

The Happiest 20 Seconds of Our Lives

By Leo K. Thorsness

Introduction by Bob Krone

American prisoners of war during the Vietnam War were the longest imprisoned in the history of the United States. They experienced torture, isolation, abuse, and absence of needed medical care. Their communications with family varied from none to one letter every two months. They were denied any news about the war or about the United States. Many died and many experienced more than six years of cruel imprisonment before their release in March of 1973.

One of those POWs was Leo K. Thorsness, Colonel, USAF (retired), Medal of Honor recipient. He spoke to Space professionals attending the International Space Development Conference, 2011, at Huntsville, Alabama. His three-minute description of how the Hanoi prisoners learned that Americans had landed on the Moon is a classic story for the Space Community. Fortunately his talk was filmed.

His statement that the 20 seconds it took for prisoners to use their tap-code to share the discovery that Americans had landed on the Moon was “The happiest 20 seconds of our lives,” exposes both the character and patriotism of those Americans suffering day after day and the global significance of Neil and Buzz stepping on the Moon on 20 July 1969.

Here is Leo:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDjDKc1LaGU&feature=youtu.be

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About the Author: Colonel Leo K. Thorsness, USAF (retired) had a distinguished career as a jet fighter pilot when he was selected in 1967 to be the commander of the F-105F Wild Weasel Squadron flying over North Vietnam. The Wild Weasels were tasked with attacking the North Vietnamese Air Defense system – the most sophisticated one since Allied airpower fought in World War II. He and his backseat Electronic Warfare Officer, Captain Harry Johnson, was shot down on his 93rd mission a week after flying a dramatic mission that earned him the Medal of Honor. They survived six and a half years in North Vietnamese prisons. See his *Surviving Hell: A POW's Journey* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008). In 2010 he was elected to be the President of the Medal of Honor Society. For his bio and the story of his Medal of Honor Mission go to en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_K._Thorsness.



Editors' Notes: People all over the world watched their television sets in suspense on July 20, 1969 as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin piloted Apollo 11's Lunar Module to a landing. It was months later that our Vietnam Prisoners discovered that Americans had been on the Moon. Leo's short report of their emotions and pride is a unique and special story about that historic event. Kepler Space Institute takes pride in sharing the story with global readers of *The Journal of Space Philosophy*. ***Bob Krone and Gordon Arthur.***