

EDITORIALS

Welcome to Eglin, Agent 007

Even a villain with a one-track mind, like the gold-obsessed Auric Goldfinger, couldn't help but notice that this month is the 50th anniversary of the James Bond movies. The first, "Dr. No," opened in Britain in October 1962, and today the film series is being celebrated with books, DVDs, magazine articles and a special display at the Crestview Public Library.

Easier to overlook is the footnote that Eglin Air Force Base holds in the history of Agent 007.

Eglin's brief role was in 1965's "Thunderball," the fourth Bond film. At the movie's climax, armed U.S. troops parachute into the ocean to battle speargun-toting terrorists who are transporting a nuclear bomb underwater. The bad guys plan to detonate the bomb near Miami.

Among the parachutists were 13 Eglin airmen. According to an article this newspaper published July 21, 1965, the airmen, "all skilled paratroopers, assisted in a skydiving scene filmed in Miami Beach" the week before.

"We jumped ... at an altitude of 1,500 feet," Tech. Sgt. Lewis Roberts recalled. "We played the good guys and were helping James Bond destroy the villains."

In 2005, a contributor to **ScubaBoard.com** added some details.

"I knew some of the pararescuemen who made the parachute jumps for the movie," he wrote. "They were not paid, and the jump was actually written off as a USAF parascuba training jump. It was out of an HC-97 aircraft, which was notorious for being difficult to jump from. ... It was not a precision jump. ... The jump was a mass exit, and they must have spread jumpers over about a quarter-mile of ocean (that's being kind). But it made for a good movie effect."

It also made for a movie smash. For a few years, "Thunderball" was among the top 10 box-office moneymakers of all time.

The entire Bond franchise, in fact, has been fabulously successful, which is why it has kept charging along as the various actors who've played 007 — Sean Connery, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan — have retired from the role or been replaced.

The current Bond is a chap named Daniel Craig. Perhaps someday Eglin airmen will help him, too, save the world.