

Rear Admiral James B. Linder, USN
Assistant Vice Chief of Naval Operations/
Director of Naval Administration
Navy Department
Washington, D. C. 20350

Dear Admiral Linder:

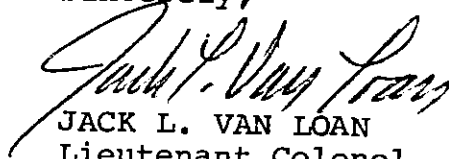
In my conversation with Admiral Zumwalt at the White House in May 1973, I expressed my personal opinion that the POW senior ranking officers in general, and Brigadier General Robinson Risner, Rear Admiral Jim Stockdale, and Rear Admiral Jerry Denton in particular, were worthy of the highest awards a grateful nation could bestow on them. I indicated that I had taken advantage of Chief of Staff General Ryan's generous offer to all returnees to communicate directly with him on POW matters and had expressed that same opinion. Additionally, I emphasized, and wish to reemphasize, that the opinion expressed is mine and mine alone. I was not, nor am I now, speaking for Major General Flynn, the Fourth Allied POW Wing, or any of its members.

It is my firm belief that General Risner, Admiral Stockdale, and Admiral Denton conducted themselves in such a manner as to more than qualify for the nation's highest award. While I realize that the Congressional Medal of Honor is normally given for a singular act of heroism involving the sacrifice of self for others, I feel that this unusual situation warrants this award for sustained performance in the early years (1965-1969) of American POW's being detained by the North Vietnamese.

These three outstanding officers, immediately upon capture and in the years to follow, put themselves between the enemy and their fellow prisoners. They acted as a deterrent and a shield for all of us. Certainly, each one of them committed individual and separate acts of extreme heroism such as General Risner after being tortured for weeks on end being put back in a cell block when the North Vietnamese thought he was sufficiently beaten down to obey their every order and would get others to do the same. Not so! Almost immediately he picked up the reins and continued to lead the resistance. Admiral Stockdale, being beaten all afternoon and well into the evening, calling out to now Navy Captain Mel Moore conveying instructions concerning what was to be done. Admiral Denton, after being

tortured to appear before a foreign delegation and hence in news reels, flashing out the word "torture" in Morse code with his eyes. Certainly each one of them committed individual acts of heroism. However, their overall sustained performance is what richly qualifies them for the award. Who is to say what might have happened to our nation had we not had the Strategic Air Command acting as a formidable deterrent between this nation and the Soviets in the tense '50's and early '60's? To draw an analogy, it was the same thing in North Vietnam. Those three officers, in particular in the early terribly difficult years, sacrificed themselves. They took the responsibility. They put themselves between the POW's and the enemy. They gave of themselves far and away above the call of duty. They set the example for others to follow. They bolstered morale that was the difference between life or death. How often did I hear from my fellows who had lived through those difficult demanding times "Robby hasn't quit and neither am I", "CAG took everything they could hand out and still kept going, so can I", "Jerry is setting an example and if he says so, that's that." By conducting themselves in that manner, they gave hope where at times there was none. They gave courage when it had fled. They gave something to cling to when one was going down. They continually reenforced the will to live. They would let no one quit or give up. In short, Admiral Linder, those three extraordinary officers saved lives. For that sustained heroic performance of duty against incredible odds and at personal sacrifice it is impossible for any of us to fully comprehend, it is my firm belief they are worthy of receiving our country's highest award.

Sincerely,



JACK L. VAN LOAN

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force