

B52 Losses in Vietnam

B52 Combat Losses/Operational Losses in Vietnam)

<http://www.nampows.org/B-52.html>

B-52Ds, B-52Fs, and B-52Gs flew combat missions in South East Asia. B-52Ds and B-52Gs flew the Linebacker II missions into Route Pack Five and Six, December 1972.

This document was done to clear up some confusion as to the names of crewmembers of ten B52s lost over North Vietnam and sixteen B52s lost in other locations. I have not had the opportunity to read other excellent source books, *Linebacker II: A View From the Rock* by McCarthy. The internet address to read this book on line is:

<http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/Publications/fulltext/linebacker2.pdf>

Linebacker -The Untold Story of the Air Raids Over North Vietnam by Karl J. Eschmann. *11 Days of Christmas* by Marshall L. Mitchel, III, published 2002, *B-52s Over Hanoi* by James McCarthy, and *Boeing's Cold War Warrior: B-52 Stratofortress* by Robt. F. Dorr & Lindsay Peacock, published 1995. Another great reference is *Boeing B-52* by Walter Boyne, published in 1981, updated in 1994. This document uses the "official" shoot down dates as recorded by the U.S. Defense Department. For example, Cobalt 1 was shot down over Hanoi at 0003 local time on 12-28-72. Other researchers fix the shoot down date as 12-27-72, the date the a/c took off from its home base. (A flight could take eight hours just getting to the target). I will use 12-28-72, the official Department of Defense date. Ranks shown are the ranks at the time of shoot down. Other valuable sources of information come from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base/Air Force Museum timeline of B-52 operations and Mr. Buck Rigg at 8th Air Force Museum at Barksdale Air Force Base.

<u>Call sign</u>	<u>Model</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Crewmember</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Status</u>
Charcoal 1	B52G	12-18-72	Andersen	LtCol Donald Rissi	Pilot	NR
	No. 58-0201			1stLt Robert Thomas	Co-Pilot	NR
	Linebacker II, near			Maj Richard Johnson	Radar/Nav	RR
	Yen Vien			Capt Robert Certain	Navigator	RR
				Capt Richard Simpson	EWO	RR
				E7 Walter Ferguson	Gunner	NR

Rose 1	B52D	12-19-72	U-Tapao	Capt Hal Wilson	Pilot	RR
	No. 56-0608			Capt Charles Brown	Co-Pilot	RR
			Near Hanoi	Maj Fernando Alexander	R/Nav	RR
				Capt Richard Cooper	NavNR	
				Capt Henry Barrows	EWO	RR
				E6 Charlie Poole	Gunner	NR
Orange 3	B52D	12-20-72	U-Tapao	Maj John Stuart	Pilot	XX
	No. 56-0622			1stLt Paul Granger	Co-Pilot	RR
			Yen Vien	Maj Randolph Perry	R/Nav	XX
				Capt Thomas Klomann	NavRR	
				Capt Irwin Lerner	EWO	XX
				E7 Arthur McLaughlin	Gunner	XX
Quilt 3	B52G	12-20-72	Andersen	Capt Terry Geloneck	Pilot	RR
	No. 57-6496			1stLt William Arcuri	Co-Pilot	RR
			Yen Vien	Capt Warren Spencer	R/Nav	NR
				1stLt Michael Martini	NavRR	
				Capt Craig Paul	EWO	NR
				E5 Roy Madden	Gunner	RR
Olive 1	B52G	12-21-72	Andersen	LtCol Keith Heggen	Air Cdr	KR
	No. 58-0198			LtCol James Nagahiro	Pilot	RR

			Kinh No	Capt Donovan Walters	Co-Pilot	NR
				Maj Edward Johnson	R/Nav	NR
				Capt Lynn Beens	NavRR	
				Capt Robert Lynn	EWO	NR
				E3 Charles Bebus	Gunner	NR
Blue 1	B52D	12-22-72	U-Tapao	LtCol John Yuill	Pilot	RR
	No. 55-0050			Capt Dave Drummond	Co-Pilot	RR
			Bach Mai	LtCol Lou Bernasconi	R/Nav	RR
				1stLt William Mayall	NavRR	
				LtCol William Conlee	EWO	RR
				E5 Gary Morgan	Gunner	RR
Tan 3	B52G	12-21-72	Andersen	Capt Randall Craddock	Pilot	NR
	No. 58-0169			Capt George Lockhart	Co-Pilot	NR
			Kinh No	Maj Bobby Kirby	R/Nav	NR
				1stLt Charles Darr	NavNR	
				Capt Ronald Perry	EWO	NR
				E5 James Lollar	Gunner	RR
Scarlet 1/3	B52D	12-22-72	U-Tapao	Capt Peter Giroux	Pilot	RR
	No.55-0061			Capt Thomas Bennett	Co-Pilot	XX
			Bach Mai	LtCol Gerald Alley	R/Nav	NR
				1stLt Joseph Copack	NavNR	
				Capt Peter Camerota	EWO	RR

				MSgt Louis LeBlanc	Gunner	RR
Ebony 2	B52D	12-26-72	U-Tapao	Capt Robert Morris	Pilot	NR
	No. 56-0674			1stLt Robert Hudson	Co-Pilot	RR
		Giap Nhi		Capt Michael LaBeau	R/Nav	RR
				1stLt Duane Vavroch	NavRR	
				Capt Nutter Wimbrow	EWO	NR
				TSgt James Cook	Gunner	RR
Cobalt 2/1	B52D	12-28-72	Andersen	Capt Frank Lewis	Pilot	RR
	No. 56-0605			Capt Samuel Cusimano	Co-Pilot	RR
		Trung Quan	Maj James Condon		R/Nav	RR
				1stLt Bennie Fryer	NavNR	
				Maj Allen Johnson	EWO	NR
				MSgt James Gough	Gunner	RR

Personnel data is from Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Office Reference Document "U.S. Personnel Missing, Southeast Asia (and Selected Foreign Nationals) (U) dated Dec 2005. Crew positions are determined from direct testimony from the returned POWs. Ranks for the Gunners are: E3=Airman 1/c; E4=Senior Airman; E5=SSgt; E6=TSgt; E7=MSgt. Air Cdr=Airborne Commander.

Status codes: **KR**...Died in Captivity, negotiated remains returned, 3-13-74.

XX...Presumptive finding of death. Remains still unaccounted for.

NR...Negotiated remains returned. Dates of return in our records.

RR...Returnee (POWs). Dates of return in our records.

A total of 10 B-52s went down inside the borders of North Vietnam. 61 total crewmembers. 33 survivors became POWs and were released at the end of the war. 28 of the downed 61 warriors perished. (Information is listed above).

Sixteen other B52s went down outside of North Vietnam. Nine were due to combat. Seven were "operational losses," which occurred while B52s were enroute to combat areas in Vietnam. (Information listed below).

Combat losses:

Olive 2 B52D 11-22-72 U-Tapao SA2 damage at Vinh. Crashed near NKP. Lost 4 engines on one side. 6 crewmen bailed out/recovered. No. 55-0110.

P- N.J. Ostozny; C/P- Tony Foley; RN- Bud Rech; N- Bob Estes; EWO- Larry Stephens; G- Ronald W. Sellers. (1st combat loss of a B52 due to enemy action)

Peach 2 B52G 12-18-72 Andersen Crew bailed out/rescued over Thailand. Hit near Kinh No. Some records say 12-19. No. 58-0246. (Combat loss, 2).

Brass 2 B52G 12-20-72 Andersen Crew bailed out/rescued over Thailand. Hit near Yen Vien. No. 57-6481. (Combat loss, 3).

Straw 2 B52D 12-21-72 Andersen Crew bailed out over Laos. R/N Maj Frank Gould not recovered. Status XX. Other crewmembers recovered.

No. 56-0669. (Combat loss, 4).

Ash 1 B52D 12-26-72 U-Tapao Hit at Kinh No. Crashed at U-Tapao. Attempted go-around with 4 engines out on same side. 4 KIA. CP, 1st Lt Bob Hymel & Gunner, TSgt Spencer Grippen were rescued. No. 56-0584. The A/C made a determination that they should bailout before the crash, but since the gunner was wounded and they felt he might not be able to physically execute the bailout, they decided as a crew to try and bring the plane in. Ironically, the only survivors of the crash were the C/P and the wounded gunner. In addition, the C/P would not have survived had he not been rescued by a crewmember from another BUF who watched the crash, and rushed into the wreck to pull the C/P out before the plane burned up. Lord, that we could have more men like these. September 11, 2001, Lt Col

Hymel, Retired, was sitting at his desk as a Defense Intelligence Agency analyst in the Pentagon. He was one of the thousands of Americans killed that day. (Combat loss, 5).

Ash 2 B52D 12-27-72 U-Tapao No. 56-0599. Bailed out over Laos/Thailand. Crew was from 28th BW, Ellsworth AFB, SD. P- Capt John Mize; CP-Terrence Gruters; RN- Capt Bill North; NAV- Bill Robinson; EWO- Capt Dennis Andersen; G- TSgt Peter Whalen. Target was SAM site VN-243, near Hanoi. After bomb release, hit by SAM. Lost all 4 engines on left wing. All crew members were picked up by rescue helicopters. (Combat loss, 6).

Ruby 2 B52D 1-4-73, Anderson AFB, No. 55-0056. SA2 hit over Vinh. Went feet wet, crew bailed out in South China Sea, all rescued by helos from USS Saratoga. P-LtCol Gerald Wickline; Co-P Capt Bill Milcarek; Tail gunner T/Sgt Carlos S. Killgore; NAV Capt Myles McTernan; R/Nav Maj. Robt. A Klingheil; EWO Capt. Wm. E. Ferg. (Combat loss, 7).

(Unknown) B-52D July 8, 1967 no. 56-0601 was hit over Vinh and suffered a complete hydraulic failure. The pilot elected to go into Danang rather than bail the crew out. After touchdown, the A/C was unable to stop or negotiate a go-around. They ran off the end of the runway into a mine field. All forward crewmembers perished. The Gunner, Albert Whatley survived with the help of a Marine fire truck crew. Crew was from Columbus AFB, MS. Whatley cannot remember the call sign. (Combat loss, 8).

(Unknown) B52D 1-13-73 (Unknown), no. 55-0116 scrapped at Da Nang, South Vietnam, after landing there with battle damage. (Combat loss, 9).

Operational losses (Vietnam War, South East Asia):

(Unknown) B52D 5-8-69 Andersen, no. 56-0593 was lost on takeoff from Guam. It started a right turn after t/o and crashed in the sea killing all six aboard. Pilot- Capt Larry Broadhead; CP- Maurice Lundy; RN- Capt Russell Platt; NAV- Maj James Sipes; EWO- Lt Thomas McCormick; G- MSgt Harry Deal. (Operational loss no.1). One B52 crewmember of the 393 Bomb Squadron, 509th Bombardment

Wing remembers the incident, saying: "The May 69 crash shortly after takeoff was debriefed to us as likely being the pilot following an erroneous artificial horizon display that was gradually causing him to bank the airplane while thinking he was in level flight caused by the inadvertent deactivation of the gyroscope during preflight and the incorrect display as the gyro wound down. The accident was late at night, over water, right after takeoff and at low altitude and the explanation was logical though pure speculation. I believe there was some corrective action taken to cover-guard the power switch for the instrument following that crash."

(Unknown) B52D 7-28-69 Anderson, no. 56-0630 was lost on takeoff from Guam. It crashed into the sea killing all eight aboard. A B52 crewmember from the same outfit, the 393 Bomb Squadron, 509th Bombardment Wing knew the lost crewmembers. He reports, "Their airplane crashed because the right wing came off the plane at about unstick during the takeoff roll. Eye witness accounts reported that the plane continued momentarily in level flight after loss of the wing and then made a violent bank below sight of the cliff at the end of the runway and crashed into the ocean. The body of the Aircraft Commander (Ed Wyatt) was recovered. We were told it appeared as though he had attempted to eject, as his chute was either fully or partially deployed. I do not believe any other remains were found."

(Op Loss no. 2).

(Unknown) B52G 7-8-72 Anderson, no. 59-2600 was over the Philippine Sea. For unknown reasons its radome separated from the airplane. The pilot/copilot reacted incorrectly and subsequently lost all airspeed. All six crewmen successfully bailed out, but one, the RN (a LtCol) got a streamer. The other five crewmen were rescued. (Op Loss no. 3)

(Unknown) B52F 6-18-65 Andersen, no. 57-0047 collided with no. 57-0179 over the South Pacific while circling awaiting KC-135As for pre-strike air refueling. 4 survivors, 8 fatalities among the 12 crewmen. (Op Loss no. 4).

(Unknown) B52F 6-18-65 Andersen, no. 57-0179 collided with no. 57-0047.

(Op Loss no. 5).

Red 1 B52D 7-6-67 no. 56-0627 had a mid-air collision with no. 56-0595 over South China Sea near Saigon while "changing formation lead." See below, next entry. There were seven survivors, six fatalities (#) among the 13 crewmembers. Crew: E-06, 22nd BW, March AFB, CA. P- Capt John Suther; CP- Wilcox Creeden; RN- Maj Paul Avolesse(#); Nav- Lt William Gabel; EWO- Capt David Bitten(#); G-SSgt Lynn Chase.; Airborne Commander- Maj Gen William Crumm, 3rd (#), Air Division Commander. (Op loss no. 6). A B52 crewman who had personal knowledge of this incident wrote the following to me: "The

crash in July 1967 (which was the midair involving General Crum) I have personal knowledge concerning as I was flying in the second cell.

The airplanes were in VFC formation (a prohibited maneuver according to the B-52 Dash -1) that was regularly used for bombing in those times. The change of aircraft positions was initiated while in the VFC formation and during a major alteration of heading in a turn from the Pre-IP to IP when the MSQ beacon on the #1 airplane was declared inoperative.

This attempted change of aircraft position within the formation was a foolish move, occurring at precisely the wrong time of the flight, and was initiated by request of the MSQ controller. Later, during the post-accident corrective action phase, lectures were given on communications from MSQ being informative not "directive" in nature. In essence, the rule being refreshed was that the pilot was in charge of flying the airplane not the ground controller, no matter what might be heard on the radio.

After this crash the VFC formation abolished after Headquarters SAC suddenly became aware of the BOLD PRINT in the Dash One that said that flying the airplanes in close proximity to one another was prohibited. (I am aware of such formation flying in the Linebacker campaigns for mutual ECM support which makes sense for survival in those circumstances, but at the time of the 1967 crash the only thing the VFC formation contributed to was sexy photographs of big airplanes in tight formation dropping huge bomb loads simultaneously."

Red 2 B52D 7-6-67 no. 56-0595 collided with no. 56-0627. See entry above. Crew: E-10, 454th BW. P- Capt George Westbrook; CP- Capt Dean Thompson; RN- 1st Lt George Jones; EWO- Toki R. Endo G- Msgt Olen McLaughlin (#). NAV- Capt Chuck Blankenship. Partial remains of Jones & Blankenship identified and returned years later. Toki, as of 5/07 can be contacted at Boeing, toki.r.endo@boeing.com. (Op loss no. 7).

Out of 498 BUFF sorties over Hanoi/Haiphong the loss rate was 1.7% (.017). The conservative number of SAMs fired was 884, with 24 BUFFs hit. Source: *Linebacker II: A View From the Rock* published by the Air War College in 1979. (Note: 2001 Boeing records list 32 B52 aircraft hit by SAMs. Other sources state that there were a total of 724 B-52 sorties flown during LB II).

Bailout:

B-52 D The B-52D has upward ejection seats for the Pilot, Copilot, and Electronic Warfare Officer and downward ejection seats for the Navigator and Radar Navigator. In the B-52D the Gunner is in the tail of the aircraft. For bailout, the gunner jettisons the gun turret and "dives out" of the hole created when the gun turret was jettisoned. Bailout order was Nav, EW Officer, CP, Extra Crewmembers, RN, and P. If any topside seats failed or any extra crewmembers were on board (up to 10 crewmembers can be carried) the crewmember came down to bail out through the hole the Nav left. The RN was there to assist. The Pilot always went last. The Gunner bailed out as soon as the bailout command was given. In an uncontrolled bail out, it was every man for himself...as quickly as possible

B-52 G The B-52G has upward ejection seats for the Pilot, Copilot, Electronic Warfare Officer and Gunner, and downward ejection seats for the Navigator and Radar Navigator. In the B-52G the Gunner sits in an ejection seat next to the EW Officer. Bailout order was Nav, Gunner, EW Officer, CP, Extra Crewmembers, RN, P. If any topside seats failed or any extra crewmembers were on board (up to 10 crewmembers can be carried), the crewmember(s) came down to bail out through the hole the Nav left. The RN was there to assist. The Pilot always went last. In an uncontrolled bail out, it was every man for himself...as quickly as possible.

During the period April 9, 1972 thru January 14, 1973, 16 other B-52s (one G-model and 15 D-models) received major battle damage (caused by SAMs), over North Vietnam. Following is a list of these sixteen B52s (aircraft recovered, no deaths or injuries reported):

<u>Serial No.</u>	<u>Date of damage</u>	<u>Remarks (All damage noted was from SAMs)</u>
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D 56-0665	4-9-72	Landed at Danang and flown to U-Tapao, Thailand. 156 damaged areas. Repaired and placed back in service, according to Boeing maintenance records. Contradicting this information, the plane is "unaccounted for" according to authors Dorr & Peacock. Contradicting Dorr's information, there is a B52D now on display at Wright-Patterson with the number 56-0665 painted on the side. If you're confused, read the next two paragraphs.
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D 56-0589	4-23-72	Landed at Danang and later flown to U-Tapao. Approximately 400 outer surface holes. 20,000 manhours. Placed back in commission 1-9-73.
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D 56-0604	11-5-72	Landed at U-Tapao. 333 external damage areas. Using horizontal stabilizer from 55-097. Estimated time in commission (ETIC) 2-1-73.
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D 55-0052	11-22-72	Landed at U-Tapao. Approx 20 holes. Repairable by T.O. 1B-52B-3. In commission 1-9-73.
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D 56-0678	12-18-72	Landed at U-Tapao. No inspar damage. ETIC 7-30-73. Est. 60,000 manhours. 350 external holes; 24 areas require kits. Lilac 03.
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D 56-0583	12-18-72	Landed at U-Tapao. Returned to service 12-20-72 minus three repairs 53 manhours. 10 external holes plus several dents and gouges.
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D 56-0592	12-18-72	Landed at NamPhong, Thailand; one time flight to U-Tapao 12-23-72. ETIC 3-15-73. External holes estimated 2,000 manhours.
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G 58-0254	12-18-72	Landed at Andersen AFB, Guam. Sheet metal damage top of fuselage 30 to 50 holes. Minus three repairs.
D 55-0067	12-22-72	Landed at U-Tapao. Minus three repairs. In commission 1-9-73. 70 manhours. Nineteen external holes. Call sign "Brick 2".
D 55-0051	12-24-72	Landed at U-Tapao. In commission 1-9-73. 226 manhours. Eleven external holes.
D 55-0062	12-26-72	Landed at Andersen AFB, Guam. "Dash 3" repairs. Returned to service 12-27-72. Cream 1.
D 55-0090	12-26-72	Landed at Andersen AFB, Guam. "Dash 3" repairs. Returned to service 12-28-72. Cream 2.
D 56-0629	12-26-72	Landed at U-Tapao. Black 03 B-52D. TOT 1609Z Duc Noi 37,000 MSL. Returned to service 12-31-72. 63 manhours to repair fourteen external holes plus three dents.
D 55-0052	1-8-73	Second incident. Landed at U-Tapao. Approx. 45 holes.
D 55-0116	1-14-73	Landed at Danang. Over 200 holes. Left wing section 21 needs replacing. Left drop tank numerous holes. Removed both; being salvaged 4-1-73. (According to one source there was not enough time before the cease-fire to salvage the aircraft so it was scraped).
D 55-0058	1-14-73	Landed at U-Tapao. Took hits from 2 of 6 SA-2s fired just prior to drop. More hits from 1 of 3 more SAMs on exit. Over 120 holes. Geoff Engels, a/c commander, Gunner, Jack Attebury, C/P Ernie Perrow, NAV Mike Gjede, EW "Torch" Torsiello, RN (Unknown).

Note: Source of aircraft data...Boeing maintenance records. The correct total number of B52s lost in combat must be 17. However, eight additional B-52s were operational losses while enroute to a combat area. **Total Vietnam B52 losses: 25.**

From: BHudson964@aol.com
Date sent: Thu, 25 Jan 2001 18:13:55 EST
Subject: **Re: Mac's Facts no. 46**

A little known fact, you might call it Mac's Facts no. 46A: The night we got bagged, as we taxied out our gunner got ill. I called for a replacement and I was told I would get one once we reached the hammerhead. At our takeoff time a truck pulled up and a guy ran to the back of the plane (B-52D-gunner sat in the rear). This "guy" comes over the intercom and says I am ready and we launched. We never got a chance to introduce ourselves nor get his name. When we got hit by the second SAM (we were hit by at least three), and after we got the bombs off--all 108 of them and on target I might add--I gave the order to bail out. The nose of the airplane pitched violently down, so I assumed our gunner had jumped. I found out two years ago, at my retirement ceremony in Germany (the wing flew Mike Labeau and my gunner to Germany to be a part of the ceremony), that the gunner got tangled up in his equipment and rode the aircraft down until a fourth SAM hit the aircraft and blew him from the "BUFF". One day at a bar a friend of mine, who was an A-6 driver and who didn't know my background, told me he was slightly behind and below a Buff that was going down when it exploded in mid air. He said he had never seen such a violent explosion. I asked him the date and he said 26 December...our night! I found out my gunner's name after I reached Clark and was in the hospital. He had come out with the first group due to injuries to his legs. I was able to meet him at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital just after he had both legs amputated. We next were together at Strategic Air Command Headquarters for his retirement ceremony. My gunner's name: Papa Jim Cook, one of the bravest men I have ever met. I am honored to have flown with Jim and what a thrill it was to have him at my retirement ceremony. Seeing how you were putting together some facts, I thought I would share this with you.

Bob Hudson

Another Note: The first B-52 flight occurred April 15, 1952. Fifty years later some are still bombing the enemies of democracies. The "H" models, known as "Cadillacs" by the crews, that are still in use today were built in 1960-62. There were 102 "H" models built during this time period. Ninety-four out of the 102 are still in service, eight have been attrited. According to the latest USAF information, they are scheduled to be eliminated from the inventory in 2040. By the standard of a 1952 plane being used 50 years later as

a first line weapon, we would have been flying Sopwith Camels and SPADs over Vietnam, and B-17s in Desert Storm in 1991. This is simply Amazing!

Mig Kills by B-52s:

I received this from Rob Michel rmichel@min.midco.net: 26 Apr 2004

First let me introduce myself. I am the historian for the 5th Bomb Wing at Minot AFB, ND. I was browsing your website for some B-52 information, noticed you were looking for the tail numbers and call signs of the B-52s with MiG kills. Please find listed below the two confirmed B-52 MiG

kills:

Date: 18 Dec 72, Aircraft: B-52D, Tail No.: 56-0676, Call Sign: Brown III

Gunner: SSgt Samuel O. Turner. 56-0676 is on static display at the "Armed Forces & Aerospace Museum" at Fairchild AFB, Washington. Thanks to Chris DeShong (deshong@hotmail.com) for filling in some missing information.

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Date: 24 Dec 72, Aircraft: B-52D, Tail no.: 55-0083, Call sign: Ruby III

Gunner: A1C Albert E. Moore. Aircraft now on display at the North Entrance to the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado.

More Final Notes....

From: "James Golston" <jamesg609@msn.com>

Date sent: Thu, 23 Nov 2006 01:43:31 -0500

Hello Sir,

I just bumped into your site by searching "B52D". What a wealth of information, thank you! I served as a BUFF Crew Chief from 1967 - 1970. I was stationed at Anderson, and U-tapao AFB during that period. I would like to bring to your attention two 'oversights' I noticed on the site. Among the 'operational losses,' add one more. I witnessed a BUFF go up in flames at the end of the runway after an aborted take-off during a rainy morning sortie. I don't have the exact date but this occurred at U-tapao in late 1969, or early 1970. I saw the tail-gunner jump out moments before the plane exploded, word was he was the only survivor onboard. My hope is that with this little bit of information, an investigation would bring this loss to light, and those brave men names can be added. Second, the plaque on display at the USAFA does not mention that some of those 126,000 missions were flown out of the Philippines'. The only time I was at Clark AFB was during one of the many typhoon evacs from Anderson, or Kadina, and the sorties never stopped. I don't think they need to change the plaque, but a footnote would do.

Thank you for the info, I hope you can use mine.

James Golston (SSGT/Honorable Discharge), USAF 1966 – 1970, AF12765167

Following is from Jim Bradley, jbrad723@bluevalley.net. Wed, 8 Nov 2006 22:10:19 -0600

Ash 1 B52D 12-26-72. No. 56-0584. U-Tapao. Crashed at U-Tapao. Attempted go-around with 4 engines out on same side. 4 KIA. CP, 1st Lt Bob Hymel & Gunner, TSgt Spencer Grippen were rescued. The A/C made a determination that they should bailout before the crash, but since the gunner was wounded and they felt he might not be able to physically execute the bailout, they decided as a crew to try and bring the plane in. Ironically, the only survivors of the crash were the C/P and the wounded gunner. In addition, the C/ P would not have survived had he not been rescued by a crewmember from another BUFF who watched the crash, and rushed into the wreck to pull the C/P out before the plane burned up. Lord that we could have more men like these.

For a complete description of this event, see: Air Force Association, August 1983, Vol. 66, No. 8 -- By John L. Frisbee, Contributing Editor. Title: Miracle at U Tapao. Article follows:

Logic said no one could be alive in the B-52, but something drew Capt. Brent Diefenbach to the blazing bomber. Linebacker II, the 11- day bombing campaign of December 1972 that persuaded North Vietnam to sign a cease-fire, had been halted on Christmas Day. Now it was the night of Dec. 26 and the operation was on again. The B-52 with Lt. Robert Hymel as copilot was assigned a target near Hanoi.

Everyone knew the North Vietnamese had used the bombing break to restock and repair their surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites. It was going to be a rough night. As Hymel's B-52 dropped its bombs and turned off target, the rear gunner called two SAMs coming up. Despite evasive action by the B-52, the missiles exploded just to the right of the bomber, wounding the gunner, knocking out two engines, and causing major fuel leaks and other undetermined damage. The aircraft commander headed for an emergency landing at Da Nang, then decided that, with several refuelings, they could make it back to their base at U Tapao, in

Thailand. The wounded gunner would have better medical treatment there. Shortly after midnight, the BUFF started a straight-in approach to the Thai base. Capt. Brent Diefenbach, a B-52 aircraft commander who had just returned from a mission in the North, sat in a crew bus, waiting to cross the end of the runway as Hymel's battle-damaged bomber neared the runway lights. The approach didn't look or sound right. Suddenly, the aircraft veered to the left and the engines roared as power was added for a go-around. Diefenbach watched, horrified, as the big bomber pitched up, plunged to earth about a mile beyond the runway, and exploded in a ball of fire.

Diefenbach later remembered the compulsive thought that he had to get to the crash site. "It appeared obvious to me that no one was alive, but something kept drawing me to go." He knew he had to get there fast. Jumping off the bus, he went out an entrance gate and climbed aboard a Thai bus that was headed in the direction of the crash. When the driver refused to go farther, Diefenbach ran down the road toward the burning B-52 until he spotted a path in the tall grass that seemed to lead to the aircraft. "For a second," Diefenbach recalled, "I thought, 'Why go on? No one is alive in that inferno.'" But again he felt impelled, almost against his will. He approached the wreckage, shouting to see if anyone was alive. To his surprise, he heard a voice inside the bomber calling for help. Rolling down the sleeves of his flight suit for protection against the heat, he entered the burning plane amidst a fusillade of exploding ammunition and pressure lines. There was no way of knowing if bombs were still aboard. Diefenbach followed the cries--the only sign of life--through a pall of smoke to find copilot Hymel, badly injured, crumpled in a position that prevented him from unbuckling his seat harness, and with one fractured leg trapped in the wreckage. Diefenbach remembers accusing Hymel of not helping and of falling asleep--"anything to keep him conscious." In desperation, Hymel told his rescuer to cut off the leg if he had to. Finally, working together for what seemed an eternity, they were able to free the injured man. "By that time, the explosions [and] the heat were nearer than I care to think about." Diefenbach dragged Hymel out of the fuselage and carried him away from the blazing wreck just as a helicopter and fire trucks arrived. The rescue crew was unable to approach the B-52, now engulfed in flames. Hymel was air-evacuated to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, then to a hospital in the States where he eventually recovered from multiple fractures and lacerations. After Diefenbach had reported details of the rescue to the wing commander, and his staff, he was taken to the base hospital "for some minor repairs and bandages." Some time later, he discovered there were "a lot of thank you's in order for the Chief Pilot in the Sky." He had extricated the copilot from an armed ejection seat. That it had not fired in the struggle to free Hymel was a miracle within a miraculous and heroic rescue, for which the Commander in Chief of Strategic Air Command, Gen. John C. Meyer <0589valor.html>, presented Diefenbach the Airman's Medal.

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Footnotes on the B-52:

The first B-52 was assembled in late 1951 and first flew in April 1952. The airplane joined the Air Force inventory in 1955. There were 744 B-52s made. There were 106 B-52 H models built. This is the final model authorized to be built. The H model is the only model still flying as of 2008. The H model is scheduled to retire in 2040.

104 of the 744 B-52s made have been lost in war, collisions or accidents (14%). Accidents have led to the loss of 85 B-52s, with causes ranging from structural failures in flight and fires to an inadvertently fired air-to-air missile from an Air National Guard fighter and pilot error.

At least nine B-52s have been lost in collisions with other B-52s or with tankers.

Corrections/additions/discussions are welcome. I would appreciate crewmember names and Call Signs of all B-52s listed. Contact Mike McGrath (NAM-POWs Historian) at: mmcgrath62@comcast.net. NAM-POWs is a 501 (c) (19) tax-exempt social and fraternal organization for the 661 returned POWs (30 escaped, 631 were repatriated) of the Vietnam War. Our Home Page is: www.nampows.org