



Volume 16, Number 2

TAC MISSILEERS

NEWSLETTER

"Serving the mace and matador missile crews and all support personnel who fought and won the cold war"



September 2014

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OUR 2015 REUNION DATES ARE SET

Mark Your Calendars and Planners For

August 23 — August 26

2015

**Updates and the latest news about the reunion will be posted
on our website as they are finalized**

Our thanks go to George Joseph Snyder for sharing with us his firsthand remembrances of the well-known Matador "HOT START" incident and a reluctant to launch Matador during his 1958 TDY to Tripoli

I was born in the small oil town of Taft, California, in 1939. Two weeks into my 7th grade, I became ill with Tuberculosis and Valley Fever, both lung diseases. I spent two years in bed, isolated from other people. I had a home teacher for two weeks, until she found out what I had, and then I never saw her again. I took a test when I was able to return to school in 1953, and passed it, so that I was able to graduate from elementary school and enter high school, without repeating 7th and 8th grades. Upon graduation from high school, In 1957, I enlisted into the U.S. Air Force, went to Lackland for Basic Training. At the end of basic, I was transferred to Lowry AFB for training as a Munitions Specialist (46130). I had the highest average scores in my class and so got my choice of duty assignment, and I choose Germany. While I was in the famous Black Hanger at Lowry AFB, I had never seen a Martin Matador, nor Mace Missile, until I walked onto my first assignment at Bitburg, which was "C" pad, also know as Idenheim. Captain **John S. Almon** was my launch officer and after a few months, in 1958, he and my crew were transferred to Steinborn, to be known as Flight "A", to set up and man two launch pads for the Matador TM-61C

Missile. Steinborn was already an existing C&G station, when we arrived. I went on three live practice launches of the Matador. One at Tripoli, North Africa, and two at the Cape in Florida. I remained at Steinborn until April, 1961 when I transferred home, was released from active service and entered college, where I met a young lady from Berlin. We got married and I continued my education. I graduated from California State University, at Fresno, with a Bachelor of Science Degree (B.S.). I then went on and earned a Masters of Science Degree (M.S.) at Fresno, while working for an insurance company. I applied for law school at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, in San Francisco. I was accepted in 1969 and graduated in 1972 with a Juris Doctor Degree. (J.D.). I then took the California State Bar, passed and was admitted to the California State Bar on December 13, 1972. At the age of 50, I became semi-retired and now only do legal work for family, friends and a few neighbors ..

THE NOT HOT START - On September 1, 1958, I was promoted from A/3c, to A/2c. One month later, on October 1, 1958, I received orders to be transported to Wheelus AFB, Libya for approximately 30 days, to participate in "Operation Marblehead" for the live practice firing on our Mighty Matador Missiles. We left Bitburg, on or about October 6, 1958, transported in a C-130, and not a C-118 Liftmaster. The practice launch site near

Tripoli, had two launch pads, launchers and launch shelters, including a lot of sand. The launch of missiles had to be completed by 12:00 noon, as the firing range closed down at exactly 12:00 noon and absolutely no missile launches could take place after that time. On the day of the missile mishap, one missile was ready for firing. The missile that my crew was counting down was still in the process, when a Major approached me and two other armament members of our crew. The Major asked us who we were and what was our job? We answered him and he told us that he wanted to get two missiles off that day, before the 12:00 noon deadline and for us to do whatever we had to do, to get our missile ready for firing. He asked if we had installed the wing destruct blasting cap yet?



Via Yadon

We answered no. We had the # 8 blasting cap with us and the Major told us to install it. The primer cord had already been installed in the wing channel by an armament NCO. At that time, the RATO unit was installed on the missile and the RATO igniter was sitting on the back of the launcher, near the RATO itself. We had never been instructed, by anyone, on how, or when, to install the blasting cap to the primer cord that was inserted in the wing channel. Probably because the wing destructive device was not used in time of war, only for practice launches at Tripoli. Well we were all A/2c and he was a Major, so we installed the blasting cap while the check out van was still hooked up to the missile and the crew was running tests. After installing the #8 blasting cap to the primer cord, we climbed down, checked that the safety jack with the red streamer, that prevented the wing destruct circuit from operating, was installed in the missile under the left wing and then I stood on the launcher platform. At that time the guidance and control people were in the check-out van, a brand new white one, conducting their check of the missile systems. Well one of those checks was obvi-

ously the testing of the wing destruct circuit and that test triggered the blasting cap and the primer cord explosion. I had seen a member of the van crew come out and pull the safety plug out. I yelled at him to put it back, but before I got the whole sentence out, the primer cord exploded, blowing a hole in the back of the wing connection panel, and into the fuel cell full of JP-4. The fuel ignited and started running down the right wing, into the check out van. Those -people got out really fast. The airman that had pulled the safety plug was knocked to the ground from the blast concussion. His helmet is shown on the ground near the missile in some of the photographs that were taken. The missile, van and associated equipment were burning profusely and people were running in case the missile fuel cell(s) exploded. They did not. I returned to the missile when the firemen, who were fighting the fire, were standing near the back of the launcher where the RATO and its igniter were located. I grabbed the igniter and removed it to a safe distance from the firemen. Other airman removed the RATO and towed it with a truck, away from the firemen and burning missile. All I knew was that we had put in the blasting cap, and we must have done it at the wrong time, but we did it correctly, because it did explode. I figured that I would lose my stripes over this incident. However, in ten months, on September 1, 1959, twelve months to the day of my one year time in grade, I was promoted to E-4. Never could figure that one out. As it turned out, after the incident, we were never questioned, by anyone, about what happened, nor why it happened!! Furthermore, after the explosion and fire, no primer cords nor blasting caps were ever installed on the Matador again at Tripoli. Even on the trips to the Cape in later years, the wing destructive items were not installed, nor used to the best of my knowledge. As for the Safety Plug that was removed from this missile, before the explosion and fire, I still have it in my possession. (See Attached Photo)

After the explosion, this airman fell to the ground and his helmet fell off his head. When he got up to run for safety, I looked from the missile launcher platform and saw the helmet and safety jack on the sand. I thought that I should get and keep the safety jack should it be needed for evidence at any hearing that might be held. How-

ever, we were never called to give any testimony, or evidence; so, I just kept the safety plug, for the next 56 years!!! **There was not any "Hot Start", as the missile was no where close to being elevated and started!!** If two



officers were mad at each other, it did not cause this incident!! We were lucky that no one was killed, nor hurt in this accident!!

THE RELUCTANT MATADOR—When our crew arrived at Tripoli in 1958, other crews were in the process of launching missiles as part of their training. Our crew watched the activity of others, until our turn came up. There was one crew, headed by a First Lieutenant Launch Officer, that



The RATO that was removed from the burning missile and marked "Unserviceable" "Compliments of Crew 2"

we watched preparing their Matador Missile for launching. The launch officer, after the missile was elevated to firing position, started the engine, and ran it up to 100%, holding it there for the required time. (I believe it was for either 60, or 30 seconds). Anyway, while holding the engine at 100%, the engine shut down after about ten seconds. The missile was removed from the launcher, taken to missile maintenance for repairs and returned the next day. The launch officer, after the count down and elevation of the missile, again started it, was holding it at 100%, and after about ten seconds, the engine shut down again. The missile was removed from the launcher and taken to missile maintenance for repairs and was again returned the next day. I

believe this process occurred three times and on the third time the missile was returned for a count down and launching, the launch officer made the statement that "This missile would not be sent to maintenance again." The fourth count down was completed and the missile elevated. The launch officer started the engine, ran it up to 100% and after about five seconds, he hit the button to fire the RATO, and the missile left the launcher. We watched the missile climb and all of a sudden, the missile did a 180 degree wing turn over, went down into the desert, and crashed. The missile was probably about a mile, or so, away from the launcher, when it went down. The crash site was inspected and a wrench was allegedly found in the wreckage. The theory was that the wrench jammed one of the wing spoilers up, causing the crash. I doubt that the preceding theory was correct. If indeed a wing spoiler was jammed in the up position, the missile would more likely have just flown in a large circle, and one of the F-100 Super Saber chase aircraft, could have shot it down with a side-winder. I have always believed that the missile, with the short 100% run up, prior to launching, did what it did three times before, namely the engine shut down shortly after the launch, and it is my understanding, that when the engine shuts down the missile loses hydraulics, which in turn, would result in the right wing spoiler coming up. I have always believed that this missile crashed due to another engine flame-out, shortly after the launch. SEE MORE FROM GEORGE JOSEPH ON NEXT PAGE



Mr. President, William "Bill" Simpson reporting on a very recent trip to Germany. "I took this at Sembach last week. Our Mace has been replaced by a tank. Just doesn't feel the same."

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71ST TACTICAL MISSILE SQUADRON
585TH TACTICAL MISSILE GROUP (USAF)
United States Air Force
APO 132, New York, New York

10 November 1959

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

TO: A/1G George J. Snyder, AF19600633
71st Tactical Missile Squadron
APO 132, New York, New York

1. I wish to express my sincere appreciation and congratulations to you for your outstanding performance during the last Wing Standardization Check. You are one of four men out of a total of 120 who received the "Outstanding" rating.
2. During this check you demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of the TM-61C by successfully accomplishing all phases of the Armament System checkout of the missile countdown in an exemplary manner. In spite of the added tensions, introduced by close observation by Wing Observers, you conducted your checks in such a manner that no discrepancies were noted. Your confident and determined attitude convinced the Wing Observers that you were extremely competent and capable of doing an outstanding job under all conditions.
3. Your technical knowledge and ability contributed greatly to the successful completion of the Wing Standardization Check by your launch team and reflected credit to your launch team as well as yourself.
4. I sincerely believe that your continued outstanding work will be an asset to the 71st Tactical Missile Squadron and the United States Air Force.


THOMAS Q. JONES JR
Lt Col, USAF
Commander

After the incident with the burning missile I studied everything I could get my hands on, regarding the missiles guidance, control and armament systems. In a Wing Standardization Check in 1959, Col. Thomas Q. Jones presented me and three other airmen with the above letter. George Joseph Snyder