Lynn Beens Interview
Utah Vietnam War Stories, KUED

Lynn Beens
My name is Lynn Richard Beens. I was born 31, July of 1946 in Detroit, Michigan.

Interviewer
What brought you to Utah?

Lynn Beens
My mother was from Utah. Her father had a bakery up on 21st South, a neighborhood bakery, and my dad came out here in the Army. He was in the Army Air Corp and stationed at Kern's Field, which is no longer there. And so they met and married and after ten or twelve years we moved out here. And that was the economy that kind of brought it out. The building trade back there was kind of going down.

Interviewer
And tell me when did you get into the Vietnam War? We can talk about training, but lets get right to Vietnam.

Lynn Beens
I was in B-52's and just stationed in Spokane, Washington and our procedure there is we would be on alert one of every three weeks where you'd sit on the end of the runway with your nuclear weapons waiting to take off, and one afternoon they came out and said, come home, go pack your bags, you're ferrying an airplane to Guam. So I went home and gave everything to my wife. Here are the bills, here's this, you've got power of attorney and all that stuff that we needed to go and then the next day I showed up at Base Ops to ferry an airplane, which they didn't have one available, so they put us on a tanker and we went down to California where we were going to pick up an airplane. There weren't any airplanes there either that were ready to go so we took a tanker all the way to Guam and then spent a month, this is was in March of 1972, spent a month waiting for airplanes so we could actually start flying missions, and then we flew out of Guam, which is usually about a 12-hour mission round-trip to go into Vietnam and back.

Interviewer
From Guam?

Lynn Beens
From Guam.

Interviewer
And that would be the Anderson Air Force Base?

Lynn Beens
Yes, the base there was Anderson Air Force Base, yes.

Interviewer
So you basically flew out of U-Tapao Thailand and Guam. Those were the two, right?

Lynn Beens
The D-models were flying out of U-Tapao, and all the G-models, as far as I remember, came out of Guam. There just wasn't room to house that many airplanes over there, so Guam was, Anderson was a big base, so we had hundreds of airplanes there.

Interviewer
Tell us about the role of the B-52 in that war.

Lynn Beens
Early on they were flying what they called Arc Light missions. Then is got changed as we got further into the war, and then it was Linebacker I and Linebacker II, but our missions were mostly in support of activities going on in Vietnam. I mean we would maybe; convoys that might be hauling material in, or supply depots or field depots and things like that, and mostly spent our time in South Vietnam. We would get a mission and fly up to a certain point, and then they would direct us from ground, we didn't have the option of dropping our weapons by aiming at a target, it was all ground controlled, and whatever they had as a mission, they'd direct us in and say, be here at this time and then they took over and guided us in.

Interviewer
Explain how that happens from the ground.

Lynn Beens
I'm not really sure. On the most part it's somebody that's down in the area that is controlling the battlefield. It could be on the ground, it could be in an aircraft that's flying over the area. I'm not really sure. It could be a central area in

Vietnam. I didn't really get much involved in that, but we'd have a general route that we would fly and when we'd get to a certain point then they would guide us in to exactly where they wanted us to drop our weapons. They were feeding in the current information as to what was going on, like a convoy might have moved to or even troop concentrations we would sometimes be targeted against.

Interviewer

This last program covers drawdown. We're getting to the end of the war. As these missions begin, were you serving from March of '72 to December when you got shot down?

Lynn Beens

We were flying, it worked out to every third day. You'd prepare the mission, then you'd fly it and debrief and have that day off and the next day you'd prepare a mission and so every third day you would fly in the country and drop your bombs and come back, so we weren't really that involved in the Vietnam War. I mean the only time I was in Vietnam was when I got shot down. For being in the Vietnam War we had a good deal because we were away from the war zone. You had your time over target where you could get fired on, but that was just a half hour out of the day. And we were brought over, it used to be D-models were doing all the flying over there and it was a constant rotation, what you'd call Arc Light. You go over for six months and then you come home, and then they wanted to step it up to kind of bring the war to an end, and so they sent the G-models over. They don't have the capability for conventional weapons that the D's have. The D's can carry a lot more bombs. They carry them out in the wings, and all we could do is carry them internally in an internal bomb bay, so we were limited 27, 750 pound bombs, where it was more than 100 that would go on a D-model.

Interviewer

So were you briefed that this was a massive campaign to end the war?

Lynn Beens

Yes, we were aware of what was going on. I mean flying south it wasn't so much, but then when we started going, coming into December when things were kind of broken down on negotiations and the peace talks were kind of going bad, then we started flying into North Vietnam. And we knew and were briefed that's what this was for--to bring them back to the tables to get them back to talking so we could get an end to it.

Interviewer

And what was your feeling going north? Were you anxious?

Lynn Beens

It was more scary and apprehensive because actually Hanoi itself was probably the most heavily defended city in the world. I mean there was so much triple A and SAM sites around that it was hard to be really protected. So we were nervous and it went from a 12-hour mission to a 16-17 hour mission, and I just flew one mission north. We were on the third day of what they call the 11 Day War, which started on the 18th of December and went from there, and we were on the 20th, took off, and it was the morning of the 21st that we got shot down. But we had crewmembers that were concerned writing their last letters to their wives and taking off their wedding rings and putting them in an envelope and sending it home. It was just a lot of concern and apprehension on everyone's part.

Interviewer

By that time did you know that some other B52's had got shot down?

Lynn Beens

We had a couple that went down, yes. In fact, I called my wife, (she won't like this) but I called my wife the day before I took off, so the 19th or early in the 20th just to let her know I was o.k. and everything and she hadn't been paying attention to the news so she didn't know what was going on, so I said, o.k. I'll let it go at that, but we had a couple of airplanes that had gone down, and that's the first ones combat-wise in the war I think.

Interviewer

Describe the crew on your B-52.

Lynn Beens

Normally we have a six-man crew. You got a pilot and a co-pilot, and they sit upstairs facing forward. You got an electronic warfare officer and a gunner, and they sit across the cockpit from the pilot and co-pilot facing aft, so they're looking backwards. And then you go down the ladder to the basement and you have a radar navigator and a navigator and we're facing forward basically right under the pilot and co-pilot. At that time I was the navigator.

Interviewer

These are the Christmas bombings, is that right?

Lynn Beens

I don't really see it as the Christmas bombings. We called it the Eleven Day War because that's how long it took. It was right before Christmas and we actually quit on Christmas and had a couple of days that they did not bomb, and I think that was because of the losses they had, and they refigured and after that they came back and cut the losses by a whole bunch, but ya we were just a mass wave of airplanes. In our situation flying there on the 20th it

was... We were the wave lead. There were 30 airplanes behind us. And then when they take off it's just amazing because on Guam it's a long runway; you're heavily loaded down with bombs and fuel. You get to the end of the runway and you're airborne, whether you want to or not because it's a cliff. So you go to the end of the runway and you hit the cliff and most of the time the airplanes just disappeared. They'll just go over the cliff and then they'll sink down, and then they start getting their speed up and then come back up, so you don't really know if someone has gone airborne until after they've come back into site. I mean it was just airplane after airplane. You could go out there and watch them go and it was just constant airplanes going. And then on that night with us we were wave lead and we were having problems with the airplane. It was pressurization. We couldn't get our pressure up and we were working with that and they were going to change us out of lead and put us in a different position, and then we figured out what was going on and solved the problem. We had an extra person on board our airplane, which was called an airborne commander, so he was in charge of the whole wave and he just sits in a jump seat right between the pilot and co-pilot so he's got no ejection seats. Not the best situation.

Interviewer
So take us to that day.

Lynn Beens
The night of the 20th we took off and we got shot down the 21st, so it was late night on the 20th.

Interviewer
Before we go to your ship being shot down, define what the Linebacker II program is.

Lynn Beens
The B-52s were a formidable weapon. They're scary. And I didn't realize how scary until I was on the ground having bombs come down, but it was one of those things that we wanted to get them to the bargaining table so we brought in the big guns, and we brought the B-52s in and just bombed them like crazy, and it was all just to get them to realize what could happen to them--what we were capable of doing. That's what the B-52 can do.

Interviewer
Why did they call it Linebacker?

Lynn Beens
I don't know. My knowledge is not good on some things.

Interviewer
So take us to that night, and describe what that felt like when you knew it was happening. Take us to that day and the moments after.

Lynn Beens
We were flying, like I said, we were the lead airplane. We were flying at 35,000 feet above the ground, and then the airplanes behind us were stacked up in 500-foot intervals above us so you have separation. We came down through South Vietnam, then up through Laos then came in from that direction headed towards the ocean really just because we had clearances of where you could go. I mean there are so many limitations when you fought the Vietnam War of what we could do and what we couldn't do. What we could bomb and what we couldn't bomb. It was amazing we could do anything with the restrictions that were there, but we flew our mission and everything was on schedule. It was a real windy day up at altitude because we had 100 mile and hour winds that were as a tail wind when we came into the target area. And this was nobody was controlling us from the ground on this one because there wasn't any of our people there, so we were on a roam.

We had gone through our target student and knew what we were aiming at and what our target was, and when we got to our initial point and then the targets, so there's a 60-mile run a target, and as we turned into that point and started going through our checklist and making sure our bombs were armed and everything was in order and starting getting our aiming down, they were starting to throw up missiles at us, surface to air missiles, SA2's. I haven't mentioned this but I don't have a window. So I'm in here but all I can go on is what the pilot or the co-pilot tells me is happening, and the co-pilot was saying that he'd seen these missiles coming up, and they're just like a flying telephone pole. They're huge. And we came into our target area and the aiming was good. We were on target. We were doing, like I was saying, 100 miles faster than normal with that tailwind.

We came to our target and released our weapons and the way they had planned everything is that you had to take 150-degree turn and go back out the way you came--pretty much the same course. And from going like 600 miles an hour, now we're back into that wind going 400 miles an hour traveling, plus when you start your turn, your jammers and electronic counter measures that you have that counteract the radars tracking on the ground, they don't work because when the airplane turns they're just shooting out into the air and not protecting you at all, so once we got into that turn, they just were broad launching missiles up at us, and there were three dozen or more missiles that they launched from the initial point to the point we got hit that they were just... they knew where we were going to be and they knew we were kind of defenseless in our turn, so they really started launching them at us.

And we really felt pretty safe in the first airplane because usually they track the first airplane and then they shoot

down two or three or something back there, but as we went into our turn the co-pilot called the missile coming up and he was tracking it and said, "O.k. it disappeared under the airplane," and about that time you felt the airplane shutter and shake as it... it basically blew our tail off, and the pilot called that he was having firelights on a couple of the engines and some trouble and couldn't control it, and to go. And I didn't want to get out! It was so nice and comfortable inside the airplane, minus 50 something degrees outside, and I turned around and checked the compartment and back in the back bulkhead that goes into the bombay, it was just gushing fuel. It looked like somebody had just opened a fire hydrant, and I just rotated back in the seat. The pilot said, "Go, get out of here!" And the seat that your sitting in, there's a little D-ring right sitting there between your legs, and you just reach down, you pull it, the hatch disappears, you go out the bottom of the airplane.

Interviewer

Is your chute on?

Lynn Beens

Your chute is all part hooked to the seat and hooked to you and you go out of the airplane, there's a strap that contracts and kicks you out of the seat and you're free-falling so fast that you don't, it's 11 Gs. I mean most of your rides at Lagoon are something like that maybe gets up to 1 G at the most. That's an 11 G down force, and I blacked out right away. I lost my helmet, so then I was without oxygen too, and so I was just free-falling, and then I actually came to and realized what was going on maybe in a 20,000 foot area, something like that, and I was spinning on my back and I couldn't control it. I tried to remember back to training. I'd never ever parachuted before in my life. And trying to remember back to the training as to what they tell you to do and I tried to spread-eagle, and that didn't work, and I tried to go into a tuck, and that didn't work, then the chute has a timer on it, an altimeter, so when you hit 14,500 feet it opens the chute, and so the chute opened and then I was swinging back and forth between the battle zone really. I mean you could see the airplanes that were flying by and dropping their bombs. You could see triple A coming up; you could see the missiles coming up and all the fires and stuff going on on the ground.
It was really... In a different situation it would have been amazing. It would be a good thing to take a picture of, you know. And coming down from the plane it had a little bit of cloud cover under us. It was four or five in the morning so it was still dark, but every once in a while they'd sent a flare up and then they'd take potshots at you and you can hear the bullets going by and I just was lucky that nobody came close to me, and then I broke through the cloud's deck so I could see and I was above a big rice paddy and I could see a bunch of militia, local people with guns armed and that that were off to the side, and when I hit the end of the rice paddy I took my chute off but they were there and there was nowhere to go. So they stripped me down to my garments, my underwear, and tied me up and marched me off to a holding area, which was kind of a... stairs going down and a tunnel and held me there until daybreak and then they did some interrogation, but their English was really really bad and I was not cooperating, so we didn't get very far with the interrogation. Then when it came daybreak they brought me up, loaded me into a truck and I was on my way to the Hanoi, Hilton.

Interviewer

Wow. What are your thoughts as you're coming to, and your chute opens at 14,500?

Lynn Beens

Well they briefed us a head of time that where we were going they wouldn't come to rescue us. They said we can't get in there so don't expect it. And it was just... and I don't know that I was thinking because I was armed. I had a gun, but I never got it out or never even thought about it. I think I was pretty much in shock. It's one of those things that you don't want to happen, and then it happens and you're just reacting and not really thinking. You're just reacting to the situation--O.K. I hit the ground, get rid of my parachute, so I take the parachute off, but then you don't have time to do anything, they're right there.

Interviewer

So they take you. Describe them walking up to you. Are they physical with you? Are they shouting at you?

Lynn Beens

Yes, they're shouting and jabbing the guns and making their commands, which you don't really understand. And then they just get the knife out and start cutting your flight suit off and cutting the lace of your boots, get your boots off, and then they just tie you up. It was kind of funny because they tied me up and then they had to stop a couple of times while they were marching me to where they were keeping me because the ropes kept falling off. It was a bad case of tying knots, and then you're just wondering and worrying where's the rest of the crew? What happened to everybody, you don't know.

Interviewer

So take me to where they took you.

Lynn Beens

Well they loaded me in just a flat-bed truck with a couple of guards and they took me to, first they took me to a village, and then they got me out and they had all the civilians lined up on both sides and they marched me through that area into a holding area to ask me some more questions, and then I had to come back through that group to

get back on the truck to leave, and as they marched me to and fro, it was just like going through a gauntlet, where they just take shots at you kicking and hitting and whatever. I got a picture that came out in the Sacramento B right after I was captured. That day they took a picture and it showed my face all swollen up from where I'd taken a hit, and then I was back in the truck and on my way to the Hilton, and I got to the Hilton probably mid-afternoon, and at that point they started the interrogations and questioning. They tied me up to where, that was painful.
What they do is they tie your hands behind your back and then they tie your elbows together, and your elbows don't normally go together, but they will if they want them to. And they would ask us questions and at the first it was name, rank and serial number, date of birth is what you gave, and then as time went on they'd come back and you loose all feeling in your hands and arms. They're just dead. And they'd ask more questions, and if you didn't cooperate then they left and eventually they came back and said, "We want you to go down and make a news release down at Radio Hanoi." Then they untied me and said, "Here, write out a statement so we can prove what you're going to say," and I couldn't even write. I mean my hands had no control.
After a while the feeling came back and so I wrote out just name, rank, serial and date of birth and I'm fine. Then they gave me some pajamas like the ones I have over there that they had me put on and I went to a building that was all pretty well staged because as we pulled up in the jeep they were throwing bricks at the truck and the guards were protecting you, but it was mostly staged for the press. They took us into a building and they had quite a few people there. I'm not sure how many prisoners were there, but they just lined you up and you went out to the center of the stage to the microphones and made your little statement and then they took you back to the prison.

Interviewer
Was this a voluntary statement or something you were forced to say?

Lynn Beens
They told me what I could say and that's what I said, so it was really pretty basic. I just said who I was, that I was flying B-52's and I was shot down and I was o.k.

Interviewer
And what's the purpose of that? Where does that press information go?

Lynn Beens
Well they were doing it, it was propaganda. We were shooting down the B-52s and we're capturing their people, and they're healthy and we're not doing anything to them, and I was in pretty good shape. I was beat up a little bit. My knees were messed up because when I ejected my legs I didn't do it properly so my legs were flailing all over. And other than that I had no broken bones or any visible injuries so I was a good candidate to go down and show that they were taking good care of people.

Interviewer
You told me you were at the Hilton for a month and then you went to the Zoo camp.

Lynn Beens
It's just Zoo is how we referred to it. It has another name. And I think I have it written down here somewhere, but we always referred to it as the Zoo and I ended up in the Zoo Annex for... Well we were at the Hanoi Hilton first, and that just... We were at the Hanoi Hilton to begin with. That's where I started out, and the first day I was by myself in solitaire and for me that was hard. You don't have anyone to talk to, anyone to discuss, and that's something I didn't care for at all, and I was only there for one day and then I was with someone else after that. So the second day I was put in with another navigator from a B-52 and a week later we were moved into a group with eight people in a room, and we had no idea who else was in the prison, I mean you didn't see people. You were pretty well segregated. They kept it pretty good that way. And then one day they brought our dinner to us and dinner was the same every day. You had soup for lunch, soup for dinner, and then some bread to go with it. My wife always thought, oh he'll be fine over there. He likes rice. We never got any rice. And when they brought the meal, it actually had substance to it. There was like a couple of whole potatoes in it, and one of the guys would bite into the potato and there was something in it, and there was a message they had written out and rolled up and put in his potato and it was from the people working in the kitchen who gave us basically, (?) we're the other prisoners that are here, there are this many of us. We're (I don't know what direction they said they were from us. And they said, if you get this message then mark and X on the bottom of the pan and we'll know that the message got to you.
And they gave us the basic camp rules--who are commander was and the chain of authority, or chain of command, and so we did that and the next morning they came in and roused us out of bed early in the morning and said, "Pack your stuff you're leaving." And we thought, well they found us communicating and now we're out of here, but it was, actually they were moving people around by shoot down date because they were starting to do the release of prisoners and the pull-back of troops and so they were trying to put everyone so that you were in the camp where you'd be released from, so anyone shot down in the last year went to the Zoo, and we found this out later. We didn't really know what happened or why it was going on, but the Zoo was just on the other side of Hanoi. It wasn't that far away. It used to be, from what I understand, an old French officer's quarters. It had nice facilities once upon a time. It had a swimming pool. It had indoor plumbing. When we were there none of that worked. The pool was actually where they raised fish for food. It was kind of a dark, ugly green, but it was there, and we just

spent the rest of our time--another two months at the Zoo--and then we were released from there.

Interviewer

So you spent how many months as a POW?

Lynn Beens

Well 99 days. I was a POW for 99 days. Went in on the 21st of December and came out on the 29th of March. I came home on April Fools Day. My wife wasn't sure we were going to be there.

Interviewer

So when did your wife hear you were a POW?

Lynn Beens

Boy, that's her story, but because I had the news release, because I went in front of the cameras and made that statement, it was picked up by the press and as a result the Air Force got word immediately that they had the transcript, and so they said O.K. we'll let the families know that I was assumed to be a prisoner. Actually the first time, right after I got shot down, I think it was that night that they actually tried to find my wife to let her know I was shot down and missing in action, but I was living in Spokane. My wife left and went down to see her parents in Utah in Kaysville, but we didn't go through the proper channels in letting somebody know that they weren't going to be home. So they came to our house, couldn't find anyone, wouldn't tell the neighbors what was going on, and finally one of neighbors said, "Well, she's down with her parents in Utah," and so then they had to get a couple of officers and a chaplain and that to be able to come out, so they came out one or two in the morning, something like that. A staff car pulls up and knocks on the door, which is the thing nobody wants to see or hear, and so they told her I was shot down and missing in action and the letter they read just said that there were no beepers, which is the emergency message in your chute that activates to show that somebody is ejected. There were no beepers and nobody saw any chutes and they didn't know anything. Well then I made the press release, so the next day this information starts coming out, so now they come back out to her again and let her know that he's presumed to be a POW, and there's also in Sacramento B down in California, they printed the picture of me and five other prisoners that were taken at that news release, and a friend of my brother's saw it, and our name isn't very common and so he said, "He's got to be related to you," and so then he sent the picture up to my wife, and she contacted the Air Force and said, "We have this now," and they said, "Where did you get that?" So something's went around the channels but they didn't get all the information with that, and then they confirmed and she called the pilot's wife and she had heard nothing, and so I was the only one of my crew that was identified as still being alive.

Interviewer

What happened to your ship? What happened to your crew?

Lynn Beens

I don't know. I wished... in fact when I went back to my home base I couldn't stay there because it was a question that was always there because I had all the family members there, and I just couldn't tell them anything. I was the navigator. The navigator's the first one to eject in a controlled situation, and I took that serious and I went as fast as I could, but the radar navigator's sitting right next to me all ready to go and eject and when I left he was ready, and the pilot said that the co-pilot ejected, and then the pilot ejected. The two people behind, the gunner and the electronic warfare officer, we don't really know what happened. He thought he heard their ejection seats go, and the airborne commander was heading back to go down the ladder to jump out my hatch when the pilot left, and so it was all just that big question of what happened?

When I was being interrogated I thought I saw my co-pilot's ID card, but I was looking at it upside down, and it could have been just wishful on my part, but I actually came across my pilot after I'd been in the Hilton a couple... I think it was when we left the Hilton that I actually came across him. When we went to the Zoo, he was there, but it's one of those terrible things where you say, well gosh I bailed out and was I dreaming? Where's everyone else? And you didn't know. And I went and talked to all of the families when I came back and I had to basically tell them that I didn't know. They should have been able to get out. But you thinking about it when you're coming down and they're shooting at ya and you could have got hit depending on who they met on the ground. They could have been killed there. It actually took them 18 years, from the time we got shot down to where they brought the remains back and declared them officially dead.

Interviewer

So they ejected, but you're the only survivor?

Lynn Beens

No my pilot survived and I survived, but the rest of them perished at one point or the other in that sequence, whether coming down, or didn't get out of the airplane, or we don't know.

Interviewer

How do you feel about that? Not knowing.

Lynn Beens

It's hard because you know in all this prisoners of war coming back and everyone treated us really good coming

back, but I'm a survivor. I'm just happy that I survived this situation because the rest of my crew didn't. That's hard.

Interviewer
And it was probably tremendously difficult for the families. Waiting for 18 years to know.

Lynn Beens
And it something... what can you say? As I left the person next to me was ready to go. What happened to him I can't answer. It would be great if I could.

Interviewer
But they found the remains of all of those guys later?

Lynn Beens
Yes.

Interviewer
Were they all in a central location?

Lynn Beens
I don't know that. All I know is that they did... when they were going back in and doing all of the excavating and searching through everything, they came up with remains of the five crew members.

Interviewer
So they were considered MIA's for 18 years then?

Lynn Beens
The Air Force considered them that way. I think some of the wives, and at the end of like seven years I think you can actually change the status and declare them deceased, and I think some of them did that just to get on with their lives.

Interviewer
So when you were in the Zoo, the treatment was pretty good because I assume they were at the negotiating table by then, am I right?

Lynn Beens
Ya, for us it was just a matter of interrogation and indoctrination. They'd call it "Quiz," but they'd come and take a couple of people out of the cell and take them into interrogation and grill you and try to get information as to what your airplane capabilities were and whatever else they came up with. Sometimes it was difficult because they had their manuals out of our airplanes. They just gathered up all of those papers that kind of ended up on the ground, and they sit there and look in the book and ask you questions right out of the book to see if you're telling the truth or not, because I think for the most part they didn't have the questions. They were being fed the questions from someone else, and so as the people were asking the questions you could tell them just about anything and they would say, O.K. that's good. Where they were really having a problem is if you refused to answer anything. But treatment, from what I heard from other POWs and read their books and that, ya in the early years the treatment was terrible. We just had the indoctrination and then they'd take you and talk to you about how good the Vietnamese people were and how we were the oppressors and trying to really talk it up to where we were the bad guys and they were the good guys. So they did a lot of that, but for the most part it was just sitting there day after day not knowing what was going on.

Interviewer
So were any of the other guys getting information about what was going on?

Lynn Beens
No, because basically after that 11 Day War there was very few additional POWs that were coming in. That was pretty much the end. There were a couple, maybe scragglers at the end of December, first of January, so we weren't getting any other information in. You'd have camp radio going all day and all night with their propaganda and their broadcasts and you had to live with that. But we did get the information that, once the prisoners were being released, the airplanes that were coming in to Geelong Airport were, they had a corridor they could fly, and they were actually breaking that corridor. They'd go right down the edge and a little over the edge just so they could come close enough to our camp that we could see them, so we knew something was going on. When a release was going on you could see, O.K. here are the airplanes coming in, so things are going as scheduled, but we really didn't know what was going on other than what the Vietnamese were telling us. I mean they had times that they'd go out and measure you for a suit of clothes--a jacket, pants and shoes--and say, "O.K. these are what you're going to wear when you go home," and they could come into the camp and say, "O.K. you're going home so change into your clothes," and then they'd say, "Nope, nope, they've been in violation so get into your pajamas again because you can't go home."

So they played games with you that way always keeping you on your toes as to not know what was going on. The day came up to where we were going to be released; we had a whole mob of news people come into our camp. In fact, I think it kind of got out of control for the camp authorities and the guards. They couldn't control it. We had

Walter Cronkite in there and a whole big crew, and as they came through they would pull you aside and say, "Hey, this is what's going to happen, you're going to be released and you're going to the Philippines to spend a couple of days there, and you'll be heading home," and that was the first valid, real information we had, but the guards just couldn't control it because there were too many people there. And that's what happened. They put us in our go-home clothes and loaded us up on a bus and took us Gillam Airport and sitting on the bus and the first bus unloads and everybody gets on the airplane and they close up the doors and the airplane leaves. There's no other airplanes going, so I thought, O.K. we're going back to camp again, but later on I found out that they had a rule that only one airplane could be on the ground at a time and so as soon as that airplane took off, another one landed and we were on that one.

Interviewer
And the media?

Lynn Beens
We were so at the end of things that it was really a little bit of interviewing, but not much to speak of. I think it was pretty much the people who had been there for so long and they came out and a lot of media, but the attention was still there. I mean we came into Hawaii in the middle of the night and there were hundreds and hundreds of people there just waiting for us as we were on our way home.

Interviewer
Describe that. What did that feel like?

Lynn Beens
Oh it felt great because I mean it showed that the American people still cared about you. I mean up to this point Vietnam Veterans were coming home and with all the anti-war attitudes and that, they came home to no fanfare, no nothing. And so they kind of, unfairly I think, gave it all to us because we had a small group that they could recognize that had served and were coming home, but really that was something that should have gone for all of our veterans coming home. It just didn't happen. People really got behind the POW situation and really came out.

Interviewer
Was Chris (wife) there at the airport in Hawaii?

Lynn Beens
No, actually...

Interviewer
Describe for a second the land in Hawaii. What time it was and what that feeling was.

Lynn Beens
In Hawaii we landed at maybe one in the morning, somewhere in there, and there were just people lined up all over the place with flags and I think somebody gave me a little bell and a couple of people gave me flags, and then as we came in we got off the airplane and we waited a little while. I think it was a refueling for the plane and then we got back on plane and we left, so it really was just a short stop in Hawaii for refueling, and we were going to March Air Force Base is where we were headed. That was my stateside hospital, and when I got there it was mid-day and when I got off the airplane then my wife and daughter were there, and my mom and dad too.

Interviewer
That must have felt amazing.

Lynn Beens
Ya. But she wasn't very sure of the whole thing because it was April Fool's Day you know, it's a joke. But we made it back.

Interviewer
So lets talk about your homecoming. What is Chris (wife) saying here?

Lynn Beens
Well you're thrown into the category of O.K. you're an x prisoner of war, and I was there 99 days, and it was, by our standards, it was terrible, but it was a short time and we pretty well went in with the attitude that we're ending the war and we're going to be out of here, so deep down you had the feeling that you had a date in the future that you were going to be back. It wasn't like some of these guys who went down early in the war where the years pass and they really don't know. So we really went in with the attitude that we're going in to get you out, even though some of us ended up being in there through the process, and then we come back and we get all of the fanfare of returning troops, but the regular Vietnam Veteran doesn't have that, so you kind of, why should I get the attention, and this guy has been over there on the ground fighting and whatever, so it's kind of... ya, you realize you're in a certain group because of what happened, but it's hard to step up and say give me this credit because...

Interviewer
Isn't it the whole experience? It's ejecting yourself and free falling and then you are in enemy territory. It's the whole shebang. It's pretty intense. It's a unique story.

Lynn Beens
But I go down to Pensacola every year for a physical. It's an ongoing one for the POW's. They are tracking your health. And I'll come across and meet some of the old POW's that had been there a long time, and the minute they find out you're in B-52s they thank you, and they'll say, "What day did you get shot down?" And I tell them the day and they say, "Oh, I think I saw you." I had a neighbor across the street from me that was a good friend and he was flying many ships behind me, but he wrote my wife a letter and said, "Ya, it was an instant fireball. The airplane just blew up." But it's so far long ago that I can really put it out of my mind in a lot of respects, and I go through something like this and I talk about it and then it all comes to the surface and I'll go back to where I'm having trouble sleeping at night.
When I first got back I would sit there and everyone I'd hear an airplane fly over you got nervous. I mean when we were in the prison camp, you could hear the B-52s coming into their targets. It's such a rumble and a drone. Even up at 35,000 feet above the ground you can hear them coming in, and when the bombs go off, you can feel the vibration when they hit. It's scary. And that's knowing they're not bombing you, and if you're a target... Every time a bomb raid came in, our camp would fill up with Army. All the local people felt that was a safe place to be. I mean they would just fill our camp up, and then after the bomb run was over then they would leave. They just felt safe there.
Interviewer
Absolutely. We have a couple of guys who were part of the C-130's with the remote drones attached underneath it, and they would go all over looking for the camps. They would fly around looking for you guys. This is what I was told, to let planes know where they can and can't bomb, and the conditions and whereabouts of the camps. Did you know that was going on?
Lynn Beens
I didn't know C-130s were doing it. I knew... we were well aware of the RF-4s--the reconnaissance F-4s, because every time it was a clear day they would fly over the camp, and you could hear them coming. They'd get down low on the deck and in the afterburner and just scream across there and as they came the guards on the wall were firing at them and they'd just come through and just come over the camp and take pictures and just be on their way. Unarmed and unafraid, you know. It's just, that was amazing that you knew they were there doing that, risking their lives just to get some information.
Interviewer
That must have felt amazing just to hear the American planes, that support.
Interviewer
You said when you were flying in for your bomb run you were very vulnerable taking that 90-degree turn. What went through your mind then?
Lynn Beens
At the time I didn't know how vulnerable we were because when we went over there and started bring the G models over, there was a modification to be made to the electronic systems and some of them were modified and some of them weren't. And then if you look at the statistics, most of the airplanes that were lost were unmodified G models, because we did not have the jamming packages that were on the other airplanes, and didn't really realize at the time that that was what was going on, but when you go through and take in all the information that was there and going through it and see what it is, you realize that's what was happening. And we were well within the losses that they were expecting, so we went up to Christmas and no changes. We were doing the same thing every day and getting more losses.
I mean the day I got shot down was the worst for a number of airplanes, but then after they resumed bombing and we back on the 28th we only had maybe one loss or something like that, because at that point they were coming in from different directions flying straight past the target. They weren't doing the big turns because they'd realized they were vulnerable at that point, so they changed the tactics to make it safer for the crewmembers. Plus there were restrictions of where you could fly and where you couldn't fly so we had to stay in the airspace that we were authorized.
Interviewer
So stationed in Guam, did you follow the war? Did you read about what was going on in different areas?
Lynn Beens
It would be on the news. You'd get current updates as to what was going on, but to really follow it close, no, I think a part of it was just being out of country. I kind of cheated on that war because I spent all my time away from it, other than ya, I served in Vietnam. I jumped out of an airplane and ended up there.
Interviewer
How old were you when you were shot down?
Lynn Beens
I'd say 25 or 26.

Interviewer
How far into your POW experience at the Zoo did you run into your pilot?

Lynn Beens
When I first got there. The first day, because all of the B-52 guys were in the annex they called, The Pigs Sty, appropriately named because when it rained the whole courtyard would just be a sea of mud. But we had four cells and I think it was like eight people per cell, and he was in there. So when we got loaded up from the Hanoi Hilton and into the Zoo he was there.

Interviewer
And he didn't have any idea what happened either?

Lynn Beens
No, he didn't know anything either, other than he said that the co-pilot had ejected and the airborne commander was at the top of the ladder when he left. And we were, they shot our tail off so we were in a high-speed dive. When I left we were probably only going 500 miles and hour. When the pilot went out he was high 600, almost 700, and when he hit the wind stream it broke his, dislocated his shoulder and broke his arm I think is what it was. So it was hard to get out after that because I mean when you come out of the airplane you don't enough clearance and you're just bouncing along. Like the airborne commander, I don't see that he had any chance at all because when you jump out that hatch you're just all the way back in the airplane all the way back.

Interviewer
Was there any moment in the 99 POW experience that, how did you cope? Jay Hess said he did a lot of praying. What did you do to soothe your troubled heart?

Lynn Beens
I think I had an advantage over Jay in that I didn't have any solitary other than that one day, and then I had somebody there that I could talk to, and that makes a big difference. You don't have the worries and the depression and the hopelessness when you have somebody else that you're able to talk with about it. Once the peace treaty was actually signed, then that's two months that we were just there as hostages waiting to be released, and they brought in Red Cross care packages, which gave us some things to do, and a deck of cards and some books and things like that. They did give us a bible after we got to the Zoo so that we, we had some religious discussions and talks back and forth between people, but religion's kind of a comforting thing because, if you're talking about the LDS faith, we were married in the temple and sealed, so it was a matter of we would be back together eventually, so that was not really the same worry that other people had. I mean a lot of people just wrote their wives off. I mean it's over. And we had people that were so pessimistic about the situation that you didn't want to talk to them because their whole thing was, "We're never getting out of here. We're going to be here for the rest of our lives," and it just... We had a member of our compound that was that way.

Interviewer
That you avoided.

Lynn Beens
Ya. So there were a lot of things, just kept busy and talked about things and planned and figured what you were going to do.

Interviewer
What is the name of your pilot?

Lynn Beens
James Nagahiro. He's Japanese-American. So he was from Hawaii.

Interviewer
Are you in contact with him?

Lynn Beens
I've lost contact with him over the last eight to ten years now, and I've tried to see if his name shows up anywhere, but he's not on the POW network where you have people communicating. He doesn't show there, but I've looked at the cemetery records to see if he maybe has passed away, but he's not there. He'd be in his 80's, and he moved back east, and when he moved back East I lost track of him. I think I have a picture of him here, and I have a crew picture with an extra picture in, because we were traded out crewmembers.

Interviewer
We were also doing an exchange of NVA prisoners after the peace treaty. Were you aware of that at the time?

Lynn Beens
No. I knew it was a drawdown of our troops that kind of determined when we came out, but I didn't know to what extent that we had of North Vietnam's prisoners.

Interviewer
Thoughts on the war. I know you feel like you weren't really in this war, but your thoughts on how the troops were

treated when they came home. Was this something you were aware of early at the war's end, or something you realized years later?

Lynn Beens

You were aware of it with the demonstrations going on and the activities and the things. You were aware, but when I was back here in the states when I was on a crew at Fairchild, Spokane, you knew what the war was doing and what was going on, so that was kind of a known.

Interviewer

And your thoughts? The protesters and this change of consciousness?

Lynn Beens

I don't know that we really had much of an opinion. When you're in the military that's, you're on board. You don't go out and criticize what's going on and that, but it's a war that's frustrating because it could have, I think it could have been over a lot quicker if they had just allowed us to do some of the things we could do. I mean we couldn't hit targets that were, you couldn't bomb their dykes or, There were just a lot of things. Our hands were tied with what they allowed us to do. It was frustrating, but you just were there to follow orders.

Interviewer

You have a military career?

Lynn Beens

I retired after 21 years, yes.

Interviewer

What did you do after this experience?

Lynn Beens

I originally went to Nav training school down in Sacramento, California to teach people to go out and do what I'd been doing. So the navigators, bombardiers in B-52s. And I spent four years there and then I went back to flying B-52s as a crewmember. I went up to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane Washington and spent seven years there, and then I went to South Dakota, Ellsworth Air Force Base and transitioned from B-52s to B-1s and that's where I ended up.

Interviewer

So describe in your job in Linebacker--what your position as a navigator is.

Lynn Beens

You're sitting in the basement and for the most part using a radarscope. You have navigation systems that can give you your latitude and longitude wherever you supposedly are and you update those with either ground references, or you could do celestial navigation if you were in a situation where you could see the stars really well, and your job is to keep yourself on course and on time, and usually flying out of Guam, that was a challenge because when you came close to the Philippines it was almost always a weather system there--thunderstorms that you had to find a way through, either to go around them, or find on your radar. You could bring your radar up and look at the clouds and see where the heavy cells were, and you'd pick and area that was less activity and go through it, or go around, which would mess up your time a lot. It was just navigating through your route. You'd go through all the way over to the coast of Vietnam and then you'd turn and go the route they had scheduled for you to go to your target area. And your job was to keep yourself in position and on time, so you got to your target when you were supposed to be there.

Interviewer

So the target, was that a railroad repair facility?

Lynn Beens

Yes.

Interviewer

Could you mention that?

Lynn Beens

The night we were flying we were targeting against a railway repair facility that had been targeted three nights prior to that, the 18th, 19th, 20th they were hitting that same target. It was probably 80% destroyed by the time we were there, but we had a limited number of targets that we could hit, and we had picked out the, I mean they picked out certain targets for us to go in and destroy, and that's what we were doing, and I think that's why we got shot down--because they knew where we were going. They knew when we came in, O.K. they're on the same route the people were on the other night and we know where they're going to go. And as result of that, they eventually changed their tactics, but it was interesting, when I was there a couple of weeks into the Hilton, they came in one day and they said, "We're going to take you on the bus and give you a tour around the city to show you the damage you've been doing," and so they took us to a hospital.

There were a couple of craters here and there where bombs had landed there, and as a group we're saying, nope

that's not us. That's not B-52s. Then they took us to an orphanage and part of the orphanage was damaged and we're going, no that was not us, and then they took us to a regular little shopping district. It was just a commercial area that was a block and a half or so from our target, and it was amazing because you had one street, the other side of the street all the buildings were there, the other side of the street was just total rubble, and we're going, ya, that's us. They were only a block and a half off their target to hit their target, but just that string of bombs, when they come out it's just one big long train, and anything that's under that is gone.

Interviewer
So that was their way of...

Lynn Beens
It was just propaganda to show all the terrible things we were doing--how we're bombing businesses and how we're hitting the hospital, and how we're hitting an orphanage.

Interviewer
How did you know those weren't your bombs? Whose bombs were they?

Lynn Beens
Well they weren't B-52s, because they were just single craters. I mean ours, when we come down it's a carpet-bombing and you can tell. It looks totally different.

Interviewer
What do the other bomb damages look like?

Lynn Beens
Oh it could be individual bombs, some of them, I know at the hospitals reports came back later that they had a triple A site set up on top of the hospital, so it could have just been a single bomb that came in to take that out, and you don't know.

Interviewer
So tell me why you like flying.

Lynn Beens
It really comes out as a secondary, even when I was going to college I took some flying lessons and I really wanted to fly, so I went to pilot training first off. As soon as I was commissioned and went to pilot training and got 10 months into the year program then I was eliminated, and that has bothered me all my life. And a couple of years ago, I was getting a physical and mentioned the problem with my eyes and the guy says, "Well I know what that is," and did some tests. I have no depth perception. And when it came to flying night and formation flights I was dangerous. I would, things just jump right up at me at night. If I'm not wearing glasses when I'm driving I tailgate, but I never realized what the problem was until just a couple of years ago. I just felt that I was kind of a failure. And since I still wanted to fly and went into nav school, and in nav school I really wanted to go into the reconnaissance F-4's, RF-4's, but there weren't any available when my time to choose something came, and so it was a really nice, safe airplane to fly B-52s so I chose those. It's fun flying. I get lost on the ground, but if I'm up above where I can see where I'm going, then O.K.

Interviewer
Tell me about the children who did pictures for you.

Lynn Beens
I got them when I returned, they presented it to me.

Interviewer
Tell me about that and those moments of recognition that were touching to you as a survivor and a returning POW.

Lynn Beens
And they're interesting and I still have them today. I mean they're, how old are they? Forty years? It was all grades in the grade schools, everything from kindergarten on up. The older kids wrote letters, but the younger ones, it could be a picture, it could be an airplane dropping bombs or an airplane getting shot down, but just whatever their capabilities were at the ages, and some of them were pretty good artists. And it's funny because I'll come across them and I'll know the people now. Like Chris, my wife, has a cousin that sent me one when she was just in grade school, and in fact when I was looking for stuff to bring today, I saw that the other day and other people I've come across... Oh ya, I got a letter from you. But some of the things, it wasn't even way back then, but current, I mean two years ago we went down to Anderson. It was a prisoner of war camp, Andersonville in Georgia, and we went to a ceremony down there honoring National POW Day, and that was just, when you go and look at the situation back in the Civil War and their prisoners and how they had to live, what they went through, it just, some of those things are really remarkable, and every time we go down to Pensacola we go by the Vietnam Wall, they have a 3/4 wall there in Pensacola and all my crew members are right at the joint of the wall, they were there. We've gone to the one back in Washington, the main one.

Interviewer
What was that like for you?

Lynn Beens
It's emotional. I mean, when you think of how many people lost their lives in that and how it affected us, it's just brings back those feelings of patriotism and how your country is and what it stand for.

Interviewer
If you could speak to the veteran, say the veteran I mentioned that felt bad that he/they didn't have the welcome home that you guys did, what would you say?

Lynn Beens
It's funny you mention that because when we went to Andersonville one of the groups that sponsored that are like a Vietnam Veteran's biker group, The Ride Home. I mean, and those guys they were the Vietnam veterans that came back and went through all of that, and they sponsor these organizations all of the time for the POWs and MIAs, and I think it's, they must realize that it was easier to give the recognition to a small group of people, and it kind of made up for the other things that I think the population felt. O.K. it's over, now we... and I think they should realize that the American people were just putting those feelings that they had withheld and that to one group of people just because it was over. It was the end of it. I mean we had my wife's cousin who was on the ground in Vietnam and he just slithered back into the states and that was it, no fanfare, no anything. It happens and it's sad.

Interviewer
Are there triggers from that war that you have still today?

Lynn Beens
No I don't thing there are really specific triggers. I think when I look down and go through it and remember my crewmembers and the times we had, it brings me back there. For the most part I'm divorced from it. It was a small part of my life way back when. But it affects me. I'm very impatient. I mean now just waiting in line I don't like that, and I think its part of... life's short. You don't want to spend it just sitting in a line or waiting for something. I'm very impatient that way. I don't know of anything that really brings it back.

Interviewer
Anything else you want to talk about?

Lynn Beens
No I think we're good.

Interviewer
Just one more thing. I want to talk a little more about the crew. Were there one or two members that you were particularly close to?

Lynn Beens
I was really closest to my gunner and my co-pilot. I mean we had a lot of same interests and that. As an example, the day we took off, the 20th, that morning we were out flying our model airplanes on the base there, and I crashed mine. I mean it should have been a premonition at that point. But we went everywhere. When we went on trips we went to Thailand together. We went over to Tokyo together. When we had breaks we spent a lot of time together. The whole time we were over there we were just a specific crew other than part way through we had one member get transferred to a different assignment.

Interviewer
Lynn thanks you for this interview. I appreciate you coming in and sharing your experiences.