

Transcript of Clip of William L. Fornes interviewed on C-SPAN, May 10, 1998

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?104822-1/prisoner-war-museum-part-2>

[full C-SPAN segment]

<https://www.c-span.org/video/standalone/?c5000531/user-clip-korean-war-pow-bill-fornes-talks-experience-pow-germ-warfare-charges>

[Fornes clip]

Andersonville National Historic Site Superintendent Fred Boyles and Mr. William L. Fornes, Korean War POW, talked about the Prisoner of War Museum opening in Andersonville, GA.

[Fornes] As a fighter pilot I was prepared to give my life for my country, but I was never prepared to become a POW. And it's kind of shocking to lose a wing on your aircraft over enemy territory, and have to bail out, and all your friends went home. So the only, the only thing left for you is to evade, if your can, or escape away from enemies. But that wasn't the case with me. My aircraft, an F-84, lost its left wing and it doesn't fly so well on one wing. But I was fortunate enough to get out of the aircraft and landed on one side of the mountain in North Korea, and my aircraft landed on the other side of the mountain. I was not captured until the next day, and it was my own stupidity that I was captured. I tried to locate myself, just in case rescue could get to me. And when I pulled out the escape and evasion map it was such a large scale, it was kinda hard to locate yourself with - using a mountain or a stream. Like here in the States, I got too close to a Korean village because I was looking for a sign that said, 'This is Yung Po Do, or whatever it happened to be. And a Korean woman saw me. I had my .45 in my hand, and I could have taken some action, but it was - I, I couldn't do it.

[Interviewer] How long were you a POW?

[Fornes] I was a POW for 13 months, ten of which was in solitary confinement before, because I was — I was considered a war criminal by the Chinese for having supposedly carried out germ warfare on the Korean and Chinese people. I didn't know what in the world they were talking about. But after seeing the devastation that had occurred in the country, I could understand they had to blame somebody for all of the disease and lack of food and unsanitary conditions. So they blamed, blamed the pilots for carrying out germ warfare. And I made a terrible mistake by trying to, uh, outwit them by — When they wanted military information, I told them some, well, fabricated lies. They wanted to know who all the people were in my squadron and what the capabilities were of my aircraft. When they withhold food and withhold water, you can, you can last awhile — you can do without food a lot longer than you can do without water. But eventually it gets to the point that, well,

you have to do something to survive. When I gave them the list of names of anybody I could think of— John Wayne, Donald Duck — and as far as my aircraft was concerned they could carry a bigger bomb load than a B-29 and was faster than a MIG. But about a week later, the interrogator, who spoke better English than I did, came back with a current roster of my squadron members. And a Dash-1, the operational manual for my aircraft that was more up-to-date than mine was back at home base. We had Koreans working on base, but how do you tell the difference between a South Korean and a North Korean? Their intelligence was fantastic! So he said, 'If you lied about that, then you'd lie about germ warfare.' And that's why I was considered a war criminal and kept in solitary confinement for those ten months."