

Gary R. Confer

F-105 History

07-Jun-68

243

The nineteenth F-105 RTU Class 68IR graduated at the 23 TFW, McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 5 Dec 67 with 27 students. Twenty six graduated. The incoming class consisted of 2 Capts and 25 2nd Lts, all recent graduates in the top 10% of the Undergraduate Pilot Training program.

"This class is unique in that it is the first class in which all members are recent graduates of the Undergraduate Pilot Training Program. ... They have no pilot experience other than that received in pilot training. This represented a marked contrast with previous F-105 RTU classes composed of older, more mature and experienced pilots."

To compensate for their inexperience, their course was increased from 92 to 120 flying hours for a total of 78 sorties (RTU course 1111106). On 8 Mar 68, student 2Lt Frank F. Perry III was killed in the crash of F-105D 62-4226 near Raymond KS.

The class deployed for conventional weapons delivery training to George AFB CA between 16 Apr - 9 May 68 with the 563 TFS. The squadron commander was Lt Col Joe W. Pickett. Capt Wyrewood Gowell was Top Student.

On 30 Apr 1968, while at George AFB, instructor pilot Maj Robert V. "Boris" Baird, ejected successfully from F-105D 61-0083 when it developed a flight control problem after takeoff.

The 10 May 1968 edition of The Wichita Eagle reported on the 563 TFS's return to McConnell after their deployment to George. "The 563rd Tactical Fighter Squadron at McConnell Air Force Base returned to Wichita Thursday after 23 days at George AFB, Calif. where it achieved a record 725 successful practice sorties.

"The student fighter squadrons at McConnell are sent to George for special aerial combat training as a routine but this was the first group of F-105 students to contain all recently commissioned second lieutenants.

"None of them are experienced pilots, but they are a good group,' said Maj. Robert B. Baird, flight commander. 'I experienced the only mishap during the 23-day exercise.' Baird was forced to eject from his craft April 30 when it developed flight control difficulty shortly after takeoff from George.

"McConnell is the training center for pilots in the F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber prior to assignment in Southeast Asia. Most students up to now had been experienced pilots who were converting from other aircraft to the 105, Baird said.

"This group of students had logged about 90 hours flying time in the Thunderchief during their training here before going to George where they flew about another 20 hours each.' Baird said. 'They will be required to complete about 10 additional hours flight time here, but they already have overseas orders for mid-June.'

"Most practice flights are over Smokey Hill Bombing and Gunnery Range near Salina, Kan.

"But when it comes time to fire on airborne targets, Kansas lacks sufficient air space.' Maj. Baird explained, so the squadron retreats to skies over the southern California desert. There they concentrate efforts on air-to-air combat practice and use of the Sidewinder missile.

"After graduation from flight training, the 26 class members will begin water survival training at Homestead AFB, Fla., before going overseas."

The students were:

Capt Wyrewood A. "Goose" Gowell	2Lt Eldon W. Joersz
Capt Kenneth G. Lindell	2Lt Charles A. Kennedy
2Lt Salvatore A. Bonacasa	2Lt Peter J. Linsley

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2Lt Donald S. Brown II	2Lt Harvey A. Marshall
2Lt Robert E. Bryan	2Lt Phillip A. Miller
2Lt Gary R. Confer	2Lt Frank F. Perry III
2Lt David Thomas Dinan III	2Lt John C. Pluta
2Lt Preston T. "Pres" Duke	2Lt Cecil L. Snell
2Lt Curtis S. "Scott" Hamme	2Lt Ronald D. Stafford
2Lt James N. Hammond	2Lt Marschall D. Tilley
2Lt Ronald A. Hoffmeyer	2Lt Richard R. Venturi
2Lt Clarence J. "Skip" Holm	2Lt Barry D. Wytttenbach
2Lt David S. Hartman, Jr.	2Lt Robert John Zukowski
2Lt Lynn A. Aikman	

Seven lieutenants -- Confer, Dinan, Hoffmeyer, Hartman, Stafford, Venturi, and Zukowski -- were assigned to the 34 TFS at Korat. Most arrived in early July 1968. Three of them were shot down: Dinan (twice) (KIA the second time), Zukowski (KIA), and Stafford (Rescued). On 13 July 1968, Confer's plane was hit over NVN and he crash landed at Udorn. He had minor injuries but the plane was destroyed.

23 TFW History, Jul - Dec 67 & Jan - Jun 68, USAF microfilm MO554 frame 2025.

13-Jul-68

F-105D 600453 34 TFS 388 TFW Korat Hit by AAA while attacking POL drums in RP-1, North Vietnam. Crash landed at Udorn RTAFB, Thailand. 17-22N 102-48E 1Lt Gary R. Confer 34 TFS pilot received minor injuries during crash landing. Call sign: "Simmer 04". The aircraft took two direct hits in the tail section from 37-mm or 57-mm AAA while pulling up from a rocket pass on POL drums and transportation in RP-1, North Vietnam.

"Both hits occurred in the tail section causing a 2' x 3' hole on the bottom of the fuselage, below the right stabilizer section and just aft of the tail hook. Lt Confer, escorted by his element lead, immediately diverted for Udorn."

The aircraft lost hydraulic systems. After landing without nose wheel steering and braking, the aircraft left the runway, collapsing the landing gear and damaging the aircraft beyond repair. The canopy had to be chopped away to free the pilot who had only a strained back and bruises. The aircraft was scrapped on 18 July 1968.

"The end result of my mission # 8, what I later learned was a flak trap at Delta 17. A burnt out truck on a old bridge pilling in the middle of a river. # 3 and I diverted to Udorn and I made a good landing that went bad since I had no steering or brakes. ... Because of that damage I lost either P-1 or P-2 I can not remember and utility hydraulics. The right rudder cable was shot in two, which is why I went off the runway and hit the barrier shack, which wiped out the gear and started removing parts from the A/C. ... Being a brand new Lt. on mission # 8 I did not handle the landing like I should have, i.e. shutting down the engine on touchdown. I do not think it would have made any difference except I might have been going a little slower when I hit the barrier shack. When I came to a stop, I heard this funny noise and I looked down and checked the engine instruments, everything looked like I could just push it up and go around. Not bad for an engine that had just ate a whole barrier shack. All in all you would have to pay a lot of money for a ride like that at Disneyland.

"My first 8 missions were very exciting. My first bomb pass diving thru clouds ended up with a 60 degree nose-up A/S decreasing thru 200 knots very fast unusual attitude recovery, # 2 a early wake-up for a rescap, # 3 or 4 another rescap - I almost had a head-on midair with # 3 circling overhead of the downed pilot, an easy one then I almost ran into a karst ridge I was strafing at the base of after going from the first target moving over a little and shooting at something else and finally # 8 above.

"After # 8 I must have wised up and nothing really bad happened for the rest of my yr. tour. During my whole year, I was the only one hit on (mission 8) in any 2, 4, 8, 12 or 16-ship mission my whole tour.

"The Lord protects fools and Lts." (Gary Confer, e-mail Friday, April 20, 2012 11:02 PM)

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A photo of the crash in the 388 TFW history for the period showed the plane carried the "JV" tail code of the 469 TFS.

388 TFW History, Jul - Sep 68, USAF microfilm NO585, frames 0067 and 0801.

06-Nov-68

335

The F-105s and pilots from the 469 TFS, 388 TFW, Korat RTAFB, Thailand, began transferring to the 34 TFS and 44 TFS at Korat and to the 355 TFW at Takhli to make way for the assignment of F-4Es and crews from the 40 TFS due to arrive from Eglin AFB FL.

1Lt Gary R. Confer from the 34 TFS was one of the F-105 pilots transferred upon the arrival of the first F-4Es. He had arrived at Korat in early July 1968 and went to the 333 TFS at Takhli in November 1968. While at Takhli, he completed his one-year combat assignment in June 1969.

The 34 TFS picked up 12 F-105s from the 469 TFS (eight of the 34ths F-105s were reassigned elsewhere), the 44 TFS received eight of the 469th's F-105Ds, and two F-105s were transferred to Takhli. By the end of December 1968, the 44 TFS was assigned five F-105Ds: 59-1771, 60-0480, 61-0086, and 61-0153.

388 TFW History, Oct - Dec 68, USAF microfilm NO585, frames 1018 and 1252 & Gary Confer, e-mail 21 April 2012.

01-Feb-69

1160

Some of the pilots included in a list of the aircrews of the 333 TFS, 355 TFW at Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, were:

Maj James L. Gorman - "A" Flight. Flight Leader Qualified.
Maj Vincent Colasuonno - "D" Flight. Flight Lead qualified.
Maj Eugene E. Cirillo - Attached Pilot. Flight Lead qualified.
1Lt Gary R. Confer - "D" Flight pilot.

Aircrew Roster 333 TFS 1 Feb 1969 provided by Gene Cirillo

17-Mar-69

2848

Wild Weasel EWO Capt Robert W. King from the 333 TFS flew a non-counting combat mission in Laos from Takhli RTAFB, Thailand. He and strike pilot 1Lt Gary R. Confer flew F-105F 63-8320 as "Chevy 4". "Strike mission - Laos - just south of Mugia Pass. We slung our bombs 1/2 mile off target." Their OIA mission lasted 3.1 hours.

Robert King's flight log database.

09-May-69

410

The 34 TFS flew its last F-105 mission before it converted to F-4Es at the 388 TFW, Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

The F-4Es were delivered on 11 May 1969 by the 40 TFS from Eglin AFB FL. The 40th changed its designation to the 34 TFS when it arrived at Korat. "...They were met with cold beer, a lei, a parade of smoke bombs, water hoses, and welcomed through most of the streets of Korat ...". The 40th designation returned to Eglin.

The final 34 TFS squadron commander with F-105s was Lt Col Harvey W. Prosser, Jr. When the squadron converted to F-4Es, he was replaced by Lt Col Joseph M. Potts. Col Prosser was reassigned to Kirtland AFB, NM where he flew the F-4 and F-104.

On 10 May 1969, Capt Clayton Bane Lyle III was one of the F-105 pilots who transferred from the 34th to the 44 TFS. (Bane Lyle, e-mail 20 Aug 2010.)

On 11 May 1969, the 34th distributed its F-105s to the 355 TFW at Takhli, RTAFB and to the 44 TFS, the only unit still flying F-105s at Korat. The 44 TFS possessed 23 F-105s. Its squadron commander was Lt Col Herbert L. Sherrill

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who had replaced Lt Col Guy J. Sherrill on 12 March 1969.

F-4E pilots of the 388 TFW called the F-105 "Thud" ("... cause that's the sound it makes when it crashes!") while Korat F-105 pilots referred to the F-4E as the "Thumb" (Two-Hole-Ugly-Mini-Bug). (388 TFW history)

Harvey Prosser commented on the attitude of the F-4 pilots. "They were not a happy bunch. I could have as many F-4 guys switch to 105s as I wanted. All the 34th young guys and the old F-4 pilot Gibs much preferred the Thud. We put up a big sign at the entrance to the O Club stating 'Tiny Tim flies F-4s'. The new F-4 guys refused to take it down and it stayed up for at least a month when the Wing Commander commanded the 34th pilots to remove it because it hurt the F-4 pilots' feelings. Also, the nickname for the F-4 at Korat at that time was Mini-Buff. Again, at the Wing Commander's order, we desisted." (Harvey Prosser, e-mail 2 Feb 10)

During the time the 34th flew F-105s, the squadron received three Outstanding Unit Awards and a Presidential Unit Citation. After it began flying F-4Es, the squadron received its fourth Outstanding Unit Award for the period 1 July 1968 to 15 September 1969 as well as the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross With Palm for the period 15 May 1966 to 29 January 1973. (James Geer, "The Republic F-105 Thunderchief Wing and Squadron Histories", Schiffer, 2002, pg 241.)

However, in its 3 years of flying the F-105, the 34 TFS paid a high price. Pilots assigned or attached to the squadron lost 39 planes to combat and accidents -- 37 "D" models and two "F" models -- enough to equip the squadron more than twice over. Thirteen squadron pilots died in combat (KIA), three more in accidents. Four pilots survived accidental crashes, ten were rescued, and 11 more became POWs, one of whom died in captivity. The following recaps each of the squadron's 39 losses, the pilots involved, and their fate:

Date	F-105	Last Name	Fate
1. 03 Jun 66	58-1171	Pielin	Rescued
2. 15 Jun 66	62-4377	Kelley	Rescued
3. 21 Jun 66	62-4358	Sullivan	KIA
4. 30 Jun 66	62-4224	Nierste	Rescued
5. 15 Jul 66	59-1761	Hamby	Rescued
6. 20 Jul 66	62-4308	Lewis	KIA
7. 21 Jul 66	62-4227	Tiffin	KIA
8. 06 Aug 66	62-4315	Rutherford	Rescued
9. 17 Sep 66	61-0191	Rutherford	Rescued
10. 10 Oct 66	62-4300	Bullock	Died
11. 10 Jan 67	62-4265	Gauley	KIA
12. 19 Mar 67	61-0123	Austin	KIA
13. 05 Apr 67	62-4395	Youngblood	Survived
14. 12 May 67	63-8269 (F)	Stewart	KIA
		Pitman	KIA
15. 15 May 67	62-4429 (F)	Heiliger	POW
		Pollard	POW
16. 02 Jun 67	61-0190	Smith	POW
17. 04 Jun 67	61-0148	Kough	Rescued
18. 15 Jun 67	61-0213	Swanson	KIA
19. 17 Oct 67	61-0205	Andrews	POW
20. 17 Oct 67	62-4326	Odell	POW
21. 17 Oct 67	60-0425	Sullivan	POW
22. 27 Oct 67	62-4231	Flynn	POW
23. 28 Oct 67	62-4356	Waldrop	Survived
24. 19 Nov 67	58-1170	Vissotzky	POW
25. 04 Feb 68	60-5384	Lasiter	POW

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26.	14 Feb 68	60-0418	Elliot	KIA
27.	15 Apr 68	61-0206	Metz	POW Died
28.	25 Apr 68	60-0436	Givens	Died
29.	14 May 68	61-0132	Bass	Died
30.	28 May 68	61-0194	Ingvalson	POW
31.	31 May 68	60-0409	Beresik	KIA
32.	08 Jun 68	61-0055	Light	Rescued
33.	13 Jul 68	60-0453	Confer	Survived
34.	01 Sep 68	60-0512	Thaete	Rescued
35.	17 Nov 68	61-0092	Dinan	Survived
36.	11 Feb 69	62-4256	Zukowski	KIA
37.	17 Mar 69	61-0104	Dinan	KIA
38.	29 Mar 69	62-4270	Stafford	Rescued
39.	03 Apr 69	62-4269	Christianson	KIA

388 TFW History, Apr - Jun 69, USAF microfilm NO586

15-Jun-69

7147

(Approximate date) 1Lt Gary R. Confer from the 333 TFS at Takhli, completed his one-year combat tour. He was next assigned to Reese AFB as a T-37 instructor pilot.

"I got out of the Air Force and went to the Nat. Guard in Kansas in 1972 then the Air Force Res at OK City in 1973." He last flew the F-105 on 28 May 1976 by which time he had accumulated 1014 hours in the airplane.

Gary Confer, e-mail 21 April 2012 & F-105 Pilot Flying Hour report dated 18 Nov 85 provided by the USAF Safety Center to Bauke Jan Douma.