

# **Feb 15, 1973: American POWs come home—with honor!**

February 15, 2016 is the 43rd anniversary of a shining moment in American history: It was on that day in 1973 that American prisoners of war came home from Vietnam with their honor intact, after suffering unspeakable torture, some for eight years, at the hands of North Vietnam led by dedicated Communist Ho Chi Minh.

It was day of great importance in 1973 in a divided America faced with war, and it is day to remember all these years later in a divided America; it is important for what it teaches about honor, duty, country, and who and what we are as Americans.

The Vietnam War had divided Americans as never before. It was and remains the first time in American history that veterans came home from war not to be honored for their service and sacrifice, but to be vilified, defamed as “war criminals,” told by their military commanders not to wear their uniforms in traveling home, many even spat upon as they arrived home at airports, train or bus stations.

Altogether, some 9,137,000 Americans would serve in the Vietnam War-era (1960-1975), constituting 9.7 percent of their generation. Some 2.6-million of them were deployed to Vietnam, of whom between 1-1.6-million either fought in combat, provided close support, or were at least fairly regularly exposed to enemy attack.” ([www.VeteransHour.com](http://www.VeteransHour.com), from which all statistics are taken.)

Fifty-Eight Thousand Two Hundred And Two (58,202) of those American veterans would give their lives in service to their country. Another 303,704 were wounded; 18% suffered “multiple amputations,” compared with 5.7% in WWII; amputation or

crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher than in WWII, and 70% higher than Korea.

Of the 58,202 who were killed, 61% were 21 or younger. 30.4% were draftees. 79% had a high school education or better (compared with 63% in Korea and 45% in WWII). 76% were of middle/working class grounds. 88.4% of those who actually served in Vietnam were Caucasian, including some 170,000 Hispanics, 3,070 of whom (5.2%) died. Blacks constituted 10.6% (275,000). 86.8% of the men who were killed in combat were Caucasian; 12.5% were Black (at a time when Blacks were 13.5% of the population).

A later survey of Vietnam veterans showed: 82% of those who saw heavy combat “strongly believe” the war was lost because of lack of political will, with which “nearly 75% of the public” – modernly – agrees it was a failure of political will, not of arms. 97% of Vietnam Era Veterans were honorably discharged. 91% of combat veterans are proud to have served their country. 66% of Vietnam Veterans “say they would serve again if called upon.”

With the passage of time, reports VeteransHour.com, “87% of the public now holds Vietnam Veterans in high esteem.”

If that is true, it most definitely was not true during the Vietnam War. Many Americans who never served, turned their opposition to the war into vilification of the Americans who were sent to fight it. Many of the more affluent fled to Canada or Sweden or elsewhere to avoid the draft. Some blatantly lied when their draft number came up causing another American to go in their place, most infamously perhaps in the documented case of the utter lies told by William Jefferson Clinton to be excused when his draft number came up. Clinton is the first draft dodger ever to be elected President of the United States—or to any office in House or Senate. Clinton remains today a darling icon of the modern progressive liberal Democrat Party, more popular, it is said, than the party's

titular head, Barack Hussein Obama, the only other president since WWII not to have served in the armed forces he would presume to lead as Commander-in-Chief.

Many others did not flee but stayed to aid and abet the North Vietnamese Communists at home, waiving the "Viet Cong" flag, making a hero of Communist torture-master Ho Chi Minh – chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, 'Uncle Ho' Is Going To Win!"—and vilifying the Americans who did serve when the country called.

These "anti-war" protestors, were mainly affluent, self-righteous, elitist, college "radicals," conscious aiders-and-abettors of the socialist/communist cause in Vietnam and at home. They were led by pampered celebrities symbolized by Jane Fonda, whose name should live forever in infamy; never-held-a-job self-proclaimed "revolutionary" college students like SDS leader Tom Hayden, "Mr. Jane, Fonda," later a Democrat Party politician in California; political opportunist John Kerry who, as a leader of the Vietnam Veterans of the War (VFW) charged "war crimes" by Americans without being able to produce any proof, and earned having his photo in a place of honor in the Communist's War Museum in Hanoi along with Fonda; and out-and-out domestic terrorists like "Weatherman" bombers Billy Ayers and Bernardine Dorn, who would later become the close associates of Barack Hussein Obama, who announced his first run for political office in Illinois in the living room of Ayers and Dorn.

Of the Americans who served, those who were the most despised, and vilified by Jane Fonda, Hayden, Kerry, et al., were the American prisoners of war, almost all American pilots, who resisted Communist demands that they betray America despite appalling, inhumane, torture, ordered and orchestrated by Ho Chi Minh right up to the day of his death.

There were 770 Americans taken prisoner of war. 113 of them died in Communist captivity. The Communists refused to

recognize them as Prisoners of War, and, instead, declared them to be “war criminals” and blatantly violated the Geneva Convention. In what became known by the POW’s as the “Hanoi Hilton,” and like prisons, the POWs were kept in filthy, windowless, vermin-infested airless cells only 9 feet long and 3 feet wide. Three feet.

Those seen as “ringleaders” of the resistance, like ranking officers of the resisters in what became known as the “Alcatraz Eleven,” James Stockdale, who would later receive the Medal of Honor, and second in command Jeremiah Denton, would be locked in solitary confinement for over four long years, in which horrific torture was inflicted on them, and the other resisters.

The fact of that torture was not confirmed until 1966. Then, the Communists attempted to force Jeremiah Denton to participate in a propaganda broadcast to be filmed by a Japanese crew for international distribution. Instead, Denton not only did not say what the Communists wanted him to say, but he blinked his eyes as if he had an eye problem. He was in fact blinking in Morse Code: “T-O-R-T-U-R-E.” Naval intelligence immediately understood what Denton was communicating. When the Communists later realized what Denton had done, they tortured him nearly to death, as he recounts in his now classic book on what POW’s endured: “When Hell Was In Session.” (WND Books)

However, Jane Fonda, Hayden, John Kerry, then lying to Congress about alleged war crimes as a member of the VVAW – without, as noted above, being able to produce any evidence to support his allegations – and their progressive liberal followers in the “anti-war movement” and the media, did not denounce the Communists’ torture, they denounced the POW’s as “liars,” claiming their Communist allies under Uncle Ho Chi Minh were innocent of torture. Fonda, Hayden, Kerry, of course, lied.

Overwhelming post-war proof of torture beyond any reasonable doubt has given the lie to Fonda, Hayden, Kerry, et al, including books by many of the POWs. These include, the late Admiral Jeremiah Denton's classic "When Hell Was In Session;" "Surviving Hell," by Col. Leo Thorsness (USAF, ret.; Medal of Honor); "The Passing Of The Night," by the late Gen. Robinson Risner (USAF); "American Patriot," the biography of the late and legendary Col. Bud Day (USMC, WWII, Korea, Vietnam); "Chained Eagle," by Everett Alvarez, Jr., the first pilot shot down, a POW for eight years; and, among others, "Faith of my Fathers," by Sen. John McCain who refused an offer of early release by the Communists because his father was the Commanding Admiral, and suffered horrendous torture for his refusal. McCain, a true hero and recognized as such by his fellow POWs, was left permanently crippled in his arms by torture.

More recently, Author Alvin Townley has written a book magnificently telling the true story of the torture POW's endured in Vietnam, and what their families endured at home: "DEFIANT: The POWs Who Endured Vietnam's Most Infamous Prison; The Women Who Fought For Them, And The One Who Never Returned." It is highly praised by the surviving POWs themselves for being at once accurate, and extremely readable. Indeed, although loaded with documented facts, it reads like an adventure novel. It is a must read. (see, for more on "Defiant".)

The nation was and remained terribly divided over Vietnam. It was not until February, 1973, after POWs like Edward Alvarez, James Stockade, and Jeremiah Denton had endured almost eight years as tortured POWs, four years of which was in solitary confinement for Stockdale and Denton, and almost as long solitary confinement for others, including (now Texas Congressman) Sam Johnson, who was in solitary for over three years, that the breakthrough in peace talks came and Operation Homecoming began.

The first flight of emancipated POWs out of Vietnam to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines was on Feb. 12, 1973, fittingly if coincidentally on the birthday of Abraham Lincoln.

At Clark, the spokesman for the POWs, then-Captain Jeremiah Denton, in military uniform, stepped to the microphone, and spoke in short stroke a few simply stated words which began the stirring of the heart of a divided nation:

"We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult circumstances. We are profoundly grateful to our Commander-in-Chief and to our nation for this day. God Bless America."

Then came that shining moment three days later on February 15, 1973, when Denton, Jim Mulligan, and the others of the first group of POW's landed at the Portsmouth Naval base in Virginia, back on American soil. Their wives and children rushed to embrace them, as, to the POWs surprise, a huge crowd Americans roared with cheers for them, waving flags, laughing, some weeping with joyful emotion, Americans at last embracing the Americans they sent to war, welcoming them home as all Vietnam veterans should have been welcomed.

Operation Homecoming began an operation of healing some of the division, some of the rancor, some of the hatred in the American atmosphere up to that time in the war. Parades, ceremonies, welcoming events were held in the hometowns of POWs and many other cities, America began to heal, and, for many, to repent of how Americans sent to war were treated on coming home.

"Vietnam had claimed more than 58,000 American lives—young men who would never walk off a plane to public fanfare. Many of their families would not experience the same outpouring of compassion that their POW/MIA counterparts received. More than 300,000 soldiers returned wounded, some disabled for life.

Others returned physically intact, but emotionally shattered. Many never received a welcome of any sort," author Alvin Townley wrote in "DEFIANT."

"More than 770 known Americans were captured during the Vietnam War, and they valiantly upheld those high standards we expect of our servicemen and they in turn expect of themselves; 113 POWs did not survive. Every man has a valuable story and his own unique perspective...To me, they are all heroes, although no more so than the men who fought the war in other places, under different sets of difficult circumstances. I will always remain in awe of what they endured and accomplished. I hope it inspires America like it continues to inspire me," Townley wrote, concluding: "Finally, to all our POWs and Vietnam veterans: GBU."

Many of the POW's are no longer with us, including Admiral James Stockdale, Admiral Jeremiah Denton, many others. But their example is.

The surviving POWs gathered together for a 40th Reunion at the President Richard Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, CA in 2013. It was taped, and is very moving. It is available at "Vietnam POW 40th Reunion News Coverage-You Tube;".

"Jeremiah" is a very important new documentary on Adm. Jeremiah Denton, and his family. It reveals "up close and personal" what the POWs and their wives and children went through in the long years of separation, never knowing for sure if their POW father was still alive, in what condition, or if he would ever come home. It is as moving as it is informative, showing what it takes by way of service and sacrifice to keep America free.

Who the Vietnam POWs who came home on February 15, 1973, are and what they did, the honor they brought to themselves and to our country, should be remembered on every February 15, if not every day. That is because who and what they are is who and

what we can be when we are at our very best as Americans.

May the God they served bless and keep them; may the country they served always honor, and never forget them.

2016 Rees Lloyd – All Rights Reserved