

2021 Operations Update

It has been an interesting year for the 20th Operations Group and as you read about our actions and incentives, we invite your feedback as we brought training and readiness to new levels in spite of COVID and other restrictions. We also said goodbye to our Group Commander Colonel Raymond “Trips” Robert who has been so active in the Wild Weasel Society. Congratulations on a job well-done and good luck in your retirement. We also say hello to Kevin “Dubs” Shaw who takes over the 20th OG and look forward to his Command updates.

55th FS update:



The Shooters have been busy despite fiscal and COVID constraints this year. In order to achieve the 20th OG and FW and ACC objectives the 55th sought opportunities to fly and train off-station on a limited budget affording younger Captains and Airmen a chance to lead and fly in a non-garrison environment. The 55th FS and Fighter Generation Squadron (FGS) team put together an outstanding string of sorties produced and flown enabling the intricate operations required by the small footprint TDYs.

The Shooters initially sent 6 jets to Eglin AFB, to conduct Agile Combat Employment (ACE), and Multi-Functional Airman (MFA) training. The DETCO was a Capt, emphasizing the

“next man/woman up” concept the Shooters embody. This was followed up by a 2 ship of jets certifying the MacDill AFB cable, enabling that airfield for use by fighters and furthering a great relationship between Shaw and MacDill AFBs.

The next month the 55th integrated with the AV-8Bs at MCAS Cherry Point and provided academics to the Marine aviators as well fostering joint relationships, and building knowledge. Following the Harrier integration, the Shooters left for Red-Flag Nellis which was an unprecedented opportunity to train with the F-35A, and the 79th FS leaving Shaw AFB with no fighter aircraft on the ramp other than the Viper Demonstration team jets. The 55th specialized in OCA-SEAD against the robust Nellis training range surface to air threats and worked on the 4th and 5th generation integration with the F-35s. Many Shooters experienced their first Red Flag. Restrictions for COVID-19 added an additional layer of challenges to the mission planning and execution of Red Flag 21-2 but highlighted the resiliency of the squadron to work through any obstacle to get the job done. Additionally, the Shooters supported the Nellis Daedalian Chapter luncheon, and worked with the local 55th FS Daedalian historian to update the recent squadron history. Continuing a trend of developing top pilots, the Shooters sent a pilot to the 21A, and the 21B WIC class with the prospects looking bright of sending another to 22A.

As an homage to the rich history of the Shaw AFB, and the multi-role capability of the F-16 the 55th honored the 30th anniversary of the Gulf War with a “Legacy Range Day” harkening back to the days of F-16s loaded up with 4x Mk 84s or cluster bombs. Sets of clean configured F-16s were loaded up with 2000lb inert bombs, went to the range where they did one pass to release the heavyweight weapons. Then, off target the jets safe’d up, hit the stores configuration switch to CAT-1, turned-in and set up for an high-aspect BFM fight. All the while, the 55th FS and FGS families were in the bleachers at the range and observed the all-around capabilities of the F-16.

In June, the Shooters developed a way to prepare for the upcoming AEF challenges and the 20th FW lead wing force presentation model. Once again as a Capt led TDY the 55th FS and FGS paired together with the Little Rock AFB, C-130Js, and the Vermont ANG to execute a more robust ACE exercise. For over a week, the Shooters operated out of various locations with jets in 3 locations at once, rejoining in the airspace to conduct SEAD training both with 55th FS jets and F-35As from the Vermont ANG. The partnership with the C-130J was instrumental in keeping the TDY agile and achieving the FS and FGS objectives. The 55th provided their own white force as well developing tactical operations orders, and communication PACE plans, and 5 paragraph orders for execution. During execution of this “grass-roots” ACE exercise the 55th FS and FGS were given the opportunity to brief some exercises specifics to COMACC during his visit to Shaw.

Not all work, the Shooters led the post-retirement party of Col “Trip” Raymond and Col “Rhino” Inman at a local brewery. The POC even secured a Dos Gringos appearance. Several all-Shooter weekends at Lake Wateree occurred with July being a multi-day Shooter Boat Regatta, and bar-b-que.

As the Shooters rounded the corner into July and August, the focus shifted to the AEF, and ensuring preparations. The 55th sought the recent deploying squadrons and dedicated part of a training day to the Combat Summit where lessons and deployment wisdom was passed at all echelons. The squadron is also gearing up for the Jaded Thunder and Iron-Hand exercises which will test the minutia of the deployment lines to the restrictions, and challenges of conducting close air support in an unfamiliar setting with new mission partners. This is in preparation for the 55th FS upcoming AEF. Overall, the year has been a canvas for the ingenuity and drive of the young Shooters, whose ideas provided great training and experiences for the squadron conducted in concert with continuous phased based training, and the never-ending mission qualification training for the newest Shooter wingmen.

Roll 'Em!

Seth "HEMI" Taylor, SHOOTER 1

77th FS Update:



In 2021, the Gamblers overcame the stresses of COVID-19 and the aftermath of a tragic training accident to ensure effective and efficient deployment spin-up, displaying resiliency and ingenuity in order to dominate high profile combat taskings in multiple AOs down-range. The Gamblers focused on creating intelligent, capable pilots in a fairly young squadron with limited familiarity in a deployed environment. Despite the aforementioned speed-bumps, squadron leadership delivered superb training and guidance to foster an environment of growth and experience. In the last 6 months the 77 FS solidified their “World’s Greatest” motto.

The 77 FS' deployment location and leave date changed and was pushed 10 days to the left just a month prior to deploying, shortening the spin-up timeline significantly. However, this didn't deter the Gamblers, as they worked to efficiently wrap-up any last minute preparation. Advanced Operational Node arrived on 3 October to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, a base that was re-constituted less than a year prior, with the 77th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron (EFS) taking over the air tasking order on 15 October. The Gamblers hit the ground running, and within 2 weeks of beginning combat operations were responsible for the farthest Small Diameter bomb (SDB) munitions strike from an F-16 to date. The 77 EFS led a bomber task force large force exercise that incorporated 25 aircraft from 16 squadrons and 3 Combatant Commands (COCOMs) to deter Iranian aggression in the Arabian Gulf. Major Matthew "Animal" Zimmer, the Gamblers' Weapons Patch, was the mission commander for multiple high profile exercises and missions while deployed and he received the Air Force Association Aviator of the Year-award as well as the Lt Gen Chennault award for his efforts.

Agile Combat Employment (ACE) exercises were a top objective for Air Force Central Command (AFCENT) and the Gamblers participated in 6 ACE TDYs throughout Central Command (CENTCOM) to showcase the ability to conduct combat operations from multiple locations with little notice and a small footprint. The 77 EFS and 77 Expeditionary Fighter Squadron crushed these training taskings while still delivering 24/7 combat ops supporting Operations INHERINT RESOLVE, SPARTAN SHIELD, and RESOLUTE SUPPORT. Major Rolandus "Turbo" Scherders, the 77 FS' Dutch Exchange Pilot, was able to deploy with the Gamblers for about a month and although he was not approved to conduct combat missions, he was able to act as a critical instructor pilot (IP) for multiple flight lead upgrades (FLUG). This ability allowed other squadron IPs to focus on other AFCENT priorities, while still allowing critical training milestones to occur. Around Christmas time, the Gamblers were tasked with their first over the horizon operation to support an Africa Command mission, Operation OCTAVE QUARTZ, providing overhead watch for exfil operations of US bases in Somalia. Again, in 2021 the Gamblers were asked to conduct multiple over the horizon operations to Afghanistan demonstrating the reach of the Squadron by employing 2x Guided Bomb Unit 38s and 2x Aerial Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS).

Operation READY LION, effectively the 77 EFS' deployment capstone, was notably the largest joint coalition air offensive on Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in Iraq in over a decade. Again, the Gamblers were selected as mission leads, culminating in 312 airstrikes over the course of two weeks that targeted ISIS strongholds in the northern Iraq Makhmour Mountains. Throughout the 6 month deployment, the Gamblers dropped 152 munitions, expended 4,737 rounds of 20mm, supported 184 Joint Tactical Air Strike request, conducted 12 shows of force, 35 shows of presence, and were responsible for 113 ISIS killed in action all while flying in four separate air orders.

Upon a well-deserved homecoming at Shaw, the 77 FS successfully reintegrated back into the training tempo of home-station, ensuring basics were not forgotten and a new MQT, FLUG, and instructor pilot upgrades class began. Since the beginning of 2020, the Gamblers have produced 17 flight leads, 7 IPs, and 15 MQT pilots and sent a pilot to the 21B WIC class. We also were able to celebrate in awarding the 20 FW Aerial Achievement to our own Captain

Decklever. Socially, the Gamblers planned and executed multiple Meat-Flags over the past year, enjoyed the Carolina Cup, celebrated the Dutch holiday “King’s Day,” and spent a Gambler weekend at Lake Wateree. The 77 FS team came together to honor the life of MEZr by hosting a memorial 5K on the Shaw AFB flightline. The Gambler Spouse network also had an active year, ensuring a strong support system for the families of the deployed and even sending multiple care packages down-range to the squadron.

The 77 FS will have a busy end to the year as the lead squadron for ACC’s ACE concept. The end of August will be the first large scale 20th Fighter Wing ACE event, Operation Iron Hand. We will continue to practice and train our ACE capabilities and press to ensure we lead the wing as the World’s Greatest Fighter Squadron in the World.

Double Down!

Lt Col Christopher “Thud” Behrens, Gambler 1

79th FS update:



The Tigers are keeping busy year. In alignment with 20th OG, 20th FW, and ACC objectives the 79th executed several off-station TDYs and ACE events, forging ties with our joint partners and offering young Captains and Airmen a chance to lead and fly as Det Cos and PROJOS.

The Tigers went to Nellis three times so far, this year. RED FLAG 21-2, in March) was spent flying Escort (who needs Eagles?). It was an international flag with many NATO partners. In May, the Tigers went back for a Neptune exercise flying against a COCOM tasked problem set. In July, we went to RED FLAG once again for a US only flag flying SEAD and working with F-35s, F-22s, and all the Nellis Range had to offer. The Tigers had 2 VUL top performers, the top intel team, and the top maintenance team.

Beyond Nellis, the Tigers integrated with the 533rd VMFA at Beaufort, supporting four instructor DACT upgrades with the Marine aviators and fostering joint relationships. Additionally, Tiger pilots taught academics, tested techniques, and worked with the FGS to codify new SOPs for ACE operations off-station with minimal maintenance oversight.

In June, the Tigers hosted the first annual “Rumble in the Jungle” BFM Fly-In, inviting and coordinating a multi-day BFM competition between F-18s, F-15Es, F-15Cs, T-38s and F-35s. F-18s from Beaufort operated out of Shaw AFB during the multi-day competition, ending with a joint Roll-Call to celebrate and hand-out awards. The 79FS showed dominance, sweeping the board for Top Individual and Top Squadron for DACT, STANDARD!

In July, the Tigers deployed 6 aircraft and 179 Airmen to Colombia, South America. This USSOUTHCOM COCOM deployment strengthened partnerships and had real strategic impacts on Russian and Chinese influence in that theater. Our pilots flew with the Colombian Air Force, flew some dignitaries (President, Minister of Defense, and others), and a great time off duty at the resort which hosted them.

Lots in store over the next 7-9 months. You may have heard by now, the Tigers won the 2020 Raytheon Trophy as the Top Fighter Squadron in the USAF. We hope to carry that momentum through the remainder of the year as we gear up for HHQ tasking in 2022.

AFF!

Lawson “SICK” Cass, TIGER 01