

ML.60.Seagulls at Shemya

One very foggy morning my crew was scheduled to fly the KC-135 back to Eielson carrying all the crew members that had completed their tour at Shemya. We were held at the end of the runway until we had adequate visibility for a safe takeoff. We got a break in the visibility, started the water on the engines, and rolled down the runway. Little did we know that when we started the water, the loud noise that resulted flushed a flock of seagulls that were sitting on the opposite end of the runway. They circled and were returning to their resting spot to land as we broke ground. The #3 engine flamed out and #2 & #4 compressor stalled. I was very busy keeping the airplane flying while Bud Ranger, the co-pilot, got the gear up and successfully got a restart on #3 and was nursing numbers 2, 3 & 4 back to climb power.



We continued our climb out and notified Shemya of our problems. They told us to continue to Eielson as Shemya was now below landing minimums. After landing at Eielson we were advised that all three engines had received major damage and needed to be changed. Additionally, there was significant damage to the leading edge of the left wing, the radome, and the nose of the aircraft. The staff at Shemya picked up 31 sea gull carcasses on or around the runway but were unable to count how many we had actually hit because we carried some back to Eielson with us.

We were very lucky that morning to be able to tell this story.

- *Bill Ernst*