

**UH-OH,
AN RB 47 ADVENTURE
Contributed by Bruce Bailey**

My crew flew to Okinawa to replace a 55th standboard crew to pull a TDY tour there. We flew out on one of the wing's KC-97 tankers. There were stops at March AFB, CA, Hawaii and Guam along the way.

As far as our Raven Three was concerned, the KC-97 was instantaneous transportation. His mode of operation was to hit a bar, get blind staggering drunk as quickly as he could. We would pour him back on board the plane and he would pass out for the duration of that leg. He would wake up when we landed at the next stop and repeat the cycle. He said, as far as he was concerned, no time passed between stops, cause he was in 'la la land'. So, it was instant transportation in his mind.

We took an engine specialist along with us to Kadena. He went to work on the RB-47H soon after arrival and reported some very bad news. His inspection indicated that five of the engines had been operated for extended periods in overheat condition – thus requiring all five engines to be changed. So, we had a week off to enjoy Okinawa's beaches, bars and bathhouses.

When the engine changes were completed, a test hop was required before we could fly an operational mission. The entire crew went along on the test hop so as to check out all the recon systems.

We were lined up on the runway with all engines at 100%. Water-alcohol injection was activated and brakes released. The old girl had a very light fuel load, so leapt away and accelerated rapidly. On reaching about half the speed needed for take-off, all three engines on the left wing abruptly quit. The water-alcohol was contaminated; this killed the engines. The plane went down the runway like a Frisbee, finally stopping on a taxiway.

Three more engine changes and extensive landing gear maintenance were required. More down time for the crew. We were becoming well known in the local joints.

Ten days later we flew another test hop without incident. Drat it. Looked like we were finally going to have to go to work.

We were anxious to get our first operational mission behind us as we would get our theater spot promotions for the tour only after completing the initial sortie.

We lined up and roared down the runway trailing heavy, black smoke from the water injection. We were nearing takeoff speed and the water was still good. It looked like a go, finally.

Our AC was a very quiet guy known as "Silent George," and a great pilot. He remained as cool under any circumstance. Nothing rattled George. He had been a B-17 pilot during WWII and had had three planes shot from under him. Then he had flown the Berlin airlift, later followed by B-29 missions during the Korean War. All those experiences conditioned him to be shot at and dumped upon. He never got excited. On this first mission out of Kadena, his calling, of "gear up," was followed a couple of seconds later by "uh-oh." When you got "uh-oh", or "Jeez" out of George, you knew it was serious stuff. Those were his extreme reactions. I looked up from my seat in the aisle to see George rapidly cranking in the trim and straining against the rudder and ailerons.

The number six engine (the only one that had not been changed) had frozen up and broken off. When it did so, it also snapped part of the wing off at the engine mount. George trimmed the airplane and climbed out as best the old bird would do. We were being bombarded by calls from the tower, telling us we had left a good bit of our airplane on the field. George had not yet declared an emergency, nor had he decided to abort the mission, so we were still under strict radio silence.

He leveled at a medium altitude and had the copilot compute our fuel consumption to see if we could fly the mission. The fuel was being sucked up fast, so George decided to abort. We had to bore holes for hours in order to burn enough fuel to get the aircraft light enough to land (a situation all B-47 types are familiar with). Once we were on the ground, we again had down time in which to terrorize the natives for another three days waiting for a replacement aircraft to arrive.

We were now so far behind schedule that when we at last got under way, we planned and briefed four missions at once then flew four days in a row. Took one day to plan and brief four more missions, then flew those. We lived on that routine for the next three weeks to get caught up. The local economy suffered badly during that period.