

A Career...

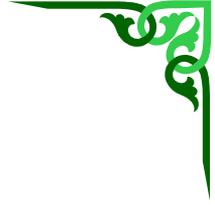
As Good As It Gets



Written by a Man of Many Hats...

Sam Pizzo

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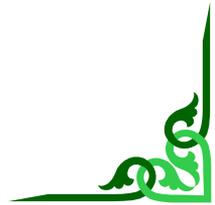


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Preface and Dedication

From time to time during my military days, I had the pleasure and honor of serving with many dedicated and talented individuals.

During my retirement years, I've taken the opportunity to record some of these moments that transpired during these crossing of paths. Some of the stories are humorous and others are not so humorous.

I was most fortunate, and lucky, not to have suffered any injuries, and am honored to have served in WWII. I can truly say it was something that I, along with millions of others, were glad we did. In essence, I had rather a "clean" war in spite of the fact that flying 30 sorties over Germany was not conducive to a healthy environment.

The exploits which took place during my tour in the Louisiana Air Guard and then later on into the B-29 crew assignment certainly provided some not too soon forgotten memories of hours of sheer boredom accompanied by moments of stark fear.

The times I spent as a crew member on the RB-47 E and H aircraft, as well as the time I spent in staff duty at Forbes AFB, were also quite memorable. The time served on the team that worked on the Central Intelligence Agency's A-12 aircraft at Area 51 was followed by being the Directorate of Operations Project Officer for the SR-71 in the Recon Center at Offutt AFB. My career culminated with being the Director of Intelligence Collections at USAFE in Germany. All of these duties, plus others not described in the book, or cleaned up for various security reasons, certainly provided me with an ample reservoir of subject matters from which to draw for the writing of the stories depicted in this collection.

Recently I was contacted by Tommy Towery who suggested I might wish to combine those stories, with other facets of my career,

and put them in book fashion. This book is the result of that suggestion. Tommy has previously published three books of collections of B-52 crew members' stories, as well as assisting others working on their own memoirs, and three books of his own memoirs.

A great deal of credit goes to Tommy for the editing and compiling of these stories, and to my good friend Pat Gros for her computer assistance and guidance in putting the stories together.

It would also be most remiss of me not to dedicate this book of captured moments of the past, to those many individuals who were present and made possible the incidents portrayed throughout the book.

Indeed, it was an honor to serve with and know each and every one of them, and I shall always cherish the memories they provided.

I would be sadly remiss if I failed to give credit to one other person who contributed greatly to whatever successes I may have enjoyed - that being my bride of 63 years. Mary, like many other military wives, took over and ran the home front while we were out playing soldier. My military career may have been much different without her love, support, and understanding. For that I shall be eternally grateful.

I hope you enjoy reading these glimpses of a military career that, for the author, was as good as it gets.

- Sam Pizzo

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CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning 1942-1945

As a young lad, then while becoming a young adult, aviation was always in my blood. I constantly read aviation magazines about my heroes and the exploits of those flyers in their flimsy WWI aircraft. I was constantly building solid scale models of their planes. Then as I hit my teens, I used balsa wood, silk, paper, and glue to build rubber band powered flying models of their craft. I think I spent most of my allowances on those planes.

When finances were available, which was not often I might add, I took very, very long bus and streetcar trips to the airport to see up close those early model Cessna and other vintage era planes of the period. My day was made when one of the pilots would chat with me - a dream come true!

With the advent of WWII, there was no doubt in my mind that I would join the Army Air Forces and apply for the Aviation Cadet Program. I wanted to fly and as bad as war is, I then had the chance to do just that. That was just what I did by signing up for the Cadet Program in mid 1942. When the time came, I was called in to take the written exam and miracles of miracles; the passing grade was 75 and that's exactly what I made on the test. I think I floated all the way home on cloud nine. This had to be a miracle; it seemed like my destiny was being fulfilled.

It so happened that all young men going into the service in our area had to report for very general physical exams and that was what I did along with hundreds of guys on the scheduled day. Now remember,

Chapter 1 – In the Beginning

I had already been accepted in the Aviation Cadet Program, yet I had to take this preliminary exam. When I took the eye test, I flat out flunked it.

The Corporal who gave me the test, looked at my papers and saw that I was scheduled to go into the Cadet Program said, “Heck I’m not going to fail you. Let somebody else along the way do so.” So he passed me!

I never failed another eye test until way after WWII when I had an eye check and started wearing glasses. I was a Captain by then and on Active Duty. I have never forgotten that Corporal's face, or the ramifications his actions had on my military career. Somebody up there was surely looking out for me.

What a bunch of young eager beavers we were as we boarded a train to Sheppard Field, Texas to begin our military service. We sang songs, became real buddies, and formed a camaraderie that made me feel proud to be with this group of young, soon-to-be flyers. About two weeks before being called up, I had an appendix attack and went for an operation to have it removed. I was not in the very best of health when I boarded that train heading to Texas. After we arrived, we were issued our uniforms and gear, and then two days later we were on a 10 mile march. About halfway or so I collapsed and they hauled me into a hospital where I stayed for a few days. When I returned to my barracks after the hospital stay, I found that my new comrades-in-arms had stolen every last piece of equipment and clothing that had been issued to me - even my toilet articles! I had one pair of fatigues, the ones I had worn on the march, a pair of socks, my GI boots, and a plastic helmet and canteen. I had to buy every piece of the replacement articles. We only made \$50.00 per month, and I think I made about \$30.00 per month for quite a while. So much for camaraderie!

After being called to active duty and spending time at Boot Camp, a College Training Detachment at Oklahoma A & M, I finally arrived at the Army Air Force Classification Center in San Antonio. I made it though the tests okay and was told that I qualified in all three categories, Pilot, Navigator, and Bombardier.

When the postings came out I was in total shock as I was selected for Bombardier training. I wanted to be a pilot and I thought my world had just ended. At any rate, being young and a bit brash, I was

determined to see if this decision could be reversed, so off I went through and up the chain of command. First the Company clerk, then the First Sergeant, then the Company Commander (a Second Looney), next a Captain, then the Major and finally a Lt. Colonel - the head man.

The Lt. Colonel had my records in front of him and after looking them over asked me why I thought his organization had made a mistake in my selection process. I pleaded my case to no avail, and then he told me that I had made extremely high grades on the Bombardier portions of the tests and that his personnel knew what the heck they were doing. He promptly and courteously kicked me out of his office.

Looking back, it was the best thing, career-wise, that could have happened to me. Perhaps I would never have had the assignments that came my way if I had gone into pilot training. Another miracle had taken place and I didn't have a clue that it had.

For a valid reason I'm sure, but what it was escapes me to this day, some well meaning strategist decided that certain Cadets to be had to have some college education before going any further in the program. That made good sense, but what followed sure as heck didn't come close to filling that need.

A whole slew of us were sent to College Training Detachments (CTD) and there were many such units scattered across the country at various universities. I ended up at Oklahoma A&M at Stillwater, Oklahoma. We were to spend about six months there and get regular college courses relating to science, biology, math, English - you name it, we got it. The courses came in hourly sessions, five days a week, four to five hours per day. They had no homework, no tests, and nobody flunked out unless they had a medical problem.

What this did accomplish though was getting us in the best possible physical condition you could imagine. During the mornings, before and after classes, there was physical training (PT) run by the Oklahoma A&M coaches and they sure got us in top notch shape.

But as far as getting us smarter, I would say it was a bust. There simply was no big pressure to study since no one was ever tested. On the other hand the university was also partaking in the Navy's WAVE program, the seagoing version of the ARMY WAC program, and there

Chapter 1 – In the Beginning

were at least a couple of thousand young ladies going through their training while we were there. We suffered through it though!

After six months, we packed our bags and headed off to Ellington AFB to begin our Aviation Cadet Training - maybe not much smarter, but in better shape than when we first arrived.

What a change it was from regular Air Force living going into the strict decorum of the Cadet program with its spit-and-polish approach to every aspect of the training. This included the weekend parades on the base to the downtown Houston parades, to line abreast formations on Friday nights, on hands and knees, to clean the street in front of our barracks with tooth brushes! Guards were posted and God help anyone who threw a cigarette butt on our street. Then of course there was the white glove inspection by the Company Commander, checking for dust and military correctness in the storing of personal belongings and the tautness of blankets on your bunk. If your barracks failed the inspection, there were no weekend passes into town on Saturday night. The dastardly culprit whose area was the cause of the failure was in deep trouble with his buddies.

Cadet Mess (food servings to you non-military types) included table cloths and waiters, and no hated Kitchen Patrol (KP) details involving cleaning up the kitchen and lastly great food. It was literally hog heaven.

That assignment lasted approximately four months (not really sure about this time frame) and off we went to Gunnery school at Laredo AAF Field at Laredo, Texas.

From being in heaven, and really getting with the program at Ellington, we were back in the real world. There were miserable dirty barracks, KP, lousy food, and Gunnery Instructors who didn't take a shine to Aviation Cadets. For one thing we made \$25 a month more than the average Private.

We had to learn to fieldstrip (take apart) and re-assemble the 45 caliber pistol blind folded as well as the 30 and 50 caliber machine guns, all within a certain time frame. Another really enjoyable bit of training was to stand up in the back of a pickup truck, riding around a figure eight track, firing a shotgun trying to hit targets being fired from towers in a fashion similar to trap shooting. I doubt if anybody ever hit

anything. We did however get the prettiest solid black and blue shoulders one would ever see. We also got to ride in the back of an AT-6 Aircraft to practice hitting a target being towed by another AT-6. I think the only thing I ever hit with that 30 caliber machine gun was the ground when the bullets finally fell to earth. We did however get to crossover to Mexico and visit the quaint (tongue in cheek here) little town of Laredo, Mexico. Our instructions were, never go anywhere by yourself and keep your hands on your wallets, which I did. Two of our group got really sick after eating dinner, so we headed back and that was our one and only trip across the border. Thankfully that training came to an end and we were presented with a set of Gunners Wings, and off we went to the Bombardier Training base at Midland Texas.

CHAPTER 2

Bombardier School

After finishing up at the Gunnery School in Laredo, we were packed into a real modern (tongue in cheek here) train and headed north to an unknown destination which turned out to be the Midland, Texas AAF Bombardier Training School.

Because it was rather warm, all the windows on the train were opened in an effort to keep cool. Not only did that not work out too well, but we were also coated with a black layer of cinders and soot from the engine. After a day or so we didn't look too sharp and smelled to high heaven. The meals were outstanding, with breakfast consisted of a bologna sandwich and that was on the menu as well as for lunch and dinner.

We finally arrived sometime in the morning and lo and behold if they didn't march us right into the mess hall and feed us a great meal. As with Ellington, it was first class service. Things were looking up, and we were ready to start our training.

First let me inform you a little about the Midland AAF Base starting with its location, which was about halfway between Midland and Odessa Texas. I don't remember seeing a tree as we visualize what a tree should look like. The ones I saw looked like sticks with twigs tied to the end of them. Talk about barren land! What that place did have was dust and plenty of it. The idea of white glove inspections was a farce.

But, in spite of all these things, we were training to become Bombardiers, and that's why we were there. Ground school consisted of many hours learning about Dead Reckoning Navigation, enemy aircraft identification, Morse code (had to be able to send and receive 25 word

per minute), learning the workings of the Norden Bomb Sight and how to operate it, plus the general things a soldier does, i.e. drill, have parades, and the like.

Many hours were devoted to training on a four wheeled platform about 29 feet or so in height with a Bomb Sight installed on it which in turn traveled across the floor of a large hanger simulating an aircraft on a bombing run. If you failed to master that - you were out. Shortly thereafter, we started flying navigational and bombing missions in AT-11 aircraft, a twin-engine trainer.

Night navigational missions were a real bummer. West Texas was loaded with oil fields and at night they were lit up and looked just like small cities. These night missions were strictly based on visual sightings on the ground and it was really easy to mistake these for your check points. I'll bet that every cadet got lost at least once, probably more, and had to abort the mission and yell for help.

The daylight missions were not as difficult; however, flying low level over west Texas resulted in a great amount of turbulence in the aircraft and burp cups were a mandatory piece of equipment to take along 'cause, if you messed up in the plane, you cleaned it up when you landed.

Finally the day came when we started flying our bombing missions. The Norden Bombsight was still a very, very secret bit of hardware, and each time we flew, we strapped on a 45-caliber pistol, that had been checked out from a vault, and swore to defend it with our lives. Flying bombing missions was a real thrill, but once again if you didn't hit the target with some accuracy you were out. In the heat of summer, the rubber mounting on the eyepiece of the bombsight from which you viewed your target got extremely hot and melted, and when you landed, you had a nice black ring around your eye. It was tough to remove, I might add.

If you messed up on a bombing run, consisting of some by-hand calculations in addition to hitting the target, you got the honor of wearing a wooden shaped bomb around your neck with the word "DUD" on it.

Finally came Graduation Day! We marched into the auditorium, up onto the stage, and got our Second Looney bars and a set of

Chapter 2 – Bombardier School

Bombardier Wings. What a great moment! As we walked off the stage we were handed a set of orders telling us where we would go for further training and the type of aircraft we would fly into combat. As I walked off the stage they handed me my orders which said B-26 Marauders at Tampa Florida. “Oh Lord”, I thought, “I’m doomed!” The word on that bird was “One a day in Tampa Bay.” However, they also said that the orders for me and six other officers had been canceled and that we would shortly receive new orders.

We hustled over to the Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ) and were promptly told that since we had graduated we could no longer stay on the base; there was no room. Now Midland, Texas in early 1944 was no thriving metropolis and I think there was only one hotel on Main Street, which of course had no rooms available. We hung around the hotel lobby and when a guest checked out we bribed the desk clerk to rent us the room! Seven of us shared one room for three days! We finally got our orders, mine reading B-17's at Dyersburg AAF, Tennessee.

I hustled home to get married, three days late for my own wedding. Mary and I are still together after 63 years.

CHAPTER 3

Honeymoon and Combat Crew Training

Now don't start thinking that those two items are one and the same. At least in my book they're not, even though circumstance made it seem so.

After hurrying home to get married, which Mary and I did, I had but around a day and a half left before I had to hop a train and head for Dyersburg AAF Field for my combat crew training.

If I thought Midland, Texas was a tiny little town in Texas (which I did) then by comparison, the metropolis of Dyersburg, Tennessee was very similar except that it had some beautiful trees.

It was a typical small Southern city with the railroad tracks running through the center of town. It had a railroad station, the typical town square with the surrounding shops, statues of Southern Civil War generals on horseback prominently displayed, and many beautiful homes. It was a lovely Southern city.

Alas however, it was not built to commercially house those flyers who came temporarily to their city, some of which, including yours truly, who desired to bring their spouses and have them near while preparing to go into combat.

The good people of Dyersburg opened their homes and rented rooms to those who opted to have their spouses with them. I located a house where this lovely widow lady had four bedrooms with two baths. She occupied the master bedroom with a bath and the other three bedrooms were rented out and shared the other bath. How we managed that without starting a fracas, I'll never know, but we did. One meal per day was included – a breakfast of cold cereal and that was it. No radios

Chapter 3 –Honeymoon and Combat Crew Training

allowed, and the girls could not play cards as that was gambling and that was a no-no. So there we were, three couples sharing a bath, with basically no kitchen privileges, having to eat our meals out, no bus transportation, and having to walk to the only restaurant close by.

This was the honeymoon that I gave to Mary - a girl who had, in reality, never traveled from home before! The way in which she handled this environment told me I had truly picked a winner. Each morning I'd walk into town and catch a bus to the base, and reverse the process in the evening.

My first glimpse of Dyersburg AAF certainly told me we were headed for England since all the streets had English sounding names, the bar was called the pub, the bank the exchequer, etc. Then I met the balance of my crew. I was just about the oldest, being 21 years old. We melded together just like we were supposed to do, and became a Cracker Jack crew.

When I saw my first B-17 up close, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. What a beauty! I saw that I had two 50-caliber machine guns at my position, located under the aircraft directly below me. I fired them with a special gun sight that I could move out of the way when I was on the bombsight. Too bad I never got to fire them because with a little training, maybe I would have hit something later on when we were over Germany. Our training was to last approximately a month, with a large portion of it being devoted to formation flying. When I made my first flight over Germany I then knew why. I do not recall any live aerial gunnery missions, although I did get to drop a couple of bombs. We did fly some navigational missions in order for our navigator to hone his skills. When having time off we had picnics with all of the crew members and I might add we did fulfill our flyer duties of serving the required time at the Pub drinking 3.2 beer.

Our training came to an end, for which I secretly think Mary was glad to see, as I'm sure she'd had enough of this honeymoon! A day or so later, I put her on a train bound for New Orleans, and a couple of days after that our crew boarded a train for Lincoln, Nebraska where we were to pick up a brand new B-17 and head for the British Isles and the 8th Air Force - or so I thought!

CHAPTER 4

Mediterranean Theater of Operations

(MTO)

After a short stay at Lincoln, Nebraska and we were off in our new B-17 headed for Grenier Field located in Manchester, New Hampshire, which was our hopping off spot for merry old England - we thought.

What a shock when we got our orders and found out that we were actually headed for Marrakech, Morocco! So after a very brief stay at Grenier Field, off we flew to Africa.

En route, near the Azores, we spotted some debris in the ocean and one item looked as if it could be a life raft. At our altitude, we couldn't be sure, so down we went just to check it out. It turned out that it was not a raft but just some flotsam from a vessel that had evidently been sunk early on.

We didn't stay very long in Morocco, just long enough for crew rest and refueling and away we went again. This time to Goia, Italy (known as a Reppledepple), a re-supply base for crews and aircraft destined for bases further up in Italy.

To our chagrin, there was no immediate need for replacement crews at this time, and the 10 of us and all of our gear were quartered in a large tent. Once again I got to eat a lot of dust, this time accompanied by very large Italian flies. The food was lousy, no Base Exchange where we could get goodies, no laundry service, no place to relax like a club or whatever, and going into town in Goia was like going into another world - one you'd like to forget. We stayed in that tent for 30 days.

Chapter 4 – Mediterranean Theater of Operations



Then we were shipped out to the 15th Air Force, 97th Bomb Group, 342nd Bomb Squadron, located in the Amendola Valley a bit south of Foggia, Italy. That area was very flat and the Germans before us and now the Americans and Brits saturated the area with aircraft bases.

There were B-17's, B-24's and every other type of warplane you can name assigned to units in that area. On our base we had another USAAF unit as well as a South African Bomb unit. That made for real peachy take-offs when the weather was not VFR (no clouds.) I think we lost as many planes forming up (four or five hundred aircraft on any max effort day) as we did in combat. You'd see a bright orange glow in the clouds and know that there had been a mid-air collision. Back in those days when we had no radar, all join-ups were done by timing and maintaining proper altitudes and headings. More on this a bit later.

Our Squadron was headquartered in a small Italian farmhouse, which included a very small room designated as our dining area. It had some benches and tables jammed together and the food was cooked elsewhere and carried in. We had no complaints though as it was a heck of a lot better than those poor Infantry guys wallowing around in and eating and sleeping in the mud. There is nothing like eating Spam cooked a variety of ways three times a day, eaten while being jammed up like packed sardines, in a small smelly little room with others. On some occasions we would forego eating in order not to go through that experience.

The Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator and Bombardiers were housed in one tent and the other six of the crew, (Engineer, Radio and four gunners) were quartered in another larger tent.

Now for a few words about our home away from home - tent number 53. Our pilot and I became scroungers of the first realm. The first order of business was to put a floor in our tent. Now in Southern Italy trees were not overly abundant which meant that needed lumber had to be "borrowed" from some unit on the base. Miraculously one day, we had a floor, and surprisingly we were never questioned as to the source of this precious commodity.

We had a young Italian lad who cleaned our tent, took care of our laundry and became a life saver when we found out that cigarettes were gold and could be used to buy eggs, potatoes, vino, cheese, and bread. He became our grocer. We did a lot of cooking over the pot belly stove that was used to heat our tent.

As one would expect, running water and, above all, running heated water were not considered a likely possibility when one lives in a tent during wartime. However that's exactly what tent 53 had! We scrounged up two fighter fuel drop tanks, one for water the other for fuel, built a scaffolding to mount them on, and ran aluminum lines from them into the tent.



Ed Cullen [KIA]

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We then devised a gadget that allowed us to control the fuel flow into the tent and to ignite it which in turn heated the stove. We then ran water lines around the stove and “Voila!” we had hot running water with which to shave. We took an oxygen bottle, cut it in half and made a basin out of it which drained out under the floor boards. We had all the comforts of home - well almost.



The Author

Our Pilot started his combat training by flying as the co-pilot on another crew before the rest of the crew flew. After he had a couple of sorties under his belt, we then flew our first mission as a crew.

We were awakened around 2:30 in the morning, dressed, had a great breakfast of fried Spam and powdered eggs, and then we piled on trucks and on to the briefing.

Our Group briefing area was in a large community barn with a stage placed in the back of it with benches in front for the crew members. It was colder than heck in there, as like I said, it was a barn.

When they pulled back the covering of the route displayed on a large board, it caused a loud groan from the assembled crew members who had evidently been there before and didn't relish the idea of returning. Later on I found out why.

On that day our Squadron was not the lead Squadron, but rather the last one in the Group (i.e. Tail End Charlie), and as a new crew we were the Tail End Charlie of the Squadron. It was not a good place to be.

With the general briefing over, the Pilots, Navs and Bombardiers went into their specialized briefings whereas the gunners went out to the aircraft to get their armament checked out.

As the Bombardier, I was briefed on the route into the target and what specific check points to look for in locating the target which I recall as being a large oil refinery, heavily defended by flak guns (German 88MM cannons) and fighters.

We were given a sandwich to take along - you guessed it, Spam on stale bread.

After briefing we piled back onto trucks and headed for our individual aircraft. After flying over in a brand new B-17, I was a little nervous when I looked at the beat up looking bird with patches all over it.

It was pretty well daylight, and we did our preflight inspection, in my case checking out the bomb sight and arming the pins on the ten 500 lb bombs in the bomb bay. After take-off and at a designated altitude, I would then pull the pins thereby arming the bombs.

One thing I learned very quickly was to go to the bathroom (outdoor toilet commonly known as a six-holer) BEFORE going out to the aircraft. Believe me, it was not much fun out in the cold in the middle of the airfield when nature calls!

After a couple of hours, the green flare went up, engines were started and pretty soon we taxied out. One by one the B-17's headed down the runway, took off, and with precision, formed up into Squadrons, then into Groups and Air Divisions and finally into the main bomber stream.

Remember, similar activity like this was taking place at a large number of airfields all over the Amendola Valley. My guess would be that at least four to five hundred planes would be heading up the Adriatic Sea en route to various targets in Europe.

The climb out and flight into Germany was without incident, except that I had not figured on the extreme cold which I encountered. A bare hand touching metal caused frost bite.

Chapter 4 – Mediterranean Theater of Operations

As we entered Germany and approached the target I knew why the crews had groaned at briefing. The groups ahead of us were almost invisible, being encased with the smoke from the exploding flak. I saw the target and released our bombs without any problem, but it looked like night outside and the peppering of flak on the aircraft let you know that this was serious business. None of them hit our crew although we did lose one plane. No fighters were seen however.

The return to base was without incident, and I welcomed my mission shot of bourbon and the donuts and coffee from the Red Cross Ladies.

I flew a few more times with the crew, and then I checked out as a Lead Bombardier and started flying with various lead crews when our Squadron led the Group or Air Division.

Crew members were constantly flying with other crews. Due to illness substitutes were always needed. On one such occasion our copilot flew with another crew and it cost him his life. During join up in the clouds, a B-17 turned into his craft causing it to crash. Four made it out but he did not. He was the only one of our crew that did not make it back after the war.

On one such mission when I flew as a substitute Bombardier, it turned out to be anything but a routine mission. It was an uneventful takeoff and climb out to the target and we encountered a few Flak bursts as we entered Germany. It was not the same however over Munich. There were a few fighters, but loads of Flak.

The B-17s' fuel tanks were located in the wings and as you used up a prescribed amount of fuel, you switched to the remaining tanks for the trip back to Foggia. Climbing out from Foggia en route to the target area is the leg of the flight whereby you used the most fuel, i.e. heavy bomb load and climbing to your bombing altitude which gobbles up the fuel.

As we approached Munich, we took a pretty good burst of Flak directly under the aircraft, however, without major damage, EXCEPT for one small shell fragment that hit the fuel transfer valve.

That was not noticed until we turned for home and prepared to switch fuel tanks. It was only at that moment when we knew we were not going to make it back to Foggia. Without the capability to have access to switch to those full fuel tanks, we were in deep trouble.

We had a few options opened to us: bail out over Germany, head for Switzerland, ditch in the Adriatic Sea, bail out over Yugoslavia, or head for and hopefully make a small island, named VIS located off the Yugoslavia coast. On the island was a small airfield used occasionally as an emergency landing strip. We also knew that VIS might be in the hands of Tito's Partisans.

Germany was out as far as we were concerned. We were briefed on what Germans were doing to captured Allied flyers as the war was coming to an end, and that didn't sound promising if we had other choices.

Landing in Switzerland was ruled out due to lots of snow and no good maps to show where to head; and, bailing out in the Alps in the middle of winter was not a very smart idea.

Ditching in the cold water in an area patrolled by German E Boats didn't seem like a good idea either.

Bailing out over Yugoslavia was not real spiffy as we did not know where Tito's Partisans were located. The partisans were on our side fighting the Germans. On the other hand, if we fell into the Chetnik's hands, (these were the Yugoslavians fighting with the Germans), the chances were that we would not make it out, period.

That left VIS only as an option. It was a good option only if Tito's troops had control of the Island. They had a clandestine radio there and we started trying to contact them as we departed Germany, and by the Grace of God we made contact. They said come ahead since it was safely in Partisan's hands. VIS was an island off the northern coast of Yugoslavia which was constantly changing hands. Tito's fighters held it for a while, then the Germans took it back, then Tito would regain control. Possession was a day-to-day thing and you never actually knew who had it until you made radio contact on your way in.

We started descending and heading towards the island, hoping for the best. It was raining as we approached the island, and when we

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spotted the runway we noticed it was made-up of steel matting joined together. We knew stopping was going to take all the skill the pilot could muster in an effort to keep us from going off the end of this short, wet, slippery runway. The pilot did a great job. We did go off the end of the runway, did a slow cartwheel and came to stop, with no one getting a scratch.

The minute we stopped, a large group of Yugoslav men, women and children surrounded the plane - all wearing ammo bandoliers around their chests, weapons of all makes and kinds hanging on their belts, and with very, very big machetes hanging at their sides.

They proceeded to strip the aircraft of the machine guns and remaining ammo we had left (even our left over K Rations) and wanted our 45-caliber pistols, which we refused to hand over. It got pretty spirited until an American Corporal showed up and settled the matter. We kept our pistols, although if anyone was required to hit anything with them, it would have been a miracle.

We stayed on the island a few days, living in a very large barn with other shot-down American and British flyers. We had baked chicken for breakfast, lunch and dinner, which was served with lots of red wine.

Each meal, this large well armed lady, showed up with a piece of wood on her head holding a bunch of baked chickens. She'd put the board down on the ground, take that machete out, cut each chicken in half, and that was your meal. Of course we had copious helpings of that vintage vino to wash down that most welcome meal. And it was truly welcomed and enjoyed.

We stayed there for a few days when a couple of Goonie Birds (C-47 aircraft) came in and took off the bunch of us, returning us to Foggia, and back to the war.

Since the island had radio contact with the 15th Air Force, we were reported as being okay, and never listed as MIA's, and our families never knew this had ever happened.

The 97th Bomb Group was an old and distinguished unit. It was the first B-17 Group to bomb Europe from England, and that was before the Eighth Air Force was formed.

When the Allies landed in North Africa, the Group followed as soon as a base could be secured. It flew sorties supporting the ground forces attacking the Axis troops, and soon started bombing targets in Sicily and Italy. When a base was secured in Italy, the Group moved up to the Amendola Valley, and stayed there until rotating back to the States after the cessation of hostilities. It ended up flying more bombing sorties than any other Heavy Bomb Group during WW II. On occasion it had some very distinguished individuals attend their mission briefings, such as Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, General Spaatz, General George Marshall, General James Doolittle, Air Marshall Tedder, Field Marshall Alan Brooke and others.

It participated in some very notable missions such as the Polesti Oil Field raids among others, including bombing Berlin, and when they reached the sortie totals flown plateau which no other Bomb Group had reached, it was decided to celebrate by having a party.

The Group had "liberated" a beach house not far from the base which was used as a rest area. It was located in Manfredonia, a small Italian town located on the coast of Adriatic Sea. You could enjoy a couple of days there just relaxing and sleeping somewhere other than a tent. This was where the party would be held.

Now I learned early on NEVER to volunteer in the Army, so I'm really not sure how it came about that I was put in charge of refreshments for the party. Beer was rather plentiful; however how to get the amount needed for the party was something else again. The hard stuff I thought was really out of the question.

It dawned on me that we were given beer ration cards and each time we had a beer in the O'Club, the card was punched; however, in reality that did not happen. Ergo the cards were never punched, and therefore technically we were entitled to a full ration card of beer.

When considering the total number of officers in the squadron, we had access to a lot of beer if I could only locate a source. I then recalled going to this very large Base Exchange in Naples and seeing officers coming out with cases of beer. A call to the Officer in Charge (OIC) at that exchange verified the fact that if we had a card we could get the beer.

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The next step was to get an okay from the brass to collect the cards, then get about 40 Officer "volunteers" and some trucks and head for Naples. This was obtained and the plan was put in motion.

I gathered up my 40 or so "volunteers", loaded them into to a Weapons carrier (a vehicle size-wise between a Jeep and a big GI truck) and two GI trucks and off we went for Naples. We parked the trucks around the corner from the exchange and I took a couple of the guys and went in on a practice run. It turned out okay. Then I started sending in the others. We worked in 10 man shifts until we had all the beer for which we had cards. Some guys went in twice and I was kind of nervous about that but it worked perfectly.

Now on the way back we really had to squeeze the guys in the trucks because of the many cases of beer we had. Like all good young , red-blooded Americans, they had to sample the wares en route back to the base. This unfortunately included the driver of the Weapons Carrier who ran it into a ditch. Luckily no one was hurt and the beer survived, but we had a heck of a time getting the vehicle back onto the road. Finally we did and made it back okay. My "volunteers" wanted to know when we could do it again!

I might add that after the party was over, we had so much beer left over, that we passed it out nightly, swapped it for anything and everything, and when the war ended and we pulled up stakes to come home we still had beer left!

Now that we had the beer, the search started up as to where I could get some of the stronger spirits. As stated earlier, we had this South African Bomb Group on our field that was quartered a bit down the road and on occasion I had met some of them in our squatty little O'Club. On occasion they would bring a bottle or two of Scotch and we'd swap them some beer for their Scotch.

A quick get-together and another round of swapping beer for Scotch solved the last of the spirits problem. I thought my requirements for the shindig had come to a satisfactory conclusion. Not so! A bit later I was called into this Full Bird Colonel's office, offered a chair and a cup of coffee, at which time I knew I was either in deep doo doo, or about to be given a job no one else wanted. I was right on in the latter case.

He wanted to know where I was going to get the other needed requirement for the party, i.e. the ladies for evening! Of course I had no clue and so advised the Colonel, to which he replied, "Son, then you'd better get cracking!", and I was dismissed.

At first I thought of the ladies of the evening from downtown Foggia but that thought was quickly discarded for obvious reasons. My next thought was of nurses from an American hospital, but I did not know of any close by. Then someone told me of a British Hospital located right outside Foggia and off I went on another not to be forgotten episode in my military career.

I pulled up in front of the hospital, went in and requested to speak with the head nurse. I was ushered into this office and sitting behind the desk was a British Nurse, a Major who invited me to sit, have some tea and explain the reason for my visit. Now for a 23 year old Lieutenant, the Major seemed to be about 60 years old, probably wasn't but it seemed that way to me.

As I explained the reason for my visit, the tea was changed out for glasses of Scotch, and an agreement was reached whereby she would provide 30 or 40 nurses, war conditions permitting. I was to guarantee the chastity of her nurses during the course of the evening. I lied of course. There was no way could I guarantee that. She did however give out with a big belly laugh when she made the proposal.

I reported back to the Colonel and once again I thought that I was finished with my chores. Once again I was wrong. This time his request was for ice to go with cooling the beer and for the Scotch! He wanted ice in war torn Italy! I lucked out once more, when I checked with the young Italian who cleaned our tent and hustled food for us. He knew of a still-working ice house that was located a couple of hours away and he could take me there. We made a recon trip and set up getting ice for the party. All that was left was to arrange escort and transport for the ladies and pick up the ice.

We had no problem in picking up the ice, and when it came time to go to the hospital, we loaded in trucks, ambulances, jeeps and what ever else had wheels, and headed out. I got to ride in the staff car with the Colonel as he thought he should go as a matter of protocol, and I

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was tasked to introduce him to the Major so that he could thank her on behalf of the Group.

We pulled up, and with the Colonel and me leading this pack of young, red-blooded flyers, we entered the hospital to see a group of British nurses waiting for us, all spic and span in uniform, with the Major standing in the front.

Now everyone came to a halt when we entered, and then before anyone could say a word these two groups of flyers and nurses melded and headed for the transports leaving me, the Colonel and the British head nurse standing in the hall. That head nurse walked up to the Colonel, said “I guess you're my escort for the evening. Let's get this show on the road!” I think he wanted to kill me, and he said so quite a few times later on in the evening. Once during the party, when I failed to dodge him as I had been doing all evening, he thanked me, not in a nice tone plus a few utterances, for getting him a date with his mother!

I was told later by the Colonel's aide that the Major drank the Colonel under the table and that it might be best if I never saw the Colonel again – period! To top it off, someone stole the Colonel's jeep. It was found the next morning out on the runway, out of gas. I have absolutely no idea how and if the nurses all made it back to the hospital, or if any problems of chastity arose.

About a week later, I called the Major and thanked her and she said she'd had a blast, and they were ready to do it again.

BACK TO REALITY

It was time to get back to the war. I flew a couple of Mickey (Radar Bombing) missions and after the first one I found that I did not care for them very much. We flew with the Group and as we entered Germany we broke away from the formation and headed for a target all by our lonesome. We were supposed to have fighter cover but for some reason they didn't show up - but neither did the German fighters. The bombs were dropped by the Radar Operator even though I could see the target quite clearly. That was the ops order and we followed it. We didn't come close to hitting the target, but the system was just coming into being and much refining and testing was to follow.

Our crew, minus the copilot and me, flew a mission and when they were over the target of Vienna, got pretty well shot up and were forced to bail out. They lost three engines due to flak. They started to lose altitude and when they got over Yugoslavia, they bailed out. Part of the crew landed right in a Partisan camp, and part landed on the other side of the mountain from the camp. Friendly Partisans got them safely to the camp three days later where they joined up and were returned to Foggia a couple of weeks later.

Once they joined up we were notified that they all were safe, the copilot and I wrote letters to the families telling them not to worry and that they were okay, but that we couldn't provide any details for security reasons. We wrote the letters on the same day that the MIA telegram was received by the families. My letter came a week after the telegram had arrived.

A few years back one of the families sent me a copy of the letter I had written in 1945 as well as a copy of the MIA telegram. They had kept it all those years and they thought I might enjoy seeing them. I did, and thanked them for doing so.

I flew a few more missions, making a total of 30, and then the conflict ended. We were scheduled to be an Occupational Air Force Unit and construction started on permanent housing. That was soon cancelled and we were told we were going home to train in B-29's for Pacific duty. Later that too changed and we packed up to go home.

A flight with returning airmen packed in the aircraft took off and we headed for the coast of West Africa, then Brazil, and finally West Palm Beach, Florida. After a short stay there we went on to Camp Beauregard, Mississippi for discharge. I opted to stay in, signed up for pilot training, and discussed doing so with Mary. All my plans changed after that conversation and I headed home to become a civilian.



CHAPTER 5

The In-Between Years

Rather soon after shedding the uniform I went to work in the traffic department for Delta Airlines in New Orleans. About the same time I joined the Air Force Reserve unit and flew with them until they moved the unit to Barksdale AFB in Shreveport, Louisiana. We'd then fly up every month or so in C-47 Goonie Birds for training, which I'm now sure was a total waste of time.

I learned that the Louisiana Air Guard was forming a Bomb Squadron flying A-26 Douglas attack aircraft. I applied and was accepted and became the Squadron Bomb/Nav. We flew monthly missions and each summer we had a two week deployment to some Southern AF base to sharpen our skills. Our training consisted of bombing, strafing, and navigational sorties.

In 1950, I was promoted by Delta Airlines and put in charge of the Baton Rouge office. Mary and I pulled up stakes and moved to that city. Meanwhile, I still maintained my status with the Air Guard.

We were there a very short time when our Air Guard Unit was alerted for active duty in support of the Korean Conflict. I was called up in March of 1951, and Mary and I once again pulled up stakes and joined the other members of our Squadron as we reported to the Tactical Air Command Base at Langley, Virginia.

Our job at Langley was to upgrade the A-26 crews that were scheduled to deploy to Korea. That seemed like no problem UNTIL we were told that part of that training was to teach the crews how to bomb

using the Shoran Bombing equipment. There was not one of the Bombardier/Navigators in our Squadron who had ever seen that equipment, let alone knew how to teach someone else how to use it!

Naturally a bit of panic and concern, coupled with a sense of urgency, set in. We first attempted to teach ourselves how to use the equipment so that we could effectively do what we were recalled to do.

I guess we did do something right since we didn't get fired, although based on the bombing results I saw, I would have to say that the North Koreans had little to fear from Shoran bombing - at least not from those crews going through Langley on their way to Korea.

I once again considered staying on active duty, and after consulting with the boss, Mary, I put in my papers to resign from the Guard and entered back on the rolls of the Air Force. Once that happened I was transferred into the Strategic Air Command (SAC), reporting to a B-29 outfit, the 301st Bomb Wing at Barksdale AFB at Shreveport, Louisiana. My sojourn with the Air Guard came to an end leaving me with many new found friends and lots of fond memories.



CHAPTER 6

The Strategic Air Command

Selecting Barksdale AFB as my base of choice was for a purely personal reason - it was close to home. Barksdale's Bomb Wing was an Atomic capable unit. At the time of that assignment, I had never seen a B-29 up close, and I knew nothing about their operations, and for certain I knew absolutely nothing about the workings of the Atomic Bomb as it related to a Bombardier's responsibilities.

You can see then the utter shock I got when I reported in and was told that I was being placed on a Select Crew. That was a crew that had been rewarded with that honor by virtue of doing all phases of their training in an outstanding manner. Crews not attaining this level of proficiency were called Ready Crews, and they were in the largest category of a group's crew roster. To add to my already shocked system, I was told the crew was scheduled to go, within three weeks, to the Select Crew Evaluation School at MacDill AFB, Florida. There they would be tested on their ability to do their jobs at this expected high level of proficiency. Fail and back to Ready Status we'd go - and I had yet to even see the inside of a B-29!

I was informed that a vital part of a Bombardier's job on the B-29 was to arm the Bomb just prior to reaching a turn point, known as the initial point (IP) at which time the bomb run was initiated. I shall go into this a bit later. Suffice to say, I had to attend a ground school on this procedure and of course do it correctly in the air.

So, in three weeks time I was expected to attend the Atomic Bomb Ground school, learn the intricacies of bombing from a B-29 (radar as well as visual), and most importantly learn how to and practice arming the bomb in-flight. I had not heard of Xanax at that time, otherwise I think I would have become hooked on 'em!

I was scheduled to meet my fellow crew members the next morning on the flight line next to our assigned aircraft, which I did. Now most Air Force crews meld pretty well together, even though there may be a bit of differences now and then. This is a normal expectancy. As I approached the assigned aircraft, I saw two officers pushing each other, both uttering some not so nice choice words. It turned out to be my Aircraft Commander and the Radar Navigator. What a great way to meet the guys you might have to go to war with! I might add that the reason we met next to the aircraft was because we were to wash the plane with long brushes and water! Did I ever think I surely made a mistake coming to this unit?

And so the three weeks training commenced, consisting of three or four flights, hours of ground school on The A-Bomb, and what other crew responsibilities went along with being on a B-29. It was three weeks of very long hours of studying and hoping to learn what I had to do. The set-to I viewed between the Pilot and Radar Nav when I first met my crew did not abate. These gents really did not care for each other at all. What a crew, and this was one of SAC's best! I also learned that my Aircraft Commander had a real short fuse and most of the crew really tippy-toed around him.

As stated earlier, it was the Bombardier's duty to arm the bomb in-flight. The plane was depressurized, necessitating the use of a walk-around oxygen bottle when opening the hatch door that lead into the bomb bay to reach the bomb. I sat on the hatch door frame, removed a metal plate on the front of the bomb, reached inside and removed and stored odd shaped explosive blocks. I then placed the fission material into the bomb. Once that had been accomplished, the explosive blocks had to be re-inserted, the plate re-attached, the hatch closed, and I headed back to the bombsight to get ready for the bomb run. If I recall correctly, all this was a 10-15 minute job. Now sitting in a classroom is one thing but it sure was another thing doing this procedure sitting on the hatch, colder than you know what, bouncing around and being scared to death you were going to drop something or blow up the plane. Where was Xanax when you needed it!

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Time flew by rather rapidly, and before we knew it we were off to MacDill AFB and our Select Crew evaluation. I might add that during those three weeks our Pilot was a nervous wreck. There were constant arguments with other crew members about their ability to perform up to his standards - so much for crew integrity.

When we were scheduled for the Bombing sortie, I felt fairly certain that things would go well. So much for dreaming! On all the missions I flew, I had maps of the route, and knew precisely where we were to initiate the procedure whereby I was to arm the bomb. The Navigator, of course, also has this info and on the pilot's map and it was so marked. As we approached the point the Navigator advised the Pilot it was time to initiate the arming process. The intercom conversation then turned into an argument between those two. The Pilot told the Navigator that he was wrong and that we were not at that point. We actually were.

All the time that argument was taking place my time to arm the bomb and get back to the bombsight was being reduced. I finally had to jump in and tell the Pilot if I did not arm the bomb at that moment, I could not do so in time to complete the bombing portion of the mission. That made it my time to get yelled at, but at least I got the go-ahead to do my job. I could not finish in time to be on the bombsight in order to make a decent bomb run, and it showed in the not too good results.

All the time that this absolute lack of crew professionalism was transpiring, the SEG Evaluator was writing profusely on his note pad. Needless to say we failed the evaluation and returned to Barksdale to await our fate. The next afternoon, we were called into the Squadron's briefing room and noticed that the Pilot and Radar Operator were not in attendance. We were advised that the Pilot had been transferred to Air Sea Rescue in Alaska, and the Radar Operator was also transferred out, to a destination unknown. Our new Pilot was a West Point Grad, and the new Radar Operator was a seasoned veteran. Both of them fit very well with the rest of the crew and things got much better.

On one of our training missions, we flew to the Gulf area, dropped a dummy Atomic Bomb on the range off of Eglin AFB, and headed home. Right after we departed the range, one of the gunners said he smelled fuel and I was told to go back and check it out. The B-29 when configured to carry the A-Bomb, had the bottom of the rear

bomb bay sealed, and a large rubberized bladder was placed in that area as an added fuel tank. When I entered that area I stepped into a pool of fuel. The bladder had sprung a leak somewhere and was leaking fuel quite profusely. I could not see where, and even if I could have, there was nothing I could do about it. I hustled back to the cockpit to inform the pilot of what I had found and he immediately ordered all non-essential electrical equipment be turned off as we made a bee-line for home. Since we didn't wish to turn on any electrical equipment, lowering the landing in the normal way became a no-no, meaning we had to hand-crank those monstrous wheels down. Now guess who got "volunteered" for that duty? Yep, you're right, me! I don't know how many of you readers have ever hand cranked down the landing gear of a B-29, but let me tell you it was no picnic. I think it took about 30 minutes or so to do, and I ended up so stiff in my back and arms that it took awhile before I was back to normal. But, at least we got down safely and that's the name of the game.

The Wing deployed to England for a three or four month period and on one mission, I flew as the substitute Bombardier with another crew for some reason or other. At one point during the flight I thought of our Co-pilot on the B-17 who flew as a substitute crew member and it cost him his life. The weather was rather "iffy" on take-off, and the forecast for our return was not very good either, although our alternate fields in Europe were okay. So off we went on a 12-hour flight into the Mediterranean Sea area.

Returning home, the Command Post at Brize Norton, our home base in England, kept advising us that the weather was not good, and might get worse. We were constantly being advised that our alternates were okay and that it was alright to return as planned. As we approached the English Coast, the Command Post advised us that the field had just gone below minimums and lo and behold our alternate fields had also gone below minimums! I think that is called "up the creek without a paddle." We were given the option of trying to return, and make a couple of passes and if not successful, we could head the aircraft towards the North Sea and bail out. Great choices! Now on this crew (and this is the God's honest truth) the pilot wore glasses thicker than mine ever were and the co-pilot had a hearing problem and was flying on a waiver. Keep this thought in mind as you will see that it comes into play a bit later on.

Chapter 6 – The Strategic Air Command

As we started descending into this dense fog, the Ground Control Approach (GCA) folks took over and started us on a straight-in approach to the runway. In the meantime I'm standing between the two pilots, don't know why, but I was doing my crew duty - which at this time was praying. Then, to top off our troubles, the radios started acting up with lots of static. As we approached minimums, GCA kept saying, "On course, on the glide path. You are at minimum altitude, over the end of the runway, you should see the runway lights." No luck here, so we were advised to pull up and GCA would take us around for another go at it. That we did with similar results. By then we were practically out of fuel with just enough to make one more pass, and if we couldn't make it, climb out towards the North Sea and bail out. Great options - middle of winter, dense fog, with no telling what fate awaited us if we did bail out.

Remember, all this was taking place in the dead of winter with storms, fog, and snow all over the British Isles and Europe. We certainly were not wearing Artic flying gear, and add to that, the idea of jumping into the freezing waters of the English Channel with little chance of a rapid rescue did not have much appeal. We were told not to bail out over the English countryside, since they did not wish for the plane to hit a populated area when crashing.

The Pilot then started to reiterate our plight and options and, after a short discussion, we all agreed with the pilot that we didn't wish to bail out. We decided that once we were over the end of the runway, he would chop the power, and pray like hell that we hit the runway without crashing and stay on it long enough to stop. The standard operating procedure for aircraft, with two pilots onboard, descending for a landing in "weather", is for one to stay on the instruments, and the other look for the landing strip. That was exactly what our two pilots did on those approaches. However, remember I mentioned the sight and hearing status of these two gentlemen and the static on the radio? Well, as we made this last approach, with the GCA instructions being garbled due to the static, the pilot with the glasses yelled out to the co-pilot with the hearing problem, "Do you see anything?" and the copilot said "No, can you hear anything?" I'm standing between them ready to poop in my pants. I realize I'm with pilots who can't hear or see too well!

At any rate, the Good Lord was surely watching out for us and when GCA said we were over the end of the runway, the pilot chopped the throttles, we hit, bounced a little and both pilots started hitting the

brakes hard. Miraculously, we finally came to a stop. That fog was so thick that we stayed put on the runway for hours because trucks could not see the runway in order to drive out and pick us up. The GCA personnel were Johnny-on-the-Spot and very, very good at their jobs. The front-end crew made a trip out to their operations to personally thank them for doing such a good job. I also made it my duty to thank those two pilots for doing a great job.

One thing that was fairly standard for a B-29 was that when an engine catches fire on takeoff, the odds are pretty good that you're going to crash. I witnessed this once. It was not a pretty sight. On one fairly foggy morning, we took off from Brize Norton, and the moment we broke ground, the number one engine burst out in flames. We were in the fog bank and looking out at that burning engine giving off this red glow in the fog surrounding us was pretty eerie. GCA had us on their radar scopes and vectored us around for a quick landing. In the meantime we could not extinguish the flames. If we could have then we probably would have flown around some to burn off fuel since we were rather heavy to attempt even a normal landing. Not putting out the fire eliminated any standard operating procedures and safety of the crew became paramount. We were too low to bail out if it became necessary, so the name of the game was to get the aircraft back on the ground ASAP. Once again GCA and the pilot and co-pilot did outstanding jobs in doing just that. I survived another scare. I should have been gray haired by the time I was 35!

We returned to Barksdale, and I applied for, and was accepted to attend Radar/Nav School. I had enough of B-29 crew duty. I'm not sure, but I think that the B-29 aircraft didn't like me. We had then become a foursome with the arrival of young Steve, so Mary, Sam Jr., Steve, and I, loaded down with scads of diapers, headed for Ellington Field in Houston for the first phase of training, and who knew what lay ahead after that.



CHAPTER 7

The 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing

I was assigned to the 343rd Strategic Recon Squadron located at Forbes AFB in Topeka, Kansas, where I would be flying the brand new RB-47E six-engine aircraft. My first order of business was finding a place to live. In the early Fifties Topeka was no thriving metropolis and housing availability was not one of its selling points. This was especially true because a new Air Force wing was being assigned there. Mary and I had zero luck finding a place and ended up living in a motel on the northwest side of Topeka and the base was located south of the city. It was great fun, especially with two youngsters running loose.

I had just about given up hope of finding a place when I ran across a milk man making his early rounds. Yes, they did deliver milk back in those days. I asked him if he knew of anyone getting ready to move out, to which he replied that he did not. I then made him an offer that if he did learn of anyone getting ready to move, if he would let me know I'd reward him handsomely. Back then a captain's pay in no way could come close to paying handsomely for anything, but I was desperate. At any rate, about a week later, he called and we got a house. I'm not sure if what he received for the tip matched his idea of "handsome," since he merely mumbled something that I never understood and took his leave. "House" was the operative word here. It was so small that eating any meal had to be accomplished in the kitchen since there was no dining room. Even then my chair straddled the door jam between the kitchen and the front room! But we at least had a house to live in.

Shortly thereafter we moved to a rather large rental complex and stayed until we were told to either buy or move out. We opted to move out and found a nice home not far away. I contracted with an independent mover, not knowing very much about him, and Mary and I started packing up in preparation to move once again. We were scheduled to move on a Sunday morning, since we were required to be out by the next morning. We were up early and started putting boxes, and stuff on the lawn awaiting our mover who was scheduled to be there by 07:30. So, 8 o'clock came, then 9, then 10, and panic began to set in as I could not reach him on the phone. At 12:30 he showed up in a very small, almost a pickup sized truck. As I walked up to the truck, I really got the strong smell of beer coming from inside. If you couple that with him just showing up and having a little truck, I'm sure I asked in a none-too-polite way, "Where have you been and are you going to move my furniture in this little truck?" He looked at me, started rolling up his window and said, "Hell no," and drove off!

We were then in deep trouble. It was Sunday, nothing was open and I had to vacate the premises that day. I made some calls, all to no avail, and frankly we were completely at a loss as to what to do when the phone rang. It was the mover's helper who explained that the truck had broken down on the way to our house, and while it was being repaired, the driver drank some beer. That explained what happened but it surely didn't solve the dilemma I was in. He then offered to help me move if I could rent a truck, which we finally located, and started moving the furniture. We finished up after midnight. A short time later we ended up buying a home where we stayed until I received orders to head for Area 51.

By then it was getting time to upgrade from piston powered aircraft into the beautiful, very fast, six-engine RB-47E Photo Recon aircraft with its three man crew. We kind of mulled around the Ops Building reading manuals waiting for crew assignments and I for one had no clue about who I would be flying with.

Then one day all the Wing's aircrews were assembled in an auditorium to learn with whom we would be flying. There was no special seating arrangements and you sat where you so desired. The process began when a Staff member from each of the four squadrons began calling off the crew numbers and names of the Aircraft Commander, Co-pilot, and Navigator.

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Unbeknownst to me, it so happened that my Aircraft Commander-to-be, James (nickname Pat) Woolbright and co-pilot Willard (nickname Bill) Palm were sitting in the row directly behind me and one seat removed to the right. As each name was called, the individual stood up.

Back in those days my vision wasn't much better than it is today and the glasses I wore were quite thick, like the bottom of a coke bottle. Thin lenses were yet to come.

When my name was called I stood and turned to see those two standing right behind me at which time Pat lets out, in a very loud voice “Good Lord Bill; he's blind!” (Note: for those of you that knew Pat you just know that I cleaned up that utterance quite a bit!) All I could think of was “Holy Cow, here I go again with another lulu of an Aircraft Commander just like my first B-29 Commander!” However, it turned out to be just the opposite. If ever two distinctly different types of individuals were meant to join up to work as a team Pat and I were those two individuals.



Needless to say many guffaws were heard from numerous fellow crew members. At that moment I think I wished I was back in civilian life because I thought for sure that this wasn't going to be a bed of roses. How right I was! However, it certainly wasn't from the negative

side - far from it. Great flying skills and barrels of laughter. It must have worked well as we became a Standboard Crew (evaluates other crews ability to perform their assigned missions), Instructor Crew, and a Select Crew and later on given Spot Promotions to Major when we began flying the RB-47 H aircraft.

I flew with one Aircraft Commander for near to eight years - that being Pat. I also lived two distinct aircrew member lives. One was on the ground, having absolutely no idea what shenanigans Pat would be into from one minute to the next, and the other being that of flying with the most professional Aircraft Commander (in the air that is) with whom I ever flew. And this group includes my Aircraft Commanders in B-17, A-26, B-29 as well as the RB'S and various others such as the AC-130, KC-97, KC-135, and T-39 aircraft.

I also had the opportunity to judge other Aircraft Commanders, and how they ran their crews while flying as an Instructor Navigator and as a Stand Board Evaluator, and it surely reinforced my opinion of Pat as being an outstanding Aircraft Commander.

He must have been doing something right judging from the fact that we made Select Crew and more importantly judging from the Co-Pilots (Palm, D. L. Thomas, Tesi and maybe one more, not too sure) that moved up to Aircraft Commanders status. He must have been a good teacher.

After a very short while, small groups of designated crews headed to McConnell AFB, located at Wichita, Kansas, to begin checking out in our brand new RB-47E aircraft. What a beauty she was. This was a very short temporary duty (TDY) then back to Forbes to really begin our upgrade to Ready crew status.

Most of our flights were made during daylight hours due to the nature of our mission, i.e. photos, and to develop our navigational skills. Using a hand held sextant the Co-Pilot would "shoot" the Sun and I would do the calculations, plotting, and provide compass headings to the Aircraft Commander. We did however, fly some night missions where we honed our night celestial skills by "shooting" the stars to plot our position.

On practically every mission we flew, there was at least one aerial refueling. Pat was excellent in this endeavor. Once again I judged this

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by flying with other crews and seeing the "disconnects" (also known as falling off the boom) that occurred with other Aircraft Commanders during the refueling process.

As I stated earlier, in my opinion Pat was a superb flyer, yet on the ground there was no telling what was going to happen next, mostly of a hilarious nature. Here are a couple of cases in point. Giving a 38-caliber hand gun to Pat and asking him to hit a target, even the size of a barn, was like saying you were going to win the lottery. It just wasn't going to happen. He was lucky if he even hit the ground within 50 feet of the target. He had the same aptitude in the basic judo skills we were being taught to defend ourselves in case we were shot down over the bad guy's countryside. That was brilliant thinking by some loony upstairs to think that we would have the where-with-all to fight fully armed Soviets with the judo we were taught, or rather was exposed to. Pat was as nimble as an elephant. It was worth the price of admission just to watch him attempt to throw his judo opponent. He kept us in stitches laughing so hard.

On one particular day, the judo Instructor was getting all over Pat for being so slow in catching on to the moves he was showing us. Finally Pat had enough and said to this young Corporal "Son, I can't hit the side of a barn with my pistol, so I'm going to fire away, hit absolutely nothing, make the bad guys mad, then throw the empty gun at these fully armed Russians and when they get real close, do you REALLY think I'm going to spring my judo on them so I can escape? The only moves I'm gonna make is to fling my gun away and raise my arms as high as they'll go, yell 'Komarad', and pray like hell." The poor young Corporal had no clue how to react to Pat's outburst so he just shook his head, turned around, and left. Pat never went to another judo class, and to my knowledge nothing ever came up regarding his judo training, or lack thereof.

Headquarters was constantly taking every precaution and making great efforts to insure that aircrews were being trained to handle any and all situations that may arise. This included skills such as learning how to evade (God forbid) if you ever ended up in the bad guy's territory. Naturally we may have to do so in all kinds of weather conditions, and that included winter conditions. So in addition to training us to become judo and pistol experts (bit of humor here) to defeat the enemy during hand to hand combat, we also needed to be

exposed to survival possibilities, such as eating off the land and coping with any weather related conditions.

Now I'm quite sure many of us who were fortunate enough to experience those training exercises did benefit to some degree by having done so. How much so I leave to those who may have participated to come to their own conclusion. From my standpoint, silence is the most prudent way to express my opinion.

And so it was that crew R-38 headed to a beautiful lake area in Topeka, in the middle of February. The temperature was below freezing, and snow was up to our eyeballs. No food was to be taken along on the trek and we were supposed to chop through the ice to catch fish and trap animals to provide meat for the table. Yeah!

Our quarters were superb. We had one large parachute hanging from a tree, with a small log triangle inside it where we were to keep a small fire going to keep from freezing to death. We should have paid closer attention to that initial lecture.

In the evening Pat took the first watch, I took the second, and Palm the third. Our ground rules stated for us to keep the fire small. I woke Bill at the appropriate time and dozed off only to be awakened some time later by Bill screaming that he was on fire. He kept yelling that he couldn't unzip his sleeping bag! Bill had disregarded the instructions about making a small fire, and had a real big fire going in the center of the parachute shelter and evidently a spark had fallen on the lower part of his sleeping bag, since there was a small smoldering hot spot on the foot of it. It was certainly not a life threatening catastrophe but it seemed that way to Bill. Now Bill Palm was a big man and his antics in jumping around that parachute tent with the foot of his sleeping bag almost on fire, seemed like the funniest thing that both Pat and I had ever witnessed. Needless to say we both burst out laughing while all the time Bill, doing his best rendition of an Indian Rain Dance, yelling he was going to kill the both of us when he got out of the sleeping bag. We finally wrestled him to the ground in the snow outside the tent and all was well. He didn't kill us.

Bright and early the next morning our first lesson consisted of taking an axe, a safety pin bent in the form of a hook, and being told to go chop through the ice, catch some fish, and have a hearty meal. After a strenuous attempt to do that, we found that the faster we chopped, the

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faster the ice seemed to freeze and thicken and the more frustrated we became. The results of our efforts were no fish and therefore no breakfast.

Next we went into the hunter mode by making snares to trap any thing that hopped or crawled. We had the same results - notta. Considering that this area was used by many crews there probably weren't any more creatures left to snare. Nature's Supermarket was bare.

Now those that knew Pat also knew that if you wanted Pat to do something, just tell him not to do it and it would be done. So it came to be that when the rules stated bring to no food to the exercise, Pat brought candy bars.

Along around noon one day as we were sitting in our warm quarters, Pat started laughing to beat the band and yelling he was going home. Come to find out he had taken a bite of his frozen candy bar and broken a tooth off his bridge and had swallowed it. He later said he told the instructors that he had to go home so that he could look for his tooth and that he couldn't do that out there in the snow. Sure enough, home he went.

I cannot tell you how long it was before Pat quit telling us, in vivid detail, how he searched for that tooth, but it was a long time. He always ended the story by saying no matter how much he washed that tooth it still tasted like you know what. Pat Woolbright was one of a kind.

Now after the judo, pistol and survival training it became most apparent to us that we would be in deep doo-doo if things went bad and we ended up in the bad guy's territory. We'd probably survive but based on what we'd been taught, it sure wasn't going to be a cake walk.

When it was decided to take the RB-47E aircraft to Forbes AFB Kansas, it was known that the runways were too short to allow for take offs of fully loaded birds. That was especially true during July and August when it really does get hot there. Therefore negotiations were started to have the entire Wing move to the Ben Guerir Air Base located in French Morocco while they lengthened the runways. And thus it was decreed that we got to spend a few months at that quaint old French Air Base.

Once again I was privileged to enjoy the company of large flies and lots of dust. We did get to visit Marrakech a few times and took in the sights of the Belly Dancers with live snakes draped around necks, eat couscous, and drink bad French wine.

That brings to mind two incidents that happened, one scary and the other rather funny.

We had a Wing Commander that was totally engrossed in his Wing amassing as many flying hours possible. The accomplishments were important, but above all else he wanted to get in those hours by any means necessary. On one mission we took off and shortly afterwards rendezvoused with our aerial tanker. The refueling receptacle on our aircraft was directly above the Navigator's position, and as we started taking on fuel I began to see a mist forming throughout my work area. It was jet fuel leaking and spraying in a mist fashion throughout the area. I was totally soaked, my maps and work station were rather wet, and once again where were the Xanax when they were needed. I called Pat and he immediately broke off the refueling process. He then called the Command Post requesting permission to scrub the mission and return back to base. They refused, advising Pat that the air circulating through the plane would eventually "dry Sam out." So, we were instructed to fly until we reached the fuel limits requiring us to land. I guess they knew what they were doing, cause we didn't blow up, but I sure was a nervous individual during the rest of that flight.

As to the kind of funny story, it goes back to our living quarters. It was the combining of two GI tents put together, making one part the sleeping quarters for six crew members and the front half a somewhat lounge area with a table and benches. We routinely visited the French Commissary and picked up cheese, French bread, sausages, etc. and ate in our tent rather than eat the lousy mess hall chow. We were furnished a young Moroccan lad who made the bunks, cleaned and mopped (mopped being the operative word here), and washed the plates and eating utensils. One day we were scheduled for a flight and had aircraft problems so the mission was cancelled. We returned to our quarters in time to see the young lad mopping the floor. When he finished he wrung out the mop in this big bucket, and threw our plates and eating utensils into the same bucket that he had just used to mop the floor! We reported this to the Flight Surgeon since the rest of the clean up guys

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were probably doing the same thing. For weeks I wondered if I was going to catch some strange Moroccan virus, diarrhea, the crud, go blind or Heavens knew what. Evidently good old American libations have healing powers unknown to mankind. We probably photo mapped the breath and width of North Africa during our stay and to my knowledge no one succumbed to the Moroccan Mop Virus. After a while we packed our bags and the Wing headed back to the good old U S A.

After returning from our sojourn to the lovely (tongue in cheek here) French Moroccan countryside, we returned to Forbes and continued our Photo Recon training. Now there were many memorable moments associated with being on Pat's crew and this is one of them that falls into the remember category. Pat, Bill Palm and myself were assigned to ferry an RB-47E aircraft to Warner Robbins AFB in Marietta, Georgia, where it would undergo some type of modification. We were then scheduled to pick up a modified bird and return to Forbes on the same day.

It so happened that the aircraft scheduled for pickup was not ready and we needed to spend the night at Marietta. There was no room in the Visiting Officer's Quarters, so into town we headed to stay in a local hotel.

We checked into the hotel around 5 pm, and went down for dinner a bit later, stopping at the bar for one drink. I might add that I never ever saw Bill Palm take a sip of any alcoholic beverage. Pat and the bar tender starting having a great time just jawing about absolutely nothing in particular. We finally went in to eat and returned to the bar for a nightcap, and around 9:30 Bill and I said we were heading for the sack. Pat in the meantime was back having more deep conversations with the bar tender and stated that he'd be up in a few moments. I had no idea as to the time he retired since we had separate rooms. Pat was not drinking when we left. The next morning we headed for the Air Base and climbed aboard the RB to head back to Forbes. Back in the 50's the US was divided into four areas, called Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ). As you flew from one to another, your planned flight path had to identify where, when, and the time you would pass zones. It was a real sunny day, and Pat kept saying he was sure sleepy and that the sun beating down on the Plexiglas canopy sure wasn't helping. He finally said he couldn't keep his eyes open and for me to swap places and he'd close his eyes for a bit down in my nice and cool area.

As I settled down in Pat's seat I asked if I could take the controls and feel like a pilot. He said "why not," then told Palm, "for Pete's sake watch him and don't let him kill us." Off went the auto pilot, and I was fulfilling my dream. I was in control of that big beautiful aircraft and I started making gentle turns to the right, then to the left, always returning to the correct compass heading. Suddenly on each of our wings, there flew an Air Defense Interceptor. I'm not sure if it was Palm or I who first noticed them, but I am certain we violated our planned flight plan when crossing from one ADIZ to the next one. Now there was nothing Pat disliked more than fighter pilots, so when we told Pat what was transpiring, his retort was to roll up our fists, stick up one finger and ignore the so-and-so's (very much cleaned up words here.) Neither Palm nor I did that. I smiled and waived at them and shortly afterwards they peeled off and headed home. When we landed, and were taxiing in, we got a call from the Command Post telling us that as soon as we deplaned we were to report immediately to our Squadron Operation's Office. When we entered the office I noticed there were some fellow officers there, all with big grins on their faces. The Operations Officer was holding a yellow telex message, and he started reading the riot act to Pat as to how the heck he'd screwed up in violating the ADIZ, and that the Wing was going to have to pay for the fuel the fighters used up in scrambling up to intercept us. Furthermore, , that the he, as the Aircraft Commander, was going to be responsible for reimbursing the Wing! At that time I was looking at the other guys in the office who were all starting to giggle, when Pat laughing blurted out, "Hey don't blame me, Sam was in the front seat flying the damn airplane and as the Aircraft Commander, he's responsible and he's the guy who should pay!"

And then the Operations Officer said that would be okay with him! By then those guys are falling down laughing and I'm beginning to get a bit nervous about the whole thing. It turned out that the incident had been reported to the Wing, but the paying and other stuff was just a way to get at Pat since he was always pulling stuff on others. I never heard another word about it, however my Aircraft Commander days had ended.

Not too long thereafter, the mission of the 55th changed and along with it came a change in the type RB-47 we were flying. The Wing went from Photo Recon to Electronic Data Collection missions flying in the H model of the RB-47. We also had a change in crew structure.

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We became six man crews adding three Electronic Warfare Officers, commonly know as Ravens. After a while they were jokingly called Crows, but I won't go into that any further about what the letters stand for. We flew different types of sorties preparing for our eventual role in gathering Electronic Intelligence. That was a role that had been ably conducted in the past by Crews flying RB-29 and RB-50 aircraft. Those sorties would be flown out of bases in Japan, Turkey, England, Thule Greenland, and Alaska. It certainly affected the crew members' home lives, since each base would be manned by three or so crews stationed on a temporary duty (TDY) deployment. Each TDY could last three or four months, equating to crews deploying every 18 months or so. That was not too good for family togetherness. The missions were fraught with danger, since at times the Soviets reacted by shooting at or downing our aircraft, even though we were over International waters. More on this later. Our crew training went well, noted by the fact the Aircraft Commander, the Raven One and myself were awarded Spot Promotions to the Rank of Major, and our crew was designated a Select Crew.

Now as we were going through this new training, the Gods that watch over crew survival techniques struck again. Somehow only Pat and I were scheduled to go to the last of the survival training schools. Why the others were not sent, I do not know, but anyway off we went to Stead AFB in Reno Nevada to again learn how to starve (as if we ever forgot) and climb mountains while doing so.

In the Air Force, back in the 50's, the Aircraft Commander was THE man. All others fell in behind and marched to his tune (except for Pat, but he was of a different breed, not too sure which one though). As we reported in at Reno they put us in teams of 10, with crew status not being a factor. It so happened that my Date of Rank made me the leader of our group, meaning that I got to tell Pat what to do. As we started out in the hills, I saw Pat skinning off the bark of a five foot or so branch, and when I asked what it was for, he replied it was his "Don't mess with me, Sam!" stick, and if I did he was going to whack me with it (once again language cleaned up!) I learned early on to always stand behind someone when giving out instructions. After a few days traipsing through the mountains while swapping off carrying what seemed like a 100 pound radio, we learned once again how to starve as we caught no fish, snared no animals, and survived on dandelion soup flavored with wild onions.

On our return home we were alerted for our first deployment. We would be spending Christmas at the North Pole, or very close to it, at Thule AFB, Greenland. A few days after our arrival, it became dark 24 hours a day. Our missions took us over the Pole, thence along the Russian coastline from Murmansk to Alaska. After take off we hooked up with our KC-97 aerial tankers, at least four to six per sortie, and took fuel from each. One tanker could not give us our total fuel requirement and have enough left to make it back to Thule. All of our missions were flown in absolute radio silence, and in pitch darkness, and in some instances right over or near the North Pole. Standard navigational procedures practiced in the States did not apply when flying in the far north latitudes. New procedures had to be developed and learned. The tankers did have running lights that we could see from quite a distance off, however, judging the distance when getting in close was rather touchy. It was my job, using my radar, to call off these distances until hook up. Sliding from one tanker to the next, in pitch darkness, with these lines abreast of five or six tankers was quite a feat and Pat, and others like him, certainly earned their pay on those sorties.

When flying in the Polar Regions we could not utilize the standard maps and navigation procedures we used in the States. That was due to the extreme fluctuations of the magnetic fields in that area of the world. Magnetic compasses simply do not work in the polar areas. We utilized the Gyro Compass and updated it with celestial shots of the North Star.

On one particular mission we took off in cloud formations that lasted for an extremely long time en route to the area of interest and we weren't able to take a fix on the North Star. As a consequence when we returned to base, I adapted a variance to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which worked just fine. When I returned to Forbes after our tour, I submitted the procedure to SAC Headquarters and it was accepted.

We encountered no Soviet Fighters during our tour at Thule, and I rather think that this did not occur for a couple of reasons. First off, it was the dead of winter and due to lousy flying conditions, perhaps the Soviets had shut down their far North Interceptor units. The second reason being, perhaps the Soviets had not employed radar installations capable of intercepting our aircraft. This latter reason being precisely why we were conducting these sorties - to find out just what was the Soviet capability to intercept our bombers in the advent of hostilities.

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To elaborate further on just how concerned our government was with regards to the Soviets' advancement with defensive/offensive systems, I enclose an article I wrote concerning one of our classified missions conducted during the early days of the Cold War. I did not however participate in these particular missions.

This honors those Air Crews and the outstanding Maintenance and other Support troops who participated in Operation Home Run.

OPERATION HOME RUN

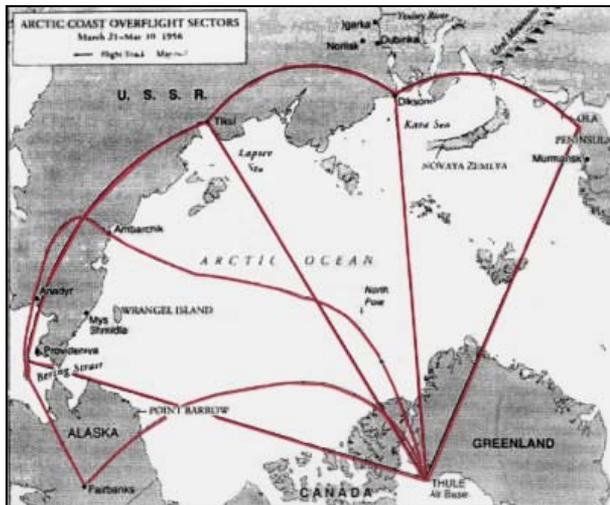
In early 1956 President Eisenhower authorized Photo and Electronic overflight missions of the entire northern slope and interior portions of the USSR from the Kola Peninsula to the Bering Straits, an approximate 7000 mile round trip. Missions would be flown out of Thule AFB Greenland. Accordingly, sixteen photo capable RB-47E model aircraft of the 10th Recon Sq from Lockbourne AFB, four RB-47H Electronic collection capable aircraft from the 343rd SRS and the 38th SRS Forbes AFB, plus 27 KC-97 Air refueling Tankers from various Air Force Bases along with various Squadron Maintenance and other Supporting Personnel of the 55th SRW were directed to take part in this Operation.

The four Crews selected were:

38th SRS		38th SRS	
AC	B Barrett	AC	R Campbell
CP	D Waller	CP	J Gyulavics
N	J McDonnell	N	P Caselton
R1	Phil Mitchell	R1	B Rosser
R2	S Elliott	R2	P Fortin
R3	Bill Kane	R3	T Everling
343rd SRS		343rd SRS	
AC	D Grant	AC	R Hubbard
CP	D Wells	CP	C Aslund
N	A Benziger	N	R Mayer
R1	C Waters	R1	G Duer
R2	C R Smith	R2	R Thompson
R3	N Yanuzzi	R3	M Sawyer

C Hunter Smith and G Finefrock each flew one sortie.

Missions would be flown between 21 March and 10 May 1956. A total of 156 combined aircraft sorties were flown during Operation Home Run. In 2001 the mission details were declassified and this is their story.



GENERAL ZONES OF INTEREST

During the 1956 time frame of the Cold War era, if the Cold War had turned into a Hot War, many of the SAC Bombers would penetrate Russia via the over the Pole flight plan when en route to their targets. It was of paramount interest to know what capabilities the Soviets possessed within the Northern Coastline, with regards to defensive as well as offensive Weaponry.

Areas of interest such as naval installations, airfields, radar sites, Atomic Energy Facilities, large industrial complexes, port facilities, missile sites, plus others would be of prime interest to the photo crews whereby our interests was to see what the Soviets had come up with regards to radar capabilities.

Thus, Operation Home Run was born. Some of the cities and points of interest to be over flown were, Dikson, Makarova, Chelyuskin, Ust Olenek, Tiksi, Nordvik, Khorgo Ambarchik, Taltumus, Anadyr, Wrangel Island, Providenya and Novaya Zemlya

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(Banana Island), and Mys Shmidta. This was the real deal. No flying 12 miles off of the coastline for purposes of studying Electromagnetic Wave Propagation. This was it.

Accordingly on March 21, 1956 the four RB47H aircraft departed for Thule AFB Thule Greenland, and deplaning was greeted by a 35 degrees BELOW freezing temperature. And of course there was total darkness at this time of the year in the Arctic.

All told, twenty RB's and 27 KC 97 Tankers were operating out of a base certainly not designed for this magnitude of operations. For instance none of the RB's had hangers and all maintenance, refueling operations etc, were conducted outdoors in 35 degree below freezing weather conditions which included blowing snow adding to the chill factors.

There is not enough praise that can be given to the dedicated Crew Chiefs, maintenance and ground support personnel who performed yeoman duty under the worst weather conditions imaginable. Line Chief Kitchens and his Crew Chiefs F Filburn, J Rodecap, L Ross and G Grenrke deserve the highest of praise for their efforts. Those efforts certainly added to the success of the mission.

Adding to the woes of just having below freezing weather there was ice on the runway. As fighters would take off on their daily routine air patrols, their jet blasts would melt the snow which would then turn to ice. Made takeoffs and landings most thrilling!



Thule AFB Greenland - May 1956

Secrecy was of paramount importance. It is doubtful that 55th Hdqrs or the Squadron staffs had any insight as to what their crews were involved in. Individual crews at Thule were instructed not to discuss any facet of their missions with their counterparts. Each flight element which might be a two or three ship flight (one H accompanying one or two E models) would brief separately, i.e. an element only knew what they would be doing that day. This policy of secrecy remained in effect until 2001 when the missions were declassified. All flights were conducted in radio silence, with hand signals being used between aircraft in flight. The RB's did monitor single Side Band Radio in case of recall, but absolutely no outgoing calls were permitted and none were ever reported on 156 sorties.

Aircraft formations varied mission to mission. In some instances aircraft were in trail formation, i.e. the RB H model flew approximately one mile or so behind the RB E model aircraft. At other times they were flying in tight formation, i.e., a wing length to the side and the same distance to the rear of the RB E model aircraft. Yet on other occasions the H model aircraft did not see the RB E model aircraft.

Distances involved on these missions required that the mission aircraft have a specific on board fuel load at a given point of the route. If attempting to obtain this amount, usually around 20,000 lbs from a single tanker, it would leave the tanker with insufficient fuel to return to Thule. On some of the longer missions, two separate refuelings were required. Thus two or three tankers would fly abreast for each aircraft in the element, each to offload an amount less than the total required. The RB's would take on a certain amount of fuel from one tanker then slide over to the next tanker getting the balance of fuel required to go the distance.



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Soviet response to Operation Home run from the standpoint of fighter intercepts reflected quite a few attempts, however in all instances they were most ineffective. There were no reports of missile firings. Basically, with regards to Fighters, it should be noted perhaps that the Soviets, during this time frame, shut down some of their fighter bases in the area due to the harsh winter weather conditions.

As to the results of the mission, we shall probably never know. All data, Photo and Electronic, was sent back to SAC Headquarters. Crews were never briefed on their accomplishments. Due to the fact that there is no official documentation available, sortie and overflight data has been derived from information gathered from various crew members. The average number of sorties flown by each crew is estimated to be between eight and ten with half of those being overflights.

What can be determined however, is the outstanding performance given by the Air Crews of the 343rd and 38th Squadrons and Ground personnel of various Units of the 55th SRW in meeting the goals of this operations, and doing so under the harshest of weather conditions. Flight crews were awarded DFC'S or AM'S for their efforts.

After the Soviets complained about the overflights, President Eisenhower responded, with tongue in cheek...“Must have been Navigational errors.” Wow! On ALL those overflights! SAC must have had some really inept Navigators back in those days! (This, by the Author, also said with tongue in cheek.)



Aerial View of Thule AFB - Circa March-May 1956

Author's Comments...

My thanks to those who provided material and support in the writing of this significant event. Prior to publication, this article has been reviewed by various participants of the Operation and deemed correct in content.

END OF ARTICLE

We continued to fly our assigned missions and as stated earlier, they were routine. That is if you can call routine being all by your lonesome flying in total darkness, right off the Arctic Russian land mass, while listening to Soviet radio chatter as they search for you and praying your radar doesn't go on the fritz.

Back on the ground at Thule, during the non-flying days, it really was routine day in day out. Every day was the same. We got up not too early, bundled up like an Eskimo, went to the O' Club for breakfast, hit the Base Exchange to see if any new gadgets had come in overnight, back to the O' Club, ate lunch, read a bit, back to the Base Exchange to see if any new gadgets had come in since you left about two hours earlier.

Take in the early movie then back to the O' Club for Happy Hour cocktails, dinner, perhaps have some after dinner libation, play cards or

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watch the movie the O' Club was showing, which was the same one you had seen earlier in the day! After this stimulating day we'd bundle up once more and head back to our reverse refrigerated barracks (kept the cold out) and hit the sack. Talk about a great way to spend your days. Finally, about February, we bundled up for the last time and headed back to the good old US of A.

Some readers may not be acquainted with the humorous antics practiced by some Crew Members of the 55th Strategic Recon Wing throughout the years while on Temporary Duty. If you are old enough to remember, you might recall the scribbling on walls in many places, including bathrooms, which stated "Kilroy Was Here." Well someone, somewhere down the line, changed the phrase to read "Pizzo Was Here!" and with time the custom spread. Over the years I have seen my name on numerous walls and places, some of which I would have preferred not to have seen it scribbled.

In the mid to late Fifties, at certain overseas locations, service men had to sign when purchasing cigarettes. This rule was followed by those staying at the Columbia Club while visiting London. It was a beautiful old English home that had been turned into a quasi Officers' billeting facility and functioned as an unofficial American Officer's Club as well.

Like all other places of lodging, people had to sign their name into the register when they stayed there. I cannot tell when, why, or even who started the practice of signing my name in both instances, but start it did.

I remember checking into the Columbia Club one time, only to find at least ten Pizzo names already on the register. I was even once questioned by the clerk at the Columbia Club as to why I smoked so much since it was really bad for my health. I might add that I didn't even smoke!

One former crew member recalled that the place most known for having my name on the sign ups was the private Reingold Club. He wrote "I was there once and there were already 14 Sam Pizzos signed in." To prove my point, I don't even know where or what the Rheingold Club is.

Once, much later time wise, while assigned to the SAC Recon Center, the 55th threw a costume party, to which I was invited. I wore a black wig, had on dark glasses, a false mustache and goatee, wore my WWII A-2 leather jacket, hung a big gold medallion around my neck, and topped it all off with a large black hat. Absolutely no one knew me, except for one or two crew dogs. While standing at the bar with one of those who knew me, a young Second Looney came up to us and my friend introduced me to him. The young Lieutenant said, "Hey there isn't no real Pizzo; that's just something we all made up to get cigarettes!" I still don't think he ever believed us.

One time a letter was delivered to the 55th addressed to Captain Sam Pizzo; 55th Wing; Topeka, Kansas. It was from some hotel in London demanding that I pay for the damages to a room that I had trashed and left without paying for repairs! Needless to say I wasn't anywhere near London at the time.

Another example on how far this thing went happened at a 55th Reunion some years later when a Two Star General, who at one time was assigned to the 55th, was speaking and said he was surprised to see the name Pizzo on the Roster. He was even more amazed to find out that indeed there really was a guy named Pizzo! I think he said that even he had signed my name somewhere or other.

The final straw though was when I sponsored a reunion at New Orleans in 1989 and at the end of the festivities I was presented with a plaque that said..."Sam Pizzo was here!!!"

I guess Kilroy and I will always be linked somewhat as long as there are old 55th's whose memory banks still work a bit.

I feel that I need to take time to put the record straight before someone writes on my headstone "Pizzo Was Here!" For those that are interested, this book should cover most of the places where I really was and why I was there.

After a couple of months back at Forbes, tragedy struck close to home. Our original Co-Pilot Bill Palm, who was by then an Aircraft Commander having his own crew, was flying off the coast of Murmansk, when Russian Migs attacked and shot down his plane. There were two survivors, the Navigator and Co-Pilot. They said Bill did make it out of his plane but drowned in the frigid Artic waters.

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Bill's remains were returned to the US authorities, and Pat and I accompanied Bill to Arlington National Cemetery, where we were pallbearers at his Military Funeral.

Shortly thereafter, I had a conversation with our Wing Director of Operations, Colonel Bob Holbury, and the subject came up regarding me accepting a Staff job in the Wing. I agreed to do so, and was advised that since we were already scheduled to go on our next TDY, we'd talk upon our return from Japan, our destination.

That time our TDY base was Yakoto AFB and if one had to be away from home, then that was a good place to be. Japan in the 50's had not really been rebuilt so off-base visits, other than Tokyo, were rather restricted and we could not eat at or frequent quite a number of locations.

Now it so happened, that our new Co-Pilot, Don Thomas, and Pat liked to fish and somehow they found a place up in the mountains where they caught lots of green trout and they decided to start catching them, freeze them, and bring a whole batch of them back to Forbes, which was totally verboten! We had refrigerators in our BOQ, and they started stocking them full in the freezer sections. I'll write more on this later.

It so happened that during our TDY time in Japan, the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team was also in Japan playing some exhibition games. On one of my trips into Tokyo, I went into the hotel bar where I was staying, and recognized one of team's pitchers having a drink. Young Sam and I have been and still are avid Cardinal fans and I knew every one of their players by name and position. I easily recognized this gent as being Toothpick Jones, nicknamed "Toothpick" because he had a toothpick in his mouth every time he pitched.

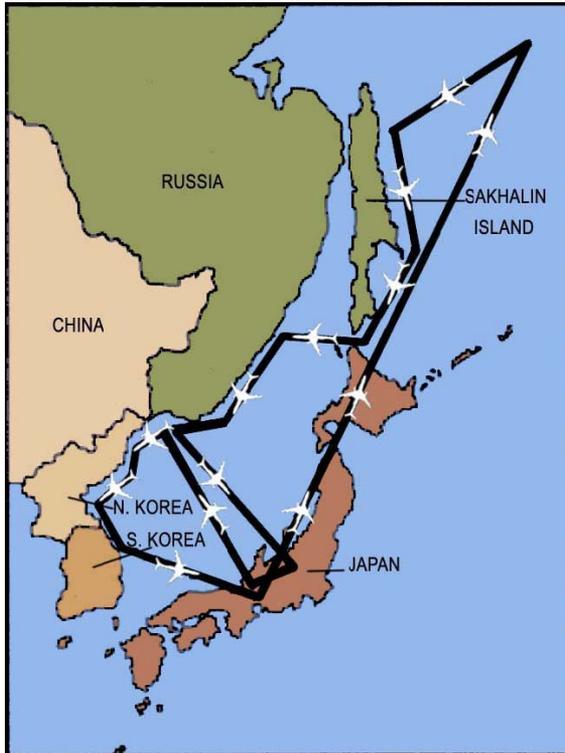
We were chatting away when he asked if I could get him some American cigarettes, and if I could he'd get me a team autographed baseball in return. I jumped at the offer and we made arrangements to meet the next evening at the bar, which we did. Sure enough he presented me with a baseball autographed with the names of Stan Musial, Slat Marion, Red Schoendienst and other star players of that time frame. I was thrilled to death. Sad to say, in one of our moves, that baseball disappeared. I've often wondered how much that ball would be worth on e-Bay today.

Back in those days, there was a custom at Yokoto, whereby as the in-place crew completed their tour and the replacement crew was on the ground and ready to go, a hail and farewell party was scheduled. And so it was for Pat's crew and the replacement crew. Let me give you a bit of enlightenment regarding the definition of a party at the Yokoto O' Club. First off, most all of the TDY'ers gathered at the O' Club every day when they were not scheduled to fly and some were known to imbibe a bit at the club's watering hole - the bar. Dress code was casual, meaning shirt, pants, and shoes. For a party, it was the same set up except perhaps a "Happy Coat" was usually prescribed and maybe it was held in a designated room. However, I'm not sure if anyone would notice or really care if you failed the dress code!

All was in readiness for the shindig when SAC threw a monkey wrench into the plans. On the night that our party was planned they scheduled a high priority mission to collect some data on a suspected new Airborne Intercept Radar that the Soviets were thought to have developed. Unfortunately, we could not reschedule our party due to the unavailability of the O' Club. All we could do now was wish for a miracle!

Now it came to pass that early on during our tour, SAC Headquarters had assigned, full time, a Colonel as the SAC Detachment Commander and he and Pat Woolbright became the fastest of buddies. They were two peas in a pod. That friendship led on occasion to some of us being invited to the Commander's home on the base where his wife provided us a home cooked meal AND he and Pat would imbibe a bit of the spirits.

Not to have a party was totally unacceptable to Pat and his new found friend. I'm not sure who came up with the idea, the Colonel or Pat, but somehow the Colonel persuaded SAC to let us fly a short daylight sortie in the Sea of Japan, in lieu of the normal nighttime mission, which would allow us to then have our party. The route encompassed, as best as an aging data bank can recall, is depicted on the following map.



After takeoff, we headed north exiting Japan and heading into the Sea of Okhotsk. When reaching our northern turn point and turning to parallel Sakhalin Island, we were jumped by at least six Russian Migs. It seems each of them were taking turns going behind and above us then making diving passes at us. The dives culminated with them flying a real tight formation with us including coming up under our wing tips attempting to have Pat turn in towards Russia, which thank goodness he did not do. When Pat and Don knew that we had company, Don asked Pat for guidance with regards to firing the 20mm cannons or not. Pat told Don that with that many Migs, and since they had not fired, it did not seem to be a wise thing to do. We would wait until or if they first started firing at us, and if they did not do so we'd wait and see what they were up to. (Note: For those of you that knew Pat, you know that the language Pat used in giving Don his instructions has been cleaned up considerably for use in this article.)



Perhaps the most tense moment of the Russian Mig encounters occurred when one of the Delta Wing Interceptors approached us from slightly above at the three o'clock position. Barreling towards us, he looked as if he intended to ram us, and at the last moment he veered sharply to the right, blocking us from his view and ending up with his aircraft being directly in front of and slightly below us. We ate a lot of his jet wash. On a pucker scale of one to ten, this was an 11! Don recalls having some worried thoughts as to whether or not the ejection seat would operate properly while facing to the rear. I guess if we had ejected, it would have fallen in the category of On the Job Training for Don. And some folks question why Air Force fliers get retirement benefits! They stayed with us until we reached the Chinese border at which time we broke left towards Japan and they left us. At no time did the big radar site in northern Japan advise us of any Mig activity but we know full well that they had them and us on their scopes.

After reaching Japan and flying south a bit we turned towards the Russian-Chinese border and when we reached our turn point we headed south, paralleling the coastline until we reached our turning point to head back to Japan. Lo and behold, as we made our turn south to parallel the coast we found that we had six or more Chinese Migs doing the exact same thing that the Russian Migs had done earlier! They made diving passes and close formation once again accompanied with much pucker time. The same instructions were given to Don regarding the guns. I cannot speak for others, but I had never flown a daylight sortie while deployed. I know that those who deployed to Thule or Alaska during the summer months did so, but I'm glad I did not have to do so. I did not relish having the opportunity of looking out of my window and being able to see smiling faces of Chinese or Russian pilots who, at any given moment, just might decide to shoot at me.

As many of you who flew out of Japan know, that area of the world has some ferocious west to east jet streams. Some of them have winds exceeding 200 miles per hour, and that's exactly what we ran into about halfway down the Chinese coast.

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Since we had the Migs with us for a while, and all China probably knew where we were by then, I probably had my radar on a bit longer than normal to insure that we would not violate Chinese airspace and give our "friends" a reason to get trigger happy. For that reason I was able to pick up the jet stream rather quickly and have Pat make a heading correction to maintain the proper course. In doing so, a rather large heading change was required, meaning that the nose of the aircraft was somewhat angled towards China. It didn't seem to bother the Migs, but it sure did affect a couple of individuals as you will note later on. Soon thereafter it was "mission complete," puckering time over, time to party and tell heroic tales of how we handled the Migs. As to why either group did not fire, who knows. I guess it just wasn't in the cards that day. I'm pretty sure Roy and the other Ravens collected a lot of data on this one; at least I sure hope so.

Unlike the mission, the party went well judged on the size of the hangover Sunday morning. That is, until a very loud banging on our door took place real early in the morning, followed by the instructions for Pat, Don, and me to get dressed immediately and report to our Ops Office. Upon arrival, we were greeted by some very upset individuals dressed in civvies whom we learned were from the American Embassy in Tokyo. These gents, one of which was really young and obnoxious, immediately started accusing us of creating an international incident by over flying Russian and Chinese territories. I finally got the 0-15 Radar Camera film viewed which I thought would end the matter, but not so. This obnoxious individual noted that the nose of our aircraft was pointed in the direction of China therefore we had to over fly. Remember the jet stream? In spite of the radar film, it took a lot of explanation and patience, to get them to believe that we did not over fly. His theory of our guilt now was that since the nose of the aircraft was somewhat pointed towards the coastline, the Mig pilots had every right to THINK we were going to over fly; therefore, they had every right to report us! They finally agreed with us and departed. We headed back to the sack with a very important lesson learned - **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, YOU JUST MIGHT GET YOUR WISH AND BE SORRY!**

After that it was time to head home. Remember Pat and Don's fish? Well they then came into play. We were scheduled to take-off in the early evening and hit our aerial tanker somewhere north of and off the coast of Japan. The weather was extremely bad with rain,

thunderstorms, and high winds but off we went, with the fish stored in an un-pressurized spot near the tail section of the aircraft. They were placed there because at altitude they would stay frozen. Well soon after take-off the Command Post called us and advised that our tanker had aborted and for us to head back to Yokoto. The only problem was that the field minimums were dropping drastically, and we might not be able to land. We were instructed to descend to a low level to burn off fuel in order to be at a safe landing weight, which placed the fish in a perilous position of defrosting. Pat was in a tizzy. The closer we got to Yokoto, the worse the weather got. Finally we were told to head to the western side of Japan and land at an air base there. That action added both flying and defrost time.

We landed around 2 AM, and a young 2nd Lt Airdrome Officer met us with his Jeep as we deplaned. Pat immediately headed for the fish, grabbed the Lieutenant and his Jeep and headed off to find an open mess hall that had a freezer where he could put the fish. I and the rest of the crew were busting up laughing at these fish saving escapades, although it was not so funny to Pat and Don.

We spent the night there and took off the next evening, and after refueling over Alaska we returned to Forbes. The next concern in the fish saga was hoping that Customs wouldn't show up at the plane since bringing the fish into the US was, as stated earlier, verboten. Pat and Don lucked out, and no Customs Inspector showed up. They had so many fish, that they took them to the O' Club and invited a whole group of officers and their wives to the club for a fish dinner prepared by the club's cooks. All's well that ends well, I guess.

We had been home just a few days when Pat, DL, and I were called into the Wing Commander's office and from his greetings we knew it was not going to be a welcome home visit - far from it. When the first words start out "What the Hell happened and why the Hell didn't you fire at the "expletives?" you know you're in trouble. Pat tried as best he could to explain his rationale (to which I firmly agreed), but the Colonel would have no part of it. Whether or not we were on course in International waters made no difference to him, nor did the fact that there were quite a few bad guys to just one of us made not one iota of difference. He only wanted to know why Pat didn't give DL the okay to fire. His final words to us were that he did not want cowards in his unit.

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Pat and I talked out in the hall and figured there goes our Spot Promotions and who the heck knew what else was coming our way. We sure thought it would not be good though. Surprisingly, that's the last we ever heard about the incident, and we kept our Spot Promotions.

Fairly soon after our return to Forbes, I was called into the DO's office and offered the job of Squadron Navigator, which I accepted. That meant giving up my spot promotion to Major, and leaving a crew, that for nigh on to eight years, was an experience that I have not forgotten to this day. Pat and I were like brothers.

Almost immediately after I officially left the crew, but before I gave up my spot promotion, an order came into the Wing directing a Pilot and Navigator to report for an approximate 30-day TDY at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. There was no mention as to what the assignment entailed.

A Major Puchrik and I reported in as ordered. What I did not know was that Major Puchrik spoke fluent Russian, and that is why he was chosen. Why I was selected left me clueless.

We reported in to an office, I think was called the Foreign Technology Division (FTD), that had the task (I also think) of finding out what the Soviet Air Force capabilities were. Shown below is an article which was printed in the Strategic Air Command's monthly publication, *Combat Crew Magazine*, which I wrote with the help of a SAC publicist, which recorded the events of the assignment. Following that is what was NOT placed in that article.



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED about your Soviet aircrew counterpart? About his equipment, his skill, how he flies his missions and meets his problems, or the consideration he gives safety? I have,

and I was fortunate enough to observe firsthand some of his operations. To make the picture even clearer, I was on a flight where the utmost would be expected a flight with the Soviet premier aboard.

During the trip of Premier Khrushchev to the United States in a TU 114 some months ago the Soviet Union maintained a supply task force to ferry mail and passengers between Moscow and Washington. The supply aircraft utilized was the TU 104. Major Augustine S. Puchrik, SSgt Patrick Pellham and I were assigned as one of the American escort crews to accompany these aircraft on their entries to and exits from the United States. Our job was to insure that correct reporting of ICAO procedures was followed, that no restricted or prohibited areas were over flown, and to operate the radio equipment for mandatory reporting and letdowns.

Soviet routing was from Moscow direct to London, with an overnight stay in London. A British officer boarded the aircraft at London and accompanied it until it returned to that city. The next stop of the flight was Iceland, where we boarded to complete the journey via Gander and thence to Washington. Our first flight was one of three scheduled for round trip service between the two capitals.

Major Puchrik, who speaks Russian fluently, handled all VHF and UHF communications, and Sergeant Pellham operated the CW radio over water. In addition, Major Puchrik had to relay all GCA information and letdown instructions to the Russian crew. At no time were we allowed to operate the equipment other than to transmit radio messages. My job was to monitor the navigation and relay ETAs and ATAs, then pass this data to Major Puchrick, who in turn relayed the data to Air Traffic Control Centers. (Estimated Time of Arrival/Actual Time of Arrival.)

Prior to the arrival of our TU 104 from London, Major Puchrik and I laid out the flight plan based on the Weather Central forecast. The Soviet crew appeared extremely cordial and cooperative and we encountered no difficulty in filing our first joint clearance.



TU 104
Commercial version of
SOVIET BADGER BOMBER

The Soviets use a navigator's log quite similar to the log used on our conventional type aircraft. Little information is placed on the maps. Instead of an E 6B computer, they use a slide rule which is also used for measuring distance. Their maps are quite detailed, resembling our WAC charts rather than our JN type charts. This surprised me somewhat until I later observed that they do a great deal of visual navigation and these charts were excellent for this purpose.

The first takeoff in the TU 104 proved quite interesting and gave me a few extra heartbeats. The aircraft accelerates rapidly. I felt a terrific series of jolts as the aircraft veered to the right and to the left as we progressed down the runway. We used an extreme length of runway for takeoff, and after we were airborne I queried Major Puchrik regarding this. He informed me that the TU 104 has no steering control for takeoff and landing other than braking action. Therefore, each time we veered right or left the brakes had been applied, which induced drag and resulted in slowing of acceleration. This makes it quite interesting with a high crosswind component such as we had during this takeoff roll.

The TU 104 essentially is a modified transport version of the Badger Bomber, lacking of course, the bombing system. The other instruments and computers are those we would normally expect to find in a modern jet transport. The radar set is comparable to our APQ 15. The Loran set is not an advanced type and the Soviet astrocompass could not be construed to be of the latest design. This is understandable, though, as the TU 104 has been flying for quite a few years.

The greatest navigational difference between the Soviets and us is that they made no attempt to use either celestial navigation or their Loran set to navigate the ocean. As a matter of fact, the mount of the sextant, which is located to the rear of the aircraft commander, was covered and no sextant was on board the aircraft! They did strictly radio compass navigation. We homed to ocean weather ship Alpha, from there to the southern tip of Greenland, then to ocean weather ship Bravo, and on to Gander.

Over water flying to SAC crews is commonplace; but as the Soviet Transport Service flies very few over ocean routes, apparently the number of experienced over water navigators is small. Primarily the Soviets rely on radio compass, radar, and visual navigation. This could possibly explain the lack of any other method being employed during our crossing. I made numerous attempts to ascertain this, but to no avail.

The Soviet navigator encountered radar trouble during the flight when his scope turned 180 degrees out of phase. This was corrected by calling the electrician on board who turned the set off and on three or four times, hit it twice, and presto, all was okay not exactly preventative maintenance but it seemed to do the job. The point is that the navigator made no effort to repair his set and, therefore, the conclusion is that only trained technicians are allowed to work on in flight maintenance troubles. Our navigators are trained and encouraged to perform in flight maintenance within their capability.

The Soviets are keenly aware of the danger of flying through thunderstorms. This fact was brought forth numerous times when the aircraft commander asked the radar operator to check weather ahead when flying in clouds. This facet of flying safety appears to be operating in air forces other than our own.

No effort was made to maintain optimum altitude; instead we cruised on a fixed altitude, usually around 30,000 feet with an airspeed of approximately 450 knots TAS. This varied only if the pilot attempted to get above or below a cloud deck.

Since I had no method of checking our actual position, I therefore had to use metro ETAs, and my ETA became an ATA for position reporting. I could only hope we were on course, and I guess we were as we didn't get lost. I think the Russian navigator was utilizing the same

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procedures when reporting to Moscow via the short wave radio as our ETAs and ATAs were the same.

Let down procedures were not standard. The Soviet crew preferred a straight in approach with the letdown starting quite a distance out. If there were clouds below, the Soviets would attempt to find a hole and let down. As an example, going into Iceland with the ceiling below 800 feet and visibility around three miles the Soviet crew found a hole in the cloud deck and made a letdown, rather than using ILS or GCA. The traffic controller was advised that we were heading inbound, using the range as our means of approach. Definitely this is not our method but it worked as we had no difficulty during the approach and landing.

The only other time that weather was encountered during letdown and landing provided me with a firsthand knowledge of a Soviet pilot's skill in handling his aircraft. This occurred during a landing at Gander when we had 300 feet and one mile visibility. During the letdown Major Puchrik was receiving instructions from our GCA operators and relaying this information to the Soviet aircraft commander. A straight in approach could not be made. We were on a dogleg to final when we started receiving some extremely large heading corrections from the controller. The navigator and I saw the field as the aircraft broke out around 300 feet and quite a distance to the right of the runway. Major Puchrik saw the field and told the pilot to make a go around. At this time the pilot came off of the gages, saw the field, racked it up to the left, then back to the right and leveled out over the runway but some distance down from the normal touchdown point. We landed and had to use the brake chute to stop. This was the only time that this chute was ever deployed. No check is made to obtain best flare or stopping distances. I feel that this action was strictly below our level of safety, and had we done this in a SAC airplane, we would have been severely dealt with. While the actual handling of the aircraft by the Russian pilot was good, I felt that a pull-up and go around were definitely in order.

Evidently the Russian pilot did not think too much of our GCA, as he requested and received an interview with the controller in an effort to determine the reason for our being so far off the centerline on final. To the best of my knowledge no reason was ever determined. I am sure that this approach convinced Ivan that our GCA system was not very good and that he should stick to his own method.

I had nine flights with this particular TU-104 crew and at no time did I see any evidence of panic, hesitation, or lack of proficiency. I feel that the Soviet crew was well trained and worked excellently as a team. I would estimate their ages to be between 35 and 40. They had been flying at least since 1942 and had WW II experience. I would rate them as proficient as most SAC crews with the same amount of flying time.

Possibly due to the fact that we had something in common, being aircrews, the Soviets displayed nothing but complete friendship and cooperation. We had access to every nook and cranny of the aircraft, and they willingly explained anything that we did not understand.

The return home by Mr. K in the TU 114, a transport version of the Bear turboprop bomber, turned out to be a very pleasant surprise as I did not know that I would be on board until the day prior to the flight. I replaced the scheduled navigator who had become ill.

Our USAF crew included Capt. Harold E. Renegar, AC; MSgt Gaylor Robinson, radio operator, and myself. The day prior to flight Captain Renegar introduced me to my new Russian counterpart in the TU 114. This aircraft is much more advanced than the TU 104; many of the instruments have been improved and, in addition, there were new types of equipment. The Russian navigator displayed the same spirit of friendship and cooperation that had been offered by the crew of the TU 104. A complete briefing was given, and I also received an abbreviated safety preflight on use of oxygen equipment. I was told that there was an oxygen bottle above the navigator compartment that would be available in case of decompression.

In the TU 114 the navigator has newer radar and Loran sets than in the TU 104, and also an improved true heading unit. In addition, the TU 114 has a periscopic sextant that is a permanent part of the aircraft.

Neither aircraft was equipped with ejection seats. Remember that these aircraft were the transport versions of the bomber models. I cannot say whether the bomber versions are equipped with ejection seats.

Prior to our departure we received the forecast from Weather Central and I drew up my flight plan. This weather information was made available to the Soviet crew for their flight planning purposes. However, they received their own weather through the Soviet Embassy,

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and their metrological office used our weather as a basis for comparison. I did not learn which of the two was the more accurate forecast.

This flight, I felt sure, would afford me the opportunity to observe firsthand a top notch Soviet crew doing celestial navigation as our route would be more over water than the previous flights. But again, this was not the case. The Soviets had stationed four vessels approximately 250 miles apart in the ocean and each vessel had homing facilities on board. You guessed it; radio compass navigation once more! So once again my ETAs were ATAs, as I had no idea where the ships were located and therefore I had to rely on DR only. (Dead Reckoning Navigation based on metrological forecasts.)

Our cruising altitude was around 30,000 feet, with a speed of approximately 405 knots TAS. The Soviets had two crews on board and approximately halfway through the trip the second crew took over for the last half of the mission to Moscow. All of our position reporting was made through English speaking stations. At no time did the Soviets attempt to make any calls other than HF contacts with Moscow. There were no problems encountered whatsoever, and the entire flight was extremely smooth.



TU 114

Commercial Version of SOVIET BEAR BOMBER

As we passed over a country Mr. Khrushchev would send a message of greetings to the prime minister of the over flown country advising him that we were flying over the country returning to Russia and that he (Mr. K) wished the people well. These messages were prepared and typed by one of the many stenographers on board. Incidentally, they worked through the entire flight with the many articles that Khrushchev and his party wanted on paper. Soviet special

cameramen were aboard busy taking pictures during the entire flight (Soviet pictures, such as an American crew eating caviar).

Our job terminated the moment we departed Sweden and headed into Russia. At this time the Soviets invited us to the rear of the aircraft to the flight lunch department, where we had a first class feast, including cognac. Breakfast on board a B 47 was never like this!

Based on my limited but firsthand observation of Soviet aircraft operations, I don't think their crews are as safety conscious as ours. This, is not criticism of their flying ability, for the Soviet crew members I encountered are certainly competent but how safe is another matter. I believe our equipment, training and knowledge are superior. The end result is a safer operation by our aircrews.

END OF ARTICLE

Back in the Cold War days, the US and Russia did not have reciprocal airline agreements, meaning neither of the countries were allowed entry into the others airspace. Therefore, I would gather that very, very few Americans ever rode in aircraft of Aeroflot, the Russian civilian air service. I am for sure that they did not fly in the cockpits. Bear in mind that early on many of the Russian government civil aircraft were just modified versions of their bomber fleet.

If a situation would arise whereby, from an intelligence gathering exercise, one got an opportunity to inspect a potential adversary's equipment, and could do so legally, it would be foolhardy not to take advantage of the situation. And so this opportunity presented itself to the US when Premier Khrushchev scheduled his visit to meet with President Eisenhower. Thus, American crews were on board the Russian aircraft as they flew in and out of the US.

We reported in to Wright Patterson AFB and met with the FTD personnel where we were instructed on what to look for and report on. In my specific case, I was given a model of the latest 35mm camera and a crash course on how to use the new gadget, and more specifically what to photograph. It was all legal, please bear this in mind.

Once we had been briefed by civilian (at least they had no uniforms on) as well as some military personnel, we flew to New York where we boarded an Icelandic Airways DC-4 and headed for Iceland

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on a boring routine flight. The only memorable thing was that about halfway there the heating system went out and we almost froze to death.

Most of the facts of the trip were covered in the article above. What follows was not written. From the moment we boarded the first TU-104, I had my camera in operation. I was always sure to request the Russian crew member having his picture taken to stand by a piece of equipment that I wished to photograph. I'd motion for them to move right or left in order to photograph the instrument of interest. It didn't take the Russians long to figure me out, and we began to have a pretty enjoyable time of it and they'd move when I was about to click the shutter, laugh and we'd do it again. I turned in my exposed film after each flight and finally they told me they had enough and to please stop. On the flight to Moscow, the same photo procedures were followed, however on a more curtailed effort. I surely did not wish to have an incident on this one.

When we landed in Moscow, the Premier and his staff all departed the aircraft, followed most quickly by the Russian crew, and we were left alone on the plane. I searched trying to find an entry way into the belly part of the aircraft, all the while my fellow crew members were yelling that we were going to be held as spies. I never did find that entry way. We waited and waited, and when no one came out to get us we finally picked up our bags and headed for the terminal - me with my trusty 35mm camera hanging around my neck. Keep in mind that we were in Uniform, yet no one bothered us. People stared at us as we entered the terminal, including some military guards, but again no one bothered us.

No one was there to greet us as we milled around the terminal, and after a wait of approximately 30 minutes or so, we saw a USAF Major running towards us. As he came up to us he did not utter a welcome to Moscow or how was your flight, but rather these words: "Which one of you is Pizzo?" I told him that I was and he then proceeded to ask me if I was out of my mind carrying a camera on a Russian airfield. He proceeded to ask me which flight did I wish to take, the one to London leaving in 30 minutes, or the other one to Copenhagen, also leaving in 30 minutes?

I said, "Whoa, we were told that we'd be treated to shows, tours, etc., etc. for a week." I wasn't about to leave. He then said that the

Embassy had received an order directing them to get me on the first plane out, no ifs, ands, or buts, and that's exactly what was going to happen and it did. He took my camera over my protests saying that was also in the order. I had pictures of Khrushchev and me and I really didn't want to give that camera up. But I did, and took the plane 30 minutes later to Denmark. I think my being a 55th'er had a lot to do with it, but I've often wondered that if that was a problem, why did they let me go in the first place. I guess that if there had been a problem I might still be in Moscow as a guest of the Soviets!

To put more fuel on the fire, a few years later when I was with the SR-71 program, I went to a meeting in San Diego and I ran into the Pilot who was on the flight to Moscow, and he couldn't stop telling me what a great time they had in Moscow after I departed. I felt like choking him.

I reported back to Wright Patterson for my debriefing, then back to the humdrum life as the Squadron Navigator of the 343rd SRW. Shortly thereafter, I went on my TDY to England, and upon my return, another turn in my career took place.

After I left Woolbright's crew and entered into my new job as Squadron Navigator in the 343rd Squadron, I felt that my most important undertaking would be to see if there was any way to increase the proficiency of the Navigators. I began checking into the accuracy of the celestial navigational missions to see if they were up to standards, and they were woefully below those of the other squadrons. In those days, there were no computers, GPS Systems, satellites, etc. Celestial navigation was accomplished the hard way - it was done with pencil, hand held calculators (not battery operated), adding, subtracting, and using Star Tables to have parameters to with which to work. I found that errors abounded, yet there was no program to check the work of our Navigators to help them be more efficient.

I submitted a request to the Squadron Operations Officer outlining a program that I thought would be of benefit, and he concurred. Each day I had two or three Navigators who were not scheduled to fly for the next few days, report in and go over the calculations of the missions flown the previous day. I then had the Navigator in question, whose previous days mission data had been checked, come in and we'd go over the findings ascertained by those checking the mission data. It

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worked. A dramatic drop was noticed in Circular Error (on a celestial navigation mission, how far off one was in time and distance from the desired destination). I received a well done from those in charge.

After a year or so I was sent to England on a short 30-day TDY, and upon my return, my career took a turn in a direction that I could never have imagined.

Upon my return from England, Mary and I went to the Forbes O' Club for dinner, and ran into (then) Colonel Bob Holbury. He was formerly the 55th Director of Operations, and had been transferred from the 55th up to SAC Headquarters where he ran the SAC Recon Center. He came back to Forbes occasionally to fly and keep current in the RB-47.

As we were chatting he asked me if I would like to come work for him. I wrongly assumed that he meant in Omaha, and I asked if this was true. His curt answer was "Can't say." I then asked "Well if not Omaha, then where?" Another curt answer, "Can't say." "Doing what I queried him?" Same curt response, "Can't say."

I turned to Mary and said, "What do you think?" Always supportive and boss of the family Mary said, "It's up to you." So, with that, I agreed. Colonel Bob then told me that I would be receiving a security clearance form which I was to fill out and return to him. I shortly received the form, filled it out, and mailed it back. Soon thereafter my neighbors, former neighbors, and associates, began telling me of strangers asking lots of questions about us: life style, debts, drinking habits, and the like. I'm sure that they must have felt certain that I had done something really bad to cause all of these government people to ask these questions about me.

After a while I received a call from Colonel Bob who told me that I'd be receiving orders directing me to report to Washington, D.C. and when I arrived to check into a certain hotel. That also took place. Soon after my arrival in the nation's capital I received a call and was told to be out front of the hotel at 0800 hours and that I would be picked up. I asked my usual questions and received the standard, "Can't say."

The next morning I was picked up and taken to a building in downtown D.C. After many questions and a black box lie detector test I was told that I had passed and would be receiving orders soon. At last, I

thought, I'm now going to find out what, where, and when. That was not so. I had been tested. I had passed.

“Go home and await orders,” I was told. When I called Mary to apprise her of this cryptic information on our destiny, she gave me the good news that I was on the promotion-to-major list. Shortly after I returned to Topeka, Colonel Bob called and said, “Sell your house and stand by.” Being the good soldier, I did just that. And Boy! What a surprise when I did get the orders! I was to report to the 1129th Special Activities Squadron Las Vegas, Nevada for a four-year unaccompanied tour.

How can one tell his wife that he's going to Las Vegas for four years and can't take her or the kids! A quick call to Colonel Bob and the “unaccompaniment” was immediately cancelled. However, I still had no clue as to what I was going to do.

I hopped a flight out to Vegas to see what the housing situation looked like, and was shocked to learn that the Atomic Test site was in the process of hiring 15,000 new workers and there was not a house to be found, at any price. After running around the city for a couple of days, I happened to be standing in a contractor's office, where I had been told that there was nothing available in the new subdivision they were building. I had just been told that there was a long waiting list of potential buyers when this lady comes in stating she did not want the house she had picked out. I immediately grabbed the salesman by the arm, took him outside, and after a bit of negotiating, i.e. passing of money, I bought a house sight unseen, although I did know what the floor plan looked like on paper. I didn't know or care where it was located. It seemed that I had just bought a house that was painted pink and I wasn't quite sure how Mary was going to like that. It turned out that it suited our needs just fine for the four years.

Let not the reader be tempted to believe by the humor which I have tried to place in this book, that flying Strategic Recon Missions during the Cold War Era was just a barrel of laughs. That most certainly was not the case. The deaths of approximately 280 valiant and gallant airmen who lost their lives as a result of being shot down by the Soviets attest to that fact. Throughout the book I merely wish to provide the reader with insights of incidents relating to my activities be they humorous or otherwise, and I give thanks to God for the fact that I made it through okay.

Chapter 7 – The 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing

And thus my memorable assignment with the 55th came to an end as we packed up and headed west; with me still having absolutely no idea what I would be doing in Las Vegas. Was I in for surprise?



CHAPTER 8

Area 51- The Ranch

The Pizzo family arrived in the glittering city of Las Vegas close to dusk on a Saturday evening. What a sight it presented after being domiciled in Topeka, Kansas, for nigh on to eight years. We had reserved some Visiting Officer Quarters at Nellis AFB which turned out to be the first mistake I made upon our Vegas arrival. It turned out that those quarters were in an old WWII barracks that had some walls put up to create separate living areas. The walls had holes punched in them, bare wood floors, no rugs, filthy bath room, but most of all, they were just plain filthy.

Being kind of late by then, and not knowing our way around, we decided to stay for the evening. We were not a happy bunch of campers. To top it off, around midnight, we heard the sound of someone playing Moon River on a saxophone! Out came the Air Police with much loud discussions and after a short time they departed and all was quiet - that is for about 30 minutes or so, when he started up again. The Air Police arrived once more and again we had a repeat of the loud discussions which ended up with our musical friend being hauled off to the stockade.

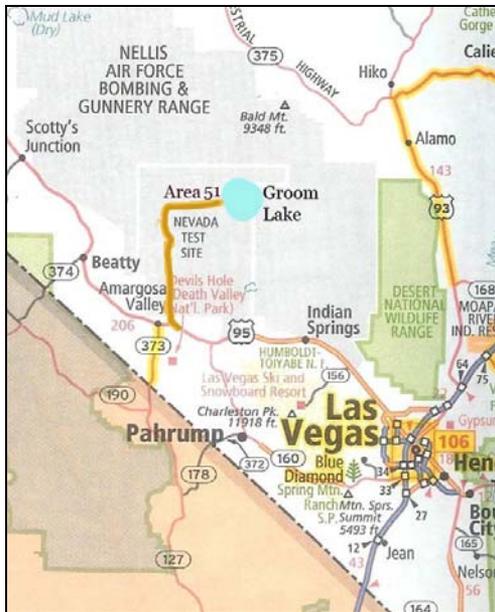
We couldn't wait till daylight came so that we could haul out of there. Then came the time for my second mistake.

We went towards town and booked rooms in this very nice looking motel. I didn't know until a couple of days later, that it was where the ladies of the evening brought their, shall we say, friends, for the night. I think our two sons, young Sam and Steve, enjoyed the

Chapter 8 – Area 51 The Ranch

place. They hung around the pool all day as the "ladies" sun bathed quite a bit. They wanted to stay longer, however, cooler heads prevailed. My saving grace happened to be that our furniture showed up early on Monday morning so that we were able to quickly move into our new home.

It so happened that at least seven of the officers assigned to the squadron lived within a block of each other in the subdivision. On the first day I was to report in, I was picked up by an ex-55th'er that I knew quite well but had no idea he was assigned to the unit. We picked up one other officer and headed up the Speedway; which is what I called the highway that went from Vegas to Reno, heading for Mercury Nevada, the site of the Atomic Bomb Testing Facility. I called it the Speedway since there were no speed limits. It was a 140 mile drive from my front door to the parking lot at Area 51. I soon found out that Area 51 was at the far northern tip of the Test Site. That little jaunt from Vegas to Area 51 took about two hours or so. When we entered the Test Site we had to get our security badges and another badge that let you know if you had been over exposed to nuclear materials. Remember, at this time, 1961, we were still exploding Atom Bombs above ground.



We got our badges and headed for Groom Lake, the garden spot of Nevada where the 1129th Special Activities Squadron was to be domiciled. Now the officer who picked us up and transported us to the area, had reported a bit earlier in the month, so you would think he knew the way. Wrong. As we headed off down a road; of course with no road signs and lots and lots of open space, we suddenly heard sirens, saw flashing red lights, and a chopper heading right toward us. "Great," I thought. "First day on the job (whatever it was) and I'm arrested!" We, of course, had taken the wrong road out from the security office, and after a radio call to the Commanding Officer up at Groom Lake we were escorted back to the right road and sent on our way.



Area 51 - The Ranch

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After reporting in and being shown my quarters (more on this later) I finally got a briefing as to what I would be doing for the next four years and how it was going to impact on my family. The first shock I received had to do with the announcement that I would be driving up on Monday mornings and returning home on Friday evenings! Thus I found out the need for those quarters. I'm sure Mary, and all the other wives, were truly wondering why in the heck their husbands volunteered for this assignment. The answer is simple; we had no idea what lay ahead.

Area 51 was not like your every day Air Force Base. It was far from it. About the only improvement that had taken place since the days that the U-2 trained there was the living quarters. There was no Base Exchange (BX), no theatre, no nothing except a single cement tennis court and I think there was a one or two lane bowling alley. There was no television, and you could only listen to radio late in the evening due to the surrounding mountains. The mess hall was so small that you practically had to stand up to eat and the food was really bad.

Things were looking up though as a new mess hall, ops building, and headquarters buildings were being built. I was introduced to my new boss, the Director of Operations, Colonel Doug Nelson, who informed me that my job was to be the Chief of the Mission Support Division. I would have a small staff of Navigators and two photo experts, one a civilian from Baird Electronics and a Tech Sgt photo expert. I might add that the staff that had been assembled for our office was simply outstanding, as it was throughout the organization.

As to our living quarters, the Agency had obtained some base family houses from Fallon, Nevada Naval Air Station, and had modified them for our use. We had three bedrooms, one bath, and a large living room which was joined to a similar unit. That made it a single unit dwelling, providing sleeping quarters for six officers. The house in which I later lived became known as House Six, the unofficial Officers' Club on the base.

Early on, we decided to build a bar on one side of the building and ditto a card table for the other side (my side.) I can't recall if we did or did not get a permit to do that, but I guess it was okay since we did it. With some Lockheed folks helping out to construct the bar and card table, House Six became much more than just living quarter for six officers. One of the gents living on the other side took care of buying

the "refreshments" each weekend at Vegas, thus, many a happy hour was celebrated in House Six. I might add that drinks sold for just whatever the cost was to keep the bar stocked. Many, many volunteer barkeeps served behind the bar during these happy times.

As to the card games, I became the unofficial host of the games, and we had three simple rules. No bets larger than a quarter, first seven to come to the table after chow got to play, and no crazy games, only five and seven card stud and five card draw. We promptly quit at 10 PM. We did however have one more rule that we had in effect, which we really needed like a hole in the head. When they built the new mess hall, they also brought in outstanding cooks who served outstanding menus cooked to perfection and you could eat all you wished to consume. And we did. At 9 PM we had the hamburger run game. No one could drop out and the winner had to take everyone's order and go pick up hamburgers and drinks. If anyone ever left Area 51 without putting on quite a few pounds they were in a small minority.

Shortly after my arrival a group of us had the honor to fly out to Burbank to meet with Kelly Johnson and some of his staff. I also met my counter-part, a Lockheed Navigator, with whom I worked most closely in the following months. Early in his career, he flew as a Navigator on Pan Am Clipper ships flying to and from the Orient. We were taken to the Skunk Works hanger where the A-12 Blackbirds were being put together. They were scattered all over the place in different stages of being assembled. After they were assembled, the process of getting them to Area 51 is a story on to itself.

Roads were scouted between the two locations and checked for clearances that would hinder very, very large crates from being transported via the ground movement. I seem to remember trees being cut and telephone and electrical lines being raised to accommodate the excess heights and widths of the crates. I think all movements were made during the dead of night, and with much security. Residents surely must have wondered what was going on, if they were awake that is. There might have been some problems, but if so they must have been minor as I never heard of any mishaps. Lockheed folks may have a different say on this, but that's my recollection.

Consider the following. We, as well as all other organizations on the base, were to be responsible for developing plans and procedures for an airplane that had not, as yet, flown. This was an airplane that

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procedures pertaining to other aircraft of the time, simply did not apply. Such things as speed, altitude, and check points which normally were acceptable were no longer were valid. Fuel consumption as it equated to allowable distances to fly before refueling was required, and decent and climb distances associated with air refuelings are some of the things that had to be determined and incorporated into our mission planning efforts. We, of course, worked closely with the Lockheed personnel in all facets of those matters.

As you can envision, my arrival at the Area was a bit premature since my staff was not complete, the aircraft was not ready, and frankly I had nothing to do. So I was given a job to design and have built a pilots lounge and to go to Burbank and buy furniture for it! That was what I did, and had Lockheed ship it to us. I think the guys liked it. The guys were ex-Air Force and Navy pilots who temporarily gave up their commissions to work for the CIA and fly the A-12. When the project was over they would revert back to their services. I might add that a large percentage of those gents ended up becoming Generals at various levels.

Prior to the arrival and first flight of the A-12, we did as much as possible to be ready for that initial flight. Routes had to be planned based on rather limited aircraft data which was refined and updated daily as we flew more and more missions. Routes had to be coordinated so as not to over fly medium and large cities due to the possibility of sonic booms. Here we also dealt rather closely with the FAA. Air refueling routes had to be established and coordinated with the only Air Refueling Squadron that had been modified to carry the special fuel which the A-12 burned. Maps had to be prepared for each mission, plus a strip map had to be prepared and photographed for placement in the aircraft. That was where my two photo gents came into play. This film strip was also used when we briefed the pilots on the details of their flight. This briefing was normally on a one to one basis with me or one of my staff doing the briefing. We also mounted segments of the entire route on rectangular lightweight cardboard holders which had the center removed, that were to be placed in a metal holder right next to the pilot.

There was one activity in which I really got a kick out of – that being the briefing of emergency airfield cleared personnel on the procedures needed to be followed in case the Bird made an emergency landing at their location. There were not a great deal of them, and on

these bases, a very, very few select individuals were cleared and then only for what to do with the Bird if it landed at their base. Usually the Wing Commander, Operations Officer, Base Fire Marshal, Maintenance Officer and I'm sure a few more to include maintenance personnel and security personnel were briefed on the operation. A package was placed in vault or safe to be opened only if and when the need arose.

The part I really enjoyed was the briefing with regards to refueling inside a hanger, which under normal refueling procedures would be a no-no. However, the Blackbirds used a fuel that was a special mixture, made to withstand extremely high temperatures, and it would not ignite by simply throwing a match into a barrel of it. A small quantity of this special fuel was carried to those briefings and when we started to throw matches into the fuel placed in a bucket, to demonstrate it's safety parameters it was worth the price of a ticket to see the reaction by some of the on-lookers -especially the Fire Marshals.

One of the jobs my shop was given was to work with a certain US Agency that was responsible for making maps for the Government. We had to see if they could come up with a map that would satisfy all our needs, including being a map that could be destroyed during flight. As we Recon folks know, in the advent of a situation whereby the aircraft may fall into non-friendly hands, we would not like them to have proof of where the aircraft came from, its areas of interest during the flight, and where the aircraft would land.

Our job was to devise a method of preparing the maps for flights in such a manner that the destruct system would function properly if necessary. Lockheed then came up with the means to store the maps in the aircraft and devised a method whereby they could be destroyed if the need arose. A map case, holding a special type of liquid which would destroy the paper satisfied this requirement.

Lockheed readied a test to see if it would work and I flew over to Burbank to witness the test. They had devised a board with all destruct components attached. The system was designed to use high pressure to force the liquid into the case, ergo, the maps would be destroyed. The Lockheed folks were all sitting at a long table facing this display board and I stood two or three feet behind them away from the board. The switch was pulled and the liquid flowed. The case filled up under this intense pressure, just as predicted. However, what was not predicted

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was the fact that without a catch to lock the lid on the case the intense pressure and causing the black liquid to come flying out of the case and on to some mighty surprised and scrambling Lockheed folks! I think I fell down I was laughing so hard.

Needless to say this was remedied post haste. The test did show that system would work; however I am not sure how the cleanup went on people and clothes since my job did not call for testing the liquid on people! I sure would have liked to have seen their expense account claiming and describing the cleaning costs. Incidentally we did not use the special maps while flying training sorties in the States; they were only used later on when flying operational sorties.

Lockheed had two test pilots and the Agency originally had 11 ex-military pilots. I ended up working with eight, and the Air Force had two pilots who qualified in the A-12 and then became Instructor pilots in checking out the Agency pilots. All told the Agency built 13 A-12 aircraft and two trainers. We lost three A-12s during my tenure with the Agency. We also lost one brave and patriotic pilot.

After being at the Ranch for about a year, I was pretty much in shock one day when I was given the news that Pat Woolbright, my old pilot at Forbes, had just been killed while attempting a takeoff. It hit me rather hard. I had lost two close friends, who were my original crew members when I first started flying in the RB-47s. An ex-55th pilot was stationed at the Ranch and he and I flew back to Forbes for the funeral, where I was honored be a pall bearer.

Pat was given a military funeral at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Some years later I was attending the funeral of another old 55th member when I was informed that even though there was very little of Pat's remains recovered at the crash site, they did recover Pat's silver dollar, which brought back some memories of my time on Pat's crew.

At the end of WWII in 1945, I came across a 1922 (my birth year) Silver Dollar that I still carry to this day. I never, ever leave home without it and never did so back then, even when flying. Pat was one who believed in kidding and he kidded me no end about my good luck charm, stating I might be a bit afraid of his flying. That was not so of course.

I did not know that some time during our crew days Pat had started carrying his own good luck silver dollar, even while kidding me about me carrying one. If I recall, his was buried with him, but I had no knowledge of that at the time. It's too bad his good luck charm didn't do as well for him as mine has done for me throughout the years.

Shortly after the Agency pilots began flying solo, an accident occurred on a flight during climb out due to an aircraft malfunction. The pilot ejected safely and the aircraft came down in an uninhabited mountainous area northwest of the dry Salt Lake which lies west of Salt Lake City. The pilot landed safely and was picked up shortly thereafter by a farmer. He was no worse for wear, except for perhaps being in a state of shock. Once the news came into the Command Post advising that the pilot was okay and location of the crash site was learned, the Commanding Officer galvanized a task force to head into the area in an effort to recover any and all pieces of the aircraft. We staged out of an abandoned airfield northwest of the dry lake and immediately started climbing the hills scouring the countryside for pieces of the aircraft. Remember, this aircraft was years ahead of anything flying at that time and was one of the country's most guarded secrets. I think we stayed there for at least two days and did a pretty good job of recovery. Lots of pictures were taken by Lockheed as well as military personnel. Upon my return to the base I was given the job of collecting all of those photos and giving them to the powers that be. You'd be surprised to know that this was not an easy job, since most wished to hold on to them.

I recall making a few trips to the CIA Headquarters at Langley Virginia which was always a desirous thing to do (tongue in cheek here.) I'd catch the last Lockheed flight to Burbank. They made two runs in the morning hours and two runs in the evening. I think they used the old Lockheed Constellation commercial airliner to transport their workers to and from Burbank to the Ranch each day. Then, taking the midnight flight from Los Angeles to Washington I arrived just in time to report to the Agency at the start of the business day. It was a really refreshing way to go. On one such trip, I rented a Volkswagen Beetle, and as I rolled into the Agency parking lot the Guard checked the car and wrote down the license number. He came back to my side of the car laughing to beat the band. He told me to step out of the car, which I did and he took me to the back of the car where he pointed to the license plate. It had the number OO7! From that trip on, each time I

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visited the Agency and saw that guard, I was Agent 007, James Bond, returning from a mission.

As stated earlier, Area 51 was not a place that had all the amenities of an average Air Force Base. However, as with all young (and I was somewhat young in the early 60's) we did find ways to pass the time, like the bar and card game in House Six. But there were other things we did to pass the time away when we were not busily engaged in the important matters of the day. For instance, we could jump into the chopper we had for rescue and other functions and, head for Bald Mountain, located northeast of the Area and close by. There we would look for mountain lions, and when we found one start chasing him down the mountain side flying at tree top, or rather bush top level about three feet off the ground! Then there was the thrill of flying in our C-130 aircraft and chasing wild horses on the Utah Flats. We would come up behind the herd at a height where you were looking up the horses rear end as you approached the herd!

In future years some historian may find oyster shells scattered around an abandoned airfield in that remote area of Nevada and will conjure up all kinds of theories as to how oysters made their way to Nevada. The truth of the matter lies with our C-130 transport aircraft, broken GE engines, and Westover AFB, where we landed and turned the engines over to GE. Additionally, none of this would have been possible without a very supportive Club Officer at that base. How it got started or who was the initiator, I do not recall, but the sequence of events went like this. When we had engines scheduled to be returned to GE, a list was started for who wanted what seafood and how much they desired. This menu included oysters in the shell, lobsters, clams, and scallops. A call was then made to a certain officer at Westover and he would order the seafood, put it in his freezer, and when we arrived the next day we would pay him, grab our goodies and depart. We'd place the goodies in the rear of the C-130, where it was the coldest and set off for the Ranch. On numerous occasions we would have the great cooks at the Ranch cook up a scrumptious seafood meal to which they were invited of course.

On one occasion, I recall going on a safari, and having the same panic feeling that Pat and Don had while bringing their fish from Japan back to Forbes. As we were approaching the Denver returning with the seafood cache safely stored in the rear of the aircraft, we ran into some engine trouble and had to set down rather quickly. I think we landed at

Buckley AFB, and then it was my turn to worry. Parts seemed not to be available right off and many frantic phone calls were made before we located whatever part was needed. All the while the seafood started getting a wee bit defrosted since it was summertime. I don't know how, but magically they found the parts and headed out to the Ranch. I don't know if we broke any safety rules getting out of there, and I don't think anyone wanted to know even if we did. I do guess the seafood didn't go bad because we had our feast and nobody died.

As most military types know, crew members were required to accomplish certain training activities each quarter to maintain their flying proficiency. While stationed at Area 51, I accomplished most of my navigator requirements aboard a C-130. Towards the end of 1962, for some reason like going on leave or because our C-130 was to be out of commission for a while, I needed to get a day celestial mission accomplished. Heavens know why, but on November 20th, 1962 I ended up in the back seat of an F-101 holding a sextant with an A-12 driver as the pilot. So off we went for a history making celestial flight. No Navigator in his right mind should do that. We leveled off and I started doing my thing as all good Navigators should. On the very first celestial shot, I told the pilot to hold her level as I was going to take a sun shot. He said "what the heck for?" I said "So I'll know where we are." In the next split second we're upside down, I dropped the sextant, and it started flying all over the cockpit, and the pilot said "Look down there, that's such and such city, I know where we are." Once again we roll over and we're flying right side up with the sextant still flying all over the cockpit hitting everything it missed on the first roll. A flying sextant leaves bruises. As soon as I could gather up the sextant and get my stomach back to normal, I told the pilot I had finished my requirements and we could head for the barn as soon as he wished. Needless to say, as you old Navigators out there know, there's more than one way to get a celestial mission in for credit. Would you believe that I had only a circular error of one mile at destination? A great feat of celestial navigation was duly recorded and I maintained my flying proficiency. That old saying of "necessity is the mother of all inventions" may be right on most of the time, but not when it comes to flying a celestial leg in the back seat of an F-101 Voodoo.

Many people may be aware that Area 51 was/is a rather secretive place with all kinds of security measures being in place to keep it secret. It was so in the early days of the A-12 program. Prying eyes, be they on the ground or in the air, were watched for and measures were

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taken to prevent any inadvertent violation of the secrecy. One such concern was the possibly of commercial, military, or civilian pilots seeing the bird in flight.

Our takeoff climbout directly crossed the FAA flight path of the main East-West commercial airliners headed to the west coast. On occasion our altitude when the bird crossed that route allowed pilots in those airliners to spot the bird. On many occasions much chatter was heard on the airwaves when a sighting occurred. Such utterances came in the form of “Holy cow did you see that!” or “What the hell was that!” Naturally in some instances comments were made that I shall not print here due to censors.

Our Command Post was equipped to monitor the airline frequencies and when a sighting comment was picked up, an alert went out to a certain office which I presume was the CIA. The agency in turn had someone meet the aircraft when it landed and the pilots had to sign a statement that they had not seen what they had just seen and would probably be sent somewhere never to be heard from again if they ever spoke about it. On rare occasions passengers would see the bird and if they could be identified, I'm sure they suffered the same fate.

On one occasion I had the opportunity to be involved in that type of debriefing. The Nellis AFB gunnery range was located a bit Northwest of Area 51 and the Navy fliers out of Fallon NAS frequently used the range for their gunnery practice. On one occasion a couple of the Jocks overflew the range just as one of our birds was taking off. Their conversation covered any and all words you would expect from a couple of young fliers seeing an aircraft, the likes of which had never been seen before. The Command Post immediately contacted Fallon and the Navy pilots were ordered to report back to their base immediately.

The Officer in Charge of the Command Post and I got into a twin engine aircraft and headed for Fallon, arriving there before the two Ensigns landed. The Base Commander at Fallon had been briefed on the program, and the Ensigns were met by Security Personnel and escorted to the Commanding Officer's Office. They were scared but surely not speechless, and they started to tell for all to hear what they had just seen. The Command Post Officer then started to explain just how deep the trouble was that they were in, wrapping it up with the never being seen again routine. I had a hard time to keep from

laughing. Finally, they were given a piece of paper to sign, swearing them to secrecy for life and being promised to be sent to Attu, Alaska or some other garden spot if they even talked about it in their sleep. I imagine the Command Post personnel really enjoyed that portion of their assignment when they heard all that type of chatter taking place.

We also had to contend with the Russian satellites flying over us. We knew when they were flying overhead and the birds were never outside their hangers when the satellites were overhead. Those satellites had big eyes.

Towards the end of 1964, I think, things were going exceptionally well. Pilot training was meeting or exceeding expectations, the aircraft were performing well, and from our standpoint in the Mission Support Division, we had ironed out all of the kinks in our job requirements. We knew that soon we would be getting ready to deploy to an overseas base to begin operational missions.

We also knew that the A-12 program was going to be phased out and be replaced by SR-71 aircraft operated by the Strategic Air Command. One afternoon, towards the end of 1964, I was called in to the CO's office. This was the office of the same officer who had recruited me for my present assignment. We had a cup of coffee and then he asked me about my next assignment. That rather puzzled me, since my tour did not end until November of '65. I think I remember telling him that I really had not thought about it since I figured it was a bit too soon to do so. His answer to this was, "Let's do it now." He mentioned the A-12s program shutting down in the near future and it being replaced with the SR-71s. I told him I was aware of that. He then said "You now have two choices, and we are going to decide upon one this afternoon." I was told that I was being considered to work at CIA Headquarters, to which he was totally opposed, or go to SAC Headquarters, to work in the Directorate of Operations Recon shop and run the SR-71 program. He said he knew the Colonel who ran that shop, and they both agreed to that being where I was to go. So much for me having a say so! Frankly, however, Washington D.C. did not appeal to me or Mary, from the cost of living standpoint, and I probably would have chosen Omaha (SAC Headquarters) anyway if I would have had a vote. After almost four years, Mary was finally going to have me around the house again.

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Remember that I stated that upon my arrival in Vegas, the Atomic Test Site had just hired 15,000 workers. Well, just as we were preparing to sell our house, they fired 8,000 of them! We put our house up for sale in January and did not get one person to look at it for six months. Then about two weeks before we were scheduled to depart Vegas I got a call during which an offer was made stating that they would buy it if they could assume the note. Of course I yelled “You bet!” To make things more bizarre, that evening I received another call wanting to buy our house. Unreal!

I have one last word about Area 51. If there were aliens there, they must have eaten at a different mess hall and they sure didn't show up at House Six for poker. That facility was really security conscious and restrictions applied. You went only where you were authorized. For instance I never heard of, or saw, the D-21 Drone vehicle at any time. I'm sure there were other things going on that I was not aware of, but aliens and space ships? Forget it.

Groom Lake was and is an extremely valuable piece of real estate that the government needs to develop new weapons systems necessary to defend our country and, in doing so, keep it out of the eyes of the media as well as those who oppose our way of life.

Thus my tour came to and end, and I can truly state that having been associated with the likes of those dedicated military and civilian co-workers will always be a high point in my life. And, of course, having the opportunity to meet with Kelly Johnson and his staff at the Skunk Works just made it that more memorable.



CHAPTER 9

Strategic Air Command Recon Center

And so my tenure with the CIA'S 1129th Special Activities Squadron came to an end and off we headed to Omaha in our brand new 1965 Ford Mustang, which we kept for 18 years. Once again, as Chief of the SR-71/B-58 Branch, I did not have the foggiest idea as to the exact nature of my job responsibilities. Like always, we ended up in a motel awaiting a base house assignment. We'd had enough of trying to sell a house when a tour was up. It was not a long wait until we moved into base housing.

Now the Air Force had a very strange rule when it came to base housing. If the base was located north of a certain parallel, it was determined that the temperature would be cool enough that air conditioning wasn't needed. It became quite obvious to me that whoever made that decision had never visited Omaha during the months of July and August. It gets HOT. Therefore as the first order of business, we went out and purchased two air conditioners.

As to my job responsibilities, I fast learned that just like the Area 51 job, I would be writing up those responsibilities as we went along. SAC was well on its way to receiving the SR-71s, but a lot still needed to be accomplished. About a week or so after I signed in, I was called into the Deputy Recon Chief's office and told that I would be giving a briefing to the Director of Operations, a two-star General. Naturally I thought it would be on the SR-71 program, but that was not so. It was on a KC-135 Tanker operation out of Alaska, of which I knew absolutely nothing. This Lieutenant Colonel accompanied me to the

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General's office and stood on the other side of the easel. All I could do was read what was on the chart and each time, and there were many, that the General asked a question I would say "Sir, I don't have the answer for that but I shall get it for you." This kept up for about 20 minutes and that LTC said nothing; he just let me have a slow dying death. The General finally told me "Get out and next time know what the hell you're supposed to brief on." Still the LTC remained silent. I most definitely thought my career was over in SAC. I might add that I did express my feelings to the LTC once we were out in the hall, not that it did any good. It was another good start on the job.

The Director of Plans ran the show for the most part, but the operational part of the program was the responsibility of the Director of Operations and under him was the Recon Center where I worked as the Chief of the SR-71/B-58 Branch. I therefore represented the Directorate on all matters pertaining to operational employment.

Beale AFB Base, the designated home of the birds was being updated to handle the aircraft, and it was being staffed before I arrived in Omaha. The Commander of the Beale unit was Colonel (soon to be Brigadier General) Doug Nelson, my Operations Officer at Area 51. There were others from the Area that also joined the SR-71 program. I soon learned that like I did at the Area, I would be required to start from scratch to define our objectives and staff accordingly. Job descriptions and responsibilities needed to be developed and approved. We had a Tanker Refueling Pilot, a Tanker Navigator, an Electronics Warfare Officer, another Navigator, and a B-58 pilot slot that I needed to have filled. I soon found out that getting a pilot out of his flying job to that of a staff officer was like pulling teeth - they hated to do so, but we did find a good one.

A great deal of communication and cooperation between the Beale personnel and our office surely helped us move forward rather rapidly. I might add that my experience at the Area helped to some degree. Our staff worked with the plans, communications, computer, intelligence, plus other headquarter offices quite often.

As we began to lay out trial missions to get our procedures ready for operational sorties, I learned that the computer and plans personnel had contracted with a computer company on Long Island to design and deliver a mission planning program. With their program we would merely put the desired coordinates into the computer and the computer

did the rest. After a couple of test runs I knew that it did not work the way it should, and upon further study I found that there was a flaw in the program. I did not know or care who was at fault; we just needed to have it fixed. The program would not allow the aircraft to make a climbing or descending turn. Using their system, the aircraft had to first level off before initiating a climbing or descending turn. This affected fuel consumption and mission timing.

I contacted the plans and computer personnel and then headed to Long Island to get the problem squared away. I took along the computer personnel who provided the requirements to the contractor. Prior to going considerable amounts of conversation had taken place between all parties involved, so our visit was not unexpected. We met not only with the computer personnel but also the president of the company. We sat around a table as I explained the problem and what needed to be corrected. This was a \$1,000,000.00 contract. The president then asked me what did I expect them to do, and I said "Fix it so that it works correctly." He responded to me by asking had I read the contract, to which I replied no. He then pulled out a copy of the contract that stated merely that they had to provide SAC with a program, which did not state that it had to necessarily work, and that a new contract would be needed before they would do anything. A few rather heated words, I think, were exchanged which ended up with me advising them that I would recommend to the powers to be that the Air Force discontinue doing business with his firm. I did that but don't know if anything came of it. I knew that we could manually plan a Blackbird mission since we did so many, many times at the Ranch, so I recommended that we do just that and throw out the computer program.

That did not set well with a few folks in SAC Headquarters, and the next thing you know I found myself up in front of the SAC Commander, a Four Star General, who wanted to know what the hell I was thinking about in wishing to cancel this particular program. I then explained the whole situation to him and my rationale for doing so, and he totally agreed with me. He then said in a very stern voice, "Sure as hell you'd better be right." Talk about placing your career on the line! I'm sure the plans folks wanted to kill me, but that's just what we did. I put into place the same procedures we had at the Ranch for mission planning.

Early on, being the sole person in SAC Headquarters that knew anything about a Blackbird, I was constantly called and requested (told)

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to prepare a briefing on some phase of the program. Most of the time that was done on very short notice. Early on it was just me, but later we had two pilots from the Ranch - one who flew as an instructor pilot for the CIA Drivers (as they were called) and the other the same officer who picked us up on my first day at the Ranch. We were blessed in having a Staff Sgt who was outstanding in his ability to rapidly take what I had written and print it out on a pad of butcher paper which I would then attach to a 3 x 4 briefing board, then put it onto an easel. I stood in front of many, many senior officers on a one on one basis briefing on all matters of the Desert Queen - the code name for the SR-71 program.

My biggest thrill (if you wish to call it that) came about every two weeks in the glass enclosed room that overlooked the SAC Control Room with all of its large screens and computers. In that room was a very long table where the Four Star General sat at the head, and on each side, in rank-descending order, was the Three Stars, then the Two Stars, the One Star and a few Colonels. I called this my “Heavenly Briefing” due to the number of stars in the room, and it was quite a while before I could do the briefing and not come out soaking wet with sweat. Later on I shall relate about one specific Two Star General and his request.

As we progressed towards becoming operational, it was decided that we should brief selected senior staff members at various locations in the US, to include the Pentagon, as well as in the Pacific, where we might be operating. On one set of these briefings another officer and I traveled to the Navy Base at Norfolk, Virginia to brief the Commander of all Atlantic Operations (CINCLANT). At the time it was Admiral Moorer. We had a briefing put together on standard size paper and once again briefed on a one to one basis at his desk. Our talks covered all aspects of our operations that we felt the Admiral should be aware of, particularly Cuba. This briefing lasted about two hours. He then suggested that I give this same briefing to the ranking Admiral at the Key West Naval Air Station. I called back to my boss and obtained permission to do so, and we proceeded to Miami and prepared to board a flight to Key West.

I have seen, and flown in, many types of commercial aircraft, but that aircraft was a twin engine heavens know what make. It looked as if it should have been mothballed many years ago. It was dirty and looked like it hadn't had a safety inspection for years. As we boarded, with these Top Secret papers under our shirts, it was like we had boarded a

bus in the back woods of any country in South America. All the passengers had multiple bags and boxes and the only language we heard was Spanish. I think I even saw a chicken. I told my fellow officer that we should be prepared to eat a lot of paper, because we might be ending up in Cuba. However, we made it okay and the briefing went off without a hitch. We burned the briefing before returning to Miami on that deluxe airline.

We also had to brief certain commanders in the Pacific in Honolulu, Guam, and Kadena. I got to visit with some of the troops from the Area when they were flying A-12 missions out of Kadena. We also went to Clark Field in the Philippines to coordinate with FAA and ATA air controller personnel cleared (security wise) on where we needed air refueling areas. The terrorists were at work even back then, as we were restricted to the base. While we were there the terrorist robbed the base bank!

Our mission planning day started off with me going to the Intelligence Office that determined the target area for the day. Afterwards I returned to our office and we started laying out the mission. We had developed a Sun Angle Chart that allowed us to ascertain the exact time best suited to be over the primary targets. We then back tracked from that point in time to determine the take off time for both the Blackbird as well as for the airborne tankers - based upon the air refueling location.

After we completed the mission plan, there were still steps that needed to be done before we gave the field the okay to launch. We did send the planned route to the 9th Wing at Kadena, and Beale AFB, as well as to the Pentagon. Sometime between 5pm and 7pm, based on the Director of Operation's schedule, I had to place the route map on a briefing board and brief the General on the mission. That briefing took place at his desk. We became quite friendly, and I looked forward to these sessions. He invariably would ask for my grease pencil and tell he wanted to change the route and how he wanted it to go a different way. I then had to tell him why we couldn't do that. He'd grumble and would say I didn't respect Senior Officers - joking of course. (I hoped.) After quite a few of these briefings with him grabbing my grease pencil, I obtained one of those silver tubes that cigars came in, painted it blue and attached it to the briefing board with a grease pencil in it. Sure enough, that next evening he asked for my grease pencil and I respectfully told him to use his own. He got a big kick out of it. I guess

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a bit of humor was in order for him at the end of what had to be nerve racking, pressure packed, days.

After that we awaited a "go" message from Washington. That usually came in during the early morning hours. I believe that this "go" or "no go" call was made based upon a weather report obtained in a very unorthodox manner. As a satellite passed over Nam it took photos of the weather conditions. At a designated location over the Pacific a modified C-130 trailed a long grappling arrangement, and at a precise moment the satellite ejected a cartridge containing the weather data. This cartridge was attached to a red and white parachute and hopefully if all went well, the C-130 snared the chute, and reeled it in. On board was a photo expert which printed out the info showing what we could expect over Nam. The info was relayed back to someone who I have no idea, but based upon this real time current weather came the "go" or "no go" advisory. I'm sure we did not have this procedure on all missions. Once the missions were launched, I stayed in the Command Post area in case something came up.

We only flew over Nam while I was there, and there were only two ways to go into North Vietnam. One way was to travel up the Gulf of Tonkin, turn left, fly over Hanoi, turn south and exit over South Vietnam. The other way was to enter by Saigon and fly north to Hanoi, turning right to enter the Gulf of Tonkin, then south heading for home. One thing that occasionally occurred was a telephone call that came from Kadena relative to a mission, normally around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. It came through a secure line in the Headquarters building which meant that I had to get dressed to go in and return the call. That was not bad in the summertime, but in the dead of winter, it was a bummer.

Fairly soon after we started flying over Nam, we noted a trawler was stationed, off the end of the runway, in International waters and certainly not there for fishing purposes. We found that as soon as the bird would take off, a message emanating from the trawler was intercepted. They knew we were coming. The North Vietnamese had plenty of time to get ready to intercept the bird or get ready with their SAM missiles. We know that Russian pilots in the latest Migs were launched and when reaching the top of their flight envelope, they launched air to air missiles, to no avail. SAM missiles were launched in single and barrage firings, and those were also ineffective. I'll bet the linguist operators on, perhaps 55th aircraft, were really getting an earful

of excited and frustrated North Vietnamese gunners and SAM controllers. On all of the missions flown while I was in the Center, I didn't hear of any, repeat, any, damage what-so-ever to the bird.

Relating to the ineffective accuracy of the SAM firings perhaps it can be traced to a couple of things. First was the speed and altitude of the bird and secondly perhaps that our electronics countermeasures were outstanding. In many instances, once a SAM was fired, the bird then took over control of the missile, and sent it out of its flight path. We probably did a lot of damage somewhere when these SAMs fell back to the ground and exploded. Could it be that the 55th SRW Electronic collections programs had a role in these successful flights over Nam?

We flew many more sorties without any mishaps other than, perhaps, my nightly visits to the Command Post to answer the phone. I do know that the photo and electronic collection results were outstanding. You could almost read a license plate on photos taken from about 80,000 feet. You may recall earlier that I stated that I would touch base on the request a Two Star General made at one of my Heavenly Briefings, and so I shall. This aircraft was like no other in many respects, a few being speed, no flaps to slow it down for landings, and a very high operational altitude. As also stated, our photo results were outstanding. At one particular briefing, the General suggested that we plan a mission whereby we came up the Gulf of Tonkin at 80,000 ft, and as we approached Hanoi, lower the landing gear, lower the flaps (of which the aircraft had none), and descend to a couple of thousand feet, to get some low level photos of that area around Hanoi.

I hesitated, stammered, made a statement that it might not be feasible, but he really persisted. I tried with utmost respect, to explain why it didn't sound like a good idea. I certainly did not wish to embarrass him, but he would not back away from his request, and he demanded to know why we could not do so. Finally with as much courtesy and tact, as I could muster, I tried to explain that if we dropped the gear at 80,000 ft going Mach 3, we would probably tear the landing gear off, and expose the insides of the aircraft to extreme devastating heat. Next, while at 2,000 feet over Hanoi, we would place the aircraft in range of many types of weapon ground fire against which we had no defensive systems, and finally that the photos that we were getting more than met our needs. And then I mentioned that to do this

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we would need to start the descent about 600 miles south of Hanoi, and take the same distance to get back up to altitude, therefore the only photos obtained would be over Hanoi with none being obtained during the run south over Nam. Finally the Four Star said, “Enough is enough of this; let’s move on.” I breathed a sigh of relief, and knew that there was one Two Star General in the Headquarters that I prayed I’d never need to work for. I did get some positive feedback from others who were in attendance, and frankly I was truly sorry that the incident ever took place. The General simply did not know the characteristics of the aircraft.

As to the B-58 Recon program, we were only tasked once. I received a call from the Director of Operations who directed that we launch a sortie to photograph the flooded city of Fairbanks, Alaska. We finally had a tasking for our staff B-58 pilot! He jumped at it with relish and enthusiasm. The B-58s were based at Little Rock and when we called to alert them, they were most anxious and pleased to become involved. Due to fuel consideration, we required an air refueling area just south of the Canadian border, and alerted the tanker squadron. We finished the mission planning rather late in the evening, being delayed in doing so, because we could not find a suitable air refueling area close to the border. There was a large Air Defense exercise taking place along the Northern states bordering Canada right where we needed to have the refueling track. We finally worked it out with the FAA and sent out the Operations Order. The mission went off without a hitch and when I received a copy of the photos I hustled them to the Director of Operations. What he did with them I’m not sure, but he was pleased by the B-58 crew efforts and results, and I so advised them of that fact.

Along towards the end of my four year tour I truly thought I had done a respectable job and my Officer Efficiency Reports (OERs) seemed to bear that out. Yet, one particular day my morale sank to zero. I was called in to the Personnel Office, and a Major said he wanted to discuss my future plans since my tour would soon be ending. That sounded good to me. He then stated that it seemed like my bosses wished for me to extend my assignment for another year, which I was pleased to hear. Then he dropped the bombshell! If I decided to extend, they were going to bring in a pilot to run the branch, meaning I would be demoted! After I came out of shock I asked why, and was told that Navigators were not authorized to be in command of certain operations. Remember this was back in the mid-60s, and very, very few command positions were authorized for non-pilot types. I then asked why that did

not occur when I was first placed in charge of the shop at the start, but got no answer.

I was told that I would be assigned to a B-52 Wing at Minot if I did not extend. When asked if there were any other options, I was told no. It seemed to me that was where I first started out, in a Bomb Wing. It was sort of like regressing, career wise. At any rate, I said I'd give him my answer shortly, and departed his office. The four years that I spent in the Recon Center was another kingpin in my career. I couldn't have asked for better; however, along with that came many, many long hours in the office, lunches and dinners at the desk, great pressure to succeed and Mary on numerous occasions had told me that the job was really taking a toll on me. I had not noticed that. I basically came to the conclusion that I would not accept being demoted and I would not go to a Bomb Wing in the frozen north. Now don't misread that last part. There is absolutely nothing wrong with being in a Bomb Wing. It is an honor to able to serve in one; however, I did not believe it was the right career move for me. Mary and I talked, and retirement seemed to be the best way to go.

I believed then, and still do so now, that being in the right place at the right time is paramount to happiness and success. It had happened to me four times in the past, and though I didn't know, it was about to happen again. After Mary and I spoke, I got a call from Major General Doug Nelson who had been my Director of Operations at the Ranch. He wished for a briefing on some portion of the program, so I had the briefing made up and headed for his office. We had some coffee and spoke of our days at the Ranch and then proceeded with briefing. About a couple of minutes into the briefing he stopped me and asked me what was the matter, stating "You're not yourself." I proceeded to tell him what had transpired. He asked if I would like to go to the Recon Center at USAFE Headquarters at Wiesbaden Germany, to which I gratefully said yes. He said he'd let me know, we then I went on with the briefing.

A couple of days later this same Major who had given me a Xanax moment called and asked who did I know because I was headed to Wiesbaden - the garden spot of Air Force assignments! He asked me why I didn't tell me that I did not wish to go to a Bomb Wing, since he could have assigned me to Hickham Field in Hawaii. I felt like shooting him. I immediately called Mary, then General Nelson to thank him, and he said he was good friends with the United States Air Force Europe

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(USAFE) Director of Operations and that he had called him and got the ball rolling.

So, we started preparing to head for Germany. At that time (summer of '69) we had a choice of travel by air or on the liner the USS United States. First class all the way, the vessel carried military personnel and their families back and forth to Europe, and we opted to fly so we could get our son settled in school. What a big, big mistake! After a couple of years they discontinued this program and we knew we had missed out on a great voyage.

During those past four years, I reinforced my beliefs in that the secret to being a success did not rest singly on one's shoulders but instead it rested on having good people working with you. When you start from scratch on a program that is so diverse and complicated as the Desert Queen, you learn quickly that the road will be real bumpy at times, and that's where a good supporting cast really pays off. And I had 'em. Good friends were made and to this day, those friendships still endure with quite a few of those Recon co-workers.

At my going away party, I was presented with the following pictured scroll, made by the same talented Sergeant who made up my many, many spur of the moment briefing charts. That's one gentleman to whom I shall always be grateful.



I left SAC with the feeling that with the help of others I had accomplished what was expected of me. I looked forward to working at USAFE, and to whatever challenges lay ahead.



CHAPTER 10 ***USAFE Recon and Intel***

USAFE RECON

So once again the Pizzo Family: Sam, Mary, and Steve (minus young Sam who was by then in the Air Force), and the pooch (which we were fortunate to have with us for 18 years) loaded up in our 1965 Mustang and headed for the East Coast en route to Germany. We checked into McGuire AFB, made arrangements with Lufthansa to ship the pooch and away we went.

We were completely amazed at the cleanliness and beauty of the country-side around Wiesbaden. There was no trash lying around, clean streets, and quaint little shops of all kinds. We checked into the Von Steuben Hotel, which I'm sure those that have been to Wiesbaden will recall as a modern hotel of the times.

We ended up staying there for a month, with Steve getting a job in the kitchen. It was rather hot and the only cooling in this modern hotel was by opening the windows leading onto the balcony. At that time of year, the flies were everywhere and leaving the door open was an invite for them to visit with us. I requested some fans but was told that there none were available. I was told that the solution to the fly problem was to leave the hall door open and the flies would go right through the room! So much for German technology!

I reported into the USAFE Recon Center which was located at Lindsey Air Station in downtown Wiesbaden. My new boss, a full Colonel, greeted me with a welcoming cup of coffee and then stated he

was sorry to see me be assigned to his shop! By then I was a Lt Colonel, and he told me that he had reviewed my OERs and that he was sure I would be promoted to Colonel, and with that he'd be forced to fire me because the job did not call for a Colonel Navigator! What a welcome.

I was placed in charge of the Recon Branch and quickly learned that the fast and nerve racking pace at SAC certainly did not exist there. There were some KC-97 Tankers stationed at the Air Base that on occasion flew a mission, but none while I remained in the Center. The only other flight I learned about was a T-39 that the Russians shot down. Other than that - zippo. The Operations Plan was so outdated that units shown in it no longer even existed in Germany, or elsewhere in Europe. It seemed like my first job would be to re-do the Ops Plan for the center, which was what I did. I was in a real 8 to 5 job for the first time in my career.

That continued until late November, when I was called and told to be in the Director of Operations office at 0800 hours the next morning. General Blood, the Officer that General Nelson had called to get me the job in Wiesbaden, greeted me by saying, "Congratulations Sam, you're fired!" I had made the full Colonels list. He also stated that there were no slots for a Colonel Navigator in Operations and that I could take all the time I needed to find myself a job. If I needed a flight during my search I was to just let him know and he'd set it up. I couldn't wait to get to a phone to call Mary and give her the good news. When I did she said she knew about it the evening before, learning of it from a Dentist who resided in our building, but felt I would enjoy hearing about it from my bosses. I really think she was getting even with me for all the many times I could not discuss things I was involved with. After the euphoria settled down I started searching around for a job in Wiesbaden, then England, and elsewhere, to no avail. I visited Personnel, Plans, Intel and the Tech Support, offices daily without success. One afternoon I was called by an acquaintance who said he had heard that there was a Colonel getting ready to retire who worked in the Intel Office. I found out who it was and hustled over there to see what the score was, and it turned out to be true. I immediately made an appointment to see the Intel Director the next day. I still haven't figured out why no one in Intel mentioned this to me earlier when I visited their shop.

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Prior to my appointment with the Colonel, I checked to see if I could find out how to approach him with my request to come to work for him. The word that I had heard was that he was a pretty tough cookie, and that I'd better have my ducks in order. He knew of course why I was there and wasted no time in asking details of my background. It was a very amicable discussion. He kept pressing about my association with Intel Operations, which of course was rather limited. He then told me that since I had insufficient Intelligence background experience, he could not use me. I sat there for a moment, and not one to be altogether tactful, I thanked him for seeing me, and that after departing his office, I would be going to Personnel to put in my retirement papers. He asked "Why are you doing such a stupid thing. You just made Colonel." I explained to him how I was fired from the Recon job because I evidently did a good job somewhere along the line that rated promotion to Colonel. Since there was no slots open for Navigators in the Operations field and now good folks like him wouldn't give me a chance to see if I'm capable of doing a job I might as well retire. That ended the conversation rather rapidly and he threw me out of his office. Of course I wasn't going to retire but that's exactly how I felt at that moment. It took about 10 minutes to walk back to my office, and as I walked in the phone was ringing. It was the Colonel who said, "Get your butt back here. You've got the job." I found out later that he had called my boss who evidently said the right things on my behalf.

USAFE INTELLIGENCE

So it came to pass that I was going into a brand new field, and once again I hadn't the foggiest idea what it entailed. The Colonel that I was replacing was the Director Of Collections (Humint, Elint, Comint, Photo, and Sigint) for USAFE and had working for the Assistant Air Attaches in Bonn, Oslo, Potsdam, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Rome. What a great job that turned out to be! I was most thankful that the retiring Colonel was going to be around for a couple of months and that turned out to be a most positive thing since I was able to sit with him and talk about every facet the job entailed. I had a pleasant surprise when I found an ex-55th Electronic Warfare Officer working in the Elint section that I knew quite well.

The responsibility of collecting Elint, Sigint, Humint, Photo and Comint Intelligence certainly presented a big challenge for me. I had personnel assigned to me that were scattered all over the continent of Europe. Some of them were in extremely sensitive or dangerous environments. For instance, the Assistant Air Attaches assigned in Berlin (Potsdam) were constantly chased and/or shot at by the Soviets or East Germans. When I visited Potsdam, we held all our classified conversations by taking walks outside of the building since we couldn't be sure about the building security or even the loyalty of some of the Germans working for us. Some of the data collected via the other components of our collection efforts certainly at times placed our personnel at risk. Blackmail was always prevalent and the watchword was never talk to strangers, in particular strangers of the female gender. We knew of course that the other side had intelligence programs as good or perhaps better in some instances than ours, and they were ruthless.

I spent the first few months dividing my time between sections to educate myself on their job functions. I initiated the old SAC function of holding Stand Up Briefings once a week so the I could keep up with the projects that were on going. I found out there were many, with lots of funds involved, dealing with many different countries. I did not become too popular when I briefed the staff that from then on, any and all requests had to pass the "W" test, i.e. why, when, what, who, and for good measure I threw in how. I guess requests were never handled in that manner before, and it took a while before it was an accepted routine without lots of grumbling.

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I soon learned that of the many individuals working in the Elint, Sigint and Comint areas, that there was one individual who was my diamond in the rough. This Government Service individual had been stationed at Wiesbaden from the very beginning of our collection programs within Europe. He was a goldmine of info for me and he and I hit it off from the git-go. The more I became involved with the many countries, his assistance became more invaluable. Ken Daniels was his name, and he was right up front on any and all activities that involved the areas listed above. Each organization needs a Ken Daniels, but he was one of a kind. He and the assistant Air Attaché in Bonn, Lt Colonel Mike Giglio, were of immense help to me in dealing with the Germans. And this is not to say that the balance of my staff were not first class, for they were, and their efforts were most appreciated.

One of the functions of the office was to meet regularly with our counterparts of all NATO countries as well as some that were not. Every few months we would visit their Headquarters and exchange Intel data pertinent to their country, and a few months later they would visit Wiesbaden. Those meetings would invariably involve lunches and dinners hosted by the host country. Much toasting took place - I might add. I worked most often with the German Air Force and at first I found it rather awkward working with those who we tried to kill and they likewise us, but my counter part, an ex-German Paratrooper an I hit it off real well. I visited his home quite a few times, and he mine, even after we retired and returned to New Orleans. In the rather stoic first meeting however, he'd tell me how he blew up American tanks in Italy, and I in turn told him how I bombed his cities. After some wine and a few good German beer things went for the better.

As stated earlier, we had dealings with many countries and some of them had quaint little customs. For instance the Italian Air Force Headquarters unit that we did business with in Rome had a large wall area upon which they placed a memento of those who passed through their facility. This consisted of cutting off one's tie and attaching it to a small aluminum plate that identified to whom the tie belonged.

On one occasion when their Officers visited Wiesbaden we arranged for a small party at one of my gents' home. During the course of the evening, and after a few glasses of wine, our visitors started snipping off the ties of those whose ties were not yet on their wall. Suddenly they went up to Mary, who was wearing a scarf around her neck, and proceeded to snip off a piece of her scarf. She was told that it

would be placed along side my tie in Rome, and furthermore, that she was the only lady ever afforded that honor. Everybody cheered. Then Mary grabbed the scissors and promptly started cutting off their ties. I have no idea why but all in attendance thought that was hilarious. Those of you who know Mary also know that she doesn't drink a drop of any alcoholic beverages - I do her share. On my next visit to Rome, I checked and sure enough, Mary's scarf was right there next to my tie.

I think most people view the Norwegians as a very polite, refined, intelligent, friendly group of people, but not real party goers. Wrong! One evening we had about six Norwegians, plus those in my office that worked with them, for a total of 10 or so over at our house where Mary had made a few large pans of Lasagna for dinner. Naturally copious helpings of wine was in order to round out the menu. Now Mary makes great Lasagna, and the Norwegians ate every last bit of that tasty dish, plus dessert, and just about emptied my wine reserves. At around 2 am, they were laying on the floor, on couches and chairs, singing Norwegian songs and having a ball. I hated to end the evening but all good things must come to an end. I think I heard about that evening each and every time I had the pleasure of dealing with those individuals after that.

Now the Danes were a different breed altogether. They were pretty much like the Norwegians in all the mannerisms alluded to in the previous paragraphs with the exception they really enjoyed a good time no matter what. Case in point, one year it was decided that we would see how many of our group wished to attend the Oktoberfest in Munich. We were overwhelmed by the response but charged ahead in making the arrangements for tickets, hotels, and the like. With the large number of those planning to go, we checked into the outstanding German rail transport and we found that it would be cheaper and more convenient to rent an entire car, and we did. Since it was about the time that the Danes were scheduled to come down to visit we extended an invitation to the two who were coming to bring their wives and join us, as our guests, in going to the Oktoberfest. Naturally they jumped at the offer. I would have loved to see how the Danes decided who would be attending, and I bet there was a lot of politicking.

All was in readiness on the morning of departure. Our guests had arrived; the essentials (food, snacks and perhaps some liquids that I wasn't supposed to know about) had been put on board our rail car with the only remaining item being the procurement of ice at the last

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moment. That important assignment was given to the two or three most junior officers who had to bring large garbage bags full of ice from the Von Steuben Hotel to the railroad station. They did their job in an outstanding manner. That last endeavor required lot' of negotiating with the hotel staff and I finally got dragged in to it because we just about emptied their supply to fill our needs. With negotiating skills, cunning and bribery, all those problems were finally resolved.

I think some of the group started partying well before the train left the station, including the Danes, and the conductor. When we arrived in Munich, the conductor was nowhere to be found, and for all we knew he may have fallen off the train. Two of the Danes didn't want to get off the train; they just wanted to keep partying. But get off we did, and it was bitter cold, which probably helped sober up some of those who participated in that Intelligence gathering program.

We checked into our hotels and headed for the Oktoberfest area. We wanted to get into the Lowenbrau tent, but it was really packed, but we noticed there was a balcony located at the rear of the tent that was occupied by only a few revelers. It was decided that this was the spot where we needed to be to enjoy the sights and sounds. Needless to say that ended up in a very serious negotiation with the manager. True to our diligence in overcoming minor impediments to our Intelligence collection goals and negotiating skills, cunning and bribery once again prevailed and the balcony became our private domain, even with a security guard to make sure that only our group had access to the area.

My most memorable moments of the Oktoberfest occurred late one afternoon when Mary and I returned to the festivities. As we entered this very, very large arena and made our way through the mass of people having a ball guzzling great beer, I noticed some of my troops were hanging over the railings. One by one they appeared to be dropping something off of the balcony, and as they did I could hear loud cheers emanating from the revelers directly below. As we climbed the steps I then had a full view of what was taking place. At a large table directly below the balcony sat a blonde lady I assumed to be about 50 years old who was really, really heavily endowed in a certain area of her body. She was dressed in the typical style of those ladies who reside in the Alps, being a leather skirt and a white blouse cut extremely low, which exposed her endowments to a very large degree. It seemed that our young troops (with their wives nearby) had started dropping Pfennig's (German pennies) attempting to have them fall, into

the target area, which you can guess where that was. Evidently she, and all those sitting in her close proximity joined in on this escapade, as every time our gent would drop the Pfennig, she would reach up and with both hands exposing more of what little wasn't already exposed. If the coins missed, they would hit the table and bounce all over the place, and the surrounding crowd would let out cheers. When one hit the target, the cheers were deafening. Since no one seemed to object, and no Gendarmes came to stop the proceedings, I opted to just sit back and enjoy the evening. For the record, I missed on my only try. The only drawback I found with going to the Oktoberfest was that you could drink all that great beer, then you were required to pay 10 Pfennig's when you needed to go pee, and you pee'd a lot. Our train ride back to Wiesbaden was certainly not like the trip down. It was very quiet and somber, and even the Danes slept most of the way back. We did not see our original conductor; he's probably still MIA.

Our collection partners, on a daily basis, collected a great deal of electronic data which we passed along, and which I hoped helped provide information things like how to set Jammers on our fighters or bombers. I became curious as to just what was filtering down to the tactical units. I approached my boss and expressed my thoughts to him and suggested that it might be beneficial if I could visit the tactical fighter bases in Germany and meet with the personnel who were responsible for programming the jammers. He thought that was a good idea but stated that he could not make that decision - it had to be made by the Director of Operations. It made sense to me, so I got an appointment with him to see what he thought about the idea. He agreed wholeheartedly. I then made arrangements to visit each unit. I selected an outstanding young Major to be the Project Officer, and he and I started making the rounds. We were welcomed at each base and shown the data that was used in selecting and setting jamming parameters for the aircraft. Remember this was in the 60s' and computers had not made their way into our lives as they have today.

I was really surprised. No two units had the same data, nor did they have any current standard documentation. Some were still using WWII data. We put that into our final report which was prepared by the young Major and in which I made some recommendations to standardize the procedures to have current data utilized. I thought it was a good report, only my boss thought I would be stepping on a lot of Operations personnel toes if we sent it forward. He asked me if I had

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any more copies, to which I replied no, and he said the matter was closed.

Fast forward in time to when that boss retired and was replaced. My new Director called me in one day and we chatted a bit, then he asked me why the Elint study we had submitted was in the safe. I told him the background and he said that not sending it forward was a mistake and he would do so immediately. I do not know to whom he sent it but a very short time later I got a letter from the Pentagon stating that they appreciated the report and that steps were being taken to implement the suggestions that I had made. I passed this information on to the young Major and so noted his contributions on his next OER.

One bright and sunny morning I was called in to my director's office and handed a copy of an order which he had just received. It stated that one Colonel Samuel E. Pizzo was, as part of his current assignment, appointed as Program Manager of a project located in England called Cobra Mist, and that I would assume that responsibility at once and make frequent reports as to its status. My boss asked what this was all about, and I told him I was in the dark as much as he was. I immediately made arrangements to visit the site, once I could find out where it was located, which I found was near Bentwaters AFB in northeastern part of England.

Arriving at Bentwaters, I made arrangements for a driver and car and off I went on another brand new assignment. The facility was out in the middle of nowhere. It consisted of two sections, one a large, completely enclosed building, with no windows and an extremely large antennae field that was probably two football fields in size. The antennas were large segments of material which looked like different size aluminum tubing and wires, which were all attached in some manner, that laid flat and were raised two or three feet off the ground. A solid mass of these covered the entire field. It was staffed by Air Force and British Air Force personnel, as well as many civilians of all technical and scientific levels. I immediately knew I was in way over my head. The system was designed to send signals from those antennae and have them bounce off the troposphere. Depending upon the height of the troposphere and the angle set in transmitting the signal, it was supposed to be able to identify tanks, trucks, etc. behind the Iron Curtain. The identification was done by operators looking at, what I would call, oscilloscopes. All those lines going up and down looked like gibberish to me.

Trip after trip was made and briefings given, but as to whether or not progress was being made, I can only suspect since the scientist types would always sound most optimistic. Yet when I'd sit with the personnel at the scopes and ask questions such as, "What does that signal represent?" or "How can you tell how many units of whatever it represents?" the answers I received more and more led me to believe that things really weren't going as planned. To date the project had cost \$25,000,000, and from my viewpoint, at that time, it was a failure. That project had been already been on going for two years before I became involved. I was assured that they were confident that it was going to work and when President Nixon visited Russia, they were going to be able to track his aircraft all the way into Moscow. I made myself available for that big test, and could see the frustration written on the faces of the operators as well as the scientists as the time came and went without any measure of success. I advised the staff that upon my return to Wiesbaden, I was going to recommend a time limit of six months, and if no improvements were noted, I was going to recommend cancellation of the project.

Upon my return I submitted that plan to my boss. By then my first Director had retired, and my new Director agreed with my recommendation. About a week later, on a Saturday, I was called and told to be in the Director's office within 30 minutes. No reason was given. Upon my arrival, I was introduced to a Two Star General, who I was told was from Army Headquarters in Stuttgart. They really ran the show in Europe. He began questioning my background on matters relating to managing a project like Cobra Mist, and of course I informed him that from a technical standpoint, I surely was not qualified to be in charge of such a project. I also stated, that surely the information was available prior to my being assigned Project Manager. He became most belligerent and wanted to know why I thought I had the right to recommend its cancellation based on my lack of a technical background. I replied, "I never volunteered for the assignment, and I based my judgment upon many conversations with the staff and operators on site." I was then dismissed and later that afternoon my Director called and told me that the General was the sponsor who pushed for and got the program approved in the Pentagon. It was his baby. On Monday I was informed that I no longer was the Project Manager. I couldn't have been any happier if I had tried. About a year after I retired, I received a letter from one of the officers who worked

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for me advising that the snake was dead. Cobra Mist was no more - about two years too late. I felt vindicated with reference to my decision.

At the giant airport at Frankfurt Germany, I had two operational sites. Located in an ex-German Military compound, on the terminal building side, we had a unit that conducted interrogations with refugees and escapees from behind the Iron Curtain. On the other side of the field there was a small Air Force unit where we kept an unmarked C-47 Goonie Bird aircraft that we used to carry parts to various collection sites around Europe as well as for other operations.

One day I was scheduled to be on board as we ferried some electronic replacement parts to a collection site. As I approached the supposedly unmarked aircraft, I saw printed in large bold red letters on the tail section, the letters “SWA.” I had rather good relations with the Crew Chief, and as I approached the aircraft, he seemed to be avoiding me, so I called him over. As he got close to me he started shaking his head and saying, “I just knew I was going to get in trouble.” I asked what he was talking about, and he blurted out, “For putting the Red Letters on the tail section.” I then asked what the letters stood for and who said to put them on the plane. He stammered and hemmed and hawed and finally said, “Sir I respectfully refuse to answer.” “Okay,” I said, “but at least tell me what the letters stand for.” Coming to attention, he said, quite proudly... “SAM’S WORLD AIRLINE.” I started laughing and said, “Sarge, the only trouble you will be in, will be if after we return these letters aren’t removed pronto.” Furthermore, I did not need to know who put him up to doing the dastardly deed, although I had a pretty good idea who was the culprit. I got a kick out of the whole thing and thought it was rather nice of them to do that. On my next visit, the letters had been removed.

Perhaps the strangest assignment I had while in Germany came in the form of a request for another officer and me to attend a briefing at a location which I shall not, even at this late date, name for various security reasons.

We were requested, by name, to depart for a specific city on a given date, take different flights, stay at different hotels, and wear civilian clothes. We were not to discuss the trip with anyone other than our immediate superior. Our boss was in titters wondering what the heck was going on, but frankly so were the two of us. We were also

advised to be outside the hotel at 08:00 hours the next morning where we would be picked up and transported to the briefing location.

We complied with the instructions and at the allotted hour I was outside the hotel, when this black car with two individuals in it drove up. One got out of the car and opened the door for me, I entered and off we went. We drove for about 30 minutes, and I'm sure I recalled seeing the same buildings a couple of times. There was no conversation. We finally drove into a courtyard that was surrounded by a massive iron fence with a rather old stone building situated in the center of the complex. Military personnel were standing guard at numerous locations around the building.

I was escorted into the building and found that the other officer had arrived a bit earlier. Introductions were made with our hosts, who were all in civilian attire and who gave no indication of rank or job status. We had some coffee and sweet rolls, made small talk and finally the two of us were seated at a small table facing a very large wall area covered with red curtains. Our hosts then stated that we were going to be given a briefing on what they believed to be the Soviets plan of invasion if indeed hostilities erupted. We were not to take notes or ask questions. That sounds rather ridiculous, but that's what took place.

They pulled back the curtains and there was a large map of their country with invasion routes depicted, air attack locations, identified troop deployment locations, aircraft dispersal areas, the numbers of air, sea, and ground troops the Soviets were expected to employ. Even the identification of the individual units of the invading forces were shown. They explained in detail how they planned to resist the invasion and how long they could withstand the attack and when and where they expected help from the NATO countries. It was totally mind boggling to say the least, and for us to be able to remember this was simply out of the question. The briefing lasted about two hours, then we broke for a light lunch, after which they requested we provide our proper authorities the data we had just received. To make this situation even more bizarre, there was an American Embassy located in the city where we were briefed. Logically there must have been a better way to provide this information to the US, other than in the manner in which we participated. We were taken back to our hotels in the same manner we were picked up, and departed that afternoon, on different flights back to Wiesbaden.

The next couple of days after our return were spent attempting to put together the myriad amount of information that had been given to us, and we both agreed that we may have come close, but for sure we knew it wasn't anywhere near perfect. We also spent some time trying to figure out why we were specifically requested for that assignment, but in the long run we didn't have a clue. We turned our report over to our Director and never heard it mentioned again. Thank goodness!

It was becoming apparent to the German Collection personnel, as well as those in my staff, that the collection equipment in the towers was in need of replacement. It simply was outdated and needed to be upgraded. Joint on-going studies by our staffs reached the same conclusion, as well as what was needed to make the system become a state of the art operation. The Germans, as was their prerogative to do, shopped around to see what best suited their requirements. With a bit of prodding and guidance we both concluded that an American electronics firm located in Palo Alto, California, offered up the best system. I might add that there was some pressure from the Pentagon for me to make sure that the American firm got the contract - a decision with which I readily agreed.

We then arranged through a four coordinated effort (USAFE, GAF, the Pentagon, and the firm) a trip to California. A great deal was arranged through our Pentagon counter-parts. So it came to pass that I and three of our technicians, the Assistant Air Attaché in Bonn, plus the German Colonel with which I worked most closely, and about six of his staff headed to an airport for the trip to the States. The Germans had quite a large number of troops deployed to El Paso, Texas where they were trained in missile operations, and in support of this effort they scheduled a GAF 707 aircraft to frequently make a round trip. It stopped at Washington on the going and returning flights. Our teams joined up and boarded the aircraft headed to the States, and deplaned in Washington. Arrangements had been made for them to stay at Ft. Myer, the home of the Honor Guards, which was indeed an honor. The first evening meal at Ft. Myer sort of set the tone for the trip - be prepared for anything. When the waiter took their order it was for steamed clams, by the bucket full, and pizza, to be followed up with of Budweiser Beer, that was also by the pitchers full. We picked up the tab on the meal. The American officer who coordinated the trip paid when we were required to do so. I will bet his expense account got a lot of scrutiny followed by some interesting comments when it was submitted.

The Germans paid for their own air fares in the States and most of their meals and hotel bills. If it was considered entertainment, then we paid. Remember the guidance I had received early on - keep 'em happy and be sure they buy American. After a day or so of briefings at the Pentagon, we flew to San Francisco, them in First Class, and us in steerage. With car rentals, we were off to Palo Alto.

We arrived in the late afternoon, checked into our motel and shortly thereafter departed for a cocktail dinner party thrown by the Electronics firm. It was a real lavish affair; then early to bed, ready for the business to begin in the morning. We were instructed to keep 'em happy, and there were a couple of semi-elderly German tech reps who requested a bottle of Scotch each evening before retiring. That ritual kept up for the balance of the trip. They'd show up the next morning bright and eager to go. If they drank the whole bottle, it surely didn't seem to have any overnight affects.

The first day started off with a well prepared briefing about the merits of the firm's proposal, followed by many questions and demonstrations. That lasted a couple of days and I can honestly say I contributed absolutely nothing. Zip. I merely was a spectator. Technical electronic words were being thrown around to which I was completely in the dark about what they meant, so when my guys nodded yes, I followed suit. If they shook their heads no, so did I. Thank goodness I was never asked a question. They knew better.

Late in the afternoon of the last day, the German Colonel told me that they were all in agreement to purchase the equipment they had been shown, and they did. There was much happiness at the Pentagon when I called them and told them the good news. Lavish praise was thrown my way, but little did they know as to the tremendous lack of input I had there. Now if the cocktail party given by the firm on the first night was outstanding, the one they put on the last evening put that one to shame. Now technically, a military officer cannot accept meals or gratuity of any kind from contractors, but as hard as I tried, I just couldn't figure out how I could determine my fair share of consumed food and libations so I could cough up the dough. I just gave up and enjoyed the festivities. Besides that, the firm would have thought I had gone nuts. I hope the statute of limitations has elapsed and the IRS or whomever, won't be after me.

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The following morning we prepared to depart for San Francisco to board a plane to El Paso so that we could catch the GAF 707 returning to Germany. Well, not so fast. The Germans decided that they wanted to go see Lake Tahoe and Yosemite! I certainly could not prevent them from doing so, but I knew I could not allow our personnel to accompany them without permission. I called for guidance and was told that it was okay. Some of my troops went to Yosemite, while I accompanied the others to Tahoe.

Tahoe was a blast. The first night we went to a pizza parlor and the group took over the place, to the delight of the rest of the customers. There was a piano there and one of the Germans played and the singing of American and German songs echoed along that strip of shops and restaurants. We closed the place up. We spent two nights there and headed back to San Francisco. We did pick up some of the bills on that junket.

As we gathered in the airport we almost had a calamity. We carried an attaché case with some classified material in it. Most of the time we had some one delegated to refrain from celebrating and they took care of the case. Several times it was the Assistant Air Attaché or I. When we drove back to San Francisco we placed the case in the trunk of one of the cars, and when we were in the aircraft boarding area, I noticed that no one had the case. Panic time! We determined it had been left in the trunk of the rental car and the frantic chase was on, not only to find the case but do so in time as to not miss our flight,. There must have been a zillion black cars in that rental lot and we, along with the Hertz manager, ran around like mad looking for our car. We finally found it as it was heading into the wash shop. The case was there and the disaster averted. We made the flight, once more with us in steerage and the Germans in First Class.

When we arrived at El Paso, we had a couple of days wait until the GAF aircraft was scheduled to arrive, so our friends now decided to visit Mexico, and off we went. Nothing happened on that little jaunt, except I learned that playing tricks on your boss is accepted in the GAF. We were in an ice cream parlor, and had all placed our order, when the Second in Command had to go to the men's room. While he was gone, the ice cream arrived at the table and one of the Germans proceeded to pour Tabasco Sauce all over the ice cream. When the refreshed officer returned he didn't bat an eye as he ate every bit of ice cream on the plate and never uttered a word. No one said a word while

he slurped it down. It just had to be like eating fire. However the next morning he complained that he'd had an upset stomach when he retired and couldn't imagine why. We headed back to El Paso, and the next day flew back to Washington then on to Germany. Mission accomplished.

Upon returning from the States and having, what I would assess, a successful trip, we felt that we should further cement our Intelligence gathering programs with the German Air Force by having a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with regards to each side's responsibilities. My GAF counterpart also felt that this would be in the best interest for all concerned. Accordingly, a small team was formed by each side to develop this document. I, my number one technician, Ken Daniels, and the Assistant Air Attaché in Bonn, Lt Colonel Giglio, headed up our team, and there were three GAF officers representing their side. We worked well together, and after a couple of long days, we had drafted up the MOU. It encompassed all aspects of our program, training, equipment, parts supply, cost responsibilities, Intelligence exchange procedures, and communications. You name it; it was covered. We ran it through our staff at Wiesbaden, then up the Chain of Command without a hitch. The same went for the other side.

Once we knew we had a document agreement, we arranged for a signing ceremony at USAFE Headquarters, whereby the Commander of the German Air Force, a famous WWII Fighter Pilot, and our USAFE Commander, a Four Star General, would do the honors by signing the agreement. All was arranged according to Hoyle. There would be a briefing by both sides, followed by the signing by the two Commanders, then a luncheon to celebrate this occasion. Photos were taken, speeches made, then something occurred that I think the Germans had never before experienced. During the luncheon, the German General rose to make a toast, only there was no wine on the table. That was unheard of in German circles. It seems that our General did not drink, nor did he wish his troops to drink, and had even closed the bars at the Officer's Mess during lunch time. There was no wine on the table. Not to be distracted though, the good German General stood up and toasted the occasion with water, a first, I'm sure, in the annals of the GAF. Shortly thereafter the Assistant Air Attaché and I were invited to GAF Headquarters, where we were presented with a GAF Electronic Warfare Officer's Badge. It was an honor, indeed. I don't believe they had previously passed out that honor to others outside of their organization.



During my visits to the various countries with which we dealt, I began to observe, what to me seemed to be a curious situation. It seemed like there was distribution of the data collected via our supplied equipment, which was being forwarded to other sources. I started a very quiet effort to determine just which agencies, ours, or otherwise, might be the recipients of the data. Bit by bit, I learned that NSA, FBI, DIA, CIA, and no telling how many others were involved. Now the idea that other US agencies were getting the data did not really upset me, but not sharing in the costs involved or providing us with Intel data that they may be obtaining while operating in these areas surely did.

After I had enough information that I could substantiate my findings, if questioned, I drew up a schematic showing the lines of communications that existed between these countries destined to the various agencies, and accompanied that with the suggestion that this should be investigated and that a joint cost and data sharing operation should be put in place. Remember this was in 1970 long before 9/11. Did I think it had merit? Yes. Did I think it would go anywhere? No.

At any rate I sent it in to my Director, and thought no more about it. One Saturday afternoon I was cutting the grass and Mary called me to the phone. It was my Director telling me I had 20 minutes to be the CINC's (Commander in Chief) office. No reason why given. I changed clothes and hustled to the Headquarters building. My Boss was waiting and when I showed up we were ushered in to see the CINC. It was a very casual atmosphere as I recall. We had a couple of cups of coffee and nothing came up which would let me know why I was in attendance. He then picked up a folder and pulled out my schematic and wanted a full explanation as to what it was all about. I proceeded, of course, to tell him and when I finished, he stated that it needed looking into and he thanked me for the info. We then started talking about Recon in general, which led him to ask me my opinion of his

Fighter Photo Recon operations, of which I had no idea what-so-ever. He then asked me a direct question about it's viability in the advent of hostilities if the Russians attacked Germany. I sat quietly for a while prompting him to say "I'd like your response." I knew I was on real rocky ground and speaking way out of my area of responsibility, but respond I did, telling him what I thought.

I stated that if the Russians poured across the border they would be doing so with mechanized units, tanks, etc. that would be very mobile. I added that if a USAFE Photo aircraft did happen to get some pictures, by the time the aircraft returned to base, had the photos developed, and passed the info on, those units would probably no longer be in their original location. He then asked "What would you believe to be our options?" I stated pilot eyeballs and radio, with the data being passed as it was being seen. The meeting ended and as we left his office my Director said, "Sam you're going to either fired or promoted." He didn't know which. He further stated that when and if the stuff I said about Photo Recon Operations got back to the wrong people I'd more likely be shot! I guess it didn't, because I didn't get shot. When I returned home I kept thinking I must have been out of my mind making those comments to a Four Star General - like preaching to the Pope. My Director was probably right; I'd most likely get shot or just disappear one day. As to the schematic, more later on that.

I was then in the last year of my four year assignment and I started being asked about my plans for the future. My Director wished for me to extend, however there were some things that were taking place in Germany as well as the Air Force, that were affecting my thoughts, as well as Mary's, on any decisions we made.

First off, the Air Force would shortly be instituting a policy with regards to flight pay, which basically stated, that if you were not in a job slot calling for you to be on flying status, you would no longer receive flight pay. That meant a \$275 a month reduction in my pay. At that time a full Colonel, on flight status, made \$25,000 per year. Secondly, USAFE was moving to Ramstein Germany, and although all of our communications lines from the many countries we dealt with were into Wiesbaden, we were not sure of just where we would wind up. We did not wish to leave Wiesbaden. A third factor was that I had been informed by the Pentagon Personnel Division that handled Colonel assignments that I would be assigned to the Pentagon into a job slot of which I was very familiar. I often dealt with the officer who I

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would be replacing who had told me that he worked at least 60-70 hours per week. More recently I was advised that he had a heart attack and passed away. I certainly was not going there. That left open the only viable consideration that made sense to Mary and me - retirement. Also we considered that I was 53 at the time and would be forced to retire in a couple of years anyway, and if I intended to work in a civilian job upon my military retirement, age wise, the earlier the better. That was what I advised my Director, and I submitted my request for retirement.

Flash back now to the schematic that I drew regarding Intelligence sharing with other agencies. One day I received a phone call from the Air Force Chief of Staff for Intelligence, with whom I was well acquainted. He advised me that I was to come to Washington and give a series of briefings, which he was arranging, to those agencies that I had listed on that schematic! I was to try and get them to agree on the cost and data sharing proposals I had listed on my sheet. I immediately wished I had never made that little study, and that not only was this going to be a futile effort, I hated to think how I would be received in what I knew would be a hostile environment.

So off I headed to Washington, wishing to heck I still had my WWII flak jacket because I sure knew I was going to need it. First though I had to meet with the General, and after a few moments of talking about the briefings, he said I was to visit with him after the briefings at which time he said he would explain the steps he was taking to stop my retirement!

In the Sixties and Seventies one thing that I feel many officers resented about going TDY, especially to the Washington DC area, was the fact that we were given a \$25.00 day per diem. Now that had to cover your hotel room, all meals, taxis, bus fares, tips and if you had a drink or two, you really put yourself in a hole. Furthermore you could not accept freebies from contractors or any civilian organizations with which you may be dealing. If you didn't have a friend or two to invite you over for a meal or ask that you stay with them, it was a real bummer. I coupled that with my feelings of what I was about to become involved with, and my heart really wasn't in the trip. Be it as it may, I was committed.

In Washington, I spent two days traveling to the different locations around the area, and my taxi fares wiped out my per diem.

Talk about motivation. At each agency it was exactly the same. There were no surprises there. It was a polite introduction, coffee and sometimes doughnuts (which I truly was glad to get, saved on eating), no rank, job position, just hello and silent stares. Usually there were only two or three attendees including the, what I assumed, ranking individual since he sat behind the desk. I would end my short dissertation, they would thank me and state they'd look into the matter, and I would then be provided escort out of the building. Not once was I questioned or did anyone suggest anything. The word was evidently out, just listen and do not rock the boat. It was exactly as I had envisioned it would happen.

I reported back to the General, accompanied into his office by a staff officer that I was well acquainted with, and one I considered a friend. As I explained to the General that I had completely failed to accomplish anything, he laughed and said, did I really think I would? He then stated the whole thing was basically a ruse to get me to come to Washington so that he could talk me, face-to-face, and get me to change my mind about retiring! With that he wanted to know exactly why I wished to retire and I reiterated my reasons. He stated he really wished that I would stay in Wiesbaden and continue to run the programs, and if I wanted to resign that would be okay. He said he would hire me as a Government Civil Service (GS) employee with the pay grade of a Brigadier General, and further that I could receive my full pension! I stated that there was a regulation that said, if Regular Air Force Officers retired and went to work for the government, they had to give up a goodly portion of their pension, to which he said that was not necessarily so. There was a little known exemption to the rule that he could invoke which would allow me to receive my total pension plus the GS salary!

I had to think about that real hard as it certainly was an honor as well as a tremendously monetary beneficial proposal. After a short period of time, I respectfully declined the offer because there were other considerations involved that I felt were overriding with regards to this matter. After a few more minutes of discussion, the meeting ended with the General stating that he had tried and regretted to not having changed my mind, that he hated to see me leave the Service, but he respected my wishes. When the other Colonel and I were in the hall outside the Generals' Office, he said he thought he had just witnessed the greatest boo-boo an individual officer could make. Based on what

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transpired since I retired, I did not then and I certainly do not now, for one minute regret that decision.

So I returned to Wiesbaden, and prepared to greet my successor who showed up rather quickly after my return from Washington. I was replaced by a real first class officer whom I felt would step right in and the program wouldn't miss a beat. I started setting up briefings for him with his new counterparts, leaving Germany for last, and that became a story in itself, that is most fitting to close out my military career.

I made arrangements with my German Colonel counterpart (who was about to make General) whereby my successor, myself, Ken Daniels, and Lt Colonel Mike Giglio from Bonn, were to meet up with the Germans. We'd visit a collection site on the Baltic Sea coast right where East and West Germany boundaries meet. We motored up to a German Air Force base where we assembled and boarded a chopper for the trip up north.

We were cruising along at what I assumed to be an altitude of around 2,000 ft. flying parallel to a wire fence, which in that area was the border marking separation the two Germanys. All of a sudden the two German pilots got real excited yelling out, "There he is, there he is," and we immediately start a sharp descent to a point that we were flying just a few feet above that wire fence. All the while the pilots keep yelling, "There's Herman; there's Herman." I looked ahead and saw an individual, in hip boots, standing on the East German side of the fence shaking his fist at us with one hand while shaking a shovel at us with the other hand. We were coming up to him rather rapidly, and as we got real close I saw him starting to wind up, getting ready to, I guess, throw the shovel at us. Heck at our altitude, I'm sure he could have just held the shovel up and we would have run into it! At about the moment he tossed the shovel at us, the German chopper pilot went into a small G-Force pull up, and they started cheering saying, "He missed again; he missed again!" Now all that was flashing through my mind at that moment, was of all the things I had been involved in my career, I was going to end it by getting shot down by a shovel thrown by a guy wearing hip boots out in the middle of nowhere. What a story that would have made. Once again though, my guardian angel came through and we continued on our way up north.

After we landed at the site, the customary military honors were exchanged and a tour of the Collection Tower was conducted. It was

then time for Happy Hour and I think we toasted to every American and German President, politician, hero, organization, and finally all days ending in the letter Y. Dinner was served with more toasts, then we all adjourned to a courtyard for an archery contest. The building was a square U-shaped building, and at the closed end of the courtyard, they had set up archery targets.

Now for those who are not familiar with the crossbow, and certainly that included me on that lovely late afternoon, firing off one of those things after numerous toasts can be detrimental to your health. The instructions I received said place your right hand around the rear handle where the trigger is located, grasp the front handle, aim and pull the trigger. They neglected to tell me that the thumb on the hand holding the front handle must be wrapped around the handle and not sticking up. Bad move. When I released that arrow, the bow string which had to be going at least Mach Three, whacked my thumb and gave me the prettiest swollen purple thumb one has ever seen. That caused no end of amusement among my fellow competitors. It was determined that my arrow did not hit the target, nor the building behind the target, but went over it and ended up in the Baltic Sea. With my luck, I probably sank a boat. After the competition ended we had to have an award ceremony, again accompanied by copious toasts, and I was awarded the booby prize.

The next morning we boarded our chopper and headed south. There was no sign of Herman; he was probably back on his farm taking shovel throwing practice. My successor said that he thought he really was going to enjoy the new job. I wonder why.

CHAPTER 11

Retirement

It was finally time for us to head home. They threw me a farewell party which was attended by many of the individuals who had worked for me throughout Europe. The officers stationed at Potsdam, near Berlin, attended and gave a crying towel and a huge box of Roloids as my farewell gifts. They knew that throughout my tenure we had our moments with some very interesting and tense situations with their operations, and I sure gulped down many a Rolaid during those moments. Many phone calls that alerted me of possible diplomatic trouble or incidents that had occurred during the daily routines sure called for those Roloids.

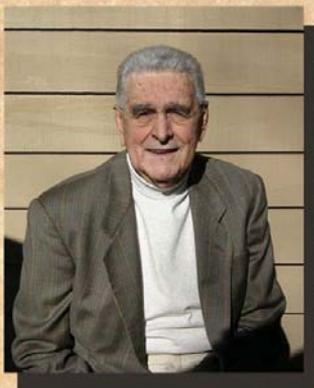
We shipped our '65 Mustang back home and made reservations to fly back. When I called to see if we could get the pooch shipped back as cargo on our same flight, I was told that for \$25 extra he could have a seat on the plane next to us, which he did. We landed in New Jersey, and were picked by an ex-55ther with whom we spent a few days before heading for New Orleans.

On June 1st, 1973, with my military career coming to an end, I checked in at Keesler AFB in Mississippi, the base from which I would retire. And what a career it had been. If, when I first joined up, I'd known just what a career it would be, I would have gladly paid for the privilege of serving. I was honored and privileged to have worked with the lowest and the highest of military ranks. My career gave me the opportunity to work with diplomats, scientists, military personnel of all ranks and branches of service within foreign governments, and also within our own military structure. It gave me access to individuals and all component levels of most Air Force Commands.

In Europe the Intelligence position was such that travel to most of European capitals was a routine aspect of the job. If you tie in the assignments that led to working with the A-12 and SR 71 programs, and meeting with Kelly Johnson and his great staff of designers and planners that certainly added to the satisfaction I felt about my assignments. Add to the above with being assigned to the 55th SRW with all that job entailed, it was simply a dream come true.

I think most of all, though, was the privilege of having superiors who had faith in me by allowing me so much freedom to develop and change programs vital to the security of our nation. Top all of the above with having had the opportunity to work with outstanding individuals throughout my career, many who are fast friends to this day, and it becomes quite easy as to why I say I was truly blessed for those 30 or so years.

It was as good as it gets. Who could have asked for anything more?



About the Author

After retiring from his second career in 1988, this time from a major steamship company as an Assistant Vice-President in charge of their world-wide cargo container operations, Sam and Mary Pizzo moved to their present location in Mandeville, Louisiana.

Sam became active in the 55th Strategic Recon Wing Association, and to a lesser degree, the Roadrunners Internationale Association (the CIA A-12 Program.)

Until Father Time said slow down, Sam enjoyed golf and he and Mary traveled a bit. Now it's just laid back time enjoying family, friends and all the charm that goes with living in this neck of the woods, with Mary still letting him do everything he wishes - providing it meets with her approval.

Sam and Mary are the doting grandparents of Johannah, daughter of Sam, Jr. and Emily and Kelly, daughters of Steve and Rosemary.

