

Interview with Floyd Wilmoth by Wesley Michael, 2 Sep, 2001

Michael: Sir, could you tell me a little bit about your background: where you're from, how you entered the military, etc.

Wilmoth: I joined the military on December 7, 1953, in Charlotte, NC. I then traveled to Fort Jackson, SC, for two weeks induction and orientation. From there I was shipped to Fort Gordon, GA for eight weeks of Infantry Basic Training, and to Fort Knox, KY for high speed radio school. From there I went to Korea in 1954 for a 16-month tour. I reenlisted in Korea for Europe unassigned, came home, spent 43 days leave with my family, then reported to Fort Dix, NJ, for reassignment to Germany.

Through the European assignment team, I was assigned to the United States Army Europe Honor Guard, and was stationed in Heidelberg, Germany. During my three years with the Honor Guard, we presided over various ceremonies for visiting dignitaries including the selection of the Unknown Soldier of WWII over the Atlantic. Upon leaving there, I came home, got out, and stayed out for 74 days. I couldn't find a decent job so I returned to the military and stayed for 22 years. I retired in 1975.

Upon reentering the Service, I was assigned to Fort Lee, MD, with the 526 Military Police Company for approximately three months. For the next three years, I was selected to chauffeur for three different post commanders. I was then reassigned to Korea for my second tour in 1962. Due to the outstanding job I did for the post commander, he got me reassigned back to the Military Police at Fort Lee, MD, in 1963. My assignment was to train and escort officers and enlisted personnel to replenish the missile sites up and down the East Coast in the first United States Army area. After being in the Military Police in-grade seven years as an E6, the Vietnam conflict came on so I decided to seek other programs in the military to enhance my promotion.

When positions for deck and engineer officers of landing craft came open, I went to the school program at Fort Lee, MD (sic - should be VA), and I asked how I could get seaman training. They told me that I would have to put in a request with the Transportation School at Fort Eustis, VA. I applied and was accepted, and went through the basic seaman course and a 19-week deck officer's course, which consisted of nine and a half straight months of training. Upon my completion of hot dot program, a warrant officer, who was assigned to the Pentagon in the warrant officer promotion team, came down for my graduation. Upon completion of awarding of our certificates, he cornered me in the hallway of the school and asked me when I going to

Vietnam because I had no sea duty to put in my application for warrant.

After arriving in Vietnam, the replacement center took ten days to locate my brother's unit. When they located him, he was transferred back to the States and I was assigned to the 5th Heavy Boat Company in Vung Tau. Upon arriving in Vung Tau, I was assigned to the Landing Craft Utility [LCU] 1577 *Sunset Strip* which was on a supply run to Saigon. I was in my company area for approximately five days before the vessel came in.

Michael: You said the *Sunset Strip*, was that the name of the vessel?

Wilmoth: 1577 *Sunset Strip* was the nickname of the vessel. I don't remember the company commander's name because I never saw him. I never saw the first sergeant for the five days that I was in the company area. I was never issued a weapon from the company. I was never issued a sheet to put on my bunk. I thought the unit commander and first sergeant had a very poor-run company. Once my vessel came in, I boarded it, and we had run two missions, one to Saigon, and I can't remember the place of the other one.

On Sunday, the 15th of July 1968, we loaded 250-55-gallon barrels of jet fuel on the well deck, and then early Monday morning proceeded to **Tun Fae**. We traveled until approximately 4

o'clock in the afternoon on the 16th of July and stopped at an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] camp to spend the night.

We got underway early on the morning of the 17th of July. At approximately 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we observed a flag in a compound on the Mekong River that no one could identify. At about the same time we saw this flag, three shots rang out across the bow of our vessel. We couldn't identify where these shots came from because they were small arms fire. So, we continued to travel and about 30 seconds later three more shots rang out. This time one round hit the port side of the vessel and the other two hit the water. At this time, we observed small craft near the shore coming out to meet us. The first mate, who was in charge of the vessel because our skipper had gone the weekend prior to Hawaii to meet his wife, decided we should turn around and go back in the direction in which we came. Approximately two to three minutes after we had turned around and headed back south, I happened to observe a LCM [Landing Craft Medium] that had been converted to an armored vessel, approaching us from the stern. There were two 20mm cannons mounted on the front of the LCM. The small craft was continuing to motion us to come ashore. When I mentioned to our skipper that the other vessel was approaching from the stern, it was decided by each of us that we ought to go to shore to see what was happening.

Upon arriving at the shore, warrant officer McCullough, who was our engineer, went ashore. The commander of the compound informed warrant officer McCullough that he should ask each member of our crew to come ashore. We were told that we had been captured by the Cambodian government, and that they were waiting for a message from the headquarters in Phnom Penh to determine our status and what they were going to do with us. We remained in the compound till about six o'clock in the evening when we were then taken back out to the river where the LCM had since departed the area.

We were put on the small craft that had initially got us to come to shore, and we traveled north on the Mekong to a landing approximately 15 miles from where we were first captured. After coming ashore, we were put on two 2½ ton trucks that took us into Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. They held us at the ministry of foreign affairs for approximately an hour while they decided whether they were going to keep us. We were taken down the Mekong to the Cambodian Navy training center where we were held for the entire five months and two days.

There were three different occasions that Prince Sihanouk took us out and put us on display in Cambodia for special affairs. When the North Vietnamese presented Cambodia with a new indoor theater, we were taken down for the dedication. They also took us to the international film festival that was held in

Cambodia that same year. On the 9th of November, which was Cambodian Independence Day from the French rule, the prince insisted that we be his special guest. His personal tailor was sent down to the navy training center, measured each one of us individually for a complete suit, shirt, tie, shoes, and socks, which we were required to wear on the Independence Day celebration. We were taken up to the rotunda on which he laid a wreath and made a speech. Then we were taken to a French restaurant for lunch, and to the stadium at about six o'clock in the evening for a two hour pageant acting out the progression of Cambodian economics from the time that they were released from French rule up until the present day. At approximately 10 o'clock they had a fireworks display. We were then taken down on the Mekong River to a floating restaurant where there were 11 prostitutes waiting for our enjoyment and pleasure if we so desired to participate. At approximately 2 o'clock in the morning, we were boarded back on the bus and were taken back to where we were being held.

Prince Sihanouk had tried unsuccessfully to get what he wanted for our release. So, on the 19th of December 1968, he finally went on radio and informed the people of Cambodia that he and the Buddhist religion were going to show the Christian religion that they, too, had heartfelt sympathy for loved ones being with each other during the holy season of Christmas.

Therefore, he was going to release the prisoners to go back to the United States to be with their families. Approximately two hours later, he finally received a letter from President Johnson requesting our release. So, he then went back on the radio and informed the people that he had received such a letter requesting our release and that we would be released and sent back to the United States.

Upon arriving back in the States, we were taken to Walter Reed Army Hospital for approximately two hours for medical checkups, winter clothing, and transportation to our homes. After a two-day vacation, I reported to Fort Bragg, NC, for two weeks. The first week was in the hospital making sure that I had not contracted any disease while I was there. The other five days was a CIA debriefing. I was then reassigned to tug boat at Fort Eustis, VA, with the 7th Transportation Group. I applied for and got my 250-ton master's license. I remained at Fort Eustis from 1969 to 71, then I was reassigned to the Panama Canal Zone. I spent four years in the Panama Canal Zone, 2 ½ years of this with the first log, which involved taking combat troops deep sea fishing four days a week on the J boat. After I made my promotion to Master E8, I was reassigned to my secondary MOS, the Military Customs Division. Then on the 1st of July 1975, I applied for and received my retirement for 22 years.

After returning home, I went to work for Uniby, Incorporated, which is a textile manufacturing company in my hometown. After six months, I was permanently laid off along with six other supervisors. I then applied for and was hired by RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company. I worked there for fourteen and a half years and took a monetary early retirement from them. Now you have my up-do-date history.

Michael: Let's go back real quick. The only references that I have been able to find to associate to your story are copies of telegrams from the Department of State to various embassies that were intermediaries. The paperwork I have show that there we 11 people onboard the vessel.

Wilmoth: Right, there were eleven Americans, and one South Vietnamese.

Michael: I have the list of names. Could you tell me what their jobs were by chance. Donald Price.

Wilmoth: Donald Price, Lee Henry, Harley Kassel, and Harl Sims were deck hands. Winfred Crow was a sergeant first class assigned to one the ARVN camps. He was an advisor to the South Vietnamese military. John Chevalier was a cook aboard our vessel. Ralph McCullough was a warrant officer engineer. Cassias Shup and Donald Grigsby were engineers.

Michael: You said you had one Vietnamese crewmember?

Wilmoth: One South Vietnamese soldier that was assigned to the AVRN camp along with Winfred Crow.

Michael: I have not reached anybody else except for Mr. McCullough's daughter. He passed away in 1983, and she's been in touch with me regarding what I've been working on. She says she may have some film, so hopefully I can get some of it. You mentioned that this was your third trip out with the 1577?

Wilmoth: This was my second trip. My first trip was the week prior to us leaving for **Cam Po**. We had went to Saigon and picked up some supplies there and delivered them to Vung Tau.

Michael: So you operated out of Vung Tau.

Wilmoth: Right. Our home base was in Vung Tau.

Michael: When your second mission came up, was it just a standard supply run mission?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: So your normal run would have gone up the Mekong River to the _____ **River**, cut off?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: Could you show me that at all on this map?

Wilmoth: That's the only canal that goes across there. So we kept on going up here, and figured out here's the Cambodian border. Probably right along here a few miles was where the ARVN camp was, it was not too far in here.

Michael: Was it still daytime when you were captured?

Wilmoth: Oh yeah. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon when we were captured.

Michael: The summary the State Department gave apparently said your craft missed the first turn about 7 miles from the border and proceeded into Cambodian territory. They mentioned another incident with the **Philippine tugboat Bream** which, I guess, had happened earlier?

Wilmoth: Right. That happened a couple months earlier where a Phillipino tugboat was carrying a barge-load of beer and did the same thing. They missed the canal also, and went into Cambodia.

Michael: Being a mate myself, the biggest question I have is how did you guys miss that cutoff?

Wilmoth: I can't really tell you why we missed it other than the fact that the charts that we had for that particular area were in French, and they did not indicate a canal being in that area. Of course, this being my first trip, I had no unearthy idea where the canal was, and I could not read the French charts that we had anyway. However, the crew that was on the vessel had prior experience in going that way to Cambodia from Vung Tau. In fact two of the crew that had traveled that way, Lee Henry and Terry Kramer, had been aboard the vessel so long that they were within 30 to 45 days of rotating back to the States.

Michael: So the relative experience of the crew overall on this route was somewhat mixed, but they made this run before?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: Was there anything different about that day?

Wilmoth: No. Everything seemed normal to me. Everybody was busy doing their job. As a matter of fact, it was so hot that afternoon that the guys had rigged up garden hoses and were hosing down the barrels to keep them cool because of the possible explosiveness of the jet fuel from getting too hot.

Michael: There's mention in the State Department information that a Vietnamese outpost very close to the Cambodian border, had actually seen you guys going up the river. I guess that was first indication that you had gone too far.

Wilmoth: That's what we were told, right. As a matter of fact, after we were captured, we were informed by the Australian embassy, who looked after our interests for the US government, that there were two speed boats from the river patrol that had tried to intercept us before we got there. They saw us too late.

Michael: Did you guys have radios onboard?

Wilmoth: Yes we did.

Michael: Charts were furnished?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: The chart I have here is mostly in French. It has notes in English from the Navy Topographic. Mr. Burk, who was a LCM driver in the Delta, let us use these. Unfortunately the one

page that shows the cutoff that you're talking about is missing right there on sheet 17. I can see it's 15 and 16.

Wilmoth: This is basically what we had of the area that we have.

Michael: Did you have the same type of charts?

Wilmoth: Same type chart, right. It was all in French.

Michael: I'm glad we're able to get a representative idea of what you had to work with. What was the makeup of your unit, and what type of missions did you normally have.

Wilmoth: Well, most of the missions that we had, as far as I could see from the few days that I was there, were strictly supply. They were to the barest Infantry and Air Force units within the Delta.

Michael: Can you describe the Mekong River at that time? If you can take me up there with you.

Wilmoth: Well, as we traveled along the lake, particularly in one area, we met up with a two-hold cargo ship, whose nationality I don't recall, but they did speak English. They had taken on mortar rounds approximately five miles from where we met them on the Mekong. As we approached that same area, we also took on three mortar rounds, but the third one didn't come within 75 yards of us. I think it was maybe a warning or just harassment more than anything else, because as I understand the

VC [Viet Cong] was very good with their mortars. That was the only harassment that we had during our entire trip.

Michael: I understand this was your first trip up that particular route, and you were told it was relatively quiet.

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: What about the river itself?

Wilmoth: It was very swift. There was a lot of debris and large plants with heavy rooting washing down the Mekong at that time because it was monsoon season. I took an old M1 Carbine that had been left aboard the vessel by someone as my personal weapon, because I had not been issued one upon arriving in my company in Vung Tau. I got up on the bow of the vessel and fired into some of the rootings of the plants just to see if there might be floating mines that the VC or North Vietnamese had possibly put in the river to blow up some of the transportation of supplies up and down the river. Other than that type of debris, the river seemed very quiet; not much was going on.

When we were captured, we were held at the Cambodian Navy training center, which was located right on the Mekong, just outside of downtown Phnom Penh. We could observe heavy traffic going south towards Vietnam. The traffic included small craft Sampans that were struggling to pull 3 to 4 long bamboo poles downstream. It is our belief that these heavy poles were

floating ammunition and other supplies underneath the water because of the struggle the Sampans had pulling these poles downstream. We also feel that was one of the reasons that Prince Sihanouk insisted that we be sent back to the United States and not back to our units in South Vietnam was because we had seen too much traffic on the Mekong.

Michael: While you were being held where were you? I've been told that it was everything from a hotel to a barracks to a jail. What were the conditions where you were held?

Wilmoth: The place that we were held, being from the country and a farm boy, looked like a normal farm feed barn in ruins that was partitioned off. The walls were approximately 8 foot high, and from there to the ceiling it was just open. In each of these different rooms, we knew they were giving the Cambodian troops navy personnel training, because I knew Morse code and we could hear them using the telegraph for Morse code training. They also had navy cadre who lived with their families in steel homes that were located in the courtyard. Some of them could speak English and we became pretty good friends with a few of them. We were able to talk to each other and they informed us that they were instructors.

Michael: So your treatment there was unlike quite a few other folks who were captured by the Vietnamese?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: You were more of a...

Wilmoth: It was a political situation that we were in rather than being with the VC or North Vietnamese. Prince Sihanouk used us as a political basketball. He initially asked for a bull dozer for each one of us for our release. He did not receive that. He in turn requested a farm tractor for each one of us. He didn't receive that. In the third request, he wanted some property down in the **fish neck area**. Since he didn't get that, his last request was a letter from the Head of State of the United States, addressed to him, asking for our release.

Our government took that to mean that he wanted a letter from the Department of State. So, Dean Rusk wrote him a letter requesting our release. He wrote back indicating that it was not good enough because since he was the president of his country, he wanted a letter from the President of the United States. So on the 19th of December he received such a request from President Nixon through the French Embassy.

Michael: That matches up, the telegram from the Department of State the shows that he originally threatened to try you under Cambodian law and hold you for ransom of tractors. A short time later than that the **RKV** characterizes penetration as the overt act of provocation connected to other border incidences and state's minimum board will be dealt with in accordance with Cambodian law. On July 25th Sihanouk dropped mention of trying

men over demanding ransom and instead indicated they would be interned till the end of hostilities in. He pretty much said, "This is what I want."

Wilmoth: Right. He kept demanding this, that, and the other for our release and once he did not receive it he downgraded his request to a lesser monetary gift. Once he didn't receive anything he indicated he saw a way out to release us because we were costing him money. He had to feed us, he had to maintain security over us. He went on radio approximately 10 o'clock on the morning of the 19th and informed the people of Cambodia that he, too, was going to show the Western religion that the Buddhist religion had heartfelt sympathy for loved ones being with their families for the holy season of Christmas. Therefore he was going to release the Americans.

At approximately 12 o'clock noon, he received a letter requesting our release from President Johnson. At approximately 2 o'clock he went on the radio and indicated to the Cambodian people that he had received the letter from President Johnson asking for our release, and therefore he was going to release us. We were released to the Australian ambassador and his staff.

Michael: The Australian ambassador played quite a role from the very beginning as the intermediary. When did you have your first contact with someone other than the Cambodian government?

Wilmoth: We were captured on the 17th day of July 1968. It took the Australian ambassador eight days to get permission from the Cambodian government to come down to visit us, ask us about our capture, and to see if anyone was injured, sick, or needed anything. From that day forward, someone from the embassy, mostly the Vice Consul Neal Manton, came down at least once a week, for the five and a half months that we were held there, and looked after us on behalf of the United States government. I think that the Australian embassy should be commended very highly for the outstanding work that they did and the treatment that they gave us.

Michael: Were any of you injured?

Wilmoth: No. None of us was injured. A couple of them got heat rash. But other than that everyone maintained their high standard of cleanliness.

Michael: What about your spirits?

Wilmoth: Everybody's spirits were very high, even though those that were scheduled to go home prior to our release. I know they were down and out, but they did maintain their highest spirits and knew that someday we would be released.

Michael: Did you guys have contact with each other during the full time period or were you kept alone?

Wilmoth: No. We were all kept together in rooms approximately 30 to 40 foot long by about 14 foot wide. We had nine bunks in

the room with mosquito netting. The Australian embassy got us blankets and food supplements. They would go around to the other embassies and pick up different types of food supplies. They would go out to the market and get fresh vegetables and eggs and stuff of this nature that we could cook ourselves. They also brought us down a two-burner camp stove so that we could cook part of our own food or at least heat it up. The Cambodian government also brought us three meals a day, which the Geneva Convention calls for. They didn't mistreat us in any way, as a matter of fact the commandant of the school, who could speak broken English, was very sympathetic toward us. We were treated with respect and were not harmed or mistreated in any way.

Michael: I'm glad to hear that. Normally what you hear coming out of the Vietnam War, as far as the POWs go, was about the mistreatment that they received.

Wilmoth: No. I hold my head up high, I respect the Cambodian government, I understand why, and I hold no animosity or ill feelings toward those people. I feel as being a career man, war is heck, and things like this occur, and that's all a part of it, and you have to accept that fact. Of course I'm a Christian, and I know that God works miracles, and I just feel that this is one of the miracles that He had His way in. So,

therefore, I give Him the credit for watching over us, caring for us, and seeing that we were not mistreated.

Michael: OK. Lets go back to when you were going up the river from Vung Tau. You said the charts were all in French. Since you weren't able to read the charts very well, how did you guys go about doing your navigating? Did you have checkpoints that you checked off? How did you know how far you needed to go up the river and when to turn to port, and where you were supposed to be?

Wilmoth: Well, the charts that we had were legible up to a certain point. The charts that we had were French but they kind of coincided with the American chart that we had. You could kind of go by the lay that they had marked on the French charts, but you couldn't read them to make out any landmarks. So you just had to kind of guess where you were at, as far as the lay of the land was concerned and the turn in the river.

Michael: Did you guys have a compass, a gyro?

Wilmoth: We had compasses aboard, we had a gyro aboard, but, you know, with those, if you can't read the charts, they're not too helpful.

Michael: Well, we've heard from other folks that they did not have compasses on board. At the time, you said the first mate was the skipper for this trip, who was that?

Wilmoth: Lee Henry.

Michael: Lee Henry?

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: OK. Can you describe, in your own words, each one of the crewmembers. What you remember of them.

Wilmoth: Ok. Well, Lee was a little, short guy about 5'6" or 5'7". Real pleasant guy, easy going, easy to get along with, knowledgeable in his job.

Michael: Was he actually navigating that day? Was he up in the Con¹?

Wilmoth: In the con, right. Cassias Shup was a German boy, real tall, very nice individual, very hard worker. Took pride in his work. Donald Grigsby was a tall, blond-headed boy, very heavy-set, kind of laid-back, wouldn't volunteer, but would do his job once you told him what to do. Terry Kramer was about 5'10", stocky good-built, nice individual, very out going, good worker. Donald Price was blond-headed, had blue eyes, wore glasses, was kind of thin, easy-going. As a matter of fact the whole crew was very nice, just easy-going. Hardy Cassel was a little different than most of the crew, he was kind of reserved, he didn't say much. But, still you would enjoy being around him. Good worker. Winfred Crow didn't know much about it at all as he was one of the guys we picked up.

¹ A 'Con' is a Control Tower that is build above the pilothouse on an LCU.

Michael: He was the liaison, or the advisor?

Wilmoth: He was one of the advisors to the South Vietnamese troops. They were going to ride with us from where they were at to **Cam Po** to pick up supplies. John Chevalier was our cook, good hard-worker, go-getter, took pride in his work. Harl Simms was just a regular, everyday guy, someone that you would like to pal with. Ralph McCullough, laid-back, older fellow, kind of nervous.

Michael: Mr. McCullough was the one who went ashore when you first got there.

Wilmoth: Right.

Michael: What did he say when he came back from talking with the Cambodians?

Wilmoth: The boy said, the commandant in charge of the post here wants us all to come ashore. We asked him where are we at, and he said we're in Cambodia. They insisted that we come ashore. Donald Price told him that we had to run the bilges because we had a small leak in the vessel and it was taking on a little bit of water. He said it didn't make any difference, they said that they would have somebody take care of that.

Michael: In your minds did you realize at this point that you guys had been captured?

Wilmoth: No. At this time, we didn't know what was going on. As a matter of fact I don't think the commander of that hamlet

knew what was going on other than the fact that they had captured our boat. They were waiting for information from Phnom Penh as to what they should do with us, because they had no facilities there to feed us, look after us, etc. So, after they had received instructions by, I don't know what type of communications they had in the hamlet, they took us out to the river and put us back on that small craft. They took us up river till 10 o'clock at night, and then took us shore landing somewhere further north on the river.

Michael: Did you guys ever see the LCM again?

Wilmoth: Yes, we did. We saw it approximately an hour after we had gotten underway at 6 o'clock in the small craft. So at approximately 7:00 or 7:30 we saw the LCM. They had confiscated the craft, beached it on the shore, and probably stripped what they wanted off of it before they took it on in to Phnom Penh to incorporate it in their gallery of watercraft. That's about all of it.

Michael: At what point did they tell you or did you realize that you were no longer simply being detained?

Wilmoth: Well, we knew before we left the hamlet that we were being detained because when they took us into one of the little huts within the compound of the hamlet, they took everything away from us that could be used as a weapon. So, at that time

we knew that they were holding us hostage for something, but we didn't know how long.

Michael: What was your reaction at this point?

Wilmoth: Well, it was a reaction of "what's going to happen?" You start thinking because you don't know really what to expect. Having served in Korea a couple of times, you know that these people are erratic and they have no sympathy for life. They don't care about life, apparently. That's the impression that they give you, so, you don't know from one minute to the next if they are going to line you up in front of a firing squad or what they're going to do. It makes you concerned. But, then, once they got us to the navy training center compound, we became, I don't want to say close friend, but some of the instructors could speak English, and they would listen to the news on the radio tell us some of the things that were going on. They would tell us about the Prince going to different hamlets and what he did at each.

One time, some of the government staff came over and they had four or five pictures of what they indicated were dead Cambodian bodies laying on straw mats cluttered with straw mats. All you could see was looked like feet hanging out from the bottom of them. They indicated that these people had been killed by aircraft strikes over the rice patties, and they wanted us to write a letter condemning this type of thing. So,

Sgt. Crow, McCullough, Price, Kramer, and myself all got together and we come up with a letter. In the letter, we did not condemn the United States being in the war nor condemn the actions that were taken, but we did say that we were sorry that things like this had to occur. We went this letter to the Prince and it seemed to pacify him. So on the three occasions that we were questioned, this is the only thing that we did while we were there as far as any communication, written or spoken, about the war.

Michael: What type of questions did they ask?

Wilmoth: Some of the questions that they asked me were how many sons I had, and what high school I graduated from. They also asked how many weapons we had aboard, and where we came from, which are military-type questions that I refused to answer. I can't remember any more. I didn't feel that questions of a personal nature, such as what town I came from and what high school I graduated from, were military-type questions. So I answered those questions to the best of my ability. For any military questions we answered, we gave our name, rank, and serial number. Once we didn't answer their military questions, they just skipped over and went on, they didn't press us for any answers.

Michael: Let me read something real quick, this is from one of the initial program's OPSEC [Operational Security]. It described

what an LCU was, what your armament was, and what type of cargo you were carrying. It says that you armored two 50-caliber machine guns, an M60 light machine gun, M16s, carbines, pistols, and one M79 grenade gun, used exclusively for the defense against powerful fire. They say the cargo was 200 drums of solvent, two commercial forklift trucks, 30 **four-foot** drums of JP4 [jet fuel], and six containers of miscellaneous supplies. All that is pretty accurate?

Wilmoth: I think there were only two vehicles, there might have been a jeep and maybe a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton on there, but I don't remember anymore. I thought all of the barrels were JP4, I'm not sure.

Michael: I'm going to mention one of the things that intrigued me about the incident. As in most things that have occurred in the past, stories have change a little bit here and there, and rumors will fly. You mentioned to me once before the possibility that the crew knew that they were going to be captured that the crew knew that they were going to end up in Cambodia.

Wilmoth: That is news to me, that is first hand news. As far as I know the crew was one big happy family. No one ever gave me any indication that they wanted to go up and be captured by the Cambodian government or any other government as far as that's concerned.

Michael: You know how military stories float around. One of the things I did want to do was set the record straight. It is my understanding that this rumor showed up in a Vietnam Veterans chat room at some point and was passed along here, there and everywhere. It just seemed to me kind of out of this world that something like this would occur. The information that I have doesn't even come close to justifying the rumor. I just wanted to ask you about that.

Wilmoth: No. As far as I'm concerned, having been on there and in country 17 days before we were captured, the crew did not, at any time, give me any indication that they were willing to go into Cambodia, or Laos, or anywhere, to be captured and be taken hostage for who knows how long. Especially when there was three or four of them getting ready to come back to the States. So rumors like that are just asinine as far as I'm concerned.

Michael: I'm glad to hear that. Is there anything that we have not covered?

Wilmoth: No. I think we've covered it pretty good as we've been talking. I'd just like to say that I'm proud to be an American. I'm proud that I served, I went and served my God and my country, and I'm happy to be a transportation _____. And I appreciate your concern, and am happy to be a part of the history, and if at any time that I can serve you or be of assistance to you, call me.

Michael: That was going to be my next question. Would you like me to follow up with you?

Wilmoth: Absolutely.

Michael: I'm sure I'll think of about half a million questions as I usually do after an interview. You mentioned you've been in touch with some of these folks.

Wilmoth: Yes, I've been in touch with John Chevalier, Cassias Shup, Harley Kassel, and Neal Manton, who was the Vice Consul of the Australian Embassy at the time of our capture. Neal is writing a book in regards to our capture. I supplied all information and pictures that I had. We have yet to find a publisher. He is looking at Texas Tech University as a possibility. He already has the manuscript there. He informed me that throughout the entire war in Vietnam, that Cambodians captured 117 Americans, military and civilian, and held them hostage from 30 days to, us being the longest at 5 months and two days. This book is going to cover all of the captures and behind the scenes things that went on that we personally are unaware of. So, therefore, I'm looking forward to getting this book.

Michael: I'd like to be able to talk to him about it.

Wilmoth: As soon as I get it, I promise you I will dedicate a copy of it to you.

Michael: If you don't mind, I would like to get a way to reach him if possible.

Wilmoth: I'll send you his email address.

Michael: Thank you. He might have some information. It seems to me, from what you're saying, he's looking at all the captures of all the Americans during that conflict. We are going to be focusing more on your situation. I'm trying to arrange interviews with your crewmembers. You got my letter and I've sent mail out to every person that I could find. I'm finding out now that some of the addresses I have are not correct.

Wilmoth: Yeah. As a matter of fact I have already looked for Price, Kramer, and Grigsby, with the state and town I had listed, on my computer, and come up with nothing.

Michael: I found a Donald Price who was a POW in WWII with the 8th Air Force. What is the chance of the two POWs with the same name in two different wars from the same home of record?

Wilmoth: Could be his dad.

Michael: He says he's not. It was an interesting thing. I'll make sure you get to where ever you got to go here. If you have any other questions call me, and, you have my phone number and address, and I have your phone number and address. So you have an email address? Can I get that?

Wilmoth: Yes, sure.