

***48-Hour Mishap Report filed by Col. David S. Mellish***  
*History of the 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing April-June 1970.*

RF 4C Phantom Tail Number 65-863 code-name Falcon 34, piloted by Maj. Leaphart and Capt. Bernholtz easily pinpointed their target while zipping along at 480 to 540 knots at 4500 feet with at least five miles visibility. Neither observed any ground fire while on the target run, as they continued on a climb-out to the southeast to head back to Udorn. Suddenly at approximately 1330, a master caution light illuminated indicating the PC-2 hydraulic system had failed. Capt. Bernholtz observed a three to six-inch hole in the right wing in front of the spoiler. Ethan Control was contacted and an emergency was declared.

Bullwhip 17 was vectored by Ethan Control to catch up to Falcon 34 to help assess the damage and check for controllability of their Phantom. Bullwhip joined Falcon 34 about 20 miles east of Udorn. Despite the discovery that the Utility Hydraulic System also failed, they determined that Falcon 34 was controllable and would attempt to lower the landing gear and arresting hook. Bullwhip confirmed that the gear and hook were down and prepared for a no flap landing and barrier engagement on runway 30.

Maj. Leaphart was able to position the Phantom on final approach at 185 knots as ground observers less than a mile from touchdown, described the approach as straight and controlled. Suddenly, with less than one half mile to Udorn, Falcon 34 rolled to the right. Maj. Leaphart fought to counter the roll with full left stick and rudder. The controls had no affect on the aircraft and it continued to roll and drift to the right.

Falcon 34 attempted a go-around but the right roll was unstoppable and continued at more than 175 knots. As the F-4 reached 45 to 60 degrees of bank and a nose high attitude, controls had no affect on the flight. The crew bailed out.

Maj. Leaphart landed on a building and subsequently fell from it fracturing a bone in his right foot. Capt. Bernholtz also landed on a building suffering a cut over his right eye.

The crippled Phantom crashed into the housing area on base, turning the entire area into a blazing inferno. Nine USAF men perished in the crash; most died as the pilotless Phantom plowed into the base radio and television studio. Flames destroyed nine buildings and one trailer. Property loss was estimated at \$147,000.

Following the crash Col. David S. Mellish, 432th TRW compiled vital information in a 48 Hour Mishap Report which was transmitted to 13th Air Force at Clark AB in the Philippines.

Maj. Leaphart had flown for 13 years, 3465 hours of which 1361 were in RF-4C. Capt. Bernholtz had flown for nearly 10 years, 2659 hours with 372 in RF-4C aircraft. The crew was medically qualified to fly the mission and had adequate food and rest 48-hours prior to the accident. Nothing was found which could impair their ability to perform the mission. A maintenance analysis of aircraft forms indicated there were no contributing factors due to maintenance performed or possible systems failure due to past history.







