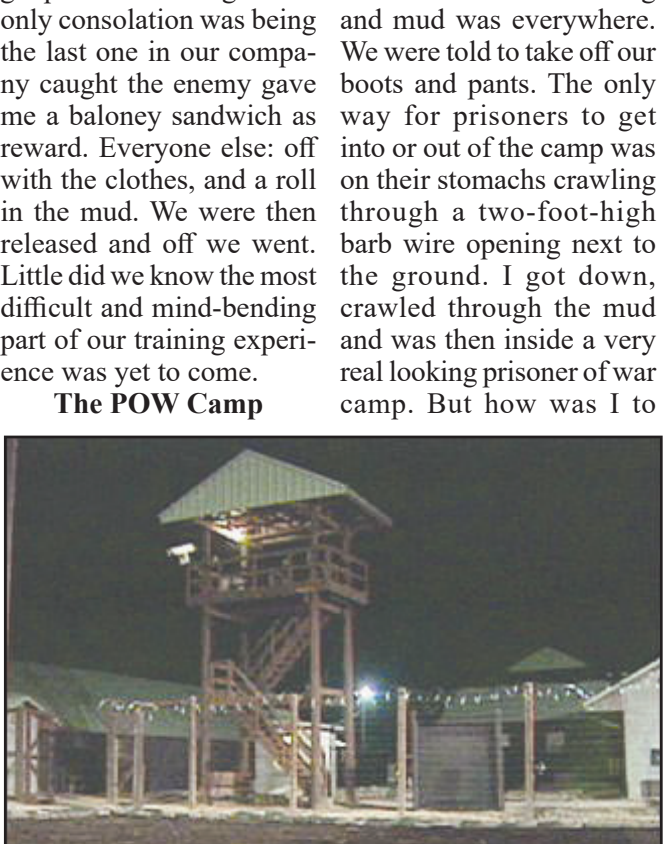
POW CAMP

-*Continued from PAGE ONE*

The capturing. And I just had to have a look around. I lifted my head, just for a little peek, and at the same moment an enemy soldier looked at the briar patch. He saw my eyes and came flying in, yelling at his buddies to drag me out at gunpoint. I was caught. The only consolation was being the last one in our company caught the enemy gave me a baloney sandwich as reward. Everyone else: off with the clothes, and a roll in the mud. We were then released and off we went. Little did we know the most difficult and mind-bending part of our training experience was yet to come.

The POW Camp



A mock POW camp similar to the one at Little Creek ,Virginia.

By now we had been up for three days and two nights with no sleep and lots of hiking and evading. Everyone was very tired, so when the late afternoon came and we stopped in a grassy area, it was not long before everyone was sound asleep, including me. The next thing I knew it was dark, and I awoke to find jeeps with bright lights and enemy soldiers everywhere. We were captured!

The enemy rounded us up and off we marched down the road, to where we did not know. I was out front and along the way I saw one of our captors pick up a dead rabbit. I wondered why, and later I would find out.

We marched for several miles until arriving at the most despicable place I had ever seen in my life, a prisoner of war camp in the middle of the woods. By then it had started raining and mud was everywhere. We were told to take off our boots and pants. The only way for prisoners to get into or out of the camp was on their stomachs crawling through a two-foot-high barb wire opening next to the ground. I got down, crawled through the mud and was then inside a very real looking prisoner of war camp. But how was I to know what a "real" POW camp looked like? This place was bad news though. I knew that.

It was now pouring down rain and probably around 2 a.m. our company was ordered to stand in the middle of the camp, in the dark, in the rain, no pants, no shoes, in just shirts and underwear. It was cold and we tried huddling closer together to keep warm. The guards caught on and forced us apart. I was shivering and shaking in that cold rain.

When the sun finally came up and I was able to survey my surroundings I saw I was in an encampment surrounded by a 10-foot-high barbed wire fence topped with coils of concertina wire.

In the front was a tall guard tower flying the North Vietnamese flag. Off to the side was a fire pit, and in the back of the yard a nasty looking mud hole full of water the purpose of which I would learn later on. Outside the wire were several small hootches, a wooden box with a lid buried in the ground, which I would soon know intimately, and a large open latrine pit.

As it got lighter several of us enlisted men were approached by guards and told to begin cutting up potatoes. I then learned why they had picked up the rabbit on the march, as we were told to gut, skin and cut it up for the stew we were making.

We chopped up all the potatoes and cut up the rabbit while some other prisoners started a fire in the pit with a large pot of boiling water for the rabbit stew. By then it had been days since anyone had eaten. The stew smelled good, and we were all very hungry and looking forward to a meal. Little did we know.

Finally, the stew was done, and the guards lined everyone up. The officers were told to eat first, then the enlisted men would get theirs. The officers went through with their bowls, got their stew, and ate while the enlisted men hungrily watched and waited. When the officers were done the enlisted men lined up; it was our turn to eat. As the first man approached, however, a guard walked up, and kicking over the pot, spilled the stew on the ground. "See, your officers eat and care nothing for you!" he yelled. Even though I knew it was a training exercise, I was mad at the officers for eating while I got nothing, which was exactly what our captors wanted, to turn us against one another.

During the day we were subjected to three different levels of interrogations. In the first I was taken into one of the hootches, and three guards, which were of course Navy SEALs dressed in strange uniforms and talking in a phony accent, beat me with fists and kicked me with their boots. As they slapped my face they screamed into my ear: "What is your mother's maiden name?" We were told previously to give only our name, rank and service number, but they never asked for that. The next interrogation was the wooden box buried in the ground. The guards put me in it and shut the lid. My knees were up to my face and this interrogation was especially hard on me, not because I was claustrophobic, but because I was taller than a lot of other guys and it was just a tight fit. I stayed in there about a half hour with the guards beating and pounding on the lid demanding to know my information, which I did not give up. The next technique, I hate to admit, I failed, and will remember for the rest of my life. A man dressed in the uniform of a chaplain sat with me alone in a hootch. He spoke English and told me in a soft comforting voice he was working with the Red Cross to get us some food into the camp. He said if I told him my mother's maiden name, he could help me. I told him. Later my friend made fun asking how I could be so easily duped. I have never forgotten how I failed and was conned by the phony Red Cross chaplain.

Being without food and sleep does play tricks on one's mind, and after listening to the strange sounding accents and going through all the different interrogations, a person can have weird things happen to their thinking. Some of our guys mentally broke down and several crossed over to the other side.

One of the rules of the camp was if you went out to use the bathroom pit, you had to go with a partner and hold hands. Yes, it was a strange sight at the latrine, but if one was able to get outside without a partner it was considered an "escape", and my friend escaped.

After he was captured and given a baloney sandwich (the standard reward), I watched as the guards took him behind a hootch, punched him in the stomach and he threw it up. However, they had even more in mind for my escapee friend. Outside the wire they tied his hands behind him around a tree, then lined us all up to watch what happens when prisoners attempt to escape. They brought out one of the guys whose mind had snapped and crossed over to the enemy. He wore a fresh clean enemy uniform, was given baloney sandwiches to eat in front of us and had a rifle to walk guard duty around the camp perimeter.

The guards then ordered the turncoat to shoot the escapee. They yelled at him to do it. The traitor pulled up the rifle, aimed and pulled the trigger. A round went off. The guards yelled "again". He fired again. My friend slumped over as if dead. The shooter began crying and broke down screaming "I killed him, I killed him." Some of the other prisoners who were having mental stress problems also thought he had been killed. They were very, very distraught. My friend and I later laughed at his good acting job.

Meantime other bad things were happening in the camp. The ranking officer, who I think was a Commander, had been stripped down to his underwear and placed in that awful looking mud hole. Filled with water up to his chest, and with his hands tied to a pole in front of him, he was blindfolded and stayed in the mud hole that way all day. I felt sorry for him.

However, as the sun began to sink low below the trees, and the day was coming to an end, so was our ordeal. The guards lined up all the prisoners. Pantless, barefoot, tired, hungry and dirty we looked up at the guard tower with the North Vietnamese flag flying on top. The sound of that country's national anthem was playing over the loudspeakers. The guards ordered everyone to turn around. The music stopped. We were then ordered to turn back around. The American flag had been raised up the flagpole. The Star-Spangled Banner was playing over the loudspeakers.

I looked around. Men were falling to their knees. The lieutenant to my right had tears streaming down his cheeks. I felt good. It was over.

Epilogue: A curious aspect to this training was when I got to Vietnam and joined my small boat unit, I had the opportunity to ask many of the guys how they did at S.E.R.E training. None of the ones I talked to had been. I found it odd that I was the only one who had gone through the training. Years later I read an article by a reporter for the New York Times who himself had been through the training. He had done extensive research on S.E.R.E. and according to him, at the Little Creek facility, the military was not so much interested in training people to survive, evade, resist, and escape, as to learn what a person's mental and physical limits and reactions were, in a survival and capture situation.

Boardman renews development incentives, issues general obligation bonds

In an effort to encourage new construction in Boardman, at their March 2, 2021 meeting, the Boardman city council passed a resolution to temporarily waive water and sewer system development (SDC's). The resolution waives the water and sewer System Development Charges (SDC's) on a sliding scaled based upon the number of equivalent dwelling units built. The waivers are for a twelve-month period beginning January 1, 2021 and runs through December 31, 2021. All property owners or developers of residential or commercial property within the city limits are eligible for the waivers.

This incentive was first passed in 2011 for residential customers only, and since then the council has passed a resolution each year approving the waiver of SDC's for all construction within the residential or commercial districts. The council also passed a resolution to increase the fees for water and sewer SDC's, the first increase since its inception in 2000.

In other city business, the council passed a resolution authorizing the issuance and sale of General Obligation and Refunding Bonds in the amount of $20,320,000 that was passed by the voters in May 2020. David Ulbricht, Special Districts Associate of Oregon Advisory Services Director gave a presentation and was available for questions in regard to the General Obligation Bond sale. The bond will provide funds for purchase of property and improvements to the city's water and wastewater facilities, including a 13-acre wastewater lagoon, a water booster pump station, an approximately one-million-gallon water reservoir, a new water collector well, constructing wastewater lift stations, acquiring land, refinancing outstanding debt and paying costs of issuance of the bonds.

The next Boardman city council meeting will be Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 7 p.m. at Boardman City Hall.

COVID vaccines available

COVID-19 vaccines will be available for farm and food processing workers at the Sage Center in Boardman March 24 through March 27. Appointments should be made by calling 541-481-4200. Health insurance is not required, but those who do have insurance should bring their insurance card. Vaccinations without an appointment will be subject to availability.

Appointments will be available from 1-8 p.m. Wednesday, March 24; noon to 7 p.m. Thursday, March 25; 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday March 26 and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 27. Second doses will be provided April 14-17.

Additionally, anyone who is interested in receiving the vaccine should sign up on the interest form at the public health department to allow them to be worked in as the next phase is available or for large events if there is state or FEMA assistance.

YOUR AD COULD BE HERE!
Submit Ads
heppner.net
Call
541-676-9228
Email
graphics@rapidserve.net
We also offer design and printing services
Heppner Gazette-Times
Sykes Printing

Print & Mailing Services
*Design
*Print
*Mail
Sykes Publishing
541-676-9228

DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5PM

HEPPNER ELKS 358
"Where Friends Meet"
541-676-9181 142 N MAIN ST
Members and Guests
Are Invited to Come Help Us Celebrate
The Installation of Our
2021-2022 Lodge Officers
Saturday, March 27th, 2021
Lounge Opens at 4 pm
Steak Dinner at 6 pm
Installation of Officers at 8 pm

WHEATLAND INSURANCE CENTER, INC
Serving Eastern Oregon since 1983.
HEPPNER
294 MAIN ST.
P.O. BOX 755
HEPPNER, OR 97836
Office (541) 676-9113 • Fax (541) 676-9001
1-800-504-9113
IONE
245 NW MAIN ST., SUITE 100
P.O. BOX 26
IONE, OR 97843
Office (541) 422-7410 • Fax (541) 276-7688
1-800-585-7410

K2 AERIAL APPLICATION
ECHO, OREGON
K2 Aerial provides agricultural spraying of pesticides and broad cast spreading of dry materials such as seed or fertilizer.
541-980-8498
Located at the Lexington Airport