OUR GALLANT MEN

MENDOCINO COUNTY FALLEN VIETNAM WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL

Compiled in Support of

The Mendocino County Fallen Vietnam War Veterans Memorial

Located at

Mendocino County Museum, 400 E Commercial Street, Willits, California 95490

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Cover Photograph by Steve Eberhard

The next causality of the Vietnam War from Mendocino County was First Lieutenant Lee Aaron Adams from Willits.

LEE A ADAMS

First Lieutenant Lee "Larry" Adams was an US Air Force pilot of a Republic F-105D Thunderchief (commonly referred to as the Thud by pilots), with the 333rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, 355th Tactical Fighter Wing assigned to the Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base (TRTAFB) in central Thailand.

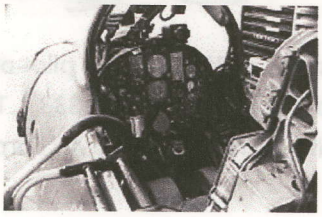
Prior to his arrival in Thailand, he was on Temporary Duty with the 333rd in Yokota Air Force Base in Japan beginning on July 3, 1965. Shortly afterwards, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred on July 31, 1965, which led to retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam. He transferred to Takhli AFB on October 17, 1965 and immediately began combat operations. The 333rd supported the 355th TFW's Operation "ROLLING THUNDER" strikes into North Vietnam losing several aircraft and pilots during the increasing defenses around Hanoi in early 1966 while 1LT Adams was assigned there.

April 19, 1966. The combat flight mission on that day consisted of a flight of four aircraft to Mugia Pass, the area where the Ho Chi Minh Trail began, crossing from North Vietnam into Laos. 1Lt Adams was number four, radio call sign Volvo 4. This was his 90th combat mission, 10 more missions and he would be up for reassignment. According to official statements, Flight

Leader Captain James C. Sharp, and Wing Man, Captain Straubinger, (radio call sign Volvo 3); "The mission was uneventful and went as briefed leading up to the target."

F-105D Thunderchief "Thud"

After dropping their bombs on the target, they proceeded to reconnoiter the roads on "Route Package One," (the area north abutting the DMZ). While flying over the roads complex, 1LT Adams radioed a report that he had seen a truck pull off the road and tried to explain its location. The Wing Man said no one else was able to locate the spot so 1LT Adams was released to make the first pass.



Cockpit

Volvo 4 then reported seeing two trucks on the road under camouflage. 1LT Adams turned the aircraft sharp and rolled in but was unable to get lined up for a strafing pass for his 20mm cannon. He said it was a bad pass and he was going up to try again. He returned for a more favorable pattern on his second pass, and dove the aircraft to pick up speed on a parallel course to the road. He pulled up sharply and rolled in on the trucks at a dive angle of 25 degrees.

The Wing Man did the same maneuver and observed "a long burst from Volvo 4 tearing up the road and the two trucks." The Wing Man glanced at his instruments; lining up his own attack, and when he looked back there was a large fireball, 1000 to 2000 feet up from the road.

The Flight Leader asked for a flight check-in on the radio to determine who had crashed. He then made four low passes over the impact area but could not see a parachute nor did he hear an emergency beeper. No transmissions were heard prior to the impact.

The Flight Leader stated, "I do not believe Lt. Adams ejected from the aircraft before it impacted." The crash site was 40 miles north of the DMZ, near Van Loc, west-northwest of Dong Hoi, in North Vietnam. Search and rescue attempts were called off due to hostile threat in the area. Volvo 1, 2, and 3 then returned to base without Volvo 4.

Fellow F-105D pilot Lieutenant Ed Rasimus wrote a memoir called, "*When Thunder Rolled*," and recalls during Operation "ROLLING THUNDER" and four costly months in 1966 while Lt. Adams was there. "Each day the mission into North Vietnam typically consisted of four or five flights of four aircraft. On average for those four months, we lost one of those guys daily. Sixty percent of the pilots who started the 100 mission tour didn't finish." The Commander of the 333rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, Colonel William C. Norris, remembers those days. "During Rolling Thunder, we lost 252 F-105s. Every day, those pilots who went to the Hanoi area went to one of the most heavily defended areas in modern warfare. To go to Hanoi day after day not only took great courage, but, more important, it took loyalty to your country."

Distinguished Flying Cross

Traveling to Vietnam in 1993, forensic experts from the POW/MIA unit interviewed two Vietnamese informants who said they witnessed the militia shoot down the airplane on April 19, 1966. The witnesses said they recovered human leg bones, which they buried at the site. Several days later, a farmer told investigators he had uncovered the bones in 1982 while plowing his field. He gave the Americans a small fragment of one of the bones that he had recovered and saved in the ossuary, (a container for bones of the dead). Blood samples were taken from two brothers and DNA analysis confirmed the identity.

First Lieutenant Lee Aaron Adams had been listed as Missing in Action until his remains were discovered, identified, and returned to his family in Willits, California in 2005. Delivering the eulogy, (quoted from the LA Times): "Nephew Steven Adams, an Assembly of God pastor from Salem, Oregon, described his uncle as a dashing figure in the family -- a star 6-foot-4 football player for Willits High School who had a passion for flying and a sensitive side that led him to bring home stray puppies. A favorite family portrait, displayed at the memorial service, showed Larry Adams asleep in a chair with a stray in his lap."

Larry Adams got his private pilot's license while attending Willits High School, then attended Santa Rosa Junior College where he was captain of the football team and received an Associate Degree in Aeronautics. He won an appointment to the Air Force Academy, graduating with the Class of 1963. He went on to become a Pilot Trainee at Reese AFB, TX, then Student Pilot at

Nellis AFB, NC, then F-105 Tactical Fighter Pilot training at Johnson AFB, NC, before going overseas.

Larry's cremated remains were brought to the Adam's family ranch in Willits to be scattered there with those of his parents.

F-105 Thunderchiefs in "Missing Man" Fly Over