THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE 177th FIGHTER WING

THE CONTRAIL

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On the cover: Aircrew and maintainers from the 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard, prepare an F-16D Fighting Falcon for an incentive flight for Master Sgt. David Bailey at the Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, NJ on December 5, 2015. ANG/Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley

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COMMANDER'S COLUMN

Reflect on our success, recognize others' excellence

by Col. John DiDonna, Wing Commander

I thought it appropriate to let all of you know I mailed Santa Claus my wishlist for the Holidays this year. He replied and told me I barely made the "nice" list, therefore I could only receive one gift. So, I asked for a Super Bowl 50 victory for the New England Patriots. He said "no problem, done". :-) Sorry if you're not a Patriots fan :-(

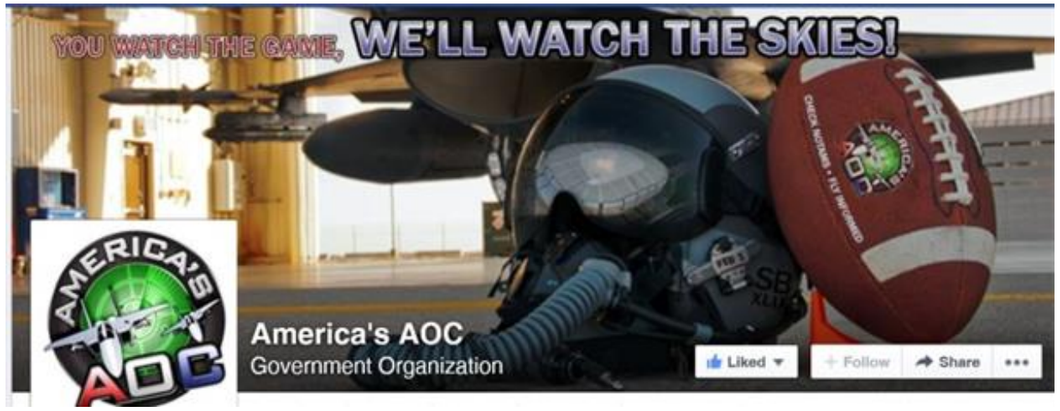
Seriously, I hope all of you had a fantastic Thanksgiving Holiday! I am thankful for many things in my life, to include having the health to serve in the United States Military alongside all of you. I cannot thank you enough for the effort you put forth to ensure mission success. I also would like to thank your families for their enduring support of your service in our Air National Guard.

I am truly amazed at what you are able to accomplish, and very much appreciate the judgment exercised when balancing mission accomplishment with all the additive (and ever growing) additional duties levied upon you. Time management both during the week and on UTA weekends is vital to mission success, mentoring our Airmen, and responsible professional development.

We have had an extremely successful year, deploying to various places around the world and within the CONUS, executing our mission in a professional/effective/lethal manner both at home and abroad. It takes a ONE TEAM effort to achieve such success. I would like you to reflect upon your military responsibilities, envision how those responsibilities contribute to our overall Wing mission, and how you contribute to our mission effectiveness. Without commitment and effort from each and every one of you, the Wing can never reach its full organizational potential. In addition, take the time to broaden your perspective and recognize the excellence which is resident outside your specific organization/work area. Seize the opportunity to say "Thank you" to an organizational leader or individual Airman who supports your service in the 177 Fighter Wing. So, from me to you, THANK YOU!

Lastly, but certainly most important, I would like to wish all of you happiness, health, safety and good cheer during this holiday season! Emotions often run the gamut during the holidays – from extreme joy to sometimes extreme sadness. Watch out for your fellow Airman's well-being, be respectful to each other, make responsible decisions, and I look forward to a very Happy 2016 serving alongside all of you. Oh, one more thing – I hope Santa finds the means to reward you for your good behavior this year – sorry if you asked for a Super Bowl 50 victory that does not involve the Patriots!!

Happy Holidays and New Year to You and Yours! Ma



Coming full circle: A chief uncovers great uncle's WWII crash site, 70 years later

The date is Dec. 24, 1944, in the midst of World War II, and while most Americans are at home preparing for a Christmas with their families, 1st Lt. Cuno Vernal Becker, an armament officer with the 836th Bomb Squadron, 487th Bomb Group, is boarding his B-17 Flying Fortress, about to take part in mission number 760 -- the 8th Air Force's largest single mission of the war.

Vern, as he is known by his family, was not originally meant to be part of that mission, but as the story is told, he gave one of his enlisted members the day off for Christmas Eve, and manned the tail gun, said U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. James McCloskey.

Vern was McCloskey's great uncle, and Christmas Eve 1944 would be the last mission 1st Lt. Cuno Vernal Becker would be a part of.

The crew of nine was shot down that day over Aywaille, Belgium. Seven of the nine were killed in action; two survived.

Flash forward more than 70 years later, and the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing is taking part in a two-week temporary duty on Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany. During some down time, part of the group took off to explore Europe.

"When we were driving back from Amsterdam, we happened to drive through Belgium," McCloskey said. "As soon as we passed through Belgium, I thought about my Grandmother, who passed last year. She would always tell stories about Vern. It's hard for me to be in Germany, or anywhere in Europe, and not think about my great uncle and the pictures of the war."

McCloskey took this opportunity to dive deeper into the history of his family, and he began to further research the events that unfolded on Christmas Eve, 1944.

"I immediately texted my dad to see if he could give me more info about Uncle Vern, and he sent me info about him, and the town he went down in," McCloskey said. "I was able to narrow it down to the hamlet of Septroux in Aywaille, Belgium."

An unknown man poses in front of a downed B-17 Flying Fortress, tail number 4337569, following a dogfight which occurred, Dec. 24, 1944. The aircraft's crew included 1st Lt. Vernal Cuno Becker, the tail gunner on the mission, and great-uncle of current U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. James McCloskey. (Courtesy photo)

From left, Gaston Mean, an Awyaille, Belgium, resident for more than 70 years, sits with U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. James McCloskey, and Mean's wife, in the living room of the long-standing Belgian home of the Mean family, Aug. 12, 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Shane S. Karp / Released)

McCloskey did not stop there. He took to the streets of Aywaille, asking the elder locals if they could recall anything from that day. The survey was unsuccessful.

"After we came back that day, I felt like I could have made a better effort to find out more," McCloskey said. "I decided to do some internet searching, and found a tiny museum in Aywaille dedicated to World War II called, 40-45 Memories."

This led the chief to Frédéric Winkin, a resident of Aywaille, and the curator of the museum.

"He said he knew exactly what I was talking about. Not only that, but he knew the exact location by the river where the main fuselage came down, as well as an idea of where my uncle came down in the tail section. From there, we set a date to meet up," McCloskey said.

Now for most, this alone is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity already, but Winkin had something else planned for the chief.

"A couple days later, Frédéric emailed me to say that he had one more surprise for me. He had found the man who pulled my uncle out of that plane, 70 years ago, and that he was willing to meet with me," McCloskey said. "Honestly, that made me nervous. I, a great nephew of Vern, was going to represent my whole family and meet this man."

A photograph of the remaining parts of the B-17 Flying Fortress fuselage, manned by 1st Lt. Cuno Vernal Becker, and his crew, taken along the banks of the Ambleve River near Aywaille, Belgium, after the aircraft was shot down, Dec. 24, 1944. (Courtesy Photo)

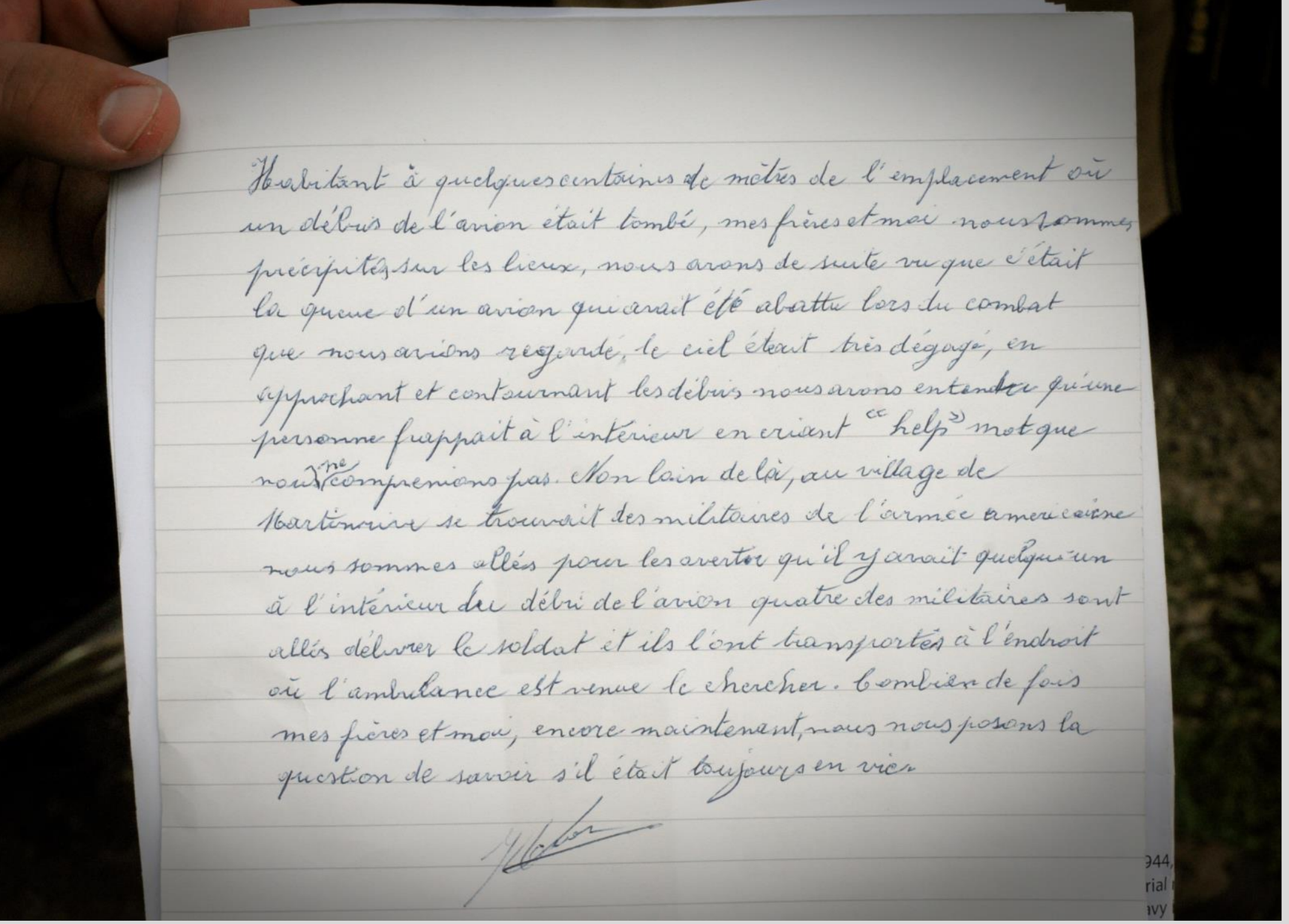
U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. James McCloskey stands along the banks of the Ambleve River near Aywaille, Belgium Aug. 12, 2015. The location is where the fuselage of his great uncle, 1st Lt. Cuno Vernal Becker's B-17 Flying Fortress, tail number 4337569, crashed after a dogfight on Dec. 24, 1944. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Shane S. Karp / released)

So on Aug. 12, 2015, McCloskey, accompanied by Winkin and two 177th FW members, went to the exact location on the banks of the Ambleve River near Aywaille, where 1st Lt. Cuno Vernal Becker's B-17 came down more than 70 years prior.

Directly after, the group was taken to the home of the older Belgian who was at the crash site in 1944, Gaston Mean.

Mean, accompanied by his wife, invited the group inside, sat them down, and pulled out a hand-written letter.

A pin drop could be heard in the living room of this long-standing Belgian home, as all eyes were focused on the older man while he precisely detailed what took place that day, in classic French dialect, as Winkin translated for the group.



Habitant à quelques centaines de mètres de l'emplacement où un débris de l'avion était tombé, mes frères et moi nous sommes précipités sur les lieux, nous avons de suite vu que c'était la queue d'un avion qui avait été abattu lors du combat que nous avions regardé, le ciel étant très dégagé, en approchant et contournant les débris nous avons entendu qu'une personne frappait à l'intérieur en criant "help" mot que nous ne comprenions pas. Non loin de là, au village de Martinrive se trouvait des militaires de l'armée américaine nous sommes allés pour les avertir qu'il y avait quelqu'un à l'intérieur des débris de l'avion quatre des militaires sont allés délivrer le soldat et ils l'ont transportés à l'endroit où l'ambulance est venue le chercher. Combien de fois mes frères et moi, encore maintenant, nous nous posons la question de savoir s'il était toujours en vie

A letter written by Gaston Mean, an Aywaille, Belgium resident for more than 70 years, depicting the events that lead to Mean helping extract members of a downed B-17 Flying Fortress, Dec. 24, 1944. The crew of the B-17 included 1st Lt. Vernal Cuno Becker, the great-uncle of current U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. James McCloskey. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Shane S. Karp / Released)

"Since Mr. Mean was the one who found my uncle, he obviously had an emotional bond with him. He never knew what happened to my uncle after that day. He wondered if he survived or died; he wondered if he went on to have a life in America," McCloskey said.

McCloskey then informed Mean of something that had been unknown to him for more than 70 years. Becker tragically died two days later from injuries sustained in the crash, at an allied hospital in Belgium. At this point, it had come full circle for both Mean, and McCloskey.

"I can't put into words how much all of this meant to my family," McCloskey said. "Everyone is fascinated and touched; I get calls from different family members all the time now who want to hear the story. I wish I could tell them more. I wish they were all in that town and that living room with me."

Chief McCloskey may not have been part of his great uncle's mission number 760, but after the experience in Aywaille, Belgium, he got as close to that crew as any man today possibly could.

177th Conducts Joint Training in Germany

Story and photographs courtesy of the 177th Air Support Operations Squadron

The New Jersey Air National Guard's 227th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS), along with the 177th Security Forces Squadron (SFS) and 177th Medical Group (MDG), conducted a deployment training scenario at Grafenwoehr, Germany in mid-October.

The scope of the exercise covered all of the elements that an overseas deployment would encompass.

"This marked the second time in as many years that we joined together to accomplish tactical training elements at the Grafenwoehr Training Area (GTA)", said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Albert J. Danza, commander of the 227th ASOS.

Approximately 120 days out, the members of the ASOS and SFS were given their warning orders advising them of their tasking and the deployment process was set in motion. Support elements of the 177th Fighter Wing accomplished the tasks necessary to get the expeditionary force "out the door".

"Upon landing in Ramstein, we executed a 5-hour convoy to the forward operating base (FOB) on GTA", explained Danza. "The ASOS scenarios were robust and extensive, ranging from mortar attacks on the FOB, to a major contingency operations scenario that changed constantly through inputs."

The SFS secured the Live Fire Shoothouse and the Military Operations on Urban Terrain site. Negotiating the course in a building block approach, urban assault and tactical building entry skills were developed, starting with walkthroughs that led to blanks, which culminated in live fire at targets.

"GTA offers a unique live fire Close Quarter Combat training opportunity that we are not able to accomplish locally and is rarely ever accomplished career-wide", remarked Chief Master Sgt. Michael Allen, 177th Chief of Security Forces.

The MDG received a unique training opportunity as well. Medevac assets stationed at GTA conducted 4 to 5 hours of training each day. The members of the MDG performed as medics on board the helicopter, while other unit members were hoisted in as simulated patients.

"Live intravenous procedures (with real needles!) were accomplished by their medics as part of a checkride," explained Danza. "Our med techs were asked to assist, all on a helicopter bouncing through the thick German fog."

GTA provides members of the armed forces with training facilities not available in the continental U.S. (CONUS). GTA combines over 100 ranges for every facet of Army and Air Force training, a live impact area for close air support training, and facilities that allow for deployed personnel to remain on post. Additionally, the infrastructure that exists between Ramstein and Grafenwoehr make this a more cost-effective trip than any trip within the CONUS.

Integrity, On and Off Base

By SrA Justin Vidal
Paralegal, 177th FW/JA

It's a crisp autumn Sunday afternoon, and you're watching your favorite football team. You're at a bar with some friends when the crowd at an adjacent table of competing fans starts heckling your quarterback's 23rd interception. You and your buddies have had a few drinks and exchange words with the less than amicable group. The trash talk escalates. You, perhaps invigorated on adrenaline and a few pints of your favorite brew, decide to take on your rivals; pummeling them to a pulp, and are promptly escorted off the premises as the police respond to the scene.

Fully aware your First Shirt is an officer at a nearby precinct, you tell the responding officers that you are a member of the Air National Guard in an attempt to relieve yourself of liability. Luckily, the rival party advises the officers that they do not wish to pursue criminal complaints, and you are permitted to go, presumably unscathed.

The truth is word almost always gets back to the base, your commander, and your peers in these scenarios all the time. As representatives of the Air National Guard, involvement in a precarious situation off-base is a direct reflection of our integrity. Likewise, it impacts the community's faith in our ability to be mission ready. You may be an AGR, technician or traditional guard member and the offense can be anything from driving while intoxicated, shoplifting, or simple assault to more serious offenses. In any incident, invoking the Air National Guard or specific members of the unit in an official capacity to delegitimize your wrong doing, demonstrates a failure to adhere to the Air Force Core Values. Implicating our organization damages trust within our community; a trust that our members have worked so hard to strengthen for decades.

Moreover, be advised that when information comes to your commanders' attention, by whatever means and from whatever source, there are certain actions they must, can, and will take. Associating the unit or specific members with that misconduct may harm your chances of redeeming yourself in the long run and can establish a basis for the commander to take more significant adverse military actions against you. It is always in your best interest to be candid with your superiors over potential misconduct issues and maintain your military bearing throughout any civilian proceedings. Integrity means possessing moral courage even if the personal cost is high. Always remember, the degree to which you hold yourself responsible to complying with the Air Force standards of conduct will set the standard for other members of this proud organization to emulate. Aim High Airmen.

Guardians

Never Leave Their Wingman!

Ask — Ask directly:
"Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

Care — Intervene. Control the situation.
Use active listening. Remove the means to do self-injury.

Escort — Get them to a primary care provider,
chaplain or other healthcare professional.

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Legion of Merit Awarded to Col. Michael Love

Story and Photograph by TSgt. Andrew J. Merlock

ATLANTIC CITY AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, N.J. - The Legion of Merit was awarded to the outgoing 177th Mission Support Group (MSG) Commander during a change of command ceremony here, Dec. 5.

Col. Michael Love was presented with the award culminating the end of his illustrious 25 year career.

“I am deeply humbled and honored to receive this recognition,” said Love. “You could almost change it to the Merit of Legions. It’s obvious that it is not the result of a solo performance.”

The Legion of Merit is a military award of the United States Armed Forces that is given for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements.

“All those magnificent accomplishments that were attributed to me really would not have been possible had it not been for the hard work and dedication of the talented men and women of the mission support group,” Love stated.

Love, who initially enlisted with the 177th Fighter Wing in 1991, was commissioned as a 2nd Lt. in 1992. Loved served as both flight and squadron commanders prior to his appointment as MSG commander in 2007.

Col. Patrick Kennedy, vice commander of the 177th FW, presented Love with the award in addition to his certificate of retirement signed by President Barack Obama.

“Mike is one of those commanders who is level headed, is unflappable in times of crisis,” explained Kennedy. “He always had that calming presence. I consider him a friend, a trusted commander, and just a great all around officer to be associated with.”

The Legion of Merit was awarded to Col. Michael Love on Dec. 5, 2015 during a change of command ceremony at the 177th Fighter Wing. The Legion of Merit is a military award of the United States Armed Forces that is given for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by TSgt. Andrew J. Merlock, Jr./ Released)

Story by Dr. Richard V. Porcelli

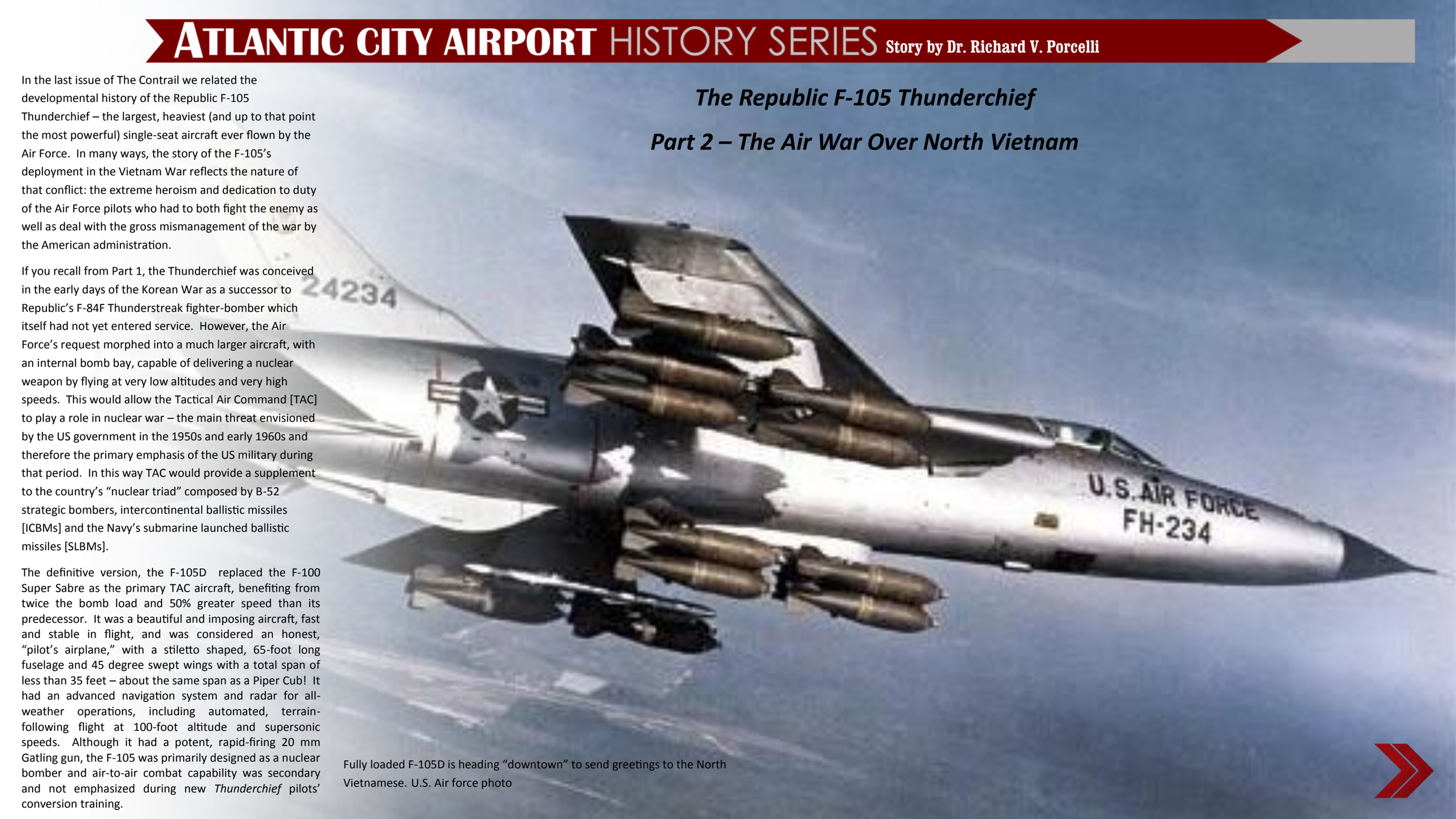
The Republic F-105 Thunderchief

Part 2 – The Air War Over North Vietnam

In the last issue of The Contrail we related the developmental history of the Republic F-105 Thunderchief – the largest, heaviest (and up to that point the most powerful) single-seat aircraft ever flown by the Air Force. In many ways, the story of the F-105's deployment in the Vietnam War reflects the nature of that conflict: the extreme heroism and dedication to duty of the Air Force pilots who had to both fight the enemy as well as deal with the gross mismanagement of the war by the American administration.

If you recall from Part 1, the Thunderchief was conceived in the early days of the Korean War as a successor to Republic's F-84F Thunderstreak fighter-bomber which itself had not yet entered service. However, the Air Force's request morphed into a much larger aircraft, with an internal bomb bay, capable of delivering a nuclear weapon by flying at very low altitudes and very high speeds. This would allow the Tactical Air Command [TAC] to play a role in nuclear war – the main threat envisioned by the US government in the 1950s and early 1960s and therefore the primary emphasis of the US military during that period. In this way TAC would provide a supplement to the country's "nuclear triad" composed by B-52 strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles [ICBMs] and the Navy's submarine launched ballistic missiles [SLBMs].

The definitive version, the F-105D replaced the F-100 Super Sabre as the primary TAC aircraft, benefiting from twice the bomb load and 50% greater speed than its predecessor. It was a beautiful and imposing aircraft, fast and stable in flight, and was considered an honest, "pilot's airplane," with a stiletto shaped, 65-foot long fuselage and 45 degree swept wings with a total span of less than 35 feet – about the same span as a Piper Cub! It had an advanced navigation system and radar for all-weather operations, including automated, terrain-following flight at 100-foot altitude and supersonic speeds. Although it had a potent, rapid-firing 20 mm Gatling gun, the F-105 was primarily designed as a nuclear bomber and air-to-air combat capability was secondary and not emphasized during new *Thunderchief* pilots' conversion training.



Fully loaded F-105D is heading "downtown" to send greetings to the North Vietnamese. U.S. Air force photo

It's physical attributes (and long takeoff runs) were the source of its early derisive nicknames of "Ultra Hog" and "Lead Sled." The source of its most common appellation, the "Thud," is not entirely certain. While one explanation is that Thud is the sound made when an F-105 crashed into a Vietnamese jungle, another attributes the name to "Chief Thunderthud" from the then popular "Howdy Doody Show" (the NBC network's children's TV program than ran from 1947 to 1960). Regardless of its origin, "Thud" became a name of both endearment and pride.

Two 355th TFW Thuds with a full bomb load taking fuel from a KC-135 prior to entering North Vietnam. U.S. Air Force photo

The F-105D eventually equipped seven tactical fighter wings. Early in its peacetime career it suffered from a poor reputation for reliability most often associated with the maintenance of its advanced electronics as well as pilot and ground crew unfamiliarity with the aircraft. It's low commission rate (the faulty terrain-following radar and related avionics were particularly susceptible to moisture-caused failures) and high maintenance man-hour requirements, as well as a shortage of spare parts, were major contributors to the problem. It also had a poor reputation for accidents, but in reality, it was statistically safer than all other Air Force tactical aircraft with the exception of the Convair F-106A *Delta Dart*.

By 1964, F-105D units provided all weather, nuclear strike capability for the attack of targets in the Soviet Union, its Communist bloc allies and China, from bases in Europe and Japan. The 46th and 49th Tactical Fighter Wings [TFW] were part of US Air Forces Europe [USAFE], assigned to Bitburg AB and Spangdahlem AB, West Germany. The 8th TFW and 18th TFW as part of the Pacific Air Forces [PACAF] were based in Japan, at Yokota AB and Kadena AB (Okinawa), respectively.

As we have seen, although designated as a "fighter" the F-105's size, weight, internal bomb bay and mission certainly makes one question the relevance of that designation! It was well designed to perform the single purpose of fighting a nuclear war. In that role it would probably be required to successfully complete just one mission per aircraft – delivery of a nuclear weapon in what possibly would be a "one way" flight. But with the outbreak of war in Southeast Asia, regardless of its design as a nuclear bomber, it is the aircraft that the Air Force relied upon to prosecute the air war.

The first F-105Ds were deployed to Southeast Asia just five days after the Tonkin Gulf Incident of August 1964 (where North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US Navy destroyers of the Vietnamese coast). Eight Thunderchiefs from the 36th TFS were sent from Yokota AB in Japan where they maintained a 24/7 nuclear alert status, to the Royal Thai Air Force [RTAF] base at Korat, arriving 9 August 1964. About 500 personnel supported the detachment. According to Col. Michael Cooper, who was one of the first F-100 pilots to transition to the F-105, "…there wasn't much when we got there – Cape Friendship was the US Army's (advisor) base and the Thais had a little flying school on the other side of the field." The Air Force personnel relied on the Army base for communications as well as day-to-day living requirements. They flew their Thunderchiefs into Korat from Japan fully loaded with munitions, but were re-supplied by a constant stream of C-130s to support their deployment. From Korat the detachment supported CIA operations against the Communist controlled Pathet Lao guerillas in Laos, with their bomb bays holding an extra fuel tank in place of a nuclear bomb. At the same time, the remainder of the 8th TFW, along with the other F-105 wings in the Pacific and Europe, sharpened their nuclear strike skills, not knowing how the Soviet or Chinese would respond to US involvement in Southeast Asia. The unit's deployment was called "temporary", partly as a cover story for flying combat missions from Thailand. They were joined in December by the 44th TFS. Although the aircraft remained, the pilots were rotated every 30 days, returning to their nuclear alert status at Yokota AB, between detachments to Thailand.

This photo of the ramp at Takhli RTAB shows the many F-105Ds of the 355th TFW; note that in this 1965 photo the addition of Southeast Asia camouflage to the Thuds was just beginning. U.S. Air Force photo

After the Tonkin Gulf Incident the US Navy flew Operation Pierce Arrow retaliatory strikes from aircraft carriers in the South China Sea over North Vietnam for the first time. At the same time, the USAF deployed tactical air strike squadrons (mainly North American F-100 Super Sabre fighter-bombers and Martin B-57 Canberra light bombers) to the three major air bases in South Vietnam to support the South Vietnamese army's fight against the Viet Cong, who were supplied both materiel and men from Communist North Vietnam.

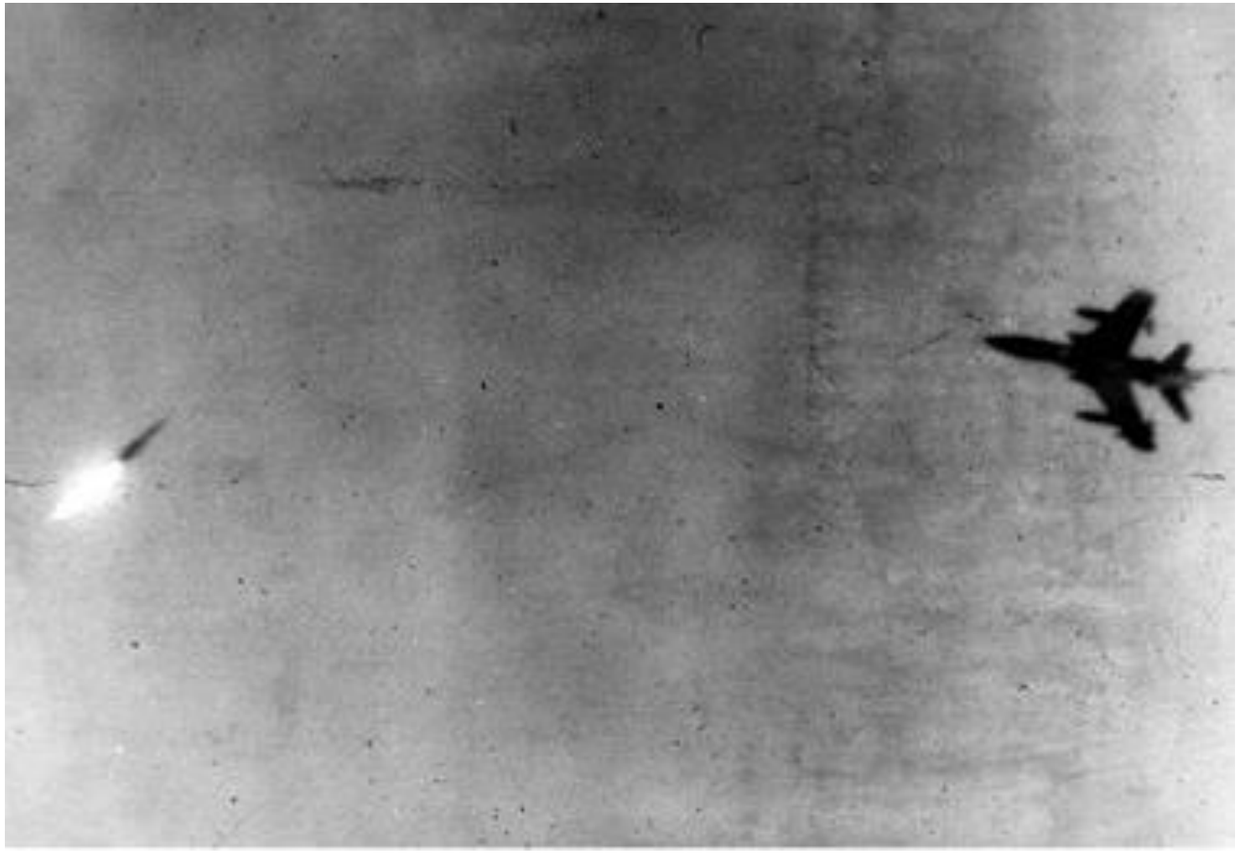
As the war escalated, the Thunderchief joined the fight in increasing numbers. The 36th TFS deployed to Takhli RTAB, providing a second Thai base for F-105 operations. In the ensuing months, F-105 squadrons based in Europe, Japan and the US were rotated in and out of these bases, mainly flying limited reprisal raids on targets in Laos, South Vietnam and the southern regions of North Vietnam, in response to an increasing number of Vietcong attacks. The rotation of F-105 units in and out of the combat theatre continued from August 1964 until early 1966, when the PACAF organized two permanent F-105 combat wings – the 355th TFW at Takhli and the 388th TFW at Korat.

Beginning in 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began formulating an air war plan that originally involved 94 key targets in North Vietnam, including bridges, rail yards, docks, barracks and supply dumps. The purpose was to reduce North Vietnamese support of Communist operations in Laos and South Vietnam, to limit North Vietnamese capabilities to take direct action against Laos and South Vietnam, and finally to impair North Vietnam's capacity to continue as an industrially viable state. But President Lyndon B.

Johnson feared a wide air campaign would lead to a direct, broader conflict with Russia and China. This concern was part of what the Army's General William Westmoreland (who commanded US military activities in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968) later referred to as "an almost paranoid fear of nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union and a 'phobia' that the Chinese would invade." Johnson did not trust his military leaders and insisted on keeping direct control of the war in his own hands, and those of his Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara.

The air plan was not implemented and discussion in Washington continued until a series of attacks on US bases in South Vietnam demanded immediate response. After deadly guerilla attacks on USAF personnel and aircraft at Bien Hoa and the Marine barracks at Pleiku, the war escalated, with Air Force and Navy aircraft flying Operation Flaming Dart missions, small-scale raids that attacked supply dumps and barracks in the southern part of North Vietnam. (And in March 1965, US Army and Marine ground forces were thrown into the fight on the ground as well.)

Again the subject of a sustained air campaign was raised and this time President Johnson approved Operation Rolling Thunder. This controversial operation was originally intended as an eight-week air campaign of attacks by the Air Force and the Navy of increasing severity, starting from the southern regions of North Vietnam, with gradual escalation north towards Hanoi.



This dramatic picture shows a F-105 successfully outmaneuvering a North Vietnamese SAM. U.S. Air Force photo

However, these missions were constrained by strict restrictions imposed by Johnson and McNamara. Among many restraints, these attacks were initially limited to targets below the 19th parallel, each of which had to be personally cleared by Johnson and McNamara. They naively believed that selective pressure, controlled by Washington, in combination with diplomatic overtures, would prevail and "compel Hanoi to end its aggression."

This faulty strategy would become known as the doctrine of "gradualism" in which threatening destruction would serve as a more influential signal of American determination than destruction itself; they believed it was better to hold important targets "hostage" by bombing trivial ones. As Operation Rolling Thunder proceeded, the restrictions (known as the Rules of Engagement, or ROE) became even more severe and constraining. Civilians in Washington dictated which targets would be struck, the day and hour of the attack, the number and types of aircraft and the tonnages and types of ordnance utilized, and sometimes even the direction of the attack. Air strikes were strictly forbidden within 30 nautical miles of Hanoi and within 10 nautical miles of the port of Haiphong. A thirty-mile buffer zone also extended along the length of the Chinese frontier. In reality, targeting was uncoordinated and randomly (and illogically) selected. Militarily significant targets, including Communist supply ships in Haiphong harbor, power plants, military airfields and later, under-construction surface-to-air missile [SAM] sites were off-limits, again in fear of causing Soviet or Chinese casualties and a widening of the conflict. Often, target selection, choice of weapons and other mission details were decided at daily White House lunches, with Johnson and McNamara (and rarely the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) making decisions that directly impacted the mission's viability (and the pilots' chances of survival) while munching on sandwiches. The targets and other mission details were then telephoned to Saigon and eventually to the F-105 squadrons at Korat and Takhli. Once something became a "target", it stayed a target until destroyed. If the first attempt failed, the raid would be repeated the next day and the day after that, always at the same time of day, with the same direction of attack, weaponry, attack group composition, etc., in a very predictable manner. It did not take the North Vietnamese long to figure out the folly of the American administration's air tactics.

The justification in Washington for Operation Rolling Thunder was that a major air campaign against North Vietnam would force them to the bargaining table and the war could be swiftly brought to a negotiated end. The original thinking was an eight-week campaign would accomplish this goal but Johnson and McNamara were tragically wrong. Rolling Thunder lasted more than three years and the only result was a stiffening of the North Vietnam's will to fight as well as drastic increase in defenses, and if anything, a greater tempo of operations in support of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. The theory of "gradualism" was in total disagreement to what Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay and other senior military leaders saw as the proper use of airpower. Note that the word "victory" was missing from the administration's goals of the air campaign while LeMay wanted to "pulverize North Vietnam"… and was not interested in gradually coaxing them to the bargaining table for a negotiated settlement. Further, the air campaign should have been more strategic rather than just trying to cut the lines of communication and supply. Thus, the burden fell to the Air Force, Navy and Marine aircrew that were duty and honor-bound to execute this faulty strategy. And they (and their families) paid a very heavy price in the process.

The majority of strikes during Rolling Thunder were launched from air bases in Thailand as well as Navy aircraft carriers operating in the South China Sea and Marine jets based at DaNang AB. In an effort to "deconflict" attacking aircraft from the three services, North Vietnam was dividing into six route packages or "PAKs," with numbering starting at the demilitarized zone, or DMZ (the border between South and North Vietnam), and going up towards the Chinese border. Later, PAK VI, which included the most heavily defended targets of Hanoi and Haiphong, were divided into PAKs VIA and VIB. PAKs I, V and VIA "belonged" to the Air Force, while II, III, IV and VIB were the Navy's responsibility. (The Marines shared PAK I with the Air Force.)

The Air Force's PAK VIA was the worst of the worst and this is where the F-105 "earned its spurs." It was the most heavily defended piece of real estate in history, with multiple layers of anti-aircraft defenses, including guns, missiles and MiGs, all controlled by a Soviet-supplied radar system. This region also included the confluence of the main rail and road routes that linked China to Vietnam and war zone in the south, and therefore was strategically the most important target area. Pilots referred to Hanoi as "Downtown," based on Petula Clark's

F-105s are shown flying over Hanoi - the most heavily defended piece of real estate in the world. U.S. Air Force photo

hit song of the period by the same name, where as the lyrics put it, "Downtown…everything's waiting for you."

On a typical combat mission into North Vietnam, the F-105Ds from Korat and Takhli air bases in Thailand would struggle into the hot, humid air, at the end of perhaps an 8,000-foot takeoff roll, carrying two 450 gallon wing-mounted fuel tanks, a 390 gallon fuel tank in the bomb bay, and five 1,000 pound or six 750 pound bombs. Shortly after takeoff and joining up of the strike group, the F-105s required the first of a number of inflight refuelings for the 700-mile trip to Hanoi. Approaching Hanoi, the F-105s would often drop down and fly at low level around the mountainous terrain that ran parallel to the Red River, about 30 miles southwest of Hanoi, which the pilots nicknamed "Thud Ridge," attempting to evade detection by the air defenses surrounding the city. Early in the campaign, F-100 Super Sabres would provide a limited combat air patrol, covering the ingress and withdrawal of the attacks, while later, the McDonnell F-4 Phantoms would take on this escort task. Later also, jammers such as the Douglas EB-66 Destroyers and still later, F-100F and F-105F/G Wild Weasels carrying jamming pods and radar–seeking missiles would join the strike group.

The gradual escalation of Operation Rolling Thunder with periodic pauses "to allow Hanoi to rethink their commitment to the war" only resulted in a hardening and resupply of their defenses and a rebuilding of any significant targets that had been destroyed in previous air attacks. For the Thud pilots, the hardened air defense took their toll. Statistically, by their 66th mission up north, "they would have been shot down twice and rescued once." Or put another way, they only had a 60% chance of completing the 100 required missions to North Vietnam. (Missions into Laos did not count, but still posed serious dangers.) If permanently assigned to one of the Thailand based squadrons, successful completion of 100 missions would take six months.

In the early years of the air war, and throughout most of Rolling Thunder the F-105 flew about 75% of the Air Force's attack missions into North Vietnam, amounting to more than 22,000 sorties. The Air Force's "big gun," the B-52 strategic bomber was not risked over North Vietnam at this point in the war because of its importance as a nuclear strike deterrent against the Soviet Union. Instead, the Thunderchief was heavily relied upon to do the job even though it had not been designed for this mission. The Air Force bought a total of 833 F-105s of all models. Of this total, 610 were single-seat F-105Ds, the workhorse of the air campaign. As early as the spring of

This fully loaded F-105D is from the 333 TFS, part of the 355th TFW from Takhli RTAB, heading to a North Vietnamese target. U.S. Air Force photo

1967, only 300 D models were left in the inventory. By the time the F-105 was withdrawn from frontline service, a total of 350 were lost. Of these, 312 were lost to anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and SAMs. (Actually, most of these 312 losses were claimed by AAA as the combination of electronic suppression of enemy air defenses [SEAD] and last second out-maneuvering of the ascending missiles was fairly successful at defeating SAMs.) A further 22 were claimed by North Vietnamese MiG fighters (with 14 lost in December 1966 alone).

According to Maj. Ed Raz Rasimus (who flew 100 missions in the F-105 and another 100 missions in the F-4, and wrote about his Thud experiences in his great book, "When Thunder Rolled") "…when a guy got shot down, if he wasn't picked up in the first 90 minutes, he wasn't coming out." As pilots and aircraft were lost at a rate of five or six per week, replacement aircrew and aircraft were flown into Korat and Takhli from Japan, and then from Europe and the US as the squadrons were depleted. The turnover was tragically rapid. This writer urges you to read Col. Jack Broughton's definitive memoir "Thud Ridge", and Col. Gene Basel's "Pak Six", perhaps the best book about the air war over North Vietnam, to get a true perspective from the pilot's point of view of the horrors (and sometimes humor) of their plight. They tell of returning from a long mission, exhausted, retiring to the bar where they would celebrate the lives of their squadron mates who did not return that day, sleep for perhaps 6 hours, and then awake to begin the cycle again of planning, manning-up and executing the next mission. The Thud pilots adopted Australian bush hats and kept their mission tallies on the hat's rim. On average, a pilot could expect to fly 16 trips "downtown" per month, plus additional missions to Laos or even South Vietnam.

There was a good reason for the pilots to dread their daily sorties into North Vietnam. In his book "When Thunder Rolled", Maj. Rasimus recalled, "…the losses were appalling. The class of nine pilots that had been six weeks ahead of mine at Nellis AFB (for transition to the Thud) lost four. The first class of 'universally assignable' pilots (i.e., former bomber and transport pilots that converted to fighters) lost 15 of 16, all either killed or captured; …for every five pilots that started the tour, three would not complete it."

Being superstitious by nature, the pilots would not leave their hat on a bed or dresser; the ubiquitous crickets that infested the washrooms could not be smashed; and once a mustache was grown, it could not be shaved off until the pilot finished his tour. Most drank more than they should have and were perpetually tired and drained. However, despite this "wild" image, Thud pilots were serious and dedicated professionals. Most were family men, and their main concerns were "seeing the wife and kids again" and not becoming a POW.

Although the F-105 had none of the attributes of a good air-to-air fighter (it was big, heavy and had a very high wing loading, making air combat maneuvering difficult), it was fast (faster than any other aircraft in the war) and had that powerful Gatling gun in its nose. In air-to-air combat, F-105 pilots claimed 27.5 MiG kills, 24.5 attributed to the Gatling gun, and 3 to the AIM-9 Sidewinder missile. All but one of the victims was MiG-17s, and the final air-to-air kill was against a vaunted MiG-21.

But overall, the F-105 did not fare well in the air war over North Vietnam. The losses were so horrendous that it became the first (and only) US Air Force aircraft to be removed from combat due to attrition. Why did the Thud suffer such losses? One reason was the politically imposed Rules of Engagement and overall strategy that allowed the North Vietnamese to rebuild their defenses. Another, related reason was the administration's civilian (mainly President Johnson and Secretary McNamara's) "hands-on" micromanagement of the tactics and in the inability of the military leaders to exercise any meaningful control on the prosecution of the air war.

A third reason lies with the F-105 itself. It was designed as a nuclear bomber, but pressed into service as a conventional fighter-bomber. By its design concept, it was not as rugged or survivable as its predecessors, particularly the P-47 Thunderbolt, F-84E/G Thunderjet or even the F-84F Thunderstreak. Although the robust construction of the airframe was able to absorb considerable damage and still bring the pilot safely home (with the aircraft often then consigned to the scrap heap), it did have severe vulnerabilities. For its designed role to fight a nuclear war, the ability to deliver one weapon at low altitude and high speed was the primary requirement. Little thought (and therefore no design consideration) was given to enduring a long-term campaign of hundreds of missions over years; the aircraft's survivability, including redundant systems, armor, separate hydraulic lines, etc. were not part of its design concept. Instead, those survivability features were traded off to achieve higher speed and range. For example, although there were two hydraulic systems, the lines were run parallel, close to each other. Therefore a hit in the wrong place would disable both the primary and secondary hydraulic systems, resulting in an uncontrollable nosing down of the aircraft. Also the internal and auxiliary (bomb bay mounted) fuel tanks were not self-sealing; thus even a small caliber hit could cause a leak and greater vulnerability to fire and explosion. A mid-1965 retrofit program attempted to rectify some of these weaknesses, including the addition of a modified flight control system that would give the pilot some control authority in case the hydraulic system was hit, buying him some time to fly out of the immediate area before ejecting. The ejection seat was also improved, and a fire suppression system was added to the fuel tanks. But the modification program did little to stop the losses. Perhaps the situation could be summarized as "a good airplane being misused in a poorly managed air war" or "the right airplane fighting the wrong war."

What cannot be questioned, however, is the dedication of the Thud pilots in the face of such horrendous odds. They risked it all to achieve results that were often questionable. As Col. Basel wrote in his book about his lost squadron mates, "I walk the streets and still grieve for them and for those that did return, for all the others and for myself…"

The last F-105D was returned home to the US in 1970; it was replaced in the fighter-bomber role by the F-4C, F-4D and eventually the F-4E Phantom. The two-seater F-105F and later, F-105G Wild Weasel remained in combat until the end of hostilities, providing invaluable suppression of enemy air defenses, including during the Operation Linebacker campaigns of 1972 that finally brought North Vietnam to a negotiated end to hostilities. Two F-105 pilots (both flying the F-105F in the Wild Weasel role, were Medal of Honor recipients, while their back-seaters were awarded the Air Force Cross.

Withdrawal of the surviving Thunderchiefs from active duty proceeded quickly. Relegated to the reserves, the last F-105 flight occurred in February 1984.

In the next issue of The Contrail the F-105's short tenure with the Thunderbirds and subsequent extensive use by the New Jersey Air National Guard, including the 119th Tactical Fighter Squadron, will be related.

This painting by Robert Tailor, called "Rolling Thunder", shows Col. Jack Broughton leading a flight of four Thuds on a low level attack on a Hanoi area power plant, March 1967. Art work, courtesy of the AviationArtHangar website

RUCK, FIRE, RECALL

Physical challenge tests will, skills, and brain power

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Nine members of the 177th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron participated in a try out for the squadron's new Advanced Designated Marksman (ADM) position at the Atlantic City Air National Guard base in Egg Harbor Township, NJ on Nov. 24 and Dec. 6, 2015.

The tryout was developed to test the members' abilities to fulfill the requirements needed for the position.

"Right now its ADM but we're thinking ahead to the potential for creating a Close Precision Engagement Team (CPET), which is more labor intensive," said Master Sgt. Kevin Allman, 177th SFS Unit Training Manager.

The tryout consisted of a training class in the morning, an approximate three mile round trip ruck sack march to a location on the other side of the base to gather intelligence and a trip to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) firing range. While at the range, the participants tested their marksmanship skills under physical duress and then answered questions about the information from the morning session and the intelligence gathering march.

"Even though a member may have good shooting skills on paper, what they need for the CPET is the ability to perform flawlessly in real world scenarios, under intense pressure," explained Allman.

From left, SrA Joe Fasanella hoists a 30 plus pound ruck sack, Airmen 1st Class Abdiel Rivera and Shane Dunlevy double time a ruck sack march to the other side of the base and Rivera checks the contents of an ammo can which he'll be tested on at the conclusion of the tryout on Nov. 24.

After the 1.5 mile trek to the munitions area, carrying a ruck sack weighing over 45 lbs., SFS members had to memorize the details of various items placed in an ammo can and then march back to the starting point in the timed event. They were then ferried to the FAA firing range, where they ran laps, did push-ups and squat thrust exercises and then conducted live-fire training, testing their marksman ship with stress factors which they might experience in a real-world scenario.

"This is a timed tryout but there's more to it than just running out and back", said Master Sgt. Andrew Hambleton, 177SFS Combat Arms Training instructor and tryout participant. "If they don't perform well at the range or if they don't remember the details of the class or the items they find, it won't matter if they're back the fastest."

Staff Sgt. Mark Naughton performs squat thrust exercises before attempting to shoot targets at the range on Nov. 24.

From right, Airman 1st Class, Zachary Ferguson, Tech. Sgt. Anthony Lemons and Senior Airman William Lopez fire at targets after performing physical training on Dec. 6.

SFS instructors quiz ADM tryout participants on information from the morning class and intel obtained during the ruck sack march on Nov. 24

PARADOCS

By Dr. Andrew Savicky, 177th Fighter Wing
Director of Psychological Health

Holiday Stress Management According to Santa's Reindeer

By Doc Andy Savicky,
177th Director of Psychological Health

First of all…realize that stress is normal and is a call to action by our brains and a necessity for survival. So here are some tips from each of the wise and wordly reindeer that have guided Santa all these years on managing stress during the Holidays:

Dasher says: "Remember what's Important – Commercialism can overshadow the true sentiment of the holiday season. When your holiday expense list is running longer than your monthly budget, you should scale back. Remind that family, friends, and the relationships in your life are what matter most!"

Blitzen believes we should: "Set Realistic Expectations. No holiday celebration is perfect; expect a few hiccups and view them as opportunities to demonstrate flexibility and resilience. Create a realistic budget and remind your children that the holidays are not about expensive gifts!"

Comet is fast but wants you to: "Take Time for Yourself – Taking care of yourself helps you to take better care of others in your life. Do something you enjoy…go for a walk, read something that interests you, or listen to your favorite music. By pacing yourself and slowing down for a little while, you may find more energy to accomplish your holiday goals!"

Dancer is always on the run but insists that we: "Take Some Deep Breaths – When you are stressed, your breathing tends to become shallow and your heart rate increases. Deliberate slow, deeper breathing will automatically put you in a more relaxed state!"

Vixen has found a valuable experience and that is to: "Volunteer – Many charitable organizations face new challenges because of difficult economic times. Find a local charity, such as a soup kitchen or a shelter where you and your family can volunteer together. Support the Salvation Army Operation Angle Tree Project. Helping others can put any hardships you have in perspective and build stronger family relationships!"

Rudolph has been there and shouts: "Support Each Other – Talk about stressors related to the holidays with your wingman, friends, and family. Learning how others are dealing with similar situations can help you work toward a solution!"

Prancer is a show off and knows the value of making people: "Laugh – A good laugh promotes a sense of well-being by releasing endorphins (the natural feel good chemical in the brain). Treat yourself and your family to a holiday comedy!"

Cupid is all about emotions, which are all normal and targets the messaage: "That we can't help the way we feel, but we can help the way we think and act. You reprogram your behavior and use maturity, judgement, restraint, logic, and reasoning in the management of Holiday Stress!"

Donner says you can't always manage all the stress by yourself so: "If you continue to feel overwhelmed, contact your Wing Director of Psychological Health, Doc Andy Savicky for additional stress management guidance and resources: Call 609-761-6871 or email andrew.savicky.civ@mail.mil for a confidential and free appointment in Building 229 by the Gym.

On behalf of my entire Savicky family, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy Holiday, which bring you peace, health, happiness, and a renewed optimism for a wonderful New Year. God bless! Doc Andy Savicky

Around the Wing

For more awards photos, check out the 177th Fighter Wing Facebook page!

From right, Chief Master Sgts. Jason Gioconda and Frank Spence serve a holiday meal to Senior Airman Jonathan Paone on November 14. ANG/Master Sgt. Andrew Moseley

From right, Chief Master Sgts. Wayne Miller and Diana Samborski serve a meal to Senior Airman Ryan Curcio on December 6. ANG/ Master Sgt. Andrew Moseley

Seneca HS Jr ROTC students and staff pose for a group photo while touring the base on November 20. ANG/ Master Sgt. Andrew Moseley

From left, U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dan Kelly, 177th Maintenance Operations Center, his son 1st Lt. Adam Kelly and his wife Mary Kelly pose for a photo after 1st Lt. Kelly's promotion pinning event at Hanscom AFB, Massachusetts, September 21. At the same ceremony, 1st Lt. Kelly, Project Manager AFAFRICA AOR Force Protection Division, pinned Master Sgt. stripes on his father, Dan. Courtesy photo

U.S. Air Force Col. John DiDonna, 177th Fighter Wing Commander, visits Santa Claus during the Wing Family Holiday festivities on Dec. 6. ANG/SrA Shane Karp