



My Missions in the F-100 Super Sabre in SEA

Lt. Col. Ron Green
USAF (Ret.)

I joined the 416th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) on Easter Sunday, 1963, at Misawa AB, Japan. Although this was to be a three year tour, in June 1964, I found myself in the last flight of F-100s leaving Misawa transferring to England AFB as a part of Project Clear Water (Muddy Water as we affectionately called it).

I was named the Squadron Mobility Officer, but was told not to worry about it as it would be at least six months before we could be sent anywhere else. True to form, in two months we were given two weeks to be on the way to Vietnam.

In exactly two weeks, after painting many of the boxes myself, we marshaled the last box for the deployment. At this moment we received a call that said we weren't going after all.

Although we were disappointed (especially me), all our work was not for naught as we found ourselves in Clark AB the next March. We were TDY (temporary duty) to Clark, but were on call for deployments to Danang AB, Vietnam, as a Response Force when we were called upon.

We didn't have long to wait as the first afternoon we were told to deploy a flight to Vietnam for missions North. I begged the Ops Officer to let me go and was told that as soon as I unloaded the last C-130 the next morning, and loaded it with equipment required for TDY support, I could get on board and accompany it.

We met the C-130 the next morning and by one of the pilots driving the fork lift, I was soon on the way to Danang. I quickly did my mobility duties that were necessary and then accomplished my in-theater briefing so that I was ready to fly. I was even able to sweet talk my way on to a mission the next morning.

After my briefing, I decided it was time to take my one B-3 bag and check into billeting for my tent bed. I figured that I would unpack my clothes and then bring my flying gear back.

I was standing in front of the Quonset waiting for a ride when three pilots ran out, of which one was from the 416th. He hollered at me that I was #4 of a RESCAP (Rescue Cap) mission for an F-105 pilot that had just been shot down (this turned out to be Robby Risner). We were to provide support for an HU-16 Albatross that was on the way to pick him up. The information was hollered to me as the pilots ran past me.

I tore my flying gear from my B-3, threw the bag back inside the Quonset and started to follow in the direction where I thought the pilots were going. I was putting my flying gear on as I ran and saw several crew chiefs standing in front of an airplane in a revetment waving me on so I went there. Ever try to put a G-suit on while running?

The other three airplanes were just starting to taxi so I told the crew chiefs to pull whatever pins they could and button me up for taxi. No preflight was made in this case as I didn't have time.

The radio came on-line and I heard the flight calling to the control tower - this verified the flight call sign which I hadn't gotten yet. I taxied on the chief's signal and strapped in as I taxied.

As I pulled into the arming area, #3 (my



Capt. Ron Green at Danang ready to step into his F-100 Super Sabre.



element lead and the pilot from my squadron) was just lighting his afterburner. I quickly armed, got clearance for take-off, and saw the flight already into their turn out of traffic. When airborne, I pulled up the gear handle and started my turn. When reaching the proper speed I pulled up the flaps and aimed at the flight for join-up. I was in trail, of course) and continued to accelerate.

I then checked my airspeed and to my surprise saw I was going through 500 knots. I was able to join up with the flight when we were about 40 miles north of Danang. We continued up the coast and leveled at around 20,000 feet.

This gave me ample time to think about things and assess that I had a parachute, water wings, G-suit and the survival kit in the airplane; but no combat survival radio, survival map or gun. This caused me to ask myself several times about what I was doing there and to question the smartness about being along on the flight. The fact that I definitely knew they were shooting in this area made me question the sanity of my decision to be part of this flight.

We sighted the HU-16 in an orbit just to the east of the downed pilot and set up in an orbit around the HU-16 and pilot in the water. The coordination was made and the HU-16 set up for landing. During this time we saw occasional plumes in the water showing that the North Vietnamese were shooting mortars, but the pilot was out of their range.

As the HU-16 touched down there was a



The author's F-100 after a crash landing at ~~Danang AB~~ Tan Son Nhut AB in December of 1965.

big spray of water and the HU-16 completely disappeared, but eventually bobbed up again. We asked if he was OK and were told "Yes, but I have one engine missing very badly." He said that it was good enough for him to taxi in and pick up the pilot.

He then taxied farther out before turning south for takeoff. He applied power and as I remember we had time for three complete turns before the wake of the HU-16 stopped, indicating he was airborne. He then climbed to 4,500 feet and continued on to Danang.

We jettisoned our bombs at sea, as we were prohibited from landing with them, and made an uneventful landing. As we pulled into the de-arming area I breathed a sigh of relief and said to myself "All's well that ends well!"

For this mission I was credited with 1/25th of an Air Medal and taken off the next day's schedule as I had already gotten my first combat mission and the others were to get their second before I flew again.

I was to earn the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) about six weeks later as the North Vietnamese tried to cut the northern area of South



Vietnam off just below Danang. As we attempted to get the maximum number of missions off and fly necessary night missions, I, as one of the few qualified for night missions volunteered and flew day and night for four days and the three nights.

On one of the day missions our ground troops were defending Danang from several platoons of the enemy. This had developed into where the enemy was organized into a hard line just a few miles from Danang and were arranged into an attack from a tree line with a trench dug in behind it for their mortars and heavy machine guns. I was leading a four ship flight and it was so close that we could easily see the airfield from our base leg on our weapons deliveries.

We dropped ordnance from our wing stations and then rolled in to strafe down the trench for maximum effectiveness. On the first strafe pass #4 called and said he was hit and was returning to base. I said, "Roger that and we'll keep you in sight 'til on final and if you bail out we'll come and cap you."

We continued our mission and on the next pass #2 called and said he was hit and was returning to land. Again I gave him the same instructions I'd given to #4. He acknowledged this and we continued on.

On the next pass #3 called he was hit and was returning to base. I rogered this and said I'd stay high and dry until he was on final. After he was on final, I continued to strafe for two more passes and in this case it was until my 20mm ammunition was expended. I never took a hit and when the ground troops took that area, they said they didn't encounter any significant opposition.

I did get the third afternoon off, but as I was going to bed I decided to go out and tan by our bunker as my tan was suffering. While sitting there reading a snipers bullet whizzed by my ear. At this point I was done trying to sleep. Adrenaline replaces the need for sleep for many days!

I was stationed with the 416 TFS at Tan Son Nhut in 1965. This happened during the time that we were not short of ordnance, but were only flying with two wing stations loaded and 50 rounds of 20mm rounds loaded per gun. We were also restricted to only expending 20mm when we were shot at.

It was hard to get shot at when delivering bombs so after dropping them I'd have the rest of the flight stay high while I went down and did a slow roll over the target at 250 knots. This was normally more than the Viet Cong could resist so they would shoot. The only thing was that at 250 knots they always shot ahead of me as their sights were set for speeds of over 400 knots and they couldn't adjust. It so happened that as flight lead, I had the distinction of always getting to expend my flights 20mm ammunition.

This story relates to a time I was leading a three ship formation of us captains (all flight leads with about 1,200 hours in the airplane) on a target in III Corps. As I remember we dropped our bombs singly (this was before the instructions of not turning one outboard station select to empty so that we could deliver our outboard bombs one at a time when selecting bomb pairs).

We had delivered our bombs when the FAC (forward air controller) said he really needed us to expend our 20mm against a shade roof and platform about one mile away. I informed him of our rule, but if he really needed our 20mm, we would do it (50 rounds of ammo per gun).

I instructed the flight to pick out one vertical support beam right at the floor level and to strafe it each time. I chose the beam closest to our run in heading and made three short burst passes. This left me with a few rounds left after the third pass where #2 and #3 fired out. I couldn't believe it but after three passes the shelter was still standing.

This got to my fighter pilot ego and I informed the FAC that I had a few rounds left for a fourth pass and that the roof would not be standing after this pass. To make sure of this I decided that I would make a slow pass and then pull up to a sharp angle of attack, light the burner and blow it down if it was still standing. The shelter was on the side of a slight hill and was used by the harvesters for shade when tending the crop. I did not think of what would happen if the burner didn't light or the engine compressor stalled.

I slowed to 250 knots as I turned final and reduced my altitude to where I was level with the target. I put the piper on the target and opened fire at about 800 feet. When I ran out of bullets, which was very quickly, I raised the nose and lit the afterburner. As I thought the shade roof was still standing but



when I flew over the roof, I blew it down.

For a few minutes I thought the FAC was going to jump out of his O-1 for joy. However, on the way home I realized what could have happened and said to myself that the shade roof was not worth an airplane and fighter pilot's life. I resolved right then and there never to do that again!

This was one of those cases where ego overruled judgment. I'm sure we all had those moments. I had to think: "There, but for the Grace of God, go I!"

The so called shortage of ordnance during the Vietnam conflict in 1966 must have affected my judgment as I did some crazy things during that time. And I never did anything resembling these stunts after we started flying with full loads again.

One afternoon I was scheduled to lead a three ship formation from Tan Son Nhut in IV Corps in an F-100F (two-seater) aircraft. I really hated to fly with an empty back-seat, but by the time we were ready, nobody had been assigned to the back-seat. As we left the squadron building I ran across one of my contemporary captains and I asked him if he'd like to fly with me in the back-seat. He said: "Yeah, I'll get my gear and meet you at the airplane."

We flew to the target area and dropped our two bombs each on some trees. As we pulled off the FAC said he badly needed to destroy a long boat sunk in about three feet of water about a mile south of the target and needed us to strafe. It was

between two trees in a line along the bank and pretty well centered between two trees that were about 40 feet apart. We pin-pointed the two trees and started an orbit. I reminded him that we only had 50 rounds of 20mm ammunition in each gun and we weren't supposed to strafe unless we were being shot at. He said he'd file a report that this was really needed and authorized by him. I replied that we'd give it a go, but 20mm ammunition might not do the trick.

Since we had the two trees, he saw no need to mark the target and I told him we'd make passes east to west as the canal ran north and south and would go down and see if we could see the boat before we'd strafe. To do this I made the first pass at our recommended altitude and rolled to about 60 degrees of bank as I went over the target. Number 2 and 3 followed me, but none of us saw it on our first pass.

I then informed Ralph, my back-seater, that we were going to go down low and slow and see if we could see it then. I got down to where we were level just off the ground, slowed to 250 knots and rolled to a full 90 degrees of bank as we went across the channel. This enabled both of us to see the boat sunk in about three feet of water and about six feet from the bank and centered between the two trees (dumb VC decision as this let us actually pin-point the boats position).

I then informed Ralph that we'd make about a 300 knot pass at 10-15 degrees of dive angle and open up at about 1,000 feet and not to jump out of the airplane. He said okay and neither 2 or 3 had seen the target yet so I told them to follow me and strafe where I did and that I'd concentrate my burst about ten feet from the bank. I wanted to get close as the 20mm ammo had to penetrate the water to the depth of the boat.

I rolled out on my final and started shooting with a short burst at about 1,000 feet. During my burst I saw pieces of the boat come up and they must have gone up to about 30 feet. I knew we'd hit them if I did a normal pullout



The Museum's two-place F-100F Super Sabre.



so I went over the target at about three feet and level and went between the two trees. This put us just below the pieces of the boat. Ralph got very quiet and never said a word on the way back to base.

On walking back to the squadron building I patted Ralph on the shoulder and asked him if he had learned anything on the flight. Ralph looked at me and said: “Yeah, I learned never to fly in the same aircraft with you again.”

I said to myself that I’d never do a trick like that again. And, I didn’t! Once again: “God was taking care of me.”

I went on to complete 231 missions in the F-100 over North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Laos. I then later flew 61 more missions over Cambodia in the F-4. This gave me a total of 292 combat missions without taking a hit. I attribute this to flying different patterns than what everybody else flew day after day. Therefore, as they flew as fast as possible, I backed off and flew as slow as the mission and aircraft would allow. 🇺🇸

Lt. Col. Ronald Green retired from the Air Force in September of 1980 and quickly found employment with McDonnell-Douglas in St. Louis. He was assigned to the AMRAAM (AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile) missile program. In tests



Capt. Ron Green in full flight gear at Danang Air Base, Republic of South Vietnam, 1965.

using both the F-15 and F-16, the missile proved effective and was purchased as the new air-to-air missile for the Air Force and Navy. Ron retired in 1996 and is currently active with his church choir, his local chapter of the Military Officers of America Association, and helping homeless vets in Scottsdale, Arizona.