



WHO'S THE GUY IN BACK? The Col John Mollison Story EDUCATION KIT

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John Mollison learned it's not who you know — it's who's got your back

At best, John Mollison's childhood was difficult. At worst, it was a sure-fire recipe for failure. Yet, by the time John went to war in Vietnam, he was well prepared to do his duty and support those who depended upon him.

There is no secret to John's success. In fact, the forces that came to bear on John's benefit are well known — when qualified people are available to teach, train and encourage, even a poor kid with half his parents can rise to great heights.

From age 10 through his graduation from High School, John was a resident of Boys Town, Nebraska. Here, John learned the critical skills of self-management, confidence and ability to work in a team environment. John also had opportunity to foster his natural talent and interest in performing arts, graduating from the University of Nebraska (Lincoln) with a degree in music.

However fortunate John was growing into young adulthood, hard challenges remained. Fulfilling his obligation to the Armed Forces, John had his heart set on becoming a pilot. That was not to be. The highly specialized flight crew training was rigorous and John did not achieve the coveted pilot wings.

Instead, he decided to become the next best thing - a "Guy in Back."

"Every person on earth comes into the world with different circumstances, talents, challenges, and opportunities.

Likewise, every person has the responsibility to turn those things into productive, positive outcomes."

John Mollison, USAF WSO and 3x DFC recipient



Support from:
Susan (Jonathan) Hayes
March Field Museum
Dean Failor (334th Eagles)



John Mollison - Vietnam War WSO BACKGROUND AND FACTS

Birthplace: Naples, Italy
Birth date: Jan 27, 1946

Occupation: Air Force "Backseater," Business Leader, Musician

FACTS:

- One of six children, abandoned by father at age 9
- Sent to Boys Town at age 11 with brother Art (age 9)
- Graduated from University of Nebraska, Degree in Music Education
 - Flew 171 combat missions
 - Three Distinguished Flying Crosses (DFCs)
- 28.5 years in USAF, retired as Colonel and Group Commander

Finished professional career as Alumni Director for Boys Town,
the place he spent much of his formative years



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John's mom realized her son needed more than she alone could provide

John Mollison was born into a world reeling from the hardships caused by World War Two. His father, John Cookman Mollison, was an American "GI" stationed in Italy. His mother, Maria Luisa Telefoni, was a beautiful war bride; the two were eager to put the war behind them and begin a fresh life of prosperity in the United States. Unfortunately, such a life didn't happen.

The young couple were not prepared for the responsibilities of family life. For Luisa, these were compounded by a new country and a new language. However, within ten years, the family grew to six children; the marriage had collapsed, the father, absent and the mother, overwhelmed.

By 1957, Luisa was no longer capable of providing for the family. Desperate for a solution, Luisa approached her church. The response was a peculiar mixture of tragedy and good sense — they recommended the two oldest boys (in their most crucial, formative years) be sent elsewhere where they might yet experience the guidance and opportunity they needed.

On August 17, 1957, John — with little brother Arthur beside him — stepped off the bus at the gate of Boys Town, a home for at-risk children located in Omaha, Nebraska.

A painful decision for sure. But, it redirected young John Mollison's path from hunger to plenty.

John received what he needed at Boys Town

Founded in 1917 by Father Edward J. Flanagan as a positive solution to the overcrowded and poorly managed orphanages.

Today, Boys Town provides a wide range of research-based services to help every child and family be healthy in body, mind and spirit by delivering the right care at the right time in the right way.

From medical research to residential facilities (in eight states), Boys Town, has established and continued to lead the standard for care and training of at-risk youth.

*The DFCS/OGTA did not receive financial compensation from Boys Town for the production of this educational resource or corresponding film.

By the end of 1945, more than 60,000 women from other nations married American service men, hoping for a new life in the United States.

Approximately 10,000 were from Italy.



Photo courtesy Col John Mollison USAF (ret)

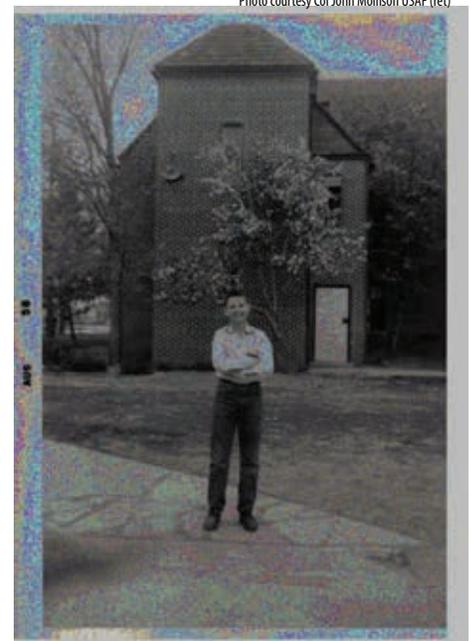


Photo courtesy Col John Mollison USAF (ret)



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Photo courtesy Col John Mollison USAF (ret)



P-61 Black Widow: US Army Air Force photo



F-4J Phantom II, VF-114: photographer unknown



F-15E Strike Eagle: USAF photo

What is a “Guy in Back”?

The military has a wide array of acronyms for roles with long or vague titles.

Typically, “Guy in Back” (or GIB) is a slang term for “Weapons Systems Officer” (WSO). Yet, GIBs can play a variety of roles in the function of an aircraft’s mission. GIBs can be navigators, weapons systems experts or electronic warfare experts. To make things more confusing, the NAVY and Marines called their GIBs, “Radar Intercept Officers” (RIOs).

GIBs are typically highly trained officers that have as much, if not more, advanced training than pilots. Whatever function a GIB does, the end-result is the same: performing crucial tasks that are above and beyond the effective function of the pilot in a crewed aircraft.

Though the term had yet to be coined, the GIB role can be traced to WWI where pilots would fly with Observers into combat areas for the purpose of aerial reconnaissance or even radio communications with ground forces. In WWII, the advent of in-flight radar for night-fighter roles further defined the GIB. In fact, Radar Operators in P-61 Black Widow fighters were often granted victories over enemy aircraft on account of their skill in navigating the airplane to the enemy aircraft (in total darkness).

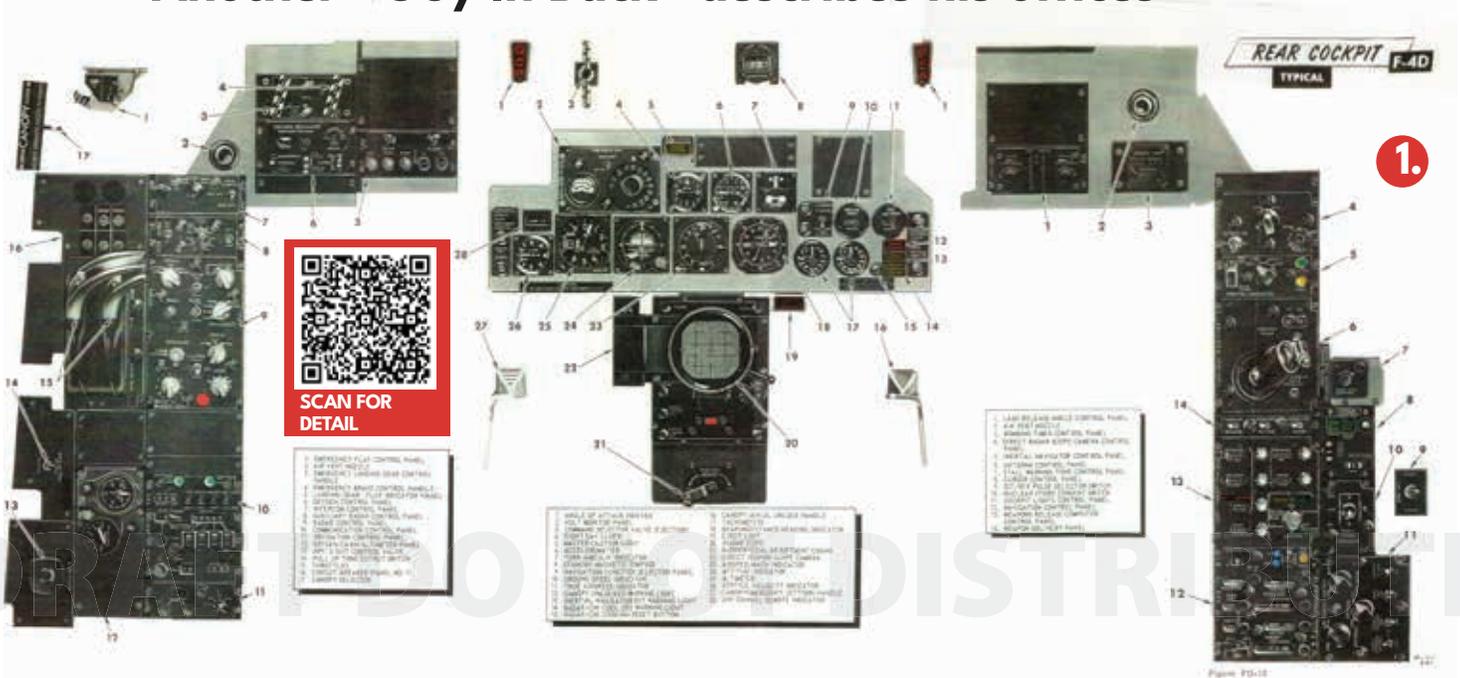
Today’s GIBs have power and control over technology that was unthinkable a hundred years ago (Iso, today’s GIBs are often rated pilots themselves). Nevertheless, though the pilot may be perceived as the ‘rock star’ of the airplane, the reality is that multi-crew aircraft are a team of experts who depend upon each other for success.



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Another “Guy In Back” describes his offices



PHOTOS:

1. Backseat cockpit panels from an F-4D, circa 1979
2. Warren Eastman in front of his F-4C, 1970
3. “Backseat” of an F-4E Phantom, circa 1972, showing the myriad of gauges and indicators
4. “Backseat” of an F-15E Strike Eagle, circa 1990, showing the display screens that replaced the myriad of gauges and switches in the F-4

Photo courtesy Warren Eastman



Photo courtesy Warren Eastman

“These two pictures show the evolution of backseat cockpits over about fifteen years — aeronautical engineers worked with WSOs to make our cockpit areas more effective and efficient.”

WSO Warren Eastman, Ph.D



Photo courtesy Warren Eastman

A BACKSEATER WHO STAYED IN FRONT OF TECH
Warren Eastman flew two combat tours in Southeast Asia, accumulating 270 missions and awarded two DFCs. Flew F-15E in flight test at Edwards AFB, retired as Colonel (reserve). As a civilian, earned PhD in Aeronautics and Astronautics, flew as flight test rated aircrew at Boeing and as a flight test engineer at Edwards AFB

Published by The Distinguished Flying Cross Society

Produced by Old Guys and Their Airplanes

Supported by Susan (Jonathan) Hayes, March Field Museum, Dean Failor

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John Mollison's F-4D USAF Phantom, #494

KNOW THE CAMO:

Many USAF Vietnam War aircraft were painted in a distinctive three-color (two greens, one light brown) camouflage called "SEA" (South East Asia)

KNOW THE CODE:

The two large letters on the tail of a Vietnam War USAF aircraft signify the squadron, sometimes home base, and often indicate the particular years in service

KNOW THE CREW:

Pilot: Jonathan A. Hayes
WSO: John C. Mollison

Though the same general pattern was used on each type of aircraft, there are subtle differences that vary from airplane to airplane.

HK = 480th Tactical Fighter Squadron
12th Tactical Fighter Wing
Phu Cat, South Vietnam
1970-71



KNOW THE NOSE:

5,195 F-4 Phantoms were built in 21 variants

One way to distinguished variants is the nose — for example, RF-4Cs had longer noses and glass panels to accommodate cameras used for Reconnaissance missions



KNOW THE MEDAL:

The Distinguished Flying Cross medal is awarded for heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial flight. It is the fourth highest award for valor.

Jonathan A. Hayes was awarded five while John C. Mollison, three.

Hayes and Mollison didn't always fly together but on March 8, 1971 they did, resulting in Hayes' fourth DFC and Mollison's second.

KNOW THE GEAR:

F-4 Phantoms played many roles in combat — fighter, bomber, reconnaissance, observation are the most common.

Two pylons under each wing could hold a HUGE variety of ordnance, fuel tanks and electronic warfare equipment.

A 'centerline' in the bottom of the F-4 could hold a number of different equipment but mostly fuel tanks or bombs.

Four AIM-7 "Sparrow" air-to-air missiles were stored in specially designed cavities on the bottom of the fuselage.



RF-4C - UNARMED AND ALONE

The RF-4C Phantom performed reconnaissance missions, often flying alone and unarmed over enemy territory - this particular aircraft was crewed by 3x DFC recipient and WSO John Stiles



John Mollison was awarded three Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) medals — the F-4D Phantom depicted above was one of many F-4 Phantoms that John flew in combat

WSO John Mollison and pilot Jonathan Hayes were both awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their action during "Lam Son 719" when they participated in the destruction of an enemy weapons storage facility so large, it burned for at least three days.

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society (DFCS) works to make sure the stories of its members are available to inspire anyone to greater Achievement, demonstrate Courage and receive the rewards that come from Education.

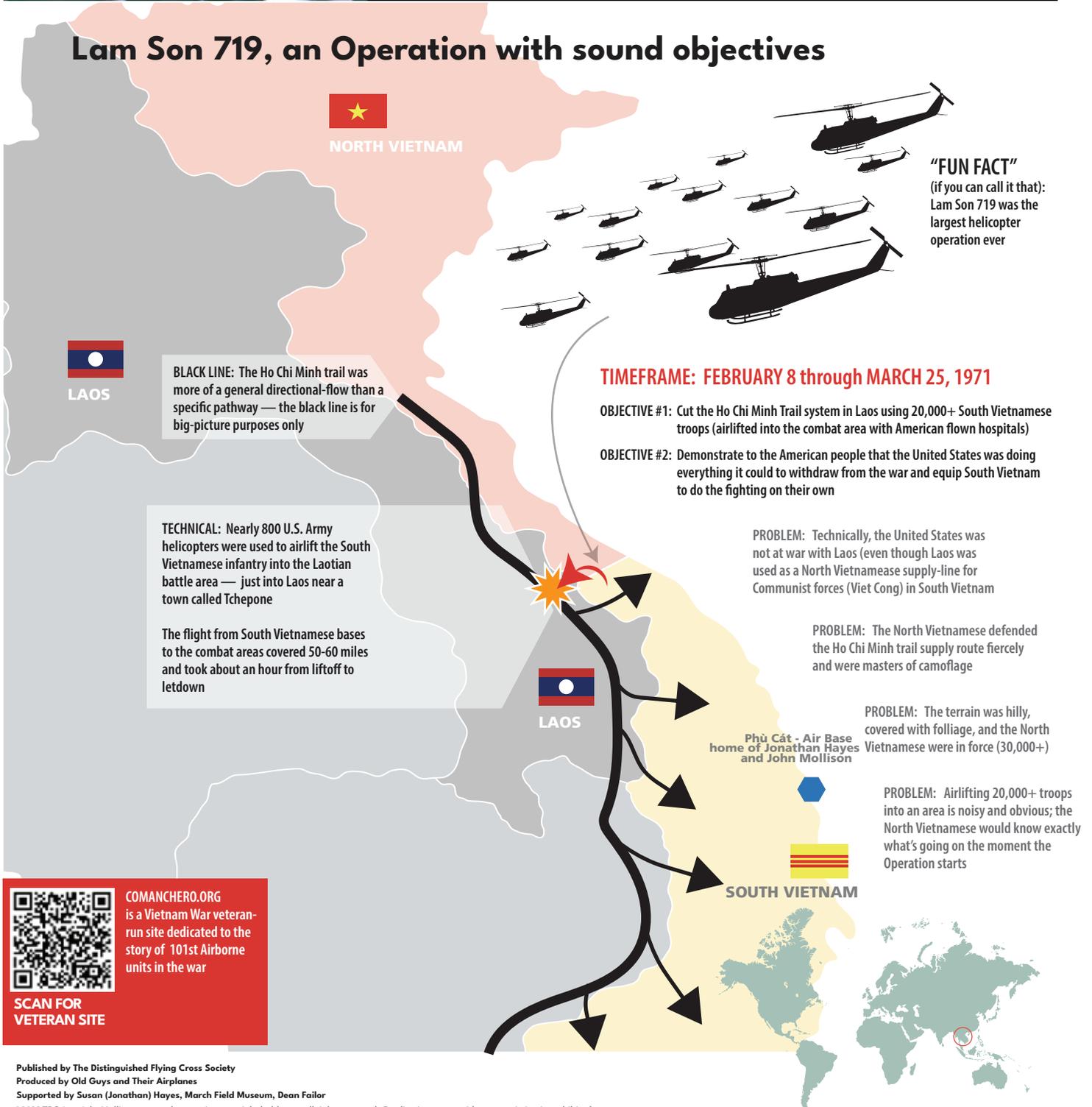
Artwork: JohnMollison.com



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Lam Son 719, an Operation with sound objectives



COMANCHERO.ORG is a Vietnam War veteran-run site dedicated to the story of 101st Airborne units in the war

SCAN FOR VETERAN SITE



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Lam Son 719: an Operation that cost dearly

Getting accurate statistics from times of conflict can vary from easy to impossible — it's important to do your own research to validate stated stats

MORE VIETNAM WAR STATS?



750+ helicopters involved
(American crew transporting South Vietnamese soldiers)

- 8,300-25,500 North Vietnamese Casualties (killed+ wounded)
- 5,400-21,200 South Vietnamese Casualties (killed+ wounded)
- 1,400 American Casualties (killed+ wounded)



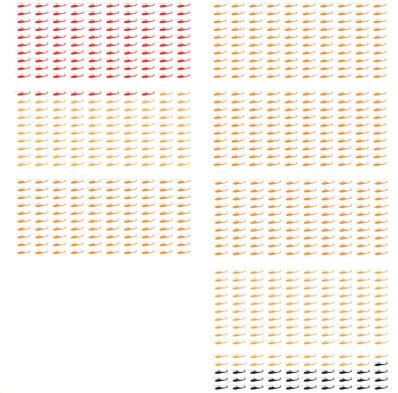
- Red: Destroyed in combat
- Orange: Damaged in combat
- Black: Undamaged in combat

OBJECTIVE #1 RESULTS:
Weapons traffic along the Ho Chi Minh trail was comparatively unaffected

OBJECTIVE #2 RESULTS:
The South Vietnamese were unable to manage their operations without substantial American aid

CONCLUSION:
President Nixon was convinced that efforts to equip the South Vietnamese to prevail in the war between the North and the South would cost more than the United States people would want to pay

Lam Son 719 provided President Nixon the will to pursue war against the North Vietnamese to force a negotiated peace settlement



Phù Cát - Air Base
home of Jonathan Hayes
and John Mollison





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COMBAT: A “DFC MISSION”: Lam Son 719, March 8, 1971

#1 HAYES/MOLLISON GET THE CALL

Four F-4D Phantoms are tasked to provide support for retreating South Vietnamese infantry, under attack from overwhelming North Vietnamese forces near the Ho Chi Minh Trail

The weather is poor, low clouds obscure the area, and the area is bracketed by rough hills

The North Vietnamese defend their war supplies with a wide variety of anti-aircraft weapons

An American FAC (Forward Air Controller) flying an OV-10 Bronco observation aircraft spots something he suspects may be a storage area



#2. GETTING INTO THE THICK OF IT

The F-4s are not appropriately armed to attack the storage area

However, the Flight Leader calculates that smoke bombs would generate enough heat to start a fire on target

All four F-4s are equipped with smoke bombs

However, the smoke bombs must be dropped at (or lower) than 25 feet!

Following the Flight Lead's direction, Hayes/Mollison deliver their smoke bombs on target

#3. POWERFUL RESULTS

The smoke bombs hit the target and start a fire

John Mollison recalls seeing a North Vietnamese soldier standing next to an old blue truck firing his AK-47 rifle at their Phantom

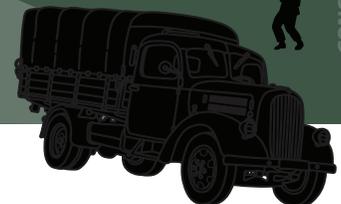
As they leave the target area, the FAC remarks that the “whole place is blowing up!”

The target was an enormous weapons supply dump and it burns for at least three days

ALL FOUR PILOT/WSO CREWS WERE AWARDED THE DFC FOR THIS ACTION



CONCEPT ART

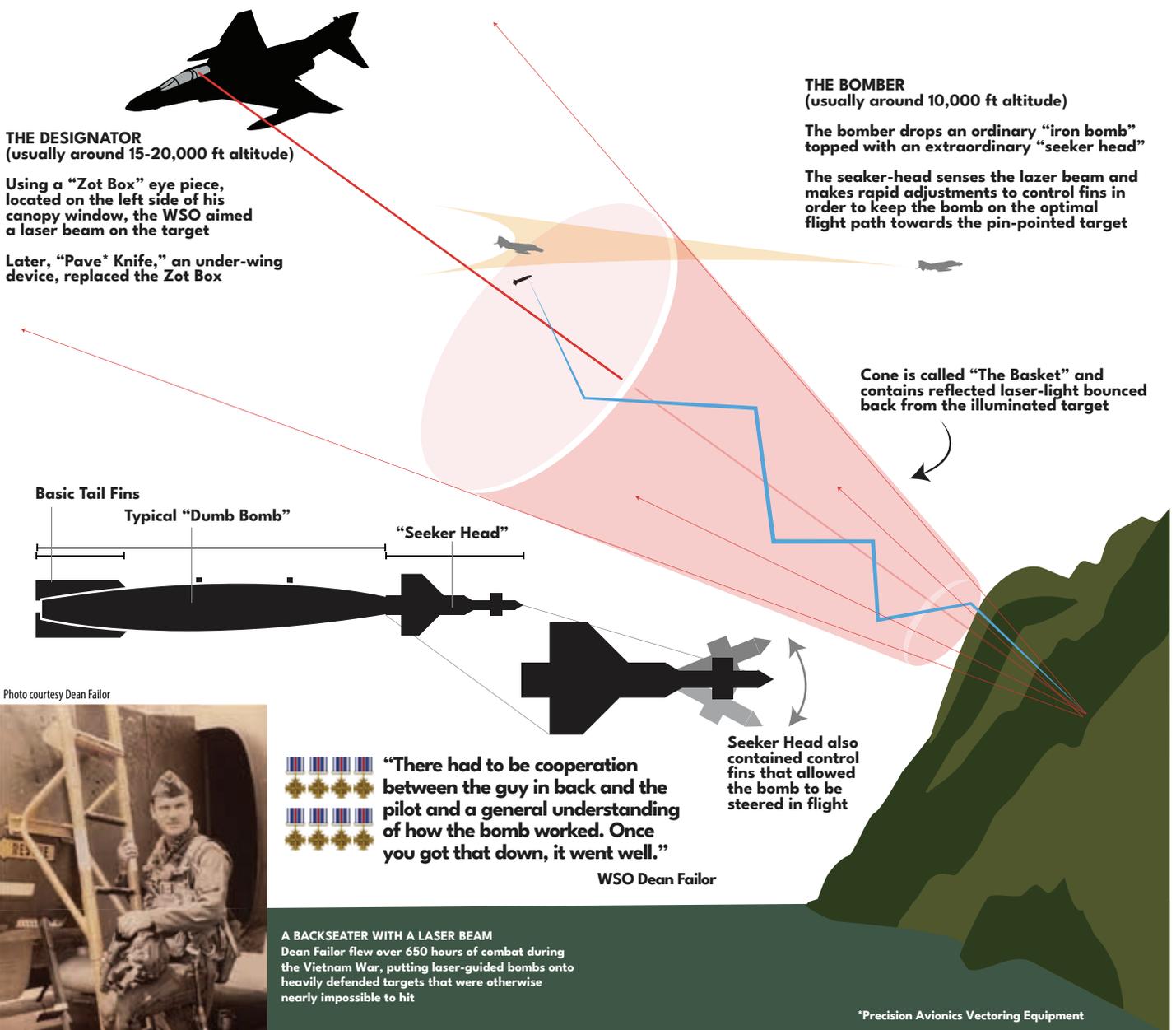




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Laser-guided bombs lowered risk, increased backseater role The Paveway 1 "ZOT" system





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LISTEN TO JOHN MOLLISON IN HIS OWN WORDS

THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS SOCIETY

CLICK ME!

OLD GUYS AND THEIR AIRPLANES
WITH JOHN MOLLISON

WHO'S THE GUY IN BACK? THE COL JOHN MOLLISON STORY

IS THERE SOMEONE YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN HISTORY FROM?

Taking advantage of the benefits provided through studying history is a fundamental aspect of personal success. Though there are excellent books, websites and even movies to help learn history, nothing beats interacting with someone who participated in the moment. Yet, it can be intimidating to talk with others about significant moments in their life, especially difficult moments that are related to war or conflict. To ease that challenge, consider these points:

1. Think about a period of history you're interested in learning about - then ask parents or teachers who they suggest you meet to learn more.
2. Ask questions that require a personal perspective such as, "What did you learn from your experience?" or "Describe your most vivid memory..."
3. If you want to record or photograph your meeting, ask for permission (and let the person know what you intend to do with their story).
4. One conversation may not be enough to understand the person or the moment; try to have at least three meaningful conversations.
5. Getting background information will help build credibility with who you're talking to but be careful to let the other person tell their story without being corrected or interrupted.
6. Be prepared for surprises! You may find that someone's personal story is different than what you've learned elsewhere.
7. You'll acquire humility, wisdom and character through learning about the lives of others so be prepared to share what you learn with others.

Published by The Distinguished Flying Cross Society

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Photo: United States Navy - wikipedia



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LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE TIMES OF JOHN MOLLISON



Col John Mollison, USAF - U.S. Air Force Photo



John Mollison retired from the U.S. Air Force as a Colonel, one step before General.



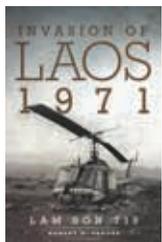
The Distinguished Flying Cross is the United States' 4th highest award for valor in flight

John was awarded three DFCs in his 171 Vietnam War combat missions



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Boys Town
Movie
Spencer Tracy



The Invasion of LAOS 1971
Lam Son 719
History book
Robert D. Sander



CONTRIBUTORS:

Col John Mollison USAF (ret)
Col Warren Eastman USAF (ret)
Col Bruce Huffman US ARMY (ret)
Col Dean Failor USAF (ret)
Maj Robert Groman USAF (ret)
John Mollison
Susan Hayes

Squadron Patch
of the 13th TFS
c.1971



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The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military decoration awarded to individuals who demonstrate heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.

One of the missions of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society is to share the heroic stories of its members with the world. Though especially remarkable, Robert Certain's story is just one of many. If you have any interest in learning more about how ordinary people can prevail under extraordinary challenges, the DFCSociety.org website is a great resource. Hundreds of DFC citations are available to read.

On behalf of the DFC Society, may Colonel Certain's story inspire you to appreciate what it takes to overcome your personal challenges.

Colonel Woody Gilliland, USMC (Ret.)
Chairman, Distinguished Flying Cross Society

www.DFCSociety.org