

Bears off the Coast of Alaska

As reported in the news last week, there were Russian Bears flying off the coast of Alaska. Bear is the code name for the Russian Tu-95 bomber. The name Bear starting with a B indicates it is a bomber and since it is only one syllable it means a propeller driven aircraft. The Badger, two syllables is a TU-16 Jet powered bomber. We watched radar tracking of both aircraft while I was stationed in northern Japan. Bears made routine flights near Alaska during that time similar to the US RB-57 flights off the coast of Russia. Air surveillance between the US and Russia is a very common occurrence. When Larry Nicholson and I do presentations to high school students about the Cold War and Vietnam War, we talk about Bears flying off the US coastline. Submarine and 'fishing trawler' surveillance is also very common. Occasionally, we hear about one or more of them off the eastern coast. The Tu-95 is a large, four-engine turboprop-powered strategic bomber and missile platform. First flown in 1952, the Tu-95 entered service with the Soviet Union in 1956. Its age is about the same as our B-52 bomber, however the B-52 is jet powered. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Tu-95 is that it has contra-rotating propellers on each of its four engines. One set of props go one way the other set go the other way. I understand it is a very loud aircraft. It is the only propeller-powered strategic bomber still in operational use today. Should we be worried about Bears flying off the coast of Alaska? I don't think so. We should be much more concerned about the leader of North Korea. Speaking of North Korea, I have to comment on the Armada moving toward North Korea. It actually was going in the other direction. Also the most well-known Armada was the Spanish Armada and we all know what happened to it. It was soundly defeated by the British. Seriously, North Korea does pose a significant threat to its neighbors and the US. There are no easy solutions when dealing with North Korea.

On a much more serious topic and as we celebrate Vietnam Week, here are some facts about the Vietnam Wall. There are 58,267 names on the wall. Of those, 33,103 were 18 years old, 12 were 17, and 5 were 16. There are 3 sets of fathers and sons on the wall. 997 were killed their first day in 'Nam, 1,448 were killed on their last day. 8 women, all nurses are on the wall. There were 244 soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor during the war and 153 of them are on the wall. Please remember those soldiers and when you see a person wearing a Vietnam hat, shirt or jacket, please thank them for their service.