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Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Secret and Dangerous: Son Tay Raider Pilot Looks Back

Son Tay Raider pilot Maj. (Ret.) William A. Guenon Jr. explains how he flew “low and slow” in the lead C-130, operating in radio silence, as he led the unlikely formation of six rescue helicopters carrying 56 Green Berets to the Son Tay Prison, while avoiding surface-to-air missiles, MiG and anti-aircraft artillery threats around Hanoi.

Good evening. Great to be here tonight, and I got to say at this age it's great to be anywhere, and on this side of the grass. Just to enhance quickly, it's going to be question and answer tonight just not you are going to be sitting and watching what's going on up here. How many have heard of the Son Tay Raid? Oh good. So if I do this right tonight the rest of you didn't raised your hands will put them up, but also the ones that raised your hands, you're going to find out kind of the rest of the Son Tay Raid story. I assume here by the gray hairs, we got a lot of Vietnam vets, air crew, any POWs? Okay. So I will have to field those questions.

What I plan to do tonight is little magic. I'm going to take this group back to the year 1970, it was the height of the Vietnam War. We had about 300 POWs, you know, captured downed, Nixon was our president, Melvin Laird was Secretary of Defense, and we were starting to lose POWs in prison, and he wanted to do something about, you know, getting them out or doing something because they really felt that they were forgotten when in fact they weren't. They were working all kinds of ways to do it, but they decided we got to get very physical on this, and go in and try to get some POWs out.

Now as I go along tonight, I -- at the bottom is the big bullet there in terms of anything I say or it generates a question, please stop me at that point, you won't have to remember it to the end of the presentation, ask me now because now I'm talking about what you want to hear. It looks like a lot of you've about the raid, so I'm sure you have some good question and what I find when you generate that first question, it kicks off, and now we are really rolling and now I'm talking about what you want to hear, and that works very well. Now in order to keep both of us awake we're going to have a short quiz at the end of the presentation. It's a one question and it's graded to 100%, so the average won't be hurt, all right? So I mean that on bottom, ask questions as we go through this.

Any good operation you're going to have some official, unofficial patches, and the military guys know what that means -- it was never approved by the service. The one there on the left that's basically Son Tay Raider patch, gives you the date 21 November when it took place, 2.30 in the morning, pretty much graphically describes what we did in terms of coming into the prison with an H-3 assault landing in there. I'll describe it further, but that was pretty much the way it happened, and then of course we left and

went back. The prison of Son Tay located about 20 miles due west of Hanoi, that was a thrilling thing.

Now the other one here, the Mushroom Patch ... our crew which was Cherry 1, the lead C-130 we only took two birds out of the States to go over to Thailand where we staged out for the actual raid, we trained down in Florida -- Eglin, Florida. And so our handlers, I'll call them that, in order to provide for our safety and there was no mission compromise, would never tell us where we were going until they had to tell us so we could go there, we understand that game. So everything was classified, top secret, nothing, hardly anything, was written down if it was, it was put away in the lock safe, you've played that game before I'm sure some of you. And so they kept all the different crews kind of isolated, the air force crews were coming from Eglin, we're trying to figure out what was going on, what was this thing about, we were the crew from Germany came in, we had another crew from Pope, they were here. And then the helicopters they were down here in -- they were down in Florida, and the plan was we'd pick up all the other airplanes over in country, being Thailand. So we are figuring out we knew what were we doing in terms of flying low level and that sort of thing, didn't know where we were going.

The Air Force crews figured out, because of the intel from the New York Times, this is about the time that the Russians were bringing their submarines down to Cuba, with the missiles. So when you flew over the ranges of Eglin and looking out the back end of a 130, we had the prison mock-up laid out there in the scrub pines of Florida. Going over at night, it looks like submarine pins, because we'd seen the same kind of picture in the New York Times.

On the other hand, the 56 Green Berets that went on the mission, they knew they were going to be dealing with people, and so even back then -- this is the '60s and '70s, embassies were being overrun and hostages taken, so they were convinced we were going to the Middle East.

What we never figured out or put together the dots or connected the dots, all of us had one, two and sometimes three towards up duty in Vietnam, and most of us had a lot of that duty up in North Vietnam. Had we connected that sooner we probably would have figured it out earlier, thank goodness and we are back, we are here today because the comprise did not happen, it worked. So we felt the treatment, you all know how they raise mushrooms. Some of you do. Oops excuse me. On the bottom KITD, Kept In the Dark -- mushrooms, right, that was us. And the other one FDHS, Fed on Horse Stuffing Sugar whatever you want you want to use for the S word, and they did that and they had us believing we're going to every other part of the world except Southeast Asia, so that's our patch.

All right, that's the target. That is Son Tay. That's a model of Son Tay. It just so happens that picture was taken, it's out in an exhibit here in museum, her code name was Barbara, and we all trained on, both the air crews and the Green Berets. This was about - I don't how to figure this out yet, this was about the run in heading we used the night at

the Raid, and that was taken with the flash camera, that's about what it looked like when we overhead to make the turn around. We dropped four parachute flares and that's about what it looked like that night, and the reason we had the four parachute flares was to light that whole area up because one H-3 "Jolly Green" landed right in this area with 14 Green Berets on board. You had a control -- not a control but a guard tower here, over here, and there was a main gate here, the only gate into the prison, and there was a big tower on top of it. Prisoners were held in these three buildings. This was a -- they called it a library, but actually interrogation took place there and propaganda was heavily flowing in that building, and this was one of the guard's quarters here from inside the prison.

The other two H-53s with the other 56 Green Berets, 20 and 22, they landed just south of this wall here out in the rice paddies to put out the two teams of Green Berets to do the security around perimeter of the prison. And there were lot of buildings around ... you can see some of them down this area that they had to get under control. So that gives you an idea what happened, this was made you noticed I used the agency, I can't tell you what it was but I can use the initial CIA. They built this. Did I give it away? Okay. Now this is down in Florida, and this is what the Son Tay prison -- you remember the last slide what it looked like -- this is what they practiced on or trained on. They were primarily two-by-fours stuck in the ground, then you got the like linen sheets or canvas around. This is the wall -- this is the main gate here, and then they had all the building for the prisoners, we're laid out there exactly to dimension from that model we had. And what was interesting about this, even back then we had Russian satellites coming over U. S. soil, so twice a day we knew there was a Russian satellite coming over Eglin. In the day time, they had to take this all down smooth it out over to make sure you couldn't, you know, pick it up as a image there from the satellites, nothing to give away that something was up as far as what the Americans were going to do. Worked well, I think. And we trained after about the first week everything we did to the next four months was at night just like where we're going to do the real mission, 2.30 in the morning.

Now this is a quick summary of the basic airplanes that participated in the raid. There was a total of a 116. I may have left out two or three, but around the 116 aircraft. We had two 130s. They were the E model and that was the ones now they call the Combat Talons, if you follow that type of thing. That's what they were. I'll describe more what they were equipped with later on. We had the five 53s. We now just, I say we, the museum now has just acquired the first Apple 1, the only one remaining from the raid, it's out in the -- out in the museum, and that was used to carry the Green Berets and also was going to used in to carry the prisoners out, we had three empties.

H-3, Banana 1, that's the one that did the assault landing inside the compound. For close air support, we had A-1Es, and they were Peach 1 -- one through five. You notice these call signs -- Peach, Banana, Apple, Cherry 1, Cherry 2. We had the refueling 130s for the helicopters and their call signs were Lime 1 and Lime 2. We kind of described that as a fruit salad with a punch, very lethal punch. So the rest of this, you'll see later on, the Navy played a big part in our raid. They were one of the big diversions, so you can see the different ones in Navy. They came off the three carriers that was always stationed, Yankee Station out in the Gulf of Tonkin. And then we had various ... we had five

Thuds, 105s. We had then 10 F-4s and they took up orbit right over pretty close to Hanoi for MiG cover if they came up. And then we had various 135s, some refuelers, some intel, some gallery, as I say the total it was about 116, so it was a -- and real busy night for something you want to be very stealthy, quite, surprise and deceptive. And keep in mind, if you remember back during those times, we had a stand own on bombing North Vietnam for about two years. Johnson started that. He didn't want to be known as the president that was going to start World War III, and so that's why he was picking all the targets back in Washington.

So that's what I call the Chariot of Armageddon. That was the lead 130 special ops Combat Talon today, and it carried a lot of stuff on board. I'll explain some of it here. Notice that it was a black, even the propellers were black, black and green, that was the jungle camouflage, and you put that in the night scene and that plane disappears. We tried to make sure if it was coming towards you, if you could hear it, and with the turbo props on 130, that sound comes down and goes behind the 130. So by the time you on the ground hear that plane, it is already too late when you think about it. It's already happened.

Now the nose at a terrain following radar, so that allowed us to get down to about 300 feet when we're leading and especially the last 20 miles into Hanoi, because what was going on there is we were trying to stay down low, below the radar, and anybody else that was looking at this. So you're down in there, we were the lowest one and then the helicopters were stacked up, three on each side of the wing above us.

Now this is the time before GPS. So instead of one navigator or two navigators, we carried three. Navigation by committee, and guess what, it worked, and the reason it worked, each one had its own job. We had a regulator nav, kept the logs, that sort of thing, the timing for the drops, get the lights on. Second nav is a radar nav. We had about three different kinds of radar on board. And the third nav was just a plain old nav map reader, and then the pilots when we weren't busy, we were looking out, checking things that were coming in. But that really worked fine, and the reason, these are normally external fuel tanks, well that night of the raid this guy was dry and it had a FLIR, Forward Looking Infrared Radar. So that gave you a little picture, it looks like a TV, black and white TV, and it's doing heat comparison with cold and warm sources on the ground. So that was good for hitting all the checkpoints right overhead because if you can see where that thing is lined and you put it right under the bird, you're going to go right over the checkpoint. Checkpoints you were okay, if you were close, as long as you knew where you were. But the final checkpoint was Son Tay. We had the fly right over that diagonal and we did. We put the FLIRs right on target.

Okay, some of you may have noticed, you see the whiskers on that 130. That's the Fulton sky hook recovery system. Now if you remember back the Thunderball, I think the second or third James Bond movie, in the very last scene they had a B-17 rigged with this. Bond was in the life raft -- never came across, made the intercept, pulled him in. I was watching at the movie, and I said to the person there, you know, this James Bond thing is going too far that's impossible, especially with B-17 and this jerry-rigged

whiskers out there in the front. About three months later, I'm making intercepts with a 130. So I believe in James Bond now, by the way.

So anyway we had this ... the two 130s were equipped with this, and we could do a night recovery. They had strobe lights on the lift line. Lift line was about 500 feet, held up there with a helium filled balloon, and you could pick up men or equipment there, you could pick up two man pick up. And we had that just in case, if whatever we had battle casualties, guys had to bail out, this and that, we could pick up some of them if the helicopters were busy doing other things.

All right. What you don't see on here, around the skin there are a lot of sensors, we had a EWO on board, Electronic Warfare Officer. And he is much like your radar detector in your car. He can pick up all the radars that are looking at you at night, tell you what they are and tell you the which ones are a threat or which ones are long-range radar, ATC radar or MiG radar is painting you, that's not a good thing, or the SAM's with their radar, you can tell that. And then he had a whole bag full of electronic wizardry that he could deal with these different radars. So that was good, that was our defense. That was how we could get around this stuff. All right. Any questions on this? Good.

Now, the six helicopters we had to refuel en route, and this is the way you do it, you know, very carefully. But you noticed, he's got his flaps down, so he was probably going about 120 knots in this picture. This is an H-3, much the same as the one that did the assault landing inside the compound. Notice where his rotors are and that's the fuel line coming in for him to take on fuel. They could do two at a time. Here is the other one on the right hand side. The only problem they said with this, some of the guys that weren't that adapt, is if they would dip the nose forward, those rotors come down and slice that fuel line, you get a windscreen full of fuel. But we did this at night, six helicopters, lights out, radio silence, and it worked.

And I said lights out. There is one exception on 130s. If you don't know 130s, on the wing tops they had three each sets of, they called them formation lights. They were flat and they shown directly up, and they were kind of a blue and it was strictly for what they called for formations. So when they were stacked up, they got something to look at and follow you along, you can't see it from the ground but the guy is flying. Well these also have a rheostat. So once we got flying with crews that we're going to fly with this, we started cranking the rheostat down. So as those lights start to dim, guess what? Those helicopters getting real close to you. So you've heard that expression holding hands very closely. Turns out that was good, because as we were actually went on the mission going up over layouts over the North Vietnam, we did go through some clouds and some heavy stuff and they were all in there tight and that's something. Once we got into North Vietnam, the last thing we want to do is do a helicopter rejoin, six helicopters trying to catch up to the 130. We had a procedure to do that if it happened but we didn't want to do it if we could prevent it, and of course we did. It worked out fine and they learned from that.

Now this is an overhead. The very first picture is out also here in the museum. It was done by a local museum artist, done very good, it was from the ground up, this is from above. And you can see these are the 53s, that's H-3 -- you can see it's a little smaller -- and he's in there pretty close. Now what you don't see here is the air speed. We were going at a 105 knots. The 130 lands at 125 to 130, now is that magic or what, it's a bunch of dumb air crew, right? We figured out -- you put down 70% flaps and at that point you got all lift and no drag, and that kept us airborne at 105 knots, our true stall-speed was 100, that's when you hit the stall-speed, you fall out of the sky, you stop flying. The reason we were going that slowly was the H-3, remember he's maxed out in fuel, he's got 14 combat laden Green Berets, we've got all the support equipment for the POWs. We had baby food, we didn't know what condition they were in for that, very, very open loose knickers, we had like jump suits for them to get into, so they had all that onboard, plus they had chainsaws, settling torches, ladders, axes, anything to get into a closed cell. So he was maxed out weight wise, but what we found out, as he got in the right position there, what was interesting, two things. We usually had the load master looking out the back and he'd tell us when that bird was in there, but guess what we already knew because not only could you hear the helicopter, but with those rotor blades close to the fuselage, it's very thin skin on the 130. Most planes, you could feel it when it was in the right position, and he was boom, boom, boom. So when you get that right sound and you could hear it, he was in the right position. But I also put him in the position ... you've heard of drafting with race cars, right? You get in behind somebody, he's taken all your resistance in front of you. That also worked for him. So once he got in there, our wing was kind of the resistance that he didn't have to fight, so he picked up, we figured about 10 extra knots, so he actually had a little more play with. So he was in there tight and he enough controllability to maintain that position throughout, it's about three hours low level like that. And of course, with the big bird, if you ever heard the word, the description a burble. A plane about to stall is on a burble and you feel it before the lift breaks off. That 130 was on the burble, that's a big burble, it's a boom, boom, boom. But you get used to it. We had four months on that flying.

All right, you kind of wonder where did you get this picture? And what happened, our final dress rehearsal down in Florida, our handlers from Washington came down to see if we could actually pull it off. And after it was done, any good, you know, dress rehearsal we have even a bigger debrief. And one of the things they said, you know, we're going back to Washington and because of all of the classification, we don't have anything written up on what's going on here. If you guys don't come back, we can't prove that you ever existed. Go out tomorrow, go fly and we'll take pictures, and we thought it was a joke and they were serious. And they were worried about going back and dealing with the Washington crowd, different you know, different area up there. What we just described -- Washington is a four sided city surrounded on the outside by reality. Think of that.

Okay. Cherry 2, the second 130, it gives you an idea what the paint scheme's about. These were A-1Es, and we had five and they were for close air support. Somebody always says there is only four in the picture; number five took that picture. And A-1E, if you don't know much about it, it was the old SPAD or the Sandy, very good bird, it could

loiter up in the area for you know eight hours and not have to refuel, so we didn't have to refuel these guys. They were good for close air support, get down in the weeds, you know, they shoot, they bomb and everything. And worked very well, they were good, they were replaced by the A-10.

Now this is the tail-end of an A-1E, and you can see the armaments on the wing where they can – they connected everything there, all the machine guns, bombs, rockets, white fosters they really paid. And we used to say that they would drop everything but the kitchen sink. Well, we learned later on some guy was in this audience, he says just a minute, we actually dropped a commode and a kitchen sink. And apparently, it's true because they said, we got from one of the carriers out there in the Gulf of Tonkin, and they had to put two on because of the balance situation and they went in and they dropped two, and I wonder to this day if there some Vietnamese on the ground that wonder what they were being bombed with. Makes a good story.

Now if you forgotten that area of the world, here's a little geography. The black area there is North Vietnam, and you can see, we were down here in Tahkli. Our route -- a lot of the planes came out of Nakhon Phanom, the helicopters and A-1Es, we were the 130s, we kind of met up over here and rejoined. This is the area where they refueled the six helicopters, and when that was all done, they were riding on the leading tanker in formation. We came in underneath, remember we had to slow down, and got right under right at the right position, did a double click on the radio and the 130, the refueler then just kind of pulled up and away, and that left the helicopters looking down at us with those formation lights. So that was best because all they had to do was kind of tip over their nose. It was like coming down over a hill. They didn't have to use that much power, and they made a very nice smooth transition rejoin. So then we were holding hands and we proceeded up north. If you remember the geography in that area, this whole area was a whole line of 6 to 8,000 foot mountains. So going through here, we were down in the valley, so nobody was going to paint anything with radars and turned out it was true. When you're riding up there, usually any other mission we were up north, you had a constant chatter with the EWO because he is picking up something's over at 2 o'clock, there's something over here at 11 o'clock, we got something off the nose. This mission that night, it was all quiet. So I thought well, he's either fallen asleep or his headset is broken. So I asked him, "How're we doing?" Well, he said, "It's clear, nothing is going on." Couldn't believe it. So that part was working.

For the folks here, remember the Ho Chi Minh trail? Notice it's coming out of North Vietnam and then coming back through Laos and Cambodia refeeding into South Vietnam to keep the war going. Are there any vets, I didn't -- did I ask that? Quick summary on the Vietnam War. It's when two superpowers decided to go to a war against each other in somebody else's country. Think about it.

So again I was doing this presentation and I met a naval officer again. I'm getting followed by naval officers. But anyway, they told me that there was also a water Ho Chi Minh Trail, and what they were doing -- Haiphong is their harbor, they were taking the old Chinese junks and loading them up and then they'd sail down here and then resupply

South Vietnam. So I said what were you in? I was thinking a destroyer or something, but he said, "We were in a submarine." I'd never heard of that, right? I said, "What were you doing there?" I still couldn't put it together. He said what they were doing is they would challenge these junks. They'd see them coming south, they were really low in the water, heavily laden. They would challenge them, of course, the junks kept going on like nothing is going to happen. These junks would get down just at the surface of the water and apparently on the bow of a submarine is a cable cutter -- which makes you think there's a pretty scary mission right there in itself -- but anyway, they have a cable cutter, so that means they must be cutting cables somewhere, and they would take that and they would ram the side of that junk and it would -- they said it broke open -- wooden, right -- it broke open like an eggshell and just, you know, dumped everything down. So he was saying ... I said "Well, how long were doing this? The last three years?" So you are right down here -- get down here, he said is all kinds of treasures down there, just truly amazing, I thought. So he said if you're into scuba ...

Okay, remember I said, you know, stealth, surprise and diversion. Our good friends in the Navy always had three carriers out here and about 15 minutes before we crossed right in this area, they launched about 70 fighters up and down the North Vietnamese coast, northeast of Hanoi and they were at 10, 20 and 30,000 feet, and they were up there for one thing, to be seen. So guess what? They were seen, they were seen big time. So all of the defense radars, especially around Hanoi -- Hanoi that time was probably the most heavily defended city in the world when you think about it, and all Russian stuff, you know, SAMs, AAA, all radar-controlled, it was a tough area out there. So they're going up and down and all these defense radars were locking on these guys. We heard later that the wheels in downtown Hanoi saw all this and they jumped to the conclusion, this is a invasion because they always expect it, remember we could have done it, couple battalions of Marines start down at South Vietnam and march up to the Chinese border and it would have been over, but we just, we didn't do it. We were afraid that what Russia and China would think about it. So we were kind of hands off on that. So the Vietnamese ... some of them we understand booked out of there and went up to China. They don't want to be in town if we had the invasion because it would have been quick. Others we heard went out to the local airport, Noi Bai, rushed takeoff and crashed on takeoff. So we did some damage that night we didn't even know about till much later on.

So this is all going on, it worked very well, EWO was quiet, he didn't anything, any activity out there, but always looking someplace else. Again we felt, well, maybe, there wasn't a compromise, this thing is going to work.

Now this is the last probably five miles into Son Tay, which is right here. This was our run-in heading, 073. Right about here, we had to leave the helicopters on their own, the last three and a half miles, so we gave them a final heading, 073, and then hack -- the word hack -- we put the power into the 130, got away from the burble, got the flaps up to 50, we were now again a stabilized airplane, we climbed up to 1,500 feet and proceeded on inbound to Son Tay. We got right overhead Son Tay, we dropped the four parachute flares to light up the area so the helicopters could land. They were about two minutes behind us. We did our right descending turn down to about here -- you see this simulator

-- we had boxes full of firecrackers, very simple, dropped those out, they started going off, and what we were trying to make happen was that, we knew there were a lot of barracks in the Hanoi, Son Tay area, with troops, and that's where they were going down on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to get down to the South Vietnam. So we didn't want to have them coming up to Son Tay and interrupting our party that was going on there. So these things are going off and so those barracks apparently unloaded and went down to this battle that never was, and we heard later on they went back out to see because they were convinced that there was a battle there, and they said all they found was just confetti from these expended fireworks. That worked nice.

Then out here where it says bomb marker. We dropped, probably the first time, two napalm bombs, and it wasn't for an offensive purpose, it was to allow -- they would come out of the 130, chute opened up, the napalm would get into the vertical go down pool and then ignite and that would burn for about 45 minutes and that was for those A-1Es to have an orbit point as they're waiting to be called in for close air support, very simple and it worked well.

So at that point, then we depart, you can see this course back out here, and then we hopped into this, about a 6,000 foot orbit. And we turned in a kind of a radio relay ship. We could talk to the Green Berets on the ground. We could talk back, if you remember Vietnam, they had a Monkey Mountain, which is just outside of Da Nang, that was a big communication center and then they could talk back to Washington. So it was pretty real time, when you're considering era then of what was going on all way back to Washington. And then of course after was all over and done with, we're up there with our ADF, we transmit and the birds there, that were coming back out with their ADF, their needles would point us, so they had a way to come back out and then go back south into Thailand.

Now these are the three orbits I talked about earlier. Five F-4s, five F-4s, and then we had five 105s right over, pretty close overhead Hanoi. And for the North Vietnamese, and of course their Russian advisors, that was a big MiG trap and so the night of the raid, they did not launch any MiGs, good for us. And later on, we had this all recorded, you could hear the Vietnamese pilots in their airplanes, out on the runway begging to be released because everything was controlled over there by the ground. They would not release them because they -- because with what was going out over the Gulf of Tonkin, they were sure there was an invasion and they were trying to save their MiGs for -- when they really needed it, so that was one last threat to deal with there.

Now that napalm, this is an old T-Bird, you got him here in the museum, but what I wanted to point out, this is the tip tank, that's about 13 feet. You can see the pilot's helmet there. It gives you an idea of relative size -- we had two of those that we dropped out that night for the markers for the A-1Es. Now this is the U.S. real estate, Son Tay, right up here, our run-in headings are about here. We did the right descending turn, we dropped off the firefight simulators in this area and of course the napalm is further out here to the west.

But the question usually comes up, there were 10 outlying prison camps in North Vietnam, and the question is why did you choose Son Tay? Well, the reason is if you notice, here's a branch of the Red River -- had a bridge up here, bridge down here. I believe the A-1Es knock this one out, and the Green Berets knock this one out, that suddenly turned this area into an island, because I got to swim across. So and it worked. And so basically, what was going here at just about half an hour, we owned that whole piece of real estate that night. They didn't know what was going on, of course everything and something else is coming out of the ocean, so they really had no idea that we even cared about our POWs. Remember they always felt they were forgotten, but the Vietnamese thought that too, they really believed it. So that's what was going on there.

This just gives you a quick idea, again the color scheme of the 130s then, and if you going to -- if you have a good imagination, there is a ramp in a door here that backend of the 130 opens up, it's like the backend of the Holland Tunnel, it's just hollow all the way back and that's where all the napalm, the firefight simulators and the parachute flares went out. As again I say, it's just gives you an idea of where that went out to go down.

Now this is Son Tay, as I said, the three houses there, these were named by the POWs: the Beer Hall, Opium Den and the Cathouse. The reason they named them this way is they could remember -- it's kind of like you've been up all night, you're weak, malnourished, you remember these simple names, and to this day if you meet a POW and he'll say -- he won't even say he was at Son Tay, he was at the Camp Hope, not Son Tay, and then you'll say "Where were you?" And he'll come right back, "I was in Beer Hall number six or Cathouse number eight." They knew every cell. So when you think about it, they had 24 hours. They really kept close track on everybody on either side who was in the prison. So when they finally released them, they knew who was around and as they moved the prisoners around the different prisons, they knew from the last where they were going, who was there and who was accountable for, good system.

Now as you can see where H-3 did the landing in here, that's where they let off the 14 Green Berets.

The first, before that H-3 did the landing, it was preceded by one of the MH-53s, three Gatling guns. So he kind of floated across just in front of the H-3 and you've heard the expression, neutralize the two guard towers. Well, the one guard tower, the one on the south, was so neutralized, it kind of fell in on itself and caught fire, a lot of the bamboo. And then he just kind of hovered on over here, while the H-3 did the assault landing. So that pretty well took care of a lot of things going on there.

Now this is the point where I kind of make the hook in the story and the twist or the dramatic turn, and most of you, if you didn't have your hand up on the Son Tay Raid ... H-3 makes the assault landing, first guy out, he's got a bullhorn. He says, "We are Americans. We are here to save you. Keep your head down. We'll be in your cell in just a little bit." Hear how quiet it is right now? That's how quiet it was in that prison that night. He had a sinking feeling. He was expecting either cheering or applauding or "Come on in and get us" or "Get me, I am over here." It was quiet. This is the raid, 116

aircraft, four months, got in there, nobody home. They had moved the prisoners about the time we had started putting the raid together.

They moved them about six miles up the road, some of those guys actually heard what was going on down in Son Tay. They had a good sense of direction, they said that's over by Son Tay, I think we just missed our ride home, but they were happy because they hadn't been forgotten, this was proof-in-the-pudding. We had come in there to get them. So this is the one, if you didn't hear about it, this is the one that's the way it happened.

So what to do now? They looked through all the prisons, all the buildings inside here, nothing, no prisoners. So now they had a dilemma because they knew also in the outside, there were quite a few other houses around. So they -- before they left in that 29 minutes, went around and searched each building just to make sure there wasn't one American left somewhere for some reason. That was a big, big fear.

Now this is a painting I found somewhere, I don't know even who the artist was, but this is what it looked like. This is one of the -- this was Apple 2 that landed just on the outside, it's outside of the prison offloading its Green Berets, and those are our flares and that's about what it look like that night they tell me. Boom, out of the night, flares opens up and they are very bright, you know, a million candlepower, that really lights the night up.

While this is going on, the H-3 is doing the assault landing inside. This is a painting and you can see the gentlemen over here with the bullhorn. And when you go to reunions and you have some of the Green Berets there, they are talking names, here I am, or there you are and then they will say, well, you know, actually you were little closer here and this guy was over here a little further, they know exactly to the step where everybody had to be and they always -- it's a team effort, they are covering each other backside as they go around. But that's it, that's the Cathouse over there, Opium Den and the Beer Hall.

And notice quarter moon. That was one of the requirements we had to go in there, had a quarter moon and it was about 30 degrees off the horizon, and we felt that was just enough that we could see once you got your night vision acquired but yet not be seen. So that worked out. So that gave us basically one window each month to have all these conditions just right and to have the weather on your side.

Now this is a new stuff I got, great stuff I think. This is from the North Vietnamese archives. The last guy out of the prison that night, we had SATO charges on the H-3, they blew up the H-3. So this is what the North Vietnamese found the next morning. That's the H-3, what's left of it. You can see the rotor, the tail rotor blades here. These are puzzled Vietnamese because keep in mind, they always knew that prison was empty. So you got to think in their mind, what were the Americans doing? Coming here to an empty prison and raising all this problem and trouble? Think about it. We never heard the answer, not one yet, that's still out. This is one of the pictures they took. Then this is the same, looking the other way. That's the Cathouse over here, there's that guard building and the main gate over here and you can see some of the Vietnamese over here

in the shadows looking at all this. I always felt when we left, the last guy out should have taken a good American flag on a mast and just stick it right in the middle of the compound, but somebody else said, this is pretty good statement too.

Now remember that bullhorn? There it is because at that point, you know, it was over, they just left the stuff and went out and got in the empty helicopters to go back to Thailand. I remember that air crew of three that brought the H-3 in to make the assault landing. As soon as that landed, they turned into soldiers, right? Their flying was done. So there's their three helmets, also you can see here some grenades and I don't know what these were exactly, some kind of rocket launchers. This was all left behind after we realized the place was empty. They took a picture of this, kind of organized it a little bit. So that was good again because they are trying to figure out what was going on here.

Now this is an after-action from a SR-71. It's about a day after the raid. This is Son Tay Raid here, Cathouse and the two Opium Den and the Beer Hall, and it shows all the damage from what we had done that night, burned out roof damage over here. Now what I like about this, I don't know if you can see, this one you can, one of the H-53s landed here, so you can see all that rice paddy pushed down from their footprints going in and coming back out. I was down in the Florida doing this presentation. When I showed this, guy in the second row jumped up and said, "I took that picture," and I said "What?" He said, "Yeah, I'm an SR-71 driver. I took that picture. I got that picture at home in my, you know, the 'I love me wall' where you put all your trophies." He has one of these, so that was a good reunion there connecting the dots. So you can see all these outside buildings outside the prison that these guys had to check just to make sure there weren't Americans here. So this is another one of those good pictures. This picture came from a Flea Market in Connecticut. It was, you know they have boxes of just pictures you go through, this one is there for a dollar. And I got another one that shows -- it was a before action just before we did the raid that we are using to figure out what was going on in prison, same flea market. Back at the time, it would have been a top secret rating.

Okay, this is what happened after is all said and done. I went back to Son Tay in 1994, so the pictures you see here are the pictures that I took. And this was the Beer Hall and the Opium Den. This is right near area where the helicopter landed, the H-3, and this is the isolation confinement. I've got a better picture of it. This was, as I said, 1994. This is that same building you saw with the shed and the door here. It's about size of a telephone booth. Notice, there's no ventilation. So our prisoners were put in there for punishment right? The three big ones. You didn't bow deep enough to their guards. Now that's a setup right away, right? What's deep enough? The other one was you didn't salute their officers properly, but the real biggie was getting caught communicating. And they would give you out punishment anywhere from a week to a couple of months. They actually, the prisoners named this "The Tank" because they got in there in the summer and it's 105, 110 degrees with the humidity to match that. It was really hot. But our guys always -- even one of your prisoner, you're still trying to out-psych the enemy and resist and they make him feel like this was a great thing to do going in the tank and so they were doing that.

When I was there, you see this little pan, there was a three-legged pig running around and I figured that's where they were feeding him from. I had an interpreter with me and I asked him "What do you think happened to the pig?" And he said, "Oh you know up here Vietnam, we have a lot of poisonous snake." Snake got hit on him, lost his leg. And this is where the American humor kicked in. I said, "No, you don't understand. That's one of those pigs that was so good, they didn't want to eat him all at one time." He laughed too.

So you remember the communication? How many know or heard about the tap code? Wow. Well, that's it. The letter missing is K. So that makes it 25, 5 and 5, all the way around, that works very well. It's kind of a phonetic alphabet. C was used for K, and let's say you wanted to say "hi," what they would do, first of all, they do the "tap, tap, tap, tap, tap" and when a guy on the other wall was ready to receive, he'll come back with the two beats, "tap, tap." So the next thing he would hear would be two taps down, that got you down on this row, and there would be a quick "tap, tap, tap" for the H and then "tap, tap, tap" for the I. That was "hi." And everything was abbreviated so they could go pretty fast and use the tin cup that was muffled, and they got very good at this, and that's what they heard most of the times. And sometimes the guards would hear that and if they were being coy, they would not make trouble right away. They'd listen to it and I understand some of the guards thought it was Morse Code. So they're trying to figure out Morse Code with this tap code. They tell me, the POWs -- the ones that were really good, just as you're looking at that now as the way they could visualize it on the wall and shows the guy across the call tapping to you. You are going down with him and hitting the letters as he is hitting letters. So it comes back through very quickly. One thing they did was church call once a week and that was basically the CC. So you'd hear a tap and you'd hear a three taps and then three more taps, that was CC. So that's basically how it works.

Now when a helicopter sat down, it did actually in fact prune this one tree. This was leftover. This is John Reynolds, a POW, went back in '98 and you can see what was leftover from that chopper coming down with its blades, it really trimmed this up. Looks like a telephone pole. Just now, it was starting -- this was in '98 -- it was just starting to grow back.

So this was that house I called the library. It was actually a propaganda den, and they would take the prisoners in there and they'd give them little bits of news that they thought was censored, but it was enough that our guys could figure out what's going on the world. Remember you're isolated and of course, they were trying to convince them that communism is good and capitalism is not good, and our guys just really rolled them over on that. They had a ball in there.

What I really want to show you is the only standing wall when I was there was the North Wall. It's basically bricks with the flying buttress and then in Southeast Asia, they put broken glass up on top to discourage you from putting your arm over to try to crawl out, and I think that worked.

This was the Cathouse, and it's starting to come apart there, but I don't know if you can see, there is a pretty good one there, the iron doors -- they are still in there when I was there in '94 -- all the way across. They tell me now today after 2003, a lot of the POWs started to go back and other soldiers to see it, and I think they got tired of it, I think they were embarrassed a little bit about it, so they recycled everything and all you have now is just some platform where those buildings once stood.

Now this is the commandant's residence. This is where the POWs were processed in and out. About the time I took this picture, I noticed these folks coming through in green uniforms. I thought they were army. Turns out they were police and what had happened after the raid, the government had given the police the Son Tay, the village, the prison, and they used it for family housing. Nothing too good for them that way, right? So I'm there and they're getting excited about my camera. They were pointing at it and shaking their fingers. So I said, "This isn't good." So I stopped taking pictures, put the camera back in the car, figuring everything would freeze over. About that time, my interpreter came up, he said, "We're arrested. We have to go down in the city and see the chief of police." So I said, "Really?" So now I'm starting to think, "Okay, another prisoner situation," right? So they took us down into the biggest -- it's pretty good size police station for a small village -- two floors, two stories -- took us up in the second floor and there was a interrogation room up there. White-washed, rickety table -- just like you see at a Hollywood, it really did. And of course, the bare light bulb on the frayed cord, all of it. I said, "Oh, man, this is going to ...". So the police chief came in and really all he wanted to know, you know, peace had broken out over the country and what are we doing back there now? So I had a cover story because I could never admit what we had done there. We'd done some damage and I didn't expect forgiveness on their soil. So I said, "I knew a POW," which I did, and I promised him I'd go out and get a picture where he used to live. And so the family part of the Vietnamese accepted that and said "Hey, that's fine. Just remember what you are taking a picture out there is the police chief's house." I said, "Okay, I'll make sure when I get this developed" -- this was before digital -- "when I get this developed, I'll send him a picture." Well, I still owe him that picture. But I got to wondering why was he concerned that I was taking a picture of this place? Well, if you think about he's only 20 miles away from Hanoi, that's headquarters for everything. And I think he was living above his rank in life as a police chief, because this is really, it's a duplex, it's right down the middle, it's a mirror image both side, they have porch on the front and back and you can see it's well painted, well taken care of, that's where he lives. So still haven't figured that one out, but we got out of the country. We were worried we wouldn't get out, but we got out fine and they actually shook hands and said, you're welcome back anytime, just check in here with the police station first. Good enough.

Now the question, why did they move those prisoners? Some people said they knew you were coming, well, we wouldn't be here today if they knew we were coming, obviously. Plain and simple, you had 10 places you could choose to go in and do a raid. This particular prison ran out of drinking water. See this black spot down here. The early part of 1970, the prisoners knew that they were running out of drinkable water, potable water, and so they convinced the guards, they had a couple -- they had one hydrologist, one

geologist, they were POWs -- they convinced the guards, let us go out, the American POWs, and dig you a new well, and that's what you see here. They dug down about 30 feet, never struck water, so they moved them, plain and simple. Nobody knew we were coming. It just happened that way.

Now these are some of the enemy defenses we were up against and they were all from Russia, from Russia with love. This is the old SA-2, surface-to-air missile. It's two-stage, liquid-driven, these are the control veins, this is the engine and warhead up here, what gets you at night, and this is one we call the affectionately the flaming telephone pole. If you see that at night, that's about what it looks like. This is a same model that shot down shot down Gary Powers over Russia, just about -- he was up 60,000 feet, Mach 2 -- pretty good, pretty fast missile. So we -- the night at the raid, we kind of estimated they shot about 30 to 35, and none of them were radar-controlled. It was just like a beebie, trying to hit the metal flying through the area. They did come close. They came close proximity to a 105, and it put shrapnel through the wing enough that he was just running out of fuel quicker than he was burning it, tried to get back over Laos to hit a tanker and flamed out, so those two stepped over the side, and so empty helicopter's coming out were be able to pick them up. So we didn't get to use the Fulton sky hook recovery system.

All right, the MiG-21, another good one. This is just kind of a side note. Notice this out here on the wing, looks a lot like our Sidewinder. This is back in the '60s and '70s, is there a toll, it's identical to our Sidewinder. So industrial espionage was alive and well even then. I point to the nose here, that's 14 stars, you know what the stars represent, one American shot down for each star. What happened when you get five stars? Designated ace, and that by the way, all the countries in the world that have fighters, have agreed you shoot down five planes, you're designated an ace, except the North Vietnamese took it one step further. When their pilots reached acedom, then they got special orders declaring them a hero pilot. Now when I was up in Hanoi, when I went out there, I was trying to find that their office that was doing that, but they have since closed their office because none of their planes are flying, so I missed that opportunity.

Anyway all the MiGs up there. I think what you are looking at here is propaganda because we didn't have much trouble with the MiGs. It was the automated SAMs and the radar-controlled AAA, that's what really got us. But every one of them, and some as many as 20, and some say well a lot, you know, either you know, a lot of pilots flew it, and I don't believe that, I just believe this is propaganda, even down when there was an air force base south of Hanoi I went out to, and every one of their MiGs had a lot of stars on the nose. This is -- that was by the way that was in their peace garden in downtown Hanoi, that's where they have all there kind of collection of the things they've shot down through the years during the war, B-52 parts, Navy planes, Air Force planes.

This is AAA, just to give you an idea, that's the two there, and they get those set up. They're normally radar-controlled. This one is not, but this one was dangerous in that you see it's a mobile one, it's not fixed base, so you go in there one night and couple nights later, they could move those around very quickly, and where you think you have a

safe path to get through when you, as we used to say “tiptoeing through the tulips,” this guys would grab you.

Now this is the crew Cherry 1, and I always get a question, you know, which one is you. So if I knew I was going to live this long I’d be probably have taken better care of myself, right.

Now this is a little thing up in Boston, it’s a big gas storage thing. It’s about 70 feet high, and it’s -- it was at the time they did it, it was a white, you know, tank so they figured let’s just do something here, and so it’s the first commercial -- it’s the largest commercial painting in America as far as that they had, and if you noticed can anyone see Ho Chi Minh in the blue stripe, well I’ll help you and I really help you. Now eyebrows, eyelids, nose, pursed lips, scraggly beard, and that’s all the commuters going into Boston see that every morning, that’s the Ho Chi Minh Memorial Gas Tank. Now the lady who did this was a nun, Corita Kent, you can just about make out her name there. I never got to interview her because she must have had some baggage herself, she committed suicide in ‘72, so much for that one.

Now I do this just because the technology allows me to do this, I like this so much. Okay, now, quiz time, what’s the name of the city here? What do you say, oh, I didn’t talk about cities before, did I? But you can figure it out. When you have a lot of money, those are water towers that look like Christmas tree ornaments. Some people say, well that’s Baghdad, it’s not Baghdad ... Kuwait City. And what I am really showing you here, look at the 130 leading helicopters this was about five years ago. The true spirit, proud tradition of Son Tay Raid is alive and well today. They’re still using that for getting some of these guys in and around.

Now if you weren’t taking notes, I was and will them out here in the lobby. It’s about 70 pictures, and after 30 years I decided to put all these down because there is a lot of urban myth that goes up around. So this is our real story, we’re sticking to it because that’s the way it went down.