

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

15-Jul-67

234

The twelfth F-105 RTU Class 67JR graduated at McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 13 Feb 67 with 22 pilots, all but two from the Air Defense Command. However, one pilot was eliminated due to a fear of flying. The class was named "Roaring 20 + 1".

Maj James D. Murray, Jr. was the "Top Gun" in the class.

The class deployed for conventional weapons delivery training to George AFB CA between 30 Jun - 14 Jul 1967 with the 560 TFS. The squadron commander was Lt Col Louis D. Braun, Jr.

The graduating pilots and their SEA squadron assignments (where known) were:

Col Carl M. Hagle - Did not graduate	Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell - 34 TFS
Lt Col William C. Decker - 469 TFS	Maj Paul F. Swanson - Korat
Lt Col Orland W. Jensen - 354 TFS	Capt Anthony Charles Andrews - 34 TFS
Maj David C. Dickson, Jr. - 34 TFS	Capt Douglas A. Beyer - 34 TFS
Maj Robert W. Hagerman - 469 TFS	Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver - 34 TFS
Maj Leslie J. Hauer - 469 TFS	Capt William H. Nottingham - 333 TFS
Maj Stanley Henry Horne - 469 TFS	Capt Robert A. Zang - 469 TFS
Maj David D. Igelman - 34 TFS	1Lt William Wallace Butler - 469 TFS
Maj Ronald Ruynan King - 333 TFS	1Lt Earl J. Henderson - 469 TFS
Maj Thomas P. Larson - 354 TFS	1Lt James L. Taylor - ?
Maj James D. Murray, Jr. - 469 TFS	

Col Hagle did not complete his F-105 training due to ulcers.

Maj Dickson was a former ADC F-106 pilot from Selfridge AFB, MI. Before starting his F-105 training at McConnell, he settled his wife, Carolyn and children near her hometown of Sherman, Texas, near Perrin AFB where he had been stationed earlier. His family remained there during his combat tour. When he departed for Korat in August, he was seen off at the airport by his wife's two uncles, George and Ben Blanton, Carolyn's mother's brothers. As a departing gift, they gave him a box of cigars and instructions to smoke one with a drink after each combat mission. During his stay at Korat, Dickson used the backs of the cigar bands to record each of his combat missions. (Dickson interview)

1Lt Bill Butler and 1Lt Earl Henderson were two ADC F-106 pilots from the 94 FIS at Selfridge. After their F-105 training, both pilots went to Jungle Survival School at Clark AB, Philippines, en route to Korat.

Maj Odell and Capt Zang were also F-106 pilots from the 71 FIS at Selfridge.

Maj Igelman came from Ent AFB, Colorado, where he was a computer programmer in the 1st Aerospace Surveillance and Control Squadron. This squadron kept track of all space objects orbiting the Earth. In prior assignments he had flown F-86Ds and F-102s at Selfridge and F-102s at Goose Bay, Labrador. He arrived at Korat in August 1967 and flew his first combat mission in early September.

Capt Beyer had been an F-104 pilot assigned to the 331 FIS at Big Spring TX. Both he and Capt Andrews reported to the 34 TFS in August 1967. (Doug Beyer, e-mail 27 Apr 10)

*23 TFW History, Jan - Jun 67, USAF microfilm MO554 & telephone interview, Carolyn Dickson, 23 Apr 2009 & Earl Henderson, e-mails 13 July 2007 and 3 Aug 2009 & Dave Igelman, e-mail 4 Apr 10.*

31-Aug-67

3825

The 34 TFS history for the month of August 1967, reported that, "... numerous targets were struck by pilots of the squadron in the Chicom Buffer Zone and within the Hanoi restricted area. A marked increase was noted in all modes of defense (AAA, SAMs, MiGs) due primarily to the sensitivity of the targets." Squadron pilots flew 411 combat missions during the month, 407 to North Vietnam and 4 to Laos for a total combat time of 1063:20 hours.

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"Combat pilot strength stood at 36 line pilots. During the month of August, four squadron pilots completed their tour of 100 missions over North Vietnam. Those completing were: Maj Harry Pawlik, Maj Donald F. Fryauf, Capt Jack A. Phillips [on 2 Aug], and Capt David C. Carter. [Not listed in the squadron history for completing his 100th mission this month was Maj John O. Rollins II.] No losses were suffered during this month and 13 replacements arrived during this period of time. Two officers, Captains Skoglund and Shulmister, that had been on temporary duty with the squadron from Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, returned to their home station."

The 13 pilots arriving in the 34th in August were: Maj William M. Blakeslee, Maj Kenneth W. Mays, Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell, Maj James L. Taylor, Maj David C. Dickson, Jr., Maj William J. King, Maj Raymond Walter Vissotzky, Capt Robert M. Elliot, Capt Robert B. Middleton, Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver, Capt Douglas A. Boyer, and 1Lt Lee E. Hollingsworth.

The Squadron Commander was Maj George G. Clausen. Maj Roderick Gene Giffin was the Operations Officer and Maj William M. Blakeslee the Executive Officer.

*388 TFW history, Apr Dec 67, Vol II, 34 TFS history, 1 - 31 Aug 1967, microfilm NO584, frame 0080.*

### 21-Sep-67

6563

In a published order, Maj George G. Clausen, 34 TFS commander, designated 29 squadron pilots as Combat Ready in the F-105. The same pilots were listed in a separate order as qualified to be Flight/Element Leaders in F-105s. The pilots were:

Maj Almer L. Barner, Jr.	Capt Douglas A. Beyer
Maj Charles E. Bishop	Capt Robert M. Crane
Maj William M. Blakeslee	Capt Hugh W. Davis
Maj George G. Clausen	Capt Nicholas J. Donelson
Maj James E. Daniel, Jr.	Capt Robert M. Elliot
Maj David C. Dickson, Jr.	Capt George W. Hamlin IV
Maj Clyde L. Falls, Jr.	Capt Lawrence G. Hoppe
Maj Roderick G. Giffin	Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver
Maj David D. Igelman	Capt Irving R. LeVine
Maj William J. L. King	Capt Robert L. Martin
Maj Kenneth W. Mays	Capt Robert B. Middleton
Maj Donald E. Odell	Capt Sam P. Morgan
Maj Dwight E. Sullivan	Capt Harry G. Paddon III
Maj James L. Taylor	1Lt Lee E. Hollingsworth
Maj Raymond W. Vissotzky	

*34 TFS Special Orders 45 and 46 dated 21 September 1967 provided by Larry Hoppe, May 2010.*

### 16-Oct-67

6158

1Lt Earl J. Henderson, 469 TFS, 388 TFW, did not fly today but commented in his combat diary on recent F-105 losses.

"Digger O'Dell [Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell, 34 TFS, POW] and Tony Andrews [Capt Anthony Charles Andrews, 34 TFS, POW] shot down today on pack VI target [Dap Cau RR Yards]. Three airplanes in first flight got it. No one sure cause."

*Earl Henderson, combat diary.*

### 17-Oct-67

F-105D 624326 34 TFS 388 TFW Korat Hit by 85-mm AAA while attacking the Dap Cau RR Yards. Crashed 16 miles NE of Hanoi in RP-6A, North Vietnam. 21-11N 106-05E Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell 34 TFS pilot ejected on his 17th mission. POW. Released 14 Mar 73. Call sign: "Hot Rod 02".

The mission was to attack the Dap Cau railroad yards. Hot Rod flight's lineup was:

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- #1 - Maj Dwight E. Sullivan
- #2 - Maj Donald E. Odell
- #3 - Maj Floyd E. Heinzig
- #4 - Capt Anthony C. Andrews

All pilots were from the 34 TFS.

Witnesses from other flights included Col John P. Flynn, Lt Col Robert W. Smith, and Maj Harold D. Wilson. The flight took off from Korat at 08:40 and Maj Sullivan and Maj Odell were downed at 10:42 on roll in to the target.

An official Air Force history described the losses. "Maj Odell's aircraft was hit by flak just as he was starting to roll in on target. At almost the same time (about one second earlier), the Flight Leader was hit. The two aircraft were close together. At least one of the aircraft disintegrated and both went down. One parachute was seen and one beeper was heard. None of the witnesses knew from which aircraft the parachutes came. All witnesses were either in their bomb runs or were attempting to acquire their targets; consequently, the period of observation for each was necessarily brief. None were sure that there were two parachutes." ("PACAF Intelligence Index of USAF Personnel MIA/PW in Southeast Asia", pg 3-172 and 3-174, AFHRA Call # K717.6031-3.)

In an oral history interview, Maj Dwight Sullivan, "Hot Rod 01", described what really happened. "...It was on my 73rd mission on a railroad yard, up over North Vietnam, about 25 miles northeast of Hanoi. I was leading a force of sixteen aircraft to hit this yard. ... It was on a Sunday morning, it was clear, a beautiful day to fly .... We rolled in the flights of four and they cross under and two over and we'd go down in formation and they'd drop off. ... As I rolled out, my number [two] just caught the corner of my eye and my number [two] man ran into me. I really wasn't shot down, I was knocked down by my wingman. Needless to say I was a little upset when I got out of the aircraft. I wasn't injured in the bailout that I knew of. But if my wing man could have heard me coming down with that chute he would not have ever wanted to see me again. Anyway, ... I saw him coming down a couple of miles away. They picked us both up."

Capt Tony Andrews, "Hot Rod 04", was shot down on this mission and also became a POW.

By the time of their last mission, Maj Odell had accumulated 78.8 hours flying the F-105. Maj Sullivan had accumulated 277.1 hours and Capt Andrews 168.8 hours.

Maj Odell was born in Pontiac, Michigan. He was awarded a Silver Star for his attack on the Dap Cau railroad yard.

*U.S. Navy CNA Loss/Damage Data Base & letter, Donald Odell, to Ron Thurlow & Dwight Sullivan interview 8 Aug 2005 by Beverly Brown for Veterans History Project.*

### 09-Dec-67

6168

Capt Earl J. Henderson, 469 TFS, 388 TFW, flew his 45th combat mission into Laos.

"Target: Truck park in central Laos.

"Armament: 6x750#.

"Led flight on good mission. Weather very bad, 11,000 overcast. Had to find target and roll in under clouds in area of Ban Ban. 30-degree dive and extremely low pull out. Surprisingly all four of us hit right on target. Stan, number two, had hung bomb [Maj Stanley H. Horne]. No flak."

"By early December 1967, [Stan] and I were the last two survivors of the six pilots from the 94 FIS from Selfridge who got F-105 assignments in November 1966. The 71 FIS also had two pilots who got F-105 assignments in November 1966 (Maj Digger Odell and Capt Tony Zang). Digger was shot down on 16 Oct 67, POW. Tony finished his tour."

*Earl Henderson, e-mail 31 July 09 & e-mail 3 Aug 09.*

### 09-May-69

410

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## F-105 History

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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.)

1Lt Joseph W. Widhalm, assigned to the 34 TFS in January 1969, also transferred to the 44 TFS. (Joe Widhalm, e-mail 7 May 2012)

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 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

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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
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*

### 14-Mar-73

1251

The fourth set of POWs was released from North Vietnam during "Operation Homecoming". Among the 107 military prisoners released on this Wednesday, were 26 F-105 pilots and EWOs who had been shot down between 3 August 1967 (Capt Wallace Grant Newcomb) and 9 August 1968 (Col David William Winn).

Col Roger Dean Ingvalson was one of the F-105 pilots released today. He had been Operations Officer of the 34 TFS and was downed by AAA on 28 May 1968.

Col James E. Bean was released in this group. He had been the 388 TFW Deputy Commander for Operations. He was shot down on 3 January 1968 while flying with the 469 TFS. "He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries, and then attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces before retiring from the Air Force on September 18, 1974."

Col John P. Flynn was in the group of POWs. He had been the 388 TFW Wing Vice Commander when he was shot down on 27 October 1967. He flew with the 34 TFS.

Maj Raymond Walter Vissotzky from the 34 TFS, shot down and captured on 19 November 1967, was another F-105 pilot released today.

Maj Dwight E. Sullivan from the 34 TFS was also released from Hanoi today. "... He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at March AFB, California, and then attended Air War College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, from August 1973 to August 1974. His final assignment was as Assistant Deputy Commander for Logistics and then Deputy Commander for Maintenance with the 47th Flying Training Wing at Laughlin AFB, Texas, from August 1974 until his retirement from the Air Force on June 1, 1978." (<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.asp?ID=1085>)

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Capt Anthony Charles Andrews from the 34 TFS, shot down on 17 October 1967, was one of the 26 F-105 pilots released today. "My home town is Chico, California, where I was born and remained until after finishing two years of college. Next I attended the University of California at Berkeley where I finished as an Electrical Engineer in 1963. My Air Force career started that Fall. "Anthony Andrews left the Air Force after his return home. He now works for a major airline." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/a/a041.htm>)

Maj Donald E. "Digger" Odell from the 34 TFS was in today's POW release. He had been downed in the same flight as Maj Sullivan and Capt Andrews.

Also released was Capt Thomas E. Norris from the 469 TFS shot down on 12 Aug 1967.

Capt Carl William Lasiter was released today. He was from the 34 TFS and had been shot down by a MiG-21 on 4 February 1979.

*"Honor Bound" by Stuart I. Rochester and Frederick Kiley, pg 585 &  
<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.asp?ID=1030>.*

**31-Jul-90**

7199

Congressman David E. Bonior, Representative from Michigan, read into the congressional record a tribute to Lt Col Donald E. "Digger" Odell.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an outstanding individual, Col. Donald E. Odell, of the U.S. Air Force. Colonel Odell is retiring from his position as base public affairs officer at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

"Colonel Odell enlisted on September 6, 1952 and served in enlisted status until April 1954, at which time he entered the Aviation Cadet Pilot Training Program. He received his commission and wings on August 1, 1955. From that time until 1958, he was an instructor pilot in the Air Force Pilot Training School.

"Colonel Odell served in Europe from 1959 to 1962. He was then assigned to the 94th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Eddie Rickenbacker's old squadron, at Selfridge Air Force Base. He was assigned to F-105 fighter-bombers in December 1966 and underwent crew training at McConnell AFB, Kansas.

"In August 1967, Colonel Odell arrived at the 34th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Korat Air Base, Thailand. He was shot down on October 17, 1967, while on his 17th mission, 16 miles northeast of Hanoi, North Vietnam. For nearly 6 long years he was held as a prisoner of war until his release on March 14, 1973. After a period of hospitalization, he returned home on April 7, 1973.

"Colonel Odell has received many awards and decorations, including the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, and Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster. He is presently base public affairs officer at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

"Colonel Odell was a great pilot, and I commend him highly. The Air Force needs more men like him and will miss his leadership. We should all salute his service and the sacrifices he made. His contributions to our Nation should never be forgotten."

*Congressional Record 101st Congress (1989-1990) page: E2569 on line at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r101:E01AU0-128>:*

**13-Mar-98**

7198

Former POW Lt Col Donald E. "Digger" Odell received his "Freedom Flight" in a T-38 at Randolph AFB, TX. Maj Scott Schroeder from the 560 FTS was his IP with call sign "Freedom Flyer #187".

*"Home With Honor. Thirty Years of Freedom" commemorative book by the 560 FTS, pg 227.*