

# Close Call Starts 3d Year in AF

SAIGON (7thAF)—An Air Force F-4C Phantom pilot in the Republic of Vietnam recently got a real bang out of his second anniversary in service. It happened when he decided to fly rather than take his day off.

Four shrapnel holes in the bubble of his plane show how close the eventful day came to being his last.

"I actually wasn't supposed to fly," said 1st Lt. Joseph C. Lippincott, 27, of Dayton, Ohio, "but I took the place of one of my friends."

Lippincott and his aircraft commander, Capt. Douglas B. Merz, 27, of Chicago, were scrambled into action to help U.S. ground forces battling Viet Cong and north Vietnamese soldiers in the border province of Pleiku in the central highlands.

"When we got over the target, 12 other aircraft were in the area," recalled Lippincott. "We also saw a downed helicopter on fire and another in the air that had been hit by ground fire."

After waiting 15 minutes for other planes to finish their bombing and strafing runs, Lippincott's flight was called in.

"A split second after we dropped our bombs on the first pass, it happened," said Lippincott.

"I heard a big noise and saw a yellow flash in front of me. It sounded like a firecracker exploded inside the cockpit. Instinctively I counted my fingers and limbs, making sure I still had everything. Then I saw the four holes in the canopy, just above my left shoulder.

"As we began to climb, we started to lose cabin pressure. I thought we might have to bail out. My hand was on the ejection handle ready for anything. But fortunately, by flying low, we made it back."

An examination of the aircraft later showed that an explosive .50-caliber shell had penetrated the fuselage and sent four pieces of shrapnel whizzing past Lippincott and on through the canopy.

"I'm lucky to be alive," he confessed, "but it was a heck of a way to start my third year in the Air Force."

## Arms Talks to Resume

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. (UPI)—The United States and the Soviet Union, co-chairmen of the conference, announced Monday that the 17-nation Geneva disarmament talks are to reconvene Feb. 21.