

61. MRVs Over Kamchatka

Two aircraft were assigned to Shemya, Rivet Amber, an RC-135E which carried a radar large enough to warrant a cautionary NOTAM (Notices to Airmen) not to fly on the starboard side of the aircraft. They were always careful to follow the NOTAM advisory and stay on the left side of Amber while on orbit.

I flew a sister ship, the original Rivet Ball, with a more benign type capture equipment, cameras. When there was an expected impact of a Russian missile on the Kamchatka Peninsula range, the klaxon went off and both aircraft scrambled to launch. Due to a lack of taxiways the full length of the runway, and the location of hangers; Rivet Ball, 59-1491, had the advantage and usually was the first to launch.

Gaslight, Gaslight, Gaslight

Back in the day, any crew dog who saw an event coming in, called Gaslight three times over the intercom and the scramble began. If the bird was near the south end of the orbit, the question was: is there enough air space for an extension or do we need to get back to the top of the orbit. If it was the latter, I would go to full military power, throw in a steep turn and head north. Southbound, I would slow the Ball to minimum airspeed, maximizing the time the right side of the bird faced the impact range. If nothing happened going southbound, we repeated the procedure and crossed our fingers.

That technique worked well. On 18 December, 1968, the Ravens and photogs grabbed this picture. It was the first documented evidence of a Russian MRV (Multiple Reentry Vehicle). I am now an honorary member of Team 2, the back-end crew dogs who got the job done. Such a momentous grab might be worth a DFC, you say. But no; *something* got in the way and the entire crew was awarded an Air Medal for this single flight. The image was publicly released about a year later.



MRV CAPTURED

- John Achor, Lt Col, USAF, Ret