

BIRTH OF THE 50TH SPACE WING

Following the end of World War II, the conflict in Europe and Asia changed from one of western democracies stopping the threat of fascism to western democracies countering the threat of communist influence. As this Cold War heated up, the United States increased military spending and formed additional units. The Air Force established new wings bearing the numerical designations of distinguished World War II groups. On May 16, 1949, the Air Staff established the 50th Fighter Wing, making it available for activation. The wing activated in the United States Air Force Reserves on June 1, 1949, at Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts. The 50th Fighter Wing consisted mainly of the World War II era 50th Fighter Group, which also activated on June 1. Assigned to Tactical Air Command's First Air Force, the wing served as the reserve corollary (or sister unit) of the 33d Fighter Wing, to which it was attached.

Originally equipped with the F-51 Mustang that had made its operational debut as the P-51 near the end of World War II, the wing's operational focus centered on keeping its air crews well trained and ready. This activity likely included participating in portions of the 33d Fighter Wing's air defense missions and exercises. Redesignated as the 50th Fighter-Interceptor Wing on March 1, 1950, the 50th Fighter Wing was reassigned to the Eastern Air Defense Force on September 1, 1950, although it remained attached to the 33d Fighter-Interceptor Wing. During this transitional year, the wing's arsenal included the T-6 Texan, T-33 Shooting Star, F-84 Thunderjet, and the F-86 Sabre. The 50th Fighter Wing's air defense and training activity continued until the organization was ordered to active duty on June 1, 1951. On June 2, 1951, the wing and its subordinate units inactivated.

The North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, which was supported by the Chinese and Soviet administrations, added uncertainty and perils to American interests and security in Northeast Asia and the Pacific Rim. While the United States' involvement in that conflict proved insufficient cause to order the 50th Fighter-Interceptor Wing to duty in Korea, it added to already heightened fears of the worldwide spread of communism. Plans to increase forces in Europe during this period resulted in part from desires to show the Soviet Union and China that, despite the Korean situation,

the United States and its European allies were committed to stemming the advance of communism, especially in Europe. The United States' national security objectives sought, as part of this commitment, to counter the potential threats posed by the Soviet airfield construction program continuing in Eastern Europe.

Negotiations with France to obtain bases in their zone of occupation in Germany began in 1951. In March of that year, the Commanders-in-Chief of the European Command and the French Forces of Occupation in Germany reached a preliminary agreement on the stationing of troops and the exchange of facilities in the French and American zones of occupation. On March 21, the French obtained 1,280 acres of land near the two small towns of Hahn and Lautzenhausen. France began construction of an air base in April 1951, including an 8,000-foot by 150-foot runway, taxi ways, 75 dispersal hard stands, hangar and alert aprons, and a variety of other facilities. The French completed their construction program at Hahn in late 1952. By this time, American and French commanders had signed an agreement that provided for the transfer of Hahn and other installations in the French zone to the control of United States Air Forces in Europe.

By late 1952, the first of many American construction programs began at the base, expanding on the facilities built by the French. The first American construction projects included a control tower, a fire station, warehouses, a motor pool, roads, mess halls, and eleven 216-man dormitories for enlisted personnel. Also included were the bachelor officer quarters, squadron operations buildings, and headquarters offices. The United States completed most of this construction by May 1953. By that time, officials had announced that Hahn would receive and support the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing and its F-86F aircraft.

Meanwhile, the Air Staff redesignated the 50th Fighter-Interceptor Wing as the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing on November 15, 1952, and placed it in active status, relieving it from the control of the Air Force Reserve. The Air Staff assigned the wing to the Tactical Air Command for activation, which occurred on January 1, 1953. Concurrently, the 50th Fighter-Interceptor Group activated as the

50th Fighter-Bomber Wing F-86Fs on the flight line at Clovis AFB



50th Fighter-Bomber Group and became the wing's primary combat element. The group consisted of two of its original World War II squadrons—the 10th and 81st Fighter Squadrons. Originally assigned to Clovis (later Cannon) Air Force Base, New Mexico for training, the wing resumed flight operations in the F-51 Mustang. Before long, the wing began replacing its propeller-driven Mustangs with the jet-powered, F-86F Sabre. As the conversion to the F-86F continued in the spring and early summer of 1953, crews and maintenance personnel continued their training in the Sabre. Once training levels for pilots and aircrews had reached operational levels, the 50th began preparations for its move to Germany.



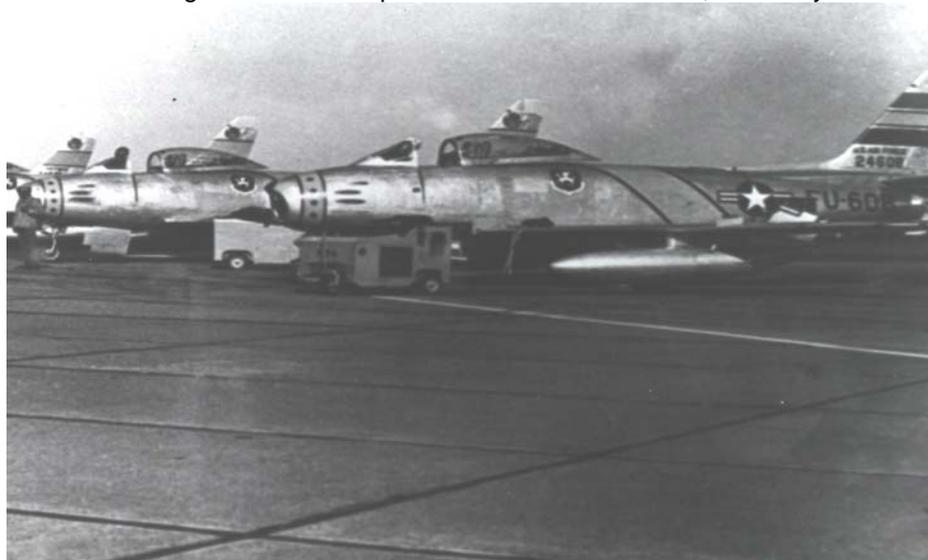
Sailing from Galveston, Texas, to Bremerhaven, Germany aboard the USNS General M. B. Stewart, the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing began its first Atlantic crossing; it was the third such trip for the 50th Fighter-Bomber Group. From Bremerhaven, the 50th moved by rail to its new home at Hahn Air Base, Germany, completing the journey in

August 1953, and reported to its new headquarters, Twelfth Air Force. At Hahn, the wing completed its fighter squadron complement, which consisted of the 10th and 81st Fighter Squadrons, with the assignment of the 417th Fighter Squadron. Although the 417th was not one of the 50th Fighter Group's original World War II units, the squadron had been stationed with the group at Giebelstadt, Germany, during the final days of the war. Soon thereafter, the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing became the first tactically operational USAF wing in Twelfth Air Force's jurisdiction.

The movement of the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing and its F-86F aircraft to the European mainland was one of several events that revealed and responded to a worsening of American-Soviet relations since the end of World War II. The former allies deeply felt a mutual distrust and uneasiness that came to characterize the Cold War between the Soviet's Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other western alliances.

This worsening of relations resulted from a series of incidents occurring after the end of World War II, including the Berlin Crisis and events in the Pacific and Northeast Asia as communists

81st Fighter-Bomber Squadron F-86Fs at Hahn AB, Germany



sought to spread their sphere of influence, threatening United States interests. The buildup of United States forces in Europe sought to quell any Soviet expansionist interests in the region by strengthening NATO, thereby demonstrating western resolve to disallow any expansionist political or military activities. The Cold War and its related arms race would last nearly four decades.

Arriving at Hahn Air Base under the command of Colonel Wallace S. Ford, the wing delayed its unpacking of all but mission critical cargo and put off other routine activities to participate immediately in exercise MONTE CARLO. The purpose of this staged combat employment drill was to illustrate the power and capability of the European allies' air defense forces. During the brief operation, the wing's air crews flew 124 simulated aggressor combat sorties, including 52 in only four hours.

In line with a stepped-up training program, which United States Air Forces in Europe (United States Air Forces Europe) initiated in 1954, the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing's air crews spent six weeks at the Wheelus Field range in Tripoli, Libya, to improve their air-to-air combat and ground attack skills. Demonstrating their prowess in both facets of their mission, the F-86F crews of the 50th flew 3,062 effective sorties in those six weeks and scored higher in both air-to-air and air-to-ground events than any other unit assigned to the Twelfth Air Force. By 1955, United States Air Forces Europe had initiated an annual, command-wide aerial gunnery competition at the Wheelus Field ranges. During the first such event, on July 30, 1955, the "straight shooting" pilots of the 50th more than duplicated their achievements of the previous year, taking top honors in the command.

While the victory at the gunnery competition was still fresh, the wing began modernizing its aircraft fleet. On October 21, 1955, the first of the wing's new F-86H Sabres arrived at Hahn. The conversion continued throughout the winter of 1955 and spring of 1956, ending in May. While preparing for and then converting to the F-86H, the wing expanded its mission responsibility, accepting the role of supporting Twelfth Air Force's 7382d Guided Missile Group. The wing had previously supported the 69th Tactical Missile Squadron at Hahn, which operated the TM-61 "Matador" missile.