



NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE®
Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Hanoi Remembered

Canadian Col. (Ret.) Lorne RodenBush discusses his role as Canada's Permanent Representative to the International Control Commission in Hanoi during the height of the bombing in the Vietnam War.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for giving me an opportunity to reminisce about a unique year in my life. But let us be clear about a couple of things. Four decades have elapsed from the time I unexpectedly took off my uniform and became an instant diplomat. Further, I'm not a historian and I'm not an expert on the Vietnam War. So I suppose you say, well, what are you going to talk about? Well, my talks are going to be about Hanoi in 1967 and 1968. It's going to be about canvas role as a member of the International Control Commission and a few items related to my job as a permanent representative to the commission, no more and no less. And a mind is a wonderful thing. It starts working when you're born and never stops until you get up to speak. So I shall note I use notes, and that way, I might get it right and we might get out of here on time. You'll note that I made no mention of age as being a factor. That too might contribute. It would seem that I might kick things off by letting you know why I'm here this evening.

Last year, at a Change of Command Parade in Canada, I sat next to U.S. Air Force brigadier general and he's pulling duty in a cold part of Canada at our Air Force Divisional Headquarters in Winnipeg, Manitoba. And during a lull in the proceedings, I explained that I had served in Hanoi and had in my possession a couple of artifacts. I pointed out that since I had a little value, or they had little value to my family or I didn't think to our museums, I wondered if there was a US Airman or his family who might have ... not the family but the Airman being interred in North Vietnam that might appreciate the mementoes. And he said that he would look into it and that he did. A few days later, I received an email from one Maj. Gen. Charles Metcalf, that I understand you are all familiar with and who I believe is here this evening, indicating that he might have some use for the items and so a couple of more emails and I sent off these two items. One is a letter opener that was reportedly made from the 2,500 downed U.S. aircraft, and the stamps were part of the series commemorating the 500th, the 1000th and every 500 through to 3,000 airplanes that the North Vietnamese say they shot down. And here is a photo of a prisoner of war by the name of Lt. Commander Collins Henry Haines that I clipped out of propaganda document that I had in Hanoi. I've found out that Mr. Haines lives in Florida, is 74 years old and the best of I know is in good health. He was released from prison during my time as were U.S. Ensign David Paul Matheny, U.S. Air Force Capt. John David Black and Norris Miller Overly, also of the United States Air Force. And within a few days, a follow-up email arrived from the good general and said would I be willing to come along and speak of my experiences. I can tell you I was rather nervous. Crafting something of interest to people like yourself, derived substantially from memory because I didn't retain any communiques or other classified material, and moreover, I wasn't sure what, if any, useful documents I would find in our archives. It's not

an easy chore, I thought. Nevertheless, after some consideration and encouragement from colleagues, I sent off an email to the general and agreed to be here.

Well enough preamble; it's time to set the table for evening repast. There probably is a need for a smattering of post-French occupation history to give relevancy to what I'm going to talk about. And then, I will address such things as, how come Canadians were in Hanoi? What role did we play? What was day-to-day life like in Hanoi? And a few diplomatic highlights, not necessarily in that order and next on the agenda is to tell how you a Canadian military officer found himself a diplomat in Hanoi during the height of the bombing in 1967 and 1968.

So let's get started. What I would think necessary in Germaine is a brief capsule of the 1954 Geneva Conference, which provisionally divided Vietnam at the 17th North Latitude into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which was the North, and the Republic of Vietnam, which was the South. The signing of the Geneva Accord in July of 1954 officially put a man to a century of domination in Vietnam. It was a two-year trial separation between the north and the south. The participants in the conference were the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, Republic of China and the Vietnams. And they oft referred to International Control Commission was formerly called International Commission for Supervision and Control. I'm just going to refer to it as the Commission. But to confused things further with regard the title, the Paris Peace Cords, which some of you will remember, of 1975 have created yet a new body called the International Commission of Control and Supervision. You can understand why it's complicated. India, Poland and Canada accepted the responsibility of implementing the 1954 Geneva Convention Accord. Simply, their mandate was to allow people to move from the North or to the South and to monitor any military activities that did not comply with the terms of the agreement. I should interject here to say that the Commission in the North Vietnam became inactive with the passing of the two-year limitation and escalation of the war in the South. That is to say there were no inspection sites.

In the South, the inspection sites continued but with little purpose of value. What did remain in the North, and I believe for good reason, was the Hanoi-based missions of the three Commission headquarters, that is Canada, India and Poland. It was recognized by all parties that our -- that is the Canadian mission -- would be a useful diplomatic link between Washington and Hanoi. Therefore, we were as close to being an embassy as was possible. And I think we should bear in mind that Canada was one of the very few western and pro-United States country with representation in Hanoi. You could say that France and Indonesia could be counted in that category, but not to the best of my knowledge. They did not play that much of a role. Certainly, your U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk understood Canada's position and undertook to -- I knew this would happen; I moved two pages at once, sorry -- undertook to use that channel at least on a number of occasions. Now my personal story and reason for being in Vietnam: Promotion beyond major in the Canadian Army required that an officer complete one year on staff, one year in command and one year out of country. So after completing the first two requirements, I was then selected for Vietnam in 1967 unaccompanied.

And upon arrival in Saigon, the Canadian Commissioner was a World War II artillery observation pilot saw my Army Wings which was the same as his and said, "You're just what I've been waiting for." We lost our external affairs envoy, who'd been heading the mission in

Hanoi. He'd been on board a Commission aircraft coming out of Hanoi when it disappeared. We never did find him. And the department has been unable to find a replacement. Extensive bombing in the North was a problem and getting a foreign affairs officer to volunteer. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, who is a Nobel Peace prize winner and previously our Secretary of State for External Affairs, had been an active proponent of engaging the North Vietnamese government in a dialogue with United States about stopping the bombing, providing the Viet Cong in the North Vietnamese government would stop sending reinforcements South.

So that's why the Canadian Government wanted something more than a part-time diplomat heading the Hanoi mission. So with only a military attaché acting as the foreign affairs representative and on a three-month stint, we were lacking the continuity and the confidence in Hanoi to press forward with the idea that had been sponsored by the Canadian government. Convinced that there was not going to be any diplomat volunteering for duty in Hanoi, the ambassador was frank and to the point. Would you agree to a one-year succumbent to external affairs for duty in Hanoi? Well, the perks were reasonable. Diplomatic passport, my wife could join me, any trips out of Hanoi that we wanted could be arranged. So after a few days of contemplation, I agreed. It seemed more interesting than being a team member in some isolated part of South Vietnam, sharing minimal duties with the Polish and Indian officers. In due course, Ottawa ironed out the details and I, without my uniform, armed with the necessary calling cards and stationary like was ready for dispatch North on board a Commission 1934 Stratoliner aircraft. And my wife's health precluded her joining me, primarily because of the lack of any guarantee of medical services in Hanoi.

As mentioned, France was the sponsor of the Commission and their financial contribution was the provision of three vintage Stratoliner aircraft, complete with seasoned pilots and flight attendants. That is to say, they weren't young, and in fact, they enjoyed having a bottle of wine between the pilot and co-pilot. Once a week, one of the aircraft would leave Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, and fly to Vientiane in Laos, where would they stay overnight. And the next day, weather permitting and if the aircraft was serviceable, they would head off to Hanoi, 250 miles away. No flight plan, no flight following, no nothing. And when they got within 25 miles of the Hanoi Gia Lam Airport, they would call and ask permission to land. Well, frequently, permission wouldn't be granted. No doubt they knew that there would be few if any U.S. military flights in the North while this Commission aircraft was in the air. This allowed them for the movement of troops and equipment. On those occasions, which were often, the Stratoliner would have to return to Laos and start all over again the next day or perhaps the next week. My flight made it on the first try, and the Canadian military attaché up there met me. We traversed the Pontoon Bridge -- I think you'll see two versions of the Pontoon Bridge here -- over the Red River and it was built adjacent to the Long Bien, 2500-meter bridge built in 1903.

The Pontoon Bridge was the only vehicle connection between local is referred to as the two Hanoi's. In 1967 the iron bridge was a top priority target for the U.S. Air Force. The first bombing raid of the bridge was on August 11, 1967. It was carried by 36 F-105 Thunderchiefs, and I observed that you had a Thunderchief on display here, general, I believe. Only partially successful and that's the bombing rage, the damaged portion of the iron bridge is quickly rebuilt. Further bombings were followed and repairs were made. But eventually, the North Vietnamese government gave up and they conceded the use of the railway that was on the iron bridge.

Nevertheless, they erected this temporary Pontoon Bridge, and they kept spare sections nearby and would bring them in on the river for repair so they were not without a bridge very often. So the Pontoon Bridge with its limitations was the only way to cross the Red River by vehicle during my time in Hanoi. Off subject a bit, but interesting that today, the French government had been asked for a loan of 14 million U.S. dollars to upgrade the original iron bridge.

Now the Canadian mission was housed in two villas resided next to each other. Not very good pictures but I've got to tell you that we were not permitted to have cameras there so any of the photos that I've had, I had to dig them up, and these pictures came from a friend of mine who was over in Hanoi recently. The villas were only a few blocks from the Hoan Kiem Lake in the middle Hanoi, a lake that I walked around frequently. And one dwelling was the offices and housed the military component, and the other was the mission headquarters, which was my home and my office. And the downstairs was made up of a large reception room and a dining room which set 12 comfortably, and I had a suite on the second floor. And adjoining the dining room is a small equipped kitchen of sorts, but for the most part, all the meal preparation was done in a separate stand-alone kitchen that looked after both villas. Of interest to you will be the Viet Cong, in fact, occupied the old U.S. Embassy in the city of Hanoi.

Now we had a Vietnamese staff of 14. That included two drivers, an interpreter, in addition to the usual health for domestic needs. The staff was, in my opinion, all card-carrying communist party members. A few were information gathering specialists reporting regularly on our activities. My interpreter informed me on the first morning that I was expected to make a formal call on all embassies during the next few days. He'd drawn up a schedule. Starting the next day, a visit was to be 40 minutes at each embassy. The list he presented to me for the first day of calls for Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Poland at 9 o'clock. After handshakes and a few pleasantries, I was invited to join the ambassador at a small table. On the table was a bottle of ice cold vodka and two large beers. A shot glass of vodka was poured, glasses were raised, a toast and bottoms up. The beer was poured. My host indicated by demonstration that I should have a sizeable swallow. And without the pausing part, a second vodka I indicated, "One, sorry, in the morning was sufficient thanks." The ambassador said in English, "We don't count until three." And he was insistent with the refills and so after three vodkas and most of the bottle of beer, I excused myself, claiming another appointment. There was no discussion of a diplomatic nature. The next three introductory visits followed the same routine. So upon return to my villa, I chastised the interpreter and informed him in a slurred voice that the next slate of courtesy calls were to include at least some non-East-bloc countries. I then took a couple of aspirins and went to bed, before lunch. Some diplomat, eh? My marching orders were clear: Reestablish our credibility with the North Vietnamese Government and the diplomatic community. Further, I was to keep my ear to the ground and prod if necessary, Canada's proposal for the cessation of bombing as a first step towards peace talks.

Our mission had advantages over most, if not all, of the diplomatic community. Local food supplies, I will tell you what they were very much, were supplemented with a full range of groceries that I had brought in from Vientiane via the Commission aircraft, as was our supply of diplomatic booze. This allowed for above-average cocktail parties and dinners. A big drawing card was relatively modern movies. However, most of them James Bond and all were in English. We could seat 60 or so and did every Wednesday night. In fact, it was so popular that I

have to have two showings, one from ambassadors, first secretaries and their spouses and one for the rest of the folks on the missions. And I drew up a schedule whereby I had a dinner party for 12 once a week, a cocktail party for 75 once a month, and on special occasions, a buffet and drinks for a couple of hundred at the Metropole Hotel every quarter or when the ambassador came on two occasions from Saigon. I'd be a good candidate for your social activities here, general, I think. Once my social plan was more or less working and known, I turned my attention to the cessation of bombing and peace and negotiations idea. It didn't take long to learn a couple of things.

The bombing objectives, which included oil storage tanks in Haiphong, and here you have an artist's concept of the attack on those oil storage sites, were not as effective as envisaged. The tank targets were destroyed, but the North Vietnamese just switched to unloading their oil from barges onto 45-gallon drums and they were stored throughout the countryside. And neither did the other bombing targets yield the results desired. At least, this was the opinion of a number of embassies both communist countries and a couple of pro-U.S. missions. They also argued that limiting or seizing bombing would not yield the quid pro quo that they thought the U.S. would want as an offset.

Now based on a Time magazine article, the U.S. supposedly had an emissary in Hanoi in early 1968, and this prompted the diplomatic community to conclude that Canada was, in fact, the messenger. They also decided that this was the purpose of the forthcoming visit of my ambassador in Saigon. The general consensus was that the U.S. would be prepared to stop bombings in the North, providing the North stop giving support to the Viet Cong in the South. Now my ambassador told me that he was not under instructions to intercede, but he encouraged me to do so -- it's called delegation. Oddly enough, my foray into the question with embassies revealed with relative ease that the North Vietnamese government were likely to support and negotiated settlement to the war providing the U.S. stop bombing the North and withdrew significant forces from the South. Then, the talks could take place very soon, I was told. My take was that Canada could play an emissary role between Hanoi and Washington. Of the Western nations on site, we were the most acceptable. The British had no status in Hanoi, having only been able to present their credentials to the city of Hanoi and not the North Vietnamese government. The French were slowly becoming influential but suffered credibility because of their own war with the Vietnamese a few years earlier. And India, by its own admission, said they were on the outside. So based with that information, I sought a meeting with Foreign Minister Trinh. I think you've seen two pictures here. The smaller one is the foreign minister at that time when I was there, and the other one is a more recent picture. And I did that by bypassing my usual contacts, Lt. Col. Gou and a Maj. Trinh, no relative of the foreign minister. And although I gained an audience, the foreign minister merely thanked me and pointed out that his most recent public statement on the subject was clear and he had nothing more to add. The information I had garnered from the embassies was obviously based on Trinh's public statement that I wasn't aware of. I've not been able find out anything substantive about the Canadian government initiative of the cessation of bombing as the first move towards a negotiated peace.

It's important, at this stage, to review the bidding as to what was happening in Washington. Not solely a government to government and not through the Canadian channels as we had been led to

anticipate. Let me explain as best as I can. I must say that most of this information came by way of recent research, not totally first-hand knowledge whilst I was in Hanoi. That's not quite true. I was privy to the U.S. emissary being in Hanoi from nine days in January 1968. I'm referring to Miami News editor Bill Baggs and Harry Ashmore, vice president of the Center for Study of Democratic Institutions, a Pulitzer Prize winner.

It was thought at the time that they have been dispatched by Washington with a communique, without knowledge of the text, and prior to President Johnson's announcement of his overture to Ho Chi Minh. They did not work through Canada but were thought to have used Indonesia and it's embassy in Hanoi. Their travel – that's Baggs and Ashmore -- was via the Commission aircraft but only from Vientiane. An interview later in 1968 of Baggs and Ashmore, which incidentally is a two-hour interview and is on the Web, tells another story. The two spent nine days in Hanoi. Ashmore and Baggs had crafted a letter to Ho Chi Minh with the help and blessing of the State Department and William Fulbright. It advised Hanoi that there could be no U.S. bombings pause without some reciprocal restraint. Before the letter reached Ho Chi Minh via Cambodia, not Indonesia, President Johnson sent off a tough-worded message to Ho, through the Russians, without I might add, having knowledge of the Baggs-Ashmore exercise, rather surprising. It was viewed by some that the Baggs-Ashmore letter and two-hour visit with Ho Chi Minh was effectively and brutally canceled by the more demanding message from Lyndon Johnson.

I now come to an event of some important, probably more so and more meaningful to me than to anyone else, for some of the details challenged my memory because I had no confirmation from our archives. It wasn't that I didn't report the incident in detail; it was rather that my communiqes always went through Saigon, and they decided what should've go on to Ottawa, or it might have been the fact that they didn't find their way into the archives. Further Canada was going through a changing of the guard. A youngish foreign service officer was taking his first head-of-mission post in Saigon, which was replacing a senior diplomat. And Lester B. Pearson, our Nobel-winning prize minister was stepping aside for one Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and this took place a week or so before the event -- as a matter of fact, it's 40 years ago almost to the a day -- that I'm going to describe. In addition, our long-serving Secretary of State Paul Martin Sr. by name and the father of one of the most recent prime ministers was retiring, and he was being replaced to by someone by the name of Mitchell Sharp. Therefore, my instructions, because of all these changes, seemed to be few and were something less in my mind that's specific. So back to my story.

As was the custom in Hanoi on special days such as the International Labor Day celebrations and visits of foreign dignitaries, the North Vietnamese government held rather gala affairs to which diplomats were invited. I was included on three such occasions. I believe the one I'm going to tell you about was part of the May 1 celebrations. Nonetheless, the event isn't terribly important. What is might have been what occurred. I received an invitation at 4 o'clock on 30th of April to attend a function, and little later I received a telephone call telling me to report to the International Club on May 1st at 6:30. Upon arrival, I was directed around the corner to the National Assembly. We were then taken to an anteroom, where we were joined by the President of Ho Chi Minh and members of the politburo. Ho Chi Minh -- you see couple of pictures of them here -- was followed by an interpreter and a gaggle of senior politburo members started

working the room. When he got to me and after a handshake, I boldly grasped the opportunity to say that Canada's new Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Foreign Minister Designate Sharp like their predecessors maintained a keen interest and placed a high value on Canada's role on Vietnam. I went to say that they continue to pursue negotiated solution to the war and that my government believed that the first step would be the cessation of bombing of the North. Ho Chi Minh responded, only partially, I should tell you through an interpreter switching to him as by saying something like, "Whether or not the Vietnamese problem can be settled does not depend on the Vietnamese people alone. It depends on the attitude of the American government." He made it clear that a settlement must be based on the rights of the Vietnamese people and the 1954 Geneva Agreement. I'm not sure what prompted his telling me that the Vietnamese had lost more than one million of its citizens during the French War and they were prepared to lose that many again to free the Americans from their homeland. And that statement wasn't difficult for me to recall.

It was obvious to the diplomatic community that I had somehow managed to engage Ho Chi Minh about something more than social exchanges so I had more than the usual number of invitations for the next few days. I think the diplomats were now convinced that we, in fact, were driving cessation of bombing and peace talk initiative. After all being a Canadian initiative in 1965 and 1966, but I wasn't sure that we were anything more than a minor player during my time. A few days after the encounter, a messenger arrived at my villa and delivered a package. It was copy of Ho Chi Minh's book of poetry written while he was in prison containing a calling card and inside the cover is a picture of Ho Chi Minh with his signature. For reasons that I'm not aware, how can I have little or no reaction from Ottawa on that particular intervention?

Just for a change of pace, I'm going to regale you with what Hanoi life was like for me before a couple of more diplomatic experiences. It was a lonely time. Social life was ample but very business like. Most activities were with the communist diplomatic community, although the French were hospitable and I frequented their quarters rather often. In fact, Madam di Ceriale, the ambassador's wife, helped me with my French. I tried my hand at tennis in their court with only limited improvement. The British Envoy, who as I've already mentioned was only accredited to the city of Hanoi, was in fact, a seasoned MI5 agent. So we had many along walked reporting to each other any happenings that we thought have some value. My entertainment life were interrupted only to often with air raids to guard against being fused of knowing we're targets where in advance we always took to the shelter in the basement. Incoming aircraft, U.S. aircraft gave cause for sirens to go off when aircraft crossed a 100-mile radar site outside Hanoi and that stopped to work. When they hit the 50-mile radar screen, announcements came over the loudspeaker, which I think said, "Go to shelters. Go to shelters." They did have above-ground shelters which were augmented by five- to six-foot deep holes in the sidewalk every 10 feet. One crawled into the hole, or in our case only too often, when were caught too far away from our villa, we were forced into these shelters at gun point. The lids likened to sewage covers were placed over your head, or if you are tall like a couple of my military attaches, their lids were merely rested on your head. Uncomfortable to say the least and a sore neck for a few days. Thanks to no one but myself, many incoming aircraft, thereafter, only broke the radar barriers, turned and departed, thus stopping all munitions making and other military work in Hanoi, and I should add that Hanoi was devoid of children and the elderly. So the tactics worked.

Let me explain, during one of my three or four rest and recuperation trips outside North Vietnam, I had informed U.S. representatives that I encountered, be it Singapore or Kuala Lumpur or Bangkok or Vientiane, that activating the warning system had the effect of shutting down Hanoi, which was primarily a war needs manufacturing community. So we were having about seven to 10 actual raids per 24 hours in 1968, and I don't know how many aircraft pierced the radars and then turned around, but I have put the total number of sirens that we would hear in a 24-hour period of about 18. Many of the downed aircraft, despite the fact that there were missiles, were the result of every weapon, be it rifle standing guard at my gate or vintage anti-aircraft weapons as you see here, fired constantly. My villa flat roof had 14 pieces of shrapnel per square foot, to give you indication of the fall out from what was going on. I had letter from Secretary of State Dean Rusk assuring me that our villas were clearly marked, and pilots were made aware of our location and there would be no targets in the vicinity. It sounded good. It didn't stop. On one occasion the loss of an Indian Commission communicator being killed in my backyard. I recognized and appreciate that any pilot facing a barrage of ground fire understandably might be inclined to drop as rockets short of target. Nonetheless, that was the only casualty during my one year there.

Another few diplomatic tales, one of the first foreign affairs initiatives announced by the new Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was he would pursue the establishment of a diplomatic relations with communist in China. Along with other diplomats around the world, I was instructed to try and find out how the Chinese delegation in Hanoi viewed this change of policy. We're all accustomed to commercials so I'm going to give you a commercial at the moment, a short one. After Vietnam, I took command of Canada's only heavy lift helicopters, and Prime Minister Elliot Pierre Trudeau was a frequent user. He liked to be in the cockpit and loved low flying and I ceded to those wishes more often than any same person would ever do and I did that for four years.

Back to diplomacy. At a Czechoslovakian cocktail party, I found an opportunity to assemble the necessary interpreters, two to be exact, and the Chinese deputy. I put the question of Canada recognizing China to him. He responded in broken English, loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, "You American lucky. I no talk." And with that, he took his entourage and left the function. The Czech Ambassador Yuri Meissner, by name, was embarrassed and very apologetic. We had become rather colleagues. He played tennis at the French villa, he attended my films and I learned that he like gin and tonic and I had a good supply of tonic, and there was always a six-pack at the door waiting for him when he left the movies. It turned out to be a good investment. A few years later, I was involved at the outset of the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. At the first plenary session in Vienna, where I was representing NATO military and sitting more or less in the back row, I noted one Ambassador Meissner behind the Czechoslovakian sign nameplate. We were like long lost brothers. That didn't take the Soviet Union nor your representatives long to recognize the fact that we somehow knew each other very well. So we became emissaries, and under instruction often and by direction often, passed on advanced positions of the two major powers, if not NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Unlike Saigon, where there was a 9 p.m. curfew, Hanoi had no restrictions. I was told that I could go anywhere I wanted but don't be found where you shouldn't be. And one of my military attachés, unknowingly or perhaps intentionally, because they took directions directly from our Defense Department, were found in a restricted area and were on the next airplane out of the company. My first week on the job didn't help our credibility. One of the difficulties that I've encountered was trying to do my diplomatic job whilst being urged, I could use stronger language by our national defense to report our military activities. After all I'd be back in uniform in no time. They didn't seem to accept that I was not doing a military job, and one of the requests was to try and find out where the U.S. prisoners of war were being held, and I had a partial list of the stockades. The military gene in Ottawa was constantly pressing my military attachés to try and locate these institutions. The one most often cited was the Ho Lao, which was build by the French a long time ago in central Hanoi, or as you would know it, the Hanoi Hilton. I never did stumble upon any of them. Armed guards were positioned on the streets leading to any restricted area, and that was enough reason for me to about turn and to walk away.

Here is a list of the camps if you will in and around Hanoi. It does not include the Hilton because I'm going to show you some pictures of it. You have a candidate for president who was a guest, if might to use that terminology loosely, at the Hanoi Hilton. That's what the Hanoi Hilton looked like in my timeframe, 1967-68, and here it is today.

For my exit story, I'm going to fast forward from 1968 to 1973. And I want to do so because my limited hardships in Hanoi pale by comparison to the U.S. prisoners of war incarcerated in the North, and I want to give them their due and on center stage. By singling out fliers, it does not in any way suggest that their sufferings were any more severe than other service members -- come in -- that their sufferings were any more severe than other service members who had similar fates, nor am I implying that their heroics are in the same category of those who paid the supreme sacrifice, but it's my belief they were pretty close to it. Let me set the stage. Those who frequent this institution will know that this isn't all new. On February 12, 1973, the world's attention was riveted on Gia Lam Airport in Hanoi. The war was over and the long-awaited start of Operation Homecoming was about to begin. The U.S. Air Force C-141 Starlifter, tail number 66-0177, landed and the first prisoners of war waited patiently. Here they are getting off the bus, the first group. They didn't want to show any emotion to their captors, and here you'll see them waiting in the rain to board the aircraft at Gia Lam. And there they are on board the aircraft. So they waited in silence until the wheels left the runway, then a resounding cheer went up from all on board. You can just imagine how pleased they were. We now have the aircraft about to depart and then we'll show it to you in the air. Dubbed the Hanoi Taxi, the Starlifter continued to serve as part of 445 Airlift Wing here on this field until 6th of May in 2006, and you're all familiar with the handover of that aircraft to this museum.

You've been a patient audience, my sincere thanks. It really was a pleasure and a privilege to speak to you this evening.