

Rainford "Ray" McMaster Tiffin

F-105 History

18-Apr-66

5176

The 6441 TFW selected the pilots for the squadron that became the 34 TFS to deploy to Korat. Most would come from the 36 TFS; consequently, the 36 TFS was slated to disband.

Bob Pielin from the 36 TFS, who had already flown 87 combat missions during temporary duty tours to Korat and Takhli, remembered how he helped select the pilots for the new squadron. "Fitz [Maj Richard P. Fitzgerald, the squadron's Operations Officer] and I initially made out a list of 25 pilots from the Wing resources to go as 34th members. The list was bounced back from HHQ as being too overloaded in pilots with over 50 missions. They recommended 6 guys in the 0 to 20 mission category, 6 in the 21 to 40, 6 in the 41 to 60, 6 in the 61 to 80, and anyone with over 80 to go TDY."

This distribution was to spread out their eventual departures from Korat as each pilot completed his 100-mission tour. Capt Pielin and Maj Fitzgerald reworked the list "... with some pronounced disapproval from those that were removed from the [original]. ... A 1.5 aircrew/aircraft ratio was authorized for 27 pilots plus Commander and Operations Officer. ... Bob Jones [Capt Robert H. Jones] was removed from the first list since he had his papers in to be discharged. When he found out about the 34th going PCS to Korat, he volunteered to go with [them] and get 100 missions before he got out. Red Dog [Lt Col Howard F. 'Red Dog' Hendricks the squadron commander] worked a 'deal', and he went TDY." (Bob Pielin e-mails, 23 Sep 2006 and 7 April 2007.)

The following list contains the positions and names of the initial twenty-nine pilots assigned to the 34 TFS. This is the revised list after Capt Pielin and Maj Fitzgerald reworked their original to provide a broader base of experience. One of the pilots, Gordon Walcott, annotated his copy of the printed list, dated 18 April 1966, with this comment: "This was the original 34th TFS crew roster when formed as an all-volunteer squadron from the 35 TFS, 36 TFS, and 80 TFS (Yokota AB, Japan)"

Commander - Lt Col Howard F. "Red Dog" Hendricks who had been commander of the 36 TFS.
Operations Officer - Maj Richard P. Fitzgerald

India Flight

Flight Commander - Maj Wayne N. Whatley
Capt Robin K. Nierste
Capt James I. Miholick
Capt Douglas G. Lauck
Capt Robert H. Jones
Capt Robert R. Reed

Lima Flight

Flight Commander - Capt James E. Hayes
Capt Merrill R. Lewis, Jr.
Capt Gordon M. Walcott
Capt Stanley S. Gunnerson
1Lt John Bernard Sullivan III

Juliet Flight

Flight Commander - Maj Kenneth T. Blank
Capt Carl L. Hamby
Capt Thomas H. Curtis
Capt David H. Groark
1Lt Phillip J. Kelley

Metro Flight

Flight Commander - Capt Robert D. Pielin
Capt Alan K. Rutherford
Capt Ralph D. Watkins
Capt Wayne D. Hauth
Capt Rainford "Ray" McMaster Tiffin - 80 TFS

Kilo Flight

Flight Commander - Maj Jack R. Stresing
Capt William O. Lessard
Capt John R. Layman
Capt Rex L. Dull
Capt Clarence E. Fox
1Lt Denis D. O'Donoghue

E-mail from Monty Pharmer, 22 Sep 2006 forwarding letter to him from Lt Col (Ret) Gordon Walcott dated, 29 July 1988, which included a roster of 36 TFS pilots, dated 18 April 1966.

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09-Jul-66

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Capt Robert D. Pielin from the 34 TFS at Korat flew his 100th combat mission. Since he had already flown 89 missions by the time the squadron arrived at Korat on 15 June 1966, he was the first pilot assigned to the 34th to reach this goal.

"My last mission on the 9th was a two ship flight with Ray Tiffin [Capt Rainford "Ray" McMaster Tiffin]. A 'sand pile' mission to Pak #1, but Fitz told me to go anywhere I wanted. I had them load six 750's, and rocket pods. We dumped the bombs on my favorite place just outside of Vinh. As the river came down from the mountains, a canal was built across a 'U' in the river and ended by going through a tunnel in a hill before re-entering the river. If you hit the entrance to the tunnel, you blocked the canal, and backed up 500 barges. A very nice 'no-no' target, to go back to and strafe barges later.

"We then road recce'd toward Mu Gia pass and found two trucks parked on individual platforms adjoining the road; another favorite place to recce before getting to the AAA sites at Mu Gia pass. We hit the trucks with the rockets, but no explosions, probably carrying rice.

"Ray then lost his generator, and we headed home. On the Laos side of Mu Gia pass, I left Ray high, rolled in from 17,000, and emptied the gun at a AAA site that shot at me on my very first combat mission, 5 October 1964."

Capt Pielin returned to Yokota where he had left his family. He was next assigned as an instructor pilot in the F-105 Replacement Training Unit at McConnell AFB, Kansas.

Bob Pielin, e-mail 7 April 2007.

21-Jul-66

F-105D 624227 34 TFS 388 TFW Korat Hit by 37/57-mm AAA near Yen Bai, North Vietnam. Crashed in RP-5, North Vietnam. 21-59N 104-47E Capt Rainford "Ray" McMaster Tiffin 34 TFS pilot was MIA then KIA. Call sign: "Portland 04". The other members of his flight were Capt Alan K. Rutherford, "Portland 1", Capt Ralph D. Watkins, "Portland 2", and Capt Wayne D. Hauth, "Portland 3", all from the 34 TFS.

The flight departed Korat at 1251 and headed to their primary target, the La Danh POL storage area 7 miles north of Thai Nguyen at coordinates 21-39-48N and 105-50-57E. However, bad weather prevented their attacking this target so they headed west on armed reconnaissance looking for another target. While flying at 100 feet altitude at 520 knots, at 0717Z, the flight encountered one SAM that burst 1/2 NM away from the flight. A minute later two more SAMs also missed the flight by 1/2 NM. The planes dropped to 50 feet and at 0728Z the pilots spotted a fourth SAM that crossed behind and above the flight and exploded 12 NMs away.

At approximately 0730Z, the flight found and attacked a group of buildings along a road segment at coordinates 21-54N and 104-47E 15 miles northeast of Yen Bai. This target was protected by a heavy barrage of 37/57 mm AAA bursting between the altitudes of 4,000 and 9,000 feet. Capt Hauth's statement described Capt Tiffin's loss.

"Approximately 30 seconds before Portland flight's pull up for a bomb run, Capt Tiffin ... was contacted by radio and visually sighted flying the right wing of Portland Lead heading 275 degrees, about 3,500 feet indicated altitude. (I) ... Was approximately 1/2 mile behind the rest of the flight and on the right side, and had positive visual contact with all members of the flight. A pop-up maneuver was made for a bomb run on a road and this was the last time I saw Portland 4. During the bomb run, Portland Lead and 2 called out heavy 37/57 AAA fire. After coming off the target, radio contact was attempted with Portland 4 on several frequencies, including Guard, with no results."

After post-strike refueling, the four F-105Ds in "Apache" flight joined "Portland" flight in the search. They heard no voice or beeper signals and no one reported seeing Capt Tiffin or his plane. Based on reports written by his flight members, Capt Tiffin was declared Missing in Action (MIA).

"... No beeper was heard. Electronic search was conducted over the area by two flights of F-105 aircraft with negative results. Captain Tiffin's last known position was over a densely populated area with farms in the surrounding area.

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Electronic search was suspended at 1700 hours, 21 Jul 1966. ("PACAF Intelligence Index of USAF Personnel MIA/PW in Southeast Asia", pg 2-104, AFHRA Call # K717.6031-3, IRIS # 1028640.)

On 18 July 1967, Capt Tiffin's MIA status was continued. "Careful evaluation of the information of record compels the conclusion that a reasonable possibility exists for the continued survival of Captain Tiffin." While he remained missing, Capt Tiffin was promoted to Major.

On 22 October 1974, the Air Force officially declared him dead. This date "... Was the date death is presumed to have occurred for the purpose of termination of pay and allowances, settlement of accounts, and payment of death gratuities ... " to Major Tiffin's wife and two sons.

Capt Tiffin was born 4 March 1938 in San Francisco, California. He entered the service from Santa Cruz, California, after graduating from Santa Cruz High School, Class of 1956. His name appears on the Vietnam Memorial Wall panel 09E line 54.

On 29 September 1993, the Joint Task Force - Full Accounting passed Capt Tiffin's case file to officials of the Vietnamese government. "... Capt Tiffin's last known location was ... approximately 25 kilometers north of Yen Bai and 1 kilometer east of Cho Ngoc, Yen Bai Province."

On 19 February 1997, a Vietnamese investigation team searched the location around Capt Tiffin's loss in the Yen Binh District. They learned that in 1963, the North Vietnamese government decided to create Thac Ba Lake by damming a river. As the lake flooded the villages in the area, potential eye-witnesses to Capt Tiffin's crash were scattered. The lake was fully formed by 1972.

The investigation team eventually located Mr. Vu Van Duyen, 69 years old, who, at the time of the crash lived in Van Chinh village, that was destroyed by the lake, and witnessed the crash. "At the time of the aircraft crash, I was concurrently the assistant village chairman, the public security chief, and the village militia commander, along with half a platoon of militia soldiers responsible for ... cutting down all the remaining trees after all the houses and personal possessions had been moved from the area (due to the rising lake)."

"The aircraft crashed between 0800 and 0900. ... The aircraft caught fire and blew up. The pilot's body was destroyed. Bones, flesh, legs and arms were thrown all over the area. I still remember there was a worker building Thac Ba lake who held up an arm for all to see. ... He later threw the arm away. ... In our village there were six people. ... We all saw and quickly collected aircraft wreckage. No one cleared or sanitized the area. No one buried the bones, flesh, legs, or arms of the pilot because the area was just about to be made into a lake and because we were very resentful."

In their report, the investigation team concluded that, "... We believe Mr. Duyen's information is accurate. He related the events to us in a natural manner. These were the things remaining in his memory. There were no (prior) arrangements or preparation. We arrived at Mr. Duyen's house unexpectedly. Although Mr. Duyen is weak, he is still alert and lucid. Mr. Duyen's entire person emanated a loyal and honest character. He wanted nothing for himself."

"With this information, we can say that the remains associated with ... pilot Tiffin, Rainford, were destroyed. No one collected remains, no one buried remains, therefore we cannot recover the remains."

U.S. Navy CNA Loss/Damage Data Base, loss 343, pg K19 & MIA records obtained by William D. "Bruce" McRae, high school classmate of Capt Tiffin, from Library of Congress and JTF-FA.

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.

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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)

Maj William R. McDaniel was another 34 TFS pilot who transferred to the 44th.

After flying 58 combat missions into Laos, the last one today 9 May 69, 1Lt Alan B. Reiter also transferred from the 34 TFS to the 44 TFS on 10 May. In the 44th, Lt Reiter was assigned F-105D 59-1759, which he named "Summertime Blues". "The name came from a 1958 rock song by Eddie Cochran." (Alan Reiter's AF Form 11 & e-mails 19 and 22 Feb 15.)

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

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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)	Pitman	KIA
			Stewart	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 .