

WAR STORIES

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609TCS, 1972-75
81TCF, 1977-81

While assigned to radar maintenance in the early 1970s (before microwave ovens became commonplace) I had always heard of someone cooking a chicken by tying it to the radar antenna in front of the feedhorn. The rumor said that it was cooked to perfection within a few short minutes. This rumor was quite popular among radar maintenance troops but I never did meet anyone who had actually done it.

But what I DO have personal experience with is a trick that we used while on deployment. Most exercises were around-the-clock gigs which meant that radar maintenance had to have at least one member assigned during the night hours to monitor the radar in case it kicked off in the middle of a mission. (The TPS-43 radar was notorious for two intermittent transmitter faults that were easily reset but, nevertheless, were nuisances to uninterrupted operation: "Waveguide Arc" and Trigger Amp Overload.") One thing that every 303X2 (now 2E0X1) learned early on is that the high RF power of the radar is capable of lighting up a standard 4ft fluorescent light tube if it is close enough to the antenna. The tube doesn't have to be wired up to anything either. The radar's RF is capable of exciting the tube's fluorescent gas and making it glow entirely through radiated energy. Therefore, it wasn't uncommon to see a glowing fluorescent tube doing circles in the dark on the antenna's sail so the radar troop on duty could join in the evening card game back at the tent. An occasional peek at the antenna would reveal whether the radar was radiating or had tripped off.

And speaking of card games, during the summer of 1973, I was sent to augment a TAC Control Squadron on deployment. (The numeral designator of the unit has long been forgotten but I remember that the deployed location was at a town called Red Level, Alabama.) It was an interesting assignment for an A1C and I seem to recall that the 4 week TDY was kinda fun. Anyway, I remember that the card table that the officers used had an interesting story behind it:

It seems that the commander of the unit and his officers had a beautiful marble table that they carried with them whenever they deployed so that they could "play their evening poker game in a style befitting an officer's game." Supposedly, since the table had a real marble top and not the "fiberglass" marble that is so common for bathroom vanities these days, the officer's card table was very expensive. However, somewhere along the line, someone made an issue about the officers having a nonstandard item on a deployment and that the bright colors of the table made a mockery of the unit's camouflaging efforts. So they spray painted their expensive marble table olive drab.