

2/9/05

OBITUARIES

'Hanoi Hilton' POW Ron Bliss, 61

■ The 2000 film *Return with Honor* included his story

By RACHEL GRAVES
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Ron Bliss, a decorated Vietnam War fighter pilot who spent 6½ years in the "Hanoi Hilton" POW camp, died Tuesday after a long battle with cancer. He was 61.

Bliss flew 35 missions over Vietnam before being shot down Sept. 4, 1966. He was making a low-level bombing run when he felt a thump "like a ball-peen hammer hitting the bottom of a piano bench," he said in a 1999 interview. Bliss ejected from his plane and woke up on a road, his head smashed open by the rear of the ejection seat. He was captured and taken to the infamous

prison camp, where he was tortured for years.

Bliss' story, along with that of 19 other U.S. POWs from the Vietnam War, was told in the 2000 documentary *Return with Honor*.

Bliss was released in March 1973 and returned to his wife, Charlene, and their first son, Erik. The Blisses, married for a 39 years, had a second son, Jason, after the war.

Bliss returned to active duty as a flight instructor at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, then earned a law degree at Baylor University in 1976. He joined the law firm Fulbright & Jaworski the same year.

Born in Buckeye, Ariz., Bliss grew up in Cheyenne, Wyo., and



BLISS

graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1964. He served as an Air Force pilot for nine years.

Bliss was awarded a host of medals for his military service, including two Silver Stars for Valor, a Distinguished Flying Cross, two Purple Hearts and a POW Medal. He was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame.

Friends and family remembered Bliss on Tuesday as loyal, courageous and inspiring.

"He never worried about cancer," Jason Bliss said. "He just really went out and lived as though nothing was wrong."

He credited that positive attitude with keeping his father alive twice as long as expected. Doctors had given him three years to live in 1998.

In addition to his wife, sons and grandchildren, Bliss is survived by his mother, Jesse Harrington, and sister, Vicki Nelson.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. Friday at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 3471 Westheimer.

In lieu of flowers, contributions should be made to the Cancer Survivors Fund, P.O. Box 972, Missouri City, TX, 77459.

rachel.graves@chron.com

Deaths elsewhere

Lazar Berman, Russian classical pianist, internationally acclaimed for his technical prowess and the energy of his performances, Feb. 6, of a heart attack, in Florence, Italy. He was 74.

Robert W. Brannum, an All-American at Kentucky who played four seasons with the Boston Celtics, Feb. 5, of pancreatic cancer, in Boston. He was 78.