

P.O.W. Who Was Against War Cites 'Pressure of Conscience'

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WASHINGTON, April 1—A former prisoner of war, who has been threatened with court-martial for his behavior in captivity, said tonight that the "pressure of conscience and morality" made him change his mind on the war while in captivity.

Capt. Walter E. Wilber of the Navy acknowledged in a television interview that he had made antiwar statements while in prison without being tortured. He added that he had never been tortured during his nearly five years of captivity.

His story thus differed sharply from those of other returned prisoners interviewed since repatriation has completed. More than a dozen have publicly described severe physical abuses.

Asked about the statements of other prisoners, Captain Wilber emphasized that he would "not disbelieve or repudiate them in any way." But he suggested that the whole story had yet to be heard, telling Mike Wallace on the Columbia Broadcasting System's "60 Minutes"



The New York Times
Capt. Walter E. Wilber
when he was a prisoner
in Hanoi in 1970.

that "each person has to tell his own story."

"We'll find that when we talk to the other 600 of us that there will be many stories because circumstances will vary," the officer said.

The antiwar activities of Captain Wilber and one other prisoner who was captured during the 1964-to-1968 period are known to have angered their colleagues. A number of returned pilots have privately said that they planned to file court-martial charges against the two men, contending that the two were rewarded with better living conditions and better treatment while in Hanoi.

In an interview published today in The New York Times, Capt. James A. Mulligan Jr., who spent nearly seven years in prison, stated what is known to be a commonly held view toward Captain Wilber.

"Those guys will get what's coming to them," Captain Wilber said. "Any guy who goes to Hanoi and gets religion about the war after he's shot down is a pure phony."

Asked about Captain Mulligan's remark, Captain Wilber, who is a resident of Columbia Cross Roads, Pa., cited a number of prominent Americans who had changed their minds about the war in Vietnam.

He said he had begun to re-examine his feelings about the war while spending 20 months in solitary confinement after being shot down in June, 1968.

"I had time to think of what we were doing and the big old bugaboo conscience and morality began to show itself," he said.

Captain Wilber suggested that the reaction to his statements, at least in the Hanoi prison, was far less uniform than it has been since repatriation.

"It was varied," he said of his fellow prisoners' attitude. "Some said, 'I'm with you, but don't include me.' Some were, of course, disgusted, but there was no problem. Everybody recognized a person's personal opinion."

In one of his antiwar radio

statements, rebroadcast on the television show, Captain Wilber praised the unification of antiwar groups, saying their drive "for an early end to the war brought joy to my heart."

His brief message cited Senators Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, and J. W. Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, as well as Dr. Benjamin Spock, then a leading figure in the antiwar movement.

Captain Wilber acknowledged that his remarks had been given to the North Vietnamese voluntarily, and said they came from "the pressure of conscience" that made him desire peace.

He suggested that many of his antiwar statements centered on the need for a negotiated political settlement of the war, and noted that "this is what we accepted; his is what the American people are very happy with right now."

At no time, he said, did he advocate "a military surrender" for either side.