

MAKE A WISH

LET'S HAVE A PARTY



Back in the fall of 1958 crew number S-38 with Pat Woolbright [AC] Don Thomas [CP] Sam Pizzo [NAV] Roy Scott [R-1] Adrian Weigart [R-2] and Roger Williams [R-3], deployed to Yokota AFB Japan for their ninety [90] day TDY.

Back in those days, there was a custom at Yokoto, whereby as the in-place crew completed their tour and the replacement crew was on the ground and ready to go, a hail and farewell party was scheduled. And so it was for Pat's crew and the replacement crew.

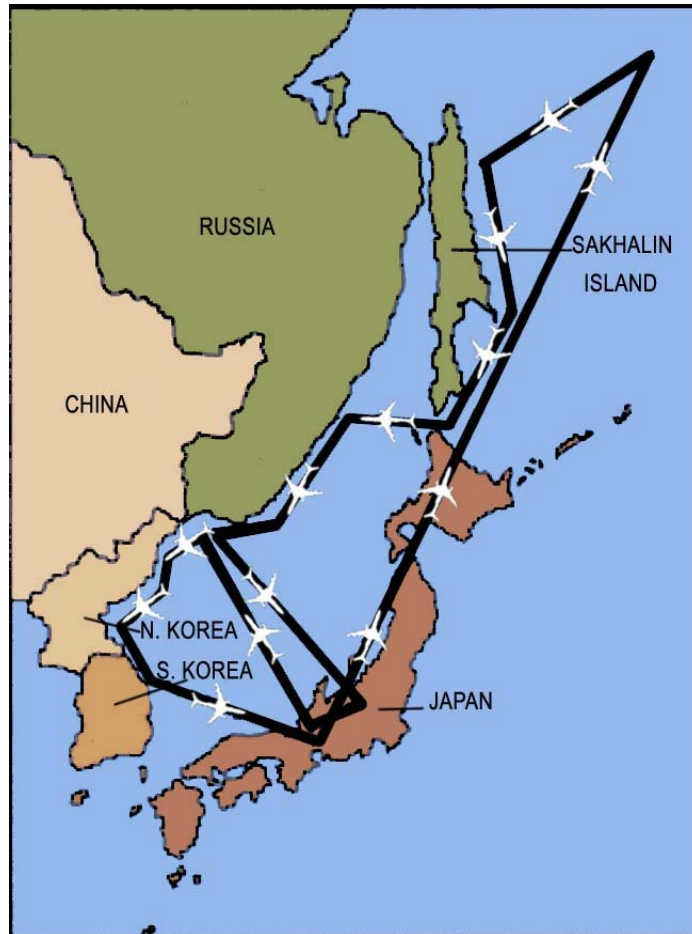
A bit of enlightenment regarding the definition of a party at the Yokoto O'Club. First off, most all TDY'ers gathered at the O'Club every day when not scheduled to fly and some were known to imbibe a bit at the club's watering hole, i.e. the bar. Dress code was casual, meaning shirt, pants and shoes. For a party, same set up except perhaps a "Happy Coat" was usually prescribed and maybe in a designated room. However, not sure if anyone would notice or really care if you failed the dress code!

All was in readiness for the shindig when SAC threw a monkey wrench into the plans. They scheduled, on the night that our party was planned, a high priority mission to collect some data on a suspected new Airborne Intercept Radar that the Soviets were thought to have developed. Unfortunately, we could not reschedule our party due to the unavailability of the Club. All we could do now was wish for a miracle!

Now it came to pass that early on during our tour, SAC Headquarters assigned, full time, a Colonel as the SAC Detachment Commander and he and Pat Woolbright became the fastest of buddies. Two peas in a pod. This friendship led on occasion to some of us being invited to his home on the base whereby his wife provided us a home cooked meal AND he and Pat would imbibe a bit of the spirits.

Not to have a party was totally unacceptable to Pat and his new found friend. Not sure who came up with the idea, the Colonel or Pat, but somehow the Colonel persuaded SAC to let us fly a short daylight sortie in the Sea of Japan which would allow us to then have our party.

The route encompassed [as best as an aging data bank can recall] is depicted below.



After takeoff, we headed north exiting Japan and heading into the Sea of Okhotsk. When reaching our northern turn point and turning to parallel Sakhalin Island, we were jumped by at least six Russian Migs each it seems were taking turns going behind and above us then making diving passes at us culminating with them flying a real tight formation with us to include coming up under our wing tips attempting to have Pat turn in towards Russia, which he did not do thank goodness. When Pat and Don knew that we had company, Don asked Pat for guidance with regards to firing the 20mm cannons or not. Pat told Don, with that many Migs, and they had not fired, it did not seem to be a wise thing to do,

until or if they first started firing at us, and since they did not do so let's wait and see what they're up to. Note: For those of you that knew Pat, you know that the language Pat used in giving Don his instructions has been cleaned up considerably for use in this article.

Perhaps the most tense moment of the Russian Mig encounters occurred when one of the Delta Wing Interceptors approached us from the three [3] o'clock and slightly above us position. Barreling towards us, he looked as if he intended to ram us, and at the last moment he veered sharply to the right, which blocked us from his view, ending up with his aircraft being directly in front of and slightly below us. We ate a lot of his jet wash. On a pucker scale of 1 to 10, this was an 11! Don recalls having some worried thoughts as to whether or not the Ejection Seat would operate properly while facing to the rear. Guess if we had ejected, it would have fallen in the category of OJT training for Don. And some folks question why Air Force Fliers get these retirement benefits!

They stayed with us until we reached the Chinese border at which time we broke left towards Japan and they left us.

At no time did the big radar site in northern Japan advise us of any Mig activity but we know full well that they had them [and us] on their scopes.

After reaching Japan and flying south a bit we turned towards the Russian Chinese border and when reaching our turn point we turned heading south, paralleling the coastline until we reached our turning point to head back to Japan.

Lo and behold, as we made our turn south to parallel the coast we now had six or more Chinese Migs doing the exact same thing that the Russian Migs had done earlier! Diving passes, close formation once again accompanied with much pucker time. Same instructions given to Don regarding the guns.

I cannot speak for others, but I had never flown a daylight sortie while deployed. I know that those who tdy'd to Thule or Alaska during the summer months did so, but I'm glad I did not have to do so. I did not relish having the opportunity of looking out of my window and being able to see smiling faces of Chinese or Russian Pilots who, at any given moment, just might decide to shoot at me.

As many of you who flew out of Japan know, that area of the world has some ferocious west to east jet streams, some with winds exceeding

two hundred miles per hour, and that's exactly what we ran into about halfway down the Chinese coast.

As we had been having these Migs with us for a while, and all China probably knew where we were by now, I probably had my radar on a bit longer than normal to insure that we would not violate Chinese airspace and give our "friends" reason to get trigger happy. For that reason I was able to pick up the jet stream rather quickly and have Pat make a heading correction in order to maintain the proper course. In doing so, a rather large heading change was in order which meant that the nose of the aircraft was somewhat angled towards China. Didn't seem to bother the Migs, but it sure did affect a couple of individuals as you will note later on.

Mission complete, puckering time over, time to party and tell heroic tales of how we handled the Migs.

As to why either group did not fire, who knows. Guess it just wasn't in the cards that day.

I'm pretty sure Roy and the other Ravens collected a lot of data on this one, at least I sure hope so.

Unlike the mission, the party went well [I judge this based on the size of the hangover Sunday morning] that is, until a very loud banging on our door took place real early in the morning, followed by the instructions for Pat, Don and I, to get dressed immediately and report to our Ops Office.

Upon arrival, we were greeted by some very upset individuals dressed in civies whom we learned were from the American Embassy in Tokyo. These gents, one really young and obnoxious, immediately started accusing us of creating an international incident by over flying Russian and Chinese territories. I finally got the 0-15 Radar Camera film viewed which I thought would end the matter, but not so. This obnoxious individual noted that the nose of our aircraft was pointed in the direction of China therefore we had to over fly. [remember the jet stream]. In spite of the radar film, it took a lot of explanation and patience, to get them to believe we did not overfly. His theory of our guilt now being as the nose of the aircraft was somewhat pointed towards the coastline, the Mig pilots had every right to THINK we were going to over fly, thereby they had every right to report us! They finally agreed with us and departed. We headed back to the sack with a very important lesson learned...

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, YOU JUST MIGHT GET YOUR WISH AND BE SORRY !

Prior to printing, this article has been verified for accuracy.

VO

Sam Pizzo

Author's Comments:

Thanks to Don Thomas for his valuable input, and once again, thanks to Pat Gros [Copper] for her computer support.