TWO MEMORABLE COMBAT MISSIONS

SUMMARY OF DUTIES:

I checked into Project Trim in May 1967, shortly after the forming of the project. I was assigned to Crew 3 as Second Technician and Radioman. I also received advanced training as the primary technician on the AN/ASN 24 (TRIM) Navigation/Bombing Computer and the ASQ-90 Airborne Data Annotation System (ADAS). During combat missions, I functioned as Radio Operator and Sensor Operator on the DLIR system. In Vietnam, I was the Assistant Avionics Work Center Supervisor and later served as Check Crew Supervisor at NAS Sangley Point, RPI.

Prior to each mission were the loading of ordinance, the preflight, and briefing; Upon completion of the mission was the debriefing, along with well deserved refreshment (San Miguel). Two missions in particular stand out in my memory.

MEMORABLE MISSION NO. 1

On this particular mission I was flying with Crew 1 & the Commanding Officer CDR A.E. Forsman. After take off, I sent the normal departure message (out-report) and reported our position hourly until we went into our assigned grid (attack area). At that time we went on radio silence and I crawled over the *"wing-beam"* to take on the duties of Down Looking Infrared (DLIR) operator. With the exception of the Bow, Cockpit, and Gun Turret, all windows were covered with curtains to prevent the enemy from seeing any light illuminating from the interior of the aircraft. All external lights were also extinguished. For this mission, our target area was at a Y of a river in the Mekong Delta. On our first pass over the point of the Y the entire sky lit up from the tracers of ground fire. The inside of the aircraft lit up from the tracers even though all curtains were intact. After passing over the area, the aircraft shook from the twin 20 MM cannons

in our tail turret (my friend, Sam Gore, was firing back at the enemy). The C.O. decided to make another pass and the results were the same. On the third pass, we dropped all of our ordinance on the point and the target area lit up not only from our napalm, but also from the explosions of enemy ordinance. The next day it was reported that over 700 of the enemy were killed.

MEMORABLE MISSION NO. 2

On this particular mission, two aircraft were involved. The LLTV required some light to operate, i.e. light from the moon. On nights where there was cloud cover resulting in no moonlight, one aircraft flew at a higher altitude and dropped flares over the target area to provide light for the attacking aircrafts LLTV. The Skipper's plane (Crew 1) was the attacking aircraft and our aircraft (Crew 3) was the flare bird. We were operating close to the Cambodian border and accidentally crossed over the border. The aircraft began to shake as we were taking ground fire from 37MMs. After the mission it was discovered that we had taken shrapnel in our vertical stabilizer from on of the 37MMs, causing serious damage to our aircraft. We also found a hole from small arms fire that passed through the fuselage by the DLIR station about 1 foot from where I was sitting. Fortunately no personnel, equipment, electrical wiring, hydraulic lines or control cables were hit.

ADDITIONAL MEMORIES

On our missions we were not supposed to fly under 500 feet. This was never the case with Crew 3 and LT (Papa) John Boyer at the controls. Approaching the target, with the aircraft diving and mini-guns firing, Papa John would be alternately hitting the rudder pedals to provide a significant spraying of fire from our mini-guns. We began to pull out at approximately 200 feet and the Tail Gunner would retaliate with the Twin 20MM Cannons.

Although the LLTV and FLIR systems were excellent systems, the DLIR would often pick up targets that were not detected on a pass by the LLTV or FLIR. One particular

night, the DLIR detected a sand-pan. I passed the targets position, along with our aircraft's altitude, speed, heading, and time that we passed the target to the TACO. The TACO programmed these coordinates into the AN/ASN 24 Navigation/Bombing Computer and the aircraft was automatically directed to the target and dropped our ordinance. The Napalm made a direct hit on the sand pan.

On one of our missions, after leaving our assigned attack grid, I was looking out the window at the radio operator's station and observed a light-beacon of another slow moving aircraft below. The aircraft (helicopter) began to draw ground fire. Immediately, I saw the tracers from 3 other helicopters that were operating without running lights firing on the enemy positions. They had set the enemy up using a decoy helicopter and 3 other helicopters in a triangular position around the decoy..

We also flew test flights in the daytime. On one flight over a river in South Vietnam, we observed two or three of our River Boats taking enemy fire. We were not armed and could do nothing to assist.

The AP2H Trim was a great weapons system and, at that time, would have been a great fully integrated system to incorporate in its entirety into a new airframe. The RT&D efforts of Project Trim/VAH-21 in Vietnam were foundational to much of our modern smart weaponry (aircraft, drones, smart missiles) in use today. It was a pleasure to be part of this organization and, if possible, I would do it again.

BY W R. (RAY) BECK, ATC USN RET