POW GRAPHIC NOVELS

WORLD WAR II

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POW GRAPHIC NOVEL SERIES, VOL 1 ★ 1945

1

NAZIS GIVE ME THE WILLYS

EXPERIENCE PFC EKSTRAND'S SERVICE AS A JEEP DRIVER IN WWII!!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MELINA TESTIN

BUILD YOUR OWN WILLYS MB!

PG. 8

STORY PROVIDED BY MALCOLM EKSTRAND VIA THE HOLT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM, LISTEN AT PRITZKERMILITARY.ORG
Born 13 August 1924 in Providence, RI, "Mac" was drafted in 1943. He qualified for the Army Specialized Training Program, and studied engineering at Providence College until the program ended in 1944. September 1944-April 1945, Mac served with the 26th Yankee Division in Europe. After the war, Mac became Dr. Ekstrand the Podiatrist. He passed away in 2018.

In March 1945, Patton’s Third Army crossed into Germany. The 26th spent the spring neutralizing Nazi forces in the southeast corner of Germany.

1 April 1945 I was relieved of Kitchen Patrol Duty.

KP had kept me off the front lines, but came with its own hazards:

One fateful day, I slipped into the ditch with me inside. I crawled out covered in flour. I didn’t find it funny.

The currency of the field.

Food came in cans.

B-Rations attracted officers.

HERSHEY’s MILK CHOCOLATE
The currency of the field.

All that was behind me now, we were across the Rhine...in Germany.
The 26th needed a new jeep driver.

Do you know how to drive?

No, Sir.

You will.

I learned to drive in 2 days.

24 April 1945
I drove Captain Sims to see the frontline.

Stopping

for a moment

Lord, please help me.

...we ran into a bit of trouble.
Wounded and captured, we finally made it to Nittenau.

American bombers greeted us as we arrived.

CPT Sims was taken to a bomb shelter.

I was left outside to guard the jeep.

Lord, if I am going to die today, let it be from German guns and not from American guns.
CPT Sims' wounds had been treated, but my shoulder was still sore.

Our captors drove CPT Sims and me to a field filled with ranks of German soldiers and two officers on horseback.

They were SS: elite Nazis notorious for killing POWs.

Luckily, we were sent on.

NITTENAU

across the Danube, to the village of Straubing.

CPT Sims was brought to the hospital and aided by English-speaking doctors.

I was sent to the stalag.
A German doctor patched my shoulder with a bandage cut from my own jacket and the label ‘prisoner’.

The stalag was already filled with a rough bunch of German soldiers.

I was terrified the Germans would kill me at night. I was in so much pain, I feared I was already dead.

Please help me, Lord.
I was the only prisoner glad to see American soldiers arrive a week later.

Schlechte Soldaten. Good soldiers!

An ambulance took me to a MASH behind the line.

You were shot in the back. I didn't realize...

I was lucky to be alive. Somehow, the bullet had missed everything important.

I was moved to a hospital in Britain.

The US Army gave me the Purple Heart, and they won the war in Europe, so I went home.
Willys MB jeeps were produced in the United States during WWII, 1941-1945. The Army selected auto manufacturer Willys (pronounced Willis) as the manufacturer of military jeeps, though Ford factories also manufactured a GPW (General Purpose Willys) jeep to keep up with demand. The Willys Military Model B became one of the most recognizable vehicles of the war. Thanks to their versatility and rugged design, more than 600,000 jeeps were built during WWII. American jeeps were valued tools and desirable even to the enemy, like the Germans who captured Mac's jeep.

The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was a wartime program, 1942-1944, designed to train officers for the Army in a college setting, while ROTC was suspended during WWII. During basic training, recruits took an exam to qualify for the program. Only 2% of Army recruits earned a spot in the ASTP to study Engineering, Medicine, or Foreign Language. As preparations began for the June 1944 D-Day invasion, ASTP dissolved, transferring thousands of students, like Mac, to combat divisions.

The Purple Heart is a medal awarded to service members wounded or killed in action. First awarded in 1932, the Purple Heart is a modern version of the Badge of Military Merit, introduced by George Washington in 1782. More than 1 million Purple Hearts, depicting George Washington, were awarded during WWII, and the medal continues to be awarded today. National Purple Heart day is celebrated annually on 7 August.

The 26th Yankee Division was founded as the Massachusetts Army National Guard. Mac found himself in the 26th after the ASTP dissolved, and soon landed with the division at Utah Beach three months after D-Day, 7 September 1944. The 26th spent the fall fighting through France and the winter locked in Luxembourg during the Battle of the Bulge. In March, the 26th crossed the Rhine River and spent the spring neutralizing Southeastern Germany. The equestrian German officers Mac encountered near Nittenau surrendered to the 26th within days of his capture.

Kitchen Patrol Duty (KP) is a generally undesirable job given to junior enlisted soldiers which involves preparing and serving chow, and cleaning the kitchen and mess tent. George S. Patton was an American general during WWII. He commanded the Third US Army in France and Germany, including the 26th Yankee Division, 1944-1945.

Stalag is an abbreviation of the German word for Prisoner of War Camp. At the Stalag in Straubing, Mac and other POWs were only fed one slice of bread a day.

A Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) was a sophisticated field hospital introduced during WWII to treat major wounds requiring immediate attention.
Build a Willys MB like the one Mac drove in WWII!
cut along the dotted lines, fold along the solid lines, glue as directed

1945 WILLYS MB
MALCOLM EKSTRAND
2

UN-BLEI ALF-ABLY

LUCKY

NAVIGATE THE
BATTLE OF THE
BULGE WITH THE
106TH DIVISION!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MELINA TESTIN

DESIGN A SERVICE
FLAG!  
pg. 8

STORY PROVIDED BY RICHARD LOCKHART VIA THE HOLT ORAL
HISTORY PROGRAM, LISTEN AT PRITZKERMILITARY.ORG
Richard Lockhart

Born 20 January 1924 in Lima, OH, "Lucky Locky" grew up in Fort Wayne, IN where he dreamed of becoming a journalist. WWII delayed this dream, but Lucky's time in the Army taught him not to be complacent. By 1951, Lucky had a degree from Northwestern University, a wife, and a long, successful career in journalism and politics ahead of him, until his death in 2019.

I enlisted 7 December 1942. It was several months before I found my permanent place in the Army... just in time for the Battle of the Bulge.

I studied at Purdue University until compulsory ROTC was cut short.

Loading the 120mm Anti-Aircraft Gun grew tiresome.

My eyesight was not up to snuff for the paratroops.

Finally, I learned to operate the 57mm Anti-Tank Gun in the 106th Division.

September 1944, 18,000 of us rode the RMS Queen Elizabeth, the largest ship in the world, to England.
We made our way to Bleialf, a village in the Ardennes Forest just inside the German border.

16 December 1944 German artillery announced the Battle of the Bulge.

The 57mm Anti-Tank Gun was one of the first casualties.

I strapped my M1911 Pistol to my ankle, and picked up an M1 Rifle in the retreat.

We felt like children, forced to obey orders that did not make sense to us.

We were here to fight, not run away.

The order came for the 106th to pull back.

We broke down our weapons

though I slipped a few dollars in the lining of my jacket.

But it was too late. The 106th surrendered to the Germans 19 December.
The German's loaded us onto Forty-and-Eight boxcars

We took turns sitting and standing for four days and four nights.

The officers and NCOs were separated, and the Jewish soldiers were sent to a labor camp. We privates arrived at Stalag IX-B.

The guards photographed each prisoner

and issued new dog tags.

From this point on, we were just numbers.

Melina Testin
We ate "grass soup" made of turnip tops and drank melted snow.

I made lists of all my favorite restaurants and meals back home.

The money I had hidden bought me extra soup and more food could be earned through work.

But the guards would hit us with branches if we worked too slowly.

February 1945, a prisoner attacked a guard for more food.

The guards lined us up. Every 10th man was to be shot until the guilty man stepped forward.

The blood on the man's clothes gave him away, and we escaped the firing squad.

Soon I could hear artillery in the mountains. Rescue was on its way.
2 April 1945 the Germans left Stalag IX-B disguised as civilians and we were liberated by the 44th Division.

I did not realize how weak I had become until I needed help onto the truck.

In Le Havre at Camp Lucky Strike, I showered, and ate until I was sick.

13 April 1945 I began my voyage home aboard the John Ericsson.

I had a terrible toothache, but I did not want to wait any longer.
The Army dropped me off in Indiana and I hitchhiked from CAMP ATTERBURY 1942 to Fort Wayne.

But when I got home, my parents were gone.

When they heard I was MIA, they moved to Ohio to be with my mother’s family.

None of my letters from Stalag IX-B ever arrived,

they had thought I was dead.

Soon I had my discharge, and a case of "Chicago-itis" that had been growing since I visited the 1933 World’s Fair.

In 1946 I moved to the city to start my life.
A Forty-and-Eight (Quarante et huit) was a French boxcar common across Europe during WWII. At first made popular for their ability to transport large loads of personnel and materiel—the name comes from the boxcar's capacity for forty people or eight horses—Nazi Germany found more sinister uses for the boxcars. Lucky remembered at least sixty prisoners crammed into the 40/8 on the way to Stalag IX-B. 40/8s soon became synonymous with the transportation of prisoners.

The 57mm Anti-Tank Gun (ATG) was modeled after the British Quick-Firing 6-pounder. Approximately 5000, 57mm ATGs were delivered to British and Soviet troops through the lend-lease program of American war aid. Unfortunately, the 57mm ATG did not prove to be effective against heavily armored German tanks. In the case of Lucky's ATG, blown up early in the battle, it did not prove to be effective at all.

The 106th Golden Lions Division was formed as an expansion of the 80th Division during WWII. In the first days of the Battle of the Bulge (16-19 December 1944), two of the three regiments became surrounded by the Germans. More than 6,000 soldiers, including Lucky, were forced to surrender, and were taken prisoner.

Camp Atterbury is a military training facility in Edinburgh, IN. Lucky and the 106th, along with the 30th, 83d, and 92d Divisions, trained at the camp 1942-1944, and the Indiana National Guard still uses the facility today. Camp Atterbury held 15,000 Italian and German prisoners during WWII. The carved rock and a chapel on the grounds were both constructed by POWs whose experiences differed greatly from the suffering of their American counterparts in Axis-controlled prison camps.

The Battle of the Bulge was a German offensive in the Ardennes Forest 16 December 1944 - 25 January 1945. It was the last German offensive of WWII.

Cigarette Camps like Camp Lucky Strike were staging areas on the French coast for Americans waiting to return to the United States on ships after WWII.

Stalag is an abbreviation of the German word for Prisoner of War Camp. Lucky and others at Stalag IX-B were later recognized as victims of prisoner abuse.

The M1 Garand was the standard semi-automatic rifle issued to American infantry troops in WWII. Over 5 million Garands were produced during the war.
Design a Service Flag!
During WWII it was very popular for a family with members in the military to display a Service Flag in their window. Think about your own family history or others you may know as you follow the directions to color and assemble your own Service Flag.

- A Service Flag is **white** with a **red border** and **gold fringe**.
- **One star** is added for each member of the family serving.
- A **blue star** indicates a living member of the family.
- A **gold star** indicates a family member who has died in service.

Some Service Flags feature more specific markings. Consider adding to your stars:

- a **gold cross** for the wounded
- a **gold circle** for decorated service.
- a **gold circle** and a **gold cross** for the missing.
- a **red circle** for the captured.
- a **red pentagon** for the decorated wounded.
1945 SERVICE FLAG
RICHARD LOCKHART
NOT DON FIGHTING YET

FLY THROUGH A GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP WITH A B-17 NAVIGATOR!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MELINA TESTIN

BUILD YOUR OWN B-17! PG. 8

STORY PROVIDED BY DONALD CASEY VIA THE HOLT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM, LISTEN AT PRITZKERMILITARY.ORG
Donald Casey

Born 6 November 1924 in River Forest, IL, Don served in the Army Air Forces 1942-1945. After the war, Don worked in Chicago as a lawyer for 54 years with degrees from Dartmouth and Loyola Chicago. Don married twice and had four sons. He passed away in 2016.

My experience in war felt like that of the soldiers from books: “We were 18 and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.”

- All Quiet on the Western Front

I was in boarding school when Pearl Harbor was bombed! To us, war would be the adventure of a lifetime.

When I turned 18, I became a Navigation Officer in the Army Air Forces.

Early 1944 was a war of air forces in Europe. Before I arrived, three of every four planes in each mission were shot down in the 8th Air Force. From the Navigator's window, it wasn't hard to see why.
Our plane got a new radar system called "Mickey."

We were able to fly more missions now that Mickey allowed us to "see through" the clouds.

I was promoted to Deputy Lead Navigator, though I hadn't taken the training course.

They didn't tell me I was promoted because 3 other Deputies had already been killed.

18 June 1944 I went on a mission to bomb an oil refinery in Hamburg.

The mission was a great success for the 8th! We only lost one plane!

Unfortunately, it was my plane.
If I opened my chute too soon, I would be shot at from below.

The civilians were hostile toward us because we had just been bombing them.

I landed in the bushes outside a hospital.

A car drove up to accept my surrender.

I looked pretty conspicuous carrying my chute.

I waited in solitary confinement for 3 days.

German officers interrogated me, but they had my navigation briefcase, so they already knew everything I knew.
I was sent to the South Camp of Stalag Luft III. It held 10,000 flying officers.

The Stalag had a small library, musical instruments, and time for leisure.

In June, an American Red Cross prisoner of war food package arrived for each man every week. By September, we only received half as many.

Our canteen radio picked up news of the Battle of the Bulge. And Hitler has ordered the evacuation of POW camps and Germany faces coldest winter in 25 years.
Winters in Chicago had prepared me for the cold. And the slippers that finally arrived in a care package from home helped, too.

We marched through a blizzard from Stalag Luft III in Sagan to Stalag VII-A in Moosburg.

The Germans locked us in train cars when an air raid passed over, and gave us tents, to sleep in the snow.

We were able to sleep inside at Stalag VII-A, but there weren't enough beds. So I had to sleep on the floor. Red Cross packages stopped arriving and the fleas were relentless.
The canteen could now pick up

BBC.

We followed troop movements closely in our "war room" as the Allies approached Moosburg.

29 April 1945 Patton's Third Army won a battle just outside the camp.

The tanks of the 14th Armored Division rolled into Stalag VII-A.

General Patton himself helped liberate the camp.

We burned the guard towers to celebrate our freedom.

C-47s flew us to Le Havre.

Ships took us to New York.

A train brought me home to Chicago.
Like aircraft themselves, radar was a tool that gained prominence through its military applications during WWII. Radar allowed crews to see through the clouds and continue operations safely even in unfavorable weather. The radar system installed on B-17s, the H2X "Mickey," was introduced in late 1943. The system included a pair of domes that sat on the outside of the plane, under the nose, and used micro-waves to return feedback images of the ground below to a display at the navigation desk inside. The dual dome design looked, to some, like Mickey Mouse ears.

The US Army Air Forces (USAAF) was active 1941-1947 as a replacement for the US Army Air Corps and a precursor to the United States Air Force. As the use of aircraft became an important part of both combat and logistics during WWII, it became clear that the US needed a more independent sector of the military dedicated to flight operations. In 1944, when Don was flying most of his missions, the USAAF included over 2 million servicemen and 80,000 aircraft.

Parachutes were invented long before airplanes, but WWII presented the first major demand with increased opportunities for flight. Parachutes could be worn on the back, chest, or bottom to be deployed via ripcord for those like Don who wore a parachute as an emergency safety measure. Parachutes could also be deployed automatically via static line for new groups like the Paratroops who jumped out of planes on purpose.

The Great Escape took place at Stalag Luft III in March 1944, just months before Don arrived. The Great Escape, which was popularized by the 1963 movie of the same name, was an escape mission planned by American, British, and Canadian POWs. 76 prisoners made it outside the camp through a series of tunnels, but only 3 made it to safety. As a consequence of the escape, life at the camp became more strict, and no further attempts at escape were possible by the time Don was a prisoner.

Forty-and-Eights were boxcars designed to hold either forty men or eight horses. During WWII, they were most notably used to transport prisoners across Europe.

George S. Patton was an American general during WWII. The 14th Armored Division was under Patton's command when it liberated Don and others at Stalag VII-A.

Stalag is an abbreviation of the German word for Prisoner of War Camp. 'Luft' meaning 'air,' Stalag Luft III was made specifically for members of the Air Corps like Don.

When questioned by their captors, prisoners were taught to only provide their name, rank, and serial number. Additional information might end up helping the enemy.
Build a B-17 like the HELL’S BELLE that Don navigated!
Cut out the rectangle below, name your plane and draw nose art in the space on the back, then follow steps 1-7 to fold a paper B-17 that really flies!

1. Fold in half, then unfold
2. Fold corners to center
3. Fold in half
6. Fold in half

Vol. 3: Donald Casey
The **B-17 Flying Fortress** was introduced in 1938, and quickly became a popular bomber in the US Army Air Forces in WWII, with nearly 13,000 built. 10 crew members served on each B-17 including a pilot, co-pilot, navigator (like Don), bombardier and nose gunner, flight engineer and top turret gunner, radio operator, ball turret gunner, tail gunner, and two waist gunners. Crews often decorated their planes with nicknames and nose art, like Don’s “Hell’s Belle,” for good luck.
CARVING UP NORMANDY

FOLLOW THIS TOUGH 'OMBRE'S JOURNEY FROM UTAH BEACH INTO THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MELINA TESTIN

D-DAY BATTLE MAP! P. 6

STORY PROVIDED BY CARVER McGRiff VIA THE HOLT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM, LISTEN AT PRITZKERMILITARY.ORG
Carver McGriff

Born 5 September 1924 in Indianapolis, IN, Carver McGriff grew up hearing WWI stories from his veteran father, and anxiously awaited his turn to join the Army. After the war, Dr. McGriff served as a Methodist Pastor in Indiana, where he still lives with his wife, Marianne. The couple has led several tours of Normandy together.

My little brother joined the Navy as a minesweeper in the Pacific, but I wanted to be in the infantry.

The Army seemed more dangerous and exciting than the Navy.

I was assigned to the 90th Division, the "Tough "Ombres."

Aboard the troop transport to Europe, I spent the weeks-long voyage on
The group of 200 men I joined were reinforcements for the 6 June 1944 D-Day invasion, the bloodiest day in American military history.

I waded ashore.

Utah Beach.

Dead bodies and crashed gliders littered the shores of Normandy.

BOOM

POW!

BAM!

We took cover in slit trenches that felt more like graves.

The people back home watching newsreels probably had a better picture of what an artillery barrage was like than we did, hiding in our foxholes.
We had not been trained to fight in hedgerows. I was afraid.

I wrote to my parents all of the things I regretted not saying enough:
I love you, and thank you for everything.
- Carver

I sent the letter to my brother and told him to only give it to my parents if I died.

My unit had to take Hill 122 at Mont-Castre.

I thought about a Bill Mauldin cartoon I had seen in the Stars and Stripes:

“My God, here they wuz an’ there we wuz”

I fought with 130 men in a drainage ditch for two days until we ran out of ammunition.

We had to surrender.

On the way to the POW camp...
An old cafe served as the POW hospital.

I wanted to escape, but I could not walk.

The Germans gave us hard cider to numb the pain, but we were not given any food.

A German doctor wrapped my shrapnel-riddled legs.

I finished healing in a London hospital where I was brought by American liberators.

I went home, where nothing had changed but me. Trying to remember my war experiences felt like watching a movie.

Like it all happened to someone else.

Like it was not me who had lived it.

What can you say to somebody who has never had anything like that happen to them? Like many other POW veterans, I decided not to talk about my war experiences for a long time. Writing my memoir and recording my oral history were important steps in my process of healing.
Dazzle Camouflage was a pattern of camouflage popular in both world wars for naval vessels. Though ineffective in concealing ships, it was meant to complicate the enemy’s ability to determine the ship's course or class. During WWII, the use of radar made any attempt at ship camouflage rather futile, and all efforts at dazzle camouflage were given up in 1945. Pictured here is the USS Iowa in dazzle camouflage. Battleship Iowa notably transferred President Roosevelt to the Tehran/Eureka Conference in 1943 at which the plan for Operation Overlord (D-Day) was decided.

The 90th "Tough 'Ombres" Division began as the Texas-Oklahoma Division. The 90th served as a reserve division on D-Day, landing at Utah Beach on 6 June 1944. After Carver's unit was captured at Hill 122 (Mont Castre) on 11 July, the division laid siege to Metz in the fall and served along the Saar River and Siegfried Line/Westwall during the winter Battle of the Bulge.

Bill Mauldin was a soldier and cartoonist during WWII. As a T-5 in the 45th "Thunderbird" Division, Mauldin designed his first war comics featuring iconic characters Willie and Joe. In 1944, Mauldin began to draw comics exclusively for the Stars and Stripes magazine. Distribution in the Stars and Stripes made fans of soldiers in every division, including Carver.

The Bronze Star is a medal awarded for “heroic or meritorious achievement or service.” It was introduced during WWII, and continues to be awarded in the Armed Forces today. Carver earned the Bronze Star for his service in capturing Hill 122 (Mont Castre) in Normandy. He also won the Purple Heart for the shrapnel wounds he sustained as a prisoner of war.

AU-Boat was a German submarine. In both World Wars, U-boats threatened Allied ships in the Atlantic. Carver luckily never spotted any U-boats during his time on the troop ship.

A Slit Trench is a wide foxhole meant to offer cover for multiple soldiers. Ideally 6-7' in depth, trenches were time consuming to build and soldiers often had to lie down for cover.

Hedgerows are series of closely planted shrubbery that bordered fields in Normandy. Difficult to see and pass through, they slowed Allied foot soldiers' assault of Normandy.

Shrapnel, the fragments kicked up by explosives, produced wounds ranging from superficial cuts to the loss of limbs. The shrapnel in Carver's legs was removed by surgery.
6 June 1944 was D-Day. Known as Operation Neptune and commanded by Major General Eisenhower, the invasion of Normandy across the English Channel is the largest amphibious military invasion in history, involving more than 350,000 Allied troops and 50 miles of Norman coastline. The Allies attacked at five beaches on D-Day: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. Operation Neptune was the first step in the Battle of Normandy, Operation Overlord.
Cut out the pieces below and track Operation Overlord on the battle map of Normandy (pg. 8).

**Montgomery**

Dempsey Crocker Bucknall

**THE BIG RED ONE**
"No Mission Too Difficult. No Sacrifice Too Great. Duty First!"

**IVY DIVISION**
"Steadfast and Loyal"

**THE WATER RATS**

**RED DEVILS**
"Go To It"

**BLUE AND GRAY**
"Twenty-nine, let's go!"

**ALL AMERICAN DIVISION**
"Death From Above"

**Rommel**

Dollmann

**TOUGH 'OMBRES**

**SCREAMING EAGLES**
"Rendezvous With Destiny"
PHANTOM OF WAR

SURVIVE A 6.5 YEAR STAY AT THE 'HANOI HILTON' WITH A FIGHTER PILOT!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MELINA TESTIN

STORY PROVIDED BY JOHN BORLING VIA THE HOLT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY, LISTEN AT PRITZKERMILITARY.ORG
John Borling was born 24 March 1940 on the South Side of Chicago. He joined JROTC in high school, and was accepted into the US Air Force Academy in 1959. After graduating first in his flight school class, John was anxious to put his training to use, flying F-4 Phantoms in the Vietnam War.

I didn't know much about Vietnam other than there was a war on, and I was in a hurry to get there.

1965: my wife, Myrna, and I welcomed our firstborn
1965: I spent 3 months in POW survival training
1965: I left for Vietnam just before Christmas

I joined the 433d Tactical Fighter Squadron

I first saw Vietnam at 18,000 feet on a bomb run north of Hanoi.

We lost two planes that first mission.

It was either going to be a very long or a very short war.
Fragmentary orders arrived no earlier than the day before the mission.

It took a lot of rain to make a WOXOF day.

MISSION 97/100:
BOMB RAILROAD BRIDGE IN BÀC GIANG: TWO LOW ALTITUDE PASSES WITH CLUSTER BOMBS, MAINTAIN RADIO SILENCE NEAR ENEMY AIR BASE AT KÉP. TOO FAR NORTH FOR RESCUE!!!
The mission spiraled out of control fast:

A hit to the tail flipped the plane upside down.

**EJECT!**

Our parachutes did not have time to deploy, so we fell fast.

I fell to one side of the hill...

AJ, the front seat pilot, fell to the other.
I made it to Highway One with my revolver and a tree branch crutch.

The soldiers took my flight suit, boots, dog tags, and a ring Uncle Dick had worn in Stalag Luft I during WWII.

I planned to stick up a car and force it to drive me south. Unfortunately, the first truck I encountered was filled with armed North Vietnamese troops.

I elected not to die in a ditch that night.

They blindfolded me and jammed me into the back of the truck. But my blindfold slipped just enough to read the sign for Hòa Lò Prison.

My captors tortured me all throughout my 6.5 year stay at the ‘Hanoi Hilton’:

I was contorted with ropes, handcuffed, and put in the stocks.

But I did not break. I would rather die than sell out my country.

Once, when I was tied up, a snake slithered across my chest.

Luckily, I found a nail to help pick the cuffs.

I passed the nail to Darrell, the POW in the next cell, through a hole in the wall.

We had an escape plan, but never got the chance to try it.
August 1966, Smitty, one of the POWs, taught us a tap code he had learned in survival training. We used it to connect over 70 POWs at the prison.

I wrote poetry about imprisonment, flying, and memories of home to tap through the walls. Memorizing the verses was a welcome distraction.

In 1969, we moved to larger rooms that held up to 9 POWs. The ceilings were too low to stand, but we were all grateful to see one another and commiserate over our treatment and the questionable contents of our prison soup.

By 1971, treatment had improved, but I fell ill and nearly died.

All I ever dreamed of was a nice simple breakfast with my wife.

I dropped from 210 lbs to 120 lbs over the course of my imprisonment.
Letters from home began to arrive in 1971, too, but only bad or bizarre news tended to make it through the censor. I wanted a picture of my daughter,

but all I got was a picture of my dog.

An overlooked stamp announcing the American moon landing kept POW morale high for weeks.

Finally, after 6.5 brutal years as a POW, I was released 12 Feb 1973 to Clark Air Force Base and began my journey home.

We were moved into the mountains during Operation Linebacker II, Dec 1972.

My time as a POW was a defining moment, not the defining moment.

More importantly:

- I graduated from USAFA
- I served as a White House Fellow
- I am married
- I am a pilot
- I have two daughters
- I run marathons
- I commanded the 94th TFS
- I was a fighter pilot
- I tried hard

When I visited Vietnam in 2002, most of the people I met were too young to remember the war and held no animosity toward American visitors.

One morning, I jogged to Hà Nội and it felt like '66 again.

The experience of war never ends.

I still have scars from my torture as a POW. AJ, the pilot who crashed with me in Bắc Giang, committed suicide. Plenty of us did not come back at all.
American intervention in the Vietnam War began with the end of French occupation in 1954. Vietnam was divided into North and South until reunification could be organized. Heightened by Cold War tensions over the spread of communism, American advisors supported the South Vietnamese government. The first American combat troops arrived in Vietnam in 1965, and American military involvement lasted until 1973. Fighting between North and South Vietnamese troops continued until the fall of Saigon in 1975. Vietnam reunified under the communist government in Hanoi.

The 433d Tactical Fighter Squadron was part of the 8th TAC Fighter Wing stationed at Ubon Air Force Base in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Known as Satan's Angels, its pilots, like John, flew F-4s with tail code ‘FG’ for ground support, bombing, and reconnaissance missions. The 433d was deactivated as a fighter squadron in 1974, and is now assigned to the Air Force Weapons School.

The F-4 Phantom was an American fighter-bomber aircraft used during the Vietnam War, known for its speed and advanced radar. F-4s were manned by crews of two, with the less experienced pilot confined to the back seat. During his fateful 97th mission, John was one of these frustrated pilots occupying the back seat. Hundreds of F-4s, like John's, were downed by enemy fire over the course of the war.

The Hỏa Lồ Prison was built during the French occupation of Vietnam and turned into a POW prison complex during the Vietnam War. American soldiers referred to Hỏa Lồ by the euphemism Hanoi Hilton. John faced torture in the Zoo sector and lived with other POWs in the low-ceilinged rooms of the Annex building. Following the 1969 death of North Vietnamese president Hô Chí Minh, treatment improved, but POWs continued to suffer from starvation, torture, and isolation. Much of the prison has been demolished, but its iconic French “Maison Centrale” gate remains as a memorial to those who suffered within its walls.

WOXOF is Air Force terminology for weather unfit for flight. Pronounced “walks off,” WOXOF is an acronym meaning the weather is obscured, with zero visibility due to fog.

A Fragmentary Order is a short mission statement given just before its execution. Frag orders maximize secrecy and are useful in situations subject to rapid change.

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) was established in 1955 in Colorado Springs, CO. John's class of 1963 was the first to spend all four years on the permanent campus.

Operation Linebacker II was an American strategic bombing campaign carried out by B-52 bombers against targets in North Vietnam in late December 1972.
Learn a Secret POW Tap Code!
In the Hanoi Hilton, John and the other prisoners communicated secret messages through the walls with a system of tapping. The numbers around the grid signify the number of taps. To locate a letter in the grid, use the first coordinate to determine the row and the second to determine the column.

Think Before You Tap: There’s no ‘k’ in tap code. Use the letter ‘c’ in its place, or the tap pattern 2,6.

Practice: POWs tapped their names, words of encouragement, and, John’s favorite, poetry. Practice tapping your name and messages of your own.

Decode: Fill in the blanks below to decipher a few lines from “Hanoi Epitaph,” one of the poems John wrote while he was a POW.
1966 POW TAP CODE

JOHN BORLING

But you dream without hope or conviction.
Mostly you dream of . . . just going home.
So you dream of steel chargers, skies to roam.

The sound of your voice, your face, or your name.
And no one knows and no one remembers.
The years have passed, the many Decembers,

From "Honoi Epitaph" by John Borling.
Melina Testin is a Chicago-based 20th Century Military Historian and has been working professionally in the cartooning and graphic novel industry since 2016. In an effort to neither shy from reality nor sensationalize suffering, Melina is creating for future generations the accessible and accurate historical resources she wishes had been available to her as a student of history.

Join Melina’s journey as she continues to share her artistic talents, passion for military history, and commitment to a fearless pursuit of the past.
POW! Prisoners of war come to life in Melina Testin’s collection of military history graphic novels that depict the real life experiences of POW veterans in WWII and the Vietnam War. Each entry includes a true POW story of valor and suffering told in the art and prose of a comic book, an illustrated glossary, and an interactive activity, allowing readers to experience history in a variety of dimensions. Testin has been honored to listen to these veterans’ oral histories, read their letters and memoirs, and communicate with the veterans’ families in her research. Enlightened respect for POW veterans, passion for military history, and courage to color outside the lines of traditional modes of education are the values Testin aims to instill in others as she illustrates to illuminate the past.

Special thanks to the mentorship of Dr. Patricia Mooney-Melvin, sponsorship from the Loyola University Chicago Provost Fellowship, partnership with the Pritzker Military Museum & Library Holt Oral History Program, and service of all US veterans. You are not forgotten.