
F-86 Fighter Intercept

Our introduction to Pakistani airspace, upon leaving India, was provided by a pair of US-built F-86 Sabre-jets, which came up under our right wing to find out why an Indian bomber was headed for Karachi. A glance at the US flags on the tail and the N7866 on the fuselage must have convinced them we were friendly, for we are alive to tell the story.

Later, we all agreed that had the 50-caliber machine guns been installed in the turrets, rather than being slung in the bomb bay, we probably would have been a pile of charred aluminum on the bleak Pakistani desert. The Indians had known what they were about when they removed the guns.

Because of a stuck exhaust valve, a Moslem holiday, and the difficulty of finding willing hands, we spent three nights in Karachi; but on Sunday, the 3rd, we had a genuine ecumenical council as our Protestant engineer enlisted the services of a Portuguese Catholic from Goa, a Pakistani Moslem, and a Jewish sergeant from the Karachi USAF-MAC detachment to help get the bird back on the in commission list.

Pan Am furnished the stands and tools and maintenance support, and mother-henned the whole operation to make sure everything was right.

Surrounded by Guns

After our rude interception over the Pakistani border, we thought our troubles were over, but our reception at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran almost caused the development of persecution complexes. No sooner had we landed than we were surrounded by sub-machine gun-toting guards whose leader didn't seem to understand our English.

We were beginning to ponder a lengthy stay in Iran when we spotted three USAF airmen who soon arranged for an interpreter. Only then did we learn that it was all a mistake; the wrong airplane had been surrounded.

We spent three nights in Tehran because of a couple of fronts over Turkey, but on the morning of April 3rd we began the arduous climb across the mountains of Iran and Turkey. (This route had been chosen because of the refusal of the Iraqi government to allow passage through their country.)

14,000 Feet Without Heat

Without heaters, without heavy clothing, and with drafts blowing in from all directions, we slowly became numb in the minus 8 degree Fahrenheit temperature. We stayed four and one-half hours at 14,000 feet, shivering and shaking at first, but eventually becoming so numb that shaking was out of the question; our nerves were too numb to shake. We had never been so cold in our lives.

After an hour and a half for refueling and warming up at Ankara, we pressed on to Athens where we spent two nights correcting minor difficulties. The enthusiasm and interest exhibited by the U. S. airmen when we landed was most gratifying and their willingness to pitch in and work all night to get the craft in shape gladdened our hearts. Volunteers removed the prop domes and found that two of the prop retaining nuts were loose; one could be turned by hand!

Other airmen corrected our battery, voltage regulator, and

radio problems, while another group went to work on No. 3 engine. Some of the men were youngsters fresh from tech schools, others were veterans who hadn't seen a B-24 since 1945, but all seemed to get enormous satisfaction out of helping to get the old bird back to the country of its birth.

Rain Through the Roof

Rome was the next destination on the flight plan, but a lowering ceiling forced us to cruise the Italian Boot at low altitude and a rain squall over Rome caused us to turn back to Capodichino Airport in Naples. That scenic, on-the-deck tour of the beautiful Italian coast was one of the highlights of the trip; it's a wonderful way to see Italy.

Weather over the Mediterranean caused a layover of two nights in Napoli, but on the day after Easter we lifted off for the run into Madrid, encountering rain squalls enroute which forced us to the deck several times and enabled us to get beautiful views of Sardinia and Mallorca. A couple of times we took in so much water we began to wonder if we were in a sinking submarine; B-24s are like sieves and water comes in from all directions. Kent was kept quite busy trying to stop the leaks in the cockpit area, but it was a losing battle.

Encountering the Spanish coast near Valencia, we were treated to a closeup inspection of olive orchards, ancient farm houses, and interesting terrain as we threaded our way up a canyon toward a saddleback where daylight could be seen. Sometime after crossing the hills, Madrid appeared on the horizon, and after a beautiful low pass and chandelle, Colonel Svendsen greased it in at Torrejon AFB.

Bomb Bay Tank

Learning that a bomb bay tank had been found by Allied Aircraft Sales at a small strip near Greybull, Wyoming, the idea of flying to Africa, Ascension Island, Brazil, and Miami was abandoned and the crew settled down to the task of preparing the engines and radios for the trip across the central Atlantic.

Again the effort was carried out with the assistance of a host of volunteers who swarmed all over the B-24, checking and correcting all items which might cause problems on a long over-water hop. Eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of their labor can be seen in the fuel consumption figures: between India and Spain the four R-1830s had gulped 235 gallons per hour, but from Torrejon to Tucson the figure was only 199 GPH.

In the meantime the tank had been trucked by Allied into Billings, flown by the Air Reserve into Kansas City, then carried free of charge by Trans World Airlines to Madrid. Once the installation of the tank was complete, the homeward journey was resumed.

Crisis: Engines Quit

Not far off the coast of Portugal the only crisis of the trip developed when Sgt. Kent commenced transferring fuel from the bomb bay tank into the wing tanks. As the tank neared the empty mark, air was pumped into the lines, causing momentary fuel starvation of 1 and 4 alternatively.

Svendsen and Boggs spent a very busy minute or so apply-