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Suggested Citation:

Weaver, Michael E. "Making a Difference: The Tennessee Air National Guard during the Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962." *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 79 (2007): 1-19.

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE:
*The Tennessee Air National Guard during the
Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962*

By Michael E. Weaver*

From late 1961 to July 1962, members of the Tennessee Air National Guard played an important role during the Berlin Crisis and helped to prevent that confrontation from escalating into a shooting war. The Alcoa-based F-104A "Starfighter" interceptor squadron deployed to Ramstein Air Base in order to bolster the air defense of West Germany and if necessary, provide armed escort for flights to and from Berlin. Indeed, President John F. Kennedy's use of National Guard and Reserve forces like the one from East Tennessee was critical to the peaceful resolution of the Berlin Crisis, yet their contribution to national defense remains an under-investigated aspect of American history.

On September 1, 1961, President Kennedy mobilized 35 Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve squadrons to reinforce North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces confronting the military forces of the Soviet Union.¹ After months of confrontation, tensions over the divided city of Berlin reached a new high on August 19 when the government of the German Democratic Republic—East Germany—commenced construction on the Berlin Wall to halt the migration of East Germans into West Berlin.²

President Kennedy had to direct an assertive response in order to forestall armed conflict. The member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could already defend against a Soviet attack, but only if they relied on an arsenal of nuclear weapons. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara therefore wanted to provide the president a greater range of non-nuclear military options. One way to do so was to mobilize and transport to Europe National Guard forces like those based

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¹ History of United States Air Forces in Europe, January 1–June 30, 1962. K570.01 Jan.-Jun. 1962 Vol. 1, ch. 3, 7. This collection, hereafter referred to as USAFE, consists of two volumes of miscellaneous documents, the first volume of which is organized by chapters and non-contiguous page numbers; the second volume is not paginated. Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, hereafter referred to as AFHRA.

² Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York, 2000), 73.

in Alcoa. Toward that end McNamara asked the Senate for permission to federalize 250,000 members of the National Guard and the Army and Air Force Reserve, which it granted on August 1.³

Kennedy then activated both in order to provide enough conventional military power to deter the Soviets from taking military action against NATO troops inside West Berlin. These reinforcements would also increase NATO's chances of defeating a Soviet attack without resorting to nuclear weapons. Air National Guardsmen comprised 21,067 of those mobilized. The president sent two Army National Guard divisions to West Germany, as well. The resultant transatlantic deployment of Air National Guard assets was called "Stair Step." Altogether 216 fighter jets made their way to bases in France and Germany, the first of which arrived in Europe on October 30 and were ready to fly combat missions by the end of the year.⁴

One of the Guard squadrons was the 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron of the 134th Fighter Group stationed at McGhee-Tyson Air Force Base just south of Knoxville across from the Alcoa Aluminum plant. Established as a new unit on December 15, 1957, the 134th replaced an Air Force unit, the 355th Fighter Group, which had flown F-86D Sabre interceptors until its deactivation on that same day. A reserve component of Air Defense Command, the Air National Guard tasked the 151st with protecting Oak Ridge in the event of a Soviet bomber attack.⁵

During the fall of 1961, personnel of the 151st, along with other residents of the Knoxville area, followed regular news coverage about the Berlin confrontation and were alarmed as the news from Europe worsened. "Pictures of the Week" included a photograph of the barbed wire and concrete fence posts that now divided Berlin. Americans remained focused on the conflict as the United States, Canadian, and Royal Air Forces conducted Operation Sky Shield II, the grounding of all commer-

³ E. Allan Lightner, Jr., "Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State," August 16, 1961, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol. XIV, Charles S. Sampson, ed. (Washington, 1994), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/hof/frus/kennedyjff/xiv/15862.htm>, hereafter referred to as *FRUS*. George Schild, "The Berlin Crisis," in *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited*, Mark J. White, ed. (New York, 1998), 107; U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1962*, 87th Cong., 1st sess., July 26, 1961, 1625-1634; Clifford J. Lawrence, "The Air National Guard in the Berlin Crisis, 1961," *Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama*, April 1968, 13.

⁴ Robert F. Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1961-1984* (Maxwell AFB, AL, 1989), 37-38; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 1; Lawrence, "Air National Guard," 16, 17, 20, 66.

⁵ "History of the 58th Air Division," July 1, 1957–December 31, 1957. K-DIV-58-HI, July-December, 1957, vol. 1, AFHRA. The archive does not have any unit histories for the 355th Fighter Group. McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base, <http://www.tnknox.ang.af.mil/>. "ANG F-104s Begin Move to Europe," *Air Force Times*, November 18, 1961, 6. The 134th Fighter Group and the 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron were co-joined units. The group contained the command, maintenance, and support elements, while flying personnel and their adjutants comprised the squadron. Newspaper accounts tended to refer to the 134th Fighter Interceptor Group. Email from Chief Master Sergeant David P. Anderson, Air National Guard History Office, August 24, 2007.

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⁶ *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, "North America's Air Defense," 23, 1961; "U.S., Red Tanks Won't Doom World," *ibid.*, November 5, 1961. "Red Guards De

⁷ Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 56. It was not a part of East or W

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cial air traffic for twelve hours while
air defense interceptors like those out
of McGhee-Tyson practiced inter-
cepts against 250 American and Brit-
ish bombers. Eight days later readers
gasped at Swedish assertions that
they had detected the explosion of a
50-megaton Soviet hydrogen bomb.
War appeared even closer when So-
viet tanks pointed their cannons at
the American sector of Berlin and
American tanks responded in kind.
The Knoxville News-Sentinel ran a se-
ries of front-page articles on nuclear
warfare under the headline "You Can
Survive a Nuclear Attack." As the
squadron prepared for the deploy-
ment, American Army trucks nerv-
ously made their way to Berlin to
"test . . . Communist Chief Walter
Ulbricht's claims of sovereignty over Allied access routes." A half-million troops
of the Warsaw Pact conducted maneuvers and America wondered if they were a
precursor to war.⁶

The crisis had been brewing since 1958 but was dramatically escalated during
the 1961 summit in Vienna between President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier
Nikita Khrushchev. At that meeting, Khrushchev demanded an end to Germany's
divided condition as well as a resolution to Berlin's status as an occupied city. Oth-
erwise the Soviets would sign a separate peace with East Germany, which would
dissolve the NATO countries' access rights to Berlin. The importance of Berlin was
highlighted in part by the fact that East Berliners were migrating to West Germany
through the western sector of Berlin by the thousands, a humiliating indictment of
the communist system.⁷ Dean Acheson, a special advisor to Kennedy on European
affairs, warned the president of Berlin's importance to the United States and argued
that "the prestige of the United States and perhaps its very survival" were at stake.



Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, left, and U.S. President John F. Kennedy sit in the residence of the U.S. ambassador in Vienna, Austria, prior to their 1961 summit. AP/Wide World Photo, from the U.S. State Department.

⁶ *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 8, 1961, hereafter referred to as *KNS*; "Skies Thunder with Test of North America's Air Defense," *ibid.*, October 15, 1961; "Giant Nuclear Device Is Exploded," *ibid.*, October 23, 1961; "U.S., Red Tanks Face Each Other," *ibid.*, October 27, 1961; Willard F. Libby, "Nuclear War Won't Doom World," *ibid.*, November 28, 1961. "3 More U.S. Convoys Test Reds in Berlin," *ibid.*, November 5, 1961. "Red Guards Delay Convoy at Border," *ibid.*, November 16, 1961.

⁷ Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 56-59. Because Berlin was occupied by the U.S., U.K., France, and the U.S.S.R., it was not a part of East or West Germany. Schild, "Berlin Crisis," 94, 100.

Acheson recommended a gradual military buildup that summer, including a call-up of reservists. Kennedy followed this advice, and began to carry it out through public addresses, diplomacy, and military action. Eighty-five percent of the American people thought that a continued American military presence in Berlin was worth risking war.⁸ In the face of Soviet threats of war if U.S. forces remained in Berlin, Kennedy nonetheless believed that by mobilizing the reserves it was possible to forestall a military confrontation. The president remained worried that the conflict could intensify into a war, so avoiding escalation became his goal and mobilizing the reserves was a means to deter armed conflict, not win it.⁹

Thus Air National Guard (ANG) interceptors were deployed to Europe with the same mission—detering war—they had in the United States. Since the Soviets' intercontinental ballistic missile force was still in its infancy, long-range bombers remained the primary threat. Air Defense Command protected American airspace from attack and Air National Guard interceptors formed the primary air defense force in places where fewer Air Force fighters were stationed. A total of 112 fighters from 56 Air Force squadrons served as the vanguard of continental air defense in 1961, but 50 jets from 25 Air National Guard squadrons were also on "alert," fueled and armed, ready to take off in less than five minutes to shoot down Soviet bombers. Two more jets and seven pilots were available as well from each squadron.¹⁰ Although some planners in Air Force leadership expressed serious doubts as to the capabilities of Guardsmen in the air defense mission, the USAF Chief of Staff, General Thomas D. White, was more optimistic as to their abilities. As a result, the Air Force integrated Air National Guard (ANG) squadrons into plans for air defense: "It is recommended that a concerted effort be directed toward close coordination with the ANG to assure them of their value in the defense system... In addition, operational exercises should be planned so that the ANG units can participate to the maximum degree possible." The tactics used for defending US airspace were similar to those in Europe, so the Tennessee Air National Guard and its 20 F-104 Starfighters were prepared to contribute to the air defense of West Germany.¹¹

⁸ "Record of Meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin Contingency Planning," June 16, 1961, *FRUS*, vol. XIV; Memorandum, June 14, 1961, *ibid.*; Schild, "Berlin Crisis," 97; "Report by Dean Acheson," June 28, 1961, *FRUS* vol. XIV; Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 71-77.

⁹ Schild, "Berlin Crisis," 101, 103, 120. Frank Costigliola, "The Pursuit of Atlantic Community: Nuclear Arms, Dollars, and Berlin," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, Thomas G. Paterson, ed. (New York, 1989), 40.

¹⁰ Lt. Col. Ralph C. Williams, "Intelligence for Fighter Dispersal Increased Alert Plan," February 12, 1962, File K-Div-30-HI, Jan.-Dec. 1962, vol. 9, AFHRA; Richard E. McMullen, *Air Defense and National Policy, 1958-1964*, 28, K410-041-26, AFHRA; Thomas W. Ray, *The Air National Guard Manned Interceptor Force, 1946-1964*, 1, 56, 67, K410.041-23, AFHRA; Operation Plan 10-61, Headquarters Air Defense Command, June 1, 1961; K410.01-13 Jan.-July 1961, vol. V, AFHRA.

¹¹ "Lt. Gen. J. H. Atkinson to General Thomas D. White, "Policy on Reserve Forces," May 25, 1959, Gen. White to Gen. Adkinson, June 25, 1959, K410-10 Jan.-June 1959 Vol. IV, AFHRA; Col. James H. Thorne, "ADC Tactical Evaluation, 32nd Air Division, 16-20 June 1960." File K-Div-32-Jan.-Dec. 1960, vol. IV, AFHRA; "History of 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Nov. 61 to 31 Dec. 61," in Unit History of the 86th Air Division, 1 July 1961-31 December 1961, K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA.

With these new aircraft more than most Guard interceptors. The Air National Guard interceptors' performance or weapons capabilities were not reliable, so Tennessee was given new jets.¹² Having flown the squadron transitioned to improve the Air National Guard to the same standards as their Air Force counterparts. The men were to be "trained in the same manner as regular squadrons." The Guard pilots wanted the Guard pilots to be as good as the Air Force squadrons seldom met that goal.

Tennessee's fighter squadrons were tapped it for active duty. The Air Force's newest mount for less than five minutes to enter active service on the ground. That morning noted that the Air National Guard units in the nation and in the Air National Guard." It never fell below the standards of the Air Force.

The Tennessee Guard was activated since July 15, when Kennedy announced that Air National Guard squadrons for federalization. One of the original units to be federalized initially informed that the Air Force's decision. When warned of the Air Force's decision, the 134th was alerted, but the 134th was not federalized for federalization the ground. The Air National Guardsmen began working on the federalization. Approximately six months to set up the air base for the Air National Guard.

¹² "History of 32nd Air Div. (SAF) AFHRA; "History of the Air Defense Command, South Carolina Air National Guard, AFHRA."

¹³ History of the 134th Group, Air Defense Command, July - December 1961, AFHRA; Conference, February 9, 1962, K410.01-12, vol. VI, AFHRA.

¹⁴ "F-104s Begin Move," History of the 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Nov. 61 to 31 Dec. 61, K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA; "Current Status Report, 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, K410.01-12, vol. VI, July - December 1961, AFHRA."

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deployed to Europe with the States. Since the Soviets' inter-long-range bombers remained American airspace from attack ary air defense force in places 112 fighters from 56 Air Force ase in 1961, but 50 jets from 25 ed and armed, ready to take off Two more jets and seven pilots me planners in Air Force lead-Guardsmen in the air defense White, was more optimistic as National Guard (ANG) squad-t a concerted effort be directed m of their value in the defense lanned so that the ANG units tactics used for defending US e Air National Guard and its 20 defense of West Germany.¹¹

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a Reserve Forces," May 25, 1959, Gen. sl. IV. AFHRA; Col. James H. Thorne, ile K-Div-32-Jan.-Dec. 1960, vol. IV, to 31 Dec. 61," in Unit History of the uly-Dec. 1961, AFHRA.

With these new aircraft the Alcoa squadron was able to carry out its mission better than most Guard interceptor squadrons in the South. The majority of the region's Air National Guard interceptor units still flew F-86Ls, a jet that lacked the performance or weapons capability necessary to intercept and shoot down invading bombers reliably, so Tennessee was at the forefront of combat readiness when it received the new jets.¹² Having flown F-86D and L Sabres from December 1957 to June 1960, the squadron transitioned to the F-104A on June 15. This was part of an effort to improve the Air National Guard's capabilities. Toward that end, pilots now met the same standards as their active duty counterparts and as of July 1, 1960, the Guardsmen were to be "trained and operationally utilized insofar as possible in the same manner as regular squadrons," which turned out to be a challenge. The Air Force wanted the Guard pilots to fly at least 17 hours a month, but National Guard squadrons seldom met that goal.¹³

Tennessee's fighter squadron, however, was one of the best, and the Air Force tapped it for active duty for that reason. The men of the 151st had been flying their newest mount for less than 18 months when they received orders on October 9 to enter active service on the first of November. The *News-Sentinel's* banner headline that morning noted that the squadron was "considered one of the most combat ready units in the nation and is one of the top-ranked flying groups in the Air National Guard." It never fell below the standard of "C-2 operationally ready."¹⁴

The Tennessee Guardsmen had anticipated that they were liable for active service since July 15, when Kennedy announced his intention to federalize several Air National Guard squadrons for deployment to Europe. In fact, the 134th/151st had been one of the original units told to stand ready for mobilization, and although they were initially informed that they would remain stateside the Air Force soon reversed that decision. When warned on October 9, most of the National Guard had already been alerted, but the 134th now had just three weeks until federal duty. In preparation for federalization the group added another weekend of training. One-hundred-fifty guardsmen began working full-time on October 16 to help prepare for the deployment. Approximately six officers and men left for Germany on November 8 to help set up the air base for the arrival of the rest of the squadron. The president also mo-

¹² "History of 32nd Air Div. (SAGE) January - December 1960," K-DIV-32-HI Jan-Dec. 1960, vol. I, AFHRA; "History of the Air Defense Command, January - June 1961," K410.01-12, vol. I. The Arizona and South Carolina Air National Guard also received F-104s in 1960.

¹³ History of the 134th Group, K169.054, AFHRA; Operation Plan, 10-61; "History of the Air Defense Command, July - December 1960, K410.01-11, vol. I, AFHRA; "ANG Aircraft Strength," in AEW&C Conference, February 9, 1962, K-DIV-32-HI, January 1962 - May 1963, AFHRA.

¹⁴ "F-104s Begin Move," History of the 134th Group, K169.054, AFHRA; "History of 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Nov. 61 to 31 Dec. 61," in Unit History of the 86th Air Division, July 1, 1961-December 31, 1961, K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA; "134th Air Guard Here Called Up," *KNS*, October 9, 1961; "Current Status Report," K410.01-12, vol. III, January - June 1961; "Current Status Report," K410.01-12, vol. VI, July - December 1961, AFHRA.

bilized the F-104A squadrons from South Carolina and Arizona.¹⁵

Although the mobilization came suddenly, the Guardsmen responded enthusiastically to federalization, with "less than four percent" asking to be exempt from the call-up. Many of them accepted considerable pay cuts as a result of the mobilization. If one was a college student, however, as were many from the 134th/151st, mobilization was good for the pocketbook. Forty-four of the Guardsmen were students at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and had to leave their classes for active duty. The University extended every courtesy to the mobilized students, either offering them half credit or a full refund of their tuition fees. Others left lucrative jobs, such as Lieutenant Cecil Meek, Jr., and Captain John Ayers, both of whom were assistant district attorneys. They understood the "necessity for their service."¹⁶ Many were chomping at the bit. Major Joseph Davenport, an owner of a liquor store and a used car lot, exclaimed that "When the bosses in Washington say the word, I'm sure all of the fellows feel like I do: 'Let's go.' We're ready for combat, if that is what is going to be necessary to let the Russians and the world know we aren't to be pushed around." Captain James Mingie, a construction engineer and former bomber pilot, added, "I'm ready to go. I expected it and I think it's time we got a little firm with the commies."¹⁷

Tennessee's Guardsmen formally mobilized on November 1 for a year of service. Leaving in groups rather than as one single deployment, a total of 450 deployed to Ramstein Air Base in the Federal Republic of Germany. The mobilization began with paperwork and the issuance of weapons at McGhee-Tyson. Guardsmen received winter uniforms, and officers, many of them new second lieutenants, purchased enough additional uniforms to last an entire year. By November 22, only 200 Guardsmen remained at McGhee-Tyson following the departure of 150 others in an Air Force transport. The Air Force wished to keep their destination a complete secret until everyone had reached their overseas base, but "departures [had] become common knowledge through families and friends of those who have already gone overseas, or are going shortly." The local newspaper reported that they were bound for Bitburg Air Base, but they were actually destined for Ramstein, a fact clarified by the 25th of the month. Orders to rush to the air base for the flight to West Germany often came

¹⁵ Gerald T. Cantwell, *Citizen Airmen: A History of the Air Force Reserve, 1946-1994* (Washington, DC, 1997), 197; "The Air National Guard in the Berlin Crisis," *The National Guardsman*, September 1962, 19; "134th Air Guard Unit Ordered to Europe," *KNS*, October 12, 1961; "500 of ANG Unit Departing About Nov. 15," *ibid.*, October 15, 1961; "Air Guard Unit May Be Split Up," *ibid.*, November 9, 1961; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 58-59.

¹⁶ "Plans and Policy," *The Air Reservist*, February 1962, 6; S. E. Stotts, "Overseas Duty 'No Sweat' for Air Guardsmen," *The National Guardsman* (May 1962), 5; "49 Leave U-T for Active Duty," *KNS*, November 2, 1961; Mary Anna Winegar, "Mobilized Students Promised Full Help," *ibid.*, October 11, 1961; *ibid.*, November 1, 1961; "Mobilization! The Air National Guard? Some of it, Probably; the Army National Guard? A Little of it, Maybe," *The National Guardsman*, September 1961, 31.

¹⁷ "134th Air Guard Here Called Up," *KNS*, October 9, 1961; "Old Heads' Will Lead 134th to Active Duty," *ibid.*, October 10, 1961.

suddenly, as with pilots telephone calls in the night. All but 1 percent men reported within 2

The original plan squadron's fighters to cr by flying from Knoxville Newfoundland, and fro ges in the Azores before to Germany, but there to the safety and feasi crossing since the F-10 engine aircraft. F-104 known to suddenly c due to airflow problem Several of the pilots flew der to test the feasibility some mechanical diffic the ocean safely. The s cargo aircraft, and reas C-124 Globemaster, de together the last of the each, the pilots were re put back together—and was not the first time th The 83rd Fighter Inter "going to pieces," so to Air Command, Genera Stair Step was a maxim of civilian life, carried o

¹⁸ Futrell, *Ideas*, 38; "3 Air C More of 134th Leave," *KNS*, ber 5, 1961; "134th Men W Mid-State," *ibid.*, Novembe November 2, 1961.

¹⁹ History 151st; USAFE, vo *X-Press*, March 7, 1997. ht McMullen, *Aircraft in Air L fense Command*, 82, K410. Squadron, 30 September 195

²⁰ W. C. Sweeney, Jr., to Com HI, Jul-Dec. 1961.

and Arizona.¹⁵ Guardsmen responded enthusiastically asking to be exempt from the mobilization as a result of the mobilization. From the 134th/151st, mobilized Guardsmen were students at the time of their classes for active duty. The majority of students, either offering them or being offered, left lucrative jobs, such as Lieutenants of whom were assistant district attorneys. "Many were chomping the bit for a liquor store and a used car lot, except for the word, I'm sure all of the fellows know what is going to be necessary to be pushed around." Captain James Humber pilot, added, "I'm ready to go firm with the commies."¹⁷ On November 1 for a year of service. In total, a total of 450 deployed to Germany. The mobilization began with the McGhee-Tyson. Guardsmen received wings. Lieutenants, purchased enough for November 22, only 200 Guardsmen out of 150 others in an Air Force operation a complete secret until the disclosures [had] become common. Many have already gone overseas, or at least they were bound for Bitburg, Germany, a fact clarified by the 25th of November to West Germany often came

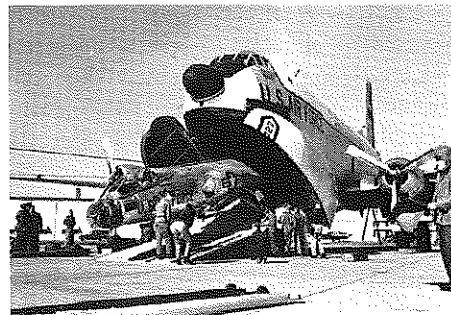
Reserve, 1946-1994 (Washington, DC, *National Guardsman*, September 1962, 19; "500 of ANG Unit Departing About Japan," *ibid.*, November 9, 1961; USAFE,

reports, "Overseas Duty 'No Sweat' for Air Force J-T for Active Duty," *KNS*, November 1961; "Help," *ibid.*, October 11, 1961; *ibid.*, "One of it, Probably; the Army National Guard," *ibid.*, 1961, 31.

Old Heads' Will Lead 134th to Active

suddenly, as with pilots who answered telephone calls in the middle of the night. All but 1 percent of the Guardsmen reported within 24 hours.¹⁸

The original plan was for the squadron's fighters to cross the Atlantic by flying from Knoxville to Argentina, Newfoundland, and from there to Lajes in the Azores before continuing on to Germany, but there was concern as to the safety and feasibility of such a crossing since the F-104 was a single-engine aircraft. F-104 engines were known to suddenly quit mid-flight due to airflow problems. Restarting it was "almost impossible" at cruising altitude. Several of the pilots flew practice flights 1,350 miles long over the United States in order to test the feasibility of this method of long distance flight. Since they encountered some mechanical difficulties, they were not confident that they could make it across the ocean safely. The squadron decided to dismantle their fighters, load them onto cargo aircraft, and reassemble them at Ramstein. The first of these large transports, a C-124 Globemaster, departed McGhee-Tyson on November 10. Ground crews pieced together the last of the F-104s in Germany on December 18. Following three flights each, the pilots were ready to assume their alert duties—before all of the jets had been put back together—and the squadron began flying missions on December 9. This was not the first time that F-104s had been sent on an overseas expedition in this way. The 83rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron deployed to Taiwan in September 1958 after "going to pieces," so to speak.¹⁹ It was no small feat, and the Commander of Tactical Air Command, General W. C. Sweeney, Jr., said as much: "We are not unmindful that the Stair Step was a maximum effort in a minimum time and that you, just a month out of civilian life, carried out the mission without a flaw."²⁰



F-104 Starfighter, dismantled and being loaded for transport. From the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, courtesy of the author.

¹⁸ Futrell, *Ideas*, 38; "3 Air Guard Units Called For Duty," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1961; "150 More of 134th Leave," *KNS*, November 22, 1961; "700 Getting Used to AF Life Again," *ibid.*, November 5, 1961; "134th Men Waiting Day to Day," *ibid.*, November 17, 1961; "Some of 134th Going to Mid-State," *ibid.*, November 25, 1961; "Fighter Group's Day Goes Smoothly," *The Knoxville Journal*, November 2, 1961.

¹⁹ History 151st; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 57; Roy Bryant, "F-104 Legacy Spans Five Decades," *The Dryden X-Press*, March 7, 1997, <http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/Newsroom/X-Press/1997/xp-97-05-.html>; Richard F. McMullen, *Aircraft in Air Defense: 1946-1960* (Historical Division Directorate of Information, Air Defense Command), 82, K410.041-12 1946-1960, AFHRA; Historical Record of the 83rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 30 September 1958, K-SQ-FI-83-HI, Jan. 1958-Dec. 1959, AFHRA.

²⁰ W. C. Sweeney, Jr., to Commander, 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, December 29, 1961, K-DIV-86-HI, Jul-Dec. 1961.

Many National Guard wives followed their husbands to Europe, where the couples paid out of pocket for apartments in nearby villages. The commercial flight alone cost "nearly \$700.00 per adult, children somewhat less." Whether to follow and keep the family in the same place or keep the family at home in familiar surroundings was normally "the first decision for the married Guardsman and his wife." Families often struggled with reduced incomes while credit tightened. Most vexing was the attitude of unethical mechanics, the inaccessibility of National Guard rules on families' rights and benefits, and appliances that broke at the most inopportune times. Nevertheless, morale overseas thrived even though the Tennesseans missed their families. They were pleased to be at a well-equipped base and were plenty busy. Their Air Force hosts scheduled sightseeing trips and welcomed them onto their sports teams. They also informed the Guardsmen not to be surprised if German families took them into their homes during Christmas, and warned them that some of the young women who made romantic advances to them were in all likelihood East German spies.²¹

The goal of the military buildup was to persuade the Soviets from interfering with Allied access to Berlin. Major Robert W. Aiken, the squadron commander, considered the mission of the National Guard reinforcements to be "serving the cause of peace just as effectively as any Strategic Air Command bomber on 15-minute alert." These Guardsmen from East Tennessee were tasked with shooting down any hostile aircraft which might attack from the eastern side of the iron curtain: "The primary mission is to prepare for and conduct air defense operations and day fighter operations as directed."²²

They would do so under the close radar guidance of American and German "fighter directors," to use the German term, directing intercepts from ground radar stations.²³ More specifically, they were to be ready to take off from Ramstein within 15 minutes of receiving orders to do so, primarily to protect unarmed aircraft flying in the Berlin air corridors from Soviet fighters.²⁴ Over the course of the deployment the Tennesseans exceeded the standards set by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Their arrival at this combat capability in the F-104 took a round-about path.

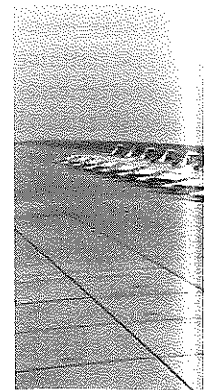
The Starfighter had its origins in a 1950 Air Force requirement for a "high performance, multipurpose fighter." The design evolved into an "air superiority weapon," one that could destroy enemy aircraft in the air and dominate airspace. By 1956,

²¹ W. D. McGlasson, "Watch on the Rhine," *The National Guardsman* (June 1962): 5, 29; "Mobilization: The Wives' Slant," *ibid.* (February 1964), 9-11; "134th Morale High," *KNS*, December 27, 1961.

²² Ministerial Conversations on Berlin, Memorandum of Conversation, August 6, 1961, *FRUS*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/hof/frus/kennedy/f/xiv/15861.htm>; "Reservists May Not Stay Full Year," *KNS*, November 29, 1961; History 151st.

²³ Welby A. Smith, *History of 86th Air Division*. A fighter director is somewhat like an air traffic controller, except that he directs fighters toward airborne targets. An air traffic controller, of course, keeps aircraft away from each other. They were known as "weapons directors" in the United States Air Force.

²⁴ USAF, vol. 1, ch. 3, 58.



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F-104 Starfighters from the 151st Air National Guard, their "TENN AIR GUARD" markings still in place. USAF photo, courtesy of the author.

Lockheed was proposing equipping the F-104 with the capability of dropping a nuclear bomb, just in case the Air Force needed it to do so in an "emergency," citing its exceptional speed as an asset for this bombing mission. Although originally intended as a weapon against rival Soviet fighters, the Starfighter first entered service with the Air Defense Command in 1958, which wanted 157 of the jets for continental defense against Soviet bombers. These would serve as interim interceptors between the F-102 and F-106. Its speed and climbing capability would ensure that no Soviet bomber could escape from it, but the Air Force soon realized that it had tasked the '104 with a mission it was ill-suited to perform. Starfighters lacked the internal space for the avionics necessary for an air defense interceptor, and it could not carry the radar or fire control black boxes required for radar-guided missiles for finding and shooting down aircraft at night. There was no way it could destroy a bomber which escaped into cloud cover. Lockheed even tried to persuade the Air Force to purchase an improved all-weather version which would utilize as its main weapon an MB-1 "Genie" air-to-air rocket with a nuclear warhead, but the Air Force opted to stick with the F-106 as its penultimate interceptor. Thus the Air Force transferred its F-104s to the Air National Guard after just two years of active duty service.²⁵

The F-104 by its appearance looks like a highly capable, intimidating aircraft. Exceptionally fast by any standard, it had the speed and power to enable it to standby

²⁵ "Military Characteristics of a Tactical Fighter (Air Superiority)," September 18, 1950, K417.03-1, 18 Sept. 1950 - 15 Feb. 1956, vol. 1, AFHRA; C. P. Lessig, USAF Acting Director of Requirements, "General Operational Requirement for an Air Superiority Weapon," August 27, 1951, K417.03-1, 18 Sep 1950 - 15 Feb. 1956, vol. 1, AFHRA; Clarence L. Johnson to Commander, Air Materiel Command, "Addition of Nuclear Capability to the F-104A," February 29, 1956, K417.03-1, vol. 2, AFHRA; B. R. Koepnick to Headquarters USAF, "Allocation of F-104 Aircraft to Air Defense Command," January 8, 1956, K417.03-1, vol. 2; McMullen, *Aircraft in Air Defense*, 79, 82-83; Brig. Gen. Howell M. Estes, Jr., "F-104 as an All-Weather Interceptor," April 3, 1956, K417.03-1, vol. 2; Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, "F-104 Versatility and Growth Potential," March 1, 1958, K243.0471-38, AFHRA. The F-106 carried more and better weapons than the F-104, was faster, had superior avionics, and could fly greater distances.

at an airfield, launch in less than five minutes, and with the throttle wide open, intercept potentially hostile aircraft as far away as 170 miles from its home base just nine minutes after takeoff, but shorter ranges of around 110 miles were more realistic. At a more modest power setting and lower velocity, the jet might reach out as far as 300 miles from its base. Because of its speed, the Starfighter would be on top of any adversary before it reached its target, whether in East Tennessee or West Germany. At maximum power it tore through the sky at 1.8 times the speed of sound, roughly 1,200 miles per hour. Nothing could get above an F-104 since it could sustain flight at 55,000 feet. Its small size made it difficult for other aircraft to see, giving it the advantage of getting to fire on an adversary before he could react. Its weapons systems were functional for the day, with its radar providing the pilot intercept guidance from beyond visual range for attacks from behind, two GAR-8 "Sidewinder" missiles—its primary armament—able to home on the heat of an aircraft's engine exhaust, and a 20 millimeter Gatling gun for use inside the missile's minimum range.²⁶

Tactics were simple. The fighter director vectored a pair so that the enemy aircraft would pass in front of the F-104 on a course 90 degrees across the nose of the fighter, at which point he would direct a 90 degree turn so that the Starfighter would arrive astern the enemy 12 miles to the rear with a speed advantage of 3:2. The pilot would position his jet dead astern and slightly below the target so as to give his radar nothing but sky and the target to look at, thereby avoiding ground interference. If he had to fire his GAR-8s, he needed to be closer than 2 miles at 20,000 feet of altitude, and at least 5 miles behind at 50,000. By the book, the pilot fired his starboard missile "at maximum range," firing the second missile only if the first failed to kill the invading aircraft.²⁷ The distance from East Germany to the other side of West Germany—anywhere from 120-150 miles—made speed an even greater requirement. Altogether, the F-104 could react quickly enough to challenge airborne intruders over West Germany, the small size of which magnified the need for a fast reaction, hence the name "Quick Reaction Alert" for jets which sat ready for launch on runways all over western Europe. The Tennessee squadron had routinely practiced similar missions over the southeastern United States.

Although the Starfighter was fast as well as difficult to see, the pilots from Alcoa had to account for several performance and maneuvering limitations inherent to the F-104. The jet was optimized for fighting in clear air masses, preferably during daylight hours, since its missiles had to "see" the infrared radiation from the enemy aircraft's engine. Night flying was feasible, but the jet was not ideal for night intercepts. The interceptor's radar could track an enemy bomber under all weather conditions, but it could only fire

²⁶ "86th Air Division Gets Proverbial 'Shot in the Arm' as the Mighty Starfighter Joins Europe's Arsenal," *On Guard* (November 1961), 4. Everett W. Dunlap, Louis W. Schalk, Jr., *ARDC F-104A Phase II Flight Evaluation*, AFFTC-TR-56-31, December 1956, 6; Air Defense Command Manual 55-5, vol. 1, 15 July 1961, K410.01, vol. VIII, July - December 1961; Dunlap and Schalk, *Phase II*, 3; William C. Lewis, "History of the Twelfth Air Force, 1 July - 31 December, 1965," K650.01-28, Jul.-Dec. 1965, vol. 1, AFHRA. "GAR" stood for "guided air rocket."

²⁷ Air Defense Command Manual 55-5, 1 October 1960, 78-79. K410.301-5, 1 October 1960, AFHRA.

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²⁸ Leslie Dyer, "Who ramento Air Materie and Schalk, *Phase II* AF33(600)-27378. N Schalk, *Phase II*, 4, 1

²⁹ Abner M. Aust, H Techniques Program

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its missiles in clear air. F-104s could not effectively engage enemy fighters in close-in turning combat (dogfights) because its minimum turning radius was so great, anywhere from 4 to 12 miles at supersonic speeds. At subsonic speeds "the turning capability becomes poor and is suitable only for non-combat operations." Moreover, the jet suffered from "pitch-up" difficulties, in which it could find itself in a nose-up attitude and unable to regain controlled flight because the wings masked the control surfaces. Therefore, if it challenged Soviet fighter aircraft, it would have to restrict itself to high speed slashing hit and run attacks with missiles and guns. One unusual characteristic is that its "turning capability at supersonic speeds is outstanding," although that still meant very wide turns. The huge turn radius meant that ground controllers were necessary to steer the jet toward its target; pilots had to begin turns before they could even see the enemy aircraft. Its one advantage here was that it could attack vertically from below as well as above and behind since its engine produced so much excess power. Furthermore, its pilots could run-down or run away from nearly all of its opponents, except one, the Soviet Mig-21, a superior aircraft.²⁸

In 1965, the Americans obtained a Mig-21 tactics manual and noticed that the Soviets compared and contrasted their newest weapon against the F-104. The Soviet jet proved superior in every respect: maneuverability, speed, and acceleration. The turning radius of the Mig-21 was half that of the Starfighter. The Soviet fighter could still catch an F-104 if the American jet tried to out-climb it. At 40,000 feet, the Mig-21 could reach the top speed of an F-104 in 2 minutes; the Starfighter would require another minute to catch up.²⁹ Had the Tennesseans fought this newest example of Soviet technology over central Europe, they would have had to count on superior piloting skills in order to win.

At times it looked like the East Tennessee Guardsmen might have to escort passenger aircraft through the air corridors to airports in Berlin. In August 1961, the Soviets accused NATO of flying subversive individuals into Berlin, thereby violating the agreement between the powers which governed air access to the city. In early 1962, the Soviets began to harass NATO aircraft flying to and from Berlin. On the March 7, for instance, Soviet Migs tormented a Royal Air Force Pembroke, a slow, propeller-driven transport aircraft by flying around it, making sudden turns in front of it, and approaching to within 100 yards. An American C-130 endured similar harassment on the March 22. The Soviets frequently held exercises in the air corridors, notifying NATO that "safety of flight would not be guaranteed." Soviet fighters even buzzed a British airliner on March 30. February and March were the two worst months of Soviet

"Mighty Starfighter Joins Europe's Arsenal," *On*
 Chalk, Jr., *ARDC F-104A Phase II Flight Evalu-*
 Command Manual 55-5, vol. 1, 15 July 1961,
 Chalk, *Phase II*, 3; William C. Lewis, "History of
 1-28, Jul.-Dec. 1965, vol. 1, AFHRA. "GAR"

²⁸ Leslie Dyer, "Who Says We Can't?" *Fighter Weapons Newsletter*, September 1959, 12, Headquarters Sacramento Air Materiel Area, F-104A Logistical Plan, July 23, 1956, K417.03-1, vol. 2, AFHRA; Dunlap and Schalk, *Phase II*, 12, 35; Air Force Plant Representative to Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, Contract AF33(600)-27378, Model F-104, Flight Characteristics, February 24, 1956, K417.03-1, vol. 2; Dunlap and Schalk, *Phase II*, 4, 13.

²⁹ Abner M. Aust, Headquarters 6002nd Standardization/Evaluation Group (PACAF), "PACAF Tactics and Techniques Program (Bulletin #5), May 17, 1965, K717.549-1, Nos. 1-13, 4 May - 1 July 1965, AFHRA.

79. K410.301-5, 1 October 1960, AFHRA.

harassment, but the Soviets were never able to prevent flights of British, French, and American aircraft from reaching Berlin. Had NATO commanders so directed, the squadron from Alcoa would have escorted NATO aircraft to Berlin. They never did. General Lauris Norstad, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, believed that armed escorts would escalate the crisis and would use up the alliance's "last trump before actual fighting." Besides, Soviet harassment had not stopped air travel to Berlin, so why react?³⁰

Had they been called upon to do so, the 151st could have responded when they first arrived in December, but the squadron did not achieve full combat capability until May 1962. In a January 1962 evaluation, the squadron intercepted 100 percent of its targets, and evaluators made note of the "thoroughly competent, aggressive and professional performance by all sections of" the squadron.³¹ The Air Force had scheduled it for 1,515 flying hours from January through March, but the squadron achieved only 65 percent of that goal.³² All of its pilots were ready for combat, but twelve out of 20 airframes suffered from mechanical difficulties, so the squadron could not be considered fully combat-ready. Things were not much better the next month, when only five of ten jets still at Ramstein were flyable.

Twenty-one pilots and ten aircraft deployed to Wheelus Air Base in Libya in February to practice firing weapons in the more favorable weather of the Mediterranean, a deployment that suggested the crisis had passed the moment of greatest danger. Six pilots remained at Ramstein. Most of the deployed jets remained air-worthy, but two collided with each other over Libya, killing both pilots in the process, and a third crashed because of an engine failure. Once the rest of the squadron returned to Germany, none of the jets were fully functional. They suffered from ejection seat and landing gear problems, as well as malfunctions of the missile firing system. In April, the readiness rate went up to ten aircraft out of 17, but then all were grounded when maintenance crews discovered that their landing gear doors would not close properly following takeoff.

The squadron finally began to contribute consistently to the air defense of West Germany in May when all but two of the jets were flyable. It was declared "C-1, fully operationally ready," even receiving the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award,

³⁰ Lt. Col. Archie G. Burdette to Berlin Air Safety Center Liaison Officer, BASC Monthly Activities Report for March 1962, April 7, 1962. K570.01 Jan.-Jun. 1962, Vol. 3. AFHRA; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 1, 27, 32; Memorandum from the Secretary of State's Special Assistant (Seymour Weiss) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs, March 14, 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol. XV, Charles S. Sampson, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1994), 42-43.

³¹ "Attachment 2, Recommendation for Air Force Outstanding Unit Award," K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961. AFHRA."

³² USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, figure 10. This did not compare well with the other two ANG F-104 squadrons in Europe, who achieved 72 and 98 percent of their scheduled hours. Ibid.



F-104 Starfighter in flight
From the Air Force

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³³ Operational Readiness R
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³⁴ Aiken, June 1, 1962.

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n Officer, BASC Monthly Activities Re- ol. 3. AFHRA; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 1, 27, (Seymour Weiss) to the Deputy Assistant Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, 13.

Unit Award," K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec.

h the other two ANG F-104 squadrons uts. Ibid.



F-104 Starfighter in front of the 151st hanger at Ramstein Air Base, now with USAF markings. From the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, courtesy of the author.

but that rating fell to "C-2, operationally ready" the next month because it did not have enough aircraft.³³ Major Aiken found that efforts to extend the endurance of the F-104s through the use of under-wing fuel tanks hurt morale and prevented pilots from flying the aircraft to the limits of what it was made for—speed. "It was our belief that the satisfaction of operating the aircraft in its best environment—the high supersonic attacks [sic]—is a contagious spirit that spreads throughout the unit, and ultimately affects the morale of every man."³⁴

Further suggesting that war was not imminent, four of the squadron's jets flew to Creel Air Base in France as a goodwill deployment after the return from Libya and for practice with the air force of that NATO ally. Since their deployment went smoothly, four of the jets flew to Oslo, Norway to commemorate the "fiftieth anni-

³³ Operational Readiness Reports, January – June, 1962. K570.01 Jan.–Jun. 1962, vol. 4, AFHRA; History 151st Fighter Interceptor Squadron, K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA; Robert W. Aiken, June 1, 1962, "Report of Flying Activities," *ibid.*; "Combat Capability Rating (C-Rating)." RG-200, Records of Robert C. McNamara, Box 15, Folder 2, Reserve & Guard Callup Resolution Sept. 1962, National Archives.

³⁴ Aiken, June 1, 1962.

versary of the Norwegian Air Force." Indeed, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Berlin observed that the Soviet diplomats had backed down: "I am inclined to believe that it marks the full end of the wall crisis and that we have won this round."³⁵

May was a great month for the squadron as Air Force evaluators rated it the best Air National Guard squadron in Europe along with its sister F-104 unit, the 197th Fighter Interceptor Squadron from South Carolina. Such a rating is not hard to understand. With just 17 jets, the Tennessee Air National Guard completed 576 flights and successfully intercepted its practice targets 90 percent of the time, a success rate better than any other squadron—active or Air National Guard—in central Europe. The attention of the mechanics made this accomplishment possible. The jets were ready to fly 98 percent of the time, and by the end of May all of the F-104s were "in commission." Tennessee's fighter squadron also set a record of 836 flying hours for the month. The Guardsmen who maintained the jets had collected a more comprehensive set of spare parts to get the jets in the air after readiness collapsed in January due to parts shortages. Most impressive was the squadron's ability to refuel aircraft that had just landed from a mission in just eight minutes. Good weather enabled it to really get into a groove. Because the pilots were able to complete their flights in the morning—sometimes two by each pilot—the maintenance troops had all afternoon to work on the jets. By the end of the month they were only working eight hours a day, and yet nearly all of the jets were ready to fly every day. On May 31, the Air Division told the squadron that breaking its flying time record was in reach; twenty-one flight hours that day took them over the top. "The final...report of the day showed one aircraft non O/R [operationally ready]. We were washing it."³⁶

The squadron's success was not surprising given the veteran composition of its personnel. Its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Aiken, had been an instructor pilot during World War II and completed 30 combat missions in the F-104's predecessor, the F-86F, in the Korean War. Other pilots flew for the airlines and had extensive experience in jet aircraft. They averaged an impressive 1,400 flying hours each, with the least-experienced pilot having logged 700. The squadron was a judicious mix of "old head" fliers, including two with combat experience, and newer airmen. National Guard units also included an officer from the Air Force who served as an advisor. In the case of the 151st that officer was Lieutenant Colonel William E. Pickron, a veteran of over 400 combat flying hours in World War II plus additional combat experience in jets over Korea. Pickron had nothing but praise for the squadron: "I have never been in a better outfit. The maintenance [of the aircraft] is excellent and the overall combat readiness of this unit is amazing." Several dozen of the officers and airmen who served

³⁵ "Attachment 2, Recommendation for Air Force Outstanding Unit Award," K-DIV-86-HI E, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA; Allan Lightner, Jr., "Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State," April 6, 1962, *FRUS*, vol. XV, 98.

³⁶ "Attachment 2, Recommendation for Air Force Outstanding Unit Award," K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, AFHRA. Evidently the squadron received one replacement aircraft to bring the number up to eighteen. Aiken, June 1, 1961.

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³⁸ Jack Raymond, "All Res
vol. 1, ch. 3, 82; "Progr
Berlin Wall: Kennedy, Khr

³⁹ History 30th Air Divisi
Narrative Report, Chicag
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Cuban Crisis," K-DIV-30
ruary 2, 1963. K-Div-30
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Deputy Chief of Mission in Berlin down: "I am inclined to believe that we have won this round."³⁵

Force evaluators rated it the best of its sister F-104 unit, the 197th. Such a rating is not hard to understand. National Guard completed 576 flights 98 percent of the time, a success rate for National Guard—in central Europe. The achievement possible. The jets were in May all of the F-104s were "in a record of 836 flying hours for the unit had collected a more comprehensive readiness collapsed in January the squadron's ability to refuel aircraft in minutes. Good weather enabled it to complete their flights in the maintenance troops had all afternoon were only working eight hours a day. On May 31, the Air Division record was in reach; twenty-one final...report of the day showed washing it."³⁶

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Award," K-DIV-86-HI E, July-Dec. 1961, Berlin to the Department of State," April

Award," K-DIV-86-HI, July-Dec. 1961, to bring the number up to eighteen.

in non-flying positions were also veterans of the previous two wars.³⁷ The peak of efficiency the squadron reached in May resulted from the combination of experienced leadership, hard work, and the fact that their jets had relatively few flying hours.

In April 1962 the Pentagon announced that it would soon begin to rotate National Guard units back to the United States since more Regular Air Force units were becoming available. The squadron got word in June that it was to return to McGhee-Tyson as soon as possible after June 20. This was earlier than had been planned, and they were leaving for the mundane requirement of runway repairs at Ramstein—a cover story. Just as they had back in November, the Guardsmen dismantled their jets and packed them in C-124s for the return to Tennessee. Even though the crisis simmered as the summer went on, the fact that the Americans were bringing National Guard forces home signaled that politicians were going to rely on efforts short of brinksmanship to at least come to terms with the Berlin Wall's existence.³⁸

The unit returned to normal operations by summer's end. On the 2nd of September the squadron flew in the air defense exercise Sky Shield III along with the Minnesota Air National Guard. Air Defense Command commented that "It is a credit to both organizations that they participated on a completely voluntary basis, Sunday, 2 September 1962 not being a drill day. . . . Both organizations are highly professional and each represents a major contribution to the air defense system." Ten out of ten available F-104s flew, and all were ready to fly again when the exercise ended. Days later the squadron supported the Chicago Air Defense Sector during its operational readiness inspection. By September 20 it was back on alert status—"fully operational," a good thing since many Air Force squadrons were having difficulties reaching that standard while they converted to the new F-106 Delta Dart. At all times one-third were ready to launch with just fifteen minutes notice—not only to destroy Soviet bombers, but also to scatter to dispersal bases so as to avoid the growing Soviet missile threat. Even though much of the Air Force and Air National Guard mobilized during the Cuban Missile Crisis the next month, Alcoa's '104s stayed put and continued their air defense duties. Its relationship with the Starfighter soon came to an end, for it began to exchange the glamorous jet for the slower but more versatile F-102 "Dagger" in February 1963.³⁹ The Air Force

³⁷ "Old Heads." Regrettably, extensive details regarding the social profile of the squadron members—the percentage who were veterans of World War II, the average length of service, the percentage with college degrees, etc.—are not extant at the Air Force Historical Research Agency.

³⁸ Jack Raymond, "All Reservists To Be Released by End of August," *New York Times*, April 12, 1962; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 82; "Programming Plan 530-62," in USAFE, vol. II, K570.01, AFHRA; Norman Gelb, *The Berlin Wall: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and a Showdown in the Heart of Europe* (New York, 1986), 269-271.

³⁹ History 30th Air Division (SAGE) Jan-Dec 1962, K-DIV-30-HI, Jan-Dec. 1962, vol. VI, AFHRA; "ORI Narrative Report, Chicago Air Defense Sector," September 27, 1962, K410.01-13 January – December 1962, vol. II, AFHRA; K-Div-30-HI, Jan.-Dec. 1962, vol. I, AFHRA; "30th NORAD Region and the Cuban Crisis," K-DIV-30-HI, 22 Oct.-29 Nov. 1962, AFHRA; 30 ODC Briefing for Lt. Gen. Terrill, February 2, 1963. K-Div-30-HI, vol. 2, Jan-Dec. 1962, AFHRA. Unlike the Starfighter, the F-102 could easily conduct intercepts in all weather conditions.

had begun to equip the National Guard with progressively more capable aircraft in the late 1950s, and the Dagger was "first-line equipment." The Alcoa unit gained a new mission fourteen months later when it began flying KC-97 aerial refueling aircraft in April 1964. It has continued the air-refueling mission to this day.⁴⁰

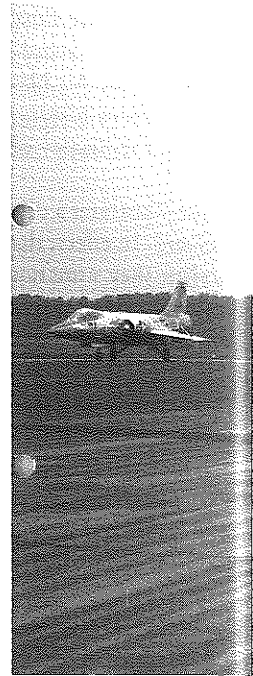
The efforts of the National Guard and Reserve pleased many in Washington. Speaking before Congress, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara concluded, "We are convinced that the rapid buildup in our conventional forces made possible by the call-up of the Reserves has done much to stabilize the Berlin situation." He added, "I don't believe there is any action that has been taken that more clearly demonstrated the strength, the will, and the firmness of purpose of this nation than the call-up of those units." Guardsmen nationwide took pride in their performance, as many outside of that institution had accused them of being nothing more than "a money-wasting, obsolescent boondoggle manned by raw amateurs and pot-bellied politicians."⁴¹ In fact, the Air National Guard executed Stair Step "much more rapidly than originally planned," without any accidents or deaths of aircrew. Furthermore, the Air National Guard had been tasked to prepare to fly to well-equipped overseas bases during a crisis, but during the Berlin Crisis, they had to fly to airbases that had only recently been reopened and were not quite prepared to support their operations. Major General Winston Wilson of the National Guard Bureau beamed that "this was the largest deployment of tactical aircraft since World War II." General Harvey Alness remarked, "I don't know how you can tell Air Guardsmen from Regulars anymore." The Air Force in Europe appreciated the F-104's capabilities, and brought over a squadron of its own Starfighters soon thereafter. Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay called the effort "truly professional." After he retired, however, he said "they just weren't what I would call combat ready." Air National Guard squadrons did not arrive in Europe fully trained for their missions. Once there, they had to begin several rounds of training in order to truly contribute to the defense of Western Europe. For that reason, Air Force leaders recommended that active duty forces stationed in the continental United States carry out future reinforcement missions instead of Air National Guard formations.⁴²

Back in the states, the commander of Air Defense Command had already endorsed the Air National Guard's capabilities, calling it "an integral part of our total

⁴⁰ Ray, *Air National Guard*, 62; "History of the 134th Air Refueling Group." The Group traded its KC-97s for more modern KC-135s in 1976.

⁴¹ Futrell, *Ideas*, 39; "Mobilization! The Air National Guard," 2.

⁴² USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 17; U. S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1963*, 87th Cong, 2nd sess., March 1, 1962, 463; McGlasson, "Watch on the Rhine," 29; "Programming Plan 530-62," USAFE, vol. II; K570.01, AFHRA; USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 85; Charles Joseph Gross, *Prelude to the Total Force: The Air National Guard 1943-1969* (Washington, DC, 1985), 138.



F-104 Starfighter from the
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⁴³ Ray, *Air National Guard*, 65

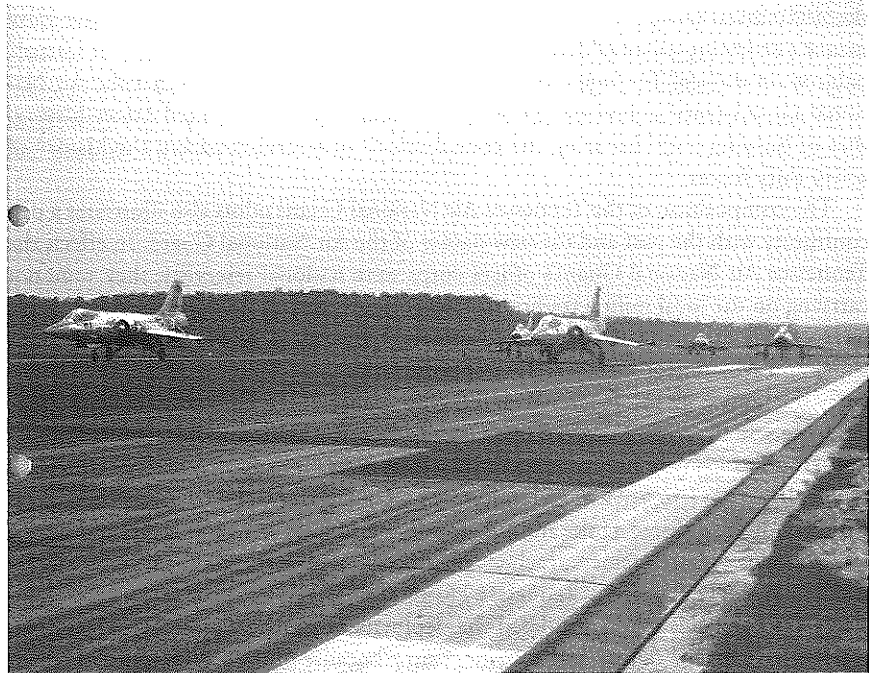
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F-104 Starfighter from the 151st landing at Ramstein, accompanied by a French Mystere IV. From the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, courtesy of the author.

capability . . . organized, trained, and inspected exactly like our active duty units. Our ANG units . . . [are] capable of instant action."⁴³ As for the capabilities of the 134th Fighter Group, given time to maintain its jets and train adequately, it was a very good combat unit that was ready to fly, fight, and if necessary deploy overseas. It did not have the ability, however, to quickly sustain flight operations from an overseas base once it got there. After a number of weeks, once it settled into a routine at Ramstein, it out-performed its peers. It did the same, given time, after it returned to Alcoa. It met the standards for combat readiness that Air Defense Command set about a month after coming back to the United States.

A number of continuities with current Air National Guard issues can be seen in the Berlin Crisis. When mobilization threatened, some Guardsmen tried to obtain waivers out of their service obligation, so the National Guard Bureau asked that the government prevent its personnel from leaving the National Guard. The Berlin Crisis warned everyone—employers, Guardsmen, their families, and the public—of the likelihood and challenges of long Guard deployments overseas. Air National Guard units were not fully ready for a short-notice overseas deployment; witness

⁴³ Ray, *Air National Guard*, 69.

the difficulties Knoxville's squadron experienced when called to duty. Active duty meant a stripping of state identity. Crewmen replaced the letters "Tenn Air Guard" painted on the jets' fuselages with the generic "U.S. Air Force."⁴⁴ That the Air National Guard story is not well-known continues a trend of United States history: that of burying and obscuring the contributions of reservists within the history of active duty forces.

The composition of the Tennessee Air National Guard pilots also illustrates a discontinuity with the past and the new nature of the Air National Guard. In effect, the Tennessee Air National Guard's officer corps were national reservists; they were not carrying on the local militia tradition. Their origins were in 25 different states. Most were college graduates with degrees from the Universities of Florida, New Hampshire, and Miami, for instance. Two opportunities drew them to Alcoa: the chance to fly the hottest jet in the arsenal, and the proximity of the University of Tennessee's graduate school. Some however, like Captain Bob Ruthstein of Chicago, had grown quite fond of his new home: "The farther I get away from East Tennessee, the less I like it. If we have to leave East Tennessee, I would prefer to be overseas." The great majority of the enlisted ranks and the non-flying officers were still locals and were a hodge-podge of businessmen, teachers, pharmacists, police and firemen, and a surgery resident at the University of Tennessee Hospital.⁴⁵

NATO generals who considered the deployment of Air National Guard squadrons to have been a failure and a waste of time because of their difficulties in reaching the combat ready status of active duty squadrons were mistaken. The purpose of this use of National Guard squadrons like McGhee-Tyson's was not purely military in nature. President Kennedy mobilized the Air and Army National Guard as a political-diplomatic act designed to show the Kremlin that he was deadly serious about resolving the Berlin Crisis short of appeasement. The mobilization of the Reserve Forces was designed to create an environment which would make it worth Khrushchev's while to solve his disagreements with the NATO countries through negotiation, not intimidation and armed conflict. Indeed, as soon as the Air National Guard squadrons arrived in Europe, the Air Force began to plan for their return to the United States.⁴⁶ The deployment was no bluff, but the assumption of a return stateside within a few months suggests that policymakers considered war with the Soviet Union possible, but not probable. In that light the squadron from East Tennessee contributed to the stability of central Europe in a manner that was out of proportion to its size or its immediate combat readiness. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer remarked to President Kennedy that the rapid reinforcement of NATO forces by United States Reservists was the great factor that persuaded Khrushchev to

⁴⁴ "Mobilization! The Air National Guard," 31; McGlasson, "Watch on the Rhine," 30; "500 of ANG."

⁴⁵ "Old Heads"; "Fighter Group's Day Goes Smoothly."

⁴⁶ USAFE, vol. 1, ch. 3, 79.

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⁴⁷ George Fielding Eliot, *Reserve Forces*. The purpose of this paper to examine all the economic embargo of the Eastern Bloc. Douglas Selva, "The End of the Cold War International History Project."

⁴⁸ Schild, "Berlin Crisis," 121-122. *First Fifty Years* (New York, 1988): 2.

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bring his threats of war to an end.⁴⁷ Although Khrushchev spewed hostile rhetoric even as negotiations continued during the summer of 1962, it took the crisis over Cuba to bring the superpowers to the brink of war. The Berlin Crisis finally subsided in January 1963 when Khrushchev summarily announced "that the wall itself . . . had produced a satisfactory result."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ George Fielding Eliot, *Reserve Forces and the Kennedy Strategy* (Harrisburg, PA, 1962), 5. It is not the purpose of this paper to examine all the reasons why the Berlin Crisis subsided. Khrushchev also worried that an economic embargo of the Eastern Bloc by the West could wreck the economies of the Soviets' client states. Douglas Selvage, "The End of the Berlin Crisis: New Evidence from the Polish and East German Archives," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998): 218.

⁴⁸ Schild, "Berlin Crisis," 121-122. McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York, 1988), 362.