

Bruce M. Bailey
2653 E. Hillview Ave.
Fresno, CA 93720

6,140 Words
First Serial Rights
Copyright 1992 Bruce M. Bailey



A CROW'S STORY

by
Bruce Bailey

What is a Crow? The high-tech battle of wits, known today as Electronic Warfare, began in WWII under the code name "Project Raven". The men operating the equipment to detect, identify and defeat the enemy radar were officially titled Radar Observers, but more commonly called Ravens. In the U.S. military those men evolved into becoming Crows.

Crows are a unique, different bunch that live in an electronic world, foreign to most. They speak a different language and have unusual values, goals and ideals. They have always been strange, unable to fit in socially or professionally with the pilots and looked upon with great curiosity and suspicion by others. Crows are in a class all by themselves - and love it.

Just as unique as the Crow is the airplane he flies. Airplanes are designed for many purposes - none of which are to accommodate Crows and their vast array of equipment and antennas. So other types of aircraft, primarily bomber and cargo, are modified for use by the Crows. What they do to those airplanes should be criminal.

What makes a Crow's airplane? Start with a fairly normal aircraft (preferably one that is already lacking in power and sophistication) and stuff it from nose to tail with 'black boxes'. When you run out of room, no problem, just begin hanging stuff on where ever possible. The designers started with an underpowered ramp queen and proceeded to make her even heavier and increase the drag tremendously. They were getting close to a real crow's airplane, but had to fulfill the final requirement - which was to make it excruciatingly uncomfortable. They stuffed the Crows into unbelievably cramped, noisy, dangerous hell-holes and assured that they had a pressurization/air

conditioning system that didn't work, ample fuel leaks, no acceptable method of escape and were unable to move around in flight.

They had then produced a heavy, marginally controllable, bastard of an airplane (for a bastard of a mission) with a drag factor beyond design limits. Those evil minds reached their pinnacle when the RB-47H was created. It met all the requirements and then some. It required a ground run across two counties before reaching flying speed and was quite iffy then. It had so much stuff added and hung on that it appeared to have an acute case of acne, chicken pox, mumps and boils. There were bumps, bulges, patches and innumerable appurtenances all over the poor thing. They eventually ran out of skin to assault and had to hang a huge pod along the side. All that added to the wind noise, vibration, weight and drag.

Although the airframe was basically a B-47, it looked and performed so differently. Never has such a degree of discomfort, inconvenience and misery been approached as that for the Crows in the RB-47. It was an ugly, overweight, under powered, unforgiving, excruciatingly uncomfortable, dangerous and noisy airplane that did a tremendous job, so vital to national security, and all of us that flew her grew to love her.

THE CROW'S NEST

The Crow Compartment (the area housing the Crows and the controls for all their equipment) was unique in the RB-47H. What would be the bomb bay in a B-47 was enlarged and converted for the reconnaissance mission. It was not a converted bomber, but built from the ground up for reconnaissance. The compartment was built into the airframe (not removable as in some versions) and was a structural part of the aircraft.

That compartment almost defied description - it had to be seen to be believed. Although the belly was enlarged to look like a pregnant fish, the inside height of the compartment was less than four feet. Not only was it impossible to stand in the cabin, there wasn't even enough room for a good crouch. Most movement was made either on our knees or in a crawl. We carried so much additional film, tapes and equipment on 'operational' missions, even crawl or kneel space was nonexistent.

The only aggravation that exceeded the lack of space was the noise. The compartment had no insulation and its thin aluminum walls were nestled between and slightly behind the six engines. Those walls were the skin of the airplane and had no padding or insulation on them. The high speed turbine for cabin pressurization sat inside the cavity, beside the Raven One, adding its piercing whine to the noise. Each piece of equipment had its own blower, vibrator, servos, etc., each adding its noise to the clamor. All that noise soon caused severe hearing problems, which led to us unsuccessfully wearing several types of experimental headgear to counter it.

The air-conditioning/pressurization system was notorious for running away in the full hot or cold mode, causing extremely uncomfortable times in Crow Country and had a water separator which didn't work at all. It was intended to pull the moisture from the air when flying low level over water. On those low altitude sorties the equipment would sweat badly and water would pool throughout the cabin in all low spots, which made for some truly miserable conditions and caused much of the electronics to short out.

Entrance into that hell-hole was made through a hatch in the belly or via the crawlway from the flight compartment. The ground hatch was a thirty by thirty inch

structural panel in the belly that was secured by twenty two large phillips-head bolts. That hatch was used for all ground operations and loading/unloading. It had to be secured well prior to engine start and would not be opened again until the aircraft was landed and parked. Those bolts required a special tool and expert touch, which caused many difficulties. Fully half the times we landed at a strange base (that airplane was strange to any base other than our own), one of the ground crew would strip the head of a bolt, requiring that we unload everything through the crawlway (an ordeal I don't even like to think about). That also happened at our home base when someone got in too much of a hurry or encountered a bolt that should have been replaced on the previous flight. When first shown the compartment hatch leading into the crawlway (which lead to the flight cabin up front), I looked at that tiny orifice and thought, "It would be just as easy to re-enter the womb, and a lot more fun".

All three Crows sat facing aft, in ejection seats, with solid banks of equipment (scopes, analyzers, receivers, recorders, controls, etc.) in front and to one side. The Raven Two and Raven Three sat side by side in the rear of the compartment, with barely enough room between their seats to squeeze through. The ERB-47 (ERB) and EB-47TT (Tell-Two) models carried only two Crows, which were positioned the same as the Ravens Two and Three above. The Raven One was the 'Crow Commander' and sat in the right forward corner of the cabin. In addition to the banks of equipment in front and to his left, there was quite an array of video, digital and analog recorders along the wall to his right and more units on the forward bulkhead (behind him). The space occupied by the Raven One in the "H" was crammed with additional equipment in the ERB and Tell-Two.

THE FRONT END

Now, how do you entice intelligent (at least half-smart) men into the cramped, smelly underbelly of an airplane from which they have no means of escape, other than the ejection seat or crawlway? Well, for one thing, you make it so much more miserable for them in the forward flight deck that their tortuous little compartment seems like a penthouse in comparison. Because there was no quick way out when on the ground and the downward ejection seat was useless at low altitude and the Crow compartment was encased in fuel cells and the frail crawlway was too easily collapsed or blocked - it was decided that the Crows would ride up front for takeoff and landing. There is where the sadists had a field day.

There was a step in the metal floor, beside the copilot position, known as the fourth-man seat. In a bomber, when a fourth man went along, he sat there on a cushioned survival kit and had plenty of room for his legs. In the RB-47H, three men were sandwiched into that tiny area by installing two vertical slings (a device thought up by the evilest of minds to torture man beyond his ability to describe the agony). There were no survival kits to sit on - we sat right on the metal floor, which increased our discomfort and pushed our heads down between our knees. But we wore a five inch thick back-pack parachute, which pushed our knees higher, bent our backs even more and shoved our faces right into our butts. The two Crows in the two forward slings faced aft, while the one on the step faced forward. The two men facing each other became very close friends of necessity. The one facing forward had to put his left leg along the wall above the shoulder of the man facing him and think clean thoughts. The

Crow sitting in the middle was tasked with closing the cabin pressure door, on which he sat. Contortionists envied the Crow who could close that horizontally sliding door while occupying the same space.

Now the Crows were all hunched over, squeezed together and intertwined like a can of worms, while encumbered with helmet, oxygen mask, parachute, water wings and thermal clothing if operating from northern bases. We couldn't move quickly if our life depended on it, and it well might have. I think that was all part of the plan, for we were so miserable that if an emergency occurred, we just didn't give a damn. There were times when I hoped we would just crash and end the agony. That form of torment served to both erase all concerns for safety and to promote a strong yearning to get into the less grueling Crow Compartment.

CRAWL TO WORK

Getting up from our takeoff position required great skill and effort, but getting into the crawlway was an art. The RB-47, still at low altitude where the air was roughest, bounced along at 310 knots indicated airspeed, while we attempted to open the pressure door and establish a beachhead in the crawlway. We had to climb down the entrance ladder (a three section telescoping device with faulty latches) which had been pulled up to its stowed length and hopefully latched securely.

That ladder was housed in a small cubicle above the frail entrance hatch. The entrance door was the skin of the airplane and would not support the weight of a man. Therefore, extreme caution had to be exercised to prevent stepping on the door, or slipping and falling on it, or accidentally tripping the ladder release while our weight was on it. On several occasions a slip resulted in the entrance door being knocked open and a Crow hanging on for dear life, as his leg dangled in the slipstream. The sudden impact of a man's weight was enough to open the door and let his leg spurt out, but then the 310 knot airspeed took over and kept the door firmly pinned against the leg and he could not pull it back in. One of the other Crows had to remove all his paraphernalia in order to climb over him and exert additional pressure on the door before the leg could be retrieved.

We got down into the hole, clutching the ladder like a cat on a screen door, and attempted to establish a hold in the crawlway with a hand, a foot, our head or something. Then we had to rotate 90 degrees, without losing our grip on the ladder (or tripping its sensitive release) and pull ourselves into the crawlway head first.

The next feat was to crawl down that narrow passage without snagging anything vital on the numerous boxes, braces, bolts, etc. liberally strewn its length. It was quite common to snag the parachute release, filling the crawlway with nylon. More serious was activating the life vest (water wings), which when inflated pinned you helplessly in the crawlway. Another Crow would have to puncture the bloated mass and free you to continue your trip, cursing the designers all the way. Three to four flights was as much as we could expect to get out of a flying suit before ripping it on something. Finally gaining the far end of the crawlway, we flattened out onto our stomachs to wriggle through the tiny hatch into the compartment. That maneuver was savored though, as it was the only place in the airplane where we could stretch out for a few moments. Then we settled down into the nest and went to work.

THE 55SRW

The 38th and 343rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadrons (SRS) of the 55SRW were unique havens for Ravens in many ways. Those two units were solely dedicated to the electronic intelligence (ELINT) mission of the Crows and were the only outfits operating the RB-47H, ERB-47 and EB-47TT (Tell-Two). Unlike bomber units, half the members of those squadrons were Crows, and there is strength in numbers.

That led to a constant, fierce but friendly, battle between the Crows and pilots. We spoke a language totally foreign to them and had an entirely different set of values, making them wary of us. They tried constantly to get the best of the Crows, but it was no contest. We referred to them as gorillas and put bananas in their seats before a flight or painted large arrows on the airplane, so they would know which end of the aircraft to get into. We painted a huge sign for the briefing room which read, "Back is up, forward is down", so they wouldn't forget. Then we simplified the sign to: "Back is up, holding back is down."

The five and six man crews of the 55th were a close-knit unit that pulled pranks on each other at every opportunity, but would not tolerate anyone else doing or saying anything against one of the crew (even the pilots). That closeness and unity was bred of necessity, due to the wing's operations. We spent half of each year at some overseas base with only our crew. Those TDYs lasted 100 days or more, during which we put our lives in each other's hands while regularly probing enemy defenses and in the local bars, bath houses, etc. We developed total faith and confidence in the other crew members and came to know them better than our own family. To this day, I feel that the men and women I worked with in the 55th are my real family.

We had detachments on bases all over the world and there was usually only one RB-47H crew at a time at each, except Incirlik AB in Turkey. The Tell-Two crews and aircraft were based there to conduct TELINT missions against the Soviet ICBM and space systems test sites. The ERB-47 was configured and tasked against specific technical requirements and often operated from the same base as an RB-47H (but was only there for a couple or three weeks at a time). Quite often the two flew together with the "H" acting as bait to stir up the defenses, in the hopes the ERB would be able to get what it was after. Both the "H" and ERB flew scheduled sorties with a day of study and preparation before each mission.

TELL-TWO

The EB-47TT was a totally new concept for the 55th. First, the airplane was a converted bomber with a removable two-man capsule (known as Blue/Brown Cradle) rather than a true recon aircraft. Its crew area was referred to as a 'capsule', while the Crow's nest in the "H" and ERB were compartments. The crews insisted upon that differentiation. Their mode of operation was entirely different also, as they were on constant alert (like bombers, UGH!) and launched as quickly as possible when signaled. Three aircraft and three crews were kept on alert at Incirlik AB (Turkey), with a fourth crew either drunk or on R&R.

The crews attended a daily 1100 briefing where they received the latest intelligence, weather, probability of a launch and the results of recent sorties. Other sources notified our Detachment (OL-4) when the Soviets were about to attempt a missile launch from the Tyuratam area. The primary crew would launch immediately, while the secondary

crew started engines and waited. They launched immediately if the primary reported a problem within the first hour. If not, they shut down the engines, but continued to wait until released. They would launch if the primary had a problem or it looked like the missile shot would occur after the primary had to leave its orbit due to endurance.

The purpose of the mission was to intercept all electronic data and communications associated with Soviet missile tests and space shots. The Crow's job was quite different and terribly dull. Gone were all the analyzers, direction finders, cameras and such of the RB-47H. The Crow Capsule was packed with receivers and recorders for collecting data on every channel or frequency between the control center and missile. There was little for the Crows to do but wait and activate the recorders at the proper time. They didn't get to play with the Russian fighters and SAMs or have any fun at all.

The Tell-Two set up an orbit over Northeastern Iran, in one of three areas, at the highest possible altitude (to increase line of sight distance) and hoped the shot would come off quickly. The aircraft was flown at maximum endurance mode if it appeared the event would occur later. More often than not, a malfunction in the missile would stop the launch and the Tell-Two would return empty-handed. It was an awful ordeal for the Crows - the alert launches under the most miserable conditions imaginable, many missions with no activity and no fun even on the successful sorties. Therefore, the program was set up so, in most cases, a Crow was transferred to an RB-47H crew after returning from a Tell-Two tour.

OPERATIONAL MISSIONS

The highly classified ferret missions we flew were referred to only as 'operational' sorties and the regions into which we ventured were known as the 'sensitive area'. We usually had a day to study the mission and prepare the airplane before flight. The day of preparation before a mission began with the Air Force's most revered activity, a briefing. We were given the route, timing, latest intelligence, weather and specific tasking. The tasking required intensive study to assure our efforts were directed against the correct targets.

From experience, a Crow can quickly and accurately identify an intercept from its sound and parameters (frequency, pulse shape, pulse rate, type of modulation, type of scan, etc.) displayed on various scopes and detectors. However, in the continuous ELINT chess game, emitters were being constantly modified to increase capability or defeat our intercept and counter-measure methods. Our study was devoted primarily to new systems, the latest changes, suspected changes, additions and relocations. We prepared a chart for the mission on which was annotated the locations (or suspected locations) of the tasked targets and the defenses most likely to end our sortie.

There was never a problem with the Crows passing up a signal or getting too little tape and film on it. To the contrary, the greatest problem was the Crows bringing back too much data. It was impossible to sit for hours and pass up the juicy fighter and missile signals, while waiting for some suspected emitter that may never be intercepted. We always gave the analysts plenty of work and they hated us for it.

The rest of the day was spent at the airplane with all manner of signal generators, test equipment, tools, spares, parts and pieces. We ran every piece of gear through its paces until it was tweaked and adjusted to our complete satisfaction. We often installed additional equipment or modified existing units to better satisfy the tasking for that

particular mission. For many years we ran into serious trouble from some sources for the unauthorized modifications to the airplane. One of my outlaw innovations enabled me to intercept the number one priority of the intelligence community and satisfy all collection requirements on a single sortie (that was unheard of, it usually took six or more sorties to confirm a new emitter). The commanding general at that location received instructions from two different divisions of SAC - one to award the Air Force Commendation Medal for the intercept and the other to courts martial me for modifying the airplane without all the red tape. He said if I would forget the medal, he would drop the charges. However, within two months all RB-47Hs had received my modification.

PREFLIGHT

The day of the mission began with, what else, another briefing devoted to pilot and navigator talk, which didn't interest the Crows at all. But it did give us an opportunity to spike the Detachment Commander's coffee with a powerful laxative, accuse the Intelligence Officer of having constipation of the brain and diarrhea of the mouth, claim that the Weather Officer couldn't even predict the next season and publicly make several degrading remarks about our pilots' gross lack of intelligence, ability and redeeming traits.

We arrived at the aircraft four hours before takeoff to make preflight checks and build our nest. We loaded every system with tape and film, put the mission identifier on each, stowed enormous amounts of spare tape and film, loaded the additional test equipment and such selected for that mission and put aboard the flight lunches and thermoses. The food and drink were most important on the long, dull sorties flown in some remote areas, but weren't touched on the good sorties with a lot of action and fun. We hoped the lunches wouldn't be touched every time we loaded them (for more reasons than one). When satisfied that the nest was in order, the ground crew was told to secure the hatch.

We then had an hour or more to kill before getting aboard for takeoff. We usually moved the required 50 feet away from the airplane, so we could smoke, and sat on the ramp. There we smoked, laughed and joked with the ground crew and continued to harass the pilots. The three Crows had their parachutes with them and most takeoffs were at night, so we commonly stretched out on the ramp, using the chutes as pillows, and gazed at the stars or napped. That was highly valued, as we would be quite cramped and unable to stretch out for the next several hours. Our antics and lack of concern further convinced the pilots that all Crows were crazy. About 45 minutes before takeoff, everyone left our little gathering to power up all the systems and start the engines. That gave the three of us a chance to really relax, have a last smoke and talk a little 'Crow Talk'.

When all six engines were running, we reluctantly got up and donned our parachutes, helmets, etc. The pilot flashed the landing lights about 15 minutes before takeoff, which was our signal to board. We clambered up the ladder, encumbered by all the gear we wore and screwed ourselves into position. We attempted to aggravate the pilots further, but found it most difficult from our irksome contortions. The pressure door was left open until the last minute, as it allowed the Crow in the middle to derive great relief from dangling one leg down the entrance chute.

THE CROW FLIES

Finally, we got the steady green light from the tower, which cleared us to move onto the runway and take off at the briefed time (all operations were conducted under strict radio silence). The six engines were brought up to 100% power and the water/alcohol injection system activated. The old girl lurched and strained against the brakes, waiting for the navigator's hack to begin the takeoff roll. With all that weight and drag, when a crew got the plane off the ground their greatest challenge of the mission was behind them - Russian fighters and missiles were almost anticlimactic.

She was a real ground lover, requiring well over two miles of run for takeoff, but once up to speed flew beautifully and was a very reliable airplane. As soon as the flaps came up, the Crows began their transfer to the rear compartment. When the last Crow disappeared down the crawlway, the copilot had to get out of his seat to close the pressure door. He usually found that quite difficult, as the Crows had tied his boot laces to the rudder pedals or something.

We had so much junk and extra gear in the nest that we had to put some of it in the seats. The first in the cabin moved everything from his seat to the floor along the left side. The second emptied his seat into the center of the cabin, which then blocked all access to the Raven Two and Three positions. The Raven One entered last, closed the pressure door and unloaded his seat into the remaining floor space. That created problems when having to perform maintenance on some of the equipment and when reloading the video and digital recorders along the left wall. It also caused injuries when the equipment was thrown about the compartment during bad weather, evasive maneuvers or copilot refuelings.

The Raven One turned on the cabin pressurization and, after confirming air flow and pressure, gave the pilot to okay to climb. The special test gear and such (all the extra junk we brought along) was hooked up and another check run on all the equipment. Calibration signals were put on the tapes and film and a world time standard tuned in to set the central time unit, which had a readout in every crew position and recorded the digital time on all Crow and navigation systems. We made the opening entries in our logs and prepared to go 'On Watch'. If time permitted, a cup of coffee or water was grabbed, as it might be the last chance we would get until after landing.

The RB-47H Crow Compartment had fuel tanks above, ahead of and behind, which were notorious for leaking into the cabin. The airplane sat in a takeoff attitude (nose high) on the ground and the nose remained high until leveling at mission altitude. The leaking fuel would puddle in the rear of the compartment (under the equipment) and not be seen until level off, when it would come rushing forward. The strong smell of fuel was always in the compartment, so did not indicate when there was a leak. With all the electrical gear and heat in the cabin, raw fuel made it a potential bomb with a hair trigger. When fuel was discovered, all power was turned off and the cabin depressurized to reduce the oxygen supply. Then we hoped to get it back on the ground before it blew up. That was a tricky ordeal as it required a minimum of three and a half to four hours flight at full power with maximum drag to reduce the weight enough to land.

Two large I-beams ran down each side of the cabin at elbow height about three inches from the ejection seats. When there was raw fuel in the cabin, it ran down those

beams first when the aircraft leveled - but could not reach the Raven One due to equipment installed in the rail.

To illustrate how a Crow thinks, I relate this story. I was flying as a substitute Raven Two with another crew, whose Raven One was named Harry. Just as we leveled off, I noticed fuel running down the rail and below my ejection seat. All equipment was fired up and we were about to go On Watch, so I grabbed my mask to call the Raven One about the fuel. Before I could trigger the mike, the Raven Three tapped my shoulder and handed me a note, while pointing to the fuel in his beam. The note said, "Don't tell Harry, he won't let us smoke".

The Raven's ejection seat was another marvel of engineering, with a twist (a twisted mind). First, there was no hole or hatch for the seat to eject through. Those same clever designers fixed that by bolting a series of large blades to a platform beneath the seat and connecting it to a couple of 40MM shells. That apparatus was to fire a split-second before the seat and create a hole for the Crow.

When the RB-47H aircraft were delivered, we were assured the system had been thoroughly tested. We flew the plane for two years in ignorant bliss. Then we acquired the films from the tests. It had indeed been thoroughly tested, but failed miserably, for every dummy blown out of the plane with that system had been decapitated - which would ruin the rest of the day for a Crow. After that we faithfully kept the safety pins installed in the seats. Another unique feature of the system was how the seat bottom slanted forward enough to have you sitting on the tip of your spine within five minutes. Much of the flight was spent sliding back in the seat, rubbing our aching asses and cursing its designers.

ON WATCH

At the prescribed point we signed On Watch and began processing signals. The Crows had a separate interphone system between the three of them to accomplish the required coordination, keeping each other informed of all activity in their assigned frequency bands.

The intercept of certain signals alerted the other Crows to expect associated emitters to come up soon. The Crows informed each other of those intercepts with a simple code word, such as 'SpoonRest' - which indicated the SA-2 missile radars were about to start tracking the RB-47. One Crow would then search for the target tracking radar while another looked for the missile guidance signal. That tip-off was done in short, simple words to save time and primarily because audio was quite often the chief means of detecting a signal. There may be dozens, or dozens of dozens, of signals in the small band to which the receiver was tuned. On the receiver pan scope and analyzer scopes, they may all look the same - especially at the higher frequencies. A trained ear could hear the radar you wanted, but couldn't see, when it was buried beneath thirty similar signals.

The intercepts were recorded in analog, digital and video formats along with associated radars or synthetic signals we generated to mix with them. Movie, still and strip photography were taken of the signals displayed on the various analyzers and oscilloscopes. By switching to one of the direction finding antennas, spinning at 300 rpm, we could log several bearings to pinpoint the location of the emitters. All

observations and actions were annotated on our audio recorders and written into the logs.

On a good mission in a hot area, the Crows didn't stop for a second except to change film and tape in the numerous systems. Even then, we learned to do so with one hand while working signals with the other, or both feet or whatever. An old Mississippi backwoods expression best describes a Crow on a good mission - "He's busier than a one-legged man in an ass kicking contest".

When Ivan sent fighters up to play or run us off, it was the Raven One that had to handle them. He could detect fighters long before the pilots could see them and was able to determine their type from their radars and weapons. He supplied identification, number, direction and range to the gorillas so they could start looking for them. In many instances, the navigator got the first indication that fighters were on the way, because their AI (Airborne Intercept) radar operated on nearly the same frequency as the RB-47 navigation radar and caused interference, spoking and blooming, on the navigator's scope.

The Raven One divided his time between the fighters and other tasks until they got serious about chasing the RB-47 away or shooting it down. Then he kept the crew constantly informed on the position and range of the fighters, and reported which ones went into a lock-on mode or armed missiles in preparation to fire.

When the enemy fired or demonstrated hostile intent according to the book (Tactical Doctrine), we aborted the mission and got the hell out of there. The pilot began evasive maneuvers, the copilot tracked the fighters with the 20MM cannons (ready to fire when required) and the Raven One deprived the fighter of tracking data by using chaff and jammers against their radars. Many a mission was shortened by aggressive actions from Soviet fighters and most of those had to be reflight later - usually with the same results. I have flown the same mission as many as four nights in a row before the higher-ups wised up and decided enough was enough.

On the other end of the spectrum were the long, dull flights where nothing happened. On those sorties we ate a lot of soup and dreamed up pranks to pull on the pilots later. In the old days, as we drove by a promising area, we would punch out a few bundles of chaff or buzz them a little with the jammers in hopes of stirring up some business. It worked quite well too, until higher headquarters found out what was going on. Then they safety-wired the jammers and counted the chaff before and after each sortie. It seemed we weren't allowed to advertise.

We soon overcame that by putting a couple of cases of empty beer cans in the crawlway before flight and dumping them into the forward wheel well as we crawled to work. Then, when we needed to stimulate the defenses, the forward gear was lowered momentarily, which released the cans. Enemy radar went crazy and business picked up smartly. It also drove the schools of tuna wild and gave us something constructive to do between flights (emptying the cans).

A crow's greatest ambition was to pick up a new or unusual signal never before intercepted. Those were very rare, so we made our own quite often. We carried gazoos, noise makers, Japanese battery-powered toys, whistles, signal generators and such aboard, in an attempt to stump the analysts. Once we carried a cricket along and recorded its chirping, which we mixed with the navigation radar pulse and electrical noise from a fuel boost pump. We recorded and photographed the mixture and called it

a new signal, speculating that it was most likely an advanced fighter AI (airborne intercept) radar.

Two weeks later the analyst's report came back properly identifying the nav radar, the boost pump and the cricket. As a crowning blow, they even reported the cabin temperature at the time of the recording and the sex of the cricket. Strangely, about a year later the Soviets came up with a new AI radar that sounded just like a cricket.

Once on the ground, the Crow Compartment hatch was unbolted and we unloaded what seemed like tons of goodies. The first-time on looker was afraid the airplane would break in two in the middle when seeing all those large bolts removed from its belly. The Crows went right to the lab with the analysts to listen to the tapes, review the film, check our DF cuts (direction bearings) and watch all the green squiggles from the video tapes. We spent hours in the lab after a good mission to see how our 'take' looked and talk some more 'Crow Talk'.

I cannot adequately describe the feeling we got when the tapes and film confirmed everything we reported in the logs and voice tapes, especially when it fulfilled one of the top intelligence requirements. We left exhilarated, ready to go have a few practice drinks and put a camel in the Detachment CO's bed or steal a firetruck or set off the klaxon in the fighter alert building or.....

Gone are the wild, good old days along with the wire recorders, tuning forks, manual systems, exciting missions, flapping around the Crow Compartment, constant experimentation and the magnificent RB-47s. There will never again be Crows like the Old Crows - but as one of them, I must say I loved it and wouldn't trade the times and experiences for any others.

CAW, CAW