



1st Lt. Erdmann "Bill" Brandt

Charlie Blair speaks of Bill in his book "Red Ball in the Sky in the chapter 11 Shark Bait.

*"I have stray thoughts about fighter aircraft traveling in the regular formation of four, rather than three. We are one short, and if the ghost of a fourth airplane should join up to fly along with us, the man I would most like to see would be **Bill Brandt**, my young assistant at Turner Air Force Base who was lost while testing the original model of the star-tracking device now mounted in Excalibur IV's nose. "*

Bill's aircraft was lost on February 20, 1955 during the initial testing of the Star Tracker. The following pages are part of the accident report.

On the morning of 19 February, Saturday, Lt. Brandt visited Colonel David G. Schilling, 31st Strategic Fighter Wing Commander, at his home. Lt. Brandt explained the progress of his project to Colonel Schilling and requested permission to fly that night, stating that the Kolsman Engineers working with him wanted to test the voltage drop in the Star Tracker's wiring. Lt. Brandt stated the intended flight would be local and would not involve any flight at high altitude. Colonel Schilling agreed to allow Lt. Brandt to carry out this flight, and signed a blank AF Form 175 with the stipulation that Lt. Brandt phone him prior to departure and relay the weather to him. Lt. Brandt said he would and left to resume work on the Star Tracker.

Lt. Brandt had been assigned the project of assisting the Kolsman Engineers in the installation and test flying of their Star Tracker along with Colonel Charles R. Blair. Lt. Brandt had been working on this project for over three months.

The Star Tracker, or Photo Electric Sextant, consisted of the following units. A Photo Electric Sextant Turret Unit, an Indicator Unit, an Amplifier Unit, a Lear-Ross Dessicator Unit and a set of connecting cables for the Photo Electric Sextant. These units were in no way wired or connected to the flight controls of the aircraft. They were mounted so as not to hinder visibility. Their only tie-in with the aircraft was a tap-in to the power source of the aircraft, and this increased the generator load from around point 35 to point 4 only. All of the equipment was secured in the aircraft. The aircraft was also equipped with a Lear F-5 Automatic Pilot.

When Lt. Brandt left Colonel Schilling's house he proceeded to Turner Air Force Base and joined the Kolsman technicians in the hanger, where final adjustments were being made on the Star Tracker. Colonel Blair had flown the Tracker a number of times that week with excellent results but a voltage drop had been detected in the wiring and adjustments had to be made to compensate for it. Lt. Brandt and his associates spent the major part of the day working on the wiring. The Automatic Pilot was known to have been working very good, and the Lear representative was on hand daily to pre-flight it.

The final adjustments were finished at approximately 1630 Saturday afternoon and

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Lt. Brandt suggested they leave for supper while he refueled the aircraft and pre-flighted it. They were to meet again at Lt. Brandt's house for coffee around 1930 E. Lt. Brandt then pre-flighted the aircraft and at 1700 E summoned the alert flight crew to tow him to the refueling pits and refuel his aircraft. This was accomplished, and after servicing the aircraft, the alert crew towed it back near and just outside of the hanger. Lt. Brandt left for his evening meal.

At approximately 1930 E, Mr. Sharpe and his assistant stopped at Lt. Brandt's house and discussed the work they had accomplished that day to greater length. Then, as they had all put in a full day, and were tired, Mr. Sharpe suggested they cancel the night flight and wait until the following afternoon. They decided the sightings could be made on the sun as well as the stars, so Lt. Brandt telephoned Colonel Schilling and explained his intentions. Colonel Schilling agreed and requested Lt. Brandt call him the next day prior to any flight. The Kolsman people then left Lt. Brandt's house for the night.

The next morning, Sunday 20 February 1955, Mr. Sharpe from Kolsman contacted Lt. Brandt and explained he and his associates intended to return to the Kolsman factory and remain there the following week. The aircraft was due for a 50 hour inspection after one more flight and Mr. Sharpe wanted to spend some time at the factory until flight tests could be resumed. Lt. Brandt then stated that he would make the planned flight that afternoon if weather permitted. He further said he would stay near the field and take some sun shots at random, and then log the results. They planned to continue when the aircraft completed inspection.

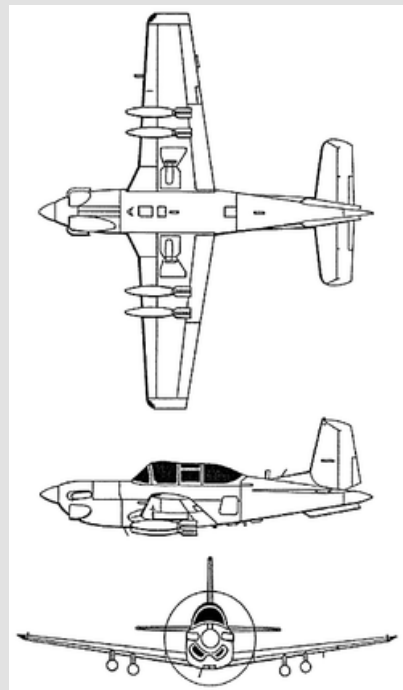
At approximately 1400 E, on the afternoon of 20 February 1955, Lt. Brandt entered Base Operations at Turner Air Force Base and proceeded to fill out an AF Form 175. When Lt. Brandt checked the weather, which was 5,000 scattered, 21,000 broken and 10 miles vis, he called Colonel Schilling. Lt. Brandt stated he intended to stay within 100 miles of Turner and would fly just over the broken deck, around 25,000 feet or lower.

Colonel Schilling gave him permission to use the Form 175 he had signed the previous day and cautioned Lt. Brandt to be very thorough in his pre-flight and not to leave the local flying area. Lt. Brandt agreed and further stated the forecast weather was to remain the same or improve slightly. This ended their conversation.

When Lt. Brandt filed his flight plan with Base Operations, the dispatcher stated he would have to file for a local flight on an AF Form 113 Local Clearance. Lt. Brandt agreed to this and re-filed his flight on an AF Form 113. The Airdrome Officer accepted it on the basis of Colonel Schilling's signature on Lt. Brandt's AF Form 175.

Lt. Brandt then contacted the alert crew and had his aircraft towed onto the ramp, and an alert crewman brought up a ground power unit to assist in starting.

The start was accomplished without incident and Lt. Brandt requested and received taxi instructions from Turner Tower. Lt. Brandt taxied to the active runway and requested take-off clearance. The tower cleared him for take-off. This was the last radio transmission heard from Lt. Brandt in aircraft 52-3272.



Bill Brandt during training in a T-34

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beechcraft_T-34_Mentor

USAF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS FEBRUARY 1955

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USAF Military Serial No. 52-3193/3242 Republic F-84G-25-RE Thunderjet **3272 written off 20 Feb 1955 Georgia**