

## **The Story of Mike Christian, Vietnam POW**

*The American Flag symbolizes the hope and inspiration that is the essence of everyone and everything in the US. There is another story that epitomizes the emotion and pride every American feels for the flag, and underscores the importance of the Pledge of Allegiance.*

The Vietnam War . . . 1971, prisoners of war were moved from isolation into large rooms at the Hanoi Hilton. One of those prisoners was Mike Christian. Mike came from a small town near Selma, Alabama. He didn't wear a pair of shoes until he was thirteen. At seventeen he enlisted in the Navy, later to earn a commission and become a Naval flying officer, and was shot down and captured in 1967.

The uniforms the Americans wore were the Vietnamese pajamas, only they were blue, and rubber sandals made of automobile tires.

Mike contrived a bamboo needle for himself and collecting some cloth of red and white, he sewed an American Flag on the inside of his shirt. And it was the practice of the prisoners that every afternoon before they got their ration of soup, they would hang Mike's shirt on the wall and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Now, repeating the Pledge of Allegiance may not be the most important part of the average American day, but for those men in that stark prison cell, it was the most important and meaningful event of their day.

One day, the Vietnamese searched the cell and discovered Mike's shirt with the flag sewn inside, removed it and him, and for the "benefit" of the other prisoners beat Mike Christian severely for the next couple hours.

Then they opened the door and threw him back inside. Mike was not in good shape and the others tried to comfort and take care of him as best they could.

The cell had a concrete slab on which the men slept and a naked light bulb in each corner of the room. After things had quieted down for the evening, in the corner of the room, sitting beneath that dimly lit bulb with a piece of white cloth, a piece of red cloth, another blue shirt and his bamboo needle, was Mike Christian. His eyes almost swollen shut from the beating, he was fashioning another American flag.

Mike Christian was not making that flag because it made him feel better. He was making that flag because he knew how important it was for his fellow prisoners to be able to pledge allegiance to our Flag and to our country.

For Mike Christian, maintaining that Flag was the right thing to do.