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F-105 Wild Weasel vs SA-2 'Guideline' SAM: Vietnam 1965-73 (Duel)

Peter Davies

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Although America entered the Vietnam War with some of the world's most sophisticated combat aircraft, the majority of their missions involved conventional bombing and fighter engagements that employed quite similar tactics to those previously used in the Korean War and World War 2. The real step change in aerial fighting came with the use of air-to-air and ground-to-air missiles. Developing methods of defeating the latter involved the rapid evolution of technology and tactics which, over twenty years later, would enable the USA to win the air war over Iraq in Operation Desert Storm in a matter of hours.

During the Vietnam War, the appearance of Russian SA-2 missiles around Hanoi in 1965 alarmed US officials. Initially reluctant to attack the missile sites, the increasing toll of US aircraft and the ways in which the SA-2s inhibited bombing tactics meant that new methods of dealing with the sites had to be developed quickly. Electronic reconnaissance aircraft had some success with jamming of the missiles' guidance systems at long range, but the real solution lay with an aircraft that could detect the radars at closer range, offer itself as a target to the missile sites and attack them before missiles could be launched at US bombers.

F-105Fs equipped with new technology quickly became an essential addition to all USAF strike missions over North Vietnam. Using new Shrike and Standard ARM anti-radiation missiles and radar detection equipment developed by the US Navy, the F-105F and its more sophisticated successor, the F-105G, continued their hair-raising battles with North Vietnamese missile batteries throughout the rest of the Vietnam War.

Here, author Peter Davies recounts the dramatic contests between these newly outfitted F-105s and the missile sites in Vietnam in a highly illustrated account, drawing on first-hand pilot experiences and technical manuals to present a full history of the technologies and tactics of both sides.

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