

A Word from Willie

Society of Wild Weasels Newsletter

December 2024



CINCWW's Corner

Fellow Weasels,

A big Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to all of you and thank you for your service and dedication that made these holidays such a happy time for my family! We missed publishing the August issue and I apologize. I have gone through cancer surgery, COVID and after getting over that I caught a respiratory infection and I was out for the count for almost four months but I am recovered. However, this issue is a great edition with Tony Marshall's career and POW experience article by Dave Melton and an interview with the 35 Cadet Squadron Commander Jacque Vasta who is ensuring our Weasel Heritage is taught to each cadet. You have to read Tony's lessons learned because they are well worth internalizing for future wars!

We have completely overhauled the medical section and we ask you to review it and pass on how we can improve it. We take this opportunity to thank Kentucky Jefferson, Phyllis Farrell, Quack Bear, Hoser Hampton and Duds Dudley for their hard work in making the VA understandable, connecting with Weasels who have survived cancer and are ready to help you through your cancer journey and prevention. Please check the medical section in Word from Willie for our plan to reengage with Congress on the VA cancer study. One of our newest members Vince Aztec Alazar is leading a group of military organizations (9 to date) to reengage on the cancer study and we are an integral part. Our focus will be on the 119th Congress and you can read our engagement plan below.

We are still working on the individual journal for each member and the hold up is on ensuring that each member is the only one that can edit their section. We are hoping to have that done by end of January! We have had some new members with the 1 year free membership for F-16/F-35/Growler Pilots, EWOs, Maintainers and Intelligence professionals but we need to advertise this better. Please let people know that you don't pay for a membership for a year, get a number and a coin when you utilize this option and are a full-fledged member for the next 12 months when you exercise this option.

We have a new editor(JJ Jerakis) coming on board who will be doing quarterly Word from Willies! I will also be doing monthly updates and our January update will be an accounting of what we have supported financially during 2024. In February we will do a look at both the 20thOG and the 79 FS at Shaw and the work they do for America. I want to close with a salute to what our members have done to ensure democracy and our republic is defended! I am thankful this Holiday season for you and your families, my family and God!

Very Respectfully

*Budman Redmond
Society of Wild Weasels Chief in Charge
YGBSM
FILO*

Fallen Wild Weasels

Wyrewood A. Gowell, WW #1405, Pilot, F-105G/F-4G, 23 May 2024
George LaFrance, WW #613, EWO,

Our Condolences to their families, friends, and brothers in arms. Hand Salute! Rest in Peace!

L.A. Bud

Membership Update

New Members

We welcome the following new members:

Scott “Big” Pippin, WW #2895, Pilot,
Daniel “Dredd” Van Sciver, WW #2896, Pilot,
James “Clobber” Salem, WW #2897, Pilot,
Jay “Bait” Baugh, WW #2898, Pilot,
Craig “Rocket” Baker, WW #2899, Pilot, F-16
Michael Radigan, WW #2900, Honorary Member
Owen Myers, WW #2901, Associate Member
Jordan “Shaggy” Hans, WW #2902

L.A. Bud

Surviving Family Members

Donna White, WW #12
Dagney Monson, WW #12A
Marnie Zimmerman, WW #12B
Jeanine Lundeberg, WW #12C

If you know of family members who qualify, have them contact us at:
LABudF4G@gmail.com

L.A. Bud

Editor’s Note: This is through August 2024.

Financials: \$58, 541 as of Oct 15



MERRY CHRISTMAS Weasels!!!!



HAPPY HANUKKAH Weasels!!!!

Societal Happenings

Our liaison officers at Luke (Uke Uken and Muskrat McNeese) have been super busy. They continue to support each F-35 graduation with a Wild Weasel plaque and a stipend for each class. As part of the introduction to the Wild Weasel history Uke or Muskrat talk about the ethos and our 59 year history! On 24 May they were joined by Donna White and daughter Dagney (Wild Weasel Society family members as part of Col Ed White's legacy) and they briefed the new pilots on the experiences of Col White and their own life as Wild Weasel family! It was well-received and a big WfW thank you to our growing liaison team at Luke!

Our 20th OG representative John Boy Walton be working for the annual grant in for Medal of Honor Winner Leo Thorness and we will continue to provide memberships and TShirts to the 20th OG Top Gun Winners in December!

The 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin setup the first Wild Weasel briefing for their students and the Society provided a briefing and Bill "Thunder" Thornton was our representative and provided a \$200 dollar class grant and a plaque for the Wild Weasel Spiring award.

A big thank you to John Farrell who was our liaison to the Tail Hook Convention.

A big thank you to Phyliss Farrell is using her long time expertise in the VA to support our outreach on how best to work with the VA.

Our intern Josh Pyne has decided to stay on after his 6 month internship and has been a great young future UK aviator! Thank you Josh for your hard work. Josh will be supporting the MACH Coalition as build out our 119th Congressional Engagement

A thankyou to Dave Melton for his article on Tom Marshall's life and experience! Tom "Hollywood" Hanton will be next! Great Job again Dave!

JJ Jerakas will be taking over as the next editor of World from Willie for the March and we welcome him. JJ is a great officer and a super person who has helped us during the cancer engagement and will be a great editor! Thanks JJ.

Lastly a big thank you to Mike Kadlubowski who has become an advisor and mentor for the 35 Cadet Squadron! Kad does it right. We provide the Cadet Wild Weasel of the month both a TShirt and a coin!

A special thanks to the 20th OG as well as the 79th Fighter Squadron and their great work on getting an Arlington Flyby for Lt Col (Ret) Mack Angel. The 20th OG (Fuego) and the 79th FS (Knight) really came through in the clutch. We are in awe of your skills and officership and we appreciate what you do for America!



Picture of the Arlington Flyby—Thanks 20th OG/79th FS!

A special call out to Brig Gen (Ret) Phil Drew who represents us at Arlington internments for our Wild Weasel Heroes! His “nickle on the grass” is exactly what we need to do those who have flown west! Thanks Phil!

One Year Memberships with coin and Society number for all F-16/F-35/Growler Pilots/EWOs/Maint/Intell

<https://wildweasels.org/wild-weasel-one-year-membership/>

Interview with Tony Marshall

15 June 2024

Subject's Biography:

Tony Marshall is a 1968 graduate of the US Air Force Academy. After completing Navigator and Electronic Warfare Officer training, he served with the 46th Tactical Fighter Squadron at MacDill AFB, Florida, from April 1970 to April 1971. He then began a combat deployment in the 13th TFS at Udorn Royal Thai AFB, Thailand, from May 1971. Though eligible to go home in May 1972, he extended his tour and was shot down on July 3, 1972. After 270 days in captivity, he was released in March 1973 and went on to complete pilot training. He then served in a variety of assignments including the 92nd TFS in England, the 563rd TFS at George AFB, and the 90th TFS in the Phillipines. During this time he became an F-4G Wild Weasel Instructor Pilot, an Assistant Operations Officer, and Chief of Operations and Training and Chief of Stan Eval. His final

assignment was Assistant Operations Officer for the 563rd and then 561st TFS on his second tour at George AFB from September 1985 until his retirement on July 1, 1990.



Tony in the Middle of Warhawk Nation!! Go Warhawks!!

- (1) You went to the Air Force Academy, graduating Class of 1968. What interested you in the Air Force and the Academy? Given the events going on at that time, was the prospect of war on your mind while you were there?

Most definitely. I was facing the draft, and didn't have any great college prospects. I read an interesting article about the Academy and I thought I'd go there and hide out until the war was over. Facing the draft, I had no interest in joining the Army since one of my classmates had already been drafted and killed. The Navy had too much water for me. So that left the Air Force.

While I was at the Academy, I got pretty much indoctrinated into the idea that, "Somebody has to do the fighting." Before then it was an attitude of "Let somebody else do it." And you're surrounded by heroes and guys that have done their part. And that was my transformation.

So while you were there, it shifted your mindset.

Yes. 180 degrees.

So you hadn't been someone who grew up with the aviation bug, the fighter pilot mythos?

No, none of that. My family tree had very little military history on it. Obviously, the blacks were relegated to servant duties, right up until that point, and I can only see, I think, three members that had even joined. So there was nothing in my military background, or my family background for me toward the military.

How was it being an African American cadet at the Air Force Academy in the mid '60s? Was that a difficult cultural environment? Did you receive a lot of harassment over it?

No, it was interesting: only three individuals harassed me overtly. And the rest of them were just, "We're all in this together." Some of my best friends came out of that.

The Academy regimen doesn't leave a lot of room for pretense and all that. Everybody is struggling. Everybody's competing, and the good thing there is, you get by on your merit. If you're a wimp, it doesn't matter what color you are. So that was good. I really enjoyed that.

It sounds like the Academy was set up well from the beginning.

Yes. There were exceptions, but for the most part, it was pretty good. In fact, I had a lot of roommates who were from the south. We got together and helped each other out. They came to the conclusion, "You're just like me, but I can't take your home, because my daddy would kill both of us." So it's just the changing times.

There was an interesting thing. I never heard a word about the Tuskegee Airmen while I was there, even though we had all kinds of Air Force movies and history of the Air Force, but they omitted that part of it.

You went on and became a navigator and weapons systems officer for your Vietnam tour?

Yeah. And I was an EWO also.

You were not in the role of an EWO during Vietnam, is that right? I know you later converted to being a pilot. Did you ever serve operationally as an EWO?

No, not really. Because I was just a WSO in Southeast Asia. And when I got back from there, I went to pilot training.

Did your EWO training come in handy against SAMs?

Yeah. One particular thing was the early RWR gear had a switch on it that you could switch to wide open. And you could hear the early warning and height finders. So I could tell when we were being targeted, just by the fact that the height finders were painting us. That was something that gave us a little more situational awareness. We could have, and should have, targeted those assets to save a lot of pilots and planes.

You deployed in May of 1971. During that time we were not flying many missions over the North. Were you then supporting mostly South Vietnam and Laotian operations?

Yes. And then it was what they called the Easter Offensive in '72. We kind of kicked back into gear over the North.

Did they even still do the patch: the 100 counter mission patch was over by then, wasn't it?

Yeah, officially. You just did a one-year tour. Of my 266 missions, 50 were to the North, so my patch reads "50 1/2 Missions North Viet Nam."

Although you were past that by the time you were shot down?

I extended. I really wanted a pilot training slot. I had been begging to go to pilot training, but they kept putting me off. And I was coming up on the age limit. And if I took another assignment, I'd be locked in. So I said I'll extend for six months, because combat tours are short term so you could do that and bridge.

Was there any sense that the prestige of extending a combat tour would help your case to get pilot training?

I don't think so. I hadn't considered that. It was really the timing itself.

That's really interesting. I noticed when I was reading your biography that you were past the normal one-year point before you were shot down. I was wondering why you were still there.

And so then, of course, you go out in July on your 266th mission. You went down. Will you tell us a bit about that experience and how it all happened and what it felt like?

I had gone to the Fast FAC program [as a Laredo FAC]. I was crewed with this guy. First time I'd ever flown with him, but he had a reputation for going out to the same target every day, which was against common sense rules. And he had been told to not do that. And before we got in the airplane, I told him that I didn't want him doing that and he said, "Okay, I won't do it." And of course, he went and did it anyway.

I made up my mind halfway through the mission that I would never fly with him again, because he did go after the same target that morning. First thing when we hit the target area, he got it [that target]. And I thought, okay, he's got that out of his system, but I will never fly with him again. But let's continue this mission.

Here's a curious thing. We took off I think at 11:00 and went down to Da Nang to refuel because the tanker was off station. We departed Da Nang at two o'clock and, we got shot down at six o'clock. I don't remember most of those four hours. They were erased from my memory bank. But as it turns out, we were north of where our

normal working area was. We had briefed some guys at Danang who were going to follow us up and drop some LGBs after we would mark the target. And just based on the audio and video from one of the guys who was doing the laser dropping. He watched our airplane on that last pass and he said that he saw something white come off the airplane. He saw a puff of vapor and of course then the airplane impacted the ground. But in analyzing the tape, we had put the mark on the ground. The rocket was on the ground. Steve was calling corrections off the smoke but he was still proceeding downhill. The only thing we can surmise is he was going down to strafe the target because he liked to strafe.

And you know, it's dumber than dirt to strafe a target that you're gonna drop a 2000 pound bomb on. But I can't think of any other reason for him to still be going down and calling corrections. Normally you pulled off, circled the target and then called the corrections off the smoke, but at any rate, what we surmise happened was a nose cone came off the centerline tank which was that white thing coming off. The vapor was just a little bit of gas escaping. But if that happens supposedly it puts the airplane out of control for three cycles of max available G, plus and minus. And then it lets you fly it again, but we were so low he didn't have time to say anything to me. He just pulled the handles and of course I went first.

My silly thing was I was changing the roll of film in my camera because I wanted to take pictures of the firework show. I wasn't really paying attention to him going down. The first indication anything was wrong was that I heard an explosion, and then my feeble brain said "You've heard an explosion but you didn't feel anything." And then the world went white, obviously because I peeked up over that canopy rail at 600 miles per hour with no visor down, and I immediately went into shock. The next thing I know, I'm on the ground, standing there with a radio in my hand. Classic out of body experience: I'm looking at this idiot standing there with a radio in his hand. The guys who were orbiting said I was babbling so they told me to shut up and answer with one click for Yes, two clicks for No. First question was "Are you injured? No. Okay, then standby." Sooner or later, six or seven guys materialized in front of me with AK-47s, so I gave up.

[What did it feel like in that moment?](#)

I was still in shock. And the amazing thing was that they were nervous. They gestured for me to take off my .38. So I dropped the .38, which was unloaded anyway. They had me take off the survival vest because they knew I had gyro jets and all that stuff. And then they made me take off the flight suit. And then they went over and played with the zippers and Velcro and then they marched me awhile. The next thing I know it's after nine o'clock, because we went down at 6:00 pm, sunset was 9:00 pm, and it was dark when I realized I was tied up in a bunker underground with my elbows tied behind my back. And just in my skivvies and that's when I yelled "Oh fiddlesticks" because I finally realized what had happened.

Somebody shined a flashlight down and motioned for me to come up and that's when I thought they were going to shoot me. But they didn't, obviously. And they marched me off to a little straw hut and kept me overnight, and then we did the interrogation the next day. I told them I was a combat photographer on my first mission which worked great. Because I had extended my tour, all my paperwork was brand new, so they bought that story. And they told me, "You know, you're a misguided Patriot. You think you're doing the right thing. Your

country's totally messed up. We've got to keep you until the war's over. We're not going to bother you." Well, that was a relief. And so then I determined that this was a graduate level survival school, and I should try to get away with as much as I could. So I proceeded to try to mess with them and tell stories and all. They bought the story that I was a combat photographer. They actually put that out to the world. I gave him the wrong name of my pilot. They put that out. I told them his name was "Cotbreth" but it was Cuthbert. It was a code. The guys back home were probably laughing their asses off, because I had rehearsed that story!

It took five days to get up the trail. I was lost the whole time because we were 60 miles from where I thought we were, so nothing looked right and my escape plans were kind of screwed up.

[But did they actually live up to their promise to treat you relatively well?](#)

Now a lot of this was they're probably curious, because they didn't get any black guys. Every day going up the trail they would bring me out, bring all the civilians out, their women and children, give them a big pep rally speech and tell me that they hated me because I had killed their brothers and fathers and sons. And that was it. But they were curious, really - nobody ever touched me. They fed me. And here's another thing - the government never told us that they had stopped the torture. When Ho Chi Minh died in '69, basically the torture was over.

The Vietnamese had told their civilian population: "When an airplane goes down, you have to turn the pilot over alive. And of course, in their brains, a plane has one pilot for one airplane. So the first guy to get caught had pretty much a pass. The second guy they don't get any extra bag of rice or medals for so they can take out their frustrations on him. In my case they caught me first. My pilot had already told his buddies that he would never be taken alive. He carried an extra gun and he apparently started shooting. Because the government hadn't told us that the torture had stopped, we had basically three options because we didn't want to be tortured. The first was to ride the airplane in, the second was to save one bullet and blow your brains out, and the third was to start a land war that you can't possibly win. And if you have a .38 and everybody else has an AK-47, that's what you're doing when you start shooting. Steve apparently chose that option. That's what we think.

The official cover story was when they [CSAR] finally gave up looking for him at night because of darkness, he told them "I'll see you in the morning. I'll bed down to hide out until the morning." But the real story according to one of the guys who was up there was they heard a lot of shooting over his radio and then they didn't hear any more from him. The Vietnamese claim they had no knowledge of him. But they eventually corrected his name and put it out. They eventually gave me his wedding ring when we were released because I had lied to them and told them that I was married. So we know they got him one way or another.

His name was Steven Cuthbert and he was TDY to Udorn. He was from the 523rd based in The Philippines. A pretty good pilot, but obviously he had this wild streak.

[You were fighting in the late part of the war, but of course we didn't know at the time when it was going to be over. But Vietnamization was a well known and already well progressed thing at that point. We were withdrawing our forces. Was there any sense before the mission or even before your tour that this was almost](#)

over? That if you went down, you were not going to be there for eight years like the guys from '65? Did that help you psychologically when you went up in the air every day?

Yeah. Back in April, when the wet season transitioned to the dry season the bad guys did not give up their territory. Traditionally, the good guys ruled during the dry season, bad guys during the wet season. That April, they did not make that transition. The bad guys held on to it. So I knew that this war was gonna be over by Christmas. And I actually missed it by a month but yeah, that colored my whole demeanor during the captivity because I knew I wasn't gonna be there eight years. I was optimistic. I was all set to be tortured for six months, but not eight years. It's like I could gut it out if I had to for half a year. And then of course when they told me they weren't gonna bother me, it changed the whole situation.

They put us in their show camp, the Zoo, which is where they brought all the journalists and where they put guys that had been recently shot down who were not injured. So they could release guys who had not been tortured or injured for propaganda.

What got you through it?

A sense of humor. I decided that this was graduate survival school, and I was gonna do my best to just mess with them every chance I got. And I succeeded a little bit.

Did you know Tom Hanton while you were there?

Yeah. I'm sure he'll tell you. I watched him get shot down. I was on a Laredo mission. Tom and his flight were escorting us, and Tom and Rick McDowell got shot down trying to keep us safe. And then I think it's probably two weeks after that I got to the Hilton. They said, "Do you want some roommates?" Sure. So they brought these guys in, put us all in a theater. Tom was one of the guys. We all went from the Hilton to the Zoo and we were roommates for the rest of the time there.

When you got home, you chose to stay in the USAF and continue pursuing your goal to be a pilot. Was there any consideration that this may not be what you really wanted to do for a career, given your POW experience? Or was there still no doubt?

There was no doubt. I was sold on the Air Force. I just wanted to be in the driver's seat. And of course, they gave me the option to go to pilot training. So it worked out.

What was your perspective on being a POW in terms of your life and in terms of your career?

Well, first thing was, it's strange, but I would have felt left out if I hadn't gotten shot down. And that's really weird. You get over the initial shock and you go, "Okay, they're gonna shoot you." My only reaction to that was that I was extremely, to put it bluntly, pissed off. Because I was in an undeclared war. I had no business being there. I was geographically on the other side of the globe from where I should have been. And the worst thing was, there was nobody that could do anything about it. Everybody would assume I got killed in the crash. And here I would be shot in the jungle like a rabid dog. My mother couldn't do anything. Government couldn't

do anything. Police couldn't do anything. That was an empty feeling. It's like your bubble has been burst and you really screwed up. And then it's like, "Okay. Alright. They're gonna shoot you." My life didn't flash before my eyes or anything. It's just, like, I'm mad!. Then of course, they didn't shoot me. So this took maybe one day and they said, "We're not gonna bother you. We've got to keep you till the war is over." Of course, they knew it was over too. This was a huge relief for me.

I still had a chip on my shoulder when I got there. And I started harassing the guards and Rick, who was the other guy shot down with Tom, finally grabbed me by the collar and said, "Quit messing with these guys, because we all have to live here." And it was interesting because Rick was from Selma. And he and I got into a heated argument right off, which the Vietnamese thought was racial. And all it was, was that he was a Chevy guy and I was a Mopar guy. And we were just arguing tooth and nail about the merits of each one. Vietnamese even came in and asked me if I wanted some more roommates. But Rick and I kept that little tidbit because if we ever got in a situation where we needed to end the session, we could just start a race riot. And that would end it. They wouldn't know how to handle that. So it's just again part of messing with them.

How I got through it? It's like okay, you got shot down. Well, you got a hell of a war story. You'll probably get your pilot training slot. You bought all the stereo you wanted, you bought all the clothes you wanted, but you haven't saved any money. You're single and your checks are going into the bank at 10% interest. This isn't such a bad deal after all. And the worst thing was I could not get up and go get a Coke when I wanted one. But other than that, I'm rooming with guys, I've got people to talk to. They're not gonna bother me. This is gonna be over pretty soon. And I'm a rationalizer, so I always look for the positive. And to me, it was a great learning experience. I came out of there with a new set of rules for life. Nothing's critical. So, all in all, it was, I'd say, a positive experience.

I noticed that the American newspaper and the Vietnamese newspaper had the same headlines. You know, we shot down 20 of their airplanes and we didn't lose a single one. We killed more trucks than the Soviet block ever built. They shot down more airplanes than the whole Western world ever built. So both sides put some spin on things. Also, getting to see the cultural differences. Saving face was big with them. That helped a lot in dealing with them. So long as you told them something, you didn't get beaten. They were satisfied if you gave them an answer. They even told us: they said, "You guys are silly. You say you're not gonna tell us anything until we beat you. And then you singing like canaries."

So that's their take on it. But the cultural differences were amazing. They absolutely could not believe you could have two newspapers in a town with differing views. They absolutely could not believe only one family lived in an American house. They totally did not understand how we kept the pigs and chickens on the aircraft carriers because they didn't know about refrigeration. So you could play things like that. One of the guys created National Doughnut Day or something. So sense of humor played a big part in most of the guys I think. But generally, most of us have a coping mechanism, either hatred, religion, sense of humor, or something like that, that you resort to in times of stress. You never want to go into this situation and never volunteer for it, but once you get there, it's like, "Okay, now what do I do?" You take it from there.

How has this helped you, later on in your career and later in life?

I don't put up with any nonsense from anybody. Nothing's critical. I don't have to do anything I don't want to do and I don't waste time. That's a very bad experience: nine months out of your life. You can't make it up. A lot of guys tried drinking. The Budweiser truck refilled the bar every morning, so you can try drinking the bar into oblivion but it's not going to work. You can eat whatever, but you cannot make up those lost months or years. And my experience was totally different than the guys who were there for five, six, seven, or eight years. I call us the Summer Help. We just kind of audited the course. They never tortured us. They fed us. It was an interesting experience really, for us, at least for me. I don't know about anybody else. But for me, it was an interesting experience.

Number one, I never understood how the British could keep a stiff upper lip during the bombing in the Blitz. When the B-52s came the first night, you're scared shitless because you never think they're very accurate. Then you hear those bombs dropping and they're coming towards you and they're gonna end up past you. The first night, you go into their makeshift bomb shelters. Second night, you crawl under the bed. Third night, "Ah! It's not even close!" The rest of the time you just go out and watch the fireworks. So you rationalize that if a bomb is gonna get you, you'll never know it. It's like thunder and lightning. You hear a lot of noise but by the time you hear the noise the bomb is done. Just like lightning: if you hear the noise, you're safe.

Was there any thought that Linebacker 2 might actually prolong the war and you'd be a prisoner for longer?

Oh, no. The first night, we lost one of the guards. He had just left his home and his street got wiped out. The guy was so shaken that we never saw him again.

So you get a situation where you got the guys up in Hanoi pushing the buttons and pulling the strings and running the war because it doesn't bother them until it hits home. Now reality sets in. So yeah, they came to the negotiating table because of the B-52s.

What was it like later in the Air Force, say in the late '70s and the '80s? Having been a POW in Vietnam, do people not know how to ask you about it, not know how to even bring it up? Do they shy away from the topic? Do they do the opposite? Do they eagerly ask you about it?

It's a mixture. Most of the Air Force people have no problem asking about it. Some civilians: they're in awe. And they think you were tortured and everything and you really had it bad, and when I tell them it wasn't that bad, they don't believe me.

But when you're talking to young people, they still get a kick out of listening to it, although it's ancient history to them. But the adults respect that you've served your country, which is the change from the guys who came back from South Vietnam that got spat on and called baby killers.

The POW group basically came out mentally intact. You don't have PTSD. A few cases of suicide, but not a lot. It's miniscule. So they were actually a stronger group.

Most of us were college educated. And here's another thing I like to tell people. Nobody gets drafted into the Air Force. You volunteer for the Air Force. You volunteer to go flying. You fight like hell to get a fighter. You volunteer to go to combat. So if anything happens to you, whose fault is it? That's my perspective on things.



We Remember!

Is it more like a true warrior mindset as opposed to just a soldier mindset? You can be a soldier because you're drafted, but you are a warrior who fought to get that fighter assignment. You wanted to be there.

Yes, and you're playing a game. They're shooting at you; you're shooting back. Some days you eat the bear; some days the bear eats you. You play the game, you take your chances. There's danger in it. But if you follow common sense rules: like I said, I flew 265 missions where we brought back everybody we took off with because we used common sense.

So it really wasn't that different than training except that they are shooting at you. But again, it's not like you're gonna get shot at every day. So you take all that into perspective, and yes, I know I'm taking a chance. But they shoot at you; you shoot at them; most of the times they miss.

When I got to the Weasels, it was the best kept secret around with the F-4G model because you had total situational awareness. You were much more aware of what's going on than anybody else who was in the fight. A guy shoots a SAM at you, he can't move. You can move! So that was a good mission.

What was your favorite overall assignment in the Air Force?

Weasel squadron. Well, no, I mean, the combat squadron was my favorite. But second best and the best mission was the Weasel mission. Mainly because I was driving instead of being a passenger. You get a little more control over your own destiny there.

What was your favorite thing about being in the Air Force - not necessarily an assignment - but the favorite thing about being in it?

Working with professionals. You knew the guys were extremely good at what they did. And the competition was always there. But the big thing about the Air Force was you got judged based on your performance. Nobody cared what color you were, what religion you were. You got called out if you messed up; you got singled out if you were good. And that was a good feeling.

The military was a family. This is something you don't see in the civilian world. You get to know people and get to know their families. Anywhere you go, you have a place to stay, have a car. It's just beautiful. When I was shot down my classmates rallied around my mother, supported her. It's just a close knit family.

And of course you get to see some godawful places you don't want to see, but all in all you get to see some good spots around the world.

Since retirement, what has given your life meaning? What do you want to do with whatever time you have left?

At the 22 year point, I got tired of the Air Force and they got tired of me, so I retired. I went to United for 17 years and they put me out when I turned 60.

While I was at United, Bill Norwood grabbed me by the ear and said, "I know you feel great that you got hired by United, but now you have a new mission. And that's to go out and recruit kids to be aviators."

So many of the kids have no clue, just like I was when I was growing up. I saw pilots in movies. I thought I wanted to be a pilot and I thought I wanted to be Superman. I had an equal chance of being both, because there was nobody that looked like me that did it. There was nobody on my family tree. Nobody in my neighborhood. I didn't know how to get there from here.

Bill said, "Do your best to educate kids that this is available" and that's been my whole mission: just getting kids involved in careers in the aerospace industry.

For instance, where I live, Apple Valley is a bedroom community. We have no industry other than cement. And they even put out an article that the jobs are hard to get. You can get a job at Walmart or a restaurant and all that, and the pay is less than everywhere else. The kids don't see that they can get into General Atomics or General Electric Aviation or the Airframe and Powerplant School, all of which are right here in town. They don't realize that.

I am starting an Aviation Academy on Monday. It's two weeks of academics and field trips to show them "Hey, you can get a high paying job right here in the desert. But you have to sacrifice and buckle down and learn some good life skills like being on time and respecting people. And, as the bottom line, none of this nonsense about not wanting to go to work today and quitting." So we teach them life skills. And then we have an Aviation Club where we'll pay for flight lessons for them. And we've turned out about six or seven of them that have become pilots, another five or six that have soloed and are now waiting to become pilots. So that's rewarding.

We do a Young Eagles program through the Experimental Aircraft Association and we probably put 200 kids a year through orientation flights. And that is very rewarding. Because if kids are scared before their first flight, they come back grinning from ear to ear. We have kids that come back 10, 15 times. But that's a good start to get them to the mindset that "Hey, I can be somebody."

We have got an aircraft mechanic at Northrop Grumman. A Cybersecurity expert at Lockheed. Grad students getting an education. People have gone into the Army and into the Air Force. So you have some success stories and that's my mission now.

Part of the reason is that somebody kicked the doors down for me to get into aviation. Prior to my coming along, most of my people were relegated to servile duties in the military, but I had a chance to become an officer and a pilot. I'm the first one on my family tree.

[So who was it that kicked the door down for you?](#)

The Tuskegee Airmen.

[Is there anything you'd like to just say that's on your mind?](#)

For us, being in prison was a holding action. At least that was my perspective. There, you can't go home. So go sit down and watch the war go by. This mess is going to be over. We had given up, really. We didn't prosecute this war to win it.

[I came along after that war, but I've read a lot about it. And one thing that struck me, and it baffles me, is that I cannot see any point in time, from start to finish, where there was an actual commitment to win the war. The troops were doing their part. But when the air war was fully hot, like it was during Linebacker 2, we had also already reached the political decision that we were leaving. When earlier, we had a political decision that were trying to force our will upon the enemy, we weren't willing to actually unleash the Air Force. So there was no point where there was BOTH a unified political and military focus on victory.](#)

No, no there wasn't, and the rules of engagement had our arms tied behind our backs.

One of the missions I was on, we were tasked to intercept some MiGs. They turned us at the border saying the threat had disappeared. And as soon as we turned, somebody came up on the radio and said "Break! They're on your ass, shooting." So we turned back, met the first 2 MiGs head on, and met a second set head on. They shot at us but they missed. We came out of there unscathed.

I did some research and found the guy who gave us the warning. I thanked him and asked him when he knew the MiGs were there. And he laughed.

He said, "We heard them taxi out, take off, get vectored on you, cleared to fire."

So my question was, "Why didn't you give us some notice when we could have been offensive?" And he said, "It's a secret. We don't want them to know our capabilities. And unless it's life or death, we're not allowed to say anything."

And it was stuff like that that went on during the war. People sat on information that could help you. You couldn't go after airplanes that were close to the Chinese border. You couldn't hit them on their bases. It was just stupid ROE.

We got a radar lock on MiGs and were denied permission to shoot. It was on the mission that Tom was shot down. When we were headed in, they said two F-4s are coming out being chased by two MiGs. I have them on radar. I have four targets: two in front, two in back. Are we cleared to fire? Nope. Okay, the two F-4s just went by. I still have two targets. Cleared to fire? No. We had to get a visual on them. So, it was just stupid ROE.

And right after Tom got shot down, we saw one of the MiGs. We got locked onto him. The pilot squeezed the trigger and nothing happened. When we got back home and they downloaded the missile, they found it never came off the rails because the cables were corroded. The thing had been loaded on the airplane for three years and never been downloaded and tested.

So we'd gone through three monsoons, and countless landings, with cables that were corroded. We were hauling around 700 pounds of dead weight! But again, there was a stupidity in the way we fought this war. There was nothing worth dying for in this war unless it was a troops in contact situation.

Interview with Major Jacque Vasta

Editor's Note: Major Vasta is the Commander of the 35 Cadet Squadron at the AF Academy and works hard to ensure that the Cadets understand their history, legacy and what is expected of them in the future. As the Commander of the 35 CS she is an honorary member of the Wild Weasels.

(1) Tell us a little about yourself please

I am a 2010 Grad and out of #35 CS, My dad graduated in 1982 and was a Wild Weasel. I am a Force Support Officer and former executive officer working for Lt Gen (ret) Carl Schaefer who is also a legacy of the 35 CS. My personal history is very rich with the 35 CS and as a member I know some of the history of the Wild Weasels, but I have learned so much more working with the Society of Wild Weasels liaison, Mike Kadlubowski and so have our cadets. I feel that I am exactly where I belong and so is my husband who is also from the Academy. We have two great kids, Charlotte 7 and Bobby 6. My background and interests are in acquisition and innovation. I want more than anything to foster innovation and faith in our military!

Editor's Note: A great salute to Lt Col (Ret) for his steadfastness and skill in combat operations. He was always a man to "ride the river with" the highest form of courage and brotherhood you could bestow in the old west! We are proud to know you Sir!



Some of the Great Weasels who made the F-4G a lethal SAM Killer!

Interview with the 35 Cadet Squadron CC Major Vasta

Editor's Note: Major Vasta was quite an innovator as an executive officer and the following is the problem she saw, the solution she developed and the app which is in use across the Air Force now and she did it as the Executive Officer to the AFMC Vice-Commander a pretty busy job all on its own.



There was no single data base or application that allowed parents to reserve childcare at the Child development center. I was able to build a data base and design a mobile application called kinderspot. We have improved it over the years, and it is now AF Wide. Major Vasta accepting an innovation award!

(2) You have been Commander of the 35 Cadet Squadron for almost a year, what experiences would you like to share?

Prior to taking Command, I had one year at Colorado Springs University studying textbook leadership, motivational leadership and many case histories. I was able to interact with others taking leadership courses and talk about what we wanted to accomplish.

My leadership philosophy is servant leadership but at its core is so much more than one belief. I also believe in Transformational leadership and that each Commander must be aware of their individualized experiences. These Cadets come to us in different stages of maturity and each one needs to become their best officer!

One of our Seniors got in trouble offering 3 beers to Freshman. It was done for him and was a bad tradition. He was otherwise a stellar cadet. Ensuring he understood the responsibilities of being an officer and what was required in the Academy was part of my leadership challenge. Once I was sure he understood that then I worked hard to find a path for him. Appealed to Superintendent and he can come back in a year. He needs more time to lead but I have complete faith in the officer he will become once he has learned from this adversity.

(3) What have you learned about the Wild Weasels since you took over and want to share with the audience?

The time I was a cadet was limited and it wasn't until Kad came back and what a huge role that played. Learning that YGSBM came from Jack Donovan really meant something to me as a legacy. The Wild Weasels became the innovators. We honor our heritage through a Wild Weasel of the month. Someone who demonstrates courage FILO and the relationships to build teamwork with engineers, pilots and EWOs.

(4) You have had a great relationship with your Society liaison officer (Mike), what would you tell us are the lessons learned in this?

One of my first introductions in this job was with Mike and we linked up and visited and I was impressed with his support and the Society. A great mentor for me and getting his take on this institution and he has filled a great advisor role. Having his experience has been a secret weapon. I could give a briefing but Mike has built a relationship with our Cadets. His link has helped us honor the heritage.

(5) What have I missed that you want to add?

Just to thank the Society for their support of our Squadron and rest assured that your legacy and ethos are building blocks for me as the Commander.

Editor's Note: Major Vasta has been superb Sq CC and her humility, professionalism and leadership have been exactly what our future officers need for life! Word from Willie salutes you for your great leadership! Mike "Kad" Kadlubowski has been a stalwart liaison officer and the team of Vasta and Kad have been everything we could ask for! Thanks to both of you from Word from Willie!



35 AOC Maj Jacque
Vasta Bio (7).pdf

Current Status of the ACES (Aviator Cancer Study)

First off a big thank you to everyone who supported, made contact with their Congress representatives or gave us their proxy to let Congress know how important the ACES Act (aviator cancer causation study) was to pass. However, it failed to enter into the FY25 NDAA or FY25 VA appropriations as a legislative rider. Aztec who works this for the River Rats and is one of our newest Wild Weasel Society members has built an organization that now includes multiple Navy associations and AF veterans such as AWACs to push this further. This is worthy work and we need to win this one!

To get the ACES Act we must shift to a new approach with many new teammates. Our objective is to get the ACES Act signed into law before the 119th Congress adjourns. How will this look and sound? Our planned advocacy will focus on two U.S. House veterans' committees and their counterpart committees in the U.S. Senate. Fortunately, Congressman **"Pfoto"** Pfluger (TX) remains our House champion. In the Senate, Senators Mark Kelly (AZ) and Tom Cotton (AR) remain our sponsors. We meet monthly to discuss strategy and tactics for getting this passed and our next meeting will be on 8th January. We have added the MACH Coalition talking papers to our Medical section and we will be reaching out to convince Congress after our holidays.

Link:

<http://spot.fund/nk3l5fdc>

Expect to see the finished Instagram and Facebook page for the MACH Coalition in January!

History and the AGM-45 Shrike

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Stan Goldstein on the history of the Strike. Here is a good link in the Museum to Weasel Hunting. The article is edited here for length but the full one is at the link.



[Unleashing the Hunters: A Journey through the History of Wild Weasels | by Investigator515 | Medium](#)

As air warfare evolved during the latter half of the 20th century, aircraft had more to worry about than just enemy cannons and machine guns. Advances in rocketry led to powerful new anti-aircraft missiles, and developments in electronics greatly increased the capability of radar and guidance systems. The anti-aircraft missiles of the World War II-era could barely be counted on to strike a large area target, but by the 1960s much smaller versions could track aircraft in the sky. The pace of progress was accelerating and air forces around the world struggled to counter each new improvement.

In the first months of the Second Indochina War, commonly known as the Vietnam War, American aircraft began to suffer losses from North Vietnamese SAMs, which were supplied by the Soviet Union. The SAMs covered medium-to-high altitudes, up to 60,000 feet in the case of the SA-2. When U.S. aircraft came in at low altitude to avoid the missiles, they were vulnerable to traditional anti-aircraft fire. To counter this threat, the U.S. Air Force initiated a program called Wild Weasel. The program became so successful that the name has since been applied to every U.S. Air Force aircraft developed for this sort of mission.

The new Wild Weasel F-100F aircraft arrived at Korat, Thailand, along with their crews, mechanics, and support personnel on November 24. They soon began flying missions over North Vietnam. By late December Donovan and Lamb had knocked out their first SAM site, and the program was on its way to becoming a staple of the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam. The U.S. Air Force dubbed the initial missions Iron Hand. The missions were made up of one F-100F and three or four F-105D Thunderchief fighter bombers, affectionately known as

Thuds. The AGM-45 Shrike was a modification of the Sparrow air-to-air missile designed specifically to home on radar. It was the first of a series of antiradiation missiles that would allow the Wild Weasels to engage the SAMs with more than just unguided rockets. It carried a 149-pound warhead that could easily destroy a radar unit such as the Fan Song. To target a particular radar, the Wild Weasel pilot had to fly directly at it until he was close enough for the homing system to work. The initial versions of the Shrike could not do that until they were within range of the SA-2. Since the Shrike's rocket motor burned out after 10 seconds, this meant that the missile continued its flight unguided. Still, as long as the missile was aimed accurately it would still detonate within 20 feet of the radar. As a countermeasure, the radar operators would turn their system off, which often threw the missile off track. This was not a complete loss, though, as a switched-off radar was useless for guiding SA-2s.

The first U.S. Air Force use of the Shrike missile occurred on April 18, 1966, when a Wild Weasel used one to target a SON-9 radar that was used to direct the fire of 57mm and 100mm anti-aircraft guns. The missile disappeared into some haze before striking the target, but the EWO noted the radar stopped functioning, indicating it had been damaged. Nevertheless, Wild Weasels remained vulnerable to gunfire and enemy fighters. The North Vietnamese radar operators realized the Wild Weasel aircraft had to fly straight at their target so they would turn off their radars whenever they saw a plane coming directly toward them. They also recognized that Wild Weasel hunter-killer teams operated in groups of four or five aircraft. Since this was smaller than the normal strike missions, they would simply shut down while the Americans were nearby. In addition, they started operating their radars for shorter periods.

The U.S. Air Force aviators noticed the North Vietnamese counters and developed new tactics of their own. They would fly threateningly toward enemy SAM sites just to get them to shut down. Sometimes they would bomb suspected radar sites just to keep their opponents off balance while strike missions were in the area. If a radar crew was bold enough to start transmitting, the Wild Weasels would quickly and aggressively attack it. They would also fly close to the strike missions to avoid standing out so the enemy would switch on their radars long enough to be targeted. Over time simply suppressing the radars became more of a priority than actually destroying them.

In March 1968, the U.S. Air Force also introduced the AGM-78 Standard Anti-Radiation Missile, which boasted a 219-pound warhead. It also had an improved guidance system that would allow the missile to continue tracking even if the radar was switched off after launch. The Standard Anti-Radiation Missile could turn up to 180 degrees after firing, so that the firing aircraft did not have to be flying directly at the radar to target it. The missile had a range of 75 miles, though Wild Weasel aircraft usually flew too low to fire them at that range and acquiring radar at that range was difficult at best. The F-4 Phantom proved capable of destroying SAM sites during the Linebacker operations of 1972 when the North Vietnamese possessed a daunting air-defense network.

In August 1967 another Wild Weasel flight covered a hazardous mission against a well-defended target. Lt. Col. James McInerney and his EWO Captain Fred Shannon flew against the defenses of the Paul Doumer Bridge. This mile-long structure was a key piece of infrastructure in the North Vietnamese railroad network. McInerney and Shannon destroyed two missile sites and suppressed four others, allowing the strike force to hit the bridge. During their attacks they dodged three SA-2 missiles and heavy gunfire. The strike force did not suffer a single loss during the mission. Both received the Air Force Cross for their heroism.

In response, the U.S. Air Force deployed a squadron of the improved F-105G Wild Weasel along with the new F-4C. The F-4C had encountered a longer development period but was finally coming into its own. During Operation Linebacker II, the F-4C flew 460 sorties around Hanoi without a single loss. Most of the targets struck were within 25 miles of Hanoi, meaning they were surrounded by what was then the densest air-defense network in the world.



Another Shout Out to the Great Warhawk Nation!

WEBSITE UPDATES

Each member's journal under development—ETIC 20 Jan—the holdup is getting each journal secure for the member to write in.

Links for reading

[The Wild Weasels: Air Force Crews Who Fly into Danger First](#) (Shout out to Gaile Connally for this article)

[What we know about Israel's attack on Iran](#)

[PLA Navy's J-15D carrier-borne electronic warfare aircraft to debut at Airshow China - Global Times](#)

Next Issue

Hollywood Hanton interview by Dave Melton and his career and POW experience
Mach 1 Coalition Update on Cancer Study

Gameplan for the 2025 Reunion

In Feb we would like to schedule a zoom call with our Wild Weasels Members taking 10 minutes to recount their “Most Memorable Mission” and record those. If you have one you would like to sign up to tell us your mission please let us know at WildWeaselReports@gmail.com



Weasels Making Sure Santa is ON TIME & ON TARGET!



Our KosherBear Stan Goldstein bringing in an ornament for the TAC Christmas tree many many years ago!

Reunions

River Rat 52nd Real Reunion 22-26 Oct 2025 Pensacola Beach

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