From the Right Seat

Pete Rafle CFII, ATP

(continued)

As a Naval Aviator, I was flying P3B Orions while assigned to a patrol squadron. We were deployed to Okinawa as well as other bases in the Western Pacific theater of operations or West-Pac. When based in Naha, Okinawa, an important assignment of the Squadron was to fly a daily Taiwan Straits patrol to “show the flag” and enforce the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty. The mission was to fly a track that passed between Taiwan and mainland China twice during the 8 plus hour flight.

As we approached the northern tip of Taiwan that day, the radar operator reported an airborne target on a constant bearing. This meant an intercept or join up. I told the lookouts to man the windows and radar to give me updates on the other aircraft’s position. I also called the nearest Ground Radar station

(GCI) to advise him of the situation. He stated that he had us on radar and that the other aircraft was an ROC F- 5 practicing interceptions. He also said that they rarely made voice contact. He would follow us on radar and wished me a good day.

Suddenly, the F-5 appeared off my port wing, the helmet and oxygen masked pilot looking at me. The F-5 maintained his position off my wingtip. I called the ordinanceman in the galley to bring up a coffee pot and a cup. When the confused sailor arrived with the pot and cup, I took the cup and poured the coffee into it, in full view of the fighter pilot out there to my left. I lifted the cup in a salute to him and took a sip. For a short while he just kept looking at me. Then, he banked sharply to the left went to full throttle and climbed away. The GCI controller came on the frequency. “Your friend left rather suddenly, what did you do?”, he asked. I said, “We just thanked him for breaking the monotony of a long patrol.”