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MAJOR KENNY WILKERSON  
1021 Wolfe Road  
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January 9, 1989

Major Kenny Wilkerson  
1021 Wolfe Road  
Route #5  
Abilene, TX 79605

Dear Major Wilkerson:

This has taken too long. I am living in a rented home at this time and my Air Force material is in storage, so I don't have the reference material I wanted nor could I find it in the Library.

So, I am going to do my best from memory.

Sincerely,



Paul D. Howman  
Major (RET) USAF

To 0000 - 0100

Kill at 0230.

Wester OH - Paul

Stennie Kullman  
~~alt~~  
Almogoe NM

First, a recap of my S. E. A. (South East Asia) experience. I was a back seater at Ubon RTAB from September 1969 to September 1970 in the 434th TFS.

I had upgraded to the front seat at McDill AFB, but when they converted to an RTU unit, I didn't have enough time logged to be an instructor pilot. I was then transferred to Holloman AFB, New Mexico. Holloman was deployed to Tahkli. From May 1971 to October 1971 I was at Tahkli. Holloman returned to their original status and I PCS'd to Udorn RTAB; 432nd TRW.

Our squadron did a lot of escort duty; both B-52's and chaff drops. We also did a little Barrier Cap and MIG Cap. I was in the 4th TFS, which had just arrived from Da Nang AFB, South Vietnam. I was starting some flight lead upgrade sorties and was working at the Command Post.

I worked four days on and four days off. On my days off I was flying. As with most scheduling operations, my first day off, they would forget I was off so usually no flying. The second day I usually had an easy flight to Laos. On the third day I would get a good combat mission, but on the wing. By the fourth day I was ready to fly flight practice up north, but they would think that I was back at the Command Post.

Consequently, getting my flight lead checkout was a little slow. To make a long story short, I was scheduled for a practice flight lead MIG Cap on the night of January 8, 1972. My Flight Commander was to be my wing man, but he was forced to abort and I used an airborne spare wing man from our squadron that had taken off earlier and was on the tanker.

*Laos - NV border*

Our orbit was in the Fishes Mouth area of North Vietnam. (Refer to note 1). Our Wing Commander had an orbit mid-Vietnam and the 555th (Triple Nickel) squadron had an orbit "Feet Wet" as a Barrier Cap to protect the tankers. Our configuration was three tanks, four AIM 9 missiles and four AIM 7 missiles. My wing man was in an F4-E; so he also had a gun.

This was my first real MIG Cap flight lead, so my plan was to make it last as long as I could. When we got, from Bulls-eye, a call that a couple of MIGs were heading our way, I didn't punch my tanks off right away. When they kept coming, I hit the tank jettison switch and got rid of my tanks. At least I thought I had. You see, I had never (still haven't) jettisoned tanks. They say, if you have you know it, as they make a loud noise and you feel a thump on the airplane.



We had pulled the circuit breakers to monitor our forward missiles, because when a centerline tank is on, you can't tell if your forward two AIM 7 Sparrow missiles are tuned. You also can't fire them because they would hit the tank. So we fooled the system to think there was no tank and to let us know the missile's status. Well, when I tried to jettison the tanks the airplane said, "No tanks; no jettison".

The MIG had launched out of Yen Bai, about twenty-five nautical miles northwest of Hanoi.

Our call sign was Crafty 01. We were receiving additional calls from Red Crown; a destroyer GCI (Ground Control Intercept) ship. Right after the mission we thought we had received only a couple of calls; but after listening to the tapes, there had been two calls off of Bullseye and twenty-four off our position.

They vectored me heading 300°; but since the MIG was 360° and our radar only went 60° left or right, and the fact that I didn't hear the heading clearly, I went 330°. They caught me and made me go 300° so we didn't have the MIG on radar. The Wing Commander was vectored 060°. The ROE (Rules of Engagement) at that time was that no one was to go North of the 19th parallel unless they were in pursuit, then you could go to 19:30.

After the MIG was within about twenty miles from me, they turned me back in, aiming to intercept the MIG at 19:30° latitude. The Wing Commander was turned back in to intercept him at 19:00° latitude, if I missed him. (Refer to note 2)

My back seater, 1Lt. Larry Kullman, didn't have the MIG on radar, but our gear indicated he was in front of us. The weather was 8,000 feet undercast, but you could see the "freight train" of B-52's going by.

Then I saw his burner and put him in the Pipper setting, ready to lock on from the front seat. Larry finally got a lock on and seeing the lock on display I squeezed the trigger. It scared both of us because of the bright flash it makes as it lites off and the noise that it makes.

I then realized that you are supposed to shoot two to make sure of a kill, so I did. The first missile didn't have the full four seconds you are supposed to have to confirm good lock on. That's why Larry had not told me to shoot yet. Also, since my tanks were sill on, the missile hit the centerline tank. The second missile also hit the tank but at least it had enough lock on time. The second missile's problem was the distance now was very close and drifting off to the right very fast.

We got the lock on at ten nautical miles, fired the first missile at 6 DME and the second one at 4 DME. Luckily, the missiles did not puncture our tank and cause an explosion.

The first missile did the classic AIM 7 barrel roll and when it went off, you could see the outline of a MIG 21 pitching up and to the left after the B-52's. The second one went straight as an arrow and appeared to hit the MIG right in the middle. For a split second nothing seemed to happen and I thought it was a dud. But then it happened, it blew! By now it was right next to my right side and I saw the fuselage split in two and one wing come off.

My first thought, since it only had one burner, was I hope that's not a Thud (F-105). Also at about ten miles out, the Red Crown controller had said to "go get them"; not declared hostile or confirmed MIG, so there was a little doubt.

This, like I said, was my first MIG Cap flight lead, same for Larry and later we found out it was the first kill for the Red Crown controller and for our airplane. So, it was a completely green crew. I don't even remember arming up the missiles.

I guess the moral of the story is that we only got one chance and we lucked out and got it! Some people had a couple of chances and missed.

Four days later, a Navy jet got a MIG 17 over the Haiphong Harbor, making mine the last Air Force kill and the next to last kill of the war.

My wing man did not have any radar, so when I shot at the MIG with my radar missiles, he maneuvered in to position to use his heat missiles if I had missed. As I turned to follow the MIG, I thought he was another one. We maneuvered back and forth for a little while until we figured out who was who. The Wing Commander made the radio call, "Tally Ho" on the burning wreckage.

A side light to this is, as I said, I worked in the Wing Command Post and knew the Wing Commander from stand-ups and he knew me. However; he did not know I was flying that night, but he knew the Triple Nickel Commander was flying. A tape out of his aircraft revealed that he hoped the 555th Commander was the one that got the kill.

Another side light: An F-111 was coming out from under the 8,000 foot undercast and the Mig fell right in front of it. I guess I almost got two kills!



The Red Crown's controller's nickname was Gambler and mine was Snake, so we used those names as our call signs the rest of the night instead of our correct ones.

On the way back to the tanker, my wing man informed me (over the air) that I still had my tanks on. I wish he would have told me over Squadron Common, then I could have gotten rid of them somewhere. But, since everyone heard I still had them, I filled them up on the tanker. My wing man said he was only going to get enough fuel to make it home. So I coordinated with the Wing Commander for another wing man and got the airborne spare he had with him for my next mission.

Our next mission was escorting a B-52 dropping leaflets over North Laos. My total flying time for the night was about three and half to four hours. After the MIG kill, I wandered over towards the target area and Red Crown called out traffic when the Wing Commander got out of his orbit. they made him go back. In the target area three Sams shot at me but didn't get close enough to cause me to maneuver.

One final side light: Everyone who got a MIG kill, traditionally got what they wanted for their next assignment or a promotion. I had just made Captain so no promotion was in the offing. I had just got to Udorn and had several months to go before a new assignment, but my back seater wanted to go into pilot training, which he did. I saw him at George AFB going through the Replacement Training Unit (RTU). He was assigned to Holloman after that hoping to get into the F-15's when they converted.

But one day riding his motorcycle in the New Mexico desert. he had an accident. The motorcycle landed on him and he died later that day in the hospital. His wife, Sherry, his son and daughter bought a house and still live in New Mexico.

*Holloman*

To sum it all up; I went back to Southeast Asia to fly an F4-E model, use the gun in combat and to kill a MIG. I got my chance to fly an F4-E, but not use the gun, which now in retrospect, probably allowed me to live longer.

I only had one chance at a MIG, which I was fortunate enough to be successful with, but the benefits normally associated with that didn't come my way.

All in all I have had a successful career and I have enjoyed it all.

Thank you for this opportunity to relive it and for the honor of knowing "my airplane" is going to receive it's credit and honor at the Dyess School.