

# Hotshot Charlie Rides Again

*The technology is now a miracle, the spirit is still Dawn Patrol*

Text by Doug Stone, Drawings by Ken Dallison

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You are looking at a hooknosed F-4C Phantom, the jet currently playing havoc in the skies of Vietnam and, under it, the old Spad XIII grandstanding in a classic loop-the-loop. The W.W. I Spad was a cloth-and-dope crate; the F-4 is a computerized "weapons system" that flies more than ten times faster and carries missiles that think. Progress. What remains constant is only war itself and the spirit of

the men who fly these fantastic machines, the impulse of delight that drives to the tumult in the clouds. The Phantom pilots try to be just as dashing as their ancestors, as you will see in the following pages, and they are. They are also a lot smarter—they must be to fly their planes. And wherever Spencer Tracy is now, he will be happy to know that chewing gum still gets stuck under the wings.



## GETTING OFF THE GROUND, AND STAYING THERE



"Contact!" and muscle started the Spad. Mechanic spun the propeller. The pilot hit two switches.



All the F-4 needs is a man to check dials and lines feeding air and electricity to start engine. Pilot in front drives F-4. Guy in back seat (g.i.b.s.), also a pilot, operates radarscope.

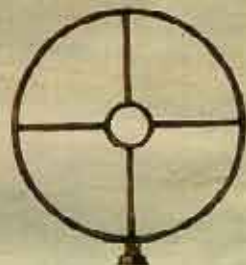
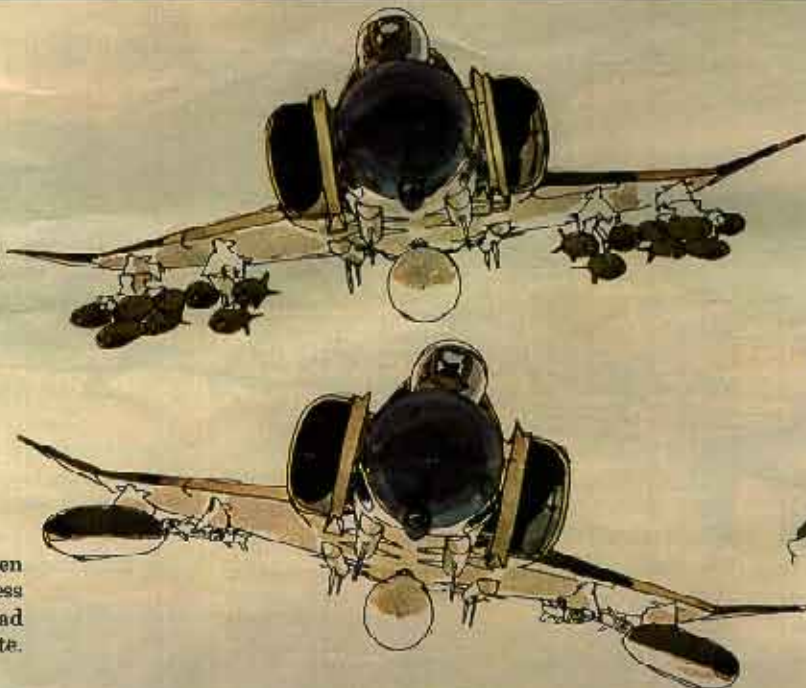


F-4 holds 3,300 gallons of fuel, must rendezvous with aerial tanker to top tanks going in and out of North Vietnam. Spad held thirty gallons.

## BAGGAGE ALLOWANCES



G-suit (anti-blackout), oxygen mask, hard hat, chute harness may save F-4 pilot's life. Spad pilot had warm suit, no chute.

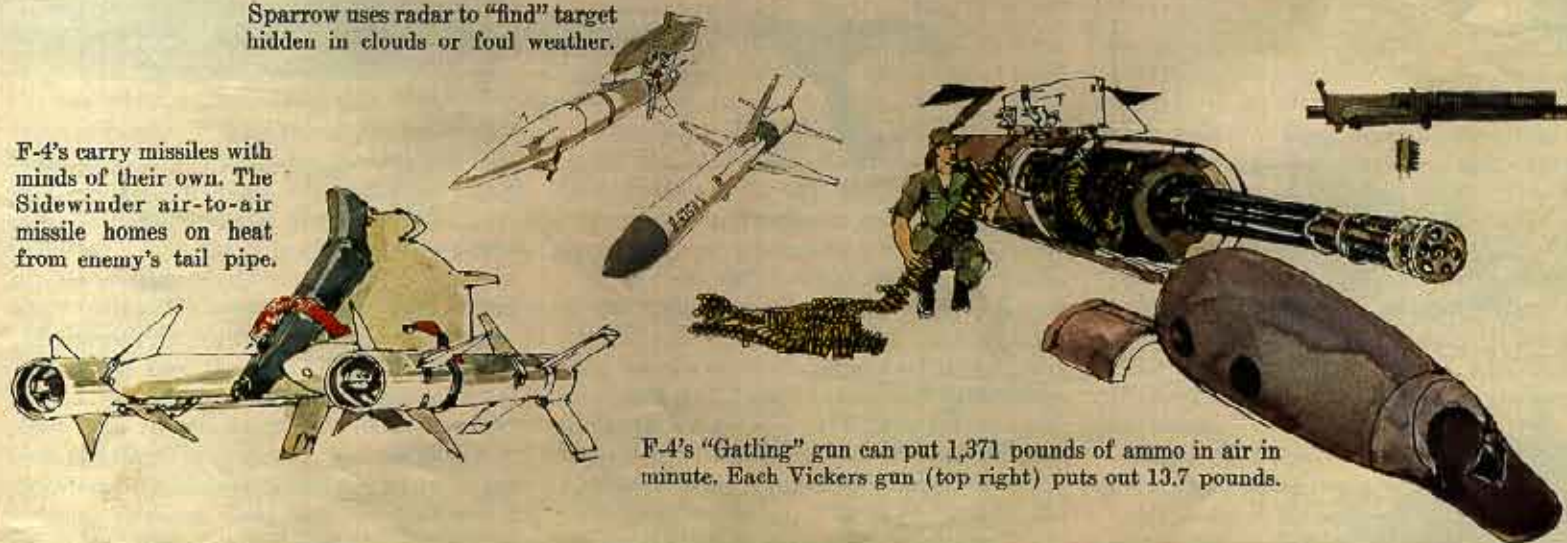


Spad pilot had a ring sight and hope. F-4 pilot has an illuminated sight, fed by radar and computer, which tells him when to fire.

F-4's punch: bombs, missiles, guns. It can carry 16,000 pounds, triple World War II B-17's bombload. Pilot jettisons bombs and fuel tanks when Migs are spotted. Spad pilot sometimes carried a grenade.

Sparrow uses radar to "find" target hidden in clouds or foul weather.

F-4's carry missiles with minds of their own. The Sidewinder air-to-air missile homes on heat from enemy's tail pipe.



F-4's "Gatling" gun can put 1,371 pounds of ammo in air in minute. Each Vickers gun (top right) puts out 13.7 pounds.

PURSUIT TACTICS: CHASING AND RUNNING

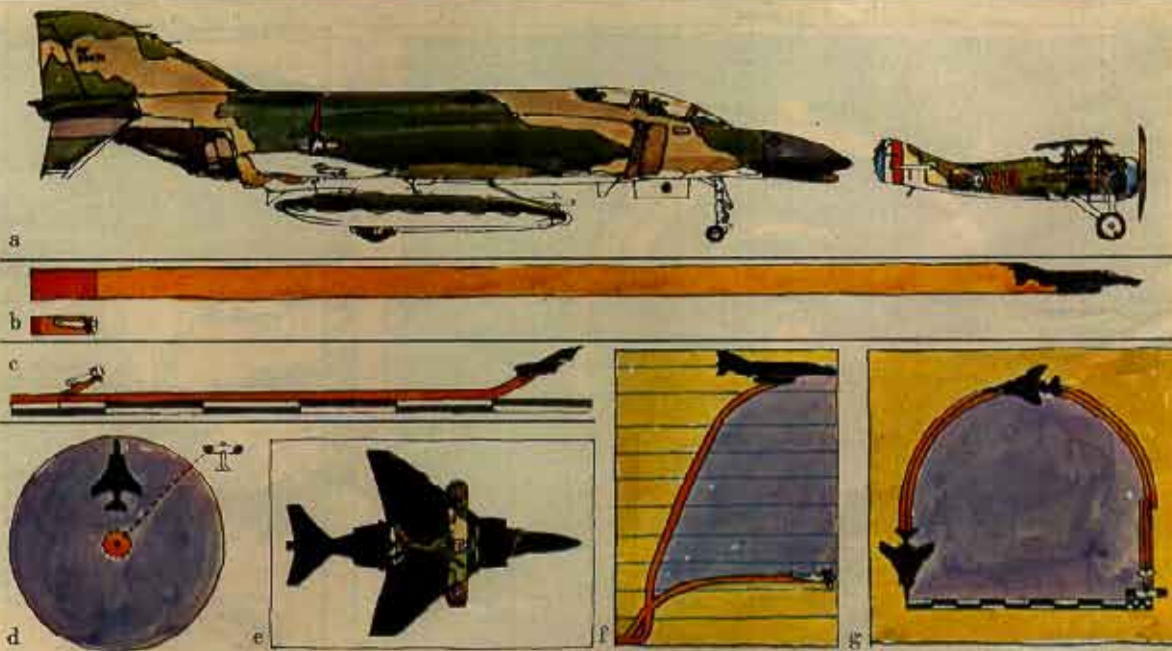


Chandelles, yes, but the updated fighting repertoire includes (counterclockwise from 12 o'clock high)—Low-Speed Yo-Yo: the trailing offensive F-4 dives below opponent's level, inside his turn, zooms to 6 o'clock. Vertical Rolling Scissors: defensive series of close turn reversals; chap who slows up first wins. Scissors Maneuver: a series of

turn reversals in an attempt to regain the offensive after an overshoot by an attacker. High-Speed Yo-Yo: offensive counter in scissors; zoom, roll, dive and slide off to prevent overshoot. High-G Roll Over: snap roll over the top, basically a last-ditch maneuver, or to get attack position. Also used for repositioning after unsuccessful attack.

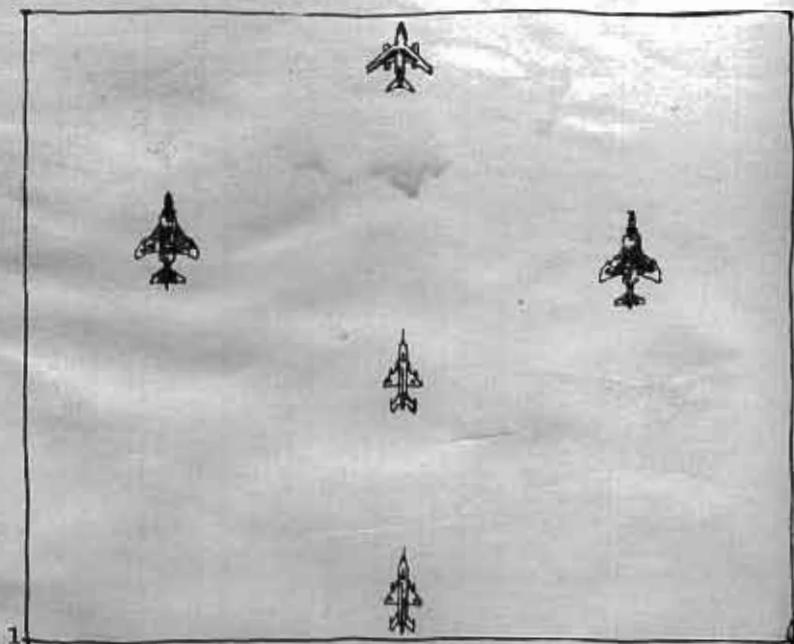
BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

The \$2,300,000 F-4C dwarfs the \$7500 Spad (a). The F-4 weighs 58,000 pounds; Spad, 1,807. Two jets totaling 33,000 pounds thrust shove F-4 to 1,650 miles an hour at 45,000 feet (b); 220-h.p. engine nudges the Spad to 130 m.p.h. Chart (c) shows Spad using 500 feet of runway; F-4, 2,500 feet. F-4 operates within 900-mile radius, Spad within 100 miles (d). Silhouette (e) shows the Spad is 20-feet 4-inches long, with 26-foot 3¼-inch wingspan. F-4 is 58 feet 3-inches long, has 38-foot 4-inch wingspan. F-4 climbs (f) to 98,000 feet in 6 minutes 11 seconds. Spad took 4.67 minutes to reach 6,500 feet. At mach 2.4 (1,606 m.p.h.) F-4 makes 10-mile turn; Spad executes prim turn of 1,000 to 1,500 feet at 130 (g).

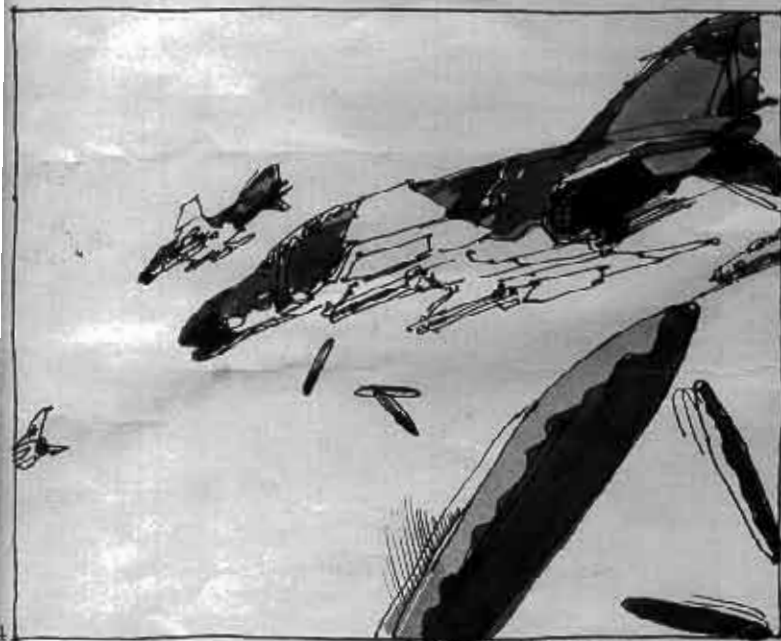


# DOGFIGHT '67: THE SCHOOL SOLUTION

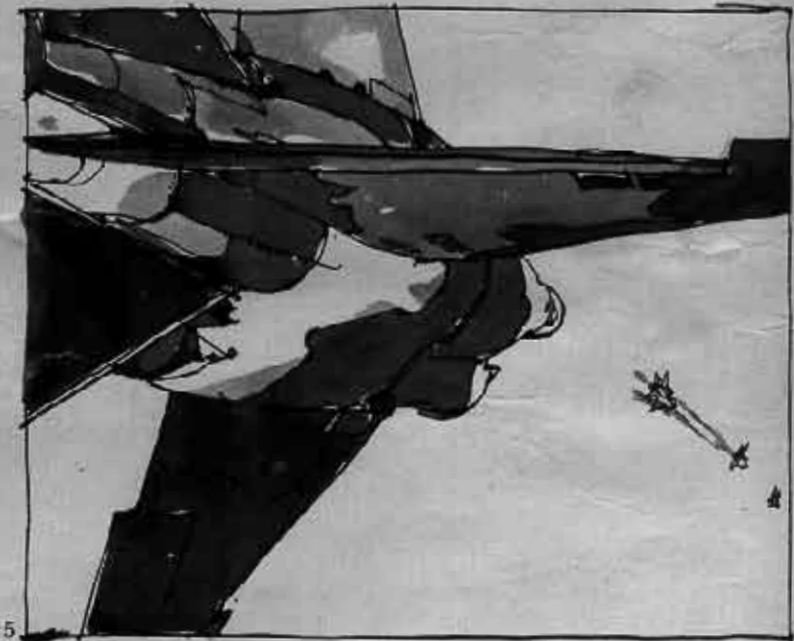
In the panel at right you are looking down on five planes. An American EB-66 is in front. An electronic reconnaissance plane, it is virtually unarmed, and its crew must concentrate on peering at North Vietnam as if there were no enemy. It is, therefore, a sitting duck for Vietnam Migs, Russian-built fighters. The wingtips of the EB-66 point directly at two F-4C's guarding it. The trio is cruising at a lazy, subsonic 570 knots. Flying the near F-4 is Captain Wilbur "Joe" Latham and his g.i.b.s. First Lieutenant Klaus Klause. Leader of the escort, Captain James "Friar" Tuck, and his back-seat driver, First Lieutenant John Rabeni, are flying the far Phantom. Now: two strangers have slid, unobtrusively, between the F-4's. They are enemy Migs, and their pilots are intent on one thing, "getting" the EB-66; they want no part of the F-4's. What ensues is a dogfight. Latham describes it:



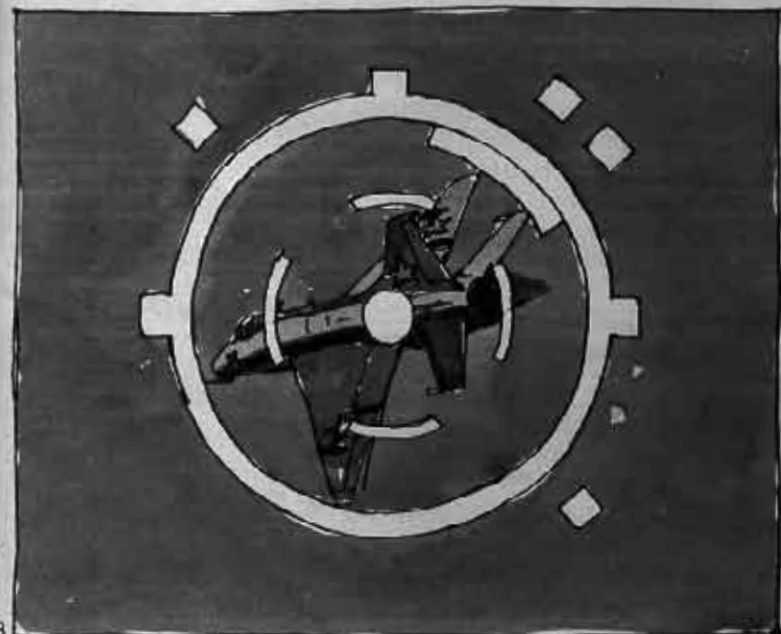
"We were escorting the EB north of Hanoi when two Mig 21's came up the middle at a high rate of overtake." Each F-4 flier watches a quadrant of sky, but at today's jet speeds, bad guys come fast out of nowhere.



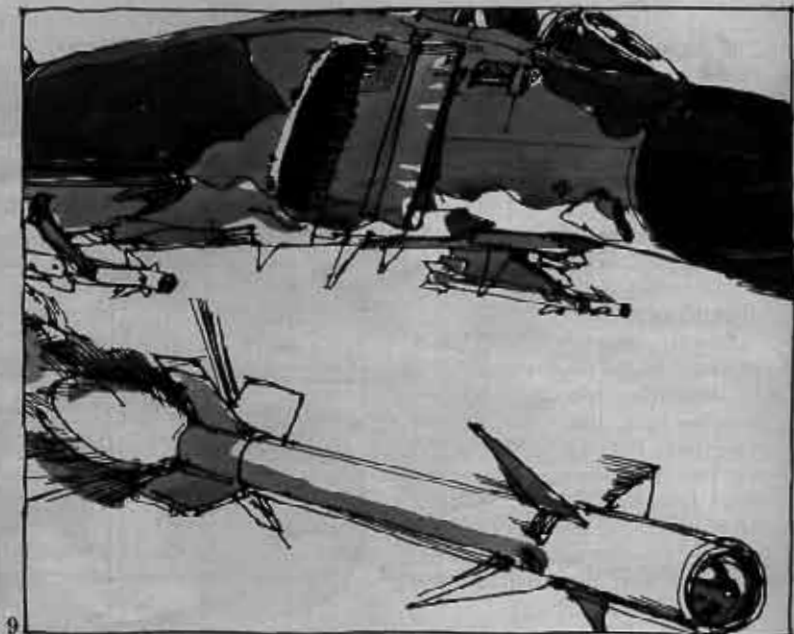
"Tuck radioed a warning to the EB to 'Break right! Break right!' We both punched off our tanks to clean up our aircraft. The second Mig flashed by my right wing." The Mig wingman must protect his leader.



"The EB broke into a diving turn, causing the Mig's missile to miss. Tuck slid in behind the leading Mig, and I fell in behind the second Mig, which was on Tuck's tail. EB (out of picture) leads single file.



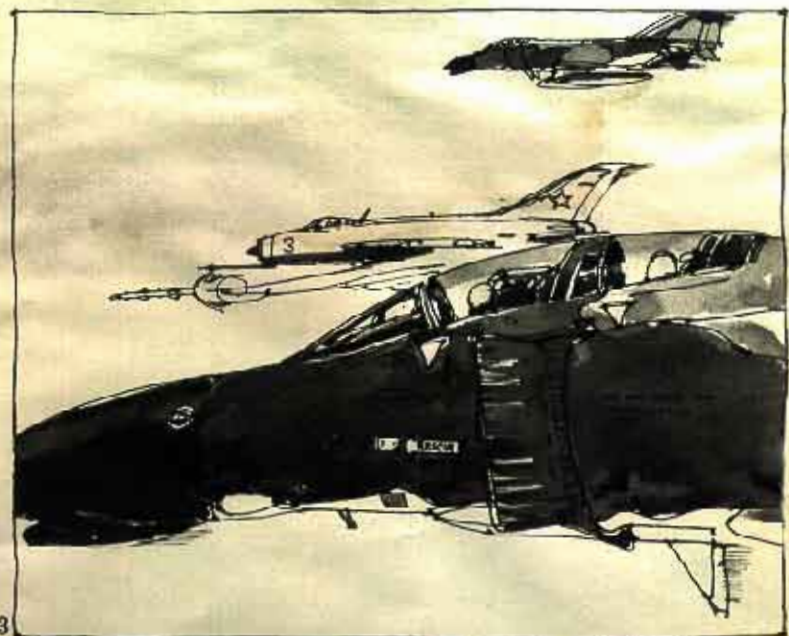
"As the Mig rolled back in for his attack, I put the pippin on him and squeezed the trigger." Latham keeps his aim dot on the Mig, big and fat in his gunsight reticle. He selected the Sidewinder heat-seeking missile.



"The Sidewinder left the rails with a 'Whoosh!', homing on the Mig." The Sidewinder is on its own, pointed at a target 1,500 feet away, and it is constantly making corrections. Mig must break fast to survive.



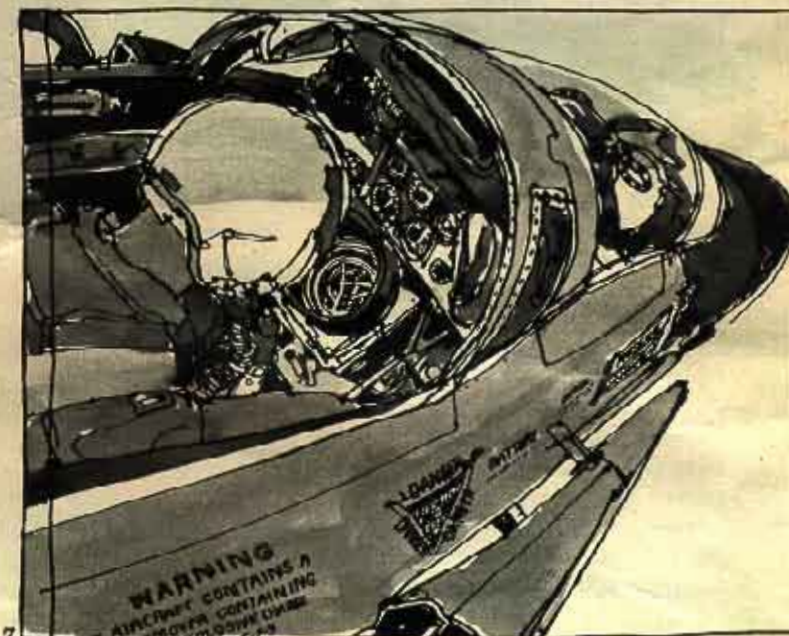
"I'd just looked back at my right as the warning cry, 'Migs,' came over the air." It was Rabeni, in the rear seat of Tuck's plane, who saw the Migs, which were "locked on" the EB-66 and ready to fire a missile.



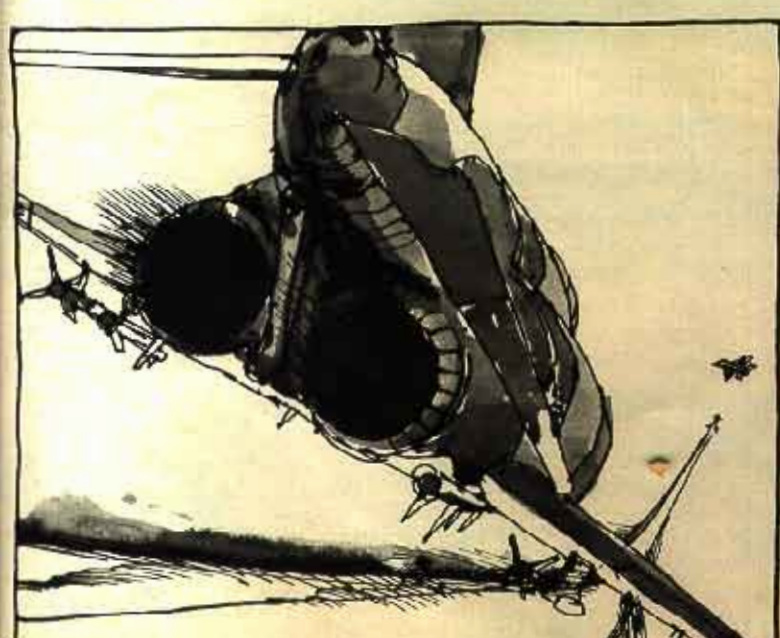
"As the silver Mig passed between us, he launched a missile at the EB. But it is not yet too late for the target plane: anything that flies, missile or Mig, can be outmaneuvered if quick, corrective action is taken.



"I warned Tuck about the Mig on his tail and Tuck reversed to the left, my Mig went to the outside for spacing." The Mig yo-yos, nose high, for a clean shot at Tuck and to avoid the danger of hitting his own leader.



"From my back seat, Klaus yelled, 'We're locked on.'" Klaus has Mig's range, course, and rate of closure on his radarscope. He is tracking the Mig, while the Mig pilot tries to position his plane to start tracking Tuck.



"Seconds seemed like hours while the missile tracked its target." Punched off from perfect launching position, at 6-o'clock low, the missile is at mach 3 in three seconds. The Mig cannot now turn inside missile.



"As I began to break away, we saw the missile explode in a red fireball in the Mig's tail." Ending: Tuck zapped his Mig, too; the EB got away. Migs' mistake: having missed EB on first pass, they should have fled.

**"THERE I WAS... AT 20,000 FEET, WITH BOTH BURNERS OUT..."**

Two F-4's in trouble, 20,000 feet over North Vietnam. The top plane has lost both engines. The second plane is attempting to give its friend's a push to safety. Both planes were hit by ground fire while they were blasting a steel works north of Hanoi. Captain John Pardo has had Captain Earl Aman drop his tail hook—ordinarily used by Navy planes for carrier landings—and is nudging Aman's plane along

with his canopy, ever so gently, so that he will not smash his wing screen. "Like pushing the other fellow's car without scratching your bumper, a great act of courage and flying skill," said a Thailand-based operations officer. Four or five pushes and the planes were out of enemy sky at 10,000 feet. The crews of both planes had to eject (Pardo's plane was out of fuel); a helicopter rescued them.



# Robin Olds and His Battle Aces

by Tom Buckley

**"G-8," this time around, is forty-five years old, a veteran of his second war, an ace four times over, and he plays squash between dogfights**

**W**hen it's over and done with, I'll stop to think about it and I'll shake for a year." Colonel Robin Olds was talking about flying over North Vietnam. He had just shot down his third and fourth Migs and the Air Force had brought him in from his base in Thailand to talk to the press. Ordinarily the press conference would have taken place after he had gotten No. 5 and become the first ace of the Vietnam war. The Air Force had decided not to wait. There was always the chance that a Navy pilot might get lucky on a couple of afternoons and slip in ahead of him. Or maybe the Air Force was afraid that the North Vietnamese would run out of planes before Olds got his fifth. And you couldn't rule out the fact that Olds might become No. 1 for some kid at the button of an 85mm automatic cannon. Flying over North Vietnam is the most dangerous job in the world. As this is being written, 603 American planes have gone down there. One hundred eighty-nine of the men who flew them are prisoners and four hundred seventy-eight are missing and presumed to be dead.

But if Olds was being brought in one plane too soon, the press didn't mind. The Vietnam war hasn't produced many heroes, at least not the kind who stick in the public memory. Anyhow, Olds was a special kind of hero: not just a brave man, but a top technician, a Mario Andretti with guns. He's someone that the over-thirty-fives can identify with, and they're the ones who support the war with taxes and anti-Communist fervor. Olds is getting along in years himself. He was forty-five in July. In World War Two, before most of the infantrymen over here were born, he shot down twenty-four German planes. Better yet, Olds doesn't drop any ordnance, which is what the Air Force calls what used to be called bombs. He sets no fires, craters no highways, machine-guns no trucks. In his camouflaged Phantom F-4C he is up there flying cover, trying to keep the Migs away from the boys with the ordnance under their wings, and that means dogfights, plane to plane, in the high clear air over the sweaty paddies, the empty streets and the peeling stucco buildings in the vicinity of Hanoi and the crowded harbor at Haiphong.

So there was Olds in Saigon. In front of the television cameras first, then feeding answers into the tape recorders, finally sitting down with a Scotch and soda and just talking for a while. He doesn't look like a man who shakes very often. He is six feet

two inches tall and built like an oak tree. He played football at West Point and was a heavyweight boxer, but he doesn't have that indefinably used quality of the former athlete, the insurance hustler in the Cesar Romero suit, or the air of fading juvenile corruption of the overage fly-boy. Just say that he is a very big, very handsome, self-possessed man with blue-grey eyes, thinning chestnut hair and the one faintly spurious or at least slightly theatrical touch, a big new demi-handlebar moustache. He had changed from his grey-green zippered flying suit into the silver-sheened Air Force tropical worsteds. The uniform, well-worn but not quite shabby, fitted perfectly but not obviously so. His flying boots, soft with many straps, had an easy glow rather than a high polish. There was no peaked garrison cap with the grommet removed to achieve the effect that used to be known as the fifty-mission crush, but the bluish-grey overseas cap was pushed back a bit. He wore no ribbons and his wings and silver colonel's eagles looked a bit tarnished.

Well, Olds has been a chicken colonel for a long time—since 1953. The word around Seventh Air Force headquarters is that if he cared less about driving airplanes and more about staff studies, high-level contingency planning, seduction of congressmen, speechmaking, deep-thinking about the aerial role in the containment of galloping inter-global anti-counter insurgency and other preoccupations of the high brass, he would have been a general long ago. But Olds not only prefers driving airplanes, he also drives the wrong kind. For two decades now the only airplanes as far as the public is concerned have been those six-, eight-, ten-engine jobs of the Strategic Air Command, formerly commanded by General Curtis LeMay, the J. Edgar Hoover of the air, with their fat, grey hydrogen bombs, their twenty-four-hour flying alerts and those nerveless majors at the controls whose eyes are black pits in twitching faces. Until recently Olds stuck to the single-engine jobs that were once called pursuits, then fighters, then fighter-bombers, or, if you're listening to someone who is already a general, multi-purpose aircraft; he now flies a twin-engine plane.

"The name of the game . . ." Olds is saying. It's everybody's favorite phrase in Vietnam. Talk to a quartermaster colonel, and the name of the game is getting hot chow to the boys in the boonies. For the infantry, the name of the game is zap Charlie. But

Olds is saying what the name of the game isn't. He puts himself down coolly. "The name of the game isn't the aerial destruction of Migs," he says. "That's incidental." Dropping ordnance is incidental, too. It's just one way of persuading the North Vietnamese to stop sending troops and supplies to the south by making them understand that, for as long as they continue, the ordnance will land on their factories, generating plants, highways, railroads, bridges, sampans, trucks, and, occasionally and regrettably, on their houses.

Olds is too much the professional to comment on the subject of American civilian opposition to the war, particularly on their belief that the bombing of North Vietnam is the least morally defensible of American tactics. Like most officers, he seems to believe such criticism is directed against the Armed Forces rather than against the political decisions that brought the servicemen to Vietnam.

From the fields on Thailand, from carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin, and from the Marine airfield at Danang just below the border, the United States can put four hundred planes a day over these targets. To oppose them, the North Vietnamese have a hundred to a hundred twenty planes. Three-quarters of them are Russian-built Mig-17's, which are about ten years old and much slower than the American planes. There may be twenty Mig-21's, which are pretty much a match for them. The Migs don't rise against the attackers every day. They seldom try to defend against raids in the southernmost hundred and fifty miles of the country. But when the strikes are near Hanoi or Haiphong or against the air bases, they often come up. When they do, Olds says, the dogfights are as vicious as anything he encountered in the Second World War.

"They're good pilots," he says. "I credit them with being extremely imaginative and very courageous." The score in the dogfight game is pretty one-sided: seventy-seven Migs downed to twenty American planes (the rest have been hit by missiles and anti-aircraft fire). But that's mostly because of superior training and experience, Olds says. The old spirit of gallantry, comradeship in the air still lives on. Colonel Olds says that he saw the pilot of his fourth kill parachute to safety after a Sidewinder missile had exploded in his tail pipe. "I was glad of that," Olds says.

Olds is commander of the Eighth Tactical Fighter Wing. It's based at Ubon in north-

eastern Thailand, about 410 miles from Hanoi. Olds says that without doubt the wing has more experience than any other fighter unit in history. The three senior officers fought in the Second World War or Korea or both. Olds calls these men the Old Heads. The oldest head is his vice-commander, a fifty-one-year-old colonel named Vermont Garrison. The operations deputy is forty-six-year-old "Chappie" James. James is even bigger than Olds. They say about him that he doesn't get into a Phantom, he puts it on. James also happens to be a Negro, but the great thing, maybe the only great thing about this war is that, for the first time, one has a chance to find out, when a man is shooting down the plane that was about to shoot you down or carrying you out of the woods while the machine guns are slicing up the leaves around your head, that you can really and truly forget what the hell color he is. And, who knows, you might still be able to forget a little even a year or two later.

Anyhow, Olds and James and the rest of the Old Heads live in big air-conditioned trailers on a street that they have named Menopause Lane. They don't have many visitors. It's difficult for anybody but the pilots and the maintenance men to get into Ubon or any of the American bases in Thailand. The Thai government is as anxious to halt the march of world communism as any other military dictatorship, but the awkward fact is that the most likely path from Thailand to North Vietnam means flying across Laos, which doesn't happen to be at war with anyone.

It's comfortable at Ubon, Olds says. He has built a squash court, where he tries to get in a couple of games a day, a bowling alley, a big swimming pool and lively officers' and enlisted men's clubs. Olds and the Old Heads leave the club to the youngsters. When they come back from a mission they aren't ready to frolic right away: they sit around in their trailers, showing each other pictures of their children and maybe their grandchildren, playing tape-recorded "letters" from their wives, drinking beer and, as Olds says, telling lies about the days of the Messerschmitts, Zeroes, Yaks, Mustangs, Stukas and the rest of those subsonic relics.

Going to bed is something tough. "It's the night before you're flying that you do your dying," Olds says. "I can see the youngsters tensing up. You judge them as carefully as you can. When it's a really tough mission, you put in the first team." The captain of the first team, of course, is Robin Olds. The co-captain is Vermont Garrison. "If you're going to command a fighter wing you're also going to lead it," Olds says.

That is what he always wanted to do. His father was a flying instructor in France in the First World War; when he died in 1943 he was a major general. Olds was born on an Army post in Hawaii. He grew up at Langley Field in Virginia. Between them, the father and the son span all but the first decade or so of the era of military aviation in this country.

"The first sounds I remember," Olds says, "were the cough of Liberty engines

warming up at dawn and the slap of the ropes in the night wind against the flagpole on the parade ground. And I can still see the red lights shining on the tops of the hangars."

He went straight to his objective easier than most. Olds seemed always to have it all. High-school class president three years in a row, All-America tackle in what was admittedly the talent-depleted year of 1942, major at twenty-two, quadruple ace, winner of the British and American Distinguished Flying Crosses, and, two years later, husband of a movie star.

It was 1947 and Olds was flying jets in an Air Force acrobatic team. The girl was Ella Raines, dark-haired, big-eyed, fabulous figure, big career. She had just made *Mr. Ashton Was Indiscreet* and was blurry with starshine. It was at a party at Palm Springs, California. "I didn't exactly cover myself with glory that night," Olds says. "In fact, I can't remember saying anything at all. I kept looking and thinking that girls just didn't come that beautiful."

He came to his senses in a couple of days, hustled around until he got her telephone number, and invited her to a grandstand seat at March Field for the next performance of his aerial circus. To his surprise, she accepted. It was a fast West Coast romance. The Coconut Grove, Ciro's, Lake Arrowhead, skiing at Tahoe. They were married a few months later. For a while they were often apart, Olds in places like the air base at Rome, New York, and Miss Raines in Hollywood. Their first child was born in 1952 and their second the following year. Both are girls. After that Miss Raines's movie appearances became less frequent. Nowadays she is, Olds says, a more or less contented housewife, living in Washington, waiting for him. From time to time she talks about resuming her career. "Have you ever met an actress yet who wasn't just about to go back to work?" Olds says with a laugh.

Korea was one show Olds missed. Even now he doesn't like to think about the fact that from October, 1950, until June, 1952, he was with an Air Defense Command outfit at the Greater Pittsburgh Airport—"that God-damned Pittsburgh." What followed, during the last months of the war, was even worse. It's entered on his service record this way, "Ch, programs div, po&r, hq eadf, stewart afb, ny." He's not sure now just what he was doing, but by the time he got himself out of the conference room the war was over. Olds went back to the Tactical Air Command, flying and holding staff jobs when he couldn't avoid them. He spent a year at the National War College (1962-63), learning to look at the big picture, and the thirtieth of last September he arrived at Ubon to take over the wing.

It wasn't until January 2, though, that Olds got his first Mig. His wing went gunning for them. They called it a Mig hunt and they got seven. His second came on May 4, and his third and fourth on May 20, when fifteen North Vietnamese planes rose with equal parts of gallantry and unwisdom to oppose Thunderchiefs bombing on the fringes of Hanoi. Olds got both three and

four with missiles, which have pretty much replaced machine guns and cannons as air-to-air weapons.

The Defense Department doesn't permit correspondents to fly over North Vietnam although they've said they will eventually possibly when the North Vietnamese Air Force has ceased to exist, which is probably all for the best. Thus, the only firsthand descriptions of what it's like up there come from the pilots.

"A piece of sky," Olds says in his deep calm voice. "Try to think of a piece of sky from fifty feet off the deck to 15,000 feet. From the tops of the trees to the cloud line and beyond. Two 105's have come in low. Now they're climbing to 10,000 feet or so to start their target runs. We're higher covering for them. Two Migs come out of the sun, trying to dive past us onto the 105's. If they're 17's they're slower, but they can turn tighter than we can. The 105's are locked on target, heading in on a straight line. The Migs want to get them, not us, or they want to force them into the flak. The flak never stops. The 85mm guns are positioned so that they keep firing at fixed points crisscrossing the approach path. The 105's have got to fly right through it. When you get lower there is the smaller stuff banging away at you. There are tracers all over the sky, hundreds of black smudges where the shells explode. Your wingman radios, 'Five o'clock, five o'clock.' Here comes a Sam missile (surface-to-air) at you, big as a telephone pole, with a long yellow tail of flame behind."

Flying with Olds is the g.i.b.s.—guy in the back seat. He operates the electronic systems—navigation and target acquisition. These are elaborate "black-box" mechanisms built around a radar set. The g.i.b.s. are cuban mostly, and the one who was with Olds over Hanoi on May twentieth is with him in Saigon. He's a smiling, freckled young lieutenant named Steve Croker. He stands silent and somewhat daunted in the shadow of the colonel. His regulation khakis are too heavily starched, a bit large for him, and his regulation black oxfords are brightly polished. His red hair is still worn in that grim, square, sides-bare Air Force Academy crew cut. Croker says little on his own, and he answers all questions put to him with brief statements that seem to begin and to end with "sir."

While Croker nods, Olds says, "You're trying to keep the Migs off the 105's. Think in the vertical plane. You're diving, twisting, dodging, you and the Migs, at 500 knots and more. It all happens so fast that it takes hours on the ground afterward to piece together what happened. And yet when you're in a battle for maybe ten or twelve minutes it seems like eight hours.

"Basically," he goes on, "the battles aren't that much different from the Second World War. Even then they were saying that we'd never be doing it again. Well, here we are. The tactics, the maneuvers, nobody's got anything new. The differences are in speed and closing rate. The weapons systems that we've got now give you a greater killing range. But the idea is still to get behind the other guy before he gets behind you." #

