

Air Refueling Support Stories

Lloyd Ward

The following events are true and accurate to the best of the authors knowledge. The events were described by Colonel Howard V. McDonald, USAF (Retired) and written here by LTC Lloyd C. Ward, USAF (Retired).

On 25 Jun 1957, 55th Air Refueling Squadron crew T-10 was ordered to Detachment 2, 55th STRAT RECON WG, APO 328, San Francisco CALIF for 90 day SAC rotational movement. Crew T-10 was headed by Aircraft Commander Major Howard V. McDonald; Co-pilot 1/Lt Allen R. Townsend, Jr; Navigator 1/Lt Lloyd C. Ward; Flight Engineer S/Sgt James D. Hutchison; and Boom Operator S/Sgt Richard D. Scott.

This assignment was primarily to provide air refueling support to the 55SRW RB-47 aircraft flying in that area. Radio silent procedures between the KC-97 and RB-47 were used during these missions.

As we prepared to depart on one of these missions and started the engines in proper order - #2 engine, #1 engine, #3 engine, then #4 engine - #4 would not start. The starter was broken. The RB-47 was on its way and expecting us to be at our appointed rendezvous point on time, with no way to contact them due to radio silence. Major Mac asked Sgt Hutchison if we might be able to start #4 on the runway by taxiing. We decided to give it a try. Sure enough, once our runway speed reached approximately 80 knots the propeller turned over and the engineer was able to get the engine started. We then taxied back to the end of the runway, took off and completed the mission successfully. Of course, the RB-47 crew would never have known that we had this much trouble to get fuel to them.

Another incident during this tour of duty occurred following the completion of the refueling portion of a night mission. Upon heading back to Yokota Air Base we were advised to proceed to Tokyo International Airport since the weather at Yokota was below minimums for landing. After turning toward Tokyo, the control tower called again and instructed Major Mac to return to Yokota, as the weather had improved. We were now getting low on fuel – but no sweat. As we neared Yokota, control picked us up and commenced a GCA approach, which Major Mac followed. The ILS and everything was perfect. With low visibility in fog, there was no wind factor, and this makes for a smooth approach. On final approach and nearing the field it was apparent that the weather had not improved. However, we were down to minimum fuel and had no choice but to continue the approach. The controller was good. He had us lined up perfectly and told Major Mac that he was approaching touchdown. He could see nothing in the darkness and fog at the point the controller said we were over the touchdown position, but Mac pulled the throttles back and held on. The touchdown was good. He reversed the two inboard engines, stood on the brakes, and then stopped. He shut down the engines then as he could not even see to taxi in. Major Mac then asked the control tower, “Who made that weather observation?”