

“Shakey” was certain he landed at Iwakuni. Now he wasn’t so sure.

The Case of the Missing Hun

By Ron Standerfer

This story was making the rounds in Japan during the early 1960s. While the details remain clear in my mind, I have long since forgotten the characters involved. Their names, therefore, are fictional.

The center of all social activity in the nuke alert facility at Kunsan Air Base, Korea was the pilots’ lounge. That’s where pilots from Misawa’s 416th and 531st squadrons gathered every evening to pass the time and pursue their favorite hobby, which was storytelling. Everyone liked a humorous story about a practical joke recently played on one of their brethren, or perhaps a major screw-up by one of the young pilots.

One evening, “Moose” McIntyre, a flight commander from the 416th, was holding forth about the trials and tribulation of “Shakey” Morgan, one of his young lieutenants. Everyone gathered around to listen. Moose was one of the best storytellers in the squadron.

“It was a typical winter day in Misawa,” he began. “The weather was bad all over Northern Japan and there was a bunch of aircraft in the air. Meanwhile, Shakey managed to get himself separated from his flight leader and was trying to land before a snowstorm arrived. But just as he started his instrument approach, the visibility turned to dog manure. He had to go around. ‘No sweat,’ the supervisor of flying (SOF) told him, ‘Go into orbit and wait. It’ll probably clear up in a few minutes.’ Shakey did as was told, and sure enough, it cleared up. He made another approach but before he could land, the visibility dropped to zero again.

This time, the SOF told him they’d found a tanker that was airborne and had fuel available to offload. ‘Hit the tanker and get some fuel,’ he said, ‘and then come back and orbit some more. It’s bound to clear up soon.’

Shakey was not thrilled with this idea. He’s tired, and his ass was getting sore. But he did it anyway. He only downloaded two thousand pounds, though. He figured if he takes more, they’ll make him stay up there forever.

He spent another hour in orbit and he’s starting to get pissed. Finally the SOF told him it was not going to clear up and sent him south to land at an alternate airfield. So the next thing you know, our boy lands at Iwakuni right into the hands of the Marine Air Wing based there.”

The listeners began to smile. They could see what was coming. The Marines stationed in Japan had a reputation for heavy drinking, hell-raising, and creating mischief in general. This was because, unlike the Air Force, they were not allowed to take their families overseas. So their tours resembled one long, drunken bachelor party.

“Things started out pretty smooth when Shakey arrived,” Moose continued. “A couple of young pilots met his aircraft to welcome him and told him their squadron would be his host while he was there. ‘We’ll take care of your aircraft,’ they said, ‘and get you checked into your quarters. Then we’ll go to the club. We’ve got a party planned in your honor.’ It all sounded pretty good to Shakey. He was tired and in need of liquid refreshment.

That night the party was the usual Marine group grope; with lots of yelling, screaming, loud singing, and spilling drinks on each other. They tried their best to get Shakey drunk, but by the end of the evening, he was still standing. There were only two fights at the bar and he wasn’t involved in either one. All in all, it was a successful evening. Score one for the Air Force!

The next morning, he woke up with a vicious hangover. After downing a handful of aspirins and a couple of cokes he headed down to base ops. The weather was clear as a bell. When he got there he called Misawa. It was clear there too. After filing a flight plan he strode out the door confidently, standing tall and looking good. But when Shakey walked out on the ramp he got a big surprise. His aircraft was not there! He looked up and down the ramp. There were dozens of Marine A-4s, but no F-100.”

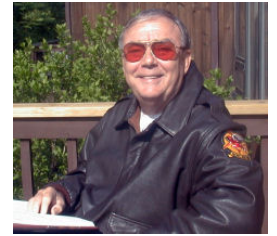
Has anybody seen an Air Force F-100?

“While Shakey was standing in the middle of the ramp with his thumb up his rear end, a young sergeant drove up in a jeep. ‘Can I help you, sir?’ he asked.

‘Yeah, I’m looking for the F-100 I parked here yesterday, Serial Number 225.’

The sergeant looked genuinely puzzled. ‘F-100? I just came on duty but I don’t remember seeing one. Let me call the command post and see if they know anything.’ The command post assured them they knew nothing about an Air Force F-100.

By then, Shakey was totally confused, and it was hard to think with his hangover. He couldn’t figure where



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the aircraft could be. It was like the *Twilight Zone* or something.

‘Maybe somebody came and took it back,’ the sergeant offered. ‘Or maybe it’s at another Marine base. Are you sure you landed here?’ It was hard for him to say the last sentence with a straight face, but he managed. Shakey gave him a filthy look and stomped into base ops.

After thinking it over, Shakey decided it was best to stall for time until he sorted things out. That’s when he called me. ‘Boss,’ he said, ‘I won’t be able to make it back today. I have a small problem with the aircraft.’

‘What kind of problem?’ I asked.

‘Nothing serious.’

Right away I’m suspicious because he didn’t volunteer any info on what was wrong.

‘Okay,’ I said, ‘but get back here tomorrow.’

The next 24 hours were a carbon copy of the previous ones—more drinking, another hangover, and no F-100. Shakey was starting to panic. Everybody at the base was sympathetic, but nobody knew where his aircraft was. He needed more time. When he called again, he told me he was sick and couldn’t fly. I knew he was BS-ing me, but I figured what the hell. He probably fell in love with some Japanese bar girl. He’d been working hard lately, so I decided to cut him some slack. ‘Okay,’ I said, ‘but I want you back tomorrow, for sure.’

On day three, Shakey was beside himself. He was out of time and out of excuses, and his aircraft was still missing. He knew he had to call me, but what was he going to say: ‘Sorry boss, but I can’t come back because someone stole my aircraft?’ No way. Anyway, he finally called. When he started talking about still being sick I jumped right in with both feet. ‘Listen up, Lieutenant,’ I said, ‘I want you to get your ass in that aircraft and be back here by two o’clock this afternoon. Do you understand me? That’s an order!’ ”

Moose to the Rescue

“Young Shakey was tough but I could hear his voice starting to tremble, like he was on the verge of crying. Finally it all came out. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘that’s different. Just hang loose at base ops while I sort this out.’ Then I hung up.

I was pretty sure I knew what happened, and what I had to do to fix things. I had to get those Marines’ attention, which meant a head-on, ball-busting, frontal attack. It’s the only language they understand. So, I picked up the phone and called the wing commander’s office at Iwakuni. The young major who answered the phone was a cool customer. I could tell right away he wasn’t going to be bulldozed by some Air Force type.

‘This is Captain McIntyre up at the 39th Air Division in Misawa,’ I began. ‘We’re thinking of sending thirty-six

F-100s down to your base this afternoon for a kind of no-notice exercise.’

‘Thirty-six aircraft? We don’t have a lot of ramp space here.’

‘Oh, we wouldn’t be any trouble. We’ll just fly down, park the aircraft and maybe stay awhile...if we have to.’ I dropped that last part about staying awhile on him real slow, so he would get the message.

The young major didn’t take the bait. ‘I don’t think that would be convenient, Captain,’ he said.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’m sorry to hear that. But look, how about this idea? Instead of us sending thirty six F-100s there, what if you were to send one F-100 up here? Wouldn’t that be a lot simpler?’

‘I have no idea what you are talking about,’ he said. ‘Besides, I would have to get the wing commander’s permission to do something like that. I don’t have the authority.’

I thought to myself, he thinks I’m bluffing. It’s time to drop the other shoe.

‘Oh, don’t you worry about the permission part. General Beverly, our division commander, will be calling your boss in about an hour to discuss this project.’ That got his attention. I could tell he was about to fold.

‘I don’t think we need to bother the colonel with something like this. Let me see if I can work something out.’

‘I would appreciate that,’ I said. ‘We need the bird here by this afternoon.’

An hour later, the phone rang. It was our base ops calling to say an F-100 was inbound from Iwakuni. Shakey was in the chocks at two o’clock sharp. He had flown all the way home at high mach cruise.”

Moose sat back in his chair looking very pleased with himself. Clearly, he’d enjoyed explaining how he had saved the day.

“Where was the aircraft all that time?” someone asked.

“Where was it? Practically under Shakey’s nose, that’s where. As soon as he left for the BOQ they towed it through a gate next to base ops, across the highway, and into an old barn that belonged to some rice farmer. Shakey said when he went to preflight it there was still straw in the intake and on the wings.”

“Was General Beverly really going to call the wing commander?” another asked. Moose rolled his eyes at the speaker as if speaking to a child who was not very bright. “Are you kidding me? Not even my ops officer knew about this, much less our division commander. It was sheer bluff all the way!”

