



UPI photo

RICHARD STRATTON AND RODNEY KNUTSON IN OAKLAND
Stratton showed reporters the scars on his arms

The POWs Finally Talk-- 'I Have Been Tortured'

By Mitchell Thomas

Navy Commander Richard Stratton pointed to some ugly scars on his arm.

"I have been tortured," he said, "I have been beaten. I have been placed in solitary confinement for a total of 18 months . . ."

The scars, he said, were made by cigarettes used by two North Vietnamese interrogators he knew as "Straps

and Bars" and "Dumb-Dumb" who prepared him for his now-famous "confession" of war crimes.

Stratton and Lieutenant Commander Rodney Knutson were talking to a huge contingent of newsmen yesterday at Oakland Naval Hospital, telling what their years of unspeakable misery in prisoner of war camps in North Vietnam were really like.

"Now that the lid is off,"

as Stratton put it, now that all known American prisoners are out of Vietnam, they spoke for the first time free of the restraint they said had been imposed previously by the fear that their comments might invoke retaliation against Americans still held by the Vietnamese.

STORIES

Their stories sounded very much like accounts of the treatment of heretics by the Inquisition, of Jews by the Gestapo, of political dissidents by the Saigon regime.

But they emerged, it was clear yesterday, with their bodies, their souls, their san-

ity intact.

"There's no room for bitterness," Stratton said. "There's too much to be done."

Even so, they accused their former captors of inhuman brutality, and formally charged that North Vietnamese leaders had committed war crimes.

Stratton is the man whose photograph, taken at a carefully staged press conference in Hanoi, in a striped prison uniform, looking totally cowed, has been print-

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ed thousands of times. At the time the picture was taken he had just confessed, according to the North Vietnamese, to being a war criminal.

He had looked that way on purpose, trying to appear as though he had been drugged, he said yesterday, in an effort "to somehow discredit a so-called confession that was an absolute and total lie."

There was nothing cowed about him yesterday. Both Stratton, a 41-year-old ca-

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reer officer from Palo Alto, and Knutson, a 34-year-old from Billings, Mont., looked healthy, tough, thoroughly sure of themselves.

Stratton said he was forced at gunpoint to appear at that notorious press conference two months after he was shot down while on a bombing raid just outside Hanoi on Jan. 5, 1967.

During those two months, he said, he had been locked up in stocks, interrogated endlessly, beaten, burned with cigarettes and deprived of food and water for up to six days at a time.

When his captors were ready to show him off to the world, Stratton said, "Dumb-Dumb spent about an hour trying to teach me a very polite oriental bow."

At the Hanoi press conference, he did a complete 90-degree bow from the waist, trying to get across the message that the whole thing was a charade.

"I told them later," he said, "that I had reverted back to my ancient Roman

Catholic custom."

"Many American men, like myself, have an 007 concept of themselves," Stratton said, referring to the identification number of fictional spy James Bond.

"The low point (in his captivity) was the realization that I could be broken by the enemy."

But then, he said, he dis-

covered that "I could come back. That was the high point."

Knutson, who was a prisoner from more than seven years after he was shot down in 1965, said he never told interrogators anything beyond his name, rank and serial number, even though he was kept in stocks, starved and "beaten to the point of near-unconsciousness."

"My buttocks were just hamburger" after being beaten with bamboo rods, Knutson said. "There was blood spattering against the wall."

And then he was forced to sit for six days on his raw wounds.

FOOD

Most prisoners were treated similarly, both men said. They said the food was atrocious, often containing cockroaches and rats. Men in solitary confinement some-

times had to spend days in painfully contorted positions.

They communicated, Knutson said, by tapping out Morse code on the walls.

"The days," he said, "were awful long."

Knutson said he kept going because "I knew that I was coming home and those bastards were going to have to stay there."

RIGHT

Both men said they were convinced that what the United States did in Vietnam was right.

"The day the B52s came which was an extremely glorious day, the whole camp broke out in spontaneous cheers," Stratton said.

He called the abortive American raid on a POW camp in North Vietnam "perhaps one of the most heroic, the most heartening things that I have ever heard of . . . a great morale builder."

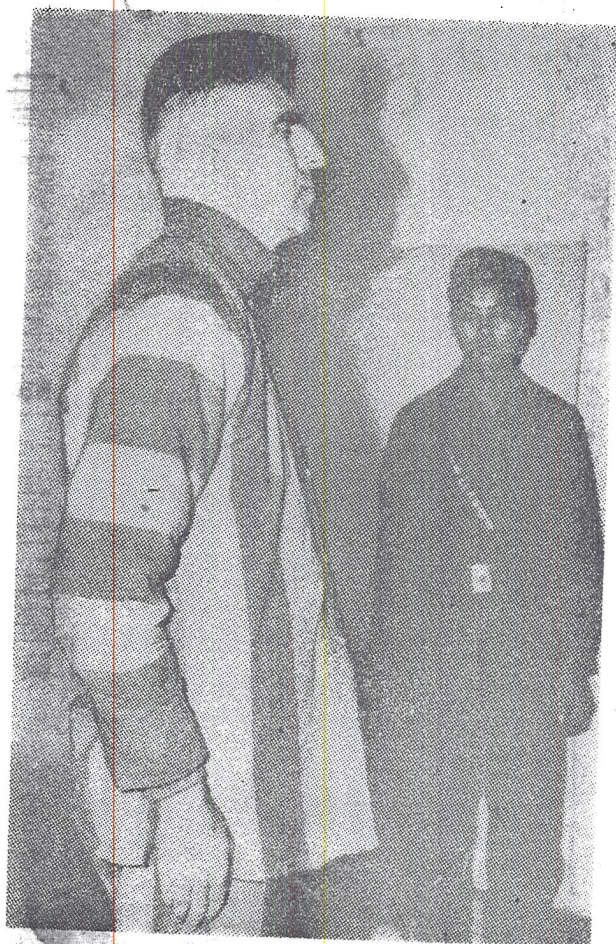
He said that "the anti-war effort in the United States aided and abetted the enemy." Knutson agreed, singling out actress Jane Fonda for criticism.

"People have the right to say what they want," Knutson said. "That's what we were fighting for . . . But they were wrong."

"Could you tell us," Stratton was asked, "what that war was all about?"

He said that was an unfair question. He said that, as a student of history, he would be interested in what the historians have to say.

"Ask me that question in six months," he said. "and I'll write you a paper on it."



AP Wirephoto

This is the famous picture of Commander Stratton 'confessing' to war crimes in Hanoi.