

# WK Post Firm Justice Promised for Ex-POWs

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By Jack Taylor

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OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla., April 26 — Returned American prisoners of war who violated POW camp directives and cooperated willingly with their Communist captors will be punished through a combination of actions by repatriated senior officers and individual armed services, according to Col. James Robinson Risner.

Not only those ex-POWs who made antiwar statements without first being tortured, but possibly some prisoners who accepted early release by the North Vietnamese could be targets of such retribution, Risner indicated.

Punishment could range from adverse efficiency reports, effectively ending an officer's career, to undisclosed actions by the offenders' particular service.

Risner, an Air Force hero of two wars who spent 7½ years in prison, was a key officer in the POWs' own secret command organization and sometimes commanded the "Hanoi Hilton," the principal camp for American POWs in North Vietnam.

Risner, released Feb. 12 with the first group of POWs to be repatriated, is on leave at his home in Oklahoma City before returning to active duty, probably in July.

Although he refused to be specific, Risner's comments differed sharply from his own previous public statements and those of many other returned prisoners.

Earlier this week, Air Force Col. Theodore Guy, a prisoner for five years, said that he may press charges and he and other senior ex-POWs intend



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post  
Col. James R. Risner: "the right type of punishment."

to enter black marks in the efficiency reports of men they regard as collaborators. Guy, who said he was senior-rank-ing officer at a Hanoi prison compound, estimate there were fewer than 20 collabora-

ex-prisoners would charge others with violations of the military code of conduct.]

Risner said that "if a man did not hold up his end while over there, then I think this will have to be reckoned with and I think the services are going to do that."

Risner talked of directives he and other commanders issued while in prison, of infractions of the POW ethic, and of hopes that angry ex-POWs will refrain from formally charging other prisoners and leave punishment to the organization, which is what the POWs call their command structure in prison.

"We have put out directives to everyone that they were not to cooperate with the Vietnamese," Risner said. "I have personally put out—and I know that others have put out—that no one would cooperate until they were tortured and then they would give what was necessary to minimize the enemy's gain."

At least one former prisoner, Navy Capt. Walter E. Wilber of Columbia Cross Roads, Pa., has stated that he voluntarily made anti war statements out of conscience and was never tortured during nearly five years of imprisonment.

Risner, who met Wilber in the Hanoi Hilton, when asked volunteer—well, I guess I if Wilber's actions violated the POW directives said, "Yes, to volunteer—well, I guess I would be better off if I didn't comment on that. I'm sure that everyone's performance will be truly reflected in the efficiency report."

The senior commander said discipline actually was not a serious problem in the POW

camp, but that some infractions did occur.

"The men knew that to do something necessitating disciplinary action was actually helping the enemy and nobody—without exception—nobody wanted to do that," Risner said.

"Normally, a message to the man was sufficient," Risner said.

Did anyone ignore camp directives or disregard reprimands?

"I don't feel that there was anyone that just ignored a directive," Risner said. "I think that perhaps due to the separation of camps and so forth there were people who did not get the full benefit of our thinking. Yes, I think that's quite possible."

"We have had—an organization and still have this organization in being, so to speak, in that we did have a commander, a vice commander, a D.O. (deputy for operations) and so forth on down the line, to take care of infractions of the regulations, violations of the directives and so forth, and I believe it would be best—all of our interests would be best served if any disciplinary action is left up to the organization.

"I think everyone agrees with this and is going to leave it at that. So I expect no individual preferal of charges.

"In all fairness to everyone, anyone that deserves punishment will receive punishment—the right type of punishment," Risner said. "Those who did the most outstanding jobs will be recognized by efficiency ratings and awards and decorations. Those who maybe were not quite up to this outstanding performance, I think this will be reflected in their efficiency ratings also."