

A Bad Day

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

On August 27th I was assigned to plan and lead a "special" mission to be flown on the following day. The mission was to bomb a "military barracks area" near Son La, North Vietnam, which is about 100 miles west of Hanoi. The mission was to consist of four aircraft, each carrying eight 500 lb. MK-82 "Snakeye" bombs. The "Snakeye" has four large metal fins which pop out when released, to slow the bomb so that it can be released at lower altitude without damage to the aircraft. This mission would be the first time these bombs would be dropped from the F-105 in combat.

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

I went to the wing operations officer and requested that he advise Second Air Division in Saigon that there was no way that I would carry six "Snakeyes" centerline, but if it was really an important target, I would take four. I also wanted "Sidewinder" air-to-air missiles outboard in place of the other two bombs, as the target was near an active MIG base. I added that I thought the whole mission was a "bad idea!"

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

I got up early and went to wing operations. I was advised that Saigon had said it was an important target, they would give me the four bombs and "Sidewinders", and the mission was a go! I believe we had a 0900 take-off for a 1000 TOT. The other three pilots were all fairly junior, but capable, officers from my "Blue Flight".

We got our weather and intelligence briefings, and I briefed the flight. We picked up our personal weapons and equipment, and were dropped off at our aircraft. I had previously been advised that I would be flying a two-seat F-105F that day since my F-105D had not passed its pre-flight checks.

Our start, taxi, and take-off were right on time. I made a "radar terrain avoidance" calibration run on departure. We rendezvoused with the tanker, and the refueling





PART I

by Col Wesley Schierman, USAF (Ret)

Wet Son La

Near the highway the clouds fortunately became broken, with bases about 1,500 feet, and I was able to visually confirm our position, on course and in the valley, which gave me some comfort! I directed my second element to separate and take spacing on me. As I turned on course for our final run-in heading I was feeling somewhat better. So far everything had gone exactly as planned!

I was flying at 400-500 feet AGL, at 420 knots, heading Northwest, paralleling the highway, about a mile to the right, on my final run to where the co-ordinates showed the target to be, but I couldn't see anything resembling a barracks area! Finally, I noted the target off my left wing about a mile south of the highway! (You got it, the coordinates were off.)

Since I was already past the target, I pointed it out to my element leader, and cleared him in to drop first, heading southeast, while I took spacing. When he made his drop, I noted that there were two very distinctive bomb blasts, so I knew there had been a malfunction of some sort. As I dropped, my wingman was on my right, but due to high terrain I had to make a right turn, so I couldn't turn too quickly. By the time I got turned enough to see the target, I couldn't tell how much damage had been done. Since we were to continue our road reconnaissance west to Dien Bien Phu, and I had not seen any ground fire, I told the flight that we would all do a 180-degree turn, and do a strafe pass to the west.

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

My first reaction was pretty much standard when I thought to myself "Oh Bleep"! Then I pulled up to establish a glide and told the flight "Elm Lead's hit. I may have to get out!" Knowing that it probably wouldn't work, I decided that I had nothing to lose, so I turned on the low altitude air start Switch. I knew I didn't have enough altitude to get out of the valley, so I continued straight ahead toward a small hill, a couple of miles ahead, which stuck up from the floor of the valley.

About that time my number four man called, "Hey Lead, you've got a lot of fire coming out of the back." I immediately shut off the airstart switch. I thought about firing my Sidewinders, but by now my airspeed was dropping rapidly, and I didn't feel I had time to accomplish the required switch settings. I was approaching the small hill when four again called and said, "Hey Lead, the fire's out now." I replied, "Yeah, the fire's out up here too, I'm getting out!" I raised the handgrips with



Korat Air Base, Thailand.

my left hand, which blew the canopy, saw the airspeed was dropping through 220 knots, checked my position in the seat, and squeezed the trigger.

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

This was a major concern as I was only about 1,000 ft. above the ground, and the seat weighs probably 80-100 lbs. I was able to work the seat down beside me and was pulling parachute risers from over the headrest, when I felt the ground was getting close. By this time I felt I was too low to safely deploy my survival kit (another 30-40 lbs.) I held the seat away from me with my right hand, and tried to position myself for a "PLF". I was drifting slightly backward, and hit pretty hard on my heels, rear, back, and the back of my head. It knocked the wind out of me, but after a short time I was able to get up and determine that I at least still had all of my major parts! (That night both of my knees were swollen to at least half again their normal size!)

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

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

I then called my flight and told them that I was OK, and my gun had malfunctioned, ejecting some pieces down the

engine intake, causing the engine to explode. They advised that the helicopter was on its way, and that they would cap me as long as their fuel would allow.

I then went back to the top of the hill and looking west, I saw the target behind me and the city of Son La on my right. My aircraft had crashed ahead of me on the other side of the hill, and was burning, and there was a village behind me on my left. I concluded that any way I went down off of the hill, I would run into searchers coming to look for me. I was also concerned that if I left the hill the search aircraft would not be able to see me, which was a requirement for a pick-up at that time.

Knowing there was a helicopter enroute from Laos, and believing that it would take searchers quite a long time to make it up the hill through the thick jungle, I elected to stay on top of the hill which would be ideal for a helicopter pick-up. About that time, my flight called and advised me that they would have to depart due to low fuel, but that Col Risner's flight was diverting to take over the cap. They also asked if I heard anyone coming. I replied "No, but tell the chopper to hurry, and I'll see you guys later."

About five minutes later I heard voices coming up the hill from the south and east. I called my flight and advised them that there were enemy approaching, and they should cancel the helicopter. I would try to hide out during the day, travel at

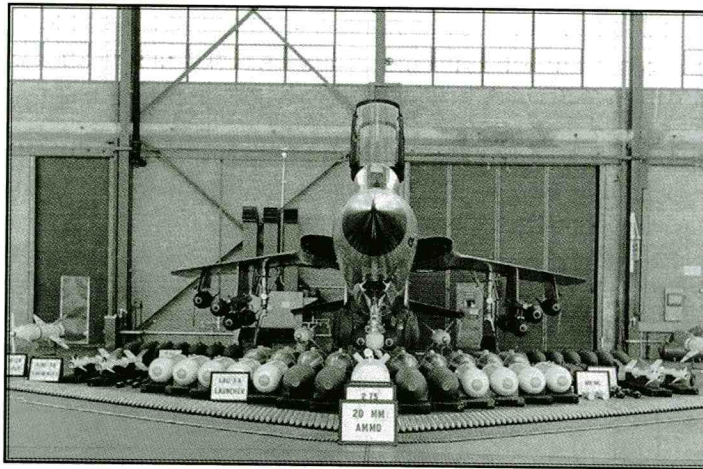
night, and try for a pick-up the next morning. I received no acknowledgement of this transmission. The flight was either out of range, or my transmitter had failed!

By now I realized that I had painted myself into a corner as there was not enough cover to conceal my movement out of the area. In retrospect, I should have gone down into the denser jungle.

I burrowed down into the thickest cover I could find. When the Vietnamese arrived I saw about a platoon of regular infantry with automatic weapons, grenade launchers, etc.

They appeared to have found my chute, then swept up the hill, and past my position, but not finding any new tracks, returned back toward the chute, and repeated the process again.

About the fourth time through, one of them saw me. He called the others over and I turned my beeper on to transmit as they dragged me out of the brush. They first took my



The F-105 and her various ordnances.



Wes Schierman with the F-105.

(Photo: Author)

boots, then were stripping my gear off of me as the RC-54 (rescue coordinator aircraft) appeared overhead, with the helicopter close behind!

That had to be the lowest point in my life. I thought to myself “the very best you can look forward to is to lose at least a couple of years out of your life.” I also began to re-view what I had learned in POW Training at Stead AFB in 1964.

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

Before long, Col Risner’s flight arrived and must have located some gun positions that were firing on them, as they began to make firing passes, strafing and firing their bullpup missiles. I don’t know how close they were, but it was awesome. About that time one of the Vietnamese realized that the beeper was transmitting so he brought it to me and indicated that I should turn it off. It seemed like a good idea at the time as the Vietnamese were getting pretty agitated, and I decided I’d prefer to have my friends leave before anyone else got shot down!

I was kept in a small cave with a locked gate across the entrance, and under guard 24 hours a day for the next three nights, while I believe the Vietnamese were going through the wreckage of my aircraft. I was then transported east toward Hanoi, tied up in the back of a truck with about 20 guards, for the next three nights. We would lay up in truck parks during the day to avoid air strikes by U.S. aircraft. I was not abused, but I only received a pint or two of water per day, and stayed very thirsty.

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

Following several months of leave, I returned to Northwest on August 20, 1973. The company was extremely receptive and helpful, and thanks to the skill and patience of some great people in the training department, I eventually checked out as captain on the 727, and later flew the DC-10, and B-747. I retired in 1995.

EPILOGUE: Following my return I discovered that I had received compression fractures of two vertebrae from my ejection. The MK-82 “Snakeye” was actually an unauthorized loading for the F-105, and should never have been used. It was never again used in the retarded mode, from the F-105. My number four received over 100 holes in his aircraft that day due to his bombs detonating prematurely. Fortunately he made it home OK! The F-105 gun system was later modified, which improved its reliability. The “very important target” had been bombed by the Navy three weeks earlier. The buildings had been abandoned by the North Vietnamese troops, who were living up in the hills in caves.

C’EST LA GUERRE !

WES



Entrance to Hanoi Hilton.

Editor’s Note: The second half of Wes’s story will appear in the summer issue.



A BAD DAY AT SO

A New Kind Of War

Part II

by Maj Wes Schierman



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

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

two are designed to shift the blame for a prisoner's failure to cooperate from the individual to the U.S. Government. He is a soldier doing his duty, as are enemy soldiers. As for the third, by not asking for anything, the prisoner is telling the enemy that he is not open to trades, or negotiations for favors.

I never mentioned the Code of Conduct to the interrogators, but instead argued that I was bound by the Geneva Conventions. Nevertheless, the Code was the accepted rule book for POWs. I had made up my mind that I would rather not return home than dishonor myself, my family, or my country!

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

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

During those ten days of interrogation I gave only name, rank, serial number, and date of birth, as required by the Geneva Conventions, politely explaining that I was prohibited by international law from giving anything else. The Vietnamese argued that there was no declared war, therefore I was a criminal in their country, and I would be tortured or killed if I did not answer their questions.

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

Throughout this time I developed a cover story, full of lies about my background, in case I should be forced to answer



their questions. Since I suspected this story would be checked and found false, I memorized a completely different back-up story for when I was again forced to answer. Since they were willing to threaten and torture, I believed I was certainly justified in lying.

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

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

Shortly after the guard left I heard a voice calling down the hall, "Hey new guy, what's your name?". I got down on the floor, and talking under my door, answered, "This is Air Force Captain Wes Schierman." The voice replied, "Hi Wes, this is Percy." (Bob Purcell was from another squadron in our wing. He had been shot down in early July. I had attended his memorial service, as he was thought to have been killed.) I told Bob I was glad he was alive, but not to expect me at his next funeral, as I had already been to one. I'm not sure he thought that was very funny!

Bob then gave me the names of all the others in the cellblock, including "Smitty" Harris, the first man from our squadron to be captured, on 4 April. Ron Byrne, a flight commander from my squadron, was shot down the day after I was, but closer to Hanoi, so he beat me there. The three of us were able to exchange information about families, etc. I was able to give Smitty information about his new son who was born about six weeks after he was captured.

At this time I was told of a "mail box" (hiding place) behind a loose brick in the shower area, where notes, etc., could be exchanged. From this, I received a copy of Morse code, and a tap code that Smitty Harris remembered, and had the foresight to pass on for all to learn. (In the future this tap code was to become a lifeline, and often our only means of communicating, for several years!) I was also given a list of the known POW names to be memorized, and found that I was #23. (In later years I had a list of 368 names memorized, which I reviewed daily.)

Next I received my "official" issue of equipment. We got a thin straw mat (similar to those used on the beaches in Hawaii), one set of long clothes, one set of short clothes, a pair of rubber tire sandals, one Vietnamese-size blanket, a toothbrush to last six months, a tube of toothpaste to last 3 months, a small water pitcher, a cup, and a spoon. Later we received a second blanket and a crew-neck sweatshirt, which was a blessing, during the cold and damp winters.

After a few days I was caught communicating, so I was placed in the stocks which were built into the foot of the concrete "beds", and locked from the outside hall. In this position, one could only sit, or lie on their back, but could not turn over, use the waste bucket, etc. I thought that to be restricted like this must be about the worst thing they could do to me (little did I know.) I was absolutely miserable, but I managed to get through 24 hours, so I told myself that if I could get through one day, I could get through another, and I did so. I told myself, "just take it one day at a time." By the end of the third day I knew I could go considerably longer. Indeed, Nels Tanner went 128 consecutive days in the stocks. I was released on the morning of the fourth day, and a "medic" treated and re-bandaged my wrist. The infection later went away.

On 17 September a new POW was brought in. When the guard left we called down the hall, "Hey new guy, who are you?" The reply came back "This is Col Robinson Risner, who's in charge here?" We knew right away who was going to be in charge! Col Risner, my squadron commander, was a famous Korean War ace who was now captured after his second shoot-down in six months. A short time later another POW was brought in. He was Maj Ray Merritt, another flight commander from our squadron. Ray had diverted to provide RESCAP for Col Risner, and had been shot down himself. In the small cellblock we now had five men from the same squadron. We were able to exchange information and in general terms, agree on a cover story.

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

In October, I had a couple of interrogations, or "quizzes" as we called them. The atmosphere was becoming more threatening. I was determined to avoid giving anything other than the required Geneva Convention information for as long as possible. It was a very difficult time for me as I was feeling guilty for what I knew my family must be going through. Also, living alone in a dark room for over 23 hours a day, not to mention the hunger and thirst, was very demoralizing. Were it not for the ability to communicate with one another, things would have been much worse. I was in an end room and used Morse code with the man next door, Ed Davis. He was my only contact for two months. I actually reached the point that

I was dreaming in Morse code! I dreamed primarily of family, food, and escape!

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

The V then published camp regulations, which were about ten rules, all of which boiled down to the fact that they considered us not POWs, but war criminals. We were to do anything they said, or else we would be punished. This began the systematic torture that would last for about the next 4 1/2 years.

They would start at one end of the camp and work their way through everyone. First they wanted us to answer all questions. Then they'd want us to write the answers. Then to sign the answers. Then they wanted biographies. They tortured people to coerce "good treatment" statements, propaganda statements, and lastly, the one we all feared most—war crimes "confessions".

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

The worst pain, however, occurred when circulation was cut off in the arms by the cuffs or ropes, and the nerves began to protest. I thought it felt like the arms were being thrust into boiling water. To my knowledge, when this was done properly (and they became very proficient at it) everyone found that they had a breaking point. The first time each of us was "broken", the guilt and remorse were devastating, but because we could communicate, we found that we were not alone. We were just human.

With guidance from some of the senior officers, our policy soon evolved to: "Don't give them anything for free", and "Drag it out as long as possible". Hopefully, the next guy would not have to go through it. All we asked was that each man try his best, and for many years, we all did.

In early December I was moved to a camp in the hills about 35 miles west of Hanoi, which we named The Briarpatch, or the "tick-tack-toe" camp. Here POWs were housed in nine

small masonry four-room huts, each within its own walled compound. Most prisoners lived alone, but a few of those captured earlier had a cellmate.

Again, the V began torturing individuals to answer questions, and I began to have more frequent quizzes, often late at night. Since the camp regulations declared us criminals, we could no longer salute, but were supposed to bow to the V, or be beaten. They had countered our "Be Military" strategy.

The V wanted to find POWs who would be intimidated enough to give information without being forced to do so. They wanted a turncoat.

Much of the quiz time was spent trying to teach us a glorious version of Vietnam history. They seemed to avoid any promotion of communism. I guess they knew we would not buy that, but they pushed their nationalism and right to independence! The two main interrogators at the Briarpatch were "Frenchy" and "Bug." We nicknamed all of the interrogators, usually trying to pick some prominent characteristic, quite often the names of animals, and usually as derogatory as possible.

Frenchy was fairly large and good looking for a Vietnamese. He could be quite charming. He was intelligent, and claimed to speak seven languages. His thick French accent earned him his name. He could also, when angered, turn into a raving, frothing at the mouth, shaking, stammering, almost out-of-control, madman. He could be very scary!

The "Bug" had eyes that stared off in different directions. He had buck teeth and hair that stood straight up like a caterpillar's. He was more controlled, but sneering, sinister, and vicious. They were both bad news.

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

My turn came on 15 January 1966. I was placed in handcuffs in my cell, and then on 3 February, put on half rations. The reduced food had no effect except to weaken me physically, and caused me to drop from about 140 lbs. to around 110. By that time I had learned to pick my handcuffs with a bent nail that I had found. I would do this at night under my blanket. Eventually the cuffs were put on twisted, and so tight that I could not get to my pick. To get my cuffs as tight as possible, the guards would force me to sit on a step, and place my arms on the step above, then they would stand on the cuffs and drive them down to the bone.

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

Over the next year I would go in the ropes, or tight cuffs, five more times. Our days were filled with terror, waiting for

our number to come up next. And there was the boredom of living semi-isolated. I created mental projects to occupy the time. In my head, I composed poetry, designed house plans, went on imaginary camping trips with my children, etc., and of course, reviewed my growing list of POW names.

Most time was spent communicating with the others in my hut. One man, peeking through a hole in his window shutter (drilled with a nail), could watch the entry gate into the courtyard. If a guard approached, he would "thump" a warning. If clear, we could have a four-way conversation for hours, using the tap code.

We discussed just about every subject imaginable, but mostly food. We were always hungry. Because of the high walls between buildings, communication hut-to-hut was quite difficult. Most information was passed when men were in adjacent torture rooms and were able to communicate a little. Occasionally POWs were allowed out to sweep the courtyards, or to chop wood for the cooking fire. Hearing this

one day, one of the men, Ensign Ralph Gaither, at great risk, called out,

"sweep code." The sweepers heard him and began to send information in code that could be heard all over the camp. Gaither was punished, but the V never caught on to this. We had our own camp newspaper!

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

The V had been talking about holding war crimes trials for the "Yankee Air Pirates", and they had "confessions" from many of us. Most of us thought this was a one-way ride, yet we were laughing and giggling like a bunch of schoolgirls with the excitement of having direct contact other Americans. We were not to talk, but by tapping code on the arm or leg of my partner, I found I was handcuffed to USAF Capt Ron Storz, the eighth American captured.

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

It was not quite that bad. That evening the sixteen of us, and thirty-eight from the Hilton were handcuffed together in pairs and paraded through the streets of Hanoi, to allow, as they put it, "the Vietnamese people to show their hatred for

us." They did a pretty good job of it, and before long, with the cadres riling the people with megaphones, we were being pelted with rocks, sticks, and bottles. The V tried to pull our heads down to make us bow, which we resisted. Some lost sandals and their feet were shredded by the broken glass and rocks. This lasted close to an hour, and as we returned to Hanoi Stadium the parade turned into a mob scene. The guards were trying to beat people off with their rifles, and the last dozen or so of us had to literally fight our way back into the stadium!

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

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

The following day many of us were asked what we thought of the night before. I told the Bug that I thought it was the most disgusting thing I had ever seen. Following my first torture I had changed my polite responses to the V. I was now very uncooperative. I refused to bow to the guards as I had done before, and told them that since they had tortured me, I now had no respect for them. They were the true war criminals. In the future, I would use that as an excuse for my lack of cooperation.

Three days later I was informed that I would get a roommate, and I was moved in with Ron Storz. Most of the others who had marched together also got roommates. As it often happened, something good came out of something bad. Also from the "Hanoi March Movies," the U.S. Government was able to identify about twenty Americans, a large number of whom had previously been reported as KIA.

Ron and I barely stopped talking enough to sleep a little for the next three nights. After living solo—ten months for me, and about fourteen for Ron—it was good to be face to face with a fellow American. I learned that Ron had been an Air Force advisor to a South Vietnamese regiment based at Hue. He was flying a trail reconnaissance just south of the DMZ in an 0-1 "Birdog" when hit by ground fire. He crashed into some trees just north of the Ben Hai River, which put him in North Vietnam. The V brought him, and the wreckage of his aircraft to Hanoi.

Ron was a very dedicated and patriotic officer. We got along extremely well, and became very close, probably more than most brothers. Ron was very religious, and hated bowing to the guards, as did I, just on general principles, so

After we collapsed onto the ground, all battered and bloody, one of the newer POWs, Cole Black, turned to his partner and asked, "Do you guys do this very often?"

we would refuse to do so until forced. At one point we were beaten with bamboo poles at least once a day for over a month. Ron was also very outgoing, and a good leader, so he was a fantastic communicator. He was very instrumental in passing along resistance information, and in getting the code to new prisoners. In the Fall of 1966 all prisoners were forced to choose who they would support, President Johnson or Ho Chi Minh. Because we had to write our answers, we all resisted, and again ended up in the ropes. Finally we chose Johnson!

By December 1966, some of the POWs thought they had developed arthritis. They had pain and stiffness in their hands and feet. These symptoms became worse, and were sometimes accompanied by severe edema of the feet and legs. The V finally figured out that most of them Beri-Beri, which is caused by a lack of Vitamin B. On 2 February 1967, the Briarpatch was closed and we were moved back to the Hanoi Hilton, into a new section we called Little Vegas. Here we were given a small loaf of French bread instead of rice, and the Beri-Beri eventually diminished.

Ron and I were placed in the Thunderbird cellblock. We soon established contact with CDR James Stockdale, who was acting as the senior ranking officer" (SRO), since Col Risner was still being isolated. CDR Stockdale was very instrumental in leading, providing guidance, and developing our resistance policy. He developed an acronym of "BACK US": B-Don't Bow in public; A-Don't accept Amnesty; C-Admit no Crimes; D-Don't kiss them good-by; and US-Unity over Self.

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

Following a brief one month move, 16 July-14 August 1967, to the Hanoi thermal power plant, which we called the Dirty Bird, we were moved back to room 7 in Little Vegas. There was what we called a "communication purge" going on at the time. The V were trying to stop all leadership, communication, and resistance. CDR Stockdale and many others had been severely tortured, and I believe that our names had come up, so we were returned to the Hilton.

On 21 August we were put in stocks, then set upon by the guards and beaten very severely. We were then taken out and tied up in shower stalls. Over the next three days, every time there was an air raid, which was about a dozen times per day, the guards would come out and kick and beat us again. We were tortured to tell who the leaders of the resistance were. After four sessions in the ropes, I finally stated that Ron Storz was the senior man in our room, (which they knew,) that he told us to resist, and we all agreed. Ron was badly injured and moved to a "Bad Guy" camp named Alcatraz, along with Stockdale and other seniors. Unfortunately, due to almost constant illness and abuse, Ron died there in April of 1970.

Orson, George, and I (now solo,) along with a few others, were moved back to the Dirty Bird, which was being bombed

fairly often. I guess we were expendable. We were kept in handcuffs about 23 hours a day. I became ill with an intestinal virus, could eat very little, and became very weak. I think my weight dropped to less than 100 lbs

On 12 October, George McKnight and George Coker escaped from the Dirty Bird. They made it about ten miles down the Red River toward the sea before they were captured the next day. They were tortured for some time, then sent to Alcatraz to join the other "hard liners".

On 19 October the Dirty Bird was closed, and we were moved back to the Hanoi Hilton. From 19 October to 20 November 1967 I was solo in the Golden Nugget, and I received some "shotgun" medical treatment which eventually cured my intestinal virus. I was given a handful of various pills to take in hopes that something would work!

From 20 November 1967 to 26 November 1968, I lived in the Desert Inn with Al Brudno, Bill Tschudy, and Jim Ray. The communications purge had put the fear of God into a lot of POWs, and communication in Little Vegas had almost stopped. With CDR Stockdale and other seniors moved to Alcatraz, our chain of command had been broken. My cell mates and I began a concentrated effort to reestablish it. We managed to pass the code to several new guys in Desert Inn, and got them in the loop, eventually contacting an Air Force colonel who was willing and able to take command. By flashing code, we were able to contact the adjacent Thunderbird. We were especially concerned when the V announced that they were releasing three American POWs from North Vietnam. We were forced to listen to tapes that these three made indicating that they were "anti-war", and were, "going home to work for peace". We felt that this was terribly wrong, and said this to the colonel, who put out a directive that no one should accept early release.

We worked very hard to pass this information. In the year that we lived together the four of us took great risks to help establish contacts. In one two-month period we made 102 notes. We passed 71, and destroyed the rest. None were intercepted, but we were caught and punished for communicating a couple of times. By November 1968, communication was almost back to normal.

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

On 28 November we four and a number of others were moved to a new camp 23 miles west of Hanoi near the town of Son Tay. I was placed in room #5 of the Cat House with eight others, one of whom was my former cellmate, Orson Swindle. Brudno, Tschudy, and Ray were next door in room #4, with four or five others.

The conditions at Son Tay were again primitive, and the treatment was still brutal. Here we did have pretty good communication. We could tap code between rooms, and flash

it to the other two cellblocks, the Opium Den and the Beer Hall.

Almost as soon as I arrived at Son Tay I began to have health problems, especially in the cold. I was later diagnosed as allergic to some trees in the region.

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

By the summer of 1969 my previous ill health, frustration with our feeble war effort, and my hatred for the V, had caused me to become even more uncooperative. Jay, Orson, & I were placed on the stool in leg irons for some infraction. Jay was returned to our room after about a week, but Orson and I suffered for about a month. Previously I had concluded that to punish one's self, by remaining on the stool with no sleep, was too self-defeating. It was better to risk the beatings and just lay down and sleep (usually about two or three in the morning), when I thought the guards were not too alert. I suspect that because of this, the last three weeks of this time my legs were pulled back and the leg irons were passed through the rungs of the stool so that the iron bar supported the weight of my legs on my shin bones. It was extremely painful. I reached the point where I could not walk, and had to crawl to the door when released for 15 minutes or so to pick up and eat my food. I believe the V became somewhat concerned about my condition, because I was allowed to return to my room by writing (another) apology to the camp commander for my "bad attitude." Orson did the same the following day.

In September of 1969, Ho Chi Minh died. In October the V announced a policy change. We would no longer have to bow to the guards. They said they were trying to improve conditions and we would no longer be needed for propaganda. Their friends in America, such as Jane Fonda, Ramsay Clark, and Wayne Morse, were helping them now!

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

At Christmas of 1969, four of us received packages from our families. I had not been allowed to write or receive any mail prior to this. In the package was a picture of my daughter and my son. It was quite a shock to see them now at 8 and 7 years old, not as I remembered them at 4 and 3. For the first time in captivity, I cried, and at least one of my cellmates joined me. We divided the contents of the packages as equally as we could, and then the trading began. It was great entertainment, listening to the bartering, and watching a value system evolve.

In the Spring of 1970 our water well was going dry. The cells were already blazing hot, and we were all suffering from heat rash, but there was not enough water to bathe properly. Surprisingly, the camp commander seemed concerned, and

agreed to let some of the POWs try to dig the well deeper. The open well was about 25 feet deep. We would lower a man down on a rope. He would dig and send the muck up in a bucket. Over a period of several days we managed to get another three or four feet deeper, which gave enough extra muddy water for at least a decent sponge bath.

On 14 July we were told to roll up our gear and we were moved to a new camp about 10 miles closer to Hanoi, which we named Camp Faith. Here the conditions and treatment were significantly better than at Son Tay. I believe the camp had been recently rebuilt to provide better conditions. The food improved considerably when we began to receive condensed milk and canned meat from the Soviet Union and China.

In September of 1970 I was allowed to receive and send (first time!) a seven line form letter. My wife's letter began, "Dear Wes, We are fine. Steve just got the cast off of his leg, and is doing just great." I wrote back, "What happened to Steve's leg?" When she received it, my wife knew for the first time that I was alive. About a year later I received her reply, "Steve broke his leg skiing."

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

Some of the US POWs were able to contact ARVN (South Vietnamese) POWs and were told that there had been some kind of commando raid. Within a week we heard Hanoi Hanna, on the Voice of Vietnam, complaining about the U.S. invasion of North Vietnam, where "Many prisoners had been killed." so we guessed it had been a raid on a POW camp. Later we found out it was Son Tay. The raid was beautifully executed. The raiders spent about thirty minutes on the ground and searched the camp, but there were no Americans there. Still, just knowing that we hadn't been forgotten was a great boost to our morale.

Being in the larger rooms now, although somewhat crowded, improved our situation. We were better able to organize our activities, have entertainment, hold educational classes, meet new people, etc. We soon had communication throughout the camp, and with other senior officers as well. Under the direction of Col Risner, CDR Stockdale, and the new SRO, Col Flynn, the 4th Allied POW Wing was formed, with a commander, executive officer, and wing staff. Each large building was organized as a squadron, with a commander, exec, and flight commanders. Committees were organized and many directives were issued (all of which had to be memorized, so memory banks were formed.) The V were very concerned about having so many men together in large groups, so initially they wanted us to get together in groups of

5 or less. Mostly, we just ignored this.

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

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

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

We always tried to hold some kind of a church service on Sundays. The men in room #7 had a very good choir (as we did in room #6.) Around March of 1971, feeling that the 5-man limitation was unreasonable, we began a "full-room" church service. As the guards arrived to take away Col Risner, and several others who were leading the service, one of the men, Bud Day, began to sing "The Star Spangled Banner." All of room #7 joined in, then rooms #5 and #6. Soon the whole group of American POWs were singing. We sang "God Bless America," and other patriotic songs and felt we could be heard half way across Hanoi. Again the riot squad arrived with fixed bayonets, and many men were placed in Heartbreak Hotel or moved to an outlying camp, under poor conditions, for several months.

I was one of those moved to Heartbreak, along with Navy LT(JG) Dave Rehmann. The conditions were miserable, and we were both sick much of the time. At one point I became so frustrated with the situation I decided to protest our conditions by shaving my head in a Mohawk-style haircut. That at least got me a quiz with the Bug. I explained that Dave and I were both sick, and that we needed to move to a better room. I was quite surprised when the Bug agreed—IF I would shave off the rest of my hair. I quickly agreed, amazed that I was not being punished. After shaving the rest of my hair, I was returned to Heartbreak to find that Dave and I had been moved across the hall from room #1 to room #7. Ken Fleenor had been moved from room #7 to room #1. That was not what I had in mind. The Bug had put one over on me! I felt really bad for Ken, as Room #7 was actually a little better than room #1, because it got a little sun. In our new room my condition improved, but Rhemann's got worse. On June 23rd, we were finally moved to room #6.

Eventually the V allowed the full church service, but told us not to sing too loud. About that time we decided to go on a

"letter moratorium," and we refused to write letters. We told the V that it was because all POWs were not allowed to write, and we were protesting the treatment. We knew it would be worrisome for our families, but felt it would pressure the V to improve our conditions. All but a handful of men went along with the program. Within a few months the V were practically begging us to write. After nine months we ended it, feeling it had achieved good results.

In March of 1972, President Nixon ordered the resumption of bombing all of North Vietnam. In mid May, 209 POWs from Camp Unity were moved north about 200 miles by truck to the vicinity of Cao Bang, near the Chinese border. The move took about 36 hours, and we named this camp Dogpatch. Being in a rural area, it was again more primitive. There was no electricity, so we were given small oil lamps to light our small huts. On the first night in our hut, one of the men entered a room with his dim oil lamp, and noticed some movement in the back of the room, so he called a guard who had a flashlight. They discovered a five foot cobra, which the guards killed, so we adopted the call-sign "Cobra" for our hut. Each of these huts had several rooms, each with a group of POWs. At night, both the cells and the huts were locked, but during the day, the cell doors were left open so we could move from room to room.

Since there was no bread in this camp, the V tried to compensate by frequently having water buffalo meat, which we called "Bully Beef." It was more stringy and tougher than regular beef, but quite tasty—at least by our standards.

The V increased their propaganda efforts. We were shown several movies, mostly propaganda, but one included a lot of scenes of Olympic sporting events (The Soviets always won, of course), but it was a welcomed diversion.

In November there was a big move within the camp. We figured out that we had been placed in huts based on our shoot-down dates. This was very good news as it suggested that some agreement with our government had been reached. The food improved and the V became somewhat friendly, talking about "when you go home", and "our countries will be friends," etc. It was obvious that something was going on.

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

On 20 January 1973, many trucks rolled into camp, and on 21 January, 208 POWs were transported from Dogpatch, in broad daylight, back to Hanoi.

Sadly we found that Marine WO John Frederick, a former cellmate who had been captured in December 1965, had contracted typhoid fever. He died just months before our release. John was a combat veteran of WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, and the father of five children. On learning of his death, I cried for the second and last time in Vietnam.

Back in Hanoi we were again housed in buildings according to our shoot-down date. A few days later the V called us out

into the courtyard and read us the end of hostilities agreement that had been negotiated, however they omitted the part which described the terms for releasing POWs. They immediately started talking about cease-fire violations, and said that we would not be going home.

However, the V really began pouring food into us, and delivered many packages from home that they had been holding back. We were allowed outside sometimes to visit with other rooms. Many of us had the opportunity to finally meet men with whom we'd communicated for years, but had never seen.

After a few more days I was again moved to an area in New Guy Village. Here I met a number of the newer shoot-downs, mostly B-52 crewmen, including three who were more seriously wounded. Two of them, Jim Cook and Tom Klomann, each had 3 broken limbs, and the third, Roy Madden, had a broken thigh. Initially, Quincy Collins and I volunteered to take care of the three, but after about two days, we found it to be so demanding that we recruited others, and we all shared four shifts per day.

The two most seriously injured were often delirious. They also had large, infected, open wounds, 3-5 inches in diameter on their posterior, which left the tip of the tailbone exposed. We were puzzled by this, wondering if they had in some way been injured when landing in their parachutes. Later, doctors at Clark AB, told that these were bed sores caused by a lack of circulation, a result of lying on a stretcher for several weeks. None of these men would eat much of the Vietnamese food so we fed them mostly from our packages. They were all improving when the V decided to take them to the hospital to have new (clean-looking) casts put on. In the process, Roy Madden's leg was re-broken, and the circulation was cut off to one of Jim Cook's legs. Both had to have a leg amputated when they returned home.

Several of the POWs were called out and told that when we got home, we must not "slander" the Vietnamese people, or the V would release our confessions and our government would punish us. The POWs replied that our government, and the whole world, would know how these "confessions" were obtained, and would condemn the North Vietnamese for their war crimes.

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

On the evening of 11 February, a group of us were taken out and issued a new set of civilian-looking clothes. The next morning we were loaded on busses and taken to Gia Lam Airport. We crossed the Red River on a pontoon bridge, and could see that the Doumer Bridge had been destroyed. We were placed in a hangar for about an hour, then got back on the bus, which took us to the ramp, where a table was set up.

As previously planned, we formed up in ranks and marched

to the exchange point. As our names were read, we were met by an Air Force colonel in his blue uniform. We noticed how sharp he looked, compared to the V in their wrinkled, ill-fitting, uniforms. We exchanged salutes, then were escorted to the first C-141. Once inside, we were greeted warmly by flight nurses, and fellow airmen. We were still rather subdued, not quite believing that this could really be happening. When we actually got airborne and the gear came up, we had a tremendous celebration, with a lot of cheering and shouting. Again, when the pilot announced that we were "feet wet" and out of North Vietnam airspace, we went wild. We realized that our dream of "Freedom Day" had finally come true!

Our arrival at Clark Air Base in the Philippines was also very moving. As I stepped out of the aircraft I was amazed to see what appeared to be thousands of people waving flags and banners saying, "Welcome Home," and other cheerful slogans. We were bused to the base hospital and checked in. I was assigned a room with another early shoot-down, Phil Butler. The first thing I did was to take about a twenty minute hot shower, scrubbing myself with real soap. It felt wonderful!

Each ex-POW was allowed to make a phone call to his family, but only after meeting with his escort officer to be briefed on his "family situation." Fortunately, I found out that my family situation was unchanged, except for the death of one aunt.

When I spoke to my wife I was quite reserved. What do you say to a wife you haven't seen in seven years? "Hi honey, I'm home?" I had thought maybe I should wait until I had completed my debriefing and physical to meet my wife, so I could give her my full attention, and find out about the children before I met them. But she very quickly put me at ease, and said "Don't worry Wes, everything is fine. The Air Force has it all set up, and we'll meet you at Travis." Although I still had some reservations, I felt better.

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

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

This was quite a shock to me, because I had no idea the airline had grown so much. Later, the C-141 crew also said that they had received a call saying that my family wanted to meet me on the ramp at Travis, as I deplaned, if that was OK. Again, who was I to argue at this point? The crew invited each

of us to tour of the cockpit, and I got a good look at the Golden Gate Bridge as we approached Travis AFB. What a beautiful sight!

As I got out of the aircraft, I saw Faye in a great-looking red, white, and blue outfit, and the kids were much bigger than I had expected. I didn't know who to hug first, so I just grabbed them all. At the terminal I also met my parents who had been flown down from Spokane by the Air Force. We had a nice visit, and I introduced them to some of my friends.

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

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

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

About this time I learned that a former cellmate had committed suicide. He had come to believe that his wife had been unfaithful, and was depressed by the anti-war sentiment in the U.S.

Over the next two months, through contacts with some of my friends at Northwest Airlines, I learned that my seniority number (428 out of 1550) could provide a very significant career opportunity, which I should investigate. An appointment was made for me to meet in Minneapolis around mid-May with NWA executives Messrs. Nyrop and Hockbrun. It had been thirteen years since I had worked for Northwest, and eight years since I had flown as pilot-in-command of an aircraft. I expected that I would be about as welcome at Northwest, as a case of smallpox!

As it turned out, I couldn't have been more wrong. Mr. Nyrop immediately put me at ease. He merely asked me what I would like to do. I replied that I would like to return to flying. He explained that I would need to pass a physical at the Mayo Clinic, which I expected, and if I was OK, they would put me

in their "Cub Captain" program, which they felt had been quite successful.

I hadn't expected this. I thought they would want me to fly as a first officer for a year or so, which I would not have considered unreasonable. I was pleasantly surprised. An appointment was made for me at the Mayo Clinic, and within a few days I was notified that I had passed. Mr. Nyrop had, on several occasions, assured me that I could take all of the time I needed before returning to work. I arranged to move to Minneapolis, and to separate from the Air Force on 17 August. Three days later I began ground school to check out as a Northwest B-727 Captain.

I was very much aware that, to my knowledge, what I was doing had never been done before, and I wanted to set a good precedent for others in a similar situation. Fortunately, I don't believe this has happened to anyone else.

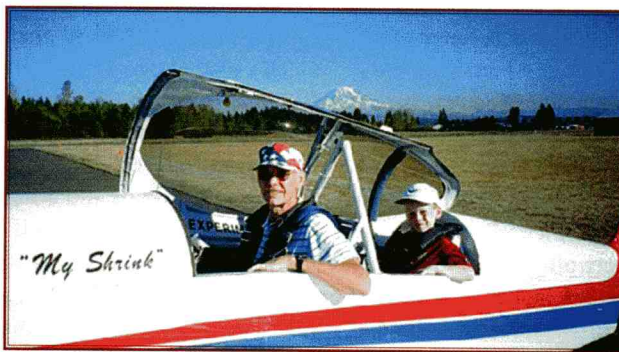
Thanks to the great training department at Northwest, my ground and flight training, while not always easy, was a pleasant experience (Well, for me, but maybe not for the instructors!)

Kenny Kreitzman and Bill Hampton skillfully nursed me through ground school (No small feat!) Ed Johnson supervised my simulator and flight training, and I flew my first Cub Captain line flight in November with Paul Sorenson watching over me. He was followed later by Tom Dummer, Ralph Ferry, and Billy Brown, all outstanding people to work with. In my opinion, my return to Northwest could not have been handled better. I flew the B-727 for about seven years, the DC-10 for two, and the B-747 for thirteen, retiring in 1995.

In April of 1988, I bought a RV-4, experimental kit-plane, which was about 95% completed. In October, I flew it for the first time, and began flying formation with a friend, Marty Foy, who had built his own RV-4. Since then we have trained other pilots to fly formation. We currently have 28 pilots who have similar aircraft, and who are qualified to fly close formation. We have great fun at local fly-ins, trying to "shoot each other down," and that sort of thing.

I feel very fortunate to have had something of a career as a military pilot, an airline pilot, and now a general aviation pilot. **SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME !**

EPILOGUE: Wes and Faye currently live in Everett, Washington where they enjoy spending time with their three children and three grandchildren. Wes continues to fly formation with the "Blackjack Squadron," and is quite active in a number of military and flying related organizations.



Wes Schierman today with his grandson- and his RV.