

## **ML.94.What Were those Pesky Russkys Up To?**

*[U.S. government angst grew during the Cold War from the moment the Soviets fired off their first atomic weapon, and invested whatever it took to see what the Russians were up to. Two major investments were in RC-135E 'Lisa Ann' and RC-135S 'Wanda Belle,' which patrolled the northern Pacific during the sixties for signs of ICBM progress. And progress they found. This biographical sketch takes us inside the first sighting of a MRV and of an exciting recon career. – ed]*

My background in recon ran deep even before the MRV search and sightings in 1966 and 1968. I enlisted in the USAF as an aviation cadet in 1953, was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt 18 Nov. 1954, and received my navigator and aircraft observer wings in 1955.

In my early USAF assignments, I flew in the Special Air Mission Squadron in Germany, providing transportation for Senior U S military officers, senior members of the US government, and members of the U.S. Congress and foreign dignitaries. Missions were flown throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East and as far east as India, including transportation for the U.S. Ambassadors to the USSR, Poland and Romania. And I flew as a U.S. aircrew member escort in a Russian IL-12, a pressurized, tricycle gear successor to the Li-2 (DC-3 copy) from East Germany to Geneva, Switzerland and return!

But these missions also included flights on several specially-equipped Big Safari C-54D/Es with 14 cameras hidden in the 'wet' wings for covert recon. Even an x-ray of the wings would not have detected the cameras. This was my early introduction to the world of reconnaissance.

My next flying assignments were reconnaissance missions in the RB-47 at Forbes AFB, Kansas and the RC-135 Aircraft at Eielson AFB, Alaska. Operational missions in those aircraft were flown around the Sino-Soviet bloc as missions that were militarily and politically sensitive.

In those assignments, I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and 10 Air Medals, flying missions on both Lisa Ann and Wanda Belle, initially with Reg Urschler, later with John Achor. The mission that resulted in the DFC was in Lisa Ann in late October (between 26 and 30, can't remember which date) 1966. We were in our area when we got the call "X-ray" from our ground controllers, indicating a launch in progress. We timed our route to take us to mid-track southbound when our on-board crew called "gaslight" and I then saw, from the co-pilot's window, 3 or 4 points of light indicating an MRV. I believe this was the first proof of this Soviet progress. Back at Shemya we received a thank you note from HQ.

When later assigned to HQ SAC (SRC), I walked the DFC paperwork through for Reg, Tom Boyd, and myself.

After some thirteen years of flying assignments, I was assigned to the Strategic Air Command Headquarters as an Air Ops Staff Officer and then as Chief of the SAC RC-135 aircraft, where I was responsible for the development of reconnaissance collection programs, employment of concepts and conduction of all operational missions of SAC's RC-135 Aircraft. Combat Apple was among the significant missions my team developed.

In later assignments I was Chief of the JCS Joint Reconnaissance Center whose mission was to assemble, coordinate and seek approval (from the US President) of all US Reconnaissance operations conducted in militarily and/or politically sensitive areas of the world and for continuous monitoring of those operations while in progress. This was accomplished with a cadre of military personnel from all the services as well as representatives from DIA, NSA, CIA, the State Department and the National Security Council. This Center had a 24-hour watch function located just off the National Military Command Center but separate due to the classification and sensitivity of those operations.

My military service awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with

Oak Leaf Cluster, The Distinguished Flying Cross, The Meritorious Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Medal with nine Oak Leaf Clusters, The Air Force Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with three gold stars, Good Conduct Medal, Army of Occupation, Germany, National Defense Service Medal w Bronze Star and Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. I have over seven thousand total flying hours in T-29, C-45, C-47, C-131A, C/VC-54D/E/G/M, B/RB/ERB-47H, KC/RC-135D and the Soviet IL-12 Aircraft which include 221 Combat or Combat Support hours.

- Tom Shepherd

*[Multiple reentry vehicle: the reentry capsule for a ballistic missile's payload, typically a nuclear weapon, where the missile has multiple instances of such, but can only target one site with all reentry vehicles. By contrast, Multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) are exoatmospheric ballistic missiles with a payload containing several warheads, each capable of being aimed to hit a different target. The first true MIRV design was the Minuteman III, first successfully tested in 1968 and introduced into actual use in 1970. – ed]*