

Wild Weasel After Action Report

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Robert Kronebusch gave me this unpublished report to use in my writings about the Son Tay raid.

This is a typed copy of the handwritten report I made after the Son Tay Raid. I was told to write an after-action mission report and turn it in to Intelligence because they were being tasked by someone whom I can't remember. This was done the day after the mission so it should be pretty accurate.

Firebird 1 Kronebusch/Forrester

Firebird 2 Reisenwitz/McAdoo

Firebird 3 Starkey/Fansler

Firebird 4 Denton/Ober

Firebird 5 Kilgus/Lowry

On 20 Nov 70 a force of 5 Wild Weasel F105G aircraft flew a SAM suppression mission in Route Pack 6A. As Firebird 1 I was the Weasel force commander and flight leader. Call signs were Firebird 1 thru 5. Our basic plan called for Firebird 1 and 2 to takeoff at 0045 local Korat time followed by 3 and 4 five minutes later then Firebird 5 five minutes after that. We proceeded to the Lemon tanker for prestrike refueling. Due to security no spare crews were briefed and only one spare aircraft was available. An extra 15 minutes was planned on the tanker to allow a ground abort time to change aircraft and still be on time. This planning proved prudent because Firebird 2 did ground abort, changed aircraft to the spare and finished refueling one minute prior to drop off time. The tanker departure was in pairs at 4-minute intervals. We proceeded North on 103° 40' E to 20° 00' N, penetrated NVN at approximately 104°36' E - 20°45'N and then direct to the objective [which we had planned as a point for initial orientation 10 miles South of the prison. At the NVN border the flights took spacing so as to arrive at the objective at 2-minute intervals and begin trolling orbits. Firebird 1 arrived over the objective precisely as planned at 0208 local, 10 minutes before H-hour.

Navigation to the area was simple; initially by doppler/nav and then by reference to towns and rivers. The towns were all well lighted and because of previous map study, readily identifiable. Moon light was significant for us because throughout the orbits I knew precisely where I was located and how far I was from the known SAM sites, how long it would take a SAM to reach me and how close I was to my firing parameters i.e., distance from the site. At precisely 0218 the flares were sighted over the Objective. We were on station for 20 minutes or 0228 before we received any Fansong indication, but during that time we were constantly painted by GCI search and height finder radar. After 20 minutes the Fansong signals started coming up. The vector scope on the APR 25 showed 2 and sometimes 3 and 4 sites were looking at us, but never more than 2 rings; indicating they were just looking not locking on or putting us in the center of the sector.

At one time about 3 minutes after Fansong activity began I received a 3-ring signal from VNI while I was head-on to the site at .86 Mach and 11 miles. I pulled up 20 degrees at 10,000 feet MSL and launched the first Shrike. The results of this firing are uncertain because the signal environment was beginning to become so dense that it was kind of hard to tell when a site went down. This site apparently fired 2 SAMs later, so kill is doubtful. The first SAMs were launched at approximately 0233 or about 25 minutes after we arrived over the objective. From this time on things got a little

disruptive because of the evasive flying we were doing. Firebird 3 received a hit from a Sam at about 0235. I saw him torch immediately after the hit, probably from fuel in the 650-gal centerline tank we carried that night. Someone transmitted "Drop your centerline" and the flame went out in about 15 secs. and Firebird 3 called out "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday" heading 035 degrees. Shortly thereafter he indicated he was in control and turning West.

The sequence of events after this are hard to recall. The significant items that I can recall are: We fired a total of 8 Shrikes out of the 10 we carried. All the pilots feel that they fired within the parameters of the Shrike usually 8-12 miles in a loft delivery from 10-12,000 feet. The distance was relatively accurate since we knew the locations of the sites before takeoff and found it easy to keep oriented while in the area with reference to the river, the objective, and the lights of Hanoi. The SAM missiles were visible throughout their entire envelope and could positively be identified at launch. I estimate that a minimum of 16 missiles were launched at the Weasel force.

I know it's possible to exaggerate this missile count when much of the time is spent maneuvering at max performance, but I base my count on several factors. I myself took evasive action 4 times and each time a pair of missiles were fired in my direction. Also, I have a mental picture of 4 missiles airborne and 2 more being launched or just lifting off for a total of 6 missiles at the same time. I saw this situation twice, once when Firebird 3 was hit and once again later. The first 2 missiles fired in my direction did not guide but they passed harmlessly behind and self destructed with little violent maneuvering from me. I also saw 2 missiles from VN2 in the middle of the activity that went straight up to some altitude well above 40k, I would estimate, and self-destructed. In evading the SAMs when the distance was about 15 miles it appeared as though a 45-degree dive in full military reduced the accuracy but when the distance closer, like 8 miles, it took max afterburner and high "G" pull-up to out turn the missile just before impact. Since we were all in the same quadrant of the SAM sites, any missile launched would start to arch over toward the force causing everyone to go down as an initial maneuver then as the SAM progressed it was possible to determine if it was tracking you or not. With 4 missiles airborne at the same time, it was necessary to go all the way to the deck once before I was sure of evading all of them. I am certain that we had Mod II and Mod III missiles fired at us. First of all, I saw at least 4 missiles fly westward over our heads well beyond 22 miles at 10-12K ft before they self destructed. Secondly several of these missiles that went to max distance, including the two that went straight up, self destructed immediately upon sustainer burnout. At least one SAM I saw appeared to go about 15 miles at 10,000 ft, sustainer burned out and after 5 secs it self destructed. The Shrikes I feel were all launched within parameters, and I cannot determine from the information we have how effective we were in damaging the SAM sites. One thing of consideration was most of the shrike launches were against less than 3 Hz ring signals. This was because of the tactics used by the SAM battery commanders.

Through Gel or acquisition radar they obviously knew what our heading was and never locked on while we were heading in toward them. We usually didn't receive full strength tracking signals while facing the site It was only after turning away at least 45degrees that they would lock on and fire so that the crew that was fired on would have to start evasive action. Any other crew lined up at that time could fire if signal strength was strong enough. My APR25/26 RHAW gear was very reliable. When I turned away the signal would slowly grow to 1 Hz 2 rings and hold until about 45 degrees of turn. It took only 1 or 2 more seconds for this signal strength to increase to 3 1/2 -4 rings, indicating center of sector scan; within 6 seconds we would receive a launch light and I could look down and see the missile launching.

At approximately 0245 I called Firebird flight to move westward 5 miles. My reasoning was

that Sam sites did not appear to fire at us when we 15 miles or more, although 15 miles was in their range. Only when we reduced the distance to less than 15 were we fired on.

As Firebird aircraft reached bingo fuel in the area, they were sent home by me. Firebird 3 was already on the egress when Firebird 5 called bingo and departed. Firebird 4 departed next followed by Firebird 2 and 1. I departed at 0255 after 47 minutes on station. Shortly after departing I heard a call from Firebird 5 to frog to move the lemon tanker north as he was losing fuel rapidly. After one transmission the tanker was started northward, and Firebird 5 called 1000 lbs. And dropping rapidly. He asked Brigham for a steer to a safe area, and this was misunderstood so Falcon 5 immediately said "head for 108"; I repeated "Firebird 5 head directly to Skyline-108 and try to bailout over the site". Firebird 5 acknowledged and then I concentrated on my own fuel situation. Brigham was saturated by both the impending bailout of FB5 and the emergency landing of FB3 at Udorn. I planned the flight to refuel on Lemon on the way back but it was going to add greater confusion if I asked for vectors to Lemon so I made the decision to press on to Udorn and if I passed a tanker I would refuel, if not I'd land at Udorn min fuel. After hearing FB5 eject 9 miles out of 108 and hearing both front and back seaters come up on guard, I switched to Udorn Approach and made a landing at Udorn with about 800 lbs.

It would not have been so simple to look down at the place where a missile supposed to launch from if it had not been for the very accurate intelligence we were supplied with. All our tactics were based on pre-briefed knowledge of site locations, those that were night qualified and those that were occupied. We were briefed they would launch in pairs, they usually did. The information we received from Capt Knops was accurate and of great value in permission planning. Our own intel officer Capt. Nina Gusev was invaluable in preparing maps, gathering info on SAM-Mig-AAA order of battle for the area. Additionally, her briefing to the crews was of the utmost importance especially with reference to the escape and evasion posture of the Laotian area.

I haven't mentioned any AAA, there was some, but it never became a factor except when we were at low altitude evading a SAM. There were 37 and 57 and some 23 mm in our area but they weren't very effective at night. Saw some awesome 85 and I think 100mm stuff going straight up in the Haiphong area in the distance. Not a factor for us.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS: By John Forrester

I was gratified and proud of the bravery and professional competence exhibited by my force members in the hazardous environment of multiple SAM launches. The force went into the high threat area knowing they were bait, and their job was to keep the missiles away from the low slow flying assault forces. Our portion of the intricate mission was eminently successful as all the missiles launched to the west were launched against the Weasel force and the slow movers were protected, though we lost one aircraft and sustained damage to a second one from SAMs.