

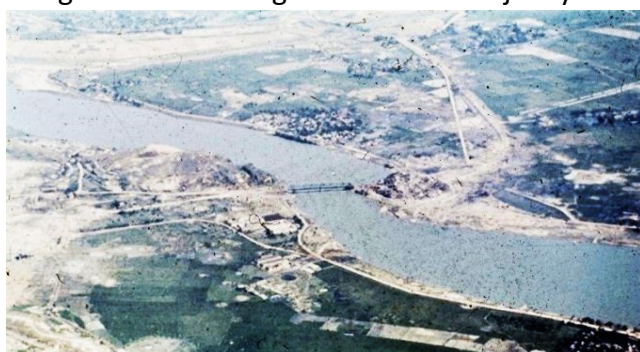


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**Teammates**—This month, the LeMay Center highlights the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing for its first successful air interdiction operation using tactically employed Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) during the Vietnam War.

There was no single commander of air operations during the Vietnam War. However, all those with a stake in bombing North Vietnam wanted the Thanh Hoa Bridge destroyed because it was an important logistical chokepoint. The North Vietnamese called this area the “Dragon’s Jaw.” As such, the US flew 873 sorties, dropped almost every type of available ordnance, and lost at least 11 aircraft during missions to destroy the bridge. These efforts were unsuccessful, and the bridge stood standing to become a major symbol of resistance to the US war effort.



Then, In April 1972, F-4s of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing dropped nine 3,000lb Paveway laser-guided bombs (LGBs) on the bridge. The Paveways didn’t just hit the bridge, but they struck it repeatedly in the same spot and destroyed its heavily reinforced western abutment. To finish it off, Navy A-7s returned in October ’72 to drop more LGBs that broke the bridge’s center span—the Dragon’s Jaw was broken for good.

Destroying the Thanh Hoa Bridge severed a major logistics and transportation pathway within North Vietnam and reduced the flow of supplies and reinforcements sent to regular North Vietnamese Army units and Viet Cong guerilla forces fighting in South Vietnam. The 8th Tactical Fighter Wing’s use of PGMs at Thanh Hoa proved the effectiveness of PGM technology to conduct air interdiction operations with a smaller but more effective concentration of airpower resources.

**Why it matters today:** The destruction of the Dragon’s Jaw is an example of *air interdiction*, which the Air Force defines as “air operations conducted to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy’s military potential before being brought to bear effectively against friendly forces or to otherwise achieve the JFC’s objectives”. The use of PGMs in air interdiction operations exemplifies the airpower tenets of *concentration* and *flexibility* in Air Force doctrine. Air planners use PGM capabilities to achieve a variety of effects against a target, increasing airpower’s effectiveness at interdicting enemy resources before they are used against friendly forces. The employment of PGMs enables commanders to expend minimal airpower resources to disadvantage the enemy.

# Air Force Doctrine

## PARAGON

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For more info on the tenets of airpower, see Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 1, *The Air Force*. For more on *air interdiction*, see AFDP 3-03, *Counterland*. You can also check out our latest podcast devoted to technological change and Artificial Intelligence on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music, or at [www.doctrine.af.mil](http://www.doctrine.af.mil).

PARKER H. WRIGHT  
Major General, USAF  
LeMay Center Commander  
Deputy Commander, Air University