

# POWs Even Learned How To Tap Out a Punchline

By George Murphy

Americans are a garrulous race, and there's apparently no way they can be stopped from communicating with each other, even it means leaving a note in a honey bucket.

This rather extreme method of communications was outlined at Oakland Naval Hospital yesterday by three Navy pilots, former prisoners of war of the North Vietnamese.

(A honey bucket, for the uninitiated, is a container used to dispose of human waste. Honey buckets are quite common in the Orient.)

The rather unsavory honey bucket method was not the only means used for keeping in touch with other prisoners, said Commander Charles E. Southwick, 41, of Seattle.

"We used hand signals, tapped on walls, left notes — whenever two persons are going to be at the same place at different times, you can communicate."

Commander James M. Hickerson, 38, of Atlanta, remembered:

"When you spend a year and a half tapping on a wall to a man in the next cell, you get to know him pretty well.

"You can tell just by the way he taps if he's feeling depressed, or happy, or lonesome.

ale of (of the POWs) tre-



CMDRS. HICKERSON, SOUTHWICK AND ESTES  
'Just the communicating helped the morale'

mendously."

Then he and Southwick demonstrated the tapping technique, Southwick rap-

"And when he's telling you a joke, he even taps out the punch line harder to give it stress."

Commander Edward D. Estes, 38, of Purdy, Mo., said: "During the really bad

years 1967-8-9, just the communicating helped the morning out in less than 15 seconds the code for "How are you?" with Estes giving two quick raps at the end of each letter group to signal he understood, and finally rapping out "fine."

Their North Vietnamese captors were infuriated that they could not stop the POWs from communicating, and frequently would hold what the prisoners called a "compurge," to stop them. The pilots said. But after the purge the signaling would begin again.

The flyers said yesterday they, like their fellows, had been tortured by their captors ("the Vietnamese didn't like the word 'torture,' they preferred to say 'punishment'," Southwick recalled.

Southwick said, too, he feels the Vietnamese "could be cruel as children can be cruel—and I've never seen such cruelty to animals as I did there."

On one occasion, he said, he saw a turnkey catch a rat and "casually burn out his eyes, burn off his nose and all four feet, then put him on the ground and watch him scurble around."

As to Jane Fonda's statements that the POWs lied about being tortured, Southwick said:

"Well, I consider the source. If that statement came from someone I had regard for, then I'd be upset.

"I only saw Jane Fonda in one movie, "Cat Ballou," and Lee Marvin stole the picture."