

Laurels for 1967

We believe that our aerospace laurels for 1967 should go to the U. S. airmen and their supporting ground crews who are fighting the bloody and bitter air war over Southeast Asia. They are fighting the most peculiar air war in history, in which the rules and restrictions imposed by their Commander-in-Chief have forced them to take many more risks than necessary; given them less than normal opportunities to defend themselves, and forced them to use tactics that achieve less than maximum results. Their valiant efforts, heavy sacrifice and limited results are also only dimly understood by the American people because of the ambiguity of their political leadership. As a consequence, these airmen are getting less public support from the home front than in any other combat in which U. S. pilots and aircraft have fought.

U. S. policy has permitted the enemy to build up the most formidable air defense system in history in the key areas of North Vietnam, with radar-directed flak batteries in heavy concentrations; radar-directed Mach 2 MiG-21 jet interceptors equipped with air-to-air missiles, and SA-2 radar-guided anti-aircraft missiles deployed in several hundred batteries.

It is over North Vietnam that the air battle is hottest, the losses heaviest and the restrictions most frustrating. Among the units involved in this campaign that merit special mention are:

■ **USAF 388th and 355th Tactical Fighter Wings** flying Republic F-105s from bases in Thailand. These wings are carrying the brunt of the U. S. air attack against the toughest targets in the north because the F-105 can carry the heaviest iron bomb load of any tactical aircraft currently in the U. S. combat inventory. It is being used on missions for which it was never designed, and performance of aircraft and pilots under extremely difficult conditions is making it possible to maintain and intensify the pressure on the North Vietnam war effort.

■ **USAF 3rd Aerospace Rescue Group** that flies Sikorsky HH-3E and HH-53B "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters on deep penetrations of hostile territory to rescue downed airmen. This unit has made over 900 combat rescues from enemy territory, and its helicopters seldom return from missions over North Vietnam without battle damage. The Douglas A-1 Skyraider pilots who fly top cover for these rescue missions also deserve special kudos.

■ **Navy and USAF units** flying McDonnell F-4 fighters on top cover missions over the north to protect the F-105 missions and Navy Douglas A-4 strikes.

■ **Navy and Marine units** flying the Grumman A-6 all-weather attack aircraft on night bombing and

electronic countermeasures missions over North Vietnam and Laos.

The growing air war in Laos still officially does not exist. Pilots do not receive official credit for missions over this territory, although their casualty rates are real enough. Among the units deserving special mention for their work over Laos are:

■ **USAF Douglas/On Mark Engineering unit** based at Nakhon Phanom in Thailand and flying long, dangerous night missions against supply convoys moving down the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos.

■ **Wide variety of well-paid mercenaries** operating a wide variety of bush aircraft, such as the Pilatus Turbo-Porter, Helio Courier, Dornier Do.27 and Do.28, de Havilland Caribou and Fairchild C-123, under extremely hazardous conditions on a wide variety of missions.

The air war over South Vietnam imposes a different set of dangers due to a variety of low-level operations in the face of intense small arms fire; the obsolete fatigue-weary aircraft flocks, and the perpetual uncertainty of the enemy's locations. Among the units fighting in the south we would like to mention are:

■ **Army helicopter pilots and crewmen** who pioneered and proved in combat a new concept of mobility for infantry, supplies and artillery. Flying Bell Hueys and Cobras and Vertol Chinooks, these helicopter pilots, many of them young warrant officers fresh from rush courses in U.S. training schools, have enabled U.S. ground troops to checkmate Viet Cong guerrillas' mobility with their vertical envelopment and airlift of heavy firepower quickly to new battle areas.

■ **USAF Forward Air Controllers (FAC)** who fly Cessna O-1s and O-2s in low, slow, eyeball reconnaissance missions over enemy territory, spotting and marking Viet Cong positions in the face of heavy ground fire. Their work makes close air support possible against the Viet Cong in the south.

■ **USAF Douglas AC-47 pilots**, many of them past 50 years of age, who are flying dangerous night missions spraying Viet Cong positions with firepower from their batteries of General Electric Miniguns.

■ **USAF units flying North American F-100s** doing the brunt of the close air support work in the south, with an aging aircraft that shows too many signs of wearing out.

■ **Units flying Fairchild C-123 and de Havilland Caribou** short-field transports on hazardous resupply missions under enemy fire for U.S. Special Forces camps throughout South Vietnam.

—Robert Hotz