



RICHARD AND ALICE STRATTON
He's found a freedom of spirit

Ex-POW Likes The New Ways

The Navy pilot whose picture symbolized the plight of American prisoners for much of the Vietnam war laughed yesterday and said he has found a new freedom of spirit in his homeland.

"Long hair, short skirts, loud music . . . we're shedding our Linus blankets, and I like it," Commander Richard Stratton, 41, of Palo Alto, told a press conference at the Naval Hospital in Oakland.

The exuberant pilot bore little resemblance to the gaunt, stooped man in the famous photograph who stood at attention in POW pajamas when he was exhibited by his North Vietnamese captors in March, 1967. Because of Department of Defense ground rules imposed on returning POWs, he declined to talk directly about the experience.

He didn't want to say anything that would "cause one man to spend one extra minute in North Vietnam," he said.

But Stratton, whom the North Vietnamese recorded admitting "war crimes," said he will be more than happy to tell all about his imprisonment "when the appropriate time comes."

Right now, he said, "I'm getting to know my family again, and my country again."

Personally, Stratton said he considers himself "much more patient after six years of waiting for an elevator, a little more tolerant, and I think I have a greater love for my fellow man."

Should the U.S. rebuild North Vietnam, a reporter asked?

Stratton grinned and shot back:

"Do you remember the movie, 'The Mouse That Roared?'"—the mythical tale of a tiny nation that declared war on the U.S. so it could profit from the massive amounts of American money its leaders knew would flow in to help put it together again.

But disaster erupted—the tiny country won the war.