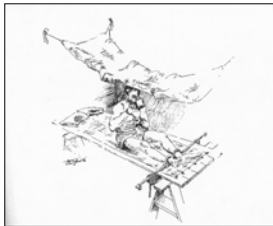




# TORTURE EXPERIENCES OF PRISONERS HELD IN NORTH VIETNAM

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On the second of August in 1964, three North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the USS Maddox, a United States Destroyer operating in international waters in support of Covert Actions by the government of South Vietnam. This ill advised action resulted in trivial damage to the Maddox and severe damage to the patrol boats. There may or may not have been a second attack by torpedo boats on 4 August. At any rate in the professed belief that a second attack had occurred, President Lyndon Baines Johnson ordered an attack on docks and oil storage facilities in North Vietnam. This initial air strike was the first step in President Johnson's explosive escalation of this undeclared war. It also resulted in the capture of the first known American POW to be held in North Vietnam, Ed Alvarez. Before the end of the conflict 490 known prisoners of war would be held in North Vietnam. An unknown number were murdered prior to arrival at prison camps. The experiences of this group included malnutrition, general abuse and actual torture.



The most severe torture commonly used was the "rope trick". The victim's upper extremities were pulled behind him. Tight bonds were placed proximal to the elbows and the elbows were pulled together. The wrists were bound. The wrists were then pulled up and forward. This extended and adducted the shoulders far beyond the physiologic range of motion. The elbows were hyperextended. Wrists were lacerated and blood supply was compromised for prolonged periods. The ulnar nerve was especially vulnerable. The pain caused by this abuse was severe. Residual paralysis and sensory loss with paresthesias lasted for prolonged periods and in some is present today.



**THE ROPES**



**THE RESULT**

The use of the Ropes was extremely common in the group shot down prior to 1970. Apparently anyone not too badly injured to torture was tortured. It was much less common in the post 70 group

Handcuffs were used for routine transport as well as abusively. Two types of handcuffs were used. The "Hell Cuffs" were ratchet types cuffs of the type used by modern police forces. These cuffs were closed very tightly to the point of skin laceration. Interference with circulation caused hands to "turn black". Nerve compression caused decreased sensation and paresthesias. Other cuffs were a type of manacle. These were cast metal and were not adjustable. They were apparently left over from the French Colonial Government and were sized for the smaller Vietnamese wrists. These are tight on a smaller American wrist. On the thicker wrist they could only be closed with force. This was done with results similar to the ratchet cuffs.



**THE HELL CUFFS**



**MANACLES**

The majority of persons captured prior to 1970 had multiple episodes of abusive cuffs. The majority captured after 1970 had no episodes at all. Non abusive use of handcuffs for transport are not included in these numbers.

A common form of torture was to require the prisoner to assume an uncomfortable position and remain in that position for prolonged periods. When the situation permitted and when no longer under observation, the prisoner would surreptitiously assume a more comfortable position. Discovery led to beatings and resumption of the position. The prisoners continued to resist in this manner and as they put it "I refused to torture myself".

Prisoners might be required to stand for prolonged periods of time, sometimes with hands raised over their heads. They were also required to kneel for long periods of time, again sometimes with arms elevated. Sometimes a pencil was placed under the knee to make it more painful.



**KNEELING**



**STANDING**

The majority of Pre 70 shutdowns had multiple episodes of enforced kneeling. It was much less common in the Post 70 group. Prolonged standing episodes had a similar distribution.

The North Vietnamese tortured their prisoners severely and over a long period of time. They starved them, exposed them to the extremes of heat and cold, denied them medical care, and abused their wounds. The external marks of torture were not obvious on their return to the United States. This concealed the fact of their torture experiences from a public eager to forget the war and led some persons to even deny that the torture had occurred. These tortures inflicted the maximum amount of pain with the least amount of obvious damage. The Robert E Mitchell Center collected data on the torture experiences of this prison population who were repatriated. It quickly became obvious that the larger group of prisoners could be subdivided into two smaller groups based on their date of capture. Persons captured prior to 1970 were treated much more harshly than persons captured afterwards. No one held in the North was captured in 1970.

Often they were required to sit for prolonged periods of time on a stool. Some times they were tied to the stool. A prisoner might be placed in leg irons in the hogtie or chained to his cot. Urination and defecation were performed with great difficulty as the prisoner would have to slide and twist to the side of the cot while his ankles remained firmly secured.

A minority of the POWs were beaten across the buttocks with a fan belt or other form of whip



**THE STOOL**



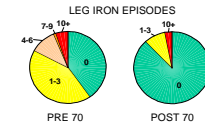
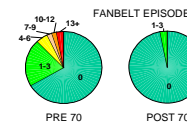
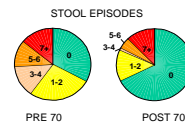
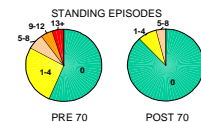
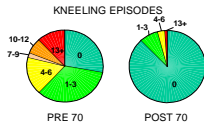
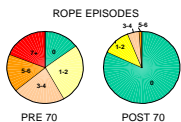
**BEATING WITH FAN BELT**



**THE HOG TIE**

Prolonged sitting on the stool was used in both shutdown year groups. It was more frequently used in the latter group as punishment for "poor attitude". Approximately 1/3 of the Pre 70 shutdown group was beaten at least once with the fan belt or some similar object. These beatings were extremely brutal. They essentially did not occur after 1970.

Abusive leg irons (as illustrated in the hog tie drawing) were used in the majority of the Pre 70 group and rarely in the Post 70 group.



**ROPES %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	15	82
1-2	27	12
3-4	22	5
5-6	17	1
7+	19	0

**HANDCUFFS %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	37	89
1-2	29	7
3-4	16	1
5-6	10	1
7+	9	1

**KNEELING %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	28	88
1-3	34	8
4-6	17	3
7-9	2	0
10-12	7	0
13+	12	1

**STANDING %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	57	88
1-4	27	8
5-8	7	4
9-12	5	0
13+	5	0

**THE STOOL %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	33	67
1-2	27	14
3-4	14	1
5-6	12	5
7+	14	12

**FANBELT %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	66	97
1-3	21	3
4-6	5	0
7-9	2	0
10-12	2	0
13+	3	0

**LEG IRONS %**

EPISODES	PRE 1970	POST 1970
0	40	88
1-3	42	9
4-6	11	0
7-9	1	0
10+	5	3