



*“There I Was...”*  
*F-106 Delta Dart Stories*



# An Air Traffic Controller at Osan AB 1968

by  
Greg Combs

**I** was an air traffic controller at Castle AFB, CA from 1966-70. All B-52 and KC-135 pilots trained at Castle at the time. We likely had the largest inventory of each plane. We also had to our delight a squadron of F-106 Delta Darts [84<sup>th</sup> FIS]. While the big planes practiced low approaches, touch-and-goes, taxi-backs and all kinds of high altitude approaches we mixed in these fighters with their speed, reputation and good looks as they blended into our traffic with dramatic takeoffs and special 360 overhead landings.

In January 1968 the North Koreans captured the USS Pueblo. The Air Force reasoned that the response would require the replacement Korean controllers at U.S. bases then rushed several of us there to handle the dramatic rise in the variety and huge jump in traffic. Korean controllers were very capable but not prepared for what was coming in that their limited use of the English language might fail them when under duress.

I was assigned to Osan AB Korea, which went overnight from a sleepy spot away from the Vietnam battles south to a high adrenaline American base on a war footing.

Another arrival at Osan was a squadron of F-106's [from the 318 FIS, McChord AFB WA], the first time (we were told) the plane had been deployed overseas [this was the first of five F-106 FIS' to deploy here during the Pueblo incident]. Being familiar with the plane as part of traffic I was happy they were coming. In the first days of February, they were near, and we began helping with their arrival. It went well except for one member of the group. I will never forget our alarm when a lone [F-106] pilot lost his radio and some other electronics. As the 106's left altitude and found the way to their new home {at Osan} a lone target continued due north, passing above us at altitude and quickly approached the border with North Korea. The pilot surely could not hear us or his mates. As he crossed the international line we watched helplessly. Then he began a wide turn inside enemy airspace, and our supervisor was already giving a play-by-play to colonels and anxious generals. No enemy radar targets appeared, and our newest colleague got his ride turned around and headed south. The rest was uneventful except for those few minutes becoming an international "incident," about which each of us responded to an AF inquiry.

To this day I am really not sure if this was accidental, [because] I can hear planners telling the F-106 commander to send a bird north to see what the enemy would do if caught by surprise and also to let the North Koreans know that the Darts had arrived.

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