

HONOR BOUND

American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973

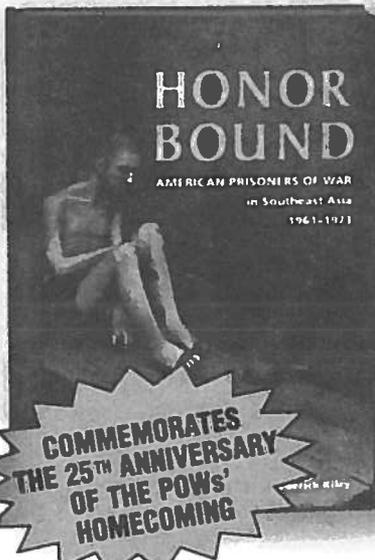
BY STUART I. ROCHESTER AND FREDERICK KILEY

- ★ The definitive account—complete, objective, and accurate
- ★ Covers prisoners and prisons in North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia
- ★ Drawn from defense department sources and scores of prisoner interviews
- ★ Vividly illustrated with prisoners' drawings and rare photographs

Among the many horrors of the Vietnam War, some of the most brutal and, until now, least documented were the experiences of the American prisoners of war, many of whom endured the longest wartime captivity of any POWs in U.S. history. With this book, two of the most respected scholars in the field offer a comprehensive, balanced, and authoritative account of what happened to the nearly eight hundred Americans captured in Southeast Asia. The authors were granted unprecedented access to previously unreleased materials and interviewed over a hundred former POWs, enabling them to meticulously reconstruct the captivity record as well as produce an evocative narrative of a once sketchy and misunderstood, yet key chapter of the war.

Published twenty-five years after Operation Homecoming, which brought home 591 POWs from Vietnam, this tour-de-force history is a compelling and important work that serves as a testament to the courage, faith, and will of Americans in captivity, as well as a reminder of the sometimes impossible demands made on U.S. servicemen under the Code of Conduct in prisoner of war situations.

696 pages. 196 photographs. 11 drawings.
6 maps. #1-694-9. List Price: \$36.95



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Bound by Honor



Stuart I. Rochester and Frederick Kiley. *Honor Bound: The History of the American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973*. Washington: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1998. Pp. 704, including Bibliography, Notes, and Index.

Also available under the imprint *Honor Bound: American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999. Pp. 696, including photographs, drawings, maps. \$36.95.

Let me be clear from the start: Read this splendid book. It reaches the highest standards of balanced scholarship and meticulous research united with clear vision and mature compassion. It undoubtedly will endure as the standard account of this part of our national history. As well as a record of some 900 American prisoners, military and civilian, most of whom returned with their honor intact, the book is a record of the authors' being bound by honor, by their own sense of obligation extending now more than 25 years, to tell the whole story, unvarnished and as nearly complete as possible. That they succeed testifies to their own endurance and their comprehensive mastery of the many stories to emerge from this longest captivity. They do for the PW experience what Gerhard Weinberg does in his one-volume history of World War II—they clarify the threads

of cause and effect, tell the stories in compelling and authentic ways, and leave us incredulous at the accomplishment of the book and the people whose stories it offers.

Whatever we think in retrospect about the war in Viet Nam—misguided national folly, a generous attempt to aid a struggling people, a painful part of the cold war, or any of the varieties of such views—one fact remains. The stories of the men and women captured by the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong and their allies, reveal the astonishing capacity of ordinary people to do the extraordinary, to endure pointless and deliberate suffering, to survive and triumph under degrading and dehumanizing conditions, to discover unrealized inner strength and belief in the rightness of democratic values.

The story of the American (and a handful of other) prisoners in Southeast Asia, as Rochester and Kiley present it in this monumental volume, at once horrifies and inspires; it draws tears, and it angers and humbles us as citizens, as veterans, and as readers. With thoroughgoing and dispassionate scholarship, the authors make clear the disastrous results to the nation and its military members when our government commits its forces to a conflict without a clear grasp of the risks, without a clear national aim, and without understanding the political and social dynamics of the site of that risk. The implications for current policy-makers are all too evident; the risks are that all too few policy-makers will read this vital history for the lessons it provides us all. I would say to them, "Read this book."

Honor Bound provides the historical setting of the war; details the capture and treatment of prisoners in North and South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and China; chronicles the prisoners' movements and resistance—in overwhelming detail with astonishing coherence. It provides structure and focus to what often seemed random

and impenetrable actions. In its twenty-six chapters, the authors clarify the differing kinds of treatment inflicted on the prisoners (or war criminals as the Viet Cong described them) from the early years (1961-4), the middle years (1965-9), the period after Ho Chi Minh's death (1969), and during the Paris negotiations until their joyous release in 1973. From their early surprise and confusion, we learn, the captors rapidly evolved an awareness of the ways they might exploit their prisoners for propaganda, both internal and international. The power of the image of American airmen humbled by the technologically inferior but ideologically superior North Vietnamese proved irresistible; that deliberate exploitation of the PWs for political and ideological reasons clearly marked their captivity as different from that experienced in WWII or earlier wars. The American prisoners, however, well aware of their propagandistic value, resisted and circumvented their captors in imaginative and subtle ways. As the authors put it:

As isolated and disconnected as their situation was, the majority of PWs never considered themselves divorced from the war effort. For them the prison camps became just another theater, albeit a unique one, with its own peculiar logistical and tactical demands. Their mission had changed, from one of active fighting to one of resistance and survival, but they still had a soldierly function to perform—to disrupt, to stymie, to exhaust the enemy, finally to defeat him, in this case on the battle field of propaganda and psychological warfare. . . . They saw themselves at the center of the political struggle and viewed their mission as ever more crucial as

they recognized the PW issue taking on increasing political significance. (129)

They resisted with imagination, individual will, and surreptitious communication despite the Vietnamese ban on such actions. When the years of systematic torture began in earnest in late 1965, torture to which about 95% of prisoners were subjected, the suffering of the individual and the demands of the rudimentary camp organization led ultimately to a strengthened chain of command and a recognition that the American Code of Conduct was unrealistic in the face of such persistent, purposeful, and brutal torture.

The treatment of Lt (j.g.) Rodney Knutson, USN, will suffice to illustrate the brutality: After refusing to give more than his name and service number, Lt Knutson's

Guards locked him in ankle straps, bound his arms so tightly behind his back they lost circulation, denied him food and water, and, when he still refused to apologize for his behavior, punched him with clenched fists until they shattered his nose, broke several teeth, and caused his eyelids to swell shut. When after three days guards removed him from the stocks, he was unable to straighten up because his bloodied back and buttocks, beaten to a pulp with bamboo clubs, had formed a giant scab. When they released his bonds, he could not believe the intensity of the pain caused by the recirculation of blood into his blackened hands and forearms. When, semi-conscious and writhing in agony, he remained silent, the Vietnamese applied a new torture that finally broke him.

In the so-called "rope torture," administered to Knutson on 25 October [1965] and soon to become a source of dread throughout the Northern camps, guards forced him face down on his bunk, set his ankles into stocks, and bound him tightly with rope at the elbows. The long end of the rope was then pulled up through a hook attached to the ceiling. As a guard hoisted the prisoner, he lifted him off the bunk enough so that he could not relieve any of his weight, producing incredible pain—with shoulders seemingly being torn from their sockets—and horribly constricting breathing. (145)

This kind of treatment varying in intensity from camp to camp and from guard to guard occurred while "prominent American peace advocates" broadcast appeals extolling the heroism of the Vietnamese and "the cowardice of the American pilots" (180-1). Their treatment grew even more galling with the arrival of the "Cuban delegation," three English-speaking Caucasians, believed to be Cubans, who brought with them more subtle and brutal treatment (396ff). That large numbers of the PWs did not end their resistance in the face of the peace movement and its propagandistic excesses testifies to their ability to see through the political fog and to remain loyal to the commitment (and constitutional oath) that brought them in harm's way.

In the face of incessant deprivation and repeated torture, many heroic figures emerge: the authors find almost daily heroism among most prisoners, but clearly Jeremiah Denton, Robbie Risner, and James Stockdale emerge as especially admirable figures, senior officers who suffered extraordinary pain and penalties from both mental and physical maltreatment, but who nevertheless

ultimately imposed their wills on their captors and led the other PWs with increasing effectiveness. To cite but one example,

Stockdale formulated a set of policies during this period early in 1967 that amplified and supplemented the previous instructions of Denton and Risner. In summary form it was conveyed in the acronym BACK US:

B—Bowling. Do not bow in public, either under camera surveillance or where non-prison observers were present.

A—Air. Stay off the air. Make no broadcasts or recordings.

C—Crimes. Admit to no “crimes,” avoiding use of the word in coerced confessions.

K—Kiss. Do not kiss the Vietnamese goodbye, meaning show no gratitude upon release.

US—Unity over Self.

Meeting the needs for both compassion and discipline and carrying the personal signature of a respected senior, Stockdale’s policy guidance lifted morale at Vegas [one of the early camps] as much as any of the improvements in the men’s physical circumstances. Of more far-reaching significance, it would become a moral-legal compass for prisoner conduct for the remainder of the war, and not just at Vegas but throughout the PW ranks. (298)

Such leadership helped the weakened and debilitated prisoners survive and clearly shaped their attitude

toward the few who accepted the Vietnamese offer of better conditions in return for collaboration. By late 1970, after Ho's death, conditions changed dramatically when some "340 US prisoners of war—all those captured in the North and known to be still alive—were gathered in one location. It was the first time all the aviators had been together in a single camp. They called the place 'Unity' " (523). Out of unity came coherence in the form of the self-proclaimed 4th Allied POW Wing, an organization that evolved from the large cells in the camp. It was so named for the *Fourth* war of the century and *Allied* "signified the inclusion of Thai and Vietnamese allies" (534fn).

The story of the organization's success in the later years (under Air Force Colonel John Flynn), in circumventing the Vietnamese captors and in holding the group together as the war's end approached demonstrates again the importance of imaginative and inspiring leadership and willing, loyal followership. By the spring of 1971, one of the prisoners later recalled, the tables had turned so that "prisoners now harass the guards" (536), but not with impunity. The captors tried vainly to disrupt the chains of command, resorted again to beatings, and dislocated prisoners almost at random. But the communication system and the strengthened cohesion meant that the Wing, one PW reported, was functioning "almost as efficiently as the normal administration facilities available back home" (539).

Anyone old enough to remember the prisoners' return back home in that spring of 1973 knows the intense emotional response from the gathered crowds and the millions watching at home on television. When Jeremiah Denton read his brief statement, the nation breathed a sigh of relief and gratitude for such men, for their freedom. Denton's words, "*We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult cir-*

cumstances. We are profoundly grateful to our Commander in Chief and to our nation for this day. God Bless America" (v) remain a ringing monument to those who endured horrific conditions and treatment, who persisted with wit and bravery, imagination and stoic determination. That such individuals served—and have long served—this country remains one of the little-sung blessings from which we all benefit. □

A Conversation

Co-author of *Honor Bound*, Frederick Kiley is a retired Air Force colonel. He was professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy prior to serving in Vietnam as an adviser to the Vietnam Air Force. He is a leading authority on prisoners of war and is the co-author of *Satire from Aesop to Buchwald* and *A Catch – 22 Casebook*. From 1984 until 1997 he was Director of the National Defense University Press. This interview took place at the Air Force Academy during November 1998.



Shuttleworth: As I read *Honor Bound*, I wondered how you became involved. It seems you have been bound to this book for a long time, longer than the prisoners' captivity. How did that happen?

Kiley: I was first drawn to the story as the returning Prisoners of War began to step off the transport aircraft during Operation Homecoming. I think for many of us who served in Vietnam, then were lucky enough to come home, the returning PW's held a very special significance. First of all, their return marked an end to that sad war, something we had been hoping for for years. Secondly, by their words, by their demeanor, they quickly came to represent something greater than unfortunate victims of the war; they stood as heroes—personifying something valiant that emerged from the frustration and

melancholy of those years. They gave us back some of the pride we had lost. I'm sure that those Americans who remember the PWs' return 25 years ago will remember how they just *lit up* this country. They were received like heroes in every state in the nation. I know what a lift those receptions gave to the returnees, who were understandably uncertain what the attitude of the American people would be toward them. But I don't believe they sensed that, in all those communities, they represented the victorious armies whose return brought a sense of closure to the war and an opportunity for the nation to recognize them for their endurance. Then, as the saga of the PWs' experience and performance in captivity began to emerge, I, like many others, came to realize that in terms of courage in the face of pain, endurance in the face of despair, and honor in the face of the grimmest of circumstances, they had clearly raised the bar a notch. They had been trapped as pawns in the North Vietnamese political-warfare scheme, targets of exploitation for propaganda aimed at the antiwar involvement at home in the United States, behind the Iron Curtain, and in the nations of the Third World. And—incredibly—they had somehow won. From that moment on, I was hooked. Eventually I was fortunate enough to join in the project to write that history sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Shuttleworth: So you, too, were a captive of sorts, honor bound to complete the story, and you stayed with it all these years?

Kiley: Yes. I had to. I just had to.

Shuttleworth: The research must have been a formidable task, and I'm sure there were many problems. What kind of problems did you encounter?

Kiley: The research was exhaustive and exhausting. Many of the returnees wrote their own individual accounts, all of which had to be read and put into perspective with other materials and official records of various kinds. The *Reader's Digest* had a team of researchers under John Hubbell, their military editor, doing a similar project based largely on interviews of returned PWs, that was published under the title *P.O.W.* and has been for many years the best basic book on the subject. Hubbell was a great help, opening all his files to me, and encouraging me to continue on and write the definitive work that would be possible with the full access I had to official materials, aided by the fuller understandings that would emerge with the passage of time and the reconciliation of varying accounts covering the same material.

Shuttleworth: How long did it take to assemble a substantial base of research material?

Kiley: Four or five years. There were great masses of it in print, on tape, and in personal materials like letters. As I organized these thousands of pages it became obvious to me that I'd never get to the heart of the story without doing extensive interviewing—and that took a great deal of time. Later, as I started to write the early drafts, I decided that it was crucial to include certain background material—not simply because this was history, but because that background made it clearer for readers to understand why the PWs were treated as they were, especially in 1965-67, and why the North Vietnamese were following a plan that, on the surface, might be unclear.

Shuttleworth: One of the strengths of the book is the framework it creates for the reader, the story it tells. Is there, for you, a key background event?

Kiley: The French PW experience in Indo-China leading up to their final defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, for example. A number of our returned PWs who have read drafts of these early chapters have confirmed our judgment on including them, because with the possible exception of the horrible treatment of the French captured at Dien Bien Phu—the general way in which the North Vietnamese treated the French in prison camps before that time was very similar to the way they treated Americans in the early years of the American captivity experience.

Shuttleworth: Didn't the treatment of American PWs change during the course of their captivity?

Kiley: Yes, from late 1969 on, it moderated in the Hanoi camps.

Shuttleworth: Why was that?

Kiley: The death of Ho Chi Minh that year offered them an opportunity to reduce torture. There were other factors. The new Nixon administration adopted a policy called "Go Public" in which they made clear the brutality and savagery that had marked the treatment of American PWs. And they supported and openly encouraged the spouses of PWs and MIAs to speak out, to travel to Paris to confront Vietnamese delegations, and in general to turn up the heat on Hanoi from the humanitarian point of view. Furthermore, the Son Tay commando raid on what had been a PW camp in North Viet Nam persuaded the Hanoi government to consolidate several outlying camps into the large compound in central Hanoi, which from 1971 on generally improved treatment as well because the PWs lived together in larger groups and isolation and torture were reduced. And there's reason to be-

lieve that the brutal deaths of certain PWs in Hanoi may have motivated the North Vietnamese to go a little easier from 1969 on.

Shuttleworth: So you wrote chapters at the beginning that frame the history by summarizing the French experience in the 1950s, and, uniquely, by discussing the earliest US PWs in South Viet Nam and also in Laos.

Kiley: That's correct. Very little has been written about those PWs in the early 1960s when the US was committed to an advisory effort and we were not "officially" involved in Laos, even though we did have Americans captured there—civilian and military. The book also covers those who were captured ten years later in the secret war in Cambodia—something I know you understand from your own experience there. And it treats in considerable detail the stories of those captured in South Viet Nam from 1965 on—a story that's not well known. There were many PWs in South Viet Nam who performed with great courage—more than 25 successfully escaped—and who lived in often desperate jungle conditions—40% of the PWs in one camp died. And there were also some who succumbed to enemy propaganda and to one degree or another did collaborate. There was a Medal of Honor awarded—posthumously—to an army captain for incredible resistance and heroism. And several PWs were held for a great many years in South Viet Nam. Jim Thompson, who was captured in the South and later held in North Viet Nam, became the longest held prisoner of war in American history. A lot more is known publicly about the PWs shot down and captured in North Viet Nam, so *Honor Bound* really fills out the rest of the story for the first time. And it's a very moving part of the entire saga.

Shuttleworth: In a story of this scale, in trying to write it accurately, what other problems did you face?

Kiley: One major problem over all these years was the need to reconcile the differing versions of the same incident or the same period of torture or exploitation, or even of movement between camps. For example, written accounts of, say, four PWs that deal with, say, a period of brutality aimed at forcing written propaganda from a group of prisoners in a certain camp in Hanoi may provide four accounts that differ in two or three particulars. How does one reconcile these variations? Well, you interview those returnees and others in that camp at that time who had not written personal accounts. Then you consult the wonderful set of camp histories written by teams of returnees at the Air War College under the direction of A.J. Myers—surely the finest such history any group of former PWs has ever written about any American captivity experience. Then you apply technical calculations—for example, standardizing the time. US time and Hanoi time are a day apart, so you need to get those dates and time accurate. Then there's sometimes the matter of an hour's difference between Hanoi time and Saigon time even though Hanoi and Saigon are almost due North-South of one another and thus should be in the same time zone. As I learned from a senior official at the Naval Observatory in Washington D.C., Hanoi changed its local time one hour to coincide with Chinese railroad schedules for trains delivering war materials to the North Vietnamese border areas. (After overrunning South Viet Nam in 1975, the Hanoi government switched back to the proper variation from Greenwich Mean Time.) That may seem like a very small matter, but it was significant in certain episodes. In fact, when Admiral Stockdale was writing the revised edition of his book *In Love and War*, he called me with that very question. He

was trying to pinpoint exact times in Hanoi for certain actions, became aware of the one-hour difference with Saigon, and wondered what the reason was.

Shuttleworth: So there were those technical problems to resolve.

Kiley: Yes—and many others. The PWs in 1971 and 1972 compiled their own history. It was a marvelous effort to try to pin down the facts before they returned from captivity. One thing they accomplished in that effort—for the Hanoi camps that is—was to track down the identity and fate of a large number of names that came into their system but were not present in 1971-72.

Shuttleworth: You mean MIA's?

Kiley: Well, partly so. Some were names of people who had been killed or had been “disappeared” by the North Vietnamese after they had lost their health or been beaten into insanity. Some were variations of names of prisoners that had been circulated for years—wherein the living PW had been moved to a different camp after he had communicated his name in an original camp. “Watson” for “Wharton” could be an example. Watson may have communicated his name a few days after arriving at the Hanoi Hilton, but another prisoner may have heard it as “Wharton” and remembered it that way. Then Watson moved to, say, the Plantation and the other prisoners never heard from him again. So in 1971-72, the prisoners now collected in one large camp were searching down the name “Wharton” until they eventually traced it to the person who had originally heard the name incorrectly, then put that information together with the time of the incident and the names of prisoners in that spot at that

time—eventually determining that “Wharton” was Watson and not an MIA.

Shuttleworth: How accurate was the final list of names the prisoners assembled?

Kiley: Extremely accurate. If a man had made it into the PW system, his name was known with virtually no exceptions. The list of the “disappeared” proved to be very accurate at Operation Homecoming. Intelligence people have told me that the correlation with their lists was amazingly accurate.

Shuttleworth: What other problems had to be worked out that extended the time it took to write the history?

Kiley: The general matter of clearing classified documents took time. The services vary, incidentally, on how they handle such requests. And within the Army, it varies by branch— Artillery, Armor, Signal, and so forth.

Shuttleworth: Who’s fast and who’s slow?

Kiley: Well, I’ll diplomatically dodge that question, except to say that eventually we got all the clearances we needed.

Shuttleworth: Including the debriefings of the returnees?

Kiley: An astute question. Many people don’t realize that the debriefings, to this day, are protected because of a commitment made to the returnees. They were asked to speak freely to their debriefers so that the truth of the experience would become known and the possible identification of MIAs would be enhanced. In return they were

promised confidentiality in that no PW could read another PWs debriefing.

Shuttleworth: Has that promise been kept?

Kiley: Yes, to the best of my knowledge. In fact, as a former Air Force officer, I'm proud that it has been honored all these years. It's an obligation that has been kept. I'm also proud of the way the debriefings were conducted. The PWs weren't read their rights and warned about statements they might make becoming evidence—none of that was done at homecoming. They weren't made to feel like they were somehow tainted because they had been captured. The effect of that policy is that they weren't burdened by innuendo while debriefing, that the intelligence community's search for MIA names was aided, and that we got a full and unhindered set of accounts of that whole PW experience.

Shuttleworth: Were you able to use the debriefings?

Kiley: Yes we had full access, and they were, of course, invaluable—in fact, essential.

Shuttleworth: I don't remember seeing them cited in the book.

Kiley: That's right—there are no quotations from the debriefings in the book. We also honored the commitment. The intelligence people were adamant in holding us to that, not because they were shielding information but because they were honoring the commitment.

Shuttleworth: Did you lose any vital information because of that?

Kiley: No, I don't believe so. The vital information became available in a number of ways and I'm satisfied that we missed nothing significant because of honoring this commitment.

Shuttleworth: Are there other stories not included in the book that you found particularly poignant? Or stories that you would have liked to have told but cut out of the book because of the length of the text?

Kiley: Yes. There were two ways we had to cut the text. First, there are many anecdotes, some sad, some heroic, some humorous, that just had to be set aside. We included as many anecdotes as we could, choosing those that were characteristic and truly representative of events in a particular chapter, plus a few that were just so good that we couldn't leave them out. Second, there are a few things that are intensely personal regarding men who died in captivity that we felt were not necessary to include because they really did not add anything not covered elsewhere and could have brought unnecessary grief to their families if published.

Shuttleworth: Even without those stories it's a big book.

Kiley: Yes, and we used a whole battery of technical tricks to keep it under 750 pages. For example, instead of a standard 6 x 9 page, we increased it fractionally—about ½" by ¾". That allows both a slightly wider line and 2 or 3 more lines per page. Then we chose a type face that was very readable and a little computer trick to surround the letters with more space so we could use a slightly smaller sized print. All that helped, as did abbreviating ranks and even using PW—an official abbreviation by the way—instead of POW. I calculated one time that these little details saved about 70 pages, yet enabled us to

keep good margins and have a book that will lie open on any page to make reading easier.

Shuttleworth: You evenhandedly describe the few captives who unduly cooperated with their captors. How big a part of the story is that?

Kiley: Well, in numbers, very small – but in the effect on other prisoners, significant. You can imagine the impact on prisoners trying to stand up under torture and resist interrogations when they hear the voices of a couple of fairly senior officers spouting propaganda over the camp PA system, knowing those officers capitulated readily in return for better living conditions. Then there was a group of about 8 enlisted who were captured in the South then marched to Hanoi in the later years who were given better treatment in return for propaganda and perhaps information about PW communication.

Shuttleworth: Was anything done to these men after the war?

Kiley: The two officers were disciplined under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and retired for the good of the service. Charges were being considered against the enlisted group when one committed suicide in Denver, and the issue was dropped after that. It's a complex story. We cover it in the final chapters of the book.

Shuttleworth: Were the returned prisoners you interviewed forthright, open to telling you the whole story?

Kiley: Almost universally so. If I heard anything from all of the interviews that I did, it was get the story out so people will know. Occasionally someone might be reti-

cent or guarded—understandably so—or I might catch him at an awkward time. I interviewed Jim Kasler at his golf course in Momence, Illinois the morning after he'd had major damage from lightning. He was dealing with insurance problems and the business of getting the course up and running again, and could easily have brushed me off to deal with more important matters. But he didn't—he was most generous and very illuminating—not just in factual information but in giving me context by which to understand things. He was typical.

Shuttleworth: I know there have been suggestions in some academic circles that the returnees got together on their stories and compiled an "official story" that was self serving, and fed that story to John Hubbell for his book *P.O.W.*

Kiley: I'm aware of that criticism in connection with the Hubbell book, and I hope to have a chance to sit down sometime with those who feel that way and discuss the matter. We deal with it in the Preface. And by writing the full story here—much fuller than has ever been done before—I think we offer the concrete history that should clarify matters. I'll let the book speak for itself on the matter.

Shuttleworth: I understand that you actually had yourself tied in the ropes so you could experience that. Is that true?

Kiley: Yes, and it was terrible. The first thing that tears you up is your neck and shoulders. Then you feel like your back will come apart. Then—and this surprised me—when they bend you forward, you can't breathe. It's terrifying. Then you go numb, and you don't feel the pain as much. But there's a surprise waiting. When they

release the ropes and let you straighten up, the pain comes back, like a numb leg coming back to life, only worse. So they get you both ways. I actually went back a second time—and it was as bad as the first. What it must have been like to know that was coming and still try to hang on and resist, I can only imagine. But my respect for those who went through that and still resisted is unbounded.

Shuttleworth: It must have been especially tough on the leaders.

Kiley: It certainly was. The torture, the endless interrogations. And it was compounded for the leaders much of the time because they were often isolated and alone. There was another group in Hanoi that very little has been written about—we might call them the middle management. I mean the majors and lieutenant commanders who might be in charge of a group of juniors or of a building in a compound. They often caught it from both ends—orders coming down from the prison leadership and gripes coming up from the captains and lieutenants under their leadership in the camp resistance structure. It made for additional stress beyond the common stresses of captivity.

Shuttleworth: The prisoners in the North must have hated the American antiwar advocates like Jane Fonda who came to Hanoi and then brought additional misery to the PWs.

Kiley: There were people like Tom Hayden and Professor Lynd who came in the early years, and the writer Mary McCarthy who arranged a meeting with Robinson Risner but either never noticed or ignored the scars he revealed and then wrote scornfully about him after-

wards—really a pretty mean-spirited thing. And there were others. Fonda came last—in 1972. She made propaganda broadcasts for Hanoi. One prisoner who resisted being forced to meet her had his arm broken. Still, for all that, she was there when times were much better than in 1966-70. Many long-held PWs told me that she was disgusting and an irritant but not taken that seriously, and that they felt much more strongly about Joan Baez, whose antiwar songs they had been forced to listen to so often. At least Baez recanted to some extent after the North Vietnamese invasion in 1975. She helped raise money for the boat people. One of the early visitors to Hanoi suggested to the North Vietnamese that they force the prisoners to write in academic blue books, the type commonly used for school exams, because they would humiliate the captives. The Vietnamese did that for two or three years.

Shuttleworth: How did you come to associate with Stuart Rochester?

Kiley: He joined the project about ten years ago after he'd become a historian in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). I'd bogged down and had other full-time duties by that time—and Stuart rode to the rescue. At first he edited what I had written, then over the years he began to write new material, which I would then edit for him. He has a rare ability to synthesize and he writes beautifully. Everything of mine that he touched, he made better. His reorganization of the manuscript was wonderful. The later chapters show his work at its best. We had a seamless collaboration, and I am very, very much indebted to him. He had many other responsibilities that took his time, but once he was hooked on the saga of the PWs and the need to get the full story down, his commitment never wavered. Nor did that of Dr. Al

Goldberg, the OSD Historian, who never wavered in his support and encouragement despite the many years and frustrations involved in finishing the book. If *Honor Bound* is well received, as I believe it will be, I hope they receive the credit they so clearly have earned.

Shuttleworth: Is there any single moment in the story that stands out for you?

Kiley: That's a hard one. There are so many. Let me give you one in the North, one in the South, and one in Laos, and one that happened after the war. When Jim Stockdale had reached rock bottom, had nothing left to resist with, and was fearful of revealing one particular piece of devastating information, he tried to commit suicide. The information he was afraid he'd spill was that there had been no second PT boat attack in the Tonkin gulf, that the United States had gone to war on a lie. He was the on-scene air commander the night of the alleged attack, and he knew there'd been no attack. That moment in his cell when he slashed his wrist and passed out in a pool of blood to keep from betraying his country is the greatest act of patriotism I know. It's far more than patriotism—it goes beyond loyalty to those who decided to wage the war. It's the warrior's ultimate commitment to honor. In the South, I will never forget the death of Rocky Versace. He held out a very long time, never gave in, never quit despite brutal treatment, illness, isolation from the rest of his group in the Delta, and undoubtedly the sense that the VC were going to kill him. A great hero. We lost something very special with his passing. His commitment never wavered. In Laos, for me the image of Ernie Brace buried alive standing upright with only his face above the dust, yet holding on through that horror and surviving—and, get this!—making a mental note that it was better to lean slightly forward as you were being

buried because it kept the worst of the pressure off your chest! He actually passed that information to the survival schools after the war. Where do we find such men?

Shuttleworth: You mentioned a fourth – after the war.

Kiley: That would be the death of Nick Rowe in the Philippines, killed by terrorists. After surviving five years as a Viet Cong captive and escaping, he was cut down in 1989 by terrorists. His death just left me empty.

Shuttleworth: Fred, thank you. This book testifies to the breadth of your scholarship and long enduring dedication. It illuminates a saga that should be preserved and will now be read by a new generation that may not know about this side of the war in Vietnam. It's an astonishingly moving story of human endurance in a most oppressive circumstance. □