



Phantom in its ground attack role. Image from "Air and Space"

Most pilots considered the Phantom to be the "hottest fighter on earth." One of the key innovations of the aircraft was the addition of the back seat. Looking ahead to future wars, designers thought that with all of the advanced weapons, radar and navigation, there would be an information overload for the pilot and the "guy in the back" could help with that. At first this created some concern for the pilots who had always flown single seat fighters and now they had a non-pilot sitting behind them. But soon they grew to depend on the **RIO** (Radar Intercept Officer) or Wizzo (**Weapons Systems Officer**) to help carry out the missions. Later, the Airforce put pilots in the back seat and gave them the ability to fly from that seat.

Although designed for fleet air defense, the Phantom was able to perform virtually any mission thrown at it. But according to many pilots who flew it in Vietnam, not having guns was one of the biggest mistakes of the design. F-4's were often ambushed on the way back after a mission, and with no guns, when the missiles were gone, they were defenseless. The Air Force solved the problem by mounting an M61 Vulcan 20mm cannon on the nose under the radome and this became a game changer.

The Phantom went through several upgrades over the years giving it more advanced capabilities and avionics but as the 70's approached the need for a more advanced fighter was growing. Enter—the F-14 Tomcat which first flew in 1970.

Our Phantom Cockpit

How did we acquire the Phantom cockpit?

We received 2 Phantoms. One is in the museum complete and the other is now just the cockpit. When our guests sit in the Phantom cockpit, they often ask, "Where is the rest of the plane? The answer is that CAM volunteers cut it off then painted it with a different paint scheme (see photo at right).

See the photos below.



Now you see it...



Second F-4 Phantom being lifted from trailer at CAM.

Now you don't!



Same Aircraft after CAM volunteers removed the cockpit.