

**"34 navigators and Lt O'Hara."**

**..... by Bill O'Hara**

**I was a brand new first lieutenant when I received orders transferring me from a bomb wing to the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW at Forbes AFB in Topeka, KS. The Cuban crisis had ended and I was assigned to the 338<sup>th</sup> SRS. As was the custom then, newer personnel "gained experience" (read: were tested) in the RB-47 by flying long-range weather recon missions.**

**During one daily commander's call in the squadron mission planning room, the commander asked the wing navigator, LtCol "Smokey" Slover, how many mission ready navigators were in the 55<sup>th</sup>. I will never forget his answer: "34 and Lt O'Hara."**

**I was crushed, then learned I had drawn the short straw and was to fly with the Wing DO. That DO was Colonel Rafferty, nicknamed "Iron Mike" for his reported tendency to absolutely eat copilots and navigators.**

**On the day of the flight, Col Rafferty finished his preflight and asked me if I was Irish. I answered, "Yes, sir."**

**"Well, are you any good? Again I answered, "Yes, sir." He replied, "Well, we'll see." The flight was uneventful with almost total silence from Col Rafferty, except for a few pointed questions aimed at me.**

**The next day, I reported to the squadron mission replot room with a few other navigators when LtCol Slover approached me, grinning and says that Col "Iron Mike" Rafferty had stated at the standup briefing last night that when he flies, you are his navigator. I met this announcement with mixed feelings and amid audible sympathetic groans from the other navs.**

**Col Rafferty and I flew perhaps six or seven more times together and the flights were always enjoyable. Though I flew many hours in recon after those early days, but at night, when it's quiet, I can still here those words echoing.....**

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