

From the Meridian Star:

MISSISSIPPI MAN IN VIETNAM COMBAT FLYER AND PHYSICIAN

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CAM RANH BAY, South VietNam

(Special) -- A Mississippi captain who is flight surgeon and chief of the Flight Medicine Section, 12th USAF Hospital here, said that his boys "almost fight each other to get on the flying schedule."

Dr. (Capt.) William P. Simmons, 32, of Meridian, Miss., has the duty of keeping the F-4C Phantom jet pilots of 12th Tactical Fighter Wing healthy.

"So far," admits the doctor, "I've had very little to do along that line. Morale has been excellent, and the stresses and strains of combat flying that could show up have not been apparent among the men of the 12th."

FLOWN 43 MISSIONS

Dr. Simmons, who has flown 43 combat missions, including 29 in the 1,600 m. p. h. Phantom, says that his flying gives him a "greater understanding of the pilot and his problems."

"By taking part in the pilot's daily life, you attain a mutual trust between doctor and patient, akin to the old family doctor. We are almost like personal physicians to the men. I live in the same barracks with the pilots, and this closeness enables me to spot problems and tensions long before the man ever steps into my office."

Dr. Simmons, a graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Medicine, learned his flight surgeon's trade at the Brooks AFB, Tex., School of Aerospace Medicine. He has been diagnosing ills for the pilots of the 12th for more than a year.

"What are the biggest problems faced by the pilots?" Dr. Simmons was asked. "Combat flying," says the father of three, "has its dangers, with the ground fire, but no one is going to cut and run because of it."

HAPPIEST WHILE FLYING

"As a matter of fact," he says, "the biggest problem is when they can't fly. These guys are happiest when they're flying and very unhappy when they're not."

Additional problems not always easily coped with are never - ending heat and the dangers of malaria and other tropical diseases, Dr. Simmons says.

"We publish a weekly newsletter warning of these and other danger areas," says the doctor "and to a man, our pilots observe the rules. They take salt and anti - malaria tablets, and get heat rashes treated immediately."

Dr. Simmons, who has become quite adept at flying in the back seat of the F-4C, says he enjoys handling the radar, navigation and communications equipment.

"I also call out the air speed, altitude and angle of attack to the aircraft commander, who must concentrate on the target and his weapons while we are attacking," says the doctor, whose youthful appearance and pleasant manner make him a much sought after companion among the pilots of the wing.

"He's a fine flight surgeon," says Capt. Marvin M. Gradert, 31, of Luverne, Minn. Gradert is an F-4C aircraft commander with the 557th Tactical Fighter Squadron.

SIMMONS RESPECTED

"Dr. Simmons has earned the respect of all of us. We like to have him along on any mission. He's a definite asset,"

Gradert continues.

Gradert's remarks typify the feelings of the pilots towards Dr. Simmons, whose paramount interest while in Vietnam is their welfare

. "I even worry about the upgrading of our backseat pilots to aircraft commander status," says the doctor. "They are eager to shoulder more responsibility as aircraft commanders. This is a good sign, and shows that the younger pilots are gaining useful experience and maturity from their tour of duty here."

Dr. Simmons calls duty in South Vietnam "a paradise" for flight surgeons.

"Flying and living with the men the way I do," he says, "gives me a closer identification with them, and that in turn helps me to do a better job."

The pilots seem to think so too.

STAYED BEHIND

When the 12th left McDill AFB, Fla., for Cam Ranh Bay last October, Dr. Simmons had to stay behind. He volunteered for an assignment with the wing, and through the determined efforts of wing officials, followed his pilot friends to Cam Ranh.

"When I arrived," he recalls, "the pilots had my living quarters all ready for me, and a little welcome party planned.

It was a great feeling