



474th Tactical Fighter Wing History at Nellis AFB

On 20 January 1968 the wing with its F-100 aircraft was transferred to Nellis AFB, from Cannon AFB, NM giving the base an operational Tactical Fighter Wing, assigned to Twelfth Air Force. With the move to Nellis, the 474th Combat Support Group became the base operating host unit. In 1968, the 474th became the first USAF operational wing equipped with the General Dynamics F-111A aircraft.

In early 1968, Air Force leadership decided to rush a small detachment of F-111A's to Southeast Asia under a program known as "Combat Lancer". Six 428th TFS F-111A's were allocated to the Combat Lancer program, and departed Nellis AFB for Takhli RTAFB on 15 March 1968. By the end of that month, 55 night missions had been flown against targets in North Vietnam, but two aircraft had been lost. 66-0022 had been lost on March 28, and 66-0017 on March 30. Replacement aircraft had departed Nellis, but the loss of a third F-111A (66-0024) on April 22 halted F-111A combat operations. While the aircraft remained poised for combat, they saw little action before their return to the USA in November 1968.

It turned out that the three F-111A losses were not due to enemy action but were caused by wing and tail structural defects. One of the Combat Lancer crashes had been traced to a malfunction of the aircraft's tail servo actuator. These losses caused a storm of controversy in the United States, with Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire denouncing the F-111A as an unsafe and defective plane. However, the Air Force and General Dynamics remained hard at work trying to fix the problems with the F-111A. The 428th TFS of the 474th TFW reached an initial operational capability in the spring of 1968. Modifications to the F-111 to correct the design flaws took a lot longer than expected, and the Wing was not fully operational until July 1971. In December 1968, Tactical Air Command activated the 4527th Combat Crew Training Squadron (Tail Code "ND" as a dedicated F-111 pilot training squadron at Nellis. The provisional squadron performed lead-in training for experienced pilots in the F-111; it was made an Air Force squadron in October 1969, being re-designated as the 442nd Tactical Fighter Training Squadron.

The 474th returned to Takhli RTAFB in September 1972. Two F-111A squadrons (the 429th and 430th) participated in the Linebacker II aerial offensive against North Vietnam. They flew bombing missions against targets in North Vietnam and Laos in the midst of the monsoon season. They flew without RB-66E electronic countermeasures escort aircraft or KC-135 tankers. On 8 November 1972, they flew 20 strikes over North Vietnam in weather that grounded other aircraft. Four F-111As could deliver the bomb loads of 20 F-4s. The 429th and 430th TFS flew some 4000 combat missions with excellent success rates in hitting targets even when visibility was near zero. Only six aircraft were lost in action.

The 430th TFS returned to the 474th TFW Nellis on 22 March 1973 assuming a replacement training unit mission, while the 428th and 429th were assigned to the newly activated 347th Tactical Fighter Wing at Takhli RTAFB on 30 July 1973. With the end of hostilities in Southeast Asia, the 474th's mission was to train combat-ready force of aircrews and maintained a rapid-reaction capability to execute fighter attacks against enemy forces and facilities in time of crisis.

In 1975, the 428th and 429th were reassigned to the wing, again being equipped with F-111A's. In August 1977, the F-111 aircraft and crews were transferred to Mountain Home AFB, Idaho in a three way realignment Code named Operation Ready Switch. In this movement, the F-4Ds from the 48 TFW at RAF Lakenheath were transferred to the 474 TFW, the F-111As from the 474 TFW went to the 366 TFW at Mt. Home AFB, ID and their F-111Fs were sent to the 48 TFW at RAF Lakenheath. The Phantoms had a relatively short life with the 474 TFW however, being replaced with new F-16A Fighting Falcons in November 1980, and later operated Block 10 F-16A/Bs.

The wing conducted routine Tactical Air Command training and deployments from Nellis with the F-16s, retaining the Block 10/15 models until September 1989, when the wing was

inactivated, the F-16As no longer being considered as front-line aircraft. Instead of re-equipping the wing, the F-16As were transferred to Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve squadrons.

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