Target: Iron Curtain

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Illustrating the fact that the reconnaissance-configured C-130s carried very plain markings and few external modifications is this photograph of C-130A-II 56-0535 of 7406th SS, seen landing at Rhein-Main in 1969. (Peter Zastrow)

The following article tells the tale of the secretive reconnaissance units assigned to the United States Air Forces in Europe that flew some unlikely reconnaissance aircraft out of Wiesbaden and Rhein-Main during the Cold War, keeping an eye on communist developments behind the Iron Curtain. A glimpse of this intriguing history is presented below, compiled with the help of John Bessette, 7499th Group Association Historian.

The year is 1945. Hitler's Germany has almost been defeated. In February of that year, the Allied leaders, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, gathered at Yalta for a conference that would change the course of global history for the next 45 years. During this conference, they decided on the postwar distribution of power in Europe. Countries in what was to become Western Europe would come under the influence of the USA and its allies, while countries in Eastern Europe would have to answer to the Soviet Union. Germany itself was to be divided in four occupation zones, the Russian zone later became East Germany, while the three 'western' zones (controlled by the USA, Britain and France) became West Germany. Berlin, Germany's capital, was divided in equal fashion. Austria, which declared independence from Germany in April 1945, was divided along the same lines, with Vienna being divided the same way Berlin was. However, in 1955, allied occupation of Austria ended and it was declared a neutral country. Once the division of Germany had taken effect, the Soviet Union firmly closed the borders with the West and effectively separated their territory with what Winston Churchill later described as 'an Iron Curtain'.

Due to the ravages of war and the efforts to rebuild the European society, the western powers had so far hardly made any effort in keeping their intelligence efforts in Eastern Europe up to date, and once the borders had been closed, they soon realized that the accuracy of the maps of those countries, for instance, was woefully inadequate, and that there was no easy way to improve this shortcoming. To remedy this, an all-out intelligence and reconnaissance effort was started, and high-flying Allied aircraft started flying 'secret' reconnaissance missions around, and sometimes over, areas of the Eastern Bloc that were of interest to Allied military planners, like naval ports and air bases. Initially, a variety of aircraft types was used for these missions, like RAF Mosquitos and USAF RB-29s, which, due to their superior performance, could operate with relative impunity in the late 1940s. However, the Soviet Union stepped up its efforts to counter these recce missions and several ended in disaster, with 16 American aircraft on reconnaissance missions being shot down by the Soviets or otherwise lost, but most of these shootdowns occurred on peripheral missions. The most notorious of these being the downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2 over Sverdlovsk in 1960. This put an end to the early overflights; President Eisenhower was very reluctant to approve of any new overflights to say the least, and officially, no new missions over Soviet territory were made.

There were, however, less hazardous strategic reconnaissance missions to be flown; these were peripheral missions flown along the borders of the Eastern Bloc. The air corridors from the west into Berlin and Vienna were another area of interest, and that part of East Germany was especially interesting for Allied planners. Beginning in the late 1940s, the USAF invested a lot of money and effort in the development of reconnaissance systems and ultimately owned a sizeable fleet of strategic reconnaissance aircraft which consisted of many RB-47s, RB-50s, RB-36s, and ultimately RC-135s, as well as various other less numerous types. The US Navy also participated, albeit on a less massive scale. Not taken into account in this article are the vast numbers of tactical reconnaissance aircraft like RF-80-As, RF-84Fs, RF-101s and RF-4Cs, which had a very different mission.

7499th SS

In the late 1940s, there were two main areas of intelligence that airborne reconnaissance could provide: photographic as well as electronic intelligence (ELINT). As early as the spring of 1946, USAFE began setting up a small flight of RB-26C aircraft which would be assigned to the 45th Reconnaissance Squadron at Fuerth, near Nurnberg, but their mission was to

Two of the squadron's earliest aircraft: On top is RB-17G 44-8889. It was assigned to 7499th SS from about 1948 to 1953 and collected electronic intelligence (ELINT) information while flying along the East-West German border and in the Berlin corridors as well as over the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. Later, it was sold to the French Institut Geographique Nationale (IGN) as F-BGSO and flew countless photo-mapping missions around the world. Bottom: This RB-26C, 44-35914 was assigned to both 7499th SS and 7405th SS from at least 1950 to 1958. It was equipped with split-vertical cameras and concentrated most of its efforts in the Berlin Corridors and Circle. The photo was taken at Wiesbaden AB in 1953. (Bob Brewer via 7499th Group Association)

remain shrouded in secrecy. This flight became operational that summer, and began flying occasional Berlin corridor and border photo reconnaissance missions. In 1947, the unit moved to Furstenfeldbruck AB, and when the RB-26 flight expanded in size, it was assigned to the 7498th Air Force Squadron in March 1949.

The ELINT B-17s used by the unit would come into the picture via another path. In 1946, there were a number of photo-mapping B-17s operating out of Furstenfeldbruck. They were assigned to Det.A of 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group, which were, as part of Project Casey Jones, making an effort to create up-to-date maps of Europe and North Africa. In August 1946, there was considerable upheaval following the shootdown over Yugoslavia of two USAF C-47s that strayed off course on two occasions in August 1946. USAFE Headquarters wondered how the Yugoslavs could vector their fighters to the C-47s so well in the murky weather, and tasked two 'Casey Jones' B-17s, quickly fitted with special equipment, to find out. These aircraft began to fly missions along the Italian-Yugoslav border and right away, on the first mission, the B-17's crew was in luck, as the Yugoslavs promptly turned on their radar set to track the aircraft. It turned out they had been able to restore a WWII-vintage German Wurzburg radar to operational condition. Following this success, the unit pioneered flying along the borders of the Iron Curtain and along the Berlin corridors (as described under the 7499th SS header) to obtain info about Soviet radars.

The B-17 element, including now both photo and ELINT B-17s, became the 7499th Air Force Squadron on 1 November 1948. Eventually, on 10 January 1950, the 7499th absorbed the 7498th and its RB-26Cs, and became the 7499th Composite Squadron. They moved from Furstenfeldbruck to Wiesbaden AB in August 1950, a move bringing it closer both to the Berlin corridors and to HQ USAFE.

7499th SS continued the by now well-established routine of flying missions along the Berlin corridors, known to the squadron as 'Project Rain Drop'. In November 1945, an agreement was signed by the four powers detailed the use of three air corridors to Berlin, each twenty miles wide and ending in a 40-mile diameter control zone over the city of Berlin itself. The agreement put no limitation on the type of aircraft that were allowed to fly into the city, but the Soviet interpretation was that the three western allies enjoyed aerial access to Berlin only to logistically support their military garrisons stationed there, although the 1948 Berlin airlift came to the aid of the citizens of the city itself. Rather than make an issue of it, the US started using the cargo aircraft mentioned above and outfitted these with covertly mounted sensors. During these 'ferret' missions; the actual presence of the aircraft often provoked a reaction of Soviet offensive and defensive electronic equipment. These signals were recorded and analyzed after the mission. Actually, quite a lot of information could be gathered during this type of mission, as several Soviet air bases were located directly under, or near these corridors. Oddly enough, no East German units were stationed near the corridors. Although aircraft flying the corridor were not supposed to be challenged by the Soviets due to the existing agreement, this was regularly the case and all too often, Soviet fighters would carry out mock attacks on Allied transport aircraft or civilian airliners. Luckily, it was rare for aircraft to be actually fired upon, but this *did* happen in various instances: in April 1952 an Air France DC-4 was attacked by MiG-15s, but was able to land safely, while in March 1953 RAF Lincoln RF531/C of the Central Gunnery School from RAF Leconfield, which had inadvertently crossed the border near one of the corridors, was shot down. That same month, a BEA Viking was also attacked by MiGs in one of the corridors. It was under these difficult circumstances that the USAF conducted these missions.

Further changes within the unit took place beginning in 1951, when the first Douglas C-54s began to arrive. These included both photo-reconnaissance and ELINT versions of the aircraft; these had gradually replaced the B-17s by 1953. Most of these cycled through the Big Safari system (see below) and received advanced data collection systems. Being common transport aircraft types, they had the advantage of blending in among the normal air transport aircraft.

There were the occasional operational losses as well: On 30 July 1952, the unit lost RB-26C 44-35894 in a crash near Roith, Austria. The four crewmembers survived the crash but sustained major injuries. They were on a reconnaissance training mission near Innsbruck in Austria and were working a valley formed by very steep mountains. At the end of the run, the pilot tried to pull up and fly out of the valley but the aircraft stalled and it impacted the mountain at 5200 ft altitude, breaking up on impact. The crash was followed by another the next week, on 7 August 1952. RB-26C 44-35885 crashed four miles south-east of Wiesbaden, when the aircraft's engine caught fire during take-off. The pilot tried to make an emergency landing in the Rhine, but unfortunately, two crewmembers were killed during the crash.

A little-known fact is that there were also air corridors into Vi-

7405th SS used a fleet of C-97Gs, with 53-0306 illustrated here. The aircraft's reconnaissance equipment, a 48" oblique and a 12-inch vertical camera. is hidden from view by several large panels which could be opened during flight, but closed again before landing. One of these panels is located in the fuselage just in front of the engines. (Rhein-Main late 1960s, Peter Zastrow)

enna, the capital of occupied Austria. Vienna was in the Soviet-occupied part of the country. There were two corridors into the city over the Soviet Zone, one from the American Zone of West Germany, and one to the north from Italy. Flight operations followed similar procedures as those in the Berlin corridors, but there was one major difference: aircraft had to land at Tulln Air Base (now Tulln-Langenlebarn), which was located 21 miles west of Vienna, within the Soviet zone of occupation. This required extraordinary measures to keep Soviet observers and air controllers from hindering the 7499th's RB-26, C-47, and occasional RB-17 collection missions. There were quite a few Soviet military targets in their zone, so collection was almost as important in these corridors as in the more famous Berlin ones. The Vienna corridors ceased to exist in 1955 when Austria gained independence, following which all allied military forces withdrew from the country.

In the early 1950s, the USAF established a covert program named 'Big Safari'. This was overseen by a program office in Logistics Command and provided the manpower and means to develop and manage various covert reconnaissance aircraft programs. Virtually every specially developed reconnaissance aircraft from 1952 through today's unmanned recce drones, has had 'Big Safari' as its godfather, including all the aircraft discussed after this paragraph, which were all developed by and through the 'Big Safari' program. One of 'rules' of 'Big Safari' in these programs was to keep the aircraft designators as 'innocent' as possible, to help the various cover stories. For example, the C-97s modified as recce aircraft were never officially known as 'EC-97s' or 'RC-97s.' They were plain 'C-97s.' The EC- and RC- designators for these aircraft and others like the C-130s are most likely the result of speculation in various press and enthusiast publications.

The very first aircraft to be developed and delivered by 'Project Big Safari' was a C-97A, 49-2592, which was delivered to 7499th SS in 1953. It had the project name "Pie Face" and carried a huge 240-inch-focal length (6000mm) oblique camera. This camera, the largest ever built, weighed 6500 pounds. It was initially installed in an RB-36. However, it was decided that an overflight of the Soviet Union by an RB-36 would probably be too provocative, and it would be better if a transport aircraft was equipped with this huge camera. The C-97 was modified at Fort Worth. The camera, which was able to photograph objects 70 miles away, took giant 18x36 inch negatives with incredibly fine resolution (these were on the largest rolls of films ever produced by Kodak) and could be positioned to take vertical, left or right oblique photographs through a large window which was hidden by covert doors. The camera was so powerful that a photo interpreter could make out the proverbial golf ball from an altitude of 45,000 feet. Unfortunately, a 10,000 ft altitude restriction in the Berlin corridor imposed by the communists made the camera less useful than at a higher altitude, although the fine resolution yielded valuable information. In 1964, the camera was presented to the Air Force Museum, along with a contact print of a golf ball on a course! The C-97 was mainly used on reconnaissance missions along the borders of Eastern European nations. As the runway at Wiesbaden was too short for the C-97 at this time, it operated from Rhein-Main AB as part of Det.1, 7499th SS, which became Det.1, 7405th SS in 1955. In 1962, the 'Project Pie Face' C-97 deployed to Florida to fly reconnaissance missions off Cuba, at the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was finally retired in 1963.

C-97A 49-2592 at Tempelhof Airport, Berlin, in the mid-1950s. With code name 'Pie Face', this aircraft was the first specially-modified reconnaissance aircraft supplied to 7499th SS, arriving in 1953. It carried a special 240-inch focal length camera. Like most of its C-97 successors, it had an open cargo deck, with its special equipment hidden below the deck and in the crew area. (7499th Group Association)

RB-26s and C-47s continued the Berlin corridor work until 1955. In addition, by 1955, the first C-118A had arrived with the unit as well. This aircraft, 51-3822, later became part of 7405th SS. This and at least two other C-118s were operated and maintained for 'another agency', which was presumed to be the CIA. These aircraft never were officially assigned to the unit, however, and it remains unknown what the exact nature of their mission was at Wiesbaden.

Eventually, as the Cold War progressed and intelligence requirements and the technical means to satisfy them became more complex, the 7499th Squadron was expanded into a

The following aircraft are known to have been assigned to 7499th AFS, 7499th CS and 7499th SS:

42-72465	C-54D	a veteran of the 1948 Berlin Airlift. Converted to ELINT standard as part of 'Project Pretty Girl'. Assigned to 7499 SS by sep51 and remained active until being transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
42-72667	C-54D	a veteran of the 1948 Berlin Airlift. Part of 'Project Pretty Girl'. Assigned to 7499 SS by aug51 and reassigned to 7405 SS on 10may55.
42-93526	C-47A	assigned to the Wiesbaden AB base flight, but loaned to 7499 SS for a few weeks in oct50 and nov50.
43-15521	C-47A	assigned to 7499 SS by jul52. Went to 7405 SS in may55.
43-17248	C-54D	a veteran of the 1948 Berlin Airlift. Converted to photo recce standard as part of 'Project Hot Pepper' and assigned to 7499th by aug50. Remained active and transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
43-39021	B-17G	was active with 7499th between apr50 and 1953, returned to USA in 1953.
43-48241	C-47D	flew with the unit between at least sep52 and oct54.
44-8846	RB-17G	flew six combat missions over Germany in 1945 with 351st BG (named 'Half Pint'), assigned to Project Casey Jones and 45th RS at Furstenfeldbruck early in 1947. To 7499th on 01nov48; by this time the aircraft had become an RB-17G. Active until feb53 and returned to USA for rework at Ogden AMA at Hill AFB. SOC in aug54 and sold to Institut Geographique Nationale (IGN) at Creil, France, as F-BGSP in dec54. Later sold as ZS-DXM and in 1985 it became the well-known 'Pink Lady' F-AZDX of 'Fortresse Toujours Volante' which was grounded for insurance reasons in 2010.
44-8889	RB-17G	served in Europe in 1945, but was stored until it had been assigned to 7499th by apr49. It was modified as an ELINT aircraft (as RB-17G) and served until sep53 when it was returned to the USA for rework at the Mobile Air Depot at Brookley AFB (AL). In aug54 it was sold to the Institut Geographique Nationale (IGN) at Creil, France, as F-BGSO in dec54. On 08sep76 the aircraft was presented to the Musee de l'Air at Le Bourget, and remains in storage there.
44-8891	RB-17G	active with 7499th between jun49 and jan52 at least, and assigned to 5th Air Division at Rabat in French Morocco on the latter date. Sold to Brazilian AF as 5107 in 1954.
44-8995	B-17G	assigned to 45th RS in may48 and to 7499th on 01nov48. Damaged in a hard landing in aug49 and withdrawn from use; scrapped in oct49.
44-34415	B-26C	previously served with 45 RS and assigned to 7499 SS on 01nov48. No further details known.
44-34416	TB-26B	assigned to 7499 SS from at least sep54; transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
44-34450	RB-26C	assigned to 7499 SS from at least mar52; transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
44-34474	B-26B	technically not assigned to 7499 SS, but was with its forerunner 45 RS when the aircraft was DBR in an accident in feb48 and scrapped.
44-35343	RB-26C	previously with 1 TRS but reassigned to 7499 SS in jul53. Transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
44-35885	RB-26C	assigned to 7499 SS by may50; lost in a crash in the Rhine on 07aug52 (see text).
44-35894	RB-26C	assigned to 7499 SS by jan51; lost in a crash in Austria on 30jul52 (see text).
44-35914	RB-26C	assigned to 7499 SS by may50 at least. Transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
44-77036	C-47A	assigned to 7499 SS by nov53 at least. Transferred to 7405 SS on 10may55.
44-77222	RC-47D	Was active with 7499th by jun49 and most likely was one of the early ELINT aircraft. Quoted as an 'RC-47' in a 1950 squadron history records. Remained active until may52.
44-83282	RB-17G	active with 7499th between at least may50 and apr53. Fate unknown.
44-83373	B-17G	active with 7499th by sep49. Active until mar52 and reassigned to HQ Air Training Command at Randolph AFB (TX) that month.
44-83378	RB-17G	stored in Europe after the war and had been assigned to 7499th as an RB-17G by apr49. Active until nov53 and sold to Brazilian AF as 5410 in 1954.
49-2592	C-97A	on 20dec52 conversion to 'Pie Face' reconnaissance aircraft (see main text) started and assigned to 7499th in 1953. Transferred to 7405th SS charge on 10may55.

C-97G 52-2678 was not one of 7405 SS's reconnaissance aircraft, but acted as a support aircraft and crew trainer for the unit. It is seen here during a visit to the United Kingdom in the late 1960s. (Henk Scharringa collection)

Another shot of one of the unit's C-97Gs shows 53-0306 taxying to the runway at Rhein-Main in September 1970. The '0' in front of the serial on the tail denoted that this aircraft was over 10 years old. (Peter Zastrow)

headquarters unit, the 7499th Support Group, with three subordinate squadrons, on 10 May 1955. Each of these had distinctly different tasks. The first was 7405th Support Squadron (SS), which was responsible for photo and ELINT missions along the Berlin corridors as well as the periphery of the Iron Curtain from the Baltic to the Adriatic and beyond. The second unit, the 7406th SS, flew communications intelligence (COMINT) missions along the borders of the Eastern Bloc in areas similar to the 7405th's operations (but not the corridors). The 7407th SS was involved in high-altitude photo reconnaissance missions, including two overflight programs. In order not to confuse things, these four units are listed under separate headings below. Eventually, in the early 1970s, the Group, the 7406th, and the 7407th would all be inactivated, but the 7405th would carry on its specialized corridor missions.

7405th SS and 7405th OS

The unit badges depicted on the left were used by 7405th SS/OS over the years. The one on top is the oldest; it was approved as the official emblem on 6 August 1958, but was superseded by the one in the middle on 19 November 1963. Finally, on 11 June 1979, the badge on the bottom replaced the earlier one. (7499th Group Association)

On 10 May 1955, following the reorganization mentioned above, the 7405th was assigned the task of patrolling the Berlin Air Corridors and largely continued the work of its predecessor, 7499th SS. At that time the unit had the following aircraft types on strength: TB-26C, B-26C, C-47, C-54D, RC-54D, C-97A and C-118A, and still operated from a heavily guarded corner of Wiesbaden AB. The squadron was organized in two flights: 'A' Flight took care of the C-54s for Project 'Pretty Girl', which was an ELINT mission, while 'B' flight had four B-26s and three C-47s, which were used for the 'Red Owl' vertical photography missions. 'B' flight also had a single C-54 assigned for Project 'Hot Pepper', which was a photographic reconnaissance project for which the aircraft was equipped with a 2500mm oblique camera. Additionally, Det.1 operated from Rhein-Main with the 'Pie Face' C-97A.

As can be seen, the squadron used an interesting variety of aircraft for the corridor missions, and most of these were innocent-looking transport aircraft. Most were used for intelligence gathering in one form or another, but the deliberate lack of radar bulges or antennae concealed their actual purpose, which made them ideal for flights along the corridors, as it allowed them to operate anonymously, without drawing too much Soviet attention. When cameras were used, these were concealed behind doors which were opened in flight, or in retractable domes. The presence of cameras and other electronic equipment could not be confirmed without an internal search of the aircraft. Prior to a mission, the pilots filed normal everyday flight plans, received the usual clearances from air traffic controlling agencies and, in general, conducted themselves as any other transport aircraft would do.

In July and August 1956, the squadron was involved in 'Operation Squint', photographing Soviet naval vessels in the Baltic and on their way to or from the Atlantic and the North Sea. The squadron's 'Hot Pepper' C-54 was used to photograph these aircraft, but the 7405th also flew several ELINT missions covering these vessels. One abortive attempt to gain additional info occurred when one of the squadron's photo-C-47s was sent to Norway to cover the goodwill port visit of a high-interest Soviet Navy ship. Unfortunately, it was overcast during the entire visit and no decent footage could be obtained. However, as luck would have it, while going to the cinema in Wiesbaden, one of the C-47's crew members saw some high-quality newsreel footage of the ship's visit, showing almost every detail they were after! It goes without saying that the USAF obtained a copy in no time!

On 27 June 1958 the squadron's single C-118A, 51-3822, was on a regular cargo mission from Cyprus to Tehran, Iran, when it strayed into Soviet Armenian airspace while flying through

eastern Turkey. It was attacked by Soviet fighters and brought down in Soviet territory. One reliable source states that the C-118 carried important and highly sensitive U-2 documents to the CIA base in Pakistan. According to reliable sources, speculation that the aircraft was on a reconnaissance mission is unfounded and incorrect. While cruising along at 19,000 ft, the aircraft was attacked by the MiG-17s, disabling No.2 engine and setting the plane on fire. Five crew members bailed out, but the other four were trapped by the fire and saw a crude air strip, where the pilot managed to make a reasonably successful crash landing, although the fuselage broke in two parts, separating the tail. The aircraft – along with the documents - was consumed by the fire. All remaining four crew members survived the crash, only to be apprehended by the Soviets, like the five others that had bailed out. Several days of interrogation by the Soviets followed, but they were all suddenly safely returned home (in this case the Soviet-Iranian border) on 7 July 1958. A few months later, the 7406th SS lost a recce C-130A-II, also over Armenia.

In the first half of the 1950s, the USAF started fielding the Matador and Mace tactical guided missiles in Europe; these were the first crude attempts to produce cruise missiles. The TM-61A and TM-61C Matadors, which had a range of about 200 miles, relied on positive guidance control by radar-directed ground controllers, but they proved to be very susceptible to electronic countermeasures. To remedy this, the ATRAN (Automatic Terrain Recogni-

Two views of 7405th SS C-97Gs at Rhein-Main. (Top) C-97G 52-2724 is seen taxying out in September 1970 - note the open cargo doors in the tail. This aircraft carried a 48" oblique and a 12-inch vertical camera. (Bottom) C-97G 53-0106 about to land in May 1970. This was the unit's only C-97 that was specially configured to go after the Soviet SA-2 missile systems in East Germany that were located under or near the Berlin Corridors, and over the years the aircraft collected large amounts of highly lucrative technical data, allowing the US to develop effective countermeasures against similar SA-2 sites in North Vietnam. (Peter Zastrow)

The following aircraft are known to have been assigned to 7405th SS/7405th OS:

42-72255	C-54D	Reportedly, 42-72667 was reserialled 44-72255 sometime in late 1955. In any case, 72255 was active with 7405 SS as an ELINT aircraft (as part of 'Project Pretty Girl') from late 1955 until feb63, when it was SOC.
42-72465	C-54D	previously with 7499 SS and remained on 7405 SS charge until may64, when it was flown back to the USA and scrapped.
42-72502	C-54D	assigned to 7405 SS in nov57, no further details.
42-72667	C-54D	previously with 7499 SS, assigned to 7405 SS on 10may55. The aircraft is reported to have been reserialled 42-72255 for some reason in late 1955.
42-72685	C-54D	modified for photo, infrared and ATRAN work from jun55 onwards as part of 'Project Lulu Belle' and initially assigned to 7499 Group in dec55, but to 7405 SS in feb56. Flew operational missions until returned to the USA in nov62 and SOC in jul64.
43-15221	C-47A	previously with 7499 SS and assigned to 7405th on 10may55. Remained active until at least sep58. Fate unknown.
43-17199	C-54D	assigned to 7405 SS between sep57 (at least) and sep63; returned to USA in latter month and SOC.
43-17206	C-54D	assigned to 7405 SS between may58 and jul58 at least.
43-17223	C-54D	possibly modified for ELINT duties. Was with 7405 SS between aug56 and jan58 at least.
43-17236	C-54D	assigned to 7405 SS between sep57 and dec58 at least.
43-17248	C-54D	previously with 7499 SS, active until at least dec58 and possibly as late as 1962, when it was transferred to the Pacific theatre, and reportedly reserialled 43-17235.
43-48186	VC-47D	assigned to 7405 SS for a short while between jun58 and aug58.
43-49207	C-47D	flew with 7405 SS between oct56 and nov58 at least.
44-34416	TB-26B	previously with 7499 SS, remained active with 7405 SS until at least jul58.
44-34550	RB-26C	previously with 7499 SS and remained active with 7405 SS until at least jul58.
44-35245	RB-26C	active with 7405 SS between dec56 and dec57 at least.
44-35343	RB-26C	previously with 7499 SS, remained active with 7405 SS until transferred out in jun58.
44-35914	RB-26C	previously with 7499 SS and remained active with 7405 SS until transferred out in jul58.
44-77036	C-47A	previously with 7499 SS, remained active with 7405 SS until at least jun58.
44-92051	C-47D	assigned to 7405 SS between nov57 and dec58 at least.
49-1910	T-29A	assigned to 7405 SS in mar58 ; It was used as the unit's training aircraft and was redesignated CT-29A in jul59. It was flown to Fort Worth, TX, on 11jun68 and was later reassigned to 6314 SW at Osan.
49-1912	T-29A	assigned to 7405 SS in jan59 ; it was redesignated CT-29A in jul59. It was flown to Fort Worth, TX, on 26mar68 and was later reassigned to 6314 SW at Osan.

Top: The 7405th used this aircraft (52-2639) and C-97G 52-2686 to patrol the Iron Curtain all the way from the Baltic, along the East-West German border, the Adriatic, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The aircraft has the distinctive under-fuselage "tub," or "canoe," a main identifying feature of these classic ELINT birds. Bottom: C-118 51-3825 sitting on the ramp, ready to depart for another courier mission. On the tail, the aircraft carries the serial '13846'; for some unknown reason the 7405th C-118s received bogus serial numbers in the summer of 1965. (both 7499th Group Association)

tion And Navigation) system was developed for the TM-61B. During the development phase, the TM-61B evolved into the TM-76A Mace missile, which was to stay active in Europe until 1966. ATRAN relied upon a film loaded into the missile's guidance system. While in flight, the missile's on-board computer would compare the features of the actual terrain with that on the film strip and would eventually lead the missile to its target, without any remote controlling. A rather intriguing fact was that, in order to create these film strips, sand models were made, featuring all the terrain features. Presumably, the terrain along the missile's flight path over enemy territory was just educated guess work! In order to obtain up-to-date information to create

49-1917	T-29A	assigned to 7405 SS in 1959 ; it was redesignated CT-29A in jul59. On 9feb67 the aircraft made a crashlanding in a field near Breckenheim, which is about two miles north-east of Wiesbaden AB. On 13feb67 the aircraft was SOC at Wiesbaden, and was placed on the fire dump, but had expired within a year or so.
49-1933	T-29A	assigned to 7405 SS in sep59 ; it was redesignated CT-29A in sep59. It was flown to Fort Worth, TX, on 13aug68 and was later reassigned to 6314 SW at Osan.
49-2592	C-97A	'Pie Face' reconnaissance aircraft, previously with 7499th SS. In 1957 the aircraft was painted as '49-2612' for a while but reverted to its original markings. Departed for USA on 12oct62 and flew missions around Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Scrapped in 1963.
51-0246	KC-97F	flew with 7405 SS between the autumn of 1963 and the autumn of 1964, acting as a crew trainer (51-0246 carried no reconnaissance equipment) following the arrival of the recce C-97Gs. Returned to USA in 1964.
51-3822	C-118A	official USAF records for this aircraft are still classified (!) but it was in use by 7405 SS by may55 (according to USAFE records, and officially, it was 'attached' to the unit) and listed as transferred on 27jun58, but on that date it was shot down over the border area between Turkey and Armenia. USAF officially stated that it was on a cargo-hauling mission from Cyprus to Iran and strayed off course during a severe thunderstorm.
51-3823	C-118A	ex 1611 ATW and assigned to 7405 SS on 24jul63. It received the bogus s/n 13842 in jul65 and was transferred to 1405 AMAW at Scott AFB, departing on 05oct65, where it received its original s/n again.
51-3825	C-118A	ex 1611 ATW, assigned to 7405 SS on 24jul63. It received the bogus s/n 13846 in jun65 and was transferred to 1405 AMAW at Scott AFB, departing on 05oct65, where it received its original s/n again.
53-3278	C-118A	ex 1611 ATW, assigned to 7405 SS on 17jul58, reassigned to 1100 ABW at Bolling AFB, departed on 19jan60
52-2639	C-97G	conversion to reconnaissance aircraft started on 22mar62, assigned to 7405 SS in spring of 1963. Modified as ELINT aircraft (Project 'Little Guy', became 'Rivet Gumbo' early in 1966). Transferred back to USA in sep70.
52-2678	C-97G	assigned to 7405 SS in the autumn of 1967. Was not a reconnaissance aircraft, but used as a crew trainer and support aircraft. Returned to USA in nov69.
52-2686	C-97G	conversion to ELINT aircraft started as 'Project Speed Light Alfa' in jul61, but this was changed to 'Small Fry' in nov61. Assigned to 7405 SS by the autumn of 1964. Returned to USA in dec69.
52-2687	C-97G	was a joint ELINT and photo reconnaissance bird; conversion to this configuration started (as 'Project Flint Stone' in jul61. Assigned to 7405 SS in jul63 and operated over the Berlin Corridors. Project name was changed to 'Rivet Stem' in 1969. Returned to USA in dec75.
52-2688	C-97G	Conversion to photo reconnaissance aircraft (Project 'Eager Beaver') started in jul61 and delivered to 7405 SS in jul63. Project name changed to 'Rivet Box' in jan67. Remained active until feb70 when it was flown back to the USA.
52-2724	C-97G	converted to photo reconnaissance aircraft (Project 'Rivet Giant') and served in the Pacific before being assigned to 7405 SS in the early 1970s.
53-0106	C-97G	ELINT aircraft (Project 'Wine Sap'), assigned to 7405 SS in the spring of 1964. Part of a CIA-directed program to collect data on SA-2 missile; flew the Berlin corridors, passing over SA-2 sites. Project name was changed to 'Rivet Stock' on 16nov67. Remained active until 1975; returned to USA.
53-0306	C-97G	converted to photo reconnaissance configuration as Project 'Cindy Fay', later changed to 'Rivet Flare', served in the Pacific before being assigned to 7405 SS by sep70. Active until at least 1973, returned to the USA after that.
62-1819	C-130E	previously with 37 TAS/316 TAW (coded 'LM') and had been delivered to 7405 SS by mar76. Departed for USA in December 1990.
62-1822	C-130E	previously with 316 TAW (no code) and had been delivered to 7405 SS by dec75. Departed for USA for rework early in 1990 and never returned to Rhein-Main before the squadron's demise.
62-1828	C-130E	previously with 37 TAS/316 TAW (coded 'LM') and had been delivered to 7405 SS by oct75. Departed for USA again in December 1990.

From late 1975, the venerable C-97s were replaced by three FY1962 C-130Es, and 62-1819 (top) and 62-1822 (bottom) in the photographs above were two of them. These aircraft were heavily modified and carried multiple sensor systems, allowing near-real-time collection of data of ground targets, such as a tank exercise, for example. They looked exactly like a normal cargo C-130 from the outside, as can be seen, and received the same camouflage schemes as their cargo cousins. Note the 37th TAS Hercules in desert camouflage in the background. (Rhein Main, 14 October 1981 (top) and 18 November 1981 (bottom), Manfred Faber)

these sand models, aerial reconnaissance missions were flown over western Europe, the main area of employment of these missiles. Both 7405th SS and 7406th SS were involved in the gathering of this terrain data. ATRAN missions were flown under the project name "Aunt Sue." The 7405th SS used C-54D 42-72684 to fly the missions as Project "Lulu Belle," while the 7406th SS would use three Boeing RB-50Ds as Project "Half Track." These aircraft used radar scope imagery, thermal imaging equipment and regular photography to get the required information, flying missions over allied territory, although the C-54 flew several missions in the Berlin Corridors as well. This aircraft was also fitted with an early-generation infrared system called a terrain reconnaissance device (TRD) and an APS-27 moving target indicator (MTI) as well. The quality of the flight lines produced was unacceptable at first, but it gradually improved as equipment became more reliable and crews more proficient. However, the program was halted in the fall of 1956 after nearly 50 missions had been flown. Also see under 7406th SS.

In July 1958, the squadron's last B-26 was retired, but there was an influx of new equipment as well. That same month, a single C-118A was received and a C-54G was in use by January 1959. Four CT-29As were received in September 1959, replacing the old C-47s – the last Gooney Bird was transferred out in May 1960. 7405th SS had the additional task to provide courier service to Berlin for the US military garrison in the city and the T-29s were used as courier aircraft; they were known under the code name 'Carol Ann'. Needless to say, the aircraft were equipped with various recce bits and pieces which came in handy while flying the daily service into Berlin! The C-118 which had been shot down in 1958 was replaced by a C-54, which was finally retired in 1963. In its turn, it was replaced again by two C-118s, which were mainly used for courier services to US embassies in the Middle East. The squadron was relieved of this type of mission on 30 September 1965 and the C-118s were duly reassigned.

Two distinctively different C-97 sub-types were received in the early 1960s: three ELINT C-97s (often erroneously identified as "EC-97s"), used for electronic eavesdropping, and two photo reconnaissance C-97s (erroneously identified as "RC-97s"). The photo C-97s were real special birds; one of them (52-2687) carried a 48-inch oblique-looking panoramic camera, a 12-inch vertical looking panoramic camera, an infrared scanner, a forward-looking infrared sensor (FLIR) and four electronic intercept stations. The other (52-2688) carried, among others, a 66-inch gyro-stabilized camera system. The camera ports were hidden behind sliding external panels or in retractable domes. There were panels on both sides of the fuselage behind the forward entry door in front of the wing. Behind these doors was a variety of sensors that required critical temperature stabilization

A well-known photograph of RB-50D 49-0307, seen during a visit to the UK in October 1957. This is one of the aircraft that was involved in flying the ATRAN mission of 7406th SS, but by this date it was in use as a trainer. (Henk Scharringa collection)

prior to the mission. These had to be cold soaked for several hours prior to take-off. All mission equipment was hidden below the deck in the C-97. The planes could carry real cargo and unwitting passengers while collecting intelligence!

Two of the ELINT C-97s (52-2639 and 52-2686) were equipped to fly peripheral missions only, and never flew the Berlin corridors. They had multiple electronic warfare officer positions and sophisticated equipment on the cargo deck and also had a distinctive canoe-like dome under the fuselage. These aircraft frequently flew missions along the Iron Curtain and other target nations ranging from the Baltic to the Adriatic, Black, and eastern Mediterranean Seas. They kept close track on the target nations' electronic systems, especially their air defense radar networks. They operated along these routes from 1963 to about 1969-70, when their mission was taken over by SAC RC-135s.

The third ELINT C-97 (53-106) was equipped with specialized equipment designed to gather high-quality technical data on the Soviet SA-2 surface-to-air missile system, which, by the mid-1960s, had spread throughout the Warsaw Pact countries, especially in East Germany, and was downing US aircraft over North Vietnam. While using the information gathered during these C-97 reconnaissance missions in the corridors, engineers designed active and passive electronic countermeasure systems against the SA-2. Both the north and south corridors were good places for this collection, as several Soviet SA-2 SAM sites were located directly within corridor limits. When the SA-2 was replaced by more advanced missile systems, the C-97 was modified to collect data on them as well. In 1975, this C-97 was retired and the special technical ELINT collection package was transferred to one of the newer C-130Es (see below).

In December 1975, C-97G 52-2687 flew the last C-97 mission from Wiesbaden, and the 7405th, renamed the 7405th Operations Squadron on 1 January 1973, moved to Rhein-Main AB. By that time, the unit had received the first of its three heavily-modified C-130Es to replace the C-97s. As with their predecessors, these aircraft carried a variety of sensors with advanced capabilities. If one sensor detected a new and unusual activity, the aircrew could almost instantly use the other sensors to see what the new activity was about. The 7405th, now specialized in flying the Berlin corridors and this continued to provide vital information. The technical specialties grew so complex, and the personnel requirements grew so numerous, that a separate squadron, the 7580th Operations Squadron, was formed in 1983 to house them; this latter unit did not 'own' any aircraft. Both squadrons operated under the 7575th Operations Group at Rhein-Main.

During the daily missions to Berlin, pilots tried, when necessary, to fly as close to the edges of the flight corridors as they could get (they named it 'the Corridor Dance'), which enabled the photographers on board to reach as far as possible into Eastern bloc territory. One of the best cameras available for the mission was a gyro-stabilized camera. Former squadron member and C-97 navigator Don Backer recalls these missions: "The cameras were run from hidden, claustrophobic, compartments on the plane. When a target was in sight, we gave instructions to the pilot to allow the photographers the best access to the target." They constantly pushed the envelope when it came to staying in the corridor and, as Don says, "we took pictures the whole way in and out." Once the plane arrived in Berlin, everyone debarked, had lunch, and then flew back to Wiesbaden. It was common for them to spot East Germans taking pictures of the unit's aircraft, the pilots, the crew, etc. Don said: "On one occasion we were returning to base when we were asked "to swing over the recently opened new Soviet Embassy" in East Berlin". The detour drew a lot of protesting over the airwaves but we always were a little slow at following instructions and the task was completed. Our intelligence agencies now knew which rooms in which buildings housed the communications and electronic equipment. The rest was up to them." The only "detected" violation of Soviet airspace that he experienced occurred when they were photographing a new Yak-28P. As Don recalls, "a special Soviet squadron of these new 'Firebars' had been seen training at a large East German airfield just outside the southern corridor and there was a high level request to get shots of an open radome on the nose of the aircraft so that would enable analysts to determine frequencies and study the equipment. As we approached the target, we could see a maintenance stand and workers on the nose of a Firebar. I placed our best equipment on the target and coaxed the pilot closer and closer getting pictures all the way. Multilingual hollering in our headsets prompted us to abruptly turn back toward the middle of the corridor as Soviet fighters approached from the rear. Our pilot apologized quickly and profusely for the dumb new man he was training and the compass that seemed to be broken".

The C-130 crews wanted to believe that the Soviets had no idea what they were doing, but they knew perfectly well, and the squadron knew it. Only the 7405th planes did their own navigation over the corridors and followed different routes, and routinely deviated 500 feet from their assigned altitude, and often flew random flight patterns. Both the Soviets and East Germans took their own pictures of the aircraft, which clearly showed open camera doors. It must also have looked suspicious when as many as fifteen men emerged from one of the planes, had lunch, then climbed back into the plane and departed, all without delivering a single passenger or piece of cargo. This behavior led to the nickname "Berlin for Lunch Bunch." Exactly why the Soviets never really protested has never been

determined. An article found on the internet relates the story of a former squadron member: “In 1994, a former Soviet scientific research vessel, which had been reconfigured as a cruise ship, was now taking tour groups around the Antarctic. It was taking on board a new set of passengers.” The 7405th navigator and his wife were chatting with the Russian ship captain when he asked the navigator whether he would like to meet a retired Soviet fighter pilot who was on the ship’s crew now. “Of course I said yes. The next evening I was invited to the captain’s cabin; the captain sent along one of his interpreters so we could talk. It was funny, but after about 30 minutes we didn’t need him anymore. He spoke a bit of English that he had learned in survival school, which for a Soviet pilot was six-months long. He had been stationed in East Germany for ten years, and I had had nine in West Germany, so between our fractured German, pencil and paper to draw pictures, and our hands to fly with, we understood each other with no problem... He asked what I had been flying, and I explained I had been stationed in Wiesbaden and flew to and from Berlin almost every day. With that his face lit up and he asked, ‘Which you fly, the electric bird or the picture bird?’ He had been stationed at Zerbst in the south corridor in the 1950s and ‘60s, flying MiG-19s and MiG-21s. He said what we were doing was common knowledge and they used to fly high-level escort with the military aircraft in the corridors, just hoping they would screw up and get out of a corridor so they could get a shot at one ... So much for tight security!”

The missions over the Berlin Air Corridors continued through the late 1980s. Then came the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the subsequent reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from East Germany. The final C-130 data-collecting mission was flown on 27 September 1990 and a week later, on 3 October, the corridors ceased to exist. By that time, over 10,000 missions had been flown to Berlin. With the disappearance of the unit’s ‘raison d’etre’, 7405th SS was inactivated on 31 March 1991.

7406th SS

Like the other units, 7406th SS was formed following the reorganization of 7499th SS on 10 May 1955. Upon activation, it consisted of just a single officer, the commanding officer, Captain William P. Fisher, and a single airman! On 17 June, the first shipment of office supplies arrived and squadron headquarters operations were set up in building T-314 at Rhein-Main, so this unit never operated from Wiesbaden. The squadron was assigned two different missions, both with RB-50s. One was

C-130A-II 56-0538 was one of the aircraft used by 7406th SS for communications intelligence (COMINT) collection. These aircraft carried an natural metal finish in this photograph taken at Rhein-Main in May 1968. *(Peter Zastrow)*

communications intelligence (COMINT) collection, with the RB-50G version, and the other was ATRAN route collection, with three RB-50Ds. Meanwhile, there was an influx of personnel at Rhein-Main, many of whom had trained on B-50s with the 98th BW, which was on deployment to RAF Lakenheath at the time. By June 1956, the unit consisted of 29 officers and 86 airmen. The first of the unit’s B-50s (48-0107) was delivered to Rhein-Main on 6 March 1956, and on 15 March, the squadron was declared fully operational, even though they only had a single aircraft assigned at the time!

More background details of the ATRAN mission can be found in the 7405th SS chapter. The use of that squadron’s C-54 was not overly successful, and the RB-50Ds proved equally troublesome. For the ATRAN project, they had the codename ‘Project

C-130A-II 56-0530 on the taxiway at Rhein-Main in 1970. There were few features to distinguish the aircraft from normal cargo C-130s, apart from the lack of camouflage and the presence of the enlarged pod under the wing, which contained some of the aircraft’s sensors and equipment. *(Peter Zastrow)*

C-130A-II 56-0535 is about to touch down after a mission. *(Rhein-Main 1969, Peter Zastrow)*

Half Track' bestowed upon them. Due to problems encountered during the modification process with Goodyear at Akron (OH), the three aircraft (48-0107, 49-0307 and 49-0312) were delayed until the spring of 1956. Upon arrival, all aircraft still carried different designations but on 1 October 1956, all three aircraft were redesignated RB-50D. To make matters worse, 49-0312 was in such a bad condition upon arrival that the unit grounded it and cannibalized the aircraft for parts. After spending a lot of effort on the aircraft, it was restored to flight status three or four months later. In the meantime, on 1 June, the first operational ATRAN mission had been flown. These missions were flown at low level and commenced from certain points in the western part of West Germany, heading for the East German border. They would fly as straight a line as possible from middle Germany to the East/West German border at 500ft and 1000ft absolute altitude, and pull up at the border. The two-man ATRAN crew sat on a platform in the forward bomb bay and collected radar imagery of the terrain. Initially, about seven 'Half Track' missions per week were flown and 52 had been completed on 19 October, when the squadron was relieved of the Half Track ATRAN mission, due to the disappointing results achieved. A former 7406th squadron member recalls another possible reason for the cancellation: "Apparently, the entire program was compromised with the publication of an Aviation Week magazine article in August 1956. All Half Track missions stopped immediately after publication of the highly descriptive article." However, a thorough search of Aviation Week issues throughout this period showed no compromise, so the main reason for the cancellation probably remains the poor results. The squadron was officially relieved of its 'Half Track' mission in January 1957 and focused on other intelligence duties. One of the 'Half Track' RB-50Ds (49-0307) continued service with the unit as a trainer. It was stripped of its armament and external fuel tanks, and eventually returned to the USA in August 1958.

The squadron's main mission was to collect communications intelligence (COMINT), flying high along the eastern borders and coasts in Europe. This mission was codenamed 'Project Dream Boat'. Five aircraft were used, three RB-50Es and two RB-50Gs (sometimes referred to as B-50G-2s); these were delivered between 1956 and 1958. These RB-50s retained the defensive armament consisting of four remotely-controlled turrets and a manned tail gun position. They also had additional radar equipment. Five Russian linguists/radio operators were

Albert O'Connor, son of the late Maj Albert S. O'Connor Sr (USAF, Ret.), passed on a few of his father's stories for this article, which give an insight of the hazards encountered in the early days:

"According to my father, back then in the 1950's, the USAF used ground-based navigation beacons to determine their distance from the Soviet-Armenian airspace/border. They flew close to Soviet airspace. My father didn't talk much about the hardships he endured flying these ELINT missions, but they lived in tents out in extreme elements, flew from ramshackle airstrips but later on they flew from paved runways and had buildings to live in, but that was after he left that Area of Operations.

My father said he remembered one particular mission where he flew his RB-50G to Lake Van to begin his racetrack orbit along the border. In the RB-50G, they shut down two of the four engines and feather the props as to save fuel and extend their time on station, so the technicians in the back could do their eavesdropping and monitoring of Soviet military communications. During this particular mission, the Soviets "lit up" his plane with ground-based radar and his techs told him that the Soviets had scrambled a flight of MiGs and had directed the jet fighters to the B-50's location. It was common knowledge that the Soviets consistently and constantly ignored national borders and they would routinely cross into Turkey, to harass or try to shoot down these unarmed ELINT planes. My father said he didn't sit around waiting for the MiGs to show up, because all he had available to him in the RB-50G were two .50 caliber machine guns in the tail of the plane. He started the two feathered engines he had previously shut down, went to full military power, to the firewall, and dove the plane down to the deck so he could "hide" his plane from the high-flying Russian MiGs and also "disappear" from their ground based radar in ground clutter and any possible aerial radar the MiGs may have had. Flying the huge lumbering RB-50G on the deck enabled him to get himself and his crew to safety on many an occasion.

What is ironic is that the RB-50G had no paint on it (it still carried silver aluminum color) with international red paint on the wings, vertical and horizontal stabilizers, so "hiding" while flying on the deck was a bit of a joke, that plane stuck out like a sore thumb if seen from above (this was the reason black paint was later applied – ed.). He also said that during another flight he was shadowed by MiGs and saw tracers fly ahead of his plane's flight path but his plane was never actually attacked directly. He said he felt the twin .50's helped keep the jets, in that particular incident, at standoff range.

The following aircraft are known to have been assigned to 7406th SS:

47-0120	RB-50E	ex 6091 RS, delivered to 7406 SS on 07jan58. Returned to USA on 27oct58 for further modification work and reassigned to 6091 RS at Yokota.
47-0126	RB-50E	ex 6091 RS, delivered to 7406 SS on 28feb57. Returned to USA in jul58 for modifications and reassigned to 6091 RS at Yokota.
47-0129	RB-50E	ex 6091 RS, delivered to 7406 SS on 05oct57. Returned to USA on 02oct58 for further modification work and reassigned to 6091 RS at Yokota.
47-0136	RB-50G	ex 4024 BS/97 BW at Biggs AFB, underwent modification work at Oklahoma City ALC and with TEMCO at Greenville in 1956 before being delivered to 7406 SS on 17mar57. Returned to USA on 12apr58 for further modification work and reassigned to 6091 RS at Yokota.
47-0157	RB-50G	ex 4024 BS/97 BW at Biggs AFB, underwent modification work at Oklahoma City ALC and with TEMCO at Greenville in 1956 before being delivered to 7406 SS on 11dec56. Returned to USA on 31dec57 for further modification work and reassigned to 6091 RS at Yokota.
48-0107	B-50D	spent time with Oklahoma City ALC and Goodyear at Akron for modification work in 1955 and 1956 before being delivered to 7406 SS on 06mar56. It was redesignated as an RB-50D on 01oct56 but returned to the USA in jan57 and eventually became a KB-50.
49-0307	JB-50D	spent time with Oklahoma City ALC and Goodyear at Akron for modification work in 1956 before being delivered to 7406 SS on 26may56. It was redesignated as an RB-50D on 01oct56 and finally returned to the USA in aug58 and became a TB-50D later in the year.
49-0312	EB-50D	spent time with Oklahoma City ALC and Goodyear at Akron for modification work in 1955 and 1956 before being delivered to 7406 SS on 03apr56. It was redesignated RB-50D on 01oct56 but returned to the USA in feb57 and became a test aircraft (designated JTB-50D) at Wright Patterson AFB.
54-1637	C-130A	delivered to 7406 SS in the 1960s; departed in jan72 and was a plain C-130A transport aircraft.
56-0484	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in jun58, departed in apr72 and was converted to C-130A again.
56-0525	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in jul58, departed in sep71 and converted to C-130A again.
56-0528	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in jul58 but shot down over Armenia 02sep58 – see main text.
56-0530	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS by oct58, departed in apr72 and converted to C-130A standard.
56-0534	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in aug58. Returned to USA dec71 and converted to C-130A again.
56-0535	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS on 04jul60. Returned to USA in dec71 and converted to C-130A standard.
56-0537	C-130A-II	Flew with 7406 SS during the 1960s – exact dates unknown.
56-0538	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in jan59. Departed again in feb72 and converted to C-130A standard again.
56-0540	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in oct58, returned to USA in feb72 and converted to C-130A.
56-0541	C-130A-II	delivered to 7406 SS in nov58, departed again in jan72 and converted to C-130A.
58-0711	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/6100 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS on 16oct71 (still carrying the code 'GT' from its former unit). Departed back home in 1972 and converted to a plain C-130B.
59-1524	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW (6100 ABW had become 475 ABW in nov71), delivered to 7406 SS in dec71. Returned to USA on 26jun74 and converted to plain cargo C-130B again.
59-1526	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS by mar73. Returned to USA by 1974 and converted to C-130B again.
59-1527	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS in jan72. Returned to USA (date unknown) and converted C-130B.
59-1528	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS on 27nov71. Returned to USA (date unknown) and converted to C-130B again.
59-1530	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS on 01jan72. Returned to USA by 1974 and converted to plain cargo C-130B again.
59-1531	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS in jun72. Returned to USA by 1974 and converted to C-130B.
59-1532	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS in may72. Returned to USA on 26jun74 and converted to plain cargo C-130B again.
59-1533	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS in apr72. Returned to USA by 1974 and converted to C-130B.
59-1535	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/475 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS on 01jan72, still carrying the 'GT' code from its former unit, but this was quickly removed. Returned to USA on26jun74 and converted to C-130B.
59-1537	C-130B-II	Previously with 556 RS/6100 ABW, delivered to 7406 SS on 27nov71. Returned to USA by 1974 and converted to C-130B.

Displaying the usual lack of any unit markings is this C-130A, 54-1637, seen at Rhein-Main in 1970. This is a "straight" C-130, used by the squadron as a training and support aircraft for its operations. Compare this aircraft with the one on the previous page and two subtle differences can be readily noted: this aircraft carries a light-grey finish instead of the natural metal one, and it does carry a pod under the wing, but of a size and shape usually found on standard C-130As. (Peter Zastrow)

The C-130B-IIs carried camouflage, unlike the C-130A-IIs. Compared to the 'normal' C-130B, these reconnaissance aircraft sported a few additional antennae, as well as the pod under the wing. Previous publications have always referred to these aircraft as RC-130Bs, but actually the correct designation is C-130B-II; this designation was also used by the unit itself. The aircraft in question are 59-1524 (above, in 1972) and 59-1530 (right, on 20oct72), both are seen here taxying past the well-known spot next to the autobahn.

(Rhein-Main 1972, Peter Zastrow)

an important part of the crew; they occupied two positions immediately aft of the navigator's position. There was also a single radio technician who had to look after the equipment while airborne. The operators monitored radio traffic overheard during the mission and recorded everything for subsequent interpretation. Although they had been delivered in a natural metal finish, four of the B-50s were soon painted a flat black on the bottom, retaining the natural metal fuselage, but one aircraft, 47-0157, was painted all flat black. This black paint was not the most durable ever applied and the aircraft all quickly gained a very mottled appearance. Following some long-range navigation training flights (most of these in the former 'Half Track' B-50s), the first operational 'Dream Boat' mission was flown on 12 January 1957, using 47-0157, the unit's only COMINT aircraft at the time. These twelve to fourteen-hour missions were usually flown at 24,000 ft. Some missions were more common than others and the six most regular ones followed the following routes: 1) From Rhein-Main to the Baltic Sea. They would fly north, up the middle of the Baltic Sea east of Gotland to a point east of Stockholm, and then start an orbit between Sweden and Finland and return. 2) Flying a triangular track over Germany. 3) From Rhein-Main, along the Balkans, to the Adriatic Sea en-route to Adana, Turkey (Incirlik AB) and return to Rhein-Main. In early March 1957 a permanent detachment was formed at Incirlik. 4) From Incirlik and fly an orbit along the Black Sea coast. 5) From Adana to Trabzon and to Lake Van. 6) Norway: in 1956 the unit designated Bodo, Norway as "7406th Support Squadron Det #2" and RB-50s flew from there. This Det continued operations until 1964, but no aircraft were permanently stationed there. Apart from the above, missions were also flown over the Eastern Mediterranean (especially during the various Arab-Israeli crises) and anywhere else they were urgently needed.

The B-50s were difficult aircraft for the mechanics; they had their fair share of engine problems, amongst other things. The engines had a tendency to overheat during high-altitude missions, and it was not unheard of to shut down one or two engines and restart them again after they had cooled down a bit. One crewmember remembers: "The temperature in the aircraft was quite difficult to control. If you went from the front of the aircraft to the rear, you had to go through a 25 ft tunnel over the bomb bays and sometimes the front of the aircraft was cold and the aft was 85+ degrees. Things broke down: we frequently came back on three engines, or with the radar out, etc etc. "

Although the B-50s had been in use for only a very short time, a replacement was on the way and in May 1957 the squadron was told they would receive specially modified C-130s in 1958, instead of C-118s which were initially thought to be the B-50's replacements (the B-50 was considered to have been a stop-gap solution pending the arrival of the C-118). The first Hercules, C-130A-II 56-0484, was delivered in June 1958. The C-130s were specialized for COMINT collection. This was a highly classified mission at the time and over 50 years later, it still is. Crews learned to fly the Hercules at Evreux AB in France, a regular USAFE C-130 transport base, in 1958, and as soon as sufficient aircraft had been received, the last RB-50s were retired, or rather, reassigned, to Yokota AB, in October 1958.

The detachment at Bodo, Norway, was retained during the changeover of aircraft types and in August 1958 the first C-130-A-II (56-528) flew to Bodo on a training mission. A request was made with the Norwegian government to operate missions out of Bodo to within 100 miles off the Russian coast, but the Norwegians would not allow foreign units to be permanently stationed on Norwegian soil. By the end of 1958, the squadron had grown to 45 officers and 237 airmen.

Unfortunately, the squadron lost C-130A-II 56-0528 in a well-known incident on 2 September 1958. The aircraft was shot down by Soviet MiG-17s during a reconnaissance mission along the Turkish border with Soviet Armenia, when it wandered into Soviet airspace. Apparently, there was no intention for the aircraft to actually fly over Soviet territory. All seventeen

crewmembers on board perished in the crash, near the village of Sasnashen, 34 miles north-west of Yerevan, the Armenian capital. The aircraft was flying a mission out of Incirlik on the Mediterranean coast and was due to fly from there to Trabzon on the Black Sea coast, turn right and fly to Lake Van, Turkey, where an orbit was started between Van and Trabzon, gathering data all the time. Although the course of this orbit paralleled the Soviet border, the aircraft would never be closer than about 100 miles. During the final orbit, the crew reported passing over Trabzon at an altitude of 25,500 feet and acknowledged a weather report from Trabzon – and the aircraft was never heard of again! According to Maj Albert S. O'Connor Sr (USAF, Ret.), a former B-50 and C-130 pilot with the unit, the crew was lured into Soviet airspace by Soviet navigational beacons in Armenia and Soviet Georgia, which were on frequencies similar to those at Trabzon and Van. However, post-Cold War studies have found no evidence for that theory, and there is some evidence to support multiple navigation errors; the definitive cause remains unclear. Anyway, at 15:07hrs the aircraft crossed into Soviet airspace. Soviet air defense radars had been tracking the aircraft for some time and two flights of two MiG-17s from the 25th Fighter Regiment from Yerevan were scrambled to intercept the C-130. The weather was good, with visibility of 15-20 kilometers. The first flight of MiGs was commanded by Senior Lieutenant V.V. Lopatkov. His wing-man was Senior Lieutenant H. Govrilov. The commander of the second flight was Senior Lieutenant Kutiriov. The first flight intercepted the C-130 at approximately 15:08hrs and Lopatkov reported firing warning shots at 15:09hrs. The C-130 started to maneuver and tried to climb away. The Soviet pilots asked for and received their command post's permission to engage the C-130 and commenced the actual attack at 15:11hrs. All four Soviet aircraft attacked the aircraft, disabling at least one of the C-130s engines and setting it on fire. The pilot of the fourth MIG reported that the C-130 was going down on fire and was shedding parts even before he began his attack, although it remained largely intact until it crashed. Following the incident, the Soviets denied downing the aircraft, claiming that the C-130 "fell" on their territory. On 24 September 1958, the Soviets returned six sets of human remains, but, when queried, stated they had no information regarding the eleven missing crewmen. Although the USA played an audio tape of the Russian pilot's conversations during a session at the United Nations, the Soviets continued to deny responsibility for the shootdown, and the fate of the remaining crew members remained unknown until the end of the Cold War, when some of the above details emerged.

Like they did with the B-50s, the unit flew missions along the edges of the Eastern Bloc countries, from the Baltic Sea all the way to Caspian Sea, and everything in-between. The C-130s made long hours and expanded on the number of missions flown by the B-50s in previous years. From 1966, their mission was codenamed 'Creek Grass'. Initially, the missions flown by the C-130A-IIs were flown at 28,000 ft and typically lasted 8 hours and 40 minutes, but continuously added equipment led to a weight increase and by 1970 mission duration was down to 7 hours and 30 minutes. Original mission times were restored to the old level with the introduction of the C-130B-II in 1971.

A one-off aircraft used by the 7406th was C-7B 61-2600, which was delivered to the unit in 1969. Partially crewed by US Army operators in the cargo hold, it was involved in SIGINT missions, flying missions along the Iron Curtain. The photograph was taken at Rhein-Main on 23 May 1970 (Lindsay Peacock)

An interesting sideline is the short-time use of a former Army C-7B, 61-2600. It was originally used as an SIGINT aircraft by the 507th USASA Group, but when the USAF gained control over the former Army C-7Bs (or CV-2As as they called them) on 31 December 1966, the role was transferred to 7406th SS, as 'Project Creek Moose'. A separate flight was formed within the unit to operate the aircraft, which was flown and maintained by USAF personnel, but the operators in the back were US Army personnel, who lived in the same barracks as the USAF squadron members. Army maintenance procedures differed from those in the USAF and the aircraft had several inspections due when it was received in February 1969. Upon completion of these, the Army demanded a receipt and received standard USAF laundry receipt, which they accepted! Operational SIGINT missions started in January 1970 and usually lasted 3 hours, taking them all along the Iron Curtain. On 31 July 1970, the aircraft was reassigned to 516th TAW at Dyess AFB (TX), ending Caribou operations for the unit.

Some of the typical missions flown included those from Rhein-Main to the Baltic Sea, where they orbited off Gotland, off the east coast of Sweden. This was a challenging environment: in the 1960s Soviet MiG-17PFs were based in Latvia and MiG-19s and Yak-28Ps flew out of Kaliningrad; all of these fighters regularly intercepted the C-130s. In addition, on 16 June 1967, a C-130 experienced an unintentional near-miss with a Soviet AF An-12 over the Baltic! These Baltic Sea missions ended in June 1973 when RC-135s of 55th SRW replaced the C-130s.

More benign missions were flown over central West Germany; orbiting along the Czech and East German border. The detachment at Incirlik (also known by the crews as 'Inkydink'!) was still active as well. The squadron actually deployed aircraft there for longer periods, usually two weeks at a time, and during such a TDY, several missions were launched from Incirlik and recovered there again. On the way back home to Germany, the C-130s would usually be stocked with things like oranges, grapefruits, nuts and leather goods which were hard to get by in Germany! Apart from Turkey, all countries bordering the Black Sea were of interest to the squadron, especially the large Soviet naval base in the Crimea. From May 1963, the Det at Incirlik would also send aircraft to Tehran's Mehrabad Airport, Iran, for short detachments to fly missions over the Caspian Sea. The Iranian heat presented the crews with some unique problems: When

Another shot of one of the unit's C-130A-IIs, taken at Rhein-Main AB on 23 May 1970. Note the very plain markings. (Lindsay Peacock)

Two photographs of the rarest of Super Sabre variants, the RF-100A "Slick Chick', as used by Detachment One of 7407th SS. An obvious feature of the RF-100A is the re-contoured fuselage below the cockpit, which contained the camera suite. Also of note is the presentation of the 'buzz number' on the fuselage. If the painter would have followed the usual standards, it should have been presented as 'FW-551' instead of 'F.W.551' as seen in these phographs of 53-1551 (above) and 53-1545 (left), both of these were taken at the squadron's area at their home base, Bitburg, in 1957.

(Henk Scharringa collection)

temperatures were over 95°F inside the aircraft, the mission equipment did not work properly, so in order to reduce cabin heat some missions started with the aircraft's top hatches open! However, in December 1965, an RB-57F of sister squadron 7407th SS crashed in the Black Sea and this caused such a diplomatic upheaval, that from that date onwards, all missions over the Black Sea and Caspian Sea were suspended. From 1966 to 1974 (with a short break April 1967 and early 1968 due to Greek reluctance to allow these flights to be flown from their territory), the unit also had a detachment at Hellenikon AS, Athens, Greece, from where missions could be flown over the eastern Mediterranean, along the coast with Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt, with the occasional orbit at the request of the intelligence crews in the back. This area was especially important during the Israeli-Arab wars in 1967, 1970 and 1973, when the unit received help from the Navy, who were flying EC-121-Ms, EP-3Bs and EP-3Es on similar missions. From 1 August 1968, the Greek detachment was known as 'Det.3'.

The unit's area of operations was not confined to those mentioned above. A near-permanent detachment was established at MacDill AFB (FL) which operated from 1964 until 1971, with at least one aircraft being present in Florida at any given time. >From MacDill, missions were flown along the northern coast of Cuba; the unit often worked in coordination with U-2s during these missions, listening in on Cuban responses in reaction to a U-2 overflight. The unit also operated from the other side of the world; on 19 February 1967, two aircraft, 56-0534 & 56-0541 and four crews, departed for a period of TDY at Yokota AB in Japan, for "Operation Creek Mark" to assist the Airborne Communication Reconnaissance Program (ACRP) mission there. 556th RS, based at Yokota, flew the C-130B-II, mostly over Korea, the South China Sea, the Gulf of Tonkin, and Vietnam. The 7406th C-130A-Iis flew local missions out of Yokota over the Sea of Japan, relieving the C-130B-IIs to fly missions in Southeast Asia. The aircraft returned to Rhein-Main in June 1967.

In July 1971, news was received that the squadron's old A-models were to be replaced by the C-130B-II. Crews went to C-130E school at Little Rock AFB (AR) and indeed, on 16 October 1971, the squadron received the first of five C-130B-IIs. Although sometimes referred to as RC-130Bs, this was a strictly unofficial designation and never used by the unit itself. The old A-models were converted to 'trash haulers' and assigned to ANG units.

Operations from Hellenikon gained importance and by the end of 1971, over 50% of the missions were flown from here. At one point, all available flight crews were sent to Athens due to increased mission requirements and by June 1973, following the cessation of the Baltic missions, all operational missions were flown out of Athens. By that time, the squadron's mission requirements had been substantially reduced and several aircraft were reassigned to the AFRES. By 1974 the squadron was no longer needed and the Mediterranean mission was also taken over by the RC-135s, which also maintained a detachment at Hellenikon. Actually, the final C-130B-II mission was flown on 14 June 1974 and the final four aircraft departed Rhein-Main for the USA on 26 June. A few days later, on 30 June, 7406th OS was inactivated; the official ceremony had been held two days earlier, attended by the USAFE band and the commander of 17th AF, Maj Gen John Giraudo. During that ceremony, a message from Gen David C. Jones, CINC USAFE, was read to the squadron. It concluded: "The sincere dedication and professionalism displayed by your personnel in performing their mission in support of national tasking is recognized not only in USAFE, but by the highest national authority. Again, many thanks for a job well done."

7407th SS

The third and final squadron to be activated on 10 May 1955 was 7407th SS; it was based at Rhein-Main AB. Instead of lumbering propeller aircraft, the squadron was in the jet business, and also operated a detachment at Bitburg.

The main body of the unit, at Rhein-Main, operated the B-57 Canberra, and various models were used over the years. The squadron's first RB-57A (52-1492, also referred to as RB-57-A-0), which had received special modifications for high-level oblique photography for 'Project Sharp Cut', was delivered

The following aircraft are known to have been assigned to 7407th SS:

51-6909	T-33A	Previously with 4756 ADG at Moody, delivered to Rhein Main in may56 and used by both the main unit as well as Det.1 at Bitburg. Transferred to 7030 SG at Ramstein on 09jul59.
52-1429	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously with the Wright Air Development Center (l/n mar55) and delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55. This aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. On 15nov56, the aircraft was damaged in a belly landing at Rhein Main. The aircraft's main undercarriage doors refused to open and the aircraft made a safe landing, with only the nose wheel extended, on a foam carpet. Repairs were completed on 02may57. 52-1429 returned to USA on 10aug59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1435	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-2) – Previously assigned to 432 TRG at Shaw AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS by sep57; the aircraft had been modified to carry an AN/APS-60 radar. Returned to USA in jun58 and reassigned to 2750 ABW at Wright Patterson AFB.
52-1437	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-2) – Previously assigned to 432 TRG at Shaw AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 08aug57; the aircraft had been modified to carry an AN/APS-60 radar. Returned to USA in jun58 and reassigned to 2750 ABW at Wright Patterson AFB.
52-1439	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously assigned to 363 TRG at Shaw AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55; the aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. Returned to USA on 29jul59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1440	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously assigned to 363 TRG at Shaw AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55; the aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. Returned to USA on 29jul59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1442	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously assigned to 363 TRG at Shaw AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55; the aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. Returned to USA on 29jul59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1462	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously assigned to 424 BS/4400 TBG at Langley AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55; the aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. Returned to USA on 29jul59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1464	RB-57A	(also sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1) – Previously assigned to 3201 ABW at Eglin AFB. Delivered to 7407 SS on 24aug55; the aircraft had been modified for 'Project Heart Throb'. Returned to USA on 10aug59 and reassigned to 154 TRS AR ANG.
52-1492	RB-57A	Delivered to 7407 SS by may55; had been modified for 'Project Sharp Cut'. Departed Rhein-Main on 30nov60 and the next few years were rather sketchy; the aircraft was actually removed from the USAF inventory between dec61 and feb65 and possibly was working on a highly classified project in the Far East. Nowadays, the aircraft is preserved at the Hill AFB museum.
52-1565	B-57B	Previously with 38 BW at Laon AB and was reassigned to 7407 SS in mar58. Initially used for 'Project Hygiene' but demodified at the end of 1959 and it served as a trainer until it departed for the USA on 07nov60 prior to reassignment to 154 TRS AR ANG.
53-1545	RF-100A	Delivered to 7407 SS in may55 – officially assigned as early as 20apr55. Withdrawn on 27jun58 and returned to USA in sep58; transferred to Taiwanese AF in dec58.
53-1551	RF-100A	Assigned to 7407 SS on 18may55. Lost in an accident on 02oct56. It suffered an engine failure and crashed just north of Neidenbach, about 10 miles north of Bitburg, West Germany. The pilot ejected safely.
53-1554	RF-100A	Assigned to 7407 SS on 18may55. Withdrawn on 27jun58 and returned to USA in sep58; transferred to Taiwanese AF in dec58.
53-3857	TB-57C	Previously with 4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB and delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. On 31dec60 the aircraft suffered serious damage at Hellenikon–Athens IAP in Greece, when the nosewheel failed to lower during landing. The aircraft was repaired on site and continued its career with 7407 SS until 27aug68, when it departed Rhein-Main for reassignment to 58 WRS at Kirtland AFB.
53-3860	B-57B	Previously with 38 BW at Laon AB and was reassigned to 7407 SS in may58. Initially used for 'Project Hygiene', but it later served as a trainer until it departed for the USA on 07nov60 prior to reassignment to 154 TRS AR ANG.

The squadron also 'owned' this TB-57C, 53-3857. which replaced the T-33A, 51-6909, as their crew trainer. Named 'Porky', it served with the unit between 1959 and 1968, and is seen here at Rhein-Main in plain markings on 18 May 1968. It returned to the USA just three months later, on 27 August 1968, and joined 58th WRS at Kirtland AFB. (Jack Friell via Steve Miller)

53-3963	RB-57D-1	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Flew back to the USA on 16mar64 and stored at MASDC.
53-3970	RB-57D-0	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Flew back to the USA on 16mar64 and stored at MASDC. Later converted to RB-57F 63-13502.
53-3972	RB-57D-0	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Dismantled and airlifted back to the USA on 25feb64 and stored at MASDC. Later converted to RB-57F 63-13500.
53-3974	RB-57D-0	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Dismantled and airlifted back to the USA on 20may64 and converted to RB-57F 63-13503.
53-3975	RB-57D-0	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Used for 'Project Big Safari'. Flew back to the USA on 25jan64 and converted to RB-57F 63-13501.
53-3976	RB-57D-0	Previously with 4025 SRS/4080 SRW at Laughlin AFB; delivered to 7407 SS on 09jun59. Departed for the USA (date unknown, was on rework when the RB-57Ds were grounded) and assigned to 9 WRG at Andersen AFB, Guam, by 1963.
55-2711	F-100C	Previously with 36 TFW; assigned to 7407 SS Det.1 on 05mar57. It was later reassigned to 7235 SS/7272 ABW at Wheelus AB.
55-4264	B-57E	Previously with 7235 SS/7272 ABW at Wheelus AB and delivered to 7407 SS on 14oct60. Departed for the USA in mid-aug65. Later became one of the well-known 'Patricia Lynn' recce B-57s in Vietnam and was shot down over South Vietnam in 1968.
63-13287	RB-57F	Delivered to 7407 SS on 29oct65 but lost over the Black Sea on 14dec65 – see main text.
63-13500	RB-57F	Delivered to 7407 SS on 04apr65. Returned to USA on 01oct68 and reassigned to 58 WRS at Kirtland AFB.
63-13502	RB-57F	Delivered to 7407 SS on 10feb66. Transferred to 6021 RS at Yokota in apr66.
63-13503	RB-57F	Delivered to 7407 SS by apr66. Returned to the USA on 04apr68 and reassigned to 58 WRS at Kirtland AFB.

in the latter half of May 1955. This aircraft was fitted with a more compact version of the 240-inch camera mounted in the Pie Face C-97, and began flying peripheral missions (when weather allowed) exploiting this camera's capabilities.

The rest of the squadron's RB-57As, six in all, arrived together at Rhein Main, via Robins AFB, Goose Bay and Keflavik, on 23 August 1955. These aircraft also had special modifications, for 'Project Heart Throb', and were tasked with vertical photography. Unlike the 'Sharp Cut' RB-57A, these were equipped for single-pilot operation, with the navigator's seat removed, and also lacked the armor and rotating bomb door and associated hydraulics of other B-57s. This weight-reduction program was initiated to increase the aircraft's operational ceiling to 65,000 ft. They were sometimes referred to as RB-57A-1s. The official squadron records, however, do not refer to these -0 and -1 designations. In October, one of the RB-57As was sent to RAF Burtonwood in the UK, where the underside of the aircraft was resprayed in blue-grey, in an attempt to improve the camouflage of the aircraft. However, it turned out that the new camo made the aircraft more visible when viewed from below and the aircraft was resprayed gloss-black again.

The squadron started training for the upcoming mission, with 7407th pilots reporting to the other USAFE B-57 units at Laon (a ground attack unit) and Sembach (which had unmodified

Above are two interesting 1950s-views (1957?) of the ramp at Rhein-Main AB. The photograph on the bottom shows the simultaneous engine start-up of four 7407th SS RB-57As. The smoke originates from the cartridges used to start the engines. At left, engulfed in smoke, is the squadron's sole T-33A. Note the C-124s in the background. The photograph on top shows another view of the flightline, with B-29s 44-27295 and 44-86443 on the right, VC-121B 48-0610 (the former presidential aircraft, Columbine II) of 1254th ATG in the middle and to the left two 'Heart Throb' RB-57As. (Henk Scharringa collection)

RB-57D 53-3972 somewhere over the USA prior to assignment to Rhein-Main. Note that the wing planform is vert different than on the RB-57F at the bottom of the page. This was a typical colour scheme for the aircraft. (USAF photo via 7499th Group Association)

RB-57As assigned). Between October and December 1955 the squadron was involved in exercise 'Red Fox' in which USAFE F-86s tried to intercept the high-flying B-57s. A few 'normal' B-57s had accidents following problems with the B-57 variable-incidence stabilizer actuator and this caused the grounding of the type within USAF twice in January and February 1956, followed by another 75-day grounding from May 1956. However, 7407th SS was allowed to continue to fly due to the unit's vital importance. Although it was not their main mission, the 'Heart Throb" participated in various recce programs in Western Europe, including one to document the construction of US bases in Spain in 1957, using the 'Heart Throb' B-57s. Every now and then a B-57 would head that way, fly a predetermined route and return with the photographs.

The main purpose of the 'Heart Throb" RB-57As was to fly reconnaissance over communist territory. President Eisenhower had reluctantly approved several Air Force military overflight programs because of the lack of knowledge about Soviet and satellite military capabilities. One of these programs was 'Heart Throb.' From starting operations in September 1955 until November 1956, when the last overflight mission was flown, the 7407th flew at least nineteen overflight missions from Rhein-Main. 1956 was a volatile year, with the Suez Crisis and the uprising in Hungary. These overflight missions were carefully planned and a number of predetermined desirable targets along the route were photographed. The 900 nm mission radius of action of these special RB-57As, flying at about 60,000 feet, enabled them to cover (weather permitting) virtually all the satellite nations from Poland through Hungary, as well as parts of Yugoslavia, providing coverage which was unprecedented and extremely valuable. The B-57s are known to have flown over cities like Budapest, Brno, Belgrade, Zagreb and Bratislava, where airports, infrastructure and industrial complexes were photographed. Most, if not all, missions were challenged by the countries the aircraft flew over, but although MiGs were invariably scrambled, they never succeeded in intercepting the high-flying B-57s. At the start of a mission, the B-57 would always be accompanied by another aircraft which looked for the tell-tale contrails. If contrails appeared at the desired altitude, the mission would be aborted.

In the meantime, an entirely different outfit had been set up at Bitburg with the activation of 7407th SS Det.1 was formed. A special RF-100A recce variant of the Super Sabre had been developed under the code name 'Project Slick Chick', with the aim to use this aircraft for overflights of communist territory. The aircraft record cards initially referred to the aircraft as plain F-100As rather than RF-100As, although unit histories and other official records note them as RF-100As. It was thought that the sheer speed and agility of these modern fighters were sufficient to defeat Soviet air defenses. Six conversions were completed; three were assigned to 7407th SS and the other three to the 6008th Composite Group at Yokota in Japan. These aircraft, drawn from an early FY1953 production batch, were the first USAF F-100s to be based in Europe. Actually, they were the first supersonic fighters based in Europe! The RF-100As were considered to be an interim solution, pending the availability of the U-2. Development of the RF-100A had begun in 1953, they were equipped with five cameras using various focal lengths. An optical viewfinder was also fitted to the aircraft, as well as extended wing tips to enable the aircraft to reach 53,000 ft, its intended service ceiling. Furthermore, all unnecessary equipment had been removed; this included the cannon and other weapons-related instruments. To house the cameras, a special camera-bay was added to the aircraft's belly (see photographs)

The RB-57Fs were awesome machines with an incredible wingspan of 122ft, as shown in this shot of 63-13502, somewhere over the USA. They were nothing like the original RAF Canberra! The aircraft served with 7407th SS in 1966. (USAF photo via Henk Scharringa)

which clearly distinguished the type from the regular Super Sabre. They were to be based at Bitburg, because Wiesbaden and Rhein-Main were considered to be unsuitable for fast-jet operations due to their insufficient runway lengths.

Col Cecil H Rigsby, a former pilot with the unit, has some recollections of his time with the RF-100A. He was sent to Belfast early in May 1955 to oversee the arrival of the RF-100As by ship, they had just completed the Atlantic crossing from Mobile (AL) on board the USS Tripoli. "We were all shocked to find that Belfast in May was the coldest place on earth. There was a constant 20mph wind blowing across the city. To make things worse, the British do not believe in heating their buildings after 30 April, no matter how cold it gets. There was only one good hotel in town and it was full. We got rooms in a hotel three stories high made entirely of wood and about 100 years old. My face was a mess because my hand shook so much when I shaved in the morning." All three F-100s eventually checked out OK and they departed Belfast for Bitburg on 16 May, with a stopover at RAF Burtonwood. At Bitburg, the squadron's hardstands and newly erected hangar (which could only house a single F-100) were located in an isolated area between two of the based squadrons, with armed guards looking over the area 24/7 – this was a top secret outfit! Detachment strength was minimal at 36 officers and men. Flight training started on 1 June 1955. Co-located 36 FBW still flew F-86s, but was slated to receive F-100s in 1956, so all the pilots were very anxious to learn as much as they could about the new aircraft until they were officially told to stop asking questions!"

Col Rigsby continues: "In Germany there were no restrictions on supersonic flights; you could go supersonic at high or low altitude." The pilots started looking for the best possible flight profiles to attain the best performance in their F-100s. During a briefing at Wiesbaden, the men were told to perform the mission with the greatest secrecy, to make up a cover story and to tell no-one, not even their wives, of the mission at hand. There were some concerns over the outcome of an encounter with Soviet MiG-17s, as the F-100, without using afterburner (to conserve fuel during a long mission) only had the slightest speed advantage over the MiG. "We made a lot of flights with a clean configuration (no external tanks) to see how we might evade an interception. This is when the countryside, and our home base, experienced a lot of sonic booms. Those F-86 pilots were really jealous!"

After a period of training, the Det's RF-100As made at least six actual overflights over communist territory. From Bitburg the RF-100 could cover most of East Germany and western Czechoslovakia. When launching from Furstenfeldbruck they could also cover western Hungary and northwest Yugoslavia. At least one of the operational missions, which originated from Furstenfeldbruck, took the F-100 over Hungary and Czechoslovakia, including overflights of Bratislava and Prague. The mission's primary objectives were to obtain imagery of military airfields. Once across the border, the F-100s accelerated to Mach .95 or .96 in full military power. Col Rigsby remembers: "As I approached the targets I began to see a flurry of aircraft activity. With my vertical cameras operating over one of the airfields I could see through the viewfinder that there were several fighters taking off and several airborne. When I reversed my direction to return and had covered all my assigned targets, I had a lot of company on my departure. The fighters were going all-out, but to match my speed they had to stay at a lower altitude, about 20,000 ft below me. They broke off when I reached the border and I recovered safely at Bitburg." Another mission took the RF-100A over East Germany; during this mission the F-100s again encountered several enemy fighters, but Rigby confides that he "never felt threatened". One of the data interpreters, Maj Roger Rhodarmer, recalls some details of the information gathered: "It was not the photography that was such a shock. When they did the first penetration, wherever it was they went, they encountered ten times more radars than we ever thought there existed. They picked them up easily and tracked them easily every step of the way. Back in Washington with the Chiefs of Staff, everybody was shaken up to know that Soviet radars were thát good"

As was the case with the Heart Throb RB-57As, the 'Slick Chick' RF-100As were never given another overflight mission after mid-1956. The reason was that President Eisenhower had approved the use of the new CIA-operated U-2As for overflight missions, and had ordered the Air Force to cease their own overflight program. In 1956, the first U-2 had arrived in West Germany and had begun flying operational missions in June. Det 1, however, remained fully combat ready. One RF-100A, 53-1551, was lost in an operational accident in October 1956; it was later replaced by a 'plain' F-100C (55-2711, formerly with 36 FBW) which was used as a training aircraft. There were a few other incidents like engine failures, but "one particularly memorable one was the release of a drag chute while flying in afterburner at 50,000 ft. Luckily, the afterburner flame burned it off before it could have any adverse effects." In May 1956, the 7407th had received a T-33A, 51-6909, which was shared between Rhein-Main and Det.1 at Bitburg. It was used for aircrew proficiency training.

RB-57F 63-13500 seen on final approach to Rhein-Main. Note that this is a four-engined B-57; it has two additional jet engines in pods under the wings. *(Manfred Faber)*

The impressive wing of 63-13500 is the most distinctive feature of the RB-57F, but other apparent changes are the different engines, TF33s - compare with the other B-57 photographs on previous pages. Also noted the podded engines just outside of the nacelles. The shot was taken at Rhein-Main. (Manfred Faber)

Finally, Det.1 at Bitburg ceased operations in the summer of 1958 and was officially inactivated on 1 July 1958. The RF-100As were flown to the storage depot at Chateauroux AB in June and shipped back to the USA. Back in the States, the aircraft were modified and delivered to the Republic of China AF in 1959.

In the meantime, the 7407th's connection with the B-57 continued when the first (52-1437) of two highly modified RB-57A-2s (which appears to be an unofficial designation as well) arrived at Rhein-Main on 8 August 1957. These aircraft were equipped with AN/APS-60 radar to test the operational capabilities and limitations of this radar, in a program known as 'Project SART-AC'. The program was finished in June 1958 and the two RB-57As were ferried back to the USA that month, to be replaced by two B-57Bs (52-1565 and 53-3860). These aircraft were involved in a program named 'Project Hygiene' and had ATRAN guidance systems installed which allowed them to simulate TM-61 Matador missile flight profiles (see 7405th and 7406th SS as well). One of the B-57s was fitted with the "shanicle" (ATRAN) guidance system, and the other with the positive ground control (MSQ-1) guidance system, simulating both systems in use on the missiles. They were stationed at Rhein-Main, but often flew missions from Sembach AB, which was the home of the 38th TMW, which was the unit using the Matador missiles. Until they were transferred back to the US in 1960, they flew over 200 missions, testing the systems and simulating missile launches. They often deployed to Wheelus AB, Libya, where the missile crews conducted actual launches. In the fall of 1958 they worked out of Wheelus as part of Operation Marblehead, a large-scale exercise involving all of the missile wing squadrons. From 1958 to 1960, 7407th SS also used the two B-57Bs for transition training for the unit's RB-57Ds; they were also used to ferry high-priority cargo and regularly made trips to Incirlik AB in Turkey. In the late 1950s, bases like Incirlik as well as Wheelus in Libya and Moron in Spain were favorite destinations to escape the inclement German winter weather and to be able to continue training. From January 1960, Nouasseur AB in French Morocco became the unit's regular winter training site. During this first TDY in Morocco, Capt Louis K Godman became the first squadron pilot to suffer a double engine failure; he managed to land his powerless RB-57D safely at Agadir.

In the spring of 1959, three pilots were sent to Laughlin AFB (TX), to start transition training on the RB-57D. On 9 June, six RB-57Ds (with the three 'old hands' and three new pilots) were delivered to Rhein-Main AB. One of these six aircraft (63-3963) was of the RB-57D-1 variant, a single-seater equipped with a SLAR radar along the fuselage and a larger nose radome that was used for day and night radar mapping operations. Other special features of this variant were an autopilot and folding rudder pedals; the latter allowed the pilot to stretch his legs during long flights! The other five were basic RB-57D-0s, all of them capable of in-flight-refuelling capability. These aircraft were twin-seaters, with an enlarged nose to house a radar and a camera-bay in front of the nose wheel well. Compared to the standard B-57B, the wing span had increased from 64 to 106 feet. The RB-57Ds carried a distinctive colour scheme, the fins and underside of the fuselage being black, and the upper surfaces retained the natural metal finish. They were assigned to 'Project Black Knight' and replaced the older 'Heart Throb' RB-57As, which were all transferred to 154 TRS Arkansas ANG.

At the same time as the RB-57Ds, a single TB-57C (53-3857) was delivered for crew training. This aircraft replaced the T-33A. As the squadron's old RB-57As had been used as crew trainers as well, the squadron received a B-57E to replace them on 14 October 1960, and following removal of the target-towing equipment, the aircraft was referred to as a TB-57E in official squadron papers, but not on official USAF record cards. Finally, on 30 November 1960, the squadron's last RB-57A, 52-1492, was flown back to the USA.

Although some have assumed that the RB-57D missions included incursions into Eastern Bloc airspace (including missions over Hungary), none did in fact take place, and overflights had officially been terminated following the U-2 shoot-down in 1960. However, the aircraft did fly many missions along the Iron Curtain, photographing everything with their powerful on-board cameras.

There was some light-hearted inter-squadron rivalry as well. Former 7407th member Herb Greathouse recalls the following incident: "During the 1961 Rhein-Main air show, there was a plain cargo C-130 aircraft doing a demo short field take-off. This was a scheduled display item for the air show that day. After the C-130 did its demo, one of our pilots went to our secured area unannounced. He took one of our RB-57Ds to show off the airplane, called the control tower on the radio and asked

for permission to do an UNSCHEDULED demo take-off. He received permission and outdid the C-130, using less runway to get airborne, climbing almost straight up, then spiraling back down, landing in front of the crowd and taxying back to our secure area. The entire squadron was loudly cheering him in! The guys that flew these planes were a class of their own". Herb also remembers that "being stationed in Germany in the '60s was fun, just plain fun, and at four Deutschmarks to the US dollar your money went a long way".

An interesting operation was 'Project White Christmas', which brought RB-57D-1 53-3963 to Thule AB, Greenland, for a few weeks in late November and early December 1960. The aircraft was used to determine whether or not high-resolution radar could be used to detect objects under ice and snow. In late 1960/early 1961, the squadron sent their RB-57Ds back to the US, where they received extensive modifications (the first one, 53-3975, left on 7 July 1960 and returned on 22 March 1961). These mods included a high-level oblique camera installation centered around a camera with a 240-inch (6000mm) lens. However, there were some problems with the modifications and an engine failure caused extensive damage to the port wing, necessitating a return to the ALC at Robins AFB. It returned to Rhein-Main in 1962 and started flying missions.

The cause of a non-fatal crash of NRB-57D 53-3973 in the USA on 4 January 1964 was determined to be structural problems with the wing's structure, which led to the immediate grounding of the entire RB-57D fleet, including the examples in the 7407th SS. By then, the squadron was already slated to receive the RB-57F, but this was still some way in the future. Only three of the unit's five RB-57Ds were in such a condition that they were cleared to fly back to the USA, the last two leaving together on 16 March 1964. The other pair was airlifted back to the USA; the last of these left on 20 May 1964. For the next year or so, the squadron only had the TB-57C and B-57E assigned. The latter was transferred out in August 1965.

The RB-57D's replacement was the RB-57F, and the first of these for the 7407th SS was 63-13500, which arrived at Rhein-Main AB on 4 April 1965. The second RB-57F, 63-13287, was delivered to the unit on 29 October. These aircraft had some extraordinary high-altitude capabilities, but ranked high amongst the most ungainly looking aircraft ever built! It was almost impossible to see the family resemblance with the original Canberra; it featured a larger tail, different fuselage, TF33 engines and optional extra podded jet engines (these could be removed and replaced by fuel tanks or sensor pods) and moreover, huge wings, with a wingspan of just over 122 ft. This huge wing made the aircraft notoriously difficult to land, as it just wanted to stay airborne in the ground effect. The RB-57F was able to carry the HTAC high-altitude reconnaissance camera which could take pictures from 60 miles away, and ELINT/SIGINT equipment was carried in the nose and wingtips.

However, on 14 December 1965, all went terribly wrong. RB-57F 63-13287 had been on TDY at Incirlik AB, Turkey, since 23 November and had been flying operational reconnaissance missions when the aircraft crashed in the Black Sea during one of those missions (although USAF reports at the time quoted that the aircraft was on 'a routine training mission'), causing considerable political upheaval between the USA and Russia. Salvage operations were difficult and both sides tried to salvage the aircraft, but reportedly nothing more than just small bits and pieces were ever found. The crew went missing, although some sources quote that they had been captured by the Soviets. The cause of the accident (enemy action or structural failure) has never been fully determined. A possible cause and the one officially released by the USAF was an oxygen system failure; the aircraft spiraled down for one hour before finally crashing in the sea. It has also been quoted that the aircraft fell victim to a SAM, but the location of the aircraft debris makes it highly unlikely that a SAM caused the loss. Also, there were no air defense communications relating to such an action. Nevertheless, this crash caused a cessation of all missions originating from Turkey and also put an end to all missions flown over the Caspian Sea.

The unit continued to operate two RB-57Fs and a single TB-57C. Part of the time was spent on 'Project Cold Rex' missions (no details known as the mission is still classified, but it may have had something to do with nuclear sampling) until 1968, when operations were suspended, due to the availability of other reconnaissance systems like satellites, and all aircraft were transferred to 58th WRS at Kirtland AFB (NM). The last RB-57F left Germany on 1 October 1968, which incidentally also was the date that the squadron was inactivated. From that date onward, 58th WRS made regular deployments to Rhein Main and continued the 'Cold Rex' mission of 7407th SS until the mission was terminated early in 1970. The RB-57Fs, like their RB-57D predecessors, also fell victim to structural wing problems and most of them were retired to MASDC in 1972.

Thus ends one of the more colorful periods of history in the USAF. Needless to say, all of the three squadron's aircrew were unsung heroes for braving the mighty Soviet air defences, as interceptions were a very regular occurrence. The intelligence gathered during their missions contributed to many programs, such as military readiness in Europe for all NATO allies, SAC strategic war planning, the development of ECM and other defensive systems, and a myriad of other operations. These units ultimately helped to end the Cold War.

Credits: Many thanks to John Bessette, 7499th Group Association Historian, for his invaluable help in creating this article, but also to 7406supron.com, 7499thgroupreunions.com, globalsecurity.com, data-freeway.com, 9websites.com/airforce, USAF, Stephen Miller, Henk Scharringa, Peter Zastrow, Frank Cooper, Manfred Faber, Herb Greathouse, Albert O'Connor II, Lindsay Peacock, Dave Wilton/BAR-NAMAR and the book 'Tactical Reconnaissance in the Cold War' by Doug Gordon. If you have any comments, additions or corrections, please mail jwaarde@chello.nl.

A close-up of the nose of an RB-57F. It is hard to see the family resemblance with the original RAF Canberra! (USAF photo)