

## My Last Combat Mission – 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1967.

Lt Col USAF (Ret) Bill Sparks flew this mission on 5 November 1967 as the Marlin Lead. The following is the Lt Col Sparks' account of the events.

I flew my 145th and last combat mission the 5<sup>th</sup> November '67, not by choice. I had arrived at Takhli Royal Thai Airforce Base on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1967 after completing the Wild Weasel School at Nellis. I talked to my boss, Lt Col Obie Dugan, who was commander of the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron and our deal was that I would fly 100 missions as a [Wild Weasel](#) and then complete another 37 missions as a strike pilot. This would make me one of the first guys to get 200 missions in North Vietnam in an F-105, since I had flown 63 missions in '65 when the 563 TFS had been at Takhli for 4 months. In fact it would make me one of the first to get 200 in anything, since Karl Richter at Korat would be the first to finish 200 in September.



My Boss sent me up the command chain. The Deputy for Operations for the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing (355TFW/DO), Colonel Bob White, agreed as well. My next stop was with the Wing King of the 355 TFW, Colonel Bob Scott. Colonel Scott also agreed and I was off to the races.

By late October '67 I had flown 77 missions as a Wild Weasel and Carlo Lombardo and I become a hell of a fine Weasel Crew. In October of '67, Colonel White was reassigned to Saigon to become the Director of Operations for all Out-Of-Country missions. He was the first director to have ever flown in the North and that, along with his excellent other qualifications, made him the best man for the job. All of us who flew in North Vietnam really needed someone who could walk and chew gum without gagging in that shop. We needed all the help we could get and Colonel White promised to be an absolute treasure. The only problem was that he needed an Electronic Weapons Officer (EWO) in his shop and wanted Carlo. Carlo Lombardo was easily the best choice for the job, but it would break up our team and I was selfish enough to want to keep him. Colonel White actually asked me, a lowly Captain, if he could take Carlo. I was forced to smile and be a nice boy. I became an instant Strike Pilot and also 'D' Flight Commander instead of 'E' Flight, Weasel, Commander.

Colonel White took me in to see our Wing Commander, Colonel Giraudo, who had replaced Colonel Scott in the summer. Colonel Giraudo, AKA The Great Kahuna, reluctantly agreed to let me finish out my remaining 60 missions for the magic 200. Carl Richter had been killed recently with only a couple to go for 200 and all the Brass were a bit nervous about allowing anyone to try for the 200 mark. I would rather have been a Weasel; however, captains take what they can get. I took over 'D' flight and started to relearn how to lead a Strike Flight. I flew my first Strike Flight Lead to Kep Airfield and my second to Phuc Yen. My third was to Kep again and I was back in the saddle. Three Route Pack Six missions in three days are a good way to get back in shape.



I managed to slow myself down in the Takhli Stag Bar by dislocating my right shoulder while rolling for drinks. A 'Roll' consists of several staid, sober, careful folk looking at each other and yelling, "Last on with his feet on the bar-rail buys!" Everyone does a front roll and the last one to whack his feet on the bar rail buys a round for the mess. I tripped, dislocated my shoulder, and had to buy for the bar. Not a very swift way to 'Roll' for drinks. Ted Moeller took me over to the Hospital and had my arm taped to my side for 10 days.

I spent the next fortnight being Supervisor of Flight (SOF), a job that ranks somewhere near dental work without anesthesia. I also heard a whole bunch of my "Friends" offer to 'Roll' for drinks. I finally got the shoulder working at about half speed and flew an Engine Change test hop to prove I was ready and went back on the schedule.



One of the reasons I had been reassigned as a Strike Pilot was that all of the Squadrons were short of Mission Commanders. My squadron, 357 TFS, had only two, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Kirk, our boss, and Captain Neely Johnson. Neely and the Boss were both outstanding; however, we really needed at least 2 more to keep the workload down. While I was SOF for 10 days, Tom Kirk was shot down over Hanoi, not recovered, and Neely was the sole Mission Commander in the Squadron. I was scheduled to become a Mission Boss after my first 3 missions, but the dislocation put that on hold. I was scheduled for two more to see if the shoulder would work before I would be certified as a Mission Boss.

I led a flight to Kep the first day back and the next day, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1967; I led to Phuc Yen again. My call sign was Marlin and we were to be the last flight to roll in (Tail End Charlie). Flying a raid against Phuc Yen is about like being in hell with your back broke. The only thing worse is to be Tail End Charlie at Phuc Yen. The bad guys kept all of their MiG-21s there and objected rather firmly when we hit the airfield. As I remember, there were over one thousand 37 mm (1.45 in) and larger guns surrounding the place and it was covered by between 6 and 16 SAM sites. Not exactly the best spot for a sight-seeing trip.



The briefing for Marlin flight was a bit different on that day because I was checking out Major Frank Billingsley as an element lead. Frank was over 40, had come to the F-105 from C-141s, and had never flown any single-seat aircraft since he went through pilot training. Frank had been one of our students at McConnell and I had given him a couple of check flights before I went to Weasel School. He asked me to cover Rescue Procedures (RESCAP) during the mission briefing at the squadron. I asked why and he told me that if he was to really be an element lead, he might have to run a RESCAP. I told him that I would run the RESCAP if required. He said, "Not if you're the one on the ground." I covered RESCAP for at least 15 minutes and asked for questions. There were none and we suited up.



All of the ground routine went smoothly. Taxi, Takeoff, Join-up, Refueling, Pod Formation and all of the other aspects of an RP-6 mission were as routine as it is possible to be. The Strike Force held a good Pod Position as we made our way through Laos and North Vietnam to the Red River crossing point about 10 miles downstream from Yen Bai. From there toward Phuc Yen the Strike Force flew at about 6,000 feet (1,830 m) and 540 knots (620 mph; 1,000 km/h) until we neared the MiG base and started our afterburner climb to roll-in altitude. For some reason the 3rd flight hung it high and waited way too long to start their attack which caused Marlin to be almost at 18,000 (feet, 5,485 m) before we could head down the slide. Our attack heading was almost east instead of southwest because of the delay and it seemed as though it took a week to fly down to release altitude of 7,000 (feet, 2,130 m). Since our target was the last standing hangar on the airfield, it was easy to spot. The normal problems caused by the flak bursting in layers caused us to lose sight of the hangar two or three times, but it didn't move and was there when we got to our release parameters of 7,000', 45 degree dive, and 540 knots. The pass looked good at the time and, the next day when I saw the Bomb Damage Photos (BDA) we had put 18 of our 24 M-117 750 pound (340 kg) bombs through where the roof had been. Not too shabby for manual bombing.

I reefed my bird hard up and left at 5+ 'G' and did my normal roll right and then left to allow my wingmen to see me for the rejoin. Our problem was that we were now headed almost directly toward Hanoi and really had few options to avoid the vast amount of flak. I took the easiest way out by flying a loose left, jinking turn around Phuc Yen in order to fly on the north side of the complex and head for Thud Ridge. There were fewer guns on the north side. It took over a minute to rejoin. Before the flight could get into Pod Formation for SAM protection, we had 3 missiles launched at us from our six o'clock.

My choices were not very good. I could turn right and over-fly the north railroad and dodge the missiles while in the flak from the rail lines, I could turn left and fly back over Phuc Yen dodging missiles in even worse flak, or I could put the flight down in the weeds supersonic and haul for the ridge below 50 feet (15 m). I chose to mow the grass. Red Dog, the Weasel flight, called the launch and told me which SAM site it was from. I jerked the bird around enough to catch sight of the first SA-2 Guideline missile and watched it hit the deck. My wingmen were almost in formation by now as I saw the second missile loose guidance commands and go up out of sight. At about the time I heard Red Dog #4 call that he was hit and burning, I caught sight of the 3rd missile as it went into some houses and exploded. I decided to come up out of the grass and started a climb



as Marlin Flight got into good Pod formation. We were at 750 knots (1,390 km/h) and were below 100 feet (30 m) above the rice paddies as I came out of after burner and continued to climb.

As I passed through about 100 feet altitude, I saw several rounds zip by me and three hit my aircraft. I took three 57 mm (2.25 in) hits almost simultaneously. The rounds came from a 57 mm site almost a mile north of us and were optically fired. These were the same guns that had hit Red Dog Four. One round hit the afterburner section just above the right slab, one was in the bomb bay directly under my feet, and one was in the Air Turbine Motor (ATM) compartment just in front of my right knee. I kept in the climb at near military power and the cockpit instantly filled with smoke. I heard Red Dog #4 calling that he was on fire and also heard his element lead tell him that he was in 'Great Shape', a big fat lie.

Red Dog Four, Dutton and Cobiell, bailed out over a rail yard less than 20 miles away and were put in the Hilton. Dick made it out in '73; however, Ed Cobiell died from torture he received from Fidel, the Cuban torture specialist at the Hilton.



I couldn't see anything because of the smoke and decided to blow the canopy. I could not find the canopy ejection handle on the left console and pulled some knob off trying, so, I flipped the manual canopy unlock lever under the canopy rail and the canopy went like it had been blown off. I was now in a convertible at 695 knots (1,285 km/h), still supersonic, climbing through 300 feet (90 m). I got two or three radio transmissions out before the radio died and every thing else decided to quit. It was probably a good thing the radio failed or everyone could have heard me squealing. The fire from the AB section caused the Fire and Overheat Lights to both come on and then quit. I checked the circuits and they didn't test (just like the good book says can happen when a big fire is on board). All three hydraulic gauges started down, bounced a few times, the utility gauge went to zero followed by primary flight gauge #2 (P2). PI (primary Flight #1) went slowly down and then dropped to zero. The oil pressure gauge went to visit the hydraulic gauges and every light on the peek and panic panel came on and then all of them quit. Shortly after the radio quit, I had a complete electrical failure followed by the failure of all pitot static flight instruments. The only thing in my Thud what worked was the Whiskey Compass and I think it was leaking alcohol.

I was still flying and heading up Thud Ridge away from Hanoi. I still had smoke coming into the cockpit and swirling around before the truly tremendous slipstream sucked it out. I caught myself reaching up and fanning the compass mounted on the canopy to see what heading I had. Now that is very stupid. I am in a 450-knot (835 km/h) convertible fanning a compass. If my arm had gotten caught, I would have been sans arm. I started to laugh at my stupidity until I noticed that the right front quarter panel of the windscreen was starting to melt. I reached as far forward as I could and felt extreme heat from the fire in the ATM compartment. I am sure that the utility hydraulic reservoir had ruptured and was burning. The right quarter panel melted almost



completely and shortly thereafter the right rudder pedal collapsed and dangled from the cables. I was now over half way up Thud Ridge and had turned for the Red River crossing. That was pure reflex, I guess. I then had an explosion in the bomb bay, which blew the doors off and a small amount of fire came into the cockpit below my left foot. I had to hold my left foot up to stay clear of the flame. It wasn't all that hot due to the suction from the canopy area.

I had a couple more minutes to get to the river. I held what I had, trying to be the smoothest pilot in the world since I didn't have the foggiest how much hydraulic fluid I had in P2. The fire burned up from the AB section and the Aft Fuel Tank blew leaving only the aircraft struts showing. The fire also burned up the right side of the aircraft, out into the right wing and the right main tire blew causing the right main to smack down into the slipstream and be ripped off the aircraft. All three of my wingmen looked like the Thunderbirds at an Academy Graduation. I had no right rudder pedal, no right gear strut, my bomb bay doors were missing, no lid on my cockpit, a melted hole in the windscreen, my left foot up, sundry other things disastrously wrong, BUT, I was coming up on the Red River. I found out afterwards that I had been called out as a SAM twice by other aircraft as I burned my way up the ridge. Marlin Three only said, "That's no SAM, that's Sparky" I started to think I had it made until the controls went and I became a passenger.



I still had 5 miles (8 km) or so to go to cross the river when all of the controls went south. The bird pitched up, shuddered, rolled right like it was going to spin, and then started another pull-up. It was still going my way, so I held on to the stick to keep my arms from getting outside and stayed with my Thud. It would pull up sharply, shudder, shake, and snap right as if it were going to spin, and then start another pull-up. It did this three times until I was over the Red River. The last time it did snap into an inverted spin entry and I decided that it had taken me as far as it could go and pulled the handles up and squeezed the triggers. Only an F-105 could have taken that amount of punishment for 7 ½ minutes and deliver the driver to the river.

I still had one of my wingmen trying to fly formation and saw him flash by as I ejected. I had no idea what my altitude, airspeed, or attitude was since nothing worked except the Whiskey Compass. I learned that I was at 24,000 feet (7,315 m), 270 knots (310 mph, 500 km/h) and entering an inverted spin, BUT I was over the Red River. Being over the river was wonderful since the Rescue Jolly Green Giants were not allowed to cross the Red River for a rescue.

I fell about a week subjective time waiting for the 'chute to open at 10,000 feet (3,050 m) and remembered that the last time I had ejected I had caught the risers under my chin and really put a raspberry on my neck. I was at least not going to do that again. I stabilized on my back in a head down position that didn't spin and when I heard the spring motor in the parachute whir, I snapped my chin down just in time to catch the risers under it. I put another raspberry on my neck.



When I looked down I was not quite across the river, so I hauled on the front risers and slipped across. I then saw that I was going to land near a small group of houses, so I went back up the risers and turned the 'chute and headed down stream.



I pulled the front risers down and then got my knee in the riser 'Y' and did front riser slips to put as much distance between me and the houses until I was at about 200 feet (60 m) or so above the jungle. I had come almost 4 miles (6.5 km) and had two ridgelines between me and the nearest house or road. I looked down and decided that I needed to stop the slip and land in what I thought was 'Elephant Grass'. I landed in 75-foot (23 m)-tall bamboo.

I smashed into the bamboo and the 'chute caught with me at least 40 feet (12 m) up. The bamboo broke and I fell the last 40 feet and landed like a sack of feed on a fairly steep hillside with no place to do any kind of a parachute landing fall (PLF). I didn't even do a Fighter Pilot PLF of heels, ass, and head; instead I just crumpled into a mound of goo. I broke my right patella, chipped a bone in my right elbow, dislocated my right shoulder again, had hairline fractures in several small bones in both feet, and landed on the family jewels with a mighty thump. I was down and across the river.

I moaned some, cursed even more, and managed to get the beeper from my parachute and shut it off. I pulled out my primary survival radio and found that the radios were very weak. Not to worry, I had two survival radios, three sets of batteries, the 'chute beeper and a partridge in a pear tree. I drank from one of my 6 baby bottles, contacted Frank Billingsley who was running the RESCAP in an exemplary fashion, and started to move down the hill and find a place I could see the sky.

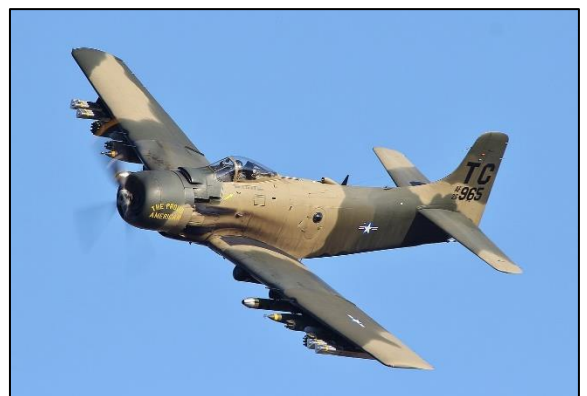


If you have never been in bamboo, don't go. It is not a nice place. I would end up several feet in the air trying to squeeze through the bamboo and have to break my way back down. I moved about 200 yards (180 m) in about 15 minutes and worked my way into 25 foot tall (7.5 m) ferns that made the bamboo look like a good place. It took another 10 or so minutes to wiggle out of the fern thicket and get under a huge tree. I tried to find a better place and gave up since the whole area was bamboo and/or ferns. I talked to Frank and vectored him into my tree and asked him to check his fuel. He informed me that he was running this show and to shut up. He also told me that he had a better view than I did, had sent the wingmen out for fuel, and was about to have to leave for a while. I found out that he left my tree, 75 miles (120 km) northwest of Hanoi, with less than 2,000 pounds (905 kg) of fuel. He went to a tanker and was back in 29 minutes. The tanker could not have been in Laos. Everyone was trying his best to pick up my worthless butt.



I sat under my tree for almost 20 minutes, it seemed like a week, until I heard a burner light. I came up on the survival radio and had a call from Ozark; a flight of four from Korat who had my CAP until Frank got back. I vectored them into my tree and they set up a CAP away from me to keep the bad guys guessing. Frank called back a few minutes later with the rest of Marlin Flight and took back the RESCAP duties. I was starting to get lonely and had finished two of my baby bottles when Frank told me that the Sandies were inbound. I had been on the ground for only a bit over 2 hours clock time or a month subjective time. I started to believe I had a chance. I inventoried my stuff and put everything I was going to take out away. Both pistols, spare radio and batteries, the beeper, all seven knives I carried, my Medical kit, and my trade goods kit. I kept out several flares and two pen-gun flare kits.

The Sandies (Douglas A-1 Skyraider) called shortly thereafter, at about 1630 local time and I managed to vector them into my tree. They left to set up an orbit away from me and I waited very anxiously for the HH-3 to arrive. I listened to the Jolly call in and then all hell seemed to break loose. Some MiG-17s showed up and the Sandies became most nervous. The Jolly tried to calm things down and the Low Sandy came by to mark my position with a Willy Pete (White Phosphorous) Bomb. The Sandy then marked another location for some reason and the Low Jolly went there. I had 17 aircraft in my CAP and everyone started to talk at once. The Jolly went to the wrong place and then headed back to me. All this time I could see a little patch of sky only about 30 feet in diameter. Frank made a pass at the Low Jolly and turned him towards me and





shouted for me to, "Do something!" I pulled out my pen-gun flare and fired and reloaded as fast as possible. I bounced a flare off his canopy and saw the pilot jump and then hover in my tree.

The radio went absolutely Able Sugar (Ape S...) with people shouting out MiG calls and as I watched the penetrator come down towards me. I had stowed my radio and did not hear a transmission from Harry Walker who was told that there were MiGs in the area. His answer was, "Keep them off my ass, I've got better things to do!" and stayed in the hover with his rotor blades whacking the tree well below the top. I backed out to see the cable operator, but the open space was so small I couldn't see squat. The cable stopped a few feet above me and then came down some more and was level with me a bit down a steep slope. I couldn't



jump because of my ankles and knee and then it swung towards me and I let it hit the ground and discharge a huge spark. I then unzipped the straps, pulled down on the folding seat, put my legs around the penetrator, really tightened the straps around my body, and yanked on the cable as hard as I could. I was pulled off the ground and up about 50 feet (15 m) or so. The HH-3E pivoted 180 degrees and started to pull me up and through the tree as it accelerated to his max speed. It was a very wild ride for a while. I broke out of the canopy at top speed for the Jolly as the winch hauled me up. The door gunner was firing his mini gun at something; so, I whipped out my 38 and shot the jungle. I figured I could get off six rounds and make everything lighter.

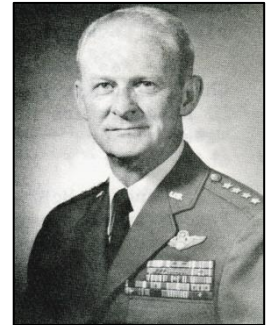
I was pulled in the door and hugged by the crew. I thought I would be the happiest man in the world, but the crew of Harry Walker's HH-3E were happier than I was. The whole crew was laughing like mad, so I asked what was funny and was told that Harry had just said, "Tell the SOB not to die until we get him to a hospital. We need a live one for a change." I had problems standing and the Paramedic (PJ) sat me down and started to check me out. The first thing he did was to strap a parachute on me. I sure as hell didn't want to use one of those again for a while. He asked if I was hurt and I told him I had some small problems. He then put me on a stretcher and gave me a good once over. It was noisy as all hell in the Jolly and since I didn't have a headset I had real problems hearing. He pulled out a Morphine Styrete case and I said NO. He grinned and showed me a miniature of Jack Daniel's Black Label that was in the tube. It was exactly what the doctor ordered.

I guess I was beat up worse than I thought since I went into shock for a while. The whole crew took off their jackets and piled them around me to keep me warm. I straightened out in time to watch the Jolly refuel on the way back. The PJ and the flight engineer helped me up to the cockpit and I sat on the jump seat as the C-130 came over us, stopped just in front and then let down until the hose was only 50 feet or so in front. We were in Laos with all of the Low Level Fuel Lights on just after sunset. There were layered clouds that were black with a blood red sun shining from below up through and between them. It was incredible. Harry moved the big HH-3E up to the hose, stuck it, and took gas. It was all very smooth, very easy, and very beautiful. I was the second furthest north rescue in the whole war. The whole crew of very brave men had risked their lives to pull me from the jungle. Henry did understand what 'We Band Of Brothers' meant.





We went to Nakon Phanom (NKP), AKA Naked Fanny and landed about 2100 hours. I was on a stretcher and really couldn't walk. I was treated like the crown jewels and rushed to the hospital for a check up. I was on the x-ray machine that was broken when Brigadier General McBride came in. Willy P. had been my Wing Commander at Spangdahlem and was a very nice and very funny man. He went into a routine about having given me a perfectly good F-105 and I had dumped it! He was not going to give me anymore. He also brought a bottle of Old Overshoes Rye Mission Whiskey and a six-pack of warm Millers beer. We both sat on the x-ray and drank the Old Overshoes neat with warm beer chaser. He also told me that The Great Kahuna had sent the Takhli Gooney Bird for me and it was inbound.



I was taken from the Hospital, never having seen a Doctor and loaded on the C-47 in my stretcher. When we were airborne, the pilot came back and put my going home ration from Colonel Girauo on my chest, a bottle of Chivas Regal, a glass, and a bucket of ice. The Chivas was to get me back to Takhli in good humour. It did a very good job. When we landed the crew turned the stretcher so I could see what was happening. I was met by the fire suppression helicopter, fire trucks, over 1,000 folk and was treated to a Hundred Mission Parade at near midnight Takhli time.



When we stopped, the doors of the Gooney Bird swung open and The Great Kahuna jumped into the C-47 and hollered, "Throw her up!" A very shapely female came flying through the air and landed in Colonel Girauo's arms. He came over, dumped her on me and said, "Welcome Home Sparky, look what I brung ya!" The lady, Vicky Nixon, had just arrived that day and was the first female on the base. She was his brand new secretary, very sharp, and she was scared spitless. I was laughing like a hyena and decided to try and calm her down since she was actually shaking. I whispered in her ear, "I just fell out of a tree, landed on my jewels, and there isn't a thing I could do to you!" She looked at me, started to cry, really hugged me, and said, "You poor baby!" We were placed in the back of Colonels 'G's pickup, still on my stretcher and given a tour of the base. Neely Johnson, who I was supposed to relieve as a Force Commander, met me with the Flight Commanders for the morning go and saluted me from the C-47. I was grounded and that was my last combat mission. I tried to talk the Boss out of his decision, but I went home. I was the first guy from Takhli that was picked up from North Vietnam in over nine months that made it back to Takhli. Frank Billingsley did a perfect job the first time he ran a RESCAP and I am the most fortunate person in the world.

I never did get to help Neely out. He finished his tour after having led over one third of his total missions into Route Package Six.

I am boycotting Black Friday – all Fridays matter.



## Fair Trading?

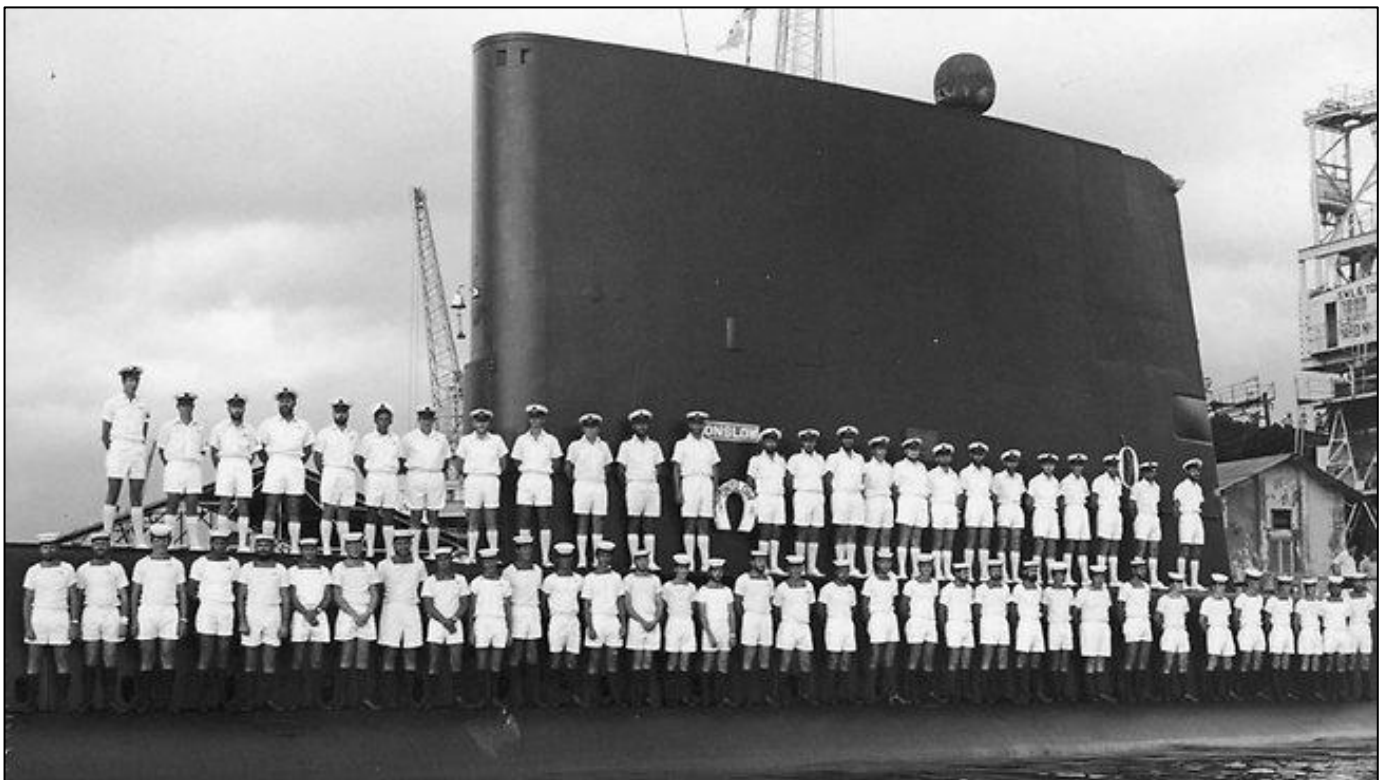
[THIS](#) is funny – and possibly very close to the bone.

## Secret Australian submarine missions during the Cold War.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1986, Prime Minister Bob Hawke came to know of the nature of the operations of Australia's secret submarines during the Cold War in Asia. The prime minister was briefed by six naval officers in the cabinet room in Canberra. The six naval officers were acting under the invitation of Defence Minister Kim Beazley. They briefed Hawke on the missions undertaken by the Oberon-class submarines of the navy to Vietnam and China and the achievements they have reached so far during the risky operations. Apparently, Beazley wanted to get the prime minister's approval in the navy's plan of building of six expensive Collins-class submarines in Australia.



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The Oberon-class HMAS Onslow, one of the many secret submarines used by Australia for espionage during the Cold War

Beazley knew of the costs needed to build the submarines, but he also knew well of the offensive and defensive capabilities the submarines would afford Australia. The Defence Minister was keen



to provide information to Hawke but the prime minister made his disinterest in hearing the presentation of the navy rather clear in his conduct. The naval officers, however, did their job well in sparking Hawke's interest. Commander Kim Pitt explained one of his missions to the prime minister. A video presentation of Pitt's grabbed the prime minister's attention shifting his mood from disinterest into that of intense curiosity.

Pitt was assigned on a patrol mission in the HMAS Orion in the South China Sea in November, a year before the briefing. His mission was to do surveillance on the then largest Soviet naval base outside of USSR, the Cam Ranh Bay, located on the east coast of Vietnam. The video showed a very clear footage cleverly taken by the HMAS Orion. The submarine skillfully escaped the unwanted notice of the Soviet Charlie-class nuclear submarine by sneaking beneath and behind the Soviet sub as it headed towards the Soviet naval base. The footage took images of the Soviet submarine as it was headed towards the Vietnamese port. The camera was secured on the periscope of the Orion which took the footage as the submarine dangerously floated on the rough sea. The location was set 12-nautical miles or 22.2 kilometres outside of Vietnamese territorial limit.



The Orion then took a deep dive close behind the Soviet sub and then to a barely submerged depth again following the surfacing of the Soviet submarine. The prime minister was glued to the video alarmed as he watched the propeller of the Soviet sub in close proximity to the Orion. He also took a glimpse of the Soviet Charlie-class technology from underneath including the ship's sonar and hull.



The Orion then positioned ahead and still beneath of the Soviet submarine. Pitt then manoeuvred the Orion to almost a halt. The Soviet sub hummed passed by without a clue of the watching Australian eyes allowing the Orion to get clear images of the other side of its hull. The photographs and the video itself provided intelligence that could only be gathered if spies were to infiltrate and take the images on the dry Vietnamese port.

The intelligence provided by the Orion was crucial to place Australia in a very strategic and political military advantage. Then, Australia was in negotiations with the US in moving against the USSR and the video granted them the upper hand in the Cold War intelligence race. After watching the video, Hawke inquired on the nature of the operations of the patrols for about an hour. The briefing included the duration, the frequency and the success of the missions. Hawke was also informed that the navy also recorded radio transmissions that were able to document the Soviet fleet. The missions helped in the tracking and identifying of Soviet vessels. During the presentation, the officers showed Hawke a photograph of the highly regarded Soviet Kirov-class nuclear-powered cruiser. US spy satellites were able to track the cruiser en-route from Murmansk, around the Cape of Good Hope to the Indian Ocean. The cruiser was intercepted by the guided missile frigate HMAS Canberra off Sri Lanka and shadowed it as it made its way to the Strait of Malacca and into the Cam Ranh Bay. The patrolling frigate did a good job in taking photographs and monitoring the communications since trailing the cruiser.

Pitt was manning the HMAS Orion as it lingered near the Cam Ranh Bay awaiting for the cruiser. He documented the communications of the cruiser including their procedures and protocols. The recording was crucial in getting information



on the operations and conduct of Soviet navy including its command and control systems. The in-depth information was also understandably crucial in intercepting and blocking Soviet communications during military encounters.

Admiral Mike Hudson was also reportedly in the briefing. He tried to pour cold water on the naval officers' excitement by warning them of the risks involved in the missions. If a submarine was detected or captured by the Soviet navy, the international costs could be colossal. "As we do more and more patrols, the likelihood of this happening will increase," Hudson said. But Hawke was optimistic. "No, you are wrong," Hawke replied. "I've got a degree in statistics and I can tell you that the probability of detection does not increase as the number of patrols increase. They are discrete, one-off events and the probability of detection is constant."

Defence Minister Beazley was glad of the outcome of the meeting. Hawke backed Beazley's plan with an approval to create new submarines. The naval officers were even more delighted that they were able to convince their Prime Minister of reinforcing the naval force.



The naval officers, however, had secrets they kept from Hawke. They had to withdraw the information of Pitt taking videos of another Soviet submarine entering into Cam Ranh Bay. While Pitt displayed his connoisseurship in submarine seamanship, he was considered by his colleagues “a bit of a pirate” in taking the risk. Pitt’s expertise made him director of submarine warfare. Australian submariners also earned respect as well as prestige during their daring patrols numbering to 20 between 1977 and 1992.

The intelligence strengthened the alliance between the US and Australia. The missions were kept classified as they kept feeding information much needed by the Western counterparts of the Soviets. The missions also produced one of the finest Collin-class submarines that became vital to the Australia’s navy.

But the HMAS Orion also had one story of failure to tell. It was on the last mission on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1992. The Orion proudly left Sydney Harbor on a mission to Shanghai. The operation involved gathering information of the Chinese navy. Manning the submarine was Commander Rick Shalders who was keen on making surveillance on the new Chinese subs. He was eager to complete the mission and return home making another mark for the Australian submariners. He later on became commander of the Collins-class submarines.



The US sought the support of Australia in gathering intelligence on the Chinese navy. The US subs were large enough to make it easily detectable in East China waters. The Australian subs, however, were ideally small to sneak into the shallow waters. The Shanghai Harbor was a very strategic area located at the mouth of the Yangtze River. It was also China’s biggest mainland harbor. The water that feeds the Chinese marine waters was shallow and murky. Civilian vessels



such as local fishing boats and ferries were also dispersed along the busy water. Eyes were everywhere.

It was difficult to do espionage without getting seen by military and non-military vessels. Any detection could compromise the mission. It would also antagonize or distress international relations between Australia and China. The Australian navy greatly prepared to make the mission a success employing the best photographic and top-notch marine technology for intelligence gathering. They also hired translators to join the mission and interpret Chinese navy communications they could gather. The mission, however, proved more difficult than the submariners planned for. The civilian fishing boats provided a natural local defence against espionage. The local fishermen with their nets were watchful of any catch and a slight movement of the submarine could also attract their curiosity, alarm and attention.

The local setting proved a dilemma as it was necessary for Shalders to raise the Orion's periscope to gather the necessary intelligence they were ordered to. Shalders, however, could not risk surfacing the submarine or get it near the surface without alarming all of China.

Shalders fears were actualized. The Orion suddenly got in tangle into some fishing lines and nets. A fishing boat reportedly sank when its net became snarled into the submarine. The fisherman had to cut the net from the boat with an axe to escape from the mesh. They were desperate to get out of the critical state they were in. Shalders was aware of the risks of detection and capture by the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Navy. He knew that the disturbance in the shallow waters would impel the Chinese navy to look into the matter. The consequences would be fatal. They, for one, would be captured and tried as spies. Aside from the safety of his crew, he also understood well the international and political implications of the discovery of their presence in Chinese territory as well as the purpose of their presence. So, he chose to abandon the mission.

He manoeuvred the submarine out of the busy shallow waters into a less dangerous area around the East China Sea. They left the Chinese territory to head for home with a breath of relief even without completing their task.

The experience of the last mission of the Orion forced the Australian navy to decide to cease the patrols. Admiral Ian McDougall, chief of the naval staff and former submarine commander, advised Defence Minister Robert Ray that the naval services of the O-boats should be discontinued due to the real dangers posed by the missions.

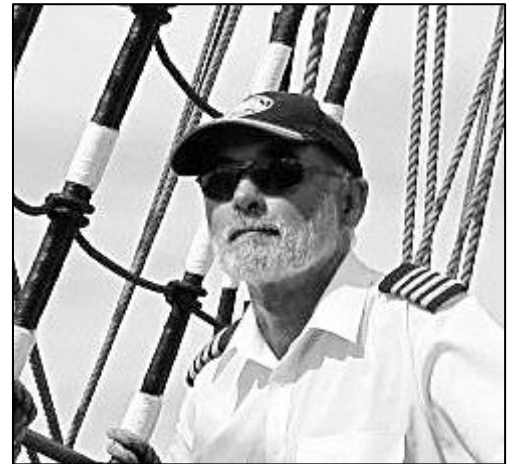


The missions were hard to let go for the Australian navy. The remarkable and brave tales of the submariners made a mark in war history. The cessation of the missions also meant foregoing the funding that poured into the naval services of the Australian O-boats. The Defence Intelligence Organization advised against the cessation of naval espionage. It saw the necessity and importance of collecting intelligence despite the collapse of the Soviet. Other countries, it claimed,



had to be monitored for the potential threat they posed, however, the Defence Minister voted on the stop of the patrols.

Commander John Dikkenberg, a senior submariner, lobbied for the reinstatement of the missions to Prime Minister Paul Keating who stepped into office after Hawke. The prime minister, however, refused to challenge the decision already made by his Defence Minister.



After four years, the decision was overturned. Ian McLachlan was made Defence Minister during John Howard's office. McLachlan inquired on the nature of the patrol missions. The navy at that time advised the Defence Minister to reinstate the missions. The request was approved on conditions that the missions be carefully "controlled and limited off Indonesia".

Minister for Defence Science and Technology Bronwyn Bishop also saw the need to continue the naval services to re-establish the skills of the navy on collecting intelligence. Six missions were launched targeting Indonesian military communications in Indonesia and East Timor where a civil war was raised by the Fretilin guerillas for their independence.

The secret missions undertaken by the O-boats during the Cold War and their contributions to global intelligence are, no doubt, a major piece of Australia's history that will have stirred the officials to decide on placing a large chunk of people's money into expensive submarines that are proven invaluable to the country's, if not other countries', security.

## **ENGLISH LESSON**

**Tsunami ——— T is silent**

**Honest ——— H is silent**

**Psychology ——— P is silent**

**Knife ——— K is silent**

**Wife ——— Husband is silent**

**Class dismissed ...**



## The Titanic.

Click [HERE](#) to see some interesting pics and information on the Titanic.

**NOT TO BRAG  
OR ANYTHING  
BUT I CAN FORGET  
WHAT I'M DOING  
WHILE I'M DOING IT.**