

# Ronald Dean Stafford

## F-105 History

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07-Jun-68

243

The nineteenth F-105 RTU Class 68IR graduated at the 23 TFW, McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 5 Dec 67 with 27 students. Twenty six graduated. The incoming class consisted of 2 Capts and 25 2nd Lts, all recent graduates in the top 10% of the Undergraduate Pilot Training program.

"This class is unique in that it is the first class in which all members are recent graduates of the Undergraduate Pilot Training Program. ... They have no pilot experience other than that received in pilot training. This represented a marked contrast with previous F-105 RTU classes composed of older, more mature and experienced pilots."

To compensate for their inexperience, their course was increased from 92 to 120 flying hours for a total of 78 sorties (RTU course 1111106). On 8 Mar 68, student 2Lt Frank F. Perry III was killed in the crash of F-105D 62-4226 near Raymond KS.

The class deployed for conventional weapons delivery training to George AFB CA between 16 Apr - 9 May 68 with the 563 TFS. The squadron commander was Lt Col Joe W. Pickett. Capt Wyrewood Gowell was Top Student.

On 30 Apr 1968, while at George AFB, instructor pilot Maj Robert V. "Boris" Baird, ejected successfully from F-105D 61-0083 when it developed a flight control problem after takeoff.

The 10 May 1968 edition of The Wichita Eagle reported on the 563 TFS's return to McConnell after their deployment to George. "The 563rd Tactical Fighter Squadron at McConnell Air Force Base returned to Wichita Thursday after 23 days at George AFB, Calif. where it achieved a record 725 successful practice sorties.

"The student fighter squadrons at McConnell are sent to George for special aerial combat training as a routine but this was the first group of F-105 students to contain all recently commissioned second lieutenants.

"None of them are experienced pilots, but they are a good group," said Maj. Robert B. Baird, flight commander. "I experienced the only mishap during the 23-day exercise." Baird was forced to eject from his craft April 30 when it developed flight control difficulty shortly after takeoff from George.

"McConnell is the training center for pilots in the F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber prior to assignment in Southeast Asia. Most students up to now had been experienced pilots who were converting from other aircraft to the 105, Baird said.

"This group of students had logged about 90 hours flying time in the Thunderchief during their training here before going to George where they flew about another 20 hours each," Baird said. "They will be required to complete about 10 additional hours flight time here, but they already have overseas orders for mid-June."

"Most practice flights are over Smokey Hill Bombing and Gunnery Range near Salina, Kan.

"But when it comes time to fire on airborne targets, Kansas lacks sufficient air space," Maj. Baird explained, so the squadron retreats to skies over the southern California desert. There they concentrate efforts on air-to-air combat practice and use of the Sidewinder missile.

"After graduation from flight training, the 26 class members will begin water survival training at Homestead AFB, Fla., before going overseas."

The students were:

Capt Wyrewood A. "Goose" Gowell	2Lt Eldon W. Joersz
Capt Kenneth G. Lindell	2Lt Charles A. Kennedy

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2Lt Salvatore A. Bonacasa	2Lt Peter J. Linsley
2Lt Donald S. Brown II	2Lt Harvey A. Marshall
2Lt Robert E. Bryan	2Lt Phillip A. Miller
2Lt Gary R. Confer	2Lt Frank F. Perry III
2Lt David Thomas Dinan III	2Lt John C. Pluta
2Lt Preston T. "Pres" Duke	2Lt Cecil L. Snell
2Lt Curtis S. "Scott" Hamme	2Lt Ronald D. Stafford
2Lt James N. Hammond	2Lt Marshall D. Tilley
2Lt Ronald A. Hoffmeyer	2Lt Richard R. Venturi
2Lt Clarence J. "Skip" Holm	2Lt Barry D. Wyttenbach
2Lt David S. Hartman, Jr.	2Lt Robert John Zukowski
2Lt Lynn A. Aikman	

Seven lieutenants -- Confer, Dinan, Hoffmeyer, Hartman, Stafford, Venturi, and Zukowski -- were assigned to the 34 TFS at Korat. Most arrived in early July 1968. Three of them were shot down: Dinan (twice) (KIA the second time), Zukowski (KIA), and Stafford (Rescued). On 13 July 1968, Confer's plane was hit over NVN and he crash landed at Udorn. He had minor injuries but the plane was destroyed.

*23 TFW History, Jul - Dec 67 & Jan - Jun 68, USAF microfilm MO554 frame 2025.*

### 03-Jul-68

2317

Capt Bill Harris, 469 TFS, 388 TFW, flew F-105D 61-0167 on his 99th combat mission from Korat RTAFB, Thailand. It was an armed reconnaissance mission in RP-1, North Vietnam. He was called by a FAC to knock out a SAM site. "SH bombs!" Sortie length was 2 hours.

The 34 TFS launched "Scuba" flight. The lineup was:

- #1 - Capt Joseph S. Sechler flying his 67th combat mission. He logged 2.35 flying time.
- #2 - 1Lt Ronald D. Stafford
- #3 - Lt Col Robert J. Klingensmith, Jr., the 34 TFS commander
- #4 - Capt William A. Thomas, Jr.

*Bill Harris, letter 19 March 2001 & Joe Sechler, mission log via e-mail 28 Apr 2010.*

### 31-Aug-68

4134

The 388 TFW history listed the aircrews assigned to the 34 TFS and the number of sorties each had flown as of the end of August 1968.

34 TFS	Sorties	Counters
Lt Col Klingensmith	59	43
Maj Langford	91	86
Capt Barr	84	67
Capt Sechler	105	87
Capt Murphy	107	97
Lt Col Christensen	118	105
Maj Roysdon	109	89
Capt J. Hartman	116	94
Col Douglas	47	43
Capt Durnbaugh	65	56
Maj Goodrich	115	97
Maj Matthews	75	61
Capt William A. Thomas, Jr.	109	104
Capt Ahrens	79	59

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Lt Col Dye	114	101
Capt Germann	97	86
Capt Thatcher	34	29
Maj Shunney	107	95
Capt Brooks	80	66
Capt Bogemann	115	97
Capt Fuhrman	118	99
Lt Col Shaver	80	66
1Lt Confer	33	28
Capt Pharmed	114	99 (Had flown 100 missions by the end of Aug)
Capt Durkee	111	99 (Had flown 100 missions by the end of Aug)
Capt Everett	69	56
Lt Col Ross	122	108
Col Stewart	118	110
Capt Bell	70	57
Maj White	75	58
1Lt Venturi	36	29
1Lt Hoffmeyer	38	33
Capt Ducton	31	27
Capt Crouch	32	27
Lt Col Bancroft	20	16
Maj Colasuonno	33	29
1Lt Stafford	34	31
1Lt D. Hartman	33	27
Lt Col Glass	6	6
Maj Holly	4	3
Maj Knapp	8	5

*388 TFW History, July - Sep 68, USAF microfilm NO585, frames 0250 - 0251.*

### 06-Oct-68

771

F-105 pilots from the 388 TFW "... closed a highway segment 31 miles north-northeast of Mu Gia Pass. Commenting on the mission, 1Lt Ronald D. Stafford, 34 TFS, said, 'The flight had excellent bombing results and cut the road in six places, rendering it completely useless to all traffic.' Other pilots on the strike were the 388th wing commander, Colonel Paul P. Douglas, and Lt Col Earl F. Bancroft, 34 TFS.

*Sawadee Flyer, Saturday, October 19, 1968, pg 1 & Thunderchief Worldwide Report, Vol IV no 3, Nov 68.*

### 29-Mar-69

F-105D 624270 34 TFS 388 TFW Korat Hit by 37-mm AAA while diving toward a target in Laos. Crashed in Laos. 15-38N 106-55E 1Lt Ronald Dean Stafford 34 TFS pilot ejected and was rescued by a USAF helicopter. Call sign: "Detroit 01". Aircraft was lost after the fourth pass during an AGM-12C mission just after missile release at 14,000 feet. Almost immediately after the missile release, the aircraft was hit by enemy gun fire and Lt Stafford ejected. 1Lt Stafford was recovered with only minor scratches and bruises after spending one hour and fifty minutes in enemy territory." Of seven 388 TFW crew members lost during the period January - March 1969, Lt Stafford was the only one recovered.

He was rescued by the crew of an HH-3 from the 37 ARRS piloted by Maj Robert E. Booth. (Bob LaPointe, e-mail 16 Jan 04)

Rescue Mission Narrative Report (1-3-037-29 Mar 69) submitted by Maj Robert E. Booth, RCC, Jolly Green 21.

"On 29 March 1969, Jolly Green 21 (Low) and Jolly Green 22 (High) were on alert status at Da Nang AB. At 0340Z,

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both aircraft were scrambled to pick up one survivor (Detroit Lead), located on the 090 radial for 22 nm from Channel 72. Jolly Green 21 took off at 0345Z, immediately followed by Jolly Green 22. Both aircraft were instructed to rendezvous with the Spads at a point 50 miles on the 250 degree radial from Channel 77.

"Jolly Green 21 and 22 climbed to an en route altitude of 8500 feet on top of a broken layer of clouds with tops at approximately 7500 feet. In flight visibility was approximately four to five miles. Jolly Green 21 arrived at the rendezvous point at 0425Z and made radio contact with Spad 01 and Spad 02. Spad 01 advised that they had the survivor pin-pointed at 28 ½ miles on the 090 degree radial of channel 72. Spad 01 then cleared Jolly Green 21 and 22 to proceed from the rendezvous point to the pick-up area. Spad 02 proceeded out bound to intercept the helicopter and lead them into the area.

"Spad 01 remained with the survivor to sterilize the area. Visual contact could not be made between Spad 02 and Jolly Green 21 due to cloud coverage and limited visibility in haze. However, contact was made between Spad 01 and Jolly Green 21 approximately three miles to the east of the survivor as Jolly Green 21 was descending. Spad 01 advised Jolly Green 21 that he had radio contact with the survivor and that the survivor was not injured. He also directed Jolly Green 21 to stay to the north of the survivor because there were gun positions to the south. The terrain was extremely mountainous in the pick-up area with peaks ranging from 2000 to 7000 feet to the northeast. The survivor was situated in a ravine that ran generally from northwest to southeast. The ravine was shaped like a 'V' with a box canyon at the northwest end forming a juncture of two ridge lines, the east and west boundaries of the ravine. The survivor was approximately 150 yards down into the ravine away from the top of the eastern ridge line. On the opposite side of the same ridge was a large clearing containing numerous houses or huts.

"Spad 01 reported that he had picked up no ground fire and cleared Jolly Green 21 to pick up Detroit Lead. At this time Jolly Green 21 had voice contact with the survivor and jettisoned his tip tanks. Jolly Green 22 remained clear and set up an orbit at approximately 500 feet MSL. Spad 01 preceded Jolly Green 21 into the area and dropped napalm on the west side of the ravine. Then he told Detroit Lead to pop his smoke. The smoke was clearly visible to Jolly Green 21 and visual contact was made with the survivor's parachute and then the survivor. A go-around was initiated and 600 more pounds of fuel were dumped, leaving Jolly Green 21 with 700 pounds of fuel in each internal tank. Jolly Green 21 made another approach and came to a hover over Detroit Lead. Meanwhile, Spad 01 and Spad 02 had set up a 'daisy-chain'. Jolly Green 21 had to hover down in the ravine on a heading of 130 degrees with a quartering tail wind from the right. This was done in order to put the wall of the box canyon in the rear of the aircraft and allow for an avenue of escape down the ravine. In order to drop the penetrator to the survivor, the aircraft had to be positioned tightly against the slope of the ridge line. This put the slope on the left side of the aircraft, which the RCC with minimal hover references. Also, since the ridge to the left of Jolly Green 21 had a slope of approximately 60 degrees, the main rotor blades were extremely close to the side of the hill. The close proximity of the rotor blades to the hill side and the lack of hover references for the RCC, necessitated close coordination between the RCC and the RCCP in order to maintain a stable hover. The pick-up was further complicated by turbulence caused by the wind blowing over the ridge lines and down through the ravine.

"The survivor came on board Jolly Green 21 after approximately seven minutes of hovering. Jolly Green 21 began his departure in a south easterly direction, down the ravine escorted by Spad 01 and Spad 02. A left turn was made and Jolly Green departed the area on a north easterly heading accompanied by Jolly Green 22. At this time Jolly Green 21 made voice contact with Crown 22 and requested in-flight refueling. Since Jolly Green 21 had to dump an appreciable amount of fuel due to gross weight considerations for an GCE hover, it was doubtful that the mission could have been completed successfully without in-flight refueling. At 0530Z, Jolly Green rendezvoused with Crown 6 for fueling. Jolly Green 21 requested and was given, 1000 pounds of fuel. Refueling was accomplished at 8500 feet without incident. Crown 6 was a definite asset to the accomplishment of the mission. The crew should be commended for their display of outstanding professionalism. Jolly Green 21 and 22 landed at Da Nang at 0600Z. The survivor, Detroit Lead, was not injured except for minor abrasions on his neck, sustained during bail out.

"Survivor: 1st Lt R.D. Stafford, 388 TFW, 34 TFS.

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Jolly Green Crewmembers:

Jolly Green 21  
RCC Major Robert E. Booth  
RCCP Capt Martin E. Richert  
FE Sgt Duane I. Beland  
PJ Sgt Stephen T. White

Jolly Green 22  
RCC Lt Col Henry E. Simpson, Jr.  
RCCP Lt Col Homer H. Howell  
FE SSgt James K. Hall  
PJ SSgt Allen J. Avery

"Comments: Spad 01 did a superior job as On Scene Commander. His directions were explicit and there was never any doubt in anyone's mind as to what he wanted them to do. The planning and leadership displayed by Spad 01 contributed effectively to the success of this particular SAR mission."

In a 31 March 1969 letter, the pilot of "Crown 6" the C-130 that assisted in the rescue by refueling the helicopter, reported the event.

"1. At approximately 0340Z as Crown 6 was approaching orbit we heard Crown 4 talking to Spad 01 and Detroit 02. Detroit Lead had bailed out and Detroit 02 was in voice contact with him. Jolly Green 21 and 22 were scrambled and proceeded to an orbit point of 090/52/72. Spad 01 and 02 were in the area of the downed pilot and Spad 01 was designated OSC. There was another mission on Guard just North of Detroit 1 and Crown 4 had to tell Spad 01 to stay off Guard till the other pickup was made (Lariat 03).

"2. Misty 31 and 41 were over Detroit's position and instructed by Crown to work with Spad 01 in the evaluation of the area. Crown 6 relieved Crown 4 and assumed command of SAR. Fast movers were requested in the event they were needed for gun suppression.

"3. At 0424Z Spad 01 reported no activity in the area at all. Detroit Lead reported he was in good shape and had not heard any activity around him. Crown advised Spad 01 that it would be desirable to send Spad 02 out to escort the Jolly Greens into the area. Meanwhile Sandy 7, 8, 9 and 10 and Jolly Green 74 and 68 were launched from Channel 89. Gunfighter and Bobbin flights were available if needed. Tanker was coordinated.

"4. Jolly Green 21 made the pickup after having some difficulty finding Detroit Lead and dumping fuel in order to hover for the pickup. Pickup accomplished at 0508Z while Spad 01 and 02 dropped ordnance around the survivor. Jolly Green 21 had requested refueling as soon as possible after pickup. Crown 6 was in descent while the pickup was being made and A/R was completed at 0528Z. Provided Jolly Green 21 and 22 with heading to DaNang.

"5. Forces utilized:

Spad 01 and 02	Jolly Green 21 and 22
Misty 31 and 41	Detroit 02
Orange Tanker	Spad 01 and 02 (Only ones to expend ordnance)

Extract from an unidentified SAR Study received from Ron Thurlow (pgs 36 - 38): "On 20 March, 1st Lt. Ronald D. Stafford, of the 388 TFW, was hit by ground fire on his second attempt at a Bullpup missile launch. Suddenly his aircraft was upside down, and then in a spin. Lt Stafford described the situation as follows:

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"... I continued around one spin in the revolution and made one transmission; 'I'm hit; I'm in a spin.' I could see the ground coming up at me. I knew I had no control over the aircraft. I proceeded to punch out.

"... I ejected with the mask on, the visor down and my head all the way back. There was very little turbulence or windblast. Almost immediately I felt the 'butt-snapper' separate, and I was in my chute. All systems worked automatically.

"... I could see huts below me and to my left. I counted ten in all. At his time, I think I picked up some automatic weapons fire from the ground. There weren't any tracers but something was whizzing past. I cut the four lines and started experimenting in what direction I could direct the chute.

".. I continued working with my parachute risers and slipped toward a ridge above the huts. As I got closer to the trees, I put on my mask, lowered my visor, and prepared for a tree landing. I raised my arms and put my face into the crook of my right arm. My knees were bent; my seat pack wasn't deployed. I possibly could have protected myself better from some scratches if I'd deployed my LPUs.

"... I hit the tree canopy, which broke my fall somewhat. I continued down and hit the ground fairly hard. I ended up sliding down the hill face forward; when I finally stopped, it was a struggle to sit up because I was on a steep hill. I sat up and found the beeper, turned it off and got out my radio. I checked to see if the beeper was transmitting and didn't get anything. I then started transmitting, 'Mayday, Mayday.'

"... I continued to talk with Detroit 02, Misty 31, and Spad 01. During this time I moved uphill ten to twenty yards and some of my transmissions were being cut off by the hills around me. I took a bearing to the southwest on two AAA pieces and told Misty 31 that they were about two miles from my position.

"Lt Stafford continued to work with the SAR forces until the Jolly Greens arrived to pick him up. After some momentary confusion caused by not knowing which was the High Jolly and which was the Low, he directed them over his position and was spotted. He continued:

"... They were right over me and I could see the penetrator coming down. I was thinking about letting the penetrator touch the ground first, but grabbed it after it hit the trees to prevent it from sliding down the steep slope. I got the strap around me, lowered two seats, and gave them the 'thumbs up' to start hauling me in. About half way up, the chopper began to move out of the area. I reminded myself to let the PJ pull me in, and not try to help.

"Lt Stafford's final observations on his experience summed up much of what he had done well:

"My URT-10 radio was tremendous. When the SAR force got close to me I had great communications ... I have no recommendations to make. I think it is the individual's choice whether or not to deploy the seat kit when coming in for a tree landing. I happened to hang onto mine. I decided a long time ago that I was not going to deploy the kit because I didn't want to have the life raft catch in the trees and having me hung upside-down in the trees."

Stafford last flew the F-105 in May 1969. He had accumulated 499.4 hours in the airplane.

On 20 November 1972, Capt Ronald Dean Stafford, age 29, was KIA in the crash of F-111A 67-0092. He belonged to the 430 TFS, 474 TFW on TDY from Nellis to Takhli. Due to a suspected TFR malfunction his plane went into the Gulf of Tonkin during a Linebacker I night combat mission in RP-1, North Vietnam. (CNA Loss/Damage Database, pg J05, USAF loss 1566)

Capt Stafford's name is on the Vietnam Wall Panel 01W Line 92.

*388 TFW History, Jan - Mar 69, USAF microfilm NO585*

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**09-May-69**

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The 34 TFS flew its last F-105 mission before it converted to F-4Es at the 388 TFW, Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

The F-4Es were delivered on 11 May 1969 by the 40 TFS from Eglin AFB FL. The 40th changed its designation to the 34 TFS when it arrived at Korat. "...They were met with cold beer, a lei, a parade of smoke bombs, water hoses, and welcomed through most of the streets of Korat ...". The 40th designation returned to Eglin.

The final 34 TFS squadron commander with F-105s was Lt Col Harvey W. Prosser, Jr. When the squadron converted to F-4Es, he was replaced by Lt Col Joseph M. Potts. Col Prosser was reassigned to Kirtland AFB, NM where he flew the F-4 and F-104.

On 10 May 1969, Capt Clayton Bane Lyle III was one of the F-105 pilots who transferred from the 34th to the 44 TFS. (Bane Lyle, e-mail 20 Aug 2010.)

1Lt Joseph W. Widhalm, assigned to the 34 TFS in January 1969, also transferred to the 44 TFS. (Joe Widhalm, e-mail 7 May 2012)

On 11 May 1969, the 34th distributed its F-105s to the 355 TFW at Takhli, RTAFB and to the 44 TFS, the only unit still flying F-105s at Korat. The 44 TFS possessed 23 F-105s. Its squadron commander was Lt Col Herbert L. Sherrill who had replaced Lt Col Guy J. Sherrill on 12 March 1969.

F-4E pilots of the 388 TFW called the F-105 "Thud" ("... cause that's the sound it makes when it crashes!") while Korat F-105 pilots referred to the F-4E as the "Thumb" (Two-Hole-Ugly-Mini-Bug). (388 TFW history)

Harvey Prosser commented on the attitude of the F-4 pilots. "They were not a happy bunch. I could have as many F-4 guys switch to 105s as I wanted. All the 34th young guys and the old F-4 pilot Gibs much preferred the Thud. We put up a big sign at the entrance to the O Club stating 'Tiny Tim flies F-4s'. The new F-4 guys refused to take it down and it stayed up for at least a month when the Wing Commander commanded the 34th pilots to remove it because it hurt the F-4 pilots' feelings. Also, the nickname for the F-4 at Korat at that time was Mini-Buff. Again, at the Wing Commander's order, we desisted." (Harvey Prosser, e-mail 2 Feb 10)

During the time the 34th flew F-105s, the squadron received three Outstanding Unit Awards and a Presidential Unit Citation. After it began flying F-4Es, the squadron received its fourth Outstanding Unit Award for the period 1 July 1968 to 15 September 1969 as well as the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross With Palm for the period 15 May 1966 to 29 January 1973. (James Geer, "The Republic F-105 Thunderchief Wing and Squadron Histories", Schiffer, 2002, pg 241.)

However, in its 3 years of flying the F-105, the 34 TFS paid a high price. Pilots assigned or attached to the squadron lost 39 planes to combat and accidents -- 37 "D" models and two "F" models -- enough to equip the squadron more than twice over. Thirteen squadron pilots died in combat (KIA), three more in accidents. Four pilots survived accidental crashes, ten were rescued, and 11 more became POWs, one of whom died in captivity. The following recaps each of the squadron's 39 losses, the pilots involved, and their fate:

	Date	F-105	Last Name	Fate
1.	03 Jun 66	58-1171	Pielin	Rescued
2.	15 Jun 66	62-4377	Kelley	Rescued
3.	21 Jun 66	62-4358	Sullivan	KIA
4.	30 Jun 66	62-4224	Nierste	Rescued
5.	15 Jul 66	59-1761	Hamby	Rescued
6.	20 Jul 66	62-4308	Lewis	KIA
7.	21 Jul 66	62-4227	Tiffin	KIA

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8.	06 Aug 66	62-4315	Rutherford	Rescued
9.	17 Sep 66	61-0191	Rutherford	Rescued
10.	10 Oct 66	62-4300	Bullock	Died
11.	10 Jan 67	62-4265	Gauley	KIA
12.	19 Mar 67	61-0123	Austin	KIA
13.	05 Apr 67	62-4395	Youngblood	Survived
14.	12 May 67	63-8269 (F)	Stewart	KIA
			Pitman	KIA
15.	15 May 67	62-4429 (F)	Heiliger	POW
			Pollard	POW
16.	02 Jun 67	61-0190	Smith	POW
17.	04 Jun 67	61-0148	Kough	Rescued
18.	15 Jun 67	61-0213	Swanson	KIA
19.	17 Oct 67	61-0205	Andrews	POW
20.	17 Oct 67	62-4326	Odell	POW
21.	17 Oct 67	60-0425	Sullivan	POW
22.	27 Oct 67	62-4231	Flynn	POW
23.	28 Oct 67	62-4356	Waldrop	Survived
24.	19 Nov 67	58-1170	Vissotzky	POW
25.	04 Feb 68	60-5384	Lasiter	POW
26.	14 Feb 68	60-0418	Elliot	KIA
27.	15 Apr 68	61-0206	Metz	POW Died
28.	25 Apr 68	60-0436	Givens	Died
29.	14 May 68	61-0132	Bass	Died
30.	28 May 68	61-0194	Ingvalson	POW
31.	31 May 68	60-0409	Beresik	KIA
32.	08 Jun 68	61-0055	Light	Rescued
33.	13 Jul 68	60-0453	Confer	Survived
34.	01 Sep 68	60-0512	Thaete	Rescued
35.	17 Nov 68	61-0092	Dinan	Survived
36.	11 Feb 69	62-4256	Zukowski	KIA
37.	17 Mar 69	61-0104	Dinan	KIA
38.	29 Mar 69	62-4270	Stafford	Rescued
39.	03 Apr 69	62-4269	Christianson	KIA

*388 TFW History, Apr - Jun 69, USAF microfilm NO586*