

At the demonstration [against Thieu] outside the Beverly-Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles last night, KPFA reporter Frank [Manazo?] talked to Tom Hayden, who has frequently visited Hanoi, about the prisoner of war torture allegations.

Hayden [voice]: We in the anti-war movement have never really chosen to make the POWs a political issue. Nixon has, and now some of the returning POWs have chimed in and since they want to take a stand about what they allege as torture, I think we have no alternative but to really begin to take a critical [attitude?] towards them.

First of all, they're liars if they suggest that the North Vietnamese policy was torture because, as anyone can see, they're the best treated American prisoners in any war in American history, including, if you study it, the American civil war. And the particular incidents that they refer to I'm quite suspicious of, as I think anyone should be because, after all, if these men will falsify the fact that they were bombing civilian targets, certainly they will make a prison into a torture chamber and a guard into a torturer.

I don't know whether it's a deliberate lie or it's their own bruised egos, being held captive by yellow North Vietnamese, and I'm not able to judge what it was. But some of them claim that their torture consisted of being humiliated by walking through the streets and people looking at them. Some of them said it was because of solitary confinement, beatings and so on. But they never tell us the context. Were they beaten because somebody in the field where they landed grabbed them, and were they put into solitary because they tried to follow their own orders which called for them to try to escape? It's not very clear from the context of their statements.

But one thing is definitely undebatable, and that is the policy over-all left them in better physical shape, and better mental shape, than any Vietnamese pilots would have been if they crashed in these Americans' back yards. They would have been trampled in about 30 seconds. And it is not the Commander in Chief and not the flag and not the national anthem and not their will that makes them able to snap off a salute and walk down the steps in good health from the airplanes - it is the Vietnamese treatment. And if people would judge by what they see rather than what they hear I think they'd come to the same conclusion.

Nixon is trying to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and make evil appear to be good, by elevating to a position of supposed national honor a group of men who were at best pawns, who have taken part in the killing and destruction of thousands of people in their homes and land.

[End of item on Hayden.]