

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with John Borling

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember - Vietnam Oral History project

Interview # VRV-A-L-2013-037

Major General John Borling, a career Air Force officer who spent over six and a half years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam and once released, had a long and distinguished Air Force career, was interviewed on the dates listed below as a joint venture between the Pritzker Military Library and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember - Vietnam* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: May 22, 2013 Location: Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, Illinois

Date: May 23, 2013, Mar 20 & 21, Apr 23, May 13, Sep 30, Oct 27, 2014; Feb 10 & Mar 5, 2015

Location: Gen. John Borling residence in Rockford, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Patty Maynor & Jan Culp, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 564 pgs. Total Time: 3:13(1) + 1:49(2) + 2:43(3) + 1:56(4) + 2:41(5) + 2:42(6) + 2:23(7) + 2:04(8) + 2:33(9) + 2:17(10) + 2:03(11) + 2:33(12) + 2:11(13) / 3.22(1) + 1.87(2) + 2.77(3) + 1.93(4) + 2.68(5) + 2.7(6) + 2.38(7) + 2.07(8) + 2.55(9) + 2.28(10) + 2.05(11) + 2.55(12) + 2.18(13) = 31.23 hrs.

Volume I: Early life, education and POW experiences

Session 1: Growing up in Chicago, Air Force Academy & flight training

Session 2: Air combat experiences over North Vietnam in 1965-1966

Session 3: Early POW years in North Vietnam

Session 4: Later POW years in North Vietnam – Hanoi Hilton

Volume II: Political experiences White House Fellowship, Staff College and command

Session 5: Running for U.S. Senate from Illinois and political offices in the 2000s

Session 6: Release from prison in 1973, flight retraining and White House Fellow duty

Session 7: Armed Forces Staff College and assignment in 'Hat in the Ring' Squadron
Session 8: Command of 'Hat in the Ring' Squadron and National War College
Volume III: Pentagon duty, SAC experiences, AFNORTH and post- retirement years
Session 9: Pentagon tour as Chief of Checkmate Group and Cmdr., 86th Fighter
Group in Ramstein, Germany
Session 10: Command of 57th Air Division, Strategic Air Command
Session 11: End of the Cold War and experiences during the First Gulf War, 1990-91
Session 12: Tour with Allied Forces-North (AFNORTH) in Norway
Session 13: Retirement years, 9-11 and publication of his book *Taps on the Wall*
Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on May 7, 2015.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in
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Abstract

Gen. John Borling, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-A-L-2013-037

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: John L. Borling was born in Chicago, Illinois in March 1940. He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1963 and received his pilot's wings in 1964. By 1966 Lieutenant Borling was flying combat missions from a base in Thailand over North Vietnam. His F-4 Phantom was shot down on June 1, 1966 while flying his 97th mission. Borling spent the next six and a half years in prison camps, including the notorious Hanoi Hilton. During the first few years as a POW he was kept in solitary confinement, subjected to torture and barely surviving on a Spartan diet. In order to keep his mind active, Borling wrote poetry and passed it along to his fellow POWs by tapping on the walls. Treatment of the POWs improved in the early 1970s. He and the rest of the POWs were released on February 12, 1973.

Following his release, Borling received pilot refresher training, then was selected to be a White House Fellow from August 1974 to August 1975, serving during the Gerald Ford administration. He then attended the Armed Forces Staff College and following that he was assigned to the 94th Fighter Squadron, the famed Hat in the Ring Squadron, which he soon commanded. Borling attended the National War College, and he followed this with a tour in the Pentagon where he served as the chief of Checkmate Group. In February 1982 he was sent to Ramstein, West Germany where he commanded the 86th Fighter Group. He followed this assignment with a tour at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers - Europe) in Belgium.

In June 1986 Colonel Borling was assigned to Headquarters, Strategic Air Command (SAC) at Offut Air Force Base, Nebraska. By June 1987 he was the commander of SAC's 57th Air Division, based at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. He followed this with senior

level assignments in SAC before returning to the Pentagon as a Major General, serving as the director of operational requirements from January 1991 to January 1992. General Borling finished his military career with a four-year tour at Allied Forces North (AFNORTH), NATO in Norway, first as the deputy chief of staff, Air, then as the Chief of Staff for AFNORTH-Europe in Stavanger, Norway. He retired on August 1, 1996 after thirty-three years in the Air Force.

Borling became the President of the Chicago area United Way shortly after his military retirement, a position he held for two years. He has remained active in a variety of different arenas since then, including serving as the director of Synthonics, a medical research group, as well as involvement in oil and gas exploration and other business ventures. He also gives speeches on a variety of topics. In 1997 he was instrumental in renewing a Memorial Day celebration in Chicago, which now occurs at the John A. Logan statue in Chicago's Grant Park. In 2004 he ran in the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate, the year that Barack Obama was elected to that seat. Borling also founded Service Over Self-America (SOS), an organization that promotes the concept that all of America's youth should serve their country in some capacity for a year. In 2013 General Borling published *Taps on the Wall*, a collection of the poetry he wrote while a POW.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Vietnam War POW; White House Fellows program; Hanoi Hilton; *Taps on the Wall*; 94th Fighter Squadron "Hat in the Ring"; F-4 Phantom; Strategic Air Command; Gerald Ford; United States Air Force Academy; Allied Forces North, AFNORTH, NATO; 2004 U.S. Senate race in Illinois; Jerry Denton, POW; General Curtis LeMay; Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers-Europe (SHAPE); SOS-America; Checkmate Group (Pentagon); Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, Illinois

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