

# Black Friday over North Vietnam

By Dan Heller

*Editor's Note: This article is an abridged extract from a book to be titled Across the Wing due out the Fall of 2021 detailing the story of four combat squadrons of Carrier Air Wing Nine (CVW-9) during the 1966-1967 WESTPAC cruise to North Vietnam. The four squadrons are VA-35 (A-6A Intruder), VA-113 (A-4C Skyhawk), VA-96 (F-4B Phantom) and RVAH-7 (RA-5C Vigilante). Keep a eye out for this work, it should be an excellent read.*

*This is a true story. It is based on first-hand interviews of the men who were there as well as those with credible knowledge of the event. United States government documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) were also referenced extensively.*

May 19, 1967, a hazy Friday morning. The darkness of dawn quietly gave way to daybreak as the muddied, churning waters of the Gulf of Tonkin began to shimmer in rays of bright sunshine breaking through the broken cloud layers. Some 90 miles east of the North Vietnamese coastline, southwest of China's Hainan Island, the faint outlines of three massive vessels began to appear. United States Navy aircraft carriers *USS Enterprise* (CVA(N)-65)<sup>1</sup>, *USS Kitty Hawk* (CVA-63)<sup>2</sup> and *USS Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31) were operating from Yankee Station<sup>3</sup> as part of Task Force 77 (TF-77), providing round-the-clock missions deep into North Vietnam.

In the Integrated Operations Intelligence Centers (IOIC)<sup>4</sup> onboard the carriers, the pace of activity was rapidly picking up. Aircrew, intelligence officers, meteorologists and other specialists from the air wing gathered and reviewed photographs and other intelligence of their assigned targets for the late morning strike. In the IOIC aboard *Enterprise* Commander (CDR) Herman "Herm" Turk of VA-35 Black Panthers<sup>5</sup> methodically worked his tired eyes over a map of North Vietnam, covered with colored strips of paper marking ingress and egress routes, as well as the locations of known enemy positions that could pose a threat to the strike group composed of aircraft from both *Enterprise* and *Kitty Hawk*.

The strike group was going "Downtown," as American airmen called the Hanoi area, in a daylight Alpha Strike. The targets for the *Enterprise* and *Kitty Hawk* strike group was the Van Dien Truck Maintenance Depot and Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) Storage Facility just six miles south of the North Vietnamese capital in an area known as "Little Detroit"



*Fully armed A-6A of VA-35 heading to a target in North Vietnam (photo courtesy of George Patterson)*

for the numerous industrial complexes and factories located there. The Hanoi Thermal Power Plant (TPP) was the target of aircraft from *Bonne Homme Richard*, who were using Walleye6 bombs for surgical precision in the densely-populated capital of the north. All targets were heavily defended by Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA), SAMs and [North] Vietnamese People's Air Force (VPAF) Soviet-supplied MiG fighters.

For the Alpha Strike on Van Dien, Commander Turk would be commanding the aircraft from *Enterprise* Carrier Air Wing Nine (CVW-9) as flight leader of six state-of-the-art Grumman A-6A Intruders of VA-35, call-sign RAYGUN. The A-6, or "Drumstick" as it was affectionately known, had a side-by-side crew configuration, bulbous radome nose and oddly protruding refueling nozzle, which gave the aircraft an outwardly awkward appearance. However, appearance notwithstanding, the Intruder had proven to be extremely effective in Vietnam. It featured a revolutionary computerized combat, weapons and navigational Flight Management System (FMS) known as DIANE, or Digital Integrated Attack and Navigational Equipment. It was this technology that made the A-6 stand out among its predecessors and contemporaries. It could fly missions day or night in all weather conditions, guided by the Inertial Navigation System (INS),<sup>7</sup> advanced Doppler radar and other sensor systems. These features were immensely important in a theatre of conflict where low cloud cover and fog, soaring karst formations,<sup>8</sup> deep valleys and months of rainy monsoons often made low-level missions impossible for other aircraft. The Intruder could also carry 18,000 pounds of payload and pull heavy G-forces due to the rugged design of the airframe.

Another advantage of the A-6 was the unique crew configuration. During the design phase of the aircraft in the late 1950s engineers at Grumman theorized that a two-man crew sitting side-by-side would work better together and achieve greater results than the typical front-and-back crew configuration of contemporary combat aircraft. The idea was drawn from the effectiveness of Royal Air Force (RAF) de Havilland Mosquito crews in WWII. It became known as “Crew Concept”, and it worked better than the designers had ever planned.

Not only was the right-seater in an Intruder a bombardier, he was also a navigator (B/N). In addition to skillfully guiding the pilot to and from the target, the B/N also played a crucial role in weapons targeting and delivery. Sitting side-by-side in an Intruder, the pilot and B/N were equal, wholly dependent on each other for mission success or failure, life or death. For the “Crew Concept” of the A-6 to work efficiently, the two men had to operate as one. Their relationship had to extend beyond the close confines of the cockpit; they truly had to respect and trust each other for maximum combat effectiveness. It often took several crew rotations before the squadron commanders found the right combination of men to fly in combat together. Once a team, the pilot and B/N operated seamlessly, each always knowing what the other was doing. Vocal communication was not always necessary. Professional familiarity coupled with being side-by-side meant the men could communicate simply by glance or gesture.

Revolutionary for aircraft at the time, the A-6 pilot and B/N used Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) television screens that displayed DIANE navigation and target information by the use of radar-generated terrain display supplied by the advanced radar and INS systems onboard. The B/N also had a typewriter keyboard to interface the sophisticated computers<sup>9</sup> that powered the system, allowing easy entry of navigation waypoint coordinates. Navigational guidance from the B/N was fed directly to the pilot via computer link to his own television screen, known as the Vertical Display Indicator (VDI).

Praise and admiration for the Intruder was high among the men who flew them in combat. Beneath the modern cutting-edge digital avionics was a tough, rugged and resilient airplane

engineered to survive the rigors of combat and protect the crew. The two Pratt & Whitney J52-P8B engines provided plenty of power and were highly responsive, critical in situations such as outrunning enemy fighters or in case of a “bolter”<sup>10</sup> landing. It was also forgiving in slow flight such as approaching the carrier for landing, giving ample warning of an impending stall.<sup>11</sup> Visibility from the cockpit was excellent, providing an unobstructed and wider field of view than most other carrier-based attack or fighter aircraft.

Highly maneuverable and agile, it could out-turn most of its contemporaries including the vaunted F-4 Phantom. Critical components such as engines and hydraulics were protected by three-quarter inch armor plating. In the effusive words of VA-35 pilot Dave Cable “The old ‘Grumman Iron Works’ beast could take a licking and still get us home. I loved the old bird.”

As squadron commanders planned the mission IOIC, phones began ringing in *Enterprise* staterooms with wake-up calls from squadron duty officers for crews flying the late morning Alpha Strike mission. One of the phones that rang was in the stateroom of



*Red (R) and Kelly in front of an A-6A aboard Enterprise in the Tonkin Gulf. (photo courtesy of George Patterson)*

26 year-old Lt. James Kelly Patterson, a B/N of an Intruder from VA-35. Outgoing and handsome with brown hair and a stout, full frame his hazel eyes exuded confidence and character. Kelly hailed from Pasadena, Calif., and had graduated from the United States Naval Academy Class of 1963. He had briefly served as a Fleet Officer aboard the WWII-era destroyer *USS Renshaw*<sup>12</sup> (DD-499) before being accepted to Naval Flight Officer (NFO) school, earning his B/N wings in June 1965.

Another wake-up call went to 35 year-old VA-35 pilot Lt. Comdr. Eugene “Red” McDaniel. Red was a strapping six-foot, three-inch native of Kingston, North Carolina. The son of poor sharecropper parents, he had attended Campbell Junior College on an athletic scholarship for baseball, then went on to Elon College to finish his undergraduate degree. He was commissioned in the Navy immediately after graduation. By the time he met Kelly at VA-42 he was already a seasoned Naval Aviator, having earned his wings in 1956. He had both flown and instructed in the Douglas A-1 Skyraider and made a Mediterranean cruise on *USS Independence* (CVA-62) before transitioning to jets and ultimately the A-6. Red and Kelly



met in June of 1965 at Replacement Air Group (RAG)<sup>13</sup> VA-42 Green Pawns where they were paired and became an Intruder team.

Red remembers Kelly fondly. “He was a great guy, mild-mannered with a strong moral character. I remember him writing a letter to his parents stating he had no problem with humanitarian aid being given to North Vietnamese civilians. He was also very conscientious of collateral damage and always careful to positively identify the target before releasing ordinance. In fact, at times he was so careful it frustrated me.”

It was early autumn of 1966 when the men of VA-35 began preparing for their impending eight-month deployment to Vietnam onboard *Enterprise*, scheduled to begin in November 1966 and lasting through July 1967. With *Enterprise* ported across the country at NAS Alameda, the squadron began moving from Oceana to the west coast. Red remembers “When we were flying from Oceana to Alameda for deployment aboard *Enterprise* we had some fun. A little while after we took off, Kelly and I switched seats in flight. Now, the cockpit of the A-6 is cramped to begin with, and I am a tall individual. I don’t remember exactly how we did it, we must have twisted ourselves into pretzels. But we did it, and Kelly sat in the left seat flying for quite a while. If our command had found out we would have received a few choice words from the skipper, at the least!” Fortunately Kelly was no stranger to the control stick of an aircraft, having earned a private pilot’s license while training as a B/N in Oceana.

The act of switching seats in flight was symbolic of just how highly the two men regarded each other. As pilot Red was responsible for the aircraft and the lives of the crew aboard. To let a NFO in the left seat take control without a very good reason was highly unusual and strictly forbidden by military regulations. It was also viewed by many pilots as an affront to the years of grueling training they go through to earn their pilot wings. However, Red and Kelly switching seats was far from an act of willful disregard or defiance. Instead it was a mutual act of faith, confidence and trust representative of the close professional and personal relationship the two men were developing, one that cemented their bond as a team. By the time they flew their first mission over North Vietnam in December of 1966 they were close friends, and had become a well-oiled combat machine.

On *Enterprise*, as late morning of May 19 approached, the men of VA-35 assembled in their Ready Room<sup>14</sup> for a briefing from Commander Turk on IOIC details of the mission and from the squadron Air Intelligence Officer (AIO) on areas of SAM and AAA concentrations. The weather at their target was forecast as broken clouds, normally adequate for the Intruders to acquire required visual confirmation of their targets.

Flying in the right seat next to Commander Turk would be B/N Lt. (jg) Junior Grade Keith Urbanek. They were the lead aircraft, flying with the call-sign RAYGUN ONE. RAYGUN TWO was Ens. Nick Carpenter and B/N Ensign Richard “Kilo” Slaasted. RAYGUN THREE was Lt. Comdr. Red McDaniel and LT Kelly Patterson. RAYGUN FOUR was Lt. Steve Owen and B/N Lt.(jg) Bruce Borchers. RAYGUN FIVE was Lt. Comdr. Bob Miles and B/N Lt.(jg) Ken Van Lue. RAYGUN



(L-R) Kelly, Nick Carpenter, Richard Slaasted and Red receiving briefing in Ready Room of VA-35 (photo courtesy of George Patterson)

SIX was Lt.(jg) Dave Cable and B/N Lt.(jg) Stuart “Stuball” Johnson. The men were given cards with designated call-signs, frequencies and navigational waypoints, which they dutifully tucked into one of their many flight suit pockets.

The Intruders from *Enterprise* would each be carrying 22 Mk 82<sup>15</sup> bombs; five and a half tons of high explosives. Also in the *Enterprise* compliment would be approximately a dozen McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawks of VA-56 and VA-113, each carrying about 4,000 pounds of Mk 82 bombs. Rounding out the *Enterprise* strike group were approximately six McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantoms of VF-96, call-sign SHOWTIME and VF-92, call-sign SILVERKITE that were equipped with AIM-9 Sidewinder and AIM-7 Sparrow air-to-air missiles for MiG Combat Air Patrol (MiGCAP)<sup>16</sup> as well as Mk 82 bombs to take out any threatening AA<sup>17</sup> defenses. Vought F-8E Crusaders of VF-211 and VF-24 from Bon Homme Richard would be providing CAP fighter cover for the A-4 Skyhawks and F-4 Phantoms attacking the Hanoi TPP.

As they climbed into their Intruder the brown jersey<sup>18</sup> plane captain helped strap Red and Kelly into their Martin-Baker Mk.5 ejection seats. They also attached their G-suits to the air valves in the cockpit. G-suits are inflatable air bladders around the legs, thighs and torso that keep blood flowing to the brain during extreme G-maneuvers, preventing pooling of blood in the extremities that can starve the brain of oxygenated blood and lead to a deadly black-out condition.

With the announcement from the flight deck public address channel “1MC” to “start ‘em up” Red and Kelly ran through the engine start checklist while an MD-3A aircraft tractor equipped with a gas-turbine starter unit (“huffer”) pumped compressed air into the two Pratt & Whitney engines. They shortly came to life with a loud whine, and several minutes later DIANE came online. Red and Kelly then began running through the pre-takeoff checklist, ensuring their aircraft was ready for flight. Although the air conditioning systems were online, the heat in the cockpit was still stifling. Familiar beads of sweat began running down their necks, soaking the collars of their flight suits with perspiration. With the engine intakes directly



*F-4 Phantom and A-6A Intruder getting ready to launch from catapults of Enterprise (photo courtesy of George Patterson)*

beneath the canopy, opening it to let in some marginally cooler air was not an option.

RAYGUN 1 and RAYGUN 2 catapulted off the bow with mighty roars, putting RAYGUN 3 next in line. The plane director, a young enlisted aviation deckhand barely out of his teens wearing a yellow jersey, began guiding the Intruder towards the catapult, easing the aircraft into place. The plane director then made fists with his hands, and held his arms above his head with his wrists crossed. Red applied the wheel brakes and reduced the engine power to idle, stopping the aircraft. Two green-jersey catapult handlers secured the nose wheel to the catapult shuttle; the Jet Blast Deflector (JBD)<sup>19</sup> rose behind the empennage.<sup>20</sup> The plane director raised both of his arms over his head, fingers from each hand slightly touching, then spread his arms out to shoulder height. Slowly the wings of the A-6 lowered and were locked in place by Red by pushing down firmly the wing lock handle located between the seats.<sup>21</sup> With the wings down and locked, wind from the gulf shuddered the aircraft as errant wisps of condensed steam rose from the catapult slot. Manipulating the stick in every direction and pressing down alternatively on the rudder pedals, the control surfaces were responsive and clear. All instruments were indicating properly and within limits.

Two red-jersey ordnance handlers scampered underneath the aircraft and removed the bannered steel safety pins off the bombs hanging from the four Multiple Ejection Rack (MER) pylons, two on each wing. One of the red jerseys held up the

pins so Red could see them. The plane captain then appeared, showing Red three bannered landing gear lock pins. During this time Kelly entered and double-checked map coordinates using the keyboard just under his hooded radar scope. The INS, part of the DIANE system, would keep track of their exact location in the air and assist in guiding them to the target.

The plane director then held up closed fists and opened them, signaling Red to release the brakes. The Intruder began to strain against the holdback of the catapult keeping the aircraft in place. Another green jersey flashed a chalkboard with the weight of the fully-loaded aircraft scrawled across it, 60,400 pounds, which Red acknowledged with a thumbs-up, agreeing that the take-off weight matched his own calculations. Catapult steam pressure had to be set differently for every type of aircraft and its corresponding weight. Not enough pressure and the aircraft would be unable gain enough airspeed for takeoff and end up “in the drink.” Too much pressure could cause the nose of the aircraft to pitch up prematurely upon launch, or badly damage the nose wheel. Arresting wire (cross-deck pendant) resistance for landing aircraft also had to be set using the same weight considerations.

The young yellow jersey swept his arms towards the Catapult Officer, transferring control of the aircraft to him. The catapult officer (“shooter”), a non-flying pilot positioned next to the catapult, stood in front of the port (left) wing of RAYGUN 3, his uniform violently flapping in the wind. With Red and Kelly intently watching, he raised his arms and twirled





*Fully armed A-6A of VA-35 catapulting off Enterprise heading to a target in North Vietnam (photo courtesy of George Patterson)*

his fingers over his head. Red pushed the throttles all the way forward as both he and Kelly instinctively scanned their instruments and annunciator panel<sup>22</sup> to make sure everything was operating properly. Known as “run up”, it was their last chance to catch a potential problem before launching.

As 18,000 pounds of thrust hit the JBD, the Intruder pulled mightily against the holdback. With all systems go Red gave a salute to the catapult officer, then both he and Kelly rested their heads firmly against their seats to prevent catapult whiplash. At 1020 hours the catapult officer went to one knee under the wing and swept his arm forward towards the bow. At that same moment the catapult operator, in a protected enclosure next to the flight deck, pressed the catapult release button. Within two seconds RAYGUN 3 was hurtling off the carrier at 165 miles per hour, heading for a rendezvous point near the coast of North Vietnam with the other aircraft from *Enterprise* and *Kitty Hawk*, while Bon Homme Richard aircraft simultaneously began their trek to central Hanoi.

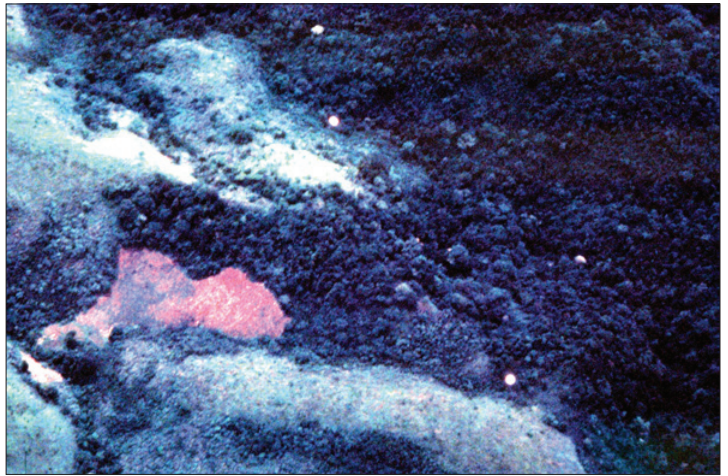
Seemingly innocuous North Vietnamese sampans and junks, drifting lazily in the gulf, began relaying information to their AA defense network inland, who were put on alert. Coastal observers, sighting the armada of aircraft, began ringing their superiors in Hanoi. AAA guns were loaded and SAM radar units were warmed up. Air raid sirens would soon be ringing throughout the capitol city.

Over the radio *USS Long Beach* (CG(N)-9)<sup>23</sup> call sign RED CROWN, a Navy Positive Identification Radar Advisory

Zone (PIRAZ) radar ship cruising in the Gulf of Tonkin began warning of enemy aircraft closing fast from the north. The ship provided vast radar coverage of the skies over North Vietnam, giving American aircraft another set of eyes. F-8 Crusaders from Bonne Homme Richard were vectored toward the bogies,<sup>24</sup> which were most likely a formation of VPAF MiG fighters.

Once joined in formation the strike group proceeded to the east coast of North Vietnam, going “feet dry”<sup>25</sup> at Sam Son, southeast of Thanh Hóa. It was then that a critical error in the planning of the mission became apparent. The strike group was having to fly at greatly reduced speed, much slower than normal for the Intruders and Phantoms. This enabled the slower and heavily-laden Skyhawks to climb to their altitude and keep up with the other aircraft. As the strike group was climbing through 15,000 feet the Intruder airspeeds were so slow that, fully loaded with fuel and weapons, they were near stalling at the slightest movement of the control stick. At such low airspeed and reduced power, they could barely maneuver, and thus were highly vulnerable to SAM and AAA fire.

Suddenly, 35 miles southwest of the target, the red missile warning light began flashing in the cockpits of the strike group. Commander Turk came on the radio and announced “blinking red,” with other pilots quickly confirming the same. Simultaneously, a buzzing began to blare into the headsets of the Intruder crews, akin to a rattlesnake, warning them they were being painted by “Spoon Rest” radar. Soon the buzzing became an intense “warble” tone, similar to a French police siren, but



*Raygun 502 in a fiery plunge (L) and two good parachutes observed (photos courtesy of Captain Paul Daley USNR Ret.)*

at a faster tempo. This meant the SAM frequency had changed from “Spoon Rest” S-Band tracking to SNR-75 (NATO: “Fan Song”) L-Band guidance mode. Numerous missiles had been launched and were in the air heading for the formation, their rising white exhaust plumes intermittently visible through the broken clouds. An A-4 pilot of VA-113 from *Enterprise*, who had patched a tape cassette recorder into the radio system<sup>26</sup> of his Skyhawk recorded the strike group radio transmissions as they encountered numerous SAMs in the air:

RAYGUN 1: “Blinking red!”  
 Unknown Aircraft: “We got a blinker.”  
 RAYGUN 1: “Missiles 10 o’clock low!”  
 RAYGUN 1: “Missiles just lifting off 12 o’clock!”  
 RAYGUN 3: “RAYGUN 3 breaking up!” (Red’s voice)  
 RAYGUN 4: “RAYGUN 4 is hit!”  
 Unknown Aircraft: “Missiles coming from 12 o’clock!”  
 RAYGUN 1: “RAYGUN 4, you say you’re hit?”  
 RAYGUN 4: “Yeah, so is RAYGUN 3, he’s burning.”  
 RAYGUN 1: “How you doin’ RAYGUN 3?”  
 RAYGUN 3: Unintelligible voice communication  
 (Kelly’s voice).  
 RAYGUN 3: “OK Red, let’s get out of here, huh?”  
 (Kelly’s voice).  
 Unknown Aircraft: “RAYGUN 3 has two good chutes.”  
 SHOWTIME 7: “SHOWTIME 7, I have two parachutes  
 at 9 o’clock.”  
 Unknown SILVERKITE: “This is SILVERKITE. I just  
 saw the plane go in.”  
 SHOWTIME 3: “RAYGUN, this is SHOWTIME 3, are  
 you going to stay with the chutes?”  
 Unknown Aircraft: “We got two beepers.”

Dave Cable, piloting RAYGUN 6 on the mission that day remembers “Within seconds of the missile alert, I saw the orange and yellow flash and felt the concussion of an exploding SAM as it detonated right next to Red and Kelly just after

they had jettisoned their munitions<sup>27</sup> and began to take evasive action. They were at our eleven o’clock position and a little above us, about 200 feet away. As it exploded, fragments of the missile appeared to have sliced right through their aircraft.”

A single SAM had detonated between RAYGUN 3 and RAYGUN 4, sending a blast of shrapnel into the right side of RAYGUN 3, crippling the hydraulics and rendering the aircraft uncontrollable. RAYGUN 4 was also impacted by the blast concussion, which jarred the aircraft violently. Believing their Intruder to be damaged, pilot Steve Owen and B/N Bruce Borchers set a course for *Enterprise*, where they landed safely a short time later.

RAYGUN 3 began streaming raw jet fuel from the starboard (right) wing and losing altitude. At 2,000 feet above ground level (AGL) and with airspeed rapidly increasing Kelly ejected, followed a few seconds later by Red. Two good parachutes were observed by other aircraft in the strike group, accompanied by audible tones of the locator beacons<sup>28</sup> from the radios attached to their flight suits. RAYGUN 3 continued airborne, unmanned, plunging steeply before suddenly becoming fully engulfed in flames over an area of North Vietnam known as “Banana Valley.” Red witnessed the burning Intruder impact the jungle in a fireball as he was descending in his parachute.

F-4 Radar Intercept Officer (RIO)<sup>29</sup> Lt.(jg) Paul Daley of VF-96 momentarily took his eyes off the radar scope to take photos with his Nikon 35mm camera. One photo showed RAYGUN 3 on fire above the jungle floor, streaming jet fuel, while a subsequent photo showed two deployed parachutes drifting towards the ground several hundred feet apart. As Kelly had ejected a few seconds before Red, they became separated, landing on either side of a high ridge on a hill.

The rest of the strike group continued to their target, only to find a solid overcast layer of clouds at 8,000 feet AGL that caused Commander Turk to abort the attack at the last minute due to inadequate target visibility.

Dave Cable is still frustrated that the mission was aborted. “Having just lost Red and Kelly and after evading multiple





(L-R) Richard Slaasted, Stuart Johnson, Dave Cable and Red on flight deck of *Enterprise* (photo courtesy of George Patterson)



Pilots and Bombardiers/Navigators of VA-35 enroute to Yankee Station and North Vietnam Fall 1966 (photo courtesy of George Patterson)

SAMs, we were a bit on edge, extremely disappointed and admittedly quite angry at being ordered not to press the attack on Van Dien. Even though my B/N had a radar lock on the target, our orders required visual confirmation with our own eyeballs. A radar lock was not sufficient for positive identification. If Commander Turk could not see it with his eyes, then none of us could, so we aborted. We left the area, departing to the south en route to our secondary target, a bridge on Route 1 a few miles north of Vinh.”

After aborting the attack on Van Dien Nick Carpenter and Richard Slaasted broke off from the strike group and headed back to where RAYGUN 3 had gone down. While flying over the crash site around noon they picked up two beepers, which was followed by a radio exchange<sup>30</sup>:

“This is RAYGUN 502.” Nick immediately recognized the voice of Kelly.

“This is RAYGUN 505, read you loud and clear” Nick replied.

“Is that you, Steve?” Kelly asked, thinking he was talking to Steve Owen.

“Negative, this is Nick. What is your condition?”

“I am okay but I have a badly broken left leg and won’t be able to move” Kelly answered.

“Roger that 502” Nick replied.

Just seconds later another voice came over the radio:

“This is 502 on deck” called out Red.

“Roger, I read you” Nick responded, “what is your condition?”

“I am okay” Red replied, not mentioning his badly injured lower back.

Nick contacted rescue forces on the radio, and relayed the coordinates and condition of Red and Kelly. The area where they landed was hilly and jungled, remote but accessible to

rescue forces, with no local enemy activity or hostile fire yet observed. With a full bomb load and their A-6 low on fuel, they flew over the men one more time, rocking their wings as they passed overhead. Setting a direct course for *Enterprise*, they were eager to get back and monitor the rescue operation from the squadron Ready Room. If necessary they would launch again to provide support for rescue efforts.

Red and Kelly were not the only naval aviators lost over North Vietnam that day. Pilot Comdr. Richard Rich<sup>31</sup> and RIO Lt. Comdr. William Stark were flying a F-4B Phantom (BuNo. 152264) of VF-96 from *Enterprise* (SHOWTIME 1). Their aircraft was hit by multiple missiles just minutes after Red and Kelly were shot down, causing catastrophic damage. William Stark ejected and was seriously injured. He survived and was captured about 20 miles south of Hanoi. Imprisoned as a POW for six years, he was repatriated in March of 1973 during Operation Homecoming.<sup>32</sup> The remains of Richard Rich, who was the Executive Officer (XO)<sup>33</sup> of VF-96 were repatriated in April 2000 and identified 10 months later.

Pilot Lt.(jg) Joseph Plumb and RIO Lt.(jg) Gareth Anderson were flying an F-4B Phantom (BuNo. 153004) from VF-114 off *Kitty Hawk*, providing fighter cover for the mission over Hanoi that day. An hour after departing the carrier, south of Hanoi, a SAM hit and destroyed their F-4. Both men ejected, were captured and imprisoned as POWs until repatriated during Operation Homecoming.

Pilot Lt. Comdr. R. Kay Russell was flying an F-8E Crusader (BuNo. 150930) of VF-211 from Bon Homme Richard. He was leading the flight of six F-8s to provide MiG CAP fighter cover for the attack on the Hanoi TPP. Lt. Commander Russell was first hit by ground fire, then a SAM. He was able to eject safely before being captured, and was repatriated during Operation Homecoming.

Pilot Lt.(jg) William Metzger was flying an F-8E Crusader (BuNo. 147021) of VF-24 from Bon Homme Richard. He

was hit by intense anti-aircraft fire, including several rounds penetrating the cockpit. Seriously injured and with his aircraft on fire, he ejected about 10 miles west of Hanoi and was immediately captured. He was repatriated during Operation Homecoming with wounds that would plague him for the rest of his life.

Later that day pilot Lt. Comdr. James Griffin and RAN Lt. Jack Walters were flying a photo reconnaissance mission in a RA-5C Vigilante (BuNo. 150826) of RVAH-13<sup>34</sup> from *Kitty Hawk*. They were tasked with photographing post-strike Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA)<sup>35</sup> on the targets that had been attacked in and around Hanoi. Approaching the city from the south, the Vigilante was at an altitude of 3,500 feet with a supersonic airspeed of 700 knots (805 mph) when they were hit by intense ground fire. With flames erupting from the airframe the men ejected 10 miles northwest of Hanoi. Immediately captured alive and taken as prisoners, both died in captivity several days later by unknown causes. Their remains were repatriated to the United States and identified in 1974.

It had indeed been a dark and costly day for American naval aviation. Six aircraft were lost, two from each carrier along with 10 men. It was an emotional gut punch for the sailors steaming on Yankee Station, one that would be felt for the remainder of the conflict, and many years thereafter. It had been especially painful for the men of VA-35, who had operated for many months without a single loss. B/N Ken Van Lue, in a letter to his wife, wrote of the day “VA-35’s luck finally has run out...it’s getting to be a shitty war!” From that day forward May 19, 1967, was infamously referred to by naval aviators of Vietnam as “Black Friday”.

Despite the heavy losses, the mission did have limited success. The strike group had managed to hit a number of targets that caused measurable damage, while the Bonne Homme Richard aircraft scored direct hits on the Hanoi TPP. The F-8 Crusaders, which had been dispatched early in the mission ingress to intercept enemy aircraft, shot down four VPAF MiG-17s in the ensuing dogfights, while losing two of their own. It was also good news that Red and Kelly were confirmed alive, with an accurate pinpoint on their location.

On standby for Search and Rescue (SAR) were the USAF Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS). The ARRS crews, stationed at numerous bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, were ready to dispatch at a moment’s notice. Typically, when an aircraft went down and survivors confirmed alive, a SAR effort was immediately launched, even if it was in an area with enemy activity.

Once activated two Sikorsky HH-3 Jolly Green Giant or Sikorsky HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters accompanied by two A-1 Skyraider “Sandy”<sup>36</sup> aircraft would be dispatched from their bases or loiter areas. The Skyraiders would use their considerable firepower to clear the area of enemy activity and would stay on-station for the duration of the rescue to provide additional assistance. Once the area was cleared of known threats a Jolly Green (“Low Bird”) would come to a hover over the downed aircrew, and a jungle penetrator<sup>37</sup> lowered by winch. A Pararescueman (PJ) could

be lowered in the penetrator to assist the survivor if he was injured or unable to do so himself. The second Jolly Green (“High Bird”) would hover nearby, providing suppressing fire and taking over in recovery, if necessary. For difficult rescues additional air resources such as the F-4 Phantom or Republic F-105 Thunderchief could be called in to help keep enemy ground forces at bay and provide MiGCAP. In addition, there were also a few clandestine American airbases operating in Laos that were known to lend a hand in rescue, when they could do so discretely.

However, the brave ARRS heroes of the Jolly Greens and Skyraiders would not appear that day for Red and Kelly. For some inexplicable and unknown reason, contrary to the mission of the ARRS, a rescue effort was denied. Gen. William “Spike” Momyer, Commanding Officer of the USAF 7th Air Force located at Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon had made the decision. For now, Red and Kelly were on their own.

The heat was nearly unbearable as the afternoon sun blazed overhead. Remembering the Survive, Evade, Resist and Escape (SERE) training by Negrito tribesmen in the Philippines, Red tried to reach high ground where he could keep an eye out for approaching NVA forces. Being elevated would also increase the chances he would be able to contact and signal the rescue forces that would inevitably appear.

Though he had attempted to raise Kelly on the radio numerous times, Red had received no answer. Their UHF radios were line of sight, and being separated by a high ridge meant their transmissions to each other were most likely blocked. Both could hear the transmissions of aircraft overhead, but not necessarily each other. He figured that perhaps, once on high ground, he would be able to contact Kelly and possibly locate him. Off in the distance he heard whistles, most likely local militia or a PAVN patrol searching for them. The whistles became fainter and fainter, until he was no longer able to hear them. Drenched with perspiration and in considerable pain from back injuries, he began trying to climb to the top of the ridge that separated him from Kelly.

Later in the afternoon, after climbing about halfway up the ridge and completely exhausted, he called out Kelly’s name. There was no answer. Another attempt on the radio also failed. Slumping against a tree trunk, he sprayed insect repellent on his exposed limbs and donned the mosquito net from his survival kit. With a throbbing pain in his back and distant, bygone images of domestic bliss filling his head, he dozed off.

Red was awakened around 2200 by pouring rain. It was so heavy, coming in torrential downpours, it made an unmistakable roar as it pelted the heavy jungle canopy. The distinct sound of a propeller aircraft flying overhead momentarily broke through the crescendo, the strobe, navigation and beacon lights glowing softly above the low cloud cover. Thinking it could be an American aircraft, he turned on his radio and tried to make contact. There was no response.

The rest of the night brought little further rest for Red, who dozed in and out of sleep with every slight sound emanating from the jungle. He constantly glanced at his wristwatch, counting down the seconds until first light. What seemed like an hour was only a few minutes. Time seemed to stand still.



Thirst and hunger pangs wracked his body. Hopeful thoughts of rescue turned, for the time being, into the reality of evasion and survival.

Back onboard *Enterprise* plans were being put in place for Nick Carpenter and Richard Slaasted to launch at first light the next morning in an A-6, accompanied by four F-4s as escorts. Once confirmed the area was clear and Red and Kelly were ready for rescue, they would again call ARRS. Until then, the two men were separated, injured, scared and being hunted like animals in the thick jungle of the enemy's backyard.

Daybreak came at about 0530 the morning of May 20. A half-hour later Nick Carpenter and Richard Slaasted, their A-6A accompanied by F-4B escorts, flew low overhead. For Red and Kelly it was a beautiful sight and sound. The planes were so close, it seemed they could almost reach out and touch them. In his after-action report Nick recalled receiving two beepers as soon as they crested the valley where the two men were located.

Kelly was first to contact Nick, reiterating his badly broken leg. He also remarked that Red was "on the other side of the hill" and no enemy activity had been observed during the night. Flying over the area he spotted Kelly, who screamed "Now! Now!" on the radio when Nick was directly over him. Red then raised Nick on the radio and inquired about rescue. After a few minutes Nick came back and replied that Jolly Green rescue helicopters from Nakhom Phanom<sup>38</sup> were <sup>45</sup> minutes out. After several additional passes the Intruder and Phantoms egressed from the area, having relayed all available information to ARRS.

However, once again Air Force ARRS failed to appear. The 45 minutes came and went, and two hours later there was still no sign of SAR. As late morning approached, Red heard the first shot. Turning around, there were two militia, clad in black with tire tread sandals, their rifles pointed at him. He had his .38 pistol in his hand and threw it to the side, which startled the men and caused one of them to fire again, closer to him than the first shot. Red immediately put his hands above his head. The two militia soon turned into a dozen, and he was a Prisoner of War (POW). Stripped of his few possessions and his arms tightly bound with rope, he was led away. Thus was to begin a hellish six-year odyssey of torture, beatings, solitary confinement and ultimately spiritual redemption for Red McDaniel.

Back on *Enterprise*, Nick Carpenter boarded a Grumman C-2 Greyhound call-sign DEEP SEA ONE and flew to Da Nang Air Base,<sup>39</sup> arriving at 1335 hours. Once there he checked in with the headquarters of the 480th TFS of the USAF. Somewhere up the chain of command a decision had been made to try and bring at least one of the men out via a Fulton Extraction Kit<sup>40</sup>.

At the headquarters of the 480th Nick met USAF Maj. Jim Craig, a burly Texan with a thick southern drawl who had experience driving a F-4 Phantom and dropping extraction and supply kits, to U.S. military, CIA and special forces Studies and Operations Group (SOG)<sup>41</sup> units operating along the Laotian-North Vietnamese border. Jim took an immediate liking to Nick, and his dedication in bringing his squadron mates home. In a briefing that evening Nick pointed out to Jim the last known locations of Kelly and Red, and where the SAM had come from

that brought them down. Nick would be flying in the back seat of Jim's F-4, traditionally occupied by a WSO. They would launch at first light.

On the early morning of May 21 Jim Craig and Nick were joined by another F-4 flying as wingman.

As they crested the valley they picked up a solitary beeper. Thundering above the treetops, Nick attempted to reach Red on the radio. There was only static until Kelly transmitted his call-sign. Nick explained the extraction kit, and the procedure for rescue. Kelly used his mirror to signal the F-4, and the kit was dropped about 100 yards down the hill from him. After flying over Kelly's position for another 45 minutes waiting for conformation he recovered the kit, they began receiving MiG warnings from a USAF Lockheed EC-121 Warning Star surveillance aircraft call-sign BIG LOOK. With heavy hearts they headed back to Da Nang. Kelly must have felt helpless as he watched the Phantoms, spewing thick plumes of black jet exhaust, disappear into the horizon, leaving him alone once again.

Later that evening Nick launched from Da Nang aboard a Lockheed C-130 Hercules and embarked on his fourth attempt to try and rescue Red and Kelly. They were joined by the same F-4s from the mission that morning, with Jim Craig as flight lead and his regular WSO in the back seat. In the valley Kelly's beeper was picked up, and voice communication established. Sadly, he had not retrieved the kit as was hoped. The North Vietnamese captured it, and almost captured him in the process. He had retreated back up the hill, barely escaping. Both Jim and Nick recall that Kelly sounded confused on the radio with some of his statements nonsensical. He spoke about seeing and meeting people in the jungle. When he was asked "Is anyone with you?" he answered in the affirmative, and mentioned the name of a Grumman civilian technician attached to the squadron. Either Kelly was attempting to talk in some impromptu code or his mental state was beginning to erode. This could have been a result of over two days in the unforgiving jungle with little food or water, a loss of blood, shock, delirium, or a combination of all. The disheartening fact that no rescue force had appeared must have also weighed heavily upon his mind, along with the fate of Red. The three aircraft returned to Da Nang, with both Jim and Nick dejected and filled with feelings of failure.

That evening in Da Nang, Jim Craig told General Momyer that enemy forces in the area were negligible, and he believed an ARRS rescue was possible. Again, it was inexplicably denied. The next morning, May 22, a lone F-4B from *Enterprise* flew over the area and detected no beeper, voice communication or enemy activity. Kelly was gone, MIA along with Red, who would not be acknowledged as a POW by the North Vietnamese until 1970. In a subsequent official report by VA-35 CO Comdr. Arthur Barie he remarked, "These men were down in good evasion/recovery country, but the location required deep penetration of rescue forces. An earlier decision and prosecution of rescue efforts may well have gotten at least one of these men out."

On June 6, 1967, an RA-5C Vigilante of RVAH-7 from *Enterprise* flew a low-level photo reconnaissance mission over the SAM sites that had brought down Red and Kelly three weeks

earlier. Numerous camouflaged SAM missiles on transporters and Fan Song radar vans were identified in the photos. The next day a retaliatory Alpha Strike was launched on those sites using A-4s, A-6s and F-4s from *Enterprise*. An E-2A Hawkeye of VAW-11 was also launched to assist the attacking aircraft in navigating around several severe thunderstorms.

The strike was led by Capt. James Shipman, CO of CVW-9, who was flying an A-4C Skyhawk of VA-113. Dodging fire from numerous 37mm, 57mm and 85mm AAA guns, the 11 aircraft found their targets and wreaked havoc. A total of nine SAM missiles were obliterated along with two Fan Song radar vans and a POL truck. Those missiles would never again threaten American aircraft.

Some 370 miles north of Da Nang Red McDaniel was enduring relentless beatings, torture and interrogation at the infamous Hanoi Hilton.<sup>42</sup> After several days an exhausted McDaniel was thrown into a cell with Lt. William Metzger, one of the F-8 pilots from Bonne Homme Richard who had been shot down the same day as McDaniel and Kelly. Red found him laying on a filthy dirt floor, barely conscious, with a gaping open wound in his left thigh that ran 18 inches long and to the bone from a two-pound piece of AAA shrapnel that had penetrated the cockpit. He also had a broken right leg, along with deep lacerations on both arms. Metzger was hovering near death.

Despite having two crushed vertebrae in his lower back, Red picked up Metzger and placed him on a cot. He began nursing him back to health by tending to his wounds, feeding him, bathing him and demanding to the guards that a physician see him immediately. It was then that the answer to his question from that night alone in the jungle emerged. It was not “God, why me?” It was “God, why not me?” His purpose suddenly became clear, and throughout the following six years of imprisonment he relied heavily upon and shared his Christian faith with other prisoners. In May of 1969, after a nearly successful escape by Air Force Captains Edwin Atterberry and John Dramesi, Red not only accepted the blame by his captors as a communications ringleader of the prison, he concocted a story about his own escape plan to prevent further punishment from falling on other prisoners. Despite days of torture that produced a compound fracture of his arm from being bound by rope tightly behind his back, physical incapacitation and weeks of solitary confinement, he never revealed a single name or thread of information to his captors. Atterberry was tortured to death as punishment, dying on May 18, 1969. Dramesi miraculously survived his torture and was repatriated during Operation Homecoming.

After being released from solitary confinement back into the general prisoner population, sensing growing discouragement amongst his fellow inmates, Red led a mass protest for religious services that caused a headache for, and put fear of a prisoner rebellion, in his captors. He was eventually allowed to lead Sunday church services, becoming a makeshift chaplain and counselor to the other inmates. The result was renewed hope and faith for the imprisoned men, many of them terribly ill. For his heroism

during internment Eugene “Red” McDaniel was awarded the Navy Cross.<sup>43</sup>

Following his release during Operation Homecoming and a prolonged period of rehabilitation at Portsmouth Naval Hospital Red returned to active duty in the Navy. He rose through the ranks, eventually attaining the rank of captain and CO of the aircraft carrier *USS Lexington* (CVT-16). His final assignment in the Navy was Naval Liaison to the United States House of Representatives. He retired from the Navy in 1982 after 27 years of service and 81 combat missions over Vietnam.

Following his Navy career he headed the American Defense Institute (ADI), a think-tank focused on critical issues of national security. He regularly gives public speeches on his experiences in the Navy, and as a POW. Amazingly, he holds no anger, bitterness or hatred towards his captors, stating “If I did, it would have eaten me alive by now.”

Upon his arrival at the Hanoi Hilton, Red had repeatedly inquired about Kelly. In late 1967 a guard informed him Kelly was alive and recovering from injuries. It made sense, as Red knew Kelly had been injured from the radio conversations with Nick Carpenter. In a follow-up inquiry he was told Kelly was fully recovered. However, further inquiries yielded inconsistent information on his friend, which left him with the conclusion that the guards were being sadistic and lying. After so many years of his own ordeal as a POW, he too begrudgingly came to the conclusion that Kelly was dead. However, as the years passed Red began to doubt that conclusion. His time working as a naval liaison to congress in Washington, D.C., only served to reinforce those doubts.

Nick Carpenter, who had tried so valiantly to rescue Red and Kelly, was shot down<sup>44</sup> over North Vietnam and declared MIA on June 24, 1968, aged 25. He left behind a wife as well as a baby daughter he never had the opportunity to meet. His status remained MIA until his remains were repatriated in January 1989 and positively identified in April 1991. Posthumously promoted to lieutenant commander, he is interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Paul Daley reflects “What Nick Carpenter did to try and rescue Red and Kelly was above and beyond the call of duty. He repeatedly and selflessly put his own life on the line trying to get those men out. He is truly a hero.”

Jim Craig retired from the Air Force in 1982 as a full colonel with 150 combat missions to his credit, including daring Walleye bombing missions against heavily-defended bridges north of the DMZ. He describes May 21, 1967, as “The darkest day of my deployment, perhaps of my entire Air Force career. Kelly was right below us, injured and scared. There we were, in a multi-million dollar state-of-the-art fighter, just a few hundred feet away, absolutely powerless to rescue him. I still think about it often, and my disappointment has not abated one bit in the 53 years since.”

In 1985, after decades of denying any knowledge of an American Naval Aviator named James Kelly Paterson, the Vietnamese suddenly produced Kelly’s military identification, along with his Geneva Convention card. When pressed for details the Vietnamese claimed Kelly was killed during an exchange of gunfire with North Vietnamese militia and



promptly buried in the jungle. However no bodily remains of Kelly or wreckage of RAYGUN 502 have ever been located by American investigators.

Sadly the ultimate truth of what happened to Kelly, and so many other American service members missing in SEA, is likely to never be known. →

### End Notes

- 1 United States Navy nuclear-powered aircraft carrier (replaced by CVN designation).
- 2 United States Navy conventional-powered aircraft carrier (replaced by CV designation).
- 3 Location of the east coast of North Vietnam where United States Navy aircraft carriers launched missions against targets primarily in the north. Carriers on Dixie Station, located off the east coast of South Vietnam, launched missions against targets primarily in the south.
- 4 A secure compartment on aircraft carriers where intelligence is disseminated and analyzed, and missions coordinated and planned.
- 5 VA-35 was known as VB-3 during World War II. Flying the Douglas SBD Dauntless during the Battle of Midway, the squadron is partially credited with the sinking of three Japanese carriers.
- 6 One of the first precision-guided munitions developed, the Walleye had a television camera in the nose, which was used for target selection. Once dropped, avionics and control surfaces guided the unpowered bomb to the selected target. The May 19, 1967, mission against the Hanoi TPP was the first time the Walleye was used in combat.
- 7 A navigation system where geographic location is determined by a computer, using inertial and directional sensors onboard the aircraft.
- 8 Topographical formations as a result of the erosion of soluble minerals, creating caverns, crevices and caves. Karst formations can tower many hundreds of feet above ground level and be covered in thick vegetation.
- 9 Grumman developed a similar computer that was used in the Apollo space program.
- 10 When an aircraft landing on a carrier misses all four arresting cables. After applying full power, the aircraft must take off again for another attempt at landing. If enough power is not regained for takeoff the aircraft will invariably ditch in the water.
- 11 When lift is no longer being produced by the wing/airfoil, typically caused by exceeding the Critical Angle of Attack (AoA).
- 12 Fletcher Class Navy Destroyer.
- 13 A Navy or Marine Corps aerial squadron from which replacement aircrew are drawn.
- 14 A compartment on an aircraft carrier where squadron members congregate, receive briefings and prepare for missions. Normally each squadron has its own ready room.
- 15 500 pound unguided (“dumb”) General Purpose (GP) bomb.
- 16 The role of a fighter aircraft to ensure air superiority over a battlefield.
- 17 Any weapon, including small arms, used against enemy aircraft.
- 18 Every crewman performing duties on the deck of an aircraft carrier during flight operations wears a different color jersey, representing their role.
- 19 A hydraulically-operated shield that raises behind a fixed-wing aircraft prior to launch, protecting other aircraft, personnel and equipment from jet blast or prop wash.
- 20 The tail section of an aircraft.
- 21 Carrier-based airplanes often have folding wings and/or stabilizers to decrease their physical footprint and increase the number of aircraft capable of being accommodated onboard.
- 22 A section of aircraft cockpit instrumentation where warning, caution and alarm indicators are clustered.
- 23 Nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser.
- 24 Unidentified aircraft.
- 25 “Feet dry” meant aircraft crossing from the Tonkin Gulf to land. “Feet wet” meant aircraft crossing from land to the Tonkin Gulf.
- 26 Junior officers had previously been accused of using the radio excessively during missions, thus blocking critical communications. The VA-113 A-4 pilot connected a tape cassette recorder to the radio system to gather evidence it was senior, not junior officers, using the radio excessively.
- 27 External munitions and stores were routinely jettisoned during SAM evasion and air-to-air combat to reduce weight and drag, thus making the aircraft faster and more maneuverable.
- 28 The emergency beacon was automatically activated upon ejection.
- 29 A Navy or Marine Corps flight officer, seated behind the pilot in the F-4 Phantom, primarily responsible for monitoring radar instruments and other aircraft systems. Typically not a pilot.
- 30 From official statement of Lt.(jg) Nick Carpenter September 5, 1967.
- 31 Harvard-educated and highly respected by his squadron mates, Commander Rich was known to build intricate wood scale models of North Vietnamese bridges he flew missions against.
- 32 The February 1973 - April 1973 repatriation of 591 imprisoned American personnel from North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and China following the Paris Peace Accords. POWs released from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia had been prisoners of the PAVN/VC in areas of their control.
- 33 Second in command of a Navy or Marine Corps military unit.
- 34 The Bomb Damage Assessment mission was originally assigned to RVAH-7 Peacemakers deployed on *Enterprise*, but was changed to RVAH-13 Bats at the last minute. RVAH-13 suffered the highest losses of any Navy reconnaissance squadron during the conflict.

- 35 Mission undertaken by a reconnaissance aircraft to photograph target before and/or after attack.
- 36 The indomitable and versatile A-1 was also referred to during the conflict as a “Spad”.
- 37 The jungle penetrator was shaped like a bullet, approximately four feet long and rounded on the bottom, allowing for easy penetration of thick jungle canopies. Three spade-shaped paddles folded down from the body, making it resemble a large grappling hook. The paddles could be used as seats, or to grasp on to. Heavy straps attached to the body of the penetrator gave a way for survivors/rescuers to safely secure themselves during insertion/extraction.
- 38 One of several USAF airbases in Thailand, often jokingly referred to by American personnel as “Naked Fanny.”
- 39 Da Nang Air Base was used by every branch of the U.S. military as well as the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (RVNAF) and commercial airline carriers. At the height of the conflict it was one of the busiest airports in the world.
- 40 The kit consisted of a canister of helium, large rubber balloon, 500 foot braided nylon tether and torso harness. Once the harness was donned it was attached to the tethered balloon, which was inflated with helium and rose high enough to be easily seen above the jungle campy. A C-130 or similar aircraft with a v-shaped apparatus attached to the nose would then catch the tether, the person in the harness snatched up and reeled into the aircraft via winch. The system was originally designed for the CIA, where it was known as the Surface-to-Air Recovery System (STARS).
- 41 Highly classified combined operational unit of U.S. military special forces operators to conduct unconventional warfare and intelligence operations in SEA.
- 42 Official name Hôa Lò Prison. Built by French colonists in the late 19th century to intern political prisoners.
- 43 The nation’s second-highest USN/USMC decoration, eclipsed only by the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- 44 Flying an A-6A Intruder (BuNo. 152949) of VA-35 Black Panthers of *Enterprise*, pilot Lt. Nick Carpenter and B/N Lt.(jg) Joseph Mobley were laying maritime mines in the Sông Cà River south of Vinh when they were hit by AAA, mortally damaging the aircraft and severely injuring Lt. Carpenter. Lt.(jg) Mobley ejected, was taken prisoner and repatriated during Operation Homecoming after

nearly five years as a POW. Vice Admiral Joseph Mobley retired from the United States Navy in 2001.

#### About the Author



Dan Heller is a Senior Docent, writer and historian at Lyon Air Museum in Orange County, California. He has been published in *World War II Journal*, the *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* and *Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) Flight Training* magazine. Prior to volunteering at Lyon he spent over 20 years as a Systems Engineer in Information Technology, working with major aerospace contractors such as Boeing, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman. His proudest professional accomplishment was as a principal engineer on the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) project, a partnership between the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Holding a Private Pilot license for single-engine airplanes along with Instrument and Ground Instructor ratings, he enjoys flying a Cessna 172S NAV III and American Champion Super Decathlon aerobatic “taildragger” out of John Wayne Airport (KSNA). Mr. Heller is a veteran of the United States Coast Guard, where he proudly served on the cutter *Morgenthau* (WHEC-722).

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