

CAVEAT for this story: This is one of the many tales we heard while we were in Southeast Asia. There's no way to verify it short of someone who was actually present, coming forward and authenticating it. Since the story DOES have a modicum of truth to it, I've decided to share it with the Association. Besides, who doesn't love a good Spectre story?

Jeff Noecker, Crew 7, 16TH SOS 1970-71

As in a sporting event, you can't tell the players without a program. So this section is added for those of you who've never heard about LtCol. Ken "Grouchy Bear" Harris. Grouchy Bear, or GB as we affectionately called him, was the 16th SOS Squadron Commander for the majority of my time at Ubon. Ten minutes with him and you an undeniable sense of how he acquired his nickname. A totally business, "mostly" by the book, individual whose gaze could stop global warming. And it got worse if he was in a bad mood. Atheistic aircraft commanders, that had done a naughty something and had been summoned into his presence, could be seen genuflecting prior to entering his office. The local joke was that his face would crack if he ever smiled.

The story goes that he was getting his hours in and did so as the AC on this particular night. (He occasionally flew the right seat as well, just for shits and giggles <and hours>). They were over their assigned target area when they were joined by the escorts. You may recall that we normally flew with the black bellied 497 TFS (Night Owls). As gunship escorts, these guys were the best. They knew everything about us and had a wonderful reputation. However, we had to fly a few missions with the F-4E's out of Da Nang whose callsign was Gunfighter. They were terrible at escort duties and we used to joke that they were lucky to hit the GROUND with a bomb. I recall that we even used to put them on targets like forks in the road, just so they'd first go Winchester, and then go away. I think we'd have rather flown against a radar guided AAA than to have them tagging along and getting in the way. So, GB is out over the trails and Gunfighter is escorting. There came a point where the gunship either needed a flak suppression run or a target hit with CBU. GB started sparkling for the fighter and got concerned when, after about a dozen rounds, nothing was heard from the fighter. GB continued firing until the fighter came up on radio and started a diatribe about tracer ammo going over his canopy and almost being hit by it. His initial mistake was showing up in the first place. His second was getting on the radio and cussing out the gunship and making an ass out of himself. He complained mightily about how the gunship endangered his multi-million dollar fighter and putting his crew at risk. By the time GB got back to Ubon, he had sparks coming out of his ears and fire coming out of his eyes. After debriefing, he went to his office and dialed up the Wing Commander at Da Nang. Legend has it that if you were an aircraft that had become lost anywhere in SEA, you could simply look at the ground and locate a glowing red phone line. Just follow it east to Da Nang or west to Ubon. Bottom line; this Gunfighter 'anal cavity' never declared "Bullseye" and just dove into the middle of the gunship's orbit. The story never did mention what became of that fighter jockey but it's a sure bet that he had an interesting chat with his Wing and Squadron Commanders the next day. I would love to have been a fly on the wall for that one.