

Two Memory Lane "Tales"
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The Teriyaki Steak
and
Abort Court

Teriyaki steak Story (June 2014)
by David Sheffey

I am sure most of us have seen the movie, *Airplane*. Recall the scene where everyone on board the plane contracted food poisoning from eating fish. The captain looked down at his finished meal, the skeleton of a fish. A similar case of food poisoning occurred on one of my deployments to Okinawa.

We were scheduled to depart Okinawa early one morning -- it the dark. All flights start in the dark, especially in the winter, which it was. The evening before, my crew met at the Officers Club for dinner. Everyone ordered Teriyaki steak, except me.

Soon after level off, I began to detect an awful odor permeating the jet. Crew members were constantly leaving their position to visit the latrines. I soon elected to don the oxygen mask to avoid the stench. As we flew toward Eielson to rendezvous with a tanker, I copied an encrypted message from Offutt: "Land Eielson to pick up Busy Penny tapes." Busy Penny was the code name for U2 flights over Viet Nam.

I checked my weather forecast for Eielson: ¼ mile visibility, ice fog, temperature -26.

Quickly I ginned-up a return message to Offutt, stating that weather conditions precluded my compliance. I was then informed that a tanker would be available, engines running, ready to launch for refueling if necessary. Attempt landing at Eielson.

In the forward cockpit area, my copilot was queasy. One navigator was in the seat breathing oxygen. Others were elsewhere. Aft of the bulkhead, the latrines were overflowing. The aircraft stunk. The VHF radio was inoperative as was one UHF radio. Everyone wanted to get home.

On arrival at Eielson, the weather was clear. No tanker was positioned. The temperature was indeed -26 degrees. It was dark – it always is. After touchdown,

the jet exhaust turned into ice fog, requiring a protracted taxi time due to the inability to see the taxiway markings. I was informed the chow hall would be open for the crew to eat. No one was hungry. I requested 90,000 pounds of fuel and the overflowing latrines to be cleaned. Forget the radios-- everyone wanted to get home.

After retrieving the Busy Penny tapes, we again boarded the aircraft. Fuel was as requested but the latrines were not serviced, the excuse being that the service personnel could not proceed beyond the bulkhead due to classification reasons.
Duh!!

I started engines, taxied, and launched. It was dark—always is. Everybody wanted to go home.

Prior to arrival at Offutt, I was instructed to hold until the runway was graded. A blizzard had just passed, dumping 14 inches of fresh snow. I had wisely loaded enough fuel before departing Eielson so as to hold until springtime. After about an hour and a half holding, I was cleared to land. Half the width of the runway had been cleared. Winds were 22 knots direct cross. Snow piles were extremely close to the outboard engines. I was tired. It was dark—always is.

After a surprisingly good landing and while rolling out, I was instructed to shut down engines at the end of the runway and prepare to be towed to the parking ramp because it was too dangerous to taxi, a bit anticlimactic from my perspective.

After debriefing I was happy to get home, having been awake for over 36 hours.

Abort Court (June 2014)

by David Sheffey

We were scheduled to launch from Mildenhall, England early one morning. It was dark – always is. The mission was planned for north of Norway, followed by an air refueling off Goose Bay, Labrador. Goose Bay weather, along with most of the east coast of Canada and the US, was forecast to be socked-in. Without a viable alternate in the event of a missed AR, I announced to the major providing the briefing that I would not fly. After the shock, he dismissed himself for about ten minutes. When returning from making a phone call to the base commander, the briefer relayed the commander's message to the extent that flying was the reason I got my flight pay.

Several hours after takeoff, flying north of Norway in cloudy conditions, the crew intercepted a shoot-down order on our aircraft. Cockpit crew members

were basically comfortable at the time. I had my seat full aft and reclined. My feet were on the dash bar while I was reading a newspaper. One copilot, Ted Hand, was sleeping behind the equipment racks. Reggie Steward was sitting in the right seat. Ken Giasor and John Chisholm were in the nav seats.

Following procedure, I immediately initiated an emergency decent – seat still full aft and reclined. Cockpit paraphernalia flew everywhere. The crew scrambled for parachutes and helmets. After securing his parachute, Reggie noticed his rubber duckies hanging from the seat. After a suitable profanity remark, he left them hanging, not wanting to remove his parachute to properly don the flotation device. Ted was rudely awakened from his slumber by the thud of the landing gear locking down.

As we dived toward the sea, I was primarily concerned with level-off altitude, knowing my altimeter setting was old and useless. The weather conditions were overcast and dark – it always is. During the descent I buried the barber pole on the Mach meter but stayed below Mach .9. Mach tuck was beginning to be noticeable. I chose to stop the descent around 2000 feet, retracted the gear, and advanced the throttles.

As usual, contact on the HF was marginal, except after the event. Then the airwaves lit up like a Christmas tree. Simultaneously, the Z's were transmitting on the aft HF, stepping on the forward HF. Knowing that I, too, had to make requisite HF transmissions, I requested the aft crewmembers to temporarily cease transmission.

After computing a new course direct to Offutt and climbing to level-off altitude, I intercepted an encrypted HF message for my aircraft: "Higher headquarters has been informed that the front end crew will not let the back end crew transmit. Explain." That angered me significantly, prompting me to call the head Wizard forward to explain who had communicated to whom and what had been said. The retort was total denial. The only good news was that I no longer had to worry about the weather conditions and refueling over Goose Bay.

Upon recovery at Offutt at 01:00 hrs., of course it was dark – it always is. Taxiing in, I was instructed to dispense with the normal maintenance debriefing and report directly to the Squadron. At the door stood Jim Clary. He told me not to be nervous, that the debriefing room was full of colonels. Inside the vault I was instructed to sit at a table in front of a tape recorder and an officer read me my rights. After a series of questions, primarily dealing with our emergency descent maneuver, the recorder was turned off and I was dismissed. No discussion was directed to the communication issue nor my initial refusal to fly.
