

Thomas H Hamman, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-1972

Captain Thomas H “Tom” Hamman was born in 1945 in Hollywood, FL, and died of injuries from a DaNang rocket attack on June 15, 1972. Tom is survived by his mother Janet Sue Hamman, sister Chris Schnell, wife Susan, and their children Kirstin and Chad, as well as Kirstin’s children Joy and Jacob.

The rocket that took his life was the first to hit the base, so he had no warning or chance to find safety in a bunker. Wayne Laessig, Tom’s Co-pilot, remembers the night well. Normally, he and Tom went to midnight chow together before their mission, but that night was different because Wayne had flown on more than 30 missions in a row and earlier that day he was told he had to take 5 days of “combat time off” (CTO was used to reduce combat fatigue) and that a replacement Co-pilot would take his place on the crew. Wayne had decided to use the CTO and some leave to “rest and recuperate (R&R) in Australia, and that night Tom came by to tell him to have a good time down under. Tom went on to midnight chow by himself and the rocket attack that took his life occurred as he was returning to his barracks area.

Tom was 26 years old and readying for a new life outside the Air Force. Vietnam was his last tour of duty and he was scheduled to separate from the Air Force upon completion of that assignment.

Janet Sue Hamman, Tom’s mother, tells us, *“My son, Tom, had many endearing characteristics, but the one that stands out among my many memories is his protectiveness. He was the oldest of the children and always was aware of “watching out” for his brother and sister. At a very young age, he was asked by his teacher to tell his “greatest wish.” His answer was “to make my sister well.” She had been very ill. Later in life, by writing to several authorities, he fought to have his brother assigned to duty other than Viet Nam. He succeeded in this effort but shortly after lost his own life in Da Nang. Our family will never forget this protective love, and how much his love changed our lives. We are grateful for the unforgettable 27 years that he was with us.”*

Over 30 years after Vietnam, Wayne met Tom's daughter Kirstin at an AC-119 Gunship Association Reunion. He told her how her father helped a green, young 1st Lieutenant understand about flying with a crew and relying on each other. Others at the reunion, like Gus Sininger, Don Williams, and Larry Barbee talked with her about flying with Tom, spending time after flights trying to relax, or rooming with him. Everyone tried to help Kirstin understand a little more about the father she never knew – his easy going attitude, his sense of humor, his common sense, and how the natural leadership he exhibited made it easy to follow and trust him, no matter what. That reunion had plenty of tears as well as plenty of hugs and smiles as we learned about Kirstin, her kids Jacob and Joy (Tom's grand children), and Kirstin learned about us, and our all too short time with Tom. Tom was the rare man and officer who no one disliked, and much more than that, enjoyed being around or flying with him. We all miss him still and will forever.