

ROYCE WILLIAMS ¹

February 21, 1994

Dear Lou,

I'm always surprised when I get a phone call from you. You must play Russian roulette with your phone directory.

So I said I had finally and recently written a blurb about my Soviet encounter. The enclosures were sent to a Captain Rodgers on request. I think he is the editor for the Naval Air Museum's newsletter. I included a letter with a lot of bio data. Well I haven't heard a peep from him so I don't know what to make of that.

Because of the security classification assigned the encounter way back when, I didn't probe to learn what else was known. As time went on it lost significance. I'm not in touch with Middleton or Rowlands but if there is anything printed there might be some new light shed on the matter by somebody.

Anyway

Cheers!

/s/ Royce

Soviet MIGS: November 18, 1952 . . revisited

Task Force 77, (4 carriers and numerous other combatant ships) arrived in the cover of the night and weather off Chongin, North Korea. I was a "Pacemaker," VF-781, soon to be renumbered VF-121. We flew the then new F9F-5 Panther. I flew on the early morning strike targeting the industrial complex of Hoeryong, North Korea. We learned after recovering aboard USS Oriskany that quite a hornet's nest of air activity was stirred up in the Soviet Vladivostok area, about 100 miles from our force. Because of this, the planned follow-on strikes were delayed for a period of assessment.

I was rescheduled for a combat air patrol flight. We dressed in the MK-5 "poopy-suit." The force was under a low overcast and it was snowing. The sea was cold and the waves were building with strong winds. The flight make-up was Lt. Elwood, division lead; Ltjg Middleton, wing; Lt. Williams, section lead; and Ltjg Rowlands, wing. This was not the regular division in that none of us had trained together as a team. We were briefed by the squadron Air Intelligence Officer who reminded us, "MIGs never fly over water." We grabbed our helmets, oxygen masks and camera film, and manned our planes.

The launch was limited to our four F9's. We joined as a flight under the overcast and then climbed. While climbing through about eight thousand feet we, received a vector from our Combat Information Center "for bogeys." We arrived on top at twelve thousand

¹ Letter to Lou Ives February 21, 1994

feet and I "Tally-hoed" contrails about 30 miles north, very high, and headed directly toward us. Combat confirmed that they were our bogeys. The division lead reported a fuel warning light, and so I continued to climb with my wingman while the other section remained at about fifteen thousand feet.

As the bogeys passed directly over me, I could clearly see their plan view and counted and reported 7 MIGS (MiG-15s). The MIGS reversed course, returning north of us. They were 30 or 40 miles from us when they split into two flights of 3 and 4, turned in opposite directions, and began descending. As they dropped below the contrail level I reported lost contact, and Combat said that they had faded from their gadget. They instructed me to level and reverse course for a position to hold a barrier between the last MIG contact and the task force. My wingman and I were at 26 thousand feet, about sixty miles from land and clearly over international waters.

In our left turn I spotted four MIGS at my 10 o'clock position, slightly strung out in a loose trail and all firing. I reported "MIGS closing at 10 o'clock" and yo-yoed up and hard left, dropping behind number 4 [MiG]. My guns² and radar were on and ready and the guns had been test fired. I put the piper on target and fired. The smoking MIG rolled out of formation, descending. I reported the hit to Combat and was sternly advised, "Do not engage." I reported that we were engaging and was then told, "Go get 'em." I wasn't immediately aware, but my wingman dropped down with the MIG.

I followed the remaining [MiG] section leader, but he pulled up and away and, as I lost him in the sun, I saw the lead and wingman attacking from my 1 o'clock. Lead was firing but at an extreme range. I turned into them to meet them head-on. The lead MIG broke off, but his wingman continued to close and was firing. I fired a long burst and we both broke away at a range of at least one thousand feet.

I believe the other three MIGS joined the fray at this point. The MIG that had been firing passed to my right, and as I looked hard in that direction I spotted the next attacker coming up fast and firing at my 5 o'clock position. I pulled hard right and kicked a hard reverse, putting me in firing position. The MIG was pulling away from me fast, but as 20MMs hit him I had to pull up right to miss the MIG and MIG pieces.

I was turning and squirming, firing bursts when I could. I found later, when I removed my immersion suit that I had rubbed my neck raw on the rubber gasket and was bleeding from all the thrashing about.

I got another MIG smoking and, although the range was a bit extreme and opening, I continued to try to track and continued firing. I then noticed a MIG closing me at my 7 o'clock and reversed my turn to the right. I had a lot of right rudder and my foot shot forward as the MIG hit me in the turn from quite a high angle off.

I notified Combat of my plight and said "I could use some help up here."

I could see the heavy cloud cover back toward the task force and well below me. Fortunately I was pointed in that direction. I was still at full throttle but my "panther" was sluggish. I didn't know it then but learned later that the MIG's 35MM had made a sieve

² The F9F had four 20mm Oerlikon cannons grouped in the nose.

of my engine's accessory section so I lost my hydraulics and the rudder cables were severed.

I looked behind me as best I could and used my rear view mirrors. The MIG settled at my six at about 600 feet range, but there was a panther behind him. I was my wingman, guns jammed and camera not working. He explained to me later that he was hoping to scare the MIG off and that the pictures he thought he was taking would help to explain to Cam (my wife) what had happened.

The MIG fired his 35MM and 23MMs as we dove from 26 to 12 thousand feet. I could see the tracers and even the 35MM rounds fly above and below me as I pushed hard forward and pulled hard back on the stick. The elevator seemed to be my only effective control.

All three of us, MIG, wingman and I penetrated the thick clouds. I lost sight of all airplanes and, after a few moments to regroup, I concentrated on the instruments. I came back on the throttle and glided in a shallow descent. I reported to Combat while trying to evaluate my plane's condition. I was vectored to "home plate." When I was under the overcast I fired a short burst, the last of my ammo. I wasn't at all sure that I wouldn't be ditching so I wanted to be as light as possible. Luckily the fighting was over, because I didn't have much ammo remaining.

Of course, all the ships of the task force were at general quarters. This presented a problem until I was visually identified and all firing stopped. I was given a "Charlie ten." All carriers had their decks spotted for one big strike and the task force was to head south . . . but it got canceled and the Oriskany was hurriedly moving aircraft to prepare a "ready deck" as I flew low over her.

My arms were tired from having to hold heavy pressures that I couldn't trim out. Because of my damage, I was going to be the first to be recovered. I was about 6 miles behind the ship when I received a "Charlie" (cleared to land). Because of the difficulty I was having maneuvering, I wasn't at all sure that I could line up with the precision it takes to land on a carrier. And there was a heavy pitching of the deck, but the strong winds that caused that were a blessing in that I was coming in hot, about 160Kts. The ship's captain [Courtney Shands] not only approved my excessive speed that I needed for control, but when I couldn't line up, angling, he turned the ship at the last moment, which I believe put me on board, not over the side. I was lucky to get my gear down with the emergency air bottle, and my hook was down . . . OK 2 wire. The LSO and the ship's captain did a great job.

I got myself through the x-ray fittings [doors] and into the ready room. There were a bunch of smiling faces, but all was quiet. The Air Intel. Officer had them promise to be quiet until he had completed the debrief. The teletype screen had some data gleaned by CIC from radio communications regarding the engagement. Other than reading that and getting out of the "poopy suit," I just waited with the rest until the other three planes of the flight were recovered; the AIO didn't want to start the debrief until all were present. In the meantime, pressure was building with the squawkbox screaming for a report right now! . . . quoting the power of several higher authorities anxious to know.

It took some time for all to be assembled. The AIO started off with the flight leader. Bits and pieces of this and that came out, but with the squawk box blaring, the AIO had

to cut and run. He filled us in on the report when he returned; and we were instructed to stick to it; it's official. The report was, in general: Williams, one kill and one probable; Middleton, one kill; Rowlands, one damaged. Later when the C.O. returned (he was launched just before our recovery as a CAP relief), he was briefed by the AIO. To me he reiterated, stick with the report.

In due time when the gun camera film was processed, The processor felt he could make a cleaner copy by editing, by getting rid of any poor quality – cutting and splicing. At a later time when I was an exchange pilot instructing at the Fighter Weapons School, Nellis, AFB, we reviewed my copy of the film, such as it was. Again later, when I was instructing at the Fleet Air Gunnery Unit (FAGU), and we came to an inconclusive but different conclusion than that of the official report.

A few days after the MIG encounter, the Oriskany arrived in port at Yokosuka, Japan. I was contacted by a friend of mine who was then serving on the staff of VADM Briscoe, Commander, Naval Forces, Far East. Responding to his request I visited COMNAVFE headquarters. He introduced me to the admiral who wanted to know “what’s with the story?” He informed me of the top secret nature of his information (back channel reports from the USS Helena, stationed near the MIG bases), and by their assessment he believed that I had shot down at least 3 MIGS.

Back at the squadron, I reported to my commanding officer regarding my visit and the Admiral’s comments. “But,” my skipper said, “you’d better stick with the official report.” He did however, let me put 3 red stars in my log book. That the incident had been initiated by the Soviets and that we were sure of it because of classified sources seemed to put a hush on most of the episode, but the Hong Kong papers had a more complete report the next day.

(See addendum, reports and comments),

Soviet MIGS, November 18, 1952 . . . revisited

ADDENDUM: I have avoided naming names and claims. My intention is to report what I saw and did. I have reported in essence to others what I have reported here, accepted in the main with interest but with a “so what?” If anyone knows the absolute fact about the “enemy” losses, it surely would be the Russians. They may even be willing to tell all . . . now. I have heard rumors about the mood in their “O” club, 11/18/52. I have had intelligence “insiders” tell “there is more.” But then it doesn’t make any real difference now, what was done was done . . . and I survived. Tit, tat, toe; (?) at a blow.

I have not been contacted by any writers/historians with the exception of Malcolm Cagle, VADM, USN (Ret.). What had appeared in American reports seems to have been selected from the not highly classified “Official Report.”

Two versions of the 1952 MIG event were reported in “Carrier Admiral” by Admiral J.J. “Jocko” Clark, USN (Ret.). and in “The Naval Air War in Korea” by Richard P. Hallion. Mr. Hallion must have done a lot of research, but mainly he reflects unclassified action reports. I cannot vouch for roles assigned Ltjgs Middleton and Rowlands in that I did not witness their involvement except as reported in the attached.

At the end of November, 1952 Ltjg Middleton, Ltjg Rowlands, and I were flown to the USMC Air Base at Pohang, South Korea. I met with LGen. Jerome there and awaited the arrival of VAdm. J.J. Clark. From there Middleton, Rowlands, and I accompanied Adm. Clark to Seoul and we attended a quite well reported meeting with President Elect Eisenhower that lasted about forty five minutes to one hour. Also in attendance were: SecDef (design.) C. Wilson, Amb. Murphy, CJCS, Gen. O. Bradley, CJCS (design.) Adm. Radford, Gen. Mark Clark, Gen Van Fleet, Gen Ridgway, Gen. Barcus, Gen. Weyland, VAdm. Clark and Maj. John Eisenhower.

The day following the Seoul meeting, we Pacemakers were flown by COD back to the Oriskany on station.

- ★ ★ ★ -