

Podunk Control July 1964

Air defense operations at H-3 in 1964 were simple. There were three weapons controllers assigned to H-3. George Bowers was the Operations officer. Charlie Wilson and I were the other two assigned controllers. I believe in theory this gave us three people to cover the three shifts. Our call sign was Podunk control. We operated out of what Charlie and I referred to as the world's darkest dark room. My recollection is of two surveillance scopes and two control scopes located on a mid-level dais. The top level provided space for a battle commander position along with a technician to manage activities. Down front we had a vertical plotting board but I don't recall it ever being in use. Normally we provided forward tell of significant aircraft activity to Ink spot control at H-1 from one of the surveillance positions. When needed we provided control to fighters from the control scopes. I don't recall the nomenclature of the scopes, but they were about 15 inches in diameter and had a cursor to measure range and bearing.

Things got real busy for our simple operation one summer morning in July 64. NATO was running a naval exercise in the north Atlantic called Teamwork. Several capital ships from the U.S. and allied nations were transiting the Faroe straits between the United Kingdom and Iceland. Soviet Long Range Aviation along with Soviet naval Aviation were quite interested in the operation and flooded the exercise area with intelligence gathering aircraft such as the Bear delta and the then new Bison. Several Badger series aircraft were also in the area.

The Iceland Defense Force was responsible for detecting and identifying all aircraft entering the Icelandic Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Soviet aircraft were penetrating the ADIZ with regularity. Charlie called me very early this particular morning and asked me to come up to operations. George was on leave so Charlie and I were it as far as available weapons controllers were concerned. When I arrived Charlie had a flight of two F-102's on combat air patrol (CAP) just east of H-1. Two more were coming airborne for my control out of Keflavik enroute for CAP. Over the ensuing ten to twelve hours, the 57th Fighter Interceptor Squadron launched what I remember to be on the order of twenty to twenty-five missions. This was a significant effort. As I recall they had a very small squadron of either twelve or sixteen deuces. So they had to launch and turn lots of fighters armed with 2.75 folding fin aerial rockets (FFAR'S) that day. It was a long haul for a single engine, subsonic fighter to get out east of Iceland. Keflavik was bearing 291 at 201 nautical miles from our radar site at H-3. From there they had to go another fifty to 125 miles out east of H-1 to engage the Soviet Reconnaissance aircraft. Our small force of radar operators was also maxed out. Practically every operator that we had worked around the clock during the exercise. Major J.C. Youngblood was the site commander. He manned the battle staff position continuously.

My first intercept that day was on a Bear Delta as I recall. Charlie and I were both recently promoted First Lieutenants with maybe one hundred intercepts total experience between us, all of which were of the training variety. Needless to say I was somewhat excited and I suspect Charlie was also. It seems that the exercise went on within our limited radar coverage for more than one, perhaps as many as three days. During that period we recorded many intercepts versus our Cold War adversary. At the end of the exercise period I had over one hundred intercepts versus Soviet aircraft. I suspect Charlie had a similar or higher total. We finished the exercise with a great deal of satisfaction that we had performed our Cold War mission effectively.

Submitted by Howard Sewell
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