

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

15-Jul-67

234

The twelfth F-105 RTU Class 67JR graduated at McConnell AFB KS. The class started on 13 Feb 67 with 22 pilots, all but two from the Air Defense Command. However, one pilot was eliminated due to a fear of flying. The class was named "Roaring 20 + 1".

Maj James D. Murray, Jr. was the "Top Gun" in the class.

The class deployed for conventional weapons delivery training to George AFB CA between 30 Jun - 14 Jul 1967 with the 560 TFS. The squadron commander was Lt Col Louis D. Braun, Jr.

The graduating pilots and their SEA squadron assignments (where known) were:

Col Carl M. Hagle - Did not graduate	Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell - 34 TFS
Lt Col William C. Decker - 469 TFS	Maj Paul F. Swanson - 469 TFS
Lt Col Orland W. Jensen - 354 TFS	Capt Anthony Charles Andrews - 34 TFS
Maj David C. Dickson, Jr. - 34 TFS	Capt Douglas A. Beyer - 34 TFS
Maj Robert W. Hagerman - 469 TFS	Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver - 34 TFS
Maj Leslie J. Hauer - 469 TFS	Capt William H. Nottingham - 333 TFS
Maj Stanley Henry Horne - 469 TFS	Capt Robert A. Zang - 469 TFS
Maj David D. Igelman - 34 TFS	1Lt William Wallace Butler - 469 TFS
Maj Ronald Ruynan King - 333 TFS	1Lt Earl J. Henderson - 469 TFS
Maj Thomas P. Larson - 354 TFS	1Lt James L. Taylor - ?
Maj James D. Murray, Jr. - 469 TFS	

Col Hagle did not complete his F-105 training due to ulcers.

Lt Col Jensen came from Hamilton AFB, CA where he flew F-104s with the 83 FIS. During the Korean war he flew F-51s and F-86s with the 18th FBG, Suwan AB, Korea.

Maj Dickson was a former ADC F-106 pilot from Selfridge AFB, MI. Before starting his F-105 training at McConnell, he settled his wife, Carolyn and children near her hometown of Sherman, Texas, near Perrin AFB where he had been stationed earlier. His family remained there during his combat tour. When he departed for Korat in August, he was seen off at the airport by his wife's two uncles, George and Ben Blanton, Carolyn's mother's brothers. As a departing gift, they gave him a box of cigars and instructions to smoke one with a drink after each combat mission. During his stay at Korat, Dickson used the backs of the cigar bands to record each of his combat missions. (Dickson interview)

1Lt Bill Butler and 1Lt Earl Henderson were two ADC F-106 pilots from the 94 FIS at Selfridge. After their F-105 training, both pilots went to Jungle Survival School at Clark AB, Philippines, en route to Korat. "Bill Butler was born on November 29, 1941, in Grass Valley, California. He was commissioned a 2d Lt in the U.S. Air Force through the Air Force ROTC program on December 18, 1963, and went on active duty beginning March 4, 1964. Lt Butler next completed Undergraduate Pilot Training and was awarded his pilot wings at Reese AFB, Texas, in March 1965, followed by F-102 Delta Dagger Combat Crew Training from May to October 1965. His first assignment was as an F-102 pilot with the 94th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Selfridge AFB, Michigan, from November 1965 to February 1967, and he then attended F-105 Thunderchief Combat Crew Training from February to July 1967. ..." (<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1708>.)

Maj Odell and Capt Zang were also F-106 pilots from the 71 FIS at Selfridge.

Maj Igelman came from Ent AFB, Colorado, where he was a computer programmer in the 1st Aerospace Surveillance and Control Squadron. This squadron kept track of all space objects orbiting the Earth. In prior assignments he had flown F-86Ds and F-102s at Selfridge and F-102s at Goose Bay, Labrador. He arrived at Korat in August 1967 and flew his first combat mission in early September.

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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Capt Beyer had been an F-104 pilot assigned to the 331 FIS at Big Spring TX. Both he and Capt Andrews reported to the 34 TFS in August 1967. (Doug Beyer, e-mail 27 Apr 10)

*23 TFW History, Jan - Jun 67, USAF microfilm MO554 & telephone interview, Carolyn Dickson, 23 Apr 2009 & Earl Henderson, e-mails 13 July 2007 and 3 Aug 2009 & Dave Igelman, e-mail 4 Apr 10.*

### 31-Aug-67

3825

The 34 TFS history for the month of August 1967, reported that, "... numerous targets were struck by pilots of the squadron in the Chicom Buffer Zone and within the Hanoi restricted area. A marked increase was noted in all modes of defense (AAA, SAMs, MiGs) due primarily to the sensitivity of the targets." Squadron pilots flew 411 combat missions during the month, 407 to North Vietnam and 4 to Laos for a total combat time of 1063:20 hours.

"Combat pilot strength stood at 36 line pilots. During the month of August, four squadron pilots completed their tour of 100 missions over North Vietnam. Those completing were: Maj Harry Pawlik, Maj Donald F. Fryauf, Capt Jack A. Phillips [on 2 Aug], and Capt David C. Carter. [Not listed in the squadron history for completing his 100th mission this month was Maj John O. Rollins II.] No losses were suffered during this month and 13 replacements arrived during this period of time. Two officers, Captains Skoglund and Shulmister, that had been on temporary duty with the squadron from Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, returned to their home station."

Maj Pawlik last flew the F-105 in February 1968. He had accumulated 436.1 hours in the aircraft.

The 13 pilots arriving in the 34th in August were: Maj William M. Blakeslee, Maj Kenneth W. Mays, Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell, Maj James L. Taylor, Maj David C. Dickson, Jr., Maj William J. King, Maj Raymond Walter Vissotzky, Capt Robert M. Elliot, Capt Robert B. Middleton, Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver, Capt Douglas A. Beyer, and 1Lt Lee E. Hollingsworth.

The Squadron Commander was Maj George G. Clausen. Maj Roderick Gene Giffin was the Operations Officer and Maj William M. Blakeslee the Executive Officer.

*388 TFW history, Apr Dec 67, Vol II, 34 TFS history, 1 - 31 Aug 1967, microfilm NO584, frame 0080 & F-105 Pilot Flying Hour report dated 18 Nov 85 provided by the USAF Safety Center to Bauke Jan Douma.*

### 21-Sep-67

6563

In a published order, Maj George G. Clausen, 34 TFS commander, designated 29 squadron pilots as Combat Ready in the F-105. The same pilots were listed in a separate order as qualified to be Flight/Element Leaders in F-105s. The pilots were:

Maj Almer L. Barner, Jr.	Capt Douglas A. Beyer
Maj Charles E. Bishop	Capt Robert M. Crane
Maj William M. Blakeslee	Capt Hugh W. Davis
Maj George G. Clausen	Capt Nicholas J. Donelson
Maj James E. Daniel, Jr.	Capt Robert M. Elliot
Maj David C. Dickson, Jr.	Capt George W. Hamlin IV
Maj Clyde L. Falls, Jr.	Capt Lawrence G. Hoppe
Maj Roderick G. Giffin	Capt Lawrence R. Klinestiver
Maj David D. Igelman	Capt Irving E. LeVine
Maj William J. L. King	Capt Robert L. Martin
Maj Kenneth W. Mays	Capt Robert B. Middleton
Maj Donald E. Odell	Capt Sam P. Morgan
Maj Dwight E. Sullivan	Capt Harry G. Paddon III
Maj James L. Taylor	1Lt Lee E. Hollingsworth
Maj Raymond W. Vissotzky	

*34 TFS Special Orders 45 and 46 dated 21 September 1967 provided by Larry Hoppe, May 2010.*

### 16-Oct-67

6158

1Lt Earl J. Henderson, 469 TFS, 388 TFW, did not fly today but commented in his combat diary on recent F-105 losses.

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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"Digger O'Dell [Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell, 34 TFS, POW] and Tony Andrews [Capt Anthony Charles Andrews, 34 TFS, POW] shot down today on pack VI target [Dap Cau RR Yards]. Three airplanes in first flight got it. No one sure cause."

*Earl Henderson, combat diary.*

### 17-Oct-67

F-105D 624326 34 TFS 388 TFW Korat Hit by 85-mm AAA while attacking the Dap Cau RR Yards. Crashed 16 miles NE of Hanoi in RP-6A, North Vietnam. 21-11N 106-05E Maj Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell 34 TFS pilot ejected on his 17th mission. POW. Released 14 Mar 73. Call sign: "Hot Rod 02".

The mission was to attack the Dap Cau railroad yards. Hot Rod flight's lineup was:

- #1 - Maj Dwight E. Sullivan
- #2 - Maj Donald E. Odell
- #3 - Maj Floyd E. Heinzig
- #4 - Capt Anthony C. Andrews

All pilots were from the 34 TFS. Three of them were shot down and became POWs.

Witnesses from other flights included Col John P. Flynn, Lt Col Robert W. Smith, and Maj Harold D. Wilson. The flight took off from Korat at 08:40 and Maj Sullivan and Maj Odell were downed at 10:42 on roll in to the target.

An official Air Force history described the losses. "Maj Odell's aircraft was hit by flak just as he was starting to roll in on target. At almost the same time (about one second earlier), the Flight Leader was hit. The two aircraft were close together. At least one of the aircraft disintegrated and both went down. One parachute was seen and one beeper was heard. None of the witnesses knew from which aircraft the parachutes came. All witnesses were either in their bomb runs or were attempting to acquire their targets; consequently, the period of observation for each was necessarily brief. None were sure that there were two parachutes." ("PACAF Intelligence Index of USAF Personnel MIA/PW in Southeast Asia", pg 3-172 and 3-174, AFHRA Call # K717.6031-3.)

In an oral history interview, Maj Dwight Sullivan, "Hot Rod 01", described what really happened. "...It was on my 73rd mission on a railroad yard, up over North Vietnam, about 25 miles northeast of Hanoi. I was leading a force of sixteen aircraft to hit this yard. ... It was on a Sunday morning, it was clear, a beautiful day to fly .... We rolled in the flights of four and they cross under and two over and we'd go down in formation and they'd drop off. ... As I rolled out, my number [two] just caught the corner of my eye and my number [two] man ran into me. I really wasn't shot down, I was knocked down by my wingman. Needless to say I was a little upset when I got out of the aircraft. I wasn't injured in the bailout that I knew of. But if my wing man could have heard me coming down with that chute he would not have ever wanted to see me again. Anyway, ... I saw him coming down a couple of miles away. They picked us both up."

Capt Tony Andrews, "Hot Rod 04", was shot down on this mission and also became a POW.

By the time of their last mission, Maj Odell had accumulated 78.8 hours flying the F-105. Maj Sullivan had accumulated 277.1 hours and Capt Andrews 168.8 hours.

Maj Odell was born in Pontiac, Michigan. He was awarded a Silver Star for his attack on the Dap Cau railroad yard.

*U.S. Navy CNA Loss/Damage Data Base & letter, Donald Odell, to Ron Thurlow & Dwight Sullivan interview 8 Aug 2005 by Beverly Brown for Veterans History Project.*

### 09-Dec-67

6168

Capt Earl J. Henderson, 469 TFS, 388 TFW, flew his 45th combat mission into Laos.

"Target: Truck park in central Laos.

"Armament: 6x750#.

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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"Led flight on good mission. Weather very bad, 11,000 overcast. Had to find target and roll in under clouds in area of Ban Ban. 30-degree dive and extremely low pull out. Surprisingly all four of us hit right on target. Stan, number two, had hung bomb [Maj Stanley H. Horne]. No flak."

"By early December 1967, [Stan] and I were the last two survivors of the six pilots from the 94 FIS from Selfridge who got F-105 assignments in November 1966. The 71 FIS also had two pilots who got F-105 assignments in November 1966 (Maj Digger Odell and Capt Tony Zang). Digger was shot down on 16 Oct 67, POW. Tony finished his tour."

*Earl Henderson, e-mail 31 July 09 & e-mail 3 Aug 09.*

### 09-May-69

410

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)

Maj William R. McDaniel, Capt Charles J. Ferrari and Capt Eben D. Jones were other 34 TFS F-105 pilots who transferred to the 44th. 1Lt Daniel P. Seals transferred to the 357 TFS at Takhli.

After flying 58 combat missions into Laos, the last one today 9 May 69, 1Lt Alan B. Reiter also transferred from the 34 TFS to the 44 TFS on 10 May. In the 44th, Lt Reiter was assigned F-105D 59-1759, which he named "Summertime Blues". "The name came from a 1958 rock song by Eddie Cochran." (Alan Reiter's AF Form 11 & e-mails 19 and 22 Feb 15.)

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.)

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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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
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)	Pitman	KIA
			Stewart	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 .*

**14-Mar-73**

1251

The fourth set of POWs was released from North Vietnam during "Operation Homecoming". Among the 107 military prisoners released on this Wednesday, were 26 F-105 pilots and EWOs who had been shot down between 3 August 1967 (Capt Wallace Grant Newcomb) and 9 August 1968 (Col David William Winn).

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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Col Roger Dean Ingvalson was one of the F-105 pilots released today. He had been Operations Officer of the 34 TFS and was downed by AAA on 28 May 1968.

Maj Konrad W. Trautman was one of the POWs released today. He had been shot down on 5 Oct 1967 while assigned to the 13 TFS. After his release he told the story of his life. "Hi! I was born March 18, 1927 in Oberlin, Pennsylvania (near Harrisburg). Mom and Dad were immigrants from the 'old country'" and I cherish my German ancestry. As a child the joy of flying caught my heart and it was "love at first sight." On March 18, 1944, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps Reserve as an Aviation Cadet. That summer, between washing and gassing up planes at the local airport, I soloed and earned my Private Pilot's License.

"June 20, 1945, I entered active duty, but the pilot training program was terminated. Then, as a G.I. I was stationed in the United States, Alaska, and Germany. In the fall of 1948 I again enlisted in Aviation Cadets for pilot training. March of 1949 I reported to Randolph Field, Texas for Primary/Basic Training flying the T-6, then to Advanced Training at Las Vegas, Nevada flying the P-51D "Mustang." In March 1950 I received my 'bars and wings.'

"Off to Neubiberg Air Base, Germany (near Munich) with the 86th Fighter-Bomber Wing flying the P-47N, the F-84E, and the F-86F Sabrejet, with 90 days TDY to Taegu, Korea, flying 20 combat missions in the F-84E. In July 1953 I returned stateside and with mixed emotions, I decided to leave the Air Force in November.

"In July 1954, I married Angela, and soon lovely Diane became our new joy. I became active in the Pennsylvania Air National Guard flying the old 'Mustang' But civilian life was not for me and in August 1955 I was voluntarily recalled to active duty and assigned to the 1737th Ferry Squadron at Dover AFB, Delaware. While there in December 1957, another man entered the family, a large 9 lb. son, Konnie, 'joined up' to make our family a 'flight of four.' Subsequent assignments at Olmstead AFB, Pennsylvania (1958 to 1959); Clark AB, Philippines until July 1961; then 4 years at Custer AFS, Battle Creek, Michigan. In July 1965 I was assigned to a GCI (radar site) in Fort Yukon, Alaska. After a one year remote tour I was reassigned to South East Asia. So it's off to Korat RTAFB, Thailand, via F-105D 'Thunderchief' training school at McConnell AFB, Wichita, Kansas.

"I arrived at Korat in May 1967. While on a bombing mission, not far from Hanoi, on October 5, 1967 (my 62nd mission), my aircraft was hit by flak. In minutes I ejected and was captured within 15 minutes. That night I 'checked in' to the infamous Hanoi Hilton." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/t/t034.htm>) "He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at Andrews AFB, Maryland, and then received an Air Force Institute of Technology assignment to complete his bachelor's degree at Penn State University, followed by Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. His final assignment was at Sheppard AFB, Texas, where he served as Assistant to the Center Commander, Deputy Commander of the 3785th Field Training Group, and Commander of the 3760th Technical Training Group from August 1976 until his retirement from the Air Force on December 1, 1981." (<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1200>)

Col James E. Bean was released in this group. He had been the 388 TFW Deputy Commander for Operations. He was shot down on 3 January 1968 while flying with the 469 TFS. "He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries, and then attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces before retiring from the Air Force on September 18, 1974."

Col John P. Flynn was in the group of POWs. He had been the 388 TFW Wing Vice Commander when he was shot down on 27 October 1967. He flew with the 34 TFS.

Maj Raymond Walter Vissotzky from the 34 TFS, shot down and captured on 19 November 1967, was another F-105 pilot released today.

Maj Dwight E. Sullivan from the 34 TFS was also released from Hanoi today. "... He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at March AFB, California, and then attended Air War College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, from August 1973 to August 1974. His final assignment was as Assistant Deputy Commander for Logistics and then Deputy Commander for Maintenance with the 47th Flying Training Wing at Laughlin AFB, Texas, from August 1974 until his retirement from the Air Force on June 1, 1978." (<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.asp?ID=1085>)

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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Capt Anthony Charles Andrews from the 34 TFS, shot down on 17 October 1967, was one of the 26 F-105 pilots released today. "My home town is Chico, California, where I was born and remained until after finishing two years of college. Next I attended the University of California at Berkeley where I finished as an Electrical Engineer in 1963. My Air Force career started that Fall. "Anthony Andrews left the Air Force after his return home. He now works for a major airline." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/a/a041.htm>)

Maj Donald E. "Digger" Odell from the 34 TFS was in today's POW release. He had been downed in the same flight as Maj Sullivan and Capt Andrews. The POW Network included his story.

"I was born and raised in Pontiac, Michigan but now call Mt. Clemens, Michigan my home. On 6 September 1952 I enlisted in the Air Force and I received my wings and commission via the Aviation Cadet Pilot Training Program on 1 August 1955. I served a tour (3 years) as an AF Basic Instructor Pilot. Then I served in Germany flying F-86's and F-102's for 3 years. I returned to the United States in June 1962 where I was assigned to flying F-106's for almost 5 years. My SEA assignment came in December 1967 and I proceeded to McConnell AFB, Kansas for combat crew training in the F-105D. I completed this training in July 1967 and after 30 days leave with my family, I departed the U.S. I had been assigned to the 34th TFS, 388th Tac. Ftr. Wing at Korat, Thailand and departed "The Good Ole USA" on the 17th of August 1967. I arrived at my new assignment on 31 August 1967, after a short stop at Clark AFB for Jungle Survival School.

"I was shot down on 17 October 1967 on my 17th mission. Our target that day had been the railyards at Dep Cau, North Vietnam, which was located about 18 miles NE of Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam, where I was a prisoner for 5 1/2 years. I was shot down by enemy anti-aircraft fire up on roll in on target.

"Shared here to illustrate what the first moments of his life as a POW are excerpts from a narrative that ran in the Macomb Daily on May 21, 1973. It was part of a five-part series on Odell, who received the Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal for Valor, Purple Heart and Air Force Commendation Medal among other awards and decorations."

### Odell's horrific day

"Just before dusk on the evening of October 17, 1967, the day my F-105D fighter bomber was shot down as I flew my 17th bombing mission over North Vietnam, I stood before a large group of villagers, my hands tied tightly behind me, naked except for my shorts.

"Already bruised and bleeding from beatings by the villagers who had surrounded me when I parachuted from my burning plane into a rice paddy, I had just been pulled from a thatched hut by four stocky militiamen who pointed their weapons toward a patch, which wound beyond the hut to a ribbon of dirt road.

"I assumed this would be the point at which a vehicle would take me into Hanoi. I wondered if I would be taken to the famed Hoalo Prison (named the Hanoi Hilton by earlier prisoners of war). I also wondered at the absence of the villagers who had been clamoring at me all day. Yet, I saw no one except for the four militiamen. The silence after the hate-filled screaming of the crowd earlier in the day should have been a signal but I was too tired and sore to realize anything other than that I was being taken to a prison camp.

"As I rounded the corner of the hut, I saw the reason for the silence and absence of villagers.

"Ahead of me in the gathering darkness, I saw the path was lined four and five deep by some 250 men, women and children from nearby villages. In their hands they held clubs, bamboo spears, stones and chunks of dirt. As they spotted me, they began shouting and gesturing. They became more frenzied and agitated as I neared them. The absolute hatred in their eyes sent a chill through me.

"Two small boys clutching bamboo spears darted from the edge of the group nearest me, lips set grimly and eyes glaring with hate. Jabbing and poking, they danced around me. I felt sharp pains as the spears pierced my thighs and legs. I tried to draw away but my guards pushed me toward the crowd, the two boys scampering back as I was jostled forward.

## Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell F-105 History

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"With the guards pushing at me, I reached the beginning of the gauntlet line.

"The actions of the boys had really fired up the others. Their chattering reached a high pitch and everyone was screaming and shouting at me, all the time raining blows with fists, clubs, and hoe handles, jabbing with spears and growing rocks and clods of dirt. I could feel blood running from my nose and forehead. My lips were cut and swollen.

"I periodically opened and shut my eyes, partly for protection and also to see whether I had neared the end of the line. But I was only about halfway through. I was getting dizzy and I stumbled, a couple of times, but I hadn't fallen.

"Stay on your feet, I kept telling myself. Stay on your feet. You'll make it.

"Then through half-closed eyes I saw a rather tall Vietnamese step out of the crowd directly in front of me. In his right hand he carried a hacksaw, somewhat rusted and bent. He reached forward and with his left hand grabbed the back of my head and forced me down in a bowed position. I felt something scraping and searing pain across my back and neck. As I struggled futilely in his grasp I twisted my head and saw his right arm pumping the saw across my back.

"My God, I thought, instinctively tightening my neck muscles. He's trying to saw my head off.

"It's at this point that the militiamen pushed the man off but he continued to attack Odell with his fists.

"This excited the crowd who renewed their frenzy further. AT one point Odell managed to struggle to his feet but was kicked to the ground by the tall man with the saw.

"Now the clubs, fists and spears were really working on me and, half conscious, I felt myself being dragged upright and pushed forward by the militia. For the first time I began to doubt that I would come out of this ordeal alive.

"At that moment, the words to the song, 'You'll Never Walk Alone,' popped into my head.

"I shut out everything that was happening to me. I seemed to lose all fear. I know I walked a little straighter down the path lined with my tormentors. I remember thinking the worst these people could do was kill me.'

"Almost to the end of the gauntlet line the crowd began to close in on Odell and his captures. Even the smallest of children joined in. A bloody-lipped Odell tried to smile at one youngster who was about 5 or 6 years old.

"His only reaction was to spit and slap at me. I was now totally encircled and felt death closing in on me. The militiamen pushed me to the ground where I sat hunched over as they tried to beat off the surging crowd. But it was futile. Seated there amid a tangle of bare legs churning the dirt, the blows and what I assumed to be accompanying curses I mumbled a prayer.

"It was answered by an old Vietnamese man armed with a machine gun who gestured for the crowd to back away. Then, he and the guards broke into a building where they kept Odell safe for transport to a POW camp. he villagers remained pounding on the doors and shouting but eventually gave up. Huddled on the floor in silence, Odell believed he had survived the first real test of what he could take mentally and physically.

"As it turned out there were to be many such tests ahead for me."

"I am married to the former Miss Shirley Danielski of Detroit, Michigan. We have four children Carol, age 14, Barbara, age 13, Paul, age 10, and David, age 7.

"I have approximately 3 years of college and have attended Oklahoma State University and the University of Maryland.

"My future at this moment is still somewhat undecided as to whether or not I'll stay in the military service or seek employment on the outside. I've had several offers not only from the Air Force, but also from private industry.

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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"I realized almost immediately what it meant to be an American. I looked back over my life and for the first time, it dawned on me how much we, as Americans, take for granted in our every day way of life. Not only our freedoms, our form of government, but even the little day-to-day niceties such as running water and sanitation facilities that contribute to our day-to-day happiness. Then I realized just how wonderful it was to be an American. I looked back and saw that even I was guilty of taking things for granted, and I saw how much more I could have done to ensure our process of government and way of life, as well as becoming aware of the contributions I could have made to my own community. You really become aware of what America means in this world, especially when now, all of a sudden, you are deprived of the freedoms and guarantees that come with being an American. I'll be the first to admit that our form of government may not be perfect, but I defy anyone to show me a better form of government or one which has built as great a nation as America in less than 200 years! I would not wish to bring harm to my fellow American or wish him discomfort, but I feel confident that if he or she were subjected to that form of government, to the type of existence that we have experienced, he or she would return as the most patriotic American that ever walked upon this earth! I realize now just how thankful and proud I am to be a citizen of this country. As we used to say to one another while in captivity: "I sure feel sorry for them (our Vietnamese guards and Officers), for someday we will leave this place and they will have to stay."

"I am very proud to have served with such dedicated, patriotic and proud Americans in the camps of North Vietnam. I only hope that we as Americans will not forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice ... that being those who gave their lives; or those many who are now confined to VA hospitals. Let us also pursue the plight of the MIA's who have not been accounted for - many who had been among us there in one camp or another!

"Donald Odell retired from the United States Air Force as a Lt. Colonel. He still lives in Michigan."  
(<https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/o/o001.htm>)

Also released was Capt Thomas E. Norris from the 469 TFS shot down on 12 Aug 1967.

Capt Carl William Lasiter was released today. He was from the 34 TFS and had been shot down by a MiG-21 on 4 February 1968.

Capt Jay Criddle Hess was released today. He had been with the 357 TFS when he was shot down on 24 August 1967. He returned to March AFB on March 17, 1973. Hess was a prisoner of war for more than five years after enemy fire downed his F-105 bomber. A photo of his daughter running to greet him was printed in the Los Angeles Times. The photographer was Ben Olender. "Heidi Hess, 9, runs to greet her father, Air Force Maj. Jay C. Hess, at March Air Force Base following his release by the North Vietnamese. ... On the weekend of March 17-18, 60 former POWs were flown from the Philippines to three bases around the United States. Maj. Hess was one of 20 former POWs flown to March AFB." (<http://framework.latimes.com/2010/11/11/welcome-home/>)

Maj Elmo C. Baker was released today. He was in the 357 TFS when he was shot down on 23 Aug 1967. "Upon his return, 'Mo' Baker was awarded numerous medals, badges and decorations which included, the Silver Star with 3 OLC, the Bronze Star with Device, the Distinguished Flying Cross with 3 OLC, the Air Medal with 10 OLC, Purple Heart and the Legion of Merit. Although Baker's wife divorced him upon his arrival home, his two children chose to live with him. In reflection, he says the medical follow-up was very good, but the Air Force was VERY inept at helping the returnees re-adjust. He says they were usually assigned staff work, with little regard for command experience gained in captivity. They were given no help on getting their careers back on track." (1997 update in <http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b074.htm>.)

Maj Robert Lewis Stirm was also released today. From the 333 TFS, he had been hit by a SAM on 27 October 1967. "I attended San Mateo Park School, San Mateo High School, and San Mateo Junior College, California. I then went to the University of Colorado where I studied Mechanical Engineering. I entered Aviation Cadets in the summer of 1953." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/s/s117.htm>.)

A photo of Stirm's family greeting him on the ramp at Travis AFB on 17 March 1973 was taken by Associated Press photographer Slava "Sal" Veder. The photo, titled "Burst of Joy", received a Pulitzer Prize for feature photography in 1974. ([http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Coming\\_Home.html](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Coming_Home.html))

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# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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Also released was Col Richard A. Dutton, a Wild Weasel pilot from the 333 TFS, who had been shot down on 5 November 1967. "... Now I am home and my biggest job is to become a father instead of 'that man Mama's been telling us about.' (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/d/d063.htm>)

Capt William Wallace Butler from the 469 TFS, shot down on 20 Nov 67, was one of the F-105 pilots released today. "Capt Butler was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at Travis AFB, California, and then received an Air Force Institute of Technology Assignment to attend the University of California from September 1973 until he left active duty on June 30, 1974. After leaving the Air Force, Bill completed his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree ...." (<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1708>) "I'll give you more information on myself and current status now. My physical condition overall is excellent. I've gained back a few needed pounds and suffer no serious illnesses or malformations, as some of the men that you've probably seen. Being with my wife, Julie, again, is truly wonderful, as we are both still happily in love. Our two children, Peter, 6, born 8 months before I left the USA, and Sheila, 5, born 4 months after I left, are the greatest! I think 'Daddy' is still a novelty around the house, but we are having a ball getting to know one another. My plans for the future are as yet uncertain. Things have changed a lot in America, and I'll need some time to adjust and decide on a future for our family." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b1111.htm>)

Col David W. Winn was the 355 TFW Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations flying with the 357 TFS when he was shot down on 9 Aug 1968. "I was born in Austin, Minnesota, and had a totally unspectacular childhood. I went off to Carroll College, just outside of Milwaukee, to get two years of college in order to qualify for the Army Air Corps. When the age and college requirements were dropped following Pearl Harbor, I dropped school, and graduated from pilot training in February 1943.

"During the next five years, I flew nearly all the fighters we had, but my World War II combat flying was in Martin B-26's and the photo version of the P-38. I instructed gunnery for three years at Williams Field, Arizona in P-47's, P-51's and P-80's until 1948, when I switched to the Minnesota Air National Guard to look for a wife and an education.

"Without achieving either, I was recalled to active duty in February 1951. But Mary Flumerfelt married me on Flag Day in 1952, and the Air Force Bootstrap program got me a University of Minnesota degree in Journalism in 1958.

"We had a most rewarding year in Yorkshire (flying Hawker Hunters and English Electric Lightnings, Mk. II) plus eight months at Fighter Command Headquarters at Stanmore on exchange with the R.A.F. Mary finally added a daughter, Helen, to our family of sons, David Jr., Frank and Peter, while we were in England.

"After two puzzling years in the Pentagon, my prejudices were totally shattered by a very rich year at the National War College at Ft. McNair, during which I completed graduate studies in international relations.

"The post, post-graduate training in Hanoi was next. I was a two-time loser, having been downed in April 1968 and again on 9 August.

"I don't know how to put those 55 months at Hoa Lo and the Plantation into words right now - maybe someday. For me, that experience has to marinate awhile." (<http://www.pownetwork.org/bios/w/w072.htm>)

"He was promoted to the grade of brigadier general April 2, 1973, with date of rank March 30, 1973."

"In August 1973 General Winn was appointed vice commander, Sheppard Technical Training Center, Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. He then became deputy commander of the 22d NORAD Region, Canadian Forces Base North Bay, Ontario, Canada. He served in this position from August 1974 to August 1976, when he became chief of staff, Headquarters NORAD/ADCOM, at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo." On May 27, 1977, he became "... commander of the North American Air Defense Command Combat Operations Center located in Cheyenne Mountain near Colorado Springs, Colo." (USAF biography on-line at <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/105193/brigadier-general-david-w-winn.aspx>.)

Winn retired as a Brigadier General on July 1, 1978.

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# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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*"Honor Bound" by Stuart I. Rochester and Frederick Kiley, pg 585 &  
<http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.asp?ID=1030>.*

**31-Jul-90**

7199

Congressman David E. Bonior, Representative from Michigan, read into the congressional record a tribute to Lt Col Donald E. "Digger" Odell.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an outstanding individual, Col. Donald E. Odell, of the U.S. Air Force. Colonel Odell is retiring from his position as base public affairs officer at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

"Colonel Odell enlisted on September 6, 1952 and served in enlisted status until April 1954, at which time he entered the Aviation Cadet Pilot Training Program. He received his commission and wings on August 1, 1955. From that time until 1958, he was an instructor pilot in the Air Force Pilot Training School.

"Colonel Odell served in Europe from 1959 to 1962. He was then assigned to the 94th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Eddie Rickenbacker's old squadron, at Selfridge Air Force Base. He was assigned to F-105 fighter-bombers in December 1966 and underwent crew training at McConnell AFB, Kansas.

"In August 1967, Colonel Odell arrived at the 34th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Korat Air Base, Thailand. He was shot down on October 17, 1967, while on his 17th mission, 16 miles northeast of Hanoi, North Vietnam. For nearly 6 long years he was held as a prisoner of war until his release on March 14, 1973. After a period of hospitalization, he returned home on April 7, 1973.

"Colonel Odell has received many awards and decorations, including the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, and Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster. He is presently base public affairs officer at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

"Colonel Odell was a great pilot, and I commend him highly. The Air Force needs more men like him and will miss his leadership. We should all salute his service and the sacrifices he made. His contributions to our Nation should never be forgotten."

*Congressional Record 101st Congress (1989-1990) page: E2569 on line at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r101:E01AU0-128>:*

**13-Mar-98**

7198

Former POW Lt Col Donald E. "Digger" Odell received his "Freedom Flight" in a T-38 at Randolph AFB, TX. Maj Scott Schroeder from the 560 FTS was his IP with call sign "Freedom Flyer #187".

During a reunion of the 34 TFS in Ohio in May 2019, Digger provided a copy of his biography that included the same narrative from the Congressional tribute. In addition, his bio reported "Lt Col Odell was medically retired from the Air Force on 11 March 1975, due to combat inflicted injuries sustained as a P.O.W.

"Lt Col Odell continued to serve at Selfridge Air National Guard Base as the Base Public Affairs Officer from May 1975 until his retirement in September 1990.

"Lt Col Odell has received the following Awards and Decorations:

Silver Star  
Legion of Merit  
Bronze Star Medal for Valor with Oak Leaf Cluster  
Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster  
Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster  
Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster  
Air Force Commendation Medal  
Viet Nam Service Medal with 11 Bronze Battle Stars  
Prisoner of War Medal

# Donald Eugene "Digger" Odell

## F-105 History

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"Lt Col Odell is also the recipient of the 'Daughters of the American Revolution Medal of Honor'."

*"Home With Honor. Thirty Years of Freedom" commemorative book by the 560 FTS, pg 227 & Odell bio given to author.*

**22-Oct-20**

8233

Lt. Col. Donald "Digger" Odell, former Vietnam prisoner of war died Thursday, Oct. 22. He was a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel and was also a fighter pilot.

O'Dell, who was a Pontiac native and later a resident of Mount Clemens after retiring from the Air Force, had a storied military career, which included five and a half years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam and nearly 20 years at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township.

He was first assigned to the 94th Fighter Interceptor Squadron from June 1966 until February 1967. He was then assigned to the F-105 fighter-bomber crew training at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas and then the 34th at Korat Air Base in Thailand in August 1967. After being released from prisoner of war status in March 1973, he returned home in April 1973 and retired from active duty in 1975.

He received multiple honors for his service, including the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal for Valor with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with 11 Bronze Stars, and the Prisoner of War Medal.

Odell received recognition for his time served, not only with medals, but also in 2017 with a street at Selfridge now named Digger Odell Street, a roadway that connects the commissary to the marina, an honor that humbled him, as he told the Macomb Daily previously "Selfridge is home to me." "I am deeply saddened by the death of my longtime friend and a real American hero, retired Lt. Col. Donald "Digger" Odell. A special moment with my longtime friend was in May 2016, when I was a member of Congress and it was my honor to present a pin and commemorative certificate to Digger and approximately 300 other veterans of the Vietnam War to commemorate them for their selfless service to the United States. He was, and remains, a true hero. RIP, Great American Patriot," said Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller in a statement on the passing of Odell.

He was also inducted into the inaugural class of the Michigan Military and Veterans Hall of Honor in 2019.

After retiring from the Air Force, he served for 12 years as the civilian public affairs officer for Selfridge Air National Guard Base, retiring in 1990. While serving as public affairs officer, he was among the founders of the current Selfridge Base Community Council, which brings together business leaders and local community leaders with military personnel at the base.

Odell was organizer and co-founder of the Wertz Warrior snowmobile ride program, an annual fundraiser for Michigan Special Olympics and was also in demand as a speaker for military and veteran events.

He was the father of five children. Arrangements for Odell are not yet known.

Macomb Daily staff writers Don Gardner and Gina Joseph contributed to this report.

*E-mail Jack Schuler 25 Oct 2020 forwarding article from The Macomb Daily newspaper.*