

In all, 566 were servicemen—325 were from the Air Force, 138 belonged to the Navy, 77 were Army and 26 were Marines. The 25 civilians were members of various U.S. Government agencies.

The Vietnamese listed 55 as having died in captivity; returning POWs put the number at 111. On April 13, 1973 the Pentagon announced that there was no evidence that any more U.S. POWs were still alive in Indochina.²⁹⁹ During this same period, however, the DOD's Homecoming Center at Clark Air Force Base (the Center) reported that returning POWs had provided information indicating that 156 servicemen "may have died in captivity".

POWs' view

In captivity, American servicemen made learning the names of fellow prisoners the highest priority and pledged to each other that they would all go home together.

Admiral James Stockdale, who won a presidential citation for his service to the U.S. while the senior officer held captive,³⁰⁰ said the pledge was central to POWs' survival, because it kept them going through unspeakable torture and other adversity:

In the matter of accountability for Americans in the prisons of North Vietnam, what appears to be chaotic to the outside after-the-fact investigators seemed by contrast comparatively orderly to the self-governing, self-accounting body of Yanks who spent considerable time there. Self-governing, self-accounting. That's important. It had to be a team operation.

We who struggled for years to maintain unity over self, keeping, memorizing, cross-checking names of all Americans physically sighted or whispered to or tapped with, we had stringent requirements to get into the system. It couldn't be hearsay, it couldn't be anything. The guy had to have been seen or whispered to or had some physical contact with somebody.

Found in those dungeons—all of this activity found in those dungeons, a meaning of life centered on being your brother's keeper emerged, keeping a memorialized chronology of contacts and acquaintances that could some day,

²⁹⁹ See discussion of President Nixon's statement to the nation and Dr. Roger Shields's statement in the Paris Peace Accord chapter and numbers chapter.

³⁰⁰ The award, bestowed by President Gerald Ford, is:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, 4 September 1969, while senior Naval officer in the prisoner of war camps of North Vietnam, recognized by his captors as the leader in the prisoners of war resistance to interrogation and in the refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Admiral, then Captain, Stockdale, was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture after he was detected in a covert communications attempt.

"Sensing the start of another purge and aware that his earlier efforts at self-disfiguration to dissuade his captors from exploiting him for propaganda purposes, had resulted in cruel and agonizing punishment, Rear Admiral Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifice.

"He deliberately inflicted a near mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. He was subsequently discovered and revived by the North Vietnamese, who convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the prisoners of war.

"By his heroic action at great peril to himself, he earned the everlasting gratitude of his fellow prisoners and of his country. Rear Admiral Stockdale's valiant leadership and extraordinary courage in a hostile environment sustained and enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."