



The New Aggressors

Out at Nellis AFB, Nev., the 64th and 65th Aggressor Squadrons carry on a proud tradition.

Photography by Rick Linares



Aggressor aircraft form up in a four-ship display. Left to right: F-15 flown by Maj. Eric Hassinger, F-16 flown by Maj. Derek Routt, F-15 flown by Maj. Phil Stodick, and F-16 flown by Lt. Col. Paul Huffman.

Nellis is the "Home of the Fighter Pilot." It's also the home of the USAF Warfare Center, with five wings and some 150 aircraft. Aggressors play a key role in USAF fighter training, acting as a realistic opposing force by using adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures. One year ago, USAF reactivated the 65th Aggressor Squadron, as an F-15 unit, to team up with the 64th AGRS, an F-16 unit. Both are part of the 57th Adversary Tactics Group.

Right: Aggressor aircraft line the Nellis ramp. Out in Nevada, the flying is good, with clear weather and mostly empty airspace.

Below: An F-16 of the 64th AGRS sports a special lizard camouflage, one of several exotic paint schemes found on the Aggressors. At the controls is Lt. Col. Paul Huffman.



Above: Airman Timothy Molle assists as a 65th AGRS F-15 starts engines and undergoes a preflight examination. The desert heat is stultifying; both Aggressor squadrons use protective canopies to protect the airmen and aircraft from the sun.

Left: An Aggressor F-15 (foreground) and F-16 display the "Flanker Blue" paint scheme seen on both types of fighters in both units. In size and shape, the F-15 is somewhat similar to Russia's superb fourth generation Su-27 Flanker. The compact F-16's size, power, and extreme maneuverability make it a good representative of smaller aircraft such as the MiG-29.



Counterclockwise, from left: The F-16 (foreground) and F-15 aircraft vary greatly in size and capability and therefore in their ability to simulate certain maneuvers. During training engagements, the Aggressor aircraft use in-flight call signs such as MiG, Ivan, and Flanker. ● A sun-washed F-15 Aggressor aircraft awaits its call to action. ● In a USAF Weapons School training engagement, F-15s flown by Maj. Phil Stodick (foreground) and Maj. Eric Hassinger turn into the fight. ● A KC-135 tanker aircraft of the Ohio Air National Guard prepares to gas up a Flanker Blue F-15. The Aggressor squadrons borrow tankers for their training exercises.



Right: One of the F-15s assigned to the Aggressors is in line for the day's action. The F-15 entered service in the mid-1970s, replacing the F-4 Phantom II. Though it has been around for three decades, the old warhorse will keep going on for years, not only in Aggressor units but also in active and ANG squadrons.

Below: An F-15 in desert camouflage paint scheme gets airborne.



Above: SrA. Chris Bennett (c) and A1C Alex Bower (r) assist Lt. Col. Greg Franklin in preflighting an Aggressor F-15.

Far left: The 65th AGRS received a first batch of a dozen F-15s and is expected to acquire another 12, making a full squadron's worth of Eagles. The unit first stood up at Nellis in 1975, flying the F-5E. It was later deactivated but was brought back last year.

Left: The presence of several F-16s with dramatically different paint schemes, such as these, are a common sight at Nellis.



Aggressor pilots are highly experienced, having at least 600 hours in the F-15 or F-16 and with backgrounds as instructor pilots. Aspiring Aggressors must work through a formal syllabus of 23 sorties and classroom training. The goal: pilots who can offer academic and airborne instruction on adversary tactics. Aggressor pilots continue their education at Nellis, often devoting more than 100 hours of research time to a single "threat" topic.

Clockwise, from right: F-15s of the 65th AGRS head to "the fight." ● Lt. Col. Larry Bruce, commander of the 65th, saddles up his F-15. ● An in-trail formation of Aggressor F-15s thunders over "The Farms," a unique section of the Nellis ranges. ● An Aggressor F-15 moves out.



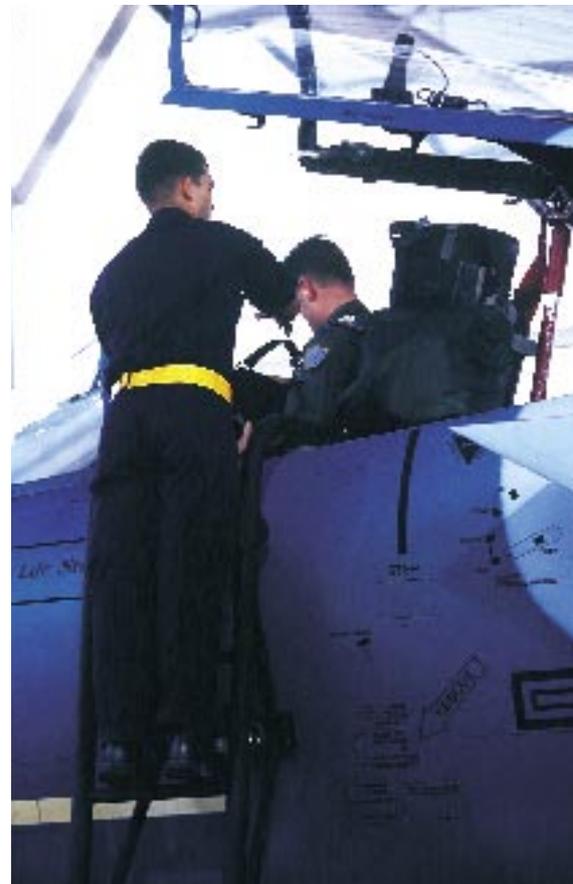
Clockwise, from right: F-15s such as this one are filling out the 65th AGRS, now going into its second operational year since reactivation. ● Maj. Derek Roult looks up from the cockpit of his F-16 Viper as it takes on fuel from a KC-135 overhead. ● This view of Aggressor F-15s definitely is not what "Blue Force" pilots want to see in the rearview mirror. ● An Aggressor F-15 (top) and F-16 complement each other. Pilots say the F-15 excels at high altitude, whereas the F-16 has the edge down low.



The US Air Force created its first Aggressor squadrons in the 1970s, a result of disappointing air warfare results in the Vietnam War. The idea was to give novice pilots the kind of real-world experience that, in the past, could be gained only in actual—and deadly—combat. The move brought immediate and positive results.

Right: A four-ship of Aggressor F-15s and F-16s prepare to mix it up with “Blue Force” fighters.

Below: With Sunrise Mountain in the background, Lt. Col. Greg Marzolf (in foreground F-16) and Lt. Col. Patrick Wech (partially hidden in rear F-16) hold short of the active runway for final checks.



Above: Airman Timothy Molleo assists Squadron Leader Stephen Chappell in strapping into his F-15. Chappell is an Australian exchange pilot serving with the 65th AGRS as chief of weapons.

Left: Lt. Col. Craig Jones taxis his F-16 out to the active runway for a late afternoon flight, to be followed by the F-15 in the background.

Dedicated “Red Air” assets have proved their worth time and again at Red Flag exercises. Together, the 64th and 65th will create even better opportunities for Air Force pilots to train for combat. ■