

ML.89.First Soviet MRV Captures

I was the signal monitor (SM) on Team-2, Rivet Ball (RC-135S, #59-1491) when we recorded the very first Soviet MRV on 4 October 1968. Bob Brown (RIP) was the manual tracker and Bob Armentrout was the tactical coordinator (TC). One of the duties of the SM is to control and operate the ballistic streak camera (BSC). When the MT calls "Gaslight, Gaslight, Gaslight" the TC flips the master switch on that activates the film cameras and the SM flips the master switch on that activates the BSC.

The photo below was taken by me (Team-2, SM) on 4 October 1968 with Rivet Ball's BSC. It is the same photo that was used in the media when released to the public. Team-2, Rivet Ball also recorded a Soviet MRV on 18 December 1968.

- *Kingdon Hawes*



The very first photographic evidence of an expanding Soviet missile threat was captured by a Ballistic Streak Camera (BSC) aboard Rivet Ball (RC-135, #59-1491), on October 4, 1968. Analysis of the film proved the existence of a new Soviet weapon system labelled SS-9 ICBM Multiple Reentry Vehicle (MRV), offering a significant advancement in Soviet ICBM lethality. Calculations of the surface effect of near-simultaneous impacts suggested MRVs would likely be employed against hardened targets such as command centers or ICBM silos.

- *Summary of a 30 November 2012 letter by Maj Edward Steffen, Special Reconnaissance Group, AFRDA*

On 4 October 1968 the Soviet Union launched a 'Mod-4,' R-36 / SS-9 SCARP, ICBM with three warheads. This was their initial entry into the world of Multiple Reentry Vehicles (MRVs). Up until that time their ICBMs carried only one warhead. Introduction of a multiple warhead ICBM by the Soviet Union in 1968 started a whole new ball game for everyone. When the big event occurred on that fateful day in October, Rivet Ball's Team-2 was on alert, in place and ready for action.

Rivet Ball and company launched from The Rock and arrived on station in time to record this historic event. It was a night shot that made for outstanding photography. Team-2 returned with a Trophy on that memorable night. Two months later on 18 December 1968 a second MRV was bagged and added to their Trophy collection. Team-2 was on a roll, flying high and 'Second to None.'

We were recommended to receive a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for our achievement but received an Air Medal instead due to the TOP SECRET nature of our mission and need to conceal mission details at the time.

- <http://rc135.com/0023/INDEX007.HTM>