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the Weasel had to try to avoid being blasted by the SAM.

A new version of the Thud was developed to conduct Wild Weasel operations. Sixty F-105F's were converted to F-105Gs. The two man crew consisted of the pilot, or "frog," who was the aircraft commander. The EWO (electronics warfare officer), known as the "bear," sat in the rear seat and was responsible for detecting and suppressing or destroying enemy SAM sites through a complex set of electronic gear.

A typical Weasel pilot felt, "The EWO tells me what to do and I do it. He provides me with the threat warning, where to look for the next SAM and when to turn the airplane around to shoot at them." The two crew members had to have complete faith and absolute trust in each other. "If they can't, they can't work together, so they'll probably die together."

And with regard to the growing threat from the air, "If you try to dogfight with a MiG, you sign your death warrant at altitude. The best thing to do is turn toward him and head straight to him in burner. With the combined closing speed in excess of 2,000 mph this presents him with a minimum cross section for a minimum time. At low altitude, just put it in burner and haul ass away. Nothing will hit you."

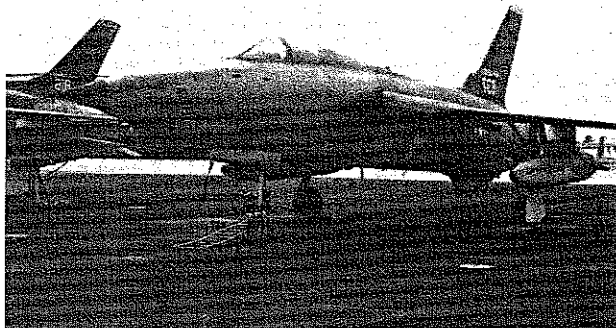
The Wild Weasels conducted two kinds of missions in Vietnam:

"Hunter/Killer" -- The Weasel would prowl the skies searching for signals indicating SAM radar. Locating one, a missile would be fired to mark the radar position. Once the site was marked, fighter bombers would go in for the kill.

"Strike Support" -- The Weasel would go in before a B-52 strike to clear a safe corridor to the target. B-52's were not sent into North Vietnam within possible SAM range without a Weasel escort in and out.

During the four years the F-105s were used in Vietnam, all by the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing, they flew 101,000 sorties, logging 263,000 combat hours, and dropping 202,596 tons of bombs. In addition, they knocked down 29 MiGs, more than any other aircraft in the SEA theater, not too bad for an aircraft whose mission was deliver bombs.

After the war was over in Vietnam, and the Thuds returned to the U.S., their operational service days were numbered. The shortage of parts really caused its demise more than any other single factor. Only 833 were built and after twenty years of service, more and more had to be cannibalized to keep others



A F-105B with the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard.(CAHA)

flying. Undoubtedly, some regret that day in 1964 when the decision was made to terminate production of the Thunderchief. After all, even today, nothing can outrun or even catch a Thud at 500 feet or lower, including the F-111 or the newest of the Air Force fighters the F-15 or F-16.

CAHA's example, F-105B-10-RE, 57-5778, was the 18th Thunderchief built and was delivered to the USAF on January 29, 1959. It was first to serve with the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 4th Tactical Fighter Wing, Eglin AFB, FL, where it was part of the batch that brought the squadron up to strength and become the first squadron in the world to operate Mach 2 aircraft.

In June 1959, our F-105 was deployed to Seymour Johnson AFB, NC, where it was to serve until January 1965 when the squadron was re-equipped with the later F-105D's.

Our Thunderchief was then sent to the 108th Tactical Fighter (ANG) Group, McGuire AFB, NJ, where it was to serve until dropped from the USAF inventory in April 1981. The 108th Squadron was the only Air National Guard squadron to operate the F-105.

When it was dropped from the USAF inventory, Fritz Freund, CAHA President at the time, was able to have the F-105 delivered to the Connecticut Air National Guard at Bradley International Airport for demilitarization. When the new BAM Exhibition Building opened for the first time in October 1981, the F-105 was part of the new display. And today, the Republic F-105 Thunderchief remains on display as an example of a sophisticated fighter that would be able to hold its own in the sky even today.