

Robb L. Hoover

Lt Col Robb L. Hoover, USAF Retired, was assigned to the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SRW) at Forbes AFB, KS, as an Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) in RB-47 aircraft in 1963 and progressed to Stan/Eval EWO. He flew peripheral reconnaissance missions in the Soviet Arctic, North Korean area, and China periphery.

In 1967 he was assigned as RC-135 Stand/Eval EWO at Yokota AB and Kadena AB, Japan. There he flew sorties in the Gulf of Tonkin and over Laos during the Vietnam War. He returned in 1970 to the 55th at Offutt, initially, then to the SAC Reconnaissance Center where he prepared mission threat assessments of all SAC reconnaissance assets, including the RC-135s of the 55th SRW.

In 1973 he transferred to Det 1, 98th Strategic Wing, RAF Mildenhall, UK, as liaison officer to Ministry of Defense, UK. He arranged for exchange visits between the RAF 51 Squadron. When not flying missions himself, he briefed the 55th crews and mission monitored the RC-135 crews deployed to the 97th Strat Wing.



Assigned to the Intelligence Directorate at SAC HQ in 1976, Lt Col Hoover played a key role in the military and political risk assessments of RC-135 operational missions. He was directly instrumental in designing special, coordinated reconnaissance operations using multiple platforms to stimulate Soviet air defense reactions in order to accomplish specific requirements. He flew as a staff observer on those missions. The extraordinary results of those missions greatly enhanced the US understanding of the Soviet air defense capabilities.

Lt Col Hoover retired in 1981 with over 3,400 hours flight time, the Distinguished Flying Cross and eight Air Medals.

His contributions to the 55th Wing did not stop when he retired. Hoover arranged for a CIA exhibit on Cold War airborne reconnaissance to be donated to the SAC Museum. This exhibit included the shoot-downs of 55th aircraft during the Cold War. Educating and documenting the history of 55th SRW operations in the Cold War has been Hoover's forte. He served as panel chairman of a symposium at DIA on overflights of the Soviet Union. Most notable of these was the account of 55th veteran Roy Kaden's RB-50 crew and their overflight of Franz Josef Land in 1952.

He has organized and conducted numerous symposiums providing extensive coverage of 55th Wing RB-50 and RB-47 operations. He has appeared on the History Channel and CSPAN, been interviewed by Stars and Stripes Pacific, and provided historical data to Stars and Stripes and the BBC on Cold War airborne reconnaissance, specifically on 55th SRW operations. He was directly involved in the effort to have the POW Medal awarded to Bruce Olmstead and John McKone for their incarceration in Lubjanka Prison; and the Distinguished Flying Cross to Roy Kaden for overflights of the Soviet Union early in the Cold War. He was instrumental in recovering, re-dedicating, and re-establishing into the heritage of the 55th Wing, the 55th Bell. The ceremonial bell has now become the center piece for heritage events of the *Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*. Robb's name is among those engraved on that bell. Notably, the 343rd Squadron's crew lounge is dedicated in his honor, as is an auditorium at Maxwell AFB, AL.

Perhaps the most enduring contribution to the 55th Wing heritage is the '*Tales of the 55th*.' Robb started the event in 2001 where wing veterans from WWII to the present relate their personal adventures on 55th operational missions. He produced, directed and narrated this event. The Tales now serves as an anchor event during Heritage Week before the Birthday Ball.

Lt Col Hoover's singular contributions during a distinguished military career and hands-on endeavors to ensure that the legacy of the Cold Warriors of the 55th SRW, and the heritage of the *Fightin' Fifty-Fifth* remain alive.

