

Red Eagles 4th of July, 2011 Newsletter

July 4, 2011
Issue 10

Fellow Red Eagles: GCI Bandit Control

This quarters article was written by Jim (Bluto) Keys, LtCol, USAF, Retired. He was the first GCI person assigned to the Red Eagles, 1978-1981. After the Red Eagles he went to ACSC at Maxwell and later on was a Squadron Commander on two occasions and a Base Commander as well.



BANDIT CONTROL

In 1978 I was looking to get an assignment in the southwest as my wife and I are from that area. A friend told me about a new unit that needed a 17XX (Ground Control Intercept officer) located at Nellis AFB. I called out there and got an interview, flew to Nellis and met with Glenn Frick. I also met with Jose Oberle, Ron Iverson and Gerry Huff. Before I left the base and headed back to Ft Walton Beach



I was told I was selected for the job. I had no idea what the 4477th did at the time but I soon figured out they had some juice.

When I got back to my office I had a note from officer assignments that I had an assignment to Nellis; that happened in one day. When I arrived at Nellis I was told to go down to the 64th Aggressor Sq and get checked out, I still hadn't been briefed on the mission of the 4477th, but I did get a security briefing and signed the necessary paperwork. After completing the Aggressor course I joined up with the unit. Our Nellis operation was conducted in 2 single wide trailers with no name on them. They were located next to the 57th Wing headquarters on the flight line. By the way, we started out as the 4477th TEF, Test and Evaluation Flight, and later became the 4477th TES. When I got briefed I looked at Gary Lewallen and Bob Drabant (Darth), and said YGBSM - MiGs.

It was an interesting setup as we worked directly for the Air Staff but were supported by the Nellis community. The TFWC and the 57th Wing Commanders had been briefed and were very supportive of our mission but I think there may have been a few people who had not been totally briefed on what we did but were told if they ask for it, give it to them. Sometimes these people were not happy with us. I can't count the number of times I interrupted the TFWC/CC and the 57th Wing/CC with items for them to sign. We were always getting things signed at the last minute and at the end of the day. On one occasion I remember I needed the Wing/CC signature and he had stepped out to fly, so I went out to the flight line and waved to him, he motioned me over to the aircraft and I went up the ladder and had him sign. He was shaking his head, but with a smile. Yes, there was a time when you could just walk out on the flight line.



Editor's Column:

The 4th of July is upon us and time to celebrate!

- Make plans to celebrate the 4th. Make sure to clean and check the grill. Refill the propane tank or buy enough charcoal.
- When going camping, make a list of all the things you'll need. Don't forget the first aid kit and jumper cables. Let someone know where you are going and when you'll be back.
- Don't forget to fly the flag.
- Enjoy this time with family and friends. Please don't drink and drive or forget to take rest stops while on long road trips.
- You can submit your stories or roster updates by emailing them to: bgalloway5@elpasotel.net or bobbro@bresnan.net or mail to:
Ben Galloway
3732 Bar 10 Road
Calhan, CO 80808

At the beginning we did not have a hanger or jet capable landing strip at Tonopah, but everyone was busy working towards that end. I would on occasion see Bobby Ellis and his guys come in and out of the trailers, always in civilian clothes. Everyone was given tasks to complete, with little guidance; it was more like, "just get it done, that's why we hired you." Most of the tasks were unrelated to our AFSCs, for example; I ended up on one occasion downtown Las Vegas at Graybar electric buying a cable trough for the hanger and ops offices in Tonopah. I also had to figure out a way to get it there - that same day. There were hundreds of these types of tasks and everyone shared in them. It was challenging, exciting, and sometimes, even fun. I was also tasked with getting the communications set up for the base in Tonopah. That's how I learned there was a large Motorola office in Las Vegas. I would get to visit it on numerous occasions. I also learned about radio crystals and the Southwest Frequency Coordinator. All of the tasks were the type that could normally be done quite easily except you could not tell anyone why or what you were up to; everything was classified. Most of the time you could not even mention the word Tonopah. Telephones were another night mare. Remember we were out in the middle of the desert. We called it Tonopah but that town was 45 minutes to an hour away, via mostly a dirt road.

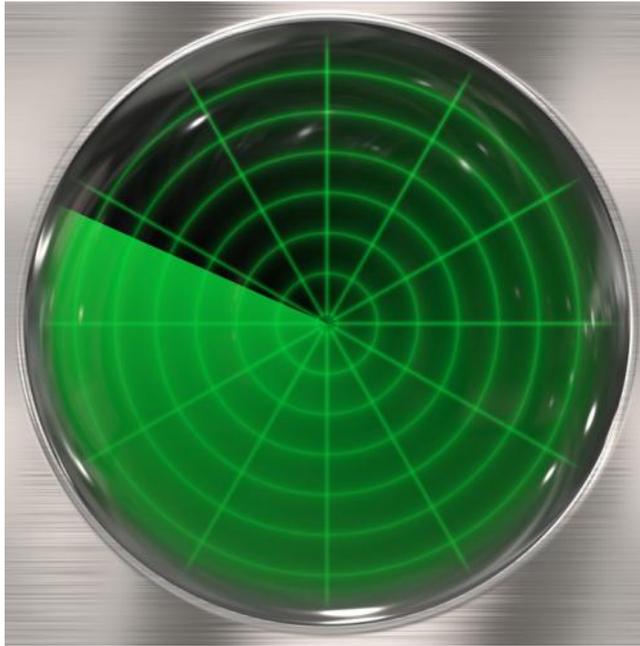
We all also had the normal additional duties found in every squadron. One of mine that posed a challenge was the awards and decorations officer. Whenever someone would leave the squadron or if someone did something way above and beyond what was required we would submit them for an award or decoration. This sounds like a normal administrative function and an easy task to complete. However, try writing a full page narrative on a Red Eagle without saying MiG, Tonopah, Soviet Aircraft, or any other classified terms and locations we dealt with.

I learned to write like a politician talks, all around the subject without saying what the subject is, but it worked.

In addition to getting the Tonopah airfield up and running, everyone also had to stay current in their specialty. Both the 64th and 65th Aggressor squadrons were lifesavers in this endeavor. We were all attached to the Aggressors and even deployed with them on occasion. Their support was outstanding and we were treated extremely well and were appreciative of their support. We could not have maintained currency without them. Speaking of staying current, I recall one pilot telling me, "where else in the Air Force can you be current in 5 different aircraft at the same time". Here's how, T-38, F-5, 2 kinds of MiGs, type 1 (MiG-17) and type 2 (MiG-21), plus the Cessna.

We often had to go to various places to get whatever was required that day. We usually took the Cessna but on occasion we took a T-38 or F-5. I recall trips to San Diego, Norton AFB,

Miramar NAS, Colorado Springs, Randolph AFB, and numerous other places. I was picked to go with Dave McCloud and 20 of Bobby Ellis' guys for an extraction trip. We flew to Hong Kong and stayed overnight and then the next morning continued on to our destination. It was not a fun trip at all; hot, humid and sleeping on a cot with a mosquito net over you for 30 days. I think we ended up getting 7 or 8 MiGs, a couple MiG engines, and a few boxes of spare parts. This is where I learned about the speed wrench and how tiring your arms can get from using one all day. We had to take the wings off the MiGs and prepare the aircraft for a long flight back to Nellis. This takes a lot more work than it sounds like. It took us 30 days; we worked every day from 6:30 am till 8:00 or 9:00 pm. I never saw an air conditioner the whole time we were at that base. We loaded the aircraft on a C-5 and had it land at Nellis at night with everything covered in black plastic. Bobby Ellis' guys met the C-5 with flat bed tractor trailers, loaded the MiGs on them and headed north. What a trip, I remember having to get shots before we left and taking quinine tablets every day as a hedge against malaria. The trip turned out to be super for Bobby and his wrench benders; we got all kinds of items for MiGs to include some specialty MiG maintenance tools.



Slowly but surely the runway and hangers were getting completed at Tonopah. One guy, Del Gaulker, who worked his rear end off for us was from the Nevada Test Site. This guy could make things happen, he was responsible for the runway and hangers and making sure they were completed on time and met specs. This was about the time I figured I would need some more guys of the GCI AFSC, so we brought Bud "Chops" Horan from the 65th Aggressors on board. Immediately upon arriving at the 4477th, Chops was given the Security Officers job. As soon as he got that job I think he had second thoughts about leaving the 65th. The security job was huge; no one could fly against us, visit

Tonopah, join the unit, or have anything at all to do with supporting us in any way shape or form, without getting briefed and signing security papers with Chops. Also, anyone that inadvertently got exposed to the program had to debrief and sign security statements with Chops. He must have done a heck of a job; no one could believe how well the secret MiG squadron was kept under wraps.

Once we got up and running at Tonopah a whole new world developed. We would pre-brief the pilots we were going to fly against early in the morning and then the aircrews would get in the Cessna and head to Tonopah and get ready to execute the flying schedule for the day. After the last mission of the day the aircrews would then get in the Cessna and head to Nellis for a de-briefing with all the pilots we flew against that day. Consequently we were pre-briefing at 5:30 or 6:00 am and debriefing at 6:00, 7:00 or 8:00 pm.

This made for some long days and nights and made it difficult to interact with your squadron mates. Seems like you were either getting on the Cessna or getting off the Cessna, or having a mission with the Aggressors that day. It was important that we exposed as many Navy, Marine, and Air Force aircrews to the MiG's characteristics, performance capabilities, and air to air combat capabilities as possible. We like to think that the long days were worth it and added immensely to the combat readiness of aircrews.

Initially the GCI function was conducted from a building up near the Communications Squadron at Nellis. As an upgrade to Red Flag they built a new facility beside the Red Flag building called Black Jack Control. There was a 2 month period when they shut down the old GCI facility and moved everything to the new building near Red Flag. During this period we still had to run the missions out of Tonopah and also provide security surveillance anytime a MiG was outside the hangers. To do this we set up an arrangement with Oakland Center via the FAA. They provided us 2 scopes and 4 radios to conduct the Tonopah mission. It required one or two of us to be TDY to Oakland Center Monday thru Friday for a couple months. But it did work quite well as we had good radar and radio coverage. We split up the TDYs between our 276's Pitcher and Emfinger, also known as Mountain and the 17xx's, depending on the type of missions scheduled. This was about the time we brought over another 17XX from the 64th Aggressor Squadron, Dan "Truck" Futryk, one of the top 17's around.

Speaking of security surveillance, anytime a private aircraft inadvertently flew near our airfield when the MiGs were out of the hangers we had to get the aircraft number and have the FAA give us the name and address of the owner. We then had to meet with the owner and do a security debriefing and have them sign the security paperwork. Sometimes this required us to go TDY, I recall one time I had to go to Oregon to complete this task. Chops was hot on this, I don't think he ever let one slip through the crack.

Everyone assigned to the 4477th was handpicked. The Navy, Marine, and Air Force pilots were the cream of the crop, superb aviators, yet humble. But even more importantly they were down to earth good people and they treated everyone with respect. Everyone got along and worked hard to get the mission accomplished; whatever it took they did it. I always thought of Bobby Ellis and his guys as the miracle people. They took old MiGs and turned them into air worthy aircraft. Everything in the cockpit was in Russian, the few manuals we had were in Russian, and many parts were not available and had to be made from scratch. What they did was miraculous; I stand in awe of them. The four commanders I worked for, Frick, Peck, Henderson, and Gibbs, were all outstanding commanders. They put in long hard difficult hours, and lost a lot of sleep worrying about the 4477th. Because of the security there was hardly anyone they could talk to about their problems or even what they were doing at Nellis. When they got home at night and their wives said,

"how did it go today?" All they could say was, "I wish I could tell you."

Just a word on the Navy and Marine pilots assigned to the Red Eagles. Naturally they were all superb aviators, they sent us their best. They blended right in with us and became Red Eagles overnight. In fact if I remember right Heater was the one that designed the unit patch and had several items made with the patch on them. They brought with them their skills as aviators, their vast knowledge of air to air tactics, and combat fighter performance. They were few in numbers but contributed immensely to the Red Eagle mission. They also got us into the Tail Hook reunion at the Hilton. What a great tradition and get together for Naval Aviators. Three things come to mind when I think back to Tail Hook. One - heck of a reunion. Two - Gerry Huff could not find his car for three days after he left Tail Hook. Three - After one beer, Keith Shean could fold his ear inside itself and make it almost disappear, after two beers he could do both ears.

The 4477th was a great assignment and we all like to think we contributed to its success. Were there bumps along the way, there sure were, almost on a daily basis. But you learned how to overcome, adapt, and be flexible. When we lost Hugh Brown, a sad day for all of us and the low point of our early history, they almost closed us down. Somehow Gail Peck convinced the right people that we needed to continue on and we did so with great results.

There is much more to tell but I will let Chops take it from here and then the rest of the Red Eagle GCI community can follow up. There is so much more to tell about Bandit Control.

Jim Keys



MiG-23 cockpit.

Red Eagles Reunion For 2011

The Boulder Station is now taking reservations for our Red Eagles reunion in Las Vegas on Oct 28-29. Earl (Obi Wan) Henderson has reserved 50 rooms for this event. There are still rooms available. Double click on the web link below and it will take you to the hotel's special site with our discounted rates. You will note the first date listed is the 27th of Oct. If you wish to change your arrival date, just click on the small calendar to the right of the date and click on the date you will be arriving. Then enter the number of nights, number of adults and children. Click "Check Availability" to load your requested dates. If you require more than one room, you will need to repeat this procedure again.

[https://rooms.stationcasinos.com/cgi-bin/LANSAWEB?procfun+rn+Resnet+BOU+funcparms+UP\(A2560\)::BCIRED;?/](https://rooms.stationcasinos.com/cgi-bin/LANSAWEB?procfun+rn+Resnet+BOU+funcparms+UP(A2560)::BCIRED;?/)

For those of you that don't feel comfortable using your credit card on the internet, you can call this number for the Boulder Station to make your reservations and use this code:

Call 1-800-683-7777 using group code BCIRED.

John (Admiral) Nelson will be taking care of the funds for the banquet and the golf course gathering. The cost for these events are as follows:

Friday, Oct 28, activities should hopefully unfold as follows. Around 1500 Hrs, a reception (drinking!) at Red Eagle bar in 65th Aggressor Squadron.

Friday, Oct 28, 1700 Hrs, a gathering of Red Eagles at the Nellis Golf Course Club House for heavy finger food, free beer and wine. Mixed drinks are available, pay as you go at the bar. The cost for that event - \$15.00 per person.

Saturday, Oct 29, Golf at 0900 Hrs at Black Mountain Golf course, approximately \$40.00 per person (pay at the club house). 1600 Hrs Business meeting at Boulder Station to discuss formalization of a Red Eagle Alumni Organization. 1800-2230 Hrs, evening banquet at the Boulder Station Hotel and Casino- \$40.00 per person

Please send your check or money order, times the number of people for events you wish to attend to: (Example: Golf Course Club House event for two \$30, Boulder Station dinner for two \$80, Total \$110).

Make checks payable to John Nelson and send to:

John Nelson
4016 Spring Crest Lane
Las Vegas, NV 89129



Missing Red Eagles

Neil Henderson, Earl's (Obi's) son, developed a Google Document web page that we can access, update and save data of our missing Red Eagles. We made progress on the initial search for missing Red Eagles from the mass mailing on June 4. We have revised the list and posted a second Google.doc. Those Red Eagles who have been found were removed from this list and added to the roster. You can access the list by clicking on the link below. The email address is the most important, but the city or state continues to be a great help. Be sure to save the file after you make inputs. In the upper left hand corner under Google Docs, click on "File" and the drop down menu will appear. Click on "Save" to save your entry and then exit.

Please click on the web site below:

https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0Ank_Nacqgb1edFJ5OGNaSTRzYXc3WmppcF9E

New Red Eagles Book Coming Soon

Gail (Evil) Peck is pleased to announce he has signed a book contract and shipped it back to Osprey. It should be published in the Summer of 2012. The tentative title is: *America's MiG Squadron, The Story of the RED EAGLES and Project CONSTANT PEG*. If anyone has really good pictures hidden away of our aircraft and/or facilities he would love to consider including them in the book, either with full credit or with the identity of the owner protected.

Gail would be happy to pay to have Costco make a CD and prints of any 35mm slides or negatives also and will return the originals if requested. If someone wants to send some without revealing their identity that is OK too. Just make a copy first so if the mail tricks us, all is not lost. Mailing address is: 8039 Leather Harness St, Las Vegas, NV 89131 and a good email for any jpg files is gtwestern@aol.com Put MiG Pictures in the Subject line so he doesn't lose them to a spam filter.

In Memoriam

Tom Gibbs Memorial Service

Tom Gibbs, The Red Eagles fourth commander, passed away on 27 May 2011. Tom and his wife Christine lived in Westcreek, Colorado and Tom was a Group AOC at the Academy in the 70s. There was a Memorial Service at the Academy Cadet Chapel at 1300 on Monday, 20 June 2011. Following the service, there was a gathering of Tom's family and friends at the USAF Academy Club. Many shared their memories and stories of Tom's life.