

## BADGER Formation

By Robert Hopkins <cobraball@mac.com>

**You asked for anecdotes about flying Offutt/Affiliated 135s. One of my favorites....**

**For many years the RC-135S COBRA BALL flew operational sorties without ever being intercepted by Soviet MiGs or Sukhois. Beginning in 1988, however, with the arrival of the MiG-31 FOXHOUND, we began to get the occasional "visitor." The FOXHOUND was a large airplane, and up close with a full load of armed missiles it made quite an impression. During October 1988, while flying RC-135S 61-2662 with "Mad Jack" Elliott, we had an unusual escort. While clearing for other traffic I noticed a small silver glint northeast of our position, which appeared to be a high-winged transport such as the IL-76. It passed south of us and we continued our mission. A few minutes later I looked out the window and was startled to see a Tu-16 BADGER flying in tight fingertip formation with us. The crew was friendly and waved, but oddly enough didn't**

leave. The BADGER stayed tucked in formation for the better part of two hours. By this time we were low on fuel and it was time to hit the tanker for an onload. As we turned east to meet the tanker the BADGER disappeared, and we figured he headed for home. About a mile behind the tanker the boomer radioed, in a nervous high-pitched voice, "Uhm, COBRA 09, uhm, you have company in trail. What should we do?" I replied, "If he pulls up into position, give him some gas..." The BADGER quickly parked off our wing during air refueling, this time with a motion picture camera and operator in the upper observation blister, apparently filming every step of our air refueling. When we had taken our onload we slid to the left, leaving space for the BADGER to move into the pre-contact position. At first we thought he would, but I guess better judgment overcame him. Still, the image of a BADGER preparing to air refuel from a KC-135 would have made a great cover for AvWeek.

**Robert "Dr.Bob" Hopkins**

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