

GOMER QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Howdy and welcome to our 3rd Aggressor Association Newsletter. Wheels Wieland has put together a nice composite of the early days of the 527th TFTAS at Alconbury, UK. I flew against these gentlemen when I was a new F-4 pilot in the early 80's at Torrejon AB, Spain and in Decimomannu, Italy. I still remember my initial DACT Aggressor checkout in the F-4D vs Pete Brennen in his F-5E. I obviously learned a lot that day with Pete driving the learning points home via his pipper on my aircraft. The second sortie, I remember doing much better and applying the lessons learned on the previous sortie, as Pete would have to interrupt his commentary into his tape recorder in order to do some grunting and heavy breathing as he was either defending or attacking. Needless to say he was a total professional and it planted the seeds of what later would become the best assignment I ever had.

Since our last newsletter the 64th Aggressor Squadron hosted a worldwide Aggressor Symposium at Nellis AFB. Unfortunately, Pink Williams was unable to make the conference due to a medical issue, so our last minute stand in was Fred "Spanky" Clifton. Spanky is one of the U.S. leading experts on the Mig-29 Fulcrum, as he did an exchange tour with the German Air Force. He currently is an instructor at the Weapon School at Nellis and he represented your Association quite well. I hope you received the "Gomer NewsFlash" about the conference update.

We continue to add members to the Association, but the best and most effective method is word of mouth. Please tell your buds about the Association, the upcoming 50th Reunion in the Fall of 2022 and the need to join up and support the group.

All for now, enjoy this month's edition. And as always, Check 6 and Be Humble,

Mark "Dula" Dulaney
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Aggressors, A Proud History.... and Pride Continues Today!



Wheels, AKA 1981, Clark AB, Philippine Islands

Hi Aggressor Association. I'm Wheels Wieland, editor of the Newsletter. I want you, the reader, to tell the difference between a letter written by a person who sent it and my words, as editor, interjecting. So the ROE is letters sent by guest contributors are in black print. My notes will be in blue. I will edit guest contributors inputs but refrain from adding to them in order to keep authenticity.

So, I welcome you once again to the Aggressor Association (www.gomersrule.com) Newsletter. This will be the third that we have published with me as editor and Dida Clifton as publisher. However I have some health problems that will not allow me to write four a year. Therefore we need another person to help and write one as a guest editor. That being said I want this third newsletter to continue in theme with the first two.

That is the initial formation of the Aggressor Squadrons at Nellis, Clark and RAF Alconbury. This one will feature the 527th at RAF Alconbury, England. I have some good resources to give you some insights as to what went down. Before I became an Aggressor in 1977, I was at RAF Lakenheath, England flying the F-4D, '74-'77. I had no idea that in 1976 this Squadron was being formed and ready to go somewhere around June of that year. I would have driven there and volunteered! I would have taken money and chocolates! And probably whiskey! Anything to be one of them as I

was a slut when it came to flying a certain Fighter.

OK, all that aside, I'd like to start with a letter from the first squadron commander, Bruce "Big Fella" MacLennan. Unfortunately, as I write this, he is not in good health. A lot of our members have gone into that area of life, Bingo fuel. I urge you to reach out to our Brothers in Arms in their time of need. Therefore, let me introduce you to "Big Fella" MacLennan.

Cheers, Steve "Wheels" Wieland,

Editor

527th TFTAS STARTUP

Bruce "Big Fella" MacLennan

527th First Commander

Before the Beginning



Your recent requests for info on the history of our Gomer units has inspired me to try to give you my recollections of the formulation of the 527th Tactical Fighter Training Aggressor Squadron (TFTAS) - as it was then designated - as best as I remember them.

Photo Courtesy of Karl Whittenberg

A cadre of fighter pilots assigned to staff jobs at USAFE had been involved in the TAC formulation of the Aggressors which had been very successful in its training purposes. We didn't have that in USAFE at the time, and they pressed the issue continuously. Finally they gained approval and funding to establish an Aggressor unit. A member of the USAFE OPS staff, Carmen Luisi, who had come from Nellis Aggressors, was the lead guy on that victory. That was early 1975. I was on the USAFE IG team at the time, and was aware of what was going on, but was not involved. I was Squadron Commander eligible, but I could have shit my trousers when the Two Star called me in to tell me that he wanted me to take over the Aggressor Squadron that was forming up! (But wait! What's this?) NO AIRPLANES! NO PILOTS! NO FACILITIES! The only thing they gave me was a cadre of volunteers selected by a Personnel Board that I had had no input too! They awarded me their choices of about fourteen to fifteen pilots who would need to go through Aggressor training at Nellis. The top pick of the choices was for OPs Officer, and it was for J.C.T Wang, an F-4 guy at Bitburg whom I had never met. We corrected that shortly by having brunch with him and Susan at Ramstein in a couple of weeks. When I said we had not been given any facilities, I was wrong. They told us we were going to belong to the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at RAF Alconbury, UK. That Wing had had three squadrons of RF-4s at one time but now was down to one. With lots of facilities available for us to choose from.

How to make an F-5 Air to Air Squadron fit on a F-4 Recce Base

I'll have to admit that I knew many members of the USAFE Operations staff at the time very well from previous assignments, but they kinda left C.T. and me on our own to get the 527th bedded down. We took an XC a couple of weeks later to meet with the 2 Star at 3rd AF and skip on down to Alconbury to meet with the "recce" people. Naturally, we were met by the Wing brass who wanted to us to take over some of the vacant older buildings in the base complex. However, one of the deactivated squadrons had been a NATO-supported unit and had a wonderful building with lots of space for renovation, open areas for aircraft parking AND was situated all the way across the field from the main Wing complex. A godsend in itself!

I moved to Alconbury in early Feb '76 to get things started, and CT went off to Nellis for training. My initial cadre was an Intel Officer and two Life Support Technicians. I convinced one of the pilot selectees, Karl Whittenberg, to leave Torrejon early and come in as my Exec Officer since I would be going for training before CT came back and there was a lot of work to be done on the building and other facilities before we would get more personal and airplanes in place. We were also going to get the Radar Controllers and some of the pilots in who would set to work writing the USAFE Regs and scenarios for DACT. USAFE had also arranged for PCS moves for 5 or 6 Nellis Aggressors to give us an experienced base of pilots. Once I got all that cooking I left for training in late March and threw it all into Karl's lap. And a capable one it was! When I returned everything was humming along just as we had envisioned, and we were ready to get some "wheels on the ramp!". I had also managed to get certified as an FCF pilot while at Nellis so we had someone to test the F-5s as they were put into service after arrival at Alconbury.

Finally, the big day arrived in mid-May when six planes arrived via C-5 disassembled and on pallets. I was able to test hop the first one on the last day of May and we were on our way.

The rest of the 24 arrived on schedule and soon the few pilots we had on board were getting in some regular flying as well as doing all the writing. We had all that finished by mid-August and started inviting small segments of USAFE fighter units in TDY to test out the scenarios in our designated restricted area over the North Sea. That all went well and we got the manuals and regs approved before the end of the year. I'm not sure of the exact date, but I believe we declared ourselves OR early in Jan '77 and started a regular schedule of deployments and hosting right away. Later in the year, we made our first deployment to an RAF unit in Scotland, and that started our participation with other NATO countries. I PCS'd in Feb '78 so didn't get to do some of the other neat shit like deploying to the ACMI range at Decci and equipping with the F-16. However, it was a wonderful experience getting the squadron started from scratch - zero - to Fully Operational.

Airspace for sale

We did indeed have a tasking in the air defense of the UK. The Brits never give you something for nothing, so during negotiations for the nice big ACM restricted area they agreed to give us over the North Sea, USAFE agreed to OPCON us to their AD plan as requested. We never heard much about it until late in '77 when we were fully operational and they had some AD exercises. We had to change gears rapidly and fit into their battle plan. It turned out to be a lot of fun and a good experience

We deployed a couple of times to RAF air defense tasked bases and were fragged by them. We were mostly used against low altitude intruders, and that was the fun part because we were VFR interceptors and could also use our radar guys in conjunction with the Brits. It certainly was not a problem incorporating those sorties into our program and gave us a lot of positive exposure with our hosts. We had no other operational commitments w/in NATO. As well as I can remember, we used to try to set up 5-6 day deployments at least twice a month but could handle more if there was a demand since our deployed unit was only three or four planes. We also frequently hosted small TDY deployments at Alconbury, sometimes at the same time. Let me give you a wild-ass guess of about 26-27 deployments for '77.

Lt.Col. Bruce MacLennan, Cmdr. 527th TFTAS



Photo Courtesy of Karl Whittenberg

The following is from a three time initial cadre aggressor

EARLY DAYS AT ALCONBURY - ONE AGGRESSOR'S FOND MEMORIES

By Art MacDonald, USAF, Lt. Col., Ret.



Wheels asked me to recall some of the events from the early days of the 527th. I said I'd be glad to do so, because my memories from RAF Alconbury rank right up there as some of the best I have. Here we go ...

Sometime in the spring of 1976, I remember getting a call from either AFMPC or TAC Personnel. My recollection is that the caller was Dick Jonas, who told me that after three years at Nellis it was time for me to move on, and that he had a good deal for me. He said I was being considered for an assignment to the new 527th, which was being formed at RAF Alconbury in the UK.

I had been expecting that call, but was not happy about it. At Nellis I had the best job in the Air Force (in the world, actually), and all I had heard about USAFE was that the weather was always bad over there. The training areas were small, and they had no supersonic airspace. I figured we would rarely fly, that the training would be severely restricted in both speed and altitude, and the Bingsos would be so high that it would be hard to get the job done. Plus, the 527th was part of a Recce wing! What was up with that?

Art as an initial 527th Cadre Aggressor

Three years earlier, I had lucked out after my F-4 combat tour at Ubon with an assignment to the new 64th FWS. In early June, 1973, I signed into the squadron upstairs at the Thunderbird hangar (The broom closet, as Gork referred to it in his previous article). My very first military duty that morning was to form up on the flight line with the rest of the squadron for the change of command ceremony between outgoing Boots Boothby and incoming Ted Laudise as 64th CC.

After flying the T-38 for two years in the 64th, I was one of many happy Aggressors who stood enthusiastically on the ramp at Nellis in mid-1975 and watched the flyby as D.L. Smith delivered the very first of what would quickly become two squadrons worth of shiny, almost-new F-5Es at Nellis. I got an F-5E checkout at Willie, moved to the 65th when it was formed, and finally got to do the best job in the world properly, with real training missiles, a real gunsight instead of the base of the pitot boom, and a real gun camera. I was a happy man.

Off to the 527th

When that fateful call came from the personnel gods in early 1976, I was not alone. Before long, a bunch of Nellis Aggressors got orders to the 527th. Scott Saunders, Roy Stuckey, Leif Dunn, Rich Frieenmuth, Joe Hodges, Bobby Nida, and I were all soon in place.

Along with the transplants from Nellis, the squadron was chock full of F-4 guys from USAFE who had volunteered to go back to the States for Aggressor Upgrade and then head to Alconbury. Bruce MacLennan (Big Fella) was the squadron commander, and C.T. Wang was the ops officer. Bill Payne was the weapons officer. Other USAFE F-4 guys who completed Aggressor Upgrade and reported to Alconbury that fall were Tommy Almquist, Mario Peraldo, Doc Graninger, Mike Galligan, Bill Jenkins, Bill Lafever, Kit Alverson, Sandy Sanderson, Barry Wood and Phil Thompson.

By the time I got to Alconbury in early September, all the planning and beddown had been completed. The airplanes were there and had all been painted. The squadron building was up and running, and the pilots were at about half strength or better. We were flying local similar sorties for training and getting familiar with the local flying environment.

As at Nellis, the controllers and Intel were key to the mission. Les Hall was the assistant ops officer for GCI, and some of the other early controllers were Mike Clifton, Walter Green, Jesse Jackson, Nick Zunic, Dave Waninger, Steve Ritter and Jan Gossage. Larry Barnes was the Intel Officer.

Unlike at Nellis, we never had O-dark-thirty briefings at Alconbury because it was often mid-morning before the fog cleared. Standard first briefing time was a gentlemanly 0800. Hopefully, the fog would burn off in time for an on-time takeoff at 1000. That was easy to get used to!



Entering the bicentennial F-15 going to the U.K. Farnborough Airshow, 1976

When I arrived in September, the airplane was sticking around Alconbury for some dissimilar training, and the pilots were Bob Bergman and Bill "Beeper" Hamilton, from Langley. I got pit ride in the Eagle, the only time I ever got to fly in the F-15. I was indeed impressed with the big bird.



The Vipers and Eagles come to play

At the same time that the 527th was standing up at Alconbury, the 36th TFW at Bitburg was converting to F-15s and a couple of F-16s from Edwards were on TDY to USAFE.

They were conducting their F-16 European Test and Evaluation. Sometime in late September or so, a couple of Bitburg Eagles deployed into Alconbury for the first time, and brought the F-16s with them to do some DACT with us in the Aggressor ACT Area.

This was the first time any of us had flown against an F-16. Suffice to say, going against a mixed force of Eagles and Vipers, we got our eyes watered. I have a very distinct memory of the first time I ever attacked an F-16. I brilliantly concluded that it would be better to be in the Viper, and I decided in that moment what airplane I wanted to fly on my next assignment!

That Fall of 1976, the 527th settled into what would be the standard operations tempo for the next couple of years:

1. We would have F-15s visiting from Bitburg almost continuously, to take advantage of supersonic DACT in the Aggressor ACT Area.
2. We would deploy to Bases on the continent: Ramstein, Spangdahlem, Soesterberg, Spangdahlem, Torrejon, etc.
3. We would have an almost constant presence at Zaragoza in Spain. Zaragoza at that time was the primary Weapons Training Detachment location, where the USAFE F-4 units deployed to get their training squares filled. Our pilots would routinely deploy to Zaragoza for several weeks at a stretch.
4. Periodically, we would deploy to one of the RAF F-4 bases for DACT against the Brits. There's nothing like being awakened in the morning at the Leuchars Club Officers Quarters with a cup of tea!
5. Once a year, the British Air Defense Forces would conduct an air defense exercise, and the 527th would be chopped to 1. CincUKAir to be used to attack incoming invaders trying to sneak in at low level from the continent. These exercises were a lot of fun, and I think they gave our controllers an opportunity to do their stuff.
6. There were also a few deployments to France, to conduct DACT with French Mirage units. I have very fond memories of my nearly four years in the 527th. I think most of the guys there felt the same way. I loved the job, and my entire family loved the UK. We lived on the economy in a little village called Brampton, and my four-year-old daughter, Meredith, started school there attending the village school for four years. She came back to the States with a definite British accent.

If you don't think we were having a good time, just take a look at this picture. I can't believe they paid me to do it!

**Art McDonald,
USAF, Lt.Col, Ret.**



The 527th Role in Training NATO Pilots

When the quadra-national base of Decimomannu, Sardinia was in full operational mode with the ACMI in 1979, the 527th had six jets deployed there 48 weeks a year while having an additional three ship deployed at other locations throughout the European theater.

Many of those three ship deployments were to other USAFE units that did not get to Decimomannu on as regular basis as the Eagle units from Bitburg and Soesterberg were able to.. So three ship deployments to Zaragoza and Torrejon Spain; Ramstein, Hahn and Spangdahlem Germany; Bentwaters, Upper Heyford and Lakenheath England were conducted to make up the those units shortfall of being able to make it to Decimomannu for training.

When not deployed to at those other USAFE bases listed, our three ship deployments took us to fly against the French at Istres, Dijon, Lyon, and Orange. We deployed many times within England to fly against the RAF at Binbrook, Wattisham, Leukers and Lossiemouth. Besides the aircraft from USAFE we flew against Mirage III-E's, Alpha Jets, Hawks, Harriers, Hawker Hunters, F-105's in Oksboel, F-104's, Draakens, F-100's, Fiat G-91's, RAF BAC Lightnings, Jaguars, and multiple variants of F-4's from other NATO allies.



IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE FLOWN WEST

Capt Bill Jenkins of the 527th was killed on August 21, 1978 while flying 74-1552 out of Aalborg, Denmark, on a NATO exercise called Oksboel. He was flying in support of some F-104s when attacked by a couple of Bitburg Eagles.



He evidently suffered G-LOC in a hard defensive turn and crashed into the North Sea at high speed. 74-1552 was my airplane, and I was in the tower at Aalborg as SOF when it happened. Bill's wingman that day was T.B. Lorincz and the Aggressor controllers were Les Hall and Steve Ritter.

Incidentally, Bill's daughter Patty Jenkins has received great acclaim recently as the director of the Wonder Woman movie. Patty was born at George when Bill was a lieutenant in F-4 RTU before going to Korat where he won the Silver Star and a couple of DFCs. Courtesy of Art McDonald, USAF, Lt. Col, Ret.

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