Driscoll: How, we detach. My whole purpose of being there of course is to defend the strike group against the air-to-air related MIG threat.

On the day of 8 May, I was on my inbound vector to my station, when I received word from my controller that bandits which was our slang term for MIGs, were airborne. I was given an attack heading which I promptly turned to and started my hot vector. Neither I nor my wingman was able to visually or on radar acquire the enemy aircraft. We continued with our hot vector and again, our feeling was that we were starting to drift off from the area of our assigned mission. Therefore, we started a turn back to the left or to the south. And at that time I happened to notice as I was scanning the horizon a MIG-17 which just popped through the clouds and appeared to be attacking us.

I called this immediately to my pilot and to the other flight over the UHF radio. No one else was able to confirm a "rally-no," that of course meaning "yes, I have sight," "no rally-no" meaning "no, I do not have sight." No one else was able to confirm or come up with a "rally-no." Therefore, I maneuvered the flight, again telling my pilot where the MIG was coming from and where he would probably go.

He called "rally-no" and he called our wingman to straighten the MIG out and again, in terminology of aviators, this means the MIG is not a threat to you at this time, but let's keep him interested while I maneuver for a shot.
Driscoll: Our wingman did this, and as he started to straighten the MIG out and we started to come back to maneuver into a advantageous position for a shot, I saw two other MIG-17s pop through the clouds in an attacking position on us. My pilot directed our wingman to break off hard to the left, and he fired a heat-seeking missile which flew up the tailpipe of the MIG-17.

However, at this time we had two MIG-17s behind us, shooting their guns. Just prior to my pilot shooting down this MIG-17 with our heat-seeking missile, we observed that MIG-17 shooting what appeared to be a heat-seeker missile of his own at my wingman.

We, of course, just prior to our firing of our heat-seeker missile, instructed our wingman to break hard to the left, that we were getting ready to shoot. He did this; we fired, shot down the MIG. The situation now is: us, and two MIG-17s behind us, shooting. We're faced with a dilemma now, not being able to brake either way since we'd be breaking into the bullets of either of the two MIG aircraft.

Nonetheless, we elected to brake to the left and discovered that the lower wing loading, higher maneuverability of the MIG-17 as we had heard in intelligence briefings was certainly true, as he rendezvoused on the inside of our turn and still represented a serious offensive threat to our aircraft and certainly to ourselves.
Therefore, realizing this and realizing that we still had an excellent chance of being shot down by the MIG aircraft if we continued in our present maneuver, realizing all of these factors, we executed what is commonly called a MIG-17 disengagement maneuver. I again cannot talk about the specifics of the maneuver, due to their classification level, but it is a maneuver based on some of the flight characteristics which we capitalize on against the MIG series aircraft. In other words, several of his weak points, knowing that he cannot duplicate the kind of maneuver that we can do. Therefore, we do this maneuver, he cannot follow us and it assists us in gaining some lateral separation between us and him and taking the first steps into getting away or escaping from the enemy aircraft.

We started to do this, and at the same time, nonetheless, noticed that the MIG on either side was still back there, pressing us quite severely. As we started to do this--

You had three MIGs on you now, is that right?

Two, two MIGs, there were--

Two were astern and this guy on your right.

This guy had been just been shot down. He'd been shot down by our heat-seeker missile. He'd been shot down a little bit earlier by our heat-seeker missile.

You got these two guys behind now.

Two guys behind us. There was another, a fourth MIG some where in the air that we'd never been able to sight visually.
that we later learned was airborne and in the general area at that time.

What we therefore elected to do to escape the two attacking MIGs on our tail was to put the nose down quickly and descend into the clouds. This entire fight took place at an altitude of perhaps four to five thousand feet. However, there was a heavy cloud layer below. Therefore we descended down into the clouds and saw both MIGs diving down behind us at our six o'clock position. We leveled out at perhaps five hundred feet down below the cloud layer, accelerated, got our energy back up, although it was still at a good level, but accelerated and then popped through the clouds, going right back up into the sun, realizing that the MIGs perhaps had a heat-seeker missile and for us to go to the sun would certainly degrade their kill probability of this missile.

We popped up, again through the clouds, back up into the sun, talking to our wingman the whole time. He did not see us. He picked up "Flak off"—aviation terminology which means "I see you now"—he picked up "Tally Ho" when we popped back through the clouds and we got back again into our original formation, and continued our mission. As MIG CAP and, again, back out to the ocean and back to the carrier.

(Tape off and on)

Driscoll: Two days later, 10 May 1972, we were again flying in to the same general area, this time as "Flak Suppressor." Now, a flak suppressor's main job is to let the main bombing force go into the target area and select their particular target.
Driscoll: make their runs and we, as flak suppressor, will observe this and when we sight anyone on the ground, shooting a gun, surface-to-air missile—and by gun I'm talking about heavy anti-aircraft type gun not just the conventional field weapon, but the heavy anti-aircraft artillery gun. When we spot this type of activity of the ground against the strike force, then we roll in on that particular threat. Hence the name flak suppressor.

On this particular day, 10 May, we had flown into a railroad shipment point, HAIDUONG Railroad yard in North Vietnam, and we had made our flak suppression run after a relatively quiet or very passive attempt on the enemy's part to inhibit our Alpha strike. Again, this was rather surprising, since you can generally count on any type of flak from light to medium to heavy to extremely heavy. And this being a high threat area, we had planned on extremely heavy flak and yet it was almost negligible. This surprised all of us. However, we were soon to find the reason for that.

As we dropped our bombs, flak suppression bombs, I looked back over my shoulder to see exactly where they had hit. As I was looking back I noticed six to eight MIG-17 aircraft attacking our strike formation. And, I saw five to six other aircraft of MIG related type, MIG-21, MIG-19—although I wasn't sure of the exact description, I did know there were the enemy aircraft several miles back in range. As we pulled off the target area, we got into a classic aerial combat maneuvering battle, however, using MIGs—all adversary of course, were jets. But it was the classic aerial combat maneuvering
Driscol: battle, which I am sure many of my predecessors in World War I and World War II time frames had encountered on a similar nature.

Bowling: Dog fight.

Driscol: Dog fight is perhaps the most correct summation of what was to occur in the next ten minutes. Now, the question of how has the fighter pilots role in this area changed in the past fifty years? And the answer to that question is probably little if at all. There is still the same basic rules that must be followed: you must maintain the same basic types of lookout, you must be able to fly aggressively and you must be able to successfully execute the same types of maneuvers. The difference, of course, comes in the degree of sophistication of the weapons systems, be they heat-seeker missile, be they radar weapons systems, and, of course, the degree of sophistication, sophisticated aircraft that all people are flying. All aircraft being MACH-1 capable with rates of closure in excess of two thousand miles per hour.

Nonetheless, very simply, it's the man who sees the other first, it's the man who flies the most aggressive airplane, the man that sees his opponent make a mistake and capitalizes on that mistake, he is the man that is going to win.

Bowling: What would you say is the number one tactical difference?

Driscol: The number one tactical dictum is to possess an aggressive spirit. You cannot be taught. You must possess an aggressive
Driscoll: spirit and you must temper that with a supreme element of confidence in your ability. Now, there are minor subtleties to that; we talk about mutual support and a wingman and a leader, and the role changing back and forth just to support each other, those are minor subtleties.

In this particular arena, there are six Navy F-4 Phantoms against in the neighborhood of eighteen to twenty MIG aircraft. And, it's significant to note, that on this particular day — and they're all from my squadron — we shot down five MIG aircraft and lost no airplanes to MIGs. We shot down five, I, with Lieutenant Cunningham, shot down three, a very close friend of mine shot down two and another good friend shot down one. We lost no airplanes to MIG aircraft.

Rather than giving you a recounting of the exact maneuvering, we broke hard into one MIG, number one, he was not able to fly his airplane properly, overshot us, we reversed back and shot him down rather easily. Number two, again, it was look out for somebody that you wanted to attack and attack him. Now, our feeling in the Navy fighter community is that our opponents in this particular regime or environment in most cases were not good pilots. They were not trained very thoroughly, they were not overly aggressive, and they did not know how to fly their airplane in the air combat maneuvering arena. They made mistakes flying their airplane that a student in basic training would not make. They were not good or competent combat pilots. However, as we were leaving the area after shooting down two MIGs, we encountered
Droscoll: a MIG-17 meeting us head-on. Now the battle that ensued with this MIG-17 pilot was without doubt the most thorough test of our nerves, our ability, and our aggressiveness. And the ability displayed by this North Vietnamese pilot, was the most thorough, polished, professional and outstanding of any pilot we'd ever had the opportunity to fight against.

We learned, at a later time, that this was their leading ace, Conrad, who had up until that time shot down thirteen American airplanes.

When we engaged this particular MIG aircraft, he started firing his gun as we started passing head-on. We hitched up and made several maneuvers in the vertical plane, each of us trying to pull for the other man's six o'clock position. We, in the F-4, did not have the gun, therefore we were not shooting at him during this time; we were striving for a missile envelope kill. He had the gun and was shooting at us repeatedly throughout these maneuverings. At several different junctures during the maneuverings, we would have to knock it off, so to speak, or fly defensively rather than fly offensively and press the attack.

Starting at the termination of the third maneuver, when we were at a low point coming up and he was at a highpoint, he lost sight of our aircraft, rolled right, rolled left, did not see us, rolled down in an attempt to run away and go home. We reversed on him, followed him down, fired a heat-seeker missile which looked like it may have hit part of his tail. We followed him down...
Driscoll: thinking it was an old decoy truck which the North Koreans used, their MIG pilots used this.

- A tactic to make the enemy, or in this case the Americans or the friendlies, to make the friendlies think that they were shot and that they were going down when in point of fact they would get down and make a low pull-out and come back up. Because we had known that this was a MIG tactic that had been utilized many times in the past, we followed him down and watched his aircraft impact the side of a mountain.

We therefore pulled off, started our climb, out of the area.

We, this time, were coming out by ourselves, we had no wingmen.

The rest of the strike group had exited ten to twelve miles in front of us. As we were climbing out, we were passing through seventeen thousand feet, still looking throughout the sky for MIG related aircraft, since we knew that there were many bandits, i.e., many I mean in excess of fifteen airborne and in the vicinity.

As we looked through the sky, we perhaps, due to our excited high key nature of this entire environment, with aircraft exploding, people in parachutes, men screaming at men to maneuver aircraft in a rather wild flail of modern day jet fighter aviation... Did you bail out?

Driscoll: No, he rode his airplane to the ground.

Nonetheless, as we were leaving the area, we could see the ocean in front of us and knew that we had perhaps thirty miles of travel time until we got to the ocean. Passing through seventeen thousand feet, the enemy launched a surface-to-air missile at us,
which we did not see until it had detonated. What it felt like was someone taking a handful of BBs and throwing them at the side of the airplane. And the flash gave the same sensation that you would feel in the morning when you get up after a rather tiring yet refreshing night of sleep and you turn the light on for the first time—that type of flash. With a handful of BBs being thrown at the side of the airplane. That noise and that flash, that's what I can liken it to.

Our aircraft still continued to fly, and we felt that perhaps although we had sustained a close call—and again, the airplane jounced as if we had flown through an airpocket which, I'm sure, many people have experienced from flying commercially. The aircraft still continued to fly, we continued our climb, and everything appeared normal—for the next fifteen seconds.

Then, however, the nose pitched violently left and, as I looked back over my left shoulder, I noticed that the airplane was on fire and burning. We had several people in our flight who had seen our fireball screaming at us to eject. We, of course, had our radios burned out, and were not able to receive their transmissions, although both pilot and R.I.O. could talk to each other during this environment, this scenario.

We had, always preplanned, that in the event we were to be hit over North Vietnam, we would not eject over hostile enemy territory unless it was a matter of complete life or death. And at this time we felt, although in extremis, we would still stay with our aircraft and continue, hoping to get to the water.
Driscoll: We controlled the nose—for those of an aviation background—with the rudder and we did not maneuver the control stick at all with the aerolon at all because we were losing hydraulic fluid at a very rapid rate. And for those that drive automobiles with power steering when low on hydraulic fluid you notice that the steering wheel growls or is harder to turn. The same with an aircraft. You need hydraulic fluid to move a jet aircraft at those high supersonic speeds. You would never move it, it would be like a stick in a block of cement without hydraulic fluid. Therefore, realizing that any input we made to the flight control would be forcing that much more fluid out of the aircraft, we kept the stick in the neutral position and used only the rudder pedal to control the nose.

We were able to get the aircraft out to a point perhaps a mile and a half on the ocean side of the North Vietnam coast.

Bowling: Roughly, where were you now, say off of Hai Phong, or... Dinh or where?

Driscoll: At this time we were approximately twenty-five miles south of Hai Phong.

At this time we tried to get the nose back up one more time to out, to get a little further away from the coast. However, at this point, when the nose was forty-five degrees nose up, it fell through and we went into an inverted spin, losing complete control of our aircraft. At this time, I was told to eject by Lieutenant Cunningham. And our call
Driscoll: between crews has always been "Willy, eject, eject, eject".

I, of course, heard "Willy, e---" and, boom, I was gone.

Bowling: (laughter)

Driscoll: In the F-4, we have the capability of the man in the rear cockpit being able to eject the man in the front cockpit. And, we'd always planned to do it that way, so that he could fly the airplane right up until the last second and I would worry about ejecting the both of us—Which I did.

I ejected myself, and he ejected with the automatic sequencer that I fired, one second after I ejected. And our first sensation was from an airplane that was frizzling and burning on fire very loud and crackling noise all of a sudden, out in an extremely deafening quiet world. And our separation from our ejection seat was very smooth and our parachute automatically deployed. We were at perhaps eleven thousand feet when this happened.

And we had, at this time, no sensation of falling through the air. It was something like animated suspension, sitting in a chute up there at eleven thousand feet. And now, all of a sudden, taking stock of what had happened in the past fifteen minutes.

The first thing we did was come up on our survival radio and advise the necessary authorities that we had been hit and our approximate position and what we were requesting in the way of rescue services. We were told that rescue services were on the way and within thirty seconds there were two Navy aircraft
Driscoll: that forwarded our position with a "clear to fire" on any hostiles who approached. Now, three North Vietnamese fishing boats and a freighter were coming toward our position. And although it appeared that we would land in the water, we were still rather concerned with the prospect of being captured by these fishing boats and freighter.

We left our beepers on so that the rescue aircraft would know exactly where we were and in which direction to home in on us.

Now, I've been asked repeatedly in news conferences throughout the country what was going on in my mind as I sat in my parachute after shooting down three MiG aircraft, after becoming the first ace of the Vietnam War, the first all-missile ace, the first ace in twenty-two years and then being shot down myself. I was asked the question on numerous occasions, what did I think, what was going through my mind as I sat there in my parachute and looked down at the fishing boats from North Vietnam coming to get me and after all I'd experienced. What was going through my mind, could I please relate this to the press?

My answer to this question was, at that particular time I thought I made an incorrect decision in leaving the army reserves back in Boston.

On a more serious note, when we came down we hit the water uneventfully. Both of us got out of our parachutes. And on the way down we were close enough, perhaps within a half a mile of each other that we were able to give our friendly fighter pilot
Driscoll: wave to each other [el dedo].

Upon hitting the water, again we both got out of our parachutes, deployed our life rafts, got into our life rafts, and again, with the fishing boats, still not realizing that they were dead in the water, both of us checked our pistols to make sure that they were on the ready for any ensuing action that may come.

Since the person conducting this interview is affiliated with the "black-shoe" Navy, I want to relate a story.

A "black-shoe" vessel approached us, but we waved him on—

Driscoll: (Laughter)

Bowling: Now, what do you mean by "black-shoe" Lieutenant?

Driscoll: Actually, I'm only poking fun. On a serious note, we sat in our raft from anywhere from fifteen to eighteen minutes and we saw at that time, two of the most beautiful airplanes you'd ever seen. And they were Marine helicopters.

Now, we in the Navy jet fighter community have had the tendency in the past to snidely snicker at helicopters, but in this particular instance, these were two of the most beautiful airplanes, again, that we had ever seen coming over the horizon.

We were rescued uneventfully, all equipment, and we were— again, thoroughly trained by the Navy that here's what we should do, when in this environment. If plan A does not work, go to alternate plan B, and if this does not work—the point being that
Driscoll: we were thoroughly trained, the equipment worked, the training that we had received in the past was invaluable because it got us by, it enabled us to perform our duties, although in a still extremely hyper-tense situation, to still, calmly and very unemotionally, perform our necessary tasks at hand.

We were rescued and taken to the U. S. S. Okinawa for medical check-up purposes. Both Lieutenant Cunningham and I were declared sound medically and returned to our carrier, U.S.S. Constellation, later that afternoon. We arrived on board a helicopter, to the cheers of the five thousand men on the Carrier Constellation, when our helicopter touched down.

We were taken off the carrier the following morning, and returned to the United States for a hero's welcome as the first two aces of the Southeast Asian Conflict. We toured the country conducting anywhere from five to six interviews, television shows, news tapings, et cetera, per day for the next four to five weeks. Speaking to numerous groups and continuously emphasizing the point that, at that particular time, and even now, we never felt like war heroes. We felt like two young men that were given certain talents in airplanes. We were given certain degrees of luck in being at the right place at the right time, and finally, we were given certain graces by the Good Lord to perform what was a significant event in Naval fighter aviation history.

Nonetheless, as we toured the country, we continually tried to make the point that our experiences were not unique, that many of our peer groups could have performed the same thing if given
Driscoll: the same set of circumstances. We were not, and we felt very strongly, and I repeat this, we were not, in our own opinion, war heroes. The war heroes that we related to were the men who were confined to the prison cells in North Vietnam.

(End Tape 1, Side 2)
As we traveled throughout the country, again, we repeatedly pointed out to the American people who the real heroes of this conflict were, and who the real people of this conflict were in terms of who deserved the credit and the attention and, most importantly, the idea of to be forgotten by the American people. And that was our men, again in my case, friends, fellow aviators, who were sitting in the prison camps of North Vietnam.

Again, I tried to reiterate, based on what I knew, concerning their treatment, which, in almost all cases, was grossly inhumane. I don't think it's necessary to discuss that specifically now, since our men have returned. They have brought to light many of their experiences in these camps, which, again, I think all can see
Driscoll: were, in many cases, grossly inhumane.

Browning: One thing, though, Lieutenant. At the time you were traveling around, we didn't have our prisoners back yet. What were your ideas at that time, because at about the same time as you were traveling around, you had some of these anti-war people traveling around. At that time, what was your feeling?

Driscoll: My feeling hasn't changed any at all, before I went over, while I was there, when I first came back, or now. And that, first of all, certainly I was there, realizing that I could end up a prisoner myself. I was there of my own free will. I could have left anytime, turned my wings in and said, I've had enough, at any time that I wanted to. I won't say that I enjoyed doing what I did, however, it's not my duty to start wars or decide wars, only to win them. And I was there as a matter of professional pride and as a matter of professional spirit and, most importantly, because I believed in my country and I believed that what I was doing was the right thing.

Again, not necessarily, as a deterrent to Communism or as an attempt to exert the Democratic rule on the country of South Vietnam. More specifically, as a feeling on my part that my country knew much more, and were privy to much more of the secret inklings of the exact situation than I was and I as an observer and as a participant could see, on a daily basis, the flagrantly obvious attempts at aggression and not only attempts, but flagrantly obvious and open hostility of one country against another. One country with Soviet support in
Driscoll: terms of equipment and operators and advisors in the field on a twenty-four hour basis. It was completely obvious to me and I never, at any time, had even the remotest doubt number one, why I was there, what I was doing, and what my final purpose was in what I was doing. Again, realizing that at any time, I could have been hit or I could have gone down prior to hitting the water and could have, perhaps, had the same fate as those to whom I have referred.

Hawling: Would you say that your thoughts of professionalism and so forth is indicative of the average or majority or whatever it is of your squadron mates?

Driscoll: I would say, positively. As a matter of fact, I can't think of one man in my squadron or other friends in other squadrons that feel any differently. Some, of course, feel more intently in terms of bombing and killing the Commie Pinks for instance, there is, of course, that faction.

Most, however, feel a certain dedication to what they're doing not in a necessarily flag-waving, "Rah, Rah", apple pie, love Mom, and America type feeling. But more in a feeling of, I would say, educated professional pride. Believing, number one, that they were there for a reason, the reason was obvious to them because they saw it every day, flying over the badman's country, or the enemy's country, and number two, they would do their level best to try and help in their own small way, in an attempt to curb the hostilities of the enemy and of the enemy's utilization of Soviet related or Chinese related equipment.
Driscoll: This, I would say, was the feeling. Again, I call it not a primitive, 'rah-rah', we love the country, but more of an educated, highly developed, keen awareness of why we were there.

We talked, on numerous occasions, of pros and cons of the war and our areas of disagreement between aviators themselves when talking about the war related more specifically with the manner in which it was being fought as opposed to why we were there in the first place. We never once doubted that, and when we say our manner of the way it was fought, we stood up and literally cheered the mining of the harbor in North Vietnam. We certainly welcomed the opportunity to go into the heartland of North Vietnam, into the strategic military nerve center in terms of its airfields, its oilfields, its refineries, its electrical plants, and to say, once and for all, okay, you wanted war, you wanted aggression, we're going to give you some war, we're going to give you some aggression. And when we went in, I'm firmly convinced, with the B-52s in late December 1972, we literally broke the will and broke the back of that country to sustain any type of a war effort.

And thus, like all Soviet related powers, we showed them power, we showed them we came to work, we were not here to talk, we were not here to second-guess, we were here to fight, because that's all they knew. We gave them a power display, and a power play. We literally brought them to their knees, we totally crippled their economy, their way of life, their war machine; hence, the peace negotiations.
Driscoll: Up until that time, up until we had done that, because
the Communist mind knows nothing besides power, up until we'd
done that, we'd gotten nothing besides lies, propaganda, and
idle, meaningless promises—which we are all aware of from
reading the papers on a daily basis. And we can just remember
how long those peace talks dragged on; and then when the B-52s
got to work, it was a matter of weeks before an agreement was
reached.

Bowling: As we know now, and as you know, Lieutenant Driscoll, one
Navy fighter squadron, or I guess it was an attack squadron,
leader did take an anti-war stance, in fact, has admitted since
his return that he collaborated and willingly so. Do you know
the gentleman that I'm speaking about?

Driscoll: No, I don't. I think I'm familiar with the case. I've
read about it in the newspapers.

Bowling: You don't know the gentleman himself, but you know about the
case.

Driscoll: Yes, I do.

Bowling: And you would say that that's an aberration, that's the
only one you ever knew about.

Driscoll: Well, I haven't had an opportunity to talk to all the
prisoners of war that have returned. I have talked to a
great number, since I'm analyzing, in my line of work right
now, why some of these people were shot down, why the Soviet
associated weapons worked against some of our people. I
Driscoll: I have had the opportunity to talk with numerous Air Force and Navy pilots who spent anywhere from seven to five years in the prison camps. And I have not had the opportunity to talk to one man who did not believe in his country, or who would not be willing to go back and do what he did in the past as a flier. Who would not be willing to go back and do that again.

Bowling: And how many such gentlemen have you interviewed? Roughly?

Driscoll: Oh, it's difficult to say the exact number, I'd say fifty to sixty, somewhere in that neighborhood.

Bowling: Out of fifty to sixty, not one took an opposite view from what you've described.

Driscoll: Yes, that's correct.

Bowling: One last thing, Lieutenant, if you would please for the record. Could you enumerate the, if you wish, your combat decorations.

Driscoll: Yes, if I'm not mistaken I presently, of course, was nominated for the Medal of Honor, when I returned, and it's still under nomination, although I certainly think it's time now that we would have been awarded the medal if we were going to get a "thumbs up" on it. But that is it's present status. I wear eleven air medals, one Navy cross, two Silver Stars, Purple Heart, National Defense Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, South Vietnamese Medal of Honor, and I'm sure I'm leaving out several, but those are
Driscoll: the ones I remember.

Bowling: You're leaving out the area ones. But your personal citations.

(Tape off and then on)

Browning: Thank you very much, Lieutenant Driscoll, for your story and the time you have taken to record it for history.

Thank you very much.

(End of Tape 2, Side 1)