**Thomas Kirk** (00:01): As an American raised in Virginia, I was taught from my mom and dad to appreciate this country or what it stands for, and most of all the freedom and the rights to do almost anything we were big enough to do. That went with me all the way through high school and to college. In college, I went to Virginia Military Institute and it was pretty rigorous discipline training. When I came out of the institute, I went right into the Air Force, and I had 17 wonderful years living all over the country, flying into 13 different countries, and the opportunities to look at the way the people lived, the lifestyle, the governments, literally all of Europe and most of the Far East. But, during the Vietnam War in October in 1967, I was shot down, taken prisoner of war, and I was five and a half years in a cell.

(01:07): With 14 months I was with three other guy, four of us in the same cell, then I had an altercation with the guards and I ended up two years in solitary confinement in a cell, one-third of this room we're in, with absolutely nothing to do but sit there and stare at the four walls for two years. During that period of time, especially the hunger, I lost about 90 pounds, and the hunger and the periodic torture that we went through, beatings and so forth, you begin to really become introspective and look into your life. And I said, "My God, what we had in there, what we have in this country ..." And I remember so vividly, the first moment of torture in the prison camp when I was bound up, I said to myself, people don't do this to other human beings, and that was my mind was telling me, how can this be? How can this happen to me?

(02:08): We went by, and living in unremitting pain is the worst thing in the world, and that sticks with me today, 47 years later. All of this comes together, the whole prison experience comes together, to manifest itself as I'm the luckiest man and the most blessed man in the world to have come from a good family, to have had a good education, be in the service, live through two wars and prison camp five and a half years, and come home healthy, and now at 91 years old, really blessed with love for this country and appreciation for all of our freedoms. I'm so very much disturbed right now that in our colleges and universities, our young people are not really convinced that this country is as good as I know it is, and that they don't have the opportunities that they do.

(03:10): I would not miss an opportunity to vote for anybody, whether it's local or government or whatever. I make a lot of talks. I made 165 talks in the last few years to churches, schools, companies, and so forth. Most of my talks are a little bit about my experiences, which caused me to feel so strongly about this country and to try to get people to understand and appreciate our veterans. The fact that it's so important to me, that service to your country, and I strongly believe that we should reintroduce the draft. I don't care if you go in the military or just working for your country or your state or whatever, I believe service to this country is mandatory, should be mandatory, and that everyone should be more involved in understanding their responsibility and obligation as a citizen to try to do well, to try to improve our country, to try to find better people always to govern us at every level of the land. I would do anything. I'd get up on my death bed and go to put my vote in because I believe everybody's vote's important, and I think every American should vote.