

TO FRANCE AND BACK, 1956-1977

New aircraft would not be the only change for the personnel of the 50th, however. With the conversion to the newer F-86H nearly complete on April 15, 1956, the wing began a move to Toul-Rosiere Air Base, France. The 417th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, under the command of Lt. Col. Charles "Chuck" Yeager, was the first of the wing's squadrons to relocate. This movement took most of the summer of that year. The wing reported itself intact, fully operational, and mission ready at Toul-Rosiere on August 1, 1956. The relocation also meant the end of the wing's association with the Matador. The move to France did not degrade the wing's readiness, as the United States Air Forces in Europe chose the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing to represent the command at the Air Force Fighter Weapons Meet at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

The 1956 UNITED STATES AIR FORCES EUROPE (50th Fighter-Bomber Wing) representatives to the Air Force Fighter Weapons Meet at Nellis AFB, NV included (L to R) Capt Coleman L. Baker, Lt Col Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager, Col Fred J. Ascani, Maj James A Gasser, and Capt Robert H. Pasqualicchio



At about this time, the wing determined that its emblem needed to be updated to reflect its new mission and new aircraft. The modified design (pictured below) depicted a Griffin, facing forward with wings spread and breathing fire. Centered behind the Griffin appeared an atomic cloud. Behind the beast's right talon, an olive branch

denoted peace. A lightning bolt behind the left talon symbolized the strength and power of the unit's aircraft.



With the movement to France and conversion to the F-86H complete, wing personnel returned to more routine duties, training, and participating in various air defense exercises. This sense of normality, however, was brief. On December 8, 1957, the 50th Fighter-Bomber Group inactivated. United States Air Forces in Europe reassigned the group's subordinate squadrons—the 10th, 81st, and 417th Fighter Squadrons—directly to the wing. Similarly, the 50th Maintenance and Supply Group inactivated, and its squadrons were reassigned to the wing. These new organizational changes resulted from an Air Force reorganization plan that eliminated remaining operational combat and maintenance groups to standardize wing structures. Deputy commanders for operations, maintenance, and resources eventually replaced the groups and assumed managerial control of squadrons. Following this reorganization, only the 50th Combat Support Group remained intact. The latter expanded its responsibilities to include transportation, comptroller, and procurement functions.

Soon, United States Air Forces Europe also announced that the 50th Fighter-Bomber Wing would receive the new F-100D Super Sabre. This advanced, supersonic aircraft would significantly improve the wing's combat capability and enhance European air defenses. The 50th converted to the new aircraft during 1957 and 1958, and on July 8, 1958 redesignated as the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing—a name it would carry for almost 35 years.

Within one year of rearming with the new jets, the wing was once again on the move. On September 1, 1959, the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing, its support units, and the 10th and 81st Tactical Fighter Squadrons began their return to Hahn Air Base, Federal

Republic of Germany. The 417th also moved from France. Rather than accompanying the wing at Hahn, however, the 417th relocated to Ramstein Air Base. Delayed somewhat by runway resurfacing at Hahn Air Base, the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing

The wing's last F-100D as it prepared to depart for duties elsewhere in the USAF



reported its movement complete on December 10, 1959. The

detachment of the 417th to Ramstein Air Base, part of United States Air Forces Europe's dual-basing concept, did not go unanswered. When the 50th arrived at Hahn the 496th Tactical Fighter Squadron was already in place. This squadron, assigned to the 86th Fighter-Interceptor Wing at

Ramstein Air Base, was attached to the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing. By December 18, 1959, the 496th Tactical Fighter Squadron began replacing its F-86 aircraft with F-102 Delta Daggers. The theory behind dual-basing was to increase the survivability of various aircraft types by dispersing them to alternate locations. Hence, a successful strike at Hahn would not eradicate all of the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing's F-100s. Similarly, a strike at Ramstein would not automatically threaten all of the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing's F-102s.

For the next several years, the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing's personnel concentrated on training, preparedness, and becoming the best fighter unit in United States Air Forces in Europe. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in October and November 1962, the wing hosted the 435th Tactical Fighter Squadron from Moron Air Base, Spain. The 435th had deployed to Hahn Air Base as part of a massive military buildup in West Germany triggered by the crisis in the Caribbean.

Following resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing resumed normal operations, conducting air crew proficiency training and participating in various exercises and competitions, oftentimes with other NATO allies. Then, on

October 8, 1966, the wing's three tactical squadrons, the 10th, 81st, and 417th, began converting to the F-4D Phantom II fighters built by McDonnell-Douglas. When the last Super Sabre left Hahn, the air crews of the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing had logged 143,147 flight hours in the F-100.

Throughout the conversion to the F-4D, the 417th Tactical Fighter Squadron remained assigned to the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing but detached to the 86th Air Division [previously the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing] located at Ramstein Air Base. The 496th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, which was stationed with and attached to the 50th at Hahn Air Base but assigned to the 86th Air Division, did not convert to the new F-4D aircraft. An earlier version of the Phantom II, the F-4C, served as a primary ground attack platform during the Vietnam War. Without the benefit of a mounted cannon, however, the Phantom's air-to-air capabilities were somewhat limited. Units involved in combat in Southeast Asia, specifically the 366th Fighter Wing, eventually modified the aircraft to carry an external cannon, improving dramatically its air-to-air combat effectiveness. Production models of the F-4D did not, however, include this modification.

For the next two years, the wing continued normal operations. Aircrew training, local and multi-national exercises, competitions, and headquarters evaluations characterized daily operations. On July 15, 1968, however, the wing underwent another organizational change. On that day, the 417th Tactical Fighter Squadron was ordered to Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, and subsequently reassigned to Tactical Air Command's 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. This reassignment and movement resulted from the implementation of Project CRESTED CAP, which provided for the semi-permanent redeployment of United States Air Forces Europe units to the continental United States.



(U) A 50TFW F-4E bordered by the variety of weapons the aircraft could be loaded with.

The fire-power the F-4E carried was over seven-times that carried by either the P-47 or F-86

To replace the 417th, United States Air Forces Europe reassigned the 496th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron from 86th Air Division to the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing. The 496th initially brought to the wing the firepower of the F-102. Still, within two years, Headquarters, United States Air Force Europe redesignated the 496th as a tactical fighter squadron. The squadron converted to the F-4E, an updated version of the wing's F-4D Phantoms, retiring its F-102 Delta Daggers.

United States Air Forces Europe then selected the 81st Tactical Fighter Squadron as the command's first "Wild Weasel" unit. As such, the squadron's primary mission focus changed from ground and air attack roles to location and elimination of threats posed by enemy radar tracking and surface-to-air missile systems. The "Wild Weasel" version of the F-4E (and later the F-4G) could be used as a radar jamming platform or as a search and destroy vehicle. On June 12, 1971, subsequent to its selection, the 81st Tactical Fighter Squadron moved to Zweibrucken Air Base, West Germany. Though it remained assigned to the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing, the 81st was detached from the wing's operational control and attached to the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing. Following these changes, the wing again settled into a more normal operational pace and returned its attentions to maintaining combat readiness.

As the Cold War neared the end of its third decade, changes again faced the 50th. In July 1974, United States Air Forces Europe implemented a reorganization plan that replaced the chief of maintenance with a deputy commander. In addition, a new deputy commander for logistics assumed managerial control of transportation, comptroller, and procurement functions previously assigned to the combat support group. In 1975 the wing's 10th Tactical Fighter Squadron expanded its capabilities when it incorporated laser-guided bombs into its munitions inventory. The 50th also hosted seven F-106 Delta Darts from the 5th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, for a brief period. This marked the first deployment of an Air Defense Command unit to the United States Air Forces Europe's theater. The 50th exercised operational control over the F-106s and crews while at Hahn. During their deployment, the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron's jets and crews participated in Exercise COLD FIRE. The wing also began providing base-level support to the 6911th Security Squadron (Mobile) when that unit activated at Hahn AB in July 1975.

In 1976 United States Air Forces in Europe began an extensive reorganization and aircraft realignment program that eventually led to the end of the F-4D era at Hahn Air Base. The 50th Tactical Fighter Wing's new aircraft, the F-4E, added more strength to the unit's punch and boasted improved air-to-air capability. The F-4E included a nose-mounted Vulcan cannon that had not been designed into earlier models. The wing also gained a replacement unit for the 81st Tactical Fighter Squadron, which previously had been detached to the 86th Tactical Fighter Wing [formerly the 86th Air Division]. The November 15, 1976 activation of the 313th Tactical Fighter Squadron reunited two of the 50th Fighter Group's original World War II units—the 10th and 313th Fighter Squadrons.

As the conversion to the F-4E continued, the wing began an operational test of United States Air Force Europe's version of Air Force's Production Oriented Maintenance Organization (POMO) on January 10, 1977. The Tactical Aircraft Maintenance System (TAMS) sought to improve the structure of the maintenance organization, improve mission ready rates for assigned aircraft, and to improve sortie production capabilities. The test continued throughout the year and culminated in

SALTY ROOSTER, a USAF-initiated exercise to judge the effectiveness of the new maintenance programs in meeting wartime levels of aircraft sortie production. The 50th Tactical Fighter Wing participated in Exercise SALTY ROOSTER, held in April 1978, flying 2,771



50th Tactical Fighter Wing F-4E lands at Hahn AB, Germany after training mission

sorties in thirteen days. During the exercise, 50th Tactical Fighter Wing air crews met or exceeded all planned objectives. The Commander in Chief, United States Air Forces Europe, General William J. Evans, who believed that SALTY ROOSTER aptly demonstrated the effectiveness of the Production Oriented Maintenance Organization, ordered

its implementation throughout the command in June 1978. While the wing's maintenance community tested the viability of the Tactical Aircraft Maintenance System, aircrews continued to participate in various exercises, including multi-national games. During one such exercise, crews of the 50th Tactical Fighter Wing logged the first USAF aircraft refueling with a KC-747 of the Imperial Iranian Air Force.