

7122 TACTICAL WING

MISSION

Primary mission of 7122 Tactical Wing was to support Seventeenth Air Force tactical attack plan for ground support of Seventh United States Army in Europe. Secondary mission of wing was to support Seventeenth Air Force operation plan of Nov 1961.

LINEAGE

7122 Tactical Wing
Activated, 7 Nov 1961

STATIONS

Chambley Air Base, France

ASSIGNMENTS

Seventeenth Air Force

COMMANDERS

Col Ervin H. Bucher

WEAPON SYSTEMS

F-84

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

122 TFW resources were used to form 7122 Tactical Wing

By 6 November 1961 the 163d Tactical Fighter Squadron with twenty-six F-84Fs, all from Baer Field, had arrived at newly reactivated Chambley AB. The wing's C-47 and two T-33As arrived on 19 November after flying the North Atlantic route. On 1 December the Rear Detachment arrived, and all guardsman assembled for an estimated stay of ten months. The personnel at Chambley now consisted of regular air force and air guard officers; enlisted men from the regular air force, air guard, and air force reserve selective assignees; and local French employees. Selective assignees are mobilization augmentees; individuals recalled from the Air Force Reserve to fill specific jobs. All units and personnel coalesced into a smoothly working organization to make the air base operational and comfortable for the forthcoming damp winter season in France.

During November supplies and equipment began arriving by the tons. Equipment had been surface-shipped from Indiana, ordered from CONUS depots, and purchased locally by base supply. A supply nightmare began with the arrival of vast quantities of conventional munitions that greatly exceeded storage capacity. By February 1962, about 8,000 tons had arrived and posed a hazard to base personnel because the ammunition had to be stored outdoors on base. At the same time 109 railroad freight cars arrived with aircraft drop-tanks. After observing incorrect stock numbers on the shipping boxes, a quick inspection revealed the drop tanks were the wrong type for the F-84F. It took frustrating persistence and reams of paperwork to return the 109 freight cars of unusable drop tanks to the Chateauroux Depot.

When the USAFE received notice that Chambley would be reactivated as a main operating base, it allocated \$800,000 for new construction and property renovation. The 7544th Support Group gave the job of deciding how to use these funds to the 7122d Tactical Wing. Twenty-four STAIR STEP projects were begun and 75 percent were completed by 1 July 1962. Projects included construction of eight Butler type hangars, a large outdoor supply storage area with security fencing, improved munitions storage igloos, a liquid oxygen plant, repairs to aircraft hangar doors and roofs, runway approach lights, GCA radar turntable and standby motor-generator set, airfield pavement repairs, six aircraft maintenance docks, and base electrical system repairs.

These projects greatly improved the war capability of Chambley AB. Some of these projects had been started by Company D, 249th Engineer Battalion to improve Chambley prior to arrival of the 122d Wing. The GCA turntable was one of the 249th's projects. It had to be eighteen feet above grade to match the high ends of the runway. This permitted night and bad weather radar landings from either direction and improved touchdown precision for the fighters. Many buildings were improved in "self help" projects performed by the occupants. The civil

engineering squadron provided tools and supplies and monitored their progress. Civil engineers were also busy during the winter of 1961-62 keeping the runway, taxiways, and roads cleared of snow and ice so alert aircraft could respond to scramble orders.

The practice of rotating pilots to Europe from the wing's stateside squadrons was very successful. On 6 January 1962 seven F-84F pilots arrived from the 112th and 113th, flew local orientation missions, reviewed war plans, and were integrated into the 163d TFS. After thirty days at Chambley they returned to their squadrons to teach this war tasking. Because of this training, their units would have been ready to support combat operations immediately upon arrival in France if deployed. It also allowed the 163d to maintain 100 percent manning, relieved the boredom of the pilots on active duty at their CONUS base, and kept them connected to their overseas wing. Later in March and April, twenty more pilots arrived for this theater indoctrination, and each pilot flew ten or more hours in French and West German airspace.

The first major exercise of 1962 was a no-notice Tactical Evaluation conducted by a Seventeenth Air Force team on 29 and 30 January. This TAC Eval began with an intelligence buildup and proceeded into a Simple Alert, State Orange, and then General Alert with Automatic Aircraft Launch Program. After the General Alert Announcement the four Sierra Alert F-84Fs were launched in less than fifteen minutes, followed by eight more F-84Fs prepared and launched within thirty more minutes. As would have happened in a real alert, not all the F-84Fs were at Chambley. Eight aircraft were at Wheelus for gunnery training. When notified of the alert they were immediately reconfigured and were ready to launch within three hours. Fragmentary Orders were executed both days, testing the wing's reaction capability and weapons loading and delivery ability. Armament load crews were evaluated on various weapons' load configurations and rapid weapons rearming of the returning aircraft. Aircraft maintenance personnel were tested on aircraft turn-around times and their ability to keep aircraft in commission for sustained combat launches. The 7122d Wing passed this evaluation with an excellent score.

The 7122d's second major test was the ORI conducted on 6 March 1962 by HQ USAFE. It passed this inspection on the first evaluation since it had practiced operational readiness during December as required by KEEN KNIFE, a Seventeenth Air Force operations plan.

All personnel were constantly involved in training to upgrade job-skill levels among the airmen. This training was made necessary by the four Unit Manning Document changes the wing had undergone as it transitioned from ANG, to TAC, to USAFE, then to a partial wing structure. Some job changes were very slight and some were total reassignments. As of 1 July 1962 the 7122d Wing had 541 airmen in job training. Approximately 220 passed tests and had their skill level upgraded. Schools were set-up on base, beginning with OJT Orientation and OJT Administrator-Supervisor courses to train the trainers. In addition to job training the wing conducted General Military Training for all personnel; the subjects were small arms marksmanship, first aid, interior guard duty, and NATO organization and mission. The wing also set up its own schools for aircraft armament loading, aircraft maintenance data collection, annual instrument flying and F-84F check-out courses for pilots.

The wing was tasked to support Seventeenth Air Force and NATO exercises throughout its stay at Chambley. Exercise RED EYE required twenty target sorties to penetrate the Spanish air defense area to test the 65th Air Division response time, and test the capabilities of the intercept controllers. CABIN CRUISER was a continuous air defense exercise conducted within West Germany. The 163d flew up to eight F-84F sorties a day. For GUNTALK, the Central Europe air defense exercise, the squadron furnished fourteen target sorties. It flew fourteen more sorties in COLD TURKEY, another air defense exercise. GRAND SLAM II was a Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force exercise between 9 and 13 April. This was a simulated test of wartime Disaster Control, the Non-Combatant Evacuation Order and Hospital Evacuation, plus the Automatic Aircraft Launch Program. One problem was obvious immediately as the 4ATAF Operations Center began requesting more aircraft support than the 7122d possessed. The 7122d Wing quickly realized that 4ATAF thought three squadrons of F-84Fs were available at Chambley instead of just one! Seventeenth Air Force promptly informed 4ATAF that only one squadron was based at Chambley. Fortunately it was only a test, not a real emergency. Overall the wing Combat Operations Center (COC) functioned very well and much was learned by all players.

By April 1962 the Berlin Crisis appeared to be settled and rumors began to spread that an early release plan was being discussed for all reserve personnel prior to their obligated date of 31 September 1962. The Kennedy Administration was interested in saving money on this emergency call-up and wanted to spend the funds on its limited war programs instead. All spring the 7122d Tactical Wing received a number of conflicting movement orders from Seventeenth Air Force. Finally on 7 June it was directed to return to CONUS with all personnel, but without its twenty-five F-84Fs. All F-84F support equipment and spare parts were to remain on base. These were to be transferred in place to the next flying unit to occupy Chambley. The support C-47 and T-33s were to be flown back to Baer Field, Indiana. All personnel were to return to Baer Field by MATS airlift for separation from the USAF by 20 August 1962. Planning began at once by wing staff agencies to assist the smooth transition of Chambley to a new fighter organization.

Immediately the 7122d Tactical Wing began by preparing a tentative airlift schedule for all personnel. An ADVON would be needed at Baer Field to set up a system to process certain ANG and Air Force Reserve personnel. All Air Force Reserve selective assignees would fly to Ft. Wayne, then be released from active duty and dispatched to their individual homes of record. At this time, the wing had ANG personnel assigned from Arizona, Missouri, South Carolina and Tennessee. Plans had to be coordinated with the STAIR STEP wings from these states for transportation of personnel to their states and units for proper release from active duty. The main body of the wing would return and be separated as a group from active duty and reassigned to ANG reserve status. Many individuals still had a reserve obligation and wished to stay in the ANG rather than chance being drafted into the Army for another year. To add to the mix, two airmen wished to separate at Chambley, tour Europe for several months, then return home. This out of the ordinary request required many messages to Seventeenth Air Force but was solved after both men obtained passports and agreed to pay their own airfare home!

The ADVON departed on 20 June on one MATS airlifter. The main body of troops departed between 5 and 25 July, usually taking two days to return to Baer Field via MATS airlift. The F-84Fs that had belonged to the 7122d TW were transferred in place on 1 July 1962 to the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing. Their C-47 and T-33As returned to CONUS across the North Atlantic without incident. On 16 July 1962 the 7122d Tactical Wing turned a much improved air base over to the 7367th Combat Support Group and departed Chambley.

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 16 Sep 2022
Updated:

Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.