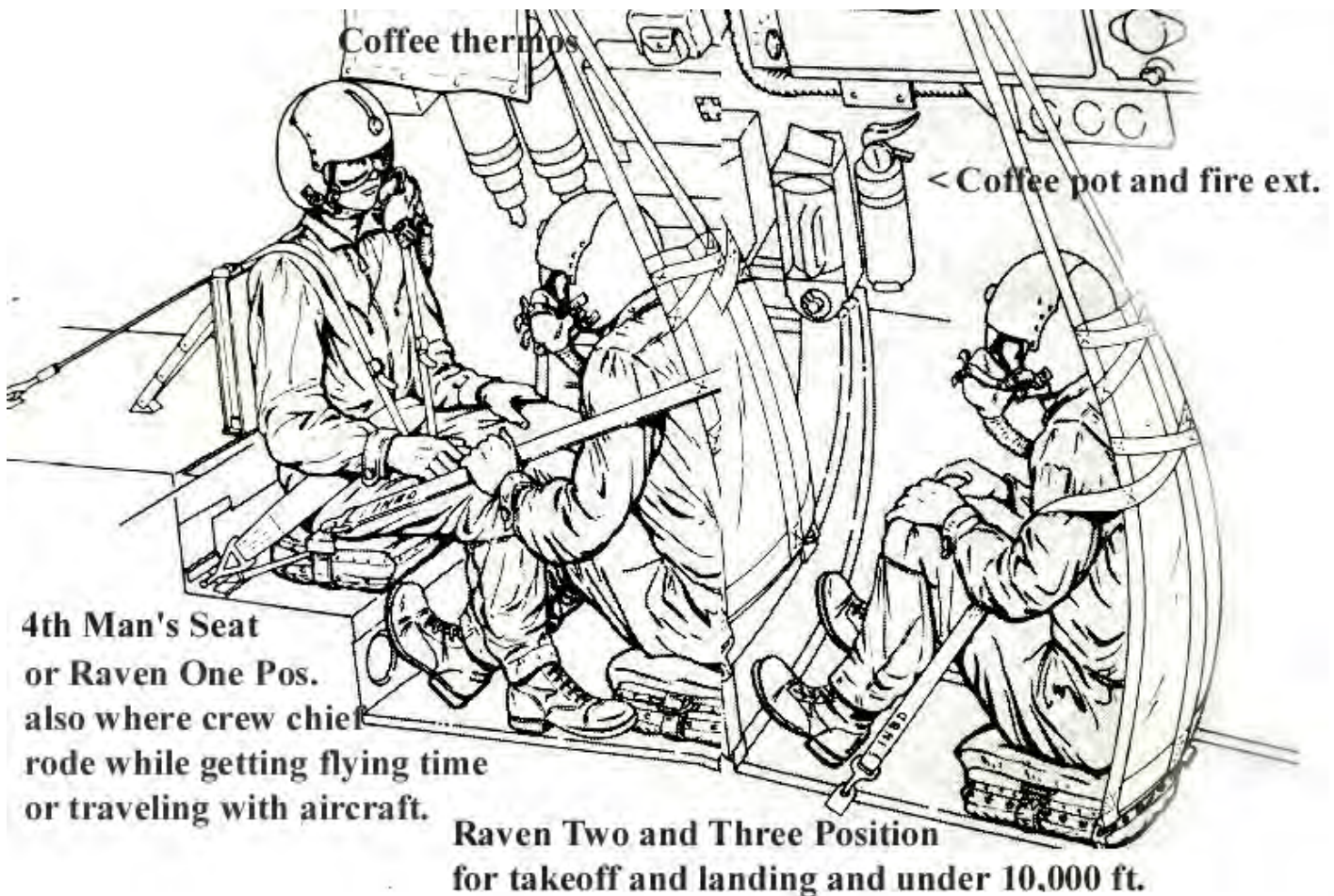


Gear-up Landing on Guam A Crew Chief's Version

The RB-47 (reconnaissance version) had a pressurized compartment located in what would have been the bomb bay of a regular B-47. This pressurized compartment had three seats for operators to sit in and operate their equipment. These three Signal Specialists Operators were referred to as "Crows or Ravens" and their positions in the pressurized compartment were known as Raven one, two and three. The bottom of this pressurized compartment was also the bottom of the aircraft, it made a bail out at a low altitude very risky so these Ravens would sit in the left side of the cockpit alongside the pilot and co-pilot during take-off and landing. Once safely airborne the Ravens would open the pressure entry door and stand on the ladder and bottom entry door and open the crawlway door and crawl about 15 feet through a passage way to the bomb bay area and enter their pressurized compartment where they would operate their equipment in their own pressurized area, then return to the cockpit area just prior to landing when due to the lower altitude they would be able to transit without either compartments being pressurized.

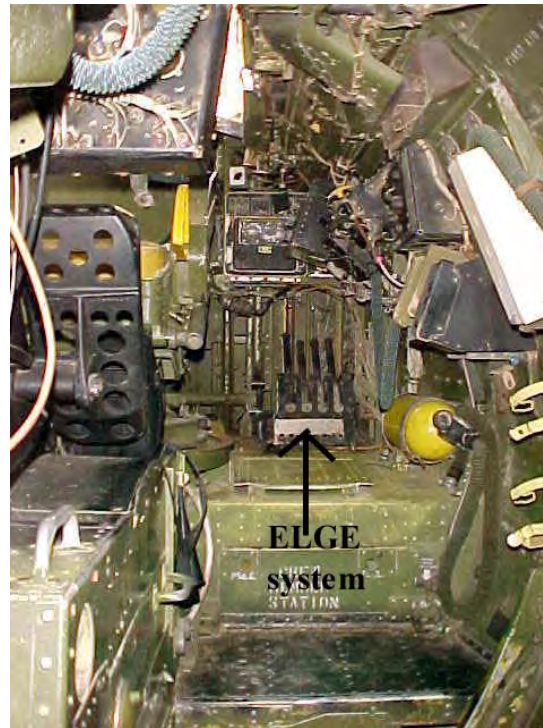


Both the B-47 and RB-47 bombers when going TDY normally took the maintenance crew chief with them if they were TDY for any length of time. This would also allow the crew chief to qualify for and draw flight pay. However the crew chief had to fly at least four hours a month to qualify for this pay.

Don Foster was the crew chief on RB-47H 53-4302 and was TDY to Yokota, Japan at OL-2 when he had an opportunity to accompany the flight crew on a scheduled four hour training

flight and as the Raven One was not going on this flight and that allowed Don to be the 6th person on the flight and to qualify for that months flight pay. However as normally happened a lot of times, things just didn't work out that way.

As this flight returned to Yokota to land the forward main gear would not extend. The normal procedure then was to use the ELGE stand (emergency landing gear extension) and through a cable and ratchet system, unlock and lower the gear and extend it to the down and locked position. This system was located to the left and slightly behind the co-pilot and consisted of four handles and lights that indicated safe or unsafe positions of all four of the landing gear.

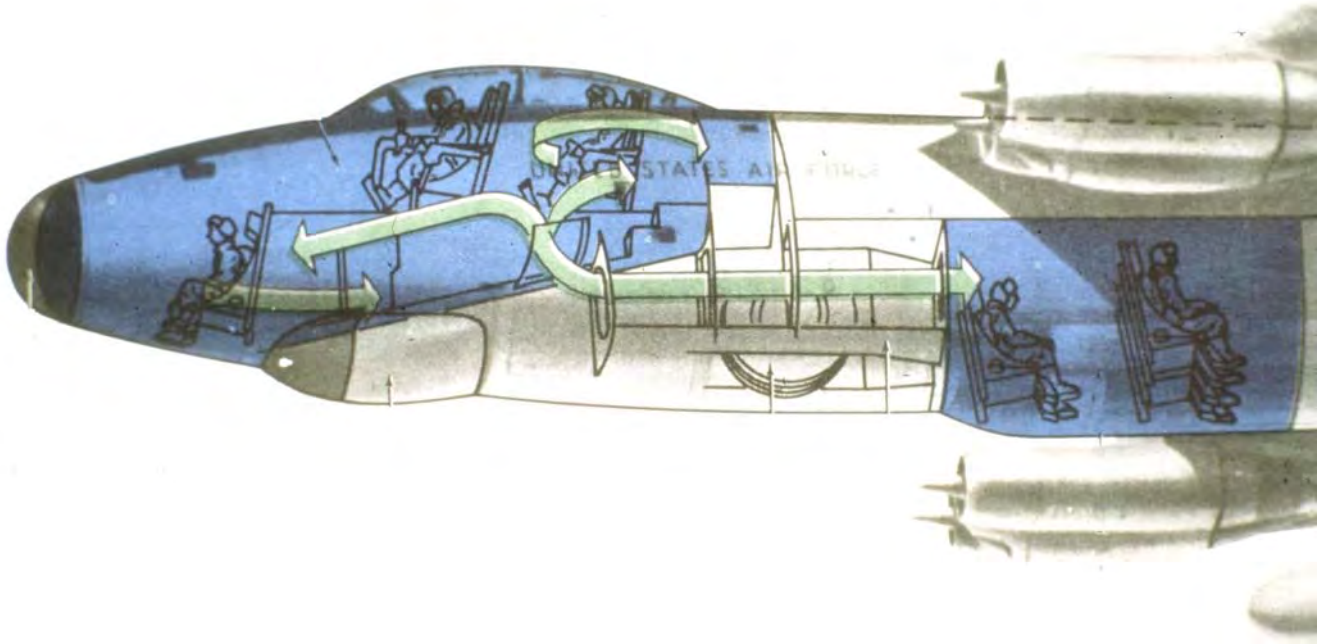


Don attempted to lower the gear using the ELGE system but the forward main gear lever would not move. After several attempts were made to lower the gear the Command Post was notified and emergency procedures were started. A tanker was launched to refuel the plane while repeated attempts were made to lower the gear.



RB-47 53-4302

Note: the forward gear doors partially open



View showing flight crew and Raven's typical seating and transit means.



Crawlway looking toward the bomb bay Crawlway looking toward the entrance door.

The 'ELGE' handle for the forward main gear would not move (it was later found that one of the ball bearings that rolls up and down the track in the retraction mechanism had split and was jammed in the track) Don recalled there was a 50ft strap in a pouch that was for emergency use to attach to an injured person's chute 'D' ring so they could be dropped out the entrance door and insure their chute would deploy. He used this strap to tie onto the handle so two people could pull on the handle. However the forward main gear lever would only move slightly or just enough to open the doors and drop the gear about 10 degrees down and would not move any more. Finally the use of the extra leverage and repeated pulling on the ELGE handle caused the release cable to brake. The ability to check the position of the forward main gear could be established by going down into the aforementioned crawlway about halfway and opening a small panel to view the gear position. Different procedures were tried along with suggestions from the Boeing Company. One procedure was to accelerate to 290 knots then do a pop-up to place 'G' forces on the plane. During this procedure Don laid in the crawlway while below 10,000 feet as the flight crew would accelerate and do a pop-up to pull 'G's to see if the gear would move. He had a good view of the landing gear out the little door in the crawlway until they pulled the pop-up, then the door would slam closed and he would be pinned down in the crawlway. After five in-flight refueling offloads in the local area at Yokota, and realizing a wheels up landing was now inevitable, Col. Riley decided to divert to Anderson AFB on the Island of Guam because of better facilities for a gear up landing.



View of an RB-47 being refueled in flight.

Two more in-flight refueling offloads were made in the Anderson AFB area while final preparations for a gear up landing were planned. A tanker was flying behind the plane on final as it came in just in case it had to go around again as the total fuel on board was down to about 4,000 lbs. Therefore they could do a quick top-off if needed.

On final on runway 06R at Anderson, the canopy was blown at 190 kts. Don had stowed every loose thing from the cockpit in the crawlway (water bottles, coffee pot, brief case etc) however, Lt. Col. Riley had folded up his Air Force blue raincoat and put it up behind his parachute. When he blew the canopy, the wind pulled it out and back down around Don's head in the 4th mans seat. He stated it sure scared the crap out of him! But they were back on he ground after 24 hours of flying.



This picture shows the touchdown and the tanker behind and above.



This picture shows someone climbing out of the cockpit and walking down the backbone of the aircraft.



This picture shows the fire department arriving and two more climbing out of the cockpit. They then walked down the left wing and made a small jump off the wingtip outboard of number one engine due to that wing being on the up-wind side in case fire broke out.



This view show the fire department has everything under control.



In this view you can see the forward gear doors are slightly open



This view shows that number six engine was slightly damaged. The left wing tip even though it was much higher was used as the exit point because of it being up-wind



Crew members, left to right. SSGT Don Foster, Maj Hassing, Nav (back to camera) two Guam Base Personnel, Capt Gilbreth, Co-Pilot, Lt Col Riley (rubbing eyes) Aircraft Commander, Maj. Miller on far right. (Not in picture) Capt Carcich. The pictures of the landing were taken by a base photographer on Guam.

Don Foster spent 11 years with the 55th SRW, from Oct '54 to Oct '65. He was TDY 13 times to other detachments with the 'H' model and later with a special project 'H' model. He believes he is the only one still around from that flight. Col. Riley and Capt Carcich passed away recently.

While obtaining the information for this story and communicating with Don about this being a 24 hour flight when his objective in going on this flight to begin with was to qualify for the four hour flying requirement I asked, did you get six months flight pay for a twenty four hour flight? His reply was as normal, "things just didn't work out that way."

The aircraft was removed from the runway and with a minimal amount of work needed for it to be in flying condition. The retraction mechanism was replaced and the number six engine on 53-4302 were changed. A scab patch was put down the belly and five days later the airplane was flown back to Forbes AFB Kansas. It was thirteen months before it flew again.

Here is a picture of the very same aircraft on duty again about four years later still on duty at Yokota once again. Don Foster was no longer the crew chief and stated he never worked on the aircraft again due to its extended maintenance down time from that landing.



The crew received the Strategic Air Command Crew of the Month and were featured in Combat Crew Magazine for July 1962

(see below)



PROFESSIONAL PERFORMERS



From left: Major Miller, Captain Gilbreath, Captain Carcich, SSgt Foster.

Crew of the Month

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE and excellent crew coordination, displayed by Lt. Col. James R. Riley and crew when their routine training mission turned into a refueling marathon and culminated in a wheels-up landing, have earned this B-47 crew of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Forbes, the title of Strategic Air Command Crew of the Month.

Other members of the crew are Capt. James B. Gilbreath, copilot; Maj. Douglass H. Hassing, navigator; Maj. Edward H. Miller, navigator; Capt. Marvin Carcich, EWO, and SSgt Donald L. Foster, crew chief.

After arrival at their destination fix, the forward main gear would not extend. The command post was alerted and emergency procedures to extend the gear were started. After repeated attempts to lower the stubborn gear were unsuccessful, an alert tanker was launched and sufficient fuel transferred to extend the flight while higher headquarters was contacted for technical advice.

The crew continued their emergency extension procedures, and were realizing partial success when the ELGE cable broke, leaving the gear about one-fourth extended. Realizing that a wheels-up landing was now inevitable, Colonel Riley requested permission to divert to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, where better maintenance and repair facilities were available.

Having completed five air refuelings in the local area prior to diverting to Andersen, another two refuelings were made over that base as the crew made several more attempts to lower the gear using procedures recommended by Boeing technicians.

Finally the runway was foamed and Colonel Riley made an excellent wheels-up landing, with very slight damage to the aircraft, and ended a 24-hour flight which had included seven air refuelings, five of them at night.

This crew's demonstrated professional competence and coordination well merits its selection as SAC Crew of the Month.