

28 January 1970

F-105G 63-8329 44 IFS, 355 TFW, USAF, Takhli

Capt Richard Joseph Mallon (KIA)

Capt Robert Joseph Panek (KIA)

The F-105G was an updated version of the F-105F Wild Weasel and had arrived in Thailand as early as April 1968 but had not seen much action due to the bombing halt imposed at that time. The F-105G carried an internal ALQ-101 ECM pod and more modern radar homing and warning receiving equipment in addition to improved versions of the AGM-78 Standard ARM missile.

An F-105G (call sign Seabird 02) was part of the escort for an RF-4C on a photographic reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam. The object of the mission was a SAM site in the hills about 25 miles west of Mu Ron Ma. The aircraft were fired at from the ground so, under the rules of engagement, they retaliated in kind. As the F-105G was pulling up from its second pass over the target it was hit by AAA and burst into flames. The aircraft turned southwest but it crashed near the village of Kam Duong Quail, north of the Mu Gia Pass. Both the crew were seen to eject and land safely. A rescue mission rapidly swung into action and four HH-53s from the 40th ARRS were dispatched together with a Crown HC-130P and a flight of Sandies to attempt a pick up. An SA-2 was fired at one of the A-1s as it was searching for the downed airmen and several MiG warnings were received but it was not realized just how close the MiGs were.

As the HC-130 was refueling one of the helicopters in a safe area to the west, two other helicopters, Jolly Green 71 and Jolly Green 72, were orbiting about 20 miles northwest of where the Thud went down. Suddenly two MiG-21s made a run through the SAR formation and an air-to-air missile hit Jolly Green 71 (66-14434), which exploded and crashed. All on board the helicopter were killed including the pilot, Maj Holly Gene Bell, and the rest of the crew consisting of Capt Leonard Charles Leeser, SMSgt William David Pruett, TSgt William Carl Sutton, Sgt William Charles Shinn and Sgt Gregory Lee Anderson. The rest of the SAR task force escaped to the west although the MiGs were taking no chances and headed for home without making a second pass.

Meanwhile Mallon and Panek were surrounded by enemy troops and at least one account claims that they were captured and executed by North Vietnamese militia. The remains of the F-105G crew and Maj Bell (misidentified) by the North Vietnamese as MSgt Sutton as his identity cards were found near the body) were amongst a group of remains handed over by the Vietnamese in December 1988. The MiG pilot credited with the destruction of the HH-53 was Lt Vu Ngoc Dinh of the 921st Regiment. During its career in Southeast Asia 63-8329 was painted as 'Rosemary's Baby', 'Protestor's Protector' and 'My Diane'. The Wild Weasel crew are listed in some documents as belonging to the 354th rather than the 44th TFS. These were the first USAF aircraft lost in North Vietnam since August 1969,