

*Before I joined the United States Air Force (USAF) in 1955, I was just a "good ol' boy" from Macon, Georgia. But flying a jet fighter only enhanced some of those Southern traits. Less than 12 years later over Vietnam I become a MiG killer with the Triple Nickel-555th Tactical Fighter Squadron.*

—Everett Raspberry

### **Early Jet days**

My first jet assignment was with the 309th Strategic Fighter Squadron flying a fighter called the F-84F Thunderstreak. Nothing could beat an F-84 going downhill, that was until the F-100 Super Sabre came along. My first thought of the F-100 was, "Boy, it sure has a big cockpit!" But each time you end up changing airplanes, you ended up thinking that way. They were all bigger than the previous one you came from. The F-100 had a lot more power and with afterburner it felt like you were dancing on the head of a needle sometimes as you had to constantly "fly" the F-100 — there was not much room for error.

Eventually, I ended up sitting nuclear alert with them while stationed in Korea and after my stint there I was sent to USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis Air Force base, Nevada, where I really learned how to fly and fight. After 11 weeks of hard flying in the F-100 and a lot of academics, I graduated the

# WOLFPACK ASSASSIN

## *Confessions of a MiG killer*

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL EVERETT T. RASPBERRY, USAF (RET.)  
AS TOLD TO AND WRITTEN BY JAMES P. BUSH

Top Gun of my class. In time, I was asked to stick around as an F-100 instructor and also teach air combat maneuvering and fire control systems. The early days of air-to-air missile work were quite simple. We had a five-inch high velocity aircraft rocket on one side (HVAR) with flares on the back of it, and when you fired it, that become your target. Then you would simply pull up and fire your air-to-air missile at those flares and it would seek it out and blow it up. It was a one-man job until the F-4 Phantom came on line.

### **Enter the Phantom**

I was selected as an instructor for the inaugural F-4C Fighter Weapons School — I was one of the first group of guys at Nellis to fly the Phantom. When I first laid eyes on the F-4 I thought, "Boy, oh, boy, this is a big mother!" The more you saw of it,





Collings Foundation's Phantom (the only civilian one flying) presents the view often seen by a tanker as an F-4 snuggles up for refueling. This was critical for the Wolfpack right before they crossed into enemy territory. The low-altitude dogfights ate up the fuel at a rapid rate. (Photo by Tyson Rininger)

the bigger it got. It seemed bigger because the fuselage was so much wider and it seemed you could have a basketball game inside the thing. At that time, I was still flying both fighters: the F-4 and the F-100. Other than having a lot more power than the F-100, I wasn't really that impressed with F-4 initially. It just proved to me that if you put enough power on a large rock, or in this case, an airplane, you could get anything to fly. With two powerful engines instead of one, it made a lot of noise and whole lot more smoke.

The other major difference was I now carried a GIB — a guy in the back — and his job was weapon system operator (WSO). That was something I had handled myself in the F-100, but to be fair, it wasn't as nearly as complicated as the upgraded equipment the F-4 had. There were a lot of "black magic" boxes in the backseat cockpit and you could search out 200 miles ahead of you with them. In the F-100 you were lucky to see a couple of city blocks. The simple radar was just there to provide range to the target — from about 3,000 feet on in and you had no control over it, so it was really a big difference compared to the F-4. The F-100 radar was fixed while the F-4 would go

50 to 60 degrees from center, up and down 40 degrees.

Although you could go Mach 2 in the F-4, I was disappointed with it mainly because for the first time in my career the Phantom was a fighter without guns. As a "fighter jock" I thought it was stupid — I mean, really stupid — period. It didn't even have a computing gun sight. All it had was a combining glass that showed a piper and all you could do with that was adjust for bombing and stuff like that. It was Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara's belief that the Air Force could do away with guns and rely on missiles alone. I guess the people back in Washington knew more about what a fighter pilot needed than we did. Unfortunately for them, we would prove them wrong over the skies of Vietnam.

### Joining the Wolfpack

I had originally been one of six pilots trained as a Wild Weasel — using the F-4 to hunt SAM sites in North Vietnam. Unfortunately, we were having all kinds of problems with them early on — mainly equipment malfunctions back in the states. Finally in October of 1966 they decided to send the six of us over to Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) and told us when they got the airplanes fixed they would bring them to us.

I arrived in SE Asia on Thanksgiving Day 1966

Some of the 555th MIG killers pose by the squadron flag showing 10 MIG kills. When this was taken, the squadron had just nailed two more, but the stars were not yet put on the banner. (Photo by Walt Radeker via Warren Thompson)



Pilots and Back Seaters of the "Wolfpack" pose in front of a 555th TFS F-4 Phantom. (Photo courtesy of author)





and was assigned to the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron known as the “Wolfpack.” To them I was just a plain old fighter pilot. Our boss was Colonel Robin Olds, a hardnosed “fighter pilot’s fighter pilot” who became an ace while flying P-38 Lightnings and P-51 Mustangs during World War II. He was a good leader and took many of the lead slots during our combat missions. I began my combat tour by flying regular missions anticipating that our Wild Weasel Phantoms would be fixed and arriving shortly — they never came. When I arrived in Vietnam, our primary early missions were MiGCAPS, flying escort for the F-105 Wild Weasels as they went after SAM sites or on regular bombing missions of selected targets.

We would typically operate at between 14-17,000 feet altitude and I preferred the lower ones much better. If you saw a missile coming, you could maneuver out of the way quicker. Because they were traveling so fast, the trick was to

sions; you had to have 100 over North Vietnam and I had almost 50 by then. The commanders got worried and said, “Hey, wait a minute, at this rate you’ll be long gone before the F-4 Wild Weasels arrive, so you’re grounded until the airplanes get here.” Thankfully, Colonel Olds had a trick up his sleeve and he needed my help.

### **Operation Bolo**

By late 1966, the F-105s had been getting pounded by the VPAF MiG-17s and MiG-21s, and Col. Olds was planning to do something about it. His plan called for a large Phantom force to draw the MiG-21 Fishbeds into a big fight which he dubbed *Operation Bolo*. During the planning stages, Col. Olds came to me and said, “Razz, you’re the only guy around here who has taught any air-to-air at Fighter Weapons School, so I need you do some training with the other guys. You know these guys don’t know a whole hell of a lot about

**A flight of four Phantoms from the 8th TFW head north with a full load of ordnance. All of the squadrons in the wing played a dual role as fighter and bomber. (Photo by James Wood via Warren Thompson)**

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dive a little to get them to start down in an arc and just as it started down, you quickly pulled up and it would go zooming underneath you — they couldn’t compensate for our aggressive maneuvers quick enough. The stuff you could see wouldn’t hurt you — but the ones you don’t see will get you every time!

By Christmastime, I almost had half of my mis-

air-to-air or combat maneuvering or missiles for that matter — so teach them!” The problem was I had never fired a missile from an F-4 before; in reality, not many of us had. But we trained hard and prepared ourselves for the unknown. Heck, I didn’t know what he was up to, not many of us did, but knowing his reputation we knew it would be big.



The aircrews in the 8th TFW were very proficient in precision bombing and once the ordnance was off, they went after any MIGs that were in their vicinity. (Photo by James Wood via Warren Thompson)

By late 1966, we found out. We were going to disguise our F-4s as F-105s to confuse the North Vietnamese. The F-105, as good as it was, could not stand and fight. It couldn't turn and the VPAF guys knew that as they sent their MiG-21s and -17s up and had a field day with the Thuds. The plan called for us to disguise ourselves as 105s inbound to the target and then trap the MiGs by closing off their airfields after they took off and shoot them down as they came back in. To block their escape north to China, other flights of F-4s would be orbiting near the border waiting to pounce on them.

The mission called for us to act like an F-105 unit so we had to adapt to many changes. One

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was the installation of the QRC-160 electronic countermeasure pod that the Thuds had been carrying to jam the SAMs. We also had to fly the same speeds and formation spreads of F-105s as we approached our targets. The targets were the PVAF airfields of Phuc Yen northwest of Hanoi and Gia Lam south of Phuc Yen. By late 1966 we were ready to go, but unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate until January 2, 1967. Our flights of four Phantoms each were named after

cars; Col. Olds naturally led "Olds Flight" and I was in the second flight named "Ford Flight," with Col. Chappie James leading the way. I flew off his wing in the number two position as other Phantom flights followed behind us. After taking off from Ubon, we met up with the tankers to top off before we made our run over North Vietnam.

Our F-4s were loaded with eight missiles each — four AIM-9 Sidewinders and four AIM-7 Sparrows. My GIB for this mission was First Lt. Robert Weston — a helluva nice guy and thankfully, he sure knew what he was doing with all those magic boxes in the rear cockpit. The rule was you had to have at least two good radar missiles and two heat seekers before you left the tanker. Well, when I checked out all my missiles, I found I had only one good missile out of my eight total. I wasn't about to miss out on tangling with a MiG, so I kept my mouth shut and kept on going.

### MiG Madness

When we arrived over Phuc Yen, we were at around 16-18,000 feet and found nothing but a cloud layer below us at 7,000 feet. I really thought that was going to throw a monkey wrench into the whole mission but the MiG-21s took the bait as they began to slither up from the clouds below. I saw one MiG-21 get in behind Olds Flight and I called it out to them. At the same time, I glanced over my shoulder and saw another MiG-21 making a run on our number 3 and 4 Phantoms in Ford Flight as I told them to break right.

The MiG then turned toward me and Col. James and I yelled for Ford Lead to break right! I got no response and saw no movement from my leader and thought he might be having radio problems. The MiG was coming up fast at our 5 o'clock so I screamed over the radio, "Ford Lead, break right, we have a MiG at our five!"

I had been on Chappie's right wing so I broke and went underneath him and turned into the MiG. As a wingman, my job was to protect my leader and that's what I was going to do. I headed for the MiG and he broke into a right turn as I went into a hard left. At one point we were 50 feet away from one another, canopy to canopy, as I rolled over the top of him.

As I chased him I knew I had one shot because only one AIM-9 was working. I also knew through all my train-

sile something to hone on. It was a long fight, 10 minutes of twisting and turning as I found myself all alone over Hanoi. As I turned for home I caught up with Olds Flight near Laos as we headed for the tanker. *Operation Bolo* had been a huge success with seven MiG-21s shot down without a single F-4 loss. The MiGs became scarce for a short time as they reevaluated their tactics and then came back at us with a vengeance during the spring of 1967.

### MiG Wagon Wheel Duel

On June 5, I was leading a flight of four F-4Ds on a MiGCAP for some F-105 Wild Weasels on an Iron Hand flight near Thud Ridge. My call sign was Drill 01 and my GIB was Capt. Francis Gullick when we noticed a bunch of MiG-17s below us in a "wagon wheel" formation. At the same time, my number 3 and 4 F-4s got jumped by some MiGs and left the area, leaving myself and my wingman, Capt Doug Cairns to deal with the threat. Although the MiG-17 wasn't as fast as the MiG-21, it was still a nasty little bug-



**Left:** Razz Raspberry and his GIB First Lt. Robert Weston.  
**Below:** Wolfpack members pose in front of Razz's F-4 with a MiG kill star on the splitter plate. Razz is cleverly hidden in the intake with Col. Robin Olds front and center. (Photo courtesy of author)

ing that I had to fire that sucker between minus 1G and plus 2G and be a certain distance behind him.

As we maneuvered around I realized I was in too close and was concerned my missile wouldn't track properly. I was becoming even more disappointed when I saw him make a run for the clouds and knew an infrared missile would not have a good chance tracking him. I thought he was going to get away. Suddenly, just before he got to the cloud deck, the MiG-21 reversed his turn and I knew this was my one chance. I went to zero G and had my piper right on him and squeezed the missile off. That AIM-9 shot out like a bullet and impacted between the cockpit and tailpipe. The MiG swapped ends and stalled out, falling into the under cast.

I almost spun in myself watching him spin down and figured he must have flashed a glint of sunlight in his rear-view mirror that gave the mis-



ger because it could turn on a dime and carried a great big old 37mm cannon in the nose that could ruin your day in a hurry.

We dived down with our two F-4s and hopped into the middle of that hornets' nest because we wanted to keep them away from the F-105s. Diving through the center, the MiGs opened up on us and you could see lots of tracers zooming by. I knew that as long as you see the tracer rounds and it didn't visually change position in your canopy glass, you better do something right quick! The trick was to go up or down or side to side but you had to do something to get the tracer moving on your windscreen—if you did he would miss



The Collings F-4D, bearing the tail code of an 8th TFW "squadron," climbs out. The squadrons in the 8th TFW used the "FP," "Fy" and "FG" codes while flying in Vietnam during the Robin Olds era. (Photo by Tyson Rininger)

you every time.

I latched onto a MiG-17 and tried to turn with him but had to break away after a few turns as I headed southeast for a few miles before turning back in and reengaging the fight. The MiG-17s and I were pulling some pretty hefty Gs and, when one would overshoot me, another one tried to latch onto me. It became a real rat race as we descended just above the treetops. I spotted one at 12 o'clock and fired off an AIM-4 Falcon missile at him. But it wouldn't guide and missed its target. I broke away from the fight a second time to get some altitude and distance and came roaring back in. I caught another MiG-17 out in front of

accurate but it was better than nothing.

I steered slightly left and down to one of the MiG's at my 11 o'clock when I yelled, "Boresight!" We were closing at each other head on at over 900 knots maybe 200 feet above the ground. My RIO replied, "OK, I got him" and I squeezed the AIM-7 missile off and it went right down the middle of his intake and that was the last anyone saw of that guy. He hadn't been firing at me at the time, but his friends sure were as I saw their tracers streaking my way. So as soon as we splashed him we went back to maneuvering again to keep from getting shot down. The fight lasted a good 30 minutes and we were getting low on fuel so we turned for home.

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me and launched an AIM-4 at him — and again it missed.

These guys were all over me so I broke away for a third time and changed my plan of attack; this time I would come screaming in at low level. I was well below 500 feet indicating well over 500 knots when I arrived and saw a MiG-17 at my 12 o'clock slightly higher with two other MiG-17s lower at my 11 o'clock. We had a procedure where the aircraft commander would say "Boresight" and the GIB would cage up the radar dish and I could put the piper on the enemy. The RIO could see the blip on the scope and then he could either lock on it or he could continue to paint it and the missile would guide on that — not very

Although it was my second and last MiG victory over Vietnam, it was also the first one scored with the new and improved F-4D Phantom. †

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*Lt Col Raspberry completed 130 combat missions with 100 as flight leader and mission commander over North Vietnam. Col. Raspberry returned to the USAF Fighter Weapons School as an F-100/F-4 project pilot and program manager. He returned to Southeast Asia and flew an additional 55 combat missions. Col. Raspberry retired from the USAF in 1977 with over 5,000 hours of fighter time. His awards include the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, and Air Medal with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters.*