

1969

## VIETNAM WAR JOURNAL

MAJOR BOB KLINE

22 January — I don't know why I'm starting this journal and I doubt if I will keep it up. Nevertheless, I begin. My purpose will be to record those things which happened to me or my buddies during a one year tour in Vietnam. An ulterior motive is to improve my writing ability.

Jim Mikulecky, Al Drew, Denny Garner, Tom Hicks, Tommy Thompson, Jerry West, Jim Ruest and I left Travis AFB on the night of 20 January. Destination Clark AFB, Philippines for jungle survival training. Latitude 15 degrees North. We are traveling in a super DC-8 with 215 other souls. All this courtesy United States Government. We have made short refueling stops at Honolulu and Wake Island. Our only concern thus far is Typhoon Phillis which we should pass well to the north of somewhere in the vicinity of Guam.

Al, Denny, Tom and I will go to the 12<sup>th</sup> TRS at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam (Near Saigon) after jungle survival. The rest will go to the 11<sup>th</sup> TRS in Udorn Thailand.

Our one year tour began on the day we departed Travis AFB, 20 January, 1969. A very personal date for all of us but also a special day in history. The day we left Richard Nixon was sworn in as the 37<sup>th</sup> President of the USA. At the same time the Paris Peace talks began serious negotiations for peace in Vietnam. All of us secretly hope this will cut our tour short but we really don't count on it. However 1969 could be the last year of the war and we could be there for the end.

24 January – We arrived at Clark AFB with little trouble from Typhoon Phillis and hauled our luggage to the BOQ. We considered staying off base at a hotel but, finding out jungle school started at 0630, we elected to stay close to the home. Yesterday, during the first day of school, we heard all about jungle food, water, and snakes—ugh! Today promises to be more on how to get away from Charlie if shot down and less on living like Tarzan.

After landing here I slept 8 hours but I still haven't fully adjusted to the time zone change. Right now it is 4 O'clock in the morning and I'm wide awake.

29 January – Tom Hick, Denny Gardner, and I went into town the night before we left for the jungle and had a little excitement. We were just looking for a local nightspot with food and a floor show and ended up on a back street surrounded by thugs. One of them pulled a knife but since we were not drunk and acted like we were going to put up a fight, they let us go. Actually I think they decided we just were not worth the effort. Most GI's do not get off that easy in that situation here in the heart of Huk activity.

Our two days in the jungle was primarily dirt, rats and a little useful knowledge. We were shown by Negrito instructors (local jungle boys) how to find food and water in the sticks. We practiced hiding overnight in the jungle and calling in a helicopter to pull us out. The only danger we faced was getting bitten by a rat. If this happened it meant a two week stay here to take rabies shots.

The Negritos found us easily in our hiding spots because this was there backyard. But it was fun playing cat and mouse with them and I enjoyed my brief contact with another cultural. I hope I never have to use what they taught me but at least I'm better prepared if the occasion should arise. Today I leave for Tan Son Nhut with Al Drew. Tom Hicks and Denny Gardner left yesterday. We board our Pam Am 707 in a few minutes. Nice going in first class.

30 January – Arrived Tan Son Nhut yesterday. God, what turmoil. Thousands of people, aircraft, vehicles, and buildings. It is going to be hell finding your way around. I have nice quarters considering this is a war zone. My squadron (12<sup>th</sup> TRS) has a lot of spirit and is building a squadron club and training facility right out side my quarters.

So far I've processed in rather haphazardly but that seems to be the way here. After I'm accepted by the squadron as something more than an FNG, I'll try to do something about setting up a system to ease the load of in-processing for FNGs and lead them by the hand for the first few days. We need assigned sponsors with transportation. Everyone needs a little help getting started before combat checkout flights.

Our sister squadron, the 16<sup>th</sup>, lost an aircraft last night. Fate of crew unknown. I understand they were fairly new men, still checking out. I didn't know them of course but I feel a loss nevertheless.

Everyone here seems very close. I suppose the situation brings that about. I'm proud to be here but a little afraid at the same time.

Tom Hicks and Denny Gardner have been assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup>. This means we will only see each other occasionally. I regret this because we have become friends and new guys need to lean on each other. I came here without an assigned pilot as the one I had was promoted to colonel. So I'm up for grabs if anyone needs a good backseater.

2 February– I'm rooming with Al Drew now, or better said he is rooming with me. The squadron is overmanned right now so quarters are a little crowded. This will change as the old guys start going home. Al doesn't seem to have any interest other than flying and sleeping but still he wouldn't be a bad roommate if he just didn't snore so loud. If I can hold out he should get his own room one of these days.

The last couple of days we have been getting the lectures and briefings that are required before we fly. As soon as all that is accomplished we will go on our first combat sortie.



The Squadron had a party last night to say good by to some old heads who are leaving this month. Right in the middle of party time we had a red alert. Four rockets had been fired into down town Saigon and the base took cover as a precautionary measure. The base has been hit several times by rockets in the near past and the base chapel was destroyed by one just before I got there. But this time the party went on as a once a month event when we change from night flights to day flights or visa versa—always saying good by to the old heads at the same event. We where black party flying suits; the black coming from the blackbird on our squadron patch.

I was told the 12TRS dates back to WWI but the squadron insignia was changed during the Korean War. Now our C.O. wants to change it back because he feels the current patch does not reflect our mission (the blackbird is holding a bomb and we don't drop bombs in the recce business—just "kill 'em with fil 'em).

No word on the missing crew from the 16<sup>th</sup>. I'm afraid they were blown into such small pieces that nothing will ever be found. How terrible for their families. This aspect of my profession is the least thought about but the most identifying. I guess it is the one thing that separates us from all other professions.

5 February – Flew my first combat mission today. No body shot at us and we took our pictures undisturbed. I hope all my missions are that peaceful but I'm afraid I can't count on that. Our target was a river strip and two canal strips. I don't have the least idea of what we were looking for. Our job is to photograph what we are told to and let the photo interpreters (Pis) look for evidence of "Charlie".

Tomorrow I fly with the old man, Lt/Col Barnard. Probably will get my ass chewed for being so dumb but that is to be expected. Today I flew with Captain Randy Scott, a nice kid who did a good job of showing me what had to be done on each mission.

Our next stop is the life support section where our helmet, parachute harness, G-suit, and survival vest are stored. The survival vest is something to behold. It weights about ten pounds but feels like sixty. In it we carry two radios, flares, first aide kit, various signal devices, escape and evasion maps, blood chit, pointee-talkie, knife, ammo, and a .38 pistol. When we get all our gear on it feels like we have doubled our weight.

Pre-fighting the aircraft takes about a half an hour. The birds are well checked by the ground crew before we get there and then we double check it before takeoff. We taxi out to the quick check area for a few more checks and then, when cleared, climb into the blue. Sometimes, with slow flyers coming in to land, we have a five minute or more wait with our canopy down, oxygen masks on, and suffering 120degree heat.

We climb out to about 30000 feet and are monitored on radar all the way to the target area. This involves a few radio call to the radar sites along the way but is well worth it. If we get shot down, they will have some idea where to look for us. Just before the target area we call up the Army to get clearance in. This is to prevent being hit by our own artillery. However, if we don't get clearance we usually go in anyway if good judgment deems it half way safe.

Our targets are normally large areas where the enemy may be hiding. We fly back and forth at low altitude photographing the entire assigned area. Sometimes we are after specific points and other times we photograph strips of roads or waterways looking for enemy supply movements. We also get shots of areas that have just completed an air strike. Doing this enables the gun-fighters to see how well they did and keeps them honest about their accurate hits.

After an hour or so in the target area we either return to base or go get a tanker for air to air refueling and then hit another target. Back at the base our film is downloaded, processed and turn over to the photo interpreters. They let us know how well we did covering the targets and if we found anything of significance. Then we are ready for the next days mission.

8 February – I now have three missions under my belt and don't think I've been shot at yet. I see a lot of action (air strikes, artillery, etc.) going on below but no sign yet of "golf balls" coming up at me. Hope this never changes.

My flight with the old man didn't turn out too bad. He is tough but willing to explain things exactly the way he wants them done. However I don't think he has much use for navigators being an old fighter pilot but he has to put up with us because we have all the camera controls in the back.

My next flight was with the squadron operations officer, Lt/Col Ryall. He is a real prince to fly with but he only has two more missions to go before he will rotate home. Our mission wasn't too successful as our tanker canceled, our left wing tank didn't feed, and the weather in the target area was lousy. However we did cover our target fairly well.

It might be appropriate here to cover a little more about the way we "fight" our part of the war. These specifics may be forgotten in the future.

The schedule for the next days mission is finalized about 1700 and posted at the squadron and in the latrine at the BOQ. (Sounds unprofessional but that is one place everyone makes at least once a day.) The schedule only covers who is flying with whom, takeoff time, in-country or out-country mission (out-country being Laos or North of the DMZ in North Vietnam.), and who are the duty and alert crews for that day.

We get our target assignment about three hours before takeoff. Normally we get two primary and two secondary targets. We spend a couple of hours briefing and mission planning. I don't yet consider the time adequate for mission planning, but after I'm here awhile I may need less time. Our briefing consists of time hack, weather, significant hostile areas, escape and evasion, and flying safety. Everything is very brief and to the point but a little rapid and bewildering to a new guy.



14 February – Valentine's Day. I fly mission number seven at 0445 tomorrow morning. I'm having a little difficulty reading the radar rapidly because I'm out of practice. I haven't been on the scope for over two months. Oh well, it will come back. I'll have plenty of night radar missions here.

I was made the squadron supply officer today. The old supply officer, Reed Darley, had an emergency at home and was returned stateside PCS. Gad, what an extra load of paper work. The squadron supply account comes close to two million bucks and I'm now the responsible officer. I worked all day on inventory and will sign for the account as soon as I find two radio receivers. Working all day and flying at night makes Bob a dull boy –but I'm tough (I hope). The squadron CO said he would turn me in for a bronze star for the work but later 7<sup>th</sup> AF Headquarters decided flying types got enough medals for air work and didn't need any for ground work.

Tomorrow I will move into my own private room with two windows. It will be nice not to worrying about disturbing a roommate. I'm about six steps from the new club, which is now 90% done, so I'll be able to find companionship if I should get lonely. Who am I kidding. The only kind of loneliness I suffer from only my wife can cure. Oh yes, in case of enemy attack on base by sappers, my assigned area to defend with an M16 is out the windows of my room.

28 February – Haven't been able to jot any thing down the last couple of weeks because I've been busy as hell. Besides the supply account, I was named the Wing awards and decorations ceremony officer and had to plan a major ceremony that came off today. Two Recce guys got the silver star, including our Squadron C.O. for a good job on missile sites in North Vietnam. Came back all shot up but with good photos of Sam locations. General Brown, the CIC of 7AF did the honors and also awarded our Wing the Presidential Unit Citation

2 March – Before I could finish the last entry I was rushed off to Udorn to hide an aircraft from expected VC rocket attacks on the base. So far none has hit our base. I leave for Udorn again tomorrow. This will be my 18th mission. So far everything has come up roses. We hit two targets today that were high threat areas, ie. numerous AAA firings. But I didn't see anyone shooting at us. Hope this keeps up. I had dinner last night in Udorn with Jim Mickulecky, Jim Ruest, and Gordon Guenter. It was good talking to them again. They are flying almost every day. Guess their Squadron the 11<sup>th</sup> is a little short of people.

Later I had my first Thai bath by a 15 year old girl but the massage felt good after the long flight. Everything was on the up and up. No hanky-panky (with a 15 year old?) She sang little Thai songs for me and when I told her I had a daughter about her age she thought I was a great papa son.

6 March – I have enough points for an air medal now. Eighteen in-country and Laos missions and one double counter into North Vietnam. That mission had a little extra excitement because as we were exiting from the North into Laos, we got a two ring AAA strobe on our 25/26 which indicated we were being tracked by AAA. We started jinking and the pilot, George Heinrick, called for me to throw on the jammers. I did and the strobe on the 25/26 broke contact. George thought the jammers did it but I knew better – they were not warmed up yet. Somehow the jinking must have done it. I didn't tell George about the time required for jammer warm up because I didn't want to shake him up anymore than he already was.

We are under strict orders not to tell anyone we are flying missions into Laos. It's all political because the papers back home know we are flying there. It's just that if we officially omit it, it might blow up the Paris Peace talks or put our diplomats in an untenable position.

I flew my first mission with my assigned pilot, Bill McCaffrey, yesterday and I fly with him again today. Wish we could fly as a crew all the time but the flying schedule just won't work that way.



7 March – We are getting shot at a little more than usual in the last few days. Col. Poe, our Vice Wing Commander, took a hit in the wing but got home safely. Jack Fiscus said he went through a hail of bullets down in IV Corp and doesn't know how he kept from getting hit.

Some of the old heads are rotating back to the States since their year is over. Olie Olson, an old friend from B-47 days left yesterday. (He was killed a few months later in a F4 training accident) Bill Fall, an old friend from Squadron Officer School days, leaves in a few more days as does Pittman. We will miss those guys both in the air and around the club,

10 March – Flew my 20<sup>th</sup> in-country mission last night with Bill McCaffery. We had a photo flash strip and a couple of infra-red areas. On the first photo flash run I dicked up and fired my carts too early, so we made another run and this time got the target. This would be a dangerous thing to do in a heavily defended area but this area was relatively safe. Later in Laos we would purposely fire three carts and jink away to draw AAA fire from the Ho Chi Min Trail gunners so our F4 cap could come down on them with bombing fury. But this night we watched one hell of a fire fight going on below us. Tracers and flares were going off everywhere. We kept a close eye on those tracers to make sure none were coming our way.

I probably should record here a bit about the sensors we use to obtain intelligence on the target. The sensors we used depended on day or night missions, scale of photograph required, etc. During the day we use several different camera configurations mounted in the nose section of the aircraft. Which of these cameras we use depends on the scale required by intelligence, enemy defenses that will effect the altitude and speed we fly, and the type of target we are after. The KS-72, mounted in the forward nose, does a good job on pin point targets such as base camps, bridges, and airfields; but requires extreme accuracy in getting the camera over the target. The KA56A, mounted in the mid-section of the nose, does a good job on winding roads, railways and area covers because it scans from horizon to horizon but requires very low altitude

for good photography. The KA55, mounted in the rear nose section, does good on area covers because it covers a large area from a good altitude but it requires a slow speed which is no good in a heavily defended area. In its' place we often put two KS72s mounted for split vertical shots. This give us fairly good coverage at any speed we want, which makes a good utility player for us as they say in baseball. We also put the K72 in an oblique in the mid section of the nose, which allows us to take pictures of targets off to the left or right of the aircraft depending on how it is mounted. This comes in handy when we fly along the Cambodian border. We are "not allowed" to fly over the border but we need to get pictures of what Charlie is doing just on the other side of the border.

At night we can use the KS72 in the forward nose or in the split-vertical configuration if we use photo flash cartridges which will illuminate the area for us. The only problem is that Charlie can follow the string of lights and take pot shots at us. This type of photography requires extreme accuracy and low altitude. Our favorite night sensor is the infra-red. It is mounted below the rear cockpit and give good coverage at 2000 feet altitude with out any flashes to give away our position. It detects the heat in various objects and when processed looks like an actual photograph. We also have a sensor called the side-looking radar, mounted below and to the rear of the rear cockpit. When processed the picture looks like a picture of radar returns. It has several classified uses and is especially good for pictures along the coast but we seldom use it. It has too many draw backs to go into.

So much for the sensors of the RF4C Phantom II, which incidently is a two engine jet fighter capable of speeds up to 2.5 mach. Since TET ended this year on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the fighting here has been fierce. Charlie has been lobbing rockets into Saigon about every other night and hitting some of our bases too. The ground fighting around Saigon has been active almost everyday. I think Charlie is trying to get a military advantage to give them strength at the Paris Peace talks but they are going about it in a piece meal fashion. The B52s wont let them mass for a large push to really be effective.

14 March – Just landed from my 28<sup>th</sup> mission and had a little action. I flew with the Squadron CO, LT/Col Barnard, on three targets along the Cambodian border. F4s were making bombing strikes about two miles off our wing and forward air control aircraft and helicopter gun ships were every where. About three miles off of the border some Charlie jerk decided to shot us down with his 12.5AAA. He missed by yards and the gun ships were on him like cats on a mouse. I didn't see the end but I'm sure that particular Charlie will never shoot at an RF4C.

In every war there are a few high ranking jerks around and this war is no exception. The Base Commander is trying to take our club away from us. We built that dude with our own hands and government material. We got the material because we said it was to be a training facility for the Squadron – and we do use it for that. But we also built a bar in it and now the Base CO is saying we are not using the facility in a legal manner and so he wants to take it from us. Our Squadron CO and the Wing CO are fighting it. I don't know how this will turn out but some of the younger troops who helped build it say they will burn it down if we lose it. A radical idea but I may help them. Time will tell.

18 March – Clem Bellion came back from a mission up North and found on his K55 and K56 film that a Sam had been fired at him. They knew the Sams were tracking them so they threw on the jammers. But they actually didn't see the missile until they saw it on the film – spotted by some sharp photo interpreter. It must have been the jammers that saved them – at least we all hope our jammers are that good. I go up there Friday with the Wing CO. My ghoulish brethren have asked for many of my personal items in case I don't come back.

2 April – As I thought when I began the journal, I haven't been very faithful in keeping it current. Since my last entry I have flown several missions in Laos with the Wing CO or the Squadron CO. The Squadron CO and I got an airborne call to make a bomb damage assessment on



a "tank" reported hit by an F4. We had a hell of a time finding it because it really turned out to be a enemy truck on an off trail. But we did it , I'm proud, and one fighter jock is embarrassed and wishes he hadn't called for confirmation from Recce pukes.

I've also spent six days in Bangkok for a little rest and recuperation. Spent lots of money, lived like a king. Tomorrow its' back in the air on a classified mission called French Leave. If we don't come back nobody will claim we were where we where. Henrick, our Ops Officer, took a hit a few days ago. Damage very light – they didn't even know they were hit for sure until they got on the ground and saw the holes.

On one mission I flew with the Wing CO, we went looking for enemy ground troops in the Ah Shau valley. He doesn't see well and went very low and very slow through the valley. I looked up and could see lines of enemy infantry on mountain trails on both sides of us. Before they could get over looking down at an RF4C, I pushed the throttles up, turned the cameras on and said let's get out of here before we take rifle fire from above. A real odd situation. I guess that is why they have me fly with old weak eyes.

7 April – I have flown 40 missions now and since the Squadron has got in a lot of new men, I'm beginning to feel like an old head. Some of these missions have been French Leave which those not flying it don't even know about it. I was first rather proud I was selected for it but then found out I was a volunteer– nobody told me that but guess I would have "volunteered" anyway had I known it was an all volunteer only mission.

Since the new men are getting checked out, I'm am only flying about every other day. Quite a change from last month. But next month many old heads rotate back to the States so my flying should pick up. Our Squadron is very good about trying to get us out of country every two or three months. My next trip will probably be to the Philippines in June.

16 April – The 16<sup>th</sup> TRS lost another aircraft on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April and I have been selected to be on the accident investigation board. New experience but not a very pleasant task.

I flew again with the Wing CO, this time into Laos on a night mission on the 13<sup>th</sup>. All went well but the boys who went through the same area that day had a lot of lead thrown at them. Nobody got hit – damn lucky.

With the accident board and this months awards ceremony to plan, I'm not flying very much and I'm getting a little buggy. I came over here to fly combat and don't feel I'm doing my job unless I do. So yesterday I got on a test flight with Tony Melli. Tony really put the bird through its' paces. He is one hell of a fine guy and has requested me as his stand board navigator. It would be another feather in my cap if I get it.

Bad news. Clem Bellion, my flight leader, was notified his boy was killed in an accident on his bike. They sent Clem home PCS since he was to rotate home next month anyway.

25 April – Accident Board work is all but over and am I glad. By Sunday I should be back to flying again. I hope the Wing Exec gets some body else to plan the awards ceremony on the 30<sup>th</sup>. The accident board was more frustrating than interesting because we had so little to work with. Pilot was killed, the navigator really didn't know what happened. I think one of their flight instruments failed or was battle damaged. The wreck is in VC hands so we can't investigate further.

Al McCartor was hit yesterday on a new Laos mission. Not much damage, just messed up the camera compartment. He landed in Udorn to check the damage, then flew it back home.

Thirteen old heads are leaving next month and they are flying their final missions this week. Many a "hose-down" is scheduled and the going away party is tomorrow night. Black flying suits will be the required dress.

30 April – Oh God, its hit close to home now. Fran Stewart, my good friend from Command and Staff College, was killed this morning in a crash landing at Da Nang, after being hit over Ban La Boi, Laos. We played on the College volleyball team, he was a great setter and I was his spiker. We won the base championship at Maxwell AFB by beating the Squadron Officer School team that nobody was suppose to be able to beat. Fran here was assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup> our sister squadron, and this is the third aircraft they have lost since I have been here. Only one out of six crewmen survived. Fran was such a good man in all ways. A true Christian, probably one of the few I've ever known. I'm sick inside. Death does not seem to differentiate between the good and the bad. But surely God will have a place for Fran. I know I am a better man because I knew him but I now feel nothing but loss.

5 May – I now have over 50 missions which means I'm about one-fourth through it all. Nothing much exciting has happened during my last few missions. I'm flying quite a bit with McCaffery. He lets me fly the plane a lot which is enjoyable. I dove the plane from 30,000 feet, rolled it going down and pulled it out at the pilot directed altitude. Helped get my confidence back in the fun of flying over no threat areas. After Fran's death I thought I might be a little shaky in the plane but I'm alright. For some reason I don't feel fear as much as I did before. Maybe it's age and experience or maybe I'm just numb to what is going on around me in this war zone.

23 may – The war must be about over, next month we are going to be inspected by an Inspector General team from higher headquarters – to include tests and all the crap we had to put up with in a peace time State assignment.

Another job came floating down to me from Wing. They want me to write Colonel Westberg's and General Holbury's end of tour report for Corona Harvest. I am certainly not qualified to do this because I am not fully cognizant of all that has gone on in the Wing during the past year.



Tomorrow I am to meet with Colonel Westberg to see just how much he wants to make of this report.

I am flying now with Tony Melli as he is the standboard pilot and I am the standboard navigator. On going into Phu Cat AB yesterday after a day mission, we were fired upon about 15 miles from the base. Looked like 23MM. Seems the bad guys are moving in pretty close to our alternate photo operations center.

Actually all of the Bases have been getting rocket attacks this month. We were hit with three at our Base a few days ago. No real damage done. I even missed that, thank God, because I was RON at Phu Cat with a bad generator at the time. Anyway it gives us something to wonder about. I think they just want us to know they can still hit us any time they like.

I've flown 16 missions with about 29 hours so far this month. I now have about 65 missions total.

5 June – things are getting a little terse up in Laos and Route Pack One in North Vietnam. Yesterday Tom Brown, the elder, got hit in the wheel well and today Tony Melli with Tom Brown, the younger, in the backseat, got hit in the tail. I was flying with George Heinrick. Also heard at dinner tonight that an RF4 out of Udorn was shot up over Route Pack One but made it to the sea and both crewmen were rescued.

My flying is minimal now as I am working on Colonel Westberg's report. Tomorrow I'll fly my 70 mission with young Larry Speight. He is still checking out as he is a recent graduate from flying training. It will be his 11<sup>th</sup> mission and I will monitor him closely.

Heard by the grapevine that young Tom Corbin, a general's son, was sent home from Udorn because of a nervous breakdown. He was Jerry West's navigator. Seems Tom decided he really didn't believe in what he was doing. I can't make any judgment because I don't know the whole story.

Al McCartor and Freddie Wells leave in a couple of days. They are the last of the "old heads" to go. For the next couple of months we should remain pretty stable manpower wise in the Squadron. All the new guys are about 3/4 the way through their checkout.

The monsoon season is here. It has rained every day for the last week or so. It has rained almost continuously today.

8 June – I finished the first draft of Colonel Westberg's report and if it doesn't get thrown back in my face, I should be back to flying in a day or two. My mission with Speight went well. He will make out well in what ever mission he is assigned.

The night before last VC came on base and blew up the ammo dumps. I was so dead asleep I didn't know it happened until someone told me. One impression of Tan Son Nhut I will always have is of hundreds of little brown men riding Honda motorcycles all over the base. I have to manage my peddle bike in among them almost every morning and evening. It gets to be a game of death-dodgers, more dangerous I think than the missions we fly. A more pleasant impression I will remember is the little doll like women in their long flowing split dresses with black silk slacks underneath. Some of these women are pretty and almost all are dainty. Each one reminds me of a small girl that matured early. I imagine we look like over grown giants to them. But Americans have been over here long enough that we are no longer strange creatures to them— just foreigners they will be glad to see go.

No good words from the Paris Peace Talks. I have just about given up on a peaceful withdrawal this year that would get me home early. My family has moved to Kiowa, Kansas, Genie's hometown, and don't I envy them. Kiowa is like a second home to me and all of the town has made me feel welcome and part of the community. •

13 June – flew mission number 73 at 0415 this morning (the dawn patrol) and had a little excitement. We lost our radar after the first target and we were on our way home when the aircraft sounded like it was coming apart. We declared an emergency and landed OK.

Seems like a turbine in the pressurization unit came unglued. All's well that ends well but I thought my pilot, young and inexperienced Lt Rowan, was going to bail us both out when the noise started.

26 June – Returned the day before yesterday from another wonderful time in Bangkok. Once again I ate and lived like a king, with shopping and sight seeing tours thrown in. Tomorrow I'll fly mission #78 with Tony Melli. President Nixon is pulling back 25,000 army troops but it remains to be seen if this will help any at the Paris Peace Talks. Don Steward had to go home on emergency leave. His wife is going to be operated on. He won't return as he already has 10 months over here. A new man came in yesterday named Jim Steward; a navigator who used to be in 101's in ADC.

7 July – Things are starting to slow down here now. I don't know if it is just a lull or if the war is actually coming to the beginning of the end. We were hit the other night with a few more rockets but it amounted to no more than harassment in answer to our artillery.

The brass is starting to become concerned with piss-ant things, which is another indication that the war is slowing down. Hope they don't bug us too much. Our new Wing CO's name is Colonel Chapman. The Vice CO is Colonel Fitzpatrick. Colonel Westberg's going away party is scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup>. Tomorrow night the grads from my ACSC class who are stationed here are having a reunion. I will attend.

I have 82 missions now. The rains are still with us and I'm working on the final details of Colonel Westberg's end of tour report. Spent last night in Phu Cat and ran into Merrill Dean, an old SOS comrade. He is stationed there with the F4 squadron and heard that I had been shot down over Laos and was missing in action. My body killed that rumor. Wish I could go home while the predictions of my death are still premature.



21 July – I am now starting on my second six months in Viet Nam. As they say here, I'm over the hump. As my first six months began with a big event, President Nixon's inauguration, so my second six months begins with an even bigger event; the landing on the moon by two of our astronauts. A great event in the history of man. By tomorrow, God willing, they will be on their way back home while I am flying my 89<sup>th</sup> mission.

We have started a new series of missions into North Vietnam and I have been tabbed to fly on the first few of these. Most of my writing so far has been about the missions we fly. I think in the next months I will write more about the people I have been associated with during my tour of duty here. I had dinner tonight with Tony Melli in the Vietnamese Officers' club. Excellent oriental food. But a little expensive.

29 July – Gene Murphy, an open-hearted next door Irishman, is leaving the squadron. He is being assigned to a Direct Air Support Center somewhere in South Vietnam. He will be missed by all because he is the type of guy who knows how to enjoy himself and help others do the same. He had an unfortunate run in with the squadron CO when he first arrived and has been in and out of hot water with him ever since. Gene doesn't care much about flying so is not too unhappy about the new assignment in the sticks. However I will miss him as a handball opponent and a good conversationalist. He is one of the men I have got to know pretty well here and I really hate to see him go. But it is a small Air Force and I'll probably run into him again someday.

9 August – Al Drew took a bad hit today and is damn lucky to be back. A 12.7 AAA went through his left oblique camera window, slit open the split-vertical camera, then through the fire wall, just missing his foot and ending up on the cockpit floor. The hit happened just west of the A Chau valley, and they headed for the water. All his fire warning lights were on but the engines and hydraulics were OK so they made an emergency landing at Da Nang with out an airspeed indicator or radios. Lt/Col Yohannan was in the back seat. They are just damn lucky to be

back.

I fly a French Leave mission tomorrow with the new Wing CO. Then tomorrow night, if I get back, I'm scheduled for 5 days at Clark AFB, PI to attend FTD training.

18 August – Back from the French Leave mission and back from Clark AB. Again I had a good time, spent lots of money, etc. I've flown my 100 missions now. Number 99 was interesting. It was a night mission into a suspected North Vietnamese Army staging area. We only covered 50% of our target due to weather but what we got filled three pages of significant data for the generals up in 7<sup>th</sup> AF Headquarters. From our mission results they decided to launch four more recce sorties that day and scheduled 10 B52 raids into the area that night. I felt we had really found the enemy for them this time. This is good since the fighting has picked up again and we need to hit them before they hit us. The French Leave mission I flew before going to Clark AB was against a suspected enemy POW camp. I never did learn the results of our mission but if we found it the follow up would be very hush/hush.

19 August – The 16<sup>th</sup> lost another aircraft last night. It crashed a few miles after takeoff. The crew bailed out OK but the plane went into a village killing two people and wounding seven others. That is four aircraft the 16<sup>th</sup> has lost since I have been here. A hard luck squadron.

29 August – a couple of days ago, I went with Tony Melli out to the crash site of that 16<sup>th</sup> bird to look for a missing part the investigating board wanted. We didn't find the part but I got a good close look at country life in Vietnam. I watched them work the rice paddies, fish, barter, etc. It was an interesting trip but I was glad to be back in the confines of the base. The only protection we had was our .38s and we were in no man's land that is run by the VC at night. (Afterthought: I think it was this outing that I got exposed to Agent Orange for which I suffered two types of cancer much later in life.)

Charlie must have gotten in a big supply of ammunition.. Someone gets shot at almost everyday now. A day or two ago, Bob Plowden was hit in the wing tank. He jettisoned the tank and landed safely at Da Nang AB. Intelligence guys also tell us that the North Vietnamese are concentrating their AAA in certain area now with the sole purpose of trying to get an reconnaissance plane. Egad, what a war.

Raleigh Lawrence, my big Texas buddy, is going home on emergency leave. His family was in a big hurricane that hit the Gulf states this month. There is a possibility that he won't come back as he has been over here better than six months. Raleigh is the kind of guy that can fix anything and the squadron will miss his fix-it-myself ability. He has been passed over three times for major – only problem was he was in ATC followed by an AFTT assignment, pure death for a flyer on our good old Air Force promotion Board.

13 September – Had a little excitement yesterday. I'm checking out a new lieutenant (Davis) and we lost our generators. Had to declare an emergency, jettison our center line tank and make a barrier engagement on our runway. First time I've done this and it all went well. The Wing CO, DCO, and Squadron CO were out on the end of the runway to watch the show. The only thing that made me nervous was this was the way Fran Stewart was killed. Course the big difference was we didn't have battle damage, got rid of our center line tank before landing and the gear held up for us. Except for all the fire trucks, ambulances, rescue helicopters, and the actual barrier engagement, it was a routine landing. Second time in my career I've had to get out of an aircraft on the runway after landing.

The lieutenant colonels promotion list came out yesterday and seven out of ten made it. That is a good ratio but we all felt sorry for the three that didn't make it. Especially sense at least two of them are outstanding flyers.

Dumb Phil Lawton, old SOS buddy, walked into the trailing edge of an RF4C wing and cut his head open. This could happen to anyone but



I would put money on Phil every time for the one who would do it.

Last happy thought for the day. I meet Genie for R&R on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October. Oh yes, Bob Reeves came back from emergency leave last night.

29 September – The war is slowing down quite a bit. President Nixon has ordered the withdrawal of more troops and said he would like to end our involvement in this war in 1970. With any luck I'll be home by then. We still get shot at about every other day but no one has taken a hit in several days. This war would end tomorrow if it wasn't for the government of South Vietnam. They can't protect themselves against the North or even their own people and that government is not worth protecting for my money. But we have made our bed and now we must lie in it.

Roger Estep, Joe Riley, and Jim Robin left for home today. Rog is going to TAC Headquarters, Joe to the USAF IG Team, and Jim to Bergstrom AFB to train recce nubies. Good luck to them. Genie has made our reservations in Hawaii and now is just a matter of counting the days: one month to go.

In about three more missions I will have Lieutenant Davis all checked out. Then I may go to Taiwan to pick up a repaired RF4C. I'll only stay one night but it will help pass the time and I may buy Genie a wig there. Lord, how I miss that woman. Tonight I fly my 125<sup>th</sup> mission.

17 October – Long time since I've made an entry. Nothing very exciting has happened. For various reasons I have flown very little since my last entry. Mostly I'm checking out new pilots in the combat business as it exists in South Vietnam at this time. There is a definite lull in the war but nothing positive is coming out of the Paris Peace talks. Rumors are flying that some of us will go home early.

Bob Plowden and Tom Brown (the younger) picked up another hit yesterday, so flying can still be a little hairy even if the end is in sight. I have 130 missions now. I'm shooting for at least 160— should get some

over that. I went to Taiwan to pick up another repaired RF4C. Had a good time, spent lots of money and got out of Vietnam for awhile.

25 October – Flying has picked up a bit for me now. I have 139 missions. The ground fighting has picked up a bit also. We are getting more action in Laos now. Bob Garcia hit two large birds the other day and did more damage to the aircraft than most ground fire hits do. He got it home safe nevertheless. Forgot to mention on the flight home from Taiwan we almost hit the silk when our gas gage went haywire and said we would not have enough gas to make it to dry land. Luckily it was just a faulty gage and we had decided to ride it out until flame out.

I've been flying a lot of missions in Laos again. Things are pretty hot up there from ground fire. Flew in a test bird the other day that had been hit by ground fire. I had no radios because a bullet had severed a wire that maintenance had over looked. But we went to 42000 feet altitude and made a Mach 2 run followed by a series of loops and rolls. Some fun and a good change from running targets.

6 November – Back from Hawaii R&R and down with a cold. Genie and I had a perfect, never to be forgotten six days. Lord how I love that woman. Also came back to find my next assignment waiting for me. I'm staying in RF4Cs and going to the 15<sup>th</sup> TRS in Okinawa at Kadena Air Force Base. I'll go home for a long leave and go back to Kadena in March. Genie and kids will join me when I have a house for them, sometime after school is out in May.

The war has picked up again with Charlie starting n offensive drive out of Cambodia. Also there are small scrimishes just south of downtown Saigon going on daily. Larry Speight lost the front half of his centerline tank over Laos yesterday. Don't know yet if it was ground fire or not. A navigator out of Udorn was killed the other day by ground fire hitting him directly. Don't know his name yet. Hope to God it is not one of my friends up there.

**16 November – Our sister squadron the 16<sup>th</sup> had another bad day today. Two of their birds were hit by ground fire up in Laos. One made it to NKP for a safe landing, the other had to be abandoned over the ocean because it was not safe to land. Both crew members were picked up immediately.**

**I flew three sorties yesterday and one today. I have 148 missions now. Just a little over two months to go and then, God willing, its home for a long leave.**

**27 November – Oh Happy Thanksgiving Day. I'm going home 35 days early. I'll leave now the 15<sup>th</sup> of December and be home for Christmas. Part of President Nixon's troop reduction plan. (I think.) I now have 157 missions and probably will finish with 165 or so. God am I happy. What joy.**

**29 November – Earl Crosby was hit in the right engine the day before yesterday and lost his generators. He made into Da Nang AB for a rather hairy landing but saved the bird and crew. Bob Plowden was hit twice in the nose section today but brought it on home because nothing seemed to be damaged enough for the usual "nearest base" landing. Now that I'm short I'm getting more leery of ground fire. Hate to have anything happen this late in the game.**

**I found out that one of the F4s that went in over Laos the other day has Joe Echanis on board (old SOS buddy). He is listed as MIA but I know where he went in and I don't think there is much of a chance for rescue if he bailed out. What a useless war.**

**10 December – For me it is all over. I flew my last mission on the 8<sup>th</sup> and had the usual hose down and champagne plus the added attraction of a kiss from a USO entertainer, Miss Halane Morris. Not a bad looking girl. I'm glad its over, I was getting very tired. I flew 28 missions in the 33 days since returning from Hawaii. A lot of action on the Cambodian border again which kept us very busy.**



Now all that remains for me is to pack up and process out and turn my additional duties over to someone else. Maybe the war will end next year.

15 December – I can hardly believe it is ending almost like it started. I'm sitting in a 707 winging my way back home and Al Drew, Denny Gardner, and Tom Hicks are with me. Also there are seven other guys from the 12<sup>th</sup> on board, all going home early. They are: Bart Bartholomew, Jack Fiscus, Jon Cox, Tom Brown (the younger), Bill Flanagan, and Phil Patterson.

In about six hours we will be in San Francisco. Most of us are planning on staying over night there and proceed on home the next day. I will have one stop in Denver to see my folks at the airport and then on to Wichita where Genie, Robin and Jeff should be waiting.

I can still remember those three all huddled together at the airport in Austin watching me leave for a year. How sad that was – but now I will see them at the airport again and this time it should be all happiness.

I hope now “my war” is over. It ended with a fury of flying along the Cambodian border at places like Duc Lap and Bu Prong. Much ground fire, air strikes, priority one targets, near mid-air collisions, etc. But now things are quiet there again. The North Vietnamese were pushed back into Cambodia. I left it quiet, I hope it stays that way.

### PROLOG 1973

It is March 28, 1973 and in four days the last American troops will leave South Vietnam. The war was to rage on for three more years after I left, however the largest commitment of men in South Vietnam by the USA during the course of the war was in April of the year 1969 and I was one of them. Following that year there was a slow reduction of troops until 1972 when another large North Vietnamese offensive was countered by renewed bombing in the North by B-52s that resulted in