

Interview with John Borling

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, April 23, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today, once again, I'm in Rockford, Illinois with General John Borling. Good morning, Sir.

Borling: Good morning to you. Spring is almost here, although it was thirty-three degrees when I ran this morning. I went out in shorts and ended up with red legs and watching other people come bundling down the path, looking like it was midwinter again, although it looks to be a pleasant day. I hope so; I'm playing golf later this afternoon.

DePue: I think it's going to warm up nicely.

Borling: I hope so.

DePue: A little bit of frost in the morning. You're speaking to a redleg, so I don't mind hearing about red legs.¹

Borling: You like red legs? All right, that's good.

¹ Members of the field artillery are referred to as "redlegs" because, during the American Civil War, they were distinguished by scarlet stripes down the legs of their uniform pants.

DePue: Absolutely, as an old field artillery guy. We're here to talk about your experiences in the Air Force. Before we started today, you mentioned that you kind of wanted to work your way backwards, so I'm going to turn it over to you.

Borling: Yeah. I'm so tired of talking about Air Force and POW stuff. Let's start in 2014 and either go forward or go back, but kind of crank up today, all right? Is that fair with you? So you don't have questions, so let me free associate a little bit. What I'm going to do is give you an orientation.

I think it's important for everyone to have an extant statement of what their meaning of life is. I don't purport to suggest that mine should be yours or vice versa. I do suggest, however, that everyone needs to have this thought through. Drinking coffee is going to make me [froggy], so we'll clear my throat a lot in the course of, and I'll get some water if we need it.

I've got a friend in California, a woman, who, when I asked, said, "Hey, that's easy; my meaning of life is I want to travel and buy clothes." Okay, I can accept that.

If you want to have some fun in a tall building elevator some time, like eighty floor A on tower in Chicago, you get in the elevator, and you poke the button, and you turn to the guy next to you in the crowded elevator—everyone's staring at the little TV machine up there—and you say, "Oh, by the way, what is your meaning of life?" And you watch the people panic. Or if you ask this question, which **every** college freshman and sophomore, at the student union asks them, you get this great puzzlement, this great invasion of space. I think, from a whole person standpoint, you are not there unless you can have some statement that is motivating to you, that is your purpose in life.

So, my purpose in life is that I like to host and attend gay dinner parties and receptions, and saving the world and everything in between. Drives my wife crazy. Drives me crazy, because it's an impossible dream; it's a beacon in the night, but it is a beacon in the night that I march to. The beacon currently shines brightly on a distant hill called SOS America. We may have talked about this before. I want to start here, because it's more encouraging to me and reinforcing of my own notions than anything you might put down in the archive here.

If we really care about America, we have to care about renewing the various and many pillars that support this arch we call the American dream. One of those pillars that is a respected pillar, of course, is the military. It needs tuck pointing always, like all the other pillars: education, the churches, the sports, the whatever, the economy.

SOS America contends that sometime between seventeen and twenty-six, every young man in America ought to give a year in the uniform military,

but do so within small units, shepherded by active duty company-grade officers and some real sergeants, keep that small unit loyalty. Allow the young men to serve in that unit, to the various Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Merchant Marine, Coast Guard entities, as well as have a bunch left over for civilian tasks, but all within the rubric of the military, so that the young man can say, “Hey,” at the end of that time, “I served.” Well, this was the guts of it. People can see it at www.sosamerica.org. I expect this to be consuming, along with my writing and speaking, for the next two years, barring health things.

In the end when you’re...I’m seventy-four in March. I’m terribly cognizant that if either Myrna or I would fall off the edge or start to slide down the imperceptible slope—the nice thing about dementia is that you don’t know you’re there—then we would reorient priorities. But for the moment, we’re well, and we’re vital, and we’re given certain resources that we can devote to the pursuit of altruism or idealism, but without illusion, without illusion.

It’s a terrible approximation. These lives in which we lead is a conglomerate of peoples within nations, always the fractures and the stresses occur. We’re looking at the Ukraine thing today, and the Ukrainian proverb that fire starts with sparks comes to mind. We end up fighting over ridiculous pieces of terrain, often not knowing why we’re there, challenged by -isms or -ologies or outright aggressions.

The John Stuart Mill stuff comes to mind, with respect to, you’re free to do what you want to do in life, basically, Libertarian view, with a greater good to the greater number factoring in there. The greater writing, advanced by his wife, was that if you’re threatened, then you get to kill. You try to kill me, I kill you back first. Therein the genesis of the human condition, since the beginning of man. One guy picks up a stick; the other guy picks up a club, and now you’re going for it.

So, for me, this SOS America gives us a common crucible of citizenship, not so much for purposes of warfare, but for purposes of service and purposes of self-esteem and purposes of national renewal.² So you ought to know that’s where I’m going.

DePue: We did talk quite a bit about SOS last time.

Borling: Well, I want to talk about it some more, because it’s ever on my mind this morning.

DePue: Absolutely.

² See ALPL interview with John Borling, Vol. 1, transcript #03.

Borling: That and writing. In fact, it came to me on my run, down the Rock River here, right about there, and I kept it with me for the rest of the run. It wasn't a long run this morning, about three and a half. The name of the book is going to be *Top Heavy*. I was working, not so much the subject matter of the book, but the construct of the book, starting off with the fact that we're suffering from too much information overload. It's almost like we're staggering around, trying to assimilate that which is going on around us. We are top heavy as individuals; we are top heavy as a city, states and nations. So how do we analyze it, and what do we do about it?

What I'm doing is telegraphing a punch that may never get thrown, but I'm attracted—with all the other things I'm working on in half form in writing, and my speaking work around the country—is that I think I'm going to try hard to develop this *Top Heavy* thing, and I've got a great Saturday to do it. I write quickly, sketch quickly. [Its] not unusual for me to rip off articles in a day in a half, thoughtful articles, which I'm filing away to be parts of chapters or lead-ins to chapters.

Increasingly, I think that, in terms of structure, we don't write, except in very small paragraphs. Bullet points are to be desired, because at the end of the day, it's almost like you can't absorb anything unless it's in a PowerPoint with three or four bullets on the slide. Then you can take that in, and then you're off to the next thing. Our attention span is almost bumblebee like, flitting from flower to flower. So we'll work on that.

All right, so that's what the future holds, along with a healthy dose of indulgent hedonism. I intend to spend a lot more time up at my summer home in Michigan. It's a modest cottage on a lake, but it's been a mooring point. I joke that I'm seventy-four, and I've been going there for seventy-five years. That's not a joke; that's a reality. I have responsibilities up there, in terms of the fireworks show on the Fourth of July and a golf tournament I do and business interests, because I've got other business interests.

Certainly, I've got to worry about Synthomics, the biotech company, and try to make this raise that takes us off into the human trials world and gets us off to the market, not certainly for our own personal benefit, but for the benefit of modern medicine.³ That's where I sit this morning, as we sit on the Rock River.

DePue: Is *Top Heavy* an autobiography or a memoir?

Borling: No, no, no. It's an observation on where we are as a people in America and the impact of modern-day technology. Then it comes back to the renewal theme, what is it that we can do to renew America? The renewal theme, the

³ Synthomics, Inc. is a specialty pharmaceutical company that focuses on the discovery, development, and licensing of metal coordinated pharmaceuticals. General Borling chairs the organization's business board and is a director/investor in the company. (<https://sosamerica.org>)

tuck pointing, if you will, of the nation-state is an ongoing task. It's like you have tradesmen in the yard every day. We don't work it at that level, so it's got to be politically practicable, as well. We'll see. Like I say, it may be a punch unthrown, but it certainly has appeal to me this morning.

Okay, so going back, it's 2014. Physical fitness: really important, as you know. Twenty-fourteen has seen Myrna and me take a big swing at getting ourselves back into pre-retirement shape from the Air Force. That would be pre-1996 shape, pretty good shape in the Air Force. Combinations of pressures, real and imagined, slovenly behavior and too much booze and hard living, unhealthy eating...Death to carbs.

Now we're off on this thing, and we're committed to it. I'm going to get down to fighting weight again and well on the way and pleased that. I'm bench-pressing more than I've bench-pressed in twenty years, which isn't a lot, but it's enough. And I'm looking forward to a vigorous summer, to include very spare drinking.

I would urge people, as they get older, to go counter to Mark Twain and moderate your habits. Leave enough vices to have some freight to throw overboard, as he would suggest, when the ship is going down. But on the whole, as you get older, you go to bed earlier; you get up earlier. You want to have your energy level sustaining of these passions that drive you, until health or mind leave you. Hopefully, for us that won't be for a long time. So, 2014 has been a physical re-orientation.

[I] tried to do some serious reading programs, have always read the *FT* as the world's best newspaper, *Financial Times*, and have recommended for years that people read *The Economist* as the world's best. The Brits call it a newspaper; we call it a magazine. I can't think of an American newspaper, save the *Wall Street Journal* perhaps, that offers any kind of perspective that is the equal of those two approaches. The *Times* and *Newsweeks* are... The French word is *les feuilles*. They're the leaves that blow in the wind. They're absolutely unredeemable in my view. You've only got so much time anyway. That will be part of *Top Heavy*, recommending the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, which are the only gatekeeper kinds of publications that I've been able to find out there that aren't so terribly biased one way or the other, that are factual.

As Walter Cronkite told me in an elevator, when we were stuck—me and a bunch of other White House fellows—in a tower. What a great thing, for the elevator to quit, not that long, and there we were with Walter Cronkite on the elevator and able to have a one-on-one with him. We'd just come from a session with him, so it was kind of cool.

Twenty-fourteen. You can't divorce yourself from family, even though you try to divorce yourself from family from time to time. The demands of

grandchildren become more apparent, at least they are now in our lives. I'll have to devote some attention to the two granddaughters, one who's sixteen and embarked now on the college search, and the one who's five or six. So, I'm going to have a long run at mentoring.

Of course, they think of grandpas as old crotchety guys, except I hope they think of me as one with a great sense of humor and the ability to compete with them physically, except I lost my knee chasing my granddaughter in January, the five year-old, at Disney World. She made a hard left brake turn, and so did I, but only got through it about 70 percent before the knee went. It took me two months to get it back and to get back up running again. So, such are the vicissitudes of life.

DePue: Do you have all of your original parts?

Borling: You know, I'm missing a gallbladder, but other than that, I've got all my original parts.

DePue: Your knees and hips, that's all—

Borling: Knees and hips are all mine. They hurt a little bit, and they are susceptible to weather a bit; you know, the cold, rainy stuff affects it a little bit. But I'm not going that fast when I run, and I am pacing myself. I got to thinking about the next marathon. I don't want to do it at seventy-five; I normally do them in great intervals. But I'll run in Chicago, because it's convenient; it's easy.

Seventy to seventy-five, there's an age group. I ran at seventy and was pleased to finish in that age group at twenty-fourth in my class, they say, I think that's what was right. So, I want to run in the seventy-six to eighty, because at least last year or the year before, there wasn't anybody in that age group running. Now I think there probably are; everyone's getting more fit and all of that business. So, I'll probably try to run one at seventy-six; that's another beacon out there.

The trick is not the training, although that's hard. The trick is getting to the starting line. There's so many things that can set you down. You cut your toenails wrong, and all of a sudden you can put yourself out of commission, blisters, changing shoes. On my last marathon, I changed shoes with about a month and a half to go and developed these horrendous blisters. That was enough, almost, to put me out of it, after all those months of training. You know that; you're a runner, right? Do you run a marathon?

DePue: No.

Borling: Well you should.

DePue: Running was always something I had to do in the military to be able to pass the PT [physical fitness test] test.

Borling: Yeah, me too.

DePue: It's wasn't something I ever loved.

Borling: I didn't like it at the academy, but I find that if I don't get my run in now, somehow my day isn't quite right. Again, in 2014. We find ourselves estranged from organized religion. For a guy who put such credence and held onto organized religion so hard as a prisoner, you find out that...As you get older, you find out that what you're on is not so much of a hard rock as shifting sand. It's shifting sand that you trudge through, questing for theological reality, theological verity.

It's easy to fall down into the trap of this denomination or that denomination or the one true church here or the one true church there. Someone's got to be wrong, obviously; most of them have to be wrong. I find myself, as does Myrna, carving our own path, frankly unable to shake the inculcations of youth—boy, that's a toughie—totally, but questioning, again, and going back into literature, looking for answers and finding more questions often, than answers. It is the questioning, I think, respectful questioning, that leads us to forge a one-on-one relationship with the creator or the almighty or the thing that we would commonly call a god.

It's a quasi-Unitarian approach, I guess, without being Unitarian. I've seen enough and read enough, not just of the hypocritical nature of practitioners or of the body politic of the religions themselves [that] I can't fail to comment on the sainthood things that are going on in the Catholic Church, with respect to two recent popes, both of whom had terrible things occur on their watch, and they've somehow been isolated or insulated from that. Well, I view this as just another example of excess.

But if you look at the impacts of the religious experience on mankind, you see great inequities foisted on an individual and on a collective basis, collective basis meaning a structural basis. So, again, I find myself on a quest, and this will be a lifelong quest, a continuing quest to try to come to terms, although I think I'm on terms, with the almighty.

I think there is some greater force out there. I don't think we've properly defined it in any of the "great religions" of the world. They just keep rolling down through the years, and it's which one are you going to pick or ride your horse on? It was *The True Believer*, Eric Hoffer, suggested that, in his book, 1953—it's the second time I've referenced *The True Believer* in about three weeks—but there's a line, "Who is a true believer? He's a guilt-ridden hitchhiker who thumbs a ride on every cause from Christianity [to] Communism, looking for a Stalin or a Christ to worship or die for. He is today, everywhere on the march." That's 1953; that's Eric Hoffer. It could have been 1833; it could have been 1733; it could be 2033.

The true believer syndrome is one that we will not easily avoid. It is lo, with us to the ends of the earth, and it causes so much problem. “Man”—again Hoffer in that book, saying— “the only man willing to fight and die for an idea,” a pretty good book. I’d better go back and reread it. I haven’t picked it up since about 1956, but there are some indelible lines in *The True Believer*.

So, those are kind of some of the currents that are running through my life in 2014. I hope you find it introspective and useful, because again, the meaning of life and the introspective... The unexamined life is not worth living, I think, is an Aristotelian concept. God knows, Aristotle is worthy of reading, however slowly and however much it puts you to sleep.

I must confess, I’ve never gotten through but a few pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but I had a great teacher/mentor who still lives, Mel Wakin, the guy at the Air Force Academy, a brigadier general, who influenced more cadets in his life than, I think, any other single human being—single professor certainly—at the academy. I’m proud to call him a friend and a mentor, though I maybe talk to him once or twice a year, max. Mel is a very good practicing Catholic and an Aristotelian, so we differ on a lot of stuff. But he has been formative in my life, continues to be so.

What else in 2014? I’m really looking forward to the 2015, 2016 political contest and hope that SOS America and some of these other efforts will contribute to the national dialogue. In fact, even more, hope for a resurgence, although it seems that the body politic just plunges blindly down these paths of whoever promises them the greatest stuff. So we’ll plod on.

That’s 2014. Now do you have some questions about 2014 and beyond?

DePue: Well, you mentioned the 2015, 2016 political season. That’s obviously a reference to the presidential campaign, but we’re also in the early stages of the 2014 campaign.

Borling: The midterms, yeah. Looking for fundamental adjustment in 2016 here... We basically just have the two parties. It’s a shame that we don’t have a more central choice, in terms of political thinking, than the identified parties. But both parties have entrenched their power structure and the process. So, where it’s very difficult to penetrate, unless you’re a member of one of those two parties, and then of course, you’re captured by the party. It was Kennedy, who at a point in time—I forget the issue, but it was a big issue—he went against the Democratic Party. He said something to the effect that there’s some things much more important than party.

I was reflecting today on the role of the presidency and how the presidents do things right, and the presidents do things wrong; every president does that. But on balance, you balance the rights and the wrongs. Then you try

to make judgments as to how you ought to go ahead. In my case, knowing, at least a little bit, President Obama and having debated him. If he was here, we would greet each other warmly, give a hug probably. If the picture was taken, he would promise me to promise him not to use it on any of my websites, because he views me a Hegelian dialectic-like, as an antithesis to his thesis.

I am a small-government guy. I do think that it goes back to the top heavy thing. The fault in America that is so vexing is the tribalism that comes. We call it racism, but it's really just tribalism. If you belong to the black tribes or the white tribes or...Even the Latino or Hispanic tribes are much more variegated than we would believe, from the outside looking in, with great levels of distrust and even hatred between various groups, even the black community not being homogeneous...

The election of a black president...That's interesting too; one drop of black blood, according to the old Jim Crow rules and things, was supposed to qualify you for being black. Well, who found that out? What physiologies are we...Why doesn't one drop of white blood qualify you for being white, or one drop of Latino blood qualify you to be Latino? At least you could be mixed blood or mixed race, with all of the benefits associated with that. In fact, I've heard it expressed that we really won't get there, in terms of our tribalism or racism, until we're all brown or tan or something. [There's] something to be said for that, I guess.

We call ourselves Swedish-Americans and Polish-Americans and African-Americans. I suspect we'll never get away from that, notwithstanding the imprecations of Theodore Roosevelt in that wonderful speech he made that there are no hyphenated Americans. In the end, it's how you act, with respect to the greater, again, body politic. You can be a Swedish-American or an African-American, I guess, as long as you would put America, put the emphasis, **Swedish-American**, **African-American**, (DePue laughs) then I'm perfectly content with that approach.

I am disappointed in the current president, because he, above all chief executives in our history, especially since the Civil War, would have been able to take race and move it, as he promised in the 2004, was it, or 2008? Two thousand and eight, I guess, speech, no 2004—.

DePue: Two thousand and four.

Borling: ...speech about no red America, no blue America, no black America, no white America.⁴ I get so disappointed with him and his administration, where they are playing, continually, the race card, when he had the power to take us to a whole new and much more healthy level.

⁴ Quotation from *Barack Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address*.

DePue: I think you need to give us a little bit of background of how you happen to know Barack Obama personally.

Borling: Well, I ran for the Senate in the 2004, U. S. Senate 2004 election, on the Republican side. Again, [I] really would have preferred to run as an Independent. I ran as a moderate Republican.

DePue: In the primary.

Borling: In the primary. In the course of the primary...It was an open seat; Peter Fitzgerald had given up the seat, which is what impelled me to run, thinking that the military background...And I have a certain pride and the ability to speak on public platforms.⁵ I get paid, as you know, considerable sums of money from time to time. Other times, I don't get paid anything, (both laugh) to go out and trot the public platform and offer observations on this subject or that subject, often what the client wants.

So I ran. There were six or seven or eight Republicans, and there were a similar number of Democrats running. We would have these joint sessions, debates and things of that nature, NAACP debates, League of Women Voters. We'd be off on the hustings and run into one another. We'd be at various convocations where both Republicans and Democrats would be present. We would be discussing, agreeing, disagreeing.

I always found it great fun to go to the things that were heavy Democratic. Dan Hynes was running on the Democrat side, and the South Side Irish parade was going on. I remember going down there; I was the only Republican who showed up at the Irish parade. It was cold; I had to go to the bathroom, and I went into Danny Hynes's headquarters on whatever it was, out at Evergreen Park there. I got a cup of coffee and a donut. Some of his staffers recognized me and said, "What are **you** doing here?" I said, "I had to go to bathroom. I needed a cup of coffee." One of his offer staffers came up and said, "Oh, General Borling, how are you?" I said, "Good to see you."

They said, "Hey, we're at Tommy Hynes." So father came up, big power. Tommy's got a place up in Sister Lakes, Michigan, where we've got a place. Tommy came over and gave me a big hug. We went outside, and Dan was just coming in with his wife, and he had some camera people with him. They saw me, and everybody kind of stopped. I said, "I want you to know, this is my favorite candidate for the senatorial election in 2004." I said, "And I'm proud to endorse him...on the Democrat side." (both laugh) Tom laughed,

⁵ Peter Gosselin Fitzgerald is a former U.S. Senator from Illinois. A Republican, he served from 1999 until his retirement in 2005. Fitzgerald defeated the Democratic incumbent in 1998, becoming the first Republican senator from Illinois to win a U.S. Senate race in 20 years.

and Dan came over and gave me a hug and his wife [did too]. I've never seen this thing, where if you're talking to or whatever—

So in the course of this thing, I had had a conversation with the president, then Barack, and I said, "Look," I said—we'd finished up a debate or something—I said, "I'm impressed with you. I'm going to make a campaign donation, a token donation, to your campaign." For whatever it was, \$5 or \$10, I forget what it was, and I sent it in. He said he'd do the same, and I said, "Okay, great." So, we were friendly then got to know each other in the course of this campaign. Oh, after the NAACP debate, however, which I think, according to independent sources, that I won, interesting notion.

DePue: Won in what respect?

Borling: Carried the day, in terms of... There wasn't a vote, but the reporters who came up said, "Boy, that really gave your campaign a pop," or "Boy, you really came out." They don't have a vote at the end, like who won or who lost, but the reaction out of that was very positive.

There's an after thing, where you're out on the microphones, and I teed off Barack, as we were talking, because I challenged him in the course of the debate, and I said, "You know, you promised to send me a campaign donation, and you never did." This is on camera. I said, "I sent a campaign donation to your campaign." Well, he reached into his wallet (both laugh) and pulled out a \$5 bill and gave me the \$5 bill on camera. I said, "All right, we're square."

But the whole thing about you can't have relations if you're a Republican with the Democrats and back and forth, what a crock. I vote the person, and I really have a problem with what I'm going to call Republican fundamentalism, especially on the social issues. Again, I'm too much of a Libertarian or independent to want to tell you how to use your own body or who you want to marry or what your sexual orientation ought to be. I frankly do not give a shit, as long as you don't come and directly influence or try to hurt me and my family.

I do care very much about national resiliency, and I do care very much about the Preamble to the Constitution and the fact that we ought to be able to practice our freedoms, as long as we don't infringe on like freedoms of others or endanger the public safety. I think we need to paint with a very broad brush. I think most people just want to be left alone, with a racetrack in front of them that looks to be a fair racetrack. Then let them run their own race, understanding that we too, need to accept losses as a society.

There are some people that are just going to cock it up beyond belief. For example, if you want to go out and throw yourself in the Rock River right now, I would urge you not to. I would even try modestly to restrain you, but if

you're hell-bent on throwing yourself in the river, I may try to throw you...I don't have a life preserver down there, but if I did, I'd throw it to you. But I would not jump in the Rock River and try to save you. I would not crawl out on a ledge. If somebody wants to take a dive, hopefully they won't hit anybody in the leap. Shit, why should somebody get out on the ledge with you? What is the brother's keeper aspect of that?

So I'm much more inclined if people want to—I'll use the British term, it's quite proper by the way—to cock up their own lives, despite best efforts of a society to have provided education and boundaries and assistance, as assistance is affordable, then I say let them cock up their own lives, and we've got to be able to accept losses.

You asked me, how did I know Barack Obama, and I'm giving you part philosophy and part this is where we met. He came to Rockford after he was elected senator. He had a town hall; I was there. I went with several hundred other people, went to the town hall. He was holding forth on health insurance, a far cry from what Obamacare has evolved into. But he was holding forth. I happened to be a believer that there is an affordable opt-in system of healthcare, so I applauded the general thrust.

He was going to go take questions. Everyone had hands up; there were 500 hands up in the crowd. I happened to be up four or five rows, kind of looking down at the podium, and so I raised my hand, along with everybody else. He was kind of scanning the crowd. He sees that I'm in, and he smiled. He said, "I've got to start with the General." And so he did. I stood up and made a respectful statement, a mini statement, and then a short question, which he responded to.

Afterwards, he ducked behind the black curtain—I think this was Rock Valley College or someplace—and I ducked behind too. His guards knew me enough. We went back through, and we had a photo op, a couple of South Side [Chicago] guys with their arms around one another, over the shoulders. That's when he whispered again, "Don't put it on your website." I said, "Okay." (DePue laughs) He knows I'm trustworthy in that regard.

That was the last time I had personal contact with President Obama, senator then, and have, as a White House fellow, not been in the same room with him since. That may well be this year.

I have put some policy things in to his administration that I thought would be helpful, basically in terms of some military positions, which are still classified, which I dealt with in an unclassified sense, but something that I thought he needed to be aware of that was within his direct sphere of influence and understanding, but which was easy to gloss over. Given his lack of experience on these things, I thought... This is not being patronizing, because I would have said it to any president who'd come in, that they need to ask these

half a dozen questions of their staff and of the military and get them satisfied, according to their own sense of truth or not truth. They didn't get to him, and I was disappointed with that. I put them in at the right level.

So, at the end, I acknowledge that presidents make great mistakes, and some make great strides for the future, and often, the telling of that tale is years downstream. But a telling of the tale that doesn't tell well currently is the tribal thing or the race thing, which we need to wrestle with as a nation, and we need to expect both wins and losses in that column.

DePue: Your comments about the tribalism, I'm not sure what the bottom line is. What's the point you're trying to make in that respect?

Borling: Well, that we have to, to the extent we can as human beings, get outside the bounds of tribalism or racism and become the **American** people. Put the emphasis on a unity, a mosaic certainly. But overwhelmingly, the unifying aspect that [is], if we aspire to be an exceptional nation, then we have to be exceptional people.

DePue: You mentioned before that you were disappointed. Is that the issue that you're really disappointed with Barack Obama?

Borling: That's the biggest single issue that I think he could have, at no additional cost to the government, tackled head on. He would have had to have been castigatory—there's a word—of blacks, Latinos and whites. He would have had to rise us up. He would have to use all his considerable oratorical skills, tele-prompted or not, to make us see, as Lincoln would say, the better angels of ourselves and to not accept the circumstances where we pass it off on a host of societal or family or educational or other efforts. He would have to rise us up in spite of that. He would have to have us want to bootstrap ourselves. He would have to preach that extravagant hope that we could literally become aligned, rather than divided, as a people.

If anything, he has, in the places that I go and the travels that I've seen, he has engendered a great white resentment. He has probably done just the exact opposite in his presidency, in my judgment, and he's not been helped by members of the administration, notably the attorney general, who is supposed to be above such things. I think, in part, this is read venally in the books that he has either had ghost written—he being the president—or written himself, where he talks about that the most important thing is winning elections. Well, this is palpably the stuff of smallish minds and goes back to the, how do you get control of the political process and then keep it forever?

The great downfall of a democratic system is that you only have to lose one decisive election, where you never have another one, or you don't have it for generations. You look at Venezuela; you look at the Soviet Union or Russia; you look at...and on and on. You look at North Korea; you look at

all these places, all the big men in Africa, where once you get into power...Mugabe in Zimbabwe.

The democratic process is fraught with difficulty and peril, and it takes an involved and enlightened citizenry, in some cases almost an oligarchy, to keep it going. One can make the case that we would be well advised, as a nation, to put in some responsible voter measures. This harkens back to the days when you would be excluding voters, and the answer is, yeah, you are going to be excluding voters, because you only want those who have a vested interest in the nation as a whole, rather than in some vested interest that is so narrow, so self-serving. People vote their pocketbooks, and they vote their issues, of course—

DePue: What would qualify as a vested interest?

Borling: Does citizenship have a cost? I guess, as I would say. So, if we were to do something as horrendously disruptive as say that, if you want to vote in an election, it costs you \$5.

DePue: A poll tax?

Borling: No, just... What the hell, a citizens' tax. If you want to vote in the election...It costs us a lot of money to run these elections, so we're offsetting the cost of the election. So, if you want to vote, it costs you \$5.

DePue: Well, in the early days of our republic, one of the measures was that you—

Borling: Had property.

DePue: You had property. Would you advocate that?

Borling: No. I'm advocating, sitting here on the Rock River on the twenty-third of April, the spring of 2014, that I could support a fee. Hell, we charge fees for everything else, for a driver's licenses and fishing licenses and licenses on the cars and dog licenses and FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] cards, or maybe...I guess FOIA cards are free. Anyway, we've got enough fees out there to burden us down.

So, I'm saying maybe, just maybe, as a differentiator, in terms of giving added importance to the electoral process... Maybe it would even increase participation, because people would see how important it is. So, if you want to vote in the primary, or you want to vote in the general election, you show up with a \$5 bill in your hand or a credit card or something, and you say, "Here it is."

DePue: Would you be surprised if party operatives were standing outside the polling places and handing out \$5 bills?

Borling: No.

DePue: That's certainly always part of the allegations about Chicago style elections, that those things occurred or handing out—

Borling: Ten-dollar-bills.

DePue: Or cans of beer or bottles of liquor.

Borling: Are they doing it now?

DePue: Well, if you listen to the lore about Chicago politics, it's been going on forever.

Borling: You know, after having been in the political game and going through and going statewide, what you find out is that the candidates are expected to give money to the central committees of the particular counties. Those particular county organizations then endorse you, not based on whether they like you or not, based upon how much money you give them. Did you know that? Did you know that?

DePue: I hadn't heard that specific comment.

Borling: Boy, you should go to Sangamon County. I wonder where the hell that is. (DePue laughs) At least I was able to split those guys and had some people murmuring. I had almost caused revolt in the Sangamon County Republican thing, with all those people down there in those days. I've even forgotten their names, Selerman and Shomo or whatever those names were—

DePue: I think you're probably talking about [Robert.] Kjellander and [William F. 'Bill'] Cellini.

Borling: Yeah, those guys then. Yeah, I talked to them, and I liked...But they were obviously at a different position. There were a couple of guys down there—and it's probably good that I've forgotten their names—a couple lawyers. They sat behind me at the deal. I made the speech, and I thought it was obviously the best speech, and so did a lot of people there. They cheered, and they had me do the Pledge of Allegiance, and they were obviously looking. But they had already made their mind up before they walked in there, because the dollars had already been paid by Jack Ryan.

DePue: This was during the primary season.

Borling: This was during then primary, yeah.

DePue: And Jack Ryan was the guy who won the primary.

Borling: Yeah, Jack won, and then he had to bail because of the sex thing, with taking the wife to sex clubs, his wife, Jeri Ryan. Then he went through this long period of denial. Then the *Tribune* finally officially outed him, although we all knew about it, during the course of the parade. In fact, my campaign manager, who quit—actually I fired him—went public just a couple days before the election.

DePue: Went public on the information about Ryan?

Borling: Went public on Ryan, yeah, and I fired him.

DePue: Because of that?

Borling: Because of that. This was not that we didn't know this. In fact, a number of us had talked about it; should we ban together and do this thing? And I, for one, thought we should, because it was being ducked. I didn't think Ryan was a good candidate, because he had broken his word to me early in the campaign. In the end, even in politics, if you give your word, you're supposed to live up to it, even in politics.

DePue: What was the specific issue?

Borling: The issue was that we would have private debates, him and me. He agreed to it publicly. Then I kept trying to schedule it; he wouldn't do it, and then he frankly denied it, again, to some great negative effect for me, at least in my perception. I called him on it.

We were also having this thing; he was holding forth about how to do away with NATO. I remember, I called him; I said, "Do you even know how many nations are in NATO? Can you name them?" "You want to do away with NATO as a fiscal gambit," I said, "having no idea, and disengagement of Western Europe." So he couldn't; he didn't know the number, and he didn't know the nations of NATO. Somebody said once, one of the pundits, said, "In the next debate, Ryan will probably not only know all the nations in NATO, he'll be able to draw the flags and sing the national anthems." (both laugh)

So we had this big to-do, and I didn't think Ryan...I thought he was very shallow and flashed his new teeth and very concerned about his hair and things. Anyway, the death knell was when he...If he would have come clean on it, himself and said, "Hey, I did some things back then," he would have ridden it out. But as it did, it just got wormier and wormier, and finally the Central Committee of the Republican Party douched him and threw it back up in the air and put the people through a... Ty Fahner, at that time at Mayer Brown [a global legal service provider], conducted a star chamber, and the

only two guys who were willing to go through it were Jim Oberweis and me, of the guys who'd run.⁶

DePue: Who had come in second in the primary?

Borling: Well, I think, yes, he had come in second.

DePue: Oberweis?

Borling: Yeah. I didn't hardly score; Rauschenberger scored well; McKenna scored. I think then, I was fifth or sixth, whatever. The reason I fared so badly, in my view, is that I was probably a really crummy candidate, if truth be known.

DePue: In what way?

Borling: Well, from a Republican standpoint, I was pro-choice, and that makes it pretty hard. I didn't raise enough money. I raised probably \$6-700,000, all in. It sounds like a lot of money but not when you're looking at four and five million, on the basis of Ryan. McKenna put a few million in, and Rauschenberger got a big thing, although Steve, at the end, and I would stand up, and I would say, and he would say, "Look, if you don't vote for Rauschenberger, vote for Borling." I would say, "Yeah, if you don't vote for me, vote for Rauschenberger. He's king of the river, with respect to understanding of Illinois politics, but I'm captain of the open sea, with respect to international relations and national focus. We would do that thing back and forth, and we had good relations until, again, when this Ryan thing hit.

Rauschenberger pledged that he would stay neutral on the deal, and he didn't. What happened, both Jim Oberweis and I got...Jim's very right of center, and I don't agree with his policies—

DePue: That's interesting. I think he's running right now.

Borling: He's running right of center again. Durbin would have been a hard slug anyway, but I don't think Jim is going to make it, because I don't think the sensitivity about small government, Obamacare, all the rest of that stuff, is enough to carry—

DePue: In what otherwise should be a very Republican year.

Borling: Should be, but I just don't...Anyway, as you recall in 2004, they imported then; they blew...I had, I thought, almost 50 percent of the Central Committee committed to me. They had given me verbal commitments. Then a number of people on the committee, including some congressmen, including one from up here, said, "Oh no, we've got to fight race with race," and they elected to

⁶ A court characterized by secrecy and often being irresponsibly arbitrary and oppressive. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/star-chamber>)

import Alan Keyes, the black guy from Maryland, who turned into a bloody disaster. [That], again, shows you the wisdom of a committee.

That marked my foray into politics, although I did... Because the congressman who ran against, who advanced and supported the Alan Keyes initiative, was Don Manzullo, who was the congressman from up here. I viewed that as geographical treason at the time. He had a responsibility to support me, as kind of the favorite son up here at that point, but he was fascinated by the race thing, and he was fascinated also by the fundamentalism. The fact that I was a social moderate or liberal even, I think, did not suit well. So I retired from the field, if you will, politically. I'm fond of saying, "I'm a better fighter pilot than a politician," I would hope.

I did send my health plan to both John McCain and to Barack Obama. John at least acknowledged that he received it, which is an opt-in plan, frankly, rather than a you all will plan. It's a single-payer plan, basically, for those who choose to opt in. For those who don't choose to opt in, again, I'm very big on individual choice, then they fend their own way.

I made one more foray, late in the game. Myrna and I were sitting in this very room, and it was the election of—a couple years later, four years later, whenever—it was a congressional election. I was concerned that Congressman [Donald A.] Manzullo, who's a nice enough guy, had violated the public trust, in terms of his commitment to respect term limits. He had campaigned relentlessly on the fact that he was going to leave after whatever it was, ten terms or something like that or five terms; I forget what the numbers are. But then he came out and said, Well, I'm too important now, and I'm a subcommittee chairman, and I'm a this, and I'm a that. Well, I viewed that as a breaking of the trust, and we talked about that.

It was well past the filing dates for running. So I said, "I'm impelled to at least be a voice that holds up the banner." I must tell you, I guess I was still nursing a bit of a wound from his lack of loyalty in the 2004 era. In fact, I've had Republican chairmen and past chairmen of the party say, "God we screwed up." and "If we'd only elected you to run against Barack—"

DePue: Things could be different.

Borling: "...Things could be different." What a vainglorious thought for me to advance, but I didn't bring that up. It's been brought up by a number of people who still walk up to me and say, "It's your fault," to me. So I carry that burden.

Anyway, so here we're sitting here talking. We'd spent a lot of our own money.

DePue: But you haven't mentioned who this congressman was that you were having an issue with.

Borling: No, it's Manzullo, Don Manzullo.

DePue: He was the one who broke the pledge.

Borling: He was the one that used to have all the Rockford area. Now, of course, they've split it, with this gerrymandering crap.

Another thought, I just finished...put my petitions in for the independent map structure, to have an independent commission draw the legislative lines. This starts with just the state lines, state districts, and then the next step is to go federal. We hope to get it on the ballot. I think the effort has been enormously successful, in terms of petition numbers. We needed 425 (hundred thousand); I understand we have close to 700,000 signatures to make it a referendum on the ballot in November of this year.

Bruce Rauner, who...By the way, Bruce probably characterizes...and I know Governor Flynn. Hell, he appointed me to be a trustee of the Lincoln Academy. I'm going to be a regent here.

I'm at least going to be elected, or they tell me I'm going to be elected, come the 3rd of May in Chicago at the fiftieth convocation of the Lincoln Academy, where it started, at the Casino Club, where we'll have a dinner on Friday night. Then Saturday we have the meeting, where I'm going to be elected, along with three others, as to be a regent, which is kind of the Executive Committee of the Lincoln Academy. Then we'll go into the 6:00 commemoration, where the likes of John Canning, Glenn Tilton, Newton Minow, [Dave] Krzyzewski, the coach from Duke, Hillary Clinton, a number of others, will be...Two others, actually three others, will be conferred with the Order of Lincoln, the highest award that the state gives.

The governor will preside. He's the president of the Lincoln Academy. The chancellor is Tom Johnson, a lawyer here in town. It's an important operation. It's one of the major philanthropic things that I do.

In any event, the reason that I got off on that tangent is unknown at this point. I've lost the thread, but we were...To go back to it, we were sitting here, Myrna and I and talking. I said "You know, I think this public trust issue is a big one," and I said "and he needs to be called on it." So, I elected to mount a write-in campaign for the congressional seat. The process is well established. You have to go around and file petitions; you have to get a lot of signatures.

DePue: More than you do to actually run in a major party.

Borling: Oh, a huge amount, huge amount of signatures. Then you have to file in every county, to get on the ballot. We did that. It was funny, some of the things that...The party didn't want to recognize me, and the Democrats didn't want

to recognize me. They had their candidate. Here I was; I was running as an Independent, basically saying, both parties have let you down.

[I] had some really fancy TV ads, and I learned a lot about how to run a campaign. I had a pretty good organization. We had hundreds of volunteers in Boone County and hundreds over in McHenry. We had a pretty good organization. I had high hopes that we were going to pull this thing out, in terms of doing more than making a statement. I thought we might sneak in there. Well...And there were some funny things happening.

I would show up at these debates, and sometimes I would be accorded privilege; other times I wouldn't, and I'd be on the outside. I'd set up my yard signs with others, and we'd have our table. Often we'd have to be outside; they wouldn't even let us in the building. Other times they did. I remember my favorite; this is a great story.

It was over at Rock Valley College, and it was the League of Women Voters. They were going to have every candidate for any office on this panel and then the two congressmen. The Democrat guy was from Galena—I've forgotten his name—and Don Manzulla were here in the middle. They were going to go through, and everyone was going to get five minutes. Then there were going to be questions and answers.

I had made application to attend, and I was denied. So this showed up in the papers, and people are saying, "You know, he's excluded." I'd say, "Well I'm going to show up anyway." I had made such a fuss about this, or the papers had, that the college deemed that this would not be a political event; it would be an educational event. (DePue laughs) You couldn't even have bumper stickers on your car, and you couldn't have... They went to such extremes.

So, I went anyway. I went in and had a bumper sticker on my car, and I had things. And they had **police** all over the place. I walked in. They did have literature, and I couldn't have my literature. Yeah, I guess I could; I could have my literature, so I spread it out on the table. That was all; you could have literature. The cops, most of whom I knew, they said, "Boy, have you caused a problem here." I said, "It's really interesting, isn't it?" They said, "Are you here to make trouble?" I said, "I'm just here as a bystander. I can't participate, because I've been excluded, so I'm a member of the audience." Well, there were some other statements made.

I walked into the back of the thing, and the head of the police detail, —I forget who he was—said, "General Borling," he said, "Are you going to do anything tonight that is going to cause us a problem?" I said, "Well, when it comes time for the congressional representatives to speak, the candidates," I said, "I'm going to adopt the worldwide wrestling gambit, and I'm going to grab one of these metal chairs and rush the stage with this metal chair."

(DePue laughs) I said, “At that point, I would appreciate it if you would make sure you put a warning shot **over my head.**” I said, “At which time, I will drop the chair and fall to the ground.” (DePue laughs) He howled. Anyway, they went... They had to go to the bathroom, and this is really... It happened.

I walked in the bathroom, and Don Manzullo walks in. Don is taking care of business, and I said, “Don!” I said, “How good to see you.” I said, “Remember, this is not a political event tonight; it is merely an educational event.” (both laugh) He didn’t find that very humorous. I think it may have affected aim, or aims. I went out, and I sat down at a table in the back. The thing goes on... God, it was so... It was a rainy, cold night. The only people that were there were blood relatives and staffers for all these people. Nobody else was there. (laughs)

The guy sits down next to me. I don’t know him, so I make introductions. It’s Jack Becherer, the president of the college. (laughs) I said, “Dr. Becherer, it’s good to meet you.” I said, “Have you come to babysit?” He laughed at that. So the thing went... It went on forever, oh, God. He had to go out, and it was raining and stuff. Anyway, so I’m sitting at the table with Jack, and we’re chatting back and forth. By the way, it started a friendship that endures to this day. Jack and Janna are great friends of ours here locally. We see each other, not all the time, but a few times. They’ve vacationed with us up at our summer home, and we’ve been to theirs.

At the end of that thing, I’m sitting there, and I said—there was a set of car keys there on the table—and I said, “Jack, are these your car keys?” He said, “No, they’re not mine.” There had been some other people that had come to the table and said some nice things, “You should be speaking” and all that stuff. I was so glad I didn’t. God, people were pitching, and people were walking off into the rain, just to get awake (DePue laughs), these people [would say], “I’m with the dog catcher” thing. It was just every bloody thing you could imagine. Finally it got down to those guys.

Anyway, at the end, it’s all over, and people are standing up, they’re so glad it’s over. And I’ve got these set of car keys, so I walk up to the podium, and I said, “Can I have your attention, please.” The crowd goes absolutely still; (laughs) everybody freezes. I said, “Now, don’t get all squirmy on your chairs, I’m not here to make a speech.” I said, “I am here to say, I’ve got a set of car keys; I don’t know who they belong to, so if someone has lost a set of car keys, I’m going to give them to the police, and they will be able to get into their car. Aren’t you proud of me?” (both laugh) And that was it. I gave the keys to the cops.

The next day, I got a phone call from Jay, whatever Jay was, over at WNTA [Rockford, Illinois radio station], Jack, not Carney, Jay... He used to be the president over at WNTA. He moved and went down to Indiana, good guy, went to Indiana and bought some radio stations. I had been in to WNTA

earlier in the day, on either Doug's show or Ken DeCoster's or one of them. In the process, I'd been into the president's office. He and I were friendly. I had scarfed up his car keys (laughing) off his desk and had them in my pocket and carried them all day. They were his car keys. (DePue laughs) We finally figured this out. He [says], "Did you steal my car keys?" I said, "Oh, shit."

Ever since then, when I would go to WNTA, I would always make it a point, especially if he wasn't in there—because he always kept his car keys right in the middle of the—of taking them and picking them up and then giving them to one of the secretaries or someone. He would say, "That Borling has been here again, stealing my car keys." That's some vignettes.

You know, it's supposed to be fun, and it's supposed to be light. Yeah, you get your ego in it, and you can lose your house and all your money; you can spend an infinite amount of time, an infinite amount of this, an infinite amount of that, and you still lose. I look back at that senate race, the primary again, and God I learned so much. I was such a neophyte. I'm not sure I could do it any better, but people have come to me since then. I've thought about publishing a book that says, "Everything you need to know about running a political race," except there's so many people out there who know it. The biggest thing is, what's your orientation; what's your orientation, mentally, going into it?

DePue: Well, the comment I heard just a couple days ago, interviewing somebody else in our Illinois statecraft series, was whether a candidate had the fire in the belly. Did you have the fire in the belly?

Borling: Oh, yeah, yeah, sure, you have to. You also have to have a great amount of physical stamina. It's hard. You have to have a good driver, and you have to have a better scheduler, and you have to have a treasurer who knows what the hell is going on.

DePue: Treasurer/fundraiser?

Borling: Treasurer, a comptroller. Really, it's the candidate himself who does three things: you raise money; you go to events, and you speak to the media. In my case, I also wanted to have a hand in crafting the political platform, in buying the media, because there's a fee. There's a 15 percent fee, if you outsource it, that goes over the top to whoever is buying the media. You can save yourself fifteen cents on the dollar, buying political media.

And you can buy some amazing political media, cheaply. For example, remember "Boston Legal" that [TV] show? The politicians wouldn't buy [advertising time in] "Boston Legal," because it was too controversial. Hell, I could buy "Boston Legal" for \$300 for a thirty-second spot, political spot. There's about five or six tiers of advertising that you can get on TV. So I would buy "Boston Legal."

I bought pro football, but I would not buy the pro football game; I would buy the run-up to the pro football game and then ask these guys, as a courtesy to the general, would you run it just before...the last ad before it kicks into the pro football game. All the guys were there; “Well, who do you think’s going to win, and what are the points?” those talk show things, not the ones after, the ones before.

The ones I couldn’t afford...What’s that show with all the doctors that was so popular? I go back...It was “Ben Casey.” No, it wasn’t “Ben Casey.”

DePue: Was it the one with George Clooney in it?

Borling: I don’t know, but it was this very popular thing; it ran for four or five seasons and had...I remember one of the doctors was an Oriental woman, a doctor, and she married some guy. Then there was the little blonde girl.

DePue: I know what you’re talking about, but I never watched it.

Borling: Three thousand dollars to buy that. I wouldn’t touch that one. We ran some political ads. If you don’t have a political ad that stops conversation at the bar, that either isn’t so riveting or so funny or something, that it just captures people’s imaginations, don’t run it; don’t bother to run it. They always tell you the pros. “Well, you have to have the identification, the name identification, and then you have to tell them what you want to run for, and then you want to have the concluding blitz. But the big thing, it comes in tri-part thing.”

Well, hell, I had name identification. My deal was to put on my orange flying suit, get over to Rockford Airport—this is for the congressional race—and have this jet running. I would duck under the exhaust of the jet, get blown a little bit, which you can, and then cut it off. I said, “That’s what you get from the Congress, hot air and noise. Haven’t you had enough?” (DePue laughs) And then I would go on and tell the story. That one captured a lot of attention, and



General Borling wears an orange jump suit in his backyard, overlooking the Rock River in Rockford, Illinois, circa 2010s.

there were some others that were run. We made them on a song, made them for a couple, \$300. I wrote my own copy.

We had a thing about, how much tax money comes back to Rockford? For every dollar that goes, how much tax money comes back? It was less than two cents.

DePue: I did want to go back to the 2004 race and ask you just one question here.

Borling: By the way, before you get to that, you led me into this, because there's nothing so...Once you get an old candidate talking...You talked about fire in the belly, well the juices get rolling again. I make no bones about it, I must have been a really crummy candidate. I spent a lot of money, personal money. I'm glad I did it. It was a fire in the belly thing that started me at the first...But in the end, in the end, Mark, John Gardner, my last great mentor, said it best, when he talked about horse sense. Do we use his definition of...Do you know what horse sense is?

DePue: I'm sure you've got a different definition than my understanding of it.

Borling: John suggested that horse sense was the good judgment that horses display when they don't bet on people. (DePue laughs) Isn't that great? And then he said, "But we don't have that luxury." At least I said that; we both said it. We said the only way we can bet on people correctly is to assess their motivation, especially for political office.

I will tell you that, agonizingly, Myrna and I and others went through and looked at my motivation. Why am I running? Why am I doing this? Why is the fire in the belly? I come back to the idealist without illusions. I come back to the fact that I thought I would be an excellent participant in the process. I thought I would be an honest participant in the process, that I didn't need it from an ego standpoint; I'd already been recognized.

Now, from a confidence standpoint or from a spotlight standpoint, yeah, there's rewarding stuff there. I think "politicians" are actors upon a stage in some measure. But my concept of political service is that it's first service and then political. I would have made a terrible party guy. I would have bucked them to the ends of the earth. I would have been out looking for the cleavages in the system, where you would have been able to make a difference, where we could advance the cause of nation first, then state, then city, and lastly party. God, I would have been a bloody disaster.

DePue: Well that's interesting, because you're running for the senate in 2004 because Peter Fitzgerald had stepped out of the picture, and he was never that Republican Party guy.

Borling: No, he wasn't. Again, he also had the rule fixed, put in place, and that is he was a guy who ran for the job, who didn't need it, which is why I'm going to

support Rauner this time around. In the end, I want people who have the screw you money and can go their own way. I think that's the only hope for the political system. The guys who need the job or are so wedded to it because of power or finances or whatever, those are precisely the people we don't want in the job. I'll vote for Harvey Bag of Doughnuts off the street, versus some guy who has been there for twenty years. This thing with Mike Madigan—I know Mike Madigan a little bit anyway—it's a God darn crime that we as a people would tolerate a guy forty years in office and controlling the process. It's not an individual thing, it's a death of the republic thing that concerns me.

Anyway, going back to Gardner. We looked at my motivation, big time. Yeah, there was an element certainly, that it be great fun, an great examination of the spotlight, remembering, when you get the spotlight, all you do is get beat up. They don't carry you around on a sedan chair for God sakes. (DePue laughs) What you get are the rocks and the spears coming in. But I like to think I've got a fairly good sense of humor and look at things lightly. So, [I] was able to make people laugh a lot, without losing the seriousness of the message. The people that believed in me really believed in me. In the senatorial race, I was told by lots of people that, "You were our second choice." In other words, if we voted for someone we liked, be it Ryan or Oberweis, if we'd had another vote, it would have been for you.

DePue: That's in the Central Committee meeting you're talking about.

Borling: Yeah, these are the guys who said...and a lot of people out on the hustings too. "Gee I voted for..." There was a guy who was the Republican committee chair from the north shore—I'm not going to mention his name—who said, "Hey, I support Jack Ryan," but who loved me, loves me to this day, and we're great friends. Now he's moved out of state, but he gave me some initial political advice and guidance, even though he was supporting Ryan from the get go, because the guy was geographically aligned; he was a north shore guy and all that business.

What you do is you continue to march, and you file this stuff away, and some of it's...What it doesn't do, I don't wake up...John McCain had this great line about how you, when you lost the election, how did you go to bed that night? He said, "I went to bed and slept like a baby." You know the rest of it, sleep for two hours, wake up crying, sleep for two hours, wake up crying. (both laugh) It had an effect for a couple of days for me, not that, but then you put it behind you.

Sitting here, 2014, glad we went down that road, glad we gave it a try. We still have people who say very inflated things, as I'm out on the circuit, because I don't shy away from political discussion, not to try to convince somebody of my position but to try to talk to that prescription that would benefit the nation or benefit the state and sketch it, in terms of practicable

issues, and then sketch it, in terms of what kind of candidate should we be looking for?

DePue: The one question I had about the Central Committee meeting is in reference to Judy Baar Topinka, who was the chairman at that time. Do you have a sense of where she was with the issue?

Borling: Judy and I have a correct relationship. It was warmer at one time and then cooled and then now is correct. We used to trade dirty jokes and stuff like that; she's an earthy kind of person. She's a quintessential Illinois political person.

My recollection of that meeting was that we all were brought in, and we had like five minutes to make our case. And I got tremendous vibes off of the committee. They were sitting at a U-shaped table at the Union League Club.

DePue: In Chicago.

Borling: In Chicago. That's where the meeting was held. This is post-Ryan now. Some other names had been advanced, Mike Ditka and some guy who did concrete. They were looking for other candidates. But as I say, I went into that meeting with commitments. I didn't have one from her. My memory may be faulty here, but as I remember, when I was doing my remarks, she, halfway through, left the table, which I viewed as...because I was speaking off to the side. I never speak with notes; I always speak extemporaneously, not that I haven't thought it through, but I never read things.

That's where I took Jim Oberweis' side once and said, "Jim, you're reading your remarks. You're doing yourself a disservice. You don't do that." Any politician that stands up and is so unsure of himself that he has to read what he's saying or make reference to stuff, wrong guy. America expects somebody to be able to stand up and make them laugh, make them cry, make them think. I'm serious. And he or she needs to do it, without reference to.

DePue: Well, I'm thinking of the statement Republicans always make about Barack Obama in that respect.

Borling: The teleprompter thing, yeah. And when he ad-libs, he gets himself into trouble, red line kinds of trouble and stuff. I think he likes to be prepared. But I have this impression that she left in the course of this thing. I finished up and left feeling very good about it, because of the reaction. It was shortly thereafter, I understand, that she and Don Manzullo and Dave Syverson—these are all names from up here—and other people, started this drumbeat toward Alan Keyes.

DePue: Well, General, do you mind if we go back a few years?

Borling: Well, we have been back; we've been back to 2004. But let me back up and just fill in some professional stuff, over the past couple years. We had the book come out, *Taps on the Walls*. Have we talked about that already?

DePue: No we haven't, and I certainly wanted to ask you what motivated you, at that point in time, to publish it.

Borling: The book published in 2013, which was the fortieth anniversary of release from the POW camp, February 12. In fact, I thought it was February 13; I had it wrong for all those years [when] it turned out [to be] February 12.

As an initiative of the Pritzker Library, now Pritzker Museum and Library, I had been on the board for a period of time, four or five years, and then left the board, believing that I had spent "enough time" in that deal and had done what I wanted to do. Jim Pritzker then, Jennifer Pritzker now, respectful of that decision, and his head of Tawani Foundation, the executive director, Lisa Lanz, came to me and talked to me about what it was that I had in mind for the future.

Previously, the subject of the book that I'd written in my mind and kept memorized for all those years, the poetry and some prose... I had published a little collector's item called *Poems for Pilots*, to accommodate an exhibition here in Rockford at Memorial Hall, a couple years earlier, 2010 or so, 2011. I opined that I would really would like to have seen that hardcopy. I thought that, given some support, it could be a worthy addition to the literature of the period. They were persuaded that it could be too, so elected to make it the first imprint of the Pritzker Military Library.

Lisa was handed the chore of making the budget. Everyone was feeling their way, how do you publish a book? They were going to set up a publishing company, Master Wings. So, a budget was developed, and a team was put together, an editing team and a production team and a social media team and a PR team and the lawyers, who later...It's a tale unwinding, and I'm not at liberty to go into any depth about it.

The reality is, this team was put together, and we wrote a new front end piece to the book and a new back end piece, came up with a title; I came up with the title, and everyone agreed. Normally the titles are the things that hang people up. It was *Taps on the Wall* or *Taps on the Walls*, and people were concerned, the lawyers, that there was a thing out there, and it was copyright. The problem is, you can't copyright titles, so it ended up *Taps on the Walls*.

John McCain, who I saw at a function in Chicago with Jim Durkin, and I asked John, point-blank, I said, "Would you be willing to do the intro for me?" He said, "Yes," which was very generous of him. Now we've got the title; McCain's going to do the forward. I've taken the body of work and very,

very minor edit, mostly just orient it so it fits on pages. Charles Rue Woods, the layout guy who did *Black Hawk Down*, by the way, excellent guy, Charles came up with the layout.⁷ Then he and I would work it through and adjust it.

The thing that I liked about the deal, which I don't think the New York team necessarily liked, was that I was not going to just chuck it over the wall and say, "All right, you pros do it." They will tell you, I was very hands-on, to the point where we're arguing use of a word in the introduction or construct in the introduction. Then I would write it and rewrite it, and then we'd go back and forth. We developed a good working relationship. I do have a lot of respect for the editor, who had some great ideas, again, not in the poetry, prose thing; that stuff is mine, but in the front end.

Then I wanted to do some back end stuff; I wanted to do an afterward. I had a new poem I wrote called *Taps on the Wall*. That was a poem for every man and every woman that was written last year, not last year; 2012. I wanted to do some things with the glossary, and I wanted to have some other acknowledgements. [There were] a lot of things I was adding and that I expected they would, but they didn't.

I'm grateful to the New York team, but in the end, I'm confident of saying, that's my book. I rode with a pretty heavy hand, but again, mindful and respectful of them processing, getting the numbers in the Library of Congress and all this other stuff, and the damn lawyers, who cost us hundreds of thousands, over \$100,000, where we had \$10,000 budget.

DePue: To do what?

Borling: Shit.

DePue: (laughs) Well, that's about as succinct as you've been for any answer, General.

Borling: Plus, run up fees. It cost them a major account, I may add.

DePue: Care to elaborate on any of that?

Borling: I'm not at liberty to go into it, but it cost them a **major** account.

DePue: I understand.

Borling: And a board position and a few other minor things, such penury. But that blew the budget out, from about \$110,000 to \$250,000 or \$260,000. That's a nut that needed to be accommodated. These books have, typically, a run of 1,000,

⁷ *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* is a 1999 book by journalist Mark Bowden that documents efforts by the Unified Task Force to capture Somali faction leader Mohamed Farrah Aidid in 1993, and the resulting battle in Mogadishu between United States forces and Aidid's militia.

1,500 copies, if you're lucky, even with all the hoopla and stuff that you had with it. We're north of 20,000 now, which is... We've made the nut, and we've made a little money. Haven't made enough to renovate a bathroom, which is how Myrna looks at things.

DePue: I don't think you've made enough to pay off the legal fees.

Borling: Some of that was amortized, but we beat expectations by a lot.

DePue: Had you been thinking about writing a book before the Pritzker folks approached you on it?

Borling: This book?

DePue: Yeah.

Borling: I always knew that I wanted to publish what I'd created back in the prison, in my mind. I didn't want to do it right away, because to do so, I would have had to have been a professional POW. I never would have been able to shrug that label, as I did, for thirty, forty... Now, you never really shrug it. It's amazing that the interests continue even to this day.

I still get bracelets back, the POW bracelets.⁸ This year we've gotten half a dozen back already. Myrna is sensitive that these people who write these notes—and I am too—get answered. We're, as I say, respectful of their concerns or feelings. Often, these things have been in a drawer, and they found them, and the things come welling up. They've seen the book now, or they get on the Web, and they look at me. If you Google John Borling on the Web—you poor guy if you have—there's a couple hundred thousand entries, I guess, or something.

I was introduced in Aurora last week, the Navy League; they asked me to come and speak to their group. I guess we had the biggest turnout of recent days. The guy who introduced me, he'd gone into the Google thing, and he had everything that I'd ever done since age twelve, and he purported to represent that to the group. He went on and on and on. When he finally finished up, I said, "Well," I said, "this has happened to me once before," I said, "and the guy saved himself by saying, "And now," he said, "for the latest dope from the Air Force, here's General Boring." (both laugh) I got a laugh line, and I said, "But he didn't say that." And I said, "He included everything about me, everything about me, except my blood type and my sperm count." I said, "Well, to put that to rest, O-positive and highly improbable." (both laugh) Anyway, where the hell were we? We were talking about—

⁸ A POW bracelet is a nickel-plated or copper, commemorative bracelet, engraved with the rank, name, and loss date of an American serviceman captured or missing during the Vietnam War. In the 1970s, it was a "thing" to wear a bracelet with the name of a POW. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/POW_bracelet)

DePue: Writing the book.

Borling: Oh, writing the book. Anyway, we've been getting bracelets back. Myrna doesn't like it when the divorcee from Kansas City wants me to come and pick it up personally, but other than that, I have not had any problems with bracelet returnees. People show up all the time with them and pour out their hearts. They have to be respected.

Once we decided to do the book—that was in 2012—it was a period of about six or seven months leading up to publication in February and the kickoff at the Pritzker Museum and Library. Then, Scott Manning, who was the PR guy and kind of the quarterback in New York, putting the team together, had scheduled some things that really were worthwhile. Then I'd scheduled a bunch of things, using my network, which is not inconsiderable.

Scott had arranged, for example, to...I did a precursor kickoff in the North Carolina area. In fact, I'll be in North Carolina, Sunday, to do some book things, but also to campaign for my White House Fellow friend and colleague, Keith Crisco, who's running as a Democrat in North Carolina. We'll go out on Tuesday the 29th. The 29th I'll be at the Asheboro Library. Then on the 30th, I'll be at Illinois State [University], which is where I'm playing golf on Monday, to do a luncheon. I'll sell four cases of books or so, campaign with Keith and do that.

But the reason I mention the book thing is that now...I've been scheduling it myself, after about three or four months, with the Pritzker help, but Scott set up things like the Town Hall in Seattle, Washington. He set up *Fox and Friends*; he set up NPR; he set up *Reader's Digest*. I set up *American Way* and *Make it Better* and *Chicago Tribune* "Lit Fest." I got the *New York Times* on my own; the *Washington Post* he got; *Chicago Trib* [Tribune] I got; *LA Times* and other...So, there was this thing back and forth. We're both working national media pretty hard to get the kind of push behind the book, and then send me out on the speaking trail to create enthusiasm for it and sell, frankly, sell.

We sold through a major distributor, Green Leaf, but we also sold through the Pritzker Military Library. I've got four or five cases of books sitting out there, and I'll trundle them around in the back of my car to the Navy League in Aurora or to wherever. I'll be, this month, coming into May, besides Illinois State and North Carolina, I'm going to be in Hondo, Texas; I'm going to be in Minnesota; I'm going to be at a convocation in Bensenville [Illinois]. This is relaxed from what it was; it was almost like political campaigning. I was gone twelve, fifteen days a month, beating the drum and selling books. I'll be at the Rockford Air Show here. I just came from the Punta Gorda Air Show in Florida, a number of private clubs in Florida.

We find private clubs, country clubs, dining clubs, like to have a speaker in to do something different, and my message is both a political message, a White House, SOS America message, and a book message. Again, I make no bones about it; I try to make them laugh, make them cry, make them think and then to gel those emotions into something very positive. I want people leaving, feeling that the evening or the afternoon has been really worthy, that they have come away enriched by the experience.

I can tell you when I know I do okay, it's I am absolutely exhausted, and I have a high energy level. I'm not that exhausted, but I know I put everything I had into it when I feel fatigued at the end, a Kennedy kind of let down, where you just have to go away. Often you can't, but you really just want to have a period of downtime, where you pace the floor and have a shot of gin or something and get yourself going. I'm not drinking anymore, so I can't have the gin anymore; that's going to be the kicker. I enjoy that, and I enjoy the interconnectivity.

The only problem is, I now have an email burden. I never hesitated giving out my phone [numbers], and I'm fielding several hundred emails a day and maybe a dozen phone calls that are coming in from hither and yon. Some people just want to follow-up or talk. I'm trying to be polite, but it's really...Myrna and I have talked about this; I'm going to have to get, if this continues, some help.

I think with the SOS America thing, with the biotech company, Synthonics, with ongoing other activities and my own penchant for wanting to have a little fun in life from time to time, I'm certainly going to need to get a social media person back into the game. I had one; I don't have one now. I'm going to need to get a secretary/confidential assistant; I'm going to need to get an executive director or COO [chief operating officer] for SOS America. It's just a matter of getting the funding for all of that, so I'm focusing on the funding to make it happen.

But we've also got to raise \$5 million for the Synthonics business, to get us into human trials. We need to do that in the next ninety to 120 days. So, I've got a few things on the agenda.

DePue: When you do these presentations, is there always a Q&A [question and answer period]?

Borling: Almost always, except if it's too large a group. When the group gets much more than about 100, 150, it's harder to keep the crowd. It's also harder to sell them afterwards. The ideal crowd's around 100 people. But yeah, there's always Q&A.

DePue: When they're doing the Q&A, is it overwhelmingly about your POW experiences?

Borling: Because I'm hocking the book at most of these things, yeah, there's a lot of that. But there's a lot of contemporary interest on the political process and a lot on SOS America. I'll take a poll, for example, on SOS America, and that was a little hard. I mean I phrase it gently and have people close their eyes and do this, but it's about a seventy-five/twenty-five positive for, that we ought to do that program. On the website, I've ratcheted it down to something more believable, like 63 percent. I've chosen that because of my class, 1963, from the academy, (DePue laughs) no more science involved.

I'm fascinated that the POW Vietnam experience continues to be so central to people's thinking, of all ages. This runs against the current of... The war you're really interested in is the war that you grew up with or you were in or you had a family member in or it occurred in your cognitive years. So here's Vietnam, and people are asking thoughtful questions, who are fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty years old, weren't even born when the Vietnam War concluded. So, go figure.

DePue: Well, I wonder if part of that—and you certainly have lived through this—was that the country did not honor or respect the Vietnam veterans, and it's completely different in terms of the approach that we now have towards our veterans.

Borling: Yeah, I think that's a fair statement, but still, the fascination with the "conflict" tends to be generational. If I said, "Grand Army of the Republic," you know what I'm talking about, but most people have no idea what the Grand Army of the Republic is. If I said, "General Order 11 from the Grand Army of the Republic," what would it be?

DePue: General Order 11?

Borling: General Order number 11.

DePue: Well, I'm ashamed to say I don't know what that is.

Borling: Who was the head of the Grand Army of the Republic right after the Civil War?

DePue: Well, it was General Logan.

Borling: John A. Logan, and in General Order #11, he established a national day of commemoration.

DePue: Memorial Day.

Borling: Decoration Day.

DePue: For the Civil War generation, yes.

Borling: Decoration Day. Well, actually well into the 20th century, then it morphed into Memorial Day [in] about '54, I think.

DePue: Was it that late?

Borling: It was in there, '36 to '54, somewhere in that timeframe. Then, of course, the date shifted around. I used to be able to pull this off, and I will again, because I'm doing the ceremony on May 26 with others at the Logan statue in Chicago. That statue is Augustus Saint-Gaudens, one of his greatest sculptures ever. He was a wonderful memorial sculptor, probably the best in 500 years, a great animalist; his horses are wonderful.

That statue in Grant Park, a couple of blocks down from the Hilton, 900 South, is where we convene at 11:00 on Memorial Day. It used to be the 30th of May; now it's, of course, squeezed into the three-day weekends, and people don't observe it as much as they should. But, we dedicated the statue in 1997—it was dedicated in 1897—and then brought back for the Memorial Day parade to Chicago and ran it for many years.

But General Order 11 of the Grand Army of the Republic is... That establishes Decoration Day. Then the Congress finally took it up, I think, in the 1911, '15, with the whole thing with the Armistice Day and other things as it went on. I, again, have to go back and get that.

I return to the notion that wars tend to be revered, established in the mindset of the people, insofar as they've affected that generation. Now, this is not universally true. You can still get a hell of a fight on your hands in Alabama or Tennessee over Civil War things. You can see doughboy statues all over this country and things erected, here in Rockford, just a half mile from here, down by the cemetery, but they seem strangely distant.⁹

I grew up in World War II and have hazy memories of being five years old at the completion of World War II, but still, one of my wars. By the time I'm ten years old to thirteen years old, I was kind of aware that Korea was going on, but not really. Then, of course, by the time I got into college and then the academy and the specter of communism and all that business, and Vietnam kicks off. Well, God, our thought was, How do we get there? (DePue laughs) How do we... don't want to miss out on this one, kind of a young man's orientation. Then, the so-called war on terror, the Afghan, Iraq thing, very much a part of our understanding, awareness now, a lot of it because of the impact of media, starting, I guess, in Vietnam more than anything and going forward.

⁹ Doughboy was the nickname for a soldier in World War I. Doughboy memorials, all featuring the statue and a stone or brick base, can be found in 39 U.S. states. (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/wwi-doughboy-statue>)

So, my point in all of this is...It goes back to the book in some notion; it goes back to this awareness or this relevance or this people hanging on, wanting to know. I think the case is also the unasked, but always present question, I wonder how I would have measured up and trying to get some feeling for, what was it really like? You come away with the notion that there's a respect factor, and there's a regard factor. There's not a pity factor; there used to be a pity factor. That was another reason I didn't want to do anything forty years ago, I didn't want a pity factor. God, [I] didn't want a sympathy factor.

So, this convoluted motivational context of what drives people to ask questions about two people who have gone through something that is clearly abnormal and have managed to come out reasonably whole, or more so, on the other end, I think, is probably as good an answer to your question of forty-five minutes ago. (laughs)

DePue: Well, let me ask a slightly different question here. Obviously, I'm sitting with you right now because Lisa Lanz, when I was talking to her a couple three years ago, strongly encouraged that I have a chance to do an oral history—

Borling: Yeah, but she's highly impressionable. (laughs)

DePue: Well, she might read this some time.

Borling: I hope she does. I have high regards for Lisa. But she's a...She, in her own right, is a person to be boosted. She's done a lot in her life, the USO, and now the Tawani Foundation is certainly taking a stand out on the prairies, with respect to prairie re...I was going to say reforestation, but that's not what you do, re-prairie-ization, how's that?

DePue: Yeah.

Borling: She's getting wound up in a B&B (bed & breakfast) restoration effort out there. She and her companion, John, are great folks, good friends, professional friends as well as personal friends, although we see each other more at formal events than go flitting about here and there.

DePue: But where I'm going with this is, now that I've started doing this, and we've had some great conversations before today, talking to Kenneth Clark, whom I'm sure you know very well, as well—

Borling: Sure, I know Ken, yeah.

DePue: I think his official title is president [and CEO] of the Pritzker Museum and Library. He hopes that you will be writing a memoir and that this might be a vehicle to help you write the memoir.

Borling: (sighs) I'm not sure my memory is good enough to do memoirs. That's one of the problems with the Internet and the emails, is that nobody does journals any more, that you can go back and refer to. The written word in dusty journals is so hard to do in the face of TV and other things. You ever try to keep a diary, even? It's just so hard. But I have, in my mind's eye, John Adams and Abigail Adams, sitting around their front room, conversing in Latin and Greek and wrestling these issues of the day that we work so tangentially and then having the time to sit down and scribe central thoughts, which we can then take advantage of to this day.

The *Federalist Papers* probably would have been read and deleted in emails long gone.¹⁰ Unless it makes its way into the printed word, the possibility that it will be preserved is small, except for worthy efforts of people like you and others. My fiftieth anniversary at the Air Force Academy saw us occasionally—videography effort from members of the class—to capture some small segment of what we were thinking, and the history of the other classes, as well, in terms of central stuff. You can see it on usafaclasshistories.org, and you can hit my name, and you get three videos, and you get some other stuff.

The problem with that is, of course, the protocols change; the technical protocols change, and you can lose that stuff, even if it's digitally done. Pretty soon the stuff is going to be... It's going [to be] kind of like going back, try to get your old cassette tapes or your eight-millimeter stuff and get it updated, and you can't. But then again, how much ought to be recorded; how much should we really do?

A good friend of mine, who's led a notable life—his name is Bob Mallot; he's former chairman of FMC Corporation—Bob just commissioned a private book, fifty or sixty, seventy books, just for his family, but did it with professional letter. They came and interviewed me about thoughts about Mallot, interactions we've had. He did that so there would be "a record" to note his passing, if nothing else, for succeeding generations. I think that's worthy.

But God, we're top-heavy, going back to that, with information.

DePue: Well, General, the last time we met, and maybe I had this all wrong, but I had the notion that you were at least thinking about writing a memoir.

¹⁰ *The Federalist Papers* were a series of eighty-five essays, written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, urging the citizens of New York to ratify the new United States Constitution. They originally appeared anonymously in New York newspapers in 1787 and 1788 under the pen name "Publius." (www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/federalist.html)

Borling: Remember, I told you the book *Top-Heavy* would probably be a punch not thrown?

DePue: Right.

Borling: The memoir would probably be thinking about cocking a punch not thrown. (both laugh) Do you know how hard it is to do that? I'll tell you what, the memoir may well come from this, from this effort that you're doing, because we've devoted tens of hours, I guess; I don't know how many hours—

DePue: Over ten hours already.

Borling: It seems like a lot. To go back and refresh memory, it would be so much work for such little reward. The other thing, I just don't think I'm important enough to merit a memoir. I don't think that I have done...

I'll tell you what, if we get SOS America rolling, and that becomes a national program, then I will have said, "Okay, Borling, now you've got some bragging rights, and now you could probably stand up and say, "Hey, look at me, look at me' and put the spotlight on, and you guys ought to buy this memoir, because I think that it's really, to use a fighter pilot term, shit hot." It's pretty cool currently. In fact, I think it's damn near petrified, in terms of any interest that would be out there.

DePue: General, we started this morning with your definition or your discussion about the meaning of life. If I were to try to sense what my meaning of life is, it's to help people preserve their story, because it's **history**.

Borling: So commendable, yes.

DePue: It's history. And your story, not just the POW years, but everything that followed afterwards... You ended up having a very successful military career, and you covered not just the Vietnam War but the Cold War and the emergence into the post-Cold War years. I think it's worthy history to preserve.

Borling: Okay, but I do so with the notion that I was, in that period, one of many. There are some things, because we've kind of flashed back into the... We moved to Rockford in 2001, and so now we've been here coming on to fourteen years.

DePue: Probably the longest you've lived in one block?

Borling: The longest we've lived anywhere, yeah. We came here after that period, back in Chicago, when I left the service in summer of '96, took our sabbatical—part by desire and part because I couldn't find a job—for the remainder of '96, at our summer home in Michigan that's so important to us.

Then [I] got picked up to be the president and CEO of United Way, thanks to an intercession by this guy Bob Mallot, and going through the process, and spent two years basically—a year and a half, two years—as the CEO of United Way. We lived in a penthouse apartment, or a condo, on the South Side of Chicago, Carol Moseley Braun’s place, and spent a grand total of four years in Chicago, four and a half years, at that apartment, or three and a half years, I guess.

Then [due to a] combinations of economic factors...The building was undergoing tremendous structural cost, and my place was one of the more expensive places in this co-op, and I had left United Way and the salary associated with that. [I] was doing some other marketing things—this is in Chicago—but still kind of fending my way. We elected to move up here, sold the apartment at a handsome profit, and came here and found this lovely old home on the river, and [we] have managed to make it a hobby...and a half.

[I] have advanced certain other business things since then, notably the energy business, which I’m no longer associated with, which has gone by the wayside. Obviously, [there’s been] public speaking along the way, always, some boards and other things that have now morphed down to two or three central areas. We’ve been here, because it offers access to O’Hare Airport pretty easily, often more quickly than I could get to it from Hyde Park. What I miss is not being able to get over to Comiskey Park or to Cellular Field, to see the White Sox games as much as I would like.

We’ve got that pass that Bowie Kuhn gave to the returning POWs. It’s a gold pass; it authorizes us, plus one, to go into any ballpark in the country for free. [I] have used it a little bit over the years, maybe less than forty times. Really, when we were living on the South Side of Chicago, we could come home and say, “Let’s go have hot dogs tonight.” Myrna and I would bus over to the park and watch a White Sox game and have Polish [hot dogs] and a couple of beers, a wonderful way to spend a Sunday night. Now it’s a two hour run to go in. So [we] try to piggyback it on—

DePue: Through a lot of traffic.

Borling: ...a lot of traffic, yeah.

So, there we were in Chicago for that period, met some wonderful people. After I left United Way and was introduced to the leadership of corporate Chicago as a part of that and was able to converse with them, many of whom are friends to this day. Went into a marketing arrangement with a promotional products firm, which is expired now, in downtown Chicago. Met some wonderful people there, but then left. I’m a big believer in sabbaticals and then took sabbaticals.

Did you know I was...Here's a little-known fact. I am an Amway distributor. (DePue laughs) Did you know that?

DePue: No. When did that occur?

Borling: Oh, 1976. John Vaughn and Pat Vaughn, God bless them, Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs. John Vaughn in Poquoson, Virginia, who we made the acquaintance of somehow, came over one night, and said, "There's something we want to talk to you about." And they made...And we thought it was a good thing, all these wonderful products from Amway. So we became Amway distributors.

The problem was, of course, I was a lieutenant colonel with a military career, kicking along pretty good by this time, F-15 squadron commander and all that stuff. I couldn't lean on anybody to be part of my group, because I thought that was untoward. So, we just kind of ordered the products and just kind of went along. We may have sponsored a few people along the way, over the years, but at the end of the day, Myrna and I are just lazy. We don't like to go to the store, and we like as much stuff brought to us as we can.

So, over the years, whether we're overseas or we're here, we've kept up this Amway IBOship, or independent business operator position. We've, again, had some people, spun some people off. John Vaughn and I went back to Norway after I retired, tried to get Norway going.

I have enormous respect for John and Pat Vaughn, who is very wealthy; he's one of these double, triple diamond guys, or more, platinum star in the heavens guys for Amway. They are the real cheerleaders. This is life, and it should be; it's made them a very fine living, and the products are wonderful.

So, we take the excess energy drinks; you've seen me drinking those here, no sugar, no carbs, no calories. We take the vitamins and supplements. We take some of the food bars. We take the shampoos. We take the breathalyzers and the shaving creams. We basically just take whatever we can order, and we order the requisite 100 PV [point value] per month, or about \$300 worth of stuff a month that you're going to buy anyway, down at the stores. Why not just have it brought to the door? So we do. These energy drinks are really good.

So yes, I'm a proud Amway distributor and have been [since], my God, '86, '96, '06. You know, I will have been an Amway distributor for forty years, and every month I get back...You spend your \$300; I get \$9 back as my commission. (DePue laughs) I'm not quitting my day job, but maybe that's...Looking ahead, when all else fails, I'll go out and start...I'll get my little trolley and go door-to-door with Amway products and see if people want to buy soap or something. It's a legitimate business. In fact, the head of Amway is the head of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. One of the

sons...DeVos and Van Andel, Rich DeVos and Jay Van Andel, were the founders, and the boys are in the business now.

One guy, Dave Van Andel, the elder son, has the Van Andel Institute, which is heavy into cancer and Parkinson's research. Of course, that plays right to our long suit of my biotech company that I'm an investor and a member of the board of, Synthonics, which is heavy into...Synthonics, S-y-n-t-h-o-n-i-c-s, www.synthonicsinc.com. We're very big, research wise, into Parkinson's and a thing called T-3. It's a medication that we're hoping to advance. And we've done some interesting work with cancer and with flu.

Dave Van Andel, from the Amway world, he's not in the Amway world; he took \$1 billion and set up the Van Andel Institute to set up a world class research organization in Grand Rapids. So, all of this happens. Well there's a little known fact; I'll have to make you a downline.¹¹ (DePue laughs)

DePue: Synthonics, when did that start?

Borling: Oh, probably six years ago. It's a Delaware-based C-corporation, privately held, offices on the Virginia Tech campuses—not offices, labs—Blacksburg, Virginia. Our whole thrust is to make existing FDA approved medicines much more efficacious, much more...quantum improvement by using—and this is the secret sauce—a patented process whereby, at the molecular level, we affix a metal ion to the ligand, if you will, of the existing drug. What this does is enable it to be delivered more efficaciously to the body, order of magnitude, in terms of solubility and permeability, in terms of bio-adhesive capabilities, in terms of pharmacokinetics. We basically make the drug do much better than current delivery methods allow and have achieved some remarkable results in animal models.

We're going into human studies whereby...For example, the pulsatile effect of levodopa, which gives you an on-off effect for Parkinson's... You normally have to take another pill every couple hours. You're either like this, or you're comatose; you're either shaking, or you're...and the therapeutic range is very narrow. We can hold the therapeutic range—have demonstrated—for over twenty-four hours.

DePue: In animal tests.

Borling: In animal tests, yeah. But not just rats; we're talking dogs and chimps and things. The amount of metal we're using, in this case bismuth, is less than you take in your supplements in the morning.

DePue: Any frustration that it takes so long to get these drugs approved?

¹¹ In multi-level marketing, a downline refers to the people you have recruited after you joined a program and whose sales or own referrals generate income for you. (<https://successfulbusinessonline.org/what-is-a-downline>)

Borling: Frustration would not be the word. It is so costly, so time consuming, so bureaucratic. You understand that the people don't want to have anything unsafe get out to the market, but in this case—

DePue: People are dying from Parkinson's.

Borling: ...People are dying from Parkinson's, and we ought to be able to go off and have an experimental approach. Let people take it at their own risk, until we can get through the rest of the trial. But in the end... You know Pepto-Bismol?¹² We have less bismuth in our composition than Pepto-Bismol. And we are running the risk of running out of money.

We need to raise \$5 million in the next 120 days. We've got the offering memorandum just out. So, if you've got friends who've got \$5 million and look at evaluation. It could be in the Bs for this company. Our evaluation now is around \$30 million, but we could be into the billions and soon.

DePue: How does a retired general officer get into this?

Borling: It appeals to my altruistic strain and that we could do something really good for America and do very well for ourselves. I got recruited by the president of the company. He and I had served on a different board together. I do bring, I would like to say, certain analytic enthusiasms to the board, and frankly, there aren't very many doors that I can't manage to get into, based upon my speckled career.

DePue: Did they approach you?

Borling: They approached me.

DePue: And these are the people that you'd mentioned already?

Borling: The Synthonics people, yeah.

DePue: So that corporation already existed when they came to you.

Borling: Yes, and they were looking for initial investment too, which I put a few bucks into it, not a lot, like \$20,000 or something.

DePue: They came to you, because they hoped that you'd be able to open doors for them?

Borling: They came to me, because they wanted me to invest, one; then two, they thought it would be useful if I would be an advisor first, and then a few years

¹² Bismuth subsalicylate, sold under the brand name Pepto-Bismol, is an antacid medication used to treat temporary discomforts of the stomach and gastrointestinal tract. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bismuth_subsalicylate)

ago, they made me a full member of the board. Yeah, I do think that, again, presentational skills, in terms of assisting there, and in terms of some rainmaking. The real proof of the pudding's going to come in the next 120 days.

DePue: What happens in the next 120 days?

Borling: We'd better raise \$5 million, or we're going to have to think about substantially tailing back our activities. But as I've said, look, we'll go flip hamburgers rather than sell this thing out for pennies. It is literally worth billions of dollars.

DePue: And there's a potential, if you don't get the five million, that you're going to have to sell out to some pharmaceutical company? Is that one of the options?

Borling: We'll sell out to a pharmaceutical company; we just want the right number. But the real problem is, we won't have operating capital to go forward, so we are going to have to raise this money, one way or another.

DePue: General, we've been at it for a little over two hours today. I was hoping to talk about your release from prison, but maybe this is a good place—

Borling: Let's talk about release from prison.

DePue: I wanted to ask just a couple quick questions beforehand and ask you—this may be kind of coming full circle to where you started—what was your frame of mind that you needed to have to keep going, from day to day, while you're in camp?

Borling: That there would be a productive life after the prison experience, that I would be competitive in the military, that I would be able to contribute to the well-being of the nation, that I would have a good family life. All of that notwithstanding, if it came down to survival without honor versus survival with honor, I would opt always for survival with honor and that I would be true to my fellows and try to be competitive within the confines of the incarceration experience itself, in terms of trying to be expansive, of intellectual, physical, spiritual attributes, where I was making something positive out of that negative circumstance, where I was not only doing that for myself but doing that for others, hence, the poetry on the mental things.

DePue: I was struck earlier... When we first started talking today, you were making that analogy, if I was to jump in the river, you'd be happy to throw me a life preserver but wouldn't necessarily jump in the river to go after me.

Borling: If it was my daughter, I would jump in the river to go after her.

DePue: You felt the same way about your fellow POWs?

Borling: Ah, they were all my brothers. I would jump in the river for them, because I know they would jump in the river for me.

DePue: I want to ask a couple things in relation to General Stockdale.¹³ Certainly, you've mentioned him quite a bit already. I first encountered him when I was teaching military leadership courses and was struck by a couple things that I read about him. Here's one; I want to read this quote and get your reaction to this. "The optimists were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas,' and Christmas would come and go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter,' and Easter would come and go, then Thanksgiving, then Christmas again, and they would die of a broken heart."

Borling: Well, I think Jim overstates the case. There were some guys who died, I think, for those kinds of reasons. But the Reinhold Niebuhr phrase of agonizing re-appraisal... So you'd set these targets, some identifiable target where you would hope things would occur to be released.^{14, 15} I'm not sure we focused on Easter, but certainly... [It's] absolutely impossible not to say, "Hey, we'll be home by Christmas, if only the... Who did the most famous, "I'll Be Home For Christmas," Frank Sinatra song?¹⁶ I guess, or Bing Crosby?

DePue: Bing Crosby.

Borling: Yeah, Bing Crosby comes to mind. Once again, we're showing our age. Realistic optimism still wouldn't dampen the hope. You wouldn't have such an extravagant optimism that if it didn't happen you would say, "I'm just going to give up life and go crawl into a corner and die." Now, some few did.

But the categories of how people dealt with the prison experience varied from the haters to the collaborators, on wild extremes, to the "why me?" guys, "Why me, God" guys, to, I think, the great bulk of the guys who said, "Dirty, crummy, lousy hand we've been dealt."

We're going to make the best of it we can, and we're going to do those things that I've talked about—it seems like endlessly—with survival with

¹³ James Bond Stockdale was a United States Navy vice admiral and aviator awarded the Medal of Honor in the Vietnam War, during which he was a prisoner of war for seven years. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Stockdale)

¹⁴ Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr was an American Reformed theologian, ethicist, commentator on politics and public affairs, and professor at Union Theological Seminary for more than 30 years. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhold_Niebuhr)

¹⁵ Agonizing reappraisal is a reassessment of a policy or stance that has been painfully forced on one by a radical change of circumstance.

Now a Christmas standard, "I'll Be Home for Christmas" was written by lyricist Kim Gannon and composer Walter Kent, and recorded in 1943 by Bing Crosby. "If only in my dreams" is the last line of the song, originally written to honor soldiers overseas who longed to home at Christmas time. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27ll_Be_Home_for_Christmas)

honor and try to stay as physically and mentally whole as we can and be resistive, without inviting punishment and retribution.

You didn't want to get "famous". Once you got famous, once you got tagged, or once they had invested a certain amount of beating you down, and they knew they could beat you down, they'd just keep coming back. Why go to a place where you can't make the sale? Go to the place where you can make the sale. So, there was all of that.

It's so hard to wrap up five, six, seven years—eight years for Alvi—in anything other than the grossest of approximations.¹⁷ But I take issue with Jim. I think he was a little too academic. On the other hand, Jim Stockdale and Robbie Risner and others, the most senior of the senior, the Jerry Dentons and the [James] Mulligans, Sam Johnson, were subject to stresses because of their senior military position and treatment. I think it was far more onerous than the "normal" POW.

DePue: Here's the thing that I found so compelling when I was looking at leadership principles and wanting to try to find a way to convey this stuff to the class. I think it was his second principle of leadership; to boil it down to its essence, life is not fair.

Borling: I can't recite to you Jim's principles of leadership. I speak a lot on leadership, but again, I always use Gardner's model, the *On Leadership* book, which I've recommended to so many. My own construct on life is not always fair [is] I use a phrase that "life will bring punishment and reward to us all, some earned, some unearned; deal with it, keep marching," end of gospel.

DePue: End of the lesson. So the lesson is, deal with it.

Borling: Deal with it, keep marching.

By the way, I do have some thoughts on PTSD—we talked about this before—I think I may have clarified recently, because that was one of the subjects that came up. I think that one of the problems with the PTSD that's so much in the news is that in recent wars, especially those involved with the religious business, with the Islamic fundamentalists and all that, is that we haven't allowed our people venting. Normally in warfare, you vent with raw humor, booze, sex, other "excessive" behavior, within limits obviously. I don't subscribe that drugs should be part of this. But all those traditional outlets for men at war have been subdued by a more politically correct

¹⁷ Everett Alvarez Jr., a former U.S. Navy commander endured one of the longest periods as a prisoner of war (POW) in American military history. Alvarez was the first U.S. pilot to be downed and detained during the Vietnam War and spent over eight years in captivity, making him the second longest-held American POW, after U.S. Army colonel, Floyd James Thompson. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everett_Alvarez_Jr.)

approach, not the least of which is the close proximity of women inside the military.

Somehow, I—boy, is this barnyard psychology (DePue laughs)—I’m going to advance the thought that lack of venting mechanisms... We’ve gone into the singing of dirty songs at the bar business before, being a little bit outside the lines. We’re not talking about going crazy, but being a little but outside the lines is able to be helpful to people who are in combat.

If you think that I’m saying something that’s foolish, look at the guys in World War II, walking into a French town, hitting the local wine cellar, grabbing the wine, grabbing the girls, hitting the haystack out behind the inn, whatever. Guys wandering off in an alcoholic daze for days, now that’s excessive. You’ve got to be able to function; you’ve got to be able to do your job.

Warfare is abnormal, and you ought to expect some abnormal behavior associated with it. Look at what’s going on in the Sudan today, in the south Sudan, where the president and the vice president have split, and you’ve got two tribal factions, the Nuer and the whatever, the Dinkas or whatever the hell they are and the Nuer people. They’re taking these towns back and forth, and they’re going into where people are taking refuge in mosques and hospitals. The leadership on both sides are saying, “Kill them all, but rape the women first.” This is so characteristic of conflict.

DePue: Any reflections, because some have been surprised, perhaps some of the psychologists and doctors who were looking at your group, that the POWs who were released had a low incidence of PTSD or whatever it was called during that timeframe.

Borling: Well, I think perhaps that they haven’t... You know, statistically, I don’t know what the relationship is. I suspect you would find that the actual manifestations of PTSD, in terms of the dreams and the sweats and the psychological release from time to time and the other aspects, is far more prevalent than you would think. I’ve got PTSD. I’ve been diagnosed with PTSD. It’s some small percentage, 10 percent or something like that.

DePue: You mean ten percent is what the military’s—

Borling: Ten percent of the disability business, yeah. But I think, for our guys, all right, well, fine, sure. Occasionally I will wake up and tell Myrna, “Boy, I was in the war all last night,” or “I didn’t get a night’s sleep,” or “Woke up in cold sweats.” But I’ve learned to avoid certain things, like I don’t watch war movies, and I don’t watch... I build my walls, and I don’t let it affect me. In fact, I think if anything, I’m harsher on the people who say that they’re all fucked up because they’re PTSD.

The things that are strange, you get people who have PTSD in the people who never left Fort Dix, New Jersey, or they've never done this or that. I think we've gotten a little over the top on this and not tough enough.

I've had a lot, and most recently at that Navy League thing, a woman who was a VA [Veterans Administration] counselor who said, "I just wish I could take them and shake them and hit them in the face and say, 'Straighten up, snap out of it.'"

DePue: Deal with it.

Borling: Deal with it. I'm very much a deal with it guy. I think if anything, again, it's a harshness. We don't deal with normal sadness or stress. Well, death basically doesn't affect me. The guys who I think or the guys who now—little admiral—refuse basically to be unhappy... Oh, you feel pains and stuff gets through the wall, but you don't labor with all of those "God, am I in the in group or the out group?" or "Am I going to get the next promotion or the not next promotion?"

There's a certain resiliency that age gives to you. That's true, because in the competitive years, those years in the military, you're stewarding the force, but you're still very competitive, very aggressive. People drop off that aggressive ladder for various reasons. This is a judgmental aggressive, a characterized ambition, trying to get something done versus being somebody, although the two tend to go hand in hand.

At the end, I just think we need to toughen up as people, and I think, in my case anyway and for a lot of guys I know, the POW experience toughened us up, because you either toughened up, or you didn't make it.

DePue: Let's finish this way then, General, because we're bumping up against the clock today.

Borling: Okay.

DePue: Can you just walk us through the actual release from prison?

Borling: Yeah, it's more indistinct than you'd probably like. We had been brought down from whatever they called that camp up north, Dog Patch or Briar Patch or whatever the hell it was. Before Linebacker started in earnest, they took a bunch of us out and put us up to a camp near the Chinese border.¹⁸ I don't know what the name of it is any more.

¹⁸ Operation Linebacker was the code name of a U.S campaign conducted against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Linebacker was the first continuous bombing effort conducted against North Vietnam in over three years. Its purpose was to halt or slow the transportation of supplies and materials by the Peoples' Army of Vietnam. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Linebacker)

DePue: And this was Nixon's attempt to put some real pressure on—

Borling: Linebacker was real... The peace talks had been going on and on and on, and again, in my book we talk about plan of reprisal, they finally got around to doing it, my plan, me and others. They called it Linebacker I and II.

They shipped a bunch of us north to a place near China, and we thought up there, Hey we can escape from this place. We're up there close to the China border; we're in the middle of the... We're not in downtown Hanoi anymore. So we really thought about... And we had escape stuff, and we had good communications. This was the night, though... I told you the cobra story. That's where we shared a room briefly with a cobra, in the dark, fun. But we figured we could get out of there. We knew where we were; we knew we were close to China. We could get to China; somehow we thought that would be better. (both laugh)

DePue: Did you know that there were peace talks going on at the time?

Borling: Oh yeah, sure, yeah. And we could hear the bombing, even from where we were, forty, fifty miles north.

DePue: Now the bombing of Hanoi was right around Christmas, I think.

Borling: Around Christmastime, yeah. Well, it was before and after. There was Linebacker I, and then there was a pause, nothing happened. Then they really hit them, Linebacker II. I don't have the exact dates.

DePue: The 18th through the 28th of December.

Borling: Okay, that was Linebacker II?

DePue: Correct.

Borling: Well, it was in that timeframe, as we were discussing this, that we thought... They said, Look, the only reason they put us north here is that one, maybe for safety, although we frankly didn't care if we got killed or not. That rolls off the lips easily. But we also had the feeling that finally—to go against Jim Stockdale again—it's really going to come to an end, one way or the other. So we elected... I can remember the discussions—I'm trying to think; for some reason Dave Hatcher comes to mind, but Charlie Boyd, others—that we're not going to try to escape, because we think we're really close, within a couple months.

Then we got rustled up one night and bused back to Hanoi, and the bombing had stopped. They threw us all back into Hoa Lo, into big, open rooms, gates open, doors open. We all said, well shit, this is it. We had a couple weeks' notice that things were going to happen. Maybe we didn't get

back until after January; I don't remember when they brought us back, frankly.

DePue: Did the diet start to improve at the time?

Borling: The food wasn't real good up there in the north, but it wasn't... What's real good; what's real bad? Shit, I don't remember. For the last year or so, they tried to improve the food; [I] gained weight, but for the life of me, I can't tell you when.

They may have come through with an extra blanket. Why do I remember that? Because we were cold all the time in the winter, that's why. Winter went from December 1 to March 1, and you were always cold. Ninety days of cold, I can live through it; I could get myself warm by walking, but ninety days of cold, and the cold was easier to take than the hot.

That said, it's really basic. Is it cold? Is it hot? Am I thirsty? Am I hungry? Am I sick? Am I well? Once you kind of work through all that stuff and you've got some excess, you say, "Now how do I make things better?" But if you're sick, you've got to fight the sickness. If you're cold, you've got to fight the cold or the hot. If you're thirsty, you've got to deal with that. Hungry, you've got to deal with that. Physical pain, you've got to deal with that. And somehow you can't let that all become... There's got to be something more.

So, they'd bring us back there, and as best I can remember, in Hoa Lo... I don't even remember; we were in large, large cells, I think some of the cells that we were in before in that large center camp area. I have a picture of it here... hell, I don't know (laughs), somewhere in there, one of those places. It was a large... because we were all there; we were all in that camp. And there were some new guys that were... That's the first time we had new people thrown in with us, people who were shot down in '70, '71, even some '72 people, I guess. I don't know if they kept them separate over at Plantation or not. [I] don't remember; you'll have to research your own records.

We'd go out, and we'd spend the day, sitting, talking. That's where Darrell and I got back together. [I] hadn't seen him in years, and we got back together. I remember sitting... There was a tree. It must not have been a tree; it must have been something else. I remember when we saw... We were so glad to see each other and sat there and talked and talked and talked.

But the guys that you'd known, that you'd tapped through the walls to... you'd never seen them, and now you got to see them. So there was a lot of that. My recollection is we weren't there very long. Now that I think back, maybe just a couple weeks, that they brought us back in late January, and we were there for maybe a couple weeks, not long. And then they issued us...

One day they lined us all up—which was very strange—military formation. We had our senior ranking guys standing out in front of the platoons or the rooms or whatever, and they read the orders...Rabbit read the orders, as I remember.

DePue: Rabbit?

Borling: He was one of the—

DePue: The nickname for one of the—

Borling: Yeah, a guard or one of the interrogators, Rabbit. Rabbit read the thing or translated for the camp commandant or whoever, that this was all going to happen in the accords, and we're going to go home. I remember when the announcement was made, and they said, "And now you are all going home." We stood there, and we didn't say a word. We didn't cheer; we didn't jeer; we didn't tear; we **merely** stood there. How's that for the poet in me, okay? No tears, no jeers...no fears. We just kind of went, "Okay, well, it's about fucking time." (laughs)

DePue: Was that reaction in part because you didn't want to believe it, or you didn't want to show any emotion?

Borling: No, I think we talked about it; show no emotion; keep it professional. So we went inside, and maybe we punched a couple shoulders kind of thing, manly thing, but keep it professional. I think they were very surprised about that. They came in then, and they gave us new clothes and new shoes. Shoes! Who had shoes? No shoes. I told you that old Russian joke, didn't I, about the no shoes?

DePue: I don't recall that one.

Borling: Write down the Russian joke about shoes sometime. It's too long to go into it; it's a great story. It bespeaks again [of] national humor being an indicator of maturity. So they gave us the shirts and jackets and pants and shoes, close to the day before or two days before maybe. Then they grouped us by shoot down time, because we were going to go in that order, the sick and wounded, the shoot down people. They did let those two traitors go out in advance, kept them separate, not on my airplane, Wilbur and Miller.

Then the day of...They let us know there'd be a phasing, so we who were in the first group kind of bid adieu to the other group, February 12th. They shipped us out to Gia Lam. That was the first time...There was another time; there was another time—now that I remember this—that they put us into a bus and took us out and just drove us through the...We weren't shrouded or anything, and we went across the rickety bridge. The Gia Lam Bridge was down, and we went over a temporary bridge to the far side of the Red River

and then went over to Gia Lam on the far side. But we were driving through downtown Hanoi, kind of looking at stuff.

DePue: Seeing the effects of the bombing?

Borling: I seem to remember there was a little, but not much. It's not like you'd look at homes today in Syria, with the World War II scenes, where the apartment blocks are gone, nothing like that.

There was another, and I don't know when this was, if it was just before release or if it had happened when we were over at the Zoo. No, it was a bigger thing. There was a time within the last year where they took people out in buses, kind of on a field trip. This is within the last year. Maybe in your research, you'll know when this went, but there was a time when they took a bunch of people out, a busload or several busloads, and drove us around Hanoi, with no blindfolds on, just looking. They didn't have a tour guide, but the guy would stop and one of the... "And this is the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum" kind of thing, and "This is the..." Why do I think they did that? My memory may be in error, or maybe they did it on the way out.

Anyway, we went over, and we got to Gia Lam. They had the buses kind of separate, and they put us into platoons, if you will. We saw the 141s, and we saw the tents or whatever and Americans in uniform. You would have thought that we would have broken ranks and run over and, "Oh." None of that.

We had briefed ourselves that we would come out... We went in as military guys, and we'd come out as military guys. We would hold formation. We don't know what the real protocol was, but when they called our names, we would go up, and we would salute smartly, and we would keep our cool. We would act in such a way that this survival with honor... that they would be proud of our return. I think we were doing it for an external audience, as well as for our own internal pride. I don't remember my name being called. I remember saluting somebody. I remember walking; there was a guy who was with me, I guess.

DePue: A guy, an American.

Borling: An American with me. We walked up the stairs or the ramp, or however we got in the 141, and there was this nurse. (long pause) So we hugged and kissed her, sat down quietly, cigarettes; we had cigarettes. I don't think we could smoke, because we were still on the ground, I think. Then they closed it up, taxied, very quiet, very quiet. Oh, there was a little buzz, but quiet; I remember it was quiet. Then we rolled, and when we broke ground there was a cheer. Fifteen minutes later, when we broke the coast, [they] said, "You have left the DRV." Wow!

Then we had the cigarettes out, and we're walking around and talking and squeezing the nurse again; God, she must have been bruised. We didn't... We did not manhandle her, but she got hugged and kissed a lot. There were a couple of nurses onboard, and they were all up to it, trust me. As a matter of fact, there are some really funny stories about Clark [Air Force Base], where some of the women wanted to do more than hug and kiss.¹⁹ They wanted to do their patriotic duty (DePue laughs), and they did. (laughs)

One of the guys in the later group—I know him; I'm not going to mention his name—got to the hospital. The nurse who was on the airplane with him told him she wanted to do her patriotic duty. He walked into the hospital, walked into his room, went out the side door and was gone for three days. (both laugh) She found me just before the fortieth...on one of my book tours and gave me a picture of her and this guy, which I gave to him at the fortieth reunion and got the rest of the story.

DePue: You got the rest of the story.

Borling: Myrna did not get the rest of the story.

DePue: Where was the destination?

Borling: Clark.

DePue: In the Philippines.

Borling: Yeah, and when we hit Clark, Jerry Denton gave that speech, of course, [that] “We were proud to have served under difficult circumstances. We are profoundly grateful to our nation, the commander in chief. God bless America.” Wow! Well said.

¹⁹ Clark Air Force Base was a military facility on Luzon Island in the Philippines, operated by the U.S. Air Force under the aegis of Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) and their predecessor organizations from 1093 to 1991. Today it is Clark Air Base, a Philippine Air Force base. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark_Air_Base)

Then we went in there, and Darrell and I got together in the... They took us right to the hospital. People were there screaming and yelling and signs and things. We were the first group. They had no clue what we were going to be, how fucked up we were going to be or not. But they took us to the hospital, assigned us rooms. I remember, they didn't have Darrell and me in the same room, so we threw respective roommates out. That's in a Clark hospital room.



John Borling and Darrell Pyle were reunited once again, following their release in February, 1973 while at Clark Air Force Base hospital in the Philippines. The two shared a tiny cell in the "Hanoi Hilton" for three and a half years.

I have no idea what those candles are. This was within the first fifteen minutes of getting into the Clark thing. We hadn't even had breakfast yet; they put us up and put us into bathrobes. That's when we went down and had the meal. Then he and I went over to the hospital, or went over to the BX [Base Exchange], got the tape recorder thing, as I remember. Then we came back, called Myrna and...Darrell's wife—God, how could I forget her name? —Darrell and his wife. That's when the story came about, "I'm going to divorce you."

Then they had Jerry Denton, me and Bill Robinson go to a school. [They] took us, still in bathrobes, over to a school, where we met fourth and fifth grade kids and talked to them just for fifteen or twenty minutes. This was all in the first day. Then we went back, and Darrell and I started downloading the poems and slept, got tired and then started going through all the—we had a lot of crap wrong with us—de-worming and de-thising and de-thating, the initial physical stuff and tooth work. I got a root canal three days or two days later.

DePue: General, I'm looking for a place to...I know you're bumping up against the clock yourself, and I'm close to being—

Borling: What time is it now?

DePue: It's 11:52.

Borling: Oh, we're doing great.

DePue: This might be a good place for us to stop for today.

Borling: Yeah. So there we are at Clark and tremendous outpouring. People who were there have of late come up to me. I now have the manifest of all the people who came out on all the airplanes—you might want to see that—on those days and who the nurses were and who the this and who the that.

I remember, Tom Barrett. There was a kick-ass nurse by the name of Susie Kasmar. God, was she wonderful. We all fell in love with Susie. She was what you'd want. She was irreverent; she was a little rough around the edges; she was good-looking, really funny, **very** sexy, and she cut Tom Barrett out of the pack big-time. Tom was a bachelor, and those two got married. I think they're still together. I haven't heard from Tom in years, but Tom and Susie, I've often wondered what happened to them. I'd like to see her again, because she was really a lot of fun. Tom was kind of a quiet guy, an Illinois guy. The parents were close; Myrna knew the parents. But I never saw Tom again after the war, and he's somewhere in Illinois. So there you go; life goes on; keep marching.

DePue: That's probably a great way to finish today. Thank you very much, General.

Borling: Thank you.

(end of transcript #5)

Interview with John Borling

VRV-A-L-2013-037.06

Interview # 06: May 13, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, May 13, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm once again in downtown Rockford. Good morning, Sir.

Borling: Good morning. I think we're going to get a little bronze plaque for that chair, "Mark's Chair." (both laugh)

DePue: Why not? I believe, General, this is our sixth session. I should mention—

Borling: God, it seems like we've been dating an awfully long time. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Yeah, we're going to have to consummate it here some time. (laughs)

Borling: Well, speak for yourself, Sir.

DePue: It's been exciting and fun for me to do this. It's important history that we're talking about, even if you might disagree with me in some respects.

Borling: Well, I think your words are obviously inflated, but I'm grateful for the attention.

DePue: Last time we finished up, we were talking about your release from six and a half years in prison, in what most people refer to as Hanoi Hilton. Of course, you and I talked about the various places you were imprisoned while you were in North Vietnam.

I wanted to start, if you don't mind, with me reading Jerry Denton's speech, once he got to Clark Air Force Base, which is pretty much how we finished off the last time. Here's what I've got, at least. I'm sure you remember this very well. "We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult circumstances. We are profoundly grateful to our commander in chief and to our nation, for this day. God bless America."

Borling: Well, he said that and brought tears to the eyes of everyone watching, even more so than the event, occasion. I'm told this by hundreds, if not thousands of people. That one really, really rocked them and it rocked us. The thing I can't remember, and I might take a minute and take off the mike; we might stop. I've got the manifest, given to me from all three airplanes that first day, and who was on what airplane.

Jerry and I had been together early in the period of incarceration, under difficult, terrible times and had been friendly, if only through a wall, had damn near died together. Then I hadn't seen him for many years. What I can't remember is why I think I was there when he made those comments, that we were all kind of clustered about, because that wasn't in keeping with the

arrival ceremony, and I think Jerry was on a different airplane. But if you'll give me a minute; let me grab this thing, and we'll just—

(pause in recording)

DePue: Are we ready to start here?

Borling: Yeah, sure. I received this, Operation Homecoming, February 12th, from Bruce Lewis, Senior Master Sergeant, who was one of the guys who helped put this thing together and ended up going to Hanoi. I'll provide this to you, to look at it. It shows that the first aircraft, the 141, and the people released at 12:30 hours, arrived at Clark at 16:25, and Jerry Denton was on that airplane.

I think that he was probably the senior...He **was** the senior guy. Stockdale was released at 14:05 and got there at 16:55, so that's thirty minutes later, the number two aircraft. The third aircraft was arriving at Clark at 17:28, so about an hour's difference from the first aircraft, and left North Vietnam at 14:45 hours, and here's the list of the people on that airplane.

A.J. Myers—he and I were together—he was on the first airplane, because he was still wounded, if you will, after all those years. So they did let the wounded guys go out first.

DePue: Were there some on stretchers?

Borling: Yeah, there were a couple, but we're going back to that. Then this goes all the way into the February and the March and the April release. This is really definitive. There's a thing in here about the Hanoi taxi, and at least I have the name of the woman.

DePue: Is that a roster of those who were held by the North Vietnamese?

Borling: This is the North Vietnamese and those released. There may have been some people later on, who were held in Laos or the south, that were brought up, that were released later. In fact, they have all of this stuff annotated in here, and I've been through it. Here's a Laos increment, and then here's the...They were, again, released to Gia Lam, a lot of them.

DePue: Well, I knew there were some that were held by the Viet Cong as well, so do you think they would have been sent to the north and then—

Borling: No, some were released in the south, as I recall. But the large number of this was done from Hanoi; although I'm looking through the book, I'm hesitating here, because it doesn't say when or where.

DePue: General, which flight were you on?

Borling: There were three airplanes that first day. I was on the third airplane.

DePue: That was based on your date of capture?

Borling: The date of capture, yeah. We said we would go down, or we would go back in the order that we were released. I was on tail number 5-0-2-3-6, third seat, 141, and there a couple of captains on board and the nurses. They [the manifest] showed the nurses, who all got hugged to death. Anyway, so that's the story.

We started with Jerry's thing, yeah. I guess it just got replayed and replayed and replayed. But I will comment that, within a couple of hours of getting to Hanoi that Jerry, Bill Robinson and I were out at what I think was the first official deputation of what would start this homecoming recognition and ceremonies all over the country. So, in my mind's eye (long pause) I was caught up in trying to repay, if you will, the outpouring of goodwill and gratitude that we got from around the world, but particularly at that first day at Clark.

DePue: Was your family there to meet you?

Borling: No. Myrna and I, obviously, [had] not talked yet, but when we did talk, from Clark later that day, I said, "Look, I'm going to go home to Scott [Air Force Base], in Illinois."²⁰ I'm from Illinois. So they had these points of entry, where the various major hospitals were. I said, "Give me a day to get back into the swing of things, and then you and daughter Lauren fly down to St. Louis."—I guess they were met by limo or something; boy they took care of them—"and then we'll team up then." So it was a day after hitting Scott that we were there. And I had my best man and his wife, then; my best man is now dead, Stu Finski, Von Finski—we were roommates at the academy—was at Scott. So, not only did I have the family there, but while we were at Scott, we had a chance to get together with Stu and Sue at their home.

²⁰ Scott Air Force Base is a United States Air Force base in St. Clair County, Illinois, near Belleville and O'Fallon, 25 miles east of downtown St. Louis. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Air_Force_Base)

Then, one of my classmates had brought down an airplane for me, Skip Kippenham. [He] took me flying, and so all that worked out. There's a shot of me literally meeting Myrna and my daughter for the first time. It's a shot where I've got the daughter up in my arms, and Myrna is in this really swanky

brown—what man

remembers what his wife

is wearing, ever—but I

remembered that she had

this brown suede outfit

on. I can still remember the

feel of it as we're walking

down the hall. I can

remember her hairdo was a

big, squirrely hairdo thing; I

said, "Wow, that's something."



Captain Borling received a welcome home kiss from daughter, Lauren, following his release from the Hanoi Hilton in Feb. '73, after 6 1/2 years of captivity. John's wife, Myrna, looks on as they celebrate their reunion at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

DePue: The fashions might have changed some.

Borling: You never comment adversely about your wife's hair. I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I am **gifted**, with respect to the understanding of certain social protocols, even in the most enduring of marriages. So there's that picture of us walking down the hall, me holding the little one's arm and off to a wild night of...I think they somewhere took the little girl...Maybe Stu and Sue took her, so Myrna and I could be together that evening.

DePue: Was that moment of meeting the family for the first time, was that the most emotional experience? This was quite a roller coaster ride I would think.

Borling: Emotional wouldn't be the right words. (sighs) Hard to encapsulate the tidal wave of feelings that were attendant to that meeting, joy, anticipation, a little apprehension. (pause) Remember, we'd had years to practice an essential stoicism. I would classify the meeting as...moderately fun...turning later into raging passion. But other than that, I'm hard pressed...me, a man of words, hard pressed to offer sufficient characterization. It's like...I guess if I was to offer some kind of metaphor...I felt like I was completing the circle that Michelangelo drew when they came to him, asking him to submit a painting,

to see if he would be accepted into a painting competition, back in the, what, 1500s I guess, in Florence.

Michelangelo had no time for this. In fact, he didn't like being a painter; he liked being a sculptor. But they dogged him and the story goes—at least as I have it—that he hurriedly walked over to another easel and grabbed a brush and drew a perfect circle, ripped it off and handed it to the guy. I guess, now reaching for something that would sum it up, the totality of feeling, I guess I felt at that moment that the perfect circle had been achieved.

DePue: How many times had you thought through that whole experience before you were released?

Borling: In my recollection? (long pause) either never, because it seemed so improbable that it would ever occur or so many flights of fancy that I can't recall actually, and they took off—what's that thing?—on gossamer wing. I would think it would be highly abnormal to have not imagined or thought about, certainly. But to try to characterize with any specificity, the imagining or the creation of that... Although, as we got closer to release in that last few weeks, I think we all kind of summoned up our imaginings of what it was going to be like. But I don't have any specific recollection.

DePue: I want to take you back to Clark. You mentioned last time that one of the first things that you did is you and Denton and somebody else went to a school. I'm trying to figure out why.

Borling: I don't know why either. There was so much focus on keeping us cloistered. This was before we even started through the physical de-worming and the de-thising and de-thating. My recollection is, it was the first day. Now, it may have been the second, but I will tell you this, we were still in bathrobes. We wanted to shuck those bathrobes in a hurry and get into some real clothes. We were in those nondescript gray pajamas and blue bathrobes. There's a picture of me and Darrell there that shows you the outfit.

I remember some PR guy coming and trying to round up a delegation, I guess would be the word. For some reason Jerry and I were there, and Jerry said he'd go, obviously. He was the headliner; he was the guy who was world famous by this time and Bill Robinson. Bill was one of the guys that I'd commissioned, the enlisted guy. He was one of the guys where the commission—the last three guys to be battlefield commissioned in the Air Force—I did that, and I was very proud of that. I was even prouder when the leadership, all the way up to the president, confirmed it. The three of us went out and went to this school and just talked to kids.

DePue: Were these American students?

Borling: Yeah, it was at DOD [Department of Defense] school on Clark Air Base, yeah.

DePue: Were you promoted upon your release?

Borling: We were promoted on time, with a date of rank, according to when we would have made captain. So I got out as a captain. Myrna tried to get me promoted below the zone of major, because she thought I was so good...below the zone to major. They indicated that they weren't going to do that. So, a year after coming back, basically, I was promoted to major, on time. Of course, the mark of competitiveness was to be promoted below the zone, to major.

So, there I was, an on-time major, going to be an average Air Force officer. Then some things fell into place, and in fact, I got promoted early to both lieutenant colonel and colonel, which then puts you into a different trajectory, in terms of potential, at least as seen by the institution, although given to great adjustment, based upon performance, success or failure, so no guarantee.

But that early promotion to colonel, by sixteen years, commission, that's as early as you can make it, basically. Maybe you could make it a year earlier, but that was a checkmark that I'd put on the career path that I wanted to pursue, leaving the academy. In other words, I graphed it the way I wanted it to go. I wanted to be a fighter pilot; I wanted to go to war; I wanted to be a Thunderbird; I wanted to be an astronaut; I wanted to make colonel in sixteen; I wanted to go to **national** war college. That's as far as I took it, by the way. I never took it to general office. That was so...That would be a flight of fancy in my view, studying as a cadet at the academy.

So, as I graphed that thing out, I obviously missed a lot of the waypoints, but I hit a few of them too, particularly the ones that then would be able to launch or advance other career things. As you get older, even though you're ambitious, you develop what I have called characterized ambition, as a guidepost. When you're young and full of piss and vinegar, and you're going hard and trying to compete, it's a pretty narrow world. Certainly, you're convivial, and you're trying to be one of the gang. Yet you're trying to be differentiated as well.

Later on, you come in with this; "It's more important to try to get something done than to be somebody," rolls off the lips easily. [It's] harder to put into action. What is it? "It's easier to fight for principles than it is to live up to them." But you do get this notion that you realize it's just not you in the game, it's lots of folks, and lots of people have a hand in your successes **and** your failures. So, you modulate the ambition factors and the ego factors, which...

Fighter pilots are, of course, known for having these huge egos. It's not really true; it's a huge confidence factor in the most part, although there's certainly excesses that we've all gone through. I don't sit in front of you as the role model. I'm fairly normal in terms of all the various male urgings that are

pushing one along before the winds. But in truth, that plan, back at school, while wildly off in so many regards, fanciful, had enough stuff in it, enough real hills that could be climbed, that I was able to climb a few of them. That meant a lot.

DePue: Again, I wanted to take us back to when you were released—

Borling: Oh, I was going off into the conversational netherworld?

DePue: Never, never, General. (both laugh) I would never accuse you of doing that.

One of the things that struck people, and I guess it strikes me as well...Having interviewed Korean War veterans who were POWs and knowing the horrific price they paid with their health as POWs, I was struck by the reports on the group that was held in North Vietnam that indicated you guys were in remarkably good health, considering everything you'd gone through.

Borling: Yeah. Again, I attribute that to that extended period of things getting marginally better in the late '69, '70 and on out. I think, even for me, though that was a period of great sickness, for a period of six months or so—and that was nearly checkout time—but that was just an illness. While the conditions were—I'll use the term brutal—in the earlier years, that gradual improvement, including diet and including some relief from—some substantial relief for the vast majority—endless punishment regimes, I think contributed to that.

While we are quick to condemn the Vietnamese for brutal and inhumane treatment and the war criminal thing—and all that's true—and while we were reduced to absolute base kinds of existence, still there was an element of keeping, at least the physical plant, going. Now, we all lost weight, and we did this, and the food was terrible, but you had enough to keep going.

The extremes in the Korean thing...Boy you get into a "can you top that?" We were certainly not in a temperate zone, because it got very hot and very cold, but not cold like Korea cold. I can't speak to the heat in Korea; I assume it gets boiling in the summer. So, we were ranging from a physical circumstance that was markedly different, I think, than the Korean business.

And I don't think that the Vietnamese went after the propaganda inculcation brainwashing business with the same intensity that they went after it in Korea. I think in Korea, they really took the guys down to sheer existence levels, in terms of starvation and a lot of people dying. I think a lot of it was weather and sanitation related. Now, they had them in larger groups too. In larger groups, of course, you get the stuff and passing stuff back and forth, one to another. So, in some ways perhaps, the isolation and semi-isolation had value for not transmitting disease.

When people get into groups, they gradate themselves within the groups. They gradate themselves through a binomial distribution, however slanted, where some people include themselves out, just because they don't think they are "part of the group" or don't want to be part of the group or whatever, but it becomes, no matter how selective or how unselective the group. I've seen it at high levels, from the White House through all kinds of various organizations, civilian and military, where people fall off the end, because they somehow don't think they're worthy or can't compete or are convinced that...It's almost like high school. It's almost like I'm not in the clique. I offer those small thoughts, but attribute a lot of it to weather and a real insufficiency of food.

DePue: Do you have any long lasting, lifelong impacts of your injury when you first were shot down and your treatment there?

Borling: Oh, yeah, I've got lifelong back problems, which will stay with me. I lose feeling in hands and extremities easily. I have a tolerable PTSD, because I refuse to...They gave us all, you have to have post-traumatic stress, because you can't have gone through that and be normal and not have it. So I'm normal, and I have some, but it's fairly contained. You don't wake up too often with the heebie-jeebies. [I] don't like war movies.

DePue: You've never seen the film about the experience in the Hanoi Hilton then?

Borling: I don't know what you're talking about.

DePue: There was a major Hollywood movie, [*The Hanoi Hilton*], I think, maybe fifteen to twenty years ago that was...I think that's the name of it.

Borling: No, never saw it. I'll give you an examples of the movies that I don't like, in fact, that cause the demons to come out. There's a movie called *We Were Soldiers* (whistles).

DePue: Based on the best-selling book, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*.

Borling: I went to see *Hair* two weeks ago, three weeks ago. This is 2014, and it's May, and it was here in Rockford, and it was part of the subscription. In fact, I was supposed to be out of town, but the schedule changed. So, I got back in town, and we went to see it. We sat down, and I said, "This is crap. This is not art or anything or music." So we left at the interval, or as they would say, we left at halftime. A lot of the theater left with us, I may add.

The strange part of all of that is that I'm a trustee and now a regent of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois, very proud of my association there. And this is our fiftieth anniversary year. We just came up with the fiftieth convocation in Chicago, and we had the dinner, the Friday night dinner, at the Casino, which was this club of clubs in Chicago, in the shadow of the Hancock Building, which is where the Lincoln Academy formed fifty years ago.

The leader, the first chancellor, was a guy by the name of the Michael Butler, who was a very wealthy businessman, philanthropist, polo playing guy from out in Oakbrook, lives in California now. Michael, interesting guy, sensitive guy, good guy, but we found out, I found out, that one of his life accomplishments was that he became the executive producer of the traveling show or the original stage play of *Hair* and thought that this was great.

In fact, there was some phrase that said, if you remember the '60s—was the line— you weren't there. (DePue laughs) Well, I wasn't there, obviously. I was in the military, and then I was gone for all of the '60s, basically. But I found this hippie, drug-taking, get dirty and find truth movement to be an anathema, explainable potentially demographically, because of the large number of young people who entered into that age group where they're ever so vulnerable, the seventeen to twenty-five age group.

Anyway...So what the hell were we talking about?

DePue: Well, I'm puzzled, General, because we went from your reaction to watching things like *We Were Soldiers*—

Borling: Oh, into this—

DePue: To *Hair*.

Borling: To *Hair*. But *Hair* is a rabidly antiwar, anti-this, free sex that, nudity bouncing around on the stage. I just didn't find it to have any redeeming value. This goes back to...I basically don't think that that's acceptable to me. I don't have to watch it, don't want to watch it. I happen to think it's shortsighted, because in the end, we won in Vietnam too. That's not a defense mechanism; that's just a fact. It took a long time to come out, but it's a fact, in terms of the impact of the American culture on Vietnam today, which is so often the case. Now Vietnam and China are getting into it again, which is a 1,000 year reality.

DePue: Vietnam is in the process of purchasing submarines, of all things.

Borling: Yes. But, to go back to the war stuff and the glorification of war stuff, I think I have most of the personal horrors buried pretty deep, but I do not go looking for ways to test it.

DePue: You mentioned *We Were Soldiers*, and I do recall that film. Were you more troubled by the combat scenes or by the scene of the women back home, getting notification that their loved ones had been killed?

Borling: I have managed to block the whole damn thing out. All I know is I'm never going to watch that film again, because it caused an emotional release with Myrna. I ended up hugging her and hanging on; all the stuff comes welling

back. As I say, I keep that pretty well damped down, and I'll be damned if I'll let you bring it back.

DePue: (laughs) The next questions...I want to make, again, a comparison with what had happened after the Korean War POWs were released—

Borling: Let me pause on that and say, I think it is a fascinating, perhaps, area to explore the differences. But then you can go back to World War II, and you can go back to World War I, and then you can go back to the Civil War, where thousands died, next to the stockyards.

I've been on a panel, and I would commend it to you, a panel of World War II vet, Don Casey, Rhonda Cornum, who was the female shot down in Iraq, and then me. We all agreed...In fact, I made the phrase, I said, "Let's not get into this *can you top that* circumstance." Every POW circumstance is a little different, even individually it's a little different, and it's always different than you imagine that it would be. But you get into this thing, well, kind of you top that; were you tougher than me, or did you have it worse than me, or did you do this, and on and on and on.

Suffice to say, the POW experience has one salient aspect to it, and that is, you're supposed to keep the faith. You're supposed to try to come back as whole as you can. You're supposed to take care of your buddy. You're supposed to keep marching. Beyond that, the horrors that individuals or groups can experience give understanding and provide how limits can be broken and people twisted and hurt and broken again. Some people are able to thrive even, where others are broken and die or come out so terribly twisted that there is no life recourse for them.

On one hand, there are these universal themes: keep faith, keep marching. On the other hand, just as we know from our individual experiences wandering through life—that we're all such individual characters; we are all on our own pedestals, or not—that to try to make gross generalizations goes back to the enlightenment discussions about what's the realities of human nature? It's something that's altruistic and wonderful, or is it something low and base? The answer is it's in between and very dependent and very adaptable to circumstance.

DePue: I was wanting to put some context to the next question, which is about the debriefing that you went through. The context was—you mentioned it already—that the Korean War POWs were exposed to lots of efforts to propagandize them, and the military in response—this might be overstated, but—was paranoid about the notion of whether these guys were going to be coming back as brainwashed.

Borling: Oh, us?

DePue: Well, the Korean War veterans.

- Borling: *The Manchurian Candidate* business and all of that.²¹
- DePue: Exactly. That's what I wanted to set up in talking about the nature of your debriefing.
- Borling: As long as you don't show me the queen of hearts, I'm fine. (DePue laughs) Nobody will know what the hell we're talking about, that old film.
- DePue: You've got to watch the *Manchurian Candidate*, which is a classic film.
- Borling: It was a classic. Angela Lansbury and Frank Sinatra, wasn't he in it?
- DePue: Yes.
- Borling: Wasn't Sinatra in that movie?
- DePue: Laurence Harvey, Frank Sinatra.
- Borling: Laurence Harvey, what an evil guy, and the McCarthy senator guy, Johnny whatever. But no, it was a great movie. In fact, [it] was really strange, going on as [I] went through the military career and even in the White House. I've had people come up to me, interrogators after the fact, CIA and other people, because I've had some pretty... Well I've had a bunch of clearances. The clearances are so high up that even the names of the clearances were special access.
- DePue: Did you get some debriefing though, that first—
- Borling: I've had a guy say, "How do we know you're not a Manchurian candidate?" (DePue laughs) And I said, "You don't." I said, "God"—and that's why I joked—I said, "Don't show me the queen of hearts," or I'd go into something. But the reality is that you want to get after this propaganda thing.
- They (the North Vietnamese) did try to convince us, but again, they were so concerned about keeping us separate and keeping us isolated and not allowing us any kind of chain of command. They would have been better off, if they had been trying to influence us, to put us into groups where the group-think could have taken over. But as it were, we were kind of on our own islands, and we were able to defend the island.
- DePue: Well, I guess my question is more, what was the nature of your debriefing, once you were released? I would assume that started at Clark.

²¹ *The Manchurian Candidate* is a political thriller by Richard Condon, published in 1959, about the son of a prominent U.S. political family who is brainwashed into being an unwitting assassin for a Communist conspiracy. The novel has been adapted twice into a feature film of the same title, in 1962 and in 2004. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Manchurian_Candidate)

Borling: It did, and then it went on at Scott, and then there was some more that went on some other time. God, they came back years later with, well what about this or what about that? This thing that they're doing down at the Mitchell Center, the POW Center at Pensacola, has a lot of data points.²² It's not just physical; it's mental, and it shows how we have deteriorated or not, mentally, physically.

They put you through all these tests, you know, can you remember fifty-seven things in a row? Can you do certain physical things and mental things? That continues, that test continues. We haven't been down there in a couple of years and need to go back, because it's an executive level physical. We don't have doctors, Myrna and I, currently. When we need a doctor, we've got a guy down the way who's a doctor, and we go knock at his door and say, "Send us someplace." He's a good guy and good friend.

But, on the debrief, (sigh) they kind of took it from day one and went forward and made a record of it. I don't know whatever the hell happened to it. I've done some oral histories for the academy and for some other folks, I guess, little ones, and that record is out there somewhere but long gone.

DePue: Did you get a sense during any of this that the military had a fear or suspicion that maybe you had been affected by the propaganda?

Borling: Oh, no, they really thought we were going to come back screwed up. In fact, a lot of people already had written books about how screwed up we were going to be, including a psychiatrist at Scott when we got there, who we tangled with immediately. They didn't know, but they wanted to be prepared. They were kind of planning for the worst, hoping for the best, kind of thing. As I say in my book, they expected these shriveled up guys, after all these years of confinement, to come back much subdued, if you will, and twisted psychologically, hurt physically.

While all of that was true, (both laugh) it was not true to the extent that it was not overridden by the notion that we were a bunch of fighter pilots who were serious about getting back to some serious living and balancing the Mark Twain excesses, if you will.²³ We started out walking into the chow hall that morning at the hospital. They had all the gook food set up over there, and we dove into the steak and eggs and everything else, all the bad combat habits

²² The Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies is a unique institution within the Navy Medicine Operational Training Command (NMOTC). It provides follow-up evaluations of repatriated prisoners of war (POWs) from Vietnam, Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, to study the mental and physical effects of captivity and to address the findings' applicability to current military operations.

²³ Known for indulging in some excesses, American author and satirists, Mark Twain, is often quoted as having said, "I never smoke to excess; that is, I smoke in moderation, only one cigar at a time." And "Too much of anything is bad, but too much good whiskey is barely enough."

that we used to have, smoking at meals, in between bites, and doing that stuff. Now we had dinner; where's the whisky kind of stuff.

DePue: I was going to say, where was the alcohol?

Borling: Although I didn't understand this until the fortieth anniversary—it didn't happen with some of the guys who came back, especially in the later groups—[some] literally walked in one door and walked out the other, because the nurses on the hill had invited them to come see them. In one case, one guy, they couldn't find him for three or four days, five days, (laughs). He was occupied, shall we say. People were doing their duty. I know that because I got, in my book travels over the last year, a photograph from a woman—gave it to me personally—a guy with her, and she said, “Well, if you see this guy, let him know that I still remember,” something like that. That's where I got some stories, and I did provide that picture.

DePue: Hopefully they didn't consider him absent without leave during that time.

Borling: He was absolutely AWOL, yeah, but what are you going to do? (both laugh) What are you going to do? So he had that attitude of, what are you going to do? But I think most of us were within reasonable bounds, military guys.

We wanted to be military. We wanted people to be proud of us. We didn't want people to think we were a bunch of raving maniacs and nutcases and worthy of pity. God, we didn't want the pity thing, ugh. We still don't, still worry about that, even after all these years. You worry that there's a pity factor working. Holy God, you would hope not, not after... But once again, it goes back into “Gee, I wonder what I would have done if I was there.”

DePue: Were any of those who were prisoners disciplined when they returned or court-martialed?

Borling: They weren't, and they should have been. That was a recommendation out of our chain of command. There were a couple, three, maybe four, who were turncoats. But they didn't want us—apparently, it went all the way up—they didn't want to sully the... We were a big, positive factor on a very unpopular war, as it wound down or wound on and then wound down. So, we were used, I think, as a rallying point for, “Look how these guys have served, and how well they've done.” So, they didn't want to do that.

Same thing with the early releases, save one, Doug Hegdahl, who was authorized to go. But the early release guys were not authorized to be early released and are not included in the NAM-POW our official...our group, our fraternity.²⁴

²⁴ NAM-POWs, Inc. is a non-profit Veterans organization, chartered by the State of Arizona in 1973 for U.S. service members held as prisoners of war in North Viet Nam.

DePue: NAM Power, is that what you called it?

Borling: NAM-POW, you can look at it online; it's Vietnam POWs. There's an organization of those of us who were there and served—as we judge it amongst ourselves—honorably, no outside judgment, as we judge it. So we have excluded fifteen or twenty guys.

DePue: Were you surprised at being treated as heroes when you returned?

Borling: Hmm. Yeah, hero's a big term and one I have assiduously avoided ever suggesting that [it's] a term I would be comfortable with. I will say, I've stood in the shadow of some and served with some, but I don't reach out for that term to be applied to me in any way. Yeah, I think we were...I was surprised at the level of national and then local attention. After leaving Scott and the big to-do at Scot, you'd get off airplanes at...certainly at Clark...the Philippines were present.

You get off at Scott, and here's thousands of people. I came up commercial [flight] from Scott with Myrna and with the little one, get off the airplane, and here's the photographers and cheering people, and pull off into a VIP room where there's an immediate press conference. Now, I think they had said, "Would you be willing to do it?" But I didn't expect the bevy of stuff. I have never been unable to take that stuff and discharge it.

Mom and Dad were there and cousins and uncle and stuff and Lauren sitting next to me, and I'm Captain Borling, and welcome home. It was front page news in the [*Chicago*] *Tribune*. That's heady stuff.

I think that I, as Myrna will tell you, started to enjoy it too much, and then she pulled me back. She said, "Do you want to be a professional POW, or are you going to go be an Air Force officer and go be a fighter pilot, like you said?" Ah, that brought it home. So we had a run of a month, maybe, or three weeks, where the fire engines...She was living in Riverdale, and I met my banker, who had taken care of Myrna and the police chief and just wonderful people there in the Dalton, Riverdale area, where Myrna's folks had moved



Shortly after Captain Borling returned to the United States, he made frequent public appearances in 1973 until his wife Myrna helped him get back to his real career in the Air Force.

from the south side out there, and my folks had moved, at this point, out to a different location from the inner city of Chicago.

So, we're out there in the suburbs and gee, it was like we grew up there. Of course, Myrna had, and our little girl had. They'd been there for six plus years. All the neighbors and things that Myrna had known, some of whom had treated her very shoddily.

It's amazing how some of the wicked treatment that we received was seconded by the wicked treatment that she received, and this is true of most of the families. You've got young, good looking wives with young kids and alone in an area where you're welcome before 5:00 around, but after 5:00, you're kind of like the widower. After 5:00, we don't want her or him over here, often because she is very good looking, and she's talented, and she'd been around the country. She had people taking shots at her, verbal shots, and jealousy. She had some money, because she was getting our paycheck, and we were reasonably well compensated, even though it didn't seem like a lot in those days. So, she had to go inside and create walls of her own and rear the little girl and have outreach to my mom and dad and her mom and dad.

DePue: Was she not living on a military base when you were released?

Borling: No, no, she was [on] south side of Chicago. She started living with her folks. There's a terrible story about... She had moved in with her folks and was living there and had been there for five, six months, because she thought I was going to be back in a hurry, because the missions went in a hurry. Yet I volunteered for another 100 missions.

I guess [on] this occasion, somewhat of a blow-up. She said, "Fine." She and her dad got into it, and she grabbed the baby and called my folks and said, "I'm going to come live with you." This was on the 31st of May. And as she walks out the door, she said, "This is terrible, what you're doing to your daughter," and to make it better, "John will probably get shot down or something." And I did, the next day.

DePue: Which is a lot for her to have to live with afterwards.

Borling: Yeah. Well, she's living with my folks at that point. In fact, they were there when they got the word at our house. I say that apocryphally; that's more Myrna's story. But there was this falling out with her family. Then, of course, it all got back together, but then she lived with my family for a while. Then she took her own place and had her own apartment. That's where all the stuff worked, because years were going to go by.

DePue: You're shot down in 1966. You're released in 1973. A **lot** had changed in the United States in those years. Were you surprised by the condition of the country you came back to?

Borling: There was a book *Reader's Digest* did, called *While You Were Away*.²⁵ It was a compilation of stuff that had occurred over that period of time, and there were other documents that had been put together in a while-you-were-away kind of thing. But I remember that *Reader's Digest* thing, and I read that quickly. It's somewhat satisfying to be featured in the May *Reader's Digest* this past year. Dawn Raffel did a great job on hyping the book, *Taps on the Walls*, and we had a good conversation.

But yeah, there was a lot. Now, I look at it; I'm not very big on *Jeopardy* kinds of answers that occurred between the mid-'60s and '73.²⁶ It's like it's a big blank period there. We laugh now, those of us who are...I'm seventy-four and a half, did six miles yesterday, can feel it in my knees today and drank a bottle of wine last night, not in celebration of the six miles but as I told Myrna, in recognition of what we would do when friends died in combat. You just raise your glass and say, "Here's to Frank, good guy," Frank Ralston in this case, drink your drink and say, "Don't bust your ass."

So, last night I drank to Keith Crisco who fell down yesterday in North Carolina, in his house, and died. Within ten minutes of that happening, I was on the phone with Terea. Finding out about it in the first hour, [I] called Terea, his secretary, and sent a quick message to John, his son.

Keith Crisco was running for the Congress, Second District, North Carolina. I'd been back just a couple weeks ago, campaigning with him, for him, he and Jane. He was a White House Fellow and a good friend, good guy, good American, running against Clay Aiken, who was the country and western star.²⁷ Well, how could Keith compete?

He'd only been a Harvard...came from very humble beginnings, got a scholarship to Pfeiffer University, went on to Harvard Business School, founded Asheboro Elastics, which continues to this day, employs a couple of hundred people. [He] was a White House Fellow, secretary of commerce of North Carolina, trustee of Pfeiffer University and a major supporter of things in central North Carolina and a really good friend and colleague. We traveled to Vietnam together, as a matter of fact, he and Myrna and Jane and me; his

²⁵ *Reader's Digest* is an American general-interest family magazine, founded in 1920 and published ten times a year. For many years, it was the best-selling consumer magazine in the United States. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reader%27s_Digest)

²⁶ *Jeopardy!*, in its 35th season in 2018, is an American television game show that features a quiz competition in which contestants are presented with general knowledge clues in the form of answers and must phrase their responses in the form of questions. The show has won a record number of Daytime Emmy Awards, is the only post-1960 game show to be honored with the Peabody Award as one of the most powerful TV programs, was on the 2013 *TV Guide* list of the 60 greatest shows in American TV history and gained a worldwide following with regional adaptations in many other countries. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeopardy!>)

²⁷ Clayton Holmes "Clay" Aiken is an American singer, television personality, actor, politician and activist. He first gained fame when he came in second place on the reality singing competition, *American Idol* in 2003. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clay_Aiken)

wife's Jan; my wife's Myrna. We were with a group of about twenty that went back, and that's where we really got close.

So, Keith died. I'm pretty well inured to death and dying; I think I'm a pretty tough guy, but for a moment yesterday, when I went up and told Myrna, I said, "Hey"—because Keith was locked in this tight race, a couple hundred votes between him and Aiken. How people could take a guy from *American Idol* and then look at Keith's record and not overwhelmingly...Hell, Keith was **presidential** material for God sakes, but they didn't. So, Keith died, and then, for a minute, I let the wall come down, but just for a minute. So, last night I drank a bottle of very good cabernet—well, half a bottle—of cabernet sauvignon, but took the time to raise a glass to Keith. What the hell does that have to do with what we were talking about?

DePue: Well, here's my next question, I think we can close the loop on it. We talked about how the country had changed.

Borling: Oh, yeah, how the country had changed, yeah.

DePue: One of the things... You came back—

Borling: We're not, yeah.

DePue: Other POWs came back and were treated like heroes.

Borling: Yeah, abused, better word. So? What?

DePue: Did that surprise you? Did that trouble you?

Borling: Yeah, it did, and even to this day, if a guy's a Vietnam guy, we say, "Welcome home." That's the standard greeting between Vietnam guys. It's interesting because people say, Well, I was Vietnam era, but I didn't get to Vietnam. So they don't get the welcome home, but you say hey, "Thanks for service" kind of thing.

I think in some respects it's caused a carom shot, with respect to the appreciation of the military since then, notwithstanding the fact that the politics of warfare have gotten more confused, I think, because so many of our politicians at the national level have had no military experience and get us trapped into these endless wars where you're trying to rebuild nations a little bit, and where the rules of engagement are so confining that you have no hope of doing what you want to do. In fact, the do-gooders get into the business, and "We're going to go nation-build," bullshit.

You go adapt and get allies where you can. Afghanistan people will tell you, we used to be able to drive around with impunity in Afghanistan, because we allied ourselves with the tribes and with the local warlords, and we used that structure. When you try to impose, over the top, some kind of

national structure and some kind of democracy, you end up in a terrible mess, which is where we are in Iraq, where we disbanded the military, and we didn't... You'd have to take the levers of power that are there. You may have been fighting with that guy yesterday, but today, he's the guy who knows how things **work** in that country. So, you don't rub his nose into it; you show a comprehensive compassion, because you can get stuff done.

Now, you don't take fifth column movements and things like that; you have to sift and winnow. It's just like Patton wanted to use the Germans after World War II, the German military, to in fact, forestall the communist onslaught and to give himself some kind of functioning organization in the area where he had domain. But we don't learn that lesson very well.

So anyway, going back to the thought, yeah, the treatment of the Vietnam folks, a lot of it abetted by just the length of the war and the fact that the American people are pretty good at figuring out what's working and what's not working. When it's not working, they have a short fuse for some of this stuff. In the case of current Iraq and Afghanistan, the only thing that's worked with that is somehow it's so distant, and the numbers involved were so small, and it was the professional military...

It seems to be so convenient now. It's almost like the nation is making up for Vietnam by extolling the service in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's, we'll show you how good we are as a people; we'll go overboard.

DePue: When you came back, were you surprised by the depth of the antiwar movement and how that manifested?

Borling: Didn't see a lot of it, although the hanger-on or the hangover part of it, you know, what do we do with the Canadian guys, and what do we do with the pardoning of this—the Carter thing—and the pardoning of that.²⁸ Any conflict, no matter how well it concludes or how poorly it concludes, you've got a lot of loose ends. Those loose ends, some of them are bandaged up pretty well, and others of them tear at your innards for a long time.

DePue: One of the things that still tears at our innards perhaps, is the number of MIAs, missing in action who... In most cases, we still don't know what happened to them. This is a kind of a lead in to the whole POW bracelet thing as well, MIA bracelets.

Borling: Well, I'm going to talk about MIAs for a minute. The bracelet thing was meant so that we are not forgotten, expression of support, solidarity. I think it meant a lot; I think it played against the Vietnamese. I think the citizens

²⁸ In 1977, U.S. President Jimmy Carter granted unconditional pardons to hundreds of thousands of men who evaded the draft during the Vietnam War. (<https://www.politico.com/story/2008/01/carter-pardons-draft-dodgers-jan-21-1977-007974>)

movements did a **lot**, frankly, to keep us alive, because I think the Vietnamese took stock of that.

They also were playing American political opinion. I think that they wanted to use us as reasonable pawns at that point. We didn't do them any good being dead or them abusing us, as they had done early. I think they saw that was a mistake, and they saw a political advantage to keeping us reasonably okay. Again, I think that was a political decision in the '69 and '70 timeframe.

Yeah, there's a number of MIAs that exist to this day. I was just reading, however, the people killed in the World Trade Center tower attacks, 9/11, maybe half are unidentified; that's in New York. So now you go off into the boondocks, and we're still pulling bodies out of Laos and North Vietnam and sites and things. I think there's a reasonable commitment made to the MIA thing. But an unfortunate byproduct of conflict is you're going to end up with a number, a sizeable number, who won't ever be accounted for, [but] less than in previous conflicts.

DePue: Did you and Myrna receive a lot of bracelets?

Borling: Oh, yeah, we got thousands, still get them back and write notes and try to be true to the feelings that are expressed. I joked that, when the divorcee in Kansas City wants me to come and pick it up, that's probably out of bounds. So yeah, we get things back, and there are some relationships that we have over the years, where people have "refused to let go" and have maintained correspondence or even a presence or visiting families. We are respectful of that.

You can't diminish what I'll call an overwhelming care factor. For the most part, they don't overdo it. They want to come, and they want to see, and they want to talk. I probably have a half a dozen people that I email back and forth on occasion, who keep in contact with me and just like to know what's going on, who are supporters. There are two or three that have become "friends." But I do that; Myrna doesn't do that.

DePue: Do you have any especially memorable experiences in that respect?

Borling: In terms of the bracelets?

DePue: Yes.

Borling: (pause) Well, they're all memorable, but some folks have gone above and beyond with...Carolyn and John Ford in Iowa, who showed up with this enormous quilt, hand done, also wanted me to get them tickets to the Cubs game, (both laugh) which I did. Carolyn and John have come to air shows, and they come and see, as I call it, and I, once a month or so, exchange brief emails into what's going on. If she and John are off on a trip someplace, I'll

get a, gee, wish you were here kind of thing. Carolyn and John are probably the top drawer of those people who have rightfully been now part of our lives for a bunch of years.

I got, again, a series of people who send the bracelets back and tell stories, and the stories now are, gee, this was in a drawer, and we were going through the drawer, and it brought back, and I cried, and I told my kids, and they have no clue, but I just found out you were alive. This is forty years later. We saw your books or... We've got something where a couple of women worked ten years on a quilt, and they sent it to me.

When I go out; I do a lot of speaking around the country, not just on books. People will come up to me and say, "Gee, I wore your bracelet," or "Gee, I did this..." Then you try to respond with a sensitivity and understanding that there was a significant emotional investment on their part, which did us, I think, a hell of a lot of good, the individual, emotional investment? No, the fact that this bracelet thing became a national movement that then echoed across...and, I think, really did help keep us alive, if you will.

DePue: So you knew about it.

Borling: No. I didn't know about it until I got back.

DePue: One last question before—

Borling: I will say that that was one of the things that was a bone of contention, when we'd get these hundreds of bracelets back in the first couple months. We had a card printed up and some pictures and things. Then I would write a note on each of these, and we would send it out. I'd be up 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, working on these things, because I felt so...committed to honoring their good feelings that I wanted to make sure that we responded.

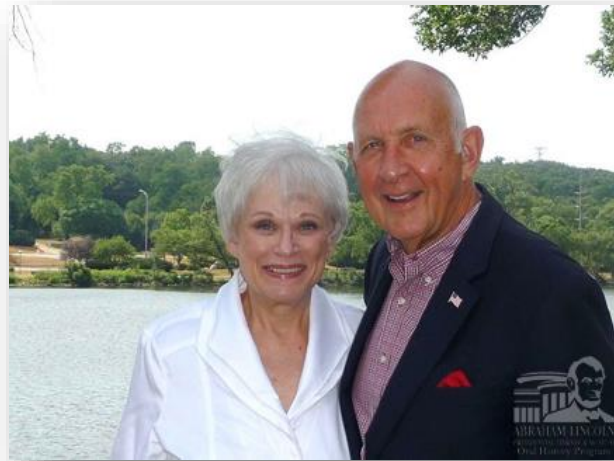
Now it's a lot easier; you can pick up the phone... We get back ten, fifteen a year, which is about normal, ten or fifteen a year. Maybe last year was a little heavier, because of the book, and/or people come up and give them to you and then throw themselves into your arms. That's always a...the depths of human feeling.

DePue: Have you saved all those bracelets?

Borling: We have donated a bunch of them here and there. You may look in the back of the cover of the book, *Taps on the Walls*, and you'll see that there's a cup, that cup I smuggled out, and it's got bracelets festooning out of the cup. I call it my cup runneth over. We've been very fortunate since those days. We had a great career; civilian life has been good; we're reasonably comfortable

Borling: financially. We're still vital, in terms of activities and efforts, going out trying to make businesses succeed, help renew the nation with SOS America, be involved in certain, select civic things. You can lose yourself in not-for-profit activity, so I've tried to keep it something where I can make a contribution. And have some time for ourselves, for enjoying ourselves.

A lot of it...Hanging here, we're sitting in my river room on the Rock River. We don't have need to stray very far from here, frankly. Our country club is four minutes in that direction, our golf course, if it's not at the country club, but Aldeen is four, five minutes away. We've got friends and some family around here, so Myrna's quite content. Me? Hell, I'm still straining at the traces, as it were, dragging stuff around the country. But that's just me.



Myrna and John Borling relax in their backyard, which overlooks the Rock River in Rockford, Illinois, circa 2010s.

DePue: One last question then, before we move on to the next step in your career, and that's, was there anything that especially surprised you about how the United States had changed when you came back?

Borling: Oh, there's superficial stuff, stupid questions about, do you miss the miniskirts, or are there miniskirts? (sighs) What had changed? I think the thing that struck me the most was that the antipathy to the military had caused the formation of what, I think, was the Grace Commission, which resulted in the abolition of the draft. I thought that that was a terrible...and do think that is a terrible mistake. Now, I think the draft had great inequity associated with it, but it was a way for the citizen soldier ethos to wind its way into the national mindset.

I just don't think we can outsource military service to a favored few, to an all-volunteer force, when the need for understanding and the growing up that occurs in the military could be so beneficial for all of American young men, principally, who are the problems in the society, and for those young women who would choose to want to volunteer. So, that I didn't like, and that I think was wrong. I've argued that case for a while, as you know, with a surprising resonance that seems to increase the further we get away from that.

I'm sure there were other factors that seem to be difficult, fly specs in the road if you will, but at the end of the day, I was much more concerned about getting back into the Air Force and competing in the Air Force. That hadn't changed a lot. The war had kept the military fairly...I recognized the Air Force that I went back into.

Let's pause here just for a second.

(pause in recording)

DePue: You and I have already talked...you've expressed your strong desire, your love for flying. That was something that helped you sustain yourself while you were in the prison camp and all. The next step then in your life, is getting back to flying in a serious way.

Borling: Right.

DePue: Tell me about that. You went back to get basically retrained or to train others?

Borling: Well, I told you that one of my classmates had brought a light airplane down to Scott. This may be repetitive, but he said, "Hey, you need to get back in the air," and I said, "Yeah, I need to get back in the air." So we went up and went flying. I'd never flown a light airplane. I'd **never** been in a light airplane.

DePue: Is this is a prop?

Borling: A prop job, yeah, a Cessna 172 or 150 or something like that. So we went flying, and I could fly the airplane, and I could take the airplane off. Landing the airplane, another circumstance. I found out I have the instinct for survival. I got it up and down but really rough, but I did it. I told Myrna, though, I want to go back to see if we get our mock-up, see if we could compete. So, we ended up, after a few months of playing POW and then some leave... We've got a summer cottage up in Michigan.

By midsummer of '73, we are moving to San Antonio, Texas. There they are having what they call the Freedom Flyer Program in the 560th Fire Training Squad at Randolph [Air Force Base], and this is going to be in the T-38.

I'd never flown the T-38. This was that supersonic trainer, the advanced trainer. I had flown T-33s. So, we showed up down in San Antonio, took my little girl, who did not want to leave; she'd been where she was. Myrna and we piled in the Ford that had been given to us, a year's free lease by Ford Motor Company. We had a Ford LTD, which we then got a chance to buy, after the year, a good deal for Ford. So, we went down to San Antonio.

We're living in Universal City, where a whole bunch of guys that are in the same apartment building are there.

We went out, and I was Freedom 43. I was the forty-third guy to go back in—that was our call sign, Freedom—and I was the forty-third guy to get this champagne ride, which is where they take you up with an IP. Some guys, that's all they would do, but I was going to stay and get checked out, because I wanted to have follow-on orders back to fighters. This was very much part of the plan to see if I was going to be any good.

I remember checking in. I'd never flown the 38, had a little ground school, not a lot, and this was going to be the day that we're going to fly. Darrell Pyle, my friend, is there, and he's Freedom 41 or 45 or something. So we said, "Hey, we're going to go off on the same day for our champagne flight." At least this is how I remember it; maybe it was a day later or two days later, but I think it was the same day. I told the IP, John Satterthwaite—I remember his name, Captain Satterthwaite—I said, "If you touch the stick," I said, "unless it's to save your life," I said, "I'll break your wrist."

So we started the airplane, taxied it out, took off; we weren't in formation, found Darrell. We did a quick hassle, just because we dreamed about that, did it in F-4s too, later, at George.²⁹ Of course, the IP in the back



Captain Borling is getting back to jets, a T-38 Champagne Flight (1st jet sortie in seven years) for Freedom 43, with Instructor Pilot John Satterthwaite. They celebrate with Myrna and Lauren at Randolph AFB, Texas in the summer of 1973).

²⁹ Hassle is a fighter pilot term for fighter maneuvers, one aircraft against another or more, with the object of out flying and effecting, if possible, shots or even a kill. In the T-38, there were no gunsights or radars and the like, so it was just maneuvering one against the other. We did it briefly, just to say we did, because we had promised ourselves that we would if we lived to fly again. (Explanation from General Borling)

seat...Both these IPs are, “We’re going to lose our wings.”³⁰ Shut the fuck up. So, we did it and split off and then went and did some air work and then went back and did a bunch of landings. He [the IP] never touched the stick the whole time. So, I hopped out of the airplane. Myrna was there and Lauren; there’s pictures of this, with the champagne flight. I said, “Hey, give me my check ride tomorrow.” I said, “I’m out of here.” I felt so golden, like I’d never been away, and I’d never flown the airplane before. We took some shots, and it was great.

So, the next day I flew. God, I couldn’t walk and chew gum; I was so dangerous. (both laugh) You’ve got this mountaintop the day before, then the **valley**, God, the Grand Canyon, the next day. Maybe it wasn’t that bad, but I certainly was in need of more training. So I hung around for, I guess it was a couple, three weeks, four weeks, smoothed it out, got check rides, got back and did all the stuff. Then it was feeling pretty good.

I stayed at Randolph. You’re trying to get credentials again, and there was a thing down there called Instrument Pilot Instructor School. I got, strictly by wheeling and dealing, a slot at IPIS and became an instructor pilot and instrument work [license]. This was really finite flying and really sharp flying. I was always good in instruments; I was always good flying. I graduated number one in my class in pilot training, from Laredo. That was many years ago.

So, I went to IPIS and stayed for another six weeks; I think it was six weeks. Then [I] went out to our first duty assignment, drove, I think, or maybe we went back to Chicago, but drove to George Air Force Base, which is where it all started. Now we’re back at George. (laughs) Found a home up in Apple Valley; Newt Bass was the developer of Apple Valley and [we] found his home, which was a 2,000-square-foot rancher, but stuck on an acre of land on Kaibab Court, beautifully landscaped, just a wonderful home, three-bedroom home.

DePue: Off base.

Borling: Off base, yeah.

DePue: Is that something you wanted?

Borling: Yeah, I think it was, yeah. I don’t think I could get on base anyway. I was just going to go through the F-4 recurrency training.³¹ So anyway, we’re out in

³⁰ The Aircrew Badge, commonly known as Wings, is a qualification badge of the U.S. military that is awarded by all five branches of armed services to personnel who serve as aircrew members on board military aircraft. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aircrew_Badge)

³¹ Recurrent training is required annual by the FAA for both pilots and crews to refresh their knowledge of required safety procedures that might have gotten rusty and to keep them up-to-date on possible changes to FAA required procedures. (<https://aviation.stackexchange.com/questions/29286/what-is-recurrent-training>)

Apple Valley and had some nice neighbors who...June and Jim Robson, were down the hill from us. We had a beautiful view, overlooking Apple Valley. In fact, the house was for sale, but we were renting it. I would later end up buying it and **loved** that house. Lauren, we'd watch her walk off, trundle off to school in the mornings, across the desert and pick up the bus a half mile away and off to school.

This is after she had run away, by the way, in San Antonio, run away in the apartment complex. We couldn't find her, and she had gone to school and left school and come back to—which was a trek, to come back—and was hiding, as we were all looking for her. She was watching us all and hiding behind the dumpsters or going behind the bushes. She called my mother, back in Illinois, and said, “Grandma, come and get me.” (laughs) because she didn't want to...Well, this was her breakthrough into the military life. Now we've not only moved her to San Antonio, now we're moving her to George.

By the time she got to George, she's into the swing of things again. She saw some people that she'd known in San Antonio, so all of a sudden she thinks, this is kind of cool; you get to go someplace for a while, and you do something, and then you go someplace else. You see people, and you see kids you've seen before. That would be a hallmark of her life, because we moved a lot; we moved almost every year for a long period of time, maybe a year and a half. She'd start to pick up kids that she'd seen four or five years ago. So it was wonderful stuff, and maintains relations with some of those kids, even today, forty years later, forty-five years later.

After a successful time at Randolph, we drove out to George and were there, and I'm going to F-4—now this is the E model, recurrency, or maybe it was the D model; I've forgotten. I guess it was the D model; I've flown them all, Cs, Ds, and Es—going to gunnery. I had checked out, remember, in the F-4, in the front seat of the F-4, before leaving. So it wasn't that the front seat was strange to me. I'm very proud to be the first lieutenant to upgrade in the front seat of the F-4 in the Air Force—they had that stupid rule of having two pilots in the airplane—and was a class commander of the F-4s at George.

[I] was flying and had orders to Holloman. And Darrell, who was with us, had orders to Elmendorf. Darrell had bought a light airplane, a Cub, a J-3 Cub, tail dragger. We flew that darn thing all over Southern California, had Myrna, and we put Lauren in it. We didn't know what the hell we were doing, but Darrell's flying, and he's got Myrna, and he's got Lauren, and we're flying around California.[We] go down to Fallbrook and see his folks. Of course, he was in the process of getting a divorce from Elaine, and that was hard. He was up living with us, godparents to our second daughter now, who's coming along. This would be February of '74, and we're still out at George.

DePue: So, your second daughter was born at that time?

Borling: Yeah, there was this party at the White House in May of '73; (counting under his breath) there was a party in May at the White House, and about fifty kids were born after that great party. (DePue laughs) Boy, we had the run of the White House.

DePue: It's like nine months after the blackout in New York City.

Borling: Nine months after the blackout period, that's right. So the second daughter was born at George. But we're out at George, and we're flying and things, and Darrell is going there, and I'm going to Holloman. I'd gone down to see Neil Eddins, who was the DO. I'd taken an F-4 down to Holloman, and said, "I'm going to go to New Mexico," and met him and June. He was very kind. I just was trying to figure out what was going to happen—by now I'm a major—what's going to happen to Major Borling? I'm doing fine in the flying world.

By the way, the vice commander of the commanders, [was] a guy by the name of Larry Welch, who was going to go on to be chief of staff of the Air Force. The DO is Jack Chain, John T. Chain, Jr., is going to go on to be commander and chief of Strategic Air Command, chief of staff of SHAFE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe]. And Jack Chain and Larry Welch and Neil Eddins are all going to be formative in my career, from this point on.

Well, it's about this time, and, again, I've graduated from the thing and about ready to move on, operationally, to Holloman. So now we're into the summer—April, May, June, July—and I have applied for a White House Fellowship, against all odds. I'm thirty-five years old, and that, in those days, was the upper limit, and went to the regional finals, survived the paper trail. In fact, I put my paper thing in on the last day, post marked the last day it could be in, even some typos; in those days you had typewriters.

I'd gone back to Washington and talked to a couple guys, one guy particular, who had been a White House Fellow and friend of mine at the academy. He said, "With everything you've got going for you, you ought to try for the White House Fellowship program." I said, "I've been away all these years. I'm just getting back into fighters." He said, "You ought to do it." So I went, and I got the brochure, looked at it and threw it in, more of a over the transom kind of thing. [I] survived the paper reading and got invited to the regional finals in Denver. You've got to go on your own hook.³² [I] came out of the regional finals either one or two—that's what you have to do—didn't know where, but one or two, and was invited to the national finals, where they take about thirty people, and then out of that thirty or thirty-five, maybe twelve, fifteen get selected.

³² On your own hook means without requiring or having been given instruction, prompting, or guidance from others; by one's own effort or energy. (<https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/on+own+hook>)

DePue: Before we go too much farther, I need to understand a little bit more about the White House Fellowship program. I know there's military people there, but are there also people from other walks of life who are applying and becoming Fellows as well?

Borling: Military are the exception. In fact, it is the only part of the executive branch that can apply. It is a year-long program whereby you serve as an assistant to a cabinet officer or a principal at the White House. On top of that, you have a robust, what they call education program, where you meet with everybody and anybody from judiciary, legislative, executive branch, celebrities, newscasters, as part of your education, and you take a foreign trip, and you travel domestically with your principal—ostensibly, it also depends on the relationship with your principal—and it's highly competitive.

It's supposed to be for those people who have established a track record of some kind, have had academic prowess and career prowess and potential that will serve the country for a lifetime. It's nationally appointed by the president of the commission. It was founded by John Gardner, my fourth great mentor, when he was secretary of HEW [Health, Education and Welfare], under Lyndon Johnson. There've only been about 600 of us over the course of the years, since the mid-'60s, when the program was in.

So this is '74, '75. I've just flushed out of the training program. I'm off to Holloman for my operational unit, when this White House Fellows' thing starts. And the Air Force, by the way, which again, is the only executive branch that can nominate people—you do it yourself, but you get an institutional push, if you want; I didn't get any institutional push. Then everyone else is from the private sector. The Air Force had pushed a couple of guys my year. I don't remember if anybody made it, but we ended up at Airlie House, which is in Virginia, out in the suburbs of Washington, Fairfax or Loudoun County, and we spent, with the national group, the national commission, for three days.

It's three days where... The only guy I can remember is Fred Malek was there; he was a tough guy.³³ Then there was some other folks, notable folks, who were on the president's commission, all of them nationally known, David Rockefeller, those kinds of folks. It was strange, because they wanted to see how you interacted one to another. They wanted to test your manners, to be at formal dinners, not black tie but dinners. Could you hold your liquor? And then there were these day-long interviews. Then you'd go out, and you'd go riding, or you'd shoot skeet. With Fred Malek, you'd go running and do pull-ups. We were constantly being evaluated at close range. We were living with the commissioners, and they wanted to see how we were going to react.

³³ Frederic Vincent Malek is the former president of Marriott Hotels and Northwest Airlines and former assistant to United States Presidents Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush. Malek served as a National Finance Committee co-chair of John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Malek)

We had dances, or there was dancing. There were written exams, if you will, essays and things. It was really... They were burrowing inside of us.

Well, at the end of the Airlee House weekend, they take you on a bus. This was the way they did it in the old days. They take you back to the Civil Service Commission. I remember this; this is so funny; this is so typical of government. They passed out these envelopes to everybody—there were thirty of us there—and this is where you're going to find out if you're selected or not. They said, "Well, thank you all for participating" —this was some high up civil service functionary—"Thank you all for participating. We hope you've had a good weekend." They said, "If you have the fat envelope, you've been selected for the program, and if you have the thin envelope, thank you very much for your national defense, but you're excused."

So, how do you know? (laughs) So, you go to the guy next to you, your envelope... Oh shit, so we all open our envelopes, and then you watch. There's mine; well, you've been accepted. Oh, God. Then, people who have not been accepted... You're all sitting in the room, and people are breaking down crying. It's a terribly **invested** kind of competition you've been in, winnowed down from thousands of people for the twelve to fifteen slots that are going to be available. Well, I got my nose stuck under the canvas tent and was selected for the program, along with about fifteen others that year, '74, '75. This is our fortieth year; this is our anniversary.

DePue: Do you think having been a POW factored into the decision?

Borling: I am absolutely certain it did, although I'll never know; you don't get a full debrief. There's two things that I think happened, because there was another POW, by the way, that applied, a Navy guy in Denver. He didn't make the regionals, get through the regionals. But I can remember some of the questions from the regionals. I can remember very little from the nationals. But from the regionals, I remember they asked me, they said, "So, if you're an ombudsman from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and..." I forget what the question was, but they come to you with this, "What are you going to say?" I can remember saying, "I'm not going to say very much until I figure out what an ombudsman is." (both laugh) And they laughed. I said, "Someone want to tell me?" They said, "You're the one who's supposed to be kind of the eyes and ears, the every man." I said, "Oh, okay, I got it, Thornton Wilder kind of stuff; I got it."³⁴ And so I would go through that.

I found that being genuine... and I like to think that I've got a reasonable ability to characterize things in a lighthearted manner, so I remember the ombudsman thing. Then I remember they said, this wonderful question about, "And what is your greatest weakness?" I said, "I don't have

³⁴ Thornton Niven Wilder was an American playwright and novelist. He won three Pulitzer Prizes, one for the play *Our Town*. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornton_Wilder)

any.” (both laugh) And they said, “But you have to have some.” I said, “I’m a fighter pilot; I don’t have any weaknesses,” and I said, “And what are yours?” (both laugh) So, I really didn’t think I had a chance in hell of being a White House Fellow, if you must know. I didn’t have the academic credentials. I had Air Force Academy, and I’d had some other stuff, little things, and I’d won some awards for writing, and I was obviously a speaker that was in demand here and there.

You’ve got Harvard Business School, Rhodes Scholars; you’ve got all kinds of folks that are really top guns, if you will. By this time, by the way, Holloman went away. I stayed at George and I was operational at George for a brief period of time. I fared very well in the gunnery competitions in the wing and, in fact, had gotten some top gun recognition, which meant a lot to me, because it meant I could compete, okay?

Now I’m flying operationally at George, but now going through this business. I remember one more thing, the only thing that sticks out at me. I had rented a car and flown out from California. One of the guys—I think it was the other POW—we were standing in the men’s room doing our business, one of the commissioners had walked in and was a urinal down. My friend was asking me, or this guy is asking me—and I’ve forgotten who it was—he said, “Hey, can I get a ride back to the airport with you?” I said, “Yeah, but it’s going to be thirteen cents a mile.” (both laugh) That shows you how the economy has changed.

The commissioner down there laughs heartily. I think that that commissioner came back to me, and he said, “You know, it was your personality factor that made the difference, made you differentiated from everybody else.” He said, “And we were right.” Because the regionals send two or three, and there’s twice the number when you get to nationals. So we got to the nationals.

I’m still staying out at George, and we’re flying. So now I’m going to be a White House Fellow. In those days, you went back in in August. You had to go back for an orientation or something, and you would start an interview process with principals around the town, cabinet officers and others. Then they would try to mate you, because there’s a staff that runs you, a professional staff, presidential appointees. In my case, Fred Dent, who was secretary of commerce was very interested, Al Haig, who was chief of staff. Remember, Nixon is still the president. Anne Armstrong, counselor to the president, was interested in me. I was interested in her and Haig.

I wanted to work as close to the president as I could. I know I had that figured out, and one of the guys who was there, a former West Pointer, Fred Benson, senior to me, said, “John, you’ve impressed everybody here.” He was a Fellow. I said, “I’d really like to work for General Haig, Chief of Staff.” Why not shoot high? I knew I wanted to be in the White House. Well, I really

got laid into by the commerce secretary. He said, "Come to me; we'll make you," you know, da-da-da, really put the press on. Do you have a question?

DePue: My question is, this is in the tail end of the whole Watergate scandal, and I would think by—is this June or July timeframe you're talking about?—

Borling: Yeah.

DePue: ...that the writing is on the wall that Nixon might not be around for that much longer.

Borling: You're right, and here's the rest of the story. I take leave, because I'm going to Washington, and I'm going to work for Al Haig as chief of staff of the White House. I'm going to be **the** White House Fellow, working for the chief of staff. I've turned down commerce, and I've turned down Anne Armstrong, the counselor to the president. I thought I might want to work for the USTR, the [United States] trade representative, because there was a lot of foreign travel involved in that; I'd like to keep moving. But Les Denend, who happened to be not only my classmate from the academy, but now is going to be my White House Fellow classmate, because there were two of us from the same class—I think Les may have had institutional push too. He was a Fulbright Scholar, he finished very high in the—

DePue: What was the last name?

Borling: Les Denend, D-e-n-e-n-d. In fact, I talked to Les just two days ago. Les and I are classmates, so was George Robinson from the Navy, retired, who was basically a leading Seabee, if you will, in the Navy, and there was a Medal of Honor guy, Ron Ray, Army guy.³⁵ So those were the four military, and that's a lot of military for a class.

Then we had a Harvard professor, Roger Porter, from the Kennedy School. We had Susan Schiffer, now Susan Stautberg, who was a board creator, a journalist, wonderful academic career. We had Melissa Brown, J. Melissa Brown, who was a lawyer and had a great track record. We had Gary Cruthers, who was an educator, later became governor of New Mexico. We had Kent Colton, a city and urban planner. We had Bill Hamilton, who was the head of a major department at the Wharton School [of Business]. We had...some others, Adam Herbert, a black guy, who was an educator; Betty McCormack, who was a business person, I think for Proctor & Gamble. I'm missing one or two, but that's about it. All these people had sterling academic and civic commitment things and were interesting. We were all...and now we were milling together as a class.

³⁵ United States Naval Construction Battalions, better known as Seabees, form the Naval Construction Force (NCF) of the United States Navy. Their nickname is a heterography of the first initials "C.B." from the words construction battalion. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seabee>)

So, I'm moving. I've left George. I'm going to go, and I'm going work for Al Haig. We go back to our summer home in Michigan, in whatever this is, late July. So, we're getting a couple weeks at the cottage, and I'm ready to report in in August, and I'm going to be a White House Fellow, civilian clothes; I'm going to be working at the White House for Al Haig.

Well, I'm in my inner tube, floating off my pier, when two guys in suits (laughs) show up. There hadn't been people in suits in Sister Lakes Michigan ever, I don't think. These two guys come walking down, onto the pier. I'm in my inner tube. And they say four words, "Call the White House." Everyone up and down the beach, "Call the White House?" I said, "What's the number?" (DePue laughs) They said "Call General Haig's office." The number, by the way, is (202) 456-1414, if you ever want to call the White House.

DePue: Still?

Borling: Still. They still have people sitting there who can find anybody, anywhere in the United States. There were years afterwards when I would need to find somebody, and I knew, because I went down and made friends with all the White House operators. I'd call, and I'd say, "Just give me the White House operator." Then [to] the White House operator, I'd say, "Hi, this is John Borling," and they'd say "Oh." They'd say, "Major," then colonel, even once general, [after] that long. But they're all gone now, and I wouldn't do that. That's still the good number. I'll tell you a wonderful story about how effective the White House operators were.

Anyway, I go up to the cottage, and I dial the phone. These guys drive away in their black government car. I call General Haig's office, and Fred Benson, who was the Fellow, gets on the line with me. He says, "Hey John, You see how things are playing out, and it's not appropriate for General Haig to take a White House Fellow." He said, "I'm hanging on for sixty, seventy days afterwards, then I'm gone." He said, "You need to call the commission and find out where you're going to be placed. He said, "I think you'll like it," he said, "but I can't talk to you." He said. "It's in the White House." And I said, "Okay."

So, I called the commission, and I got to Joan Benzinger, who was the commissioner lady. I said, "Hey, what's the deal?" She said, "Well, we've switched you, because you were the first choice for two other principals." She said, "You know about the secretary of commerce." She said, "But you were also first choice for Anne Armstrong who, when she couldn't get you, didn't take a Fellow. So she wants you to be her foreign policy special assistant, liaison to the National Security Council and working the bicentennial," which is '76, which she had principal domain over. She said, "So which one of these do you want?" "Oh, no," she said, "Commerce is gone, so this is a happy thing. You'll be in the White House, and you'll be working for Anne

Armstrong.” I said, “Okay, sounds good to me.” So I went back to my inner tube. (DePue laughs)

DePue: I assume everybody’s watching you go back to the inner tube.

Borling: Yeah. A week or so later, we moved on to Washington, two weeks maybe. We ended up in a motel in Vienna and were watching Nixon resign. The program was independent of who the president is, and Ford is taking over. I can remember Lauren...In fact, Megan is still a baby. Myrna and I had to go back to Washington. As part of the selection process, they wanted to see the wives; the wives had a program as well. We left the baby with friends, in fact, a former POW and his wife, and flew back to Washington—talk about Myrna having some...leaving her unweaned baby yet—and went back to Washington. So, now we’re in Washington, and we’re watching TV, and Lauren starts crying. She said, “Why are they doing that to him? He brought my daddy home.” Oh, hoo, now we’re all crying. So that’s the start of it.

We get a house in North Arlington, North 26th Street. I can remember, I’ve got my new suit and my little briefcase, and it’s day one. I go down to Lee Highway, and there’s a bus that runs from there down to downtown. I can remember thinking, Here I am; I’m going to go help save the country. (laughs) I get on the bus and [said], “Does this bus stop at the White House?” (both laugh) Well, I think that is an apocryphal story. I actually drove down the first couple days, but then later I did, “Does this bus stop at the White House. Or maybe it was the first day; hell, who knows.

Anyway, [I] ended up having a marvelous year. My office was actually in the OEOB, the Old Executive Office Building, which is connected by Executive Drive to the West Wing, but had a White House pass. In those days, full run of the White House. You got a blue pass, you could go anywhere. You didn’t go into the residence without invitation, but if you wanted to take someone with you, “Oh, you want to come over to the White House? Sure, come on.” You’d call down, “Hey, Joe Schmitz is coming to the White House; can you pick him up at the gate?” They’d just let him in. He’d come to your office, and you say, “Oh, you want to go see the White House?” We’d walk across and wander through at leisure.

Myrna could come. We parked on the Ellipse, working for Anne Armstrong, and did, in fact, do a lot of things with foreign countries and with ambassadors and with others with the bicentennial. [We] did liaison with the National Security Council. It was Kissinger’s council and then Scowcroft. Ended up going with Anne, as one of her personal guys, to the World Food Conference; she was the representative in Rome. Had a wonderful trip to Rome with her and her husband, who was a rancher. God, why don’t I think...I never thought I’d forget his name.

Their address was interesting though, the Honorable Anne Armstrong, Anne L. Armstrong, Armstrong Ranch, Armstrong, Texas. (DePue laughs) If you're going to have an address, that's an address to have. This is the ranch where Dick Cheney, a few years ago, blasted that banker.³⁶ What the hell was his name? He's a good friend of Jim Baker's, a big guy, big Texas guy, been in the family since Spanish days.

But we all went to Rome together, and then Anne resigned. When Nixon resigned, she had a period under Ford and then left. I'd go to cabinet meetings and sit on the back bench kind of thing, [with] Anne sitting there at the front, at the big cabinet table. I'd sit in the back and do that. Ford would see us and nod. I'd met the president a time or two, but my principal relationship was with Anne Armstrong. So she leaves. Now I don't have a position.

Ron Nessen, who was the press secretary, makes a bid for me. I told Ron, and so did the commission, so did the military that, "Look, it's just not appropriate to have—even though I'm in civilian clothes—a major being part of the..." He wanted me to be spokesperson, congressional relations. Tom Korologos wanted me, and it wasn't going to be proper, either, for me to be a lobbyist as a major in the Air Force. This is all happening very quickly, but those bids were made, bids rejected. Then I rejected the press thing. Then I said, "I don't see how I can go be a White House lobbyist with the Congress," heady that they wanted me to do that, heady, especially with Nessen. Ron and I really got along. The Baroudi organization had a guy in it by the name of Ted Marrs, Dr. Marrs.³⁷

Oh, by the way, the funny thing was, Anne asked me, when I went to work for her, she said, "What do you want to be, an assistant to or a special assistant?" It sounded to me like special assistant really was the right thing. I said, "I think special assistant." I find out later, that I've just downgraded myself. (both laugh) To be the assistant to the president, it's much better than being the **special** assistant to the president. Anyway, so that shows you how much you learn about things in life. Wouldn't you think, on the face of it, that special assistant...?

DePue: You can get some special crummy jobs.

³⁶Richard Bruce Cheney is an American politician and businessman who served as the 46th vice president of the United States, under President George W. Bush. In President Gerald Ford's Administration, Cheney was assistant to the president and White House deputy chief of staff. He succeeded Donald Rumsfeld as White House chief of staff, when Rumsfeld was named secretary of defense and later was manager for Ford's 1976 presidential campaign.

³⁷Theodore (Ted) C. Marrs, was a physician, brigadier general in the Air Force Reserve and Defense Department official who worked in the White House under Presidents Nixon and Ford. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1990/12/21/deaths/959c1817-0576-456a-8de7-e4128625e594/?utm_term=.799c02c88803)

Borling: Ted Marrs is a special assistant to the president, so he's a step down from the assistant too, but he wants an executive officer who handles all of the domestic portfolio and all the outreach to special interest groups across America. Well, I thought that was pretty fascinating. I met him, and I liked him, and he said, "You'll be my exec." I said, "Okay, all I want is that every paper that gets to you gets to me first." He sits back; he says, "What?" I said, "If you want me to be your exec, I'll be your exec, but every paper has to get to me first."

He had a secretary that had been with him, in one incarnation or another, for like ten or fifteen years. She's in the meeting too, and she's... I said, "I'll work closely with..." I won't mention her name now, although she's probably dead, Verna. I said, "I understand you guys have got a special relationship, but if you want me to come in, I'm not coming in as some figurehead." There's another assistant secretary who's going to be my secretary, Mary Featherall, great gal. Mary goes to me later; she says, "I can't believe you're laying down the law." I said, "Look, I've got six months here, seven months left, six months maybe, and we're going to have to run the ship," I said, "If I'm the executive officer." So, he hired me.

Now I find out that I have unusual access to the President of the United States because Ted, as special assistant to the president, is working a number of agendas that Gerry Ford thinks are really important, to open up the White House, make it more accessible post-Nixon, et cetera. In fact, I end up running a program called—whatever it was—Wednesday or Thursday, at the White House, where I invite groups in, and I'm the action officer for this. I have the president speak and cabinet officers, take people on tours and get photographs. Mary, she's basically the action officer for the action officer. We're running that, and we're doing other things.

After just a short period of time, one day Ted, who is Doctor Marrs; he's a pediatrician. His wife, Annette, was a close friend of Madam Chiang Kai-shek's. So, we've got that working, and Annette Mars, who was just an elegant lady... This will just give you an example of what it is; Ted comes running in. He says, "John," he said, "I've got a speech for the president." We were part of the group that vetted all the speeches, State of the Union, all that stuff. People think it happens in a vacuum; it doesn't. A lot of people fight to get a line in the State of the Union, and then it gets scrubbed and rescrubbed. He said, "I've got the president's speech here for the savings bond drive, and the two chairmen are going to be over in the Green Room, and the president's going to be there. I can't do it; I've got to do something else," he said, "You do it." This was like my first week as his exec.

I grab the speech, dash across his... We're right there. In fact, I have one of the few original offices in the White House, dating from the OEOB. I run across and get up to the Green Room, and sure enough, there's two guys there, John deButts from AT&T and Gabe Hague from U.S. Steel. I think it

was Gabe anyway. I'm talking to these guys and made introductions and gave them a brief on how things were going. I've already run down into the East Room, to check that the people are there. You learn how to advance these things; tested the mike, ensured there was a speech there, looked at it; it was all there; saw Nessen and the folks, and everything's cool; dash back, down to the Green Room; had some more words with these guys, and the president walks in.

I said, "Mr. President, I'd like you to meet..." He greets them; he knows; he greets these guys. We're sitting down, the four of us, and we're talking for about five or eight minutes. I'm looking at my watch; I said, "Mr. President, it's time to go." He kind of okay, stands up...Here's the president; here's me; here's Hague and deButts, and we're walking down the hall to the East Room. I've got to tell you, I'm feeling pretty shit hot, man. Here, I'm calling the shots; we got the President of the United States. I'm on his left; we're going down, and we've got this East Room full of people, and it's going to be just fine.

He turns to me; he says, "I know these two guys behind me pretty well; who the hell are you again?" (both laughing) I said, "Mr. President, I'm John Borling, Major Borling, Air Force guy, White House Fellow." He said, "Oh, a White House Fellow." I said, "Yeah." He said, "You're working for Ted." I said, "I work for Ted." And he says, "Great."

Well, the upshot of that story is that—this is before the Thursday at the White House or Wednesday at the White House got set up—that I became John. Although we never double dated or anything, but we would have a lot of presidential contact. Gerry Ford was just a **really good** president, in my view, steady hand on the throttle. The two things that cost him the election, in my view, he bailed out Chrysler; he pardoned Nixon—three things—and he also gave a big thing to New York, bailed out New York. And he did things which he thought were right for the country.

DePue: There are a bunch of ways I **can** go here, but I'm going to take a couple steps back. Maybe this is just my fascination with politics, but did the whole Watergate scandal trouble you? You were just brand new, released from being a POW, getting re-acclimated to being an Air Force pilot and flying.

Borling: Aware of it. It's never the act as much as it is the cover up. Ah, Benghazi comes to mind.

Remember, as White House Fellows, we get to go back every year; there's a reunion. We've gotten so big now that we do it at the Chamber of Commerce, right across Lafayette Park from the White House. Then we may or may not have a White House reception. But we have cabinet officers, and we have often the president or the first lady. So we get to see, sample, put our

toe in the river of what the current administration is doing and how it's doing. A common denominator of all presidential administrations...

Although I give a nod to Michael Beschloss or someone who is much more attuned to this, or my classmate, Roger Porter, who served in three administrations.^{38, 39} He ended up being assistant to Bill Simon in the Treasury Department, and then worked domestic council issues, and then came back and worked for Reagan. So Roger has been close to that, head of the JFK School at Harvard. They let me go and take some courses there, but they wouldn't let me... Also, the same thing at the business school. So I've frolicked in and out of learning how to feather your oars on the river there.

The common denominator is that they get a circle the wagons mentality at a point in time. Loyalty to the president becomes, in my judgment, the litmus test that the wagons get more substantial and bigger, and the walls get bigger as time goes on, because it's such a vicious town. It's vicious from the standpoint of people trying to exact power and wealth factors in or out of the government. It turns into a very venal business, and then you add the business of politics, which is trying to get your people elected to get things done that you think are right. You can get this closeted, inside the beltway mentality really being dominant.

It takes a **really** wonderful president to be able to rise above that and to be able to do things that are... Every president wants to do it; they want to do what's right for the country. Every administration really cares about... They may have some kind of mandate they think, or some kind of thrust that they think would be good for the country. But in the end, they want the country to advance; they don't want the country to go backwards on their watch. They want to have a legacy that people say, "God, he was a great president."

Unfortunately, the presidents are just men or are just women and subject to the flaws of the human condition. They are helped with their flaws by making the flaws more apparent, to the extent that they abet a self-serving inner circle.

³⁸ Michael Richard Beschloss is an American historian and a specialist in the United States presidency. He is the author of eight books on American presidents and is *NBC News*' presidential historian, as well as a contributor to PBS's *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Beschloss)

³⁹ Roger Blaine Porter is an American professor, currently serving as the IBM Professor of Business and Government at Harvard University. He has served under three presidents, Gerald R. Ford, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_B._Porter)

In Nixon's case, the Haldemans and Ehrlichmans were mini- tyrants of their own.^{40, 41} Yet, for what we call a third rate burglary, the whole house of cards came shuttling down. Nixon did some **wonderful** things for America, opened up China, basically bankrupted Russia, held the course long enough in Vietnam for things to develop. [He] did price controls; that was wrong. Every president is going to do some things right and some things wrong.

DePue: How about EPA?

Borling: Well, I think EPA has well exceeded its bounds. I'm working on a book currently, at least I have an outline. This is in the last three weeks, it's come to mind. I'm going to call it *Top-Heavy*. It's going to be written in a fashion that will not be top-heavy from the standpoint of being able to lay out the major thinking. Governments get top-heavy, people get top-heavy, and we've got to restore balance.

Anyway, so in Ford's case, certainly political, coming off the House, but he had a good relationship with the Congress. He and Tip O'Neill would go back and forth, but they'd have drinks together. In fact, that's the thing that they ought to do, and they've just started it a little bit. But the president ought to invite both parties over, large numbers of them, for cocktails at 5:00 or certainly the leadership. It's very hard to get pissed at somebody or not do business with somebody where you've had a couple of martinis. That was a recommendation we all made, because we get to make recommendations.

But anyway, so Ford was, I think, better than most. President Carter, again, well intentioned. But I think he had a failed view of the world, was not well placed with his economic advisors. Remember the rampant inflation. He got set up by Iran and the desert, whatever it was, debacle.

DePue: Desert One, I think.⁴²

Borling: So I think his legacy is tarnished. Reagan got lucky, but God, he did a lot of things wrong with the contras and other things.

⁴⁰ Harry Robbins "Bob" Haldeman was an American political aide and businessman, best known for his service as White House Chief of Staff to President Richard Nixon and his consequent involvement in the Watergate Affair. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._R._Haldeman)

⁴¹ John Daniel Ehrlichman was counsel and Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs under President Richard Nixon. He was a key figure in events leading to the Watergate break-in and the ensuing scandal, for which he was convicted of conspiracy, obstruction of justice and perjury. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ehrlichman)

⁴² Desert One was the first staging area in Operation Eagle Claw, a failed U.S. Armed Forces operation ordered by President Jimmy Carter as an attempt to end the Iran hostage crisis by rescuing 52 embassy staff held captive in Tehran, Iran. Eight helicopters were sent to Desert One; when only five arrived in operational condition, the operation was aborted. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Eagle_Claw)

- DePue: We're going to have an opportunity to talk much more about Reagan. I do want to ask more about your reflections on President Ford.
- Borling: Yeah.
- DePue: First of all, what did you think of his pardoning of Nixon? He caught a lot of flak then and certainly when the election came around.
- Borling: I thought it was a courageous decision.
- DePue: How about his decision—this is kind of the first step—setting up a clemency board for some of the draft dodgers.
- Borling: Again, I think part of the task of leadership is, when you come through a tumultuous time with raw feelings all around, you've got to take steps to bring things back together. I for one, thought again, that was a courageous decision. It probably wouldn't have been one that I would have immediately recommended. But Kissinger said something that was wise, that I remembered. He said, "That which you are going to do inevitably, do immediately." Don't stick it in a little bit. You know, this was a fighter pilot; don't stick it in a little bit; stick it in all the way. (DePue laughs) So if you're going to do it, do it. I think I learned that, although I learned from Ted Marris too.

I can remember this one day, I got a piece of paper across my desk, and I knew what the answer was, immediately. Of course, I'm an ENTJ, so we always know what the answer is immediately. That's a Myers-Briggs profile.⁴³ So, I rushed in; I said, "Sign off on this. This is so important. Look at this," I said, "it's a major shift." I've even forgotten what the issue was, major shift of policy. Ted took it, read it, reached down to his lower right-hand drawer and slipped the paper in there. I said, "What are you doing?" Ted and I had a great relationship; he allowed me such latitude. Of course, I was working from 5:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night; I was on White House hours. Myrna, God love her was...

When we'd have to take the baby to the doctor, we'd bring the baby into the White House, Megan, and we'd stand her up on Ted's desk, strip her down. He was a pediatrician, so he'd give her the once over. She was doing this, and I remember this one day we were there—I guess it was Saturday—Verna was there, the secretary, or Mary was, and we were talking with Ted. We looked around, and we said, "Where's Megan?" She was, whatever; she

⁴³ The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an introspective, self-report questionnaire, with the purpose of indicating differing psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. The MBTI sorts psychological differences into four opposite pairs, "dichotomies," with a resulting 16 possible psychological types, each an abbreviation of four letters, representing the four type preferences. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers%E2%80%93Briggs_Type_Indicator)

was, a couple years old. So, we went out, and there she was, running down the hall. There was a hideaway office on the first floor—I've forgotten—the vice president's office is on the second floor; we were on the first floor. She was down by the hideaway office. She was a long way down the hall, starkers [naked], running as fast as her little legs could carry her. And then she turned around to make sure someone was after her. We were all after her, you know.

DePue: Big smile on her face?

Borling: Big smile on her face, running naked through the White halls, or through the OEOB halls.

Anyway, he puts this paper down in the bottom drawer, and he says, "You have to learn about the principle of skillful inattention." I've always remembered that phrase, and I'm still not very good at it. Sometimes, you just leave well enough alone, and time will cure it, or the world will keep spinning, and the issue that seems so critical today is a nothing issue tomorrow. What time is it, by the way? Have you got your watch on?

DePue: Eleven o'clock.

Borling: Okay, we've got thirty minutes more; is that about right?

DePue: Yeah.

Borling: That's a vignette from those days. But yes, what else do you have on Ford that you'd like to touch? By the way, again, eminently approachable, very solicitous of his wife, didn't know the pressures...Of course you know the pressures. I remember walking one day with Gerry Ford, with President Ford. Remember, the chiefs of staff in those days were Don Rumsfeld⁴⁴ and Dick Cheney.

DePue: I was doing some research. Holy cow, you've got Al Haig, Don Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, what a trio.

Borling: What a trio is right. I got pretty close to Dick Cheney, who was a special friend of Anne Armstrong's, and knew...In fact, Rumsfeld stole my desk. (DePue laughs) Did I mention that?

DePue: No, no. Well, good Illinois boy.

Borling: He lives in Virginia now or in Washington. I would come to work early, and I would go down to the OEOB coffee shop in the basement and get a cup of

⁴⁴ Donald Henry Rumsfeld is a retired American political figure and businessman who served as secretary of defense under Gerald Ford and again under George W. Bush. He is both the youngest and the second-oldest person to have served as secretary of defense. Additionally, Rumsfeld was a three-term U.S. Congressman from Illinois. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Rumsfeld)

coffee. There was this woman who had a game leg, and she would limp. She had a function there that no one...No one paid any attention to her, frankly; she was kind of a mousy little creature. I don't say that in a critical sense; it's just the way she was. But I'd be there early in the morning; she'd be there. I'd greet her, and we'd talk and go back and forth. I've forgotten her name, I'm sorry to say. We'd chat, and then I'd go up and get things cooking'. I was working Air Force plus White House hours.

I was actually determined to get as much out of that White House Fellows experience as I could. I would work those hours, so I could take a couple hours, maybe in the course of the day, to get over for an education program, which would go three or four times a week, plus stuff at night, plus...Myrna would come in. We were living a fast track. In fact, they did some articles in the *Washington Post* that were not very complimentary, about what a fast track I was on. It showed you how...You were under a lot of pressure to get a lot of stuff done.

There's one thing I'm not too proud of, where they characterized me going down the hall, and I've got to hit and elevator. I said, "Well, we're a minute from going up to 4:30 in the OEOB for a presidential conference or press conference, and I've got to be there. I looked down the hall, and Mary is running. I've got this reporter chasing me. I said, "She's not going to make it (thump) and closed the door, and off we went. He reported on that. (both laugh) I didn't feel real great about that.

But anyway, this woman with the limp, this one day—you were talking to me about my back—I said, "What do you do here?" I said, "We've talked and stuff, but I don't really know what you do." She said, "Well, I'm kind of in charge of the attic." I said, "We've got an attic in this place?" She said, "Yeah, it's full of furniture; I deal with furniture. My crew, we move the furniture." I said, "Do you have a stand-up desk by any chance?" She said, "Yeah, I do," she said. "I think we can find one of those." I said, "Would it be possible for me to get it down to 103?" That was my office, 103. She said, "Sure," she said, "I'll look after that."

I go up to my office, and I'm sitting there. About thirty minutes later, there's a knock at the door. This is still in the early morning hours. Here's a couple of burly guys, and they've got this beautiful carved standup desk. She's standing there smiling, and she says, "I think you'll like this one." I said, "Whoa!" I said, "That is a gorgeous carved walnut, not ornate but just nicely done, and just the right height for me; it was a big desk.

DePue: With a little bit of history even?

Borling: I said, "Where did you get this?" She said, "Well"—it wasn't the attic; they've got an annex someplace and an attic. She said, "Well, they say it was

President Jackson's standup desk." (DePue laughs) Holy shit, President Jackson's desk. So anyway, she goes away.

Ted Marrs comes in a couple of hours later, and I said, "You should see what I have." He walks in, and he says, "That's a beautiful desk." He was shorter of stature and the desk was too tall for him. I said, "And it's President Jackson's." Wow. So the story of this desk roams through the White House structure; John Borling has got President Jackson's desk.

One day I'm having a meeting in my office, and for some reason... I think it was Dick Cheney was in my office. He must have been the assistant... He was; he was the assistant chief of staff. So he comes over. We're having this meeting in my office, and we're talking whatever we're talking. There's a number of people there. He sees the desk, and he says, "Wow, that's really something; we heard about this."

About twenty minutes later my phone rings; it's Dick Cheney, and he says, "John," he said, "It's Dick." He said, "Hey, Mr. Rumsfeld would really like to have your desk." (both laugh) I can remember sitting on the phone... I said, "Well, you can tell Mr. Rumsfeld for me that he can have it." **That** week-end in the *Washington Post*—and I have the picture to prove it—there's Don Rumsfeld at **my** desk, working at his standup desk. Don and I have talked about this, and so has Dick. I said, "You're the bastard that stole the president's desk from me." We all laugh about it now.

Well, to finish the desk story. Later I went to supreme headquarters as the exec to the chief of staff, and the desk that sat in the exec's office—and I controlled every paper going into the chief of staff—was the desk at which Eisenhower established himself. There's a plaque on it, "At this desk, General Dwight David Eisenhower established allied command Europe and himself as the supreme allied commander." And there's my desk.

General Rogers, who was SACEUR (supreme allied commander Europe) at that time, came into my office one day, and he saw that. He said, "I want that desk." So he took my desk away, but it came back because it was a pedestal desk, and you could see his feet under the desk, and he didn't want that. So, I got General Eisenhower's desk back. Meanwhile, the chief of staff, who I worked for—four-star, American, soon to be Jack Chain; it was Jim Dalton—had Alexander Haig's old desk, when Haig was the supreme allied commander. So now we've got two desks, but I've got Eisenhower's desk.

I go to Strategic Air Command to be the exec to... In fact, Jack Chain, who was chief of staff of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force), took me with him to SAC (Strategic Air Command). I ended up walking in to be the exec to the chief of staff—seems like I've been an exec too many times—and the guy sitting behind the desk says, he said, "We know about you; you're the fighter pilot who's coming here to be the

exec to the CINC (commander in chief),” who’s also a fighter pilot. He said, “I want you to know that you’re going to be sitting at living history, because this was General LeMay’s desk.” (both laugh)

So now I’ve had Eisenhower’s desk; I’ve had LeMay’s desk; I’ve had maybe Andy Jackson’s. I’ve decided that the title of my memoirs is going to be, *Elbowing It*. (both laughing) I don’t know if it was Jackson’s desk or not, but it makes a great story.

DePue: Well, more about the Ford team, because this a—

Borling: It’s a great team.

DePue: ...colorful group of people.

Borling: Great team.

DePue: Mrs. Ford, your impression of her.

Borling: I didn’t know her real well, but as I said, she carried herself with such great style and grace. We’d see them at the official functions. She was always very kind to Myrna and Lauren. We didn’t take Megan other than a few times, because she’d go naked running through the halls. (DePue laughs) We have great pictures of us at the Easter egg rolls and at the Christmas things or when my folks would come to visit; I could take them anywhere and have all these wonderful pictures of Mom and Dad sitting outside the Oval Office. In fact, if the president wasn’t there, in the Oval Office, Ford kept the door open; there was a velvet rope. The Roosevelt Room, which is right off the Oval Office, which is where all the morning meetings and major meetings in the West Wing are held—

The West Wing is really small; it’s not big at all. People fight for little nook and cranny spaces there, but most of the business is done in the OEOP, except you’ve got the national security advisor and the chief of staff and the secretary, who is very important. I’m not talking about the secretary to the president; I’m talking about the staff secretary, who manages the paper flow.

Over on the East Wing, you’ve got the military aide; you’ve got the First Lady’s stuff in the East Wing, and the theater. Now, increasingly, the vice president, who never used to be in the West Wing, wants a West Wing office. So you’ve got to take care of that. You’ve got a couple counselors to the president who normally have a West Wing office, and you’ve got the press bunch, of course, which are there, and [Tom C.] Korologos and some of the congressional liaison have some small offices. But for the most part it’s a tiny little thing. There’s the White House mess in the basement and the barber shop.

But the point I was going to make, with Ford anyway, the door would be open, and I can remember walking with my folks. They have a Secret Service man there, and most people are just... You can walk, and you can look in. I can remember walking in, waving at the Secret Service guy, clipping the rope and walking my folks into the Oval Office. Not far into the Oval Office, because if the president came back, we...(both laugh) But there we were, standing there. For someone to have said that they've stood in the Oval Office, I thought was important. I don't think Myrna ever went with me and did that, but I had my mom and dad for twenty seconds. Then we went out and had pictures in the Rose Garden and around.

With a White House pass in those days you could wander anywhere. And with Ted Marrs, he had a parking place on Inner Executive Drive. If he didn't use it or Annette had dropped him off, I'd get to use it. In fact, more than that... We only had one car; sometimes I would take the bus down, and Myrna would come to East Executive Drive, honk the horn. The guys knew the car; they knew Myrna; they'd let her in, and she'd park on East Executive. You can't get into East Executive Drive with a **tank** these days.

It just shows you how the world has changed. Myrna would come flopping up, because once you're inside the structure... Now you've got to have passes, stuff, and God it's so... It's like the Pentagon; I can't go to the Pentagon unescorted any more. I have to be escorted by a sergeant. I don't have anything against the sergeant, but why the hell is a retired general officer not able to wander around the Pentagon and see. People say, "I haven't been in the Pentagon in years."

DePue: Did you have a chance to meet any of the rest of the Ford family, the children?

Borling: Jack, on occasion.

DePue: Is he the one that's going around now, talking about his father's experiences?

Borling: I don't know. The daughter...

DePue: Susan, I think.

Borling: Susan, yeah, I've met her a few times, but I didn't get close to the family. In fact, we were coming down, walking through again with somebody on the presentation floor, and Jack Ford came down. He had a pair of shorts on, and that was it. He didn't have shoes; he didn't have a shirt, nothing. He stopped and he said, "Oh..." He knew me in those days by name. I said, "Jack, this is your house. You can go anywhere you want to go." I said, "We're the intruders, not you." But he was embarrassed that he was kind of, *déshabillé*. That was one thing; we didn't have much to do with the kids.

I'll tell you a really good guy, cabinet officer, that I got pretty close to was [Casper] Cap Weinberger. I really thought he was a first rate guy. Cap had HEW [Health Education & Welfare]. It's strange how that occurred. This is going to sound a little self-serving, but it's a good White House story, again.

Shelley Buchanan, Pat Buchanan's sister or wife—I'm not too sure; I think it was his sister, Shelley Buchanan—was the West Wing receptionist. When you walk into the West Wing, there's a woman sitting there at a desk. Then there's a sitting area in there, waiting for whoever to come down to grab you to go to their offices or wherever. And Shelly...I was wandering through one day; she was new, and I'd been there a few months. I was wandering through, so I stopped and said howdy and made introductions.

She said, "Can you help me out? I've got a problem." I said, "Sure, what can I do?" She said, "I need somebody to represent the White House tonight at the Kennedy Center with Ambassador [Anatoly Fyodorovich] Dobrynin [Russian Ambassador]." She said, "There's this Russian concert going, and Dobrynin's going to be there, and he's got the concert master, and he's got a composer, and we need someone from the White House to go." She said, "Everybody that I've contacted can't do it, doesn't want to do it.

I've talked to the NSC [National Security Council]; they said just anybody was fine." She said, "Can you be anybody?" (both laugh) She says, "Here's the key." I said, "What's the key?" She said, "That's the key to the refrigerator for the champagne." I said, "Oh, of course." There were three theaters in the Kennedy Center; the president's box, in each one of those theaters, was obviously center. This was the big box in the Eisenhower Theater, had like eight seats. The other one, whatever it was, I've forgotten. Anyway, so I said sure.

So I get on the phone. I said, "Guess where we're going tonight? Get your tightest girdle on and your nice dress," I said, "we're going to the Kennedy Center." So, she drove down, and then we drove over to the Kennedy Center, parked and went up. We're waiting for Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin to show up, and a number of other functionaries from the Russian embassy, and the composer. So we were the official White House hosts.

DePue: And a translator, I would assume.

Borling: I think Dobrynin spoke enough English that it was okay, but he was a bore. Myrna and I are sitting there, and we're talking to the other people and being nice and listening to the Russian chorus do their Russian thing, opening up the champagne. I didn't serve champagne; everybody serves themselves, but I had the key. We didn't get invited to the opera thing at the embassy, which I thought was kind of strange. But we did our duty, and we were correct.

The next morning I go back and give the key back to Shelley. She basically says, this is such a pain in the ass, all these tickets to the Kennedy Center. [dog starts barking] The dog thinks it's a pain in the ass too.

DePue: (laughs) Yeah, obviously.

Borling: I said, "Well, if there's any way I can help you with it, let me know." And she said, "Would you?" I said, "Sure." She said, "Well look, we've got tickets for this and this and this and this and this, and little by little, trying to help out, it ended up that Shelley and I were working the tickets to the White House. Pretty soon it was more of an additional duty for me. In the last three or four months at the White House, I would hesitate to say dominant, but I could... Well, let's put it this way, cabinet officers were calling **me**, asking if they could have tickets to the president's box. I found myself in a delicate position, having to balance conflicting things, and I'd do it with Shelley. We'd also have...

I do remember one when the Bolshoi Ballet was in town. I was out of town. It was a Saturday, and I had tickets for Myrna and our daughter and for Gary Caruthers's wife—because we were all on a White House Fellows trip, Gary and I were—and his daughter to have seats. I was about ready to farm out the other four seats for the Bolshoi Saturday matinee, when I get a call from Cap Weinberger, who said, "John, is there a chance I can have four seats in the president's box?"

By this time, I'm locked in; I'm the guy, and Shelley and I have a nice relationship. I don't try to take any of her authority away from her, but she's letting me, essentially for a few months, manage the program, to the extent of, at the end when I'm leaving, I have people who are, weeks in advance—I'm going to be gone—who are...I'm assigning this stuff to.

I guess the upshot of it was they found out that I had too much authority in this, and they ratcheted it. I couldn't pass it on to somebody. This was a personal relationship that we had. I was very fair about it, but Myrna had more than her share of opportunities to go, so she shared the box [for] that one. She thought that was pretty neat, with Secretary and Mrs. Weinberger and their two kids, at a Saturday matinee for the Bolshoi Ballet.

That may not sound like very substantive stuff, but I've got to tell you, in the White House, if you're on an A-list for cars, if you have access to the White House mess, and you have access to the president's boxes at the Kennedy Center, you're doing okay.

DePue: Donald Rumsfeld has factored into a couple of your stories. What's your impressions of him during those years?

Borling: I thought he was a fine chief of staff, tough guy. I remember we were in a meeting with him, and people were talking about stuff. He said, "Everybody

wants to work substance, substance; everyone wants substance.” He said, “Remember this, process is substance.” Process is substance. So there’s a Rummyism for you, and he’s right. I’ve always remembered that. He had great confidence in Dick Cheney too, and Dick, as I say, when Don left and then Dick took over the—

DePue: Were you still there when Cheney—

Borling: Yeah, I was still there, yeah. As a matter of fact, we were having a private meeting with the president, four or five White House Fellows that worked right in the White House. We were having a private meeting with the president. There would be another one where there would be a major sayonara, when the president would...Ford was great access to us.

For me, I was there routinely, if anyone’s routinely with the president. I always felt a great sense of awe, responsibility, walking in the gates, of what a privilege it was to work at the White House and how important it was to do things right and to give it your all.

In fact, I patterned myself to a burnout. I was working hours...I moved from ten hours to twelve hours, to where I’d be getting home at midnight and going back and 5:00 or 6:00. Myrna said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m planning myself to burnout.” There’s always more work than you would...A lot of it’s the law, where you’ll keep getting work, and the work will expand as you have the authority to expand it or the desire to expand it. So I’m sure a lot of it was of my own making, but I was, at the end, working...

As I mentioned to President Ford once...I’m walking down the halls, and I’m saying, “I’m working on four to five hours sleep a night, and I imagine you, Mr. President, are doing that too, but,” I said, “I find that I have to crash about once every two weeks. I need to go down hard for twelve hours,” I said, “and I try to make my biorhythms work out”—this is when biorhythms were—“So that I get the best part of the day for the stuff that’s important.” I said, “Have you figured out your biorhythm pattern yet?”

He got very personal—I remember this—he said, “You know, I work the five hours sleep too, a night, and my biorhythm, my best time, is in the morning.” He said basically, “By the afternoon, I’m shot.” He said, “And the schedulers know that.” Warren Rustand was the scheduler. I knew Warren; Warren was an ex-White House Fellow, and Warren, and I would work.

Warren was from Arizona, and we’d talk about stuff, and you would pattern...So when it’s time to do the Thanksgiving turkey, you don’t do that in the morning; you do the Thanksgiving turkey at 4:00 in the afternoon, when you can just do representational things. The president has to be available for ceremonial stuff; it’s part of the deal. So you do that in the tired time, if you will.

There's this great picture in the White House. I forget where it was, but it shows Lincoln on the staircase, feeling a goat's, you presume udders, because the farmer's brought the goat to the White House, believing that this is desirous of presidential attention. Apparently the goat has some problem, and Lincoln is down checking the goat's udders. The president used to hold—like the king would or the prime ministers would—office hours, where anybody could come. So they'd just line up and show up. There was no schedule. If you had a petition for the president or a thing, you'd just show up.

This is obviously many years ago; this was not under Ford. But again, he was very, very open. When he would come down to my Thursday at the White House things, he'd blow his schedule and spend more time with the people and do things. He wouldn't do it all the time, but maybe three or four times out of the six months or seven months.

But I will tell you, I came away enriched by that experience, having a sense really how government and interagency things work, having a feel for how you need to be chary of power and even more chary of arrogance. I wish I could say I was immune from having had those ills from time to time, but I suspect precious few have. But boy, there's something when you pick up the phone, and you hear your secretary say, or you say, this is the White House calling. I mean, that's...that's...

When I used to run the Looking Glass from SAC, as the DO of SAC, and the twenty-four hour command post, you would pick up the phone and say. 'This is the Looking Glass calling. We're currently on station somewhere in the north of the United States.' But to say. "This is the White House...or when you're on the other end of the line, and I have been, "This is the White House calling." Boy, you sit at attention.

DePue: Two more questions for you, and one of them is going back to your promise that you had a story about your secretary. Do you recall what that was?

Borling: Oh, yeah. God, this might have to be off the record.

DePue: (laughs) You have to make a decision quick, whether it's on the record or off the record.

Borling: With Ted, I had a situation with Verna, the long-time secretary. This is the tension between executive officers and secretaries. She was rebellious. This is a personal relationship between him and his secretary that goes back a bunch of years, and I'm going to be the six month exec in there.

She had run a piece of paper in to him that should have gone through me. He's calling me in to talk about it, and I don't have any clue, because it came to Verna. She's supposed to ship it to me; she can look at it; she can give me talks, thoughts, whatever, but it comes in through me, because I've

got to know what the hell's going on. I don't mind some of the social stuff; that stuff, that's fine; let that go. But she did a paper of substance.

I walked out to her, and I said... This is early on, and I was being tested; she was a salty old gal. The door had closed, and I said to her, I said, "If you ever do that again," I said, "I will hit you in the... with an axe." It was a very dirty word. And she said, "You can't say that to me." I said, "We either work together," I said, "Or we take this battle in there." I said, "How do you want to work it?" She said, "Okay."

We never had another problem, which I attest to her great judgment and superior intellect and greater professional savvy and courtesy. I certainly don't attribute it to me. Sometimes the well placed invective can clear the air. I have great respect for her, and we became great friends.

DePue: The last question for today then. You've already expressed your admiration for President Ford. I think he has the distinction, if you want to call it that, of being the only person—

Borling: Only person unelected.

DePue: Unelected. Was he the right person for that time and that job?

Borling: I think that the overwhelming thinking would be that, boy, we were so lucky to have Gerry Ford at that time. Sometimes, in periods of stress, which the nation is always under, we can tolerate mediocre performance or uninspiring leadership or sporadic this, sporadic that, but America has, on often very narrow time limits and with seemingly almost divine intervention, brought forth people at the right time, who managed somehow to do the right thing. The country gets another shot of adrenaline, if you will, and it carries us for several generations.

Somebody said once, There's a lot of ruin in a nation where you hope that the administration or that the inherent thrust of people to live a comfortable life, versus living a life that has the opportunity for real national advancement attendant to it... I'm mixing my metaphor, here. Let me go back to that. I worry that the tendency to want to live a comfortable life or to live an overly risk-free life, on the part of the administration or of the people themselves, puts us in positions that where, in fact, we become uncomfortable and that there is so much more at risk.

Then, we've been fortunate as a nation to have leaders step up, imperfect as though they may be, and take us into a time when at least a couple more generations can see their way forward, when the slope of the line of American development is upward. That's a task, to stay in the game, where the slope of our development is upward.

Gerry Ford, I think, was one of those guys. I think Ronald Reagan was one of those guys, and I'm not just...I think, frankly, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was one of those guys. But it's never a perfect match; there's always going to be great error. But at the end of the time, is the slope of the line up, or is it down.

On such macro estimations, do we conclude yet another interrogation by Mr. Mark DePue, of this poor servant, John Borling?

DePue: Thank you, General.

(end of transcript #6)

Interview with John Borling

VRV-A-L-2013-037.07

Interview #07: September 30, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: I am with General John Borling today. We're in your home in Rockford, a beautiful scene on the river. We were just commenting that it went from summer to fall in one day. It's September 30, 2014, and it's been a couple months since you and I were last together. I know you headed up north, and I've been busy during the summer as well. It's great to get back with you again.

Borling: Always a treat, Mark. I congratulate you on, shall we say, a reduced splendor tie. Here we have him in a pink button-down shirt and a shocking blue tie, which goes very well, and an interesting tie pin.

DePue: Well, I should mention that this is in honor of my daughter's wedding this summer. She got married in August, and this is Malibu blue. I didn't know that Malibu blue existed.

Borling: Malibu blue, look at that; that's quite handsome.

DePue: That was one of her colors, obviously, and it goes well with pink.

Borling: Yeah, it does.

DePue: Well, let's get back to your career. Last time we talked, we were discussing, at length, your experiences as a White House Fellow. That sounded like a fascinating and intense period of time for you. One of the things didn't discuss last time was what was going on in the larger world. Certainly you have some thoughts and reflections about that. But before I dive into those questions, I want to ask you about what you were doing with the poetry that you had written while you were a prisoner and whether or not you were still thinking about poetry and writing poetry during this very busy time.

Borling: Yeah. As you recall, I had downloaded—using the verb that didn't exist in 1973—onto a cassette recorder—which I didn't even know existed—at Clark, starting and then finishing it up actually when I got back home to Riverdale, after a few days down at Scott Field in Belleville, where the families teamed up—most of us anyway, Myrna was there—and where I got my first taste of flying again from a great classmate who brought an airplane down.

Just to get back into this, I may be recounting things I've already told you. But I finished it up in Riverdale, Illinois while we were getting acclimated, Myrna and I and the little girl, and writing notes back. In fact, I had cards printed for the thousands of bracelets that I got back, in between this and in between riding around in fire engines and doing welcome home kinds of things.

The country really, if you think back on it, in every locale where a POW came back, turned with enthusiasm to the welcome home ceremony, almost, I think, as an expiation of feelings that people had carried over the long war years, which, by the way, puts us contemporarily into this thing with ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant], because the president stands up, and using circuitous reasoning, talks about how long and how hard it's going to be. If there's anything we've learned over the years, Americans don't like long and hard. They like go in, kick ass—I'm sounding like Sarah Palin now—but go in, kick ass, make it happen and get out. I happen to think that's the way you fight wars, and if you're not willing to do it, don't go in the first place.

That said, this enthusiasm of the general public in the various cities and towns around the country, certainly visited us. That, plus the transcribing of the book onto tape and getting ready to go back and be a productive

member of the Air Force, all—hopefully, a productive member of the Air Force—all, I think, compounded our personal situation, because I was running around on afterburner. I think Myrna would have liked a little more cruise control. But as part of that process, I had the book then typed up by a typist, and submitted for release to DOD. You had to go through that release process.

DePue: Released to be published?

Borling: Released to be published. In other words, you weren't able, at least in the old days—I don't know what the rules are now—as an active duty officer, active duty person, to have anything published that wasn't given DOD clearance, especially if you were dealing with matters that were sensitive or that DOD thinks are sensitive. The DOD and the State Department and the White House normally think anything is sensitive that is critical. (DePue laughs) And they will slap classifications of “confidential no foreign” on, if you say anything that is mildly irritating or has traces of calumny, according to their interpretation.

My book has got some shots in it that I take, but it came back cleared. I have the original manuscript with it still cleared, somewhere in the basement, but buried it then for—as you know—for the forty years. I hope that responds to your question, because at the end of the day, all that folderol with respect to the coming home resulted in me and Myrna having a come to Jesus meeting—in fact it was her meeting; I was just an attendee (both laugh)—saying, “If you wanted to be a professional POW for the rest of your life, great, go do that. When you're ready to come back to the real world, come back to me.”⁴⁵ So, she was pretty instrumental in centering my attention and getting us back, I think, on the track to being a nonprofessional POW Air Force officer.

DePue: Were you writing any poetry? Were you thinking in those terms?

Borling: I had certainly written, and have continued to write over the years, sketches and...It's intimidating to go back and read what you wrote twenty, thirty, forty years ago, refine some things, publish some things over time.

I do a lot of public speaking, as you know, and I have, even since I did it well before I was a captive and was pleased to, when we got into larger groups, head up the Toastmasters outfit, along with others and critiqued people and be critiqued, as Toastmasters do. We had an active Toastmasters deal. I pride myself with a certain facility on the public platform. [I] did that and then would make comment or do creative things as a part of that.

But in truth, other than private things...I would always write my wife poems on anniversaries and birthdays, rather than buy her a card. Nobody

⁴⁵ A come to Jesus meeting is any meeting in which a frank, often unpleasant, conversation is held so as to bring to light and/or resolve some issue at hand. (<https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/come-to-Jesus+meeting>)

reads the cards. I think it's a gigantic... Women do; I don't think men do. I think they get this Hallmark thing with all manner of roses are red, violets are blue business. You open it up, and you chuck it, even though it's got all these wonderful things from your daughter or your wife or things. Well, the women keep them; the guys chuck them, at least in my experience. I do; I don't know if you do. Do you chuck your cards?

DePue: Yes.

Borling: Pretty much so, yeah. Myrna's got a trunk full of them, but they're mostly... They're poems and things that I've written over the years, very private. She wouldn't part on them. In fact, some of them are, shall we say, finite in expression, that she says, "If I die before you do, you must burn these." (both laugh) I say finite in expression; that's a mild way of putting it.

DePue: So these are things she wants to take it to the grave with her.

Borling: No, no. She wants them burned in the yard before... If she pitches down the stairs tonight, my first task is not to call 911; it's to go to the basement and get the box and burn it.

DePue: Anybody who's going to listen to this or read this later on, are going to be dying to find out what's in those poems.

Borling: Ah, yes, it will. I've even done recently some rap things, just for fun.⁴⁶ I've got a friend, a professional colleague, who strangely [a] terribly cultured woman, loves gangsta rap. On her birthday last year, I did a gangsta rap, very mild, thing.⁴⁷

We happened to be on the phone the day before her birthday—notice I'm not mentioning her name—and we made reference to that. We were offshore; we were at a conference overseas. We were in Hawaii actually. I had sent her this little ditty, which she remarked to. She said, "It's my birthday tomorrow." I'd forgotten; I didn't know that, so I said, "Well, I'll have to come up with something particularly vile for you in the gangsta rap."

So, I did create something that is, not vile, but very suggestive and left it on voicemail. [I] have heard nothing. I suspect that this person, with whom I

⁴⁶ Rap is a type of popular music of US black origin, in which words are recited rapidly and rhythmically over a prerecorded, typically electronic instrumental backing. (<https://www.dictionary.com/rap>)

⁴⁷ Gangsta rap developed in the late '80s, evolving out of hardcore rap. It has an edgy, noisy sound. Lyrically, it is abrasive, as the rapper spins profane and gritty tales about urban crime. (<https://www.allmusic.com/subgenre/gangsta-rap-ma0000002611>)

have a certain economic interest as well, is probably reviewing the bidding with respect to any future dealings with me. (both laugh)

So, we run the gamut from the lofty Elizabethan or Petrarchan sonnets to something that's significantly less intellectually oriented.

DePue: But none of the things that you did post-release as a POW, as I recall, have made it into the book.

Borling: No, save *Taps on the Walls* itself and save a new introduction and a new back end and some editing of the poems. But they're 99.9 percent pure, just like Ivory soap.

There were some things that we didn't want in. For example, I wrote a poem on the day of my retirement, when Ron Fogleman, the chief of staff and Jane and I and Myrna met at midfield, out there on the academy plain. I wanted him to retire me; he flew out especially for that. He had other business, but we timed it so it could be the four of us. As it turned out, a few family members, over my protestations, showed up. I didn't even invite the superintendent, in fact, disinvited the superintendent. So it was just Foges and me, or "Buzzard" as he's called.

I had a thing, "On a rampart day in a something way..." that was two quatrains that were very meaningful, both to the Buzzard and to me and to Myrna and the kids. Everybody cried. I didn't cry; I was pleased to be ejecting from the force at that time, had had long enough. And [there were] some stories and things written, lost in the annals of time. But if you were talking about published stuff, the answer is no, long answer.

DePue: Why would you not include the poem, which is obviously important to you, about your retirement, in the book?

Borling: Because I didn't think it fit. The guts of the book were to be the things that I wrote in North Vietnam. The only exception to that, again, was I did, as I said, put a new front end on, a new back end on. [I'm] very proud of the dedication in that book, would commend people to read it. But then, [I] wanted to write a poem for every man and every woman, kind of encapsulating how we trudge on or march on or run on or get on with life. That's *Taps on the Walls* itself.

So that was written especially...and over the protestation of the editor, who, as it turned out, was very helpful. But I didn't let her do much editing, suggestions here, there, certainly on the front end, but the book is mine. I didn't want it to be the product of someone else's thinking or writing. A number of people did treatments, which I may have incorporated a sentence or two in the introduction or something at the end, but the rest of it was mine, so attest to the genuine nature of the book, and I think it, in fact, has helped the reception.

I'm still out. Here it's almost two years later now, and the reception for the book...Saturday night I was out, and people were running up to me with copies that they bought on Amazon or somewhere else and wanted an inscription.⁴⁸ I track it on Amazon to see where we sit, of the millions of books, where we sit in the rankings. We bounce from a quarter million down to up into the low thousands, depending on how much I've been out on the trail speaking.

Now, as the fall is upon us, of 2014, we'll be doing a good deal more of that. Veterans Day is coming up. I'm turning people down for the week, people willing to pay, which Myrna says, "Work your schedule better," because I'm doing some things without pay too.

In fact, I had one that was going to be north of, you know...Well, it's going to be in the many thousands of dollars, but I just committed to do something. A thing had canceled, and so I did something down here locally as a favor to memorial hall, which has been helpful to me over the past timeframe. I seem to be blabbering on.

DePue: Well, let me take you back to 1975. We talked a lot about that experience and your views of Gerald Ford and that important transitional presidency. But one thing we didn't discuss that happened during the Ford presidency was the fall of Vietnam—

Borling: Yeah.

DePue: ...April of 1975. I think you were still a Fellow at that time.

Borling: Yes, yes I was. (sigh) The term was "decent interval;" it was a Kissinger term. It was a suggestion that somehow, if we could just keep things hung together for a period of time, a decent interval, and then if things came unraveled, somehow it wouldn't be "our fault."

There were a series of maneuvers on the Hill that resulted in funding reductions and explicit lack of support [that] were just an invitation to the dance for the North Vietnamese. Here [I was], all these many years later, almost forty years later, with the fellowship year coming to an end, but it was a frenetic end.

I was, as is my bent, spread pretty thin, both in terms of White House responsibilities, albeit modest, compared to so many. But [I was] still putting in long days, leaving the house at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning to get down into the White House complex at first light and leaving, often, not until 8:00 or

⁴⁸ Amazon.com, Inc. is an American electronic commerce and cloud computing company based in Seattle, WA that was founded in 1994. The tech giant is the largest Internet retailer in the world, as measured by revenue and market capitalization.

9:00 or 10:00 at night. I was literally planning myself to a burnout. The experience was so illuminating, so heady as well, I think I probably suffered a bit of Potomac fever. Again, Myrna had a come to Jesus meeting about that and got me back into the land of the living.

I had transitioned from a foreign policy and a bicentennial focus into a circumstance where I was running a domestic program for the special events or the public outreach portion of the White House. It took an enormous organization. There were two of us; I had an assistant, the wondrous Mary Featherall. God, I haven't talked to her or mentioned Mary's name in years.

DePue: I do think we talked a little bit about that part of your experience the last time.

Borling: Plus, the fellowship program, in those days, was very intense, four or five events a week, where you would be off with a luminary in a private session or a dinner or a lunch, probing, discussing, learning.

There was a foreign trip that got involved as well in that timeframe, off to Kenya, Zambia, Kuwait, all manner of places. We were supposed to go to Nigeria, but there was a coup—nothing much has changed in Nigeria over the years—so they pulled us off of that, and we ended up going someplace else.

[This was my] first experience with the smoke that thunders; that's what they call Victoria Falls. They didn't have a bungee jump opportunity in those days, over that bridge that separates Zambia from Zimbabwe, Rhodesia in those days, that paradise, notwithstanding the black mambas.⁴⁹ I really would like to go back there and bungee jump off that bridge.

As recently as last week at the Van Andel Institute, up in Grand Rapids, where we were helping sponsor, in a small way, a Parkinson's symposium for my biotech company or the company with which I'm chairman of the business board, I met this intriguing woman, Emily something or other, twenty-seven years old, doctoral candidate in epidemiology, obviously very, very bright, marathon runner. In fact, we've pledged to run the 2016 Chicago Marathon together.

I think she has potential to be a White House Fellow. She needs to finish her doctorate and needs to do a few other things, but boy, she's been in Zambia and all those places and South Africa. She has a foster home, apparently, background, and has really made something of herself.

She promised that she'd run on ahead in 2016 and finish the marathon, and then run back and pick me up (DePue laughs) and get me through, so if

⁴⁹ Living in the savannas and rocky hills of southern and eastern Africa, the black mamba is widely considered the world's deadliest snake. Reaching up to 14 feet in length, although 8.2 feet is more the average, it is Africa's longest venomous snake. (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/b/black-mamba/>)

the knees and the hips hold, we'll give that a shot. That will be age seventy-six. I was going to run this morning, but I blew my schedule with emails and other tasks around here; this guy coming up from Springfield, Mark DePue, to ruin my whole day, before we take off for Phoenix tomorrow.

So, the track remains rapid, but all of this, in some respects, is free association that Mort Sahl termed abusive, funnels us back—that's supposed to be somewhat humorous—funnels us back into the Fellows experience and what was going on in the fall of Saigon.⁵⁰ I've used this rhetoric, this verbosity, to try to give you a feeling of pace in life and also, perhaps, a defense mechanism against that occurrence.

As I remember now, and say with no apology, I blotted it out, took note and didn't have any particular emotional or intellectual catharsis. [I] saw it kind of as a natural course of events, thought it was regretful, was dismayed by the helicopter evacuations off the roof, was probably of that group that thought, Well, that puts an end to that, and the loss is now complete.

But as the pathways of history have shown, you need to take a longer view. That longer view obviously is that Vietnam today represents...I would hesitate to use the word ally, but certainly friend in Southeast Asia of some significant import. And our economic and other relations with them, while not perfect certainly, are to be commended.

In large measure, I think one could make an intellectual case that, much like when you have a fight with somebody that ends up being your friend, it's almost like lancing a boil in some cases. Well, this was some boil, some lance, the Vietnam experience. But on balance, the world seems to have tripped on quite nicely in terms of Vietnamese and American relations.

I return to the notion that I took note but was not much affected by. That's probably an understatement. Again, you have to remember that psychologically a lot of us... I'll just hesitate to speak for the fellows, so I won't; I'll surmise this is the case, and in discussions with others, it has proven to be so.

But we have a broad tolerance for dealing with bad things. That broad tolerance is, basically, we have walls, even hastily erected walls, that don't let unhappiness or unpleasant things, without being Pollyannaish—God, how many qualifying words—we don't duck down behind, but we find that those tidal forces don't affect us as they affect other people, such significant matters as death of a family member or things. It basically doesn't affect. I'm sure some psychologist will have a hell of a time with that one. They already have,

⁵⁰ Morton Lyon "Mort" Sahl is a Canadian-born American stand-up comedian, actor and social satirist, pioneered a style of social satire that pokes fun at political and current event topics, using improvised monologues and only a newspaper as a prop. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mort_Sahl)

and we always beat them at their own game, because we think people who don't think the way we think, are weak. How's that?

DePue: (laughs) A revealing comment.

Borling: I think it's a very worthy comment. I have limited...and Myrna too. Now, here's an effect. I talked about the come to Jesus thing. God, she's as tough as I am. We, if something happens, okay, take note. Maybe she'll be a little more human, but then get over it, keep going; keep marching. You've heard me say that a million times.

DePue: Certainly, the Ford administration was not, at that point in time, ready to give up on this. They requested—

Borling: They tried.

DePue: ...something like \$522 million from Congress that turned them down, abruptly. Do you think that we should have gone back there and continued the struggle? Let me put it this way, do you think that war was winnable?

Borling: Well, I'm going to be a Bill Clinton now and ask you to define what's winnable. I've already indicated that winnable is often necessary to be judged by a longer view of history and what goes on, versus [General Douglas] MacArthur sitting on the decks of a battleship, taking the abject surrender of Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong and the defense minister—senior moment, I mean come on; I've met the guy; I've talked to the guy.^{51, 52} Who is the defense minister? He just died last year. It will come to me in a minute, but the other big three.

So, do I think that war...I think it was winnable in the early days. Once you get a revolutionary spirit, a nationalist spirit, a civil war spirit engendered, and you're not prepared to stay or work it for generations, you've got to remember; they're going to be there. So you need to either go in with—and I don't know another way to do it—in a reign of terror.

There have been very few hearts and minds kind of circumstances that have been won in this war, over the years, against uprisings or terror. It's always taken lots of killing and lots of pain and lots of destruction. Could we have done that? We could have done that early on, I think, but the nation was exacting that. It has to have just cause; it has to have support of the political and of the population. That political and civil support evaporates pretty

⁵¹ Ho Chi Minh, a former prime minister who also had served as president North Vietnam, was a key figure in the foundation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, as well as the People's Army of Vietnam and the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh)

⁵² Phạm Văn Đồng was a Vietnamese politician who served as prime minister of North Vietnam until 1976 and, following unification, as prime minister of Vietnam until he retired in 1987. He was considered one of Ho Chi Minh's closest lieutenants. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ph%E1%BA%A1m_V%C4%83n_%C4%90%E1%BB%93ng)

quickly, at least it has tended to do so over the course of history, especially when [there are] injurious effects because of that, be they economic or loss of life kinds of things.

Sir John Keegan suggested that military units start to come apart at the 10 percent loss rate, 15 percent loss rate, even lead, elite units. I don't know if we've come to a point where we've quantified when the political will evaporates, what percentage it takes or how much noise in the streets until the situation basically becomes "how the hell do we get out of it," rather than "win it."

Yeah, we could have won it, I think, in the traditional military sense of having a cessation of hostilities concluded on very favorable terms. But we lost that, because we let it go long. That seems to be our... We'll rape them a little; we'll just put it in a little, rather than jamming it home. That's my thinking anyway, and it's absolutely specious, because it's opinion, maybe based on historical realities. I can't support it any more than someone who suggested we do the exact opposite. The outcome would have been just as helpful.

DePue: I'm sure you've heard plenty of times, the conservative critique of the Vietnam War, that we won every battle, and we could have won that war if we'd only gone in and taken that military approach. Do you have sympathy with that argument?

Borling: Oh no, I do; I do. Again, I state that in the book. In fact, part of the poem, of the epic poem is,

*So once elected, war the objective, wrap it up neat and fast
It won't be pretty, and that's a pity, but better first than last
Moral, immoral, a senseless quarrel, winners are right in history
The fact is in war, I tell you once more, no substitute for victory*

With apologies to MacArthur.

DePue: Do you think the word "betrayal" would be appropriate or a bit of a stretch, as far as South Vietnam?

Borling: Well, who do you want me to put that moniker on?

DePue: The South Vietnamese people, perhaps.

Borling: Oh no. Oh, betrayal to the people. No, the South Vietnamese people were, in the main, like people everywhere, "Just leave me alone." "Let me get on with my life the best I can, and give me a chance to make things a little better in my life for the folks and kids and stuff," and grossly, those feelings notwithstanding, the literacy aspects of this.

I know a lot of colleagues, a lot of classmates, who felt that we, in fact, let them down. The word betray is not too injurious a word. If you look [at] what went on afterwards, there was a quasi-reign of terror, but there was also a good deal of nation building that the North Vietnamese did, even with the re-education camps.

And it wasn't too awfully long before they were engaged in Cambodia as the **only** force that was offsetting some of the terrible things that went on. They also had a dust-up with the Chinese; I forget the timeframe. And they were still heavily involved in Laos. All of this sounds reminiscent of the themes that seem to be so pervasive, and that is, that conflict is the norm and not peace or peacetime, that there are forever ideas, ideologies, economic, land, ethnic, resource, kinds of considerations that impel people and nations into conflict.

For us, absent leveling the north early on, I think that the path gets set to these interminable conflicts, where you're almost fighting to regain some imagined status quo, anti-status quo, anti, before things happened.

The Kuwait thing with Iraq, we'll just liberate Kuwait, and then it will be all right. Well, then ten years of peace, not war, and over flights and fighting that resulted in yet another war, which has resulted now in yet another war. We can't underestimate the Huntington battle of civilizations that confronts us now.⁵³ If we think that this is just another aberration, this ISIL, ISIS business, we are so badly mistaken, in my view. It may cause us to have some strange bedfellows, in terms of who's on our side for the moment and who isn't. But I see no outcome, absent a very, very ambitious and brutal attack on those forces.

You asked the question, "Well look, if they could take all this land in six months or eight months, and we're forecasting a campaign that's going to last for years, and we're supposed to be the most powerful nation, and we have this unprecedented coalition, what's not ringing true?"

DePue: You're obviously talking about ISIS, ISIL's current success in the Middle East is probably grabbing huge swaths of—

Borling: Yeah, yeah, sure. Do you know what ISIL stands for?

DePue: Yes.

⁵³ Huntington's battle of civilizations is a hypothesis that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-cold war world. In 1992, American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington argued that future wars would be fought, not between countries, but between cultures and that Islamic extremism would become the biggest threat to world peace. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clash_of_Civilizations)

Borling: What?

DePue: Islamic State of Iraq and Levant.

Borling: And the Levant. Do you know what the Levant is?

DePue: It includes Jordan, Syria, probably part of Israel, Iraq, a much larger area than—

Borling: It extends, depending on how you look at it, from certain provinces in Turkey, down the Mediterranean littoral, through Lebanon, Syria, you're correct, and Iraq, but certainly Palestine, Israel, which ceases to exist, Jordan and Egypt. This was the focus of establishing this caliphate.⁵⁴ I keep hearing these things about the moderate Muslims, and I would agree, there are moderate and good Muslims all over the world, all 1.5 billion of them. But if only 10 percent are radicalized—hell, if only 1 percent are radicalized—

DePue: You still have tens of thousands.

Borling: No, you've got millions. One percent of 1.5 billion is 15 million, larger than the combined armies of World War II at any given time. The loss rates were different; you had 20 million Russians lost or killed or died. One percent, I don't think, by extrapolation, that's probably too small a figure, too large a figure, depending on how you look at it, to think might fall into the ideological clutches of a rampant, fanatical Muslim movement. It certainly has in the past.

So, sports fans, we have a little work cut out for us. I can make the case where the weaponization of terrible stuff is increasingly reachable by groups. I'm talking germs; I'm talking chemicals; I'm talking, not so much the nuclear stuff, although that wouldn't be all that difficult, given material to create the quasi dirty bomb and make segments of the major city uninhabitable for a long period of time, Chernobyl-like stuff.

This is the challenge that mankind has produced, no less radical thinking to combat one another, but they accompany it now with a technological capability that can create broad swaths of desolation.

DePue: Let's take it back to the 1970s again.

⁵⁴ A caliphate is a state under the leadership of an Islamic steward with the title of caliph, a person considered a religious successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammad and a leader of the entire community. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate>)

Borling: I'm still in the White House, and it's still 1975. Remember, Mayaguez goes on in this timeframe.⁵⁵ My facts may be a little off here, but that was the start of this communications capability, where they were giving the White House the capability, basically the capacity in the SIT room, the situation room, to be a command post. They tell the story; it's apocryphal; I think it's apocryphal.

I've been in the SIT room and, again, memory ill serves me, but that the president, in fact, was listening to the ongoing business with the Mayaguez and the recapture and all of that business. And somebody had urged him to take the microphone and speak to the crews. Gerry Ford didn't do that, to his credit.

Once again it comes out, and we don't see it very often, that the military should be given the task, go do X, then don't do what's so often done. What's being done now is they're targeteering in the White House, just like Johnson did, picking the targets. What the hell kind of operation is this, where you have the highest leadership, even at DOD, picking the target? Pick the category of targets; talk about any restraints that you think should be on there, but don't sit down, "Well, let's hit that one, and let's do that one." This is **horror** story.

DePue: It's hard to imagine that LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson] would not have grabbed that mike and had a conversation.

Borling: LBJ probably would have flown out to Hawaii, while it was going on, and put himself in for another Silver Star (DePue laughs), which as you recall, he got a Silver Star for flying some mission off of Waikiki or some damn thing. I'm serious.

DePue: Yeah, I knew about that incident. You mentioned the Mayaguez incident, and that's a little dustup with the Khmer Rouge. How about your reaction to what happened to Cambodia afterwards and the killing fields?⁵⁶ Was that even comprehensible at the scale of destruction that was going on?

Borling: I think that there is a general aversion to—and I think some of its ethnic based—to even want to deal with it. I think at that point, we were in the "We don't even want to deal with it" mode. I think it may have been known, but it

⁵⁵ The Mayaguez incident took place between Kampuchea and the United States less than a month after the Khmer Rouge took control of the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, ousting the U.S. backed Khmer Republic. The seizure at sea of the merchant ship's crew prompted the U.S. to initiate what was the last official battle of the Vietnam War. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident)

⁵⁶ The Cambodian Killing Fields are a number of sites in Cambodia where, collectively, more than a million people were killed and buried by the Khmer Rouge regime, during its rule of the country, immediately after the end of the Cambodian Civil War in 1975. The mass killings are widely regarded as part of a broad state-sponsored genocide. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_Rouge_Killing_Fields)

was unfortunately just not able to be tolerated, intellectually or emotionally, by the population, by the world.

Later in life, 1997 timeframe, I had occasion to be involved with some really wonderful Cambodian people in Chicago, people who were survivors of the killings fields, and there's a killing fields museum in Chicago. Myrna has never been there—I haven't been there either, actually—but made a modest donation, but one that was large at the time and appreciated.

I got into some trouble with somebody. I get in trouble with somebody a lot. They'd ask me back then—this was in the '90s; I was the CEO of United Way—they were asking me about Southeast Asia and Cambodia. They said, have I ever been to Cambodia? I said, "No, but I bombed it." I meant it in jest, actually, and I said it much more lightly than I just said it now. But it really went down the wrong way with some do-gooders in the structure.

I found myself having to amplify my remarks, that I meant no disrespect, et cetera; it was just part of the game. I think it may have been, even though Cambodia wasn't on the list in those days, that we may have strayed south of steel tiger a time or two.⁵⁷ But in the end, the Cambodian forces, or people in Chicago, knew I was "on their side" and damped this down. I'd already made a contribution to this museum.

In the end, I think it was, how much Southeast Asia can you stand? So Cambodia kind of slipped in... The horror of the Khmer Rouge slipped in in the wake of Norodom Sihanouk, who was both a Francophile... He was also a neutral, helpful to us because Cambodia certainly was a sanctuary for the Vietnamese.⁵⁸ Any time you've got sanctuary situations existing, operationally it's a nightmare. You can scurry back across my yard here and be safe; that's hardly a circumstance you can tolerate.

DePue: And yet that's exactly what we're tolerating today between Syria and Iraq as well; that's the challenge that we're dealing with today. Well, I'm sorry, I myself am drifting back into—

Borling: Seventy-five. Well, what else in '75 though? When you think about those years, you had the pardoning of Nixon, which was a brave political move on the part of Gerry Ford. You had some economic dislocations that were going on, with respect to bailouts. And Ford took a position that he wanted to make

⁵⁷ Operation Steel Tiger was a covert U.S. aerial interdiction effort, targeted against the infiltration of People's Army of Vietnam men and material moving south from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam through southeastern Laos to support their military effort in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Steel_Tiger)

⁵⁸ Norodom Sihanouk, a former king and prime minister of Cambodia formed a government-in-exile in North Korea after a military coup ousted him. Following Khmer Rouge's victory in the Cambodian Civil War, he returned to Cambodia as its figurehead head of state. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norodom_Sihanouk)

the White House more accessible. The Nixon fortress White House business was very much on his mind, and in a kind of a Midwestern, “Y’all come,” kind of thing—We don’t say y’all in the Midwest—but in the Midwestern welcoming tradition, he took steps to reach out.

I was [blessed] to be a small part of that, in terms of inviting to this various special interest groups, business groups, et cetera to the White House. He and Betty Ford were a very stabilizing influence, in my judgment. I can remember talking with him. I can’t recall the circumstance. There was a couple of us; it seemed strange that a White House fellow would have opportunity to engage the president in private or a personal discussion, but it happened this day, and we’re talking about biorhythms.

DePue: Yeah, I think you mentioned that story the last time.

Borling: Did I mentioned that about the morning...? Yeah, yeah. So that was something. He was just a very real guy. Every president has such tremendous forces working that it’s almost impossible...It is impossible to be error free, because the decisions that come to the desk are...If they were easy decisions or there was something that was a slam dunk, it’s already done down line; people have already taken credit for it.

It’s only the stuff that gets to the president that often is the worst of two choices or the best of two bad choices. If they do the position papers right, it does get down to two or three things that are normally very, very hard and gross approximations of what should or could be.

I think about this with the presidents as you go through, from the Johnsons and the Fords and the Carters and the Reagans. The ones that seem to do the best are the ones that put it in pretty stark terms. “We’re going to do this;” “We’re not going to do that,” and will go against their best political judgments and future. The presidents that get into trouble are the ones that try to get—and it’s very hard not to—overly political and overly clever. So, give me people who get elected to public office—and I think Gerry Ford—who are there to do their very best for the country and devil take the hindmost with respect to their party or the political realities.

Now there’s nuances to all of this. Certainly, Ford was a Republican and did things for the Republican Party, but he was much less wedded to the notion that, gee, if I pardon Nixon there will be a firestorm—and there was—and that will be bad for the party and bad for my reelection chances. We need people to quit thinking about the next election and start thinking about next generations.

DePue: If you don’t mind, let’s get to your next assignment beyond the White House Fellow year.

Borling: It was great; I patterned myself to burnout. Again, I left the White House structure. There was something just so awe inspiring about being able to drive up to the gate and walk in or drive in, in some cases, and to have the full run of the place. Not only that, but be able to take whoever I wanted, with no prior clearance, and just, "You want to go see the White House, fine; let's wander over and take a look."

And it was an enormous responsibility. I still have my White House pass. It's stamped "canceled" now; no one would do it. I was never a scrapbook person, but I kept pretty good scrapbooks from the White House Fellows year, because it was such an honor. That's what it was; it was an honor to be able to, again, be such a small part of it and to try to influence, again in a very small way, the goings-on of such large issues.

I'll be back at a White House Fellows... We go back every year or have the opportunity. We've grown now into a steady state organization; it's about 700 strong, those who are alums of the program. We're kind of, actuarially, where we're going to be. (DePue laughs) This is the fiftieth year from formation in '64, under Lyndon Johnson, with John Gardner, my great mentor, the instigator, if you will. We'll go back, and the program is set. Interestingly, it's set after the midterms, so that's going to be something.

Our lead off speaker, invited anyway, is Secretary Kerry, a controversial figure in my view, seems to be acquitting himself fairly well as the secretary of state.⁵⁹ I think he's much more substantive than his predecessor, Hillary Clinton. But that said, that's just my personal opinion. We're going to have the supreme [Supreme Court justice]... We always have a supreme, and it's going to be Kagan this year, and a number of others, again, representing the legislative.⁶⁰ And the journalist, Tom Brokaw, [we're] going to beat him up a little bit, even though he's going to get an award. And we've got one of our own who gets a Legacy of Leadership Award, the Gardner Award; it's going to be Myron Ullman this year.

The theme is a good one; it comes from Robert Frost, *Stopping by the Woods*.⁶¹ We're calling it "Promises to Keep," because the commitment, when you become a Fellow, is that you will spend a lifetime then, trying to advance the worthy cause of state and nation, that you'll try to be about things that are helpful to the advancement of the American condition. An imperfect, not very

⁵⁹ John Forbes Kerry is an American politician who served as the 68th United States secretary of state from 2013 to 2017. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Kerry)

⁶⁰ Elena Kagan is an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, nominated by President Barack Obama in May 10, 2010 and confirmed by the by the U.S. Senate in 2010. She is the fourth woman to serve as a Justice of the Supreme Court. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elena_Kagan)

⁶¹ "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a poem written in 1922 by Robert Frost and published in 1923 in his *New Hampshire* volume. Imagery, personification and repetition are prominent in the work. In a letter, Frost called it "my best bid for remembrance." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stopping_by_Woods_on_a_Snowy_Evening)

directed approach, but we gather, in small groups and large over the course of the year, and we do this one convention thing and then provide our assessments as we trip through life, hoping that we're giving back.

So we have promises to keep. If you look at the range of the Fellows who have impacted on the national scene, it's not lacking and will not be lacking. It's very much a part of our assumed charge that we have such a responsibility. So, we'll go back. The wives get to go too, or the spouses get to go too, so it's kind of fun.

DePue: Where to after that kind of an assignment?

Borling: Armed Forces Staff College. I was a major, had been promoted a major on time, and there was a six month intermediate service school, joint school, at Norfolk in those days, on a compound over there in Norfolk, Virginia Beach area. It was a walled compound with Marine guards. We lived on base. You could let the kids out in the morning, and they could roam this place at will, because there were Marine babysitters at the gate, so they couldn't get out.

DePue: Why that, because there was an Air Force Staff College as well, correct?

Borling: You have the Air Command and Staff College, which was a major level or intermediate field director rank. You've got SOS, or the Squadron Officer School, then you've got these mid rank schools. Armed Forces Staff College is no more. Now, you've got a Navy counterpart, an Air Force counterpart and an Army counterpart. Leavenworth is Army Command Staff; Army War College is at Carlisle; Navy War College is at Newport. There's a naval something or other, command and staff, somewhere, and then everything for us is down in Montgomery, both Air War College and Air Command and Staff, which is a year-long program.

Well, in my case, I needed to make up time, so I wanted a six-month deal and was lucky to get selected for that. I put it in on my dream sheet and expressed interest in going there and was very fortunate to be selected for this, in those days, considered the best of the intermediate service schools, because it was joint, and you could get in and get out, and it was great. Jerry Denton happened to be... Was Jerry the commandant?⁶² I think he was when I got there, because I can remember writing or doing some speeches for him and Jane. I miss Jerry; he died this year, as you may recall, or last year, in the recent past.

⁶² Jeremiah Andrew Denton Jr. was a U.S. senator, a United States rear admiral and naval aviator held captive for eight years during the Vietnam War. As one of the earliest and highest-ranking officers to be taken prisoner in North Vietnam, Denton was forced by his captors to participate in televised propaganda, during which he confirmed for the first time to U.S. Naval Intelligence that American POWs were in fact being tortured. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah_Denton)

Ken Kirkpatrick, he was a lieutenant colonel, and he was kind of our leader for our particular section. He was a good guy; he was a smart guy, and he was Vietnam experienced. I remember Ken, who had kind of a diffident manner, but no less intense, with respect to the various disciplines we studied while we were there, at field grade level, and had associations with the various other services, which frankly, I hadn't had, except in the war experience, so Marines and Navy and Army guys. It was very satisfying. We lived in these little, dismal quarters on base, but we thought they were great.

Some of the things that come to mind... "Retreat" always sounded, at close of business day, if you will, or close of day.⁶³ We were just a block away from the parade ground, a block and a half maybe, where the big flag would come down, with the Marines and all of that stuff. By this time, my daughter, Lauren, was ten years old, and the little girl, born in '74, was a year, almost two years old, year and a half. I can remember them toddling off, hand in hand, to go a block and a half away to stand retreat. All the kids would get there; there'd be fifty little kids standing there with their hands over their heart, and we would go out and stand retreat with them.

I think back to that Jackie Gleason movie, *Soldier in the Rain*, where he was the scheming supply sergeant, ripping off everybody.⁶⁴ But at the end of the movie, there's this particular thing where he, and I think it was Steve McQueen... They start to play retreat, and McQueen says, "Let's quick, get inside." And he says, "No, no," and he goes out, and in the rain, stands retreat, a powerful moment.

I talked about the walls before, but I tell you, I get operatic chill from, be it on the plains of the academy or wherever retreat is sounded. And rather than try to avoid it, I would seek it out. If you're in a car, some say you just stop and wait in your car, with the others whizzing by you. I make it a point to get out of the car and stand and salute. In fact, the new, not so new, protocol business is that veterans are supposed to salute for "Star Spangled Banner" and for other things, even though they're not covered, at football games or wherever, that you're encouraged to render military salute, where before you would just kind of stand there with hand over your heart or baseball cap or whatever. It's a little imperfect yet, and people still aren't accustomed to it, but retreat is really something.

So anyway, the kids at Armed Forces Staff College would do that, and it would not be unusual to have men, women, kids, several hundred deep, out there standing voluntary retreat, and certainly anywhere on the base, because

⁶³ Retreat, a bugle call, is a military signal for the end of day, known as "Sunset" in some countries. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retreat>)

⁶⁴ *Soldier in the Rain* is a 1963 comedy film, based on a 1960 novel by William Goldman and concerns the friendship between an Army Master Sergeant (Jackie Gleason) and a young country bumpkin buck sergeant (Steve McQueen). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldier_in_the_Rain)

this was a very small compound. Things just came to a halt. It's almost a freeze, as it should be, a freeze moment. Same thing with the raising of the flag in the morning. But they normally did it... The guys were up and out running and doing something; they'd stop and do the raising of the flag ceremony. But when "To the Color" would sound, that was important, still is, still is.⁶⁵

Another vignette, on a much less moving basis, or perhaps not, physiologically speaking, there was an affair of some importance during our six months there, wives club generated, all services certainly. There was to be a contest, various contests. One of them was a pastry contest. I recall the night before, we had everybody over at our place, and we were doing what young field grade officers do and their wives, drinking and going on with this and that and having a grand time.

Somewhere, it came up that there was this pie contest that was going to be there the next day. So, the guys figured out that we ought to enter an apple pie into that contest, showing them what we would do. So at about midnight or so, (DePue laughs) we started making apple pie. Of course, I'm the marketer in the crowd, so I decided we would call it the whatever our section was—section twenty-four alpha or something—all American, Bicentennial, Red-blooded American Apple Pie. Someone went off and made this sign about the apple pie.

The rest of us went to work making this apple pie. Well, we didn't really have all of the necessary ingredients, but we had Crisco [shortening], and we had flour, and someone found some canned apples someplace. We were throwing those in there and cinnamon and whatever else we could figure out. I kept telling the guys, "Making the dough, you want to knead the dough as little as you can, and you want to use just a minimum of Crisco." We had a lot of hands in the broth; we had a lot of cooks working this thing out.

DePue: With a great amount of expertise in making apple pies?

Borling: Well, I knew how to make a pretty good pie, actually, and I thought I was good, but I think the canned apples didn't hack the course, as I remember, and we were short of cinnamon, I think, so we may have substituted nutmeg or some damn thing. Anyway, we kept throwing stuff into the pie. We made this pie, and we put it in the oven. It was my job in the morning, because it was my oven, to get the pie out and to have it gel and get it over with our sign—the sign was very important—into the tasting zone.

⁶⁵ To the Color is a bugle call to render honors to the United States. It is used when no band is available to render honors, or in ceremonies requiring honors more than once. To the Color commands all the same courtesies as the National Anthem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EsUvNz_i60)

As I remember, we may have cooked it a little long, but long or not, it came out of the oven and sat on the counter. I remember saying to myself, Boy, this is really a heavy pie. I got it over at 7:00 the next morning and put it into the queue and put the sign up and went away. I must tell you, I hadn't had the foresight to taste the pie. They tasted the pie in the course of the day. (DePue laughs) I guess it was really bad; delta sierra comes to mind.⁶⁶ The sign was great, but this thing weighed about twelve pounds. The crust was as thick as my wrist. The poor judges just chiseled their way into this thing.

We, of course, were heartbroken that we didn't win. (both laugh) One little tiny piece was taken out of the pie. At that point, after they had the little tasting piece, I got into it. You needed a jackhammer (DePue laughs) to get into this thing. So, we got into it, oh God, what is this? Tastes like shit, but good, but good, the old joke about moose turd pie, up in the hunting camp. So, that was an experience at Armed Forces Staff College.

I remember, we did a lot of war gaming stuff. It was very much an operational school. In fact, I thought the war gaming stuff was higher level stuff than what we were involved in, but I guess it was focused at the action officer level, which creates the planning aspect. A lot of business with respect to logistic TPFDDs [Time Phased Force Deployment Data] and things of this nature, to impact the logistics aspect of it. What ships by rail? What ships by sea? What ships by airplane, which is fast but very, very expensive? And you don't impact it much. You think about how many C-5s it takes to put things in theater. Then the first ship lands, and it carries more in one journey than all the C-5s that we've been flying for the three weeks it's taken to load out the bulk or the cargo ship. It's an interesting arrangement, a lot of stuff on logistics.

DePue: In other words, you're being trained to be midrange or higher level staff officers as well.

Borling: Exactly, yeah, and with a fair appreciation for command things, a lot of history, a lot of psychology. We did a lot of interactive, with respect to troops and integrity and things like this.

DePue: Well, you're right in the midst of all kinds of American history and a lot of military history as well.

Borling: We are. The MacArthur Museum, for example, is right there in Norfolk and still a place that most people don't even know about and so very worthy, downtown Norfolk. We got down there often. We had civilians, by the way, which is another advantage of the school.

⁶⁶ Delta sierra is a military acronym, from the Vietnam War era. It stands for "DS" which is how military personnel would describe a bad situation or poorly planned mission. It stands for "dog shit." (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=delta%20sierra>)

DePue: DOD civilian?

Borling: Well no, State Department...DOD, State Department and other civilians. So you had a fair amount of rub-off here that was pretty good. I will tip my hat to you, David Loving. David was in our section, and he was State Department, and David was very expressive. He was a much more sensitive type, a much more intellectual type than us devil-may-care, scarf in the breeze, fighter pilot and infantry officers or artillery guys, who are still pretty rough around the edges, if you will, notwithstanding some world class experiences.

David was...I'd hesitate to call him effeminate, but he was less...He was, as I say, more given to expression and took a little ribbing in that regard but was part of the gang and certainly contributory in many ways and expansive in terms of his thinking, and thereby, increasing the boundaries of our own thinking. I congratulate David for that; although, I'm not sure we appreciated it as much as I did in retrospect.

But I will not forget the night...Again it was at our place. (laughs) In those days, Myrna was much more conducive to me saying, "Hey, we've got fifty people coming over, get the Bisquick and the dog food, and whip up something, because we'll be there in twenty minutes."⁶⁷ You'd just show up, and you'd start to party; it was kind of that. As I say, she's mellowed; no, she's hardened over the years. (DePue laughs) I would probably not be able...I could do that down at the little boathouse probably, but I couldn't—

Anyway, we were impressed by David...press ganged by David, to buy tickets for an opera in Norfolk, at the coliseum there. He had made this speech about how good it was going to be and that we all had to go to the opera. Well, we hadn't been to an opera. I'd never been to an opera, so we all bought tickets.

Well, this party that's set up, David is going to instruct us in the opera. He was a season ticket holder in Washington, at the Washington Opera, which was pretty...Later I became a season ticketholder at Washington, third row seats, Saturday night. Never should have let those seats get away from me. Anyway, I did; economics drove it. Opera seats are expensive.

David brought his records over [of] this opera. I forgot what opera it was, but it was a classic, either a Verdi or a Puccini opera. He wanted to play the opera and lecture to us as a part of the preparation for going to see the real opera. Well, the first act went down pretty much okay, as I remember. David is lecturing and holding forth, and we're all sitting around listening to this music and drinking. When it came time for the second act, we got much more interested in drinking and ridiculing David. (DePue laughs) We never got to the third act or fourth act or whatever it was. Anyway, David took a lot of crap

⁶⁷ *Bisquick* is a pre-mixed baking mix sold by General Mills under its Betty Crocker brand, consisting of flour, shortening, salt, and a leavening agent. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bisquick>)

that night, after trying manfully to instruct this unruly crowd in terms of the mysteries of grand opera.

We ended up, the next Saturday night or whenever it was, going to the opera. I remember being singularly unimpressed. Now, we didn't have real great seats, remember we were in the balcony, up on the right side, cheap seats. You can't afford the \$200 seats down front. Yet there was something there. I like music; I play the piano, a little bit anyway, and like jazz and stuff. But I've never publicly been able to commend David for at least lighting a spark. It fizzled and died but later got relit. Now, of course, Myrna and I are just great lovers of opera. Still, we're pretty selective. We don't go for the wild new stuff, and Wagner is elusive. But that was, again, one of the benefits of Armed Forces Staff College. It only lasted six months, so the speed of it was good.

Talking about the speed of it, we've been speeding on here for a minute. I have another observation or two about Armed Forced Staff College, but let's pause a second if we can.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We are back from a very brief break. General, you said you had a couple other observations about the Staff College.

Borling: This business about TPFDDs and TPFDLs, Time Phased Forced Deployment List, that's the TPFDL. TPFDD, Time Phased something something Delivery. One of it has to do with people, and one of it has to do with stuff, but it is... We were using primitive, primitive computers. This is back, trying to affect movement of forces and materials to a particular theater.

The process is no less strenuous today, assisted on one hand, by increased automation, also bedeviled by it, because what you don't want to have happen is the ship's at the port, it's got a sail by date, and either the troops or the stuff that's supposed to be on the ship doesn't show up. Often you don't know this until the ship gets to the point, and then you find out that... You unload the ship, and you find you have fire extinguisher hoses when you really wanted fire extinguishers, or that you wanted a group of combat engineers, and you get the post office department that shows up.

It's a terribly complex circumstance, and trying to take the errors out of it with all our automation, my observation would be that we often factor in error because of the complexity of the circumstance, airplanes taking off empty, going to a location, because they have to be there the next day to pick up another load to go someplace else, and the stuff didn't make [it] that was supposed to get on the airplane. Or if it does make it, it's the wrong stuff.

The frictions that Clausewitz talked about of combat certainly exist within the movement of men and women and supplies.⁶⁸ And much like war planning, a lot of this of course, if you look at the von Schlieffen Plan, it broke down because of the ability just to move troops over available road space, in terms of that envelopment of Paris, et cetera. It was a brilliant plan, except when it got to the point where the movement of requisite troops and materials, the road system couldn't handle it. So similar to us, we fly into a forward operating location; we've got all this stuff; it's stacking up on the ramp, and you can't move it off to get to where it is. It takes a longer time.

Yet, I was impressed with the planning factors in World War II, where it was back of the envelope stuff, where they did [Operation] Overlord in the attic of National War College, structure.⁶⁹ I forget how long it took them, but they just took everybody in there, and three or four months later or less, it was done, Overlord, the largest and perhaps the last great seaborne invasion force.

Now, you'd be so vulnerable to high tech weaponry that to have an opposed landing with millions of men on both sides kind of thing, it's almost like the armed knights going off to war, that we wouldn't do it. Although some suggest that our infantrymen are so bogged down with Kevlar and all this business, sixty, seventy pounds worth of armor, that the enemy forces, in their sandals and skirts and turbans, are literally running around them, that the guys have a hard time maneuvering.⁷⁰ So there's always this ponderousness.

Well, at the Armed Forces Staff College, we were dealing with this ponderous nature, and it brought it home that the frictions of war tend to be getting stuff lined up and then moved and then moved again. You want to restrict the number of times things are handled and the things are moved. Our process, I don't think still does that very well. But gearing up for war is not an economical venture in terms of the planning factors and then the execution factors associated with it. So that's one thing.

We got orders, quickly. We hadn't been there but three months or so, and the orders started to filter in. My final on orders was to go to Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia and fly F-4s again. So, I had taken leave and gone down to Valdosta, Georgia and bought a house, a place called

⁶⁸ Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, a 19th century Prussian general and military theorist termed friction as the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. According to Clausewitz, friction is caused mainly by the danger of war, by war's demanding physical efforts, and by the presence of unclear information or the fog of war.

⁶⁹ Operation Overlord was the codename for the Battle of Normandy, the Allied operation that launched the successful invasion of German-occupied Western Europe during World War II. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Overlord)

⁷⁰ Kevlar is a synthetic fiber of high tensile strength used especially as a reinforcing agent in the manufacture of tires and other rubber products and protective gear such as helmets and vests. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevlar>)

Tanglewood. It was a for sale by owner thing, so I was able to get it pretty cheaply. I called my friend, the banker, up in Chicago, and we got the requisite monies to buy the house. That was important, because I couldn't really qualify on my pay for a house.

DePue: Were you or the Air Force giving you another stateside assignment, rather than overseas? Did it have anything to do with being a POW?

Borling: Well remember, I'd only been back, by this time, less than two years or two years, two and a half years. So, I don't know. I got orders to go to Moody Air Force Base and F-4Es or Ds, whatever they were, and that was fine. Moody, Valdosta, Georgia, great, glad to go back to fighters again.

This house that I bought, this is a bit of a stretch, because leaving George Air Force Base for the fellowship year, where I had flown both RTU and then [I] was there operationally there for a while. I bought the house we'd rented, Newt Bass's house in Apple Valley. I was so enamored of this house on the hill. Newt Bass was a developer, and we had this acre estate, a very modest house, probably 1,500 square feet, a little three-bedroom house. But it had been a place where Darrell Pyle and others had come. We had had the next child. Our next door neighbors were the Robsons, June and Jim Robson. She was the assistant to Roy Rogers, and we've, I think been through that business. So, we got teamed up with Roy Rogers again in Apple Valley and would watch our daughter trip off to school across the high desert. We had the baby there, and it was all kind of a thing.

So, I'd bought this house for \$23,000. Then we'd gone to Washington, and we'd gone into considerable debt. The fellows program costs you money; you don't make money on it. Some of the other people were getting civilian wages, but I was just getting my military wage. Washington was expensive, and we were renting in North Arlington. Then we had to move again, and we went down to Armed Forces Staff College, living in quarters. And then I went down and bought another house in Valdosta, and now we're hanging on, financially.

I decide to make a visit over to Langley Air Force Base, the Air Force side. The first wing is just getting up, just cranking up with the F-15s, the Eagle. The commander of the first wing was Colonel Larry Welch, Larry D. Welch. General Welch had been my vice commander out at George in F-4s. I don't know if I've already relayed this story or not, about how Welch and I met?

DePue: I don't think so.

Borling: We'd gone back to fighters in the replacement training unit of the combat training school there, short course in F-4s, and I was the class commander. The dining in or dining out, formal party at the end was something that I was

going to MC [master of ceremonies]. We had invited the wing commander, Colonel Beaver, who declined, in favor of having the vice commander do it, and his wife, a certain Colonel Welch and his wife, Eunice, who I'd never met.

So, there's this party at the George Club. We're sitting there with the Welches at one of the tables, and I get up to introduce him, because he's going to be the speaker; that's the deal. I said to the guys, I said, "Colonel Beaver, the wing commander, couldn't be with us tonight. He declined to attend. We really wanted to have Colonel Beaver here," who was the wing commander at this graduation ceremony," I said, "But instead, we have the vice commander and his wife with us, Colonel what's his name." (DePue laughs) Everybody laughed, and I said, "Oh, Welch, Colonel Welch is with us tonight, and he's got something to say to us. Let's give the vice commander a hand."

Welch walked up and gives me the old, you know... Well, in the course of his speech, and he's a wonder... Larry Welch is the most intelligent officer, I think, that's ever worn an Air Force uniform; he's that smart, brilliant man. He used the words, "the mass of men," or he used a quotation, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," and went on to express that theme, quoting Thoreau.⁷¹

At the end of that speech, I went up and thanked him. Then, as an aside as we were walking off the dais, the podium, I said, "Do you know the rest of the quote?" He said, "The rest of the Thoreau quote?" He said, "No." I said, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet, and what is confirmed desperation is merely resignation." I said, "Sir, it's my thought that one should never be resigned." He nodded; he shook hands. I said good night to him and his wife, Eunice. He went his way, and I went mine.

Years pass, and Larry Welch is now the premier wing commander in the United States Air Force. He is the commander of the First Tactical Fighter Wing at Langley. They're just starting to build up to get the first operational wing of F-15s.

With temerity, I request an office call and go over to this office building at Langley and walk in there. This is within two weeks of me leaving Armed Forces Staff College and going on down to Valdosta. Anyway, I guess I had to go to the BX or something over there. I wanted to go to the BX at Langley and went over there. [It was] maybe three weeks.

I walk in; we sit down, and he greets me like we're... I'm still Major Borling, and he's Colonel Welch. We sit down, and he starts holding forth on the budgetary process and this and that, and God, I just found myself blown

⁷¹ "The mass of men..." from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, is perhaps Thoreau's most frequently quoted saying. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/finding-meaning-in-imperfect-world/201806/do-the-mass-men-lead-lives-quiet-desperation>)

away by the expansive intellectualism of Colonel Larry Welch. We have a nice enough chat; we talk about this and that. I don't really remember any more specifics, except this.

He's got a long office; it goes...to this room, the door is here, and his desk is there, and I'd been sitting across the desk from him. I go over to the door, and I had my hand on the knob; I'm turning the knob of the door, and I looked back at him, and I said, "You know, Colonel Welch, I'll always wonder what it would be like to be in the first wing and to be bringing on the F-15 program." I said, "That would really be something." He said, "Do you want a job?"

I've turned the knob, two houses, living in quarters, broke basically. Do I want a job? I said, "Yes, Sir, I do." He said, "I'll need a letter." I let go of the knob and walked back across the room. I've got my little briefcase with me. He said, "I can't just hire anybody into the first wing. Every pilot coming into the first wing is personally approved by the commander of Tactical Air Command, General Dixon," Robert J. Dixon. He said, "So, I'm going to need a letter." I said, "Well, I've got a letter," I said, "that may do it," just a letter of recommendation from wing commander or someone that says you can come into the wing.

Oh, he had asked me, by the way, he said, "John," he said, "What do we need around here?" I said, "You need somebody with a broom; the place is filthy." (DePue laughs) I said, "The halls have got paper in them and stuff." He said, "God, I agree." He said, "I'm not the base commander," he said, "They've got the support things, and I'm just the operational wing commander." We got talking about cleanliness and stuff, he said, "But we're learning a lot of lessons, and we need to capture the lessons." He was very much on that part, capture the lessons and bring out a brand new wing.

We'd stolen the wing designation from Seymour and given them a different one, so that we've now got the first fighter wing. I told him, "I was in the first squadron at the academy, on the first wing, first fighter wing, which was flying ADC airplanes out of Selfridge." I went there and flew with them. I've had an association, even as a cadet, with the first wing. I had an association with the first wing.

He said, "You need a letter." I said, "Well, I've got a letter; I'm not sure it will do the trick though." I just happened to have it in my briefcase. I'd gotten it just days before, and for some reason I had it, so I pulled it out. He said, "Well, who's it from?" I said, "It's from the president," (both laugh) and it's a dear John letter, a personal letter from Gerry Ford, signed by him, because of the work we'd done, and he made reference to some of the stuff.

Welch looks at me, and he said, "This will do." (both laugh) He called, whatever her name was; I've forgotten the secretary's name—I knew her so

very well—and she made copies of the letter. She was...Her eyes were like this, from the president.

I went home and told Myrna, “and he said ‘this will do.’” I get a call the next day from a personnel type; he said, “We’ve changed the orders, you’re going to the first wing.” Then I got a call from, I think it was from Larry Welch, or one of his people, who said, “You’ve been hired into the first wing as the historian.” I remember going back over to Langley, and I said, “Historian? I thought I was coming to fly airplanes.” (both laugh) No, I didn’t say that; I said, “Of course, I’m the historian; I’ll be the best historian I can.”

I started working on all the stuff that you would do to be a historian, making it up as I went along. He told me, “Look,” he said, “We’ll get you a pilot slot.” He said, “I can’t get you in the first squadron, but we’ll get you in the second squadron.” In fact, they man up a little bit in the first, man up a little in the second, the 27th, which is the Frank Luke squadron, the 71st, which was a World War II squadron that added into the first wing after the 17th got destroyed in combat, and then the most famous, the 94th, the Hat in the Ring [Gang], was the third squadron that was going to get manned up.^{72, 73}

You had all these personnel movements within the wing, very fluid, where a cadre would get trained, and they’d move to the second squadron, because we were the first wing. The first operational wing had just gone on a test, yes.

DePue: One thing I wasn’t quite sure of when you told this story. Was it your intention to find some way to get into that unit when you made the visit, when you made that office call?

Borling: You know...I’m going to give you a yes and a no, but I remember that doorknob moment. I remember the panic that Myrna and I had over, now what do we do? We’ve got two houses; we’re not living in either one of them; we’re living in government quarters. We’ve always lived beyond our means, and now we’re...I’ll tell you a funny story about looking at the third house.

Anyway, we’re looking for another house. Three or four months pass, and I’ve got a spot to go out to Luke to check out in the F-15. I am the low time guy in this airplane; I’m a major. I am absolutely the low time guy by

⁷² Frank Luke Jr. was an American fighter act, ranking second among U.S. Army Air Service pilots in number of aerial victories during World War I. He was the first airman to receive the Medal of Honor. At Luke Air Force Base in Arizona, an Air Force pilot training installation has been named in his honor since World War II. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Luke)

⁷³ The 94th Fighter Squadron is one of the oldest units in the United States Air Force, first being organized on 20 August 1917. As the first American squadron in operation, its aviators were allowed to create their squadron insignia. They decided to commemorate the U.S.’s entry into World War I by taking the phrase of tossing one’s “hat in the ring” to signify the willingness to become a challenger. Its symbol is the image of Uncle Sam’s red, white and blue top hat going through a ring. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/94th_Fighter_Squadron)

thousands of hours in fighters. The people they're putting into the airplane are the best guys in the whole Air Force, for the Eagle, this new single seat air superiority fighter. Frankly, people are kind of going what the...is he doing here? I'm the historian. (laughs) So, I get a class date, and someone else picks up the historian duty. I am going to be the assistant operations officer of the second operational squadron, the 71st Squadron.

As it turns out, we have gone and looked for houses over in Virginia now and found out that we can't qualify for a house. My financial portfolio is unavailable. I can't qualify for a \$40,000 house. We don't know where we're going to live. We're going to have to find a rental place, a tenement. Myrna's not real happy about this, but we keep looking. We go out to a little jerkwater, back tidewater town called Poquoson and drive around. We're driving around Poquoson. There's not even a stoplight in this town; there's a flashing yellow, old, some marinas and some coves, all off the Chesapeake. We drive out into this one area; it's called...we see White House Cove.

We drive out there, and here, perched on a beautiful piece of property is a brown frame house, dock, deep water dock, on White House Cove. We look at it, and it's for sale by owner. Myrna and I, we're just, God look at that house. Well let's go look at it for the heck of it. We walk into this house with this lot. There's a big mansion kind of house going in next door, and there's a nice frame house on the canal. But we're on the cove, and the cove goes out to the Chesapeake. It's just gorgeous. Across the way there's a waterman marina, where they go for oystering and stuff.

The people are very nice, and they show us this house, three bedroom house, large rooms and two stories and kind of a Cape Cod thing. Myrna would probably say, No, it's not a Cape Cod; it's a whatever, but anyway, it's a house. They want \$76,000 for the house. The guy, he had it built. He's building another one down the way, smaller. They said it's too big for him. He says that he's got like \$30,000 worth of equity in the house and that the house is assumable. All I've got to do is come up with \$30,000.

I called my banker, (both laugh) and I said, "I need \$30,000 to move into a house, and I can assume a house with about \$40,000, and the costs are this, and I can manage the costs."

Oh, by the way, I had flown down to Valdosta, Georgia, and had gone to the next-door neighbor of the house that I had bought, because it was vacant now. I said, "I'm going to put a for-sale sign up in the yard with your number on it, if you would help me with this," I said, "and if I sell the house, I'll give you a commission. But I can't live in this house, and I've got to sell it, and I don't have time," and I went back. The house sold in ten days, and I made \$100 on the house. By the time I gave him \$100 and I made \$100; it was done.

Now we're out from under Valdosta. My banker had helped finance that one. He said, "Well, \$30,000," he said, "You just want a signature loan for this, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah." He held his breath; he said, "Okay." So we moved into this house, this magnificent house on the water in Virginia. That is going to prove to be the singular move that has enabled us to have a fair amount of financial freedom in life, because we learned then the rule that we have lived by ever since; never buy a house, unless it's on the water. Never buy a house, unless it's on the water.

DePue: And we're looking at the river.

Borling: We're looking at the water right now, yeah. This **is** a charming location. It's not the greatest body of water, but it's a nice body of water, and it certainly has held property values. Now we've got this house, so Myrna's happy, because it's a gorgeous house. It's the best house we've ever lived in.

DePue: And the location, does that mean the girls are going to be going to school in the civilian—

Borling: The girls are going to be going to school at civilian schools. They've gone to school, obviously; Armed Forces Staff College, they'd gone on to the county. There were not real great schools in Norfolk, and the other one was too young. Before that, in Washington, they'd gone to great schools in Washington, or the little one had, Megan had, Lauren, whatever the hell her name is, the one who's fifty almost now; the one who's more like me. But the trick is...I'm feeling a little apprehensive. I'm a good stick, I thought, but I'm in this outfit now with these guys who are some of the best fighter pilots in the world, and I go out to Luke.⁷⁴

DePue: You're senior in rank to an awful lot of these guys I would think.

Borling: A lot of them were captains; there were no lieutenants. You had to be well experienced in...I remember Frank Bloomcamp, who was the DO, who came up to me, and he said, "Look at this," he said, "You've got like"—I don't know how many hours I had, 700 hours or something—and he said, "I assume most of that was in the front seat of the F-4." I said, "That was a lot of it." I remember telling him that was a lot of it. Actually, it was swing seat; about half of it was backseat time. I was combat ready in the F-4, had been in war and had been after the fact certainly, but I didn't have a lot of fighter time. I'm sitting there really thin suited, but I pushed the busted flush through and went out to Luke.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ A good stick has been described as someone that "wears" the airplane, rather than having the plane just take him for a ride. (<http://www.collectspace.com/ubb/Forum3/HTML/003449.html>)

⁷⁵ In cards, busted flush means a potential flush that ultimately was not filled. In general, it is anything that ends up worthless, despite great potential. (<https://www.phrases.net/idioms/busted-flush>)

DePue: Say that again.

Borling: I pushed the busted flush. Do you know what a busted flush is?

DePue: No.

Borling: When you play poker, and you've got four cards of the same suit, but the fifth card isn't, but you bet it right and you push through the flush. They don't call you, but you're sitting there with your heart in your mouth as you push all your money into the pot. So, I went out there, and I was a little apprehensive about going to Luke.

I wasn't apprehensive about flying the airplane but fighting the airplane. It was really an abbreviated checkout, because all these guys, they're all big guys, so you're like you're going to get eighteen hours or something like that, in the airplane. Then you're back and you finish up the rest of it at Langley. This was no... There's no long course for the F-15. You're all great fighter pilots, and you've all been down this route multiple times. Most of you have got ten years' experience or eight, six to eight, ten years' experience in jets. Everybody's been hand-picked; everyone's had a letter. (both laugh) God love Larry Welch; man, what a man.

I went out there, and I did okay. It didn't take me any longer to solo the airplane than anybody else. A couple of two seat models, what they did was they'd give you, I think, two rides or maybe—yeah, two rides in a tub, we called them, the two seat version. Then they soloed you.

I hadn't been flying for a while. I'd gone to Armed Forces Staff College, and I had another layoff of eight or nine months then, the year before that. So I hadn't flown an airplane, again, in a couple of years. This is after the layoff.

Anyway, so two rides, and so I sold it, boom. And now we're into tactics; now we're doing air-to-air stuff. I was always pretty good at that, but I was not as good as many of the other guys, so I was really having to work it hard. But, that said, finished the loop program and graduated on course, on time. I assessed my own air-to-air capabilities versus the other guys', as in the lower 50 percent. But I assessed my basic flying of the airplane well into the upper 50 percent.

A lot of it is head stuff, where you just have to learn some stuff. So, I went deep into the air-to-air world, in terms of my own academics and understanding and that kind of stuff, and really enjoyed my time out at Luke and met some really good guys and learned a lot from them and maybe was able to give a little bit back.

DePue: A couple quick questions here. During the time that you were away from flying, were you still drawing flight pay?

- Borling: Um-hmm. Yeah, we didn't have to do the four-hour thing; that had gone away. It used to be you had to do four hours a month, or you didn't draw a flight pay. But if you were rated, and you'd had a certain number of years, they still continued the flight pay.
- DePue: When you're into the tactical portion of learning to fly, I'm assuming you were talking about the air-to-air combat kind of thing.
- Borling: Air-to-air combat, yeah. We did some air-to-ground too, but then they pushed that away from us. The airplane was capable air-to-ground, but we had a couple sorties, as I remember, and then that was it. They wanted us to focus on air-to-air, which was glorious, because that's what all fighter pilots want to do anyway.
- DePue: Exactly. Were you going through something like the top gun school at the time?
- Borling: No, not then; this was the checkout thing. The top gun stuff, I'd already, back at George, had hit all around, whatever we called top gun for the wing. We'd have done that. But there were schools, different schools, fighter weapons schools and the Navy top gun school, and coming on was a thing called Red Flag, which were all higher order activities, if you will, in the fighters.
- DePue: Wasn't there something that the Air Force experienced, about the Vietnam era, where they decided they needed to get back towards air-to-air skills?
- Borling: Yeah, the aggressor squadrons were formed. In fact, I wanted to be an aggressor. One of my guys was, Tom Browning, that I lived with. He ended up to be very good in the aggressors. We flew against the aggressors; they'd come to Langley.

But the whole business at Langley was to upgrade the air-to-air capability of the Air Force. We had four... We had the sparrow missile; we had the sidewinder missile, and we had internal gun. God, this is license to steal. You're out there doing tactics, large and small, but always taking longer range shots with the sparrow. Identification is still a problem, short range shots with the sidewinder missile, which is a heat-seeking missile, eventually all-aspect heat-seeking missile, and then, if necessary, into the gun position. We did all of that, and it was just great.

The deal was, you'd go back to Langley. I walked in, and I'm the assistant ops officer of the 71st Squadron. The ops officer is a rough-and-tumble guy by the name of Jack Britt, who'd come over from the 27th Squadron. He is second in command to Bill Fennelly who's the squadron commander, who was handpicked to be the second squadron commander.

You remember these names. Dick Craft was the first squadron commander of the 27th, very cerebral guy but very well practiced. When Britt

left, Walt Worthington fleeted up and was the ops officer of the 27th, the Luke squadron, very proud of their position as the first squadron of F-15s and some excellent pilots in it. Then the 71st moves along.

We were basically training ourselves to be combat ready. We had a syllabus—I'd helped construct it—the things you had to do. You had to have so many air-to-air sorties; you had to have so many refueling; you had to have so many landings, day, night. We shot the gun for real, so you had to kill the dart or the towed target; you had to go shoot a missile down at Eglin, on the gulf test range, then you had to have check rides to see that you were, in fact, qualified, and are you going to be an element lead, which means you could lead a two ship? Or are you going to be a four ship lead, where you could lead a four ship, which was about the most that we did? Then we had eight ships and more.

Well here, I'm the assistant ops officer, I got eighteen hours in the airplane. I've got to be flight lead qualified for everything, so I made a flight lead right away, just kind of with the stroke of a pen.⁷⁶ All of a sudden I'm in the training business, and I'm training and evaluating some of these guys who are much more senior, in terms of flying time and stuff, but we were learning it together. We're learning the airplane together, and the airplane has got...It's a new airplane, so it's got some defrugalities; it's got some deficiencies, like it tended to blow up, the engine, and catch on fire. We all talked to one another, and we said, "Hey, nobody jumps out of an F-15. We do not...We would bring them back.

I remember Sandy Murchison brought one back, the compressor blade had shredded out, and he was on fire, on fire; there was fire shooting...He brings it...hell, he's not getting out of the airplane. He lands at Langley, and they put the fire out, and he's a hero; he did a good job. We had other guys that the thing would...We called it a compressor stall or have blowouts. We'd lose an engine, and we'd come in and land. You didn't jump out of the F-15; you brought it home. This was the most expensive airplane in Air Force history, operational airplane; SR [strategic reconnaissance] was more expensive. We felt this enormous pride of being in the first wing.

Yeah, go ahead.

DePue: You started the process already, but I'd like to have you do a quick comparison between the F-4 and the F-15. The fifteen had dual engines?

Borling: The fifteen had two engines, F-100 engines, Pratt and Whitney engines. The F-4 was [a] twin engine airplane, J-79 GE engines. F-4 was a more sturdy airplane, I think. It was a Navy airplane to start with. The F-4B, you don't

⁷⁶ Flight lead is the first aircraft in a formation, the experienced pilot in the formation who is primarily responsible for accomplishing the mission and leading his wingman.
(http://www.christianfighterpilot.com/fighterpilotspeak.htm#Flight_Lead)

have a stick in the front cockpit. The Air Force models, the Charlie, Delta and Echo models, had sticks in both cockpits. Only the Echo had the internal gun. We said, "You never, ever make an airplane without an internal gun." It's always a last ditch thing that you have. The F-4 was not as maneuverable as the F-15; I forgot how heavy it was, a great bombing airplane, a very reliable airplane, ugly airplane. by some. I thought it was a pretty airplane; I liked the F-4, (DePue laughs) a loud airplane, didn't have real great performance characteristics like the F-15, which was so agile. The thrust to weight ratio was... You could accelerate, given low fuel weight, even going straight up.

DePue: So you're going to deal with more Gs then, when you're flying that.

Borling: You had to deal with a lot more Gs, yeah. It was 7.33 G capable. Then, after a certain fuel weight, then it went to 9 Gs later, with certain stress factors. But the beauty was, it was single seat, single seat, lovely airplane, so—

DePue: Was there a Navy version as well?

Borling: No. A different version came out later, called the FA-18, which had F-15 kind of characteristics, still a main line of the fleet. Remember now, the F-15 Eagle came on operationally in 1976. This is 2015; it's still flying. That's one heck of a deal.

DePue: It came out, obviously number wise, it came out before the 16. But wasn't the 16 pretty close after that?

Borling: The 16 came along just a few years later, yeah. It was another replacement airplane.

I'm going to make another stop, if I may. How are we doing on time?

(pause in recording)

DePue: We're good.

Borling: We'll go to lunch somewhere around noon? Is that all right with you?

DePue: Yeah, we're pretty close to that already.

Okay, we're back again, with some more reflections on your F-15 experiences.

Borling: Well, I really can go on for some time, because we've had wonderful assignments. We've been privileged to have some significant responsibilities. There was a glory with that airplane that just everything clicked.

So, here I am, assistant ops at 71st, working with Jack Britt, who's the ops officer, and Bill Fennelly, who's the squadron commander. Fennelly and

I, Bill, really hit it off. As a matter of fact, he lived just down the street from me. He too was on...He was on the little canal that we were on, but we were in White House Cove. So Bill and Maryanne, his wife, were great friends and good people.

Here, I need to be judicious, and I would couch all this in terms of me offering my estimations. I'm not trying to be injurious to anyone, in terms of reputation or capability. Everybody in the F-15 world were truly extraordinary, but it's like having a lot of stallions in the corral; you get kicked a bit. The kicking was that Jack Britt, who is now deceased, who was a superb fighter pilot, only a one tour guy though, in Vietnam. He and his wife, who was a great gal...He'd been ops of the 27th, came over to be ops of the 71st. He and Bill didn't particularly get along. Bill was a much more quiet guy, much more of a delegation kind of guy. And Jack, whose call sign was "Thing," was much more rugged and not easy to deal with in his own right.

Anyway, Jack went to be the new commander of the Hat in the Ring, as the 3rd Squadron came on, across the way. That left the ops officer position of the 71st open, and I was selected to be the ops officer or the number two in command of the 71st Squadron. I haven't been in the wing now for six months, and all this is happening so quickly. So, I'm the ops officer of the 71st, and Bill Fennelly, God love him, gives me great running room. Well, I'm not a bashful guy anyway, and the ops officer is supposed to run the squadron if you will. Bill was, frankly, I think more comfortable on the overarching admin kind of side and left me to run the squadron, and I did. We still didn't have a full complement; we're bringing in new people.

I remember one day, we were going to go on a hurricane evacuation, because a hurricane was sweeping up the coast, and we wanted to get the airplanes back safe. A guy came in on a motorcycle; his name was Mike Toddy (spelling??), with his wife on the back end, Sue. He was just out of Luke, and he had even less hours, I thought, because they curtailed the airplane down to eleven or twelve hours. He basically could fly the...He'd soloed and done a few things with it. Mike comes rolling in.

We're getting ready to evacuate airplanes, and I'm one pilot short. This guy comes walking into the squadron, blue jeans on, and he's dragging his wife with him. He says, "Hi, I'm Mike Toddy; I'm reporting to the 71st Squadron, Captain Toddy." I said, "How many hours have you got in the airplane?" He says, "I've got eleven." (DePue laughs) I said, "Get a flying suit on; you're going off on my wing. We're flying a right path; there's a hurricane, and we got to get the airplanes out of here."

His wife is standing there. I said, "Here's your choices." I said, "You can go over to the BOQ, and we'll get you a room or a motel," I said, "Or better yet, you can go out and stay with my wife, Myrna, at the house, and ward off the waters." This is really great. I'd managed to get three sandbags,

(DePue laughs) so we could put sandbags on the back door, because we're right on the water, and they were talking as if the world's going to end. But we were stuck with the airplane. I called Myrna, and I think she came and got Sue.

The skies are darkening, and I grabbed Toddy, and off we blast. I take the squadron out. I don't know where Bill is, but I take the squadron out. Maybe by this time, I've got 100 hours in the airplane, if I'm lucky, but I'm one of the high time guys now. (DePue laughs). The ops officer, I take the squadron out; we land at Wright-Pat, Wright Patterson in Ohio, and go off to the Holiday Inn. We're sitting by the pool.

I called Myrna, and I said, "How are you doing, hon? We're sitting by the pool." Boy, do I get an earful. (DePue laughs) She said, "The water is rising; the storm is coming, and you're there with your ___ king airplanes, and I'm going to die here with the girls." She's not that way, but it was kind of funny. The storm blew through, and nothing much happened. We didn't get any water in the house.

A couple days later, we took everybody back to Langley. Mike Toddy becomes really...I just said, "You get on my wing and stay there," because I'm the old hat now, in the program; I'm the ops officer of the 71st Squadron.

It came time for officer effectiveness reports. In those days there was a system where...I don't know what they are now, but it was one, twos and threes. You could have 10 percent ones, or 15 percent ones, 20 or 30 percent twos, and everybody else was a three. If you were a three, you're in the bottom of the pile. There was no further degradation...There wasn't one through ten or...All these guys were hand-picked guys. We're sitting there, and I'm sitting there thinking, Jesus, we've got all these other guys. You just looked at all the majors in the wing; you racked them up real quick mentally, and I said to myself, Jesus, I'm going to be a three, and here I am, the ops officer of the second F-15 squadron.

Larry Welch called me up. I guess Fennelly gave me a one, and he only had like two ones to give or maybe one one. I was the ops officer; he had to give me a one. It went to the next level review board and got chopped to a two. It went to the next level review board, got chopped to a three, at which point the whole shooting match went to Larry Welch.

He called me in to his office, and he showed me the report. He said, basically, "This system is so stupid." He said, "I can't give you a three, not with your background, not with what you've done, not where you are." So, he used one of his preempts, if you would, and moved me up. I think he moved me to a two. The next cycle, I was a one and stayed one, in the wing. But I remember that. It was such an unfair evaluation system, and it caused a lot of guys to get out of the service.

Well, anyway, so I'm flying ops for the 71st. Bill Fennelly doesn't prosper. A variety of things occurred, but Bill's tenure is cut short as a commander. Meanwhile, I've been running the 71st.

DePue: Is the commander position a lieutenant colonel or full?

Borling: Lieutenant colonel, lieutenant colonel. By this time Red Flag has started big time, and we're taking people out with twenty-five hours in the airplane, to Red Flag.⁷⁷ I've got people out there, both at Nellis and also at Dugway Proving Ground, and I basically go to Red Flag. I don't stay there, but I'm there two weeks out of the month or three weeks out of the month.

I've got my assistant ops officers running the squadron, and a new squadron commander is brought in. Dick Craft leaves the 27th. Jack Chain has now come in and replaced Welch, Colonel Chain, another superb officer, just wonderful guy, who was also at George. He was the DO, the director of operations, at George. What a lineup, Welch and Chain in the same outfit.

There's a story of how Jack and I met that I'm not sure I've relayed to you, but I think it bears some story. I told you about how Colonel Welch and I met. I'm coming back into George—this is operational now—with a sick airplane. The F-4 has three hydraulic systems, two which handle redundant power control systems and one which is a utility system, which handles the gear and the flaps and other things and the radar thing. You'd have to lose all three systems for the airplane to basically be uncontrollable. There's also a thing called a RAT or a ram air turbine, which could come out, or is that in the F-15? That may be on the F-15; I'm not sure.

Anyway, I had lost utility and one of the PC systems, which means I'm in a very restricted airplane. I can only turn in one direction, and the airplane has to be kept going very fast, or it's going to go out of control. Bad enough that the back seater is screaming at me that he's going to eject, and I'm telling him to be cool, and we're lining up, trying to get this thing home. I'm using all the skills I have to keep the thing in the air.

I get about ten miles out from George Air Force Base, lined up on Runway 1-6, 1-6-0, kind of heading south. There's another runway, which is 2-1 Runway, a big mountain up here we call bust your butt, where the concrete plant was. Two-one, was the principal emergency runway, because it was closest to all the fire stuff. But I couldn't maneuver the airplane. I was lined up on 1-6. I had altitude, and I'm holding, trying to get a controllability check. Somewhere around 350, 400 knots, the thing started getting squirrely on me. I called up and said, "I'm coming in, emergency landing, Runway 1-6,

⁷⁷ Exercise Red Flag is a two-week advanced aerial combat training exercise held several times a year by the United States Air Force, using "enemy" hardware and live ammunition for bombing exercises within the adjacent Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_Red_Flag)

and I'm going to take the barrier if I can, but I've got PC and utility failure," described what was going on.

We're about ten miles out, and we get this call from the tower. It says, "The DO says land Runway 2-1. I said, "Negative," I said, "Tell the DO no." Got down a little closer, and I dropped the gear 100 knots faster than the gear was supposed to be dropped, just to see if I could control it at 350 knots, and I could. The flaps, I think I could blow down, but I didn't blow them down, because they wouldn't have come down. The gear dropped through gravity, so I've got gear down and getting closer now. The airplane is drifting, and I can't turn it in the direction, so I'm playing the wind. They said, "The DO orders you to land Runway 2-1." I came back, and I said, "Tell the"...I said something very bad, like tell the DO to jam it.

[I] plunked it down at the end of the runway. I was short fondle at that time, had the hook down. The hook skipped, missed the barrier, so now I'm in a dead airplane, going down the runway. Let the chute go at about 300 knots, and the drag chute held; it didn't shred. Slowing down, I have no brakes. I got the hook down; the hook had dropped, and I'm seeing the departure and barrier. It's a long runway; this is like a 12,000 foot runway. I said, "Shit, we've got this hacked."

I looked back up, and the utility pressure has come back up, which means I've got brakes. I put the feet on the brakes, and I said, "Oh," and the thing responds. This is great, shit. We're down to normal speeds now, maybe thirty, forty miles an hour, and we're coming up on the last barrier, and I've got brakes, ah, great. So shit, I raised the hook, taxi over the barrier, at which time the brakes go to the floor, and I lose all brake. (both laugh)

I've just raised the hook over the last barrier, and here's the end of the runway, looming, and we're still going about thirty miles an hour. So we throw open the canopies and stick out our hands. (both laugh) We come to rest with the nose literally in the overrun, but I'm still on concrete with my nose gear, and we're stopped.

I clamber out of the airplane. Here comes the blue staff car with the DO, waving away the emergency equipment and everything. He drives up, and I'm standing there next to the airplane. He said, "I thought I told you to land Runway 2-1." I said, "You pay me to bring them back, and there it is." He said, "Damn good thing," rolled up the window and drove away and waved everybody off. It was about a three mile walk in 120-degree heat, back to the...maybe two mile walk. He just kept waving everybody off, and we're lugging our gear and got back in. And I never saw Colonel Chain again...at George.

Now I'm at Langley when I'm still in the 71st. Here comes Colonel Chain, walking out of the club. I'm a major; I'm in flying suit, he's in blues. I

salute him, and he said, "You!" And I said, "You, Sir." He said, "What are **you** doing here?" I said, "I'm flying F-15s in the first wing." I said, "What are you doing here, Sir?" He said, "I am the assistant to the commander of tactical air command." I said, "I've got the better job." (both laugh) He said, "I agree; let's go have a drink." So we walked back in, Judy, his wife, Jack, me, Colonel Chain. Welch is still the wing commander. We sit there and talk and whatever.

That will start a professional relationship that commences. Now, when Welch leaves the wing...He used to be the assistant to the commander, and the next guy in is Jack Chain, who is the wing commander. Here's Colonel Borling sitting with Chain, and he gives me one of those head nods as we sit there. That's my only talk with him. Again, smart guy, he's probably the smartest guy. If Welch was the most intelligent, Jack Chain has got street smarts that you wouldn't believe, learned a lot from him.

There's a movement that John Jaquish, who was the ops of the 94th Squadron under Thing—these two guys were solid—goes to take the 27th commander spot. They brought in a new squadron commander on top of me. Fennelly is gone, and Chain calls me up and says, "You're going to be the ops officer of the Hat in the Ring." I'm making a lateral move from the 71st to the 94th, now in the Rickenbacker Squadron, the Hat in the Ring, working for the guy I started working with and for, Jack Britt, who didn't want me to be his ops officer. He wanted a different guy to be his ops officer. But the reason I'm moving over there is we're in the training business now for training the Europeans wings up to combat ready. The 94th is taking on that responsibility, and because I'd been doing it over there, they move me over to do it with Jack Britt.

DePue: Does that mean that the 94th pilots had come back to the States and were destined to return to Europe?

Borling: No, these are 94th guys; they've already gone through. They've been like me, and they've been gearing up and doing Red Flag and doing that stuff. They are some of the best in the wing now, and they've been put together to be a training cadre for Bitburg, which is just getting its jets, and Soesterberg, which is in Holland. Those were the next...and Eglin, which was going to be next after that. Remember, we're a very small cadre at this point.

DePue: Are you still a major at this time?

Borling: Still a major.

DePue: And were you happy to get to have a chance to go to the Hat in the Ring Squadron?

Borling: Very. I was a little concerned about Jack Britt. Now, when I say...No, I think I had been promoted, below zone, to lieutenant colonel. That had to happen in

'77. I think I was right on the cusp. I'd been promoted three years, below the zone, to lieutenant colonel. The reason that that happened was a combination of two things: one, the F-15 program and two, the White House Fellows thing.

I had a president endorse... Oh, no, he didn't endorse. My boss at the White House, who was assistant to the president, signed it off. They said, "No endorsement needed; official reports directly to the President of the United States." But the letter had made it into the file, and it was a very nice letter.

DePue: Which carries more weight probably than OER's [Office of Employee Relations].

Borling: Oh, yeah. So anyway, now I'm three years below the zone to lieutenant colonel, and I go over to the Hat in the Ring Squadron. Jack and I, we're okay, professional enough, but we were not birds of a feather. We got along; we did the job, and he recognized that I was a good ops officer, and I was a loyal ops officer, and I was great at training these guys. Between Jack and I, we would always run the last sortie. We're the guys that put the sword on their shoulder and said, "All right, you're combat ready." But they had to fly with us first.

I was increasingly confident that I could do anything in that airplane. We would take guys up. I remember one guy, we were up, and it was the middle of the night and the tankers flopping around. I went up and hooked up in the middle of a turn and all this stuff and got the fuel and dropped off and said, "All right, next guy in." They couldn't get hooked up, and they were this, and they were that. So we went down and we debriefed that. I said, "You know guys, you've got to think your way through this, refueling and turns and night and all that business." And one of the guys said, "Yeah, but you're the ops officer; you've got thousands of hours." (both laugh) He had more time than I did and more airplanes. I really felt good about that.

Anyway, sometimes I would critique myself. You go in the debriefing room; you call it straight, and sometimes you get disoriented. Then you call a knock-it-off, because you can't have a bunch of airplanes doing this, and you're not there.⁷⁸ The debriefs were brutal, honest, brutal, and then you left it there. But everything from taxi stuff to radio stuff to tactical stuff—

DePue: Who was running the debriefings though, you as the ops officer?

Borling: Whoever was the flight lead for that particular sortie. So, if you were off on a two ship, and you were the flight lead, you'd do it. More often, you'd be off with a four ship, and you'd split up and do what they called 2B2s. Sometimes you'd have a four ship, and you'd go 4V4 over dissimilar aircraft. We'd fly against the F-14s out of Oceana or other airplanes that would come in, the

⁷⁸ In the U.S. Air Force, the term "Knock-it-Off" is used to direct all aircraft to cease maneuvering when safety of flight is a factor. (<http://navyflightmanuals.tpub.com/P-367/Knock-It-Off-Kio-Terminate-43.htm>)

aggressor airplanes that would come in. Whoever was the lead for that element would sit down and go through it. Whenever I flew, unless I was in an evaluation circumstance, I was normally the guy who'd debrief it. You're always harder on yourself than you were, because if you weren't honest with the guys, they'd [say] "Come on."

DePue: Were there any cameras in the aircraft or on ground?

Borling: Oh, we had gun camera film; we had radar film; we had all kinds of stuff that corroborate. We'd go through, and then we'd reconstruct the fights. You would normally meet two hours before sortie, before takeoff, and you would sit there. Again, you're with guys. All right, so start taxi, takeoff, will all be standard. We'll go off, and if it was trail or whatever, ten second spacing, we'd do an emergency procedure of the day, engine fire on takeoff or engine failure on takeoff or whatever it would be. You'd do that; you'd brief that. That takes care of, in about five minutes, all the vanilla stuff of the flight, how you're going to get back, how you're going to pitch out and land and all that. You get rid of that stuff, so it's been briefed.

Then you spend the rest of the time on the tactical portion of the mission; how you're going to set up, what's going to be done, what the rules of engagement are, you know knock-it-off, this stuff. You'd go through all the things that you don't...If you're over the ocean, and you're out of control at 10,000 feet or you bust 10,000 feet, controlled or not, it's an automatic knockoff, and you've got to knock-it-off. That's like you've hit the ground. Over land, we'd use 5,000 feet, but over water, 10,000 feet.

We'd brief all manner of tactical consideration, speed, altitude, things. We'd throw the other guys out, and we'd come up with our game plan against those guys, how we'd go in low, or we'd go in high. We had a pulsed Doppler radar. It meant you could paint low to high. If you're going against the Navy, they couldn't see you if you were down in ground clutter, so we'd almost always come in low and pop up through their formations. All that stuff was there, and I mention again, the glory about being in the Hat in the Ring.

At the same time, I was taking people out to Red Flag all the time, still doing that. Jack Chain's the wing commander. I'm leaving for Red Flag on Saturday, the next morning. I'm taking out fourteen airplanes or something like that. I'm leading it. I get called to come to his office.

Meanwhile, Britt and I, we'd had some guys from Bitburg, and Britt had stood up at the meeting—we're all around the table—and he said, "We're not going to make it." He said, "We can't graduate these guys in time." He said, "I've looked at it." He said, "We're not going to make it." Well, I'm sitting there, looking at my data, and I've got an entirely different arrangement—wait a minute; let me think a minute. That comes a little later. No, it comes now—I'm sitting, looking at my stuff, and I said, "With all

regard for Colonel Britt,” I said, “I’ve got a different cut here.” I said, “I think it’s going to be tight, but we can make it. We can graduate all these guys and get them there on time.” Britt says, “I told you we can’t.” I said, “I’m the ops officer, Sir, and I tell you we can.” —Is that right? Let me figure this out a minute. No, no, that’s wrong; that’s wrong. That didn’t happen then; that happened later, ops officer things, “I’m ops officer; I’m going off.” That did not happen; I’ve got it out of sequence—

It’s a Friday afternoon, and I get called into Colonel Chain’s office. He said, “How is it going, John?” I said, “Good, Sir, thank you.” I know on a Friday afternoon, two things are happening; you’re getting fired, or you’re getting commended. (both laugh) He said, “You’re off for Red Flag in the morning,” and then he gave me the fateful words, the Chain words. He said, “I’ve got a job for you.” I said, “Yes, Sir.”

He said, “I’m sending you to maintenance.” I said, “Yes, Sir.” He said, “I want you to be my chief of maintenance training.” He said, “We failed the last two inspections.” He said, “Maintenance training is holding the wing back in terms of combat ready airplanes.” He said, “I need someone there to go take charge of that,” he said, “and do it right.” I said, “Yes, Sir, I’ll be glad to do it. I’ll be back from Red Flag in two weeks.” And he said, “No, you don’t understand.”

The head of maintenance slipped out from another door, and [he] said, “Meet your new boss.” He said, “You’re not going to Red Flag tomorrow.” Now I didn’t know if I was being fired or whatever. He said, “You guys are excused.” I went out with the DCM, and I said, “Am I being fired, and you’re accepting me?” He said, “Far from it, we really need you in this job.”

Saturday morning, I watch the guys take off for Red Flag. I’m at my new office...Oh, and Chain [had also] said to me, he said, “You’ll continue to fly.” He said, “You’ll continue to be an IP.”

DePue: Which are things you wanted to hear, I’m sure.

Borling: Instructor pilot. He said, “If you do well, I’ll fight to get you command of the squadron.” He said, “If you don’t do well,” he said, “Well you know what happens then.” I said, “Yes, Sir.”

Saturday morning, I’m in my new office maintenance training, and I’ve got a couple of the sergeants with me, who are good guys. I said, “Give me the lay of the land, because I don’t know shit.” These sergeants, who were really good guys, started saying, well, we failed this; we failed that; we did that; we did that. I said, “Well, give me all the...” I said, “Where’s all the regulations on this stuff, and where’s all this OJT stuff for three level, five level, seven level, nine level positions, and how did they come in with that?” I said, “All right, you guys go have a weekend,” I said, “I’ll see you here

Monday morning,” He said, “Early.” I said, “And we’ll figure out what we’re going to do.”

I sat there and read that whole weekend. I went home in the evening, but I read Saturday and Sunday. I thought it was a bunch of gobbledygook. I thought the whole hierarchy of training and the syllabuses that they had, how to be a crew chief, fire extinguisher training, marshaling training, changing oil, taking soap samples, all this stuff that you do to... This is for training crew chiefs. And that was the principal problem, was the crew chiefs.

We had a bunch of three level crew chiefs, but they weren’t doing the jobs right. We put them through these... But we had an FTD or field training detachment that was separate. They were supposed to be teaching them that, and they weren’t, because they were each given the basics and then flushing them out to us to get them to the right level, to get them to the five level, or get them to the three level and then the five level. I had very few seven levels, which is the sign off level. So in the first week, I figured that I needed to rewrite all the manuals myself. (laughs)

DePue: Are these technical manuals or training manuals?

Borling: These were training manuals, but to do technical things, to be crew chiefs basically. So I sat down and redefined how we were going to train in the first wing, and I wrote the manuals.

DePue: What I’d like to suggest is that this might be a good time to take a break. We’re not done with this subject, and we can continue with it afterwards—

Borling: Sure

DePue: ...because I’ve got some questions I’d very much like to get clarified myself, but I think this is a good time for a lunch break.

Borling: Okay.

(end of transcript #7)

Interview with John Borling

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Interview # 08: September 30th, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is September 30, 2014. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is my second session for today with General John Borling. Good afternoon, General.

Borling: Glad we had a nice lunch.

DePue: Thank you very much for lunch. I appreciate that.

Borling: Pleasure.

DePue: When we finished off last time, you had just been surprised by being assigned as the maintenance officer for the 94th.

Borling: Oh, yeah, maintenance training officer for the first fighter wing, for the whole wing.

DePue: An important distinction between maintenance officer and maintenance training officer. What I wanted to ask you here—just bear with me, an ignorant Army officer—the relationship between the maintenance crews, especially the crew chief, with the aircraft and with the pilots.

Borling: In those days, they were not aligned; they were separate. In other words, they didn't work for the squadron commander. There was a quasi-arrangement called POMO or Production Oriented Maintenance Organization. The dichotomy has been always, do the maintainers, especially the frontline

maintainers, work for the squadron commander, operational squadron commander, or do they have their own separate chain of command?

I've always been one who favored putting them under the operational commander, with liaison with the maintenance organization. The maintenance people have always been kind of, let us have our own world with the avionics and the back shops, certainly not being part of the squadron.

Well, all of that aside, organizational structure aside, there was at this point in time in the first wing, a maintenance training unit that covered the whole wing, as well as a field training detachment, FTD, that also had maintenance training responsibilities. But this particular organization had been graded badly in previous inspections by headquarters, Tactical Air Command. (sneezes) Pardon me.

When I got sent that Friday and waved goodbye to my guys on Saturday, I must tell you it was with some misgivings. But the deal was, when they say, "I've got a job for you," if you're worth your salt, you say, "Yes Sir," and you go and do the best you can. It was a SOP (standard operating procedure) that I was able to continue to fly and continue to maintain IP (Instructor Pilot) status, although I was going to do so at a much reduced rate, and I was still going to do it in the Hat in the Ring, the 94th Squadron.

So I went to work rewriting the manuals and the regulations and our training plans and things and trying to instill in my cadre of instructors a sense of élan, a sense of enthusiasm and purpose over and above what they had. I tell you, these are good guys, but the rules and the regulations were so nitpicking, the pencil-pushing aspect of it was taking away from the reality of the training.

DePue: Again, I feel like I'm the most ignorant guy on the subject, but I've got this notion in my mind that one good model of the way to do maintenance and the relationship between the maintainers and the pilot is that the maintainer is always working on the same airframe, and the pilot knows them. It's not just a matter of parking the aircraft and walking away.

Borling: That would be ideal, and as time went on, we got identity where you would fly "your airplane," and you would have "your crew chief." But the maintenance schedule and the rotation of the schedule and the amount of hours that you could devote to one pilot didn't allow you to have one pilot, one airplane, one crew chief kind of thing. It had to be a more shared responsibility. You've only got twenty-four, in my case now eighteen, airplanes in a squadron, and you've got more pilots than that. Your manning ratio is 1.25 to 1.5, so you don't have enough jets to go around for the guys, and that's a constant rotating thing.

DePue: So, getting back to the élan that you're trying to make up.

Borling: I thought the morale business was in need of pushing, so I pushed on that with my own guys and then worked with the various squadron commanders in the maintenance structure, because I intended to turn it on its ear and to turn it on its ear quickly. I did this out of a certain naiveté that it could even be done that way, because people kept saying, “No, you can’t do it,” and I would say, “Why?” We were failing, doing it the way we’re doing it, so let’s try something new.

In the end, this series of initiatives of realigning lesson plans and training needs and training regulations...I even tackled the Air Force on-the-job training manuals and said, “Well, we’re not going to live with that; we are going to live with this, and we are going to do that, and we are going to do that.”

So, three months go by, or so, four months, and I pretty much changed the gospels, if you will, and changed how we were preaching to the troops. We had graduated a few classes, and I was out there testing to see if the enthusiasm and what we’d really said was working, and it seemed to be working.

About this time, a no-notice inspection team—maybe it was five months out—a no-notice inspection team from headquarters, TAC, that had rated us unsatisfactory just a few months earlier came rolling back in and took us from stem to stern in the whole maintenance structure, but with particular emphasis on training, since that was an unsatisfactory field. The head of the MSET [Maintenance Standardization Evaluation Team], or the logistics team, was a colonel by the name of Eddins, Neil Eddins.

DePue: Edmonds?

Borling: Eddins, E-d-d-i-n-s, Neil Eddins. Now as a practical matter, I had run into Neil Eddins when I had been at George, because I was scheduled to go to Holloman in New Mexico for operational duty after the war and had flown down to have a meeting with the DO at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico. That guy’s name was Neil Eddins, and this was several years ago. Neil had taken me around the base, taken me to his home, introduced me to his wife, June, and was very enthused about me coming to Holloman. Well, as it turned out, I stayed at George, operationally, never went to Holloman and then got into the White House Fellows program, so that was a different path.

But now, all of a sudden, this guy Eddins, Colonel Eddins, who happened by the way, to be ex-leader of the Thunderbirds—so no mean stick, this guy—was on the maintenance side of the house, and he was the head of the inspection team coming back to re-look at the first one, with everyone

cringing, because our mission capable rate had not improved a lot, and we were still struggling with the new airplane.⁷⁹

So anyway, Colonel Eddins came through. Not knowing anything else, I told him and his team, I said, “We’ve turned everything up in the air, and this is what we’ve got,” and I laid it all out for him. And then they went and talked to our guys; they looked at results; they went and tested our latest batch of graduates. Colonel Eddins responded to me personally; he said, “I thought you were going to come work for me when I was the DO.” I said, “Now we’re both in maintenance; look at this, lucky guys, lucky us.” (DePue laughs) I am a lieutenant colonel by this time.

A week goes by or four or five days, whatever it was, and we go to the out-brief. We’re sitting there waiting, and they put [up] the green lights and yellow lights and red lights and commentary. He’s at the lectern, reading this stuff out. They’re going through the various squadrons list, and he comes down to maintenance training. Well, this is going to sound awfully self-serving, but the upshot was we went from unsatisfactory to excellent, which is unheard of in that period of time. Colonel Eddins said some very nice things about maintenance training and about me, and that was the end of it.

Well, I get a call from Colonel Chain that afternoon or the next day, whenever it was, wanted me to report to his office. There’s the head of maintenance guy there too. He said, “Well, you’ve done it.”

DePue: With some note of regret in his voice?

Borling: No, no, he was just joshing me. He said, “We want you to keep doing it, so you can submit the gains.” I think I ended up spending about ten or eleven months in maintenance and grew to learn so much, learn so much and finally figured out, I couldn’t have done what I did, if I’d knew anything, because I would have been hide-bound by all the rules and regulations. And if I hadn’t had the support of the head of maintenance and Colonel Chain, the wing commander, I couldn’t have done it. It wasn’t like I did this all by myself. Certainly, all the sergeants were just great and stayed as long as I was in the wing, just special sources of support.

Time goes on, and I’m still in maintenance, and Chain, now, is going to leave. (makes this statement in a whining voice) And he’s leaving me in maintenance, and he’s going away, and he promised me. He calls me into his office. No he doesn’t; he goes away, and I’m in maintenance. Guess who the wing commander is?

⁷⁹ The Thunderbirds is the air demonstration squadron of the U.S. Air Force. They are assigned to the 57th Wing and are based at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_Thunderbirds)

DePue: Was it Britt?

Borling: No, it's Neil Eddins. (laughs)

DePue: Oh!

Borling: So, Colonel Eddins comes in, and Jack Britt is moved into a different position; he goes someplace, and the Hat in the Ring comes open. Neil Eddins calls me down; he said, "Jack Chain said the next squadron that came open, he wanted you to have it." And he said, "I'll tell you what, I want you to have it, and I'm recommending you to the numbered Air Force commander, but once again, it has to go all the way up the chain." I was lieutenant colonel and took the squadron with the appropriate ceremony in the beginning of 1979.

DePue: A quick question here, in terms of personnel policy for the Air Force, what was the traditional stateside tour length? Was it three years?

Borling: Yeah, the traditional tour length for a position was about two years in a given position, unless you got fired or you got extended, but two years would be about it.

DePue: And the traditional length for a command position like you're into now?

Borling: About two years, yeah, eighteen months, two years, if you didn't get fired. But now I had **the** best squadron. I had **the** best job in the Air Force. I'm squadron commander of the F-15s and the Hat in the Ring Squadron, with this litany that goes back to Rickenbacker in World War I, the most famous of the American fighter squadrons, and it's all mine.⁸⁰ I have a third boss, probably the only three colonels I knew in the Air Force who'd gone boom, boom, boom, commander, commander, commander. Not that that's a slam dunk, because all these guys, you've got to perform for them.

Britt had gone to ADO; he'd gone to assistant DO. That's where we're having the argument, over the table, about "He won't be able to finish; Borling won't be about to do it." And I said, "Borling will do it."



Major General Borling, call sign "Viking," straps on his favorite fighter, the F-15 (Eagle), while at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona in 1991.

⁸⁰ Edward Vernon ("Eddie") Rickenbacker was an American fighter ace in World War I and Medal of Honor recipient. With 26 aerial victories, he was America's most successful fighter ace in the war. He was also considered to have received the most awards for valor by an American during the war. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Rickenbacker)

DePue: Doing the maintenance training job?

Borling: No, this is now the ops thing, training troops in Europe, training troops that are going to Europe. He said it won't be done for a month and a half. I finished three days or four days or five days in advance of when I said I would do it, and we had qualified crews going to Europe. Well that (lowers voice) didn't sit well with Jack Britt. But Neil Eddins thought it was shit hot.

Now, we're done with that. I'm going out to Red Flag; we're taking people here and there, and a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] tour comes up in the fall of '79, where we are going to go to Soesterberg, Holland. The 71st Squadron had been there, but we're going to take it up to Christmas. We're going to sit a NATO defense commitment, birds on alert—this was still Cold War stuff—and live in Holland. I'm going to command Soesterberg for a period of time, for two months or so.

DePue: While you're still the commander of the 94th.

Borling: While I'm still commander, but I'm taking my squadron over; I'm taking the whole squadron over, because Soesterberg was back training, and we're going to be taking their place while they're training.

DePue: So, you're a unit commander as well as a base commander?

Borling: Well, at Soesterberg, I was the deployed fighter commander and worked with the guy who was really the head of the operations there and, later, who worked for a full colonel, who was Al Pruden, as I remember.

Al had the command of Soesterberg, but his ops commander was a guy by the name of Fogleman, Ron Fogleman, who would later be chief of staff of the Air Force, who was my classmate and longtime good friend. His name was "Buzzard," call sign Buzzard. My call sign's Viking.

So we went to Soesterberg at the end of '79 and had a marvelous time. Other than the heart attack that I had in the airplane, it wasn't a bad tour at all.

DePue: Wait a minute, don't gloss over that, unless you're being facetious.

Borling: Well, I thought I had. You would fly north out of Soesterberg, up over the North Sea, up over Friesland, which still views itself as independent of the Netherlands, and we would do air-to-air training over the North Sea and then come back and bingo back to Soesterberg, over-flying a base called Leeuwarden.

I was up there one day. I'd just pulled in and taken a tracking gunshot at about a 7-G thing, when I felt my chest explode. I got the shot and rolled off and said, "Knock-it-off." I could hold the top of the stick, and I could hold the throttles, but I was in crippling pain, rippling across my chest. My head is

down here, and I'm flying the airplane, but barely. I said, "Knock-it-off." And I said, "Viking has got a physical problem," and I explained it. I can talk on the radio; I'm in a lot of pain. I said, "Let's land at Leeuwarden." I couldn't get the airplane down. I couldn't fly the airplane well enough to land at Leeuwarden. So we pressed back to Soesterberg, and I just kept letting on down.

I literally landed the airplane, flying the airplane in a much physically retarded capability, took the barrier, as I remember, the front end barrier, got out of it, and they met me with an ambulance, shut it down on the runway, and lifted me out of the cockpit and took me to the hospital.

DePue: What's going on through your mind at this time that—

Borling: I thought I was having a heart attack.

DePue: ...this could end your entire career perhaps?

Borling: No, I thought I was having a heart attack. I didn't think about ending careers. I was thinking about getting the airplane down and the immediate stuff. To hell with all that. So anyway, they get me over to the hospital, and they're running all these tests. I'm gradually getting better; I'm breathing; it's not hurting as much, but it's still hurting.

They said, "Your heart is fine." They said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "Well, I don't know, nothing. I was flying and pulled these Gs, and it felt like my whole chest let go." They said, "Well, you've got some strain up here and some torn muscles and things," apparently, or ligaments, or whatever the hell holds your sternum together. They said, "Have you done anything?" I said, "Well," I said, "We did have the Fighter Pilot Olympics yesterday" —this was a Monday— "on Sunday." They said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, where you take the nose gear tire, and you try to throw it as far as you can. Then you've got the anchor chain, and you're dragging that. And then you have the tug-o-wars, and then you do the monkey climbs, and then you do fights and stuff."

They looked at me, and they said, "And you want to know why your chest hurts today." (DePue laughs) I guess it was throwing that nose gear tire like a discus thing and then dragging the anchor chain around. You're the squadron commander; you've got to participate in everything.

It took a couple days, but I was back on status. I just strained everything, and the G thing had let...It's kind of like you take a rubber band, and then you go, boom, and it all let go. Anyway, that was my heart attack in the airplane.

Part of that, being at Soesterberg and my guys are put on alert, and we're doing all that good stuff. By the way, the 94th Squadron was a miracle

squadron. I could take all the names in a hat, pick them up and throw them at the scheduling board, and that would fly. I didn't have to worry about who was lead or who was wing; I could just... I had guys who were so good that it was amazing, many of them better than me. I was credible; it's very important to be credible. But some of these guys were just incredible, such an honor to command them.

We had this great thing, and we'd have guys going around, cross country. I became aware that the Richthofen Wing, the Red Baron Wing, was in Wittmund, Germany, which is up in the northern part of Germany. So, I took an airplane one day on my mission and instead of binging back to Soesterberg, I binged into Wittmund and announced myself as the commander of the Hat in the Ring. We'd fought in two wars against one another, World War I and World War II, never met in peacetime.

I ran into the incredible commander, Colonel Klaus, K-l-a-u-s, "Mufti," M-u-f-t-i—that was his call sign—Eggert and his back seater, Genst Hoofanlow. They had F-4s. And John—what was John's name? They had two squadrons, the 711 and the 712, the crapshooters. I'll think of John's name. We sat at the bar. They have a squadron bar, or it was a group bar, and they apologized. They said, "Well we didn't..." "Normally when Americans come in here, we take down the third commander of the Richthofen bunch. Do you know who it was? Hermann Göring."⁸¹

DePue: I was going to guess. How many other pilots would I have known of World War I vintage.

Borling: But they didn't. We sat there and drank. Mufti and I said, "Look, we've just got to get our two units together." He agreed. So, I said, "I'll go back, and I'll run the paperwork through the American side and the NATO side. You run it through the German side, and we'll talk next week." I said, "I've got a window here, right here. That weekend, that Friday, we can show up here, and we'll have intercepts or something. We'll land, and we'll do something, or we'll meet out over the North Sea, and we can do something more outrageous, but under control." He said, "Right." So, I went to NATO, and I went to USAFE, United States Air Force in Europe. All of them turned me down, couldn't do it. Mufti went to the Germans. They turned him down, because NATO turned him down.

I call Neil Eddins, back in the States. I said, "Here we are with the Richthofen bunch. We're only an hour away and ta-da-ta-da-ta-da, everyone's turned us down." I said, "I think there's an historical imperative working." Neil Eddins, God love him—and we're still great friends today—he said a phrase; it was probably the highest compliment I'd ever received as a

⁸¹ Hermann Wilhelm Göring was a German political and military leader, as well as one of the most powerful figures in the Nazi Party that ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. A veteran World War I fighter pilot ace, he was a recipient of the *Pour le Mérite* (The Blue Max). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_G%C3%B6ring)

commander, but one fraught with...support and yet legitimate reservation. He said, "Viking, I trust you." I said, "Yes, Sir," and hung up.

We arranged this meeting over the North Sea. I was going to put twelve F-15s up, leave a couple on duty. Mufti was going to have a few of his airplanes up. As it turned out, the North Sea was too rough for the Germans. They wouldn't let them fly on this particular day, over the North Sea, because you couldn't get in your raft if you went down.

Mufti said, "We've got to move it over Germany." We said, "Well, we'll meet, and we'll do intercepts only." I said, "I'll bring twelve airplanes" or ten airplanes, whatever it was. I already had two airplanes over there. In fact, one had a bad engine. I'd stuck two over there kind of as an advance party. Ron Fogleman and I had to get an engine—unbeknownst to everybody—from Soesterberg to Wittmund to change out an engine. We tried to get it into a little Dutch transport that we had domain over, couldn't get it, had to get an air ride trailer. Ron and I are, literally, the two of us are wrestling this engine, trying to get it into the airplane. But we put it in an air ride trailer, and got it over. Bill Yantis, that was the guy's name. Bill was the IP who had the broke airplane at Wittmund, stayed broke for a couple days, but we got it fixed with that engine. I sent some crews over.

Anyway, so we're going to do it over Germany. So we launch, and I spread guys into kind of route formation. We're maybe 100 yards apart, and we hit the inner German border. I look on my radar scope, and (lowers voice) all I can see is...I see about 100 airplanes. I called my deputy leader, and I said, "How many airplanes are you pinning out there, 100?" He said, "I've got over 100 airplanes." I said, "Go tactical; spread it out; I want 6,000 feet, line abreast." We spread it out a mile apart, line abreast. We had a twelve mile front, and we go shooting into Germany. I said, "Put us up on the mach."⁸² We couldn't go supersonic over Germany.

DePue: Were you thinking this is perhaps the Soviet hoard coming at you?

Borling: No, I thought this was the bloody German Air Force coming after us. As it turned out, they'd launched everything from every base in northern Europe. They'd launched F-104s, F-4s, the Hawk, the G-91s. They had 100 airplanes out there, more than that; there were 110, 120 airplanes. And we had 12, but we were spread out a mile apart.

I dipped us down, because they don't have pulse Doppler radar. It's an old thing we did with the Navy. At about twelve to fifteen miles, I said, "Shoot them in the face." So we started calling fox ones, you know, and let it time out; shoot another fox one. From twelve miles on in, and we're on the mach; we're .95...I should have actually slowed down—I thought about that

⁸² The Mach number describes the aircraft's speed, compared with the speed of sound in air, with Mach 1 equating to the speed of sound. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mach_number)

later—to get more shots. With twelve airplanes and four sparrows, we've all got off two to three sparrows, so we've taken out thirty-six airplanes—theoretically, if you have a PK [probability of kill] of one—and then we hit the merge.

Now we see all these airplanes. It's like that story about the lady who loved western art. She's society, glam, and she hired this somewhat eccentric western artist to do a mural on her wall. She was going to go off on a trip and then come back and have a big party. This guy was famous, and he would do it. She did, and she said, "I'd like something out of the west." He said, "Well, how about General Custer?" She said, "Fine." You know the rest of the story don't you?

When they unearthed the painting and the mural, with all of her society folks there, and the guy said, "We've done Custer's last stand." It showed a huge cow with a halo around its horn, and the main part of the mural was all these Indians copulating. (DePue laughs) They're all standing there, and he said, "The last words to enter Custer's mind, 'Holy cow, look at all those fucking Indians.'" (both laugh)

Well, holy cow, look at all those fucking airplanes! We hit the merge, which is like this; we were like this, in the pull, and we went up through this composite formation that spread for miles. The only problem is, we're over north German airspace, which is also full of airwaves. We're all playing about 80 percent, because there are airliners where we are. I converted on one guy, and there's an airliner coming this way, and I'm converting behind the airliner. German air traffic control is going bug-fuck.

We do this rolling in the sky for a few minutes. Somehow, in all this gaggle... You're getting killed, and you're killing; there's no tactical business to this. You've got one guy shooting one guy, who's shooting one guy, who's shooting one guy, kind of thing. I ended up on Mufti in all of this, and I said, "Mufti, this is getting a little too exciting." I said, "What do you say we get a..." I said, "I've got fox two on a guy doing this, and he did a reversal and shot me out. Then he took a shot, and we're doing stuff." I said, "Hey, Mufti, that's you," He said, "Well, let's get this thing knocked off." So we knocked-it-off. We said, "Form it up; we're all going back to Wittmund."

We've got formations of ten and twelve airplanes and more, lined up in echelon, and we come sweeping down initial, at Wittmund, and the F-4s or my guys land. Everyone else just makes little approaches and presses on home, to wherever home was for them.

Now everyone's safe; we've got everybody down on the ground. I am breathing a sigh of relief, because that was pretty engaging stuff, even though we were playing at 80 percent speed. John Goodman comes out with a tray and meets us at the airplanes; he's the commander of the 711 Squadron. He

has little blue schnapps for us, as we start this event now, which is so famous, that at—

I was at an event two weeks ago, someplace, or three weeks ago, and a guy comes up to me, who was a German civilian, used to be a German fighter pilot, and he was at Wittmund. He looks up at the site, and he says, “Oh, you’re the Viking.” You know what he said to me? He said, “They’re still talking about that party.” This is three weeks ago.

Anyway, so John Goodman meets us with this stuff, and it’s methyl blue in schnapps, which turns your urine blue for a week. It’s also poison, but we knocked it down. We went into the area where Göring is staring at you, and we had a meal and lots of drinks. Then afterwards, it started out, time for the fighter pilot party. We said we would play fighter pilot leapfrog for our flying jackets. Everyone said great. In fact, we had to teach them the game, fighter pilot leapfrog, but they were willing to play. So we all threw our flying jackets into a pile, and whatever squadron won, got all the jackets.

The way the game is played, I’m sitting in this chair with a back on it. Have we ever talked about this before?

DePue: No.

Borling: You have a guy sitting in the chair. You would be me; you would be standing there. And there would be a guy standing there and a guy standing there. So, there’s one, two, the guy in the chair, and then I am standing on this part of the chair, facing that way. This guy is holding my legs, so I’m balanced on this.

DePue: The back of the chair.

Borling: On the back of the chair, I’m standing there. The squadron commander from the 711, John Goodman and the other guy, the blonde-haired guy, Peter—I forgot Peter’s last name—is standing on the other chair. At the signal, “Go,” my job is to throw myself as far as I can in that direction. The number two guy puts here and throws himself over the head of this guy. The number three guy... Boy, you’ve got to watch out, you’re stepping here and go. This guy stands up and throws himself over the backside of the chair, at which point, fight’s on.

Now the fight is, you’ve got to get to that wall, and then you’ve got to get back to this wall. The first guy who does that, of whatever operation, wins. But when the fight’s on, that means the entire squadron can participate. So now we’ve got three squadrons of guys grappling. There’s no punching; it’s all holding, pulling, tugging, tearing, but there’s no punching. There’s no judo, there’s just... It was kind of like a rugby scrum, if you will. And I won. (DePue laughs)

Now, I had a little help, because before, when they... We figured, how are we going to start this thing? So, they got a German air policeman, who shot his gun into the ceiling as the starting thing, with a live round, boom! And I pushed... I immediately pushed the other two guys off the chairs in that direction. Now, that was an illegal move, but that's all right. Then I threw myself forward, and then we went and did this thing. I'll show you the pictures downstairs of this party. We've got a collage of this stuff, and it shows me fighting through. God, I was so proud.

Anyway, I won all these... I've still got the flying jacket, and we did that. There's another variation on this theme, which... I should tell you that the party went on, and the Germans brought in their mascot, Biggie LaRouge. Biggie was an adventuresome creature. She took a champagne and milk bath and a few other things and is seen hugging and doing other things with various members of the assembled group. One picture of her hugging a particularly energetic American fighter pilot, whose face is thankfully hidden behind her locks, but Myrna has always suspected. (DePue laughs) In any event, the party goes on; it goes way late; it's great. It's a drunken brawls; it's great fun. Biggie LaRouge adds a lot to it.

Well, in the course of the evening, I ended up wearing a German flying suit, and Germans are wearing American flying suits, such a great camaraderie, and we stagger off to bed. I had set it up so we would not even start to brief until 5:00 the next afternoon. We went to bed around 3:00, so we're fourteen hours or more between bottle and the throttle.

But that afternoon, somewhere around 3:30, 4:00, there's a knock at my door, and here stands George Thomas. He's one of my squadron, one of my new guys, a new pilot. George is standing there in his boots, a skirt and a blouse, which I recognized belonged to Biggie LaRouge. (both laugh) He said, "What am I going to do?" He said, "She's got my flying gear; this is all I've got." I said, "Did you trade?" He said, "Well, I must have." I said, "Looks like flying gear to me." (both laugh) George flew home in a skirt and a blouse. Actually, he got a German flying suit too, but it was part of the deal. That's the funny part of the story.

The sad part of the story is George later became, many years later, commander of the Hat in the Ring and killed himself, playing the combat version of fighter pilot leapfrog, which is where you stand backwards and throw yourself off backwards and broke his neck.

DePue: I was going to ask you, if somebody does get injured doing these kinds of stunts, how do you explain all this to the flight surgeon, because now you're off flight status?

Borling: Sometimes belonging to a fighter squadron is more like belonging to a gang.

DePue: Listening to your story reminds me that it doesn't matter what country you're in. If you're a fighter pilot, you've got a lot more in common with each other than you don't.

Borling: There is an enormous bond. The thing about rough-and-tumble games, at least in my time, was always part of it. We used to say that in Vietnam, that God, this isn't a fighter squadron; this is a bloody street gang. Guys would get hurt jumping off the bars or something or throw themselves... We had a pool, swimming pool, that guys said, "Let's go jump in the pool." So they did; they went out and threw themselves in the pool. The fact that it didn't have any water in it didn't mean anything. But you're pretty loose when this is happening, and in truth—I didn't do it— but they went into the shallow end; they didn't go into the deep end.

DePue: I've got to ask you one other question here.

Borling: That's a true story, at Ubon, or we'd do a MiG Sweep. Robin Olds was famous for this. Do you know what a MiG Sweep is?

DePue: No.

Borling: Well, let's assume we're here in the bar at Takhli or Ubon or Korat. The club goes in that direction, all the way through the dining room and everything else. Someone would say "MiG Sweep," and you would launch arms, and you would run in the open direction, and you wouldn't stop for anything.

DePue: A mig sweep?

Borling: A MiG Sweep. And you would just go. You would go across tables, food flying, people... The non-rated people sitting there would scurry to get out of the way. And we'd go until we hit the wall, and that would be the end of the MiG Sweep.

Or Dead Bug. People would call, "Dead Bug," and you were expected to throw yourself backwards and land on your back or head or whatever, with your feet and your hands in the air, shaking like this, Dead Bug.

DePue: The question I wanted to ask you, Sir, was when you—

Borling: Before we do that, let me give you an example of great leadership, Jim Covington, Vice Commander, Ubon, 8th Tac Fighter Wing. The guys are whooping it up in the bar; a small fire is burning over in the corner; it's under control, but it's still burning. The new base commander comes in, a navigator. One of the guys, who has a penchant for hijinks, had ripped the flight suit off a guy, the G-suit pocket; he had a thing on it. He ripped it off, so we gave the guy his flying suit. He's standing there in his skivvies and his boots, drinking at the bar.

The new base commander comes in and sees this guy standing in his skivvies and orders him out of the bar. So the guy nods and goes walking out of the bar, but he picks up a sofa. He's a big guy; he likes to steal sofas. He would steal sofas in George, where we were. But his wife would always make him bring them back in the morning, after he stole the sofa. He's a big guy, Dave Conneck. So he took the sofa, and the guy said what...? He's taking the sofa back over to his room.

Oh, there's Myrna. Oh, she's getting the dog, who's been out there forever, since we came home.

So the base commander got excited. This time Conneck comes back, and somewhere he's lost his shirt and his shorts. Now he's nude, except for his boots. He came back to get another sofa. (both laugh) So he's getting another sofa, and the guy, this time, comes back and threatens him again with arrest and kind of looks at him and kind of gives him the sofa and walks over to the bar and orders a drink.

The little Thai guy, he comes back this time with air policemen, and he orders them to draw guns on all of us. Well, the air policemen are not going to draw guns on all of us. We take the base commander, and throw him in the street, the colonel, the new colonel.

The next guy through the door is Colonel Jim Covington, the vice commander. The place is a mess. The fire is now firing even worse, and Conneck is standing nude at the bar of this thing. And Jim Covington does the one thing that I'll always remember, in terms of seizing the leadership moment; he screams out, "Are there any fucking fighter pilots in this bar?" "YEAH!!!!"

It's 5:00 in the morning, we've got to go fly. He said, "Dead bug!" And we all throw ourselves on the floor, and he throws himself down, jumps up, grabs a broom, and he says, "Okay, let's clean this place up, guys," and he starts sweeping, sounds like a good idea to me. "Somebody put the fire out." So we go put the fire out. We burned down the corner of the club. (laughs) It's like that wall is fully charred, because it was wet; we kept throwing water on it. We cleaned the club. The base commander didn't last a day on the base. The new DO, Chappie James, the black guy—

(dog comes in) Hi, you're back. Did mother let you in? Hello, Myrna.

Myrna: What?

Borling: You let the dog in.

Myrna: Yes, I did.

Borling: Anyway, so that's a leadership moment, using Dead Bug. Now if you do Dead Bug, they court martial you. Of course, this is old guys talking. You think the spirit's gone out of the force. It hasn't; it's just gone underground. Because it's turned into such a politically correct force, it's turned underground. It's no longer at the Officer's Club. Sometimes it's not even in the squad room. Sometimes it's somebody basement, but it's such a shame. I learned more about flying at the bar than I ever learned out of the books or the stuff. You talk to the old guys—

I remember when I was a lieutenant, I'd hang on Bob Hutton; I'd hang on Chuck Kall or John Walker. Those three guys made me the first lieutenant to upgrade in the F-4. You used to have to qualify on the range to be upgraded, and it took two missions minimum. For most guys, it took twenty, thirty missions to upgrade, to get to your bombs and your rockets and your weaponry. This was just before going to war. I had two missions; that's all they could give me. I qualified in two missions. I was very proud of that.

DePue: Some of these stories you're talking about remind me of—

Borling: I'm very proud of them, so if I sound like I'm bragging, I am, and I'm sorry about that. Once you've got the thing that says fighter pilot up there—

DePue: But it sounds like Tailhook and all of the—⁸³

Borling: Well, it was Tailhook without the women, but it was like Tailhook. We have a thing called River Rats now, Red River Valley Fighter Pilot Association River Rats. But Tailhook was a set up deal; it never should have happened.

DePue: Well, is it time to go and ask you that question that I want?

Borling: What's the question?

DePue: When you were in simulated combat, aerial combat, how were you determining if you got hits and taking shots and things like that?

Borling: They've got it pretty sophisticated now, with lasers and stuff, but you had gun camera, and you had radar camera for shots that you could take. You would call out your valid shots, and then you'd validate it with either the radar film or the gun camera film.

DePue: Both missiles and guns?

⁸³ The Tailhook scandal was a series of incidents at the 25th Annual Tailhook Association Symposium in 1991, where more than 100 United States Navy and U.S. Marine Corps aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted 83 women and 7 men or otherwise engaged in "improper and indecent" conduct. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tailhook_scandal)

Borling: Missiles and guns. But it's gotten a lot more exotic now with laser and stuff like that.

DePue: Well, gosh, I don't know where to go from here.

Borling: Where were we? No, we were at Soesterberg, and we were talking about the command duty. That's what we did in '79 with Neil Eddins.

Oh, there was a funny story. I took the guys back on the day before Christmas, on the 23rd, what the Norwegians charmingly call *Lillejuleaften*, Little Christmas Eve. Somewhere south of Keflavik, which is Iceland...I had had a fuel leak the whole time, so I was hitting the tanker, hitting the tanker. As a matter of fact, it got to a point where I was going to either have to bingo the whole squadron into Iceland, or I was going to go back on my own to the continent.

The only problem was the continent was socked in by now with a bad storm. But I said, "Well, they've got a slingshot tanker, I'll ride the tanker back and send the rest of the squadron ahead, to go home for Christmas." I'm probably not going to make it home for Christmas. Boy, this was a toughie; I've missed a lot of Christmases, but I turned around and went back. I got back in, and the tanker was able to bingo down to Spain but didn't have enough gas to take me to Spain.⁸⁴ So, I'm looking at northern Europe and everything socked in, in fact, closed. I call up Fogleman, Buzzard, at Soesterberg and I said, "Ron, is there any way you can open up Soesterberg and get me in? I've got nowhere to go."

I guess I could have gone into a civilian strip, Rhein-Main or Charles de Gaulle or one of those places, but I didn't have enough gas, and I was...So Ron called Dutch Mil, got a controller out, GCA (ground controlled approach) guy, and said, "We'll talk you into Soesterberg, but it's pretty much zero-zero."⁸⁵ (whistles) Well, I'm a good instrument pilot but, and I've landed in low visibility, low ceilings. I've always said, well, they call it zero-zero, but it's not.

We're coming down, and he said, "Vik," he said, "It's really bad," he said, "So, just hang on Dutch Mil." The Dutch Military RAP counter, the radar controllers were excellent. I'm listening to them, "Viking, you're three miles out; you're on glide path; you're on course." I'm sweating down, and I'm listening to this guy. He said, you're ten feet left of course or fifteen feet left of course and on glide path, fifteen feet left of course. Finally the guy said,

⁸⁴ Bingo fuel is a military term that means the pilot doesn't have enough fuel for anything but returning to base and cannot continue on a mission. But more commonly now, it refers to the fuel number that, when reached, the aircraft has to divert to an alternate, in order to keep their 45 minutes of required reserve on board. (<http://cessnachick.com/2016/04/16/what-is-bingo-fuel/>)

⁸⁵A zero-zero landing is characterized by zero visibility in both horizontal and vertical directions. (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/zero-zero>)

“Viking, are you going to put this thing on center line or are you going to stay fifteen feet left of course?” (both laugh) I’m fifteen feet... You tweak it. “On course, on glide path, on course, on glide path, over the runway.” I see nothing. “Over the runway; cut your power now; give it a little flare.”

As I touched, I had runway, in fog and snow; it’s snowing. I drop the hook, and I took the approach end barrier. It was that fast. I already had the hook down actually, and I took the approach end barrier. Maintenance comes out, wheels me out of the barrier, then I do a dumb thing; I advance the power to get moving; I’m going to taxi it.

The runway is so slick, I start doing this. Buzzard’s goes, “Viking, shut the son-of-a-bitch down. We’ll tow you!” (both laugh) I shut it down, I go sliding off toward the end of the runway, kept it on the runway. They towed me in. I took a lot of shit for that. “What were you thinking, taxiing in in that kind of stuff?” So, it was really quite a feat, which almost had me kill the family a few years later, because I remembered that zero-zero landing.

I’m in a light airplane with the family, going into Benton Harbor one night. They called it zero-zero, and I said, “Shit, zero-zero my ass.” It almost was my ass. I had to go around and almost killed the whole family.

But now it’s the 23rd of December. I get on the line to Myrna, “Sorry, Toots, not going to make it.” She’s saying, “The hell you aren’t.” Or maybe it was the 22nd, or it was the 23rd. Anyway, it was “Not going to make it.” She went to the vice wing commander, then to Neil Eddins, and said, “John’s spent too many Christmases away from us in the family. You find him a tanker, and get him home.” (DePue laughs)

They went to Mildenhall, and there was a tanker on reflex there that the guys wanted to go home. I say Christmas Eve; it may have been the 23rd. I may be one day off, but it was either the 23rd or 24th. I took off from Soesterberg and picked up the tanker over England and went home to Langley. As I get into Langley...I had a Santa Claus hat on. So, I landed and came over. I lived on the water, so I came over and I rolled my wings. Well, they were already at the base. I could always go over and wag my wings, so they’d know it was me and get dinner ready or whatever. I wagged the wings.

The whole squadron was there and Myrna and the two girls. I had taken the helmet off, and I had a Santa Claus hat on when I came in. It was quite a homecoming. Neil was there and the whole bunch. I remember that, what a great squadron. Ah, what a squadron.

DePue: And a real lesson in the true chain of command, huh?

Borling: Yeah, Myrna did that all by her lonesome. So Christmas passed; New Year’s passed; it’s January 15th. A tasking comes down from Washington that they want to send an F-15 squadron to Saudi Arabia to show the people in Iran that

we're serious about this stuff and that we're going to be the first F-15s in Saudi Arabia.

DePue: This is after the Iran hostage crisis.

Borling: Yeah, this is after that, and the Shah has been deposed. This is 1980.

DePue: Before Desert One.

Borling: This is before Desert One. I think Bakhtiar or somebody... I don't know where it is, but it's right close to the takeover by Khomeini. We're just back; we've been back less than two weeks, and Neil Eddins calls me. He said, "This is a high profile mission; you have got to be..." He calls the three squadron commanders in. All of us wanted it, even though I'd been back just two weeks, after two months away.

He briefs it, and he said, "I'll make the decision who goes, shortly." I get a call from him immediately after the meeting. He said, "You guys are just back. I don't know if I can..." I said, "We want to go. This is a nationally important mission," I said, "and I can do this." Neil said to me, "I knew it all along, and why shouldn't I send my very best?" What a vote. No colonels, just me, Lieutenant Colonel Borling, in charge of the whole package. We launched out. I report to Neil, obviously, but you know who my direct chain of command was for this thing, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Davy Jones [Air Force General, David Charles Jones].

DePue: I'm thinking that there are no other U.S. military units even close to Saudi Arabia at the time.

Borling: None, and this is the first F-15s that have ever been into Saudi Arabia. In fact, this is probably the first F-15s that have even been west of Wittmund, (laughs) because we just didn't have any; there weren't that many at this time. We'd sent some to Korea. I'd gone halfway on that deployment, but we pulled Europe and that was it. Those were the two offshore things. Now we're going to Saudi Arabia of all places. The crown prince is going to meet the airplanes. My remit was, "You be over Riyadh at 11:00 on..." whatever day it was, or 10:00, whatever time. So I said, "Right."

We launched off of Langley. Normally you'd go north, and you'd go up, and you'd land at Bitburg; you'd land somewhere in Europe. But in this way, the thing that looked to be best was to land in the Azores, then spend the night in the Azores, and then go across the Med [Mediterranean Sea] and down across Egypt and then into Riyadh. So we did.

We took off. I had, I don't know how many airplanes. Yes, I had twelve airplanes, plus two spares, fourteen. We flew to the Azores, had tankers. As we hit the Azores, they said, "We've got sixty knots direct crosswind," (laughs) and you land over the cliffs at the Azores. I said, "**Sixty**

knots?” I said to the tanker, I said, “Why don’t you guys go in and land? (both laugh) If you make it, we’ll come in.” They did.

We came in, and it was more like thirty knots, but it was plenty. Coming over the cliffs, you get bounced around. We landed, and we were all fine. We’re there, and Davy Jones had given me two instructions. He said, “I want you to make single-ship takeoffs wherever you go, no formation takeoffs. And just for flight safety, I don’t want you to fly any civilian DVs in your airplane.”

DePue: DV meaning?

Borling: Distinguished visitors. He said, “Except two,” and he gave me the names of the two Saudis that we could fly.

DePue: These are single-seat aircraft though.

Borling: We had two, two-seat airplanes with us, which we called them the tubs; I wouldn’t fly it.

That night at the Azores, a storm came in. In order to take off, we had to take off something like 4:00 in the morning in order to be at Riyadh at the correct time. So we’re up, and we’re briefing at 2:00 in the morning. Our guys are there, and it is pouring. It is a tropical storm like you wouldn’t believe. I’m looking at the options of taking off fourteen airplanes. Actually, I’m going to take off fourteen, and the other two are going to bingo back, stupid. The tankers can’t get off, so they’ve got tankers coming out from Europe. They re-routed [the] tankers; we were going to pick them up in Gibraltar, actually long of Gibraltar. They’re going to punch out into the Atlantic.

We’re taxiing out. I’m number one. I’m having a jeep lead me out, and I’m having trouble seeing the jeep. That’s how bad it is. I’ve got my four ship guys, and we’d briefed fifteen-second takeoffs. I stop everybody out there, and I say, “Guys,” I said, “I think there’s too much risk in going off single ship. [If] someone loses radar contact, we’re going to be strung forever. We’ve got to go off in two ships.” I said, “I know the weather’s bad, but [does] anybody think that’s a bad idea?” “No, let’s go off in two ships,” because if one guy loses his radar, the other guy can take it.

The thing is, can you fly formation in bad weather? Well, shit, you can fly formation in bad weather, but now it’s night bad weather. (laughs) So I’m sitting there thinking, I’m violating the orders of General Jones, but what the hell, he’s not there. So anyway, that’s what we did.

We took off, and we’re rolling down the runway. I can’t see my wingman, because of the spray. I’m looking back, and I can pick up just pieces of it, but liftoff—remember, this is the magic squadron—sucked the

gear. Clay says, "I'm coming under." He goes under, and he sits like this, riding on one light, riding on my wingtip light.

DePue: Right underneath you?

Borling: Right underneath me. Right underneath me, because he needed to see... If you're out here with wingtip clearance, you've got one light and maybe cockpit light. But if you get underneath, there's other illumination from off your airplane, off the belly the airplane and that kind of stuff. He's riding underneath, so we're giving him the "slide it in" comments, and Clay is riding there. I'm flying and listening to the guys go off. Oh, God, I get slow; the leader gets slow. I'm holding my heart, because I'm still—

DePue: How far underneath is he from you?

Borling: Oh, I don't know; he's a couple feet.

DePue: That close?

Borling: Oh, yeah, he's close; he's tucked in tight. Now, I say he's underneath. He's tucked in where he's getting the opportunity for a reflection off the deal. It's different for every guy, but we're flying really close formation, getting bounced around a little. We're getting bounced around as one airplane; you're in the same air mass.

But I get slow. I'm so concerned about other things and trying to get a vector out for tankers, and trying to read... I don't have a radar that can read clouds. I don't have that kind of capability, so I'm by guess and by God, trying to get through this fucking thunderstorm and to get out up on top. So I get slow. Then Animal, who was in the last flight of the last two ship says, "Vik, for Christ sake, push it up." I look down there, and I've got 210 knots, ahhhhh. I said, "Vik's pushing it up." I had just cocked... I almost put them all in the water. That's how bad it was.

DePue: Under normal circumstances, I would assume that this would never have happened.

Borling: It would never have happened, never have happened, but the combination of night, weather, stress, my fuck-up.

DePue: No, I mean that the mission would have been scrubbed, because of the weather conditions.

Borling: Oh, yeah, the weather would have been scrubbed. Yeah, yeah, we would have scrubbed it. But given the impact to do this, I went ahead and launched. Well, we got up on top and... I don't tell that story proudly. That's probably the worst operational thing I ever did, except for a couple others.

Anyway, so we get rolling, and we get into Gibraltar. We pick up tanks. The Med's nice. We break Egypt, and that's our last tanker, at Egypt. So now we're on our own and complete under-cast over Egypt.

We break the coast of Egypt, and we go over the Sahara, and we're breaking down. I'm looking at my watch. I'm flying on the inertial navigation system [INS]. I fly out the time and the distance and the INS, which is very unreliable really; although I'm checking it with others. They say, "Yeah, we're about there, and there's a hole in the clouds." I take the twelve ships, and I go right through.

There below us is a large, what looks to me like a mud city. But off to the left of the mud city, I see a runway complex. I look at the runway complex, and that's the Royal Khalid Air Base. I look at my watch, and we've got about five minutes to go to 11:00. So I take it out over to the far side of the city—I'm trying to think of what relation it would be to the... If that's Riyadh, take it to the southwest side of the city, and spread everybody out into route formation.

No! I'm saying no to the dog.

...get everybody out in route formation, and we come over the top of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia at about 150 feet off the rooftops. I've got my guys spread into this route formation. We looked mean and great. We hit the overrun of the runway that's coming this way; we're landing this way, so it's ninety degrees to our left.

The official party is coming. I can see the cars coming, the crown prince and all, and we're short of the overrun. They're just getting out of their cars when we hit the overrun. They're starting to walk, and I do a pitch-up brake, right over the cars, with all my guys into the pitch.⁸⁶ I said, "Pitch up; brake now. We pitch all twelve at one time, up over the top, and then peel off into a thing on a long downwind to go down to this other runway to come around and land. The only problem is, the guys were so excited with this pitch-up brake thing that some of the guys are landing hot, and we're getting guys overrunning guys on the runway."⁸⁷ But we all get down safely.

We taxi in then on this runway, and I pull in and stop my... The nose of my [airplane] is pointed at the royal limousine, which is between me and maybe the edge of my wall there. We get everybody in a line, all the engines, and we do the Thunderbird shutdown signal. The engines die; crew chiefs come running up and salute. We had all this stuff planned. I jump out of the cockpit and met—now, the crown prince has not come forward, but—all his

⁸⁶ In aerodynamics, pitch-up is a severe form of stall in an aircraft. It is directly related to inherent properties of all swept wings and seen primarily on those platforms. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitch-up>)

⁸⁷ Landing hot means landing at speeds above normal landing speeds. (<https://www.charterflightgroup.com/aviation-jargon-45-terms-aviation-enthusiasts-should-know/>)

minions, who bring me forward to meet Crown Prince Abdullah—I guess is what his name is—and the American ambassador and Prince Saud and all the rest of the royal guys.

My guys are behind, standing at—this is after an eight hour flight or whatever it is—standing at attention by their airplanes, with their crew chiefs on their side. I was so damn proud, so damn proud. You know who I was proudest of?

DePue: The crew chiefs?

Borling: Debbie Worth, my female crew chief, standing there. She didn't have her T-shirt on; she had a shirt on. Airman or sergeant Debbie Worth, who was my personal crew chief. There was a big to-do about us bringing women crew chiefs to Saudi Arabia, and I said that's who we're using. She marches ashore, and she's standing at the front of the airplane, a really good-looking gal.

DePue: The kind of thing that maybe the Saudis weren't used to seeing.

Borling: Always a thrill to get strapped into the airplane. Anyway—

DePue: How do the crew chiefs and the maintenance crews get there before you guys did?

Borling: They went in with a support airplane the day before or whatever it was, to get ready for us. Man, was that something. And the ambassador [says], "I'm so fucking proud." And he said, "You guys were on time." I said, "If you only knew." (both laugh) We almost put a squadron of F-15s in the water. I didn't tell him that.

Carl Cathey was there, the chief of the U.S. military training mission to Saudi Arabia, who later became the vice chief of USAFE and turned into one of my dearest and best friends, probably salvaged my Air Force career. Carl's dead now, miss him a lot. Boy, he was a good guy.

DePue: The crews had come all the way over from the United States, not ferried in from Europe or anywhere else?

Borling: The crew chiefs?

DePue: Yeah.

Borling: No, they were from my outfit; they were from the 94th. These were my people, because I hand-picked everybody who went. Believe me, I couldn't take the whole squadron. I could take fourteen airplanes, so that left four airplanes, and I put two extra pilots in, in advance, and I had two more at Saudi Arabia. And the guys, I had to leave some behind. That hurt.

Anyway, we spent a couple days in Saudi Arabia. I flew a bunch of DVs, more than they wanted me to fly. I was flying...I personally flew Saud, the foreign minister, and Prince Turkey, the intelligence guy. And I let other guys fly other guys. It was a great thing. We gave the first static display for Saudi women that had ever been given, out on the flight line. As we're giving the briefing on the airplane and everything, they're exposing themselves to us.

DePue: I was going to ask if they were veiled.

Borling: Oh, yeah, but they were exposing themselves.

DePue: Well, to what extent were they...The veil was coming off?

Borling: They were flashing us with the veil and giving us the little high sign eyes. The Saudi men, this was so embarrassing for them. We were like here, but they were looking away, talking to the escorts. They couldn't see the women doing this.

That night, we showed up at the base commander or the wing commander's house for a party. The door was answered by this woman in western dress—kind of diaphanous dress, but western dress—with no veil or anything. She said, "Hi, I'm Fatima. Don't sweat it, I lived in Vegas for six months." (DePue laughs) We walked in, full bar, other high-ranking things with their wives, without veils. We had not been briefed on a dress code. We thought we were just going to be pogues, so we're all in flight suits.⁸⁸ We had flight suits; that was the deal, but they're dressed nicely.

The next-door neighbor comes through with his wife, who is in full veil, next-door neighbor, one of the wives, his youngest wife, I guess. He looks around and sees all these other women, grabs his wife's thing and rips it off her. She now basically is standing there in her bra and panties. She does this and runs into the kitchen, where Fatima spends twenty minutes talking to her. She comes out and sits—actually she had kind of slip on, over this bra and panties—and sits on the end of the couch like this, with her face down. Fatima had never met her; she's her next-door neighbor. She [the wife] was embarrassed beyond words.

DePue: Was this your first exposure to Muslim traditions?

Borling: Yeah it was; it was. And the Saudis were knocking down booze like there's no tomorrow. In fact, they all got sloshed. My guys were ordering soft drinks. I knew enough about that, so we didn't do any of that. We spent a couple, three days there.

⁸⁸ Pogue is American derogatory, pejorative military slang for non-combat staff and other rear-echelon or support units. Pogue frequently applies to those who do not have to undergo the risk and stresses of combat as the infantry does. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pogue>)

Then, from General Jones, I got orders, “Go to Khamis Mushait,” which is down on the Yemeni border. We took off from... Oh, I flew Carl Cathey and flew some other guys. It was a great success. We flew down to Khamis Mushait, which is on the Yemeni border, where they had some Saudi fighters. We just did some sorties down there, flew some more people.

They took us to a valley where people lived along... It was like Grand Canyon stuff. There were these wooden trellises, of which there were huge baskets that people would stand in, and they would let them down by rope, down this sheer cliff. They would live in caves on the inside, or sometimes... There were more trellises that would go down all the way to the valley floor. It was several, by my judgment, not hundreds of feet, maybe a thousand feet down. The people were living in these caves in the side of this, like Pueblos.

The guy said, “Do you want to see it, up close?” You’d see the Saudi men or women go sauntering up, hop into the basket and hang on. Well, we got up, from about here to that door, eight feet away, and there’s nothing out there; there’s just this cliff. Well, I take another couple of steps. I’m terrified of heights; I can’t stand heights. So, I got down on my hands and knees, and I’m crawling forward. As I got closer, and I could look, I’m on my **belly** going forward. (DePue laughs) I look behind me, my whole squadron is on its belly. We look over the edge; I mean it is sheer. You look at these people standing in these baskets, going up and down, with braided rope or something. I’m saying, I wouldn’t do that if it was a crane and steel cable.

The Saudi guys are standing there; they’re next to us, and we’re all looking. (both laugh) All the brave Americans are on their bellies. These Saudi guys are standing there looking like, what’s the matter with you guys? So we back away. I remember that; that was scary stuff.

DePue: So you just impressed the living daylights out of them, the way you came in. Then here you are a couple days later, huh?

Borling: On our bellies at Khamis Mushait. Well, we’re at Khamis Mushait and things are sketchy, but I’m getting word through Carl Cathey at USMM, the United States Military Mission. He says, “We’re getting word from General Jones. It’s getting a little more exotic. They may want you to go out around the world.”

DePue: This is my question to you, Sir... I’m going to jump in here. Was this mission something that the Saudis had requested or something that the Americans—

Borling: No. Something the Americans requested. But then it came out that they wouldn’t let us go armed, so we weren’t armed. So it was kind of turned into an air show.

DePue: Yeah, but the Iranians don’t necessarily need to know that, do they?

Borling: When it said so in the... This was under Carter.

DePue: Enough said.

Borling: But we got the word that we might go out around the world. They said, "Hang in there." We got the word; I finally got hookup through an embassy line, direct back to the joint chiefs. They said, "Here's what we want you to do. We can't work the around the world thing; we can't get clearances. Send four to the Sudan." (DePue laughs) I said, "**Where?**" They said, "The Sudan. Send four to Morocco, and send four to Spain."

I stood the guys up. I said, "All right, four to Sudan. I'm taking that one." I gave my ops officer four to Morocco, and I gave the assistant ops officer, Rick Parsons, I said, "Rick, you've got to tough it out and go to Spain." He says, "I'll take Spain."

DePue: Why did you choose Sudan?

Borling: It's just exotic, going to Khartoum, Sudan?

DePue: Well, I would assume we had no military relations with Sudan.

Borling: None.

DePue: At that time, did we have any in—

Borling: No, no. It just changed. It had just changed, and they were at least pro-American a little bit. Remember, Sudan was so pro-Russian; they had MiGs and stuff like that. So the government had changed, and it opened up.

DePue: So, this is after the time Carter had made his inroads with Egypt and the Egyptian-Israeli talks and all of that?

Borling: I don't remember, and I don't have the guy's name any more, but I've got a picture of him, the head of the Sudanese air force or Sudanese military, and the ambassador.

We didn't even do tankers; we flew from Khamis Mushait, hit Port Saud and went over to Khartoum and beat up the city of Khartoum, and the sister city, Omdurman, and came in. We're doing kind of air show stuff over the runway. Clay Jones, my ever-loyal number two, Clay ended up being CEO of Rockwell International, over in Iowa, big guy.

We were in a pull, and Clay said, "Hey, I just lost an engine." I said, "Ah, shit." He says, "I'm going to peel it off and go in and land." So, Clay went in, peeled off and landed. He said, "Be aware guys, no runway remaining markers." When you land, you have... It was kind of disconcerting. So we landed.

We had a 141 there that had—there was no fuel for us—but he brought in a fuel bladder, so we had extra fuel. I had enough fuel for two sorties more, so I flew a couple guys in Sudan. They got on national television and told the people to get up tomorrow, because the F-15's going to fly and go supersonic over... We were blowing out what windows there were. Spent a couple days, toured. "That's the confluence of the White and the Blue Nile," did that.

DePue: Got to see Khartoum?

Borling: Oh, yeah, Khartoum. I could have flown the MiG 21, but they didn't have any tires for it. They offered to let me... Well, we crawled all over the MiG 21, but we couldn't fly it because of no tires.

I had no contact with Jones at this point, not even though the embassy line; it was down. But we got... The 141 radio hip-hopped in somehow that they wanted us to then go to Portugal. We were supposed to meet in Portugal in three days. So, we took off. They said there will be a tanker at so and so, and there was. We tanked and ended up going to Lisbon, Portugal, spent a couple days in Portugal.

DePue: Was the rest of the unit there as well?

Borling: All four from Morocco came; all four from Spain came. All of us got food poisoning in Portugal, spent a day under the blankets, but that's all right. We were supposed to be touring Portugal; we were all touring the latrine. They said, "Now come home."

We got it off to the airfield, got the things gassed up. I led the formation off. We hit tankers and landed at Langley within five minutes of our scheduled arrival time and taxied in. Neil Eddins met us at the airplane. There was national press at the airplane. They said, "How easy is that?" They said, "Halfway around the world, you got all the airplanes; you didn't miss a lick." So, that was the end of that sortie, that mission.

Got promoted three years below the zone or two years below the zone, to full colonel, which meant I had to give up the squadron. Gave up the squadron that summer and had orders to National War College.

DePue: How long were you in command then?

Borling: Probably about fifteen months, all said and done, eleven to fifteen months. I've forgotten frankly, but not long enough. God, I would have kept that squadron. If they said, "You can have this job for the rest of your life, (DePue laughs) I would have traded it in." One more question, and I have to take a break.

DePue: The question is, I'm trying to understand the rationale of sending you guys to Saudi in the first place. That makes some sense, a show of force to Iran. But

then, why leave so quickly afterwards, unless you're trying to show that you can get the Air Force anywhere as quickly as possible?

Borling: I don't know. That was a decision above my pay grade. But I do know that it also impelled the Saudis to buy F-15s, and the foreign military sales thing was important to us. I'll be right back.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Took another quick break, and we're back at it this afternoon.

General, what I'd like to do is to take a little bit of a diversion and have you respond to some, let's call them more strategic kinds of questions. One of the things that happened after the Vietnam War was that the military was rethinking who the threat was and who they should be focusing their energies on. Perhaps it was much less an issue for the Air Force than it was for the Army and the Marine Corps. But, even in your case, in the Vietnam War you're fighting a military that really doesn't have much of an air force; although they have plenty of air defense weapons systems. Was the focus very deliberately now on the Soviet threat, in the 1970s and into the '80s?

Borling: Yeah, I would think that would be the case. The military has a budget process that in fact is threat-based, or the foundation of that is threat oriented. So, you can make a tongue-in-cheek argument that, in order for the military to get funded, it has to have a threat against which it is posturing. One can, I think, make an argument that how much is real and how much is fabricated is that matter of balance.

The reality is that, post-Vietnam, we determined as a nation to outsource to a very small percentage of the population, our military needs. We ended the draft. I think this was a great mistake, because it tended not to **involve** the mass of citizenry. Even if you didn't get drafted, you were subject to it, even by lottery. I happen to think that a program of conscription, even today, would be helpful to the national fabric. But that's one of the things from Vietnam.

This business, we used to have a national guide that said we could fight two and a half wars, a war in Europe, a war in Asia, and another half-war someplace else. Then it went to one and a half wars. Now, increasingly, it looks like a half a war. We used to have a much more robust force structure. We are structurally disarming ourselves, and this occurred after Vietnam and after the [Berlin] wall came down in 1989.

DePue: Part of what the military was looking at was—and this is especially true, I think, of Creighton Abrams, who was chief of staff for a short period of time for the Army—involving the Reserve component much more, as well, that if you needed to get into the war in the future—I think you've alluded to this already—then you get into Congress having a national debate, and part of that

national debate is about bringing in the National Guard and the Reserve. Was that a focus of what was going on in the Air Force in the late '70s, early '80s?

Borling: I don't think so. I think the Air Force resisted Guard and Reserve involvement, except when they were really needed, in favor of the active force.

What has happened, post-80s—I would say more 90s, 2000s, 2010, probably post-Gulf War, certainly post-Gulf War One, even more urgently, Gulf War Two [is that the] long quartering of substantial amounts of air forces offshore caused us to rely upon Guard and Reserve forces to augment the active force.

So, I think it was the protocol of being a forward-deployed force that caused the Guard and Reserve focus and then the notion that somehow it was more economical, so we could draw down the active force and rely more on Guard and Reserves. I'm not sure it really is, when it's all said and done.

One thing is that the Guard and Reserve forces tend to have a very high standard of maintenance, because the people who've gotten out, in favor of a "stable lifestyle"—it certainly hasn't worked out that way—are much experienced in the weapons systems that they're supporting. You find a lot more seven-level maintenance guys in Guard and Reserve things than you would in the active duty.

DePue: The other couple questions I've got are in reference to what the Army in particular, and I think the Marine Corps to a lesser extent, referred to these years as the "hollow army years" because of the lack of funding support.

Borling: That was Shy Meyer.⁸⁹ I can't speak with authority to that, other than I think the whole military has been hollowed out and is hollowing even further. You used to, when you were a lieutenant, stand up at the bar and scream, "I'm the best fighter pilot in the world, and I can take anybody on." By the time you're a captain, a major, you still may think that, but you carry it with you quietly. The confidence is not in the shouting or the exposition, the shouting; it's through the deeds.

So, when we stand up, and our politicians, including our presidents say, "There is no military second to ours in the world. We're the most powerful nation." It reminds me a little bit of the lieutenant at the bar or someone trying to summon French-like false glories. I'd much rather see the

⁸⁹ Edward Charles "Shy" Meyer is a retired U.S. Army general who served as the 29th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. During his tenure, he prosecuted an Army-wide modernization program with emphasis on quality over quantity, stressed the need for a long-term investment in land force materiel, and launched a unit-manning system to reduce personnel turbulence and to enhance readiness. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_C._Meyer)

evidence of that in actions and the impact on world affairs and make my own deduction, rather than have it shoved down my throat. It rings hollow.

DePue: Did you feel that was the case for the Air Force in the post-Vietnam, late 1970s years?

Borling: I think there was a malaise, because we'd just been at it too long. This goes back to this thing about ISIS now, that if we get into another long thing or long... We haven't been out of anything for it seems like forever. My view is all right, well if we've got to be in it forever, at least let's send invoices to these people we're supposedly helping. It costs you \$1 billion a month. You want us to be there? That's the price tag.

DePue: Which only a handful of countries, like Saudi Arabia, have been able and willing to do with that kind of thing.

Borling: We made money on the first Gulf War. We didn't make any money since.

DePue: Right. How about a reduction in force? Did the Air Force experience that in post-Vietnam years?

Borling: Yeah, we did, and we continue... The thing is, it all continues. We've drawn down force structure and numbers to an alarming rate, the numbers of fighter wings, the number of fighter squadrons. Now maybe that's not the appropriate measure of merit.

We seem to have invested a hell of a lot more of intelligence, even though the president reminds us that the intelligence keeps letting him down and has him making mistakes. What a crock. The intelligence is always to be taken with kind of a guarded view, but... Think of the Santee raid, where the thing was empty.

The problem with us is that we're trying to take all the variables and all the risk out, and we're trying to understand everything perfectly. You've got to go with your gut; you've got to go with your instincts; you've got to go with speed. A violent plan, violently executed—even a half-assed plan—has a better chance of a well-thought-out, infinitely-analyzed plan, timorously put into effect. Napoleon said it best, "If you want to take Vienna, take Vienna." I think that's a wise saying anyway. But I lecture on these matters, so don't get me started lecturing.

DePue: Well, let's get you back to the National War College. Was that your **desired** posting, the next time you got a promotion?

Borling: I was very surprised I got promoted to full colonel when I did; that's at the sixteen year point. That's as accelerated as you can get. I still think they may have made a mistake with me by a year. I got snuck under the wire by a couple days. It was interesting, because all three colonels, all three

commanders of all three squadrons at Langley got promoted, two of us below the zone, all of us below the zone, to full colonel, John Jaquish, John Lucas, I think, and me, and I was the junior. I think I was the absolute last guy on the to-promote list.

DePue: But isn't that a pretty good indication that the Air Force sees stars in all three of your futures?

Borling: It did, and in John Jaquish's case, it came true; he became a three-star. I became a two-star, and Lucas didn't make flight rank.

DePue: Let's talk about getting to the National War College and that experience.

Borling: I will, with one proviso, that I want to commend the leadership team at Langley, when I was a squadron commander and before, but the combination of Neil Eddins, Stan Musser, [who] was a Thunderbird, good friend of Neil's. Stan died a couple years ago, sorry to say, his wonderful wife, Dawn. And we had Jerry Neighbors as the DO. Jerry and his wife were just...Sue, I guess. I don't know Jerry's wife's name now, but she was wonderful, and she was beautiful, and she and Myrna were great friends. But June Eddins and Myrna were really great friends, and Dawn Musser was such a lady, and Stan was such a reprobate, (DePue laughs) but what a good guy. That was a wonderful, wonderful wing and the highlight of our career.

I will tell you, then getting promoted and getting assigned to National War College, which was the crème-de-la-crème of the schools, that was always...When I mapped out the career I'd like to have at the Air Force Academy, I wanted to make colonel in sixteen, and I wanted to go to National War College. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I also wanted to be a Thunderbird, and be an astronaut, and I wanted to be an ace. So half of them worked out, and half of them didn't. I didn't have POW on the list, as I remember.

DePue: Kind of tough to be an ace in the kind of warfare—

Borling: Yeah, it was just, we had one ace, Steve Ritchie, but it was the incidence of the...He was class of '64 from the academy, and all glory to Steve, and Chuck DeBellevue, who was a back-seater, was an ace as well, had more kills than Steve.

But the reality is that going to national and making colonel in sixteen was an achievement. You talk in terms of ambitions, somewhere along the way, ambition to be somebody is overridden by ambition to do something. It was somewhere around major, lieutenant colonel, that I became more enamored of what I'll call characted ambition, no less ambitious, just trying to do it for the right...trying to have the right motivation. If you're pushing yourself into the limelight all the time, you find the limelight dims in a hurry. You have to have orientation outside of self, and I have tried to remember that.

DePue: Did you, by this time in your career, run into people that were colleagues and competitors, who were trying to do the maneuvering to become general officers, maybe in the wrong way, the kind of things that always seem to crop up when you're fighting for that number one rating in OERs [Officer Effectiveness Reports]?

Borling: Yeah. By nature, the fighter world, the whole world, at levels where people are trying to achieve, is competitive. But I guess there's rules of the road to how you compete, how principled your competition is, how much you want it. Are you willing to give up things that are within your control for the potential of a future tomorrow? It's very hard to make general officer, in terms of percentages. It's almost something you don't think about.

But I believe that the sacrifices that we made along the way—I'm talking Myrna and me—were helpful to that quest. As you get into positions, senior colonel positions, that typically have been competitive for a general officer rank, you keep thinking that you've got a shot at it. But there's a lot of full colonel positions that will never be promoted to colonel. There's a certain select few that, if you get that plum, then you know you've got a shot.

The rules have changed about how people get promoted. It's much more machine-like today than it was yesterday, where all the four-stars basically had a priority list, and they just ranked their colonels, one through twenty, who they thought were competitive for general officer. Then they would have kind of a quota system that the board would look at, and they would pick those people.

Now it's much more mechanistic, and I'm not too sure it's as effective, because you want the people to take note of and have personal knowledge of, not just a paper trail, but personal knowledge of the performance and the character and the aggressive factors of the people that are going to be generals. (Sighs)

Generals are supposed to be generals too. They're not supposed to be specific, but we have developed pipes where you've got intel generals and weather generals and maintenance generals and fighter pilot generals and non-fighter pilot generals and space generals and cyber generals. If the term **generalist** means anything, it's that the people who you promote to these senior ranks have to have the executive capacities to learn quick, adapt, and then put things in place to take the institution forward.

DePue: Wasn't there a sense, though—again, this is from my Army experience—that there was a necessity to punch your ticket along the way, to get the right kind of assignments?

Borling: Obviously, there's why I said Armed Forces Staff College, National War College in residence.

DePue: A successful command.

Borling: A successful command at various levels, squadron, group, wing, division...well not division; that's a general officer position. Increasingly, wing command is a general officer position. So yeah, and then this fascination with joint stuff; you have to have joint duty in order to be promoted.

[There's] this supposition that you had to have a master's degree. Doctors' degrees are looked at askance; ah, you want to be smart but not too smart. You find people chasing bullshit master's degrees, just to fill a square. I don't have a master's degree. I think I was the only general officer of my crowd who did not have a master's degree. On the other hand, I was White House Fellowship, published author, had the POW experience; that's joint, I guess.

But actually, before I got promoted to general, I had SHAPE duty, so Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. That was going to be my only joint deal. I had successful command; I had been moved into various positions where different skill sets were required. So, I could make a case, but if you want to go on being promoted below the zone, without an advanced degree, boy, that would be a no-no today; I'll tell you. And I happen to think that's too bad. Many of these other advanced degree things are just square-filling; square-filling, that's all it is.

DePue: What was the curriculum like at the war college?

Borling: Well, let's get to the National War College first. We had to leave the coast in Virginia, which was this fabulous house on the water, where the black lab next door, Licorice, would serve as the guardian of my—(thinking out loud) this was 1979, born in 1975, '74; so this would be my—five-year-old, who'd be out there, rushing around in the backyard with a deep water bulkhead about out where my bulkhead is, so forty, fifty yards away. Licorice, the black dog, would never let her go anywhere close. He'd just bump her, and she'd go running. He could go faster and bump her, grab her and pull her back. So Licorice was her friend.

And then a little girl, a Chinese girl, Jennifer Liang, moved in next door, her age, and they were inseparable. So this is going to be the first hard move for my five year-old, Lauren. The old head by this time knew what it was like, so she's ready to go again...not ready, but accepting.



General Borling's official photograph, used during his tenure as chief of staff, Headquarters Allied Forces North Europe at Stavanger, Norway.

We had to sell the house. We bought it for \$76,000, with that assumption that I told you about. So, I went to a couple of the major manufacturers and businesses in the area and said, "Look, I've got this house for sale. If you have a senior executive moving in who wants to have an unusual place on the water," I said, "he ought to come and see it."

The CEO of Liber America, sent his new vice president of sales over, and [he] looked at the house with his wife. They loved it; they loved the location. They brought the boss with them; they brought the CEO, who looked at the house to see if it was going to be suitable for their vice president, a very German approach.

DePue: For entertaining, I would assume.

Borling: Entertaining. I told them that the price of the house was \$150,000. I'd been there three years, three and a half years. They knew that, and they said, "That's too much. You can't ask to double your money in three years." I said, "Yes I can." I remember walking out on my pier; hell, we had \$50,000 worth of pier structure out there. I said, "If you want to wake to the sound of seabirds in the morning..."

The president looked at me, and the guy looked at me, and the wife said, "I really want this house!" (DePue laughs) Myrna was hoping to get our money out of it. So we took that money and went to Washington.

DePue: Sold it for \$150k then.

Borling: For \$150k. Well, now we had about \$75k in our pocket, which was a lot of money. We went driving around, looking for places at National War College. I was out in Lorton, Virginia—which is about thirty minutes from downtown on a fast track—and found, out along the banks of the Potomac, a place called Hallowing Point River Estates.

There was a guy there who was just tapping a sign into the lawn, For Sale. I said, "How much do you want for the house?" He said 162, and I said, "Let me walk the land." I walked the land; it was gorgeous, right on the Potomac, four miles of open river and stuff. This is down the road to Gunston Hall Plantation. You go through a wilderness area where the eagles are and all. This is still in Fairfax County.

I walked out, and I said, "I'll give you \$150,000 for the house, cash." I only had \$75,000, but I figured I could call my banker. He said, "When do you want to move in?" I said, "Next week." He said, "I can't do it." He said, "I need two weeks." I said, "Okay, two weeks." I want home, and we shook.

DePue: This is before Myrna had seen it?

Borling: This is before Myrna had seen it; I whisper that. In fact, I'd only been through it for about ten seconds. I didn't care about the house; I cared about the land and all this wonderful water. It was a split-level house, which is was kind of a '50s house, brick, but not real fancy, modest house, three-bedroom, 2,400, 2,500 square feet but on the water.

The next weekend I drove Myrna up. She wasn't happy at all that I had "bought a house" without her. I said, "Well, look," I said, "It's easy." I said, "I've got three or four other houses we'll take a look at, and if you like any of them better, we'll buy [one of] those houses instead of that one. Now, I'm running a busted flush at this point, because I've shaken hands with this guy.

So we go. Myrna said, "Oh, I love this house." It's on a canal, not on a river. It's a colonial, and it's got pillars and shit. So then we go over to another house; she didn't like that one.

Then we drive over to, down the thing where the horse farms are and through the wilderness area. She said, "Oh, this is so magic." [It's] seven miles from Highway 1, right next to Belvoir Peninsula; we're one peninsula south. We drove out there, and we drove up to this place. She said, "This is magic out here, isn't it?" I said, "Let's walk around the land." She said, "Oh, look at that, and the dogs can run here." And we had a lot next door to us that was unbuilt. She walked into the house, and she said, "Ah, this isn't so nice." Then I said, "Well, you can have any one you want." I said, "Take a look at how your kitchen looks out on the water there though, sitting out on the deck." I said, "We can get a boat." And I said, "I think it would really..." She says, "You know, you're right. Let's take this house." I said, "Great." (both laugh)

That's the last time I did that. But we kept that house, rented it for large numbers, more than covered the mortgage—it was our cash cow—and sold the house for a lot of money, north of \$500,000, as I left the service. That gave us a springboard into Carol Moseley Braun's penthouse in Hyde Park and into this place. So, I guess you should call this oral history, *Buy on the Water*. How's that?

DePue: So you had that house for well over ten years, fifteen years or so?

Borling: We bought that house in 1980, and I sold it in...1996, when I retired from the Air Force.

DePue: So, even though there was a couple years with pretty hefty inflation, you sold it for three times your purchase price.

Borling: Yep.

DePue: Did the black lab come with it, or is that the neighbor's dog?

Borling: No, the black lab was back on Poquoson. We sold the Poquoson house and bought this house on the Potomac—this is going up at National War College—and kept that house all through the years and then commuted. In fact, I did buy the boat, and we used to commute to National War College, in the boat.

DePue: Well, that's what I was going to ask you, because that is on the other side of the river.

Borling: Yeah, it is, but you can do that. We drove most of the time. We had other guys that lived down there. You tended to live south of Springfield. It was very expensive to live there, but we did that. We're at National for a year, enjoyed National War College immensely.

DePue: What was the commute time?

Borling: Fast track, again, thirty-five minutes.

DePue: Not bad for the DC area.

Borling: Yeah. Non-fast track, hours. My favorite thing is when the snow hits, three or four times a year. This was later, when I was with the Pentagon. They would allow everyone to start on their way to work, get all the highways clogged, and then they would come over the radio and say, "Well, now it's going to turn into a snow day and only the mission-essential people report to work." (DePue laughs) And everybody turns around. They don't get home until 5:00; you might as well check in to the nearest bar.

When I was working at the Pentagon, my guys told me, "How do you know if you're mission-essential or not?" I said, "When the helicopter comes for you..." (DePue laughs) But everyone would go to work, because you were mission-essential.

DePue: That's part of the ego of it, is that you don't want to be non-mission-essential.

Borling: Yeah, nonessential, who would want to be that?

So anyway, we went to National War College. It was a gloriously refined place. We shared... This was at Fort Leslie J. McNair in Anacostia, or actually not short of Anacostia. It's down there by Hains Point in DC, down by the main fish market. That's where the presidents go to jog around the... It's the place where they hung the Lincoln conspirators.

DePue: Yeah, it's not far from the Capitol or the White House, it's right there, isn't it?

Borling: Well, the Capitol is close, right down South Capitol Street. We would jog there or jog along the river on lunch hour. It was a relaxed but a taxing setting intellectually, again, fully joint, State Department and Army, Navy, Air Force,

Marine Corps, Roosevelt Hall. There's a Roosevelt dedicated memorial hall here in Rockford. If you've not seen it, it's worth the journey. It's the only memorial hall dedicated by a sitting president.

DePue: Was that in honor of Teddy or Franklin?

Borling: Teddy, Teddy did it. It's just four or five minutes from here. We're too late now; they're closed, but if we ever do this again, we ought to make a stop. It's got some original Lincoln stuff in it.

DePue: No, I mean the one at McNair. Was that also Teddy?

Borling: Yes, also Teddy. A great library, we shared it with the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. We used to joke about how commercial they were, versus how...the House of Commons, House of Lords, kind of thing. I made up the story that for their graduation, their keynote speaker was going to lecture on how to change a tire.

DePue: Wasn't that where the Center of Military History is, as well?

Borling: I don't know, but the Pan American War College is there. I don't know about the military history. It's now the United Defense Institute or College there, with ICAF, National and something else. It's rather small, so I don't know where it would be.

That house, by the way, that sits...As you come down McNair, there's a large parade field that fills almost the whole length of the installation, going down toward Roosevelt Hall at the end and then the ICAF building on the left, the admirals' and generals' row, beautiful, antebellum homes on the right, on the channel that goes down to the main fish market. But as you go down there, there's this house, where, in front of the house is where the Lincoln conspirators were hung, including the woman, whatever her name was.

DePue: Mary Surratt.

Borling: Yes, that's right. The house, and Mary Surratt's ghost still lingers in that house. Having lived in a house with ghosts, I'm perfectly willing to accept that.

DePue: That it's not just legend, it can very well be the fact?

Borling: Well, I didn't live in **that** house with ghosts, but I've lived in a house with ghosts at Offutt Air Force Base. The quarters [are] famous for its ghost or ghosts.

DePue: So, again, what was the curriculum while you were there?

Borling: Wildly elevated geopolitical, with nationally and internationally known speakers, less war, more genesis of conflict and a case history approach. I would have preferred more war, but you've got hefty geopolitical thinking. They also had great racquetball, and for the second time in my life, I took a racquetball in the eye. That wasn't any fun, went down hard on that one, much like I did at the academy.

I had a pretty good foreign trip, as part of the National War College, into Puerto Rico, Venezuela. That was kind of it. And as I reminded myself, Venezuela was the kind of country that I had the feeling that people would just one day get out of their parked cars, all of them on the freeway, and just walk away into the jungle and leave Caracas a denuded city. [It's] right up there with Thailand at rush hour. We did Vieques, as well, the Navy bombing range that is no more.

DePue: Is that in Venezuela?

Borling: No, that's off Puerto Rico. (signs) The environmental people got off the Navy for doing their shelling of this little island—beautiful beaches—kind of like we used to do off San Clemente, I guess. It's hard to find a place to shell with impunity these days. Had trips to the Navy and the Army, Benning, for example, and out to San Diego. We had an Air Force trip; I think we went to Langley of all places, don't remember. But [I] had good friends, and we called ourselves the illustrious class of '80, and so we remain.

DePue: I wonder if there was discussion at the time... Again, the Soviet Union would have been **the** threat that you were focused in on and your—

Borling: I'm going to be destined for the Pentagon, where I'm going to be, first job, chief of Checkmate.⁹⁰ So that is very much the focus of the country.

DePue: Was there any discussion while you were at the war college, about the fragile nature of the Soviet economy and that they were teetering on the edge economically, that that might be the way to defeat the Soviet Union?

Borling: Not that I can remember. By the time I got to Checkmate, that was a theme we developed.

DePue: The reason I ask that—forgive me for doing this—but my last year at West Point, I had a course on Soviet government and policy. Our instructor was a

⁹⁰ Since its inception in the 1970s, Checkmate has been a cross-functional planning and analysis organization on the Air Staff that has taken on various roles, depending on the needs of the Air Force's senior leaders. Checkmate is used to give Airmen the edge they need a fight, by looking across the spectrum of conflict. (<https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/126656/checkmate-strategic-studies-group-supports-leaders/>)

rare lieutenant colonel, and that was his theory that he posited there in 1976. It seemed very unlikely in '76.

Borling: It doesn't have to be a theory. The problem is that a lot of this stuff is transitory. The problem with Communism was that it was not an -ism as much as it was a supposed *raison d'être* [purpose], based on natural law, for Russia, and later People's Republic of China, to exist and prosper. If you're a student of Marxist—well, I call it historical materialism or the Hegelian earlier precursor, dialectic materialism, and the works of Feuerbach and others—the damnable aspect of Communism—again an -ism—was that it purported to have locks on natural laws, which in and of themselves dictated that our form of government and life would perish, either violently, or it would wither away.

Now if you have been inside that stuff—and I have been inside that stuff, not the student of it that I used to be—you can make a case for the process of the dialectic, endlessly. But when you try to ascribe all human thinking to basically three compartments and from that then be predictive of the ends of various nation states and their forms of government and economy, you run into real trouble.

What happened was it doubled back on them, and they didn't realize that the gun that they were pointing at everybody was pointed at themselves. Now, you can make a case that the new theology is merely to try to reinstate the territorial glories of yesteryear.

DePue: The new realities for now Russia.

Borling: Russia, Russia, right.

DePue: Vladimir Putin.

Borling: Yeah. And that's distressing, because the thinking over the last fifteen, twenty years has been—as best manifested in the book, *The Pentagon's New Map*—that nations which have an enduring economic, interactive responsibility with the world—those where you can do business—the rule of law applies, and where the rights of women are respected, the big three, and have some kind of sense of humor about themselves, depreciated, are thought to be so integrally intertwined that they would never risk or go to war, one with another, because it would be like cutting their own throats.

DePue: Except that's exactly where Europe was in 1912.

Borling: The problem is that war and the spin-up to war hardly ever follows rational actor models, and that's what we experience time and time and time again.

DePue: Was that the kind of discussion that you were encountering when you were at the war college?

Borling: No. We encountered it, because we generated it at Checkmate. There was a certain Socratic hesitancy that got built into the equation. But you were, again...Go back to the careerism. You're talking about a bunch of colonels or Navy captains, who are deemed, by presence at the National War College, competitive, for advancement. In fact, some significant percentage of that...I think we had forty Air Force, forty Army, forty Navy, forty civilians, and the Navy was split up Navy, Marine Corps, so that's 160 folks. Of those 160 folks, I wouldn't be surprised if half, a third to a half, made flag rank or civilian equivalent.⁹¹

DePue: I think this might be a decent place for us to call it a day, before we get to your assignment at the Pentagon, because I think that's something that we'll want to spend a little bit of time.

Borling: Multiple assignments at the Pentagon.

DePue: Right. So, are there any comments that you want to make about that experience at the war college or your career up to this point, before we end for the day?

Borling: Well, the commandant of the war college was an admiral by the name of John Barrow. I thought he was a good commandant. He was a rear admiral.

DePue: Barrow?

Borling: Barrow, John Barrow, and there was a Harvey—I don't know; what the hell is Harvey's last name, long term civilian professor? Harvey, Harvey, Harvey—I was there with some people that I'd served with previously, a couple of White House Fellows, a couple of folks from the academy that had been friendly together and had high estimation, one of another. The competitors tend to have high estimation, one of another, not that you don't want to beat them, but you have high estimation.

I think the emphasis on mind and body workout was important. A lot of guys ran their first marathon while at the National War College; I was one of them. I didn't run it well, but ran it and run them today. The physical environment was conducive to putting another notch in your gun belt. It was kind of like working at the White House; you'd walk into Roosevelt Hall, and you knew you were in a historically significant place.

That tour in Washington in that timeframe also gave us the opportunity to get acquainted **well, again**, with the cultural scene. There are ways for the military to enjoy theater at a very low cost or no cost. The only thing that was a little off-putting was that my favorite place in Washington was no longer as

⁹¹ Flag officer or flag rank is a term applied to a military officer holding the rank of general, lieutenant general, major general, or brigadier general in the US Army, Air Force or Marine Corps or admiral, vice admiral, or rear admiral in the US Navy or Coast Guard. (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/flag+officer>)

accessible as it used to be, and now it's damn near inaccessible, and that's the Lincoln Memorial. You used to be able to drive around the Lincoln, and if you had enough chutzpah, you could park right there and just walk up the steps.

My favorite time to go there was just before they turned the lights out at midnight and have Smoky the Bear guy, the park service guy, up on the left, come out and offer some facts about the monument and why it's...the Us or Vs, and how big is the thumb, and why is there a misspelling in the second inaugural?⁹² The Lincoln at midnight is clearly my favorite place in Washington. But now you have to go park in some place and walk a mile and finally get there.

DePue: Is that part of the post 9/11 world?

Borling: It did change then, but it also changed in 1980 from when I was there [in] '74, '75. It used to be a place where **presidents** would wander to the Lincoln. Nixon would sneak out of the White House and go walk the Lincoln at night.

DePue: For a bit of inspiration and thought?

Borling: Yeah. It is a place where, absent crowds, you can gain meditative strength, in my view. I do. Anyway, that's my favorite place in Washington.

DePue: General, I think that's probably a great way to finish for today.

Borling: Thank you.

(end of transcript #8)

(end of volume II)

⁹² Smokey the Bear is urban-speak for a state trooper/highway patrolman.
(<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=smokey%20bear>)