

100th MISSION

(An Essay by Bob Krone, Colonel, USAF (Ret) written for the 18 March 2009 Opening of the National Museum of the Air Force, “100 Missions Exhibition,” Dayton, Ohio.)

Military Aviation Artist Brian Bateman has created a permanent commemorative image for those United States Air Force flyers who flew 100 Combat Missions over North Vietnam during the Southeast Asia Conflict.*



Pure joy is a rare wartime emotion. For an aviator in aerial combat feelings of satisfaction about a mission well done are common, even daily, occurrences. Those feelings may approach joy when skill and knowledge under stress have saved the lives of fellow aviators, countrymen, allies or assisted in winning an important military objective. But Joy, in psychological terms, defined as “*An emotion of animation that marks a sudden attainment of some important personal goal*” comes to an aviator after the solo flight, when doing a roll after penetrating an overcast into a sun-filled sky, and – especially - when landing with honor after the last combat mission.

The pictures at the end of this essay recorded that instant of joy for pilots just welcomed back to the flight line at Korat Air Base, Thailand, after their 100th combat mission over North Vietnam in their F-105D Thunderjets. Those of us who reached the 100 Counters were the lucky ones. Thirty-Five percent of all the F-105D/F pilots and electronic warfare officers who flew in the Vietnam War between 1964 and 1968 did not reach the 100th mission. Many who did not suffered long cruel treatment in Hanoi prisons. Read Leo Thorsness, *Surviving Hell: A POWs Journey*, 2008.

Pilots of the 469th TFS, in November 1965 were the first to deploy PCS to SEA for North Vietnam missions. Captains Willy Koenetzer, Bart Barthelmus and Bruce Holmes designed the 100 Mission Patch at a three-day R & R in Bangkok in December 1965. The patch’s first awards were to Bruce Holmes, Dick Ely, Bill Ramage and Willy May when they all reached the magic 100th together on 16 January 1966 (picture below).

The 469th also initiated the “100 Mission Reception” for the returning fighter pilot. Fire engines and trucks loaded with crew chiefs firing flares lead the taxiing Thud from the end of the runway to the parking ramp. Commanders, pilots and enlisted maintenance greet the pilot with congratulations and champagne. The flying suit comes off and is replaced with one with the 100 Mission Patch on the left shoulder. Then a ride to ops where the illusive 100 gets logged on the mission board followed by a “*Ringing of the Bell*” in the bar. This reception became a great morale booster for the entire base and spread to other bases throughout Southeast Asia.

This celebration served to remind other pilots that “*There is a Way*” to reach the 100 mark. In fact, “*There is a Way*” became the title of a USAF Aerospace Audio Visual Service (AAVS) film at Korat in the Fall of 1966 showing the F-105, its pilots, mission and support personnel. That film remains in 2009 as the best documentation of the Thud story. Eighty-five percent of USAF combat missions to North Vietnam were flown by the F-105D and the Wild Weasel F-105F.

I believe that the eleven years the United States fought Communism in Vietnam accelerated the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demise of Communism, the collapse of the Soviet Union and winning the Cold War.

Bob Krone
14 March 2009



Capt Bud Millner, 28 Apr 66



Capt Bob Chastain, 24 Apr 66



Maj Jim Jones, 28 Apr 66



Captains Holmes, May, Ely & Ramage, 15 Jan 66



Capt Glen Belew, 27 Apr 66
Flight Surgeon Doc Jim Dyke- behind



Maj Bob Krone, 3 Jun 66



Capt Bill Secker, 31 May 66

* Brian Bateman recreated with historical accuracy the images and markings of the four F-105Ds and one F-4C jet on the 100th Mission of Major Bob Krone, 469th Squadron Commander, 3 June 1966, The flight members were: Lead, Major Bob Krone, F-105D 62-4325; #2 1/Lt Thomas A. Gibbs, F-105D 59-1766; #3 Captain Steven R. Sanders, F-105D 61-0196; #4 Captain Carl S. Hicks, F-105D 62-4265; #5 Photo Chase, F-4C 63-7518, Pilot Captain Jim V. Meyers, 434th TFS and 469th TFS Flight Surgeon, Dr. Marshall "Jim" Dyke in the rear cockpit. Because Major Krone was the first USAF Squadron Commander to reach 100 Missions, 7th Air Force in Saigon sent a film crew to document the flight. Brian Bateman used that film when creating this painting. Four Squadron Commanders had been shot down previous to 3 June 1966. They were: Lt Col Robinson Risner, 67th/Commander, 16 Sep 1965; Lt Col Melvin Killian, 334th TFS Commander, 30 Sep 1965; Lt Col George McCleary, 357th TFS Commander, 5 November 1965; and Lt. Col Bill Cooper, 469th TFS Commander, 24 Apr 1966. Bob Krone became the 469th Commander that date. With appreciation to USAF Historian Howard Plunkett, who documented these names and aircraft for the National Museum of the Air Force, Dayton, Ohio.

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