

PLANEGRAM

MICKEY PILOT

This is a story that was pulled out of:

Lightning Strikes issue July 2011, P-38 National Association by John Deden

I (Richard Reade) as a former F-5 photo reconnaissance pilot, had similar moments and excitement during trips over Japan and Korea.

- John's World War II memories shared in the November issue of *Lightning Strike* rekindled some of more memories. Here is a short version of the story.

In late 1944 - 1945, I, along with eight other guys, served at Bari, Italy, with the 15th Air Force's 5th Photo Reconnaissance Group, 15th Photo Recon Sq., flying P-38L/F-5Es. We had gone through PR P-38 training together at Will Rogers Field in Oklahoma City.

Sometime after we arrived, we were provided with two "Dropp Snoot"/Mickey" radar-equipped P-38s. These Mickey planes had the elongated, bulbous nose of opaque fiberglass. Inside the

nose, seated in cramped quarters entered by a small hatch on the pod's bottom, was the Mickey operator, a trained officer navigator/bombardier from a bomber group. The navigator would determine the courses and targets, with the "pilot-in-command" flying the Mickey P-38. Usually these missions were flown in instrument weather, to hopefully avoid any chance of interception. In front of the navigation were the controls for the medium-range ground-scanning radar. The transmitter/receiver "dish" was located in the fiberglass dome. It scanned the ground for navigation purposes and to establish bombing target information.

The mission profile was that the pilot would fly the plane to the IP (initial point) of a normal bomb run. From there the navigator would guide the pilot to the correct heading and altitude for a "bomb run" while he took pictures of his radar

scope showing the ground track to the target and the target itself. After the mission the pictures would be delivered to 15th AF Headquarters (also at Bari) for reproduction and disbursement to various bomb groups, where navigators and bombardiers would use them to lead bobber squadrons to the targets in cases where they would be obscured by clouds-for, as it was known then, "bombing-through-overcast."

After my Mickey navigator and I finished our target runs, as I was leaving the Vienna area I ran out of fuel in my 160-gallon drop tanks so I elected to jettison them to reduce drag and get a bit more mileage out of the fuel we had left, as it would be a close thing. I notified the navigator so if there was the usual rattle, jerking and/or banging he wouldn't be frightened. "Ok, drop 'em." So

continued inside

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I did. One went clean but one hung up a bit, then with the usual shake it released and we began the trip home.

All of a sudden my tail-warning radar alarm started screaming, so-instant reflex-I did a half wingover to the left into the cloud bank. As we pitched over and down I looked back, and right beside us cruises my last drop tan! It was the "bogie"!

Then it was into the clouds for a 10,000 foot recovery maneuver and back to on-top, instruments scrambled. I asked the navigator for a steer to home. He gave me a heading-like" turn right and fly this heading" - which I did. After about ten minutes I realized that the sun was in the wrong place for the time of day and ours required an almost due south course. I questioned nav, who asserted that we were on the right heading. Many years before as a teenager my father had taught me how to find my way through woods and forests, day or night. From his teaching I knew the sun was in the wrong place, so I climbed 45,000 feet

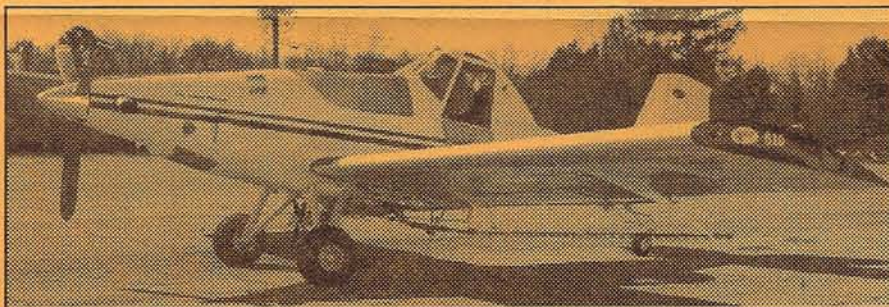
and began calling our Italian homing station. After a few minutes a faint voice requested that I make a very long call, which I did.

Then the faint voice told me to turn left 90 degrees and call again in ten minutes. Now the sun is in the right place but nav is very unhappy.

Ten minutes later I called again and the now-stronger voice requested a slight course change. This continued for the next half hour, by which time we should be nearing the Yugoslav coast on the Adriatic Sea, so I requested let-down clearance from the 14,000 foot mountains near the coast. Homer provided the

info so I could clear the mountains and safely let down over the sea, which I did. I got some worries as we reached the last forecasted ceiling for Bari of 2,500 feet and could see the heavy waves of the sea. On into Bari. Homer brought me in about one mile from the end of the runway. Perfect! On the ground with a bit of fuel left over (about 25 gallons, I was told).

Later, while meeting with homer personnel to thank them, I was told the "recovery" was the farthest out ever accomplished to their knowledge. I thanked them profusely, as if I had obeyed my navigator I would have ended up in Berlin!



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