

# Neil F. Blake

## F-105 History

---

**13-Feb-67**

230

The eighth F-105 RTU Class 67FR graduated at McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 22 Sep 66 with 15 pilots and consisted of 1 Lt Col, 4 Maj's, 7 Capt's, and 3 1Lts.

They named themselves "The Untouchables".

The class deployed 16 F-105s for conventional weapons delivery training to George AFB CA between 13 Jan - 3 Feb 67 with the 560 TFS. The squadron commander was Lt Col Louis D. Braun, Jr. One of the students, Maj Francis P. Walsh, was the 100th pilot to enter the RTU program since it started in Jan 66. Student Lt Col Harry W. Schurr was awarded the Top Gun and Outstanding Pilot plaques.

The graduates were:

|                                |                                      |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Lt Col Harry W. Schurr         | Capt Robert D. Reese                 |
| Maj Robert T. Cavanaugh        | Capt William J. Schaff               |
| Maj Ward Kent Dodge            | Capt Francis T. Torikai              |
| Maj Benjamin M. Pollard        | Capt Konrad Wigand "Konnie" Trautman |
| Maj Francis P. "Frenchy" Walsh | 1Lt John William Bischoff            |
| Capt Aquilla Friend Britt      | 1Lt Neil F. Blake                    |
| Capt Douglas G. Glime          | 1Lt John W. Ronemus                  |
| Capt Frank R. Jenkins          |                                      |

Three of the pilots received Wild Weasel training at Nellis AFB, NV before reporting to South East Asia. They were Lt Col Schurr assigned to the 469 TFS, and Maj Cavanaugh and Capt Schaff who were both assigned to the 357 TFS.

Born in France, "Maj Frank P. 'Frenchy' Walsh ... saw his home in France destroyed three times during World War II bombing raids." (Sawdee Flyer, Feb 23, 1968)

Unfortunately, these guys were hardly "untouchable". Within 8 months of graduation, five of the 15 graduates were lost. Two were killed in SEA and three others become POWs, one of whom died in prison.

*23 TFW History, Jul - Dec 66, USAF microfilm MO554.*

**22-May-67**

3814

By 22 May 1967, eleven more Ryan's Raiders pilots had arrived at Korat from training at Yokota. These were the third set of crews for the Ryan's Raiders flying F-105Fs. The men, all pilots, were assigned to the 34 TFS.

This group was the last of the original pilot/pilot crews assigned to the Ryan's Raider program. Don Henry, one of the front seat pilots who had arrived from Kadena on 4 May 1967, recalled that these crews "... traveled by various modes of transport (military cargo to Korat or commercial to Bangkok etc.) and arrived on various days." (Don Henry, E-mail, 28 March 2005.)

The pilots were:

Maj Kenneth D. Oliver  
Maj James B. Register  
Maj Harold D. Wilson  
Maj James R. Bassett

Capt Tom T. Walker, graduated from McConnell's RTU Class 67ER on 6 January 1967.

Five other pilots graduated from F-105 RTU Class 67FR on 13 February 1967. They were:  
Maj Francis "Frank" P. Walsh

# Neil F. Blake

## F-105 History

---

Capt Konrad W. Trautman  
Maj Robert D. Reese  
Capt Douglas G. Glime  
Capt Neil F. Blake

Don Henry recalled, "... during May and June, there were more backseaters than frontseaters and crew pairings were not always the way we flew each mission. (Don Henry, E-mail, 28 March 2005.)

Maj Oliver was teamed with Maj Walsh. "I was very fortunate to have Major Frank Walsh as my backseater. In addition to being a pilot he was a former SAC Navigator/Radar Specialist and we really made a good team. Frank and I flew about 52 missions over North Vietnam before we ever saw it in the daytime. We had about 65 missions when he was moved to the F-105D day mission. From there on, I flew with a number of different backseaters and 'graduated' to flying Wild Weasel support missions for the B-52 'Arc light' strikes in the southern part of North Vietnam." (Frank Oliver letter to Rick Versteeg, dated 9/11/98.)

The crews who arrived in April and May, "... flew a total of 98 missions in the high risk Route Packages 5 and 6A during the next 80 days. They are credited with the first night, low-level, single ship attacks on targets such as the Thai Nguyen steel mill, Kep airfield, Yen Bai railroad yard, and the Bac Kan trans-shipment point."

*388 TFW history, Apr Dec 67, Vol II, 13 TFS history, 1 Apr - 31 July, microfilm NO584, frames 0044 - 0045 & "A Special Report on 'Ryan's Raiders', by Maj Albert L. Michael for Project Corona Harvest, Jan 1970, pg 6.*

### 29-May-67

5143

The 34 TFS Ryan's Raider crew of Capt Tom T. Walker and Capt Neil F. Blake flew a night North Scope mission in F-105F 63-8353 with call sign "Moonstone". Using the Toss Bomb Computer in the BTIP mode and flying at 3500 feet, they dropped six 750-pound bombs on target 1496, the Hou Hong Ferry Complex. "Calibration successful. Refueled as briefed. Flew route to IP at 5000 feet AGL. In area, descended to 1000 AGL from IP to target. Excellent radar freeze point on target and TBC BTIP bomb release. ... Bombs were seen to impact along north bank in target area. Unable to observe range from target due to darkness."

*388 TFW TWX 300143Z May 67 to 7 AF in PACAF DO Read File for 29 - 31 May 67, AFHRA Call # K717.312, IRIS # 00518475.*

### 01-Jun-67

4107

Lt Col James E. McNerney, Jr. replaced Lt Col Gerald F. "Jerry" Fitzgerald as commander of the 13 TFS. Lt Col Fitzgerald had just completed 100 missions over North Vietnam as well as 13 missions over Laos. On this same date, the Ryan's Raider crews in the 34 TFS transferred to the 13 TFS.

Lt Col McNerney, along with his EWO Capt Fred A. Shannon, had reported in to the squadron in March 1967 after they both had completed Wild Weasel Class 67WWIII-8 at Nellis. Lt Col McNerney was the squadron's Wild Weasel Operations Officer. He continued transitioning the Wild Weasel crews into the Ryan's Raider operation and releasing the Ryan's Raider back-seat pilots into the strike force as F-105D pilots.

Most Ryan's Raider back seat pilots transferred as strike pilots to other 388 TFW squadrons. For example, Capt David L. Burney and Capt Aquilla F. Britt transferred from the 34 TFS to the 469 TFS. Maj Francis "Frank" P. Walsh a rear seat pilot transferred to the strike mission in the 13th.

However, pilots Maj James B. Register and Maj Kenneth D. Oliver remained with the Ryan's Raider Commando Nail mission when they transferred to the 13 TFS and flew together. The Ryan's Raider crews of Capt George A. Bogert, and Capt Donald S. Aunapu, Capt Tom T. Walker and Capt Neil F. Blake also transferred to the 13 TFS as did the crew of Maj James R. Bassett and Capt Konrad W. Trautman.

# Neil F. Blake

## F-105 History

---

*388 TFW history, Apr - Dec 67, USAF microfilm NO 583, frame 1494 & Jim McInerney, e-mail 1 Nov 2004 & Nancy Fitzgerald 5 Nov 85 letter to Bauke Jan Douma.*

**31-Aug-67**

3816

As of 31 August 1967, the 13 TFS possessed one F-105D and 20 F-105Fs to perform their three separate operations. "The day Strike pilots visually attack all assigned targets. The Wild Weasel crews destroy enemy defenses i.e., surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft artillery. The 13th [Ryan's Raiders] operate singly against point-targets at night or in weather."

"Late in August several of the initial crew members assigned to the Raiders were released to the day strike force. This was brought about by the imminent arrival of specially trained Wild Weasel crews from Nellis AFB. These crew members will remain in the 13 TFS and will still be available for Raider operations should the need arise." The six Ryan's Raider pilots transferred to strike missions were:

Maj James B. Register  
Maj Francis P. Walsh  
Maj Harold D. Wilson  
Capt Thomas T. Walker  
Capt Neil F. Blake  
Capt Calvin H. Markwood.

By the time he transferred to the strike force, Maj Walsh had flown 41 night, low-level Ryan's Raider missions. (Sawadee Flyer, Friday 23 Feb 1968)

Thirteen pilots departed the 13 TFS after completing 100 missions in August 1967. They were:

Maj William E. Underwood departed 3 August.  
Capt Christopher D. Dascalos departed 3 August.  
Maj Russell A. Starkman departed 3 August.  
Capt William M. Milstead departed 3 August.  
Capt Donald M. Majors departed 4 August.  
Maj Charles E. Van Driel departed 4 August.  
Maj David H. Coats departed 5 August.  
Maj William T. "Ted" Twinting departed 5 August.  
Maj John R. Des Jardins departed 7 August.  
Maj Robert J. Lines departed 8 August.  
Maj George V. Wish departed 22 August with 1003.6 hours in the F-105.  
Maj Anthony Gardecki departed 26 August.  
Maj Edwin F. Malone departed 26 August.

Capt Rowland F. "Frank" Smith, Jr. and EWO 1Lt David H. Williams and Maj James H. Mirehouse and EWO Capt Albert L. "Mike" Michael, were credited with destroying SAM sites in August 1967.

*388 TFW history, Apr - Dec 67, Vol II, 13 TFS history, 1 Apr - 31 July, microfilm NO584, frames 0052 -0056.*

**01-Oct-67      18-Oct-67**

847

Under PACAF Movement Order 35, dated 20 September 1967, the 13 TFS designation was transferred from the 388 TFW, Korat RTAFB, Thailand, to an F-4 squadron at Udorn RTAFB, Thailand. The departure of the 13 TFS left the 388 TFW with the 34 TFS, 469 TFS, and 44 TFS. The reduction to three squadrons was a result of combat losses of the F-105.

Under 388 CSG special order AB-3874, sixty officers were transferred from the 13 TFS to the 44 TFS. On 1 October 1967, personnel and F-105F aircraft of the 13 TFS began being absorbed into the 44 TFS, which had arrived at Korat from Kadena on 25 April 1967. The 44 TFS distributed their twenty-one F-105Ds to the 34 TFS and 469 TFS and picked up the Wild Weasel and Ryan's Raider missions from the 13 TFS. The changeover was completed on 18 October 1967.

## Neil F. Blake

### F-105 History

---

The 388 TFW commander, Col Edward B. Burdett, led the change of command ceremony. Lt Col James E. McInerney, Jr., who had been commander of the 13 TFS, replaced Lt Col Fred A. Treyz as commander of the 44 TFS.

Korat's base newspaper, "The Sawadee Flyer", reported the event but got its facts wrong. "It was noted that the retiring 13 TFS, which came to Korat in June 1965 [wrong year. It was June 1966] from Kadena AFB, Okinawa, had been an offspring of the 44th. A cycle is now completed: from the 44 TFS in March 1965, [1966] then the 13 TFS for over two [one] years and back again to the 44 TFS in September 1967".

One of the 13 TFS Wild Weasel crews transferring to the 44 TFS was Capt Robert E. Dorrrough and his EWO Maj Clarence S. Summers. Another crew, this one assigned to night raider missions, was Maj Kenneth D. Oliver and Maj James B. Register. Capt Norman E. Powell was a Wild Weasel pilot who transferred to the 44 TFS.

Capt Calvin H. Markwood and Capt Neil F. Blake, former Ryan's Raider pilots, transferred to the 44 TFS.

About this time, Maj Robert W. Barnett transferred from the 44 TFS to the 469 TFS. Maj Eugene L. Main transferred from the 13 TFS to the 469 TFS.

While at Korat, Lt Col Treyz flew 107 combat missions in F-105s. He was next assigned to the USAF IG at Norton AFB, CA. (USAF bio Brigadier General Fred A. Treyz)

Maj Donald S. Aunapu transferred from the 469 TFS to the 44 TFS.

Wild Weasel pilot Capt Rowland F. "Frank" Smith, Jr. transferred from the 13 TFS to the 44 TFS as did Maj James H. Mirehouse.

*Sawadee Flyer, Friday, October 13, 1967 388 TFW history, 1 Oct - 31 Dec 67, USAF microfilms NO584, frame 0031 and NO583 frame 1721.*

#### 19-Nov-67

4840

Maj Spence M. "Sam" Armstrong from the 34 TFS flew his 23rd mission into North Vietnam. He was "Goose 1" that took off at 0605. His mission lasted 1 hour 55 minutes. His flight lineup was:

- #1 - Maj Armstrong flying F-105D 60-0458
- #2 - Capt Neil F. Blake, 44 TFS

"I was the 'super spare' for the morning strike force. That meant I briefed and taxied out with the Iron Hand flight (always the first flight off) and sat running on the end of the runway until somebody aborted and then I would launch to fill in as needed. There are also always 2 airborne spares for the 20 aircraft strike force and if they are not needed they go to Pack I and bomb. Everybody took off okay this a.m. and I was about to give it up as a lost cause when I heard that one of the airborne spares had air aborted and I was to take off and join the other airborne spare to be a flight of 2. (No single-ship strikes permitted). The guy I joined with happened to have been replaced by a spare already as he had some minor difficulties. We hit a tanker, took on some fuel and made a road cut in Laos just out of Mu Gia Pass then drove into Pack I for a weather reconnaissance and counter. My bombs were good. My wingman was bad all the way around!"

*Maj Sam Armstrong's 100 mission combat log, pg 10.*

#### 02-Dec-67

8056

In mission RT56A-213, Capt Neil F. Blake from the 44 TFS, hit a target at 20-20-45N and 104-19-39E.

*Archive Control Number NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42649C.*

# Neil F. Blake

## F-105 History

---

**07-Dec-67**

8057

In mission RT56A-218, Capt Neil F. Blake from the 44 TFS, hit a target at 20-23N and 104-13E.

*Archive Control Number NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42649C.*

**15-Dec-67**

1449

In addition to planes from the 355 TFW, F-105s from the 388 TFW also struck the Canal des Rapides bridge (JCS 13) in RP-6A, North Vietnam.

Maj Louis L. Levy from the 469 TFS from Korat flew F-105D 62-4270 on a mission for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (Fourth Oak Leaf Cluster). " ... Major Levy was a member of a force of F-105 Thunderchiefs assigned to attack a vital railroad and highway bridge in the vicinity of Hanoi. Major Levy bravely fought his way through heavy defenses to successfully hit his target. ... "

Three other F-105D pilots from the 469 TFS were also on this strike, designated RT56A-226. They were Maj Wintford L. Bazzell flying 61-0220, Maj Stanley Henry Horne flying 61-0068, and Navy exchange officer Lt James Karg flying 62-4269.

Two pilots from the 34 TFS also bombed the nearby Trung Quang railroad yard at coordinates 21-05N and 105-55E. They were Lt Col Nevin G. Christensen flying 61-0132 and Maj Kenneth W. Mays flying 60-0435.

The 44 TFS history told of their support to the day's missions. Capt Douglas G. Glime from the 44 TFS "... led Hatchet flight (composed of Capt Glime, Major John J. Tobin, Maj Walsh and Captain Neil F. Blake). The assigned mission of Hatchet Flight was to suppress the 85-mm sites which covered the egress route of the main strike force. The ordnance carried was 3,000-pound bombs and Hatchet was ordered by the Strike Force Commander to destroy the threatening sites prior to the roll in of the main force. Upon reaching the target area, Captain Glime took his element on a perfectly executed bomb run on two 85-mm sites to the north and west of the target whereas Major Walsh acted correspondingly on the sites situated on the north east. Each element accounted for one site completely destroyed and Lieutenant Colonel William Decker, Commander, 469 TFS, leader of the main strike force, reported that the 85-mm fire observed during the egress was unusually light."

" ... It was necessary to strike the canal's two bypass bridges as well. All three were short and easily repaired, so the effect was at best temporary. In any case, the weather closed in again before much could be done to attack rolling stock backed up in railyards and on rail spurs. The big railyard at Yen Vien was hit, as was the rail car repair shop at Gia Lam, but the North Vietnamese put over a hundred cars on spurs that had not been authorized for attack. On the last day of clear weather (on 19 December), Seventh Air Force's request to hit these rail spurs was making its way too late through channels to Washington; approval did not reach Saigon until early the next morning." ("To Hanoi and Back", pg 112).

*388 TFW history, Apr - Dec 1967, USAF microfilm NO463 frame 1757 & Lou Levy, award citation provided in reply to Ron Thurlow letter, 1 Oct 2001 & National Archives air strike films, archive control number NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42649C & 44 TFS history extract.*

**27-Jan-68**

8058

Capt Neil F. Blake from the 44 TFS flew the F-105 for the last time. Since his first flight on 1 October 1967 he had accumulated 396.3 hours in the Thunderchief.

*F-105 Pilot Flying Hour report dated 18 Nov 85 provided by the USAF Safety Center to Bauke Jan Douma.*