

Rest of the Story

Crash of F-106A 59-0052

Homestead AFB Florida 1973

By Michael E. (Mickey) Rountree, LtCol USAF (Ret)



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Here is the end of the story

F-106 tail number 59-0052 now lies at the bottom of Biscayne Bay, about a mile off the coast line, near Homestead Florida. Also, there is a brick in the Beaver Creek Veterans Memorial with the name of "Capt. Zack Stidmon." I sponsored that brick many years ago, when they were building the memorial.

Now, the rest of the story

Back in 1973, our squadron (84 FIS at Castle AFB in California) had a responsibility to keep two aircraft on five minute alert at Homestead AFB, Florida. As Christmas of 1973 was coming up, the rotation had me as one of the holiday alert pilots. At that time, our kids were two years, and seven months, respectively. Zack was in my flight, and volunteered to do the duty for me so I could be with family. One of the aircraft that went there was the one with my name on it, 59-0052 had "Capt Mickey Rountree" on the canopy rail.

In the middle of the night, around Dec 11, 1973 NORAD scrambled the Homestead jets to pursue a low flying contact coming from the area of Cuba. Turns out it was probably just a drug runner. It was low and slow by F-106 standards. Zack tried to get an ID, but he got low and very slow, eventually tail dragging into the water. His body was still in the cockpit when they cut him out.

So, you see, that is why I say that Zack died in my place.

Ironically, it was only 10 months later that I was assigned to Homestead for F-4 training. I will never forget my very first takeoff in the F-4, because as I rolled into the right turn out of traffic, I glanced down at the beautiful blue-green water and there it was – the F-106 that still had my name on the canopy rail! It was pretty tough to get my head back into flying.

My friend Zack died while flying a mission that I should have, in a jet that has my name on it!