

HEFEL, DANIEL HENRY

Name: Daniel Henry
 Hefel
 Rank/Branch: E4/US
 Army
 Unit: HHC, 2nd
 Brigade, 101st
 Airborne Division
 Date of Birth:
 Home City of Record:
 Guttenberg IA
 Date of Loss: 05
 February 1970
 Country of Loss:
 South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates:
 163045N 1072824E
 (YD494093)
 Status (in 1973):
 Returned POW
 Category:
 Aircraft/Vehicle
 /Ground: UH1H



The Ride Home, Sept 2018.

Other Personnel in Incident: Tom Y. Kobashigawa, John W. Parsels (returned POWs); James M. Lyon (missing)

REMARKS: 730327 RELSD BY PRG

Source: Compiled by HOMECOMING II and the P.O.W. NETWORK from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews. 2019 w/info from Danny Byers.

SYNOPSIS: At 1530 hours on February 5, 1970, Capt. James M. Lyon, pilot, Capt. John W. Parsels, copilot, SP5 Tom Y. Kobashigawa, crew chief, and SP4 Daniel Hefel, door gunner, were flying a UH1H helicopter (serial #68-16441) on a maintenance mission from Hue to Phy Bai, South Vietnam.

When the aircraft was about 18 miles northwest of Hue City, the helicopter caught fire and crashed (due to a malfunction). Capt. Lyon was thrown clear of the aircraft and was burned extensively over his body and part of his right leg. His leg was severed four inches below the knee. The other crew members were also injured and could not take evasive action. They were captured at 1630 hours by NVA troops and spent the night near the crash site.

Throughout the night, the crew members heard their pilot yelling and moaning in pain. At 0600 hours, Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his

position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1Lt. Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at "Camp Farnsworth") that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1Lt. Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

Curiously, the Vietnamese have not returned the body of Capt. James M. Lyon, nor have they been forthcoming with information concerning him. Tragically, Capt. Lyon has been a prisoner of war for nearly 20 years - alive or dead.

Even more tragic are the thousands of reports that continue to flow in indicating that some hundreds of Americans are still prisoner in Indochina. It's long past time we brought our men home.

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UPDATE - 09/95 by the P.O.W. NETWORK, Skidmore, MO

DANIEL H. HEFEL Sergeant - United States Army
Captured: February 5, 1970
Released: March 27, 1973

My name is Sgt. Daniel H. Hefel prisoner of war for 1143 days and mighty glad to be home free. I entered the service on December 3, 1968 and was inducted in the army on December 5, 1968. I took my training at Fort Polk Louisiana and was sent to Vietnam on May 23, 1969. When I arrived there I was attached to the 101st Airborne Division. I was stationed 12 miles from Hue near Eagle Beach and was a foot soldier for eight months. During this time I was hospitalized twice for malaria. I then volunteered to be a door gunner on a helicopter and was accepted. I was thrilled and happy because I thought I now would be dry and not wet and muddy as I had been in the fields. I wrote my folks and told them that I thought I now would be safe. That was the last letter my folks were to receive until October 2 1972.

I had been with this outfit only a little more than a month, and we were on our way to have the wings on our Huey painted, (our captain said we were on our way to the beauty shop), when we were fired upon and crashed against a

mountain. I and two other members of our crew were taken prisoner by the Viet Cong on February 5, 1970. My back was broken in the crash, a stick went through my lower lip, breaking my upper teeth. My right arm was also broken and both my legs were badly burned. I will have to carry these ugly scars the rest of my life. How I got out alive is still a mystery. We were taken to a camp somewhere in South Vietnam. The trip took seven days since our captors had to carry us because none of us were able to walk. They carried us on makeshift litters. The fourth member of our crew was killed in the crash and was buried at the scene of the crash.

We were held in this camp for a little more than three months. We lay on strips of lumber placed on cement blocks, and a straw mat was the only bedding we had. We were fed tiger and elephant meat and some thin rice soup. Later, we were taken by truck to a camp in North Vietnam. I was still completely paralyzed from my waist down and my back pained me constantly. After about five months life came back to my legs and back, but I was still unable to walk. But time heals, and finally, twelve months later with the aid of crutches I was able to get around, and by the time I was released I could walk again. During the time of my imprisonment I underwent an appendectomy. The doctors ("butchers" I call them) performed the operation without giving me any anesthetic. It took them about four hours because they couldn't hold me still. This, in my estimation, was the most severe punishment any man could bear, and it is one experience I shall never forget.

I was kept in a room with four to six prisoners. We were given small jobs to do, such as dishes, scrubbing our floors, sweeping the courtyard, etc. After our jobs were finished, we were allowed to play cards, sing or just sit around and reminisce, pray, dream out loud. I mostly did dishes because my back was too unstable for me to do any heavy work.

In October of 1972 our hopes were raised and life at the camp became more bearable. It was a great disappointment when the peace talks failed, but we never gave up hope. My parents received word on March 24, 1973, my mother's birthday, that I was to be released. On March 26 I left the Hanoi Hilton to fly to the Philippines and Freedom. What a happy day! On March 30, 1973, my father's birthday, I was flown to Denver, Colorado where I was met with open arms, love and tears, by my loving parents, most of my brothers and all of my sisters. My parents, Tom and Florence Hefel, have fourteen children, ten boys and four girls. Nine of us boys have served our country and my parents say that they have been in the service of our country for over twenty years. The past is past, so now we live for the future, which we hope will be lived in peace.

Daniel resides in Iowa.

<http://lzsally.com/gate1/index.php>

<http://lzsally.com/companies/b2501/>

MORE INFO: <http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1006>