

# Tales of Torture

ONE came back without fingernails. Others bore permanent scars: After the last of the 565 surviving American prisoners of war (the reported POW death rate was 18 per cent) returned from Hanoi ten days ago, POWs began pouring out their recollections of torture. A few critics, notably Jane Fonda and her husband Tom Hayden, shrugged them off as the tales of "liars" and "hypocrites." But most Americans, horrified, did not question their sincerity.

One former prisoner estimated 95 per cent of the POWs had undergone torture at some point in their captivity. Those captured in the middle and late 1960s often indicated matters had improved after 1969, the year President Nixon was inaugurated.

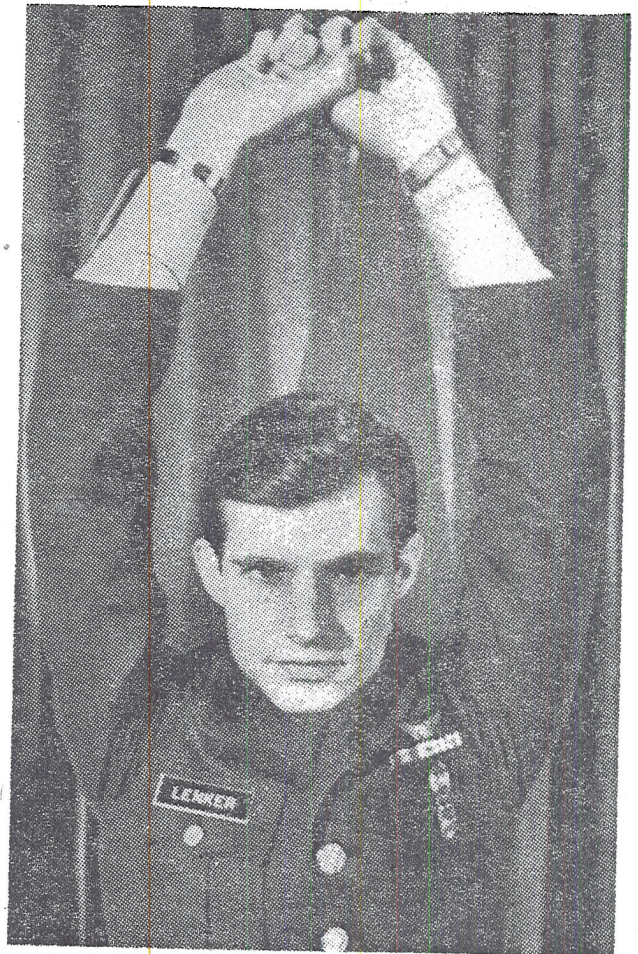
Staff Sergeant Michael Lenker showed how his hands had been wired above his head.

Others, including Colonel Robinson Risner, told how their captors would "tie your wrists behind your back and force your head and shoulders down until your feet or toes were in your mouth . . . until you acquiesced in whatever they were trying to get you to do." Some were beaten until their buttocks were "like raw hamburger." Many were manacled in iron stocks for days or weeks. Several were "reduced to the lowest depths" in solitary confinement or underground holes.

Major Richard Stratton of Palo Alto, who had been displayed on TV four years ago, announced he intended to sue his former captors as war criminals. Most POWs concurred the tortures were effective, though few had actually turned informer. "They broke me many times," said Lieutenant Colonel Richard Keirn. "I'm no hero." Said another POW: "We're being put on a pedestal we don't deserve. We're no better than anyone else."

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SERGEANT LENKER