

WING TIP PHOTO

The 'Wing Tip' photo of **Wanda Belle** was taken after a joint night mission to Kamchatka with **Rivet Amber** for a scheduled Soviet ICBM re-entry mission. What appears to be a telephone pole coming through the left wing is, in fact, a telephone pole that the wing impacted when the aircraft got too far left of the painted taxi line. The pilot attempted to get a better line up for the ground crew to tow the aircraft into the hangar when it came to a sudden, abrupt, and embarrassing stop, much to the pilot's surprise.



As the two aircraft mentioned above completed their tasked mission, departed the planned flight track abeam Soviet Kamchatka and turned toward home (Shemya), I (the **Lisa Ann** Aircraft Commander) suggested a formation flight return to base and the **Belle** A/C agreed having the **Lisa Ann** join on his right wing. It was a clear, pitch-black night as we cruised toward The Rock when suddenly I saw a flashing light aimed at us from the lead aircraft, I believe from the right over-wing hatch, sending a series of Morse code letters. Having retained some knowledge of the code from my previous experience at Incirlik in the 'Tell Two'... twelve words a minute requirement ... I began identifying the letters on our intercom while concentrating on our formation position, having no clue what signal was being sent. I just kept reading the code aloud.

After an interval of a few minutes and repeated flashing Aldis lamp light signals from the **Belle** one of the back end-guys on our airplane called me on interphone and asked if I would like to know what was being sent as he happened to be taking it down on paper. I responded in the affirmative and he read back: "CURSE YOU, RED BARON."

As we approached Shemya and made contact with approach control I advised them we were a flight of two requesting an enroute decent to a GCA final to Runway 10. The weather unbelievably was CAFB.

The Approach/GCA controller then asked on which side of the lead number two was flying. "Right" we responded. He then asked our intentions. I notified the controller that lead would land and number two would do a low approach and go visual pattern. All went swimmingly in formation throughout this part of the maneuver, with lead touching down on R 10 and numero dos on "the go"... a "Bolter" in NAVY terminology.

We then extended our now clean low approach to execute a 270 degree turn to the right, south of the Island maneuvering to a head-on, low approach from south to north over the water to mid-field over the tower followed by a 270 degree right turn to the east for alignment for a R 28 for a third low approach after which the tower called and suggested we land.

After landing and taxiing back we noted the **Belle** appeared to be 'strung up' (no pun intended but perhaps appropriate) and continued our taxi to Hangar #1, up on the hill. Subsequent debriefing revealed the following:

Our Detachment Commander, who as I recall was Col Zeba B. Ogden and one helluva great commander ('nother lesson in leadership), was in the tower as he was for all recoveries. After our final low pass down R 28 in front of the tower and just beyond the **Belle's** location on the west end of the ramp, we executed a 90 degree turn to the north simultaneously disappearing from sight into the inky, black night as **Belle** impacted the light pole, generating the crash alarm and the assumption in the tower that we had gone down.

Well, there 'kinda' was an 'investigation' and the pilot of the **Belle** was asked why he deviated to the left from the taxi line his statement was he was "so disconcerted by the other airplane he became 'distracted'". End of 'investigation.' Back to the Yahtzee Board. The wing leading edge was repaired on the island with no further discussion ... well ... except for now as I believe the statute of limitations are long passed. Fifty- five years gone and both pilots still alive.

Just another day on 'The Rock,' the 'Black Pearl of the Pacific,' separating the Bering Sea to the north and the Pacific to the south where, in 1966, we were chasing Soviet long range ICBM's impacting the Far East Soviet test impact range on the Soviet Far East Peninsula.

P.S.: For those unfamiliar with these aircraft, **Wanda Belle** was bristling with odd

antennas and unusual windows on its right side, and **Lisa Ann** was even further specialized with what appeared to be six engines, one of which was an air conditioner/heat exchanger providing cooling to a huge Hughes Corporation on-board radar and the other a power source. This was a one-of-a-kind multi-multi-million-dollar modification designed especially for this mission. For those familiar with this aircraft type (USAF C-135) this specific aircraft had an extremely heavy operating weight of 180,000 pounds (empty) due to the weight of the radar. Normal operating weight for this type was 108,000 pounds.

Unfortunately, both **Wanda Belle** and **Lisa Ann** were later lost, **Wanda Belle** on landing at Shemya and **Lisa Ann** shortly after taking off at Shemya.

