

The operations tempo at the 52nd Fighter Wing in Germany picked up during the Gulf War and simply has never gone back down.

Fighters of



Spangdahlem

Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy

Spangdahlem Air Base, situated in the Eifel Mountain region of Germany, has been a pivotal military site in Europe since its dedication in 1953. The 52nd Fighter Wing has served as its host unit for more than 30 years. It began its tenure at Spangdahlem as the 52nd Tactical Fighter Wing on Dec. 31, 1971. In October 1991, it was redesignated the 52nd Fighter Wing. Air Force fighter operations at Spangdahlem are the most extensive in Germany, and perhaps the most versatile, with three fighter squadrons—the 22nd, 23rd, and 81st—and the 606th Air Control Squadron.



At left, two F-16s from the 23rd Fighter Squadron get a final check from the ground crew before taking off on a training sortie. The 23rd completed conversion in 1995 to the latest version of the F-16CJ, becoming a dedicated defense suppression unit for US Air Forces in Europe.

Most signs at the base are in English and German. USAF employs more than 600 German nationals at Spangdahlem, and base-community relations are excellent.

Hardened aircraft shelters (seen top and right) are typical of Cold War-era NATO bases. At right, an A-10 from the 81st Fighter Squadron taxis out of its shelter in preparation for a sortie. The 81st is the only A/OA-10 squadron in USAF. Optempo is very high at the base—the 81st provides dedicated close air support, air strike control, and combat search and rescue capability to NATO and USAF commanders.

The squadron converted from F-4s to A-10s in 1994.





Staff photo by Guy Aceto

An A-10 travels one of Spangdahlem's short taxiways in preparation for yet another mission. At right, an A-10 takes on fuel.



Above and right: A weapons loader checks an AGM-65 missile.

The A-10 Warthog can carry up to six AGM-65 Mavericks and up to four AIM-9 Sidewinders. The aircraft can, with max load, go into combat with 16,000 pounds of ordnance.



Photos by Paul Kennedy



In September 1997, the 81st became the first USAFE squadron to participate in Operation Southern Watch, the enforcement of the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. The unit also flew more than 1,400 sorties in Operation Allied Force, the 1999 NATO action in the Balkans, and led the conflict's first two successful search and rescue missions, recovering two downed pilots.

From the cockpit of an F-16, one gets a panoramic view of the German countryside near Spangdahlem. Base officials work closely with local government representatives and agencies to provide effective training, despite noise and altitude restrictions.

Spangdahlem boasts the largest US fighter presence on the continent and has busy skies. Air traffic is somewhat alleviated by a high optempo; members of the 81st deploy frequently to other areas, including the Persian Gulf, Kosovo, Bosnia, and other European bases, and for operations in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.



Bucolic scenes such as these are common in the area surrounding the air base. Farm lands and rolling hills dominate the landscape.

Spangdahlem covers more than 1,200 acres of Eifel countryside. The air base was built in the French occupation zone at the end of World War II. It was turned over to the US in 1952.

The 22nd Fighter Squadron came to the base in 1994 when nearby Bitburg AB, Germany, shut down. The 23rd has been at Spangdahlem since 1972.





The two F-16 units fly state-of-the-art aircraft and are tasked with the Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses mission. The 22nd and 23rd F-16s carry AGM-88 High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, GPS-guided munitions, and the HARM targeting system pod.

Spangdahlem crews train in F-16s carrying a mock combat load to give the aircraft a realistic feel in flight. The aircraft shown here is carrying training versions of the AIM-120 AMRAAM, AGM-88 HARM, and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles. On the centerline hardpoint is a ALQ-131 electronic jamming pod.



The wing's 606th Air Control Squadron also came to Spangdahlem from Bitburg. The 606th was the first USAFE ACS tasked to support Southern Watch and has deployed to Kuwait as part of several Air Expeditionary Force rotations in support of OSW and Enduring Freedom.

The base's "hot pit" is in a protected area right off the taxiway and is designed so that the airplanes can refuel while undergoing maintenance.



Photos by Paul Kennedy



At left, pilots from the 23rd Fighter Squadron get the day's flight, aircraft, and weather information from "the board." Every fighter pilot is familiar with these information centers, which are continually updated.

Below, an A-10 from the 81st takes off in the mist. Operations are all-weather—the Eifel region averages 100 sunny days a year. Temperature and precipitation are similar to what is found in the Pacific Northwest.

Eighty-first crews recently have been flying training missions with C-130 crews from nearby Ramstein AB, Germany. The heavily armed fighters fly escort for the theater transports, as they did over Afghanistan for Enduring Freedom.

The 81st's Warthogs, with tank-killing 30 mm GAU-8/A guns, are ideal platforms for close air support.





Above, an F-16 Fighting Falcon breaks through the clouds to land at Spangdahlem. At right, an A-10 taxis to the runway.



Optempo at the German bases skyrocketed during the Gulf War. It remained high through the 1990s and has escalated even further in response to European base closures and military action elsewhere.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

As the war on terror broadens and other conflicts erupt, it isn't likely that the men and women of USAF's 52nd Fighter Wing will be standing down any time soon. ■