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Hi Gang:

The Hatch is back in town and boy is it great. It's time to "let the good times roll again".

I have really been busy and enjoying every minute of it. Willie and girls met me at Maxwell AFB, Alabama where I did my debriefing and medical checks. They really looked good and it didn't take Willie and I long to get things straight between us. Except for intestinal worms and underweight, I'm in good health. A couple of broken bones have healed nicely. I was very fortunate in that I had no serious illnesses while in North Vietnam. Still have excellent eyesight. I recommend staring into the dark --- it seems to do the trick. Have made a number of speeches, family reunions, trips, odd jobs around home, (mowing yard etc.) getting to know Willie and daughters again, answering letters, personal finances (taxes etc.) reading, answering telephone, eating, eating and occasionally getting a little sleep. Wow ! fun huh?

Willie and the girls are great. I'm so proud of them, you can't believe it. Willie has been a real trooper in every respect. She has things so well organized that I am really not needed around here. Elizabeth and Alison are well adjusted and both are doing great. They have all been stepping lively since I came home.

I plan to stay in and around Mount Airy until June, then return to work at Seymour Johnson in Goldsboro, North Carolina. I plan to retire next March and hopefully go into business around the Mount Airy area. This is a wonderful place to live and you can't find any nicer people anywhere. So come on to Mount Airy when you retire.

Neighbors, family, friends and everyone have all been so nice since I returned. It is heart warming to experience and somehow makes any sacrifice worthwhile. I have been flooded with gift offers, but Willie wisely channeled most everything into a Scholarship fund which was named after me. There is already enough money to send one student to school on the interest. All the publicity has made me feel rather awkward, but maybe some good will result from all the action.

Here are a few comments about my PCS in Hanoi. When I was shot down I came very close to being rescued, in fact, it would have been a piece of cake, but my radio batteries went dead and the spare radio batteries were dead also. I was captured the next morning, stripped of clothes and gear, and walked and rode to Hanoi via footpaths and truck. It didn't take

them very long to get my attention in Hanoi. Result: two broken ribs, busted knee, torn shoulder and chest muscles and paralyzed arms for about one month. My knee healed in time to make the Hanoi march on 6-July-66. That was quite an evening. During the following three days, I was allowed to confess to being a criminal. Yes, you bet I talked, lied, fabricated stories and I confessed to bombing churches, hospitals, kindergardens, old people and my own mother. They wanted us to bow to everyone and it was either do it or take a beating. That lasted till 1970. The pressure was always on to denounce the United States, and South Vietnamese Governments, any pro-war activities, fellow POW's, God, and peanut butter. They tried to make us violate every article of the code of conduct. If living solo or with another man we were kept from sight of any other American, and when caught trying to talk to anyone, it was good for a torture session. The cells had little or no ventilation and they were like ovens in the Summer and freezers in the Winter. One long harassment. Imagine pre-flight for six years with the upper class having the privilege to beat the hell out of you.

Food was poor at first, but improved in 1970. Plenty of rice, and weed, pumpkin or cabbage soup. Some fruit and meat (fish) in 1970-73. Medical care was poor and was often used as blackmail for those that really needed it.

The North Vietnamese in no way met the minimum standards of treatment as prescribed by the Geneva Agreements of 1949 concerning POW's. They refused to release MIA information and would not permit the International Red Cross to visit the prison camps. Many men could not write home or receive mail until 1970. I received about 12 letters from Willie.

However in 1970 treatment took a turn for the better. Food improved, all men could write home and started to receive mail. Bowling stopped and they finally got off our backs for propaganda. We could finally just be left alone to exist. We moved into larger cells with more guys. About 50 men in a living space of approximately 1400 sq. ft. (it was great). I think this improved treatment was a direct result of the intensive letter writing program in the United States at that time.

My ability and desire to resist grew from the first. It was a long ball game and I came up to bat a number of times, but now the "Old Hatch" is on the mound and you better believe that I have a hopping fast ball!

We stayed busy during the early years trying to keep communication links open. We had to tap on the wall between cells, flash paper through cracks and do a hand code (like deaf & dumb mute code) between buildings when it was possible to see another POW. There had to be an extensive clearing system to

clear the guards. We also had a vocal code which consisted of a series of coughs, throat clears, spits and hacks. Neat huh? All of our efforts were quite successful and we could pass news or orders in a hurry. It was good organizational work. In the latter years we added educational programs. Everyone taught everything he knew and you learned everything that was taught. The absence of books, news, and factual information has created an intense desire for me to read and learn in almost every field.

There was a great need for spiritual strength and I received it in huge quantities. I have become a dedicated Christian and I hope that my Christian belief, knowledge and practice will continue to grow. I wholeheartedly recommend it because it is an exciting and rewarding life.

I have no regrets about my captivity. On the contrary I think it gave me an opportunity to step off, and take a close look at life, values, and principals. I think I am better prepared to channel my energies into a more fulfilling life of being a better husband, father, Christian and American citizen. I just want to live for today --- a full rich life, filling every minute with 60 seconds worth of action and accomplishment.

I have no hatred or animosity towards my captors, but I hold communism and socialism in utter disdain. In fact, I pity the people of North Vietnam or anyone who has to live under that type of Government. They are so completely brainwashed and live in a world of pure fantasy. It is unreal. Everything they hear and read in music, literature, religion and art is all oriented toward word liberation, struggle and revolution. It is a disease. It is incredible.

I am very proud of President Nixon's courage and persistence in seeing this was honorably completed. It was a great feeling to come home the way we did and I would have gladly stayed longer had it been necessary to achieve the same results. I am convinced that the only thing a communist understands is force. The heavy bombing and blockade is what brought this war to an end. To tell you the truth --- I'm proud to be an American and to have been a part of the action in South East Asia.

While I was away my father and a number of close relatives passed away. We have lots of mutual friends that will not be coming home. Well time waits for no one and I am glad to have known them while I could.

I have really been having a ball reading your old letters, Christmas Cards, and hearing Willie talk about visits and vacations. It has been an experience talking to you on the telephone and your recent letters. I have

thought of you so many times, and I have relived some of the good times that we have shared together. Thanks for thinking of me and my family and thanks for your faith in me.

I am looking forward to seeing you all again. Please tell any old acquaintances hello and let us continue to hear from you.

GOD BLESS YOU

I thought you might like a copy of this letter. Am still trying to find a date to come back to Stuart. Will let you know if I can make it. Sorry you missed having lunch with us last week. Dave & Willie