

The RB-47's Super-Secret Anti-Submarine Mission

Yokota was one of the five detachments to which the 55th deployed crews and maintenance personnel, typically for three-month TDY periods, during which they flew higher-headquarters-directed reconnaissance missions in support of National Security. These deployments were accomplished without their families, but supported by SAC personnel on location accompanied by their wives and families, typically on a three-year PCS assignment. This arrangement thereby provided the PCS personnel many opportunities to encounter the rotating TDY 55th aircrews in social surroundings, which is how the anti-submarine story of this 55th TDY crew came about.

The security and sensitivity surrounding these missions was extremely high, and flight crews were prohibited from discussing their activities, generating a lot of speculation and many questions about what we did. On a particular evening at the 'O' Club, several of the PCS wives again expressed their curiosity to one of the 55th crews, and persisted in their understandable curiosity to discover precisely why the airplanes came to Yokota and what they and their strange looking airplane with the black, bulbous nose did. The TDY crew had a typical 55th SRW imagination and ways of describing what they did without compromising the actual mission.

So that evening the Navigator, Tom Reed, who had a particularly exceptional imagination and delivery, ably assisted by one of the crews and with occasional furtive looks around to see who else might be listening, described to the PCS wives, in hushed detail, what they had been so anxious to hear.

Tom began by asking them if they had ever seen a movie depicting a submarine and the employment of SONAR, where the sub transmits a signal commonly described as a ping and waits to hear a responding ping indicating a target on the surface. You could sense the tension and anticipation of those leaning forward in their chairs so as not to miss a word, finally about to learn what these secretive 55th RB-47H crews were doing.



Tom continued, explaining that our crews listened for a sub's ping and, upon receipt, sent a responding ping to the sub in order to determine its exact location beneath the surface. Upon confirmation, the RB-47 dropped down to an absolute minimum altitude. The crews in their rear

compartment were equipped with very long-handled-poles at the end of which were cups which were used to scoop water near the target sub. They hauled the water back into their compartment, where they stored a huge amount of paint and, after analyzing the color of the water sample they had collected, mixed a lot of paint with the same color characteristics as the sample. They then dropped back down over the now confirmed location of the enemy sub and discharged the paint on the water while continuing to respond to the subs searching ping, confirming to the sub there was indeed a target on the surface.

The sub, believing they had located a target, raised their periscope to confirm a visual sighting. But as the periscope was covered with paint coinciding with the color of the water, the sub didn't realize they had broken the surface. Tom then asked his rapt listeners if they were familiar with the blunt, dark nose of the RB-47, to which they all excitedly and enthusiastically responded in the affirmative. Tom continued describing the sub, with its periscope blinded by the paint, continuing to rise, and when it rose 100 feet above the surface the RB-47 rammed it with its blunt nose, destroying the submarine.

- Reg Urschler

[Spinning such an absurd tale for innocent, gullible wives in a libation-rich environment seems wicked, but wickedly funny imagining the wide-eyed hook, line, and sinker reception of the conspiratorial, straight-faced delivery all the way to the punch line. Hopefully not beyond. -ed]