



## SEA History

3 - 4 April 1965

### Attack on the Thanh Hoa Bridge

a.k.a. The infamous *"Dragon's Jaw"*

by Jack Graber, F-105D fighter pilot

354<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron

Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand

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In April 1965 the 354th TFSq was deployed from McConnell AFB to Korat RTAFB, commanded by Lt Col Chas. Watry. Lt Col Robinson "Robbie" Risner was TDY with his squadron from Okinawa. (Sorry, I can't remember his unit) 67<sup>th</sup> TFS

On April 3, Lt Col John Boyd ("Forty-second Boyd") (See a book by Robert Coram called Boyd) and Major Mike Muskat (sp?) came to Korat from TAC Hq to brief us on a brand new concept called "Energy Maneuverability Curve." Practically everybody knows about it now but in 1965 it was brand new.

They compared the **MiG-17** and the **MiG-21** to the **F-105** and informed us that we could never ever turn with these fighters, but there was one area where we could beat them. There were a couple of things we could do better.

One was to go really fast, like 800 knots at low altitudes. The other was in deceleration.

Boyd (chewing hard at his fingernails, lest they grow past the stubs, he was definitely a "type A" personality) briefed us on a last ditch maneuver for the F-105 vs. a MiG.

He said if a MiG was on our tail, and maybe shooting, that we should turn hard into him, descending to draw the shooter down also. Then put the power in idle, extend the speed brakes (the speed brakes on an F-105 were humongous). Hardly anyone could stay in formation with us if we put the speed brakes out except of course, another F-105) and then pull enough G's to high speed stall (some people call it flat-plate) the airplane. The resulting deceleration would put the shooter out in front.

There was no way they could stay with us. Of course we would be hanging it all out if there were other MiGs hanging back waiting for their turn. The Thud driver would now be out of airspeed and ideas faced with the next task of getting it flying again. Recommended altitude to start this maneuver and recover was about 10,000'.

Well, the next day, April 4, 1965 we were tasked to go to Thanh Hoa Bridge, again! We had already bombed it once or twice. It was mangled and bruised, but refused to fall into the gorge, so we were going again. Robby Risner decided to act as Mission Commander and would clear folks in, score bombs, etc. Sort of a new concept at the time. It was a max effort with both squadrons launching most of their aircraft and crews. We carried 8 X 750# M117 General Purpose bombs each. I can't remember how many total aircraft, but I bet you each squadron put up five flights. That would make 10 flights of four. That makes 40 F-105's and 320 bombs. Might have been more.

In-flight refueling was scheduled in Northeast Thailand before the strike. Evidently, the tankers got one FRAG (Fragmentary Order).

Anyhow, the tankers and the fighters were all mixed up. Everyone did the best they could, got gas and proceeded to the target area. But now the sequence was out-of-whack and some of our flights arrived at the same time. Robbie Risner kept a list of flights checking

in and would clear one flight in at a time, first come, first served, so to speak.

The weather did not cooperate either and there were middle clouds and low visibility out south of Thanh Hoa where we were holding.

We just made the best of it, dragging around 6,000 lbs of iron bombs, and about 40,000 lbs of airplane, power was up around max continuous on the tail pipe temperatures, airspeed was whatever we could manage at 15,000 feet, generally around 350 knots. If you were in a MiG, you couldn't ask for a better set up for target practice.

Our MiG Cap was F-100's with AIM-9 Sidewinders positioned north of Thanh Hoa.

MiGs were reported heading our way. They managed to avoid the F-100's altogether. I was in a flight of four, in a left hand orbit, tactical formation, everybody straining to check six and looking for MiGs, waiting for our turn to hit the bridge. We passed another flight of four who were in an opposite direction.

Before we finished the 360 degrees of turn to pass them again, MiGs hit the other F-105 flight. The visibility was lousy and we did not have each other in sight when it happened. As I recall, Frank Bennett was flight leader of the other flight. Other flight members were Dick Pearson (now mayor of Apple Valley, CA) Jim Magnusson and Capt Vern Kulla.

MiGs hit Frank Bennett's aircraft, but did not "down" it. He pulled out over the South China Sea and headed south for Da Nang Air Base in South Vietnam. The aircraft was damaged enough that Frank was not going to be able to land it, so he made a controlled ejection.

Unfortunately, an unusual event occurred. The chute opened, but Frank was recovered, dead, in the sea. I think a submarine picked him up. It is estimated that the seat flew around and struck him in the head, killing him.

Jim Magnusson's aircraft was hit hard. His wingman was trying to evade a MiG and trying to keep Jim in sight. Jim's aircraft was burning and headed into the ocean. No chute was observed and neither Jim's aircraft or his body was ever recovered.

The rest of the story is very interesting. Dick Pearson had a MiG on his tail and was being shot at. Dick used the last ditch maneuver described the previous day by Col Boyd and was successful in shaking the MiG.

The author of **Boyd** the book got it slightly wrong when he said the event was April 4. He also missed the boat when he could have given Boyd credit for the "flat-plate" maneuver that Dick Pearson employed. (See page 177 and 178 of his book)

Regardless, that was our introduction to energy maneuvering. I think Dick Pearson is glad that he found out about it.

My flight never saw any of the MiG action. We went to the bridge and mangled it some more. We never could make it fall down.

I need you to know that all this may not be exactly how it all happened. It is my recollection of the facts. As you know, personal observation is highly subjective and our memories suffer from age. It is hard to forget that day, though.

You can visit Frank Bennett <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi> and Jim Magnusson's <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi> names in Washington, DC at the Vietnam Memorial. Their names are there.

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