

Lyman Award Remarks

Dave Shea

Thank you very much. What an introduction. I only wish I did half those things.

Somehow I feel like little Ralphie's old man in the movie A Christmas Story who learned he was to get "A Major Award." I only hope it isn't a leg lamp.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I wish to deny that I was the PR guy for The Wright Brothers' first flight. That was Doug Kennett. But General Hap Arnold did rely on me a lot.

Thank you for this award. I am truly humbled. How humble am I? Well, I declined an offer from UTC and AIA to rename it the Shea Award.

I want to thank my former bosses at Raytheon, Pam Wickham and Mike Doble, and my colleague Steve Baron, whose creative writing talents pushed my nomination over the goal line. Thanks also to AIA for failing to do due diligence on my nomination. And thanks to UTC for sponsoring the Lyman Award for 38 years. Thanks, also, to my wife and best friend, Mary, who's put up with me for 42 years. She's still trying to figure out what I did for a living. This is beginning to sound like the Academy Awards.

Seriously, when I look at the list of past recipients of the Deke Lyman Award, I can't believe that I am now included. I've known and worked with more than 75 percent of the honorees over the years – all distinguished journalists and/or PR professionals. I never considered myself to be in their class.

I asked Doug Kennett, last year's recipient of the Lyman Award, for advice on what I should say to you tonight. He said to just tell them your war stories. If I did that, we'd be here all night. But let me pick out a few, and I promise not to bore you.

I have fond memories of the 1989 Lyman Award winner, the late Phil Klass, the brilliant senior avionics editor of Aviation Week. Phil and I bonded over UFOs when in the late 60s, early 70s, I was the Air Force spokesman on the subject, and Phil was the great debunker. He was called the Sherlock Holmes of UFOology.

It was Air Force policy not to engage in debates over the origin of flying saucers, so when requests came in from radio and TV talk shows, I would politely decline but refer the callers to Phil, who never met an interview request on the subject he didn't like.

When I retired from the Air Force in 1988, Phil attended the ceremony at the Pentagon and presented me with a bumper-sticker-like plaque, which I still have hanging on a wall in my man cave. It reads: UFOs are real! The Air Force doesn't exist.

Let me tell you about Operation Homecoming. This was not my finest hour. The year was 1973, the scene Clark Air Base in the Philippines for the return of our POWs from North Vietnam. I was assigned as chief of the Joint Information Bureau in the hospital there. One of my duties was to work media requests from the main JIB to interview former POWs. Late one afternoon I was asked to see if Col. James Kasler would agree to be interviewed by the Stars and Stripes, which, as most of you know, is the unofficial publication of the Department of Defense. Col. Kasler, an Ace in the Korean War, was in captivity for six and a half years and was among the first group of POWs released by North Vietnam.

Col. Kasler agreed to the interview, which I monitored, recorded and established the ground rules for:

- Any questions regarding life in captivity in the North were off-limits
- The interview was to be limited to the colonel's reactions and impressions since being released.

These rules were established so as not to antagonize the North Vietnamese and endanger the welfare of the remaining POWs.

The reporter, a civilian journalist named Hal Drake, agreed to the ground rules on tape and the interview began. I had to interrupt several times when Drake asked Col. Kasler about his feelings toward certain liberal politicians prolonging the war and especially when Col. Kasler said he was tortured in an attempt to force him to see Jane Fonda. I told Drake he couldn't use that, and he agreed. All this was on the tape – an important lesson.

The interview ended, and then I made a big mistake. Because I was late for another assignment, I left the colonel alone with the reporter. The next day this story appeared in Stripes: Returnee Charges Protestors with Treason: Their Hands Are Stained with GIs' Blood. All hell broke loose. Gen. Chappie James was the principal deputy in DoD Public Affairs at the time, and the witch hunt began. How did that happen? When did he say that?

As it turned out, after I left the scene, Kasler told Drake: "I want this in the story. We can thank the war protestors for prolonging the war. Undeclared war or not, what they did is treason. They gave aid and comfort to the enemy. Their hands are stained with the blood of American GIs."

An investigation ensued with the result that Drake was returned to Tokyo and Stars and Stripes had their credentials withdrawn.

Do I blame the reporter? Not really. He had a big story. Do I blame Col. Kasler? A little, but who can blame a man who went through what he did. Do I blame the editor of Stars and Stripes? To some degree, yes, because Stripes violated the ground rules. But most of all, I blame myself. I forgot a basic rule: The interview isn't over until the reporter and subject say goodbye and go their separate ways. I learned a valuable lesson that day, but fortunately the story had no repercussions in the North.

New story. In February 1979, the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown in a revolution. In October, then President Jimmy Carter reluctantly allowed the Shah into the United States to undergo surgical treatment at the Cornell Medical Center in New York.

At the time, I was the director of Public Affairs for Air Training Command at Randolph AFB in San Antonio, Texas. One Sunday morning in November, my phone rang at about 5 a.m. It was Major General Bill Acker, the commander of the Basic Military Training Center at nearby Lackland AFB. He told me the Shah was being airlifted to nearby Kelly AFB for transport to the Wilford Hall Medical Center on Lackland for further treatment. He told me to get over to Lackland right away. I asked him if the media was aware of this development. Yeah, he said, I already heard it on KBUC – the country and western station.

This was big news. Recall that 52 Americans were taken hostage in Iran on November 4, 1979.

So, I put on my uniform and high-tailed it over to Lackland where I met up with Lt. Col. Mike Terrill who was the Lackland AFB public affairs officer. We set up a media information bureau in the base's recreation center and made plans to have the Shah's spokesman meet with the press there at noon. Not so fast. I took a phone call from DoD Public Affairs and was told to call off the press conference and kick the media off the base. The State Department wanted the focus on the hostages, not the Shah.

We had some 50 members of the press already assembled, and I argued in vain to let the press conference go on. So poor Mike Terrill had to tell the media there would be no press conference, and they had 30 minutes to leave the base. You can imagine the reaction. On NBC that night, there was Mike telling the press to leave. A reporter asked, "Are you asking us, or telling us." "Right now I'm asking you," said Mike. Then the camera cut to scenes of security policemen with German Shepherds.

Several days later, then Assistant Secretary of Defense Tom Ross was asked at a Pentagon press briefing why the media were being prohibited from talking to the Shah's spokesman. Ross said he had no objection to their talking to him, only not on the base.

Now these press briefings were always transcribed and disseminated to major command commanders and public affairs officers. As I finished reading the transcript, my hot line from the commander of ATC, Gen. Bennie Davis, rang. "Did you read what Ross had to say?" he asked. "General, I said. "Ross really didn't mean that. State doesn't want the focus on the Shah." "I can read," he said. "Set it up."

As I was considering what to do, a call came in from Brig. Gen. Jerry Dalton, the director of Air Force Public Affairs in the Pentagon. Now, General Dalton is short in stature and is a man I greatly admire. After he finished saying what he called me for, I swallowed and told him what Gen. Davis instructed me to do. He got very excited, and told me to hold on, not to do anything just yet; he'd get back to me.

As I sat there stewing, my hot line from Gen. Davis once again rang. Now you should know that Gen. Davis and Gen. Dalton didn't get along, and I was in the middle. He said, "So, you had to talk to the little guy," (I cleaned that up). I said that Gen. Dalton had called me, which was true but perhaps not the whole truth. "All right," he said. "Dalton has a point. Have your Reservists set up the press briefing downtown." Although I believe I did the right thing, Davis said something I'll never forget: "The quickest way to get fired around here is to forget whom you work for." The press briefing went off without a hitch, and the heat was off. I dodged a bullet.

One more quick story, then I'll let you go. This one is from the industry side.

In 1997 I was with Hughes Aircraft when Raytheon acquired it. Talk about a cultural divide. At that time, Raytheon was centrally controlled by its Chairman and CEO Dennis J. Pickard whose disdain for the media was well known. I had a couple of opportunities to meet him during this period, which I avoided because I figured working with the media would not exactly endear me to him. Fast forward to 1999. Mr. Picard, now retired, agreed to answer written questions from the Wall Street Journal about the aggressive acquisition phase Raytheon embarked on during the mid-to-late 90s. I was asked to help him prepare his answers.

Thinking he was in Lexington, Mass., at Raytheon headquarters at the time, I strolled into Ken Dahlberg's conference room in Rosslyn where I came face-to-face with someone I had successfully avoided for two years. "So you're the famous Dave Shea," he said with somewhat of a smirk. I tried to hide, but there was nowhere to go.

The session went quite well, and I discovered he actually had a charming side. As the session ended, he made some unkindly references to the news media. At that point I said, "Clearly, Dennis – by this time we were on a first name basis -- you haven't read my book." "What book is that," he growled. "Media Isn't a Four Letter Word," I replied. "Ho-ho-ho." "Wait, I'll get you a copy."

I ran down to my office, picked up a copy, and hi-tailed it back to the 20th floor where Mr. Picard was about to leave. I said, "Wait. Let me inscribe it for you." And this is where I get the chutzpa award for 1999. I wrote: To Dennis J. Picard, whose performance with the media inspired me to write this book. There was this long pause, then "Ho-ho-ho" and a pat on the back. I dodged another bullet.

Once again, I thank you for this honor, and I'll see you all tomorrow at the luncheon.

Luncheon Remarks

Thank you very much for this honor. I feel as though my name is being added to the Stanley Cup.

As I told my colleagues at dinner last night, I was not the PR guy for Wilbur and Orville's first flight. That was last year's Lyman Award winner Doug Kennett.

Again, thank you.