

GOMER QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Welcome to our Winter 2021 Newsletter. We hope that all of our group is staying safe and being smart in this COVID environment. Mostly, I hope this stuff gets under control so we can get back to living our lives, enjoying our friends and family, and have our 50th Anniversary Reunion next year!

In this addition we have another article from “The War Zone” magazine about our Aggressors. I found it to be quite interesting and educational. Hope you enjoy.

Then in the Aggressor Stories section, Reina Pennington relates her journey to and with the Aggressors. I'll take this time to ask you to send in your stories about your Aggressor days. It could be anything, a great deployment, a great bar night, a great engagement, anything that you would like to relate and can be printed.....LOL! We would like to start getting more stories from our group, that is where the fun happens, and I know there are a ton of good stories out there. You can send to any of the Board or to me at dula737@aol.com.

We finish up with the notice that Les Hall, 527 AS Charter Member, passed away and a follow up article that was written by Big Fella MacLennan before he passed away.

As always we have our Aggressor Swag section if you are looking for some memorabilia. Aircraft Models, Aggressor Steel Mugs, and Association Shirts are available. We would like to thank those that ordered their Aggressor Mugs. Your Association received approx. \$500 from the sale of the mugs. For those that have not ordered yet, please consider getting one for yourself or others. Josh Bush is very accommodating getting the mug personalized the way you would like.

Also, we are on track for our Aggressor Reunion in the Fall of 2022. Details to follow as we get closer and dates firm up. Currently looking at early November timeframe.

We are always open to your comments and suggestions. Check 6 and Be Humble,

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Our first article today comes from Pink Williams and appeared in the December '20 War Zone Magazine.

It is a great article about the Aggressors, where they are, where they have been and where they are going. I found it to be educational and a further glimpse into the on-going evolution of the Aggressor Program.

Click on the link for an enjoyable read, "Inside the Air Force's Elite Aggressor Program with One of its Top Pilots"

<https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37991/playing-the-bad-guy-inside-the-air-forces-elite-aggressor-program-with-one-of-its-top-pilots>

AGGRESSOR STORIES

Next up is the Aggressor story of our own Aggressor Association Historian, Reina Pennington. As many of you may recall, Reina was an Intel Officer attached to the 64th and 65th Aggressor Squadrons from 1980-1982. This is her story of becoming an Aggressor.

My Aggressor story

Reina Pennington, intel officer to the 64th and 65th, 1980-82

When the Aggressors showed up at Hill AFB in 1979, I had no idea what I was in for. I was a Second Lieutenant intel officer for the 388th TFW when the Aggressors came to town on one of their usual road shows. I sat in on every briefing and was enthralled. I had not known that the Air Force had a unit that simulated the Soviets—certainly no one in the intelligence division had mentioned it. Having majored in Soviet Studies in college, I couldn't imagine a better job than Aggressor intelligence officer. I cornered the detachment commander, Ron Iverson, and tried to convince him that my background uniquely qualified me to be the next Aggressor intelligence officer. As it happened, their intel guy was going to PCS soon. Someone worked a time on station waiver (I'd been at Hill less than two years) and the next thing I knew, I was headed for Nellis.

The 4th TFS Weapons Shop at Hill had done a great job of preparing me for the big time. There I learned to dry run my briefings to one of the weapons guys to be sure I didn't say anything unusually stupid in front of the squadron. They got me a lot of flights so I could see what things looked like in the air. I'd been on TDYs to Red Flag and Norway and participated in full-blown intel-scenario exercises.

Nellis was its own universe, mostly good. This was back in the day when there were still strippers in the back bar, and the most loudly sung tune on the juke box was "Take This Job and Shove It." I'm glad I got to be part of that Nellis, to play deceased insect and dollar bill game. This was before "Happy Hour" became "Drinks at Reduced Prices," when the O-Club was still a place of camaraderie and carrier landings.

The not so good stuff was mainly in the intel side of things. Unfortunately, there were always some who thought intel belonged at their desks in HQ except for the occasional briefing. The Aggressors thought otherwise. The first thing they did was tell me I had to go to ground school, and they put me in a flight suit like the GCI folks. I went through the whole course of classes with the incoming pilots. I didn't get any flights, of course, but later they worked rides for me in host unit back seats on some deployments. The rationale was, that way I could see on radar and in air combat how the Aggressors were simulating Soviet formations and tactics. At least that was my rationale, and I'm sticking to it!

I was lucky to work with both the 64th and 65th, as well as the 4477th. I was assigned topic specialties, just like the pilots and GCI, for presenting on road shows. I did most of my deployments with the 65th. I also handled the intel shop, documents, current intel briefs, and threat updates.

Serving with the Aggressors was my dream job. I only stayed two years due to an

issue up chain when the intel unit got a new commander. I had received orders to go to the Naval Postgraduate School to get a master's degree, but he had them rescinded on the grounds that I was essential personnel. I then got an offer from the DIA Soviet Air branch to go to DC to write a Soviet tactics manual, and he couldn't override that. I wish I'd stayed at Nellis longer, but unfortunately the guy who was writing my OER was an asshole.

I have so many indelible memories of my time at Nellis. I worked with more great pilots and GCI than I can begin to mention. Best job in the Air Force, especially for an intel officer. It was the closest the Air Force ever got to really integrating the intel and flying worlds. Pilots got the clearances they needed to see the important stuff, and we truly worked as a team.

Best flight: 2v4 in the F-16 (422nd vs. Aggressors) in Doc Krempel's back seat. Got my 9G pin.

Most fun flight: "Orientation flight" at Nellis with Marshall McCloud. It was his final flight before leaving Nellis. It involved a lot of low altitude and inverted flight, sometimes simultaneously.

Weirdest flight: F-15 ride at Langley with Hal Hornburg (then SEFE) as part of a check ride for the wing commander.

Most ironic moment: I was at DIA and the aforementioned wing CO had become TWFC CC. In 1985 he had me called on the carpet by a 2-star at DIA over an Air Force Magazine article I published called "Another Look at the Soviet Pilot." In that article I suggested that the Aggressors needed more modern aircraft to continue doing their job. He angrily suggested to my 2-star that maybe I should actually go to Nellis before I wrote about the Aggressors. He had no idea that I had served with the Aggressors prior to DIA, although it said so in the article. I pointed this out to my boss, who simply said it wasn't in my best interest to go around pissing off generals.

Best bar night: I was introduced to long necks and Jeremiah Weed at Sunrise Cedars by various parties.

Most memorable bar night: Berlin, on TDY, in the little pub with the German Shepherd who liked me and bit one of the pilots I was with. He probably deserved it.

*As a side note I just learned that Dr. Pennington currently appears in the Netflix series *Greatest Events of WWII in Colour* (Episode 5 on Stalingrad). She will also be in new episodes on Kursk and Berlin coming soon.*

You can follow her at her website: <http://www.reinapennington.com>

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IN MEMORIOUM

The Association received this from Les Hall's son. Note: Les was a Charter

Member of the 527th Aggressor Squadron. Rest in Peace, Sir!

My father Les Hall was a Weapons Controller for the 527th Aggressor squadron from 76-79. It's with a heavy heart that he did pass away October 28th of this year. I have included an Obituary for him. My favorite of my Dads squadrons was the 527th and living in England for 4 years while he served at RAF Alconbury was beyond what any boy could have wished for. If you need anything else from me one of his sons, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,
Les Hall
704-200-5635
Engle.hall@yahoo

<https://woodridgefuneralhome.com/tribute/details/34264/Engle-Hall-Sr/obituary.html>

Late breaking news, your Association just learned that Tom "Boomer" Boma has flown West on 9 Feb 2021. Boomer was Red Eagle and a member of the 65AS from 1985-1988.

Blue Skies and calm winds my friend! A slow hand salute to a fine man! Details to follow.

527TH TFTAS STARTUP

As many of you know Bruce "Big Fella" MacLennan was laid to rest at Arlington Cemetery. I know a few fellow Gomers attended the ceremony including CT Wang, his first Ops Officer at the startup of the 527th.

Yogi O'Neal asked me to include Big Fella's summary of the start of the 527th in this Newsletter.

527th TFTAS startup

Bruce "Big Fella" MacLennan
527th first CC
2 Jul 2017

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.

I don't consider myself much of an author, but I have always had an inner feeling that what we did in USAFE and at RAF Alconbury, UK, in the years leading up to the activation should be recorded somewhere. Maybe this is it!

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 trou when the Two Star called me in to tell me that he wanted me to take over the Aggressor Squadron that was forming up! 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 a brunch with him and Susan at Ramstein a couple of weeks later.

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.

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 a 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 personnel 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!"

CT and I had overlapped at Nellis by a couple of weeks and put together our squadron patch consisting of an F-4 gunsight at Fox 2 range locked on to a Soviet bear's heart. We were greatly assisted by the aviation artist at Nellis (can't remember his name) in putting the whole idea together. The USAFE Ops Staff also deserves a lot of credit for the support they gave us during the whole beddown and activation process. I had also managed to get certified as a 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.

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 good experience.

We deployed a couple of times to RAF air defense tasked bases and were fragg

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.

Bruce "Big Fella" MacLennan

AGGRESSOR SWAG SHOP



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