

Once an RC-135 was even diverted to intercept a Soviet Tupolev Tu-95 Bear strategic bomber, Roberto Benitez, who worked on USAF RC-135 aircraft, recalls on Quora.

‘One day a Soviet Tu-95 Bear recon bomber overflew the Alaska mainland. It wasn’t the first time.

‘The radar station notified Alaskan Air Defense Command (AADC) of the intrusion. There was only one minor problem, AADC was asleep at the wheel and had no fighters on alert.

‘So AADC called SAC at Eielson AFB in Fairbanks to see if they had any aircraft available to respond. Well, it just so happened that they had a Boeing RC-135 training in the area (close enough to give backend specialist a chance to monitor the Soviets for training), but over the Alaskan mainland.

‘The RC was diverted to do the intercept. The RC snuck up on the Bear from low rear and then pulled up alongside. It was a surprise to the Soviets. They were even more surprised when the RC backend crew asked them in Russian if they were lost. Of course, they were (uh huh). So, in Russian they were told where they were from, their unit, where they were, how to get home, and cheerfully escorted out of US airspace.’

Benitez concludes;

‘Once we got home, our unit painted a red star on the nose area and renamed the RC-135 (reconnaissance) to an FC-135 (fighter/interceptor).’

