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IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY

for war veterans to talk about their experiences, especially those who served in Vietnam, but on November 4th 2017, we were fortunate to have four veterans share their air combat stories for the panel, *The Vietnam War: Perspectives from Air Combat Veterans*.

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

VETERANS SPEAK

MEMORIES OF AIR COMBAT IN THE VIETNAM WAR



“I was at 4,200 feet when the missile struck.”

- Capt. Mike Brown



“If it hadn't been for those tactical air crews... my bones would be in North Vietnam.”

- Maj. Joe Crecca

THE PANEL WAS PART OF “War Machine: Propaganda in a World at War,” a weekend series that included aircraft tours, living history performances, panel discussions, and talks with artists and authors. The programs focused on how government used propaganda during World Wars I and II and the Vietnam War to justify actions, influence the news and build support.

Four veteran panelists and a moderator, representing a variety of military branches and aircraft, spoke at length about their involvement in the Vietnam War from 1963 to 1975. Jim Conner, who was a Bell UH-1 Iroquois “Huey” helicopter pilot and is currently the president of the Pacific Northwest chapter of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, moderated the discussion.

The first to speak was Capt. Mike Brown, who served two tours and was the only panelist representing the U.S. Army. During the Spring Offensive of 1972, Mike’s Bell AH-1 Cobra helicopter was hit by a North Vietnamese SA-7 missile. “I was at 4,200 feet when the missile struck. I was able to land the front half of the helicopter and walk away from it. Actually, I ran away from it!” Mike said, “A lot of things came together to allow my co-pilot, Marco Cordone, and me to survive. And that is a feat that has not been duplicated since.”

The veterans’ stories grew more powerful as the program went on. Lt. Dave Cable piloted Grumman A-6 Intruders for the U.S. Navy and shared what it was like to take off from and land on an aircraft carrier in the middle of the ocean at night. The aircraft was designed for “all-weather” missions, so Dave often took off from the 300-foot runway of the USS Enterprise with very low visibility. “Launching from the Enterprise at night was like flying into a big, black hole,” Dave said, “There was absolutely no horizon.” Dave described the surface-to-air missiles (SAM) he encountered and how he was able to evade them while flying, although not everyone on his mission was so lucky.

Next, Museum Trustee Capt. Jim Farmer detailed his experiences piloting a massive B-52 on more than 100 combat missions. “We got shot down on the third night of Operation Linebacker II,” Jim recalled. “If you’re ever wandering around in the woods, 100 miles from an enemy city, and you’re praying for a guardian angel—that’s what she looks like!” The Sikorsky HH-3E Jolly Green Giant helicopter that rescued the group was a welcome sight for the downed crew.

Maj. Joe Crecca was the last to speak. He flew “86 and a half missions” while enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. On November 22, 1966, Joe was flying a McDonnell F-4C Phantom towards Hanoi when he was shot down by a SAM. Joe was able to eject safely but was taken into custody and interrogated, tortured and imprisoned by the North Vietnamese for 2,280 days—over 6 years—before he was released on February 18, 1973. Joe detailed his time in captivity at the Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi, the layout of the prison campus, and the improvised normalcy that the American troops maintained while incarcerated. “If it hadn’t been for the tactical air crews like Dave Cable, and especially the B-52 crews like Jim Farmer, I would not be here. My bones would be in North Vietnam,” Joe said.

Jim rejoined Joe on stage to announce the Museum’s newest endeavor, *Project Welcome Home*—a veteran-initiated campaign to restore our B-52G Stratofortress #2584 and install it in a new Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Park. Mike Brown says, “Just as our effort in Vietnam was, this should be a team effort.” The aircraft was repainted last summer at Paine Field in Everett, and it will be disassembled and transported to Boeing Field this spring. The park, due to open later this year, is a venue for veterans to share their stories and will be free to all who wish to learn, honor and heal.

To learn more about *Project Welcome Home* or support the project, visit: museumofflight.org/WelcomeHome

ABOVE: After being rescued from North Vietnam, Crecca is repatriated. (COURTESY JOE CRECCA) • Crecca, far left, awaits his repatriation. (USAF)

OPPOSITE: High angle right side view of a B-52G in flight, banking to the right. (USAF) • Pararescuemen do a “fast rope” from a hovering HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter. (USAF)