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Everyday Lives, Everyday Values Interview with Jerry Borrowman, co-author of *Beyond the Call of Duty: The Story of an American Hero in Vietnam*.

Program originally aired on KSL Radio on April 25, 2004.

Host: Doug Wright

Doug: We'd like to welcome you to our program today. We're going to discuss a new book that is out from Shadow Mountain. This is **Beyond the Call of Duty: The Story of an American Hero in Vietnam**, Colonel Bernard Fisher, USAF Retired, author, along with Jerry Borrowman. Jerry, we thank you for joining us. We wish the colonel could have been here, but we're certainly grateful you could join us today.

Jerry: *Thank you, Doug.*

Doug: Let's talk about the genesis of this book. We were discussing the Vietnam Era because both you and I grew up during that era. Was that part of the motivation for wanting to write and work on this book with the colonel?

Jerry: *You know, it's interesting, I've previously written two books in the World War II Era, and it's been my natural area of interest. And it finally dawned on me that I needed to write a book out of our time and to deal with some of the issues that people faced who lived through Vietnam. And so I actually sort of went looking for this story because it was an era that I wanted to understand better.*

Doug: The writing history for you. You've written extensively for the financial services industry in which you work; you've also written for the Ensign; you've co-authored three other previous biographies. How did all this start for you?

Jerry: *Years ago I wrote an article that appeared in the Church News. It was about Alan Larson, who at the time was Speaker of the House of Representatives in Idaho. And I don't want this to sound too vain, but when I saw my name on the by-line it was almost a magical moment as I realized the things that I thought and the people that I thought were worth speaking about could have their story told very wide.*

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Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *A number of years later I told the story of my grandmother who'd turned a hundred years old. She immigrated to America from Denmark, and it was exciting for all the excitement that brought to the family and the people who knew her as well as the inspiration it provided others because she'd led a very good life. So I like telling stories of people who've had interesting and meaningful lives.*

Doug: Did this writing gift appear at any early spots in your life? Did you have a teacher who recognized it?

Jerry: *You know, I actually credit Carlos Asay. He was my mission president when I was in Texas, and he would write these marvelous newsletters. And I started corresponding, of course, as you do automatically. And he's the one that came back and says, "You know, you have a real gift for writing." And that sort of was very motivational to me. Then I took a class in college--I graduated from Idaho State in Pocatello--one of the professors asked us to keep a reading journal of things that we'd studied. Most kids would turn in about ten pages worth of stuff.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *I turned in about sixty, and the teacher said, "You know, this is great. It's a lot."*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *Because he had to read through all of it. But he encouraged that habit as well.*

Doug: We were talking off the air prior to our interview a little bit about how you write. I'm always amazed at those who still have their day job.

Jerry: *Yes.*

Doug: As you do in the financial industry. But how in the world and where in the world do you find the time to write?

Jerry: *Yeah, I really try to carve out time. For example, when I'm traveling and I quite frequently am on an airplane, great time to take an extra battery with a notebook computer to get the words down. I will set aside time--a lot of writing is effective planning. You first of all learn the story; you organize the story. Generally when I write a book I'll start out and interview the person who I'm co-authoring with; I'll come up with what I think will be the chapter titles; and then you begin to fill in the questions that you need to get from the other person to write it.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And once you have the structure in place the writing actually happens pretty fast, because now that's in your mind and it just starts to come out on the paper.*

Doug: It happens pretty fast for those who have the gift.

Jerry: *Oh, I suppose.*

Doug: For some of us it is agony.

Jerry: *You know, one of the things that I've always thought--probably the most influential class I ever took was ninth-grade typing.*

Doug: Yeah. Oh, boy.

Jerry: *Because I took one year of typing, and I type about a hundred and ten words a minute.*

Doug: Wow.

Jerry: *So I can type just about as fast as I can think, maybe a little faster.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And so that's really been a great thing for me to be able to put those thoughts down pretty quickly.*

Doug: That's so interesting that you would say that, because even though I do not have the expertise you have in typing--I type no where near that fast--but heaven bless my ninth-grade type teacher.

Jerry: *Yes.*

Doug: What a difference that's made in my life. And who ever thought that we'd be living on a keyboard. I mean, at the time it was just, "You need to know how to type." Now you need to know how to type to live.

Jerry: *To get airplane tickets, to correspond with the person who's in the cubical next to you.*

Doug: Everything. Exactly. To get your church assignments. Whatever it is, you have to be able to type. I wanted to talk for just a moment about some of the previous books. And we quickly just mentioned those. There's *Three Against Hitler* and then also *A Distant Prayer*. Give us a little background on those books.

Jerry: *Three Against Hitler is a firsthand account of Rudi Wobbe. Rudi was best friends with a young man by the name of Helmuth Huebener, and they grew up in a branch of the LDS Church in Hamburg, Germany with a man by the name of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. Karl-Heinz is still alive. These three boys grew up with this American influence in their life, and so they had a different perspective on what was happening as Hitler came to power in Germany and as he began to assert authority through the Nazi party. Helmuth has been judged a genius in his abilities to think, so as a teenager he began to feel that what he was learning from the German news was incorrect. At any rate, he started a resistance effort. Rudi and Karl-Heinz supported him in that passing out pamphlets that were anti-Nazi in nature.*

Doug: Boy, that took guts, didn't it?

Jerry: *Well, it took a lot of courage.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And it brought them head to head with the Gestapo where there was no way but that they could lose. And so Rudi talks about this. It's a very challenging book in the sense that many people who were there say, "We should be subject to kings, rulers, and magistrates." These boys took a different tact and said, "We should stand up for what we know to be the truth." And that created a lot of, you know, that created controversy in their life.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *At any rate, Rudi was this passionate, fiery speaker who had this great love of freedom, and we tried to capture that in the book.*

Doug: And what about *A Distant Prayer*?

Jerry: *Very different story. Joe Banks grew up in Salt Lake City, and his younger brother is Ben Banks, some people may know Elder Banks. Joe was drafted. He wanted to go on a mission; he wasn't able to do that because the war started. He served as an engineer on a B-17 Bomber, which has a crew of ten. In the course of the time he was in the service, he served forty-nine combat missions. And forty-nine times over hostile enemy fire is almost miraculous. And the forty-ninth mission his aircraft was disabled by bombs dropped from the lead aircraft that was American, and Joe became a prisoner of war behind German lines. The story of his imprisonment and then a forced march across Germany is amazing. The thing that happened in Joe's life that has touched so many readers is that at various times he can ascribe miracles that intervened in his behalf to preserve him at sort of the last moment.*

Doug: Right.

Jerry: *And so people have found that very, very inspiring.*

Doug: When we come back from this brief break I'm very interested to discuss this brand new book and also have you introduce us to Colonel Bernard Fisher, who is USAF Retired. **Beyond the Call of Duty: The Story of an American Hero in Vietnam** is the title of the book we are discussing. We'll be right back on Everyday Lives, Everyday Values.

Doug: We're back on Everyday Lives, Everyday Values. Tell us about Colonel Bernard Fisher. You co-wrote this book with him.

Jerry: *Bernie Fisher's one of the most amazing people I've ever met in my life. He grew up in Kaysville, Utah just near Hill Field. He always wanted to be a pilot. He got to actually fly in an airplane at age thirteen and then he didn't get to again until the end of World War II, but he had this burning desire to--he did everything fast.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *Bernie drives cars fast, he played sports fast. He's kind of a short individual, very slight build, and he just loves airplanes.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And so he fulfilled his dream. One of the things we talked about in the book is what it's like to become an Air Force pilot, how you earn the right to do that, all of the different ways you can be washed out of those instructions, so to qualify is quite an accomplishment. In Vietnam, he earned the Congressional Medal of Honor, actually the first person to receive the Air Force version of the Medal of Honor. And one of only sixty out of two million people who served in Vietnam who earned that medal.*

Doug: Wow.

Jerry: *And, of course, often it's awarded posthumously.*

Doug: Yes.

Jerry: *Because a person dies in the attempt that saves the other individual's life.*

Doug: It is amazing, as I look at his distinctions here. And, you know, we've talked about the Congressional Medal of Honor, but Distinguished Flying Cross, Silver Star, I mean, highly decorated.

Jerry: *He won every award, literally, that you could win because of his, well not just courage. He's not just, he's not a person who has bravado. He doesn't take foolish risks, but when it comes down to supporting other people, he was willing to put his own life on the line for them.*

Doug: Yeah. I love the pictures in this book, too. I have to tell you, for me that really adds a lot. And I love the one at the opening where he's just sitting there putting on his helmet, and boy, you know, he looks like he's ready to go to work.

Jerry: *You know, just an interesting story, we recently had a book signing downtown, and at lunch we were sitting there with some of our books. And a waitress came up and said, "So tell me the story of this book." We said, "Well, this is Colonel Fisher's story." A few minutes later she comes back, the manager of the Tiffin Room, and says, "My dad flew the SR-71 Black Hawk on the world speed record between New York and London. And I think he'd be very interested in your story." Well Bernie, you know, immediately responds and starts telling us stories about how in an F-104 Star Fighter they'd actually do trial runs of the Black Hawk.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And they actually got some kilts.*

Doug: Oh, wow.

Jerry: *Now that's about impossible when you consider the altitude they can fly at and the speed.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *And yet Bernie was able to pull that off. To just sort of finish that story, she went down, got a copy of the book, called her dad. He reminded her that he'd had lunch with Bernie Fisher in the White House right after he'd set that record.*

Doug: Oh for heaven's sake.

Jerry: *That's the kind of stories I hear as I travel around. Everybody in the United States Air Force knows Bernie Fisher.*

Doug: It's interesting, the prelude to this book is titled, "The White House." Let's talk about that.

Jerry: *Well, if you can imagine what it's like to meet Lindon Johnson, this dynamic, six foot six man, and he was to award it. So as we're trying to think of how to start the book in a way that is compelling, my wife said, "Jerry, what's the most dramatic moment in the book aside from the rescue? You don't want to put that out of context."*

Doug: Right.

Jerry: *I said, "Well I think it'd be meeting Lindon Johnson."*

Doug: Oh, yeah.

Jerry: *And so that's where we start the story, with him in the White House. He's got five little boys; one of them falls asleep on the couch. The president comes up, puts him in his lap, talks to him. And one of the things that Bernie's told many times as he's talked to other people is just as they were ready to go in and meet the press corps and see his mom and all of this, Lindon Johnson thumped him in the middle of the chest and about took his breath away because it was so unexpected.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *He says, "You ready to go?" And he goes, "Yeah, I'm ready." And away they go. And, you know, that had to be the most exciting moment in a person's lifetime.*

Doug: Yeah, I have this image of LBJ--it's a famous picture--where he is just looming over the person that he's talking to.

Jerry: *Well, and if you figure Bernie's about five foot eight.*

Doug: Right. So all of a sudden I'm putting this into perspective. That must have been quite a moment. Obviously we're not going to have time to get into every aspect of the book. After all, that's why we wanted to talk about the book so people will be interested and they'll go out and they'll take a look at it for themselves. But you've already thrown out a couple of

interesting tidbits, you know, the Vietnam Era, the rescue, and so on. Just give us a little sketch of what we're going to find in the book that you have authored with the colonel.

Jerry: *Bernie's story about the rescue mission that won him the Medal of Honor was told in the Reader's Digest, the Saturday Evening Post, he appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, he met President David O. McKay. This was big news in the late 1960s, and that story's been told many, many times. What hasn't been told is sort of the career biography. How did he get into the service? What was it that prepared him so at that moment when nobody else would have thought to go down and rescue this downed aviator, Bernie did?*

Doug: Mm-hmm.

Jerry: *And so we try to set the stage of how he got into the service, what it was like to learn to fly an aircraft. There's this thrilling story--to me probably the favorite part of the book--where he flies an F-104 Star Fighter two times the speed of sound. Bernie did something that I don't think anyone else has ever done: he's flown two dead stick missions in an F-104. A dead stick means you lose your engine and you bring the aircraft down and land it.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *It has a very small wingspan and so, consequently, you have almost no glide when it goes down. Bernie did it twice, once from fifteen thousand feet and once from forty-five thousand feet up. A quick story that I think your listeners will appreciate. In order to make the second landing he takes the plane as high as he can get it, loses the engine. The minute he loses the engine all of the cabin heating goes away and the windows frost up. He's got to make three three-hundred-and-sixty degree spirals to be in position to land. And so he literally reaches in his pocket, pulls out a credit card, and scrapes the window so that he can see where he's at in relation to the landing. And he's able to pull this thing with manual controls. Just an amazing pilot.*

Doug: As you're telling me these stories I'm trying to visualize them. And what keeps popping in my mind are some of the images I have of pilots the likes of Chuck Yeager and so on who are doing just spectacular things. We're talking about a majorly world-class pilot here.

Jerry: *Bernie came down to, he was considered for the Thunderbirds, which is the U.S. Air Force equivalent of the Blue Angels.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *It was down to him and one other fellow to be on that team. So this is precision flying at high speed. Just an amazing guy.*

Doug: Whoa. Because, and we were talking about this, again, prior to going on the air, for both of us, the Vietnam War. I grew up with the Vietnam War. From the time that my third grade teacher was teaching me about the cabinet of John F. Kennedy--and we knew them all, by the way.

We knew them all at the time; we had a magnificent teacher. And we were studying this and little snippets of Vietnam, little tidbits of where we were going, sending advisors to, you know, consultants and so on. Even at that age I was aware of that. And then when I was old enough where I could have gone to Vietnam, it was just the hottest topic in the nation at that time. And then right up until the very end of the Nixon administration, Vietnam was still the issue. We grew up with this. As the colonel and as you look back on this era and you write this book, thoughts about that. How does he react now to the Vietnam Era and his role in it?

Jerry: *You know, that's one of the things that was most interesting to me as I interviewed Bernie for the book. Bernie was a career professional military person.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *It was not his decision to question whether or not we ought to be there. And throughout this is his sense of dedication to the country. He goes where the commander-and-chief tells him to go. He served without hesitation. And to this day he says, "You know, I look back. I understand the controversy. I understand why people will now second-guess the war. But that wasn't my role. You can't run a military if you don't have people who are loyal."*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *The other thing that came out of the interview that was impressive to me, having seen some of the images of, you know, drug use and the different problems, he said, "I was there with professional pilots. These were college educated men, these were extremely accomplished individuals." He said, "There was none of that."*

Doug: Yeah. Colonel Hal Moore, I had the chance to interview him too not all that long ago. He was here in Salt Lake for a special event at the Chamber of Commerce. And, boy, he took exception to that image, too. He is so enraged by many images that are left in the movies. And of course a movie was made, you know, "We Were Soldiers," with Mel Gibson playing Colonel Moore. And he had that same thing. He said, "You know, that may have happened here and there, but the impression that is left with the American people is that it was everywhere and widespread."

Jerry: *And Bernie just plain rejects that.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *He said, "I was serving with some of the finest, most intelligent men." You know, in the rescue mission there were three supporting aircraft, men who put their lives on the line to support Bernie as he did this. They flew in--and without getting too much into it--what happened in the rescue mission is an aircraft went down. The runway was too short for any fixed-wing aircraft to land. Normally you call in a helicopter because a helicopter has the ability to defend itself while rescuing someone. You know, the people can sit in the doorway and fire.*

Doug: Right.

Jerry: *A fixed-wing aircraft, to land, is completely exposed so they just never do a rescue. Well that's what Bernie did.*

Doug: Yeah.

Jerry: *He landed what was called an A1-CE Sky Raider with wind behind him on a runway that was a thousand feet short. And he sat there as a sitting duck while he was able to pull off this amazing rescue mission. Three of his supporting people started flying strafing runs to try to protect him while he was on the ground. They were in what's called Winchester. They ran out of ammunition. And so one guy says, "I don't know what we can do." And the lead aircraft, John Lucas, I think, said, "The Viet Cong don't realize that we're out of ammunition, and they flew past us with no defense themselves just to keep their heads down."*

Doug: Amazing.

Jerry: *And so you have men who won the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross. Bernie won the Medal of Honor to bring to pass this rescue of one human being.*

Doug: What a wonderful story, and included in **Beyond the Call of Duty: The Story of an American Hero in Vietnam**. Jerry, I thank you so much for joining us. And I'm sure our listeners are very, very anxious to pick up the book. It is published by Shadow Mountain. I hope that you'll give Colonel Fisher our very best when you see him. What an amazing story, and I appreciate you sharing it with us.

Jerry: *I will. Thank you.*

Doug: **Beyond the Call of Duty** is the title of the book published by Shadow Mountain and, again, authored by Colonel Bernard Fisher and also Jerry Borrowman, our guest today on Everyday Lives, Everyday Values.

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