

HOME WITH HONOR

The Military Code of Conduct and Its Impact on American Prisoners of War in Vietnam

CODE OF CONDUCT

FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES

- I. I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.
- II. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.
- III. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.
- IV. If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.
- V. When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.
- VI. I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles, which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.

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History Honors Seminar
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Home with Honor:
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American Prisoners of War during Vietnam**

by

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Senior Honor Thesis

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After a year of work, research, writing, and editing I have completed my History Honors Thesis. I became curious about the role of POWs during Vietnam after taking History 138 with Professor Logevall. I wanted to explore the experiences of the POWs and learn their story and how the Military Code of Conduct affected their captivity and survival. I will always be grateful to retired Lieutenant Colonel Wes Schierman, held in North Vietnam for seven and a half years, who was willing to sit down and talk with me. His generosity and insight inspired my paper. I would also like to thank Former Army Captain Roger Fox, a Vietnam helicopter pilot, who graciously allowed me to interview him for a veteran's perspective of the Code. His knowledge and candor helped me understand the reality so many Vietnam servicemen faced.

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Home with Honor
The Impact of the Military Code of Conduct on American Prisoners of War
during Vietnam

This project centers on an analysis of the Military Code of Conduct during the Vietnam War, and its impact/influence on American Prisoners of War. The paper examines the longest wartime captivity of any group of American prisoners in United States history. Created in 1955, by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Code of Conduct lists the duties of a prisoner of war. During Vietnam many prisoners faced severe mistreatment and torture. That created an almost impossible conflict between honoring the military Code and the nation, while trying to protect and save their own lives. Attention is given to ex-POWs' memoirs and stories, including first person interviews, the Geneva Conventions, U.S. Government documents and memorandums, and past war experiences. The emotional, physical, and mental brutality of the conflict challenged the interpretation of the Korean-era written Code which seemed outdated especially in the brutal circumstances of captivity in Vietnam. The Vietnam experience led the American Military to reevaluate the Code. This paper explores the origins of the Military Code of Conduct, the confusion the POWs faced in Vietnam as they tried to live up to the Code, and the national debate after the war over changes to the Code.

Introduction

“‘I’m getting out!’ I raised the handgrips with my left hand, which blew the canopy, saw the airspeed was dropping through 220 knots, checked my position in the seat and squeezed the trigger. As the seat fired, and I saw the canopy drop down, I was aware of two sensations; a sharp pain in my lower back, and the extreme force of windblast hitting me in the face.”¹ Forced to eject from his F105 fighter plane due to a gun malfunction, Air Force Captain Wes Schierman soon realized his life was about to change. Thirty-eight years after his capture, and now retired from the Air Force, Wes Schierman sat down with me to share his experience as a POW in Vietnam, and his insight into the U.S. Military Code of Conduct, which governed his existence as a prisoner. Landing near the top of the small North Vietnamese hill, Schierman told me he quickly hid his parachute, helmet, ejection seat and survival kit. The rest of his flight circled overhead, trying to keep sight of him while they called for a rescue helicopter. Knowing that a chopper was en-route and not far away, Schierman believed he would be rescued before the Vietnamese could make it up the hill and find him. But his hope for rescue disappeared as he heard voices coming up the hill, closing in around him

When the Vietnamese arrived I saw there was about a platoon of regular infantry with automatic weapons, grenade launchers, etc... They first took my boots, then were stripping my gear off of me as the Rescue Coordinator Aircraft appeared overhead, with the helicopter close behind! That had to be, to that point, the lowest point in my life. I thought to myself the very best you can look forward to is to have lost at least a

¹ Wes Schierman, interview by author, Mukilteo, WA, 27 December 2002. A complete version of the interview is included in the Appendix.

couple of years out of your life, I also began to review what I had learned in POW training at Stead Air Force Base...²

Like many other United States Prisoners-of-War, Schierman chronicled his experiences in captivity during the Vietnam War for people to understand what he and many others faced. Wes Schierman, a United States Air Force Captain, fighting for his country, now was a prisoner. That experience placed him and many others in a unique and controversial role during the war. Once they were captured, Schierman and the other POWs were forced into an extraordinary situation. Tortured, emotionally abused, interrogated, plagued by disease, and malnutrition, these men faced great pressure. The prisoners' role as soldiers, their belief in democracy, and their obedience to the Military Code of Conduct placed tremendous emotional demands on them. For many prisoners their determination to continue to resist, and ultimately their survival was enforced and reinforced by following and interpreting the Code of Conduct taught to them during survival school. What Schierman learned in POW training was something new for the soldiers in Vietnam. This was the first time a written doctrine governed their lives while in prison; a doctrine that created confusion and hardship for them. Designed to establish a set of guidelines for members of the Armed Forces, the Code of Conduct reinforced the duties as prisoners and fighting men. It was more than an Executive Order, it became a life or death doctrine to honor their country and fellow soldiers.

Vietnam served as the first test case for this military doctrine, designed to provide the American troops with a solid foundation to resist their enemy once taken prisoner.

² Schierman, interview by author, 27 December 2002.

But its ambiguous language left many questioning what was appropriate and honorable behavior. The Code of Conduct was only partially effective for the prisoners in Vietnam. Through examination of the Code, personal stories and memoirs of several ex-POWs, and official U.S. Government documents this paper will illustrate that while the Code helped lay the foundation for proper conduct during captivity, it also lacked sufficient and specific information to help prisoners survive the harsh treatment they faced. They were forced to rely on themselves and their senior officers for more effective forms of resistance. Following the war, that triggered a thorough reexamination of the Code of Conduct and its intended expectations.

What is the Code of Conduct?

On August 17, 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued Executive Order No. 10631 making the newly established Code of Conduct official U.S. military doctrine. President Eisenhower stated his expectations in his address

Every member of the Armed Forces of the United States is expected to measure up to the standards embodied in this Code of Conduct while he is in combat or in captivity. To ensure achievement of these standards, each member of the Armed Forces liable to capture shall be provided with specific training and instruction designed to better equip him to counter and withstand all enemy efforts against him, and shall be fully instructed as to the behavior and obligations expected of him during combat or captivity.³

Training was organized to ensure that all servicemen understood the doctrine. It consisted

³ Vernon E. Davis, The Long Road Home: Prisoner of War Policy and Planning in Southeast Asia (Washington D.C.: Office of Secretary of Defense, 2000).

of six separate Articles, designed to instruct all military branches how to conduct themselves during combat, but more importantly during captivity. The six original Articles were written as follows

Code of Conduct:

Article I

I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

Article II

I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.

Article III

If I am captured, I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.

Article IV

If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information nor take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.

Article V

When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.

Article VI

I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.⁴

Each of the six Articles were carefully constructed by the Defense Advisory Committee, created by the Department of Defense. In order to understand fully the importance placed on each Article, historian Craig Howes, in his book: Voices of the Vietnam POWs,

⁴ Craig Howes, Voices of the Vietnam POWs. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

interprets and examines each Article in the Code.

According to Howes, Article I defines a soldier as an "American fighting man." But when the "American fighting man" falls into enemy hands he is no longer a soldier but a prisoner. In March 1957, a Naval General Order was issued to help further explain what the military's opinion about a POW's combat status is, "an American fighting man, must oppose the enemy whether in active participation in combat, or as a prisoner of war."⁵ The military expects that the soldier will continue to fight even after capture by resisting the enemy.

Howes writes that in Vietnam Article II was the least significant part of the Code. The Article says that no soldier will surrender of his own free will while he still has the means to resist. The provisions of this Article were not as important in Vietnam because most POWs were not ground soldiers, but aviators shot down or forced to eject from their aircrafts, as in Captain Schierman's case. Their ability to inflict casualties on the enemy ended as soon as they ejected. Once they hit the ground, avoiding capture became difficult since, "Seven out of every ten men who lived to tell what happened suffered injuries so severe when they ejected that they were incapable of even trying to escape or evade capture after they hit the ground."⁶

Article III, deals with escape and resistance "by all means available" once a serviceman is captured. After the war this Article became the focus of controversy as the POWs returned home. Many prisoners agreed that trying to escape in Hanoi as well as in

⁵ Howes, Voices, 20.

⁶ Howes, Voices, 21.

the Viet Cong controlled jungles would not be successful. Harassing guards and attempting escape could lead to severe punishment. Prisoners held in Hanoi made several attempts to escape, but both turned out badly, resulting in death and prison-wide punishment throughout the camps.

Article IV stresses the need to continue to recognize and obey the command structure even while in captivity. This Article was created following initial reports from the Korean War, which chronicled the disintegration of the chain of command in the prison camps. "...[C]ompany officers must command, sergeants must feel different from privates, and the grunts need commanders and rules, not big brothers and the chance to express their opinion."⁷ Without camp organization and discipline, the military believed that resistance and even survival became more difficult. Article IV played a critical role in the lives of prisoners in Vietnam, especially those held in Hanoi. The communication systems developed and the chain of command followed by the prisoners helped them thwart their captors' rules, and kept many of them alive.

Howes contends that Article V sparked continued debate, following the Vietnam War, because it was the hardest to interpret and understand. It states that the prisoner is "bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth," and that they will evade answering further questions to the "utmost of my ability." The Military wanted to impose specific conduct guidelines when the enemy interrogated POWs, and answering their questions with the four limited criteria seemed to be the most efficient means for

⁷ Howes, Voices, 23.

keeping important military information from the enemy. This Article also caused heated debate, not only internally between the military branches, but also inside the prison walls.

Article VI, the last Article of the Code, refers to the responsibilities of each service member individually, as cited in the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The prisoners and soldiers would be held responsible for their actions not only during combat but also during captivity. Upon returning home after the war, military investigators would examine and prosecute any code violation under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The Role of the Korean War

In order to understand the Code of Conduct and the role it played for the prisoners during the Vietnam War, it is important to examine first its origins and creation, which means looking at the Prisoner-of-War experiences in the Korean War. Before the Code of Conduct in 1955, there was no written military doctrine that dealt specifically with the conduct of captives. The Uniform Code of Military Justice served as a broad reference for soldiers and their actions, but it did not go into detail about what was expected of prisoners. The Geneva Conventions, created in 1929, following World War I, established a set of international rules for the treatment of prisoners during war. Following World War II, the United States and sixty other nations gathered to revise the Geneva Conventions. Four separate treaties resulted, the most widely known was the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, signed on August 12, 1949.⁸

⁸ Davis, Long Road Home, 2.

The treaty defined in detail the rights of prisoners and conditions of captivity that were legal during a time of war. While it created a written record of international consensus on the standards for humane treatment of POWs, their rights and privileges, and obligations of their captors, the Conventions did not detail how the U.S. prisoners were to conduct themselves in war. The military assumed that wartime prison experiences would be similar throughout the world, and they relied upon this assumption for an unwritten standard of behavior. But the experiences during the Korean War resulted in a re-examination of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and a new analysis of POW conduct. Korea was the first war in which Communist forces held U.S. Servicemen for an extended period of time. That added a new and unfamiliar dimension to the conditions, exploitation and indoctrination of POWs.⁹ The enemy sought to establish moral and psychological dominance over the prisoners, causing them to question U.S. involvement and international strategies. These same tactics used by the North Koreans would be used by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. A minority of American soldiers from the Korean War decided to embrace Communist views, seeking safety from their captors, and volunteering to write propaganda articles in support of North Korea. It was this group that the U.S. military leaders focused on as they debated future wartime conflicts.¹⁰

Early assessments of the prisoners' behavior emphasized those who failed to conduct themselves properly, helping fuel media coverage of alleged misconduct. These images fostered a negative impression by the public of the nation's military capabilities. It

⁹ Davis, Long Road Home, 7.

¹⁰ Davis, Long Road Home, 1.

was these images and impressions that worried the Department of Defense.¹¹ As a result, in May, 1955 the newly organized Defense Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War was established under the chairmanship of Carter L. Burgess, Assistant Secretary of Defense and General John E. Hull as Vice-Chair. The main task of the Committee was to determine what happened in Korea and how it could be prevented from happening again. Their assessments and reports determined the Nation needed a unified Military Code of Conduct, outlining responsibilities and guidelines for the Armed Forces during captivity. Their investigation confirmed that the U.S. Armed Forces had never clearly defined a Code of Conduct applicable to prisoners after capture.¹² The United States government also believed in creating a unified Code for prisoner conduct because it discovered that relying solely on the Geneva Conventions was not enough. North Koreans choose to ignore the Conventions. In a memorandum, presenting strong endorsement for the Code, the Secretaries of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated "The Code of Conduct was developed and promulgated with full cognizance of the fact that our enemies do not always adhere to the laws and frequently violate the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. U.S. Military personnel are obligated to adhere to the provisions of the Code of Conduct regardless of threats of death."¹³

¹¹ Davis, Long Road Home, 11.

¹² Davis, Long Road Home, 13.

¹³ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, Microfilm collection, Reel Number, 364, titled: The Code of Conduct and Related Matters, 1-16.

The Defense Advisory Committee

As the Korean POWs returned home, the government decided to review prisoner conduct quickly in order to determine the extent to which they conducted themselves honorably. The initial assessments of the Korean POWs pointed to a lack of training and preparation. Officials became convinced that service training must be redirected and extended to cover future situations where soldiers might face similar circumstances. As a result of these initial findings, the Department of Defense in 1955 created the Defense Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War. Under the authority of Assistant Secretary of Defense Burgess, and General Hull, the Committee began its task studying reports, hearing testimony from Korean prisoners, educators, public officials, military commanders, veterans groups, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other medical experts to determine what to do so that the Korean situation would never happen again. It would not be until after the initial evaluation that the Committee determined that the original impression of the Korean war POW experience was incorrect,

In reviewing the prisoner experience in Korea, the Advisory Committee concluded that the unfavorable picture that resulted from the early assessments was overly harsh... It pointed out for instance, that of the 78 Air Force men against whom the Communists had applied physical and psychological coercion to extract confessions of germ warfare, 38 had signed, but 40 had not. Overall, the committee averred, when full account was taken of the conditions of captivity, 'The record seems fine indeed.'¹⁴

The Committee saw the need for improved methods of training to prepare soldiers to perform with more discipline while in captivity. The Committee confirmed that the

¹⁴ Davis, Long Road Home, 12.

U.S. Armed Forces had never clearly defined a code of conduct applicable to prisoners after capture. The different services each had their own regulations that had generally worked well in the past but there was no unified, comprehensive Code. The Committee determined that a unified and standard Code of Conduct for prisoners, supported and enforced by a strong training program, was necessary. It recommended to President Eisenhower that he should issue an Executive Order from the six-point Code of Conduct the Committee prepared. The Advisory Committee viewed the Code as a document of cardinal importance, "...with a status and authority higher than that of a Department of Defense directive."¹⁵

Of the six Articles submitted to the President and Department of Defense, Article V ignited the most controversy. Article V deals with prisoner behavior under interrogation. This Article continued, after its creation, to be the most controversial among military officials and prisoners. The committee heard a variety of opinions referring to standards that should be followed when captives were subjected to interrogation by the enemy. Some of those offering opinions to the Committee wanted POWs to refuse to answer any questions beyond name, rank, serial number and date of birth. Others argued that this demand was unrealistic; that very few prisoners had succeeded in revealing only that information in past wars and could not be expected to when faced with the type of physical and physiological coercion that captors could potentially exert. The Committee relied heavily on medical professionals and physicians

¹⁵ Davis, Long Road Home, 13.

for their opinions concerning Article V. Like the prisoners in Vietnam will assert later, the doctors and physicians interviewed advocated that every man had a breaking point. Many men in World War II were forced to give more than name, rank, serial number and date of birth. Nearly every prisoner in Korea gave the enemy something else besides these four.¹⁶

On the subject, Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery voiced his novel opinion,

...that the United States could frustrate the enemy's purpose entirely and spare its men the ordeal of torture by authorizing U.S. servicemen to sign any document the communists want them to or appear on radio and TV programs and deliver any script the Reds hand them. At the same time the United States should declare to the world that it was following this policy, under which any prisoner statement or confession broadcast by the captors must be held to have no validity.¹⁷

But the Committee rejected Gallery's idea because of possible repercussions an ex-POW might suffer if a confession enabled the enemy to convict him as a war criminal, thus removing him from protection under the Geneva Conventions.

The Committee made the final decision that name, rank, serial number and date of birth would be the only answers a prisoner should supply an interrogator, making it the first and only line of resistance. The Committee did however, state that a prisoner may be driven past this first line of resistance during captivity, so that they would need to be trained for successive lines of resistance. But Committee members also emphasized that the prisoner was fully responsible for all of his actions, making it hard for the prisoner in captivity and at home not to face scrutiny and possible trial if he violated the initial line of resistance declared in Article V. When he issued Executive Order 10631, President

¹⁶ Davis, Long Road Home, 15.

¹⁷ Davis, Long Road Home, 15.

Eisenhower stated

Every member of the Armed Forces of the United States is expected to measure up to the standards embodied in this Code of Conduct while he is in combat or captivity. To ensure achievement of these standards, each member of the Armed Forces liable to capture shall be provided with specific training and instruction designed to better equip him to counter and withstand the enemy's efforts against him, and shall be sully instructed as to the behavior and obligations expected of him during combat of captivity.¹⁸

Quickly, the Code and its interpretation came under fire from certain branches of the military, especially the Air Force. The Air Force questioned the language of Article V the most. The sentence referring to providing the captor with only name, rank, serial number, and date of birth, without training in other lines of resistance did not seem logical nor realistic to Air Force commanders.¹⁹ The internal debate over article V continued to grow after a new version of the Code appeared in August 1959. That version stated in reference to Article V that

In the face of experience, it is recognized that you, if you should become a POW, may be subjected to an extreme of coercion. Still, you must resist to the limit of your ability. Don't expect to fall back to successive lines of resistance. Once you have gone beyond the first name, rank, service number, and date of birth in almost any respect whatever, you have taken the first step that leads to collaboration. On the first line you must endeavor to stand to the end.²⁰

The Department of Defense published a series of posters to help Servicemen understand each Article. The DoD also sent out pamphlets, presenting the text of the Code and its revised meaning. The above quote was a statement written for one of the pamphlets.

¹⁸ Davis, Long Road Home, 17.

¹⁹ Davis, Long Road Home, 20.

²⁰ DoD Pam 1-16/DA Pam 21-71/NAVPERS 92638/AFP 34-10-1/NAVMC 2512, "The U.S. Fighting Man's Code," 6 Aug. 1959.

What the Department of Defense included in the new version of the fighting man's code argued against the training of the Air Force, which had been trying to endorse a second line of resistance program in the Code. In January 1963, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, finally presented the issue to the Chief of Naval Operations in the following message,

1. U.S. Navy pilots who have attended the USAF Advanced Survival School at Stead AFB, Nevada, have received training in second posture of resistance to interrogation. This training, which permits disclosure of information beyond name, rank, serial number, is in direct conflict with the U.S. Navy interpretation of Article V of U.S. Military Code of Conduct as taught by Navy Fleet survival schools. The resulting confusion detracts from resistance training...and may severely jeopardize the position of American POWs detained in any type of conflict.

2. Request that the above difference in interpretations...be resolved, and guidance be provided which establishes a firm policy with respect to any Cold War situation as well as general war.²¹

The differences in interpretation of Article V went before the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on October 3, 1963 the JCS sent the issue to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. The Navy, Marine Corps and Army, along with JCS Chairman General Maxwell D. Taylor agreed with the original Code of Conduct and Article V, set forth in President Eisenhower's Executive Order, prohibiting a prisoner to go beyond name, rank, serial number and date of birth when interrogated. They also determined that the training guide and its language allowed for a wide range of interpretation, encouraging the various services to train their men differently, and allowing them to implement successive lines of resistance. That resulted in a resolution by McNamara on January 3, 1964. In his

²¹ Davis, Long Road Home, 23.

response to the JCS memorandum, McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs to thoroughly investigate Code of Conduct training within each service and then develop recommendations for instructional material for use in training all members of the military. McNamara defined the nature of the instructional materials for the training program as follows

I believe that the wording of Article V of the Code of Conduct, providing that the individual will evade answering questions beyond name, rank, service number and date of birth 'to the utmost of my ability,' must continue to be binding on military personnel. I believe further in the principle that once a man is placed in a position where it is beyond his ability to resist answering further questions, he must understand that any further responses are made entirely on his own responsibility, and that the degree of accountability to which he will ultimately be held will depend upon the nature of those responses and their results. Accepting these fundamental principles, I can see the need for a program which will ensure (a) that the military man clearly understands his obligations and responsibilities in this regard, (b) that he is properly informed and instructed as to what he can expect from his captors, and (c) that there is a consistent approach by all Services in this matter.²²

The JCS submitted their findings to McNamara on May 28, 1964, voicing no dissenting opinions about the Secretary's interpretation of the Code. The original wording in Article V remained the only option for prisoners. If the prisoner went beyond those four main answers, he was to be solely responsible for his actions. The Defense Department believed it had resolved the questions about the Code. But during the conflict in Vietnam and as the American prisoner count continued to rise, the Code of Conduct and prison behavior would be revisited. The official doctrine and the words on paper proved inadequate for prisoners who were forced to make on the spot decisions in order to

²² Davis, Long Road Home, 25.

survive.

Literature Review

In the spring issue of *Military Affairs* in 1965, historian Peter Karsten stated, "...[T]he motivation and conduct of American servicemen, in or out of prison camps, have been a source of concern from the American Revolution to the present."²³ In the Spring issue of the *American Quarterly* 1970, writer H.H. Wubben echoes this argument, "Even in a popular war, World War II, the Army worried about the lack of dedication among its troops. Indoctrination programs were overhauled and beefed up with negligible success."²⁴

While the government and the military worried about prisoner conduct during World War I and II, nothing prepared them for the treatment their POWs would face in Korea. The initial critical analysis of the conduct of American prisoners was published six years after the war. War correspondent and author, Eugene Kinkead wrote In Every War But One. His book supports the conclusions reached by the Defense Advisory Committee. Kinkead focuses on what he interprets as the failed behavior of the prisoners of war just as the military and government did. The opening lines of his book reflect his argument, "In every war but one that the United States has fought, the conduct of those of its servicemen who were captured and held in enemy prison camps presented no unforeseen problems to the armed forces and gave rise to no particular concern in the

²³ Peter Karsten, "The American Democratic Citizen Soldier: Triumph or Disaster?" *Military Affairs*, XXX (Spring 1965), 34-40.

²⁴ H.H. Wubben, "American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the 'Something New in History' Theme," *American Quarterly* 22, 1 (Spring, 1970), 3-19.

country as a whole... That one war was the Korean War.”²⁵

Kinhead bases his argument on the evidence that twenty-one American prisoners decided not to come home after the conflict ended, instead choosing to stay in Korea. To the military, the Department of Defense, and the United States government, those twenty-one decisions were shocking. His book spotlights case after case stressing the failures of the Korean POWs. He focuses not only on the number of men who decided to stay in Korea, he also stresses the death rate among the POWs as a sign of lack of morale and discipline among the American soldiers. He writes that 2,730 men out of a total prisoner population of 7,190, died in captivity. That is 38 percent of all prisoners, one of the highest death rates ever experienced by U.S. soldiers in captivity.²⁶

Kinhead focuses on enemy treatment and tactics and their effect on the prisoners. He emphasizes the idea of Indoctrination and Collaboration of prisoners of war with their captors. He defines the term Indoctrination as that given by one of the chief psychiatrists who evaluated the POWs following the war. “...[A]n effort to change a man’s viewpoint while he is still a thinking individual by regulating his thoughts and actions.”²⁷ The Koreans first broke down the prisoners physically, making collaboration easier. Kinhead’s study shows 13 percent of POWs, that is 1 out of every 7 men, were found guilty of serious collaboration following their return home. Kinhead pinpoints one of the most serious forms of collaboration; Koreans using some imprisoned U.S. soldiers to return to the front lines and try and infiltrate their fellow soldiers urging them to desert

²⁵ Eugene Kinhead, In Every War But One (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1959).

²⁶ Kinhead, In Every War, 17.

²⁷ Kinhead, In Every War, 31.

and stop fighting.

Unlike World War I and II, from the onset of captivity in Korea, the Army began collecting data for a formal study on the behavior of the POWs. For the first time all returning prisoners were given a psychiatric exam. Kinkead discusses the different phases that were set up for the repatriated prisoners. Phase one consisted of a biography, where prisoners wrote about their experiences. Phase two consisted of a counter intelligence questionnaire, and phase three focused on military intelligence. The Army set up ten groups, called Joint Intelligence Processing Teams, which contained seventy-two specialists each. These groups determined the criteria by which the Army would judge the loyalty and degree of collaboration of each man.²⁸ The criteria for collaboration was based on several factors: the first, information given by the returnee about offices they held in camp, and what duties and privileges they were given. The more the prisoner spoke to the enemy and gave information the higher their standing in camp. The second factor in the criteria examined the number of names prisoners gave about collaboration by fellow prisoners. The Processing Teams judged that if a prisoner did not name major collaborators there was a good chance he was a collaborator too. Because of the new procedures 82 cases were approved for court martial and brought before the Army's Board on Prisoners of War Collaboration. By the end of the process, only 12 men actually were brought to trial charged with informing on fellow prisoners, collaborating with the Communist enemy, misconduct as a prisoner of war, assault of an officer, larceny, and

²⁸ Kinkead, In Every War, 40.

murder.

The scope and completeness of the Army Study uncovered several situations which, although relatively minor in regard to the number of men involved, properly came within any inclusive report of that investigation. One of the more serious of these was that the Army found that certain of our soldiers has been recruited to act as spies, and had returned from prison with defiant missions as enemy agents in the United States.²⁹

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 became the international standard for handling captives. The Conventions prohibited physical violence and torture to extract information from POWs. Article 17 of the Geneva Conventions, after which Article V of the Code of Conduct was modeled, stated that a prisoner was only bound to give name, rank, date of birth, army regime, serial number, and/or equivalent information.³⁰ Any country that signed the Geneva Accords was required to follow the standards set forth. But as the U.S. found out in North Korea, and later in Vietnam, the enemy did not always live up to the Geneva Accords. The problem in Korea was that soldiers were not trained for the psychological techniques the enemy used nor were they familiar in advanced with the physical mistreatment they would experience.

In the Committee's report Kinkead found collapse of Army unity and rank, and a lack of obedience for higher command. The Army believed these factors were detrimental to a prisoners desire to survive. The Committee found differences in how the POWs conducted themselves based on their branch of service.

More than two-thirds of Air Force members were officers, compared with

²⁹ Kinkead, *In Every War*, 76.

³⁰ To see a complete version of the Geneva Conventions go to: "The Avalon Project: Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War," n.d.
<<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/lawofwar/geneva03.htm>> (10 October 2002).

5 percent for the Army. Over half had some college training as against the 5 percent for the Army. Not only was its social and educational level higher-so was its value to enemy intelligence officers. An airman is highly technically trained. He carries in his head routine information about aerial equipment and combat tactics of much greater value to the enemy than any information possessed by the average GI.³¹

The results showed that Air Force prisoners displayed a unified front, preserving a strong chain of command, even when officers and commanders were separated. That was unlike prisoners from other branches who were younger, less educated and less experienced.

Kinhead believed that American POWs experiences in the Korean War and the response to them by the Military signaled a profound change in the American attitude toward wartime conduct.

Never before had a President found it necessary to clarify the principles of conduct for our military personnel, which had here to fore always been prescribed in regular training manuals. The fact that it was necessary to spell out what had always been taken for granted by Americans as constituting the unquestioned duties and obligations of our fighting men showed how greatly the Korean War differed from the seven previous major wars that this nation had fought.³²

Kinhead's book was published six years after the end of the Korean War and the return of the POWs. His distance from the conflict and the experiences of the POWs influenced how he interpreted and analyzed the Committee's test results and conclusions. Later studies argue that Kinhead's evidence and interpretations about Korean POWs do not support the reality of their conduct. Those studies conclude that the Korean War was not as different as POW conduct in other wars, as the Army initially believed and

³¹ Kinhead, In Every War, 159-160.

³² Kinhead, In Every War, 20.

Kinhead's book reinforced.

Researcher Albert Biderman refuted Kinhead's argument, making a strong case that the Korean war was not a unique and failed POW experience, rather that its similarities in treatment and conduct compared to previous wars outweigh its differences. March to Calumny, published in 1963, disputes Kinhead's study and the Army's conclusions. Biderman writes that there were only two official evaluations of the Korean prisoner of war episode. The first was conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Secretary of Defense on Prisoners of War, from which the Code originated and which Kinhead includes in his study. The other official evaluation was published by the Senate Committee on Government Operations, following extensive hearings. Kinhead never included those hearings in his book. Biderman concludes that these evaluations were not as widely circulated, widely spread to the public and the military, as negative information and portrayals of the POWs were. More often than not, Biderman claims, these negative portrayals were taken as the authoritative viewpoint, as in Kinhead's book, rather than the official conclusions of the evaluations by the Defense and Senate Committees.³³

Kinhead had claimed that in no other war had the death rate among American POWs been so high. Kinhead concluded this meant that the Korean Prisoners gave up resisting emotionally and physically in captivity and let themselves die. Yet five Army physicians who survived captivity in Korea wrote in their report to the American Medical Association

³³ Biderman, March to Calumny (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 4.

Every prisoner of war in Korea who died has suffered from malnutrition, exposure to cold, and continued harassment by the Communists.

Contributing causes to the majority of deaths were prolonged cases of respiratory infection and diarrhea. Under such conditions, it is amazing, not that there was a high death rate, but that there was a reasonably good rate of survival.³⁴

Kinthead stresses the enormous number of POWs who were suspected of collaboration with the enemy. He claims that the number had also never been so high. Biderman, however, shows the inconsistencies in this argument, by including the numbers of alleged misconduct behavior versus the number of prisoners who were convicted of actual misconduct,

The Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of war, in its summary of the investigations of alleged prisoner misconduct, gave a total of 192 (179 of them Army), as the 'maximum possible misbehavior cases' among the 4,428 returned prisoners investigated by all the services. The unqualified statements in Kinthead's volume that one third were 'guilty' of something...are difficult to reconcile with the total, which amounts to 4.3 percent of all repatriated prisoners of war.³⁵

Included here is a table from Biderman's book that shows the numbers of returned POWs from each branch and the number required for further investigation.³⁶

<i>Service</i>	<i>Total Repatriated</i>	<i>Number "Required Further Investigation"</i>	<i>Percent "Required Further Investigation"</i>
Army	3,973	426	11%
Air Force	224	87	39
Marine Corps	200	52	26
Navy	31	0	—
All Services	4,428	565	13%

In total, only 11 men were convicted of misconduct, but in ten of those cases the offenses

³⁴ Biderman, March to Calumny, 21.

³⁵ Biderman, March to Calumny, 28.

³⁶ Biderman, March to Calumny, 30.

were so slight that they warranted no punishment. Here H.H. Wubben sides with Biderman. Wubben argues Kinkead misused his data, particularly the death rate cited in the Defense Advisory Committee's research.³⁷

So far as the POW death rate, 38%, is concerned, this figure is speculative. It does not include atrocity deaths, which numbered over a thousand. Nor does it include well over two thousand missing in action. The Chinese kept no dependable records, and throughout much of the first year of the war the prisoners were in no position to do so themselves...By implication they blame most of the deaths on prisoners negligence, or worse, on loss of will to live.³⁸

While Kinkead gives the impression the POWs did not resist Communist interrogation and torture, Biderman counters, writing: "In actuality, every camp, and nearly every company of every camp, had at least one resistance organization."³⁹ Who was correct? Biderman argues that the Korean War POW experience and the captives conduct did not differ that drastically from conduct by prisoners in previous wars, but that the military and Kinkead exploited the test results following the prisoners return in order to create and support a formal Code of Conduct. Kinkead argues that the military and the government needed to view what happened in Korea as a warning signal, and that the creation of the Code was the only way to protect military information, defend the nation's honor and mandate the conduct of a soldier captured in a future war. In 1962, one year before Biderman published his rebuttal to Kinkead, 21 scholars, familiar with POW behavior in Korea,

³⁷ Wubben, "American Prisoners of War," 3-19.

³⁸ Wubben, "American Prisoners of War," refer to Albert Biderman's book, *March to Calumny*, for his statistics, 12-13.

³⁹ Biderman, *March to Calumny*, 60.

signed a statement entitled, "To Set Straight the Korean POW episode." This paper, written by two of the scholars, Edgar Schein and Raymond Bauer, refuted the popular version of the POWs story publicized by Kinhead. The 'Statement' included these challenging assertions

The behavior of the Korean prisoners did not compare unfavorably with that of their countrymen or with the behavior of people of other nations who have faced similar trials in the past.

Instances of moral weakness, collaboration with the enemy, and failure to take care of fellow soldiers in Korea did not occur more frequently than in other wars where comparable conditions of physical and psychological hardships were present. Indeed, such instances appear to have been less prevalent than historical experience would lead us to expect.⁴⁰

By 1998, the literature on the issue of the origins of the Code and past war prison experiences was more complete and less emotional than earlier conclusions and the Korean POW issue. Stuart Rochester and Frederick Kiley's book, Honor Bound: The History of American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973, compares prisoner war experiences during World War I, World War II, the Korea War and Vietnam. When comparing the POW situation during World War I and II with the experiences during Korea and Vietnam, Rochester and Kiley conclude that the characteristics of the enemy in the two World Wars were radically different from Korea and Vietnam. Prisoners in World War I and II were held mainly together, in large prison camps, not in solitary confinement for months, or even years as was the fate of many prisoners in Korea and Vietnam. When

⁴⁰ This formal statement is found in Albert Biderman's, "The Dangers of Negative Patriotism," *Harvard Business Review*, XL (Nov. 1962), 93-99.

the prisoners were separated, morale and leadership were harder to establish. If Korean or Vietnamese POWs were caught communicating with each other in any way, their captors punished them severely. The treatment and punishment prisoners experienced during Korea and Vietnam focused not only on breaking down physical strength and endurance, but also on breaking down POWs mentally. For them survival became a physiological battle as well as a physical one. The North Vietnamese did not even view the prisoners as POWs but rather as war criminals, to be tried and punished for their actions. Unlike World War I and II, Vietnam was never a declared war, so that gave the North Vietnamese a loophole to side step the Geneva Conventions, just as the North Koreans had done.

One aspect of this is evident in the way the North Vietnamese used food as a method of controlling the prisoners. Prisoners were starved and forced to eat unfamiliar food. Many lost 20-30 pounds, if not more, making it even harder to keep energy levels up and even more difficult to fight off disease and infection. And as it had for prisoners during the Korean War, survival of the fittest ruled. Some prisoners obtained food through devious means, even at the expense of their fellow prisoners, because they all were starving. Due to their inability to defy the enemy their resentment toward their captors turned to verbal resentment toward each other. In some instances this resentment, the loss of normal living conditions, and inability to control their surroundings caused some to sink into depression, which could lead to death.⁴¹ It is just one example of how

⁴¹ Wubben, "American Prisoners of War," 8.

the Articles in the Code of Conduct failed to meet the real needs of American prisoners in Vietnam.

The Vietnam War

American prisoners of war in Vietnam suffered the longest wartime captivity of any group of U.S. prisoners in history. Many POWs spent more than five years in captivity. Several of the more known and recognized prisoners during the Vietnam conflict, such as Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, the first POW taken in 1963, and Commander Jim Stockdale, were held more than seven and a half years.⁴² Ironically the Vietnam conflict claimed the smallest number of prisoners in U.S. history. There were fewer than 800 U.S. POWs, compared to 4,000 U.S. servicemen taken captive in World War I, 130,000 during WWII, and 7,000 U.S. POWs during the Korean war.⁴³

Many of the 800 Vietnam POWs wrote memoirs to help the public understand their ordeal and their feelings. They wrote not only about the war but more importantly about the role the Military Code of Conduct played in their years of captivity. The Code was intended to establish standards of discipline and conduct for the prisoners, but in the memoirs read for this paper, there is a consistent theme that the rigid demands of the Code created daily confusion and hardship as the prisoners struggled to survive.

⁴² Return With Honor, prod. and dir. Frieda Lee Mock and Terry Sanders, 1hr. 42 min. AFF/AOG, USAFA, 1998. Videocassette.

⁴³ Stuart I. Rochester & Frederick Kiley, Honor Bound: The History of American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973 (Washington D.C.: Office of Secretary of Defense, 1998), V.

Personal Accounts

Captain Wes Schierman

Air Force Captain Wes Schierman recalls the moment of capture, on August 27, 1965, as the lowest point in his life. He had no idea what to expect the day he arrived in Hanoi at the main prison camp known as the Hanoi Hilton,

As the large iron gates at the entrance to Hoa Lo Prison slammed shut behind me, I knew I was beginning a new kind of war. Basically it would be mostly a war of wills--theirs against mine. During the time since my capture, I had plenty of time to evaluate my situation and to develop a plan for my resistance. I remembered several recommendations if captured, from my training at Stead AFB... #1. Be military, #2. Don't discuss, or argue politics, #3. Don't ask for anything, and #4. Follow the Code of Conduct to the best of your ability...the Code was the Rule Book for POWs. I had made up my mind that I would rather not return home, than to return having dishonored myself, my family, and my country!⁴⁴

For the next ten days of interrogation, Schierman gave only his name, rank, serial number and date of birth, just as Article V of the Code stated. Day after day he argued to the North Vietnamese that those were the only answers he was required to give by international law. The North Vietnamese however, claimed that Schierman, like the other POWs, were not prisoners but criminals, therefore not requiring the Vietnamese to abide by the Geneva Conventions. Schierman realized that his situation and his line of resistance provided by the Code were not going to be enough to help him to survive North Vietnamese imprisonment.

⁴⁴ Wes Schierman, "Bad Day at Son La: Shoot down and Captivity," Retired Northwest Pilots Association (2002).

Captain Schierman was fortunate, in a sense, to be one of the earlier prisoners taken captive, number 23, because the Vietnamese had yet to come up with an effective method of prohibiting communication among the prisoners. While most of the early prisoners were placed in solitary confinement, they were still able to establish a means of communicating that grew as more POWs were brought to Hanoi. This system allowed the POWs to organize leadership among the prison cells. From this a strong and more unified resistance developed, forcing prisoners to redefine the Code and its Articles to fit their daily struggles.

In October I had a couple of interrogations, or 'quizzes' as we called them. The atmosphere was becoming more threatening. I was determined to avoid giving any other than the required Geneva Convention information for as long as possible! This was a very difficult time for me as I was feeling great guilt for what I knew my family must be going through. Also, the isolation of living alone in a dark room for over 23 1/2 hours a day, not to mention the hunger and thirst, was very demoralizing. Were it not for the ability to communicate with one other man, things would have been much worse!⁴⁵

That was the support and encouragement Schierman and other prisoners found critical in order for them to survive. They organized, as best they could, a military unit with the lower ranking men depending on senior ranking officers to provide the leadership and authority. Schierman understood the importance of building this cohesive prison unit.

Commander James Stockdale

Navy fighter pilot Commander James Stockdale was the twenty-sixth prisoner captured during the first year of the Vietnam conflict. Stockdale was extremely valuable

⁴⁵ Schierman, "Bad Day..."

to the United States Navy and a potential gold mine of information for the North Vietnamese. Stockdale knew critical information about the American war efforts, especially the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The U.S. Government used the events in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 to help justify their growing involvement in Vietnam. "On August 2, 1964, the American destroyer Maddox, was patrolling the waters of the gulf, monitoring North Vietnamese communications, when it was surrounded by North Vietnamese junks."⁴⁶ Thinking the Vietnamese boats were preparing to attack the Maddox, the captain ordered his crew to fire, letting loose several torpedoes. Two days later, on August 4, something happened that continues to be questioned by historians. "That night, in stormy weather, the Maddox reported it was under attack again, but the weather interfered with its radar, its sonar was not functioning properly and there were no sightings of attacking boats by American planes in the area."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, President Johnson issued retaliatory air strikes, resulting in Congressional passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to escalate the war. Stockdale hoped that he would never be put in a position that would force him to share his military secrets with the enemy.

I was in possession of the most damaging information a North Vietnamese torturer could possibly extract from an American prisoner of war. If I were captured, and if my captors had read my name in most any American newspaper a year ago after the Gulf of Tonkin episodes, the simple confession they might be able to torture out of me would be the biggest Communist propaganda scoop of the decade.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Tim Larimer, "In Hanoi, a Look Back at a Vietnam War Flash Point," New York Times, 10 November 1995, sec. A3.

⁴⁷ Larimer, "In Hanoi," A3.

⁴⁸ Jim Stockdale & Sybil Stockdale, In Love and War (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1990).

As with many of the other prisoners, Stockdale relied on his initial training, where he had learned what POWs could expect from captivity and how to handle it. What he also remembered was the distorted view and unrealistic information the Navy gave him and his fellow servicemen about captivity.

...I lay flat on my back on that high library table (in the interrogation room) and thought of my future. Back last May aboard the *Oriskany*, a classified E&E (escape and evasion) publication put out by the U.S. Air Force's Second Air Division in Saigon was circulated among us pilots. It said that after we were captured, not to worry, 'there will be no torture or physical mistreatment.' Since rough capture in the street, I hadn't had a hand laid on me yet, but the atmosphere in this prison had already made it obvious to me that that document was a lie. Sooner or later they would twist me into a knot and have my testimonial about the Tonkin Gulf on the front page of every newspaper in the world.⁴⁹

It is difficult to understand the kinds of punishment and torture prisoners faced during Vietnam. Ex-POW John McGrath memorized the various ways the prisoners were physically abused, and he sketched them for his own memoir. These drawings illustrate the universal experiences most POWs faced.⁵⁰



⁴⁹ Stockdale, *In Love*, 116-117.

⁵⁰ For his entire set of sketches see his memoir, John McGrath, *Six Years in Hanoi* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1975).

Stockdale's status as a senior ranking officer placed added responsibility on him. He viewed his training at Navy survival school as "better than nothing preparation for North Vietnam," but he believed that neither the Code of Conduct, nor the training were clear and effective for the experiences he and his fellow prisoners faced. After learning of the North Vietnamese camp regulations, pasted to the back of his and everyone else's prison door, Stockdale, as the senior officer in camp, recognized the important role he must play in creating a second line of resistance against the guards and interrogators. Following the Code alone would not suffice. This became clear after many of the POW's first interrogations, when even the toughest among them could not withstand "the ropes." "The ropes" was a torture technique during which the North Vietnamese guards tied up prisoners; their arms tied together at the elbows and wrists and stretched above and behind their shoulders, to see how much pain each prisoner could take before they started to talk.

Stockdale played an important role in communicating to the other prisoners what they needed to do to stay alive, while he faced constant pressure from the North Vietnamese to collaborate.

I was being solicited to entice my junior officers to betray their oath of office, their Code of Conduct, their country...He (the North Vietnamese interrogator) had us pegged-we (Stockdale and Colonel Risner, the other Senior ranking officer) were the leaders of the only prisoners he had, air force and naval service (navy and marine) flight crews. He knew the Code of Conduct and that we were responsible, and our juniors were responsible to obey us.⁵¹

Guilt consumed Stockdale and the other prisoners, guilt that they had dishonored their

⁵¹ Stockdale, *In Love*, 161-162.

country, their fellow prisoners, their families, and worst of all themselves. Some soldiers were forced to write propaganda statements and make oral confessions because their bodies could only handle so much pain. What the physicians from the Korean War study had concluded held true for the POWs in Vietnam, each man had a breaking point and the North Vietnamese did everything they could to get the prisoners to that point.

As the North Vietnamese made more demands to get propaganda information from the prisoners, Stockdale and fellow senior ranking officer Robinson Risner, an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, decided that new rules must be established for the POWs, by the POWs. They insisted that before prisoners gave any information they had to experience certain levels of torture first. This helped define a boundary for the prisoners, which also helped unify and organize them, making it more difficult for the North Vietnamese to extract information from them.

On the fourth day, a second American voice, that of the cell mate of the first, took over the reading of Salisbury's articles. This voice was self-conscious and ponderous in a way that gave an ominous, serious aura to that recitation. That did it. I put out the order: 'To talk on the cp radio requires a license. The license costs one week in leg irons. The license is good for one week and then must be renewed.' I got the order out just in time; about five more Americans were asked to read the next day, and all refused. As a result of totally unanimous refusal, only the two who had already read for the squawk boxes went into leg irons, and they for less than one week. The reading requirement was dropped by the Vietnamese agenda for the time being.⁵²

Stockdale now had an idea of what it was going to take in order to resist the captors.

Relying on a Code of Conduct, written ten years earlier by the Defense Advisory

⁵² Stockdale, *In Love*, 246.

Committee, could not be their only line of defense in Hanoi.

The Code that Stockdale and Risner created defined for all prisoners what was expected of them. Stockdale knew that the code and the rules could not be too vague because it would only result in questioning and arguing about definition later.

The law could not be too vague; to just give the order 'Obey the Code of Conduct' would have been the biggest cover-your-ass maneuver of all. The Code, as good as it is, is like a constitution-arguments can go on endlessly about how it should be applied to specific situations. I had to spell out our Hanoi-specific applications, to select out certain of Cat's (the main interrogator) key programs that we would likely be able, by corporate effort, to defeat...⁵³

In order to make the new prisoner rules easy to remember, Stockdale came up with an acronym: BACK US: Bow, Air, Crime, Kiss, Unity over Self. The prisoners were not allowed to "Bow" in public while under camera surveillance or if "non-prison" observers were present. All POWs had to stay off the "Air," not making any broadcasts or recordings. Every prisoner was told not to admit to any "Crimes" the North Vietnamese accused them of during interrogations and confessions. Nor were the prisoners to show any gratitude to their captors once released, meaning do not "Kiss" the North Vietnamese goodbye. The "US" stood for Unity over Self, a rallying cry among the prisoners to support one another.⁵⁴ By the spring of 1967, the new Code had been spread to every camp in the Hanoi prison system under Stockdale's leadership.

Unfortunately, just when the prisoners had renewed their hope, the North

⁵³ Stockdale, In Love, 251.

⁵⁴ Rochester & Kiley, Honor Bound, 298.

Vietnamese found a way to break down the morale of the group by creating a new "release" program. The Vietnamese recognized the power that freedom had over the prisoners and they knew how to exploit it. Not one man would want to stay in his situation longer than he had to, but "Unity over Self" demanded otherwise and this caused a rift among the prisoners. Stockdale knew what the North Vietnamese were trying to do.

I gave their new release program a name: FRP-the Fink Release Program, and that was the way it was to be known. I also issued an order that started on its way to the other cellblocks of Las Vegas (a section of the Hanoi Hilton prison) and with subsequent movers to the camps elsewhere in the city and outside it: 'No early releases; we all go home together.'⁵⁵

Early release became a difficult issue during the war. The Code of Conduct states that no soldier/prisoner will accept any kind of special favors or early release. So Stockdale, like many of the other prisoners, was shocked that his own Government and military leaders would accept and even promote early release from prison when the Code forbid it. It did not help their situation, especially as prisoners argued with each other to "stand unified" in their decision to follow the Code that Stockdale and Risner made,

...I was dismayed that my own government encouraged and applauded these early releases. For a military man to accept parole and come home early was forbidden by the Code of Conduct. Yet our government encouraged and condoned this sort of release. What kind of honorable situation existed when our own government disobeyed the code it had sworn our servicemen to uphold? ...now the U.S. government was flagrantly encouraging the military to disobey its own code. I was not encouraged by a newsletter from the head of the Navy Bureau of Personnel, dated May 20, 1968, which said, 'The news concerning negotiations with North Vietnamese gives hope and cautious optimism.... I believe we are reaching a turning point and I pray that the matter of

⁵⁵ Stockdale, In Love, 254.

prisoner release will be one of the earliest resolved.⁵⁶

Lieutenant Spike Nasmyth

The Code of Conduct never took into account the conditions the POWs lived in, their lack of food and the beatings and torture they endured. Air Force Second Lieutenant Spike Nasmyth feared he would be tortured to death if he only answered his interrogators with name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. Nasmyth quickly realized that the North Vietnamese had no intention of abiding by the Geneva Conventions, and that he was not an average prisoner of war.

Then I heard the guards shouting and yelling, running around. I could hear somebody just getting the hell beat out of him-bang, bam, grunts, and groans. It was then I realized there were other Americans close by and that someone else was hurting and about to say something beyond name, rank, and serial number. Snakeye came in a little later. 'Your friend is ready to talk, you heard him.' 'You aren't following the Geneva Conventions with this guy. You're torturing him.' 'You are not prisoners of war. You are criminals.'⁵⁷

Most of the prisoners made up cover stories and lies in order to survive. "Listening to this, barely able to hold my eyes open, I started to conjure up stories in my mind. I knew there couldn't be many more days of this before I was going to start talking. I started making up lies, anticipating the questions he'd ask me."⁵⁸ Nasmyth looked toward the Code for moral guidance, but to his fellow POW leaders for a Code of resistance in order to live.

⁵⁶ Stockdale, *In Love*, 296.

⁵⁷ Spike Nasmyth, *2355 Days* (New York: Orion Books, 1991).

⁵⁸ Nasmyth, *2355 Days*, 34.

Norman McDaniel

On July 20, 1966, Air Force pilot Norman McDaniel was shot down and taken to the Hanoi Hilton. During McDaniel's first interrogation, it became clear he had no control over his fate.

When I refused to give more than my name, rank, service number, and date of birth, I was threatened that I'd be forced to talk. When I didn't respond positively to their threats, I was pushed, shoved around, and harassed. When I still refused to talk, I was beaten and then questioned again. That was the sequence, which was repeated a couple of times, the beatings becoming progressively more painful each time.⁵⁹

It is amazing the length the POWs were willing to go not to shame and dishonor their country or their fellow service members. McDaniel describes one situation, early on in his captivity, where death seemed imminent

At one point a rope was rigged across the rafters of the hut, and I was told that if I didn't answer their questions, I'd be hanged. I thought they were serious and I was prepared to go the limit. The rope was placed around my neck, and two of the guards began to pull the opposite ends as the interrogator asked questions. Each time I refused to answer or made no reply to the questions, the rope was tightened. As my toes could barely touch the floors, I began to lose consciousness. But evidently the interrogator decided that the hanging tactic would not produce the desired results.⁶⁰

McDaniel remembered from his training that if any attempt at escape was going to be made it needed to be done before arriving at the main prison camp. "Until my arrival in that cell, (in the Hanoi Hilton), I had hoped that some opportunity would occur in which I'd be able to return to friendly hands either by my efforts alone or with the aid of others.

⁵⁹ Norman A. McDaniel, Yet Another Voice (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1975).

⁶⁰ McDaniel, Yet Another, 12-13.

However, these hopes were abandoned as I viewed the cell after the guards removed my blindfold and closed the door.”⁶¹ Since escape was out of the question, prisoners needed to find other means to resist their captors. Because most prisoners were held in solitary confinement for some duration of time, they invented a means of communication that also helped them to resist. The earliest prisoners devised a method of tapping on the cell walls to exchange messages with one another since they were never in a large group during captivity until the final months of the war. In this “taping code,” “The alphabet was divided into five parts with five letters in each part. We eliminated the letter ‘K’ using ‘C’ instead. Each letter would be tapped in two parts. The first tap would indicate which of the five parts of the alphabet, and the next tap would indicate which letter in that row that it was.”⁶²

	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	J
3	L	M	N	O	P
4	Q	R	S	T	U
5	V	W	X	Y	Z

The code spread quickly throughout the Hanoi prison camps. They used it not only to tap on cell walls but also when they swept the courtyard, when they whistled, and even when they coughed. It was a terrible risk since the Vietnamese punished any prisoner they found attempting to communicate. The taping code helped POWs determine authority and leadership and helped Stockdale relay new POW rules and regulations. McDaniel also

⁶¹ McDaniel, Yet Another, 14-15.

⁶² Jay R. Jensen, Six Years in Hell (Orcutt, CA: Publications of Worth, 1989).

writes about another resistance ritual, which became a weekly occurrence among the prisoners

Each Sunday morning, when the guards were not too close, the senior ranking officer or some other designated person would initiate a signal for church call, which consisted of five bumps on the adjacent wall, followed by a pause and then a single bump... The senior officer recommended that as a minimum the occupants in each cell recite the Lords Prayer, offer a personal silent prayer, and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.⁶³

Through these means the majority of the prisoners continued to serve and honor their country. Their creative and unconventional resistance ensured that they would return home with honor. That became their motto: "Home with Honor." It was a motto Lieutenant Colonel Jay Jensen tried to live up to for six years during captivity in the Hanoi Hilton.

Lieutenant Colonel Jay Jensen

Jensen was shot down on February 18, 1967 in his F-105F fighter. He was consumed by feelings of worry and stress, moral fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. Jensen quickly embraced this new motto.

As a prisoner I suffered torture, degradation, poor food, no medical care, poor living conditions, and under constant threat of more torture or even death... The constant worry that I might be tortured to the point I would give valuable information or propaganda to the enemy, thus dishonoring my country, or betraying my fellow POWs, was always eminent. 'Home with Honor' was our motto.⁶⁴

⁶³ McDaniel, Yet Another, 24.

⁶⁴ Jensen, Six Years, 52.

It was a rallying cry that the North Vietnamese did their very best to destroy. In addition to trying to live up to the Code of Conduct, the prisoners faced North Vietnamese camp regulations posted inside every cell door. If the prisoners failed to comply with the camp rules, punishment would follow, anywhere from solitary confinement to torture. Some of the regulations clearly at odds with the Code of Conduct were,

-The criminals are under an obligation to give full and clear written or oral answers to all questions raised by camp authorities. All attempts and tricks intended to evade answering further questions and acts directed to opposition by refusing to answer any questions will be considered manifestations of obstinacy and antagonism which deserves strict punishment.

-The criminals must maintain silence in the detention rooms and not make any loud noises which can be heard outside. All schemes and attempts to gain information and achieve communication with the criminals living next door by intentionally talking loudly, tapping on walls or by other means will be strictly punished.

-Any obstinacy or opposition, violation of the preceding provisions, or any scheme or attempt to get out of the detention camp without permission are all punishable. On the other hand, any criminal who strictly obeys the camp regulations and shows his true submission and repentance by his practical acts will be allowed to enjoy the humane treatment he deserves.

-He who escapes or tries to escape from the camp and his (their) accomplice(s) will be seriously punished....⁶⁵

Jensen knew that while his spirit and heart were strong, physically his body could only tolerate so much.

I remember telling myself over and over again, 'don't give up, don't give up; hold out, don't talk.' Then a very strange thing happened. As I was telling myself this, all of a sudden I heard a voice say, 'I'll talk! I'll talk! Stop! I swear it was not my voice. A very strange sensation indeed! I guess my mind and the spirit were willing but the body was weak. I found out (as every other prisoner I later talked to had found out) that their

⁶⁵ Jensen, Six Years, 78.

irons, their chains, their ropes and sticks were stronger than our bodies, but not our spirits.⁶⁶

Jensen made every attempt at being very general with his answers, misleading his captors so that they gained nothing of value from what he told them. Hard-liners, testifying before the Defense Advisory Committee had "called for adherence to what was termed the 'Spartan Code,' an absolute refusal to answer any questions beyond providing name, rank, serial number, and date of birth..."⁶⁷ But Jensen's experience, and that of the other POWs, proved that interpretation unrealistic.

The Code of Conduct was an outgrowth of studies made after the Korean War to strengthen the American fighting man-to let him know what was expected of him, and to give him a code of ethics or honor. However, in some areas, it is very general. We found that there were many circumstances not covered specifically enough in the code. Some areas were not covered at all. For instance, on surrender, would you, with only a pistol, fight it out to the end against a hundred "V" soldiers closing in on you from all sides? And what was meant by the 'means to resist/capture?'⁶⁸

Jensen had many questions concerning the definition and clarification of the code, especially when it came to specific situations he and others faced. They were forced to rely on the organization and military structure within the camp as best they could, as well as their own minds in order to figure out what was affordable and what was not. "There were so many questions and situations not covered by the Code of Conduct."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Jensen, Six Years, 42.

⁶⁷ Davis, Long Road Home, 14.

⁶⁸ Jensen, Six Years, 79.

⁶⁹ Jensen, Six Years, 81.

The Debate During Vietnam

While each prisoner struggled to honor their country, their fellow prisoners, and themselves, discussion at home opened up once more about changing certain aspects of the Code and recommending different training techniques. A key figure in opening the debate was U.S. Ambassador W. Averell Harriman. From mid 1967-on, the Office of the Secretary of Defense assumed the primary responsibility for policy formulation regarding prisoner of war matters in Vietnam. An interdepartmental Prisoner of War Committee was established in hopes of making contact with the North Vietnamese to negotiate the release of some of the prisoners. Secretary of State, Dean Rusk appointed Harriman to assume general supervision over that Committee. Harriman became the single spokesman for the U.S. government on all POW matters.⁷⁰ He began to recognize, by 1969, that some elements of the Code should be altered and he let his thoughts be known to Secretary of Defense, at the time, Melvin R. Laird. In January 1969, Harriman sent a letter to Laird stating that in order to better accommodate the experiences the prisoners were facing in Vietnam as well as prepare future servicemen, modifications must be introduced to the Code. His letter helped demonstrate that the six Articles may not be as effective as originally thought by the DoD and the U.S. Government. As early as 1966 President Johnson had assigned Ambassador Harriman the task of supervising and coordinating U.S. efforts to obtain the release and return of American prisoners held in

⁷⁰ Davis, Long Road Home, 42.

North Vietnam and by the Viet Cong. In attempting to carry out his orders, Harriman became worried about issues relating to the conduct of American captives. Harriman believed the Code did not take into account the circumstances which the POWs were facing. In his 1969 letter to Secretary Laird, he wrote that the enemy handling the American prisoners was trained and successful in guerilla warfare tactics and nowhere did the Code contain information on how POWs should counter these tactics.

American combat personnel are likely to be engaged in guerilla warfare in remote areas of the world. Our experience has been that prisoners are likely to be held under conditions of extreme hardship, including long periods of solitary confinement when they are isolated from outside contacts... Under such circumstances, I believe it is not only unreasonable to expect individuals to behave according to the standards reflected in the Code of Conduct, but from strictly humanitarian viewpoints, the behavior required serves to increase the pressures on the individuals and to endanger his well being. In addition it does not serve the best interests of our Government.⁷¹

Ambassador Harriman recognized the importance of maintaining discipline among the POWs in order to prevent intelligence information from falling into the hands of the enemy, but he also felt that it was the duty of the government to supply service members with the greatest protection possible while they were held prisoner. Harriman did not oppose a uniform Code of Conduct, what he argued was that the Code enforced since 1955 was outdated and did not provide enough protection and lines of resistance for POWs in Vietnam,

...It seems to me, our aim should be to train military personnel to

⁷¹ A copy of the letter Harriman wrote to Laird can be found in the Library of Congress POW/MIA database, on microfilm reel number 301, titled: NVN: POW Recovery Operation/Letter from Ambassador Averell Harriman to Laird on Code of Conduct for U.S. PWs, 27.

be able to cope with the conditions and pressures of captivity in a way that avoid maltreatment and also avoids disclosure of information valuable to the enemy. To this end, personnel who run the risk of being captured should be thoroughly briefed on the kind of treatment and conditions to expect if they become prisoners. Their training should emphasize the art of surviving the expected pressures.⁷²

Harriman hoped that Laird would endorse improved, more advanced training methods with new standards of conduct that would provide better protection for American prisoners, ensure military information be kept secret and prepare future soldiers more efficiently. But, it would not be until several years after the prisoners returned home, under the Carter Administration, that the Vietnam POW experience would lead to change in the original Code of Conduct.

Returning of POWs

On February 12, 1973 North Vietnam released the first contingent of POWs in what was referred to as "Operation Homecoming." The prisoners flew to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. After being screened for immediate medical needs, briefed about their family situations, and treated to a huge meal, the military wasted no time debriefing the POWs about their captivity, treatment, and any military intelligence information. From Clark the ex-POWs flew to any one of nine bases the military set up to continue the debriefing process. All nine bases conducted interviews in a standardized format, with additional special subject interviews by the different services. Captain Wes Schierman was

⁷² Harriman Letter, Reel 301, 27.

assigned to Travis Air Force Base, in Solano County, California, where his daily routine, like that of his fellow returnees, was spent in a half day of physical exams, and the other half debriefing with his assigned Intelligence officer. "During our two weeks of ½ day debriefing sessions, I made about 23 hours of audio tapes on the various debriefing subjects. Each night Rick, (his Intelligence officer) would type the tapes into manuscript form which was later put on microfilm."⁷³ The debriefing files and audiotape interviews are still listed as classified military information. The ex-POWs are not even allowed a copy of the manuscripts because the Department of Defense believes "...that the POW Debriefs are sensitive Data and are to remain Classified."⁷⁴ This classification makes it difficult for researchers and historians to gather accurate information regarding the debriefing process. While the memoirs of ex-POWs can leave out vital information or forget important facts, historians and researchers can only rely upon these accounts for first person Vietnam prison experiences. Schierman explained that his hours of audio tape were broken down into various topics, with the first 16-18 hours giving a chronological description of what happened on the day his plane went down, covering his mission, his captivity and confinement, up until the day of his release. The remaining 5-7 hours of audiotape dealt with special interest subjects, such as escape, evasion, communications, chain of command, collaboration, diet, solitary confinement, and the Code of Conduct.

These (5-7 hours) were in-depth discussions of what we'd experienced, our evaluations, and recommendations... This information was taken, studied, compared, correlated to evaluate our performance, previous training and

⁷³ Schierman, Email.

⁷⁴ Schierman, Email.

abilities of our captors. From this, the DOD (Department of Defense) hoped to find ways to improve things for our soldiers to better resist and survive, should they become POWs in the future!⁷⁵

The information that the Intelligence Officers received from the later hours of recordings helped influence the changes made to the Code under President Carter. From these debriefing reports the Pentagon created a Code of Conduct Review Board.

Evaluating the Code

In a memorandum sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on May 17, 1973, the Defense Intelligence Agency included its examination of a select group of returnees and their comments. While the DIA report provides some insight on the influence of the Code in Vietnam, it fails to provide concerns and comments made by the entire POW population. The data is therefore open to interpretation. The Defense Intelligence Agency, in its report, stated that where the returnee "discusses their own attitudes toward behavior in captivity with no stated reference to the Code, it was necessary to interpret or infer what the returnee meant regarding the Code."⁷⁶ What is important, however, in the comments included in the study, is the information the returnees supplied relating to the Code in the context of their survival and resistance training. Of the 591 Americans released during Operation Homecoming, (25 were civilian prisoners), comments about the Code are

⁷⁵ Schierman, Email.

⁷⁶ The Defense Intelligence Agency's report containing returnees comments can be found in the Microfilm collection from the Library of Congress in the POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 394, titled: NVN: DIA Miscellaneous/PW Returnees Comment on U.S. Code of Conduct for Prisoners of War, 95.

available for only half the group, 284 returnees. The breakdown of each service and the POWs who commented on the Code is as follows:

	USA	USN	USAF	USMC	CIVILIANS	TOTAL
DID NOT COMMENT	38	70	154	21	24	307
COMMENTED	39	68	171	5	1	284
TOTAL RETURNEES	77	138	325	26	25	591

As predicted by the Defense Department, comments concerning the Code varied. "There were those men who viewed the Code as something similar to the 'Ten Commandments' or direct 'orders from the President,' and there were men who said that the Code was of marginal, if any, value to them."⁷⁷ While the attitudes toward the Code varied, the majority of the 284 POWs surveyed, eighty percent, agreed that the Code in its original form must be altered for future prisoner situations.

One of the critical issues the returnees felt needed to be addressed dealt with the training given to each serviceman. What was originally brought up during the early 1960's, by the Air Force, reappeared in the returned prisoners' statements. Many felt that a more stringent and standardized training program should be established. The DIA report concluded that those men who had specific and sophisticated Code of Conduct and/or resistance training performed better than those men who did not. The differences were magnified when the prisoners noticed the variations among the resistance techniques used by the different branches. In 1965 the Air Force sent a memo to the Department of

⁷⁷ Defense Intelligence Report, Reel 394, 95.

Defense, asking for clarification and more efficient Military wide training procedures dealing with Article V of the Code.⁷⁸ Air Force commanders did not believe that giving only name, rank, serial number and date of birth was a realistic and manageable line of resistance for prisoners. In the mid 60's they had established their own lines of resistance during training. This lack of uniformity among all the service branches made it difficult for the prisoners to establish a unified system of resistance in the prison camps. Among the specific recommendations from the DIA study and comments provided by the returnees,

...greater emphasis on the enemy's culture and history, more instruction on American policies and international/current affairs, practice in developing cover stories used during interrogations. Also several returnees commented that the Vietnam experience should be incorporated into the current prison camp training exercise. This would include establishing a prisoner organization, developing communication techniques, and placing men in solitary confinement.⁷⁹

While training and enforcement received numerous recommendations from the returnees, greater importance was placed on the interpretation of the Code itself. Many prisoners, Wes Schierman among them, felt that the Code was not specific enough, leaving it open for interpretation by individual prisoners. This need for clarification only placed more pressure on the prisoner who feared that if he did not interpret the Code correctly, he could face court martial upon his return to the U.S. Of the six Articles in the Code, the Defense Intelligence Agency report focused on two: Article III and Article V. Article III, dealing with escape by all means necessary, was a difficult dilemma for POWs.

⁷⁸ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 80 (PDS 80), titled: Code of Conduct and Captured Personnel.

⁷⁹ Defense Intelligence Report, Reel 394, 96.

Many POWs considered the chances for successful escape were small and unrealistic.

Here I am, to get out of here, to walk out, I'm going to have to walk 100 plus some miles across Laos into Thailand and that's all, mostly, unfriendly bad guy country... It wouldn't have been too difficult to get outside of the prison, but what does that accomplish. You know, when you're in the middle of three million people, not your own race, you can't speak the language, you may or may not have a decent disguise... I don't think you've got a prayer of walking out of there alone without some outside help...⁸⁰

Not only did escape offer little chance for success, it also meant a high probability of reprisal against fellow prisoners. The North Vietnamese did not solely punish the escapee. They also questioned every prisoner about the escape attempt and harassed and tortured anyone they thought might have information. By the middle of the war the prisoners, themselves, decided that no one should attempt escape, unless they had help from the outside.

...a couple of guys decided to escape out of a big camp...and conditions had improved significantly where they were not in immediate danger of dying... I think most of us would agree that it was pretty ill-advised, but because the code of conduct says, 'I will make every effort to escape and assist others to do so,' they went, and no one would tell them not to.⁸¹

No one told them not to try and escape because that would be going against the Code and its orders. "...[I]t (the Code) was a direct order from the Commander in Chief, and it was legally enforceable under UCMJ... You will be violating an order if you violate the code."⁸² Even though the prisoners decision not to try and escape violated the Code,

⁸⁰ Schierman, Interview.

⁸¹ Schierman, Interview.

⁸² Schierman, Interview.

many believed it would be more productive for them to resist the enemy through other means.

Article V also generated intense feedback from the returnees. Since its creation in 1955, Article V (name, rank, service number, and date of birth) had proved to be the most controversial section, spawning years of debate over its intended definition and its demands on the prisoner during interrogation. Finally in 1964, after much discussion the Department of Defense issued a directive stating that there would be no alteration of the original language in Article V. The returnees concerns about Article V focused on the torture they experienced. The possibility of POW torture had not been a major consideration when Article V was written. But in Vietnam torture was the bitter reality for prisoners, forcing many of them to provide information beyond the "Big Four." The POWs questioned the value of being tortured in order to keep unclassified and/or biographic information from the enemy. Many returnees thought it would be smarter to allow POWs to answer unclassified and biographic questions in order to preserve their strength and retain the capability to withstand torture later. That change may have saved the prisoners much hardship and suffering.

Early in 1974, the Assistant Secretary of Defense sent a memorandum to all the service branches, requesting an evaluation of the POW experiences relating to the Code, its training, and directives. Each report was to include recommendations and was to be submitted by July 1, 1974 to the DoD.⁸³ Between that February through July the Chief of

⁸³ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 39 (PDS 39), titled: Evaluation of

Naval Personnel compiled a detailed study. The group conducting the study was composed of five active duty Navy officers as well as several Marine Corps officers. The officers worked under the guidance of W.R. Flanagan, Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel. This report, as well as reports from the other military branches, was used as a basis for future decisions concerning the Code.⁸⁴

The Naval evaluation consisted of three parts. The Executive summary provided an overview. The main portion of the evaluation was broken into nine chapters. The chapters covered background information, the methodology the group used to compare the Code of Conduct with the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the different directives from the various military branches, and concluded with recommendations. Part III of the report consisted of the appendix, which included the questionnaire given to the returnees, a list of interviewees, various memorandums made throughout the war, as well as an independent analysis of the Code of Conduct by returned POWs provided by the Center for Prisoner of War Studies in San Diego, California.

The Naval Personnel Committee sent their questionnaire to 178 Navy and Marine Corps returnees as well as to 31 of the 82 USS Pueblo former crew members.⁸⁵ "Based

Experiences under the Code of Conduct. The Naval Personnel report, see memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) to the Assistant Secretary of the Military Department in appendix C of the report.

⁸⁴ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 39 (PDS39), titled: Evaluation of Experiences under the Code of Conduct. The Naval Personnel report, see the letter of the groups' requirements from Deputy Flanagan to RADM Billy D. Holder, USN, in appendix A of the report.

⁸⁵ In 1968 the USS Pueblo, a Navy surveillance ship, was captured by the North Koreans. There were 82 men onboard, one man was killed during the attack, and the other 81 were taken prisoner and held for 11 months in North Korea. The Pueblo contained highly classified military information. For more information about the USS Pueblo attack see: Edward R. Murphy Jr., Second in Command (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). Murphy was the Executive Officer of the Ship.

upon the detailed interviews and questionnaire responses, the Study Group found that most POW returnees did not understand at the time of capture that the Code of Conduct was never intended to be a legally binding instrument under which violators could be prosecuted.”⁸⁶ The Study Group determined that this lack of understanding, which it attributed to inadequacies in training, placed great stress on many prisoners, especially after they suffered great physical and mental torture while being forced to reveal information beyond that allowed by the Code. The Study Group also found that of the six Articles, II, III, IV, and V were the least understood. A primary objection to Article II

...centered around the rigidity of the words, ‘never surrender of my own free will.’ The question arose repeatedly as to whether or not a pilot who had ejected and was surrounded on the ground by vastly superior numbers of the enemy armed with AK-47 weapons had ‘voluntarily’ surrendered when he failed to shoot it out with his .38 caliber revolver. Did he still have the means to resist?⁸⁷

While the ex-POWs criticized the phrasing of that Article, the Naval Study Group believed that there was no basis for changing the wording. They concluded that once the pilot had ejected from his airplane, he had lost his main weapon system, and his revolver was an inadequate means of resisting superior forces.

Criticism of Article III focused on the phrase

‘...make every effort to escape...’ Most of the prisoners who rated this language as unrealistic believed that they had an absolute obligation under

⁸⁶ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

⁸⁷ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

the Code to escape, the problems of a Caucasian successfully transiting the streets of Hanoi without recognition or capture notwithstanding...while all appeared to think and plan escape continuously, the realities of the situation they would face once outside the prison walls...precluded most planned attempts.⁸⁸

Some returnees recommended placing the word "reasonable" into Article III, making it read, "I will make every *reasonable* effort to escape..." But the Study Group did not agree. What the Study Group did agree with was that the prisoners had made every effort under the circumstances to escape. The Study Group concluded that the existing language was logical and understandable as long as there was adequate training to support it.

That was especially true when referring to the word "parole" in the third sentence of the Article. The subject of parole became a critical issue after some received early release. The U.S. Government supported the Early Release program even though in the Code early release was forbidden. "It was noted that essentially all interviewees considered early release to be the ultimate form of parole."⁸⁹ After one group of prisoners accepted early release, POW leaders imposed a rule that other POWs must not accept early release because it symbolized special treatment, which violated the Code. Ironically the Government did not interpret early release as special treatment, which sparked more controversy. Senior Ranking POW Officer, Jim Stockdale adamantly opposed accepting early release. It was under his authority that "no one goes home early" was first initiated. After Stockdale created the "BACK US policy" its first real test came with the early

⁸⁸ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

⁸⁹ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

release program. By offering the promise of early release, the Vietnamese discovered they could break down the morale and cohesiveness of the prison camps. But the Vietnamese were not solely to blame. The U.S. Government supported early prisoner release as a way to save the administrations integrity and dignity, as well as attempting to ease suffering for the prisoners and their families. Jim Stockdale strongly disagreed

...I was dismayed that my own government encouraged and applauded these early releases. For a military man to accept parole and come home early was forbidden by the Code of Conduct. Yet our government encouraged and condoned this sort of release. What kind of honorable situation existed when our own government disobeyed the code it had sworn our servicemen to uphold?⁹⁰

For the most part, Article IV (following a chain of command) did not receive much criticism. The main concern was over the issue of determining who was senior as new captives continually arrived throughout the war. It was not until the spring of 1972 that the prisoners, themselves, established a "Shoot Down Date of Rank" policy. While this method seemed to work rather efficiently for the prisoners once agreed upon, the Study Group did include in their conclusion the possible need for a Department of Defense-wide policy concerning seniority determination in instances of lengthy prison situations.⁹¹

Throughout the Vietnam War Article V received more debate than any of the others. Suffering starvation, dehydration, the "ropes," solitary confinement, and constant interrogation the reality of surviving by providing only name, rank, serial number, and date of birth became impossible. While its language seemed clear to those returnees surveyed,

⁹⁰ Stockdale, In Love, 296.

⁹¹ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

the expectations were not as clear. The Study Group mailed 178 questionnaires to returnees. Only 126 were returned. When asked whether the requirements of Article V were realistic here is how Vietnam POWs and the USS Pueblo POWs responded.

Requirements realistic?	USS Pueblo	SEASIA	TOTAL
Yes	5	51	56
No	13	57	70

More than half the Vietnam POW returnees found the requirements unrealistic.

Any general discussion of the Code of Conduct quickly centers upon Article V... All reported that they learned quickly in captivity that a persistent captor can force the most determined prisoner to go beyond "the Big Four," (name, rank, serial number, date of birth) and that, once having gone beyond this point, they suffered grave feelings of failure and guilt.⁹²

The Naval Study Group concluded that the Vietnam POWs,

...all signed statements at one time or another, usually under the pressure of great physical and mental duress, but most appeared to have made every conceivable effort to render these statements harmless by the manner in which they were written. Because they experienced the impossibility of giving only name, rank, Service number and date of birth only, and no more, a very significant number of returnees held the requirements of Article V to be unrealistic.⁹³

Between 1955, when the Code was created, and 1964, the Defense Department attempted to clarify how Article V should be interpreted. In 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended hard line, rigid adherence to the "Big Four." That directive by the

⁹² Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

⁹³ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39).

JCS did not support or condone the use of cover stories to avoid giving the enemy bogus military information. The 1964 Department of Defense Directive stated that, "All training programs...inculcate in each member of the Armed Forces...a recognition that the Code is a binding military obligation. The consequences of not holding up to name, rank, Service number and date of birth...is binding on all military personnel."⁹⁴ But what the Naval Personnel Group concluded was that there must be some middle ground between the training tactics from 1955 and the training tactics in 1964. Underlying the POW returnees concern over this Article was the sense of shame and guilt they experienced when they violated the directives of Article V. Following the initial report in 1973 by the Defense Intelligence Agency, one returnee spoke of the pressure the prisoners experienced.

"Once forced to go beyond the 'Big Four,' many prisoners felt a sense of shame that they had failed the Code. 'That's one of the worst feelings in the world,' remarked one returnee, 'the depression you get after you crack, because you figure that I've broken the Code of Conduct, I've let myself down, I've let the whole world down.'"⁹⁵

It was not the returnees' intentions to reveal military secrets to the enemy, but many felt that revising the language in Article V could help limit the pressure and anxiety future prisoners would feel. Reality had taught many prisoners that, "(A) The enemy can get a prisoner to respond to any question if they maintain a concerted campaign and (B) there is a difference between 'classified' and 'unclassified' information (and some of the former may be 'declassified') for interrogation purposes."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Naval Report, Reel 39 (PDS 39), see appendix R, Comparison between 1955 and 1964 training positions.

⁹⁵ Defense Intelligence Report, Reel 394.

⁹⁶ Defense Intelligence Report, Reel 394.

The Defense Review Committee

Just a few years into the war, the Department of Defense realized that in its first test case of the Code there were shortcomings in both its interpretation and in what the military expected from its servicemen. Three years after the first prisoner returned to the U.S., in May of 1976, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs established a Department of Defense Review Committee for the Code following the completion of reports from each branch of the service. Three months later, in August, the DoD sent a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which included several changes and alterations to the Code for comments by the JCS. The Defense Review Committee's report was the final phase of evaluation following the Vietnam POW experience. During the war, the DoD had already planned to conduct a two-phase review of the Code.

"Phase one of the plan, individual Service Analysis and Evaluation of PW Experiences, was completed in August 1974 when the Services forwarded their positions on Code of Conduct training to DoD."⁹⁷ The Army, according to the Defense Review Committee's final report, really pushed for changes to the training program and some modification to the language in the Code. The Navy recommendations were two fold. One, they agreed with the Army, that training must be changed to solve the problems of misinterpretation. But the "Navy also recommended that the Code not be changed, either in language or intent, because it would weaken the value of the Code and because changes would cause

⁹⁷ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 302, titled: NVN: Review of the Code of Conduct/Committee Recommends changes in the PW Code of Conduct based on experiences of U.S. Servicemen imprisoned in North Vietnam. Report of the Defense Review Committee for the Code of Conduct.

new problems of interpretation disproportionate to the intended gain.”⁹⁸ The Air Force agreed with both the Navy and the Army about revising training policies. But the Air Force also recommended an in depth review and possible changes to Article III, dealing with parole, and Article V, dealing with resistance and disclosure.

After receiving the evaluations from each service branch, the 1976 Defense Review Committee also interviewed fifty individuals including,

...ex-prisoners of war and hostile peace-time detainees, experts in PW behavior, representatives of organizations concerned with PW's and members of the 1955 Advisory Committee... These interviews enabled the Committee to hear comments on the value of, and guidance provided by, the Code of Conduct. The Committee desired to compare individual PW responses to the Code with the ideas of the Code's original framers.⁹⁹

The Defense Reviews evaluation produced a number of recommendations. The most important of these suggested changing only specific words, and changing the training programs, with the goal of revalidating the Code of Conduct. “There was consistent agreement throughout Committee proceedings that the Code of Conduct has served as a useful guide to the American Serviceman through a wide spectrum of circumstances-- during normal service, on the battlefield and in captivity.”¹⁰⁰ Regardless of criticism of the Code by former POWs, the Committee focused more attention on the positive feedback from the evaluation of each branch when deliberating any modifications. Many servicemen felt that the Code lacked clarity, causing confusion among the instructors, who provided the training, and ultimately the servicemen. This confusion made the pressures

⁹⁸ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

⁹⁹ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

of captivity worse. Opponents to any language changes believed that they would weaken the Code. They argued that, "Many PW's endured great torture and abuse; some lost their lives in upholding the Code as currently worded; and a change could be construed as a breach of faith with those men. Changes might be perceived by the public as an admission that the Code failed to accomplish its goal during the Vietnam conflict."¹⁰¹ The Committee ultimately concluded that the Code helped establish a high standard of prisoner conduct. But their conclusions also acknowledged shortcomings in the training programs and the need for changes to Article V in order for servicemen to better understand what was expected. Ultimately what the Defense Review Committee proposed for Article V was a minor change. Instead of reading "When questioned...I am bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth," the new proposal read, "When questioned...I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth." The Committee recommended that the President sign an Executive Order permanently changing the wording of Article V.¹⁰²

When examining training procedures, the Committee concluded that there was no standard training program covering all branches. "Some PW's and detainees had completed sophisticated survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training which enabled them to understand their situation and to cope with it more effectively; whereas others might only have been exposed to a poor quality tape recording of a lecture on the

¹⁰¹ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

¹⁰² Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

Code to 'fill a square.'"¹⁰³ This made the senior ranking officer's job harder in captivity when attempting to establish a cohesive unit structure among the prisoners.

One of the biggest training issues centered on the changes already made since the Code's promulgation. "...An individual who received Code and related training in 1958 would probably have learned a different interpretation of the Code than an individual who received his training in 1964."¹⁰⁴ The DoD ordered a new training directive in 1964 that emphasized strict adherence to answer only the "Big Four" questions. The 1976 Review Committee requested that the DoD revise the training directive it issued in 1964.

Perhaps the Review Committee's most telling discovery was that there had been no

...department initiated investigation to determine if there had been any violations of the UCMJ by the PW's during captivity in Vietnam... This situation contrasted markedly with events that followed the Korean conflict... Following the return of PW's from Vietnam, careful instructions were given to debriefing personnel to limit the scope of questioning to intelligence information only... The responsibility to uncover any violations was left entirely to the PW returnees.¹⁰⁵

It became clear from the Committee's report that after an already unpopular war, the Department of Defense did not want to further taint the public's image of the prisoners from Vietnam as heroes. The DoD also did not want to initiate lengthy trials, which could result in more unfavorable publicity for the Armed Forces. This notion of negative public perception is what caused the 1955 Defense Advisory Committee to conduct their study in

¹⁰³ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

the first place. After Vietnam it seemed that the military was more worried about public perception of its conduct in the war, than they were about prosecuting violators of the Code. This approach was in direct contradiction for the reason the Code of Conduct was created. President Eisenhower mandated the Code in 1955 so that the “failed honorable behavior” by the prisoners during Korea would never happen again. When it came time to accuse suspect POW behavior following the Vietnam conflict, a test that would determine the Code’s validity, military officials and the Government decided not to address the issue.

Amending the Code of Conduct

Once the Defense Review Committee made its findings known to the Department of Defense, the Pentagon wrote an Executive Order to amend the original Code of Conduct for President Carter’s approval. The new wording of Article V would read as follows, “When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am *required* to give name, rank, service number and date of birth...”¹⁰⁶ The new amendment to the Code replaced the word “bound” with “required” and recommended deleting the word “only.” The Committee believed that making these small changes would help limit future misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Article V and its intentions.

After the Defense Review Committee found that no formal investigation had been conducted of the Vietnam POWs, the Committee drafted a directive to require the Secretary of Defense to review the conduct of each prisoner after returning home to the

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Defense Review Committee, Reel 302.

U.S. The Committee recognized the importance of investigating the conduct of each prisoner to determine the strengths and the weaknesses of not only the prisoners but also the Code.

The final major amendment created a Department of Defense directive to standardize and unify the training and educational materials necessary to support the Code of Conduct.¹⁰⁷ The objective of the directive was to make sure that all branches of the service establish identical standards and training techniques for evasion, escape, and resistance. The directive placed responsibility for ensuring standardized training programs on the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, "...to ensure that Code of Conduct related training programs conducted for members of all of the Military Departments are adequate, appropriately uniform, and consistent with this directive and the Report of the 1976 Defense Review Committee for the Code of Conduct."¹⁰⁸ Certified instructors and materials were to be provided by the Air Force. The Air Force was designated as the Executive Agent for operating a joint training facility and providing instructor training for all of the services.

On November 3, 1977 President Carter signed the Executive Order implementing the changes recommended by the Defense Review Committee. President Carter wrote that the Code "...has helped individuals in captivity to sustain their moral and physical strength and to survive extreme torture and abuse. However, experience indicates that

¹⁰⁷ Report of the Defense Review Committee for the Code of Conduct, 50. See the Department of Defense Directive Number 1300.7A for the entire report concerning changes made to the training program for the Code.

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Defense Review Committee for the Code of Conduct, Department of Defense Directive, 52.

certain words of the Code have, on occasion, caused confusion resulting in training divergences...¹⁰⁹

While the Committee and the Department of Defense believed their changes to the Code went far enough, that was not the belief of Captain Wes Schierman and many other returnees. Schierman believed that information gathered from the debriefing tapes of the POWs did lead to some positive and meaningful changes. But he felt many recommendations he and his fellow POWs made were ignored.

The questions of what constitutes 'escape', and 'amnesty' and 'parole', were, in my opinion, not properly addressed and remain ill defined to this day! The question of 'Collaboration' was also ducked by the DoD, who with the advent of 'Watergate,' and 'Bombings of Cambodia', the 'Pueblo Incident,' and our 'Defeat in Vietnam,' didn't seem to have the will to subject themselves to further 'adverse publicity!'¹¹⁰

Schierman believed that by not clearly defining such terms as "escape," "collaboration," and "parole" the Defense Review Committee did a huge disservice to the Vietnam prisoners, and did not make POW situations easier for future military men and women. But the issue that bothered Schierman most, and is evident in Stockdale's criticism as well, is how hard the prisoners tried to live up to the Code, only to discover later that their own government had not lived up to it, by supporting and encouraging early release of prisoners, which the Code forbid.

¹⁰⁹ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database, microfilm reel number 302, titled: NVN: T-Day planning/Executive Order Amends the Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces, Including Provisions for Prisoners of War. A memorandum from President Carter to Joint Chiefs of Staff dealing with amendments made to the Code in 1973.

¹¹⁰ Schierman, Email.

Conclusion

The Code of Conduct was established in 1955 by the Department of Defense to create a standard for prisoner behavior during wartime. It set a high standard for POWs, a standard that did not always reflect the reality POWs faced during the Vietnam War. The ongoing controversy, especially over Article V, created confusion between what the Military and the Code expected of prisoners and what they could realistically do while in captivity. During the Vietnam War the POWs experienced extreme stress. Many prisoners were held in solitary confinement for months at a time, some even years. They were plagued by disease and starvation, tortured continuously, and when they were captured some had already suffered severe injuries. The training the servicemen underwent before going into combat helped provide the prisoners with a foundation to resist the enemy as best they could. But early in the war the prisoners, under such Senior Ranking Officers as Captain Stockdale, were forced to create their own set of regulations and conduct that extended beyond the scope of the Code as they attempted to gain some control over their situation. Throughout their captivity, the Code of Conduct was in the back of their minds, as they knew they would be held accountable for any behavior or action not sanctioned by the Code.

Since its creation, the Code of Conduct has undergone continuous review by the Department of Defense. As early as 1963, the Air Force voiced its concerns about training as detailed in Article V. The Air Force had been teaching its personnel a second line of resistance that allowed them to answer questions beyond the "Big Four." But in 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff determined that was not what the framers of the Code

expected. The issue of parole and special treatment in Article III also sparked disagreement about what was expected and what actually happened. The prisoners had sworn they would not accept any special treatment from the North Vietnamese. The POWs formulated the policy that no one would go home early, regardless of the situation, unless they were sick or wounded. But the Government, which created and enforced the Code, worked persistently to obtain the early release of prisoners. Captain Stockdale, the Senior Ranking POW Officer who initiated the "No Early Release" program for prisoners in North Vietnam, could not understand how his Government expected the prisoners to live up to the Code when it did not, "...now the U.S. government was flagrantly encouraging the military to disobey its own code."¹¹¹

In 1973, following the return of the POWs, these issues triggered a major Defense Department review. But the Defense Review Committee's report included feedback from only a quarter of the repatriated POWs. In a separate review by Navy intelligence, only 14% of the returnees who participated in their survey, spoke positively about the Code. But those 14% also believed that no changes needed to be made for fear they would weaken the Code. Eighty percent of the returnees felt the need for clarification of certain wording and changes in training. The Defense Review Committee did change especially troublesome language in Article V, ruling that future prisoners would not be expected to answer only with the "Big Four" (name, rank, service number and date of birth). The Committee changed the wording from "bound" to "required" and deleted the word "only,"

¹¹¹ Stockdale, In Love, 296.

making it read as follows: "When questioned...I am required to answer with name, rank, service number and date of birth." But the Committee failed to address the issues of escape, parole, and special treatment in their recommendations, frustrating many POWs because of their experiences in Vietnam. Captain Wes Schierman among them did not think the changes to Article V went far enough. He felt the minor changes would continue to make prisoners feel pressure and shame when they gave in to the enemy and supplied interrogators with more information when they were tortured beyond their capacity to resist.

Vietnam was the first test case for the Code of Conduct during wartime, yet its ambiguous language and rigid expectations created significant problems for the POWs. While the Department of Defense reviewed the Code after the war, it failed to investigate the conduct of individual prisoners, which was a major objective of the Code when it was created in 1955. Vietnam provided a unique opportunity to amend the Code of Conduct and make its expectations more realistic after 800 men suffered torture and years of imprisonment while trying to live up to the Code. But the military was reluctant to overhaul it. The Review Committee sought input from only a quarter of the released POWs, and it did not adopt the most far-reaching changes that a number of prominent POWs recommended. The military in part was trying to preserve strict discipline. At the same time the Pentagon feared major changes to the Code would brand it a failed policy, sparking further public and political backlash in the wake of the unpopular war. Many records of the investigation into the Code of Conduct after the war remain classified. Only when these documents, POW debriefing tapes and manuscripts among them, are

declassified can researchers gain further insight into the Military Code of Conduct and its impact upon the lives of the prisoners.

Appendix

Interview with Wes Schierman
By Kiersten Throndsen
(Side A)

KIERSTEN: I'm just curious. Describe what your military position or service was. If you can just tell me exactly what your job was during the Vietnam War, what your rank was.

SCHIERMAN: Okay, I was rather unusual. Most of the guys I think you will find up there were, if not career officers, we were mostly air crew, mostly pilots or navigators, but air crew. We had just a few enlisted guys, about four or five, I think, at least in the areas that I was in. They were captured in the North, and they were usually helicopter crewmen, paramedics, or crew chiefs on some of the airplanes. I think that would basically cover the four of them, I believe there were. And of course in the South, later some of the people were captured in the South, especially during Tet of 1968, they brought quite a bunch of them up North eventually; they marched them north, and several died on the way, several were killed in bombings or various things. But, generally they kind of tried to keep them separated, isolated from us to a certain extent. But there was just enough intermixing that we knew about them and the fact that they were up there, but that is kind of a separate group, a different thing.

I was actually just a National Guard officer who had gone on active duty back in 1962 on what was to be a three-year contract with the Air Force. I was in the Air National Guard over in Spokane; in fact I joined when I was still in high school. On my nineteenth birthday, I was eligible to apply for pilot training, which I did. I got accepted and went through pilot training, then when I graduated and got my wings and commission, I went back to the Air National Guard because I wanted to finish college also. So I went to school at Washington State for a little over two years while I flew with the Guard, and I met Faye there. We decided to get married. I had about two more courses to go to complete a degree in psychology. Prior to that I was working on a double major thing, but by this time I decided I really liked flying airplanes better than most anything else. So we moved up to Spokane, and I started pulling full-time air defense alert with the Air National Guard.

At that time we had F89's, which was an all weather interceptor thing, and we had a commitment to do that, so I was kind of like on part-time active duty there at home. In 1962 they opened it up for people to go back into the tactical air command. They were trying to build it up, and so it was initially a three-year contract. In the meantime, I had worked for the airlines for about a year; then I got laid off on a furlough thing when they were buying the jets and so forth. So I didn't really know if and when I would ever get called back to the airlines. This seemed like a fun thing to do at the time, and so in September 1962, I went in on what was to be a three-year contract.

I flew F100's at Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico for about 18 months; about nine months of that was temporary duty mostly overseas. I had tours in Thailand and Saudi Arabia and flew across the Atlantic in my little F100 a couple of times... and the Pacific,

both oceans, which was kind of interesting in a single engine airplane with aerial refueling of course. Anyhow... so I was just kind of a part-time guy. By this time I was a captain.

Then in I guess March 1964, I didn't have any overseas time so I needed... I was coming up for an overseas assignment basically. I received initially an assignment to go fly B26's in South Vietnam, which was an unaccompanied tour. Because I had been away from my family so much, I really wasn't too hot about an unaccompanied tour at this time, but anyhow the wings started falling off the B26's, so they canceled that assignment. Later I got an assignment to fly A1's as an advisor in South Vietnam, again an unaccompanied tour.

At that time I was on temporary duty going through a stand eval school, they called it. You become a check pilot type thing – a standardization pilot. I was up in Langley in Virginia, which is TAC headquarters for a week assignment, but the people in personnel just assumed I was overseas somewhere again, which is where we usually were at that time, so they gave my assignment to another guy who used to be a friend of mine, and he went on the deal to South Vietnam. About this time, I got some F105 assignments to Okinawa, which was an accompanied tour. So the squadron commander said, "Well, if you don't want to go on a remote tour you better grab that 105 thing." So I did. That's how I ended up in Okinawa, flying the F105.

I arrived there in July 1964, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred in August 1964. That's the way we... that pretty much committed us. Congress passed a resolution giving Johnson the power to basically not declare war but to engage in war type activity. I forget how it was worded. Immediately we pretty much started a pretty rapid increase of our buildup to support the war in South Vietnam. Our wing at Cadena (sp) Air Base in Okinawa was one of the first ones involved. We went down to Thailand... I take it back, we went to South Vietnam. I flew my first combat mission in January 1964 (?), out of Danang, and we had a strike on a bridge up in central Laos, playing the jars (?). We lost two airplanes and had another one shot up, but we knocked down this little bridge, and the Air Force decided that was a great victory for some reason and declared it such anyhow, and they gave us all an air medal, which was totally absurd but a lot of stuff that happened then was.

Anyhow, I was kind of a part-time guy. I ended up getting captured on August 28, 1965, and on I think it was September 20, my three-years contract was up. Interesting little story about that, but I won't go into it.

KIERSTEN: You were based in Okinawa. Okay. And you have written in your biography that you were doing escort and strike missions. I'm not really familiar... I mean by strike missions you just said you bombed the bridge. Is that kind of what you were doing?

SCHIERMAN: Right. The escort missions initially started out when we were flying over mostly just South Vietnam or Laos or occasionally North Vietnam, and we would escort the reconnaissance aircraft. The rules of engagement then, you know, we wouldn't shoot at them unless they shot at us, but you had to protect the 101; and of course they were always

going to shoot at us, so then, you know, we would just basically shoot back at the gunners, which is... But a strike mission, to differentiate, is usually a preplanned mission on a given target, and you actually go in there planning to bomb, usually mostly we were bombing that target. We did a little of both. The escort missions initially didn't count as combat, which was another silly kind of rule, but...

KIERSTEN: And then a little bit more description on the F105, which you were flying at this time. Were you by yourself flying or did you have a cocaptain or ...

SCHIERMAN: The 105's, most of them we flew in combat, were normally a single seat airplane, which was the F105D, but the day I did go down, the airplane I lost was a 105F, which was a two-seat model. I just took it as a spare aircraft. Occasionally we used it as a spare, and I guess when they preflighted the airplane I was assigned to take originally they found something wrong with it so they pulled up the spare, and I used it. We didn't like to fly the F's up there a whole lot because they were heavier and they burned more fuel because of the extra cockpit and weight and all that. But later on in the war, they started using the 105F, it was what they called "The Wild Weasel" missions, which were surface to air missile suppression or SAM suppression. So I think every one that was lost after me always had two people in it.

When the Vietnamese caught me, it was big game for years to find out who my other pilot was. Of course I told them I was just a new guy in the back seat, and I didn't know anything, of course, which was the standard story. We were all new guys on our first mission. The Vietnamese probably realized that something was wrong when all of their prisoners...

KIERSTEN: Right, so you were by yourself then that day?

SCHIERMAN: Well, I was leading a flight of four airplanes. So I was in one, then there were three other individuals in three other different airplanes. We flew in a flight of four.

KIERSTEN: Okay.

SCHIERMAN: Two sometimes but mostly four.

KIERSTEN: I guess basically from here on out, if you can just sort of describe the beginning of August 28, 1965. You said you had gun malfunction, so you weren't shot down. What happened, I mean was there time before you were captured where you were trying to contact, you know, the other captains of the planes you were with or what happened to those planes?

SCHIERMAN: Actually, I just wrote a whole story for a magazine in three different monthly versions of ... one is of the shoot down in great detail, then two of them to cover the seven years I was captured. I can shoot that to you on an email and cover the whole thing, if you want to do that in much detail.

KIERSTEN: That would be great.

SCHIERMAN: I'll just give you a rather brief overview in case you have any questions or if there's something you don't understand. It was again a very... it was a different mission, and at the time I was acting weapons officer down at Corat (sp) for our squadron, and our squadron received the mission to plan a mission to go strike a target which was a military barracks area near Somah (sp), North Vietnam. The ordinance they wanted us to use had never been used on the 105 before in combat, and it was what we called a Mark 82 Snake Eye. The Snake Eye bomb was defined... it had these skins that popped out. When you released a bomb, rather than just a bomb with little guidance films that freefall, these big petals would flop out, four of them. They acted as a retarding device, a parachute more or less, to slow the bomb down so that you could drop it at a lower altitude and still get safe separation from the bomb blast yourself so you don't blow yourself out of the sky.

Anyhow, I ... this mission was supposed to come off the following day, so I ... You get what you call a frag, and I forgot what that stands for, but it's a little piece of the big mission picture, a fragmentation, I think. It tells you all of your assignments for the next day. Anyhow, they gave me this mission, and I went in and started studying and planning. I was primarily concerned with these Snake Eyes because it had never been done before, so I read all of the data that I could get on the weapons tests that had been run at the weapons test center out of Nellis Air Force Base. Near as I could tell, they wanted me to drop six of these bombs off the centerline ejector rack on the aircraft, and they wanted two off the outboard stations. From everything I could read, they had never successfully dropped six off the centerline without the things either running together below the airplane and going off prematurely, or perhaps the fins failing and running into each other, and so on. So anyhow, it was obvious that was not a good idea.

But what I read in there said they had occasionally dropped four off, or usually dropped four off successfully. So I went back to the wing operations officer and told him to call Saigon, the second air division at the time they were calling it, it was the higher headquarters, and they were the ones that were assigning these missions and the criteria. A lot of these missions we found out later, a lot of them were coming directly from McNamara and Johnson. They were doing their own planning, and they were much higher, higher up the line, but these civilians in charge in a lot of cases were even directing the tactics and what weapons we could use, where we could drop them, and when we could drop and all that, which was not a good idea because they didn't know what they were doing to a large extent.

Anyhow, I went back and told them there was no way I was going to take six bombs off the centerline of those things, but if it was a really important target, a real important mission, I would take four. I didn't want the bombs outboard; I wanted air to air missiles because it was right next to an active MIG base, the target was very near. So... but I also added I didn't think this was a good idea at all, probably... I didn't have a good feeling about it at all. It shouldn't really have been done period, but... I came back the next day. I went ahead and did our flight plan and came back the next day, and they said, "Oh yeah. Very important target. Take four bombs. We'll give you everything you want. Go. Do it."

So we did. One of the other factors that was significant is that they didn't have a picture of the target. All they had was a set of coordinates, you know, geographical coordinates where it's supposed to be. Well, when I got there, I'm doing my run in, and the target plotted to the west side of this main highway that ran from where I actually did a let down into this valley up toward the city of Somah (sp). It was about two thirds of the way up. It plotted on the right side of the highway, so I'm down low because ... The reason the Air Force wanted to drop these ... use these Snake Eyes is because the Navy had been using them on their A4's which were smaller and slower and everything, and they could get in below lower weather than we could. So they could fly sorties when we couldn't. And, you know, the Air Force could not stand that because it's all ... a lot of intraservice rivalry. That was a big problem.

So anyhow, they wanted to do this. The weather was not really very good, and so that was the whole deal. So we were down low, and I'm running up this highway looking for the target, and I can't find it. It's not where it's supposed to be. And finally I looked about a mile or so south of the highway, and there's the target. Well, by this time we are almost... We had had to separate into two flights of two now to keep separation from the bomb blasts for the two different flights. We were going to drop in pairs. Originally, I was just going to run in, and we were going to go straight through, and we were supposed to do a road reconnaissance out to Dien Bien Phu (sp) which was the famous target where the French opened it up, getting defeated.

Anyhow, by the time I finally figured out the target is not here it's down there, they have given me the wrong coordinate apparently, or conceivably I could have misplotted it, but I don't think so. We checked that. Or misread it, I should say. So I think they gave us the wrong ones. But anyhow it was off. So by this time we're almost past the target, the first flight. And the second flight is behind me. So I cleared the second flight to go in first. Instead of now dropping, running from east to west so that we can continue straight through, now we were dropping from west to east. Well, when the first flight dropped... I fell in behind them. When the first flight dropped, I saw two very definitely separated bomb blasts. So I knew that either one of the loads on one of the aircraft had gone off prematurely under the airplanes or the fins had failed any maybe had gone off long. Again it would be under the airplanes so it was not a good deal.

When I dropped, because of my original intention, I had the wingman on the right, but because of a high terrain, a car step here (?) they call it, I had to make my turnout to the right in order to get turned around or get out... to keep from going over that airfield basically. So by the time I got turned around where I could see, I couldn't tell how much damage we'd done. In the past, in the few cases when we didn't get the target the first day, they'd always turn you around and send you back, and you had to go get it the next day, which was not a fun thing because they were waiting for you usually. So because I wanted to continue the mission back behind me to the west, and I hadn't seen any flak at this time, I told the guys okay we'll do a 180, turn around and follow me back around, and we'll make one strafe pass going through. I figured well at least we can tear up these buildings with the guns, and maybe we won't have to come back tomorrow.

So they... that's what we were doing. I rolled in. I had just fired about a second burst of the trigger on the gun, and the gun quit firing. I'm thinking, hm, that's kind of strange. They talk about time compression or whatever. Actually I think you stretch it. In a lot of cases where you're really intent on something, time seems to slow way down. But I remember I was already thinking, "This is unusual," and I don't know that I ever let up on the trigger, but there was a large clunk on the left side of the airplane. Then it felt like the engine... There was a large explosion, and it felt like the engine fell right out of its mounts under the belly of the airplane. It just went rrrrr...ow. Then it got very quiet. Essentially, the engine exploded and just disintegrated apparently or close to it.

Anyhow, I knew I couldn't... I was down low and now we're right over the target, and I knew I couldn't get out of this big broad valley. We always wanted to try to go for the high ground, because normally that would buy you time before the bad guys could come up and get you, and a lot of times we had a helicopter pretty close, and they'd come in and hook you off the top of a mountain or something, and away you'd go. So I saw there was a small hill in the bottom of this valley, kind of a low mountain shaped thing, but I figured that was the highest terrain I could get to. So I pulled up and glided up over the top of the hill. In the meantime, I was wishing this thing would get me out of the big valley up into the big hills, the big mountains. This was still too close to civilization for me.

Anyhow, no altitude, no air speed. I had also turned on this low altitude air start switch, just hoping the engine might in some way start, cough a little bit, start once, run a little bit, but not really expecting it to. I turned that thing on, and shortly thereafter the number four guy called and said, "Hey lead, you got a bunch of fire coming out the back." So I thought obviously that was not a good idea, so I turned that off, glided a little further, and shortly thereafter he called and said, "You know lead, the fire's out now." And I said, "Yeah, it's out." Well, initially I called and said, "I'm hit." That was my first reaction with the big bang, and I said, "I may have to get out." By that time, I was already pretty convinced I was going to have to, but you always hope for the best.

Anyhow, I told him, "The fire is out up here too. I've got to get out." So I blew the canopy and got really positioned in the seat, and the last time I looked it was going through about 220 knots, I think, which is hardly flying in a 105.

KIERSTEN: Oh oh.

SCHIERMAN: The coffee got hot. Anyhow, so I ejected myself on top of this hill. It worked out that I had just about enough air speed to get that far, and altitude. That part was good, and anyhow... I'm getting too involved here, but when I ejected, then separated from the ejection seat, the seat ended up hitting me. The parachute opened around it, so I had been pretty well bashed all down my left side by the seat. I looked up and the seat was hanging in the parachute risers over my head, which is not really a good deal because it weighed a fair amount, 80 to 90 pounds probably. So I spent some time coming down in the parachute, trying to get rid of the seat, and I never did with the ground coming up, but I did work it down in the risers to where I could hold it off beside me.

So I landed with one hand holding the seat over and the other hand in the riser of the chute. I hit on my heels and back. It knocked the wind out of me really good, but I was surprised because I landed with that seat and everything, and my survival kit I didn't deploy either because I was working on the seat so I probably had an extra 100 pounds of weight on me when I hit, which is quite a bit.

I felt around and fortunately all the pieces seemed to be there. So then I got really concerned, trying to roll up the parachute, hide the seat, hide the survival kit, hide my helmet, all this stuff. It's just kind of low brush up on top of this hill. It wasn't really big trees or anything, and I couldn't really hide all that stuff all that well, but I got out my radio and talked to my wingman and told him I was down on the ground, that I was okay, and that I thought the gun had blown up. By that time, pieces had started to fill in, and I was fairly confident that's what happened. They acknowledged that, and they said they had called the helicopter.

I knew there was a helicopter not too far away down in Laos, maybe 100 miles away or maybe even a little less. And for some reason, I wasn't totally thinking correctly, I think I had it in my mind that they could get there in about a half hour. And if I had been thinking of reaction time and so on, coordination and all that, I should have known better. But anyhow, it ended up taking I think about an hour for them to get there. I was running around on the ground there for about five minutes, and I felt something kind of sticky in my left hand. I looked down, and I was bleeding like a stuck hog. I had a cut in my wrist that you can see there, and my wristwatch looked like you had taken a hatchet and chopped it right down to the bottom of the case, you know except the case was still there, the bottom of it, but everything else was just smashed. So something sharp on that seat had hit me, I guess. Had that watch not been there, it would probably have taken my hand right off. Even at 200 knots, things are flying around pretty hard.

So I got a compress I always kept in my G-suit pocket where I could get at it in the cockpit, and I wrapped this thing up as tight as I could. It had cut that vein that goes right through there so it was really bleeding. Then I went on and wandered around, and got up a little bit. I hadn't quite hit the top of the hill, so I went up to the top, and I could see there was a main highway running up to Sanla (sp) over here. I had seen a village back behind... the target was back here, and I'd seen a village up here on my left as I was coasting up to the hill, and then the airplane had crashed over on the other side of the hill and was burning. So I figured any way I went down off that hill, I was just going to meet searchers coming up that much sooner. And knowing that the helicopter... my wingman told me they had called the helicopter and it was inbound, and knowing that I was also concerned about getting down under the big jungle canopy. At that time, the rescue helicopter guys had to have a visual on you before they could pick you up, because they got into traps, and I had heard of several instances where they couldn't pick people up because they were down under the jungle canopy, and they couldn't find them.

So I pretty much made up my mind I would just stay up on top of this hill, and that helicopter ought to get here, because I had always heard how tough it was to move through

the jungle and everything. Later on, after I was captured and they were running me down the hill through the jungle, I found out they had trails down there too. It was too much of a populated area. Long story short, the Vietnamese got there just slightly before the helicopter did. They were just stripping the gear off of me when the RC54 which was a rescue coordination aircraft was overhead, and the helicopter was not too far behind him, so I probably missed a pickup by about 20 minutes, something like that, if they had been that much sooner, maybe.

But in retrospect, what I should have done was go down into the jungle where I had better cover, and then I could have gone either way. If the helicopter got there first, I could have popped back up to the top of the hill, and if the bad guys got there first I would have had better cover to hide in and maybe have gotten behind them and slipped down behind them, but that was hindsight. When I heard them coming up the hill, they came up from two sides, it was about a platoon of regular infantry, about 30 guys, with automatic weapons and all that good stuff, so I wasn't doing to shoot it out with them. So I burrowed down into the heaviest cover I could find, and they went by me about four times, I think. They would go by, and of course I had on these jungle boots which leave a very distinctive track, and I'd bled all over the place, you know, while I was wandering around, and they have some pretty good old trackers there, I think. I got to meet one later, very close... I think they were going by, and they, you know, so they wouldn't cut any of the tracks down here, so they kept going back to the... They found the parachute originally and the seat, and they kept going back there, and then they'd sweep through again. About the fifth time through, one of them was about from me to you, and he about stepped on me. He saw me, and he yelled, and they all came over and just piled on, and started taking stuff off of me.

That had to be about the lowest point in my life up to that point, I think, because I realized that ...

(Side B) The tape runs out of recording room, so the last few questions are not included

.... at the time that this war was going to get over real fast. I couldn't conceive too much more than two years. Heck, we had fought all of World War II in about four years. But anyhow, all these guys were regular infantry it looked like except this one old guy, and he had on a kind of loincloth, towel, turban or something around his head. Beetle nut teeth, all blackened and so on. Real leathery skin. He reminded me of Kunga Din. I don't know if you remember that story about in India, probably not, it was before your time, but he could have been 40 years old or 100 years old. It was really hard to tell their age, but he looked old. He was jumping around; he was really excited. He was kind of mad at me, but I think he was the tracer, a civilian, an old tiger hunter.

But anyhow, he had a smooth bore, what looked a shotgun with a bore on it about that big, and it was sticking right into my nose. I was looking down the barrel of that thing for a while. But I think he was an old tiger hunter and could probably have tracked me anywhere he wanted to in there. An interesting experience...

KIERSTEN: At that point, were you thinking... before they found you... were you thinking, you know, I have honest faith that the helicopter will come rescue me, and I'm not concerned about anything else except just staying out of the way of any North Vietnamese troops. Was there an honest feeling of not hope but just the fact that they'll come find me or were you kind of concerned a little bit about the situation?

SCHIERMAN: Well, I was concerned big time, but I was maybe somewhat overconfident because I knew this helicopter was at this Lima site not too far away, and again I thought this hill was probably high enough, and it looked like very thick jungle around under it that I was flying over previously, and I thought it would take the North Vietnamese definitely longer to get up... I figured at least a couple hours probably to get up to the top of this hill, unless they happened to be there, and I couldn't really see why anyone would happen to be there, or it didn't appear that way. But, I ... basically the deal was up there you pretty much got picked up the first day or ... unless you were in quite a remote area...

KIERSTEN: Got picked up by the helicopters?

SCHIERMAN: Yeah, you were rescued...

KIERSTEN: Okay.

SCHIERMAN: ...right off the bat. That was the best deal, and I was of course hoping for that. Because walking all the way across Laos, evading and so forth, was not going to happen. You'd never make it. It's tremendously rugged country in that area, and no friendlies for miles and miles. So you either pretty much got picked up or you were probably going to get captured or killed, whatever, one way or another. I think hope springs eternal. I wasn't thinking that far ahead. In fact, I didn't even bother to take the stuff out of the survival kit. I hadn't deployed the kit, which means I hadn't opened it, and I didn't want to open it, because there's a life raft that deploys, and now I've got more stuff to hide. And I always carried quite a bit of survival gear on me. We had vests, and I had several bottles of water, and I had radios, and a first aid kit, and a little bit of food and various things. I figured you are either going to get picked up soon or you're not, and I essentially kind of had nowhere to go here anyhow, at least in my mind at that time. So essentially I just kind of put all my eggs in one basket.

KIERSTEN: O kay. So they found you, and they were stripping off your clothes, your uniform, and everything. Do you have any idea where you were taken or kind of describe the beginning of your captivity? I don't know what happened after...

SCHIERMAN: I think I have some idea. That would be an interesting thing. That's the only reason I think I'd ever want to go back to Vietnam, is if I could go back in that area and maybe see if there was anyone still alive that remembered the incident and see if what I think happened really happened. Where we did go. Essentially, the first thing they were doing with this aircraft overhead, they got my weapons and all this stuff off of me and my G-suit off of me and took my boots, which is a very clever thing for them to do because tender feet like us would not go very far in the jungle at all without some kind of foot gear.

They tied my arms behind, a rope around my neck, and then we took off, running through the jungle down to get under the jungle canopy. I was stumbling and falling. We got down there, and they ... Before I was captured, you know, when the guy saw me, I had two little radios. One was you talk on the thing and it had a homer type deal on it too, but we also had one that was just... it transmitted a homing signal, and our F105's had UHF/DF or direction finding, and if someone transmitted... It was a clear line of sight basically was what it took, but we would turn a little switch in our cockpit, and this little needle would point to that radio transmitter.

So when I knew I was captured basically, I switched this thing on to transmit so the beeper was still beeping, and they could home on it. So we were running down the jungle, and by this time my flight had to leave, they were low on fuel, but they had called another flight. Colonel Eisner happened to be my squadron commander, and he had a target with a time on target 20 minutes behind me. So they had hit their target – I believe they hit it – and when they heard I was down, they came over to continue the cap. We tried to keep aircraft overhead, if we could, so when the helicopter came you'd have some support, fire support, to suppress any of the opposition there so you could rescue the guy.

And apparently they found some gun positions or something because they started making some firing passes which sounded pretty fearsome down under the deal; this Gatling gun is a 20 millimeter cannon that fires 100 rounds a second out of the barrels of the thing, 6,000 rounds per minute. And it just makes a big "Whoooo" horrible sound when you're near the receiving end. But anyhow, I guess one of the Vietnamese was carrying this radio and apparently noticed it was ticking or clicking or something, and he realized that the thing was on so we stopped there a little bit, and he came over and pointed to this thing and wanted me to turn it off. I thought, oh well, that's probably a pretty good idea because for one thing I wanted these guys to go away. You know, I didn't want anyone to get shot down looking for me. I was already captured so there wasn't any way they were going to rescue me, from the air at least. So I turned that off.

They took me down and put me in a cave most of the day, and there were aircraft overhead then most of the day. They came up and continued to search and all that, which they do. In Vietnam, probably one of the greatest things of the whole air war was the rescue people and the effort that was made to rescue pilots. In some cases, they ended up losing five, six, or seven people and four or five aircraft trying to rescue one guy, but they kept it up. But everyone knew they would really give it a good try.

Anyhow, they kept me in that cave, and a little medic came up and got into my first aid kit. My wrist was still bleeding pretty badly. I hadn't stopped the bleeding, so he came up ... it was toward evening, and he got out my survival kit. Between the two of us, he let me point out what we needed, and we got another good bandage out of there and put some disinfectant on it. Then we got it wrapped up really good again and that's all the medical attention I had for the next two-and-a-half weeks or more, something like that. That one bandage got pretty ripe. I think I was getting blood poisoning; I had this big red streak up my arm, and it was getting really sore, but anyhow I think I covered that in the deal.

Right then, as soon as I knew I was captured, after I had this thought, you know, "Well, you're looking at a good couple years," you revert back to your training. Okay? Just a year or so before in June 1964, I went through their survival, escape, evasion, and resistance training, whatever... Now they call it SERE, survival, escape, resistance, and evasion. I went at Stead Air Force Base near Reno, Nevada; since then it has moved up to Fairchild, near Spokane. Anyhow, I tried to review quickly kind of what I had been taught there. One of the big things that came to my mind for whatever reason was be military. You know, you know military's got you, and if you act military maybe you'll get a little bit of respect from the people just because they think, "Well, he's a soldier too," or whatever.

So I pretty much marched around everywhere I went; I tried to. And I ... the other thing was to start working on a cover story, because somewhere along the way you're going to be questioned, and you want to have some phony answers; you don't want to give them valid information. And if any of the information is ever used, people who know will know that you're not giving it willingly and so on; I guess that's part of the rationale. So I had a lot of things to think about, and that night they took me into a building which I think was the barracks area that I had been bombing, one of them. It was abandoned. There were a bunch of buildings that looked the same, and they had been damaged. By this time it was dark, and the aircraft had gone away so... We didn't do much night work in those days, particularly rescue.

By this time, my back was really hurting. When I ejected, I felt a real sharp pain in my lower back, but I was running on adrenaline, I think, to a certain extent up to there, and by this time both knees had swollen up; they were about half again their normal size; so I really did hit pretty hard when I parachuted. But they put me in this little room, and they came in, and they had what looked like a little tuna fish can. It was chicken but about a third of it was bones, crushed bones, and it was kind of oily, greasy stuff, and they had a little bowl of rice. They kind of pointed, you know, take some of this chicken with the rice and so on. Well I wasn't hungry at all. I had been very thirsty. I don't think they gave me any water that first day, and I was very dehydrated. So anyhow I ate a little bit of this stuff, and I'm trying to pick through these sharp bones. Anyhow I had a little bit of that, then I told them I didn't want any more. They kept offering it to me. Okay?

So a little later the guy went away, and pretty soon he came back, and one guy came in with his chopsticks, and he got the can. Apparently they would draw straws to see who got the leftovers or whatever. The guy took that little can of chicken and bowl of rice, and it was all gone, bones and all.

I found out later, when they butcher a chicken, usually they just take a machete and just chop it all up and everything goes in the pot. So I learned a little bit about eating habits and stuff. One of the other things they teach you in survival school is you don't turn down food, any kind of food. If they give it to you, eat it. If you want to stay alive, you're going to have to learn to eat a lot of things that you would never eat otherwise. It was good advice because a good share of what we got, a person probably would never eat if they didn't have to. Interesting experience... Three nights in a cave while I think they were

going through the wreckage of my airplane. Then three nights bouncing along in the back of a truck, driving only at night to get that 100 miles back to Hanoi.

So I arrived there on March 2, 1965. I went down on the 28th. It was about a week before I got to Hanoi. Anyhow, I covered the rest of that stuff in pretty good detail in the books. If you have any questions on it, too, we can just exchange emails.

KIERSTEN: I want to talk a little bit now about the code because you talked about some training. Basically, I know there are six articles, and I reviewed the code a little bit, but tell me a little bit about the code and your training and that sort of thing.

SCHIERMAN: As you know, it came out after Korea because they didn't do very well in Korea. I'm not sure anyone could have done very well, but they were looking for something to kind of give some standardization, give some guidance and goals and direction, and have everyone learn it. Then at least you ought to all be on the same page. I thought, personally for me, that the survival training that we got was more important than the code itself. Basically what it did was try to instruct you on each of these principles to a certain extent. You're going to follow the orders of your superior officers; you are going to organize into chain of command based on date of rank...

KIERSTEN: In the prison...

SCHIERMAN: Right. So you always look for a senior guy to give you direction, and they are supposed to of course know more than somebody else. But it at least gives you an organization and gives you goals and things to shoot for to organize your activity. One thing that is not in the code, I don't think, is it doesn't talk about communications. I think if I were writing it or adding to it, I would say, "You will make every effort to communicate with your fellow prisoners" because if you're alone, you're weaker than if you have some kind of mutual support, in general. But that's neither here nor there. You're supposed to make every effort to escape and assist others to do so. I immediately started looking for escape materials. They put me in this cave, which was up in the hills. It had been used before, I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure I know who used it, in fact, one of the guys who was shot down earlier in that same area. I think he was kept in that cave too.

They had built a wooden gate across the front of this cave, the entrance to it, and it had a chain and a padlock on it. They kept a guard outside it with a little lamp going at night. It was guarded 24 hours a day, all the time, the three nights that I was kept in that cave, days and nights. I crawled around everywhere I could in that cave, looking for another exit and so forth but couldn't find any. They gave me a little can; it looked like it was perhaps some canned meat or some kind of canned supplies. I don't think it was ammunition, but it was a metal can, and it had had a lid on it that they had cut open like with a can opener thing. Well, it was to use as a waste can, and in checking that can out, I found that there was a piece of metal on the side where there had been a seam. I was able to work that piece off of there, and it made a real nice little knife blade, a little cutting blade, which I kept, again thinking of escape ... you could cut through your ropes or whatever.

In route to Hanoi... another thing they teach you is to escape your best odds are to do it in the field, immediately after capture or as soon after... before you get back into a formal prison system because there they are used to keeping people, and they will also have better facilities for locking you up and so forth, than when you're out enroute with just the troops. In this case, they were in pretty good shape with a cave and a locked gate across it and armed guards and all that stuff, but like traveling in the truck, they had me tied, being nice about it, not too tightly, and one of my escape attempts was going to be... I never quite got it done, but a scheme that I came up with while we were driving, winding up these mountain roads at night and there were about 20 of these guards in there with me... I was tied up to the front of the truck behind the cab ... this was a tarp covered thing, military truck.

They had my arms tied around the biceps here back behind me... I guess they were just pulled back like so. I think my hands were still free somewhat... Yeah, I know they were. Anyhow I was able to work... I noticed that every now and then one of these guys would get up, and they'd go to the back of the truck. A lot of them were getting car sick because they had never ridden in a car that much, or a truck or whatever. ... winding around in the dark, and they'd go back and were throwing up over the back of the truck. They had their packs sitting, you know, they were just packed in kind of all around me. They had their packs lying down all around and so on. I was able ... the guy next to me, I was able to work myself pretty much free of these ropes, where I could get out of them, and I came up with this scheme. If I can get hold of one of these guy's packs... and I noticed that they all had... they wore sandals, rubber tire sandals, or tennis shoes, but they usually I think had both. I figured in each pack, they had what they weren't wearing at the time, and either one of them would have been better than no foot gear at all.

I needed a knife, and I was able to work this knife out of this guy's sheath that was next to me; he was asleep. This was about 2 in the morning, and my plan was to grab one of these packs and the guy's pith helmet. I would put on the little helmet and just kind of slouch down and wander to the back of the truck like I was going to get sick and throw up like the next guy, then just bail out and run like heck in the dark and hope that I could get lost in the dark. So I got myself free from the ropes and got this guy's sheath knife. I was just getting ready to grab the guy's pack and helmet... I was waiting until we slowed down a little bit and started climbing preferably, and the guy next to me woke up, lit a cigarette, started to talk to the other guy, then they were awake. So now I've got this guy's sheath knife. So we were bouncing around in the truck, and I finally got the knife in his sheath. I didn't want to tip him off, what I had in mind. So anyhow I reverted back to my training.

KIERSTEN: How did your feelings or thoughts about escaping in the beginning of imprisonment change in the middle and toward the end? Did they change? What is... What I've read is that escaping was just not really an option.

SCHIERMAN: Right. I pretty much expected that. Again... I mean, this was a real desperate thing, and I had to think about it quite a bit. Here I am, to get out of here, to walk out, I'm going to have to walk 100 plus some miles across Laos into Thailand, and that's all, mostly, unfriendly bad guy country. You know, maybe I can find some Montanards

(sp) or whatever that would be friendly, but how do you know? And it was really a desperate deal. But at the same time, I didn't really relish the idea of getting to Hanoi and being stuck there, because like I said I figured at least two years. I thought well, maybe I can get out of here and maybe I can signal an airplane. That would be about your only chance. Without a radio, it's really tough, but I thought well maybe I've got a can or a mirror or something I can use to reflect sun, if there is any sun. So I was willing to try it, but it never quite came together.

I almost tried it again the second night. As we were actually getting ready to drive the last night, I knew that we must be getting close to Hanoi, and we were just breaking camp to go get in the trucks. The truck was parked out near the road about 70 to 80 yards from where we had moved back into the jungle and set up our little... They gave me a little mosquito net to lie under during the day. Anyhow they were all wrapping up, and there were two guys left with me. The rest of them had all headed for the truck, and again this one guy had his pack and rifle, the whole works there. One of them got impatient and took off and left me alone with a single guard, the last one. He turned his back on me, and I looked, and I said, "Okay, there's his pack; there's his rifle. They're all going that way. If I can take him down without making too much noise, if he can't yell or whatever, I can grab his gear and take off in the other direction."

And I just decided it's worth a try, and I was just about to take a step toward him, or maybe I had, I've forgotten, but all of a sudden the other guy yells, and he comes running back. He realized what he had done, and here he came chugging in there. So I turned around, and that was the last chance. I never got another one after that.

Once we were in the system, it depends to me to a certain extent on how desperate you are. I mean there's got to be some logic to it. The thing that was important to me, a big factor... in many cases it wouldn't have been too difficult to get outside of the prison, but what does that accomplish. You know, when you're in the middle of three million people, not your race, you can't speak the language, you may or may not have a decent disguise, as long as you don't speak the language in a society where everyone monitors everyone, down to the city block or the village or whatever, I don't think you've got a prayer of walking out of there alone without some outside help, but like in one case where one of my former roommates and a bunch of us were being kept right next to the Hanoi thermal power plant, which was being bombed fairly frequently, staying there you probably weren't going to live very long, and the conditions at that time were really very brutal and deplorable and so on.

Well, one of my former roommates there, George McKnight, and another guy named George Coker, were in that same situation. They decided they would escape, and their plan... They figured out they were next to the river, not too far away, and they could get out of their cells, and they coordinated this thing by tapping with this code we used, and they figured they could go out through this big coal bin type thing, where they had this coal that they burned in the furnaces for the power plant. They would get to the river, float down the river, maybe steal a boat, get out to sea, and the Navy might rescue them. Well,

really bad odds, but when you consider the alternative, maybe you're going to get bombed anyhow, a lot of people sick, and it looked like the war was going to last a long, long time.

So they decided to go, and I don't have any problem with that. I think it was a good choice, but later in 1970, I think, a couple of guys decided to escape out of a big camp, again right in the middle of Hanoi, and conditions had improved significantly where they were not in immediate danger of dying and so on. I think most of us would agree that it was pretty ill-advised, but because the code of conduct says, "I will make every effort to escape and assist others to do so," they went, and no one would tell them not to. It turned out they were caught; they didn't get very far away at all, and the Vietnamese couldn't believe that someone would do that under those conditions unless they had outside help, and they were very concerned about, you know, whether they had a security problem here, plus they found out that everyone in these two adjacent camps knew about it, about 200 people, so they lost tremendous face. And they wanted to set a precedent that said, "We don't want any more of this," so they ended up killing one of the guys and almost killing a bunch of other people, really seriously injuring a lot of people in the ensuing torture sessions to find out what it was all about.

When Coker and McKnight went, there were very few people involved in the area, and I think we convinced them that we didn't really know that much about it. There were just a couple people involved, so they didn't lose as much face and so on. They came down hard on them. Sent them to a really bad guy camp any everything, but to me that one was far more justified. To me escape should be defined as having some reasonable expectation of being able to reach friendly hands, if you will.

In World War II, where they had the big mass camps, 18,000 prisoners and maybe a few hundred guards, if that, where if they could escape 30, 40, or 50 guys, literally all the troops around would have to stop and hunt for them and various things, it would really shut down their war effort to a certain extent, really disrupt it perhaps... There is some logic in that, just a harassment type escape even, but up there when they sat in the Red River Valley with three million people... they're all out in the fields, they're on the streets every day, they don't need to mobilize or anything. They are going to catch you one way or another because someone is going to talk to you.

KIERSTEN: When you said no one was going to tell them not to try to escape, these second guys, that was because of the code? I mean if anyone was to say, "No, this isn't a good idea, they could be considered a traitor to American warfare?"

SCHIERMAN: They had broken the code. When I went through Stead and that vintage, we were all taught that the code of conduct was a ... It was passed under Eisenhower, and the President is the Commander in Chief, and as such it is a direct order from the Commander in Chief, and it was legally enforceable under UCMJ, punishable. You will be violating an order if you violate that code. When we got back I found out that the new interpretation is, and it is true legally... Well, I wouldn't say it's an interpretation, but it's a guideline...

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