



In Service to America

THE FORWARD OBSERVER

VVA Chapter 47 PO Box 4277, Riverside CA 92514-4277 <http://www.vva47.com>



Together Always



Volume 18 - Issue 7

In Honor of Michael "Bat" Masterson

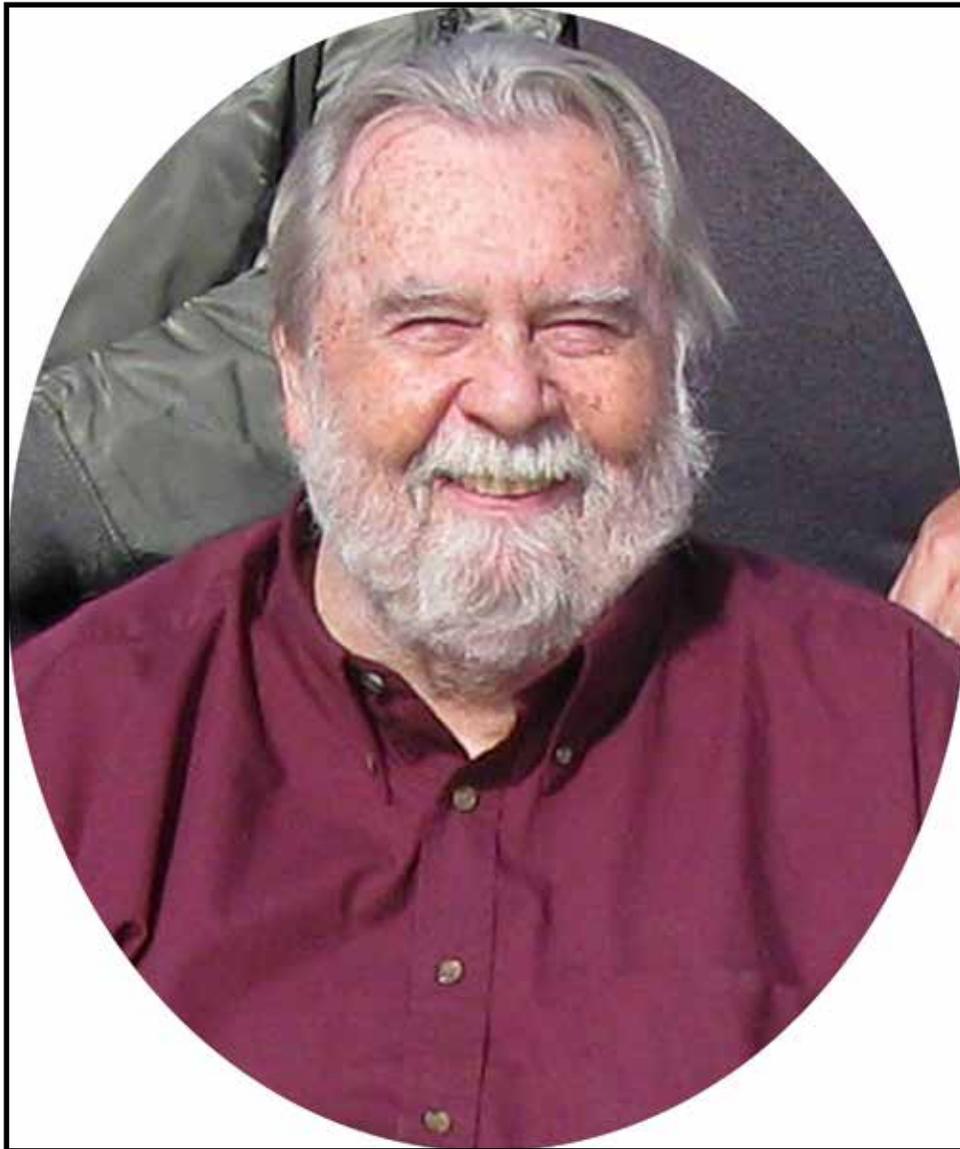
Summer 2017

GARY KUDERMAN

Gary Kuderman – born January 5, 1945 – passed on March 13, 2017.

Six days after Gary's birth, his father, Sgt. Leroy Nichols, was killed in action in the Ardennes Forrest. His mother met and married John Kuderman approximately two years later, and in March, 1948, his brother Jim was born. They moved to Pico Rivera where he grew up.

On December 7, 1965 he enlisted in the US Navy, entered basic training at USNTC, San Diego one week later. After basic he received orders to The Construction Battalion Center (Home of the Pacific Seabees) in Port Huene, CA and assigned to the 4th Battalion Security Platoon and sent to Camp Pendleton for additional training, including Defensive Infantry Tactics and weapons training.



ion was constructing a very large bridge in the An Hoa valley so he did a lot of bridge guard alongside Marines from the 7th Marine Regiment, and riding "shotgun" on convoys.

His battalion second deployment was late February, 1968 in response to the Tet Offensive.

He came home in November, 1968 and discharged February, 1969. Gary worked at everything from delivering flowers to driving trucks, couldn't find a job he enjoyed so he entered Cerritos Community College in January, 1971. He worked for The Episcopal Service Alliance doing social work for the homeless then worked for the City of La Habra providing services for

January 1967 his battalion was deployed to Vietnam. As part of his job in the Security Platoon it was his job to protect the men and equipment at various worksites in I Corps. His battal-



those in need of job training and employment. In 1984 he became a Readjustment Counseling Therapist for the VA, working first for the Riverside Vet Center and then the Upland Vet Center, retiring in 2000.

Gary joined VVA Chapter 57 in 1985, later becoming Chapter 47. He has served as president and board member and also news-



letter editor.

(Editor's note: I served with Gary for many years on the Chapter 47 Board of Directors, also worked with him on many newsletters, and shared many meals with him. We even served in the same Area of Operation (AO) in Vietnam – the An Hoa Valley – although at different times. We shared many memories of that area. I will miss him a lot.)

NEWSLETTER

I am sorry for how long it has been since a regular newsletter has come your way. No excuses - many reasons but no excuses. I will do my best to get back into getting these out to you. Steve does send out e-mails on events, but this newsletter needs to be done more often. There is so much history to it, and part of it belongs to our own Gary Kuderman. He was the editor of the newsletter when I became president in 1992, so we started working on it together. It might have been an excuse to share a meal and shoot the breeze, but that's where I got started with this newsletter.

Back then very little was done on the computer. Gary had a typewriter that he did most of it, and I did my president's message and a few other items, then I took it to the printer. When it was done I brought it home to put labels and stamps on. I now do it completely on the computer, electronically take send it to the printer, and Steve does the labels & stamps.

I'm going to ask for some help from you. I encourage all of you reading this to participate in contributing to its content. It would be helpful to send me photos and stories of events you have participated in. This will help share with your fellow chapter members what you've been doing in our communities. Thanks - Tom

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

Chapter 47 is doing well. We now have 296 members in the chapter, 236 of those members are Life Members. This is outstanding.

For those of you who are still yearly members you might consider joining for life. Life Membership is only \$100.00 no matter your age. You will never have to worry about renewing your membership again. Please think about it.

Talking about membership, we all know a Vietnam Veteran who is not a VVA member. Let's get out there and recruit these Vietnam Veterans. Let's talk them into joining VVA.

VVA is at an all time high in membership, as of October 1st we have 80,095 members. This is the first time VVA has been over 80,000 members.

Let us keep VVA growing, get your friends to join. We would love to have them as members. So let's sign them up.

See you in June.
Steve

CHAPTER OFFICERS FOR 2017 - 2019	
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Donation Pick Up	clothingdonations.org
Vet Centers:	
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Corona	951-734-0525
County Department of	Veteran Services
Riverside	951-955-6050
San Bernardino	909-387-5516
Pettis VA Hospital	909-825-7084 800-741-8387
Chapter 47 meets on the 3rd Saturday of each month at the VFW 10267 in Jurupa Valley. The meetings begin at 10 a.m. Board meetings are on the second Wednesday of each month, also at the VFW at 10 a.m. Check our web site for further information directions/maps/etc. Meetings dates/times do change throughout the year, notices will be sent. Check our chapter web site often.	
Membership is open to all Vietnam Era veterans, regardless of the country where you were stationed (Feb 28, '61 to May 7, '75), race, religion, gender, ethnicity. AVVA membership is open to anyone with an interest in supporting the goals of VVA.	
The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Chapter, its Board of Directors, its membership, or VVA Inc.	

VETERAN DRIVER LICENSE

During First Year, 38,000 Californians Apply for Veteran Driver License Program

Sacramento Veterans Day 2016 marked the first anniversary since the State of California started offering Veterans the opportunity to place a printed VETERAN designation on a California driver license or identification (ID) card. So far, 38,000 California Veterans began the process of adding the distinguished marking to a driver license or ID card, which can be used as a simple and official way to confirm military service.

During the first year of this successful program, more than 38,000 Veterans visited a County Veteran Service Office (CVSO), where they obtained the Veteran Status Verification form needed to apply for the special designation. Veterans then visit a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) field office with the form to add the VETERAN designation to obtain a license or ID. The DMV processed and issued more than 31,000 licenses and ID cards to Veterans, as Veterans usually wait until renewal time before adding the new designation.

The driver license and ID program partners include the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), CVSOs, and DMV. The program honors the military service of our Veterans. As part of the program, more than 7,400 Veterans who visited a CVSO also learned about and filed new benefit claims. Additionally, a VETERAN designation often means a business can easily confirm Veteran status when offering discounts on holidays such as Veterans Day.

To obtain the VETERAN designation, follow these three easy steps:

STEP 1 - Find your military discharge certificate (DD214). If you need assistance obtaining your military records, then contact a CVSO. To find a local CVSO, call 844-737-8838 or visit www.calvet.ca.gov.

STEP 2 - Take your DD214 and government identification to a CVSO and obtain your completed and stamped Veteran Status Verification Form.

STEP 3 - Visit www.dmv.ca.gov or call DMV at 800-777-0133 for an appointment. Then bring your Veteran Status Verification Form to a DMV field office. Complete your application, pay any fees including the \$5 fee to add the Veteran Designation.

AVVA & MVCN

AVVA has formed a new partnership with MVCN Military and Veteran Caregivers Network:

Nearly 6 million Americans care for wounded, ill and injured military service members and veterans of the pre- and post-9/11 eras. These "hidden heroes," which include parents, spouses, children, extended family members, friends and battle buddies, are often overwhelmed. They face significant challenges including: scattered resources, isolation, poor health and emotional stress.

The MVCN supports caregivers of all ages, eras and stages, offering peer support and access to partner organizations' resources and services, with the goal of increasing caregivers' connectiveness, hopefulness, wellness, knowledge and skills.

If you are any kind of caregiver, you will most likely find wonderful support from the MVCN.

More information: <https://milvetcaregivernetwork.org/>

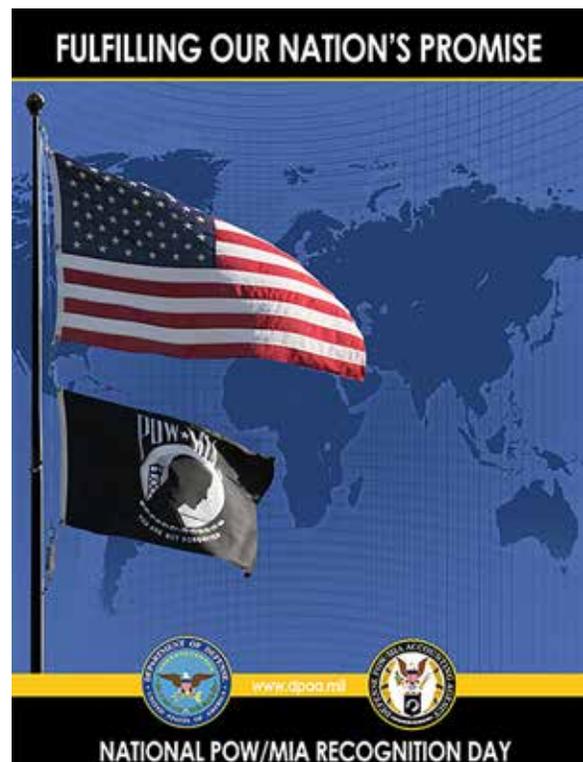
This is a great organization and has some wonderful thoughts on care giving.

At the AVVA Luncheon, during the 2017 Convention, our guest speaker will be Debbie Sprague, a training manager and mentor with the MVCN and author of *A Stranger in My Bed* - a book about living with Secondary PTSD. I know Debbie personally and she is a wonderful lady and author.

Debbie Sprague on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/debbie.sprague.792>

Thanks as always,
Elayne

POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY



Observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day are held across the country on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools and veterans' facilities. It is traditionally observed on the third Friday in September each year. This observance is one of six days throughout the year that Congress has mandated the flying of the National League of Families' POW/MIA flag. The others are Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence

Day and Veterans Day.

The flag is to be flown at major military installations, national cemeteries, all post offices, VA medical facilities, the World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the official offices of the secretaries of state, defense and veterans affairs, the director of the selective service system and the White House.



tember General meeting. This year it will be September 16 at the Military Museum (1394 N. E St. San Bernardino, CA) at 10 a.m. Prior to the meeting a ceremony will be held outside at the Flag pole. Following the meeting there will be a lunch for all who attend. Please mark your calendars and join us.

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK EACH YEAR MILLIONS OF AMERICANS FACE THE REALITY OF LIVING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION.

During the first full week of October, NAMI and participants across the country are raising awareness of mental illness. Each year we fight stigma, provide support, educate the public and advocate for equal care. Each year, the movement grows stronger.

During Mental Illness Awareness Week on Oct. 2-8, join NAMI in shining a light on mental illness and replacing stigma with hope by taking the #StigmaFree pledge at www.nami.org/stigmfree.

To help spread the word, NAMI's #MIAW pages provide a variety of resources to download, such as flyers, posters and social media graphics. Our resource toolkit contains press releases and other templates to customize within your communities.

We believe that mental health issues are important to address year-round, but highlighting them during #MIAW provides a time for people to come together and display the passion and strength of those working to improve the lives of the tens of millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

If you or someone you know may need a mental health assessment, anonymous online tools are available. For National Depression Screening Day on Oct. 6, you can get a free mental health screening at HelpYourselfHelpOthers.org.

4 HEALTHY HABITS FOR THOSE WITH PTSD

There are many ways to cope with a PTSD diagnosis. While professional treatment is an important part of living well with mental illness, there are a few things you can do at home to make daily life easier. With the symptoms of PTSD and their impact on day to day activities, it is important to know how to cope with them on your own. Here are a few things you can do to benefit your daily life with PTSD.

QUALITY SLEEP

Getting enough quality sleep is difficult for many people suffering from PTSD. Nightmares and insomnia prevent going to and staying asleep. There are a number of ways to handle this side effect but most effective will likely be an evening routine. Evening routines help train the brain when to feel tired, making it easier to fall into deep sleep and stay asleep. These routines can also be supplemented with melatonin.

An example of a nightly routine might be to turn screens off an hour before bed, read or do a quiet hobby for a half an hour,

change into comfortable clothes, have a relaxing cup of herbal tea, and get into bed. Your brain will eventually learn that when the routine begins, it will soon be time to sleep.

RELAXING HOBBIES

Having a hobby is a great and healthy method of reducing stress. Studies have shown that practicing a hobby you enjoy reduces stress while improving your mental state. It can act as a coping mechanism for when things get tough.

Given that PTSD has a high addiction rate due to self-medication, positive coping techniques are a necessary skill to have. Anything from crocheting or doodling to woodworking and fishing can be a positive way to limit your symptoms, reduce stress, and feel better.

WELL-ROUNDED DIET

A well-rounded diet is very hard to stick to. Most people have at least one nutritional deficiency as a result of their diet. However, certain deficiencies can negatively impact your mental state and exacerbate the symptoms of PTSD.

You may want to consider meeting with a nutritionist to identify where your nutritional gaps are and how to remedy them. You can also incorporate supplements if the problem will be too hard to correct with diet alone.

ENJOYABLE EXERCISE

Exercise is a very important part of mental well-being. The endorphins released when exercising can boost your mood, reduce stress, and decrease the symptoms of PTSD. Of course, it's also important to select a form of exercise you enjoy.

Dreading your exercise of choice may actually increase your stress levels, negating the positive effects. Some fun forms of exercise might be swimming, tai chi, yoga, or hiking. Test out your options and pick one that makes you look forward to your workout.

Learning to cope with PTSD is a learning process. A counselor is an important part of learning to live with PTSD as is your support network. If you find yourself struggling, don't try and manage on your own. Talk with your counselor or loved ones and get the support you need. In the meantime, work on cultivating these healthy habits. You may be surprised by how much of a difference they can make.

B-52s

Nightmare Up North – B-52s Over Hanoi in Linebacker II

By Paul Novak

Truly it was "one of the most awesome armadas ever assembled," as Major Bill Stocker, in command of the lead B-52, later described it. The roar could be heard and vibrations felt 10 miles away when our 78 giant bombers went to full throttle on all eight turbojet engines, one after the other, over 2 1/2 hours, and took off from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

Thousands of observers cheered the spectacular sight—the



complex choreography of the largest launch of B-52s ever undertaken. The 26 three-ship cells of aircraft moved from 5 miles of walled-in, fortified parking areas and taxiways into position on the runway. The spectators included the crew of a Russian trawler off the coast of Guam.

Forty-two additional U.S. bombers left later from the U-Tapao airfield in Thailand. We were all headed for Hanoi and the port city of Haiphong. The trawler's crew radioed Hanoi and gave the North Vietnamese hours of advance notice that the BUFFs (Big Ugly Fat Fellows) were on their way. The date was Dec. 26, 1972. All 120 Boeing B-52s plus dozens of Air Force, Navy and Marine support aircraft would reach their targets and drop thousands of tons of ordnance over a 15-minute period.

Some of us would not return.

I was an Air Force captain and the navigator of a six-man crew from Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts that included aircraft commander Captain Richard "Dick" Purinton, co-pilot Captain Malcolm "Mac" McNeill, radar navigator and bombardier Lt. Col. Jean Beaudoin, electronic warfare officer Major Bob Dickens and tail gunner Master Sgt. Calvin Creasser.

We were one of the lucky teams that made it "over the fence," safely out of enemy territory after hitting our target. The December 26 flight, part of Operation Linebacker II, which began December 18, was our second mission over the enemy's capital city and our third in North Vietnam.

Most Heavily Defended City

In 1972 Hanoi was considered the most heavily defended city in the world, protected by layers of air defense and the sheer massed quantity of Soviet-made supersonic surface-to-air missiles and MiG fighter aircraft. In previous air campaigns over North Vietnam—Rolling Thunder in the mid-1960s and Linebacker I in mid-1972—the U.S. military command had not allowed B-52s to attack Hanoi's air defenses.

The North Vietnamese used early-warning radar with a range of about 170 miles to spot incoming B-52s. The located target was handed off to fire-control radar that directed the SAMs and at about 40 miles provided more refined data on the position, altitude and speed of the arriving aircraft. Soviet-built MiG-17s, 19s and the technologically advanced 21s, strong competition for American fighters, were launched against the bombers to "pace" them and report altitude and speed to the SAM operators.

B-52s confronted the SAM threat with electronic countermeasures, such as jammers that created an "electronic cloud" over enemy radar and thus covered the aircraft's specific location. Flying in three-ship cells maximized this effect, hiding all three aircraft.

As the lead navigator, or "Nav," of our three-ship formation, I had to get those aircraft to the target within 30 seconds of our scheduled drop time in a coordinated attack with the 117 lumbering giants in the other cells.

We were coasting into Qui Nhon, South Vietnam, after a five-

hour leg from Andersen and an air-to-air refueling over the Philippines, when I called out to Purinton, "Pilot, Nav, right to 3-4-0," giving our intended heading in compass degrees. The only sound in the aircraft was the comforting roar of the engines.

It was also my job to advise the crew of action points—entering the threat zone, the initial point of the bomb run and the time to target: "Crew, Nav, we're 25 minutes south of the Gulf of Tonkin, about one hour to the target." Those updates ensured that the items on the bomb-run checklists would be completed. Each crew member performed critical tasks at designated points along the flight route. Missing one of these in hostile territory could prove fatal.

I was stationed on the windowless lower deck along with Beaudoin, a gray-haired Frenchman. As our radar navigator—"Radar" or just RN during flight—Beaudoin had to direct the rendezvous with the Boeing KC-135 air-to-air refueling tanker, prepare the bombing system, locate the precise aiming point for our target and release our 54,000 pounds of ordnance.

Trouble Over the Gulf

"Pilot, Nav, we've got a problem down here." My navigation position counters, which showed our latitude and longitude, had failed. The counters were continually updated by the radar navigator, who gets latitude and longitude figures by locating a known radar return on the ground and placing a set of electronic crosshairs on it, much like an arcade video game.

"Nav, Pilot, what's your plan?" Purinton asked.

"We have the radar. We'll go range and bearing since I can't use the counters." This meant I would have to manually identify ground returns from my 5-inch radarscope. Then I would plot their range and bearing from the aircraft on my chart in order to initiate turns and call action points.

"You want No. 2 to take over navigation for the cell?" was the pilot's logical question. I wanted to remain as the lead navigator. I was trained to work without the counters and knew I could. We were 10 minutes from hostile territory.

"No problem. I can get us to the target," I replied. We were entering unfamiliar territory, and I realized it would be a challenge to identify radar returns. Many of the ground landmarks were built of wood, which does not reflect radar. This was, in fact, a big problem.

"Rog, copy," was the pilot's only response. He understood the situation and trusted us to get the job done. For the first time, a knot formed in my stomach.

"Crew, Nav, we're over water and into the Gulf of Tonkin." This first warning of hostile territory alerted everyone to keep a sharp eye as we made our way toward the coast of North Vietnam.

Threat Area

"Pilot, Nav, left to 2-9-0. Crew, seven minutes to next turn. We're 60 miles from the coast. Seventeen minutes to target."

I instructed electronic warfare officer Dickens to watch for SAMs, even though I knew he was already focused on that activity: "EW, Nav, threat area at the turn."

"Crew, EW, I have launch on two: 1 o'clock and 9 o'clock. No uplink." An "uplink" meant the North Vietnamese ground radar was sending guidance signals to the missile. No uplink was good news for us. That meant it would be easier to dodge the two missiles.

"Pilot, Nav, right to 3-5-5. Crew, 20 miles from coast-in. RN let's get the checklists done."

We were 70 miles from Hanoi. "I've got a SAM!" Purinton called.

"EW has uplink."

SAMs suddenly came at us like an angry swarm of bees. We were told later that more than 200 of them were fired at the seven waves of B-52s that night. Our bombers couldn't run from them. We cruised at 450 mph; the SAM at 2,400 mph.

But no one panicked. When we realized we hadn't been hit, we instantly went back to work and got ready to unleash total destruction on the Van Dien vehicle depot, 18 miles south of Hanoi.

"Crew, guns," called tail gunner Creasser, who sat 140 feet behind the rest of us. "I have aircraft at 7 o'clock, tracking."

The tail gunner, manning four .50-caliber machine guns, each with 600 rounds of ammunition, used radar to track and target hostile aircraft. But the plane Creasser spotted this time turned out to be a friendly escort, a McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II.

Our small tables on the lower deck were covered with maps, navigation plotters, checklists, stopwatches and a variety of other navigation equipment. Amid the mess, the radar navigator and I methodically kept the aircraft on time and on course for the bomb run to Hanoi.

"RN, Nav, confirm that return is Thai Binh," a city about 70 miles from Hanoi.

Beaudoin set the radar range at 100 miles, and Hanoi popped up at our

11 o'clock position, right where it should be. I stared at it for a moment wondering what was in store for us, certain that I didn't want to know the answer.

"You're right, Nav. It's Thai Binh."

"Pilot, Nav, left to 3-2-0. Crew, seven minutes to target. Radar, bomb run checklist."

The interphone chatter crescendoed as we neared the target. The co-pilot, gunner and pilot called out SAM launches and clock positions. The electronic warfare officer confirmed SAM reports and told us whether missiles had locked on to us. Beaudoin and I reported navigation points, times to target and the action points that alerted other crew members to the tasks they needed to perform. It was the organized chaos verbalized by a B-52 combat crew at war. Each crew member knew what needed to be done and accomplished it.

One might think fear would lurk about or even dominate the thoughts of a combat flight crew facing possible death or capture and torture. But it didn't. Perhaps the training, the necessity of getting a job done or the frenetic activity pushed such thoughts aside. I don't really know. I honestly don't remember feeling afraid. And in talking later with other crew members, I learned that fear had no home on that aircraft.

Bomb Run

In six minutes our three-ship cell of B-52s was scheduled to unload 162,000 pounds of explosives on the vehicle depot, rendering it unusable to the North Vietnamese. To reach the target, we had to go through "wall-to-wall SAMs every step of the way," as one crew member said.

We started the bomb run with our three aircraft arranged in an offset triangle, separated by 1 mile of distance and 500 feet of altitude. The formation was crucial to obtain that "jamming" effect on enemy radar, which enhanced our chances of survival.

The radar navigator placed the electronic crosshairs on our aiming point for the target.

"Nav, confirm aim point," Beaudoin said.

I studied my radarscope for 10 seconds and replied, "Rog, that's it."

“Pilot, RN, center the PDI.” The pilot direction indicator was a steering needle on Purinton’s instrument panel tied into the bomb system. When the indicator was centered, the aircraft was aimed directly at the target.

Beaudoin and I worked our way through the checklist for releasing the bombs. The arming sequence did not start until a wire was automatically pulled from each bomb as it left the racks.

Dickens interrupted: “Crew, EW, multiple SAM launch, 12 o’clock.”

“Pilots searching,” co-pilot McNeill announced. Then “Bingo, have what looks like two, no, three, coming up from our 12 o’clock.”

“Uplink!” replied the electronic warfare officer.

“EW, co-pilot, two tracking across.”

The two missiles were moving across the pilot’s line of sight and going away from us. The bad news was the third missile.

“Third one still has uplink.”

“Damn, comin’ straight at us,” McNeill yelled the bone-chilling words.

“Crew, starting combat turns,” Purinton said.

He put the aircraft into a series of steep banked turns left and right, a tactic meant to break the missile’s lock on our aircraft. The turns also diminished the effectiveness of our electronic countermeasures, but the decision, with a missile headed straight for us, was easy for the pilot to make.

“EW dispensing chaff,” Dickens said, referring to aluminum foil-like material ejected to fool the enemy radar and divert the missile.

In the midst of this, the radar navigator and I finished our checklist and concentrated solely on the target, just 90 seconds away.

“I’ll need it straight and level at 30 seconds to go, Pilot.”

This was essential so the bombing gyro would stabilize before the weapons were released. Without stability, the bombs could be tossed anywhere.

“Rog,” was all Purinton had time to say. I could hear the strain in his voice. Maneuvering the steep turns was like driving a loaded cement truck with no power steering, no automatic transmission and no brakes.

“Lost uplink,” called the electronic warfare officer, his voice at a lower pitch. The missile missed us and wandered upward.

“Pilot, 60 seconds to target, straight and level, center the PDI,” the radar navigator calmly requested.

“Rog, straight and level, PDI centered.”

“Crew, Nav, 30 seconds to target.”

I counted down. “Twenty seconds to target,” speaking rather calmly, I thought.

“SAM launch dead ahead,” called the electronic warfare officer.

“Searching,” one of the pilots said to no one in particular.

“Bingo, have it. Looks like it could hit us right between the eyes.”

A SAM traveling at 2,400 mph would take about 10 more seconds to reach the aircraft. At bombs away, it would hit the aircraft.

This time we couldn’t execute combat turns to get out of the way. Our aircraft was a sitting duck.

“Ten seconds. Bomb doors open.”

We didn’t open the doors earlier because that would have created a bigger radar target for SAMs.

“EW dispensing chaff.”

“Missile still tracking visually,” McNeill said.

“Crew, prepare for bailout,” Purinton announced, as calmly as a bus driver announces the next street.

“At bombs away, I’m gonna bend the fuselage”—put the aircraft into an almost impossibly steep turn.

“Five seconds,” from the radar navigator.

“Holy Mother...” someone pleaded. (Maybe it was me...I don’t remember.)

“Bombs away,” Beaudoin said.

The aircraft shuddered as all the weapons departed simultaneously. The severe turn yanked me to the right, and the ejection seat shoulder straps burned into my skin through the flight suit.

Where was it? The bailout light? Where was it? Oh yeah, look up, Paul. My mind was doing things my body couldn’t comprehend. All in the flash of an instant. Nav bails out first. How can we get this far and then get blown out of the sky? Ejection D ring, find it, find it, gotta find it...there. Keep your elbows in. Brace your back. All galloping through my mind.

Not us. Why us? Stay with me, God. Tighten your seatbelt. Already did that. A voice. There’s a voice. Foggy. Not making sense. A voice....

An explosion. A brilliant flash. The airplane vibrated and rocked from side to side. The SAM detonated far enough away that there was no damage.

“Crew, Pilot, keep your eyes open. We’re not out of it yet.”

What did the voice mean, keep my eyes open? How could I if I was dead?

“Nav, Pilot, heading?”

Heading...Heading...Nav...yeah...that’s me...must not be dead...Heading...

“Crew, Radar, bomb doors closed.”

What seemed like minutes of agony flashed by so quickly that no one noticed my slight hesitation responding.

“Left 2-6-0,” I heard myself say.

“Everybody OK?” Purinton polled the crew and got a positive response.

We may have avoided the SAM because of the pilot’s extreme hard turn, but we also surmised that the missile missed us because it never achieved uplink. If it had, the electronic warfare officer would have detected the signals. The SAM must have been launched visually, without radar guidance from the ground, as a desperation salvo.

Later...Over the Fence

“Crew, Nav, out of the threat area,” I announced. We could finally relax.

The pilot made his call to the airborne mission commander: “Over the fence with three.”

As we turned south, the aircraft was silent. No interphone chatter, no activity. It was as if we had entered a different dimension—peaceful and quiet. The adrenaline left my body, and I sagged in my ejection seat. It was then that it all hit me: what we did, the danger and the magnitude of it. We were all drained.

At our debriefing we learned that two B-52s had been shot down. Two friends of mine weren’t coming back. I had played golf with one of them 36 hours earlier. That made it personal. Before, it was a mission—a dangerous one—but it was a thing, a possibility, not the death of a golfing buddy you just had a pitcher of beer and a pizza with at the officers club.

Dick Purinton and I glanced at each other but never spoke of it. We couldn’t do that. There were more missions to fly. “Guys, let’s hit the roach coach and get a couple chili dogs,” he offered.



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“I’ll buy.”

So we did...and he did...and everything was back to normal, at least until we launched again for Hanoi.

Four months after the Christmas bombings, Purinton was diagnosed with leukemia at his flight physical. He died in June 1974—a true hero. The man’s skill flying this nation’s frontline strategic bomber saved my life. H

Paul Novak, a decorated former B-52 navigator who teaches creative writing at an adult extension of Arizona State University in Phoenix, wrote about B-52 crews in his anthology, *Into Hostile Skies*.

