



Insignia for the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing.



TORNADO DOWN!

DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF THE KOREAN WAR, HISTORY'S FIRST JET BOMBER VERSUS JET FIGHTER COMBAT TOOK PLACE DURING A SECRET RECONNAISSANCE MISSION

BY ADAM STANTON

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Captain Charles E. McDonough looked out from his cockpit into a clear Chinese sky that he knew could quickly turn extremely hostile. The date was 4 December 1950 and the 31-year-old pilot was flying North American Aviation RB-45C Tornado USAF 48-015 operating with call sign of Charlie Randall Able (carrying nose art and the name *Timely Exposure*) and it was loaded with the most advanced intelligence-gathering gear of the time period.

What was a Tornado, the first all-jet USAF bomber, doing in these hostile skies? Originally, the RB-45C was not going to be classified as Initially Operationally Capable (IOC) until mid-1951. North American was planning to deliver operational variants of the recon-modification in late 1950 and these would be for crew and maintenance training purposes. However, any set-in-stone plans for the RB-45C were thrown out the window when North Korean forces poured into

South Korea on 25 June 1950, setting off the Korean War. The invasion caught American and Allied intelligence completely by surprise.

At Yokota Air Base in Japan, the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (SRS) was based as part of the Far East Air Force (FEAF) and when the invasion started, the unit was equipped with a few Lockheed RF-80 Shooting Stars and Boeing RB-29A photo-recon/electronic intelligence aircraft. Obviously, there was an immediate

There was nothing revolutionary about the RB-45C but it did provide a platform for the USAF to carry out recon missions against the communists during the early days of the Korean War.