

TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS ONE PARTICULAR POW FROM THE VIETNAM WAR WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE, WHO NOW SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE TO ALL OUR AIR FORCE AND OTHER SERVICE MEMBERS, WHO HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF AIR FORCE HERITAGE, AND ONE WHOM I WILL NEVER FORGET – CAPT LANCE PETER SIJAN. BUT FIRST, THE BEGINNING OF OUR ASSOCIATION.

OUR CLASS OF 822 ENTERED THE AF ACADEMY ON 26 JUN 1961, A DAY THAT BEGAN 6 OF THE MOST HELLISH WEEKS A 17 YR OLD COULD IMAGINE. NONE OF US HAD ANY IDEA WHAT THE FUTURE WOULD HOLD. OF ALL MY CLASSMATES, SEVERAL WOULD BECOME GENERAL OFFICERS – HOWIE ESTES AND MIKE RYAN, WOULD GO ON TO 4 STARS AS DID THEIR FATHERS. RYAN WOULD BECOME CHIEF OF STAFF FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS, OTHERS WOULD MAKE THEIR MARK IN OTHER WAYS. AS ASTRONAUTS, RESEARCHERS, AVIATORS, COMMANDERS, PRESS SECRETARY FOR PRES. CARTER, BUT ONE, LANCE SIJAN, A NEIGHBORHOOD BAR OWNERS SON FROM MILWAUKEE, WOULD RECEIVE THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR HIS ACTIONS AS A POW.

DURING OUR BASIC SUMMER THE UPPERCLASSMEN WERE TASKED TO BUILD US INTO AN EFFECTIVE TEAM WITH A SENSE OF CLASS UNITY AND PURPOSE. BASIC CADET TRAINING WAS DESIGNED TO PREPARE US FOR THE TASK OF BEING CADETS, WITH THE TOOLS NECESSARY TO

SUCCEED. DAY ONE THEY LINED US UP AND TOLD US TO LOOK AT THE MAN ON OUR LEFT THEN THE MAN ON OUR RIGHT. THEN THEY TOLD US "ONE OF YOU WON'T BE HERE WHEN YOUR CLASS GRADUATES, AND UNFORTUNATELY THAT PROPHECY TURNED OUT TO BE TRUE."

"COOPERATE AND GRADUATE" WAS THE SLOGAN DRILLED INTO US.

OUR TRAINING INCLUDED "SPIRIT RUNS" TO THE ROCK, A LARGE MONOLITH ABOUT 2 ½ MILES NORTH OF THE CADET AREA. THIS WAS USUALLY IN FULL FATIGUES, COMBAT BOOTS AND M-1 CARBINES, SOMETIMES AT HIGH PORT OVER OUR HEADS. IT WAS DURING THESE RUNS THAT THE CHARACTER OF LEADERSHIP EMERGED IN MANY OF OUR CLASSMATES. ONE PARTICULAR RUN, SOME OF THE WEAKER GUYS HAD DROPPED BACK TO THE REAR OF THE FORMATION AND LANCE AND MIKE SMITH, HIS ROOMMATE, DROPPED BACK TO TAKE THEIR RIFLES AND HELP THEM. ONE OF THE UPPERCLASSMEN, WHO WAS DRESSED IN SHORTS, T-SHIRT AND TENNIS SHOES, WAS A PARTICULARLY UNLIKABLE GUY. HE WENT TO THE BACK AND MADE THE MISTAKE OF PUSHING LANCE AND THE CLASSMATE HE WAS HELPING. AND TOLD MIKE AND LANCE TO GIVE THEM BACK THEIR RIFLES AND LET THEM RUN ON THEIR OWN. LANCE GOT INTO HIS FACE AND THREW A SHOULDER BLOCK INTO HIM SENDING HIM SPRAWLING. THE UPPERCLASSMAN THEN SAID, "I'LL HAVE YOUR ASS FOR THAT." SIJAN SAID, "YOU TOUCH ONE OF OUR PEOPLE AGAIN, MAN, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO HAVE ANYBODY'S ASS." THEN SIJAN CALMLY SAID, "IF YOU

WANT TO SEE WHO CAN RUN WHERE WITH BOOTS AND RIFLES, YOU GET YOUR BOOTS ON AND GET YOUR RIFLE THEN WE'LL COME BACK OUT HERE AND I'LL RUN WITH YOU AS LONG AS YOU WANT." THE REST OF US THOUGHT – THAT'S THE END OF SIJAN.

PROBABLY THE ONE THING THAT SAVED SIJAN, IS THE UPPERCLASSMAN DIDN'T GET PERMISSOIN TO TOUCH THEM BEFORE HE ACTED, WHICH WAS A SERIOUS VIOLATION OF THE RULES. AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION BY OUR UPPERCLASSMEN THAT AFTERNOON THEY MOVED THE SENIOR TO ANOTHER FLIGHT AND NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AGAINST SIJAN. I BELIEVE THE UPPERCLASSMEN RECOGNIZED THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF LANCE AT THAT VERY MOMENT. THE REST OF US JUST KNEW HE WAS A GOOD GUY TO HAVE ON YOUR SIDE IN A FIGHT.

THE SUMMER WAS HARD, AND THE ENSUING ACADEMIC YEAR DID NOT RELIEVE THE PRESSURE. WE LEARNED TO BOND TOGETHER AND HELP EACH OTHER OUT. THE RELEVANCE OF THIS TRAINING WASN'T UNDERSTOOD BY MOST OF US UNTIL MUCH LATER IN OUR CAREERS, WHEN WE WERE FACED WITH REAL COMBAT SITUATIONS.

WHAT DISTINGUISHED LANCE FROM THE REST OF US? NOT A LOT, AT LEAST NOT THAT WE COULD HAVE SEEN EARLY ON. WITH A YEAR OF

MILITARY TRAINING BEHIND HIM AT PREP SCHOOL, HE WAS ALREADY AHEAD OF THE GAME IN MILITARY BEARING, SHOESHINES, DISCIPLINE, AND CONDITIONING. HE WAS ALSO MORE MATURE AND HAD A SUPER ATTITUDE. HE USED TO SAY – “COME ON GUYS, THEY CAN’T KILL US. IT’S JUST A LITTLE PAIN. WE’LL GET THROUGH THIS.” HE WAS A BIG GUY – RESERVE TIGHT END ON THE FOOTBALL TEAM UNTIL HE DROPPED FOOTBALL TO FOCUS ON HIS ACADEMICS. HE WAS GOOD LOOKING, HAD A GREAT, FRIENDLY PERSONALITY, AND HE HAD A QUIET DEMEANOR UNTIL HE GOT FIRED UP. FOCUS, PERSEVERANCE, COMMITMENT, QUIET STRENGTH ARE THE WAYS CLASSMATES HAVE DESCRIBED HIM. HE ALSO HAD A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR, A WINNING SMILE, AND A SURPRISINGLY TENDER SIDE. HE WAS A GOOD AMATEUR ACTOR AND LOVED TO SING. JOE KOLEK, A FORMER ROOMMATE RECALLS IT WAS GREAT TO FOLLOW LANCE AROUND AND PICK UP HIS CASTOFFS. HE ATTRACTED WOMEN LIKE FLOWERS ATTRACT BEES.

FRESHMEN WERE REQUIRED TO STAY AT THE ACADEMY OVER THEIR CHRISTMAS BREAK, BUT COULD HAVE VISITORS. MY FAMILY IN ALASKA COULD NOT GET AWAY TO VISIT, BUT SEVERAL OF US WERE INVITED TO DINNER WITH OUR CLASSMATES’ FAMILIES. LANCE’S FAMILY WAS CLOSE-KNIT AND HE WAS PARTICULARLY EXCITED THAT THEY WERE COMING OUT TO THE ACADEMY FOR OUR FRESHMAN CHRISTMAS. I GOT INVITED BY LANCE AND ENJOYED A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION WITH HIS MOM AND DAD, YOUNGER BROTHER AND

LITTLE SISTER. THEY WERE A TYPICAL ALL-AMERICAN FAMILY AND YOU COULD SEE HOW PROUD THEY WERE OF LANCE.

OUR MILITARY TRAINING COVERED THE HISTORY OF THE AIR FORCE, ITS HEROES, ITS FOUNDERS, AND OF COURSE, EXTENSIVE INDOCTRINATION IN THE CADET HONOR CODE AND THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PRISONERS OF WAR. THE EXPERIENCES OF OUR POWS DURING KOREA LED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT. WE ALL THOUGHT WE UNDERSTOOD IT WELL. ONE OF OUR REQUIREMENTS WAS TO MEMORIZE THE CONTRAILS BOOKLET, WHICH CONTAINED INFORMATION ON AIR FORCE HISTORY, FAMOUS QUOTES, AIRCRAFT, THE CADET SYSTEM AND CODE OF CONDUCT. ONE PARTICULARLY IMPRESSIVE QUOTE WAS FROM CAPT. THEODORE HARRIS, IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR 14 MONTHS AS A POW IN KOREA. "IF I CAN'T GO BACK WITH MY SELF-RESPECT, I WON'T GO BACK AT ALL." LITTLE DID WE KNOW THAT THE ACTIONS OF A CLASSMATE IN VIETNAM WOULD END UP IN THE FUTURE CONTRAILS ISSUED TO EVERY CADET TODAY.

COL MIKE SMITH, LANCE'S FORMER ROOMMATE, RECALLS THEY TALKED SOMETIMES ABOUT THE CODE OF CONDUCT THAT WAS TO TEST SIJAN'S CHARACTER SO SEVERELY FEWER THAN THREE YEARS LATER.

"WE FOUND NOTHING WRONG WITH THE CODE. WE ACCEPTED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ACTION HONORABLE TO OUR COUNTRY. IT WAS

STRICTLY AN EXTENSION OF LANCE'S PERSONALITY. WHEN HE ACCEPTED SOMETHING, HE ACCEPTED IT. HE DID NOTHING HALFWAY."

IT WAS 1961 AND VIETNAM WAS NOT YET A HOUSEHOLD WORD. BY THE TIME THE REMAINING 517 OF US GRADUATED, VIETNAM WAS A MAJOR THOUGHT ON OUR MINDS. LIKE MOST YOUNG MEN AT THE ACADEMY, MOST ALL OF US WANTED TO BE FIGHTER PILOTS. MY DEFICIENT DEPTH PERCEPTION DICTATED I WOULD BE A NAVIGATOR AND FOLLOWING TRAINING I WAS ASSIGNED TO MCCOY AFB, ORLANDO, FL TO FLY B-52DS. OTHER CLASSMATES INCLUDING LANCE, WENT ON TO FIGHTERS.

DURING SURVIVAL SCHOOL AT FAIRCHILD AFB IN 1966, A NUMBER OF MY CLASSMATES WERE GETTING READY TO DEPLOY TO VIETNAM. ONE ASPECT OF THE PROGRAM WAS AN EVASION TREK WHICH TOOK SEVERAL DAYS WITH MINIMAL RATIONS THROUGH THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS NEAR SPOKANE. FOLLOWING THE TREK, WE WENT THROUGH AN OBSTACLE COURSE WITH GUNS FIRING AND EMERGED TO BE "CAPTURED". WE THEN WENT THROUGH A FEW DAYS OF INTERROGATION, LIGHT AND SOUND DEPRIVATION, ISOLATION, AND MORE INTERROGATION. DURING OUR FIRST HOURS FOLLOWING CAPTURE, WE WERE LINED UP IN A COLD CONCRETE BUNKER WITH BURLAP BAGS OVER OUR HEADS. THERE WERE SMALL HOLES AND YOU COULD SEE A LITTLE BIT. WE WERE COMMANDED, "ALL F4 CREWMEMBERS TAKE ONE STEP FORWARD." THE GUY TO MY RIGHT DID SO – WRONG MOVE!! THEY LANDED ON HIM LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.

LATER, I FOUND IT WAS HOWARD HILL, WHO WOULD EVENTUALLY END UP IN THE HANOI HILTON. I ASKED HIM AT A CLASS REUNION IF HE EVER MADE THAT MISTAKE WHILE A REAL POW!. HE TOLD ME HE HAD LEARNED A VALUABLE LESSON FROM THE TRAINING.

WE ALL FINISHED UP SURVIVAL, EVASION, RESISTANCE AND ESCAPE TRAINING AND WENT TO OUR ASSIGNMENTS. SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING AT MCCOY AFB I DEPLOYED FOR THE FIRST OF 5 ARC LIGHT TOURS. **OUR B52S BOMBED FROM 30,000+ WHILE THE FIGHTER GUYS WENT IN LOW AND FAST.**

LANCE WAS ONE OF SEVERAL CLASSMATES FLYING THE F4. PART OF HIS STORY IS FROM THE DEC 1986 EDITION OF AIRFORCE MAGAZINE, BY JOHN L. FRISBEE.

ON THE NIGHT OF NOV. 9, 1967, LT. COL. JOHN ARMSTRONG, THE SQUADRON COMMANDER & 25-YEAR-OLD LT. LANCE SIJAN IN THE BACKSEAT FLYING HIS 53RD COMBAT MISSION ROLLED IN ON THE TARGET, THE BAN LOBOY FORD ON THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN LAOS, THROUGH WHICH LARGE QUANTITIES OF NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY MEN AND MATERIAL ROLLED AT NIGHT TO RESUPPLY THEIR TROOPS IN THE SOUTH.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, THE AIRCRAFT WAS ENGULFED IN A BALL OF FIRE AS THE BOMBS DETONATED A FEW FEET BELOW THE F-4. NEITHER THE FAC CONTROLLING THE MISSION NOR ARMSTRONG'S WINGMAN

SAW CHUTES. BUT THERE WAS ONE CHUTE. SIJAN EJECTED AND WAS DRIFTING TOWARD A FLAT-TOPPED, HEAVILY FORESTED KARST FORMATION. THE KARST WAS LIKE THE SOUTH DAKOTA BADLANDS WITH HEAVY FOREST ON IT.

SOMETIME THE NEXT DAY, SIJAN REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS IN A HAZE OF PAIN. HE HAD SUFFERED A COMPOUND FRACTURE OF THE LEFT LEG, A CRUSHED RIGHT HAND, HEAD INJURIES, AND DEEP LACERATIONS. MOST OF HIS SURVIVAL GEAR WAS GONE. HE TENDED THE BROKEN LEG AS BEST HE COULD, THEN LAPSED AGAIN INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, A FLIGHT OF F-4S PICKED UP THE SOUND OF SIJAN'S BEEPER, AND A SEARCH-AND-RESCUE OPERATION GOT UNDER WAY. THROUGHOUT THE DAY, SIJAN MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH THE RESCUE FORCE, BUT SEVERAL ATTEMPTED PICKUPS WERE THWARTED BY NVA GUNNERS. AT 5 P.M., A JOLLY GREEN CHOPPER MADE IT IN DIRECTLY OVER SIJAN. IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO CRAWL THROUGH TANGLED VINES TO THE CHOPPER'S PENETRATOR, SIJAN LOST CONTACT WITH THE RESCUE FORCE. AS DARKNESS FELL, THE SAR OPERATION WAS CALLED OFF.

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, THE SEARCH RESUMED, BUT SIJAN'S RADIO BATTERIES WERE DEPLETED. FAILING TO MAKE CONTACT, THE SAR TEAM WAS RECALLED. SIJAN WAS ON HIS OWN. IF HE WERE TO

SURVIVE, HE MUST MAKE HIS WAY DOWN THE STEEP KARST TO WATER AND AN OPEN AREA WHERE HE COULD WARM THE RADIO BATTERIES AND CALL IN A CHOPPER. WITH A CRUDE SPLINT ON HIS SHATTERED LEG AND ONLY THE THUMB AND FOREFINGER OF HIS RIGHT HAND FUNCTIONING, SIJAN BEGAN THE MOST INCREDIBLE JOURNEY IN THE HISTORY OF AIR FORCE SURVIVAL EFFORTS.

ARTICLE II OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT STATES IN PART:

I WILL NEVER SURRENDER OF MY OWN FREE WILL.

FOR SEVERAL DAYS, SIJAN, LYING ON HIS BACK, PUSHED HIMSELF OVER THE SHARP ROCKS WITH HIS GOOD RIGHT LEG, A FEW PAINFUL INCHES AT A TIME. HIS ONLY SOURCE OF MOISTURE WAS DEW LICKED FROM FOLIAGE IN THE MORNINGS. THERE WERE MANY FALLS DOWN THE STEEP SLOPE AND PERIODS OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND DELIRIUM. FIRST HIS CLOTHING BECAME SHREDDED, THEN THE SKIN ON THE BACK OF HIS BODY, UNTIL HE WAS INCHING ALONG ON RAW FLESH. AT LAST HE FOUND WATER AND PRESSED ON, INCH BY AGONIZING INCH.

FORTY-FIVE DAYS AFTER HE PARACHUTED INTO THE FOREST, SIJAN SAW AHEAD THE OPEN AREA HE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR. HE DRAGGED HIMSELF OVER A BANK AND FELL UNCONSCIOUS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE

HO CHI MINH TRAIL, THREE MILES FROM HIS STARTING POINT. THAT WORKS OUT TO ABOUT THE LENGTH OF A FOOTBALL FIELD EACH DAY.

ARTICLE III IN PART READS:

IF I AM CAPTURED I WILL CONTINUE TO RESIST BY ALL MEANS AVAILABLE. I WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ESCAPE AND AID OTHERS TO ESCAPE.

LANCE REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS IN AN NVA ROAD CAMP, HIS FORMERLY ATHLETIC BODY LITTLE MORE THAN A SKELETON PARTIALLY COVERED BY TRANSPARENT SKIN. HE WAS GIVEN SOME FOOD AND WATER, BUT NO MEDICAL ATTENTION. IN SPITE OF HIS PITIFUL CONDITION, HIS MIND FOCUSED CONSTANTLY ON ESCAPE. WHEN SOME STRENGTH RETURNED, LANCE SIJAN OVERPOWERED A GUARD AND DRAGGED HIMSELF UP A TRAIL, ONLY TO BE RECAPTURED AND PUNISHED.

SIJAN WAS MOVED TO A TEMPORARY PRISON NEAR VINH, WHERE HE WAS BEATEN SEVERELY, BUT REFUSED TO GIVE ANY MILITARY INFORMATION. THE GUARDS, WHO HAD NEVER SEEN A HUMAN IN SUCH GHASTLY CONDITION, REFUSED TO TOUCH HIM. SIJAN WAS PUT IN THE CARE OF MAJ. BOB CRANER AND CAPT. GUY GRUTERS, AN F-100 FAC CREW WHO HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN NEAR VINH. GRUTERS. CLASS OF 64, HAD BEEN IN SIJAN'S SQUADRON AT THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY. IN

HIS LUCID MOMENTS, SIJAN GAVE THEM THE DETAILS OF HIS LONG, PAINFUL JOURNEY.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, THE THREE WERE LOADED ON AN OPEN TRUCK FOR A THREE-NIGHT TRIP TO HANOI IN THE CHILL MONSOON RAINS. AT HOA LO PRISON, THEY WERE PUT IN A DAMP CELL. SIJAN, WHO HAD CONTRACTED PNEUMONIA AND WAS NEAR DEATH, ASKED HIS CELLMATES TO PROP HIM UP ON HIS PALLET SO THAT HE COULD EXERCISE HIS ARMS IN PREPARATION FOR ESCAPE.

ARTICLE IV OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT STATES:

IF I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I WILL KEEP FAITH WITH MY FELLOW PRISONERS. I WILL GIVE NO INFORMATION OR TAKE PART IN ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT BE HARMFUL TO MY COMRADES. ARTICLE V CONTINUES. WHEN QUESTIONED, SHOULD I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I AM REQUIRED TO GIVE NAME, RANK, SERIAL NUMBER, DATE OF BIRTH. I WILL EVADE ANSWERING FURTHER QUESTIONS TO THE ULTIMATE OF MY ABILITY. I WILL MAKE NO ORAL OR WRITTEN STATEMENTS DISLOYAL TO MY COUNTRY AND ITS ALLIES OR HARMFUL TO THEIR CAUSE. – ALL THAT WAS ALLOWED AND ALL THAT WAS REVEALED DURING HIS ORDEAL. DURING QUESTIONING OTHER POWS RECALL HEARING HIM YELL “MY NAME IS LANCE PETER SIJAN” ALL OTHER ATTEMPTS TO GET HIM TO SAY MORE FAILED.

SEN JOHN MCCAIN, A POW IN THE HANOI HILTON FROM 1967-1973 , WRITES IN HIS POWERFUL BOOK, **FAITH OF OUR FATHERS**, “I NEVER

KNEW LANCE SIJAN, BUT I WISH I HAD. I WISH I HAD HAD ONE MOMENT TO TELL HIM HOW MUCH I ADMIRER HIM, HOW INDEBTED I WAS TO HIM FOR SHOWING ME, FOR SHOWING ALL OF US, OUR DUTY – FOR SHOWING US HOW TO BE FREE. FEW OF US EVER SERIOUSLY CONTEMPLATED ESCAPE, AND OUR SENIOR OFFICERS NEVER ENCOURAGED IT. A FEW BRAVE MEN TRIED. ALL WERE CAUGHT AND TORTURED. NEITHER DID EVERY PRISONER REFRAIN FROM PROVIDING INFORMATION BEYOND THE BARE ESSENTIALS SANCTIONED BY THE CODE OF CONDUCT. MANY OF US WERE TERRORIZED INTO FAILURE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER. BUT SIJAN WASN'T. HE OBEYED THE CODE TO THE LETTER.”

ON JAN. 22, 1968, LANCE SIJAN DIED. WHEN THE POWS WERE FREED IN EARLY 1973, CRANER AND GRUTERS RECORDED THE DETAILS OF HIS LONG FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND HIS RESISTANCE TO TORTURE. LATER, THEY WERE MAJOR SOURCES FOR MALCOLM MCCONNELL'S BOOK, *INTO THE MOUTH OF THE CAT*. MCCONNELL WAS A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSMATE OF SIJANS.

ON MARCH 4, 1976, PRESIDENT GERALD FORD PRESENTED THE MEDAL OF HONOR POSTHUMOUSLY TO SIJAN'S PARENTS. THREE OTHER FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR, ALL LIVING, ALSO RECEIVED MEDALS OF HONOR FROM PRESIDENT FORD. ONE OF THEM WAS AIR FORCE COL.

GEORGE E. **"BUD" DAY** ["ALL DAY'S TOMORROWS," *AIRMAN*, NOVEMBER 1976]. COL. DAY LATER WROTE TO *AIRMAN*:

"LANCE WAS THE EPITOME OF DEDICATION, RIGHT TO DEATH! WHEN PEOPLE ASK ABOUT WHAT KIND OF KIDS WE SHOULD START WITH, THE ANSWER IS: STRAIGHT, HONEST KIDS LIKE HIM. THEY WILL NOT ALL STAY THAT WAY--BUT BY GOD, THAT'S THE MINIMUM TO START WITH."

GRUTERS, CLASS OF 64, SAID. "HE DIED DEFENDING THIS COUNTRY. HE DIED SO WE COULD BE HERE TODAY IN A FREE COUNTRY."

COL BOB CRANER, A FELLOW POW WHO WAS LATER A ROOMMATE OF SEN. JOHN MCCAIN IN THE HANOI HILTON, RECOMMENDED SIJAN FOR THE MEDAL OF HONOR. WHY?

"HE SURVIVED A TERRIBLE ORDEAL, AND HE SURVIVED WITH THE INTENT, SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE, OF PICKING UP THE FIGHT. FINALLY HE JUST SUCCUMBED. THERE IS NO WAY YOU CAN INSTILL THAT KIND OF PERFORMANCE IN AN INDIVIDUAL. I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY WE'RE TURNING OUT LIKE LANCE SIJAN, BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE THERE ARE VERY MANY."

SIJAN'S WILL TO SURVIVE WITH HONOR WAS AN INSPIRATION TO OTHER POWS DURING THE DARK DAYS OF THE VIETNAM WAR, AS IT SHOULD BE TO ALL OF US. HE DEMONSTRATED, AS FEW HAVE THE ALMOST LIMITLESS CAPACITY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT TO TRIUMPH OVER THE DEPREDACTIONS OF FATE AND THE MALEVOLENCE OF EVIL MEN.

SEN. JOHN MCCAIN WENT ON TO SAY **"IT IS A SURPASSING IRONY, THAT WAR, FOR ALL ITS HORROR, PROVIDES THE COMBATANT WITH EVERY**

CONCEIVABLE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. THE VETERAN KNOWS WHAT GREAT LOSS AND GREAT JOY FEEL LIKE WHEN THEY OCCUR IN THE SAME MOMENT, THE SAME EXPERIENCE. SUCH AN EXPERIENCE IS TRANSFORMING, AND WE CAN BE MUCH THE BETTER FOR IT. WE HAD MET A POWER THAT WANTED TO OBLITERATE OUR IDENTITIES, AND THE CAUSE TO WHICH WE RALLIED WAS OUR RESPONSE: WE ARE FREE MEN, BOUND INSEPARABLY TIGHTER, AND BY THE GRACE OF GOD, AND NOT YOUR SUFFERANCE, WE WILL HAVE OUR FREEDOM RESTORED TO US.... NOTHING IN LIFE IS MORE LIBERATING THAN TO FIGHT FOR A CAUSE LARGER THAN YOURSELF, SOMETHING WHICH ENCOMPASSES YOU BUT IS NOT DEFINED BY YOUR EXISTENCE ALONE.”

WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE TO OUR AIR FORCE AND OTHER SERVICES OF TODAY? NOTICE I SAID OUR NOT YOUR AIR FORCE. THOSE OF US WHO SERVED HAVE GREAT PRIDE OF OWNERSHIP IN OUR PREVIOUS SERVICE. IT WAS THE FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE IN MOST OF OUR LIVES, AND THOSE BEFORE AND AFTER ME HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR YOU TO RUN THE AIR FORCE OF TODAY. OUR HEROES LIKE SIJAN, DAY, MCCAIN, GRUTERS, CRANER AND COUNTLESS OTHERS, ARE THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLES OF COURAGE. NONE OF THESE MEN SET OUT TO BE HEROES. THEY WERE JUST DOING THEIR JOB, DEFENDING THEIR COUNTRY, PROTECTING OUR FREEDOM. THEY ACCEPTED THE POSSIBILITY THEY COULD END UP DEAD OR AS POWS. THEY DID SO WILLINGLY AS DO YOU WHO WEAR THE UNIFORM TODAY.

THE AIR FORCE IS A MUCH DIFFERENT ORGANIZATION THAN WHEN I RETIRED 24 YEARS AGO. **LEANER, MORE FLEXIBLE, MORE INTEGRATED.** IT IS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING TO MEET NEW CHALLENGES. YOUR NEW LEADERS ARE BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF YESTERDAY, EMBRACING THE LESSONS OF THE PAST, SHOWING FORESIGHT FOR THE AIR FORCE OF TOMORROW. THEY STILL HOLD TRUE THE VIRTUES SO APTLY DISPLAYED BY THE COURAGE OF OUR POWS: INTEGRITY, SERVICE, UNITY, HONOR.

IN THE WORDS OF MIKE RYAN, CLASS OF 1965, AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF - RETIRED

"OUR CORE VALUES, INTEGRITY FIRST, SERVICE BEFORE SELF AND EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO, SET THE COMMON STANDARD FOR CONDUCT ACROSS THE AIR FORCE. THESE VALUES INSPIRE THE TRUST WHICH PROVIDES THE UNBREAKABLE BOND THAT UNIFIES THE FORCE. WE MUST PRACTICE THEM OURSELVES AND EXPECT NO LESS FROM THOSE WITH WHOM WE SERVE."

THE CLASS OF 1965 HAS ESTABLISHED A HISTORY OF POWS WHICH IS CONTAINED IN THE ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES DOOLITTLE HALL BUILDING AT THE ACADEMY. IT IS OPEN TO ALL AND ENCOMPASSES NUMEROUS VOLUMES FROM INTERVIEWS HELD WITH RETURNEES. IT IS A REMARKABLE RESOURCE AND IS USED TO TEACH OUR CADETS OF TODAY, THE LESSONS OF YESTERDAY.