

THE BROKEN LANDING WHEEL

One day early in my tour at Korat, Crew 32 took off for what should have been routine mission. (Weren't they all supposed to have been?). Lieutenant Colonel John Norton, our new aircraft commander, who was replacing Captain Maury Hammack, had recently arrived and was getting a checkride from Lieutenant Colonel Robert "Bob" Helfrich.

As we took the active runway and increased our ground speed, the vibration became excessive, and it was evident that something was wrong. After we were airborne, it was determined that we had not only blown a main landing tire on the left side but had also broken the metal landing wheel rim itself, a large chunk of which lay on the runway. Without the cushion of the tire, the weight was apparently too much stress on the wheel itself.

Rather than Return to Base (RTB), we flew the mission with the full realization that sooner or later, the old bird would have to land. The mission itself was without further incident.

Then we returned to Korat after mission completion. Fortunately for us, in the cockpit were two very seasoned, experienced pilots—Lieutenant Colonels Helfrich and Norton, each of whom by himself probably had been flying longer than I had even been alive. They knew what they were doing. Also, Captain Hammack was maintaining a careful eye on things below via the drift meter.

Because the damaged wheel was on the left side, Lieutenant Colonel Helfrich had the crewmembers move to the right side of the aircraft to the greatest extent possible to shift the weight. Our landing was quite rough, as was to be expected, but considering everything, it was quite decent.

After the aircraft came to a complete stop, one of the combat information monitors (CIM) came forward with a roll of toilet paper and asked, "Anybody need some of this?" We all had a good laugh.