

Leo Johnson – A Tell Two Story

Back in '66 when one of the two Shemya birds (Wanda Belle) was in the lower 48 for maintenance a decision was made to deploy a Tell Two from Forbes to "The Rock" as a temporary replacement. I happened to be at Eielson at the time and was qualified in both airplanes. Having flown both airplanes from "The Rock" for over a year, I was very intimately (!) familiar with the weather conditions.

Also having spent over a year TDY at Incirlik in the TT and ten years and 3,000 hours in -47's (all models) I was intimately familiar with its performance and limitations. When the news arrived at Eielson about the TT proposed deployment to Shemya we were quite disturbed and made our objections accordingly, nonetheless the TT was deployed.



The records...if there are any... will tell us on which landing this incident (change of underpants after landing category). I believe it was the first attempted landing. I did not witness it personally but had statements from those who did.

The aircraft attempted a landing on runway 28 with a stiff right crosswind with Leo in the back seat as the CP, not making the landing. This occurred over fifty years ago and while most of the details remain specific, vivid and frightening yet today, a few, very few are not as crystal clear.

The aircraft bounced on landing and began drifting left toward a drop-off to the water... which is the Pacific Ocean. The brake chute (I don't recall the dimensions but at least twice the size of the approach chute) had been deployed sometime after the first bounce. The aircraft was now on the ground, but off or moving off the runway.

A go-around decision was made as the aircraft continued left and at some (critical) point Leo reportedly jettisoned the brake chute. The aircraft continued left on the ground and totally disappeared below the edge of the island. Det ops personnel in the tower directed tower to activate the crash alarm.

After a short period of time, certainly like forever for those observing from the tower, only the rotating beacon located on the vertical stabilizer came into view as the airplane entered ground effect over the water, ultimately regaining sustainable flight and directed to recover at Eielson.

I am told debris (rocks, etc.) had damaged the flaps and I cannot confirm the aircraft flew to Eielson with flaps and gear extended. I also have no clue as to whether any official investigation or report was initiated as it clearly and obviously was an incident not only embarrassing but very close to being fatal. Leo could best describe it and he takes his story with him. In my opinion, he was instrumental in saving the crew and aircraft.

So ends the story of TELL TWO operations on "The Rock". Tail Winds, Clear Skies and Happy Landings Leo. Well Done!

Crew Dog 1