

Bogey at 3 O'Clock Level

by **Richard "Zot" Barazzotto**

In the July issue of Videmus Omnia, was a picture of the massive Soviet TU-128 Fiddler interceptor, the largest fighter aircraft ever built. The photo was taken by crew E-18 flying from Eielson on June 29th, 1972 in the Kara Sea, north of the Fiddler's home base of Amderma. The menacing AA-5 Ash air-to-air missiles (nearly 11 feet long!) with infrared and radar homing noses are clearly visible.



We asked for whoever remembered taking the picture to let us know so attribution could be given. Well, now we know who the 'bogeyman' is: Richard "Zot" Barazzotto. Following is his account:

The stories in the July 2001 55SRWA newsletter brought back a flood of memories.

Names and faces, missions and places, all came running through my mind as I read. Then in the back I saw a very familiar picture. It was a close-up of a Soviet TU-128 Fiddler, a picture of which that I have hanging on my wall with the rest of my flying momentos. Here is the rest of the story: That picture was taken on the last flight of a deployment of Combat Sent (A/C# 849) which took place during June 1972. It was an interesting month that saw us twice return to Omaha from Eielson when the navigation system crumped.

The first time it happened we had just hit the tanker and were topped off on gas. The command post air-filed our flight plan and we headed south - without car keys, wallets, or our loved ones knowing we were coming home. Fortunately, we all knew how to break into our own homes, and after that, we always disregarded the regulations and carried our keys and wallets.

Our whole deployment was filled with problems, and we even had a theme song - Jerry Reid's "When Your Hot, Your Hot, and When Your Not, Your Not." We also used the "I have some good news and some bad news" greeting with regularity. On one flight we were having a problem of losing oxygen. As the copilot it was my job to monitor that and I had all hands turn off their oxygen regulators as we tried to find the cause. It was a stuck regulator and the off/on trick fixed it, but everyone knew that we had a reduced supply of LOX. About two hours north of Eielson, the navigation system gave up the ghost with the usual bang and a cloud of smoke that came up from under the cockpit floor.

I turned on the emergency intercom (which overrides what everyone is listening to) and announced, "Crew - this is the copilot. The good news is that we have plenty of

oxygen left. The bad news is that we are going to have to use it because we have a fire." Given that two hours north of Eielson is not a place where many would go for a vacation (even in June), that got the crew's attention. They were out of their sleeping bags, fully dressed and wide-awake in record time. Fortunately, the fire was only a puff of smoke, and the return to base and the landing were uneventful. The nav system quit several other times, once during an engine start. We shut down, announced to the tower that we had a fire on board and abandoned the plane. By the time the message got to the command post, it had been

garbled to say that the plane was in a hanger and on fire. Needless to say, the base commander was really interested in what was going on. Fortunately, this, too, was only a puff of smoke and no real damage was sustained by the plane or the crew.

Because we were scheduled to fly only a few times a week, we had time to sightsee, and for those of us who had never been to Alaska, it was an adventure. On one planned three-day break, I secured permission to go to Mt. McKinley National Park and stay over. Several of us took the train from Fairbanks, booked rooms in the park hotel and made plans to take a bus tour early in the morning. Little did I know that after we had departed, someone figured out that the schedule had been messed up and we were really supposed to fly the next day. Oops!

We had a great trip, saw lots of wildlife and relaxed, blissfully unaware of people jumping through hoops trying to figure out how they were going to get the only RC-135U qualified copilot in the state of Alaska back in time to make the flight. They looked at all kinds of options from sending a private plane to using the base rescue helicopters. Finally, someone made a rational decision and just told SAC to change the schedule.

Given all the problems that we were having, SAC HQ was starting to take notice of us. Besides the maintenance problems, the mission had yet to be accomplished. After each mission a crew would disappear as he took the mission tapes back to the lower-States for analysis. He would reappear in a few days and another crew would disappear after the next flight.

On the day in question I took two cameras with me, the standard issue Pentax with a 200mm lens and my personal Minolta, also with a 200mm lens but with color film.

Someone had installed the focusing glass backward so the Pentax didn't focus correctly. For that reason I planned to focus on infinity and then switch cameras if the opportunity should avail itself to take a picture. Little did I know how soon that opportunity would happen. We were in the operational area doing our thing when I happened to look out my right window. There, flying perfect formation on our wing tip, was a **TU-128 Fiddler**. In total shock I told the aircraft commander and he slapped my arm and said, "Take a picture!" Duh!! What a great idea! So I grabbed the Pentax and snapped a shot, then switched to the Minolta and took some more. As soon as I grabbed the first camera, the Fiddler pilot decided that he should be gone and rolled right. That is when I snapped the picture (of the aircraft).

As we were debriefing at Eielson, an excited intel guy brought us the first proof. It was the first time that anyone had taken a picture of a TU-128 and it showed with remarkable clarity details that we didn't know – like the antenna arrays (probably for a data link) and the outlines of the wing tanks.

Guess the four years I spent at Rochester Institute of Technology getting a BS in Photographic Science, and all the time playing with cameras actually was useful. The aircraft commander was **Bob Lyons**, and I remember **Larry Staringer** was one of the crows who would disappear to take the tapes south.

After the picture news made it to Offutt, they (*StratReconCenter*) decided that the last mission wasn't going to happen (and) we prepared to head home. I wanted an interesting souvenir so, I headed to the woods and dug up a birch tree. It neatly filled the plane from one emergency exit hatch to the other. Because of the permafrost, it didn't have a deep root ball. But, as it warmed up, it did have a bunch of Alaska-sized mosquitoes, now looking for dinner in the plane. A little bug spray took care of that problem and it arrived home without further incident. The tree's trip from the plane to 1608 Madison St. was in the right side of my wife's VW (with the seat out.) It thrived in its new, warmer home and Larry would always greet me asking, "Does a tree grow in Bellevue?"

Fly Safe,

Zot Barazzotto, Xenia, OH