

A Word from Willie

Society of Wild Weasels Newsletter

June 2025



CINCWW's Corner

Fellow Weasels,

It is almost the 4th of July and for me the 249 Birthday of the US is something to celebrate! You have done your part and more in keeping America the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave", so I offer you a special thanks for all you do and have done for this great country. It is also the 250th Birthdays of our great Army, Navy and Marines! Big Yell here!

We have a great article on Tom Hanton's career and his experience as a POW. Tom has been a great officer and patriot and the things he has done after his military career are equally impressive! Thanks Tom for your great work! Dave Melton has been instrumental in conducting interviews and writing up these living history notes (thanks Dave). Aztec has good news and a caution on the ACES Act that he has led the MACH Coalition to success in. While we are on the road to success, we still need to be vigilant in our efforts! A big thank you to Chip Mattingly who has provided support to the Weasels on this issue and has volunteered to support it in the future. We also want to say goodbye to Major Jacque Vasta who as the Commander of the 25 Cadet Squadron Wild Weasels instituted a Wild Weasel of the month, improved the legacy room and overall made the cadets aware of their Weasel heritage! She and her family move to Kirtland where she takes an FSS Command! Thanks Jacque and Kad Kadlubowski who has been a model liaison working with Jacque!



<https://shop.usafa.org/products/cadet-squadron-35-wild-weasels>

Sleet has posted the voting for the Reunion. It includes both place and timing and he would like two votes on which place you want to go to. So far about 150 people have voted so keep it up.

<https://wildweasels.org/reunion-2026-planning/>

Once we have the top vote getters, we will contact that base and see if they can host us for our reunion. I hope to have the next location and date locked down by August. I want to call your attention to the recent death of Major Wade Holmes while on Active Duty from Brain Cancer. Wade was Viper pilot who had both a drone kill and been selected for Weapons School when he passed. Wade leaves behind a wife and 5 kids and the Air Warrior Courage Foundation has started 529 Education Accounts for his 5 children. If you would like to donate, please go to the link below and earmark your donation for Major Holmes or put in the comments where you want it to go. The AWCP has over 85 of these 529 accounts for children of aircrews we have lost and it is amazing watching them in action set those up.

<https://donate.givedirect.org/index.php?cid=15484>

Lastly, I want to close with a tribute to all Weasels of every generation. What we have seen in Iran is the total destruction of an Air Defense system and your innovation and creativity in tactics, strategy, equipment and support have a legacy in their destruction! Thanks for all you do and what you continue to do and Happy 4th of July!

VR
Budman Redmond

Society of Wild Weasels Chief in Charge
YGBSM
FILO

Medical Update

Note from Quack Bear about Prostate Cancer

The issue of PSA testing for prostate cancer is in the news lately, since former President Biden is reported to have just shown up with stage-4 metastatic prostate cancer. We are being told that he was not given the standard PSA blood test for over a decade. It seems hard to believe but there are government guidelines that specifically disrecommend PSA testing after age 69. All Wild Weasels should know that being a military aviator has been clearly shown to place us at a higher risk for certain cancers, including prostate. (You can also be at higher risk if you're African-American or if you have a positive family history of prostate cancer.) As such, I recommend that all military aviators should begin PSA testing at age 40, and continue annual testing until their life expectancy, for whatever reason, has become less than 10 years. Don't let any doctor talk you out of PSA testing!

Update on the ACES act by Vince "Aztec" Alcazar

From the River-Rats and founder of the MACH Coalition.

"On May 5, in a suspension of rules vote followed by a procedural floor vote, H.R. 530, Aviator Cancer Examination Study (ACES Act) passed the House, 367 votes for, 5 votes against. This sent the measure to the Senate. Almost 30 days later, on June 4, the Senate, in what in Senate parliamentary rules is termed a "hotline" vote, S.201, the Senate version of H.R. 530 passed 100 votes for, 0 votes against.

Had there been no changes—amendments, to the texts of H.R. 530 and S.201, we would probably be waiting for White House determination of a PoTUS signature ceremony arrangement in the Oval Office. However, there are substantive differences between H.R. 530 and S.201 as passed in each chamber. We worked especially hard to avoid this scenario, where lawmaker amendments could impede or even stop the progress of the ACES Act in this Congress. Because we are advocates and not lawmakers, we lost control. Ultimately, that occurred because lawmakers in particular positions of authority were able to exert their prerogative and did so. Where are we today?

After its successful June 4 vote, the Senate sent S.201 to the House for mandatory parliamentary review—triggered by verbiage differences. In his role as House Speaker, Congressman Johnson must now decide: 1) table the ACES Act UFN, 2) accede to the Senate version, or 3) opt to exempt the ACES Act from his own pay-go rule. Clearly, we do not want scenario #1, but we are in a delicate position. If the Speaker decides either #2 or #3 or both, it's possible that a conference could be eventually convened, House/Senate ACES Act versions be resolved, a joint Congressional version be crafted, and the bill made ready for presidential signature.

As of this writing, the House and Senate are in recess. There is no sense of timeline or the Speaker's intent. He is holding his cards close to the vest, as is his style. It's important to point out that other legislation is consuming lawmaker bandwidth. Until those bills are passed/resolved, numerous other bills are metaphorically in respective holding patterns. MACH has formed a well oiled advocacy team. When our congressional sources tell us that grassroots advocacy is wise, we will do what good airpower does: mass then deliver. Meanwhile, please watch for updates."

To get updates on the act go to.

<https://x.com/MACHCoalition>

<https://www.facebook.com/p/MACH-Military-Aviator-Coalition-for-Health-61570257942482/>

Membership Update

Fallen Wild Weasels

Jay E. Gasper, WW #718, Pilot, F-4C, 5 Nov 2024

Ronald L. Shepard, WW #474, Pilot, F-105G, 26 Apr 2025

Wade Holmes, WW #2924, Pilot, F-16, 15 May 2025

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:

Oliver "Chico" Lause, WW #2921, Pilot, F-35

Bryce Coulson, WW #2922, Pilot, F-35

Michael "Johnny Bravo" Drowley, WW #2923, AFOTEC/CC, F-35

Wade "Stab" Holmes, WW #2924, Pilot, F-16 (Posthumously)

Michael "Mobile" Holmes, WW #2925, Pilot, F-15

Edit Correction:

Craig Gourley, WW #2920, Honorary Member

L.A. Bud

If you know of family members who qualify, have them contact us at:

LABudF4G@gmail.com

Interview with Tom Hanton



May 2023

<https://www.c-span.org/program/american-history-tv/vietnam-prisoners-of-war-50th-reunion/628046>

Jump to 17:25 min

Born in 1944 in Santa Monica, California, and educated at California State University Long Beach, Lt. Col. Hanton entered Officer Training School on November 16, 1967. After commissioning in February 1968, Lt. Col. Hanton was trained as a Navigator and Electronic Warfare Officer at Mather AFB. Following a tour as an F-4 Weapon System Officer at Holloman, NM with the 9th Tactical Fighter Squadron, he was assigned to a combat tour in the F-4E with the 4th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Da Nang AB, South Vietnam. He was forced to eject on his 135th combat mission and spent 275 days as a Prisoner of War. When he returned to the United States after the war, he obtained a master's degree from Arizona State and served as an Electronic Warfare Officer in the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at George, AFB, first in the F-105G and then the F-4G Wild Weasels, including roles as a Standardization/Evaluation Flight Examiner and the initial instructor cadre in the F-4G. He ended his career in the USAF serving as Chief of the Electronic Combat Division at Headquarters Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center at Kirtland AFB, NM, retiring on February 1, 1993. He has been the Treasurer and President of NAM-POWs and is currently the Communications Director. **(As of the time of this writing)* He is also on the boards of the Society of Wild Weasels and the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association. Lt. Col. Hanton was awarded the Bronze Star for exceptionally meritorious service while held as a Prisoner of War.



How did you find yourself in Vietnam?

After I graduated from Long Beach State here in California, I went to Officer Training School and then to Navigator and Electronic Warfare Officer Training. During that timeframe, the AF was putting Navigators in the back seat of F-4s and the F-105G as Weapon Systems Operators or Electronic Warfare Officers. But our aeronautical rating was Navigator. After my F-4 RTU at George Air Force Base, CA I went to Holloman AFB, NM. Actually, I had orders for Ubon, Thailand, and right before the class graduated, they changed six back seaters' assignments from SEA to Holloman. I was at Holloman for almost two years, 1970 and 1971, and then received orders for a January 1972 report date to Da Nang AB, Vietnam. I arrived there at the end of January, and I started flying combat missions about a week after that, in the first week of February. From February of '72, I was in the 4th Tactical Fighter Squadron, and from February to June 27, when I was shot down, I flew 135 missions, with about 25 of them being over the North. We started going North again in April 1972.

We were in Da Nang, and it was like, literally, a 10-15 minute flight into Route Pack 1, which was the southern part of North Vietnam, and that's where the enemy was assembling forces for their push south and had numerous supply areas. The North Vietnamese Army came across the border with troops, tanks, and related equipment. And at the time, there were no American combat troops in that area – only US Marine and Army Advisors with the South Vietnam Army. So, we flew a lot of Pack 1 sorties. The guys from Thailand were doing most of the Pack 6 sorties, although we were assigned a few there. One-hundred and thirty-five missions was a lot of missions in only five months. You can do the math: it was almost every day. Some days we would go out three times. We could be in some of the combat areas in five minutes, ten minutes.

On the 27th of June of 1972 I was on what I think was my third or fourth escort mission into Route Pack 6. The other Route Pack 6 missions had been on MiG CAP while all the other North Vietnam Missions had been Interdiction Missions. In fact, our squadron was the last US fighter squadron stationed in Vietnam. We were at Da Nang with the F-4E, then we moved to Takhli AB, Thailand the day before I was shot down. I flew one combat mission out of Takhli and was shot down that day on number 135 - 27 June 1972.

Tell us about that experience, if you feel comfortable with it.

At first light, on the morning of 27 June we were MiG escort for three flights of F-4s who were laying a chaff corridor for the F-4 flights that would soon bomb a military compound on the edge of Hanoi. And there was actually no threat activity during that phase of the overall morning mission. We had air-to-air missiles, and, of course, the gun on the F-4E. I was in the fourth aircraft of the formation, Blue 4, as we say.

That mission was very unusual compared to the other 134 missions. In mid-May the 390th squadron was closed down as part of combat forces withdrawal from Vietnam. When I arrived, we had three squadrons, 4th, 421st and 390th, I was in the 4th. In fact, all these squadrons were on the list of those Nixon was pulling out. We were on the books to go to Udorn AB, Thailand at some point. And then, of course, the invasion happened. But it didn't change the schedule. It did change a few things, but they shut the 390th down right in the middle of all that!

What they did with the 390th squadron guys, was that anyone close to the end of their tour were sent home. I don't know what the criteria was, but then the rest of them were evenly split between the 421st and the 4th. We essentially got an additional flight. We then had five flights because of the number of people.

On the 27th of June mission all the guys in the flight, except for me, had transferred in from the 390th. I didn't know any of them. I hardly knew the guys in the other flights of the 4th because we tended to fly with the guys in our own flight. That's the way we did it, and generally, we flew with the same pilot, though not always. So, I was crewed with a pilot and three other aircrews I'd never flown with or knew. It was really unusual.

I'm in Blue Four. We did the chaff-escort mission and because of no air-to-air activity we had all our ordnance when we egressed. While we were on the tanker, we were directed to talk with a controlling agency that wanted to know our weapon status. We were still air-to-air capable. Several F-4s were lost during the follow-on bombing phase of the morning mission and they were conducting a SAR that needed MiG CAP. The bombing target was just south of Hanoi. It was a military supply depot. The guys who were dropping bombs came in and, of course, they were escorted by other F-4 flights. But some of those guys got shot down. I don't recall the numbers, but I think two.

In fact, that day, the 27th of June, we lost five F-4s, every one of them to MiGs, not any to AAA or SAMs. That was one of the best days for the North Vietnamese Air Force, because they accomplished all of the shoot downs. There were only, I believe two other days in the whole war where they shot down that many airplanes over North Vietnam and the only day that five F-4s were shot down by MiGs.

People sometimes refer to having either a SAM Day or a MIG Day. This was obviously a MiG Day. Why were they so successful that day?

At that point, we're talking June, we've been doing almost the same thing every day over North Vietnam. It was the same routes. There's only so many routes you could use. Timing wise, it was similar. And they watched us, they could hear us talk, just like we could hear them through some of the agencies. They just studied our routine and capitalized on it. By then, in fact, I think after the Robert Olds Bolo Tactic, they started doing their air-to air-tactics differently - they didn't want to directly engage us. Their tactic became

hit and run – high speed from low altitude directly below the target aircraft. And that's exactly what happened on 27 June 72.

The MiGs did not turn their radars on, so we got absolutely no warning whatsoever. I have met the MiG flight lead who told me they were vectored into position. We were in a tactically unsound formation for a MiG CAP as a four-ship. You should not do four-ship MiG CAPs. You do two and two, but for some unknown reason, that's what our flight lead did. Perhaps because it was not briefed – being both MiG Cap and Escort – and how to establish the CAP.

I've heard that the USAF would not allow its pilots to do a two and two for air superiority missions. All the veterans agreed this was blatantly stupid, but this was ordered from on high. Was that true?

That's a good question. I don't know. We rarely did CAP. We used to just escort when we were up there. And I mean, I had already been in the F-4 for two years with probably 700 hours or so in the F-4. At Holloman, I don't ever remember doing a four-ship CAP mission. We didn't have the kind of training that they have now. We tended to have intercept missions and other Air Combat Training (ACT), but we rarely did CAP.

Wild Weasel tactics involve a different kind of Combat Air Patrol than an air-to-air Combat Air Patrol. But it's a similar concept: we never flew Weasels in a four-ship formation, maybe to the combat area but not after arrival there. The readers know this quite well - you split the flight up and put two in one location and the other two in another. Flying as a four-ship air-to-air ends up that one is flying formation most of the time, especially as Blue Four with little time for lookout. In our case we ran out of fuel. We were always behind, because you needed more power to maintain formation. We were constantly going into burner just to try to get back into formation, and doing numerous turns, trying to remain in the SAR area.

When we got shot down, that was our third departure for the tanker after we had MiGs called out. Every time that we got on station, they called out MiGs. We turned toward them, and then they would turn away, and we would chase after them. Of course, by this time, we were low on fuel. We had jettisoned all of our tanks. So now we've got clean airplanes, which, while it has some advantages, fuel is not one of them. And so, we'd have to depart our CAP area sooner than desired. We couldn't stay up on the Combat Air Patrol that long with only internal fuel and the second and third times we cycled in, we were clean.

We were at Joker fuel – which was damn near out of fuel. It was touch and go whether we would have been able to make it to the tanker. Our flight lead was not even acknowledging our earlier bingo calls. It was really frustrating. My front seater had an F-105 tour and had been in the F-106. He was not a rookie. He just didn't have a lot of F-4 time. He was a very good pilot doing the best fuel management job possible, but we were just given a tough situation. At that point we were out of formation being unable to use burner to pull back into formation. We got shot down because we were husbanding our fuel. We were cut off from below the flight as we were departing North Vietnam. On the third time in there is when we got shot down, both Three and Four. Both of us were shot down because we were both out of formation and the lead element couldn't monitor our six.

We were hit by a heat-seeking Atoll Missile from a MiG-21. The MiGs came from behind, in trail, which had become their preferred tactic. It wasn't obvious to me what had happened to the airplane. I knew we were out of control, but didn't know what the flyability was until I grabbed the stick. The airplane was just going all over the sky. The hydraulics were gone.

We didn't talk about bailing out after the Atoll hit. I don't know why we didn't, but we didn't. Some guys in that situation do not have enough time. We were at a little over 20,000 feet, so we had some time. It was just about getting as far away from there as possible and as close to Laos as we could go. You wanted to get away from North Vietnam.

I wasn't anxious to bail out right away, but I was anxious to bail out when we got to 10,000 AGL, which was about 12,000 feet on the altimeter. I was waiting for it to wind down, and by the time I was about to pull the lower handle, he pulled his ejection handle. I just know we both went and then I'm floating down in this valley, and I wanted to get over to this karst, this big outcropping, type of mountain that was on one side of a village surrounded by rice paddies. And now I'm steering towards that karst and three peasants are at the other end of this rice paddy. All of a sudden, I heard something go zinging by me, and they were shooting at me.

TEASER.... For the rest of the story head to ...

<https://wildweasels.org/pows-that-returned-with-honor/>

2024 Funding

Available balance \$ 68,997 down slightly from last quarter's \$69,422.



My Instructor said -- "Think like a bomb"

Links of Interest



<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2135747/shaw-tirelessly-maintains-wild-weasels-during-red-flag-15-4>

SoWW History

This month there was the strike in Iran. In this link, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Caine gives an overview of the strike package. There are several references to the suppression of enemy defenses.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtYELwdb2FQ>

Some history provided by one of our members about Constant Peg

<https://www.twz.com/air/f-22s-fly-alongside-migs-to-commemorate-founder-of-americas-secret-soviet-fighter-squadron>



John Hill and John Buick go for a swim after their 100th Mission in Vietnam

Reunions

Please complete this polling form before

6 July 2025

<https://wildweasels.org/reunion-2026-planning/>

to help us plan the date and location for our
2026 Wild Weasel Reunion.

River Rats Annual Reunion; Pensacola late Oct '25

<https://www.river-rats.org/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=1898086>

Next Full Issue

Aug 2025 update will be an interview with Col Fuego Tuzell, the outgoing Shaw OG.

We are looking to do an overview of the suppression of Iranian Defenses during the recent US Air attack. Keep a lookout...

If you have feedback please drop us a line at WildWeaselReports@gmail.com

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