

VOICES FROM THE DARK

by Lee Humiston & Friends

4th ALLIED POW WING



Vietnam
1964 to 1973



"SPOOK"



"RABBIT"



"SPOT"

McGee
1955

A FOREWORD

by
B/Gen. Robinson Risner, USAF (ret.)

POW 09-16-65 to 02-12-73

As I read "Voices From The Dark," it took me back to the years of inhumane treatment of the American fighting men by the Communist North Vietnamese. Most of these poems were composed in a dark and dirty 7 x 7 foot cell and came from the deepest depths of these brave men.

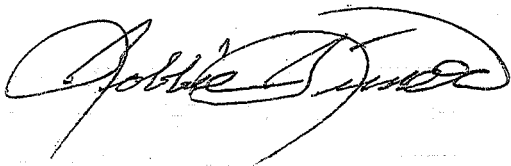
Despite the pain, loneliness, and despair, it was raw courage, faith in God, and love of country that enabled them to successfully resist the enemy's attempts to brainwash and use them. Because of these natural attributes of the American fighting man, the communist Vietnamese efforts were futile.

In spite of the depraved treatment the American POWs had experienced, some for as long as nine years, they came home with their heads held high, proud to have served their country as warriors and POWs.

Since this is a book of poems, I felt this one describes my shootdown and represents many of the other pilot's final moments as free men.

**I was on a combat mission,
While flying fast and low,
When enemy guns opened up ahead,
I saw their tracers glow.
Their steely arms reached out their hands
To claw me from the sky.
Their fingers tore my plane's heart out,
I felt it gasp and die.**

I feel that anyone who reads this book will get a vivid look into the hearts of American fighting men.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robt. Risner", with a stylized, flowing script.

A FOREWORD

by

V/Adm. Jeremiah Denton, USN (ret.)

POW 07-18-65 to 02-12-73

Deprivation, severe deprivation, strongly excites the mind. Poetry is often the result of such excitement in the case of good minds, particularly the deprivation of food, of freedom, of happiness has motivated the victims to write poetry which tends to be the very best quality of intellectual expression of which the individual author is capable.

Indeed, famous examples have been produced in classic literature. Among these examples is the Nobel Prize-winning poetry of Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996). Brodsky shared much of the same kind of deprivation P.O.W.s in Vietnam experienced.

Krushchev arrested him in 1963, accusing him of holding a "world view damaging to the state." After a long period at slave labor in Siberia, he was "asked" by the government to leave the Soviet Union.

Returning to freedom in the West, he accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetry. Much of it was written during his incarceration, but some was written before his incarceration, thus helping cause his incarceration.

Brodsky has a leg up on us P.O.W.s, I believe, in that he was born into the evil system, but had the guts to oppose it to the point of infuriating the system's overseers. By his bravery he induced his own punishment - yet prevailed with honor.

We had to be captured by the system and in reaction to our conditions, wrote our poetry and displayed our honor. On the other hand, we were serving a good system of government, supporting our beloved country rather than opposing it as Brodsky had to do. He and we both supported truth, right, and freedom. But our task was a bit easier because we were supporting our system and being supported by it. Both he and we wrote our poetry in the inspiration of our situations.

So mankind advances against tyranny by both those who oppose it from within and those who oppose it from without. This brand of valor earns poetry written by those who appreciate that valor.

Lee Humiston's dedication of this book and his actively manifested appreciation of P.O.W. valor are his response in a kind of poetry. For that we thank him. In that we are bonded in poetry.

INTRODUCTION

In 1964, LtJg. Everett Alvarez was shot down and became America's first pilot prisoner of war in North Vietnam. Many more would soon join him in what became this country's longest and most costly war. Not only was the war costly in material, but in the lost lives and broken bodies of hundreds of thousands of this nation's young men. Eight years would pass and over five hundred men would spend years of their lives rotting away in North Vietnamese prison cells until someone had the courage to do what it took to end the war and bring them home. Not just home, but "Home With Honor." President Richard Nixon was that man. His Christmas bombing campaign in 1972 accomplished in two weeks what had not been done in the preceding eight years.

At no time since the American Civil War has our country been so divided over an issue as it has been about Vietnam. Even today, thirty-two years after it ended , arguments still rage as to what the right course of action should have been. I believe a hundred years from now people will be debating America's first failed war and still have no clear answers. What is clear is such a protracted and debilitating war would never have happened had the military been allowed to do it's job free of political intervention in 1965, as it was in December of 1972.

There are no good wars and Vietnam was a particularly ugly one. However, as there always seems to be, there was a silver lining for the nation. It was called "OPERATION HOMECOMING." Ask anyone old enough to remember the war and unequivocally they would tell you the one truly good memory they have of those terrible years is the return of our P.O.W.'s. People were glued to their televisions from one end of the country to the other, all hours of the day and night, until the last man was off the plane and once again home with their families as free men.

When I began to gather together a collection of P.O.W. uniforms and artifacts for a future permanent museum to illustrate the P.O.W. experience in Southeast Asia, I also obtained books written by the P.O.W.'s themselves. In several of the books I discovered some wonderful poems which I enjoyed immensely. When I called to ask permission to use them in a series of backdrop frames for the display I was informed there were a lot more poems out there. Most had not seen the light of day since they were composed and many had never been published in any form. With the zeal now familiar to most of my NAMPOW friends I began tracking down these budding poets! Soon I had over eighty poems in my hands. It was obvious I had far more than I could use as backdrop material. The problem I faced was how to choose which of these poems to leave out. They were all so wonderful. I would like to say I had a stroke of genius, but the plain truth is common sense dictated there was no other choice than to share them all by publishing a book.

Now, as was the case with the Nixon Library display and the Dallas NAMPOW Silver Anniversary reunion, I had a mission. One, unlike my ultimate goal of a permanent Vietnam P.O.W. museum, which could be accomplished now, not in the distant future. Back to the phones and E-mail I went to obtain introductory information for each poem and maybe shake a few more loose. Things began to come together with each contact. Drew Cottril, a River Rat, offered his fantastic POW/MIA poster for my use as the book cover. Robbie Risner and Jerry Denton agreed to do the foreword for me. Mike McGrath and Jerry Coffee donated their art work to use in any manner I thought best. As you will see when you read through this book, it is uncanny how many of their drawings matched up to so many of the poems. As a centerpiece for the book I chose to use some color photographs of my display in the Nixon Library. These are to give the reader an idea of how the P.O.W.'s lived and of their incredible creativity in other areas besides poetry. I now had the poems, the art work, the center piece, a wonderful foreword, and a book cover. I had a book. Mission accomplished!

I have made no attempt to comment on the Vietnam War as to it's merit, right or wrong, but simply to show it from the perspective of those who fought it in a different way. Men who faced their Code of Conduct up front and personal. Not from the abstract view of a class room or in a survival school exercise, but in the knobby-walled room of Hoa Lo prison and in the jungle cages of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as well as the prison in Peking, China. These poems are theirs, composed as they lived them, under circumstances still unimaginable to most of us. The poems will take you from the depths of their despair that was captivity in 1965 North Vietnam, to the terror of the Hanoi Parade of 1966, to the growing hopefulness of the 1970's, and finally to their ultimate triumph in 1973, when they stepped off the C-141 at Clark AFB in the Philippines as free men.

I hope this book will be equal to their expectations and live up to their Code of Honor. I have spent the better part of my adult life striving to put together something worthy of the honor due these American heroes. I have endeavored to do that here and believe I have done so. This book is a legacy for their children and grandchildren. Perhaps through these pages we may be better able to understand a little something of the price these men paid in our nation's behalf.

Lee Humiston

When reading these poems, I feel it is important you, as the reader, get an idea of just where these wonderful words were written. Not in a cozy den years after the war, reflecting back on those terrible times, but in dark, filthy, dank cells such as this actual photo of one of the cells from the area of Hoa Lo prison the POW's dubbed NEW GUY VILLAGE.

New Guy Village was the incoming area for newly captured POW's and it gave them their first taste of the concept of "humane and Lenient treatment" their North Vietnamese captors were about to inflict upon them. There would be worse places, if one can even imagine anything much worse than these, but this will set the stage.



This is an actual set of Camp Regulations which was smuggled out in 1973 and given to me for my displays. It is one of the last versions issued by the North Vietnamese. There were several different versions, one of which I have at the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. Another version yet is with my display at the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington, DC.

CAMP REGULATIONS

-American servicemen participating in the war of aggression by U.S. administration in Viet-Nam and caught in the act while perpetrating barbarous crimes against the Vietnamese land and people, should have been duly punished according to their criminal acts; but the Government and people of Viet-Nam, endowed with noble and humanitarian traditions, have given those captured American servicemen the opportunity to benefit a lenient and generous policy by affording them a normal life in the detention camps as practical conditions of Viet-Nam permit it and conforming to the situation in which the war is still on.

-Detainees are to observe and carry out the following regulations of the camp:

- I- Detainees must strictly obey orders and follow instructions given then by Vietnamese officers and army men on duty in the camp.
- II- Detainees must be polite towards every Vietnamese in the camp.
- III- Inside the detention rooms, as well as outside when allowed, detainees must not make noise or create noise. Quarrel and fighting between detainees are forbidden. In time of rest, total silence is imposed.
- IV- Detainees must not bring back to detention rooms any object whatsoever without the camp authorities permit it.
- V- In case of sickness or sign of sickness is felt, detainees must immediately inform the camp for the medical officer to check and cure.
- VI- Detainees must assure hygiene of the camp, take care of personal items provided by the camp as well as of any other thing for collective use.
- VII- In case of air alarm, detainees must keep order and silence, and follow the camp regulations on security.
- VIII- In need of something, detainees must address themselves to Vietnamese army men standing nearby by announcing two words "BÁO CÁO" (means "report"), and should wait if no English-speaking people was available yet.
- IX- In the detention rooms, every detainees are equal with each other. Anyone does have the right to free thinking, feeling, praying etc... and no one is permitted to coerce any other into following his own opinion.
- X- Violation of the regulations shall be punished.

THE CAMP AUTHORITIES

RISNER'S RULES

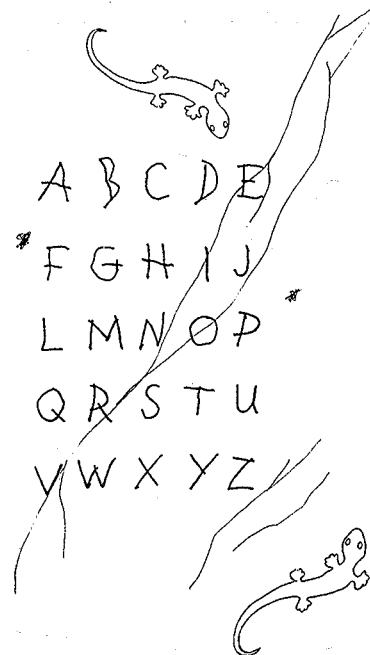
- 1.) Don't bow in public.
- 2.) If forced to write, write 6th grade.
- 3.) Once each day, face the east and pledge allegiance to the flag of the U. S.
- 4.) Before going to bed at night, say the 23rd Psalm.

These rules were given to Major Ken Hughey by 1st Lt. Ron Mastin using the tap code method through the walls of their adjoining cells in the "Thunderbird Inn" section of the infamous Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi, North Vietnam. We know it as the "Hanoi Hilton".

Major Hughey had just come from the "knobby room" (sometimes referred to as the "green room" or as "room 18") and was at the lowest point of his life, to the point of being suicidal. He credits General Risner's rules as being spiritually uplifting as well as reminding him of his heritage and duty. To this day he believes they helped get him through the ordeal of being a prisoner of the North Vietnamese and to bring him, "HOME WITH HONOR."

Col Ken Hughey, USAF
POW 07-06-67 to 03-04-73

Lt Col Ron Mastin, USAF
01-16-67 to 03-04-73



THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

**I pledge allegiance to the flag
Of the United States of America
And to the republic for which it stands
One nation, under God, indivisible,
With Liberty and justice for all.**

THE 23rd PSALM

**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of
Righteousness for His names sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
Shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for Thou art
With me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence
of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
Days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the
LORD forever.**

Robbie Risner was one of the early SRO's (Senior Ranking Officer) in Hoa Lo prison. He was captured on 9-16-65 after being shot down on an "Iron Hand" mission. It was the second time he had been shot down, but this time his luck did not hold and he couldn't be rescued. He would remain a prisoner for almost 7 1/2 years until he was released on 2-12-73. Robbie had been an Ace in the Korean war, shot down 8 enemy MIG's and was already an Air Force icon..

In early 1965 he had been shown on the cover of Time Magazine with the inside story touting him as the epitome of the American fighting man. The North Vietnamese knew all about him before he was captured and very badly wanted to get their hands on him. When they did, he paid the price in spades. Robbie was among the most tortured of the prisoners of the Vietnam war. He once endured 365 straight days of torture and another period of 10 months locked alone in almost total darkness. I still tend to call him Job for how he managed to endure so much and yet come home an unbroken man.

Robbie was, and is, an inspiration to us all. He has been honored with a 9 foot tall statue at the USAF Academy and an annual award in his name is given to the top student at the Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB in Nevada.

As with so many others who know him, not only do I stand in awe of Robbie, I am honored beyond believe he deigns to call me friend.

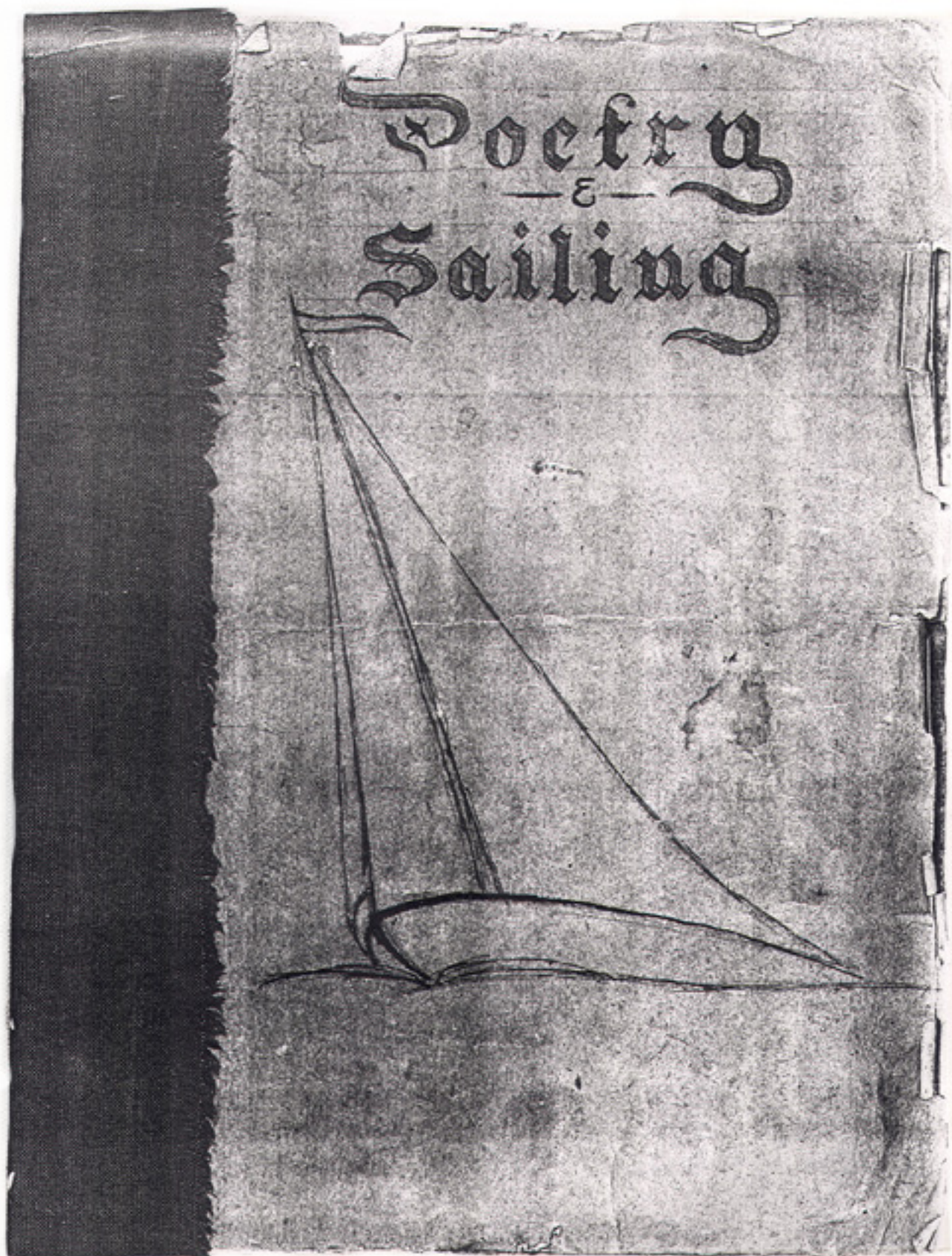


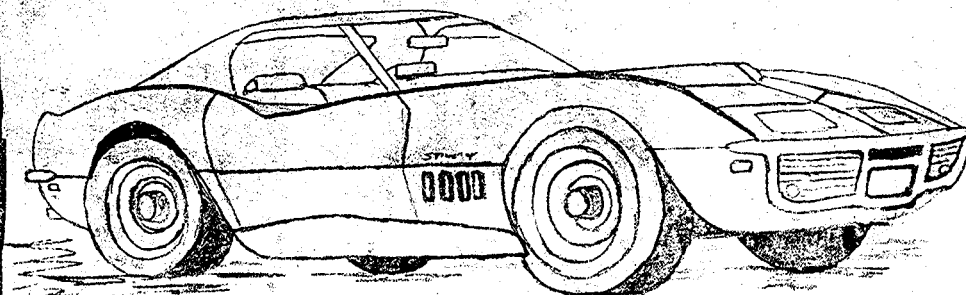
This photograph was taken sometime after the Paris Peace Accords had been announced to the POW's. As part of the agreement that the order of release would be by shoot-down date, the North Vietnamese re-aligned the POW's into cells in that order. The photograph shows the two most famous seniors, Robbie Risner and Jim Stockdale in a cell together. In the cell next to them were several 1965 shoot-downs, along with the little dog Maco, which Ed Davis, (furthest to the right in the photo), would smuggle onto the plane and bring home with him.

The others in the photo from left to right are, Skip Brunhaver, USN, captured 08-24-65, Dick Bolstad, USAF, captured 11-06-65, Unknown, Cole Black, USN, captured 06-21-66, Jon Reynolds, USAF, captured 11-28-65, Ed Davis, USN captured 08-28-65. All would be going home on the first planes out on 02-12-73. THREE'S IN...



One of my favorite P.O.W. artifacts is a hand made book titled Poetry & Sailing. It was given to me by Collie Haines who received it from Ralph Gaither. The book is a compilation of stories, drawings, and poetry done in prison by a variety of guys as best he could remember them. It is a fantastic body of work considering where it was made and under what conditions. The following samples will give an idea of their talent.





Corvette

PRICES:

\$ 4,871 HARDTOP
4,528 RAGTOP

SPECS:

WHEELBASE 98.0"
OA LETH 182.5"
" WIDTH 69.0"

ENGINES

300 HP 350 CI STD
350 " " " 131.68
390 " 427 " 221.20
400 " " " 326.55
435 " " " 437.10

TRANSMISSIONS

3 SPD MAN STD
4 " " (REG OR CLOSE)
184.80

TURBO HYDRAMATIC WITH
350, 390, 390 OR 400 HP
221.80
WITH 435 290.40

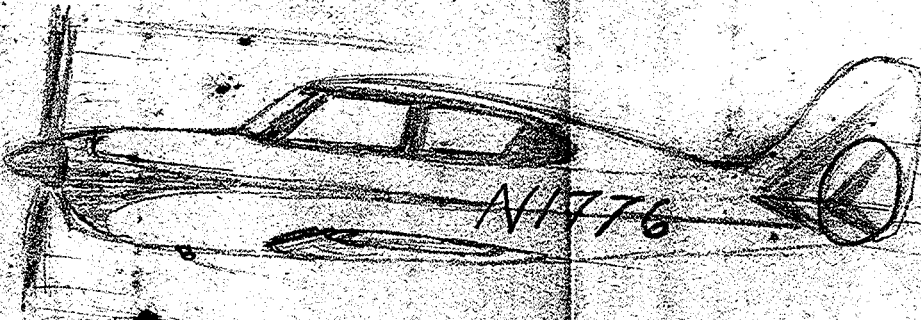
OPTIONS:

\$ 105.35 PWR STEERING
42.15 " BRAKES
63.20 " WINDOWS (2)
STD DISC BRAKES
172.75 AM - FM RADIO
278.10 " " STEREO
428.70 AIR COND
84.30 TILT/TELESCOPING STEERING
28.15 WHITE STRIPE TIRES
16.90 SOFT RAY GLASS

\$ 1146.85

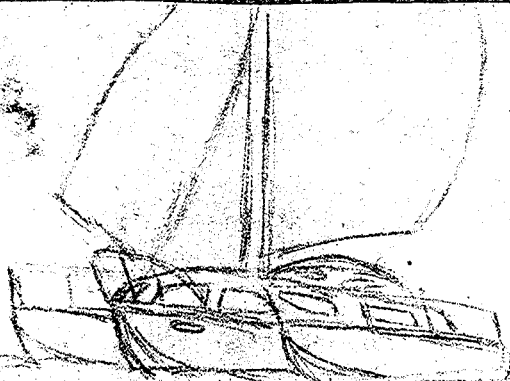
total w STEREO RAD

HARDTOP + 4 SPD MAN + 400 HP + ALL OPTS = \$ 6429.20
(NO AIR) " + TURBO + 435 HP + " " AVAIL = 6316.65



BELLANCA CRUISAIR

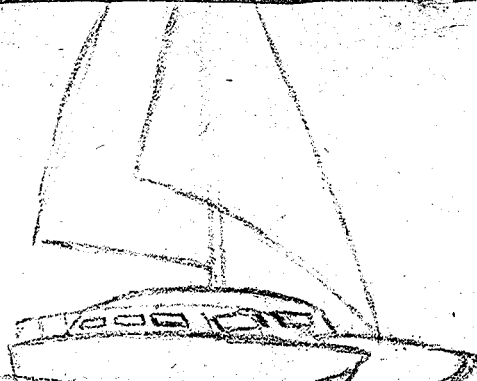
HP	TAS	COST	REMARKS
150 FRANK	145	2650 TO	AEROMATIC PROP
160 FRANK	150	3200	2 WOOD WING; FABRIC STEEL TUBE FUSELAGE
180 LYC	160	3000 UP	CONSTANT SPEED PROP
225 CONT	195	6000 UP	TRICYCLE GEAR FIBERGLASS COVER
265 CONT	205	6000	FUEL INJECTION 1800 RPM ROC \$18,500 NEW LAST BUILT 1964



SYMMON'S 33' TRIMARAN

LOA 32'8" DRAFT 3'
 LWL 28'6" DISP 6,160
 BEAM 18'8" SLEEP 6
 GALLEY/HEAD CABINS 2
 HEAD RM 6'6"
 AUX ENG OPT
 SAIL 362 \$16,995

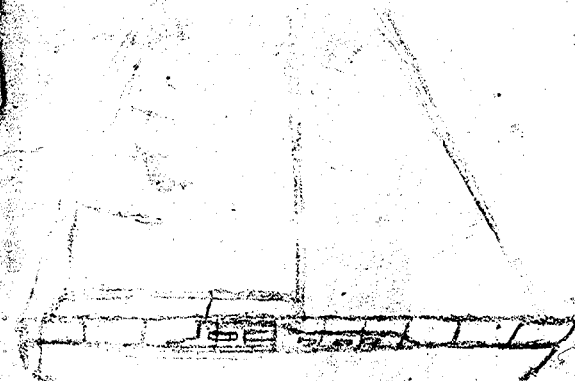
BUILT NEW YORK



IROQUOIS MK II CATAMARAN

LOA 30'6" DRAFT 5'4"/1'4"
 LWL 26'9" SAIL 362
 BM 13'6" HEAD/GALLEY
 OUTBOARD OPT.
 SLEEP 8 CABINS 5
 FIBERGLASS / ALUM SPARS

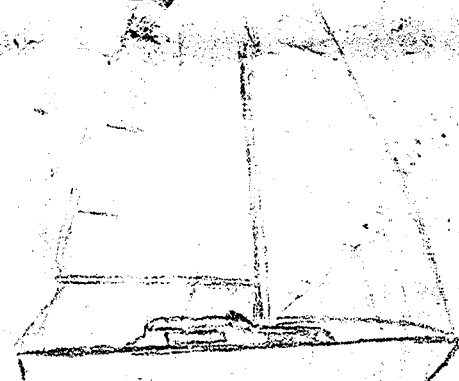
\$15,495



OLYMPIC 40

LOA 40' DRAFT 5'8"
 LWL 28'1" DISP 20,000
 BM 10'11" BALL 7,200
 SLEEP 6 / 3 CABINS / 6'2 HD RM
 GALLEY / HD / DIESEL
 754 SAIL AREA

\$35-39,000



IRWIN 23 ST PETE, FLA

LOA 23' DRAFT 5'4"/2'5"
 LWL 18'6" SAIL AREA 256
 BM 8' NO HEAD
 GALLEY STD
 4/3 OPT DISP 3200 / 1500 WCB
 SLEEP 4 / 2 CABINS

\$4,495

A Christmas poem from the book of Poetry & Sailing - Author Unknown

"DER NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS"

**Twass der night before Christmas, der house it ver still
Der stockings ver hung from der chimney to fill
Nutting ver moving in all of der house
In hopes der Klaus would soon come heraus
Der children ver tired and all gone to bed
Mit mudder in her nitegown and me on ahead
Ve vere searching der house for toys
Ve crept in der quiet nut to make any noise
Mudder ver carrying der toys in her gown
Exposing her person from der waist down
As ve passed by der crib of der boy
Our youngest, our sweetest, our pride und our joy
He opened his eyes und peeked from der cot
Und he seed all dat mudder had got
Vithout noticing der toys she's got un her lap
He asked for who is der little fur cap
Hush she said smiling with delight
I think I'll give it to your FADDER tonight!**

One of the first poems I received for the intended backdrop to the POW artifact display came from Pete Schoeffel. When I inquired if he might have more, he sent me "A Discouraging Word", a package he put together of all of his poems along with complete introductions to each one. Once I decided to expand beyond using the poems for the backdrop and write a book I had only to transfer his words into my work up.

Pete was a LCDR flying out of VA 15 in an A4-C when he was shot down on 10-04-67. By the time he was released in March of 1973 he had spent 1988 days as a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese.

A DISCOURAGING WORD

by

Capt. Peter vanRyter Schoeffel, USN (Ret.)

The following poems were composed not primarily to create a body of verse, but to fill the void of the endless days deprived of mental challenge. Of course, pencil and paper (or any other way of writing) were forbidden, so it was necessary to memorize the lines as they were composed, slowing the process of composition considerably and militating against improvement of barely acceptable lines. Having no background of the principals of composition of poetry, I wrote each as an experiment -- in rhyme scheme, meter, or format.

I present them more for what insight they may give into a POW's frame of mind than for poetic value. The generally pessimistic viewpoint expressed in these, and in some which may be included at a later date, prompted the title of the collection. This, the first poem I worked up, came about under the following circumstances. In the summer of 1968 I had a "quiz" of a very threatening character. It was after I had been in solo for four or five months and was in a pretty shaky mental shape as far as having any great faith in myself or my ability to withstand the Vietnamese efforts to use me. The quiz seemed to me to be of a very high intensity, and the interrogator said he would use punishment that was longer in duration and more painful than any I had been subjected to before. This was to be done unless I changed my thinking about the U.S. role in Vietnam.

I had seen enough illogic in the way the communists (North Vietnamese) thought to make me believe that they were capable of doing just as they said, trying to force a man to change his thinking by using pain.

The quiz lasted three or four hours and went through a number of cycles of increasing intensity of threat. At the end I was thoroughly frightened and tired. The interrogator told me to return to my room, think hard about what he said, and he would see me again "soon." That was Friday afternoon. I was convinced he was going to see me again and resume the process. On Saturday morning I thought I would surely be called up for another "quiz". and I sat in my room dreading what was going to happen. The afternoon passed and no quiz, but I was certain that if I didn't have one Saturday, Sunday would bring it. Sunday was the same, and when Monday came I was beside myself, waiting for the quiz. Finally Monday morning I realized I had to do something

with my mind in order to get a grip on myself. I decided to try to make up a poem, something I had not done since high school days.

THE LESSON

Many are the thoughts the prisoner thinks of home,
Many are the memories gathered 'round,
And through the endless nights that he must spend alone,
How sweet to him remembered voices sound.

Happy scenes of childhood then does he recall,
And all the acts of loving kindness done
By those who sacrificed that he might stand more tall,
And live to seek the goals that they had won.

Then bitter his remorse he little showed his love,
And often turned a sullen face their way,
For all their loving deeds in recollection prove
He ne'er their love in fullness can repay.

What a foolish way to learn a lesson old
That calls us from the past in hallowed voice,
But if it must be so, 'tis better manyfold
To learn, and in that lesson I rejoice

This was written in December, 1968 when I had been in solitary for about eight months, but had not had much personal threat since summer.

When Christmas came in Hanoi, the Vietnamese used the occasion for all the propaganda they could obtain. They served a big, fine dinner and made a great to-do about it. The first verse refers to that.

Of course their basic outlooks didn't change just because of the season, and the POW's were being "punished" right up to Christmas Day itself. This is what the second verse refers to.

We had been hearing about a first agreement taking place in the Paris talks and thought perhaps something meaningful might come of them. For that reason some of us (myself included) were optimistic. This is what the last line is about.

CHRISTMAS IN HANOI

**The air turns chill near Christmas,
The end of another year.
The dinner will be "festive",
But bring us little cheer.
It's thoughts of those we left behind,
The ones we hold most dear,
That brings us warmth at Christmas,
And gives it meaning here.**

**The guards with stolid faces,
Their spiteful, childish ways,
The petty lies and brutal threats
Fill up our empty days.
But no humiliation
Can quench in us the pride
That's kindled by the kind of men
Who suffer at our side.**

**'Twas men like those beside us
Who made our country strong;
The nation that can mold such sons
Must know her greatness long.
The winter looms before us,
But spring will break it's thrall;
Our hearts have heard the first faint notes
Of freedom's distant call.**

The title of this poem is, of course, the motto of West Point, and I consider that it is the finest motto in military use. Although the meaning behind the three words was best expressed by General MacArthur in his farewell address to the Corps, I thought I would like to write something on the subject. I started out trying to write a sonnet, but was unable to express my thoughts within the constraints of the form, so ended with four quartrain.

DUTY HONOR COUNTRY

**There's an iron sound that's heard in Duty's name
And calls us sternly to what must be done,**

**And he who fails in heed of Duty's claim
Is outcast, whom all men will surely shun.**

**Honor has a sound of silvern grace,
Yet Honor forms the strongest shield e'er wrought.
Once tarnished, there's no deed that can replace
The luster that a life of service bought.**

**Our Country! Golden are the words that tell
Of vistas blessed by nature's open hand
Where men may all in peace and freedom dwell
Secure in brotherhood across the land.**

**The soldier who can make these words his own,
His duty, honor, serve his country's need,
Is forged of metal that's the brightest known,
Whose strength endures wherever fate may lead.**

I was still solo when I wrote this one. There had been some rumor among the POWs that someone had received a letter containing the phrase, "Have faith, hang on."

I liked the sentiment and felt that with a change in wording it would make a good motto for us. I liked the positivity of the thought and the fact it embodied an enjoiner, not a boast. I had wondered if I could write something with a refrain, so I decided to make the attempt using a refrain, "Have faith, hold fast."

THE CREED

**In bitter times a whisper came,
That seemed an easy thing to say,
But was to us a guiding flame
To light a long and weary way:
"Have faith, hold fast."**

**For often in the wracking gale
A hand may slip, may lose the yard,
Half senseless wash against the rail,
Yet sternly comes the word:
"Have faith, hold fast."**

Our gauntlet of contempt we fling
To those, a few, who paid no heed,
Who said it would not cost a thing
To spurn their mates, disdain the creed:
"Have faith, hold fast."

For those who fall, yet faith preserve,
And rise to take their place again,
They show the mettle of their nerve
And rightly gain the praise of men
"Have faith, hold fast."

Full many 'neath the tyrant's hand
Are standing, staring stark with shame
For having fallen. Yet they stand.
Their lips the silent watchwords frame,
"Have faith, hold fast."

And we who know the crackling pain,
The bitter burdens that they bear,
And fall beneath a lesser strain,
Take strength from them again to swear,
"Have faith, hold fast."

The captain holds, the crew is strong,
To each the call of honor plain.
Though days are dark and nights are long
They clearly hear the grim refrain.
"Have faith, hold fast."

The peril of the voyage past,
When we in harbor safely lie,
Still floating from our shattered mast
Aloft our tattered flag will fly,
"Have faith, hold fast."

In late 1969 I was again solo and again needed something to occupy my mind. I started thinking of verses of "Eternal Father", the Navy hymn. There are verses which cover the mariner, one slanted toward flying, and one for those in peril on the ground. I thought we needed one to refer to the realm of space. I wrote the verse of Eternal Father which relates to that. This is the second verse. I wrote another verse on a challenge from Col. Sam Johnson, another POW, with

reference to the prisoners of war. These are the first and third verses.

ETERNAL FATHER

Oh Lord, the hope of men in chains,
Who knoweth all the prisoner's pains.
In ancient times Thy sword's bright flame,
Hath laid the tyrant low in shame.
Stretch forth in mercy, now, Thy hand
To captives in a foreign land.

Oh Thou whose stars in countless flight
With awesome splendor fill the night,
The saving power of Thy love
Is boundless as the void above;
Then hear us when we seek Thy grace
For those in peril out in space.

Oh Lord, the hope of men in chains,
Thou knowest all the prisoner's pains
Again Thy people call Thy name
To send us from this place of shame.
Stretch forth in mercy, then, Thy hand
To captives in a foreign land.



In late 1970, we started living together in large groups, but in early 1971 we had trouble over the rights of the POWs to hold church services. Quite erroneously, the Vietnamese thought I was an instigator of the trouble, and I was sent to another camp. It was one of the most depressingly run down and unsanitary in the DRV.

In the fall of that year I became sick and was isolated from the others. So, again I needed something to occupy my mind and I looked for a subject for verse.

We were living in the worst, shoddy, neglected atmosphere imaginable, but we would often see the camp's officer-in-charge stride about with a proprietary air, taking great pride in that panorama of complete neglect, laziness, and decay.

I tried in the poem to describe some feelings on the generally hopeless prospect of the future that the Vietnamese had, being confined as they were by their political ideology and cultural background. I was also trying in this poem to use a rhyme scheme that interlocked from one verse to the next.

HANOI AUTUMN

No glory of gold is autumn here,
Its colors grey of sullen sun
And green slimed walls neglected through the year,
They give to passing time the lie
Of hope in stillborn prayer.

The moldered wall that rots devoid of care
Surrounds this garden of neglect
Where fly-clouded cans and weeds the bare earth share,
And, vacant-eyed, the guards collect
To squat in primal stance.

Those vacant eyes will fill when, by mischance,
To them perverted fun is shown,
A mouse to set ablaze in flaming dance,
Or battered pup whose whimpered moan
Does much amuse.

Then, monkey-like their toes curled 'round their shoes
They shamble off with toneless songs
That fade into strident din that spews
Incessant from the speaker throngs,
That carping, jealous voice.

Unknowing of the wealth they lose by choice,
As heedless of the fecal haze
That covers all, they're told they must rejoice
To pawn for this their numbered days
Bereft of human pride.

A microcosm of the land outside
this cell within a prison vast,
But holds enslaved, its formless hopes belied,
Their future, circling to the past,
Its ancient prospect drear.

During the winter of 1971, we had many physical health problems. In my room, for example, there was one man whose health was so poor he looked like a product of a Nazi death camp. We tried to get medical help for him, but his health continued slowly deteriorating. Depressed by that, the seeming unreality of the entire situation, and the sickness of the whole atmosphere, I wrote:

THE WATCHER

Death passes through in the courtyard,
And patient the gaze of his eye,
Touching a few in the courtyard,
Who feel his cold robes whisper by.

None there are now who will stay him,
Yet few who have not felt his hand
Touch them with pain to repay him,
And leave on their bodies his brand.

Silent he watches them sicken,
Their once flooding life ebbing slow,
And waits, for that tide will not quicken,
His darkening kiss to bestow.

He mocks them for times they have wasted,
Their memories of lives long since past,
As they long for the wines yet untasted,
Love's treasure they squandered, too fast.

Sneering he hears them pretending
Their hearts are not chilled by his breath;
Some, with their fantasies ending,
Will soon follow beckoning death.

Another POW, LCDR. Mike Christian, thought something should be written about a room which most of us know as the "knobby-walled room." The stucco interior was the site of painful ordeals for many a despairing POW.

THE KNOBBY-WALLED ROOM

The muffled moans have died, and they have gone,
To leave you there in dual pain.
The body's ache will fade with breaking dawn;
The soul's will never wane.

You lie in agony, forlorn,
Then pain recedes, and in the gloom,
Your vision dulled with self-despising scorn,
You stare about the room.

This is a room that legions sad have known.
Veneered with dirt, its stuccoed walls
Know well the cry of him who fights alone,
Despairing when he falls.

Here, twisted in a choking knotted hell,
You strove to save your broken pride,
And failing, heard its never-ending knell,
And mourned you had not died.

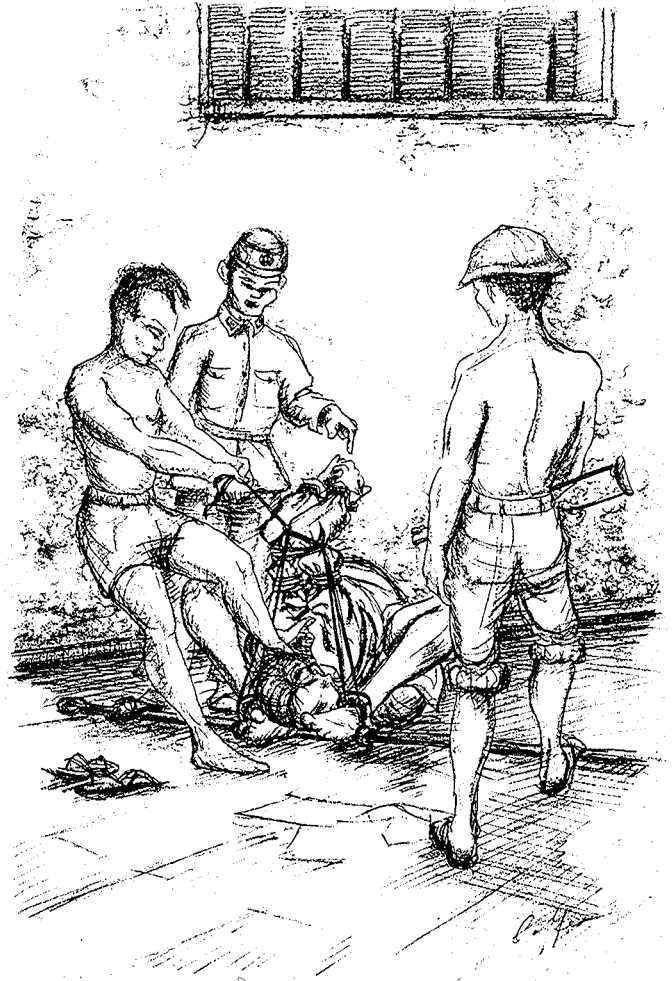
The hook you hung from seems to prophesy
Its threat of hours yet to come,
And this short respite will no solace buy,
For pity's voice is dumb.

In service of the misery of men,
Another sacrifice to make,
The priests of torment will return again,
Again their vengeance take.

You'll drown once more in seeming endless pain;
The rasping breath, the sobbing moan,
Familiar of this room will long remain,
And now they'll be your own.

A people's soul is seen in many things;
This sordid place symbolic stands,
The heart of darkness spreading somber wings
To stifle other lands.

Take heart; may this be comfort for your tears
Your pain will end and sound a plea,



Beseeching men that in the coming years,
No rooms like this may be.

After reading another prisoner's poems describing a beautiful natural scene, and admiring its imagery, I wondered if I could write a description of a situation similarly tied in with the impact of some aspects of nature. I wanted to express a love of country, and incorporate this thought into the poem.

ETCHINGS

Deserted streets now lie in silence rare,
Behind the lamplight, crouching, looms the dark.
Excited breath hangs silver in the air,
And blank-faced homes return the awestruck stare.
Of children taken sledding after dark.

Stark black and white against the living blue
In filigree is etched a birch's bough,
While on the sands stand pines in somber hue,
That, sighing ancient choruses anew,
With summer's peace the dreaming lad endow.

The mist is rising slowly from the lake;
A paddle's dripping breaks the morning still.
A man and boy forge bonds that never break,
And share in wonder watching nature wake
As slanting sunshine warms the morning chill.

The shattered rocks rent from the ragged shore
That tear the sea and fling it's fragments high;
Tormented trees whose tangled limbs implore
The seaborne winds to cease their pagan roar;
They teach a man his own defiant cry.

West of the plain the mystic mountains rise.
Though purple now in golden robes they rest,
And bounded but by ever wilder skies,
Awash in light a lonely eagle flies,
A mote of freedom following his quest.

**In sharpest shades, some simple scenes endure
That live by chance, their colors all unplanned,
And from them in my breast springs deep, obscure,
The welling tide that flows so clear and pure
To flood my heart with love for native land.**

This poem was written during a period of time when the political situation and war seemed to be without evidence of change, while on a personal level, a lot of us in camp were at a point in our service careers when normally we would either go on to success or give proof of not having a talent to do so. This aspect of that time, when, for many of us those years were crucial, seemed striking to me.

FATEFUL YEARS

**In the life of man there are years of his prime
When he kindles the guttering blaze
That lights up his path and brightens with time,
Giving meaning to all of his days.**

**Then when closing his days he examines his past
To say "Such were the works that I wrought.
From travail of those years my saga will last,
The tale my child's children are taught."**

**"For those were the years, having learned what I know,
Having seen what there was for my hand,
That I turned all my wile to nurture and sow
The seed of the harvest I planned."**

**"For then I was strong, and distant my gaze,
And then rang my words clear and true,
And driven by spurs shining brighter than praise,
Did I strain every muscle and threw."**

**"And the pattern I wove in life's tapestry fine
Shows to all how I stood in the strife,
For I took not my ease, did no burden decline;
I leave richer the treasure of life."**

From those years alone does a man's fortune flow
And make fertile the fields he will tend,
So, fruitful in labor, his harvest will grow,
And his realm will he ever extend.

But those years being lost, he's forgot by the fates,
Like a toy cast aside by a child.
Discarded by time, on a midden he waits,
His life's once clear purpose defiled.

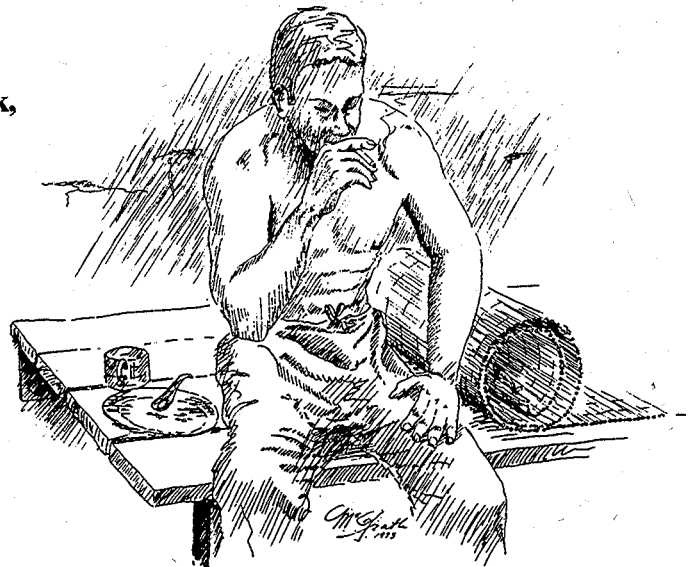
All stagnant he lies and in trifles is bound,
And the strength of his hand wastes away.
He sees but the trash at his feet on the ground,
And his words are a meaningless bray.

He lives in a past that prepared for a day
Now aborted, its child never born,
With a fatherless future whose glittering array
Is a wraith that recedes with each morn.

He passes his day in a pointless repose,
Leaves the forge fire's coals growing cold.
His ambition lies crushed by the weight of his woes,
And the years write no tales to be told.

Where his harvest should rise, yet unbroke lies the ground,
And his castle remains but a plan.
In the years yet to be, not a shard will be found
As the mark of the works of a man.

And what will he see when he closes his book
And finds his account in arrears?
All the pages are blank, tho' close he may look,
Where he reckons his most fateful years.



This is the last poem that I wrote. It was an attempt to do something else I hadn't done, express a dramatic episode of action. The situation I took is one of the most dramatic, both physical and emotional, in military life --- the night combat flight from an aircraft carrier.

NIGHT HOP

**The briefing's finished now, the lights are low,
And in the ready room will stillness reign.
The murmured words and scattered laughter show
The carelessness of careful men who know
The danger they disdain.**

**Then in metal tones remotely sounds,
"Now man your planes," a thin insistant cry
That send them, as the hunter to the hounds,
In haste to rise and seek aloft the bounds
That hold them from the sky.**

**And through the twisted caverns glowing red,
Where distant engines scream their hidden might,
They climb the iron heights 'til they have fled
The booming world below, as though in dread,
And burst into the night.**

**There on the rolling deck in half-lit glare,
Struggle straining knots of weary men
Who, little knowing glory, only share
The valor and the danger of the air,
And keep the hunter's den.**

**From the ramp to cats upon the bow,
Leaning on the wind they wait to tame
The spitting planes that harshly light them now,
And, screaming more than minds of men allow
Their menace do proclaim.**

**Slowly, then the planes prowl from the pack.
A dancing, wary shadow leads them out.
They stalk him as they creep along their track,
Like cats enraged, too puzzled to attack
His dimly glowing knout.**

Enmeshed in rubber, nylon, sweat, and sound,
The pilot curbs his beast as if in spite,
And strains to pierce the blinding night around,
As ragged clouds of spurting steam surround
The importuning light.

He creeps upon the cat to bounce in place,
And shadows dart beneath to bind him fast
And dart away! The howling swells apace.
The screaming beast is eager for the chase,
Aquiver in the blast.

A moment's pause, the pilot's final scan,
Then ready, red and green the lights aglow,
He shrinks his world into the narrow span
Of ghostly deck, and waits as best he can,
A wand that circles slow.

Deliberate as doom it arcs to leave,
Against a dim, descending trace,
Then after but a skipping heartbeat's heave,
Engulfed by power granting no reprieve,
He's hammered into space.

Another moment's lost before in flight,
The beast and pilot one in union merge,
Then foot by cautious foot he finds the height
That leaves his heartbeat easy in the night,
And beyond the verge.

He circles in the black and trackless sky;
His wingman joins, a dim and silent ghost,
Then on, into the endless night they fly,
Until, half-hidden below in cloud they spy
The faintly gleaming coast.

The coast behind, the arcing path they leave,
Is sudden knotted 'round a spitting flare.
In tangled loops the tumble to deceive
The lovely languid web the tracers weave
To spin a scarlet snare.

Then deep into the flare's unsteady bowl
They dip to leave a boiling on the ground.
The flare blinks out, and nights torn flesh is whole.
A scar remains, the slowly sinking coal,
Then in the dark is drowned.

His wingman's joined and feet are wet once more.
The fury and the flak are left behind.
The rack's are clean, and havoc's on the shore,
But fickle night, whose mantle once he wore,
Now hides what he must find.

They part to find the far and nameless place
Marked but by a gauge's spinning hand,
And locked within his groaning lonely case,
He drones into the void of formless space,
The world at twenty grand.

In fragile proxy does his world appear
Its outline sketched by meters, lights, and glass.
He attends to distant voices cold and clear
That speak remote and calm, removed from fear,
Whate'er may come to pass.

Insistant pointers pose in dim display
Each racing moment's yet unmet demands;
With eyes but for their changing red array,
He strains to hold the chiding voice at bay
With tensely speeding hands.

At last appears the ship, a seaborne star
That swims deceiving in the boundless black,
Then comes the line-up lights, a mirror bar,
The frantic power call, the numbing jar
That makes the eardrums crack.

He lunges forward, smashed against the straps,
And but by instinct jerks the power back,
Slaps in the boards, then the hook and flaps.
As he clears the landing zone his wingman traps
And taxis to the pack.

They follow yet another dancing light,
And creep to find their place along the bow,
Then nuzzle in the soft, dissolving night,
While far below, the bowwave, gleaming white,
Is crashing from the prow.

The moaning of the dying engine wanes,
And stepping stiff before a driving wind,
They dodge among the blindly charging planes,
Mistrustful of this realm where danger reigns,
And death has often grinned.

Now in the ready room the lights are high,
The movie's held, and coffee cups in hand
Their jokes and laughter over-loud belie
The careless mask that's worn by men who fly,
The breed's derisive brand.

What fascinates these men to make them go
Each night in search of her whom others shun,
To court the cold caress that pilots know,
The chilling kiss whose aftertaste is woe,
And all too often won.

Within they hold the pride that seems to bind
The men who pass a trial that others fail,
For they have looked on death, themselves to find,
And often for their eyes a glory shined,
Denied to those who quail.

Throughout an ever warring world they roam.
Their scattered ships on distant seas are tossed,
And few there are to mourn that day at home,
When they leave a lonely wreath upon the foam
To mark a comrade lost.

Another logbook entry green and red,
As soon forgotten as a moment's fear,
But you who rest each night secure in bed
Can easy sleep for those who oft have bled
To buy your freedom dear.



Capt. Peter Schoeffel, USN
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 10-04-67 to 03-04-73

Admiral Jeremiah Denton is a man of many great personal strengths. Among those strengths is his deep spirituality. He is a devout Catholic who even as a prisoner of war practised his faith daily under conditions so horrendous, few of us could ever imagine them.

In 1967, he was taken, along with ten other prisoners who had been singled out for special treatment, to a place of horrors Bob Shumaker dubbed "Alcatraz." It was as filthy, desolate, and despairing a place any American P.O.W. was ever held in North Vietnam. It was a place for incorrigibles, the "die-hards." It was to be Jerry's home for two terrible long years.

In the spring of 1968, to celebrate Easter, Jerry thought they should pray for a sign that they might be released from their agonizing ordeal. To help, he composed a poem he titled "The Great Sign." It was of a conversation between the three women who came upon the rolled back stone at Christ's tomb on the Sunday morning thirty hours after his crucifixion. The poem was to explain the desperate hopefulness the eleven of them still maintained alone in those tiny, dark, dank cells looking for a "Great Sign" which would relieve the pain and anguish they were suffering.

THE GREAT SIGN

Joanna, one of the holy women:

**His manger birth drew kings in awe,
His smile the former blind men saw,
In Him, divine and mortal merges,
Yet He's the one the soldiers scourged.**

Mary, the mother of James:

**He praised the humble and the meek,
The grateful deaf mute heard Him speak,
His face was love personified,
Yet He's the one they crucified.**

Mary Magdalene:

**Now our tears with doubts combine,
How could He die yet be divine?
We must dispel this faithless gloom,
Let's pray at dawn beside His tomb.**

Almost all of the men imprisoned in Alcatraz had an abiding faith in God. So, for Easter 1969, Jerry composed another poem for them. It was eagerly awaited by the others and Jerry took true joy in composing it.

LA PIETA

The soldiers stare, then drift away,
Young John finds nothing he can say,
The veil is rent; the deed is done;
And Mary holds her only son.

His limbs grow stiff, the night grows cold,
But naught can loose that mother's hold,
Her gentle, anguished eyes seem blind,
Who knows what thoughts run through her mind?

Perhaps she thinks of last week's palms,
With cheering thousands off'ring alms
Or dreams of Cana on the day
She nagged Him till she got her way.

Her face shows grief, but not despair,
Her head though bowed has faith to spare,
For even now she could suppose,
His thorns might somehow yield a rose.

Her life with Him was full of signs
That God writes straight in crooked lines.
Dark clouds can hide the rising sun,
And all seem lost, when all be won!

R/Adm. Jeremiah Denton, USN
Alcatraz, Hanoi, North Vietnam

**USS Independance, CVA 62 - October 17, 1965 - Gulf of Tonkin
Mission: Alpha Strike**

Ralph Gaither was twenty-three years old and a fighter pilot flying an F-4B with VF-84. His mission on this strike was to protect the bombers and to take out the flak sites. He had already flown some seventy combat missions. Although he had no way of knowing it, this was to be his last. He and his backseater, Rod Knutson, survived the shoot down, but they spent over seven years as prisoners of war of the North Vietnamese. They were released together at Gia Lahm airfield on 2-12-73.

Before he went on station in the Tonkin Gulf, Ralph met a young girl named Sonya Little, and he thought a lot of her. He composed over a dozen poems during his long years of imprisonment with the majority of them revolving around her and their possible life together when he came home.

When he got off the plane at Travis AFB, California in February, 1973, Sonya was there waiting to meet him. They spent some time together, but they had both changed and nothing further developed with their relationship. He was, however, grateful for the memories of her. Along with his strong faith in God, they helped get him through his ordeal.

LOVELY SONYA

**Lovely Sonya, my thoughts oft turn to thee
When I, a man, look back at days now past.
I think of you, my love, and how that we
Once found a love that years shall prove will last.**

**Our love, my dear, now burns so strong in me;
My heart is filled with the burning desire
To hold you in my arms ever so free
And taste your kiss so filled with your love's fire.**

**Oh, my true love, my love, my love, my life!
Never to be the one I call my wife;
Away you've gone, eternally to be
My lonely heart and soul's one memory.**

**So long as God gives me the breath of life,
So long will I want you to be my wife.**

1966, Hanoi, North Vietnam

ON A FALL DAY

**On a fall day, with white clouds high above,
I chanced to meet a beautiful young girl
Who was blessed with the virtues I love
And gave me life as our love's world unfurled.**

**She's freshness so like the wind and sea;
And eyes as bright and clear as those fall days.
Her hair oft danced in the autumn's cool breeze;
She was lovely in her gentle shy ways.**

**Her lips on mine soothed like the cool night's dew
That so gently touches the earth's warm breast;
Her love lifted my soul with strength so new,
Giving me life and will to face the test.**

**Those days now gone will live forever in me;
And forever I'll have her memory.**

**Power Plant, Hanoi, North Vietnam
Summer, 1967**

OUR MEETING

**A trip to Japan and a break off the line;
A time to relax and catch up on things;
Quiet places to find a sip of good wine;
With walks in dark lanes, thoughts of life's refrains.**

**Breakfast at the club, the taste of fine food;
A table alone right in the first row;
Served in the right mood, the food was so good;
Everything just so, served by an ex-foe.**

**I sat there that morn in the land of the pearl
When I noticed at a table near me
Approached a young girl with soft flowing curls
Who I soon could see was very lovely.**

She joined three friends and sat down to eat;
She seemed to be quiet with not much to say.
I thought what a treat it would be to meet
Her on that fine day, but there was no way.

Back at the club at a later date
I was pleased to see her come into sight;
But she had a date, so I did not make
A move to her side, like I would have liked.

Instead I just watched her from across the way,
Thinking to myself, I wish I could find
A reason or way to meet her that day.
As I searched my mind, it was the wrong time.

Then I felt a tap from a friend behind.
He asked if I'd like to meet a new girl.
His gaze drew a line to you at that time.
A new world unfurled, for you were that girl.

Camp Faith, North Vietnam
Summer, 1970

YOUR FACE

Like a new day's dawning
Your face comes to my mind;
With the fresh breeze of spring
And fall of summer's rain
Into this standing time.

Your face is like a light
Bursting through the dim fog
Giving this lost man sight
Through these lonely nights
To freedom, home, and God.

Whatever fate may be,
I face it without fear;
For in this tempest sea
Shines the dream to be free,
And meet with you my dear.

**Camp Faith, North Vietnam
1970**

DAWNING DAY

**As the sun breaks and a new day begins
I stand and watch inside my prison cell.
My thoughts are filled with life that once had been;
The life I lived before this darkened hell.**

**My hungry heart thinks back to days of you,
Days which are gone, but living still in me.
Those hours shared, although they were so few,
Burn in my heart and I yearn to be free.**

**This day will fall and die, I know too well,
Leaving me here, trembling with a just fear.
But I'll live on and through this lonesome hell,
'Til dawning day finds me with you my dear.**

**Camp Faith, North Vietnam
1970**

SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, SOMEWAY, SOMEDAY

**Somewhere across windswept fields of green;
Over mountains, purple in their hue;
Across white-capped oceans I have seen;
Lives a young girl who I love so true.**

**Somehow I pray she knows of my love
And knows my heart is hers evermore.
Oh, God, who guides my life from above,
Tell her she is all I'm living for.**

**Someway I'll cross those fields swept with wind
And trod o'er the mountains standing high.
I'll sail the tempest seas that have been
The bounds that part my love and I.**

WHAT IS THIS THING THAT BURNS?

**What is this thing that burns in my heart?
Bursting with life like a new world's dawn.
Filling my soul with warmth at its thought.**

**Is it God's voice that comforts my soul?
Whispering low His warm words of gold.
Giving His help and warm hands to hold.**

**Or to be free that yearns so inside?
While I now live, a man held in bond,
With death so near and often defied.**

**Oh, no! It's love that burns in my heart!
Darling, it's you, your love is the dawn
That burns within and fills me with thought.**

**Your love is life that comforts my soul -
Lovely brown eyes and kisses of gold,
Gentle shy ways and warm hands to hold.**

**It is your love that yearns so inside!
A beauty held by fate's lonely bond!
You are alpha, omega defied!**

**These things are true and ever shall be,
'Til earth is done, and death do I see.**

**Camp Unity, Hanoi Hilton, North Vietnam
Summer, 1971**

YOUNG MEN

**Oh, love is life and life is love;
And for each man there's one.
For once man's born, he lives to love
Until his life is done.**

**By grace of God, in time of war,
Young men will feel love's glow**

Someday I'll leave this life, to be free,
And ask to hold her hand throughout life.
That day I pray she will ever be
The girl I will ever call my wife.

North Vietnam
Summer, 1970

ALONE

Alone I lie in these darks nights of death,
With the torment of my restless desire
Haunting my soul through lost hours of breath,
Burning my heart are thoughts of your love's fire.

It is you who comes again and again
Into these cold hours of my lost time,
Drawing me back to days that once had been,
Hours that were then only yours and mine.

You come to see me with thoughts of your warm kiss,
As when our lips were met through the dark night.
Softly I feel your warmth and slenderness
Pressing my chest as we kissed in the night.

Oh, my true love, will you ever be near,
Or are you gone, only to be a dream?
I ask myself this with a taste of fear
When I awaken and feel life's cold sting.

On I live in these days of standing time.
I think of you, my love, and then I cry.
For as the years pass on, my heart does find
Our love grows strong, as I watch my life die.

North Vietnam
Summer, 1970

**Before they're called to fight and die
Against their country's foe.**

**Camp Unity, Hanoi Hilton, North Vietnam
Summer, 1971**

MY MEMORY OF YOU

**My memory of you is sweet and gentle
As your warm lips when first they touched to mine.
You live within my soul so like an angel;
Destined to be part of me through time.**

**You are pure as a new mother's love,
And tender as her most devoted care.
You fill my heart with an eternal love,
Which comforts me in life's dark days and fair.**

**You are with me in most silent need,
When all the world has turned and has no end.
You are the love, the life, the strength that lead
My way. With you inside my heart no wind,**

**Nor sword, nor test of time shall ever be
A bound, parting my love and faith in thee.**

**Hanoi Hilton, North Vietnam
Spring, 1972**

WHERE IS MY HEART?

**Where is my heart in time of silent thought?
In hours lost amidst life's lonely years.
When all's gone wrong and efforts are for naught
To find an end to life so filled with tears.**

**Does my heart cry and mourn my sadden plight?
Or curse this life with each and every breath?
Or turn to God throughout the day and night
To save my soul lost in a pit of death?**

**Oh, no! Oh, no! My heart is filled with love,
And dances time away with thoughts of you.
On love's sweet wings my heart climbs above
And lifts my soul to sing on rainbow's hue.**

**For thy sweet love instills my heart and soul
To live, to share thy love in Freedom's hold.**

**Dogpatch, North Vietnam
Summer, 1972**

MY LOVE FOR THEE

**My love for thee defies all bounds within
The minds of men. My love is pure as faith
That spans the trials of life and death and sin.
My love is as true as truth and that has no end**

**Across the breadth of time. My love is life
That shall not die, though threat by sword and chime.
My love shall e're remain when all in life
Has turned, when all I have is thy love's light**

**To guide my way along. My love for thee
Shall ever be 'till faith has passed in men,
'Til truth is o'er and life has ceased to be.
For thy sweet love that lives in me.**

**My past, my world, my dreams, my heart and soul,
My love for thee is all that life can hold.**

**Dogpatch, North Vietnam
Fall, 1972**

I LOVE

**I love the dawn with small bird's song,
That starts my life anew.
I love the day with sun's soft ray,
The sky so fair and blue.
I love the dusk that comes with trust,**

**That all is well above.
I love the night with wind on flight,
That tells me of your love.**

**Dogpatch, North Vietnam
Christmas, 1972**

John Blevins and Ralph wrote El Raton to celebrate catching their first big (1 lb plus) rat, which their cell mates said couldn't be done. They got him under the dish rack using a bed board that was 2 inches thick, 15 inches wide, and 7 feet long. It weighed about 60-70 pounds, so when it hit the rat he was left flat ...

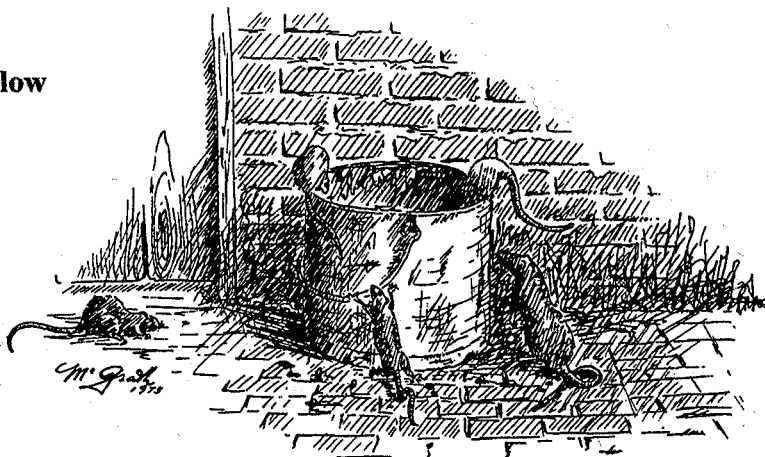
They were so proud of their feat they wrote this poem and proclaimed it to the doubting room the next morning.

EL RATON

**It was just a spring night, without much light,
When El Raton entered the room.
He was so clever and sly as he slipped by,
The legs of the ole' chow rack.**

**How was he to know, that soon that fatal blow
Would make him a flat rat.**

**Lt. Col. John Blevins, USAF
1971
Hanoi Hilton, North Vietnam
POW 09-09-66 to 03-04-73
and
Cdr Ralph Gaither, USN
POW 10-17-65 to 02-12-73**



SILVER NIGHT

**Quietly we walked through the silver night;
With your arm in mine without a word to say;
I wanted that night to hold you so tight;
And tell you Sonya, we could find a way.**

To cross o'er the distance of land and sea;
And build a strong love though so far away;
For surely as we a strong love could see;
God would find a way for our love to stay.

But how could I talk of love to you dear;
To have known you for but one wonderous week;
And when we held near it seemed to draw fear;
Protecting your heart you thought I would break.

So on we walked through the silver night;
I wanting so much to taste your soft kiss;
And hold you so tight, together that night;
Adrift on love's breast with you in love's bliss.

We came to your place and you asked me in;
Small hope had I to hold you in my arms;
As when I'd began you had always been;
Protecting your charm when held in my arms.

You came to my arms and when we first kissed;
Softly your sweet lips pressed tightly to mine;
The sweet tenderness of you near my chest;
Made my heart inclined to hold you for time.

I stayed there with you that too short last night;
Holding you near in my hungry arms;
Together that night with you held so tight;
So lost in your charms with you in my arms.

We parted without a word or a kiss;
Our love far too new to know what to say;
As through the night's bliss you had said this;
Love would only fray and had not a way.

As I looked into your eyes for that one last time;
My heart throbbed wildly to hold you near;
You gave me no sign at our parting time;
My heart turned to tears when we severed dear.

Hanoi, North Vietnam

Christmas time is, and always has been, a time of giving. American P.O.W.'s in Vietnam had little to give each other, but that didn't stop them from being creative and finding ways to share whatever they could. Thus poetry became one means of giving something in keeping with their Christmas spirit no matter what their circumstances were.

For Christmas, 1971 Ralph gave George Coker a Rosary he made using turkey bones for the beads, aluminum for the cross, and string from his blanket. George, in return, wrote this beautiful Christmas poem for Ralph. He wrote it on the terrible North Vietnamese toilet paper. Ralph still has it today.

CHRISTMAS HAS COME

It has been four thousand years, hopefully man has matured,
Through many ordeals, God's chosen people have endured.
Now the mighty Romans control the world's behavior,
And God's children await the coming of the Savior.
Prophecy has come.

During the great Roman peace, veiling the world entire,
Comes an edict from Caesar, to all his empire.
To take a census of all the people on the earth,
So each man must register, in the town of his birth.
Scripture's time has come.

Thus a simple carpenter, living a humble life,
Journeys to Bethlehem, and taking with him his wife,
From Nazareth he travels, to register his name.
As all of the house of David are doing the same.
St. Joseph has come.

A Holy woman, whose body is truly God's house.
With trust in the Lord, accompanies her most chaste spouse.
Blessed is the Virgin with child, whose time is at hand,
Riding on a donkey to answer Caesar's command.
Sweet Mary has come.

Bethlehem inns are filled, there are no rooms to be found,
A cave like stable is the only shelter around.
But there in that lowly setting a male child is born.
And all is peaceful and quiet, on that Christmas morn.
Child Jesus has come.

To stand guard over the infant, an angel is sent
While heavenly host proclaim, the glorious event.
Glory to God in the highest, angels sing on high,
Peace on earth to men of good will, at last Christ is nigh.
The angels have come.

To shepherds in the fields, angels told that holy night,
Go to Bethlehem, and behold there a wondrous sight,
Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a crib of straw,
There is an infant boy worthy of your praise and awe.
The shepherds have come.

From the distant orient, three kings are proceeding,
Following a bright mystical star westward leading,
With gifts of gold, frankensence and myrrh, they go until
Over a stable in Bethlehem, that star stands still.
The wise men have come!

Prophecy and scripture say, the Redeemer is here,
So Mary and Joseph around the Christ child draw near,
The birth of the son of God is what the angel's voice
Seeing the Prince of Peace, shepherds and wise men rejoice.
Infant King has come.

Come let us make cookies, and candy, and trim the tree.
Come let us prepare our presents and stockings with glee.
Come let us join together with the angels to sing.
Come let us adore and give praise to the new born King.
For Christmas has come. Christmas has come.

Cdr. George Coker, USN
Christmas, 1971
Hanoi Hilton - Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 08-27-66 to 03-04-73

Ralph Gaither and Mike Cronin first became cellmates during a camp shuffle in May of 1967. In July of 1967, in clear violation of the Geneva convention which prohibited placing prisoners in target areas, they were transferred to the Hanoi Power Plant. They were there only a few months due to an escape from a section of the power plant the POW's had nicknamed "Dirty Bird." The North Vietnamese transferred Ralph and Mike back to the Hilton in October. Their new cell measured nine feet in depth by four and a half feet in width. The stacked bunk beds were three feet in width which left just one and a half feet of walking space. It was small ...

The identical adjoining cell housed 1st Lt. Bob Peel, USAF and Capt. Orson Swindle, USMC. At the bottom of one wall was a small drainage hole connecting the two cells. It enabled them to have easy communications with each other and also to pass things back and forth.

As a gift to Ralph and Mike for that Christmas in 1967, Bob and Orson made a single die from hardened bread dough wrapped in tinfoil. It was for them to use in some of their games. In return, Ralph and Mike wrote a poem on scraps of toilet paper using an empty lead toothpaste tube for a pencil.

OUR CHRISTMAS GIFT TO YOU

Our Christmas gift to you this day
Cannot be seen in any way
From our hearts to God we pray,
He'll send all his love your way.

Christmas shared so far from home
Finds us together, not alone.
To sadness we are so prone,
But let us keep this day a brighter tone.

May each of us with hearts aglow
Know his loved ones miss him so.
With hope as pure as driven snow,
They know the time will quickly go.

Through a new year we walk, it seems
Guided by God's radiant beams.
As sadness seems to come by reams,
We cherish all our hopes and dreams.

So this Christmas, don't dismay,
For things may yet go our way.
For as the song is wont to say,
Christ was born on Christmas Day.



**Capt Mike Cronin, USN
POW 01-13-67 to 03-04-73
and
Cdr Ralph Gaither, USN
POW 10-17-65 to 02-12-73
Hanoi Hilton, Hanoi, North Vietnam
Christmas, 1967**

In May of 1972 Ralph was sent north with about two hundred other POW's to a camp near the Chinese border. After surveying their surroundings, a campwide vote dubbed the place "Dogpatch." Conditions in Dogpatch were worse than the Hanoi Hilton, but better than he had lived in some other places. At least they were not in solo, they had companionship, were organized, and could hold church services.

When it became Ralph's turn to speak for a church service, he chose the blessings they had as his subject. Knowing the men he was going to speak to, and thinking of his own seven long years of imprisonment, he knew there was much to be thankful for.

I THANK THEE LORD

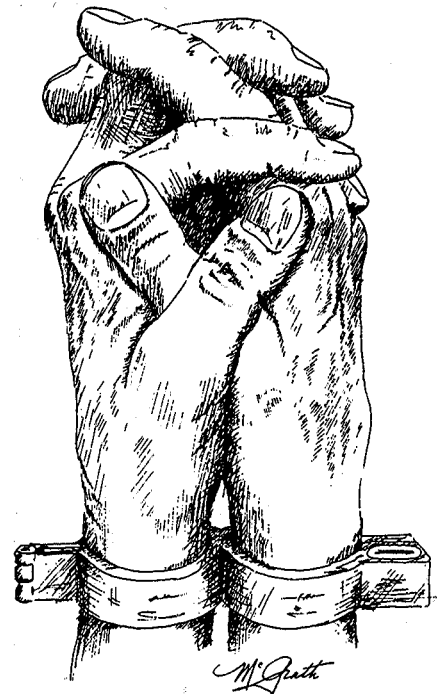
**I thank Thee Lord, for blessings big and small;
For spring's warm glow, and songbird's welcome call;
For summer's lease, with clouds that dance and rain;
For autumn's hue, and winter's snow white shawl.**

**I thank Thee for the harvest, rich with grain;
For tall green trees, a park with shadowed lane;
For rushing streams, for birds that love to fly;
My country's land, the mountains and the plain.**

**I thank Thee for each sunset in the sky;
For sleepy nights, the bed in which I lie;
A life of truth, and peace, a woman's love;
Her hand in mine, until the day I die.**

**I thank Thee, Lord, for all the things above;
But most of all I thank Thee for Thy love.**

**Dogpatch, North Vietnam
1972**



WE FEW

**Beloved heritage is ours
To fondly cherish evermore.
By God's own hand sweet freedom's flower
Was planted at our nation's door.**

**Warm blood of men enriched the soil
In hope it blossom-filled would thrive.
Though tyrants sent fierce weeds to foil
And hamper growth, it still survived.**

**The blooms will wither not nor die;
Some men will crave the fragrant air.
Unyielding Resolve reigns on high
With Duty calling those who care.**

**Much-needed care cannot be sloughed;
A few must bear the load for all.
From sun-soaked shores to windswept bluffs
We few will answer Duty's call.**

**Col. Howard Hill, USAF
4 July 1971
North Vietnam
POW 12-16-67 to 03-14-73**

MORNING THOUGHTS

Upon the dungeon wall a filigree in gold
Cast by the morning sun
It is quiet now, the locust still
A new day has begun

My thoughts, now back
Long years before
A time, a wife and sons
A friendly shore

Suddenly, the harsh gong sounds
And I am here
This bleakest of worlds
Full of terror and fear

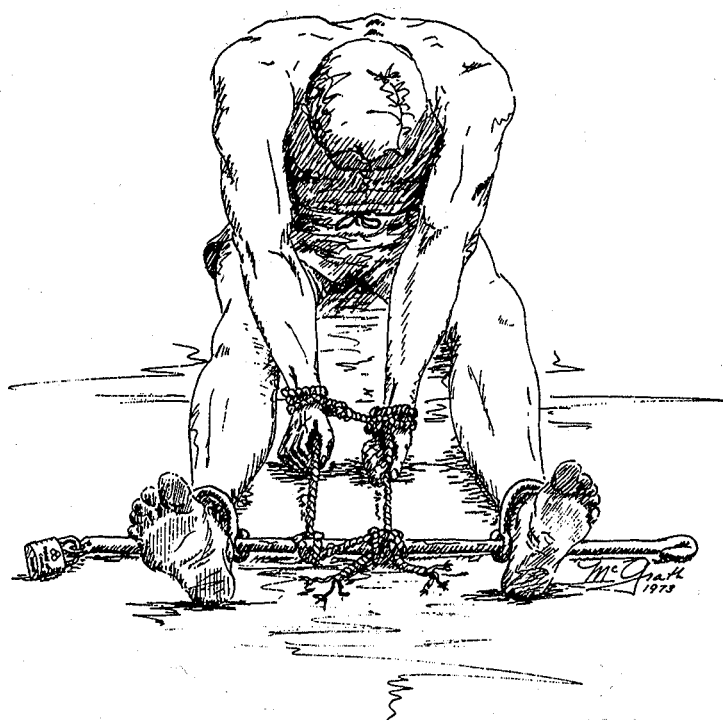
I ponder now what this day holds
A bath, some bread, perhaps some rain
But then like the others
It could bring more pain

Between two shadowed worlds
I seem to be
One, tender loving dreams
The other, stark reality

But this will end one day
Though I know not when
In years I suppose even
Five, six, maybe ten

And when it does
And our ordeal is through
I ask dear God only to know
What is false and what is true

Col. Robert Waggoner, USAF
1969
North Vietnam
POW 09-12-66 to 03-04-73



A SIMPLE THOUGHT

**As I sit each lonely day,
And dream each hour away,
A simple thought has come to me
And this is hard to say.**

**Don't think of where you are or why,
But put that thought aside
And accept that day of fateful days,
As the day you died.**

**Now dream your dream of yesteryear,
Fond memories recollect,
And of the things you're sorry for
Just pensively reflect.**

**But of the things you haven't done
Yet dearly wish to do,
Prepare your plans in circumspect
For you'll be born anew.**

**Col. Robert Waggoner, USAF
June, 1971
North Vietnam**

Sometime in 1967, while Bob Lilly was sharing a cell with Dick Bolstad in the Barn section of the Zoo, his poem "Solo" just came to him. Bob says he is not a natural born poet and he would not personally hold this poem up to public scrutiny. However, at that time he and Dick shared a cell wall with A. J. Myers. A. J. really seemed to like the poem and thought it had merit, (as do I), so he passed it on for the other guys to enjoy. If Bob ever had any doubts the poem made the rounds, he had a surprise coming! At his wedding after he returned home, Ralph Gaither, who was one of his guests, got up and recited the poem verbatim. Another guest, John Davenport, a west coast ABC correspondent and Bob's longest and dearest friend, was also the master of ceremony for the reception. He was an excellent speaker and was next up. But, he had really been impressed with Bob's poem and Ralph's delivery of it. He knew Ralph was going to be a tough act to follow, so to break the ice and give tribute to Ralph he said, "I didn't know I was going to have to follow the Mormon Tabernacle Choir!"

Now, in Bob's words, "For what it's worth..."

SOLO

Time is an ocean
 The scene for my trip
 Four walls and shadows
 Consist of my ship
 Out on this ocean there's
 Nothing to see
 For no one is there
 Except time and me
 And time has no substance
 So I guess you could say
 I'm alone, alone, in a
 Terrible way
 And yet at the bottom
 Of this murky brine
 There is a light that
 Forever shines
 That life is God and life
 Ever more
 And with His help
 I will find the far shore

Col. Bob Lilly, USAF
 1967
 Hanoi, North Vietnam
 POW 11-06-65 to 02-12-73



One night during a bombing raid on Hanoi, Jerry Coffee peeked out his cell window and watched a flight of four Air Force F-105's make their bombing run. As they pulled up, it was obvious one had been badly hit. It was trailing a lot of smoke and broke from the flight. He followed it until it disappeared from his sight. He presumed it went in.

As he lay there in his cell thinking about the incident, he felt he needed to compose a toast to the unfortunate pilot and all of the others before him.

On New Year's Eve, 1968, Tom Storey and Jerry were in the Stardust section of Hoa Lo prison. Jerry was whispering under the door crack to Tom the toast he had created. Tom liked it so much, even with the danger of being caught and knowing what terrible punishment that would bring, he made Jerry repeat it several more times until he had committed it to memory. He promised Jerry when the time came they were again free men, whenever that might be, at the first dining in he would give that toast.

After they were released in 1973, Tom's first assignment was to the USAF Academy. The Air Force had an annual conference for general officers and in 1973 it was to be held at the Academy. Tom found himself seated with General's Curtis LeMay and Jimmy Doolittle. Two men of heroic proportions and icons to the members of the USAF as well as to the American public. Men not known for being in awe of anything nor anyone. When the time came for toasts, many were given, there was the clinking of glass to glass with everyone in a very jovial mood. And then it was Tom's turn. Remembering his promise so many years ago in the Stardust, he proposed Jerry's "One More Roll." WHEN HE WAS FINISHED THERE WAS TOTAL SILENCE. YOU TRULY COULD HAVE HEARD A PIN DROP. To the men in that room, men who spent their careers flying into combat and laying their lives on the line, it was a stunning toast, one they would never forget.

ONE MORE ROLL

We toast our faithful comrades
Now fallen from the sky
And gently caught by God's own hand
To be with Him on high

To dwell among the soaring clouds
They knew so well before
From dawn patrol and victory roll
At Heaven's very door

And as we fly among them there
We're sure to hear their plea -
"Take care my friend; Watch your six,
And do one more roll ... Just for me."

**Capt. Gerald L. Coffee, USN
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 02-03-66 to 02-12-73**

MY LOVE

**How can I tell you of my love
Which soars within me far above
all other feelings of my heart
How can I let you know, my love
when we're half the world apart**

**My love is the glow of the early moon
Rising, rising til very soon
it bathes the darkness away
My love is the murmur of the mid-nite rain
whispering those words you know I would say**

**My love is the memories we have shared
The precious dreams that we have dared
to count upon together
My love is the warmth of an April sun
promising an end to cold grey weather**

**My love is the soft kiss of your quiet tears
Brought by those occasional fears
which are the price we sometimes pay
My love is the laughter of our small ones dear
to bring you joy when I'm far away**

**My love will ever burn so bright
As through each lonely day and nite
it's you I'm thinking of
You have only to be my love
and you will know my love**

**Capt. Gerald L. Coffee, USN
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

This is the original hand written version of Jerry Coffee's poem, "My Love", which he wrote in prison. It was written on the back of a used package of Albanian cigarettes. Much of the paper the P.O.W.'s used for teaching notes, to write personal thoughts, and to send secret messages came from this type of source.



"My Love" G.L. Coffee
Handi

How can I tell you of my love
Which soars within me far above
all other feelings of my heart
How can I let you know, My love
when we're half the world apart
My love is the glow of the early moon
Rising, rising 'til very soon
it bathes the darkness away
My love is the murmur of the mid-nite
whispering those words you know I ^{rain} _{would say}
My love is the memories we have shared
The precious dreams that we have dared
to count upon together
My love is the warmth of the april sun
promising an end to cold grey weather
My love is the soft kiss of your quiet tears
Brought by those occasional fears
which are the price we sometimes pay
My love is the laughter of our small ones
to bring you joy when I'm far away ^{dear}
My love will ever burn so bright
As through each lonely day and nite
it's you I'm thinking of
You have only to be my love
and you will know, My Love

TIGER LILY

**When daddy tucks me in at night
He calls me "Tiger Lily"
Or lemon drop or dandelion
Or something else that's silly.**

**He tells me I'm his ice-cream girl
His tea cup full of honey
His lady bug, his candy kiss
His cuddly baby bunny.**

**He says that I'm a sugar-plum
His white marshmallow dove
His gingersnap, his little bag
Of jelly beans and love.**

**At last he says I'm as sweet
As a hundred chocolate creams
And then he'll kiss my nose goodnight
And leave me to my dreams.**

**Capt. Gerald L. Coffee, USN
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

SUMMER LOVE

**Summer love is a tender flower
That blooms in the age of spring
Delicate, impetuous -
A warm and perfect thing.**

**The sun-gilt notes of a playful duet,
With passions quite unplanned;
The dark magic of the moonlit surf
As phosphorus lingers on shimmering sand.**

**The rendezvous, the carousel
The playful dares - all taken;
The charming grace of a summer place
Where youthful hearts awaken.**

Where tempting questions of romance
Find their sweet replies;
The bloom of a star-burst - red white and blue -
Reflected in lover's eyes.

Where the summer stars wink wisely
On the secrets that they share;
On those cotton-candy promises
So bright, so sweet and so much air.

Come the realities of fall
Where paths are seldom crossed;
And the last few petals yield
To the sting of the autumn frost.

Summer love is a tender flower
That blooms in the age of spring
The fragrant memory is eternal
Though the love is a fleeting thing.

Capt. Gerald L. Coffee, USN
North Vietnam

FRED

Little weevil in my bread
I think I just bit off your head.
I see the place where you have bled -
The dough around it is all red.
But that's okay for now, instead,
I know for sure you're really dead.

I wonder if your name was Fred!

Capt. Gerald L. Coffee, USN
North Vietnam



THE FERTILE LAND

**Night shadows fell grotesque across
These greying prison walls
Shadows that cry out despair
My whole world seems so small.**

**The night's cold cape now fills my heart
With thoughts of hopeless sorrow
God, grant me strength that I may bear
The hardships of tomorrow.**

**The stillness fades before the dawn
I wake to face the sun
This day can bring no happiness
Until the war is done.**

**Eternity has come once more
I live for just today
I count the hours of my youth
And watch them slip away.**

**The minutes drag on one by one
With no one here to share
My heart is filled with loneliness
With hunger, hate, despair.**

**These empty hours that bear no fruit
The days of endless waste
I sit with idle hands and wait
Frustration clouds my face.**

**Some days so hot, I cannot breath
Some nights too cold to sleep
I try to drive them from my mind
They're burned there far too deep.**

**I watch my only link with life
Creep slowly 'cross the floor
A golden coin of sun's pure light
That's all, nothing more.**

The sun, now spent, has reached it's ebb
Perhaps this night brings peace
I sum my hopes in these few words
"Someday this war will cease."

I've nothing left but memories
The rest they've stripped away
I feel these dreary walls close in
"How long here must I stay?"

What strange place is this
Where I can only dream of water?
A hostile land that lives on lies
Passed on to son and daughter.

They've struck at me because they hate
Because I won't bow down
They've used their might to humble me
To force me to the ground.

I've reeled beneath the blows they've struck
My body has cried out
But pain can never change my heart
Can never make me doubt.

I must go on for one more day
My faith must never bend
And tho my life here is so hard
I know this Hell will end.

And now the years have passed me by
The seasons come and go
The once green leaves now fall to earth
In nature's changing show.

The chilling winds from China blow
Across these walls of grey
I dream of once warm love now gone
Her memory fades away.

I think of home and family
the things I used to do
I muse about the days gone by
And wonder 'bout the new.

I've thought about that giant oak
Whose branches touch the sky
Bowed down beneath the howling winds
I've often heard it sigh.

Raw winter's icy winds now calm
That tree I love prevails
It's faced the storms of countless years
And weathered many gales.

I know from where I draw my strength
The faith that helps me stand
For, like that Mighty Oak
My roots are in ... "The Fertile Land."

Cdr. Bradley Smith, USN
North Vietnam
POW 03-25-66 to 02-12-73



Quincy Collins was shot down on 09-02-65 flying with the 80th TFS. As one of the early shootdowns he thus endured the very worst his captors could mete out. But endure he did, right up until his release on 02-12-73. His love of music and poetry were a large part of his personal method of survival. He formed and led choirs and he wrote the POW hymn. Incredibly, Quincy brought out the original score and lyrics written on the coarse North Vietnamese toilet paper that was the main source of writing material for the POW's. He recently gave it to me for my displays and I have shown a small piece of it below.

POW HYMN

O God to Thee we raise this prayer
And sing from with-in these foreign prison walls,

We're men who wear the Gold and Silver wings,
And proudly heed our Nation's call.

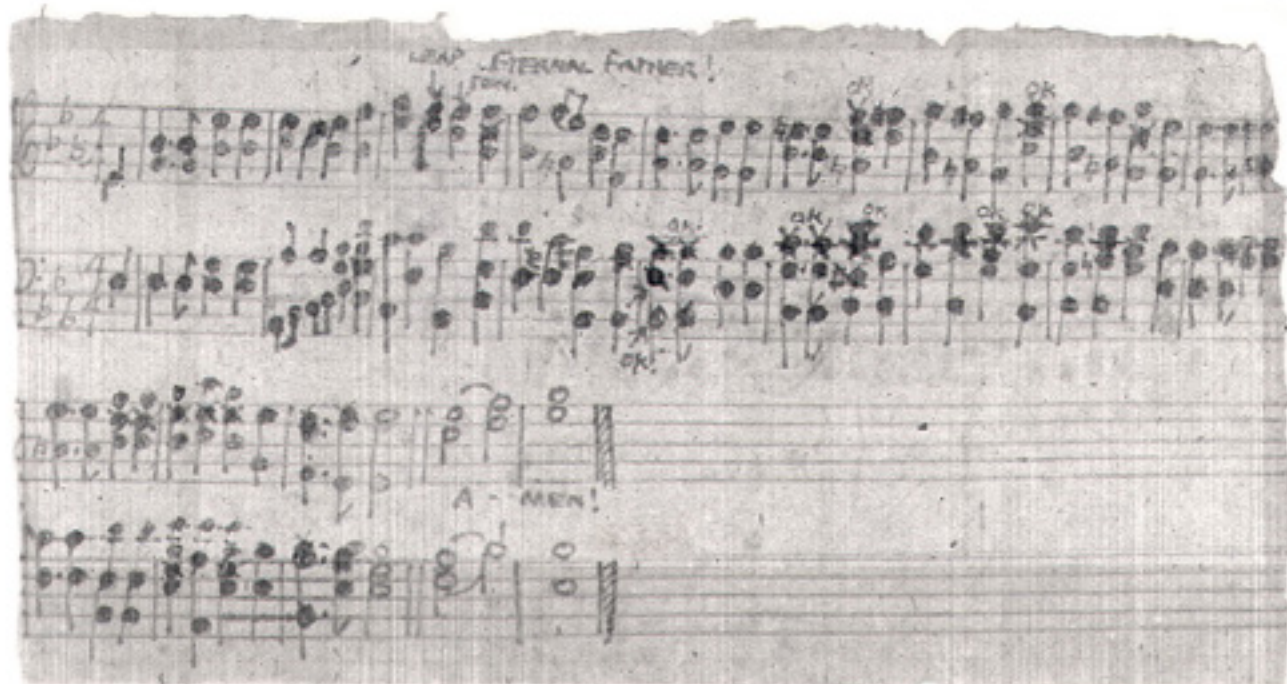
Give us strength to with-stand
All the harm that the hand of our enemy captors can do,

To inflict pain and strife, and deprive every life,
Of the rights they know well we are due.

We pledge our unswerving faith and loyalty,
To our cause, America, and Thee!

Amen!

Col. Quincy Collins, USAF
Hanoi, North Vietnam
1973



In 1970, I was pulled out of my group at the Hilton and put into solitary in another part of the camp where most of the senior officers were held. Colonel Bean was in the cell next to me and we managed to bore a hole in the wall so that we could communicate. He had been my Squadron Commander, knew my wife and sons and had visited them in California on his way to Southeast Asia after I was shot down in 1965. His descriptions were exhilarating, but then I realized his visit was four years earlier. My thoughts really began to focus on Christmas and my family, and I began putting words and music together to express all of our hopes and dreams for the future, but knowing that for the present, we would have to settle for reminiscing. This was for my fellow POW's.

IT'S CHRISTMAS AGAIN IN YOUR HOMETOWN

The winter is blowing
And in some states it's snowing
It's Christmas again in your hometown
Tom turkey is cooking
And your folks are looking
To gather the family all around

The gifts are wrapped and hidden
And the cards have all been sent
Soon Santa will be coming
What a wonderful event

So vanquish care and sorrow
And plan a bright tomorrow
It's Christmas again in your hometown

It was five years into my imprisonment and I had neither been allowed to write a letter nor receive one. The very day in 1970, when I was removed from a short stay in solitary confinement and returned to my group at the Hilton - I got my first letter! I was beside myself with anxious anticipation as I took the short one page and began reading the seven lines from Mom. The letter was two years old and she made reference to my father having died. I was crushed! I hit one of my lows in prison for now I would only have past memories of him to hold onto, not the future ones I had thought so much about when we met again at my release. My dad was bigger than life to me, and so I began composing a poem in his honor.

MY WONDERFUL FRIEND DAD

No one will ever know the pain of sorrow and despair,
That ripped my heart and tore my soul and left me standing bare.
So unprepared was I to read the startling news so sad
How death had claimed a part of me, My Wonderful Friend, Dad.

Now that the darkened veil has covered One so dear to me,
So many hopes and dreams I'll never ever see.
For all the words and deeds omitted when the chance I had,
Have e'er been lost for me to do, My Wonderful Friend, Dad.

So hear my word memorial wherever you may be.
I'm proud to be your son and wear the name you gave to me.
I'll n'e'er forget the lessons that you taught, both good and bad.
And may we meet again someday, My Wonderful Friend, Dad.



Guy Freeborn was a Lieutenant flying an F-4 with VF-142 and served in Vietnam from 1967 through 1969. While there, he had the distinction of bagging a MIG-21 near Phu Lai, North Vietnam and surviving 201 missions over the north. Although not a POW himself, as with so many of the guys in their cells in Hanoi, this poem just came to Guy in the middle of the night. He wrote it as a tribute for the 25th anniversary of "Homecoming."

FOREVER YOUNG

**Hail to our comrades
Fallen from the skies
Though yet we see them on the wing
Through time and tear dimmed eyes.**

**Hail to their courage
Though fear flew with them too
For who among us hasn't known
That dark dread as we flew.**

**But even now we see them
Undaunted, laughter on their tongues
We see their youth, their un-used years
Forever, ever young.**

**Hail to our buddies
Our wingmen, leaders too
Who loved with passion, ecstasy
That freedom in skies so blue.**

**Hail to their irreverence,
Exhuberance, devil-may-care,
Persistence, skill, and bravery
As Death caught them in mid-air.**

**We see them still as they continue on
Their spirit as bright as the sun
Their image unchanging, locked in time
Forever, ever young.**

**So raise a glass, ye gathered here
Re-calling every name
Smiling with the memories
Tarnished, but still the same.**

**They're soaring still beyond the clouds
Their earthly mission done
Yet in the Heavens, they'll always remain
Forever, ever young.**

Cdr. Guy Freeborn, USN (Ret.)



Ernie Brace had been a Marine pilot, but when he was captured, he was flying for Bird & Son under contract to U.S. AID ferrying supplies in and out of Laos and Thailand. Ernie was the longest held civilian and the longest held survivor period to come out of Laos. The brutality and barbarism Ernie suffered in almost eight years as a POW are almost without equal.

THE JUNGLE GREEN

**Please don't bury me in the jungle green
Where the tigers prowl and the monkeys
scream
Just take me out to the ocean blue
That's where I want to go when I'm all through**

**Don't put me in this dark damp ground
Where the leeches crawl and the worms
abound
Just take me out to that great blue sea
And that's where you can bury me**

**Now I've been here is this jungle too long
And I'm tired of the birds and their crazy
songs
I want to go where there's people at play
And you can see the sun all day**

**Ernie Brace
1967
Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam
POW 05-21-65 to 03-14-73**

RATS IN THE THATCH

**You'll never see our pictures or our names in the press
Cause if we lose our cover it becomes an awful mess
They called us Tigers back in forty-one
And ever since we fly for cash and not for fun**

CHORUS

**Rats in the thatch, but I don't care
It's the commies in the grass that give me a scare
Oh you can keep your medals and you can keep your brass
Cause all that we fly for is good hard cash**

**Now over Laos is a funny little war
And it's fought by civilians who don't mind the gore
They get lots of flying, they get lots of time
But the best thing they get is that good old dollar sign**

**And over in Vietnam they say the flyings fine
The Air Force watches for the Migs, the Marines guard the line
Now the Hill Tribe troops need supplies just like you or I
And as long as we get paid we'll supply them from the sky**

**And even in Cuba we were there too
And we lived high in Miami in the Fontaine Bleau
If you didn't get caught you made lots of cash
But if you did get caught even Uncle Sam would have your ass**

**Ernie Brace
1967
Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam**

PRISONER IN A CAGE

**I'm just a prisoner in a cage;
I have no name, I have no age.
The guards don't even know what I've done,
All they know, I'm a captured one.**

**They think I flew a 105,
And bombed and strafed the countryside;
There's some would like to see me dead,
So to stay alive, Gotta use my head.**

They captured me back in '65
I guess it's lucky I'm still alive;
I tried to escape three times in all,
Now I'd go a fourth, but I'd have to crawl.

They buried me alive once, for seven days,
That was supposed to mend my ways;
I'd still try, but as you can see,
I don't have the legs to carry me.

My feet are in stocks, my neck tied to a pole,
What food I get is shoved through a hole;
At night I lie down, and my hands are tied,
The rope is stretched to a pole outside.

Now I've been sick, and almost died,
I had to crawl to get outside;
I wasn't helped in anyway at all,
Just beaten and held against the wall.

But I'll get out of here, I know that now,
Though I don't know when and I don't know how;
I'll see my family once again,
Though I don't know how and I don't know when.

Ernie Brace
Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam

UNTITLED

**If you are able
save them a place
inside of you
and save one backward glance
when you are leaving
for the places they can
no longer go.**

**Be not ashamed to say
you loved them,
though you may
or may not have always.**

**Take what they have left
and what they have taught you
with their dying
and keep it with your own.**

**And in that time
when men decide and feel safe
to call the war insane,
take one moment to embrace
those gentle heroes
you left behind.**

**Major Michael Davis O'Donnell
1 January 1970
Dak To, South Vietnam**

(MIA 24 March, 1970)

The help the NAMPOW's have given me in reseaching poems to enhance this book is nothing less than phenomenal. A case in point is this next poem.

I was talking to Ralph Gaither, that human repository of P.O.W. poems, when he asked, "Do you have Tom Storey's poem Ashes to Dust? It is a good one and needs to be in your book." I told him I had heard other guys mention it too, but it was one I did not yet have and I would do all I could to obtain it.

The problem was how to track Tom down! He had been out of country for many years and although now back in the states, his current address and telephone number were not available. Enter Mike McGrath ... and I had a good phone number for Tom. When I called, Tom said he would be pleased to add his poem to the collection. He was just amazed I had even heard of it!

He said, "I was really sick, and laying there in my cell in the Stardust, the old refrain ashes to ashes, dust to dust, kept running through my mind. The completed poem actually just popped into my head. I repeated it over and over until I had it memorized." As seems to be the case with many of these poems, they just "popped" out of nowhere and into being for the guys. Tom says this was his one and only attempt at poetry and he is glad to share it again thirty plus years later.

FROM ASHES TO DUST

The ashes from war
Are settling on the land,
But, nature continues on to spite
Man's inhumanity to man.

Two are joined together in holiness
To perpetuate the human race.
Bring forth the blessing from the womb,
The bright new smiling face.

Learn well the message from the Book,
The lessons from the past.
There's still a chance to change the plan
Before the die is cast.

Walk life's pathway hand in hand;
Time is short, but not too late.
Pass on to those who follow you,
To love and not to hate.

Hold close the truth and keep your faith
In God's fraternity;

**For mortal life is but a whisp of dust
On the threshold of eternity.**

Lt. Col. Tom Storey, USAF

**Cell # 5, Stardust cellblock
Little Vegas complex, Hoa Lo prison (Hanoi Hilton)
(The Devil's Island of Southeast Asia)
Hanoi, North Vietnam
February, 1968**

John Heilig sent along these three poems with the thought I might add them to the book even though he feels they are not very good. In his words, "I don't consider any of this poetry, especially "The Picture", to be any good. But some may not be quite as poor as others. It is strictly the work of a poetically uneducated amateur. All I can say is they made sense at the time." I don't think any one who reads these will agree with John. They are eminently readable and do pass muster in every aspect.

GREEN SHOOTS

The dark hard rain, the snow-capped cold,
Deepen time's scars in soil and stone.
Bittersweet tears from error's mold,
Conscience's fabric stained as shown
In time's reflection pool,
In life's reflective school.

Bright shoots of green grow best in fields
Of men's and marble column's doom.
As life prevails and bears great yields
When new direction, purpose bloom
In time's reflection pool,
In life's reflective school.

Capt. John Heilig, USN
1970
North Vietnam
POW 05-05-66 to 02-12-73

John wrote this sonnet for his daughter Donna who was only eleven months old when he was shot down.

SONNET FOR DONNA

How long these years you've spent within my heart,
In troubled cells within this jackel's lair.
How many years before my hand may chart
That gentle sweep of brow and cheek so fair.
Yet you and I have done so many things!
We've sung a thousand songs of love's sweet ways.

With thoughts of you imagination brings
A precious gift of purpose to these days.
And if a score of ifs then come to be,
Those dreamed of days with you will I then savor,
And help you grow in life and spirit free.
The days grow longer with each day apart;
How long these years you've spent within my heart.

Capt. John Heilig, USN
1971
North Vietnam

THE PICTURE

A picture of force,
A political course
In abuse of the utmost degree,
I saw on a wall
In a prison we call
Camp Faith in the quote, DRV.

Forty humans perhaps
Sit with hands in their laps,
Semi-ringed in formation three deep.
They taste the next potion
With doubtful emotion,
The news of dear Ho's final sleep.

They slouch in their rags
As the leadership brags
Of the infinite joys of their land
And speaks of a mate,
His death they must hate,
Of new slogans, old fires to be fanned.

The peasant's dull trance,
That weak mental stance,
So inflexibly questioning naught;
As a horn on a ladder
Now dictates course patter
In a manner that Pavlov taught.

Men and machines,
How strange that their teams
Now seem to reverse in their roles;
As the radio trains
Asia's pushbutton brains,
In these nations of cold-molded souls.

It shackles men's minds
With a truth that one finds
The most flexible, yet so concrete.
This riddle, a tumor,
A joke without humor,
A decaying and dark one-way street.

If one picture can tell
Of the fate of that cell
Or at least may convey these impressions,
How can any man know
What cancers must grow
In a billion such human secessions?

And who could feel stronger
Than we who no longer
Are strangers to Uncle's cruel lash,
In this bleak choking life
Filled with hatred and strife,
Engulfed in this great sea of trash.

But I seek no crusade
Nor revenge to be paid
To the men who fostered such crimes,
Nor to wage revolution
Or force evolution
On those who must change their own times.

But to alter my day
In a meaningful way
By exploiting the will I possess;
Helping build the best world
All freedoms unfurled,
With the men who'll accept nothing less.

Capt. John Heilig, USN
Hanoi, North Vietnam

Bill Reeder was a U.S. Army captain assigned to the 1st Aviation Brigade when his helicopter was shot down on May 9th, 1972. As were so many of the POW's, Bill was badly wounded when he was captured. The worst of his injuries was a broken back and a gangrenous leg. He was held in bamboo cages along with one other American and twenty-five South Vietnamese soldiers.

On July 2nd, 1972 they left northern Cambodia for the long trek up the Ho Chi Minh trail to North Vietnam and ultimately Hanoi. By the time they arrived, the other American and seven of the South Vietnamese soldiers had died.

For his sanity and to help him keep going, he mentally turned the trail into a riding and biking trail in California. His first poem, "Spencer & Me", was composed as a light marching piece which he recited silently along the way. He also sang bars of the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine" and Burl Ives' "A Little Bitty Tear Got Me Down" as a way of keeping his mind off the pain. Bill told me his ability to concentrate on these verses got him through the three month plus ordeal of the forced march to Hanoi.

**SPENCER & ME
or
ODE TO A FIVE YEAR OLD**

**Spencer and me
As you can see
Are happy as can be
For we're father and son
And oh what fun
We do have together.**

**Ho Chi Minh Trail
July, 1972**

Bill created "Sand" after watching so many of the other prisoners slowly die during the first few weeks of the march north. As many times he was near the point of death himself, the poem had, and still has, great personal meaning.

SAND

**Our stay here on earth
Is measured you know.
Beginning at birth
The sand starts to flow.**

**The hourglass once turned
The deed being done,
However concerned
The sand will still run.**

**It seems like a crime
That this life is so grand
Must run out of time.
There's not enough sand.**

**Ho Chi Minh Trail
August, 1972**

When they finally arrived in Hanoi in October of 1972, Bill was placed in solitary confinement in the Hanoi Hilton. This final poem expresses his feelings about that period of time in his captivity.

THE PRISON

**What is that moan from the prison,
From ghostly souls in the prison,
That ghastly forgotten terrible sound
Echoing out to sea?**

**Doomed broken men locked behind bars
Plagued with filth and festering scars,
All of them crying in strained weak voices.
Dear God, please let me be free.**

**Col. Bill Reeder, USA
October, 1972
Hanoi Hilton - Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 05-09-72 to 03-27-73**

A lifetime ago and far away, a young Marine captain answered duty's call. Like so many others, before and since, he had to leave his wife, expectant with their first child, and go off to war.

Captain Steve Hanson left for Vietnam on the 3rd of September, 1966. Two weeks later, on the 17th of September, his wife Carole gave birth to their son Todd. Just eight months into his tour, and only two weeks before an R & R in Hawaii to be with them, Steve went Missing In Action in Laos. The month before he was shot down Steve sent home a letter and poem for Todd to tell him about his mother for Mother's Day.

Carole has graciously allowed me to use the poem and the letter in its entirety. She felt, as do I, it exemplifies all of the brave young men who had to leave their homes and families behind and stand in harm's way for their country.

Dear Todd,

10 May 67

Your dad is not a good poet or anything like that. Right now he is a Marine ten thousand miles away who has never seen you, but who loves you none the less. We will get to know each other quite well in years to come, but right now it is Mother's day and I'd like to tell you a little about your Mom. In later years when you read this maybe you will think your dad was a sentimental slob. I hope not, because by then I think you will fully realize the truth of what I am about to tell you about.

YOUR MOTHER

**She is the sunrise of every new spring day
She is the beauty of every rainbow after every storm
She is the warmth of every winter hearth
She is the laughter of every child's joy
She is the mystery of a starry night
She is the comfort of a selfless, unquestioning love
She is the courage of one who believes
She is the faith of those who pray
She is all of this and so much more, but most of all,
She is ours. What greater wealth can there ever be.**

I will pray all my life, Todd, that you achieve all the goals that you set for yourself. I will work to see that you have every opportunity, but the most I could ever ask God for you, would be that you find a girl like I did in your Mom.

Love,

Dad

Carole was a ceaseless and tireless worker for the POW/MIA movement during the war years. Although her primary concern was to find out about Steve, Carole cared about all of the missing and those who were prisoners of war. She, like so many of the wives of the POWs and MIAs, is a true American heroine.

Carole has become a very dear friend to me and to my family. Without any equivocation, I can tell you ... all these years later ... she is still the epitome of the poem.

As I sit here writing these words it is hard not to become emotional realizing they were written on Mother's Day, 1967 and in searching out the letter for me, Carole found it on Mother's Day, 1999, ... 32 years later to the day! This is also the day Carole learned Steve's remains have possibly been located in Laos. With the far too long awaited co-operation of the Laotian government, the U.S. has finally gotten to the site of Steve's crash and located several graves. Steve's dog tags were found at the site.

Carole is presently married to Capt. Jim Hickerson, USN (Ret.). Jim was flying with VA-147 when his aircraft was shot down over North Vietnam on December 22nd, 1967 and he became a prisoner of war. Jim came home of March 14th, 1973, 1909 days after being captured.

They are two wonderful people who represent the best this country somehow always finds in times of need. People I am proud to call my friends.

* * * *

It is a rare thing in any lifetime we can follow a story that started so tragically and see it through to a happy ending. This is one of those times.

Captain Steve Hanson did not live to meet his son Todd, nor see him grow to manhood, but Steve's prayers were answered in more ways than he could have ever dared to hope. One of those answers was God's gift of Jim Hickerson to be Todd's father.

Todd wrote this poem in 1986 during his third year as a Midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy. He wrote it to honor the man who raised him as his son. It was to be his gift on the occasion of Jim's retirement after thirty years of active service to his country as an officer in the United States Navy. To me, it is the finest tribute from father to son I have ever read. The love expressed in this poem is beyond what any father could hope or expect, and, what most fathers only dream of receiving.

Other than expressing my belief this completes Steve's poem to his son Todd, and makes it match point, I will say no more. The poem speaks for itself.

THIRTY YEARS

**You are my Father,
I am proudly your Son.
I grasp the torch,
As you pass it on.**

**You are my hero,
I am the one
Who is standing in awe
Of all you have done.**

**You are my teacher,
I long to learn
The lessons you teach me,
From your concern.**

**You are my best friend
In whom I confide.
Through good times and bad times,
You stand by my side.**

**You are my leader,
Down life's long road.
I follow your footsteps
Where ever I go.**

**You are the eagle
That soars through the sky,
While I, the young blackbird,
Am yearning to fly.**

**Now, - as you land ...
With such dignity;
I start my quest
For those gold wings I see.**

**So that I; Yes, too,
May take my place,
In blue-gold skies,
And touch God's face.**

**And when at last,
His face I do see,
Dad, I'll thank Him
For all you have been
To me.**

**Midshipman Todd Hickerson
Class of 1988
United States Naval Academy**

As a postscript, Todd hand wrote these words along the bottom side:

"Thanks, Dad, for being forever my hero. I know that you will continue "flying high" - and that I'll be "forever on your wing." I love you Pop! God bless you always."

As if it were possible to add frosting to an already very sweet cake, out of the blue I received an offer from a gentleman to donate for my book this original letter, with a photograph of a very young Todd pleading for information as to the whereabouts of his dad. Carole told me they stood him on the table in the patio of their southern California home to take the photo. She had not seen this letter since that time. Both She and Todd autographed it for me. It will now go into one of the POW permanent displays.



I am 2½ years old. My daddy has never seen me. For over 2 years he has been missing in action - shot down in the Vietnam war and my mommy is very sad. She cannot get word as to whether he is dead or a prisoner of war. She keeps asking everybody but cannot find out a thing.

PLEASE HELP ME FIND MY DADDY !

Todd Hanson
P.O. Box 313
El Toro, California 92630

Every country, even including Vietnam, likes the respect of world opinion. Thus exists the need to impress upon Hanoi that the free world feels North Vietnam should be obligated to abide by the Geneva Convention in the treatment of war prisoners and to release a list of all such prisoners held. They should further be urged to negotiate immediately for an exchange of prisoners regardless of further pursuit of the war.

Only the pressures of world opinion can influence any action in this regard and we appeal to you to keep hammering away PERSISTENTLY on this matter until SOMETHING IS ACCOMPLISHED.

It would be deeply appreciated if, after reading this communication, you would send it on to the editor of your hometown newspaper. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Committee on Behalf of POW-MIA's
Wives and Families
786-C Via Los Altos
Laguna Hills, California 92653

*Heartfelt thanks
to the Committee... a
champion for all POW/MIA's
and their families!
Love,
Carol Ann Hanson*

The author of this poem, done in French, is unknown. As were most things written by the prisoners in North Vietnam, it was down on the back of a used pack of cigarettes. In this case the brand was Tam Thanh. I received it, along with some other wonderful POW artifacts Cliff Walker brought out of Hanoi on his release.

Col. Cliff Walker, USAF
POW 01-14-68 to 03-14-73

LA SILHOUETTE DE TOI
LA S, DE TOI QUAND T'ES ALLÉ,
COLÈRERA TOUS MES RÊVES ET LE SOIR
REGARDES MES YEUX AMOUR À VOIR
COMME TU DONNES À MOI LA VIE
L'ESPOIR. TU ÉTAIS TROP LOIN DE
MOI PETITE ÉTOILE, UNE LARME
BAISAIT TES LÈVRES ET AUSSI MOI
ALORS, QUAND JE RÊVÉ DU
PRINTEMPS, PENDANT CE SAISON
ENCHANTANT, VIVRA UNE BELLE MAIS
TRISTE MÉMOIRE, LA S, DE TOI



These initials and dates, hand printed on a piece of North Vietnamese toilet paper, and given to me by Col. Cliff Walker, were to help memorize the names of the prisoners. With eventual release, and the immediate debriefing that would follow, it was imperative to be able to give a full accounting of every American captured and known to be alive in the hands of the North Vietnamese. Each man would memorize the names of prisoners they had come in contact with, or seen, and pass the names on to whoever they could. Through this means they built up a common memory bank which would ensure no one was forgotten and left behind.

GS = Richard E. "Gene" Smith 17-1-35
DS = Dwight E. Sullivan 22-1-31
DC = Carl D. "Dennie" Chambers 7-3-41
JS = John E. Stavast 5-5-26
TS = Theodore E. Stier 5-6-40
MM = John M. "Mike" McGrath 10-7-39
DF = David E. Ford 25-7-35
JG = Gerald "Jerry" Gerndt 18-8-42
CZ = Charles P. Zuhoski 21-9-41
TB = Terry L. Boyer 22-9-38
CR = Charles R. Rice 7-10-43
CW = Hubert C. "Cliff" Walker 26-10-41
JE = Jeffrey Ellis 8-11-40
BH = William M. "Bill" Hardman 16-11-33
CT = Charles R. Tyler 18-11-34
BB = William M. "Bill" Butler 29-11-41
KF = Kenneth Fisher 10-12-36
BS = Robert R. "Bob" Sawhill 13-12-30

GS 17-1-35
DS 22-1-31
DC 7-3-41
JS 5-5-26
TS 5-6-40
MM 10-7-39
DF 25-7-35
JG 18-8-42
CZ 21-9-41
TB 22-9-38
CR 7-10-43
CW 26-10-41
JE 8-11-40

BH 16-11-33
CT 18-11-34
BB 29-11-41
KF 10-12-36
BS 13-12-30

Col. Jim "X-Ray" Ray weighed in with a couple of neat limericks and some interesting stories on how the P.O.W.'s passed the time and kept their minds sharp with word games. He was an English major and still loves language and word play.

He says they played and experimented with many and various word games. One was to see how many consecutive double letters they could use in a valid word. Allowing for some "poetic license" (which since may have been revoked), someone defined the engineering development of hotter than air lift vehicles as "balloonneering", or "balloonneerring" (if the engineer made a lot of mistakes!)

Jim said, "As you can see, sometimes (often, ... too often) we had far too much time on our hands." However, his story of how the POWs at Son Tay passed Robert Service's "The Cremation of Sam Magee" from building to building is truly awe inspiring. Later in this book I will add that poem, along with "Invictus" since they were favorites of the guys, and then relate Jim's story in full.

Jim was a 24 year old USAF 1st Lieutenant, flying an F-105 with the 469th TFS when he was shot down on May 8th, 1966. He was released on February 12th, 1973 after 6 years, 9 months, and 4 days as a P.O.W.

There was a young NAMPOW from Lynn
Who became so excessively thin
That when he was made
To drink lemonade
He slipped through the straw and fell in

Anonymous - (in honor of Fred Flom at Son Tay prison camp)

A Vietnamese soldier named Tu
In supply line got only one shoe
Growled a grumpy old Sarge
To the G I in charge
"Why don't you give two to Tu, too?"

*

*

*

*

HOW THE POEMS WERE PASSED
(as recalled by X-Ray, 1 June 99)

SON TAY PRISON, NORTH VIETNAM
1968 - 1970

At various times from 1968 through July 1970, the prison at Son Tay held some 50 to 70 prisoners in two separate buildings. The buildings were oriented perpendicular to each other. The east end of the east-west building, which contained cellblocks called the "Opium Den" (on the east end) and the "Beer Hall," was about forty feet from the north end of the north-south building (named the "Cat House").

One of the prime objectives of the communists was to prevent any American prisoners from seeing, overhearing, or communicating in any way with any prisoner (except for cellmates, when one was so fortunate not to be in solitary confinement). It was part of their "divide and conquer" demoralization strategy, an integral part of their frequent attempts at "brainwashing" and propaganda exploitation. Covert communication links among all POWs was essential to keeping everyone's morale up, and to keep information flowing to and from the senior leaders, in order to counter that threat.

Whenever any prisoner was outside, the shutters of any window from which he might be visible were kept closed. Whenever the shutters of one room were opened for ventilation, the windows of other rooms or buildings with line of sight opportunity were kept closed. During periods when prisoners were moving to interrogation "quizzes," or on work details, all shutters were closed ... stifling what little ventilation there might have been.

Within any building the "tap code" could usually be employed secretly and safely to pass or relay information from room to room among the prisoners. Communication links between buildings were more challenging. But, it didn't take long for "American ingenuity" to solve the problem at Son Tay. Whenever the windows of the Beer Hall were open, during siesta time, when only one or two roving guards were on duty, the opportunity came. We in the middle room (#5) of the Cat House would press outward at the bottom of our door, creating a crack through which our designated communicator could see anyone standing at an open window in the Beer hall.

The code flasher lay on his stomach on the floor with his head at the door while another exerted pressure on the bottom edge of the door. They couldn't see us (nor could the most vigilant guard), but they could see a white (or light colored) piece of paper flashing signals through the crack. At the danger signal from the person at the open window, the code sender retracted the flash card,

preventing a roving guard from seeing anything suspicious. At the "all clear" signal, the flashers, silently conveying the standard tap code, could continue safely.

After official business messages had been passed, the flashers could send other data, such as personal greetings from former squadron mates. Then, inspirational notes such as brief quotes from literature or philosophy, or from the Bible, were appropriate. As days and weeks went by and communicators became more proficient, even relatively slow and cumbersome tap code flashing could complete most official and routine message traffic efficiently, allowing more and more time for inspiration and entertainment. Longer poems and passages became feasible. One of our favorites, for its relevance to our experiences, is "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me
Black as the pit from pole to pole
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the terror of the shade
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate
How charged with punishment the scroll
I am the master of my fate
I am the captain of my soul.

Rudyard Kipling's "If," "Ballad of East and West," and "Gunga Din," were also highly valued, but those were very long poems that, at first, seemed to be impossible to pass. Some in the Cat House knew portions of them and had already shared what they could, but we didn't even think of "calling long distance" to get them unabridged, or to pass along what we had of them to another building.

One day Ron Mastin sent word that one of the Beer Hall inmates knew "The Cremation of Sam Magee," and was not only reciting it for their entertainment, but was helping others memorize it.

When that information was relayed, one of the Cat House cons said he had known it once. He lobbied intensely for us to get it from the Beer Hall so he could relearn it and teach anyone else who wanted to memorize it. "It's that good. You'll love it," he insisted.

"How long is it?" I asked, since I was one of the code flashers.

"Ohhh, a few hundred lines or so," he responded. "But it's well worth it," he added quickly, countering the flashers' reactions.

Eventually we code flashers were convinced to request it from the Beer Hall, but only at a rate of four, or a max of eight lines per day. That worked OK, since writing materials were prohibited. The discovery of any covert writing by camp authorities was extremely dangerous to physical well-being if discovered, so it would have to be memorized as it came. A very useful temporary aid was a porcelain plate or bowl and a tiny piece of pencil lead. The code flasher-receiver would relay the words as they came; they were written in tiny letters on the plate or bowl until the session was over; then that addition would be memorized by one or two men and then passed on to others in the cellblock. In case of danger, the writing on the porcelain could be wiped clean instantly. So for the next several weeks (or was it months?) in our spare time at the Son Tay prison, some of us used the flashed tap code to transmit, receive, and memorize "The Cremation of Sam Magee," while we reciprocated with poems we knew.

(excerpt)

"Strange things are done in the land of the midnight sun by the men who toil for gold;
And the Arctic trails have their secret tales that can make your blood run cold.
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights, but the queerest they ever did see
Was the night on the marge of Lake LeBarge where I cremated Sam Magee."

The chilly land of the midnight sun
Is assuredly not the only one
Where very strange things are told.

No, sweltering, putrid Hanoi jails
Also hold many secret tales
That will make your blood run cold ...
Too!

X-RAY

Son Tay, about 23 miles west of Hanoi, is the prison camp "liberated" by the Son Tay Raiders on the night of November 20, 1970. See Ben Schemmer's book "The Raid" for an outstanding account of this superb rescue operation. Unfortunately, through no fault of the heroic Raiders, who performed exceptionally well, no American POWs were found and returned home. We had been transferred on July 14th to an improved prison several miles closer to Hanoi. There was no

security leak. The move was part of a long planned consolidation of prisoners. The apparent intelligence shortfall was that the U.S. agencies didn't know of the move until a matter of hours before President Nixon made his "go-no go" decision. Even then, there was ambiguous evidence as to whether some Americans might still be held at Son Tay. So, President Nixon, urged by JCS Chairman Admiral Thomas Moorer, Raider commander, USAF B/Gen Leroy Manor, Raider ground force commander, USA Col. "Bull Simons, with the consultation of advisors Haig, Kissinger, Laird, Rogers, et al, made the decision to launch. There were no serious casualties (except among the North Vietnamese); all Raiders returned safely; only two suffered injuries.

God bless 'em all for trying!!!

THANK YOU, SON TAY RAIDERS!!!

No poem, nor any word ever written is as inspiring as learning of an action like this, an action clearly demonstrating that we had not been, and would not be forgotten. When you realize that fellow citizens, who don't even know you, volunteer for this kind of rescue effort, knowing that many of them may die in that effort, words just can't express the overwhelming sense of appreciation; except possibly "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 (KJV)

Col. James "X-Ray" Ray, USAF
Son Tay prison camp, North Vietnam
POW 05-08-66 to 02-12-73



It seems I go from one level of amazement to another seeing how one man repeating his poem or limerick will jog his memory of someone else's. "Call so and so, Lee, he wrote a great one" or "you have to get John to let you use some of his, they are fantastic." So, I make contact with the new lead who will invariably say, "Mine wasn't much" or "mine wasn't very good, but you can use it if you'd like." Always they are wonderful! Each one adding and building on the others until this glimpse into some of the ways the POWs helped each other through their seemingly endless days has become this magical book.

"VOICES FROM THE DARK"

* * * *

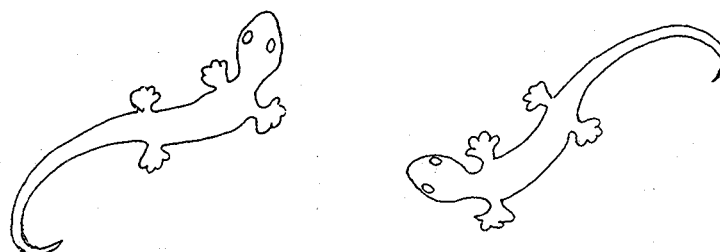
No sooner had I entered Jim Ray's story of Son Tay into the book when I received an E-mail from Mo Baker who had been SRO (senior ranking officer) at the Opium Den in Son Tay and remembered receiving poems from the Cat House by the flash tap code. He said, "I would never have believed that I could memorize 47 quartrains of "East Is East." My English teacher would have been proud of me as I barely made it through "Trees" in her senior English class.

Mo, like so many of his fellow prisoners lived in more than one camp during his years of imprisonment. During his long stay in Hoa Lo prison (Hanoi Hilton), he found the little geckos to be an endless source of amusement. These little lizards would chase each other across the four walls and ceilings. Once he even saw a pair breed upside down, moving him to write this couplet:

Little Gecko, you playful pup,
You don't care which side is up.

The little yellow tropical lizard, the gecko, was every POW's cellmate. We followed the cycle of their lives, marveling at their infant fragility, cheering their exploits, and mourning their deaths.

The gecko became our symbol and our mascot, for through them we saw ourselves more clearly.



At Camp Faith (Don Hoi barracks), with the assistance of Gene Smith, he wrote a verse for the hymn "How Great Thou Art" which was very meaningful to them. Since their return home, it has been performed thousands of times all over the United States.

"In foreign lands, You're even there beside me.
Your Holy Spirit in my heart yet dwells.
When nights are cold, I feel Your Light inside me
Imparting warmth to these cold hostile cells.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art."

While confined at Dog Patch (Dong Khe) in Cao Bang province near the Chinese border, John Borling recited his "Poems for Pilots and Other People" for the other prisoners. He requested that each of them memorize a couple of his poems in case he didn't make it home. Mo memorized two that he thought were excellent. John, by the Grace of God, did come home and many of those excellent poems are in this book.

Mo said, "On a long trip last year I recited nearly an hour's worth of poetry from those prison days. It will forever be a part of me. So, I honor those brave men who risked beatings and isolation for peeping through door cracks, key holes, and windows to transmit a little diversion to make our miserable lives a little better."

Mo and Gene were both USAF F-105 fighter pilots. Mo was a major and flew with the 357th TFS. Gene was also a major, but he flew with the 333rd TFS.

Col. "Mo" Baker, USAF
Nort Vietnam
POW August 1967 to 03-14-73

Lt. Col. Gene Smith, USAF
North Vietnam
POW 10-25-67 to 03-14-73

Walt Eckes was captured on May 10th, 1966. Just short of a month into his captivity, and along with another young Marine, he managed to over-power his guards and escape. They had many close calls, with the Viet Cong once coming within three feet of discovering them, but they finally reached the safety of a South Vietnamese Army post.

Walt says he wrote this poem with the help of a bottle of Jack Daniels!

WATCH MY BACK

One more time, our last attack
Please buddy John, watch my back
Medic up! The pointman is down
The C.O. shouts as the incoming mortars pound
Arty up! The command comes in
The F.O's job will soon begin
The batteries will fire without a doubt
The observers have long since gone out
You were always there when things were tough
We've stood side by side when the times were rough
Rounds are getting closer...We can hear them crack
Please buddy John, watch my back
Clearance denied...friendlies nearby
Artillery can't fire, are we going to die?
At 19, I'm too young of a man
to die in this country, they call Vietnam
Wait one! The word comes back
Friendlies gone by - artillery will attack
On the way, the F.O. hollers
Corrections will soon follow
We're sticking close...We took some flak
Please buddy John, watch my back
Fire for effect, mission complete
Enemy suffers another defeat
Dust settling everywhere
Corpsman running here and there
Now counting casualties
John, why won't you speak to me?
You kept me alive, you taught me the facts
But now...No more buddy John to watch my back

Corporal Walter Eckes, USMC
POW 05-10-66 to 06-05-66

IN HONOR OF MY MOTHER

Ted was flying with FITRON 151 in an F-4B. He was on his fourth tour and his 348th mission when he lost out to the odds and was bagged on 8-27-72. He told me he wrote this tribute for two reasons. The first was out of love for her and the second for the lessons she taught him throughout his life.

Ted said "When you are in the situation I found myself you reach inside for the comfort and strength to face what may be ahead. The best place to find that comfort and strength was in the memory of my mother's deep and abiding love".

**I was introduced to life under her guidance and care
From her I first saw love, compassion and intelligence
She cared for me in times of need with unselfish devotion
Sacrifices she made that I have never known.**

**Through her knowledge I learned the beauty of nature
I drew from her well of sincerity as a thirsty traveler draws water
She pointed me along a true path
I feel near her when she is far.**

**Neither walls nor bars will enclose my thoughts
And she will not be forgotten for my children
will know of her and theirs thereafter.**

To her I say a simple thanks...she deserves much more.

**Capt. Ted Trieble, USN
17 Sept 72
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 08-27-72 to 03-28-73**

One of the few things the North Vietnamese provided in any form of ample supply, was cigarettes. They came in three basic brands. Truong Son, Tam Thanh, and Dien Bien, with an occasional pack of Albanian Leka's thrown in.

Ralph Gaither sent me this short poem about cigarettes written by Bill Shankel. When I asked some of the guys about the cigarettes, Ray Alcorn chipped in with, "Lee, they all had nicotine, so they couldn't be all bad." I got this response from Dick Stratton, "The only info I have is from the VC and they lie! 14 brands produced in North Vietnam. Truong Son was 2nd from the bottom; tasted like unfiltered Camel cigarettes soaked in urine and sitting in the middle of the LA Freeway for a full circle of rush hour. Dien Bien was 2nd from the top; tasted like unfiltered Camel cigarettes a year after their expiration date. Not a bad smoke. Never smoked before or after jail."

TRUONG SON BUTTS

Truong Son butts, a smoking man's cigarette.
So limp, so dry, so loosely packed,
So slow and chokey on the draw,
Truong Son butts,
They're so F—— GOOD.

Cdr Bill Shankel, MC, USN
POW 12-23-65 to 02-12-73

Capt Dick Stratton, USN
POW 01-05-67 to 03-14-73

Capt Ray Alcorn, USN
POW 12-22-65 to 02-12-73



Prison propaganda photograph of Dick Stratton, USN taken during an interrogation or "Quiz" as the POWs themselves called these sessions. He is smoking one of the North Vietnamese cigarettes.

These are photographs of the three types of North Vietnamese cigarettes that were given to me by returning POWs who brought them home when they were released in 1973. They are intact and have never been opened.



WHEN DUTY CALLS

**The puffy clouds that dot the summer sky
Their fleeting somber shadows signify
The mood of wives and mothers of men
They possibly may never see again.**

**This cruise is different from the one before
For duty calls us to some hostile shore.
I now hear your words of comfort to one
"This duty calls my husband and your son,**

**We must prepare for any sacrifice
And hope that only duty will suffice."
Your cheerful smile, your poise, your stylish dress
Assurance of your strength to meet this test.**

**With our most cherished mem'ries within me
The winds of Freedom blow us out to sea.**

**The years of war require much sacrifice
And now I too have had to pay this price,
Shot down and captured in a hostile land,
Deprived of all the dreams we once had planned.**

**Our Ginny had now grown to womanhood,
But I am convinced she has understood
Just why for Freedom's cause I wasn't free,
And why both Mom and Dad you had to be.**

**All those whose men were missing felt this pain,
But none so much as those who hoped in vain.
Sweetheart, you took it well, I'm proud of you
Our life and love and dreams we'll now renew**

**Though all my love for you will long remain
You know when duty calls I'll go again.**

**Cdr. Doug Clower, USN
North Vietnam
POW 11-19-67 to 03-14-73**

Some poems are quite long and stirring, others are very poignant. There are those that touch the soul and those that make you laugh. You will find all of these and more in this book.

This one by Larry Writer is short and to the point. Larry wrote it shortly after the death of Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of North Vietnam. He says the last line should be read verrry sloooow! I love it!

ODE TO UNCLE HO

**Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh
Ho Ho is red
Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh
Ho Ho is dead
Ho Ho Ho**

**Col. Larry Writer
Winter, 1969
The Plantation
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 02-15-68 to 03-14-73**

Larry was an Air Force captain flying as the, "Backseater - GIB", navigator in an F-4D with the 389th TFS when he was shot down and captured on the 15th of February, 1968. He had been in solitary confinement for almost two years when he wrote his "Ode." It must have been quite popular as all I have had to do is start it and most of the guys will instantly finish it for me!

NIXON LIBRARY POW EXHIBIT



Long black prison pajamas worn in captivity by Sgt Mike Lenker, USA, who was a POW from the 8th of February, 1968 until his release on the 16th of March, 1973 in Hanoi, North Vietnam. The red striped prison pajamas belonged to Lt Paul Granger, USAF, who was shot down over Hanoi in a B-52 on the 20th of December, 1972 during the Christmas raids ordered by President Nixon. The 11 days of raids ultimately ended the war and brought the POWs home. Paul was released on the 29th of March, 1973.



Sgt Mike Lenker, USA, being released in Hanoi on the 16th of March, 1973. Shown are his "Ho Chi Minh" rubber tire sandals and his calendar marking the days until his release.



Photograph of LtJG Porter Halyburton, USN, taken just before his last flight over North Vietnam on the 17th of October, 1965. Shown is the hat he made from a worn out tee shirt, a clothes pin made from bamboo, a case to hold a pipe sent from home made from worn out black prison pajamas and a pair of socks from one of the few care packages he ever received from home. Porter was released with the first group freed on February the 12th, 1973. He was on the second plane out of Gia Lahm airport to Clark AB in the Philippines and on to HOME!



Prison photo of Capt Neal Jones, USAF, captured on the 28th of June, 1966 after his F-105 was shot down. A tooth pick Neal made from a piece of dog bone is shown beneath the photo. The Rosary was made by Lt Ross Terry, USN, using bits of string, tooth paste tubes rolled to make the beads and the cross and medallion were made from dried bread dough. Ross was a POW from the 9th of October, 1966 until the 14th of March, 1973. The box of soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, and hand towel were placed in the POWs release bag as propaganda to show how well they were treated. The bar of lye soap was what they actually used and it had to last months!



An authentic brick from the wall of the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" (Hoa Lo prison) and an authentic roof tile from the prison complex dubbed the "Zoo" by the POWs. The dolls clothes were made by the daughter of Cdr Mel Moore, USN, from his actual prison clothes and rubber tire sandals. Mel was a POW from the 3rd of March, 1967 to the 4th of March 1973.



These two drawings are by Capt Ted Gostas, USA, who was captured on the 1st of February, 1968 during the Tet offensive. Ted was one of the most brutally tortured POWs and these drawing represent his memory of that time.



The vase in the photo is made from the actual shell casing that brought down Lcdr Dale Osborne's A4F naval aircraft on the 23rd of September, 1968. It was engraved and given to the North Vietnamese gun crew who downed him. It is the only known verifiable artifact of its type in the world. The photo was taken before Dale's last mission.

The North Vietnamese also used their postage stamps to show milestones in the amount of American aircraft shot down during the war years. These were usually in increments of 500. In one of my POW displays I have a complete collection of these stamps, which though perhaps not quite accurate, are very colorful and show their propagandized side of the war. A case in point is the stamp showing the capture (staged) of Sgt Billy Robinson, USAF, who was well over six feet tall being taken in by a North Vietnamese girl who was less than five feet tall.





HANOI, NORTH VIETNAM - 1965

This a photo of a mural from the side of a building in Hanoi commemorating the claimed downing of the 100th American aircraft to be shot down over North Vietnam.



Captain Guy Gruters was flying F-100's with the 19th TASS as a Fast FAC when he was shot down on 12-20-67. He remained in captivity until his release on 03-14-73.

While this poem was not written during Guy's long years in prison, it did take root and was basically formed during that period. In the years since his homecoming Guy has refined his words and finally put it down on paper. It is Guy's story as he lived it, touching on his relationship with Lance Sijan, his brother Terry's several tours of duty in Vietnam, and his wife Sandy's patient wait for his eventual return. It also expresses his feelings about the wars aftermath.

In large part, it was Guy's efforts, along with Bob Craner's, that resulted in the awarding of the Congressional Medal of honor to Lance Sijan for his heroic evasion and firm resistance as a POW, right up until he died. That remarkable story can be found in the book "Into The Mouth Of The Cat."

AMERICAN TIGERS

**My wife's name was Sandy,
daughters Dawn and Sheryl Lee,
I flew a fighter called the F-100,
The Sabre, the Dollar, the Century.**

**The F-100 was an outstanding bird,
an excellent weapon I know,
as Sandy and I kissed tenderly,
it was time to go.**

**Sandy was a warrior's woman,
no man could ask for more,
calm courage on her beautiful face,
I left for Vietnam's shore.**

**I went to fight where night is day,
all energy on the attack,
I went to fight to keep the fight away,
from Sandy at my back.**

**American Tigers beside me,
in the air, on land, at sea,
we fought as our countymen always have,
for a people to be free.**

**The Colonels had been to Germany,
each time as an unwelcome guest,
they said nothing there was even close,
the gunners in the North were the best.**

With four hundred missions flown,
tracers flowing free,
I was shot down, then rescued,
Jolly Greens pulled me from the sea.

I fought on half a world from home,
all energy on the attack,
and every day in a thousand ways,
God and Sandy covered my back.

American Tigers beside me,
in the air, on land, at sea,
we fought as our countrymen always have,
for a people to be free.

Determined men at the guns,
thousands of red tracers pass by,
down, steep diving, we hold fire,
then our cannons speak, and those men die.

American Tigers beside me,
in the air, on land, at sea,
we fought as our country men always have,
for a people to be free.

Again hit bad, in trouble,
all hydraulics blown away,
the fighter rolled without control,
and plunged for earth that day.

I pulled the handles, the canopy went,
the rockets blew me clear,
I hit the ground in '67,
I'll never forget that year.

American Tiger around me,
in the terrible prison hell,
we fought on in a different way,
our only weapons faith and will.

Sijan died beside me,
the toughest man I've ever known,
the manner of his death a testament,
to the product of American homes.

American Tigers around me,
in the small, dark prison cells,
we fought on in a different way,
our weapons faith and will.

In the camp called the Hanoi Hilton,
we heard the great Tet boast,
by the end of the year though, very clear,
Tet was a communist roast.

American Tigers around me,
in the small, dark prison cells,
we fought in a different way,
our weapons faith and will.

My brother Terry followed me then,
flying O-1's and B-52's,
and he didn't stop flying and fighting,
for a day the whole war through.

An American Tiger is airborne,
twelve thousand miles from home,
and he will not leave till the job is done,
he knows Sandy is alone.

Year after year Terry fought on,
no commander could send him back,
downed three times, he never flinched,
but held to the attack.

An American Tiger is airborne,
twelve thousand miles from home,
and he wouldn't quit till the job was over,
his brother didn't come home.

The camps were cold, I was a man alone,
hunger, torture the way of life,
I held on through the long, long years,
for God, honor, and my dear wife.

American Tigers around me,
in the terrible prison hell,
we fought on in a different way,
our weapons were faith and will.

**Faith in American Tigers,
Faith in our God above,
Faith in the nation behind us,
Faith in the women we loved.**

**Will to keep on fighting,
Will steady through the years,
Will to bring us courage,
Will to conquer fear.**

**I saw their officers close-up,
not a pretty sight to see,
but no match, believe me,
for fighting men born free.**

**In '72 the guerrilla war lost,
Hanoi tried a conventional attack,
but they hadn't figured, even considered,
Nixon sending the Tigers back.**

**Russian tanks rolled southward,
Tigers take to the air,
the tanks are smashed, Hanoi's hopes dashed,
Tigers kept it fair.**

**Then Nixon sent my brother
and his friends in the B-52's,
to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong,
in Christmas of '72.**

**American Tigers were airborne,
Masters of the sky,
men who always fight to win,
men not afraid to die.**

**American Tigers in combat,
a beautiful sight to behold,
fighting for God and Country,
may we always have men so bold.**

**Lonely lovers stand behind them,
with cherished homes and families,
may we always have such women,
may we always keep them free.**

**Hanoi sued for peace then,
Tigers had made them yield.**

With the treaty signed, we believed their lies,
took our Tigers from the field.

I came back after six years gone,
a man no longer alone,
there waiting quietly with Dawn and Sheryl,
stood Sandy in our home.

American Tigress to greet me,
with heart so brave and true,
she fought on through the tragic years,
for God, honor, and her man too.

Hanoi and the Russians waited two years,
attacked in wave after wave,
our leadership had lost the will to defend,
South Vietnam became their slave.

American Tigers were home then,
and broken-hearted watched them yield,
no way to defend the helpless,
without Tigers in the field.

Now why would anyone have doubts,
of the nature of the communist beast,
atheist and cruel, let's stop it,
or one day on our people they'll feast.

For God must be disappointed with quitters and cowards,
as all good people are,
may we strive for what's right, not easy,
and in future, with God, win our wars.

Then Sandy gave me Ginger,
Ryan, Amber, and Tyler too,
and our little baby Misty,
dearest Sandy, I love you.

American lover to greet me,
at the close of a long, hard day,
through all the fears, through all the years,
how blessed we are today.

First grandchild on the way now,
and Sheryl's husband, our new son Dave,
May I say how you've lived, Sandy?
You gave, and gave, and gave.

**I thank God for all American men,
and all American women too,
but most of all, sweet Sandy,
I thank God for you.**

**Guy Gruters, USAF
POW 12-20-67 to 03-14-73**

This grouping is by Porter Halyburton, who was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam from October 17, 1965 until his release on February 12, 1973. As best he can remember they were all written in the prison complex called the "Zoo." They begin in 1968 and end in 1973 as he was leaving Clark AFB on a C-141 for the United States and home. You can follow his despair and fear of the unknown, which his life had become, to his utter joy of once again being a free man in a society of free men.

WINTER CRYPT

**How can I describe the way that I feel?
As if the stream I was crossing
Had suddenly frozen,
And locked my ankles in an icy grip,
Immobilizing that once-fluid force
And I with it ...
And we have nothing to do
But wait until the thaw.**

**Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
1968
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

PRISON GARDEN

**How long will the black roses bloom?
Perhaps for the day ... or through the night,
But in the morning their thorns
Will be sharper still.**

**How long have the white roses bloomed?
They have long since died,
But left the fragrant memory of their passing.**

**When will the red roses bloom?
Perhaps tomorrow or tomorrow,
But I have tasted the bitter lemon,
Seen the deep puple,
Heard the rustling of the grass
And felt the tightening of her arms.**

Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
1968
Hanoi, North Vietnam

THE MAN

The Man spoke to me
And I can still remember the words
That he said:

"Never fear that which lies
Beyond the scope of your imagination,
Never balk at that conception
Which seems to jump
Just outside your sphere of comprehension.
You are young and not yet
Tempered by the fires of time;
You have not yet tested
The limits of endeavor,
Or know the reason of your being."

He said that, "Although time may lift you
To the apex of your ambitions,
It will not be without great effort,
Nor should it be ...
That man can live upon the blood
And sweat of his providers,
And never do or say
A worthwhile thing.
But you must be the Architect and Builder,
And claim the wealth
Of your creations."

Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
1969
Hanoi, North Vietnam

RELECTIONS ON CAPTIVITY

**How can I measure the loss
Of my dimensions ...
As I lie, spread across
This crass expanse of time ...
Bitter years, devoid of latitude
Or luster:
My duty days of trial
And decision
Are but pages turned
But pages not forgotten.**

**Those countless hours
Of aimless retrospection ...
Regret, restraint, and introspection;
The strange monotony of
Unrewarded hopes,
Unconquered hopes ...
Amidst my unborn tears,
Have tempered the mettale
Of my structure
And filled the empty spaces
Of my soul.**

**Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
1970
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

YEARS

**The years expend themselves upon the walls
With slow and steady cannonade,
Without a thought for those within
Who peer beneath the door.**

**Fish wrappers today are yesterday's dreams
And soon to be ashes and smoke,
And only a few are judiciously saved
To be wrappers and liners and smoke.**

Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
1972
Hanoi, North Vietnam

METAMORPHOSIS

Trembling and silent before the threshold,
We stand on the eve of our Resurrection.
Hardly daring to believe at last
The valve may crack and we may seep
Into the tip of an infinitely expanding horn,
To be belched unto that crowded carnival,
An old song.

She stands before me, silent, across the wide river;
Her smile seen dimly through the damp fog.
Watching through my peephole, I can only
Whisper her name -- Freedom ...
And I, within my hardened shell,
Await Rebirth.

Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
February 1, 1973
Hanoi, North Vietnam

FREEDOM

A newborn, reborn child of joy,
I step from my cell into your arms,
Your lives, your love,
Your soontobemine world,
Our country ...
Freedom ... too sweet for paltry words ...
But now I try ... to you we must express ...
Can I, for all, say thank you ...?
Again my paltry words will fail.
One, two, three, 2, hundred, ... million ...
One to infinity for each ... Thank you.

Our suffering ... feel no pity ...
Please, no pity ... We stand tall
For you ... with you.
My hand quivers, joydrops wet my face,
The lump is always there ...
The apple of joy and love ...
For you ... and freedom.

Just now I read ... to me ... to us;
"Dear Sir,
I sure am glad
Your all done ...
I said a prayer every night ...
And it finally came true.
Welcome home sir.
I would have
Gave my life
To get you guys out of there
But I don't think my parents
Would like it.
I think you'll like being home
With your family.
I'm a six grader.
Gary"

Many died in Vietnam ... gave their lives ...
Love them ... honor them ...
Please honor them ...
They won't be coming home.
We are all here because of you ...
My paltry words have failed ...
But ... I must try
To say
Thank you.

Cdr. Porter Halyburton, USN
February 16, 1973
Airborne in a C-141



It was February 2, 1962, and Ron Webb was a young 1st Lt. navigator assigned to a KB-50 tanker, pulling TDY (temporary duty) in the Azores. While there he wrote an ode unaware of the significance it would have to him later in his career. He titled it "FATE 44" ... and as fate would have it, he was involved in a mid-air collision with another F-4C northeast of Hanoi on June 11, 1967. It was his 44th mission over North Vietnam!

His next two poems were written in 1970 as a reflection of his thoughts during a continuous one year period of solitary confinement. He spent an additional six months in solo, but his motivation for any poetry had ceased.

In 1971, due to the raid on the Son Tay prison camp to free the American POW's, the North Vietnamese gathered all the POW's into Hanoi where they put them in large cells in groups of 40 to 50 men. In this environment with so many guys together for the first time, they indulged in everything from classes, to choirs, to Toastmaster Clubs, to bridge and chess tournaments ... along with their heavy clandestine communications and military activities. It was at this time Ron put his poems on scraps of paper. They were then passed around for the enjoyment of others. By release the poems were still out there, but he never saw them again. One day, long after he was home, he visited the Naval Air Museum at Pensacola, Florida to see their POW display. Incredibly there were his poems mounted on display! He has no idea who brought them out of Hanoi in 1973, nor who gave them to the museum.

**FATE 44
(Ode to a KB-50)**

**The night was dark and filled with a pervading gloom.
Thunderclouds hid the view to outward eternity ...
Intermittent lightning illuminated the ramp and tenant iron birds,
A solem crew passed purposefully through the nocturnal chillness.**

**These men could not know of their impending doom ...
Their job of aerial refueling they did with positive certainty.
Their thoughts about these missions were rarely described in words.
Only the inevitable engines-start broke the evening stillness.**

**Soon FATE 44 was airborne and proceeded to the rendezvous.
The huge storm clouds seemed to fall away and the many starry eyes of night appeared.
Checklists were mechanically followed and watches carefully monitored.
The focal moment of the mission arrived at last.**

Two smaller planes emerged out of the night and into view.
Drogues were silently extended as the fighters neared ...
It was as though young ones had come to feed from the mother bird ...
And she did her job well as she had done so in the past.

The task completed, the tanker began wending her way home.
No one will ever know what really happened ...
There was an explosion ... then another ...
For FATE 44, this mission was the last.

1st Lt. Ronald J. Webb, USAF
February 2, 1962

DREAMS

We sleep the long nights
We sleep in the day
Our minds ever-seeking
Escape - far away
Our dreams - somewhat varied
When sleeping's the frame
But our dreams, when concious,
Are always the same
We long for return
to our homeland, so great -
To our families, our friends,
To a sweet, loving mate
We are being held hostage
This truth we now see
The time here is mounting
Days, months, years ----- eternity
Our existence here now
Is a dreamworld -- no more --
And our hopes for the future
Depend on a war
Our hopes mix with dreams
And our dreams never cease
Conjuring up solutions --
The only one is peace

When our day of peace comes
Will our dreams then come true?
We've been hoping and dreaming
That they will ---
That they do ---

Col. Ronald Webb, USAF
1970
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 06-11-67 to 03-04-73

THE SOUND OF OUR AMERICA

We close our eyes and listen
To that sound across the sea
It's the sound of our America
In all her majesty
We've been away so very long
Yet our memories are sharp and clear
Of the one's we love so very much
And the place we hold so dear
We dream that we'll return someday
To that place we cherish true
And when we reach that golden shore
We'll start our lives anew
We long to be in America
To resume a happy life
Away from the miseries of war
The separation and strife
To walk again in healthy air
In a real democracy
Away from this evil social form
With it's lies and hypocrisy
Back where there's truth and dignity
Where a man can stand so tall
Back in America
The greatest land of all

**Yes, we close our eyes and listen
To that sound across the sea
It's the sound of freedom ringing
In the land of liberty ---**

**Col. Ronald Webb, USAF
1970
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

FRIENDS

(Dedicated to America's Children)

**Have you ever been locked in a room all alone,
for many a month on end?**

**And never seen a friendly face, a laugh,
a smile, a grin?**

**If you had been locked in a room all alone
for many a month on end**

**Then you would know how a rat or a mouse
could become a prisoner's friend.**

**Now rats and mice make very good friends
they visit you each day.**

**They're fairly small and quiet and they
really like to play.**

All my friends were rats or mice,

I talked to them each day

And we did agree that they would not bite, if

I would stay out of their way.

**I used to feed the rats and mice that
ran around the room.**

**They helped to keep my spirits high and
chase away the gloom.**

**So if you're ever locked in a room all
alone for many a month on end**

**Just look around and you may find a
rat, a mouse, a friend.**

Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN

1970

Hanoi, North Vietnam

ODE TO A PORCELAIN CUP
(Dedicated to all POW/MIA bracelet wearers)

Oh, Poreclain cup you've served me well
Thru these years of waste
Each time I feel the need to drink
You watered my weathered face.

When first we met many years ago
You were bright and shiney and new
Now you're dull, chipped, and cracked
You've become aged too.

We've been thru a lot together
Lo these many years
Lots of heat, lots of sweat
Hours of longing and fears.

When my days of detention are thru
And I return at last to my home
I will have to leave you here my friend
Dejected - all alone.

But when I leave this forlorn place
As my days in this hell are up
I'll take along the memory of you
My old porcelain cup.

Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN
Spring, 1970
Hanoi, North Vietnam



UNSUNG HEROINES

(Dedicated to the wives of the POW's and MIA's)

**Heroes are made, not born, they say,
It was true in the past, and it still is today.
For the soldiers and pilots who fight in the war,
We bedeck them with medals, by the score;
But what of the women, who wait at home.
Fighting hours of boredom, long nights alone,
Being both father and mother, to all of their brood
Managing the home, the budget, preparing the food.
Are they not heroines in every sense of the word?
They suffer in silence, their laments unheard;
Are not these women, of men gone to war
The unsung heroines, today as before?**

**Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN
Fall, 1970
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

EVERY DAY CAN BE VALENTINES DAY

**A heart shaped box of candy
Given once a year
To that special someone
You profess to love so dear**

**This coupled with a card
For your turtle dove
An obligation every year
To tell her of your love**

**That's the way it used to be
When we were young and free
Wild young bucks, so full of life
Just turning twenty-three**

Then we went away to war
To defend democracy
But fate stepped in, now here we sit
In the heart of the DRV

During our time of detention here
We've all had time to think
To reflect upon life's past deeds
Carousing, girls, and drink

We will all be wiser men by far
When we return at last to our home
More appreciative of life and a loving wife
Never more the urge to roam

So make every day - Valentine's Day
In a way that won't hurt at all
Just whisper to her - "I Love You"
When the shadows of darkness fall

Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN
February, 1972
Hanoi Hilton

A CHRISTMAS TRILOGY

Christmas Past

A room full of warmth, on Christmas morn
The smell of a pine tree, white snow on the lawn
Wide eyed children, so full of glee
At the sight of their presents, under the tree
At church we celebrate, the birth of our Savior
Then a big Christmas breakfast is normal behavior
Later that day when friends come to call
We serve fruitcake and eggnog, there is plenty for all
Turkey with dressing, the traditional dinner
Topped off with mince pie, to make it a winner
More coffee, a cigar, or a small glass of sherry
All of these things, made Christmas merry

Christmas Present

**Christmas here this year, will be better than most
With so many roommates to dine and to toast
We'll sing traditional carols or maybe a hymn
Or listen to Dicken's story about Tiny Tim
Though we're still confined within this prison's wall
Each in his own heart, hears the family call
And of this one thing, I feel very certain
We'll be with them in spirit, if we can't make it in person**

Christmas Future

**We'll celebrate Christmas, at the church of our choice
With peace again in the world, all mankind will rejoice
We'll party and visit, with friends old and new
This dream will come true, for me and for you
Comfortable and secure, in the warmth of our home
With a real turkey dinner, instead of a bone
Together our families, around our own tree**

In the home of the brave, in the land of the free

**Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN
June, 1972
Hanoi Hilton, Hanoi, North Vietnam**

This poem was sent to Duffy upon his return home from Hanoi in February, 1973 after nearly seven and a half years of imprisonment by one of "his" bracelet wearers. It came enclosed with the bracelet she had worn day and night, week after week, year after year, until finally, by the Grace of God, he came home.

ESPECIALLY FOR CDR JAMES HUTTON

We wore a bracelet
With a soldier's name
We hoped our prayers
Were not in vain

The man, the face
We did not know
We hoped very soon
They'd let you go

We wondered if
You were alive and well
We knew for sure
You'd been through hell

We thought about
Your family - your home
We know the feeling
Of being alone

So if a prayer was
ever heard
We now know God
Hears every word

God bless you Jim

Linda Sanidan
Feb 20, 1973



THE P.O.W.—M.I.A. BRACELET®

Over 1500 Americans are either Prisoners Of War or Missing In Action in Southeast Asia.

Aside from the inhumane treatment witnessed by those few who have returned, the most tragic aspect is that most of the families of these men do not know if their sons, husbands, or fathers are alive or dead. Hanoi won't tell them.

This bracelet honors the man whose name is inscribed and includes the date he was lost. It should be worn with the vow that it will not be removed until the day the Red Cross is allowed into Hanoi and can assure his family of his status and that he receives the humane treatment due all men.

★ ★ ★

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While this particular poem was not written during Duffy Hutton's imprisonment in Hanoi, it takes its seed from a poem he wrote while there titled "Heroines", which related to the wives, mothers, and daughters waiting at home. When the Vietnam Nurse's Memorial was being built for placement near the Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC, he decided to expand on the poem to express the feelings he had always had towards these women, especially as many of them were on the plane bringing him and the other P.O.W.s out of Hanoi to freedom. Many more were there to care for him in the hospital on Clark AFB and again at the Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego, California, including his future wife, Eileen.

So. I feel this excellent poem has a valued and honored spot in this book of poems, prayers, and verses from the P.O.W.s. I hope all who read this book will heartily agree.

A PIECE OF THEIR HEART
(Dedicated to the Vietnam Women Veterans)

Heroes are made, not born they say,
It was true in the past, and it still is today.
For the soldiers and sailors, who fight in the war,
We bedeck them with medals, by the score.

But what of the women, who have also served,
They answered their country's call, with courage and nerve.
In field units and on hospital ships, proudly, they were there,
Comforting, healing, or just combing a patient's hair.

Their backgrounds were varied, but to serve was their goal,
So they came - Oh so eager, and a few rather old.
Compassion and caring, their characteristics in common,
Came from their souls - the absolute bottom.

For the injured to be air evaced, and soon to be missed,
They were sent off with a smile or maybe a blown kiss.
For the fatally wounded, a fate far grimmer,
A black body bag, for a life without glimmer.

Many were young, and quite immature,
But they outgrew that - by the end of a year.
They were challenged by duties, few could have guessed,
But when the chips were down, they passed the test.

**Their sleep often shattered, by a strange whistling sound,
The telltale signature, of an incoming round.
As they scrambled from their beds, and their hearts began to pound,
Their survival instincts screamed, you must hit the ground!**

**The trauma and pain, they saw with their eyes,
Affected them deeply, for the rest of their lives.
They have suffered in silence, for so many years,
Reliving the nightmares, recalling the fears.**

**Countless thousands over the years, traveled this road,
To the jungles of Vietnam, bearing their load.
They answered the call, of their mother's nation,
And when the job was done, returned to life's station.**

**For the fighting men, since the beginning of time,
Monuments have been built, of marble so fine.
But where are the memorials to these women who served,
As in the past - forgotten - despite their nerve.**

**A tribute to those who gave their all - The Vietnam Wall,
With a statue - symbolic of men, on a Washington mall.
But where is the bronze symbolism - for the women who served?
They answered their country's call, with courage and nerve!**

**Are not these women - who answered the call to war,
The unsung heroines, today as before?
And all that they touched, while from loved one apart,
They gave a small gift - a piece of their heart!**

**Capt. Duffy Hutton, USN
P.O.W - North Vietnam
October, 1965 - February, 1973**

In a group of his own poems which Duffy Hutton sent me, was this next one. It was written in the Hanoi Hilton, but the author is unknown. If, in reading this poem, someone recognizes it as his, or knows who in fact did write it, I will give them proper credit in future editions. It is a wonderful poem written with great depth of feeling and it deserves to have it's author known.

RETROSPECT

I never really missed your love
 Until I went away
Not til then did I understand
 What you meant to me each day

You accused me of being unromantic at times
 In retrospect you were right
For I was reluctant to confide in you
 What I felt in my heart each night

I regret I never told you
 Those things you longed to hear
Those three little words, that I know now
 Would have been music to your ear

Throughtout these long years of separation
 One thought has haunted my head
I curse those lost moments of silence with you
 Those truths I left unsaid

A wise man once philosophized
 Procrastination is the thief of time
I hope that thief hasn't stolen your love
 For I still want you for mine

When at last, we are together again
 In a week, a month, a year
In the soft moonlight, I'll hold you tight
 And whisper, "I love you dear"

Author unknown
Hanoi, North Vietnam

As best he can remember, Dave Burroughs wrote this poem on September 23, 1966. It was the day after his mother's birthday and somewhere around the time President Johnson addressed the United Nations. LBJ's speech to the assembly in defense of our P.O.W.'s seemed to have a short term effect on how the North Vietnamese treated them. At least for the next twenty-four hours he was left untortured in the Garage section of the Zoo, there in Hanoi.

MOONSHINE

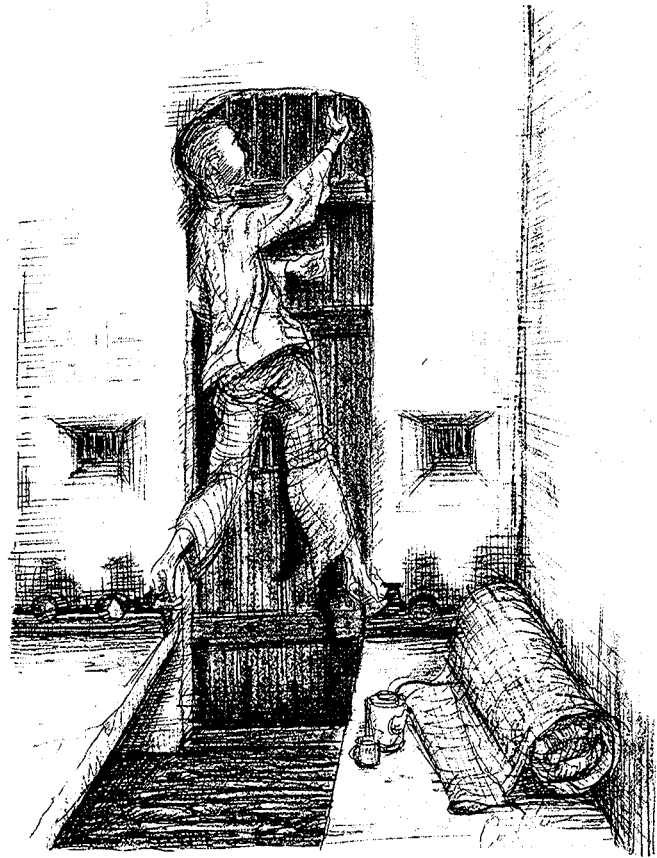
In the darkest of times, I peep through a slit
in a warped, weathered door in a cell.
No windows let light of star cross my brow -,
No doors let my temper undwell.

But God's human brain, perverse as it is,
flings out meaning, no matter impeding
it's thought as it circles the globe.
The moon gathers shines for you and is singing.

For me a peep through a slit will do.
Reflected rays unlock a sigh.
The joy once squeezed, now broadly shouts
unfettered free in a mutual sky.

That same moon that shines for me
also shines on you.

Col. William "Dave" Burroughs, USAF
September, 1966
The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 07-31-66 to 03-04-73



Dave Carey was shot down and became a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese on August 31st, 1967. In 1970 he decided to try his hand at poetry by composing several for his fiancée and wife to be, Karen. Yellow Clad Dream refers to the color of the clothes she was wearing when they met and Dreams of You is self explanatory. She waited five and a half years for him to return to her. They were married on May 5th, 1973, six weeks after his return home to freedom. As a gift he had the poems printed and framed which he presented to her on the night before their wedding. Karen died of breast cancer in 1996. They had been married twenty-three years.

The French poem and the English translation, are from the versions he gave to Jerry Coffee years ago and which Jerry used in one of his books.

YELLOW CLAD DREAM

**The night that we met, it rained I recall
The Hi-Life, the movie, the oranges and all.**

**The places we'd been, the things we had seen
Paled in the mist round a yellow clad dream.**

**Through the next few months, our love how it grew
My world was aglow with, my Darling, you.**

**Now times of duress and trouble and pain
My comfort comes from our love's sweet refrain.**

**You're strength when I'm weak, and joy when I'm sad
Courage against heartaches and problems I've had.**

**Your memory's with me, alone and afraid
Companion and refuge, never to fade.**

**Your love and your faith, my guardian theme
Hope for the future, my yellow clad dream.**

**Capt. Dave Carey, USN
North Vietnam
POW 08-31-67 to 03-14-73**

DREAMS OF YOU

**Now when I think of days gone by,
Memories that I hold dear.
Mt. Diablo and sunny sky,
I thrilled to have you near.**

**That April day that scared us all,
How happy was the word.
your booby made it through O.K.,
The story I have heard.**

**The night you told me you loved me,
You gave my heart it's wings.
I made the long journey homeward,
You couldn't hear me sing!**

**The trip to Anchor bay, the truck,
How well you knew the way.
The road, the wreck, the broken clutch,
Your company saved my day.**

**The day we sailed Oriskany,
The world to which I'm bound.
How glad to know you understood,
My world of speed and sound.**

**The little toy cars you sent me,
Spent your money to buy.
I've passed the days, and months, and years,
Always wondering, "Why?"**

**The breakfast coffee with a kiss,
Those things done just for me.
My words of thanks, inadequate,
How 'ere sincere they be.**

**Now when I think of days ahead,
My hopes, my dreams for two.
The ones I think of most of all,
Are those including you!**

**Capt. Dave Carey, USN
North Vietnam**

JE ME DEMANDE ... (I WONDER...)

**Je me demande comment dit-on,
"Tu es le monde a moi."
Parce que je veux dire ces mots cherie,
A toi autant de voies.**

**Tu es le soleil a moi,
la lune et les etoiles.
Tu es la brise de mon esprit,
Qui met le coeur a voile.**

**Tu es la chanson des oiseaux,
A moi l'arc en ciel.
Tu es la fleur de bon matin,
Plus douce que le miel.**

**Tu es les vague qui baisent la plage,
Musique aux orielles.
Tu es le silence de l'eglise,
Que fait l'esprit tranquille.**

**Tu es le but de mes espoirs,
La joi de toute la vie!
Tu es le theme de tous mes reves,
Femme pour laquelle je vie.**

**Capt. Dave Carey, USN
North Vietnam**

I WONDER

**I wonder how one says,
"You are the world to me."
Because I want to say these words dear,
To you in so many ways.**

**You are the sun to me,
The moon and the stars.
You are the breeze of my spirit,
Which sets my heart to sail.**

**You are the song of the birds,
To me the rainbow in the sky.
You are the morning flower,
Sweeter than honey.**

**You are the waves that kiss the beach,
Music to my ears.
You are the silence of the church,
Which makes my spirit tranquil.**

**You are the goal of all my hopes,
The joy of all my life.
You are the theme of all my dreams,
Woman for whom I live.**

**Capt. Dave Carey, USN
North Vietnam**

This poem was developed over the 7 1/2 years Wes Schierman was a P.O.W. to tell his children about the circumstances that took him away from them for such a large period of their lives and of the great longing and love he had for them.

SANDRA LEE

**I once told my wife, when we create life,
I'd like it to be a boy.
It'll be so much fun, to have a young son,
He will be our pride and joy.**

**The months slowly passed, 'til one day at last,
That wonderful hour drew near.
I waited outside, my heart beat with pride,
My new son would soon be here.**

**The doctor came out, I wanted to shout,
Are my wife and my boy all right?
I must have turned gray, when I heard him say,
You have a daughter this night.**

**A daughter for me, now how can that be,
I had expected a son.
For what good are girls, with their little curls,
Well I'll be a son-of-a-gun.**

**Tho girls aren't the best, with her I've been blessed,
Perhaps it's God's will devine.
We can't give her back, tho a son we lack,
Maybe we'll have one next time.**

**I guess I should see, perhaps she might be,
Better than nothing at all.
Come on said a nurse, who's manner was terse,
I followed her down the hall.**

**Then what met my eyes, was quite a surprise,
Sort of a cute little prune.
She had lots of hair, she looked pretty fair,
Maybe I'd spoken too soon.**

By now she was two, and starting to do,
Some things that weren't quite so mild.
For instance one day, she wondered away,
Natural thing for a child.

She drew on the wall, of our bedroom hall,
She could be a little bum.
But my Sandra Lee, meant the world to me,
I'd love her 'til Kingdom come.

But then I was sent, to the Orient,
My family at home must stay.
And my Sandy changed, and acted so strange,
Her daddy had gone away.

Three months can be wild, when a little child,
Lacks the affection that's craved.
Her love and her trust, trampled in the dust,
She felt she had been betrayed.

And when I got back, I noticed the lack,
Her love was not quite the same.
She was more distant, not so persistent,
She wouldn't be hurt again.

Too often I'd leave, she would still grieve,
But not quite as much as before.
Now independent, she showed less resentment,
But we still lacked in rapport.

By now she was three, and starting to be,
Both sensitive and demure.
Yet oh so alive, and burning with drive,
So hard to understand her.

And now another, her little brother,
Helped to occupy her mind.
Poor Steve's had it rough, for Sandy was tough,
But they played well most of the time.

This time I was pleased, to go overseas,
My family to me did fly.
The following year, was to me so dear,
At least I had them close by.

I was still busy, life was a tizzy,
Much time I spent on the pad.
They'd come to the base, and we'd meet someplace,
This duty wasn't so bad.

For the first time we, were able to be,
Close as a family should.
Sometimes we'd eat out, or just drive about,
Believe me, it felt so good.

The children matured, became more assured,
We developed a balance.
Life was just dandy, and soon our Sandy,
Began to show her talents.

By now she was four, and craving for more,
Knowledge, adventure, and fun.
Sometimes so tender, my heart she'd render,
Then she'd come up with a pun.

We'd read Mother Goose, and then Dr. Seuss,
Over and over again.
She's in nursery school, and then off to the pool,
Now she's learning to swim.

She'd meet me and say, dad can we have a
Ride on your motor scooter.
We'd fly down the hill, how she loved a thrill,
I think she's getting cuter.

Off to the exchange, then the driving range,
She wants to hit some balls too.
She's wild on her trike, and she wants a bike,
She gets one, silver and blue.

Sometimes I'd say no, and it hurts me so,
She wanted some cowboy boots.
No one had her size, those tears in her eyes,
Shook me right down to my roots.

Steve and Sandra Lee, now both close to me,
I was regaining their trust.
Those times I was there, before their night prayer,
Piggy-back rides were a must.

Yes, those days were great, but the times grew late,
War clouds brewed over the hill.
The pressure was high, for some men would die.
Who it would be, was God's will.

I didn't want to go, I loved my family so.
Why should I risk all of that?
Perhaps it was pride, or something inside.
I couldn't run like a rat.

I'd had a good life, a wonderful life,
I lived in a fine country.
I thought we were right, and that we should fight,
so that others could be free.

I thought of the day, when my kids would say,
what sort of man was my dad?
Myself I'd despise, if ever in their eyes,
that answer should make them sad.

So combat I flew. My missions were few,
before ill fate brought me down.
I lay there in fear, the enemy near.
I pressed myself to the ground.

I didn't fear death, but I did regret,
the pain my family would know.
And as I was caught, my very last thought,
would they know I loved them so?

The following days, my life was a maze.
What's the direction to take?
My captors, evil, torturing people,
trying my spirit to break.

Such terrible lies, they always devise,
and when those fail, they use force.
They use their power. Want me to cower.
Then I'll believe them. Of , Course.

Dark dungeons alone, a heart broken moan.
The irons biting my flesh.
The hunger and thirst, the fearing the worst.
The sickening sting of the lash.

Not only the pain, to drive me insane,
but my worst foe was regret.
Now others shed tears, and waste all these years.
Do they know I'm alive yet?

The minutes that creep, the hours so bleak,
days, weeks and months turn, to years.
The years now a blur. What's happened to her?
My world disappears in tears.

One thing drove me on, although all hope was gone.
What will they think of their dad?
I must do what's right, continue to fight.
It took all the strength that I had.

Then things got better. I got a letter,
a picture, are those kids mine?
I wouldn't have known. My God how they've grown.
I see the passage of time.

Treatment more gentle, pressure just mental.
I feel that I might survive.
Is there a chance, we might once again be,
a family, together, alive?

Some more letters come. The photos show some,
of the nice things that you do.
My dear Sandra Lee, how I'd love to be,
at home to share them with you.

You are a good cook. How pretty you look,
dressed up for your ballet course.
Now you like to ski, and are so happy,
when you're riding your horse.

You're mom tells me you, do quite well in school.
You are creative an gifted.
No surprise to me. I knew you would be,
since your first book you lifted.

I think of the time, on my lap you'd climb.
Dad, read me a story please.
My how you'd wiggle. Cute little giggle,
when I'd tickle your knees.

Now you're eleven, and it's been seven
long years since I've held you near.
How I remember, ninth of December,
a day to me oh so dear.

I wonder if you, remember me too.
I've been gone most of you're life.
If you should forget, again the regret.
The thought cuts me like a knife.

You've grown like thunder, and now I wonder,
what sort of woman you'll be.
It won't be too long, my girl will be gone.
God, will I be there to see.

Each day in my mind, I pray I will find,
this time can't drive us apart.
By night or by day, be blue skies or gray,
you always live in my heart.

An now I'll just wait, not knowing my fate.
I try to hope for the best.
Will I ever leave, or forever grieve?
Will my country pass the test?

One thought drives me on, as I face each dawn,
and picks me up when I'm blue.
Perhaps in the spring, when the song birds sing,
I'll be there to hear them with you.

I hope that someday, to you I will say,
these words, then you may know.
That I'll be so glad, to again be your dad,
For Sandy, I love you so.

I'd like to explain, why I've brought you pain.
Perhaps this crude verse will do.
If I make it home, when we are alone,
I will recite it for you.

Major Wes Schierman, USAF
August 1972
North Vietnam



Faye Schierman showing her two children, Sandra Lee and Steve, a portrait of their dad, Major Wes Schierman.

The photo was used by a local newspaper to bring awareness to the American public of the plight of the POW's and MIA's.

**Major Wes Shierman, USAF
POW 08-28-65 to 02-12-73**



North Vietnam

POW 08-28-65 to 02-12-73

On June 29th, 1966, the North Vietnamese paraded a newly captured POW, Capt. Murphy Neal Jones, through the streets of Hanoi in the back of a truck to great applause from the people. So, on July 6th, 1966 they decided to hold a larger parade for the people and for the world, in which they would humiliate our POWs and the United States of America itself. It was intended to show to the world how powerful they were and how weak this country was. For some time they had been threatening to hold show trials which might end in death sentences to the American "Criminals" of the blackest order. Had they truly not feared the reaction of the American people, and of the world in general if they had done so, these trials might actually have taken place.

Prisoners were gathered from the "Hanoi Hilton" and from other camps as well. Some were given new issue prison pajamas which had numbers stenciled on them and some had numbers stenciled on the ones they were wearing. The numbers had a wide range and seemed to have no rhyme nor reason. Since the parade was going to be filmed for worldwide release it was thought by the POWs the numbers were to fake the viewers into believing the North Vietnamese held far more Americans than they in fact did.

Almost from the start, things quickly got out of hand, and could have ended in the death of many of the POWs. Those who were there, to this day, can tell you the fear was palpable among the North Vietnamese guards themselves. The crowds had been whipped up past the point of any control and only wanted to kill the American POWs marching by them. They were, after all, the hated enemy. This poem by Wes Schierman of his participation in the parade brings that atrocity to life.

THE HANOI PARADE - A NIGHT TO FORGET

I had been ten months
Alone in a cell,
Each day a torment
Like living in Hell.

And then came that awful
Jingling of keys,
The door swung open
There wasn't a breeze.

It was blazing hot
That sixth of July,
We loaded on trucks
All wondering why.



Captain Murphy Jones (Freedom Flyer #89) is paraded through Hanoi on 29 June 1966 shortly after his capture.

Although blindfolded
And nervous with fear,
We laughed and joked
With our new friends so near.

The guards excited
Were not too alert,
A few slaps and kicks
But no one was hurt.

Handcuffed together
Sixteen of us came,
To Hanoi stadium
But not for a game.

Why we had been brought there
We didn't know,
Probably for
A propaganda show.

North Vietnam threatened
That some would be tried,
Some wondered if this
Might be our last ride.

We ate a rice ball
Some bananas too,
A much better meal
Than we were used to.

About dark they drove us
To Bay Dinh square,
We peeked from our blindfolds
Others were there.

About sixty airman
Handcuffed in pairs,
Our blindfolds removed
Some said a few prayers.

"Don't harm the people"
An officer said,
"If you should do so
You will soon be dead."

We started to march
And said our Amens,
The North Vietnamese
Now wanted revenge.

Trained in the searchlights
We held our heads high
For we had all once
Been men of the sky.

The people cursed us
And spit in our face
They jerked our heads down
To cause us disgrace.

We moved through that sea
Of humanity
As bullhorns riled them
To insanity.

Men, women, and children
All striking out
Sticks, stones, and bottles
Were flying about.

Our flimsy sandals
Soon tore from our feet
We were cut by rocks
And glass in the street.

How long we had gone
I just couldn't say
Perhaps a half hour
It seemed like a day.

The crowd, now a mob
They had tasted blood
Even the bullhorns
Could not stop that flood.

When a man would fall
The crowd broke our ranks
The guards didn't care
They too hated yanks.



The Hanoi March 6 July 1966. Captain Hayden Lockhart (Freedom Flyer #139) holding up USN Lieutenant Phil Butler after receiving a blow to the head

Fists from the darkness
Occasional stars
So easy to hate
In this world of ours.

My partner staggered
The sweat soaked our clothes
A little old lady
Had broken his nose.

Mr. Ramsey Clark
And Jane Fonda too
These were the people
So loving to you.

We saw just ahead
The stadium gate
We fought our way in
Not knowing our fate.

We fell to the ground
Exhausted and weak
Then loaded on trucks
Too tired to speak.

Back to the Briar Patch
Sixteen of us went
To our filthy cells
All battered and spent.

We were fortunate
No one had been killed
But their thirst for blood
Had not yet been stilled.

That night in Hanoi
After the Parade
Many were tortured
Their debt still unpaid.

They wanted confessions
And statements too
Another excuse
To torture anew.

**Communist truth
A propaganda lie
To cheat their own people
And lead them to die.**

**There are those who say
"An eye for an eye"
Such treatment's humane
We deserve to die.**

**But if that's the case
I don't understand
Why nuclear vengeance
Did not strike this land.**

**The Hanoi Parade
Though not a Bataan
To me disgusting
A disgrace to man.**

**The world will forget
That was long ago
I'd like to forgive
But I can't I know.**

**My partner's dead now
He fought them too hard
I still exist here
Behind windows barred.**

**I hope it's worthwhile
The cost has been great
I'll try to forget
I'll try not to hate.**

**Maj. Wesley Schierman
August, 1972
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

As a prisoner of the Chinese, Navy Cdr. Bob Flynn was subjected to daily broadcasts of Radio Peking, which were played each day. The broadcast always ended with "Now Comrades and Friends we end this broadcast with the playing of ..." and then they played the "Communist Internationale." With the contempt Bob had for his captors and anything communist, especially this song, he decided to compose his own words for it and sing them whenever it played.

One day, as they often did, the communist Commissar and his cadre of guards came into Bob's cell to check on his attitude, list to him all of his shortcomings, and to let him know, "Flynn has a bad attitude - he glares at the guards - he doesn't bow, etc." At this same moment the daily broadcast ended with the playing of the "Communist Internationale." Bob immediately started singing his version of it. The Commissar was stunned Bob not only knew the words to their great anthem, but would sing it. That is, until he finished the second stanza and the Commissar realized Bob was mocking them. They instantly began to pile on and beat him. As he relates it today, it was not too bad since there were so many of them in a small area, not a lot of damage could be done, even to a handcuffed man. He was sentenced to sixty days punishment for his "crime." Although he could not know it at the time, the conditions between the United States and China were improving to the point that to do him any great harm was out of the question. But, from that time on every day as the broadcast was about to end he would hear the padding of tennis shoes as the guard would quickly run down the corridor between the cells to the radio and turn it off. That insured Bob could not sing along with the anthem and humiliate them.

"THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALE"

You rotten vermin of the earth,
You filthy slogan shouting scum,
Deceitful tyrants, ne'er-do wells,
What dirty bastards you've become!

Freemen know your slander and your lies,
Your balderdash from Marx to Mao Tse Tung,
Tomes by Engels, Lenin, Stalin too,
Are but the world's most bloodstained vulgar dung!

Men of reason sing of Freedom's light,
Of peace on earth to all men of good will.
While you shoot lies from guns that hate,
And slaughter culture as you kill.

But someday men who you have turned to slaves,
Will no longer in your dungeons dwell;

**And you can rant as damn you please
In red hot flames in Hell!**

**Cdr. Robert Flynn, USN
1968
Peking, Peoples Republic of China
POW 08-21-67 to 03-15-73**

Bob Flynn was one of only two prisoners from the Vietnam war held by the Chinese communists in Peking. The other was Phil Smith, a U.S. Air Force pilot shot down and captured in 1965. They were both kept in almost total isolation right up until the time they were released.

Bob was, however, allowed to write letters home. More than his fellow P.O.W.'s held in North Vietnam, but like them, he did not get a lot of stationary to write on. So, when he did have the opportunity to write, he made good use of every inch of space available. In one of those letters home, as a birthday present to his son, he wrote something for him in the margin. The title, "Sumnum Bonum" he believed to mean "the essential principal", which was the best he could remember of his Latin!

SUMNUN BONUM

**My Boy
My hand
should
but cannot
be on your shoulder.
It as He tells (reveals)
So I tell
you owe
the world a living.
When appears
a man pushing
a roan
says otherwise
says his
'ole strawberry
is ridable**

(side saddle too)
rationally smile daffingly,
show him the roads
you have developed
O'er majestic mountains
fruted plains.
Sell him an automobile. Heed all tenses
of glory be to the Trinity
then make
daily acts
of Faith
Hope
Love
Contrition
There are birthdays
Before
and after.

Yours

Dad

Cdr. Robert Flynn, USN
Peking, Peoples Republic of China

Another song the Chinese played constantly during the years of the "Cultural Revolution" was "Dong Fong Hong" or in English, "The East Is Red", and in Bob's words, "sometimes somnambulistically"... The following is the Chinese version and then Bob's.

THE EAST IS RED

The East is red
Up comes the sun
China's brought forth
A Mao Tse-Tung
He is the Great Leader
He is the people's saviour.

THE EAST IS RED
(Bob's version)

Dog, Frog, Hog
All make dung
But not as rotten much
As Mao Tse-Tung
Chou En-Lai and that rat Lin Piao
Are all dirty rotten bastards
Just like Chairman Mao

This next was a Chinese favorite entitled "Long Live Chairman Mao". Bob cannot remember the Chinese lyrics, just that it also was played constantly, but here are his:

WHIZ ON MAO TSE-TUNG

(Verse)

A carrion buzzard flew out of Deutchland,
In Russia he ate some shit,
Flew into China where he got sick,
And upon a flat rock he puked it.
Sun shown upon it, it commenced to smell,
Worse than a megaton of dung.
Sun finally hatched it into a critter,
Called the bastard Mao Tse-Tung.

(Chorus)

Whiz on MaoTse-Tung
Whiz on all his dung
People of the world someday
Will form an endless line
To whiz on the grave of Mao Tse-Tung

(2nd verse)

Mao calls himself the world's greatest leader,
He likens himself to the sun,
But someday the people of the world will undo him,
A fitting end to Mao Tse-Tung.
Mao had no father, Mao had no mother,
From buzzard puke he was hatched,

**And the whole world will be better off,
Once the bastards been dispatched.**

(Chorus)

**Whiz on Mao Tse-Tung
Whiz on all his dung
People of the world someday
Will form an endless line
To whiz on the grave of Mao Tse-Tung**

DESPAIR

And Lo! The dawn cannot suffice for all this pain,
And flowered paths bring wretchedness
Instead of hint of gain.
Precious life, precious gift - hath not bartered with the fates,
To bestow upon the sad-eyed youth
A love to still his hate
And time is laughing tongueless
At the gate of death.

Major Ted Gostas, USA
North Vietnam
POW 02-01-68 to 03-16-73

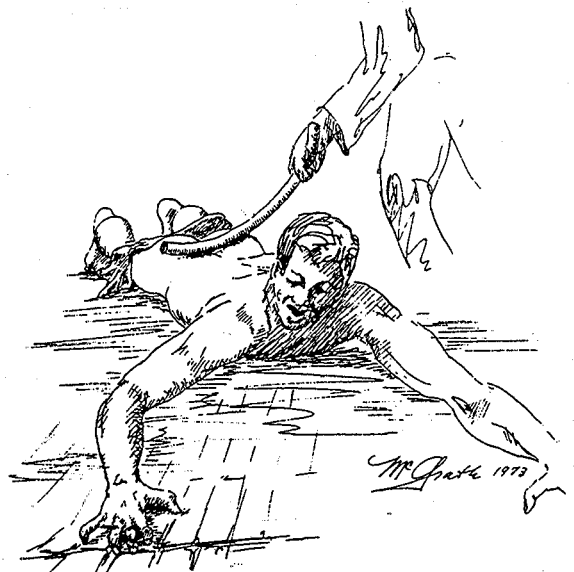
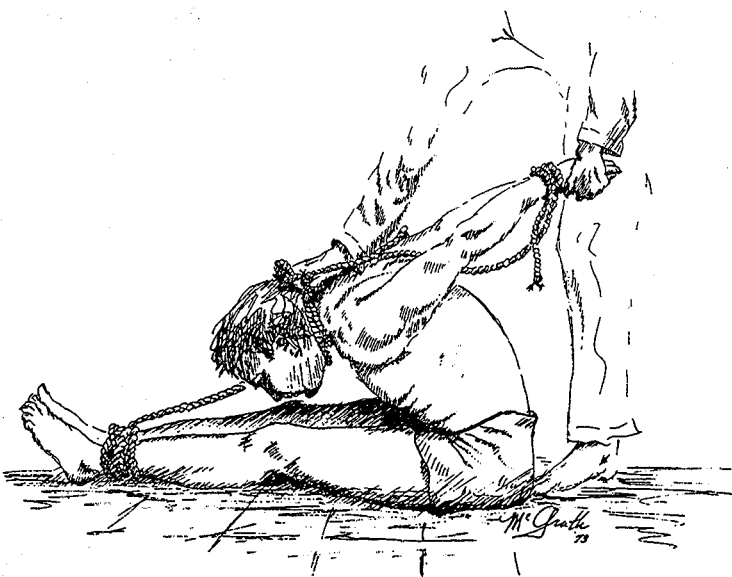
TORTURE

"Please don't torture me for I am not able to stand the pain."

"But you must be punished for your crimes. You, you are a lackey of American Imperialism, but us, we will fight to the last drop of blood!"

Pain becomes a nausea and I find I have urinated myself and I have messed myself and my face is all bruised and I must crawl and limp to my cell for there will be more interrogations tonight!

Major Ted Gostas, USA
North Vietnam



PUNISHMENT

"You are a LIAR! Go down on your knees."

I can't stand the pain. I am going to pass out! I am awake again. It was a nightmare. But who is slapping my face? Who is kicking me in the stomache and why?

"Sir, this is a nightmare!" "Your nightmare is only beginning!"

**Major Ted Gostas, USA
North Vietnam**

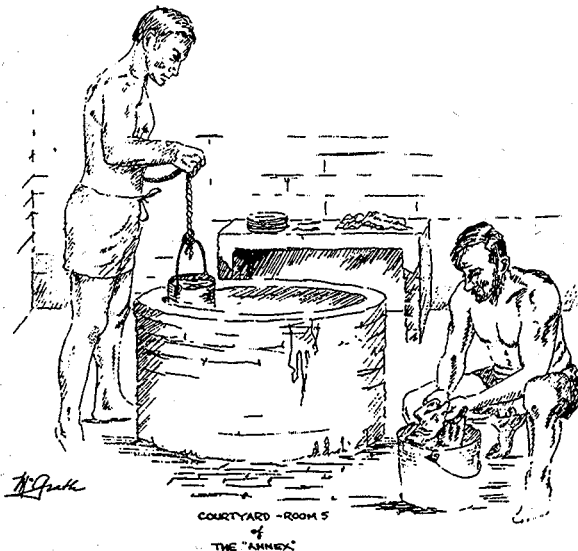


WASH YOUR CLOTHES

**This is a bucket.
This is a well.
This is a small tuna fish can.
This is lye soap.
This is a stone to pound my clothes.
The time of five minutes is up.**

**Hang the clothes quickly!
Hurry back to the cell.
It is afternoon!
Out I go!
I will take my dry clothes from the line but this time
I will not ask permission. A mistake!
His kick did not crack my tailbone, but it felt like it!**

**Major Ted Gostas, USA
North Vietnam**



"Freedom Is Not Free" was composed in the fall of 1972 while Dave Baker was a prisoner of war in a jungle camp in Cambodia. There were seven men in the camp and they were all kept in bamboo cages approximately one hundred feet apart. He was taken to this camp after spending about six weeks touring the countryside with the Viet Cong. He was in pretty bad shape as he had been shot a couple of times in several attempts at escape. He will always remember how good it felt to see another American, even if it was under extremely harsh conditions. The men in that camp were some of the bravest he had ever met and not one of them ever gave up hope of getting back home. He thought this simple verse of poetry would tell the story of a few Army, Marine, and Air Force men who had to spend some time together in a terrible place none of them ever thought they'd be and would certainly never forget. Although they were held in individual cages, even today he still believes everyone heard the poem as the words were passed from one cage to another. It was his hope that a fighter pilot trying to be a poet would pick up their spirits, at least for a little while. They were all released together in February, 1973 in South Vietnam and still remain in contact with each other twenty five years later.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE

**In this camp, there are seven men
All of whom Uncle Sam did send.
"To Vietnam to fight," he said.
So others can decide how they want to be led.**

**Gladly we went, but alas for us,
We were captured in battle in the heat and dust.
Taken away from our families, out of the war,
Then chained to a cage, beaten and sore.**

**We are Army, Air Force, and Marine
And all of us are ready to scream,
About the inhumane treatment and care,
The Viet Cong call "lenient and fair."**

**As prisoners of war we eat pork and rice,
But we think steak and other things nice.
Our minds seem to dwell in the future and past,
Oh, how long can the war last?**

**I know that someday we will all be set free.
But, only the good Lord knows when that will be.
The United States, Friends, and wives,
Surely it will be the happiest day of our lives.**

Until that great and eventful day.
We must all stick together and pray.
And give thanks to God for being alive,
For surely it was He who let us survive.

We will all be a little older, but much more wise
And I don't mean for listening to Communist lies.
If there is one thing upon which seven men can agree.
That one thing is: Freedom is not free!

B/Gen Dave Baker, USAF
Cambodian jungle, 1972

"THE SEVEN"

AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR RELEASED FROM CAMBODIA

Capt. Dave Baker, USAF 06-27-72
Maj. Al Carlson, USA 04-07-72
Capt. Johnnie Ray, USA 04-08-72
Capt. Mark Smith, USA 04-07-72
Sgt. Ken Wallingford, USA 04-07-72
Capt. Jim Walsh, USMC 09-07-72
Capt. George Wanat, USA 04-08-72



Held captive by the Viet Cong inside Cambodia, Captain Dave Baker (Freedom Flyer #133) is carried on a stretcher to the Loc Ninh release point.

In August of 1967, at a time when the North Vietnamese were putting the POW's under heavy physical and emotional pressure, Bob "Percy" Purcell and Bunny Talley were cellmates in room # 1 of the "Pool Hall" in a camp known as the "Zoo."

As they searched for strength to continue their resistance against what they knew was coming, they decided they needed a prayer dedicated specifically to that purpose. They were both Catholics and from their respective backgrounds they knew of no patron saint for prisoners of war. After some thought Bunny mentioned St. Joseph was the patron saint of "hopeless causes"" As nothing could possibly be more hopeless than the situation they were in, they zeroed in on a prayer to St. Joseph to help and guide them.

After maybe twenty minutes of mental gymnastics, Bunny proposed a prayer. When a few recitations to see if it could be improved upon came to no avail, they truly knew it was inspired by God. The next morning Percy was able to recite the prayer from memory the very first time. They knew then they would be given their needed strength and from Whom it would come.

"ST. JOSPEH, THE FOSTER FATHER OF OUR DEAR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BE UNTO US OUR CHAMPION IN THIS OUR HOUR OF NEED. SHARE WITH US, THY LOYALTY AND FORTITUDE, AND DEFEND US AGAINST THE INFLUENCES AND WRATHS OF THESE IGNORANT MEN. IN THIS LIFE, OUR BATTLEFIELD, TOGETHER WITH MARY, OUR BELOVED MOTHER, PLEASE LEAD US INTO A PEACEFUL AND LIFE EVERLASTING... AMEN"

**Col. Bernard "Bunny" Talley, USAF
POW 09-10-66 to 03-04-73**

**Col. Robert "Percy" Purcell, USAF
POW 07-27-65 to 02-12-73
September, 1967
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

Scratched into the wall of one of the cells in Hanoi was this line. It sums up the feelings of every P.O.W. No one seems to know who wrote it, or if whoever did write it survived captivity by the North Vietnamese. What is known, is that those who saw it or heard it repeated, were deeply touched by the words. To this day they can quote it verbatim.

**"FREEDOM HAS A TASTE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FOUGHT AND ALMOST DIED THAT
THE PROTECTED WILL NEVER KNOW"**

Anonymous

Also scratched into a wall was another memorable saying, but here the author is known. Ray Merritt was shot down September 16, 1965 flying an F-105 for the 67th TFS which was TDY to Korat AB from Kadena AB on Okinawa. He was shot down just minutes after his squadron commander, lead on the flight and long time friend, Robbie Risner. They were not to see each other again until seven and a half years later when they walked out to the C-141 at Gia Lam side by side.

Shortly after capture he managed to purloin an old nail he felt might be useful for many things. One of those was to etch into the shower wall of the Heartbreak section of the Hanoi Hilton this saying:

"SMILE, YOU'RE ON CANDID CAMERA!"

**Col. Ray Merritt, USAF
Heartbreak Section - Hanoi Hilton
Fall, 1965
Hanoi, North Vietnam**

This Poem by A. J. Myers was prompted by an often used tactic of the North Vietnamese. He is not sure of the exact time he wrote it, but places it around the time of the death of Ho Chi Minh.

As an example, during a time all of the POW's were suffering from severe loss of weight, two POW's complained to the camp authorities of the need for better food. As a result, their already meager rations were cut in half for one week!

He composed this poem after more than a month in solitary confinement. He had been put there for going on a hunger strike to protest the lack of adequate dental care given to the POW's. Years earlier he had broken several fillings on bits of rocks that were in the rice they were fed. The North Vietnamese steadfastly refused to fix them. The teeth finally came to give him much constant pain and he wanted them pulled. When he went on strike as a protest, they cut off his water, moved him into solitary, and would not pull his teeth, nor move him out of solo until he agreed to do some painting for them.

COMMUNIST CORRECTION

**Poor wretch in misery and pain,
Who showed improper attitude
When he dared openly complain,
Was made to suffer even more
To teach him proper gratitude
For his pathetic plight before.**

**Col. A. J. Myers, USAF
1969 - 1970
North Vietnam
POW 06-01-66 to 02-12-73**

Jim Warner was a 1st Lt. in the USMC flying back seat in an F4B out of the 1st MAW when he was shot down and captured on October 13, 1967. He wrote this poem when he was in solitary during his stay at the Son Tay prison camp in 1969. He came home to freedom on March 14, 1973. He had been a prisoner for 1,979 very long and very hard days.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD

**Light interrupts the darkness of the void
The light of living stars and stars destroyed
Before the light which here is seen had come
But half the way from where it had begun,
The brilliant light the heaven's stars display
Does not betray which stars have passed away,
Instead implies a still serenity,
A heaven fixed for all eternity.**

**The furtive skyward glance of man belies
To human eyes, the chaos of the skies,
Belies the shifting symmetry of light
Until the stars give themselves unto night.
The dramas played upon their world, perhaps,
Their joys and sorrows now forever past,
Their dust cast out upon the void to drift
'Til summoned from infinity, they shift,
Called by the summons imperceptible,
Yet summons still and irresistible.**

**Thus, as it was before, it was again;
A stellar matter gathered itself in,
When of the dust of worlds which are no more
Of stars which were destroyed by their own force
The incandescent nebula was formed
And then this cloud's unnumbered stars were born.
When molten orb which cooled to form our world
By spinning sun about itself was hurled,
The trackless rim of endless night they traced
Through time unending star and planet raced.**

**And when the planet's molten face had cooled,
And in its basins, growing seas had pooled,
the water of the centuries of rain,
The storms which washed the planet's hills and plains**

And washed the stuff of earth down to the seas.
Then by the lightning of Devine decree
Were living things spawned in the planet's seas.
Borne like the Cyprian upon the foam,
Protean life swam in proteus home.
But life was slow to change, for life was frail;
To what avail change, if changes fail?
Until life found it's cupric porphyrin
And life then fed itself upon the sun
And seed succeeded seed in ceaseless chain.
The seed of life bore seed of ceaseless change.
And filled the seas of earth with living hosts
And from the seas onto the barren coast
Onto the broad, unyielding shield of stone
The seed of life by ocean's life was thrown.

Where life reduced the planet's rock to dust,
The shield, by that primordial slime was crushed.
And of this primal life by Maker's hand,
was fashioned over untold eons, man.
The world, a dark and obscure crystal lay
Before Him on the dawn of man's first day.
Nor fang, nor claw, nor horn, nor strength of limb
Was given man by Who created him.
Yet in the breast of man there glowed that spark
Of Heaven's light which might dispell the dark.
When from the damp and darkened cave he came
Erect, on his hind legs, to speak his name.
I sing of arms and man, by fate exiled
To wander homeless -- man, motherless child,
Song of his trials, song of his lament,
Song as he passes with his garment rent;
Song as he struts in his brief masquerade,
The futile gestures of his vain charade,
Song of the winds, which following his hands
Erase the symbols he makes in the sands.

1st Lt. James Warner, USMC
1969
Son Tay, North Vietnam
POW 10-13-67 to 03-04-73

THE BALLAD OF SPARROW 3

CHORUS

**Oh where, Oh where can my wingman be
Was he clearing my six for me.
I sit in Hanoi a lonely P.O.W.
I wonder where my wingman is now**

1st VERSE

**Here is the ballad of a Phantom crew
We flew up north like so many do
To strike North Vietnam in an F-4E
Strike escort called Sparrow 3.
The weather was forecast bad that day
But we would go there anyway
This one mission had to be flown
We had to make our presence known.**

2nd VERSE

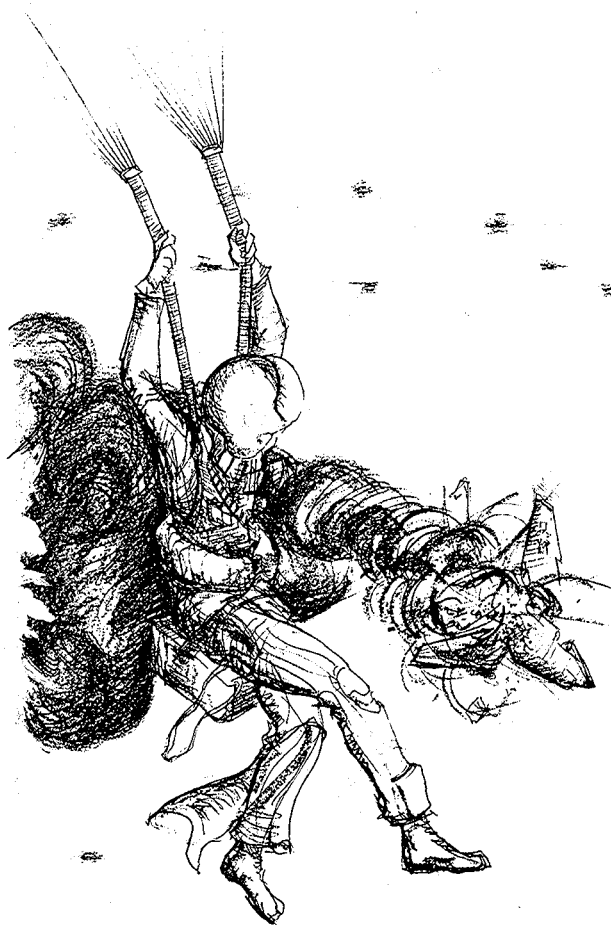
**The Gulf of Tonkin was our refueling track
From here there was no turning back
Coasting in, couldn't see land yet
The SAM's began to be a threat.
Onward, onward the Phantoms flew
On the lookout for an SA-2
Red Crown said there are MIG's today
Looks like they're coming out to play.**

3rd VERSE

**Nearing the target clouds obscured the ground
Mission commander said let's turn around
Sparrow 3 has two MIG's at ten
Coming from high and closing in
Made a hard left, but not too tight
I've almost got one in my sight
From out of nowhere came that fatal blast
We knew our Phantom had flown her last.**

(Sung to the tune of "LAST KISS")

1st LT. Cecil H. Brunson, USAF
POW 10-12-72 to 03-29-73
Capt. Myron A. Young, USAF
POW 10-12-73 to 03-29-73
Hanoi, North Vietnam
1972



In the fall of 1972, after nearly five years of imprisonment, and shortly before Col. Ben Purcell's son David's nineteenth birthday, he was feeling extreme pain for all the years he had missed with his son, his wife Anne, and his other children. It made him think back thirteen years before when he and Anne had lost their little daughter Clarice to a tragic illness. As he reflected back on those terrible days, he decided to try to write a poem in her memory. In his own words, "The verses may never be classic, but the words and thoughts came straight from my heart." Colonel, I think you're wrong, it truly is a classic and wonderful poem and belongs in this book.

IN MEMORY OF CLARICE

No lovelier child ever graced a home,
Nor purer soul passed into the unknown,
than this precious daughter with eyes so
 bright,
who has taken her place with the stars at
 night.
Her hair was like threads of the finest gold,
her smile so warm it chased the cold.
Her soft, clear voice would often ring,
spreading joy and happiness as she would
 sing.
This brave little girl tho' her suffering was
 severe,
would never complain to those she held
 dear.
Without waiting for Mom or Dad to lead the
 way,
she passed through the veil and slipped
 quietly away.
Our hearts will grieve, the pain shall never
 pass,
for the loss of "Sissie", our bonnie little lass.
But eternal in our memory is her sweet
 smile,
and that greatest of blessings,
having had her awhile.

Love, Dad
Somewhere in Vietnam
November, 1972

Col. Ben Purcell, USA
North Vietnam
POW 02-08-68 to 03-27-73

This entry from Ken Cordier is very poignant to me. Those who remember, or who have heard, the stories of the incredibly harsh and inhumane treatment dealt to American P.O.W.s by the North Vietnamese will understand.

In today's secure world we Americans, as a people, take so much for granted in our lives. Most of us never give a second thought about how much we have. We just expect it to be there as our due. No consideration is given as to what it might be like to wake up and have everything we own taken away from us. Not only the luxuries, but even the every day essentials. The average American could not even begin to comprehend what it would be like to think they might not live to see the dawn of the next day.

People have become so complacent in their lives even their prayers to God and the asking of His blessing at mealtimes have become rote. It is just another of the daily routines to say quickly so the food won't get cold or to get the children down to sleep.

To men like Ken Cordier, who at 29, was just starting his life ... and as an Air Force captain and fighter pilot ... was beginning his career climb, the reality of the total loss of everything he knew was on him in an instant. One minute he was safe in the cockpit of his F-4C and the next he was in a rotting North Vietnamese cell in the hands of an enemy the likes of which few other American military men have ever known.

Ken, like so many of his fellow airmen in Hanoi, found solace in prayer. I made reference to the poignancy of this particular prayer earlier. To me knowing where he was and what his life had become, and all these years later knowing what he survived, that he could compose this Grace under those circumstances says all anyone would ever need to know about this man. Can anyone imagine giving thanks to God for food so disgusting in its content I cannot even begin to describe it here ... or to thank God for another day of life knowing it may bring you unimaginable pain and suffering. That is the poignancy of this Grace and the essence of the man.

Ken recently told me after all these years he still says this particular Grace and that ... it still applies!

A POW'S GRACE

Our Father in heaven
We pause to give thanks
For this food, our health, and another day of life.
Help us to be humble and mindful of our many blessings.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

Col. Ken Cordier, USAF
North Vietnam, USAF (Ret.)
POW 12-02-66 to 03-04-73

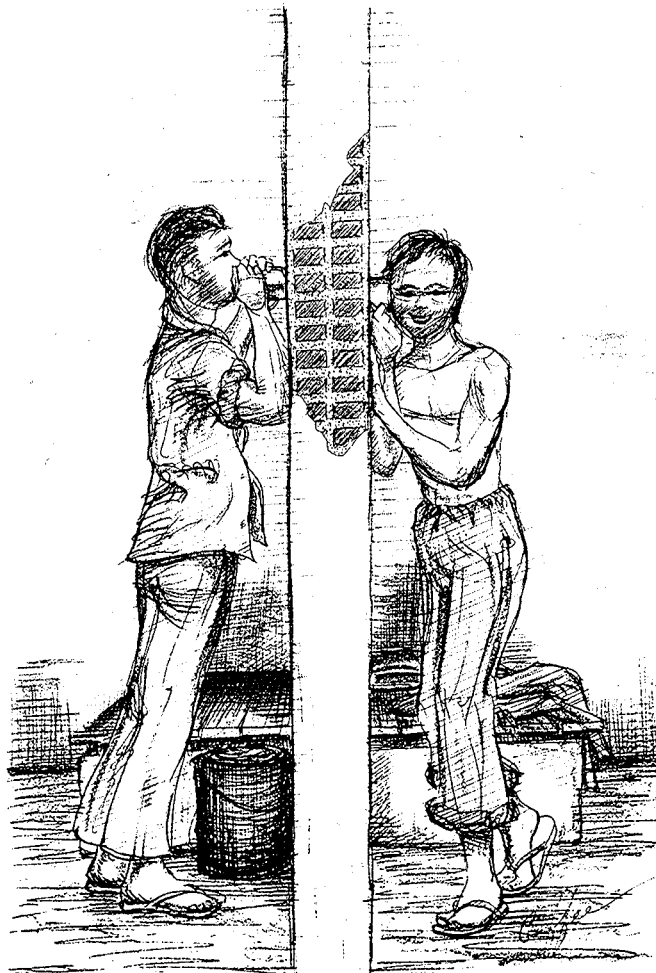


Captain Cordier next to his F-4C.

A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR ERNIE BRACE

In the North Vietnamese prison system there was a select group of eight prisoners of war who had been captured in Laos. They called themselves the LULU's. This is an acronym for the "Legendary Union of Laotian Unfortunates." Ernie Brace, who was the longest held prisoner in the group, created the nickname for communications purposes. These men were indeed unfortunate in that having been captured in Laos, the Vietnamese denied they held them as prisoners or even knew of their existence. They took the position they were not prisoners of the North Vietnamese, but of the Laotian Pathet Lao. Thus, no packages nor mail sent to them could be received. Neither could they send letters home. They were not there! These men were in such a special category it was touch and go if they would ever get to go home at all. When they finally were released it was in uniforms unique to them and not the same as all of the other P.O.W.'s. Even on the last day of captivity the North Vietnamese would find a way to keep them separate.

When Christmas, 1969 came, Ernie had been in solitary confinement for four and a half years. He had no way of knowing it, but he was about to get a cell mate. It was Jim Bedinger. They not only became fast friends, but two of the best communicators in the prison camp system. This proved extremely useful as the LULU's were kept as isolated as possible from the other prisoners. Still, they managed to keep in constant communication with them.



One prisoner who had gone through flight school with Ernie many years before was part of a separate group of prisoners who called themselves the "Peace Committee." These were a group of prisoners who not only professed they were against the war, but willingly and actively participated in North Vietnamese propaganda. It was Christmas, 1970 when Ernie learned through him that his wife and sons thought him dead and so she had remarried. When Ernie pressed for some more information, this officer advised him any further attempts at communication would cause him to report Ernie to the camp authorities. It would be an understatement to say Ernie was depressed by this information and in the situation it placed him. As Ernie's friend, Jim thought he should do something to cheer him up. He decided to write a poem and give it to Ernie as a Christmas present. It came from his heart and he believes Ernie received, and has thought of it that way, through all these years. It was the one and only poem Jim ever wrote in Hanoi.

HOME IS WHERE YOU HANG YOUR HAT

"Home is where you hang your hat."
Why, I don't know who said that,
But home is much more to me;
It's as precious as my liberty.
It may be big and it may be small,
But it's filled with love from wall to wall.
You can hear the children laugh and play,
And at the very close of day
You can smell the smoke in the air
Telling you there's warmth in there.
"Home is where you hang your hat;"
Well, I just don't know about that.

LTJG Jim Bedinger
December, 1970
North Vietnam

THE LULU'S

Ernie Brace, USMC 05-21-65
Maj. Walt Stischer, USAF 04-13-68
Capt. Ed Leonard, USAF 05-31-68
1st Lt. Steve Long, USAF 02-28-69
LtJg. Jim Bedinger, USN 11-22-69
Maj. Norbert Gotner, USAF 02-03-71
1st Lt. Jack Butcher, USAF 03-24-71
Capt. Chuck Reiss, USAF 12-24-72

COMES THE DAWN

**Awake each morn before the dawn
My thoughts of life go on;
Of home and family - the things I've done,
The things I'll do when this war's won.**

**Thoughts of home as the sky turns gray,
Of how they're doing while I'm away;
Will I go home, or will I stay?
These thoughts still come at each new day.**

**Here I stand, and there's death's door,
Can I know if this life's o'er?
Is now the time that I will die;
Or will I live for another try?**

**Who am I in God's great plan?
Is there a place in life's short span
That I might win and try again,
And go back home to the world of men?**

**Can I come through this hate I feel
And live again in a world that's real?
Can I break free of the shackles cruel
And once again live the "Golden Rule?"**

**What I must do to win this game
Is take on me His sacred name;
To do all things for love of Him -
Gives me this chance, the game to win.**

**And yet I see my place for now
Is to turn to Him, my head to bow;
To cleanse my heart of feelings ill,
And trust in Him to do his will.**

**In His short life He showed the way
My trust in Him is strength this day;
And now I know through sorrow's doom
The joy of life in darkest gloom.**

**How long this stay I cannot know
But the end must come to this life so low,**

Wether by death or the release so wanted
My life goes on, but now undaunted.

I'll live - I'll live in flesh, or spirit go
But I'll stay true to the things I know;
For God is real and He knows our plight
And I feel Him close in the dark of night.

But to return to Him is my main desire
He's shown the way - the way by fire;
I've paid my dues and now I'll freely give
My earthly life - to with Him forever live.

That great Victory I've won for sure
In the battle each day for a heart that's pure;
That's the win, it's plain to see,
For now each day I feel His love for me.

Now joy is mine from a heart that's pure
It gives the strength to each day endure;
And life's great lesson I've surely learned
That now with Him a place I've earned.

Capt. David "Jack" Rollins, USN
1969
North Vietnam
POW 05-14-67 to 03-04-73

HOME AGAIN

In the world again after so many years
Our freedom won with blood and tears;
Now we who lived are home again
To find our place in the world of men.

Things are changed for us the few,
For now we see the world anew;
A new perspective this second time around
Of how we'll use this freedom newly found.

Just what I'll do is not yet known,
But my heart is pure and my love has grown

Only time will tell for you and me
We'll live each day and then we'll see.

Those years confined in a prison cell,
taught me much and did me well;
For what I know, I know for sure;
That joy will come to a heart that's pure.

Now I'm home midst life's great trial,
I wend my way - yet all the while
The things He did, the things He said,
The way He lived and the way He led.

Show me the way each day anew,
For now as then, His gospel's true;
And beyond today there's a grander plan
Made by God for the use of man.

The tasks are great and the journey's long,
But my support mid life's great throng
Comes not from earth, but from above,
And is shown to me through His great love.

Yes, that great Victory I've won for sure
In the battle each day for a heart that's pure;
That's the win, it's plain to see,
For now each day I feel His love for me.

Yes, home again to the world of me,
My chance is here to live again;
How will I do when comes the test?
Will I think of Him and do my best?

Well, if I apply the lessons
I'll know for sure the place I've earned
And if I've earned a place with Him above
I earned it through my peace and love.

"Life breaks everyone"
And some grow stronger
at the breaking point.
(Anon.)

May God bless us all to
Grow stronger at the
breaking point.

1st Lt. John Borling was flying an F-4C with "Satan's Angels", the 433rd TFS, when he was shot down by enemy ground fire over North Vietnam on June 1st, 1966. Severely wounded, he was captured trying to hi-jack a truck to use in his escape.

John told me one of his tactics to stay sane and mentally sharp was to compose poetry in his mind. The poems, in the many thousands of words, were his companions and salvation. Others built houses, golf courses, boats, airplanes, or worked out some complicated mathematical problems in their minds to accomplish the same goal.

John sent me the following paragraphs for background purposes, and as an introduction. From this extract from that transcript of the words he actually wrote in the Hanoi Hilton in February of 1973 comes a few of the companion poems. It was the first time he had something to write with and he tried to capture the "story behind" the poems.

"The enemy was manifold and my ally was time ... crippling and numbing time. The problem: How to make time a friend or at least a neutral? How to fill the void?. Mental hunger is the most ravenous. How to feed the beast? Each man had to find weapons ... weapons to kill time. One of my weapons was poetry."

"Gathering information on poetry from the few men with whom I had contact and adding my own resources, I began to create. With the joy of creation came the righteous vengeance of merited destruction. I killed time. I killed time as surely and precisely as it needed to be killed. No longer did I fear it and, thought the enemy would use it along with other privations and punishment, I killed it and I was glad. With apologies to Thoreau, I don't believe eternity was injured at all."

"Arriving at Clark AFB, after that first meal (breakfast), I remember rushing to the BX to buy a tape recorder so I could begin recording them. As hard as I looked, I could not find a tape recorder ... no reels or tape anywhere in the BX. Finally I asked a saleslady and she gave me this half a shoe box thing. I told her no ... no radio ... I wanted a tape recorder. A little future shock! I had no idea what a cassette recorder was, but 45 minutes after hitting Clark AFB, I owned one."

"These words of long ago and far away and the poems are still immediate and vital ... even after all these years. Couched in pilot talk, they speak, in serious and humorous ways, about things we knew and cared about. I went to the sky because, as Richard Bach said, "it's the only perfect place." God only knows we needed to feel that and believe we would go there again."

One of John's poems that is a favorite of mine is "The Boneyard" as it evokes memories from my childhood of watching squadrons of these planes flying over my house on their way to war. It is even more meaningful as I remember the last flyable B-24 in Air Force inventory flying into Wright-Patterson AFB to become part of the Air Force Museum. She was sand pink in color and called the "Strawberry Bitch." She is still there today.

CARPET OF CLOUDS

**A recent PIREP calls it topping out
At Angels twenty-two,
With CB's building, northwest quad,
Some anvil tops in view.**

**And so it is, as I come piercing through,
Abandoned gray and gauge,
To stride with giant steps upon
A great and vacant stage.**

**Gold flecked, a carpet wisping white extends
Beyond the eye and mind.
Here, distant towering pillars stand,
In warning to our kind.**

**I level scanning maybe six above,
My mask conceals a smile.
All mine, so climb then half roll off
And Cuban Eight a mile.**

**My flashing craft alive to eager touch
Responds with easy G,
We dive and zoom, then lazy roll,
Askimming, running free.**

**A quick crosscheck, my wandering mind attends,
As swept back silver soars
Across the domed and vaulted heights,
Along wide, wind washed shores.**

**A pilot's halo follows fast beneath,
And boundless, like the air,
The joy of flight, though strapped in tight,
I find great freedom there.**

**Perhaps below, some hapless soul can hear
Faint bugles in the sky,
He'll shake his head at darkling clouds,
And wonder why we fly.**

His collar up and cap pulled warding down,
He'll never know the thrill
Of chasing cross a shouting sky,
The solitude, the still.

But you've been there, so know of what I speak,
The empty spaces hurled,
From cockpit throne, you reign alone,
On top in Titan world.

Now marking on the antiseptic blue,
This message from the high,
Engraved within the hearts of men
Who love and live to fly.

On top, some special sun split afternoon,
You'll find no limit sky
And live lifetimes in brief minutes,
Whole lifetimes as you fly.

1967

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam

MOMMY, WHERE IS MY DADDY

I hear you walking in the night,
You think I'm fast asleep,
I know your sounds of loneliness,
I hear you pray and weep.

You think I'm too young to know,
The agony and the pain,
Of missing, the man gone away
In search of war and fame.

He didn't come home with all the rest,
It's been four years and more,
His squadron mates don't know his fate,
O cruel unending war.

I try to fill the gap he's left,
For emptiness adjust,
I love him though he's just a dream,
And picture that we dust.

Oh mommy, where is my daddy?
Won't he ever be coming home?
You say he loves us very much,
But he's left us so long alone.

* * *

Lauren, my precious daughter,
This tale you must be told,
Your daddy wore the silver wings
Of Air Force pilots bold.

He loved the world of speed and sound,
He flew a Phantom Two,
And life was love and freedom's fight,
What happiness we knew.

He told me before we married,
About his other life,
And how he wanted me to be,
A loyal Air Force wife.



At times I hated those four words
But did the best I could.
I know he loved me all the more,
Because I understood.

You'd have to see the look he wore
When coming in at night.
A hug, a kiss, and then his words,
"Gee, I had a great flight."

He'd tell us of the wondrous things,
He's seen and done that day.
Aloft in his great chariot,
Holding the world at bay.

He's play with you and fool with me,
Out on the front room floor,
Then talk about a pot of gold
And rainbow he did score.

But now he's gone, listed missing,
Ten thousand miles away.
And nothing left for us to do,
Just sit and wait and pray.

He will be coming home one day,
Believe with all your heart,
He'll laugh and hold us in his arms,
And time again will start.

* * *

Myrna and Lauren, my darlings,
The hurt I've caused to you.
It pains me more than my sad fate,
For nothing I can do.

The endless days have turned to years,
Impossible it seems,
And all our plans and all our hopes,
Are now just shattered dreams.

Honey, they've just about killed it,
The drive and the desire
To make my mark and get ahead,
Just embers now, no fire.

I know that I must fly again,
Be free and know the joy,
As boundless skies and purest air,
Help memories destroy.

I know that I must love again,
My child and faithful wife,
The dim-bright figures of my past,
The touchstones of my life.

I seek elusive happiness,
That most men never know.
To be in love with home and work,
And help my country grow.

And God must play a vital part,
To Him all thanks belong.
For He is here when I am weak
And helps me get along.

Still, I run an uncertain race,
Ahead, another bend,
My breath comes short and I'm so worn,
Not sure if there's an end.

I think of small things like ... front doors,
Rooms with familiar chairs,
Recollections I long to see,
And you upon the stairs.

But now I'm gone, listed missing,
Ten thousand miles away,
And nothing left for me to do,
Just sit and wait and pray.

I will be coming home one day,
Believe with all your heart,
I'll hold you in my arms and try to laugh,
And time again will start.

1970

Hanoi, North Vietnam

THE OTHER CHRISTMAS

T'was the night before Christmas, and out on alert,
Not a creature is stirring, card table desert,
The pilots, the crew chiefs in bunkrooms asleep
Toss fitful awaiting the klaxon to leap,
And off in a corner, a dark tinsel tree,
It's Christmas again in the land of the free.

T'was the night before Christmas out over the pond
Where a Starlifter strains for far Europe beyond.
The drone of it's engines an ole carol say,
Ramstein tomorrow, Adana next day.
It's instrument panel dull red all aglow,
Back home at McGuire, it's starting to snow.

T'was the night before Christmas so far out to sea,
Be it a cruiser, destroyer, or attack CV.
Up forward, the lookout marks tolling of bells,
No church steeples here, just salt spray, and ground swells.
And on watch from on high, the O.D. doth roam,
The Captain's chair empty, both here, and at home.

T'was the night before Christmas, up over the pole,
There's a B-52 on atomic patrol.
With peace their profession, it's crew does attend
Their fortress of strength to deter and defend.
Strange, all electronics of this modern day
Show nary a sign of old Santa and sleigh.

T'was the night before Christmas, a deployment call comes,
So good-bye little children who dream sugar plums,
Tomorrow they'll wake, their young eyes all alight,
Then blink back the tears, Daddy's left in the night.
Now far from the hearth where each stocking is hung.
Cross cold, starlit skies, a small aircraft is flung.

T'was the night before Christmas, down deep in the pad
Stands a Minuteman poised, if the world should go mad.
It's cold chimney silo has no warming place,
Nor rooftop awaiting a swift courser's pace.
And what yuletide missal from men waiting still,
Though strange it may seem, peace on earth, and good will.

And what yuletide missal from men waiting still,
Though strange it may seem, peace on earth, and good will.

T'was the night before Christmas, mud up to the knee,
There's a lone foxhole dug by a young PFC.
He's only eighteen, Christmas eve seems too
close
But ready he stands, to destroy unknown foes.
He's scared, but he'll do the grim job that he must,
In him you have placed, your defense and your trust.

T'was the night before Christmas, all over this earth,
There's a serviceman standing, no mistletoe mirth.
He's Army and Navy, Air Force, and Marines,
If asked he could tell you, how much Christmas means.
You don't know his name, waiting children or wife,
But for you, if need be, he'll lay down his life.

T'was the night before Christmas and then, Christmas Day,
And just maybe you'll think of those men far away,
And just maybe take out a moment or two,
Say a short prayer for them, the family and you.
A small price indeed for your bright, tinsel tree,
It's Christmas again, in the land of the free.

1968

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam

SONNET 4 45 43

The world without, within our weathered walls,
Remote, like useless windows, small and barred.
Here, months and years run quickly down dim halls,
But days, the days, the empty days come hard.
I used to count a lot, count everything
From laps of exercise to words of prayer.
What hurt that hunger, thoughts that thirst can bring,
Companions, waking, sleeping, always there.
But policy's insanities unwind,
Till bad is good and betterment is worse.
So refuge blanket, net and molding mind
Create a mingling dream real universe.
Fine temper steel with heat and heavy blows.
If only men were steel, but then, who knows.

(Sonnet 4 45 43 - Literally, in tap code - Sonnet for US)

1971

Hanoi Hilton - Hanoi, North Vietnam



THE BONEYARD

Alone, I walked a desert path,
Beneath a sky of red.
Along a fence that split the world,
Perchance, a heart instead.

I viewed the metal might of man
In motionless parade.
And through the mesh reviewing stand,
Saw legends that were made.

They had faced the flak and fearsome skies
Of Schweinfurt and Rabaul,
Then air-dropped candy to Berlin,
And stalked the Yalu hall.

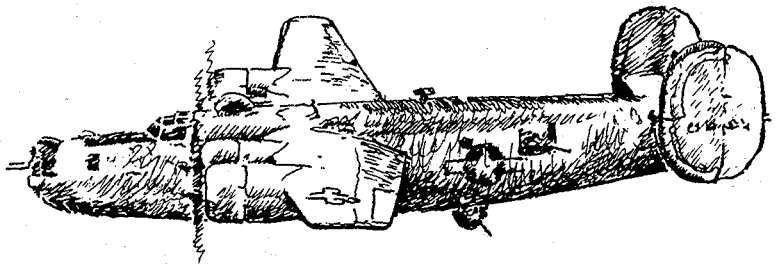
See manifested from within
Their tarnished hulks, a string
Of beer and bombs, the coal and kids,
So freedom's bell could ring.

Young ones, parts newly stripped away,
Stand dumb in disbelief,
And wonder how they came to be,
Upon this dreaded fief.

Veterans, in resignation wait,
Struts sunk into the sand.
Though gloss be gone, and fabric ripped,
Still strangers to the land.

All bear the cross called lack of need,
Old age or obsolete.
They're scourged beneath the sky they loved,
Along a desert street.

A pilot's judgement can't be heard,
Above the roaring din,
The shouts that cry out crucify,
And keep the dollars thin.



So they're confined, judged guilty of
Duty dereliction,
All slumped in rigid sacrifice,
Hoping resurrection.

Don't think about the giant press
That makes proud metal cry,
Recall the adage, timeworn too,
Always the other guy.

Yes, this is an aircraft boneyard,
A desert dying bed,
Here hope is strong, but hope is gone.
Among the sleeping dead.

Some would say, aircraft cannot feel
Hence, cannot know their lot.
Such is the theme for all things old,
Not needed, let 'em rot.

Unknowing superior man,
I scorned along with thee,
Till one nite, wakened from deep sleep,
I heard them calling me.

Go back to sleep, I told myself
And not another thought.
Still, lying there I could not find,
The rest and peace I sought.

Feeling foolish, I walked the fence
That cold dark desert night,
Till asked a shadow by my side,
"Hey buddy, got a light?"

The shiver started at my heart
And ran from neck to toe.
The tingling fear of things unknown,
Nowhere for me to go.

He smiled and cocked his ancient cap,
With fifty-mission crush,
Then talked to me in gentle terms
Amid the desert hush.

"Don't be afraid. I'll be your guide"
And it will all make sense."
"Just follow me" and saying that,
He passed on through the fence.

His easy smile and beckoning hand
Motioned me what to do,
Taking a long cold water step,
I followed him on through.

We walked the whispering avenues,
Talking of way back when,
And listened to the women speak
Of their great need for men.

Well, that night their prayers were answered,
I saw it come to pass,
Dry grass became concrete once more
All stained with oil and gas.

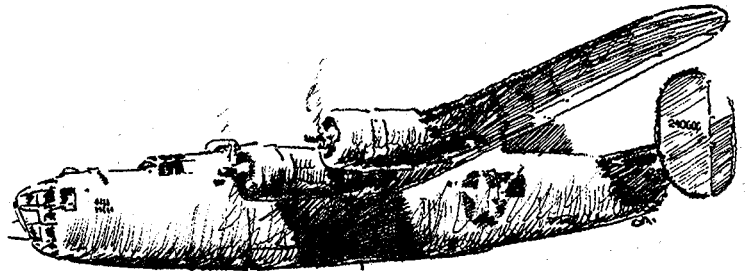
Ground crews clustered around their birds
Readying them for flight,
And down the line came those of old,
To get some time that night.

Stopped by an old B-24
My friend said, "Want some fun,"
"Fly the right seat with me tonight,"
"Out on a guernsey run."

We rushed our pre-flight, made our checks,
She was no hanger queen,
But joined late at Bunker Beacon,
So flew as Green Sixteen.

The approving air around us,
Was filled with those reborn.
I knew the joy of men with wings,
Sounding the hunter's horn.

In tight formation, through the night,
Field grade moon above,
And happiness, that special pride,
Call it, a kind of love.



A bulky, dog-eared short-snorter,
I signed with leaky pen,
A brotherhood unknown to most,
Yet prized by flying men.

But on landing came a sadness,
These times were all too rare,
We taxied to the parking ramp,
And chocks that meant despair.

We walked the quiet avenues,
And watched them fade away.
Heads bowed and leather jacket backs,
With nothing more to say.

Concrete became dry grass once more,
The night wind moaned its loss,
I thought of brave men gone before,
A hat, a ring, a toss.

We reached the fence, I passed on through,
And saw a dead star swoon.
One slow salute and he walked back,
Into his chain link tomb.

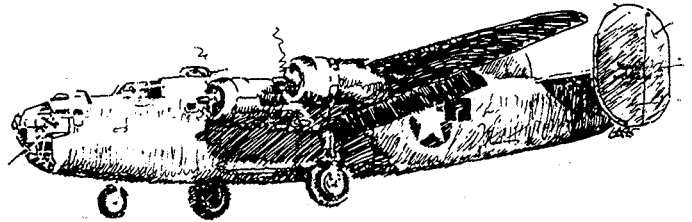
* * *

The alarm clock rang in the morning,
I smiled myself awake.
I should have taken an extract,
Just for my form-5 sake.

Funny how real a fantasy,
Based on dreams can become
But I cut myself while shaving,
I had an ink-stained thumb.

1967

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam



THE BALLAD OF THE CROSS COUNTRY FLYER

He wore a big hack watch and fighter pilot boots,
He was liquored, he was leathered, he was lean,
He'd RON'd at Nellis, drank, gambled, chased the toots,
He was outbound now, all gauges green.

His visor down and slumpin', great gulps of oxygen,
He's so hurtin', he's haggard, he's so hung,
With blood shot blivet eyes and a pickle tasting tongue,
He's filed direct and BLD is swung.

Now east of Tuba City storm clouds start to build,
So somewhere bout mid-canyon, he pushes up to mil,
He's only got an ancient hog, many has it thrilled,
Upward losing airspeed, feeling kinda ill.

Now standing on his tail pipe, just barely in the clear,
He's frantic callin' center requesting weather steer,
But center doesn't answer and C sub L max near,
He stalls and spins that mother, Oh shit and oh dear.

Dark clouds are all around him, aircraft that won't fly,
Lord oh Lord be with me, his graveyard spiral cry.
I'll never lay another bet, on that you can rely,
Just kick a little rudder Lord, I'm too young to die.

Now all you disbelievers take note of what I say,
I was in the cockpit that dark and gruesome day,
I can't describe what happened, there isn't any way.
But I snapped to straight and level and continued on O.K.

Still dark and heavy weather, I pressed on zero nine,
A talking, squawking center, faint hoping sun would shine.
Then came some buzz saw static and a high pitched piercing whine,
A moment later, helmet dead, NORDO, off the line.

Not satisfied, misfortune kept dealing heavy blows,
The TACAN started spinning, my compass card, it froze,
With circuit breakers poppin', adding to my woes,
Oil smoke started seeping up between my toes.

The fire light was flashing, EGT beserk,
Hydraulic pressure zero, another minor irk.
RPM unwinding, it hung up with a jerk.
Enough for me, I tried my seat, the bastard didn't work.

Lord oh Lord, it's me again, same old luckless guy,
In need of major maintenance sir, so this bird'll fly.
I'll never take another drink, no more rock and rye.
I'm off the booze, it's up to you, will I live or die?

There I was at thirty thou, my situation tough,
Once more the old man in the sky put me on the cuff,
The Christmas tree extinguished, He really did His stuff.
Soon flying smooth, point seven two, I guess I paid enough.

I drove on uneventful, tailwinds, making hay,
Commencing letdown sixty out, direct to GCA.
The field was holding just above minimums that day,
I vectored down through layers where imbedded CU did lay.

Leaving twelve and calling, so far still shooting scratch,
I bend her up in rounding a rather fearsome batch.
I get too close and now it's gross, that bumper makes a snatch,
I find myself afringing through a fairly hairy patch.

But low at two I spot some blue an opening does cajole,
O.K. you single saddle steed, let's make like a mole.
On I flew, got halfway through, the boiler full of coal.
Blue turned to black, I've had the cack, it's just a sucker hole.

Inside of a thousand, be they witches or what'er,
And me bowel boring deeper through that fulsome odored lair,
I felt someone aplucking at my short and private hair,
The aircraft started bucking, things ripped beyond repair.

First scraping from the canopy, then floorboard bound for thrills,
It's big time rock and roll plus violent wifferdrills
The stick is ineffective, indifferent to my skills
The aircraft starts to tumble and my lunch bag spills.

I tunneled in almost blacked, excessive G oppressed,
Rivets poppin' swappin' ends, my bladders over stressed
My weekend warrior weakened heart, clumping in my breast,
Once more I turned my thoughts upstairs, this was the final test.

Lord oh Lord how could you, affirmative tis I,
Here I come on bended wing, cartwheeling through the sky,
I've one last vow to offer, just get me through my cry,
And no more bed til I'm wed, no more rubbing thigh.

The collection plate was sagging, passing round the pews,
There you have it, now sworn off, gambling, broads, and booze.
Image tender throttle benders say better life to lose,
That's verbal varnish, armour tarnished, nicked and scratched I choose.

My requisition chit was in, would it be approved?
The clerk at distribution really must have moved,
For sudden in a blinding flash, erratic flight was smoothed,
Thin and tranquil, breaking up, the angry heavens soothed.

My trim tabs kiss the clouds good-bye, home plate below not far,
I drop my nose to entry point, CAVU to nearest star.
I hit the break and things are jake so stand her on the spar
Then button G and as I key, my words of thanks they are,
"You can cancel out that clearance Lord, I'm downwind VFR."

1971

Hanoi Hilton - Hanoi, North Vietnam

BENEATH PILED BLANKETS

**From huddled sleep, from humbled sleep,
My sickened shape awakes.
Still lost in darkness,
Beneath piled blankets.**

**Sick lungs suck deep, asthmatic deep,
It's cold, controlless shakes
Across the chamber,
Beneath piled blankets.**

**I struggle steep against the steep
Of loathsome life that breaks,
The sure and sureless.
Beneath piled blankets.**

**I'll fight till sleep, till tired sleep
My sickened shape retakes.
Still lost in darkness,
Beneath piled blankets.**

1969

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam

HANOI EPITAPH

**When days of dim hope and boredom abound,
And you half listen to the desperate sound
Of empty time-patch conversation.**

**When heat is so hot, and cold so cold,
You think of your youth and how you've grown old,
The endless and senseless frustration.**

**When things don't go right and treatment is bad,
You think of the war and how you've been had,
Now live confined, it's life's lowest station.**

**When you try to do the job expected,
"Hang on, Keep Faith," till resurrected,
Without plaudit or praise from the nation.**

**When you cling to values you know are true,
Like family, God, the red, white, and blue,
It's your fortress against indoctrination.**

**And when flood waters rise on mental levee,
You go on, though the standard staff heavy,
And you live in confirmed desperation.**

**When the floor is furrowed by tired feet,
And life slips away under the pounding beat,
You trudge on, in the dark desolation.**

**When years have passed, the many Decembers,
And no one cares and no one remembers,
The lost flyer and his supplication.**

**When the bombing has stopped with no end in sight,
Cover your ears as we cry in the night,
With considerable justification.**

**When you can't go on the burden too great,
And words lose their meaning, except the word hate,
You bend and forget repatriation.**

**The man on the street, a face in the crowd,
Isn't concerned with the mind numbing shroud,
That grey time causes us to be lost in.**

**The years have passed, the many Decembers,
And no one knows and no one remembers,
The sound of your voice, your face, or your name.**

**So you dream of steel charges, skies to roam,
Mostly you dream of ... just going home.
But you dream without hope or conviction.**

1969

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam

FRIENDSHIP

A friend is a wingman.

A friend can be lead.

A friend is there, when there's a need.

1969

Hanoi, North Vietnam



THE TOURNEY

**The scepter raised and silent challenge made,
Again, I mental summon lance and shield,
And somehow last til regal colors fade.
It's now the victor absent from the field,
Hard pallet draws me, huddled down upon,
A distant tower tolls a muffled chime,
Another muddled day had eddied on
To join the addled stream of tousled time.
Embittered languor blankets captive man,
So armoured, sally forth at dawn consigned
To stand alone, and parry best I can
Until appointed tourneys end resigned.
For time's an old and boring enemy.
Too cruel to kill forgotten men like me.**

1970

Hanoi Hilton - Hanoi, North Vietnam

THE ROAD

**A field and a fence, then the winding road.
A narrow, nameless, nothing of a road.
Sometimes in the day, travel some by light.
Mostly in the dark, darkness of the night.**

**Then come the trucks, grinding up the track,
Jolting, jarring, olive muddy black.
Past the wounded field, past the twisted gate,
Running east to dawn, dawn is always late.**

**The road rests, resting, shoulder humbled down.
Drizzle spits, muck shifts, drizzle draining down.
Tired like a whore, known too many men,
Tired asking why, tired asking when.**

**Now it's Jim Joe John Jack, pack upon his back,
Marching, marching, never looking back.
Frightened he's afraid, frightened that he's brave,
Marching to the front, marching to his grave.**

**The track and the tread numbered days record,
The road remains, remains to be ignored.
Engineer regard your road.
The work in vain,
To make the crooked straight and the rough places plain.**

1969

The Annex - Hanoi, North Vietnam

THE DERELICT

The west was a patchwork of color flung over a racing sky,
The wind was a lover's whisper, that needed no reply.
The strip was of weed torn concrete, scarring desert floor,
And a derelict came flying, flying, flying,
A derelict came flying,
Long final to zero four.

Over the sentry saguaro and ancient access road,
It's gear and flaps full down and locked,
Ball turret position stowed.
Across the wasted overrun and into practised flare,
Then dust was blown at the bleached end,
A puff of smoke at the bleached end,
And tail wheel touched tarmac there.

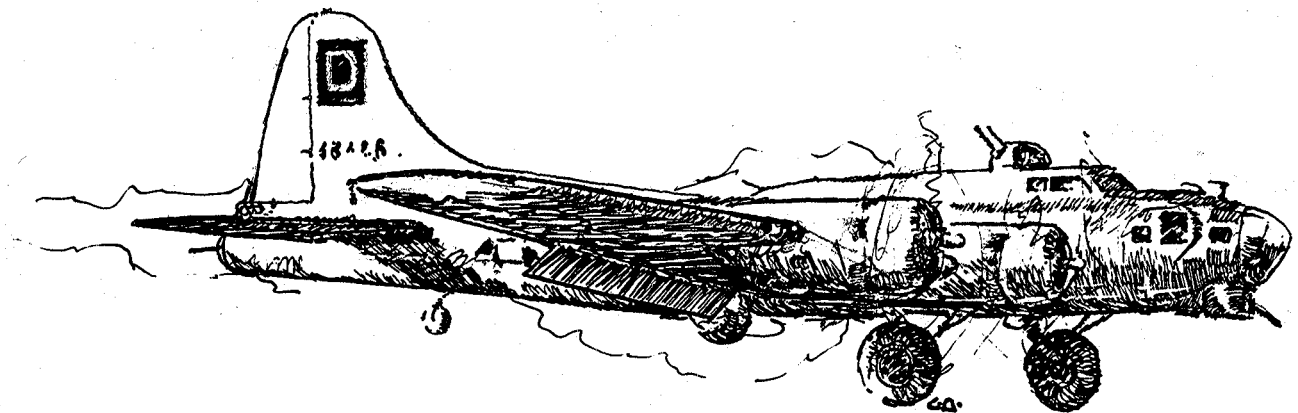
A fuselage of mottled brown, the dirty greens and black,
Along the crusted taxiway,
Chin turret guns hung slack.
It's wings were streaked to the trailing edge,
Black square, white D on the tail,
And it came, the outboard throbbing,
The cyclones, outboards, throbbing,
It came like a lost child sobbing,
Searching to no avail.

Line's edge and the question, rest or roam,
It paused and seemed to stare.
An apron expanse of loneliness,
The ramp lay withered and bare.
Grey clapboard beyond and rusting tin
Vacantly weather away,
The tower door on a broken hinge,
Time marked by an aimless sway.
A throttle burst brings no answer,
Nor trooping the line's empty glare,
A review of past disappointments and departures of despair.

No use to wish or to linger,
No good to wonder why.
The Fort will return to the runway,
Unable to live or die.
Take off roll and farewell drone,
Unheard in the desert air,
Outbound in search of home again,
Trying to go home again,
And all who follow it home again,
Will never find it there.

1972

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam



WHO IS IT

**Who is it sits in summer sun,
With air conditioner that won't run?
Who is it chill now winter come?
The heating unit's on the bum.**

**Who is it sits with propped up boot,
In salt encrusted flying suit?
Who is it smokes fag after fag,
And reads the latest flying mag?**

**Who is this man who talks so crude?
The chosen one, grease pencil screwed.
Who is this chap who seldom speaks?
Yet monitors so many freqs.**

**Who is he not caught unawares
With loaded very pistol flares.
The coffee drunk lukewarm and black,
By him who logs 'em off and back.**

**By now you've guessed our mystery friend,
If you've pulled time at runway's end,
That yellow box on wheels still waits
For you perhaps or squadron mates.**

**So watch some grease, some barely hack
A landing that would break your back,
But what the hell they all got gear,
Thanks be to thee dear mobileer.**

1971

The Zoo - Hanoi, North Vietnam

THIS ONE'S FOR THE BIRDS

(To be read in a syncopated style and with a southern accent)

Well way down south on the Texas flat,
Where prickly pear and jack rabbit at,
Lived two wood peckers in a saw-off stump,
Alookin' all the day for somepun to thump.

Now I knowd one, name of Maggie Mo
T'other buddy be, B'rer Jamie Jo.
Maggie, he was lead with a bunch of rrrs
But, Jamie, he were young, kinda unawarrs.

It happened one day as I recollect,
Setting on a cholla with nothing to peck,
Maggie turned to Jamie, "Say brother O,"
"I got me an idee, think you otta know."

"From yonder back, north to San Anton,"
"Local flyin wood's dry as a bone,"
"Cottonwood, willer, other thorny thing,"
"Just don't fill the bill, that empty holler ring."

"But I heard tell of a promised land,"
"Where trees grow tall and the peckin's grand."
"Californy redwood, supposed to be the best,"
"I be of mind to mosey on out west."

Now Jamie chawed, pondered it a spell,
It twern't too long he opined, "Do tell."
"Maggie what you say, surely do appeal,"
"Guess I'll tag along, give them redwoods a feel."

The two ambled down, Laredo Base Ops,
Hidy to a few plannin' their hops,
They checked with weather, then into the charts,
Filed an eyeball route and departed them parts.

Maggie was aleadin', first leg high,
Jamie on the wing, hanging right spry,
Fast as a possum clawin up a tree,
The two headed west bout angels twenty-three.

Couple hours out they let on downd,
Quick stop at Kirtland for turn around.
Moon pie and cola, nother tank of gas,
Soon headed west again, really hauling ... fass.

Oak Creek Canyon, real purty passed by,
Jamie thrashing weeds, Maggie stacked high,
The two skedaddled in their feather flight,
Pleased as Mr. Bullfrog on a moonlit night.

Round about Vegas Maggie took lead,
Off to the west some weather he seed,
"Hello there Center, en route VFR,"
"Dogged if we aint caught in visual underwarr."

The two smoked on, broken now below,
Maggie said, "Boy, just a piece to go,"
And sho nuff ahead, them big trees of red,
Where a fool could peck his brains out, till he dead.

They entered into holdin by and by,
Weather a mite touchy to Maggie's eye.
"We better take a TACAN, radar too,"
"Caution be the watchword, fore we have a chew."

Jamie started frettin', young and bold,
They called for clearance, continue to hold.
Jamie so bothered, so anxious to peck,
He rolled on his back and Split S'd to the deck.

Luck of a rebel helped him downd,
Landed on a tree, commenced to pound,
He'd jest reared back for that first giant peck,
When come a bolt of lightnin, struck him in the neck.

Pore ole Jamie, laying in the brush,
Tail feathers singed and a deadly hush,
Maggie was on final, he touched down good,
To a fine full stop next to a likely hunk of wood.

Maggie looked for Jamie, peered to be,
Big Daddy Sherman had marched to the sea.
There were feathers all strewed, blood on the ground,
Jamie lay apantin like a red bone hound.

**Maggie stood alookin', shook his head,
"Tis a wonder, I declare, you aint dead."
"Now I seed me some sights and heard me some tales,"
"There is one thing I know that's true for all males."**

**"Boy, fore you fly agin, think on these words,"
"It's true for man, and it's true for birds,"
"No matter what you call it, love or sin,"
"Don't be such a hurry, put your pecker in."**

1972

Dogpatch, North Vietnam

Maj. Gen. John Borling, USAF

This next selection almost didn't get entered into this book of POW poetry as I couldn't get permission to use it from the family. After a lot of correspondence with Al's brother Bob and convincing him it needed to become a part of the book, he got consent to use the pertinent portion of it for me from Al's widow. I, and the Nam-Pow community are very grateful. The following words came directly from Bob Brudno.

"On Memorial Day, 2004, the name of Captain E. Alan Brudno, USAF was added to the Vietnam Memorial. After enduring 7 1/2 years as a POW in North Vietnam, he died suddenly only four months after his release. He was the first to die.

Adding his name to the Wall got national attention, in part because of how he died, but more because he served as a reminder that wars kill after the shooting stops. He was tortured physically and mentally by his captors, but resisted, as did the others, until he was inevitably broken. The North Vietnamese stole his spirit and left him with little strength to survive. Left to fend for himself then, he took his own life after so briefly tasting freedom.

What his captors could not take from him was a poem that he committed to memory as a gift to his wife. Being an aeronautical engineer by training, he knew little of poetry. So he used the tap code through his cell walls to reach other POW's who might teach him how to structure a poem. When he was done, the poem was 1000 lines long.

Most of the poem was so personal that it will never be published. Many of his fellow captives, however, have urged his family to publish parts of it, because it tells their story too."

Robert Brudno

A POW's POEM

**The blistering sun - much work to be done -
The missions were long and fatiguing.
Then to Bangkok I flew - to relax, and to view
The mysterious East, so intriguing.**

**Oriental new faces - exotic old places -
I loved buying gifts for you, too.
But the one thing to mar that brief R & R
Was the emptiness there, without you.**

**I returned to my base - to war's hurried pace -
To the letters and tapes that you sent.
How exciting to hear all your words of good cheer -
They were with me wherever I went.**

Our future looked bright, through the perilous fight,

Though the air of each flight remained sober.
Then fate made its play, in an impartial way,
On that eighteenth day of October...

Get out!! Get out!! - I heard Tom shout,
As we made our dive for the ground -
We were out of control - we started to roll -
The earth was spinning around!

Not a second to lose! I grabbed for a fuse -
Could this be the terror of Hell?
An ear splitting din - sudden darkness closed in -
I'd ejected - I tumbled and fell.

I plunged through the void - would my chute be deployed?
Then the air seemed incredibly still...
As I drifted down there, so engulfed in despair,
That strange hostile land sent a chill...

The jets circled high in that clear, foreign sky,
O'er the trench, where I now lay in pain.
But no rescue could be - it was over for me -
The search overhead was in vain.

Heartbreak Hotel: That first dismal cell
Was a seven by seven foot room.
An old rusty pail - the filth of that jail
Contributed to much of the gloom.

A slab for a bed - I would there rest my head
On the shackles that yet were unused.
The guards - not too pleasant - and the rats, ever present
Could hardly have kept one amused.

Twice a day, I'd be fed a hunk of stale bread -
And soup, made of swamp-weeds and bones.
Or at times, for the bread, there'd be rice, instead,
With those damned little tooth-cracking stones.

And dessert - for the ants - was the blood from my pants,
And the pus that would ooze from each sore.
For medical aid, like the flesh that decayed,
Was rotten right down to the core.

A dim, staring light - each grim, sleepless night -
With confidence yet to be won;
I fought isolation - each camp regulation -

But the battle had barely begun.

**In the weeks that would follow, my life would seem hollow -
Away in self pity I'd wile.
I'd ponder my fate - the misfortunes of late -
Would I ever again know your smile?**

**A red, bamboo curtain - a life so uncertain -
I feared the worst would come true.
And my mind as it strained, was especially pained
By the fears of what you might go through.**

**Than I found consolation in deep meditation:
And I came to appreciate more
Of the life God had planted. For I'd taken for granted
The blessings I'd known once before.**

**Well, I left that first prison - new hopes had arisen -
And a cell-mate was waiting for me.
The nightmares subsided, and new dreams provided
Escapes to the land of the free.**

**Sixty-six, sixty-seven: So far from that heaven
Of being in your arms once more.
In the Devils embrace, I was now face-to-face
With the communist concept of war.**

**With conceit they would preach. With deceit they would "teach".
Their "brainwashing" never would cease.
How I'd always despise all their slander and lies,
And those endless harangues about "peace".**

**I'd often take note of an infamous quote -
Fundamental to Lenin's own laws...
That "truth" was defined for the communist mind
As whatever would further the cause.**

**With utter hypocrisy, they challenged democracy,
And ethics I learned in my youth.
And to show me the light, it was their declared right
To force me to swallow their "truth."**

**With naive expectations, they had hoped that my nation's
Ideals I'd betray with concessions.
I retorted, of course - they resorted to force -
Only torture could gain those "confessions."**

Being chained to a spot - being tied in a knot -
So bent, so crushed, so twisted...
In such terrible pain that could drive one insane,
Few mortals could long have resisted.

Against horrors so chilling, the spirit was willing -
But the flesh was too weak to withstand.
Was it really a sin for a man to give in?
Could I better resist each demand?

Those "civilized" fools broke all human rules -
So sadistic, so cruel, so brutal.
In those darkest of hours, when a proud soldier cowers,
Those tortures made living seem futile.

To be, or not to be - to be, or not to be -
I pondered o'er hamlet's frustration...
How it heavily weighed on my mind, as I prayed:
O Lord, lead us not to temptation.

The parade through Hanoi, down that Street Without Joy,
Further strengthened my previous conviction;
I shuddered and squirmed, as it also confirmed
Nineteen Eighty-Four's savage prediction.

Many torments ahead - many purges to dread -
Many threats of war-trials remained.
Man prisons for me - many cells would I see
The turmoil kept life ever strained.

A new cell-mate for me! At times, there'd be three!
Having someone to talk to was great!
That existence, so bleak, had not been unique -
They also had shared in that fate.

Isolation's reprieve - those friends helped relieve
So much of the misery then.
It was all off 'n on, though - in time they'd be gone...
I'd be left alone, once again.

The jingle of keys - I was so ill-at ease,
Especially when I'd be alone.
The adrenaline's surge - I could sense a new purge,
When I'd hear an American moan.

It's hard to express how that mental duress
Played an especially torturous role -

**Like the termites that fed like the boards in my bed,
It was gnawing away at my soul.**

**A clandestine call! A few raps on the wall
From a man in a neighboring cell -
The encouraging word from the taps that I heard
Brought me out of the Doldrums of Hell.**

**How many more frights - how many more nights -
How much sorrow, each long lonely day?
How many more fears - how many more years?
Tomorrow seemed so far away.**

**Though my daydreams of you gave me something to do,
How empty was life when alone!
Then I found occupation in mental creation,
And designed a new home of our own.**

**From frequent recession to deeper depression,
I still had possession of it,
From solo existence to cell-mates assistance,
My work on it never would quit.**

**As my dream house progressed, I became more obsessed
With designs for your future with me.
For without you to share all those dreams with me there,
How meaningless living would be.**

**So your happiness stole first place as my goal -
My other ambitions withdrew.
There was little regret - my future was set -
I now knew what course to pursue.**

**Sixty- eight, sixty nine: There was still every sign
That the Reds would relax no demand.
Our resistance was met with continuous threat
Or a purge - to soften our stand.**

**From home a few came seeking truth (?) - perhaps fame;
To themselves they brought shame in our eyes.
So naive to be sure - yes, they got the cook's tour;
Most were fools for the lure of Red lies.**

**Though our plight would remain, and the Reds would maintain
Propaganda to quell world suspicions,
The wind carried straws to plead for our cause,
And to press them for better conditions.**

And great changes came! Some sunshine - a game -
And six mates for me then seemed so many!
But how could that prize ease the plight of those guys
Who still had to live without any?

A few would get fetters, while some, a few letters;
What luck for me the eight that I did!
Not releasing a name - it was part of the game,
Like the news the Reds constantly hid.

Nineteen seventy's eve: Seems so hard to believe
That so many long years have now passed.
But our youth shall not fade - like the polish of jade,
It forever was destined to last.

The years that you've wasted - the fears that you've tasted -
The bitters you've found in the stew -
You'll never regret it - don't ever forget it -
I'll, someday, make it all up to you.

Debby, where there is life, there is bound to be strife;
But where there is life, there is hope.
My life now is you - and I know I'll pull through
With whatever I may have to cope.

I've learned from the shocks, in this school of hard knocks,
That fate is a bitter advisor.
Though I've still much to learn, when at last I return,
You will find me much older - and wiser.

More capable, too, of being, to you,
The husband you'll always deserve -
I'll devote my whole life to my wonderful wife;
You, forever with love, will I serve.

The children we'll raise - their memorable ways -
The treasures of love that we'll keep -
The home that we'll build will always be filled
With those greatest rewards life can reap.

Yes, the years have been long - but my faith remains strong
In God, in my country, in you.
How I dream of the day you'll again come my way,
And the good life we'll then build anew.

When that day arrives, and freedom revives

**With a thrill beyond any compare,
I'll return to the world - Old Glory unfurled -
To the heaven of meeting you there.**

**On June 3, 1973 Captain Alan Brudno took his own life after only four months of freedom.
He was awarded the Silver Star posthumously.**

* * * * *

**This is a photograph of cell #13 in the "New Guy Village" section of the "Hanoi Hilton"
(Hoa Lo) prison in Hanoi, North Vietnam. Al Brudno would have spent his first few weeks
in this section of the prison and perhaps in this very cell.**



Danny Glenn sent these along, if I cared to use them. As with some of the guys he tended to self-denigrate his work as not too good. I think they eminently qualify for the book and I think you, as the reader, will agree. Danny was a USN pilot flying an A-4C when he was bagged just before Christmas 1966. He was to spend the next six plus years as an "Uninvited Guest" of the North Vietnamese.

MARKERS

If life is like a highway
Leading to the great beyond
The mileage markers that we pass
Simply show how far we've gone

What makes a marker special
Is not the number on its face
It's what we pack between those signs
As we move from place to place

It's the scenery that's important
Friends we meet along the way
How we treat our fellow man
And the love we show each day

So save that apprehension
Over markers pay no heed
Consider instead the warning signs
And where that path may lead

The route for each is varied
Each trail holds a special threat
But as markers pass wherever we are
Let the challenges be met

Cdr. Danny Glenn, USN
POW 12-21-66 to 03-03-73

BEHIND THE MIST

Somewhere in time the morning rests
Behind the mist its shadow rests
Deep inside the core of thought and dreams

As day unfolds, each moment finds
A change of scene, while act unwinds
An altered view of recurring themes

A pause amid the hectic pace
To see more clearly face to face
Transcendent meaning in the mortal chain

And then, perhaps a chance to climb
Within the realm of space and time
Reaching out for God's Eternal Plane

By fate's design the evening tide
Rolls into place with past beside
Provoking fear of youthful goals unmet

The darkened clouds of spectral sight
Now opened through the gate of night
Releasing time and place from earthly net

Somewhere in time the morning rests
Behind the mist its shadow nests
Deep inside the core of heart and mind

Where place and time merge into one
And hope and dreams precede new dawn
Of here and now, and always unconfined

MY POET TREE

My
Poet
tree is very
trite. Though I try
and try with all my
might, to make its
branches fresh and new,
each sappy word just oozes
through

GODLY INTERVENTION

I'd passed that road so many times going here and there each day
Saw it reach into the haunting woods in a rather pensive way
"I'll take that road someday," I said, as the throttle met the floor

"But now I'm in a hurry," so I moved on - with a roar

**I was off to do a hundred things of significant import
There were meetings, mail and phone calls, messages to sort
My time was too important, I couldn't stop or hesitate
The world just couldn't function if I didn't regulate**

**The days sped by and once again I barreled by that place
When a monster rig with eighteen wheels began to slow my pace
"Get out of my way," I cursed and swore as I moved in close behind
Then a blast ripped through his eighteenth tire and tread began to unwind**

**Caught in a storm of rubber and cord I tried to dodge the advance
I swerved to the right to avoid being hit by a random missile of chance
With speed of light and wrath of fire and eight-ply lance tore in
To bind up my left front axle and cause on heck of a spin**

**I yanked the wheel and hit the brake as I watched my life flash by
While fighting hard to control that skid I had to question - why?
Why did the fickle finger of fate glance at me that day?
And let that blasted truck roll on, contented on his way**

**He never looked back as he topped the hill, he continued running free
While I left the road and smashed - against a hapless cottonwood tree
As the dust settled down I breathed in deep and slowly cleared my eyes
There ahead lay that rustic lane, somewhat to my surprise**

**I was thankful not to be impaired in this place of low occasion
But eager to be on my way in new found transportation
My Jag was bent, it wouldn't start and no one was around
So I thought I'd try that backwoods trail to see what might be found**

**My nature was to bolt and run. To walk was not my style
But soon, I began to relax a bit along that country mile
There was time to savor Dogwood, ponder sunlight through the trees
And even sense the smell of roses wafting in the breeze**

**The roadway, cool and narrow crossed a rivulet serene
And rose up on the other side through abundant fields of green
Where nestled in among the pines a rural chapel stood
To serve the needs of wayward souls while passing by this wood**

**This place, I thought, just might provide an altered situation
There seemed to be a pattern here of primordial destination
I pushed the hand carved door aside and peered into the narthex
To find a vicar standing there arranging sacred objects**

**"Father, sir if you'll excuse me, I've stopped along this path
To offer up a thankful prayer for deliverance from the wrath
Of a fiendish turnpike cruiser and a call too close to mention
For I surely would have perished without Godly intervention"**

**As he turned around to face me, I felt his spirit kind
He looked at me with knowing gaze that bore into my mind
And said, "I'm glad you're here my son, but weigh again your lot
About wether Devine hand entered in. Maybe -- maybe not."**

**"To help us stop and think a bit, and alter our perspective
On why and where we're headed, down that highway, unreflective
While a greater, higher purpose, with meaning yet unraveled
Stands waiting our discovery along a trail less traveled"**

**As his thoughts embraced my being like a newly opened door
I saw a premonition of all the back roads to explore
He must have grasped the fervor that I felt to forge ahead
"I'll have the sexton take you on his way downtown," he said**

**I thanked him as he walked with me to the churchyard porte-cochere
To continue on my journey in a pickup waiting there
"Hop in," he said, "I'm pleased to share this ride
Since we both can use the service a repair shop can provide"**

**"You see," he said, as he pulled away, "the chapel can't afford
A clergy that draws full time pay in service to the Lord
So, I'm off to town to try to help the vicar make a buck
To get the wheel in back repaired for his eighteen wheeler truck"**

Heroes

**Searching for a special sense of identity
Seven men representing three hundred and fifty years
Gathered around a carved oak table
In a contemporary gothic church
Talking about heroes**

**Joined in contemplation of noble warriors
Moving quickly from John the Baptist
To Abraham Lincoln, John Wayne, Norman Swartzkopf,
And others
Larger than life**

**Molded by determination
Tempered by exposure to adversity**

**caught up in purposeful, sacrificing, altruistic
Burning desire to serve a greater cause
To make a difference
To change the world**

**Seeking to define that collective boldness
Of mortals elevated to a revered realm
Playing out destiny's hand
Or rising to the occasion**

**Ultimately departing the sureness of polished oak
In search of unfamiliar wilderness
Away from reflective imagination in quest of action
To slay the dragon
To breathe life**

In gathering up poems for this book, my goal has always been to get as much information as possible about when they were written and where, so the reader might better understand what circumstances prompted the men to write them. As this poem just recently came to light through a casual conversation with Chuck Gillespie's widow Helen, that is not possible here. Chuck brought it out with him when he came home in 1973 and Helen has always loved it. It is a poem that needs no introduction ... and it speaks volumes of the man Chuck Gillespie was. With Chuck, it was always ... God, country, family. At the time he wrote this poem he had already been a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese for five years. He had no idea when, or if, he would ever be coming home. He knew he was in God's hands and that was enough.

Chuck was a Commander flying an F-4B with VF 151 when he was shot down. He was captured on 10-24-67 and released on 03-14-73.

Let our lives be lead in the days ahead
In the way that Jesus taught;
Let his words so clear that we hold so dear
Fill our minds with righteous thought;

Let us cause no strife in our daily life
With the men who cross our path;
Let us try to rid as our Savior did
From our lives all scorn and wrath;

Let us daily seek in the words we speak
To be friendly, helpful, and kind;
Let our Savior's love, as in heav'n above
Fill our heart and soul and mind;

Let our thoughts be pure and our actions sure
As we learn to forget and forgive;
Let us always do as we wish others to,
And our lives we will Godly live.

Capt. Charles R. Gillespie, Jr. USN
Hoa Lo Prison, Hanoi, North Vietnam
1972
POW 10-24-67 to 03-14-73

Larry Friese was a Marine Corps Bomb/Nav flying in an A6A when he was shot down on February 24, 1968, just days short of his twenty-sixth birthday. He was released on March 14, 1973, eight days after he turned thirty-one. The following two poems were inclosed in letters he sent home to his family. The ballad, which he wrote in Hanoi during 1971 - 1972, is from a book he intended to publish after he came home. It was titled, "Humor Helped Me Cope." Larry's sense of humor more than helped him cope, it brought him home sane. He can keep you in stitches for hours with his poems and stories, but those will have to wait for a future and different type of book!

CHRISTMAS POEM

The earth has made another round,
I hope the gang is safe and sound.
Another Christmas far away,
But I'll be there as every day.
You'll fix a turkey, trimmings too,
Won't you Ma? Old devil, you.
With fudge and lights and everything,
Christmas cheer, the voice of Bing.
No doubt my toast's a shout from stout,
But bottom's up, one-eighty out.
Of course this year's final night,
Chase something stiff with "Victor's Light." *
And thru another three-sixty-five,
May you all be kept alive.
The Good Book days it's gotta cease,
"A time for war ... a time for peace."
And come that year when peace is styled,
Son of a bitch, it's gonna be wild.

* Victor is Larry's dad and he makes home brew. Most people call him "Vingegar Vic."

POEM FOR LARRY'S MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY

Where'er I go, Whom'er I meet,
I size up men, but few compete
With one whom I lived when I was young,
Who placed me on the bottom rung.
A lot of nice things I could say;
I've room to say but one today.
Of selfishness I now shall speak,

That cold and curt sardonic freak
Called selfishness, Thru out it's sown
And you have less than all I've known.
So Happy Birthday, Mother dear,
I hope you see your hundredth year.

THE BALLAD OF FRANNIE WHITE, 1971 - 1972

While cruising 'round the beltway in
The fresh cool air of spring,
My great big Honda Four and I
Were doing up our thing.

I motored past a little car
Of color red as fire.
"Twas parked upon the shoulder with
A flat posterior tire.

Well here is what I saw there as
I sailed swiftly past.
Decked out in her new fancy rags
Was one delightful lass.

It was so obvious to me,
We do all understand.
Misfortune's paid a call to her
And she could use a hand.

So clamping down my binders now
I zookied to the right.
And as I went up to her she
said, "Hi, I'm Frannie White."

"Well may I, Frannie White?" I said,
"I see you've had a flat,
And you can't change a wheel in
A set of rags like that."

I did a fine job for Frannie White
And as I did I saw
She kept a-looking at my bike
With eyeballs full of awe.

Altho she didn't come right out
And tell me what filled her head,
I thought she'd kinda like a ride,
Cuz here's what Frannie said.

"It's sure a nifty scooter that
My Good samaritan has."
Said I, "Now look here Frannie White,
What is this scooter jazz?"

"The mill that you're referring to's
The horse of Galahad.
And murder cycles you can't ride
'n a set of rags like that.

So there you are Miss Frannie White,
Perhaps I'll see you 'round"
With that I lit Ol' Dobbin off
And started churning ground.

My four were snorting smoke and fire
With all that they were able.
I went one quarter of a mile
And broke my throttle cable.

So clamping down my binders now
I zookied to the right,
Dismounted quick and started flag-
ging down that Frannie White.

And up the road as big as life
Her car as red as fire
Did bring my old friend Frannie White
Dressed in uptown attire.

She stopped and said, "I'll gladly help
In any way I can."
I showed her what my problem was
And slipped ten in her hand.

She leaped into her fire bomb
And aimed it toward the store.
She said, "I'll hurry back and have
You on the road once more.

And then I sat and waited there
An hour and a half.
I was convinced that Frannie'd split
And handed me the shaft.

My heart was heavy and forlorn,
Man, was I disenchanted!
Then something crazy came to pass;
The seeds of love were planted.

Yah, stomping down her binders now
She zookied to the right.
And with that cable in her hand
Came running Frannie White.

And she was ready for the road,
That's ready by all means -
That sweat shirt on her was well-worn,
As were them old blue jeans.

We dropped her bomb and let it sit,
There's little more to tell.
I told myself she wants a ride,
I'll do it up right swell.

I'll hang her there behind me on
My screaming go-machine,
The ride she'll get will flake her hide
And turn her eyeballs green.

If she calls it a scooter than
I swear I'll shoot her dead.
She screamed, "This Honda Four's some kind
Of leaping lump of lead!"

You'd guess the rest, in case you can't
I'll drop a couple of hints,
My peach pie Frannie White and I
Been riding ever since.

So cats and chicks -- one question now,
You've heard my story thru
How do I love my Frannie White?
You know HOW-WOW I do.

Cdr. Larry Frieese, USN/USMC
Hanoi, North Vietnam
POW 02-24-68 to 03-14-73

POW - MIA

**A giant among a nation of small men,
Whose courage and devotion for country
Rules his heart.**

**A small room for a big man,
One without light and air.
A wooden plank for a bed.**

**Constant humiliation and deprivation,
Torture, starvation
And isolation, a way of life.**

**Thoughts of God
Giving him strength
But reality - an endless exile.**

**Memories of loved ones,
Trust in his country
And prayers, to be given a letter.**

**Life has been spared,
The Lord must have reason.
With faith he'll endure.**

**He lowers his head and submits,
Not to the enemy,
But to the will of God.**

**Phyllis Hivner
October, 1970**



Phyllis Hivner, wife of Col. Jim Hivner, USAF, is one of those special women who waited, not knowing the fate of her husband for over 4 and 1/2 years. Her first letter from him arrived in her mailbox on the saturday before Easter, 1970. To this day she does not know how it got there. The postman swears he did not deliver it and there were no post marks on it, except Hanoi, North Vietnam. Even now, after all these years, she still considers it her miracle from God. She had to wait another 3 years until Jim finally came home.

Phyllis is not only one of the most patriotic people I have ever known, but one of the most talented, as this poem will show. In her own words;

"This poem is dedicated to the men and women who, throughout history, have loyally served in the armed services. Those thousands of prisoners of war who lived these words;

My husband, my hero, Colonel James O. Hivner, USAF, 7 1/2 years a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, who permits me to share his life and the thoughts of his soul."

The POW's always close with GBU, or God Bless You. Truly God has blessed these two remarkable and wonderful people.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

**Among the crowd
Hand on my heart,
Old Glory passing by,**

**A flush of pride
Chokes off my words,
Oh free and spacious sky!**

**This land of ours
Where freedom reigns
In full reality!**

**Yet in my soul,
I hear a voice
That will not set me free.**

**It speaks to me
Of former times,
Faith mixed with screams of rage,**

**Of prison bars
And tortured lives
And hell within a cage,**

**Of prayers to God
For daily strength
And courage for us all**

**To rise above
The pain of war
And dream freedom's call.**

**We could not walk,
Yet we would crawl,
To pledge our loyalty**

**To God and country.
More than life
These thoughts were sanity --**

**To walk again
Among free men
And raise our voices high,**

**To pledge allegiance
To our flag
For which we'd gladly die.**

**We often prayed
Our Sacrifice
Might mean the end of war**

**But dreamed of freedom
Night and day,
Of being home once more.**

**Now long years past,
Safe home at last,
I see our flag go by,**

**And heart and voice
Alike rejoice,
My country, hear my cry!**

**We did not fight,
We did not die,
To gain a heros fame,**

**But if one doesn't
Share the cost,
Then one must share the blame.**

**Our freedom has been
Bought with blood,
Of those who fought and died,**

**In hopes that one day
Man would find
A peace that spreads worldwide.**

**Reach out your arms,
Grasp every hand,
Tell everyone you care!**

**On land and sea
Let freedom ring
For all men everywhere,**

**Our honored dead
Will rest in peace,
And God will grant new birth.**

**Mankind will march
As veterans all
Waging peace on earth.**

God Bless America.

Phyllis Douglas Hivner

In March of 2003, I went to Randolph AFB to attend the 560th Flying Training Squadron's annual Dining In held in honor of the Vietnam War's returned USAF POW's. This was the thirtieth and final reunion in which a former USAF POW would get his 100 mission or "Champagne Flight."

The 560th FTS was originally given the mission of re-qualifying USAF returned POW's to flying status in 1973 and it was the only program of its type in military history. After the initial qualifications it was decided to hold a reunion annually and give a pilot POW who was incapable of returning to flying status, his final flight.

On the return flight back home I was carrying a very large framed original movie theater play bill for the film "Return With Honor", autographed to me by over two hundred ex-POW's. While in the waiting area the plane's crew walked by and the command pilot stopped and asked if he could look at it. He said, "I'd give anything to meet one of these guys." A smile crept on my face as I told him I could arrange that right now if he'd take the frame into the cockpit to protect it. He said, "Of course, but how can I meet this guy."

Returning home with me was Col. Ray Merritt, who had been captured in 1965 flying wing to Robbie Risner, both of whom have items in this book, and he had also attended the reunion. The entire crew were awed and were moved to spend time with Ray. The Captain then asked to see our tickets. He went to the counter and had us upgraded to first class at once. He tried to get us booked that way on the second leg of our trip, but first class was full. Still, on that leg we were treated like royalty again. Right before take off, the head stewardess on the second flight called me forward and asked if I'd introduce her to Ray. Not a problem there. Soon after we were airborne, she came back with a napkin with something written on it. It was a poem. I asked her to sit in my seat so she could read it to Ray and his wife Dorothy. It became a very emotional moment. It turned out she was ex-USAF and had served eight years before getting out to join America West Airlines.

POEM OF THANKS

**How does one say thank you
For all you have done**

**If not for your bravery
Our freedoms we would not have one**

**For you truly are a hero
A beacon shining bright**

**A hopeful sign to others
As they survive another fearful night**

**So with humble heart
And grateful soul**

**Thank you for your bravery
My thanks forever more**

**Liz Lorch
USAF 85-93
"Mud Handler"**

**America West Airlines
03-29-73**

I told Ray, "You see, no matter what the news media say, your actions all those years ago and your homecoming, still have a positive affect on people, even this younger generation." It amazed him, but not me. I have always known what an inspiration to the country these wonderful men were, and ARE!

This is a commemorative coin I designed for the last hurrah at Randolph AFB. They were given to each POW who attended along with a book commemorating the thirty years of the Dining In. A coin and a book were sent out to every USAF POW who had gone through the program and to those who received their flight over the years, but who could not attend.

**Lee Humiston
NAMPOW Friend, Archivist, and proudly, "KEEPER OF THE FLAME"**



Joe Milligan never wrote any poetry of his own while in prison, but this one stuck with him through all the years since ... It is by Hervy Stockman, as best he can remember, and he first heard it at the Plantation in early 1968. He said, "It's amazing what you can remember when you get old!"

A LIMERICK

**There once was a prisoner in Hanoi,
who derived a most vicarious joy,
when from a mixture of rice,
and underarm lice,
he fashioned a self-propelled toy.**

**Col. Hervey Stockman, USAF
POW 06-11-67 to 03-04-73**

**Col. Joe Milligan, USAF
POW 05-20-67 to 02-18-73**

This next, and last, piece is a quote from Major General R H Burris, spoken at the Vietnam Wall on July 16, 1993. It is a stunning commentary on just how strong emotions were twenty years after the end of the war, and still are, another twelve years later.

"Bud your mother and I are here, with our friends from the Air Force Gunners Association. We're here to pay our respects and to remember.

We've been told lately that we should put aside the memories of Vietnam and forget for the sake of harmony.

In behalf of all the veterans of Vietnam that I have had the privilege to speak to and all those who cannot speak for themselves, I have a message. We came back from Hell and you spit on us. You looked upon the face of treason and you turned your head. You brought us back in body bags. You assaulted us in the colleges and universities. You gave solace to the enemy and thereby put many more names on the wall. You do high honor to those who would not serve and for all that, you ask us to forget. Well, I'll tell you. Here's my message:"

"WE'LL FORGET, JUST AS SOON AS THE FALLING RAIN, LIKE MOTHER'S TEARS WASH ALL THOSE NAMES OFF THE WALL"

This last entry is by Jeff MacNelly, who was one of the great political cartoonists in this country.

In 1998, to honor the Vietnam POW's 25 years of freedom, he drew what has to be (at least to me) the best 25th anniversary card ever made. It could not have been more meaningful, nor wonderful, had it been drawn the day they came home. His words and his drawing will not lessen with the passing of time.

I would like to close my work with a personal thank you to the Chicago Tribune for allowing me to use Jeff's cartoon to end this book.



This is a book about the war in Vietnam and some very special men who were imprisoned there from 1964 to 1973. It is not so much a book about war and valorous deeds as it is about valorous men who performed heroically under circumstances so horrendous, we, as Americans will never be able to understand, nor fully appreciate what they were put through, not even today.

No amount of survival training could, nor did, prepare these men for what they would have to face as they became not just prisoners of war, but they would be the "Blackest of Criminals", when held by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam and by the North Vietnamese in Laos, Cambodia and in North Vietnam itself.

This book will show how they took the war to their enemies in a way no one could ever have imagined. Though they no longer had the physical tools to wage war, were isolated from each other in unbelievably filthy cells where they were placed in stocks or manacles for weeks and months on end. Beaten, starved and tortured, they still fought on. Fought on in the one and only way left to them, they used their minds.

As you absorb their poems and view their drawings, it is my belief you will come away with a deeper understanding of how some ordinary American fighting men who were not a handpicked elite, became extraordinary and survived the living hell that was their imprisonment.

This is ... "VOICES FROM THE DARK"

Voices From The Dark is a "window on the past." These poems, composed in the dark filthy cells of Vietnam, were passed from cell to cell, often at great personal risk, to be shared by fellow POW's.

They provided entertainment, comfort, inspiration, and diversion. The authors, without benefit of pen nor paper, chose this medium to express their thoughts and impressions, as they struggled to resist and survive.

Some are short, others are near epic, but all are from the heart, providing the reader a close-up look at the thoughts and values of the POW's. You'll feel the love of God, country, honor, duty, and not the least, of fellow POW's.

**Wes Schierman, USAF
POW 08-28-65 to 02-12-73**

As a returned POW who was incarcerated in North Vietnam for over five years, the poems in Voices From The Dark exemplify the hopes, fears, and even the humor that filled our days during those difficult years.

My heartfelt thanks goes out to Lee Humiston for his dedication, tenacity and perseverance in putting this book together. My hope is that America will read this collection and better understand the resiliency of the human spirit and the priceless gifts of freedom and family we so often take for granted.

**Capt. Jim Hickerson, USN
POW 12-22-67 to 03-14-73**

Long after we are gone from this life, we will continue to be remembered as the 4th Allied POW Wing, due in part to the tireless efforts of Lee Humiston, who painstakingly collected, cataloged and preserved our artifacts and memories for future generations.

His exhibits and this book are a most important part of the Nam-Pow history and experience. Many words of description have been written, but the visual displays and these poems, mostly written in the cells and prison camps of Vietnam, give the viewer and reader an in-depth perception of the American POW in Vietnam. The enemy could deprive us of our physical freedom, but they could never imprison our hearts and minds.

Lee Humiston has sacrificed much to accomplish these displays and this book. He has earned our endless gratitude and respect, as does his understanding and patient wife Pam and their children, Rachel and Eileen. Without their support, this impossible dream could never have been attempted, let alone realized. Lee has given the Nam-Pow families and our nation a timeless legacy.

God Bless each of you for this unbelievably generous gift of your dedication and selflessness.

**Col. Jim Hivner, USAF (Ret)
POW 10-05-65 to 02-12-73**

These poems written by American heroes held as prisoners in Vietnam under terrible conditions for up to eight years are a tribute to the character, integrity, patriotism and human spirit of these men.

As you read these positive poems, remember that they were written while these men were being brutally tortured. These poems show a level of patriotism and absolute commitment to our country and its ideals that should inspire every citizen to do more for our country.

Every American should read these poems and understand that freedom is not free. Freedom can cost a terrible price. These men paid that price.

H. Ross Perot