

## **ML.88.Remarks by General Reg Urschler, Tales of the 55<sup>th</sup>, 6 September 2017**

Shalom Allah Cum (Allah be with you)... mahr haba effendi... Akadash... nahcissan?... chokee tesh akura Dehrum... Nahcissinis?...eeim... tesha kura dehrum.

Good afternoon, Colonel Manion, distinguished guests, officers, chiefs, nco's, airmen all, supporting spouses and families of the 55<sup>th</sup>, past and present, who watch and wait.

My purpose today is twofold: first, to present to the 55<sup>th</sup> Wing from the 55<sup>th</sup> wing association an Icon representing a unique airplane and mission flown by 55<sup>th</sup> crews from late December 1958 until mid-1966. And, second, to share with you a critical contribution from a chapter in your unit's proud and varied history, unknown to many, now lost in the passage of time, except perhaps to those who remain with us who participated in the production of information which affected major national security decisions.

First a little background. My association with this organization began in August 1955, sixty-two years ago when I reported to the 343<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron as a twenty-year-old former enlisted guy and newly-minted Second Lieutenant 'butter bar' pilot, thrown into a group of highly decorated World War II B-17 and B-24 pilots and navigators who had been 'in the Arena,' who had experienced the challenges and horrors of war up-front and personal – heroes about whom I had only read during World War II.

These men, and their wives and families, became my Family, and taught a young pup – or tried to – 'how the cow eats the cabbage' (the 'realities of life') and the sacrifices necessary to maintain and sustain – as you continue to do today – the most precious gift we as Americans are blessed to enjoy, our freedom.

At that time the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Strategic Air Command, was located at Forbes, approximately seven miles South of Topeka, Kansas, on a highway which is very familiar to us here at Offutt, Highway 75, with five remote detachments:

1. England
2. Yokota, Japan
3. Eielson, Alaska
4. Incirlik, Turkey, and
5. Thule, Greenland

The 55<sup>th</sup> was composed of a total of sixty airplanes, forty-five RB-47's and fifteen KC-97 tankers for a total of sixty aircraft. The wing's primary mission was to collect passive electronic radar signals only – no comint – accomplished by the 38<sup>th</sup> and 343<sup>rd</sup> SRS in the RB-47H and ERB-47H – while the wing's secondary mission was weather reconnaissance flown by the 338<sup>th</sup> in RB-47Ks.

At the beginning of the space race between the USA and the USSR, our intelligence gathering network had no way to monitor and collect powered flight telemetry transmitted from soviet missiles being launched from the facilities located at Kapustin yar and tyuratam. One solution was to have aircraft equipped with special electronic sensors flying at high altitude and 'parked' as near as possible to these facilities during the launches to intercept and record the telemetry, particularly and especially powered flight telemetry for evaluation by intelligence analysts to determine engine thrust, throw weight capability, range and other critical performance characteristics.

Note the canoe type fairings housing special sensor antennae fitted to each side of the aircraft. Immediately outside and below the pilot's canopy. In early 1958 three B-47Es were selected for modification. Initially three crews were identified to train, deploy and execute this new mission. Copilots



on these three crews received specialized and concentrated training in international Morse Code to a minimum twelve words per minute proficiency, essential to mission success.

Designated EB-47E 'Tell-Two' and delivered to the 55<sup>th</sup> in late fall 1958, they were fitted with a crew capsule designed to carry two electronic warfare officers in what normally would be the bomb bay area of the B-47 bomber.

The two electronic warfare officers would occupy positions in the forward pressurized compartment for takeoff until the aircraft reached an altitude of 4,000 feet. Then they crawled on their hands and knees, while wearing their parachutes, to the rear Compartment. They reversed this procedure prior to landing.

In very early December 1958, two of the crews flew two of the newly modified airplanes from Forbes to Incirlik. Rendezvous and refuel with KC-97 tankers was done enroute to their first stop at Torrejon, Spain. These operations were normally conducted at fifteen or sixteen thousand feet, depending on weather conditions and scheduled on-load.

The 47 was configured for slow flight by extending fifty percent flaps (not 50 degrees) to accommodate the slower speed of the propellor driven KC-97. Initial contact speed was typically one hundred eighty-five knots indicated to accommodate the slower speed of the KC-97, gradually increasing as the refueling progressed.

The boom operator 'coached' the receiver to the contact position either with pilot director light signals during radio silent operations or voice commands during normal missions. During my fifteen years serving with the 55<sup>th</sup>, I had the pleasure of flying the 'Tell Two' for eight months in Turkey. All told, I flew a total of 12,000 Hours in all models of the RB-47 and all RC-135s currently assigned.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the third crew prepared for their deployment to the land of 'minarets,' ekmet eemek,' 'chai' and 'leechi nuts.' In the early years we were prohibited while on TDY from identifying the organization and base to which the aircraft was assigned, consequently Forbes became 'the patch' or 'home plate.'

Also in very early December, 1958, the third crew deployed, only this time in not so gracious an aircraft but rather a 'sleek' C-124 (aka 'old Shaky') provided by MATS (Military Air Transport Service) known today as MAC. Our journey Included stops at Dover, Delaware; Lajes, Azores; Torrejon, Spain; Athens, Greece; and finally, after five very tiring, 'shaky' days--Incirlik, Turkey. Having been a passenger on that excursion, I can vouch for the nickname 'Old Shaky.'

Turkey: the home of Detachment 4, 55<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Strategic Air Command and the new home of the 'Tell-Two.' On arrival at Incirlik we were advised these were the original assigned quarters, thankfully upgraded recently to modern day Butler



Buildings with all the amenities (such as indoor plumbing) with outside options constructed by TUSLOG (TurkishUSLogistics) via the Tumpene Construction Co. Two of the three crews were required to be on alert, responding to telephone recall at all times, to launch on notification of an impending missile launch either from Kapustin Yar or Tyuratam.

The schedule called for two crews to be on alert for 20 consecutive days. The third crew had a 10-day break. During that time, Crews traveled to London, Paris, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Vienna, Madrid, the island of Majorca, Rome, Naples, Athens and to the then 'Pearl of the Mediterranean,' Beirut.

'All work and no play' was never the 'Fightin' Fifty Fifth' modus operandi, and it applied here as we see two of our intrepid aviators, obviously not on alert, enjoying a libation and conversation with one of the three Air Force Nurses assigned PCS in the Ottoman empire.



When alerted the crew responded to their previously cocked aircraft, starting engines, taxiing and launching in complete radio silence, responding to light signals from the control tower, maintaining radio silence until within one Hundred miles inbound on return.

Joined enroute to the black sea orbit by a navy EA3-D, specially modified for the same purpose and carrying a crew of six including a pilot and navigator who had ejection seats. You will note the bulge on the belly which housed four army security agency enlisted personnel, who did not have ejection seats.

We flew orbits while awaiting missile launch from Kapustin Yar above the Black Sea and Tyuratam, north of Tehran and east of the Caspian Sea.



Enroute to the area of interest and during the holding orbit, the copilot would check off ship's inter-phone every five minutes to monitor a special Air Force high-frequency morse code message. On his knee clipboard was a one-time pad used for each specific 24-hour period. The morse code signal, when decrypted by the copilot, provided the crew with the latest proposed launch time of the soviet missile. The launch information came from U.S. ground monitors of communications between the soviet launch site and control center.

11 December 1968, eleven years after the Soviets launched 'Sputnik' two ravens and the 'Wanda Belle' crew from Shemya successfully captured on the BSC (Ballistic Streak Camera) the first photographic evidence of a soviet ICBM Deploying three MRVs (Multiple Reentry Vehicles.)

In 1963 the USAF established a special detachment on the island of Shemya located at the end of the Aleutian chain, a location familiar to current 55<sup>th</sup> air crews. This detachment's mission was to launch a specially modified aircraft from alert status proceeding to an orbit adjacent to Kamchatka to capture and collect photographic data of an Incoming re-entry vehicle, or multiple RV's.

'Wanda Belle' was a highly modified C-135A with ten quartz glass windows behind which were mounted a series of cameras controlled by the Manual Tracker (MT) located under the glass blister at the top of the aircraft in the center of a black circle. The aircraft was re-designated as an RC-135S, code name 'Wanda Belle' and known to you today as 'Rivet Ball.'

'Wanda Belle' was equipped with four PW J-57 water-injected engines, each producing about 11,000 pounds of thrust, a total of 44,000 pounds of thrust, providing a climb rate of 1,000 feet per minute.

A second highly modified former MATS C-135B aircraft, code name 'Lisa Ann' joined the mission at Shemya in 1966. This aircraft was equipped with four PW TF-33-P5 engines with thrust reverse capability, each producing about 16,000 pounds of thrust. The engines were the same as those currently installed on the 'Open Skies' aircraft operated by the 55<sup>th</sup> wing. Equipped with an immensely powerful radar capable of tracking objects at very substantial range, she weighed 180,000 pounds empty – no fuel – with minimum reserve on final of 45,000 pounds for diversion to Eielson. If you do the math, you will determine we were touching down at 225,000 gross weight, with the attendant final approach and touchdown speeds adjusted for wind gusts, in 200 and a half ceilings – one half mile visibility – book limit crosswinds of thirty-five knots, with an RCR of eight on an ice or slush covered runway.

Unfortunately, both 'Wanda Belle' and 'Lisa Ann' subsequently were lost, one on landing at Shemya, the other somewhere in the Bering sea.

Finally, 'Two at Four.' The 55<sup>th</sup> Wing Association Is proud to donate this work of art by a member of the 343<sup>rd</sup> in the hopes it will be displayed in a place of honor as a reminder to present and future generations of the pioneering operational and technological contributions to national security by the men and women of the 55th wing.

'Two at Four' was painted by Lt. Col. Eugene Dziejowski, 343<sup>rd</sup> SRS.

*"March 1960. An EB-47E 'Tell-Two' taking off on a telemetry collection mission in an early morning rain from Adana Air Base, Incirlik, Turkey, 55<sup>th</sup> SRW operating location four."*

This painting is the genesis of a collection program performed yet today by the 55th wing.

Thank you. Allah smala dek.....gule, gule.

