

F-105 Plaques Dedicated at the Air Force Academy

Howard Plunkett

On 6 August 2018, the Air Force Academy held a long overdue recognition of the F-105's service during the Vietnam War by commemorating two bronze plaques mounted on the wall of the Academy's Southeast Asia War Pavilion. One plaque summarized the war record of the Thunderchief; the other listed the names of Academy graduates of classes 1959 through 1970 who were pilots and EWOs during combat over Vietnam and Laos. Thud pilot Lt Gen Dale W. Thompson, Jr. (Class of 1960) funded the plaques and his friend General Ronald W. Yates (also Class of 1960) shepherded the year-long project. Over 50 people sitting in the morning sunshine attended the outdoor ceremony while planes buzzed overhead towing cadet sailplane pilots to their morning lessons.

After toasts of Jerimiah Weed, five guys took the microphone to tell war stories. Col Howard L. "Bodie" Bodenhamer (Class of 61) told of the day at McConnell when President Johnson presented him a Silver Star and then, learning that Bodie was a fellow Texan, pressed into Bodie's palm his own Silver Star lapel pin from World War II. Col Leonard C. "Lucky" Ekman (Class of 63) described how the war changed for him and his friends when North Vietnam began using SAMs for air defense. Lucky persuaded fellow Wild Weasel pilot Richard W. "Dick" Arnold (Class of 61) to tell how he, too, attacked SAM sites in North Vietnam. Wild Weasel pilot Howard C. Towl (Class of 68) said his experience was a bit different during Linebacker missions in 1972 when he had to evade SAMs at night, the clouds below him glowing in the dark from the missile's exhaust. Finally, Robert A. "Bob" McNeese, an F-4G Wild Weasel pilot during Desert Storm, thanked all F-105 Wild Weasel crews for passing on lessons learned from Vietnam that enabled his Weasels to survive Bagdad's air defenses without loss.

At Doolittle Hall, war stories continued during the lunch put on by the Association of Graduates. It was a great Tactics Conference.



F-105 pilots who gathered at the Air Force Academy on 7 Aug 2018.



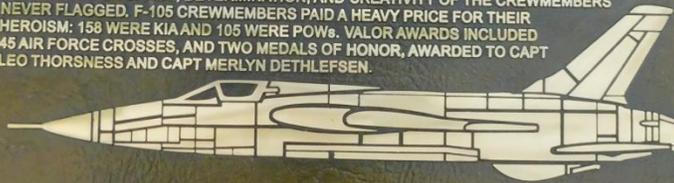
Lucky Ekman introduces Dick Arnold at the dedication ceremony.

REPUBLIC F-105 THUNDERCHIEF

THE F-105D, NICKNAMED THE "THUD" BY CREWMEMBERS, WAS DESIGNED AS A SINGLE-SEAT, NUCLEAR-CAPABLE, SUPERSONIC, LOW ALTITUDE PENETRATOR. IN VIETNAM IT WAS CALLED UPON TO SERVE IN AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT STRIKE ROLE AND BEGAN OPERATIONS IN AUGUST 1964 FROM TWO BASES IN THAILAND, TAKHLI AND KORAT. DUE TO ITS LONG RANGE AND MASSIVE 14,000 LB LOAD OF BOMBS AND MISSILES, THE F-105 WAS THE PRIMARY STRIKE AIRCRAFT IN NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS AND PARTICIPATED IN BOTH MAJOR BOMBING OPERATIONS, ROLLING THUNDER AND LINEBACKER. WITH MANY TARGETS REQUIRING 1,250 MILE ROUND TRIPS, AIR REFUELING WAS REQUIRED BOTH TO AND FROM THE TARGET THE F-105 WAS AN EXTREMELY RUGGED WARHORSE AND COULD ABSORB SEVERE BATTLE DAMAGE.

AIRCRAFTS FLEW INTO THE MOST CONCENTRATED AIR DEFENSES IN HISTORY AND SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES. BY 1968, AFTER 395 F-105s WERE LOST (A 57% LOSS OF THE ENTIRE F-105 FLEET), THE AIRCRAFT WAS WITHDRAWN FROM THE STRIKE ROLE. F-105F/Gs CONTINUED TO FLY THE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS WILD WEASEL MISSIONS AGAINST THE HIGHLY DEFENDED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE SITES UNTIL LATE 1972. THE WILD WEASEL MISSION WAS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE THE MOST HAZARDOUS AND COMPLICATED OF THE WAR. WILD WEASELS ESCORTED THE STRIKE AIRCRAFT AND WERE THE FIRST IN AND LAST OUT OF THE TARGET.

THE BRAVERY AND HEROISM OF F-105 CREWMEMBERS CANNOT BE OVERSTATED. FROM 1964 TO 1968, F-105 WINGS AVERAGED LOSING ONE CREWMEMBER A DAY. A PILOT HAD ONLY A 75% CHANCE OF COMPLETING A 100-MISSION TOUR. IN SPITE OF THESE DEVASTATING LOSSES, THE COURAGE, DETERMINATION, AND CREATIVITY OF THE CREWMEMBERS NEVER FLAGGED. F-105 CREWMEMBERS PAID A HEAVY PRICE FOR THEIR HEROISM: 158 WERE KIA AND 105 WERE POWs. VALOR AWARDS INCLUDED 45 AIR FORCE CROSSES, AND TWO MEDALS OF HONOR, AWARDED TO CAPT LEO THORSNESS AND CAPT MERLYN DETHLEFSEN.



OF THE 115 AIR FORCE ACADEMY GRADUATES WHO FLEW THE F-105 IN COMBAT, NINE GRADUATES WERE KILLED IN ACTION AND SEVEN GRADUATES SERVED THEIR COUNTRY AS PRISONERS OF WAR. FOR GRADUATE HEROISM, TWO AIR FORCE CROSSES AND THIRTY-SIX SILVER STARS WERE AWARDED.

**USAF GRADUATES WHO SERVED AS F-105 COMBAT
CREWMEMBERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

'59

COUNTS, ROGER L.
CWACH, EMIL E.
FERRARI, CHARLES J.
GROARK, DAVID H.
LASEN, PAUL S.
MIHOLICK, JAMES I.
MITCHELL, JAY N.
QUIGLEY, NORMAN P.
SEIZYS, ANTHONY W.
THOMSON, LAURENCE, J.
TRACEY, RICHARD E.
WOOD, DEAN C.

'60

ANDERSON, JAMES W. III
GIFFEN, JOHN C.
HART, CHARLES E.
JOLLY, WILLIAM R.
PATCHETT, RONALD D.
THOMPSON, DALE, W. JR.
VIKAN, DEAN F.
WATERS, SAMUEL E. JR.

'61

ARNOLD, RICHARD W. SS(4)
BODENHAMER, HOWARD L. SS(2)
LANE, PETER B. SS
MOORBERG, MONTE L. AFC, KIA
TULIS, JAMES F. JR.
VIQUESNEY, JULES L.
WHITE, ROBERT P. SS

'62

BILLINGTON, GORDON F.
BLAISDELL, MICHAEL P.
BROWN, CHRISTOPHER H.
BRUCHER, JOHN M. KIA
EASTER, JOHN R.
HAWKINS, FREDERIC O.
HORNADAY, RALPH J. SS, KIA
PADDON, HARRY G.
SCHAUENBERG, ROBERT S.

'63

ADAMS, ALFRED P.
ADAMS, LEE A. KIA
ARDERN, WILLIAM E.
CARLSON, THOMAS O.
DOTSON, ROBERT S.
DRISCOLL, JERRY D. SS, POW
EKMAN, LEONARD, C. SS(2)
GOOLD, MICHAEL D.
GRAVES, GEORGE D.
GUILD, RICHARD E.
HALL, ROBERT W.
HANNAM, JAMES T.
HEGSTROM, ROGER J.
MILLER, DELBERT F.
MURK, HAROLD E.
MUSSELWHITE, GROVER E.
NEWHOUSE, JOHN W.
REYNOLDS, RANDOLPH S.
SAVONEN, STEVEN J.
TATE, JAMES P.
THOMAS, LEO T. JR. SS, KIA
VENKUS, ROBERT E.
WARNER, WAYNE A.
WINZELL, JAMES R.

'64

ABBOT, ROBERT L. JR.
BLISS, RONALD G. SS(2), POW
BROWNING, RALPH T. SS, POW
BUSHNELL, MART H.
HALLMARK, KENITH V. II
HARVEY, EDWIN L.
HOFFMAN, JOHN M.
JONES, WILLIAM C.
LACEY, KEITH N. SS
LEMON, JAMES F.
LODGE, ROBERT A. SS(5), KIA
MANNING, JAMES D.
MCNISH, THOMAS M. SS(3), POW
NEUENS, MARTIN J. SS, POW
O'KEEFE, TIMOTHY F. JR.
OLIN, GARY S. SS(2)
RICHTER, KARL W. AFC, SS, KIA

'64

ROGERS, ALAN V. JR.
RUNNING, RONALD N.
RUTTER, MILTON R.
SHIVELY, JAMES R. SS(2), POW
SMITH, GARY M. SS
SMYTH, CHARLES W. JR.
SPELIUS, WAYNE C.
VERSTREATE, JAMES P.
WHITE, JAMES B. KIA

'65

BROWN, TIMOTHY J.
HOLLINGSWORTH LEE E.
MCINERNEY, PETER T.

'66

BOYD, STANLEY E.
CARLSON, RANDAL D.
KENNEDY, CHARLES A.
RICHARDSON, MERCER B.
SMITH, LEE T.
WISE, SIDNEY J.
WOMACK, CARL L.

'67

BAXTER, DALE E.
BOSILJEVAC, MICHAEL J.
SS(2), POW, KIA
FEDEL, GARY A.
FEMRITE, RALPH B.
MOOK, GILBERT D.

'68

DELOACH, JOHNNY G.
FUNK, LARRY J.
KILBREW, KERRY E.
TERRY, JAMES G.
THOMAS, EDWIN A.
TDWT, HOWARD C.

'70

PUSEMAN, RICHARD A.
TUROSE, MICHAEL S. KIA