

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Wars have been fought for many reasons ranging from religious, territorial, and economic reasons, to colonial expansion and sometime even ideologies. In ancient times prisoners were seldom taken and victory often meant that the victor would totally destroy or enslave the defeated party. One historian refers to prisoners, hostages, and captives during this time as merely a “footnote” to the military experience.

As long as nations engage in wars, or think they can promote their cause through terrorists’ activities, the taking of military prisoners or civilian hostages’ remains a fact of international political life. Despite efforts to codify and “humanize” prisoner of war/hostage conditions, the cultural unknowns of an imprisoning power cannot be estimated or pre-determined. It is difficult to predict the humanitarian instincts of one’s captors. As a result, the ability of prisoners/hostages to survive is always questionable.

Military members, from the beginning of their enlistment, receive a clear message; knowledge is the key to success in the command environment. The implied message is that if you work hard, take advantage of every opportunity to advance in rate/rank, and follow the chain of command, the institution will reward you. Military people live in and by a very structured protocol of behavior. Regulations and instructions guide tasks to completion.

Uniform insignia indicate job description, status, and level of experience. But what happens when the trappings of this sub-culture are removed? Specifically, what happens to people who have relied heavily on their military or civilian status for self-validation and sense of self worth? When all these external trappings are stripped away, prisoners have only their personal values to hold on to as they face captivity. How they adhere to the Code of Conduct, their faith, and their value system depends on their personal integrity, strength of character, and belief in themselves and their country.

A lesson learned following the Korean conflict is that a person can be prepared through rigorous training to acquire “survival skills” that empower them to face

captivity (or the possibility of captivity) more effectively. This nonresident training course is designed to help provide some of these survival skills. The overall objectives of this course are

- to help you gain knowledge of the history and policy pertaining to prisoners of war,
- to show you how this knowledge can provide captivity survival skills, and
- to suggest avenues of support for POW/MIA’s and their families.

To assist you in meeting these objectives, discussion questions are included in each chapter. These questions are intended to direct your thinking to the primary teaching points and to act as initiators for a more in-depth discussion of the subject matter.

Since ancient times, wars and their consequences have been preserved in historical record. One of these consequences, readily available for review alongside causes, strategic planning, types of weapons, and lessons learned, is the taking of enemy prisoners. War, when viewed from the perspective of how human beings treat their enemy captives, takes on a profound dimension that increases in importance as fighting is prolonged. It may be argued that the considerable maintenance costs associated with providing enemy prisoners food, clothing, medical care, and shelter have often placed the imprisoning power, over a period of time, in the position of choosing between pursuit of its military objectives and ensuring the humane treatment of enemy prisoners. How nations have developed in theory, and observed in practice, restraints that apply to the conduct of war and the capture and treatment of prisoners, is the subject of “the law of war.”

Statistics cited in chapter 1 are current as of July 2000. Future requests for updated statistics should be forwarded to the National League of Families, 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 219, Washington, DC 20036-5504.

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN INTERNATIONAL CODE

Learning Objective: *Recognize the historical factors and circumstances contributing to the need for an international code concerning the taking of, concern for, and care of prisoners of war.*

The ancient world exercised little restraint in its conduct of war, reserving what few mitigating features it recognized for wars between like peoples and civilizations. Conquered powers underwent torture, slavery, death, and confiscation of property. Little distinction was made between combatants and non-combatants. During the Middle Ages, barbarism, brutality, and mass killings continued to typify wars. This was true even of those wars, which were often religious in origin and nature. In the early Middle Ages, because few moral or legal inhibitions restricted fighting powers, total defeat meant total destruction.

Prompted, however, by religious ideals, ideas of chivalry, and the emerging rationalist and humanist sentiments of the Renaissance, nations began for the first time in the later Middle Ages to codify the conduct of hostilities. One early law, for example, specified that Christians taken prisoner by other Christians could no longer be enslaved. In 1550, Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican priest and professor at the University of Salamanca, wrote that he considered it illegal to do more harm in war than was warranted by the objective. The procedure to follow in the treatment of prisoners, he maintained, should be to hold them for ransom, vice brutalizing them, or killing them, en masse. By 1625, with the publication of *De Jure Belli ac Pacis, on the Law of War and Peace*, a comprehensive international formulation of conduct between warring nations had appeared. The author, Hugo Grotius, espoused the ideal that wars should be fought for a just cause. In this, he foreshadowed the terms that marked the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) specified that prisoners would be released without ransom. Exchange and parole had become the new rule.

Between the years 1581 and 1864, at least 291 international agreements were concluded with the intent of providing maximum protection for human life during a state of war. By the eighteenth century, humane treatment of prisoners of war was an established ideal. Montesquieu, for example, held that prisoners should only be prevented from further active

fighting. Rousseau reasoned that because war involved relations between states, the only individuals who were enemies were soldiers, not unarmed men (prisoners). In agreement with this view was de Vattel, who defined "Belligerents" as those who were able to fight for the aims of war. Prisoners, because they were unable to fight, were not included in this category, and therefore should neither be considered nor be treated as belligerents.

According to de Vittal prisoners could be confined but were not to be treated harshly unless guilty of some crime. It is interesting to note that clergy and men of letters were given special status provided they did not bear arms on the field of battle. If they did, then they were subject to same treatment as regular combatants.

Ideals, of course, contrasted markedly with actual practice. During the American Revolution, the colonies made an effort to apply the concepts expressed by the eighteenth century humanists to their treatment of enemy prisoners. In reality, treatment depended on the attitude toward the specific enemy group involved. For example, British prisoners were treated fairly well, according to the principles of humane treatment expressed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Hessian mercenaries, however, were normally held as indentured servants. Loyalists received the harshest treatment of all: most were convicted of treason and were condemned to death. American prisoners captured by the British were maintained in wretched living quarters; but then, so were most British soldiers and sailors captured by the Colonists.

Read, "Don't Worry, Be Still: The Virtue of Nonchalance," by John Garvey in Appendix I of this manual. The author looks at emotions and raises questions as to their role in stressful situations that test our ethical judgment.

As has been the case throughout history, the conditions of imprisonment during the American Revolution were dictated by the prevailing customs and culture of the imprisoning power, as well as by the captor's hatred of the enemy — an emotion which frequently negated the capacity of the captor to apply Rousseau's principle of distinction between soldier and prisoner.

In the early nineteenth century, during the years immediately following the Revolution, Daniel Webster echoed the humanitarian ideals expressed in an earlier age, when he declared that prisoners of war were to be considered unfortunate, not criminal. Nevertheless, prisoners taken during the Mexican War received harsh treatment.

During the Civil War, treatment varied widely, from grossly inhumane to compassionate, on either side of the conflict. In an effort to achieve uniform treatment of prisoners, President Lincoln tasked Professor Francis Lieber to prepare a set of rules that both sides could follow. On 24 April 1863, President Lincoln published as General Order 100, Professor Lieber's "Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field." Following is a summary of selected articles:

Article 49. A prisoner of war is defined as a "public enemy armed or attached to the hostile army for active aid" who has been captured.

Article 52. Belligerents may not make the determination on their own to view prisoners of war as brigands or bandits vice professional military forces.

Article 53. Chaplains, medical staff officers, apothecaries, hospital nurses, and servants, are not prisoners of war, unless the commander has reasons to detain them. They are to be treated as prisoners of war only if they choose to remain with their captured companions and may be exchanged if commander sees fit.

Article 56. Prisoners of war are not subject to punishment for being a public enemy, nor may they be subjected to any excessively severe treatment.

Article 74. Prisoners of war are prisoners of the government, not of the captor.

Article 75. Prisoners of war are subject to confinement and imprisonment, but not to intentional suffering.

Article 76. Prisoners of war are to be well fed, treated with humanity, and may be required to work for the captor's government.

Article 78. Prisoners of war who escape and are recaptured shall not be punished for escaping.

Article 79. Prisoners of war who are wounded shall receive medical treatment.

Despite what became known as the "Lieber Code," the treatment of prisoners on both sides was anything

but uniform. In general, treatment was better at the start of the war than in the middle and latter years. Neither the North nor the South was equipped to maintain prisoners. Accommodations, food, and clothing were all in inadequate supply, particularly in the South. Properly trained guards were also in short supply, which meant that abuse and excessively harsh treatment occurred in individual cases. The reality of prisoners was an unanticipated consequence of the war. Neither side wanted to appear inhumane, yet neither side was prepared to sacrifice its military objectives to ensure the appropriate care of prisoners.

In the same year as the publication of the Lieber Code, further efforts took place on an international scale to bring about a uniform code of prisoner treatment. These efforts culminated in the establishment of the International Red Cross. At the urging of Henri Dunant of Geneva, Switzerland, the first of the Geneva Conventions was held in 1864 for the purpose of determining provisions for the wounded in war. In 1874 an international conference known as "The Project for an International Convention on the Laws and Customs of War" was held in Brussels.

The results of this conference, though not ratified with the force of law, were nevertheless published in the form of a manual in 1880, and contributed part of the foundation for subsequent international conferences on the law of war. Skeptical of its ideals, German Field Marshal Count Helmuth von Moltke, the great strategist who molded the Prussian army into a formidable war machine, expressed doubt that the code would yield real results. In a memorable reply to von Moltke, Professor Jean Gaspard Bluntschli wrote, "Every state, even the most powerful, will gain considerably in honor before God and before men if it is found to be faithful and sincere in respect to and observation of the law of nations." Bluntschli's appeal to moral sensibilities and conscience reflects a timeless standard, not only for a nation's honorable and humane treatment of enemy prisoners, but also for prisoners' cultivation of an attitude that values resistance with honor. Nevertheless, even under the "best" of circumstances, that some tension will arise between the humane nation and the resistant prisoner is inevitable: the essential and radical conflict implicit in war involves the deep-seated, foundational values of nations opposed to one another. Regardless of how "honorable" each side seeks to be, they are still at war.

THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS IN WORLD WARS I AND II

Learning Objective: *Recognize the evolving concern for the status of prisoners of wars, the information a prisoner was required to give to the captor, the requirements for humane care of prisoners, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Geneva Conventions during World Wars I and II.*

It was the Hague Conventions of 1864 and 1899 that, along with the Geneva Conventions of 1906, 1929, and 1949, codified most of what still exists today as the definitive law of war. As nations moved into the twentieth century, efforts to commit one another to specific restrictions and observances of war became more concerted. As the practice of war became increasingly “total,” i.e., involved greater numbers and populations of people at greater cost for longer periods of time, its consequences became more destructive and widespread.

In the Annex to the Hague Convention of 1907, it was stipulated that armed forces of belligerent parties could consist of combatant and non-combatants. If captured both had the right to be treated as POW’s. They must be humanely treated and their personal belongings remain their property. Chapter II of the Annex detailed specific conditions for their treatment.

Article 4. POW’s were prisoners of the Government and not the captors.

Article 6. POW’s could be used as laborers according to rank and aptitude.

Article 7. The capturing Government was responsible for their welfare.

Article 8. POW’s were responsible to the laws of the capturing Government.

Article 9. POW’s were required to give their name and rank.

Article 18. Granted POW’s the liberty to exercise their religion.

Unfortunately, because the Hague Conventions stipulated that signing be unanimous in order for the terms of the conventions to apply, the code was not binding in World War I. The Geneva Convention of 1929 corrected this deficiency by requiring all governments that signed to be held to its provisions. The Convention of 1929 was signed by 33 nations, including the United States.

During World War I, which marked the beginning of American involvement in global conflicts, the United States sought to ensure the humane treatment of Americans imprisoned overseas, by transporting enemy prisoners to this country, and providing them good treatment. While enemy prisoners were interrogated for intelligence purposes, this was considered appropriate as long as force was not used. This national strategy of modeling reasonable treatment of prisoners was, apparently, effective. The Germans soon found it more expedient to treat Americans well. Statistics show that only 147 (3.5%) of the 4,120 American prisoners taken captive in World War I died during imprisonment, all causes of death considered.

World War II occasioned the first real test of a legally binding convention that all signatories were committed to observe. This time, the problem that arose involved the non-signatories, Russia and Japan. These nations did not observe the terms of the convention in their treatment of enemy prisoners. Consequently, when captured, Russian and Japanese troops received harsh treatment from some of their captors. The Germans, for example, insisted that because Russia was a non-signatory, humane treatment did not apply to Russian prisoners. As a result, of five million Russians taken captive, only one million survived.

American treatment of enemy prisoners, as in World War I, followed specific treatment standards established by the United States government with regard to food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and pay. Additionally, enemy prisoners were entitled to religious services in their native language, conducted by American military chaplains and civilian clergy conversant in those languages. While attention to standards of treatment was motivated to some degree by humanitarian concern, ensuring humane treatment for American prisoners was high on the agenda. Captivity for Americans held by the Germans was arduous, but they did not receive political indoctrination, nor were they denied the opportunity for religious expression. Despite humane treatment of Japanese prisoners by United States forces, Americans imprisoned by the Japanese did not fare as well. Treatment varied somewhat, depending upon the interests or personality of the camp commander. On the whole, life in the prison camps was deplorable. The Bataan Death March is but one example of the fate of many prisoners. Similar conditions and treatment existed at Cabanatuan, Old Bilibid Prison Camp, Palawan Barracks, and Davao Penal Colony.

Figures 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 depict allied prisoners who liberated and who could testify to the truth of this fact.

THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS AFTER WORLD WAR II

Learning Objective: *Recognize the revisions to the Geneva Conventions after World War II, and the impact of these changes on the treatment of prisoners of war during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.*

There have been three Geneva Conventions (1906, 1929, 1949). The last in 1949 was designed to correct deficiencies that arose in World War II. Specifically that issue was Article 2 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. The 12

August 1949 revision specified that the conventions would apply to all signatories and non-signatories “if the latter accepts and applies the provisions thereof,” a move directed at Germany’s refusal during the war to treat Russian prisoners humanely.

A further provision in this convention stated that the conventions “apply to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.” This was the provision that afforded the United States tremendous leverage in securing changes in treatment for, and eventually the release of, American prisoners during the Vietnam War. Although accounts of American prisoners’ captivity in Vietnam abound with incidents of torture and deprivation, in violation of the



Figure 1-1.—Jubilant Prisoners at Aomori, 29 August 1945.



Figure 1-2.—POW's Celebrate at Aomori, 29 August 1945.

Geneva Convention, the United States was not completely powerless in efforts to change these abuses. Because South Vietnam was a signatory to the Geneva Convention, American prisoners could be transferred to South Vietnam for release. Further, because North Vietnam was also a signatory, the pressure brought to bear on them by the international community to

comply with the standards of the Geneva Convention contributed significantly to American prisoners receiving improved treatment toward the close of the war. During the Korean War, by way of contrast, neither the Republic of Korea, nor North Korea, nor the Chinese Communists were signatories to the Geneva Convention. As a result, the United States had very



Figure 1-3.—Released Prisoner at Aomori, Japan, 29-30 August 1945.

little leverage in effecting the release of American prisoners of war.

It is important to remember that Communist Block countries took exception to Article 85 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 that offers protection to POW's legally convicted of a crime before capture. As a result communist captors often used their reservation to this article as the basis to charge all opposing armed forces members as "war criminals." Thus, POW's were often charged as "war criminals" simply because they waged war against their communist captors.

The Korean War presented a variety of unique problems for the United States in its management of enemy prisoners. Western food aggravated already existing medical and nutritional problems plaguing the Korean prisoners. Additionally, American soldiers guarding the captives often used more force than was necessary, because of their negative attitude toward and fear of the Koreans. A third consideration had to do with the fact that the United States' view of enemy prisoners as non-combatants (vice active enemy

agents) underestimated the pervasive, subtle power of the communist system. Captain Kim Sun Ho of the Republic of Korea, a war crimes investigator at the United Nations Command prisoner of war camps in Korea, considered it noteworthy that communist prisoners were treated no differently from anticommunist prisoners. South Korean civilians in the area, he said, could not understand this, because in their eyes, fair treatment of communist prisoners was too fair. They were aghast at the costs expended by the United States for the care and maintenance of enemy prisoners. Statistics do, in fact, bear out the startling difference between the way American prisoners were treated, and the way North Korean prisoners were treated. Of the 173,219 North Koreans taken prisoner by the United States, 3,432 (2%) died. Of the 7,190 Americans taken prisoner by North Korea, 2,730 (38%) died.

It was the experience of the Korean War that acquainted the United States for the first time with the power of indoctrination and propaganda. While the Japanese had used these tools to a limited degree in

World War II, they did not use them to the extent that the Communists did in Korea. The Japanese had been harsh, and this prompted commanders to limit the amount of mission-related information provided to aircrews going into combat, but the Japanese never developed an intentional program of indoctrination. The Germans, on the other hand, were skillful practitioners of stagecraft, misleading geniality, glib questions, and kindness. They would typically stage a mock interrogation of an air crewman they had captured, in which they went through the motions of attempting to elicit information from him. After the interrogation session, the prisoner was invited out for a beer. Over a period of time, crucial information, gathered piece-meal in convivial social settings from a variety of prisoners, resulted in increased casualties and thwarted air raids on the part of Allied forces. Viewed against the backdrop of these previous experiences, communist indoctrination was confusing and unpredictable. Compulsory, systematic, and very well organized, the tenets of communism comprised the baseline of prison camp life. A battery of camp and company newspapers, published by the prisoners, but managed by the North Koreans, provided a steady diet of propaganda and slanted news reporting on the war. Prisoners were categorized and separated from one another at the out set. Widespread use of self-incriminating and self-critical statements made by prisoners were combined with propaganda, and exploited for use in indoctrination lectures. Numbers of prisoners succumbed to what was widely branded after the war as “brainwashing.” On the whole, American forces were not prepared to practice escape, evasion, and resistance, nor had they received consistent training regarding what information could be revealed, and what could not be revealed.

POST-KOREA: THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Learning Objective: *Recognize the lessons learned from the Korean War, the reasons for the establishment of the Code of Conduct, and the lessons learned from the Vietnam War.*

At President Eisenhower’s insistence, the Defense Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War was convened on 17 May 1955 to review the Korean experience, and provide specific guidance to address the identified problems. The Committee’s recommendations included the following:

- Establish a Code of Conduct.

- Institute a training program.
- Develop security regulations.
- Develop an escape and evasion strategy for American forces, for the purpose of infiltrating enemy areas and assisting American prisoners.

The first of these recommendations, the establishment of a Code of Conduct, was enacted as Executive Order 10631 on 17 August 1955. By all accounts from Americans held prisoner in North Vietnam from 1964 to 1973, it was the Code of Conduct that inspired and provided the framework for resistance and survival. The Code, combined with good training, enabled our people to detach themselves from and maintain a perspective on the methods being used to exploit them for political ends.

Unfortunately, there were some important lessons to be learned from the POW accounts after WW II; however, no organized effort was instituted to formulate a specific code or training program. For purposes of learning the lessons of captivity, the Vietnam experience forms our most recent precedent, and the only test, thus far, of the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct and the training ordered by President Eisenhower’s Executive Order 10631. The subsequent chapters of this course will explore some of the specific lessons of Vietnam regarding prisoners, those missing in action, their families, and some of the chaplains who ministered to them.

Like Korea, Vietnam confronted the United States with unique dilemmas regarding the treatment of enemy prisoners. Unlike Korea, enemy prisoners were not under the direct management of the United States. Upon capture, the Vietcong were generally transferred to the South Vietnamese. Despite the fact that South Vietnam was a signatory to the Geneva Convention, there was a deeply ingrained philosophy on the part of the government against full compliance. The predicament of the United States was that Article 2 held the capturing power responsible for the treatment of enemy prisoners if the detaining power did not comply with the Geneva Convention. Thus, the difficulty of ensuring compliance, coupled with concern over world opinion in the light of problems associated with the treatment of American prisoners, thrust the United States into a tremendous struggle to achieve humane treatment for the Vietcong.

Beginning in 1973, nearly 600 American prisoners of war returned from Vietnam. While there had been suspicions, and some confirmed reports, of torture, extreme deprivation, and inhumane treatment, the full

story of cruelty and heroism emerged for the first time as formal debriefings were conducted in the months following repatriation. Prisoners described the various methods of interrogation, including rope torture, which characterized prison life at the “Hanoi Hilton” (Hoa Lo Prison), particularly prior to 1970. They also described their dogged and determined dedication to uphold the Code of Conduct, to support their fellow prisoners, and to remain faithful to their country. Most remarkable of all, while they experienced a variety of residual medical problems, and evidenced some difficulty in transitioning to a culturally changed United States, they maintained their sense of honor, and exhibited a heightened awareness of the meaning of life.

Today, 27 years following repatriation (*in year 2000*), the vast majority of American prisoners of war are psychologically and spiritually sound. The contrast with the way in which American prisoners in Korea fared is noticeable, but the reasons why are not mysterious. The advantage of those imprisoned in Vietnam may be attributed to their higher overall educational level, their better advance training in survival and resistance, and the Code of Conduct. The Code, in fact, forms the spiritual core of SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape) School, the Navy’s program to acquaint Navy and Marine air crew and intelligence personnel with the survival skills, evasion techniques, enemy interrogation tactics, and the resistance posture necessary to endure captivity with honor. Students also realize and confront their physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological limitations. The lessons are arduous, but indelibly impressed. American Naval personnel imprisoned in Vietnam testify to the fact that they did not have to start at “ground zero” in actual captivity, because they had already built, through SERE training, a known set of resources. The Air Force requires similar training for its aircrews.

REPATRIATION AFTER KOREA & VIETNAM

Learning Objective: To develop an awareness of the sensitivity of the political needs of our country of developing diplomatic relations with Vietnam and yet continue in the pursuit of information about POW’s and MIA’s.

A sobering consequence of the Vietnam War that remains unresolved is the number of American military members and civilians unaccounted for in

Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). Since 1982, through increased intelligence efforts, a significant body of information has been gathered from refugees and other sources. According to the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, the data provide credible evidence that the remains of over 400 American servicemen were recovered and withheld by the Vietnamese. This number has decreased as negotiations between the two governments have been more successful, and as some remains have been returned. Efforts are underway to achieve a full accounting of the missing, and to have the remains of those who died returned to their nation and families. The United States has had to persevere, and has occasionally been frustrated in its efforts to meet these objectives. Nevertheless, over time, the issue in Southeast Asia is being resolved.

Over the years, as the uncertainty and pain of waiting are prolonged for the families of those missing in action, the likelihood of resolution may appear less promising. U.S. policy has intentionally sought to keep separate the humanitarian issues associated with the repatriation of persons from the political and strategic aspects of the normalization of relations between nations. The reason for this intent is to avoid the development of a conflict between these two areas, a conflict in which the humanitarian issues would inevitably lose. Since 1981, government resources have been applied in countless numbers to the resolution of prisoner of war/missing in action (POW/MIA) matters, especially to the issue of MIA repatriations.

At the end of the war, there were 2,583 unaccounted for American prisoners, missing in action or killed but not recovered. As of June 28, 2000, 2,014 Americans are still missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War, though 468 were at sea or over water. Joint missions are still underway in an effort to achieve the fullest possible accounting of personnel still listed as missing. Secretary of Defense, William S. Cohen, underlined this commitment in these words, “We’re committed to all our warriors, past and present, we’re committed to their families, whose pain has endured for decades. America’s fallen heroes did not face the horror of battle for us to turn away from their sacrifice. They didn’t fight for us to forget.”

TERRORISM: THE NEW CAPTIVITY

Learning Objective: *Recognize the definition of terrorism and the nature of the continuing threat of terrorism and hostage taking.*

Although a much larger dimension in its scope, hostage taking still entails all the psychological traumas of prisoners of war. The intensity of the various hostage experiences plus the factor that non-military personnel can be involved seem to limit the effectiveness of strictly military training to forestall the threatened results. The need for Chaplain Corps personnel to be trained in successful counseling techniques in dealing with the released hostages becomes imperative.

While hostage taking is not a recent phenomenon in world affairs, and while it often accompanies nonpolitical violent crime, the terrorist acts of the previous decade have been particularly frightening in their intensity, and have received worldwide news and instant coverage by the media.

Terrorism is defined as the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives. In such a circumstance, the hostage becomes a political pawn, and their status is more akin to that of a prisoner vice a hostage victim.

Just as American prisoners of war in Korea and Vietnam were exploited for political and ideological ends, hostages in Iran and Lebanon have been used to manipulate the U.S. government into a position of unwilling negotiation. Innocent bystanders who suddenly find themselves “imprisoned” in a fast-food restaurant while their “captor” negotiates personal demands with the police outside, may be held hostage for a period of hours, or possibly days. Such circumstances present traumatic after-effects for the victim, but the victim’s whereabouts are no secret. There is also the guarantee that, eventually, the hostage taker will be either caught or killed.

In contrast, political hostages in a foreign country have been held for years, while the terrorist group responsible for their capture pursues accomplishment of its own ideological and political ends. The political hostage’s whereabouts are almost always secret, especially if that individual has been kidnapped. Aside from an occasional photograph or videotaped

message, the outside world has no information about the hostage’s health or well-being, and may not even know whether the individual is still alive.

Because the leverage afforded the hostage’s home country by the Geneva Convention cannot be exercised in this situation, such rights as sending and receiving mail, available on a limited censored basis even to the POWs in Vietnam, are non-existent for the political hostage. Unless the nations whose citizens have been captured decide to negotiate directly with the terrorists, the only option for solving this crisis is quiet diplomacy, and the hope that, somehow, external influences or events will intervene. In the meantime, the political hostage is imprisoned, and viewed by the captive power as representative of the opposed political ends of his or her country.

Since 1982, some 100 foreign nationals have been taken hostage by a variety of ideologically and politically committed terrorist groups. Prior to 1982, 80 percent of terrorist attacks were against property, and only 20 percent were against people. During the 1980’s, despite a slight decline in the total number or worldwide terrorist incidents, the percentage of attacks against people increased to 50 percent; the rate of death increased 13 percent. Deaths of hostages, and death threats against them (which may or may not be acted upon), have typically taken place in response to world events. The volatile and constantly changing face of political life in the Middle East has served to confuse and entangle even further the unfolding crisis of the hostages.

As long as nations continue to engage in wars, or find that they can work with some great degree of effectiveness through terrorist groups, the taking of prisoners/hostages will remain a fact of international political life. Despite centuries of effort to codify and “humanize” prisoner of war conditions, the cultural unknowns of the imprisoning power are formidable, the humanitarian instincts of one’s captors quixotic, and the survivability of the prisoner mostly untested. Training to survive captivity has been developed out of the hard lessons, both the successes and the failures, of past scenarios.

The next chapter provides examples of some of the lessons learned by prisoners of war.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you react were you called into a brig to provide care for a distraught prisoner, and, as

you step close to hear the prisoner's voice, he spits in your face?

2. Suppose you were placed in charge of 10 prisoners who were members of an elite enemy fighting group that had massacred 50 people in a small village. In

addition, they had killed six of your shipmates while attempting to flee aboard a small gunboat, how would you be impacted in your treatment of these prisoners?

3. Why do you think it is necessary to have "laws of war?"

