

**When there's trouble, get there on the double!**

## Operation Double Trouble

By Ron Standerfer

It began suddenly, with an unexpected and bloody uprising in the Middle East. In a matter of hours, the geo-political situation in the region had become destabilized. The question in everyone's mind was, what will the Soviet Union do? Washington didn't wait to find out. Within an hour after learning of the coup, a flash alert went out to two troop carrier wings in the States. They were to proceed immediately to Augsburg, Germany. A combat group of 1,800 paratroopers was about to be deployed to Incirlik Air Base near Adana, Turkey, and from there to Lebanon. The date was Tuesday, July 14, 1958.



**Lt. "Fire Can" Dan Walsh was one of the five pilots to complete the record setting non-stop flight to Myrtle Beach, SC to Adana, Turkey.**

A package of air power had to be in place before the combat group arrived in Lebanon to provide air superiority, close air support, reconnaissance, and airlift. The next alert went out to various TAC bases ordering the formation of a Composite Air Strike Force, or "CASF." The force put together

came right out of the Emergency War Plans document, including the code name, "Operation Double Trouble," as in, "where there's trouble, get there on the double." It consisted of F-100s, RF-101s, B-57s, B-66s, KB-50s and various airlift assets. It was an audacious move. In one fell swoop, American air power was about to be positioned within striking distance of every capital in the Middle East as well as the underbelly of the Soviet Union.

The message arrived at Myrtle Beach Air Force Base at 0945 that Tuesday morning. Deploy twelve F-100s non stop to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, it said. Take off time will be 1550 hours. Five and a half hours---that's all the time the pilots had to grab some clothes from home, flight plan, and brief. But somehow they made it. At 1550 hours, twelve F-100s took off and headed east. They had a 6,400 nautical mile journey ahead of them.

There were three flights of four in the deployment. Each was led by a two seater, which provided an extra pilot to navigate and handle the communications. Since many of the pilots had never made an over the water deployment, care was taken to place at least one experienced pilot each flight. The mission leader was Lt. Col. Devol "Rock" Brett.

Things were looking pretty good as the twelve aircraft passed the last landfall at Cape Fear, VA. The sun was shining brightly and everyone was throttled back to long range cruise at 30,000 feet.

### **Then things fell apart**

Two hours later, just as it was getting dark, they spotted the tankers for the first refueling. That's when things began to fall apart.

There were supposed to be six KB-50s on station---but there were only four. Sorting all this out would take precious time and fuel. Meanwhile, one of the tankers aborted, leaving only three to work with. Any way you looked at it, there wasn't going to be enough fuel to go around. To make matters worse, there were thunderstorms and high cumulous buildups in the refueling area. After milling around in the turbulence, one aircraft got only a half a load, and another got none. Colonel Brett sent them off to an emergency airfield in Nova Scotia. But the field was socked in with fog. One managed to make it to Greenwood, Nova Scotia. The other punched out over the town of Caledonia.

Meanwhile, Fire Can Dan found himself chasing a tanker in the soup as he was making a 120 degree turn. The turbulence was bouncing the tanker every which way as Dan grimly hung on, the nose of his aircraft wobbling at a high angle of attack, airspeed dangerously low.

"I kept telling myself that falling off the tanker was not an option," he recalled. Somehow he stayed hooked up, but by the time it was over and he had climbed to 35,000 feet, he was 150 miles behind the rest.

The first refueling was accomplished at the cost of two aircraft and twenty five minutes of precious cruise time. Worse yet, there was no time to regroup when it was over. Colonel Brett's flight of four was still intact but the rest were strung out behind him in two flights of two aircraft with Fire Can Dan bringing up the rear.

Communications began to break down. Brett could talk to his own flight but not to the others. Fire Can Dan could talk to nobody. Meanwhile, the tail winds they had been enjoying shifted to a headwind. Everyone was short on fuel and concerned that they would not make it to the second refueling.

### **I'll circle the steamer, then eject**

The next to fade was an element of two aircraft flown by Lieutenants Clyde Garner and Anthony Zielinski. Flying in the weather with no reliable navigation aids and no communication with the others, they calculated that they had ten minutes of fuel left. Convinced that he would have to punch out, Zielinski made a Mayday call and began to descend into the darkness below. Shortly thereafter, Garner spotted a bright red glow in the water. Certain that his squadron mate had crashed, he descended and spotted a tramp steamer. I'll circle it until I run out of fuel and then eject there, he decided.

But Zielinski was alive and well. The red glow Garner had spotted was from an active volcano in the Azores, not Zielinski's aircraft.



Miraculously, Zielinski had obtained a DF steer from nearby Lajes Field. The two aircraft joined up and limped into Lajes, landing on the fumes. Immediately after landing they rushed out to buy a bottle of bourbon for the tower operator who had given them the DF steer.

The remaining aircraft were hurting for fuel by the time they reached the second refueling point. Things would have to go well, or more aircraft would have to divert. Things didn't go well. It was a repeat of the first refueling, only worse. The weather down at refueling altitude was "delta sierra" with heavy turbulence that bounced both the tankers and fighters so severely that it was almost impossible to refuel. To make matters worse, two of the tankers ran out of fuel. Colonel Brett and three other aircraft couldn't get enough to continue, and diverted to Lajes. "Try to form a single flight," he advised the remainder before he left, "and push the tankers east."

### **And then there were four**

For the remaining aircraft, it took an agonizing ninety minutes to refuel. During that time Fire Can Dan finally caught up with the others. When it was over, the four aircraft soldiered on into the night, joining up with each other as they went. An hour later, the sun came up and they spotted the coast of Spain and Portugal off in the distance. A local GCI site gave them a positive fix on their position. The pilots were elated. Water bottles were drained, and lunch boxes were broken out. It was the first time they'd had a chance to eat or drink. "It was a big moment for us," Fire Can Dan said. "I remember that guys were singing Oh What a Beautiful Morning and The Rains in

Spain on our discrete squadron freq."

When the flight arrived at Incirlik they decided to make a statement. Joining up in a crisp, tight, diamond formation, they made a low pass over the runway before making a lazy turn into the traffic pattern. But there was one more surprise left. As he turned on to final approach, Fire Can Dan saw that the aircraft ahead of him was about to land gear up! A quick radio call sent him around, but Fire Can Dan had to go around too. "It was just what I needed," he commented later, "another five minutes of flying time."

The adventure ended as many deployments do with the "final four"---Captain George Branch and Lieutenant Russell Youngblood, who were in the F model; Lieutenants Craig Fink and James Cartwright; and, of course, Lieutenant Fire Can Dan Walsh---sitting outside at the Officers Club in Incirlik savoring juicy hamburgers and knocking back cold beers. During the night they had flown nonstop from Myrtle Beach, SC in twelve hours and thirty five minutes from takeoff to touchdown, with three refuelings. They were the first to arrive and in doing so, had set a world time-distance record for an operational flight under non-simulated conditions. Another ho hum day at the office!

And the Middle East crisis? While the Russians growled and threatened, and the Arabs complained, a special envoy from the U.S. arrived in the theater to sort things out. He was able to speak softly because 1,800 paratroopers and a CASF had delivered a big stick---right to the negotiating table.

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