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USAF - Flying Recon in Vietnam

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)



An all weather, long range aircraft capable of both bombing and air to air combat, the F-4 Phantom was developed by the McDonnell Aircraft company, entering service in 1960 with the US Navy. By the mid 1960s the aircraft would be adopted by the United States Marine Corps and the US Air Force.

The F-4 is formidable adversary with a max speed over Mach 2, capable of carrying approximately 18,000 pounds of weaponry - including various types of missiles and light-bombs. In addition to these armaments, the F-4 was also equipped with an M61 Vulcan.



Officially adopted in 1963, the US Air Force would become the largest user of the platform during the Vietnam War. Not only was this aircraft capable of delivering effective air to air and air ground payloads, it was also successful at conducting reconnaissance missions.



Photo of jacket, MM2011.18

Pictured here is a flight-jacket that belonged to US Air Force COL Robert T. Linnon, of Clarion County, PA. In thirty three years of service & flight, he served in World War II (WWII), Korea, and Vietnam - his flight experience included piloting the famed F-4 Phantom in Vietnam.

In WWII he was tasked with flying search missions, based out of Greenland, hunting for German submarines. Unfortunately for the pilots of WWII, many of them had only a few years of rest until they would be tapped for service in combat once again during the Korean War.



Note the 3650th Pilot Training Wing patch on Linnon's jacket, acquired during his service with the Wing, which was located at Sampson Air Force Base. Sampson was stood up as a result of the North Korean Army crossing the 38th parallel, invading South Korea; the need for an increase in trained pilots via the training installation located at Lackland Air Force Base could be met. Sampson remained active from 1950 through 1956.



Photo of jacket, name tape and command pilot wings, MM2011.18

During his time serving in Vietnam, Linnon flew photo reconnaissance over North Vietnam - earning him the 100 Mission shoulder sleeve insignia. Missions such as these involved flying above and beyond enemy positions to photograph their positions, movements, and assets. If downed, the pilot and navigator would attempt to evade capture behind enemy lines.

Pictured above Linnon's name tape is his Command Pilot Wings. To earn this designation, the basic requirement includes fifteen years as a rated pilot and permanent award of senior pilot rating. In addition to this, the pilot must achieve three thousand hours of flight time. During his distinguished service in the US Air Force, he also served as a flight instructor at the USAF Academy in Colorado.

If this jacket could speak, one could only imagine the stories it would tell. Linnon's jacket was donated to the Museum by his family shortly after his passing in 2011.

