

Stanley K. O'Kelley & Crew

This year's composite induction into the 55th Wing Hall of Fame made at the 55th Wing Birthday Ball on 24 January, were the **15 members of a 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing RB-50G crew**. Their aircraft was shot down by Soviet aircraft in 1953. Fourteen of the crewmen perished, and they were the first Cold War hostile fire casualties of the Fightin' Fifty-Fifth.

Aircraft commander, **Captain Stanley K. O'Kelley** and his crew were assigned to the 343rd SRS at Forbes AFB, KS, and deployed to Yokota AB, Japan. It was from there they launched on July 29, 1953, on an airborne reconnaissance mission over the Sea of Japan to surveil military activities in the Vladivostok area of the Soviet's Far Eastern Military District.

While flying over international waters off-shore from the Siberian coast, two Russian MiG-17s attacked the RB-50 without warning. As cannon fire shot out two of the RB-50 engines, gunner A2C James Woods returned fire. But the RB-50 was mortally wounded and starting to break up. Capt O'Kelley issued the bailout command as the aircraft was spinning and tumbling into the waters below. Several crewmembers did bail out.

While floating in the fog-shrouded waters, Capt O'Kelley and his co-pilot, Capt John Roche, yelled to each other without visual contact. Soviet patrol boats were heard in the area. Some of the crew members may have been recovered by those vessels. After several hours Capt O'Kelley slipped beneath the waters. Capt Roche was recovered by a US Navy destroyer 22 hours after he had been shot down.

Just two days earlier, this valiant crew flew the first reconnaissance mission after the Korean War cease-fire went into effect. They may well have been attacked by the Soviets to retaliate for an incident along the Yalu River the day of the cease-fire. The demands of the Cold War, in which it was imperative that the US be supplied with the latest intelligence on Soviet radar developments, put 55th crews at the tip of the spear.

While others celebrated the end of a hot war, Capt O'Kelley and his men prosecuted the mission, flying in harm's way, so that our military forces and our leaders could be fully informed on Soviet intent and capabilities. The crew made the ultimate sacrifice in the performance of that duty.

Only Capt Roche survived. The fate of the others, who were thought to have bailed out, and may have been captured, has never been fully established. John Roche died of natural causes at age 78 in December 2002.

Capt O'Kelley's crew performed their mission in heroic fashion. Their devotion to duty lives on in the proud traditions of the 55th Wing. They are true heroes of the *Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*.

The Crew of RB-50G, #47-145 (#9653), were:

Aircraft Commander: Captain Stanley K. O'KelleyNapa, California
Copilot: Captain John E. RocheWashington, DC
Navigator: Captain Edmund J. CzyzChicago, Illinois
Navigator: Captain Lloyd C. WigginsMarksville, Louisiana
Navigator: Captain James G. KeithHobart, Oklahoma
Raven 1: Captain Warren J. SandersonPark Rapids, Minnesota
Raven 2: Major Francisco J. TejadaLos Angeles, California
Raven 3: Captain Robert E StalnakerHuntington, West Virginia
Raven 4: Captain John C. WardPasadena, California
Raven 6: Captain Frank E Beyer, Jr.Webber Falls, Oklahoma
Flight Engineer: MSgt Francis L. BrownModesto, California
Central Fire Control: SSgt Donald W. GabreeSan Leandro, California
Gunner/Radioman Roland E. GouletMount Holly, New Jersey
Gunner A2C Charles J. RussellPhiladelphia, Pennsylvania
Gunner A2C James E. WoodsBuckhannon, West Virginia