



USAF

Visiting Forces in the UK 1942-2011

A Heritage Pamphlet



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When World War II began, the air defense of the United States was not yet complete. There were critical shortages of radio equipment and aircraft of all kinds. The North Atlantic Army Air units in Newfoundland, Greenland, and Iceland were few in number and small in size. The largest part of the activity was to improve the installations along the air route to Britain. Airmen rushed to complete those improvements in Labrador, Baffin Island, Greenland, and Iceland. By the end of December 1941, ten stations that linked the airways to the British Isles were either finished or at least functional, and all that remained was to defend them against enemy attacks.

An agreement was reached in late May 1942 between Gen. Hap Arnold and Air Chief Marshall Porter. They agreed that the British would provide a total of 127 airdromes, some of them already in use by the RAF, and 75 to be constructed for the VIII Bomber Command in East Anglia and the rest for southern England. Their goal was to have bomber bases for 2,300 bombers by June 1943. This consisted of 66 bases ready for the VIII Bomber Command by March 1943. The conversion of Great Britain into a giant aircraft carrier began in earnest. By the end of the war, 165 RAF bases supported U.S. Army Air Force aircraft (USAAF). A total of three numbered Air Forces, nine commands, four air divisions, 33 wings, 116 groups, and 449 squadrons were at one time or another stationed in Great Britain.



WWII: The Air Battle

From May 1942 to July 1945, the Eighth planned and precisely executed America's daylight strategic bombing campaign against Nazi-occupied Europe, and in doing so, the organization compiled an impressive war record. On May 8, 1945, Victory-in-Europe (V-E) Day arrived. Approximately 350,000 officers and men had served in the 8th AAF during the three-year period in which the Americans participated in the European Theater of Operations. In the attack by Allied air power, almost 2.7 million

tons of bombs were dropped; more than 1.44 million bomber sorties; and 2.68 million fighter sorties were flown.

The 9th Air Force, on the other hand, was originally constituted as V Air Support Command Aug. 21, 1941, and activated Sept. 1, 1941. It was re-designated 9th AF in April 1942. The 9th AF participated in Egypt and Libya, the campaign in Tunisia, and the invasions of Sicily and Italy. The 9th AF transferred to England in October 1943 and participated in Normandy invasion. At first the 9th AF was assigned to operation "Point Blank" along with the 8th Air Force. Their mission: to smash the German Luftwaffe in the air and on the ground to bring about complete air supremacy. To accomplish this, medium bombers of the 8th AF were reassigned to the 9th AF. In effect, the plan was to prepare the 9th AF units for their major role: direct tactical support for ground forces in the coming invasion. By "D" Day, June 6, 1944, the 9th AF had become the largest tactical Air Force ever assembled under one command: 250,000 personnel with 3,500 airplanes in 1,500 units. It consisted of fighters, bombers, troop carriers, air defense, engineering and service commands. Whole enemy divisions surrendered to the 9th AF in southern France after being harassed to the point of utter desperation. Rommel himself was shot off the road. Hardly a German unit could move in any kind of visibility without being gunned down, rocketed, and bombed by the 9th AF. As soon as the fog lifted in the "Battle of the Bulge," the enemy offensive was halted, once and for all. The carnage inflicted on the German retreat out of the "Bulge" by the 9th AF during January 1945 was something participants will never forget.

Victory had come at a high cost: 280,000 Americans killed and 670,000 wounded, captured, or missing. The totals included 35,000 Army Air Force officers and airmen killed, 13,700 wounded, and 39,000 missing, captured, or interned. Twenty-five Army Air Force aviators in the European and Mediterranean theaters won the Medal of Honor (sixteen of them posthumously).

The Cold War Begins

The United States Air Force in Europe command (USAFE) originated as the 8th Air Force on February 1, 1942 and flew heavy bombardment missions over the European continent during World War II. The command was given its current name in August 1945 when it had 17,000 airplanes and 450,000 personnel. During 1946, a massive demobilization took place in the United Kingdom. By the end of 1946, the aircraft inventory declined to less than 2,300 and the personnel reduced to 33,000. But in January 1946, Gen. Carl Spaatz and RAF Air

Marshall Sir Arthur Tredder recognized the threat of the Soviet Union to Europe. They arranged for four air bases in East Anglia to be available for the deployment of American B-29 Bombers if ever deemed necessary. That event was quick to follow when Russian troops blockaded transportation lines in the western occupation zones and Berlin. On August 26, 1948, Operation Vittles began from Wiesbaden Air Base in Germany. Those flights continued until September 30, 1949. The operation consisted of 277,264 flights of 2,326,204 tons of food and coal transported to Berlin. Between 1948 and 1950, the 3rd Air Division took control of all bomber units stationed in the U.K. As a result, bases at Fairford, Greenham Common, Brize Norton, and Upper Heyford were constructed to position bomber forces. During February 1951, a special construction program was initiated to build or upgrade 26 British bases. On May 1, 1951, the 3rd Air Division was inactivated and replaced by the 3rd Air Force. On March 20, 1951, Headquarters Strategic Air Command (SAC) activated the 7th Air Division to assume control over SAC bomber units deployed to Britain. From the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, the United States was committed to help defend Western Europe against aggression from the Soviet Union, a mission that continued until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.



The US Force Structure Altered

Between 1954 and 1958, the force structure in Great Britain was altered. The size of Burtonwood Air Depot was scaled down as the U.S. began to provide units depot support. By May 1955, the 7th Air Division reduced its strength by 50 percent. It began to rotate forces every 90 days. The United Kingdom base program reduced to 25 sites, and would diminish even more in the years to come. The SAC operation was soon supplemented by intermediate range ballistic missiles in 1958. Four strategic missile squadrons had 15 missiles each assigned at RAF Feltwell, RAF Helmswell, RAF Driffield, and RAF Luffenham. Those were removed when the intercontinental ballistic missile technology

made them unnecessary in 1963. The early warning system was placed at Flyingdales Moor.

During this time period, the French President Charles DeGaulle placed limits on U.S. tactical forces based in France, which resulted in the relocation of the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing and the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing. The 48 TFW relocated to RAF Lakenheath January 15, 1960. On June 21, 1961, an additional base was closed and personnel at three other bases were reduced to detachment size. The change resulted in a loss of 7,300 military and 30 civilian positions. In 1962, the Air Force discontinued support squadron activities at South Ruslip, West Ruslip, Bushy Park and Denham. Those consolidation efforts reduced personnel by 439 positions.

The Department of Defense announced Project Clearwater July 26, 1963. Clearwater ended the SAC reflex operations in Britain April 1, 1965. B-52 bombers made frequent trips to Greenham Common and other bases in the UK, but were only deployed to NATO on an individual basis, not as groups or wings. RAF Brize Norton, RAF Fairford housing and South Leigh Beacon Site were all returned to the British government. On June 30, 1965, the 7th Air Division was inactivated. In June 1964, RAF Chelveston, RAF Fairford, RAF Greenham Common, and RAF Sculthorpe were returned to the Air Ministry. RAF Burderop Park and Chiselton recreation annex were also returned to British control. Further, Redcoste and Project 703 mandated the reduction of costs in Europe. The two programs reduced the 3rd Air Force staff from 346 to 244. In March 1966, the French withdrew from military participation in NATO. The US government then had to find new locations for its tactical units. On April 15, 1966, the 513th Troop Carrier Wing transferred to RAF Mildenhall; the 66th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing moved to RAF Upper Heyford; and the 322nd Air Division moved to High Wycombe Station.

USAFE consolidates operational control

One recurring theme in the 3rd Air Force U.K. history has been the ebb and flow of responsibilities between it and other headquarters, usually driven by budget and personnel ceilings. On July 1, 1961, USAFE consolidated operational control of all its tactical units under the 17th Air Force in Germany. This allowed manpower cuts of more than 300 positions at USAFE headquarters and the 3rd Air Force. The 3rd AF was left with logistical support of units in the U.K. and dealings with the British government. Consolidation did not work, in part, because the 17th AF could not manage the USAFE

tactical force of 11 wings plus the five Air National Guard wings sent to Europe in November 1961 during a new crisis over Berlin. USAFE restored operational control of the units in the U.K. to the 3rd Air Force-UK September 1, 1963. In April 1972, the pendulum swung again, as the command stripped the 3rd Air Force-UK of operational control of its tactical wings and reduced its headquarters manning from 234 to 63. The smaller headquarters moved to RAF Mildenhall, its present home, June 30, 1972. The pendulum swung back in the 1980s, when a new USAFE commander sought to expand the role of the numbered air force headquarters. Operational control of the tactical wings returned to the 3rd AF in June 1987. A year later the headquarters had grown to 149 personnel.

GLCM

The larger 3rd Air Force Headquarters handled some important issues in the 1980s. The 3rd Air Force's biggest program that decade was undoubtedly the deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCM). This project was an eight-year effort to counter Soviet deployment of SS-20s in Eastern Europe. These two-stage, multiple-warhead, mobile Soviet missiles had a range of 3,000 miles. Moscow began deploying them in 1977 and continued to do so, at a rate of about one a week, for the next five years. In response, NATO decided to deploy 108 Pershing IIs and 464 GLCMs while seeking an agreement with Moscow that would limit theater nuclear weapons.



Eldorado Canyon

The 3rd Air Force UK units also made history on the night of April 14, 1986, when they took part in Operation Eldorado Canyon. President Reagan ordered air strikes against Libya in retaliation for a Libyan-sponsored terrorist bombing in West Berlin that killed three and wounded 229. Eighteen F-111Fs from the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, RAF Lakenheath, hit targets at Tripoli military airfield, Azziziyah barracks, and the Sidi Bilal training center with GBU-10 laser-guided bombs and 500-pound Mk-82 high-drag bombs. Three EF-111s from the 42nd Electronic Combat Squadron, RAF Upper

Heyford, jammed Libyan air defenses, while 28 tankers flew aerial refueling missions from RAF Mildenhall and RAF Fairford. Attack planes from the USS *America* and USS *Coral Sea* hit Benina airfield and barracks in Benghazi, while other Navy jets jammed and suppressed defenses. One F-111F went down during the raid and its two crew members were lost.



GLCM in place

The first GLCM arrived in Britain in November 1983, and USAFE had activated all six planned GLCM bases, two of them in Britain (RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth), by September 1987. But by then Washington and Moscow were close to an agreement eliminating intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) worldwide. Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the INF treaty December 8, 1987, and it entered into force in June 1988. USAFE inactivated its GLCM unit at RAF Molesworth in January 1989, and the one at Greenham Common followed in May 1991.

As of December 31, 1988, the 3rd Air Force UK possessed seven wings on eight bases and operated two additional bases for other commands.



The Bases

The 10th Tactical Fighter Wing and the 17th Reconnaissance Wing were supported at **RAF Alconbury**, which included A-10A Thunderbolt II and the Lockheed U-2 and U-2R aircraft. The 10th Tactical Fighter Wing stood up August 20, 1987, and was configured with two squadrons of A-10A aircraft. The 509th and 511th Tactical Fighter Squadrons were assigned June 1, 1988, and September 1, 1988, when they relocated from the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Bentwaters. The 511th TFS A-10s flew approximately 1,700 combat missions during Operation Desert Storm. On June 30, 1991, the 17th Reconnaissance Wing inactivated but its subordinate unit, the 95th Reconnaissance Squadron, remained at Alconbury as the 17th Training Wing (a non-flying organization). It deactivated at Alconbury September 15, 1993, and then reactivated, July 1, 1994, as the 95th RS at RAF Mildenhall (assigned to the 55th Operations Group). On March 31, 1993, the 10th TFW was redesignated the 10th Air Base Wing, and became the host unit. On December 1, 1992, the 39th Special Operations Wing arrived at Alconbury. The 352nd Special Operations Group activated at that time and consisted of the 7th Special Operations Squadron (MC-130H), 21st Special Operations Squadron (MH-53J), 67th Special Operations Squadron (MC-130N/P), 321st Special Tactics Squadron and the 352nd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron. However, the 10th Air Base Wing was inactivated October 1, 1994. The 710th Air Base Wing was activated as the host unit on RAF Alconbury.

Next, the 352nd Special Operations Group transferred to RAF Mildenhall on 17 February 17, 1995. The airfield was returned to the Ministry of Defense September 30, 1995. The base support functions, however, remained under USAF control. The former runways and operational sites of RAF Alconbury transferred to the Urban & Civic Limited organization. On July 12, 1995, the 710th ABW was inactivated and the 423rd Air Base Squadron at RAF Molesworth assumed the host unit role at Alconbury. In July 2005, the squadron was redesignated as the 423rd Air Base Group, while its headquarters and mission was moved to RAF Alconbury. The 501st Combat Support Wing was reactivated March 22, 2005, at RAF Mildenhall. It served as administrator to the various geographically separated units in the U.K. On May 1, 2007, the wing moved to RAF Alconbury where it remained as of December 10, 2012.



The 20th Tactical Fighter Wing at **RAF Upper Heyford** supported F-111E Aardvark aircraft. The 20th Tactical Fighter Wing headquarters relocated from RAF Wethersfield to RAF Upper Heyford June 1, 1970. The transition came as the wing prepared to receive the first two F-111Es, September 12, 1970. On July 1, 1983, the 42nd Electronic Combat Squadron activated. In February 1984, the first Grumman (General Dynamics) EF-111A Ravens arrived. On April 14, 1986, five EF-111As and 20 F-111Es took off from RAF Upper Heyford to support Operation EL DORADO CANYON. On January 17, 1991, the 20th TFW aircraft launched combat missions from Turkey and Saudi Arabia that continued until Operation DESERT STORM ended. During the operation, the 20th TFW deployed 458 personnel, flew 1,798 combat sorties, and dropped 4,714 tons of ordnance. Cold War operations ceased in 1991 and the 20th TFW operations at RAF Upper Heyford gradually phased down. The wing redesignated the 20th Fighter Wing (55th, 77th and 79th Fighter Squadrons) on October 1, 1991. On December 15, 1993, RAF Upper Heyford closed. RAF Upper Heyford transferred to the 620th Air Base Wing until September 30, 1994, when the base was returned to the Ministry of Defence.





The 48th Tactical Fighter Wing at **RAF Lakenheath** supported F-111E Aardvark aircraft. By January 1991, the 48th deployed 66 of its 70 F-111s to Taif, Saudi Arabia, along with more than 1,400 personnel. During Operation DESERT STORM, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, (Provisional) flew 2,500 combat sorties, dropped 7.3 million pounds of precision guided munitions, destroyed 920 tanks and armored personnel carriers, 245 hardened aircraft shelters, 160 bridges, and 113 bunkers. On February 27, 1991, the 48th recorded the first combat employment of a GBU-28, which destroyed an Iraqi command and control center.

On October 1, 1991, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing was redesignated the 48th Fighter Wing. The wing received the first maintenance trainer F-15C Eagle January 10, 1994, and its full compliment arrived by July 22, 1994. In February 1999, the wing participated in Operation ALLIED FORCE. On March 24, 1999, the 493rd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, stationed at Cervia Air Base, Italy, recorded four aerial victories against the enemy. In May, the 492nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron launched combat operations directly from RAF Lakenheath, the first sustained combat operations flown from England since World War II. The wing deployed 1,011 personnel to 18 different locations, utilized 69 aircraft, flew 2,562 sorties out of three locations for more than 11,000 combat hours in less than three months, dropped 3.1 million tons of munitions, and scored four out of the five confirmed Air Force aerial victories. On September 11, 2001, support for what would become Operation ENDURING FREEDOM began. The wing deployed more than 2,300 personnel and 134 aircraft in support of OEF in 2002 alone. On March 19, 2003, the wing deployed more than 500 Airmen to every country in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility. The wing continued to support Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and OEF until OIF ended August 31, 2010, and Operation New Dawn began the next day. On December 17, 2011, the last U.S. troops in Iraq crossed the border into Kuwait and ended almost nine years of a deadly and divisive war.

The 81st Tactical Fighter Wing at **RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge** supported A-10A Thunderbolt II and F-16C Fighting Falcon aircraft. At the end of the Cold War, the USAF presence at Bentwaters was gradually phased down. The last A-10 aircraft departed Bentwaters March 23, 1993, while the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing deactivated July 1, 1993. The USAF returned RAF Bentwaters to the Ministry of Defence on that day.



The 303rd Tactical Missile Wing stood up at **RAF Molesworth**, which eventually supported 69 BGM-109G Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) systems. The 303rd Tactical Missile Wing was activated December 12, 1986. However, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty December 8, 1987. As a result, the 303rd TMW deactivated January 30, 1989. On January 11, 1990, the RAF announced a new construction project at RAF Molesworth to build the U.S. European Command's intelligence analysis center. This facility began operations as the USEUCOM Joint Analysis Centre (JAC) to gather intelligence for U.S. and NATO missions in the Middle East.

The 501st Tactical Missile Wing at **RAF Greenham Common** supported 96 BGM-109G GLCM systems. The GLCM Alert and Maintenance Area provided a maximum security area with six large above ground shelters, which stored ninety-six operational cruise missiles. The United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987. The last GLCM at RAF Greenham Common was removed by the end of March 1991, and the 501st TMW inactivated June 4, 1991. In 1997, Greenham Common was redesignated a park.

The 513th Tactical Airlift Wing at **RAF Mildenhall** supported the EC-135H Stratolifter aircraft. On April 11 – 15, 1986, the 513th TAW supported the SAC buildup of KC-10 and KC-135 tankers for a combined attack by the U.S. Navy and USAF on Benina and Tripoli, Libya during Operation El Dorado Canyon. On February 1, 1992, the 100th Air Refueling Wing activated. It replaced the 513th Airborne Command and Control Wing (redesignated

June 18, 1987), but with a different mission. As host wing, it took over the support of all the tenant units on RAF Mildenhall. The wing received its first permanent KC-135 May 22, 1992, and reached its full complement of nine tankers in September 1992. RAF Mildenhall changed November 28, 1998, when the USAF ended the European Tanker Task Force (ETTF) mission. The number of 100 ARW tankers increased to 15.

On March 31, 1993, the 2147th Communications Wing redesignated to become the 100th Communications Group. This moved the responsibility for all USAF communications within the U.K. to the 100 ARW. United States Air Forces in Europe announced the relocation of the 352nd Special Operations Group from RAF Alconbury to RAF Mildenhall May 7, 1993. However, several delays prevented the 352 SOG from completing this move until April 30, 1995. The activation of the 501st Combat Support Wing on May 12, 2005, marked the last new unit to call RAF Mildenhall home. However, on May 1, 2007, the unit moved to RAF Alconbury. Since the end of ETTF, the 100 ARW supported numerous USAF and NATO missions as well as several major operations: Noble Anvil, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 100 ARW supported Operation NEW DAWN (September 1, 2010 to December 17, 2011) and Operation ODYSSEY DAWN (March 19, 2011 to March 30, 2011). The wing then supported Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR until Oct. 31, 2011).



The 7020th Air Base Group at **RAF Fairford** supported the KC-135 Stratotankers of the 11th Strategic Group. On November 15, 1978, the 11th Strategic Group was activated at Fairford. It performed aerial refueling support for USAF operations, deployments, redeployments, and NATO exercises. KC-135 and KC10 tankers deployed to Fairford and supported Operation El Dorado Canyon in 1986. The KC-135 mission ended there in 1990, and the station returned to standby status. The status was upgraded for limited use in the mid-

1990s. The airfield supported B-52 missions during Operation ALLIED FORCE in 1999, DESERT STORM in 1991, and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003. The runway and fuel systems were renovated and two climate controlled hangars were built for accommodating B-2 Spirit bombers (May 2000-May 2002). Construction of a B-2 maintenance hangar was completed in 2008. RAF Fairford's status was changed in 2010 when military personnel were removed leaving only a civilian operating unit. It was designated a "warm base" or standby airfield. RAF Fairford provided the only abort landing site for the NASA Space Shuttle in the U.K. because its runway is 9,993 feet. RAF Fairford also supports the Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT), which is considered the world's largest air show (supports 535 aircraft).



The 7274th Air Base Group at **RAF Chicksands** supported the 6950th Electronic Security Group, which performed a communications and signal intelligence (SIGINT) operation. The unit's Elephant Cage antenna was dismantled in 1996 after the USAF withdrew and returned the base to the Ministry of Defense. The 6950th operated at RAF Chicksands from July 1, 1974, to June 30, 1995.

The 1969th Communications Squadron at South Ruslip formed a detachment at **RAF Croughton** in 1950. In 1955 this detachment became the 1230th Airways and Air Communications Service Squadron (AACS). In 1961, the 1230 AACS redesignated to become the 2130th Communications Squadron. In 1961, the squadron redesignated to the 2130th Communications Group. Due to the 2147th Communications Group at RAF Mildenhall, the realignment of many squadrons, detachments, and operating locations in 1980, the 2130th CG inactivated. The 2130th Communications Squadron reactivated July 1, 1983, to manage the communications mission at RAF Croughton. The mission increased in December 1985 because the Giant Talk station at RAF Croughton began operations. In mid-1986, the 2130th CS again redesignated to become the 2130th CG.

In 1993, the 2130th CG redesignated to the 630th Communications Squadron. It aligned under the 100th Communications Group at RAF Mildenhall. But, on July 1, 1994, USAFE conducted another command-wide reorganization. USAFE activated the 603rd Regional Support Group as an independent **group directly under the 3rd Air Force**. The 3rd Air Force issued an order, effective May 24, 1996, that assigned 603rd RSG personnel to the 100 ARW for administrative control. The 603rd CS inactivated and the 422nd Air Base Squadron activated August 1, 1996. The 420th Air Base Group reported directly to the 3rd Air Force until May 26, 2004, when the 38th Combat Support Wing was established to provide oversight and advocacy on behalf of three geographically separated units (GSU) groups. The 38th CSW and 420th ABG were responsible for the day to day operations of the 422nd ABS and RAF Croughton. On May 12, 2005, the 422nd ABG became a unit of the 501st Combat Support Wing and the 501st CSW replaced the 38th CSW. This placed the 422nd ABG in charge of the 422nd ABS, the 422nd CS, the 422nd Civil Engineering Squadron and the 422nd Security Forces Squadron.

The 672nd U.S. Strategic Missile Squadron arrived at **RAF Feltwell** May 20, 1958. The squadron trained RAF missile crews on the Thor system from May 20, 1958 to Oct 1, 1959. Det 7 of the 99th Air Base Squadron stood up in November 1959 and remained until 1963. On September 14, 1966, the 48 FW activated the RAF Feltwell Family Housing Annex for RAF Lakenheath personnel. On November 30, 1974, the RAF Feltwell Storage site was activated. At present, the base is administered by the 48 FW at Lakenheath and provides school facilities, storage, furniture loans and sales, as well as housing. It is supported by the 48th Mission Support Group.

RAF Menwith Hill was leased to the United States in 1958. The U.S. Army Security Agency established a high frequency radio system that monitored and intercepted communications from the Soviet Union. In 1966, the National Security Agency took over the facility. During the 1970s, construction began on large scale satellite communications infrastructure. Menwith Hill base operations are supported by the 421st Air Base Group of the 501st Air Base Wing.



The Gulf War

The 3rd Air Force UK units were in the forefront of the world's response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Eighteen F-111Fs from RAF Lakenheath were the first USAFE aircraft sent to the Persian Gulf in Operation DESERT SHIELD, arriving at Taif, Saudi Arabia, August 25, 1990. Forty-six more joined them by early December. Four EF-111As and 18 A-10s also left Britain for Saudi Arabia late in December. On the eve of the Gulf War, four F-111Fs and six EF-111As from the 3rd Air Force UK flew to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, to support Joint Task Force Proven Force, which opened a second front against Iraq from the north. 48 FW provided critically important en-route support to units deploying to the Gulf, and provided forward bases for SAC B-52s and KC-135s. During DESERT STORM, the F-111Fs from Lakenheath destroyed dozens of hardened aircraft shelters and hundreds of tanks with precision strikes. In a highly publicized attack, two of the wing's planes destroyed key portions of the Al Ahmadi oil station. The Iraqis had opened the oil station's spigots, polluting the Gulf with millions of gallons of oil. The attack destroyed the pump system and stopped the flow of oil.

Post Cold War

With the Cold War and the Gulf War behind them, the men and women of the 3rd Air Force UK faced new challenges in the 1990s. One was the reduction of U.S. military presence in the United Kingdom. Famous names from the past, like Bentwaters, Greenham Common and Upper Heyford returned to British control, and many American bases that stayed open faced cutbacks. On September 30, 1996, the 17th Air Force inactivated and the 3rd Air Force assumed control of all USAFE units north of the Alps. It grew substantially, consisting of more than 25,000 military personnel and more than 35,000 family members. Its aircraft fleet exceeded 200 planes, including KC-135s and F-15s in England, and A-10s, F-16s, C-9s, C-20s, C-21s and C-130Es in Germany.

Reorganization and Deployment

In addition to a larger area of responsibility, the command reorganization also changed the mission of the 3rd Air Force UK headquarters, which took a more active role in responding to contingencies and leading or augmenting joint and combined task force headquarters. In recent years, the 3rd Air Force UK has deployed personnel and equipment to Turkey, Southwest Asia, Africa, and the Balkans. More recently the 3rd Air Force UK took part in Operation GUARDIAN ASSISTANCE, the U.S. military's response to the 1996 Zaire/Rwanda refugee crisis; Operation Assured Lift, the movement of African peacekeeping troops to Liberia in 1997; and Operation EAGLE VISTA, President Clinton's 1998 visit to Africa. The 3rd Air Force UK pilots achieved four of six coalition aerial victories during Operation ALLIED FORCE, the NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia, while the headquarters provided the command element for Operation SHINING HOPE, U.S. humanitarian assistance to Kosovar refugees.

The 3rd Air Force UK assets also provided air protection over the skies of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Operation DENY FLIGHT. Along with allies from NATO countries, the 3rd Air Force UK aircrews applied airpower in Operation Deliberate Force, the bombing campaign that paved the way for the Dayton Peace Agreement. USAFE theater air control forces provided tactical Air Battle Management Command and Control over the Adriatic and Balkans airspaces from the outset of Operation DENY FLIGHT in 1995 until the end of Operation ALLIED FORCE in 1999.



The 3rd Air Force UK forces again mobilized in March 1999 when NATO intervened in Kosovo to stop Serbian repression of the province's ethnic Albanian majority. Efforts to find a diplomatic solution collapsed, resulting in Operation ALLIED FORCE, the NATO-led air war over Kosovo. The 78-day operation ended June 10, 1999, culminating in the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo and

the eventual return of refugees to their homeland. The 3rd Air Force UK led Joint Task Force Shining Hope, established to assist hundreds of thousands of refugees expelled from Kosovo by Serbian leadership with the assistance of soldiers and paramilitaries.

The 3rd Air Force UK has been on the front lines of the war on terror since 11 September 11, 2001. During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, it helped support an air bridge from Europe to Asia that delivered 3,300 tons of humanitarian daily rations to northern Afghanistan, opened a base in Kyrgyzstan for coalition forces and established a medical evacuation network that moved nearly 4,000 patients. It also took part in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM to remove the government of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The staff at the 3rd Air Force headquarters at Ramstein led the contingency planning effort as the operational arm of USAFE. The first deliveries into Georgia were flown by a C-17 Globemaster crew whose cargo included 104,000 doses of antibiotics. USAFE's 1st Combat Communications Squadron sent a team to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to provide communications support to the U.S. Embassy and to American military personnel.

Most recently these unique attributes came to the forefront during U.S. support to operations in Libya in 2011. When the United Nations called upon the international community for action, the 3rd Air Force UK was able to quickly draw upon its personnel and resources to provide humanitarian assistance in the early crisis. Later, the wings of the 3rd Air Force UK contributed on-hand combat forces as part of a coalition of European and other partner nations to protect the Libyan populace from the violence of the

Qadhafi regime. After NATO assumed responsibility for Libya in April 2011, USAFE bases continued their support for follow-on operations of Operation ODYSSEY DAWN with Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR. The operations went from March 19, 2011, to Oct. 31, 2011.

