

EWO Flying from the Front Seat
By Warren Thurn
Written in 2009

I do not remember the exact date but I believe it was in mid-1974, Tony Germann and I flew an F-105G from Hill AFB to Kirtland AFB. Tony was in the back seat and I was in the front seat. We think this is the only time that a non-rated pilot has flown the F-105G from the front seat and would like to have this event recorded in the Wild Weasel history.

While those who have not flown the F-105G may not realize why this flight was extremely unusual, if you have been in the back seat of the F-105G you know that there is no forward visibility in approximately a 30 degree cone. That means that the person in the back seat is not able to do much once the aircraft has turned final. Neither Tony or I made any notes about this flight, therefore our memory of a flight we made 35 years ago may be slightly different. Prior to the flight my only pilot training had occurred in the back seat of the F-105G. Tony stated that I was one of the better formation pilots he had instructed. With the help of almost every F-105G pilot that I had the privilege of flying with, but especially the instruction I received from Tony, I was able to develop a fair amount of proficiency in flying the F-105G. Tony said that he had no doubt that I could fly the aircraft from the front seat.

As I recall, we had departed from George AFB to McClellan AFB and then on to Hill AFB. Tony recalls that we had discussed the planned flight while we were at McClellan, and I am certain that we did, although I don't remember that part. What I vividly remember is spending a couple of hours in the Officers' Club at Hill AFB the evening before the flight. The morning of the flight while we were pre flighting the aircraft, I remember Tony asking me if I was going to fly the leg from Hill AFB to Kirtland AFB. I remember thinking that he was talking about me flying from the back seat, and since it was kind of my leg, I said sure. Tony said to get my stuff out of the backseat and then I realized what he meant. So we switched our personal gear and Tony climbed up the front ladder to show me how to start the aircraft, to make sure I knew how to deploy the drag chute, and to make sure I understood any other difference required to fly from the front seat.

While we were moving our gear, a F-105G aircrew from Nellis AFB showed up at their aircraft, which was parked adjacent to ours. I don't remember who that crew was, but I remember talking to one of them later and he said they were in disbelief when they saw the canopies close, the afterburner light, and off we blasted. For me it was the flight of my lifetime. I can only imagine what it was like for Tony. As I recall, we had planned to fly the overhead pattern at Kirtland AFB and then make a low approach. It was to be a way for both of us to gain a bit of confidence in the final approach to landing. When I checked in with Kirtland to give them our request, I was told that weather was moving in, that they could not approve the overhead pattern,

and that I would have to land out of the first approach. For the first time during the flight I felt the pucker factor.

With a good deal of instructions from Tony, I landed out of the initial approach. Tony remembers it as a fair drop in landing. Meaning, I believe, that I flared a bit high. I of course prefer to remember it as a great landing. Anyhow, we were both rather pleased. Then as we were taxiing to park, we noticed a F-105G from our home base, George AFB, parked on the ramp. Since no other George AFB crew had been scheduled for a cross country when we had departed George AFB, we thought it would be either our squadron commander or operations officer. Not a good thing. As we taxied closer to our parking spot we noticed who we remember was Billy Dobbs and Chuck Wienke. Both great guys and squadron folks like us. I remember that they at first thought we had switched helmets, then they remembered that Tony was probably 6 foot 4 inches tall, and I was 5 foot 10 inches tall.

Of course, we asked them to keep the flight quiet, and they did a remarkable job. Still word of the flight spread quietly to several people. I was not aware of the fact that other people knew of the flight and then one Friday night at the George AFB Officers' Club, our operations officer, Tom Halley, walked up to me and said, "I hear you are quite a pilot." He quickly walked away before I would have to respond. I will always remember that as a real touch of class. I would love to hear from any one of the F-105G crew members who witnessed the departure or arrival of this flight. It was a kick.