

Yom Kippur's Nickel Grass

On p. 61, reference was made to replacement F-4 Phantoms from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base [*"The Yom Kippur Airlift," July, p. 56*]. Additional F-4s were from Nellis AFB [Nev.].

Late on a Saturday flying day, eight crew members from the 414th Fighter Weapons Squadron were called into the squadron commander's office. Lieutenant Colonel Gardecki told us to go home, get passport, clothes, and doppel kit—and don't ask any questions.

At approximately 1700, four jets (brand-new "slatted" F-4E models with TISEO) took off on a still unknown mission, refueled over Oklahoma City, destination Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. We were met by the DO, then-Col. Bill Kirk (later USAFE/CC).

Next steps remained unknown for a few more hours as we were on again, off again for next launch.

Finally after a fitful night of sleep, we took off for Lajes Field, Azores. Next stop still unknown.

Early the next day, we got our final orders—Israel, Hatzor Air Base, (if I recall correctly). We were intercepted by Israeli fighters (call sign Lemon Speed) and led to our final destination.

As we taxied off the runway and stopped in the de-arming area, Israeli ground crew jumped on the back of the airplane and attached Star of David decals to our tail.

We pulled into parking spots and as engines were winding down, arming crews were already loading bombs.

We were taken to squadron operations and greeted warmly by local fighter crew [personnel]—one of whom was Eitan Ben Eliyahu, later CSAF of IAF. By the time we were bused to lunch, their new F-4s were launching on combat missions.

Within a matter of a couple of hours we were on one of those C-5s now loaded with a couple of key pieces of former enemy defense systems, courtesy of IAF. We were back in squadron by Tuesday morning. What a cross-country!

Col. Tom Owens,
USAF (Ret.)
Arlington, Va.

I was a loadmaster at Dover in the 3rd MAS and was on either the first or second C-5 to land at Lod. My recollection is that we were first but the 436th AW history claims it was Maj. Josh Hinson's crew. I was crewed with Maj. Tedd Griffith, and we went out from Dover on the same airplane with Hinson as a deadhead crew and were supposed to take it on to Lod from Lajes. However, the airlift command post put both crews in crew rest for some reason and we departed late the next afternoon. However, we were in a Travis airplane for some reason—I think it was because several C-5s had arrived at Lajes and the airplane we came in on was blocked.

At any rate, when we left Lajes, no C-5s had landed at Lod and possibly no C-141s. I remember Major Griffith telling us in the briefing that the Arabs were threatening to shoot us down. I was really pissed and said so because we had no parachutes. I had served two tours in Southeast Asia and a couple of TDYs from TAC on C-130s and had a lot of combat missions, including over North Vietnam and Laos and was not happy. We picked up an IAF escort as we passed near Egypt and there were no incidents.

The reason I am writing this is because of the statement that the airplane was offloaded by hand. No, it wasn't. While there were no USAF air freight personnel and no K loaders there yet, we were met by El Al airline personnel

with airline loading equipment. The cargo was ammunition on pallets and they pushed them onto their equipment and hauled them off. Nothing was "offloaded by hand." I'm pretty sure we were the first C-5 into Lod because the description fits our experience. We took off from Lajes just before dark and arrived at Lod around midnight local time. We loadmasters never left the airplane but El Al stewardesses "gave" us sandwiches, soft drinks, and coffee. I put "gave" in quotes because we learned later that the airline charged the US for all of its services and the trinkets and other things they gave us. We all got key chains with the Star of David on them and the officers got roses.

I don't remember how many trips I made into Lod but I made at least one more and probably two or three. One was in daylight. I was surprised to see cotton growing at the airport. On one trip the crew I was with picked up a load of classified cargo—captured Soviet vehicles and a radar van. We took them to Dover then on to Nellis after crew rest. It was an interesting experience but except for the bit about the threats to

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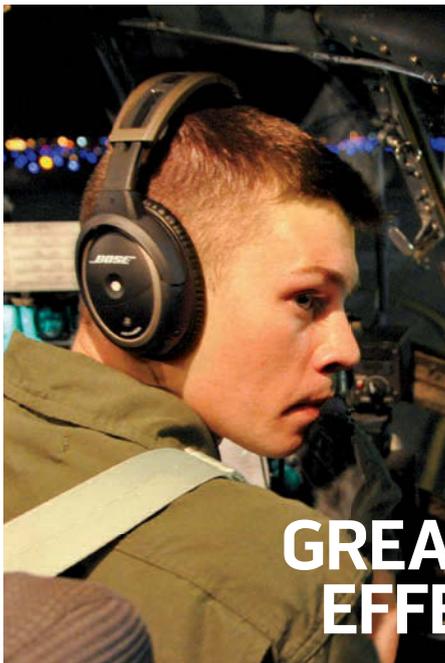
shoot us down, uneventful. Incidentally, our pilots were on the same frequencies with Soviet transports going into Egypt and Syria and they were talking back and forth on discreet frequencies. The Soviet pilots were as concerned about somebody being shot down as we were.

Sam McGowan
Missouri City, Texas

■ Sam McGowan is no doubt correct about how the first C-5 into Lod was unloaded. "By hand" is a shorthand reference that goes back for years in various reports, probably meant to mean that the 40K loaders were not there. Among other accounts, a 1989

Airpower Journal article, published by MAC's Airlift Operations School—used the phrase "by hand" to describe the unloading. A fact sheet currently posted online by the Air Mobility Command Museum says the airplane was "unloaded manually by Israeli civilians and MAC crew members." It is useful to have McGowan's more precise and accurate explanation.—JOHN T. CORRELL

At the start of the war, the missile command at Redstone Arsenal, Ala., immediately established a command post operating 24 hours a day in support of the war. I represented transportation, working 12 hours a day, while another



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member worked the night shift. Our only objective was shipping missiles to Israel. Shipments went smoothly with a couple of exceptions as follows.

We shipped 14 Hawk missiles in one aircraft. The pallets slid in as part of the bed of the aircraft. But pallets would not hold all the missiles so after they were loaded the remainder of the missiles were placed on top of the load and tied down. Although overloaded, the C-141 aircraft managed to carry the shipment to its destination without a problem.

There was also a requirement for 123 TOW missiles. The summer before, Israeli personnel had training [in] firing these missiles, at Ft. Benning, Ga., but they still needed the instruction manuals. While these missiles were being flown out, I found that the instruction manuals had also been shipped but by surface means. Going across by ship, they would not be delivered to Israel before the war was over. I had another manual shipment prepared and delivered to Robins AFB, Ga., where they were then flown to Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. An EIAI aircraft destined for New York bypassed there and landed at Wright-Patterson, picking up the manuals. They arrived in Israel before the missiles got there.

When the war was over, before all of our pilots had left Israel, Golda Meir called them to a meeting and proclaimed that our shipments were delivered to Israel faster than the Russians delivered their support materials to Egypt and Syria, which was a major factor in Israel winning the war.

Maj. David N. Baker,
USAF (Ret.)
East Moline, Ill.

John T. Correll's article highlighted the role of strategic airlift to support Israel during Operation Nickel Grass. As he stated, Military Airlift Command (MAC) "was now expected to produce an instant airlift, even though its aircraft and crews were committed to other purposes." What Mr. Correll did not address was how the MAC missions were backfilled. I was a C-130E pilot at the time, stationed at Dyess AFB, Texas. Our wing was tasked to provide airlift for the missions that MAC was using the C-141 and C-5 to fly essential armaments and supplies to Israel. I specifically remember flying a mission to the Naval Base at Adak, Alaska, since the C-141s normally assigned to that mission were engaged in Operation Nickel Grass. So in no small measure the C-130 Hercules also provided airlift in support of Israel in her hour of need. I'm most happy to say I was part of that mission.

Col. Jon S. Meyer,
USAF (Ret.)
Baltimore

A significant part of the airlift operations was not mentioned, probably because at the time that portion of airlift was under the operational control of Strategic Air Command (SAC).

I was an E-4 (sergeant), KC-135A crew chief at the time and on Saturday afternoon, Oct. 13, KC-135A Stratotankers from Pease AFB, N.H., and Plattsburgh AFB, N.Y., started preparations to deploy to Lajes. Around midnight, the SAC tankers left CONUS for Lajes. My tanker (59-1498, now an R model stationed at Bangor ANGB, Maine) carried the operational staff for the tanker ops, so we were the first

in (and last out). When we arrived at Lajes, the ramp was just about empty. Lajes was actually in the process of phasing down as it had been deemed unnecessary, so we parked at the fuel pits (made the most sense for the tankers) and started tanker operations immediately.

CONUS tankers ferried the Israeli-bound F-4s and A-4s (some factory-fresh from McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis) out of Seymour Johnson. Our Lajes-based tankers picked them up mid-Atlantic and escorted and refueled until they were passed over to the tankers out of Torrejon (Spanish Tanker Task Force) and the TJ task force got them close enough to pass them off to Ben Gurion (Tel Aviv) Airport for transfer to the Israeli Air Force. I later learned from a McDonnell Douglas pilot that before they got out of a maintenance debrief on the aircraft, the national star had been painted over and the Star of David stenciled on the sides and wings of the jets, and they were already being refueled and loaded with ordnance for the combat mission.

MAC started arriving a day or two after SAC got to Lajes. C-5s, C-141s were coming in and rapidly taking over the ramp. Many of us were fresh out of tanker operations in SEA as part of the Young Tiger Tanker Task Force so we gave the code name to the SAC operation as Young Camel TTF. We even developed a stencil of a camel with a KC-135 boom for a tail with a mission to "tag" as many MAC aircraft as we could. Billeting space became scarce and MAC and SAC crews shared the little space that was left in the old barracks/dorms. My small dorm room was set up with two bunk beds and all were filled. Upon return from a fighter-drag mission, the tankers were recovered and refueled at the fuel pits and then we'd tow the mission-ready aircraft down to the other end of the ramp to free up parking for the MAC aircraft.

Missions went on for about 10 days, and we started to wrap up the SAC operations. As we prepared to leave, the command staff was deep in meetings and word on the flight line was we were going to stay. The deployed commander and my OMS commander (Lt. Col. Leroy Gibbons) came out to my aircraft and dispelled the rumor and said we were headed back to Pease, but that the SAC fleet was going to Defcon 3.

By the time we landed at Pease, the entire KC-135A and FB-111A fleet was "cocked" on alert. Every tanker had a

Senior Staff Changes

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NOMINATIONS: To Be Lieutenant General: Jerry D. **Harris Jr.**, Jerry P. **Martinez**. **To Be ANG Brigadier General:** Michael J. **Feeley**.

CHANGES: Maj. Gen. Kenneth T. **Bibb Jr.**, from Vice Cmdr., 618th Air Ops. Center (Tanker Airlift Control Center), AMC, Scott AFB, Ill., to Cmdr., 618th Air Ops. Center (TACC), AMC, Scott AFB, Ill. ... Maj. Gen. Stephen A. **Clark**, from Dir., Force Structure, Rqmts., Resources, & Strat. Assessments, SOCOM, MacDill AFB, Fla., to Dir., Strat. Plans, DCS, Strat. Plans & Rqmts., USAF, Pentagon ... Brig. Gen. Brian **Robinson**, from Cmdr., 618th Air Ops. Center (TACC), AMC, Scott AFB, Ill., to Dir., Ops., AMC, Scott AFB, Ill.

COMMAND CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT CHANGES: CMSgt. Ramon **Colon-Lopez**, from OSAF, Manpower & Reserve Affairs, Pentagon, to Command Chief, AFRICOM, Stuttgart, Germany ... CMSgt. Eric D. **Neilsen**, from Command Chief, Jt. Spec. Ops. Air Component-Central, Al Udeid AB, Qatar, to Command Chief, NATO Spec. Ops. Forces, SHAPE, Mons, Belgium. ☪

full wartime fuel load (188K pounds) and every Aardvark loaded with a full load of AGM-69 SRAM (short-range attack missile). I remember Gibbons telling us to go back to the barracks and repack to redeploy. Within a day or so, we started to stand down and started the task of defueling all the tankers to an operational mission load and the removing SRAMs from the FB-111As. Going tanker to tanker, we pit defueled by running one engine and using the air refueling pumps to transfer the fuel back to the storage area. I was deeply impressed by the manner in which we deployed and supported the effort, something that has rarely been cited in articles about this early venture into the “sandbox.”

Roll ahead to 2007. I assumed command of the 439th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Westover ARB, Mass. My operations group commander jokingly said he hired me because he never met anyone who flew those Yom Kippur missions. My wife told him it really just meant I was old.

Col. Charles R. Tupper,
USAF (Ret.)
Edisto Island, S.C.

Excellent article. In October 1973 F-4s also went from the 33rd TFW at Eglin AFB, Fla.

I was a buck sergeant crew chief still living in the dorms when at 3 a.m. there was banging on the doors. “Recall, recall,” we were told. Don’t shower, don’t shave, don’t pack a bag. Just get dressed and get to the flight line as quickly as possible. We hung three tanks on every F-4 on the ramp, did an engine run for fuel transfer checks, refueled them, and got every plane that could be finished in the phase dock on the line and hung three tanks on them. After the sun came up, paint shop came out to the ramp and painted over the unit ID letters on the vertical stabilizers (ED at the time) on every plane. Later that afternoon all our planes departed. We never saw those F-4s again. We were never told where they went, but watching the news, it was not hard to guess where they ended up.

Joel Blue
Biloxi, Miss.

There is a caption error on p. 60 of the excellent July issue. The artillery piece being unloaded is not a 155 mm howitzer. It is an M107 175 mm self-propelled gun. With a maximum range

of 32 kilometers, the M107 was capable of supporting Israeli forces maneuvering to encircle the Egyptian Third Army on the west bank of the canal from positions on the east bank.

Lt. Col. Dan Hudson,
USA (Ret.)
Salt Lake City, Utah

First Is First

Your “Airpower Classics” piece on the F-35 Lightning II (*Air Force Magazine*, July, p. 88) credits Lt. Col. Eric Smith as being the first USAF F-35 pilot. That honor is not rightfully his. The first USAF pilot to fly the F-35 was Lt. Col. James Kromberg, who first flew the F-35 on 30 January 08. He was the third overall pilot to fly the F-35, following Lockheed pilots John Beesley and Jeff Knowles, and the only USAF pilot to fly AA-1, the first SDD F-35. Six other USAF pilots also flew their first flights in the F-35 prior to Lieutenant Colonel Smith—Lt. Col. Hank Griffiths on 23 April 10 (10th F-35 pilot), Maj. Matt Hayden on 26 May 10 (12th F-35 pilot), Maj. Scott McLaren on 16 August 10 (14th F-35 pilot), Lt. Col. Leonard Kearn on 23 February 11 (18th F-35 pilot), Maj. Steven Speares on 22 April 11 (20th F-35 pilot) and me (USAF Civil Service test pilot) on 2 June 11 (23rd F-35 pilot). Lieutenant Colonel Smith first flew the F-35 on 27 June 11, making him the eighth USAF pilot and the 25th overall F-35 pilot. Please give credit where credit is rightfully due.

Lt. Col. Vince Caterina,
USAF (Ret.)
Palmdale, Calif.

Still Bringing Them Home

Your “Letters to the Editor” section of *Air Force Magazine* often brings information to light that expands and illuminates previous articles.

In the case of the letter from retired Maj. Vern Pall in the July 2016 issue, it includes information that is so false that I am compelled to respond [p. 6].

He states that when President George Bush came into office (elected in 2000), he “terminated” the MIA recovery program in North Korea.

In fact, the program continued in operation until mid-2005, when it was temporarily put on hold by SECDEF Rumsfeld because the US recovery teams’ safety was in danger.

The program continues today, albeit with more emphasis on South Korean recovery teams—teams that returned

US remains as recently as April of this year.

Col. Ron Sable,
USAF (Ret.)
Tucson, Ariz.

Bird’s Eye View

I love watching air shows [*“Thunderbirds,” July, p. 44*]. The last one I attended was painful as it was in Smyrna, Tenn. (formerly Sewart Air Force Base), on my home turf. Oddly, the same day an Air Force Thunderbird also went down, thankfully with less tragic results. It was also the No. 6 jet. I know it’s dangerous flying in such close formation and the concentration must be exhausting, but I know those pilots love to do it for the enormous pride and satisfaction, as well as the public accolades and for what they represent to the taxpaying public.

Well, it got me to thinking when the colorful fuselage of the F-16 jet was contrasted against the green vegetation surrounding its crash landing site. I mean no disrespect for tradition, but I think it’s time for a change in color scheme for the USAF Thunderbirds, as a new replacement aircraft is being considered. Frankly, the present Thunderbird color scheme has always reminded me more of a “circus type” hype. It looks like it belongs to something that ought to include “clown” pilots. Lest I tick off the entire Air Force chain of command, which is not my intent, I just wanted to get somebody’s attention.

If I had to pick between the Navy Blue Angels and the USAF Thunderbirds, I’d have to go with the Blue Angels, from a purely aesthetic point of view. Their gold on blue color scheme is really sharp. So my proposal is simply to change the Thunderbird color scheme to silver on blue. After all they are still the cardinal colors of the United States Air Force. I think it would give the Navy a run for their money!

Another selling point is the view the public gets. Those Blue Angels can be seen amid the sky and clouds very well. The Thunderbird color scheme is tough to see sometimes, depending on the level of humidity in the air and prevailing cloud cover.

The Air Force has always been in the forefront of maintaining its high public image. I’d say it’s one of the best. So it’s not going against tradition as much as it is embracing change, just like when that stupid enlisted rank insignia, denoting non-NCO status was changed to a “meatball with wings” and then

changed back to its distinctive original design. That star in the middle of the blue ball with those inverted stripes is one of the reasons I enlisted!

Rick Courtney
Nashville, Tenn.

As usual an excellent article on the T'Birds, but note that the T'Birds flew over Atlantic City and not Ocean City, N.J., and the full F number for the Super Sabre before the F-105B was F-100C and after the 105 was F-100D. The past and present photos of the T'Birds will always reflect the total dedication of the officers and enlisted members to demonstrate the full capabilities of USAF's inventory of fighters.

John Maene Jr.
Hawthorne, N.J.

Numbers Don't Lie

Got a real chuckle out of the comparison of F-22 versus golf courses (183 F-22 to 194 golf courses) [*Air Force World: By the Numbers*, July, p. 16]. And then chuckled again at the snippet "Trimming From the Top" [*Air Force World*, p. 14] about the CSAF's unsuccessful attempt to cut 15 three-star generals and only getting at eight. I participated in a couple of similar efforts during my career, with little success as well. But the real eye-opening belly laugh came when I got to the "Chart Page: Where the Generals

Are" listing the top 10 locations outside the Pentagon [p. 19]. How about this for a numbers comparison: Number of Active Duty aircraft at these 10 bases versus number of GOs at those locations? Including Langley and Randolph skews the data towards the planes, but how many AD aircraft does USAF have at Scott, Wright-Patt, Ramstein, Lackland, Peterson, Hickam, Ft. Meade, or Maxwell? Of course those locations house significant headquarters but comparing planes to GOs there may help illustrate why the force has significantly reduced force structure and airmen but not so much the generals. Maybe USAF could try just a little bit harder to "trim from the top."

Col. John Campbell,
USAF (Ret.)
Crossville, Tenn.

Moody's Blues

I really enjoyed reading the article on Moody Suter and the programs he advocated and gave life to [*Wingman: The Visionary Moody Suter*, July, p. 76]. Such a visionary leader whose training forums saved lives in future conflicts via Red Flag, the Aggressor program, and the Warrior Prep Center in Europe.

I was the first Aggressor controller assigned to the 527th Tactical Fighter Training Aggressor Squadron at RAF

Alconbury in '76 and experienced the fruits of his labors firsthand. I also had the privilege of welcoming "Snake" Clark to the 527th as a fellow Aggressor controller, and he became a future visionary himself.

Lt. Col. Bertram Pryor,
USAF (Ret.)
Norman, Okla.

No Excuse

Thanks for including my letter to the editor, "Bubbles? Well, That's Perfect," p. 9 [August].

However, my first name is Otha not Otto, my last name is Vaughan not Vaughn, I received my USAF commission through AFROTC, so it should be USAFR (Ret.), not USAF (Ret.).

I guess I am nitpicking but everybody always spells my name wrong.

Otha H. Vaughan Jr.
Huntsville, Ala.

Correction

In our August issue, p. 8, we ran a letter entitled "Faint Praise for Stalin," but neglected to include the writer's rank. Albert Weeks is a second lieutenant, USAFR (Ret.), and was a 21-year-old navigator on B-17s—later B-29s—preparing to fly missions over Japan when the war ended.—THE EDITORS

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