

Robert W. Johnson

F-105 History

18-Sep-66

226

The fourth F-105 RTU Class 67BR graduated at McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 16 May 66 with 15 pilots. It was named "The Lickity Splits" and consisted of 2 Lt Cols, 8 Maj's, and 5 Capt's.

On 27 Jun 66, Lt Col Charles F. Neff, Jr. was the second 23 TFW RTU student fatality when he crashed in F-105D 59-1767 during a training mission.

The class deployed 14 F-105s with the 560 TFS to George AFB CA between 23 Aug - 19 Sep 66 for conventional weapons delivery training. The squadron commander was Maj Everett W. Harris. Maj Alfred J. Lagrou, Jr. was the Top Gun and Outstanding Pilot.

Other pilots completing the course were:

Lt Col Benjamin C. Murph	Maj Homer T. Terry
Maj R. Diaz, Jr.	Capt Gale B. Anstine
Maj William C. Eagle	Capt George R. Hennigan
Maj John A. Graff	Capt William W. Kennedy
Maj Robert W. Johnson	Capt Frank M. Smith
Maj Robert Earl Kline	Capt Frederick L. Watkins
Maj Claude C. Mitson	

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

10-Mar-67

880

On 10 and 11 March 1967, seventy-eight F-105s from Korat and Takhli and 22 F-4Cs from Ubon bombed the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel plant, JCS 76, BE 616-00214, at location 21-33-29N and 105-52-08E in RP-6A. The Air Force had scheduled missions against this target twice each day since 24 February, when the target was first added to Rolling Thunder 54, but all missions up to today's had been diverted due to bad weather over RP-6A. (PACAF Rolling Thunder briefing to CINCPAC for the period 20 Feb - 19 Mar 1967.)

"The Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Combine, located approximately three miles southeast of Thai Nguyen, was the first large plant of its kind built in NVN. According to official estimates by the NVN government, the complex would satisfy 20 percent of the country's iron and steel requirements when it was in full production. Important products produced at this plant in early 1967 included steel barges, POL tanks, and bridge trusses." (Project CHECO, Rolling Thunder, 17 November 1967, pg 7.)

"This showpiece of North Vietnamese industrialization was located thirty-five miles due north of Hanoi and about three miles south of the small city of Thai Nguyen. The Chinese began construction of the plant in 1958 to take advantage of iron ore deposits on the northern edge of the delta. Pig Iron production began in 1963, and by 1967 the plant made barges and fuel drums out of imported steel. The plant's own steel mill was nearly ready to begin operation. There were only two other ironworks in the country, both of them much smaller. While they produced perhaps fifteen thousand metric tons a year, the Thai Nguyen works were designed to produce three hundred thousand of pig iron and two hundred thousand of steel. The complex, including its power plant, occupied two square miles along the railroad that connected it with Hanoi. About ten thousand people worked at this, the largest industrial facility in North Vietnam." ("To Hanoi and Back", pg 57).

F-105 pilots from the 388 TFW flew the first wave in the attack.

The 469 TFS was fragged to form a flight without bombs to provide weather reconnaissance and MiG CAP to precede Korat's main strike force. The flight lineup was:

#1 - Maj John M. Rowan, 469th Operations Officer
#2 - Maj Ray H. Bryant, 469th Assistant Ops Officer

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#3 - Lt Col Gordon Albert "Swede" Larson, 469th commander
#4 - Maj Roy S. Dickey flying his 48th mission into NVN.

Maj Dickey described his mission. "The weather reconnaissance flight trolled the area for over 30 minutes and received no enemy fire whatsoever. As it turned out, the weather over target was CAVU, we saw no MiGs, and had no bombs with which to kill, maim women and children, or blow up the steel mill. It was a perfect day for putting the bombs down the stack. ... I did wish that we had bombs aboard that day." (Roy Dickey, "The Saga of the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Works", in his scrapbook.)

The 8 TFW from Ubon contributed F-4Cs to the mission as "Strike-Cap" flights in which the F-4s carried bombs as well as air-to-air missiles. The F-4s were assigned to strike the target but were to jettison their bombs and protect F-105s if MiGs became a clear threat on ingress. To continue their protection against MiGs, the F-4s were to follow F-105s out of the target.

The 388 TFW provided four F-105 strike flights. Korat's "... mission commander and the first three strike flights were provided by the 34 TFS." The 34th's flight lineup was:

"Chevrolet"

#1 - Lt Col Joseph C. Austin, Mission Commander
#2 - Capt Jack A. Phillips flying his 16th combat mission. Awarded the DFC.
#3 - Maj Edward C. Jones flying his 95th combat mission. He was awarded the DFC*.
#4 - Maj Harry Pawlik, awarded DFC 1st OLC*.

"Possum"

#1 - Maj Homer T. Terry, awarded Silver Star
#2 - Maj Dewey Lee Smith
#3 - Maj William C. Eagle
#4 - Capt Jackie R. Youngblood.

"Random"

#1 - Maj Robert W. Johnson
#2 - Maj Charles E. Irwin, awarded DFC*
#3 - Maj William W. Augsburg, awarded DFC 5th OLC*
#4 - Maj Robert G. Miner, awarded DFC*

(* DFCs awarded under Hq 7 AF Special Order # G-1093)

The 469 TFS provided Korat's fourth strike flight, "Harpoon", led by Capt Charles C. "Clint" Murphy.

Unlike the earlier weather reconnaissance flight, most of these strike flights encountered enemy MiGs, AAA, and SAMs. "Enemy defense reaction was withheld until just prior to CBU release at which time the area erupted with heavy, accurate 37/57/85/100-mm. A layered barrage of light AAA formed an almost continuous carpet at 5 - 6 M. This barrage was largely suppressed when the CBUs impacted. 85 & 100-mm continued to burst at higher altitudes in the target area and up to 10 NM out along the egress route. ..." (388 TFW OPREP 3, TWX 101254Z Mar 67, in PACAF DO Read File folder, 9 - 11 March 1967, AFHRA Call # K717.312, IRIS # 898698.)

On the day he flew as Korat's mission commander, Lt Col Joseph C. Austin assumed command of the 34 TFS replacing Lt Col Richard M. Heyman, Jr. Austin, "Chevrolet 1", "... led the force with a flak suppression flight being first on target. Ingress to target was conducted in defensive box formation at 16,000 feet. Low ceilings prevailed over the entire route, breaking up short of the target area. Preselected flak sites were struck by the CBU flight and strike flights struck assigned targets within the complex. Heavy 37/57-mm fire was encountered as strike aircraft initiated their roll-in and the flak suppression flight dropped a portion directly on the target complex, thus

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silencing many of the gun emplacements. Bomb damage was extensive, ... although a blast furnace area escaped damage completely. As aircraft egressed the target area, they encountered moderate to heavy 85-mm fire within five miles of the target. This barrage necessitated continuous jinking to slip through the barrage." (388 TFW history)

As "Chevrolet 3", Maj Edward C. Jones from the 34th received the Distinguished Flying Cross. "At this time pilots weren't required to fly into Route Pack VI (Hanoi) after the 95th mission. This was my 95th. Shortly after, the criteria was changed to 90 missions. I would have really been upset if I got nailed on that mission." (Ed Jones, letter to Ron Thurlow, 25 March 2001.) His award citation read, in part, "... Maj Jones delivered his ordnance with precise accuracy on the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel complex through one of the heaviest concentrations of AAA fire ever encountered over NVN. Major Jones's task was compounded by the attack of hostile aircraft and SAMs upon his formation. ..." (Ed Jones, e-mail 26 April 2010.)

As "Possum Lead", Maj Homer T. Terry received the Silver Star for gallantry. "... Major Terry led the first attack upon the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Works which is in one of the most heavily defended areas known to modern aerial warfare. Major Terry's conduct during this mission displayed his total disregard for his own personal safety while under continuous and extremely heavy fire. ..." (Homer Terry, letter to Ron Thurlow, undated.)

Later, Maj Terry described what happened to him during this mission. "We came upon some pretty fierce defenders, but again we got all 16 aircraft on and off the target without anyone being hit, although I got the scare of my life when I thought I was hit. Fuel from our droppable fuel tanks was fed into the main fuel supply by compressed air from the engine compressor. When the droppable tanks are empty, air gets into the main fuel system and causes a hammering effect just like when air gets into your water pipes at home. To avoid air getting into your main fuel supply, we had a 'saber drain' relief near the rear of the aircraft and some fuel is ejected with the air. Fuel released from the drain pipe causes a visible vapor that can be seen by ground defenses, ergo, we had a checklist item to turn off the external fuel flow before entering the target area. On this day, I forgot to follow the check list! As I was pulling off the target, a greater than normal hammering noise started and simultaneously, #2 called and said 'lead you are hit and on fire'. I almost swallowed my tongue. The best way to extinguish a fire is to climb as rapidly as possible and starve the fire of oxygen, so I maintained the afterburner climb and shortly thereafter my wingman called that my fire was out. My engine instruments never gave any indication of a problem. When we got into a safe area, my wingman carefully checked me over and there was no apparent damage. An after landing check confirmed 'no damage'. My wingman said that just before the fire began a cluster of AAA rounds had been tracking right up to my tailpipe. We surmised that they ignited the fuel from my saber drain." (Homer Terry, "Destroying the Steel Making Capability of the NVN", via e-mail 27 Mar 2010.)

On egress, "... fifty miles from the target, a MiG-21 engaged 'Random' flight [led by Maj Robert W. Johnson] just after they had recovered from a SAM attack. The MiG launched one air-to-air missile at the flight, but evasive action caused the missile to burn out short of its intended target and the MiG-21 broke off his attack. No aircraft were lost or damaged during this strike." (388 TFW history)

A 388 TFW OPREP 3 described this MiG encounter in more detail. "Random 1 - 4 was on egress route heading 270, location 21-55/104-55, altitude 20,000, speed 500 knots, time 0753Z. Flight observed a MiG-21 approaching them from 6 o'clock position heading 270, altitude 18,000 ft. When MiG-21 was approximately 5 miles away, he fired a missile at the flight. Missile appeared to have a white streamer trailing behind it. Flight took evasive tactics by turning approximately 45 degrees, climbing toward the sun. Flight observed missile to approach about 2 miles behind flight, then began to lose momentum and arch toward the ground. Missile impact not observed. MiG did not pursue attack and broke away after missile launch. Flight then continued on egress route." (388 TFW OPREP 3, TWX 101139Z Mar 67, in PACAF DO Read File folder, 9 - 11 March 1967, AFHRA Call # K717.312, IRIS # 898698.)

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Four of Ubon's F-4Cs in a "CAP-Strike" flight that followed Random flight were involved in this MiG 21 encounter. "They first met up with the F-105s over northern Laos inbound to the target and maintained position above and behind the last F-105 flight for ingress and egress. After the MiG-21 fired its missile at Random flight, number 3 in the F-4C flight rolled inverted, nose down, and fired a Sparrow missile without a radar lockon in an attempt to divert the MiG. His missile followed a ballistic path and missed the MiG by about 1/2 mile. Later, at a point on the Red River just below Yen Bai, with the flight of F-4Cs trailing the last flight of F-105s by 3 to 4 miles, at 14,000 feet altitude, the flight spotted four MiG-21s closing in on the F-105s from 5 o'clock at the same altitude. The F-4Cs turned toward the MiGs who did a hard turn away and escaped." (Red Baron Report)

Red Baron Event III-87, pgs 97 - 98 & 388 TFW history Jan - Dec 67, AFHRA microfilm NO 583, frame 1226 & "100 Missions North", pgs 193 - 199.

12-Mar-67

1274

Twenty-one F-105s and four F-4Cs struck the Viet Tri Thermal Power Plant (JCS 82.17) for the first time. Pilots reported one large secondary explosion with orange fire from the generator hall/boiler house and numerous fires. The coal treatment building and the transformer yard were heavily damaged. "... We estimate it will take approximately 18 months to repair this plant." However, the plant was struck again a week later, on 19 March.

Three flights from the 34 TFS, 388 TFW, struck the Viet Tri Power Plant at coordinates 21-17-57N and 105-25-26E. Flight lineup was:

"Finch"

- #1 - Maj William E. Augsburg, mission commander
- #2 - Maj John R. Whaley
- #3 - Maj Robert W. Johnson
- #4 - Capt John W. Swanson, Jr.

"Nelson"

- #1 - Lt Col Joseph C. Austin
- #2 - Capt David C. Carter
- #3 - Maj Donald F. Fryauf
- #4 - Maj Earl Johnston.

"Possum"

- #1 - Maj William C. Eagle
- #2 - Capt Jack A. Phillips flying his 17th & 18th missions into NVN. He was awarded an Air Medal.
- #3 - Maj Harry Pawlik
- #4 - Maj James N. McClelland.

The flight was probably recycled for RESCAP.

"Finch" flight acted as flak suppression and each member had a preselected gun emplacement to attack. The two strike flights carried two 3,000-pound bombs each and were to attack the boiler room and generator hall. Gun emplacements attacked were completely neutralized and the only ground fire encountered came from a suspected hospital area north of the target."

Pilots from the 469 TFS also flew on this strike.

"Pilot BDA reported complete destruction of the target. The photo aircraft covering this strike was shot down by a surface-to-air missile while egressing the target area."

The photo aircraft, "Neptune 2", was RF-4C 65-0877 from the 11 TRS, 460 TFW, from Tan Son Nhut. Capt Edwin Riley Goodrich, Jr. was KIA and 1Lt John Walter Clark became a POW.

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An attempt to rescue the downed RF-4C crew was called off. "At 12/0309Z, Neptune Two was reported down at coordinates 20-55N and 104-45E [65 miles west of Hanoi]. No report of either chute or beeper. High performance aircraft as well as A-1Es made a search of the area with negative results. At 12/0429Z, the forces were withdrawn after SAMs were launched against the jets. At this time, 7th AF directed the SAR activity on this mission be suspended." (Rescue Opening Report 2-3-19 12 Mar 67, TWX 120719Z Mar 67 from 3 ARR GP OL 2, Udorn RTAFB, Thailand, in AFHRA Folder Call # K318.2411-5, IRIS # 1017063.)

"With no BDA available another strike was scheduled and pilots reported the target destroyed before they dropped their ordnance. Film strips taken from KA-71 strike cameras verified the boiler room and generator hall 50% destroyed with the remaining portion totally gutted."

PACAF Rolling Thunder briefing to CINCPAC for the period 20 Feb - 19 Mar 1967 & 388 TFW history Jan - Dec 67, USAF microfilm NO 583, frame 1226

28-Mar-67

101

The 34 TFS, 388 TFW, flew their 10,000th combat hour since their arrival at Korat RTAFB in June 1966. A flight of five F-105s flown by 34 TFS pilots struck multiple targets in the Dong Hoi area. Pilots were:

Squadron Commander - Lt Col Alan G. Nelson;
Flight Commander - Maj Homer T. Terry;
Operations Officer - Maj Carl W. McKenzie;
Flight Commander - Maj William C. Eagle;
Flight Commander - Maj Robert W. Johnson.

History of the 388 TFW, Jan - Mar 1967, USAF microfilm NO583 frame 1227.

31-May-67

760

F-105s from the 388 TFW flew more hours during the month of May 1967 "... than any USAF Fighter unit has ever done". The wing flew "... 5,219 hours of which 4,950 were in combat strikes over North Vietnam. Major targets struck by the 388th during May (were) the Hoa Loc MiG Airfield, Bac Giang Railroad Highway bridge (JCS 18.23) and vital lines of communications." Col William E. Fish, Director of Materiel said, "The primary reason for this total ... figure is the work ... by our maintenance personnel on the line..."

The history of the 34 TFS reported that the squadron flew 418 combat sorties during May 1967, 402 in North Vietnam and 16 in Southern Laos, for a total of 1066:20 combat hours. "A change was noted in enemy fighter tactics. MiG-17s are now being deployed in the target area at very low altitudes (100 - 500 feet AGL) in an attempt to strike the F-105s as they pull off the target. This change in tactics was probably due to the presence of F-4C flights ingressing the target area with the strike force.

Three pilots from the 34 TFS completed their 100th combat mission over North Vietnam during May 1967. They were Maj William C. Eagle, Lt Col Robert W. Johnson, and Capt William W. Kennedy.

Lt Col Johnson's 100th mission was his last flight in the F-105. He had accumulated 352.9 hours in the airplane. (F-105 Pilot Flying Hour report dated 18 Nov 85 provided by the USAF Safety Center to Bauke Jan Douma.)

The squadron had 22 line pilots that included the commander, executive officer and operations officer as well as four attached pilots from the 388 TFW staff. They gained four new pilots to offset the three losses of the pilots who completed their tours. The inputs during May 1967 were Maj George G. Clausen, Maj Robert G. Miner, Capt Robert L. Martin, and Capt Nickolas J. Donelson (a Ryan's Raider pilot who had arrived in April.)

34 TFS history, 1 - 31 May 67, USAF microfilm NO584, frame 0072 & Sawadee Weekly, Saturday, June 10, 1967, pg 6 & 34 TFS web site on 2 April 2007 at <http://s88204154.onlinehome.us.34tfs/scarf.htm>.