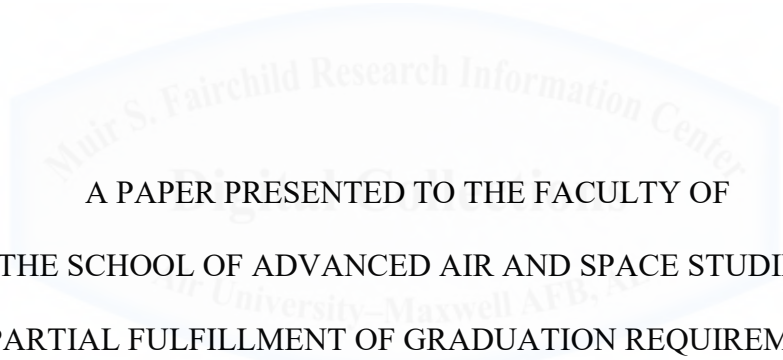


THE SHOW MUST GO ON:  
FIGHTER PILOT FOLKSONGS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

BY

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## APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standard of research, argumentation, and expression.

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## DISCLAIMER

The conclusion and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines fighter pilot folksongs of the Vietnam War and their relation to combat psychology scholarship using recorded folksongs and songbooks as primary source materials, in addition to fighter-pilot-songwriter interviews, and numerous secondary sources on folklore scholarship, Vietnam War history, and combat psychology. It first defines fighter pilot folksong within the context of the 1950s American folk revival which had a significant impact on the creation of folksongs by Vietnam War veterans. After then providing context to the experience of fighter pilots in the Vietnam War, this study uses previous folklore scholarship to categorize and sort 189 Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. The resulting categorization of songs show a strong correlation of category themes and combat psychology suggesting a connection between folksongs and the management of combat stress.



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Introduction  
A Short Tour and a Bus Ride

*I do not delude myself that these are great songs, but they are truthful songs, that are historic songs, and they deserve to be preserved. By some people, they will even be cherished.*

- Joseph Tusso

Osan Air Base in the Republic of Korea is home to America's most forward permanently-stationed fighter wing. Ready to fight tonight—should open fighting resume on the Korean Peninsula—the 51<sup>st</sup> Fighter Wing rarely rests. Standing outside one of its fighter squadrons on a Friday night you would hear and see dedicated maintainers fixing combat aircraft older than most of them. They complete their tasks in the cold, heat, snow or rain. They tend to the health of the aircraft late into Friday evenings capitalizing on the lack of flying on the weekends to focus on fixing issues which have accumulated during the week. It takes a lot of work to keep airplanes built in the late 1970s combat ready. Inside the squadron, the pilots are attending to a different type of health. War machines need pilots to fly them. Pilots capable of handling the stress of the job, potential dangers of combat, and should the war in Korea start again the probable loss of friends.

Stepping inside the squadron, at first glance it seems quiet and deserted. The lights are mostly off, computer cooling fans quietly hum and the occasional radio transmission from the maintainers blares from the operations desk radio. But, there is a dull roar coming from a room down the hall. Voices grow louder, intense, and you are not sure if it sounds like a celebration or fight. Then a voice rises above the rest accompanied by the banging of a gavel, “LPA a song!”<sup>1</sup> shouts the “Mayor.” The Mayor is a senior captain in the unit, highly respected by his peers, and tasked as the master of ceremony for the monthly squadron roll call. He is wrapping this one up before it gets too out of hand and the lieutenants’ singing is the final act. They look sheepishly at each other trying to silently decide on what they are going to sing. Finally, one sings out,

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<sup>1</sup> LPA stands for Lieutenant Protection Association. It is a traditional, but informal, organization of the lieutenants in a flying squadron. The expectation is they stick together, help each other learn how to be good combat pilots, and most importantly serve as the heart beat of morale in the squadron.

“Dear.... Mom....”—it is an old favorite from Vietnam and the squadron joins in. The Mayor relaxes, his task complete for another month, and the songs continue as the “formal” portion of the roll call ends and the group descends into the proper chaos of singing, drinking, smoking, and games.

This was my Friday night once a month as a lieutenant in the 25<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron at Osan. During roll calls the LPA ensured the booze flowed, enforced the Mayor’s rulings on captains and majors who stepped out of line, read squadron histories, and selected a few songs to sing at the end of the night. I eventually grew tired of the same few songs everyone knew and embarked on drafting a new unit songbook. It was complete with in-depth squadron histories, combat casualties and POWs, notable alumni, bar games, and of course songs—ninety-four total.

I struggled collecting and adapting the songs for that songbook. Many I found sang about other units and—being a historian—I regretted changing the lyrics to match them to our squadron and times. I felt that they were enjoyable just the way they were, but I knew A-10 pilots would not, under any circumstances, sing songs praising F-16s or F-15s. So, I changed the lyrics to match our aircraft, our mission, and our time and place. It took me years to understand that I had not robbed previous authors of their creativity, but rather I had participated in a long fighter pilot folk-tradition of adjusting songs to fit my circumstances. I did not fully appreciate this folk-tradition until undertaking this project.

This project was born out of my long personal interest in fighter pilot songs and a School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS) staff ride to Vietnam. My interest in fighter pilot songs had continued since my days as a lieutenant in Korea and songs by Vietnam veterans served as a guide in my personal study and understanding of the war beyond what I read in history books. They conveyed a certain emotion which most histories lacked. Each song contained an opportunity to learn about small details of the war: a callsign, a pilot, a specific mission, or a location on the map. During our SAASS field study these songs echoed in my brain. How can you not hum, Irv LeVine’s “Battle of Doumer Bridge” to yourself as you walk across the Paul Doumer Bridge in downtown



Hanoi? Driving along Route 9 from Khe Sanh back to Quang Tri, I decided to share a few songs about the Ho Chi Minh trail by Chip Dockery and Toby Hughes with my classmates on the tour bus. I had no idea or intention at the time to make folksongs my thesis project. I was not at all certain they had anything to do with airpower strategy.

I have many people to thank for getting a bus ride of songs in Vietnam to a completed thesis. I will be forever grateful for Dr. David Benson and Col Stephen Renner for selling me on my own ideas and encouraging me to pursue this project. It is particularly just rewards for Col Renner who was my Squadron Commander in Korea where I drafted that songbook; Dr. Richard Muller, my advisor, for keeping me gently on timeline and providing some calming words when self-doubt arose; my step-mother, who after eighteen years, I finally let do a “hard edit” on my work. Any remaining errors found within are my own; Dr. Lydia Fish at Buffalo State College, the director of the Vietnam Veterans Oral History and Folklore Project for her folk-expertise and research assistance. A quick Google search from a bus in Vietnam led me to her work and helped me focus on the perspective of fighter pilot songs as folk material. My special thanks to Dick Jonas, Irv LeVine, Toby Hughes, and Chip Dockery for their music, time, and most importantly the standard and example they set flying and fighting in Vietnam. Generations of fighter pilots still look to that war for lessons about our culture and tactics. Most importantly, to my wife, for whom supporting my academics over the last two years was the least of her accomplishments compared to her own professional achievements and growing our family.

Prior to beginning this project, I had ideas about what these songs meant and what their purpose was, and I was never certain if these beliefs came from a bias of having lived and flown in fighter squadrons or if there was some truth behind their ability to forge a cohesive group identity and allow warriors to cope with the danger of combat. What follows is my attempt to explore these songs from an academic perspective. These songs fit nicely between folklore studies and combat psychology. There is something more to these songs than an entertaining night of drinking and singing. They are the

artifacts of a group coping with the stress of combat through many of the mechanisms described by combat psychologists.

Through the course of my research I collected 189 Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. This paper cites fifty of those songs. While only a verse or two of each song appears in the text, the full lyrics are available in the appendix. I do not delude myself that these are Grammy winning songs, but as Joseph Tusso—an English professor and Vietnam fighter pilot—said “they are truthful songs, that are historic songs, and they deserve to be preserved. By some people, they will even be cherished.”<sup>2</sup> I am glad to preserve a few of them in this paper and hopefully convince many that they should be cherished, if not for their entertainment value, at least for the role they played in sustaining Vietnam War fighter pilots through their crucible of combat.

Chapter 1 addresses the scope of this project and answers questions about the definition of fighter pilot folksongs. The first reaction I receive from fellow fighter pilots when I tell them my thesis topic was, “Oh, fighter pilot songs? You mean the ones we can’t sing anymore?” It is true there are many songs—some of them fighter pilot folksongs—which are no longer fit for singing in today’s fighter squadrons. But most bawdy songs people think of when they think fighter pilot songs simply are not fighter pilot folksongs. The second reaction is an attempt to reconcile modern fighter pilot songs which have distinctive rock ‘n’ roll flair with the idea that they could be occupational folksongs. Chapter 1 explores these issues through a summary of the 1950s American folk revival which broadened the definition of folk music and makes it easy to define what a fighter pilot occupational folksong is by placing it in the broader context of American folk studies.

Chapter 2 presents background on the Vietnam war from the perspective of fighter pilots. In eighteen pages it is impossible to cover all aspects of a very complex war, but the general themes and missions discussed in fighter pilot songs are addressed. For those who are well versed in the Air Force experience in Vietnam, Chapter 2 is largely a review except for the introduction of a cast of characters. Songwriters Dick

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<sup>2</sup> Tusso, *Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 18.

Jonas, Irv LeVine, Toby Hughes, and Chip Dockery all provided interviews for this project. Chapter 2 introduces them and others.

Chapter 3 examines previous scholarship on fighter pilot folksongs. There is not a lot of material to review. Most books on fighter pilot songs are simply songbooks. At most they contain a short introduction and brief background on each song; rare are the sources which examine the entire body of fighter pilot, or even military folksongs. The review of previous scholarship provides definitions and categorization of fighter pilot folksongs which Chapter 4 uses to analyze songs' meaning and purpose.

Chapter 4 uses the typology defined in Chapter 3 to examine how songs align with a body of scholarship on combat psychology. Like scholarship on fighter pilot folksongs, there is also little scholarship on fighter pilot combat psychology. Most combat psychology focuses on the ground combat experience. That which does focus on airpower most often examines WWII bomber pilots. Still, general themes of combat psychology are readily identifiable in fighter pilot folksongs.

*So what does a bunch of songs and a night of drinking have to do with strategy?*

War is a human endeavor and despite how remote or antiseptic technology makes it, men and women must be ready to fight it and in doing so exert violence against their fellow man. There are psychological costs to combat. Willful acceptance of danger on behalf of the group and the act of killing are not natural for most people. Songs are one of many tools that make these psychological costs more bearable. So long as humans must withstand and inflict violence it is important to build martial cultures which sustain their efforts.

A roll call on a Friday night in Korea—with pilots drinking inside, while their maintainers turn wrenches—at first glance has little to do with combat capability. But looks are deceiving. The culture fostered by roll calls, traditionally supported by folksong, create an environment where combat aviators are more ready and capable of withstanding the crucible of combat.

## Chapter 1 Defining Fighter Pilot Folksong

*The definitions of what is or what isn't folklore and the categories of behavior those definitions imply—the stuff on which the discipline is based—are very much our invention. We don't make up the facts, but we make up the boxes in which they are carried home. No definition has universal acceptance, nor have any of the definitions been constant in time.*

-Bruce Jackson in *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1985

A fighter pilot folksong is created within, by, and for the community of fighter pilots, rather than one meant for commercial or popular consumption. These songs deal thematically with the experiences, tools, and people encountered within that community both in training and combat, in flight and on the ground. In the spirit of Bruce Jackson's quote above, the metaphorical "box" containing collected fighter pilot folksongs is one of my construction; however, I have grounded it in the work of professional folklorists who examined the occupational folksongs of other groups.

The idea that college-educated aviators, flying the most advanced technology of their day, and disseminating their songs through tape cassettes and other technology, constitute a folk group challenges the classic definition of folklore. Classic folklore refers to the material produced by rural, homogeneous, and uneducated peasant-folk living in isolation. Scholars occasionally expanded this definition to include other groups which shared these folk characteristics—namely cowboys, lumberjacks, sailors, and miners.<sup>1</sup> But important changes in folklore studies took place in the 1950s, which resulted in widespread acceptance of a more dynamic and progressive definition of folklore. After all, as Jackson pointed out, "no definition [of folklore] has universal acceptance nor have any of the definitions been constant in time." Before accepting a definition of what, if anything, constitutes a fighter pilot folksong, it is essential to understand the theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauman, Roger D. Abrahams, and Susan Kalcik, "American Folklore and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1976): 373, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712518>.

and academic work which created a progressive concept of folk and why many scholars now consider fighter pilots a folk group with their own lore.

The following sections will trace the causes of the American folk revival in the 1950s and how mass culture challenged classic folk definitions. The change in classic folk definition in turn allows a conceptualization of folklore that supports defining fighter pilot songs as a subcategory of occupational folksongs without regard for the classic requirements such as oral transmission or peasant-like roots. These challenges to classic folk definitions resulted in debates between folklorists such as Samuel Bayard and Benjamin Botkin, who attempted to expand and modernize the definition of folklore, and Richard Dorson who defended classic definitions focusing on a historical and traditional view of folk. Botkin and the progressives won the debate and established a pluralistic and dynamic conceptualization of folklore, thus framing the 1950s revival.

### **The 1950s Folk Revival & Dynamic Definitions of Folklore**

The American folk revival of the 1950s forced mid-century folklorists to confront the interaction between traditional folklore and mass culture. The post-war economic boom of the 1950s saw a dramatic rise in the number of college-educated middle-class youths.<sup>2</sup> This created new venues for performed folk music, bringing it out of union halls and country gatherings and into coffee shops and college campuses. People began to view folksingers and songwriters as artists, and concert opportunities increased with the availability of a newly economically empowered audience. Record companies saw an opportunity, and what traditionally had been an orally distributed form of music became commercially available for mass consumption.<sup>3</sup>

As traditional folksongs increased in popularity, and folk artists began to make new works, folklorists had to readdress the definition and delimitation of what constituted folklore. Were contemporary songs folklore? Were traditional songs recorded for profit

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<sup>2</sup> Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 4 (1996): 522.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 530–34.

folk albums? Could folklore address non-agrarian experiences such as factory work, urban life, or contemporary political debates?

As the debate about what constituted American folklore in the 1950s began, Samuel Bayard took a reasonable approach to recast a modern definition of folklore. After examining and discarding widely accepted definitions based on the vague concept of tradition, Bayard suggested that materials studied by “unquestioned folklorists” should define folklore—if folklorists study it, it is therefore folklore.<sup>4</sup> Bayard inventoried the studies of a diverse group of scholars. Among them, he found those who studied everything from fairy tales to dances, charms, and customary practices. He concluded that folklore was “certain categories of creative ideas which have become traditional among the people of any society and which may be recognized as their common property.” By creative ideas, he meant ideas which are long-lived, and by traditional, he meant not propagated by an official or authoritative source.<sup>5</sup>

Bayard’s definition could reasonably include the popular folk music of the 1950s, but traditional folklorists such as Richard Dorson did not accept Bayard’s applied studies methodology. Rather than questioning who Bayard selected as “unquestioned folklorists,” Dorson argued that American folklorists studied the wrong things and concerned themselves with the wrong questions.

### **Objections and Tradition**

Richard Dorson is the embodiment of a traditional folklorist. He conceptualized folklore as a historical phenomenon; for it to be authentic American folklore, it must address unique cultural conditions of the New World such as colonization, westward migration, immigration, slavery, and democracy.<sup>6</sup> He not only attacked Bayard’s methodology of defining folklore through applied studies but also led what he considered

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Bayard, “The Materials of Folklore,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 66, no. 259 (1953): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/536742>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Simon J. Bronner, ed., “Richard Dorson and the Great Debates,” in *Following Tradition* (University Press of Colorado, 1998), 350, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nqtf.13>; Richard M. Dorson, “A Theory for American Folklore,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 72, no. 285 (1959): 203–11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/538132>.

the defense of folklore as a serious academic pursuit against those who attempted to popularize or apply it to social reforms and mass culture.<sup>7</sup> Dorson's argument in the 1950s is the academic foundation to claims that fighter pilot songs are not folksongs.

Dorson presented "A Theory for American Folklore" to a gathering of the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association in 1957 with the objective of defining what American folklorists should study. He categorized seven groups of academic folklorists in the United States and criticized each in turn. His objections fell into three broad categories: 1) The area of study did not examine uniquely American materials. 2) The area of study was a subdivision and did not apply to American culture or American folklore as a whole. 3) The area of study moved too far away from traditional materials.<sup>8</sup>

In the first category were comparative folklorists and literary historians. Comparative folklorists studied the adaptation of folk material brought to the United States from abroad. Dorson criticized this study as dealing with "primitive literature [of another land] and not with American civilization."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, literary historians attempted to examine traditional American stories but usually found these stories were transplants from European nations or were of popular construction and not necessarily traditional. As Dorson wrote, "the deeper subsequent scholars dig toward folk roots [of these stories], the more unsatisfactory their research appears."<sup>10</sup> While many fighter pilot songs from the Vietnam era and later are original works by Americans, those of earlier wars were often adaptations of British Army songs, and Vietnam also had its share of newly adapted Royal Australian Air Force songs. To Dorson, these adaptations would not qualify as authentic American folklore.

Dorson's second category included cultural anthropologists, regional collectors, and folksong specialists, each of which took the body of American folklore and cleaved off a portion for closer study. Dorson believed emotional attachment to "their people" motivated regional collectors. He found them to be un-academic, lacking serious

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<sup>7</sup> Bronner, "Richard Dorson and the Great Debates," 350.

<sup>8</sup> Dorson, "A Theory for American Folklore."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 202.



discipline, and their efforts resulted in “an aimless piling up of folklore bric-a-brac.” A more serious subdivision of American society in Dorson’s mind came from cultural anthropologists who provided useful tools to divide America into subcultures; he thought that they had little to offer the totality of American folklore because they framed problems on “one unique, complex culture.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, Dorson claimed that American folksong specialists separated themselves from academic folklorists with their myopic focus on music.<sup>12</sup>

These are fair criticisms if one believes the study of American folklore should be indivisible and left to professional academics. While Dorson’s criticisms object to the *approach* these groups took to American folklore, none object to the *material* studied. While this study of fighter pilot songs might not meet Dorson’s standard for academic folklore, these criticisms do not disqualify the material itself from being worthy of investigation.

Dorson reserved special vitriol for the one group in his final category, the “popularizers.” He believed it was his duty to call out authors if they were “manipulating folklore simply to make a quick buck, and in so doing sacrifice their personal integrity.”<sup>13</sup> Popularizers, according to Dorson, employed “no theoretical premises, and engage in no basic research in the field or in the library. Their aim is to reach the public with any materials at hand, and their methods too often are the methods of fakelore.”<sup>14</sup> Dorson first coined the term fakelore in a 1950 essay to describe commercial works which misrepresented themselves as folklore or tampered with traditional folklore.<sup>15</sup> Dorson cautioned against this tampering because it would “dilute the ‘salty and rich’ core of American folklore and detracted from the essential message of its glorious earthiness.”<sup>16</sup> Dorson painted popularizers as those who wished to make money selling folklore or “fakelore.”

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>13</sup> Dorson quoted in Bronner, “Richard Dorson and the Great Debates,” 362.

<sup>14</sup> Dorson, “A Theory for American Folklore,” 202.

<sup>15</sup> Bronner, “Richard Dorson and the Great Debates,” 369.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 370.



Unfortunately, he clumped serious progressive folklorists in with opportunistic business owners and painted them all with the brush of capitalism and greed. At the root of Dorson's criticism was a serious debate about the future of American folklore. The central issue was how to reconcile traditional notions of folklore with materials that were more accessible to mass culture. On one side of the debate were the traditionalists exemplified by Richard Dorson, on the other side were the progressives exemplified by Benjamin Botkin.

### **Debate & Consensus**

Dorson and Botkin clashed on two major issues. The first was alluded to in Dorson's criticism of the popularizers—that is the issue of “fakelore.” Examples of fakelore include the popularization of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales or the newly constructed story of Paul Bunyan. Dorson viewed folklore “as a precious historic artifact whose form needed to be kept intact to keep its original cultural integrity and scientific value.”<sup>17</sup> To preserve what he saw as the integrity of folklore studies Dorson attacked progressive folklorists like Botkin, labeling them popularizers and fakelors.<sup>18</sup>

What was fakelore for Dorson however, Botkin viewed as “folklore in the making.”<sup>19</sup> Botkin approached folklore from a humanist vs. historical mindset. He believed that folklorists should “help Americans appreciate the folklore of the American past, recognize the folklore of the present, and realize that they were in the process of creating the folklore of the future.”<sup>20</sup> While Dorson would see fighter pilots' adaptations of traditional songs with modern lyrics as destructive to the historical record, Botkin would see only the creation of new folklore and the merging of tradition to contemporary culture.

The second issue on which Dorson and Botkin clashed was Botkin's concept of applied folklore. Botkin viewed folklore not as an independent discipline but as one

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>20</sup> Jerrold Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 395 (1987): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/539987>.

connected “to the study of culture, of history or literature—of people.”<sup>21</sup> In this sense, a folk artist should adapt folklore to modern culture, and scholars should use it to study broader social themes such as education, work, and recreation.<sup>22</sup> Dorson instead continued to worry about the academic rigor of folklore arguing that “it is no business of the folklorist to engage in social reform, that he is unequipped to reshape institutions, and that he will become the poorer scholar and folklorist if he turns activist.”<sup>23</sup> Botkin had little sympathy for such concerns, arguing that “it implies lack of faith in your field or profession not to see its relation to the life around you.”<sup>24</sup> Botkin’s belief in applied folklore led him to expand his folklore study into previously un-tilled ground.

Botkin is largely responsible for expanding the definition of folklore to include non-agrarian and urban material. After completing several regional folklore collections, Botkin turned his attention toward urban lore.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, Botkin began to dismantle the notion that folklore was only a product of the isolated and illiterate groups traditionally studied by folklorists. He argued that “any group of people with common background, experience and interests that develops a body of custom and fantasy peculiar to itself” constitutes a folk group worthy of study.<sup>26</sup> Many other folklorists followed Botkin’s examination of non-traditional folk cultures, particularly those who focused on music such as John Greenway and Archie Green—who will be discussed later.

Botkin ultimately prevailed in his debates with Dorson and established a new paradigm in American folk studies. He developed new theoretical ground now widely accepted by contemporary folklorists.<sup>27</sup> His theoretical premises included first that folklore can exist in modern society because the social structure can provide the isolation and separation previously supplied by geography and rurality. This allows both the educated and uneducated to produce folklore. Second, he maintained that folklore is not strictly traditional but undergoes modernization, and that “for every form of folk fantasy

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<sup>21</sup> Botkin quoted in Bronner, “Richard Dorson and the Great Debates,” 383.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>24</sup> Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin,” 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

that dies, a new one is being created, as culture in decay is balanced by folklore in the making.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, he argued that folklore does not require strictly oral dissemination.<sup>29</sup>

Botkin’s pluralistic and dynamic conceptualization of folklore which gained acceptance among contemporary scholars has one central criterion: that the material has partial or limited acceptance among a group “as distinct from the universal acceptance of that which is popular or ‘modern.’”<sup>30</sup> On this central criterion, Greenway and Green built their definitions for modern protest and occupational folksongs. Their definitions require little adjustment to create the box which contains fighter pilot folksongs.

### **Application to the Study of Folksong**

John Greenway published *American Folksongs of Protest* in 1953 and had to debunk traditional folk definitions directly because the debate between Dorson and Botkin was still at that time unresolved. Greenway admitted that widely accepted traditional folklore definitions of 1953—which required that a folksong should have “lost its identity as a consciously composed piece; that it have undergone verbal changes during oral transmission; and that it have been sung for an appreciable period of time,”—would disqualify most of his chosen evidence.<sup>31</sup> Regardless, Greenway offered that a folksong was actually a communally owned object concerned with the interest of the people.<sup>32</sup> Combining Botkin’s and Greenway’s criteria, folk is defined as material separate from that which is popular or modern, possessed by the group communally, and which addresses interests particular to the group.

The explosion of folksongs which addressed social or political themes in the 1960s clearly supports Greenway’s concept of folklore. Folksingers joined the debate over the Vietnam War in the 1960s well before popular music took up the issue. Singers such as Pete Seeger, and Peter, Paul, and Mary sang against involvement in Vietnam.

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<sup>28</sup> Botkin quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Botkin quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> John Greenway, *American Folk Songs of Protest* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1953), 5–6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Merle Haggard and others focused on supporting the troops and disagreed with the message of the growing peace movement.<sup>33</sup> As these artists sang about a war in which they did not fight, service members sang about the war from personal experience—fighter pilots included. Their songs fall into a subcategory of what Archie Green called “occupational folksongs.”

Green took the theoretical groundwork laid by Botkin and Greenway, constructed a definition for occupational folksongs, and used it to examine the songs of Appalachian coal miners. Green saw in the coal miners a folk group which had characteristics of both rural and urban societies.<sup>34</sup> These characteristics are also present in combat units in Vietnam: a close-knit group dependent on each other to perform a dangerous job in relative isolation from society at large equipped with specialized technology. To engage in his study of this group, Green set aside traditional folk definitions which relied on oral distribution and a close association with the peasantry and defined an occupational folksong as that which “describes work itself and portrays the life, diversions, and struggles of men on the job.”<sup>35</sup> This definition creates a box which can include the mining songs of Green’s study, as well as those of fighter pilots or any other occupation with the necessary folk characteristics.

### **Fighter Pilot Folksong Defined**

Fighter pilot folksongs are a subcategory of Green’s occupational folksongs. They describe the work, life, diversions, and struggles of fighter pilots at war and in training. They deal thematically with the experiences, tools, and people encountered within that community. Thanks to the work of scholars like Botkin and Green, folklorists at large accepted the idea that fighter pilots do constitute a folk group.

In war, distance, time, and most importantly experiences isolated pilots from society at large. They existed in a close-knit group dependent on each other for survival

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<sup>33</sup> “Time to Lay It Down” (State College, PA: WPSU), Part I, accessed February 14, 2018, <http://atimetoheal.wpsu.org/soundtrack>.

<sup>34</sup> Archie Green, *Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 446.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

and success.<sup>36</sup> They created their own lore, often in song, meant for themselves and separate from that which was popular or modern.

As early as 1957, amateur folklorists identified Air Force pilots as a folk group “who accept [songs] and mold them and make them their own by imposing their individual and collective stamp upon such songs.”<sup>37</sup> These amateur folklorists and collectors identified thousands of songs from WWI through the mid-twentieth century. They included many bawdy songs in their collections which have little to do with the life or experiences of flying combat missions. Where did this singing tradition originate? Which songs are specifically fighter pilot folksongs vs. bawdy drinking songs? And why did the Vietnam War develop so much new and original folk material?

### **Origins of Fighter Pilot Folksong**

From the outset of WWI, American pilots sang songs, usually adopted from the British Army which possessed a strong singing tradition.<sup>38</sup> British soldiers sang versions of “I Don’t Want to Join the Army” as far back as the Napoleonic Wars with an original title of “I Don’t Want to be a Soldier.”<sup>39</sup> In typical folk fashion, airmen updated the lyrics of this song over time. By the Vietnam war, pilots knew it by the title “I Don’t Want to Join the Air Force,” but the song retained its general theme. “I Don’t Want to Join the Air Force” recounts a pilot’s facetious desire to stay home, have sex, and live off the earnings of a high-born “lady” as her pimp rather than fly dangerous combat missions.

I don’t want to join the Air Farce  
I don’t want to go to war.  
I just want to hang around  
The Piccadilly Underground,  
Living off the earnings of a high-born “lady.”  
Don’t want a bullet up my arse-hole  
Don’t want my buttock shot away.  
I’d rather be in England,

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<sup>36</sup> Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 21.

<sup>37</sup> William Wallrich, *Air Force Airs: Songs and Ballads of the United States Air Force* (New York, NY: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1957), xvii.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph F. Tuso, *Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, 59–60.

In jolly, jolly England,  
And fornicate me bloody life away<sup>40</sup>

While the modification of “I Don’t Want to Join the Army” to Air Force life was a minor change in the first line, “The Dying Aviator” based on a 19<sup>th</sup> Century British sea song— “The Old Tarpaulin Jacket”— was updated to reflect the dangerous nature of flying and pay homage to the connection between man and machine even in death.<sup>41</sup> Versions of “The Old Tarpaulin Jacket” recast for the aviation services may have appeared as early as 1911 in the Royal Engineers Balloon Company, but certainly were in existence by 1912 in the Royal Flying Corps.<sup>42</sup> By Vietnam, there were multiple versions specific to individual types of airplanes, but the second stanza in each version was continually reserved for the gruesome imagery of a dying aviator entangled in the wreckage of his aircraft and speaking these last words to his comrades:

Take the cylinders out of my kidneys,  
The connecting rod out of my brain,  
The crankshaft from under my backbone,  
And assemble the engine again.<sup>43</sup>

Beginning in WWI, amateur collectors began compiling these and other songs and in doing so became what Botkin would label amateur folklorists.<sup>44</sup> A few of these collectors published their work. “The Dying Aviator” was the catalyst for C.H. Ward-Jackson, a British Royal Air Force officer in WWII, to begin collecting aviator songs. He published approximately two hundred songs in the *Airman’s Song Book* in 1967, which contained songs from pre-WWI through the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Ward-Jackson’s work is typical of those in the field containing the occasional brief historical background of songs, but it remains at its heart a songbook where the lyrics are the primary focus. C.W. “Bill” Getz performed the same service for the young USAF. He collected and published over one

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<sup>40</sup> C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, vol. 2 (Burlingame, CA: The Redwood Press, 1986), CC-1.

<sup>41</sup> Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> C. H. Ward-Jackson, *Airman’s Song Book* (London: William Blackwood & Sons Limited, 1967), 2.

<sup>43</sup> C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, vol. 1 (San Mateo, CA: The Redwood Press, 1981), A-6.

<sup>44</sup> Hirsch, “Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin,” 26–27.

<sup>45</sup> Ward-Jackson, *Airman’s Song Book*.

thousand songs in his two-volume work *The Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force*.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Getz published the songs in two volumes—labeling the second the “The Stag Bar Edition” complete with a warning for readers who possess “tender sensibilities” instead of the glowing endorsement from General Jimmy Doolittle available in the first volume—brings up an important issue.

### **Wheat and Chaff**

Many fighter pilot songs could offend. They were written and sung by young men far away from home wrestling with killing, death, and their own mortality. For authenticity’s sake, their words and themes are presented here without replacing offensive language with substitutions or dashes for censorship. This study, however, does not include some of the more offensive material. The exclusion of these songs is not an effort to expunge the record of offensive material but rather to separate the wheat from the chaff and limit the scope of this study to those songs which comment directly on the experience of combat.

Fighter pilot folksongs and songs sang by fighter pilots can be different. Then Lieutenant Rob Burgon discovered this fact as a young fighter pilot on a cross-country trip in his F-22 for the weekend. In a public bar, he heard a familiar tune, one that he considered a fighter pilot song. After joining the group singing for what was almost certainly a terrific good time, he was disappointed to learn that they were not fighter pilots but a rugby team.<sup>47</sup> But what young Lieutenant Burgon discovered was true; many of the songs sang by fighter pilots come from rugby or other British sports and bar traditions.

These bawdy songs provide an entertaining albeit lewd night of singing, but fail to provide insight into the nature of fighter pilots’ work the way an occupational folksong should. It would be a useful academic study to understand if and how these songs help develop unit cohesion and esprit de corps, but that is a different project. It is necessary to

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<sup>46</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*; Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*.

<sup>47</sup> Rob Burgon, *Piano Burning and Other Fighter Pilot Traditions* (Salt Lake City, UT: Slipstream Publishing, 2016), 47–48.



limit this study to understanding what the occupational folksongs of American fighter pilots in the Vietnam War tell us about their perceptions of themselves, combat, their leaders, and the enemy. Thus, my definition of a fighter pilot folksong is restricted to those that comment on the work, life, diversions, and struggles of fighter pilots at war and in training.

### **The Unique Position of the Vietnam War in Folk History**

Two contextual factors, which are not present in earlier conflicts, aid the examination of what fighter pilot folksongs say about the Vietnam veteran's perception of themselves, combat, their leaders, and the enemy. First, the folk revival of the 1950s made Vietnam a musical war in the same sense that WWI was a literary war. Paul Fussell noted in *The Great War and Modern Memory* that "by 1914, it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but vigorously literary, for the Great War occurred at a special historical moment when two 'liberal' forces were powerfully coinciding in England."<sup>48</sup> These forces were a belief in the educational power of classic English literature and the popular appeal of self-improvement. The folk revival conspired, in the same way, to ensure that the generation of pilots who fought in Vietnam were most likely exposed to folk music in college and many "were already experienced musicians when they arrived in Vietnam."<sup>49</sup> Ward-Jackson, when he published the *Airman's Song Book* in 1967, lamented the lack of contemporary songs, apparently unaware that American fighter pilots were reviving the tradition half a world away.<sup>50</sup> While Vietnam veterans continued the tradition of writing parodies of popular songs, empowered by the folk revival, they spawned more original work than appeared during the World Wars. While Vietnam is often thought of as the rock 'n' roll war, thanks to the folk revival, folksongs provides an alternative soundtrack of folksong.

Second, recording technology enabled the capture of a significant number of folk performances in Vietnam. Few, if any recordings exist of WWI or WWII pilots singing

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157.

<sup>49</sup> Lydia M. Fish, "General Edward G. Lansdale and the Folksongs of Americans in the Vietnam War," *Journal of American Folklore*, 1989, 392.

<sup>50</sup> Ward-Jackson, *Airman's Song Book*, xx-xxi.



songs contained in the collections of Ward-Jackson or Getz. We have lyrics and tunes, but no recordings of the men themselves singing. This is unfortunate because as Green noted of mining songs, listening to a piece “directly from a folksinger, or indirectly via a disc, imparts a sense of emotional immediacy and tension beyond the feeling evoked in letters.”<sup>51</sup> The pervasiveness of tape recording technology in Vietnam rectifies this condition, and fighter pilot folksongs circulated in country on an informal tape network.<sup>52</sup> One singer, Toby Hughes, had a song he composed beat him back to the states. Upon occasion the ability to record folksongs allowed them to arrive on the desks of senior leaders. The 100<sup>th</sup> Mission Party for Irv Levine at Korat—a songwriter in his own right—was recorded and made its way to General Ryan, Commander of Pacific Air Forces.<sup>53</sup> General Edward Lansdale recorded similar parties in Saigon and forwarded folksongs to senior American officials, including Secretary of Defense McNamara, in hopes of providing them with the ground truth of the Vietnam War. It seems unlikely that these top officials understood Lansdale’s intended message if they listened to it at all.<sup>54</sup> Lansdale was an applied folklorist who would have made Botkin proud. He examined the use of folksongs for psychological warfare and as a means of passing intelligence from the field to senior officials.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The folk revival of the 1950s created the conditions for the development of new folksongs during the Vietnam War and for the acceptance of that music among the academic folklore community. The proliferation of recording technology ensured that a rich historical record would be available for future folklorists investigating the subject. Except for Lansdale and a few other collectors and amateur folklorists, the fighter pilot folk material of Vietnam sat idle for many years. In 1990, Joseph Tusso, a former fighter

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<sup>51</sup> Green, *Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Lydia M. Fish, “Informal Communication System in the Vietnam War,” *New Directions in Folklore*, no. 7 (2003): 1.

<sup>53</sup> Fighter pilots who were assigned to fly missions into North Vietnam had to accomplish 100 missions before going home. One hundred missions constituted a tour of duty. As a result, the completion of number one hundred was cause for grand celebration. Ed Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled: An F-105 Pilot over North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 26, 244.

<sup>54</sup> Fish, “Informal Communication System in the Vietnam War,” 8.

<sup>55</sup> Fish, “General Edward G. Lansdale and the Folksongs of Americans in the Vietnam War,” 390.

pilot and English professor at the USAF Academy, published his collection of fighter pilot songs from Southeast Asia in *Singing the Vietnam Blues*. While still predominantly a songbook, Tusso began to place the material within the greater context of applied folklore. Les Cleveland and Lydia Fish followed him and approached the material not as collectors but as folklorists. Cleveland and Fish published books, scholarly articles, and arranged concerts and recording sessions for Vietnam veteran artists. Chapter 3 will explore the themes they have discovered, but first Chapter 2 provides a summary of the Vietnam War as fighter pilots saw it.



Chapter 2  
A Brief and Simple History of a Long and Complex War

*What the Captain means is, it's a fucked-up war.*

-Field tape skit from the 12<sup>th</sup> TFW

The Captain in the skit quoted above expressed a basic fact of the Vietnam War that historians and scholars later made the subject of chapters and books—although using less colorful language. The necessity of the war was debated by politicians, and the United States entered it neither blindly nor with scientific precision.<sup>1</sup> In the conduct of operations, military commanders chafed under what they saw as excessive political interference and squabbled with each other over strategy and command relationships. At the tip of the spear, most Americans found themselves inadequately trained and equipped. Eventually, America's fighting men found themselves despised by their own countrymen as Americans abandoned their support of the war and blamed both their politicians and soldiers for it. As Stanley Karnow wrote, "In human terms at least, the war in Vietnam was a war that nobody won—a struggle between victims. Its origins were complex, its lessons disputed, its legacy still to be assessed by future generations."<sup>2</sup> Few events loom as large in American civil military relations and US military doctrine and training than the Vietnam War.

The two major camps of scholarship on the Vietnam War argue either that Vietnam was the wrong war and essentially unwinnable, or that the United States failed to achieve its strategic goals due to the political restrictions politicians placed on military power. Regardless of whatever facts the first camp can leverage about Vietnamese nationalism, South Vietnamese political corruption, or lack of tangible American interest in Vietnam, most fighter pilots who flew in the war are subscribers to the second camp. Certainly, during their combat tours in Vietnam, most believed they could win if only given the chance to fight the way they trained.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, a History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 14–15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

The American involvement and strategy in Vietnam was the antithesis of Air Force training and doctrine in the 1960s. The Air Force focused on deterring and—should deterrence fail—winning a nuclear war against the Soviets. This lent the service and its pilots to an “all or nothing” view of warfare. This was not the war they found in Vietnam. The following sections outline briefly the political context of the Vietnam War and its major operations as seen by Air Force fighter pilots. The objective is to understand the political context, restrictions, and objectives of the war as understood by the men who wrote and sang songs about their experiences flying in it—not to provide a balance survey of scholarship or viewpoints of the war. Generally, pilots understood the war as a struggle against communist aggression where politicians prevented them from applying maximum violence against their enemies. As a result, the stated political goals appeared unachievable.

### **Background**

The United States entered the Vietnam War in the same manner it ultimately chose to fight it—gradually.<sup>3</sup> Following WWII, France wanted to reclaim many of its pre-war colonies, among them Indochina, where the Office of Strategic Services—the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency—had supported the Vietnamese fight against the Japanese. A little-known figure, Ho Chi Minh, hoped for continued American backing in the post-war world for Vietnamese self-determination. Cold War politics prevented the United States from providing its continued support to Ho Chi Minh for two reasons. First, Ho Chi Minh had intermingled Vietnamese nationalism with communist political ideologies. Second, the United States needed French support in Europe to balance against the Soviets. Once back in control of their former colony, the French attempted to put the genie of Vietnamese nationalism back in the bottle but failed. In 1954, the Viet Minh—the Vietnamese nationalists’ guerilla army—cut off and defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu. Subsequent peace negotiations divided the country along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. Ho Chi Minh became president of North Vietnam, while the French

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<sup>3</sup> Walter J Boyne, *Beyond the Wild Blue: A History of the United States Air Force*. (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 141.

gave the leadership of South Vietnam to Emperor Bao Dai. Fearing further communist expansion, American support for South Vietnam started immediately, with 325 trainers and advisors sent to the country in 1955.<sup>4</sup>

Ho Chi Minh's continued pursuit of a free and united Vietnam gradually drew the United States into full scale combat against both the North Vietnamese and the insurgents they supported in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong. President Eisenhower's succession by John F. Kennedy brought with it a shift away from preventing direct conflict with the Soviet Union through the threat of massive nuclear retaliation. Instead, Kennedy favored the concept of flexible response and meeting low-level communist aggression with tailored amounts of force.<sup>5</sup> This was a major shift in American policy with grave implications for the USAF, which had tailored its forces for nuclear war against the Soviets.

When Kennedy entered office in January 1961, the USAF had a force organized, trained, and equipped for nuclear war. The story of the USAF in Vietnam is largely a story about an organization struggling to adapt to a war it did not want and was ill prepared to fight. The USAF's organization for nuclear war continued to impact operations in Vietnam through the end of the war. In December 1972, Strategic Air Command (SAC) insisted on planning the strikes for Operation Linebacker II from its headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, instead of letting in-theater commands plan and execute these missions.<sup>6</sup> After years of complaining about politicians in Washington reaching down into the tactical and operational levels of war, when given a free hand the USAF centralized target selection and strike planning at its highest levels. Training was also an issue. Fighter pilots lacked adequate training in air-to-air combat, preparing instead for the delivery of nuclear weapons and intercepting enemy bombers.<sup>7</sup> Their aircraft were also optimized for these missions.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall L. Michel, *The Eleven Days of Christmas: America's Last Vietnam Battle* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Brian D. Laslie, *The Air Force Way of War: U.S. Tactics and Training After Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 1-3.

The principal USAF fighter aircraft of the Vietnam War, the F-105 Thunderchief—the ‘Thud’—and F-4 Phantom, were designed for the delivery of nuclear weapons and bomber intercept missions. The F-105 had a long fuselage and narrow wings giving it the capability to carry a nuclear weapon internally at low altitudes and high speed, but it could not easily turn and fight with a MiG. The Phantom, while more maneuverable than the Thud, initially did not have an internal gun for close-range air-to-air kills and its primary missile—the AIM-7—was designed to shoot down large non-maneuvering targets such as bombers. These front-line fighters were not the first aircraft the USAF sent to Vietnam but as the war progressed they came to dominate the conflict and their design limitations significantly impacted operations.

The first USAF adjustment to meeting Kennedy’s focus on flexible response was the creation of the 4400<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Squadron in April 1961 at Eglin AFB, Florida. The 4400<sup>th</sup> did not have F-105s and F-4s but rather vintage WWII aircraft such as the Douglas A-26 Invader (designated B-26 from 1948-1965) and T-28. The 4400<sup>th</sup> was meant to train partner Air Forces to resist communist wars of national liberation. Faced with increasing insurgent activity in South Vietnam that was backed by North Vietnamese supplies, the United States sent a detachment of the 4400<sup>th</sup> to Ben Hoa Airbase in October 1961 under Operation Farm Gate in the ever expanding American advise and train mission.<sup>8</sup> Eventually US Farm Gate crews were flying combat missions so long as they had a Vietnamese crew member on board. By mid-1964 the 4400<sup>th</sup> Farm Gate Detachment was redesignated the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Commando Squadron and jet aircraft also began to arrive in Vietnam. In June, SAC tankers refueled a flight of F-100s as they went to bomb antiaircraft defenses in Laos which had fired at US reconnaissance planes gathering intelligence on North Vietnamese supply routes into South Vietnam. In November, the Viet Cong struck back at US airpower by mortaring Ben Hoa Airbase and destroying five B-57s.<sup>9</sup> The need for greater airfield security led to the landing of US Marines in Danang to secure the airbase there. While USAF efforts in the early 1960s focused on supporting the South Vietnamese, efforts in the late 1960s took a coercive

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<sup>8</sup> Boyne, *Beyond the Wild Blue*, 145–46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 152–53.

form as the United States attempted to compel the North Vietnamese to cease their interference in the South.

What Mark Clodfelter describes as negative objectives significantly limited the scope of US coercive efforts against North Vietnam during the late 1960s. Clodfelter's book—*The Limits of Airpower*—provides a framework for determining the effectiveness of airpower which centers on the positive and negative objectives desired by policy makers. Positive objectives are those sought through the application of military force. Negative objectives are those which require the limitation of military force. President Johnson's positive objective for Vietnam was "an independent non-Communist South Vietnam [which] must be free...to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security."<sup>10</sup> Vietnam, however, evoked memories of Korea where Chinese intervention risked escalation and prevented the unification of the Korean peninsula.

Cabinet members invoked analogies with the Korean War and Munich during deliberations as the Johnson administration weighed the wisdom and method of intervention in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> The analogy with the Korean War developed into a negative objective of preventing Soviet or Chinese intervention. The second negative objective for Vietnam, according to Clodfelter, was Johnson's desire to limit the size of the American commitment so that the war would not distract from his domestic agenda of the Great Society. He saw airpower as the ideal tool which he could increase or decrease at will. After four years of limited operations in South Vietnam and Laos the Air Force was about to commit to major—although not unrestricted—combat operations in North Vietnam.

### **Air Force Operations in Vietnam**

Within the context of Johnson's positive and negative objectives, the Air Force sought to support the establishment of a free and independent South Vietnam through three primary efforts. The first was what Robert Pape calls a risk strategy, the gradual and

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 40–41.

<sup>11</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).



escalatory bombing of North Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> The second was an interdiction effort against North Vietnamese supply lines running into South Vietnam. The third was support for US Army and South Vietnamese operations against the Viet Cong. Pilots who flew close air support missions in South Vietnam rarely, if ever, flew strike missions up North. Those pilots stationed in Thailand and attacking targets in North Vietnam rarely, if ever, attacked targets in South Vietnam to support ground forces. In both cases, operations in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail were frequent diversions. Because the experiences of fighter pilots in Vietnam varied across these missions, it is helpful to understand these campaigns from the perspective of a fighter pilot.

### **One Hundred Missions North**

The bombing missions against North Vietnam to compel Ho Chi Minh to cease his support and sponsorship of the South Vietnamese insurgency make up the typical image of USAF airpower in Vietnam histories. Large strike packages of F-105s and F-4s, and eventually B-52s, flew North to strike targets in the face of one of the most dangerous air defense systems of the day—equipped with Soviet MiGs and surface-to-air missiles (SAM). The United States and Vietnamese fought with the same systems which would face each other over Eastern Europe in a contest between the super powers. Operation Rolling Thunder and later Operations Linebacker I and II were the application of airpower to achieve political concessions from North Vietnam. Each campaign was an attempt at the direct and independent application of airpower to obtain a strategic effect. To pilots, the greatest impediment the USAF faced in pursuit of this independent strategic campaign were the operational limitations placed on it by President Johnson.

Johnson's negative objectives in Vietnam caused Rolling Thunder to be micromanaged from the highest levels of the US government through rules of engagement, target selection, and bombing pauses. One view of airpower history in Vietnam is that the political restrictions on airpower in Rolling Thunder prevented its ability to coerce Ho Chi Minh. Clodfelter disagrees. Setting that debate aside and focusing on the experience of fighter pilots flying missions up North, it is important to

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).



understand the impact of these political restrictions on fighter pilots' perceptions and attitudes about the war.

The rules of engagement, which were designed to limit the expansion of the war or maintain American domestic support, appeared to fighter pilots as providing sanctuary for the enemy, preventing the destruction of key targets, and most importantly placing them at a disadvantage tactically. Restricted target areas included MiG bases and SAM sites, to avoid killing any Chinese or Soviet advisors. This put US forces in a reactive position unable to destroy threats proactively to gain air superiority over Hanoi and Haiphong. Hanoi and Haiphong themselves had "no strike" areas which consisted of anything within 30 nautical miles of the center of Hanoi or 10 nautical miles of the center of Haiphong. Additionally, there was a 30 nautical mile buffer zone along the Chinese border in which no targets could be struck, effectively creating a sanctuary for the North Vietnamese to store supplies.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the restrictions placed on pilots by the rules of engagement, politicians also reserved for themselves target selection. President Johnson approved targets during his infamous Tuesday lunches. These targets remained on the target list until removed by him. This slow and gradual pace of targeting gave fighter pilots the impression that they were not striking targets of value to the North Vietnamese and, upon occasion, that this method of target selection forced them to strike targets which they destroyed earlier in the week because the target list had yet to be changed. Fighter pilots would have much rather executed the 94 targets recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as quickly as possible. One wrote to *Aviation Week* in 1966 that he was sick of "being told how to fly my aircraft in combat, [and] flying my aircraft for minimum effect."<sup>14</sup>

The target selection process of the Johnson administration in Vietnam, along with its declared bombing policies to entice the North Vietnamese to negotiate, serve in many histories as the primary example of excessive political interference with military operations. Major Ricky Drake investigated the effect the rules of engagement and target

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<sup>13</sup> Ricky James Drake, "The Rules of Defeat: The Impact of Aerial Rules of Engagement on USAF Operations in North Vietnam, 1965-1968" (Air University, 1992), 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

selection had on aircrews flying in Vietnam. He found that they eroded trust in civilian leadership and made aircrews feel that they were fighting two enemies, the North Vietnamese and politicians in Washington.<sup>15</sup> Jack Broughton, a renowned fighter pilot whose court-martial conviction for attacking Soviet ships in Haiphong Harbor was eventually overturned, says as much in his book *Going Downtown: The War Against Hanoi and Washington*.<sup>16</sup> To win against each of these enemies all a pilot had to do was survive his tour.

The Air Force assigned pilots to bases in Thailand for a tour of one hundred missions North. For a mission to count towards their tour credit they had to fly into North Vietnam; if they did the mission was a “counter.” Missions flown in Laos or into South Vietnam did not count. Most pilots completed their 100-mission tour with around 25 non-counters over the course of six months to a year. The 100-mission tour was designed to provide a light at the end of the tunnel for the pilots who flew the dangerous missions into North Vietnam. For F-105 pilots this light often seemed to be a train. One Thud pilot remarked, “By your 66<sup>th</sup> mission you’ll have been shot down twice and picked up once.”<sup>17</sup> His comment was statistically accurate. While all missions into North Vietnam were counters, pilots did not perceive them as equally dangerous. The difference between easy and hard counters was mirrored in pilots’ minds by the Route Package system.

To ease the deconfliction between Navy and Air Force strike missions, the United States divided North Vietnam into seven Route Packages, I through V, and VI-A and VI-B. Route Package VI was divided along what fighter pilots called the Northeast Railroad traveling from China to Hanoi to create VI-A and VI-B.<sup>18</sup> Route Packages I, V, and VI-A were given to the Air Force, while II, III, IV, and VI-B were assigned to the Navy. Package VI with the major industrial target areas of Hanoi, Haiphong, and the Thai Nguyen steel plant, as well as the Northeast railroad was the most heavily defended as indicated by the SAM coverage in Figure 1 and the MiG operating areas in Figure 2. The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> Jack Broughton, *Going Downtown: The War Against Hanoi and Washington* (Pacifica, CA: Pacifica Military History, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Walter J Boyne, “Route Pack 6,” *Air Force Magazine*, November 1999, 56–61.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

pilots who flew into these areas called themselves the “Red River Rats.” The Red River flows approximately along the railroad line departing northwest out of Hanoi in Figure 1.

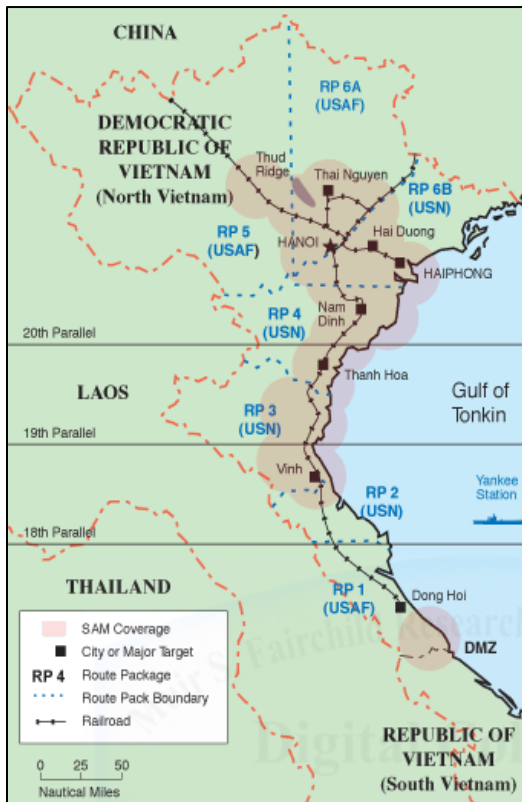


Figure 1: Route Package System



Figure 2: Rolling Thunder Strike Routes

Source: “Downtown Historical Background,” accessed April 7, 2018, [http://www.airbattle.co.uk/d\\_history.html](http://www.airbattle.co.uk/d_history.html).

Route Pack VI qualified as a hard counter for the Red River Rats, while pilots believed missions to Route Pack I, particularly early in the war before SAMs were present, were easy counters. According to Ed Rasimus’ memoirs, squadron schedulers had to carefully balance hard and easy counters with non-counters across the squadron’s pilots so that the danger of Route Pack VI was spread evenly. New pilots were frequently given a few missions to adjust to combat before flying to Route Pack VI, and pilots close to their tour completion were spared the risk if possible.<sup>19</sup> The rules of engagement further compounded the dangers of Route Pack VI in the minds of aircrew. Not only did pilots have to contend with SAMs, MiGs, and flak, they also had to follow ever changing

<sup>19</sup> Ed Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled: An F-105 Pilot over North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003).

rules or risk disciplinary action assuming they returned safely. Jack Broughton recounts one instance of a pilot shot down while awaiting court-martial proceedings because he attacked a SAM site under construction on a previous mission.<sup>20</sup>

As folklorist Les Cleveland noted, “Vietnam warriors were faced with intolerable conflicts. On the one hand, the official ideology of the military command exhorted them to heroic behavior and dedication to the mission. On the other hand, the confused strategic objectives of the war seemed unattainable.”<sup>21</sup> Johnson’s positive and negative objectives in Vietnam created a situation where the operational approach appeared disconnected from the goal of coercing North Vietnam. Fighter pilots felt that the rules of engagement and target selection process not only put them in unnecessary danger but were the primary barrier to achieving their strategic objective of coercing North Vietnam. With this belief firmly ingrained, surviving their 100-mission tours—not victory—became the only way to end the war for many pilots.

Dick Jonas and Irv LeVine, two of the most prolific song writers of the war up North, survived their 100-mission tours. Jonas graduated from Valdosta State University while serving in the Georgia Army National Guard. After graduation he attended Air Force Officer Training School to pursue his dream of becoming a fighter pilot. During the Vietnam War, he flew F-4s as a backseat pilot in the 433<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS), 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base in September 1967. LeVine was a former B-47 copilot who transitioned to the C-130 in 1965 and later volunteered to fly F-105s in Vietnam out of Korat Royal Thai Air Base in the 388<sup>th</sup> TFW. Both men sang songs before their time in Southeast Asia. LeVine played at the Officers Clubs at McConnell AFB, Kansas and later at Korat almost nightly. Jonas had written a few songs while in college and turned his creative attention to his thoughts and feelings on combat when he arrived in Thailand. Jonas’ song “Let’s Get Away with it All” and another with unknown authorship—“Our Leaders”—addressed pilots’ feelings about the rules of engagement; both songs are discussed in later chapters.

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<sup>20</sup> Jack Broughton, *Thud Ridge: F-105 Thunderchief Missions Over Vietnam* (Manchester: Crécy, 2006), 93–95.

<sup>21</sup> Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 140.

## **A Year Fighting the In-Country War**

The classic image of airpower in the in-country war is jet fighters dropping napalm on jungles, villages, and black-pajama clad Viet Cong. Since the early 1960s and Operation Farm Gate, the USAF was engaged in supporting the fight against the Viet Cong. At times US ground forces fought the Viet Cong through classic counter-insurgency strategies focusing on “hearts and minds;” at other times it favored search and destroy operations. In both contexts, USAF fighter pilots provided overwhelming firepower for American and South Vietnamese forces. Unlike the war up North, airpower in the in-country war functioned as a supporting service for ground forces. Relieved of the pressure to provide war winning effects on their own, airmen’s friction with policy makers subsided; however, the joint nature of in-country operations brought old service rivalries to the surface.

The Vietnam War was a turning point in US Army and USAF relations. During the Korean War, the US Army often complained that the USAF did not provide adequate close support and envied the control Marines exercised over their airpower.<sup>22</sup> To avoid reliance on the seemingly unreliable Air Force, the US Army pursued helicopter aviation. While helicopters proved effective at increasing battlefield mobility and providing limited firepower, they could not match the capabilities of fixed-wing aircraft in terms of survivability or lethality. With a long counter-insurgency brewing, the US Army and USAF began work to integrate their operations.

Huge strides were made in air-ground integration during the Vietnam War, with the USAF fielding a small air force of single and dual-engine propeller aircraft and specially trained aircrews—called Forward Air Controllers (FAC)—to provide close integration between USAF firepower and Army maneuver operations. While there were some airborne observers and controllers in Korea, the FAC concept exploded in Vietnam. The FAC became the connective tissue between soldiers and fighter pilots.

The working relationship between the services was never perfect in Vietnam. The Army and the Air Force frequently debated the best way to allocate airpower to support

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<sup>22</sup> Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

ground forces. The Air Force stuck to its traditional position of centrally controlling airpower so it could use resources efficiently, shifting them between interdiction and close support. The Army wanted what they saw the Marines had in Korea—full control over local airpower assigned directly to the ground commander. The FACs were a compromise; assigned to support local ground commanders, they provided those commanders with access to air delivered fires while allowing the Air Force to retain control and flexibility of its fast jets. The Air Force and Marines debated the control of airpower across services, with the Marines gripping the control of their aircraft tightly and the Air Force arguing for a single theater Air Commander. These arguments came to a head during the North Vietnamese siege of Khe Sanh.<sup>23</sup>

Khe Sanh was a Marine fire base in South Vietnam along Route 9 near the tri-borders of South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and Laos. During the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese besieged and hoped to capture Khe Sanh. A victory at Khe Sanh would appear to be a repeat of the capture of Dien Bien Phu from the French, which led to their eventual withdrawal from Vietnam. Both Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh depended on aerial resupply. In 1954, the North Vietnamese effectively closed Dien Bien Phu's runway. When the French attempted to resupply via airdrop, most of the supplies landed in Vietnamese hands. Cut off from resupply, it was only a matter of time before the garrison capitulated.<sup>24</sup> While debates about the most effective organization and control of airpower in Vietnam raged, USAF and Marine pilots saved Khe Sanh. The story of Khe Sanh exemplified the experience of fighter pilots fighting the in-country war. As high-level debates about doctrine, organization, and command and control played out between headquarters staffs, the pilots, soldiers, and Marines in the fight simply got the job done.

Pilots assigned to South Vietnam to fly the in-country war went for a year. There was no magic number of missions which sent you home—every mission for a year was a counter. These pilots flew almost twice as many missions as their comrades in Thailand who went up North. Often their fight centered on protecting an eighteen-year-old draftee

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<sup>23</sup> William W. Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars*, ed. A. J. C. Lavelle and James C. Gaston (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2003), chap. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: First Da Capo Press, 2006).



with a rifle, with many hours sitting on alert waiting for the call of “troops-in-contact” which prompted them to race to their aircraft and fly to the sound of gunfire to protect their countrymen.<sup>25</sup> Occasionally the war was brought to them with mortar attacks on their bases, and during the Tet Offensive even flying missions and striking targets on their on base as the Viet Cong infiltrated American installations.

Toby Hughes was the premier song writer of the in-country war. Hughes flew 224 missions in the Phantom out of Cam Ranh Air Base, home to the 12<sup>th</sup> TFW and the skit “What the Captain Means” quoted at the beginning of this chapter. He began writing songs of the in-country war as a response to the strong folksong culture emanating from units in Thailand. He wanted to tell the story of the in-country war. His songs are laced with the scramble to react to a troops-in-contact situation, defending the Marines at Khe Sanh, and stories of heroic FACs. But the in-country war was not the only war he fought.

Hughes also flew into Laos and went North into Route Pack I on armed reconnaissance and interdiction missions to stop supplies from reaching the Viet Cong so maybe there would be one less troops-in-contact the next week. Eighteen of Hughes’ 224 missions were into Route Pack I on armed reconnaissance. Several of his songs talk about the dangers of flying there and over the trail and into Route Pack I. His comrades stationed in Thailand joined him in the interdiction mission as they few non-counters over the trail. Together they fought what Bernard Nalty called “the war against trucks.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The War Against Trucks**

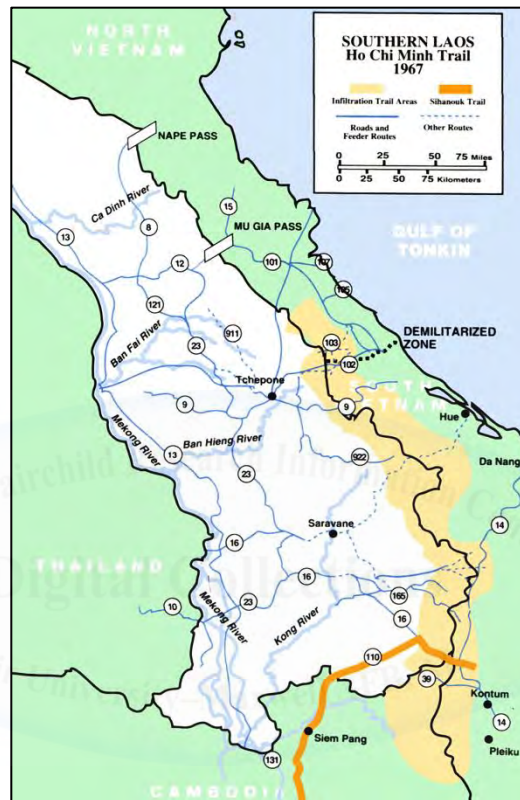
There is little popular imagery of fighter pilots’ interdiction efforts against North Vietnamese supply and infiltration into South Vietnam along what Americans called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The bombing of Laos was a secret war and although covered by the press American officials rarely acknowledged it. Fighter pilots often referred to these missions as taking place in the “far western DMZ [demilitarized zone].” The objective of these operations was to prevent the North Vietnamese from supplying the growing

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<sup>25</sup> Troops-in-contact is a term to describe a situation where a friendly ground force who is engaged with the enemy and needs assistance. Specific doctrinal definitions have changed over time, but the urgency it conveys remains seared in the minds of pilots who fly close air support for ground troops.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *The War against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos 1968-1975* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005).

insurgency in South Vietnam. The popular conception in the Johnson administration was that North Vietnam controlled the insurgency and that it could not survive without North Vietnamese support. How much the insurgency relied on supplies from the North is debatable, but funneling supplies to the southern insurgency was at the very least a major North Vietnamese operation.



**Figure 3: Ho Chi Minh Trail circa 1967**

Source: Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos: 1960-1968* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 234.

The North Vietnamese infiltration of South Vietnam began in May of 1959 with a highly secret group of eight thousand soldiers of South Vietnamese background and porters who moved supplies across the DMZ between North and South Vietnam. In 1961, the trail moved into Laos to avoid the increasingly fortified DMZ. By 1964, the road network had grown to over 1,300km of primary and secondary roads manned by 31,000 troops. It was infiltrating half of the Viet Cong's fighters and 80 percent of their experienced cadre. The effectiveness of US airpower caused the introduction of camouflage, the use of caves, a centralized routing system, and over 800 pieces of air



defense artillery in 1967 (Figure 3). By 1975, over 100,000 troops were manning the trail which provided 71 percent of the 1972 Easter Offensive supplies to forces in South Vietnam. There remained a few choke points through the mountain passes out of North Vietnam and major interchanges such as the town of Tchepone (the dangers of which Hughes addressed in song), but largely the trail developed into a diffuse transportation network which was all but impervious to aerial interdiction in the thick jungles of Laos.<sup>27</sup>

Interdicting truck traffic on the trail was the first mission that involved the direct participation of American airmen beyond an advise and assist role. The character of the Vietnamese supply lines and the dense jungles in Laos presented difficult technical challenges to United States efforts. As the war progressed, the United States employed a variety of electronic sensors and intelligence mechanism to locate trucks and supplies on the trail. Both in-country and Thailand based pilots flew armed reconnaissance missions in Route Pack I and in Laos under a variety of operation names with ever-changing geographic boundaries. Operation Tally Ho covered interdiction efforts in Route Pack I (Figure 4). Hughes wrote two songs about his experiences in Tally Ho: “Tally Ho Tonight” and “Lakes of Tally Ho.” Operations in Laos included Barrel Roll which originally covered the Laotian panhandle along the border of North and South Vietnam. In April 1965, Barrel Roll continued in Northern Laos, but Operation Steel Tiger replaced Barrel Roll along the Laotian border of central Vietnam. By the end of 1965, Steel Tiger split into two sections, with the area immediately along the Vietnamese border renamed Tiger Hound (Figure 5). By 1968, these operations expanded their areas to encompass all of Laos albeit with varying restrictions.

Regardless of the operation’s name or geographic location, the war against trucks was mostly the same to fighter pilots. They employed weapons in three main ways. First, they could recon the trail themselves flying back and forth at low altitudes and high speed to find trucks to bomb. Second, FACs could locate targets, mark them with rockets, and direct strikes. Third, radar controllers could direct them to drop bombs on suspected positions in operations called sky spots—these appeared to be of dubious value to a fighter pilot who would rather see his targets. Strikes along the trail occurred in the day

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<sup>27</sup> Phong Đăng, *5 Hồ Chí Minh Trails* (Hanoi: Thế Giới Publishers, 2012).

and night, as a deadly game of hide and seek played out between truck drivers and pilots. The danger along the trail varied by location with Mu Gia Pass, Tchepone, and later Route Pack I becoming highly defended areas. Jonas, LeVine, and Hughes all wrote about and referenced their experiences on armed reconnaissance over the trail, but Chip Dockery appeared to focus on it the most. Dockery flew F-4s out of Udorn in the 13<sup>th</sup> TFS assigned to the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing and wrote three songs focusing on the experience of North Vietnamese truck drivers.

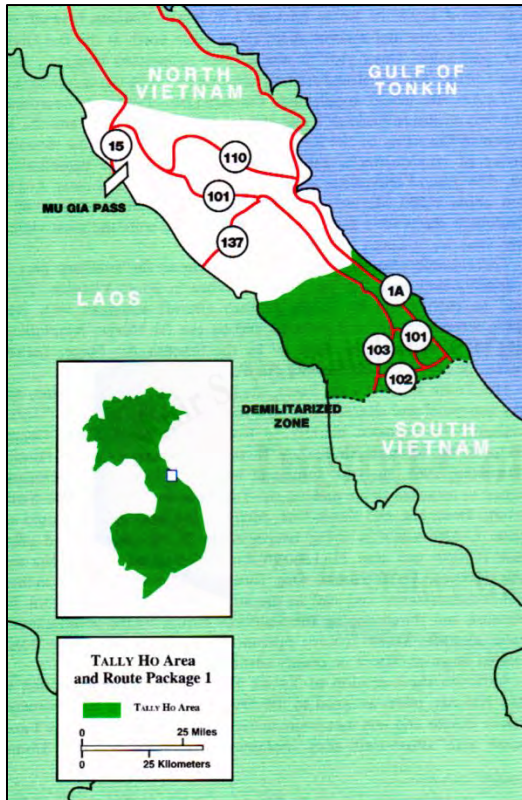


Figure 4: Operation Tally Ho Area



Figure 5: Interdiction Operations - late 1965

Source: Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos: 1960-1968* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 154 and 99..

In November 1968, Operation Commando Hunt began to absorb the various other named operations under one joint USAF-US Navy umbrella. Operation Rolling Thunder and the bombing strikes up North ended after an offer by the North Vietnamese to negotiate. When negotiations failed, Johnson did not renew the bombing of North Vietnam as promised due to domestic pressures. Instead the United States placed increased focus on its interdiction efforts. Commando Hunt leveraged intelligence

gathered from a CIA program code named Igloo White. Igloo White introduced the latest electronic detection devices which used sound, vibration, and even smell to identify activity on the trail. Despite all these efforts, the North Vietnamese were able to build up forces in the south adequate to launch the Tet Offensive in 1968 and later the Easter Offensive in 1972. The Easter Offensive in 1972 proved that airpower interdiction efforts had failed to prevent the buildup of North Vietnamese forces in the South.

Facing what appeared to be an impending collapse of South Vietnam during the North's 1972 Easter Offensive, President Nixon—like his predecessor—turned to airpower to save South Vietnam and win the war. Nixon's Operations Linebacker I and II were given significantly more latitude than Johnson's Rolling Thunder because Nixon had fewer negative objectives to protect. The Sino-Soviet split and warming Sino-American relations allowed Nixon to be more aggressive with airpower in North Vietnam. He authorized the employment of B-52s and the mining of Haiphong Harbor. These operations led to effective negotiations and the withdrawal of US forces. Some airpower historians have used Nixon's Linebacker campaign as proof that the gradualism of Rolling Thunder was the incorrect application of airpower. While this may be true, it is not necessarily proven by Nixon's success. Not only did he have fewer negative objectives, he also reduced the terms asked of North Vietnam. Instead of Johnson's free and independent South Vietnam, Nixon agreed to let the North Vietnamese hold their captured positions in South Vietnam. In 1975, when the North renewed its attack on South Vietnam, the US Congress blocked American intervention.

The South Vietnamese government fell on 30 April 1975. Two decades after their victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, the Vietnamese nationalists in their minds had completed their anti-colonial revolution. To Americans who served and fought in South Vietnam, it felt like an abandonment. Images of South Vietnamese attempting to board airplanes as they began their takeoff rolls, waiting at the American embassy for evacuation, and ditching helicopters near American ships in the South China Sea brought the panicked scenes of South Vietnam to American living rooms. America's long, divisive struggle in Vietnam was over—the hopes of stopping communist expansion in South Vietnam were dashed.

## Conclusion

American involvement in Vietnam spanned over two decades, but most histories of the war address only portions of the experience. They focus on specific time frames or questions. As primary sources, folksongs address only snippets of the war—a mission, a person, an airplane, a unit, a feeling. Their authors experienced the war in slices of one hundred missions or one year. Very few served more than this, because a second tour was voluntary until every pilot across the Air Force had served at least one tour. Yet these songs connected pilots across tours, airframes, bases, and mission. The frustrations of missions over the trail and the dangers of Route Pack VI were relatable to and respected by all.

Songwriters such as Dick Jonas, Irv LeVine, Toby Hughes, and Chip Dockery—to name just a few—sang about all the ways the war was “fucked up” but also about the thrill and fear of combat, and the bravery of their friends and comrades. Their songs reference names, places, and events in the historical record. Jonas changed the words to “I’ve Been Everywhere” to reflect the locations of Southeast Asia—he simply pulled out his flying map and started making rhymes.<sup>28</sup> The correct map of Vietnam and a few fighter pilot folksongs would tell you a lot about their war. As a young lieutenant flying A-10s in Korea, this is how I initially listened to this music and learned about the Vietnam War from a perspective other than the history books I read at the Air Force Academy. The availability of this music is due in part to the work of Lydia Fish and her Vietnam Veterans Oral History and Folklore Project.

As a folklorist Fish was interested in preserving and studying the music created by veterans of the Vietnam War. In the early 1990s, Fish gathered several Vietnam veteran folksingers for a concert at the Library of Congress and other venues, eventually recording a CD.<sup>29</sup> Since then, Jonas released over thirty albums on his Erosonic label.<sup>30</sup> Some songs are Jonas originals, some recorded with or credited to his friends, others have true folk origins and their original authors are unknown. Fish approached the music

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<sup>28</sup> Dick Jonas, interview by Maj Charles Stretch, Telephone, March 6, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Saul Broudy et al., *In Country: Folk Songs of Americans in the Vietnam War*, .m4a, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> “Erosonic,” accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.erosonic.com/>.

through the lens of a folklorist and began to place the folksongs of Vietnam veterans within the broader context and scholarship of folk music discussed in Chapter 1. Her work and others’—such as Les Cleveland who examined the use of music to assimilate civilians to military life—can help categorize fighter pilot folksongs to understand their authorship, performance, viewpoints, and biases. These categorizations provide important tools to sort through—and understand—the wide variety of music.





### Chapter 3 Fighter Pilot Folksong Authorship, Performance, and Viewpoints

*Some of them are happy; some are sad. Some are fresh and enthusiastic; some may seem cynical or disdainful of the way things are... You're going to hear genuine courage, and honest understandable doubts about the good sense of doing things which are then done with the fullest enthusiasm.*

-Maj John Roberts, introduction to song tape,  
Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, 1970

Major Roberts had it right. Fighter pilot songs cover about every aspect of the air war in Vietnam. Before attempting to extract meaning and perceptions from fighter pilot folksongs, it is important to understand their authorship, performance, and viewpoints. There is little scholarship that focuses specifically on fighter pilot songs of Vietnam. The two exceptions are Lydia Fish's work as the director of the Vietnam Veterans Oral History and Folklore Project, and Joseph Tusso's *Singing the Vietnam Blues*. Tusso's work remains predominantly a songbook but also recounts the historical context of how pilots created and sang these songs. Fish briefly addresses their purpose in military life and the uniqueness of fighter pilot songs compared to the rest of military occupational songs. Between Tusso's collection of songs and Fish's understanding of their role as "a strategy for survival" exists the work of C.H. Ward-Jackson and Les Cleveland. Ward-Jackson's categorization of songs by authorship and performance style provides an understanding of the limitations inherent in certain song styles. Cleveland's categorization by song theme provides a nearly complete survey of topics that songs explore.

#### **Authorship and Performance**

Fighter pilot songs served different purposes within squadron life. Pilots sang some communally while musically talented squadron members performed others. Ward-Jackson noted this difference in performance use in his collection of pre-Vietnam songs. Ward-Jackson divided songs of the pre-Vietnam era into four broad categories of use:

squadron songs, concert party songs, training songs, and camp songs.<sup>1</sup> His final two categories of songs—training and camp songs—are categorizations based on the job of the authors. Training songs come from aircraft schools while camp songs, according to Ward-Jackson, were those of aircraft mechanics and enlisted non-flying men in the squadron.<sup>2</sup> These are less useful for categorization of songs than the distinction between squadron songs and concert party songs. These two categories help identify those fighter pilot songs of a traditional folk origin versus those with attributable authorship. They also delineate how the fighter pilots sang and performed songs and indicate some limitations of squadron songs when addressing more serious topics.

### **Squadron Songs**

Squadron songs usually have a traditional folk origin. Squadrons sang them communally at gatherings and parties. Ward-Jackson's categorization of a song as a squadron song referred generally to its lack of authorship and theme. Squadron songs were those composed communally, resulting in a lack of authorship. Ward-Jackson noted that most of these songs were parodies of popular songs but that they "may more aptly be described as a folk-song-in-the-making since there is rarely any conscious attempt to burlesque the original."<sup>3</sup> Units adapted squadron songs for their own use, changing names, unit numbers, and mascot as required. These songs usually cast the unit in a positive light and focused on building *esprit de corps*. The view of unit operations in squadron songs covered a range from great deeds and outmatched bravado, to cynicism and trepidation. A prime example of what Ward-Jackson would call a squadron song from the Vietnam War are the updated versions of "Fighter Pilot's Hymn."

"Fighter Pilot's Hymn" is of true folk origin. It dates to at least WWII, based loosely on a song with the chorus "throw a nickel in the drum, save another drunken bum."<sup>4</sup> "Fighter Pilot's Hymn" is probably one of the most well-known fighter pilot

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Ward-Jackson, *Airman's Song Book* (London: William Blackwood & Sons Limited, 1967), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, vol. 1 (San Mateo, CA: The Redwood Press, 1981), F-7.

songs. Its lyrics usually address the fear and danger of combat missions and its catchy chorus—which references a superstitious fighter pilot folk tradition—allows for easy communal signing in the bar. The second-to-last verse of an updated Vietnam version titled “Cruising Over Hanoi” captured the general theme of the song and how combat pilots updated it to suit their war.

As I descended in my chute,  
My thoughts were rather grim.  
Rather than be a prisoner  
I’d fight them to the end.

I hit the ground and staggered up,  
And looked around to see,  
And there in blazing neon,  
Hanoi Hilton welcomed me

(CHORUS)

Hallelujah, Hallelujah  
Throw a nickel in the grass  
Save a fighter pilot’s ass.  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah  
Throw a nickel in the grass  
And you’ll be saved.<sup>5</sup>

A squadron song that demonstrated the application of a contemporary parody is “Phantoms in the Sky,” sang to the tune of “The Ballad of the Green Berets.” SSgt Barry Sadler’s “The Ballad of the Green Berets” was the number one hit in the United States for five weeks in 1966 and the subject of frequent parody in military circles. Some units took its positive message and disparaged it, as exemplified by this verse written about fearful instead of brave paratroopers.

Frightened soldiers from the sky  
Screaming “Hell I don’t wanna die,  
You can have my job and pay,  
I’m a chicken any old way!”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., F-10.

<sup>6</sup> Les Cleveland, “Songs of the Vietnam War: An Occupational Folk Tradition,” *New Directions in Folklore* 7 (2015), 3.



Others used the tune of Sadler's song and adopted its positive message to create squadron songs of their own. "Phantoms in the Sky" is just one of many such examples.

Phantoms in the sky,  
Charlie Cong prepared to die.  
Rolling in with snake and nape,  
God creates, but we cremate.

North of Khe Sanh we did go,  
Then the FAC said from below.  
"Hit my smoke and you will find,  
The NVA are in a bind."

We rolled in at 1000 feet,  
We saw them bastards beating feet;  
But they couldn't run quite half as fast,  
As my pipper was on their ass.<sup>7</sup>

### Concert Party Songs

Pilots authored concert party songs—the wittiest type of song according to Ward-Jackson—in the opposite fashion from squadron songs. Ward-Jackson believed his label of concert party songs described itself: "songs written by airmen, about airmen to sing to airmen on the station stage in home-made theatricals."<sup>8</sup> Ward-Jackson, a WWII Royal Air Force veteran, wrote predominantly about the song culture he observed during his service. Self-entertainment of this style was frequent in WWII, and officially encouraged as a morale building device. The US Army distributed "Hit Kits" containing music and sanctioned jokes about service life to the troops in the field for their own performance.<sup>9</sup> The parties at the officer's clubs in Thailand and South Vietnam probably held no such sanction—at least above the Wing Commander level—but they still generated a vibrant performance culture.

Joseph Tusso captured this culture vividly in his book, comparing it to that of the Anglo-Saxon warriors in *Beowulf*. Pilots in Southeast Asia hoped for the immortality

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<sup>7</sup> C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, vol. 2 (Burlingame, CA: The Redwood Press, 1986), PP-1.

<sup>8</sup> Ward-Jackson, *Airman's Song Book*, xv.

<sup>9</sup> Les Cleveland, "Singing Warriors: Popular Songs in Wartime," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 3 (1994): 168.

promised by completing one hundred missions, while they fought off the demon of the “golden BB” which seemed to kill without regard to the skill or bravery of its victims.<sup>10</sup> Every month at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base there would be a party. Flyers would wear highly ornamented decorative flying suits to a feast served by Thai women. At these events squadrons would bid farewell to those returning home, welcome new arrivals, mourn lost comrades, and generally let off steam. Songs were central to this experience as Tusso recalled, “during the meal, a solitary singer or a group of singers would provide entertainment. On some occasions song sheets were provided, and we would all sing.”<sup>11</sup> This tradition continues today in fighter squadrons, although with less performed singing, favoring instead the communal singing of squadron songs.

Almost every squadron in the Vietnam War had its minstrel.<sup>12</sup> During Tusso’s tour in the 435<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) it was Jeff Wilkins. Wilkins was from the southern United States and fluent in southern folksongs when he arrived in Thailand. Over the course of his tour, his song writing reflected the war’s domination of his daily life and thoughts. Tusso noted that Wilkins started with a mood or theme and compose orally as he plucked away at his guitar. While Tusso mentioned the title to a few of Wilkins’ songs, he did not include them in his collection, nor are they found in Getz’s collected works, or Jack Horntip’s collection on-line. Like many folksongs before them, they are likely lost to history. Concert party songs were less frequently recorded in unit songbooks because of the solo nature of their performance. There was no need to document their words on song sheets for communal singing. Fortunately, this is not the case for all fighter pilot composers of the Vietnam War.

The most prolific composer and performer of Vietnam is Dick Jonas. Jonas was an F-4 back-seater in the 433<sup>rd</sup> TFS— “Satan’s Angels”—at Ubon, Thailand during the same time Wilkins and Tusso were in the 435<sup>th</sup>. Jonas, also from the southern United States and an accomplished folksinger and songwriter before the war, applied his craft to the experiences around him. One of his songs highlights the crossover thematically

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph F. Tusso, *Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

between Ward-Jackson's squadron and concert songs. While the authorship and performance may be radically different, they quite frequently hit on the same themes. Dick Jonas' "Son of Satan's Angels" is a performed song with an original tune which hit on the themes Ward-Jackson assigns to squadron songs—that of building *esprit de corps*.

I'm a son of Satan's Angels, and I fly the F-4D.  
All the way from the Hanoi Railroad Bridge, to the DMZ.  
I'm one of the old Hoot Gibson's boys, and mean as I can be.  
I'm a son of Satan's Angels, and I fly the F-4D.

Hello, Hanoi Hanna, send your MiGs to meet their doom.  
Light 'em up and blast 'em off, Hoot's boys will be there soon.  
I don't care if you are the gal with a mouth full of silver spoon,  
Cause I got Sidewinders on board onboard that'll home on an AB plume.<sup>13</sup>

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Ward-Jackson's categories of squadron vs. concert party songs divide fighter pilot folksongs by authorship and performance style. The former has traditional folk origins resulting from the adaptation of songs from previous conflicts or contemporary parodies of modern songs composed and sang communally by the group. Concert party songs, on the other hand, usually have an attributable authorship. They frequently used an original tune. Songwriters performed them for their comrades. This division does not address the theme or viewpoint of the songs. As shown by Jonas' "Son of Satan's Angels," a concert party song can instill unit pride just as much as a squadron song such as "Phantoms in the Sky." The division between squadron and concert party songs is important to keep in mind when evaluating the message and meaning of songs. Concert party songs allow for more complex lyrics and storytelling, while squadron songs must enable participation of a frequently unskilled chorus. Concert party songs allow for more nuanced expressions of emotion that squadron songs must mask under the warrior ethos or dilute with gallows humor for the benefit of communal singing.

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<sup>13</sup> Dick Jonas, *RBAAB: The Red-Blooded All-American Boy* (Chino Valley, AZ: Erosonic, 1997), chap. 1, 12-13.

## Fighter Pilot Folksong Viewpoints

Whether squadron or concert party song, the fighter pilot folksongs of the Vietnam War addressed the entire range of experiences and feelings associated with a combat tour in Southeast Asia. On the nature of combat, they ranged from the bravado of near invincibility to the sadness of lost comrades and fear of the unknown. They relished killing and lamented the death of innocents. They longed for home, wives, and children; and they celebrated audacious parties and the company of local exotic women. Les Cleveland categorized military songs by the viewpoint they adopted. In his mind, songwriters adopted the viewpoint of specific warrior archetypes. Cleveland's categorization of songs by warrior archetype provides a useful framework to examine fighter pilot songs of Vietnam; however, his categorization is not perfect nor complete. Cleveland focused on songs' ability and use to help integrate civilians into military service. This focus biased his categorization and development of warrior archetypes.

Cleveland examined the role of song in assimilating large numbers of draftees into military culture, and concluded that military songs expressed the views of several warrior archetypes as they struggled with this transition. Scholars have examined the process of bringing civilians into the military and making soldiers from many perspectives. One of the most well-known is Lt Col Dave Grossman, who approached the process from a psychological perspective in *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*.<sup>14</sup> Closer to Cleveland's methodology is Paul Fussell who explored many of the same themes tangentially in his examination of *The Great War and Modern Memory*.<sup>15</sup> While Grossman presented the science behind the process of indoctrinating civilians into the military and preparing them to kill, Fussell and Cleveland observed this process through cultural artifacts. In Fussell's case these artifacts are largely literary in the form of poems, and in Cleveland's they are musical.

Cleveland proposed five traditional archetypes and included a sixth specifically designed for Vietnam. Cleveland's archetypes were: the Happy Warrior, the Reluctant

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<sup>14</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Warrior, the Mortal Warrior, the Bawdy Warrior, the Hungry Warrior, and finally the Vietnam Warrior. Cleveland focused on the role these archetypes play in the indoctrination of civilians into military life. Because of this focus, a few adjustments to Cleveland's archetypes are useful when relating them to fighter pilots in Vietnam and focusing on their experiences in combat vs. their transition into military service. Still, examining Cleveland's archetypes and issues with them serve as an orientation to the themes and messages available in Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. The following sections explore Cleveland's archetypes and propose adjustments to clarify categories.

### **The Happy Warrior – Proud and Dutiful**

Cleveland's happy warrior sings songs which celebrate the ideal image of the warrior. They include a diverse set of perspectives about what an ideal warrior should be. First, and decidedly not folk, are officially sanctioned propaganda songs or marches designed to recruit soldiers and build national pride. Cleveland argued that the peak of this practice was the German Army in WWII which expected its soldiers to know a wide variety of officially sanctioned songs and marches.<sup>16</sup> This official perspective codified the ideal warrior ethos in song. It has its parallels in folksong as well, usually in the form of ballads about great leaders, specific units, or aircraft instead of the broad-based nationalism of official songs; but these folk-ballads are not always happy.

Cleveland's archetype of the happy warrior had two faces—one of them not necessarily happy—and for this reason it is better to think of his happy warriors as *proud warriors*. The first face of Cleveland's happy warrior had an awareness of their own vulnerability in life; and the second, had an association with and a reflection of the romantic stereotypes of recruiting posters.<sup>17</sup> These two faces exist in the happy—or rather proud—warrior songs of fighter pilots in Vietnam. Many songs dealt with the risk and threats faced by combat pilots as they flew up north to strike targets but do so with an upbeat tune and acceptance of the mission without the frustration or complaints that

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<sup>16</sup> Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 56.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

would associate the song with other archetypes. Prime examples of this upbeat acceptance of risk are “Teak Lead” or “Thanh Hoa Bridge.”

Teak was the flying callsign used by F-105s at Takhli.<sup>18</sup> The leader of Teak flight was shot down and over again across consecutive days spawning a parody of “The Red River Valley.”<sup>19</sup> The song “Teak Lead” documented the danger of ending up in the Hanoi Hilton if your wingmen did not heed the instructions of the flight briefing. The singer progressed from flying as the wingman in Teak Flight to being scheduled as Teak Lead for the next day’s mission due to the previous losses of Teak Flight leads.

So I listened as he briefed on the mission,  
Tonight at the bar TEAK Flight will sing.  
But we’re going to the Red River Valley,  
And today you are flying my wing.

Now if things turn to shit in the valley,  
And the brief that I gave you don’t heed,  
They’ll be waiting at the Hanoi Hilton,  
And it’s fish heads and rice for TEAK lead.

So come and sit by my side at the briefing,  
We will sit there and tickle the beads,  
For we’re going to the Red River Valley,  
And my call sign today is TEAK lead!<sup>20</sup>

Despite the death of comrades and the superstitious risk of flying as Teak Lead, there was little reluctance to do so in the song “Teak Lead.” The song remained upbeat. This acceptance of death is an ever-present theme of happy warrior songs. Jonas captured this theme in his song “Thanh Hoa Bridge.”

The North Vietnamese completed the Thanh Hoa Bridge in 1964. Ninety-five miles south of Hanoi, it carried the only railroad across the Son Ma River along with a principal highway. Its construction was particularly resilient to bombing with only two spans supported by one central concrete pillar. The United States flew hundreds of

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<sup>18</sup> “POW/MIA/KIA - Linebackers I & II,” accessed February 2, 2018, <http://www.geocities.ws/seavet72/PW/i-pow.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> John Piowaty, ed., “Songs of SEA with Stag Bar Supplement,” 1969, 7, Jack Horntip Collection, [http://www.horntip.com/html/songs\\_sorted\\_by\\_informant/military\\_songs/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/html/songs_sorted_by_informant/military_songs/index.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, R-3.



missions against this bridge with significant losses and achieved no lasting effect. That changed with the introduction of laser-guided bombs. On 27 April 1972, aircraft carrying 2,000-pound laser and TV guided bombs closed the bridge to traffic briefly but did not drop any of its spans. Jonas documented the next strike on the Thanh Hoa Bridge in song. On 13 May 1972, the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW)—the “Wolf Pack”—dropped one of the bridge spans with two and three-thousand-pound laser guided bombs, closing it to rail traffic for the rest of the year.<sup>21</sup> Jonas told the story of “the day the Thanh Hoa Bridge saw the light.” Notably for the happy warrior archetype this song celebrated victory in the face of great losses—“a lot of parachutes laying out on Thanh Hoa Ridge.”

On the day the Thanh Hoa Bridge saw the light,  
The guys from the Wolf Pack went up north to fight.  
We did our thing like we oughter;  
We dropped that bridge in the water,  
On the day Thanh Hoa Bridge saw the light.

There’s a lot of good planes in the mud under Thanh Hoa Bridge,  
And a lot of parachutes laying out on Thanh Hoa Ridge,  
And the guys that took ‘em north can’t go nowhere,  
All because of the guns on the ground around Thanh Hoa Bridge.<sup>22</sup>

The second face of Cleveland’s happy warrior channeled the romantic, recruiting poster imagery of the warrior. Cleveland believed that another Jonas song typified this view point. Jonas wrote the “Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats” on his way to the first stateside reunion in 1973 after the war.<sup>23</sup> Even though the resounding imagery is that of the romanticized brave warrior, the hymn cannot get away from the harsh realities of combat. The two verses below display this conflict. The first tells what the Red River Rats expected from members of their warrior caste as they flew missions north across the Red River and into Hanoi, while the second acknowledges the fate of lost friends.

Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.  
Hold your head high, stand tall, you are men.  
Never run from a fight, be prepared day and night,

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<sup>21</sup> Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The United States Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966-1973* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 234–35.

<sup>22</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, T-5.

<sup>23</sup> Jonas, *RBAAB: The Red-Blooded All-American Boy*, chap. 2, 4.

Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.

Look around, there're a few empty chairs,  
Honored comrades should be sitting there.  
Some are dead where they fell, some fight on from a cell.  
Charge your glass, raise it high, drink to them.<sup>24</sup>

It is difficult to read all the references to death and loss in these songs and think of them as those of happy warriors. Cleveland's happy warrior archetype is better thought of as the *proud warrior* who understood the risks of his profession and accepted them with a full measure of devotion to duty in the best traditions of the warrior caste. This enthusiastic acceptance of risk and death is different than the treatment of death by Cleveland's reluctant or mortal warriors.

### **The Reluctant Warrior – Frustration and Fear Death**

Cleveland's reluctant warrior archetype contains two sub-archetypes, and both are the embodiment of the need to relieve stress. Ward-Jackson saw stress relief as the true purpose of military folksongs. Rather than for pure amusement and entertainment, pilots designed songs "fundamentally, to 'let off steam.'"<sup>25</sup> Cleveland's reluctant warriors are in this tradition. He argued that a soldier of a Western democracy can accept the lack of control he has over his life in combat so long as he can "grumble, protest and joke about his fate, to ridicule his leaders and to assert his personal autonomy and dignity."<sup>26</sup> There are two distinct types of reluctant warriors. The first are *frustrated warriors* who complain about leadership or poor administration of the war. The second are truly reluctant and cope with the fear of combat missions through humor. The truly *reluctant warriors* sang songs in the tradition of "I Don't Want to Join the Army;" their songs allowed them to admit they were afraid and make light of the situation.

There was no shortage of frustrated warriors in Vietnam. Many Vietnam fighter pilot songs complained about leadership from 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Saigon to Washington, DC—be it the halls of the Pentagon or the Oval Office. Toby Hughes' "Tchepone" takes

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<sup>24</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, B-5.

<sup>25</sup> Ward-Jackson, *Airman's Song Book*, xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, 59.



aim at nameless colonels and staffers at 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force. In the song a colonel sent a pilot out to bomb the town of Tchepone—a major intersection on the Ho Chi Minh Trail—claiming that it’s a “real easy” target, “No sweat my boy, it’s an old time Milk Run; A small peaceful hamlet that’s known as Tchepone.” It turns out Tchepone is one of the most heavily defended sites on the trail and the mission is not a milk run.

I make it back home with six holes in my bird.  
With the Colonel who sent me I’d sure like a word.  
But he’s nowhere around, though I look near and far.  
He’s gone back to Seventh to help run the war.<sup>27</sup>

Besides 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force the most frequent leader targeted in pilot songs was Secretary of Defense McNamara. “Republic’s Ultra Hog” toasted Secretary of Defense McNamara in its second to last verse:

Here’s to McNamara, his name will always smell.  
He’ll always be remembered down in Fighter Pilot’s hell.  
He frags all the targets and sends us out to die,  
He sends us into combat in Republic’s 105.<sup>28</sup>

The squadron song “Our Leaders” is the most complete set of complaints against leadership in Vietnam and even shows a bit of sympathy for McNamara. It complained about bomber tactics thrust on fighter pilots by nameless colonels at 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The theme continued with the next echelon of command micromanaging in succession, from the “bomber tactics” mandated by 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, to targeting from the Joint Chiefs, who yielded to the judgement of McNamara. The final verse ended with tactical decisions finally landing on the desk of the Commander-in-Chief:

Now Mac’s job is in danger,  
For he’s on salary, too;  
To have the final say-so,  
Is something he can’t do;  
Before we fly a mission,  
And everything’s O.K.,  
Mac had to get permission from  
Flight Leader L.B.J.!!<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, T-1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, R-3.

<sup>29</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, OO-16.

Frustrated warriors also made jokes about the futility of their efforts. One of the most humorous songs joking about the missions assigned is Hughes' "Tree Buster." In "Tree Buster," Hughes complained about the lack of good targets and how all he accomplished in the war was bombing trees. For good measure, when he was finally tasked with "targets worth the time" the Wing Commander and the rest of the Wing Staff bumped him off the schedule to save him for the job he does the best—"tree busting."

A suspected VC Depot, a Command Post or a Trail  
An LZ Prep the names are just a tease,  
Just once I'd like to hear the FAC described like it is  
And say he's got suspected VC trees

Tree buster, oh tree buster!  
They give them fancy names  
Trying to make you think you're doing good  
But sure as hell you know that there ain't nothing there but trees  
And the only thing you're doing's chopping wood.<sup>30</sup>

"Tree Buster" joked about the frustration of unrewarding combat missions, but despite how well led or rewarding the mission was, there was still significant danger. Dealing with this danger with humor is what separated the merely frustrated warrior from the truly reluctant warrior. Truly reluctant warriors acknowledged their fear in song and made light of the risks with a bit of humor. Three songs which dealt with the dangers of combat and reluctance to fly the mission in a humorous way were: "Don't Send Me to Hanoi," "Downtown" by Jonas, and one of my favorites, "Singha Hero."

"Don't Send Me to Hanoi," to the tune of the New Vaudeville Band's "Winchester Cathedral," is a pilot pleading with the schedulers, hoping they do not send him to bomb Hanoi. Ed Rasimus recounted this mindset in his memoir *When Thunder Rolled* many times.<sup>31</sup> His squadron posted the schedule for the next day's missions on the door of the officer's club. Missions to Route Pack VI—Hanoi—loomed large in Rasimus' mind. The threat there was high with surface to air missiles (SAM) and MiGs;

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<sup>30</sup> Toby Hughes, *Vietnam Remembered Fast and Low*, CD-ROM (Erosonic, LLC, 2005), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ed Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled: An F-105 Pilot over North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003).

and the chance of rescue if you ejected was low. Missions to Route Pack VI were the most difficult way to get counters to the one hundred mission credit and the immortality of going home. The pilot in “Don’t Send Me to Hanoi” is hoping for an easier mission. After naming all the dangerous places he does not want to fly, he pleads:

Just send me on milk runs,  
Where there are no big guns.  
I just want to fly where,  
It’s easy on my bear.<sup>32</sup>

Dick Jonas’ “Downtown,” which followed the tune of Petula Clark’s song of the same title, is probably the inner monologue of the pilot from “Don’t Send Me to Hanoi” after his pleas failed and found himself scheduled for Route Pack VI and began his mission planning.

Planning the route you keep hoping that you  
Won’t have to go today – downtown  
Checking the weather and it’s scattered to broken  
So you still don’t know – downtown  
Waiting on the guys in TOC to say you’re cancelled  
Hoping that the word they give will be what suits your fancy,  
Don’t make me go, I’d much rather RTB  
And so you sit and you wait, thinking,  
“Oh, fuck, shit, hate!”<sup>33</sup>

“Singha Hero” followed the tradition of “I Don’t Want to Join the Army,” it provides what the singer believes is a useful and acceptable alternative to flying combat missions. It not only acknowledges the dangers of combat but carries these risks to their conclusion: the grief and loss experienced by a loved one. The singer would rather sit at a bar than fight MiGs, dodge SAMs, bomb targets, or earn medals:

Lord I don’t want to be no hero,  
My mom don’t want no golden star.  
I just wanna, tall cold Singha,  
In the bar lord, in the bar.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, DE-4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, DE-6.

<sup>34</sup> As sung by Chip Dockery on Dick Jonas et al., *Come and Join the Air Force*, CD-ROM (Erosonic, LLC, 2005), 15.

Reluctant warrior songs approached the stress of combat with humor allowing the acknowledgment of fear without shame.<sup>35</sup> Frustrated warrior songs, which frequently complain about leadership, are a form of accepted disrespect. Together the frustrated and reluctant warrior songs enabled pilots to blow off steam and release stress from combat and pent up anger and frustration about their situation.

### **The Mortal Warrior – Contemplating Death and Mourning the Death of Friends**

Mortal warriors, according to Cleveland, sang about “death and suffering, and grim jokes about the lethal nature of the battlefield.” They are a means of confronting the terror of combat.<sup>36</sup> There are two deaths that are important to Cleveland’s mortal warriors: the possibility of their own death and the death of their friends. The *reluctant warrior* who was blowing off steam about the dangers he faces is difficult to distinguish from Cleveland’s *mortal warriors* who sang about their own death. The difference is only whether the warrior is protesting and joking about his fate vs. making “grim jokes about the lethal nature of the battlefield.”<sup>37</sup>

The unclear distinction between reluctant and mortal warriors requires more precise labels. I separate Cleveland’s reluctant warrior archetype into *frustrated warriors* who complain about their leaders or the running of the war and *reluctant warriors* who use gallows humor to confront the fear of their own death. The label of *mortal warrior* will be set aside for any song which confronted the possibility of the singer’s own death directly without the accompanying gallows humor of the reluctant warrior. Those songs which deal with the death of friends and comrades are a sub-archetype of Cleveland’s mortal warriors, what I will refer to as the *mournful warriors*. Table 1 summarizes these definitions of frustrated, reluctant, mortal, and mournful warriors.

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<sup>35</sup> Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, 62–63.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 1: Frustrated, Reluctant, Mortal, Mournful Warrior Archetype Summary**

- Frustrated warriors – complain about leadership and mismanagement of the war
- Reluctant warriors – confess their fear of flying combat missions with humor
- Mortal warriors – contemplate their demise and the risk of combat without the humor present in reluctant warrior songs
- Mournful warriors – sing about the loss of friends either generally or specifically

*Source: Author's Original Work*

There are few examples of truly mortal warrior songs which sing about their own death in a grim manner. The expression of fear without the accompanying gallows humor of the reluctant warrior was probably not productive in a medium designed for public consumption. Tuso highlighted the private nature of many songs that were “composed and sung in the confines of a lonely room in the early morning hours after a mission—such songs were not meant for the public, and except for rare instances will probably never be seen or sung again.”<sup>38</sup> No doubt, mortal warriors contemplated their own death, they wrote farewell letters home and gave them to friends for safe keeping, but they rarely expressed these fears publicly in song.

One of the few documented examples of a truly mortal warrior singing about the possibility of his own death without the humor of the reluctant warrior is Jonas’ “Will There Be a Tomorrow.” His introduction to the song framed perfectly the state of mind of the mortal warrior. “Sometimes when he is alone with his heart of hearts he’ll shed a tear and say a prayer for his comrades of yesterday; and he knows his own chances of becoming part of yesterday are uncomfortably good. So, his philosophy becomes, ‘Say it now, if it’s worth saying, if it must be done, do it now; for there may be no tomorrow’”<sup>39</sup> Jonas’ understanding that these thoughts often come “alone with your heart of hearts” echoed Tuso’s sentiment that many mortal warrior songs were rarely sung publicly. Fortunately, Jonas provided a small window into a combat pilot contemplating his own mortality in an emotionally honest manner.

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<sup>38</sup> Major Joseph F. Tuso, “Folksongs of the American Fighter Pilot in Southeast Asia, 1967-68,” *Folklore Forum*, 1971, 1,

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/2642/FF%20BSS%207.pdf?sequence=1>.

<sup>39</sup> Jonas, *RBAAB: The Red-Blooded All-American Boy*, chap. 1, 28.

There's someone who I'm sure loves me only.  
She's the one on my mind when I'm lonely.  
Does she know, can she see, is she still true to me;  
Does she know what it's like to be lonely?

From the sea comes the sun, dawn is breaking.  
Soon the fight for my life I'll be making  
If I die over here, will they know; will they care;  
Will there be joy or hearts that are breaking?<sup>40</sup>

Mournful warriors sing about the second type of death—the loss of their comrades. Songs about lost comrades occurred in both squadron and concert party formats. Squadron laments are usually general and not specific to an actual incident. Examples include “The Dying Aviator,” “Along the Northeast Railroad,” or “The Bronco Song.” When the discussion of death is non-specific it occasionally retains a sliver of humor, but significantly less than those of reluctant warrior songs. “Along the Northeast Railroad” displays a bit of this humor.

“Along the Northeast Railroad” is like “The Dying Aviator” in that it recounts the final words of a dying comrade. Unlike the pilot in “The Dying Aviator,” the pilot in “Along the Northeast Railroad” is not concerned about reassembling the airplane he crashed, but rather rejoicing in his own passage onto better pastures with whiskey, poker, singing, and women.

I'm going to a better land  
Where everything is right  
Where whiskey flows  
From telegraph poles  
Play poker every night

There's not a fucking thing to do  
But sit around and sing  
And chase the pretty poo-ying  
Oh death where is thy sting?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, W-12.

<sup>41</sup> Tommy T., “Sneedo”, and “G”., *A Night at the Bar with the Boys*, .mp3 (St. Thomas Church, Glenhoola, Scotland: Garage Music Ltd., 1989), 22, [http://www.horntip.com/mp3/1980s/1989--2002\\_a\\_night\\_at\\_the\\_bar\\_with\\_the\\_boys\\_\(CD\)/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/mp3/1980s/1989--2002_a_night_at_the_bar_with_the_boys_(CD)/index.htm).

“The Bronco Song,” also known as “Dear Mom,” documents the death of a forward air controller (FAC) as reported to his mother by a Western Union telegraph man:

Dear mom, your son is dead.  
He bought the farm today.  
crashed his OV-10 on Ho Chi Minh’s Highway  
It was a rocket pass and he busted his ass.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm<sup>42</sup>

While these songs addressed the death of non-specific comrades with a bit of humor and communal singing, Jonas wrote songs which embrace the full anguish of losing friends. Jonas wrote “Blue Four” while flying F-4s at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base. Blue four is traditionally the youngest and most inexperienced member of the flight, flying in the number four position. The number four position, in the back of the flight, is the most exposed. As Jonas said, Blue Four’s “position [is] the most precarious, his life expectancy shortest.”<sup>43</sup> “Blue Four” is a lament for a wingman who did not make it back to base.

There’s a fireball down there on the hillside,  
And think maybe we’ve lost a friend,  
But we’ll keep on flying  
And we’ll keep on dying,  
For duty and honor never end.

There’s an upended glass on the table,  
Down in front of a lone empty chair,  
Yesterday, we were with him,  
Today, God be with him,  
Wherever he is in your care.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the emotion, “Blue Four” remains abstract. It is about all lost wingmen. Jonas’ “Ballad of Jeb Stuart” recounts a specific death. J.J. Winters was Jeb Stuart’s flight lead and told Jonas the story while they were in Fighter Weapons School together in 1972. Jeb ejected near Mu Gia pass and was stuck hanging in his parachute waiting for

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<sup>42</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, B-21.

<sup>43</sup> Jonas, *RBAAB: The Red-Blooded All-American Boy*, chap. 2, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



rescue. Ground fire delayed the rescue effort and Jeb Stuart died before the Para-rescue Jumpers (PJ) could reach him.

First the PJs tried to reach him, but it took too long,  
And I was bingo minus seven, time to head for home.  
All the way to Wolf Pack Country not a word was said,  
'Cause when the PJs finally reached him,  
Young Jeb Stuart was dead.

We rolled out and taxied in, and climbed out in the rain.  
Hoot and Bill and all the boys, they met us at the plane.  
I told Hoot Jeb didn't make it, they got him at the pass,  
And I came home because my bird was running out of gas.

Listen boys, and hear me good, I want you all to know,  
That ol' Jeb died a hero's death, the way we all would go.<sup>45</sup>

A few archetypes converge in the final verse of "Jeb Stuart." Not only is the scene reminiscent of that in "Blue Four," with aircrew returning without their wingmen, but it also speaks to the virtuous warrior themes. The concept that Jeb died bravely hanging in his parachute expressed the values upheld by the combat pilots in Vietnam. What the selection above excluded is Jeb Stuart's participation in his own rescue attempt, never giving up, and attempting to—as is said in today's Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) communities—effect his own rescue. Jeb, with his legs broken, and hanging in his parachute, helped Sandy destroy the anti-aircraft guns in the valley so that Jolly could try to rescue him. Sandy was the callsign used by A-1E Skyraiders when they flew rescue missions. Their job was to locate the downed aircrew and protect them until the rescue helicopters flying with the callsign Jolly could come in of the pickup.

Sandy flew right down the valley looking for the sites,  
He pulled off with battle damage and turned around to fight.  
Jeb called up and told him, "Sandy, bring it down again.  
The guns are down behind the Karst; now lay your napalm in."

Jeb worked Sandy like a FAC, "Hit 20 meters right,  
Watch the small arms on the left," then all the guns went quiet.  
Jeb was talking low and weaker, time was running out.  
The guns were down and Jolly's here, but I began to doubt.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, B-2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, B-2.



Three warrior archetypes confront death in song. *Reluctant warriors* confront their own death humorously. *Mortal warriors* contemplate their own demise without such gallows humor. *Mournful warriors* sing about the death of their comrades. At times mournful warrior songs are general and have a slight tinge of humor, while at other times they are laments full of grief and sorrow. What these categories make clear is the presence and possibility of death was a constant reality for pilots in Vietnam.

### **Bawdy and Hungry Warriors – Parties and Complaints**

Cleveland's bawdy and hungry warriors sing songs which focus on pilots' leisure time and living conditions. There are few of what Cleveland would label hungry warrior songs written by fighter pilots, but there are many bawdy songs. Bawdy songs are usually related to excessive drinking bouts or sexual encounters. Most of these songs, as previously discussed, are not original to the fighter pilot community and therefore do not qualify as occupational folksongs of fighter pilots. However, life in Southeast Asia with the ability to take leave from combat bases to places like Bangkok and Saigon spawned some bawdy Vietnam folksongs. Most, such as "Saigon Girls," talked about encounters with local women of ill repute. These relationships were usually complicated by the woman's father being Viet Cong or by her pimp robbing the pilot in his sleep. Most of these songs warn against encounters with such women, such as the song "Saigon Girls."

When I awoke next morning I had an achin' head  
My pocket book was empty, and my lady friend had fled  
Now lookin' this little room I couldn't see a thing,  
But a poster saying Yankee go home and a picture of Ho Chi Minh.  
Where is Chu Yen? My fair Chu Yen.  
She can do a lotta things but she can't dance the polka.

Now I've come to this conclusion all pilots need a rest,  
But if you go to Saigon your morals it will test.  
The morale of this story is don't be a sinner.  
Stop going down to Saigon try Red Cross Rec Center.  
Farewell Chu Yen, good bye [inaudible]  
I'm trading in my achin' head I'll try a Red Cross dolly.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bull Durham, *Songs of SAC & Songs of SEA*, CD-ROM (Air Force Sergeant's Association, n.d.), Disc 2, Track 8.

Hungry warriors according to Cleveland are basically grumbling. Cleveland focused in on complaints about food. Complaints about food rarely existed for the fighter pilots of Vietnam. At well-established combat bases they had access to officer's clubs and, as Tuso pointed out, fests at monthly parties with Thai waitresses. But, since complaining is a favorite pastime of military pilots, they occasionally found things to gripe and grumble about. Irv LeVine's song "Korat Grunts" complains about the large number of support troops who crowded the base.

They beat you to the dining hall, they beat you to the bar.  
You have to stand in line at the latrine.  
I don't know if they plan it all or leave it all to chance,  
But it makes the pilots think its mighty mean.

You see them at the swimming pool and at coffee all day long,  
And a lot of other things that I forgot,  
I think the devil hired 'em and sent 'em everyone,  
To really make it Hell in old Korat.<sup>48</sup>

The humorous complaints in "Korat Grunts" shows just how comfortable life at a Royal Thai Air Base could be. At Korat there was a dining hall, a bar, and a pool—ideal conditions from which to fight a war. There is a significant disparity between Cleveland's conception of hungry warriors complaining about lack of food and harsh conditions and the complaints about life at Korat. Being far from home is never easy, and there is always something to complain about in the military, but there are many Vietnam veterans who would be envious of the ability to stand in line for a latrine much less have a pool. Pilots largely recognized their good fortune and there are few hungry warrior songs by Vietnam fighter pilots.

### **The Vietnam Warrior – Wrestling with the Morality of Killing**

Cleveland reserved a special archetype for the Vietnam warrior, but the conflict he saw in the Vietnam warrior exists in other wars as well. Cleveland saw that "Vietnam warriors were faced with intolerable conflicts. On the one hand, the official ideology of

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<sup>48</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, GG-8.

the military command exhorted them to heroic behavior and dedication to the mission. On the other hand, the confused strategic objectives of the war seemed unattainable, while field operations all too often resulted in devastation and suffering to the civilian population and precipitated a moral crisis about the righteousness of what was being done.”<sup>49</sup> The conflict between the warrior ethos embraced by the proud warrior and the reality of war’s brutality to both soldiers and civilians exists independently of confused and seemingly unattainable strategic objectives.

The American bomber pilots of WWII faced the same conflict between warrior virtues and the brutality of war despite broad support from the American public which saw the war as good and just. One of their songs, “Drunken Pilot,” made light of putting drunken pilots in the nose of B-17s so they can bomb the blind and pregnant in their homes and churches.<sup>50</sup> Songs which address the conflict between warrior virtues and brutality of war are not unique to a Vietnam warrior archetype. They are songs of a *moral warrior* archetype who wrestles with the morality of killing.

Moral warrior songs addressed the death of non-combatants through morbid humor. The message of these songs is not itself moral and in fact often encouraged excessive and indiscriminate violence. The need to rationalize and seek approval of this type of killing springs from moral concerns within the warrior. The WWII bomber pilots who sang “Drunken Pilot,” knowing that they were likely killing civilians, had to make jokes about it. They needed to feel like the group accepted and approved of their actions.<sup>51</sup> The limited character of the war against North Vietnam and the counter-insurgency within South Vietnam certainly exacerbated this need but it is not unique to Vietnam.

The challenge of waging counter-insurgency by force was best encapsulated by a quote given to journalist Peter Arnett by an Army Major as the Army attempted to recapture the village of Ben Tre. The village was overrun by the Viet Cong and the Army

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<sup>49</sup> Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> Wallrich, *Air Force Airs: Songs and Ballads of the United States Air Force*, 44–45.

<sup>51</sup> Dave Grossman and Loren W. Christensen, *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace* (Warrior Science Publications, 2004), 312–13.

Major said, “It became necessary to destroy the village to save it.”<sup>52</sup> The song “Strafe the Town and Kill the People,” to the tune of “Wake Up the Town,” captured this type of operation from the perspective of a fighter pilot.

Strafe the town and kill the people;  
Hit them with your poison gas.  
See them throwing up their breakfast  
As you make your second pass

See the fat old pregnant women  
Running thru the field in fear;  
Run your 20 mike mike thru them,  
Hope the film comes out real clear

Strafe the town and kill the people,  
It’s the only thing to do.  
Set your gunsights residential,  
You’ll get more kills if you do.<sup>53</sup>

This type of morbid humor was not isolated to the pilots who flew within South Vietnam. Like the pilots of WWII, even when going North and attacking military targets in the Route Packages, pilots knew they probably killed innocent people.<sup>54</sup> The song “Napalm” captured this reality to the tune of “The Great Ship Titanic.”

It was up by Hanoi, where the Red meets the sea.  
I was out on a recce, to see what I could see,  
When I spied a farmer man with his pitchfork in his hand;  
It was sad when my napalm went down.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Deis, “It Became Necessary to Destroy the Town to Save It.,” accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/02/it-became-necessary-to-destroy-town-to.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, SS-16.

<sup>54</sup> Through the course of interviews with songwriters and veterans many took issue with the description of Vietnamese civilians as “innocent.” They invoked early airpower theories of industrial warfare which highlight the connection between the productivity of a factory worker and a nation’s ability to wage war. Some veterans included farmers as part of a nation’s war machine because their product—in-part—fed the army. In their minds they did not see many innocent people on the other side.

As a military tool, airpower faces some unique questions about the application of *jus in bello* principles such as of proportionality, distinction, and military necessity. Regardless of how warriors fit the death of civilians into a *jus in bello* frame work, Grossman tells us that “there is enormous resistance associated with kill[ing] an individual who is not normally associated with relevance or a payoff.” For this reason I elected to use the term innocents. This is not to pass a moral judgement on the songs or the actions they describe, but rather to highlight the resistance to killing civilians regardless of justification.

(CHORUS)

It was sad, oh, it was sad  
It was sad when my napalm went down  
Hit the farmer  
There were husbands and wives,  
Itty bitty children lost their lives  
It was sad when my napalm went down.

It was up by Dong Hoi, where I won my DFC  
I was out on a recce to see what I could see,  
When spied a church below and I let my rockets go  
It was sad when those rockets went down.<sup>55</sup>

This song about killing innocents speaks to the brutality of war but others embraced the futile nature of the conflict because of the disconnect between battlefield victory and winning the war. Toby Hughes' "One Level Gunner" is the perfect example of soldiers on each side resigning themselves to this reality. The song is about a supposedly inexperienced anti-aircraft gunner off the runway at Danang. He never hit anyone. As the song progressed it turned out that the gunner was the best the Vietnamese had. Out of self-preservation, or possibly the perceived disconnect between tactical victory and strategic victory, he intentionally missed the Phantoms. Both sides were happy with their way of fighting the war. The gunner intentionally shot behind the F-4s and the fighter pilots left him alone.<sup>56</sup> Hughes' "One Level Gunner" has a parallel story from the Misty FACs flying over the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

In the winter of 1967-68 the Misty FACs noticed an anti-aircraft gun site a few miles south of Mu Gia pass which fired liberally at night but hit no one. Misty pilot Jonesy Jones described the elaborate back story constructed by Misty pilots to explain this anomaly. They theorized that the gunner, who they named the "Kid on the Karst," was a young Vietnamese soldier who spent all day carrying 23mm ammunition up the jagged mountainside to shoot at night. When dark came he would fire at the sound of aircraft which explained why he could never hit anyone. The ground fire was so inaccurate that the Mistys often used the Kid on the Karst to show new pilots what 23mm

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<sup>55</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, 1:G-11.

<sup>56</sup> Hughes, *Vietnam Remembered Fast and Low*, 8.

tracer fire looked like.<sup>57</sup> One day the Kid shot too close to one of the Mistys as they flew this orientation and the Misty FAC directed a pair of F-105s to strike the Kid. This caused a significant amount of angst in the squadron. Many were concerned the Vietnamese would send up a better gunner, much like the pilots in Hughes' "One-Level Gunner." Lucky for the Mistys, the Kid was back the next day not pulling enough lead and shooting behind their aircraft at a safe distance—from a lack of skill or self-preservation we will never know.<sup>58</sup>

Hughes' "One Level Gunner" and several songs by Chip Dockery further humanized the men on the other side of the war. Dockery's "King of the Trail," sang to the tune of "King of the Road," would be the North Vietnamese equivalent of a happy warrior song sang by a truck driver on the Ho Chi Ming trail.

Well, I've been driving night owl all over these parts,  
Putting up with arc lights and damn recce carts,  
Thank God for them they've saved my load,  
Without the extra light I'd run off the road.

I keep a little extra rice and with a little bit of luck  
get a girl from the road crew to ride in my truck  
I'm a man of means by no means, king of the trail.<sup>59</sup>

The song's primary intent was probably to address the futility of US efforts to stop the traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail as the King of the Trail used light from US aircraft to navigate. The King of the Trail knew all the bypasses around typical targets and watching the United States waste bombs filled him with joy.

While the primary intent was an ironic commentary on US efforts, Dockery does it by humanizing the enemy. He further humanized the enemy in "Sitting in the Cab of My Truck," to the tune of "Sitting by the Dock of the Bay." "Sitting in the Cab of My Truck" is a reluctant warrior song from the North Vietnamese perspective. The driver left his home thinking he would be a "peoples' hero" and instead he found himself chained to

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<sup>57</sup> Don Sheppard, ed., *Misty: First Person Stories of the F-100 Misty Fast FACs in the Vietnam War* (The Sheppard Group, Inc., 2002), 114.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>59</sup> Brundy et al., *In Country: Folk Songs of Americans in the Vietnam War*, 8.

his truck and forced to drive. He realized war was not a game and found himself too scared to light a cigarette out of fear of revealing his position.

Here I sit havin' a nicotine fit,  
God I'm too scared to get a cigarette lit.  
'Cause that might just blow my only hope,  
Of not showin' up on a starlight scope.

I'm sitting here with britches so tight  
'Cause I think that Spectre's due back tonight  
Bleedin' from my ears and my nose  
From a sky spot that finally came close.<sup>60</sup>

The moral warrior archetype wrestles with the conflict between the virtues of the proud warrior and the reality that war involves the destruction of human life. Traditionally, this conflict revolves around the killing of innocents. The songs of WWII bomber pilots and fighter pilots in Vietnam reflect this theme using humor to process the destruction they are a part of. Hughes and Dockery's songs highlight the ability of songwriters to humanize their enemy. Whether for ironic commentary on US bombing efforts or to explain phenomena like the Kid on the Karst they speak to an acknowledgment that on each side of the war were men fulfilling their duty and that killing was not as glorious as the proud warrior would have you believe. Hughes summarized this feeling nicely in his song "Delta Dawn."

How long must we endure the bonds of hatred?  
How long must we heed the call of Mars?  
How long before all men can live together?  
How long to bind the wounds and heal the scars?  
The soldier prays for peace more than all others,  
For he must bear the deepest wounds of war.  
Lord take our hand and lead us through the midnight,  
To the shining promise of your morning star.<sup>61</sup>

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Cleveland's archetypes provide a framework to survey the themes and message of Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. His archetypes were not a perfect fit to cleanly categorize and understand the various viewpoints. A slight adjustment of his archetypes

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>61</sup> Hughes, *Vietnam Remembered Fast and Low*, 7.



has left us with the following categories and themes of Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. Table 2 summarizes the definitions of each warrior archetype.

**Table 2: Warrior Archetype Definitions**



*Source: Author's Original Work*

## Conclusion

Ward-Jackson and Cleveland provided several tools and typologies to categorize and sort military folksongs. Ward-Jackson looked at the authorship and performance style of songs, categorizing them as squadron or concert songs. This typology of songs provides an understanding of the creative process and the performance environment. Squadron songs come with limitations both in creation and our understanding. The group process of creation and performance limit the creative space that is available in concert songs for more complex and nuanced storytelling. Squadron songs need to be simple and easily sung by a group, concert songs do not. In addition to the more nuanced storytelling available in concert songs, occasionally commentary from the songwriter can bolster our understanding. Unlike squadron songs, which lack attributable authorship, a concert song's authorship is frequently known. This allows for a more detailed understanding of the author's perspective and, in the most fortunate circumstances, direct commentary by the songwriter as to the song's meaning. For this research project, Dick Jonas, Irv LeVine, and Toby Hughes all provided insight into the motivations and stories behind the

creation of their songs. When this commentary is unavailable for other songs, Cleveland's categorization of warrior archetypes helps identify biases and motivations.

Cleveland's warrior archetypes wrote songs for specific purposes. These archetypes apply to warriors across conflicts and generations. They each bring with them biases and motivations. For example, proud warriors did not sing about fear even if it was pervasive in the ranks. A desire to increase pride and *esprit de corps* motivates them and songs acknowledging fear do not advance this cause. Songs about fear are the property of reluctant or mortal warriors. When determining what songs say about the perceptions of Vietnam fighter pilots it is important to identify from which perspective they are sung. The warrior archetype the songwriter invokes will lend the song certain bias. Ward-Jackson and Cleveland's typologies provide the tools to examine Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs. By keeping their typologies in mind, biases and intent can be developed and leveraged to understand the purpose and use of the song in context.

Previous scholarship on Vietnam folksongs concluded that they served several purposes. While examining the work of General Lansdale in Vietnam, Lydia Fish concludes that the military occupational folksongs of Vietnam "served as a strategy for survival, as a means of unit bonding and definition, as entertainment, and as a way of expressing emotion."<sup>62</sup> The traditional themes Fish found present in these songs were similar to Cleveland's archetypes. They included: the praise of great leaders, celebration of heroic deeds, mourning the death of comrades, complaints about incompetent leadership and support/headquarters troops, drinking, and women. The songs "provided a means for the expression of protest, fear and frustration, of grief and of longing for home."<sup>63</sup>

When further narrowing her focus to Air Force songs of Vietnam, Fish found a few notable differences between the songs of fighter pilots and that of Vietnam folksongs at large. Fighter pilot songs denoted a larger sense of agency over their combat experience than those of ground forces. There was still plenty of complaining but as one

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<sup>62</sup> Lydia M. Fish, "General Edward G. Lansdale and the Folksongs of Americans in the Vietnam War," *Journal of American Folklore*, 1989, 391.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

fighter pilot wrote Fish, “In general we regard our SEA [Southeast Asia] experiences from the perspective of badly-managed warriors rather than victims.”<sup>64</sup> The songs of fighter pilots in Vietnam, according to Fish, not only reflected the traditional military folksong themes but conveyed “their sense of mission, of honor, and of loyalty to the group, as well as their lack of reverence for authority, skepticism, and rampant individualism.”<sup>65</sup> Her understanding of Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs sparks numerous questions.

What were fighter pilots’ perceptions of their mission; what constituted honor in battle, especially in a war where civilian casualties became a concern; how did they define the scope of their group; what were they skeptical about? Does a leader emerge within the group who can be the object of great praise? At what point, due to rank or behavior, did fighter pilots lose their reverence for this authority and leadership? And finally, how does loyalty to the group square with rampant individualism? Many of these questions can be answered by viewing Vietnam fighter pilot songs through the typology of warrior archetypes.

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<sup>64</sup> Lydia M. Fish, “Songs of the Air Force in the Vietnam War,” April 15, 1996, 4, <http://faculty.buffalostate.edu/fishlm/folksongs/afsong.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### Honest Emotions, Falsehoods, Exaggerations, and True Stories – What do These Songs Tell us about the Fighter Pilots of the Vietnam War?

*Songs are the statement of a people. You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, the wants and aspirations.*

- John Steinbeck

*But let's also not forget that not nationalism, not even patriotism, but only comradeship, the loyalty to the group, is the essence of fighting morale. And that morale is certainly embodied in the songs you are now going to hear.*

-Maj John Roberts, introduction to song tape,  
Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, 1970

Steinbeck is correct. The occupational folksongs of Vietnam fighter pilots reveal the “hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, the wants and aspirations” of the group. An evening with their music—and a stiff drink as Jonas recommends—will reveal the emotions, reality, and bravado of flying combat missions in Vietnam. At times you must listen carefully for what is not there, or what is merely implied. The perspective from which the song was written—proud, reluctant, frustrated, mortal warrior, etc.—matters and brings with it its own biases. No one song tells the full story. When viewed as an entire collection of songs a more balanced picture emerges of men far from home, fighting their own short portion of the war (be it a year or one hundred missions north), and dealing with the danger of combat, the loss of friends, and the reality of killing in a war they felt their country would not allow them to win. In response to combat stress they turned to traditional mechanisms to build group strength and decompress. One of these mechanisms are in their songs.

### **Methodology**

The conclusions in this section are derived from 189 fighter pilot folk songs collected from the Jack Horntip and Donald L. White collections, Bill Getz's songbooks,

and commercially available CDs from Dick Jonas' Erosonic Label.<sup>1</sup> Other sources were cross referenced, but yielded no songs that were not already present in the sources listed above. By no means is this collection complete. This is a typical challenge for folklorists. As Bruce Jackson noted "No folklore collection can ever, without a great deal of independent information, be assumed to be representative of what was out there to be collected; scholarship based on fieldwork is based on scholarly artifacts, not on facts themselves."<sup>2</sup> While there are certainly songs missing, based on interviews and previous scholarship, the 189 songs assembled are representative of the field. Furthermore, the fact that folklorists such as Jack Horntip and Bill Getz collected these songs suggest that they were the tunes most popular with airmen. Their popularity and preservation suggests these songs were emblematic of pilots' thoughts and emotions about their experiences.

Most of these songs were written during the war by pilots flying out of bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, but a few were created later. Some may argue that this study should only include songs written in Southeast Asia, but songs written after a combat tour should be included for two reasons. First, several songs written after a songwriter's combat tour (by Jonas in particular) were written prior to the end of the larger conflict. These songs, written from bases in the States and Japan, comment on ongoing stories and experiences provided by friends in theater. Second, as Grossman notes, the process of coping with combat stress does not end with the conclusion of a combat tour. Some of the post-combat tour music captures this process of healing and expands on themes present in music written in Southeast Asia. The difficulty in expanding the data set beyond music written in Southeast Asia is determining which music written state side should be included, and which discarded.

Post-combat tour music included in this study must meet the following requirements. First, it must discuss Vietnam experiences instead of more general service themes. Second, it cannot discuss or address the conclusion or aftermath of the war. The

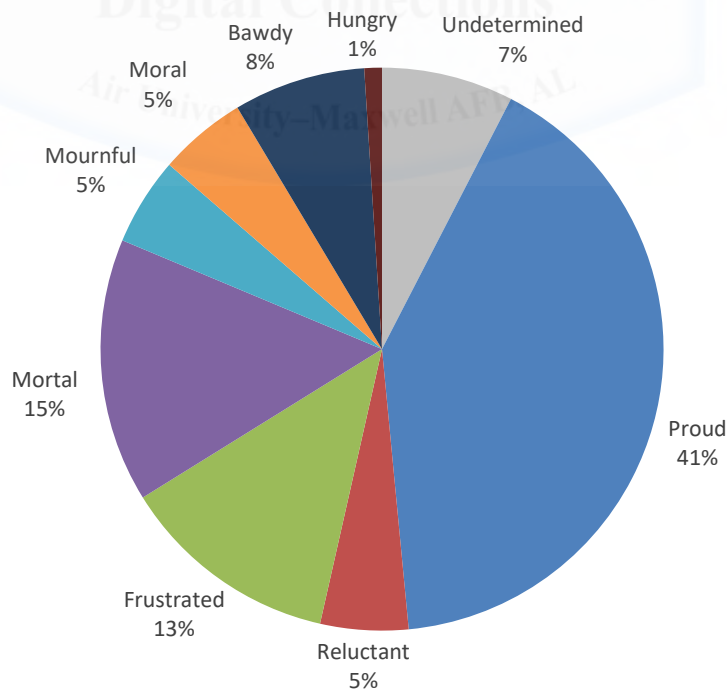
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<sup>1</sup> "Military Songs, Songbooks and Recordings," accessed March 27, 2018, [http://www.horntip.com/html/songs\\_sorted\\_by\\_informant/military\\_songs/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/html/songs_sorted_by_informant/military_songs/index.htm); Kenneth G. White, "Songs from SEA (South East Asia)," accessed March 23, 2018, <http://woolyfsh.com/seasongs/>; Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*; Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*; "Erosonic."

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Jackson, "Things That from a Long Way off Look like Flies," *The Journal of American Folklore* 98, no. 388 (April 1985): 131, <https://doi.org/10.2307/540436>.

reader may note that the conclusion uses LeVine’s song “Cold Black D.C. Wall,” which violates this second rule. It was not included in the 189 songs examined for this chapter, only for the conclusion.

To better understand how these songs served as part of a strategy for survival and what they can reveal about the perceptions pilots had about themselves, combat, their leaders, and the enemy, I coded each song by warrior archetype using the definitions from the previous chapter. Each song had one, and only one, warrior archetype assigned. Proud warriors sang the largest number of songs, 81 total, or 41 percent of the collection. There were less than half as many frustrated or mortal warrior songs, and about equal numbers of bawdy, reluctant, mournful, and moral warrior songs. There were fifteen songs whose archetype was undetermined. Many of these are songs were about training experiences or longing for home. Some could argue for including these songs with one of the warrior archetypes but the relationship was not obvious; therefore I left their archetype undetermined. Figure 6 shows a breakdown of songs as a percentage of the collection.

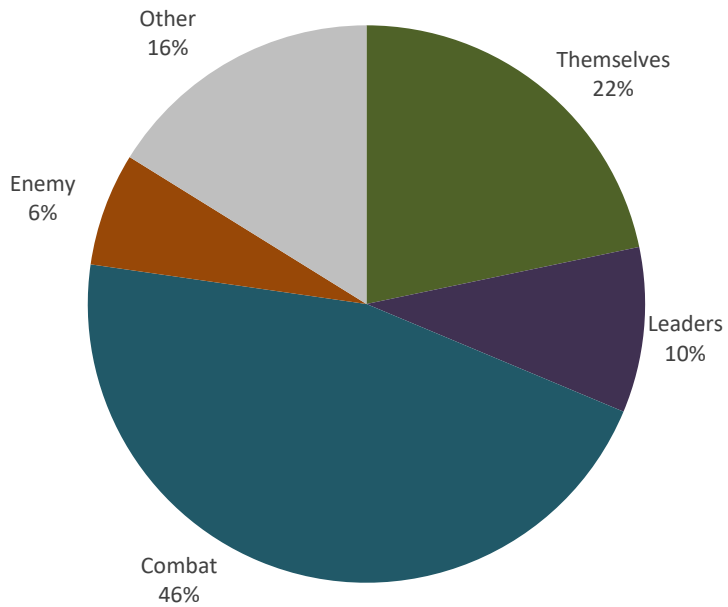


**Figure 6: Percentages of Warrior Archetypes**

*Source: Author’s Original Work*

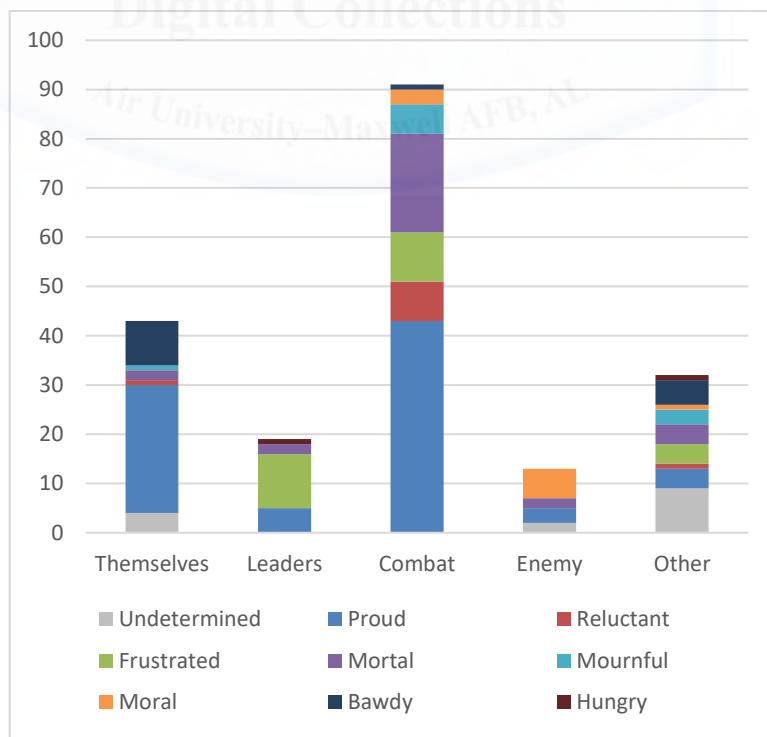
I then tagged each song with applicable themes which included: themselves, combat, leadership, and the enemy. A few songs had multiple themes. For example, Toby Hughes' "Tree Buster" is about the frustration of combat and the selfishness of the wing leadership. It was coded with combat and leadership themes. Songs about themselves had to address the behavior or characteristics of the group either in or out of the cockpit. These did not include songs about airplanes or women unless they addressed the relationship pilots had with them. Songs about combat were ballads which told about the experience of flying missions in Southeast Asia or the associated emotions. The dividing line between songs about combat and songs about the enemy was determined by the treatment of the enemy in songs. In combat songs the enemy is a faceless opponent represented by surface to air missiles (SAM), flak, or MiGs. Songs about the enemy, however, talk about the skill or the motivations of the people behind these weapons. Addressing the qualities or heroics of a good leader or criticizing the policies of bad leaders or organizations defined songs about leadership. Thirty-two songs did not address any of these themes. Instead they discussed qualities of airplanes, women, and thoughts about the Vietnam experience written well after the war. Figure 7 shows the breakdown of songs by theme.





**Figure 7: Percentages of Themes**

*Source: Author's Original Work*



**Figure 8: Warrior Archetypes within each Theme**

*Source: Author's Original Work*

Trends began to emerge by coding songs with a warrior archetype and theme. The songs fighter pilots sang about themselves in Vietnam conveyed the stereotypical fighter pilot image: cocky, brash, professional in the cockpit, and downright unruly on the ground. Vietnam fighter pilot songs about combat, however, discarded this stereotype if sang by a warrior archetype other than the proud warrior. Songs about the enemy respected their skill, disparaged their humanity, or displayed empathy through humor depending on the warrior archetype. Songs about leadership likewise split their message along archetypal lines. By keeping archetypes in mind when examining these themes, bias and intent can be developed and leveraged to understand the purpose and use of the song in context.

### **Themselves**

Fighter pilots sang songs about themselves in Vietnam to create a group identity and build morale. Scholars have long recognized that morale and group cohesion fortify soldiers against combat stress. Research such as Anthony Kellett's *Combat Motivation* "reinforce[s] the view that unit cohesion is indeed strongly predictive of military performance and directly linked to the number of combat stress casualties."<sup>3</sup> Kellett spends much of his book discussing the use and purpose of the "primary group" as a source of motivation in combat. Fighter pilot songs about themselves attempt to define the values and qualities of primary group members. S.A. Stouffer concluded that the purpose of defining a primary group was to "set and enforce group standards of behavior, and it supported and sustained the individual in stresses he would otherwise not have been able to withstand."<sup>4</sup> As such the songs pilots sang about themselves were from the viewpoint of proud warriors who idolized bravery and skill in the cockpit and bawdy warriors who created room for the release of stress after dangerous missions. Both archetypes invoked stereotypes in the interest of defining a group identity which would survive in the crucible of combat.

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Stokes and Kirsten Kite, *Flight Stress: Stress, Fatigue, and Performance in Aviation* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1994), 219–20.

<sup>4</sup> R.A. Stouffer quoted in Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston, MA: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), 99.

## The Warrior in the Cockpit

Proud warrior songs about themselves are the second largest group of fighter pilot songs, second only to proud warrior songs about combat. The songs proud warriors sang about themselves built group identity and camaraderie. In pursuit of this goal the messaging and material used in songs was selective. The glorification of the group in combat is not false, but it is a selective truth which ignored the fear of combat or the reality that not all members of the group measured up to the image idealized in song. The absence of fear in songs about themselves is obvious when compared to the songs about combat discussed in the next section. But nowhere in fighter pilot song is there an acknowledgement of group members who were not the embodiment of the fighter pilot warrior image. Based on interviews with songwriters and memoirs of Vietnam fighter pilots, these men did exist.

The lack of full transparency in songs about themselves is understandable. First, the purpose of these songs, as Cleveland pointed out, is to motivate warriors and integrate them into the military lifestyle. Confessions of fear or admission that some were not up to the task would be counterproductive. Second, most pilots in Vietnam acted in accordance with the values personified in song. As Toby Hughes wrote in his unpublished memoir, “Being true to fighter pilot’s code, we were never afraid, at least not when or where others might notice.”<sup>5</sup> But all of the songwriters interviewed acknowledge that the embrace of the fighter pilot ethos was not universal.

Most interviewees attributed the source of this problem to the Air Force’s rotation personnel policies in Vietnam. The Air Force dictated that every pilot serve a tour before it sent anyone non-voluntarily to the war for a second time. This resulted in cargo pilots retrained as fighter pilots and non-volunteers arriving at units in Thailand and South Vietnam. Jonas noted that in general the talent was good, but there were some guys that were “just fucking worthless.”<sup>6</sup> LeVine admitted that he did “witness cowardice, ignorance & incompetence any number of times.”<sup>7</sup> Rasimus’ memoir, *When Thunder*

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<sup>5</sup> Toby Hughes, “What the Captain Means” (Cibolo, TX, 2014), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Dick Jonas, interview by Maj Charles Stretch, Telephone, March 6, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Irv LeVine to Maj Charles Stretch, “My Answers to Your Emailed Questions,” March 1, 2018.

*Rolled*, relates a number of instances of flight leaders dragging him into dangerous situations unnecessarily or flights leaving comrades shot down on the ground without so much as a radio call.<sup>8</sup>

To be clear, these incidents were the exception not the rule, and anyone who mustered the courage to strap on an aircraft and take the fight North to Hanoi, or over the trail or the rice paddies of South Vietnam is deserving of the respect and thanks of a grateful nation. But, when listening to the songs Vietnam fighter pilots sang about themselves it is important to remember that they express the ideal version of a combat fighter pilot, not the reality for every individual.

The idealized image of the group in combat describes brave and deadly warriors. Pilots celebrated these qualities within ever expanding definitions of the group, be it the squadron, wing, or larger. “Son of Satan’s Angels,” mentioned in the previous chapter, hit on both these themes as Jonas expressed his pride in his Squadron, the 433<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron led by Korean War ace “Hoot” Gibson. The 433<sup>rd</sup> was a subordinate unit of the 8th TFW—the Wolf Pack. Jonas’ song about the Wolf Pack focused more on its leadership than the qualities of the men, but “Song of the Wolf Pack” hit on the same themes of bravery and capability as “Son of Satan’s Angels.”<sup>9</sup> “Song of the Wolf Pack” is a squadron style song with its original authorship unknown. Sang to the tune of “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” it was probably popular in the bar at Ubon.

We take off in our Phantoms  
To play our deadly cards.  
The engines make our thunder,  
And our eyes are steely hard.

We’re on the way to battle  
The forces of the foe.  
We’re certain to destroy them,  
We’ll seek them high and low.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled*, 119–23 and 226–30.

<sup>9</sup> “The Ballad of Robin Olds” by Jonas was more about pride in Olds’ leadership than the qualities of the men in the 8th TFW; C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, vol. 1 (San Mateo, CA: The Redwood Press, 1981), B-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, S-15.

Pride at the squadron and wing level is not surprising, but eventually the definition of the group continued to expand as respect and admiration began to grow between bases and airframes. According to Robin Olds' memoirs, the integration and teamwork between the wings in Thailand was a major effort of his as the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW). He hosted the first River Rat tactics conference at Ubon designed to increase communication and teamwork between the strikers and their escorts. He noted that the conference included "whiskey drinking, fun and games, songs, skits, and stuff, but the serious business of talking to one another went on, too."<sup>11</sup> These conferences were eventually known as "practice reunions" for the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association. Jonas wrote "Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats" on the way to the first stateside reunion after the war. By 1973, the definition of the group had clearly expanded to include all those who flew and fought in Vietnam. As noted in the previous chapter, the "Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats" celebrated their warrior ethos.

Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.  
Hold your head high, stand tall, you are men.  
Never run from a fight, be prepared day and night,  
Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.<sup>12</sup>

The qualities celebrated by these songs were not exclusive to the men who flew up north to Hanoi. Chip Dockery makes it clear that combat pilots in Vietnam universally celebrated these qualities. His song "Prowlin'" differs in tone slightly from those about missions up North. "Prowlin'" expresses a bit more enjoyment in the mission over the trail than over Hanoi. When the enemy does make an appearance in "Prowlin'" they are quickly dispatched by Dockery's wingman.

Well I've been a Phantom pilot here for a month,  
wouldn't have it another way.  
I've been flyin' F-4s with the 13th Panther Pack,  
prowlin' in the night and the day.

Two called out, 'Lead break hard right,  
You've got 37 trackin' too close.'  
Then he rolled in with Mk-82s and put 'em

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<sup>11</sup> Robin Olds, Christina Olds, and Ed Rasimus, *Fighter Pilot: The Memoirs of Legendary Ace Robin Olds* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 286.

<sup>12</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, B-5.

right down that gunners throat.

Well the trucks were stalled and we had a ball,  
blowin' their shit away.  
Hey, there ain't nothing better than flyin' with the Pack,  
fightin' in the night and the day.<sup>13</sup>

Dockery was likewise impressed by the pilots who flew older aircraft out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Force Base. His song "Holy Shit" is about an F-4D pilot leaving his base to see what flying A-1s, A-26s, and O-1Es was like at NKP. Every verse discusses the bravery of those pilots who flew low and slow into combat.

With an O-2 FAC, callsign of Nail,  
We trolled along the Ho Chi Trail.  
Just a dodgin' gunfire and slingin' willy pete,  
Way too damn low and slow for me.

These guys are crazy, they have no fear,  
They live on AVGAS, cordite, and beer.  
They'll fly 'em back shot full of holes,  
To NKP where the Mekong flows.<sup>14</sup>

The admiration of forward air controllers (FAC) was widespread. LeVine once teased his friend Jonathan Myers about the difference between the F-105 and O-1. After learning more about the FAC mission he wrote "O-1E" as an apology.<sup>15</sup> Toby Hughes' brother Joe flew 455 FAC missions in Vietnam. Many of Toby's songs feature the bravery of the FACs, who he thought were real heroes.<sup>16</sup>

When Vietnam fighter pilots sang about themselves in the cockpit they did so from the perspective of the proud warrior. Unlike songs about combat, songs about themselves ignored the fear of combat and instead advanced the narrative of the group as comprised of brave and deadly warriors. To form a group identity that could withstand the stress of combat they did not openly acknowledge occurrences of cowardice or incompetence. The ability of each member in the group to attach himself to the group

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<sup>13</sup> Dick Jonas et al., *Come and Join the Air Force*, CD-ROM (Erosonic, LLC, 2005), 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Dick Jonas and Irv LeVine, *Cold Warriors*, CD-ROM (Erosonic, LLC, 2002), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, "What the Captain Means," 25.

identity of the ideal fighter pilot would make him more resilient. Pursuing this purpose there is little room to make space for fear in the definition of the group. Attachment to a group is not the only mechanism an individual can evoke to cope with combat stress. Distractions and the release of tension also serve their purpose. The songs fighter pilots sang about their behavior out of the cockpit encouraged the use of these other mechanisms.

### **The Warrior in the Bar**

Just as the proud warrior songs are a selective truth about the warrior virtues of group members, so too are the bawdy songs fighter pilots sang about themselves out of the cockpit. They mostly encouraged the “letting off” of combat stress through drinking and women. Ed Rasimus recounts a celebration at Korat when John Casper returned to the base after he was shot down and subsequently rescued on a mission near Mu Gia Pass. It is worth quoting at length.

The beers led to a songfest and each of us vied to remember the raunchiest, most obscenity-laden ballads, round, and ditties. Older pilots reworked songs from the Korean War to reflect local names and places, while younger guys embellished songs they had learned in pilot training or in college. Maj Rock Campbell, a classic Irish tenor in the 34th Squadron came over and stood us all up in a chorus line then directed us in a Gilbert and Sullivan-style operetta recreating a poor individual’s experience in shaving with a rusty razor. Cigars fumed, whiskey flowed, and the voices got louder but no more tuneful. It all sounded pretty good to us, and who else counted? It was foolishness of the highest order but seemed appropriate to the celebration.<sup>17</sup>

As addressed in Chapter 1, not all the songs Rasimus, Campbell, Casper, and friends sang that night were fighter pilot songs. Some were just college drinking songs. But the story shows the importance of booze and bawdy songs for some pilots in the release of stress after a near death experience. When fighter pilots sang about themselves and the need to blow off steam in this manner, they typically sang about drinking and women. “Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild, Wild Women” is typical of these songs.

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<sup>17</sup> Ed Rasimus, *When Thunder Rolled: An F-105 Pilot over North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 185.



Once I was happy and had a good wife;  
I had enough money to last me for life.  
I met a gal and we went on a spree;  
She taught me to smoke and to drink whiskey.<sup>18</sup>

The song, like “Saigon Girls,” concludes with a warning about getting carried away with women and booze while out on the town or on leave. Most of these songs are traditional drinking songs updated “to reflect local names and places” as Rasimus mentioned. “Suits of Covey Blue” fits squarely in this category as it relates the story of a Covey FAC getting a local woman pregnant and abandoning her and the baby for the war.<sup>19</sup>

While many of the single pilots, and probably a few married ones, engaged in such pursuits during their tour, it would be wrong to assume that these songs depicted the true behavior of every pilot. Just like the proud warrior songs about themselves, the bawdy warrior songs are a selective truth. The bawdy songs were designed to entertain in the bar and provide group endorsement for pilots to drink and pursue women to release steam. While these songs promote unhinged partying and liberal pursuits of women, they do not tell the entire story of pilots’ leisure time or thoughts beyond combat.

Jonas, who had wife and daughters at home in the states, wrote several songs about missing home, “Fighter Pilot’s Christmas” is a stark contrast to the bawdy songs about drinking and women. While not necessarily a song about themselves, it shows that the image of the womanizing fighter pilot in Vietnam is a stereotype. Just as not all pilots were the brave and upright warriors denoted in the “Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats,” not all of them were the adulterers of “Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild, Wild Women” or fathers of bastard children as told by “Suits of Covey Blue.”

Merry Christmas Mom; Merry Christmas Dad,  
Merry Christmas to my love.

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<sup>18</sup> “12 TAC FTR WG Song Book” (Dragon Gate Stationery & Printing Co., Ltd., 1966), 25, Jack Horntip Collection,  
[http://www.horntip.com/html/books\\_&\\_MSS/1960s/1966ca\\_12\\_TAC\\_fighter\\_wing\\_song\\_book\\_\(PB\)/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/html/books_&_MSS/1960s/1966ca_12_TAC_fighter_wing_song_book_(PB)/index.htm).

<sup>19</sup> “The Raven,” n.d., 62, Jack Horntip Collection,  
[http://www.horntip.com/html/books\\_&\\_MSS/1990s/1990\\_the\\_raven\\_\(spiral\\_PB\)/1990\\_the\\_raven\\_\(horntip\\_collection\).pdf](http://www.horntip.com/html/books_&_MSS/1990s/1990_the_raven_(spiral_PB)/1990_the_raven_(horntip_collection).pdf).

Merry Christmas to the sweetest little  
girls that ever came from God above.  
Wish I could be home with the ones I love  
It's a long time since I've gone.  
Santa, take this heart of mine,  
And tie it up with bows and twine,  
And take it to the folks back home.<sup>20</sup>

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The songs fighter pilots sang about themselves were from the perspective of proud and bawdy warriors. Both archetypes endorsed and promoted fighter pilot stereotypes to create a group identity which would be resilient in combat. Proud warriors focused on the skill and bravery of group members. Bawdy warriors endorsed the release of stress through behavior that would be questionable or unacceptable in other contexts. Psychologists who have studied combat motivations tell us that this is a natural and useful reaction to combat stress, but forming an aura of invincibility or using the distractions of booze and women are not the only methods available to cope with the stress of combat. Lt Col Dave Grossman's work *On Killing* and *On Combat* discuss the need of warriors to process their fear and their reaction to the act of killing. Many of the emotions he discusses are present in fighter pilot songs about combat.

Grossman takes a psychological look at what is required to fight a war, kill, and come out the other side of the experience mentally fit and morally at peace. To be sure group dynamics play a large role in this process for Grossman, but only a portion of the group dynamics Grossman highlights align with the bravado and debauchery of fighter pilot songs about themselves. The core psychological work Grossman finds necessary to surviving combat and killing is contained in fighter pilot songs about combat.

### **Combat**

Vietnam fighter pilot songs about combat—in contrast to those about themselves—provide a more complete representation of the warrior archetypes and a more nuanced view of war. While proud warriors sing just under half of the collected songs about the combat experience, frustrated, reluctant, mortal, mournful, and moral

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<sup>20</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, F-6.

warriors all make their contribution. Together these songs constitute what Grossman would define as an informal critical incident debriefing. Do not be fooled by the academic name, critical incident debriefings—as Grossman notes—are an ancient tradition. They have occurred around camp fires between days of battle where old warriors taught young ones how to deal with the horrors and losses encountered that day.<sup>21</sup>

Fighter pilots have long held a culture of formal debriefing to understand what happened on the mission and how to improve, but this is only half of the debrief process. The informal portion is just as important as the formal. The informal debrief puts “everyone back together” and restores “morale and unit integrity.”<sup>22</sup> The intent of informal debriefing can be seen in the proportion of combat songs sung by the various warrior archetypes and the changes in those proportions based on the type of missions flown. Some missions required more post-combat debriefing than others because of unclear objectives or excessive restrictions.

Within the combat theme category are multiple subcategories. Not all combat missions were the same. As addressed in Chapter 2 there were multiple air efforts in Vietnam. To better understand the nuance and sub-categories of combat songs I tagged them with mission specific identifiers. Specific missions included: flights to Route Pack VI, flights over the trail hunting trucks, and FAC and CSAR missions. Clear trends and differences appeared between missions to Route Pack VI, FAC, and CSAR missions.

### **Proud Warrior Combat Songs**

Proud warrior songs about combat are a natural companion to proud warrior songs about themselves. Instead of focusing on the individual and unit they focus on the experience and the action. They allow pilots to take pride in their work and the danger of combat. Proud warriors sang about all the mission areas mentioned and focused on the thrill of combat and heroic deeds of themselves and others.

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<sup>21</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), 307.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

There were fewer proud songs about the combat experience in Route Pack VI than those about FAC or Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions. Chapter 3 introduced a few of these proud Route Pack VI songs. “Teak Lead” and “Cruising Over Hanoi” highlight the danger of these missions and the willingness of pilots to continually fly into that danger. Two other songs celebrate the joy of getting bombs on target and eventually dropping the infamous Paul Doumer Bridge. “Dashing Through the Sky,” sang to the tune of “Dashing Through the Snow,” shows the elation of dropping bombs in combat.

Heads up Ho Chi Minh,  
The Fives are on their way.  
Your luck it has given in,  
There’s going to be hell to pay,  
Today it is our turn,  
To make you gawk and stare.  
What fun it is to watch things burn  
And blow up everywhere!!!<sup>23</sup>

The “Battle of Doumer Bridge” by Irv LeVine recounts the last major bombing success against Hanoi by the Rolling Thunder air campaign.<sup>24</sup> The Paul Doumer bridge served as a major artery from the Northeast Railroad on the Vietnamese-Chinese border through Hanoi and south to the war. President Johnson denied requests to attack the bridge until August 1967 because the Doumer Bridge was in downtown Hanoi. On 11 August 1967, the F-105 wings at Korat (LeVine’s base) and Takhli both dropped 3,000lbs unguided bombs, destroying one span of the bridge.<sup>25</sup> Due to repair efforts they returned on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of December. The 388<sup>th</sup> TFW from Korat did most of the damage on the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>26</sup> Three months after the bombing halt in April 1968, the Vietnamese repaired the bridge.<sup>27</sup> In May 1972, F-4s with laser guided bombs struck it again fulfilling

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<sup>23</sup> C. W. Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, vol. 2 (Burlingame, CA: The Redwood Press, 1986), DE-2.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The United States Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966-1973* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 112.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

LeVine's promise in "Battle of Doumer Bridge," "But if Ho puts that damn bridge up, well, we'll all be going back."<sup>28</sup>

As Toby Hughes noted in his memoirs, and Dick Jonas in his interview, few pilots argued about the heroics of the FACs and CSAR pilots; respectively 10% and 20% of the proud combat songs collected were about these missions. A typical proud FAC combat song is Toby Hughes' "160 VC [Viet Cong] in the Open." Sang to the tune of "160 Acres in the Valley," it recounts a FAC's joy when discovering a Viet Cong unit in the open running for the trees. It is the opposite of the combat experience Hughes sang about in "Tree Buster." In this story the VC are clearly visible providing legitimate military targets to the FAC and fighters. The FAC's mark is at the feet of his enemy and the fighters are ready to strike in Hughes' last verse.

I've got one hundred sixty VC in the open,  
I've got a flight of F-100's up above.  
I've got my Willy Pete smoking at their feet  
It's the kind of situation that I love.<sup>29</sup>

"160 VC in the Open" and "Dashing Through the Sky" allow the group and individuals to express pride in killing. Pride in killing other people is not a natural reaction. Grossman discusses at length in *On Killing* the process required to train killers, and then the necessary psychological work after 'the kill' for the killers to be morally at peace. Group admiration and celebration of the action is an important aspect of this process. In the twentieth century Grossman believes that fighter pilots were one of the few warrior castes who had the opportunity to do this right.<sup>30</sup> They celebrated the accomplishments and kills of their comrades making the act of killing and the acceptance of danger easier. Whereas an infantry soldier with notches on his belt for kills would be frowned upon, fighter pilots proudly displayed them on their aircraft and were awarded the title of ace. Not all proud combat songs celebrate killing though. The CSAR mission provided many opportunities to celebrate the heroics and sacrifice of a mission dedicated to the principle "That Others May Live."

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 235; Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force, the Stag Bar Edition*, BB-10.

<sup>29</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, O-10.

<sup>30</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 312.

Proud CSAR combat songs were sung from the perspective of the rescuers, survivors, and witnesses. Sam Waite and Mac McCormick sang “Sandy Cannonball” where they recount the process of Sandys scrambling for a mission, protecting the survivor, and suppressing the threats for Jolly Green to execute the pick-up.

The success of the mission was Sandy all the way  
Their fighting bombing strafing was the thing that made the day  
The Sandy’s are the heroes, the Jollies get the cheer  
But hell it doesn’t matter so hang it in your ear.<sup>31</sup>

The slight dig by Waite and McCormick at Jolly getting the credit is good natured and understandable. Waite flew Jolly Greens while McCormick flew the Sandy mission. It was undeniable that no matter how safe Sandy could make a downed pilot feel, there was nothing which compared to the sight of a Jolly Green coming for the pick-up. “Bull” Durham, a B-52 pilot who flew EC-47s in Vietnam, told the story of a rescue from the survivor’s perspective. In the song “Jolly Green,” the survivor calls the helicopter “The prettiest sight that I’d ever seen, is Jolly Green, my Jolly Green.”<sup>32</sup>

The list of songs about CSAR is long and varied. Fighter pilots sang about their protectors and saviors with unqualified admiration for the bravery of Sandy and Jolly crews. After the war, Jonas wrote “Pull the Boom from the Gas Hole Tanker” which recounted an entire rescue effort from the perspective of the downed aircrew’s wingman. The efforts of Sandy and Jolly saved many lives and allowed for celebrations like those mentioned in the previous section when rescue forces returned John Casper to his base the same day he was shot down. It is no wonder that songs about combat celebrated this mission above all others. The knowledge that rescue forces would risk their lives to bring you home no doubt steeled the resolve of many a fighter pilot. It continues to do so today.

The proud warrior songs about combat celebrated the deeds and heroics of pilots and aircrew in Vietnam. They allowed fighter pilots to celebrate violence and killing. There was substantial worship of the FAC and CSAR missions who frequently exposed

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<sup>31</sup> Kenneth G. White, “Songs from SEA (South East Asia),” accessed March 23, 2018, <http://woolyfsh.com/seasongs/>, Vol2, Track 13.

<sup>32</sup> Bull Durham, *Songs of SAC & Songs of SEA*, CD-ROM (Air Force Sergeant’s Association, n.d.), Vol 1, Track 2.



themselves to great danger to save or protect their fellow Americans. Other warrior archetypes who sang about combat did not mention these missions as much. As the perspective of combat shifts from proud to reluctant, mortal, and mournful archetypes, the focus on missions in Route Pack VI take a front seat.

### **Reluctance, Mortality, and Mourning in Combat**

While proud warriors sang about each mission type and maintained a consistent view of combat, mortal, mournful, and reluctant warriors had different perspectives depending on the mission. There are no true mortal, mournful, or reluctant warrior CSAR songs. Because the USAF flew fewer CSAR missions than missions up North, one might conclude this was due to the total fewer number of losses. This is unlikely, despite fewer total losses, over fifty percent of A-1 losses resulted in the death of its pilot vs. approximately a third for F-105 and F-4 losses.<sup>33</sup> But songs about mortality, reluctance, and mourning are not necessarily a direct reflection of perceived danger; rather they are the manifestation of the need to cope with the danger of combat due to the lack of other coping mechanisms or other factors which increase vulnerability to combat stress.

The fact that CSAR pilots did not sing about their own mortality, reluctance to fly (if they had any), or loss of their friends is not a reflection of the danger of their mission. They, after all, flew directly into the areas where faster and supposedly more survivable aircraft had been shot down. The lack of combat songs by these warrior archetypes about CSAR reveals that they most likely dealt with the danger and fear of combat by focusing on the importance of their mission. It speaks to a truth that it is easier to risk your life for your comrades than a target or a political objective. This trend continues in mortal and mournful warrior songs about FAC combat experiences. Like the CSAR missions, there were no reluctant FAC songs, and mortal and mournful warrior songs about combat in Route Pack VI outnumber FAC songs two to one.

The greater proclivity of mortal and mournful warriors to sing about missions in Route Pack VI vs. FAC missions suggests that that pilots who flew against targets in

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<sup>33</sup> Chris Hobson, *Vietnam Air Losses: United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973* (North Branch, MN: Specialty Press, 2001), 268–69.



Hanoi had the greatest need to reduce combat stress through the debrief process. Like the lack of reluctant CSAR songs, this is not a reflection of pilots flying in Route Pack VI facing greater danger than those flying low and slow aircraft on FAC missions. Of the 346 FAC aircraft shot down, there were 220 pilots killed, a 63 percent fatality rate, double that of fast jet pilots. This is not surprising considering the O-1 and O-2 did not have ejection seats and pilots had no option but to ride mortally wounded aircraft in. The smaller portion of mortal and mournful FAC songs more likely denoted a greater feeling of control over their combat experience.

The perception of control greatly reduces warriors' vulnerability to combat stress. Alan Stokes and Kristen Kite in their book *Flight Stress: Stress, Fatigue, and Performance in Aviation* looked specifically at combat stress and risk factors associated with psychological casualties in air combat. One of the major factors was a sense of control. For example, WWII Royal Air Force bomber gunners had the greatest rates of psychological casualties despite not suffering from any greater danger than their pilots.<sup>34</sup> When comparing the combat experiences of an F-4 or F-105 pilot flying to strike targets in Hanoi or a FAC patrolling the trail or Route Pack I, the FAC had far greater control over his combat experience.

Pilots in general exercise greater control of their combat experience than infantrymen, but the pilots flying against targets in Hanoi did not choose the targets, or in many cases the attack direction. They could not choose to destroy MiG airfields or SAMs threatening them. They were part of a large strike force with orders provided from higher headquarters. Many memoirs and songs recount strike missions against targets pilots thought were exceedingly dangerous to strike or not worth the risk. FACs had a different experience. They flew alone in their assigned areas. They decided which targets were worth striking and which areas were too hot to fly in. FACs were rarely, if ever, ordered against specific targets, and when they were they were in control of the manner and timing of attack.

When mortal or mournful warriors did sing about FAC combat experiences it was in the second person and always non-specific. Chapter 3 introduced the mournful

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<sup>34</sup> Stokes and Kite, *Flight Stress*, 217.

“Bronco Song” about a deceased FAC’s mother receiving a telegram notification of her son’s death. A typical mortal warrior FAC song is “The FAC That Never Returned” sang to the tune of “Wreck of the Old 97.” Even though it is about a FAC whose body may lie forever in the jungles of Vietnam, it emphasizes the successful mission more than the FAC’s fate. Even the fighter aircraft and soldiers in the story fail to notice the demise of their FAC.

Oh, the leader rolled in and he asked for his target,  
the FAC told him where to aim his guns.  
With an unerring eye they smoked those Charlie  
‘til they had them on the run.

Oh, the battle was hot and it was too much for Charlie.  
The soldiers began to shout,  
“God bless you fighters for saving our asses  
and driving those VC out.”

Well no one noticed that crippled Cessna  
as he made his final bow  
For one of those bullets found its target  
and Charlie had kept his vow.

Well did he ever return? No, he never returned  
and his fate is still unlearned.  
He may lie forever in the Vietnam jungle.  
He’s the FAC who never returned.

He’s the FAC who never returned.<sup>35</sup>

The mortal and mournful warrior songs about combat in Route Pack VI do not approach death in the same manner of FAC songs. There is a stark contrast between “Bronco Song” and “The FAC That Never Returned” and Jonas’ “Will There Be a Tomorrow” and “Blue Four”—both introduced in Chapter 3. The latter openly discuss the possibility of not surviving the next mission and witnessing the fiery impact of a friend’s airplane on a hillside. While lyrically they are not specifically about strikes into Route Pack VI, those strikes were predominantly the missions Jonas flew. Jonas’

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<sup>35</sup> White, “Songs from SEA (South East Asia),” Vol. 1, Track 7.

approach to death and loss in these songs is more reflective than most mortal warrior songs about Route Pack VI.

The many mortal warrior variations of “On Top of Old Smokey” all discuss the threat and losses of bombing missions against Hanoi.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Jonas’ “Will There Be a Tomorrow,” they convey the danger actually encountered on the mission focusing on how pilots were killed over Hanoi instead of contemplating death itself. The lyrics to each variation change but the theme remains constant. The excerpt from “On Top of the Pop-Up” below displays the apparent hopelessness of threat reactions over Hanoi. The sky fills with flak and SAMs, while the emissions intelligence (ELINT) fails to warn pilots about the threat, and the standard defensive jinks are judged to be worthless.

The sky filled with fireballs,  
The missiles flashed by,  
Sweet mother of Jesus,  
We’re all going to die.

Number two called, “I’m hit,  
I’m going to bust.”  
Not one goddamn ELINT  
A poor jock can trust.

So come ye young pilots,  
And listen to dad,  
Forget about jinkin’,  
And your ass has been had.

They’ll hit you and burn you,  
Their flak reaches far,  
It’s a long walk to Takhli  
And a beer at the bar.<sup>37</sup>

A F-105 pilot had a sixty percent chance of completing his 100-mission tour without being killed or captured. The feeling that “we’re all going to die” was anything but an exaggeration. Irv LeVine wrote one of the best mournful Thud songs. LeVine wrote “Thud Ridge” to the tune of “House of the Rising Sun” on his knee board while

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<sup>36</sup> “On Top of Old Hanoi,” “On Top of Old Thud Ridge,” and “On Top of the Pop-up;” Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, O-13 and O-14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, O-14.

flying home to Korat after a mission to Route Pack VI. His words tell the story better than mine.

My good friend Ray Vissotzky was number three in our flight against a barge yard at the north west edge of Hanoi. We were in the process of “rolling in” when someone (I never found out who) called a SAM under us. I was number two and was looking upward at lead and saw the missile drive into the body of Ray’s bird... I was still rolling right so saw no more—later lead said I had a missile under me also, but I rolled off its path. We continued in our dive, dropped our six 750lb bombs and pulled up. As often happened our flight broke up and I found myself off to one side and high. I saw a fire ball—which SAMs often looked like—below me and thought it [was] another SAM. I dived toward it—the accepted maneuver at the time... But it wasn’t a SAM. It was Ray’s bird burning heavily, he was straight and level. I joined on him well off to one side to see if I could do anything to help. His cockpit was filled with smoke and he lost control of his plane. I had to pull back my throttle and put down flaps to slow down with his bird. He rolled to his right, away from me and ejected at ninety degrees of roll. I saw the streak of Ray in his seat but he soon disappeared into the heavy cloud bank below him and heard his beeper. I froze my position on my bird’s computer, pushed up the throttle, sucked up my flaps, and hit the burner. AAA [anti-aircraft artillery] was bursting all around me but I was never hit. I found tears streaming down my cheeks and mask. I had the urge to write about the incident and wrote ‘Thud Ridge’ on my clipboard.<sup>38</sup>

Ray Vissotzky spent five years as a prisoner of war leaving a wife and five children at home.<sup>39</sup> LeVine kept details like names and places out of “Thud Ridge” because he did not want to give the North Vietnamese any information on his friend whether he be captured or in hiding, but the song is about Vissotzky.

Oh there are some hills in North Vietnam  
They call old Thud Ridge.  
And they point on down towards the heart of town, past Hia Gia’s bridge.

For those who fly up yonder,  
through a hail of SAMs and flak,  
know a MiG on your tail, can really be hell  
For some won’t be coming back.

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<sup>38</sup> Irv LeVine to Maj Charles Stretch, “Answering Your Last Email,” January 26, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Joan Vissotzky, Ray’s wife, wrote a book about her experience, *The Other Side of the Coin: A Journey to Courage*.

I don't recall his name now,  
and I can't name you the place  
Where a friend was shot down near the heart of town,  
While tears ran down my face.<sup>40</sup>

The reluctant, mortal, and mournful warriors sing almost exclusively about combat. The proportion of these types of song vary depending on the mission. FACs had fewer mortal and mournful songs possibly due to a greater sense of control over their combat experience. A greater sense of control reduced FACs' susceptibility to combat stress. In turn, this reduced the need for informal debriefings of the type Grossman recommends. Whatever the reason, according to the collected songs FACs appeared less concerned with danger than the pilots flying up North. Maybe Dockery was correct in his song "Holy Shit," those guys were crazy. While the pilots flying up north expressed reluctance and an occasional hope that missions would cancel in their songs, FACs and CSAR crews did not sing about such reservations if they had them at all. This likely has to do with the perceived effectiveness and worth of the missions. It is easier for a FAC or CSAR pilots to justify why they should risk their lives when their countrymen are on the ground. Certainly, as seen by the proud warrior songs about combat, FACs and CSAR pilots received unconditional admiration from their comrades in other airframes.

For the pilots flying north, they faced significant political restrictions and perceived that leaders forced them to fight with one hand tied behind their backs. This feeling of frustration is apparent in songs about leadership in the Vietnam war. The perceived lack of support from leadership and the growing anti-war movement at home made these pilots more susceptible to combat stress. In turn they had a greater need to pull together as a group and address combat stress by informal debriefings through song and socializing at the bar.

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The purpose of fighter pilot songs about combat is to process combat stress, allowing the group to debrief their experiences so they can be mentally ready for the next mission. These songs put "everyone back together" and restored "morale and unit

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<sup>40</sup> Irv LeVine to Maj Charles Stretch, "Irv 3 Songs," 27 Apr 18.

integrity.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike songs about themselves which focus on developing shared identity and defining ideal and acceptable behavior, songs about combat were about acknowledging natural feelings of fear and loss as pilots flew dangerous missions and saw friends killed and captured while at the same time celebrating the thrill of combat and killing of the enemy. Without addressing these issues through a method of informal debriefing, pilots would be less likely over time to continue to live up to the ideals espoused in the proud warrior songs about themselves and combat.

The proud, reluctant, mortal, and mournful warriors were not the only ones to sing about their combat experience. Frustrated and moral warriors also told stories from their own perspective. There are significantly fewer frustrated or moral warrior songs about combat than there are proud, reluctant, mortal, or mournful warrior songs. Those which do exist are closely tied to the frustrated songs about leadership, and moral warrior songs about the enemy. Rather than discuss the combat perspective of these archetypes on their own they will be examined within context of songs about leadership and the enemy.

### **Their Leadership**

Fighter pilot songs about leadership in the Vietnam War highlight the frustration of being “badly managed warriors” and the pride of association with leaders who were themselves capable warriors. Like songs fighter pilots sang about themselves, songs about leadership, with few exceptions, carry a bias caused by the frustrations of combat. Only about ten percent of the collected songs discuss leadership in the Vietnam War as their primary message; of these, three quarters are negative and only ten percent positive. It would be easy to conclude from songs that Robin Olds was the only great leader of the Vietnam War.

Robin Olds was a triple ace from WWII who eventually rose to the rank of Brigadier General. His most famous role in the Air Force was the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> TFW at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base from September 1966 to September 1967. There he frequently came into conflict with Air Force policies about the war and grew his legendary mustache as a form of protest saying, “It became the middle finger I couldn’t

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<sup>41</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 303.

raise in the PR [public relations] photographs. The mustache became my silent last word in the verbal battles...with higher headquarters on rules, targets, and fighting the war.”<sup>42</sup> Olds was known for leading from the front and ruffling feathers.

In his first address to the pilots of the 8<sup>th</sup> TFW as their commander, he challenged them to teach him the ropes and that with their help he was going to eventually lead missions into North Vietnam. He finished by saying, “I will listen to you and learn from you, but soon I’m gonna be better than all of you, and when I know more about your job than you do look out.”<sup>43</sup> He ultimately led Operation Bolo, the first and most successful fighter sweep of the Vietnam War.

The operation was conceived and planned entirely at the 8th TFW. The objective was to strike a decisive blow against North Vietnamese MiGs while honoring the restriction against bombing North Vietnamese airfields. Olds needed to lure the North Vietnamese MiGs into a fight. The MiGs routinely avoided F-4s while attempting to intercept the F-105 fighter-bombers.<sup>44</sup> The ruse was simple, Olds made his F-4s appear to the North Vietnamese as F-105s, lure them into battle and destroy them.<sup>45</sup> To accomplish this, the F-4s flew F-105 speeds, altitudes, and routes utilizing F-105 callsigns, communications, and electronic jamming equipment.<sup>46</sup> The ruse worked and seven unsuspecting North Vietnamese MiG-21s were destroyed with no American losses. Following the operation, North Vietnamese MiGs remained grounded for two weeks.<sup>47</sup>

Olds’ opinion of how to fight the war in Vietnam—like many other fighter pilots’—was at odds with that of President Johnson’s administration. He advocated for the expansion of the war, to include bombing Chinese railheads and mining Haiphong Harbor.<sup>48</sup> While speaking to a group of students at a midwestern university, while he was the Air Force Academy Commandant of Cadets, Olds launched into a fierce rebuke of the

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<sup>42</sup> Olds, Olds, and Rasimus, *Fighter Pilot*, 284.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 272–78.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher H. Oliver, “Robin Olds: Leadership in the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing” (Air University, 2006), 21.

<sup>48</sup> Olds, Olds, and Rasimus, *Fighter Pilot*, 344–46.



Vietnam War. He blamed Washington for limiting the war and costing the United States unnecessary casualties.<sup>49</sup> Many of his fellow fighter pilots endorsed his views, even though Washington did not. While Olds continues to have an unrivaled popular reputation amongst fighter pilots, he certainly was not the only great leader of the war.

While most proud warrior songs about leadership invoke Robin Olds as the premier exemplar, the frustrated warrior songs about leadership have many targets. The negative slant on leadership most songs take is a direct outgrowth of frustrated warriors looking for someone to blame. The frustrated songs about leadership allowed pilots to complain about policies and decisions they felt put them at unnecessary risk. The proud warrior songs about leadership provided real life exemplars of the ideal warrior.

### **Frustrated by Leadership**

Frustrated warriors sang about combat and leadership, but the root of frustration in combat songs was almost exclusively leadership. Two frustrated warrior songs about combat introduced in Chapter 3 have leadership as the source of their frustration. “Tchepone” complains about a nameless colonel from 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, “Tree Buster” complains about the unspecified “they” who give worthless targets fancy names. Even proud warrior songs about combat such as Dick Jonas’ “Wolfpack’s Houseboy” take swipes at leadership—“Seventh fragged us way up North on a bridge that wasn’t worth takin’ any chance to be shot at.”<sup>50</sup> The source of this frustration was the incremental approach to airpower President Johnson favored in Vietnam. This was counter to most pilots’ training and instincts. Forced to risk their lives in a strategy they thought was ill advised, they sang of their frustrations. The level of disrespect in songs was significant. As seen in Chapter 3, “Our Leaders” took shots at leadership from 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force all the way up to the President.

This form of disrespect is important to maintaining group identity and venting frustrations. Les Cleveland noted, warriors of western democracies can accept service as “long as he is able to grumble, protest and joke about his fate, to ridicule his leaders and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>50</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, W-14.

to assert his personal autonomy and dignity.”<sup>51</sup> They served as a form of accepted disrespect. It is possible that a few of these leaders heard some of these songs with tapes sent to General Ryan at 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force and Lansdale sending recordings back to Washington, DC. Toby Hughes performed “Tree Buster” once with General Ryan in the audience. It was not well received, but Hughes was never disciplined for singing the song.<sup>52</sup> It is important for leaders not to take humorous criticism from their troops too seriously. As Lansdale believed, it is an excellent source of feedback. It may be difficult for a captain to tell the President exactly what he thinks of the war when the President visits his base, but the truth is there in song if leaders are willing to listen. If you wanted a fighter pilot’s prescription on what to do up north, look no further than Jonas’ “Let’s Get Away with it All.”

Let’s take a trip to the package  
We got the bombs and the balls  
Let’s kill a SAM site, let’s keep it up tight  
Let’s get away with it all  
Let’s bomb the heart of Hanoi  
Let’s strafe down Embassy Row  
Let’s scatter napalm all over Gia Lam  
Let’s have a really big show  
We’ll travel around from town to town  
We’ll clobber every place  
We’ll drop bombs and CBUs  
On every MiG air base  
Let’s strafe the ships in the harbor  
Let’s bomb the dikes above all  
Let’s cross the ridges and let’s bomb the bridges  
Let’s get away with it all.<sup>53</sup>

While pilots sang openly about their frustration with leadership in Washington, they were more restrained in their critiques of leadership on their own bases. Like songs about themselves, there was probably little benefit to disparaging men you flew and fought with daily. LeVine wrote, “Not all the leaders were there to win but of course they were all there to survive and make the next rank. I didn’t like it but I soon assumed that it

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<sup>51</sup> Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1994), 59.

<sup>52</sup> Toby Hughes, interview by Maj Charles Stretch, Telephone, March 15, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Dick Jonas, *Soul of the Warrior*, .m4a (Erosonic, LLC, n.d.), 17.

was part of any large outfit.”<sup>54</sup> He did put a few names in song during his 100<sup>th</sup> Mission Party and felt they were mostly taken in good humor. Hughes had a number of poor experiences flying combat with one of his wing commanders but declined to elaborate.<sup>55</sup> He never mentioned any in song. While songwriters avoided writing about poor leadership at the Wing Level and below, they embraced singing ballads about great leaders.

### **Praise of a Great Leader**

The few songs about great leaders in Vietnam should not be interpreted to mean that good leadership was not important, or that there were few admirable leaders worthy of song. The list of great leaders immortalized in song is very short, and shorter still if limited to songs written during the war. Jonas and LeVine both wrote songs about Robin Olds. In Jonas’ songs his squadron commander “Hoot” Gibson is occasionally mentioned but does not have his own dedicated ballad. After the war Jonas wrote about Bill Kirk, the Wing Weapons Officer in the 8<sup>th</sup> TFW (and future Air Force four-star general) during Jonas’ tour. While Olds remained first in fighter pilot song lore, Jonas, LeVine, and Hughes all had other leaders they drew inspiration from even if they did not sing about them in song.

For Jonas the most important thing about combat was leadership, “It was more important than the music, it was more important than anything else.” Olds was first in his mind as a great leader but he only served with Olds briefly. Gibson and Kirk were clearly men he would follow anywhere. For Hughes it was Ralph Parr, his squadron director of operations, “He was the personification of the old saying, if you can do it—it ain’t bragging. He was arrogant, pompous, and the best fighter pilot I knew.”<sup>56</sup> LeVine, who only met Olds after the war, mentioned Doc Blanchard of West Point football fame as one of the great leaders at Korat. The importance Jonas places on leadership is confirmed by Mark Wells’ study on *Courage and Air Warfare* where he finds that leadership at the

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<sup>54</sup> LeVine to Stretch, “My Answers to Your Emailed Questions.”

<sup>55</sup> Hughes, interview.

<sup>56</sup> Jonas, interview.

tactical level was a major contributing factor to the sustainment of the Combined Bomber Offensive in WWII.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Hughes and LeVine never wrote about Parr or Blanchard should not detract from their importance to the men at Cam Ranh Bay or Korat. Robin Olds simply loomed larger than life in most pilots' minds and therefore had more songs written about him. A survey of Vietnam pilots found that a good combat leader was an example to his men and had confidence in himself. They would never ask anyone to do something they would not do themselves. The most often cited example was Robin Olds.<sup>58</sup>

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Ultimately, songs about leadership in Vietnam display a clear divide in opinion between leaders at the wing and below who flew and fought with their men and those who appeared to be detached bureaucrats managing a war from afar. Even though men like Jonas had great respect for General Momyer who commanded 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the organization was not spared criticism.<sup>59</sup> The further leaders get from the men and women in the cockpit or trenches, the more difficult it is for them to see the world the same way. The various levels of command between the soldier and the statesman make it difficult for the former to understand the latter's policies, and for the latter to understand the former's reality. Songs, as Lansdale believed, can bridge this gap. They provide an unguarded look into the opinions and experiences of warriors.

### **Their Enemy**

Fighter pilots sang about their enemy in Vietnam with a mixture of grudging respect, humanity, and unbridled ferocity. Ultimately, they viewed them as fellow warriors, men, and targets. Having recognized the humanity and a portion of themselves in their enemy, the songs about the North Vietnamese sought to ease the pain of killing while recognizing the horror of war. Grossman recognizes that there is significant

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<sup>57</sup> Mark K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 155.

<sup>58</sup> Antone E. Gajeski, "Combat Aircrew Experiences During the Vietnam Conflict: An Exploratory Study" (Air Force Institute of Technology, 1988), 51.

<sup>59</sup> Jonas, interview.

physical, mechanical, and emotional distance between pilots and their victims; still, the distance is never absolute. Joseph Campo showed in his dissertation that remotely piloted aircraft crews—despite being accused of waging war by video game—have a clear understanding that they are taking human life and suffer the mental and emotional injuries from doing so.<sup>60</sup> Grossman tells us that following a kill there is often exhilaration, remorse, and then rationalization.<sup>61</sup> Proud warrior songs about combat contain most of the Vietnam fighter pilots' exhilaration at having caused death and destruction. Songs about the enemy serve to address the remorse through rationalization.

### **Respect for Fellow Warriors**

The North Vietnamese may have been inhabitants of a pissant country to President Johnson, but to men like Jonas and Hughes they were adversaries worthy of respect. Jonas dedicated an entire song to the MiG-21 jocks.

Now there's a lot to be said for the guys who fly the MiG-21s up  
north.  
I don't reckon they make very much, but every dime they're paid  
they're worth,  
I mean, how much guts does it take to jump a force of 24 Thuds  
That's covered by a cap of F-4D's and eight MiG hungry studs?<sup>62</sup>

Of course in the end the Phantom and its crew were superior, but young Phantom drivers must learn the tricks of the trade lest they fall victim to a MiG. As Jonas said, "I was not contemptuous of them [the North Vietnamese], they were good."<sup>63</sup>

While the MiG-21 was the most advanced fighter flown by the North Vietnamese, Jonas warned young pilots about the aging MiG-17 as well. Painted camouflage instead of silver, they ambushed F-105s on their way to the target by hiding against the green Vietnamese jungle at low altitude. They were significantly more maneuverable than either the Thud or the Phantom. Jonas wrote "Banana Valley" about the valley near

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph Campo, "From a Distance: The Psychology of Killing with Remotely Piloted Aircraft" (Air University, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 233–45.

<sup>62</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, M-4.

<sup>63</sup> Jonas, interview.

Hanoi where MiG-17s hid waiting to ambush American fighters. Jonas introduced the song saying this, “When you go MiG hunting, you gotta be careful, especially if it’s MiG-17s that you find. They sneak off down to Banana Valley and lay in the grass like a snake, and just wait for somebody to make a slip.”<sup>64</sup>

Just go down to banana valley,  
Go on down and meet your fate,  
Just go on down to banana valley,  
But when you go down, down, down, you better learn to hate.

Well, I got friends in banana valley,  
I got friends that learned too late,  
I got friends in banana valley,  
They went down, down, down, ‘cause they did not hate.<sup>65</sup>

Flying the in-country war, Hughes had a similar view of the enemy. While he did not face the MiG-21s or the dense SAM activity over Hanoi, Hughes respected the North Vietnamese capabilities. He also noted that they possessed a greater will to fight, “We flew a year and went home, they were home. And they were damn good.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Targets and Men – Rationalization and Empathy**

Beyond respect for their opponents’ capabilities and will to fight, a paradox emerges in fighter pilot songs about their enemy. On the one hand fighter pilot songs such as “Strafe the Town and Kill the People” celebrate indiscriminate violence, while others such as “One Level Gunner,” “King of the Trail,” and “Sitting in the Cab of My Truck” tell the story of the enemy from a very personal and human perspective. Why do pilots humanize soldiers on the other side—their actual enemy—while celebrating the destruction of civilians?

The apparent celebration of wanton violence aimed at civilians is not surprising given Grossman’s research on killing and combat. Grossman notes that even if a soldier “kills in self-defense, there is enormous resistance associated with kill[ing] an individual

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<sup>64</sup> Dick Jonas, *RBAAB: The Red-Blooded All-American Boy* (Chino Valley, AZ: Erosonic, 1997), chap. 1, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Getz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Songs of the Air Force World War I Through the Vietnam War*, 1:B-4.

<sup>66</sup> Hughes, interview.

who is not normally associated with relevance or a payoff.”<sup>67</sup> Despite the physical, mechanical, and emotional distance fighter pilots had from people they killed on the ground, the distance is never so absolute as to disassociate themselves from killing.<sup>68</sup> In some manner they had to reconcile the killing of non-combatants. The rationalization for a kill, whether a non-combatant or not, is the same process.

Killing is a traumatic and intensely personal experience. For those warriors whose exhilaration from combat transitions to remorse or guilt, they must rationalize the act. One of the key rationalization processes is through a support group who can tell the killer that their reaction is natural. It is okay to have felt excited about killing. Ideally the soldier’s society supports this message, bolstered by welcome home parades and other acts of approval.<sup>69</sup> Lacking the support from society, songs like “Strafe the Town and Kill the People” help normalize the process of killing and endorse the excitement of violence even if the people killed are not always uniformed soldiers. The motivation to humanize the enemy in song is less clear.

There are two possible motivations behind songs like “One Level Gunner” by Toby Hughes, and “King of the Trail” and “Sitting in the Cab of My Truck” by Chip Dockery. The first is that they were for a simple laugh. Hughes admits that there was no truth to his story about the gunner off the runway at Danang. He never thought much about the men on the other side. Dockery’s songs on the other hand take a much more personal view of the enemy. His songs are from the enemy perspective. They recognize that as different as flying jets and driving trucks was, there was a little bit of each other in the enemy—men who were willing to fight for their country. An American Vietnam Veteran said of his experience that “in killing the grunts of North Vietnam, the grunts of America had killed a part of themselves.”<sup>70</sup> Dockery’s songs point to a bit of empathy with the other side. This empathy is what a society wants in their warriors. It ensures that warriors are sheepdogs and not wolves.<sup>71</sup> They are protectors willing to do violence on behalf of the group, but not ungoverned sociopaths. Songs like Hughes and Dockery’s

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<sup>67</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 174.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.



allow the group to share feelings of empathy while veiling it in humor to maintain the warrior image.

### Conclusion

The fighter pilot folksongs of Vietnam provide a view into the mechanisms used by combat pilots to cope with combat stress. The songs provide a previously unexplored tool to understand combat motivations and reactions to stress. Philip Hamilton found while researching his thesis “Fear and Loathing in the Air” that literature on fighter pilot combat stress is rare. That which does exist falls into three categories: historical analyses which have traditionally focused more on WWII bomber pilots, such as Wells’ *Courage and Air Warfare*; clinical analyses such as Kellett, Stokes and Kite, and Grossman; or personal memoirs.<sup>72</sup> Two decades before Hamilton’s work, Walter Grady recognized the same limitations and sought to explore the problem through surveys of F-105 pilots from Vietnam. His survey suffers from a few limitations, among them a small sample size and over 25 years of elapsed time between combat and the survey.<sup>73</sup> While folksongs suffer from their own biases, they do help partially address these shortcomings. Folksongs, often written during the war, provide a contemporary view of events and stress of combat. Additionally, the process by which a folksong survives for collection suggests that it had a general acceptance among the group. Fighter pilot folksongs reinforce the conclusions drawn by previous scholarship on combat stress through official records, psychology, surveys, or memoirs.

In songs about themselves, fighter pilots showed the importance of group cohesion. Scholarship on combat motivations has identified group cohesion as an important factor. As Kellett recognized, strong group cohesion and identity allowed individuals to perform at a higher level.<sup>74</sup> Grady discovered this same trend in his F-105 pilot survey with all respondents rating group cohesion as very important.<sup>75</sup> Proud warrior

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<sup>72</sup> Phillip T. Hamilton, “Fear and Loathing in the Air: Combat Fear and Stress in the Air Force” (Air University, 2005), 12–16.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Anthony Grady Jr., “The Moral Domain of War: A View From the Cockpit” (Air University, 1993), 85.

<sup>74</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 99.

<sup>75</sup> Grady Jr., “The Moral Domain of War: A View From the Cockpit,” 46–57.

songs about themselves promoted a group image of brave and deadly warriors, while bawdy songs about themselves encouraged excessive drinking and womanizing to release stress out of the cockpit. Neither of these viewpoints were entirely accurate. Many pilots missed home and did not participate in some of the bawdier actions immortalized in song. Songs about combat, likewise, show that even the brave pilots had fear and reluctance to fly combat missions.

A wide variety of warrior archetypes sang about combat and showed that pilots needed to debrief their combat experiences. The need for this debrief process, at least as represented in song, varied by mission. Forward Air Controllers, who exercised greater control, and CSAR pilots who received huge amounts of praise, sang fewer mortal, mournful, or reluctant songs. Those pilots flying missions to Route Pack VI, with all the political restrictions and politics associated with those campaigns, displayed a greater need to cope with their negative experiences through song.

Due to the small sample size in songs about leadership and the enemy, connections to previous scholarship are more tenuous. Proud leadership songs appear to support Wells' conclusions about the importance of leadership to combat motivation. This is also confirmed by interviews with songwriters and pilot memoirs, but the sample size of proud leadership songs is exceedingly small. Frustrated leadership songs pair nicely with frustrated warrior combat songs and show how leadership can add to combat stress as well as alleviate it. Songs about the enemy took a number of viewpoints. Some sang about the enemy's competence while others formed a paradox between humanizing the soldiers on the other side while apparently celebrating the killing of non-combatants. These likely are connected to Grossman's identified need to rationalize the act of killing.

Vietnam fighter pilot folksongs provide a unique view into the workings of combat motivations and group cohesion. They display several scholarly theories of group dynamics and combat stress in action. Most importantly they convey the emotion and experience of combat. The raw emotions present in song provide a closeness to the experience of combat that few other sources can replicate. To read about the importance of group dynamics or an informal critical incident debrief process is one thing, to hear it play out in a song full of emotion is another. For all of these advantages, songs do have

their biases. First, they are meant to entertain. The messages and themes in songs will reflect this desire and the gallows humor and poking fun at frustrations should be understood as an entertaining view on what could be rather serious emotions and issues. Second, there will naturally be biases toward the viewpoint of a few individual song writers or small groups. The process of preserving and collecting songs partially limits the impact of this bias. Unpopular songs are not likely to survive and become included in folk collections. Therefore, those which are present probably possessed general support from the larger group. In sum, fighter pilot folksongs, like other folk material, provide an important window into the values, emotions, and experiences of the group.



## Conclusion

*It didn't stop with the war.*

- Dick Jonas

*As I stood close by that Wall an inner voice kept calling  
And my heart went out to all who'd lost someone  
Though the many years have passed their love and hope still lasts  
It's so lonely for the ones who've lost someone.*

- Irv LeVine, "Cold Black D.C. Wall"

When asked if there was anything else he wanted me to know at the end of his interview, Dick Jonas said, "It [the music] didn't stop with the war."<sup>1</sup> His record label—Erosonic—now has 31 albums with only the first three covering exclusively his experiences in Southeast Asia. While subsequent albums and songs by Jonas and LeVine dealt with contemporary military folk themes such as LeVine's "Iraqi Hacienda" or Jonas' "Nipple on the Grass"—which celebrates the entrance of women into combat aviation by replacing nickel with nipple in "Fighter Pilot's Hymn." They also revisit old memories and stories from their war recording CDs and performing at reunions. As good folk artists, they know that the show must go on, with new music adapted for the time and place they find themselves, but the psychological work of processing combat experiences and the loss of friends from old wars is never complete.

America is still healing from the wounds of Vietnam. The Vietnam War Memorial itself serves a reminder of the scar the war left on the national psyche as its black granite cuts down into the National Mall. The legacy of the war is still debated as the nation works to sew up the divisions it caused. For Vietnam veterans and folk artists, music continues to be a tool to celebrate the pride they feel in their Vietnam service, remember the dangers, and mourn the loss of friends. LeVine's "Cold Black D.C. Wall" quoted above is just one many songs which reflect on the war and its aftermath which fell outside the scope of this paper. Other songs written well after the war celebrate great leaders such as LeVine's "Robin Olds" (which he sang at Olds' memorial service in

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<sup>1</sup> Dick Jonas, interview by Maj Charles Stretch, Telephone, March 6, 2018.

Colorado Springs in 2007) or Jonas' "Bill Kirk" on his 2013 album "Willing to Fight." Beyond the use of folksongs in combat addressed in this paper, further research should focus on the change in the tone and message of this music from the early days of Vietnam through today. It is likely that fighter pilot folksongs reflect the early naiveté of American involvement in Vietnam, the growing frustration and disillusionment with the war, and the challenges of coming home having risked your life and killed for your country—having lost friends in the process.

Not only have the folk artists from Vietnam continued to work on their music, they also passed the torch to modern fighter pilot folksingers. During my assignment to Korea, the 25th Fighter Squadron had a band. Down the road from Osan, the 80<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron had the Juvat Boys Choir and they sang original and adapted folksongs at unit events—they have also released a CD with LeVine under Jonas' label. But the premier modern fighter pilot group is Dos Gringos, a pair of F-16 pilots who sing with more of a rock 'n' roll style, but their songs remain part of the same folk tradition. They have transitioned from releasing albums which complain about everything from the rise in remotely piloted aircraft to Air Force personnel policies, to running a veteran-oriented music company. Their company, Operation Encore, seeks to help veterans find their voice through music and "bridge the gap between reality and public perception of veterans through the powerful medium of original music."<sup>2</sup>

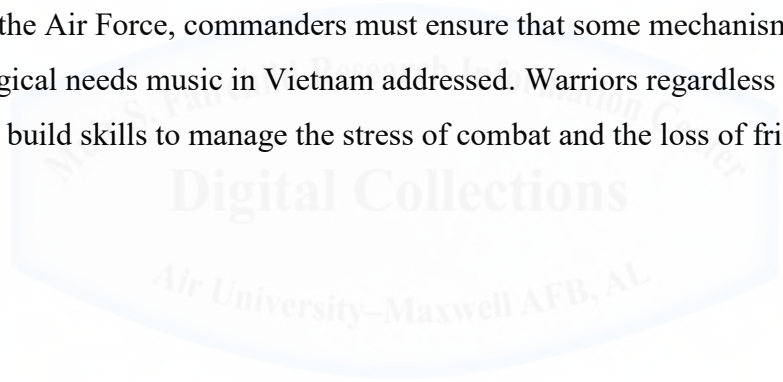
Despite the great work done by the men of Dos Gringos, some are concerned about the future of fighter pilot folksongs. The Air Force is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water. Productive and purposeful fighter pilot folksongs—like those discussed in this paper—have been intermingled with drinking songs since WWI. Bawdy drinking songs are no longer acceptable in modern Air Force culture for good reasons. In 2012, personnel issues at one fighter base exploded into a fire storm of bad publicity for the Air Force. Fighter squadrons were accused of harboring unprofessional materials and supporting a culture of excessive drinking and sexism. The result was a purging of squadron songbooks from Air Force units. Much of the material discarded was inappropriate and no one should mourn its journey to the shredder, but a substantial

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<sup>2</sup> "About Us," Operation Encore, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://operationencore.org/about-us/>.

portion contained important history and culture. The 2012 purge extinguished much of the culture built around roll calls and song and explains why many fighter pilots think of fighter pilot songs as “those we can’t sing anymore.” This view does not appreciate the full body of work that are fighter pilot folksongs or the importance of this music to group cohesion and combat effectiveness.

It is unclear if the Air Force needs to recapture some of this folk heritage. The Vietnam War occurred a time ripe for the production of military folk music due to the 1950s folk revival. It is hard to imagine today’s college graduates pursuing songwriting with the same enthusiasm. They simply have access to many other forms of entertainment even when deployed to Afghanistan. During my 2011 deployment there, we had no *Beowulf*-like feast that Tusso describes, no booze, and spent most of our time watching TV series instead of writing music. Regardless of any decision to recapture military folk music in the Air Force, commanders must ensure that some mechanisms addresses the psychological needs music in Vietnam addressed. Warriors regardless of time or place still must build skills to manage the stress of combat and the loss of friends.



## Appendix Complete Lyrics of Referenced Songs

These 55 songs were referenced in this thesis, their full lyrics are available here. Of note many songs have multiple versions, source material for each song is located in the footnotes of the text where it was referenced, that information was not repeated here. These songs use a significant amount of slang and technical terminology. Rather than include significant footnotes throughout the songs; acronyms, slang, and technical terms used in the songs can be found in the list of acronyms and glossary of terms which follow this annex.

160 VC in the Open ..... 108	The MiG-21 ..... 118
Along the Northeast Railroad ..... 108	Napalm ..... 119
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### **160 VC in the Open**

By Toby Hughes

Tune: 160 Acres in the Valley

I've got one hundred sixty VC in the open,  
And ten or twenty North Vietnamese.  
Got to get some air, put a strike down there,  
Before that they can make it to the trees.

I've got one hundred sixty VC in the open,  
It's a target that you don't get every day,  
So I call the DASC and I quickly ask,  
To please get the fighters on their way.

Number one should have a gun,  
And a load of what we call incendi-gel  
Send number two with CBU,  
When they get here we can really give 'em hell

I've got one hundred sixty VC in the open,  
I've got a flight of F-100s up above.  
I've got my Willy Pete smoking at their feet  
It's the kind of situation that I love.

### **Along the Northeast Railroad**

Unknown

Along the northeast railroad  
One bright and sunny day  
By the wreckage of his Thunderchief  
The young pursuer lay.

His parachute hung from a nearby tree  
He was not yet quite dead  
Now listen to the very last words  
The young pursuer said

I'm going to a better land  
Where everything is right  
Where whiskey flows  
From telegraph poles  
Play poker every night

There's not a fucking thing to do  
But sit around and sing  
And chase the pretty poo-ying  
Oh death where is thy sting?

Oh, death where is thy sting?  
Oh, death where is thy sting?  
The bells of hell may ring-a-ling  
For you but not for me.

Oh, ring-a-ling-a-ling-ling, blow it out your ass  
Ring-a-ling-a-ling-ling, blow it out your ass  
Ring-a-ling-a-ling-ling, blow it out your ass  
Better days are coming by-and-by.

### **Ballad of the Green Beret**

SSgt Barry Sadler

Tune: Original

Fighting soldiers from the sky  
Fearless men who jump and die  
Men who mean just what they say  
The brave men of the Green Beret

Silver wings upon their chest  
These are men, America's best  
One hundred men will test today  
But only three win the Green Beret

Trained to live off nature's land  
Trained in combat, hand-to-hand  
Men who fight by night and day  
Courage peak from the Green Berets

Silver wings upon their chest  
These are men, America's best  
One hundred men will test today  
But only three win the Green Beret

Back at home a young wife waits  
Her Green Beret has met his fate  
He has died for those oppressed  
Leaving her his last request

Put silver wings on my son's chest  
Make him one of America's best  
He'll be a man they'll test one day  
Have him win the Green Beret.

### **The Ballad of Jeb Stuart**

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Original

On a steep and jagged hillside near Mu Gia  
Pass  
Hanging in a parachute, this day is his last.  
Just another fighter jock, they're mostly all the  
same,  
But this one here was different, Jeb Stewart was  
his name.

Well, Jeb was feeling mighty poorly, both his  
legs were broke,

And I could see him hanging there between the puffs of smoke.  
I told Jeb, "Now, drink some water, Sandy's on the way,  
The Jolly Greens are coming in, we'll get you out today."

I could tell that he was hurt much worse than first thought,  
'Cause sometimes he just wouldn't answer then sometimes he'd talk.  
"Ol' Jeb likely needs a doctor," I said to Crown,  
And he came back with, "Jolly's got PJs they'll soon be down."

I held high and kept Jeb talking to me all the while,  
When I told him here comes Sandy, I could see him smile.  
Jeb said, "Listen, babes, you have ol' Sandy watch his stuff,  
They got ZPU and small arms, this one's goin' be tough."

Sandy flew tight down the valley looking for the sites,  
He pulled off with battle damage and turned around to fight.  
Jeb called up and told him, "Sandy, bring it down again.  
The guns are down behind the Karst; now lay your napalm in."

Jeb worked Sandy like a FAC, "Hit 20 meters right,  
Watch the small arms on the left," then all the guns went quiet.  
Jeb was talking low and weaker, time was running out.  
The guns were down and Jolly's here, but I began to doubt.

First the PJs tried to reach him, but it took too long,  
I was bingo minus seven, time to head for home.  
All the way to Wolf Pack Country not a word was said,  
'Cause when the PJs finally reached him,  
Young Jeb Stewart was dead.

We rolled out and taxied in, and climbed out in the rain.  
Hoot and Bill and all the boys, they met us at the plane.  
I told Hoot Jeb didn't make it, they got him at the pass,  
And I came home because my bird was running out of gas.

Listen boys, and hear me good, I want you all to know,  
That ol' Jeb died a hero's death, the way we all would go.

### **Banana Valley**

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Just go down to banana valley,  
Go on down and meet your fate,  
Just go on down to banana valley,  
But when you go down, down, down, you better learn to hate.

Well, I got friends in banana valley,  
I got friends that learned to late,  
I got friends in banana valley,  
They went down, down, down, 'cause they did not hate.

There's snakes in the weeds in banana valley.  
Them snakes in the weeds know how to hate.  
Them snakes in the weeds in banana valley,  
They go down, down, down, and there they wait.

I heard all 'bout banana valley,  
How fighting them snakes, could be so great.  
So much fun in banana valley.  
Gotta go down, down, down, and investigate.

Two weeks ago in banana valley,  
Two of my friends killed one of them snakes,  
Two weeks ago in banana valley,  
They went down, down, down, to attend the wake

### **Battle Hymn of the Red River Rats**

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

The Red River Rats meet again,  
Telling tales, remembering when

Battles joined in the skies, shed our blood, gave  
our lives.  
The Red River Rats meet again.

War is never a beautiful thing,  
But we fought for the right on the wing.  
Dropping bombs, dodging flak, fighting MiGs,  
we'll be back,  
Shout the Rats Battle Cry, let it ring.

Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.  
Hold your head high, stand tall, you are men.  
Never run from a fight, be prepared day and  
night,  
Sing the Red River Rats Battle Hymn.

Look around, there're a few empty chairs,  
Honored comrades should be sitting there.  
Some are dead where they fell, some fight on  
from a cell.  
Charge your glass, raise it high, drink to them.

I'll tell you a tales that will curl your hair  
I'll tell you the truth, 'cause I was there  
About what happened on Ho Chi Minh's  
backyard.

Gyrene, sailor and Air Force type,  
Black smoke pouring from a hot tailpipe,  
Flyin' and fightin and livin' a life that's hard.

Black smoke, flak smoke, red SAM fire,  
Pressin' your luck right down to the wire.  
Pickle 'em off and boot those babies for home.

But the battle ain't over 'til you've parked and  
chocked,  
So if you fly and fight keep your guns  
unlocked,  
And don't try to fly and fight when you're all  
alone.

What's that telltale wisp I see?  
That's a contrail pulled by a Fishbed C;  
The cards are stacked and it looks like time to  
deal.

Lead's got bandits 12 o'clock high  
Let's bend it around and scramble for sky  
And arm your guns this ain't no game, it's real.

We flew the Valley and the railroad lines,  
From Dien Bien Phu, to the Cam Pho Mines,

But the price was high and measured in rich red  
blood,

When tales are told in the halls of fame;  
When warriors meet you'll hear these names;  
Skyhawk, Crusader, Intruder, Phantom, Thud.

The Red River Rats meet again,  
Tellin' tales, rememberin' when,  
Battles joined in the skies, shed our blood, gave  
our lives,  
The Red River Rats meet again.

### **The Battle of Doumer Bridge**

By Irv LeVine  
Tune: Original

Eighteen December, sixty-seven—  
At noon like a thunderclap.  
We dropped Doumer Bridge on down  
Into Ho Chi Minh's wet lap.

(CHORUS)  
Well now boys,  
We fought the Battle of Doumer Bridge  
I said, Doumer Bridge, yeah, Doumer Bridge.  
We fought the Battle of Doumer Bridge  
And the Bridge went tumbling down.

Now you talk about your River Kwai Bridge,  
And the one at Thanh Hoa, too.  
We dropped seven spans of the Doumer Bridge  
Down into the mud and goo.

Ho says he holds all the cards, boys,  
And he plays them with great joy.  
Wonder how he liked our game of "bridge"  
Up at old Hanoi?

Now we lost some friends up yonder  
Due to SAMs and MiGs and flak,  
And if Ho puts that damn bridge up,  
Well, we'll all be going back.

For those who've gone before us  
For those on that far shore,  
I know we'll forget them soon,  
Let's sing it just once more

(CHORUS)x2

## The Bronco Song

Unknown

Dear mom, your son is dead.  
He bought the farm today.  
He crashed his OV-10 on Ho Chi Minh's  
Highway  
It was a rocket pass and he busted his ass.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm.

He went across the fence  
To see what he could see.  
There it was as plain as it could be.  
It was a truck on the road, with a big heavy  
load.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm

He got right on the horn,  
And gave the DASC a call.  
Send me air, I've got a truck that's stalled.  
The DASC said, "That's all right, I'll send you  
[insert squadron callsign here] flight"  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm.

Those Phantoms checked right in.  
Gunfighters, two-by-two.  
Low on gas and tanker overdue.  
They asked the FAC to mark just where that  
truck was parked.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm.

The FAC he rolled right in,  
With his smoke to mark  
Exactly where that truck was parked.  
Now the rest is in doubt, cause he never pulled  
out.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm.

Dear mom, your son is dead.  
He bought the farm today.  
He crashed his OV-10 on Ho Chi Minh's  
highway  
It was a rocket pass, and he busted his ass.  
Hmmm, Hmmm, Hmmm.

Him, Him, Fuck him.

## Blue Four

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Original

There's a fireball down there on the  
hillside,  
And I think maybe we've lost a friend,  
But we'll keep on flying  
And we'll keep on dying,  
For duty and honor never end.

There's an upended glass on the table,  
Down in front of a lone empty chair,  
Yesterday, we were with him,  
Today, God be with him,  
Wherever he is in your care.

They were four when they took off this  
morning,  
And their duty was there in the sky.  
Only three ships returning,  
Blue Four ain't returning  
To Blue Four, then, hold your glasses  
high.

There's a fireball down there on the  
hillside,  
And I think maybe we've lost a friend,  
But we'll keep on flyin',  
And we'll keep on dyin',  
For duty and honor never end.

**Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild, Wild Women**  
Unknown

Once I was happy and had a good wife;  
I had enough money to last me for life.  
I met a gal and we went on a spree;  
She taught me to smoke and to drink whiskey.

(CHORUS)

Cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women,  
They'll drive you crazy, they'll drive you  
insane.

Cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women,  
They'll drive you crazy, they'll drive you  
insane

Cigarettes is a blot on the whole human race,  
A man is a monkey with one in his face.  
Here's my definition, believe me, dear brother  
"A fire on one end, a fool on the other."

Brother, repent or they'll write on your grave:  
"To women and whiskey here lies a poor  
slave."

Take warning dear stranger, take warning dear  
friend;  
They'll write in big letters these words at your  
end.

**Cold Black D.C. Wall**

By Irv LeVine

Tune: The Fields of Athenry

By that Cold Black D.C. Wall I heard a young  
girl calling.  
She said, "Daddy are you here or far away?  
When you left both me and mom, for that far  
off Vietnam,  
You promised that you would come back some  
day."

"And, oh, how I wish you would come home  
So things would be like before you'd gone  
We would laugh and play and sing  
And you'd push me on my swing  
It's so lonely here at home for me and mom."

From that Cold Black D.C. Wall I thought I  
heard him calling  
Saying, "Darling, dry your eyes for I'm right  
here."

Though I tried to make it back, Fate shot me off  
the track  
And this is as close as I could make it, dear."

"And, oh, how I wish I could come home  
So things would be like before I'd gone  
We would laugh and play and sing  
And I'd push you on your swing  
And I'd never, ever leave you and mom."

As I stood close by that Wall an inner voice  
kept calling  
And my heart went out to all who'd lost  
someone  
Though the many years have passed their love  
and hope still lasts  
It's so lonely for the one's who've lost someone

And, oh, how I wish they'd all come home  
So things would be like they were before  
We would laugh and play and sing, and our  
hearts would all take wing  
And we'd all forget that awful Vietnam War  
We'd all forget that awful Vietnam War.

**Cruising Over Hanoi**

Unknown

Tune: Throw a Nickel on the Drum

We were cruising over Hanoi  
Doin' four and fifty per-  
When I called to my flight leader  
"Oh won't you help me, sir?  
The SAMs are hot and heavy,  
The MiGs are on our ass,  
Take us home, flight leader,  
Please don't make another pass."

CHORUS

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Throw a nickel in the grass  
Save a fighter pilot's ass.  
Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Throw a nickel in the grass  
And you'll be saved.

I rolled into my bomb run,  
Trying to set the pipper right,  
When a SAM came off the launch pad,  
And headed for our flight.  
Then number two informed me,  
"Hey four, you'd better break!"  
I racked the goddamn plane so hard,

It made the whole thing shake.

I started my recovery,  
It seemed things were all right,  
When I felt the dammed impact,  
Saw a blinding flash of light.  
We held the stick with all our might  
Against the binding force,  
Then number two screamed out at us,  
“Hey four, you've had the course!”

I screamed at my back seater,  
“We'd better punch on out—  
Eject! Eject, you stupid shit!”  
In panic I did shout.  
I didn't wait around to see  
Joe had got the word.  
I reached between my legs and pulled,  
And took off like a bird.

As I descended in my chute,  
My thoughts were rather grim.  
Rather than be a prisoner  
I'd fight them to the end.  
I hit the ground and staggered up,  
And looked around to see,  
And there in blazing neon,  
Hanoi Hilton welcomed me

(Slowly)  
The moral of this story is  
When you're in a Package Six  
You'd better goddamn look around  
Or you'll be in my fix.  
I'm a guest at Hanoi Hilton,  
With luxury sublime.  
The only thing that's not so great—  
I'll be here a long--long--time.

### **Dashing Through the Sky**

Unknown

Tune: Dashing Through the Snow

Dashing through the sky,  
In a Foxtrot one-o-five,  
Through the flak we fly,  
Trying to stay alive.  
The SAMs destroy our calm,  
The MiGs come up to play,  
What fun it is to strafe and bomb,  
The T.R.V. today.

(CHORUS)

CBUs, Mark 82s, 750s too,  
Daddy Vulcan strikes again,  
Our Christmas gift to you.

Heads up Ho Chi Minh,  
The Fives are on their way.  
Your luck it has give in,  
There's going to be hell to pay,  
Today it is our turn,  
To make you gawk and stare.  
What fun it is to watch things burn  
And blow up everywhere!!!

NOTE: There is another version of this song that uses the Phantom II for the aircraft, and the first verse is a variation from the first version.

Dashing through the goo,  
In a fucking Phantom two  
Flying through the flak  
Never looking back,  
Through the hills we dodge,  
The SAMs coming our way.

### **Delta Dawn**

By Toby Hughes

Tune: Original

The roar of mighty engines splits the morning,  
On shafts of fire the fighters climb away.  
The eastern sky's ablaze with light of dawning  
For men who fly and fight, another day.

The sky above the coast is washed in sunlight;  
The sea is dark as day breaks on the land.  
The vast and flooded delta's fertile grandeur  
Reminds us of how small the works of man.

From twenty thousand feet the land is peaceful,  
With the beauty God meant the world to be,  
The morning mist, the sparkling silver sunlight  
On the Mekong, flowing gently to the sea.

In the spell of this high deep blue enchantment,  
And the beauty of this lovely verdant land,  
How far away the pain, the tears and heart  
break  
Of man's cruel inhumanity to man.

How long must we endure the bonds of hatred?  
How long must we heed the call of Mars?  
How long before all men can live together?



How long to bind the wounds and heal the  
scars?

The soldier prays for peace more than all  
others,  
For he must bear the deepest wounds of war.  
Lord, take our hand and lead us through the  
midnight,  
To the shining promise of Your morning star.

### **Don't Send Me To Hanoi**

Unknown

Tune: Winchester Cathedral

Don't send me to Hanoi,  
Don't put my name down.  
The shooting is bad there,  
Don't send me downtown.

The bridges at Bac Giang,  
More milling around.  
Another Brown Anchor,  
I think I'll leave town.

Don't send me to Yen Bai,  
I don't like that flak.  
It takes too much damn gas,  
To bring my ass back.

Don't send me to Dong Hoi,  
I don't want to get none.  
BUFF support missions  
They make my ass numb.

Just send me on milk runs,  
Where there are no big guns.  
I just want to fly where,  
It's easy on my bear.

### **Downtown**

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Downtown

When you get up at two o'clock in the morning  
you can bet you'll go—downtown  
Shaking your boots, you're sweating heavy all  
over 'cause you get to go—downtown  
Smoke a pack of cigarettes before the briefings  
over;  
Wishing, you weren't bombing, wishing you  
were flying cover.  
It's safer that way  
It's hairy as hell down there

You know you're biting your nails,  
and you're pulling your hair;

You're going downtown where all the lights are  
bright,  
Downtown—you'd rather switch than  
fight,  
Downtown—hope you'll come home  
tonight—downtown, downtown

Planning the route, you keep hoping that you  
won't have to go today—downtown.  
Checking the weather and it's scattered to  
broken, so you still don't know—  
downtown.

Waiting for the guys in TOC to say you're  
cancelled,

Hoping that the words they give will be what  
suits your fancy.

Don't make me go  
I'd much rather RTB,  
And so you sit and you wait thinking,  
oh foxtrot-sierra-hotel,

I'm going downtown that's why I'm feeling low  
Downtown—but don't want to go  
Downtown—going to see Uncle Ho—  
downtown, downtown.

### **The Dying Aviator**

Unknown

Tune: Dying Hobo

A poor aviator lay dying,  
At the end of a bright summer day;  
His comrades had gathered around him,  
To carry his pieces away.

The aircraft was stacked on his wishbone  
His machine gun was wrapped 'round his head;  
A spark plug he wore on each elbow,  
It was plain he'd quickly be dead.

He spit out a valve and some gaskets,  
And stirred in the sump where he lay;  
To mechanics who 'round him came sighing,  
These are the brave words he did say:

“Take the magneto out of my stomach  
And the butterfly valve off my neck  
Tear from my liver the crankshaft  
There's a lot of good parts in this wreck.



Take the manifold out of my left eye  
And the cylinders out of my brain;  
Take the piston rods out of my kidneys,  
And assemble the engine again.”

### **The FAC That Never Returned**

Unknown  
Tune: MTA Song

Let me tell you the story of a brave young pilot  
who served in old Vietnam.  
He was the man most hated by the Victor  
Charlie though he carried not a single  
bomb.  
Well this handsome young Captain reported to  
the Major a Forward Air Controller was he.  
They gave him an O-1 and sent him into battle  
to see what he could see.  
So he climbed into his Cessna and he head into  
battle with his rockets tucked snug beneath  
his wings.  
When a cry came from that ground commander,  
“Charlie’s got us in his ring.”

#### (CHORUS)

Well did he ever return?  
No he never returned and he fate is still  
unlearned.  
He my lie forever in the Vietnam jungle,  
He’s the FAC who never returned.  
  
Oh the ceiling was low and the rain was falling,  
his Bird Dog was pitchin’ all about.  
Well he said to that soldier, “No sweat brother,  
TAC air will get you out.”  
Soon the fighter arrived they were F-100s they  
called down to our FAC.  
He told ‘em it was rough but to follow his  
directions, this one they could hack.  
Now Charlie didn’t like the sight of that Bird  
Dog and the bullets began to fly.  
He said, “If that airman brings in those fighters  
then he is going to die.”

Oh, the leader rolled in and he asked for his  
target and the FAC told him where to aim  
his guns.  
Well unerring eye they smoked those Charlie  
tell they had them on the run.  
Oh the battle was hot and it was too much for  
Charlie. The soldiers began to shout,  
“God bless you fighters for saving our asses  
and driving those VC out.”

Well no one noticed that crippled Cessna as he  
made his final bow  
For one of those bullets found its target and  
Charlie had kept his vow.

### **Fighter Pilot’s Christmas**

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Merry Christmas, Mom; Merry Christmas, Dad;  
Merry Christmas to my love,  
Merry Christmas to the sweetest little girls  
That ever came from God above.

Wish I could be home with ones I love,  
It’s a long time since I’ve gone.  
Santa, take this heart of mine  
And tie it up with bows and twine,  
And take it to the folks back home.

A turkey Mom will bake, and Dad will  
say a prayer,  
And someone special thinks of me,  
I’d give anything if I could be back  
home,  
But it’s so far across the sea.

Wish I could be home with the ones  
I love,  
It’s a long time since I’ve gone.  
Santa, take this heart of mine,  
And tie it up with bows and twine,  
And take it to the folks back home.

Santa, take this heart of mine,  
And tie it up with bows and twine,  
And take it to the folks back home....

### **Fighter Pilots Hymn**

Unknown  
Tune: Throw a Nickel on the Drum

I was cruising at six angels  
In my Foxtrot 105,  
Thinking ‘bout the Poo-ying  
Back in the Takhli dive;  
When a sudden burst of ack ack  
Was all around the sky.

#### (CHORUS)

Hallelujah, Hallelujah!  
Here’s a tanker full of gas,  
To save a fighter pilot's ass.

Hallelujah, Hallelujah!  
Put your gas hole on the boom  
And you'll be saved.

So squawked my parrot, mayday,  
And called up GCI,  
Asking for a tanker  
To keep me in the sky.  
Well, the Airman-third controller  
Said, "Please don't go away.  
Let me call up Seventh  
To see if it's okay."

Then a friendly tanker pilot  
Called out, Fighter jock, no sweat,  
I've got half a jug of coffee  
So I'm not bingo yet.  
If you get a vector to me  
I'll be glad to pass some gas.  
Turn your twenty mike-mike off,  
And don't shoot up my ass.

It was really getting hairy,  
As I sped my old Thud south.  
I could feel the cotton rising  
All inside my mouth.  
Then I saw the silver tanker  
And gave a happy shout.  
Then I saw the drogue behind,  
And started punching out.

**Holy Shit!**  
By Chip Dockery  
Tune: Original

My Squadron CO, he said to me, "You're  
gonna leave your F-4D  
and go to fly where propellers swing, where the  
slow movers to their thing."

And so I went to NKP, their PE sergeant he  
howled with glee,  
"You ain't gonna need this" he said and  
laughed, and took away my oxygen mask.  
These guys are crazy, they're all insane, they  
fly their prehistoric planes  
From a jungle airfield where the rhesus roar, at  
NKP by the Mekong shore

The A-1 driver he said to me, "Why try to hit,  
what you can't see?"  
And he rolled in from four thousand feet, and  
pulled out damn near in the trees.

These guys are crazy, with balls of brass, they'll  
use their prop to chop commie ass.  
They'll root around down among the trees,  
then fly on back to NKP.

In an A-26, in the night time dark, we found a  
convoy near an old truck park.  
We nailed the lead truck, then bombed them all,  
then strafed the gun site with fifty cal.  
Those guys are crazy, they have no fright,  
they'll piss with the guns, in the dead of the  
night.  
In an ancient warbird built in '43, still fightin'  
on from NKP.

With an O-2 FAC, callsign of Nail, we trolled  
along the Ho Chi Trail.  
Just a dodgin' gunfire and slingin' willy pete,  
way too damn low and slow for me.  
These guys are crazy, they have no fear, they  
live on AVGAS, cordite, and beer.  
They'll fly 'em back shot full of holes, to NKP  
where the Mekong flows.

Then I went back to Udorn-Thani, to my  
oxygen mask and my F-4D  
And to my CO later that day, gave my report,  
and to him did say:  
"These guys are crazy, they've come unhinged.  
Their whole damn life's a flying fighting  
binge.  
And I'm damn glad that I got to see how the  
slow-movers live at NKP.

**I've Been Everywhere**  
By Dick Jonas  
Tune: I've Been Everywhere

Well, I took off from Ubon in a thick and heavy  
driving rain  
I toted my bombs out to Green Anchor Tanker  
Plane  
I had a brand new AC riding in the front seat  
A guy with six months RTU, before that a  
Tweet'  
He asked me if my counters numbered much  
more than ten  
I said, "Listen, Mac, there ain't no place up  
there I ain't been."

I've been everywhere, Man, I've been  
everywhere

I crossed the mountains bare, Man, I seen the  
flak-filled air  
Of SAMs I've had my share, Man, I've been  
everywhere

I been to Hanoi, Haiphong, Phuc Yen, Yen Bai  
Lang Son, Hoa Lac, Phu Tho, Son Tay  
Hoa Binh, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Bac Ninh  
Thai Nguyen, Gia Lam, Viet Tri, Do Son  
Thud Ridge, MiG Ridge, Northeast Railroad  
Bac Mai, Ninh Giang, Bac Giang, Poo-yeng

I've been everywhere, Man, I've been  
everywhere  
I crossed the mountains bare, Man, I seen the  
flak-filled air  
Of SAMs I've had my share, Man, I've been  
everywhere

### **I Don't Want to Join the Air Force**

Unknown

Monday I touched her on the ankle,  
Tuesday I touched her on the knee,  
Wednesday with success,  
I lifted up her dress,  
Thursday I saw it, Go Blimey.  
Friday I put my hand upon it,  
Saturday she gave my balls a tweak,  
And Sunday after supper,  
I rammed the old boy up her,  
And now she earns me seven quid a week,  
Gor Blimey.

I don't want to join the Air Farce  
I don't want to go to war.  
I just want to hang around  
The Piccadilly Underground,  
Living off the earnings of a high-born "lady."  
Don't want a bullet up my arse-hole  
Don't want my buttock shot away.  
I'd rather be in England,  
In jolly, jolly England,  
And fornicate me bloody life away.

### **Jolly Green**

Unknown

(CHORUS)  
Jolly Green, Jolly Green,  
It's all painted brown and green.  
Well the prettiest bird that I've ever seen is  
Jolly green, my Jolly Green.

Got shot down late last night.  
Flak and the missile were hittin' just right  
Got on the horn with all my might called Jolly  
Green, my Jolly Green.

I sit alone here in this tree,  
'Fraid as Charlie as I can be.  
I wish to the Lord that I could see that Jolly  
Green, my Jolly Green.

Sounds of rotors now I've heard.  
Here comes that great big whirly bird.  
The PJ cable now I've seen on Jolly Green, my  
Jolly Green

### **King of the Trail**

By Chip Dockery  
Tune: King of the Road

First six-by number three, destination DMZ  
Hand on the wheel and foot on the gas  
About three miles outta Mu Gia Pass

I keep a little extra rice and with a little bit of  
luck,  
Get a girl from the road crew to ride in my  
truck.  
I'm a man of means by no means, King of the  
Trail.

I know every by-pass around [inaudible]  
Watching them waste bombs fills me with joy.  
Every gunner in every town, that hoses off a  
few clips a Spectre's around

I've seen Truck parks for sale or rent,  
Cave spaces fifty cents.  
Survival radio on two-forty-three, so you can  
listen to the back seater hanging in the tree.

Well I'm a Ho Chi truck driver—number one.  
Haulin' my load and havin' my fun.  
Old worn out ties and tubes, from rollin' over  
too many CBUs

Well I've bene drivin' night owl all over these  
parts.  
Puttin' up with arclights and damn recces carts.  
Thank God for them they saved my load, with  
out the extra light I'd run off the road.

## Lakes of Tally Ho

By Toby Hughes  
Tune: Original

Fingers, Pork Chop, Butterfly, Bat, T-Bone,  
Waters of fire that the devil has claimed for his  
own.

The fish don't bite and the boats don't row,  
And the gunners are out whenever you go  
To Fingers, Pork Chop, Butterfly, Bat, T-Bone.

Fingers, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat, Pork Chop,  
They got quad-23s and the music don't never  
stop.

The FIRECAN chirps and the triple-A zings,  
And every now and then the FAN SONG sings  
At Fingers, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat, Pork Chop.

Fingers, Pork Chop, T-Bone, Bat, Butterfly,  
The man on the ground's full of hate for the  
man in the sky.  
He lives in the trees and he sleeps in the muck,  
He'll hang it all out for a hundred-dollar truck  
At Fingers, Pork Chop, T-Bone, Bat, Butterfly.

Fingers, Pork Chop, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat,  
When you take it on down, heads up! Hold on  
to your hat!  
Lookin' for the trucks and findin' the guns,  
Flyin' through the lead storm, ain't this fun?  
At Fingers, Pork Chop, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat.

Pork Chop, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat and Fingers,  
Precious memory, how it lingers.  
Five mileposts on the road to hell,  
All your life you'll remember them well,  
Pork Chop, T-Bone, Butterfly, Bat and Fingers.

Fingers, Pork Chop, Butterfly, Bat, T-Bone,  
When the war's all over I'm coming back here  
all alone.  
Make one more pass and I know I won't miss;  
I'll stand on the banks and take a good piss  
In Fingers, Pork Chop, Butterfly, Bat, T-Bone.

Hate-filled, hair-trigger, hypertense hide-and-  
seek zone.  
Where two go in and one often comes out  
alone,  
And I pray for the day that the bastards are dry  
as a bone,  
Gimme five KT and I'll turn that mud to stone,  
Fingers, Pork Chop, Butterfly, Bat, T-Bone.

## Let's Get Away with it All

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Let's take a trip to the package  
We got the bombs and the balls  
Let's kill a SAM site, let's keep it up tight  
Let's get away with it all

Let's bomb the heart of Hanoi  
Let's strafe down Embassy Row  
Let's scatter napalm all over Gia Lam  
Let's have a really big show

We'll travel around from town to town  
We'll clobber every place  
We'll drop bombs and CBUs  
On every MiG air base

Let's strafe the ships in the harbor  
Let's bomb the dikes above all  
Let's cross the ridges and let's bomb the  
bridges  
Let's get away with it all.

## The MiG-21

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Now, a MiG-21 is a great airplane so the  
Phantom pilots say,  
And I don't think we can doubt their word, they  
go up there every day.  
Long and sleek and fast and high, it's a dang  
mighty fine machine.  
You can take the word of an F-4 jock, a MiG-  
21 is mean.  
But so is a Phantom, ugly—but big and  
powerful and faster than greased lightning'.

Now there's a lot to be said for the guys who  
fly the MiG-21s up north.  
I don't reckon they make very much, but every  
dime they're paid they're worth,  
I mean, how much guts does it take to jump a  
force of 24 Thuds  
That's covered by a cap of F-4D's and eight  
MiG hungry studs?

Yep, those MiG drivers are pretty sharp but not  
very smart;  
In fact, they gotta be outta their ever-lovin'  
mind to tangle with a Phantom.

Now, take it from a guy that's been up north  
 and had at a MiG or two,  
 That's a good way to end your tour right now,  
 I'm here and I'm telling you.  
 He's at 10 o'clock high and going to 8, and  
 next at your deep six,  
 And your eyeballs are goin' like mad, little  
 man, you're in a fix.  
 But no sweat, G.I., that Phantom will reach up  
 and grab ahold of you,  
 Spin around, and swat that MiG between the  
 eyes,  
 And bring you home a hero.

If you wanta know how to fight a MiG-21,  
 here's what you can do,  
 Talk to the guys that's been up there, they'll tell  
 you a thing or two.  
 Guys like Olds and Barrios, Bogoslofski, and  
 Kirk.  
 They'll tell you that in a minute and a half you  
 can do a whole day's work.  
 They fly the Phantom—or it flies them,  
 It all depends on how you look at it.

I had my chance not long ago when the MiGs  
 came out to play.  
 I was just one of eight good men that went up  
 there that day.  
 Throttles wide open and climb and dive and  
 pirouettes and dips.  
 Just take my word about MiG-21s, those dudes  
 are mighty fine ships.  
 It was four Phantoms and two MiGs when we  
 got started,  
 And when we got done it was just four  
 Phantoms.

Yeah, a MiG-21 is a mighty fine ship, all the  
 Phantom Pilots say,  
 And that little game is all for keeps when the  
 MiGs come out to play.  
 We've been up there and we'll go up there 'til  
 this clambake is done  
 And there's been fights and there'll be fights  
 Between the Phantom and the MiG-21.  
 But just have a look at the score-board, friend,  
 It's all in favor of the Phantom.

## Napalm Unknown

It was up by Hanoi, where the Red meets the  
 sea.  
 I was out on a recce, to see what I could see,  
 When I spied a farmer man with his pitch folk  
 in his hand;  
 It was sad when my napalm went down.

(CHORUS)  
 It was sad, oh, it was sad  
 It was sad when my napalm went down  
 (Hit the farmer)  
 There were husbands and wives,  
 (Itty bitty children lost their lives)  
 It was sad when my napalm went down.

It was up by Dong Hoi, where I won my DFC  
 I was out on a recce to see what I  
 When spied a church below and I let my  
 rockets go  
 It was sad when those rockets went down.

(CHORUS)  
 It was sad, oh it was sad,  
 It was sad when those rockets went down  
 (Hit the steeple)  
 All the people ran like hell,  
 (When those rockets hit the bell)  
 It was sad when those rockets went down.

I was up by Thai Nguyen when I knew I was  
 through,  
 The 37s and 57s had shot my turbine through.  
 It was when I hit the silk oh my God I strained  
 my milk!  
 It was sad when that pilot went down.

(CHORUS)  
 It was sad, oh it was sad,  
 It was sad when that pilot went down  
 (Hit the bottom).  
 There were husbands and wives,  
 (Itty bitty children lost their lives)  
 It was sad when that pilot when down.



## O-1E

By Irv LeVine  
Tune: Original

### (CHORUS)

Oh, the O-1E's go flying along the mountain  
track across the jungle and along the shore,  
and some just don't come back.

From high above I see him. He's down there by  
those trees. I'm up here in my  
Thunderchief and I don't think he sees me.  
Good morning up there fast mover, this is  
"Twinkie O-13, I'm your FAC today and  
it's a fact I say I'm in this O-1E."

I'm gonna mark your targets and call your BDA  
Now don't you miss or I'll be pissed; that's  
all I've got to say.

Hey! Both of us are pilots. We're all that we  
can be. He's not to blame, but I wouldn't  
trade planes; 'cause he's Flying an O-1E.

### (CHORUS)

He's got the job of bird dog; he's not a fighter  
jock like me. He's the guy in the sky most  
likely to die 'cause he flying an O-1E.

I ride a Martin Baker; he sits on his flak vest.  
We both do a job for Uncle SAM but I  
wonder who's the best.

I drop six 750s, they really leave big .e fucks  
around, down close to the ground with  
grenades in mason jars.

A thousand rounds of ammo, my gatling gun is  
mean. He thinks it's swell with a hand full  
of shells and an old AR-15.

Now, the O-1E's an aircraft that most of us  
forgot. But it's really the most and I'll raise  
a toast when I'm back at old Korat.

### (CHORUS)

Too many didn't come back .... Oh, here's to  
the O-1E....

Yes, here's to the O-1E.

## One-Level Gunner

By Toby Hughes  
Tune: Original

There's a one level gunner out chained to a tree  
Just off the runway he's waiting for me  
The tracers come up in a dotted red line but the  
bullets are always a little behind

I still sometimes wonder if one will be mine.

The Yankee Air Pirates live right over there  
My job is to shoot when they take to the air  
To shoot down a Phantom would be a great  
deed

But they're small and I can't seem to draw a  
good bead

There fast and I can't seem to pull enough lead.

That gunner's been out there for 21 days  
Shooting in daylight and darkness and rain  
He ain't hit no body and that's a bit strange  
I'm afraid any day now that our luck will  
change

And that one-level gunner will soon find the  
range

Some might feel different but I like it here  
Uncle Ho send me nuoc mam and bullets and  
beer

Don't live under ground where its clammy and  
damp

Don't live in a spider hole slimy and cramp  
I won't die on the wire of a Green Beret Camp

We can go out and get him any time that we  
choose

Just blow him away with some good CBUs  
But that would be cruel and stupid to boot  
An unwise decision that bares bitter fruit  
If the gomers replace him with one who can  
shoot

I'm a 9-level gunner the best that we've got  
I can hit what I aim at with only one shot  
Can bring down a Phantom in a big blazing  
heap

But it's been well said "as ye so shall ye reap,"  
And napalm for breakfast ain't my cup of tea.

In my mind I can see him in his little hat  
Cleaning his AK on his little a little straw mat  
With fish cakes and rice and a bonnie to drink  
He smiles and he looks and he gives me a wink  
And maybe he's smarter than some of us think

I'm happy with my way of fightin' the war  
Shoot ten feet behind as the Phantoms fly o'er  
I don't bother them and they don't bother me  
And I'll live here forever chained to my own  
tree.

In this nice little spot by the South China Sea.

## On Top of the Pop-Up

Unknown

Tune: On Top of Old Smokey

On top of the pop-up,  
And flat on my back,  
I lost my poor wingman,  
In a big hail of flak.

Guard channel was silent,  
The sites were all dead,  
Until we rolled in,  
And looked up ahead,

The sky filled with fireballs,  
The missiles flashed by,  
Sweet mother of Jesus,  
We're all going to die.

Number two called, "I'm hit,  
I'm going to bust."  
Not one goddamn ELINT  
A poor jock can trust.

So come ye young pilots,  
And listen to dad,  
Forget about jinkin',  
And your ass has been had.

They'll hit you and burn you,  
Their flak reaches far,  
It's a long walk to Takhli and a beer at the bar.

## Our Leaders

Unknown

At Phillips Range in Kansas,  
The jocks all had the knack,  
But now that we're in combat,  
We've got Colonels on our back.  
And every time we say, "Shit-hot,"  
or whistle in the bar,  
We have to answer to somebody  
Looking for a star.

(CHORUS)

Our leaders, our leaders.,  
Our leaders, is what they always say,  
But it's bullshit, it's bullshit,  
It's bullshit they feed us every day!

Today we had a hot one,  
And the jocks were scared as hell,

They ran to meet us with a beer,  
And tell us we were swell  
But Recce took the BDA  
And said we missed a hair;  
Now we'll catch all kinds of Hell  
From the wheels at Seventh Air.

They send us out in bunches,  
To bomb a bridge and die,  
These tactics are for bombers  
That our leaders used to fly.  
The bastards don't trust our Colonel  
Up in Wing, and I guess,  
We'll have to leave the thinking to  
The wheels in JCS!

The JCS are generals,  
But they're not always right,  
Sometimes they have to think it over  
Well into the night;  
When they have a question,  
Or something they can't hack,  
They have to leave the judgment to  
That money-saving Mac!

Now Mac's job is in danger,  
For he's on salary, too;  
To have the final say-so,  
Is something he can't do;  
Before we fly a mission,  
And everything's okay,  
Mac had to get permission from  
Flight Leader L.B.J.!!

## Phantoms in the Sky

Unknown

Tune: Ghost Riders in the Sky

Phantoms in the sky,  
Charlie Cong prepared to die.  
Rolling in with snake and nap,  
God creates, but we cremate.

North of Khe Sanh we did go,  
Then the FAC said from below.  
Hit my smoke and you will fund,  
The NVA are in a bind.

We rolled in at 1000 feet,  
We saw them bastards beating feet;  
But they couldn't run quite half as fast,  
As my pipper was on their ass.



### **Prowlin'**

By Chip Dockery  
Tune: Original

Runway 3-0 take off roll, listen to those  
afterburners roar.  
Gear up, flags up, two's movin' in, headin' for  
the fight once more.  
Well I've been a Phantom pilot here for a  
months, wouldn't have it another way.  
I've been flyin' F-4s with the 13th Panther  
Pack, prowlin' in the night and the day.

Two called out, "Lead break heard right,  
you've got 37 trackin' too close."  
Then he rolled in with Mark 82s and put 'em  
right down that gunner's throat.  
Well the trucks were stalled and we had a ball,  
blowin' their shit away.  
Hey, there ain't nothin' better than flyin' with  
the Pack, fightin' in the night and the day.

Vang Pao and his men stuck on a ridge close to  
the PDJ.  
The North Viets had been givin' 'em fits for the  
better part of two or three days  
Well the weather was bad and the situation  
sad, 'til a Raven put us back in the fray.  
Put the bombs on the smoke man it ain't no  
joke, I love doin' this all night and all day.

Well the years have gone by and I still love to  
fly, it ain't bad at middle age.  
As flyer or a lover or [INAUDIBLE] still  
better than most guys half my age.  
But there's times when the fire and the blood  
runs hire I need a Phantom screamin' into  
the wind.  
I'd give half I got for one more shot to be flyin'  
with the Panthers again.

Yeah, I'd give half I got for one more shot to be  
flyin' with the Panthers again.

### **Pull the Boom from the Gas Hole Tanker**

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Pull that boom from the gas hole, tanker, let me  
go.

Clear me out of the anchor track before the sun  
sinks low.  
I got a buddy on the ground up north in Route  
Pack Four,  
Pull the pipe from the gas hole boomer let me  
go.

We rolled in on a bridge up north about  
daylight,  
And the guns on the ground were lookin' for a  
fight.  
Pullin' out we got hosed pretty good with ZPU,  
And they shot off the starboard wing of Wolf  
Pack Two.

Ol' Wolf Pack Two was on the beeper when he  
hit the ground,  
I told him don't go nowhere, just hang around.  
I got a Jolly Green Giant coming in in a little  
while,  
So hang loose, old buddy, we'll bring you home  
in style.

Well, ol' Sandy came in first with nape and fifty  
cal,  
And that Super Jolly Green looked good as a  
big-eyed gal.  
Wolf Pack Two spent the night down south at  
NKP  
With a tall Singha and a poo-yeng on his knee.

### **Republic's Ultra Hog**

Unknown  
Tune: Wabash Cannonball

Listen to the jingle, the gruntin' and the  
wheeze,  
As she rolls along the runway, by the BAK-9  
and the trees.  
Hear the mighty roarin' engine as you leap off  
in the fog,  
You're flying through the jungle in Republic's  
Ultra Hog.

We came up from old Korat one steamy  
summer day,  
As we pitched up on the target, you could hear  
all the gunners say,  
"She's big and fat and ugly; she's really quite a  
dog,  
She's known around the country as Republic's  
Ultra Hog."

Here's to McNamara, his name will always  
smell.  
He'll always be remembered down in Fighter  
Pilots' hell.  
He frags all the targets and sends us out to die,  
He sends us into combat in Republic's 105.

Listen to the jingle, the gruntin' and the  
wheeze,  
As she rolls along the runway by the BAK-9  
and the trees.  
Hear the mighty roarin' engine as you leap off  
in the fog,  
You're flying through the jungle in Republic's  
Ultra Hog.

### **Robin Olds**

By Irv LeVine  
Tune: Original

There is an American fighting man, Robin Olds  
is his true name  
He started life in the Hawaiian Isles, his flying  
brought him fame  
He was his father's oldest son, his mother's  
pride and joy,  
And dearly did his country love this All-  
American boy.

His schooling took him to West Point, to flight  
school and beyond  
When World War Two beckoned to him, he  
quickly  
crossed the pond  
He flew the Lightning far and fast, he did so  
with esprit  
And soon the Luftwaffe knew his name; for a  
double ace was he

When the war was over, over there, they gave  
him stateside command  
The Korean conflict was building fast in that far  
off Asian land  
He flew a Sabre, he worked a desk, he did both  
with great class  
Since they would not let him fly and fight; his  
foe became the brass

Then they needed him in Vietnam to lead, fly  
and fight once more  
In yet another far off land on another foreign  
shore

The Ubon Pack became his gang, the Phantom  
Two his steed  
And history notes and here I quote, "he  
answered every need"

He shot down many Russian MiGs, they only  
counted four  
He only left when his job was done, and he  
walked through history's door  
There are those that do not remember him, this  
manly man 'mongst men

But his Wolfpack gang they all recall and  
would follow him again  
There's more to tell for he's not gone, not  
vanished in the night  
His words still echo loud and clear:

"Peace is not my profession  
my profession is to fly and fight!"

### **Sandy Cannonball**

By Sam Waite and Mac McCormick  
Tune: Wabash Cannonball

Listen to the hot flash, the jingle and roar, its  
Compress on the telephone sayin' Sandys  
go to war.  
We've gotta pilot out there that needs your help  
today so wake up from nap alpha and get  
upon your way.  
We dashed out to our six-pack the weather is  
what's bad, we'll take on any mission in  
our mighty Super Spad.  
We roll on down the runway with a rumble and  
a roar, and as we cross the thresh hold say  
climb you friggen whore.  
Headed for Mu Gia with a full head of steam,  
tryin' hard to over-take those friggen Jolly  
Greens.  
Put them in an obit and go on into fight, and  
blast it on throughout the day and on into  
the night.  
The sun is sinking lower in the western sky  
send the freakin' Jollys in we hear old Blue  
Chip cry.  
Listen to the rumble the rattle and the roar  
there's 7mm, small arms by the score.  
We Sandys roll on in there, survivor if you  
please, dig yourself a great big hole and  
hide amongst the tress.

We'll plan a first light effort and be back in the morn', we'll get your out of this here fix as sure as you are borne.  
 The sun comes up next mornin' Misty says its right, the Sandys roll on in there lookin' for a fight.  
 Low lead looks it over and find some ground fire there, they daisy chain upon it and blow it in the air.  
 They put in twenty mike-mike and a willy pete smoke screen to clean up the area for the big Jolly green.  
 Listen to the rumble the rattle and the roar, CBU and miniguns and Charlie is no more.  
 Jolly come on in here the area is clean, from here on in this pick-up is gonna be routine,  
 Jolly's come on in their thinking things are great they get into a hover and [inaudible]  
 They hear the Jollys callin' saying we're taking ground fire here, Jolly we are with you so you need have no fear.  
 Make your pick-up quickly and get on out of there, let's get on back to the Sandy box and have a glass of cheer.  
 Headed back to NKP Compress is on the air, JSARC, King, and Blue Chip are singing praises there.  
 Sandy set the whole thing up but to answer the pilot's pray, Jolly had their [inaudible] out to keep their record clear.  
 The success of the mission was Sandy all the way, their fighting, bombing, strafing, was the things that saved the day.  
 Sandy's are the heroes, the Jollys get the cheer, but hell it doesn't matter, so hang it in your ear.

### **Singha Hero**

By Chip Dockery  
 Tune: Original

We were capin' west of Hanoi on a some what cloudy day.  
 When the SAM launched, climbing sky-ward, come to blow our shit away.  
 Lord I don't want to be no hero, my mom don't want no golden star.  
 I just want a tall cold Singha in the bar Lord in the bar.  
 I was jinkin' off the target, one dark night in old Tchepone.

When clip of -37 damn near blew my ass back home.  
 Lord I don't want to be no hero, my mom don't want no golden star.  
 I just want a tall cold Singha in the bar Lord in the bar.

I was blue four on a bar cap, the one the MiG were comin' for.  
 When I got a fire light on my left engine, what a fucked up way to go to war.  
 Lord I don't want to be no hero, my mom don't want no golden star.  
 I just want a tall cold Singha in the bar Lord in the bar.

I was pressin' on a target, just a little south of Dong Hoi.  
 When a ZPU stitched my airplane, blew holes all in my Mach 2 toy.  
 Lord I don't want to be no hero, my mom don't want no golden star.  
 I just want a tall cold Singha in the bar Lord in the bar.

Lord I don't want to be no hero, my mom don't want no golden star.  
 I just want a tall cold Singha in the bar Lord in the bar.

### **Sitting in the Cab of My Truck**

By Chip Dockery  
 Tune: (Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay

Hidin' in the mornin' sun, I'll be drivin' in the evenin' come.  
 Watchin' the Phantoms roll-in, and I'll watch 'em pull away again.  
 Now I'm just sittin' in the cab of my truck, thinkin' this life ain't such a game.  
 Sittin' in the cab of my truck, filin' my chains.

I left my home in Dong Hoi, headed for the DMZ.  
 Well, I had something to live for, a peoples' hero I was gonna be.  
 Now I'm just sittin' in the cab of my truck, lookin' through the windshield at flare lighted rain.  
 Sittin' in the cab of my truck, yankin' my chains.

Here I sit havin' a nicotine fit,

God I'm to scare to get a cigarette lit,  
'Cause that might just blow my only hope,  
Of not showin' up on a starlight scope.

I'm sitting here with britches so tight, 'cause I  
think that Spectre's due back tonight  
Bleedin' from my ears and my nose from a sky  
spot that finally came close.  
Now I'm just sittin' in the cab of my truck,  
watchin' the bombs fall through the rain  
Sitting in the cab of my truck, filin' my chains.

### **Son of Satan's Angels**

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Original

I'm a son of Satan's Angels,  
And I fly the F-4D.  
All the way from the Hanoi Railroad Bridge,  
To the DMZ.  
I'm one of the old Hoot Gibson's boys,  
And mean as I can be.  
I'm a son of Satan's Angels,  
And I fly the F-4D.

There ain't a triple-A gunner up there,  
That's anywhere near my class;  
'Cause m as mad as I can be,  
And I'm in for one more pass.  
He hosed me down one time too much,  
And that one is his last.  
I look back at where he was,  
Hey, man, ain't that a gas!

Hello, Hanoi Hanna, send your MiGs to meet  
their doom.

Light 'em up and blast 'em off,  
Hoot's boys 'ill be there soon.  
I don't care if you are the gal with  
A mouth full of silver spoon,  
'Cause I got sidewinders onboard  
That'll home on an AB plume.

### **Song of the Wolf Pack**

Unknown

Tune: Ghost Riders in the Sky

Oh, pilots of the Wolf Pack,  
Go to the briefing room.  
The mission is a good one,  
To the MiGs it will mean doom.  
We're going up to Hanoi,  
To Kep and Phuc Yen, too,

To write our bloody record,  
In the annals of the blue.

We take off in our Phantoms  
To play our deadly cards.  
The engines make our thunder,  
And our eyes are steely hard.  
We're on the way to battle  
The forces of the foe.  
We're certain to destroy them,  
We'll seek them high and low.

We battle today, and make our kills.  
The Wolf Pack in the sky.

We cycle through the tanker,  
The tension starts to rise.  
We go to meet our destiny,  
Awaiting in the skies.  
We tune and arm our missiles,  
As we streak across the black.  
Our boss is in the forefront,  
Leading the Wolf Pack.

We're showing on their radar.  
Their hearts are full of hate.  
They rise to meet our challenge,  
To meet their bloody fate.  
They're headed for disaster,  
As any fool can tell.  
They dare to face the Wolf Pack  
We'll shoot them clear to hell!

We battle today, and make our kills.  
The Wolf Pack in the sky.

Wolf Pack lead says, "Contact."  
They're MiGs, a flight of two.  
I'm too close for the Sparrow,  
The Sidewinder will do.  
I'll roll into the six o'clock  
Behind the trailing MiG,  
And let him have a missile  
Just like a fiery GIG.

Oh, other flights engaged more MiGs,  
Hot action filled the air.  
The Wolf Pack's lust was sated,  
Before heading for their lair.  
The enemy won't soon forget  
The awesome deadly toll,  
As the 8th Wing troops return to base,  
And make their victory rolls.

We battle today and make our kills.  
The Wolf Pack in the sky.

### **Strafe the Town and Kill the People**

By Chip Dockery

Tune: Wake the Town and Tell the People

Strafe the town and kill the people  
Lay your high drags in the square.  
Roll in early Sunday morning;  
Catch them while they're still at prayer.

Drop some candy to the orphans;  
Watch them as they gather 'round.  
Use your 20 millimeter;  
Mow the little bastards down.

See the fat old pregnant women  
Running thru the field in fear;  
Run your 20 mike mike thru them,  
Hope the film comes out real clear.

Strafe the town and kill the people;  
Hit them with your poison gas.  
See them throwing up their breakfast  
As you make your second pass.

Strafe the town and kill the people,  
It's the only thing to do.  
Set your gunsights residential,  
You'll get more kills if you do.

### **Suits of Covey Blue**

Unknown

Tune: Bell Bottom Trousers

Once there was a waitress in the Ubol Hotel  
Her mistress was a lady and her master was a  
swell

They knew she was a simple girl and lately  
from the farm

And so they watched her carefully to keep her  
safe from harm

(CHORUS)

Singing of Willie Petes and rockets pods  
Suits of covey blue  
Let him fly the FAC planes like his daddy used  
to do

First there came a squadron, every fighter  
jockey's dream

They piled into the whorehouse and they  
packed the steam and cream  
Many a maid and mistress and wife before them  
fell

But they never made the waitress at the Ubol  
Hotel

Then there came a company of the spectre's  
from the town

Followed by a complement of the rapists of  
Reknown

They broke through every maidenhead that  
came within their spell

But they never made the waitress at the Ubol  
Hotel

Then there came a young Covey, an ordinary  
bloke

A-bulgin' at the flightsuit with a heart of solid  
oak

In 'Nam without a woman for seven months or  
more

No need to ask this FAC what he was lookin'  
for

He asked her for a candlestick to light his way  
to bed

He asked her for a pillow on which to lay his  
weary head

And speaking very gently, just as though he  
meant no harm

He asked her to come to bed with him just to  
keep him warm

She lifted up the blankets and a moment there  
did lie

He was on her, he was in her, in the twinkling  
of an eye

He was out again and in again and plowing up a  
storm

And the only words she said to him were, I  
hope you're keeping warm

And early in the morning when the young  
Covey arose

He said, here's 200 baht my dear for the trouble  
I have caused

If you have a daughter, then bounce her on your  
knee

But if you have a son, make the bastard fly like  
me



So now she sits in Ubon, a lovely daughter on  
her knee  
A-watching for the airplanes, a-coming back  
from sea  
A-watching for the Nomex, and Covey  
uniforms  
And all she wants to do my boys, is keep the  
Coveys warm.

### **Tally Ho Tonight**

By Toby Hughes

Tune: They're Hanging Me Tonight

(Spoken)

There's a place God overlooked  
When He said, "Let there be light."  
Cause there's no place in the world so dark  
As Tally Ho at night.

(Sung)

The sky is slowly growing dark  
As day comes to its end,  
And in the constant monsoon rain  
The night crews' day begins.  
The raindrops fallin' on the hooch  
Make such a mournful sound.  
T'was on a rainy night like this  
My roomie, he went down,  
My roomie, he went down.

We headed north that dismal night;  
We had our route down pat.  
We flew the road up to Mi Le  
Then turned west to check out Bat.  
I heard him call a target out,  
A light down on the shore.  
I heard him say he's rollin in,  
Then I didn't hear no more,  
I didn't hear no more.

I can't help thinking of that night,  
And tonight I'll go again.  
At eight o'clock I'll brief the flight,  
And our takeoff time is ten.  
I try to write a letter home,  
But I just can't seem to start,  
And the only sound I hear is rain,  
And the beating of my heart,  
The beating of my heart.

And in the darkness of my mind  
I see my Baby's face,  
But it quickly fades to trucks and flak

And that God-forsaken place.  
Alone within my lonely room  
My heart is filled with fright.  
The sun may shine tomorrow,  
But it's Tally Ho tonight.  
It's Tally Ho tonight.

### **Tchepone**

By Toby Hughes

Tune: The Strawberry Roan

I's hangin' 'round Ops, just spendin' my time;  
Off of the schedule, not earnin' a dime.  
A colonel comes up and he says, "I suppose,  
You fly a fighter, from the cut of your clothes."

He figures me right; "I'm a good one, I say  
Do you happen to have me a target today?"  
Says yes he does, a real easy one.  
"No sweat my boy, it's an old-time milk run."

I gets all excited and asks where it's at.  
He gives me a wink and a tip of his hat.  
"It's three-fifty miles to the northwest of home,  
A small peaceful hamlet that's known as  
Tchepone.

(Ah, you'll sure love Tchepone)

I go get my g-suit and strap on my gun,  
Helmet, and gloves, out the door on the run.  
Fire up my Phantom and take to the air.  
Two's tucked in tight and we haven't a care.

In forty-five minutes we're over the town.  
From twenty-eight thousand we're screamin'  
on down.

Arm up the switches and dial in the mills,  
Rack up the wings and roll in for the kill.

We feel a bit sorry for folks down below.  
Of destruction that's comin' they surely don't  
know.

The thought passes quickly, we know a war's  
on,

And on down we scream towards peaceful  
Tchepone.

(Unsuspecting, peaceful Tchepone)

Release altitude, and the pipper's not right.  
I'll press just a little and lay 'em in tight.  
Pickle those beauties at two-point five grand,  
Startin' my pull when it all hits the fan.

A black puff in front, and then two off the right;  
Then six or eight more and I suck it up tight.  
There's small arms and tracers and heavy ack-  
ack.

It's scattered to broken with all kinds of flak.

I jink hard to left and head out for the blue.  
My wingman says, "Lead! They're shooting, at  
you."

"No Bull!" I cry as I point it towards home.  
And still comes the fire from the town of  
Tchepone.

(Dirty, deadly Tchepone)

I make it back home with six holes in my bird.  
With the Colonel who sent me I'd sure like a  
word.

But he's nowhere around, though I look near  
and far.

He's gone back to Seventh to help run the war.

I've been 'round this country for many a day;  
I've seen the things that they're throwin' my  
way.

I know that there're places don't like to go,  
Down in the Delta and in Tally Ho.

But I'll bet all my flight pay the jock ain't been  
born

Who can keep all his cool when he's over  
Tchepone

(Oh, don't go to Tchepone)

### **Teak Lead**

By Unknown

Tune: Red River Valley

To the valley he said he was flying,  
And he never saw the medal that he earned.  
Many jocks have flown into the valley,  
And a number have never returned.

So I listened as he briefed on the mission,  
Tonight at the bar TEAK Flight will sing.  
But we're going to the Red River Valley,  
And today you are flying my wing.

Oh, the flak is so thick in the valley,  
That the MiGs and the missiles we don't need.  
So fly high and down-sun in the valley,  
And guard well the ass of TEAK lead.

Now if things turn to shit in the valley,

And the brief that I gave you don't heed,  
They'll be waiting at the Hanoi Hilton,  
And it's fish heads and rice for TEAK lead.

We refueled on the way to the valley,  
In the States it had always been fun,  
But with thunder and lightning all around us  
'Twas fatal for another TEAK lead.

So come and sit by my side at the briefing,  
We will sit there and tickle the beads,  
For we're going to the Red River Valley,  
And my call sign today is TEAK lead!

### **Thanh Hoa Bridge**

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Original

(CHORUS)

On the day the Thanh Hoa Bridge saw the light,  
The guys from the Wolf Pack went up north to  
fight.

We did our thing like we oughter;  
We dropped that bridge in the water,  
On the day Thanh Hoa Bridge saw the light.

There're a lot of good planes in the mud under  
Thanh Hoa Bridge,

And a lot of parachutes laying out on Thanh  
Hoa Ridge,

And the guys that took 'em north can't go  
nowhere,

All because of the guns on the ground around  
Thanh Hoa Bridge.

So we put our heads together one night around  
a tall Singha,

Trying to figure out a way to kill a bridge that  
didn't really wanna die.

We talked it up to the boys with bombs with the  
brains,

And they allowed to kill the Thanh Hoa Bridge  
wouldn't take no strain.

### **Thud Ridge**

By Irv LeVine

Tune: House of the Rising Sun

Oh there are some hills in North Vietnam  
They call old Thud Ridge.  
And they point on down towards the heart of  
town, past Hia Gia's bridge.



For those who fly up yonder,  
through a hail of SAMs and flak,  
know a MiG on your tail, can really be hell  
For some won't be coming back.

I don't recall his name now,  
and I can't name you the place  
Where a friend was shot down near the heart of  
town,  
While tears ran down my face.

(Additional verse, added by unknown author)  
Woe to the kids and widow  
Who bear their grief alone,  
For their man who flew up yonder,  
He won't be coming home.

We all know that it's worth it,  
That we hold a sacred trust,  
There are those at home burn draft cards and  
groan  
But they don't speak for us.

Yes, there are some hills in North Vietnam,  
We call old Thud Ridge,  
And they point on down towards the heart of  
town,  
Past Hia Gia' bridge.

(Additional verse, added by unknown author)  
Yes there are some hills in North Vietnam,  
They call old Thud Ridge and they'll be there  
'Til the trumpets blare  
To call the lost pilots home.

### **Tree Buster**

By Toby Hughes

Tune: Little Joe the Wrangler

I've been a fighter pilot now  
For damn near all my life.  
There's nothin' in the world I'd rather do.  
I've flown every kind of airplane  
From the T-6 to the Hun,  
And I've logged ten thousand hours in the blue.

I've flown against the ground troops  
And I've flown them air-to-air,  
'Gainst ships and tanks and anything you  
please.  
But I'm stuck in Southeast Asia now  
And goin' up the walls,  
Cause the only thing I'm doin's bombing trees.

Tree buster, oh, tree buster  
Where do you go today?  
Will the target that you strike be somethin'  
good?  
Will your efforts be rewarded  
With results that you can see?  
Or will once again you just go choppin' wood?

The life of a tree buster  
Is frustrating for a jock,  
As we daily scatter splinters far and near.  
Cause the jungle that we bomb today  
Will grow back in a week,  
And you'll never even know that we were here.

A suspected VC depot,  
A command post or a trail,  
An LZ prep, the names are just a tease.  
Just once I'd like to hear the FAC  
Describe it like it is,  
And say he's got suspected VC trees.

Tree buster, oh, tree buster,  
They give 'em fancy names,  
And try to make you think you're doin' good.  
But sure as Hell you know  
That there ain't nothin' there but trees,  
And the only thing you're doin's choppin'  
wood.

This morning when the frag came down  
We scarce believed our eyes,  
It was bridges, trucks, and SAMs and  
everything.  
With visions of good missions  
And of targets worth the time,  
We rejoiced, and then the phone began to ring.

First the Wing Commander  
Said he thought he'd like to fly,  
Then the DO, Stan/Eval, and all the rest.  
We were all bumped off the schedule  
By those wienies up in Wing.  
They would save us for the job we do the best.

Tree buster, oh, tree buster,  
What makes your face so red?  
Don't you know they'd let you go, too, if they  
could?  
They'll tell you all about it, though,  
Tonight, around the bar,  
And tomorrow you'll go back to choppin' wood

## What the Captain Means

The following is an interview with an F-4C pilot of the 12th Tac Fighter Wing at Cam Ranh Bay. It is complete with the Captain's comments along with the press' interpretation of the Captain's comments. The Captain's view of the war is most significant for all those who served a year here at Cam Ranh where the sewer meets the sea.

Correspondent: Well Captain now that you've flown a few missions, what is your opinion of the F-4C as a combat aircraft?

Captain: It's the best sonovabitchin' airplane in the Goddamn Unites States Air Force inventory. It's so fuckin' maneuverable you can fly up your own ass with it.

PAO (Public Affairs Officer): What the Captain means is that he has found the F-4C highly maneuverable at all altitudes, and he considers it an excellent aircraft for all missions assigned.

Correspondent: I suppose, Captain, that you've flown a certain number of missions over North Vietnam. What do you think of the SAMs used by the North Vietnamese?

Captain: Why, those bastards couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle. We fake the shit out of them. There's no sweat.

PAO: What the Captain means is that the surface-to-air missiles around Hanoi pose a serious problem to our air operations and that the pilots have a healthy respect for them.

Correspondent: I suppose, Captain, that you've flown missions to the South. What kind of ordnance do you use, and what kind of targets do you hit?

Captain: Well, I'll tell you, mostly we aim at kicking the shit out of Vietnamese villages; and my favorite ordnance is napalm. Man, that stuff sucks the air out of their friggin' lungs and makes a sonovabitchin' fire.

PAO: What the Captain means is that air strikes in South Vietnam are often against Viet Cong structures and all operations are always under the positive control of forward air controllers, or FAC. The ordnance employed is conventional 500-

and 750-pound bombs and 20-mm cannon fire.

Correspondent: I suppose you spent a R&R in Hong Kong. What were your impressions of the Oriental girls?

Captain: Yeah, I went to Hong Kong. As for those Oriental broads, well, I don't care which way the runway runs, east or west, north or south--a piece of ass is a piece of ass.

PAO: What the Captain means is that he found the delicately featured Oriental girls fascinating, and he was very impressed with their fine manners and thinks their naivete is most charming.

Correspondent: Tell me, Captain, have you flown any missions other than over North and South Vietnam?

Captain: You bet your sweet ass I've flown other missions--missions other than North or South. We get fragged nearly every day for uh, over in a, those fuckers over there throw everything at you but the friggin' kitchen sink. Even the goddamn kids got slingshots.

PAO: What the Captain means is that he has occasionally been scheduled to fly missions in the extreme western DMZ, and he has a healthy respect for the flak in that area.

Correspondent: I understand that no one in the 12<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter has got a MiG yet. What seems to be the problem?

Captain: Why you screwhead, if you knew anything about what you're talking about--the problem is MiGs. If we'd get scheduled by those peckerheads at Seventh for those missions in MiG valley, you can bet your ass we'd get some of those mothers. Those glory hounds at Ubon get all those frags, while we settle for fightin' the friggin' war. Those mothers at Ubon are sitting on their fat asses killing MiGs, and we get stuck with bombing the goddamned cabbage patches.

PAO: What the Captain means is that each element in the Seventh Air Force is responsible for doing its assigned job in the air war. Some units are assigned the job of neutralizing enemy air strength by hunting out MiGs and other elements are assigned

bombing missions and interdiction of enemy supply routes.

Correspondent: Of all the targets you've hit in Vietnam, which one was the most satisfying?

Captain: Well, shit, it was getting' fragg'd that suspected VC vegetable garden. I dropped napalm in the middle of the fuckin' cabbage, and my wingman splashed it real good with six of those 750-pound mothers and spread the fire all the way to the friggin' beets and carrots.

PAO: What the Captain means is that the great variety of tactical targets available throughout Vietnam makes the F-4C the perfect aircraft to provide flexible response.

Correspondent: What do you consider the most difficult target you've stuck in North Vietnam?

Captain: The friggin' bridges. I must have dropped 40 tons of bombs on those swayin' bamboo mothers, and I ain't hit one of the bastards yet.

PAO: What the Captain means is that interdicting bridges along enemy supply routes is very important and that bridges present quite a difficult target. The best way to accomplish this task is to crater the approaches to the bridge.

Correspondent: I noticed, in touring the base, that you have aluminum matting on the taxiways. Would you care to comment on its effectiveness and usefulness in Vietnam?

Captain: You're fuckin' right. I'd like to make a comment. Most of us pilots are well hung, but shit, you don't know what hung is until you get hung up on one of the friggin' bumps on that goddamn stuff.

PAO: What the Captain means is that the aluminum matting is quite satisfactory as a temporary expedient but requires some finesse in taxiing and braking the aircraft.

Correspondent: Did you have an opportunity to meet your wife on leave in Honolulu, and did you enjoy the visit with her?

Captain: Yeah, I met my wife in Honolulu, but I forgot to check the calendar, so the whole

five days were friggin' well combat-proof—a completely dry run.

PAO: What the Captain means is that it was wonderful to get together with his wife and learn firsthand about the family and how things were at home.

Correspondent: Thank you for your time, Captain.

Captain: Screw you, why don't you bastards print the real story, instead of all that crap?

PAO: What the Captain means is that he enjoyed this opportunity to discuss his tour with you.

Correspondent: One final question. Could you reduce your impression of the war into a simple phrase or statement, Captain?

Captain: You bet your ass I can. It's a fucked up war.

PAO: What the Captain means is . . . its a fucked up war.

### **Will There be a Tomorrow**

By Dick Jonas

Tune: Original

Can you say will the sun rise tomorrow?  
Will there be any time left to borrow?  
Will the poet make a rhyme?  
Will there be any time?  
Can you say will there be a tomorrow?

Seems to me I have been here forever.  
Will this war ever end, maybe never.  
Will the dawn still arrive;  
Will I still be alive;  
Or will I sleep alone here forever?

There's someone who I'm sure loves me only.  
She's the one on my mind when I'm lonely.  
Does she know; can she see;  
Is she still true to me?  
Does she know what it's like to be lonely?

From the sea comes the sun, dawn is breaking.  
Soon the fight for my life I'll be making.  
If I die over here,  
Will they know; will they care;  
Will there be joy or hearts that are breaking?

Can you say will the sun rise tomorrow?

Will there be any time left to borrow?  
Will the poet make a rhyme?  
Will there be any time?  
Can you say, will there be a tomorrow?

### **Wolfpack's Houseboy**

By Dick Jonas  
Tune: Original

Seventh fragged us way up north  
on a bridge that wasn't worth  
Takin' any chance to be shot at.  
But they said you've got to go,  
Put the word on Uncle Ho:  
You've no choice, men, this is combat.

So the boys in TOC  
Pooped us up on what we'd see,  
And intelligence said, "Watch for SAMs.  
MiGs are up and Triple-A  
Will be thick as flies today.  
Give 'em hell, the war is in your hands."

Well, we hit the tanker twice,  
Then my blood went cold as ice  
As we dropped off and crossed the Red;  
Barracuda understood.  
He called out, "That launch is good!  
Take it down right now or you'll be dead."

Well, it almost makes me cry  
Down below I see bullseye  
Through the clouds of flak between the SAMs  
There's the bridge I came to bomb.  
Lord, I'm scared, I want my mom.  
Then my GIB said, "Pickle, pull, both hands."

This is almost just like heaven,  
Twenty miles from Ninety-seven.  
We're home free, of that there is no doubt.  
Then a MiG I couldn't see  
Hosed a missile off at me,  
Then the bird pitched up and we punched out.

I can see the Phantoms go  
Round and round from here below.  
They won't leave without my GIB and me.  
And that MiG-21,  
Just got plastered with a gun,  
And the pilot's frightened eyes see.

Oh, he landed in a tree  
Only forty feet from me

Then I whipped out my .38  
I said, "Tell me how it feels,  
When your MiG turns two cartwheels?  
Come on down with us and here we'll wait."

"Hello, Chevy Lead, up there,  
This is Chevy Two down here,  
With my GIB and the guy you just shot down."  
"Chevy Two, say what you mean.  
I've called in the Jolly Green.  
Just stay put and soon we'll have  
you found."

First I saw the Sandys come,  
Making circles in the sun,  
Then the Jolly Greens were overhead.  
That MiG jock went up first,  
I made him believe the worst  
"No tricks, boy, or I'll fill you with lead."

Well, we brought that son-of-a-gun  
All the way to Fifty-one.  
Two took off, it's true, but three came back  
He won't fly the Phantom II  
But here's what we're gonna do;  
Make him Houseboy for the whole Wolf Pack!

## Abbreviations

**AB:** Afterburner  
**AIM:** Air intercept missile  
**AVGAS:** Aviation gasoline  
**BDA:** Bomb Damage Assessment  
**BUFF:** Big Ugly Fat Fucker  
**CAP:** Combat Air Patrol  
**CBU:** Cluster Bomb Unit  
**CO:** Commanding Officer  
**CONUS:** Continental United States  
**CSAR:** Combat Search and Rescue  
**DASC:** Direct Air Support Center  
**DFC:** Distinguished Flying Cross  
**DMZ:** Demilitarized Zone  
**DO:** Director of Operations  
**FAC:** Forward Air Controller  
**GIB:** Guy in the backseat  
**GCI:** Ground Control Intercept  
**JSARC:** Joint Search and Rescue Center  
**KT:** Kiloton  
**LZ:** Landing Zone  
**NKP:** Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base  
**PDJ:** Plain de Jars (Plain of Jars in Northern Laos)  
**PJ:** Pararescue Jumper  
**RTB:** Return to Base  
**RTU:** Replacement Training Unit  
**SAM:** Surface-to-air missile  
**SEA:** Southeast Asia  
**TFS:** Tactical Fighter Squadron  
**TFW:** Tactical Fighter Wing  
**TOC:** Tactical Operations Center  
**VC:** Viet Cong

## Glossary

- 37s and 57s:** 37 and 57 (or 23) references the caliber in millimeters of anti-aircraft artillery.
- 750s:** References the weight of the M-117 750lb bomb. The M-117 was a general purpose high explosive “dumb” bomb dropped ballistically from aircraft.
- Air intercept missile (AIM):** The designation for guided air-to-air missiles. During Vietnam the primary missiles were the AIM-7, AIM-9, and briefly the AIM-4. The AIM-7 was a semi-active radar guided missile. It required the shooting aircraft to “illuminate” the target with radar energy. The missile would then guide on the reflected radar energy to hit its target. Shooting aircraft had to maintain a radar lock throughout the time of flight of the missile and it was poor when shot downward into radar ground clutter. The AIM-9 and AIM-4 both guided to the target using heat seeking technology.
- Afterburner (AB):** Afterburner is a jet aircraft engine system which inject and then ignites fuel in the exhaust system creating significant increase in thrust.
- Arclight:** Arclight missions used of B-52Fs based in Guam from 1965-1973 to target the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They effectively turned portions on Laos into a moonscape.
- Banana Valley:** A banana shaped valley 30 miles southwest of Hanoi. Vietnamese MiG-17s would often wait at low altitude to ambush American strike packages on their way to Hanoi.
- Barracuda:** An F-105 radio callsign used by the 355<sup>th</sup> TFW at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand.
- Bear:** Slang for the back seater in an F-4 Phantom.
- Big Ugly Fat Fucker (BUFF):** Unofficial nickname for the B-52 Stratofortress.
- Bingo:** Aviation brevity terms for the minimum fuel state needed for aircraft to return to base.
- Blue Chip:** Callsign for 7<sup>th</sup> AF Command and Control Center
- Brown Anchor:** Air refueling location in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- Cluster Bomb Unit (CBU):** An air dropped munition that separates into multiple submunitions which can cover an area about the size of a football field killing personnel and destroying vehicles.
- Compress:** Radio callsign of the rescue command center at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base.
- Crown:** Radio callsign of the HC-130s which flew as airborne rescue command and control aircraft.



**Daddy Vulcan:** Slang term for the 20mm vulcan cannon or gatling gun in the F-105.

**Demilitarized Zone (DMZ):** A 10km wide zone along the border of North and South Vietnam which neither country was authorized to place military forces. The DMZ was established by the Geneva Accords in 1954.

**Direct Air Support Center (DASC):** The command and control element responsible for providing aircraft to support army maneuver units.

**Director of Operations (DO):** The number two position in USAF fighter squadrons responsible for operations of the unit.

**Drogue:** A type of air refueling equipment. Drogues are a basket on the end of a hose which pilots fly their aircraft's refueling probe into to receive fuel.

**FIRECAN:** The NATO code name for the Soviet SON-9 fire control radar used to guide large caliber anti-aircraft artillery in Vietnam.

**Fishbed C:** The NATO code name for the MiG-21.

**Flak:** The shrapnel of exploded anti-aircraft artillery shells.

**Guard channel:** The emergency radio channel.

**Hanoi Hanna:** A Vietnamese radio personality who made English-language propaganda broadcasts directed at US troops.

**Hanoi Hilton:** The Americans nickname for the Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi. The French built the Hoa Lo prison during their colonial rule of Vietnam.

**Incendi-gel:** Slang term for napalm which was gasoline mixed with special soaps to make a highly flammable sticky gel.

**Jolly:** Radio callsign of HH-3 and HH-53 rescue helicopters in Vietnam.

**Joint Search and Rescue Center (JSARC):** The theater level combat search and rescue command and control element located in the Air Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut AB.

**Kiloton (KT):** A unit of weight used to reference the amount of explosive desired, in context of "Lakes of Tally Ho" it is referencing five kilotons of TNT.

**Mark 82 (Mk-82):** A five hundred pound ballistic bomb.

**Martin-Baker:** The manufacture of fighter aircraft ejection seats during the Vietnam War.

**MiG:** Russian or Soviet fighter aircraft manufactured by the Mikoyan and Gurevich aircraft company.



**Mu Gia Pass:** A principle pass through the Annamite Mountain Range used by the Ho Chi Minh trail to travel from North Vietnam into Laos. During the war it was heavily defended by North Vietnamese air defenses. See Figure 3.

**Ninety-seven:** The channel for the tactical air navigation (TACAN) equipment on Lima Site 85 in northern Laos. Lima Site 85 was a secret CIA outpost in Laos designed to support clandestine operations there but eventually expanded with aircraft navigation equipment such as the TACAN broadcasting on channel ninety-seven.

**Northeast Railroad:** The principle railroad which lead northeast out of Hanoi to the Chinese border.

**OV-10:** A twin-engine turbo-prop aircraft designed by North American Rockwell to serve as a forward air control and observation aircraft. It had significantly more capability than the previous generation of observation aircraft (the O-1 and O-2). It could carry up to six thousand pounds of munitions instead of only marking rockets and was equipped with an ejection seat.

**Pararescue Jumper (PJ):** Specially trained airmen who flew in the back of rescue helicopters who were responsible for the medical care of rescued pilots. More than simply an airborne medic, PJs would often leave the helicopter to search for and recover pilots who could not make it to into the helicopter or onto the hoist on their own.

**Pipper:** The gun or bomb site on an aircraft.

**Quad-23s:** Four 23mm anti-aircraft guns.

**Replacement Training Unit (RTU):** The training units in the United States which qualified pilots in new aircraft before their tours in Vietnam. In the context of the "Lakes of Tally Ho," Jonas is attempting to impart the fact that the pilot only has six-months of experience in the F-4.

**Sandy:** The radio callsign of A-1 Skyraiders and later A-7 Corsairs who flew rescue missions to recover downed pilots. Sandy's role was to locate, authenticate, and protect the survivor until Jolly could execute a pick-up.

**Sidewinder:** The nickname for the AIM-9 heat seeking air-to-air missile.

**Singha:** A Thai beer popular with US troops during the Vietnam War.

**Spectre:** The radio callsign and nickname for the AC-130 gunship.

**Thud Ridge:** A roughly 20nm long ridge approximately 10nm northwest of Hanoi which points down towards the city. American pilots used it to hide from North Vietnamese radar sites during their ingress and egress from targets in and around Hanoi.

**Triple-A:** Slang term for the abbreviation of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA).

**Twenty Mike-Mike:** The caliber of most US fighter aircraft guns, 20mm.

**Victor Charlie (VC):** Slang term for the Viet Cong using the phonetic alphabet names for V and C, Victor and Charlie respectively.

**Viet Cong (VC):** The South Vietnamese communist guerilla force which fought an insurgency against the South Vietnamese government and the Americans from the late 1950s through 1975 with the support of the North Vietnamese.

**Willy Pete:** Slang term for white phosphorus smoke rockets. White phosphorus burns incredibly hot but also releases lots of bright white smoke making it a perfect tool to mark targets.

**ZPU:** Russian acronym for anti-aircraft gun.



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