“BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER” 1971

It seemed so long ago when LBJ, summoning the Allies of Great Britain and West Germany, the United Nations and Congress, brought forth his “Gulf of Tonkin” Resolution and the first air strikes against North Vietnam at Quang Khe and Vinh. That was 1964. Not a year since the assassination of JFK and not that far distant from Cuba in ’62.

It commenced with the sombre words to camera by a President known for his short fuse and Southern drawl: “Repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defence but with a positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight”.

It followed with the pronouncement of targets by Secretary McNamara whilst the jets were en route and it ended with the loss of a pilot and our first POW, a Skyraider and Skyhawk both flying from the carrier Constellation. It was a portent of things to come.
Our “intervention” in Vietnam had now entered its twilight. Six months ago on New Year’s Eve the Tonkin Resolution met repeal. Yet, the US troop pullout whilst apace, was definitely not deemed a retreat. Ask anyone in official circles and the withdrawal was a measured strategy. The White House even gave it a name: “Vietnamization”.

So when in late January, seventeen thousand troops of the ARVN pushed towards the Laotian border in operation “Lam Son 719” they sought to finish a job begun in Cambodia by our forces a year ago; the belated closure of “The Trail” and the final passing of the initiative into the South’s hands.

It soon became apparent that seventeen thousand ARVN faced NVA numbers five thousand stronger. Despite brutal fixed wing and rotary support resulting in twenty thousand NVA casualties, the only legal military punch we could provide under the restrictions of the “Cooper-Church Amendment”, the enemy grew past forty thousand. Concurrent losses decimated the ARVN to just eight, an unsustainable ratio of five to one. Rather than living up to its name, honoring the hero over the Chinese some five centuries prior, Lam Son 719 had run its premature course.

At the end of the action ARVN casualties numbered seven thousand-six hundred and eighty-two with one thousand-seventy-six dead. US casualties numbered one thousand-four hundred and two with two hundred and fifteen KIA. Eight US jets were lost. Seven hundred and twenty-six US helicopters were damaged of which one hundred and eight were outright destroyed. It was an epic, its tales horrendous and extreme.

In the “O” Club we watched President Nixon on the night of 7 April proclaim that “Vietnamization has succeeded”. We also heard him announce the return Stateside, of one hundred thousand more troops.

Three weeks later, five hundred thousand demonstrated for peace in Washington.

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So here we sat this pre-monsoonal Monday, July 12, 1971 strapped to our Rhino’s, our F4E Phantoms, en route to our own Lam Son 719.

The planners called it the “Thanh Hoa Rail Bridge”, the locals called it Ham Rung from which derived the ominous label “Dragon’s Jaw”. To us, it was enough to simply say “The Bridge”.

Almost nine hundred sorties had been flown against this five hundred and forty foot span of pavement and steel, dug and revetted into the banks of the Song Ma, home to the sole railway line and flanked by a highway, all forming part of “Route 1A” leading south from Haiiphong to the DMZ.

Two locomotives filled with explosives had stolen it from the French decades before. Now rebuilt, a Communist feat, here it sat fifty feet above the murky water, huge rectangular trusses expertly supported by minimal presence on massive concrete piers. So many air crews gone, so much expended. We’d seen bombs bounce off its surface. To some, its landscape was more cratered than the moon.
How it was that we were flying this day was something else all together, for by definition since 1968, we weren't bombing the North at all. Air reconnaissance remained our eyes and since the end of “Rolling Thunder”, it proceeded at first unarmed and unescorted in a projection of good will.

The thing is, when you’re flying over enemy territory in a war, the bad guys are bound to be bothered and it didn’t take long for the radars to light up, the AAA to burst, the SAM’s to fly, the MiG’s to commence a slow redeployment south and our recon assets to start flaming down.

Rules of engagement were thus set. Dare a Spoon Rest, Flat Face, Bar Lock, Side Net, Fan Song or whatever radar Uncle Ho chose to employ in the North even blink at a US plane, retaliation would follow. This doctrine became enshrined in the agreeable phrase “Protective Reaction”.

As with any concept, doctrine sometimes took a persona of its own and local Protective Reaction “Type 1” and “Type 2” soon grew to premeditation “Type 3”. Though still termed “reaction”, these were in fact offensive forays, pre-planned and pre-defined. They remained the realm of the President and in their nomenclative it was supposed, nothing would change the consistency of the fact, “that North Vietnam was not being bombed”.

Amidst the already sixty-odd Protective Reaction missions flown this year were the Type 3 versions “Louisville Slugger” and “Fracture Cross Alpha”, the latter encompassing over two hundred sub missions of its own. Then a SAM struck luckily for the first time over Laos and word began to spread, that the Seventh Air Force in Saigon had manufactured many of our casus belli just so we could win and go home.

Who were we to argue? When the “frag” issued from 7AF and made its way to our Wing in Udorn, Thailand all we cared was that we were “reacting” to something and for this reason, “The Bridge” today was our reward. Our mission was definitely Type 3 and its aim was clear: Forget the past and earn nine hundred Victory Points by putting the Dragon’s Jaw out of action!

We smiled. It was a nice day to fly.
Aircrews flying at helter-skelter speeds operated day-to-day, with a language system of their own called “The Brevity Code”, still in wide use throughout air forces today. Pinpoint accuracy of maximum communication with the minimum of words, were its aims. Some of these terms together with others used here are provided for your reference.

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**TERMINOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIM 7</td>
<td>Sparrow medium-range air-air missile (US).</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIM 9</td>
<td>Sidewinder short-range air-air missile (US).</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGM 45</td>
<td>Shrike medium-range anti-radiation missile (US).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGM 78</td>
<td>Standard ARM long-range anti-radiation missile (US).</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARM</td>
<td>Anti-radiation missile.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angle off</td>
<td>Subject’s heading relative to another, 180 degrees being head on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogey</td>
<td>Radar contact.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bandit</td>
<td>Visually spotted enemy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARCAP</td>
<td>Combat Air Patrol for the protection of an asset.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Combat Air Patrol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di di mau</td>
<td>Get out of here (Vietnamese).</td>
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<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>McDonnell-Douglas Phantom II multi-task fighter (US).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>NATO designation MiG 19 subsonic fighter (USSR/VPAF).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fishbed</td>
<td>NATO designation MiG 21 supersonic fighter (USSR/VPAF).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox 1</td>
<td>The act of firing a semi-active radar guided missile.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fox 3</td>
<td>The act of firing a fully active radar guided missile.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frag</td>
<td>Fragmentary order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresco</td>
<td>NATO designation MiG 17 subsonic fighter (USSR/VPAF).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorilla</td>
<td>Large grouping of inbound radar contacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hustle</td>
<td>Hurry up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>Killed in action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knot</td>
<td>Speed in nautical miles per hour, 1 knot equals 1.852 kilometers per hour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MiG</td>
<td>Mikoyan-Gurevich (Soviet aircraft manufacturer).</td>
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<tr>
<td>MiGCAP</td>
<td>Combat Air Patrol for the interception of enemy fighters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mach</td>
<td>The ratio of aircraft speed to the speed of sound, Mach 1 = the sound barrier.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nautical Mile</td>
<td>1.852 kilometers (miles and nautical miles are used interchangeably in this article).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVA</td>
<td>North Vietnamese Army.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Padlock</td>
<td>Keeping a visual on a bandit lest it be lost.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Port</td>
<td>Left.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pursuit</td>
<td>Subject’s heading relative to another’s rear, Pure pursuit being nose to tail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAM</td>
<td>Surface to air missile.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEAD</td>
<td>Suppression of enemy air defenses (aka) Iron Hand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Splash</td>
<td>Shoot down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starboard</td>
<td>Right.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tally Ho</td>
<td>The act of making a visual contact.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Trail</td>
<td>The “Ho Chi Minh Trail”, an NVA infiltration route through Laos and Cambodia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trash</td>
<td>Unsuccessful missile termination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vector</td>
<td>Heading.</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>United States Air Force.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vox</td>
<td>Voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPAF</td>
<td>Vietnamese People’s Air Force.</td>
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Be sure to check the bibliography included at the end of this article too.
The slow thump of ceiling fans swirled acrid smoke and humidity across the trestle tables, festooned with maps, clip boards, charts and the other paraphernalia of a desk bound war. Past the slightly askew Venetian blinds outside in the Operations Room, typewriters, telephones and the odd comm frequency fought for the attention of short-sleeved staff whose sweat and routine in mannerism added to the illusion that this was simply another government office and not the nerve centre of a mission currently in progress.

Behind closed doors, the Duty Officer continued his briefing to the Colonel at his side. “Yes sir, flights have sortied as scheduled, they’ve been airborne now for a good half hour. We’re beginning the scenario with the package fuelled and some eighty nautical miles west-northwest of target, seventy nautical miles due south of Hanoi.” The D.O. checked his watch. “That gives the package twenty-five minutes to gain Victory Points and begin its way to back to base with fuel reserves permitting a landing.”

The Colonel nodded his approval setting his attention to the next sortie at hand.

In “War Over Vietnam” fuel management reigns supreme. Fail to allow your assets sufficient reserves for the return trip home, even after a scenario ends and Victory Points for their destruction will be awarded to the other side. Each airborne asset communicates its fuel load and endurance at all times. Winning is no longer just a factor of meeting your objectives. You must bring your assets home alive.
Buffeted by a slight turbulence, the Strike Commander surveyed his assets having swung the package north and east into Laos ready to begin the game.

His force was a balanced one. A flight of four F4E Phantoms ("Cheetah Flight") armed with chaff pods led the way followed by an aging flight of four needle-nosed F105G Thuds ("Waistcoat Flight") of which he was part, configured as Wild Weasels for SAM suppression Iron Hand. Both were rapidly approaching the North Vietnamese frontier.

A sleek but also almost antiquated EB66 Jammer ("Echo Flight") flew in between currently crossing into North Vietnam and allocated to it flew a flight of four F4E’s ("Elvis Flight") as its Combat Air Patrol, which had done so a minute to its front.

Ten nautical miles or a minute’s flying time at current speed behind the Thuds, flew two flights of F4E’s in echelon – the actual strike force ("Banjo Flight” and “Bullet Flight”). Four planes in each brimmed with twelve Mk82 “slick” iron bombs. Two further flights of four F4E’s ("Coyote Flight” and “Cowboy Flight”) sat at their beams providing strike escort.

Finally, thirty-eight nautical miles behind (four minutes flying time) cruised a solitary RF4C unarmed reconnaissance platform ("Rabbit Flight") and eleven minutes away from the entire main body in central Laotian airspace, flew two huge KC135 Tankers of the Strategic Air Command ("Kilo Central"), on an west-east ellipse for the return trip home.
“War Over Vietnam” employs an intuitive interface offering many on-map aids to assist your command. Click any portion of the map and drag a line for a point-to-point distance. Click a unit and right click the map to determine flying time. Distance may be set to nautical miles, kilometers or statute miles; speed may be incremented in knots or Mach. Work with settings that are meaningful to you. After all, it’s your decisions based on this information that will win or loose the game. In what follows the terms “nautical miles” and “miles” will be used interchangeably.

1300 HOURS LOCAL (25:00 GAME TIME REMAINING)

To the crews in the 32 “virtual” cockpits that hummed, in the 32 “virtual” airframes that jostled amidst the 10 actual flight icons on map, the tension of flying in Charlie’s backyard never resulted in tedium. All the more so, when the point of no return arrived. The main comm frequency came alive. “Waistcoat Leader to all flights”. It was the Strike Commander.

“Echo Flight proceed ten miles due east, vector to port and commence a north to south jamming track from that point, Elvis Flight will set BARCAP to your north extreme…

“Cheetah Flight lay your chaff corridor east-southeast and run a dogleg around Bai Thuong to target…

“Banjo and Bullet Flights follow in Cheetah Flight’s wake for your run in, Coyote and Cowboy Flights will continue parallel as your escort…”
“Rabbit Flight increase throttle to Mil now. We want you in and out shortly after the strike…”

“Waistcoat Flight will fly standoff fifteen miles northwest of target. Radar’s clear at this time gentlemen. Beginning the scenario now.”
CONTEMPLATIONS

With that, the Strike Commander clicked the black Normal speed button on the Toolbar and the clock started ticking. Settling back at the controls of his F105 – head of the Weasel flight, he eyed the brown-green terrain 20,000 feet below through broken cloud cover – a perfect position to monitor the battle as it would unfold around him in what was known as “Route Package 4”.

The airbase at Bai Thuong represented his biggest concern, smack in the centre of his package’s eastern path. Though it had been hit numerously in past years, the VPAF had a tendency to helo-lift fully fuelled fighters around the battlefield in ambush. Then, he had to consider the air facilities at Phuc Yen and Gia Lam, north and east of Hanoi, both within easy reach of replenishment from China.

As if to exemplify the challenge, his next thought went to the nature of the enemy’s integrated air defence. The fact remained that whether MiG or SAM, neither obviated the potential for a ferocious VPAF flak.

Accordingly, he would fly his package at Nominal altitude and figured to keep it there for the entirety of the mission unless fate would otherwise prescribe. Over a hundred men had sacrificed in the name of “The Bridge”.

![THREATS Diagram]
The VPAF air defense system reflected not only the doctrinal limitations of its patrons namely the Chinese and the Soviet Union but also the limitations of training and experience in its operation. Multiple calibres of AAA co-existed with a sophistication of SAM sites rounded off by regiments of MiG’s - the Fresco, Farmer, Fishbed and Chinese derivatives flown by zealous airmen who at best, possessed little more than a handful of years experience in the concept of flight, let alone advanced combat technique. Early friendly fire incidents led to an immense fear of fratricide between SAM crews and their fellow airmen. This manifested itself in the concept coined by US flyers as “MiG Day - SAM Day” namely, that should MiG’s ever be seen to sortie, it was highly unlikely that SAM’s would soar nearby. These doctrinal quirks of the era are catered for within “War Over Vietnam”.

1300:44 HOURS LOCAL (24:16 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. Crossing Indian territory, request permission to begin chaff run”.

“Cheetah Flight make noise now”, the Strike Commander replied pressing “C” on his keyboard. The four F4E’s of Cheetah Flight “virtually” formed up at the Laotian boarder line abreast and began dispensing strips of silver foil designed to mask their wake against radar and radar-based SAM threats. The corridor became clearly visible on the map as a blue patterned zone. The USAF was a master at the art by now.
“Waistcoat Leader this is Echo Flight. Coming up to position and turning northeast now. Jam run commencing in ten”. The Strike Commander looked at his charts.

“Roger Echo Flight, swing your music when ready”. He almost said “purple music” in reference to the magenta colored wedges emanating from Echo Flight’s beams, being its areas of potential jamming influence but he knew Echo Leader and it would be just his style to belt out some track from that up and coming Deep Purple outfit to garner a response.

But before Echo Flight could respond, its CAP cut in. “Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Bogey! Northeast, thirty-five miles from my position heading in a beeline”. The Strike Commander paused the action. He plotted the enemy’s heading at one hundred and eighty degrees angle off and surmized the merge at roughly four minutes flying time, closing fast.

The show had started early.

“Roger Elvis Flight. Increase throttle to Mil and proceed to your planned orbit point. You’re weapons free under rules of engagement. All Flights, we have hostiles in the area, Coyote and Cowboy Flights maintain course and check east”.

Elvis Flight accepted its new speed setting.
Though collectively armed with sixteen Sparrow AIM 7E medium range, radar homing missiles, doctrine in the Nam prevented their use without a visual confirmation of target. Effective range became ten nautical miles well within their potential and at this late stage of the war, it was something that those flying intercept wished they could do without.

1302:25 HOURS LOCAL (22:35 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Multiple bogeys now on track! Confirm two bogeys inbound”.

“Copy two bogeys Elvis Flight. Coyote Flight throttle up and change course vector northwest. You’re no longer strike escort, take beam on Elvis Flight. Coyote and Elvis Flights you’re weapons free under ROE”. The Strike Commander plotted a new course for Coyote Flight, clicking it to Military power.

Though three flights of air superiority F4E’s flew at his disposal (the much-improved version over the Navy’s Phantoms by way of the addition of an internal 20mm Vulcan cannon) and fog of war prevented him from knowing exactly how active Phuc Yen and Gia Lam were, the Strike Commander elected to keep Cowboy Flight as strike escort. MiG’s were certainly valuable victory point-wise but ultimate victory in this scenario would be gained or lost at “The Bridge”. Cowboy Flight flew on as insurance.
Then, as if to prove this thinking wrong Elvis Flight radioed in with a third bogey contact and then a fourth! Two Regiments of VPAF may well have scrambled.

A powerful GCI radar west of Hanoi swept as far as northern Laos painting the entirety of the inbound package as bogeys for the enemy. The VPAF would only know the direction and general presence of each “iconic” contact, exactly as the Strike Commander knew of the bogeys inbound to Elvis and Coyote Flights.

The MiG’s had sortied to probe, to see exactly what Uncle Sam had sent them – and then to find his weakness, split it at the seams and pounce. They had the advantage of a home ground stadium working for them.

**1303:14 HOURS LOCAL (21:46 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

“Waistcoat Leader to Elvis Flight. It looks like everything is heading your way. Come back one-eighty degrees and bring the fight to Coyote Flight. I estimate Echo Flight is the prize. Coyote Flight hit burners now. Hustle”.

The Strike Commander set Coyote Flight’s new speed and with Elvis Flight reversing course, radar contact with the enemy was momentarily lost. He waited for a reading from Coyote or Echo Flights on their northwest paths.
1303:54 HOURS LOCAL (21:06 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Echo Flight. I have a bogey now tracking on my scope. No, make that four bogeys inbound crowding for Elvis Flight”.

“Roger that Echo Flight, maintain your jam route. Coyote Flight bring your heading further east. Elvis Flight reverse course now and engage at will. The first round will have to be yours. You’re cleared hot”.

Just as Elvis Flight made the turn Coyote Flight called in, “Waistcoat Flight. Report fifth bogey inbound, thirty-eight miles north-northwest and alone on our left flank.” The Strike Commander figured, that contact must have scrambled from Phuc Yen. It would wait. Elvis Flight sat on the verge of weapons parameters.

Then the battlefield changed remarkably.

1304:14 HOURS LOCAL (20:46 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. SAM radar southeast of Bai Thuong!”

Cheetah Flight currently masked by the jamming box of Echo Flight had picked up an active SAM site, brightly “lit up” on its warning receivers, five nautical miles southeast of the Bai Thuong airfield and perfectly placed to harass the entire package along its ingress route.
1304:21 HOURS LOCAL (20:39 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Elvis Flight almost simultaneously came alive. “Waistcoat Leader we have radar lock-on to Bogey 1. Awaiting order. Fox 1!” Elvis Flight had entered weapons capability just shy of a visual and with a Control + right click from the Strike Commander, let loose with its first volley of two radar homing Sparrows, launched “virtually” from the lead aircraft of its two elements.

Air combat was a split second thing. Acknowledging the missiles from Elvis Flight aloft, his package at lightning speeds, air howling around him, the Strike commander had a job of his own to do. “Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. Head southeast in Echo Flight’s music. Banjo Flight, confirm your position”.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We’re twenty-five miles at your six, Cruise throttle”. Waistcoat Flight had an opportunity to play a game of its own. At that thought, the first SAM’s launched Cheetah Flight’s way.

1304:24 HOURS LOCAL (20:36 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Flight this is Cheetah Flight. We have multiple SAM’s inbound! Proceeding as fragged”. The sight of two pencil-like SA2’s roaring towards them, Cheetah Flight steadied and carefully maintained its corridor formation. Whilst chaff would serve to protect aircraft in Cheetah Flight’s wake, it did nothing to offer frontal protection to the chaff flight itself! Therefore, each F4E in Cheetah Flight supported an ALQ 87 Electronic Counter-Measure Pod (ECM), a “noise maker” of its
own. Success with these toys had been impressive and Cheetah flight prayed that the miracle would continue.

“Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. Wild Weasels, select Standard ARM’s.” Seeing that the SAM site lay outside AGM 45 missile range, the Strike Commander toggled the Toolbar and selected the larger AGM 78A from the flight’s Ordnance Dialog.

He pressed the Control Button on his keyboard and right clicked the SAM site. “Fox 3!” The anti-radiation missile left the rail in a bright orange flame. It was a massive beast. Possessing a three hundred and sixty degree launch capability it out-ranged its more prolific Shrike sibling by a long measure. Almost rocket-like in look, its all-round aspect gave the Weasel an improved “cat and mouse” capability. Waistcoat Flight’s Weasels carried two missiles apiece for a flight total of eight. Seven now hung under their collective wings.

As one weapon launched another swung wide. “Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Trash those Sparrows. We now have a Tally Ho! Two MiG 17’s approaching. Wait one. I’m padlocked on two MiG 21’s!”

The game was on in earnest. Bogey 1 and Bogey 2 had been spotted. Friendlies and bandits were now headlong in approach. MiG 21’s could be missile carriers too.
The VPAF flew an aging fleet but given the right tactics an effective one. MiG 17’s were cannon luggers, they flew to mix it up, to “put lead” into the enemy. The MiG 21 on the other hand, though faster but less agile, could port the Atoll AAM, a rear heat-seeker just like the Phantom’s own Sidewinder. For that reason, though the outcome would be rapid, the MiG 21’s – “Fishbeds” as NATO came to know them, posed the greater threat at this separation.

“Roger Waistcoat Leader. Fox 1!”

Then word crackled from the southeast. “Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. Both SAM’s flew right by. Looks like another inbound now”. Cheetah Flight watched as two immense white smoke trails scooped below and to the aft. Its ECM doing its job making the flight “invisible”. Now a single tube loomed inbound on its starboard beam.

Word from Coyote Flight too. “Waistcoat Leader we have a new contact! Bogey 6. Northwest, fifteen miles from Bogey 5 and heading for the action”. Elvis Flight could see the gorilla as well but was too busy.
“Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. That’s a trash on the Fishbeds”.

The Strike Commander re-issued his launch order at the MiG 21 icon. Elvis Flight fired again. “Fox 1!”

Elvis Flight misses again with bandits and friendlies about to merge. Still within Sparrow range Elvis Flight prepares another volley. Four eligible targets highlight in yellow (boogies as yellow triangles and bandits as yellow circles) but Elvis Flight will maintain its focus on the menacing MiG 21’s. Coyote Flight still at burner, flies within seconds of joining the fray. Echo Flight turns perilously close on its jamming route.

To alternate between weaponry click the Select Ordnance button on the Toolbar. If micro-management isn’t to taste, weapons selection and firing may be left completely to the AI by way of the Auto-Fire button. The amount and number of ordnance fired per volley may never be controlled, this being a matter for doctrine.
1304:41 HOURS LOCAL (20:19 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Yeah! Splash one Fishbed Waistcoat Leader! The first kill for the day. “Going after Fishbed 2”. The Control+right click order came.

Bogey number 5 at the mission’s left flank began a subtle starboard maneuver towards Coyote Flight in an apparent effort to lure it out of the developing melee. In the meantime Waistcoat Flight’s own ARM continued soaring seventeen nautical miles from the SAM site at Bai Thuong.

1304:43 HOURS LOCAL (20:17 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Splash Fishbed 2!” A single missile sent the second MiG 21 spiralling into the fields below.

With nine Sparrows in hand Elvis Flight received a vector into an eastward pursuit of its now nearest rival and initial target, the twin MiG 17’s now threatening breakthrough towards Echo Flight. “Fox 1!” Rang over the vox net.

Coyote Flight powered on to assist.
1304:47 HOURS LOCAL (20:13 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Splash one MiG 17. Proceeding to number 2”. Another Sparrow left a Phantom’s undercarriage in a smoky trail. “Fox 1!”

The fights verged on the merge, a phenomenon where two radar blips amalgamated into an indecipherable radar track. The proximity between friend and foe being thusly close, the radio came alive almost instantaneously.

“That’s trash Waistcoat Leader”.

Immediately. “Fox 1!

Only a brief count of seconds… “There she goes! That’s a hit!” The eruption of the second Fresco left the eastbound view of Elvis Flight clear ahead.
1304:52 HOURS LOCAL (20:08 GAME TIME REMAINING)

By now Elvis Flight knew the drill. Accepting a vector to port, it was a simple matter of raising targets and awaiting confirmation. The next in line was the former Bogey 3.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight, engaging Fishbeds to the north, confirm”. On the affirmative Elvis Flight replied with another “Fox 1!

1304:58 HOURS LOCAL (20:02 GAME TIME REMAINING)

The Phantoms “virtually” Split-S’ed into position and issued snap-shots on rolling out. They caught the MiG 21’s unaware. The relief was audible in Elvis Flight’s transmission. “Oh, beautiful! Splash 2 Fishbeds Waistcoat Leader!”

Now for a lock-on and volley at the remaining two Fresco’s, formerly Bogey 4. The Control+right click was issued…


Coyote Flight veered according to the Strike Commander’s right click. A lock-on for Bogey 5 would be seconds away.
Elvis Flight launched two of its last three Sparrows. “Waistcoat Leader this is Elvis Flight. Splash one MiG 17! The voice betrayed its stress. “This will be close… Accepting the order now… Fox 1! That’s trash on Fresco 2! We’re Winchester on Sparrows and head-on!”

Elvis Flight now lay beyond the strike commander’s control. Though its weapons selection had defaulted to Sidewinders on depletion of its Sparrows and the enemy sat within its small red firing arc, the AIM 9E was a rear aspect heat seeker and unless Elvis Flight could somehow force the overshoot and angle back for orders, a dog fight with guns was about to ensue and that, only the artificial intelligence of both sides could resolve.

Good thing to. For with Elvis Flight about to mix it up and Coyote Flight still to make lock-on with its bogey’s up north, Cheetah Flight reported another SAM near miss, as the battlefield changed again.

A new SAM site adjacent to the “The Bridge” far to the east powered up and launched at Cheetah Flight afresh.

Two clear fronts to this mission had clearly developed. It was “MiG Day” in the north and most definitely “SAM Day” down south. Bai Thuong airbase would not scramble this afternoon.
“Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. Fox 3!” An ARM 78A roared towards SAM Site 2 at “The Bridge” too.

1305:12 HOURS LOCAL (19:48 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Across the strike frequency Waistcoat Leader could hear the swirling dog fight of which Elvis Flight was now a part. The chatter was crisp, the commands urgent. All in a “virtual” arena where aerodynamics and not missiles held sway.

The lone MiG 17, agile and built for close combat, “virtually” pulled extreme G’s, jinked and undercut against the full flight of Phantoms as they, with their heavier weight, employed thrust in vertical scissors and broad scoops in an effort to force the overshoot. Short staccato bursts raced against the roar of engines and then the cry came.

“May Day! May Day! Elvis 3 is hit and in a spin!” A brilliant explosion followed. “Elvis 3 is gone!”

Static momentarily filled the package’s helmets, then a matter of fact “virtual” command. “Elvis Leader to Elvis 2. Follow me in.”

“I see no chutes Elvis Leader,” it was thought Elvis 4 added, almost in an undertone.

The Strike Commander shifted his gaze to the lower corner of his console and saw the Victory Bar grow in favor of the VPAF. Three seconds later, the strike frequency crackled with a clipped report.
In its brief moment of elation the Fresco let its concentration slip. It made an unlucky turn giving Elvis leader a positional advantage. The Phantom’s 20mm Vulcan took its opportunity, peppering the MiG’s hydraulics along the fuselage. It flipped in a mechanical sigh and went down like a rock.

All within the space of two red and blue icons on a map, gripped in a “virtual” close combat that no human could control.

“Waistcoat Leader to Elvis Flight. Reduce speed to Cruise. Hold current vector and set CAP against Bogey 6. Coyote Flight is in action to your west”.

Elvis Flight accepted the throttle setting. Its three Phantoms “virtually” took up pyramid formation and maintained its current course. It’s next potential conflict, Bogey 6 was seventeen nautical miles north and closing.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Coyote Flight. We have lock on to Bogey 5. “Fox 1!”
1305:17 HOURS LOCAL (19:43 GAME TIME REMAINING)

The battle persisted in the north, when the Weasel’s first ARM came to ground.

“Waistcoat Flight to Waistcoat Leader. ARM impact! Damage report Site 1. ARM 2 still in flight twenty-one nautical miles from SAM Site 2 and closing”.

The Strike Commander saw the combat advisory listing nil damage. In powering down SAM Site 1 had cut the potential for the ARM’s success to just ten percent much as it would to a SAM of its own, had it been in the air.

1305:27 HOURS LOCAL (19:33 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Cheetah Flight with SAM issues of its own watched as the rockets of SAM Site 2 went wide and high. Immediately the flight came on line. “Waistcoat Leader we have another launch from Site 2. Tubes are inbound! We can see them, ten miles from the bridge and coming up smart!”

“Waistcoat Leader to Cheetah Flight. Roger. We have ARM on its way”.

Seconds later a loud, excited voice distorted the comm frequency. “Waistcoat Leader! This is Coyote Flight. Splash 2 MiG 21’s!” Coyote Flight’s 2 AIM 7E’s had tracked Bogey 5, homed in as it came into visual range and struck with unwavering accuracy.

“Waistcoat Leader to Coyote Flight. Set Vector to Bogey 6, they’re all yours. Elvis Flight reverse course, take original orbit at Echo Flight and reset BARCAP.”
1305:49 HOURS LOCAL (19:11 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Cheetah Flight was indeed proving itself the SAM magnet. With two rapidly approaching “smoke sticks”, that made a collective total of eight SA2’s fired its way.

Yet, the risk of a loss to Cheetah Flight in Victory Points was more than offset by two related operational concerns: With every SAM launch, one less threat faced the actual strike force; and success for the strike force relied on a perfectly laid ingress and egress chaff corridor over the target.

So Cheetah Flight would push on, screened it was hoped, by its ECM. “Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. SAM’s went high”. Seeing the miss and reading the incoming ARM, SAM Site 2 closed itself down.

Moments later, SAM Site 1 powered up and more SA2’s roared towards Cheetah Flight from the west.

“Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. Switch to Shrike and Fox 1!” Now within range of Waistcoat Flight’s more numerously stocked, semi-active AGM 45, the Strike Commander selected Shrikes from the flight’s Ordnance Dialog box and let loose against SAM Site 1 in a blinding white flash.
1306:00 HOURS LOCAL (19:00 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Coyote Flight. We have Lock-on to Bogey 6 moving away from us to the southeast. Confirming your order... Fox 1!”

Two Sparrows flew out, precisely as Waistcoat Flight’s AGM 78 reached the vicinity of SAM Site 2 and went wide by a large measure. Then SAM site 1 seeing the Shrike inbound powered down but not before its missile too went for naught at Cheetah Flight.

Cheetah Flight’s evasion record remained perfect under its ECM.

Four levels of map zoom may be toggled at any time. The graphics included in this article span all, with the exclusion of Ultra Zoom-Out, which is an exceptional planning tool for theatre-wide operations. Graphics here, may not give a true indication of size owing to the vagaries of publication.
**1306:15 HOURS LOCAL (18:45 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

Then Coyote Flight reported a miss followed by a “Tally Ho!”

“Waistcoat Leader this is Coyote Flight. We have Bogey 6 as two Mig 21’s at one-twenty degrees angle off heading for Elvis Flight”.

“Waistcoat Leader to Coyote Flight. Vector starboard and go pure”. The Strike Commander right clicked Coyote Flight into a potential tail chase to prevent its bandit breaking through.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Coyote Flight. Roger. Fox 1!”

Five seconds later Coyote Flight reported again. “Splash one bandit! We’re moving for a rear shot now. Fox 1!”

**1306:26 HOURS LOCAL (18:34 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

SAM Site 2 barely six nautical miles away now, lit up and launched at Cheetah Flight for a third time. One smoke trail showed and its trajectory was almost vertical.

The Weasels of Waistcoat Flight held in patience. Without a chance of beating this interception there was little they could do.
That was until the nearer SAM Site 1 joined the fun and issued the first missile directly aimed at Waistcoat Flight itself! This one would be close. It was Fox 1 with a Shrike back at Site 1 and a head-on closure of six nautical miles as well.

1306:34 HOURS LOCAL (18:26 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Pushing his flight through a rapid “virtual” evasive jink and employing the inbuilt ECM characteristics of his F105G aircraft, the Strike Commander successfully threw the incoming SAM off trail. His efforts were rewarded with scenario-altering news.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Coyote Flight. That’s a hit! Splash Bandit 2! Our radar is clean”.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Echo Flight We’re on our northbound leg and confirm radar clean”.

The skies in the north were bogey free.


It looked like the battle for the MiG’s was over. The battle for “The Bridge” was about to begin.
CAULDRON

The Strike Commander reviewed his progress against plan. Less than nineteen minutes game time remained, the strike package sat four minutes out and the Victory Bar still showed a slight VPAF win despite the MiG’s being cleared from the sky.

The north secure, the enemy would likely now rely on its anti-air. Without doubt the VPAF understood the target in question was Ham Rung.

How many SAM’s remained at Sites 1 and 2 though? The Weasels of Waistcoat Flight had to this point tracked five missiles apiece, including that airborne via Site 2 for Cheetah Flight at present.

A typical SAM battalion deployed six rails. That might imply only one missile apiece in reserve but how many more sites remained unannounced? Had lax doctrine led the enemy to play its hand too quickly? A US win would only come with bombs on target and he most certainly could not afford another aircraft loss.

7AF had tried TV guided bombs before and had failed to cripple “The Bridge”. It would take skill to throw a Mk82 “slick” dead centre on a road. Accuracy boiled down to training and in this game, the conundrum lay with the whim of probability-based fate.

It was Cheetah Flight still in the thick of the SAM launch from Site 2 that brought him back to the first matter at hand. SEAD. Silencing those SAM’s.

1306:40 HOURS LOCAL (18:20 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. They missed us again but here comes another. Straight up!” With nerves of steel, the flight braced against what might be SAM Site 2’s last round.

1306:46 HOURS LOCAL (18:14 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Cheetah Flight. That SAM went wide too. We’re holding against another but no launch yet”.

Southbound, the Shrike from Waistcoat Flight soared five nautical miles from Site 1. At two Nautical miles closure, the Site’s radars abruptly shut-off breaking lock to the ARM’s guidance system.

Four seconds later, Waistcoat Flight’s missile impacted the outskirts of Bai Thuong, to nil effect.
Cheetah Flight now flew five miles from “The Bridge” about to cross the dirt trails and dust pits forming SAM Site 2’s intricate network of defenses. The Strike Commander’s threat appraisal appeared to be firming.

Site 2 sat dormant. Cheetah Flight thundered on. Too high an altitude for the site’s eager flak emplacements, yet at the perfect intercept had a SAM existed for dispatch.

“Waistcoat Leader to Cheetah Flight. Increase throttle to Mil and stay heads-up on your final run”. The Strike Commander confirmed the course settings for the chaff run directly over the target, feet wet into the gulf and then southwest for the leg home.

Now things became interesting.

Waistcoat Flight took a holding pattern three nautical miles north of Site 1. Banjo and Bullet Flights with their explosive ordnance came forward four nautical miles from Site 1’s radar zone, west. Waistcoat Flight switched to Standard ARM allowing it a three hundred and sixty degree reaction for what might come next.

“Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. We have a SAM launch from Site 1! Fox 3!”

Site 1 came alive but launching at whom? The Strike Package had verged on radar range…

“Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. We’re the target! Begin evasive maneuvers now!” The Standard ARM not requiring a lock-on, freed the flight from its forward aspect and allowed its F105’s to “virtually” bank wildly.

The SAM exploded in Waistcoat Flight’s disturbance and Site 1 immediately shut down with seconds to AGM 78 impact. The Standard ARM, thrown off track at the last moment, came to earth too far away to matter.

The Strike Commander tracked Banjo and Bullet Flight inching into Site 1’s missile envelope. He awaited confirmation of his SAM count.

The two flights penetrated the enemy’s red SAM radar circle proper…
1307:30 HOURS LOCAL (17:30 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Thirty seconds expired without a SAM launch. A cautious smile grew on the faces of the Wild Weasel crews. Cautious because SAM Site 1 and 2 both glowed red, fully active.

Cheetah Flight then crossed “The Bridge” its chaff glittering in the sunshine. Nothing fired.

“Waistcoat Leader to strike force. Bring your headings slightly northwest over the chaff and follow the route in”.

With Banjo and Bullet Flights about to head southeast for their run, it was time to retire the Combat Air Patrols in the north and bring the lone sentinel of Echo Flight home.

The crippled Elvis Flight and its partner Coyote Flight, both relatively low on fuel, received vectors with a right click to Kilo Central. Echo Flight powered its throttle up to Cruise and received a vector southwest to Udorn.

For good measure and to avoid any surprises from an overstocked arsenal, the Strike Commander ordered the simultaneous launch of a Shrike at Site 1 and a Standard ARM at Site 2 from his Weasels.

A few seconds later, Site 1 powered down followed by Site 2, guaranteeing a miss for both ARM’s – but whilst airborne no SAM would dare fly. The game of “cat and mouse” was working.

1308:21 HOURS LOCAL (16:39 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Rabbit Flight. We’re over Indian Territory”. The recon flight had finally entered North Vietnamese airspace. It would be the final asset on target.

Cheetah Flight by this time, had pushed out into the Gulf of Tonkin, still emitting chaff pending its swing southwest and for home.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We’re eighteen miles north-northwest of target, two minutes thirty seconds out and coming up to our starboard turn into bomb leg shortly”.

On that, Cheetah Flight itself made its swing, heading inland for the comfort of Thailand.
SUCCESS in a strike mission came down to Victory Points and bombing efficacy. The Strike Commander had hauled his multi-faceted package across three countries, through a MiG shield and across an aggressive SAM umbrella.

However, his ultimate task, lay in turning the Victory Bar from red into blue and this he had yet to accomplish. Would he risk both flights? Would he drop a bomb load on Site 2 leaving a single flight for “The Bridge”?

The Dragon’s Jaw awaits. SAM Site 2 glows active but silent, two immense AAA rings radiate out. The orange label indicates “The Bridge” as a mission target.
"Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We’re ten miles north-northwest of target, one minute twenty seconds out. We’re turning inbound now”.

"Waistcoat Leader to Cowboy Flight. Terminate strike escort and form up eleven miles south of Bai Thuong. Waistcoat Flight will meet you there. We’ll escort the strike force home”.

"Waistcoat Leader this is Rabbit Flight. We’re forty miles west-northwest of target. We’ll have polaroids for you, three minutes after strike”.

It was crunch time.

"Waistcoat Leader to Banjo Flight. You’re first in the rank. Maintain Nominal altitude and take your run in as fragged. Happy hunting gentlemen”.

"Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We have SAM Site 2 coming into visual now and can just make Ham Rung on the horizon. Heading to target”. The comm frequency gave static.
**1309:54 HOURS LOCAL (15:06 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We’re almost over Site 2. We have the target in sight. We’re in flak range now. We can see plenty of activity down there but we’re too high for the guns. No SAM’s on scope. One minute to slick release.

Thirty long seconds passed “Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We’re over Site 2 now. Almost over target. She is a big mother isn’t she? Pickles hot! Beginning bomb run now”.

**1310:23 HOURS LOCAL (14:37 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

At twenty thousand feet, Banjo Flight “virtually” dipped its collective nose into a forty-five degree dive. The heavy flak still out of range remained silent.

The Phantoms screamed down letting loose their sticks of iron bombs and pulling back just through ten thousand feet. “Bombs away!” The Mk82’s fell at a rapid diagonal slant tearing through the sky directly for the Song Ma, followed by a massive cacophony of smoke, dirt and water.

The F4’s, climbing under immense G’s, left three thousand feet between themselves and AAA range. Pilots and Wizzo’s “virtually” tried twisting their heads, looking for signs of carnage in the fast disappearing scene to their rear.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We have damage report”. The orange letters flashed on the Strike Commander’s console. “That’s ten percent damage to target.”.

Banjo Flight regained its pre-attack level and banked starboard away to the southwest. The Victory Bar reflected the smallest amount of blue indicating the scenario now at a Draw. It wasn’t enough.
1311:16 HOURS LOCAL (13:44 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Bullet Flight following less than one minute behind could sense what was coming. “Waistcoat Leader to Bullet Flight. Get those bombs on target gentlemen. Bring it home”.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Bullet Flight. Beginning bomb run now”. The four Phantoms “virtually” dove as their predecessors, making their angle much more acute.

With a rapid pull up on issuing “Bombs gone!” a powered, vibrating return to pre-attack altitude met with a sharp starboard bank away beating any chance of flak.

The primary explosions at “The Bridge” this time were more pronounced. The reaction below frenzied. “Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. Damage report in.”

The Strike Commander followed the orange electronic advisory. Thirty percent bridge destruction! Added to Banjo Flight’s efforts, “The Bridge” had taken a critical hit and the Victory Bar showed it.

Over two-thirds its length now filled with blue and a small US flag appeared at its left. The package had a Minor Victory in its grasp and a final act had yet to come.

“Waistcoat Leader to strike force, that’s a good job gentlemen”.

1309:54 and the strike force enters flak range of both Site 2 and “The Bridge” (1). Too high an altitude for the flak to make itself known, Banjo Flight proceeds to target (2) and at 1310:23 inflicts 10% bridge destruction. The Victory Bar finally shows blue but it is not enough. The score is drawn.
Waistcoat and Cowboy Flights orbited south of Bai Thuong waiting to bring Banjo and Bullet Flights home. Cheetah Flight running lower on fuel received a new vector to Kilo Central and set off west-southwest still trailing chaff.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Rabbit Flight. We are two minutes from target in a beeline. No sign of contest. Charlie is quiet… Thirty seconds to go”.

1313:41 HOURS LOCAL (11:19 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader this is Rabbit Flight. Over target now. The camera is rolling”.

The coup de grace had arrived. Rabbit Flight though unarmed, played an integral role in the package. Bomb Damage Assessment made the war machine function.

This strategic value reflected in the Victory Bar, adding another third to its length – filling it completely with blue and heralding a Major Victory for the mission!

“Waistcoat Leader to all flights. Let’s di di mau. Kilo Central is awaiting rendezvous ten miles southwest off friendly skies. Call it as you need it. Maintain flight paths as assigned”.

1312:12 HOURS LOCAL (12:48 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Waistcoat and Cowboy Flights orbited south of Bai Thuong waiting to bring Banjo and Bullet Flights home. Cheetah Flight running lower on fuel received a new vector to Kilo Central and set off west-southwest still trailing chaff.

“Waistcoat Leader this is Rabbit Flight. We are two minutes from target in a beeline. No sign of contest. Charlie is quiet… Thirty seconds to go”.

The coup de grace had arrived. Rabbit Flight though unarmed, played an integral role in the package. Bomb Damage Assessment made the war machine function.

This strategic value reflected in the Victory Bar, adding another third to its length – filling it completely with blue and heralding a Major Victory for the mission!
The package, victorious though wounded, arced slowly southwest heading for the relative safety of Laos and home plate at Udorn.

As missions go this day’s had been a military success but any loss wore hard on the whole. That to Elvis Flight was particularly harsh considering its single-handed anti-MiG feat. Two crews “virtually” verged on Ace status in its ranks.

Such were the musings of the victor.

Seventeen minutes passed…

1315:58 HOURS LOCAL (9:02 GAME TIME REMAINING)

“Waistcoat Leader to all Flights! Heads up!” We have a new SAM. Contact, threatening launch sixteen miles directly ahead to our southwest, twenty-three miles from my position. Cheetah Flight, only six miles due east of your position. All units hit Mil throttle now! Waistcoat Flight select Standard ARM and Fox 3!”
arely had the warning been received and the throttle settings accepted, than Cheetah Flight – still the SAM magnet of the mission called back. “SAM’s! Two of them coming up on our starboard rear now!”

Fourteen seconds later. “That was a close miss! Here comes another single... Argh! It’s missed again!”

Waistcoat Flight’s AGM 78 flew twelve miles from target

**1316:04 HOURS LOCAL (8:56 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

Barely had the warning been received and the throttle settings accepted, than Cheetah Flight – still the SAM magnet of the mission called back. “SAM’s! Two of them coming up on our starboard rear now!”

Fourteen seconds later. “That was a close miss! Here comes another single... Argh! It’s missed again!”

Waistcoat Flight’s AGM 78 flew twelve miles from target

**1316:36 HOURS LOCAL (8:24 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

“Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. We have a single SAM inbound twelve miles to our front starboard! Look at that sucker fly! Employing ECM now.”

As with Cheetah Flight both strike flights carried the benefit of the ALQ 87 pod and were now more than confident in its success.

**1316:52 HOURS LOCAL (8:08 GAME TIME REMAINING)**

“Waistcoat Leader this is Banjo Flight. The SAM Flew right by!”

SAM Site 3 closed transmission and Waistcoat Flight’s ARM impacted the jungle. Immediately the site re-activated, bright red with radars live.
“Waistcoat Leader to Weasels. Get that SAM! Fox 3!” Another Standard ARM issued forth.

1317:06 HOURS LOCAL (7:54 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Waistcoat Leader this is Cowboy Flight. We have a single SAM inbound! Heading straight for us twelve miles and closing! We’re head on! Taking evasive maneuvers now. Break. Break!”

Site 3’s missiles were spreading over the entire package.

Cowboy Flight began a wild “virtual” climb. It’s labored jinking and sliding competed against G-Suits. Hearts pumped, legs strained.

It took just eighteen seconds and a massive fireball erupted ahead of Waistcoat Flight. “Its Cowboy Leader”, the anonymous call came in. “He’s gone!”

“Damn it! Fox 3!” The Strike Commander came back. Counting five SAM’s fired, the Strike Commander ordered a third Standard ARM launched, sending two missiles Site 3’s way.
1317:40 HOURS LOCAL (7:20 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Site 3 knew its business. It had time to play. It launched its sixth rocket due east for Bullet Flight’s flank. It missed. The site shut down and Waistcoat Flight’s vengeance went astray in stereo.

1318:00 HOURS LOCAL (7:00 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Site 3 lit up again. The Strike Commander recalculated his figures. He had his Weasels, Cowboy, Bullet and Rabbit Flights all within the site’s radar circle. “What’s his game? Waistcoat Leader to Waistcoat Flight. Select Shrike and Fox 1!”

But it was a bluff. Site 3 shut down, the Shrike went wide.

Nothing further heralded skyward that afternoon.

1322:40 HOURS LOCAL (2:20 GAME TIME REMAINING)

Elvis, Coyote and Cheetah Flights queued under the care of Kilo Central, whilst the remainder of the package kicked for home with fuel supplies to spare.

Tired and shaken, the crews knew that “The Bridge” was shambles.

They also knew that their Major Victory had just been stolen from them.
The Victory Dialog - Closer to a draw than it looks.

*****

RETROSPECTIVE

"War Over Vietnam" serves as a memorial to those who flew, fought, suffered and died, fighting an air war against a wily enemy and a home grown doctrine that magnified harms way.

It was an air war that saw technological superiority squandered and the names of "Son Tay", the "Zoo", "Hanoi Hilton" and myriad others (whose failure to mention does not betray their relevance), join our vernacular.

"War Over Vietnam" achieves this by bringing to war gaming the only operational air warfare platform, where the complex math of flight, combat, electronic warfare and doctrine is left to the silicone and the actual war-fighting to the human commander.

The scenario just witnessed never happened.

It forms one of the few hypothetical actions included with the game. Yet, within every scenario a story awaits.

The "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution", "Lam Son 719", "Protective Reaction" and the horror of the "The Bridge" all form a painful chapter of United States Military history.

It would be another ten months on May 13, 1972 when part of the "Line Backer" offensives, that fourteen USAF F4E’s would sortie some with a new weapon, the
3000 pound laser guided GBU and finally fall one of “Dragon Jaw’s” impressive spans. Even then, NVA trucks would manage to cross it soon after.

“War Over Vietnam” offers one of the freshest additions to the war game hobby. Its treatment is unique and its lessons on air power and Vietnam, so vast that it offers a degree of intimacy and immersion that so many games fail to provide.

“War Over Vietnam” whilst a game, may even serve as a testament to the precept that once a military force is called upon, it’s time to let the professionals earn their pay and for the politicians to stay away.

Then again, it was Clausewitz who reminds us that war is, “… nothing but the continuation of policy with other means”.

The purists might prefer Joseph Heller’s words: “… and that was Catch 22”!

So if you’ve enjoyed the action here, remember this is just the “Getting Started” scenario!

The story recounted also illustrates enhancements to performance parameters scheduled for release with the “War Over Vietnam” 1.01 free upgrade. Visit www.hpssims.com to check availability.

This game is designed with the air enthusiast and budding Strike Commander in mind.

Think you can do better than history? Then set your vectors; clear the skies and bring your package on!

Operational air command is just a click away.

*****

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adam Parker is the new Test Coordinator for the Modern Air Power series. He began war-gaming with Avalon Hill’s Fortress Europa in 1976. An Honors Business graduate with studies in Law, he works as commercial manager whilst moonlighting as a graphics artist, writer and amateur historian. You’ll find his other official contributions in game art and writing across a number of HPS’s series. Married, he lives in a leafy suburb of Melbourne, Australia, situated near three exclusive golf courses and a driving range, where somehow, he remains an appalling practitioner of that Scottish sport.

*****

The Author would like to extend his sincerest thanks for advice to Gary “Mo” Morgan, former Weasel Wizzo, award winning war game guru and designer of the Modern Air Power Series (John Tiller creator and programmer). Each and every error in this publication as to procedure, doctrine and “Jock-Speak” is the author’s own. Hell, tell a pilot to “right click” himself and you’ll get a more than interesting reply!

*****
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