

“WHAT’S YOUR STORY MR. THOMAS?” “SIR, THIS IS MY STORY.”



I was born in Columbia, South Carolina and graduated from high school there. However, because my parents divorced when I was three years old, I attended many schools in many places. I got a pretty good education, but missed some important pieces (e.g., trigonometry, algebra II) along the way. Of course, these shortcomings would haunt me throughout my years at USAFA and in graduate school. As a child I also suffered from the insecurity of not knowing where I would be living from year to year and what the future held for me.

As I was growing up I was fascinated with flying. Movies like *Flying Leathernecks*, *The Flying Tigers* and *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* convinced me that I wanted to be a fighter pilot someday. So, with no money for college I began thinking about what I would do after high school graduation. I found a brochure for the Air Force Aviation Cadet program in the guidance counselor’s office. The opportunity to fly, to become an officer and the stability and security of military life seemed to be a perfect fit for me. But I soon learned that the program would be terminated before I graduated, so it was back to the drawing board. One day I saw a television commercial about the Air Force Academy and sent for a catalog. I read it from cover to cover and quickly decided that it was the path I wanted to take. Although my dad had served in the army during WWII, no one in my family knew anything about the service academy admissions process, and I was totally ignorant about the long administrative road ahead.

In the back of the catalog was a sample letter that an admissions candidate needed to send to his congressman or senator to request an appointment. I copied the letter word-for-word and sent it in. My father assured me that I had no chance of getting an appointment, because they were only for politically connected people. Consequently, I was surprised when I heard from the congressman’s staff providing an appointment to take the Federal Civil Service exam the next week and an explanation that the congressman would use the results in his appointment determinations. There was no time for preparation, even if I had known how to prepare.

Weeks went by, and I had just about given up hope when a letter came in the mail marked “Congress of the United States.” It was from Congressman John J. Riley informing me that I was the third alternate for his appointment to the Air Force Academy. I was elated, but then the reality that I was fourth in line for the appointment set in. Nevertheless, when the large package filled with instructions and forms arrived from the Academy my optimism returned and I got to work. I didn’t think I had a chance of getting admitted, but I kept at it. After the medical examination and physical fitness test at Shaw AFB in Sumter, SC, I received a letter saying I was not physically qualified to attend the Academy. My heart sank. But after reading the whole letter I learned that the disqualification was due to cavities in my teeth, and if I would get them fixed would be back in the hunt. My father had not encouraged me throughout the whole process, but he did step up with money he couldn’t afford to get my teeth fixed.

Longer story shorter, I came home from school one day in May to find a letter from the Superintendent welcoming me to the Class of 1964. Apparently the three guys ahead of me had either opted out or were not qualified for some reason, and I was on my way.

My dad managed the Greyhound bus station in Columbia and naturally got a good deal on a bus ticket to Denver. I don’t remember much about the trip except it was long and I slept a lot. I do remember changing buses in St. Louis and making a rest stop in Limon, CO about 3:00 pm on the last

day. I had some time, so wandered into a bar in town. There I had my first of many Coors beers. I remember how good it tasted after hours and hours on the bus and how delighted I was that the drinking age for 3.2 beer was 18. Although I dreamed about becoming a pilot, unlike many of my classmates I never set foot in an airplane until my T-33 orientation ride during Doolie summer.

I arrived in Denver and somehow found the hotel my dad had arranged for me. I imagine it must have been close to the bus station. It was pretty cheesy and frayed around the edges. On the way to my room, the elevator operator asked if I would like some company for the evening. I didn't know what he was referring to, so I declined. A few months later I would regret that decision. The bus ride from Denver to the Academy is still a blur. I also don't remember much about the reception, except the push-ups after the shots. However, I remember very well passing through those glass doors after the in-processing. I didn't know it at the time, but those doors led to a life I never imagined I would have.

I was assigned to 12th Squadron, which became 17th Squadron after the reorganization. Our AOC was Captain Robert D. Carter ("Bobby Airpower"), an F-86 pilot who had flown in Korea. I still have the swept-wing prop and wings pin that he inspired us to wear. My first roommate was Bert Nixon from Richmond, VA. We were part of the group that flew in C-130's to march in John F. Kennedy's inauguration parade. The weather on the east coast was terrible, and many of the aircraft were unable to land at Andrews AFB. Our aircraft diverted to Langley AFB in Hampton, VA and we were bussed to Fort Meade MD for billeting. We got there very late that night and had to stumble around in the dark in the open bay barracks to find a bunk. It was freezing cold, and all we had were thin army blankets. I remember sleeping under my cadet overcoat.



Early the next morning we rode busses to Washington where we stood around on the street for hours waiting for the parade to begin. There was ice and snow on the streets, and the temperature was below freezing. I could barely feel my fingers and toes. Finally, we began to march. We were all wearing the rubber overshoes we were issued, and anytime someone would step on your heel the overshoe would come off. I'll bet there were hundreds of them left on the street. I remember seeing the new President in his top hat when we did our eyes-right (which I think was actually an eyes-left). After the parade we must have had some time off, because I spent the night at Bert Nixon's house in Richmond. I don't recall how we got there or whether or not we flew out Langley for the trip back to the Academy. Unfortunately, Bert was dismissed for an honor violation during our second semester.



The years at the Academy were a grind, but there are many fond memories of my time in 17th Squadron and the life-long friendships I made there. Here are a few of the high points:

- Making it through 4th Class year and surviving time on the intermural boxing team.
- After ending the first semester with a 2.0 GPA, making the Dean's List after two more semesters.
- Getting a supersonic ride in an F-100F at George AFB during the ZI field trip.
- Spending the entire summer after 3rd Class year in Europe, including the northern Europe field trip, 3rd Lieutenant in an F-102 squadron at Bitburg AB, Germany and an epic 30-day journey in a Volkswagen bus through southern Europe with squadron mates Rod Wells, Alan Rogers, Jim France and Kelly Wilson.

- Introduction to the love of my life, Pat McClain, on a blind date arranged by squadron mate and best man Pete Caldarelli.



Reese AFB

Pat and I were married three days after graduation in her hometown, Raton, NM. Part of the deal with her dad to get his blessing was that she would be able to finish her remaining two years of college after we were married. She was able to transfer her General Motors scholarship to Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX, so I chose Reese AFB as my pilot training base. I also chose the earlier 66A class so we could get settled in time for her to start the fall semester. It all worked great, because Reese was still one of the few bases that had the brand new T-38 for basic training. Our honeymoon consisted of a very long road trip back to South Carolina to visit my dad and to Florida to visit my mother. We didn't have much money, so we camped along the way using gear borrowed from Pat's father.



My instructor in the T-37 was Lieutenant Jack Flannery who turned out to be a great guy. I would see Jack again in 1969 when he joined our F-4D squadron at Danang AB, VN. Class 66A at Reese had a bunch of great guys, including classmates Les Baer, Gary Dickinson, Tom Eggers, Dick Hackford, Don Hall, Larry Martin, Rod Martin, Jim Pierce, Rob Tornow and Denny Wiedemeier. Despite the pressures of learning to fly we seem to have a good time, and before we knew it was time to move on. Our class still has periodic reunions to relive old, good times.



Davis-Monthan AFB

My assignment out of pilot training was to the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Bentwaters, UK. The wing was converting from the F-101C Voodoo to the F-4C Phantom II. After a short trip to Stead AFB, NV for survival training, I was ordered to join the conversion class at Davis-Monthan AFB as an F-4 back seat pilot. Pat stayed in Lubbock to finish college. The experienced single-seat pilots from Bentwaters were a scary bunch, but most of them reluctantly adjusted to having a guy in back seat. They were also experienced partyers who opened the eyes of us youngsters to the lives of Cold War fighter pilots. Colonel Robin Olds had been the previous commander of the 81st Wing and Colonel Chappie James had been his DO. So the party bar had been set pretty high. After training began, I was assigned to the 92nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, which had a roster of notable fighter pilots such as Virge Paiva, Moody Suter, Mike Dowell and Sid Wright. The commander was Slade Nash who held the land speed record in the F-86.



At the completion of our training at D-M, we were sent to the McDonnell factory in St. Louis to accept delivery of brand new F-4C's. They were Block 15 aircraft, which were the last of the F-4C line before the F-4D's were produced. They had a few of the features of the future D models, including the elimination of the infrared housing on the bottom of the radar dome. Our job was to pick up the airplanes, fly them to Warner Robins AFB in Georgia, and wait for instructions and flight planning to fly them to Bentwaters. I'll never forget the smell of that spanking new airplane. Of course, there was not much to do at Robins



until enough aircraft arrived to make up a cell for the trans-Atlantic trip, so I was introduced to even more fighter pilot antics. Robins was an Air Materiel Command base at that time with a wing of B-52's as tenants. There were no flight suits allowed in the main areas of the officers' club, and a coat and tie was required in the evenings. There were lots of drinking games, but the one that made the greatest impression on me was "rolling for drinks." This game involved no dice. When someone yelled, "Let's roll for drinks!" everyone dashed for the back wall of the bar, hit the floor in our suits and ties, and rolled on the floor toward the bar. The last one to arrive had to buy. You can imagine how that went down with the locals.

Luckily, we didn't have to wait too long for our trip to begin, and there were no court martials. I was crewed with Major Al Smith, a Korean War veteran, for the flight to Bentwaters. I don't remember much about it, except we were on cold mike most of the time, and I did a lot of the flying while Al smoked cigarettes up front. He would take over when it was time to air-to-air refuel and then give the airplane back to me. After one refueling I happened to glance behind us and saw that our airplane was dumping fuel. This was not a good thing over the North Atlantic. No one else in the flight had noticed. After I was able to get Al's attention, he turned off the dump switch. The dump switch and the air-to-air refueling switch in the F-4 were similar and located in close proximity to each other. He had simply activated the dump switch instead of closing the air refueling door.



RAF Bentwaters

Our primary mission at Bentwaters was tactical nuclear war in case the Soviets decided to invade Europe. Consequently, there was a lot of alert time sitting and sleeping next to our F-4's loaded with nuclear bombs. We had target folders to memorize, six-shot 38 caliber pistols for self-defense, one eye patch to wear on the bombing run so we would have at least one good eye to use after the bomb (or someone else's bomb) exploded, and a "blood chit" in several languages in case we were fortunate enough to fall into the hands of friendly partisans. All that aside, there were no tankers involved so we pretty much knew we were on one-way missions.

Although our primary mission was "nukes," we still had to qualify every year in various conventional ordnance deliveries. The weather in northern Europe usually prevented regular practice and training in conventional work. Therefore, USAFE maintained Wheelus Air Force base near Tripoli, Libya and an instrumented bombing range in the desert. As I write this in March 2011, while Libya is engaged in civil war and NATO is establishing a no fly zone, the memories of those times at Wheelus AFB are particularly poignant. Wheelus was a place where you reunited with friends and classmates from other bases in Europe, enjoyed the sun, had "blabber-mouth" parties on the beach, and did nothing but fly one or two times a day.



Pat graduated with honors from Texas Tech and prepared to join me at Bentwaters. She handled all the administrative details of setting up a move, selling a car, getting a passport and arranging transportation on her own. She learned a lot about how the Air Force works in a short amount of time. Because the pilot population at Bentwaters had doubled, there was a shortage of affordable housing. However, I got lucky and found us a place in the country not far from the base. We rented one-half of a 300 year old house with a thatched roof, stone floors and no central heat. The



landlord was a retired Scots doctor who lived with his wife in the other side of the house. It was a beautiful place in the summer, but very cold in the winter.

About the time Pat arrived in England the Air Force recognized the folly of putting pilots in the back seat of the F-4 and ordered the F-4 wings in Europe to establish front seat upgrade programs for their pilots. I had several front seat simulator missions under the program, but only one memorable flight. Our squadron was at Wheelus, and I was crewed with our operations officer for the flight back home. We had aircraft problems, so the other flight members left without us. When our jet was fixed the boss told me to fly in the front seat for the trip home. I was very happy for the simulator training, so at least I knew how to start the airplane. On the way north we encountered some un-forecast headwinds, and with the weather bad at Bentwaters decided to land at Ramstein AB for fuel. By then it was dark, the ceiling and visibility were barely above minimums and the runway was wet. I flew the best GCA I had ever flown and made a perfect landing. I don't think the ops officer said more than ten words to me during the whole flight. The next day we continued on to Bentwaters with me back in rear cockpit feeling very smug. I later found out that the ops officer thought I had already flown the required transition sorties in the front seat and had no idea that the flight from Wheelus was my first.

Davis-Monthan AFB

After we landed at Bentwaters I checked my mail box and found a huge surprise. I was being ordered to Southeast Asia with a stop at Davis-Monthan to go through the front-seat F-4 RTU course. This was unexpected, because I had been at Bentwaters less than 18 months. However, there was a major glitch in the assignment when I came down with a case of infectious hepatitis, which put me in the hospital for 30 days. Although I was still grounded, the medics finally let me leave for Tucson. I was very worried that I would lose my upgrade opportunity, but they simply put my class date on hold until I could get back on flying status.

I found myself in a class of mostly experienced tactical fighter pilots transitioning to the F-4. There were a few former training command instructors and some F-106 pilots, but I was the only former F-4 back seater in the class and youngest and least experienced pilot. The superstar of the group was Chis Patterakis. Chris was a contemporary of many of the F-4 instructor pilots in the squadron and a well-known F-100 pilot who had just finished a tour with the Thunderbirds. He was the odds-on favorite to win the class Top Gun award.



I was just happy to back flying again, and the rust disappeared fairly quickly. I surprised myself by being pretty good at dropping bombs and won the strafe award in the class gunnery competition. Although air to air combat in the F-4C was always an adventure, I found that I was pretty good at that, too. Once I got my confidence back, I loved every mission and couldn't wait to fly the next one. When they announced at the graduation dinner that I had won Top Gun, I was totally surprised as were most of the others in the room. I mumbled through a few words of acceptance and sat down in disbelief. Chris and the other experienced pilots in the class were gracious in their congratulations. It was one of the proudest moments of my life.

Danang AB, SVN

About two-thirds of the way through the course we received our combat assignments. I had hoped to go to Thailand, because I had many friends there. But the Air Force had plans for me to go to the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing at Danang Air Base in the northern part of South Vietnam. Pat had been teaching school in Tucson, but decided to get a teaching job in Albuquerque where she could live with her parents while I was away. I was relieved that she would not be alone. I knew that the 366th "Gunfighters" were flying missions over North Vietnam, and the policy was that after 100 missions over the north you were able to come home. I anticipated that I would be gone six months at the most, and we would be on to our next assignment. I had recently been promoted to Captain, and Pat insisted that I have some portraits taken in uniform before I left.

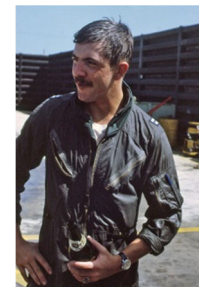


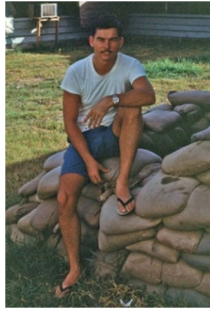
There was the obligatory stopover at Clark AB in the Philippines for jungle survival training, and I arrived at Danang via C-130 during the first week of June 1968. I was assigned to the 480th Tactical Fighter Squadron flying F-4D's where I was happy to find classmate Duke Moreland as an aircraft commander. Doug Jenkins and Steve Ritchie would join us later. My first combat mission was on 15 June 1968 on the Laotian border near the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp. My flight lead and instructor was Major Bob Lea. Bob was a Bentwaters guy, and we were in the same class at D-M when I was in the back seat.

Accommodations at Danang were not great for junior officers. Colonels and field graders lived in air conditioned trailers, but many of us lived in screened hooches with no air conditioning. We flew 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it was very difficult to sleep during the day if you were on the night schedule. Add fairly regular rocket and mortar attacks at night, and it was tough for anyone to sleep. After a month or so, though, we were all in air conditioned rooms, but the rocket attacks kept coming. We learned to sleep through the sirens, but after the Lopez FAC operations building near us took a direct hit, we renewed the practice of going to the bunkers when the sirens went off.



Danang's I Corps location meant that most of our missions were flown in North Vietnam and Laos, with some close air support in I Corps. As I recall, Duke Moreland flew his 100th mission over the north in October 1968, and he was the last in our squadron to do it before the bombing halt at the end of October. My last flight with Duke was a night mission in North Vietnam on 30 Sep 1968. It was my 48th "counter," and I was not going to get the early ticket home, like Duke.





The second, but less desirable way, to go home early was to get shot down twice (assuming you survived and did not get captured). On 19 Aug 1968, on my 49th mission, I was shot down while on a close air support mission in the DMZ. Marines had helicoptered into the DMZ and were getting hammered by North Vietnamese mortars and artillery. We were scrambled off of Gunfighter alert to attack the mortars. The friendlies were within 100 meters of the enemy, so we had to drop our “snake and nape” at very low altitude. I was hit on the first pass and the airplane, full of fuel and loaded with bombs, caught fire and exploded very quickly. My GIB, Gerry

Greene, and I ejected in the nick of time and hit the ground after only a few swings in our chutes. The ground was totally denuded from bombs, artillery and Agent Orange. There were bad guys everywhere, and they were coming for us. Lucky for us, the Marine Regimental commander was there in his command and control Huey. He landed next me, picked me up, and we then flew over to get Gerry. His knee was badly injured, so the gunner ran to him, picked him up and threw him into the chopper. They flew us to the field hospital at Quang Tri. If the Marine hadn't been there, we probably would have been killed or captured. There was no place to hide, and the Jolly Greens from Danang could not have gotten there in time.



Steve Ritchie had been instrumental in creating a Fast FAC detachment at Danang. The Misty FACs, flying F-100's and led by Medal of Honor winner Bud Day, had been very successful in finding targets in high threat areas of North Vietnam. It was thought that the F-4 would be a good platform for that type of mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos -- and in North Vietnam, if the bombing resumed there. Steve was part of the initial cadre trained by the Mistys and helped set up the Stormy operation at Danang. The basic idea was to fly at low altitude just above small arms range but low enough to spot lucrative targets. Of course that put the aircraft in the heart of the envelope for larger anti-aircraft weapons like 23mm ZPU's and 37mm guns, so the aircraft had to be constantly jinking as you flew along the trails. The average mission was 3 to 4 hours with two or three air refuelings. It was a hazardous job, but occasionally produced spectacular results.



I had become a flight leader, instructor pilot, flight examiner, and was chosen as Danang's Junior Officer of the Year for 1968, when we received word that the 480th Squadron would be moving to Phu Cat



AB to make room for a squadron of F-4E's that was deploying from the U.S. About that time, Captain Vic Smith, Class of 1965 and one of the original Stormy cadre, was shot down during a Stormy mission over Tchepone, Laos and was MIA. Steve Ritchie persuaded me to replace Vic. It didn't take much arm twisting, because I wasn't interested in the hassle of moving to Phu Cat for the last few months of my tour. The Stormy flight was attached to the 390th Tactical Fighter Squadron, so I joined that squadron and Steve and I became roommates. I flew my first Stormy mission of 6 Feb 1969 with the Stormy commander, Major Ray Walker. The first four



missions were flown in the back seat, and one of them was the first time I ever puked in an airplane. Looking in the cockpit and reading a map while pulling a constant 3 to 4 g's was not my idea of fun. I flew the fourth mission with Steve, and he cleared me to go out on my own. I was very relieved and

gained a new appreciation for the GIB's who did the Stormy work. When I joined the Stormy flight I had a total of 161 combat missions, including 63 missions over the north. I would get four more counters as a Stormy and 50 total Stormy missions, which was the maximum you were allowed to fly. I finished my tour at Danang with 215 combat missions and 450 combat hours. I'll leave for another day the story about the Danang bomb dump exploding.

*These friends of mine, we shared some good times together
 Days of sunshine, days of rain.
 Many jobs and many towns we worked and never
 Cared if we saw the same town again
 Then one day we weren't as young as before
 Our mistakes weren't quite so easy to undo
 But for all those roads, my friends, we travelled down
 I'm a better man to just have known of you.
 From the song "Friends of Mine" by Ian Tyson*



Langley AFB



The next road I travelled led to Air Defense Command. I was assigned to the 48th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Langley AFB flying the F-106. However, I first had to go Perrin AFB to complete a short course in the F-102. I never understood why an experienced F-4 pilot with over 600 hours of flying time had to fly the F-102 to get some "delta wing experience" before going to the F-106. The F-106 was much easier to fly than the post-stall gyration prone, hard-wing F-4.

I joined Pat at her parents' house in Albuquerque and took it easy while she finished her teaching contract. Afterward, at her suggestion, we took a long, leisurely road trip to visit national parks in the west that I had never seen. It was a great idea, because it helped me decompress and stop feeling like I needed to be back in Vietnam. Then we were off to Perrin. From Perrin we went direct to Langley, because there was a delay in my 106 class date. We found a house and began settling in while I checked out in the T-33. Once I got started with my 106 training at Tyndall AFB, Pat came down, and we enjoyed a few weeks in a rental house on Mexico Beach. I enjoyed flying the F-106 and it was very pleasant time.



The mission of the 48th was of course strategic air defense. We sat five minute alert at Langley and also had an alert detachment at Wilmington, NC. Many people were not aware that the F-106 carried an unguided rocket with a nuclear warhead, called the AIR-2A, designed to engage large formations of Soviet bombers.



Of course, the nuclear piece complicated force generation and ORI scenarios. Although I grew to like single-engine, single seat flying, I found the mission to be less than challenging. That changed, however, when several defecting Cuban aircraft landed undetected and unchallenged in the southern U.S. and a number of airliners were hijacked to Cuba. We were ordered to set up an alert detachment at Homestead AFB, FL to help with the problem. We got a lot more scrambles at Homestead, and also got involved in the drug interdiction campaign. Except for the time away from home, that was fun

for a while, but very suddenly I received orders to report to the AFIT residence school at Wright-Patterson starting in May 1971.

The time in the 48th FIS was short, but in retrospect it was typical of why Pat and I grew to love being in the Air Force. Unpredictable moves to new places and jobs, reuniting with old friends and finding new ones made life exciting and rewarding.

Wright-Patterson AFB

I like to say that I never had an assignment I didn't like, but this one came pretty close. I had envisioned that I would finish my F-106 tour and then volunteer to return to SEA for a second tour in the F-4. But by 1971 the Air Force envisioned the end of the war and an excess of experienced pilots. The personnel wizards created the "rated supplement," and I and several others were some of its first victims. The Air Force was also struggling with the impact of Secretary of Defense McNamara's studies and analysis shop. They were applying relatively simplistic quantitative analysis tools to the force structure and budgeting processes in the Pentagon, which created unwelcome results. Air Force leadership decided they needed an analysis shop of their own to challenge the OSD/SA studies. They created the Assistant Chief of Staff for Air Force Studies and Analysis as a stand-alone agency working directly for the Chief of Staff and had AFIT create a two-year masters level course to train staff officers in the discipline.

Math challenged, I have no idea of why I was chosen for such a program. I almost flunked the algebra refresher course that led off the program, and then worked my butt off for the next two years. Classmates who were at Wright-Patterson at the time were Barry Barnes, Bob Hovde, Herb Bevelhymmer, John Davis and Rusty Elder, among others. We had some fun, but most of it for me was sheer drudgery.

The Pentagon

After graduation from AFIT in 1973, I was sent to Air Force Studies and Analysis in Washington. Finding a place to live in the D.C. area was a shock, especially for a Captain. We bought a house in Burke, VA that we could just barely afford, and I settled for the long commute to and from work each day. I was assigned to the Interceptor Division in the Strategic Forces Directorate. Apparently, my two-years experience as an F-106 pilot marked me as an air defense expert.

Outside of the academic environment of AFIT, the work turned out to be very interesting. There were plenty of crash projects, late nights, and weekend work that were typical of the Air Staff. Briefing slides were hand made on sheets of paper using a typewriter and strips of tape for graphs. They were then turned into colored transparencies for the briefings. There was no PowerPoint! In fact, there were no desktop personal computers. I used several computer simulation models to do my work, which entailed preparing a bunch of punch cards to be fed into an IBM 360 main frame computer in the basement of the Pentagon. They had to be submitted before the end of the day, so they could be run over night. The results would always be printed on large perforated sheets of paper and would be picked up first thing in the morning, unless someone else's big job had a higher priority. If there was one mistake in a single punch card, the job wouldn't run and all you would get back would be a few sheets showing why the job failed. Seeing a small printout early in the morning when there was a deadline looming ruined your day. The first two years I was required to fly four hours a month to maintain my flight pay, and flew the T-39 out Andrews AFB, MD.

The absolute high point of our tour in Washington was the birth of our first child, Lynne Elizabeth, on 15 Jul 1974.

Studies prepared by our division always had a name that included Sabre, such as Sabre Shield for a study of air defense radar capability. When the E-3A AWACS was on the drawing board we were tasked to prepare a study to support buying the airplane for strategic air defense. We struggled with coming up with a good, alliterative Sabre name, and finally I suggested that we call it Sabre Sentry. The name stuck and eventually the nickname for the airplane became the E-3A Sentry. It was never purchased in significant numbers for strategic air defense of the continental U.S., but our study helped push it over the budgetary threshold based on its general purpose applications.

In fact, during my Pentagon tour the entire basis for strategic air defense planning underwent a seismic change with a stroke of the pen in the Defense Planning Guidance. The primary mission of air defense forces was changed from defending North America from air attack by Soviet nuclear equipped bombers, to simply providing surveillance and control of U.S. airspace. Since the advent of the Cold War, it was well known that the weak link in our air defenses was the limited ability of air defense systems to detect and successfully engage low flying aircraft. There were big plans to develop and deploy over-the-horizon backscatter radar (OTH-B), AWACS in a strategic role, and hundreds of new interceptors with look down, shoot down capability. The new systems would have filled the gaps in ground-based radar coverage and provided a credible defense against low altitude attackers.

The revision of the strategic planning guidance brought consideration of the advanced systems for air defense to a halt and began a complete review of the necessity of all aspects of the Cold War strategic air defense force structure. I was tasked to prepare a study of the utility of the dozens of air defense interceptor bases and detachments located around the perimeter of the U.S., particularly in the northern tier along the Canadian border. After months of work, the study concluded that, in light of the new planning guidance, many of the air defense locations could be eliminated along with the units that supported them. The study received a great deal of scrutiny, and as a young Major select I briefed it all the way up to Air Force Counsel and the Chief of Staff. The final step was to take it to CINCNORAD, General Lucius Clay, Jr. My top cover was Brigadier General Jasper Welch, who was in charge of Studies and Analysis, but the NORAD and ADC staffs did all they could to discredit the study. General Clay was unhappy, but was a gentleman, and I left Colorado Springs with my head intact. Despite the staff efforts, the logic of the study was inescapable and it led to major changes in air defense force structure. I figured my career was over and began thinking about the airlines or law school. It would be only two years later, 1 Oct 1979, that Aerospace Defense Command ceased to exist and became a sub-command called ADTAC within Tactical Air Command.

Keflavik, Iceland

Ironically, my assignment after four years in the Pentagon was to an air defense unit in Iceland. It was a 12 month unaccompanied tour, and I was to attend Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, VA (AFSC) followed by a short course checkout in the F-4 before reporting to Iceland. The Iceland unit was the 57th Fighter Interceptor Squadron "Black Knights," and it was equipped with the F-4E. I was not looking forward to being separated from my wife and beautiful baby girl, but was delighted to be able to fly the F-4 again.



Pat had gotten a very good job in Northern Virginia working for a mortgage insurance company based in San Francisco. She had quickly advanced in the company with more and more responsibility. So, when we moved to Norfolk the company didn't want to let her go and allowed her to continue

working from there. We had sold our house in Burke, and when I received my remote assignment we decided to buy a townhouse in Arlington, VA so Pat could continue with her job.

AFSC was a cool school. Only six months long, it included students from all our armed services and some NATO countries. The course included a joint exercise using a computer simulation, and I, branded as a nerd from Studies and Analysis, was recruited to teach my section how to use the computer. However, my career doubts were eased somewhat when General Welch called me at the staff college to tell me I had been selected to Lt. Colonel below the zone. When the time came I drove to George AFB at Victorville, CA for my F-4 refresher course. I had a stop at MacDill AFB on the way, but that is another long story for another day. It was great to be flying again, and before I knew it I had kissed Pat, Lynne and our dog Zip goodbye and was on the way to Iceland. I arrived there in May 1978.



The Cold War was still going on, and Keflavik was a NATO base with the primary mission of monitoring Soviet air and naval activity in the North Atlantic waters between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom – the GIUK Gap. Air Forces Iceland consisted of two radar sites, the 57th FIS, a Jolly Green Giant rescue detachment and occasional deployments of airborne warning and control aircraft. The Navy had a rotational detachment of P-3 Orion submarine chaser aircraft and supporting systems. The 57th had the added mission of providing air defense for Iceland if the Soviets were to attack. Iceland sat in a very strategic location, because there was no way for the Soviets to get their aircraft, ships and submarines into the North Atlantic from Murmansk except by passing through the GIUK Gap. We always had two aircraft on 15 minute alert and two more on one hour status. It was 15 minute alert, because we flew every mission in rubber survival suits, “poopy suits,” due to the cold Atlantic waters.



If there was a high point of the tour, it was getting scrambled to intercept Soviet Bear aircraft transiting the Gap in route to Cuba or conducting surveillance activities against the U.S. Navy. We found it to be exciting to be up close and personal with our Cold War enemies. Classmate Doug Jenkins was the assistant operations officer of the squadron when I arrived, and I replaced him in the job when he returned to the U.S. After pinning on Lt. Colonel, I took over as operations officer.

The definite low point of the tour was being separated from my family for so long. Unlike today, the only way to communicate with the home front was by letter or audio tapes, which was very unsatisfactory and led to misunderstandings. Pat’s job had gotten more demanding and she had some travel responsibilities. By herself in the Washington D.C. area, with no support group and a four-year old was challenging, to say the least. Added to that were all the issues with punch lists and furnishings for a new house, car troubles, a beloved dog who was not coping with long hours alone, and the stress of her father being seriously ill with cancer. She says it was the most difficult year of her life.

Moody AFB

I left Iceland in May 1979 and headed home to Virginia. My return was not a happy one, because Pat’s father died the day I arrived. We went to Colorado for the funeral and then came home to prepare for our next move. I had received an assignment to be the operations officer of the 339th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Moody AFB in Valdosta, GA. Moody had been an undergraduate pilot

training base, but was now home to an operational F-4E wing, the 347th TFW commanded by Class of 59er Colonel Brad Hosmer. Classmate Dick Hawley was the Deputy Commander for Operations.



I had to report to Moody fairly quickly, so Pat stayed behind to make some decisions about her job and get the house ready to rent. We had decided not to sell it, because we had only owned it about a year and anticipated that we might be back in the Washington area again. Pat had earned pretty good money in her work, and I didn't have anything to spend money on in Iceland, so we had accumulated enough of a nest egg to afford to buy a house in Valdosta, as long as our Arlington house was rented.

We had no problem renting the Arlington house and found a good house with a large yard in a nice neighborhood where lots of Moody officers lived. Pat was able to continue her work for PMI, and all was good.

This was our first assignment to an operational Tactical Air Command unit, and in a short time we really liked what we saw. TAC, under General Wilbur Creech, was doing things right and providing unit commanders with the resources they needed to accomplish the mission. There was a heavy emphasis on flying the contracted number of flying hours each month, which led to improved aircraft maintenance and supply and unit pride. While unable to completely return to squadron aircraft maintenance similar to what ADC squadrons had used, TAC had reorganized maintenance so that each fighter squadron was assigned its own Aircraft Maintenance Unit (AMU), which gave flight line maintenance personnel identity with and a stake in the success of the squadron. And it wasn't just the flight line that saw improvements. Benchmarks were set for support agencies to improve their standards, to the benefit of everyone on the base, e.g., shorter waiting times at the pharmacy and faster processing of TDY vouchers.



The 347th was a Rapid Deployment Force unit, so we had strict requirements for generating aircraft and deploying rapidly to Europe, if necessary (still the Cold War). Each squadron had a designated location in Europe to which it would deploy and maintained detailed plans about how it would set up and begin operations once it arrived, even down to floor plans for the buildings it would use. Squadrons were designated as the alpha, bravo or charlie squadron. When ordered, the alpha squadron had to be airborne and on the way to Europe with its full complement of aircraft within 24 hours. Non-flyable aircraft were replaced by aircraft from the bravo squadron. This was called "robusting." The bravo squadron was required to be airborne within 48 hours of the alert, with robusting from the charlie squadron. The charlie squadron would be held in reserve to repair broken aircraft and augment the deployed squadron as necessary. The 339th "Dragons" was the charlie squadron when I joined it.

The F-4E was an aerodynamically different aircraft than its older brothers, the C's and D's, plus it had an internal Gatling gun. Since I had been flying the E model in Iceland, I didn't need an E transition course, but it had been a long time since I had dropped any bombs. It was great fun getting back into the swing of air-to-ground combat and learning all the new techniques and tactics that had been developed since the end of the Vietnam War. Under Brad Hosmer's leadership, the wing was very professional and combat oriented in its training. Some of the old-school leadership thought the new training regimen was too extreme and too risky, e.g. flying line abreast tactical formation at 200 feet above the ground.



However, lessons from Vietnam and the Red Flag exercises had proven otherwise. We were training to fight against the Soviet Union and had to be good at what we did to be effective and to survive. I felt a great sense of accomplishment when I became combat ready at Moody.



After six months with the Dragons, I was transferred to the 68th TFS as its operations officer. The 68th "Lightning Lancers" was the alpha squadron and was commanded by Lt. Col. Joe Ralston. In addition to an upcoming operational



readiness inspection (ORI) where we would have to generate the entire wing and launch the aircraft as if we were deploying to battle, the squadron was preparing for a historic deployment to Egypt. It was an exciting and demanding time, and Joe and I were very busy getting our aircrews and maintainers ready for both events. We passed the ORI with flying colors, followed up with a trip to Red Flag, and got serious about the deployment to Egypt. The deployment was to be for 90 days with 12 aircraft and we would be based at Cairo West airfield, an Egyptian Air Force base. There were no facilities for us to use, so part of mission was to field test an air deployable system called Harvest Bare that was intended to provide the necessary living and work facilities for a bare-base operation, particularly in a desert environment. There would be about 400 personnel at the deployment site, and it would be the first American military presence in Egypt since World War II.

It had only been a few years since the Egyptians had asked the Soviets to leave Egypt, but they still relied heavily on Soviet military equipment for their arsenal. As part of its ongoing military assistance program with Egypt, the United States had given the Egyptians 35 F-4E's. Most of them were stationed at Cairo West, and the Egyptian Air Force was having a difficult time



flying and maintaining the aircraft. The airplane was relatively sophisticated and complex compared to the Soviet aircraft to which the Egyptian crews were accustomed. The idea was for us to set up operations next to the Egyptian aircraft, fly a fairly heavy schedule every day, and therefore demonstrate that it could be done with the F-4E in desert conditions. The exercise was called Proud Phantom and we were scheduled to deploy in late July 1980.

Things were progressing very smoothly. Pat and I were happily surprised to learn that she was pregnant with our second child who was due in January, and planning for the deployment was looking good. Then, just a few weeks before we were to launch Colonel Hosmer called me and told me to take an airplane to Shaw AFB and interview with the 9th Air Force Commander for a squadron commander job. I had recently learned that I had been placed on the TAC Squadron Commander List, a prerequisite for getting a squadron. However, I was dumbfounded that they would consider moving me just before the Egypt mission. I went to Shaw, met with General Braswell and returned to Moody the same day. I then learned that it wasn't me who would be moving but our commander, Joe Ralston. It seems the TAC commander needed a new executive officer, he wanted Joe, and he wanted him now. Joe was very upset that he would not be leading the squadron to Egypt, but you did not say no to General Creech. With General Braswell's approval I was to be the new commander of the 68th TFS. We hastily put together a change-of-command ceremony, and two weeks later on 28 July 1980 we were on our way to Egypt.



The non-stop flight to Cairo West was 13 1/2 hours long and required 10 air-to-air refuelings. Although fighter aircraft had been conducting trans-Atlantic deployments for many years, there was

always a lot of adrenalin involved in getting underway and getting through the first few refuelings and this was to be an unusually long flight. A few of our younger pilots had some trouble getting connected to the tanker during the first night refueling, but they managed to settle down and get it done. I led the first cell of six aircraft, and our brand new squadron operations officer, Major Steve Steele, led the second cell. Everything was fine until we completed our final refueling over the Mediterranean. As I closed the air refueling door I noticed the utility hydraulic gauge on my jet begin to fluctuate. The refueling door is operated by the utility system, so figured it was just a transient fluctuation. I was wrong, and the gauge gradually sunk to zero. That meant I had to use an emergency system to lower the landing gear, I had no brakes, no anti-skid system and needed to engage the approach end barrier. Cairo West did not have barriers, but part of the Bare Base package was to install mobile barrier systems at each end of the runway. I made the necessary radio calls and instructed the other aircraft to land before me. There was only one runway, and when my aircraft engaged the barrier it would take some time for ground crews to get my aircraft out of the barrier, tow me off the runway and get the barrier reset. A few members of the flight were a little low on gas, so I didn't want any problems with getting everyone on the ground. My wingman, Urb Dishart, confirmed that my landing gear had come down successfully, and I orbited the area until everyone landed safely. I then made a successful barrier engagement. There were quite a few members of the Egyptian press on hand, and I made an inauspicious arrival behind a tow tractor.



After we got some rest we began to explore the base and were briefed on rules and procedures by the Egyptians. We could fly anywhere except over Cairo, Aswan and Luxor. There was a huge desert for us to train over and mainly unrestricted airspace for air-to-air training. There was even an abandoned convoy of destroyed armored vehicles and trucks in the desert for us to strafe and bomb. The base itself was interesting. There were still signs of damage from the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and Soviet made Badger and Beagle bombers were parked in Soviet built revetments.



It was 90-day deployment, but Colonel Hosmer decided that he would replace the 68th squadron crews and maintenance personnel after six weeks. He wanted the 70th TFS to benefit from the experience, as well. The aircraft would stay in place, and the 70th crews would bring them home in October. We had six weeks of some of the best flying I had ever seen. We accomplished all of our training objectives and even flew a few sorties against Egyptian MIG-21's. I believe the Egyptians gained from the deployment, also. A few weeks into our operation the Egyptians began coming to where our airplanes were parked and asking questions. Soon our crew chiefs were launching their aircraft and vice versa. It was a great learning experience for everyone. I learned all about "three cups of tea" during my regular visits to the Egyptian base commander. There was always a mandatory period of tea and pleasantries prior to getting down to business. I grew to like the Egyptian officers very much.



The success of our deployment was marred by one tragic event. During the final two sorties on the last day of flying before we boarded C-141's for the flight home, one of our field grade pilots, who had little experience flying fighters, became disoriented on a low level flight over the desert and flew his airplane into the ground. He and his WSO were both killed. Of course, this cast a pall over our trip home, but it didn't change the fact that the overall mission had been a great success.

The next 21 months while I finished my tour as squadron commander was one of the most rewarding times in my life and in my career. The wing continued as one of the premier fighter wings in the Air Force, and we were constantly being challenged with new opportunities to demonstrate our abilities. Our squadron was full of bright young professionals who loved their work and loved to have a good time. I was so proud to be their leader. Pat blossomed as the first lady of the squadron, and the other wives loved her and respected her leadership.

Our son Robert McClain was born 26 Jan 1981. He had curly hair and weighed nine pounds, but we soon discovered there was something seriously wrong with him. He could hardly digest any food and began losing weight rapidly. He was hospitalized, but the doctors at Moody were baffled by his ailment. Sometimes, certain foods would work for him, but he continued to decline. Pat had quit her job, and was spending hours a day on Robert's care. Thankfully, we received a referral to Shands Children's Hospital at the University of Florida. He received wonderful care, but they were never able to really diagnose what caused his problem, other than the villi in his small intestine were not fully developed. They placed him on a special diet, and he gradually recovered. Not long afterwards we had another surprise when we learned Pat was pregnant with our third child. Jean Louis was born 14 Mar 1982, and we had two babies to keep us busy, along with running a fighter squadron.

About the time Jean was born I received word that I had been selected for promotion to Colonel. I had been so busy with the squadron and everything else that I hadn't been aware that I was in the primary zone. With the promotion and my two years as a commander approaching in June, I knew that we would soon be leaving Moody. As usual, it came sooner than expected when in April I received a phone call from J. B. Davis, the TAC Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DP), telling me that I was coming to work for him, and he needed me there in early June. I turned over command of the squadron in May, and Pat and I, our three kids, parrot and pregnant cat packed up to move back to Langley AFB.

Langley AFB

After a long road trip in a too small Honda station wagon, we arrived back in Tidewater Virginia in late May 1982. We were able to get housing in one of the old brick quarters on the Langley main base. It was little small for us, but was historical and very convenient to everything on the base. I could walk to work and usually did. My job was Deputy Director of Personnel Plans and Systems. My boss was Colonel John Dunning, a career personnel officer and great guy. He and General Davis were working to develop deployable automated personnel systems so that the troops who did the personnel work wouldn't have to stubby pencil all the documentation required to track the comings and goings hundreds of deployed people. This was still before the availability personal computers. Davis had specifically hired me because of my many deployments as a squadron commander and experience with computers in the Pentagon. It took a while for me to learn about the personnel business, but we made progress with the task. The most difficult part was convincing the TAC bean counters that we needed funding.



Brigadier General Billy Boles replaced General Davis as the TAC/DP, and appointed me to be the TAC Director of Assignments. I was learning a lot about personnel in a hurry. I was in charge of all TAC

personnel assignments except generals and colonels. Lucky for me, I had a staff of excellent personnel professionals and a good group of fighter pilots in the rated assignments shop. For the most part, they kept me out of trouble, but every day there were tough decisions to make about peoples' careers and lives. We missed squadron life, and I certainly missed flying, but the personnel people turned out to be great folks and we made life-long friends with many of them.

Fort McNair, DC

After two good years at Langley I was sent to attend the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) at Fort McNair. We still owned our house in Arlington and arranged to have it available for us when we got to Northern Virginia. It was a fairly short commute from there over to Fort McNair, and with the Metro up and running, very convenient to go into downtown Washington. ICAF was a joint school, so we got to know many people from other services and government agencies. We had the most senior leaders in Washington as guest speakers, and Pat had coffee with Barbara Bush.

The school was eleven months long, and ICAF students had to concentrate part of their curricula in one of the defense industries. There were national and international field trips scheduled for each industry. I chose ship building to learn about something new. It turned out to be a good choice. Our group visited steel plants and shipyards around the U.S. and then went to Germany to view their very robust ship building industry. There is no commercial ship building industry in the U.S., but we saw the major yards building Navy and Coast Guard vessels. In Germany, we saw a very active business building diesel submarines for sale to various countries around the world.

Langley AFB

After a year in senior service school and two years on the TAC staff, I was ready to get back to operations. Once again, however, my air defense credentials affected my assignment. In July 1986 I became the Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations for Headquarters 1st Air Force at Langley AFB, VA. 1st Air Force had been reactivated on 6 Dec 1985 replacing Air Defense, Tactical Air Command (ADTAC). Since its creation in October, 1979 when TAC absorbed Aerospace Defense Command, ADTAC, commanded by a Colonel, had dwindled from a Major Air Command commanded by a four-star general to only a few active duty units and four air defense sectors. That was the bad news. The good news was 1st Air Force was now one of the three Numbered Air Forces in TAC, and I would get to check out in the F-15. I went to Tyndall AFB, site of my F-106 training, for a senior officer course in the F-15. The 325th Tactical Training Wing was one of two F-15 wings training pilots to fly the airplane. We had several good friends there, so it was fun to be back at Tyndall. More good news was our family was assigned one of the large brick quarters at Langley.



While I was at Tyndall, the TAC commander, General Russ, tasked my old friends in TAC personnel to develop and host a conference for new squadron commanders' wives. They invited Pat to be a guest speaker at the conference to give the perspective of the wife of a former squadron commander. General Russ attended, and she blew him away with her presentation. After that she was invited back to speak every time they had the conference.



I loved flying the F-15 and thought that everything that was wrong in the F-4 was corrected in the F-15. But I had a lot to learn about employing the airplane that wasn't taught in a senior officer checkout. My former F-106 squadron, the 48th FIS, was still at

Langley, so I did most of my flying with them while at the headquarters.

Major General Buford D. “Derald” Lary was the commander of 1st Air Force. He was a no nonsense leader couldn’t abide the excuse, “this is how we always did it in ADC.” Unfortunately, there was still resentment among old air defenders about the TAC takeover and many from the old ADTAC staff had carried over to 1st Air Force. He and I got along well and worked hard to eliminate some of the hard feelings.

In March 1986, I was assigned to Tyndall AFB as Deputy Commander for Operations of the 325th Tactical Training Wing. We loved life at Langley and hated to leave so soon, but we would soon discover that the next four years would be some of our best times in the Air Force.

Tyndall AFB

Tyndall was the only full base assigned to 1st Air Force, but there was a lot going on there. It was the home of the Air Defense Weapons Center (ADWC), which was commanded by a major general. The two major organizations under ADWC were the 325 TTW and the Weapons Evaluation Group (WEG). The WEG operated the drones used in the testing and evaluation of various air-to-air missiles. They also ran the program where active duty and Air National Guard fighter units would deploy to Tyndall to live fire missiles. Whenever there was a William Tell air-to-air weapons competition, they would administer that, as well.

The Southeast Air Defense Sector, commanded by a brigadier general, was a major tenant on the base. It was one four air defense sectors covering the continental U.S., which provided surveillance and control of our airspace. The four sectors replaced the old SAGE air defense system of Cold War days and provided the command and control or air defense units tasked with intercepting unidentified aircraft entering U.S. airspace. Tyndall was also home to the Air Force Civil Engineering Center, which had the mission of developing new civil engineering techniques and equipment to respond to worldwide deployment needs.



At the time I became its DO the 325 TTW was composed of six squadrons. There were two F-15 training squadrons, the 1st and 2nd Tactical Training Squadrons. The 95th TTS “Boneheads” was a T-33 squadron that had the job of providing airborne targets for air defense unit training and operational readiness inspections all over the country. It was manned primarily by a group of lieutenants who loved to fly. There was an academic squadron that handled the ground and simulator training for our F-15 students, and there was a weapons controller training squadron that did the initial training for officers who were entering the Air Weapons Controller field. Finally, the wing had a maintenance training squadron, which provided advanced training for skilled maintenance technicians.

As the new DO, I hit the ground running and was soon going through F-15 instructor pilot training, so that I could fly with students. I also became reacquainted with the T-33 and occasionally flew with the 95th.



I worked hard to become familiar with each squadron’s leadership and to get a firm grip on the F-15 training business. I soon learned that we had a very professional and experienced cadre of F-15 instructor pilots. As I began flying with students fresh from undergraduate pilot training, I also learned that we had a lot to teach them about flying and fighting the F-15. However, my stint as DO did not last long. Our wing commander, Hale Burr, came to the end of his tour and was reassigned.



The new commander was Dick Myers who would later be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The current vice commander decided to retire, and I was chosen to become the vice.

We decided not to move from the DO's house to the vice commander's house, which was next door. It was a good decision, because less than a year later on 3 Jun 1987 I took command of the wing. Dick had been assigned to command the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing at Langley and departed early. Major General Ted Rees, ADWC Commander, presided over the change-of-command. I was happy learn that Major General Lary would also be there, because I was sure he had a lot to do with my selection to command the wing. The change-of-command began a very happy and very busy two years for Pat and me. She continued to speak at the squadron commanders wives conferences, and was picked as TAC's representative on the Defense Blue Ribbon Panel on misguided prohibitions against wives of senior officers working. She travelled to all the Major Air Commands, spent many days in Washington. We also had three youngsters in school and an extremely active job related social life. Tyndall was a popular place for VIP's to visit, because of the fishing and the golf. We had a very nice base golf course, and the weather was usually good. As was customary, the TAC commander, General Russ, and his wife came to dinner at our house. They did that with all the TAC wing commanders as sort of a hospitality check and interview for future responsibilities.



We moved across the street to the wing commander's house. Tyndall housing wasn't great, but was in a super location overlooking the bay and a beautiful barrier island. The sunsets were spectacular. We used to joke that we lived in a \$20,000 house on a million dollar lot. We had a great crew of senior officers at Tyndall, which also made life pleasant and work fun. As Luke AFB phased out its F-15 training, our 95th squadron traded its T-33s for F-15s. As if we weren't busy enough, the Center got the opportunity to host William Tell 1988. Teams from all the fighter commands came to Tyndall to compete in various air-to-air events, including live missile firings. It was a very high visibility event with lots of important people to be taken care of, including golf tournaments and awards banquets. There were also plenty of fun-loving fighter pilots to rein in without spoiling the fun. Most importantly, with lots of intense flying going on we needed to make sure the operations were all coordinated and safe. It was the first William Tell for recently activated 1st Air Force, and everyone was very pleased at how it went. Six years later I would return to Tyndall to be the Chief Judge for William Tell 1994.

Before we knew it, my two years as a wing commander were over. We had learned that I would be replacing my good friend Brigadier General Bill Ball, Class of 1963, as Commander of the Southeast Air Defense Sector. So, there would be no move from Tyndall, just a move to the house next door. There was no major adjustment for me in taking command of the sector. I was very familiar with their mission, and I would continue to fly with the wing. I made it a point to get out and visit all the flying units and radar sites controlled by the sector, and Pat accompanied me on a few of visits. There was only one active duty squadron, the 48th FIS at Langley, assigned to the southeast sector. All the rest were Air National Guard units. The sector's area of responsibility stretched from El Paso, TX to Washington, DC. We were by far the busiest of the sectors because of the drug interdiction mission.



Just before Christmas of 1989 I learned that I had been selected for promotion to Brigadier General. We figured that the promotion would mean finally saying goodbye to Tyndall after almost four years.

Cheyenne Mountain

When the assignment came in it was not what I expected. But then, few of my assignments were what I expected. We were going to Colorado Springs, and I was to be a Command Director in the NORAD Combat Operations Center in Cheyenne Mountain. The requirement to have a general officer on duty at all times in Cheyenne Mountain was a holdover from Cold War days. We had five flag officers sharing the duty: two Air Force, one Army, one Navy and one Canadian Forces. We each had a crew that manned the operations center and we rotated on eight-hour shifts along with our crews. The midnight shift was the worst. The schedule took a lot of getting used to, but after three years of command responsibilities, the family time was great.



The family and I arrived in Colorado Springs in June 1990, and we bought a house close to Cheyenne Mountain primarily because of the excellent school district. General Kutyna, CINC NORAD and CINC Space, pinned on my star on 1 July 1990, and I was ready to start work. Except for the launch drills we practiced on every shift, the work was deadly boring. However, things got a little more interesting when the first Gulf War kicked off. Very soon we discovered that our missile warning systems, though intended primarily for ICBMs, would detect the SCUD missiles being launched from Iraq. We got with the technical folks to adjust some radars and our displays so that not only would we know that a SCUD was being launched, we could predict where it was going. This proved to be very helpful to the people on the ground in Saudi Arabia and Israel. About 90 seconds after a launch we could tell the theater command centers, via direct communication, that missiles were on the way and what we thought were the targets. They would start the air raid sirens and pass the word to the Patriot batteries, which then knew where to look for the incoming warheads. We would then turn on CNN and watch the engagements.

Of course, I would have rather been flying F-15 missions and shooting down Iraqi MIGs, but I had to leave that to young guys we had trained at Tyndall. But it was nice to feel like we helped the war effort somewhat from Cheyenne Mountain. General Chuck Horner was the air commander during Gulf War One, and when he became CINC NORAD after the war, he had high praise for the work we had done.



After about a year I moved up to be NORAD Vice Director of Operations (J-3V). My boss, the J-3, was a Canadian two-star. My primary job was running NORAD operations in Cheyenne Mountain, including the operations center. My office was in the mountain, and I continued to pull occasional shifts to stay current and to give the Command Directors a break. When General Horner took command of NORAD/SPACECOM he relied on me to cut through some of the joint BS and tell him how things really worked. He had a warrior mentality and wanted to concentrate on getting space gathered intelligence directly into cockpits. I was able to help him do that by picking up some of his NORAD burden. He repaid me with a good fitness report, which led to my selection to Major General.

Germany

General Horner informed me of my promotion in the command center January 1993 and told about my next assignment. It was another joint job, but this time to NATO. I was to replace classmate

Lee Downer as Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations for the Second Allied Tactical Air Force, Rheindahlen, Germany (2ATAF) for the last few months before its deactivation. I was then to become the first Deputy Director of the brand new Allied Command Europe Reaction Force Air Staff at Kalkar, Germany (RFAS). I had to be at Rheindahlen in February 1993, so we decided that Pat and kids would stay in Colorado Springs until school was out.



Rheindahlen was a British Army base in the northern part of Germany. It was the headquarters for the ACE Rapid Reaction Force, commanded by a British General. 2ATAF was in the last few months of existence, and most of the American cadre had already been reassigned. Colonel Mike Scott was in charge of the final shutdown for the Americans, so there wasn't much for me to do but approve things. I lived in the officer's mess for the first month, or so, and then decided to get some furniture from Ramstein and move into house assigned to the American general. I basically camped out until Pat and the kids arrived in the spring.

Because I was the first to hold the RFAS job there had been no housing arranged. There was some government housing available for U.S. personnel assigned to Kalkar, but it was not adequate for the type of NATO entertaining we were expected to do. Fortunately, there was an English speaking German officer assigned to help with this sort of thing, and he helped us find a great house for rent in Xanten, a small German town on the Rhine River about 30 minutes from Kalkar. We did not bring a lot of our furniture to Germany, but we were able to get some pretty good stuff from Ramstein. Our German landlord spoke some English, so that helped with the transition, as well. There was only an American elementary school at Kalkar, so older kids had to make a two-hour trip to Dusseldorf to attend the International School of Dusseldorf (ISD). The first year, Jean attended the Kalkar School and Robert ISD. The second year they both attended ISD, which was a wonderful experience for them. They had a personal German driver who picked them up in the morning and drove them to and from ISD.

The purpose of RFAS was to develop contingency plans for the deployment of NATO air forces to conflicts not normally within the NATO sphere of defense. During the Cold War, except for the United States, NATO air forces were to fight in place to defend NATO countries from attack. The demise of the Soviet Union led our European allies to reexamine the missions of their air forces. They had to decide whether to maintain the status quo or to give them a more mobile role. In order to save them from the budgetary axe, they chose the latter option. The Director of RFAS was a German Lieutenant General. However, he also had national command responsibilities, which took most of his time. Therefore, as Deputy Director, I had responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the staff. We had a very energetic British Air Commodore as Chief of Staff, who kept things running like clockwork. Our staff was comprised of air force officers from all the NATO allies.



It seemed like a simple task. Develop deployment plans for a menu of possible conflicts and educate European air forces on the logistics requirements of fighting from deployed locations. However, nothing is ever easy in the political arena of NATO. There was resentment from the operations directorate at SHAPE Headquarters, because they felt that they had responsibility for contingency planning. There was resistance from USAFE Headquarters, because they were protective of their command and control responsibility for U.S. forces. Nevertheless, we actually got some plans drafted, one of the first of which was for Afghanistan. At the time I left the staff in July 1995, I wasn't sure whether our work would ever come to fruition. Looking back today I can see that NATO air intervention in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and in Libya, all had roots in RFAS.



Living in Germany was not easy for us. The closest U.S. military facilities were two to three hours away. A trip to the commissary and BX was an all-day affair. We were the only Americans in Xanten, and although we were warmly welcomed by our German neighbors, coping with German rules and customs without speaking the language was difficult. Pat got pretty good at German, but I had to rely on my German driver, if I needed help. Our kids had a great experience at ISD, but after the long commute back and forth each day they were often exhausted. All in all, we were not sad to leave Germany, but view our time there as growth opportunity for us all.

Shaw AFB

My next and final assignment was to my home state. I would be Vice Commander of 9th Air Force and U.S. Central Command Air Forces headquartered at Shaw AFB, SC. It was fun to be reunited with my South Carolina family, and Shaw was a nice base on which to live. Our older daughter, Lynne, was finishing her studies at the University of Colorado, and the two younger kids enrolled in Wilson Hall School, a private school in Sumter. Another good thing was that I would be flying again, because the 9th AF Vice Commander traditionally checked out in the A-10 "Warthog."



As the air component for Central Command, we were very busy enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq that was put in place at the end of the first Gulf War. Operation Southern Watch, as it was called, was a very resource intensive operation that was managed by a joint task force, JTF-Southwest Asia (JTF-SWA). The commander of JTF-SWA was a USAF two-star on a 90-day temporary duty assignment. The joint task force consisted of U.S., British and French fighter aircraft supported by tankers and AWACS aircraft. There was also a U-2 detachment, search and rescue assets, and U.S. Army Patriot missile batteries at Riyadh and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. When there was a U.S. Navy carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf, the JTF-SWA Commander had operational control of its air assets. JTF-SWA had its headquarters in an annex of the Saudi Air Force headquarters in Riyadh.



As soon as we arrived at Shaw and unpacked our bags, my new boss, Lt. General John Jumper, asked me to go to Riyadh and take command of the joint task force. The current commander had a family emergency and needed to cut his tour short by 30 days. I quickly got outfitted with desert gear and was briefed on what I needed to know about the job. Within a few days I was on a plane headed for Dhahran. Once again, Pat was left holding the bag on getting moved into a new house, the household goods shipment taken care of, the kids registered for school, and picking up the Volvo we bought in Germany from the port in Norfolk, VA, among many other things. The 30-day TDY turned out to be more like six weeks, but eventually I got back to Shaw. One of the highlights of my time with Southern Watch was visiting all the various units that were involved in the operation. One was my former squadron, the 68th Fighter Squadron from Moody, which was now equipped with the F-16. I met the commander and we posed for a photo op. Another highlight was a courtesy call on Prince Abdullah, the Saudi Minister of Defense, in his palace outside of Mecca.



The pace was hectic, and the next thing on the agenda was a deployment to Egypt as air component commander for a large CENTCOM joint exercise called Bright Star. Bright Star was based at Cairo West, Egypt, so it was interesting to see what had changed since the Proud Phantom deployment in 1980. All the Soviet aircraft were gone, but so were the Egyptian F-4Es. They had traded them in for F-16s, which were operating from a different base. One of the deployed fighter units was from the 366th Fighter Wing “Gunfighters” from Mountain Home AFB, MT. This was my old Vietnam unit, and they took me for a ride in an F-15E simulating an attack on Aswan. Thanks to the Egyptian Air Force, I also got a flight in an Egyptian MIG-21. It was a great experience that made me think back to all the time we spent in the F-4 studying and practicing how to defeat the MIG-21 in aerial combat.



When I returned from Bright Star I finally found time in February 1996 to go to Davis-Monthan AFB for my A-10 senior officer checkout. I enjoyed being back at D-M, and it was a blast flying the airplane and shooting the big 30mm Gatling gun. I was then able to visit various 9th AF A-10 units to get my flying time. It was a kick being around the young fighter pilots again and marveling at their professionalism.

In the spring of 1996, we learned that General Jumper was leaving 9th AF for an assignment in Europe. Although I had two years remaining before mandatory retirement, for various reasons I decided to retire. I agreed to stay on for a few months to help with the transition by the new commander, and set an official retirement date of 1 Oct 1996. With accumulated leave and the other transition time allowed before retirement, I set a retirement ceremony date of 2 Aug 1996. My good friend and classmate Brett Dula graciously agreed to preside at my retirement ceremony. He was Vice Commander of Air Combat Command at the time. I have to say that Pat was not wholeheartedly in favor of my retirement. She loved the Air Force and its people and wasn't ready to leave; however, she was supportive of me and understood the reasons for my decision.



After the Air Force

We decided to stay in Sumter for the time being to decide our next move. Pat had a job she enjoyed as an archivist for the local historical society, and the kids were starting a new school year. Of course, I had been thinking about what to do next, and decided I wasn't interested in working for in the defense industry. Many times when I had considered leaving the Air Force, going to law school was always one of the options. I looked into the alternatives, discussed it with Pat, and decided to take the first steps necessary to make it happen, the Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) and law school applications. It turned out to be nearly a fulltime job for several months. I took an LSAT preparation course, worked hard on the practice exams and took the test at the University of South Carolina. In the meantime, I applied to ten law schools with varying degrees of difficulty in which to get accepted. I was worried about my Academy GPA, because the two biggest factors in getting accepted are LSAT scores and undergraduate GPA. But I learned that because of grade inflation over the years, the law schools applied adjustment factors to bring older GPAs from quality schools into line with modern standards. So, my 3.08 GPA at USAFA translated to a 3.6 with the adjustment. I did well on the LSAT and was offered admission to all ten schools to which I applied, including Duke University and the University of Colorado.

The decision of where to go turned out to be pretty easy. We still owned our house in Colorado Springs, I was still a Colorado resident, and in-state tuition was reasonable. Duke was by far the most prestigious school I got into, but with two more kids to go to college and me not working there was no way we could afford the tuition at Duke. I accepted Colorado's offer, and we made plans to move back to Colorado Springs the summer of 1997. Jean and Robert would be able to finish high school in the Cheyenne Mountain school district.

The move went fairly smoothly. We had gained a new member of the family named George in Sumter, and he made the trip with us. He was a funny looking mutt that turned out to be a wonderful addition. After fourteen great years with us, he died almost a year ago and we miss him very much. Boulder was too far for me to commute to school, so after looking at rentals we decided to buy a small condo for me live in during week, and I would come home on the weekends. That worked out well, because with the money we made when we sold the condo and my VA education benefits, I went to law school and lived in Boulder for free. It was a good thing, because we had some tight months with two kids in high school and neither of us working. Along the way we adopted another dear pet, Murdock, a Dalmatian who was with us for 12 years.

I graduated in May of 2000 and went to work for a large law firm. I had worked for them for two summers while I was in school and was very fortunate to be hired by them after graduation. There were three Academy grads in the firm, and they helped me with the transition. I worked in commercial litigation and found the work very stimulating and rewarding. My office was in south Denver, so we sold our house in the Springs and moved to a new house on seven acres outside of Castle Rock. We have been there ever since. After six good years practicing law, we found ourselves in good financial condition. So, when I turned 65 I decided to retire for good.

Our kids are grown and all doing well. We are thankful to be healthy and are enjoying retirement to its fullest. We are looking forward to our 50th wedding anniversary and our 50th Class of 1964 reunion.

Disclaimer: The facts I have included are mostly from my memories and a few documents I've retained over the years. I apologize for any errors or omissions.

March 29, 2011

To be continued . . .

