

Jeremiah Denton, a pilot with the rank of U.S. Navy Commander during the Vietnam War, was flying his bomber off the carrier USS *Independence* when he was shot down on July 18, 1965.

At the time of the shoot-down, Denton was leading an attack on a military installation in North Vietnam.



Captured by the North Vietnamese, he was a prisoner of war in Hanoi for seven years and seven months. Denton spent much of that time in solitary confinement.

He, and ten others, were kept in a special prison which the American POWs dubbed "Alcatraz." Known as one of the "Alcatraz 11," Denton occupied Cell No. 10.

About ten months after his capture, Denton became part of a propaganda campaign for North Vietnam. On the 2nd of May, 1966, a Japanese journalist interviewed him for a television broadcast.

Although his captors had instructed Denton to answer the journalist's questions in a particular way, Jeremiah followed his own mind and expressed his own thoughts. Even though he knew he'd be tortured later, the Navy Commander said that he supported his government and whatever actions they took.

Denton used his eyes to communicate with Morse Code what he could never say with his voice. In this video clip, you can see him spell-out these dots ("DI") and dashes ("DAH"):

DAH DAH-DAH-DAH DI-DAH-DI DAH DI-DI-DAH DIT

What is the meaning of that string of Morse Code? It spells-out the word "torture."

Denton's eyeblinking Morse-Code message was the first confirmation American military leaders had that U.S. prisoners of war were being tortured by the North Vietnamese.

The U.S. National Archives, which today maintains the original of the recorded interview, provides a transcription of two key segments (shown in this video clip):

Asked about his treatment, Denton responded—contrary to his thin and haggard appearance:

"I get adequate food and adequate clothing and medical care when I require it."

Asked about his views on the actions of the U.S. government, he said:

"I don't know what is happening, but whatever the position of my government is, I support it—fully. Whatever the position of my government is, I believe in it—yes sir. I'm a member of that government and it is my job to support it, and I will as long as I live."

Promoted by the Navy, during his captivity, Denton was released by the North Vietnamese on February 12, 1973. He wrote *When Hell Was in Session* (about his life as a POW).

After retiring from the Navy, Denton decided to take-up politics. He was elected as a U.S. Senator, from Alabama, and served in that capacity between 1981-1987.

Admiral Denton died on the 28th of March, 2014, at the age of 89 and is buried at Arlington Cemetery.

His defiant use of Morse Code, to communicate what his life as a POW was really like, is an example of how one can resist even the worst of enemies under the worst of conditions.

Credits:

Clip of recorded interview, described above, online via U.S. National Archives.

In-text image of Commander Jeremiah Denton, Jr., photograph by Pomponio, March 1965 National Archives, General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1947- [428-GX-831925].

In-text historical video explaining Morse Code and its rhythmic "DIs" and "DAHs," online via YouTube embedding.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Blinking-Eyes-Send-a-Morse-Code-Message>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Jeremiah Denton

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