

Since 1979 the 388th Fighter Wing at Hill AFB, Utah, has flown nearly every operational variant of the F-16.

Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director

This F-16C from the 4th Fighter Squadron streaks over the mirror-like waters of Utah's Great Salt Lake en route to a training range for an air to ground sortie. Equipped with LANTIRN (Low Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infrared for Night), the aircraft has proved to be adept at night as well as in daylight at striking a variety of targets.



Viper Country





The days usually run long at Hill AFB, Utah. Maintenance crews ready the 388th's aircraft in the late afternoon sun as flight crews settle in for a training mission that will take them into the evening. LANTIRN, via its targeting and navigation pods slung alongside the intakes on these F-16Cs, gives pilots the ability to get to the target in almost any weather and under cover of darkness to employ precision guided weapons. During the winter months at Hill, the 388th regularly flies about 25 percent of its training sorties at night. During the longer summer days, a little more than 12 percent are night flights. At left, Capt. Andrew Wolcott gets ready for the evening's sortie under the watchful eyes of crew chief Amn. David Allen.

The job of the 388th is to put a weapon on target. That doesn't happen without the munitions crew preparing the right weapon for each job. At right, Amn. Doyl Watson and A1C Chad Mullins prepare two 2,000-pound bombs for flight line delivery. Although these bombs are only inert training rounds, the munitions specialists use the same care and expertise as they would for live weapons.



The guidance control mechanism of a Precision Guided Munition requires periodic checks to ensure it's functioning properly. TSgt. Francisco Torres, a weapons systems evaluator from Eglin AFB, Fla., visited the 388th to perform these vital inspections. Whether employed in a training round or the real thing, the mechanism has to be in perfect working order—it's critical to the pinpoint capability of any PGM.



On the flight line, the weapons load crew works with the flight-line crew to load the weapon. Above, A1C Jamaal Brown drives the "jammer" as weapons load crew chief SSgt. John Barriball checks the 2,000-pound bomb. At right, once it's moved into position on the aircraft, load crew members (left to right) A1C Timothy Smith, Barriball, and Brown attach the guidance package that will turn the "iron bomb" into a GBU-24 precision guided weapon.

The 388th FW's LANTIRN-equipped F-16s carry a wide variety of weapons. Munitions crews are versed in everything from the AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile to the 2,000-pound laser-guided bomb like this one.





An average training sortie can last from one to four hours. In a little less than five minutes' flying time, a Hill pilot can be over the Utah Test and Training Range, one of the country's largest military training ranges. The UTTR offers a wide variety of targets and attracts units from around the world. Above, the geometric-shaped target (lower left in photo) is visible from the F-16 as it begins its target run. At right, the view from the backseat is tremendous. When these same missions are flown at night, detailed information from the LANTIRN pods and a wide-angle Head Up Display establish a clear advantage for this version of the F-16.





This training mission included a simulated attack on a Surface-to-Air-Missile battery, six bombing runs from different angles, and a series of strafing runs. Similar mission profiles for each training sortie ensure maximum use of valuable range training time. With their frequent deployment schedule, the crews of the versatile 388th recognize the value of training time to keep their skills sharp. At left, in a hard bank, the pilot pulls his Viper in on one of the strafing runs.

After meeting all the training requirements, the F-16 pilots perform a Battle Damage Assessment of each other's aircraft. At right, clearly visible are the LANTIRN pods, an electronic countermeasures pod on the centerline hard point, an AGM-65 Maverick missile (top), and the pod on the opposite wing that held the six blue practice bombs. Although weighing only 25 pounds, the practice bombs have the same ballistics as a standard 500-pound bomb. This BDA check reveals that one of the bombs failed to release. Since that's not an uncommon occurrence, it's one of the reasons for doing these kinds of checks.



The LANTIRN system is central to the mission of the 388th's F-16s. Each Viper's system is checked frequently to ensure it is in tip-top shape. Using the same equipment they deploy with, A1C Dario Murga (left) and SrA. Rodney Ricketts go through testing procedures on the navigation pod. The nav pod, which contains a terrain-following radar along with an infrared sensor, enables the aircraft to maintain a preselected altitude and gives an infrared image of the terrain to the pilot via the wide-field HUD. The targeting pod, with its forward-looking infrared sensor and laser designator range finder, can pinpoint a target as well as keep track of other moving elements—giving the pilot the information he needs to complete a variety of missions.

With a busy operations tempo and demanding training regimen, maintenance is critical. The 388th is justifiably proud of its engine shop. In the background of the photo at right is a row of seven spare General Electric F110 engines ready to go at a moment's notice. In the foreground (left to right) SSgt. Hans Furber and Amn. Adam Kelly replace fan blades on another jet engine.



Vital to the 388th's mission, the 729th Air Control Squadron controls the skies over Hill AFB and at the nearby UTTR. The unit uses much of the same self-contained equipment its members employ on frequent missions to South and Central America in support of counterdrug operations. At left, TSgt. Jeffrey Brochu (left) and SSgt. Brian O'Mullan look over one of the squadron's AN/TPS-75 radars. The "Topsy-75" is a sophisticated radar capable of simultaneous long-range search and altitude-finding operations. Information from other radars can also be combined with data from the Topsy-75 to create an integrated picture of the aerial battlefield for theater commanders.

At right, A1C Martina Culich examines part of a satellite communications dish as A1C Jacquelyn Ashley looks on. The 729th ACS provides support for a number of missions outside Hill AFB and has the TDY numbers to prove it. During daylight, a trained six-person crew can assemble the AN/TPS-75 from its transport configuration to full operation within 90 minutes. At night, a nine-person crew can perform the same task in about 2.5 hours.





Above, one of the 4th FS's Vipers comes in on final approach at the end of a daytime sortie. A few hours later, the night shift takes to the runway. The long flame of an F-16 with full burner is visible in the darkening skies (right) as it rockets down the runway. The 388th FW was the first unit to fly the LANTIRN system in combat—Desert Storm—and is USAF's largest night-fighting wing.

The wing was the first to receive the F-16 in 1979. Since then the 388th has flown nearly every version of the Viper and continues to make history. ■

