is one of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers who were caught and imprisoned on foreign soil. The tormenting suffering that these POWs experienced violates basic human rights.

The personal accounts of repatriated POWs expose much about the anguish of their captivity. They are narratives of survival, revealing how prisoners were able endure their experiences and their strength of will that led them to make it through alive. They also provide an important sociopolitical perspective regarding American-fought conflicts. How do foreign enemies treat their prisoners, and what effect does that have on international policy? How does the nation garner support for military intervention?

This analysis investigates how POW narratives can provide answers to these questions. By examining the personal narratives of four prisoners held during World War II—Harold Brick, Russell Gunvalson, Harold G. Kurvers, and Gene Boyt—and four prisoners held during the Vietnam War—Donald Richard Peppard, Larry Chesley, Porter Halyburton, and John S. McCain III—through narrative criticism, this research highlights the appearance of four common trends. They all provide a description of captivity, a description of their captors, the coping mechanisms that they used to survive, and their patriotic sentiments to reveal indispensable perspectives regarding foreign enemies. It will also show how Kenneth Burke’s concept of Rhetoric of Rebirth plays a crucial role in the

narratives specific to the Vietnam War, as it helps structure an argument in favor of American involvement. The main focus of this research is directed toward POWs from World War II and the Vietnam War.

The second chapter of this thesis provides a review of the historical context of both World War II and the Vietnam War and specifically examines the roles that American POWs had in these conflicts. Chapter three analyzes previous scholarly research pertaining to the portrayal of these wars in the media and the psychological toll captivity has had on POWs. Chapter four outlines the methodology and describes each of the narratives used in the analysis. Chapter five is the first section of the analysis and examines how POW narratives describe captivity. Chapter six analyzes how they describe foreign captors, chapter seven analyzes the coping strategies used, and chapter eight analyzes how the narratives establish patriotic sentiments. Chapter nine is the final section of the analysis which examines the role that Kenneth Burke's Rhetoric of Rebirth plays in those narratives concerning the Vietnam War. Chapter ten describes the implications of this research, and chapter eleven provides a conclusion. Eight appendices that show the trends found in each narrative along with the specific page numbers from each artifact are also included at the end.

CHAPTER TWO

In the Trenches

“Does it take a special brand of courage just to endure, to survive?” (LaCroix 5)

Attitudes in the United States regarding returning war veterans have significantly shifted over the course of the century. World War I soldiers were hailed for ending European supremacy and affirming America’s position as a global authority, even though they returned to a country plagued by a new strain of influenza. Veterans of the Vietnam War were disparaged for entering into a controversial and unfavorable conflict. And current soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are faced with a country that is disconnected and dissociated from the war abroad. But World War II soldiers were sent to fight a highly favorable war against belligerent and malevolent forces. A victory for the Allies, and consequently the United States, marked a victory for morality and righteousness over corrupt aggressions. Return from World War II was cause for great celebration.

World War II

World War II was the largest armed conflict in history, involving many of the world’s nations. Initial combat erupted largely as a result of the long string of events that occurred following the repercussions of the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles, signed June 1919, was one of the peace treaties ending World War I. It stipulated that a defeated Germany accept sole responsibility of the war, concede nearly 13% of its territory to surrounding nations, and make substantial reparation payments. As Germany struggled to adopt these provisions, other countries adapted to the terms of war by

launching massive unification campaigns. The Japanese Empire became increasingly militaristic and seized the puppet state of Manchukuo in eastern Inner Mongolia and Manchuria in 1931. After being condemned for this incursion, Japan pulled out of the League of Nations.

The end of the Russian Civil War in the early 1920s led to the formation of the Soviet Union under the pragmatic Vladimir Lenin. Following Lenin's death in 1924, his successor Joseph Stalin enacted a series of national reforms known as the Five-Year Plans that helped foster economic development under the guidelines of the Communist Party. In Italy, fascist dictator Benito Mussolini seized power with the promise to increase the Italian colonial empire in Africa. In October 1935, he led the country on a vicious and violent invasion of Ethiopia that ended with an annexation of the African nation in 1936.

After attempting to overthrow the German government in 1923, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Struggling to regain Germany's lost reputation and national esteem, Hitler immediately abolished a democratic government and violated the Treaty of Versailles to initiate a massive rearmament campaign.

As a response to the foreboding conflict occurring in Europe and Asia, the United States signed a series of Neutrality Acts in the 1930s. Supported by isolationists and non-interventionists, these acts severely limited America's participation in foreign conflicts. Yet as the United States maintained its neutral stance, post-war Europe and Asia began to disintegrate further into several armed conflicts and power struggles.

In 1937, Japan launched a German-supported campaign to invade all of China after the capture of Beijing in July and subsequently Nanjing in December. In early 1938,

Germany annexed Austria. Encouraged by the lack of global response to this act, Hitler led his country into Czechoslovakia; France and Britain conceded this territory. After Germany seized the entire country and split it into two separate states, France and Britain aligned together, promising support for Poland.

On September 1, 1939 Germany attacked Poland. Adhering to its former promise, France and Britain declared war on Germany. On September 17, the Soviet Union signed a truce with Japan and began its own invasion of Poland and continued with an invasion of Finland in November of the same year.

By 1940 the USSR and Germany entered into a non-aggression pact. Shortly after, Denmark and Norway were conquered by Germany, which continued its advances into France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium. In June, Italy also invaded France and declared war on the United Kingdom as well. France surrendered after twelve days and was divided into Italian and German occupation zones.

As tensions mounted in Europe, the United States still abided by its acts of neutrality. It continued to trade with the United Kingdom and increased the size of its navy, but the general public opposed any direct military intervention. By September 1940, the formation of the Axis Powers legitimized the union between Japan, Italy, and Germany and expanded in November with the inclusion of Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary.

In early 1941 the Germans launched an offensive attack on the Soviet Union to obtain strategic territory and eliminate the state as a military power. As Germany penetrated further into the USSR, Japan attempted to seize oil reserves from Indochina. The United States and United Kingdom responded to this attack with an oil embargo.

Japan planned to retaliate to these actions by taking over Southeast Asia's resources. To prevent intervention by either Britain or the United States, the Japanese launched an airstrike on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Within days, America dropped its neutral stance and declared war.

Japan continued its aggressions with attacks on Malaya, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma at the end of 1941. By 1942, the Japanese had captured an estimated 50,000¹ American prisoners through its encroachments of Southeast Asia. Those captured during this time in the Philippines experienced abhorrent treatment during the Bataan Death March.

In Europe, the Allies began to gain momentum by 1943 and by early 1944 the Soviet Union was able to expel the Germans from Leningrad. The Soviets were also able to force the Germans to relinquish the Ukraine. June 6, 1944 marked one of the major turning points of the war with the Allied D-Day invasion of northern France. Paris was soon liberated and German troops were forced to retreat into Western Europe. Allied advances throughout the year continue to result in the capitulations of territories by the Axis Powers. The Germans launched their final offensive on the Western Front in December 1944. Yet in April 1945, the Reichstag—the parliament of the German empire—was captured, indicating defeat of the Third Reich.

Throughout the war, Winston Churchill of Britain, Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, and President Roosevelt met several times to discuss the future of post-war Europe. However, Harry Truman succeeded Roosevelt after his untimely death in April 1945. Germany surrendered in May following Hitler's suicide. Yet Japan continued

¹ Sources estimate between 30,000 and 75,000 POWs participated in the Bataan Death March

fighting in northern Burma and Rangoon. In July the Allied forces demanded an unconditional surrender from the Japanese, but when the country renounced these terms, the United States decided to drop atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered several days later on August 15, 1945.

The conditions experienced by American POWs during World War II were completely dependent on the location of their captivity. Roughly 100,000 to 120,000 were imprisoned in German occupied lands and less than 3 percent of these POWs perished during their captivity. As a signatory of the Third Geneva Convention, Germany more or less abided by the provisions regulating the treatment of POWs. According to the PBS special, "American Experience", the rate of death for POWs in the Pacific theater during the war was 37% and 40 % for those held in the Philippines ("Bataan Rescue"). Yet for POWs in Germany, this statistic was only 1.2% ("Bataan Rescue"). While these experiences may not compare to the horrors of those held by the Japanese, historian Hal LaCroix remarks in his collection of POW stories from Nazi prison camps, "The heroic endurance of American POWs in Europe should be truthfully honored, and the truth is that in the bowels of the Nazi war machine they fought an unrelenting battle against brutality, dysentery, loneliness, and overwork....They fought it not knowing if they would be lined up the next day and shot as Hitler's revenge" (4).

On the other side of the globe, thousands of POWs held in the Philippines faced savage treatment from the Japanese during the 1942 Bataan Death March. In April, when General Edward King surrendered to Japan in the Philippines, an estimated 50,000 American and Filipino troops entered into hellish captivity. The march earned its name from the excruciating conditions the captors had to endure trekking over 86 miles of

thick-dusted roads from the Bataan Peninsula to Camp O'Donnell. En route, thousands died from dehydration, fatal wounds, starvation, and needless executions. Later reported as a war-crime, one *New York Times* article from January 28, 1944 said of the march, "The ghastly recital revealed beatings, allowing parched men to drink only from carabao wallow, crowding them into barbed-wire bullpens and horsewhipping some who picked up comrades who had collapsed from the terrible heat" (qtd. in Boyt xi). It has been estimated that between six and eleven thousand men did not survive the brutality of the march, which included torture, abuse, and murder.

While the location of captivity shaped each individual's experiences, the ability to survive to retell their story is what defines a POW. World War II involved many nations and combat occurred all over the globe. And, unlike the Vietnam War, American intervention was eventually received with strong public support. It is important to understand how different POW narratives structure distinct experiences and perceptions of the war.

The Vietnam War

In March 1945, after the conclusion of World War II, Japan seized power in Indochina and ousted the previous French Vichy government and its authority over the area. The Viet Minh army of North Vietnam and leader Ho Chi Minh quickly took control after Japan surrendered and helped proclaim the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) in the north. France tried to reestablish its position in the south but failed to create a reasonable agreement. By 1946, they were at war. Through the years, France's

position weakened while the DRVN's status as a powerful nationalist nation grew stronger.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 aimed at restoring peace in Indochina. Countries including the U.S., France, The People's Republic of China, the DRVN, and South Vietnam agreed to end the Franco-Viet Minh war with a cease fire, a complete partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel, the separation of the Viet Minh to the North and France to the South, and free elections to be held in the North in 1956. As these discussions of peace were occurring abroad, the U.S. was toughening its anti-communist stance at home.

The U.S. hoped that Ngo Dinh Diem's 1955 election as President of the Republic of Vietnam in the South would strengthen its influence in Vietnam. Initially friendly with the U.S., Diem soon launched oppressive and corrupt practices within the government. As a result, southern nationalists created the National Liberation Front, or Viet Cong, to retaliate against Diem and his regime. The Viet Cong utilized guerrilla warfare tactics in attempts to escalate conflict and overthrow the government. Conditions in the country rapidly deteriorated and Diem was eliminated in a coup in 1963.

President Kennedy was the first to introduce military advisors into Vietnam; by 1963 nearly 16,000 men were sent to support the South Vietnamese army against the increasing guerilla threat. His successor, President Johnson, introduced ground troops in 1965, changing the U.S.'s strategy from defensive to offensive. After the frustrating 1968 Tet Offensive, a campaign that attacked over 100 communist cities yet caused Johnson's to renounce his incumbency, military presence had heightened to 535,000. According to historians Stuart Rochester and Frederick Kiley in *Honor Bound: The History of*

American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973, “Johnson’s abdication reflected the growing conviction in Washington that a military victory in Vietnam was impossible.... Under Nixon, U.S. troops were gradually withdrawn, but intensive bombing of North Vietnam was resumed at intervals to maintain pressure of Hanoi for a settlement” (9). Nixon’s complex plans of de-escalation involved an expansive 1970 bombing campaign into neighboring Cambodia and Laos.

The experiences of American POWs during the Vietnam War are inextricably linked to the muddled sociopolitical history that enveloped the nation during that time. Unlike other wars with U.S. participation, the Vietnam War lasted more than the term of one president and without a rallying, deciding victory. Instead, the country had to bear a decade of national turmoil and anxiety. With looming feelings of defeat, the nation regressed into fear, polarization, and ultimate failure. Foreboding feelings were felt abroad too as captured soldiers also had to endure the torment of uncertainty. Pushed to their physical and emotional thresholds of pain, American POWs in Vietnam were unwillingly sucked into the legal and political complexities of war. Disturbing peace discussions, the sociopolitical controversy surrounding Vietnam kept POWs hostage in an unfamiliar, war-torn nation that persecuted its captives and used torture to conduct interrogations.

In January, 1973 both the U.S. and North Vietnam, along with South Vietnam and the Viet Cong agreed to sign peace accords. But by early spring, the terms for the repatriation of POWs had yet to be resolved. In a press conference held March 2, 1973, Nixon delineated his plans for POW release and troop withdrawal stating, “It is in our interests and we are doing everything that we can to get both parties, North and South, to

comply with the cease-fire, but as far as the POW's are concerned, the agreement clearly provides that in return for withdrawal, the POW's will be returned. We expect that agreement to be complied with" (Nixon "The President's News Conference"). Even though the bombings in Cambodia would continue until August and relations were still hostile with the communists, the U.S. did not intervene further. The war ended in an overall failed effort; the last acknowledged POW was released in 1975.

American POWs faced cruel conditions that were intensified by shifting international politics. President Johnson's evasion of an official declaration of war left POWs in legal limbo. The Vietnamese dismissed the 1949 Geneva Convention requirements that enforced the proper treatment of captured soldiers and instead opted to characterize them however they pleased. Thus, POWs were usually denied their established, humane privileges. "Cold War constraints, the apprehension over Soviet and Chinese interventions... also limited U.S. strategic options and encouraged a policy of 'graduated response' that held American prisoners hostage to the spasmodic and sometimes fickle shifts in Washington's prosecution of the war" (Rochester and Kiley 12).

In efforts to break POW resistance for pertinent information, the Vietnamese quickly established torture routines as standard procedures. American policies post-Korean War introduced a code of conduct for captured prisoners. They were to only release their name, rank, service number, and date of birth to enemy forces. Succumbing to torture and announcing any other information was equated with treason and was also perceived as dishonorable. Yet with torture techniques ranging from brutal beatings to onerous rope ties binding prisoners to stocks for days to monotonous repetitions of

Vietnamese maxims, it was impossible for soldiers to remain silent. In his book *M.I.A or Mythmaking in America* author H. Bruce Franklin wrote regarding the past conditions of believed POWs, “But while the belief in live POWs may allow some flicker of hope, it hardly offers comfort, for the missing men are imagined to be in a place much more like hell” (9).

The physical fragility of POWs was aggravated by the constant uncertainty over the status of their fate. The terms of their captivity were indefinite, which led to broken spirits and weakened morals. According to Franklin, a total of 771 soldiers were captured and interned during the Vietnam War. 658 were released back to U.S. military control and the remaining 113 died in captivity. “That they could triumph over such adversity was testimony not only to the Americans’ physical courage but also to their own strong traditions and the sense of purpose and their conviction that history was one their side, even as it seemed, for the moment, to be conspiring against them” (Franklin 13).

The POW narrative is an indispensable account of the experiences and conditions of surviving in an enemy camp. In his book, Franklin advocates for the study and analysis of these personal accounts. “But the disease can never be cured so long as we fail to confront the true tragedy of the missing in Vietnam. We certainly need a ‘full accounting’” (170). This argument is an important one: personal POW narratives provide an authenticity that cannot be achieved through government-released statistics and debriefing files.

Each international conflict involving the U.S. since World War II has created animosity on the home-front. The divisions between those in favor of particular wars and those opposed have severely separated American unity. POWs provide a new perspective

to the debate other than pro and anti-war, one in which soldiers who are held in captivity while fighting for the nation, are forced to endure unwarranted torture before being repatriated back to the U.S. An analysis of their discourse provides insights into the history and psychology of their experiences; it reveals common patterns concerning the descriptions of captivity and captors, similar coping mechanisms, and feelings of patriotism shared between the men.

CHAPTER THREE

Review of Literature

“Americans have a history of fascinated horror at captivity” (Costigliola 759).

Within the field of Communication, the scholarly research pertinent to this paper has been dedicated to examining the Vietnam War through film and press coverage. The majority of research pertaining specifically to POWs is found within sociological fields of study. Therefore, this review of literature is first directed at research from the Communication field, and then examines research of POWs under a sociological lens.

Even though research analyzing the personal narratives of POWs is sparse, a significant amount of scholars have examined the cinematic representations of soldiers fighting in international conflicts. Woodman’s analysis of the Vietnam War films *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Hamburger Hill* (1987) interprets American defeat in war. He suggests that these films justify America’s loss of victory by stereotyping the Vietnamese enemy as yellow-peril “super-soldiers” (Woodman 45). They cast the Asian enemy as a barbaric and uncivilized force that uses super strength, determination, and clandestine tactics to outlast American forces. This rationalizes American defeat: the U.S. was bound to lose to such a formidable and unrelenting enemy.

In his article regarding the Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Schweitzer focuses on the psychological evolution of American troops fighting in Vietnam and how the war atrocities transformed ordinary civilians into guiltless killers. Concentrating on the soldiers’ hardened moral judgment as a consequence of endless fighting allowed filmmakers to discuss controversial issues such as the origins of war, changing American ideologies, race relations with troops, and an evaluation of the war

effort. Arguing the film is “superior to much of the written work on the Vietnam War” he believes it is a historic and realistic portrayal of American troops’ experiences (Schweitzer 68).

Directing focus toward the psychology of soldiers in Vietnam, Morag suggests that defeated masculinity is evident in films emphasizing events after 1968. These films are hyper-masculinized, portraying American soldiers as hunters to compensate for feelings of defeat felt during the war. “This dominant model expresses the most extreme sense of denial—historic, moral, and sexual” (Morag 205). Once this denial becomes acknowledged, the previous identification between masculinity, patriotism, and nationalism are subverted. K. Rasmussen and S. D. Downey also discuss the perverted mythologies of war. Through their study of *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), they conclude that these films undermine the notion that war is necessary to overcome formidable forces of evil and that the contradictions of militarism create a quagmire for troops. “Soldiers are victims who victimize others; they are powerless to alter events but have the power to devastate; they have moral instincts but engage in immoral acts” (Rasmussen and Downey 189).

Unlike other Vietnam War films that emphasize the effects of war atrocities on specific characters, the anonymous author of “Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam” argues that the 1987 film *Dear America* attempts to reestablish the forgotten identities of all American soldiers. Stating that “the film’s aim is to let us hear the voices that otherwise go largely unheard” the article discusses how soldiers immediately surrendered their individuality upon arriving in Vietnam and as a consequence, struggled to participate in the overall war effort (“Dear America” 117).

The scholarship on press coverage during the Vietnam War seeks to determine if soldiers and veterans were accurately and substantially portrayed in American media. Prior to Vietnam, American veterans had been welcomed back home and venerated by the public. Patterson III examines if the disaffection towards Vietnam veterans was due to media bias. In his investigation of *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution* before and after 1968, he concludes “1) the press gave favorable coverage to the Vietnam war and the Vietnam veteran; and 2) the amount of antiwar coverage increased in the post-1968 period and that coverage was perceived as unfavorable toward the war and the veteran” (Patterson 310).

Huebner supports this argument that journalists “produced a body of work that faithfully reflected the complexities and perplexities of the American fighting man and the war in Vietnam” (159) in his analysis of American press coverage of the war. He argues that the media’s shift in perspective ideology of the war paralleled the complicated feelings of both soldiers and American public opinion. Coverage of the war began by casting American soldiers as “heroic, selfless soldiers” yet by the mid-1960s, news reports were beginning to hint at the defectiveness of the army as troops were becoming more victimized and defeated (159).

While it is important to understand how American-fought conflicts have been portrayed in the media, an examination of literature regarding POWs is imperative for this analysis. Young examines the difficulty in translating actual POW experiences into cinematic success. He argues that many Americans targeted POWs as a source of frustration over the lack of victory in the Korean War. Filmmakers found it difficult to

capitalize on these POW narratives; the films' lack of success was based on the nation's negative perception of captured soldiers, viewing them as "symbols of the nation's vulnerability to foreign evil" (Young 54).

Prividera and Howard III's examination of Private Jessica Lynch's narrative following her POW experience in Iraq in 2003 discusses the persistent marginalization of women in the U.S. military. Like released POWs, women share similar experiences of entrapment, except they remain trapped in the gendered perception of their worth. After Private Lynch's release, the media stripped her of her title as "soldier" and labeled her as an all-American "girl next door" who needed to be rescued by masculine heroes. "Ultimately, Lynch was recognized for what was done to her (capture and rescue) rather than what she did (soldiering)" (Prividera and Howard 34). This damsel-in-distress paradigm permanently erased Lynch's status as an American POW and she became subordinate under her male counterparts.

Interest in forced captivity has prompted a significant amount of research concerning both the psychological and psychiatric conditions of American POWs after their release. In his 1946 article examining the psychiatric conditions of 4,617 men released from Japanese prison camps during World War II before their return to the United States, Brill discovered that many of the men developed anxiety upon their release and nearly all felt extreme resentment toward their Japanese captors. Yet one interesting finding revealed that some men felt a sense of accomplishment. "They feel they have a much better insight into human nature, because they have had a glimpse of man without the veneer of civilization" (434). The surviving men were able to overcome the harsh

experiences by adapting to the severe conditions. “Most of them felt that many of the men who died did so because they lacked courage” (438).

Concerning the mental stability of surviving POWs of the Pacific Theater during World War II, in 1987 Goldstein and fellow researchers found that personal coping mechanisms abated the psychiatric symptoms of depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Of the 41 veterans examined, the majority was able to return and live “relatively normal lives from the point of view of work and family considerations” (Goldstein et al. 1211).

The 1986 research of Ursano, Wheatly, Sledge, Rahe, and Carlson supports these findings. After evaluating 325 repatriated American POWs held during the Vietnam War, they discovered that the majority were successfully able to adapt to the extreme stresses of their captivity. “The [repatriated prisoners of war] who suffered the greatest stress and deprivation were most likely to feel that they had benefited from the POW experience” (708). Social and familial support systems and cognitive experiences, such as mental games that emphasize problem solving, were the most beneficial strategies for coping with their traumas.

Further research conducted by Ursano and Rundell in 1990 reveals that survival during captivity is most related to the extent of injury and maltreatment, yet successful coping mechanisms included the ability to adapt to both psychological and physiological adversities and the availability of communicative means. While PTSD, adjustment disorder, depression, psychoactive substance use disorders, anxiety disorders, and phantom-pain disorders were common among Vietnam POWs, “post-1969 POW

returnees experienced more complete and rapid return toward normal and expected baselines than did POWs who were captured before 1969” (445).

Henman also further investigates coping mechanisms among American POWs in her analysis of captive soldiers in during the Vietnam War. She determines that the reason Vietnam POWs suffered relatively less from post-war mental disorders and stress is because their narratives portray resilience as a communication phenomenon. Defining resilience as a “capacity to cope with and to survive traumatic conditions and to recover from adversity” (14), she argues that Vietnam POWs utilize this concept in their narratives to diminish the harsh realities of their experiences, thus unifying the troops in a strong sense of community. “Through the creation of social support and interdependency these fiercely independent men learned to rely on their own power and to draw a sense of mastery from one another. Ordinary men were able to do extraordinary things” (169).

Research has not been limited to solely the analysis of POWs. One study conducted by Hunter between 1971 and 1978 examined the families of repatriated POWs during the Vietnam War. One of the first major adjustments undergone by families of POWs was the switch from complete dependence to unaccustomed independence. POW families had to quickly adjust to the changes in role relationships. The families that adjusted better quickly adapted to the role reversal that had occurred while the males were abroad. By 1978, 5 years after the return of the prisoners, 50% of families at the time of captivity had stayed together. These families had “well renegotiated and stabilized the family roles and were well integrated” (Hunter 246).

Dekel and Solomon continued this line of research through their 2006 investigation of marital relations among former POWs. War captivity has been labeled a

detriment to spousal relations, yet “it remains to be determined whether these effects are due to the captivity experience or whether they are due to PTSD, which only some of the prisoners develop after captivity” (709). The study discovered that marital problems found among POWs were in fact due to PTSD. POWs suffering from PTSD were more likely to succumb to verbal aggression and heightened sexual dissatisfaction than POWs not afflicted with the disorder.

Only a meager amount of research has been dedicated specifically to the analysis of POW narratives. In his 2004 research, Costigliola focuses on the narratives of American POWs held behind Soviet lines during World War II. He believes that it is important to revisit these personal histories now that the adverse stigma regarding Germany and the former Soviet Union has been lifted. These narratives integrated both emotional and rational thought that “contributed to the formation of verbal images of the Soviets as ‘animals,’ ‘barbarians,’ and a ‘Frankenstein’” (780).

Using narratives from British POWs held by the Japanese in both Thailand and Japan during World War II, Murakami’s research centers on the concept of reconciliation and redemption. He establishes that post-war narratives serve to reformulate significant past experiences to discover new positions of reconciliation. Since reconciliation is a continuous process, narratives function as tools to “settle with a meaning of a particular experience or event and the constitution of situated identities in a social relation” (435). POWs achieve reconciliation through claiming a change of identity and reformulating the past.

With the U.S. currently involved in another international conflict, this time occurring in the Middle East, Americans are constantly demanding information. In the

face of globalization and advancing technologies, Americans feel they are obligated to know precisely what occurs on the fronts. The government and media are expected to deliver accurate reports to satisfy the demands of the nation. Yet one of the simplest ways to understand the condition of war is to reflect back on the personal experiences of those who have already fought. This investigation of World War II and Vietnam POW narratives shows how these texts either reaffirm or subvert existing ideas of war and what they reveal about the psychology of an American soldier.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

“How can we know them? The answer, surely, is one by one” (LaCroix 2)

Human beings communicate through fundamental storytelling techniques. Walter R. Fisher argues that storytelling can be found in all forms of human communication and is an indispensable vehicle for people to relate to each other and to discover certain truths. Defining narration as, “a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning to those who live, create, or interpret them” (Fisher “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm” 375), he proposes the existence of a paradigm that frames narration as an essential component of human communication. This narrative paradigm is a synthesis of both the argumentative and literary strands of rhetoric. While the paradigm is not necessarily rhetoric on its own, it helps illuminate what could be interpreted as rhetorically significant. Critics use the paradigm to discover symbolic messages and analyze their rhetorical power. “[It] is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication—assuming that all forms of communication can be seen fundamentally as stories...occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character” (Fisher “Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm” 57).

Karyn Rybacki and Donald Rybacki developed Fisher’s concepts into a form of narrative criticism. They explained it as a way to interpret communication through storytelling symbols that establish certain common trends and patterns. The fusion of these elements allows audiences to test the validity of the story. Do these pieces form a cohesive and rational narrative? If they do, then the main focus of the criticism becomes: “What does an audience see as the truth of it?” (Rybacki and Rybacki 110).

Storytelling techniques are fundamental to the POW narrative, which structures all techniques in a cohesive manner, and, as a rhetorical device, reveals ideologies regarding American-fought conflicts that garner support for war. Under the lens of narrative criticism, all of the narratives analyzed share four main narrative themes: the description of their captivity, the description of their captors, the different coping mechanisms they used, and the patriotic sentiments they felt throughout their experiences.

Another feature shared by some of these narratives is a Rhetoric of Rebirth story. Kenneth Burke's concept of Rhetoric of Rebirth plays an integral role in the four narratives from the Vietnam War. Burke believes that human motivation follows a pattern based on three rhetorical steps: pollution, purification, and redemption. When human beings commit a guilty act, they feel the need to restore themselves to an ordered state, because according to Burke, they are "rotted with perfection" (Burke "Definition of Man" 507). By following this process, he argues that an individual is able to achieve a new identity and state of mind.

First, pollution occurs when one commits an offense that violates the hierarchical orders of society. Human beings wish to get out of a state of pollution or guilt. So after committing this act of sin, one intrinsically looks for a way to cleanse themselves. Purification is the process in which one relieves guilt through symbolic action. It is "the step of cleansing or catharsis, where the guilt is sloughed off" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 196). An individual can follow two routes. Through victimage, guilt can be transferred to something outside of themselves. Or, through mortification, a person can inflict suffering on themselves for the sin they have committed.

Both lead to redemption, the final stage of the process. This symbolizes the rebirth of the individual. The individual has been purified and through the process has arrived at a new state in the search for their true self. “It represents our attempts to discover and maintain our identities so that we can act purposefully, feel at home in the world, and move toward the perfection we seek” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 197).

One particular study conducted by Robert E. Rosenthal examining the 1989 film *Born on the Fourth of July*, is pertinent to the Vietnam POW analysis. He applies the Burkean concept of rebirth to explain the psychological transformation of a Vietnam veteran, Ron Kovic, upon his return to the United States. However, instead of arguing that Kovic committed a wrongful act himself before entering into the rebirth process, Rosenthal shows that the American society placed its collective guilt on Vietnam veterans, “hoping to purge itself in order to restore our social consciousness to its pre-war innocence” (28). His analysis reveals that Kovic feels the burden of America’s guilt upon his return from Vietnam and questions the legitimacy of the war. He is scapegoated by society and to dismiss these feelings of failure, he participates in the antiwar movement. Yet after much soul-searching, he enters into the stage of mortification by realizing that the failures of the United States were by no means his own fault. He is finally redeemed at the Democratic National Convention of 1976 where he is welcomed as a hero and makes a speech announcing “Just lately, I felt like I’m home...like maybe, we’re home” (qtd. in Rosenthal 40). Through this rhetorical transformation, Kovic no longer feels ashamed about his veteran status. He is finally able to accept and feel proud about his actions fighting in Vietnam.

I have chosen to examine eight very distinct American POW narratives to achieve the most comprehensive analysis possible. Four narratives are from POWs who were imprisoned during World War II. Harold Brick and Russell Gunvalson were both held in Germany. Harold G. Kurvers and Gene Boyt were both imprisoned by the Japanese in the Philippines and forced to participate in the infamous Bataan Death March. The four remaining narratives originate from POWs held during the Vietnam War. Donald Richard Peppard was held captive in North Korea. Larry Chesley, Porter Halyburton, and John S. McCain III were held in Hanoi by the North Vietnamese. Five of these eight narratives came from interviews for the Veterans History Project, a branch of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress established to preserve stories of wartime service for future generations. The three remaining narratives are autobiographical books that pertain specifically to imprisonment. The following section provides a brief description of their lives and experiences in captivity.

Harold Brick

Brick was drafted into the Army in June, 1943 and assigned to the 275th Regiment, 70th Infantry Division. He arrived in Marseilles, France in December, 1944 but was soon captured in eastern France, close to the German border in early January, 1945. He endured nearly six weeks at Stalag IX-B in Bad Orb, Germany before being transported to another camp by Trebnitz on the eastern border. He remained at the work camp until mid-April, 1945 when the Germans evacuated due to potential advances of the Red Army. Abandoned by their captors, Brick and his fellow POWs wandered for several days until being discovered by American forces. He was discharged in December, 1945 and returned to his family in Lake Henry, Minnesota. He married in 1953 and retired

from his career with the U.S. Postal Service after 31 years in 1984 and spoke to Thomas Saylor for the Veterans History Project in April, 2004.

Russell Gunvalson

After entering into the Army in 1943, Gunvalson began training with the 590th Field Artillery, 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, which was later shipped to Europe in November, 1944. They quickly set-up along the Belgian-German border, but were overcome by German forces soon after. Gunvalson became a POW on December 19, 1944. He and his division were first marched to the German town of Gerolstein and then transported to Stalag IX-B at Bad Orb. He remained there until January, 1945 when he was transferred to Stalag IX-A at Ziegenhain until he was liberated by U.S. troops on March 30, 1945. Before being sent back to the U.S., he was moved to a medical facility in Rouen, France for two months. Once he returned to his home in Wisconsin, he still spent several weeks recovering at various medical facilities. He then returned to civilian status and began working for the U.S. Postal Service before retiring in 1979. His interview with Thomas Saylor for the Veterans History Project took place in February, 2004.

Harold G. Kurvers

Born in 1918 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Kurvers was drafted into the Army in 1941. He joined the 194th Tank Battalion as a medic and his unit was soon posted to the Philippines near the Army Corp's Clark Field. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, Kurver's battalion was forced to retreat until it was eventually captured at Bataan. He survived the Bataan Death March and stayed at the prison camp,

Camp O'Donnell, for nearly three months in 1942 before being sent to Cabanatuan, Philippines in October, 1944. After two months, he was herded with sixteen-hundred other prisoners onto a ship bound for Japan. When the ship finally docked in January, 1945, only 400 of the original passengers were still alive. Kurvers was sent to the prison camp Fukuoka #17 and worked in a coal mine until the end of the war in August, 1945. Upon liberation, he was hospitalized for a year to recover from tuberculosis. Soon after his release, he married his wife Dorothy in 1946 and spent the rest of his life with her in St. Paul raising their three children. He spoke to Thomas Saylor for the Veterans History Project in 2002.

Gene Boyt

In 1997, David L. Burch, a friend of the Boyt family, approached the POW regarding his experience on the Bataan Death March. After three years of communication and collaboration between the two men, they compiled Boyt's narratives into a book published in 2004 and titled *Bataan: A Survivor's Story*. Raised in the Great Plains region of the United States, Boyt's family moved around throughout his childhood due to poverty. He joined the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935 and later graduated from the ROTC in 1941. In May of the same year, his unit was transported to the Army Corp's Clark Field where he worked as a project engineer. Boyt was captured by the Japanese a few days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December, 1941 and was forced to participate in the Bataan Death March to Camp O'Donnell. Similar to Kurvers, Boyt spent a few months at the camp before being transferred by rail to Japan in October, 1942. He was among approximately 875 men brought to the Japanese prison camp

Tanaguaw. By the time he left in August, 1943, only 341 POWs were still alive. He and the remaining survivors journeyed to another camp, Zentsuji, on the island of the Japanese homeland. After spending two years there, he endured another arduous transfer to a remote mountaintop prison called Roko Roshi. He was liberated after a month by American forces in August, 1945. After his return to the U.S., he married, raised two children, and continued his career as an engineer. In 1987, he was among a group of POW survivors of the Bataan Death March who returned to the Philippines to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the Japanese takeover. According to his narrative, "It was definitely a bittersweet trip, but one I am very glad to have made" (Boyt 217).

Donald Richard Peppard

In 1967 Peppard was commissioned as a Chief Petty Officer aboard the U.S.S. Pueblo² to help monitor waters off the shore of North Korea. On January 23, 1968, several North Korean vessels, including sub chasers and torpedo boats, chased down the American naval ship. The enemy troops boarded and captured all 83 crewmembers. After enduring eleven months of cruel imprisonment, Peppard and the remainder of the crew were released December, 1968. He spoke with Alan P. Pendergrast for the Veterans History Project in October, 2002.

² When the U.S.S. Pueblo was captured, President Lyndon B. Johnson defended allegations that the vessel was used for spying on the communist country. He maintained the stance that the Americans were innocent and the actions of the North Koreans were unjustifiable. He prohibited attempts to retaliate or to rescue the crew. However, after 11 months of tortuous captivity, President Johnson issued an apology which admitted to spying, and the crewmen were released. As soon as the men reached safety, the U.S. government immediately rescinded the apology and continued to deny the espionage (Wood 2010).

Larry Chesley

Born in 1938, Chesley had a meager upbringing in Burley, Idaho before he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force at the age of 18. In 1964 he entered Undergraduate Pilot Training and was awarded his wings in March, 1965. He immediately began flying combat missions in Southeast Asia with the 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron. However he was forced to eject over North Vietnam in April, 1966 and was taken as a POW. He spent 2,464 days as a captive at the Hanoi Hilton, which amounted to a little over 6 ½ years. He was released during Operation Homecoming on February 12, 1973 and was hospitalized for a brief period following his liberation. He was still able to earn his MBA at Arizona State University. At the end of 1973, his narratives were published into a book titled *Seven Years in Hanoi*, which serves as the basis for this analysis. Chesley later became a flight instructor at Williams Air Force Base, Arizona before retiring from the Air Force in 1982. He continued serving his country as a State Senator in Arizona from 1993 to 1997.

Porter Halyburton

Porter Halyburton was born in 1941 and raised in Davidson, North Carolina. In October, 1963 he entered into the U.S. Navy Pre-Flight Program where he was trained as an Intercept Officer. In April, 1965 he began flying combat missions in Southeast Asia, but was shot down over North Vietnam in October of the same year. He was immediately forced into captivity by the North Vietnamese and spent 2,675 days at the infamous Hanoi Hilton. Similar to Chesley, he was released during Operation Homecoming in February, 1973 and continued to serve at the Naval War College in Rhode Island until his

retirement from the Navy in 1984. He was interviewed by Aaron Keegan in 1998 and in 2008 he served as a guest speaker at the 40th Reunion of the Third Medical Battalion.

John S. McCain III

Former Lieutenant Commander John S. McCain III was shot down during the Vietnam War in 1967 while flying over Hanoi. He was imprisoned there for over 5 ½ years. His original statements were published in a 1973 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* upon his release in and were used for this analysis. Son of John S. McCain Jr., distinguished Navy admiral, McCain's captivity fascinated the media and caught the nation's attention. According to the 1973 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* "Of the many personal accounts coming to light about the almost unbelievably cruel treatment according to American prisoners of war in Vietnam, none is more dramatic than that of Lieut. Commander John S. McCain III" ("John McCain, Prisoner of War"). In 2000, he published his memoir *Faith of My Fathers* which provides a detailed account of his time in captivity. Soon after publication it became a *New York Times* bestseller.

In 2008, McCain ran against former Senator Barack Obama in an intensely publicized presidential campaign. During his race to the White House, McCain's status as a POW frequented his discourse and influenced his policies, especially when he spoke out in favor of humane interrogation methods and against U.S.-inflicted torture of foreign prisoners ("The Third McCain-Obama Presidential Debate"). The biography on his website even attested to his experiences, stating, "John was then taken as a prisoner of war into the now infamous 'Hanoi Hilton,' where he was denied necessary medical treatment and often beaten by the North Vietnamese. John spent much of his time as a

prisoner of war in solitary confinement, aided by his faith and the friendships of his fellow POWs” (“Ready from Day One”). McCain’s endeavors as an influential political figure publicized his experiences as a POW. His fame and relevancy with the American public make his narrative worthy of study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Description of Captivity

“Flies, maggots, and dead bodies were everywhere, and the odor was overpowering” (Boyt 139)

The first trend in the POW narrative is a description of captivity, which includes both the setting of imprisonment and the physical well-being of the captives. While the eight POWs analyzed endured a variety of different conditions, all the narratives describe their intolerable captivity. Defining his prison camp as “deplorable” (Boyt 153), Boyt describes the infamous Camp O’Donnell as “the worst hellhole in the Philippines, with conditions even poorer than on the Death March” (142). Also held in the Philippines during the World War II, Kurvers recounts the conditions he faced aboard a prison ship that herded POWs from Bataan to Japan. He depicts them as “Terrible. Packed. Just packed. Shoulder to shoulder, belly to back. [The prisoners] went mad the very first night. Guys were cutting throats, sucking blood” (18). While Boyt equates his captivity to hell, Kurvers sheds light on the psychological toll imprisonment had taken on the POWs. The conditions were so unbearable, some men resorted to killing each other.

Even though conditions in Germany during World War II were significantly better, these narratives show that these POWs endured abhorrent captivity as well. Brick describes the camp Bad Orb as “a godforsaken place” (19) where “everything was difficult” (19). His cell was approximately the size of a basketball court and fit over two hundred and fifty men. “They were laying side by side. I mean we just...that was without blankets. I mean the only thing we had to cover us was our overcoat. That was our shelter” (8).

Held in Hanoi during the Vietnam War, Chesley says his conditions were “gruesome” (29). He comments, “The name Hanoi Hilton is of course the Americans’ nickname for the major prison compound in Hanoi. The Vietnamese are more realistic. Their name for it is *Hoa Lo*, which means ‘hell hole’” (18). While the type of cell and duration of solitary confinement varied for those captive in Hanoi, punishment remained a consistent practice. Chesley describes one such tactic as “being confined to a hole in the room. . . . The holes contained sharp rocks, they often contained a pool of stagnant water, and they were always full of mosquitoes. The punishment at this time for communication between rooms was to live in that hole for three months with the hands tied or cuffed behind the back, without a mosquito net, and without any blankets to keep you warm” (27). During his time in Hanoi, McCain was held in solitary confinement for over two years. He says:

I was not allowed to see or talk to or communicate with any of my fellow prisoners. My room was fairly decent-sized—I’d say it was about 10 by 10. The door was solid. There were no windows. The only ventilation came from two small holes at the top in the ceiling, about 6 inches by 4 inches. The roof was tin and it got hot as hell in there. The room was kind of dim—night and day—but they always kept on a small light bulb, so they could observe me. I was in that place for two years (8).

Harsh treatment and horrible living conditions during the war were not isolated to Vietnam. Peppard describes his captivity in North Korea as “very dreary, very dismal” (9) and remarks, “We were awakened at six every morning, and we sat all day long in straight-back chairs, and that is all we could do until we were allowed to turn in at night” (9).

The second way these narratives outline the hellish conditions encountered by the POWs is describing the physical appearance of the prisoners. Boyt says, “All the prisoners at Camp O’Donnell were reduced to skin and bones. We looked like Holocaust survivors, with ribs and collarbones protruding visibly. When men finally died of starvation, their bodies were just withered skeletons” (144). Kurvers laments “We had thirty, forty [dying] a day” (9) in his discussion concerning his sojourn in Camp O’Donnell. Citing hunger as the main cause of death, he continues, “You were hungry all the time. Even when you were full, you were hungry. There was something your system was crying for” (15).

Similar to Kurvers, Gunvalson struggled to satisfy his ache for sustenance during his captivity in Germany. “[Hunger] was twenty-four hours a day. It was just...our stomachs just rolled. Just crawled all the time” (13). He later adds, “I was nothing but skin and bones. My clothes just hung on me and I hadn’t had a bath, a shower since the first of November....You’re almost ready to give up because of your weakened condition. That’s what...(sighs) Germany wanted” (22). This discourse enhances the understanding of captivity conditions. Descriptions of hunger and the appearance of the POWs are shocking. Yet they further shed light on the physical effects imprisonment had on the soldiers. Not only were men psychologically breaking down, they were physically deteriorating as well.

These descriptions of captivity and the physicality of the POWs are imperative to the overall narrative. Not only do they provide a setting—an essential component to the narrative paradigm—they reveal the deprivations that these men endured. And, one

cannot understand the significance of these men overcoming such hardships and the sacrifices they made if their captivity experiences are not first described.

CHAPTER SIX

Description of Captors

“They tortured him to say that he wasn’t tortured” (McCain 16)

The second trend common to all of the narratives is a description of the captors. Understanding how POWs perceived their enemies, characterizing them as malicious and hostile reveals a sense of justification of the American war effort. These narratives structure the captors as unfavorable first by highlighting their stupidity and erratic behavior. Then, by discussing the extreme brutality that the POWs experienced, the narratives broaden the scope of captivity to show the universality of evil among all foreign enemies. However, an additional section will show how the Germans were exempt from participating in these cruel acts of torture. Finally, an analysis of the narratives originating from the Vietnam War will address communism and show how the POWs both admonish the ideology and establish the authority of American democratic ideals.

Stupidity

Highlighting their captors’ stupidity serves two functions in these POW narratives. On the surface it first shows that captured soldiers are more intelligent than the foreign forces that have imprisoned them. Defining Vietnam as “a backward country” (Chesley 55), Chesley establishes his intellectual superiority over his captors by stating, “Apparently he wasn’t smart enough to slip my underwear down, so he cut the back of it out to give me a shot” (24). McCain shared similar sentiments regarding the Vietnamese’ intellect and even describes one in particular, “The North Vietnamese interrogator, who was pretty stupid, wrote the final confession, and I signed it” (13).

Realizing their mental advantage, these narratives show that several POWs leveraged their intelligence to manipulate and deceive their captors. Peppard recounts an event when his crew was caught extending their middle fingers in the air and their captors asked them about the gesture's meaning. "We for a long time got away with the explanation that it was a Hawaiian good luck sign. So that went on for a while, and—but then later on they learned what it was and they beat the hell out of us" (17). Halyburton had similar experiences with his captors and states:

But we tried very hard to make sure that what they did get, you know, was not useful to them, which in a way, was not all that difficult, because they didn't have anybody there who had been educated in the United States. They had no one who had learned English in the United States. So their knowledge of the language, idioms and humor and even accents, you know, were fairly foreign to them. And so you could use of their ignorance against them. So you could play games with them, you know, deceive them. You could make them believe some real ridiculous stuff (11).

This discourse shows that American POWs are smarter than their foreign captors, yet it only superficially critiques their stupidity. Therefore, these narratives reveal a second trend concerning the captors' intellect: remarks undermining their captor's intelligence to reinforce American superiority.

Chesley first attacks the Vietnamese' lack of understanding of American culture. He says, "Because our captors had only a poor understanding of English, absolutely no feel for its idiom, and no background of American ways and customs, they rarely saw through the prisoner's attempt to fool them" (64). Then he takes a strike at communism, the defining factor of the war, and states, "With their Vietnamese and communist background, their poor education, and their lack of appreciation for what we knew as

freedom, they apparently could not understand that we had minds of our own and that we really approved of and glorified in the right to dissent which was our birthright as Americans” (63). Here, Chesley shows that stupidity is the foundation of their communist background. His captors, and the country they belong to, are communists because they lack the mental capacity to understand a democratic state. McCain also furthers this point and states, “Others came in to find out about life in the United States. They figured because my father had such high military rank that I was of the royalty or the governing circle. *They have no idea of the way our democracy functions*”³ (7).

For these two POWs who served during the Vietnam War, this discourse links the enemy’s stupidity with a justification of the war. These critiques disparage the captors and simultaneously admonish communism. This establishes the understanding that foreign enemies are too stupid to run a functioning, democratic government. American intervention is therefore worthwhile if it helps spread our moral and intellectual ideals and eliminates stupidity in government.

Erratic behavior

By characterizing their captors’ behavior as erratic, these narratives reveal that POWs did not deserve the type of treatment they received in captivity. Boyt describes his Japanese captors as “senseless” (134) “who killed with cold impunity” (127) and Kurvers’ perception of the Japanese consistently follows this trend. He states, “The only problem was that we didn’t know who we could trust. Sometimes they could give you a cigarette, then the next thing kick it out of your mouth, so we didn’t know if you could

³ Emphasis added

trust them all the while...I don't understand their culture. Just because you couldn't understand their language, you were belted for that" (14). Kurvers emphasizes that he and his fellow POWs did not understand why they were being punished. Under the Geneva Conventions, a captured POW is entitled to certain privileges such as immunity from punishment and torture. Japan became a signatory in 1886 and Germany followed in 1906. The Philippines is also among the list of countries that have ratified the convention. Yet, these narratives show that the tortuous actions of the captors were completely unjustified and in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Boyt describes his regulation as "pointless" (187) and even states regarding two different torture sessions he encountered, "Both punishments were unnecessary and evidently served only to satisfy the guards' twisted sense of correction" (188).

The captors are depicted as cruel and unreasonable. Thus the American POWs provide a stark contrast to this characterization. Chesley describes the treatment he received from the Vietnamese as "barbaric" (69) and states, "This guard would beat me with a stick about eighteen inches long and maybe a quarter of an inch in diameter. Every time our aircraft flew over, or just whenever he felt like it, he would beat on me" (13). In these circumstances, the American POWs are depicted as innocent and completely at the mercy of their captors. This can garner significant sympathy from the audiences of these narratives. American troops chose to fight for the country and therefore should not be subjected to such atrocious and senseless conditions.

Also, administering undeserved punishment to POWs violates the Geneva Conventions. And these narratives show that these violations were both consistent and frequent. Since their actions are representative of their country, audiences can generalize

that these foreign governments are also participating in this type of deviant behavior. American intervention is therefore substantiated if its goal is to correct the perverse actions of these foreign states and rectify the damages they have caused.

Brutality

Torture was frequent in prison camps and all the narratives analyzed, except for those of Brick and Gunvalson who were both held in Germany, discuss the malevolent brutality of the captors. When describing the Vietnamese, Chesley states they had a “genius for cruelty” (66) and uses language like “barbaric” (65) and “sadistic” (64) to recount his beatings. McCain’s accounts of his experiences in Hanoi reflect this trend as well. When he was first captured, a mob of Vietnamese guards immediately set the tone for the rest of his time in captivity. “I said, ‘My God—my leg!’ That seemed to enrage them—I don’t know why. One of them slammed a rifle butt on my shoulder, and smashed it pretty badly. Another stuck a bayonet in my foot” (2). The brutality he encountered continued for seven years marked by periods in solitary confinement, interrogations, and torture sessions. He later describes one guard as “a psychotic torturer, one of the worst fiends we had to deal with” (4) and regarding one particular torture session, he states, “I had been reduced to an animal during this period of beating and torture” (13).

The Japanese and North Koreans were not exempt from participating in a variety of methods of cruelty. Kurvers states that “[The Japanese] were cruel to their own people” (14) and they treated their American POWs similarly. He recounts reading a propaganda pamphlet and states, “It said, they didn’t care if we died.... They didn’t” (19)

and continues to describe an instance when fifteen captives were taken outside to a cemetery and immediately beheaded (20). Boyt further emphasizes the grotesque savagery of his Japanese captors by stating, “As I left through the main gate, I saw an example of the guard’s gruesome flair for decorating, which became my most memorable image of Cabanatuan: two severed heads, one stuck atop the other” (157). And of his North Korean captors, Peppard says, “Oh we could hear the screams down from the passageways when they had taken people out and were beating them. We know people were getting beaten real bad” (11).

By casting the captors as cruel barbarians, these narratives emphasize their involvement in sadistic practices and establish a sense of bestiality. Boyt recounts the severed heads, adorning the prison walls as sick decoration (157) and Kurvers mentions a propaganda film featuring Japanese soldiers throwing babies in the air and catching them on bayonets (22). The graphic descriptions of torture succeed in nauseating and producing disgust among audiences. It is unequivocal that the enemy is inhumane and lacks even the smallest sense of morality. Not only have these evil entities violated the established regulations of the Geneva Conventions, some narratives, like McCain’s, reveal that they “seemed to get a big thrill out of the beatings” (14). Their corruption is no longer just political, it is perverse as well.

These descriptions of brutality justify American intervention. Similar to the discussions of erratic behavior and cruelty, brutality in foreign governments and states outside of prison camps can be extrapolated from these POW accounts. Prison camps are just one level in a governmental hierarchical structure. Captors receive orders from superior sources—powerful governmental figures. Therefore audiences of this discourse

can infer that foreign regimes are as cruel, if not more cruel, than the captors and guards they employ. According to the POW narratives, our own soldiers were disgustingly mistreated. Therefore, it should be our duty as a nation to punish those involved and enforce regulations that support our more compassionate and humanitarian ideals.

German Captors

Throughout this analysis, one anomaly became unmistakably apparent. The prisoners held in Germany, both Brick and Gunvalson, did not experience the same instances of cruelty and torture as those held in other countries. The narratives of these two men follow all other trends discussed in this analysis except the descriptions of stupidity, erratic behavior, and brutality of their captors. In fact, both Brick and Gunvalson were initially incredibly intimidated by the Germans, stating “Because we got word that [the Germans] were shooting prisoners. And that you know, ran through our mind more than anything” (Gunvalson 4). Yet, as their captivity continued, their narratives reveal that the Germans’ behavior falls on the opposite side of the spectrum of the Vietnamese, Japanese, and North Koreans.

Brick begins his narrative by declaring that his German guard was “cordial” (3). Later, he even states, “he was a good guard. I mean he was [a good human being]” (6). There is little debate regarding Japanese violations of the Geneva Conventions during World War II. POWs held in Germany acknowledged their fortuitous conditions. Brick states, “Well, I surely didn’t want to be a prisoner of the Japanese, because I knew that they had it lots worse than we did” (28). Gunvalson’s narrative also reflects this fortunate

leniency. “I can’t say the Germans treated me poorly at all. I mean, if they would have had the provisions to feed us I think they would have” (15).

Unlike the Vietnam War, American intervention in World War II was greatly supported across the homefront. Hitler personified evil and the Axis Powers were a clearly defined enemy. Germany did not violate the Geneva Conventions to the extent that other regimes did. As the war progressed, Hitler’s war crimes continued to become public. By July 1944, Soviet troops liberated abandoned Nazi concentration camps in Poland and had discovered the remains of gas chambers (“Lublin/Majdanek: Chronology”). By September of that same year, American reporters visited the Lublin and the Majdanek camps in Poland and published pictures of the horrific atrocities (“Lublin/Majdanek: Chronology”). Soon the whole world would be aware of Nazi atrocities.

By Nazi Germany’s final offensive effort on the Western Front at the end of 1944, the empire was severely faltering. These narratives show that German guards stationed at prison camps seemed to be losing hope. Their living conditions matched their prisoners’ conditions and their own government was neglecting their needs.

As the Third Reich continued to fall, instances of brutality and cruelty against POWs decreased. The captors’ government had abandoned them and their indifference was reflected in the treatment of their prisoners. By the moment of their liberation, many POWs felt little disdain for their captors. Gunvalson poignantly states at the end of his narrative that it was not the Germans he was fighting, it was their evil regime. “I have no ill will for them. I know they were the enemy. The German people were not my enemy or the German soldier. It was Hitler and his regime that was our enemy” (15).

Communism discussed by POWs of the Vietnam War

“Hanoi, in effect, has tried to apply the principles of the Nuremberg trials to U.S. captives; to the Communists, the Americans are not prisoners of war in the Geneva sense, but war criminals” (“Nation: Acting to Aid the Forgotten Men” 7), states a 1970 article regarding the treatment of POWs that were held in North Vietnam during the war. While discussions of communism are not necessarily categorized as descriptions of captors, it is a consistent theme that reveals how POWs have the rhetorical power to establish the credibility of American ideals. Three of the four POWs analyzed who were captured during the Vietnam War explicitly admonish communist ideologies. Chesley’s remarks against communism emphasize the barbarity of its ideals. He first states, “A Communist is a person who will torture you to write a statement that you have not been tortured. Among other things, our captors did just that” (72) and later accentuates his point by saying, “Communists, it seems, can torture and kill—and then go home smiling to dinner and a good night’s sleep” (150). To Chesley, communism represents “forces of darkness and horror” (113). It is a savage force that must be annihilated before it spreads its wickedness further and affects America’s own freedom. McCain’s views parallel those of Chesley as he states, “This is what Communism is all about—armed struggle to overthrow capitalist countries” (6). Both of these men’s views reflect the popular assumption of the domino theory. Communism is a rampant epidemic that will spread if the forces behind it are not immediately stopped. This includes the countries in which they were imprisoned.

Instead of speaking to the depravity of communism, Halyburton’s narrative reveals his support for U.S. interventions. He states:

Well, what I understood and believed I think at the time was that the communists in North Vietnam with the support of China and the Soviet Union, were attempting to overthrow the government in South Vietnam, and what would be a preview to overtaking the other countries in the area, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, perhaps further than that. And we were sort of drawing the line in the sand, saying, this is where you stop, you know, *and that was worthwhile doing*⁴. And that the South Vietnamese people desired democracy and did not want to be communists and that was worth, you know, trying to make sure that they weren't enslaved by communism (6).

Here, Halyburton shows that American efforts to stop communism and protect freedom are in fact good. Although efforts to enter into and escalate the war divided the nation, this narrative shows that intervention was necessary and worthwhile. Chelsey briefly addresses this as well and states, "To my mind [Americans] were fighting in a worthwhile cause....In that sense they were defending the best that is in our way of life, the cause of freedom" (113).

This discourse is incredibly persuasive. These POWs endured horrific conditions while fighting for their country, and still believed that their efforts were worthwhile. These narratives have the power to unite audiences around the purpose of the Vietnam War and to diminish the negative repercussions that resulted from national animosity and anti-war movements.

⁴ Emphasis added

CHAPTER SEVEN

Coping Mechanisms

“We believed we would win in the end” (Boyt 71)

In the overall POW narrative, coping mechanisms were indispensable. For those who survived, these methods gifted them with the will to fight and live until liberation. These stories would not be told if the men who lived through them had felt apathetic and defeated. Therefore it is crucial to understand how these men coped and how they found the will to survive. The following analysis will examine the three common trends that were evident throughout the eight narratives: optimism, faith, and communication.

Optimism

One of the most powerful coping mechanisms adopted by POWs was optimism. Regardless of where the POWs were imprisoned, optimism proved to reduce the hardships of captivity and provide a sense of purpose under horrible circumstances. While conditions of the Bataan Death March were excruciatingly insufferable, Boyt remarks that he remained “haggard yet confident” (78). “Yet with each mile that I survived,” he further states, “I grew tougher and vowed to carry on, dreaming of the time when the march would end. Above all, I fought to live; as bad as things were, I did not want to die” (128).

Also a survivor of the Death March, Kurvers’ narrative reflects similar feelings of optimism. When asked by his interviewer whether he believed he would make it to Japan, Kurvers responded, “Optimism rules, you know” (23). Kurvers also introduces the interesting notion that those prisoners who did not maintain optimistic attitudes were the

ones who perished during captivity. When asked if there were prisoners who had a hard time being optimistic and struggled to laugh once in a while, Kurvers said, “Yes. And none of those came back” (13).

Gunvalson’s optimistic views are very similar to those of Kurvers. He initially declares, “I’ve never tried to be negative about anything” (13). Then, when discussing how he coped in relation to those who did not survive, he says, “When I went into the Army I said I know there’s going to be things in there that I’m not going to like, but I said I’m going to be positive about it and do what I’m told to do, when to do it, and not make any ripples or cause any trouble...trouble will follow you” (13).

Chesley also cites “the will to live” (70) as a strong coping strategy throughout his captivity. Regardless of the conditions that he suffered through during his six and a half years in Hanoi, he believes that “there is no profit in being sad, especially about what you can’t change” (137).

It is incredible to believe that these men were able to remain optimistic throughout their captivity experiences. Yet, as Chesley comments, “For all their neglect and cruelty the North Vietnamese did not break our spirit” (71), surviving POWs were able to channel optimism to strengthen their will to live. In the POW narrative paradigm, an optimistic attitude reveals that these men did not feel defeated by their capture nor did they feel neglected by their country. Even though he was forced to endure one of the most hellish death marches in history, Boyt still held on to the belief that Americans can persevere and states, “We believed we would win in the end” (71). While McCain admits that there were low points during captivity and that after five and a half years he was almost “at the point of suicide, because I saw that I was reaching the end of my rope”

(13), he continued to believe that American forces were close to ending the war. Even in their darkest hours, these POWs never lost hope that their country was coming to liberate them. Brick recounts in his narrative how his German captors abandoned their camps due to the advancing Red Army. Unlike the Germans who felt defeated by their government and therefore fled to seek refuge outside of their country, American POWs continued to endure harsh conditions with the solid conviction that the U.S. would never let them down.

Faith

Many of the POW narratives reveal that faith in God acted as a very successful coping mechanism. A devout member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Chesley addresses an entire chapter of his narrative to his faith. Titling the section, “No Atheists in Hell Holes”, his overall belief is that “hardship and danger sharpen the religious instincts—or rather, make people feel toward God” (87). Yet he was not the only prisoner who believed faith to be a strong coping strategy. “I think that most men I knew in prison were sincerely religious. Most of them prayed to God asking for strength and guidance” (Chesley 88). While Chesley’s narrative was the most religious of the eight texts, with him mentioning “Lord” thirty-times and “God” fifty-one times compared to four mentions of the word “barbaric” and six of the word “cruel”, faith in God was a major factor contributing to the survival of many other POWs.

These narratives show that POWs utilized their faith in the Lord in two distinct ways. First, several appealed to God to help them endure hardship. During the German bombing of his troops, Brick states, “We were there for over forty-eight hours and prayed

all the while being bombed” (7). Gunvalson not only relies on his faith to survive, he states his belief that he was strengthened by it:

[Faith] was something that you could rely on because...like I say further on, that the Germans, they did everything they could to break me down physically. They did everything they could to break me down mentally. And financially I had nothing. But the only thing I had left was my faith in God. That's one thing they couldn't take away. As a matter of fact I think it probably made me stronger (10).

McCain's narrative shows that he also used his faith to reinforce his values and seek guidance. “I was finding that prayer helped,” he says. “It wasn't a question of asking for superhuman strength or for God to strike the North Vietnamese dead. It was asking for moral and physical courage, for guidance and wisdom to do the right thing...I was sustained in many times of trial” (14).

The second way these narratives demonstrated the faith of the POWs was by attributing survival to God. McCain briefly mentions that prayer alleviated much of the physical pain he felt in prison (14), and both Gunvalson and Kurvers declare that God was the contributing factor in their survival. Gunvalson states, “I think it's just the grace of God we made it because we were together” (17). Here, God is portrayed as the reason he was able to make it out alive. Upon his liberation, Kurvers had similar sentiments and stated, “God was with me. I was fortunate” (18).

This reliance on faith throughout captivity shows that their belief in a transcendent Deity prevented them from succumbing to the hellish conditions they were experiencing. From a rhetorical perspective, these men evaded defeat by petitioning to a superior being far more powerful and great than the captors that imprisoned them. These

men knew that their faith would prevail over their captors' brute force and malevolence. They trusted a benevolent, humane source to provide them with the assistance to tolerate some of history's most evil circumstances. As McCain had said, the POWs did not want God to strike their captors dead (McCain 14). They merely sought guidance and strength to continue surviving until liberation.

Communication

The third coping mechanism utilized by POWs is communication. Especially for those prisoners held in solitary confinement, communication, regardless of the method, proved to be vital. Even if it consisted of a cryptic tapping-code system or the simple whistling of a song, these tactics allowed prisoners to share their experiences with one another and remind each other that they were still alive.

Both Chesley and McCain spent time during their imprisonment in solitary confinement and both men discuss how communication was essential for survival. Chesley describes how many men relied on complex systems of codes including methodical sweeps of a broom and foot-taps on the floor. "In the early days in particular," he says, "the system of communication between single or small cells was virtually indispensable" (104). And, declaring that communication "was of the utmost value" (14), McCain believes that it served to "keep up morale" (14) and acted as the difference between "being able to resist and not being able to resist" (14). Even if it was only a wave, wink, or tap on the wall, McCain states, "As far as this business of solitary confinement goes—the most important thing for survival is communication" (8).

However, most captors regarded all forms of communication between prisoners as conspiracy. They went to great lengths to ensure that POWs were not able to speak to or see each other. Admitting that he and his fellow prisoners frequently attempted to violate their orders against communicating, Halyburton says, “And the punishment for getting caught communicating was, could be quite severe. And about the least you could expect would be to be beaten some and then to spend two weeks in leg irons and handcuffs” (11). McCain found similar conditions at his camp and states, “When they caught us communicating, they’d take severe reprisals” (14).

Communication provided POWs with company. It assured them that even though they had been separated, they were not alone in their struggle to survive. Like many POWs, Halyburton states that regardless of the punishment, he dedicated “a lot of time communicating with others” (10). Since they could not be together physically, this system gave POWs the opportunity to join together mentally. While they did not conspire to seek retribution against their captors, they bonded over the conditions they were enduring. It was a crucial resource that reminded them that their cause had not been lost.

Communication also functioned as an essential coping mechanism for POWs once they had been released and were repatriated on American soil. Both Brick and Gunvalson discuss how becoming members of POW organizations alleviated some of the pain they still felt years after their release. Prior to joining the organization, Brick’s narrative shows that he avoided most conversations regarding World War II and his time spent in captivity. After joining one particular organization, he says, “For my part it was good for me to talk about it. Not only that, I mean the ex-POWs they’ve helped me” (30). Regarding having other POWs to talk to, he adds, “I think it was quite important. Yes. I

mean, it gave you a feeling of belonging” (9). For Gunvalson, joining a similar organization was “[the] greatest thing that ever happened to me. It helped me to where I am today and just talking about it” (30). And for those POWs who do not embrace these organizations? “They’re miserable people” (Gunvalson 30).

As these narratives have shown, communication between POWs after repatriation is just as powerful a coping mechanism as it was for POWs when they were in captivity. Both Brick and Gunvalson describe how it provided them with a sense of belonging. Similar to prison camps, where POWs were separated by cells, ex-POWs in the United States are separated by distance and the responsibilities associated with reentering their previous lives. Yet communication serves the same purpose of providing the men with a community of peers to share their experiences. For many POWs, it is difficult to discuss their painful experiences with their families and friends. Communication with other POWs enables them to truly relate to each other’s experiences. It gives them the resources to accept what happened to them during captivity and to embrace the new chapters in their lives. For a POW to have the strength to recover after their experience, the narratives reveal that communication techniques are indispensable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Patriotism

“We former POWs love our country” (Chesley 112)

Patriotism is an essential component of the POW narrative. After all the terrible hardships these men faced, it is important to recognize their faith in their country. These eight narratives reveal that patriotic discourse is a common trend that can be categorized into two groups: support for U.S. policy and pride in the country.

Support for U.S. policy

While patriotism appears in all of the eight narratives analyzed, explicit support for U.S. policy only occurs in those narratives of the Vietnam War. This is particularly important due to the controversy concerning American involvement. Yet these narratives reveal that while the war may not have been highly favorable on the homefront, those fighting in it believed it to be an important cause. After stating, “I believe that in the long run we all felt the U.S. policy to be right” (Chesley 113), Chesley continues to explain:

We knew that there were political facts to be faced, and that our government was doing all it could properly do to secure our release from an enemy who had no regard for human life or dignity and who treated us (and their own nationals who were POWs in South Vietnam) as pawns in the game (113).

By emphasizing the Vietnamese’s disregard of compassion and morality, Chesley further legitimizes U.S. intervention. He also adds his belief that POW efforts were worthwhile and states, “Because the POWs generally felt that we did what we were supposed to do for our country, only what others would have done if they had found

themselves in our circumstances” (146). Therefore, the war overall was not extraordinary, it was *supposed* to happen for the good of the country.

Another way these narratives show support for U.S. policy is by criticizing dissenters. When discussing student protests and the antiwar movement, Halyburton mentions his animosity towards them and states: “Because from our point of view, that simply prolonged the war. It made the government less able to prosecute the war the way that we felt, you know, was needed in order to win....The antiwar movement was our enemy. And so we sort of had that attitude through most of the time” (13). Chesley shares similar sentiments and says:

We managed to reconcile ourselves to all this with the thought that as servicemen it was our duty to fight for America’s freedoms, among which is the right to dissent. We might disagree with the dissenters. We might consider them ill-advised, immature, blind to reality. We might wish for them the experience of living for a few years in North Vietnam and trying to show their dissent there by protest marches and by flying the American flag. But still it was our responsibility as necessary to protect their right to act wrong (163).

Halyburton uses the word “enemy” to describe the antiwar movement and Chesley explicitly says that dissenting is “ill-advised”, “immature” and “wrong”. Previous sections of this analysis have shown that these narratives use similar language when describing their foreign captors. Therefore the POWs have equated the antiwar movement with the very enemy that imprisoned them. Categorizing dissenters in this light shows the POWs’ firm conviction that U.S. foreign policy was correct and therefore their captivity was worthwhile.

Pride in Country

Pride in the United States is a theme found in all of the narratives, regardless of the war and location of captivity. In many instances, this pride was extremely explicit. Chesley discusses his love for the United States several times and even states, “It is that under God’s blessing the United States of America is the greatest country on the earth” (165). When justifying his involvement in the Vietnam War, McCain states, “I think America today is a better country than the one I left nearly six years ago” (28) and further adds, “I had a lot of time to think over there, and came to the conclusion that one of the most important things in life—along with a man’s family—is to make some contribution to his country” (29).

One of the more common ways this trend appears is by equating America to freedom and integrity. When discussing his liberation, Peppard claims, “As soon as we were in U.S. hands, I felt we were free. . . . I saw those soldiers there with their uniforms and with their buses painted up with the U.S. Army insignia on it and all that I felt that I was finally out of that place” (14). Similarly, Kurvers states regarding his return to the United States, “That was freedom. I didn’t feel really free until I got back there” (28). When Gunvalson was released from German captivity, he says, “And another beautiful spot was when we got liberated and they took that swastika down and put up the American flag in its place” (13).

In all of these instances, America, and everything that symbolizes it, provided the men with a source of motivation and relief; they knew their freedom had been fully restored when they finally landed on American soil. Equating America with freedom

shows the powerful significance the POWs placed on their country. Instead of becoming angered by their imprisonment, the men continued to hold the nation in high regard.

The trend of patriotism is important to the overall POW narrative. These men cannot feel like their efforts are significant without pride in their own country.

CHAPTER NINE

Rhetoric of Rebirth

“Because we kept faith in each other, we could recover our spirit” (Chesley 71)

A Rhetoric of Rebirth story was found in the four narratives of POWs from the Vietnam War. As previous sections have shown, these men faced cruel conditions while in captivity. Yet their ability to endure these experiences, remain patriotic, and feel as though their efforts were worthwhile shows how they eventually accomplished redemption after completing the process of rebirth.

Chesley admits that he frequently felt as though his time in captivity was futile. However, he continues to state, “I no doubt lost a lot by my seven years’ captivity, but I like to think it wasn’t all loss. I believe I learned a thing or two there and reaffirmed others. One thing I learned was the futility of worrying over something one can’t control” (71). Regardless of the amount of time he spent imprisoned and the extreme brutality he encountered, he later reinforces the idea that serving one’s country should be an important consideration for every American. He states, “As to my military service, I have no regrets about spending those years serving my country. I believe that any young man living in America should be willing to serve this country if the military called upon to do so” (162).

Peppard continued to serve out his military career after his releases and briefly states, “Outside of that I enjoyed my time in the Navy, else I wouldn’t have stayed after I got back. But I did enjoy that” (24). He did not feel discouraged by America’s defeat in the war, and neither did Halyburton, whose remarks reveal that he felt as though he had become a better person after his time in captivity. He states:

Well, I think I obviously matured a lot. As you would normally during that period of time, but I think I got, I rearranged my priorities about things that were important. I had a much greater sense of what was really important, as opposed to what seemed to be important. I think I learned that the human body, mind and spirit is a lot tougher and more adaptable and creative, you know, than you ever think it is. That you can get a lot more out of your mind and your body then [sic] you think you can if you are called on to do that. So, it just gave me a very, very different outlook on life, on what was important (17).

Similar to Chesley, McCain explicitly states in his narrative that second to family, the most important thing in life should be the desire to serve the country (27). His statements even go further than the other POWs because he believes that America as a country has been redeemed after the conclusion of the Vietnam War. He says:

I think America is a better country now because we have been through a sort of purging process, a re-evaluation of ourselves. Now I can see more of an appreciation of our way of life. There is more patriotism. The flag is all over the place. I can hear new values being stressed—the concern for environment is a case in point (28).

McCain's discourse unequivocally addresses the rebirth process. For him, the Vietnam War was ultimately a healthy experience for the entire nation. While controversy surrounding the war lasted for decades, McCain's perspective is incontrovertible. Regardless of the intense antiwar movement at home and military failure abroad, America, as a whole, is a "better country" (28). McCain's point of view shows that not only was America misguided in its attempts to blame Vietnam veterans for the nation's involvement in the war, but both the veterans and the country were able to improve because of it.

Burke's Rhetoric of Rebirth serves a similar purpose as the descriptions of captivity and captors do for those narratives of the Vietnam War. POWs persevered through harsh imprisonment and still faced animosity upon their arrival back to the United States. Yet, they believe their efforts to be important, and they feel they are better people due to their experiences.

CHAPTER TEN

Implications

“Any one of the prisoners would have been willing to die for his country had that been required of him” (Chesley 68)

While POW narratives garner attention regarding the mistreatment of prisoners, their assessments of international conflicts have gone largely ignored. Not only are POW experiences with foreign enemies invaluable to the politics of war, they reveal a new perspective that can potentially sway public opinion. This narrative criticism reveals four trends shared by all eight narratives: description of captivity, description of captors, coping mechanisms, and patriotism. An analysis of these trends shows that these narratives disclose the effectiveness and morality of an American soldier and accentuate the enemy’s unjustifiable stupidity and cruelty [with the exception of those held in Germany during World War II]. They also show how POWs managed to cope with their experiences and still maintain strong patriotic sentiments.

While these trends are common in all eight narratives, there are important differences between those of the POWs held during World War II and those of the POWs held during the Vietnam War. By the time America became involved in World War II, intervention was not just favored, it was expected. Those who fought were sent off with hope and celebrated upon return. “It is for the veterans of World War II...,” says LaCroix, “that we have reserved our fondest, least complicated tributes. They fought the Good War, after all, emerging triumphant against evil” (1). How do we distinguish their narratives from those of Vietnam veterans?

Since approval of American intervention in World War II was guaranteed across the homefront, these narratives do not function to garner support for the war. However,

they do shed light on the sociopolitical environment of the countries in which the POWs were held. For Brick and Gunvalson, their narratives reveal that their German captors were not nearly as passionate about the war as other foreign captors, and eventually felt neglected by their government. This provides a stark contrast to the perceptions of German soldiers involved in the Holocaust who persecuted and murdered millions of prisoners. Yet the Germans in charge of POW camps did not practice this same type of barbarity. Even though they were fighting for the Nazi state, their indifference made them more empathetic and appear as victims of their country's injustice as well.

For those POWs held by the Japanese, their narratives confirm Japan's blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions. They showed no mercy for their captives. If they were not working them to death, they were beating them endlessly or depriving them of food. Although over 60 years have passed since the end of the war, it is important that the mistreatment encountered by these POWs is not forgotten. The number of living survivors is diminishing quickly, and their discourse provides historical context regarding conditions on enemy territory and acts as a reminder of the unshakable perseverance of the American soldier and POW.

By emphasizing the cruelty of the captors and addressing the issue of communism, the four narratives concerning the Vietnam War challenge common beliefs that American involvement was unwarranted and haphazard. Although Rasmussen and Downey state, "As pragmatists, many Americans apparently are willing to put the tragedy to rest through a reconceptualization of Vietnam as an anomaly in the larger framework of the American war experience" (191), these narratives legitimize military intervention in Vietnam. They show American POWs as honest, moral soldiers of peace and portray

the foreign enemy as destructive and immoral. According to these narratives, the U.S. would have been neglecting its international responsibilities of maintaining peace and preventing the communist threat had it not interfered. Audiences of this discourse are therefore led to trust the government's decision to intervene.

The controversy regarding the U.S.'s current involvement in the Middle East has been equated with battles against communism from decades past. Similar to the 1960s and 70s, the invasion into Iraq and America's ability to withdraw has resulted in heated opposition to foreign policy decisions. Vietnam POW narratives have the potential to render advocacy for this American conflict if their rhetoric is understood in light of the United States' current political situation.

POW experiences have had a profound effect on repatriated prisoners and their families, yet the short term effects of their narratives are difficult to measure. Men returning from captivity during World War II were welcomed and celebrated by the American people, yet the efforts of those returning from the Vietnam War did not resonate as strongly with the country. In 1974, Nixon briefly addressed the POW issue in his State of the Union speech saying, "They have returned with honor. And we can be proud of the fact that our courageous prisoners of war, for whom a dinner was held in Washington tonight, that they came home with their heads high, on their feet and not on their knees" (Nixon "State of the Union"). Vietnam POWs were honored by the government, but American audiences struggled to interpret the war as valuable.

Decades after these wars, it is still challenging to decipher the long term effects of POW narratives. As previously stated, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress established the Veterans History Project in 2000 to commemorate the service of

America's armed forces. A branch of the archives has been allotted for the experiences of American POWs. This has made transcripts, photographs, and video footage available for the public, allowing more audiences to have access to these powerful narratives.

Issues concerning POW treatment also began to appear during John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign. As his episodes in Vietnam were introduced into his discourse, they were brought to the forefront of media attention. Orson Swindle, a former lieutenant colonel who briefly shared a cell with McCain in Hanoi, shared his views about the candidate to *U.S. News & World Report*. "He chose probably to die. That, my friend, is character beyond what most of us can understand" ("McCain's 'POW Buddies' Speak Up on his Behalf"). Fellow POW Gunvalson has also spoken out regarding McCain's character by stating, "I think John McCain is a survivor. He's a hero to me" (23). His survival narrative during the Republican Convention and presidential campaign was used as a point of inspiration. By promoting the time he spent in captivity, different media outlets increased national awareness of POW discourse.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Conclusion

It is important to realize that this research examines eight narratives from only two American-fought conflicts. There is still so much information to be attained from narratives that have not yet been analyzed. Global politics have shifted significantly over the past decades, yet the history of POWs and their narratives provide a fundamental account to the change in these policies.

The four main trends found in this research reveal that regardless of location, the POW experience is a shared one. While these narratives are essential in understanding foreign and domestic perspectives of war, it is important that the personal histories of these men are not forgotten. Their accounts provide indispensable insights into the psychology of foreign enemies, yet serve as a reminder to the extent of sacrifice that they made for the country. These men were beaten, tortured, starved, and murdered for a cause they believed to be worthwhile, regardless of whether they received support from the American people. While imprisonment interrupted their fight for the United States, POWs felt as though they were bettered by their experiences, and as Gunvalson states in his narrative, “As a matter of fact I think it probably made me stronger” (10).

If anything is taken away from these stories, it should be the inspiration that these POWs instill in their audiences. These survival narratives emphasize the incredible strength that can be found when people are pushed past their breaking points. They teach that regardless of the circumstances, people can be resourceful, they can cope, and they will survive. The discourse created in POW narratives tells inspiring human stories that

show that nothing is impossible if you have the will to survive. It is discourse that is nothing less than powerful.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Narrative of Harold Brick

| | | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | <i>Disbelief in being captured</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> | <i>Adherence to military standards</i> | <i>Speaking English</i> | <i>Description of Germans</i> |
| Pages | 2 | 3, 26, 28, 29 | 3 | 3, 20 | 3, 6, 20, 21, 22, 23 |
| | <i>Intimidation Factor</i> | <i>Erratic behavior of captors</i> | <i>German civilians</i> | <i>Faith</i> | <i>Horrible conditions</i> |
| Pages | 3, 4 | 4 | 6, 4, 17 | 7, 9 | 7, 8, 19 |
| | <i>Coping Mechanisms</i> | <i>Rhetoric of Rebirth</i> | | | |
| Pages | 9, 17, 19, 29, 30, 32 | 34, 35 | | | |

Appendix 2

Narrative of Russell Gunvalson

| | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| | <i>Faith in God</i> | <i>Disbelief in being captured</i> | <i>Intimidation factor of the Germans</i> | <i>Description of Germans</i> |
| Pages | 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 17 | 3 | 4, 7, 25 | 4, 8, 15, 21, 22, 25 |
| | <i>Conditions of captivity</i> | <i>German civilians</i> | <i>Speaking English</i> | <i>Rhetoric of Rebirth</i> |
| Pages | 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22 | 6 | 6, 7 | 10, 30, 33 |
| | <i>Coping Mechanisms</i> | <i>Abuse of prisoners--punishment</i> | <i>Jessica Lynch and other POWs</i> | <i>Patriotism/Optimism</i> |
| Pages | 5, 9 | 12 | 22, 23, 26, 29, 30., 31, 32 | 12, 13, 24 |

Appendix 3

Narrative of Harold. G. Kurvers

| | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------------|
| | <i>Meager Upbringing</i> | <i>Japanese bombing</i> | <i>Physical conditions of soldiers</i> | <i>Dislike for MacArthur</i> | <i>Conditions of surrender</i> |
| Pages | 2, 7, 25 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| | <i>Cruel Conditions of captivity</i> | <i>Treatment of Japanese</i> | <i>Coping mechanisms</i> | <i>Physical Description of Japanese</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> |
| Pages | 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19 | 7, 8, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 | 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 18, 19, 23, 29, 30, 31, 32 | 13, 14, 15 | 28 |

Appendix 4

Narrative of Gene Boyt

| | | |
|--------------|--|---|
| | <i>Immediate Impressions of Japanese</i> | <i>Pos. Will to Fight</i> |
| Pages | 54, 56 , 59, 60 73, 84 | 59, 60, 63, 68, 71, 78, 125, 128, 145, 149, 154, 157 |
| | | |
| | <i>Feelings of defeat</i> | <i>Japanese--English language</i> |
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| | <i>Horrible Conditions</i> | <i>Subversive Behavior</i> |
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Appendix 5

Narrative of Donald Richard Peppard

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| | <i>Decision to Join</i> | <i>Erratic behavior of captors</i> | <i>Brutality of captors</i> | <i>Adherence to military standards</i> | <i>Description of captivity</i> |
| Pages | 1, 3 | 5, 9, 12 | 7, 9, 10, 11 | 7, 11 | 9 |
| | | | | | |
| | <i>Coping mechanisms</i> | <i>Stupidity of captors</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> | <i>Rhetoric of Rebirth</i> | |
| Pages | 11, 17 | 9, 13, 14 | 14, 16 | 18 | |

Appendix 6

Narrative of Larry Chesley

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| | <i>Pride</i> | <i>Faith</i> | <i>Adherence to military standards</i> |
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Appendix 7

Narrative of Porter Halyburton

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|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | <i>Decision to join</i> | <i>Against communism</i> | <i>Stupidity of Vietnamese</i> | <i>Adherence to military standards</i> | <i>Conditions of captivity</i> |
| Pages | 1, 3, 5, 6 | 6 | 8, 11, 15 | 8, 11 | 9 |
| | | | | | |
| | <i>Coping Mechanisms</i> | <i>Brutality of captors</i> | <i>Description of captors</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> | <i>Rhetoric of Rebirth</i> |
| Pages | 10, 13 | 11, 12, 16 | 11 | 13, 14, 15, 16, 19 | 17 |

Appendix 8

Narrative of John S. McCain III

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| | <i>Cruelty of N. Viet captors</i> | <i>Refusal to comply with captors</i> |
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| Pages | 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 | 28, 29 |

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