

## F-104's in action during the Berlin crisis

### The F-104A/B deployed to Europe during the Berlin Wall Crisis in 1961

During the fifties, there was a steady outflow of East Germans from the Soviet occupied East Berlin to the West Berlin. The reason was the shortage of essential goods and consumer items because of the dependence of heavy industries in East Germany while the West Germany was in swelling prosperity. The East German government was unable to stop this flow because the 4-power status of Berlin specified free travel between Berlin's eastern and western sectors. In the June 1961 meeting between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev in Vienna, the tension over Berlin intensified. Premier Khrushchev threatened to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany which would end the existing 4-power agreements guaranteeing American, British and French access rights to West Berlin. He also stated that if US insisted on occupation rights after the treaty, US should expect the Soviet to meet force by force. Under this Soviet threat, President Kennedy returned to the US and started planning to mobilize the reserve units for active duties so as to strengthen US combat troops in Europe. The US Congress gave President Kennedy this requested power in August 1.1961. Stirred by this crisis, the number of Germans leaving East Germany increased significantly, further draining the already depressed economy of East Germany. On August 13.1961, the East German and Soviet troops closed all the crossing points between East and West Berlin, seal off the border first with fence and then with concrete wall topped with barbed wire.

On 1 November; the Air Force mobilized three more ANG fighter interceptor squadrons. In late October and early November, eight of the tactical fighter units flew to Europe with their 216 aircraft in operation "Stair Step," the largest jet deployment in the Air Guard's history. Because of their short range, 60 Air Guard F-104 interceptors were airlifted to Europe in late November. The United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) lacked spare parts needed for the ANG's aging F-84s and F-86s. Some units had been trained to deliver tactical nuclear weapons, not conventional bombs and bullets. They had to be retrained for conventional missions once they arrived on the continent. The majority of mobilized Air Guardsmen remained in the U.S.

On August 30, 1961, President Kennedy ordered the National Guardsmen and Reservists to active duty in response to Soviet moves to cut off allied access to Berlin. He mobilized 28 Air National Guard (ANG) squadrons of which 11 were sent to Europe to reinforce USAFE.

In late October and early November, eight of the tactical fighter units flew to Europe with their 216 aircraft in operation "Stair Step," the largest jet deployment in the Air Guard's history.

Because of their short range, 60 Air Guard F-104 interceptors were airlifted to Europe in late November. They consisted of 3 squadrons of early model of F-104, one from the Arizona ANG, one from Tennessee ANG and one from South Carolina ANG. These 3 ANG squadrons received their F-104A's and F-104B's between February and July of 1960 from the Air Defense Command. They were all under the control of 140<sup>th</sup> ANG Wing and were based at the following ANG bases in the US:

Arizona ANG	197th FIS	Skyharbor Airport, Phoenix, Arizona
S. Carolina ANG	157th FIS	McEntire ANGB, Eastover, South Carolina
Tennessee ANG	151st FIS	McGhee-Tyson ANGB, Knoxville, Tennessee

The 3 F-104 ANG squadrons were officially mobilized on October 1, 1961. Since the F-104s lacks the range and had no in-flight refueling capability, they were airlifted to Europe by MATS Douglas C-124's in November 1961 under "Operation Brass Ring". Their missions were to conduct air superiority and offensive air support operations if required to defend West-Berlin.

In Europe, these squadrons were assigned to USAFE. The Arizona ANG 197<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) and Tennessee ANG 151 FIS were assigned to Ramstein Air Base in West Germany under the 86<sup>th</sup> Air (Defense) Division of the 17<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The South Carolina ANG 157 FIS was assigned to Moron AFB, Spain under the 65<sup>th</sup> Air Defense Division.

In addition to the F-104A's, each ANG squadron also sent 2 F-104B's along for proficiency training while stationed in Europe. Unfortunately, a few F-104A's and F-104B's crashed and were written off during their deployment in Europe. The tension ended in the summer of 1962. These 3 F-104 squadrons were officially demobilized in August 15.1962. Shortly after, they were redeployed back to their home bases in the US. Within about a month after the 197<sup>th</sup> FIS's F-104A/Bs were returned to the States, they were transferred to the other 2 ANG F-104 squadrons. This is because the mission of the 197<sup>th</sup> FIS AZ ANG was changed and it was redesignated 161st Air Transport Group flying the C-97 Stratofreighter.

From the Air Force Record Cards, the following F-104A and F-104Bs were identified to have been deployed to Europe between 1961 and 1962.

#### **Arizona ANG 197th FIS at Ramstein AB**

F-104A (18): 56-773 (attrition compensation to 151 FIS), 56-779, 56-782, 56-784, 56-791, 56-793, 56-795, 56-808, 56-809, 56-810, 56-816, 56-818, 56-821, 56-823, 56-826, 56-832, 56-833, 56-860  
F-1 04B (2): 57-1301, 57-1308

note: 56-809 crashed June 18, 1962 on after take off from Ramstein AB

#### **Tennessee ANG 151<sup>st</sup> FIS at Ramstein AB 1961**

F-104A (18): 56-813, 56-814, 56-822, 56-824, 56-830, 56-831, 56-834, 56-846, 56-848, 56-851, 56-852, 56-861, 56-870, 56-872, 56-876, 56-880, 56-881, 56-882  
F-104B (2): 57-1302, 57-1306

note: 56-813 & 56-848 were both involved in a mid-air collision on March 17, 1962 during the landing at Ramstein.

note: aircraft 56-881 crashed 4 days later, on March 21, 1962, near Bad Schwalbach, Taunus, 18 miles NW of Wiesbaden AB, Germany, after the aircraft pitched up and entered an uncontrollable flat spin, while being stationed at Ramstein. Capt Pierce ejected safely

#### **Tennessee ANG 151<sup>st</sup> FIS at Ramstein AB in May 1962**

56-773 (attrition compensation from 197 FIS May 1962), 56-814, 56-822, 56-824, 56-830, 56-831, 56-834, 56-846, 56-851, 56-852, 56-861, 56-870, 56-872, 56-876, 56-880, 56-882  
F-104B (2): 57-1302, 57-1306

#### **South Carolina ANG 157th FIS at Moron AB**

F-104A (10+8?): 56-771, 56-844, 56-849, 56-854, 56-856, 56-857, 56-858, 56-862, 56-866, 56-871.  
See note 3: (56-827, 56-829, 56-841, 56-863, 56-864, 56-865, 56-867, 56-878)  
F-1 04B (2): 57-1310, 57-1311

note: 56-0841 crashed on December 9, 1961 during deployment "Stair Step" at Moron AB, Spain, after engine failure (compressor stall) 3 NM SE of Malaga, Spain, pilot Capt Billingsley ejected safely

note 1: 56-862 was written off on June 2, 1962. Two-seater 57-1311 was written off January 29, 1962.

note 2: AF records show that some of the 157<sup>th</sup> squadron's F-104A's were transferred to Europe in mid 1962 and not in late 1961. Therefore, it appears that the 157<sup>th</sup> squadron might not have the full compliment of 18 F-104A's in late 1961.

note 3: These 8 F-104A's were assigned to 157<sup>th</sup> FIS but record cards did not explicitly document that they were deployed to Europe or their post-1961 entries were missing. However, other information and circumstantial evidence strongly suggest that these 8 F-104As were likely to have been deployed to Europe along with the other 10 157<sup>th</sup> FIS F-104A's. Input from readers to confirm or disprove the transfer of these F-104As to Europe is kindly solicited.

#### **Author's notes:**

1. This is not an article on the complete history of the 1961 Berlin Wall Crisis. Just sufficient historical information is provided to allow readers to get up to speed on the background of the conflict that prompted US to send 3 squadrons of F-104s to Europe. Author encourages comments from readers who might have more information about this deployment to share with everyone.

2. USAF ANG website (<http://www.ang.af.mil/history/heritage.asp>) states that in all 60 F-104's were deployed to Europe during the Berlin Crisis. However, the author can only positively identify 11 F-104A's from 157<sup>th</sup> FIS deployed to Europe based on explicit entries in the record cards. Taking into account of the missing 7 F-1 04A's from 157<sup>th</sup> FIS based on information and circumstantial evidence, it will fit the grand total of 60 F-104's which would consist of 3 squadrons with 18 F-104A's and 2 F-104B's each.

## The F-104C/D deployed to Europe during the Berlin Wall Crisis in 1961/1962

### 434<sup>th</sup> TFS "Red Devils" 479<sup>th</sup> TFW

August 14, 1961 to Moron AB, Spain,

September 25, 1961 to Bitburg AB, Germany until December 17, 1961

Inactivated January 3, 1962, to become the initial F-104G training squadron and was designated 4443<sup>rd</sup> CCTS and moved to Luke AFB as the initial German/NATO F-104G unit

56-0908, 56-0910 (to October 1, 1961), 56-0911, 56-0912, 56-0913\*, 56-0914, 56-0920, 56-0921, 56-9024, 56-0926, 56-0929, 56-0937, 57-0910 (from October 1, 1961), 57-0911, 57-0924

F-104D: 57-1332, 57-1334

56-0913\* crashed on take-off from Moron AB, Spain on August 28, 1961; the pilot Captain Jon N. Griffin was killed

The 434th was on a routine deployment to Moron in August 1961, but they did not leave Moron AB for Bitburg AB until September 25, which was four days after the 435th TFS arrived at Ramstein AB on September 21, 1961 (by Bob Messerli)

Bob Noack deployed to Bitburg with the 434th TFS during the time frame of F-104 deployments to Germany (by Bob Messerli)

### 435<sup>th</sup> TFS 479<sup>th</sup> TFW

September 19, 1961 to Ramstein AB, Germany from George direct, until January 22, 1962

56-0886, 56-0887, 56-0902, 56-0904, 56-0927, 56-0928, 56-0934\*, 56-0935, 56-0936, 56-0938, 57-0912, 57-0915, 57-0921, 57-0923, 57-0925, 57-0926\*, 57-0927, 57-0930

F-104D: 57-1332\*, 57-1334\* (from 434<sup>th</sup> TFS)

\* stayed to the end of the period (to 436<sup>th</sup> TFS)

Also received 56-931 back from damage repair while at Ramstein and it was flown back to George AFB at this time

(56-0886 was seen at Toul-Rosieres Air Base Air Show 1961)

The 435th, commanded by LtCol Frank J. McGuinness, launched on September 19, 1961. I recall we hit KB-50 tankers over Kansas and landed at Myrtle Beach, then continued on to Bermuda. The following day (September 20, 1961) we flew on to Lajes with two air refueling over the Atlantic. From Lajes we flew to Moron, Spain and the following day (September 21, 1961) continued up to Ramstein Air Base. I recall the landing at Ramstein very clearly, as I was flying wing and my lead had to go around as it was quite hazy and we weren't well lined up. (by Keith Davey)

Keith Davey was on the same deployment with the 435th TFS, but he was in a different flight than mine. It should be mentioned that when we departed Moron, Spain for Ramstein we were armed at the end of the runway before taking off for Ramstein. We were not certain of what kind of reaction or reception we would receive from the Soviet Migs across the border in East Germany upon our arrival. We flew direct non stop over France and landed at Ramstein Air Base 21 September 1961 (by Bob Messerli)

### 436<sup>th</sup> TFS 479<sup>th</sup> TFW

January 18, 1962 to Hahn AB, Germany from George AFB direct, until April 12, 1962

56-0894, 56-0896, 56-0898, 56-0901, 56-0918, 56-0919, 56-0920, 56-0933, 56-0934\*, 56-0937, 57-0910, 57-0911, 57-0913, 57-0916, 57-0918, 57-0922, 57-0926\*, 57-0928

F-104D: 57-1332\*, 57-1334\* (from 435<sup>th</sup> TFS)

\* from 435<sup>th</sup> TFS, stayed to the end of the period

The 434th TFS deployed from George to Hahn Air Base, shortly before the 435th redeployed back to George AFB and the 436<sup>th</sup> had a full squadron of 18 aircraft deployed with them. When they arrived at Hahn, I went from Ramstein to Hahn for a period of one month to provide Theatre indoctrination of German air control procedures to their pilots. (by Bob Messerli)

### 476<sup>th</sup> TFS 479<sup>th</sup> TFW

April 8, 1962 to Hahn AB, Germany taking over 436 equipment, until August 10, 1962

56-0894 (ylo, 436<sup>th</sup> TFS) at RAF Sculthrope, UK May 19.1962

56-0899 noted at Finningley, UK 1962

56-0901 noted at RAF Wethersfield, UK 1962

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#### references:

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