



Today in SEA History

27 March 1972

Prelude to the loss of *Prometheus* - "Spectre 13"

Background: In 1970 - '71, I flew as an enlisted aircrew member with *then*-Maj Max C. Brestel and *then*-Capt Dick Castillo at Randolph AFB, flying T-39A Sabreliner airlift missions with the 3300 Support Squadron. We were a 'crew'. Max was the chief of HQ ATC command presentations, along with his assistant Capt Dick Castillo, on the ATC command briefing team. They reported to Col Bill Johnstone, ATC chief of staff (my future next door neighbor in 1983) and supported our ATC commander, Lt Gen Sam Maddux Jr.
<http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6274>

Gen Maddux wanted a credible combat veteran as his command lead-briefer in presenting ATC's message to our national leaders and US citizens around the country; therefore, selected Maj Max C. Brestel, F-105D fighter pilot.

Sidebar: While serving as a member of the 354th TFS, 355th TFW, Takhli RTAFB *then*-Capt Max C. Brestel was the first American pilot to shoot down (with 20mm cannon fire) two MiGs in the Vietnam War while flying an F-105D flack-suppression mission (ahead of the strike force) against the Thai Nguyen steel mill, located some 50 miles north of Hanoi on 10 March 1967. *Then*-Capt Merlyn H. Dethlefsen also flew on the same mission as a Wild Weasel against the SAM defenses surrounding the steel works at Thai Nguyen and would subsequently be award the MOH for extraordinary heroism at the risk of his own life. Brestel flew a total of 247 combat missions in SEA, including 107 over North Vietnam. Lt Col Brestel is retired and living in San Antonio, TX.

We (Brestel, Castillo, Laymon) then all rotated from Randolph AFB, PCS to SEA in about the same time frame.

Maj Brestel's second SEA tour was to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, known affectionately as NKP (or Naked Fanny) as operations officer (and acting commander) of the OV-10A "Pave Nail" FAC program with the 23rd TASS.



Major Max C. Brestel
Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base

(Credit: USAF photo)



OV-10A Bronco
23rd TASS

(Credit: *then*-SSgt John Evans, Det. 3, 600th Photo Squadron, Ubon RTAFB)

Dick Castillo went to Ubon RTAFB as an Infra Red (IR) sensor operator on the AC-130A "Spectre" gunship program with the 16th SOS.



AC-130A s.n. 55-0044, *Prometheus* - "Spectre 13"

~ Note: 3 red STARS {A-A kills} above the crew door ~

(Credit: Tom Combs, crew chief of *Prometheus*)

I was assigned to the Scatback T-39A combat courier and airlift system at Tan Son Nhut AB (Saigon) RVN from 30 Sept 1971 - 18 Sept 1972.



The Scatback Courier "*Warhorse*"

T-39A Sabreliner 61-0673

On Landing Approach – Dirtied Up

Crew Chief: SSgt Bob Laymon

Asst CC: Sgt George Lennon

Asst CC: Sgt Ron Havalliena

(Credit: USAF Photo)

While in SEA, I ran into both Brestel and Castillo on the teak wooden steps coming out of 8th TFW “Wolf Den” (Base Ops) at Ubon, while I was flying the Scatback Bravo afternoon courier mission on Monday, **27 March 1972**.

Sidebar: Those wooden steps to the “Wolf Den” at Ubon were an icon of the Vietnam War ...as famous as the “**Purple Water Fountain**” in the Pentagon. There are many classic photos of historic leaders and events that were framed on these steps, such as Col Robin Olds and Chappie James.



**Col Robin Olds (left) on the wooden steps leading from the
8th TFW Wolf Pack**

(Credit: USAF photo)



**Scatback T-39A s.n. 60-3483 parked outside of
HQ 8th TFW *Wolf Pack*, circa 1972**

(Credit: Al Groth - RIP)

Castillo took the time to tell me a little about his Texas Instruments AN/AAD-4 Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR) and the adjacent AN/ASD-5 “Black Crow” Direction Finder Set to find the emissions of the ignition system of Russian ZIL truck engines on the HCM trail. It was a brief 15-minute reunion on the steps of the 8th TFW “Wolf Pack” den.

Then I had to depart for Da Nang and RTB to TSN on our Scatback Bravo afternoon T-39 courier mission.

Two days later (Wednesday, 29 March 1972) Dick Castillo was shotdown by a PAVN SA-2 SAM, 21 miles west of Tchepone, Laos (in the Steel Tiger AOR) and Max Brestel was organizing and leading the SAR effort for our friend and fallen companion.

Also on **Monday, 27 March 1972:**

The Loss of Jolly Green 23

Capt David E. Pannabecker, pilot; Capt. Richard E. Dreher, co-pilot; Sgt. James Manor, flight Engineer; Sgt. Raymond J. Crow, Jr., pararescueman; and A1C Raymond A. Wagner, pararescueman/recovery specialist; comprised the crew of a HH-53C Super Jolly Green Giant (s.n. 68-10359) call sign 'Jolly Green 23' on an morning escort mission into Cambodia. The aircraft departed Nakhon Phanom RTAFB at 0830 hours, as the #2 aircraft in a flight of two Jolly Greens.

Following aerial refueling over southern Thailand, the two Super Jollys rendezvoused with the rest of the flight. Upon sighting the aircraft to be escorted, Lead radioed "Tally Ho," the signal acknowledging he had visual contact with the other aircraft. When there was no response from Capt Pannabecker's helicopter, Lead attempted to locate him visually. After completing a 180-degree turn, Lead reported seeing a column of black smoke rising from the dense jungle 5 miles away.

A search and rescue/recovery (SAR) pararescue team from the Lead helicopter was lowered to the ground at the crash site to check for survivors. During the over three hours the team spent on the ground, they could not approach near enough to the burning wreckage to determine if there were crew members trapped inside the aircraft due to the intense heat. However, the team searched the surrounding area and reported finding two partially deployed parachutes, but no trace of the men who had used them, near the burning helicopter.

Later that afternoon, a second rescue team was deployed in the immediate area of the crash. They reported the fire was out and the aircraft had been completely destroyed. They also reported no remains were visible. There were no further attempts to locate or recover any crewmen from the downed Super Jolly Green due to the presence of hostile forces who had moved into the area.

At the time the formal search effort was terminated, Richard Dreher, David Pannabecker, Raymond Wagner, James Manor and Raymond Crow were all assigned Status **BB** - Killed in Action, Body Not Recovered.



U.S. Air Force



***My Form 5, Non-Rated Individual Flight Record, PCN 22110A, entry:
Monday, 27 March 1972: Scatback T-39A: s.n. 61-0675 {equipped with
SSB-HF ultra long range radio}.***

(Unusual to take a spiffed-up VIP aircraft out on a trash-hauling Scatback Bravo courier mission?)

We flew 3.0 hrs and 3 sorties of S4A combat support time (over the RVN, Laos & Cambodia) and sequentially 2.3 hrs and 3 sortie of S4 SEA theater support time (over Thailand).

We then flew an add-on mission (Iron Man) consisting of 2.1 hrs and 2 sorties of S4A time (probably out & back to Da Nang or Hue Phu Bai).

7.4 total flight hours and 8 total sorties. Whew. Long day!





AF Art: Ken Chandler

The Veteran ...on whose shoulders today's warrior stands

ROE:

Today in SEA History is a product of retired Chief Master Sergeant Bob Laymon.

The purpose of this series is historical research and education to preserve the heritage of our SEA warriors.

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