

EX-P.O.W.'S TELL OF HANOI TORTURE

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Say They Gave War Data or
Signed Antiwar Papers

NYTimes

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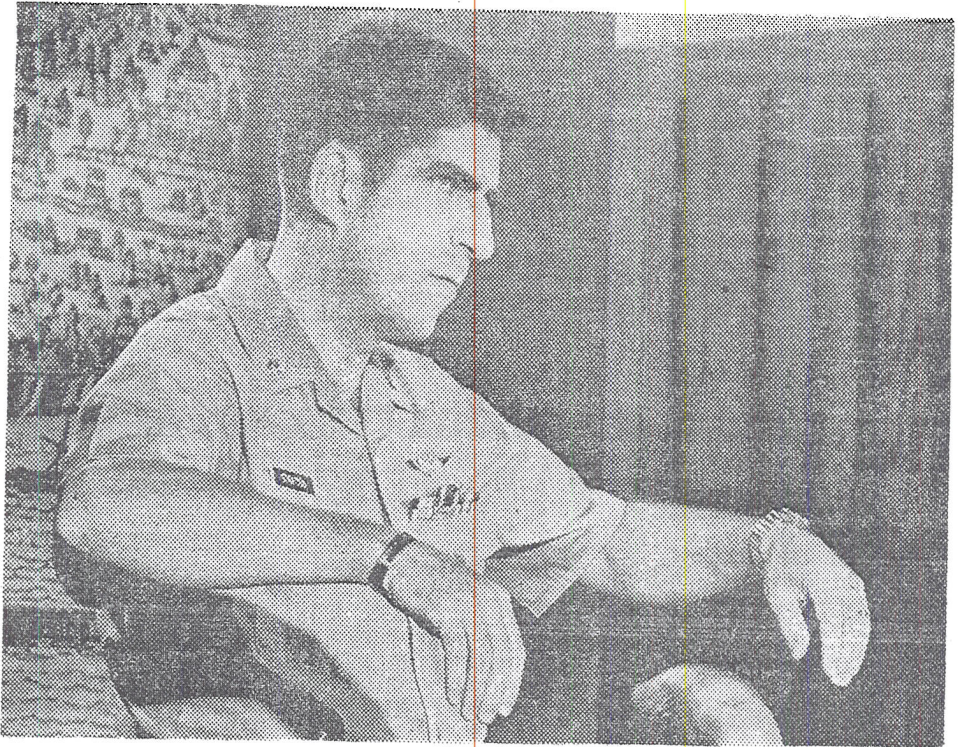
Former prisoners of war told chilling stories today of mental and physical torture at the hands of their North Vietnamese captors.

In news conferences across the country, the men said they had been beaten, tied, shackled and starved until they provided information about American war plans or signed antiwar statements and confessions of war crimes.

But to many of the men, the most devastating treatment was prolonged periods of solitary confinement. As Col. Robinson Risner put it at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland: "Can you imagine someone putting you in a closet and closing the door and saying, 'See you in six months'?"

The former prisoners talked about their captivity hours after the last of the 589 Ameri-

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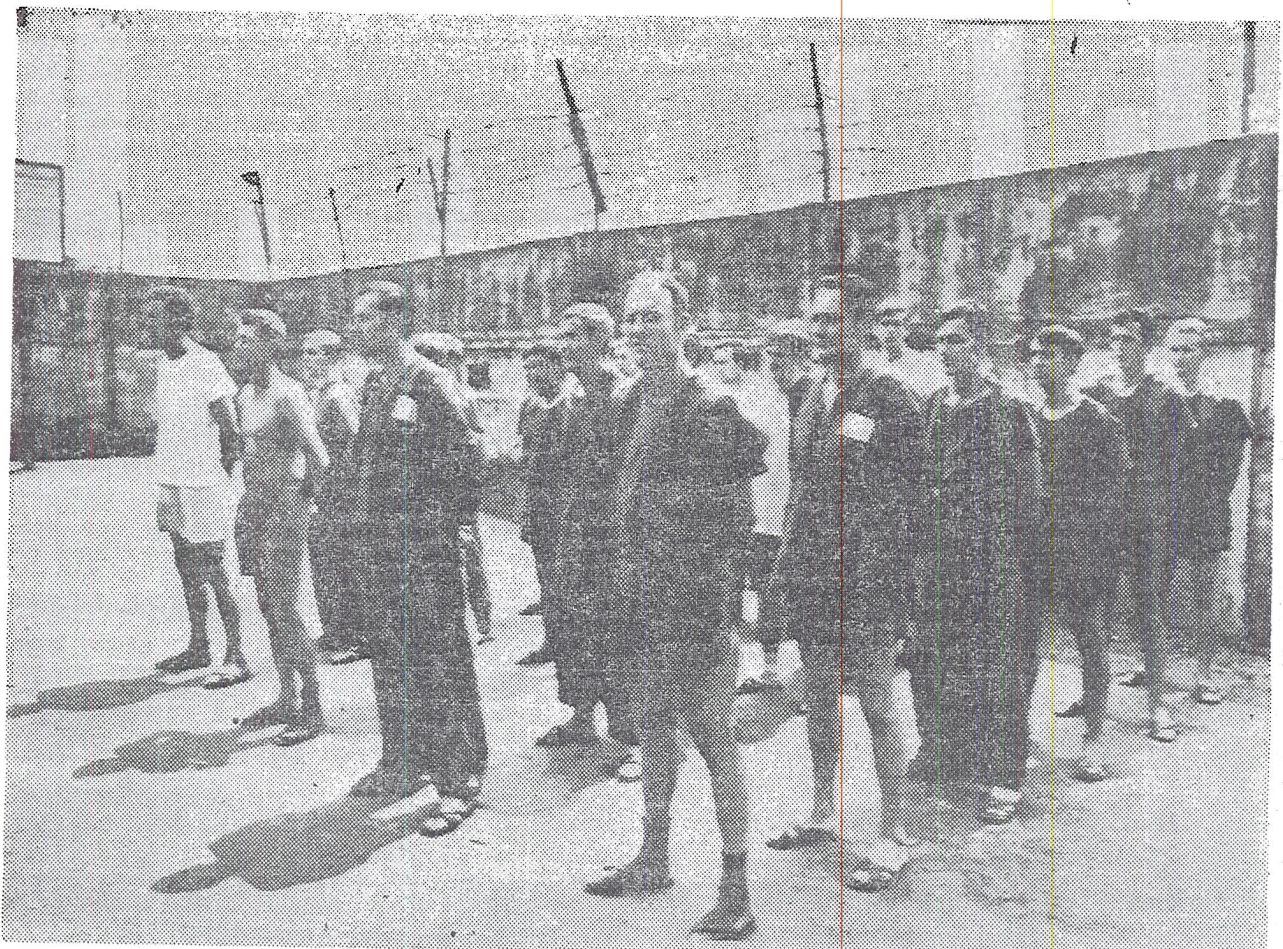
United Press International

Comdr. Richard A. Stratton, at Oakland Navy Hospital, describes his ordeal as prisoner

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 1



Associated Press

American prisoners of war at camp on Nga Tu So Street in Hanoi awaiting inspection before release yesterday

Former Prisoners Charge Torture by the Enemy

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can prisoners of war landed at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. Until now, the men had refused to discuss details of their life in Communist prisons for fear of jeopardizing the release of comrades still behind bars.

By and large, the men kept a firm hold on their emotions and even joked occasionally. In describing life in solitary confinement, Capt. Wendell Rivers told a conference at Bethesda Naval Hospital that "you can get up at 6 in the morning and fall asleep at 8 at night and walk all day in circles around your room."

"But you have to reverse direction once in a while so you don't fall down," he added.

But occasionally their anger and bitterness spilled out and their voices quavered. As one former prisoner put it recently, the older prisoners "lived on hate" for their captors and the Communist system. And it was not really clear today how that hatred colored their tales of an experience that Colonel Risner described as "severe torture, degradation, deprivation, humiliation, you name it."

Purpose of Stories

Asked what purpose the stories of torture might serve, Lieut. Col. John A. Dramesi said at Andrews: "It gives you some idea what we've been up against all these years. People over here have been screaming that the North Vietnamese are humane and their cause is just. Well, this shows how humane and just they are."

Torture and other harassment declined dramatically after October, 1969, the prisoners said, and few men were forced to make statements. Food improved, they said, and prisoners were moved into larger groups. In the fall of 1970, following the unsuccessful raid on the Son Tay prison camp, most of the prisoners were moved to a central prison in Hanoi and communications improved sharply.

By early 1971 the men were able to organize the fourth allied prisoner-of-war wing, with Col. John P. Flynn as commander and Colonel Risner as vice commander, the prisoners explained. The wing hewed to strict military procedures and controlled many aspects of prison life.

From the earliest days, the prisoners said, they tried to communicate with each other by tapping on the walls or flashing hand signals when they had the rare chance to see each other. When the system was working, the men could transmit about six or eight words a minute, but they were frequently caught and often punished for their "comming," as the technique was called.

The men interviewed today conceded that there had been disagreements among the prisoners at times, but none of them said they had witnessed any fist fights. Nor did any of them say they would press charge against any prisoners for disobeying orders from the camp commander of cooperating with the enemy.

Two senior pilots and several dozen younger men captured in the last year had made voluntary statements against the war and had met frequently with foreign visitors in Hanoi. These acts violated the regulations set down by the camp commanders, but the men today seemed in a forgiving mood and played down the possibility of legal reprisals.

It was the question of torture that dominated the news conferences. Some details had leaked out before, but the stories released today sketched a far more complete picture of alleged mistreatment.

For example, Colonel Risner said he had been tied so tightly into a ball that his shoulders popped out of their sockets and his toes were pushed against his mouth. On other occasions, he said, an iron bar was lashed to his ankles, where it gradually bit into his flesh.

Lieut. Comdr. Everett Al-

varez, the first American pilot shot down over North Vietnam, was not tortured for the first two years. But in mid-1966 he was made to sit on a stool for four or five days, with no sleep or food, he said. Several prisoners said they had been shackled to the bunks and had wallowed in their own waste for weeks at a time.

In most cases, the prisoners wound up signing statements or even making tape recordings that were later broadcast over Radio Hanoi, they said. As James A. Mulligan put it at a news conference in Portsmouth, Va., "I've been broken. I think everyone here has been broken. We went through agony over and over again."

None of the prisoners actually saw a fellow prisoner die in captivity, but Colonel Risner said he was sure that some men had "died at the hands of the North Vietnamese," either through positive mistreatment or lack of adequate medical care.

New Insights

Their experience prompted some of the men to gain new insights into themselves. Lieut. Col. John Dunn said he had been stunned to realize his own limitations. "I found myself doing things I thought I never would, like making statements against my country," he explained at Bethesda. "I was sure that I was a superman, and that I could go right down the line to my death."

But he found out, he said, that his captives were more "clever" than he imagined. Most prisoners would have found it easier to face a firing squad than the "continuous high level of pain" inflicted on them, he said.

Commander Alvarez said he had finally capitulated when he decided it "wasn't worth dying for," but later he felt remorse and wished he had died, he said.

Capt. Wendell Rivers recalled spending nine days in isolation with nothing but bread and water and "crying like a

baby" for 15 minutes. But after he "had a good cry," he said, he became convinced that he would survive.

Captain Rivers tempered the unrelenting criticism of the North Vietnamese by noting that while the prisoners often ate badly, they usually ate almost as well as the guards, and sometimes even better. Moreover, he said, the medical care the men received was no worse than that afforded the North Vietnamese people.

Colonel Dramesi provided the most dramatic story of the day when he described how he and another prisoner had escaped from one prison for about 24 hours. Equipped with native-looking clothes, and with their faces colored, the two men climbed a wall and even made their way through a peasant village unnoticed. But they were seized the next day in a massive manhunt.

Colonel Dramesi said he had been severely tortured when he was recaptured. His partner, Capt. Edwin Atterbury, was never repatriated, Colonel Dramesi strongly implied that Captain Atterbury had died in prison, possibly from the effects of mistreatment after the escape attempt.