

BAC Giang Power Plant, North Vietnam

Dave Cable

Date: April 5, 1967
Target: Bac Giang Power Plan, North Vietnam, 21°15' N 106° 12' E (approximate)
Position in Flt: Strike Leader, single airplane
Support ACFT: 1 E-2A (Overpass) and 2 EA-1Fs (Robbies), positioned 20 nm east of CIP
Ordnance: 22 MK-82 banded Snakeeyes
Launch Time: 2130 Local
Coast in Time: 2150 Local
Coast in Point (CIP): 20° 34' North 106° 37' East
Heading to CIP: 278° True
Defenses: Heavy AAA (37-57-85MM) over target and SAMs
Turn Point: 22 miles inland, 20° 38N 106°12E
Heading to Turn Pt: 278°T
Defenses: SAMs, 7 fired, 1 hit
Heading to Target: 002°T from turn point
Time Over Target: 2158 Local
Crew: LTJG David W. Cable, LTJG Stuart C. Johnson

LTJG Johnson and I were assigned as strike leaders in a flight of one aircraft to bomb the Bac Giang Power Plant in North Vietnam. The weather was forecast to be 500' overcast and raining from CIP to target. After launch our course was northerly to intercept our inbound heading of 278° T to the Coast in Point (CIP) at about 40 nm off the coast at an altitude of 9,000 ft and an airspeed of 250 KTS.

Upon intercepting the 278° inbound course, a descent was commenced which put us at 500 ft AGL 15 miles prior to CIP. At this time a steady S band (nose) warning light came on the ECM panel; we broke the Firecan RADAR lock with about 4 packets of chaff. Airspeed was then increased to 360 KTS as we proceeded at 500 ft AGL to the CIP. Two miles prior to coast in, a barrage of 37-57MM and automatic weapons fire erupted directly in front and on all sides of the aircraft so suddenly that it was of little use to attempt an evasive maneuver. The barrage ceased as quickly as it had begun, and we continued on. The AAA can be described as very close, perhaps 200 ft- 300 ft and directly ahead of our flight path.

No more opposition was encountered until we reached our turn point 22 miles inland and flying at an altitude of 450 ft to 550 ft AGL. As we made the turn to the target, which was at this time 38 miles away. Our heading was then 002°T. At this time the ECM panel indicated steady lockups of S-nose, S-tail, right-wing and left-wing warnings. Fansong in high PRF was audible in the ALR-15 as was Firecan AAA radar. It was apparent that more than one Fansong radar was tracking us as the tone became extremely loud and garbled by the interference of other radars. At thirty-three miles to go, Stu informed me that we were somewhat left of the course that we wanted; however, he felt that we were in good shape and would hold what we had. As the

ECM activity was increasing, I descended to an altitude of 300 ft AGL which broke the Fansong locks momentarily. At 25 miles to go, airspeed was increased to 420 KTS and I began a shallow climb in order that Stu get a better look at the target. At 22 miles he said that he had the target area and at 600 ft the Fansong radar locked up again. At this time, we entered the overcast under which we had been flying until this time, and at 20 miles military power was applied and acceleration to 450 KTS was commenced. At 15 miles Stu said that he had the target and it looked perfect! We were in a shallow climb at this time and Stu stepped the system into attack. I was beginning to look for missiles as I thought that the APR-27 had failed. At about eight miles to go, I realized that it hadn't, as it blinked on and then off suddenly and did not come on again until after we broke off target.

Ahead at six miles the clouds were bright as the flak (85MM; 37-57MM) began erupting. Stu once again assured me that he had the target perfectly. At four miles from release the aircraft was buffeted violently by nearby exploding 85MM rounds. At this time, we were at release altitude (1,200 ft AGL) and 455 KTS and the VDI (Vertical Display Indicator) steering was centered. The barrage of tracking fire continued from there until about 15 seconds after release. Immediately, after our "Straight Path" automatic release the aircraft was shaken so violently that Stu and I both thought that we were hit. I broke to the right to a 90° angle of bank 5G turn climbing slightly to 1,500 ft AGL. This broke all radar locks at that time and, as we passed about 90° of our turn to escape, I commenced a decent to 500 ft AGL and pulled off some power. We were at 500KTS. As I eased up on the G, Stu called a missile at our 12 o'clock position. We had at this point reached about 500 ft AGL and were below the overcast. The missile ascended into the overcast and our APR-27 came on loud and clear and flashing. A second missile was then observed to launch from the same site and it flew up into the overcast. It was possible to track the missiles by watching their exhaust flame as they came in close. The first exploded about ¼ mile ahead and to the starboard. The second came somewhat closer and hit the ground just abeam of us to the right. I was now in a rapid decent and leveled off at 200 ft AGL. Stu was watching and calling out the missile barrage while I remained on the gages. The APR-27 continued to flash and I turned it off, for we could see two more missiles launching from a site off to our right. With the APR-27 making so much racket we could not talk about what was happening. The second pair of missiles passed about 200 ft over the aircraft from right to left and exploded harmlessly on our left. I now descended to 150 ft AGL and informed Stu that we'd go no lower - he agreed. We had now reached our turn point to go outbound to the gulf, which was a heading of 139°T (coordinates: 20° 52'N, 106° 15" E). Two more missiles were launched from a site directly ahead of us and it was apparent that they would have a tough time guiding as we were within about a six-mile arc – a distance to be reached for the SAM to guide effectively. Both missiles flew into the overcast and came down to our right about ¼ of a mile away and exploded on the ground. We passed almost directly over the site at 200 ft AGL. The sky was then black, and we thought that we had it made. To be sure I turned the APR-27 back on. It was still in operation (flashing red). 10 seconds later I saw a glow in my mirrors of a missile accelerating behind us. Feeling confident prior to this time I had climbed to a safer altitude of 300 ft AGL. We were now making 480KTS. The missile appeared to me to be ready to join up with us, but at the last minute fell off and flew directly below us. I broke toward the missile and climbed slightly just as it went off. The aircraft was shaken violently,

and Stu said that he had seen the SAM explode very close underneath us. I checked the gauges for loss of hydraulics and called Overpass (E-2A) reporting that we had been hit by a SAM and were proceeding to our coast out point. The aircraft was flying okay, and we climbed slightly to about 1,000 ft in case we had to eject. At this altitude and 480 KTS we escaped to the safety of the gulf. At altitude I made a check of the slow flight characteristics of the aircraft and landed aboard normally.

Five holes were found on the underside of the fuselage and lower right wing. The missile was estimated to have exploded about 250 ft below and behind the aircraft.

As the weather over North Vietnam remained cloudy, obscuring the ground from airborne reconnaissance, BDA was not available for about one month after our strike. Radar scope photography however showed that Stu had his cursors about 200 ft short of the generator hall and perfectly in azimuth. As we had 22 MK-82s (stick length 760 ft), we determined that we had heavily damaged the power plant and associated facilities.

Authors' Note: After attending and listening to our post-flight debrief, Captain James L. Holloway III, Commanding Officer of the USS Enterprise, later to become CNO, directed that LTJG David Cable and LTJG Stuart Johnson be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their bravery during this demanding single aircraft night-strike against the Bac Giang power plant in North Vietnam. This was originally a handwritten report and was submitted pursuant to Captain Holloway's directive in support of the award.