

Richard Lamothe's Military History

Richard Lamothe joined the United States Air Force in 1963 as a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. He graduated as a 2nd Lt. 1967. From there, he went to Pilot Training at Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, Texas and graduated in September 1968. He was assigned to numerous transition training bases, for transition to the O-2A (twin tailed Cessna 337 civilian version). In 1969 he was assigned to Southeast Asia, as Forward Air Controller (FAC) where he flew the O-2A in 221 combat missions, both day and night airstrikes on enemy targets moving along the Ho Chi Minh Trail from Nape Pass, Mu Gia Pass, and Ban Karai Pass. Some experiences are presented in the additional "My tour in the Southeast Asia Theater of War" as follows:



My tour in the Southeast Asia Theater of War

I arrived on 1 February, 1969 at Bien Hoa AB and the 504th Tactical Air Support Group (TASG). The first night was somewhat sleepless because of the constant sound of artillery. On the second night in country, the VC welcomed me and others to Vietnam with a rocket barrage. It is very interesting to note that you can fall asleep very quickly with out-going artillery fire and wake from a deep sleep when an enemy rocket explodes nearby. When the second rocket hit, everything became boots and skivvies into the bunker. The barrage continued for 30 minutes with a very near miss, bringing sand down through the PSP holding up the layers of sandbags. Next day we were flown to Phan Rang AB for theater training on the Combat tactics we would use for flying in an anti-aircraft environment. Little did I know how soon I would find out! The date was 27 Feb, 1969,

with my combat instructor pilot on a night mission checkout, we were turning on to final approach when tower advised, "Aircraft turning final, you are getting ground fire!" The instructor said "GO BLACKOUT NOW!" All light switches were off in less than a second while he executed a 90 degree banked turn at 250 ft. above the ground. Looking for the source of gunfire, we returned to land in a very steep approach power off and quick taxi to the revetment. As this was my last checkout mission, I was assigned to the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. Its mission was to fly interdiction over the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos. After the events of previous days, I was provided with 100 hours of unique training for tactics to be used in the survival of our aircraft in a high threat environment for our slow aircraft (90 -110 knots).

There were two very threatening missions where the NVA missed my aircraft by a small margin. The first mission was while we circled a probable target three times when 7 rounds of 37 mm anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) passed in front of the right wing by two feet. The rounds looked like beer cans going by, but way too close to revert to a rapid turn and uncoordinated flying to the nearest high ground to go look things over. The call for strike aircraft went unfilled, so we marked it on our charts for debrief. The other mission occurred when I was solo on a mission in hot area doing reconnaissance of the roads and jungle for dusty trees. I was silly enough to fly straight and level for more than 30 seconds, more like 3 minutes. Suddenly a large black cloud appeared above and slightly behind me, it was a 100 mm gun! Upon seeing the airburst, I put the nose down and began jinking left, right, up, left, down, right, up, left, anything to put separation between me and the last airburst. It obviously worked, as the next airburst was at my altitude, but considerably behind and off to the left. Not having any fighters to help me, I moved further away and called Hillsboro for strike aircraft to strike the guns firing on me from North Viet Nam. The answer came back "Denied" as no fighters were available. My first thought was, so much for being a Clay pigeon. I continued the mission and fired two White Phosphorus (Willy Pete)

rockets into the Jungle covering between two road intersections. I was rewarded with a very large fireball uncharacteristic of the warheads on my rockets. Noting this, I continued my mission and reported the AAA firing and reported the WP actions on the ground. For a few minutes on this mission, I felt truly alone and fearful for my life and family. Training took over and I survived to return the favor to the enemy.

Now to some of the better missions that earned me the satisfaction of knowing I was in some way making life difficult for the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Pathet Lao (PL). One of the early checkout missions I spotted and counted three trucks caught in the muddy roads trying to move one truck to cover. This time fighters were available, and we were able to set two on fire and blow the third into a deep crater. It was an early start to the rainy season, so they were caught unprepared to move supplies quickly at night. The second mission was one in which I left the area for a couple of days and came back. Upon return, I noted a much wider road where a path had been. There were two spurs going toward the Karst storage area. Once again, I was fortunate to get one flight of Navy fighters to work the area with me. After briefing them, I held off to the east and watched the results. The first fighter down the chute dropped where I marked. Results led to a larger than expected blast for a 500lb bomb. About that time I cross over the run in heading, to better view the target area. At this time, the Lead aircraft pilot asked if I was OK, to which I replied "OK, Why?" He answered that it looked a little testy for me as I turned to look back 90 degrees and saw about 100 airbursts from a 23 mm AAA gun on the run in path and behind me. At this time, I briefed #2 to strike the base of the Karst, north of last strike the distance from the road to the Karst. I then directed #3 to observe the strike area and that he was cleared hot on any gun he saw firing at his wingman or me, just call in. Number 2 rolled in and was in his run when Number 3 called gun position in sight and in hot. At that point I saw the gun; also directing # 2 go west and # 3 to go east. After looking the target area over, I directed #4 to roll in on the

tree line paralleling the road. No more guns were firing as a result of a direct hit on the ammo storage. 4 dropped as directed and laid a string of cluster bombs in the trees creating a lot of black smoke, but no explosions. I briefed the flight on their great work and gave them the battle damage assessment. Their reply was "Hope to see you again soon." These two missions would have qualified for decorations, but I was too busy to turn it in. As it was, I was submitted for and receive two Distinguished Flying Crosses. I was also given a squadron unique award for directing strikes on previously untouchable targets as neither side would acknowledge any thing was there, the Ferdinand Magellan Award with Astroglobe Cluster. It was most likely the only time this happened.

While I was at Phan Rang AB, and at Nakhon Phanom, I flew 221 combat missions as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) and Instructor FAC. In this time, I received enemy AAA fire on almost every mission. Night missions made it easier to see the ground fire, but also harder to see the supply vehicles. We were tasked with slowing the supply system on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I can confirm observing 15 AAA guns and 14 vehicles destroyed. There may be more, but I did not log all my strike results in my flight log.

Thank You for reading this short group of war tales by Richard R. Lamothe Nail 27 - Hammer27 - Easy 27 Tactical call sign for 3 TASSs'

In June, 1970 he was promoted to 1 Lt. while stationed at Randolph AFB, San Antonio, Texas as a T-37 jet instructor pilot.



He was there for 2 years, and then re-assigned to Craig AFB, Selma, Alabama for 2 more years as instructor pilot for T-37's. While there he also was trained as T-41 (see below) (Cessna 172), Flight Examiner. He was promoted to Captain in 1972.



In 1974, the United States Air Force was downsized, and he was given the opportunity to transition into the Minuteman missile program as a Launch Officer. He accepted that position, was assigned to Ellsworth AFB, Rapid City, SD. He spent four years there, and progressed from crew member to crew instructor, and command competition crew member. While there he graduated from University of South Dakota with a Masters degree in Business Administration.

In 1977, he was re-assigned to Columbus AFB, Mississippi as a T-38 instructor pilot. While there, he was promoted to Major in 1978.



In 1979 he applied for and was assigned to the Air Training Command (ATC) Inspector General Office at Randolph AFB, San Antonio, Texas for two years. In 1981 he was re-assigned as a fighter pilot resource to Howard AFB, Panama. The Tactical Air Command (TAC) required

his senior Air Force experience in the tactical operations area.. He flew the O-2A there and also was part of the Wing Command Post/Tactical Air Control Center for two years. He also moved up to Operations Officer for Flying Operations & Airspace Control. He was promoted to Lt. Colonel while at Howard AFB.

In 1984, he was re-assigned to the Pacific Air Force Command (PACAF) at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, flying OV-10's. He was also an Air Operations Officer in PACAF Headquarters. When the OV-10 squadron lost half it's aircraft to a Western Pacific location, need for additional Staff pilots lost their flying positions and operational contacts.



Later in 1986 he was given the opportunity to take command of five aircraft delivery detachments through out the Pacific Theater. In 1988, he later moved from Hickham to Randolph AFB, San Antonio, Texas where he retired on Aug. 31, 1988 as Lt. Colonel.

After retirement Richard became involved in teaching in High School & College as Instructor, certified for life in Texas from 1990-2005. He retired from teaching in 2005. From 1988 to present, he became active in city government in a number of different duties, on five commissions, and as a city councilman.