



☰ ⬤ ☰ Today in SEA History ★ ★

Monday, 8 May 1972: "Operation Freedom Train"

Up North: *Prelude to the loss of Oyster 01 and the rescue of Roger Locher*

During an air strike in the Hanoi area on 8 May 1972, two MiGs fell to USAF F-4D aircrews. Two different MIGCAP flights, both from the 432d TRW, Udorn RTAFB supported this strike and each encountered MiGs in the target area. Maj. Barton P. Crews and his WSO, Capt. Keith W. Jones, Jr., downed a MiG-19 [Chinese Shenyang J-6] the first enemy aircraft of this type destroyed by a US Air Force crew.

Major Crews describes his skirmish:

On 8 May 1972, a flight of four F-4Ds was fraggged to provide MIGCAP for strike flights hitting the Hanoi area. I was scheduled as number three, with Capt. Keith W. Jones as my weapon systems officer. After the flight arrived at the preplanned orbit point the flight proceeded north of Yen Bai airfield, and then made a 180°right turn heading south.

After crossing the Red River, the lead F-4 aircraft called, "Bogies, 12 o'clock." I immediately acquired them visually and identified them as four MiG-19s.

I called over the radio, "They're not friendly."

The lead aircraft commander confirmed that, and directed the engagement. I set up my attack on the northernmost element of MiG-19s and started a closure on what appeared to be the number two man. My WSO stated that he couldn't get a lock-on so I pulled the pipper up to the MiG and fired one AIM-7. I estimated the range was under 3,000 feet. I did not see the missile impact as I directed my attention to the lead MiG. Captain Jones stated he saw a yellowish chute go by.

As I was trying to get my pipper on the lead MiG, he did a hard break and ruined my tracking solution.

At that time, my number four aircraft said over the radio, "That's a kill."

Shortly after that, my number four WSO, Lieutenant Holland, called, "Bandits at 6 o'clock. "

I then broke off my engagement and went into the clouds and lost the MiGs. Later, on the ground, 1st Lt. William S. Magill and 1st Lt. Michael T. Holland, the aircraft commander and weapon systems officer on my wing, confirmed seeing a chute and observing the MiG do a slow roll to inverted position and start down.

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The other MIGCAP flight was trailing the strike force over Hoa Binh and heard the radio chatter as Crews' flight engaged its MiGs. 'Red Crown' [USS Chicago, PIRAZ Station – Gulf of Tonkin] requested assistance for a flight of F-4 strike aircraft which was also engaging MiGs near Yen Bai. Before they could reach the battle area, the flight disengaged, but Red Crown advised that another group of bandits were approaching from the east. Maj. Robert A. Lodge, flight leader, with Capt. Roger C. Locher as his WSO, turned his flight eastward and crossed the Red River. Locher soon acquired two targets on his radar, and the flight turned to engage them. As Lodge closed on a MiG, he saw another at 1 o'clock. "I continued to close on our radar target while watching the second, closer one," he said.

At about one mile, I saw that the other aircraft was a silver MiG-21.

We broke radar contact with the leading MiG and locked on to the wingman. We were about Mach 1.4, with the MiG about as fast as us in afterburner. I was low on the MiG, and I do not believe he was aware he was under attack. He was in a right turn, initially, then reversed to the left. I fired two AIM-7 missiles in ripple fire at a distance of 4,500 feet, using a pure pursuit attack at about 20°angle-off.

Both missiles guided directly to the target. The first hit the MiGs right wing, which was breaking up when the second missile hit the center of

the fuselage. I observed no bailout. I last saw the MiG disintegrating and out of control. The lead MiG broke [↗ vertical] up hard and I lost visual contact with him. My wingman then engaged the MiG unsuccessfully.

We disengaged at Bingo-fuel and egressed the area. Passing the initial area outbound while descending, I observed a parachute to the left of my aircraft at an estimated 300 feet away. I almost hit the chute. There was a yellow canopy and a body in the chute, but I did not notice if the pilot was alive. Egress was then uneventful with a normal recovery.

♠ **Credit:** The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia-aces and aerial victories, 1965-1973.

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Oyster 01 Bravo & Alpha, and crew chief Sgt Joey Hill, 8 May 1972