

SFCHRONICLE

Ex-POW's Story of North Viet

Orlando, Fla.

An Air Force major who said he was brutally tortured during eight months in a North Vietnamese prisoner of war camp said yesterday a letter he wrote to his family may have helped him gain his freedom.

"You'd never guess that these people had a heart," said James Low, "but they claimed a letter I wrote home influenced their decision to let me go. The letter never got home, but the North Vietnamese told me they were influenced by my

strong wishes to return to the United States."

Low, 45, who told part of his story on the CBS Evening News Tuesday night, said that on his release he was warned, "If you return, we will have your head on a plate."

RANK

In an interview yesterday, Low said, "The higher your rank, the worse you were treated. It seemed they took dead aim at me."

(But in two separate interviews immediately after his release Major Low said that there was no political indoctrination and no force or

pressure while he was a prisoner.

"We had good treatment in North Vietnam," Low said Aug. 2, 1968, the day he was released. "The North Vietnamese were real good to us.")

The native of Sausalito, Calif., was shot down Dec. 16, 1967. Tuesday night, however, the major said he endured "the worst pain I could possibly imagine."

PIPE

Low said the North Vietnamese placed an 18-inch pipe, one inch in diameter, into his mouth "much as you would place a bit crossways

in a horse's mouth. Then, the guy behind me grabbed the pipe's ends and stuck a knee in my back.

"He yanked until the pipe snapped into my jaws and almost cracked my neck and back."

The 20-year Air Force veteran said, "It wasn't a case of me cracking and talking. I was so pained that I was half-delirious. They also beat me with their fists, their boots and their gun butts."

CONTRAST

Low said the treatment he received contrasted sharply with filmed reports from Ha-

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Torture

noi that show POWs engaging in group activities, talking together, playing basketball.

Now base operations officer at McCoy Air Force Base near Orlando, Low said the "things pictured in that famous North Vietnamese POW film certainly were not in vogue when I was there."

"Maybe it's changed, but I doubt it. I can only speak of what was done to me in 1967-68. We didn't play volleyball and we didn't go to church on Sundays. There was no group activity allowed."

Associated Press