

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DONALD L. HEILIGER
Pilot, Air Force, Vietnam War
1999

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Heiliger, Donald L. (b.1937). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 3 sound cassette (ca. 180 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 180 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 180 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract

Heiliger, born in Madison (Wisconsin), delves into his experience as a F105 Pilot in the 333rd Fighter Squadron during the Vietnam War and his six years as a prisoner of war. Heiliger attended navigator training for four years and then enjoyed teaching navigation before attending pilot training. He trained in T-37s, T-38s and F105s. Heiliger goes into detail about experiences on nuclear alert for Korea from Japan. He arrived in Japan in November of 1965 and was shot down one and a half years later in an F105. Heiliger says that the most common weapons he flew with were six 150-pound bombs and a Gatling gun. He relates a story about shooting at water buffalo near the Viet Cong in Laos, which he did not enjoy. Heiliger is mentioned in a book; *MiG Killers*, but never shot down a MiG himself. He points out that the F105's were not very good air-to-air fighters and their orders were to just get away from other aircraft. Heiliger has flown out of Osan (Korea), Mito (Japan), Takhi (Thailand), and once landed in Da Nang (Vietnam). He explains that in October and November of 1967 they were losing one F105 a day in Vietnam, the first time Heiliger went down in a plane was in 1967 while flying a D105. Heiliger relates stories of refueling in the air and adds a scary story about a disconnect from the fueler not working. He tells that he worked in a unit nicknamed "Ryan's Raiders," called so because they were under the command of General "Black Jack" Ryan. Heiliger reveals how the air war was controlled out of Saigon and how the operations worked and that a lot of money was spent bringing in technical people from the United States to enhance the radar. His best friend was shot down and killed three nights before Heiliger went down the second time. He explains that their targets were anything from rail yards to army camps and his target on the night he was shot down was Kep Marshalling Yard, about thirty miles northeast of Hanoi. On May 15, 1967 he was running his eleventh mission with Ryan's Raiders with Major Ben Pollard as his back-seater. While he discusses the weaponry he carried that night he explains figuring circular error probability (CEP) and expresses the feelings he experienced, "You're going to be a little more excited; you're breathing a little more heavily up there." He goes into detail about having to fly through the buffer zone between China and Vietnam, the preparation for the attack and that one of their electronic countermeasure pods (ECM) was not working, which would help jam the radar of opposing planes. Heiliger illustrates getting hit and fire igniting in the F105 before he and Pollard had to eject; Pollard went first. Heiliger discusses ejecting from the plane, his twenty minute descent, what supplies he had, his injuries, and what happened after he landed in a tree, "There was no moon. Go underneath the canopy of the jungle. That is really dark. And so I thought, okay, one thing they teach you is you don't fool around in trees at night. You don't fool around in

trees.” He did not know where the plane went, but relates that on the 16th of May the State Department sent a letter apologizing to China stating that one of their planes may have intruded their territory. He explains that after getting down he watched a village and was eventually discovered by villagers and they took everything except his underwear and boots. He broke his .38 gun so they couldn’t use it. Heiliger paints a picture of what it was like in the village and not seeing any anger until two communist cadres arrived and frenzied up the crowd. He was held at gunpoint inside a hut for about forty minutes and thought he may die, “And after a few seconds of that, I was convinced that that was my time to go. Once you’re past that, actually, the fear goes, I think. I wasn’t afraid anymore.” Heiliger reports that he was taken away by jeep and found Pollard whose back was badly injured. Upon arriving at the “Hanoi Hilton” (Hoa Loa Prison), he was separated from Pollard for five years. Heiliger discusses the Honor Code several times (only revealing name, rank, serial number to captors) and being told “We don’t want to torture—they never used torture, the word is punish. We never want to punish you, so whatever happens it’s your fault. That was always the reason. It’s your fault you’re being punished because you won’t do what they want you to. It’s not our fault. We don’t want to do this, but you won’t cooperate so you’re forcing us to punish you.” He provides a sketch of the torture he endured, including clubbings, the use of screw cuffs, and u-bolts. Heiliger explains that he was taken to another prison nicknamed “The Zoo,” which used to be a French film school. He describes the various means of communication between prisoners; five-by-five matrix tap codes, sign language, writing on toilet paper, and fashioning ink out of various items they accumulated. They even wrote entire books, such as text books and lists of others being tortured on toilet paper. He mentions his disdain for people he thought were not supportive of the war such as California Governor Jerry Brown and several traitors who gave in to their captors’ demands. Heiliger estimates that there were about 337 total prisoners at Hanoi until 1969 and 1970 and then about 600; he was about number 150. Heiliger delves into his experiences getting to know himself and others at the prison, what they did to pass the time, and his own difficulty in receiving mail from home, and the reception he received from various family members when he returned home. He explains the order of release from the prison and how many people were wounded or died. Heiliger was returned to Clark Air Force Base then stayed in the service for twelve years before attending George Washington University for a masters degree in Latin-American studies and international relations. He received two purple hearts, a distinguished service medal, a meritorious service medal, retired as a colonel then later retired as the vice president of a marketing firm in Washington D.C. Heiliger discusses his opinions on Chile and Allende and his thoughts on the Vietnam War as a whole; “Vietnam I look at, and maybe this rationalizes it, people say we lost the Vietnam War, we did this. We won the Cold War. I look at it that way. Everything between World War II and the end, when the Berlin wall fell and everything else fell, were battles to the final victory.”

Biographical Sketch

Donald Heiliger (b. 1937) was born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. He served as a pilot in the Air Force during the Vietnam War. He was shot down on May 15, 1967 and was held as a prisoner of war for six years until his release on February 18, 1973. He has three children from his first marriage and was married during his time as a POW. His second marriage was to Cheryl Edwards in December 1973. He lives in Stoughton, Wisconsin and has been a member of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs from 1999 to 2005.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Jane Schneider, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2003.

Transcription edited by Christina M. Ballard, 2008.

Interview Transcript

Jim: We're interviewing Don Heiliger. It's the 10th of November, 1999.

Heiliger: It's December.

Jim: December. Excuse me. And you were born when?

Heiliger: January 16th, 1937.

Jim: Where?

Heiliger: Here in Madison.

Jim: And you entered military service when, Don?

Heiliger: 18th of September, 1958. I had Guard and Reserve Pack before that, though.

Jim: In the Army National Guard here?

Heiliger: Yes, Army and Air Force.

Jim: Oh, and Air Force?

Heiliger: Well, Army for 10, 11, 12 months, something like that, with the Army National Guard, 32nd Division, National Guard band.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Heiliger: While I was trying to stay out of the military.

Jim: Oh, I see. Now look what happened.

Heiliger: And then, when I went on to advanced ROTC, they had to transfer me over to the inactive because you couldn't be inactive and receive a double stipend. So, they first transferred me over to the Army inactive standby reserve, and then the Air Force, because I was in the Air Force ROTC, they said no, you can't be in that either. They've got to give me a second discharge to go into the Air Force inactive standby reserve. And then they found out they had transferred me at the wrong grade. I had made, on paper, from an E-0 to an E-1 during that time. So they had to give me another discharge, re-enlist me, so by the time I finally got my commission I had four discharges from the military.

Jim: So, in 1958 you entered where?

Heiliger: Second Lieutenant, Air Force, first at Lackland Air Force Base.

Jim: But you had no pilot training at that time.

Heiliger: Oh no. No, no, no, no, no.

Jim: So you just went in as an untrained second lieutenant.

Heiliger: Right. I went to Lackland for four weeks, which was extended because I had some kidney stones there. But, basically, I went to navigator training and was a navigator for about four years before I went to pilot training.

Jim: I see. And navigator training, was that at Lackland?

Heiliger: At Arlington Air Force Base in Texas from late '58 to mid-1959. Then out to Major(??) Air Force Base for advanced navigation and bombing, radar bombing.

Jim: Any particular aircraft?

Heiliger: No. Then I went back to Arlington, Texas, to teach in navigation, and then back to Major to teach bombing again. And then I went to pilot training.

Jim: You had a circuitous route.

Heiliger: Then I went to pilot training; not until 1964. So I'd been in the service, let's say, almost five and a half years before I went to pilot training.

Jim: And did you go to pilot training because you wanted to or—

Heiliger: Because I wanted to fly.

Jim: Or they were short and they—more money or anything.

Heiliger: No, I wanted to. If, in fact, I wanted to stay in the military, which I was making up my mind after my five-year point, and Arthur Anderson in Chicago was waiting for me because they had given me a five-year leave, let's say, when I got out of college to come with them after that time. But I had to make up my mind. I would not have stayed in had I not have been a pilot because, at that time, particularly at that time, the ol' boys' club said that you had to be a pilot in order to progress. We had no generals in the Air Force that had ever been navigators. Now, that doesn't mean you aren't going to make it. I did not, but at least you wanted the opportunity. And if you were a navigator I don't think that opportunity even existed.

- Jim: They sort of told you that this is the end of the line unless you wanted to do something better.
- Heiliger: The end of the line, there were an awful lot of majors that was the end of the line, let alone getting up for—
- Jim: Was navigation a difficult course, before we go beyond that?
- Heiliger: No. It was completely different than piloting, obviously.
- Jim: Of course.
- Heiliger: But no. I enjoyed teaching it. I never flew operationally as a navigator, other than—
- Jim: So you did a class—
- Heiliger: I have 22, 2300 hours as a navigator.
- Jim: And the class training was your primary.
- Heiliger: I taught in the class and taught in the air, and navigation as an air instructor also. And then on standardization evaluation for other navigator instructors.
- Jim: I see. But they didn't increase your rank?
- Heiliger: Oh yeah. Like everybody else, sure, I made it all the way up to captain.
- Jim: Oh, before you got to—
- Heiliger: I went to pilot training as a captain. Three of us in that class.
- Jim: Out of the navigator school?
- Heiliger: Yup, all three out of navigator.
- Jim: And so they sent you where?
- Heiliger: I went to Webb Air Force Base, Big Spring, Texas.
- Jim: I'm not familiar with that.
- Heiliger: It's just west of Amarillo. And that was in March of 1964. I graduated in class of 1965, in March of 1965, from Webb Air Force Base.
- Jim: So you started out in what aircraft?

Heiliger: From there I graduated number one in my class, so I got a choice of assignments.

Jim: Tell me about your basic training. What did you train in?

Heiliger: First of all a T-37. I never flew a prop plane, ever, until I got down to Uruguay years and years later. I started out on a T-37, which is a small—side-by-side training jet they still use. And then right from that to the T-38.

Jim: Was that an easy aircraft to fly?

Heiliger: I thought they were both relatively easy. I enjoyed the T-38 more than the 37. Just having a side-by-side instructor doesn't mean you can get away with as much. Back to back—

Jim: Isn't that good for making a better pilot?

Heiliger: I'm not sure. The first question is whether you can afford the minor errors and still stay alive. And checking out later in the 105, the first landing and takeoff I made in that was by myself because they didn't want to be with you in that.

Jim: Didn't trust you?

Heiliger: No. Two-seated 105 is a back-to-back, but there's no elevation of the rear seat and there's no way the pilot can watch it and make sure, so they preferred to test you out. They'd take you in a lot of times, and just before the flare, of course, you'd be landing it from the back seat. But when you made your real landing, your first one, you were in a single seat.

Jim: In a 105.

Heiliger: Mm-hmm. That's where I went from pilot training and took my first assignment as a fighter pilot.

Jim: Was that an option for you that was given to you?

Heiliger: Yes. And I'm 28 years old at that time, 27, 28 years old.

Jim: Meaning you were older than the average.

Heiliger: Older than the average new prep fighter pilot. And when I went through pilot training, then there was, I should say, minor pressure to either take another ATC, air training command, as an instructor pilot, or, preferably, a multi-engine airplane because I was "too old" to be a fighter pilot.

Jim: They said you were too old?

Heiliger: They implied that I would be nicer if I was younger, that I was too old to start out in a single engine. I wanted to build up flying hours and all that kind of stuff, and fighters don't build them up as fast as going for droning long hours—

Jim: Right. They don't stay up long enough.

Heiliger: --Transporter. Not a bomber, it was only a transport.

Jim: Tell me about the 105 before we leave that. Did you like to fly that?

Heiliger: It was a great plane. It was the biggest single-engine airplane—

Jim: It didn't have a long life in the Air Force. They—that pretty fast, I thought.

Heiliger: Well, for its time it probably had a long life, now you consider how long planes are lasting.

Jim: I suppose.

Heiliger: I suppose the life, but they retired the last one, I guess, after I came home. They retired the last one from the Guard, even, in 1970.

Jim: Wasn't that—

Heiliger: It was designed as a nuclear deliverer, primary—

Jim: Fighter bomber.

Heiliger: At that time you didn't have attack designations in the Air Force. You had F or B or C. I think it might have been an attack title if it would have had the current designations in that it was an attack airplane, not a fighter. In other words, you had the air-to-air capabilities, all of the things of every other plane, but it was not a good platform for air-to-air; too heavy, underpowered. But it was a great weapon deliverer for nuclear weapons going in low. And, in fact, when we were converting over to the F-4 just before I got shot down, I was flying out of Japan, TDY to Southeast Asia. But we were converting over to the F-4. The F-4 could not do the mission that the F-105 could do the same way. In other words, it would have to go in higher longer, go down for a shorter time and back up high, which makes it more vulnerable. With a 105 we could go in all the way low.

Jim: But the F-4 was the more famous airplane.

Heiliger: Oh certainly. Certainly. Well, not in Vietnam it wasn't necessarily, but in the total totality of the Air Force because a lot more people flew it.

Jim: Because it certainly lasted a long time.

Heiliger: Oh yeah.

Jim: And, of course, that came from the Navy.

Heiliger: It was originally a Navy plane.

Jim: I had a friend who flew that in the Navy. Well, before we--

Heiliger: But it had a bomb bay, the F-105, see, and that was originally for a nuclear weapon. You'll never find a fighter with a bomb bay, except the F-105, although most of the missions I sat, when I was sitting nuclear alert in Korea out of Japan, most of the missions I think we had two nuclear weapons, one on each wing, and used the center, the bomb bay, for a fuel tank.

Jim: Oh—know about this.

Heiliger: A fuel tank slung underneath also to get big—range. And then on the out--

Jim: How many minutes in the air?

Heiliger: Oh, quite a bit. We could go, albeit our missions out of Korea were usually pretty short, except some. We had a few in Russia, but most of them were in Korea. But we would have two Y-1 type of nuclear weapons, one slung on each wing and each one 50 times the size of Hiroshima, which is awesome.

Jim: All of a sudden I've got too many questions. I don't know where to start. In the first place, was that your first 105 which you took--

Heiliger: That was the first plane I flew, and the only plane basically.

Jim: Was that really a rush for you to take a plane that you hadn't done before?

Heiliger: It was a rush in the sense that we were in the first classes. In fact, I think I was in the second. My friend Wally Newcomb was in the first class just ahead of us arriving. We were the first one in our squadron of training, in squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, where we went for 105 training in Nellis, Las Vegas. We were the first ones to come right out of pilot training into that. Up until that time, all pilots going to the 105 had been in something else, operationally, first. We were the first crews to come directly out of pilot training to the 105. So that was kind of awesome.

My personal instructor was Neil Eddens, who was an ex-Thunderbird, who later went back to commend the Thunderbirds. One of my classmates, Guy Morgan, also flew the Thunderbirds later, and also came back a second time to command, to be the leader of the Thunderbirds. And to have a guy teaching in the 105 out in the deserts, and you're on his wing and he's teaching you to have confidence in you, and you're looking at him and he looks so low that there's no room for you to be snugged in without hitting the ground, and he says, just be—I will not crash you.

Jim: So he talked you into the ground that first fly? Talked to him on your wing?

Heiliger: First flights, well first landings were made, and from there on all the flights I took with him I was on his wing and he would just make sure I tucked in.

Jim: That seemed to be an adequate way to learn how to deal with the plane.

Heiliger: Yes. Yes. We were given enough several rides in the back seat to get the feel of what it was like and what it would look like; semi look like in the landing because you could see a little bit, but not the very end of it.

Jim: I was going to say, you couldn't see the straightaway in that aircraft, could you?

Heiliger: Not from the back.

Jim: You had to fly like Charles Lindbergh did looking out the side of the window.

Heiliger: Yes, which you can't do. There's not a way to get the feel completely.

Jim: I understand.

Heiliger: But it was a great plane.

Jim: With your new 105 where did they send you?

Heiliger: They sent me to Japan and, as I say, the primary reason Japan was the—nuclear alert in Korea; Osan, Korea, or our base—

Jim: Right. So you were prepared to drop that big thing.

Heiliger: We were on alert when we were over there, and war was breaking out—was breaking out. Most of the time I was there we were every other week in Korea. And a lot of times it was because of people going PDY (Present For Duty), like I did, to Southeast Asia to make up for shortages in pilots. There's many weeks where we couldn't even get back. After a week we'd be sitting

at—until somebody could relieve you. So we were more than once every other week.

Jim: Your missions over Korea from Japan?

Heiliger: Missions over there we flew over in a transport to pick up our plane, which was already on alert.

Jim: Where in Korea?

Heiliger: Osan, which is about 30 miles south of Seoul.

Jim: Yeah, I've been there. I was in the Navy.

Heiliger: And our gunnery ranges were right outside. It was fun flying over there because everything was so close. You could take off and get to your gunnery range in a matter of minutes, whereas flying out of Japan everything is kind of like the United States where everything is so protected. We had to fly down to an island south of Japan, south of Tokyo, to do a lot of our bombing. We did have another range over in Mito, which is in the eastern shore of Japan, but anytime we'd do nuclear weapon-type practice, we'd be on this island.

Jim: Low-level bombing.

Heiliger: Yeah.

Jim: At full speed, full throttle.

Heiliger: Full throttle. Nuclear weapon we'd be at 600 knots. Now that's a full throttle. You could do it supersonic, but you can't carry a weapon supersonic on the wings, for example.

Jim: Too much drag.

Heiliger: Too much drag, yes.

Jim: So your orders were, supposedly, the thing was lit. Who lit it, the nuclear weapon? Who would be in charge of that?

Heiliger: Once we take off, we are.

Jim: You could make the decision to make it active or not?

Heiliger: Once you take off you are active. There's no way to turn you around at that time.

- Jim: Yes, but what's the danger of your dropping it accidentally, then?
- Heiliger: You never take off unless you're given the green light.
- Jim: Got it.
- Heiliger: Once you got the green light, you were in a go and there was no way to turn you around.
- Jim: Got it. And how would you practice then? With dummies?
- Heiliger: Yeah, dummies. Dummies or just—it's not a critical thing to practice a drop of a nuclear weapon as much as the procedure. Not as much as it is with conventional bombs you're floating in or using the Gatling gun. This is a full fire with all the missiles that a fighter would have, besides the difficulty of a nuclear weapon.
- Jim: I would think you would practice turning sideways, though, after you let go of that thing.
- Heiliger: Yeah, you had all kinds of things in your cockpit. Complete closure, shield, eyeglasses, everything.
- Jim: What were your instructions?
- Heiliger: Including one patch to keep you with one good eye.
- Jim: See, now this is the stuff that makes these interviews terrific. I've never read that.
- Heiliger: Yes.
- Jim: One patch. It was down—
- Heiliger: You had a shield that came automatically. As soon as you pressed the trigger to release the weapon, the shield closed over the cockpit. Now, what happened, the worry is you probably tried as much as you could because you're not the only guy up there. There's other things going off around there. Nobody wanted to fool themselves, and I don't think anybody ever much pretended that there'd be another mission out of it because these are probably one-ways, only because if anything happened you wouldn't have a place to go back to, if you were still living.
- Jim: Don't they tell you you are expendable?
- Heiliger: No. Everything was planned to come back.

- Jim: They had a plan for you to get back.
- Heiliger: A plan for that and a plan if you couldn't get back. In other words, where to take it, where to punch out.
- Jim: And that depended on where you're dropping it, didn't it?
- Heiliger: Obviously. Each mission was different.
- Jim: I understand.
- Heiliger: But most of them, like I say, at that time--I'm not giving any secrets, we're not at war now, most of them were in Korea. A few were in the southern, eastern coast of Russia. We could make that too, but that was a single weapon usually because we couldn't make it with two.
- Jim: And your plan was, in each instance, to return to the base from whence you came.
- Heiliger: Yup. Reload and go again. But the chances were probably slim, as we well knew. Mainly the thing was to try to keep at least one eye.
- Jim: That's right. But once you dropped the cookie, everything changed.
- Heiliger: And we were all on low-level delivery too. A couple years before, in fact the D model of the 105, I flew the D and the F, the D a single seat and F a two-seater, both of those were basically—and the weapons at that time had advanced to the point where you're on a lay-down(??), you'd drop the thing out and parachute would retard behind you and it would stick in the ground, and then sometime after that would go off, like a minute later. So it gives you time to go—
- Jim: Oh, those nuclear bombs were—
- Heiliger: At the time I flew them.
- Jim: I see.
- Heiliger: Before that, in the B model 105 with the straight over the thing where it would pop off like that—
- Jim: Get the hell out of there.
- Heiliger: Literally an element(??). In fact, even the D model had an automatic element in it.

Jim: Oh really?

Heiliger: You pressed the button, if you wanted to do that. And it primed the thing and everything. You program, you put everything in and you'd program. You'd press the button, it would start the climb, it would release. You didn't do anything.

Jim: Not even release it?

Heiliger: It would even roll you out.

Jim: Everything was programmed from the minute you hit that button.

Heiliger: Yes. If you used that system.

Jim: I understand.

Heiliger: Now, we didn't have any targets. We practiced it only for fun because—capability. So we'd play it to see what a perfect element looked like because it made a perfect element. But no, what we practiced is the lay-down and—

Jim: How many hours did you have in 105?

Heiliger: I finally ended up with 1000, something like that. And, from the time I arrived in Japan it was November, Thanksgiving-ish of '65. I got shot down a year and a half later and I had about—

Jim: That was in the bomber.

Heiliger: In the 105.

Jim: In the 105. Oh, you were shot down in the 105.

Heiliger: Yes.

Jim: While you were in Japan—

Heiliger: And then we got called upon to go down because either ferry missions—we were doing maintenance for the 105s. The 105s flew out of Takhli in Thailand. No 105s flew in Vietnam. We never flew missions out of Vietnam.

Jim: Oh, your base was in Thailand.

Heiliger: They might have, in 1965, the first ones. I don't think so. As far as I know, the whole 105 fleets, both of them, were at Takhli or Korat. And we flew

everything out of Thailand. I landed once at Danang, but only because of an emergency. Otherwise we never flew out of there. And we would go down temporarily because they were short of pilots, for instance. I went down—

Jim: Tell me how you got involved in Vietnam, though.

Heiliger: We? Because we were pilots.

Jim: I understand. But you were in Japan practicing--

Heiliger: I'm in Japan. One, we did the maintenance of all the aircraft at Stoc Li(??), the air base in Thailand. All the 105s were there. We did not have full-scale maintenance for the first couple years. The major engine maintenance, complete overhaul of an airplane, they'd bring the bird back to Japan or Okinawa. Kurat went to Okinawa. The birds at Takhli came to Japan for complete overhaul. We even sent some of the birds down to Taiwan to be overhauled. And we'd go down and pick them up there and take them back down to—

Jim: I see. Was that an automatic number of hours that they had a complete overhaul?

Heiliger: Yes. And I have no idea what—

Jim: But it was a certain number.

Heiliger: Oh yes. And you don't fly anymore until you get it redone.

Jim: They don't have another aircraft for you?

Heiliger: No. I say you don't fly that airplane. They have to find a spare. So they'd bring the airplane back to Takhli. So we'd go down and pick up birds occasionally and bring them back. And also because they were short of pilots. They always seemed to be short of pilots when the wars come, I don't care how many they have. We were called upon to go down and fly temporarily.

When I went down, for instance, in '66, in April or May of 1966, basically two months PDY, I went down to Takhli. I'm trying to think, there were four of us I think from Japan at that time that went down. And I flew with the 333rd attack fighter squadron. Just like any of the others, I had my rotation. And I was really lucky because the other three that went down got put into places—they kind of always filled in as a spare. I was given a regular flight. We had a five-man flight, four of them—if our flight was tapped to fly a four-ship, I was one of those four or the spare, and we just rotated right around, even though I was the temporary.

- Jim: That was your standard mission, four planes active and one—
- Heiliger: One would be a spare.
- Jim: Okay. Now, what would—
- Heiliger: In other words, we'd take off and the spare could take you back.
- Jim: What were we bombing with them? What was the weapon or—
- Heiliger: The most common I flew with was six 750-pounds.
- Jim: And did you fly those at low level?
- Heiliger: No.
- Jim: That was back to a more conventional—
- Heiliger: Normally we would fly almost that, just like any other high low-end dropoff. You find a target on the way home, use the Gatling gun. That was called in by a fact—border patrol.
- Jim: Was that your choice, the Gatling gun?
- Heiliger: Normally you'd have facts out there, border patrollers, flying in the T-41s or whatever they were flying. And they would call up, anybody around this area, and they wouldn't know who's out there necessarily. Anybody here? And if our flight lead, and I was never a lead at that time, but if our lead would say yeah, we're up, we're heading back. We've got fuel and we've got enough for an extra half hour and everybody's got 1000 rounds of 20 millimeter, what do you want. And we normally didn't have any bombs because you dropped them. And you don't have any air-to-ground missiles, so normally you would—
- Jim: How do they—
- Heiliger: They would just say hey, once we'd get in the area they'd see us normally, and they'd say okay, we'll fire a smoke, and that's where the target is. You figure out how you want to get in. Or they'd recommend a way in if the thing was defended.
- Jim: Yeah, because the triple A would be somewhere.
- Heiliger: Normally they weren't flying around too much triple A either because of being shot down. They're a little light airplane, little L-19s or whatever they were flying.

Jim: Right.

Heiliger: So they would then call us in and we would take care of and try to pepper them up with—we rarely, it was not considered life-enhancing to make more than one pass because, when you make a second pass, third pass, then if there were somebody shooting at you, the second and third passes they were better at hitting you.

One time I remember, the only time, and I'll just add this to your story, we had a border controller that said, hey, I've got some—they called us into the area and he said, I've got some Viet Cong, and this was going in Laos, by the way, and they had some water buffalo that were down there that were being—it's their tractor or food. They were being moved and they said we need you to shoot up this herd of water buffalo. It didn't sound really inspiring. However, we made three runs and the guys, the four air controllers, were just ecstatic. Oh, you're doing great. Congratulations. These things are falling like flies. And nobody really liked it. But hey, it's like shooting up material or a truck coming down.

Jim: You just shouldn't think about it.

Heiliger: And then on the way back, I forget what our call sign was that day, the four air controllers called it Misty Fact or Misty Lead or whatever, he said, you know those water buffalo I shot? They just got up and moved away. They were trained to lay down. [Laughter.] We probably hit a few, but actually I think we all cheered that night at the bar because we didn't really want to hit the water buffalo.

Jim: That's a great story. Great story. So, tell me about enemy aircraft.

Heiliger: None. Oh once, yes. Twice, actually, I've seen it. One was serious where we were up res-capping somebody else. If somebody is shot down, either from your own flight or another flight, if you have fuel, to try to help and make sure that person is spotted and somebody stays in the area, maybe even to ward off if you had some 20 millimeter left. You would stay in the area and the whole flight would then sit up at an altitude which was normally where they would bail. Normally. You're not going to sit over the center of _____(??) doing this, but normally in these areas in the western part of Vietnam or the southwestern part or Laos, we would then sit up when the guy bailed out and res-cap. I forget what that stands for, but it's a rescue and something.

Jim: Capture?

Heiliger: Something like that. But anyway, you're up there on station until helicopters may be able to get in there. And you have to have another flight come in.

You run low on fuel, another flight would come in and do the same thing. And I remember one time we were doing that and we got wind of a couple MIGs and we got down. We got down, we just got down on the deck and outran them.

Jim: Oh. You were prepared to deal with it.

Heiliger: We were prepared to, but I would hate to. A 105 was not a good air-to-air. Now, I'm in a book called *MIG Killers*. I should have brought that for you. I'm not a MIG killer, but the F-105 did shoot down a few MIGs. But mainly, I know one of my friends that just passed in front of me, he was the trigger and just happened to hit. But most of them—

Jim: Generally they were too big to make turns.

Heiliger: It was not a good air-to-air plane, even though it was a “fighter.” It was too heavy. And underpowered.

Jim: So the MIG could turn inside.

Heiliger: Right. And, like the last night I took off in a two-seater, but I'll go into that, 55,000 pounds with a 16,500-pound thrust engine. Even with afterburner and water it only brings you up to 26,500, so you've got more than a two-to-one ratio against you. Now your F-15s and F-16s have better than one-to-one. It's better the other way. That's who they can go up that way. We can go up too for a little while and then—

Jim: Come scurrying down.

Heiliger: Right.

Jim: Yes, it's incredible what those—

Heiliger: So I'm saying, your best bet on a 105, you're not going to stay to engage.

Jim: Get the hell out.

Heiliger: Normally, in fact not even that, the orders were not to engage, to get away assuming that you had the opportunity. And in both cases we did. One in particular we just had put the burner in. We were already a little low on fuel, but then we made it into the base. What's the base up in northern Thailand? Whatever it was, we went into there.

Jim: It was an alternate site, then.

Heiliger: It was alternate base if we ever needed it, and we just went in to refuel. And to also help in the res-cap of the pilot.

Jim: Did you find any _____(??) there?

Heiliger: No.

Jim: I had a good friend who flew two tours.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. Some of our buddies came back and flew in another 104.

Jim: Yeah, he liked that.

Heiliger: And some even flew two series in a 105. We lost more—I think we almost depleted the 105 fleet in Vietnam.

Jim: You lost too many?

Heiliger: Oh yeah.

Jim: Because?

Heiliger: We were used as the heavy bomber. F-4s didn't do the bombing until later. If it was the Air Force's portion. I'm not talking Navy, I'm talking about Air Force.

Jim: I understand.

Heiliger: The stuff that rolled in was normally F-105s, so you were in there mixing it up. In October, November of 1967 we lost one a day.

Jim: Due to ground fire?

Heiliger: Almost all. It was ground or sand(??).

Jim: Oh yeah, we haven't talked about that. Tell me about the sand.

Heiliger: Never saw any.

Jim: Never saw one?

Heiliger: Not that I know of. And I don't think when I was hit it was a Sam either, so—

Jim: Well, are we ready for that now? Tell me about that.

Heiliger: This was on the second major time I was sent down. The first time I went down in '67 flying a D model, a one-seated model, as I told you about being assigned to the 333rd. In 1967, early in 1967, I think around the end of January, we had a new commander in the Pacific Air Force, Black Jack Ryan. General Black Jack Ryan. He was, quote, as I heard from staff, embarrassed that the Air Force did not have a counterpart to the Navy 86—all-weather capability. And we didn't. Everything we flew almost was bay stuff. The Navy could go out with their A-6, and the A-6 is still flying, by the way—

Jim: That's right.

Heiliger: And do night stuff. And we couldn't. So he wanted to come up with an alternative, and this is where you get into competition with the Navy. Another story, right?

Jim: Sure.

Heiliger: But we had to have our competition with the Navy to make sure that, at the end of the day, if the Navy logged a counter we would have a counter too. Okay, okay, okay, I know. But in looking back, you wonder if you weren't up there sometimes as a prisoner because you were part of a conflict between them. So he put out kind of an all-points bulletin to the various things. I guess they did a staff study of what planes were capable. Well, one was a B-58, which they had taken off by that time. But it had all the stuff for low-level delivery and everything and could do it. But none of them had been brought up yet. So his plan was to eventually—he wanted something temporarily until he could bring something else, either get permission to use B-52s or bring up the B-58s or something. What airplanes, then, could do that? Well, the 105 had it all. Obviously we did because we were a nuclear weapon deliverer. We could deliver day and night. We had a terrain-avoidance radar on there, which could get you to go up and down, valleys to sea. And it was good to about 750 feet. Six hundred feet, I think. And that's when the specifications broke down. We can guarantee you up to 600 feet.

Jim: That you can see. Visualize everything up to 600.

Heiliger: Well no, it was the fact that it had a tolerance of 600 feet. In other words, if you're at 500 feet they wouldn't guarantee that you weren't going to hit the ground. It wasn't because you couldn't see. The equipment design wasn't any better than that at the time.

Jim: Got it.

Heiliger: Now you've got much better, obviously. So, what planes could fly terrain and what planes could go at night, could come in low, could do all these things we'd like to do, and have a night capability to **[End of tape one, side one.]**

run competition with the A-6? And they found out the F-105 was the most—and I know they sent out and they telegraphed both the COTA(??), our base, and to Kadena, which is Okinawa. Kadena did not give them a very good response because I know they got pissed off at the people running Kadena.

But anyway, we both then got into a—and they shipped us over to Kadena and to COTA, about 25 pilots that were on their way to fly single-seat—this was the crane. This is what you want to fly. You don't want to ever fly two-seater stuff if you were a single-seat. And you'd certainly never want to fly with a back seat. There were some—fly our backseat.

Jim: Oh really?

Heiliger: With those that knew what they were doing. One had had combat time, and I had combat time flying from a year before. In fact, quite a bit of time. And I also knew all the systems down there. You knew how to get on tankers down there because you never flew in a 105 from Thailand to a target in North Vietnam without having to tap at least once into a tanker. You had to get fuel or you wouldn't make it.

Jim: We haven't talked about that yet.

Heiliger: No, but you always did that, day or night. Later at night, before it was—even in Laos most of the time, if it was northern Laos, we had to find a tanker. I mean, there'd be one assigned to us.

Jim: But you knew that when you took off that this guy would be waiting for you.

Heiliger: Oh sure. Sure. If you were hurting coming back, then you would call. Hey, anybody can help me out with fuel and you'd take anybody that would—

Jim: When you're down to fumes, right.

Heiliger: Down to fumes. And we did that several times, particularly if we were rescuing somebody and you were—

Jim: These tankers were 707s?

Heiliger: Yes. KC-135. Same thing.

Jim: Before we leave that, was it hard?

Heiliger: No. Not—[both talking at once]. We had two systems on the 105. You had the type where the boom would plug in. All you had to do is fly on the tanker, by wing literally, your position on the tanker. Now, the other system, we had

a probe that came out. And then, if you were assigned to a tanker that had a basket, it was your responsibility to plug in. Now that's another story.

Jim: That's harder.

Heiliger: Particularly when you're in weather or it's turbulent. Now try to plug into that thing. Or at night, later. That's even more fun.

Jim: Because you couldn't see it very well?

Heiliger: No. The basket's floating around. All you would do is you—you don't chase the basket ever because the basket's out there. You say, okay, here's about the iffy medium and you'd say okay now, forward, and you'd keep your position. Hopefully you'd hit it; if not, back off and keep trying.

Jim: Just keep poking at it.

Heiliger: And usually after three or four you'd get in. You might be lucky on the first time. If it's not turbulent, you probably can do it. If it's turbulent out there, it's tough.

Jim: Once you hit it, were you locked in?

Heiliger: Yeah.

Jim: Then you didn't have to do anything?

Heiliger: No. It made its automatic connection.

Jim: Right. But if you got close enough, it grabbed your probe.

Heiliger: No, the basket you've got pressure on it, on the basket. The probe you were actually locked. If the guy plugged into you—in fact, my first mission ever in refueling it at Las Vegas, unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to the tanker, both of our disconnects didn't work.

Jim: Gees.

Heiliger: I know. It started streaming fuel and I'm yelling "break away," and I can't get it off and he can't get it off. Finally he shoved me out and we literally, brute force, disconnected. Yeah. That was one of the scariest, actually, I've ever been in. That was early in my flying.

Jim: I was going to say, that could've brought both of you down.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. Could have. Probably me for sure. Chances are, not him. But anyway, so we refueled every time going out. Even in '66. But in '67 we were sent down, then, as this training, after we got done with our training, flying this, actually literally, single-ship stuff, all by ourselves, 750 to go out at night. All weather. And just more harassment and to get your counter(??) up there.

Jim: Right. That's what it really was about.

Heiliger: To get your counter up there. And we hopefully did some damage. Now, if I remember right, the circular air probability of dropping a weapon, which didn't bother you in nuclear time, right? So you're off 600 feet.

Jim: --Was pretty good.

Heiliger: We used to say those drovers should have a flag coming up when they hit the ground saying, "Don't run, you'll only die tired." You know? So you don't care if it's 600, 700 feet up. So the best you could expect with the automatic equipment, which we were dropping on—now, if we were rolling in, okay, you'd hit right on. You could see. But you were doing it at night or whatever and using the radar, which the radar would only guarantee about a 600 CEP, at best. Now, it doesn't mean you're that good. That's the best the system can do. You probably would maybe match it by another 300 or 400. So you might have a 1,000 pounds _____(??). The 750 only had a kill range of 750 feet, which means you don't want to go lower than 750 either because it drags right below you. There's no retard on that. So, when it blew up, it's going to go up to 750. If you were down to 600 it would probably hit you.

Jim: That's right.

Heiliger: Right. But, so our missions were normally figured in at 800 feet. And about the low-level portion was 420 and we'd push it up to normally about 600.

Jim: Why did they have you flying singles, though?

Heiliger: It's to our advantage at night. At night you're not going to turn on all your lights anyway.

Jim: That's right. Well, they didn't really have a target of great consequence anyway.

Heiliger: No. The only good thing about this is, once we reached down there, and I led the first group down there, the lowly captain that I was, the first four planes on this, what we called it Ryan's Raiders, not with happy pilots in the back because they were pilots just like we were, they expected to go to Vietnam to fly a single engine. And they were pulled off. In fact, they made up a decal

which donated as Ryan's, General Ryan, we called them Ryan's Raiders. It had a two-seated F-105 with a golden spruce in the back seat. That's our patch.

Jim: What did Ryan think of that?

Heiliger: We knew that it would be a success. It didn't make any difference what the end result would be. It would be a success. It would be labeled. It would always come out a success and it did, even though it failed. It's still listed as a success.

Jim: I understand.

Heiliger: So we teamed up in Japan while we were training, and I got a guy by the name of Ben Pollard all the time to fly with me. And Ben was a major and I was a captain, which is very unusual. Front seaters usually are the seniors, right?

Jim: Right.

Heiliger: Ben had a lot of time; not a whole lot of time, but some time. But his last assignment, he was an aeronautics(??) professor at the Air Force Academy. And they needed pilots. They were pulling pilots in from all over.

Jim: They pulled one of the trade school boys out.

Heiliger: Another one that got shot down, the only one that was shot down before me, his backseater was Bob Stewart, who was an English professor at the Air Force Academy.

Jim: My gosh.

Heiliger: So anyway, we headed down again in April of '67, late April of '67, to take—four joined us from Kadena, from Okinawa. We had eight planes down there in the first contingent. And we were—targets night after night and we'd just divvy them up. The beauty of it was, the only thing we had to do was hit a target at a time, any way you want to get there. No other mission. Everything was so controlled out of Saigon on the whole air war. All we were given was a target and a time. You figure out your own way. Here's your tankers, you get done your tanker—

Jim: That's your problem.

Heiliger: Somewhere in this time frame. You'd tell them about what time you're going to get there. You plan your way in, you plan your way out. And when I was

shot down, and the guy ahead of me was shot down, we didn't even leave anybody any plans as to how we were getting in.

Jim: So they really didn't know where the hell you were.

Heiliger: No. I knew the guy ahead of me, one of my best friends, Pete Bidman(??), got bagged three nights before me and he got killed. But I knew about where he'd be coming in because the next night I took the same target. I said, "I want to fly that target" and I planned it the same way he did. I scared the living daylights out of me. That was two nights before I got shot down. The weather was bad. We had enhanced radar. We had brought in—this program was going to work because they'd spent an immense amount of money bringing technical people in from the states to enhance the radar. We could increase the size, the size of the picture on the scope, we could double or triple the speed of the scope so that you had the best possible radar. So much better than the 105 would ever have.

Jim: What was the advantage of increasing the speed of the radar scope?

Heiliger: It would give you a faster change on the target. In other words, as the radar scope, particularly if you're blowing this thing up, you want that thing to change a lot. So we had like a zoom lens on it. This was all done by radar.

Jim: What was your usual target at night?

Heiliger: Anything from railroad yards to Army camps.

Jim: Just put it in the yard, that's good enough?

Heiliger: Well, we had a spot in there. Yes. In other words, we had a house to hit or something like that to hit.

Jim: How did you know where that house was?

Heiliger: By radar. Remember, I'm an old radar navigator.

Jim: I understand. But you didn't have film photographs that were given to you to look at and—

Heiliger: No, but you could pretty well tell what it was going to look like on the radar screen. And we had studied that and say here's the thing you're looking for. Now Ben, unfortunately, he was not a radar background and he was my back seater. He was supposed to be the expert on radar. I was the expert on radar.

Jim: Role reversal here.

Heiliger: Role reversal, besides being a major. So I would certainly help him out.

Jim: Sure.

Heiliger: And we could normally pick it out. And we'd talk about the target on the way in. I know when we went down to fly on our gunnery, Ryan wanted to know, what is our probability. So, just before we left to go down there, and they wanted to see is it worth sending these guys or not. Ben and I had something like 750 CEPs. When the set's only capable of 600, that's not bad.

Jim: And CEP is?

Heiliger: Circular error probability. In other words, from the target, how far out will you be? And on the gunnery range we were hitting 750, and the system is only designed for 600. So we felt pretty good about that. In the heat of combat, maybe 1000. You're going to be a little more excited; you're breathing a little more heavily up there. And these are all at night.

Jim: And you carried two 500-pound bombs?

Heiliger: No, six 750s.

Jim: Six 750-pounder? A heavy load.

Heiliger: Six fives, three and three. Forty-five hundred pounds. That's not bad.

Jim: Did you just drop them all at once?

Heiliger: Yes. Oh yeah, you'd have to. There's no single—I don't know if that rack, I'd have to go back in my memory, I don't know if that rack could be, if you could turn a switch to go single amount. I don't think so. Everything else was six—everything I ever knew in combat was all. One little 750 ain't going to do a lot. The circular probability helps a lot more when you have six of them floating out there in a pattern, obviously. But, again, it's just one ship with six bombs. After getting shot down, I looked at it real quickly and I said the best we were doing was keeping them awake at least. Two of them, instead of having a free time, we were at least harassing them enough to have gunners watching and maybe shooting and having to stay up at night.

Jim: Okay, now we're getting down to it. So, on this particular evening—

Heiliger: On May 15th, 1967. I was on my eleventh mission with the Raiders, Ryan's Raiders. In other words, we had flown 10 successful ones before that. And, in fact, Ben and I probably had the most of the ones—

Jim: Was that one a night or one a day?

Heiliger: It hadn't been quite three weeks. So obviously a couple days to get adjusted and start flying. So we were probably almost every other night and sometimes back-to-back.

Jim: Regardless of weather?

Heiliger: Oh yes. Weather didn't make any difference.

Jim: It did to you, but it didn't to Ryan.

Heiliger: No. That's what the plane was designed for. The only problem in weather is then getting on a tanker. And if you're in the weather, then it's even more fun.

Jim: Right. Or seeing your target.

Heiliger: You don't need to. It's on radar. You don't use anything visual. I mean, you're using visual to see if you can help seeing any horizon. You might not want to hit the ground or something like that. And we heavily used that. We didn't trust the _____ (??) avoidance on that plane. And Ben and I always had planned everything with a minimum altitude besides our radar to make sure. I don't care what the radar says, we're not going to fly below this.

So, that night was the marshalling yard northeast of Hanoi about 30 miles called Kep. There's a Kep Air Base, and then there was a railroad marshalling yard right near that town of Kep or right near that base or whatever it is. It was referred to as the Kep Marshalling Yard and the Kep Air Base.

Anyway, this particular marshalling yard was our target and we were coming in partly along the coast of lower China. See, we were even allowed to use the buffer zone. That was nobody was allowed to use the buffer zone. We gave the North Vietnamese a 25-mile buffer zone that our planes would not fly in unless it was guaranteed or something, that close to China. We didn't want to hurt China at all. We were allowed to use that buffer zone. Only planes that I knew of at the time, we didn't have to tell them where we were going, how we got there. We could even use the buffer zone as long as we go in and hit our target on time.

Anyway, we were coming in, and we were coming in along the coast. We had hit our tanker fine, and we were using a little bit of that buffer zone to come in. So we'd come down from the buffer zone toward Kep, and then we were planning on pulling off coming back, then back over the Gulf of Tonkin and swing down and then come back in. We normally would hit the tanker in and out. You just wouldn't have enough fuel because we went a long ways in.

We wanted to use the buffer zone. We didn't want to go where all the other planes could go.

So we came in and everything was normal except one of our ECM pods wasn't working. That is, we carried two electronic countermeasure pods, which should jam the radar. If two of them were working it would jam the radar pretty good. One working it would semi-jam, but they could read through it probably. So one of them didn't work. We could never bring it on-line that night. One was working, the other one wasn't. And we were flying probably, at that time, 550 give or take, up to 600 as a final bomb run. We'd come in at 420 and from there on we'd go, when we were on the final run, we'd push it.

And we got about 30 miles away. The strobe on our vector, we had a gear on there to tell us if they were locked on us. This is crude, but at that time it was pretty—and the strobe was right straight on us. They were lead locked on our plane. Something was locked on us. It doesn't mean they're going to hit you, the radar is locked on. So, like I say, we couldn't get the ECM to work all the way. Otherwise they would have been locked on. Anyway, we got on 10 seconds or so before the target bombs away. Got a little tug in the back end and something hit it. And we never knew. We still don't know what it was. We were low enough and I don't think anybody could throw a rock up there, but probably, I assume, some _____(?) because we watched the guards later for years when there were planes. All they do was sit on the ground with their weapons like this. They didn't look. All you needed to beat these people was put a curtain up. It could have been one of those, it could have been a program light aircraft, an anti-aircraft 57.

Jim: A bird?

Heiliger: No. It hit the engine. The firelights came on and everything. We got the bombs away and I'd have liked to climb right then. Obviously you want a lot of air if you're going to bail out. And we were on fire. All the caution lights came on. We lost ja, ja, ja, ja, ja. Everything was red. We lost all the lighting. The only thing that was working was the little, and the 105 had to have all its stuff for the instrumentation to work. But they did have alternative small little gauges that worked literally off the battery. And that worked, and the battery also was okay because Ben and I were able to talk. And we climbed using that. I normally had no lights, so I had a flashlight and took it out. I don't know if I was holding it between my teeth or what. I was using that to see how high we were. And we started to climb back to the buffer zone, if we could, because if we turned right we were going to be in that buffer zone, and then come back out heading southeast to hit the Gulf of Tonkin if we had to bail out.

And we almost finished the turn and we got to about 18, 18,500 from 1000, give or take. And we were watching the fire going forward on the aircraft, commenting on it as it went forward. And then Ben said, oh, fire's in my cockpit, got to go. So I said okay, see you later, and he ejected. I said well, that's okay. I mean, it's not here, the plane's flying. And I got probably another 10 miles, another minute and a half, give or take. I was up at 23-thou by this time, just ready to level off. I wanted about that altitude. And a flash fire broke into my rear console in front of me. And you have a choice: burn up or get out. So I did the same. I'm sure that's what happened to Ben, too.

Jim: Getting out involved—

Heiliger: I got one friend that bailed out because he didn't know the new system. The old system used to be you pulled the handles up, which not only armed the system, it also kicked off the canopy. The new system, when you pulled the handles up, it only armed the system. And Wally Newcomb, who was up there with me almost the whole time, forgot about that and panicked.

Jim: Oh boy.

Heiliger: If he'd have known that it didn't, and it was only smoke in the cockpit—there's another way to get rid of that canopy, if you think it. And he had the altitude to do it. He could have released the canopy manually, let it blow and get rid of the smoke. He may never have been a POW, who knows. Maybe. Maybe, who knows.

Anyway, the system as I had it was you pull up the handles, squeeze the trigger. At that point the canopy blows and point three seconds later you go. One second after that there's an explosive charge in your seatbelt, which blows the buckle off. And there's kind of a tension recliner that snaps the thing tight and kicks the seat away and leaves you floating.

Jim: What was that experience like?

Heiliger: On a dark night with no moon, rather exciting.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: Oh yeah, I know it.

Jim: Was the jolt more than you expected?

Heiliger: No. The 105 is an excellent seat for ejecting. Originally the 105 was built with a catapult only, which is a very soft ejection compared to the F-4. The F-4 was horrible. That was a Martin Baker seat. Very harsh; a lot of back injuries from the F-4. F-104, almost no back injuries from the bailouts. Ben

hurt his back in landing. He landed in some rocks I found out later. And we had a double system. It would catapult out to about 300. My memory's going—3, 350, I can't remember, and then there'd be a rocket boost another 450. What had helped with that extra was is give you zero/zero ejection on the ground.

Jim: I see.

Heiliger: Before we used to have to have 100 feet and 100 knots, I think. And then, with the double, the catapult and the rocket, it gave you—you needed the 100 knots, but you could go it on the ground if you're on takeoff. If you've got to go, you could make it if you had the 100 knots. You could blow yourself right on the ground and make it, theoretically. At night, 23,000 feet, and there's no way to know exactly because there wasn't any moon, I'll guarantee that. It was a moonless night. Clear, but no moon.

Jim: And the plane just wandered(??) in right away?

Heiliger: I have no idea. I didn't see it.

Jim: Never saw it.

Heiliger: I didn't see it. The plane went into China, I know that. I'll get to that part in a minute. But what they teach you—teach you to bail out, how many thousands of times have you gone through it, it's just so automatic. And the same thing in the bailout. Normally, if you're in the daytime and you can look at the horizon, assuming you haven't lost consciousness, and at this time I didn't know if I had. I lost my helmet on the bailout. I'm sure, I thought I had my oxygen mask on, but I don't know. Maybe I was holding onto that flashlight in my teeth. I can't remember right now. If I didn't have an oxygen mask on, the chances are the helmet would blow. It might blow anyway off your head, but I know I lost mine. I didn't have a helmet.

They teach you that, if you're in the daytime, fine. The chute is rigged to go off at 14—if you're below 14,500 feet it will pop open. But if you're above, it will wait until it's past 14,500.

Another thing they teach you in the daytime is you don't want to pull it right away anyway if you can help it because you want to slow down to, what's the average velocity of somebody flailing around. If you're flailing around it will probably be 150, 160 terminal velocity. If you streamline yourself you can probably get up to 200 or so I think. But they want you to slow down because we were doing 450 or something maybe at the bailout. And, even in the short time you would slow down some, but they still don't want you popping the chute until you've slowed down to terminal velocity, if you can.

They teach you in the nighttime, though, you make the choice because, if you can't see, you don't know if you lost consciousness, you don't know if you're at 14,000, 5,000, 500. Your choice. And I elected to pull it as soon as I could sense it. And it worked good, obviously. And I don't know if I lost panels. I never could see any panels up there. There was, like I say, no moon. But it worked good.

Jim: Panels?

Heiliger: Panels on the chute. It's like an orange. You might lose a panel or two and still—

Jim: Oh. I didn't know that was a problem.

Heiliger: Well, if you pop it too fast and speed is too high. Just because of the speed, the velocity will pop it. Or it might even wreck your whole chute. But it'll probably pop a panel or two if you're going too fast.

Jim: Got it.

Heiliger: Or if you're going what they say is the normal speed for popping it, no. But it was a good chute. And, like I say, I don't think I had popped any, but I never knew. Deployed my survival kit, which then hangs below you. That consists of primarily the life raft. Everybody carries one in their seat. This is all in your seat. You deploy that, there's a life raft that kicks out, and a whole bag of goodies like cans of food and compasses and all kinds of stuff for survival. That hangs below you. The chute, you, and all the survival stuff below you.

Jim: And a 45?

Heiliger: I had a 38 with 50 rounds. Six in there, one tracer, five rounds.

Jim: Is that standard?

Heiliger: It was your call on what you want loaded. Even the Geneva Convention doesn't allow you to use tracers, but I think we usually had one. Yeah, I know I had one. And I think I had four or five more that I carried, too, and the rest of them were just standard.

Jim: But the 38 was a standard issue.

Heiliger: That's what most of us carried. It was standard issue for us. When I was first in the military we fired a 45 a lot. And the 45 would jam. You can't maybe clear it. A 38 won't because the action is generally unjammable. If you've got bullets, it'll work. For a 38, the thing might jam or whatever. And also, the 38 is a heck of a lot easier. I don't have big hands. I had trouble with a 45

anyway, but that's not why I use a 38. A 38 was issue. We carried that and we carried about 50 rounds.

Also in my G-suit, we all wore G-suits to keep the thing on, I had it in my pockets and life vests. And we carried a life vest. Everything was loaded with stuff I had, besides what's in the survival kit. I had baby bottles of water, we carried about 250 feet of letdown tape, rope, because the trees were 200, 250 feet high in that country. If you landed in one, which I did, you may have to use that to get down. And knives, all kinds of garbage that you thought you would need. Most of it was what you thought you would need. Some of it was standard issue, but a lot of the stuff you'd pack your own goodies in there.

So, coming down, I could start to see the horizon coming down. And you figure it's about 1,000 feet a minute on the descent, so I had about 20 minutes, give or take. And the approach to the trees, the jungle, all of Vietnam is a jungle, I swear, there was no safe area, I don't care what intelligence says. This whole country's at war with you. There is nobody going to be friendly to you.

I could see I was going to land in trees, and that was normal. And, as I was saying, I crossed my legs, like they teach you, to protect whatever you've got down here. And I've got three kids since then, so it must've worked. Anyway, I went through the trees. The parachute caught in a tree. My life support equipment hanging below me caught in another tree. So I'm in the center of the hammock, and this is now probably—our target on time was about 9:20, I think, that night. So now we're talking ten o'clockish. And you thought it was dark before. There was no moon. Go underneath the canopy of the jungle. That is really dark. And so I thought, okay, one thing they teach you is you don't fool around in trees at night. You don't fool around in trees. You don't try to get out of it.

Jim: Stay put.

Heiliger: Stay put. You don't know if that thing's 200 feet high.

Jim: Yeah, that's true.

Heiliger: And, like I say, I've lost friends that tried to get out and fell.

Jim: Two hundred feet to their death.

Heiliger: Or something. Because they went in—a couple of my buddies picked up the remains. So, that's what we carried the letdown tape for. So I thought okay, I can stay like this. This is into the jungle, there's nobody going to know I'm here right now. I wasn't sure where I was because you're floating down and

you don't know how winds would take you. I knew I was flying right on the border of China coming down when I was trying to egress to the Gulf. Which way it took me—Now I know that my plane impacted in China because, when I met somebody about a year later who knew our situation, they were shocked to see me because they know the plane had impacted in China and we were putting out signals from the parachute for our crews to pick up. And they thought one if not both of us were in China.

Jim: That was automatic.

Heiliger: Yeah. We could turn it off if we wanted, but most of us elected to have it on. And so I know the State Department sent an official apology to the People's Republic of China the next day saying one of our airplanes may have intruded in their territory. That was mine. On the 16th of May they sent that. So, I'm in my hammock, and then it was starting to be a tug of war on my leg, and I was starting to lose circulation on my left leg. I wasn't going to make it until four in the morning when the light might come up.

Jim: What was the matter with your leg?

Heiliger: There was a tug on it. It was just cutting off circulation right there. So, I said, well, it's better to hang in the parachute than to be in the center of this hammock because it was the life support equipment that was yanking on my leg. I don't know why. **[End of tape one, side two.]** So then I got everything—

Jim: Your compass?

Heiliger: Yes. And left that area the best I could and got as far away right then, and climbed up a hill and got to a place where I could then overlook the valley. Then I got my maps out and figured about where I was, and I had a pretty good idea. I thought I was on this side of the border. I thought. And if I could, I was probably about 70 miles from the coast.

And my plan at that time, I thought nobody's going to come and get me, one. Nobody had ever gone up that far. Two, it was foggy the next day. The only thing I had to go was my map and hill by hill by hill, night after night. It was my only plan. I didn't have any better plan than that. It was the only thing I had. So I sat watching this village most of the day from the top of the hill. I had a couple candy bars, I ate those, and figured I could forage for some food. Out in the jungle there are things to eat.

Anyway, the next afternoon about probably 3:00, 3:30, I tried to contact—we have a system where you contacted between 15 and 45 after the hour with your radio by the search and rescue procedures. So I tried and nothing in the first few. Maybe early afternoon somebody was on the radio. It should've

given me a hint they might have gotten Ben's radio. Anyway, long and short is I didn't know. I didn't even know it—Ben. I tried calling Ben. Nobody answered.

About 3:30 the next afternoon I heard rustling coming up the hill. People, moving. And, one, I'm probably not a good forest person or jungle person moving around. Two, they probably found my shoe or survival equipment, or somebody had given them a vector. I don't know. I don't know anyway. Anyway, they were coming up. Obviously they knew I was around somewhere. Heaven knows I probably left enough tracks in there.

And as I heard them come up I tried to hide behind the—and the rocks. And I had pretty good hiding—but the next thing I know, a little ol' head popped over where I was hiding, and I don't know who was most afraid, him or me, but he screamed. I had a choice, I could shoot it out—there were about 35 or 40 of them.

Jim: Civilians or soldiers?

Heiliger: Civilians. Villagers. Same ones that I found later, probably from that same village I had been watching. It seemed pretty quiet down there earlier and it didn't seem like they were scurrying around. Anyway, so I elected to give myself up and broke my 38 so they couldn't use it. And they took everything except the only thing I had was my underwear and my boots at that time.

Jim: They took all your clothes.

Heiliger: Yeah. They took everything that I had.

Jim: Did they tie you up?

Heiliger: I can't remember. I don't think so. No, because they were moving me down. I don't think they tied me up.

Jim: And they took you where, then?

Heiliger: Down to that same village I had been watching. It looked like it, anyway. We just walked down the hill, literally, which is several thousand feet. A little minor mountain.

Jim: You had your shoes?

Heiliger: I had my boots. They left me my boots at that time, until I got down to the—my tee-shirt and shorts and boots and socks.

Jim: And that was it?

Heiliger: And that was it. They had forgotten to get—did they take my—I'm trying to think. Somehow they had left—I had a little pocket knife. They must've left my ___ on initially because they took everything else out until they got down to the village, and then they showed, they put everything else they had taken from me—mad at the guy that missed that because I did have a weapon. Anyway, they took me down and, actually this is a little village—then I saw Ho Chi Minh's picture on the calendar, so I knew we were inside the border. I thought, anyway, it would be on—

Jim: Were they angry?

Heiliger: No. No. Remember, I'm in the buffer zone. Now they, everybody probably, had relatives involved in the war. But, as far as direct, being either bombed, we gave them that buffer zone. So they wouldn't have had any—we had people pitch forked down in the DMZ area.

Jim: Oh really?

Heiliger: Oh yeah.

Jim: Probably civilians.

Heiliger: Sure. In fact, it was only sometime after I flew my first series of missions in '66, somehow intelligence had found out that the government had finally offered a reward if they turned in prisoners. Before that, your option, man.

Jim: Your option.

Heiliger: Well, they got some prisoners. But I was lucky. I'm sure they—at that time they gave them an extra bowl of rice or something. I don't know what the rewards—it was meager, but it was a reward.

Jim: So you had some value, then, to them.

Heiliger: Yes. Somebody realized that we might have value anyway. So, yes, they were actually a fairly friendly group. I told them I was hurt, and I had, I had gotten bruised knees and bruised ribs from the fall from my parachute. And that was sore for months after that. But nothing—and I told them my knee hurt, too. And then they tried to hit some little, not a nurse even, what do you call it, a corps person or something. And she tried to bandage the thing. But I was trying for sympathy at the time, anything I could get.

So everything was fine. They gave me some nice sweet rice and started even smoking cigarettes at the time. I wasn't a smoker, but since they offered me a cigarette I took it and smoked it. It was a friendly group. And some guy tried

to, I don't know if he was interrogating me or what, but he didn't have any English capability. All he had was some little book with some pointy-talk English, and we just kind of laughed a lot with each other and stuff like that. It was fine. And then finally, probably an hour later or so after all this, maybe an hour and a half, and more villagers were coming from surrounding villages. We had several hundred people now in this area.

Jim: Coming to see you.

Heiliger: Yes. And most people, if nothing they were curious or smiling, but I didn't see any anger at that time until these two Communist cadres showed up. Now they were the first uniformed people I had seen. They weren't soldiers.

Jim: Oh really?

Heiliger: They didn't seem to have the uniform I saw later, but they had a uniform on. Political people? I have no idea. Anyway, once they showed up, then they pulled me outside of this little house that I was in and having a good time with the villagers. In fact, I was thinking this was not a bad—we were hearing that light is at the end of the tunnel, six, seven weeks we should be all done with this war, and I might as well spend it here. This is not a bad little village.

Then they had a circle formed out there. In fact, I was watching them. I was sitting outside playing with the dog they had, and they had this whole group in a circle with this guy, one of the two cadres, had a bullhorn, a battery-operated bullhorn. And he was starting to work up this crowd. And I didn't like the looks of what I was seeing at all. Finally he yanked and pulled me to the center of this circle that he had all these people around, and they were just starting to get into one frenzy now. And I thought, my God, they're going to rip me apart.

Jim: Yelling at you?

Heiliger: Yelling, waving sticks and knives and everything else, to the point where I wasn't sure how good his crowd control was. I was really worried. Finally, I don't know what he said, but everything went silent. Absolutely pin-drop silent. And I looked around the circle and there were a dozen, maybe 15, 18, I don't even know, ladies in black, no teeth, beetle net. They chew that stuff—and I thought, oh my God. This is a Christian village. It looks like they gave the last rites to somebody. And sure enough, they took me in that little hut I was in, put me up against the wall, brought two heavies with automatics and leveled them at me. I thought, that's it.

Jim: Two pistols?

Heiliger: No. Automatics. I don't know what—

Jim: --They were going to shoot you.

Heiliger: Yes. And after a few seconds of that, I was convinced that that was my time to go. Once you're past that, actually, the fear goes, I think. I wasn't afraid anymore.

Jim: Well, you assumed you were dead, so—

Heiliger: Yes. Yes. And the only thing I was mad at was that no one would know where I was. That was my only irritant at the time. And I said, I have a fairly strong Lutheran belief, and I started saying my prayers and said them again. I'd say 45, 50 minutes passed like this.

Jim: And they were still leveling at you, but not asking you anything?

Heiliger: I didn't know when the hammer was going to fall.

Jim: I mean, there was silence.

Heiliger: Silence.

Jim: Incredible.

Heiliger: Yeah. And finally, the guy came in who was the little mayor or whoever that guy was talking to. He seemed to be a honcho in the village or head guy. I'm not sure what his position was, if any. But it was his house, evidently, that we were in that was a combination jail, city, house(??), or whatever. Anyway, he came out and he dismissed those two, the actual people with the automatics. He came up, and pointy-talkingly said, no die tonight. Tomorrow. Well, I wasn't too happy about the tomorrow part, but at least I knew there was a reprieve. So, it's dark now. And they gave me some more food, I can't remember what. But they had two beds in the place. No mattresses on them, I don't think. I think they used the same thing we used later, just a little roll-up mat. They gave me one bed, which was more like a double bed, and the rest of the family slept on the other bed. I mean, it seemed like a hundred people. There were a lot of people, and I had the one all to myself. But I was complaining because I didn't want tomorrow to come.

Jim: No kidding.

Heiliger: I wanted to get out of there. I thought, you know, we had films of people in Hanoi. We knew some prisoners were there. Although I thought earlier this wouldn't be a bad place to spend it, I didn't want the next day to come, when the tomorrow portion of his statement would occur. So I was really complaining. I didn't let anybody sleep. Screaming out how much I was

aching and all this sort of stuff. I've got to get out of here somehow. Maybe they'll move me out of here if I complain enough for medical or something. Well, I think they planned on that anyway. But anyway, about 2:00 in the morning, give or take, three, something like that, they got me up, gave me back my boots, which they had taken from me, and started walking me. And part of the time I was tied up, part of it I wasn't. I was going through the jungle, stumbling around, even though there was somebody around to help lead. And every time we'd come to a clearing there'd be some voices and whatever they said, and people would start hitting me.

Jim: Hitting you?

Heiliger: With sticks and things. Yeah.

Jim: And these are people who are not the village people.

Heiliger: No. I'm moving. I'm moving.

Jim: Right. So these are other people now.

Heiliger: Yeah. And about light plus an hour, when the light came up the next morning plus an hour, we'd been walking for several hours, quite a few hours it seemed like. We came to a clearing and there was a Jeep there, which obviously they had radio contact to have a Jeep there. I wouldn't expect that this is the Jeep out of the jungle. They put me in the back and had me tied up. Put me in the back and they started moving. And I learned quickly to keep my head away from the side of the Jeep, particularly when—it was canvas-backed, it was covered, canvas side of the cover—to keep my head away because, if they ever stopped. They told people if my head ever hit the side I'd have rocks or branches that were hitting my head, so I learned to keep to the center of that thing. And people would look in, but it was mainly if you kept your body up the side they'd hit you. About halfway, early afternoon that day, they stopped. We had been stopping in little villages, and I guess they were taking me towards Hanoi. It was a long day, day and a half or so drive, if I remember. They stopped in another village, a small village, and they had me blindfolded most of the time.

Jim: Oh, were you?

Heiliger: Yeah. This is common when they were moving you to blindfold you.

Jim: Even though you couldn't see anything in the jungle.

Heiliger: Well no, but it is daytime. And, like I say, I couldn't see if anybody was hitting me, but I learned to keep away from the sides. They stopped, opened up the back, and put the life raft in and there was Ben. He was semi-delirious,

if not delirious, because of his back that he hurt on landing. Really bad. And no talk; no talk. If you talked or even say anything they'd hit you, so it wouldn't take you too long to realize you weren't supposed to.

Jim: Hit you—

Heiliger: A stick or not billyclubs but just a stick, or just hit you with their hands, fists. Nothing gross, I mean. My gosh. Nothing to—

Jim: They wanted to shut you up.

Heiliger: They wanted to shut you up. So, when they weren't around I'd say hey, Ben, anything I can do? And we'd try to converse, but I don't even know how much he was able to really fully comprehend what was happening. They stopped one time. I almost forgot about this. They stopped one time for a long time, maybe mid-afternoon after they had Ben. I don't know what happened, I don't know what they did with Ben that day, but they took me up, and I don't know where it was, kind of like an amphitheater-type stage. They didn't have any blindfold on. I mean, I had a blindfold all the way and my hands bound, and I could hear the crowds out there forming. And these same type of thing where they were working the crowd up in fever pitches again. And finally they yanked this blindfold. I have never seen so many angry people. Yanked the blindfold up so I could look out at them. Looked like a million angry people out there. Yeah, I know, it's just a show. And then they put the blindfold back on and marched me back to my—

Jim: You were the main attraction that day.

Heiliger: I guess I was then. Then finally we arrived late at night, this was a day and a half now after, to Hanoi, arriving at the Hilton, what turned out to be the Hanoi Hilton Hoa Loa prison.

Jim: And what was the real name of the Hanoi Hilton?

Heiliger: Hoa Loa. H-o-a L-o-a. I think that's how it's spelled. It's now been torn down, as I understand it, from guys that have visited. But they split Ben and I up and I was never near Ben for almost five years from that point.

Jim: You never saw him again?

Heiliger: I never saw him until we were ready to go. But the last year—I'm trying to think. January, February, yeah, about a year before they moved us so that we were in adjoining 50-man rooms later. This was much later. Adjoining rooms. And communications were done by many ways. A tap code, which you've heard about, or signals, using a form of the ____ code, A, B, C, D. We also drilled holes through walls, 15 and 18 inches thick, some of these

walls between, which you could tap through, like that (tapping on table), especially if you had a spoon or something like that. Even your fingers could do it—nails. They tried to keep your nails short.

But I remember Ben got on, five years later almost he got on the wall and said he apologized for the condition he was in the last time we were together. Because he knew he was delirious when I last saw him.

So they took and separated us, took us in and went through the same routine they probably did with everybody, at that time anyway, try to get you to go beyond name, rank, serial number, and date of birth.

Jim: Now we're talking to somebody who speaks English.

Heiliger: Yes. Oh yes.

Jim: Tell me about that.

Heiliger: They had their series of interrogators.

Jim: Did they march you into rooms, sat you at a table—

Heiliger: He sat you at a little stool or even a round stool or a square stool, just a cheap—

Jim: Your interrogators—

Heiliger: Usually one. Usually one. Or a guard probably is around, too, in case you didn't give the right information. He was told then to—

Jim: Bat(??) you.

Heiliger: Bat you. But the first one probably not, if I remember right. It was just a fairly conversational thing. I was the air pirate(??) that had come to his country, and he'd like to ask a few questions. And he knew right from--he started, what is your name? What is your rank? What is your serial number? What's your date of birth?

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: Very good. Relatively good. It was broken, but certainly you didn't have any trouble comprehending him. And then he'd ask specific questions. Of course you'd say, well I can't answer that, and we'd go back and—

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: Yes, because, by the Geneva Convention and by our honor code, we can only give name, rank, serial number, date of birth. Which is good until you know you're going to be up there more than a few hours. So anyway, we'd go over that and he'd say no, you must, you're required by our camp rules to—

Jim: And his question was?

Heiliger: And I'd say, well, I'm required by my own code and the Geneva Convention. No, the Geneva Convention doesn't hold because you're a prisoner of war, which is nonsense because the Geneva Convention carries on no matter what. So we'd go back over this and finally, well, I'll leave you to think about it.

Jim: What was the question?

Heiliger: I don't remember. Something similar, what's the name of your parents or something. I don't even remember what it was.

Jim: Yeah, I see.

Heiliger: But you're not supposed to do it.

Jim: Right. But it wasn't a pertinent question at all.

Heiliger: It wasn't. Most of them weren't at that time. Most of what happened, I'm convinced, at least at my grade, which is a lowly captain, was only to prove to you that they could make you go beyond name, rank, serial number, date of birth.

Jim: Got it.

Heiliger: Now, if they could exact a good-guy treatment statement or something like that, how nice their captors have been and things for you to sign like that, that's great too. But the idea was not to give them anything. And, like I say, you were honor bound not to tell them any more. And, of course, then the second interrogation would come. Well, have you thought about it? No, no, I can't.

Jim: This is a day later?

Heiliger: Oh no, an hour later, sometime. The guy was working. It would probably depend on how many were in there. I happened to be shot down at the second-most busy time. Only when I told you those 105s in October, November, about a half year later, were shot down. All of those, one a day, a more busy time for them. They had a lot of prisoners to interrogate. And remember, I was just a lowly captain at the time. And they knew that. They had majors and lieutenant colonels that would know more than I would.

They were never convinced after we got into it a little bit who was in the front seat and back seat. Why is the captain, and I said no. I'm sure they thought I was lying. And when we got beyond the name, rank, and serial number—and what it is, you won't do this and then we'll—we don't want to punish you. We don't want to torture—they never used torture, the word is punish. We never want to punish you, so whatever happens it's your fault. That was always the reason. It's your fault you're being punished because you won't do what they want you to. It's not our fault. We don't want to do this, but you won't cooperate so you're forcing us to punish you. So somebody'd beat you around a little bit and go through—

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: Well, you'd get some pretty good clubbings—fast you can do pretty good.

Jim: You didn't break any bones?

Heiliger: No. In looking back, they were careful in most cases, other than those that already had injuries from the bailout, which they would use that. In John McCain's case or others where they had injuries from the bailout where they would use that injury and pull on it or something like that. But in my case, I didn't really have, except for some sore ribs and things like that, I did nothing wrong from the bailout other than a few superficial wounds.

Jim: You never ran into John McCain?

Heiliger: No, I never lived with John McCain. I lived by him and I know John, but I never lived in any room with John.

Jim: Oh, how'd you ever meet him?

Heiliger: Afterwards. Everybody knows everybody. After we came back.

Jim: So this went on.

Heiliger: So we went probably through this a couple times, I don't know. And finally, after the hitting around, he says one more time and then we'll have to apply some more punishment. And then they went into the really crude stuff, and that is—we call it the rope trick I think is what we referred to it as. First of all, behind your back they would give the screw cuffs to cut off circulation in your wrists.

Jim: With ropes?

Heiliger: No. This is with regular screw cuffs. Actually metal cuffs made to tighten down. And they were to the point where you would have no circulation. And this is behind your back. Then they would put, and usually with some sort of clothing on—they didn't want to leave permanent marks. We never figured this out until later. Until you get to talk to somebody, you don't know what somebody else did. And they would put in either ropes or straps and pull your shoulder blades so they would touch behind you. But they did not pull mine out of the socket.

Jim: I would going to say, that will dislocate your shoulder.

Heiliger: At least I don't think it did. If it did, it came back.

Jim: You'd have noticed it.

Heiliger: Yeah. Well, it was pretty bad. I was screaming, so I don't know how bad it was. And then they would take and put the bar, U-bolts, on your legs with a eye-bolt on it. I should say an eye on it, and put about an 8-12 foot, depending upon, I've seen both, give or take, long rod through it so that they just fit your ankle so that when it went down it would torque your ankle. And there's no room on that U. It's not slipping, it's tight. So that would be torqued. It was very excruciating pain on the ankle. Then they would take your hands behind you, pull you up and actually tie you to your feet with you in that condition. It was very painful. And then they'd leave you like that. And if you're screaming they'd put something in your mouth and then they'd walk out. Well, one, the circulation has been cut off. And the circulation air has been cut off by these—now how many died because they threw up in it, because when the pain gets too severe you eventually lose control of your physical and mental faculties. Now, the one thing they taught us, and I think they're teaching it now, the U.S., in your survival training, POW training—

Jim: Oh, you had this before.

Heiliger: Yeah. They teach you a second line of resistance, i.e., you'd have the four things, the honor code where you only give name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. But, before the pain gets too severe, and before you lose the ability to control your particular mental faculties, and only you know that, and it may be just a threat one day because they did it to you the day before bad or something, so only you know that. Lie, cheat(??) to get rid of the pain. Do something to get rid of the pain.

Jim: Whatever.

Heiliger: Whatever. But I mean without giving anything, hopefully, valuable. And you could talk a long time on nonsense. Days. Years. A good POW could

probably talk forever if he can repeat stories or you can tell them the aircraft's got seven wings or anything you want to.

Jim: You can make up anything.

Heiliger: I found that they were fascinated when I gave them an electronics course, I mean something they would get as a freshman at the college, because I knew the electronics from radar. How fast does electrical energy go? Six point two milliseconds—I can't remember anymore all this stuff, but I could remember it then. And half of it was lies anyway. And oh boy, they were just fascinated with this wonderful electronics course, which is of no value. And there was no security problem in this thing because it was stuff you'd read out of the textbook. So that's what I hitched onto eventually. And then they had you fill out something on your family. Who were your parents, who were you wife, kids, and that.

Jim: You did that?

Heiliger: I did that finally.

Jim: How long did they keep you—

Heiliger: But we did that many times before they finally would do that. And the thing is, we didn't know at the time, but as we—then we met others, our other guys, and found out, and then we determined that the time you could leave—I'll tell you, when they do that it's months before you get the feeling back.

Jim: But you said they left you there. How long did they leave you?

Heiliger: Twenty-five minutes.

Jim: Twenty-five?

Heiliger: That's what we determined later. Anything longer than that may be permanent.

Jim: I was going to say, you'd lose the use of your hands.

Heiliger: But everybody, even no matter who bad, there was one guy up there, J. J. Connell(??), who got killed up there or died up there. But he is the only one I know of that really had, long term, I'm talking years. Most of the time it would come back right around anywhere from a month to six months. That's a long time.

Jim: The feeling in your hands? Sure. They damaged the nerves.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. But the nerves would repair, or something would repair.

Jim: They left you there for, you say, 25 minutes.

Heiliger: Well, we find out it's about that before they'd relieve the pressure.

Jim: Then they'd undo all that.

Heiliger: Undo it, ask you some more, then they'd put it back on again.

Jim: Right then and there. Jesus Christ.

Heiliger: But then, about two or three applications, depending upon the person, maybe I'm weaker, maybe I'm stronger, but after several applications you do lose control. You start pissing and shit and everything else. And you still have some mental faculties to go back on. But you know when you ain't going to have that anymore, and that's what they teach you. Before you lose that and before you'll tell them anything, although there is very little that I knew that would help them in anything I could think of, start talking. That's why I say you start talking and give them something.

Jim: Even though it's gibberish.

Heiliger: If they catch you in a lie, you try to always lie anyway. A good POW never tells the truth, except now. Now we tell the truth. But I'm saying you lie to them, and if they catch you in a lie or doing something, I know they always wanted—Ross Jerry and Niles _____. Anyway, they were a crew, an F-4 crew in the Navy, and I don't know what they had done to them, but they wanted them to have some sort of statement they could take over to a war crimes commission in Stockholm. They were always making these war crimes—it's like having these—commissions. Rural(??) commissions on nonsense.

Anyway, they were forced to fill out, after all kinds of stuff, and they filled out the conditions on their ship. They had lied and they said, well, we had all this anti-war sentiment on our ship. We didn't really want to fly these missions. Oh, well write us about this. So they wrote this whole long thing about how conditions were on their ship. There was Clark Kent and Red Rider and all these—they had this whole litany, and it was the funniest thing you ever read—took this to Stockholm. And were the laughingstock of Stockholm. And then, of course, the shit hit the fan back—

Jim: I was going to say, that—

Heiliger: Poor Ross was a year, besides the meetings, he was a year in Seoul. And I'll tell you, he was a strange character. When I first met Ross he had just come

out of solitary in a year, and he was strange. So anyway, after this, I'll try to keep it short here because I've got to go too.

Jim: Oh no. I know.

Heiliger: But I would like to—but anyway, after a short time of doing this, and I think, remember they've got, I'm not trying to rationalize, but they got people a lot senior to me that they might be able to get something out of. Some captain doesn't know squat. A little more than a lieutenant, but—

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: Like I say, luckily, being at that time, with them being so busy with as many people, all they wanted to really prove is that, to me, I'm looking back, they really wanted to prove to you that they can go beyond what our honor code said that we had to do or the Geneva Convention. And once they've done that, I guess, we all felt like I think if anyone—I said most of us, at that time, no matter whether you've taken the second line of resistance or not, I feel that most of us, had we had the opportunity, would probably have committed suicide. At that point. Because we don't know if you're, I felt like—

Jim: You're the only one.

Heiliger: I couldn't make it and I'm the only one that couldn't do it. I don't care what they taught you in school. They also taught us there's a guy in POW school or survival school taught us, before the pain gets too severe you'll pass out. I'd like to have that guy because that's bullshit. Well, anyway, I got into a room, just for a day, with a couple others. I can't remember their names. But then I got into my first room with John Dramesi and Bill Baugh, and we lived together. They moved us to another camp we called the zoo. It was out of the Hilton complex area. It was still in Hanoi. It was an old French film studio because every time we dug in the ground or did any digging in their garden or whatever, we'd find old 35-millimeter film. And it was, we found out later, it was a film studio, French. And even the swimming pool they put fish in it now.

Jim: Once they got you there they left you alone?

Heiliger: No, not particularly. They would still call you out occasionally for interrogations, trying to get—

Jim: Start over again?

Heiliger: Not to the point where, unless you pissed them off or something. Usually they were still looking for good guy statements. And I can't say we were a room—Bill and John were tremendous. I'm sure glad I roomed with them

because I let them lead the charge, let's say. Or we all did, let's say that. But John particularly taught the guards, educated the guards with his head, as he always called it. They beat him around the head.

But it was a couple rooms in our little building. Our three-man room, there was another three-man room or four-man room, a couple of solo rooms in that particular building. But ours and the other three-men rooms were pretty hard chargers. In other words, they weren't going to get—and I think they knew that.

And I'm not saying anybody did anything disgraceful, but there's people they would talk them into doing things that we would never do. And I think that they bothered us less looking for anything. They'd call you up about every couple of months. And I hated the daytime because I always thought the daytime is when they do all this stuff. Normally the middle of the night is when I loved to lay awake. It was quiet, peaceful, and I know nobody would bother me, even with the three-men room.

Jim: But they would go quite a while, though, between talking to you at all? Maybe months?

Heiliger: Weeks. **[End of Tape 2, Side B]**

Jim: So your routine, after they—

Heiliger: The routine was basically the three of us did everything. We had 24 hours a day, seven days a week we were together.

Jim: Did you have something to grow? Did you have a garden?

Heiliger: Nothing, at that point.

Jim: I mean, they didn't allow it or you—

Heiliger: One, by Geneva Convention, theoretically they can't make officers work.

Jim: Right. But that—

Heiliger: Now, the other good part, though, is, if they could, we'd love to go outside. We didn't get outside. We were in that little room. Sometimes we'd be sucking air through the door if they had the one window closed because it was so hot and getting no air circulation. Go underneath the door and get air. But we also, during that time, what did we do. We weren't allowed to talk, theoretically, with each other. You're supposed to whisper. If they caught you talking they'd hit you, so we'd talk quietly.

Jim: The guards were how far away, generally?

Heiliger: Anywhere from not around to right outside your door. Communication was forbidden. They made sure you knew the camp rules. One was you could never communicate with another room, let alone another building. You were never in a compound(??).

Jim: This was like a dormitory with several small rooms?

Heiliger: Cells.

Jim: Cells?

Heiliger: Yeah. All one story, obviously. And I think there was a three-man, a three-man, a four-man, and a couple other little hallway, and a couple of singles.

Jim: And food?

Heiliger: Food would come twice a day. They made all the food.

Jim: Rice?

Heiliger: Rice. Particularly the first couple years, rice was the majority of the time. And a soup of greens or cabbage; cabbage was probably the most predominant. And then, if you take the water off of what was in the soup, you'd have a side dish. So there were three things. You'd have a vegetable, which was the same thing that was in the soup, and the soup and the rice, or a little French bread.

Jim: How much weight did you lose on this?

Heiliger: Quite a bit the first year. Then, as the last couple years when they improved the quality of the food, we were holding.

Jim: Then you didn't lose any more weight, but you didn't gain either.

Heiliger: But they would deliver the meals about, I'd say, maybe eleven in the morning, 10:00, 11:00 in the morning, and about five or six in the afternoon. Two meals.

Jim: You had no communication with the outside world?

Heiliger: No communication with the outside world. No communication with other rooms, theoretically. Now, that's when we got to communicate—we never stopped communicating. There was no way they could stop us, whether it be something as simple as finding some way with some thing to write a note,

even on the toilet paper they gave you with something you made. We made books later and stuff out of toilet paper. It was very thick paper. And we made pens out of bamboo fans, the part that held it together. You could create or pen out of there or other things. Ink we could make out of ashes, cigarette ashes. And, if you mix it with either fat or sugar, it will hold. Not a good ink, but it will hold. If you just use ashes and water it will disappear in a matter of as soon as it dries almost. And we also used the red adobe tiles from the roof. Break them up and mix it with water and you've have a fairly good ink. And the best ink we had was they had a lot of, what do you call it, not infection, fungus. Fungus, a lot of that, particularly down in your crotch and stuff like that. And they did, later particularly, give us some anti-fungus medicine of some sort. Blue. Beautiful ink. The best ink we had.

Jim: _____ Violet(??), I'm sure.

Heiliger: Yeah. I had no idea, but it was a good ink. But the best we had initially was just cigarette ashes and sugar.

Jim: And what did you use for writing instruments?

Heiliger: That's what I say, the end of a fan.

Jim: The end of a fan?

Heiliger: Where we usually make it with a razor blade—

Jim: Take a knife and—

Heiliger: We didn't have any knives.

Jim: Razor blades?

Heiliger: Secret razor blades when they'd allow you to shave.

Jim: Where was the bathroom?

Heiliger: The bathroom was primarily in a bucket in a corner.

Jim: Any showers?

Heiliger: They had kind of a large cistern outside. I should say a big, built maybe that high filled with water from a well that you'd pour into that, or directly from the well and just throw it over you. We would get out several times a week, maybe for a few minutes, dependent upon how bad the air raids had been and how pissed off they were at the time.

- Jim: They watched you carefully so you didn't communicate when you did that.
- Heiliger: That's right. But we occasionally were able to leave a note by the area. You could watch through the door at some other group out there, you just couldn't communicate with them. He might even be pointing down there hoping somebody would see it and somebody would pick up your note. But the guards occasionally found them. And if they found any communication, then they didn't like it at all, seeing this was a violation of camp regulation, and probably the most serious. They didn't want any communication with another room. I think they were extremely fearful of any organization. This would certainly keep organization. So that's one way, you'd leave notes. Obviously that's very crude and not very predictable. Communication with a tap code was the best. I think you know the tap code, which is one, one—
- Jim: You'd have to learn the Morse Code.
- Heiliger: No.
- Jim: No?
- Heiliger: [Tap-tap] That's an A, [tap-tap-tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tap-tap-tap], that's a Z. Matrix, five-by-five. One through E, one, one-two, one-three, one-four, and one-five. Two-one is an F. All the way through Z is five-by-five.
- Jim: How did you learn that?
- Heiliger: I think they taught some of these. Some would learn it in survival training. We did not. But somebody knew it when we got up there.
- Jim: And they taught you.
- Heiliger: And luckily I got in with Bill and John because I was too stupid the first day when I was by myself and listened to the [tapping on table] da, da-da-da-da, and you'd go [tapping on table] da-da. And you'd go, hey, we've communicated. No, they'd go [tapping on table] and then they'd start like that. What's that guy doing? He's not giving me shave-and-a-haircut. Well, I moved in with Bill and John and they had learned it through the—eventually it comes to me. Oh, that's what you're trying to do.
- Jim: What did you gain by communicating?
- Heiliger: You wanted to let people know that you're there. Names. You'd pass on as many names as you knew because we could then communicate with our whole building through the code so we'd know who was in that building. What's happening, if somebody's taken out for interrogation what are they asking for. Eventually we'd communicate with other buildings by the same

way, either through a common wall with another building, or they let us go out and sweep.

Jim: Sweep?

Heiliger: Sweep the dirt.

Jim: In the compound?

Heiliger: Yeah. Swish, swish-swish, swish-swish-swish, swish.

Jim: So you learned to do—

Heiliger: So we can put out the camp newspaper that way.

Jim: A camp newspaper?

Heiliger: Well, I'm joking.

Jim: Sure. I understand.

Heiliger: Because we'd find out who's getting tortured or who's—I mean it. If they were looking for statements, they might have a couple of rooms they're working on to try to get them to write things or something like that. Or if they were caught communicating maybe they would have them out there and they may torture you again for something.

So anyway, the funny part of that was they knew the code. The Vietnamese knew the code. We weren't doing anything special. They knew it was a five-by-five matrix. Eventually they came to us and said, oh, you guys are sweeping the code. You can't do that, so we want you to sweep at least six times. I'm not kidding you, it's like kids, isn't it?

Jim: Kind of like children.

Heiliger: So they said okay, here's an A, six-six, six-seven.

Jim: You just changed the code.

Heiliger: That's right. Ten-ten was a C. It'd take you longer, but you'd still get out the same information. But they were happy.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Heiliger: And they were happy. And the other way, then, if we were actually in, like later in the larger rooms where we could actually hold somebody up on a

bunk, they had these huge windows and you could see another room. If another person was up there, you'd hold them up there, and now you could go with a mute code, a form of the mute code. Not exactly, but it was ours. A, B, just like a C, D—E, I can't do with the arthritis. E, F, and I can't remember them all. G, H, I, J. It looks like it, see? It looks like it to me. Anyway, they would do that and we could communicate that way. Either a person like that tapping, or that, could actually communicate almost as fast as I'm talking.

Jim: I'll be darned.

Heiliger: No, the only reason is, when you're tapping or doing that, you don't do the whole word. If you've got a root like government, you get to the g-o, you know what it is. You just tap them.

Jim: Onto the next word, right?

Heiliger: Onto the next word. You'd hear a series of twos from the other side. As soon as he got the word he'd tap so you don't waste time. Same thing as that. If you're up here, the guy's not—

Jim: He'd tap back that he got it?

Heiliger: Yeah. [Tapping on table to demonstrate.] Coming back. If the guy's on the other side, tap-tap, tap-tap. Got that one, go onto the next one. So it was a good communicator, a good guy tapping, which we all got to be reasonably. You could almost go as fast as we're talking. Certainly like this because Irv Williams was the best we had in our room. In the Navy, now retired as a captain in California. But Irv was about the fastest guy I have ever seen with his hands, and he could be up there just like that. Of course, as soon as you knew the word, same thing. The guy on the other side would be nodding; onto the next word. And he'd be talking—

Jim: Incredible.

Heiliger: And those are the major ways of talking. As far as communications with the States, my folks did not know for two-and-a-half years that I was alive or dead.

Jim: And your total time here—

Heiliger: I was MIA for the first two-and-a-half years.

Jim: Two-and-a-half years.

Heiliger: Yeah.

Jim: Wow.

Heiliger: And then they found out—

Jim: The Navy didn't give them any help at all?

Heiliger: Nobody knew.

Jim: That's right. So they said nothing.

Heiliger: When they knew, if they knew at that time. Nobody knew for sure. And my particular mission was a very hush-hush one because of the China bit.

Jim: For all they knew, you were in China.

Heiliger: Well, I was told when I met the first guy that was involved that I knew well before and knew of my situation, he said the U.S. was convinced that one or both of us were in China. So, I was up there five years, nine months and four days. So, the first two-and-a-half years my Dad and Mom did not know if I was a prisoner or not. I was MIA the whole time.

Jim: Did they send you anything once they found out?

Heiliger: After two-and-a-half years, when I got to write my first letter. Somewhere around then, I don't know when that was delivered to them, we also got out our first guy. There were five releases of three up there, 14 of which came back as traitors—

Jim: Let me have that one a little slower here.

Heiliger: The word was you wouldn't accept release early. You go home and order(??) shoot(??) down. You wouldn't do anything for that release, you wouldn't even give them a nice statement. They want to send you home, they're going to carry you out the door, fine, there wasn't anything you could do about it.

Jim: Ergo, if some guy was released early—

Heiliger: We heard. We heard the statements. They would make statements back to us.

Jim: They had to tell them something.

Heiliger: Why don't you guys join us? It's so easy to get—that type of thing. Some of them.

Jim: How did that come back to you?

Heiliger: Tape recorder. They'd play it over the Voice of Vietnam.

Jim: In other words, "I've been released, why don't you guys"—

Heiliger: Things like that. Two of them, the worst we had, and they didn't get out early, they were promised but they never got out early, which we think is hilarious, they'd be sitting on the same side of the interrogation table as their captors.

Jim: That would make me angry.

Heiliger: Yeah. Miller and Wilbur. One was a Navy commander and the other a Marine lieutenant colonel.

Jim: What happened to them?

Heiliger: They all came home. The government, after everything was said and done, and there was another camp where Ted Guy, who just died a year ago, within this last year, he was a commander. He was a colonel up there. And he had some enlisted people at his particular camp. How he ever ended up with them I don't know, but they were really tough, this group, to take care of. And they would do things, whatever the Vietnamese wanted. Writing, whatever. Do anything.

He could not maintain them, and he tried, as we did with the two, Miller and Wilbur, to get them court-martialed. The military decided, on the two that were in the Department of the Navy that we had the problems with, one Marine and one Navy, Miller and Wilbur, and actually the others—in fact, one guy committed suicide when he was being pressed about a possible court-martial. The military decided in all cases that—we all felt we came back honorably. And that's the pin right here, "Returned with Honor." And we feel we did.

And the question is, everybody went beyond name, rank, serial number, and date of birth. Everybody. Maybe the last few didn't get asked, I don't know. I don't have any idea when they had the B-52s coming in. But basically the 350 of us. That doesn't mean we gave them anything, we think. And maybe that's rationalization, but we still felt honorable about it. But where's the line? Is it because one guy went one sentence beyond or ten sentences? And if these guys went that far, they could come back and say, well you also went beyond the name. And they felt, for the good of the Corps, the POW corps, if you want to call it that, they decided not to prosecute.

We wanted it prosecuted. We wanted our names strung out because we felt, for the good of the future, it would have been better to prosecute and say, you can't get away with that type of stuff.

Jim: Well, making tapes for the enemy goes well beyond the call of Geneva or anybody.

Heiliger: Okay. Regardless. I agree, but they didn't want to do anything to taint our names. We came back with a good name. And they said, for the good of you guys, because your names are going to be drug out and the fact that you went beyond, and some guy's going to say in the bar some night, hey you didn't uphold the honor code. Of course, they didn't have the—but they said no, let's not do that. So, a lot of us were pissed. We wanted—and looking back they probably were right. Looking back.

Jim: Yeah. If you stand back and take a bigger—

Heiliger: At that time we were a little pissed that they didn't. Anyway, so the only guy out of the 15 that came out early, Doug Higdahl, Doug was a seaman who fell off a carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin, didn't have any floatation gear, swam for ten hours, and was picked up by—I don't know if it was a _____ boater or a Vietnamese control boat, and was a prisoner. And unfortunately, and I'm kind of digressing here, but we always did everything for interest, right, and we passed on, we always had—every so often we would go through, okay, who would bail out the lowest, lowest, highest, fastest, and all that kind of stuff. Doug always won the lowest and slowest. He fell off a carrier. So we didn't let him play anymore. But Doug had a fantastic mind. And we eventually—When we were first shot down, we had a list of probably 700-some names that we would memorize, how many POWs we had up there. But we would put everybody who was ever shot down. And we had a problem. I know when, who was it, well we did it to ourselves up there because we had a buddy that was on our wing and got shot down. Even if we didn't know, we would say, well, we're pretty sure he went down there. We saw a good shoot, even if we didn't see a good shoot. We didn't want anybody listed as KIA. We wanted them listed as MIA initially. And even the next day when we'd go up there we'd say, we think we heard a beeper. We think we heard somebody trying to talk on the radio. We didn't hear anything, but we didn't want them to close out the rescue. And they'd go on trying to rescue many days sometimes, and hopefully nobody got killed in trying to rescue. Because we didn't want our buddy to be given up. So a lot of these names, we even come in with names because people would say that they heard a beeper. So we'd come up with any name that we knew, and we'd have them on our list of names, 700-some at one time when there was only 337 of us total, at that time.

Jim: When you were there that was the total number of prisoners?

Heiliger: Up to about '69, '70. And then, when they started the B-52 raids later and the war got heavy again the last year and a half, they got a lot more. It ended up I

think about 600 of us walked out of North Vietnam. Somewhere around there. But of the original corps, if you want to call it that—

Jim: Three hundred.

Heiliger: I was number 150, give or take. So I was almost in the middle of that original group. Ben and I were 150, 151 or 151,152.

Jim: Have you run into any of these 15 traitors?

Heiliger: They're not a member of our organization.

Jim: I'm sure they aren't, but have you ever run into them?

Heiliger: The closest I ran into was the guy, and this was not a traitor there, that was one of those two that were on the other side of the table, who never did get home early, by the way. That was the beauty, they walked out with us. All that shit they pulled up there, and they didn't get home any earlier than we did.

Jim: And nobody tried to do anything against them?

Heiliger: Jerry Brown, the governor of California at that time, appointed one of them as a supervisor of the city of Los Angeles. Jerry Brown was not a Vietnam war lover at all, as were a lot of people. It was just like to prick us—the guy ran for re-election.

Jim: You mean you think he did that on purpose?

Heiliger: I don't know. I don't know.

Jim: It certainly sounds like that way.

Heiliger: He was "an ex-POW."

Jim: Yeah, he was a POW.

Heiliger: He was POW whether he did good things or bad things. Jerry Brown didn't care, he appointed him. The guy ran for re-election and we started a letter campaign that you won't believe. Hundreds of letters came in to the point where the guy, I think it was Miller—yeah, it was Miller. Hundreds of letters came in to the point where he had a lawsuit against everybody who had signed. We had 400-some of us that sent letters, individual letters to all the newspapers, shotgun(??) letters around like crazy. The guy lost like mad.

Jim: Good.

Heiliger: Instituted a lawsuit, USAA defended it. They put up most of the money on defense, and he just lost massively. It went all the way through and the guy just got wiped out.

Jim: That's a little revenge anyway.

Heiliger: Yeah. But other than that—Cheryl, she couldn't believe it. We weren't married. We went up to Dallas. That was the first time we went to anything, and she wasn't familiar with it. And the first thing we went to was the White House when we came back. The White House, the 3000, they had their masses of people and so forth. They had the tents up on the White House lawn. In fact, we had a reincarnation of it a year and a half ago at the Nixon Library. And we went to that. It was really nice. The same chefs(??).

Jim: The first time was how many?

Heiliger: All of us.

Jim: All 300 or 600?

Heiliger: All 600 plus guests. So, 1000 of us and 2000 other people that wanted to be there too.

Jim: Fantastic.

Heiliger: And the next thing was in Dallas. The city of Dallas invited us all. That was in early June. We came back in February and March, give or take.

Jim: And this was?

Heiliger: '73. And in June the city of Dallas, right around the first of June, opened up the doors to the city of Dallas, had us all down there, and Tony Orlando, who still puts a show on for us every year at Branson, was there singing his "Tie a Yellow Ribbon" and all that. Bob Hope was there and all those people. Bob Hope was at the Nixon Library for the second one, even, and was at the original White House one. Anyway, Cheryl says, "What happened?" because what happened is the doors opened and we were coming down an elevator from the hotel, and everybody was just babble-babble-babble-babble-babble. You can imagine, we're so used to talking we all want to talk anyway, you can't shut us up. So we're coming down in this elevator, the doors open up, this guy gets on, and it's quiet. It was like when they were going to shoot me. We got off the elevator and Cheryl said, "What was that?" I says, and I don't know if it was Miller or Wilbur at the time, but—

Jim: What the hell was he doing there?

Heiliger: He's an ex-POW.

Jim: Oh, you mean officially they didn't turn their back on them, just the guys.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. Cheryl said, "What happened?" It was quiet.

Jim: Nobody said a goddamn word.

Heiliger: Nobody said a word down there. Well, they're not part of our now POW organization. In fact, we've lost—the rules we set up is, anybody does anything disgraceful, and we've got one case, one of the guys that lived with me, John Dramesi, he got kicked out of the service literally, and—

Jim: Later you mean?

Heiliger: Yeah. Which we felt was retribution because he wrote a book called "Code of Honor," and it was a first-person book. The only guy that did anything right was him. Everybody else was a shithead, including me, including all of my buddies I lived with. So, he was up as the commander at Pease and then at Plattsburgh, he was commander of a SAC base, and somehow he got into an argument with his wife. I think he beat her too. And misappropriated funds to build his own gym on the base—

Jim: So he was kind of—out of the service.

Heiliger: And she turned tail on him. And within less than a day he was out and he is no longer part of our organization. We have decided, one, the guys didn't like the way he wrote the book. And that's no reason to kick him out, but they never got paid back. And they said okay, this is our payback. Anybody who does somebody dishonorable like that could be kicked out. You're not part of our organization even though you were honorable up there.

Jim: How many are left in the organization?

Heiliger: Everybody who hasn't died. Probably still almost everybody is still a member, and we get together almost yearly.

Jim: That's nice.

Heiliger: So what did we do up there for those five years? Let's get into that just for a second, then I'll bug off.

Jim: Sure.

Heiliger: The first year it's tough. You tell stories, all the jokes you knew, and—

Jim: Over and over again—

Heiliger: That's good for about two weeks. [Both laugh.] You told everything you knew, every story—

Jim: Twenty-five years of stories.

Heiliger: Every story. So, what happens, and this is the interesting thing and this is the thing I think is good for this review because it's the only time that—well, two things happened. One is eventually when you live with somebody or two people 24 hours a day for that long, and literally, with the exception of going out and emptying the bucket and take a bath a couple times a week, because even the food is right outside the door, you didn't even really get out for that, you lose façade. We all, you carry, I carry, how we like to present ourselves, how we like to be—there's no reason to. And so you're about as natural as you can be. And it's funny because, as we moved from room to room, or they'd make a switch as we got to larger rooms particularly, and the façades are gone, but they'd make a room switch and suddenly we all had a little façade again for a while until you're part of the group again. So you project things that everybody--come on, you're not really like that. You know, you don't say it, but everybody was that way. So you could really feel—

Jim: You were trying to—

Heiliger: If you were an expert on psychology, it would have been a fun thing to be up there if you were a psychologist or something. And the other thing is that the mind is a great computer. The mind has a hard disk in there that's unbelievable. And I think everybody appreciated that because—later we used it even more. We never had any books. We never had anything we could do except for what was up here. But it's amazing how, when you don't have anything, you can push that button to recall, and things will come out that—I can't do it now. Example. When I came out, from what other people had, you memorized everything you could, too. I learned French, Spanish and German up there.

Jim: By word of mouth.

Heiliger: By people—and I took tests, Air Force tests, when I got out. I got good on them all. And I use Spanish. I was in Latin America for four years plus, but the basis of that, I took a refresher course as a Foreign Service student in Spanish, both Cheryl and I.

Jim: And this was after you stayed in the Service?

Heiliger: Oh yeah. I pulled 30 years.

Jim: After you came out?

Heiliger: Yeah. For 15 more years. No, excuse me, 12 more.

Jim: As of what position?

Heiliger: I went and got my master's. I wanted nothing more than to get some education at that point. I hadn't seen books, I hadn't seen anything to read. I wanted education. Everybody says, well, go back to flying. I says, well, I really don't think I should. I had been a short-term pilot, really, because I had been a navigator, remember. So I said, I'll compete. I can compete with anybody. You want me to go there, I'll compete. But I'm afraid of how I can compete. If you make me even I'll compete with anybody. So I said, one, I want to go into the diplomatic line. I want to be an air attaché somewhere. And that was my goal. So I went to GW University in Washington and got my master's in Latin-American studies, international relations. And then I became an air attaché, first of all to Montevideo, Uruguay, and then Santiago, Chile right after that. And then I came back, head of the chief of the International Affairs Division. I was under the vice-chief. I reported directly from a lowly colonel right to a three-star. Nobody in between. A great assignment. Loved it. Nobody had ever hardly do that. You always go through layers to get up to that point. And then I was a senior military representative to the state of Israel.

Jim: At what rank?

Heiliger: Colonel. **[10-second blank spot]**--Poetry, for instance. And you tried to memorize it because you wanted to make the mind useful. And so you memorized, memorized, memorized because you didn't have books to read.

Jim: That's all you had.

Heiliger: Yeah. Except with our languages we made our dictionaries. We had about a 25,000-word dictionary.

Jim: On toilet paper?

Heiliger: And the Vietnamese would find it. They'd take it and cart it away and we'd start again.

Jim: It was obviously—material, right?

Heiliger: Oh yeah. But they didn't want us to have anything. So we'd make another one. Time. Time.

Jim: You had so much time.

Heiliger: Yeah. But anything that had any value we'd use. You might remember a poem or somebody else. And we had a couple English majors that had—

Jim: And you'd share all this.

Heiliger: Shakespeare and stuff like that. And I tell you, you push that out, stuff that people—and it's amazing how accurate it was, coming back now. I'm sure there was a word here and there that may not be. But I swear this is why my wife married me when I came back. She's an English major and was teaching school, but I could recite poetry for nearly six hours and not repeat myself.

Jim: Under ordinary—

Heiliger: I can't do any of it now. I can't do it now, not even one total one, I don't think.

Jim: --What the stress of—

Heiliger: But you also rely on books and things that you can have, so why learn it.

Jim: So you don't bother with it.

Heiliger: But all that memory stuff, particularly in our generation, you were forced to. I was forced to memorize a hymn a week in confirmation class and things like that. And they all came back. A lot of them came back.

Jim: All those hymns that you had to—

Heiliger: Yeah, and other things that you were forced to memorize. Now they don't memorize much. I always worry. I tell kids when I speak, I said you've got to memorize certain things that are going to get you through because you're going to come with a crisis in your life and, if you don't have it, you commit suicide and things like that because you don't have something right then to grab onto. You can't say, well, where in this book am I going to find it. Anyway, I'm off—

Jim: That gave you a balance?

Heiliger: I think so.

Jim: Gave you some touch with the real civilization.

Heiliger: Yes. And we all had it. The average age was 30 years when we were shot down, the average. We're all professionals, almost, with rare exceptions,

because that was our career. So, to say we're not like any other war that we've had, and I'm not saying we were better or worse, I'm not knocking it down. I'm saying it's different, though, because any other war you've got draftees, people that either didn't want to be there or were drafted, and they're 18 years old when they get shot. We were an average of 30. I was at 30. I was right at the average when I got shot down. So you've got 10, 12 years of post-high school experience. You still run out of stories. But you were saying, what do you do then? Well, you tell it again. But you also go further back, particularly when you're telling your own life. And there's very little of Bill and John that I don't know. Very little.

Jim: --To think you embellish your history.

Heiliger: No, the history I don't think so much.

Jim: After a while it wasn't necessary anyway.

Heiliger: I don't think you did. I mean, we'd joke about it and say well, I'd like to have been. But there's very little about their wives, very little about anybody in their family we don't know.

Jim: That was too tough a subject?

Heiliger: What? We did know. Everything.

Jim: Oh, I thought you didn't know.

Heiliger: Everything.

Jim: They didn't mind telling about their—

Heiliger: When you get to the point where you lose the façade, you're tiring of hearing the same old story, just keep going further and further back. And it's embarrassing sometimes, particularly when you first got out. Now I've forgotten half of them. But to have met a couple of the wives, because we know so much about them, and they don't know you know all about this. He's not going to tell them and I'm not going to tell my wife or whatever. Of course, my wife divorced me while I was up there, but--

Jim: Oh, while you were a prisoner?

Heiliger: Yeah. I should have brought you a clipping. It was just about two months ago. Lisa Howard, Scripps Howard Syndicate? I don't know if she's any relation, but she writes in a Scripps Howard. And she wrote a story and she called up a bunch of us. And I got a couple paragraphs in. And it came in

from a friend from a Seattle newspaper, of all places. And I don't know why. I'm sure it was around here, but nobody ever cut it out. I never saw it here.

Anyway, it was written about the fact that my wife had divorced me while up there. But I have no bitterness towards this. The idea—

Jim: You have none?

Heiliger: No. We were in pretty bad shape when I got shot down.

Jim: Oh. I was going to say—

Heiliger: Well, let me go back. It's illegal what she did because, after World War II, you and I weren't around, but the stories are there, where these women would marry somebody—

Jim: Oh, I was around.

Heiliger: Ship them overseas [**End of tape two, side two**], while they were overseas, get divorced, marry somebody else, and they'd have six, eight paychecks coming. So, after World War II they made what was called a Soldier's and Sailor's Relief Act, which forbade any institution of a civil action against any service person that's overseas. Period. Forget if they're a POW. Well, divorce is a civil action.

So my wife was wanting to go back, she was going back anyway, and I kept saying you can't divorce me, but you can go back home. That was in Japan.

Jim: This was before you left.

Heiliger: Yeah. So we were in pretty bad shape marital-wise. Now, whether we would have finally ended up with a divorce or not--she came back here--

Jim: The fact that you were an MIA was probably facing the process?

Heiliger: Possibly. And even when she found out I was alive she told the kids I was dead.

Jim: (Unintelligible.)

Heiliger: No.

Jim: Do you still have contact with these children?

Heiliger: Oh yeah. Yeah. I'm like an uncle more to them, but oh yeah. Sure. In fact, Jim just called me a couple days ago.

Jim: Two children?

Heiliger: Three, a boy and two girls, all in Ohio because that's where he went. I didn't know until I came back.

Jim: The guy she married?

Heiliger: Yeah. Which I didn't know she was fooling around with him in Japan. And then when I called Smoky Stover, who was one of my flight commanders, and he escorted her back, and I found out from her he tried to put the make on her on the way back home. And anyway, I called Smoky, not to get him about that because I could have cared less, I says well, why did he go back to Columbus? And he said, that's where he was, you stupe. The guy she was fooling around with.

Jim: You were the last to find out.

Heiliger: I'm the last to find out any of it. So anyway, I came back to that situation. Actually, I had some inklings by a couple letters because all the letters I wrote finally and finally got some answers back, slightly. I kept asking, did she continue what she had planned. I think maybe my mother and father finally figured it out because the day I got shot down was the first day I wrote them and said we were having problems, that Carol was coming home. The day I got shot down I wrote that letter back to them.

Jim: That was a big day.

Heiliger: So anyway, I finally got an answer back, oh, probably four or five months before I got released, maybe less, saying that she was going ahead with her plans. So I assumed that was what I was talking about. But nobody knew that because it was really funny when I got released.

The first thing when we got to Clark Air Force Base, they took me in this room, there were about two or three shrinks in there and a couple doctors, and they sat me down and—

Jim: Oh, they were going to deliver the bad news.

Heiliger: Yeah. And is everything okay? Yeah, yeah. And they said, we'd like to give you some really bad news. Your wife divorced you in Juarez, Mexico, while you were still gone. And I just burst out laughing. I says, you know, this scene really is funny to me because I was pretty sure of that information. I hadn't talk to anybody yet, I hadn't called home yet. They wanted to make sure I found this out before I called home.

Jim: They were prepared for this big breakdown. I'm sure that they were disappointed.

Heiliger: And I tell you, when I told them that that's what I suspected because of the situation, oh you should have seen the relief on their faces. And it's so funny how serious they were. If I could only look at that, if I could have shot that footage.

Jim: They wanted to treat you so gently.

Heiliger: And they were. They didn't want anything to happen to us. In fact, I guess the guys--we were the second group. We were a small group to get out. Another story. But anyway, the first group that got out I guess went wild at the hospital. And so this group they were going to take and make sure nothing happened.

Well, one of our guys was a brother to a stewardess who brought over a couple of her friends to Clark to meet him. He escaped from the hospital. They didn't find him for a day. They were afraid to lose anybody because we were such a kid-glove group they—

Jim: They wanted to catch up in one night.

Heiliger: Well, they couldn't let anything bad happen to any of us either. So, if they couldn't find somebody—

Jim: That's right. You were symbolic by then.

Heiliger: If anything would have happened to any one of us, their career was down. So it was kind of funny.

Jim: Yeah. Did at any time that you decided that you weren't going to get home?

Heiliger: No. I don't think so.

Jim: You never lost hope or anything?

Heiliger: No. The only question was if you could live long enough, I think. I don't think there was ever a feeling—

Jim: I mean, you weren't worrying about starving to death?

Heiliger: Not starving as much as whatever disease somebody would get.

Jim: Yeah. You didn't mention any diseases. Anybody get—

Heiliger: No. Actually, we stayed pretty healthy. I got colds and things like that, and I think part of my inside emphysema is probably caused from that.

Jim: The guys who were—

Heiliger: The only guys that I know of—well, we lost a few up there. Very few. One guy I now got cholera. We were in a camp near China the last year. They moved us out of Hanoi, 208 of us. Two hundred seven of us came back. And the one guy, about a month or two before we were coming back, his fever was up. And the guy's in his room. Why they didn't catch it heaven only knows.

Jim: It's a very catchable disease.

Heiliger: Yes.

Jim: I've treated several of those.

Heiliger: And he got it. I think it—that's what they said he had now. He had all the signs of it.

Jim: This new camp, just before you got released, was that a better place?

Heiliger: No, worse. We were in 45, 50-men rooms. We went from, like I say, the first year we were in the three-man room. Me. Some were in twos, some four, but all little. Then, when we went over route(??), after the first and second years, the second and third years we moved in next door to the zoo. Remember I told you that film studio?

Jim: Yes.

Heiliger: They built a camp. They actually built a ten-unit, nine-man rooms camp, which they filled eight of the ten and used the other two for interrogation or torture, if they needed to. And they have 72 of us in there in nine-man rooms. Theoretically we couldn't talk room to room, but nine, hey, four stories—for a little while.

Jim: Brand new stories to tell.

Heiliger: Right. Right. And then, that's the second and third year. We had an escape attempt at the end of the second year. John Dramesi and a guy by the name of Ed Atterbury left our room and, well, it wasn't hard. You go out through the roof. They had worked on it about half a year.

Jim: Yeah, but then where do you go?

Heiliger: Well, they planned to float down the river, literally. We didn't want them to go because we were afraid of the aftermath on us.

Jim: Right.

Heiliger: And it was justified. Some of us almost got killed. That was the worst torture that we had than when we first arrived.

Jim: What was different? Just more of it?

Heiliger: Harder. Harder. And Red McDaniels, who was the—we had one room that you could sign between the two camps. Red McDaniels was the key to that. And they beat him 100 times with a rubber hose and they almost killed him with that. Larry Garino, who was the camp commander, our camp commander, the senior man on this side, not our side because we knew what was going on, they thought he was the senior, therefore he knew what was going on in all of them. And he didn't have any idea. And, like I say, when the pain gets too bad you try to tell them things, but he couldn't find anything to tell them because he didn't know. And it got so bad he slit his wrists. Luckily he didn't make it. He's still living.

Jim: The two guys that escaped through the roof, how long did they last before they caught them?

Heiliger: I'd say John and Ed left about a little before midnight. We were happy to see them go because it was such a divisive thing in the room. Seven of us said he shouldn't. And it was hard to say no to John because the honor code says, number six says, you will make every effort to escape. John took that, and he also was an idealist unfortunately, and somehow he took Ed.

Somehow Ed Atterbury, of all the people, this guy had been passed over a couple times for major because he hung out his whole career at the bar. Made him an idealist like him. Commiss(??) says this is the thing to do, so the point where Ed was so strung up on it that he probably would have hung on longer than anybody in interrogation because he was now such an idealist. He was killed three days after he got back.

They were out, they left at midnight, probably captured about five the next morning when the sun came up. Wasn't going to be any trouble if they got out to get over the wall. Guards are so lax that was not a problem. And then what, just like you say. And then they were captured somewhere around five, brought back to our camp, because people saw them. Not put back in our room, obviously. And the Vietnamese listed Ed as dying. They went out on the 5th of May, listed as dying on the 8th of May.

Jim: But they killed him.

Heiliger: I'm sure. But John, he may be an idealist, but he also knows when to give. Ed was probably so built up, plus he wasn't in as good a shape as John, but John was a wrestler for Rutgers. But I'm just saying I don't know what killed him.

Jim: So one of them survived.

Heiliger: One survived.

Jim: Is he still alive today?

Heiliger: Yeah. That's the one we don't allow in the organization because of his first-person book.

Jim: Right.

Heiliger: So anyway, that was the second and third year we lived there, that was the first year. The second year we were back with the same seven of the nine plus two other newer ones. And then, toward the end of the third year, they moved us away from Hanoi to about two miles from Sahn Pai(??), the place where they tried the rescue. We were down the road two miles. We heard it all. We wondered what the heck was going on. They hadn't bombed or done anything for about a year and we wondered what was going on. We found out later.

Anyway, then they moved everybody. Because of that they moved everybody back to the Hilton. Everybody. And they put most of us in these 40, 50-man rooms. We were 20 or so in our room out of this other place in the country, now we're 50. They also forced all the people they had had—they had some of our senior colonels for over four years. That's tough. We never lost communication with them, it's just that—

Jim: They felt that they possessed more information than anyone else, is that—

Heiliger: Or were better in leadership. They didn't want us to—

Jim: Oh, they didn't want to mix with the troops.

Heiliger: And I'll have to admit, once we got everybody together, then they formed the organization. We weren't so sure always that we were doing okay by ourselves without a "Fourth Allied POW ring," which is that.

Jim: Did it all go by rank once you got back?

Heiliger: Everything was rank. You were always in rank. If there are two people, one guy outranks another.

Jim: Yeah, but I don't know if that still counted as a prisoner.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. Yeah. The unit rank and shoot-down. Not what—you don't care if you're on a list or not. And our room was nine.

Jim: Didn't care if you what?

Heiliger: On a list to be promoted. John had made the list to be promoted.

Jim: That doesn't count.

Heiliger: John Dramesi made the list to be promoted; therefore, sometime after he had been promoted he would have been senior to another guy in our room by the name of Red Wilson, bless his soul. He's dead now. But Red was senior because at the date of shoot-down his date of rank for captain was senior to John's.

Jim: I know about those. They had a rank because, just before I got out of the Navy after being in Korea, I got out one month before the next all-Nav(??) that would have moved me into a lieutenant commander from being a two-striper to—but I'd rather get out anyway.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. So, like I say, then we moved back into the wallow(??) for the fourth and fifth year because we were only at this little one outside the country for a couple of months before the Sahn Pai raid. We just always figured they were afraid that, if the U.S. was that sincere about rescuing people, they wanted to make sure everybody was in the same complex so it would be harder.

Jim: But when did you first find out that you were about to be liberated?

Heiliger: Then, like I say, we spent the fourth and fifth year in these large rooms. The sixth year, when the B-52s started bombing in around May of '72, give or take, they started the action again heavily, I think the Vietnamese were afraid that we would—they might accidentally bomb some of us. We were a bargaining chip.

Jim: Oh, that's what you were used for.

Heiliger: So they moved 208 of us, like I said, up to that camp near China. It was colder up there. It was ice on the water and it was freezing at night during the winter. And back then, during the day, we were in a building of 20, but at night for 14 hours of the 20 hours because it was dark or past their working hours, they would lock us back up into one- or two-man cells for the night for 14. I was in one cell into the next year, except during the day I was out with my other 20. But they didn't seem to care whether we talked between ourselves. We could talk, so at least that was a plus.

And they all said you won't move back to Hanoi until it's over. I think that's about the only time they told us the truth. So, around the 20th of January, it was just after my birthday, the trucks rolled into the camp, enough for everybody. We could count them. And they started moving us the next

day. We were back in Hanoi on the 20th, they signed the peace accords on the 27th of January. They told us five days later because they had to tell within five days by the agreements. They waited five. And we were out of there, they started the first out on the 12th of February.

Jim: How'd they get out? March out?

Heiliger: No, they took us by buses to the airport.

Jim: So you flew out of Hanoi?

Heiliger: Yeah. Gialam airport.

Jim: On what kind of an aircraft? American?

Heiliger: C-141.

Jim: They just flew them in and away it went?

Heiliger: The only extra tale, then, I'll have on this, and then I've just got to go because I can go on forever in this, but the only extra tale I'll say is how we got out. You're supposed to go out, by the agreements, in four groups, four equal groups: sick and wounded first, just what we wanted. Sick and wounded or shoot-down sick and wounded first, exactly what we had held through the whole time. Nobody leaves unless they have approval. And the only guy that had approval was Doug Hegdahl, the guy who fell off his carrier. Everybody else went home before they were supposed to, without permission, and we regard them all as less-than-honorable.

So we sent the first one out on the 12th of February. That night, they rounded up 20 of us, including me, and put us in a separate room and says, you're going to be the next ones. You're going home earlier than the next group. We said no. The rules are, one, two, three, four. You read us that. We all had a copy of it. They had to give us that too.

Jim: What was the ploy here?

Heiliger: We said we're not going.

Jim: They wanted to extract something from you?

Heiliger: No. They said you're going, it's arranged. But we're not going. To the point one night they brought in heavies with automatic weapons and said, if you're not going we're shooting you. And they leveled them at us and we said, you ain't going to squeeze that trigger, you idiots. We're on a list. How are you going to explain it? And they just walked their people out finally.

Jim: Our side already knew who was on the list?

Heiliger: Except for a couple. They didn't know my backseater for a while. He was not on the list. We got a list of everybody that they got, and Ben wasn't listed on it. So we were afraid what they were going to do. But he walked out the same.

So anyway, for six days they kept us like that. They said, it's going to happen any minute. They're coming in. And we said no, we're not going. So this was the 12th. On the 17th of April—we left on the 18th of February, excuse me. On the 17th of February they brought in a lieutenant colonel, American, and a couple other officers for the pre-release arrangements for our little group of 20. And we said no, we're not going. And they said, we will go only if our senior man of our 20 gets to talk to that lieutenant colonel and finds out things. So Jim Pierry(?), who died about a year ago, was a senior man. Only one of our 20 was in the next group of 20 that would have gone, and that's the guy that escaped and _____ with his sister; _____. a millionaire in California.

Anyway, Jim Pierry went out to talk to that lieutenant colonel and he says, all they'll tell me is that Kissinger has arranged this thing. He doesn't know anything more. He says he's told me this. He says, "If you guys want to go, fine; if you don't want to go I'll turn around and go home and you can get out next group. That's up to you guys." So he came back and told us and I said, hey, most of us didn't want to go that way. And, as I told Bill Baugh, who is one of my best friends, I says Bill, how can I go? I've spent now almost six years up here and I consider it an honorable—and I don't care how, if it's not in the order, somebody somewhere along the line of people that didn't know you particularly are going to say, hey, what did he do?

Jim: Right. To deserve this.

Heiliger: What did he do? And there were a couple in that group, I'll have to admit. And I'm not knocking people because they're all friends now. A couple in the group I would prefer not to have gone home on a special arrangement with because I think they did more than I did. Maybe I'm trying to be pure, but I didn't want to. And Bill finally talked to me the day before we left. It didn't make any difference on my side. I was still saying no. He says, "Don, don't worry about it." He says, the people that know you know what you've done. So what more do you—you have to look in the mirror. What do you care if somebody doesn't know you what they think? The people that know you, they know what you've done. I said, well thanks, Bill, that really helps.

But anyway, the next morning, then, or maybe it was all that same day. I can't remember. Everything was getting confused. But our senior guy went to talk to Norm Gattis, who was the senior of the whole Wall-O(?) of our group. We ended up, because the first group had already gone, the Stockdales had gone, the Reisners had gone already. Some of these people had already gone, the people we would look to for leadership. Anyway, Norm Gattis was

a senior of that group, which should have been in the next group to go. And so he came out as a one-star right away. So, Norm went to talk to our senior guy, Jim Pierry, and he got permission to talk.

And so, Norm came over, and this was on Sunday afternoon and we left on a Sunday afternoon. He came over about three hours before we were released and he says, okay guys. I know some of you don't want to go. I know some of you won't go. He says, so I am ordering you home. So I was ordered to come home. I always thought that was kind of special.

And the only thing we could find out about here that it was—and Kissinger, I saw him in California and either he doesn't remember it or whatever. We still don't know why that group of 20. All of us had something the matter back here. My wife had divorced me. Another guy's father was—he got home two days before he died. One of the guys, gosh, his wife had really been bad up there. I mean, she not only spent everything that he had made, he was about 10,000 bucks in debt. We always expected the wives to live on nothing and we'd have all this money saved.

Jim: (Unintelligible.)

Heiliger: For him he definitely didn't, and for most, of course, they didn't. So I can't tell you why. All of us had some personal reasons. And if that was the reason, I have no idea, but we've never been given a good explanation. And to this day I don't know why I was selected in the 20. So I was part of a fifth group, an extra group.

Jim: Was that selection made by the U.S. military?

Heiliger: Exactly.

Jim: It wasn't made by the Vietnamese.

Heiliger: No. No, and we told them that was correct. Everybody I've ever talked to said no. Those names were given by Kissinger in Paris or whomever he—he's the one that actually handed over that list of names. Why? We have no idea. And I still felt bad. And sometimes, why didn't—nobody(?) looks down on it. And nobody could explain it. Particularly at that time I was very serious. And it really was less than great to come home under that situation.

But then, like I say, my wife had gotten her divorce in Juarez, which is the only way she could have gotten it because she couldn't have got one in the States.

Jim: So where did they go? Where did you go then?

Heiliger: Back to Wright-Patterson. My folks were in Madison here, and so I could have gone either to Scott Air Force Base or to Wright-Patt. My family, the kids and my former wife, were all in the Columbus, Ohio area. So Wright-

Patt was the closest to that, and my folks could've gone to one or the other. And so that's where I ended up.

Jim: See the kids?

Heiliger: --My folks. They were there. My folks were there. The kids did not get out at the airplane. They were with my former wife in the car.

Jim: She wouldn't let them out of the car?

Heiliger: I don't know. But it was my mother and dad that walked up. Like I say, not only did she not—I don't know at what point she told the kids I was living. There must have been a real come-uppance there—

Jim: So she had a little explaining to do.

Heiliger: She never wrote, nor would she giving the writing materials. That's why it took me almost four years to get a letter up there. She never gave the writing materials to—

Jim: To the children?

Heiliger: To my parents to even allow them to write.

Jim: How could she prevent them from writing?

Heiliger: Because she got all the materials, being that she was the wife.

Jim: Oh. You mean they wouldn't know where to write you.

Heiliger: No. They wouldn't know where to write until she gave them, because she would get all the materials and say okay, it's time for your monthly letter, and she'd toss it away.

Jim: That's dreadful.

Heiliger: Must've really been pissed off at me.

Jim: That's still dreadful.

Heiliger: Anyway. Yeah, I know. Well, she's dead now.

Jim: It's more than that.

Heiliger: She died in '83.

Jim: So then you remarried?

Heiliger: Oh, I married within—Cheryl I had known since she was a little kid. We both went to Our Savior's Lutheran on East Washington Avenue and it's now moved up to Droster Road. She was the organist in the church. Actually, she is 12 years younger than me, but I've known her family. I knew her dad and grandfather. I went to a voter's meeting with her at the same church, so I've known the family. There really are only three major families in that church. We combine one of them.

But she was the organist of the church. And I came home—let's see, I got out on the 18th and I came home in about early March. Three weeks after I got home—I had to get home because my folks were hounding me. The press was on them all the time. So I said I'd better get home and get the press off their backs. And I came home.

I still needed a nose operation because of some of the beatings and stuff they had done.

Jim: Oh, they had broken your nose?

Heiliger: Yeah. Plus, my friends had worked on me and said my nose was too large, my old POW buddies. And at that time the Air Force would do anything they wanted to you. In fact, one of the guy's wife got a breast implant within about three days after he got home.

Anyway, so one of five plastic surgeons in the Air Force happened to be at Wright-Patt. The says, "What do you want?" I says, "My guys say I need a better nose." Besides, I needed some work anyway. They said, Butch Kincaid, he says, "Okay, I will make a nose to fit your face." He wouldn't tell me what it was going to be like. He wouldn't let me pick it. He said, "I'm going to make a nose to fit your face and personality." And I did.

So anyway, I told my wife-to-be—I came home and then I went to church that Sunday. And I went up to her, I knew her, her family I knew, I didn't really know her. I said, "Okay, I'll be back in three weeks. I want all Bach." I taught music appreciation up there, by the way. Classical music became my love. And I said, "I want all Bach." And sure enough, I came back in three weeks and she played all Bach. I said "Okay, I owe you dinner."

Jim: And it went on from there.

Heiliger: Yeah.

Jim: Do you think permanent damage? Do you look to yourself?

Heiliger: I have a lot of disabilities that are primarily in joints. We're finding that, as a group, we have a lot more joint problems.

Jim: Arthritic.

Heiliger: Arthritic-type things, that seem to be coming. The Navy did a great job in following us.

Jim: Oh they did?

Heiliger: Of their own. Now we're all in it. I haven't gone down yet, but now they're inviting us. They're invited, in fact I've got to get down there because they want to get us all in that. And the wives too. When they go down there, they're given a full physical.

Jim: They're looking for long-term effects.

Heiliger: What they did is they took a test case, a test group. Us, the Navy I should say, and another test group with everything the same, all fliers and everything except they didn't have the POW experience. And they followed them. Still following them.

Jim: Just everything in general.

Heiliger: Everything they can think of. For most of the time there was no difference in the test group and us. We're finding now there are some more joint problems, arthritic problems and so forth in the test group. But the one thing that is better is emotional stability. They found that, as a rule, and that's why they were a little pissed off now in the press and everything on John McCain, because look what they're saying. The guy can't be trusted. Remember *The Manchurian Candidate*? Poor John is just sitting in it. And I can see more e-mail. We have an Internet between us all, and we—

Jim: Everybody is screaming about this.

Heiliger: Everybody is screaming now. And they're writing letters to all the people and everybody's on it. We're getting 40, 50 Internets a day, just from our own group on this.

Jim: The other people in his party are trying to think of ways to take it to him.

Heiliger: Probably. That's the most logical. Because John, sure he's got a temper. Everybody's got a temper. As he says, I think, "I get pissed off when I don't get my parking space. But then it leaves." I do too.

Jim: Everybody does that.

Heiliger: And I just heard things I don't like about John. I'm not 100% behind him, nor am I behind any candidate, because I can't agree 100%. But overall I trust him when he says something because I feel I can trust us.

Jim: That part you know.

Heiliger: And if he follows like he has, and certain personally about his character maybe, but it isn't a matter of trust in what he says. And I think that's where most of us are coming from. Most of the guys when they write say hey, there's a lot of things I don't like, John. In fact, I don't know if I can support John all the way.

Jim: He isn't going to make it anyways.

Heiliger: But, don't tell him that it's because he was a POW.

Jim: Right. Well, he isn't going to make it anyways.

Heiliger: He'll take New Hampshire, I think.

Jim: Yeah, but that's about it.

Heiliger: But that's about it.

Jim: He doesn't have the money, for one thing.

Heiliger: But he's a viable candidate.

Jim: Oh, he's a terrific guy.

Heiliger: Yeah. He's got some flaws, but character-wise I think he's good.

Jim: He's honest, I like that.

Heiliger: A couple other things.

Jim: I'm ready.

Heiliger: I know. Killing time. When we got in the large rooms, then we kind of divided it up into time. During the morning when you first get up for a couple hours, it's exercise time. Our room was like a—do you have anything at all? The room was like this [Heiliger draws on paper.] and a wall here, and there'd be another room, for instance, the same way over here. This was filled with cots or pallets where we just lay our mattresses down, raised up like this. This was a U in a well, so this was a track. Run, run, run, run every morning.

Jim: That's kind of nice.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. We'd go a couple miles each, at least. Just run. But it's a long way. You figure there's 25 bunks, so I'd have to estimate the width, I don't even know right now. Then every other exercise, too. During the time most of us, except a few couch potatoes, most of us did some exercises obviously. And really, fantastic amounts. I know we always tried to establish records, and that's why I'm getting to this.

I tried to set a record. The record for sit-ups was 3,500, and I was going to beat it. So I got up—

Jim: Continuous sit-ups?

Heiliger: I got up to 1,250. And my tailbone was so red. I knew I couldn't make it much further so I gave up and never tried to set it again. But I don't know what the record was when we got out. This was several years before we got out I tried it, so maybe it was—I have no idea.

Other records, I know Bunny Talley, on his 34th birthday, because everybody was kidding him about getting old, he did 7,777. Not fully kneed, but deep-knee bends, not to the point of down to your ankles. We just kept feeding him for a couple days and he kept doing them.

One of the records, and I tell this, my wife says, "Don't tell this anymore." She doesn't like it. But we were getting _____(??) we were getting our American packages until they discovered we were getting secreted messages in some of them.

Jim: When was that that you started getting packages?

Heiliger: I got my first two-and-a-half years after I was shot down. I wrote my first letter, I got my first package shortly after that. And my folks knew I was alive and they didn't care, they just sent a package up. Regardless of the letter system(??). I got a two-pound box of Fanny Farmer candy. They knew what I loved. Anyway, we were getting other things like chewing gum and stuff. But there would be secreted messages. Cans of spam would have like maybe a whole microfilm of the *New York Times*.

Jim: How did you look at it?

Heiliger: We had readers sometimes. We had to filter out grape Kool-Aid because the microdots were the same size. Only grape. Some guys came in with readers and they were able to keep them sequestered in their butt or something.

Jim: But the microfilm was so small.

Heiliger: They could read it. They had a reader, too, for that, some guys. One page of a microdot is the same as a page. And they had readers for those for sure. I don't remember how they read the film.

- Jim: Or how they got them. How did they get a reader?
- Heiliger: They came in. Some guys came in with a microdot reader. How they kept it all through that I have no idea. Or maybe they got it through another package. Maybe the latter. I don't remember. Some of us, we never were completely **[End of tape three, side one]** in the loop, anybody on everything that we did in secret. Some of us between letter writers. There were maybe 10% of the guys came in as "letter writers" that were taught at survival training. And it's a special code that I can't even tell. But it was ways to secrete messages in letters beginning how you write, what the first word is, what the seventh word is. You set the pattern in each letter and only you would know, and only somebody else reading that letter, because of the pattern as it started, knew what the whole system was to figure out what the letter says. And the letter would say, it's nice weather, blah, blah. It wouldn't have anything—
- Jim: But you had to go to school to learn how to do this.
- Heiliger: They taught another 10% of us up there. I became one the last couple years.
- Jim: Was that hard to learn?
- Heiliger: No. It was fun. It gave you something more to think about.
- Jim: I'm sure.
- Heiliger: They would give a message they would want sent out. However you wanted to do it was up to you. You just developed your own letter, and maybe ten of us would send out the same message up there.
- Jim: Assuming that one of them would get through? How would you send the messages out?
- Heiliger: That's what I say.
- Jim: Yeah, but how would they leave the compound?
- Heiliger: Through letters, six- or seven-line letters. We were allowed to write about one a month.
- Jim: But the person receiving the letter would have to understand what's going on.
- Heiliger: Hopefully they would pass them to the U.S. or turn them over to the U.S. I know the U.S. had asked the families to turn over all letters so they could diagnose it for many things. How was the person's health? You could tell by the letter writing. Unfortunately, they always looked for the worst case. They kept telling my folks I was getting weaker and weaker. They also told

families, just before we came home, they took them all down and told them that we were coming back as psycho cases and everything else. They really gave us bad—the folks were almost afraid for us to come back.

Spending time. We did exercises. Oh, we got packages. I was saying, one of the packages we got in was chewing gum, American chewing gum, for a while. So we decided we would test them to see which had the most endurance. And Wrigley's still uses that in their ads. And the only rule is you would chew the same stick day after day. And at night you could put it in your water cup and then start chewing it the next morning. Sixty-seven days on the same stick of Wrigley's spearmint. All the others didn't make it.

Jim: What would happen? That would seem to go on forever.

Heiliger: No. It broke down finally.

Jim: It did?

Heiliger: Yeah. They've never used this, I don't know why. Wrigley's is a great opportunity. You can chew that same stick—I think somebody—

Jim: (Unintelligible.)

Heiliger: During the daytime some of the classes we would teach various things. Like the Spanish classes and stuff like that we'd do during the daytime. On weekends—

Jim: You could do this openly?

Heiliger: Yes, in a 50-man room.

Jim: You could do it openly, then.

Heiliger: But we would make sure that whoever was looking at us, if the guards came around, which they didn't really come around looking that much, didn't see us with the books we had made.

Jim: Out of toilet paper?

Heiliger: Out of toilet paper.

Jim: Boy, it's tough to keep those in reasonable condition, wasn't it?

Heiliger: It was thick toilet paper. It's not the toilet paper like you think. Very coarse, very hard. A sheet is at least, or it's thicker than that [indicating thickness]. Not very good for toilet paper, but great for writing. So we taught courses like that. And anything you can think of we had courses in, even social dance.

Phil Butler was an Arthur Murray instructor at one time and he taught us social dancing, which the Vietnamese thought was—six or seven of us wouldn't participate. The rest of us said hey, that's great, we'll learn anything. We taught skiing, we taught golf, everything that you can do. You didn't have any skis or anything, but you went through all the stuff.

I taught music appreciation, which is normally done at night because the guys liked it and I had about a 20-hour course on it.

Jim: But no music.

Heiliger: You'd hum, whistle, whatever you can do. Remember, you've got a captive audience.

Jim: Yeah, I know. If you made a mistake, who'd know? Right?

Heiliger: And I found out very quickly, as did most people, if you were the only guy that knew something you were the expert. Actually, Ken Cordier, who was the best man at our wedding, wrote down my whole music appreciation course a couple times. He'd pass them from room to room. People were really interested in it up there. It was something new to them.

Jim: What would you teach, then?

Heiliger: History of it, different composers, what they did, about their lives.

Jim: But you knew about this, Mozart and Bach and Brahm.

Heiliger: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Jim: The B's, you knew all about the B's.

Heiliger: All of them. Conductors, what's an orchestra made up of? How is it set up? That took about 20 hours. Twenty separate hours. Anyway, Ken wrote it all down and did it several times. He was an engineer. Beautiful printing.

Jim: That was a course book.

Heiliger: That was his course book. We actually passed it around to a couple rooms. We even lost everything. The Viet picked it up, every copy that we had made. Joe Greckor, the guy that's 10,000 bucks in debt, came out with it. Joe got out and he says, "Don," he says, "Guess what I took out?" I says, "What?" He says, "Your course. Here it is." And he gave it to me. So I still have that. I have that in a lock box, I've got copies made. But it's amazingly accurate. I've got some errors in there.

Jim: So what?

Heiliger: And then at night we would have four nights a week, for instance one year, in '71, four nights a week were movie nights. Tell movies. The art of storytelling is back because you never had any films or anything. But again, somebody's memory. Right from here.

Jim: You remember a movie they liked to talk about?

Heiliger: Now, if you had two guys that knew the same film, then you could collaborate and really come up with—but an average movie lasted—

Jim: Tell the story of the movie.

Heiliger: The story. And it would take two hours to tell it. A good movie took two hours if you really prepared it. So it's about as long as a flick, maybe longer. Then you said what's right and what's wrong. There was a group that wanted it exactly as it was. If there was an error in it, they'd let you know if they remembered it. And then there's others that would like the X-rated version. Embellish it any way that you could, you know. So there you have the differences.

So that one year we told movies. Let's see, how many days, four nights a week, so 200-some movies.

Jim: Tell me one thing: laughter.

Heiliger: A lot of prison humor.

Jim: Was laughter—

Heiliger: Happy birthday. [Heiliger singing the verse.] Happy birthday, people dying every day, happy birthday.

Jim: I mean, but you had a lot of that.

Heiliger: Yeah.

Jim: You kept up morale this way, I think?

Heiliger: Well, the one thing that you had, and particularly, and I feel sorry for some of the colonels that were alone a lot, but I was never by myself. But I think a total of 60-some days I counted off that I was really by myself. I'm not talking about those nights by myself, I'm talking about actually separate from torture—I actually would sing. Sixty-four days I think I kept, if my memory is correct.

But if you're sitting with somebody else, and we were all, like I say, all professionals, and nobody—if you get down, somebody's going to kick you

and say, hey, you're no better than the rest of us, why should you be down. You didn't stay down too long.

Jim: That was probably the most traumatic thing they could have done to a person is total isolation.

Heiliger: Oh, no question. Like I say, I knew Ross a year later—

Jim: (Unintelligible.)

Heiliger: Or if they would have worked on you, because at least you could get some comfort when you arrived back. And then, like I say, at night then they had movies or my course. They liked it at night and not in the daytime. For some reason they liked it, kind of a movie-type thing. They really liked that. And so we'd get new people in and then we'd give the course again if they were switching rooms.

And then another guy by the name of Darrell Pyle, Darrell had twice gone over the Andes. And his goal was to parachute into the Colombian—what's the name of that place in Colombia where no white man has ever walked out of?

Jim: Oh, the Machu Picchu?

Heiliger: No, Machu Picchu is in Peru. But in Colombia, I forget what the name of that is. Anyway, that was his goal in life. Well, Darrell had done it twice. He had gone down the Amazon. Once he had gone all the way down the Amazon.

Jim: That falls? Is that the place?

Heiliger: I can't remember. Anyway, he had gone down the Amazon. He had then bought a Jeep in Manaus, he and his brother I think it was. And they were just building the road to Brazilia at the time, so the Caterpillar was pulling him along all the way. Made it to Buenos Aires, bought a horse, going through ____ (??) all of Argentina on a horse. That was by himself, that part of it. And that story, and then he had another one similar in that area of the Amazon. He occasionally came down with a bout of malaria because he had had that as a result of that. But he's just a fascinating story.

People listened to Darrell forever. And then he got killed in Alaska after he got back flying a light airplane on skis and one ski broke. He got divorced, his son was with him, and luckily his son made it through.

So anyway, at night they'd do that or poker. Poker became very big. And originally it started because we got American cards. You could play poker. I'm not a poker player. I tried to play a little while with them, but I lost about 40 or 50 bucks. And being an old accountant, my degree here, it bugged me I couldn't pay it off. So I quit playing.

And then they took all our American cards away when they found out we were getting all this contraband stuff in through our packages. Everything American left—sweaters, everything, we didn't get in. Later they'd take candy out and chop it up, chop it all up looking for contraband. Sometimes something would pop up and the guy would grab it and take it back in the room it was so obvious. But they were just doing a perfunctory job.

Anyway, for a while we were making our cards out of toilet paper with rice paste or bread paste. And then finally they gave us Vietnamese cards, but they were so bad you could feel the card. You could tell what it was by feeling it. There was no uniformity. So what they did, they said okay, we can't play poker this way. So what we'll do is, if we could have dealers, we'll pay a nickel a hand. So I worked all my debt out and still kept, for nothing—

Jim: You'd pull(??) from every pot and got your payment—

Heiliger: No, you didn't pay anything, you just kept track.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Heiliger: And I knew what I was and I just reduced a nickel every time. Finally I worked all that out. And everybody just kept records. I think Darrell, we called him Coon Ass because he was from Louisiana, but it wasn't his real name. I can't remember right now. He owed over 1,000 bucks. He paid it off when we left. That was his open debt.

Jim: It's interesting to listen to you how details suddenly rise and become extremely important under these circumstances because it sort of keeps you from going crazy.

Heiliger: Oh yeah. We probably played more bridge than most contract bridge players that are master bridge players.

Jim: But I mean your concern for every little detail to the penny I think is the thing that—

Heiliger: Well, everything we did, when you've got the time and you want to make sure it's done right, there's no hurry for things. So when you did stuff, then, I think you did it right, either with making a dictionary or writing a dictionary. Neither our German nor French dictionary was as elaborate as the Spanish. The Spanish I would say was big. And I think Al Meyer was our German guy. He was the guy I lived with the longest up there. He's from Fredericksburg, Texas, originally and didn't even know English until he went to kindergarten because he—

Jim: He made a German dictionary?

Heiliger: That's that old German—yeah. And he would help us with German. I learned German from him. I don't remember who taught French. But Skip Brunhaver hadn't had Spanish since high school, but he's got a photographic mind. And his Spanish was much better than Dave Lute(?), for instance, who was Mexican-American because he had too many Mexican words, not Spanish words. So he had a lot of errors in his Spanish. But I'll tell you, Skip's was really good.

Jim: You used the Spanish when you went after the war.

Heiliger: Oh, Cheryl and I are still fluent in it.

Jim: Because you spent so much time down there.

Heiliger: Yeah. We didn't have any kids. We spoke Spanish in the house. All of our friends down there were—well, my job was as an attaché to be mixing it up with the military.

Jim: Was that a rewarding experience?

Heiliger: Terrific.

Jim: You don't regret any of that?

Heiliger: Oh. I spent 14 of my last 20 years overseas, counting in Vietnam. So most of my time was overseas, except for just a short stint in the Pentagon. Everything else was overseas.

Jim: Just think how broad your education is.

Heiliger: Oh, it's been great.

Jim: It's fantastic. Wonderful.

Heiliger: No, I can't regret the Air Force. It was good, except for that six years I'd like to have back. But, other than that, I chose it. I don't have any regrets.

Jim: Did you get any medals?

Heiliger: Oh yeah.

Jim: What did you win?

Heiliger: We were guaranteed two things. We were guaranteed our first promotion. I was a major. I was guaranteed I would make lieutenant colonel unless I did something really bad. And we were also guaranteed our first assignment. I

chose schooling. From that point on, we were on our own. And I think we've been that way ever since.

As far as medals, from that up there—

Jim: Purple Heart?

Heiliger: Two. Both documented. One was for prisoner of war, I think they gave it to everybody, and then one was for something else. [Six-second blank spot.] --I retired, really. Not a whole lot. Not a whole lot of medals. Vietnam Service Medal _____(??) because we were up there for so long. Other than that I don't think there was that much. Most of the others I gained in the military through my own—the Distinguished Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal. That's from work.

Jim: That was from your work, right. So you retired as a?

Heiliger: Colonel. Retired in Washington, worked there as a vice-president of a marketing firm. And I came back here to raise my kids.

Jim: Right. You retired at three-quarters pay?

Heiliger: Yes. No, I was one month short.

Jim: But they still gave it to you?

Heiliger: No.

Jim: No kidding.

Heiliger: One month short of it. It was three-quarters less—no, I retired out of Israel.

Jim: Israel? When were you in Israel?

Heiliger: I was a senior military representative there.

Jim: Yeah, but you were down in South America.

Heiliger: First.

Jim: How did you get over to Israel?

Heiliger: I took the job. I had a choice of going over to China or Israel as a senior military rep.

Jim: What was it like over there?

Heiliger: Great. I had a good time. And two of my three predecessors had made general, so I thought, either one, I had a chance. In fact, the guy that took the China spot is another POW, John Reynolds. He made general because of his term for the Air Force. He says, anyway. The Air Force, they switched slots over there. Navy a year, Air Force a year, Army a year, who was the senior person. The senior person was the one star. And he just happened to be in the right time.

- Jim: Isn't that a shame. What would your daily job be?
- Heiliger: Spying.
- Jim: Spying?
- Heiliger: Yeah. Overt spying. No, really. Make sure you report everything to the States what's happening in that country. Or politically, if you knew. In South America it was easy because the military in the Baltics(?), I was there during the Junta days. I know Pinochet. I feel sorry for him right now. I went to his daughter's wedding.
- Jim: Oh, did you? He's bad news now.
- Heiliger: These people, I really get tired of do-gooders that were not on the scene.
- Jim: Right. It's hard to—
- Heiliger: --People that are, even county supervisors, oh, we've got to free this person or we've got to do this. They've never been there. Everything's bad in Nepal or Tibet or wherever. They read it. Everything they do is read it.
 But I'll tell you, the whole group at that time, during Allende things were so bad down there. I mean, I don't know why somebody isn't going after Allende for things that were done during his administration. But, that's not popular. They had less than one million bucks in the bank in the whole bank, the whole country, at the time Pinochet or the group took over in Chile. And bread lines. Lines you think of in Russia. It was horrible. We'd be standing in line for soap and toilet paper and stuff like that. I mean, I've talked to so many people. I've got so many friends. And some of them are civilian, they're not all military, so I get a pretty good perspective. And things were really bad down there. And the Cubans were in there. And it's like part of the whole Cold War.
 Vietnam I look at, and maybe this rationalizes it, people say we lost the Vietnam War, we did this. We won the Cold War. I look at it that way. Everything between World War II and the end, when the Berlin wall fell and everything else fell, were battles to the final victory. And whether we didn't do as well on one or we did okay or didn't do okay, you had to do it at that time. We had to have the Chiles, we had to have some of these. Otherwise that front would have been Communist right now, I'm convinced. Allende was a Communist. He was the only free(?) elected Communist in the world.
- Jim: I was going to say, in South America they'd be very close to becoming—
- Heiliger: And I'll tell you, the people were demanding. It was the women that went to the streets in Chile to demand the military take over. It wasn't the military. The women down there have a lot of guts.
- Jim: Oh really?
- Heiliger: Oh yeah. And they were the ones out in the streets protesting against the Allende regime. Do something, military. And in their Constitution, local(?) and Latin American countries have in their Constitution, a more overseeing provision than we

do, than we give our military. And that is they are the ultimate defenders of the Constitution. When things don't go right, they have the right by their Constitutions to come in to preserve the democracy. And that's what they all went in for. Nobody went in for permanent military juntas. And after they're in a while, they're no better than anybody else. Corruption comes in there just like the corruption comes in any place, unless you have a way to change it.

So I was in Uruguay during the Junta. There it was strictly a Junta, a four-man Junta; or three-man Junta. And in Chile they had more of a combination civil/military. That was the one in Uruguay, the favored Aparicio Mendez, who was ancient, was their President. The Junta elected him president and now have their own figurehead. There's a joke that the head of the Junta says, Aparicio, go and get us three cups of coffee, you know. Oh, while you're out get a fourth for yourself. Standard joke. And they'd say these things all over, amongst themselves, too, you know.

Jim: How did all the Japanese end up in Peru? Do you know anything about that?

Heiliger: I don't know. Trade.

Jim: It's amazing. There's a lot of them down there. One of them was President of the country. And all the Germans in Argentina.

Heiliger: Well, Germans in Argentina and Chile. Both of them. In fact, there are still discussions in parts of Chile where they still have small fortresses down there. And I've never got to the bottom of that. But you go down the lake area of Chile, that is all German, just like Argentina. In fact, one of my good friends, who was retired by the time we got down there, Colonel Eric Buchardt(?), a Chilean name? No. Fritz Dreier.

Jim: Not very Chilean.

Heiliger: Eric Buchardt was a retired colonel in the Chilean Air Force. And a funny story—I've got to get out of here. A funny story of Eric, and he's a legend in his own Air Force because he didn't know any Spanish until he went to the Air Force Academy. And that area, just like my friend down in Fredericksburg, Texas, that was German. They didn't even teach it, in the home it was German. And the schools were German in Chile, so until he went to the Air Force Academy where he had to learn Spanish—so, at the end, and I'll leave on this, at the end of this, when they graduate and they have to take their oath of office, they always say "I" and then their name, "proud to be a Chilean, promise" blah, blah, blah. Eric says, "I, Eric Buchardt, surprised to be a Chilean." [Both laugh.] And he still is in the legends of the Chilean Air Force and still living down there.

Jim: Fantastic. Thank you, sir.

Heiliger: Yeah.

[End of Interview]