

# Flight Line AAR Mod

After the USAF F-4C Phantoms arrived at Ubon in 1965, there was a good deal of interaction between the crews of 79SQN and the 45th TFS. As most of the USAF crews had less than 100 hours on the F-4C, they were acutely aware that the development of tactics for their expected ACM engagements with the MIG-15s and 17s was lacking. FLTLT Mick Feiss (the 77SQN FCI) volunteered to give a briefing to the crews on the tactics and close-in ACM manoeuvres used by the squadron with the Sabre. The logic for this was that the performance of their expected opponents over North Vietnam roughly equated to that of our Sabres. This offer was eagerly accepted and as usual, Mick covered the topic in exceptional detail. While the Phantom had a superb radar and the Sparrow missile, it also carried the AIM-9 (a more capable model than ours) and its use in the close in environment was in the forefront of all concerned.

Over the next few weeks, we flew several missions with them to allow the USAF guys to work up effective tactics using the enormous power and performance advantages of the Phantom. Their advantage in the vertical plane was soon apparent in ACM manoeuvring and this was further developed between Mick Feiss and his counterpart in the 45th. We soon scheduled a series of ACM engagements (4v4 and 2v4) on their return leg from strike missions up north. Whilst ACM was probably the last thing on their minds after getting home unscathed after a strike up north, the benefits paid off in June 65 when the 45th achieved the first USAF kills of the war. As a matter of fact, the crews came over to our Mess on the night of their return. This interaction between the squadrons was given credit in the USAF records both then and later with the continuing activity with the 8th TFW Phantoms of Colonel Robin Olds and 'Chappie' James.

The pilots in 79SQN were all rather envious of the Phantom drivers doing their 'stuff' and we used to 'escort' some of them up to the Thai/Lao border (and beyond when unsure of the position!) on their way north. The short range of the Sabre without an AAR capability was blindingly obvious compared to our new 'friends'.

Just up from the 79SQN crewroom was the USAF 'junkyard', where the casualties of war and other incidents were parked. In the area were an RF-101 and an F-105D, both of which had received hits in NVN but struggled back to Ubon. There were also bits of other aircraft, including the AAR probe off an F-100 Super Sabre. The sign below only lasted two days as Col Knutson (USAF base commander) was not amused.



I had a bright idea and enlisted the help of another pilot, Bob Richardson. We 'borrowed' the AAR probe and bought it down to our lines. The CO 79SQN at the time, SQNLDR Roy Frost, had a cynical sense of humour so I outlined a 'plan' to fix one of our aircraft with an AAR mod, take a photo of it and send it back to Butterworth saying we had done modification on the fuel system to enable us to do some AAR trials with the USAF. While you can't see it from the pic below, we tied the rear end of the probe to the port undercarriage leg and a heavy rope over the Sidewinder rail to hold the probe in the horizontal position, then I stood in front to hide it. The pic looked reasonably real and we sent it down to 77SQN at Butterworth, with a thinly disguised explanation of our efforts to improve the operational capability of the Sabre.



The squadron crews at Butterworth saw the joke right away but one of the techs at Ubon got a nasty message from 478 Maintenance Squadron, asking who had authorised the modification and didn't he know that such changes had to be approved by Support Command in Melbourne etc! I guess there are always some who can't see the wood for the trees.

Anyway, we all had a good laugh about the things that boggies will get up to!