INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN P. FLYNN

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Flynn's residence, San Antonio, Texas

Tape 1 of 3

F: There was an exodus from the air force then. It was a very interesting period, because most of the enlisted guys got out. And some of us were lucky; I got assigned to what eventually became the Twentieth Fighter Wing, and it was stationed at--well, I was in a fighter replacement depot at Shreveport, and we just checked in every day and said, "We're here." And they had a few airplanes, and we tried to get our flying pay, four hours a month. And that went on for about three months, and then they shipped me to El Paso, to this group. And they had a full complement of aircraft, Mustangs again.

It turned out that we were in very unique circumstances, because all of our enlisted men had gotten out. When I say all of them, I mean almost that. In our squadron we had one enlisted guy, and he was an old Canadian guy; he was a master sergeant. He was a millionaire; he had made a fortune investing in the stock market during the war. And he became our engineering officer, and we in turn became our own crew chiefs, and every pilot in the squadron had a job, either maintaining aircraft or an engineering officer. I was the tech supply officer, because they wouldn't trust me with a wrench or anything. That was good judgment.

We did have a mission. Our mission was to fly aerial demonstrations, and to this end they made up an aerial demonstration team of four ships. I was a first lieutenant; I was on that team. And so we went out and we flew these demonstrations in aircraft that we maintained ourselves.

Eventually our team became what was, I think, the first acrobatic team. We flew in the 1946 national air races in Cleveland against the navy Blue Angels. We were in Mustangs and the Angels were in their Corsairs. It was quite a thrill for me to be flying over Lake Erie and knowing that Mary Margaret's family was down there watching and my family was down there watching. But that was about the only mission that we had, and our group commander at the time said, "You guys, we either make this or you'll all be put back in the replacement depots. We've got to do this mission, and we've got to do it well."

About that time the air force was through the trauma of reorienting to a peacetime circumstance. They had trimmed down most of the

force; the exodus of enlisted guys had finished; new guys were coming in, and we were starting to sort out other missions, useful missions.

And then about the next event was the advent of the jets. Now, we were young guys, very, very good pilots, even though we had to say so ourselves, and when the jets came out, they came out P-59s, and they used to land at El Paso where we were based, and we could watch them come in, and it was always a thrill to watch them come in; first, they didn't have a prop, and secondly, they had very little power and very little response to even rapid throttle adjustments, so quite often they'd touch down short and you'd see this huge cloud of dust, because El Paso is four thousand feet in altitude, roughly, and of course that affects a jet a heck of a lot more than props.

We used to watch the navy come in, too, and they had the props, and they used to do the carrier pattern, you know, hang it on the nose, and they'd come grinding around and wham, they'd hit, too. So we'd get up in the tower every day and watch these guys come in. And of course, we'd pitch out at two hundred and fifty knots and crank it around and we could land--it was a big runway, and we could really hot-dog it, and we'd needle these guys every time we saw them at the club that night.

But it did become the Twentieth, the wing did, and then it was moved to Shaw Air Force Base, still in Mustangs, and then the jet school opened up at Williams Air Force Base. P-80s. That was going to be the official air force jet, Shooting Stars. So I was sitting on the front edge of history again, being a young guy--I wasn't the flight commander; we had a bunch of old guys, captains and majors, and really heavily experienced. And when the first class of jet school out at Willy [Williams?]--they picked the people who would be instructors out there, and a bunch of us were the second class, and there were twelve guys that were made instructors, so our class--I think we had about fifteen guys that were taught by those twelve guys, and thus the generations of jet fighter pilots started.

At this point I was shipped out to March Air Force Base and joined the Twelfth Reconnaissance Squadron.

G: Where is that?

F: Riverside, California. It was an incredible experience again, because here we had a concentration--the Twelfth Reconnaissance was adjacent to the First Fighter Group, which was also at March, and the Twelfth Reconnaissance was run by a man by the name of Leon Gray, Colonel Leon Gray, and he was a Distinguished Service Cross winner in World War II, probably one of the top reconnaissance pilots in the business. In fact, he was. An incredible pilot, ex-airline pilot.

And the First Fighter Group had that kind of talent in it also. Tex Hill [?], for example, the local Tex Hill [?], the American Volunteer guy, he was in the First; Billy Hubdee, who's a Distinguished

Service Cross winner--he lives in San Antonio--he was in that outfit, and eventually became my ops officer. But tremendously combat-experienced people, and they were all the aviation-pioneer kind of guys.

Well, for a young guy to be associated with them was an incredible experience, and I was a superb pilot; a superb stick-and-rudder guy. They were the superb air planners, and they needed young guys like me, because they needed wing men, and there I sat, and I was really fat. And I learned a whole bunch of air force history from those guys, and how to really lead airplanes, and stuff like that. We only had twelve aircraft, and I led a squadron, so it was a tight squadron. And we did the same thing; we were doing air shows, and things like that. But we were also doing pioneer work in high-altitude reconnaissance with that aircraft. And we were operating at forty-five thousand feet, and we were working on stretching the range. That was a very, very, incredibly interesting time. And we were the only guys that were doing it at the time. So we were the leading edge of the field.

At which point I got transferred overseas, and we go to Japan. They tried to put me in a recce squadron over there, and I said, "No, I'm not a reconnaissance pilot; I'm a fighter pilot that got into reconnaissance by accident." So they put me up in the Forty-ninth Fighter Group at Misawa, Japan, which was up in the northern part of Honshu. The reason why I went up there is they were just getting P-80s. These were fighter aircraft, now, not reconnaissance. So we were the first outfit in Japan to get P-80s.

There were about five of us that understood how to fly jets. All the other guys were prop guys, and they didn't understand jets. So I was in the catbird seat again. Just the roll of the dice, and here I was sitting there at another incredibly interesting period in air force history.

Our squadron was the Eighth Squadron, and we were the second squadron to get P-80s. We had about five or six jets, and the Ninth Squadron was parked first on the ramp--that was the designation [?] squadron--the Eighth Squadron was behind it, and we had the Seventh Squadron, who had all props--they were still converting; we had, as I said, partially converted, not completely converted. And the Thirty-fifth Wing, which was stationed at Yokota, or Johnson Field, near Tokyo, came up and attacked us, a mock attack. We used to attack each other's airfields to keep the air defense alert and all the rest of the stuff.

They came up with a formation of about eighteen to twenty-four aircraft. We were getting prepared for an operational readiness inspection, which was our big test. And we were shorthanded pilots, so we had all the pilots who had additional duties, they were all cleaning up their act for the operational readiness inspection. And I was the assistant squadron ops officer and A flight commander, and I had two of my guys on alert. One guy I had tried to ground. His name was Stu

Young, and I'd gone to the squadron commander, who supported my judgment. I said, "This guy's going to kill himself in an airplane."

Since we were so short of pilots, the wing commander had made the decision that we would keep Stu Young as a pilot, but we wouldn't fly him. And I also had a young guy with me that was not a fighter pilot; he wanted to be a fighter pilot, a great young guy, but he was not a very good pilot. But I was breaking him in to element lead, because he was so eager.

So we had to man a two-ship alert flight that day, and I picked Stu Young, the guy that was a bad pilot, and this other man, and I said, "Okay, you guys. You are filling the holes; you're on alert. But you are not to scramble. If we get an air defense scramble"--I was only about a hundred yards away from the shack, and there was another guy that was working. He was the squadron engineering officer; he was right next door. He and I would run for the aircraft and take it. But we had to have somebody physically in place, so that was the role of these two guys, right?

It was about noon, and all of a sudden we heard the sound of aircraft coming over the base. We looked up and I could see about thirty-five Mustangs in attack formation. They came over the base pretty low, and we knew it was the Thirty-fifth Wing. They had hit us. And the air defense guys had caught this, and they scrambled the alert flight. Both those guys took off, despite what I had told them. And Rabbit Johnson and myself were running toward the alert shack when we saw them fire up and start a taxi, so I thought, "Oh, my God." But you know, no big deal.

The attacking aircraft went north, and they turned around and they came back in show formation.

G: What was the formation?

F: In show formation, close together and not spread out in combat formation. They came in fairly low, about a thousand feet, and there was our alert flight, two ships up there, and they're flying over these guys, and they were trying to show us that they had intercepted them. And Dave Greenwood [?], the flight lead, was making a lazy pass and broke off, you know, plenty of room--you're not supposed to come so close to--x number of feet to another aircraft, and he was well within that. But this other guy, the guy that couldn't fly, Stu Young, he was flying off Dave, and when Dave swung this way he slewed out that way, and he sliced through the lead man in that formation.

The lead man in that formation was a first lieutenant. The leader of the formation was a famous World War II pilot by the name of Bert Marshall, and he had just let his wing man take over the lead, and he swung to this guy's wing, as they drove across the field with all of their airplanes behind them. So when Young hit the lead aircraft, that

aircraft exploded and it went back through the formation. And of course these aircraft were eating the debris, and so they started ingesting it and their engines started to cut out. And to make a very long story short, they had about eight pilots bail out or belly in on our airfield, and this guy Stu Young, the very poor pilot, he hit our ramp inverted, going maybe around four hundred miles an hour. He took a prop off one of the aircraft parked in our area, the eighth squadron area, and then he hit inverted and his aircraft disintegrated and hit all of our twenty-five P-80s. We found his head up a tailpipe of one of the front line aircraft there.

Everybody was at lunch, and all they'd heard was this roar of the aircraft, and then the roar of the aircraft again. They heard the alert aircraft scramble, and then they heard these explosions, so they assumed there was an attack. Those of us that were on the line knew what had happened, but the whole base didn't, so the whole base thought they were under attack, and the firemen were coming out, and the aircraft were burning.

The end result was that we lost those twenty-five brand new P-80s on that ramp, through fire. We lost a couple of Mustangs in our squadron. That was the greatest peacetime disaster that ever occurred in the air force at that date, at least, and of course Mike, my squadron operations officer and myself were right in the middle of it. And we had to go down to Tokyo and testify. That accident was never reported publicly. To this date it's never been--

G: I know it's the first time I'd heard of it.

F: So those are the kinds of things that were happening to me. Here I was, you know, I was still a first lieutenant, and--well, as luck would have it, I started--I was with another guy, a beautiful guy whose name is Rabbit Johnson, very gifted, perhaps the best pilot I've ever flown with. But he was also a mechanical genius. He was always screwing around. He was the squadron engineering officer that I was talking about. We were now being re-equipped with P-80s--from a diminishing supply--and Rabbit and I were always trying to stretch the range of the aircraft. That was our big problem with jets. He and I had been in the Twelfth Recce together, and we did all this high-altitude flying. So we knew a hell of a lot about stretching that airplane.

Rabbit had an idea. Our tip tanks held a good amount of fuel. Our external tanks held more fuel than the internal tanks. But in combat you'd have to get rid of your external tanks. Rab got to thinking about that. Our tip tanks came in three sections: a nose, and a center section, and an aft section. The aft section and nose section were pointed; the center section was just a cylinder, and had bolts holding them together, and that was a tip tank. And they were mounted right up--Rabbit said what he thought he could do was that he could take the tip tank apart, get another middle section, put the nose and the cap behind that, the tail section; now he had a four-section tank, and all

he needed was a longer screw. And that's what he did. He made two sets of tanks, and one night we got our squadron commander drunk, Major Jack Dugan [?], and Rabbit pulled this on him. And Jack said, yes, he thought it was a good idea.

So Rabbit arranged to fly that airplane in the morning, before dawn. Nobody was up, and he and I went down the line, and Jack Dugan went down the line, and Rabbit went up, and sure'n all hell, we had a snow shower. Rab couldn't get back on the field, so he had to stay up. And he stayed up about--you know, our good time aloft was about two hours and fifty minutes. But he stayed up around three-fifteen, because he had the extra fuel, and landed safely.

G: That's not the way you like to prove your theory, though.

F: No. Then the next day I took the airplane, and I flew it about fifteen hundred miles, which was a record, out and back, went down to [inaudible] and back, and landed without incident. I made the third flight with the aircraft, and I was using it to strafe and everything else on our range, and I found that it had a very bad characteristic: when you dive down and you strafe and now you want to pull out, as you pulled out this aircraft had a tendency--unlike the three-section tanks--had a tendency just to swap ends. And so you had to put forward stick to keep it from swapping. And once again, my experience helped me. The Mustang with the full fuselage tank had the same characteristic, and I didn't expect this, but when [during] my first strafing run, I pulled back in about a four-G pull, and it started to swap ends, I knew exactly what to do with it. I popped that stick forward. And then we knew that about that airplane. So when we started to fly it we could tell people about it.

Well, we went down to Fifth Air Force and told them what we had. We had an aircraft now that could go about maybe one and a half times farther than the regular P-80 could go, just by the simple thing that Rab had done. And incidentally, Rab also put in baffles to help ease that fuel swapping [slopping?] if you had to fight that way. And Fifth Air Force looked at it, and our ex-group commander was an operations officer down in Fifth Air Force, and his name is John Murphy; he's retired here. And he liked the idea, and he sponsored it in the Fifth Air Force. And the materiel guy said no, we couldn't do that; Lockheed had already tested big tanks and they'd lost two test pilots doing it, and that was a dangerous thing to do. We argued the case, because Rabbit had now put in baffles and we knew about the surge and everything else. So Murphy permitted us--he got it through the staff and got permission from Fifth Air Force--to build a set of big tip tanks for each of our aircraft in the Forty-ninth Wing.

The next thing that happens, Korea occurred. We've got our P-80s, and we're into Korea the second day. We're into the fight the second day. The Eighth Wing has P-80s, and it's down at a place called Ituzuki. We come in the second day with our airplanes, and the Eighth

had just finished converting from their P-51s. And since we had the big tanks, we were going further than anybody in jets, and that was a critical time to have those extra legs. And we were right into it. We covered the--well, we watched [General William] Dean get captured. We saw the Twenty-fourth Division committed piecemeal, decimated; we saw the withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter, and the whole damned thing unfolded and we were right up there in front. And we didn't have much air opposition at all, but we were doing good work.

Things were so chaotic that we didn't even know that our people did not have tanks, nor did they have field guns, when they were committed in the early days of Korea, the Twenty-fourth. And we had problems identifying them. We had no intelligence, and we saw these guys coming down the main highways, and tanks and artillery pieces, and we were going to cream them, and then the guy said, "No, don't shoot. We don't know who they are." We landed and checked back with the army, and the army said, "Don't worry. If they're in a tank or they have field artillery, they're the enemy, because we don't have any stuff over there."

Tape 2 of 3 [Side 2 of first cassette]

F: Now let's see, what was I going to talk about?

G: You were going to talk about the role of communications in the POW experience.

F: Oh, yes. When you read some of these books--now, I'm going to make a very, very perhaps unkind statement, but you will see several books by POWs, the seniors, that indicate that these seniors were instrumental and, by their communications and constantly exhorting the other POWs to behave themselves, are responsible for our people coming home in good shape. You recall earlier we were talking about the caliber of our people. I had the occasion to be associated with one of our guys who was one of our best and our bravest, and he had come upon a senior officer's statement to that effect, that through his efforts--he had constantly, emotionally exhorted the people to resist, and he was, ergo, responsible for the behavior of our people. And this friend of mine, the best and the bravest, wrote a very harsh letter--not a harsh letter, but a very incisive letter--back to this other senior, and said that no one could take credit for how *he* had behaved in prison. And I think that that's pretty much the story.

I don't think the seniors can take credit for how our people behaved, because each of us had to fight our own battle alone, facing the Vietnamese. And I'm certain that a lot of our youngsters were impressed by the seniors, but I think that our people would have reacted the same way, particularly those--they were well grounded in the code of conduct; they had all been through survival school and everything else.

The nature of that experience, the way they separated and isolated you, you could do pretty much what you wanted to do. You could. No one's in there in the interrogation room with you; you could have spilled your guts. I don't think our people did that. I have every evidence to the contrary, as a matter of fact. So I'm always a little bit uncomfortable with these people that say, "I was the senior at that time, and I did this and I did that." We seniors had a whole bunch of help. As a matter of fact, it was the senior that the pressure was on. If you didn't do what your constituency thought was right, you wouldn't be the leader. That's it. I mean, it's as simple as that. These guys would have just disobeyed. The shoe's on the other foot, and I believe that.

G: That's an interesting statement.

F: We had a great group of people there.

G: Were there any instances of seniors having to get into step, I mean, can you think of an example of that?

F: Yes, there are a couple. Yes, there are a couple of seniors that failed the test. One of them I mentioned; this man that was sick. But it was rare; it was rare. It's pretty difficult to find a coward in a trade that is as demanding as fighter pilot. Now, you'll find all dimensions of fighter pilots; they're not all heroic. But you know one thing about them: they'd bet their bottom a couple of times, and they pretty well know what's going down. And our performance, when one considers the total population and what was at risk and what they confronted, I think the performance of our people was great.

And once again I'd stress that the experience is characterized by [the fact that] you are alone, at first. You don't have access to your seniors. They're alone some other place. As a matter of fact, they'll play you the seniors' records, or whatever the seniors were doing, to encourage you as a junior to follow them. Now you don't know how your seniors got there. So it's just not the kind of situation one would think; it's just the reverse of what one would think. So any time you hear one of these seniors say how great he was, you might say, "Balderdash." You just have to hang in there with that herd.

(Interruption)

G: Your rank did affect the way you were treated.

F: Yes, the higher the rank, the worse treatment you were going to get. It's the last place in the world where you want rank. You're a high target. They attribute to you a much greater knowledge than you probably hold, and you're a more valuable captive as far as propaganda is concerned.

G: Wasn't Lieutenant McCain, CINCPAC's son, wasn't he--he was captured.

F: I'm glad you mentioned that. I was in the hospital, and the Bug [a North Vietnamese interrogator] came in and he said, "Do you know Admiral McCain?" And I said, "No, I don't know him." He said, "You know, Admiral McCain, in charge of all the ships." And I said, "Well, I know of him, but I don't know him." He said, "Do you know the Prince?"

G: The Prince?

F: Yes. I said, "I don't know any prince." He said, "The Prince, the Prince. You know, his son." I said, "No. I didn't even know he had a son." He said, "We have the Prince. We have just shot him down. We have gotten messages from all over the world, asking about the Prince. We have never had a message asking about Flynn."

(Laughter)

And I thought, "Thank God." Do I know John McCain? Yes, he took the heat off of me there. He was a man of high value to them, because they could use his relationship with his father and his father's influence, so John must have had a--I never talked to him personally about it, but he must have had a hell of a time, because they probably offered him blandishments and all kinds of good deals that no one else had.

G: He was injured pretty badly, too.

F: Yes, he was, yes. We both had fairly similar injuries, as a matter of fact. He landed right in the lake in downtown Hanoi, too.

G: Right where?

F: In the lake in downtown Hanoi. But John was a very good prisoner of war, and he was a gifted communicator and a lot of other things. But he emerged with a great deal of respect. And strangely enough, we were in the same release group, naturally, and I interviewed all the junior officers while we were waiting to be released, and we just had a sit-down--you know, senior officer-junior officer, "Here's the way it looks to me," and the future and all that stuff, and "What are you going to do?" And I was talking to John, I said, "You know, John, the thought occurred to me that you ought to go into politics." He is very articulate, very well-spoken, holds good, solid views, and is a great patriot. And sure and no heck, doggoned if he's [not] probably going to be a senator from Arizona here.

G: I think we have another example of that, don't we? Isn't Jeremiah Denton in politics?

F: Yes, Jeremiah. Although Jeremiah, I think, is a different case. I'll be surprised if Jeremiah gets reelected. Jeremiah is a very sensitive, very intelligent man, and when I say very sensitive I really mean that; he feels things that most of us don't feel. He's a guy that wears his heart on his sleeve, and he'll go to hell and back to fight for it. And

amongst the other of his attributes, he is not afraid to assume an unpopular stance. He doesn't care what happens; what he really cares about is what is really right or wrong, by his definition. And I don't think that's helped him in his home districts. I've heard rumbles right now that Jeremiah is in trouble because he is not pandering to the local issues. He's on the national issues, and--I'm repeating rumors, but I believe some of those rumors, knowing Jeremiah as well as I do. Jeremiah's just--well, he's more like his namesake than anybody I've ever met. Jeremiah in the Bible, well, you read Jeremiah in the Bible and you've seen Jeremiah Denton. And he was one tough apple. Not because he was pugnacious in a street-brawling sense, but because he had such great conviction, and he'll die for his convictions. And he won't try and finesse them. I mean, he fights with his heart.

G: That's the hard road.

F: Yes. Yes.

We had some great guys; we really did. It was what you would expect from a population such as that.

Tape 3 of 3 [Side 1 of second cassette]

G: I was going to ask you what kind of missions you were flying in those early days in Korea, essentially ground support?

F: Ground support, yes. Well, we were doing ground support and interdiction. We were the guys that did the major--since we had the jets, we were hitting the bridges up around the Yalu and things like that. The Mustangs couldn't get up there. But the Eighth Wing, it turns out, didn't really understand how to fly P-80s, because they didn't have the cadre of people that our outfit did, and so they made a hell of a racket and turned in their P-80s to get their Mustangs back, so they could have more time over the target. And it turned out that now we had spare airplanes, and we were living off the Eighth Wing. That was incredible. And then eventually the F-86s get in there, and all my buddies from March Field days were flying those F-86s, Billy Hubdie amongst them, and they were the guys that were the MIG killers. We couldn't kill MIGs; they had a big advantage over us in the F-80, because they were swept-wings and we weren't.

But I finished my tour over there; we were running out of pilots; we had no--our guys were tired; people were getting killed because they were tired. And finally replacement pilots started to come in, and that war catches up with itself.

So now we go home, and now I'm in another pioneer outfit called the Twentieth Wing again, and it's at Shaw Air Force Base, and they're flying F-84s. And they have an interesting mission: they're going to

teach that wing to be the first fighters that carry nuclear weapons, for nuclear strike. So we went to bomb commander school, and learned how to--we could reproduce an atomic weapon, and we knew how to put them together and all the rest of the stuff, and we were the guys that experimented with the nuke delivery for fighter aircraft. And this we called the Low Altitude Bombing System maneuver, the LABS, and we did all that. We did all the navigation trials, myself and four other guys--well, no, excuse me; there were eight of us--were selected to go and try out all of this stuff. And here we are, and we proved that you can take a fighter aircraft and cut off all its radio assistance, all of its navigation aids through radio, and just go time and distance. And we developed this to such a fine art that we could navigate over sixteen hundred miles and hit our target within one mile and one minute. And we tested that; we ran fifty profiles. The entire eastern seaboard was given to us; the FAA shut down everything else and we went. We had all of our instruments wired off, navaids wired off, and we sent out fifty sorties. We brought in fifty targets, within one minute. We didn't know why we were doing this, and then finally we were called and [they] said, "You're going to be the first atomic strike wing. You're going to be SACEUR's [supreme allied commander, Europe] strike force."

Now, I'm a senior ops guy, and I have all this experience, and so when we get over there, I'm running the operations; I'm the assistant group ops officer, a captain. But I'm not really the assistant group ops officer, because I know a hell of a lot about this stuff, and so did a couple of other guys. One of the guys was a planner, and so the three or four of us that were really in the inside of this and did all the tests and all that, we were the forerunners. We didn't have the ideas, but they told us what they wanted done, and that's when we'd have the ideas. My friend Bobby Wayne and myself, we'd set a record. I think we spent twelve hours and fifteen minutes airborne in F-84s and delivered a simulated nuke on [inaudible]. So that was the longest in-flight refueling that we'd ever done; no radio aids and everything else. So that meant we could go long distances with air refueling, transcontinental if we wanted to.

And behind this was an idea by TAC [Tactical Air Command]. TAC wanted the fighters to take over the role; they said they didn't need SAC [Strategic Air Command] with their B-47s and all the rest of the stuff. It was a major challenge by TAC to take the SAC mission, believe it or not. And the TAC generals really wanted to do that. But fortunately, cooler heads prevailed.

Anyhow, now we're over in the UK and we've got our wing and then their B-45 wing, and we did become SACEUR's strike force. Eventually we pick up another wing: the Eighty-first at Bentwaters [?], and that was the keystone of what we have over in Europe today.

I come back to the States and then I go to a couple of schools, and I get a headquarters assignment in the Pentagon. I worked the missile problems. That was the Minuteman coming into the force, and the

Polaris coming into the force. That's another historic story, and I have first-hand knowledge of it because I was the air force action officer, and every time the Titan, the Atlas, the Polaris or the Minuteman came on board for discussion [in the] JCS, it was I that briefed the air force chief, and I had to get coordination from the entire air staff, and I was a light colonel then. So some of the things from that episode--this is running too long--but for example, I was the action officer in 1962 when JFK set the force levels of our strategic force--missiles, bombers, and submarines--at precisely the force level they are today. I remember the paper which he signed; it was top secret, and the numbers are all the same. And every president since JFK has honored those force levels. We weren't up to them then, but every president all the way to Reagan--those same force levels obtain. And people, when I make speeches about the past, when I tell them that, and say, "You know, we quit racing in 1962. The Soviets knew it. It became public knowledge that we fixed our force levels. We were trying to send a discreet signal to the Soviets; we didn't want to race. And they read that as 'Okay. This is our chance.'" And that's why we're where we're in today. But that was a very exciting time for a young lieutenant colonel.

Then I went to the National War College, and then I went back to Europe.

G: Where were you in October 1962?

F: In October of 1962. I was in the Pentagon.

G: When the Cuban missile crisis broke.

F: Yes.

G: What were you doing?

F: I was the plans action officer for missiles, war plans.

G: Can you give me a little story? What did you do--?

F: No, see, in the missile crisis I wasn't involved in the operational deployment. I was out of TAC; I was in the headquarters in the strategic branch. I was involved, though, in some of the action that most people really don't understand. I think the profile, the Cuban missile crisis, is quite well known. But one thing that's not quite well known: we gave the Soviets a quid pro quo, Khrushchev, in order to cover his embarrassment by his withdrawing missiles. We withdrew our Jupiters out of Turkey.

G: Is it true that JFK had ordered those removed before that and they hadn't been, and he was under the impression that they had?

F: Not to my knowledge. Now this may have occurred--you mean, once the flap started, he gave the order to remove them and then he thought they were removed and it wasn't removed, or he had ordered them removed before the flap?

G: The story I have is that he had ordered them removed way before the flap had started. It was simply something that was going to be done in the course of time, because they were outmoded missiles; we didn't need them any more--

F: Well, that part is true. They were outmoded missiles, and politically we had problems with them, as we did any time you have nuke weapons on foreign soil, and particularly those days. And particularly Turkey in those days was politically--not unstable, but occasionally [we] suspected that they might go critical.

To answer your question, I don't know the answer to that question, but if I had to guess I'd say that that's not true. I can't imagine JFK ordering the withdrawal of those missiles and it not having occurred. Now, I would suggest that it probably is a pretty good story to tell, to cover JFK, saying he had wanted the missiles out anyhow, therefore it was no sacrifice on his part to withdraw them.

G: Right. Both of those versions are extant, and there's a certain amount of argument among scholars as to which occurred.

F: Well, it should be a fairly easy point to prove, because all of that must be in the JCS archives.

G: Right.

Okay. Now you left the Pentagon and you went to the War College.

F: Yes.

G: And from there, where? I've lost you.

F: Now, here's the coincidence. Now I go back to Europe. Guess what? I'm deputy for ops of the Forty-ninth Wing--this was the second time I'd been in the Forty-ninth Wing, and I'd been in the Twentieth Wing twice--over in Spangdahlem [?], Germany, and they're flying F-105s.

G: Which is a brand-new aircraft.

F: Brand-new airplane, and it's a nuke-strike, and it's designed specifically for that. And I started out there as the DO, and it was a great job for me. I got back in the cockpit, and I relearned to fly, and I was now upgrading my skills to the latest technology, because that's what the 105 had.

G: What kind of a reputation did the 105 have?

F: Oh, just a tremendous one. We called her the Thud, and Big Mother. And God, she was an incredible airplane. That airplane--let me tell you what that aircraft can do in a strike mission.

You take off. The minute you get airborne, you reach down, lift up your gear. And then you tell the aircraft, you punch a button and you say, "Okay, automatic pilot, take control." So it freezes your attitude, and now you start a climb. Now, you have to make throttle adjustments. And now you get to about a thousand feet, and you say, "Okay--" press another button--"level off." And you make another throttle adjustment. And then you tell the aircraft, "Now take your instructions from your navigation system. And automatic flight controls, you obey the nav system." And then you reach down, you turn on your radar, get out your maps; now you're watching your terrain-following radar. And now you're navigating that way. You're doing time and distance, and you've got a nav system that's inertial navigation; it's not radio, so it's self-contained, and it's--

(Interruption)

F: --you're flying at five hundred feet or a thousand feet, and the aircraft's taking its commands from the navigation set, the flight controls are slaved into the course and everything else, and all you're doing is monitoring it on your radar. And as you approach the target, you break out the target, and you break it down so maybe you're about ten thousand yards out, and now you're tracking down your cursor, and occasionally making slight corrections, overriding the flight controls, to keep that thing tracking down. Then you press another button, you tell the thunderstick, it's called, which is the bombing system, "Now you take over the aircraft." So it takes over the aircraft, and the only thing you have to do is when the cursor passes the target, you press the button, and you let go. And now the aircraft will automatically deliver the weapon. The bomb bay doors come open, the aircraft pulls up, delivers the weapon, rolls out, and automatically heads for home.

G: It's interesting that they still require a human decision to let the weapon go.

F: Yes. Now you're going home, and the navigation system is back in control, flight control is listening to it, and when you get close to your home base, when the nav system tells you you're over the home base, the aircraft automatically goes into a holding pattern. So then you drop all the automatic stuff off the line and make a turn into the base, drop the gear, and then tell the instrument landing system, "Now you have command of the aircraft." And the aircraft will fly down the instrument landing system approach, and as you pass over the runway, hit the pedal, disconnect all automatic systems and land the airplane.

G: That's fascinating.

F: Now, that's an airplane.

G: And that's much less fatiguing on a long mission.

F: Oh, God, yes.

G: You don't have to fly the airplane every minute.

F: No. And you can devote your time--and this is one man with one nuke weapon, and by God, we proved it time and time--well, anyhow, I'm the DO of the Forty-ninth Wing over there, with all this background in the Twentieth Wing and SACEUR strike force and everything else. So I had two glorious years there at Spangdahlem, and a really--

G: I can probably find it, but the transcriber may not be able to make it out. Spandau?

F: S-P-A-N-G-D-A-H-L-E-M, Spangdahlem.

G: That's all one word, I guess.

F: Spangdahlem, yes, and Bitburg were the two F-105 bases over there. So we were the leading edge of the--still the SACEUR strike force. Two years there, and finally they pull me up to headquarters, and Dave Jones is the inspector general for the theater, and he subsequently became chief, and he wanted me as his director of operational readiness inspection, which meant I was the OR team chief, and so I did all of Europe, and I became the bad guy, and I hit all the wings over there in Europe and inspected all of them, so I had a very, very good knowledge of the European war plan.

At the end of that one-year tour--this was in 1966--I was receiving letters from the 105 pilots that were now over in Southeast Asia. The 105s were carrying the bulk of the strikes against North Vietnam, and they were flying out of Korat and Takhli. Now those pilots that were flying the Thuds, as we called the aircraft, were the same guys that were flying the Thuds in Europe. And so I was getting letters from these guys and they said, "Hey, Colonel, we really need experienced people over here," and they told me about their losses and everything else. Well, Dave Jones wanted to extend me and give me a wing over there, and a wing was the prelude to getting your star. And I told him no, I didn't want to; I wanted to go over to Southeast Asia. And he told me, "You know that you can't get a wing in Southeast Asia unless you've had one." And I said I didn't care about that; I'd take a vice wing job. That was okay. And that's how I got over to Southeast Asia. And now I'm renewing my acquaintanceship with all these Thud pilots that--we'd competed against each other when we went down to Wheless in bombing competitions and stuff like that.

G: What was your assignment? Where did you go in--?

F: I went to Khorat.

G: What outfit was that?

F: 388th. And the 355th was at Takhli, and we were sister wings, and all the pilots knew each other, and everybody had their own reputation.

G: When did you get there?

F: I got there on July 1 of 1967. And I'd never gone to a POW training; I'd always been too busy. And for the first time they put me through a survival course that was at Clark Air Force Base, and we got rained out the first day. They had eighteen inches, and in the class before us six guys were killed in mudslides, so they pulled us out. So I had no indoctrination as to the theater, but I'd been over the theater before, and I'd flown in Korea, and they needed me there. And so I never had any of these little funny schools, never in my air force career. I was always too busy.

But anyhow, I was shot down on my thirty-sixth mission. I was shot down over the Doumer Bridge, which is right in the center of Hanoi.

G: Were you going after the bridge?

F: Yes. And that's not the first time we'd been up there. Our wing and the Takhli wing--we always, routinely, went against Package Six. Package Six was the area around Hanoi proper. Package Five was the very northern part of North Vietnam, and then the subsequent packages come down the DMZ. Package One was just north of the DMZ.

We occasionally flew missions in Laos, but they were really training missions. Of my thirty-six missions, I think probably--I'll give you a guess--probably twenty of those missions were downtown Hanoi. And when you went downtown Hanoi, you briefed sixteen pilots, and four Wild Weasel pilots who were also flying the F-105. And you could look around that room and bet that one of those guys wouldn't come back, on the average. So you could see the mortality rate there, the shoot-down rate.

Now, not all the pilots went up to Pack Six that often. But Red Burdette, who was the wing commander, and an old buddy from March Field, the March Field flying days, ex-reconnaissance guy, he and I made a pact that every time we had a Package Six mission, either he or I would be on it. Because we wanted to make certain that those young guys knew that the old guys were up front. And that had a hell of a lot to do with the morale of that wing, because the--and this is classified--the preceding wing commander never went up there. Nor did his vice commander.

G: Why?

F: You can only draw your own--well, first, they were not good pilots. They were not good F-105 pilots, for one thing. And secondly, they didn't have the kind of backgrounds that Ed Burdette and I had.

G: Did you know Newt Whately?

F: Who?

G: Newt Whately.

F: No.

G: Just an aside.

F: Anyhow, that's where I was hacked; I was hacked over Hanoi.

G: Do you know what got you?

F: Oh, yes: SAM. And I'd flown the Wild Weasel mission, too, so I knew. But when I was hit, I didn't think it was a SAM; I thought it was antiaircraft. We were coming in, and I was probably doing around five-forty with the afterburner on in about a 30-degree dive. I was in my run, and I'd just gone through a bunch of eighty-seven millimeter, you know, black clouds; you went right through them, and you'd see the red inside of them--it's really the most exciting mission in the world. And then I heard this bang-bang-bang and a clang, and then all the lights in the cockpit went on, all the warning lights and overheat lights. So my wing man called and told me I was on fire, and I knew that, you know; I said that over the radio, but fortunately my radio was out by then. I said, "I know that, you dumb"--you know.

But I was fortunate. I had my oxygen on 100 per cent, as a precaution. I had my pressurization off, so when that aft section got hit and the fire started back there, I knew sequentially what was going to happen, because as a DO I had investigated a lot of 105 accidents. I knew the controls were going to burn out, and there's no way you'd get that airplane home. So I was really well prepared for that circumstance. I knew precisely what to do. And I lost my ailerons, and then I lost my rudder, and then I lost my elevators, in that sequence. And now I was going ballistic, and I was over the speed of sound when I punched out, so I was well outside of that envelope. And I punched out around ten grand, ten thousand feet, the chute depl--I just went unconscious. I heard the bang, and I woke up and I saw my feet at a forty-five degree angle and I saw the Red River underneath me, and I tried to deploy my raft, and I went unconscious again, and woke up to the sound of a barking dog. But it wasn't a barking dog; it was a Vietnamese peasant. And I was in a rice paddy field. I could hear the Takhli strike coming in, and antiaircraft shooting at them.

I had made a perfect landing. I was sitting on the parachute like this, back; the wind was about five knots, the canopy was gently

billowing. And thank God, I had landed in a rice paddy, because when they started--tried to extricate me from there and they cut the chute off, and tried to get my helmet off--I had my helmet on and I had my mask on, my chin strap; everything was secured, everything worked--and then when they started pulling me out of that rice paddy, I knew I was hurt. It was my right thigh, and when they extricated me from that I saw my right femur sticking out of my right thigh. It was all muddy, and you know what they fertilize rice paddies with.

They dragged me to a little path between the paddies, and the peasants started to beat me and they cut off my clothes. Some police came. We wore our rank and name, and they saw. They said, "You colonel?" And I said, "Yes." There was kind of an English-speaker that was there. Then they knocked me unconscious and when I awakened I had my eyes--I was naked and I was in some sort of a trench, and I had my hands tied by wire behind my back, and it was really painful and I was whimpering, and then I'd pass out. And then eventually I ended up at what we called the Knobby Room in the Hoa Lao prison. That's the torture chamber, and that's where my interrogation started.

They identified me immediately. They said, "We know who you are," and they came in--I was the morning strike, and they came in with an ID card of a guy named Ross Timberley. He was on the afternoon strike, and I don't know what time elapsed between when they picked him up, but he told--you know, I guess they bent him--and they showed him. They said, "Do you know Flynn?" He denied it, and then they punched him around a little bit and said--they'd already been torturing him--he finally admitted he knew me, and said I was the vice commander of that wing. So we got that protocol out of the way.

Then the torture session started, and they eventually busted me.

G: What were they trying to get you to do?

F: They wanted military information; that was their major concern. They wanted to know--they had some very interesting questions to ask, and--

G: Were they sophisticated questions or not?

F: Well, pretty sophisticated, yes. You know, they'd tortured a lot of pilots, and they had a big bank of information by then. See, this was in 1967, and that war had been [going on since] 1964, 1965. Well, in 1964 they were capturing. And some of these guys were pretty knowledgeable, like Robbie Risner and those old guys.

This interrogation lasted for about a week, and they didn't do anything about my leg. I mean, it was just sticking out there. And in the torture they ripped out my right shoulder and popped my left knee. So now I had one limb left. And finally they took me to the basement of the hospital, and put me on a couple of boards on sawhorses in a little prison cell down there. And they still hadn't washed me. I was a hell

of a mess. And no clothes. They had a guard down there to take care of me; he fed me. And I knew they were trying to keep me alive. I was in very precarious circumstances. I was hallucinating; I was incapable of eating, the whole nine yards. And then the interrogations continued, down there in that thing there. Still hadn't been operated on, but they were starting to prep me for operation.

I did two things that--at some point you have to satisfy them. I mean, there's no way out. They've got you, and when they bust you, they bust you. And they're pros at it; they don't fool around. And you're scared, you're scared to lie, because you don't know what the other guys have told them and all the rest of the stuff. So it's a very delicate thing, that situation. You can't get out of there. I tried to commit suicide, which is another story, and was unsuccessful in it. But the two big questions they asked me--they wanted to know the JCS target list. Now the JCS target list is--every country in the world has targets and they're numbered, serially numbered, and they knew I was a senior officer and would know something about that list. And I told them that if they would get a map and get a pencil, then I would show them the JCS target list for North Vietnam, which was--they got really excited about that. And then they left, and the next day about five of them came in there: different guys now, they're older; I thought one of them might have been a Chinese, I couldn't tell.

So I just told them every place where there's a railroad marshalling yard, circle that. And they did that. Every place there's an airfield, circle that. And every place there's a marshalling yard, circle that; a highway crossing a river--and they started to catch on, and then I said, "There is no pilot in the world that can memorize the target numbers that list all these targets. And we get our targets by target numbers. Our intelligence officers go in a big black book and they identify that target by the target number which headquarters sent down." Now that was a straight-out, flat statement and I finally got through to them that nobody, no one, could ever help them. The only way they could get it is if they had the book of target numbers. They couldn't get it from a pilot because none of us were that capable of remembering target numbers. We had no interest in target numbers. All we knew was the target puller. We didn't talk about targets by numbers; we said, "The Hoa Lao [?] approach," or "The Doumer bridge," or "Gia Lam airfield." We didn't say we were after target 194763. People just don't talk that way.

So they bought that, and I think I saved a lot of people from future torturing, because most of the guys said they were tortured on that same thing, most of the seniors. The other thing was on strike orders. They asked, "How did you get your strike orders?" I said, "We got them from Seventh Air Force in Saigon." They said, "How do you get them?" I said, "They come by telegraph wire." I didn't know how--you know, I knew we got them by TWX.

Each time I talked, boy, they were right up on the edge of their chairs. They figured they really had the gold. And the one thing I convinced them is, I said, "You know, the morning strike comes in late at night. And senior officers and intelligence officers get together and decide how to attack that target. And then the morning strike goes off. And then the afternoon strike comes in by wire. They do that purposely so the morning strike pilots don't know what the afternoon target is, so that if they're shot down"--and I convinced them of that. And that was a lie. You did know--you could know, if you were interested, you could know what the afternoon target was, just by casual inquiry of your intelligence guy. "We're hitting the Doumer bridge this morning. What's the target this afternoon?" "Some x--x marshalling area." There was no classification in that sense. There should have been.

But I convinced them of that, and that was two things that I did, and I didn't give them anything beyond that. But I thought that I'd given away the family farm. See, I'd never been through these schools, and so I was just--I was operating on common sense and a lot of experience, but I didn't have the benefit of the scholarly approach. But it worked out pretty much to my advantage.

G: Did your leg get infected?

F: No. And the reason for that is that the only--I said they were not medicating me. They weren't, except about the third day they started to hit me with massive doses of penicillin. That needle was about this big; it looked like a horse needle. And that's all they gave me. They didn't dress the wound; they didn't clean it. When the guards came to my room, I thought they were very strange people; they had a mask over their [faces], and their handkerchief, and I said, "Well, they're like the Japanese. They must have colds." I finally figured out what that was: it was my odor. I must have smelled to high heaven.

And it was in there that I attempted suicide. Since I held--see, I'd been to the National War College, and as part of that I went to Panmunjom [on] our field trip; I selected Korea. And the North Koreans and the Chinese on the other side of that--they photographed everybody. So I knew I was on their dossier for that one. I also knew that I was on the dossier for my work in Europe, because all the dossiers on all full colonels that are ever in Europe in the strike force, or any place in Europe, are kept by the Soviets. So I was really praying against all odds that they wouldn't pick me up. And when they came to that vital collection, they said, "What did you do in USAFE [United States Air Force, Europe]?" And they knew I was from USAFE, because I had told them. [They said,] "Where were you before?" I said, "In Europe." They said, "What did you do?" And I said, "I was a training officer in headquarters." And of all they guys they're going to track, they're going to track the IG [inspector general] and the operational readiness inspection guys and things like that. And I held all of the current war plans for nuke strike, and I held the ongoing reconnaissance plan. And

I was afraid that they were going to put those two together, and I was afraid that someday a Chinese or a Russian interrogator would walk in. I could see Russian uniforms outside. I was in the basement, and the window was at ground level, and I could see Soviet soldiers there, and they of course manned antiaircraft guns. There was a Soviet presence there already, and I suspected Chinese, because a couple of times real big guys came in, and the Vietnamese are much smaller. And I didn't know what crossintel was going on, and so that's why I said, "Well, there's only one decent thing to do, and that's to commit suicide." And I tried to kill myself by throwing myself off this plank bed, which was about four feet high, and trying to hit my head on the concrete.

That didn't work. I had only one limb, and when I came off of that--this arm was okay, and I was pushing myself, kind of inching, worming my way back. They had operated on my right leg and it hadn't been casted yet. They still hadn't operated on my left leg. So I finally did manage to get over, and when I threw myself backwards, I hit on my head but it didn't knock me out. And then I said, "Okay"--every night I used to try and listen to see if the guard would lock the door, and that night I thought that he had not locked the door. So I said, "Okay, then I'll"--and I assumed that there was a stairwell up to the ground floor, at least, and in the early morning hours if I could climb up the next stairs or something I could maybe throw myself out a high window.

So I wormed my way back towards this door, which was only about six feet behind me, and I got to it and I got to the handle and the damned thing was locked. So I tried to crawl back, and somehow--I don't know what I was trying to do then, but I passed out. And that's the way they found me in the morning. They found me just dead out on the floor, naked, with this wound dressed here but not cast, and they had a bunch of loose gauze bandages so air would flow through there, and I had--well, I have a total of fifty-three or -four stitches in my legs from those operations, both legs, and I have a silver screw in my left knee, and I had what they call a nail--it's a rod, about a twelve to fourteen-inch rod--in my right femur. They'd joined it together and spliced it, and put silver wire around.

But I was completely uncasted, and that's the way the doctor found me, the surgeon that operated on me. And he was going to kill me himself. He really chewed me out. He said, "You know, we could have healed many North Vietnamese people. But instead we took care of you, and look what you are trying . . . ." They never figured out I was trying to commit suicide; they just figured I was--I don't know, careless or something. They never put two and two together. And subsequently I came back and got this leg operated on, and they restored the rigidity of that leg that they'd torn up. This arm here healed by itself.

G: That's your right arm.

F: Yes. And I used to lift it up like this with my left arm, and I'd get it and I'd grab the hair by the teeth to move it, if I was trying to go like this. And that's about the only way I could do it. But gradually this thing comes back in. The body is an incredible thing. And that's the only thing they ever gave me, was penicillin.

(Interruption)

G: Were you entirely sane at the moment?

F: No. When you go through that kind of experience, you're drifting in and out, for one thing, because of the physical circumstances, and then the sheer and utter terror of the interrogation and the torture, and then the knowledge that they beat you, they broke you, and you don't know that they broke the other guys too. You are only measuring yourself against yourself, and now you think it's a horrible thing--you're a traitor. Well, for an experienced warrior to feel that he's a traitor is something different than a young guy feeling that he's a traitor. You've been through a couple of wars already, and you know what behavior is expected of seniors. You know that you're supposed to--well, you risk your life every day when you climb up in an airplane, and you're not worried about your life or you wouldn't be in that airplane. And then to be beaten in that game is an incredibly crushing thing.

G: You feel like you betrayed yourself.

F: Yes, well, betrayed your country. You're a traitor. You gave them information. And that was one of my problems, not ever having attended survival school. I was just too busy to do those things, and knew I would behave properly anyhow. And then to--now, that's probably some of the things that I would have learned, that yes, they can bust you. And if they do bust you, try and limit the damage as much as possible. Which I did, and I thought I did that very well. But what I didn't do is that I didn't have that knowledge that other people were going to be busted, had been busted, et cetera. And that would [have been] some form of solace to me, and thus I wouldn't have attempted suicide or something because I felt like the number one traitor. It turns out every guy that I've talked to that underwent hard torture was broken. Ninety-five per cent of us underwent hard torture; that's the statistic, and hard torture we defined as physical pain to the extent that you are willing to do something that you hold to be seriously immoral to stop it, like turn on your own mother. And that's not a bad definition. So for a guy to come in cold on that, in my circumstance, was inexcusable. And I should have--I was really dumb, not being properly trained. You can come to the same point, but God, the cost. If I had known that before I went in.

On the other hand, I may not have tried as hard as I did to try and survive [?] that information. So you never know. But it would have been a hell of a lot easier. Our people as a whole, now, taking our population up there, the pilot population--it was mostly all pilots;

about 99 per cent were pilots. We had three or four enlisted guys. And those people were above average intelligence, above average courage, above average education--more than our share of doctorates and masters and stuff like that. So by and large our performance as a group was very good. You would expect a top performance, and our guys did make a top performance, with minor exceptions. But to take a group like that, that size, and all perform that well--now, we don't know a lot about some of the people who probably performed superbly. Those are the guys who never showed up, and they probably died in torture. And we do know we had three guys driven insane, because torture is an imprecise art, and I don't think the interrogator wants to kill you, but we were in various shapes and circumstances and injuries, and it's easy to . . . .

Another interesting thing is the torture guards. They're very carefully selected, and there's always an officer in charge of your torture. You may not know it, but there is always one in charge. Now some--there were two guards. One was called Pigeye and the other one was called the BUF, Big Ugly F-U-C-K-E-R.

G: Wasn't that a nickname for the B-52 at one time?

F: Yes, the B-52, yes. Anyhow, Pigeye was a very good torture guard. He busted you and that was it. The BUF, on the other hand, when the officer wasn't looking, and he'd already broken you, he'd give you one for the old Gipper, see. He was sadistic. I couldn't come within fifty yards of the BUF without really being frightened, and I mean frightened. That guy really scared me. Pigeye, I could talk to him, shook his hand, shared a cigarette with him, and it didn't bother me. But the BUF was a psychological terror for me, because he was a psycho.

G: He liked his work.

F: Yes. He liked his work. And he liked to degrade people, and he liked to hurt them.

G: Where do you suppose they got their techniques? Do you have any insight into that?

F: I think probably that communist society just automatically develops it. We were treated, I think, by and large, better than they treated their own prisoners. See, we were in the big Hoa Lao prison, which means "the place of the cooking fires," the big pokey that was built by the French to incarcerate the leadership of the politburo, incidentally, and they were all in the areas where we were kept. We were in the same cell blocks, maximum security cells. And you had red placards in some of the cells: "In this cell our beloved comrade Such-and-such was tortured to death by the French imperialists."

The French society probably had a contribution to it. They probably treated their prisoners pretty badly if they were trying to get information, especially the underground. The Vietnamese have a long

history of warfare, and the communist system demands results, and they don't care how they get them. So I think it's just a way of life in the communist society. But there are all kinds of tales our people tell of what they were doing to their own people. And what they were doing to their own people made it look as though they treated us pretty nice. In the back of my mind I always believe that. I do think they accorded some degree of respect to us--

Tape 3 of 3 [Side 2 of second cassette]

F: --despite the abysmal treatment, and I say that because, once again, the way they treat their own people is so much worse than the way they treated us. We could always recupe [?].

And perhaps it's because we were items of high value. We were worth a whole hell of a lot to them. We were the bargaining point.

G: How long was it before you had contact with another American?

F: Hmm. Let's see. Almost immediately. What happened was, I couldn't care for myself, and they had me in a cell right next to the dispensary when I came out of the hospital. And by then they had casted me; they had casted my right leg and my left leg, and a shoulder cast, and I was covered with boils. I'd only been washed once, I guess, in that whole time, and I must have smelled like hell. But I couldn't go to the john; I couldn't defecate by myself. The guard would have to roll me over and get a pot underneath me. I could clean myself with my left hand, fortunately, or else he would have had to do that. And they didn't like us, you know, they thought we were filthy and all the rest of the stuff.

(Interruption)

G: --tell us where any record of your debriefing might be found.

F: Yes. I know that the air force intelligence section would have it, that is, in headquarters, air force. I doubt very much if it's unclassified. And then the Office of History has--they were kind enough to come down and tape an interview, an extensive interview; I think they spent five days with me. So they have that document, but that document is classified. And I'm the only person that can release it. I have a copy of it here, as a matter of fact.

G: That's the Office of Air Force History?

F: Air Force History. And I think the place where it is kept is at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama. But it can't be released without my permission. And the reason why--you know, I'm not being chintzy about it; there are a lot of things in there that are classified. Time will declassify them, I'm certain, but someday I hope to write a book

myself. I've been urged to, in many cases. And the book would be in pretty much the same form as what we're talking about now, and that's why it isn't a wasted project as far as I'm concerned, because when you give me a transcript of what I've said, that just eases some of the others. Now, obviously some other stuff in more detail is in this transcript that I have over there. And it's ready to publish, if I give the word. But I don't want to give the word; I don't know why. But I think I'd like a lot of time to pass first, because it's pretty easy to--like some of my judgments, you know, my judgments tend to be very harsh, and I say things that might possibly hurt people, which are people who might well be innocent. They may not be innocent in my mind, but I've never talked to them in depth, and it's pretty easy to make judgments, particularly when you think you're a hotshot fighter pilot and you're contemptuous of everybody that isn't, and that categorizes about 98 per cent of us in our field. We are--

G: You wouldn't be doing it if you didn't think you were good.

F: Yes, you think you're better than everybody else, and it turns out we know now as we grow older, we're not. (Laughter) I'm always amazed when I run into some other really great people! But we're prone to do that, and we are prone to be very judgmental, and we're judging them by our standards, and our standards are kind of an ephemeral thing, especially when you're judging a guy in his profession and you don't know anything about it. You're trying to judge him by the fighter pilot's standard, which is a low forehead and low brow, and all testicles or whatever would do there.

G: You were describing when you first had contact with an American, when you were operated on.

F: Oh, yes. It was Tim Sullivan [who] finally showed up. He was a six-foot-four navy [lieutenant] j.g. He was shot down about the same time as I, and they put Tim and I together. He was actually my nurse, and he probably saved my life. He's big enough, he could get me out of that plank bed that we had and do such things as carry me into the washroom, so for the first time I could get washed and things like that. It probably was a very difficult time for Tim, because I was an old guy, and Tim was a pretty young man, and I imagine he had his trauma trying to take care of me, because I was not the best patient in the world, and--but he was a beautiful young guy, and we stayed together for about I guess around six months. They were trying to get us to write, and at this point I'm afraid to refuse. But there's no doubt what they were trying to do; they were trying get a pretty good political statement out of us--out of me, or him, but chiefly me. And I balked at that point; I said I would write--I was afraid to refuse to write, but I wouldn't write anything that was useful for them. I just wrote what I really thought. A little bit carefully, I wasn't at this point trying to irritate them; I was hoping for a status quo. I didn't know the system. I didn't know how long had that system been extant, had never heard about anything. And I had never heard about prisoners of war making

statements against the government. I think I heard one, and that was the famous case where--I forget, one of our guys--they were accusing Captain Marvel or somebody else of some horrible thing, and then the Vietnamese--I think [Robert] Shumaker was the guy that did that, the navy fellow--but I'd heard about that. What I didn't know was that they really clobbered that guy when they found out what they'd done to him; he paid for that. But I was instinctively trying to avoid any confrontation with the Vietnamese, because I didn't want to go through any more interrogation about military secrets. I figured that I was way ahead of the game, and the last thing I wanted to do was to place that at risk, the very thing that I'd tried to commit suicide for. I would have accepted any alternative than to place at risk the stuff that I knew about in the European war plan, the NATO war plan and the reconnaissance plan.

So I knew I was well ahead of the game, and I didn't want to risk that. I didn't give a damn if I gave away a few things, so I wrote a couple of innocent letters. And when the Bug--who was my chief interrogator, and he's a famous guy in our history; the Bug tried to shake me and I stood fast on it. By then I was mobile, ambulatory, and they had moved us from the room next to the dispensary to a place called the Mint, which was right across the way. Tim and I were still together. Well, when the Bug called me in to try and get me to alter some of the stuff that I had written, and I refused, it was then that they separated Tim and myself. They had thought there was some utility in keeping us together, I guess. They had to keep him with me. But now there was no physical reason, and I was not cooperating, and so they put me in the category of uncooperative and I was treated accordingly.

So that's the story until very late in the game. They separated Tim, and then later they take me to another place which is inside the Hoa Lao, but it was very isolated. And incidentally, I was never held, except for the brief time living right next to the dispensary, I was never held in a cell that adjoined another cell. There was always an empty cell or an empty space. So I was in a cubicle by myself. There was a communications system going on, but I never got into that. The reason for it is chiefly that, that I never had a common wall, and the few attempts at communications never seemed to work out.

When I was at the dispensary, I knew there was a guy next to us, and I tried to raise him. And he would never respond. And then there were a couple of guys from our wing; they were in the wash house, which was just opposite us, the door to my cell was opposite the wash house, and this one guy knew I was in there. I guess they'd peeked out and seen me, and saw Tim carrying [?] me. And his name is Ross Timberley, and he was the guy that was shot down the afternoon I was shot down, and [I saw] his ID card. And he told me they were being moved. They. And that was the only message that I had. And then somebody dropped a message that gave us the tap code, the famous tap code. But I really had no opportunity to use it, because I didn't have a common wall, and I wasn't smart enough to use coughing and things like that. But under-

neath it all I really saw no utility in communicating. I figured everybody was separate just the way I was, and they were all going to hold, just as--well, that was a dumb thing on my part, because there were a lot of people, I guess, who survived because of communications, other people encouraging them. And I never got in that position where I could encourage anybody, because I didn't have the communicative ability or the know-how, and not only that, once again, I was running silent and deep. I was quite glad just to be left alone and not disturb this holy grail that I was trying to survive, you know, my virginity.

So then I was moved out of there into what was called Heartbreak Hotel in this isolated portion, and once again I was isolated. There's no common wall, and everything else. And we were well out of the POW community anyhow. I didn't know this at the time, but just when I hit the prison, that is, when they put me next to the dispensary, that was the time of a great communications purge in Hoa Lao prison. And they took the guys that were there, and they were all superb communicators, and they put them out in a couple of outlying--what we called camps, little junky prisons in the environs of Hanoi. So when Tim and I hit the Hoa Lao prison, they'd just had a purge, communications were down, except that one guy that dropped this little note saying the code. And then they moved those guys out again, so there was no organized communications, and then I go to Heartbreak Hotel and there's no organized communications there. It turns out that in Heartbreak--I knew there were other prisoners. We were washed separately, but you could hear the other cell doors open. And there was one, two, three, four, five prisoners in there. But there's no communication. From my standpoint, I didn't need any, and apparently the other guys didn't either. Now, this is a lot different than what you hear from the other things.

Well, it turned out then that I was there, I think, about a year, and I was perfectly content by myself. As a matter of fact, I was glad that I was alone, because I didn't have to worry about anything disturbing my circumstance, that I was now at a complete standoff with the Vietnamese; they weren't asking me anything. I was now aware that I hadn't given them anything, increasingly aware, and increasingly happy with my circumstances. But I knew that I was probably the senior, except my wing commander had also been shot down about a month after I, and he had not shown up. I found out later that he died in prison: Red Burdette. So I didn't know where Red was; there was no communications at all, and my cell was right across from the wash room, the shower head, a hole in the ground where you rinsed out your toilet buckets. And so one day, I know there's a prisoner in there, and one of the prisoners had just washed down the floor of the hallway, and the shower room--it's not a shower room, but--so I'm on my bed and I say, "Hey, maybe I can see this guy's feet." So I look under my door, and the door has about a two-inch crack. And I looked there, and not only do I see a guy's feet, but I see a puddle of water, and I have a perfect mirror. I can look into the shower room and see who's there.

Well, the guy that I saw is a fighter pilot by the name of Norm Gaddis, and he is an old buddy. And he had been flying out of South Vietnam, flying F-4s, and he was shot down. And I didn't know he'd been shot down. And then the next guy that came in was a guy by the name of Jim Bean. He was our deputy for operations at the 388th, and I was the guy that hired him. So there's Jim Bean. And then there's a guy by the name of Max, he was a Vietnamese guy. I didn't know Max then, and I figured he was a Vietnamese prisoner, because we were in that portion of the prison where they had Vietnamese prisoners: political prisoners, prostitutes, whatever, thieves, black marketeers. We were just a little enclave, and I could stare out my window and see them bring them in, and little kids in irons and all the rest of the stuff.

So now I knew that Norm Gaddis was there, and knew Jim Bean was there, and this Vietnamese guy, and then another white guy, Dave Winn, it turned out to be. He was a full colonel when he was shot down, also, another Anglo, and I didn't know Dave. But now I knew that Norm was there, and Jim, so I said, "Well, I've got to communicate with those guys, just to say hello and all the rest of the stuff." So I did. I just said, "Hey, Norm. This is John Flynn." And my first question was, "How much food are you getting"--I said, "How much bread are you getting?" Because I was starving to death; I really was. The reason why I was, was I was a little nutty at this time anyhow, but the ration had been one loaf of bread, and then one bowl of soup at ten o'clock, and then repeated in the afternoon. And they started at this period to give us a small loaf of bread at breakfast--that is, not breakfast, but they gave us half a loaf of bread at breakfast. That's when I was in the other place. And I refused the bread, and the camp commander came; he was really interested in why I was refusing the bread. And I said, "I'm not going to take any extra bread--I know what the ration is--until I'm satisfied that everybody else is getting it." And he tried to assure me--his name was the Cat [Cap?]; he was very sophisticated; he pretended he was educated in Paris--he tried to assure me that everybody was getting it. And I said, "If you show that to me, I'll accept the extra bread. But if you won't show it to me, I'm not going to eat it." Well, I needed it. And then they moved me, and so there I am fighting the battle over there, and I'm getting so nutty that every time they bring in a loaf of bread I have my bunk marked with the normal size bread, and I thought these guys were shrinking the bread. I thought they were slowly shrinking it, so that's how nutty I was. Anyhow, that's the first thing I said to Norm, "How big is your loaf of bread?" (Laughter) And I forget what Norm said.

We had some degree of communications, but it was all oral. So it was not really--you didn't know where the guards were, and everything else. But almost immediately we were moved from there. While we were--I could look out in the courtyard and I could see Robbie Risner and another guy exercising, so I knew that--they were exercising together; the other guy's name is "Swede" [Gordon] Larson. Swede lives here in San Antonio now; he's an air force colonel. They were playing ping pong, and occasionally they'd speak to the Cat, who was one of the

prison officials. And I could see the kids out there and all that. And about that time they were starting to let me out, and I could walk. And then they'd let the other guys out, one by one. So we were getting about half an hour's exercise outside.

At about that time I was called in by the Bug, and he had been my interrogator and supervised my torture. And there in that room was Jim Bean, Dave Winn, and Norm Gaddis. And the guard brought me in, and the Bug said to me, "I have decided to let you live with some other people, these people." And I said, "I will not accept living with anybody if there's a price attached to it. I am going to continue what I'm doing; I don't care whether I live with somebody or not," because I had this pristine status that I had--and I would have done anything to maintain that status. That was my sine qua non; that was my entire life at this time, the holy grail. So he said, "You won't have to do anything. You can live with these people. I will place no conditions on you." And then he cautioned us. He said, "Through our munificence we are letting you do this. Now, if you make any trouble and so forth we will have to punish you." But they put us back into the original part of the prison where I was first incarcerated, and they put four of us in a little place called the Mint. And there we sat. And now for the first time we went out and exercised together, too. And the guards were a little bit lax, and we started communications. We had a tough time communicating, because they were a bunch of pros around there, and they were very cautious, and we didn't know how to be cautious. So I remember the first guy we saw--they strung up blankets so that you couldn't see the other guys. And the four of us were exercising in our little blanket cubicle, and there's another guy exercising right next to us, and I said, "I'm John Flynn. Who're you?" And the guy said, "La Guardia." And then he wouldn't say anything more. And so we named that guy La Guardia. Well, it turned out his name wasn't La Guardia; he was trying to tell us, "The guard will hear you," and his name was Dick Stratton. He was the famous Hanoi bomber, the Mad Bomber. You know, they cut his hair, and you know.

I saw Robbie, and I tried to signal him that he was now a colonel. I was shot down later than Robbie, and I went like this and this, and he didn't even--he was very impassive.

G: You waved your hands like an eagle.

F: Yes. Well, finding all these expert communicators, you know, we weren't getting anyplace--oh, yes, the guys were coming by and we could hear--now, Dave Winn had used the tap code, so he was fairly familiar with it, and now these guys were coming by and they were sending very--they were coming by our door and they were tapping, very infrequently, but they were trying to get in "comm" with us. Now this is important, because now we are the seniors, and now we are in a position that if we can get into communications, we can assume a senior leadership position for the first time. But these guys were so fast with their comm that Dave couldn't read it, and they were just short bursts. Well, finally we got

into communications with a guy by the name of Ernie Brace. He was a civilian, and he was a superb communicator. He did it very simply. We were exercising in one of our little cubicles, and he was in a cell above that, and he established communications. He said, "Look underneath the wash basin in the first wash house, and I'll leave a note for you." And that's how we got into the communications system. And from there it got better, and then pretty soon we find the torture had stopped--

G: When would this have been, approximately?

F: This was probably--I can never fix it in my mind. Norm Gaddis could tell you the day and the month; he has incredible recall. But I'd put it at late 1969 or 1970.

We had a few hassles with them, the four of us in the Mint did, and we couldn't get good communications with the other guys, and the reason for this is that we had a man that was disrupting our communications. The communications we had set up--we could put our note in the little shower that was in this one building that we were in, an open shower, and that could be retrieved by the next group coming in, who had good communications with the camp. So we let them know who we were, and we called ourselves the Four Bulls. All four were colonels, and we were the ranking guys there, and we said, "We are ready to accept command." We didn't know what else to do; we didn't know what had transpired before or anything else.

And then all of a sudden we couldn't get a message back, and we didn't hear anything. Well, there was a man who was mentally ill, who was disrupting our communications and taking our notes. So that was unfortunate. But it led to a difficulty. And then there was a great relocation, and we ended up in another, kind of empty cell block. It was a maximum-security cell block, where they had incarcerated all the former leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party, the politburo. And the four of us were placed there. And there was the cell block right next to us--it wasn't really a cell block; it was a prison room. They put fifty Yanks in there, and we had a clear shot at these guys. So finally we got into communications with them, and they were in communications with the rest of the guys.

G: Can I interrupt you?

F: Sure.

G: The man who was disrupting your communications: how do you know he was a mental case?

F: Because I know the man very well.

G: Is he back?

F: Yes.

G: Is he still a mental case?

F: Yes. Well, he's not in an insane asylum, but he has deep mental problems, and he killed a man incidentally--not accidentally, but he killed a man when he got home. He was freed from it; it was called an accidental killing. But he was just one of those guys, and he would not have anything to do with communications. He was content to sit there, and he did exercises all the time, and everything else, and every Sunday--

G: What did he do with the notes, do you know?

F: Just threw them down the toilet.

G: He wasn't passing them to the other side?

F: No. He was actively disrupting them. He was active in disrupting these communications. He didn't want to get--I think one of the things, he did not want to be tortured. He had already been tortured enough, and he didn't need any help, and he didn't see any purchase in opening communications. So he resisted our communicating, because he was close enough to us that he might get caught in the fireball.

G: If I read you correctly, then, you're saying he just didn't want to stir anything up.

F: That's right. And to this day, I don't know the motive. His motive may have been impeccable, but from our standpoint, we resented deeply what he was doing, and I threatened him physically. I said--and he was bigger than I was, and younger. (Laughter) But it was just one of those strange things that happen, and it's not the last time it will happen. People under stress act much differently. So that's the way that one went.

But then we did eventually get communications, and then we really sophisticated the situation. But by now, it's a pretty easy job, because there's always the threat of torture, but we had reasonable assurance that torture had been finished.

G: Do you know why? Do you have any insights as to why?

F: No, to answer you directly, we've never been able to figure that out. Now, one of the factors that obtained, we think, was that the treatment changed after Ho Chi Minh died. We can't establish a relationship to that event, but we know that that--it may have been coincidental, but it might have been that after Ho Chi Minh died there was a reassessment of the North Vietnamese situation, new leadership, okay? And amongst other things, they may have examined their policies towards prisoners. Now, we're getting toward the end of the experience anyhow, and the Vietnam-

ese might have assumed that an end was coming, and they'd better line up their policies to, in effect, a diplomatic end to the war that would redound to their advantage. And certainly, continued torture of our people wouldn't redound to their advantage.

Another thing that probably helped us was that we had nine guys or eleven guys come home early, at different times. And one of those guys dumped, as we called it, his entire computer bank, which was tales of blood and thunder and torture. This was a guy by the name of Hegdahl. He was a navy seaman; he was a young guy, nineteen or eighteen years old. He fell off the fantail of a destroyer in Haiphong harbor; they scarfed him up and they immediately started to groom him for release, because he was obviously an innocent victim. Well, one of our guys, I think it was Dick Stratton, got close to him and told him what was really happening, what had happened to the prisoners and all that stuff. And meanwhile Hegdahl, this innocent young guy, was pouring sugar in the gas tanks of--they left him to run around the Vietnamese vehicles and all that stuff; he was sabotaging and everything else--they never knew he was in communications. And he had a great recall, and Stratton unloaded on him. So he came back and said, "Here's what's really going on."

Now, the other guys that they'd released, amongst whom was a--what, a lieutenant colonel? They didn't know anything of that sort had been going on. They'd been indemnified against it; they were candidates because they were malleable. So the Vietnamese treated them much differently, and then they came home to testify as to how good our treatment was over there. Well, hell, we were laying in rags and starving to death and being tortured and all the rest of that stuff. So it was a very good ploy.

When Hegdahl dumped, obviously they went through Red Cross and, I suppose, diplomatic channels, and sub rosa diplomatic channels, and registered some hard protest as to the treatment, which was, incidentally, not much different than the way they treated their French prisoners. And I think probably that's the reason for the change. I think that's probably the significant reason. It was revealed how we were being treated.

G: Do you know if there were any threats made through sub rosa channels on your behalf?

F: I would not rule it out, but I sure don't know about it. And there would be no reason why we would know about it, except I would think that at this late date in conversations with our intelligence people or State Department, somebody would have said, "Hey, baby, we really laid it on them and said that we were going to increase our bombing until such time as. . . ."

Which brings up another exceedingly interesting point, and this is a historical point that should be recognized. And that is that when we

bombed the North--Red Burdette describes it--we were in charge of plucking an eye from a face without injuring the face. We were very careful not to inflict any damage on the civilian population and all that stuff, despite the Vietnamese propaganda. They were accusing us of deliberately bombing dams, and hitting hospitals, et cetera, ad nauseam. The reverse was true.

What actually happened was in December of 1972--well, what is a prelude to this, up until that point, the Vietnamese had never suffered any real damage. There was no penalty, in other words, for what they were doing down south. They never admitted they had any of their soldiers down south, and they had thirteen divisions down there. We weren't doing any heavy damage to them. We dropped their bridges; we busted their marshalling areas; they repaired them. But we were always restrained. And it turned out that initially, no one supported the North Vietnamese, but as they hung on and as fortunes turned towards them, then the fraternal order of socialistic republics--and that was, you go around, the Soviets, the Chinese, the Bulgarians, the Yugoslavians, the Hungarians. Each year the Vietnamese would go shopping for assistance, and we could tell from the press releases over the radio--and we had to listen to the radio; one was in every cell--you could tell by the length what they got from these various countries. When I was first captured, the guards didn't have common pieces of uniform. The trousers didn't match, and they were wearing Ho Chi Minh sandals, and when they relieved each other on guard, they had the duty pith helmet, which was a mark of distinction. The French colonials wore them. They traded the pith helmet, and they traded the rifle, which--the rifle was, you know, but they were very poorly dressed.

As the war went on, and they suffered no ill effects and they were getting more and more assistance from the fraternal order of socialistic republics, it started to reflect. For example, pretty soon they had matching trousers and shirt. And then they showed up with wristwatches, and then they showed up with sunglasses, portable radios, and then they started to show up with tennis shoes. Now, tennis shoes might not sound like a big deal to you, but to them it's like a Cadillac.

And then we saw some Chinese pork and Russian fish, cans, in the garbage, so their diet had improved. Everything improved. All this time, when we think we're hammering them, we ain't. They're getting better and better and stronger and stronger, until December, when Mr. Nixon ordered a decisive campaign against them, and for the first time those guys were scared. There's a story that I tell in all the speeches I make about this, where we had an intelligence section, and, you know, it's exciting to be in the middle of Hanoi when Hanoi's being bombed. The antiaircraft comes up, and the sirens go, and all of a sudden they're firing and SAMs are going off and the aircraft are coming in. They're our aircraft and we know they're our fighters, because we fly sixteen ships; we go down in trail twenty seconds apart, and we know we've got four Wild Weasels ahead, and we know when the strikes come in and what they're from. And so we could pretty well tell what the

casualties are, at least, going in to the target. And we'd listen for the bombs; they'd go bum-bum-bum, bum-bum-bum-bum, bum-bum-bum. And if you've only got fourteen, you know that two aircraft didn't make it in. Now, they may have aborted.

And we kept track of all that, and our guys tried to keep track of the numbers and intensity of the fire, and was it heavy or was it light. So they're getting a training, and when SAC finally came in, President Nixon decided to commit them decisively, we didn't know this. And we were--"Here comes the raid," and all of a sudden here comes the SAMs going off and comes now the airplanes, and bum-bum-bum, bum-bum. But they didn't go bum-bum, but brm-bdm-brdm-budabum-budabum-budabum--God, it went on for about a half an hour, and then the next '52 dropped. And at this point our intelligence guys, and wisely--we knew it--said, "The heavies are in." And at that point I sent a message out to our people, and I said, "Pack your bags. You're going home. I don't know when you're going home, but you're going home. The big guys are in."

There was a profound difference then in the attitude of the Vietnamese. It turned out now for the first time they were suffering from this, and their attitude changed completely, and I had a couple of very interesting interviews, where they tried to fake me into going down and--they tried to get an emotional statement from me that we should not hit these poor people and things like that. They fake attacked [?] on me and a whole bunch of other stuff. But the whole thing was working, and--well, the other thing is that we'd tell the guards, "Do not be afraid. The United States will not hurt us." And they'd look around, and they'd edge under the eaves of our prison cells. And the boss of the prison gave orders to his guards. He said if we didn't stop cheering when the B-52s bombed, go in and bayonet us. We got that interpretation directly from one of our Vietnamese prison guards, who was an English speaker, Dat.

G: What was his name?

F: Dat, Captain Dat. D-A-T. An incredible little guy.

And that's how it went on. Later on, I had occasion to talk to Henry Kissinger, and I remarked how frightened they were for the first time, and they were really scared, and they were taking hits. I said, "In other words, the harder we bombed, the better our treatment was." And that was true. And he said, "That's strange you should say that. Negotiations were never so difficult as during bombing pauses." And I said, "Our treatment was never so bad as during bombing pauses." And he said, "That's right." And we both agreed that the Vietnamese thought bombing pauses were a sign of weakness, because in their society, when you've got the guy down, you don't say, "Now pay attention, or I'm going to really hammer you." They hammer him. That's their culture. In our culture you say, "Be careful, now." And this is really articulated better than ever in one case where the Cat sketched on a pad a big man and a small man, and he put boxing gloves on them. And he said, "The

big man is the United States. He is very strong. The little man is very weak; it's Vietnam. The little man is going to win because the big man does not want to fight." And they were getting that from all the disturbances here in the United States, and they were getting that in their daily newspaper and their daily propaganda broadcasts to their own people. Every time we had a riot in Watts or a disturbance on a campus, or anything that could be related to the point. And they had Jane Fonda coming over, Fulbright, Kennedy, all those ultra-liberals. Every time they made a pronouncement, that was spread right over the entire communist world as a sign that the United States did not want to fight.

G: How did that affect your morale?

F: Oh, it made us very, very angry, and the Jane Fonda visits, for example, were very disturbing to us in a frustrating sort of way. What could we do about this woman, who was very liberal, who had been demonstrating against the war, and toured with a group of other female actresses with some sort of a really tacky show to all the army camps, and the army wouldn't let them in. So they did it outside the gate. But we heard the scripts from those shows, and they were really--you know, filled with little vignettes of the senior officers trying to make love to the secretaries, the WAFs [Women in the Air Force], all that trash. That made us very upset, and we didn't like these sorts of people. They didn't understand what was going on in Southeast Asia; they could [not] care less. It was a cause, a liberal cause, and they were going to try and prevail.

G: Did you ever have to meet any of these delegations from the United States?

F: No.

G: They never tried to make you (inaudible)?

F: No. I was not a candidate for that.

In retrospect, they treated me pretty decently, except for that initial try. Jeremiah Denton said something to me when we were all together at the end, and the Bug came around. And there were about ten of us in this little cell area, maximum security. And the Bug never said anything to me, and I was the senior and he knew it. They never recognized me as the senior; they wouldn't. We were criminals, our official status was criminals.

Jeremiah said, "I don't know what you did, John, but the Bug really respects you." And I think one of the things that may have helped that is I never bad-mouthed them. A lot of our guys would swear at them and all that, in anger and all the rest of the stuff. I never did that. I tried to keep my dignity. I was the senior officer, and I addressed them--they were our captors, I knew it; they were keeping us alive. I knew that. But I tried to maintain a line, a well-defined

line of what we would do and not do, a and b. They knew I was going to go down the line to protect that. And I didn't try and excite them; I didn't swear at them or anything like that. A lot of our guys did. They deliberately--especially when they found out that torture had finished. Boy, they really got on the V's. A lot of guys came out and were real tough, and I thought, well, you guys forget how it was.

(Interruption)

F: --Mary Margaret, and what a superb woman she was. But two things: all the time that I was in the pokey--and we heard about the League of Families, and I was sitting there praying--they were coming and visiting and all the rest of that stuff; they were going over to Paris and that sort of thing--I was praying that Mary Margaret would not be a part of that movement. I figured I was a U.S. Air Force fighting man, and if my wife had to go someplace to get me out of there, I didn't want to come home. I figured that the air force had gotten me in, and I had every bit of faith that the air force would get me out. And sure and no heck, she was sitting here feeling the same way, that her place was taking care of the children, not trying to get me out of there. And she had her opportunities to go over to Paris and join that movement, and she did not, and that's a sharp contrast to most of the seniors who were incarcerated. A number of them became very politically active. So I blessed her for that one, because I was really praying on that. This had been my third war, and I was a graduate of the National War College, and I knew that these wars took eight years, on the average. The British had fought these limited wars for years, and that's what they had told us, eight years for these. And sure and no heck, it was eight and a half.

But the other thing was that, when I came home, we all had our--oh, I didn't receive--what, maybe I got one letter from Mary Margaret, maybe two or three, and I only got a part of a package. And I always felt good about that; that meant that I was doing the right things; I was on their bad-guys list. But I hit Clark Air Force Base, and we're all permitted a telephone call, and I called Mary Margaret. And I said, "Honey?" And she said, "Jack?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Jack Flynn, where have you been?" (Laughter)

And she waited for me to laugh. And when I laughed, she knew everything was okay.

G: That's amazing.

F: Yes. That's how smart she was.

G: It sounds like she made it very easy for you to come home.

F: Oh, yes. We had our--you know, it was difficult to get along. I was still nutty, and Mary Margaret had been used to making all the family decisions and all the rest of the stuff. Unbeknownst to me, she wanted

me to get out. She never said it, never tried to influence me. But she'd hoped that I'd get out. And probably she was right; it would have been a better deal if I had gotten out.

G: In what way?

F: Oh, for the family. Because when I went back to work, it was just a continuation of my previous career. I was never around when Mary Margaret needed me. The burden of the family was always on her, and I didn't realize the deep trauma that the family had suffered while I was away. Now I see the results of that--and how smart you were, Mary Margaret.

End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview I

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JOHN P. FLYNN

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