

The DEAD Man's Hand

At Shaw AFB, S.C., airmen of the 20th Fighter Wing train incessantly to “suppress and destroy.”

Photography by Greg Davis



A crew chief of the 77th Fighter Squadron alerts an F-16 pilot to make his preflight checks before the start of an April 5 training mission.

USAF has been boosting its F-16s with the Common Cockpit Implementation Program, bringing Block 40 and 50 jet aircraft new multifunction displays, on-board oxygen systems, and the Joint Helmet Mounted Cueing Systems. The 20th Fighter Wing at Shaw AFB, S.C., was the first to complete the basic CCIP upgrade, and this spring it took some of its new F-16s out for a spin. Wing F-16CJs and DJs flew from Shaw to the Avon Park range in Florida, where a realistic scenario played out in April. The 77th Fighter Squadron "Gamblers," one of the wing's three flying units, went SAM hunting, proving they can self-designate targets and fulfill the Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses (DEAD) mission.

[1] First Lt. Russ Rotan pilots his F-16CJ on an April 4 "Long Rifle" mission. This fighter carries a LANTIRN targeting pod, visible on the right intake cheek mount in place of the HARM Targeting System (HTS) pod usually found there. Rotan wears a Joint Helmet Mounted Cueing System helmet.



1



1

For this "Long Rifle" mission, the F-16s carried full-size but inert 500-pound GBU-12 munitions. The objective was to put bombs on target in a smooth Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses mission. The event honed the skills of not only fighter pilots but also maintenance teams, tanker crews, and combat controllers.

[1] View from the cockpit as, in the distance, two more F-16s fly over the Atlantic. [2] The F-16CJ drops two GBU-12 laser guided bombs on the Avon Park range. [3] The Viper turns over an airfield target after releasing its two bombs.



2

[2] Fully fueled and equipped, an F-16 readies for its takeoff. [3] An F-16 crew chief snaps a salute as an F-16DJ of the 77th FS taxis out for a training mission. [4] Rotan's F-16CJ breaks over Shaw at the end of a four-hour training mission.



3



2



3



4



4



5

[4] An F-16 crew chief warily watches his surroundings before he gives the F-16 pilot a signal to taxi. The enlisted maintenance troops keep the aircraft ready to fly on a moment's notice.

[5] In this shot, the night-vision LANTIRN system is clearly visible.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom, USAF F-16CJs performed Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses, or SEAD. They did this so well that they put themselves out of business and had to re-role to become DEAD and close air support (CAS) platforms.

[1] This F-16CJ prepares to launch on a training mission. Note the four blade aerials of the AN/APX-113 advanced electronic interrogator-transponder, mounted in front of the bubble canopy. The "SW" tailcode applied to the other jet aircraft can be read as it refracts in the bubble canopy of the near one.



1



1

Upgraded jet aircraft at Shaw were initially designated as F-16CJ+ so as to differentiate them from unmodified aircraft within the wing. Since the entire Shaw fleet has now undergone the major portion of the CCIP upgrades, there is no longer a reason for a separate designation and it has been dropped.

[1] An F-16CJ taxis at Shaw on its way to a parking space. This jet aircraft sports full-color markings of the 20th FW commander, Col. Jim Post. It carries special artwork behind the cockpit. Moreover, each squadron's patch appears on the intake, and its colors are painted on the tail. [2] This weapon loader puts on display an AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missile, top, and an AIM-120 AMRAAM. [3] A pilot clambers out of the F-16CJ adorned with squadron colors.



2



3



2



4



4



5



3

[2] An F-16CJ refuels from a KC-135R; waiting its turn is an F-16DJ of the 79th FS. [3] A pilot with the 77th FS performs preflight checks before lowering the canopy; note his HGU-55P helmet, worn due to a shortage of JHMCS helmets. [4] Rotan's F-16CJ flashes a wingtip-mounted AIM-120B Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM). [5] F-16s such as this one can now carry targeting pods and self-designate ground targets.

[4] An F-16CJ, mounted and ready to go, its trademark sharkmouth intake prominent in this head-on view. [5] Three 20th FW F-16s take a refueling break over the Atlantic during action at the Avon Park bombing range.

F-16 upgrades include ability to use the Link 16 data transfer system through which several aircraft share targeting and position information with each other on both blue and red forces. They also have a new modular mission computer with increased computing power.

[1] This fighter, serial #01-7053, was the final Air Force F-16 to come off the Lockheed Martin production line. It is assigned to the 79th FS at Shaw. [2] An over-the-shoulder view of a yellow-tipped GBU-12 bomb, a 500-pound laser guided weapon—one of two carried by this F-16CJ—hanging under the wings. Flying in formation is Rotan in his F-16CJ. [3] Inside a test cell at Shaw, technicians throw the switch and let an F110-GE-129 power plant run in full afterburner.



1



1

Because of the CCIP transformation, 20th FW units have not deployed to Southwest Asia in recent years. They likely will do so in late 2007 or early 2008. The wing is preparing as if it is a foregone conclusion.

[1] Gassed up and ready to go, Rotan's F-16CJ heads back out to an engagement. [2] An F-16CJ returns to park after a local training mission. Note the mission markings under the cockpit; these markings are most likely heritage from Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. [3] An F-16CJ of the 55th FS pulls alert under a sunshade shelter. Ever since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, F-16s from Shaw have stood alert for combat air patrols over US cities.



2



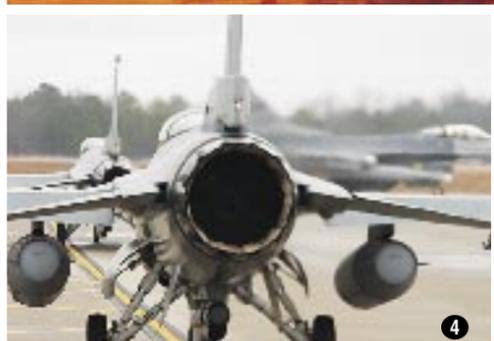
3



2



3



4



5



5

[4] F-16s stand by on the ramp at Shaw. [5] The pilot of an F-16CJ of the 55th Fighter Squadron gives the 55th's "shooter" sign before the start of a training mission. [6] High above the Atlantic, an F-16DJ of the 79th FS gasses up at the end of a Long Rifle mission. Note the empty backseat.



6



4

[4] Three aircraft assigned to Shaw over the years are (l-r) RF-4C, EB-66A, and RF-101.

[5] Two F-16CJs of the 55th FS taxi under cloudy skies at Shaw. The aircraft are configured for an air-to-air mission, which is just one more demonstration of the flexibility and versatility of these venerable Air Force fighters.