



The POWS

The men who praise Nixon and boo Carter

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LOS ANGELES — Nearly 300 ex-prisoners of war met here last night to reminisce, but also to praise the man who was president when they came home from Viet-

nam five years ago and to lambast the current commander-in-chief.

One ex-POW, a Medal of Honor winner, termed recent military decisions by President Carter "two of the dumbest decisions ever made in our history."

The Carter criticism and Nixon praise came from leaders of NAM-POW, an organization of former

Vietnam prisoners of war.

The ex-POWs were reunited here in the largest such gathering since the then-just released POWS were honored at the White House in 1973.

Highlight of the reunion weekend was a cocktail reception at the Nixon villa at San Clemente.

The boos of Carter and the approval of Nixon came at a news conference here.

Retired Air Force Col. George Day, now an attorney of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., said he thought deferment of the B-1 bomber and neutron bomb decisions were "two of the dumbest decisions ever made in our history."

The Medal of Honor winner said Carter consistently has made wrong defense decisions, "from amnesty on through," and had ignored the wishes of the "mainstream" of American society. He said he thinks the majority of returned POWs agree with him.

Day said the United States —Turn to Page 9, Col. 1

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needed the B-1 because its current bomber force is to a large degree "outmoded" and the neutron bomb is necessary because of the Soviet tank threat to Western Europe.

Former Air Force Col. Bob Barneth of Tucson, Ariz., said he would not go so far as to call Carter "incompetent," as Day had done, but he did agree that the presi-

dent's decisions on the B-1 and the neutron bomb were "very wrong."

The men still on active duty sidestepped the political questions, indicating they could get fired for speaking against a president.

Capt. Howard Rutledge, president of NAM-POW, said the group is fraternal, not political. He is on active duty as commanding officer of the University of Oklahoma's

ROTC unit.

"It is one of the duties of an officer in uniform to support the commander in chief and we do," said Navy Cmdr. John McCain. He is a Navy liaison to the U.S. Senate.

However, there was uniform praise for Nixon, their party host, by the five members of the news conference. The organization had approached Nixon and he had

invited it to his San Clemente home. Nearly 600 went to San Clemente, counting the 273 ex-POWs, their wives and guests.

"We as a group are grateful to him (Nixon) for what he did" in bringing POWs home, Rutledge said. "I'm honored that he would invite us down."

Similar sentiments were expressed by the others.

Rutledge said returned POWs comprised "a normal group... with all the normal problems." As far as readjustment went, he said: "We've all been to the worst place in the world; anyplace else is a step up."

Navy Cmdr. Everett Alvarez, formerly of San Jose, said he has "a better idea of my values, of what's important in life." He was longest in a North Vietnamese prison camp — eight years.

During that time his wife divorced him. But he has reestablished himself in the service, remarried and had two children.

The reunion commemorates the fifth anniversary of the release of 556 POWs from Vietnam prisons.

Former Gov. Ronald Reagan was a scheduled speaker at a banquet at the Airport Marriott Hotel here last night.