

## AN UNUSUAL CHRISTMAS GREETING

By LTC William S. Perrin, USA, Ret. # 363

In February 1962, I arrived at Fliegerhorst Airfield in Hanau, Germany, and was assigned as Commander, Aerial Surveillance and Target Acquisition Platoon (ASTA) in the 503rd Aviation Company, 3rd Armored Division. I had completed transition onto the OV-1 at Ft. Rucker in November 1961. The 3rd Armored was the first unit to receive the Mohawks. They started arriving in July 1962 and were checked and serviced by our Grumman Technical Representative, Walt Mattson. We conducted the Department of Army's Field Test and Evaluation on the OV-1. We began a special training program to conduct regular Side Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR) missions, along the borders of West Germany in support of the intelligence efforts of HQ, Seventh Army. We were ready by late August or early September. The SLAR Section was commanded by Captain Russell H. Potter. The SLAR missions were flown by Captain Potter, Captain Dean R. Willwerth, also in the SLAR Section, 1st Lieutenant Roy A. Wulff, of the Infrared Section and myself.

During the Christmas week of 1963, I volunteered to fly one of the scheduled night missions. It was scheduled for a 0100 takeoff. The weather was good for Night Instrument flying, the clouds were low and light snow was falling. All preparations were made, SFC Houston, our best Ground Control Approach (GCA) Radar operator, was to be in the GCA Shack upon our arrival back at Fliegerhorst. My Technical Operator (TO) for the mission was Sp-5 Seymore. I arrived at the hanger at 1145 hrs to preflight the Hawk and go over the mission with Sp-5 Seymore. The flight plan was filed under the call sign of CORVETTE which we used on these missions. The current weather at Fliegerhorst was, ceiling 400 ft overcast with 1-mile visibility, and light snow falling. The weather upon our arrival back at Hanau was to be worse but above landing minimums. I used Ramstein AFB as my Alternate Airport. After a real thorough preflight, SP-5 Seymore and I climbed aboard and secured ourselves in the Martin Baker Ejection seats and taxied out for the runup. All was perfect, clearance copied, Rotating Beacon on, Ejection seat armed, we rolled out on the numbers and lined up the Hawk on the center line of the take-off runway. I looked up through the overhead Plexiglas and said my prayer, "Into Thy Hands Father, I Commit My Spirit" and pushed the power levers forward. The Hawk roared down the runway, came off at 100 knots for safety, and we were into the overcast. Every time I entered the overcast, it was like wrapping up in a warm blanket. Right turn to Salmunster Beacon, to maintain 4,000, then passed Salmunster Beacon, climb to 12,000 feet, direct to Fulda. With the autopilot on in a 140-knot climb, the Hawk was steady and smooth. At 12,000 feet we were handed off by Frankfort Departure to our GCI Site Controller for vectors down our assigned course. We broke out of the overcast at 11,500 ft and were seeing bright stars for the first time in weeks. We were able to tell our families, after these missions, that there was still a sun and moon over Germany, even though they could not see them during the winter months. About 30 minutes into the run down the boarder, the GCI Controller asked if we were IFR or VFR? I replied that we were VFR ON TOP. He asked me to look over to our left out about 1 mile and see if we could see any aircraft running lights! I was surprised to see another aircraft to our left rear flying parallel to our course, but running at a faster speed than we were. The Controller said that we had a Boogie running parallel to us! At that moment I heard over my headset, "Guten Morgen, CORVETTE"! Well Seymore and I just stared at each other. I replied, "Good Morning, Kraut"! The Controller said, "Corvette, maintain present heading and course". There was a long period of silence on everyone's part. The controller then asked how far the clouds were below us? I replied, "About 500 feet". He said, "Descend to 11,000". I acknowledged him and descended down into the clouds. He said that the bogie had gone on past us on our same course, but he had just completed a left 270 degree turn and was now on a 90 degree course to intercept us in about 2 minutes. "Are you still in the clouds", the Controller asked? "Roger", was my reply. "Well he is coming directly at you from your left, maintain present course, CORVETTE". I looked at Seymore, and went to Intercom. "Seymore, this is no joke! That Kraut can do anything! If you know the aircraft has been hit by a missile, eject and work your way west until you are sure that you are in West Germany, then ask for assistance. Use your compass and map. Look for my chute and maybe we may can join up on the ground". He looked pale, just like I did! The Controller told us that our two blips were converging and would join in one minute! What do you do in a situation like that? You just hold your course and take a long hard breath! After a few seconds, the Controller said, "CORVETTE, your two blips are now merging"! We held our breath! "CORVETTE, are you still there"? "Roger, I replied". "DAD BLAST IT"! said the Controller, "That Dude has crossed the border and is heading straight for Frankfurt"! He told us to stay in the clouds, and maintain our present course. In a minute, the Controller said that the Bogie was turning left again making a 180 degree turn and was going to make another run at us. He stated that the Bogie was 45 miles inside West Germany, but was heading back our way again. He told us that our blips would merge again in about 2 minutes. Sure enough, here he came. The Controller said, "CORVETTE, your blips are about to merge again, hold steady". About 3 seconds later the Hawk hit some turbulence as we flew through his wash! "Corvette, are you still there"? "Roger that, still here, I replied". The Controller commented, "Looks as though he is heading for home on an easterly course, let's hope so". Then over the headset came, "Guten Abend, CORVETTE, Merry Christmas"! I answered, "Good Night to you, Kraut, and a Merry Christmas to you"! There were no transmissions from him after that. Seymore and I just stared at each other again. We finished the southbound run, made a 180-degree turn and completed the Northbound run without incident. Over Fulda, The Controller said that he would make the necessary reports and asked me to do the same, upon landing back at Fliegerhorst. I acknowledged that I would. We were cleared for a left turn to 170 degrees, direct to Salmunster beacon, and descend to 4000 feet. As we were descending we discussed how lucky we were headed home without encountering any kind of emergency from our "Bogie Kraut". At 7000 feet the Controller said, "CORVETTE, contact Frankfurt Approach Control on 236.2 and good night, sir". I replied, "Thanks for the protective procedures back there, and good night to you, sir, Out". I contacted Frankfurt Control and was told to continue my descent to Salmunster Beacon. Sp-5 Seymore and I just sat silent as we descended, thinking about what could have happened back there. Frankfurt Control said "CORVETTE, Hanau's present weather is 200 feet overcast and 1/2 mile visibility with light blowing snow, winds from the West, at 2-3 knots, altimeter 2982, over". I replied, "Roger, Frankfurt, request a GCA Approach into Fliegerhorst, Hanau, over". Frankfurt replied, "CORVETTE, you are cleared for a GCA Approach into Hanau, contact Hanau GCA on 236.6, over". I acknowledged Frankfurt and contacted Hanau GCA. It was so good to hear SFC Houston's voice as he cleared us across Salmunster Beacon on a heading that would intercept the inbound course at a 45-degree angle for the GCA Approach. I looked over at Seymore and asked how he was doing? A wide grin on his face told me that he was thankful and happy to be making a good safe approach at our home field. I reduced power, put down 15 degrees of flaps, slowed the Hawk to 130 Knots and turned on the inbound course. Houston lined us up on the inbound course. The Hawk was smooth. "CORVETTE, this is your final controller, you need not make any further transmissions, you are on course and approaching the glide slope, lower your gear at this time". I pulled the gear lever into the DOWN position and the Hawk shuddered some as the gear came down and locked into position. I loved to feel the Hawk shudder when the gear came down, she let you know right away that everything was OK, and the gear was on the way down and locking into position. As the Gear locked, the Hawk automatically slipped into a 120 Knot, 500-fpm descent. "CORVETTE, acknowledge your gear down and locked", requested the Controller. "Roger, I have three down and the pressure is up". "CORVETTE, you are just to the right of the centerline, come left to 265

degrees, slightly above the glide slope". " The weather is 200 feet overcast, ½ mile visibility, winds from the West at 2-3 knots, altimeter 2982, you have been cleared to land. You are now on course, on glide path. You are now approaching minimums". " CORVETTE, you are now at minimums, if you cannot see the runway, execute a missed approach, at this time and remain on this frequency". "GCA, this is CORVETTE, I have the runway lights in sight". "Roger CORVETTE, take over visually, you are cleared to land. " This is CORVETTE, Roger sir, and thank you for another fine approach". " CORVETTE, contact Hanau Tower at this time, good night, sir". " Good night to you Sgt. Houston, well done"! We taxied to the hanger where the crew chief and maintenance personnel were ready to inspect the Hawk and get her ready for tomorrow's missions. I went into the Flight Operations Office and sat down and wrote out an After Action Report, with an Incident Report concerning the incident with the East German Air Force aircraft that made two passes on us during the mission. I never received any feedback on my reports or that incident, during this mission. I guess that it was a STAND OFF on both sides. Them, for not wanting to admit that one of their pilots did make a run on us, and us, for not wanting to admit that he flew over Frankfurt and we were unable to do anything about it! In either case, neither SP-5 Seymore, nor I, had any complaints, on anything, that night. It was a beautiful White Christmas in Germany, that year.

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