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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

WASHINGTON DC 20330-1000

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

June 26, 2023

SAF/AFDO (MDR)
The Jones Building, Room 3350
1500 West Perimeter Road
Joint-Base Andrews-NAF Washington, MD 20762

John Greenwald, Jr.

[REDACTED]
Dear Mr. Greenwald Jr.,

This is in response to your 28 September 2016 Mandatory Declassification Request for a document with IRIS number 00904204, pertaining to "U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview".

Attached is the document response to your MDR request. The Department of the Air Force reviewed the document and had no objection to declassification in full.

Address questions concerning this review to the undersigned at (240) 612-4940 and reference our case number 17-MDR-013.

Department of the Air Force
Mandatory Declassification Review Program

Attachments:

1. Your letter dated, 28 September 2016
2. Final Document

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This document is made available through the declassification efforts
and research of John Greenewald, Jr., creator of:

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by the Air Force Declassification Office
Date: June 2023 Reviewer #: 148

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**U. S. Air Force
Oral History Interview**

Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals

8239-0512-283

Maj Fred N. Thompson

REVIEW ON 31 Dec 1988

10 FEB 1982



Corona Harvest #0012127

ALBERT F. SIMPSON
HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER
Air University

~~AIR FORCE HISTORICAL CENTER~~
OFFICE OF AIR FORCE HISTORY
Headquarters USAF

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Group 3
Downgraded at 12 year
intervals; not
automatically declassified

00904204
3-7121-188
3-7121-187

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ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

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ACCESS GRANTED

DATE

REMARKS/PURPOSE

REVIEW ON 31 Dec 1988

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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

K239.0512-283

RETURN TO	K239.0512-283 00/04167 040468
AFTING MANWELL AFB AL 36112	

Interview

of

Maj Fred N. Thompson

by

Maj Samuel W. Riddleberger
Maj Richard E. Clement

Date 2 Jan 1970

Location _____

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FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by USAF historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS AIR UNIVERSITY
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA 36112



REPORT TO
ATTN OF SA

9 September 1976

SUBJECT Oral History

TO: AFSHRC/110

1. You have requested our opinion as to the US Government's (i.e., US Air Force) rights and interests in and to oral histories collected under AFR 55-15, Project CORONA HARVEST. Implied in your request is also the question of what rights and/or interests do project participants have in the products of their participation.
2. Those persons who acted as interviewers, technicians, and editors for collecting and transcribing the oral histories and were military members or government employees performing those functions as part of their duties have no rights to or interest in the material and/or products of the project. The primary legal basis for this opinion is 17 USC 26; AFR 110-8, paragraph 17; and Scherr v. Universal Match Corporation, CANV. 1969, 417 F. 2d 497. This is within the doctrine of "work for hire" which classifies the employer as "author" and not the employee.
3. Those persons who participated as interviewees likewise have no right to or interest in the products of the project except those specifically granted in AFR 55-15 and/or specifically granted by agreement prior to the interviews. These oral histories are analogous to "end of tour reports," or like reports, made by the interviewees about their military or government employment function and part of their official duties. We find the legal basis for this conclusion in 17 USC 8 and 26; AFR 55-15; and AFR 110-8, paragraph 17a.
4. It is noted in reviewing the Index, Project CORONA HARVEST Oral History/ape Interview Collection that certain of the items of the collection are not results of interviews but products of lectures, speeches, and nongovernmental media. Some examples of those products are items 213, 242, 255, and 264. This opinion does not purport to include those documents or like documents.
5. Access to the documents collected must be controlled in compliance with AFR 12-30, AFR 12-35, AFR 205 series, and access agreements with the interviewees. The preliminary access control, by necessity, must rest with you as custodians and ultimate approval or disapproval authority as prescribed by appropriate regulation and law.




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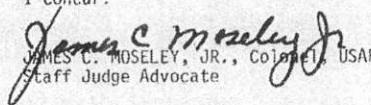
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6. It must be borne in mind that the government holds no property right in such materials but that government publications, documents, records, and files are generally considered to be within the "public domain" and not subject to copyright. Restriction upon their use is limited only by the Freedom of Information Act, 5 USC 552; the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 USC 552a, implementing DOD directives and USAF regulations, those restrictions applied to classified documents, and other common-law restraints.

7. This opinion concerns CORONA HARVEST oral histories but is applicable in general terms to other oral histories acquired within the meaning and terms of AFM 210-1 and AFR 210-3; however, case-by-case consideration may be necessary for those oral histories which were not developed within the same basic concept and parameters used for Project CORONA HARVEST.


WILLIAM M. MCKENNA, III, Major, USAF
Director, Civil Law Division

I concur.


JAMES C. MOSELEY, JR., Colonel, USAF
Staff Judge Advocate




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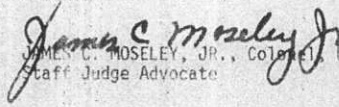
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ABSTRACT: CORONA HARVEST Oral History Interview #283

Interviewee: Major Fred N. Thompson

Position(s): 416th TFS (37th TFW), Bien Hoa AB (Phu Cat AB),
RVN, April 1967 - March 1968

POW, April - August 1968

Subjects Discussed:

1. Code of Conduct
 - a. Instruction
 - b. Use by enemy
2. Capture and incarceration
 - a. Apparent lack of enemy intelligence on captive
 - b. Apparent failure of enemy to use chemo-interrogation
 - c. Non-belligerent technique of captive
 - d. Colonel Robinson Risner
 - e. Indoctrination sessions
 - f. Enemy use of US communications media
 - g. Treatment of aircrews
 - h. Debriefing
3. 416th TFS/37th TFW
 - a. Operations
 - b. Targeting/ABCCC fragging
 - c. Khe Sanh
 - d. Ranch Hand escort missions
 - e. MSQ

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GROUP 3 - DOWNGRADE AT 12 YEAR
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Project CORONA HARVEST Oral History Interview #283
2 June 1970

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CORONA HARVEST Control #0012127

Taped interview of Major Fred N. Thompson by Major
Samuel E. Riddlebarger and Major Richard B. Clement
of the Project CORONA HARVEST Oral History Office

Riddlebarger: Fred, could you possibly give us what your opinion, estimation is of the Code of Conduct based on your experience? You've been back awhile now and so forth - do you see some changes needed in it?

Thompson: I don't see any changes needed in the Code itself. I think the Code is good. It was written pretty well. I liken it to our Constitution in that it was broad in scope. I think the biggest problem we have in the Code of Conduct is the way it's being taught.

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The press has been allowed to interpret it. The Air Force teaches it in an unclassified version, and then they back ground and teach it in a classified version. This has caused a lot of problems. The biggest one problem, of course, is Article V. That's the one everybody hurrahs about - the statement that you're bound to give name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. I quote from General [S.L.A.] Marshall's editorial during the Pueblo incident. That was put in there for a purpose. The reason that they wrote it in there in that way was because the Geneva Convention says you must give this to your captor. But you can see the semantics. You are bound only to give this. What they're really saying is this is the only thing you have to give them, not that that's the only thing you may give them. The second part is, of course, where it goes on to say evade answering other questions. Anything you tell the enemy we're taught, of course, we're

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individually held responsible for it. It's realized in communities, people like Dr. Bitterman [?] and others that have written on this subject that a prisoner is going to give some information. There is no one who can avoid any discourse with the enemy at all if they want to get it. Then it's a matter to what degree they want. I'm off the track of the Code of Conduct a little bit here. The press, of course, picks up and interprets this, and makes it a tool, therefore, that the enemy can use against a prisoner. "Look here, you'll already told us what your mother's name was; you violated your own code right there." Regretfully, the unclassified teachings and I am referring to the quarterly, semi-annually, whatever command you're in, exam that is put out - the answers are wrong. [Major] Joe [V.] Carpenter [ex-POW: see CORONA HARVEST Interviews #284, 359] came by. The first thing they did was give him the ATC [Air Training Command] exam, and [he] flunked it.

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Riddlebarger: I know Joe; he didn't like that.

Thompson: Well, he was being a little tongue in cheek about it; but the thing is entirely wrong. But if you put it any other way, the doggone thing then would be classified, and they're not equipped to do it. I taught the Code of Conduct in Flight School when I was an IP. [Instructor pilot] in ATC, and I had no guidance whatsoever, except that stupid little pamphlet that's put out. I tried to get guidance, and they told me, "No, it's classified, and you're not authorized to teach a classified hour on it; so stay out of it." Well, here I am with no real background, no ability to get any background, and I am suppose^d to teach it. Well, what this does - ROTC, Flight School and by the time a guy gets to Fairchild [AFB, Washington], his mind is made up; and he may or may not listen to his instructor at Fairchild when he gets the other version of it or runs some techniques

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of evasion, which answers the last part. How do you evade? That's what they should be teaching out there. Then you get instructors who won't take the time or trouble to teach you all these things. They give it to you in classroom, but then let you get by with name, rank and service number, for example. I went through in November of '66 at Fairchild, and comparing notes with classmates out in the woods, some of my class got by with standing up and reciting his name, rank and serial number and date of birth over and over and over again, and they finally put him back out and, of course, then into the compound phase and off to the woods and it was all over with.

Riddlebarger: You don't think this is realistic?

Thompson: It certainly is not, because about the second time I gave a guy my name, rank and serial number and date of birth to another question he had asked, they got all upset with me,

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jumped up and down, pounding, got purple in the face and everything. Well, it just won't work. We call it idiot's lip, you know. There ain't no way. If they want it, they'll ask for it. But when I went through, they taught me that - my particular instructor made me use techniques that had been given to me in the class. I had a fake story and all this, and how to evade. I started off thinking, "I'll show him how tough I am. I'll stand up here and give him name, rank" - that's what I thought I was suppose to do. Well, that didn't work. Pretty soon I got up out of the floor and - their method was pushups, of course, to show you that you would be subjected to stressful exercises, so that we did pushups - and after my arms got pretty sore, he said, "Now, are you ready to talk business?" He put his arm band on, academic situation, and explained all over to me again. Then I tried the techniques, and I saw my grade later - I got a real high grade

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on that phase of resistance training. I got a guy who felt good that day, obviously, who was conscientious, who gave me some good instructions.

Riddlebarger: This is at Fairchild?

Thompson: At Fairchild. But other members of my class didn't all have that same opportunity.

Riddlebarger: So then, in a word, you feel the Code is all right, but we need to go a whole lot different route, or more extensive route, on teaching it?

I think I recommended in my second paper that Joe and I wrote together - we recommended that the Code not even be taught. You can put it on the wall, do whatever you want to; but it's better not to even teach the d--- thing in the unclassified version. If you feel that it has to be classified, let it be taught in survival schools and proper environments, but don't give a yo-yo like me,

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like I was given at Reese [AFB, Texas], the responsibility for teaching it when I don't know anything about it to start with. So I think it's best just to drop it entirely. There's the code - you can recite it or whatever you want to do; but things were written in broad terms. They should stay that way, and individual lunheads like I was, putting their own interpretations in it, standing up on the stage supposingly with authority and not know what they are talking about, teach it and write questions on it - it's ridiculous. In effect, I feel we really have a dual standard here. We've cut the classified standard and the unclassified standard, and the unclassified standard is the standard that gives the enemy the tool that they keep hitting you in the head with.

Riddlebarger: Has the Air Force made any overtures toward you, Joe or any of the others on revising their training system in this regard?

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Thompson:

At first, when I was - during this debriefing and I made a few remarks about the training, I was offered a job - to that extent, yes. None of us have really had any desire to go out and teach at Fairchild. Again, the commander out there receives very little guidance from above, apparently, in the basic course. At least, in my visit in June of '69, I found this to be true, and the guidance he had was locked in his safe and his instructors didn't pay any attention to it. They weren't even privileged to the information. There was another course out there run by - well, the CSSP [?] [?] ? [?] course that [Major] Merritt [M.] Helm ran; and he had the same information that the commander had, and his instructors were privileged to that information and it was their guidance, their policy guidance, from the policy shops in the Pentagon. He was running a real fine course out there. He said to me that about half of his course time was spent unteaching

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what they had learned in the basic course because he gets the students, the ones that are in that course that complete the course, the basic course, and they're selected to stay over an extra seven days or whatever it is, and he has to spend part of that time unteaching what they learned in the other side.

Riddlebarger: Your remarks about the enemy using this Code of Conduct against us - apparently you agree with Major James N. Nick Rowe: see CORONA HARVEST Interviews #209, 250 and some of the others that it is, in effect, being turned around against our own people.

Thompson: Yes. Press interpretation is one, of course, that they could hold up. In discourse with the enemy, you're going to have to talk about something. Lying is a very bad method or technique. But for instance, it's up to you, I think, my personal opinion, whether you tell them what your mother's name was.

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or is, or whether or not you're married. It's not vital to the security of the nation or to you or your compatriots in prison or anything else. But as soon as you do, then they jump down your throat. "Aha, you went beyond name, rank, serial number and date of birth" because that's only what you can give them, you see. Of course you're responsible for it if you do; so I am responsible. For instance, they shot me down, in my particular case, they shot me down. They saw me jump out of the airplane, and they sat there and watched me until I landed on the ground, and they captured me. Now, they say, "What kind of airplane were you flying?" "I don't know." That wouldn't work at all. They are not going to buy that one little bit. However, I am held responsible for telling them that I was in an F-100. On the other hand, if I had been wandering loose for two weeks and they captured me, they don't know what airplane I was flying and; h--- I could have

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all sorts of ways of faking it. "I don't remember" would be a better way to put it then. "I've been wandering here in the jungle." So here's an answer. I got to tell them what airplane I am flying or else I am openly belligerent. I can't play that stupid with them because they know d--- good and well there's some checkout involved; so I tell them, "Yes, I am flying the F-100." In that circumstance, I don't think that really tells them a whole lot. They saw it, knew it and everything else.

Clement: Did you get any indication that they had intelligence from other than information they had picked up in South Vietnam? In other words, were they getting intelligence through these supposed Russian channels that, for instance, they knew your wife's first name before you mentioned anything?

Thompson: No. They never indicated any prior knowledge, any -- They never gave any indication that

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they had a dossier on me at all. They never let any information out of that nature.

The information they did have was a lot of information about my base in South Vietnam. Well, h---, the VC built it, with the help of RED HORSE [Rapid Engineer Deployable, Heavy Operations Repair Squadron, Engineer⁷], so --

Riddlebarger: I believe you said in your transcript for 75 cents you could send away and get a map of it.

Thompson: Yes, "aren't you surprised to see a map of Phu Cat?" I said, "H---, no. The VC built it; it comes as no big surprise to me," and that upset them. "How do you know that"?

Clement: The VC were amazed half the time.

Riddlebarger: You know, Nick Rowe in here, in his interview, stressed the phrase or the word "punitive articles," that his interrogators were always stressing that the Code of Conduct was a punitive regulation, a punitive thing. Did

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you get this same general --

Thompson:

They didn't use that term with me, no. In fact, they didn't push it too much with me at all. But my techniques, things I did to evade divulging important information were such that I didn't push them to. I used a complete non-belligerent approach that started, as I mentioned, helping them out in the jungle, trying to build their confidence so they'd slack off, which started working immediately. And, I think, that's just basic human nature. So by the time I got around to being interrogated by anybody that really knew what they were doing, I was, of course, old by them - ten days old, anyway - and they already had the feeling that I was a pretty good guy and I wasn't bucking them; and that's exactly what I wanted them to think - that, "H--- you caught me. What do you want to know? I'll tell you anything I know. I don't know very much, but" and

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that was the approach I followed. So when I didn't tell them something or didn't answer their question to their satisfaction, they really didn't suspect, I don't think, that I was fooling with them, that I was faking it. They thought I was being sincere and honest. I was a stupid nut.

Riddle: ~~de~~debarger: Yes, as I recall, the only thing that you deviated on at all was they asked what munitions you were hauling, from reading your transcript.

Clement: ~~de~~ment: And they had no real way of telling --

Thompson: ~~de~~son: Yes, that was - in a way I was afraid of the napalm. I didn't want to get into that area with them, as I said here. I wanted to see if they would bring it up, and let them bring it up - not me - and they never did. Of course, I know they knew I was dropping napalm - that's not hard to miss; somebody up there was dropping it.

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Clement: Well, yes, but they'd be hard pressed to check it back to your bird because you'd been moved through X number of people's hands before you got all the way up to the professional interrogator; and he could never check up that, by golly, it was your bird that was dropping this stuff that splattered like unto napalm.

Thompson: Yes. Who dropped CBU; who dropped napalm; who did what.

Clement: Back to what you said a minute ago - Nick Rowe brought out with Captain Humbert R. Versace?, I believe it was, that he felt that he died, or was killed, because of his antagonism.

Riddlebarger: His extreme antagonism.

Clement: He was just at them all the time - name, rank, serial number - and just constantly fighting them. He felt that the Viet Cong just got tired of that, and just said "All right, we'll just try you. Let's see

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how strong you are." He was stronger than they were, so they killed him.

Thompson: A good example of how this can kick off - one guy related to me that he was captured with his GIB ["guy in the back"], and his GIB felt that to resist, to show resistance, meant don't do a d--- thing they tell you, which included getting in the truck after he was captured. Well, they put him in the truck, but immediately he was classified as a hard head, belligerent, and hasn't been seen since. He has recently started writing letters home, finally; but his treatment was entirely different. "All right, you're going to be a hard nut; we'll be a hard nut with you." He just brought problems on himself. It's my contention if you force them to beat the h--- out of you, pretty soon you're going to lose your wits and divulge information you don't want to.

Clement: Probably even more, a lot more than from your approach.

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Thompson: The only time I really changed from that technique was once here on the training at Fairchild. The question they asked me about that, and I told them I wouldn't answer them because it was classified. I used the words they had just used on me. I turned them right back on them and got by with it. I may not have gotten by with it if it hadn't been well into the period and they hadn't been belligerent all along; otherwise they would have probably knocked my head off.

Clement: The first day if you had hit them with that approach --

Thompson: I ain't going to tell you. I know something you don't know, and I ain't going to tell you. They're going to find it out or bust. We say that our interrogators can find out anything they want to know. It's a matter of the degree of trouble you want to go to get it, and is it worth that amount.

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Riddlebarger: Right.

Clement: Was there, I might have missed it in your tape there, was there any use of chemicals during your interrogation?

Thompson: No, not that I am aware of.

Clement: The needle or anything that --

Thompson: No, definitely nothing overt. If they put something in my food, I wasn't aware of it. I never had any funny feelings or any indication that I had any drugs.

Clement: Did they indicate that they had such stuff available?

Thompson: No, never did. Didn't mention it at all. It's probably appropriate to bring this up since you mentioned drugs right now, is the crab, the land crab business. There's a letter that recently came down to Morgan Smith /Chief, Artic, Desert, Tropic Information Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, from 1127th

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[USAF Field Activities Group, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia] that a prisoner had, a Vietnamese prisoner had reported that he had been in [?] prison and talked with a buddy of his who was a guard up there who disclosed to him that they were feeding prisoners these land crabs because it ate their minds away, affected them in some fashion so that they would never be useful if they ever went home. They'd never be able to fly airplanes or think clearly or logically ever again and over a period of time this will wipe you out. Now, this may be their belief. The Vietnamese do eat crabs. I saw them in my travels. In talking with [Lt Colonel] Keith Grimes [Air Command and Staff College: see CORONA HARVEST Interview #478] on the subject, he saw crabs in Laos, but he was advised by his flight surgeon not to eat with them, but it was for lung fluks or something like that. I guess everybody's got their thing about them, but I don't know of any effect that

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it's had. People, even long-term prisoners that I've seen over there - I talked with Colonel Robinson Risner in '68, just before I left, and his mind didn't seem to be affected at all, very sharp.

Clement: What guidance are they getting - not to eat the crabs?

Thompson: No, they're investigating it. Morgan is looking into it. They'll have to do some lab work on it. Really, it may be an old wives' tale over there. The Vietnamese may think it does, and if they think that, it may really work on them; but, see, we haven't been taught, we haven't been conditioned to believe land crabs are bad. But they said they were grinding up in powder and putting them in the food, you know, and h--- if they were, you wouldn't know it.

Riddlebarger: That's true.

Thompson: They could dump anything in that soup; you'd

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never know what it was.

Clement: You'd never taste it.

Thompson: You don't try to taste anything anyway. You just put it in your mouth and swallow it, hope it stays down.

Riddlebarger: If I could pick up a point you just made there. I may have missed it in your transcript and all. What were the circumstances of your getting to talk to Risner? For how long did you get to talk to him?

Thompson: Well, for a minute, maybe. He was present at our release, at our pre-release meeting with the three peaceniks that came for us on a - this was a Wednesday, the night before the release ceremonies. We met with the three Americans who came to escort us out. This was in a controlled-press-conference-type of thing. A lot of Vietnamese were around, photographers and people taking notes. Then the camp officials were there and all.

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Colonel Risner was present at that meeting. He had been allowed to come over and speak to us. We had about a minute apiece to talk with him, but it was in a guarded manner because his escort was standing nearby. So that's what I got to see of him.

Riddlebarger: That's the only time you saw him?

Thompson: Yes, and he was allowed to sit in our meeting.

Clement: Sir, you gave the impression, maybe more than the impression, talked about a little bit during the get-together the other day on the platform that you had done, or had attempted to throw some of their indoctrination back at them, tried to do some good work for our side against their side while you were in captivity. Could you go into that a little bit?

Thompson: Can you refresh my memory a little bit more as to specifically what it was I said? I'll get my mind on the track here.

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Riddlebarger: I don't recall the exact words - Joe was doing most of that conversation there - but there were a few remarks you threw in, too.

Clement: Joe Carpenter.

Riddlebarger: Joe Carpenter, yes - that during the interrogation sessions, while they were asking you things and so forth, that they would ask questions about the American way of life and so forth; and they appeared surprised or, at least, they gave the appearance or wanted you to think they were surprised or a little awed by the fact that people from the lower classes, say, could become airplane pilots and officers. I know Joe - I think his phraseology was, they were somewhat surprised and taken aback, if I may use that phrase, that people could advance themselves, that these kinds of opportunities were still available in the United States - or were available; I shouldn't say "still available." I know Joe said he thought that he had made

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some inroads possibly on some of the interrogators in this way.

Thompson:

Yes. In my experience, though, I would qualify one thing. It wasn't really during interrogation sessions, but during the indoctrination sessions.

I split this - in my case, it was a pretty drastic cut with only one or two instances that broke the trend. Interrogations lasted for me about six days, and then that was the end of asking questions. They just let me alone. Then, about once a week, they would call me in and talk with me in sessions that I call indoctrination sessions. "What do you think about this, that and the other," you know. Just talking. They would give me a book to read or sometimes a mimeographed sheet that was obviously excerpted from a history book or something. Communists, I believe, call it re-education. But during these sessions, you could - the guy was

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pretty friendly. The interrogator we called - and we shouldn't call him an interrogator - the indoctrinator we called Wayne, over at the plantation, was very, very susceptible to carrying the field on these subjects. I played up the part of being a poor, country boy and this surprised them quite a bit, that my father wasn't politically influential or rich; I hadn't attended a service academy; in fact, hadn't graduated from college and could still fly an airplane. They didn't believe that; how that could happen.

Riddlebarger: Do you think this was a pose, or do you think he really --

Thompson: No, I think, he really was surprised because, as we know, if you've worked with allied officers, any of the flying personnel and most of the officers are there because of political reasons. Particularly if they get to come to America and we associate with them, you can bet that they're politically

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influential in their home. So most countries seem to operate that way, and I feel certain that the Vietnamese are no exception - that the people with pull get to fly the airplanes. They don't see how you could take a guy off a rice paddy and throw him in an airplane. In fact, you probably couldn't. But he was surprised at that. He wanted to know if people really owned their own cars, [if] everybody had a car, [if] everybody had TV. These sort of things surprised him. But he was a budding capitalist himself. As I mentioned, he rode a motor bike when everybody else peddled - things like this - and he wanted TV real bad.

Riddlebarger: Well, this seems to be a thread that runs through these, yours and Joe's, and I know it's in Nick Rowe's here. Do you think maybe this is one of the things that is working for our side by this policy of not just giving name, rank and serial number? I mean does

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this have a long-term beneficial effect on the POW do you think?

Thompson: In what way? You mean --

Riddlebarger: Well, in reducing it more to an individual basis and possibly getting you a little easier interrogation, indoctrination, by being more talkative about the way of life, the American way of life.

Clement: Here's an opportunity for them to talk to an American who is willing to chat.

Thompson: Yes, this - I don't see any harm in it at all, and it may help some. At least, in my way of thinking, it follows along the non-belligerent line. There's no sense in making them, forcing them to beat you or use dire measures, tie you up or whatever it might be. I see no harm in carrying on this kind of discourse with the indoctrinator, at least as this instance was. It may not work with a hardliner, but --

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Clement: Was this - do you feel, or do you know whether this indoctrinator was in the political chain so that the information you were giving him was going back upstream?

Thompson: It was in the political branch of the Army. You see, they have a military branch and a political branch, and he was in the political branch. The only guy around that I knew of was Flunky, the camp commander, camp commandant, however you want to call him. He was in the military branch, according to Wayne anyway. He explained how it all worked to me so nice. Major Bai [?] was political, political branch of the Peoples' Democratic on and on, a term about a mile long.

Riddlebarger: Let me ask one more about indoctrination here. I know Nick Rowe talks a lot about their repetition in the aspect of - just because the war is going to be over is no sign you're going to be released, and your good treatment

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and so forth, and potential possible release is based on your behavior and so forth. Did they hammer you pretty hard on this point?

Thompson:

The things they said to me about release from the beginning was that there was no way that my government could get me out; that it was going to be solely up to them, and whatever they choose to do with me. I might be there a very long time, and I may be tried in their court system and serve a sentence, as they saw fit. All these things were thrown at me from the beginning, veiled threats; but I had no reason not to believe them. I was firmly convinced that there was no way that my government could stand up and say, "You've got to let him go," and make it stick. And still, I think, that's true. Then they reinforced it by saying that my government didn't care about me anyway, and they used statements, like Rowe said, the same people, the same statements, to reinforce this argument that people - all they wanted

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was out, and they had already signed me off
and --

Riddlebarger: Sounds almost verbatim like --

Thompson: -- don't care at all.

Clement: Was there any option given, such as I understand was given in Korea, to come on over to our side?

Thompson: No, they never mentioned that at all. They did, many times, say that they weren't asking me to be disloyal, to betray my people; and, of course, they considered there were a lot of good Americans. They had picture of them in their peace marches and all that. They never showed a picture of Congressman Mendel Rivers. That was the way they handled it, see. and so "be loyal to the good Americans." That was the pitch they had. Now, they'd tell me their story - and this is part of the indoctrination method or technique that they used was the "soft-sell, buddy, buddy"

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approach. You are provided the information and you can weigh my side against their side, so to speak, and make my own decisions. I am sure they were so convinced that theirs looked so pretty and good that, h---, anybody in his right mind couldn't pass it up; but they never asked me for a conclusion.

Riddlebarger: Did you get a good, strong diet of Senator William Fulbright, Senator Mike Mansfield, or Senator Stephen Young --

Thompson: The big ones when I was over there were, of course, Fulbright, Wayne Morse from Oregon. We heard a good bit from Bobby Kennedy for awhile.

Riddlebarger: Senator Frank Church or Senator Mark Hatfield?

Thompson: Well, it's in here.

Clement: Not McNamara, of course, and --

Thompson: They didn't like McNamara too well.

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Clement: No, you mentioned --

Thompson: He was one of Johnson's "running dogs."

Clement: Right. You mentioned that they didn't like him and spoke of him as their enemy and the peace loving people of America as their friends.

Thompson: You can bet that any member of Congress, either body of Congress, that made any statement against the policy of the government was quoted to us.

Riddlebarger: Well, the point I was getting at here is Nick Rowe specifically states that their propaganda was, to his way of thinking, somewhat more devastating because it wasn't their propaganda. It wasn't stuff they'd prepared; everything was your own coming right back at you.

Thompson: That's exactly right.

Riddlebarger: He said it was almost exclusively that way.

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They weren't handouts written by the bad guys; they were public utterances by our own people.

Thompson:

They even made a lot of a statement that President Eisenhower made back in the early days of the Indochina War that we can't afford to lose Vietnam. They said, "Lose it - you didn't even have it. Here's your President; he thinks he owns Vietnam." This was in '54 or something like that, I think, when he made that statement. "We need the tungsten, and the tin." It was all in his statement there, and I have no doubt that it was in his statement. They just take what they want out of it and use it to reinforce their arguments, and anything else that these so-called liberals choose to put out - editorials, anything that appeared that they can use. They put it together and used it very skillfully. The biggest tendency it had with me was to plain p--- me off. For that reason I think it lost

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some of its effect. I could see what they were doing, of course. The only pictures we ever saw of America were the peace marchers, the long beardies; and they thought that's the, you know - like any press can make you think that the country is devastated.

Clement: Chicago.

Thompson: Yes. Like I talked to some allied officers in the class first of the year. "We were scared to death to come to school in the United States because all we saw was rioting. We felt that we would have to bring some bodyguards with us. We couldn't go out at night. We couldn't do anything." They were surprised to find that - "your press is like our press," you know; it's really not that bad after all.

Riddlebarger: It doesn't necessarily give a representative point of view.

Thompson: So, it was the same idea we had.

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Riddlebarger: Fred, was this stuff - I am talking about the press releases and so forth - was this presented in a way that [there was] little or no doubt in your mind that its veracity was good; I mean, that it really was what it was purported to be?

Thompson: Yes, I was pretty certain that the the things that they showed me and the things I heard were actually said or written. I was pretty certain that it wasn't all of the article, but in most cases - well, you take something they'd say was a quote from Newsweek or The New York Times, and you could read it, and you knew doggone good and well that they didn't write it because of, if nothing else, just journalistic style. It was a direct quote. It would be foolish, particularly if they had already decided to let me go, to show me stuff that I could come home and check on and find that it was completely false. In fact, I found that most of the

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things were pretty accurate. They didn't write the whole story. They'd take out a column that they wanted.

Riddlebarger: But you recognized that being done, too, didn't you?

Thompson: Yes. Knowing as I do about our press and everything, I was sure that it had been done that way.

Riddlebarger: You mentioned, "if they had decided to release you" - did you have reason to believe that they intended from very early, possibly after your interrogations, to have you as a potential releasee?

Thompson: One of my theories is very strong that way, that soon after my capture they made a decision to release me or to use me in the next release they were going to have. It may have been somewhat kicked off by the things that I did in the very beginning that were reported up the line. It may explain

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why I was kept in isolation the entire time. Not only in isolation, but in a cell removed from others more or less so that I couldn't even communicate through the walls, and that sort of thing.

Clement: But can you tell that others were also isolated, or were others together, and you were isolated?

Thompson: It seemed that - well, Joe was isolated, Joe Carpenter; and Jim Lowe was there a little bit longer, and he had a roommate. There's a good chance that his roommate was considered for release at the same time since he has been released now, Hegdahl [?]. This is just a theory, of course. I can't base it on more than just this idea. It may explain some of it. But, basically, they didn't give me too hard a time. They didn't bother with me at all. They just sort of stuck me over in a corner and waited until they decided to do something.

Riddlebarger: Kind of had you up their sleeves.

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Thompson: I think they sort of picked it. I fit their bill for propaganda because I didn't appear injured. I was fresh. I hadn't been there long enough to become --

Clement: Emaciated.

Thompson: -- emaciated in any way, and would look good to the people.

Clement: To carry one step further - traditionally, as I understand the Asian viewpoint, the value of human life is very, very small. What do you think their value was of you? Because they had - well, they had another human being; did they hold you in great, as a very, valuable piece of merchandise?

Thompson: I think that - and this is a feeling; I can't base it in fact - but I believe that they feel that all the pilots they have are valuable to them. They will be sometime, and they just wait and see. Consequently, they make some effort to keep you fed, clean,

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so that you wouldn't lose them in a mass break-out of disease or something like that, or they wouldn't die just from hunger or starvation.

Clement: Do you include the rest of the crew members or just pilots?

Thompson: No, well, everybody. I mean people they've got up there - whoever they are. A few enlisted men, all of them are - they, I believe that they look at them as a valuable instrument. Someday we may find out what they want to do with them - negotiations, bargains, or whatever it might be. They watched us pay Cuba in tractors for some people once. They may have something like that in mind. They figure that we'd pay more for rated people, flyers, than they would for the Army's throwaway riflemen.

Clement: They are certainly familiar by now with our chit system, willingness to pay for a crew member that way. So possibly they figure that

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at the negotiating table, the final negotiations will be \$100,000 per person, or 82 jeeps or F-4s, or something.

Thompson: Well, you can rest assured that in the fine Oriental manner that they're not going to give away something for nothing, and they are going to do it in such a manner that they don't consider it a loss of face to them. They are not just going to give them up, and say, "Here we were wrong, you can have them back." But they'll make some gain from them if they possibly can.

Riddlebarger: Do you think they eventually will release most or all of the troops up there? I know that's rank speculation.

Thompson: I really think so, yes.

Riddlebarger: I know you said in your transcript that you thought if the bombing stopped, it might cause them to release some.

Thompson: Well, I think so. This is relatively sensitive

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information that I don't know all the facts of, but it appears that, or they're saying anyway that there would have been some more releases following our, well, following the last release anyway in '69. There would have been more releases had [Secretary of Defense Melvin] Laird not started accusing them of all the bad stuff, and one other of the people who has been released, that is, leveling charges at them. So that they are responsive to world opinion definitely. They don't want to be made to look bad. Their big kick is being humane and nice people. I think they probably are not as cruel as Koreans, Chinese from what I've seen of them working around the Koreans. In South Vietnam, they were very close to me. People are more, they are more southerner than the Koreans. They live in a tropical climate.

Riddlebarger: A more temperate type.

Thompson: Yes, follow that ecological background pretty

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much. So, the Koreans live in a vigorous climate; they're vigorous people. You can't really compare necessarily the treatment that we witnessed in the Korean prison camps to what we've seen in North Vietnam. At any rate they don't want, right now don't seem to want to be accused of bad torture and things like that. So whenever they can release people without it making them look too bad, they'll try it. I think that was some of the reason for releasing samples as they have, three at a time. The first six, or the first two groups, all of us short-time, looked pretty good, hadn't been terribly mistreated, and they wanted to see just what our Government would say when we came out. The policy for awhile, thinking that way, was to just lay low and don't say anything; and, of course, I got accused in some areas of coming home and not telling anybody anything. And, of course, it's quite obvious that's not so; but as far as the public was concerned, that's what they

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thought had happened. "How come you didn't come home and say the things that this last group did?" Well, h---, I said them, but I still wear the uniform, and it was not my privilege to release them. I don't make the plans and concepts.

Clement: Whatever it takes to get the rest of them out.

Thompson: And I go along with them. I think that that probably may still be a good policy.

Clement: Because then they might release three more just to see what we'll do with those three, and three more --

Thompson: And I think eventually, yes - they released Bob Freschman [?] to see what we would say about people who had been injured, mishandled; and maybe if we had just accepted him quietly, too, as far as the public was concerned, it might have gotten some more out. But that is speculation on my part, though, entirely. They'd release them - when they released

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them all and whether it's all at once or dribbling out in small groups, I still believe that it will be at such a time that they're pretty sure that --

Riddlebarger: It will be to their great gain.

Thompson: Yes, they are not going to put in a compromising position because of it, such as holding war crime trials against them or something like that, you know, and having a world tribunal for what they've done to the prisoners over there. Jim Lowe was tortured...[dead tape].

Riddlebarger: On your travels north, you did encounter quite a few?

Thompson: Yes, the people themselves - if you're talking about their feelings toward us, aircrew member - the people didn't like us one little bit. Of course, that's not too illogical. If they got their hands on a pilot they wanted to make out all the suffering that they felt they had undergone. A few of them --

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tried to take it all out on me because it's the only one they had available at the time. If any people had been killed in their family or friends, [they] blame me for doing it [and] they'd like to do me in for it. The military is pretty well indoctrinated on how to handle people and I think for the most part did a good job. One instance, I referred to here - a guard beating up on me. I didn't say anything about it. I didn't report him, but somebody did; and he came and apologized for it. I can't understand why that happened, but it did. So his feelings carried him away there. There may be more of this going on, of course. But policy isn't that as a rule; but the people were pretty put out about it.

Clement: Put out about this guy?

Thompson: No, about us, toward us. They're upset, you know - what right do we have to kill them? They don't tell you that they were

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killed while they were shooting an anti-aircraft gun, you know. If they'd gotten in a hole, they might not have been hurt. They are convinced, or at least some of them are convinced, that an American pilot is so super that he can fly along, a dot in the sky, and look down on the ground and see people running around under the trees; and not only that, but he can tell when there are women and children in the crowd and he singles those out, you know, and things like that. At least that's what they say, and some of them are pretty well convinced of it. "Man, I can't even see a person at 10,000 feet." "No, no. Sure you can; many times you've bombed people just on purpose." "I didn't see nothing but trees."

Clement: If that.

Thompson: Oh, we saw plenty of trees, in the South anyway. That was all we saw. Tree busters. But for this reason they think we're really

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after them. You can see an orphanage hidden under a clump of bushes. They accuse us, of course, of killing women and children. One series of photographs - and this is propaganda they're putting out to their people, too, you see, to engender their hatred, to stir them up to fight more, you know, and we got some of it. The Burn All - Kill All series - they showed us women who had been killed, children who had been killed by CBU and napalm and all this stuff, and how bad it was, and they'd show us all these pictures. They'd be on one side of the wall; and then you go to the other side of the wall and they'd show their glorious fighting people, women and children manning the guns, that were doing the shooting, you know. Well, you put two and two together and you begin to wonder - but they don't do that. They look at one wall and when they turn to look at another wall, that one's, the first one they saw is completely blanked out and on

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to the next story.

Riddlebarger: Separate entity.

Thompson: Yes. But I think most Americans don't think that way; at least, I didn't. I looked at it and I said, "Well, you know, if they put that picture over by that picture, showed that woman laying beside her 57mm she was firing...garbled." We were flak suppression. We were not mad at that particular individual at all. We were mad at the gun. But that's the way they look at things, and the way they tell their people that we look at it.

Riddlebarger: We were talking earlier about getting eight or nine of you together. Would you like to make that recommendation here?

Thompson: Yes, I would. I think that - nothing to lose and you may gain quite a bit in understanding what's going on. I have not read anyone's debrief, except Joe Carpenter's because we

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were able to get both of them. [Lt Colonel] Norris [M.] Overly has never read my complete debrief. All he's read is editorials that have come out in the TIG and other documents where people have said, "Well, this looks interesting; we'll put that in" - very sketchy and little detail. In traveling with Norris extensively the last year or so and having opportunities to sit and talk with him, we find that we have a number of things that we've said that the other one didn't know, things we did or saw that the other one didn't know that we had done, and this - the best example I can think of is Colonel Risner. Norris saw Colonel Risner; I saw him; and [1st Lieutenant] West [L.] Rumble saw him - all three groups saw him. We feel that putting that together tell us something about Colonel Risner. Well, these are the sort of things that will, I think, benefit, or the benefits that will come out of the meeting of all of us. The initial plan was

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that we would all have an opportunity to read everyone else's debrief and then, having done that homework, get together and have a seminar or discussion group led by someone qualified to help us out, and study it, and we may learn, be able to put things together. A comment that I may not even have had in here may come up as it jarred my memory from something that another one might say.

Riddlebarger: You said there were six Air Force and three Navy, right?

Thompson: I believe so. In the first group, you had Overly, Black and Metheny [?]. Metheny was Navy, so it's two and one. My group was three Air Force; and the last group was one Air Force and two Navy. So that's six and three.

Riddlebarger: How many days, do you think, would be ideal for this? Say, three days, a week; a couple of days to look over one another's writings

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and debriefings, and then a couple or three days of talks - something like this?

Thompson: Well, looking at this big thick book there, I'd like to include Jim Rowe in the group. Although he's Army, I think, and was in the South, I think there may be some benefits because of techniques and things.

Riddlebarger: There are certainly some similarities.

Thompson: Very definitely. The people have been taught from the same book, Mao's primer. It would probably take a couple days of reading, or more, to read these materials. If it was deemed necessary, it would be helpful to, probably, scan through them.

Clement: Well, in this case and Major Rowe's case, it could be mailed to the individual conferees because it's unclassified.

Thompson: Yes.

Clement: In your case and Major Carpenter's - a little.

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bit of a problem because it's classified and you have to get it through your base security officer, although it could be done.

Thompson:

Yes, the first time it was mentioned by the 1127th that was one of the problems. They had been duplicating the information to get out to people for pre-study, and they say it was too much trouble for them to run this off again. There are a lot of pages involved, I'm sure. So the project at that time was dropped. Now, the reason - the primary reason given for a meeting like this was to - maybe putting us all together, we'd come up with things that haven't been noticed before, we may gain some insight into how they do and how they operate. We're not hoping to discover new prison camps or anything like this; but a better understanding of what is going on may just uncover some little thing that might help toward getting their release.

Clement:

We have found in the oral history process

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per se that quite often a conference of two or three experts and one, use the term "moderator," someone who runs the machinery and keeps things on some kind of a track where necessary and where not necessary, lets it run - and all he does is keep the machinery going and try to keep the conversation down to one individual at a time - and who is of equal or less rank than the guys being involved, whereas the moderator, if he's a one star general, is going to tend to keep you quiet. He's going to tend to, not - a subconscious thing; you're not going to say what you really want to say. You're not going to let the thing get into a good, healthy argument, if it's going to go that way, and bring out these fine points that are stuck in your head.

Thompson: That's exactly right. You can't --

Clement: You can't make a show out of this thing with colored lights, cameras. There's no value in that.

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Thompson:

I went off on a trip sponsored by the Pentagon in December, briefing at 17 bases of next-of-kin people there. In some audiences, we had wing commanders, and in a couple of audiences we had some genera's who attended who didn't get in the way - they didn't ask questions. But their very presence changed the whole atmosphere of and no one wanted to ask - very few questions were asked, very little discussion during the period that the discussion was open. At other bases there was a very drastic contrast, at the other bases where they didn't stay in the briefings or whatnot - the families who, certainly the civilians and whatnot, moms and dads who don't know anything about the military as a general rule, just opened up and fired questions left and right and left the briefings more satisfied because of it. So what you're talking about here - you throw a general in here and everybody is going to be worried about shirts on straight and that...

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sort of thing, and whether he should or shouldn't say what he's got on his mind; it might offend the general. I would include one other person in this group. I would like to see someone from the OPR office of primary responsibility on the prisoner situation present at these meetings, namely, Lt Col Vincent A. Di Mauro if he's still available or Lt Col Harold G. Kloberdanz (they work up in XPD XOX: Director of Plans, USAF) to help. I think they may benefit probably the most from this sort of thing; and whether it's an input to training or an input to projects that are in being or in embryo stage development toward getting prisoners home, I think that it would be helpful to have them in that discussion.

Riddlebarger : I should think that this meeting could produce some concrete proposals for E&E escape and evasion and the survival people and so forth and their schools people.

Thompson : It should. I've got a lot of feelings about . .

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the school situation out there. Most of them have been - I've voiced them; they've been kicked around. I visited Fairchild and had conferences with all of their instructors out there. I observed their training, and had been a fairly recent graduate and had been watching it again. It hasn't been too effective, as far as I know. People say, "That's nice, but it's too much trouble to change."

Riddlebarger: I know Nick Rowe was pretty critical on some of these points, too.

Clement: Well, the fact that it would be in a transcript, in a document, and sent out there, a copy of the transcript sent out there, gets it a lot farther along than just a "Hey, it's a nice idea to have red scarfs for everybody." It's now in writing and everybody out there reads it. Maybe the commander says it's a little too much trouble, but the individual in the classroom, the instructor picks it up

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The case here of Nick Rowe talking about using elephant ear to take care of skin rash. The commander might think that's --

Thompson: But people don't always agree with him. People, a lot of people don't agree with me, these ideas I've expressed on evading answering questions. H---, there's a lot of people in the military that are firm believers that, by golly, if you say anything besides name, rank, and serial number and date of birth, you've had the lick, and you might as well let them kill you because we will when you get home.

Clement: But there are presently nine experts in the world.

Riddlebarger: That's right.

Thompson: And you have - well there's a few more than that.

Clement: Well, that we have access to.

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Thompson: McComb, Homestead --

Riddlebarger: Well, I should think that even if I were teaching a class, let's say in one of these subjects at Fairchild that this ought to be required reading, and so should this. If I am an aircrew member, if I am a pilot going through this course prior to a SEA tour, why in the world shouldn't I read this and this.

Thompson: Well, the TAC TIG comes out, goes to all bases, but it's locked up in the vault in the intelligence shop because it's classified, and the guys can't --

Clement: Well, I think, an approach --

Thompson: -- a lot of times don't even know that it's available as I found out when I got home.

Clement: I think an approach to this conference-type of thing would be at the beginning state that we would like to do this in at least two sessions, and we'd like to try to keep --

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one of the sessions unclassified so it can be used with wide dissemination; then we'll hit another session, or a portion of a session, that we consider classified, if it has to be. You see, Major Rowe did two sessions with us where he did an unclassified session right here, and then we got into a classified area. He came back; it was a different day, I believe.

Riddlebarger: Yes, it was.

Clement: It was a different day, a different room, and treated some of the same subjects, but he also treated these other subjects that were classified.

Riddlebarger: There were strictly blue suiters in these with them that day, too.

Thompson: There are a lot of ways to handle things. They made a lot of mistakes debriefing, initially. I think he may have mentioned it in one of his lectures with you ~~now~~.

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they throw the fear of God at you. H---, it's quite obvious you don't have to testify against yourself. And when they sit down here, and they want information and knowledge, and the first thing they read you is an article out of the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] --

Riddlebarger: A strange atmosphere is quite obvious to me here, Fred. I wasn't going to bring it up, but since you did, it seemed apparent to me.

Thompson: I was under some strain, I sure was. Since I've been here, I wrote a letter to a lawyer out in California who is going to defend Jim Lowe on a flying charge, on adjustments to life again when you get back. I realized, even though I had been trained and everything, I was still ingrained with this name, rank, serial number, date of birth stuff pretty deeply, and I had gone beyond that although all this has come out and has been scrutinized, and they determined that I

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didn't release any vital information. But I wasn't sure, and once or twice I have run into people who have not made direct charges at me, but have given me the feeling that they consider me traitorous and I didn't know how it was going to be viewed. This sort of thing plagues you. My whole idea, I sat down and told Major Berry who was my debriefer that I've got to lay it out here and you do whatever you want to with it, and I wasn't sure what was going to come out of it. I've got to lay it out on the line now and get it over and done with. I am not going to live under the gun the rest of my life wondering one thing or another. So it was sort of strained during the debriefing because I was tense about it, and the day after I got back, bam, had to go right into it you know.

Clement:

Is that right? They didn't give you a couple of days --

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Thompson: H---, they weren't even going to give me the first night with my wife. She was there. I got it, but after a lot of arguing. There was a whole bunch of doctors there at the hospital, you know, and I was a specimen they had to investigate and put on their slides and look at, and they were ready to go to work. They weren't going to let me go home. [OE] course, I felt that I was in pretty good physical shape. First thing I wanted was a good drink of whiskey and a good meal; and as soon as I got those, the next thing jumped up.

Riddlebarger: I remember you even said something over at the club about that one night. I mean after that platform presentation, about the good stiff drink.

Thompson: Yes. People say that sex drive is the basic drive, but it's only basic when all the other drives before it are met, when you're fed and clothed and protected. I don't

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think that I felt any lack of sex of anything else as a problem while I was in prison because I wasn't sure if they were going to feed me the next day or come in and shoot me for that matter. So I had those things on my mind more than I did the latter.

Riddlebarger: Well, Fred, that's basically all we wanted to ask on the POW part. We would like to ask one or two closing questions about your tour over there prior to that. Is there anything else you'd like to throw out on the POW aspect. We want part of this as an opportunity to let you say something straight away. It's not a debriefing or anything like that.

Thompson: Well, prior to being captured?

Riddlebarger: Yes, we wanted to ask a couple of questions about your flight ops and all, and --

Thompson: Oh yes. Well, we'll get into that. I don't --

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have a whole lot more. I think we need to improve training on the prisoner business. In my last paper I made some recommendations - you can get ahold of that when it comes out - recommendations that I don't think can be accused of being slanted directly toward Vietnam. I don't want to see that happen. It happened after Korea. There should be some changes. I don't want to get in the job of being an instructor, but I think we need to have more officer instructors and supervisors on the staff at Fairchild. Right now they've got two or three, and NCOs do all the teaching and they supervise each other. The qualifications of people up there - even the ATC Stan Board [Standardization Board] goes up there and inspects the school; they inspect who's keeping the paper work, who's writing who's ER, and that sort of business, the mechanics of it, and that's all they're really qualified to check. I think there needs to be a direct line of

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communication from the policy office on the Air Staff to the school. In essence, they run the material of the school without going through the ATC chain. ATC can do the bookkeeping and the housework, you know, because it is a school. You want somebody who's been to AIC [Academic Instructor Course] teaching from the platform. An officer teaching from the platform in some ways is more forceful than an NCO, I think. He needs to have officer supervision and assistance in things like interpreting. You get a letter down - it takes a Philadelphia lawyer to figure out, and that's your policy guidance. "What the h--- does it mean?" We ought to have an officer who, if he's got a question, he can pick up the phone and call [the Department of] Defense tomorrow, and say, "What the h--- did you mean by this," and straighten it out; and then say, "Now, Sarge, this is what we want to teach." But they've got good formats, and they go

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through the attention step and overview and everything like they ought to; but it's the meat of the material that should be a direct line. ATC filters the thing - "This don't look good, so we won't send that up." A lot of things happen along this way. It needs to be improved a lot.

In getting into flight ops, I think the biggest problem, my biggest problem was cured after I was shot down. General William W. Momyer said there ain't going to be no more of that. I don't think nap/alm/s and high-drags are correct ordnance to carry into a high threat area in the first place. You've got to deliver them from low altitude. I think that was corrected and cured.

Riddlebarger: Can we back up just a minute. You went over in what month, now?

Thompson: I went over in April of '67.

Riddlebarger: And you were shot down in

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Thompson: March of '68.

Riddlebarger: March of '68. So you had almost a tour under your belt when you went down. This was F-100s, and it was RP [Route Package] I and II; or were you hitting all around?
[End of reel]

Riddlebarger: Could you give us in a sentence or two, as we were talking, when you went over and what you were doing, now, up until the time you were shot down.

Thompson: OK. I can't do anything in a sentence or two as you're finding out. I went over in April of '67, joined the 416th Fighter Squadron at Bien Hoa, 3rd Wing, and served there until the 29th of May '67. We moved up to Phu Cat, opened the base, fighters. I moved up with the squadron, and I flew out of Phu Cat from then until the 20th of March of '68 when I was shot down. My first operations in Bien Hoa were standard close air support roles. Sidelines were we

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specialized a good bit in the Ranch Hand support flying, armed escort, IV Corps spray activities and some in III Corps. All of our other operations were just close support and interdiction in-country roles. When we moved up to Phu Cat, for awhile, we continued just in that vein, nothing real interesting, routine operations. Then the Battle of Dak To broke out - we solely supported that; all of our sorties went to Dak To. Then as Khe Sanh broke out, we found out that we could fly all the way up there. We started working with out-of-country. Our squadron and our wing, by then, had been joined by the 612th, to form the 37th Wing and we were tasked solely to Hillsboro, or Moon Beam or whoever in the h--- was up. We were fragged without targets in most cases, fragged at a rendezvous point. They had no compulsion at all in sending us wherever they had a target that was hot when we showed up. We had TQTs time over

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target⁷ and ordnance, and we started working out of country. Of course, along in June, I guess, July, Misty ⁷FACS⁷ started operating out of our squadron. We got that operation kicked off.

Riddlebarger: Did you fly this?

Thompson: No, I didn't. We learned more and more about the operation up there. They were working in Steel Tiger, Tally Ho, Pack I; and of course, with that information and photos and all that, we became more effective and did a good bit of work in Laos - I think I was about 20 times over in Tally Ho. This was the first time I had been up in Pack II - and that's not for the record. I was in northern Pack I, but I was actually shot down about five miles into Pack II. But there's no line up there; the Navy gets mad.

Clement: Would you comment on the effectiveness, as far as preparation and ordnance delivery and whatnot, to - instead of being fragged to a

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hard target where you, the fighter pilot, can prepare your dive angle, et cetera, et cetera, just to be fragged to a ABCCC [airborne battlefield command and control center], and you didn't have any idea whether you're going against a truck, against a building, against suspected truck parks, et cetera, et cetera.

Thompson:

It makes it harder to break in a new man, say a UPT [undergraduate pilot training] graduate who has just joined your squadron after going through a quick course at Luke [AFB, Arizona] or anyone else that doesn't have fighter experience, except just to come over there. It's harder to break him in and to get him started off well when you don't have a target to discuss; but when you're flying with people that are pretty well versed and used to operating together as a [F-7] 100 outfit, particularly was -- We found no problem. In fact, we found it more

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challenging. We had pretty standard tactics. You know, you get up there and look it over and Lead says, "OK, Plan B today." In briefings you discuss, "OK, we'll try to use the butterfly or wheel" or something like that, and we knew what that meant. You never knew going into a target anyway what the weather was going to dictate. You do your d----- to deliver the ordnance. So you can't say we're going up and do a 45 degree dive angle and release at this point, and all that. So the briefings were pretty general in nature anyway. It wasn't the same sort of operation as if we'd have a specific target and have to go sort it all out for yourself, find it, locate it and identify it and shoot at it. But, generally I don't know that we had any trouble at all operating, except when we had a brand new guy in the outfit. The flight lead had to be aware of that and be prepared to help him out. He may have dropped his sight-setting card or

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something. I know I've gotten up there and got to jinking and my check list and my sight card and everything else is in back of the canopy somewhere I can't even get to it. I had 30 degree, 15 degree settings memorized. I got up there and the d--- weather was bad, and it's up the side of a hill, and I had some other figures, but I couldn't get to my card; so my flight lead hollered, you know, you just automatically said, "Let's try this" and "I think about 130 mils will work" or something like that. "Thanks a lot. I'd been wondering what I was going to do." But these sorts of things were overcome. You really don't have to know the target. H---, half of the time it changed in-country. You'd get fragged over to work with a Tom FAC [Forward air controller] or something, and you get down there, and, h---, it's not Tom. The DASC [Direct Air Support Center] has moved you over to work with somebody else - an entirely different target.

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Clement: Well, then it's also more efficient in that the target study, the vast amount of time you have to spent on the ground is reduced?

Thompson: Yes. I don't see any real need for it. There's a spot on the ground. If there's a FAC in the area or somebody to give you an elevation, if nothing else, that's the big thing you've got to have if you're going to be accurate; at least in a 100 where you don't have any radar height-finding arrangement, I think tactically you're much more flexible to work with an ABCCC or any function similar to it, whether he's airborne or not. Just getting current information in, current targeting information, and you come into an area and get dispersed to whatever is needed at the exact time, I think, is much better than trying to frag against a certain target and then if they change it, you've got to be - you've got to make sure you changed it and did they really have the authority to change it. These are things we had to be

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careful of in the South. Just anybody couldn't change the target on you without being in trouble.

Clement: Did you find that ABCCC was, in fact, current on the situation and --

Thompson: Oh yes, because, you see, they were in contact with - well, they're working with Misty; Misty is talking to them all the time. They're out there screwing around and they call Cricket and say, "Hey, we've got something up here; we found a SAM site." Just happened to drive by and see it, you know, catch the sun just right or something, and right away Cricket says, "Well, we've got two flights of F-4s inbound." "Well, send them over," you know - or they were able to make the decision, "S---, that's a good target there; let's grab these guys that are going to hit a suspected supply depot or something that we don't know anything about, and go over there." All these FACs are

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calling in information to them and they send the best ordnance that they have available to them, at the time that they have them. In the Khe Sanh problem, the biggest thing was TOTs. There just weren't enough times on target in the day to get all the ordnance we could have carried up there.

Riddlebarger: Did you ever hit Khe Sanh, or did you have a lot of missions into Khe Sanh?

Thompson: Yes, it started as complete support for Khe Sanh, but, Lord, you get up there and Khe Sanh was bad; we're airborne; we're over the rendezvous point or the orbit point or something; and, bingo, Hillsboro would say, 'Well, Khe Sanh's VOC's [voice communication] off; you can't get in. They need the support and TPQ is tied up, so Mao or somebody has got a truck running down the road; why don't you go get it.' And off we'd go - all we need is a vector.

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Riddlebarger: Did you ever have any problems at Khe Sanh with getting stacked up or coordination or strike direction by FACs who had, maybe, four or five flights stacked up, or maybe having to work with a Marine FAC or something like that. We've heard a lot of stories about --

Thompson: The biggest problem I had was not running into somebody else's flight up there. I lost an engine up there or nearly did one day. At the time I had a flight of four - the weather broke and everybody had moved into Khe Sanh - and I saw six FACs, and everytime I'd say, "OK, do a left turn," at least two of them would do a left turn. I saw a flight of Crusaders go by through my formation; two flights of F-4s strung out and went through my formation, or I went through theirs. We're down at 5,000 feet trying to see what the FACs are talking about and find out which FAC is our FAC, and all these - there must of been 16 airplanes all

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trying to orbit and do the same d--- thing at the same time. Of course, here comes one sailing through, you're dropping a bomb; he's found one. It got real tight up there, and a h--- of a lot more danger running into somebody than there was getting shot down. Although I never did understand how they got 37mm out on the edge of the perimeter of Khe Sanh, but they sure as the devil did up there several times. But it was a problem.

Riddlebarger: Did you ever have other than Air Force FACs put you in up there?

Thompson: Yes, I've worked with Marine FACs up there some. We had a problem once when the Marines had a free fire zone. They were under different rules of engagement than we were. I was up in I Corps south of Da Nang when - well, between Hoi An and Da Nang on that river, Hoi An River runs out of Hoi An there; I guess it is the Hoi An River; anyway.

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Clement: The Hoi An River, yes.

Thompson: -- there's a railroad bridge crosses the river. The railroad is running north/south, and the bridge had been pretty well bombed up and so had the track. But there was the bridge and the railroad and a highway. Panama sent me over to this Marine FAC, and he said, "OK, describe the area. This is a free fire zone; go in there and hit anything you see." I said, "I can't do it." And we got in a long discussion - I almost aborted the flight because they couldn't get me anybody else to work with. The FAC wouldn't come over and direct me. I spent about 30 minutes fooling around there trying to sort it out. I couldn't drop under my rules. Eventually I talked the FAC into coming over and putting me in. In the meanwhile, I found a guy shooting down there on the ground, and he hit my wingman who was holding high and dry while I went down to investigate -

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put a hole in his tip tank and made him mad. But he missed me; I was coming in too low and fast for him to get a bead on me. He was shooting at us with a hand-held weapon. I could see the white puffs of smoke from his rifle there as I went by everytime. But the FAC - it was just out of the free fire zone, so I went by this little place. I saw the hootches back in - the FAC would come in and sort it out and put us in. But the most effective, in some instances, if it was timed right, was the passes we'd make as they were spraying. We'd drop CBU along the sides of them because they had figured out where they could be seen from - no sense in dropping it right in front of them because they'd get pretty much a free pass [whereas] the guy off to the side of a little bit has got an angle on them and he can shoot at them. Missions that we escorted them on, they took very few hits; and the missions that they went in unescorted, they got the

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h--- shot out of them. Consequently they liked to have us go along. It was effective when we were able to brief together particularly, and we did that at Bien Hoa. We knew what they were going to do, and they knew what we were going to do. My squadron never - at the time I was there - never hit one of the Ranch Hands, but they did occasionally pick up a little CBU if somebody mis-timed their run a little bit. But if you went too far ahead, all you did was alert the people that, "Here comes a low and slow C-123; get ready to shoot. As soon as the CBUs are through going off, why, have at it." So that was a drawback, if your timing was off. Pre-strike of a known target, too, could soften it up. If a FAC knew that they had some gun positions in a spot they were going to spray on, we'd go pound them good and hard before the spray operation started, neutralize the area before they came in. That was IV Corps. In III Corps, I don't

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think I expended in front of anybody but once. We made passes in front of them, but that wasn't effective. I think that was a waste there. To circle over them is better or behind them slightly - don't alert anybody in front, unless you're going to do it.

Clement: Do you have any firsthand experience in the accuracy of MSQ mobile search special or TPQ?

Thompson: Well, I saw quite a few of them on drops. The best one I had was right in April, early May, sometime in that time frame. They had just had a problem with MSQ down there, had some bad runs, and they were re-validating all the places. I made some of those validation runs, just dropping one bomb or something like that, just to score and calibrate their system. I did that one morning - beautifully clear morning down in IV Corps. They ran us and we plotted the target that they gave

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us that was right on the tip of a little piece of land where two rivers came together. The bomb hit right square on the tip of land, just exactly where we've been pre-briefed we were going to drop on. When we released, came up about 20 and then break, and you could see the bomb go in, and, h---, it was a perfect drop. In most cases you had to, of course, we didn't know exactly what our target was. Well, I say "most cases" - some we did and some we didn't. We knew what the coordinates were, but didn't know where they were located. We'd go look them up, and say, "It looks like they must be shooting about the side of this hill here, or in this little valley'or something like that. For the most part, they appeared to be pretty accurate. A lot of it at night, of course, or in bad weather, you couldn't grade, but you'd release your bombs and anytime you had an opportunity you'd look and see and you'd say, "Well, that looks about where the target ought to be;

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