

ML.66.RAF UPPER HEYFORD

SIGINT missions from Eielson covered the Russian Arctic coast from the Bering Sea to the Barents Sea, and a fill-in trip to the Baltic Sea. Most missions were round-robin, out and back to Eielson. On longer flights to areas around the Kara and Barents Seas, a recovery in the United Kingdom made more sense. This was in the PM – Pre Mildenhall – days, and our recovery base was RAF Upper Heyford, near Oxford, England.

On our first trip into Upper Heyford after the Rivet Ball accident, my Nav 1 came to me after landing. He said “I figured this landing would be the one that tested you.” He was referring to the similarity between the runways at Shemya and Upper Heyford. Upper Heyford sported an 8,300-foot swayback runway and it was a night landing. When I asked him how I did, he said, “You passed.”

A good recovery schedule after landing was a short maintenance debrief, a short BOQ check-in, an equally short taxi ride to Bister North where we could catch the last train to London arriving at Paddington Station. U.S. military were welcome to stay at the Columbia Club, across Bayswater Road on the north side of Hyde Park. From there on, it was transportation by bus and underground for sightseeing until Sunday evening and the return to Upper Heyford.

All the crews staying at RAF Upper Heyford got to know the manager of the Officer’s Club, Beryl. She had a soft spot for Yanks since she married a retired USAF NCO. At one point she had to let her O-Club chef go because the GI’s complained too often about a chef who fried eggs in fish oil.

While at Upper Heyford, my crew was tasked to cover a flight into the Baltic Sea. This was not a typical mission, but was tacked on due to maintenance problems with the Offutt AFB bird scheduled for the flight which was unable to cover the tasking.

- John Achor, Lt. Col., USAF, Ret