

I WAS THE COPILOT AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE LANDINGS!!

Contributed by Jack Kovacs, Fairborn, OH, 3 November 2020.

It's the summer of 1963, Forbes AFB, Topeka, Kansas.

I'm a first lieutenant. It's late on rainy afternoon; we are deploying to Turkey in an RB-47 Tell-Two. Take off time in the late afternoon allows us to cross the Atlantic Ocean at night for celestial navigation, and coast-in to Spain at dawn, landing at Incirlik AB, Turkey, about noon local time.

All goes fine on takeoff Forbes, until "gear-up" and climb power set. Losing oil pressure on one of the outboards!! Abort mission and return to Forbes, but too heavy to land right away. Since we can't dump fuel, we have to fly around dirty (gear & flaps down, approach chute out) at mid-altitude for about three hours to get down to allowable landing weight.

By the time we are on final it's now dark and still raining. As usual, the AC lands a little "hot", calls for brake chute, but for some reason, delays a few seconds, then pops out (brake chute door may have been frozen due to flying in freezing rain for hours). We come to a stop about 10-15 feet onto the macadam overrun, which is **not** weight bearing, especially with an all day rain. All switches off, abandon aircraft and all assemble off to the side in the rain.

Whoops! Climbing down the ladder we notice that the front main gear had sunk into the macadam so much that the bottom of the entrance ladder, normally well above the ground, is now touching the ground, and the front main gear is buried into the mud up to the hub. No need for the fire trucks and ambulances, and their crews which were standing nearby.

Then we see three or four people running across the infield toward us, with one hollering "**Where's the Aircraft Commander**"?? In one coordinated motion, I, the nav and two Ravens swing our arms to point at our AC. The person who was hollering was a one-star, Commander of the 21st Air Division!!

Despite the rest of us thinking our deployment would be cancelled for sure, we left for Turkey, in another aircraft, the following day, and spent the next 90 days flying alert missions.

Which brings us to the "Rest of the Story".

A few days before our scheduled departure to the States, our AC had been bragging about how he was going to buzz the airfield on the way home. Every chance we got, up to the night before, the rest of us tried to talk him out of it. Our AC thought he was a better pilot than he actually was!

On departure morning everything went fine through takeoff and climb-out, which was to the east before we headed west. At 5000', doing 180° turn to head west, the rest of the crew is thinking the AC had changed his mind about the low pass. All of a sudden, during the turn the AC calls the tower and requests permission to make a low pass. (It's just after 0600).

The tower approves, and we start a slight descent, with slightly reduced power, building up airspeed. The next thing we know we have passed almost at rooftop level **OVER THE BARRACKS, not over** the runway, then pulled up the nose to climb, while shoving the throttles to 100% (as the engines are pointed back toward the ground!) (Roof top level was confirmed by those on the ground who later stated that the engine exhaust fumes had settled around the barracks buildings.) A few seconds later the tower calls and says, "That ought to wake them up."

We climbed up to cruise altitude and headed for Spain where we hoped to get a tanker so we could fly home non-stop. But that was not to be. When we contacted the SAC command post

at Torrejon AB, we were told there were no tankers available and we'd have to land at Torrejon, spend the night and hope for a tanker from England the next day. So on that beautiful, clear, sunny day, the AC opted for a visual descent to the base. As we completed our Before Landing Checklists, I heard the AC call Torrejon Tower saying we were on "straight-in final" (to the base). I brought to his attention that Torrejon was off our right wing **not in front** of us, and we were on final to Barajas!

With a quick, steep turn, and much jockeying of the throttles and aircraft, we landed hot as usual. We blew two tires (one front, one rear) and somewhere along the way, threw a turbine blade through the engine cowling of the number 3 engine, which fortunately did not hit the fuselage.

Tires changed, engine changed, cowling fixed, we left the next morning for the U.K. in hopes of connecting with a tanker. But it didn't happen, and again we had to land and spend the night. With a shortened final, high airspeed, and much throttle jockeying, we landed hot, and again blew two tires!

We left the next morning, got a tanker and made it back to Forbes. As usual, the Wing had our families out on the flight line to welcome us home.

So the AC was going to make a nice landing to show off. He hit hard and we bounced and had to recover by going around. The next time we landed without incident. But that's not the end of it.

The low pass over Incirlik at 0600 local time woke the Turkish base commander and his complaint made it back to SAC HQ. It turned into a minor international incident. That, coupled with what happened on the way home caused the AC to lose his crew.

No loss for me, because I had already received notification for a PCS to Incirlik that I had arranged for 4 months later, so I went on spare-status for the rest of my time in the **55th**. The AC's fair-haired boy status couldn't save him this time, and he ended up being transferred to a T-37 training organization away from Forbes; the other crew members were assigned to other crews in the **55th**.

"NOW YOU KNOW THE REST OF THE STORY."

Jack Kovacs was an RB-47 copilot in the **55th SRW** from 1958-1964; an ops officer in SAC Det 4 (TUSLOG Det-50) in Incirlik AB, Turkey 1964-66;

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