

7-year POW to speak at ceremony in November

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Retired Capt. William "Bill" Robinson, who is the longest-held enlisted prisoner of war in American history, was released from the infamous Hanoi Hilton on Feb. 12, 1973.

Robinson was a member of the U.S. Air Force, flying as a crewman aboard a Kaman HH43B "Huskie" helicopter on rescue missions in Vietnam when he and his fellow crew members were shot out of the sky by the enemy in 1965.

A photograph was taken shortly after his capture, preserving the image of Robinson being escorted at gunpoint with fixed bayonet by a diminutive North Vietnamese woman in uniform. The photograph became very popular in Vietnam, and it figured prominently in the country's propaganda campaign. It was used on official North Vietnam postal stamps issued in 1967.

Robinson, a graduate from Roanoke Rapids High School, in Roanoke Rapids, N.C., was only 22 years old when he was captured.

He was paraded around in several villages where he was hit, spat upon and taunted. Torture was part of everyday

life; for the next seven and a half years he endured not only torture, but starvation, beatings, boredom and humiliation, and was kept in a cell so small he could barely fit into it. He and other Prisoners of War, POWs, were generally given two meals and about 15 minutes outside each day.

After 2,737 days of confinement, on Valentine's Day in 1973, the plane carrying Robinson touched down in Washington D.C. Robinson described himself as feeling lucky that he only spent six months in solitary confinement.

On April 9, 1973, Robinson received a battlefield commission as a 2nd Lieutenant for his valorous and honorable behavior during captivity that was frequently brutal and inhumane.

Robinson harbors no resentment or hostility for his captivity. In 1995, the Vietnamese government offered to provide for Robinson and his wife to visit their country again to visit the site of his former prison in Hanoi. Robinson graciously accepted and even visited with the former soldier who appears with him in the famous photograph of his capture.

When asked about that meeting and his feelings toward his former enemy, Robinson stated that "she was very gracious and kind" and that "she was just a soldier doing what was asked of her."

Robinson retired from active duty in 1984 for medical reasons, but left with an impressive record of military service that included 23 years in service, with seven of those being in captivity. He was one of the first enlisted members to receive the Air Force Cross in addition to being awarded the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, POW Medal and two Purple Hearts.

As a surviving POW and veteran, Robinson spends ever more frequent amounts of time visiting with military groups and school children to share his story and teach them the value of honor, dignity and duty.

Robinson will speak at the POW/MIA Service of Remembrance on Tuesday morning, Nov. 6. The service is scheduled for 8 a.m., at the Welk Resort in Branson and is held outdoors, weather permitting. The event is open to the public. For more information, call 417-336-4232 or info@pownetwork.org.



courtesy of the P.O.W. Network