

The *Suzie Lee* orbited quietly at 11,500 feet on its assigned station slightly north west of Las Vegas. Her pilot, Major B. J. Allred, knew that the old bombers days were numbered and the time was short. But one of the last operational B-29's was still a capable bird, still in the air, and from the point of view of her pilot, she was still everything she was meant to be.

The *Suzie Lee* had seen action in the Pacific with the 21<sup>st</sup> Air Force. She had dropped her bombs on the Japanese home islands and participated in the firebombing of Tokyo on March 9, 1945. Unlike other birds of her vintage she had lived to tell the tale. She was still sweet, after all these years. Like his high school sweet heart, she was still the girl he would always remember, still the first kiss, still the first in his heart, and among the first to deliver her payload of death.

But this flight, perhaps her operational last, above the Nevada desert, was unique in a way that no other '29 would ever match. Her bomb bay doors were welded shut; their payload was unlike any she had ever delivered, more ruthless and more complex than any bomb to fall on Europe; more deadly than any that was dropped onto Japan except the contributions of the [Enola Gay](#) and the [Bockscar](#). Secured in her bomb bay was the most powerful radar transmitter ever taken aloft, and the power supply to run it. The wave guides alone were five inches square and encased in a ceramic shield since they would heat to nearly 400 degrees when used. The bombardier position, directly forward of the cockpit, was stripped of instrumentation and contained a parabolic dish used to discharge the deadly electromagnetic bolt. During tests it had cooked birds as they flew.

Allred quietly monitored the chatter from half a dozen radar stations scattered across the desert. He traced a lazy circle in the sky, waiting for the moment of contact that may or may not come.

"Blackbird 14, this is Nellis control. I have a contact bearing 012 range 51 miles."

"I'm on it." The navigator quickly plotted the contact and then said, "Bearing 093 range 19 mile, angels 15."

Allred glanced at his watch, 0458 hours, 8 minutes until detonation. He pointed the nose up a little, turned right to 093 degrees, and added power. The big bird responded well and began to close the distance to both the disk and the bomb. "Call out the range."

"Range now 13 miles and closing."

"We can fire at 9 miles."

"Range now 11 miles."

The co-pilot toggled the transmitter from stand-by and powered it up. In a moment he announced, "Full power."

"Range 10 miles."

The next minute was crucial. If the disk became aware that it was under attack, it could easily flee, open the gap, and avoid being hit. It was an agonizing exercise in time and distance. If they were too close when the atomic bomb detonated, the shock wave could tear the plane apart. If they were too far away from the target, their weapon would be ineffective

"Range 8 miles."

Despite his anxiety Allred's professionalism and many years of service won out. He simply whispered, "Fire."

The co-pilot triggered the transmitter. A burst of microwave energy leaped from the antenna. Traveling at light speed, it impacted the disk almost immediately. It also

blew out the circuit breakers in the B-29, which powered down all 4 engines. The crew had practiced what to do in this event and the flight engineer immediately began struggling to restart them. Allred turned the nose south and began trading height for speed. It was a dangerous maneuver, since he had no engines, but the bomb ...

Frenchman's Flat Nevada, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0505 hours.

*As the first faint streaks of dawn poked over the distant hills the blast came. A vivid flash of light pierced the desert darkness and lighted up the entire countryside. It lasted but a moment or two then was gone. All eyes turned toward the spot where the bomb had exploded. They saw a big ball of furiously churning fire, smoke, sand and debris rapidly rising from the ground in huge, rolling waves. The afterglow remained for several minutes while the mushroom cloud continued to rise then drift away and apart. Then sun was still below the horizon but daylight was coming fast. Broad streaks of sunlight slanted over the mountaintops like ghostly fingers clawing at the heavens. Rumbling of the shock wave continued for nearly five minutes, bouncing back and forth from one mountain wall to another. [\(Nevada Highways & Parks3, no2, "Observation Shot Project", \(Jun-Dec 1953\): 3-16 \)](#)*

The device named 'Harry', part of a series of tests collectively called Operation Upshot-Knothole, detonated. The system was 66 inches long, 56 inches in diameter and weighed 8,000 pounds. This particular design, using a large heavy bomb to get an efficient yield out a small amount of radioactive material, was never incorporated into operational thermonuclear weapons. As the supply of fissile material grew the design became obsolete.

'Harry' was notable, however, for a different reason. Of the cumulative total of 85,000 person-roentgens of gamma exposure produced at the Nevada Proving Ground over the lifetime of above ground testing, Harry contributed 30,000 all by himself.

The operation exposed military personnel to radiation more aggressively than previous tests. Observation by military formations was conducted at a minimum safe distance, but for some, it was not their first rodeo. 84 men exceeded the annual limit of 3.3 rems over an 11 week period. The highest exposure was 26.6 rems. The exposures did not produce symptoms; they simply increased the lifetime risk of cancer a small amount.

The effect on the civilian population living downwind from the test site was much worse. Upshot-Knothole released 35,000 kilo curies of a radioactive form of iodine, Iodine<sup>131</sup>. The half-life of Iodine<sup>131</sup> is 8 days, which means a quantity of it will remain radioactive for 80.7 days. The iodine was blown on the prevailing winds to St. George Utah where it fell on the grass that was eaten by cows. The milk was harvested and then shipped to a dairy in Las Vegas, then distributed across the region. Grade school cafeterias served radioactive milk to first and second graders; fifty years later the grandchildren who had inherited damaged DNA from this process would be born with cancer.

The total civilian radiation exposure amounted to 89 million person-rads of thyroid tissue exposure, about 25% of all exposure due to nuclear testing. Eventually it would cause 28,000 cases of thyroid cancer, 1400 deaths. Other cancers including breast cancer and brain cancer followed. In places as far away as Kansas people would die.

Quinlab felt three impacts. Nerve endings in his hands, attuned to signals from the living parts of the craft, felt the electrical surge as it burned into each system. The gamma burst, the largest he had recorded, was preceded by something else, followed by the expected shock wave. Damage was significant. Insufficient time was available for speculation about the first impact. It could wait. His thoughts controlled the craft and his first thought was a hyper jump. Too late, those systems were damaged and would require 1.67 hours to re-grow. He added all available velocity and the craft streaked across the nearly cloudless sky at a little under 800 miles per hour. In a moment he would be forced to touch the land and allow the ship time to heal. They were above a small range of desert mountains and the craft itself selected a flat spot on the western edge of these hills, and then settled onto the ground, but the landing was not smooth. He was thrown to one side and registered minor damage to his left leg.

Power was automatically re-routed from propulsion and other systems to allow maximum usage for repair. A conduit ruptured and sprayed green fluid into the cockpit. Quinlab was covered with the semi-vicious nutrient fluid used by main propulsion. The exterior door opened automatically, a safety precaution. Outside were two smart monkeys, so startled that they could do little but stand with their mouths open and look.

“Archer, this is Nellis control. Your bogey is down.”

General Black quickly translated the last known position, expressed in latitude and longitude, onto his map. It was near a tiny place named Silver Creek. Black wondered if this was inhabited or was simply another of the myriad of places which had a name, but nothing else. “Nellis this is Archer. Acknowledged. Remain alert to the possibility that the bogey could take off again. Pass that to the other stations.”

“Roger Archer. Nellis out.” Black was inside a “duce and a half”, a 2 ½ ton truck parked next to the Dairy Queen in Needles California. The truck was packed with communications gear and a large tent, various colorful banners and other objects that might become useful later.

The nearest ground team was on the Nevada side of the Colorado River very near Davis Dam. Black picked up a different radio handset and said, “Alpha Echo one two this is Archer. The bogey is down in your yard. Proceed to Silver Creek reference three five seven three one seven. Acknowledge.”

The relay took a few seconds. The transmission was weak. “Archer this is Alpha Echo twelve. In route. Out.”

Black glanced at the personnel roster. It was that intelligence wienie, Kaiser. He didn't trust the man but at the moment had little choice. Nevertheless, he located the next closest team and started them in the same direction.

[Wikieup](#) Arizona, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0517 hours.

Green pressed the headphones tighter against his ears, straining to hear the distant radio traffic. The radio calls were very weak and his attempt to follow what was

happening was made more difficult since some of the transmissions were too distant to be heard. A relay station positioned on the highest peak of the Hualapai Mountains helped a lot. He was giving Holland a running commentary. Several maps were spread out on the floor of the old ambulance. Green squatted like a baseball catcher as he consulted the maps and tried to follow the situation, an unlit Chesterfield dangling from his lips.

“The bomb went off 12 minutes ago.” He checked his watch. “The bogey is down near Silver Creek. It must have run like a bat out of hell to get that far in a few seconds.”

Holland was amused by the play-by-play, but relieved that his part in this little melodrama seemed to be over. The ambulance was parked a few yards from a greasy spoon named *The Post Cafe*. Despite the morning light that was only now becoming visible, they had been awake all night and it felt a lot more like a sunset. He considered getting a few beers to celebrate, and then peered carefully over Green’s shoulder to see where Silver Creek was.

“*Archer* has sent that guy Kaiser to Silver Creek.” Green looked at the map again. “It will take him the better part of an hour to get there. The B-29 has been ordered to continue south, toward the bogey. *Archer* wants to be able to get another shot if the thing suddenly takes off again.”

Holland reconsidered about the beer. Perhaps they should wait a while.

“Charlie look at that damn thing!” John Kramnicz, 35 and his partner, Charles Cockburn, 80, stood outside the one room cabin on the last day of their lives. Cockburn wore only his long-handled underwear and boots and stared at the strangest thing either of them would ever see. A lizard emerged from the saucer covered in green ketchup and then simply stood near the door and did nothing. “Do you think he’s hurt? Do you think that’s his blood?”

“He looks like he’s favoring his left leg a little. He could be hurt.” Cockburn ran into the cabin, grabbed a sheet and some duct tape and ran back outside. The lizard stood erect on two feet. Cockburn approached the lizard very slowly with the sheet extended in his right hand.

“What’s with the sheet? You trying to surrender?”

“No, I’m trying to bandage it up.” He approached very carefully and then used the sheet to wipe away some of the green ketchup. The lizard blinked its large eyes several times but made no move to stop the humans. Cockburn made several swipes along the lizards left side, mopping up the blood.

Quinlab was not physically touching the craft but was close enough that its flight and data recorders clearly captured his thoughts, “... what is this asshole doing?”

Cockburn wiped away the last of the green fluid but found no puncture or abrasion on the lizard. Then he tore the sheet in strips and carefully tied one strip around the lizard’s knee, then another. After several wraps of sheet, he peeled off two feet of duct tape and secured his bandage to the lizard, which had yet to do anything except blink its huge eyes. It seemed to have several eyelids and they sometimes fluttered up and down.

Quinlab had no idea why the smart monkey would try to restrain only one leg and not both. But he sensed empathy from the human, not aggression, and became curious to see what it would do next.

Kramnicz said, "The little bastard looks skinny. I wonder when he ate the last time."

"What do you figure he eats? Bugs?"

Kramnicz walked into the cabin and returned with a grocery bag that contained eleven oranges. He removed one, carefully peeled it, and then took a bite. The orange was sweet and for a moment he regretted his decision to feed it to the lizard, but it was, after all, one of God's critters and it looked hungry. Then he rubbed his belly, said, "Yummy", and offered the brown paper bag to the lizard.

Quinlab understood from this gesture that the monkey was trying to give him the bag and the fruit. It seemed normal, but somehow reversed, that a monkey would try to give him fruit. The ship alerted him to the presence of hydrogen and suggested that he should take it. He reached forward and grasped the bag.

"He took it, he took it." Cockburn was delighted.

A previously alerted platoon of Air Force Military Police began a simple job. There were given the names of 11 scientists, told to round them up and put them on board a waiting transport aircraft.

Green was puzzled; after word was relayed that the '29 restarted and was closing to the new position, not much happened. The radio was quiet despite a flurry of activity to the north. The distance covered by the flying disk in a few short minutes would require hours of travel by several different groups to catch up.

Two cowboys rode their horses out of a field in back of the cafe, dismounted and tied their horses to a horizontal post that was apparently provided for that purpose. It looked like something out of a movie. One of the cowboys hoisted his pants up and both walked inside. Holland was still ambivalent about the beer.

One of the smart monkeys decided to move toward the open hatch. The walls of the cockpit were still covered with nutrient fluid, the craft had not healed the important systems yet and cleaning up the fluid was a low priority. Quinlab was concerned for a moment about letting one of them get so close to the hatch, but the animal stopped short of entering and simply looked. Since he had no nose, Quinlab was unaware of the odor generated by the mess. The smart monkey, however, was well aware of it and took a very quick step backward.

The surveillance systems were slowly coming online. They reported that three smart monkeys were present. Two stood very near the craft, a third was standing in some rocks, bearing 101.44 degrees, range .0004 standard units. This one carried a device that used a chemical propellant and a metal projectile; a handgun. His intention was not clear but his behavior indicated he wished to remain hidden from the other two. With him was a large, heavy animal that used four legs; also concealed. It was festooned with a leather device that allowed the smart monkey to sit on its back, presumably for the purpose of transportation. The intention of the large animal indicated that it wished to eat. Quinlab evaluated both the third contact and the large animal as a potential threat, not to himself or the craft, but to the empathetic monkeys.

He could remember no precedent for this situation. The computer began an exhaustive search of memory for similar situations and also searched for instructions on how to proceed. Monkeys doing violence to each other was common. However no specific instruction was included that approached this situation. The computer did, however, find a few historical instances where a large carnivore was stalking a monkey for the purpose of consuming it. In some cases the animal was restrained in a force field until the monkey had time to successfully escape.

In this case however, he could not remain here long enough to use that remedy. He logically considered the options, among them the option of simply allowing these two to die. The other two occupants joined his thoughts; critical decision-making was regarded as a high priority and such mental joining was not unusual. The fact that these monkeys had shown empathy was considered a superior trait so the decision was made to save them. Quinlab removed a small device from his belt and held it out to the nearest monkey.

Kramnicz took the device and was mentally given instructions that it was a weapon and how to use it. He was also alerted to the presence of the other contact. "Charlie, is that R24 standing over in the rocks?"

Cockburn could see the south end of the horse and recognized the saddle blanket. "It sure is. Funny that he'd show up here just now."

"He probably just wants to trade for a bottle. These guys gave me a gun of some kind because they think he's up to no good. I guess they just don't like Indians."

The Suzie Lee, again under full power, began to orbit the town of [Oatman](#), Arizona, at an altitude of 12,000 feet. If the flying disk tried to take off, Allred would be in an excellent position to get another shot.

The ship alerted Quinlab that main power was restored and normal flight mode was available. He entered the cockpit, ordered the hatch closed and told the ship to continue the transit toward the southeast. The ship rose into the air ...

Allred saw the saucer scream past the nose of his ship at a range of less than 1000 feet. "Fire."

An electrical spike knocked Quinlab to the deck of the cockpit. The tough hide around his brain protected him from the impact but the shock was too much. He slipped into a dark place. The ship died in the same moment as Quinlab. Its velocity however was more than enough to throw it into a ballistic arc. It continued up and southeast like a giant cannon ball reacting, not to any command, but the simple Newtonian laws that governed such things. Within a second velocity began to fall away and gravity took over. The ballistic arc terminated when the saucer slammed into the desert for the final time.

"Archer this is Nellis control. Your bogey has re-impacted near Wikieup."

Holland felt, rather than heard, the impact, like the sickening crunch when two cars impact at high speed. He jumped behind the wheel and started the vehicle. The

motor cranked, choked once, then caught; Holland slammed the transmission into gear and the ambulance kicked a ton of dust into the air as it accelerated down the dirt road that managed to masquerade as US Highway 93. He headed north for half a mile, and then turned west on yet another dirt road. A street sign named this one '[Chicken Springs](#)'.

Green was surprised by the take off and was knocked onto the floor in the back of the ambulance. But his headphones were still in place and he began yelling, "It's us. It's us. The damn thing is on the ground about 15 miles from here."

"I know." Holland raced down the dirt road like a mad man, emulating Corporal Green's performance from earlier in the day. Twenty minutes of driving passed quickly when, to his right, he saw the glint of metal. He turned off the road and drove directly up a sand wash, parking the ambulance a few yards from the wreck.

The saucer was upside down. It had plowed into a patch of mesquite trees and was partially obscured by broken branches. The hatch had sprung open pointing toward the sky instead of the ground. What looked like a body had been thrown from the craft and dangled from a tree a few yards away. Most of the saucer was visible from the road and Holland's first impulse was to hide it.

"Green, get an ax."

"I've got to radio in."

"Forget the radio. Get an ax. We've got to cover this up. Anybody can drive down that road and see the damn thing." Holland reached for his cane, climbed out of the ambulance and ambled toward the body. Patches of a green fluid clung to it in a few places and its left knee was wrapped in duct tape. He was surprised to find something as common as duct tape wrapped around the little body, more surprised to find that a bandage or dressing was underneath the tape. The little creature was gray and had scales, like a snake, for skin.

Green was gathering brush and pushing it into place to further obscure the saucer. Holland said, "Cut some of those branches, the big ones, and push them over the exposed part." Holland climbed back into the ambulance, put the headphones over his ears and spoke into the microphone. "Archer this is Alpha Echo one four. The bogey is down for the count. The occupants are dead. Over."