

CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH A FASTMOVER AT ROVING SANDS 97

By Steve Douglass

Roswell is an interesting place. Even without its UFO history. Located just across the mountains from Holloman AFB and the White Sands



Missile Range the skies over Roswell are filled with flying things.

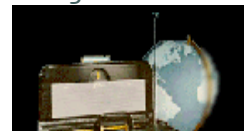
Even when Roving Sands is not in session, military aircraft take advantage of the long expansive runways at RIAC to practice touch and go, stop to refuel or just buzz the place in mock bombing attacks. F-117s flying in the pattern at RIAC are not an uncommon sight as are various military aircraft temporarily stationed there on transient alert. I once watched an unmanned Q-106 drone fly over the base at low level, followed by an F-86 chase plane.

But during Roving Sands, the place is a flying circus. The Navy side of the base becomes a landlocked aircraft carrier, complete with arresting wires, an optical landing system (called the Ball) with F-14s, F-18s, E2-C Hawkeyes and EA-6B Prowlers lined up on a side parking area just as they would be on a carrier deck.

During the wargames, overhead, KC-135s and KC-10s circle the town endlessly, refueling everything from stealths to B-52s.

It is also a military monitor's wet dream. The airwaves are crowded with the squawks and chatter of military aircraft and ground units engaged in a mock Armageddon. You'll find them communicating throughout the bands, shortwave from microwave.

Tactical ground communications could be found on the VHF low bands (30 to 70 MHz) with most of the air to



air stuff found on the UHF 225 to 400 MHz bands.



But if you want to get the full picture, you have to monitor and search every band, even those that aren't reserved for military communications. Marines and Army units could be found communicating on the VHF military mobile frequencies ranging from 136 to 148 MHz. We even found navy air to air combat chatter in that range. Military commanders could be heard violating COMSEC rules and blabbing their warplans over hundreds of active cellular phone frequencies. Seems they were more concerned with convenience than security.

Terry, Ken, Chris, Meinrad and myself took the time to search out and find as many Roving Sands related communications channels as we could find. Like an intelligence unit, each of us would concentrate on searching through one particular frequency band. Fortunately we had more than enough radios to accomplish this. From our monitoring we were able to deduce more about what was really going on at Roving Sands than if we were briefed by the military itself.

It all came together during night air strikes. By monitoring the proper channels, we were able to construct in our heads a three dimensional view of the war taking place in the skies over New Mexico. The Interceptors became walking talking virtual radar sets, probably more aware of what was going on in the air than most commanders on the ground.

Callsigns helped identify the players and we kept close track of who everyone was. We began hoping for certain players, who were always returning early, shot down by virtual missiles, to do better on the next sortie. When things became confusing, we would listen in on the White force judges in their AWACS and flying command posts providing a play by play. Using maps of the area we could sort out where the war was taking place and who was attacking who.

Sometimes we held our breath for returning aircraft, declaring an emergency because of an equipment malfunction. We would watch the emergency equipment rollout and cross our fingers until the pilot was down safely.

And sometimes we had a few chuckles. I remember one Red Force pilot, breaking with radio protocol, laughing and reporting on the radio

for everyone to hear, "Man this is better than sex. I can't believe we get paid to do this!", His comments were seconded by a chorus of anonymous microphone clicks, a form of radio applause.

One night we couldn't help but chuckle when we heard Stallion Control at WSMR say, " who ever is dropping bombs on Red Rio .. desist immediately. You are dropping on your colonel!"

But always, and being Interceptors, we kept our ears open for those aircraft we couldn't readily identify.. the bat planes, secret stealth aircraft thrown into the fray to see how well they could be integrated with conventional forces. At some point they had to use them. If they were so secret that commander couldn't risk using them for fear of disclosing their existance, then they were worthless.

Although by now it was quite clear to the military that every year Interceptors were in the area, I was continually surprised what secret aircraft they would trot out for us to see. Either they didn't care or wanted us to know intentionally.

For example, on one night at Roswell, the Interceptors and the Aussie film crew were camped out on the perimeter fence watching a night strike in progress. We were watched by security patrols very closely. How did we know? We could see them and monitored their communications.

At one point the Australians did a very stupid thing putting us again in hot water while disclosing our presence to everyone and anyone in the area and yet we still saw amazing things.

We were just outside of the base, set up on the end of one of the runways. It was after 9:00 PM and we were watching the skies waiting for the inevitable fly over by recon aircraft that happened after every strike. Until then we had only heard them, hampered by an annoying thin overcast that kept us from seeing anything flying at high altitude. But tonight we had high hopes. The sky was clear and beautiful. The comet Hale-Bopp shone with breathtaking beauty.



Not wanting to attract any attention, I told the Discovery Channel crew to shoot only available light or with their night vision equipment, which they did. We were interviewed at length about Roving Sands and black aircraft and why a bunch of get-a-life-guys

were standing out in the desert looking for aircraft our government assures us don't exist.

As Terry set up a tripod with camera attached the place suddenly lit up like a Broadway opening. The bonehead camera crew had turned on huge klieg lights and were shining them down the runway. More than pissed I confronted the crew and ordered the lights turned off.

Minutes later a UH-1 helicopter lifted off from the Navy side of the base and began flying along the fence line. It shone a bright spotlight on us and hovered there, trying to dust us.

We waved and tried our best to look harmless but soon an approaching sheriff's's car told us that we had been perceived as a threat. Again we were treated with the unwanted attention of a spotlight shone in our faces, this time by an angry peace officer who, had probably been summoned by the military away from his television to find out who these yahoos were and what they were up to.

We identified ourselves as journalists covering Roving Sands and this seemed to calm him down. He just loved the Discovery Channel and watched it on many occasions. He seemed genuinely pleased to find celebrities on his beat and actually joined in for a few minutes, watching the aircraft come and go and telling us a few stories of the strange things he had seen in the sky.

After a few minutes the sheriff left. We monitored him calling the tower at Roswell and assuring them we were just a TV film crew and not terrorists.

By ten o'clock most of the fighters had returned to Roswell. We anxiously scanned the skies and the airwaves for any bat planes that might be sent on recon runs over Roswell, but because of the unwanted attention we had garnered we really didn't expect to see anything.

Minutes later a very high flying but moderately slow aircraft overflowed the base. It was clear from his cruciform shape, easy to see against Hale Bop's glowing tail, that it was a U-2. This was confirmed by monitoring the scanner. Talking to WSMR controllers he identified himself by the callsign PINON, a standard U-2 identifier.

Moments after the U-2 cleared the area we were overflowed again. This time our visitor was much faster and much higher. Although we heard no sonic boom, monitoring the scanner again confirmed his identity, the callsign ASPEN, indicated it was an SR-71 Blackbird. He would fly northeast to loudly boom my home base at Amarillo, prompting

many calls to the police and press. ([Amarillo Globe News Story](#))

But the heart-stopping climax was yet to come. As we were preparing to call it a night we had another visitor. Whatever it was, it made the SR-71 flyover look like a pedestrian crawl by comparison.

At an amazing speed the craft overflowed the Interceptors and RIAC. One solitary light giving away its presence. Nothing was heard, probably due to the craft's extreme altitude. It wasn't a satellite, because it followed almost exactly the same flight path of the SR-71 and the U-2 and didn't fade away to nothing like we had seen satellites do when losing the light of the sun.



Plus, whatever this fast flyer was, it was manned! Captured by the scanner for the Interceptors to hear was this short communication; " WSMR, this is ASTRID ..on my mark .. now at D P 12.... mark."

The Interceptors were more than thrilled. I looked over at the Discovery Channel crew, hoping they had captured the images of the fast flyer with their night vision camera equipped with an extreme telephoto lens. They had not. They had been taking a break and missed the shot.

Well, I said, "at least I have a dozen witnesses."

P>

[return to main menu](#)

[back to top](#)