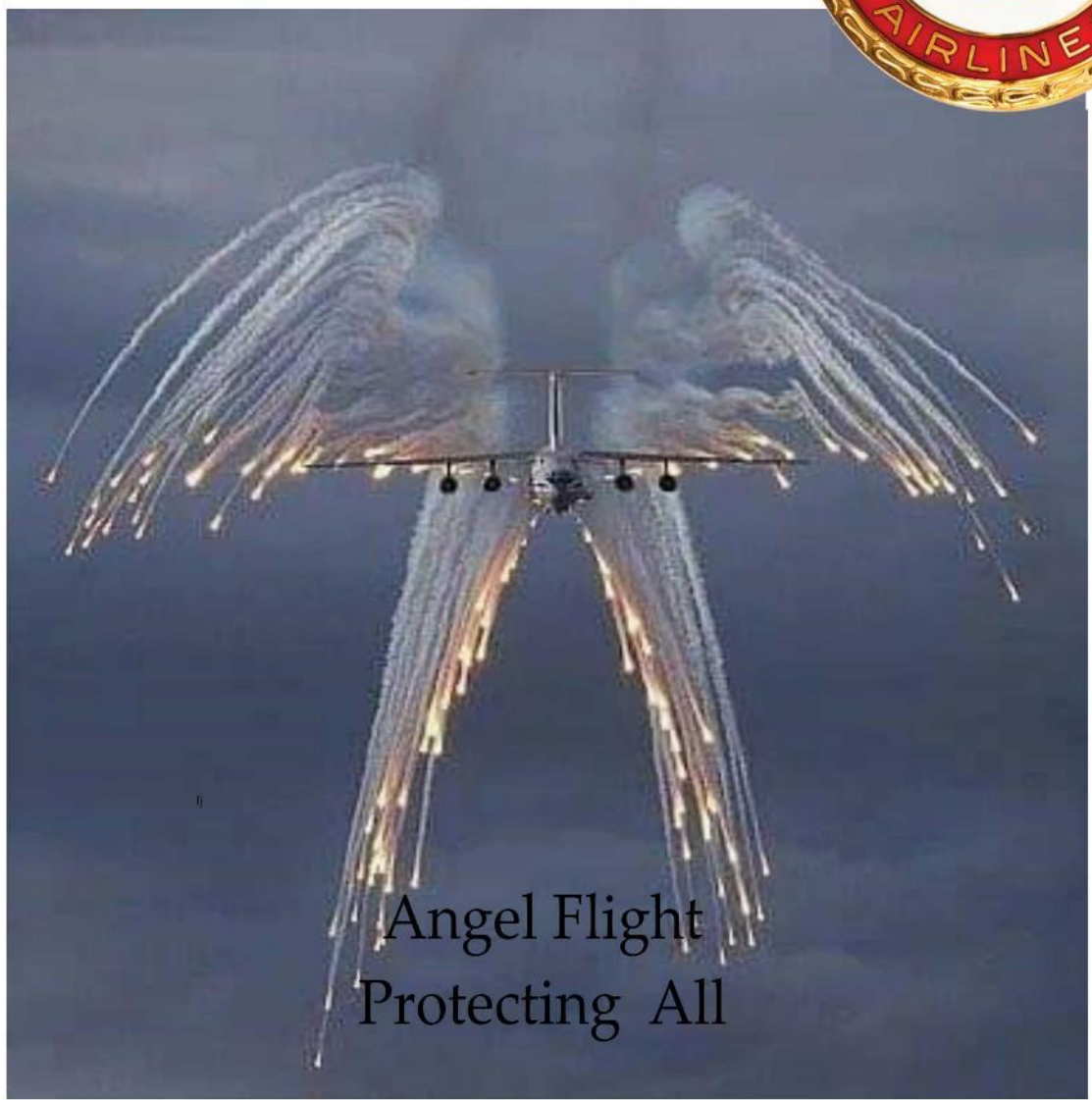




ISSUE 206

JULY 2018



Angel Flight
Protecting All

RETIRED NORTHWEST AIRLINES PILOTS' ASSOCIATION

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RNPA CONTRAILS

EDITORS IN TRAINING

Jay Sakas
jaysakas@gmail.com
360-731-0871

Dick Dodge
dick@rcdodge.us
828-489-9027

OBITUARY EDITOR

Bill Day
wlday@comcast.net

CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS

James Baldwin
John Doherty
Erika Armstrong

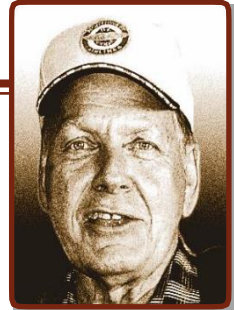
REPORTERS

Each Member

ADRESS & PHONE CHANGES

Howie Leland
14541 Eagle Ridge Dr
Fort Meyers Fl 33912
howieleland@gmail.com

President Reports



Gary Pisel

Greetings,

The RNPA Board of Directors held its annual meeting in MSP on June 20. It was determined that RNPA still had some life left. There was many comments about holding a next Reunion after New Orleans. Several sites were proposed for exploration: Louisville, San Diego and Salt Lake City.

If you have any feelings about any of these locations let us know.

The summer cruise, headed this year by David Griffiths was a huge success. Over 190 people attended for the beautiful ride on the St. Croix. This is the largest event under the RNPA name.

The reservations for New Orleans are coming in very good.

At present there is a limit of rooms, but Ron is working to expand that. **IF YOU ARE INTERESTED SIGN UP PRONTO.**

Reservation form is elsewhere in eCONTRAILS.

At the New Orleans Reunion there will be an election of officers. All members of the Board are eligible to participate in the election. If you are interested in being on the board and running for a seat contact me.

Hopefully you have read the Pension report. The pensions for all Northwest personnel is funded over 100%, a first.

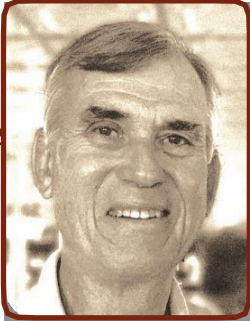
I once again have the license frames that state:

ALUMNI NORTHWEST AIRLINES

They are \$15.00, including postage. Send me your information and a check made out to Gary Pisel,

9961 W Cameo Dr, Sun City AZ 85351





Trea\$urer'\$ Report: Howie LELAND

Good News! At the June board meeting, the board decided to extend membership through 2019 for members in good standing in 2018. Our expenses have been greatly reduced with "Electronic Contrails", thus allowing us to operate with built up reserves.

We continue to recruit new members. Applications are available at "RNPA.ORG". When completed, send the application along with a check payable to RNPA to:
RNPA Howie Leland 14541 Eagle Ridge Dr. Ft. Myers, FL 33912
New member dues are \$25 for regular members or \$20 for affiliate members.

If you have a change of address or phone number, please notify me at the above address, or call my phone, 239-758-3789 or by email at: howieleland@gmail.com
We want to stay in touch with everyone.

I encourage you to attend the RNPA Reunion in New Orleans in May, 2019.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to RNPA.



The Second Issue

The second e-Contraails is published. It has been an interesting last couple of months. We have been improving the web site. Made immediate information available through the RNPA Forum, a great place for conversation. You will find it under the section called News.

Being that 4th of July is upon us, it was only apropos the this issue be dedicated to the many Northwest families who served and sacrificed to defend this Nation It is only fitting we recognize the sacrifice of one of our own, Captain Wes Schierman.

His story of survival during the Vietnam war, was printed previously in Contraails. It is interesting reading even today. So, we are reprinting it. It seems that just about everyone has a Wes story, I am reprinting as many as I can. Thanks again for the stories and the quick response.

When we started eContraails, we did not envision how hard it was to get articles and stories that would attract readership. Anything you, the members, want to publish or see published, send them to me at econtraailseditor@gmail.com. Sitting in the cockpit I was constantly regaled with stories of adventure, humor and the occasional sob story. Let's hear your stories in print.



Notices to Airmen

From here on out
the most criticle
thing is NOT
FLY THE AIRPLANE
instead you must

KEEP YOUR EMAIL UP TO DATE

The only way we will have to
communicate directly with you
as a group is through emails.
Change them here, and **ONLY** here



RNPAnews@bhi.com



ADDRESS & PHONE CHANGES

Howie Leland
14541 Eagle Ridge Dr.
Fort Myers, FL. 33912
howieleland@gmail.com

Howie can't change your email address changes.

&

RNPA News can't fix your address and phone changes.

They both need to be kept up to date

A TRIBUTE TO ALL WHO GAVE THEIR ALL.....



A TRIBUTE TO ONE OF OUR OWN



WES SCHIERMAN

JULY 21, 1935 ~ JANUARY 04, 2014

An Epilogue



Wesley D. Schierman, age 78, a retired Northwest Airlines Captain, 'Flew West' on January 04, 2014 after a short intense battle with lung cancer. Wes's lifetime devotion to his family, country, and aviation is so exceptional as to merit special mention.

Wes was born at St. John, Washington and raised on a wheat farm near Endicott. Naturally, once reaching a workable age, Wes was called upon to swing his weight with farm chores but it soon became apparent that his allergies were incompatible with wheat harvest. Farm life was not his calling.

Wes enlisted in the Washington Air National Guard (WA ANG) on February 02, 1953 and entered the Aviation Cadet Program the following fall. On February 23, 1956 Wes would graduate with Aviation Cadet Class 56-I from pilot training at Williams AFB – a distinguished graduate. With new Air Force pilot wings and 2/Lt. bars, Wes matriculated onto Fighter Gunnery Training in the T-33 and F-86. In June of 1956 Wes returned to reserve status as an ANG fighter-interceptor pilot, standing alert at Spokane in F-94 Starfire and F-89 Scorpion aircraft.

Wes enrolled at Washington State University (WSU) while regularly standing fighter interceptor alert duty with the ANG. Wes joined the ATO fraternity where he set a laudable example of maturity and academic prowess for his frat brothers. One of his former roommates

accredits Wes's encouragement for motivating him to complete his degree. The mental discipline and maturity acquired in the Aviation Cadet pilot program had well prepared him for an academic experience. Wes and Faye met in November of 1957 on campus at WSU and were married the following fall – September 1958. Wes was twenty-two years old and Faye twenty-one. Faye completed her degree and teacher certification after marriage. The two of them would be married for 55 years.

Let there be no doubt - flying was Wes Schierman's passion. Just slightly below family. While setting the curve at WSU, he also established a strong reputation with his Guard unit, serving as an instructor pilot in the T-33. By 1959 he had acquired enough pilot time to be hired by Northwest Airlines. The early sixties were the end of the prop era and just before the onset of the jet-age boom in recreational travel; seasonal layoffs were common. Wes was both flying DC-4 copilot for NWA and standing alert with the ANG at the Spokane airport (Geiger Field). Anticipating yet another layoff, in September, 1962, he volunteered for USAF active duty under a three year contract.

Returning to active duty Wes checked out in the F-100 and then the F-105. In August 1965 Wes returned to Korat AB, Thailand on what was to have been a second three- month temporary duty (TDY) assignment. But, on a 10th mission in eleven days, Wes punched out of the F-105F over North Vietnam, becoming a POW. A profoundly moving account of his POW experience is described in a lengthy article in the *Daedalus Flyer* entitled *A Bad Day at Son La*. This article is available on the RNPA website as well as the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron website: <http://67tfs.org/>. What is truly remarkable about Wes's POW experience is its duration, which required boundless tenacity and

strength just to endure. Wes had these qualities and such strength of character that he emerged as an acclaimed leader among the POWs.

At the time of his capture Wes's permanent station was Kadena AFB, Okinawa. Faye Schierman moved the family back to Spokane and waited for nearly eight years for her husband's return. For five years the Air Force listed him as missing in action.

During the eight long years of captivity he would endure nearly endless rounds of torture, suffer horribly from asthma and allergies, and incurred a weight loss to less than one hundred pounds. There were days when, due to his asthma, his cellmates did not expect him to live through the night. In Admiral James Stockdale's accounts of his capture, he lauds Wes's strength of character and leadership qualities despite the physical hardships he endured.

Wes was in captivity for 2,725 days. His captivity ended on February 12, 1973. That day he and a group of fellow prisoners were bussed to Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport. As the POWs previously agreed, they formed up into ranks and marched across the ramp to the exchange point. The POWs military bearing during their departure is illustrative of the military discipline and decorum they maintained during captivity, which totally baffled the North Vietnamese. Each POW was called by name out of formation, he stepped forward to meet and exchange salutes with a USAF Colonel, and then boarded a C-141 aircraft. Can you imagine what the sight of the Colonel's uniform and the USAF insignia on the C-141 must have meant to them? If you can read the *Bad Day at Son La* account of the departure and flight back to Clark AFB and still have dry eyes you are a tougher character than most of us.

Upon arrival at Clark AFB, Wes spoke with Faye by telephone for the first time in almost eight years. Faye quickly put Wes at ease and set the scene for his much awaited homecoming. Read about the homecoming in the *Bad Day at Son La* article. One tidbit needs to be shared with his pilot peers:

Wes writes, "On 16 February, I flew to Travis AFB on the same C-141 *{the Hanoi Taxi}* that had brought me out of Hanoi. The crew told me that when leaving Hanoi on that first day they had received a message for me from a NWA B-747 going into Manila. The airline captain said, "Welcome home, Wes. Thought you'd like to know your seniority number is 428 out of 1,550, and you could be flying captain on the 727 or a 707. Sure glad to have you back, even though you are senior to me. It was signed, Steve White"

Returning to the states, Wes spent six months on active duty before returning to Air Force reserve and civilian status. After an extended leave spent reuniting with his family, he and Faye were sent to Maxwell AFB, AL to attend a special six week course for assimilating POWs back into society. Wes attended classes five days a week reviewing the military changes and the political and cultural news that had transpired during his captivity. A specialized annualized atlas was designed to describe each year of captivity. Wes and Faye highly valued this experience.

The Air Force made him an attractive career offer, but with it came the sure realization that what remained of his career would over time involve less flying. Wes wanted to fly and he did not ever again

willingly risk being separated from his family for so long. After talk with NWA friends, Wes and Faye made the decision to return to NWA.

Wes's return to airline flying is described in the last page of the *Son La* article. The process started with an appointment with CEO Donald Nyrop at the NWA's General Office where Mr. Nyrop immediately put Wes at ease. Mr. Nyrop respected what Wes had endured and offered him management positions, but Wes wanted to fly. Mr. Nyrop told Wes that he needed to pass a Mayo physical, and if he passed the physical, he would be put in the 'cub captain' program on the B-727. Wes hadn't expected as much and anticipated at least a year of copilot flying.

Wes was given two months of safety (IOE) time. Half way through this time, the IOE instructor called MSP to advise the program manager that Wes was ready to be signed off. Safety requirements dictated that Wes complete the full two months of IOE time. Toward the end of the time he flew 2-3 days of mountain station flying. The FAA PIO (Principal Inspector) Frode Jesspersen observed Wes during that time and signed him off for line flying. Wes summed up his NWA experience, "In my opinion, my return to Northwest could not have been handled better." He flew the B-727 for about seven years, the DC-10 for two years and the B-747 for thirteen years before retiring in 1995.

Wes Schierman was a self-effacing man and the first to acknowledge the vulnerability, the courage, and the dedicated skills of his NWA colleagues who had served both in the cockpit and on the ground during the Vietnam War. He was heard to say, "Oh, you would have done the same or more." Unless questioned, Wes never spoke openly about what he had gone through.

In 2005, Wes and Faye returned to Kadena AFB, Okinawa where they both were honored guests of the renowned 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron's POW Day ceremony. Wes almost declined the invitation because the date conflicted with their wedding anniversary. The Squadron Commander got wind of Wes's concern and set out to make this an anniversary to remember. The Wing Commander passed the word down to make it happen. Wes and Faye were accorded hospitality and honors beyond any expectation. The squadron arranged for VIP quarters, the commander's wife personally attending Faye throughout the visit, and set the scene for their anniversary dinner.

The highlight of the Kadena visit was for Wes to finish flying, in an F-15, the 'return to base' leg of his last Vietnam flight in 1965. The squadron commander reports that Wes came to the preflight briefing with a lengthy list of questions, obviously having done his homework about the F-15, and confirmed that Wes's still had that fighter pilot's touch. After landing his host taxied the F-15 to a stop next to a red carpet and a tub filled with chilled champagne. Glasses were raised to Wes for completing the long awaited 'last landing.' Later the entire Fighter Wing gathered to hear Wes speak about surviving a POW experience.

The POW Recognition ceremony at Kadena AFB included a formal in-ranks formation and a presentation for Wes. A young female officer stepped forward to present the award to Wes. After presenting a plaque, she pressed her hands into his and in the exact POW format tapped the coded words "God Bless You". This young officer had taught herself the POW code for this event! It becomes obvious why Faye described this visit as the most memorable of their lives.

Wes and his NWA buddy Marty Foy had a special bond, even their airplane hangars were next to each other. Faye says she could always tell that Wes was talking on the telephone with Marty by the volume of Wes's laughter. Wes purchased a basket case RV-4, tore it down to component parts and reassembled it again. The FAA recognized this work and awarded Wes A&P certification on this airplane, as well as the RV-12 he built. Those who recognize perfection saw it in Wes's airplanes. The word around the Arlington, WA Airport has it that Wes was also a real stick in his RV-4. He and his pal Marty Foy served as formation instructors with the Black Jack Squadron, a civilian group who seek to fly their Vans RV aircraft with precision. The Black Jack Squadron performs formation demonstrations at airshows; they performed a 'missing man' formation at Wes's memorial service.

Wes was also a generous man who eagerly shared his friends and contacts with others. He put people in contact with each other to make good things happen. In addition, he was acclaimed for his efforts to encourage young people interested in aviation, often traveling extensively to inspire and motivate them toward aviation careers.

The family was the highest focal point of Wes's life. He loved being a father. Faye describes how in early marriage, Wes would take even the very youngest with him on errands. Stacy learned to hunt with her father. Years after the POW experience, his daughter Sandy and son Steve joined Wes in a parachute jump. Wes wanted them to better understand his F-105 bailout. The Schierman offspring traveled extensively with their parents. All three of them also earned a FAA Private Pilot's License. Today Steve is a pilot for Alaska Airlines and Stacy is a pilot for Sky West Airlines. In a bit of irony, sixteen years after

Wes flew to freedom aboard the *Hanoi Taxi*, his son Steve would be assigned by the Air Force to fly the same airplane.

Wes was especially well liked by his airline colleagues. Early after returning from his POW experience he was asked about his feeling toward the North Vietnamese. He responded with extraordinary charity toward the Vietnamese people, holding no animosity toward them. Despite the incredible duration of his incarceration, he was not consumed by it. There has to a good lesson there.

Wes's final hours were spent with his family at his side. On January 26th the Schierman family held a memorial service for friends at the Museum of Flight at Boeing Field – Seattle. The turnout was impressive. All the speakers, and especially Marty Foy, spoke with dignity and respect for this special man. Fellow POW and retired USMC Colonel Orson Swindle had enduring words for Wes's family. Swindle spoke to each family member by name and then pointed his finger slowly around the room at each of us, and said, "Most of you in your lifetime will not likely ever meet another person with the strength of character of Wes Schierman." That really summed up the testimonies of his fellow POWs.

The ranks of NWA pilots include many notable and courageous men. Wes Schierman's name is added to that respected list. All who knew him were grateful for the experience. Those who did not would be wise to emulate him. Thank you to Wes and Faye for sharing your lives with us.

byline... Bill Day

"A BAD DAY AT SON LA" by Wes Schierman.

As some of you may remember, I was a Washington Air National Guard Pilot from 1956 to 1962. I also flew for Northwest as a DC-4 Copilot, based in Spokane, from 1959 to 1960, when I was placed on Furlough Status. In September of 1962, I returned to active duty in the USAF, on a 3 year contract, flying first the F-100, and then the F-105. In early 1965 I participated in a number of the earlier strike missions against North Vietnam. On August 16th, I returned to Korat AB, Thailand on what was to have been a second three-month temporary duty assignment. I flew 10 missions in the next 11 days.

On August 27th I was assigned to plan & lead a "Special" mission to be flown on the following day. The mission was to bomb a "Military Barracks Area" near Son La North Vietnam, which is about 100 miles West of Hanoi. The directed ordnance for the mission was to consist of (4) aircraft, each carrying (8) 500 LB. MK-82 "Snakeye" Bombs. The "Snakeye" has (4) large metal fins which pop out when released, to slow the bomb, so that it can be released at lower altitude without damage to the aircraft. This mission would be the first time these bombs would be dropped off of the F-105, in combat.

The problem was, when I studied all of the test data available from the Weapons Test Center at Nellis AFB, I found that they had never successfully dropped (6) "Snakeyes" off of the centerline station on the F-105. The bombs would either run into each other, & explode prematurely, or the fins would fail, which in either case caused damage to the aircraft. I did find however, that they could usually drop (4) without malfunctions.

I therefore went to the Wing Operations Officer & requested that he advise Second Air Division in Saigon that there was no way that I would carry (6) "Snakeyes" centerline, but if it was really an important target, I would take (4). I also wanted "Sidewinder" air-to-air missiles outboard in place of the other two bombs, as the target was near an active MIG Base. I emphasized that I thought the whole mission was a "bad idea"!

I returned to continue my flight planning, making maps, planning the briefing, getting weapons settings, also making radar predictions, & studying the terrain, as the weather forecast was not very good, & the target was in very mountainous area! Another problem was that I had no photos of the target, only a set of geographical coordinates. I went to bed not looking forward to the next day's possible mission!

I got up early & went to Wing Operations. I was advised that Saigon had said it was an important target, they would give me the (4) bombs & "Sidewinders", & the mission was a go! I believe we had a 0900 Take-off for a 1000 TOT. The other (3) pilots were all fairly junior, but capable, officers from my "Blue Flight".

We got our Weather & Intelligence Briefings, & I briefed the flight. We picked up our weapons & personal equipment, & were dropped off at our aircraft. I had previously been advised that I would be flying a (2)-seated F-105F that day as a replacement, since my F-105D had not passed its pre-flight checks.

Our start, taxi, & take-off were right on time. I made a "Radar Terrain Avoidance" calibration run on departure. We rendezvoused with the tanker, & the refueling went like clockwork! I cycled back on the tanker again to top off my fuel, as the F-105F would burn more fuel than the "D" models.

BAD DAY (Continued)

We proceeded from the refueling drop-off point north over the Mekong River, past what we called the "fish mouth" of North Vietnam. I did a "Doppler" update over the TACAN Station near Sam Neua in Northern Laos

II

I closed up the formation & we descended down into the undercast as we crossed the border into North Vietnam. I was using the "Ground-Mapping" Radar, & "Doppler", to navigate to our turn-point at Highway 6, just West of Nasan Airfield.

As we approached the highway the clouds fortunately became broken, with bases about 1500 feet, & I was able to visually confirm our position, on course & in the valley, which gave me some comfort! I directed my second Element of (2) aircraft to separate & take spacing on me. As I turned on course for my final run-in heading I was feeling somewhat better. So far everything had gone exactly as planned!

I was flying at 400-500 feet AGL, at 420 knots, heading Northwest, paralleling the highway, about a mile to the right, on my final run to where the co-ordinates showed the target to be, but I could not see anything resembling a barracks area! Finally as my time had almost elapsed, I noted the target off my left wing about one mile South of the highway! (You got it. The coordinates were off).

Since I was already past the target, I pointed it out to my Second Element Leader, & cleared him in to drop first, heading Southeast, while I took spacing off of him. When he made his drop, I noted that there were two very distinctively separated bomb blasts, so I knew that there had been a malfunction of some sort. As I dropped, my wingman was on my right, but due to high terrain I had to make a right turn, so I could not turn too quickly. By the time I got turned enough to see the target, I could not tell how much damage had been done. Since we were to continue our "Road Reconnaissance" to the West to Dien Bien Phu, & I had not seen any ground fire, I instructed my flight that we would all do a 180-degree turn, & do a strafe pass to the West.

I made a left turn back to the target, rolled in, & had just fired about a one second burst, when the gun stopped firing. I was just thinking, "that's odd" (because I still had the trigger depressed), when I heard & felt, a "clunk" on the left side of the aircraft, followed almost immediately by a very loud explosion in the aft section of the airplane. Then the engine just "ground down", as if it had fallen out of it's mounts on to the belly of the aircraft!

My first reaction was pretty much standard when I thought to myself "Oh Bleep"! Then I pulled up to establish a glide & called the flight "Elm Lead's hit. I may have to get out"! Knowing that it probably could not work, I decided that I had nothing to loose, so I turned on the "Low Altitude Air Start Switch". I knew I did not have enough altitude to get out of the valley, so I continued on straight ahead toward a small hill, a couple of miles ahead, which stuck up from the floor of the valley.

About that time my # 4 man called "hey Lead, you've got a lot of fire coming out of the back".

BAD DAY (Continued)

I immediately shut off the "Airstart" switch. I thought about firing my "Sidewinders", but by now my airspeed was dropping rapidly, & I didn't feel I had time to accomplish the required switch settings. I was approaching the small hill when #4 again called & said, "Hey Lead, the fire's out now". I replied, "Yea, the fire's out up here too, I'm getting out"! I raised the handgrips with my left hand, which blew the canopy, saw the airspeed was dropping through 220 knots, checked my position in the seat, & squeezed the trigger.

As the seat fired, & I saw the canopy bow drop down, I was aware of two sensations; a sharp pain in my lower back, & the extreme force of the wind blast hitting me in the face. Even at only 200 knots it was much stronger than I had expected! I believe I closed my eyes. About a second later I felt the seat pulling out of my left hand, & I thought "let go"! Another second later I felt a very soft opening shock, & thought "that's nice". Just about then I felt a very heavy impact on the left side of my body. I looked up, & as I suspected, the ejection seat, having hit me, was tangled in the parachute risers, over my head!

III

This was a major concern as I was only around 1000 ft. above the ground, & the seat weighs probably 80-100 lbs. I was able to work the seat down beside me & was pulling parachute risers (the cords) from over the headrest, when I felt the ground was getting close. By this time I felt I was too low to safely deploy my "Survival Kit"(another 30-40 lbs.). I held the seat away from me with my right hand, & tried to position myself for a "PLF". I was drifting only slightly backward, & hit pretty hard on my heels, rear, back, & the back of my head. It knocked the wind out of me, but after a short time I was able to get up & determine that I at least still had all of my major parts! (That night both of my knees were swollen to at least half again their normal size)!

I had landed near the top of the small hill, & I now had a major problem. There was not a lot of heavy cover, & I now had to try to hide a parachute, helmet, ejection seat, & a survival kit (with raft)! I quickly dragged them into some low brush, & concealed them as best I could.

I then moved up to the top of the hill to attempt contact with the rest of my flight who were circling overhead. I then remembered that only the day before they had installed the "Beeper Homing Radio" in our parachutes, so I had to go back down to my chute & recover the "Beeper". In doing so, I noticed something "sticky" in my left glove & when I looked, I discovered that I had received a very deep cut, which severed a vein in my left wrist, which was bleeding profusely. I got a compress out of my "G-suit" pocket, & tied it as tightly as I could over the wound.

I then called my wingmen & told them that I was OK, & that I had concluded that my gun had malfunctioned, ejecting some pieces down the engine intake, causing the engine to explode. They advised that the helicopter was on its way, & that they would cap me as long as their fuel would allow.

I then went up to the top of the hill further away from my chute. At this time, looking West, I had the target behind me, the city of Son La on my right, my aircraft had crashed ahead of me on the other side of the hill, & was burning, & there had been a village behind me on my left. I concluded that any way I

BAD DAY (Continued)

went down off of the hill, I would only run into searchers, coming to look for me, that much sooner. I was also concerned that if I went down off of the hill, below the thick jungle canopy, the aircraft would not be able to get a visual sighting to identify me, which was a requirement for a pick-up at that time.

Knowing there was a helicopter enroute from not too far away in Laos, & believing that it would take searchers quite a long time to make it up the hill through the thick jungle, I elected to stay on top of the hill which would be ideal for a helicopter pick-up. About that time my flight called & advised me that they would have to depart due to fuel, but that Colonel Risner's flight was diverting to come in & take over the cap. They also asked if I heard anyone coming. I replied "no, but tell the chopper to hurry & I'll see you guys later".

About five minutes later I heard voices coming up the hill from the South & East. I called my flight & advised them that there were enemy approaching, that they should cancel the helicopter, & that I would try to hide out during the day, travel at night, & to try for a pick-up the next morning. I received no acknowledgement of this transmission as my flight was either out of range, or the transmitter had failed!

By now I realized that I had "painted myself into a corner" as there was not enough cover to conceal my movement out of the area. In retrospect, I should have gone down into the denser jungle far enough that I could have gone either way, depending on who arrived first.

IV

I burrowed down into the thickest cover I could find. When the Vietnamese arrived I saw there was about a platoon of regular infantry with automatic weapons, grenade launchers, etc. They appeared to have found my chute, etc., then swept up the hill, & past my position, but then not finding any new tracks, returned back toward the chute, & repeated the process again.

About the fourth time through, one of them almost stepped on me, & saw me. He called the others over & I turned my Beeper on to "Transmit" as they dragged me out of the brush. They first took my boots, then were stripping my gear off of me as the RC-54 (Rescue Coordinator Aircraft) appeared overhead, with the helicopter close behind!

That had to be, to that point, the lowest point in my life. I thought to myself "the very best you can look forward to is to have lost at least a couple of years out of your life" I also began to review what I had learned in POW Training at Stead AFB in 1964.

The Vietnamese, very concerned about the aircraft overhead, tied my arms behind me, looped the rope around my neck, & started running me down the hill through the brush, into trees, slipping & falling, etc., until we were concealed under the jungle canopy.

Before long, Col. Risner's flight arrived overhead, & must have located some gun positions who were firing on them, as they began to make firing passes, strafing & firing their "Bullpup Missiles". I don't know how close they were, but it was an awesome sound, & it sounded close! About that time one of the Vietnamese realized that the "Beeper" was transmitting so he brought it to me & indicated that I

BAD DAY (Continued)

should “turn it off”. It seemed like a good idea at the time as the Vietnamese were getting pretty agitated, & I decided I’d prefer to have my friends leave before anyone else got shot down! I was kept in a small cave, with a locked gate across the entrance, & under guard, 24 hours a day, for the next three nights, while I believe the Vietnamese were going through the wreckage of my aircraft. I was then transported East toward Hanoi, tied up in the back of a truck with about 20 guards, for the next three nights. We would lay up in “Truck Parks” during the day to avoid air strikes by U.S. Aircraft. The “V” did not abuse me, but my biggest problem was that I only received a pint or two of water per day, & was very thirsty.

I arrived at Hoa Lo Prison, which we named the “Hanoi Hilton”, early on the morning of September 3, 1965..... I left there for the last time on February 12, 1973. The intervening years were spent fighting a war against our captor’s attempts to exploit us. Most of the POWs battled the enemy in every means we could devise. I’m very proud to have served with so many brave, patriotic, & dedicated Americans!

Following several months of Leave, I returned to Northwest on August 20, 1973. The Company was extremely receptive & helpful, & thanks to the skill & patience of some great people in the Training Department, I eventually checked out as Captain on the 727, & later flew the DC-10, & B-747. I retired in 1995.

EPILOGUE: following my return I discovered that I had received compression fractures of two vertebrae from my ejection. The MK-82 “Snakeye” was actually an unauthorized loading for the F-105, & should never have been used. It was never again used in the “Retarded Mode”, off of the F-105. My # 4 Man received over 100 holes in his aircraft that day due to his bombs detonating prematurely. Fortunately he made it home OK! The F-105 “Gun System” was later modified, which improved it’s reliability. The “very important target” had been bombed by the Navy three weeks earlier. The buildings had been abandoned by the North Vietnamese Troops, who were living up in the hills in caves.

C’EST LA GUERRE ! WES.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Part II

“A NEW KIND OF WAR” by Wes Schierman.

I arrived in Hanoi on the morning of September 3, 1965. As the large iron gate at the entrance to the Lo Prison slammed shut behind me, I knew I was beginning a new kind of war. Basically it would be mostly a war of wills - - Theirs against mine. During the time since my capture, I had plenty of time to evaluate my situation and to develop a plan for my resistance.

I remembered several recommendations if captured, from my training at Stead AFB, which I decided to utilize in my contacts with the enemy. # 1. Be military, # 2. Don't discuss , or argue politics, #3. Don't ask for anything, and #4. Follow the “Code of Conduct” to the best of your ability.

I never mentioned the “Code of Conduct” to the interrogators, but would instead argue that I was bound by the “Geneva Conventions”, however the “Code” was the “Rule Book” for POWs. I had made up my mind that I would rather not return home, than to return having dishonored myself, my family, and my country!

Obviously the Vietnamese were in control. I had won a few battles in the past, but they had won this one. They could kill me at any time, if they chose to do so, but that fact could not cause me to compromise my principals !

I was placed in a solitary room in an area the early prisoners had named “New Guy Village”. After a few hours I was escorted to my first interrogation, the first of many, day and night, for the next 10 days. I marched in, stood at attention, and saluted the interrogator. He returned my salute.The first round was mine !

During my initial 10 days of interrogations I gave only name, rank, serial number, & date of birth, as required by the Geneva Conventions, politely explaining that I was prohibited from giving any other, by international law. The Vietnamese argued that there was no declared war, therefore I was a criminal in their country, so I would be tortured or killed if I did not answer their questions!

There were many threats, but the worst they seemed willing to do, at that time, was to slap me around some, and have me stand in a corner. My 4th grade teacher was tougher than that!

Throughout this time I was learning to be a criminal. I had developed a “cover story”, full of lies about my background, in case I should be forced to answer their questions. Since I suspected this story would be checked and found false, I memorized a complete second different story for when I was again forced to answer. Since they were willing to threaten and torture, I believed I was allowed to “cheat, lie, and steal”!

After several days the cut in my wrist had become infected. I had a red streak up my arm and believed that I had blood poisoning. The Vietnamese, or “V” as we called them, offered medical attention, but only if I would answer questions. I refused.

At the end of the 10 days I was given my last chance to answer or be killed. I again politely refused. I was returned to my room. After a few hours I was moved into a small cell block that was named “Heartbreak Hotel”. I guess they decided to let me “cool my heels“ for a while. The building consisted of a door to a center corridor, with four cells on each side. I was placed in cell #1, the first inside the door on the right. Cell #8, across the hall from me served as a “cold water” bathing area, and the place our “waste buckets” were dumped. (Nice combination!).

Shortly after the guard left I heard a voice calling down the hall “hey new guy, what's your name?”. I got down on the floor, and talking under my door, answered “This is Air Force Captain Wes Schierman”. The voice replied “Hi Wes, this is Percy”. (Bob Percell was from another Squadron in our Wing. Bob had been shot down in early July. I had attended his Memorial Service, as he was thought to have been

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

killed !). I told Bob I was glad he was alive, but not to expect me at his next funeral, as I had already been to one. I’m not sure he thought it very funny!

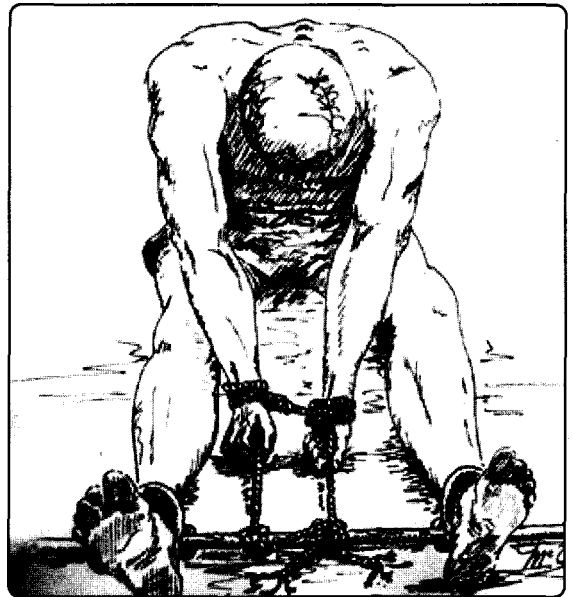
Bob then gave me the names of all the others in the cell block, including “Smitty” Harris, the first man from our Squadron to be captured on April 4th. Ron Byrne, a Flight Commander, also from my Squadron, was shot down the day after I was, but closer to Hanoi, so he beat me there. The three of us were able to exchange information about families, shoot-downs, etc. I was able to give Smitty information about his new son who was born about six weeks after he was captured.

At this time I was also told of a “mail box”, (hiding place) behind a loose brick in the shower area, where notes, etc., could be exchanged. Through this, I received a copy of Morse code, and a “Tap code” that Smitty Harris remembered, and had the foresight to pass on for all to learn. (In the future this “tap code” was to become our “lifeline”, and often the only means of communication for some, for several years!).

I was also given a list of the known POWs names to be memorized, and found that I was # 23. (In later years I had a list of 368 names memorized, which I reviewed daily).

Here I received my “official” issue of equipment. We got a thin straw mat, similar to those they have on the beaches in Hawaii. Also, one set of long clothes, one set of short clothes, a pair of rubber-tire sandals, one “V”-size blanket, a toothbrush to last 6 mo., a tube of toothpaste to last 3 mo., a small water pitcher, a cup, and a spoon. Later we received a second blanket and a “crew-neck” sweatshirt, which was a blessing, as the winters were very cold and damp!

After a few days I was caught communicating, so I was placed in the “stocks” which were built into the foot of the concrete “beds”, and locked from the outside hall. In this position, one could only sit, or lie on his back, but could not turn over, use the waste bucket, etc. I thought



that to be restricted like this must be about the worst thing one could do to a person. (Little did I know). I was absolutely miserable, but I managed to get through 24 hours, so I told myself that if I could get through one day, I could get through another, and I did so. I told myself, “just take it one day at a time”. By the end of the third day, although it was very difficult, I knew I could have gone considerably longer. (Indeed another man, Nels Tanner, did go 128 consecutive days in these stocks!). I was released on the morning of the 4th day, and a “Medic” treated and re-banded the wound in my wrist. The infection later went away.

On Sept. 17th a new POW was brought in. When the guard had left we called down the hall, hey new guy, who are you? The reply came back “This is Colonel Robinson Risner, who’s in charge here”? We knew right away who was going to be in charge there! (Col. Risner, my Squadron Commander, was a famous Korean War Ace, who was now captured on his second shoot-down in 6 months). A short time later another POW was brought in. This “new guy” announced that he was Major Ray Merritt, another Flight Commander from our Sqdn. (Ray had diverted to provide RESCAP for Col. Risner, and had been shot down himself!). We now had 5 men from the same Sqdn. In the small cellblock. We were able to exchange information on families, etc., and in general terms, agree on a cover story.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

In late Sept. a number of us were moved to a new camp in Hanoi called “the Zoo”. With the new codes to communicate, and Col. Risner’s leadership to organize our resistance, the “V” were becoming more and more frustrated in their efforts to acquire information and cooperation from the POWs. Living conditions were becoming worse. The food consisted of a small plate of rice, a cup of thin “weed” soup, and maybe a couple of bites of pig fat (with hair), or some kind of vegetable or root. This we received twice a day, with a small pitcher of water.

In October I had a couple of interrogations, or “quizzes” as we called them. The atmosphere was becoming more threatening. I was determined to avoid giving any other than the required Geneva Convention information for as long as possible! This was a very difficult time for me as I was feeling a lot of guilt for what I knew my family must be going through. Also, the isolation of living alone in a dark room for over 23½ hours a day, not to mention the hunger and thirst, was very demoralizing. Were it not for the ability to communicate with one other man, things would have been much worse! (I was in an end room, at that time using Morse code with the man next door, who was my only contact for two months. I actually reached the point that I was dreaming in Morse code!). I dreamt primarily of family, food, and escape!

In late Oct. the “V” discovered a note with some resistance instructions from Col. Risner, and a map of the Zoo. Perhaps they thought it an “escape map”, or had “lost face”, but they moved Col. Risner back to the Hilton where he was severely abused for many months, and made to pay very dearly for his leadership!

The “V” then published the “Camp Regulations”, which were about 10 rules, all of which boiled down to the fact that they considered us not POWs, but “War Criminals”, and we must do anything they said, or else.... We would be “punished”! This began a period of periodic and systematic torture that would last for about the next 4 1/2 years!

They would start at one end of the camp and work their way through everyone. First they wanted us to answer all questions. Then they’d start again to get us to write the answers. Then again to sign the answers. Then they wanted “biographies”. They tortured people for “good treatment” statements, “propaganda” statements, and lastly, the one we all feared the most,.... “War Crimes” confessions! Those caught attempting to communicate were also tortured.

The technique used usually consisted of moving the subject to an isolated quiz room where he would be placed in tight handcuffs, with his arms twisted up behind his back. He would then be forced to sit on a low stool, or concrete block, 24 hours a day, with no food and very little water, and no sleep. If you were caught off the stool or asleep, the guards would come in and beat you with their rifle butts, bamboo poles, feet, fists, etc. After a few days, (or even weeks) of this, they would ultimately use the “rope trick” where ropes or nylon straps wrapped tight around the biceps would be used to draw the arms up tight behind the back, and the head would be forced forward down between the legs. The rope might then be passed over the shoulders down to leg irons, and the arms pulled higher until the shoulders frequently dislocated. Due to the compression of the chest, breathing was greatly restricted, and suffocation could occur.

The worst pain however occurred when circulation became cut off in the arms by the cuffs or ropes, and the nerves began to protest. The closest description I can think of, is that it felt like what I think it would feel like, if the arms were thrust into boiling water up to that point. To my knowledge, when this was done properly (and they became very proficient at it) everyone found that they had a “breaking point”. The first time we were “broken”, the guilt and remorse was devastating, but because we could communicate, we found that we were not alone, we were just human.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

With some astute guidance from some of the senior officers, our policy soon evolved to: “Don’t give them anything for free”, and to “drag it out as long as possible” in hopes that the next guy would not have to go through it! All we asked was that each man try his best, and for many years, all did!

In early Dec. I was moved to a camp in the hills about 35 miles west of Hanoi, which we named the “Briarpatch”, or the “tick-tack-toe” camp. Here the POWs were housed in 9 small masonry 4-room huts, each within it’s own walled compound. Most prisoners lived alone, or “solo” as we called it. A few of those captured earlier had a cellmate. Here there was no electricity, and the window was always kept shuttered.

The “V” began torturing individuals to answer questions. I began to have more frequent quizzes, often late at night. Since the Camp Regulations declared us criminals, we could no longer salute, but were supposed to “bow” to the “V”, or be beaten. (They had countered the “Be Military” strategy).

The “V” very much wanted to find some POWs who would be intimidated enough that they would give information freely without being forced to do so, in other words, they wanted a “Turncoat”.

Much of the quiz time was spent trying to teach us a glorious version of “V” History. They avoided any promotion of Communism, as they knew we would not buy that, but rather pushed their “Nationalism”, and their right to independence!

The two main interrogators at the Briarpatch were “Frenchy” and “Bug”. (We named all of the interrogators, usually trying to pick some prominent characteristic, quite often the names of animals, and usually as derogatory as possible!).

Frenchy was fairly large and good looking for a Vietnamese. He could be quite charming. He was quite intelligent, and claimed to speak seven languages, with a thick French accent, earning him his name.

He could also, when angered, turn into a raving, frothing at the mouth, shaking, stammering, almost out-of-control, madman! He could be quite scary! The “Bug” had one eye that stared off in a different direction than the other. He had “buck teeth”, and hair that stood straight up like a caterpillar’s. He was more controlled, but sneering, sinister, and vicious. They were both “bad news”!

During these quizzes I would use every stalling technique I could think of to drag things out. I would pretend to fall asleep, change the subject, ask dumb questions, misunderstand, forget, etc., all trying to “buy time”.

Finally it was my turn. On Jan. 18th I was first placed in handcuffs in my cell, and on Feb. 3rd, put on half rations. The reduced food was not effective except to weaken me more physically, and cause me to drop from about 140 lbs. To around 110. By that time I had learned to pick my handcuffs with a bent nail that I had found, which I would do at night under my blanket. Eventually the cuffs were put on twisted, and so tight that I could not get to my cuff pick. (The guards would force me to sit on a step, and place my arms on the step above, then they would stand on the cuffs and drive them down to the bone, to get them as tight as possible!).

On Feb. 21st I was put in the ropes for the first time. I managed to last about 24 hours before I concluded I could stand no more pain, and would have to agree to answer their questions with my cover story. I had managed to drag it out to almost 6 months from the day I was captured. Fortunately, probably due to this, I was never asked for any significant military information.

Over the next year I would go in the ropes, or tight cuffs, again 5 more times. Our days were filled with the terror of when our number would come up next, and the boredom of living semi-isolated. I created projects to occupy the time. In my head, I composed poetry, designed house plans, went on imaginary camping trips with my children, etc., and of course, reviewed my growing list of names.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

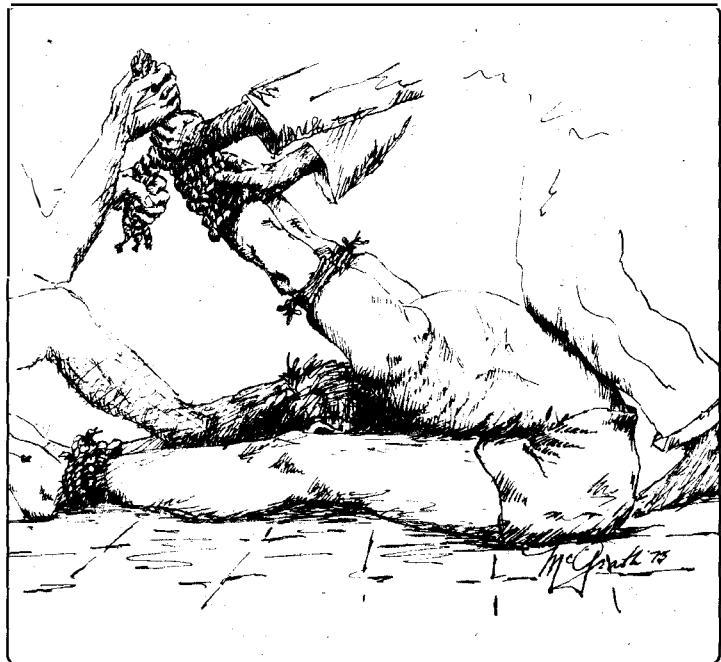
The greatest time was spent communicating with the others in my hut. One man, peeking through a hole in his window shutter, drilled with a nail, could clear the entry gate into the courtyard. If a guard approached, he would “thump” a warning. If clear, we could carry on a 4-way conversation for hours, using the tap code.

We discussed just about every subject imaginable, but mostly food. We were always hungry! Because of the high walls between buildings, communication hut to hut was quite difficult. Most information was passed when men were in adjacent torture rooms, and able to communicate some. Occasionally POWs were allowed out to sweep the courtyards, or to chop wood for the cooking fire. Hearing this one day, one of the men, Ensign Ralph Gaither, at great risk, called out “sweep code”. The sweepers heard him & began to send information in code that could be heard all over the camp. Gaither was punished, but the “V” never caught on to this. We had our own camp newspaper!

On the 6th of July 1966, 16 of us from the Briarpatch were blindfolded, handcuffed in pairs, and loaded 8-each into the back of two trucks with a number of guards, and drove the 35 miles into Hanoi, in broad daylight.

The “V” had been talking about holding War Crimes Trials for the “Yankee Air Pirates”, and they had “so called” War Crimes Confessions from many of us. I, and I believe most others, thought this was a “One-way” ride, yet we were laughing and giggling like a bunch of schoolgirls with the excitement of having direct contact with another American.

We were not to talk, but by tapping code on the arm or leg of my partner, I found I was handcuffed to an Air Force Captain, Ron Storz, the 8th American captured.



When the trucks stopped we were unloaded from the trucks and our handcuffs and blindfolds were removed. We found ourselves in Hanoi Stadium. As I looked around I could envision thousands of screaming Vietnamese filling the stands to witness the public executions. I’m sure the others were thinking the same when Ed Davis said “Well, the Christians are here, where are the lions”! We all had a good laugh at that as it seemed so appropriate!

As it turned out it was not quite that bad. That evening the 16 of us, and 38 from the Hilton were handcuffed together in pairs and paraded through the streets of Hanoi, to allow, as they put it, “the Vietnamese people to show their hatred for us”. They did a pretty good job of it, as before long, with the “Cadres” riling the people with megaphones, we were soon being pelted with rocks, sticks, and bottles. The “V” were trying to pull our heads down to make us bow, which we resisted. Some lost their sandals, so their feet were shredded by the broken glass and rocks. This lasted perhaps close to an hour, and as we approached Hanoi Stadium the parade had actually turned into a mob scene. The guards were trying to beat people off with their rifles, and the last dozen or so of us had to literally fight our way back into the Stadium!

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

As we collapsed onto the ground, all battered and bloody, one of the newer POWs, Cole Black, turned to his partner and asked “Do you guys do this very often”? The other man, Chuck Boyd, thought for a few seconds, then replied, “No, only on Saturdays”. Again, we had a good laugh!

Late that night the 16 of us arrived back at the Briarpatch, but many of those from the Hilton were further beaten and tortured. The “V” wanted revenge!

The following day many of us were called to a quiz and asked what we thought of the night before. I told the Bug that “I thought it was the most disgusting thing I had ever seen”! (Following my first torture I had changed my response to the “V” from being polite, to being very uncooperative). I now refused to bow to the guards as I had done before, etc. I told them that since they had tortured me, I now had no respect for them, as they were the true “War Criminals”! I would now put the Onus on them, and use that as an excuse for my lack of cooperation in the future!

Three days later I was called to a quiz and informed that I would get a “roommate” as they put it. I was moved in with Ron Storz, as were most of the others who had marched together.

As happened quite often, it seemed that something good could come out of something bad. Also from the “Hanoi March Movies” that were published, The U.S. Government was able to identify about 20 Americans, of which a large number had previously been reported as KIA (Killed in action)!

Ron and I barely stopped talking enough to sleep a little for the next 3 nights. After “living solo” 10½ months for me, and about 14 for Ron, it was good to be face to face with a fellow American! Ron was a very dedicated and patriotic officer and American. We got along extremely well, and became very close, probably more so than most brothers. Ron was very religious, and hated bowing to the guards, as did I just on general principals, so we would refuse to do so until forced. At one point we were beaten with bamboo poles at least once a day, for over a month.

Ron was also very outgoing, and a good leader, so he was a fantastic communicator. He was very instrumental in passing resistance information, and in getting the code to many new prisoners.

In the fall of 1966 all prisoners were forced to choose who they would support, President Johnson, or Ho Chi Minh. Because we had to write this down, we all resisted, and again ended up in the ropes until finally we chose Johnson!

By Dec. of 1966, some of the POWs thought they had developed arthritis. They had pain and stiffness in their hands and feet. These symptoms became worse, and some were accompanied by severe edema of the feet and legs. The “V” finally figured out that most in the camp had “Beri-Beri”, which is caused by a lack of vitamin B.

On Feb 2, 1967 the Briarpatch was closed and we were moved back to the Hanoi Hilton, into a new section called “Little Vegas”. Here we were given a small ¼ loaf of French Bread, instead of rice, and the Beri-Beri eventually diminished.

Ron and I were placed in the “Thunderbird” cellblock. We soon established contact with Commander Stockdale, who was acting as the “Senior Ranking Officer” (SRO), since Col. Risner was still being isolated.

Commander Stockdale was very instrumental in leading, providing guidance, and developing our resistance policy! He developed an acronym of BACK US: B = Don’t Bow in public. A = Don’t accept Amnesty. C = Admit no Crimes. K = Don’t kiss them good-by. And US = Unity over Self.

On May 21st Ron and I were moved to the “Stardust” and received two new cellmates, Air Force A-1E Captain George McKnight, and Marine F-8 Captain Orson Swindle. Both were good tough resistors and we all got along famously, although we were always in trouble with the “V”.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” Cont’d

Following a brief one month move, from Jul. 16, 1967 – Aug. 14, 1967, to the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant, which we called the “Dirty Bird”, we were moved back to Little Vegas, room 7. There was what we called a “Communication Purge” going on at the time, where the “V” were trying to stop all leadership, communication, and resistance. Commander Stockdale, and many others had been severely tortured, and I believe that our names had come up, so we were returned to the Hilton.

On Aug. 21st we were put in stocks, then set upon by the guards and beaten very severely. We were then taken out individually and tied up in shower stalls. Over the next 3 days, every time there was an air raid, which was about a dozen times per day, the guards would come out and kick and beat us severely! WE were tortured to tell who the leaders of the resistance were. After 4 sessions in the ropes, I finally stated that Ron Storz was the senior man in our room, (which they knew), that he told us to resist, and we all agreed!

Ron was badly injured and moved to a “Bad Guy” camp named “Alcatraz”, along with Stockdale and other seniors. Unfortunately due to almost continuous illness and abuse, Ron died there in April of 1970.

Orson, George, and I, now solo, along with a few others, were moved back to the Power Plant, which was being bombed fairly often. I guess we were expendable! We were kept in handcuffs about 23 hours a day. I became ill with some kind of an intestinal virus, and could eat very little at this time. I became very weak.

On Oct. 12, George McKnight, and George Coker escaped from the Power Plant camp. They made it about 10 miles down the Red River toward the sea before they were captured the following day. They were tortured for some time, then they were sent to Alcatraz to join the other “hard liners”.

On Oct. 19th the Dirty Bird was closed, and we were moved back to the Hanoi Hilton. From 19 Oct. 67 to 20 Nov. 67 I was solo in the “Golden Nugget”, where I did receive some “shotgun” medical treatment which eventually cured my intestinal virus. (You are given a handfull of different pills to take in hopes that something will work!).

From 20 Nov. 67 to 26 Nov. 68, I lived in the “Desert Inn with Al Brudno, Bill Tschudy, and Jim Ray. The “Communications Purge” had put the fear of God into a lot of POWs, and communications in Little Vegas had almost stopped. With Commander Stockdale and other Seniors moved to Alcatraz, and little communication, our chain of command had been broken. My cellmates and I began a concerted effort to help re-establish it. We managed to pass the code to several “new guys” in Desert Inn, and got them “in the loop”, eventually getting contact with an Air Force Colonel who was willing and able to take command. By flashing code, we were able to establish contact with the adjacent Thunderbird. We were especially concerned when the “V” announced that they were releasing 3 American POWs from North Vietnam. We were forced to listen to tapes that these three made indicating that they were “anti-war”, and were, “going home to work for peace”! We felt that this was terribly wrong, and expressed this to the Colonel, who put out a directive that “No one should accept early release”!

We worked very hard to pass this information. In the year that we lived together the 4 of us took great risks to help establish communications. In one two-month period we made 102 notes. We passed 71, and destroyed the rest. None were caught. We were caught and punished for communicating a couple of times.

Editor’s Note: This is the conclusion of Part II Of Wes Schierman’s incredible tale of captivity during the Vietnam War. The RNPA Newsletter and the readership are grateful for the effort Wes has made in bringing us this long-awaited story. The final episode of “Bad Day at Son La” will appear in the November issue. RHS

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” - THE CONCLUSION

By Nov of 68, communication was almost back to normal.

On Nov 3rd, 1968 we heard that it was announced that President Johnson had unilaterally declared a bombing halt in North Vietnam, north of 20 degrees north. When the POWs realized that our release was not part of the deal, morale became very low. We knew we would be there for a long time!

On November 28th the 4 of us and a number of others were moved to a new camp 23 miles west of Hanoi near the town of “Son Tay”. I was placed in room # 5 of the “Cat House” with 8 other men, one of whom was my former cell-mate, Orson Swindle. Brudno, Tschudy, and Ray were next door in room #4, with 4 or 5 others.

The conditions at Son Tay were again more primitive, and the treatment still quite brutal. Here we did have pretty good communication. We could tap code between rooms, and flash it to the other two cellblocks, the “Opium Den” and the “Beer Hall”. (Obviously the Navy guys named this camp!).

Almost as soon as I arrived at Son Tay I began to have health problems, especially in the winter. (It was later diagnosed as an allergic reaction to some trees in the region).

The “V” continued their constant pressure to “cross us over to the peoples side”! Our room resisted their efforts at every turn, which kept our senior man, AF Captain Julius (Jay) Jayroe under a great deal of pressure, but he handled it well.

By the summer of 1969 my previous ill health, frustration with our feeble war effort, and my hatred for the “V”, had caused me to become even more “uncooperative”. Jay, Orson, & I were taken out and placed “on the stool” in leg irons for some infraction. Jay was returned to our room after about a week, but Orson And I remained out for about a month.

Previously I had concluded that to “punish ones self”, by remaining on the stool with no sleep, was too “self defeating”. It was better to risk the beatings, and just lay down and sleep (usually about two or three in the morning), when you thought the guards were not too alert.

I expect that because of this, the last three weeks of this time, my legs were pulled back and the leg irons were passed through the rungs of the stool so that the iron bar supported the weight of my legs on my shin bones. It was extremely painful! I reached the point where I could not walk, and had to crawl to the door, when released for 15 minutes or so to pick up and eat my food.

I believe the “V” became somewhat concerned about my condition, so I was allowed to return to my room by writing (another) apology to the Camp Commander for my “bad attitude”. Orson did the same the following day.

In September of 1969, Ho Chi Minh died. In October the “V” announced a policy change. We would no longer have to bow to the guards. (This always caused a conflict) and they were trying to improve conditions.

They stated that we would no longer be needed for propaganda as their friends in America; Jane Fonda, Ramsey Clark, Wayne Morris, etc., were helping them now!

In November, or December, a Vietnamese dentist, with a foot powered drill, was brought into camp. Many POWs received some long needed, but very crude dental work. I had a badly decayed tooth pulled, with no novocaine (the first of two). Fortunately, mine did not break off, as did several others.

On Christmas of 1969 I, along with three others, received a package from our families. (I had not been allowed to write or receive any mail prior to this). In the package was a picture of my daughter and my son. It was quite a shock to see them now at 8½ and 7 years old, not as I remembered them at 4½ and 3. I cried for the first time in captivity, and at least one of my cell-mates joined me!

We divided the contents of the packages as equally as we could with all in the room, and then, the trading began. It was great entertainment, listening to the bartering, and watching a “value system” evolve.

“A BAD DAY AT SON LA” - THE CONCLUSION

In the spring of 1970 our well was going dry. The cells were already blazing hot, and we were all suffering from “heat rash”, but there was not enough water to bathe properly. Amazingly the Camp Commander seemed concerned, and agreed to let some of the POWs try to dig the well deeper.

The open well was about 20 feet deep. We would lower a man down on a rope. He would dig and send the muck up in a bucket. Over a period of several days we managed to get another three or four feet deeper, which gave enough extra muddy water for at least an occasional “sponge bath”.

On the 14th of July we were told to “roll up” (our gear) and we moved to a new camp, about 10 miles closer to Hanoi, which we named “Camp Faith”.

Here the conditions and treatment were significantly better than at Son Tay. The camp had been recently rebuilt, I believe to provide better conditions.

The food improved considerably when we began to receive some condensed milk, and canned meat, from the Soviet Union and China.

In September of 1970 I was allowed to receive, and send my first 7-line form letter. It began, “Dear Wes, We are fine. Steve just got the cast off of his leg, and is doing just great”! I wrote back, “what happened to Steve’s leg? When she received it, this was the first time my wife knew for sure that I was alive. About a year later, I received her reply, ”Steve broke his leg skiing”.

About 2:00 AM on the morning of November 21st we awoke to the sound of gunfire and “SAMs” being fired from just outside our camp. We could see flares being dropped to the west. By daylight we could see that our guards were on full alert, carrying gas-masks and hand grenades. The “V” were very agitated, and doing a lot of “milling around”. Two days later, almost all of the POWs in North Vietnam were moved back into the Hanoi Hilton complex, into larger 40-50 man rooms, in an area we named “Camp Unity”.

Some of the POWs were able to contact some ARVN (South Vietnamese POWs) and were told that there had been some kind of a “commando raid”. Within a week we heard “Hanoi Hanna”, on the “Voice of Vietnam”, complaining about the U.S. invasion of North Vietnam, where “Many prisoners had been killed”, so we guessed it had been a raid on a POW camp. Later we found out it was Son Tay!

The raid was beautifully executed. The raiders spent about 30 min on the ground and searching the camp, but there were no Americans there! Still, just knowing that we hadn’t been forgotten was a great boost to our morale!

Being in the larger 40-50 man rooms, although somewhat crowded, also improved our situation.

We were better able to organize our activities, have entertainment, hold educational classes, meet new people, etc. We soon had communication throughout the camp, including other senior officers as well as: Col. Risner, Cdr. Stockdale, and the new SRO, Col. Flynn. Under their direction, the “4th Allied POW Wing” was formed, with a Commander, Executive Officer, and Wing Staff.

Each larger building was organized as a Squadron, with a Commander, Exec, and Flight Commanders. Committees were organized and (many) directives were issued (all of which had to be memorized, so memory banks were formed).

The “V” were very concerned about having so many men together in large groups, so initially the wanted us to only get together in groups of 5 or less. We mostly just ignored this.

Since the “V” seemed to have “taken a step back”, many of the (mostly junior) officers felt that we should become more aggressive. Perhaps recognizing that our senior officers could control us better than they could, the “V” began to recognize our military organization, but probably to “save face”, they required that everything had to be handled by the “junior man” in the room! We called it the “JO Program”.

We tried a “hunger strike” to protest for a couple of days, but the “V” just cut off our water, so it didn’t last long. We ended up going along with the program only as much as required to “get the job done”!

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In our room 6, someone got the idea that we would conduct “Operation Stare”, where when outside with the guards, we would stare at them to show our displeasure with them. Boy did it work! Within a few minutes of several of us staring at the “rifle guard” when we were out to bathe, he began literally to shake, and soon retreated from the yard! Within about 20 minutes the “Riot Squad” arrived with “fixed bayonets”, herded us back into our room, and took a number of men away to be punished!

We always tried to hold some kind of a “church service” on Sundays. The men in room 7 had a very good choir (as we did in room 6). Around March of 1971, They felt the 5-man limitation was too unreasonable, so they began a “full-room church service”. As the guards arrived to take away Col. Risner, and several others who were leading the service, one of the men, Bud Day, began to sing “The Star Spangled Banner”. All of room 7 joined in, and soon room 6, and 5, and soon the whole group of American POWs joined in. Then we sang “God Bless America, etc.. etc. We probably were heard half way across Hanoi!

Soon the “Riot squad” again arrived with fixed bayonets, and many men were pulled from the rooms and placed in “Heartbreak Hotel”, or moved to an outlying camp, under poor conditions for several months!

I was one of those moved to Heartbreak with a Navy Lt. J.G., Dave Rehmann. The conditions were miserable, and we both were sick much of the time. At one point I became so frustrated with the situation I decided to protest our conditions by shaving my head in a “Mohawk” style haircut. That at least got me a quiz with “The Bug”. I explained that Dave & I were both sick, and that we needed to move to a better room. I was quite surprised when “The Bug” agreed that we would be moved to a better room if I would shave off the rest of my hair, to which I quickly agreed, amazed that I was not being “punished”. I shaved off the rest of my hair, and was returned to Heartbreak to find that Dave and I had been moved across the hall from room 1 to room 7! Ken Fleenor had been moved from room 7 to room 1! This was not what I had in mind! “The Bug” had put one over on me! I felt really bad for Ken, as Room 7 was actually a little better than room 1, as it did get a little sun. Also, my condition did improve there, but Rhemann’s got worse. On June 23rd, we were thankfully moved back to the larger room 6.

Eventually the “V” allowed the “full church service”, but told us not to sing too loud! About this time we decided to go on a “letter moratorium”, and we refused to write letters. We told the “V” that it was because all POWs were not allowed to write, and we were protesting the treatment. We knew it would be worrisome for our families, but felt it would put pressure on the “V” to improve our conditions. All but a handful of men went along with the program. Within a few months the “V” were practically begging us to write. After 9 months we ended it, feeling it had achieved good results!

In March of 1972, President Nixon ordered the resumption of bombing over all of North Vietnam. In mid May 209 of the POWs from Camp Unity were moved by truck north about 200 miles to near the town of Cao Bang, which was near the Chinese boarder. This move took about 36 hrs. This camp we named “Dogpatch”.

Again, being in a rural area, it was more primitive. There was no electricity, so we were given small oil lamps to light the small huts. The first night when we moved into our hut, one of the men entered a room with his dim oil lamp, and placed his rolled-up mat and gear on a bedboard. He noticed some movement in the back of the room, so he called a guard who had a flashlight. They discovered a 5 foot cobra which the guards killed, so we adopted the call-sign “Cobra” for our hut.

Since they had no bread in this camp, the “V” seemed to compensate by frequently having “Water Buffalo”, which we called “Bully Beef”. It was more “stringy”, and tougher than regular beef, but quite tasty, at least by our standards.

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Each of these huts had several rooms, which held several men. At night, both the cells and the huts were locked, but during the day, the cell doors were left open so we could move from room to room.

The “V” increased their propaganda efforts. We were shown several movies, mostly propaganda, but one included a lot of scenes of Olympic Sporting Events (The Soviets always winning of course!), but it was a welcomed diversion! We also saw some English language versions of the “Soviet Union” magazine, which had some interesting photos and articles. Toward fall the “V” seemed to be trying to improve conditions. For the first time we were allowed to see a 1970 U.S. magazine called “Sports”. It had a photo of a 747, the first I’d ever seen. I thought it was quite good looking for such a big aircraft. (I still do!).

In November there was a big move within the camp. When communication was resumed it soon became obvious that we had been placed in huts based on our shoot-down dates. This was very good news as it implied that some agreement with our Government had been reached. The food also improved and the “V” became somewhat friendly, talking about “when you go home”, and “our countries will be friends”, etc. It was obvious that “something was going on”!

In December we learned of the B-52 bombings. The “V” were quite candid and indicated that “this would not last long”. The POWs in Hanoi refer to the B-52 bombings as “The greatest show on earth”!

On January 20, many trucks rolled into camp, and on January 21, 208 POWs were transported from Dogpatch, in broad daylight, back to Hanoi.

Sadly we found that Marine WO John Frederick, one of my former Son Tay cell-mates, captured in Dec. of 1965, had contracted typhoid fever, and died within months of our release!

John was a combat veteran of WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, and the father of 5 children. On learning of his death, it was the second and last time that I cried in Vietnam!

Back in Hanoi we were again placed in buildings in relation to our shoot-down date. A few days later the “V” called us out into the courtyard and read us the “End of Hostilities” agreement that was negotiated, however they omitted the part which described the terms for releasing POWs. They immediately started talking about cease-fire violations, and that we would “not be going home”!

The “V” however really began pouring the food on us, and delivered many packages from families, that they had been holding back. We were allowed outside some to visit with other rooms. Many of us had the opportunity to finally meet face-to-face, men whom we’d communicated with for years, but had never seen!

After a few more days I was again moved to an area in New Guy Village. Here I met a number of the newer shoot-downs, mostly B-52 crewmen, including 3 who were more seriously wounded. Two of them, Jim Cook and Tom Klomann, each had 3 broken limbs, and the third, Roy Madden, had a broken thigh.

Initially, Quincy Collins and I volunteered to take care of the three, but after about 2 days, we found it to be a very demanding 24 hr. a day job, so we recruited others, and worked in 4 shifts per day.

The more seriously injured two were often delirious. They also both had large, infected, open wounds, 3 – 5 inches in diameter, on their posterior, which left the tip of the tail-bone exposed. We were puzzled by this, wondering if they had in some way similarly been injured when landing in their parachutes, or some such. (On questioning the Doctors at Clark AB, we were advised that these were “bed sores” caused by a lack of circulation, as a result of being left laying on a stretcher for several weeks)!

None of these men would eat much of the Vietnamese food, so we fed them mostly from our packages. They were all improving well, when the “V” decided to take them to the hospital to have new (clean looking) casts put on. In the process, Roy Madden’s leg was re-broken, and the circulation was cut off to one of Jim Cook’s legs. Both had to have a leg amputated when they returned home!

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Several of the POWs were called out to “quizzes”, and told that, when we go home, they must not “slander” the Vietnamese People, or the “V” would give our confessions to our government, and our government would “punish us”!

The POWs told the “V” that our government, and the whole world, would know how these “confessions” were obtained, and would condemn them for their “War Crimes”!

A few days before release, the letters I had received from my wife were returned to me, and I was also one of about 5 guys who had our wedding rings returned. (I knew the “V” had my wedding ring, and had previously made an issue of it, by accusing them of having stolen it from me)!

On the evening of Feb 11th, a group of us were taken out and issued a new set of civilian looking clothes. The morning of the 12th of Feb., we were loaded on busses and drove to Gia Lam Airport. We crossed the Red River on a pontoon bridge, and could see where the “Doumer Bridge” had been destroyed! There was a delay, so we were placed in a hangar for about an hour, then back on the bus, then drove to the tarmac where a table was set up.

As previously planned, we got out of the busses, formed up in ranks, and marched to the exchange point. As our names were read off, we were met by an Air Force Colonel in his “Dress Blue” Uniform. It was very moving, as he looked so “sharp” compared to the “V” in their drab, wrinkled, ill-fitting, uniforms! We exchanged salutes, then were escorted to the first C-141, and inside greeted warmly by a number of Flight Nurses, and fellow officers.

We were still rather subdued, not quite believing that this could really happen. We loaded fairly quickly, started engines, and taxied out. When we actually got airborne and the gear came up, we had a tremendous celebration, with a lot of cheering, and shouting. Again when the pilot announced that we were “feet wet” and out of Vietnam’s airspace, we again “went wild”. It appeared that our long dreamed of “freedom day” had really come!

Our arrival at Clark Air Base in the Philippines was also very moving. As I stepped out of the aircraft I was amazed to see what appeared to be thousands of people waving flags and banners saying “welcome home”, etc. Again we were bussed to the Base Hospital, and checked in. I was assigned a room with another early shoot-down, Phil Butler.

The first thing I did was to take about a 20 minute hot shower, scrubbing myself with “real soap”.

Each POW was allowed to make a phone call to his family, but only after meeting with his “Escort Officer” to be briefed on his “family situation”. I was fortunate to find out that my family situation was unchanged, except for the death of one Aunt.

When I spoke to my wife I was quite reserved. What do you say to a wife you haven’t seen in 7½ years; “Hi honey I’m home”?

I had thought I should maybe wait until I had completed my debriefing and physical to meet my wife, so I could give her my full attention, and find out about the children before I met them. She very quickly put me at ease however, and said “Don’t worry Wes, everything is fine. The Air Force has it all set up, and we’ll meet you at Travis”! I still had reservations, but felt somewhat more at ease.

The 4 days at Clark were busy. We had a quick debriefing, mostly concerning names of known POWs, and a brief physical to cover any immediate medical problems. Then we were buying uniforms, personal articles, and gifts, plus a lot of visiting with friends. Most were running on adrenaline, and slept very little!

On February 16th, I flew to Travis AFB, on the same C-141 that brought me out of Hanoi. The crew advised me that when coming out of Hanoi on the first day, they had received a message for me from a Northwest 747 going into Manila. It said “Welcome home Wes, thought you’d like to know your seniority

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is 428 out of 1550, and you could be flying Captain on a 727, or a 707. Sure glad to have you back, even though you are senior to me”! It was signed , “Steve White, # 15??”.

This was quite a shock to me, as I had no idea the airline had grown so much. Later, the crew also advised me that they had received a call saying that my family wanted to meet me on the ramp at Travis, as I deplaned, if that was OK. Again, who was I to argue at this point. The crew allowed each of us up for a tour of the cockpit, and I was fortunate to get a good look at the Golden Gate Bridge as we approached Travis AFB. What a beautiful sight!

As I got out of the aircraft, I saw Faye in a great-looking red, white, and blue outfit, and the kids were much bigger than I had expected. I didn't know who to hug first, so I just grabbed them all.

At the terminal I also met my parents who had also been flown down from Spokane by the Air Force. We had a nice visit, and I introduced them to some of my friends.

I spent the next two weeks split between a very thorough physical, and an equally thorough debriefing. We stayed at a “guest house” on base. Each morning a driver would pick me up to drive me up the hill to the hospital. The speed limit on base was 30 mph. When he drove 30, it seemed like about 70 mph to me! I had not seen any relative motion for so long, I was unable to properly evaluate it !

The Air Force decided that I was “fit enough” to return to flight duty after a period of convalescent leave, so on March 2nd, I returned with my family to their new home in Spokane. I felt quite a bit like “Rip Van Winkle”. It was like being born again. I had to buy new clothes, get a driver's license, meet with family, buy a new car, answer a lot of correspondence, and do a lot of public speaking.

I was very curious as to if I would remember how to fly an aircraft, so I called my former Air National Guard Unit, and requested a back seat ride in a T-33, which I had flown quite a bit prior to 1963. They agreed, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that, although I was “quite rusty”, I was still able to control the aircraft fairly well, especially on instruments.

About this time I learned that my former cell-mate, Al Brudno, had committed suicide. He had come to believe that his wife had been unfaithful, and was depressed over the anti-war sentiment in the U.S.

Over the next 2 months, through contacts with some of my friends currently working at Northwest Airlines, I became aware that my seniority # of 428 out of 1550 pilots could provide a very significant career opportunity, which I should investigate.

An appointment was made for me to meet with Mr. Nyrop, and Mr. Hockbrun , in Minneapolis, around mid-May. Keep in mind that at this time it was coming up on 13 years since I had worked for Northwest, and 8 years since I had flown as “Pilot-in-Command” of an Aircraft! I expected that I would be about as welcome at Northwest, as a case of smallpox!

As it turned out, I couldn't have been more wrong. Mr. Nyrop immediately put me at ease. He merely asked me, what I would like to do. I replied that I would like to return to flying. He explained that I would need to pass a physical at Mayo Clinic, which I expected, and if so, they would put me in their “Cub Captain Program”, which they felt had been quite successful.

This I did not expect. I had anticipated that they would want me to fly as a “First Officer” for a year or so, which I would not have considered unreasonable, so I was pleasantly surprised. An appointment was made for me at Mayo Clinic, and within a few days I was notified that I had passed.

Mr. Nyrop had, on several occasions, assured me that I could take all of the time I needed to make arrangements to return to work. I arranged to move to Minneapolis, and to separate from the Air Force on August 17th. I began ground school at Northwest on August 20th to check out as a B-727 Captain.

I was very much aware that, to my knowledge, what I was doing had never been done before, and I wanted to set a good precedent should any others find themselves in a similar situation. Fortunately, I don't believe that has yet happened.

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Thanks to a great training department at Northwest, my ground and flight training, while not always easy, was always a pleasant experience (Well, at least for me—maybe not for the instructors)!

Kenny Kreutzman and Bill Hampton skillfully nursed me through ground school (no small feat)! Ed Johnson supervised my simulator and flight training, and I flew my first “Cub Captain” line flight in November with Paul Sorenson watching over me, followed by Tom Dummer, Ralph Ferry, and Billy Brown, all outstanding people to work with!

In my opinion, my return to Northwest could not have been handled better! I flew the B-727 for about 7 years, the DC-10 for 2, and the B-747 for 13, retiring in 1995.

In April of 1988, I bought a RV-4, Experimental Kit-plane, which was about 95% completed. In October, I flew it for the first time, and began flying formation with a friend, Marty Foy, who had built his RV-4. Since then we have trained other pilots to fly “our type” of formation. We currently have 28 pilots, with similar aircraft, who are qualified to fly close formation. We have great fun, flying up to 16-ship formations at local fly-ins, trying to “shoot each other down”, etc.

I feel very fortunate to have had something of a career as a Military Pilot, an Airline Pilot, and now a General Aviation Pilot! “SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME”! WES.

HOME COMING!!!!!!



**RETIRED NORTHWEST AIRLINE PILOTS'
ASSOCIATION**

Disclaimer: These stories have not been editedas is.

Remembering Wes.....



George Lachinski

Capt Karstan Haram and I were on a flight from msp to Spokane. I met K.P. at the 727-200 and he asked me if I knew Wes. Being a USAF pilot, I knew of his POW and NWA status. K.P. Then said how thankful he was for his sacrifice to our country and he was on our flight. K.P., being the gentleman he is, asked me if we could offer him the F/O seat the trip to Spokane. I agreed this was good thing to do, because he was trying to decide if he would stay in the USAF as a General officer or return to NWA. I have to tell you, it was amazing watching him fly the 727, he hadn't flown an airplane in 7 years and was flying the 727 as an expert. His landing at Spokane was perfect. He told us later that with the trust we placed in him he decided to return to NWA.

Steve White

Wes my neighbor here on Whidbey Island for several years after his return. His daughter, Stacey was in my son's class. She's flying for somebody, his son Steve is flying for Alaska.

I was a 707 s/o on a ferry flt. HNL/MNL at the same time the med evac flts. were to come into Clark. Got on the HF and called around till I got a controller who directed me to the right freq. to ck. in w/ Med Evac. Asked if they had Wes on board. Yes ! Not knowing if he was even able to come to the cockpit and talk, I just left a message for him. He asked around for me when he got back to NWA, as I was his first contact. Shoulda been bolder and asked to talk to him.

He was real open re: his treatment in prison, gave a talk to his daughters class, maybe about 6th grade.

Took my wife, Wanda up for a loop de loop in his RV. He moved to the mainland to be closer to his airplane.

Dick Goforth

Flew a month with Wes and as everyone is saying couldn't have asked for a better month. A story that has stayed with me. One of the days was a fairly early pickup and the 3 of us were the only people in the restaurant. The food came and it wasn't right, don't remember just what it was, but it wasn't right. Wes just started raising hell with waiter. I would probably have eaten and grumble. After the waiter went back to make it right Wes explained that he had promised himself that if he ever got out Hanoi and eating water and rice that he was never going to eat another bad meal again. Sounded very reasonable to me. Really enjoyed that month.

Gerald Krueger

I had the genuine pleasure to fly a whole month with Wes ! He had stories after stories and I will "try" to recall some of them. He called the NV the "friendly north vietnamese people"?? He threw a fit when they took his wedding ring away from him,--every now and then they would question him as to Why he made such a fuss. 7+1/2 years later when he was released they gave him his ring back. One time they loaded a whole bunch of POW's in a cattle truck took them to a soccer stadium and they had really hyped the crowd about the killers they were going to show them. So they excited the cattle truck and 50,000 jeering civilians wanting to kill them. One of the POW's said: "Well the Christians are here Where are the Lions"? Wes said if it hadn't been for the unbelievable talented leadership while "In Jail"(Wes's words) things would have been a lot worse. His capture>>> he didn't get shot down--- his guns exploded and ruined the engines. After ejecting it was just little while and he could hear the rescue choppers coming when the NV captured him. It was 5 years before his wife found out he was still alive. He wrote home to tell her to divorce him and marry someone else because at that time he was sure they would never ever be released???? His wife Faye was just devastated to get such a letter. She became Very active in the POW effort to release of get humane treatment for their husbands and family members??? The worst torture was the ropes===somehow they would sort of hang them by these ropes and then twist the ropes and your ligaments and muscles would slowly tear away from the bone. Terribly painful??

When Nixon renewed the bombing the entire place filled up with military people knowing we wouldn't bomb our own prisoners. Things improved after that and B-52 crews began to come in and they finally got news from home and about the world. Wes had extreme contempt for the "American-Traitor-Bitch" -- Jane Fonda-- The Council of World Churches--and that crazy politician(I can't recall his name) who came to "visit" the POW's---these three traitors caused some tough

treatment and even deaths of some of the POW's??? He did praise entertainer Joan Baez for her efforts when she visited them as POW's --- when she returned home she contacted every dependent of the prisoners.

*** The returning POW's thought the world of Richard Nixon because he got them out of "jail" —so Nixon always attended the POW's reunions.

*** One note of interest. At NWA later than Wes ---we had another POW pilot return and check out as a DC-9 Captain? Fred McMurray was my roommate in our commuter pad and had wild stories to tell about his stay in the Hanoi Hilton.??? IF you are interested I can tell some stories about old Fred also??



2018 - Scholarship Winners

PAUL SODERLIND MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

This year's Paul Soderlind Memorial Scholarship Fund selectees for 2018 have been announced. Again, this year the choice was difficult for the Wings Scholarship Committee. There were 81 students that applied. Wings then reduced the field to 20 for the PSMSF committee to consider. Once the qualification requirement of a familial connection to NWA was verified, the essays were evaluated, and the selections finalized. This year's applicants had NWA relatives from ground services, mechanics, pilots, flight attendants and office staff.

Due to a very generous contribution to the Fund, rather than awarding the usual six scholarships, there were seven awarded this year. Our thanks to all that were involved in the selection and especially to those who continue to contribute to the Fund.

The application period will be open in November for the 2019 scholarships. Be sure to check the Wings FCU website for the latest news on the Paul Soderlind Memorial Scholarship.

Tom Schellinger, Secy/Treas, PSMSF – tpschellinger@prodigy.net

Emily Dehn



As a college undergraduate student, I've come to adopt the motto "every little bit helps". From the extra step on a run, to the extra minute in the office, to the additional page in the library, it's often the little things which culminate to produce great results in our daily lives. Every once in a while, however, something big comes around which changes a life all at once. I am both humbled and honored to say that for myself, receiving a scholarship from those at the Paul Soderlind Memorial Scholarship Fund is one of those pivotal life moments.

Few people understand the impact a scholarship can have better than those giving it and those receiving it. For this reason, I am so very thankful to Mr. Paul Soderlind, those honoring his name, and everyone at Wings Financial Credit Union for their generosity and interest in the higher education of young adults. I can say with utmost confidence that the funds I have received will be applied towards the University of Minnesota's tuition costs quite as soon as they can be. Since 1938, Wings Financial has been dedicated to creating value for its members—something I will personally attest to for the rest of my life.

Katherine Ernste



Hello! My name is Katherine Ernste and I am from Faribault, MN. I am currently attending the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities and majoring in Physiology. I am finishing up my junior year and am absolutely loving all of the opportunities that the cities have to offer.

Currently, I work as a research volunteer in the emergency department of Hennepin County Medical

Center and investigate cardiovascular disease in a laboratory on the U of M campus.

Between all of that, I find time to become actively involved in a couple of clubs on campus, including the Tau Sigma National Honor Society and the American Medical Student Association. And if there is any time to spare at the end of the day, I enjoy exploring the city and participate in a recreational volleyball league.

I hope to one day attend medical school at the University of Minnesota so I stay very busy trying to do anything and everything to achieve that goal. I was largely influenced by my grandfather to pursue a career in medicine. He worked as a Captain for Northwest Airlines for several years where he was often distinguished by his contagious smile and philosophy of "Life is Good!" He was diagnosed with multiple myeloma when I was only 4 years old, and one of my earliest memories is visiting him in the hospital.

Sadly, he passed away about a year after diagnosis, but I hope to pursue a career in medicine to both honor him and help others who are facing the same struggles.

Lastly, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to everyone at Wings Financial and the Paul Soderlind Foundation who made this opportunity possible. I am going to put my scholarship money towards furthering my education, and hopefully moving one step forward towards reaching my goals.

Calib Nilsson



I just finished Freshman year as a Mechanical Engineering student at Letourneau University in Longview, Texas. I have been learning awesome things about how the world works through math and science. I am being challenged by the rigorous academics, but I have enjoyed every second and look forward to my next three years there.

Also, this summer, I am using the financial breathing room given by last year's Soderlind Scholarship to get my Private Pilot's Certificate. I am learning in a J3 Cub, just like my grandfather Larry Daudt did in 1959. Hopefully I will be certified before I go back to school in August. I look forward to the opportunities that the Soderlind Scholarship will give me, and look forward to what my future in Science and Aviation may hold.

Kirby Olive



I feel extremely honored and blessed to have been chosen as a recipient of the Paul Soderlind Memorial Scholarship. It is such an honor to represent my family as one of this year's finalists and I was thrilled to have been selected. I have been in love with flying and with traveling since I was a baby. My grandfather, David Olive, was a pilot at Northwest Airlines for 33 years and my father is a retired USAF pilot who has been flying for Delta Airlines since 2001. I have

always enjoyed listening to them talk about the airlines and about their love of the profession. They have instilled a belief in me that through hard work and perseverance I can achieve my dreams for the future. I plan to continue my journey to success as I go forward in the next phase of my education.

I have been accepted to The University of Alabama and will be enrolled there next fall in the School of Commerce and Business Administration. I am proud to be the third generation of my family to attend Alabama following in the footsteps of both my grandfather and father to the campus in Tuscaloosa. After I complete my undergraduate degree I plan to attend law school and hope to focus on family law. It is my goal to provide legal help to the neediest members of my community in the hopes of helping others maximize their opportunities. I would like to thank the Paul Soderlind Memorial Fund, the Retired Northwest Pilots Association, and to all of the generous donors that made this scholarship possible. I am deeply appreciative of your generosity and truly humbled by the trust you have placed in me.

Joe Swensen



I am very grateful and honored to have received the Paul Soderlind Scholarship. This scholarship will make a big difference as I will be putting the money towards my tuition at Yale University in the coming fall. I would like to extend a special thank you to everyone who helped to create and sustain this fund and to the late Paul Soderlind, without whom we would not have some of the advances in

commercial aviation that we do today. Along with this I am thankful for our troops in the Army, Air Force, and Navy for their service to our country

and providing us with the freedoms that we cherish every day.

Finally, I would like to thank Roger Moberg, a retired Northwest Captain, a former Navy officer, and my grandfather, who has been a great role model for me throughout my life. He is wise, caring, and always leaves me with something to think about.

Thank you all!

Ashley Rezachek



My name is Ashley Rezachek and I was selected to receive the Paul Soderlind Scholarship. I want to thank you for helping make this scholarship possible.

Currently, I am a student Minnesota State University Moorhead. I am majoring in two major courses of study.

Biochemistry/Biotechnology and Multimedia Journalism. I am hoping to one day combine my two fields into a career in science writing or science news writing.

I believe communicating science to the public is critical because it can affect policies and guide people's decisions. My plan for the scholarship award is to help pay my tuition costs, textbooks, and other class material as I work my way towards completing my education.

I am both excited and thankful to receive the Paul Soderlind Scholarship. I am very excited to continue working towards my career and educational goals, this scholarship will help make that happen. It has given me the opportunity to follow my dream career. Again, thank you very much.

Logan Westgard



I am a 19 year old, first year student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. I grew up in Evergreen, Colorado and graduated from Evergreen Senior High School in 2017. I began in the fall of 2017 at Miami University as a Chemical Engineering major and have been loving it ever since.

While the coursework is very difficult and time consuming I have found time to join an intramural soccer team and am a member of Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity.

Miami is a great place with a lot of stuff to offer, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. I am planning on continuing to study chemical engineering for the next three years here at Miami University. I am unsure what I want to do when I graduate from school but know that Miami will prepare me for anything to come in my future!

Thomas P.
Schelling
r Apple
Valley,
MN



'Tis the Fourth of July, during which we honor the two most important symbols of this nation. The flag and the national anthem. There is a history behind the two and they are connected.

And here is the rest of the story.....

The Story of the Fourth of July



The Declaration of Independence

We celebrate American Independence Day on the Fourth of July every year. We think of July 4, 1776, as a day that represents the **Declaration of Independence** and the birth of the United States of America as an independent nation. But July 4, 1776 wasn't the day that the Continental Congress decided to declare independence (they did that on July 2, 1776). It wasn't the day we started the American Revolution either (that had happened back in April 1775). And it wasn't the day Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence (that was in June 1776). Or the date on which the Declaration was delivered to Great Britain (that didn't happen until November 1776). Or the date it was signed (that was August 2, 1776).

So, what did happen on July 4, 1776?

The Continental Congress approved the final wording of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. They'd been working on it for a couple of days after the draft was submitted on July 2nd and finally agreed on all the edits and changes. July 4, 1776, became the date that was included on the Declaration of Independence, and the fancy handwritten copy that was signed in August (the copy now displayed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.) It's also the date that was printed on the Dunlap Broad sides, the original printed copies of the Declaration that were circulated throughout the new nation. So, when people thought of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 was the date they remembered. In contrast, we celebrate Constitution Day on September 17th of each year, the anniversary of the date the Constitution was signed, not the anniversary of the date it was approved. If we'd followed this same approach for the Declaration of Independence we'd be celebrating Independence Day on August 2nd of each year, the day the Declaration of Independence was signed!

How did the Fourth of July become a National holiday?

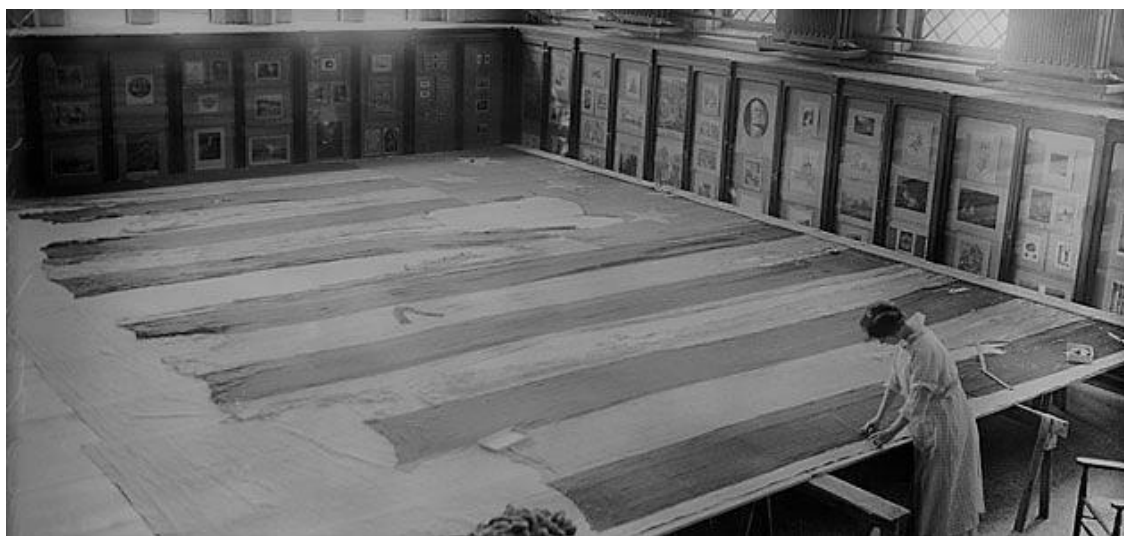
For the first 15 or 20 years after the Declaration was written, people didn't celebrate it much on any date. It was too new and too much else was happening in the young nation. By the 1790s, a time of bitter partisan conflicts, the Declaration had become controversial. One party, the Democratic-Republicans, admired Jefferson and the Declaration. But the other party, the Federalists, thought the Declaration was too French and too anti-British, which went against their current policies.

By 1817, John Adams complained in a letter that America seemed uninterested in its past. But that would soon change. After the War of 1812, the Federalist party began to come apart and the new parties of the 1820s and 1830s all considered themselves inheritors of Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans. Printed copies of the Declaration

began to circulate again, all with the date July 4, 1776, listed at the top. The deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on July 4, 1826 may even have helped to promote the idea of July 4 as an important date to be celebrated. Celebrations of the Fourth of July became more common as the years went on and in 1870, almost a hundred years after the Declaration was written, Congress first declared July 4 to be a national holiday as part of a bill to officially recognize several holidays, including Christmas. Further legislation about national holidays, including July 4, was passed in 1939 and 1941.

The Story Behind the Star Spangled Banner

How the flag that flew proudly over Fort McHenry inspired an anthem and made its way to the Smithsonian



A conservator works on the Star-Spangled Banner in 1914. (Corbis)

By **Cate Lineberry** SMITHSONIAN.COM MARCH 1, 2007

On a rainy September 13, 1814, British warships sent a downpour of shells and rockets onto Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor, relentlessly pounding the American fort for 25 hours. The bombardment, known as the Battle of Baltimore, came only weeks after the British had attacked Washington, D.C., burning the Capitol, the Treasury and the President's house. It was another chapter in the ongoing War of 1812. A week earlier, Francis Scott Key, a 35-year-old American lawyer, had boarded the flagship of the British fleet on the Chesapeake Bay in hopes of persuading the British to release a friend who had recently been arrested. Key's tactics were successful, but because he and his companions had gained knowledge of the impending attack on Baltimore, the British did not let them go. They allowed the Americans to return to their own vessel but continued guarding them. Under their scrutiny, Key watched on September 13 as the barrage of Fort McHenry began eight miles away.



“It seemed as though mother earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell in a sheet of fire and brimstone,” Key wrote later. But when darkness arrived, Key saw only red erupting in the night sky. Given the scale of the attack, he was certain the British would win. The hours passed

slowly, but in the clearing smoke of “the dawn's early light” on September 14, he saw the [American flag](#)—not the British Union Jack—flying over the fort, announcing an American victory.

Key put his thoughts on paper while still on board the ship, setting his words to the tune of a popular English song. His brother-in-law, commander of a militia at Fort McHenry, read Key's work and had it distributed under the name "Defence of Fort M'Henry." The *Baltimore Patriot* newspaper soon printed it, and within weeks, Key's poem, now called "The Star-Spangled Banner," appeared in print across the country, immortalizing his words—and forever naming the flag it celebrated.

The Flag's Beginnings

The Star-Spangled Banner's history starts not with Francis Scott Key, but a year earlier with Maj. George Armistead, the commander of Fort McHenry. Knowing that his fort was a likely British target, Armistead told the commander of Baltimore defenses in July 1813 that he needed a flag—a big one. "We, sir, are ready at Fort McHenry to defend Baltimore against invading by the enemy...except that we have no suitable ensign to display over the Star Fort, and it is my desire to have a flag so large that the British will have no difficulty in seeing it from a distance."

Armistead soon hired a 29-year-old widow and professional flag maker, Mary Young Pickersgill of Baltimore, Maryland, to make a garrison flag measuring 30 by 42 feet with 15 stars and 15 stripes (each star and stripe representing a state). A large flag, but one not unusual for the time. Over the next six weeks, Mary, her daughter, three of Mary's nieces, a 13-year-old indentured servant and possibly Mary's mother Rebecca Young worked 10-hour days sewing the flag, using 300 yards of English wool bunting. They made the stars, each measuring two feet in diameter, from cotton—a luxury item at the time. Initially they worked from Mary's home (now a private museum known as the Flag House), but as their work progressed they needed more room and had to move to Claggett's brewery across the street.

On August 19, 1813, the flag was delivered to Fort McHenry

For making the Star-Spangled Banner, Mary was paid \$405.90. She received another \$168.54 for sewing a smaller (17 by 25 feet) storm flag, likely using the same design. It was this storm flag—not the garrison flag now known as the Star-Spangled Banner—which actually flew during the battle. The garrison flag, according to eyewitness accounts, wasn't raised until the morning.

After the Battle of Baltimore

Armistead remained in command of Fort McHenry for the rest of his life. Historians are not sure how the Armistead family came into possession of the flag, but upon Armistead's death in 1818, his wife Louisa inherited it. It is she who is thought to have sewed the red upside-down "V" on the flag, beginning the stitches for the letter "A." She is also thought to have begun the tradition of giving pieces of the flag away to honor her husband's memory, as well as the memories of the soldiers who defended the fort under his command.

When Louisa died in 1861, she passed the flag down to their daughter Georgiana Armistead Appleton over the legal objections of their son. "Georgiana was the only child born at the fort, and she was named for her father," says Thomassen-Krauss. "Louisa wanted Georgiana to have it."

The Missing Pieces

In 1873, Georgiana loaned the flag to George Preble, a flag historian who until that time had thought the flag was lost. That same year, Preble had the first known photograph of it taken at the Boston Navy Yard and exhibited it at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, where he stored it until 1876.

While the Star-Spangled Banner was in Preble's care, Georgiana allowed him to give away pieces of the flag as he saw fit. Georgiana, herself, had given away cuttings of the flag to other Armistead descendants, as well as family friends. She once noted, "[H]ad we given all that we have been importuned for little would be left to show." This family tradition continued through 1880 with Armistead's grandson giving away the last documented piece, says Thomassen- Krauss. Several of these cuttings from the Star-Spangled Banner have been located over the years, including about a dozen that are owned by the American History Museum. "We're aware of at least a dozen more that exist in other museums and private collections," says Kendrick.

But a missing 15th star has never been found. "There's a legend that the star was buried with one of the soldiers from Fort McHenry; another says that it was given to Abraham Lincoln," says Kendrick. "But no real evidence has surfaced to support these stories, and the true fate of the star remains one of the Smithsonian's great unsolved mysteries."



Stories from the Cockpit



Flying with Captain Archie Keller

by Cliff Leary

While I was still a probationary 2nd. Officer, and asking myself how in heck I'd survive these new phenomena called winter; I spotted a trip on the bid board that offered a brief escape. There it was, and it was mine! A new non-stop to and from L.A. with about a +100 F respite from my usual tundra trips and those horrible frost-bitten walk arounds!

Obviously overlooked by those bidding seniors to my lowly position, I jumped on it. I recognized the FO's name. He was newly upgraded from the panel and fun to fly with. The captain was new to me.

As I walked away from the bid window, I ran into a slightly more senior member of the junior fraternity. Comparing trips, he informed me that I had made a mistake. My captain's name was scribbled on his "do not bid" list--- reason unknown.

A few days later I reported for my first trip with "do not bid" Captain Keller, fresh pressed uniform and spit shined shoes. I was

determined to watch my six and keep my mouth shut, at least until asked to speak. I hoped to get the FO aside and quiz him, but the opportunity wasn't to be. After my preflight, I met and shook hands with Captain Keller. Nice enough guy. No red flags. The cockpit was quiet for awhile---checklists and all business. So far, I guess, my captain was satisfied with my performance. No harsh words, nothing unusual, all professionally done airplane business. A bit quiet, but that's okay.

At cruise altitude, suddenly and unexpectedly, Archie (first names now) turned toward me and said something like "Cliff, tell us about yourself".

Okay, the ice breaker! I started with the basics, California guy, schooling, family, my USAF flying. All brief and safe enough stuff. A few friendly words between the three of us now. Off to a good start.

He turned back to the requirements of flying, then casually asked over his shoulder if in my ten years in the air force, by chance, had I ever run into Bill Momyer, probably a colonel by now?

Hot button hit. Without due consideration, I blurted out that indeed I had! I had briefly worked for the jerk when he commanded Air Training Command, a one star then. He was a self-absorbed, politically connected SOB.

I continued my rant. Somehow the bastard was promoted to Major General and put in command of the 7th. Air Force in Viet Nam. Barely settled into that office word of mouth came back that through his arrogant and stupid micro-management style he'd cost the lives of two of my good friends.

Wow, Cliff, probably not a good probation report coming. I

took a deep breath and apologized. Captain Keller, I am so sorry. I hope that I have not insulted a good friend of yours.

As Archie turned toward me, he was wearing a very broad smile. He informed me that I was a great judge of character. Our mutual acquaintance had been his wingman when they got into a fur ball over occupied France in WW II. Momyer had left him unprotected while Archie was intent on (successfully) shooting down a German fighter. A second German had moved into Archie's six and managed to shoot him down. A couple of weeks later Archie managed to rejoin his fighter squadron, with the help of the underground; he'd been slipped through German lines. Back home, he learned that his wingman had claimed Archie's kill. By "bad luck" Momyer's gun camera had malfunctioned.

A bit later in our trip Archie and the copilot had a quiet discussion. I was offered the right seat that leg, and for the rest of the month nearly every other leg the right seat was mine. The copilot graciously covered my panel without a second thought. I learned a lot about the 727 from the two of them.

Well, along came the strikes and layoffs. Try as I might, my seniority never again allowed me to bid with Captain Archie Keller. I won't forget that month.

I regret that I never thanked Archie before his last flight West. In my 28 years on and off payroll with NWA many other guys and gals befriended me, and I am afraid that I was neglect in telling some how much I appreciated them.

Dual Engine Out on the DC-10-40

by Greg Novotni



It was March 1985, I was a new DC-10 Second Officer. Having survived the Dickie Bihler checkride, I figured I could handle anything. One glorious day, our schedule was MSP-MKE-TPA (yes we used to fly that on the DC-10). John Firehammer was the Captain and Dan Stack was the FO. In MKE, an FAA controller showed up for the jumpseat. He was a large guy, I recall, and enjoyed the banter in the cockpit. The one anomaly on the aircraft, was the #1 engine had an inop CSD, so we had one less engine driven generator.

We were somewhere in Jacksonville Center's airspace cruising at FL 370, looking forward to the layover. Center called urgently and requested we vacate FL370 immediately for a lower level. Dan was flying, and dutifully, pulled all three engines back and began our descent (the normal procedure, at the time).

Immediately, engines #2 and #3 compressor stalled, and we became a single engine DC-10, with no operating generator. The instrument and the engineers panel were both lit up with RED Master Warnings. I looked over my shoulder and the FAA jumpseater looked like he was

having a heart attack. Since NWA did not have a "Two Engines Out checklist" at the time, we went through the Red Border checklist for "Engine Failure" on each of the engines, to no avail. I was worried about "losing the cabin", because the pressurization controller was AC driven, so I manually closed the outflow valve with the big wheel.

We drifted down to below FL 250, and the APU, finally started (which had a FL 250 start limitation). Now we were cooking, had AC power to the boost pumps, and enough air to windmill airstart the #3 engine. Emergency declared and inbound to TPA we proceeded. The weather was partly cloudy and not a factor. The #2 engine never did restart. So, we conducted a 2 engine approach to an uneventful landing.

After landing the local FAA FSDO was all over the aircraft. I remember thinking, "That's is IT for me, I am on probation". I was certain Chief Pilot Leever the Cleaver would find something wrong with my performance. I tiptoed around the F building, for the next few months, wondering when I was going to get called on the carpet. It never happened.

Within a few months, they revised the entire Top of Descent procedures for the DC-10-40 with their Pratt JTD-9s. Engine anti-ice-on, Bleeds to High, establish a shallow descent, hit Mach hold at around .83 and make a very gentle transition to descent. Then slowly retard engines 1 and 3 to idle, followed by slowly retarding #2 to idle. That procedure was around until the day the aircraft was retired. BTW, years later, on the DC-10-30 with GE CF6 engines, we had no top of descent procedure.

I hope John or Dan are around, and on the forum, to embellish or correct my 33 year old recollections.

One Day

One Day long ago, there was a retired airline pilot who was, surprisingly, not "full of shit." However, that was long ago and it was just for that "One Day."



Darrel Smith

"holy s#*÷ engine out!!!"

One can never truly appreciate the fun of "holy s#*÷ engine out!!!" unless you have experienced it taking off at night out of NAS Norfolk in a C-46 (yes "46") fully loaded with a bunch of crap bound for Cherry Point.

The underwear was un-salvageable.....



Rob (the Geezer)

The Case of the Missing Crew

by Jay Sakas

Disclaimer: I heard this story soon after I was based in Seattle in 1970. The airline and participants are unknow....Kind of.



It was a dark night, somewhere over the mid Pacific, on a B 707 flight from the Pacific Northwest to Tokyo. The whole crew were old timers, the exception being a newbie flight attendant on her first Orient trip. Because she was new, the purser, Pete, gave her the job of taking care of the flight crew. We will call her Abby, to keep the characters straight. The Captain, we will call Archie and the copilot, Robbie. It was way after dinner and all the passenger were sleeping. The crew was feed and the typical let down after dinner was in full swing.

After a short snooze, Archie turned to the Second Officer, who we will call JJ, and said it might be a good time for some coffee. JJ hit the call button and an alert voice of Abby came on the line.

“Abbey, hi, we are all getting sleepy and could use some company. So how about coming up and bringing some coffee. Would you be so kind and brew a fresh pot. Make it two black and mine with cream and sugar.
.....Thanks.”

After a while the cockpit door opened, and Abbey came in with a tray holding the three coffees. The cockpit was dark with only the glow from the instrument lights. Not paying much attention to her surroundings she asked...“Who wants what?”

There was no reply.....She starts to look around and suddenly realizes there are no crew members in their seats. She starts to scream but stifles it and runs out of the cockpit. She runs to the front galley for the purser. Not in sight. She heads for the back of the airplane to find the lead flight attendant. Getting the Purser was out of the question. The Purser was a male and he was not friendly. She sees the lead Flight attendant in the back galley and heads for her, trying not run or scream.

The lead notices that Abbey is walking real fast up the aisle and whimpering. So of course, they get her into the galley, and start asking what the problem is. Pulling herself some what together she explains what just happened. That when she brought the coffee, no one was in the cockpit, it was empty and no pilots to be found. The lead looks at Abbey and says, “ That can’t be. Where would they go?”

“Outside for a smoke. You sure one wasn’t in the biffy.....”

“No, I would have seen one of them go in”, stammered Abbey.
“Were you sleeping and this was a dream?” asked the purser. Nervously, she said “no”

The lead took Abbey by the hand and said, “Let’s go up and see what all this nonsense is all about.” They get to the cockpit, open the door. The lights are full bright, and all the pilots are in their respective seats

Archie turns around and says, “It is about time you got the coffee, Abbey” Abbey, looking around and now maintaining her cool leaves the cockpit. The lead goes to follow her, turns to the front and trying not to laugh, says, “You are bunch of sh*ts”. and leaves.

She goes to the galley and helps Abbey get a fresh round of coffee. Abbey and the lead go to the cockpit, open the door and again no one is in their seats. Whereupon, Abbey hands the coffee tray to the lead and runs back to the rear of the airplane, all the while stifling a scream.

From that day on, Abbey has refused to service the cockpit. She has never brought up the incident around pilots. Though I heard she did marry a pilot, for a short while. Story unverified

In the end the airplane was always under control. How did the guys do this dastardly prank?



The day when the U.S. Marines invaded McDill AFB...

By Captain Fred Pack

The day that I received my Naval Wings of Gold, left the ranks of a Naval Aviation Cadet, and became a "Trained Killer" (please read: 2nd Lieutenant USMCR) I was designated MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) a 7333 or Jet Day Attack pilot.

"Hot dog, I'm a Marine Jet Fighter Pilot, ready to go out and save the world."

Off I go to MCAS Opa Locka, Florida. It is March 1957. Captain Paul French and I began to form VMF-251 from a box of papers. The squadron begins to take shape. We get our planes: FJ-3 Furies (Same as USAF F-86D but with a tailhook). Simulators, manuals, flight procedures fill my days. Just as we were about to go operational, the multi-engine training squadron at Opa Locka runs out of students.

The Commandant, in his infinite wisdom grabs the 9 junior officers on the base and says: "You're going to be a multi-engine pilot." I will be turning in my hardhat for a baseball cap and silk scarf for a coffee cup. I am about to trade the excitement of air combat and blowing things up for the pleasure of being able to get out of the seat, stroll to the back of the plane and take a leak.

Turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Probably would never have been hired by NWA without the experience. Most of my fellow active duty squadron pilots came with NWA. That was before "Hocky Puck" decided to hate Marines.

Anyway, I have been issued my baseball cap and have my very own coffee cup. I'm learning what flying instruments is all about. As a jet jockey, we had a Tacan penetration to a GCA pickup. That was about it. ILS? What in the heck is that?

One instructor had me fly it blind to about 5 feet before I chickened

out. Super stable ILS at MIA. About half way through training, we had to go to Pensacola to pick up an engine.



My aircraft commander is Sargeant Justin C. Hawlick....no...not a typo....Sargeant. He was a "NAP" or Naval Aviation Pilot but never accepted a commission. He was designated a NAP in 1947. Off we go in our R4Q-2. No, I'm not swearing...same bird as the USAF C-119F Flying Boxcar. We tenderly referred to it as, "10,000 rivets flying in loose formation. Also known as the shuddering sh*thouse."

Opa Locka to Tampa and up the West Coast was the plan. Ah, the plans of mice and men! Over Tampa.....smoke in the cockpit...acid electrical smoke... follow the procedures and shut everything electrical down.

McDill AFB is beside us so down we go... no radios, no transponder, no aldis lamp. Maybe we could have opened the window and shouted??? Buzz the field at 500 feet, wiggling the wings like crazy. No lights from the tower, no flashing runway lights, nothing.

So, we landed. Turned off the runway onto the taxiway right in front of a firetruck. We could see the firemen reading comic books. We fully expected to be met by a half-track, sporting twin 50 calibers. Nothing. Nobody paid us any attention what-so-ever.

Out comes the airport chart as we try and pick our way to transient parking. In, among, and through parked B-47s with an armed guard every 150 feet. PS, nobody pointed a gun at us (like at the old Taipei airport) to stop.

We finally find transient parking. Nobody to park us, so we park ourselves. The crew chief jumps out and sets the chocks. I go looking for a telephone to make sure our flight plan is closed out. The phone conversation went something like this: "Who are you?" "Where are you?" "FIRE!!!" "OMG!!!!", click

Nine firetrucks, 150 MPs with guns drawn, and countless generals converge on the airplane. We were ordered, at gunpoint, back onto the airplane and had to pass out our dog tags and ID cards before being allowed outside again.

It is obvious that I am the ONLY officer on board the airplane. The generals want to talk to me. I politely referred them to Sgt. Hawlick.

" But, he's only a Sargeant", I replied.

" Yes Sir! But he is the aircraft commander. I am only the co-pilot!"

Sgt. Hawlick is grinning like an ape. He told me later that "there are advantages to just being an enlisted man". I am ringed with more brass than I knew existed. They wouldn't even talk to Sgt. Hawlick...just me.

Turns out that McDill was right in the middle of a High Alert exercise and we blew their security all to h*ll. The guys in the tower got court-martialed and the men in the firetruck got court-martialed and guess.....Who had to write all the letters?





Till November