

# Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

## F-105 History

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**26-Jan-62**

304

The tenth F-105D operational training Class 62G, Course 111506E, graduated 17 pilots at the 4520 CCTW, Nellis AFB NV. The class began training on 27 Nov 1961. The class was attached to the 4526 CCTS at Nellis, commanded by Lt Col James Ellis Bean and consisted entirely of pilots from the 49 TFW, Spangdahlem AB, Germany. The student pilots were:

Maj Charles C. Botvidson	1Lt Jack L. Fowler
Maj Donald K. "Danny" Salmon	1Lt Robert D. Husemoller
Capt Donald T. Aukerman	1Lt David W. Liningston
Capt Frederick N. Frizzel	1Lt Thomas R. Maher
Capt Anthony J. "Tony" Gangol	1Lt Gary G. Ray
Capt Cecil B. Juanarena	1Lt Ralph R. Schneider
Capt Manford E. "Manny" Simpson	1Lt Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.
1Lt Kile Dag "Red" Berg	1Lt James C. Morgan
1Lt Henry D. Canterbury	

*4520 CCTW History, Jul - Dec 61, USAF microfilm MO2195.*

**31-Dec-62**

5707

By the end of 1962, the 8 TFS, 49 TFW, Spangdahlem AB, Germany, had 32 operationally ready F-105 aircrews.

During the past six months, "the squadron had two deployments of three weeks each to Wheelus AB, Libya for the purpose of qualification in various F-105D weapons delivery procedures ... ." While at Wheelus, all 32 pilots qualified in three methods of nuclear weapons delivery: Blind IP, Blind Laydown, Visual Laydown "... and received familiarization training in Estimated Manual Releases". They also were qualified in conventional weapons strafing, dive bombing, low-level bombing, rocket firing, and air-to-air firing against the Dart.

The top three squadron pilots in nuclear weapons delivery and their CEAs of all first bombs dropped were:

#### Visual Laydown

#1 - Maj Robert O. Shimp - 81.3 ft  
#2 - Capt Maurice E. Seaver, Jr. - 114 ft  
#3 - 1Lt Ronald C. Gould - 163 ft

#### Blind IP

#1 - 1Lt Ronald C. Gould - 819 ft  
#2 - Capt Jerry N. Hoblit - 854 ft  
#3 - Capt James A. Springer - 884 ft

#### Visual TIP

#1 - Maj Jack Graham Farr - 705 ft  
#2 - Capt John W. Garten - 760 ft  
#3 - Capt Blake C. Morrison - 810 ft

"The winners of the overall squadron NWD championship in accordance with 49 TFW Operations Instruction 900-2 with their points based on 6200 possible points are as follows:"

#1 - 1Lt Louis S. Middlemist - 4108 points  
#2 - Capt Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. - 4068 points  
#3 - 1Lt Ronald C. Gould - 4038 points

During the past six months, the squadron's 32 pilots averaged 72:59 flying hours per month. "This low time is due in

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part to maintenance problems, weather and alert posture and was quite discouraging to all pilots. However, all pilots did an outstanding job of maintaining their Operationally Ready status on this minimum amount of flying time."

Maj Louis D. Braun, Jr. reported in to the squadron as the Operations Officer.

In the past six months, one squadron pilot died in an aircraft accident and one was severely injured when he ejected. 1Lt Robert B. Gerlach died in the crash of a de Havilland L-20 Beaver, (possibly on 5, 6, or 7 August 1962). Capt Blake C. Morrison received a broken back when he ejected from his F-105D on 20 December 1962. "The pilot is now in a stateside hospital [in San Antonio] without the use of both legs."

*49 TFW history, 1 Jul - 31 Dec 1962, pp 27 - 29, AFHRA call # K-WG-49-HI, IRIS # 450711.*

**31-Dec-63**

5733

During the past six months, the 8 TFS, 49 TFW, flew 3,661 hours in their F-105Ds. "The Squadron accomplished its flying schedule without having a single aircraft accident, giving the 8th Squadron a perfect flying safety record for the entire year.

"Every pilot in the Squadron successfully requalified in all nuclear and non-nuclear deliveries."

At the end of 1963, the 8 TFS had 29 officers. Ten of the officers (marked with an asterisk) had arrived in the squadron since July 1963.

Lt Col Robert A. Evans - Squadron Commander  
Maj Jack G. Farr - Operations Officer  
Capt Maurice E. Seaver, Jr. - Assistant Operations Officer  
Capt James E. Westom - Fighter Weapons Officer  
Capt Thomas E. Heide \* - "A" Flight Commander  
Capt John W. Wiechert, Jr. - "B" Flight Commander  
Capt Samuel H. Martin III \* - "C" Flight Commander  
Capt J. D. Tindall - "D" Flight Commander  
Capt Glen D. Lerum - Administrative Officer  
Capt Ralph R. Schnieder - Intelligence Officer  
Capt George A. Ball - Mobility Officer  
Capt George A. Wood, Jr. - Targets Officer

The squadron had 17 line pilots ("Bomb Commanders"):

Capt Gary G. Ray	Capt John E. Mount *
Capt Frederick N. Frizzell	Capt James S. Walbridge *
Capt Sterling H. Wood *	1Lt Ronald C. Gould
Capt Wayne A. Kromi	1Lt Carl G. Decker *
Capt Roger G. Huggins *	1Lt Joseph P. Shouse *
Capt Richard E. Wendell	1Lt Russell S. Wasser
Capt Donald R. Yates *	1Lt Frederick R. Greenwood
Capt Jerrold N. Tamm	1Lt Walter H. Jones *
Capt Lawrence C. Curtis, Jr.	

"All incoming pilots achieved combat-ready status within a few months after reporting to the Squadron. New pilots were swiftly prepared for their Tactical Evaluation certification by an intensive operational training program involving instrument familiarization, radar low-level navigation, and weapons delivery."

Between July and December 1963, eight pilots from the 8 TFS rotated "... to stateside assignments". They were:

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Capt James W. Alder	Capt Lewis S. Middlemist
Maj Lewis D. Braun	Capt Roger P. Sheer
Capt Lawrence R. Brehm	Capt Billy R. Sparks
Capt Richard C. Marshall	Capt James A. Springer

The squadron history reported that they had two problems hindering their operations:

1. A shortage of assigned pilots. "This lack of air crews with AFSC 1115E creates unnecessary complications in scheduling and in meeting extra flying commitments."

2. A long delay in getting on-base housing for pilots. "Too many Bomb Commanders must live off-base at distances that hinder the rapid recall of combat crews for alerts and frag coverages. The completion of an alert recall may sometimes be delayed by as much as one-half hour. This problem could be remedied easily by giving Bomb Commanders priority for on-base housing."

*49 TFW history, 1 July - 31 Dec 1963, AFHRA call # K-WG-49-HI, IRIS # 450713.*

### 11-Apr-64

5438

The Thunderbirds flew their second unofficial demonstration in their F-105Bs at Nellis AFB "... for Maj Gen John C. Meyer, 12th Air Force Commander."

Capt Bill Sparks, an F-105 pilot stationed at Nellis, commented on the Thunderbird performances in the F-105B. "I saw 2 full shows and a lot of practices that short season and it was a spectacular show."

*4520 CCTW history, 1 Jan - 30 Jun 1964, pp 35 - 36 & Bill Sparks, E-mail to Weasel Net, 14 Apr 2002.*

### 01-Jun-64

F-105D 624402 23 OMS 23 TFW McConnell Operational loss. In-flight fire. Crashed at 1725 CST 17 NM SW of McConnell AFB near Clonmel, Kansas. Capt Billy Reed Sparks, Jr. 23 TFW pilot ejected and survived. Call sign: "Aqua 09". "An F-105D Thunderchief fighter plane crashed and burned Monday afternoon in a muddy field two and one-half miles southwest of Clonmel. The pilot, Capt. Billy R. Sparks, 29, ... escaped uninjured. ... 'I was in the air about 35 minutes, part of the time hanging under a parachute,' Capt. Sparks said. 'It was the first time I've jumped and I hope it's the last.' ... The plane took off from McConnell Air Force Base at 4:50 p.m. on a test flight. The accident occurred about 5:25 p.m. 'I don't know what happened,' Capt Sparks said. 'I noticed the plane on fire. I was trying to gain altitude and the controls locked. That's when I left.' Oscar Johnson, a farmer in whose field the plane crashed, said he saw the craft burning in the air and watched the pilot eject. 'Just after the pilot bailed out, the plane turned its nose straight down and bored into the ground and exploded in a big ball of fire. I started over there to see where the pilot was, but the ammunition began blowing up and I hid back of a tree. Sounded like a war around there for a few minutes.' Capt Sparks said he ejected from the burning plane at 5,000 or 6,000 feet. ... The F-105D is one of 45 such craft stationed at McConnell. The planes were grounded May 14 after being involved in 18 major accidents at other bases earlier this year. The restriction was lifted Thursday and the planes were being test-flown. ... Asked about the grounding order, Capt. Sparks said, 'I don't know about the rest of them, but this one has sure been grounded again. I guess this plane decided it didn't want to fly any more.'"

### History of Flight

"On 1 June 1964, F-105D-31RE, SN 62-4402, 23 OMS, was scheduled for a routine functional check flight to complete T.O 1F-105-909. The pilot was Captain Billy R. Sparks. The aircraft was configured with two 450-gallon external fuel tanks mounted at the wing inboard stations and an internal bomb-bay tank. Aircraft was fully serviced with 15,925 pounds of fuel. The flight was filed on a DD Form 1080 local clearance with a request to ATC to utilize positive control airspace to FL 410 in accordance with letter of agreement with Kansas City Center. The DD 1080 shows an ETD of 1645 CST with a one-hour and 30 minute (1 plus 30) ETE. Fuel on board was listed as one hour and 50 minutes (1 plus 50). The call sign was Aqua 09. ... Normal pre-takeoff inspections and checks, takeoff were made

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from McConnell AFB, Kans, at 1659 CST.

"The pilot completed an engine droop check to FL 400, normal and extended afterburner range checks, and manual afterburner cutoff check. Pilot then descended to 20,000 feet and completed slow flight checks, airspeed and altimeter checks, and landing gear, flap, and rudder lock checks. Two pressure-dive checks of the toss-bomb computer were unsuccessful due to no release light. The pilot then attempted a radar dive check from 30-degree dive at 350/ 400 KCAS. On recovery from this check with the wings level, the nose 20 to 30 degrees above the horizon, an approximate altitude of 2500 feet AGL and two to two and one-half Gs, the pilot felt and heard an explosion in the aft section. Simultaneously, the control stick moved full aft and the aircraft pitched up into a high speed stall. The control stick was immediately moved full forward by the pilot but had no effect on the aircraft. The right wing dropped and the pilot applied full left stick, left rudder, and full forward stick. The aircraft started to roll level then snapped to the right. The pilot ejected as the roll passed 90 degrees at an approximate altitude of 3500 AGL. All escape systems functioned properly and the pilot received only minor injuries. The aircraft crashed in a pasture 17 nautical miles southwest of McConnell AFB, Kans, at 1725 CST. Total time of flight was 26 minutes."

"Crash of a fifth Republic F-105 ... After it had been removed from restricted flight status following a complete inspection suggested Air Force would probably re-inspect all F-105s cleared so far in its effort to track down the cause of a recent series of F-105 accidents an Air Force spokesman said. Also those F-105s not yet inspected would be subjected to a more intense inspection than originally planned. F-105s have been on restricted flight status since the recent crashes."

*The Wichita Eagle, 2 Jun 64 & AF Form 711 USAF Accident/ Incident Report 64-6-1-2, dated 17 June 1964, signed by Col William H. Holt, Board President & Aviation Week and Space Technology, June 8, 1964.*

**08-Apr-65      15-Aug-65**

13

The 563 TFS from the 23 TFW, McConnell AFB KS, deployed eighteen F-105s to combat operations at Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, under "Operation Two Buck Charlie".

The squadron commander was Maj Jack F. Brown. Maj Everett Wayne Harris was the Operations Officer. Maj Billy J. Ellis was the Assistant Ops Officer. "After 51 combat missions, [Ellis] ... returned to Langley AFB in November 1965 and was assigned to Headquarters Tactical Air Command in the Directorate of Operations as F-105 weapon systems project officer. "

The F-105s left McConnell at 10:00 AM on 8 April 1965 with stops at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, and Andersen AFB, Guam.

Six pilots had departed with the Initial Support Team (IST) on 7 April. They were Capt Kile Dag "Red" Berg, Capt Jack L. Fowler, Capt Paul W. Hanson, Capt Thomas D. Scott, Capt Robert C. Wistrand, and Capt Charles N. "Charlie" Warner.

Eighteen more flew their F-105s on today's deployment. Seventeen of the pilots were:

Capt Robert Norlan Daughtrey	Capt Bill Sauers
Capt David L. Hrdlicka	Capt Kenneth C. Schow
Capt Robert Jackson	Capt Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.
Capt Kenneth Johnston	Capt Russell L. Violett
Capt Larry G. Lighty	Capt Richard D. Vogel
Capt Albert L. Logan	Capt Sam Woodworth
Capt Edward D. McCabe	Capt Martin V. Case, Jr.
Capt Craig Miller	Capt Robert R. Reed
Capt James M. Rhodes, Jr.	

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The 23 TFW commander, Col Edmund B. Edwards, accompanied the squadron during this deployment. He remained at Takhli as Base Commander until July 1965, when he returned to McConnell for his reassignment to Hq 2nd Air Division at Tan Son Nhut. "He flew more than 40 combat sorties in the F-105 Thunderchief." (USAF Bio Brig Gen Edmund B. Edwards)

Capt Robert R. Reed deployed with the squadron but "... flew only three missions with the 563rd as I had orders to the 35 TFS in Yokota, Japan."

Capt Billy R. Sparks described the squadron's deployment. "The 563TFS, 23TFW, at McConnell were put on alert to deploy to an unknown base in SEA in early Feb. '65. We had been OR for about 6 months and thought we were heading to Japan until the alert orders. We sat around on our butts and tried to figure out what we were going to be doing. We heard that we would be flying combat missions in NVN and that's about all we knew. The siren hooted at 0'Dark-30 on 11 April and we went through a full deployment drill and then sat around for the rest of the day waiting to find out WTF." "O."

"We had just lost our Squadron CO, Red Hendricks, and had a new CO, Jack Brown, and, due to a retirement, a new Ops Officer, Wayne Harris; so we were a little nervous. We were finally given a departure time of AM 13 Apr. '65 and went home to tell our Ladies that we were going somewhere for sometime."

"Launch was a thing of beauty. The Senior NCO and the Maintenance Officer had all of our birds (21 F-105Ds) lined up and ready to go on the edge of the flightline all in a row. Each of us was greeted by the crew chief and handed forms, all of which had ZERO discrepancies. We all climbed in like the T-Birds and started from a hand salute from the Senior NCO who was starched and standing at rigid attention. Twenty-one birds at once makes one hell of a lot of smoke."

"We took off in flights of 4, with 2 sections of 8 and 1 of 4, headed for our 1st refueling near LA. We carried 4 of the spares all the way to Hickam. We had a terrible time with the first refueling because FAA screwed up everything by delaying the tanker takeoffs. Jack Brown finally got on Guard channel and had everyone head towards Edwards and assigned altitudes for rendezvous with our assigned tankers. I had 1200# when I hooked up and we weren't even feet wet yet."

"From then everything calmed down and we made it to Hickam -- piece of cake. The pilots had our asses chewed for being motor mouths and then went to the club annex and had a Mai Tai drinking contest. Al Logan (later Maj. General) won with 14 Mai Tai and I finished 2nd with 13. The whole Squadron went to dinner at the Hickam Club and made absolutely wonderful asses of our selves. It looked like the Scene from The Great Santini."

We went to Guam the next day and there were exactly 4 radio transmissions total from take off until landing. The first was "Look at all that water". The next two were exactly the same, and the third was "It's only the top". ... We landed at Guam and were put in the worst barracks I had ever seen. We ended up spending 2 nights there due to really shabby weather between there and Takhli. That was the first time that we were told officially that we were going to Thailand."

"We arrived on 17 Apr. due to the weather and the Dateline. I was met by the same crew chief who launched me. He handed me my banjo and a fairly cool beer. We slept on the floor of the Officers club since they were still building the hooches. We had 2 hooch-type buildings on the flight line and parked our birds on hardstands in pairs. We had 2 officer hooches by the 2nd night and flew our first sorties on the 3rd day we were there. We lost our first aircraft on the 4th day (Sam Woodward) and had our first wake that night."

"The pool was built about 2 months after we arrived. Showers and latrines were built by the end of the third month, of course with no hot water. Each shower had a couple of towers that held water because we had daily power failures and the only water was what was in the towers. The only AC units were in the Comm Shack and one room in the Clinic that was in the old Japanese teak building that still stands at the same place."

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"There was NO wing staff or Commander above the Squadron COs from the TAC and PACAF Squadrons that were there. The COs divided up the duty by having the TAC Squadron run things on odd days and the PACAF Squadron run things on even days. Worked for 5 months like a charm."

"The 563rd was deployed there for 4 1/2 months and lost 10 aircraft and 6 pilots. That was when it was easy before things got harder. We watched the bad guys build their SAM system and I watched the first missile lift off from southwest of Hanoi on 20 July '65. There were 3 SA-2 missiles on that launch and they killed 1 F-4C and blew hell out of 2 others that landed at Udorn. We were on the first SAM raid on 27 July where we lost 2 birds and both pilots, and Korat lost 4 birds and 3 pilots. Two of the 5 downed pilots were POWs and the other 3 names are on the 2nd panel of the wall about eye level. ... "

During their Takhli deployment, the squadron flew 3,794 combat hours. They lost eight F-105Ds -- two to accidents and six to combat. Four of their pilots were killed and one became a POW. Pilots and support crew returned home to McConnell after they were relieved on 15 August 1965 by the 562 TFS.

*"Thud" by Lou Drendel. Pages 9 -12 & 23 TFW History, Jan - Jun 65, USAF microfilm MO554 & Bill Sparks, 563 TFS pilot, e-mail to 355TFWTakhli@egroups.com, 27 Nov 00.*

#### 10-May-65

621

(Approximate date). Pilots of the 563 TFS, 23 TFW, flying combat from Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, reported seeing SAM sites being built in North Vietnam. Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. recalled that, "Al Logan came in to Ops in mid May and said, 'The gomers are building a SAM site about 25 nm south of Hanoi.' ... I took off later and went to have a look. They were building something that looked like a weird star and I reported it (to Intelligence) as soon as I landed. Russ Violet landed just after and did the same thing. Nothing happened. Maj. Jack Brown, 563rd TFS Commander, went down to (Second Air Division in) Saigon to get permission to hit it and was told to not 'bother the Russians'. We were ordered to leave (the sites) (by now 4) alone. "

*Lt Col Bill Sparks, retired F-105 pilot, e-mail to Weasel Net, 12 November 1998*

#### 04-Jun-65

#### 05-Jun-65

907

F-105 pilots of the 563 TFS flew rescap missions in "... 'Happy Valley' near Sam Neua, Laos, on 4 and 5 June ... ", to help recover a Navy A-4C pilot downed in the Barrel Roll area of Laos on 3 June 1965 . "This valley contained no less than sixty-eight AAA guns. The pilots of the 563rd destroyed almost all of these guns in order that a downed Navy pilot could be rescued. ..."

The A-4C pilot was Lt Raymond P. Ilg with VA-22 from the USS Midway. After being on the ground for two days, he was picked up by an Air America helicopter on 5 June.

Capt Albert L. Logan was one of the 563rd pilots on this RESCAP mission. He received a DFC. "Capt Logan was cited for a June 4 aerial flight in which he led a flight of F-105s against 37-mm and 57-mm anti-aircraft gun positions which were hindering rescue attempts of an USAF airman. With disregard for a veritable curtain of flak and withering cross fire, Captain Logan silenced seven guns. Then, not satisfied with these results, he rolled in on additional passes to deal out more damage with cannon fire."

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr., also from the 563 TFS flew on today's mission. He received "... a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross with Combat 'V' ...for heroism while participating in aerial flight as F-105 Pilot and Flight Leader over the Republic of Vietnam on 4 June 1965. On that date, after successfully carrying out their primary mission of destroying a key road section, Captain Sparks' flight was diverted to provide flak suppression in support of a rescue operation for a downed U.S. Air Force pilot. Arriving over the area, Captain Sparks encountered heavy 37-mm. and 57-mm. anti-aircraft fire. Not to be deterred, he courageously attacked and silenced four of the guns on his first pass, relieving the pressure on the rescue operation. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-162 (September 30, 1965) on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals->

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awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399.)

The 563rd also lost one of their own planes to AAA during the rescue effort for the Navy pilot. Capt Walter B. Kosko was recovered after his plane crashed in Thailand near the border with Laos.

*Thud by Lou Drendel, pages 9 - 12 & McConnell AFB Contrails base newspaper, Fri Nov 26, 1965, pg 5.*

**27-Jul-65**

564

As the second F-105 squadron TDY to Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, the 563 TFS from the 23 TFW, McConnell AFB, Kansas, provided three flights of eleven F-105s in striking SA-2 SAM site number seven northwest of Hanoi. The mission was part of Operation Spring High, the first attack against SAM sites in North Vietnam.

The 563 TFS squadron commander, Maj Jack Brown, led the first flight, Maj Everett W. Harris led the second flight, and Capt Paul R. Craw was "Hudson Lead" in the third flight. The other three pilots in Hudson flight were Capt Kyle Berg #2, Capt Bill Sparks #3, and Capt Marty Case #4. Their planes also carried napalm cannisters.

Paul Craw remembered flying the mission. "The Takhli group proceeded north to about Yen Bai and (flew) down the Red River valley on the deck. I do recall it being rather pretty with all the farms and grass-roofed huts. ... We flew low and when we got to the intersection of the Red and Black rivers which was just short of the target, I really got low. In the past I had been able to drop napalm as fast as five hundred twenty five knots without getting tank break up, so I held the speed right at 500. I had to climb when I got across the Black, so I was low. At this time I was perfectly lined up on a missile, or the dummy put in its place, so it should have been a sure kill. Just past the target, I called for burners and started a right turn to get back across the Black River which was safe haven so to speak because the choppers were not to cross the river for a rescue attempt."

Capt Bill Sparks was Hudson 3 on the mission. "On 27 July, someone shook me awake at O'dark 30 and told me not to get up since I was going on a SAM raid. I tried to hold still and then went to the club and had a Martini with (Capt Paul Craw) and the other members of (his) flight."

"We waited around until afternoon and went to the briefing and were told we were going to carry CBUs or napalm and fly at 100' and 360 kts to one of the sites. Three flights of 4 in trail using Yen Bai as an IP. ... Korat was to do exactly the same thing to the other site ... at the same time only ... head on to us and about 3/4 (of a) mile away. Another 12 birds from each base were to hit the supporting barracks with 750s. ... After the shortest brief on record, we mounted our steeds and started for the valley."

"Yen Bai was easy to find at low level since they were shooting like stink before we got there. It seems that McNamara had told the South Vietnamese our route, ordnance, and timing two days before. The only change was that we were doing 540 K CAS at less than 20'. We were the 3rd flight to our target and we went ... at very low level. I was hit 11 times between the IP and target and my bird was 1 of only 4 flyable the next day."

Capt Sparks received the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism. "... Captain Sparks participated in a strike against a heavily defended Surface-to-Air Missile site near Hanoi, North Vietnam. This was the first attack by fighter aircraft on an operational SAM site in military history, and the hazards involved cannot be over-emphasized. Penetrating target defenses on a high speed low level run in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire, Captain Sparks courageously pressed his attack to inflict heavy damage upon his assigned target. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-161 (September 30, 1965) on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>)

Other strike pilots from the 563 TFS on this mission were Capts Russell L. Violett, Capt James M. Rhodes, Jr., Jack Carson, and Jack Fowler. Two squadron planes and their pilots were lost. Capt Kyle Berg, was shot down and became a POW. Capt Walter B. Kosko was shot down and killed. Captains Berg and Kosko were awarded the Silver Star while other squadron pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross for the mission. (563 TFS History provided by

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Marty Case.)

Capt Berg's Silver Star citation read: "The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 8, 1918 (amended by act of July 25, 1963), takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Captain Kile Dag Berg (AFSN: 0-19609685), United States Air Force, for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as Pilot of an F-105 Thunderchief Fighter-Bomber of the 563d Tactical Fighter Squadron, in action over North Vietnam, on 27 July 1968. On that date, as a Flight Leader, Captain Berg participated in a strike against a heavily defended Surface-to-Air Missile site near Hanoi, Vietnam. This was the first attack by fighters against an operational SAM site in military history and the hazards involved cannot be overemphasized. Penetrating hostile defenses and heavy anti-aircraft fire on a low-level, high-speed run, Captain Berg courageously pressed the attack to score a direct hit on his assigned target. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Berg has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force." (<http://militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=24096>)

After Capt Berg and Capt Kosko were shot down, Capts Dick Moore, Phil Kiernan, Hal Dortch, and Russ Schoonover, launched on RESCAP from Takhli. These four pilots were also awarded the DFC.

"We lost #2, Kyle Berg, at the target and our 1st flight lost #2 just past the target coming out. Korat lost 4 Thuds, three on their SAM site and 1 on the barracks. We also lost 2 of 3 RF-101 RECCE birds and hit 2 dummy sites that had over 250 37-mm or larger guns around each one."

"The score was 3 dead Thud drivers, 1 dead RECCE driver, 2 POW Thud drivers, 1 POW RECCE driver, and Frank Tullo picked up by the 1st Jolly Green in the north."

"We got fair to middlin' drunk and tried to wreck the base; but, unfortunately, there were NO full bulls at Takhli to beat to death. The upshot of IRON HAND 1 (mission designation) was that we had underwhelmed them a lot."

*23 TFW History, Jan - Jun 65, USAF microfilm MO554 & U.S. Navy CNA Loss/Damage Data Base & Bill Sparks, E-mail to the Weasel list, 12 Nov 1998 & "The Whims of an Idiot", unpublished story by Paul R. Craw, sent via e-mail to Ron Thurlow, 30 Jan 2000.*

#### 27-Jul-65

F-105D 610113 563 TFS 23 TFW Takhli Hit by heavy gunfire during the strike on SAM Site 7 in RP-6A NVN. Crashed in North Vietnam. 21-12N 105-18E Capt Kile Dag "Red" Berg 563 TFS pilot ejected and became a POW. Released 12 Feb 73. Call sign: "Hudson 02". Hudson Flight from the 563 TFS consisted of four F-105Ds flown by Capt Paul R. Craw, Lead; Capt Kile D. Berg, #2; Capt Billy R. Sparks, #3; and Capt Martin V. Case, #4. The flight attacked SAM site #7 at location 21-10-30N and 105-21-40E. Capt Berg crashed at 14:07 at 21-12N and 105-18E.

"The following is an extract from the statement by Capt Billy R. Sparks, Hudson 3: '... Just after weapon release, I broke hard right through Lead and 2's smoke. As I rolled out, I saw Hudson 2 in a slight climb burning from forward of the intakes past the speed brakes. The aircraft continued to climb to about 1000 feet, snapped over and crashed almost vertically. Several radio calls were made to Hudson 2, but none were acknowledged. Two puffs of smoke were seen coming from the cockpit area as the aircraft snapped over. The aircraft crashed 3 miles from the target and the intense flak in that area made it illogical to return for a better look.'

"The following is an extract from the statement by Capt Paul R. Craw: '... Hudson 2 received a hit that started the aircraft burning from the intake back. The fire was clean and no smoke. The aircraft fell straight forward. Several radio calls were made for him to eject. He said nothing. When the aircraft reached a vertical dive, I noted two puffs of white smoke come from the aircraft which could have been the canopy and parachute leaving the aircraft. The aircraft crashed in the vicinity of the target and anti-aircraft fire made it illogical to return to verify crash results.'

"On 16 Mar 66, Capt Berg's status was officially changed to detained. Basis for this change was a Prague radio



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broadcast concerning him and a letter to his wife." (PACAF Intelligence Index of USAF Personnel MIA/PW in Southeast Asia", pg 1-027, AFHRA Call # K717.6031-3, IRIS # 1028640.)

Capt Paul R. Craw was Capt Berg's flight lead. " ... I looked in the rear view mirror and sure enough I picked up Kyle Berg's aircraft. All I could see was radome and fire. It had decelerated and had fallen back a couple of thousand feet. I thought I saw the nose come up just before it rolled to the right and splashed. There appeared to be a puff of smoke which was obviously the ejection seat in operation. Marty Case, the number four man, assured me that Kyle did not get out of the aircraft. ... As it turned out he got out OK and was picked up by the bad guys within about five minutes. ... We finally determined that Kyle was a POW about two years later."

"(Earlier) ... I (had) tried to talk Kyle out of going since he was to get out of the Air Force in a few days. His answer was, 'Boss, this will be a big mission and I don't want to miss it.' He got a Silver Star for it but I doubt that that medal was worth eight and a half years in jail." (Craw story)

As number 2 in "Hudson" flight, "... Kyle Berg's F-105 was hit just seconds before he reached the target. ... A few hundred feet off the ground when he ejected, Berg swung once to the left and once to the right then hit the dirt. Berg landed 150 feet from the burning wreckage of his Thunderchief and was quickly surrounded by a group of wide-eyed teen-agers toting 'awfully big weapons.' His premonition had proved true. Kyle Berg did not return to Takhli that afternoon, nor did he leave North Vietnamese captivity for over seven years. ... After spending his first thirty-one days as a POW in solitary confinement, Berg was given a cell mate. Ironically it was Pop Keirn, the man whose supposed death he had been sent to avenge." (Vietnam Experience)

*U.S. Navy CNA Loss/Damage Data Base & "The Vietnam Experience, Thunder From Above" by John Morrocco, pg 108 & The Whims of an Idiot", unpublished story by Paul R. Craw.*

#### 11-Aug-65

F-105D 610172 562 TFS 23 TFW Takhli Hit by light 37-mm AAA while attacking a radar site. Crashed in RP-3, North Vietnam. 18-52N 105-47E Capt Lawrence D. Wilson 562 TFS pilot ejected. Rescued by an HU-16B. Call sign: "???" 4". "Capt Wilson bailed out about 10 miles offshore after his aircraft was damaged by enemy ground fire while on (an) armed reconnaissance flight over North Vietnam." He was rescued by HU-16B tail number 50-17161, flown by Maj Frederick C. Wismer. The rescue was supported by a US Navy A-1H with rocket pods. Capt Wilson was returned to Da Nang AB, Vietnam.

Rescue Narrative Account 38-814-11 Aug 65, 33rd ARSq History, July - Sep 1965

Date - 11 Aug 65. Number picked-up: One F-105 pilot, Name - Lawrence Wilson, Capt, USAF.

HU-16B Rescue Crew:  
Maj Frederick C. Wismer, AC  
Capt Robert W. Graue, CP  
Capt Roger J. Coslett, N  
SSgt William K. Warren, FE  
A1C Anthony S. Yocabet, RO  
A1C Colin A. Lande, PJ 1  
A2C Harvey W. Finn, PJ 2

"The downed pilot was sighted by his wingman as he ejected and descended. The HU-16B on precautionary orbit nearby was vectored to the scene by ARA-25 homer and visually. A routine open sea landing and take-off was accomplished and the pilot was returned to Danang AB, RVN."

Rescue Mission Narrative 38-814-11 Aug 65.

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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"An HU-16 on precautionary orbit over the Gulf of Tonkin received a call on guard channel from an F-105 that was hit coming off a strike in North Vietnam. The F-105 pilot declared he was going to bail out. The HU-16 requested a homing steer from the distressed aircraft's wingman, and as he turned to the heading, made a visual sighting on the descending parachute. The HU-16 jettisoned wing tanks and was on final approach as the survivor landed in the water. The pickup was made approximately 14 miles off the shore of North Vietnam. The HU-16 aircraft commander, Major Frederick C. Wismer, made a normal water take off and delivered the survivor to DaNang AB, RVN."

On this mission, Capt Wilson from the 562 TFS was flying as number four in a flight of four F-105Ds from Takhli RTAB, Thailand. Number one was Capt Bill Sparks from the 563 TFS, number two was another pilot from the 562 TFS, and number three was Capt Jim Rhodes also from the 563 TFS flying F-105D 61-0159. The two 563rd pilots were on their last combat mission of their deployment to Takhli that started in April 1965 and were breaking in the two 562 TFS pilots on their first combat mission. Both squadrons were from McConnell AFB, Kansas, and were on temporary duty at Takhli. The 562nd was replacing the 563rd. Capt Rhodes remembered his experience: "... We flew a route recce along Route 7, shot up some trucks, bombed a bridge and headed for Hon Me Island for a pass at the radar site. ... My wingman ... was trailing smoke/fuel and as we climbed through 12,000 feet, his Thud began shedding panels. We didn't have to tell him twice to punch out. Good chute! We knew there was a SA-16 Duckbutt in the area, so Sparky held high and got the SA-16 on our frequency as I circled four as he made his nylon letdown. The SA-16 was close enough to see the F-105 crash into the sea and began his approach for a water landing. Just then a NVN PT boat from Hon Me came charging into our little party. ... I put my piper on his waterline and opened up. ... I fired a long burst and pulled off. As I came back around, I saw one each PT boat sawed in half and sinking. ... When what to my wondering eyes should appear but another PT boat. He really had his mach up as he attempted to get between the downed pilot and the landing SA-16. ... I prayed I still had some bullets left as I put the piper on him and squeezed the trigger. I was so intent on sinking that damned boat, that I watched about 100 rounds blow him out of the water before I started my pull-out. That good old Thud rotated fine, but I was still descending at a great rate. I pulled and prayed. ... Still shaking, I circled as a very successful rescue was made."

*National Archives motion picture film shot list, Item 39695 & Jim Rhodes, "Two NVN PT Boats Sunk And A Thud Driver That Almost Didn't Make It", in River Rats Album II, pg 38 & "PJs in Vietnam", by Robert L. LaPointe, pg 417.*

#### 13-Aug-65

6698

One day after the 562 TFS arrived at Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, to replace the 563 TFS, two of their pilots flew a combat mission together. The pilots were Capt Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. from the 563rd and Capt Ben H. Allen, Jr. from the 562nd.

Ben Allen recalled his first mission. "... I flew a pre-dawn launch w/6-750s, and 2/2.75 rockets pods. Billy Sparks was the flight leader, I was his wingman, and when we returned to Takhli, he shook my hand, hung my parachute on 'his' peg, said 'Ace, you got it made, its all yours, let's get a beer!' We headed for the club, the sun was hotter than Hell. I was wringing wet, and was sure I'd get killed soon. The food was so bad, most of the time we'd eat peanuts for lunch, but the beer was cold. And it was Friday the 13th."

During his combat tour at Takhli, Ben Allen was temporarily assigned to 2nd Air Division at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon. "I flew the F-105 from Takhli in 1965 with the 562nd TFS. I spent two weeks in Saigon in 'Out Country Planning' working for B/G George Simler. 'Same day, same route, same time' was so bad, Gen Simler had ordered me to stop at all TAC bases on my way back to Takhli and 'brief' every squadron that he wanted to see the last line of each strike report read 'This mission flown in accordance with all frags and directives.' When he told me this, he stomped his foot and said 'Listen closely to me, now; I want to read this on every mission strike report!' He stomped his foot several times, this time and winked his eye. I had worked for him on Okinawa and knew his style quite well. He only wanted to 'READ' it. He was appalled at the indifference of PACAF, DOD and the WH. I spent three days going from base to base putting out the word to 'Plan YOUR mission!' Losses went down after this directive. Few understood that Simler was in a fight and on the side of the pilots. It was a constant fight with an incompetent DOD!"

*Ben Allen letter dated 23 October 1986 to Bauke Jan Douma & Ben H. Allen, e-mail, February 6, 2009.*

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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**08-May-67**

6676

Seven F-105F crews in Wild Weasel Class 67WWIII-10 graduated at Nellis AFB, NV. The class had started on 8 May 1967 and was assigned to the 4537 FWS, 4520 CCTW.

The crews assigned to the 13 TFS, 388 TFW at Korat were:

Maj Donald C. Windrath (WW # 324) - Pilot  
Maj Earl E. Krug (WW # 327) - Pilot  
Capt Gerald W. Metzler (WW # 335) - EWO  
Capt Ramon R. Balut (WW # 337) - EWO

Capt James H. Mirehouse (WW # 326) - Pilot  
Capt Albert L. Michael (WW # 328) - EWO

Capt Charles A. Horner (WW # 333) - Pilot  
Capt Dino M. Ragagli (WW # 325) - Pilot

The crews assigned to the 355 TFW at Takhli were:

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. (WW # 330) - Pilot to the 357 TFS  
Maj Charles A. Lombardo (WW # 322) - EWO

Capt Donald W. Schalk (WW # 332) - Pilot to the 333 TFS  
Capt Douglas C. Honea (WW # 331) - EWO

Capt William F. "Bill" Grieger (WW # 334) - Pilot to the 354 TFS  
Capt Erich A. Koch (WW# 329) - EWO

*Wild Weasel Class Roster and Classes Database.*

**11-Jun-67**

1182

Using call sign "Atlanta Lead", Col. Jack Broughton, 355 TFW Vice Commander from Takhli RTAFB, Thailand, led a strike against two rail yards in North Vietnam. Viet Tri and Phu Tho were on the northwest rail line between Hanoi and China and the yards were between the two towns. Col Broughton split the attacking force into two flights of four F-105s and he led the section attacking Viet Tri. The element lead, Maj Ted Tolman, attacked the AAA sites protecting the rail yards. Col Broughton dropped his bombs on a building south of the tracks. The attack devastated the target areas.

After the mission, they found they had "... started several good-sized fires, triggered three large secondary explosions, destroyed thirty-five railroad cars, destroyed the two largest buildings in the choke point area, cut the tracks in twelve places and knocked out the six-gun 85-millimeter battery."

The two flights attacking Pho Tho had "... closed the choke points at both ends of their yards while saturating the tracks and cars in between."

A Wild Weasel flight from Takhli with call sign "Bull Whip" supported the Phu Tho attack. The flight lineup was:

#1 - Maj Benjamin R. Fuller III with EWO Capt Norman L. Frith II from the 333 TFS  
#2 - Unknown  
#3 - Maj Loyd A. Whalen with Capt Robert F. Lewis, Jr.  
#4 - Capt Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. with EWO Capt Charles A. "Carlos" Lombardo from the 357 TFS. (Norm Frith, interview, Fairborn, OH, 20 Aug 04, and Bull Whip mission tape on CD.)

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## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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After this attack, Col Broughton led his flight on armed reconnaissance along " ... the road leading from Hoa Binh back through the northwest hill country into China." While searching for a target, the flight evaded a SAM and eluded a MiG-21 that attempted to attack his flight.

After looking over a couple of areas that remained destroyed from previous attacks, the flight located and struck an army supply depot that had sprung up in a previously destroyed area. During his strafing run, AAA punched a large hole in the vertical fin of Col Broughton's aircraft, F-105D 62-4338, which he had named "Alice's Joy". After a harrowing hour of nursing his damaged plane through an in-flight refueling, Col Broughton landed the plane at Takhli where ground crews, working overnight, swapped out the aft section with another aircraft.

Col Broughton received permission from 7 AF to attack this same site early the next morning. He and the 355 TFW's intelligence crews spent much of the night planning the next day's mission.

*"Thud Ridge", pgs 221 - 232 & 355 TFW History, Jan - Jun 67, USAF microfilm NO462 & "100 Missions North", pgs 259 & 265.*

#### 17-Jun-67

7284

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. received the Silver Star for a mission he flew today. The award was "... for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force while serving with the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron, in action over North Vietnam, on 17 June 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks flew in the element lead aircraft on a surface-to-air missile suppression flight supporting a twenty-eight ship strike force. In an extremely heavily defended target area, Captain Sparks flew through the formidable defenses guarding two surface-to-air missile sites and attacked two other sites menacing the force. Following two successful attacks on these sites he returned to the first one over-flown and, disregarding the concentrated intense defenses guarding it, attacked and heavily damaged this complex. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Sparks has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

*General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-1814 (October 25, 1967) on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.*

#### 30-Jun-67

5605

"As of 30 June 1967, individual pilots of the 357 TFS, 355 TFW, had flown the following number of combat missions. Only Rolling Thunder (RT) missions counted toward completion of a combat tour."

	RT	TOT
Maj Elmo C. Baker	30	30
Capt George Balog	21	21
Capt John William Bischoff	57	57
Maj Walter L. Catron	75	77
Maj Robert T. Cavanaugh	32	32
Maj Ward K. Dodge	57	57
Maj Robert K. Donahue	99	101
Maj Stanley M. Dunkle	99	102
Capt Phillip M. Drew	6	6
Lt Col Obadiah A. Dugan	56	60
Maj William A. Fredlund	41	41
Capt John E. Geiger (EWO)	74	75
Capt Charles A. Hanson	93	94
Capt Jay Criddle Hess	4	8
Capt Frank R. Jenkins	65	66
1Lt Gordon L. Jenkins	94	98
Capt William N. Johnson	4	4

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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Capt John C. Leech	30	31
1Lt Robert A. Lodge	95	100
Maj Charles A. Lombardo (EWO)	21	21
Capt Bruce J. Lotzbire	44	44
Maj Thomas H. Maus	70	72
Capt George A. Miklos	28	28
Capt Theodore G. Moeller	32	32
Maj David L. Nichols	80	81
Capt William J. Schaff	30	30
Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr.	27	27
Capt Robert W. Speilman (TDY)	33	34
Maj Robert L. Stone	6	6
Capt Francis T. Torikai	40	40
1Lt David B. Waldrop (TDY)	25	26
Capt Edward Webber (EWO)	24	24
1Lt James Benton West (TDY)	15	15
Maj William H. Wheeler (EWO)	1	1

Attached:

Col Harold I. Hill	44	45
Col Robert H. White	26	26

*357 TFS history 1 Apr - 30 June 1967, in 355 TFW history 1 Apr - 30 June 1967. AFHRA microfilm frames 1732 - 1733.*

### 05-Jul-67

1208

At 0830Z, four 355 TFW F-105Ds from "Barracuda" flight attacked the Vu Chua RR yard south (ART 1079) at coordinates 21-26-15N and 106-20-35E in RP-6A, North Vietnam. The first two aircraft dropped twelve M-117 bombs on approximately sixteen pieces of rolling stock. "Barracuda 3" and "Barracuda 4" dropped ten CBU-24s on a large concentration of AAA north of the center of the yard across the river.

"Barracuda 3", Maj. Ward Kent Dodge from the 357 TFS, was hit by a barrage of 37/57- and 85-mm AAA while flying at 400 knots 15,000 feet over the target. "Lead and Nr 4 observed impact of an A/C at 212500/1062200 at 0852Z -- No chute sighted." Maj Dodge became a POW but died in captivity.

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. received "... a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Silver Star ...for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force while serving with the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron, in action near Kep Airfield, North Vietnam, on 5 July 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks aggressively engaged and suppressed a surface-to-air missile site and an active anti-aircraft artillery site, although surrounded by heavy anti-aircraft fire, while in support of a major strike directed at the railroad facilities near Kep. Although all ordnance had been expended on prime threats to the strike force, and dangerously low on fuel, Captain Sparks persisted in flying aerial cover for a downed fellow pilot in the flak infested airspace until the onset of darkness and fuel demands forced him to reluctantly depart the area. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Sparks has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

*355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY OPREP-4/061 in USAF microfilm NO463 & General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-2198 (December 9, 1967) on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.*

### 17-Jul-67

3261

USAF aircraft struck four targets along the Northeast rail line (RR 2) in RP-6, North Vietnam.

The Bac Le vulnerable rail segment (BE 616-G0706) at 21-31-19N and 106-26-40E, previously struck on 10 July, was

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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interdicted again on 17 July. Pilots expended a total of 44 M-117s and six MK-82s during 5 sorties against this target.

The Vu Chua railroad yard (BE 616-01401), at 21-28-21N and 106-22-58E, struck on 12 July, was bombed again on 17 July and 19 July in 29 sorties expending a total of 131 M-117s, 12 MK-117s with time delay fuzes, and 6 MK-118s. Five destroyed or damaged pieces of rolling stock were in the yard on the 17 July strike.

The Bac Le railroad yard (BE 616-01383) at 21-30-47N and 106-26-13E, previously bombed on 12 July, was struck again on 17 July by 4 sorties expending 4 MK-82s and 12 M-117s. "Pilots reported one rail cut." Four pilots from the 34 TFS struck this target in RP-6. They were:

- #1 - Capt Jack A. Phillips Mission Commander flying his 90th combat mission over NVN.
- #2 - Capt Lawrence G. Hoppe
- #3 - Maj George G. Clausen 34th squadron commander
- #4 - Maj Robert T. Campbell who had recently arrived in the 34th.

This mission, his 90th, made Capt Phillips "Golden". He flew his next 10 missions between 21 July and 2 August in the lower threat region of Route Pack 1.

In the afternoon, the Kep railroad yards, (BE 616-01371, BE 616-01931, and BE 616-01932) on the Northeast rail line were struck 17 July, 18 July, and 21 July as a single target complex. Thirty-one sorties expended a total of 143 M-117s, 5 M-117s with time-delay fuzes, and 4 MK-82 against this complex. A total of 95 pieces of rolling stock were sighted during these strikes with an unknown number destroyed or damaged.

Maj Thomas H. Maus from the 357 TFS flew F-105D 62-4384 against the Kep railroad yard at coordinates 21-24-48N and 106-17-36E. His strike camera film showed bomb impacts on the yard.

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. flew on today's missions. He received "... a Third Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Fourth Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a Wild Weasel F-105F Pilot near Kep Airfield, North Vietnam, on 17 July 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks aggressively engaged numerous surface-to-air missile sites and anti-aircraft artillery radar guidance facilities in support of a strike against a vital rail yard. Captain Sparks was so effective in his radar suppression mission that not one hostile missile was fired in close proximity to the strike force and his efforts directly contributed to the overall mission, resulting in the destruction of a vital transportation facility. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-2245 (December 14, 1967), citation on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.)

*PACAF 27 July 67 Rolling Thunder briefing to CINCPAC for period 8 Jul - 23 Jul 67 & Jack Phillips Mission Summary via e-mail 18 Mar 11 & National Archives Strike Camera Records, Archive Control No. NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42718A.*

### 20-Jul-67

932

In six strikes involving 22 sorties, the Yen Bai airfield and support complex west-northwest of Hanoi in RP 5 was struck visually on 20 July. Pilots reported they destroyed six pieces of construction equipment and made Area 3 unserviceable. Photo coverage on 20 July revealed the destruction of three buildings in the target area but analysts identified numerous trucks and two power shovels from target photos. (PACAF 27 July 67 Rolling Thunder briefing to CINCPAC for period 8 Jul - 23 Jul 67.)

Four flights of F-105s from the 355 TFW bombed the Yen Bai airfield. Today's strike was the eighth attack on the airfield in July. It had been struck previously on 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 17 July. "The 40 sorties attacking this target destroyed the repaired portion of the field as well as six pieces of the heavy construction equipment in use." (CHECO).

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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"Yen Bai airfield, which has been under construction, 78 miles northwest of Hanoi, was struck yesterday (July 20) by Air Force tactical fighter bombers from three bases. The airfield was being used as a storage area for heavy equipment. Maintenance and administrative buildings were hit and at least four AAA sites were silenced around the edge of the field. 'We dropped 3,000 pounders directly on a AAA site that was firing at us,' said (357 TFS commander) Lieutenant Col Obie A. Dugan, 42, of Arlington, Va. Dugan led one of the flights of F-105 Thunderchiefs from the 355 TFW."

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. from the 357 TFS flew on this mission. He received "... a Second Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Third Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross ... for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a Wild Weasel F-105F Pilot near Yen Bay, North Vietnam, on 20 July 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks aggressively engaged a surface-to-air missile site while in support of a strike force targeted to bomb and destroy an airfield at Yen Bay. In spite of inclement weather, poor visibility and numerous radar controlled anti-aircraft guns Captain Sparks was so effective in his surface-to-air missile suppression mission that not one missile was fired at any of the fighter-bomber aircraft. His efforts directly contributed to the overall mission results of complete destruction of the construction equipment at Yen Bay airfield with not a single aircraft lost. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-2027 (November 16, 1967) citation on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.)

"F-4 Phantoms from the 8 TFW and 366 TFW also struck the target. A large amount of construction equipment was noted in the area near the airfield. Crews from the 8 TFW reported they wrecked six pieces of the heavy equipment."

Maj Al Lenski from the 333 TFS, flying his 81st combat mission, was the flight lead of the last flight of the strike force. The runway was under construction "... with some partially constructed buildings and a large area on one side of the field with a large quantity of 50-gallon fuel/oil drums. Our task was to crater the runway and destroy the petroleum area. Each of the four flights had one of these as a specific target area to bomb."

The strike force encountered AAA and three SAMS but all USAF aircraft returned to to their bases.

*Project CHECO Report, 17 November 1967, pg 33 & Air Force news release provided by Obie Dugan to Ron Thurlow in letter dated 20 Feb 2002 & "Magic 100" by BG Al Lenski, pgs 34 - 39*

#### 23-Aug-67

1399

In today's strikes, "five USAF aircraft were lost over NVN: four F-4Ds and one F-105D."

In the morning, the 355 TFW struck the Bac Giang railroad and highway bridge (JCS 18.23) (616-00479) at coordinates 21-16-28N and 106-11-24E and the nearby railroad yard in RP-6A, North Vietnam.

Col Robert M. White, 355 TFW/DO, led the strike as "Shark 1" for which he was awarded the 2nd OLC to the Silver Star. " ... Led a force of 20 aircraft against a key bridge in North Vietnam. Numbers 2 and 3 in my flight hit by AA fire. No. 3 [Maj Elmo C. Baker] bailed out. White flew low cover but no. 3 was captured. White, with failed hydraulic systems, made emergency landing at Da Nang, South Vietnam." (Bob White, e-mail to Ron Thurlow, 12 Sep 2001.)

At 0040Z, four 355 TFW F-105Ds in "Shark" flight attacked the bridge. "Shark 2", 1Lt Gary S. Olin in 62-4268, dropped two CBU-24s on an 85-mm AAA site 2,000 feet north of the bridge. As the plane rolled in on the target, diving through 10,000 feet, it was hit by 85-mm flak in the fuselage aft of the bomb bay.

"Shark 3", Maj. Elmo C. Baker, and "Shark 4", Maj Myron L. Savage, each dropped their six M-117 bombs on the bridge. As he pickled his bombs, "Shark 3" was hit in the aft fuselage by a AAA burst. Two minutes after being hit, at 0050Z, the pilot, Maj. Baker, ejected at coordinates 21-16-30N and 106-30-30E. For the next five minutes, the three other planes in the flight flew rescue cover until the pilots saw villagers picking up Maj. Baker. "Shark 1" diverted to Da Nang with aircraft problems. The other two planes made it back to Takhli. Maj Baker became a POW who was

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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released on 14 March 1973.

Wild Weasel pilot Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. from the 357 TFS flew on this mission. He received "... a Fourth Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Fifth Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross ... for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-105F Pilot near Bac Giang, North Vietnam, on 23 August 1967. In spite of intense hostile anti-aircraft fire, which made approach to the target extremely difficult, Captain Sparks not only proceeded to attack and destroy two gun-laying radar installations, but remained in the hostile area to render any and all possible assistance when one of his fellow airman was downed by the deadly and accurately tracing anti-aircraft artillery fire. He did not depart the area until dangerously low on fuel and all further attempts to assist the downed airman were deemed futile. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-606 (February 24, 1968) citation on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.)

*Chronology of Seventh Air Force 1 July 1967 - 30 June 1968, pg 3 & 355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY DOI 4841 OPREP-4/217 in USAF microfilm NO463, frame 274.*

#### 07-Oct-67

1844

Between 0047Z and 0103Z, two flights of 355 TFW F-105Ds strafed the Hoa Lac helicopter area (BE 616-H9035) at coordinates 21-05-00N and 105-25-50E, west of Son Tay, in RP-6A, North Vietnam. Flying between 1,000 and 3,500 feet above the ground, the eight aircraft in "Marlin" and "Shark" flights destroyed a total of two MI-6 Hook and four MI-4 Hound helicopters. The two MI-6s were easy to spot but the MI-4s were camouflaged and difficult to see. "Marlin" flight made 6 or 7 strafe passes on MI-4 helicopters while "Shark" flight made 24 strafe passes. "Shark 1" and "Shark 2" destroyed the two MI-6 helicopters that burned with black smoke rising to 200 feet. They both strafed an MI-4 and the helicopter collapsed but did not burn. "Shark 3" and "Marlin 1" strafed one MI-4 that burned "furiously". "Shark 4" and "Marlin 3" strafed two MI-4s and noted sparkles from their 20-mm hits but the helicopters did not burn. Each F-105 carried one AIM-9 but the OPREP indicated that all eight missiles were carried back to Takhli.

Gun camera magazines on "Shark 3" and "Marlin 2" jammed and the gun cameras on "Marlin 3" and "Marlin 4" didn't work due to electrical failure.

Four of the F-105D pilots who strafed the helicopter dispersal area were from the 357 TFS. The pilots were Col Robert M. White in 62-4318, Capt Calvin F. Jewett in 60-0504, Capt Theodore G. Moeller in 58-1168, and Capt Ramon Anton Horinek in 61-0109. Their gun camera footage for mission RT56A-157 showed their strafing of helicopters, buildings, and roads.

Col White, 355 TFW/DO, led the strike for which he was awarded the 1st OLC to the Silver Star. " ... Six helicopters destroyed, two severely damaged." (Bob White, e-mail to Ron Thurlow, 12 Sep 2001.)

Capt Moeller described the mission. " ... The flight ... was a mission downtown on Russian helicopters. It was a flight of four, led by Col Bob White and myself as element lead. We made numerous passes on the choppers destroying several of the birds. We carried no bombs and a full load of 20-mm." (Ted Moeller, letter to Ron Thurlow, 17 Oct 2001).

Capt Horinek claimed he destroyed one of the helicopters on the ground with an AIM-9 missile. His crewchief remembered, "After dawn Captain Horinek returned with a smile on his face to park in the spot. I put the ladder up and when I climbed up to help him out he said, 'I got it.' Still in the dark, I asked, 'What did you get, sir.' He replied, 'I got the biggest helicopter the Russians ever built. We had intelligence on when they were starting the engines and I caught him on the ground with a hot engine and stuck that Sidewinder in him and blew him up.' Later, during post flight inspection of the aircraft I found that a flak fragment had cut out a 'V' shaped portion of trailing edge below the rudder." (Bobby Dean former F-105 crewchief of 61-0109, e-mail, 11 Aug 1998).

Wild Weasel pilot Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. with EWO Maj Charles A. "Carlos" Lombardo, also from the 357 TFS,



## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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flew this mission as "Barracuda 01".

"Takhli was given a pop-up mission to strafe helicopters near Hoa Loc airfield in Route Pack Six (RP-6). We had prepared to attack a railroad marshalling yard at Phu Tho about 25 miles northwest of Hanoi. It was considered a fairly easy target since it was outside the main Hanoi coverage of SAM sites. Col. Bob White, 355 TFW/DO, was the Force Commander of a 16-ship formation of F-105D bombers, 4 F-105F Wild Weasels, and 4 F-4D MIGCAP from Ubon (8 TFW).

"I was leading the Wild Weasels as Barracuda Lead, George Guss (357 TFS) was #2, #3 was from the 333 TFS, and #4 was from the 354 TFS. It was not at all unusual for us to fly with people from all three squadrons in the Weasel Flight. The Force consisted of two flights of 4 from the 357 TFS, Shark and Marlin, one from the 354 TFS, Bear, and one flight from the 333 TFS. This was normal for all RP-6 missions. The Force Commander and the 2nd Flight from the same squadron, and one each from the other squadrons.

"We had just started the mission briefing in the operations center when we were told to scrub everything and plan to hit two targets -- two flights to Phu Tho and two flights to strafe (guns only for ordnance) 6 helicopters parked near Hoa Loc airfield. Everyone went bonkers! We left the briefing room and went to planning and started to try and work up a plan to do something we had never seen before. Since Phu Tho was not covered as heavily as Hoa Loc and that it would take several passes to kill 6 helicopters with the gun, Hoa Loc got priority. The 8th wing also had a mission to try a new gimmick at Hoa Loc -- level radar bombing of the airfield. Bob White decided that he would lead the strafe mission and Dale Leatham, Bear Lead, would take the 333 TFS flight and hit Phu Tho.

"I told both of them that there was ZERO way I could cover both strikes since they were simultaneous and over 60 miles apart. In addition, Barracuda had been tasked to cover the 8 TFW strike at Hoa Loc that was to be 15 minutes later than the Phu Tho strike. The fix was to have Dale go with no Weasel coverage, call Ubon and see if they could move up 10 minutes, and keep Barracuda in the Hoa Loc area to cover both the helicopters and the level bomb drop. We went back into the briefing room with all of the folk and briefed the new tasking. I am sure that everyone in the room was convinced that this was the stupidest idea in the last six months. Strafing anything in RP-6 was about as stupid an idea as possible. We were all sure that we would lose at least one and probably more at Hoa Loc. Strafing was only used in RP-6 when absolutely necessary during a rescue or some other emergency.

"While we were all in planning, the flightline people were busting their butts downloading bombs from 10 Thuds (8 primaries and 2 spares). Shark Flight had all been configured with 2 M-118 3,000 pound bombs and a 650 US gallon tank centerline. Marlin had two 450 US gallon tanks on the wings and 6 M-117 750 pound bombs centerline. The Cannon Cockers solved the problem by dropping the centerline MER racks with the bombs on them or dropping the 650 tank full of gas. That was way above the limit for the bomb loader but it worked and the birds were all reconfigured in less than 45 minutes total. We had the best maintenance in the world and easily the most motivated men in the universe.

"We made our takeoff times, took gas from the tankers, dropped off in North Laos, and headed for the Black River. The MIGCAP joined up about 3 miles at 6 as briefed and I took Barracuda out 10 minutes ahead of the force to check out the area for SAM activity. We had the normal number of Fire Can and SAM radars up and sniffing plus three height finders and one Bar Lock GCI radar. The presence of the Bar Lock meant that we could expect MiG activity. I took a long poke past the Black toward the Red River and then accelerated straight at Hoa Loc. There was little SAM activity and only the normal amount of gun radars in the area. Shark came into the area and his number three, I think, spotted a Mi-8 under some netting about 4 miles northwest of the airfield. A SAM came up about then and I took him down with a Shrike from Barracuda two.

"Both Shark and Marlin started a left hand square pattern just like at a training range in Kansas. They found all of the choppers by the second pass and were hitting them in turn. They were in 4 or 5 separate places in a fairly small area, all under netting. On about the 3rd or 4th pass, a MiG-17 rolled in behind Marlin 4 and started to fire at him. I hollered for

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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Marlin 4 to break with no action. I yelled his name and told him to break with no action. I had rolled in and hit the burner to catch the MiG and finally opened fire early to try and get him to break off his attack on Marlin 4. When I fired, the MiG went into a Zone-4 defense (standard Soviet defensive move) and then did a split 'S' from about 3,000 feet. I was closing at about the Mach and pulled high for a re-attack when George Guss decided to follow him through the split 'S'. George pulled over 7 'G' and blew dirt almost the length of the runway at Hoa Loc with a ton of guns shooting at him. The MiG headed for Hanoi. Two MiG-21s came by at about 10,000 feet, were attacked by our MIGCAP, and they headed for home. Barracuda 2 and 4 both called Bingo and I sent them home. Barracuda 3 stayed with me. By now all of the helicopters had been hit and were burning, so Shark called for a Bug-Out southwest. As he started his last pass, a SAM fired a single SA-2 at the force. I was in position to loft two Shrikes at him and then turned to put the missile at my six and went low to check the helicopters. I smoked by them at well over 600 knots and saw numerous fires and a couple of really bent rotors. As we left the area we had about enough gas to make Udorn with about 750 pounds.

"On the way in Barracuda 2 saw Fire Can radar on a small hill overlooking the area and asked permission to gun him. I told him to smack him and Guss rolled him off the road. On the way out, we hit the wreckage again and dropped our CBU canisters on a gun that was shooting at us. Post-strike refueling went smoothly and we all made it home. Shark and Marlin killed all of the helicopters, Bear hit Phu Tho with no problems, and the 8th wing troops dropped the radar bombs on Hoa Loc airfield with no losses. Over all, it was a very good mission for all of us."  
([http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Wild\\_Weasel\\_mission\\_1\\_October\\_1967](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Wild_Weasel_mission_1_October_1967))

Capt Sparks received "... a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in addition to a Previously Awarded Silver Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Seventh award of the Distinguished Flying Cross ... for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight on 7 October 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks displayed outstanding aerial competence and courageous professionalism in the aggressive pursuance and acquisition of the assigned target. The tenacity of this officer to attain the objective against formidable defenses is in accord with the highest military objectives. ...." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-1977 (May 21, 1969), citation on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.)

With the destruction of their heavy-lift helicopters, the North Vietnamese were severely hampered in rapidly relocating their SAM sites during the monsoon period. For about six months, Wild Weasel pilots could more easily find SAM sites because their locations remained fixed. (Robert Huntley, former 354 TFS Wild Weasel pilot, interview, 5 Nov 2002.)

*355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY DOI 5335 OPREP-4/049 in USAF microfilm NO463, frame 1371 & National Archives Air Strike Films, Vietnam, record control number NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42718A.*

#### 25-Oct-67

3062

In the morning, for the second day in a row, the 355 TFW and 388 TFW attacked Phuc Yen airfield (JCS 6), in RP-6A, North Vietnam. Takhli pilots from the 357 TFS were again in this airfield strike. The four flights of F-105Ds attacked in one-minute intervals, "Shark" at 0100Z, "Marlin" at 0101Z, "Scotch" at 0101Z, and "Wolf" at 0102Z, and dropped a total of 54 M-117s, six M-118s, twelve CBU-24s, and eight CBU-29s.

"Shark" flight dropped CBUs on flak sites south of the runway. While over the target, one pilot in the flight inadvertently fired an AIM-9 while he was dropping his CBUs. "Shark 2", Capt Raymond A. Horinek from the 357 TFS, was hit by 57-mm or 85-mm AAA while in his dive bomb run over the target. He ejected and was captured on the ground. He was released as a POW on 14 March 1973.

"Marlin" flight dropped all six of their M-118s and six M-117s on the northeast revetments in Area L. KA-71 strike camera film showed two of the M-118s cratering the parking apron immediately south of Area L.

Strike camera film also verified "Scotch" flight's interdiction of the runway in at least two places. Two impacts were noted at the junction of the west crossover link, one at the junction of the center crossover link, and a string of five

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### F-105 History

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good interdiction running immediately west of the center crossover.

"Wolf" flight dropped 18 M-117s on the southwest revetments, Area E. The flight couldn't see their bomb impacts due to evasive maneuvers. "Wolf Lead" was unable to release his bombs over the target and, while on egress at 9,000 feet at 0106Z, jettisoned his six M-117s with their MER in an uninhabited area at 21-42N and 105-25E. The flight received moderate, accurate 37/57-mm, but very little 85-mm AAA, from roll-in through egress, bursting at aircraft altitudes between 6,000 and 15,000 feet. While on roll-in at 15,000 feet, "Wolf" flight saw two SAMs heading in a westerly direction in a steep climb through the strike force. The first SAM detonated over the west end of the target area at approximately 3,000 feet resulting in a large orange fireball. The second SAM passed through the strike force and detonated at 15,000 feet. Both SAMs, which appeared to be unguided, came from an unknown location and detonated within a half mile of the force. On egress, "Wolf" flight also received moderately accurate 37-mm AAA two nautical miles east of the target.

Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. from the 357 TFS flew on this mission. He received a "... Silver Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Sixth Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross ... for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-105 Pilot near Phuc Yen, North Vietnam, on 25 October 1967. On that date, Captain Sparks flew in a flight of F-105 aircraft executed to strike the heavily defended Phuc Yen Airfield of the North Vietnamese Air Force. Despite extremely heavy, barrage-type anti-aircraft fire and numerous surface-to-air missile launches, Captain Sparks disregarded his own safety, pressed the attack, and delivered his ordnance precisely on target. ... ." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-744 (March 8, 1968) citation on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>.)

Three F-105 flights from the 388 TFW - "Hatchet", "Olympia", and "Vegas" - struck the airfield. The draft of an expanded strike report, written by 388th Public Affairs, described the mission. "'Today's mission had a little bit of everything ... MiGs, SAMS, and flak,' commented Capt Lawrence G. Hoppe, 28, from Roselle, Ill. Capt Hoppe went on to say, 'Inbound to the target, the MiGs had at the back flights and we had to break. About six to eight total came in on the deck and popped up behind us. They tried to hit at us but didn't get anybody, but then we didn't get any MiGs either. Getting in closer to the target, we saw a couple of SAMs come boiling off the ground. We could see the SAMs ignite and the cloud of smoke they create. They just start rising off the ground and arc over and come at us. Just prior to roll-in we got quite a few bursts of 85. You could see them on the ground right next to the runway. One site was really ringing off and throwing up a bunch of flak. The flak was heavy and very accurate. We could also see 37/57 going off beneath us. We had to dive through that. We dropped our ordnance on the runway. Coming around I had a chance to look back and saw four strings of bombs cutting the runway. It looked real pretty. We had good bombing.'

"Capt Hoppe also reported flak and SAMs being fired on the way out from the target, but no MiGs were encountered by his flight.

"Summing up the mission, the captain said, 'All totaled, it was a very good mission; you might say a satisfying mission. You got to do what you've wanted to do for a long time. We felt pretty good.'

"Describing the physical appearance of the airfield, Capt Hoppe said, 'The runway had been hit yesterday and had been cratered, but it looked like during the night, they had filled it in. They had just filled them with dirt. You couldn't determine any pock marks -- it looked like it had been filled in. But they have some more holes they have to fill in now.'" This was Capt Hoppe's 82nd counter. He flew for 3.8 hours.

"A flight leader on the mission, Maj Harold J. Steinke, Jr., 35, Midwest City, Okla., said, "I observed one string of bombs impacting about two thirds down the runway right on the target. The first string of bombs that went off were right in the middle of the runway and no doubt cratered it pretty well. This was a real good mission. We've been waiting a long time to hit Phuc Yen.'

"Major Almer L. Barner, Jr., 37, Ruleville, Miss., was also a flight leader on the second Phuc Yen raid. He said, 'We

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### F-105 History

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were the second flight to hit the airfield. We broke and rolled out and jettisoned our bombs but the MiGs had gone. We accomplished the task of getting the MiGs off the strike force. Talking to the other fellows in the flight, they think they did a pretty good job on the runway.'

"Others on the strike were: Capt Russell E. Temperley [469 TFS], 32, Newton Center, Mass; Major James D. Murray, Jr. [469 TFS], 34, Bayonne, N.J.; Maj David D. Igleman [34 TFS], 35, Richmond, Ind; Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver, 38, Hobbs, N.M. and Silverton B.C., Canada; 1Lt David B. Waldrop, 25, Nashville, Tenn; and Maj Spence H. Armstrong, 33, Columbia, Tenn." (Draft Expanded Strike Report - 388 TFW - 25 Oct 67 provided by Larry Hoppe, May 2010 & Larry Hoppe AF Form 5. NOTE: His Form 5 shows two missions flown on 24 Oct 67 and none on the 25th so I assume the second entry is a typo and should be 25 Oct 67.)

The flight lineup of "Vegas" flight, all from the 34 TFS, was:

- #1 - Maj Almer L. "Buddy" Barner, Jr.
- #2 - Maj Larry R. Klinestiver
- #3 - 1Lt David B. Waldrop III
- #4 - Maj Spence M. "Sam" Armstrong flying F-105D 62-4221

This was Maj Armstrong's 12th mission over North Vietnam. Take off: 0600. Mission length: 2+45. "This was the same target, Phuc Yen Airfield, as I had hit yesterday. Today things were pretty uneventful until we spotted some MiGs as we were coming down 'Thud' Ridge. They were low and coming in at our 5 o'clock position. Since our flight was primary for MiG defense of the strike force of 20 aircraft, we punched off our bombs and tanks, went into afterburner and broke into the MiGs. They fired something but I never saw them again. They must have been trying to avoid the falling tanks and bombs and ducked down to the left. At almost 90-degrees of hard turn, a SAM detonated about 3,000' off my right wing and slightly high. We got down on the ridge and headed NW out of there. On the way out we saw one lone MiG-17 (silver, the other two were camouflaged) high and going away. No chance to get him. Sure was nice chasing MiGs rather than braving the flak." (Maj Spence M. Armstrong, combat mission log for period 5 Oct 67 - 14 Apr 68, pp 4 - 5.)

"... Iron Hand Shrikes hit the radar and the site went off the air. Photo BDA showed the runway to be heavily cratered from this raid. Many support buildings and the Air Defense Center appeared to be badly damaged." (355 TFW Report on Outstanding Achievements, 1 Mar 67 - 29 Feb 68.)

The attacks from yesterday and today, "... cratered Phuc Yen's runway and damaged its tower, thanks to a direct hit on the latter by a Navy Walleye guided bomb. Most of the eighteen MiGs then based at Phuc Yen were caught on the ground; reconnaissance photography indicated that perhaps a dozen of them suffered severe damage." ("To Hanoi and Back", pg 90)

F-4s from the 8 TFW flew air cover for the F-105s. They had several engagements with North Vietnamese MiGs but no planes from either side were damaged. (Video, "F-105 Missions Over North Vietnam", report ending 25 November 1967, Film Report FR-856, Produced by the Aerospace Audio Visual Service.)

The JCS history reported the results of yesterday's and today's strikes, as well as a third strike against Phuc Yen on 26 October, as "three MiGs were destroyed, three were damaged, and the runway was made unserviceable."

The PACAF briefing to CINCPAC on 7 November 1967 listed different results and also reported on North Vietnamese progress in restoring the runway. Post-strike photos showed that 5 MiG-21s and 5 MiG-17s parked in Area H were either damaged or destroyed, and that two MiG-17s in Area G were destroyed. Photos on 26 October showed at least 39 craters on the main runway and extensive damage to the adjacent revetted area. Photos from 28 October revealed repair activity on the runway but the runway remained unserviceable. Photography dated 30 October revealed that the runway had been repaired and was serviceable once again.

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### F-105 History

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F-105s from the 355 TFW also struck the main runway at Hoa Lac airfield, dropping 750- and 3,000-pound bombs on the northwest and southeast ends of the center of the runway. Pilots reported large secondary explosions. (Video, "F-105 Missions Over North Vietnam", report ending 25 November 1967, Film Report FR-856, Produced by the Aerospace Audio Visual Service.)

*355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY DOI 5481 OPREP-4/1?? in USAF microfilm NO463, frame 1390 & History of the JCS, Vol III, pg 44-10 & Rolling Thunder Status and Analysis Report to CINCPAC for the period 16 - 31 October 1967.*

**25-Oct-67**

1186

After striking Phuc Yen Airfield in the morning when Capt Ray Horinek from the 357 TFS was shot down, the 355 TFW and 388 TFW went after the Paul Doumer bridge (JCS 12) in the afternoon. It was their second mission of the war against this heavily defended target. Pilots from the 354 TFS " ... led the strike force in, and when they left, North Vietnam's largest bridge was downed for the 2nd time." (355 TFW history, Microfilm NO463, frame 1565).

Four flights of F-105Ds from the 355 TFW bombed the bridge:

Four F-105Ds in "Bear" flight struck the bridge at 0911Z.

Two F-105Ds in "Bison" flight and four F-105Ds in "Kingfish" flight attacked at 0912Z.

Four F-105Ds in "Wildcat" flight dropped their bombs on the bridge at 0913Z.

Strike flights aimed for the third through the ninth spans from the northeast bank. The pilots didn't see bomb impacts due to rapid egress and smoke.

The flak suppression flight attacked three sites three nautical miles northwest, two sites one nautical mile southwest, three sites three nautical miles northeast, and two sites two nautical miles east southeast of the center of the bridge. All AAA sites appeared to be well covered by CBUs. Flights received intense, accurate 37/57/85-mm AAA barrages on pull-out from the target bursting at 4,000 to 8,000 feet. The flak continued for approximately three minutes bursting between 4,000 and 10,000 feet until the flights had egressed half way up Thud Ridge. The gun sites that fired were located 5,400 feet north northeast and one nautical mile north on the river bank from the center of the bridge.

At 0908Z, while the force was on ingress heading 074 at 10,000 feet altitude at 20-59N and 105-30E, two SAMs were observed heading 250 degrees at the force's 12 o'clock position. When first observed, both SAMs were at 10,000 feet and climbing. Detonation occurred at approximately 17,000 feet. Distance between the force and the missile was estimated at 7,000 feet.

Three minutes prior to time over target, "Bison 2" could not arm his right in-board pylon. "Bison 2" left the flight with "Bison 4" as escort and, at 0920Z, the two pilots expended their ordnance on a road in RP-5. "Bison 2" and "Bison 4" dropped four M-118s on or near the road at coordinates 20-59-00N and 105-59-55E. Dust and smoke precluded BDA.

Four minutes after they attacked the bridge, "Bear Lead" and "Bear 2", using their M-61 gun, strafed Hanoi SAM site B-01-2 (BE 616-02351) at 21-17-12N and 105-53-05E. Their slugs impacted well within the target area but precise BDA was precluded by post-strafting maneuvers.

Maj Dale W. Leatham, "Shark 1", led the strike force of sixteen F-105s from Takhli. They were first to attack the target. Second in the strike force was Maj Charles Edward Cappelli, 354 TFS, who led "Bear" flight. Capt Gene I. Basel was "Bear 2" and Capt Lawrence G. "Jerry" Evert was "Bear 3" flying F-105D 62-4385. The third strike flight was led by Maj Richard E. "Gene" Smith as "Wildcat 1". "Wildcat 2" was Maj Gene Boone, an instructor pilot from Nellis on temporary combat duty. "Wildcat 3" was Capt Donald W. Schalk, and number 4 was Capt John D. Thomas. Each plane carried two 3,000-pound bombs.

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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"Wildcat Lead" in F-105D 58-1168, Maj Richard E. Smith, Jr., received a direct hit by 37-mm AAA at pull-off from his dive bomb run from the bridge. At 6,500 feet, heading 360 degrees at 550 knots, his aircraft immediately started porpoising and then nosed up and started spinning. At the time the aircraft nosed up, a beeper was heard but no chute was observed. The pilot's status was initially unknown. One AIM-9 was destroyed with the aircraft. (355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY DOI ??? OPREP-4/??? in USAF microfilm NO463, frame 1391. Top of OPREP is illegible.)

Fourteen years later, Capt Basel described the action in his book, "Pak Six". "Minutes from the target, Bear 3 got into trouble. Jerry Evert was flying an already notorious airplane, number 385. That Thud had gremlins, bad ones. The mechanics had torn that airplane apart over and over, had all but replaced every component of the flight control system, and still it went crazy on nearly every mission -- usually at a critical point. We were approaching Hanoi from the west at about 500 knots. Jerry began struggling with his cursed airplane as it rolled and pitched violently. ... He shot out of the formation, out of control. His speed brakes opened and the plane slowed enough to regain some control. Jerry turned back and number four followed him for protection."

As the two remaining planes in Bear flight headed toward the bridge, two SAMs were launched at the strike force. The missiles missed but then AAA opened up. "Flak began to blossom here and there in groups of six. Big red flashes grew in an instant to thick black puffs that lingered as if marking the spot. The air became filled with sound. The big voice yelled about MiGs, and the Weasels had gone to work."

Each of the four flights pulled up then rolled over diving on the bridge and released their bombs. "I yanked the wings level in the dive, the nose pointed steeply down, the afterburner spouting flame and rocketing me toward the earth. ... I stopped looking at anything but the sixth span of the huge bridge. The glowing gunsight crept up to the span, I made one quick correction, paused, then pickled."

By the time Capt Basel pulled up from his bomb run, the sixth plane over the target, the gunners had perfected their aim. As he led the third flight down, Maj Gene Smith from the 333 TFS was hit by AAA and he ejected over Hanoi.

As each plane joined up with its flight, the F-105s headed for the safety of Thud Ridge. "We were ... going as fast as we could, jinking and weaving wildly. Every bad guy in the valley was still shooting. ... We passed Thud Ridge at the speed of sound with MiGs giving chase. They didn't have a chance. We had that extra edge of speed they lacked: adrenaline."

Twenty-one F-105s dropped a total of 63 tons of 3,000-pound bombs. "Again the bridge was rendered unserviceable by the destruction of 2 cantilever spans just east of the island, the eastern pier supporting the span, and the highway deck on the span just west of span number 5."

One pilot from Korat flying against the bridge was Maj William M. Blakeslee from the 34 TFS flying F-105D 59-1743.

"Barracuda" was the Wild Weasel flight protecting the strike force. One of the Wild Weasel crews from the 357 TFS was Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. and his EWO Maj Charles A. Lombardo.

But it was a costly day for the F-105s. During their attacks on two big targets in Hanoi, Takhli lost two planes and the pilots became POWs.

Later in the day, tragedy struck a pilot from Korat when Maj Aquilla Britt, 469 TFS, the lead 388 TFW pilot striking the Doumer bridge, died when he collided with a C-123 on the runway at Tan Son Nhut as he landed in a blinding rain.

"The [Doumer] bridge was repaired and serviceable by 20 November 1967."

*"Pak Six", by G. I. Basel, pgs 54 - 60 & National Archives Archive Control Number NWDNM(m)-342-USAF-42649B & "The Tale of Two Bridges", pg 75 & 388 TFW history, Apr - Dec 1967, USAF microfilm NO463 frame 1756.*

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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27-Oct-67

2497

The 333 TFS, 355 TFW, Wild Weasel crew of Maj Bruce D. Stocks and EWO Maj Frank N. Moyer flew their 47th combat mission together. "Went to briefing for PM go. We were started up & waiting for taxi time when we heard Wolf Lead call "Abort, abort, abort". Shortly after, he went off the end of the runway & we saw the plane burning. When we heard the rescue chopper call "We have the pilot aboard & he's OK", I thanked God for his mercy. Col. Giraud, Wg Cmdr leading a flight, cancelled the mission because of the crashed plane's unexploded bombs + its having torn out the arresting barrier."

The plane that crashed was flown by Capt James R. Main from the 354 TFS.

"So we had a slow afternoon after that. After a Weasel meeting & supper, Bruce & I learned we were to fly an Arc Light tonight, so relaxed at the BOQ for a couple of hours, then went to briefing. We had a single-cycle trip, not to the usual DMZ but to the Mu Gia Pass. Bed at 0300."

"Carlo Lombardo (333 TFS EWO Maj Charles A. Lombardo ), ex-Stewart [AFB] Sqdn EWO, quit flying under "45-22" & is going to finish out a year at 7th AF Hq in Saigon." His pilot, Capt Billy R. Sparks, flew his remaining missions as a strike pilot, but 9 days later (on 5 November) was shot down and recovered over North Vietnam.

*Diary of Frank N. Moyer, 4 Jun 67 - 15 Mar 68.*

05-Nov-67

1441

"Pilots from Korat's 388 TFW and the 355 TFW at Takhli, claimed 36 craters on the runway at Phuc Yen Airfield following a strike on 5 November. Ninety 750-pound bombs (M117s), six 500-pound bombs and 80 CBUs were reported expended in the attack. Five AAA sites were estimated damaged or destroyed, and confirmed by KA-71 strike photography. Post-strike photography reflected repair efforts, a servicable taxiway and the runway unserviceable." (7 Air Force Weekly Air Intelligence Summary (WAIS), 67-46 dated 11 Nov 67, for week of 3 - 9 Nov 1967, pg 3.)

Taking advantage of the clearer weather in the afternoon, F-105s from the 388 TFW, Korat, and the 355 TFW from Takhli struck Phuc Yen MiG airfield (JCS 6) (BE 616-8520) for the third time since their first attacks on 24 and 25 October 1967. This time Takhli lost two F-105s -- a "D" flown by Capt Billy R. Sparks, Jr. from the 357 TFS, and a Wild Weasel "F" crewed by Maj Dick Dutton and EWO Capt Glenn Cobeil from the 333 TFS.

"During this attack, two MiG-17s were damaged on the ground." (Chronology of Seventh Air Force 1 July 1967 - 30 June 1968, pg 6.)

(NOTE: Much of 355 TFW OPREP from which part of the following was taken is illegible)

Four of the flights, "Wildcat", "Wolf", "Marlin", and "Scotch" were strike flights, and the fifth, "Red Dog", was a Wild Weasel flight. "Marlin Lead" (Capt Sparks) and the Wild Weasel F-105F of "Red Dog 4" were lost to AAA during this mission. Both the pilot and EWO of the Wild Weasel crew (Maj Dutton and Capt Cobeil) were captured. "Marlin Lead" (Capt Sparks) was rescued.

At 0825Z, the four F-105Ds in "Wildcat" flight dropped two CBU-24s on the first target, an (illegible) area in RP-6A, North Vietnam. Pilots reported 100% of their ordnance hit the target area but there were no secondaries and they could not provide BDA due to evasive tactics. The flight encountered heavy AAA (illegible).

The primary target struck was Phuc Yen airfield, (JCS 6), the third time F-105s hit this target since 24 October. Pilots from the 357 TFW were in this raid. Intense, accurate barrages of 37/57/85-mm AAA blanketed the area. Beginning at 0808Z with "Marlin" flight, the four strike flights dropped a total of four MK-118s and twenty CBU-24s on the airfield. After dropping his ordnance, "Marlin 1" was hit and downed by flak. At 0823Z, the four F-105Ds in

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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"Scotch" flight used CBUs to suppress active flak sites adjacent to the airfield.

Next over the target, at 0827Z, were the four F-105Ds in "Wolf" flight. The strike pilots reported direct hits on the hanger in Area 4 and both the (illegible). After the flights left the target, they began a RESCAP for "Marlin 1" at coordinates 21-26N and 104-51E in RP-5. The three pilots in "Marlin" flight capped between 0835Z and 1008Z and were assisted by the pilots in "Scotch" flight between 0915Z and 0940Z. The RESCAP flights maintained a high and low cell and established voice contact with "Marlin 1" on the ground. The three pilots in "Marlin" flight ran short of fuel and had to depart the area after the A-1 Sandys arrived. However, "Marlin 3" returned and pinpointed the area for the Jolly Green helicopter crew who succeeded in picking up the downed pilot.

Strike camera photos from the second flight over the target showed bomb craters on the runway from the first flight. (CINCPAC briefing)

The F-105Fs in "Red Dog" flight struck two targets. Their first target at 0835Z was a suspected military area at coordinates 20-27N and 105-13E in RP-5. They dropped one CBU-24 and one CBU-29 on the area but did not see their bomb impacts. At 0841Z, they dropped two CBU-24s and two CBU-29s on a segment of Route 13 at 21-19N and 104-46E, also in RP-5, and, again, did not see their bomb impacts. After "Red Dog 4" was downed, the other three members of the flight circled the area and heard a good beeper signal but could not raise either of the downed crew on voice. After refueling once, the flight was relieved on RESCAP by "Ozark" flight.

(Bottom of OPREP is missing)

One day after their return from R&R, Maj Bruce Stocks and EWO Maj Frank Moyer from the 333 TFS were the crew leading the "Red Dog" Wild Weasel flight from Takhli. They had also led Takhli's Wild Weasels on the first Phuc Yen airfield strike on 24 October. This was Maj Moyer's 50th combat mission. In his diary, he described what happened this time. "We were to lead the late go, so slept in. Went to TOC at 0900 to plan our lead & worked on it right until brief time at 1120; the combination of Pri. & 1st Alt. were tough! Well, we flew it! Got a valid launch signal near Phuc Yen, & Sparky got hit taking it into the weeds. Made it south of the Red [River] before he had to punch out because of fire & was rescued; back to Takhli near midnight."

"But Dutton & Cobeil, our newest Weasel crew & flying #4 slot, also went to the weeds & were set afire. They didn't make it to the Red but did manage to bail out before the plane blew up just north of Phu Tho. We stayed with them almost until their chutes reached the ground but couldn't stay longer because of fuel. Set up Rescap operation, then went out for tanker. Sent our #3 man on home, then we & #2 met a Mig Cap flight over Channel 97 [tacan station] to go back into the area. Orbited their area trying to establish radio contact with them, but couldn't, 'til we were too low on fuel to stay longer, so met emergency tanker for limited refueling & flew home at over 30,000 ft to save fuel. Came in VFR [visual flight rules] with barely 2,000 lbs left - ca 20 min. So apparently 2 good guys are prisoners because of my "Valid Launch" call. And Sparky, being at about 140 missions & having punched out before, will go home with no more combat. Lousy day to mark the halfway point -Mission #50."

Maj Moyer was awarded the Second Oak Leaf Cluster to the Distinguished Flying Cross for his being " ... directly responsible for the safe recovery of a downed aircrew in a very hostile area." (Frank Moyer, letter to Ron Thurlow, 21 Sep 2001).

Lt Col Robert W. Smith, the 34 TFS commander led Korat's strike force in the third attack against Phuc Yen Airfield (JCS 6). "I was Strike Force Commander to Phuc Yen Airport for a return match with the enemy, on 5 November, just a couple weeks after our first attack there. This time our job was to hit the runway, which had been assigned to the 355th wing on our first strike there. We had made strides in paying more attention to our attacks and the results were evident in our strike photos.

"At that early stage, I found time to annotate a map with some of my strike mission notes and write home to Martha to



## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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share with her some of what we were doing, none of which was classified. That was a practice I quit as a result of the increasing demands on my time. From that mission, I included a series of three strike camera shots of our attack, which I had annotated.

"I had been pleased, when the KA-70 strike photos confirmed that my six 750's hit squarely on the very middle of the runway, but more excited about the improving results by the flight. The outcome was far better than before, encouraging me in our efforts to improve weapons delivery." (Bob Smith's autobiography on line at [http://www.kalimera.org/nf104/ab/ch\\_5/v.html](http://www.kalimera.org/nf104/ab/ch_5/v.html))

Capt Hugh W. Davis, 34 TFS, was awarded the Silver Star for flying this mission. "Captain Hugh W. Davis distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force over North Vietnam on 5 November 1967. On that date, Captain Davis led a force of twenty F-105s against the Phuc Yen Airfield. Despite a heavy barrage of anti-aircraft fire, surface to air missiles and the threat of hostile aircraft, Captain Davis guided the force in a successful raid which rendered the runway and several anti-aircraft sites inoperative. Later, he participated in a rescue effort and was instrumental in the successful pickup of a downed pilot. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Davis has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force." (Hugh Davis award citation)

1Lt Earl J. Henderson from the 469 TFS from Korat flew on the Phuc Yen strike. It was his 34th combat mission into North Vietnam.

"Target: Phuc Yen airfield  
"Armament: 6x750 .025

"Bad again at Phuc Yen. They were waiting for us today. Flak pretty bad. Lead hit twice. Once in canopy. Got glass in neck. No one shot down in our group. Takhli lost two, got one guy out. We had best bombs I've ever seen. Many, many craters on runway." His flight lead was Lt Col William C. Decker, the squadron Operations Officer. He "... was hit by a 12.75 cal round that came through the top of the canopy while flying straight and level. We surmised that it was a spent round falling. I think it embedded in the seat head rest. Canopy glass hit Lt Col Decker in the neck and caused some minor injuries, but he got a purple heart for his troubles." (Earl Henderson, e-mail 3 August 2009.)

Lt Henderson received the Distinguished Flying Cross (1 OLC) for this mission. "... Lieutenant Henderson was a member of a flight of four F-105s assigned to attack the most vital airfield in North Vietnam. Flying through intense anti-aircraft fire, he dropped his bombs precisely on the runway and rendered it completely unserviceable. When his flight leader's aircraft was heavily damaged by anti-aircraft fire, Lieutenant Henderson joined in close formation and escorted him back out across 140 miles of hostile territory to a safe recovery. ..." (Earl Henderson, combat diary and award citation.)

Post-strike coverage from 6 November revealed numerous craters on the runway but repair work had already started. Two MiGs in Area G, damaged during the 24 October strike, were still in the same place but two of the MiGs that had been damaged in Area H, the northern revetments, had been removed. Additional photography obtained on 20 November, two weeks after today's strike, confirmed the runway was back in operation. (Rolling Thunder briefing to CINCPAC for period 1 - 15 November 1967.)

*355 TFW JOPREP JIFFY DOI ??? OPREP-4/051 in USAF microfilm NO463, frame 1398 & 388 TFW history, Apr - Dec 1967, USAF microfilm NO463 frame 1757 & Diary and Combat Log of Frank N. Moyer, 4 Jun 67 - 15 Mar 68.*

### 05-Nov-67

F-105D 610173 357 TFS 355 TFW Takhli Hit by 57-mm AAA after attacking Phuc Yen Airfield (JCS 6). Crashed in RP-6A, North Vietnam. 21-33N 104-51E Capt Billy Reed Sparks, Jr. 357 TFS pilot ejected and was rescued by a USAF HH-3E helicopter. Call sign: "Marlin 01". At 16:30, "The F-105 received 57-mm AAA hits on egress

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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from a bomb raid against Phuc Yen Airfield (JCS 6). The pilot maintained control of his flaming aircraft until he reached a point west of the Red River. SAR was successful." (355 TFW history)

Capt Sparks received "... the Second Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Third Award of the Silver Star ...for gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force as an F-105 Pilot of the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron, in action near Phuc Yen Airfield, North Vietnam, on 5 November 1967. On that date, after completing a highly successful bomb run on the largest maintenance hangar on the airfield, Captain Sparks' aircraft was hit by a barrage of 37/57 millimeter fire on egress from the target. Despite losing all his instruments and flying in an aircraft which was burning from cockpit to tail, Captain Sparks stayed with the aircraft and flew it over sixty miles until it finally went out of control and he was forced to eject over hostile territory, later being recovered by friendly forces. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Sparks has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force." (General Orders: Headquarters, 7th Air Force, Special Order G-655 (February 29, 1968) on line at <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=45399>)

Capt Franklin A. Billingsley was "Marlin 03".

"Nov 5, 1967, is a date that I must celebrate every year, since this was the day that my worthless butt was pulled from the jungle in RP-5 about 16 miles south of Yen Bai and about 1 mile south of the Red river. For any of you that were there, my call sign was Marlin Lead and we were tail end Charlie on a strike at Phuc Yen. We put all but five 750s into the last hanger standing on the field and pulled off left and went north of the airpatch to egress. Three SAMs were launched at 6-o'clock (validated by Reddog) and since we were not in pod formation yet, I elected to take us on the deck and haul ass. I saw one hit the ground and two more go ballistic above us and started to pull up when I was hit by three 57-mm rounds, one directly below the cockpit, one just in front of the cockpit right side, and one in front of the afterburner area. I was at 690 CAS and at 100', pretty damned good shooting."

"The cockpit filled with smoke and I blew the canopy to see out and shortly thereafter had a complete electrical failure along with a loss of all instruments including the pitot gauges. I got out three radio calls and, luckily for my reputation, could not be heard whimpering on the radio. The Thud burned for slightly more than seven minutes and finally went out of control over the Red River twelve miles downstream from Yen Bai. The right front quarter panel had melted, the right rudder pedal burned off and fell to the floor, the bomb bay tank blew off the bomb bay doors, the aft tank blew several feet off of the top of the fuselage, and the fire burned into the right wheel well and the tire blew down and ripped off. My wingmen looked like the Thunderbirds all this time."

"After I finally lost control, stayed with it for about one more minute and blew out somewhere around 24,000 over the river. After at least a week of subjective time, the 'chute opened and I slipped across the river and was going to land in a town. I managed to get my heels into the front risers and slipped using alternative fronts about four miles down stream. With typical fighter pilot logic I picked what I thought was elephant grass and landed in 75' tall bamboo. I fell about 40-50 feet and landed on the family jewels in an excellent heels, ass, and elbow PLF."

"My wingmen had already called in that I was in an "excellent area" for pickup. My #3 stayed until he had less than 3,000 lbs. and was back from refueling in under 25 minutes. Guess where the tankers were. Either they were way north or he had a mach 4 thud. I had 17 birds in my cap by the time Harry Walker showed up in the most beautiful CH-3 Jolly in the universe. When he went into a hover chopping the top out of a 200' teak tree, four MIG-17s made an appearance. The low Sandy told him to get out of the area and his reply was, 'F...You, keep them off my back, I've got more important things to do!!'"

"I got hauled out after less than 2+30 on the ground. When the PJ pulled me in the door and gave me a hug, Harry said, 'Tell that SOB not to die, we need a live one for a change!' They had picked up Richter and John Bischoff, both dead, before me, and needed to change their luck. I was carried off of the CH-3 at NKP and fed Old Overshoes chased with warm Millers by Willy P. and then loaded on a gooney bird and flown to Takhli for one hell of a party."

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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"I was the first pickup in NVN in 6+ months since Spade Cooly in April. I made it out due to the FACT that Republic built one hell of a tough bird, three wingmen did everything right, Tanker pilots have enormous cojones, 7th AF wanted one back, and most of all because Harry Walker is a Warrior and had a crew that had to have wheelbarrows to carry their Cojones to the bird. I need to thank all of the troops involved and to especially thank Russ O'Neal, flight engineer, for keeping in touch for 31 years." (Bill Sparks, e-mail to Weasel Net, 5 November 1998).

Russ O'Neal was the flight engineer in the Jolly Green Giant helicopter from Udorn and NKP that rescued Capt Sparks. "Had the honor of picking Bill Sparks off a North Vietnam mountain side after he dumped his F-105 trying to reach Thud Ridge on 5 Nov 67. Wish all my missions in North Vietnam were as successful as Bill's." (E-mail posting on Thud Ridge Web Guestbook, 19 May 1998)

The helicopter crew had been on strip alert at Lima Site 36 in Northern Laos for the past two days when they got the afternoon call to launch with "Jolly 56" and A-1 "Sandys" to rescue "Marlin Lead" and "Reddog 4". After arriving over Capt Sparks' location, Sgt O'Neal dropped the penetrator to the maximum length of its cable. "I swung the cable to get the penetrator to swing up the slope toward where I had seen the survivor disappear under the foliage. The penetrator didn't swing back out. After about 30-seconds I felt four tugs on the cable. ... What a relief when I saw swing out from under the foliage a big handle bar mustache, with an even bigger grin under it, hugging the penetrator like his first date. When the survivor was about 50-feet below the door, I spotted some locals coming over the ridge and told Capt Walker 'Let's get the hell out of here'. He rolled left and away from the ridge. The survivor was immediately dangling 300-feet over the valley on the end of a 3/8" steel cable going about 75 knots. ... I finally got a shaken but happy survivor inside Jolly 37. He just laid on the floor looking up at us grinning from ear to ear."

Full Story by Russ O'Neal

I was the flight engineer on the Jolly that pulled Bill Sparks out of Indian Country in Viet Nam. Attached is my version of the rescue I wrote for the Jolly Green Web page in honor of the anniversary of 'Sparky's rescue.'

Flying the Jolly Green rescue helicopter in south East Asia can best be described as hours upon hours of boredom waiting for some poor fighter jock to get his ride 'blown out from under him.' This was the norm with the occasional adrenaline rushes during our search and rescue operations.

November 5th, 1967 started out as one of those boring days. I had been on landing-strip alert at Lima Site 36 in Northern Laos for two days. It was late afternoon, and I was sitting on our Jolly helicopter's aft ramp day-dreaming about my 'Freedom Bird ride' to the States just 32 days away.

When all hell broke loose !

Squawking an ALERT . . rescue control CROWN TWO called us at 15:31, saying a F-105 RED DOG Lead [ Wild Weasel Pilot Major Richard Dutton and back-seater Capt. Earl Cobeil ] and MARLIN Lead [ a F-105 flown by Captain Bill Sparks ] were all in trouble over North Viet Nam.

They also told us both crews had 'punched out' with exact locations currently unknown.

Eight (8) minutes later we were launched and we were directed to a holding point on the North Viet Nameese (NVN) border. We would be assigned as low-bird, while another JOLLY would be our 'high-bird' backup.

With less than 2 hours 15 minutes until sun down . . we had ( 3 ) three jocks on the ground. And our adrenaline was flowing . . fast.

Shortly after lift-off, CROWN TWO called again and gave us the latitude and longitude of the rescue locations for RED DOG Lead and for MARLIN Lead. CROWN TWO directed us to proceed to MARLIN Lead's location first.

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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About 35 minutes later, COMPASS ( Rescue Command and Control - Saigon ) assigned us as the primary low rescue bird.

Our flight enroute at 7,500 feet was up close to a scattered cloud layer to avoid ground fire and to offer us protective cover from ' bad guy ' aircraft. So far, the trip, was uneventful and could have been called ' textbook.' On the other hand, back then, we were still in process of ' writing the textbook.'

We arrived at MARLIN Lead's rescue location at 1650.

Waiting there on the scene, Forward Air Controller SANDY directed us in for an immediate pickup. He next radioed to MARLIN Lead . . somewhere in the dense foliage below :  
" POP YOUR SMOKE ! "

We spotted smoke about halfway down a steep ridge . . at one-thirty off our nose just two ' clicks ' ahead of us.

We jettisoned our drop tanks and headed for the smoke. We entered a hover over the downed pilot's smoke. I started the rescue wire rolling down. And our pendulum-shaped, rescue penetrator slid down through the tree canopies.

The jungle foliage was thick. I couldn't see the ground or the survivor. All I could see was . . what looked like . . the tip of a survival flare waving at me from somewhere deep in the foliage.

Chatter on the radio was like nothing I had ever heard. It seemed like everyone was yelling all at once . . with their radio ' squelch ' buttons cranked up to maximum intensity.

Then, our confusion and our pucker meters almost ' pegged out ' as radio communication between ourselves and the orbiting SANDY FAC went ' tits up.' SANDY had been trying to tell us that . . we were on the wrong guy's smoke. But his instructions to us had been garbled and ' broken up.' In addition, we could no longer transmit directly to SANDY.

Holding high over a near-by karst limestone ridge, our partner JOLLY 56 relayed the FAC's radio calls to us. So I pulled up the penetrator and we headed out to the ridge where SANDY was now orbiting above the second smoke.

We flew near the location of the smoke, but because of heavy foliage of this location . . we couldn't see this survivor either.

As we unseeingly crossed over his location, he fired his pen gun flare. But it ignited behind us and we didn't see that one. But as we got turned around we immediately saw two more pen gun flares as they shot up through the dense tree canopies.

About this time, I briefly spotted the survivor about three quarters of the way up a steep karst slope. Briefly, he stood up in a small 4 X 4 foot clearing, then he disappeared into thick jungle foliage.

Even though I could no longer see the survivor I persuaded our pilot, Captain Walker, into making a LOWER hover over the tiny clearing.

Due to the steep angle of the karst slope, we had been in a very high hover, with the helicopter's rescue door facing the steep karst. I'm thinking . . why the hell isn't this jock standing out there in that little clearing ?

Is this is a trap ?

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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I ran the rescue penetrator down with the hoist. It kept going and going. The next thing I know . . . the orange-painted cable end is showing. The final ten ( 10 ) feet of the 250 foot cable is painted bright orange to alert the hoist operator so he doesn't allow the cable to . . . fall off . . . the drum.

The only thing fastening the cable to the penetrator's rewind drum . . . is an ' ordinary set screw ' that may or may not hold another 50 or so lbs. before its threads are ripped away.

Concerned, I stopped the penetrator from unwinding when it was still 12 feet higher than where it needed to be. But I still didn't see the survivor below.

We needed to get it a bit lower.

So I told our pilot Captain Walker that his tail rotor was clear and to lower the helicopter about TEN MORE FEET so the max'd length cable could reach the ground.

He said to me . . . " TAKE A LOOK . . . OUT OUR FRONT ! "

I looked out and saw our re-fueling probe was buried up to our cockpit in an enormous tree.

And our rotor tips were light beating against the top of the tree.

I slowly start lowering the hoist until the cable had only one wrap left around the drum . . . plus the little set screw. But the damn penetrator was still about (4) four feet above the ' spot.' And I still didn't see the survivor.

Now I'm wondering . . . is the survivor even down there any more ? I decided to try one last move before telling Captain Walker to get us the hell out of Dodge.

I took my hand and began moving the cable to get the penetrator swinging up slope toward where I saw the survivor disappear. The penetrator swung into the foliage.

BUT . . . IT . . . DIDN'T SWING BACK OUT !

After about 30 seconds I felt four sharp tugs on the cable.

Gently, I began winding the cable back in . . . not knowing if the set screw would accept the survivors's weight until I could get a couple wraps of cable back on the winch.

I'VE GOT TWO WRAPS !

And then I saw the survivor ! What a relief it was . . . when I saw a huge handle bar mustache . . . with an even bigger grin . . . a man wrapped around, hugging the penetrator like a first and only date . . . came swinging out from beneath the foliage.

When the survivor was about 50 feet below the rescue door I spotted some ' locals' [North Vietnamese soldiers] coming over the ridge. I told Captain Walker and quote :

"Captain, let's get the hell out of here " !

We rolled left, away from the ridge . . . with the survivor dangling on our 3/8" steel cable at 300 feet going about 75 knots over the valley. With joy and fear combined . . . what a ride it must have been on the end of that wire !

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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We finally got the shaken but happy survivor inside.

He just lay there on the helicopter's floor . . . looking at us . . . grinning at us from ear to ear.

Russ O'Neal  
Flight Engineer,  
Jolly 37

"Crown Two reported at 0834Z that Marlin Lead had taken a hit and was egressing. Next report had Marlin Lead bailed out with good chute and beeper. Jolly Green 37 and 56 were scrambled from L-36. RESCAP and MIGCAP were set up and the SAR forces. There was no reported ground fire and Jolly Green 37 made the pick up of downed ACM. Pilot was in good condition with bruised elbow and ankle. Sandy 6 reported being jumped by a MiG but took no hits. Jolly Green 37 made an air refueling and delivered the downed ACM to Nakon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand. This is a ARRS Combat Save."

(Rescue Opening/ Closing Report 2-3-85-4 Nov 67, TWX 051312Z Nov 67 from 3 ARRG Udon RTAFB, in AFHRA folder Call # K318.2411-5, IRIS # 1017066.)

"Jolly Green 56 (Low) and 37 (High) were scrambled from LS-36 at 0840Z and told to rendezvous with Sandys 5 and 6 over North Station. At the time of launch a position for the downed survivor (Marlin Lead) had not been given to either of the crews. Shortly after takeoff Crown 2 gave a location of 047/89 from Channel 97 (21-23N and 104-46E) and directed all aircraft to the North Vietnamese border immediately.

"We flew near a 7500' (MSL) scattered cloud layer to avoid ground fire and offer protective cover from hostile aircraft. Visibility throughout the mission was excellent. Approximately 35 minutes later while en route to the scene, Compress directed JG 37 to make the recovery since JG 56 was not aerial refueling equipped. At this point the altitude of the downed airman was unknown and a good possibility existed that without the use of A/R enough internal fuel would not be available to make recovery and land at a suitable base during the hours of darkness.

"Arriving on scene at 0950Z, JG 37 immediately sighted a rising cloud of white smoke and, upon direction of Sandy Lead, started toward it. Approaching the smoke, JG 37 was advised that it was the wrong marker and that another smoke bomb had been dropped closer to the survivor's position. At this point radio communications between JG 37 and the Sandys disintegrated. JG 37 could not talk to the Sandy, whose transmissions to the JG were, in turn, broken. JG 56 now in high orbit over a mountain of nearby karst began relaying the Sandy's direction. Although two different compass headings were initially given, by picking an average we crossed a nearby ridge and sighted the second smoke signal. Flying directly toward it the survivor fired a flare (we later learned) which ignited just after we had passed his position, making it impossible to see. Taking relayed instructions from JG 56, JG 37 turned around. Still there was no sign of the survivor. At this point someone called 'up the hill' and the crew sighted remnants of smoke. Instantaneously two pen flares shot up through the trees. MiG CAP called 'bogies' in the area. Almost immediately they were reported low and away. JG 37 entered a hover over the downed airman and, in spite of thick foliage, a steep slope and several high trees, no great difficulty was encountered in making the pickup.

"Just after we had dropped our tip tanks for the hover, JG 56 called and advised that Compress had changed the original decision and told him to make the recovery. In view of the advanced stage of the effort, however, we were allowed to continue.

"Shortly after beginning our departure, Sandy 6, who had proceeded to escort JG 56 out of the area, called MiGs and reported that he was being fired upon. Neither JG crew sighted the enemy aircraft. The only other hostile activity observed was small arms and/ or automatic weapons fire across the Black River and each time we crossed a valley. Our altitude was such that no battle damage was sustained. En route to Channel 89, JG 37 conducted A/R with Crown 2 and landed at 1300Z. JG 56 landed at Channel 86 at 1240Z with insufficient fuel to return to Channel 89.

# Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

## F-105 History

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"The name of the survivor was Capt Billy (NMI) Sparks, USAF.

"Crews of Jolly Green 37 and 57 were:"

Jolly Green 37	Jolly Green 57
Capt Harry W. Walker, RCC	1Lt James H. Platt, RCC
Lt Col Gerald B. Lowe, RCCP	Maj Richard A. Wagner, RCCP
Sgt Russell L. O'Neal, FE	SSgt Harry D. Thacker, FE
MSgt Clarence R. Boles, PJ	Sgt Joseph M. Duffy
TSgt Charley D. Smith, PJ	

(Rescue Mission Narrative Report, Mission 2-3-85 4 Nov 67, from Det 2 37 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, dated 21 Nov 67, signed by Capt Harry W. Walker, RCC, in AFHRA folder Call # K318.2411-5, IRIS # 1017066.)

*355 TFW History, Oct - Dec 67, USAF microfilm NO463 & Bill Sparks, e-mail to Weasel Net, 5 Nov 98, e-mail posting on Thud Ridge Web Guestbook, 19 May 1998.*

**05-Nov-67**

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Years later Bill Sparks described his shutdown and rescue in more detail.

My Last Combat Mission  
November 5, 1967

I flew my 145th and last combat mission 5 Nov '67, not by choice. I had arrived at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base on March 15, 1967 after completing the Wild Weasel School at Nellis. I talked to my boss, Lt Col Obie Dugan, who was commander of the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron and our deal was that I would fly 100 missions as a Wild Weasel and then complete another 37 missions as a strike pilot. This would make me one of the first guys to get 200 missions in North Vietnam in an F-105, since I had flown 63 missions in '65 when the 563 TFS had been at Takhli for 4 months. In fact it would make me one of the first to get 200 in anything, since Carl Richter at Korat would be the first to finish 200 in September. My Boss sent me up the command chain. The Deputy for Operations for the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing (355TFW/DO), Colonel Bob White agreed as well. My next stop was with the Wing King of the 355 TFW, Colonel Bob Scott, Colonel Scott also agreed and I was off to the races.

By late October '67 I had flown 77 missions as a Wild Weasel and Carlo Lombardo and I had become a hell of a fine Weasel Crew. In October of '67, Colonel White was reassigned to Saigon to become the Director of Operations for all Out-Of-Country missions. He was the first director to have ever flown in the North and that, along with his excellent other qualifications, made him the best man for the job. All of us who flew in North Vietnam really needed someone who could walk and chew gum without gagging in that shop. We needed all the help we could get and Colonel White promised to be an absolute treasure. The only problem was that he needed an Electronic Weapons Officer (EWO) in his shop and wanted Carlo. Carlo Lombardo was easily the best choice for the job, but it would break up our team and I was selfish enough to want to keep him. Colonel White actually asked me, a lowly Captain, if he could take Carlo. I was forced to smile and be a nice boy. I became an instant Strike Pilot and also "D" Flight Commander instead of "E" Flight (Weasel) Commander.

Colonel White took me in to see our Wing Commander, Colonel Giraudo, who had replaced Colonel Scott in the summer. Colonel Giraudo, AKA The Great Kahuna, reluctantly agreed to let me finish out my remaining 60 missions for the magic 200. Karl Richter had been killed recently with only a couple to go for 200 and the all of the Brass were a bit nervous about allowing anyone to try for the 200 mark. I would rather have been a Weasel, however, Captains take what they can get. I took over "D" flight and started to relearn how to lead a Strike Flight. I flew my first Strike Flight Lead to Kep Airfield and my second to Phuc Yen. My third was to Kep again and I was back in the saddle. Three

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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Route Pack Six missions in three days are a good way to get back in shape.

I managed to slow myself down in the Takhli Stag Bar by dislocating my right shoulder while rolling for drinks. A "Roll" consists of several staid, sober, careful folk looking at each other and yelling, "Last one with his feet on the bar-rail buys!" Everyone does a front roll and the last one to whack his feet on the bar rail buys a round for the mess. I tripped, dislocated my shoulder, AND had to buy for the bar. Not a very swift way to "Roll" for drinks. Ted Moeller took me over to the Hospital and had my arm taped to my side for 10 days.

I spent the next fortnight being Supervisor of Flying (SOF), a job that ranks somewhere near dental work without anesthesia. I also heard a whole bunch of my "Friends" offer to "Roll" for drinks. I finally got the shoulder working at about half speed and flew an engine change test hop to prove I was ready and went back on the schedule.

One of the reasons I had been reassigned as a Strike Pilot was that all of the Squadrons were short of Mission Commanders. My Squadron, the 357 TFS, had only two, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Kirk, our boss, and Captain Neely Johnson [Capt William N. Johnson]. Neely and the Boss were both outstanding; however, we really needed at least 2 more to keep the workload down. While I was SOF for 10 days, Tom Kirk was shot down over Hanoi, not recovered, and Neely was the sole Mission Commander in the Squadron. I was scheduled to become a Mission Boss after my first 3 missions, but the dislocation put that on hold. I was scheduled for two more to see if the shoulder would work before I would be certified as a Mission Boss.

I led a flight to Kep the first day back and the next day, November 5, 1967, I led to Phuc Yen again. My call sign was Marlin and we were to be the last flight to roll in (Tail End Charlie). Flying a raid against Phuc Yen is about like being in hell with your back broke. The only thing worse is to be Tail End Charlie at Phuc Yen. The bad guys kept all of their MIG-21s there and objected rather firmly when we hit the airfield. As I remember, there were over 1,000 37 mm and larger guns surrounding the place and it was covered by between 6 and 16 SAM sites. Not exactly the best spot for a sight seeing trip.

The briefing for Marlin flight was a bit different on that day because I was checking out Major Frank Billingsley as an element lead. Frank was over 40, had come to the F-105 from C-141s, and had never flown any single-seat aircraft since he went through pilot training. Frank had been one of our students at McConnell and I had given him a couple of check flights before I went to Weasel School. He asked me to cover Rescue Procedures (RESCAP) during the mission briefing at the squadron. I asked why and he told me that if he were to really be an element lead, he might have to run a RESCAP. I told him that I would run the RESCAP if required. He said, "Not if you're the one on the ground." I covered RESCAP for at least 15 minutes and asked for questions. There were none and we suited up.

All of the ground routine went smoothly. Taxi, takeoff, join-up, refueling, pod formation, and all of the other aspects of an RP-6 mission were routine. The Strike Force held a good pod position as we made our way through Laos and North Vietnam to the Red River crossing point about 10 miles downstream from Yen Bai. From there toward Phuc Yen, the Strike Force flew at about 6,000 feet and 540 knots until we neared the MiG base and started our afterburner climb to roll-in altitude. For some reason the 3rd flight hung it high and waited way too long to start their attack which caused Marlin to be almost at 18,000 before we could head down the slide. Our attack heading was almost east instead of southwest because of the delay and it seemed as though it took a week to fly down to release altitude of 7,000'. Since our target was the last standing hangar on the airfield, it was easy to spot. The normal problems caused by the flack bursting in layers caused us to lose sight of the hangar two or three times, but it didn't move and was there when we got to our release parameters of 7,000', 45 degree dive, and 540 knots. The pass looked good at the time and, the next day when I saw the Bomb Damage Assessment photos (BDA), we had put 18 of our 24 M-117 750# bombs through where the roof had been. Not too shabby for manual bombing.

I reefed my bird (61-0173) hard up and left at 5+ "G" and did my normal roll right and then left to allow my wingmen to see me for the rejoin. Our problem was that we were now headed almost directly toward Hanoi and really had few options to avoid the vast amount of flack. I took the easiest way out by flying a loose left, jinking turn around Phuc Yen



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### F-105 History

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in order to fly on the north side of the complex and head for Thud Ridge. There were fewer guns on the north side. It took over a minute to rejoin. Before the flight could get into pod formation for SAM protection, we had 3 missiles launched at us from our six o'clock.

My choices were not very good. I could turn right and over-fly the north railroad and dodge the missiles while in the flack from the rail lines, I could turn left and fly back over Phuc Yen dodging missiles in even worse flack, or I could put the flight down in the weeds supersonic and haul for the ridge below 50'. I chose to mow the grass. Red-Dog, the Weasel flight [from the 333 TFS], called the launch and told me which SAM site it was from. I jerked the bird around enough to catch sight of the first SA-2 Guideline missile and watched it hit the deck. My wingmen were almost in formation by now as I saw the second missile loose guidance commands and go up out of sight. At about the time I heard Red-Dog 3 call that he was hit and burning, I caught sight of the 3rd missile as it went into some houses and exploded. I decided to come up out of the grass and started a climb as Marlin Flight got into good pod formation. We were at 750 knots and were below 100' above the rice paddies as I came out of after burner and continued to climb.

As I passed through about 100' altitude, I saw several rounds zip by me and three hit my aircraft. I took three 57 mm hits almost simultaneously. The rounds came from a 57 mm site almost a mile north of us and were optically fired. These were the same guns that had hit Red Dog. One round hit the afterburner section just above the right slab, one was in the bomb bay directly under my feet, and one was in the Air Turbine Motor (ATM) compartment just in front of my right knee. I kept climbing at near military power and the cockpit instantly filled with smoke. I heard Red-Dog 3 [NOTE: the call sign was "Red Dog 04"] calling that he was on fire and also heard his element lead tell him that he was in "Great Shape", a big fat lie.

Red-Dog 3, Dutton and Cobiell, bailed out over a rail yard less than 20 miles away and were put in the Hilton. Dick made it out in '73; however, Ed Cobiell died from torture he received from Fidel, the Cuban torture specialist at the Hilton.

I couldn't see anything because of the smoke and decided to blow the canopy. I flat could not find the canopy ejection handle on the left console and pulled some knob off trying, so, I flipped the manual canopy unlock lever under the canopy rail and the canopy went like it had been blown off. I was now in a convertible at 695 knots, still supersonic, climbing through 300'. I got two or three radio transmissions out before the radio died and everything else decided to quit. It was probably a good thing the radio failed or everyone could have heard me squealing. The fire from the AB section caused the Fire and Overheat Lights to both come on and then quit. I checked the circuits and they didn't test (just like the good book says can happen when a big fire is on board). All three hydraulic gauges started down, bounced a few times, the utility gauge went to zero followed by primary flight gauge #2 (P2). P1 (primary Flight #1) went slowly down and then dropped to zero. The oil pressure gauge went to visit the hydraulic gauges and every light on the peek and panic panel came on and then all of them quit.

Shortly after the radio quit, I had a complete electrical failure followed by the failure of all pitot static flight instruments. The only thing in my Thud what worked was the Whiskey Compass and I think it was leaking alcohol.

I was still flying and heading up Thud Ridge away from Hanoi. I still had smoke coming into the cockpit and swirling around before the truly tremendous slipstream sucked it out. I caught myself reaching up and fanning the compass mounted on the canopy to see what heading I had. Now that is very stupid. I am in a 450-knot convertible fanning a compass. If my arm had gotten caught, I would have been sans arm. I started to laugh at my stupidity until I noticed that the right front quarter panel of the windscreen was starting to melt. I reached as far forward as I could and felt extreme heat from the fire in the ATM compartment. I am sure that the utility hydraulic reservoir had ruptured and was burning. The right quarter panel melted almost completely and shortly thereafter the right rudder pedal collapsed and dangled from the cables. I was now over half way up Thud Ridge and had turned for the Red River crossing. That was pure reflex, I guess. I then had an explosion in the bomb bay, which blew the doors off and a small amount of fire came into the cockpit below my left foot. I had to hold my left foot up to stay clear of the flame. It wasn't all that hot due to the suction from the canopy area.

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I had a couple more minutes to get to the river. I held what I had, trying to be the smoothest pilot in the world since I didn't have the foggiest how much hydraulic fluid I had in P2. The fire burned up from the AB section and the aft fuel tank blew leaving only the aircraft struts showing. The fire also burned up the right side of the aircraft, out into the right wing and the right main tire blew causing the right main gear to smack down into the slipstream and be ripped off the aircraft. All three of my wingmen looked like the Thunderbirds at an Academy Graduation. I had no right rudder pedal, no right gear strut, my bomb bay doors were missing, no lid on my cockpit, a melted hole in the windscreen, my left foot up, sundry other things disastrously wrong, BUT, I was coming up on the Red River. I found out afterwards that I had been called out as a SAM twice by other aircraft as I burned my way up the ridge. Marlin Three only said, "That's no Sam, that's Sparky" I started to think I had it made until the controls went and I became a passenger.

I still had 5 miles or so to go to cross the river when all of the controls went south. The bird pitched up, shuddered, rolled right like it was going to spin, and then started another pull-up. It was still going my way, so I held on to the stick to keep my arms from getting outside and stayed with my Thud. It would pull up sharply, shudder, shake, and snap right as if it were going to spin, and then start another pull-up. It did this three times until I was over the Red River. The last time it did snap into an inverted spin entry and I decided that it had taken me as far as it could go and pulled the handles up and squeezed the triggers. Only an F-105 could have taken that amount of punishment for 7 ½ minutes and deliver the driver to the river.

I still had one of my wingmen trying to fly formation and saw him flash by as I ejected. I had no idea what my altitude, airspeed, or attitude was since nothing worked except the Whiskey Compass. I learned that I was at 24,000', 270 knots and entering an inverted spin, BUT I was over the Red River. Being over the river was wonderful since the rescue Jolly Green Giants were not allowed to cross the Red River for a rescue.

I fell about a week subjective time waiting for the 'chute to open at 10,000' and remembered that the last time I had ejected I had caught the risers under my chin and really put a Raspberry on my neck. I was at least not going to do that again. I stabilized on my back in a head down position that didn't spin and when I heard the spring motor in the parachute whir, I snapped my chin down just in time to catch the risers under it. I put another Raspberry on my neck. When I looked down I was not quite across the river, so I hauled on the front risers and slipped across. I then saw that I was going to land near a small group of houses, so I went back up the risers and turned the 'chute and headed down stream. I pulled the front risers down and then got my knee in the riser "Y" and did front riser slips to put as much distance between me and the houses until I was at about 200 feet or so above the jungle. I had come almost 4 miles and had two ridgelines between me and the nearest house or road. I looked down and decided that I needed to stop the slip and land in what I thought was "Elephant Grass". I landed in 75' tall bamboo.

I smashed into the bamboo and the 'chute caught with me at least 40 feet up. The bamboo broke and I fell the last 40 feet and landed like a sack of feed on a fairly steep hillside with no place to do any kind of a parachute landing fall (PLF). I didn't even do a Fighter Pilot PLF of heels, ass, and head; instead I just crumpled into a mound of goo. I broke my right patella, chipped a bone in my right elbow, dislocated my right shoulder again, had hairline fractures in several small bones in both feet, and landed on the family jewels with a mighty thump. I was down and across the river.

I moaned some, cursed even more, and managed to get the beeper from my parachute and shut it off. I pulled out my primary survival radio and found that the radios were very weak. Not to worry, I had two survival radios, three sets of batteries, the 'chute beeper, and a partridge in a pear tree. I drank one of my 6 baby bottles of water, contacted Frank Billingsley who was running the RESCAP in an exemplary fashion, and started to move down the hill and find a place I could see the sky.

If you have never been in bamboo, don't go. It is not a nice place. I would end up several feet in the air trying to squeeze through the bamboo and have to break my way back down. I moved about 200 yards in about 15 minutes and worked my way into 25 foot tall ferns that made the bamboo look like a good place. It took another 10 or so minutes to wiggle out of the fern thicket and get under a huge tree. I tried to find a better place and gave up since the whole area

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was bamboo and/or ferns. I talked to Frank and vectored him in to my tree and asked him to check his fuel. He informed me that he was running this show and to shut up. He also told me that he had a better view than I did, had sent the wingmen out for fuel, and was about to have to leave for a while. I found out that he left my tree, 75 miles northwest of Hanoi, with less than 2,000 pounds of fuel. He went to a tanker and was back in 29 minutes. The tanker could not have been in Laos. Everyone was trying his best to pick my worthless butt up.

I sat under my tree for almost 20 minutes; it seemed like a week, until I heard a burner light. I came up on the survival radio and had a call from Ozark; a flight of four from Korat who had my cap until Frank got back. I vectored them into my tree and they set up a cap away from me to keep the bad guys guessing. Frank called back a few minutes later with the rest of Marlin Flight and took back the RESCAP duties. I was starting to get lonely and had finished two of my baby bottles when Frank told me that the Sandies were inbound. I had been on the ground for only a bit over 2 hours clock time or a month subjective time. I started to believe I had a chance. I inventoried my stuff and put everything I was going to take out away. Pistols, spare radio and batteries, the beeper, all seven knives I carried, my Medical kit, and my trade goods kit. I kept out several flares and two pen-gun flare kits.

The Sandies called shortly thereafter, at about 1630 local time, and I managed to vector them in to my tree. They left to set up an orbit away from me and I waited very anxiously for the HH-3 to arrive. I listened to the Jolly call in and then all hell seemed to break loose. Some MIG-17 showed up and the Sandies became most nervous. The Jolly tried to calm things down and the Low Sandy came by to mark my position with a Willy Pete (White Phosphorous) bomb. The Sandy then marked another location for some reason and the Low Jolly went there. I had 17 aircraft in my CAP and everyone started to talk at once. The Jolly went to the wrong place and then headed back to me. All this time I could see a little patch of sky only about 30 feet in diameter. Frank made a pass at the Low Jolly and turned him towards me and shouted for me to, "Do something!" I pulled out my pen-gun flare and fired and reloaded as fast as possible. I bounced a flare off his canopy and saw the pilot jump and then hover in my tree.

The radio went absolutely Able Sugar with people shouting out MiG calls and as I watched the penetrator come down towards me. I had stowed my radio and did not hear a transmission from Harry Walker who was told that there were MiGs in the area. His answer was, "Keep them off my ass, I've got better things to do!" and stayed in the hover with his rotor blades whacking the tree well below the top. I backed out to see the cable operator, but the open space was so small I couldn't see squat. The cable stopped a few feet above me and then came down some more and was level with me a bit down a steep slope. I couldn't jump because of my ankles and knee and then it swung towards me and I let it hit the ground and discharge a huge spark. I then unzipped the straps, pulled down on the folding seat, put my legs around the penetrator, really tightened the straps around my body, and yanked on the cable as hard as I could. I was pulled off the ground and up about 50 feet or so. The HH-3E pivoted 180 degrees and started to pull me up and through the tree as it accelerated to his max speed. It was a very wild ride for a while. I broke out of the canopy at top speed for the Jolly as the winch hauled me up. The door gunner was firing his mini gun at something; so, I whipped out my 38 and shot the jungle. I figured I could get off six rounds and make everything lighter.

I was pulled in the door and hugged by the crew. I thought I would be the happiest man in the world, but the crew of Harry Walker's HH-3E were happier than I was. The whole crew was laughing like mad, so I asked what was funny and was told that Harry had just said, "Tell the SOB not to die until we get him to a hospital. We need a live one for a change." I had problems standing and the Paramedic (PJ) sat me down and started to check me out. The first thing he did was to strap a parachute on me. I sure as hell didn't want to use one of those again for a while. He asked if I was hurt and I told him I had some small problems. He then put me on a stretcher and gave me a good once over. It was noisy as all hell in the Jolly and since I didn't have a headset I had real problems hearing. He pulled out a Morphine Styrete case and I said NO. He grinned and showed me a miniature of Jack Daniel's Black Label that was in the tube. It was exactly what the doctor ordered.

I guess I was beat up worse than I thought since I went into shock for a while. The whole crew took off their jackets and piled them around me to keep me warm. I straightened out in time to watch the Jolly refuel on the way back. The PJ and the flight engineer helped me up to the cockpit and I sat on the jump seat as the C-130 came over us, stopped

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just in front and then let down until the hose was only 50 feet or so in front. We were in Laos with all of the Low Level Fuel lights on, it was just after sunset. There were layered clouds that were black with a blood red sun shining from below up through and between them. It was incredible. Harry moved the big HH-3E up to the hose, stuck it, and took gas. It was all very smooth, very easy, and very beautiful. I was the second furthest north rescue in the whole war. The whole crew of very brave men had risked their lives to pull me from the jungle. Harry did understand what "We Band Of Brothers" meant.

We went to Nakon Phanom (NKP), AKA Naked Fanny, and landed about 2100 hours. I was on a stretcher and really couldn't walk. I was treated like the crown jewels and rushed to the hospital for a check up. I was on the x-ray machine that was broken when Brigadier General McBride came in. Willy P. had been my Wing Commander at Spangdahlem and was a very nice and very funny man. He went into a routine about having given me a perfectly good F-105 and I had dumped it! He was not going to give me any more. He also brought a bottle of Old Overshoes Rye Mission Whiskey and a six-pack of warm Miller beer. We both sat on the x-ray and drank the Old Overshoes neat with warm beer chaser. He also told me that The Great Kahuna had sent the Takhli Gooney Bird for me and it was inbound.

I was taken from the Hospital, never having seen a Doctor, and loaded on the C-47 in my stretcher. When we were airborne, the pilot came back and put my going home ration from Colonel Giraudo on my chest, a bottle of Chivas Regal, a glass, and a bucket of ice. The Chivas was to get me back to Takhli in good humor. It did a very good job. When we landed the crew turned the stretcher so I could see what was happening. I was met by the fire suppression helicopter, fire trucks, over 1,000 folk, and was treated to a Hundred Mission Parade at near midnight Takhli time.

When we stopped, the doors of the Gooney Bird swung open and The Great Kahuna jumped into the C-47 and hollered, "Throw her up!" A very shapely female came flying through the air and landed in Colonel Giraudo's arms. He came over, dumped her on me and said, "Welcome Home Sparky, look what I brung ya!" The lady, Vicky Nixon, had just arrived that day and was the first female on the base. She was his brand new secretary, very sharp, and she was scared spitless. I was laughing like a hyena and decided to try and calm her down since she was actually shaking. I whispered in her ear, "I just fell out of a tree, landed on my jewels, and there isn't a thing I could do to you!" She looked at me, started to cry, really hugged me, and said, "You poor baby!" We were placed in the back of Colonel G's pickup, still on my stretcher, and given a tour of the base. Neely Johnson who I was supposed to relieve as a Force Commander, met me with the Flight Commanders for the morning go and saluted me from the C-47.

I was grounded and that was my last combat mission. I tried to talk the Boss out of his decision, but I went home. I was the first guy from Takhli that was picked up from North Vietnam in over nine months that made it back to Takhli. Frank Billingsley did a perfect job the first time he ran a RESCAP and I am the most fortunate person in the world. I never did get to help Neely out. He finished his tour after having led over one third of his total missions into Route Package Six.

Bill Sparks  
Once A Thud Driver

*Don Jay <djay@nc.rr.com> e-mail posting on AirwarSEA@yahoogroups.com, 10 Oct 10*

**05-Nov-67**

4331

Maj Kenneth W. Mays from the 34 TFS flew in today's strike against Phuc Yen airfield and participated in the rescap for Capt Bill Sparks from the 333 TFS at Takhli. "On Nov 5, 1967 I was number 3 in a flight led by Floyd Henzig [Maj Floyd E. Henzig]. The target was Phuc Yen Air Field. Takhli was first in and they stirred up the hornet's nest. Korat had good bombs and did not lose an acft. We were the last flight in and as we pulled off the target ... Billy Sparks, indicated he was hit ... . Floyd picked him up and we joined on him. As he crossed the Black River the acft was engulfed with flames and he ... bailed out ... . Floyd and I set a pattern above him ---one element high and another low and called for rescue. A tanker came north and we took turns cycling to the tanker. Some F-4s came and set up high cap. We spent the next 1.5 hours running MiGs out of the area and shot up some trucks/troops trying to get to Sparks ... .

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"Sandys (A-1s) arrived and our concentration was providing them cover. After the Sandys assured the area was safe the Jolly Greens came in and made the pick up of Sparks ... . This was the only real opportunity I had for shooting down a MiG, but had no missiles and when we pursued they left the area. A long day, but a successful day----good bombs on the target and a successful pick up of a fellow F-105 crew. ..."

Maj Mays received the Silver Star for this mission. "Major Kenneth W. Mays distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force over North Vietnam on 5 November 1967. On that date, Major Mays, after successfully attacking a heavily defended airfield, returned deep into hostile territory to assist in the rescue of a downed pilot. During the rescue, a hostile aircraft initiated an attack on the rescue force, but Major Mays counter attacked and pursued the hostile aircraft with such skill and determination that it was forced to break off and flee the area. Due in great measure to the outstanding courage and aggressiveness exhibited by Major Mays, the rescue of a downed pilot was successful. By his gallantry and devotion to duty Major Mays has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

*Col Ken Mays, USAF (Ret), unpublished memoir, "Tour At Korat -- July 67 to Feb 68", dated 15 Dec 2003 & Ken Mays e-mail and citation, 9 July 2012.*

**19-Feb-68**

6887

After returning to Nellis from Osan, Capt Kevin M. "Mike" Gilroy continued his instructor duties with the 4525 FWW. He described some of his work during this period.

"... HK White and I had been selected to give Weasel briefings, probably two or three a month, at a lot of places. Usually, we would take an F-105F and go give a couple hours of briefings in our flight suits and then fly home. I remember going to Norton to brief the IG team, to Army ADC Hdqs, several time to the Air Force Academy, as well as a few times to Navy Fallon to brief whatever carrier group was training there at that time.

"HK and I were transferred to the Ftr Wpns Wing in Oct '68, and assigned to the Academics Section working for Grady Morris (The Alligator). We lectured on SAM capabilities (me) and Wild weasel operations (HK) to the Tac Ftr Operations Officer Course as well as to the Tac Fighter Commanders' Course. First course was 0-5 and 0-6. CC course was 0-7 and up. HK got some negative comments on the course attendee's evaluation about using 'Combat Profanity' and was replaced by Billy Sparks.

"I remember Billy Sparks, Pike Grubb, and I taking the T-39 to Wright Patterson and picking up the AFLC Commander and taking him to the Eglin Range so he could see how the Weasel equipment worked. (The T-39 was one of the two T-39As we had at Nellis for EWO and pilot orientation rides.)

"We partied hard the night before at a stop at McConnell, and were badly hungover and I'm sure breathing noxious fumes all over the 4 star. I was in back with the General and showed him what SAM signals and AAA signals looked like on both the APR-25/26 as well as the APS-107 (F-4 equipment).

"We dropped the General off back at WPAFB and headed home. Billy asked me if I would come up and fly in his seat, as he couldn't stay awake. I wasn't in much better shape, but did so. After about 15 minutes, Pike Grubb said, 'I need to get some shut eye also', and went back to stretch out. I flew the aircraft back to Nellis and was on final for landing, when I thought better of it and rocked the wings for one of them to come up and do the landing. Never saw two guys move so fast in my life. I think Pike was the first one up and we landed smoothly.

"Billy and Pike used to love to tell that story years later. Billy and I got our flying time with the 4537 FWS, as instructors. We did not like to fly as instructors on Ryan Raider sorties, as we felt really unqualified to do so. Although few others were much better.

"Billy and I flew as a crew until I left for ACSC in July of 1970. "

# Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

## F-105 History

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Mike Gilroy, e-mail 14 May 2011.

**15-Apr-68**

2356

(Approximate date) "During a special ceremony at Las Vegas, Nevada, last month, eight Thunderchief pilots who have completed 100 missions over North Vietnam received recognition certificates from Fairchild Hiller's Republic Aviation Division."

The pilots were:

Maj William Baechle	Capt Robert F. Lewis
Maj Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.	Capt Harold W. "Pappy" Stoll
Maj Charles E. Van Driel	Capt Byron P. Favre
Maj George G. Clausen	Capt John E. Geiger

*Thunderchief World Wide Report, Vol III, No 9, May, 1968*

**12-Jun-69**

7095

The 474 Combat Support Group published an order listing 73 officers assigned to Nellis who were credited with combat missions over North Vietnam. Many were F-105 pilots and EWOs.

"The following officers, organization indicated, TAC, this stn, have flown the number of Out-Of-Country Combat Missions as indicated below in SEA. Authority: AFM 36-11 & AFM 35-9."

The 11 officers from the 4525 FWW were:

NAME	MISSIONS
Maj Robert K. Hanna	91
Maj Jimmy L. Jones	122
Maj Llewellyn Kennison	6
Maj Rezk M. Mohamed	76
Maj Glenn E. Peake	100
Maj Leonidas D. Richardson	30
* Maj Billy R. Sparks, Jr.	145
Maj Harris J. Taylor	100
Capt Byron P. Favre	33
Capt Anthony W. Platek	100
Capt Michael D. Thomas	100

\* Maj Sparks last flew the F-105 on 16 July 1969. He had accumulated 2066.9 hours in the airplane, placing him as the 65th pilot with the most F-105 flying hours.

Those assigned to the 4536 FWS (F-100s) were:

Maj James A. Braster	15
Maj William H. Fletcher	50
Maj John L. Mesenbourg	100
Maj J. L. Pennington	1
Maj Joe C. Robinson	4
Maj Edward P. Schmit, Jr.	2
Maj Bernard W. Stewart	2
Capt Athos E. Guillot, Jr.	15
Capt Samuel H. Holmes	96
Capt Paul F. Kimminau	59

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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Those assigned to the 4537 FWS (F-105s) were:

Maj George W. Acree II	133
Maj William Baechle	100
Maj Gene I. Basel	79
Maj Anthony Gardecki	100
Maj Robert N. Johnston	100
Maj James P. Padgett	100
Maj John O. Rollins	100
Maj Robert M. Thompson	100
Maj William E. Underwood	100
Maj Richard D. Westcott	100
Capt Robert C. Bigrigg	100
Capt Philip M. Drew	161
Capt John E. Geiger	100
Capt Joseph C. Howard	69
Capt George E. Kennedy	100
Capt Robert F. Lewis, Jr.	100
Capt Donald J. Mattasolio	100
Capt Richard E. McDowell	100
Capt Charles F. O'Donnell	49
Capt Roger L. Peden	80
Capt Norman E. Powell	100
Capt George H. Vipond	100

Officers assigned to the 4538 FWS (F-4Cs) were:

Lt Col Emmett S. Walden, Jr.	51
Maj Samuel O. Bakke	102
Maj Lloyd W. Boothby	101
Maj James T. Craig, Jr.	100
Maj Edwin T. Hawks, Jr.	60
Maj Rex D. Howerton	100
Maj David A. Jacobsen	90
Maj Maurice B. Johnston, Jr.	23
Maj William L. Kirk	100
Maj Dale G. Nelson	1
Maj Norman A. Ruby	83
Maj Kenneth R. Ryckman	100
Maj Thomas S. Swalm	105
Maj Daurice C. Vest	42
Capt Jerry D. S. Bolt	104
Capt David L. Burney	100
Capt William S. Gordon III	116
Capt Marvin M. Gradert	27
Capt Roger A. Hermeling	100
Capt Jerry W. Jameson	100
Capt Richard K. Koehnke	100
Capt Richard S. Ritchie	77
Capt Donald E. Simanski	100
Capt Norman E. Wells	100
Capt Robert K. Wilson	101

# Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

## F-105 History

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Other officers on the list were:

Capt Albert C. Vollmer	82	474 TAC Hospital (Recovering from injuries)
Maj Thomas L. Hennagan	41	474 TFW
Maj Willam C. Coltman	6	430 TFS
Maj Willard M. Lindsay	35	Det 1, 4538 FWS
Maj George L. Pritchard	1	Det 1, 4538 FWS
Maj John L. Winkler	15	Det 1, 4538 FWS

*474 Combat Support Group Special Order P-121 dated 12 June 1969 provided by Norm Powell via e-mail 7 Jan 2012.*

**12-Jul-80**

72

The F-105 was retired from active USAF service in a "reunion" hosted by the 562 TFS, 35 TFW, at George AFB CA. An example of every production model of the F-105 participated in the ceremony. A "Sawadee Party" for the F-105 was held the previous day.

During the ceremonies, Wild Weasel F-105G 62-4416 was placed on display at George as a memorial to F-105 pilots.

F-105 units participating in the Sawadee were: 301 TFW AFRES, Carswell AFB TX; 113 TFW ANG, Andrews AFB MD; 508 TFG AFRES, Hill AFB UT; 108 TFG ANG, McGuire AFB NJ; 116 TFW ANG, Dobbins AFB GA; 192 TFG ANG, Byrd Field VA.

An article in the Summer 1980 issue of the USAF Fighter Weapons Review, former F-105 pilot Blake C. Morrison, wrote a tribute to the F-105 titled "Requiem for a Heavyweight".

"The standard joke around the bar in the Officers' Club in the early sixties would go something like this: an F-4 driver would raise his voice and demand, 'What's the sound the F-105 makes when it hits the ground?' Came the rousing chorus response, 'THUD!!!' Numerous chortles, snickers and guffaws.

"THUD."

That's one of the most respected names in the history of American aviation.

"She was called a lot of things then -- hyper-hog, ultra lead sled, ultra hog, Drop Forged by Republic Aviation and a lot more names that are unprintable. No one ever called the F-105 by her official name, 'Thunderchief', except the press. She was one big joke early in that decade. That is, she was to all except those of us who flew her.

"But, 'THUD' stuck. And we Thud drivers just smiled a knowing smile and quietly continued separating the gin from the ice. We knew something the others didn't. She was one of a kind. She was as stable as a Swiss franc and she could hit. She could hit with the Gatling gun and she could hit with bombs -- lots of bombs. She had long legs at low altitude. She was fast. It was very easy to go fast with her -- especially on the deck. And nobody else could go that fast.

"Then we were presented with Vietnam and we found out some other things. From 1966 to 1968 she was THE one to carry the big iron downtown. She wasn't exactly designed for it, but Thuds hauled seventy-five percent of the smash carried down Route Pack Six. And in combat, she maintained a 90% in commission rate.

"Maybe it was because she was used to taking hits from anyone and everyone, for we found out that she could take other kinds of hits -- the real kind as well -- and still fly. As an example, numbers 512 and 376 (two dash tens) took direct SAM hits aft and came back home. So did number 167 (a dash five) return with the entire right stabilator shot off.



## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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"But she wasn't perfect. No real lady is. She couldn't turn worth a damn. We found that early on in USAFE any time we tried to engage a Hunter or a Mark Six. We figured even a Frisbee would outturn the Thud. To improve her chances in the air combat arena, there was a proposal in 1967 to upgrade each Thud by extending the wings 18 inches, removing the duct plugs and displacement gear to decrease weight, increasing internal fuel capacity by sealing the bomb bay and installing a larger tank, increasing thrust by 5,000 pounds and adding other combat improvements. Ah, what might have been. She would have been a Super Thud.

"And she didn't always come back. Her corpses line Thud Ridge, Hanoi, Thanh Hoa and a lot of other places up north. But she wrote the epitaph for a lot of good men like Karl Richter. She died a lot. Over half the inventory was gone by the end of 1968 -- most lost in combat.

"She became a legend and legends flew her: Robbie Risner, Karl Richter and Leo Thorsness, to mention a few. She was flown by other greats such as Dave Waldrop, Billy Sparks and Pete Foley. And she was handled by many unknown like Bob Gerlach, Jim Stiles and me.

"As a Weasel she reigned supreme. She killed SAM sites, SAMs, MiGs and earned medals of honor for two men, Leo Thorsness and Merlyn Dethfelsen.

"The Thud piled up thousands of combat hours on each bird and she was said to be weary and worn out. But ask any F-15 driver who tried to pace her at low altitude during Red Flag 80-2. It was, 'Check twelve, Turkey, and I'll be waiting for you at the Club back at Nellis.' She's the only bird I know that can give you 'the bird' whether parked on the ramp, taxiing out or in-flight.

"She entered the inventory on 26 May 1958.

"On 12 July 1980 she made her last scheduled operational Air Force flight at George AFB. She goes on to the Guard and Reserve. But she stays with us as an American classic and a real thoroughbred. She could break your back but never your heart. She is genuinely loved by all who flew her and a lot who didn't

"The epitaph for a great American, 'Feo, Fuerte y formal,' fits the F-105 -- 'She was ugly, she was strong, but she had dignity.'"

*"F-105 Thunderchief" by J. C. Scutts, pg 108 & Hi-Desert Flyer, 11 Jul 80 & Article, "Requiem for a Heavyweight" by Blake C. Morrison, Production & Design Mgr. 57 FWW/DOWN, Nellis AFB, NV, reprinted in Aerospace Safety Magazine, October 1980, pp 14 - 15.*

**25-Feb-84**

27

Saturday's Thud-Out ceremonies began at 9:30 a.m. when the 419 TFW hosted an open house in their hanger. John Coon described the mood as "... more somber and nostalgic, in keeping with the motto of Thud Out - 'Let me tell you about my best friend'. The mood was also reflected in the weather - low, gray overcast, cold temperatures (in the 20s), and it was snowing off and on." Two restored F-105s were parked inside, gleaming under the hanger lights. F-105B 57-5814, which, twenty years earlier, had flown as "Thunderbird 1", was now camouflaged and marked with the 419th "HI" tail code. The 419th had flown the plane since April 1973, when they received it from the New Jersey Guard, and had retired it at the end of 1980. (It later ended up displayed at the Salt Lake City airport where it was left to deteriorate so badly it was eventually scrapped.)

At the other end of the hanger, parked beneath a large American flag hanging from the rafters, was F-105D 59-1743 with bombs loaded on all of its stations. A Vietnam combat veteran from 1967 to 1970, it had ended up its career in 1981 with the Virginia ANG, and was now in the collection of the Hill Aerospace Museum across the base from the 419th hanger. It was marked with the "JJ" tail code of one of its earlier units, the 34 TFS from Korat, Thailand.

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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Beginning at 10:45 a.m., three F-105Fs flew over the crowd that had gathered on the flightline. Flying the planes from the front seats were all highly-experienced F-105 pilots from the 419th's 466 TFS. The men in the rear cockpits, "Backseat Honorees", were well-known F-105 pilots from the Vietnam war.

Flying 63-8287 with call sign "Thud 01" was Lt. Col. James K. "Gringo" Webster, who had flown 137 F-105 combat missions. In his back seat was Col. Thomas J. Coady, who had over 1,000 combat hours in the F-105, the most of any F-105 pilot. (After this flight, his total F-105 flying time was 1859.7 hours accumulated since his first F-105 flight on 1 July 1967.)

In "Thud 02", F-105F 63-8261, was Maj. Frank P. "Black Jack" Bernard who, on 6 October 1970, was one of four pilots flying the last F-105D combat mission of the Vietnam war. In his rear cockpit was a former Wild Weasel pilot who had been awarded the Medal of Honor, Col. Merlyn H. Dethlefsen.

Flying 63-8309, "Thud 03", was Maj. Barry D. "Taco" Wytttenbach who had flown 159 combat missions from Korat and Takhli. Behind him was the Wild Weasel pilot and ex-POW who had also been awarded the Medal of Honor, Col. Leo K. Thorsness.

Colonel Victor Vizcarra, a former F-105D pilot from Yokota who, as a Captain, had flown F-105s in combat over North Vietnam in 1965 and 1966, watched the flyover. " We all were bussed out to the flight line to observe 'supposedly' the last operational Thud flight. I remember being disappointed that they were all 'two holers', not a single 'D'. It was ... extremely cold but well worth enduring the low temperatures to see and hear that great distinctive sound of the Thud as they took off and then came back over the field several times. The flight was relatively short, less than an hour, and then they came in for individual landings. I remember they ... didn't drop their drag chute as they cleared the runway and instead taxied in with the billowing chutes trailing behind the aircraft. It was a chilling and emotional sight that made your eyes water knowing that this was the last operational time these great birds would take to the air. It was pretty quiet with not too many people talking as we all walked back to the busses. It was definitely the saddest time of the 'Thud Out' - It was as if we had just buried our closest friend and were walking away from the grave."

An hour after the F-105F fly-over, F-105D 62-4347, mounted on a pylon in a small park near the 419th area, was "... dedicated as a monument to all Air Force personnel who lost their lives while flying the Thunderchief...". This plane had accumulated more flying hours on its airframe, 6,730.5, than any other F-105 and was known as the "High Time Thud".

The dedication speaker was Brig. General Roger P. Scheer, deputy to the Chief of the Air Force Reserve, from Washington D.C. General Scheer had flown F-105s for years starting as a First Lieutenant at Spangdahlem, Germany, in 1961. As a Major, he had been awarded two Silver Stars during his 450 combat hours flying F-105s in Vietnam. He later commanded a Reserve F-105 squadron and, as a Colonel, commanded the Reserve's 301 TFW that flew F-105s from Carswell and Tinker. He was one of six pilots to log more than 3,000 hours in the F-105. Col. Vizcarra remembered the ceremony. "I would best describe (the atmosphere as) being very much like a 'wake', mostly festive but still solemn at times, everyone being sorry to see an 'old friend' go. The weather was brisk for the ceremony outside ... . (General Scheer) ... spoke from a raised podium so he was easily visible from the back of a good size crowd gathered around the front of the static display. I'd estimate there was close to a couple of hundred people ... for the speech."

After lunch, the 419th hosted a three-hour Tactics Symposium for active duty and Guard and Reserve people with Secret clearances. Those attending heard briefings on Compass Call, the EF-111, and an assessment by Dick Pawloski from General Dynamics of military threats throughout the world.

The banquet started with cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Originally planned for the Officers Club, tables were set up in the 419th hanger to handle the larger-than-expected crowd who paid the \$25.00 fee. Vendor booths from the Officers Club the night before offered Thud memorabilia along two side walls of the hanger. Former F-105 pilot, John Piowaty,

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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noted for the handle-bar moustache he sported during his combat tour at Takhli in 1967, manned the booth sponsored by the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association -- The River Rats.

John Coon remembered that, "... there were quite a number of displays pertaining to the F-105 -- charts of MIA, POW, and KIA Thud pilots; high-time pilots and Thuds; many strike and post-strike photos. ... Slides of F-105s were constantly being shown on a large screen hung from the ceiling." The high-time pilot chart listed 20 names. At the top was Col. Raymond F. Kingston with 3,709.6 hours flying the F-105. He had flown acceptance test flights from the Republic factory during the F-105's production period. General Scheer, the morning dedication speaker, was number three with 3,493.3 hours. Not noted, but an indication of the hazards of flying the plane, nine of the 20 pilots listed had ejected from an F-105, only one of which was due to combat.

Vic Vizcarra described another detail. "One thing ... that really impressed me was a computer printout of every pilot that had flown the Thud, sequentially listing from the highest time and date of checkout to the lowest time and latest checkout date. The computer list was long and was posted starting along the hanger wall of one side and then wrapped through the front hanger doors to the other side hanger wall. I remember seeing Jim Caldwell's name, a good friend from the 80 TFS (at Yokota), being either the second or third high-time pilot with over 3,000 hours in the Thud. At the end of the list there were several pilots with only 10 hours Thud time which I thought was strange and then figured out they were students that didn't finish the checkout program. ... "

Dinner began at 7:00 p.m. It was conducted as a "semi Dining Out" with formal toasts and guest speakers throughout the evening. John Coon recalled that, "The temper and atmosphere during the dining out was at times festive and at other times somber and nostalgic." For the uninitiated, a program handout described Dining Out protocol under the heading "Thud Out Rules of Engagement" and declared, "This event is a last tribute to a grand ole warbird. What made it a legend in its own time was a team effort of Thud pilots, maintainers, engineers, and Thud lovers. Therefore, we have opened the doors to whomever would like to attend."

The dinner menu started with shrimp cocktail and featured a 10-ounce New York strip steak. It ended with apple pie, an appropriate All-American meal for the occasion.

The party planners raffled a wire sculpture of an F-105 produced by the CAM Squadron at Hill. The raffle winner donated the sculpture back for an auction to raise money for the Scholarship Fund of the River Rats. Tom Carlson won the auction by bidding \$400 dollars. He then gave the sculpture to the Rats for permanent display. The auction raised a total of \$3,200 for college scholarships for sons and daughters of men killed in the Vietnam war. Later, the River Rats decided to use the sculpture as the award to the person selected as the River Rat of the Year.

Speeches started during dinner. First up was Theodore W. Van Geffen, Jr., a Dutch aviation writer who was well-known in the F-105 community, and who had been gathering historical information on the F-105 since 1965. "The Dutchman" spoke for nearly an hour, illustrating his talk with 35-mm slides while he recited key events and dates, along with achievements and deficiencies encountered in the plane's development and deployment over the years.

The plane's early test flights were the subject of the talk by Mr. Henry "Hank" Beard, who had been a Republic test pilot at Edwards and had flown the first F-105B with a J-75 engine in May 1956. "I'm very proud to be here tonight. I wouldn't have missed this thing for anything." Referring to Van Geffen's long talk, he joked, "It must have been written by North American. I'm going to tell you a few good things about the airplane. I have never seen a pilot who had over 10 hours in it who didn't like it." Hank showed a few Republic film clips on tests at Edwards that included the 190-knot wheels-up landing he made at the end of his first F-105B test flight after its gear wouldn't come down. The plane skidded 4,000 feet down the runway. "How many of you guys remember your first flight that well? I remember every foot of it! When the drag chute didn't work, I was pushing on the brakes and it still didn't stop any quicker." Due to the public's attitude against the Vietnam war, he lamented the lack of awareness of the plane and its combat record. "Some of the cadets over at the Air Force Academy said, 'What's that airplane?' It carried the war for five years and nobody seems to know it! But you guys do! ... This was one of the greatest machines to ever take to the

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr.

### F-105 History

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air. And it still is." Commenting on what has been important to him, he remarked, "Let me give you a little of my philosophy. It's not the ten first flights that I've made for which I'm very proud. It's not the 15,000 hours that I've accumulated over the years in flight testing and in the Air Force. What means the most to me are the friends you pick up along the way. Witness you guys here! There will never be another airplane to be retired with a history that this one has and I'm glad I'm a part of it."

The next speaker was retired BG Robert R. Scott who had had one of the longest associations with the F-105 of anyone. He had retired in 1970 and was operating a cattle ranch in California. General Scott reminisced about his long military career. He was a 55-mission World War II fighter pilot who flew P-61 night fighters in China where he shot down two Japanese planes. He flew 117 combat missions in the F-86 in Korea and became involved with the F-105 at Edwards in 1956 as a Tactical Air Command test pilot comparing the Thunderchief with North American Aviation's F-107A. He described the F-105 as "... the most versatile single-engine fighter that the world has ever seen", and said the Air Force definitely made the right decision in selecting the F-105 over the F-107. After his work at Edwards, he commanded the Air Force's first F-105 test squadron, the 335 TFS, at Eglin. As a Colonel in 1966 he led the 355 TFW at Takhli, Thailand, where he flew 44 F-105s combat missions over North Vietnam and shot down a MiG-17.

Renowned F-105 combat pilot and story teller, retired Lt. Col. Billy R. "Sparky" Sparks from Las Vegas, Nevada, was next. He had flown 2,067 hours in the F-105 with 184 and 1/2 combat missions in Vietnam having been shot down and rescued on one of them. He said he had first met the F-105 at Nellis in 1961, then again at Spangdahlem and McConnell. "McConnell is a lot like Utah without the mountains but with the dumb liquor laws." He was, he said, supposed to talk a lot about Rolling Thunder. "For those of you who don't know what Rolling Thunder was, it was a lot of fun over in South East Asia." What he remembered was, "... Robert McNamara as Ops Officer, the Government of the United States as Flight Commander, and 4,983 other assholes sitting back here as flight leads." He said he was in the first TAC F-105 squadron to go to Thailand where he flew Rolling Thunder missions. "I don't really know how to describe Rolling Thunder. Anyway, they wrote a song called the Doumer Bridge Blues and the first verse goes something like this:"

"Tell me a place just south of the Ridge.  
The name of the place is the Doumer Bridge.  
You take the mike and I'll take the flak,  
Come on I'll show you where it's at.  
Come on I want to show you the way!"

In his characteristic rapid-fire story telling, Sparky described his first attack on a munitions storage area. "My first Rolling Thunder mission that I can remember, Fred Cherry was going to take us up. We were going to find a bunch of things that looked like ammunition bunkers by Phuc Yen Airfield. ... Fred had to go get in a spare airplane, so as I taxied out, Fred said, 'Why don't you go and find it and show me where it is'. We found the place and rolled in. We did our very best bombing job to put bombs right through that first bunker. We got this great secondary. Two or three other flights got these great secondaries. About that time Fred Cherry showed up and said, 'Where are they?' I said, 'Don't bomb none of those buildings there's nothing in them. We got the most secondaries you've ever seen in your life! So much for McNamara.' Sparky described another of his favorite Rolling Thunder targets -- the Thanh Hoa Bridge. "To show how smart Rolling Thunder was, we went back to the Thanh Hoa Bridge about 937 times dropping 750-pound bombs on that sucker and it would have taken a major earthquake to knock just the dirt off it! The only smart comment I ever heard about that stupid bridge was from the guy that commanded the Navy. You know, guys that fly off boats and run around on water and have trouble in rolling up their airplanes when their boat runs off? He said, 'I'll make a deal with Ho Chi Minh. I'll push two squadrons of Phantoms off the fantail if he'll blow that sum'bitch up and leave it.' Ho Chin Minh wouldn't do that and so we lost more Phantoms than that. They finally got the damn thing when they got 2,000-pound bombs in '72."

The Thud Out marked the retirement day for the next speaker, MSgt Wally "Knuckle Buster" Craggs. He recalled events from his 14 years as an F-105 crew chief, at Nellis, Korat, Takhli, and the 419th at Hill. He remembered

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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hanging 450-gallon wing tanks at Korat "... about four or five times a day", and told of one memorable pilot write-up on an F-105 at Hill -- "The cockpit lighting was too dim." He signed that one off as, "It was evening. Remove the pilot's sunglasses." He ended by leading a toast, "... to the weapons loaders and the shit-hot maintenance troops of the Thud!"

Speaking next was Dr. Robert J. Sanator, President of Fairchild Republic Company. He offered his perspective on the airplane his company produced. "I thoroughly enjoyed today's events and I'm proud to be here to represent the many thousands of men and women who worked at Republic for over 50 years and have designed and built more than 24,000 aircraft. In this day of mixed emotions, the thrills of this final flight equate to those I fully remember of the first F-105 flight I witnessed years ago. The F-105, as you know, had a difficult birth, an uncertain childhood, and a dubious adolescence. But did it ever have a magnificent maturation ... when it mattered. ... There was no sight more beautiful than today's flight of the F-105. Even now in the 1980s this creation of the 1950s looks like it belongs. It's as sleek and modern looking as any aircraft flown anywhere in the world today. ... The F-105", he continued, "introduced for its time a long list of firsts ... an especially designed internal gun capable of firing 100 shots in one second ..." and the first to include integrated avionics. "It was born of a day," he said, "when things were simpler, bureaucracies smaller. ... It was bought on the basis of a proposal, a document consisting of one book of 150 pages." He pointed out that, "... along with the lasts of today, tomorrow the Air Force accepts the 713th and last (Fairchild-Republic) A-10A better known as the Warthog or just plain Hog."

Retired Col. Leo Thorsness, was the evening's keynote and final speaker. He filled in for former POW Lt. Gen. John P. Flynn who fell ill during the day's activities and didn't make the banquet. He characterized flying the F-105 as "pure ecstasy". He told of his feeling watching his wingman circle around him as he was parachuting into Hanoi the day he was shot down. "Here comes that Thud, he's coming right at you. You've got zero airspeed, you're going down, you're stuck under that damned chute. He's close by -- 50 to 100 feet to the side. You'd give everything in the world and everything you ever wanted to change places with that guy." While acknowledging his fellow pilots, he gave credit for the success of the airplane to the people behind it. He had all the maintainers in the audience stand for applause. "Hats off to you!", he said as the crowd clapped and cheered. He spoke eloquently of his experience as a POW. "I had freedom and lost it for a few years. I can say to the rest of the world there is still no other nation that offers its citizens opportunities, freedoms, delights, as does the United States of America. Thank you so much for asking me to be here."

It was after midnight when the party ended. Victor Vizcarra remembered that, "... after the dinner and speeches, (the 419th ) started handing out ... parts from ... bins at the back of the hanger to anyone that wanted a piece of the Thud. I picked up a wing tip light fairing with a red lens and a couple of blue lens formation lights which I still have." As a Thud maintainer, John Coon picked up a different souvenir. "I obtained an 'Iron Maiden'. This was a set of avionics equipment cooling air ducts from the lower electronics compartment. I still have the scars on my head and arms from banging into the sharp edges when I worked on the F-105."

The crowd gradually drifted out of the hanger with everyone taking not only spare parts no longer needed, but fond and often sad memories of the plane that was once a part of their lives.

*Thud-Out Program Handout & Thud Out attendee, Victor Vizcarra, e-mail, 4 Jan 01 & John Coon letter and audio tape & MiG Sweep #46 Summer 1984 pgs 1 and 2.*

**18-Apr-13**

7252

Many of you are aware that another great fighter pilot and RROTY 1999, Billy "Sparky" Sparks, is lining up for his final T.O.

"As many of you probably know, Sparky, aka Barracuda Lead, has fought prostate cancer for over twenty years. It's finally taking down this wonderful lead/wingman/friend/patriot/warrior." (John Piowaty, e-mail to Ivy McCoy, 1 May 2013.)

Here's what I have learned from Joe Montana on Facebook.

## Billy Reid Sparks, Jr. F-105 History

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"We are about to loose another warrior. Lt. Col. Billy Sparks is in the final phase of cancer. Billy was an F-105 strike pilot and a Weasel pilot at Takhli. He is very weak and not receiving visitors nor is he taking phone calls. His family has asked that no one call. They do not have time to respond to emails so if you want to send a card or a letter the address is:

Billy and Dell Sparks  
1566 Livingston Drive  
Henderson, NV, 89012-2405

Please, above all, do NOT use this info to look up their phone number and call."

May his victory roll be smooth and flawless, like his patriotism and love of country.

*Gary Baber e-mail 18 Apr 13 forwarded by Dave Brog*

**10-May-13**

7283

Fellow River Rats and Friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I inform you that our Good Friend and Fellow Fighter Pilot, Billy Sparks, took off on his final flight this morning. We, the Fighter Community, and the USAF have lost a Great Warrior.

When final arrangements have been scheduled I will inform everyone.

Our prayers go out to Dell and the Sparks Family.

God Bless Billy,

Jack Redmond

"LT. COL. BILLY SPARKS U.S. Air Force, Retired Billy R. Sparks, a longtime resident of Las Vegas and Henderson, had his final flight May 10, 2013. He was born Dec. 7, 1934, in Hart County, Ky., to Coy and Kathleen Sparks. Billy was a decorated U.S. Air Force fighter pilot who flew over 145 combat sorties over North Vietnam. During his 20 years of service, he received three Silver Stars, seven Distinguished Flying Crosses and 15 Air Medals. Post-military, he served as an analyst and advisor with several defense contractors. He was frequently called upon as guest speaker and lecturer for inspirational and motivational talks. He recently published a collection of stories about his military career entitled, "Takhli Tales." Billy enjoyed skiing, traveling and cooking for family and friends. He is survived by his wife, Dell; son, Reid; daughter, Peggy; and three grandchildren. Memorial services will be noon-2 p.m. Friday, June 14, at the Nellis Air Force Base Chapel, 4302 N. Washington Blvd., Bldg. 617, Nellis AFB, NV 89191. Attendees without military ID will be required to make arrangements with the security office 72 hours in advance."

*Jack Redmond 10 May 2013 e-mail forwarded by Dave Brog to Weasel List &  
<http://obits.reviewjournal.com/obituaries/lvrj/obituary.aspx?n=billy-r-sparks&pid=164810077#fbLoggedOut>*