

What is this red tornado?

It is a 2.5 min. timed lapsed photo of an AC-119G "Shadow" gunship flying in a standard firing circle, with four 7.62 mm GAU-11 mini-guns each firing 6000 rounds per minute.

The Story:

Sept. 1970, Phan Rang AFB, RSVN.

As an AG and part of the Shadow 61 crew, I was upset to say the least that the Flight Surgeon grounded me (DNIF for 8 days) after a really bad experience with the base D.D.S. relative to an impacted wisdom tooth. On a stormy night, Shadow 61 launched without me as I played cards with alert crews in the hootch. "61's" frag was cancelled and had to RTB due to very bad weather. While returning, "Charlie" was attempting to infiltrate the base perimeter with sapper explosives. As the base alert siren motivated most in our hooch into a defensive posture, the 'phone rang and I learned from the Ops Officer that Shadow 61 would be firing on Phan Rang's perimeter to repel the attack. Cool !!!---I ran for my Minolta 7s rangefinder camera freshly loaded with Ektachrome 160. Without a tri-pod of my own (yet), or other airmen in sight outside the hootch to borrow one from, I propped the camera on top of a Ford F100 pick-up truck. I took only two exposures: one about 40 secs., the other 2.5 min.

I helped set-up the Phan Rang Photo Hobby Shop to develop Ektachrome transparency film (slides). It was a wonderful place to get-away on a "day-off". In the fine print of the Kodak developing instructions, I learned you can "push" the ASA160 to ASA400. A few days later, I spent some nervous time in the dark room processing and pushing the film. While wiping off the final rinse solution from the developed film strip, I could feel other airmen peering over my shoulder to see what the images from the other night looked like. WOW was the mildest of adjectives used.

Many reproductions were made for Officers and Enlisted, and Flight and Maintenance crews.

Michael Drzyzga (former AG, SSgt, 17th S.O.S)
October 12, 2006

37 Pecan Lane
Oak Ridge, NJ 07438
Oct. 13, 2006

SSgt. Darrin Kast
71st. S.O.S (AETC)
4150 Hangar Rd. SE, Bldg. 1000S
Kirkland AFB, NM 87117-5832

Subject: Picture for the Heritage Room

Dear Darrin:

First and foremost, I want to again thank you and the other airmen of the 71st SOS for extending such an awesome welcome to the members of the AC119 Gunship Association on Sept. 29, 2006. Of many wonderful experiences that day, I enjoyed seeing the unit's efforts to preserve its rich history on the wall of the Heritage Room. I suspect that one day you will need larger walls!

With the history in my mind, I offer the enclosed 11 X 14 color picture which I trust will find a good location on one of those walls. Also enclosed is a brief "story" of the making of the Red Tornado. As with any fond memory of years ago, I told the story of that experience as best I truly remember, but it is still a story.

Darrin, I was prompted by a few other ex-Air Commandos to ask your consideration of the following: Would you be able to provide me with a current unit coin (I saw one during the visit and it is beautiful!!). It would mean a lot to me.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Michael Drzyzga
973-235-3418 (d)
Drzyzga513@hotmail.com

ENCLOSURE (1)

ec: Col. James L. Cardoso, Commander (w/o enclosure)
Mr. Ray Barridale, Pres. (w/o enclosure)