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Authors Unit: 23rd TASS, 1966 \*During period early '66, while I was there it was "Det 1 - 7/13th AF"

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Authors title of submittal: MEMOIRS OF A 'T-O'd FAC, circa 1966

*OK JUN 14, 2010  
JK*

I Departed Travis 1 Jan 66. My orders were to Jungle Survival School at Clark, but I was told at Clark 'disregard' my orders; they needed FACs in Vietnam right now. I arrived at Bien Hoa for two or three 'check-on' flights and was then assigned to the ARVN Division in town. I must have been the Div ALO/FAC as I was the only 'blue-suiter' there.

During the few days I was at Bien Hoa a F-100 landed. That normally wasn't a big deal, but this one was an aviation marvel! He had actually destroyed a hooch in the jungle, BY FLYING THRU IT! He was the luckiest guy in the world that day but needed a little more training on when to pull-up from a strafing run. The leading edges of wings and the horizontal tail were in a shambles and the gun ports and barrels were packed with bamboo! The 'Hun' was class 26'd and I really regret not getting pictures. The BDA was "one hooch destroyed and—oops, one 'Hun' also destroyed."

About three weeks after I arrived at Bien Hoa, I was called down from a VR flight to report to either the TACC or TASS commander, don't recall which. He opened the meeting by (This is a bighlight that I'll never forget!) saying, "You're the only guy we can afford to lose." (I should'a shot him right then!) He went on to tell me that I'd be taking an O-1 in less than 48 hours, to an undisclosed classified destination for an unknown length of time.

A couple of days later, at Da Nang, I was ordered to Nakhom Phanom, Thailand (NKP). At NKP was ordered to (1) fly unmarked airplaues, (2) wear unmarked flight suits, (3) was told NOT to carry my Geneva Convention card. I really didn't like the tour—AT ALL!

#### The Oscar M saga

In late Feb 1966, I think it was Ben Witterman and I, were on a 'Thud' (F-105) mission to bomb a bridge about 30 miles south of Mu Gia pass. For some reason, two Sandy's A-1s went out with us that day. I located and marked the target. It was about 100 yards north of my smoke. The first three aircraft in the flight were just short or left (9 o'clock) of the target but number four

delivered all 5 x 750's dead center! I found out later, that number four is usually the weak sister in many flights, but not on this one. I can still recall the timbers and dirt flying!

I gave them their BDA and in less than a couple of minutes I heard the call:

*"Lead, this is Two, I'm on fire and bailing out!"* I was sure it was the A-1 flight.

We had headed north into the valley south of Mu Gia and as I crossed the karst, I saw an A-1 low and to the right, trailing smoke. I turned toward him and as he went under my left wing, I watched the pilot step on the canopy rail and jump. As the plane continued to roll to the right, I saw that the fire from the lower engine cowling was engulfing the centerline fuel tank. I circled as his chute descended, someone went on 'Guard' channel to report the shoot down and we watched both the pilot and the plane land along the east bank of the river. His flight lead made two passes to see if he was in the chute; we'd not talked to him on his URC 10 radio.

Lead reported he was unable to see because of the wing of his airplane. I told him on my next orbit that I'd punch down in the smoke of the burning A-1 and make a low pass along the river. Out of the smoke at about 50', I headed south toward the bend. I recall Benn calling me;

*"One seven, get the hell out of there, everyone in the valley is shooting at you!"*

I began what I hoped was violent jinking, saw the A-1 pilot's empty chute harness and because of the karst at 12 o'clock I turned west over the river and went to tree-top level. I anxiously began checking for leaks, holes, fluid pressures, etc. A mile or so west, I began climbing back up to 1,500 feet, having noted only a crack in the lower left windshield. We began checking flights into holding patterns from 15,000' and above and would take the low flight to strafe from just north of the chute toward and past the still smoking remains of the A-1. When the 'Jolly Greens' (rescue helicopters) arrived about 30-40 minutes later, I vectored the first one toward the chute. On his first pass, he overshot and during the turn-around called to say, *"They are shootin' the hell out of me!"* (I thought I could hear the 'dings' over the radio!) I was nearing 'bingo' fuel (60-65 NM was about one hour ETE [Estimated Time Enroute] in the O-1). Benn put in another strike and they made one more attempt; which was unsuccessful. I've checked for his name on "The Wall" and believe his name was, "Oscar Martorer".

At NKP, as I parked, the crew chief seemed overly inquisitive about the right side engine cowling. After I shut down, we found two large and deep nicks in the prop and a dent about the size of a football in the right engine cowling. The crew chief asked, "Where have you been, Captain?" When I viewed the picture I took of the prop, I yet wonder how it ever kept from splitting—but then I'm sure I know! We also counted more than 30 bullet holes in the "Jolly Green" and the A-1 lead insisted on starting paperwork for the DFC for my efforts.

About the same time, I was putting in a two-ship Thud flight, strafing a trans-shipping point along the same river about 25 east of NKP. As two began his pull-up he called, "Lead, this is two, I've flamed out!" I was on the same run-in heading as he was; he was just below my left wing. I saw that the entire afterburner/speed brake area in the tail section was on fire. Above and outside me to the west, lead saw the same thing and said, "*Two, you're on fire—GET OUT!*" I watched the canopy and seat depart the Thud. A good chute, he landed in a small grove of trees just at the base of the karst, a great spot! He came up on Guard channel, and I assured him he'd be just fine and the Jolly Greens were en route. He took out the small orange piece of chute they carried and I could see him from more than a mile away. I told him to sit tight and I was going to check out the small village a mile or so northeast of his location. I recall thinking that I might dissuade anyone going his direction with my M-16, and remaining rockets. He was 'too cool' until the Jolly Green over flew him on the first pass and then he got real excited!

We suspected that the access panel to the gun compartment must have blown off and had been ingested in the F-105's intake, causing the fire in the engine.

Meeting the pilot back at NKP, I asked about a very good friend of mine, Ralph Balcom. It turned out that he and Ralph were roommates at Udorn. He later was a 'shoot-down' up north and a POW. I recall that he was pictured on the cover of Life Magazine later in 1966. Thru information from a pilot training classmate, I believe it'd be 'Chuck Boyd'; who after returning as a POW retired as a General, USAF. A few days later, I flew a paycheck to one of our NCOs who was in the hospital at Udorn, and I was able to spend the night with Ralph. It was about mid-May while I was at TSN when I heard that Ralph was MIA - no radio call and no beeper. He had been on mission #98 of his 100.

#### Who dead sticked an O-1 at the NKP downtown airport?

One of the last missions I flew from NKP was a real 'Chinese fire-drill'. Ken Millay and I had been assigned two TOTs about an hour apart. With about three hours and twenty minutes endurance in the O-1, we had two hours en route to and from the target area and a 1 hour loiter time in the target area. We did the most serious 'mission planning' I can ever recall in the O-1's. I also had a Lao observer in the back seat on FM radio, who would try to make contact with the ground teams; 'Elephant' as I recall was their call sign.

About 10 minutes short of our first TOT (mine), 'Invert' called to tell us the first flight of fighters had been scrubbed. We continued to our target on the 'trail' and began VRing from south to north toward Mu Gia. Ken's was a flight of Thuds with 3,000 pound delay fused bombs. They were trying

to create a landslide on the trail just south of Mu Gia pass. About 15 minutes before the second TOT we got another call from 'Invert'. We were to put a flight of Thuds on a truck park east of Mu Gia. For a while, I considered telling them, 'to stuff it'. I decided to cross the Mu Gia Pass area at 8,000 feet (hoping they wouldn't hear me) and then to put the strike in from that lofty altitude. I made contact with the fighters, rolled in and I seem to recall launching two Willie Pete rockets. I thought at first that I had 'duds' as it took them such a long time to hit the ground. I got to watch that mission from just below the Thud's roll-in altitude and then watch them establish their dives and release bombs BELOW me. My BDA was whatever they wanted it to be as I was as low as I was going to go.

I snuck back across Mu Gia about the time Ken was making contact with his flight. Number three in the formation 'Tally-Hoed' the target from about ten miles out. I suggested that Ken launch a Willie Pete rocket and that we needed to get-goin!; 'cause I was below bingo fuel. Ken FACed the fighters and I was already headed west toward NKP. I had both tanks in the red (1/8 tank remaining) and ran one completely empty about 30 minutes east of the Mekong River. I asked 'Invert' to check and see if the Sandys and Jolly Greens were available and that I'd appreciate an escort because I was almost sure I didn't have enough fuel to make it all the way back. The Sandys and Jolly Greens picked us up about 15 minutes east of NKP and I'd been in the red on the remaining tank for what seemed like an hour.

I maintained 8,000 feet and told them that when I got overhead the river, I'd lower the nose to see if the engine would quit. I did that and the engine 'did that' also. I elected to shoot a 'flame-out' pattern (quite a feat since the last time had been in a T-6 leaving primary pilot training in 1953) to the 'downtown' airport at NKP. The engine re-started and continued to run thru landing and clearing the runway, but I had other problems. Remember the Lao observer? He was a 'persona non-grata' in Thailand. I met the airport manager about half way out to the airplane and tried to explain that a helicopter would soon arrive with fuel.

The HH-3 arrived with a 40 gallon drum and the crew pumped it dry! Seems to me the full fuel capacity in the 0-1 was 40 gallons. En route to the NKP, I felt a vibration in the tail. I looked around to see the HH-3 in close trail formation. I then knew for damn sure I was in the wrong combat airplane since I couldn't out run a helicopter!

I considered over-flying NKP and going to Udorn to severely diminish the physical condition of the duty officer that had jacked us around that day.

A few days later, I was reassigned to Saigon (Tan Son Nhut) as Chief of 0-1 Combat Operations. About this time, I discovered that every one of my three PCS's had been in direct violation of the AF Manual. I was about to become my own 'personnel officer'.

"Come on sonny; we've been shot at before." (page 5)

When we got word that an O-1 (Lee Harley) was down in "Operation Cricket", as in NKP, where I had just come from, I went to the Officer in Charge of Task Force Alpha at 7th Air Force Headquarters, Colonel Hesse, I believe. I walked to the wall map while a 'two-striper' posted the 'down' coordinates. Those being several miles east of the North Vietnam coast, I stated that he'd have had to refuel en route from NKP as the plotted coordinates were beyond the O-1's endurance. He directed the 'two-striper' to verify the coordinates and motioned me toward a desk where a lieutenant colonel was seated. He introduced us and indicated the lieutenant colonel 'worked' that area. I told them both that the use of the O-1 in that area was criminally negligent on the part of a higher headquarters. The lieutenant colonel responded, "Come on sonny; we've been shot at before." My attitude during the tour had been hostile, some times latent -- sometimes not! I replied something to the effect, "Yeah, and G— D— it you had armor plate, ejection seats, navaids and this is a f—k—g 'Montana sheep ranch airplane' that has no business being there—I'm telling you—IT'S CRIMINALLY NEGLIGENT!" As he began to rise up, Colonel Hesse told him to sit down and to shut up! Adding, "This guy has been there and done that, we haven't and we will listen to him." I was so mad that if he had continued to stand, I may have 'decked' him right there! (A couple of years later, shortly after I was recalled to active duty with the Kansas ANG, I took a C-54 to Cannon AFB, NM to pick up a team from the Air Division who would visit our Squadron at McConnell. Win a candy bar, if you guess who was on that team.) At that time, I had other problems though. Visibility at Cannon was near zero in fog; we had difficulty just taxiing. Multi engine aircraft could file with a takeoff alternate within an hour; Amarillo was. We were able to see only the two nearest runway lights; we took off and at 50 feet above the ground were in the clear. En route, McConnell passed a message that their forecast was for 200 feet ceiling and ½- mile visibility and asked what our intentions were. We checked the charts; multiengine minimums were 100 feet and ¼-mile visibility. Our response was, "We will land at McConnell," which we did.

#### The 'Pentagon paint job'

Another picture I regret not taking was our O-1's with a 'Pentagon paint job'. In January or February 1966, a Higher Headquarters determined that all, repeat all, airplanes in the Southeast Asia Theater of operations would need to be painted 'camouflage' due to the MIG threat? Get this picture—as FAC's we intentionally placed our planes in the immediate area of an air strike. Very nearby, were fast flying jets whose operators were intent on a target on the ground. With the light gray O-1 we stood a fair chance of being seen against the jungle background, while not being seen from the ground against the gray clouds. As a side benefit 'Charlie' would seldom take the chance to

shoot at us, since they were smart enough to know we could get air strikes quickly. They shot a lot at the Army O-1s, with olive drab paint, especially outside the artillery umbrella. We raised as much hell as we could, directly and indirectly. We advised the field people not to take their airplanes to Saigon for paint, tell maintenance you need them too badly. We sent messages to 'Higher Headquarters saying, whatever you do, don't camouflage paint the O-1s'. If you do both things that will happen are bad! It will increase the 'mid-air-collision' potential (that is if the fighters can find us in the target area) and it will make the airplanes a whole lot better target for the gunners on the ground. Strikes in South Vietnam couldn't be made without a FAC marking the targets.

The first FACing attempt with a camouflage paint job that I knew of was near the coast east of Bien Hoa. The flight of four, Navy A-4's spent 45 minutes of frustration trying to make 'eye-ball' contact with the FAC, Jim Milner, a friend of mine. In total frustration, Jim launched his rockets at the target, cleared flight to drop on his smoke, and departed the area for Bien Hoa to file an OHR (Operational Hazard Report).

The solution - by some 9-level 'thinker' - was to paint a rectangle of about 2 feet by 5 feet on top of each wing, and a triangle shape behind the cockpit on top of the fuselage. I'd let you guess the color but it might take two guesses---those of you who made the first guess "International Orange", win your choice of a candy bar! Got the picture now---'camo' except for this 14-15 sq feet of International Orange on top, did 'they' think the Migs were going to come up from below us? Now remember, this was to be painted over 'camo'. Boy! Do I regret not getting all this on film.

We had to be in a bank to stay near a target---if we looked out our side windows, the strike fighters would get a profile view of us and could not see tops of our wings or fuselage unless we banked toward them which could be disastrous. Is that as bad as it gets - you might ask?

The original gray paint job cost about \$250. The 'camo' paint job was about \$750. The International Orange over-paint took airplanes off-line again and was -- you're not going to believe it; \$1,500. A typical plush chair, air-conditioned room, 'Think Tank', 'Brain-dead', higher headquarters decision. At Saigon, I test hopped these airplanes that Air Vietnam had the contract to re-paint and I would bet a buck or two on the dollar figures quoted above.

I also regret not getting a copy of a 'joke TWX' that one of the guys sent to NASA requesting development of an 'anti-gravity device' because by then the O-1's were 'over-grossed' with paint.

I'm not sure, but a mid-air collision; F-105 and O-1 east of NKP may have resolved the 'paint' issue. While this O-1 wasn't camouflage, the two or three tone green paint (the AF must not have had olive drab paint but all the markings were painted over with green paint) made it tougher to see. The O-1 pilot had been my roommate at NKP, Karl Worst. I've watched the Suicide Missions on the History Channel and I don't recall seeing any camouflage/international orange O-1's, do you?

"NKP Tower, we're over the AP shack, entering downwind." (page 7)

Late in April or early May, I arranged for Roger Nelson (a pilot training classmate and a ALO/FAC with one of the U.S. Divisions) and I to take two O-1's to NKP. They were replacements for Karl Worst's mid-air and Lee Harley's being obliterated near 'titty peaks' east of NKP. Over half way from Da Nang and about 10 minutes east of the Mekong River, the WX went 'dog-dirt'. We got on FM for inter plane communication and I briefed him. We'd plan to hit the river south of the town of NKP, follow it north to the temple/shopping area of town, turn west and hope to find the blacktop road to the air base. If we found the road, we would take it to the air police shack off the southeast end of the runway, I'd turn right to put us on downwind and drop him off. I called the tower when we found the river and told them what we were planning to do. They said something like, "The airspace is all yours; the field is closed." The rain on the asphalt road helped and it went exactly as we'd hoped. I dropped him off on downwind, made a right 270-degree turn, entered on base and we parked the planes on the ramp. The guys at the O' Club were impressed enough to buy us a couple of drinks. Roger was en route to visit Neil Eddins, another classmate at Takhli. Roger is deceased, but I'll need to call Neil to see if Roger talked about the 'below minimums arrival' at NKP.

In Jun 66, my application to AFBCMR (reference a passover to major) was returned because they couldn't find 'a probable error or injustice'. I asked for a 'compassionate reassignment' and was sent to Cam Ranh Bay for ten days in the 'psycho' ward to explain to a 'shrink' why I was so upset. After my release from the 'loony ward', I returned to TSN and when I tried to 'forecast' to get out of the service; I was told, 'you've already forecasted'. For the remainder of my time in the AF, I was my own personnel section. I've wondered why many personnel office staff were not KIA'd since so many of us had easy access to loaded guns?

#### PUFF; The Mini Dragon

And now, what I call the 'Puff, the mini dragon' chapter, since the C-47's with Gattling guns were called "Puff; the magic dragon". I recall inspecting an O-1 at the big U.S. Army deployment area ('Blackhorse', maybe) about 20-25 miles east of Bien Hoa in Jan/Feb 66 that had a M-60 machine gun mounted on an aluminum plate over the back seat. With the rear windows open, it could shoot out of one side. I do remember thinking it was a lousy idea.

While I was at the Support Group Headquarters at TSN, a young (all captains at the time were younger than I) captain somehow got this great idea that mounting two M-60's; one pointing out of each back windows, would really give the FAC's a great weapon system. Since I thought one was a lousy idea, this was twice as bad and simply stupid! I expressed my unequivocal opposition to it and furthermore, told him I would not have anything whatever to do with it. I did not keep it a secret and

the Group Commander (a full colonel & rated navigator, I think) must also have known it. But he and the captain thought it was the best thing since sliced bread. When I left TSN for Binh Thuy, they were putting together a 'dog & pony' show for the then 7th Air Force Commander, Gen Momyer. Get this picture—here were two guys; one who would never have to fly it and the other one a 'headquarters weenie', who were seriously proposing to make the 0-1 a 'two gun—Puff; the mini dragon'. Frankly, it still makes me shiver with anger when I think about it and I'm exerting max effort to keep it a 'mixed company' story. Sometime before I left Vietnam I'd heard from someone who was at the Momyer briefing, what had happened at that briefing. He told me that General Momyer closed the briefing early and told those two guys, "Tear up the materials and don't ever let this stupid idea come up again. I don't want to ever hear about it again." Or words to that effect. My hearing about it may also have been a highlight.

OK, so why tell us about it - you may ask? Several years later while I was submitting yet another application to the AFBCMR, I took a closer look at the copy of the Personnel Assignment Orders sending me to NKP. In the same paragraph where my name was listed, was a name I now recognized. (Another candy bar if your first guess is right.) Let me redo the sentence from the above paragraph: Here were two guys; one who would never have to fly it and the other (emphasis added) *a candy-ass 'headquarters weenie' who had somehow gotten out of a real combat assignment to propose getting other guys killed.* I'm not sure, but I seem to recall seeing that the Group Commander made star rank. I have no idea what happened to the 'candy-ass' but my guess is he made Major on time. Suspension from the rafters with piano wire attached to a very specific part of his anatomy would have been my preference!

Finished my SEA tour as an IP in the FAC School at Binh Thuy. In October or November, we got 'ChuckE'. His form 5 showed over 200 landings at Hurlburt. I refused to fly with him as I was by then a 'short-timer'. Numerous flights suggested he was 'erratic' to 'extremely erratic' on landings. Reluctantly, he was sent to a strip near 'Three Sisters' in the Delta and when it flooded, he was moved to Phouc Vinh. We began to hear from the Army that they had twice-a-day air shows, his takeoff and his arrival. On one of the arrivals, he ground looped and dinged the 0-1. He was sent for by the TASS Commander and when I left I understood that 'he'd never fly again without an IP'. I got a call in early 1968 from a guy ferrying an OV-10 to Hill AFB and had one of the biggest laughs I can ever recall. ChuckE was to have been re-assigned to Hurlburt as an 0-1 IP and they were wondering if Cessna could make a three-seat 0-1. My big laugh turned to near puke when I was told ChuckE had made Major in December '67

**A guy called 'magnet ass'**

During my time at Binh Thuy, we stood on the ramp one day watching a flight of F-100's put in a strike just southwest of the base. We could hear the bombs and during the strike we saw one of the flight break out of the pattern and head directly toward Binh Thuy. Another joined him and the early one landed. That was most unusual as with no barriers, if a 'Hun' didn't get a drag chute, the runway was thought to be too short. When he taxied in to park (I don't think he used the drag chute) and opened the canopy, no one could find the ladder for him to exit the cockpit. I stood along side urging someone to get a truck or something to help him out. The blood from his upper left arm eventually ran down the side of plane and was dripping on the ramp. Eventually, someone found a ladder and got him to the dispensary. I talked to him later as my younger brother flew 'Huns' about that time, but he didn't recall knowing my brother. Turns out this guy had gotten the nickname, 'magnet ass', as he reported ground fire from take-off to landing. This time he took a round just above the intake that splintered when it hit the instrument panel and a piece cut a deep gash in his left upper arm. At first the flight didn't believe his reporting ground fire until he said, "Yes, damn it!; I'm hit and I'm bleeding!" He didn't use the drag chute because he couldn't use his left arm; it also made throttle control almost impossible. A one arm landing in the F-100 made his landing an 'aviation feat'!

I took an O-1 from Binh Thuy to TSN for my port call about 12 Dec 66. Since I had a bet with Ken Millay that the 'damn Montana sheep ranch airplane' couldn't make it to 10,000 feet, I climbed all the way. At 15,100' I watched F-101's making jet penetration turns to TSN.

Got home to Omaha about 13 Dec 66 and that truly was the single most memorable highlight of my Vietnam tour. A few days later I celebrated my second 'Jewish holiday', another passover to major. I was forced to go to Shaw AFB for release from the Air Force, which I then demanded. I was delayed for three days so the 'two-star' could award the combat decorations; Bronze Star, DFC (for the A-1 pilot mission) and seven Air Medals. As an aside, he said, (while pinning them on) "Capt, you sure were a busy young man over there." I truly remember wanting to tell him to "stuff 'em".

I moved to Wichita and began work as a flight test engineer on the A-37 at Cessna. I Joined the Kansas ANG at McConnell and was the base operations officer and flew the C-54. I'd been scrounging pilot time in the T & A-37. In late Jan 1968 I had about 100 hrs and the ANG manual said I could check out in the F-100 with 100 hours of 'jet' time. I started transition training by getting the dash-one and visiting the various maintenance sections of the unit; a self study ground school. The Air Guard unit was recalled that next week and Tactical Air Command was asked to

grant a waiver for me to continue transition training. Waiver was granted and I became fully combat qualified in the 'Hun' about Jun. Not bad for an ole 'shaky' driver, huh?

Since it may be appropriate for me to stake claims, I'll list several:

At the low end of the scale, I claim to be the only decorated FAC who was passed over, not twice but three times before I made Major, after the recall, in 1969.

I'll claim the altitude record for 0-1's at 15,100 MSL.

I may have been the last active duty pilot to log time in the 0-1. I was asked to checkout a Civil Air Patrol guy when Kansas Civil Air Patrol got a 0-1 on 31 Aug 1971.

Partly due to my being a FAC, I lay claim to:

- 1) The oldest aviator whose initial jet check-out was at age 36+.
- 2) The only person whose initial jet check-out was in the F-100.
- 3) I don't recall any repeat flights, so I claim to have become combat qualified in the F-100 in the minimum number of required flights.
- 4) The only guy who'd been an IP/FE in heavy transports (C-124) and who then became combat qualified in the F-100.

In closing, our call sign at NKP was Gombey. I understood it to be the Japanese 'drinking call', much like 'skoll' in northern Europe. I took my call sign, Gombey-17, at NKP in February 1966 and retained it throughout my tour in Vietnam.

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/ \_\_\_\_\_

**Leo F Kimminau, Maj, USAF (ret)**

\*Ten pages - odd numbered pages shown