

July 6<sup>th</sup> 2015

In 1972 I took a picture of a Russian TU-128 supersonic fighter. I was the co-pilot of an RC-135 and we were in the Kara Sea off the Arctic Ocean on top of the Soviet Union. The picture was eventually declassified and a book written about the TU-128. Alex flew the TU-128 and his story is in the book along with mine. He found me on Facebook and as they say – the rest is history.

Zot

---In about 2006 my friend, Robb Hoover wrote an e-mail to me:

“ You may recall a few years ago that we were trying to track down the crew that took that magnificent photo of the TU-128 FIDDLER in the Kara Sea on 29 Jun 72, and you came forward. When AF Historical Research Agency bulk declassified some of the collateral histories of the 6 SW from the 1960s and 70s that photo was included. The photo had the attached information that it was taken by 55 SRW Crew E-18 on 290529Z Jun 72 at 71 20N 060 55E.

I've since gotten a 343rd Crew Roster from that summer (courtesy of Jim Clary) and see that the E-18 Crew Commander was Robert L. Line, Alternate Crew Commander Thomas C. Hruby, you were the copilot, Powell (William C.?) was the Nav-1 and Saenz (Roland) was the Nav-2. I don't know who the crows were as in those days they were a separate crew.

I've since been contacted by a British author (retired British Royal Air Force officer) who is a Russian linguist. He now translates Russian military manuals of historical interest into English for publication. And he is now working on the TU-128 manual. He had come across the FIDDLER picture on our 55 SRWA website and contacted me for further information. So I am taking up research again about this photo. As I think you also know it was carried in Jane's All the World's Aircraft in the late 70s. How they got the photo I have no idea. (Zot comment - leaked so the Soviet's would know that we knew more about the plane than we could have gotten from satellite (overheads) picture

So as our Association historian I trying to fit together as many pieces of the story as I can. You as the copilot would have taken the picture, correct? The level of detail is stunning. And so perfectly framed. With a superb view of the outboard radar homing and inboard infra-red AA-5 ASH air-to-air missiles.

Can you recall any other details about the intercept? How close did the FIDDLER approach? Was there more than one? The home base for the FIDDLER would have been Amderma, obviously. I presume you landed at Eielson, hence the 6th SW Intel shop would have processed the photos. Did you take off from Offutt? As I recall we were experimenting with some very long missions in those days. Or perhaps in was round-robin from PAEI.

I would especially like to contact the Crows to see if they intercepted the BIG NOSE airborne intercept radar which was a very high priority in those days. Do you have contact with any of the other crewmembers? I will be seeing Roland Saenz next month. He lives in Bellevue, and we 82nd SRS vets here get together for dinner.

I would appreciate any help and memories you can offer.

Robb Hoover

Bellevue Nebraska

P.S. After the Brit gets his book published and we have access to a greater level of detail about the FIDDLER, we could put together your/crew memories of this and publish them on our special section in the SRWA website. Sam Pizzo has been pushing to make sure that we capture some of these stories and preserve them. This FIDDLER episode certainly merits such treatment.

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Dear Robb,

Guilty as charged. I did take the Fiddler picture. Checking my Form 5 it was flown in Acft. 792 on the 28th of June 1972 (out of PAEI but over the international dateline so it was on the 29th Zulu.) The sortie was 13.9 hrs. I have both FP & CP time on my Form 5. I remember that there were only two drivers on all the flights except June 11th. Now let me see if I can write the rest of the story to set the stage for the picture.

That entire month was the trip from hell. It was a Combat Sent mission and I remember that Larry Staringer was one of the guys who appeared, grabbed a load of tapes and disappeared while he took them back to Offutt. It was the trip from hell because the inertial navigation system kept breaking. The INS was recycled from the Hound Dog missile and when it broke it really broke. The failure item was the nav equipment air conditioner and it was usually accompanied with a loud bang and cloud of

smoke billowing up from under the cockpit floor. That caused many interesting problems, especially the first time it happened after we hit the tanker.

This was what happened according to my Form 5 (the official AF record of where I was and what I was doing.) A good memory refresher given that this event happened 44+ years ago.

Date	Mission symbol	Duration	Reason
June 01	T3	5.6	ferry flight to Eilson (PAEI)
June 04	09	12.7	ops sortie
June 07	T3	3.2	broken plane before tankers
June 08	T3	5.7	home to Offutt (OFF)
June 11	09	17.9	ops sortie with AAC - OFF to PAEI
June 13	09	10.6	air File to Offutt with a broken plane
June 16	T3	5.6	back to Eilson
June 21	Baseball played at midnight without lights		
June 25	T3	2.8	broken plane - PAEI - PAEI
June 26	09	13.5	ops sortie
June 28	09	13.9	picture sortie - lox loss-broken plane
July 01	T3	5.7	home to Offutt - with the tree



Being SAC trained killers we were supposed to fly with nothing personal but ID cards. It was June, we were supposed to be gone 30 days and our families had gone on vacations. The first time it happened (June 07) we hadn't hit the tankers so we landed at Eielson where it was determined that they couldn't fix the plane. Next day we headed home for repairs. Because we were now six hours further away from our target we needed a third pilot to make it a sortie from Offutt. They found an AAC (Alternate Aircraft Commander,) set up the tankers and we headed north on June 11th. That sortie was uneventful and we landed at Eilson after a scenic tour through the Kara Sea. SAC was too cheap to pay for a ticket for the AAC to get home so he was sent south on a tanker heading for CA.

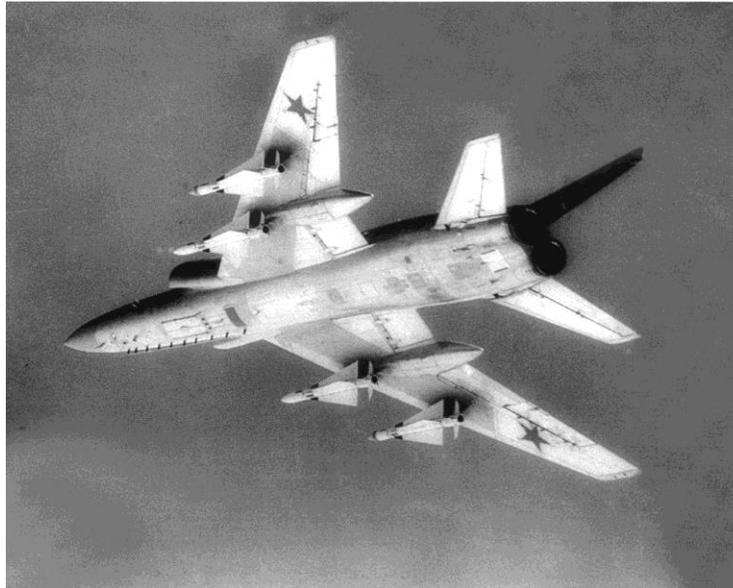
On June 13th we had just hit the tanker, all tanks were full and we were headed north when the now familiar loud bang and cloud of smoke rose from the cockpit floor. We immediately knew that the air conditioner's cooling unit had again bitten the dust. Since we would have to dump gas to land the Command Post at Eielson air filed us to Omaha and home again we went. I know we beat the AAC back to Omaha. They fixed the plane and we dead headed back Eilson. Most of the sorties were Round Robins from Eilson and ran around 14 hours. This broken nav system plagued us through the month. We had other incidents that generated a theme song for the trip - "When Your Hot, Your Hot" by Jerry Reed. It was on the juke box at the club and we played it often. That went right along with the other line "I've got Good News and Bad News."

The flight on June 28th (the day of the picture) went smoothly until we were in the area. We were flying between Novaya Zemlya and the main land looking for signals from a new Soviet radar. We were supposed to be all alone in international airspace, just boring holes in the sky. I looked out the right cockpit window and much to my surprise there was the TU-128. He was flying a nice fighter style wing tip formation, maybe 10'-15' off our wing tip. He was probably hoping for someone to hold up a Playboy centerfold. Since he wasn't supposed to be there it was a shock to say the least and I have no idea how long he was there. I think I poked the Aircraft Commander (Captain Robert "Bob" Line) and pointed to the TU-128. He leaned around so he could see the right wing tip, and then I remember that he slapped my shoulder and said "Take a picture!"



Picture was taken in the Kara Sea at 71 20N 060 55E

I had two cameras. A government issued Pentax with B&W film and an 80-200 MM lens and my Minolta with color slide film, also with an 80-200 mm lens. The focusing glass had been installed backwards in the Pentax so I wasn't sure that it was working right. That is why there is only B&W picture. I grabbed the Pentax from the floor by my left foot and shot the now famous picture. Once he saw me duck for the camera he decided that flying formation with an RC-135 may be fun, but he didn't want it caught on film for all the world to see. So he made a turn to depart. I snapped the first picture and by the time I picked up the Minolta and shot what was left of the scene he was history. Never saw any results from the color film. It was all over in a few seconds. I don't recall telling anyone in the plane except Bob that the TU-128 was there. By the time that would have been useful information, he was gone. On that sortie I understand that a good signal was collected but the picture was the most important take from the month. When we got back to Eilson and debriefed the intel folks processed the B&W film. They had an 8x10 before we left and everyone was talking about it.



**Soviet TU-128 NATO code name - Fiddler**

For comparison the TU-128 is about the same size as the B-58 although with about 1/2 the wing area. It was a big plane out the window.

	<b>TU-128</b>	<b>B-58</b>	<b>RC-135</b>
<b>Length</b>	89' 4"	96' 9"	136' 3"
<b>Span</b>	59' 5"	56' 10"	130' 10"
<b>Height</b>	23'	31'	41' 8"
<b>Wing Area (sq ft)</b>	861	1,542	2,433
<b>Weight (empty lbs)</b>	54,000	55,560	96,466
<b>Weight (gross lbs)</b>	88,200	163,000	297,000



**US B-58 supersonic bomber**

We had a few other incidents that caused consternation and got us a lot of attention in places like SAC HQ. We were scheduled to fly about every three days so a few of us decided to go to Danali National Park and tour Mt. Whitney. It was all cleared with the powers that be and since we weren't scheduled to fly for a few days some of us made plans to overnight and catch the sightseeing trip early the next morning. When those who just made it a day trip got off the train they were met with the question - "Where's Zot?" Turns out we were actually scheduled to fly the next day and I was AWOL, looking at the sights in Danali. After a bunch of tries to make the mission happen (like finding a co-pilot from the Eilson crews but none were qualified in the U) and scheming ways to get me back from the park (including sending the rescue helicopters or a Piper Cub) they finally gave up and told SAC HQ that we would fly in two days. Heard a lot about that side trip but it was spectacular tour of the park.

We had two other incidents that come to mind about theme song. On one occasion the nav cooling system blew up while we were still on the ground. It went with its usual big bang and a cloud of smoke. Since we were just starting engines I called the tower to tell them that we had a fire on board, were shutting down and would be abandoning the plane. By the time that message got to the Base Commander he heard that we were on fire in one of his hangers. For some reason that really upset him.



**This is a Combat Scent sister ship to 792 the one I was in when the picture was taken**

**The other incident I think was on the June 28th flight and it had to do with the oxygen system. Monitoring the quantity of LOX on board was my job as co-pilot. As I noticed the unusual loss of oxygen I had all the regulators turned off. When that stopped the loss I had them turned on again in stages. Cycling the regulators did the job and the loss stopped. However, the nav system was up to its usual tricks and about 2 hours north of Eilson (still over the frozen Arctic ocean) it decided to die with the usual bang and a cloud of smoke. Since the mission was essentially over the guys in the back had cleaned everything up and were taking naps. With the bang I went to the emergency position on the intercom (which overrode whatever else they were listening to) and made the following announcement. "Crew this is the co-pilot - I have some good new and some bad news. The good news is that we have plenty of oxygen left. The bad news is that we are going to have to use it because we are on fire." That got the attention of everyone still on a headset and the whole back end was awake and back in their boots in short order. The good news was that there was no real fire and we safely returned to Eilson. But our reputation continued to grow in the wrong direction.**

**With the plane broken and the mission nearing its scheduled end a decision was made to cease flying operational sorties. So we had a day to get packed and ready to return home. Alaska is a wonderful place with all kinds of things that air crews like to bring home. Frozen crab legs and salmon ranked high on the prize list. There were places in the plane where a block of frozen fish would stay frozen and they were usually well filled. For some reason I decided that I wanted a birch tree. Fairbanks is in the permafrost zone so even though it was June the ground was only thawed about 8" deep. I enlisted some guys and we dug up a rather large birch tree and dragged it back to the plane. We put the roots by the over wing hatch on the right side and it went almost all the way across the plane. The problem arose when it warmed up and all the mosquitoes hatched. We had to fog the plane before we could take off to kill all the little buggers looking for lunch. Back home I took the right seat out of my wife's VW bug and we moved the tree home looking like a Keystone Cop car. For years Larry Starringer always greeted me with "Does a Tree Grow in Bellevue?" Yes, it did fine and capped our image as "When You're Hot, You're Hot. When You're Not, You're Not."**

**All in all it was a very interesting trip. The flying was good, we cheated death several times and not only did we get a prime picture but we got a lot of good war stories. There is one more aspect to this tale that almost no one knows. My first operational assignment was in Viet Nam flying OV-10s as a Forward Air Controller. I was stationed in Da Nang and Bien Hoa and flew in Laos and Cambodia as a traffic cop on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. My job was to stop stuff coming from North Viet Nam and help the Cambodians fend off the bad guys. When my tour was almost over I got orders to B-52s. I called MPC (AF Military Personal Center) and tried to explain that I was the only rated pilot in the AF with a Photographic Science degree from Rochester Institute of Technology (and they only graduated about 20 of us a year.) I'd also been a flight test engineer at Wright-Patterson before entering the AF and probably should go to some unit that has something to do with reconnaissance. Didn't make a sale on getting new orders and I was bummed.**

One evening I was crying in my beer about the situation and Arch Battista, another Covey FAC, offered to write a letter to the commander of MPC explaining why they made a mistake. Arch wrote the letter (he later went to law school and served 30 years on active duty and in the reserves,) I signed it and we dumped it in the mail box, no stamp required. About two weeks later I had new orders to the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. MPC couldn't get me out of SAC but they did get me moved out of B-52s, which was a blessing. And that is the rest of the story of why a guy with a broken camera got a lucky shot.

Zot



This is a picture of the Russian pilot (Nirodenko) who was flying the TU-128 I took the picture of.

Alex flew TU-128s and Mig-31s. He retired from the Soviet AF and came to the US in 1993 with a wife, three kids and few suitcases. He drove a cab, did other jobs and went to school to learn computer programming, which is what he does now. After the book was published and he read my story it wasn't hard to find me on Facebook. I invited Alex and Lucy to come to Dayton for a couple of things. 1. To meet Judy and me. 2. To see the AF Museum, 3, to visit the Dayton Air Show (which was fun but it rained a bunch and we left before the area where the cars were parked turned totally into a sea of mud.) and 4. to tell his story to my military pilot buddies. We did all 4, toured the new house, had dinner at the Clifton Mill and toasted with Russian Vodka. It was a fun visit and next year we are planning on going back to visit them in NY (north of NYC on the west side of the Hudson River. We joke that he is my brother from another mother and you can see that we kind of look a bit alike.



**Russian Mig-31**



**Alex, Lucy, Zot & Judy -  
Dinner at the historic Clifton Mill**



**Alex, Kathy and Zot after Alex's talk to military pilots. Kathy is the Flight Captain and the tee shirts were a gift from Alex and have a picture of the TU-128 and a map of the Soviet Union**