

Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. '51
Colonel (Ret'd), United States Air Force
A Pi Kappa Alpha Warrior

After serving in the later months of World War II (in a non combat role), Fred Crow entered Cornell and was initiated into our fraternity on March 6, 1948.



Crow is shown at the left, at his home in Williamsburg on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2011, where he lives today at 8314 Barons Court.

He recounting his experiences as a teen-ager on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He was living at the base in Pearl Harbor with his family, as his father had just retired from the Navy days before.

Fred Crow was born in 1926 in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve on December 20, 1943, and entered the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Army Air Forces on February 15, 1944. After the war ended, he was discharged on October 28, 1945.

On graduating from Cornell, he rejoined the U.S. Air Force for pilot training on June 13, 1951, and was commissioned a second lieutenant and received his pilot wings at Stalling AFB, North Carolina, in June 1952. Captain Crow served as a fighter pilot and forward air controller at various bases between April 1953 and June 1961, and then served as an F-100 Super Sabre pilot with the 478th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Cannon AFB, New Mexico, from July 1961 to December 1962. During this time he deployed with his unit to Europe in support of the Berlin Crisis from September to November 1961. His next assignment was as a Forward Air Controller attached to the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, from December 1962 to August 1964, followed by Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from August 1964 to July 1965. Col Crow then served on the staff of Headquarters Tactical Air Command at Langley AFB, Virginia, from July 1965 to May 1966.

He completed F-4 Phantom II Combat Crew Training before serving with the 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron at Ubon Royal Thai AFB, Thailand, from October 1966 until he was forced to eject over North Vietnam and was taken as a prisoner of war on March 26, 1967. While in prison in Hanoi, he came to know John McCain. After spending 2,171 days in captivity, Colonel Crow was released during Operation Homecoming on March 4, 1973.

In an oral history recorded in 2012, Colonel Crow recounted the following:

“I was shot down on a mission ... (I) .. was not supposed to fly. Lieutenant Colonel (name deleted) was supposed to fly the mission” Crow explained, “Colonel (name deleted) was a weenie. He was never around when something was to be done or a decision to be made. He would say he had to go out of town to get new glasses, or an excuse similar. He had signed up for the mission on March 26 because the weather was bad, meaning it would be a simple, not dangerous mission. However just as they were scheduled to fly, the weather cleared up, changing the mission. He wimped out and ... (I) ... had to take his place leading sixteen airplanes into danger.

“I got hit in the rear with a missile, it knocked me out of the sky, the controls would do nothing. The first thing I thought was, if I knew I was going to get shot down I would have had more for lunch than a hamburger and a coke.”

As he was getting necessities from the plane, a Jeep with dogs that had sniffed him out approached him.

“Two Vietnamese soldiers came up and stripped me of everything, including my wedding ring and then

hog tied me. They had messed up my arm so much that above the elbow the circulation was got off so I generated black scabs all over my arms because my lymph node system had been damaged and cut off. We were only twenty-six miles from Hanoi so it did not take too long to get there. We drove up to the Hoa Loa Prison, which many refer to as Hanoi Hilton. It means 'fire in the forge' in Vietnamese. They pulled me out of the Jeep and carried me into what we later called the naughty room, for it was the interrogation room. On the wall someone had painted a sign with a rabbit that said 'Happy Easter Day' because I had been shot down on Easter Sunday."

That was an Easter Colonel Crow would never forget, changing his life for the next six years because of another man's fear. He was now a prisoner of war.

Crow explained, "When I first got there I was sweating so bad and so thirsty that I was licking my sweat up off the floors. The interrogator, who we called "the bug," was a professional, showed absolutely zero emotion. He couldn't pronounce my name so I was 'Cow' for the next six years."

Colonel Crow spent the next six years in Hanoi Hilton, spending three years in solitary confinement, known as 'Heartbreak Hotel.' Crow explained to me that one time he had tried to peak through his cell bars that were very high up by standing on his "bathroom" bucket. The "bug" had caught him so he placed one of his ankles in a stock and both his wrists in another stock.

Crow said "I was in that position for three days, but the pain was worse when he let me out, trying to straighten my back was extremely painful. The Vietnamese wanted to shape us up so we weren't troublemakers, but that was our goal, to cause trouble." He also stated that the "bathroom" bucket wasn't so bad if he was in solitary, but when he shared a cell with four other men the bucket was very gross and unsanitary by the end of the day.

When Colonel Frederick Crow was first settling into Hanoi Hilton he noticed someone had written on the wall "this too shall pass." He stated, "It kind of bucks you up to know you're not alone and that there is someone else here with you." Crow said, "We always worried about getting caught doing something, like tapping on the wall. Hours of boredom would go by with minutes of stark terror."

As for food, the prisoners had rice and boiling water twice a day. "Once a week they would let us out to wash down in the sinks, we couldn't shower. We always looked forward to that," Crow explained.

Mary Crow, the colonel's wife, sent many letters and packages, but Crow said he didn't receive them. "Actually, one time they brought me something my wife had sent me. It was a sterling silver toothpick. That was the only thing I ever received because they could not figure out what it was. I had to explain it to them." Colonel said, "sometimes in my cell I could smell chocolate and I knew someone had a package come in and the Vietnamese officers were eating our chocolate." Mrs. Crow and their four children had no idea whether their husband/father was alive. Mary received word once that Colonel Crow was in Hanoi Hilton. This was because a Navy sailor who had been captured memorized all four hundred and fifty names of the prisoners. When the sailor was captured "We told him to act cuckoo and nutty so they would let him go. He started acting like a damn idiot sweeping the yard with the broom upside down, doing everything to seem crazy. There were four or five officers who gave up and confessed everything so when they were released the sailor was too. Of course those officers were ostrich sized when they got back and I think three of them committed suicide" Crow explains. However, this one sailor restored faith in a lot of families.

Crow realized one day "they started fattening us up, they would give us a loaf of French bread and a cup of sugar for meals. This is when we realized we were going to be released. When the Vietnamese told them peace papers had been signed in Paris on January 27, 1973 they were about to get around and gather up in the courtyard. This was the beginning of "Operation Homecoming." The rule was first in first out so even though the first prisoners of war left Hanoi on February 12, 1973, Crow had to wait until March 4th. Crow arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington D.C. with many camera flashes going off as he was greeted by his family for the first time in years. He had to go through forty-two hours of intelligence debriefing before the medics got to them. "All I needed was a hernia repair and a teeth fixing. They had the President's dentist fix me up" Crow states as if it is not a big deal.

Colonel Crow ended the interview by telling the story of how “on the ride home to Hampton, Virginia Mary was driving the car at eighty mile per hour and it scared the living crap out of me! I hadn’t gone anywhere near that fast in over six years.”

Colonel Crow made the following remarks upon landing at Andrews AFB Maryland on the afternoon of March 7, 1973, on returning to the United States from North Vietnam:

"We come to you from the prisons of North Vietnam. Our motto was “Unity Before Self”. Our mission was to return with honor. We have accomplished our task.

"What a thrill it was to take off in this big beautiful aircraft from Hanoi with us aboard. Freedom was ours! How proud we were to be greeted just a few short hours ago in Honolulu, Hawaii, United States of America as American fighting men returned from battle.

"And now here we are in the shadow of our nation's capital, fighting back tears of joy and gratitude. We have reaped the fruits of our faith and trust in our God, our Commander-in-Chief, our families and all the people of this wonderful, wonderful country and indeed the world who have worked so hard and so long to bring us home. We are indebted to you forever. America we love you!"

After being released, he was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at Andrews AFB, Maryland, and then attended National War College in Washington, D.C., from August 1973 to June 1974. Col Crow's next assignment was as Vice Commander of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at George AFB, California, from July 1974 to May 1975. His final assignment was at Langley AFB, Virginia, where he retired from the Air Force on October 1, 1981.

Here are Fred Crow’s career military decorations:



Fred's key honors, awarded for actions in Vietnam are:



Silver Star

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 8, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Colonel Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as an F-4C Pilot in the 433d Tactical Fighter Squadron, Ubon Royal Thai Air Base, Vietnam, PACIFIC Air Forces, in action in North Vietnam, on 26 March 1967. On that date, Colonel Crow led his flight on a day strike/combat air patrol mission against a target area with numerous defenses. Colonel Crow delivered his ordnance directly on target under withering fire from hostile forces. After all ordnance was expended the strike was engaged by hostile aircraft. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, Colonel Crow suppressed the hostile aircraft engagement subjecting himself to intense attack by numerous Surface-to-Air missiles. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Colonel Crow has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Silver Star

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 8, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Silver Star to Colonel Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, for gallantry and intrepidity in action in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force on 26 March 1967, while a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam. Ignoring international agreements on treatment of prisoners of war, the enemy resorted to mental and physical cruelties to obtain information, confessions, and propaganda materials. Colonel Crow resisted their demands by calling upon his deepest inner strengths in a manner which reflected his devotion to duty and great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Legion of Merit

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, 20 July 1942, takes pleasure in presenting the Legion of Merit to Colonel Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from March 1967 to February 1973. His ceaseless efforts, by a continuous showing of resistance to an enemy who ignored all international agreements on treatment of Prisoners of War, in the extremely adverse conditions of the communist prisons of North Vietnam, demonstrated his professional competence, unwavering devotion, and loyalty to his country. Despite the harsh treatment through his long years of incarceration, he continued to perform his duties in a clearly exceptional manner which reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Distinguished Flying Cross

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Major Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-4C Aircraft Commander over North Vietnam on 1 November 1966. On that date, Major Crow was flying a strike mission against a vital railroad yard. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, Major Crow very effectively delivered his ordnance on target. This daring attack denied the hostile forces the use of a vital link in their transportation system. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Major Crow reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Distinguished Flying Cross

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross to Major Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-4C Aircraft Commander near Hanoi, North Vietnam, on 4 November 1966. On that date, Major Crow led a flight of four F-4C's against a vital petroleum products storage area. Although two surface-to-air missile attacks and extremely heavy gun defenses were encountered inbound to the target, Major Crow courageously led his flight to the target where they inflicted heavy damage on this vital supply area. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Major Crow reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Prisoner of War Medal

Colonel Frederick Austin Crow, Jr. (AFSN: FR-26569), United States Air Force, was held as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from March 26, 1967 until his release on March 4, 1973.