

# Liberty crews experience 'war' with Red Flag training

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There was a war going on not too long ago, and every day for two weeks, 70 aircraft filled the Nevada sky in battle, vying for air superiority. In one of the last battles, F-16s from Nellis AFB, mimicking Flankers, tried to take out F-16 good-guys "sweeping" the skies to clear the way for the 492nd Fighter Squadron's Strike Eagles and New York Air National Guard F-16s, who were playing an interdiction role.

AWACS tracked hostile contacts, calling out, "Hostile, low and slow" to denote fast-moving aircraft flying high or a lower-flying, slower aircraft which could mean helicopters. EA-6B prowlers worked to jam air-to-air and air-to-ground radars and Maj. Rick "Moose" Watson, 492nd FS mission commander, coordinated all 70 aircraft prior, to ensure the mission went smoothly.

Soon into the battle, the interdiction aircraft on the way to striking their targets were being targeted themselves, and the 492nd Strike Eagles changed posture and turned air-to-air.

"If they get in our way, we're going to kill them. If this guy is not pointed toward us, not acting interested, go to the target," briefed Watson before the Nov. 4 afternoon run at Red Flag.

"Our objective is to survive," said Capt. Rob Capozzella, four-ship flight lead for the 492nd Strike Eagles. "Get airborne as fast as you can. Survive. Ninety-five percent bombs on target. Air-to-air for self-defense. Watch the high threats."

A litany of numbers, call signs, code words and information was passed to the aircrew before this flight. First, the planning. Aircrew not flying worked the mission plans; four intelligence troops from the 492nd FS ensured aircrew had current threat updates and target photos. A mass briefing for all aircrew involved in the afternoon's flying conveyed more information than one would think could be taken in, and back in the 492nd operations area, a final brief before the flight. Maps and various cards covered the table in the middle of a room surrounded by bulletin boards, more maps on the wall and various bits of notes and information cluttering the walls.

The biggest threat in Red Flag, according to Capozzella, is the Red Flag aggressors and the MiG-29 Fulcrums, here at a Red Flag for the first time ever. "They look a lot like an Eagle in the air," he said. "From two to three miles away, you can't tell the difference."

There is one telltale sign that pilots look for with the MiGs, though.

"MiGs find us visually, after directive targeting from ground control radar," explained Capt. Rich-

ard "Tex" Coe. "We've been getting visuals on them by looking for smoke."

Whenever the MiGs push their power up, a trail of black smoke leaves the engine, giving a good indication that the aircraft is a hostile, and where it's heading.

The other threat, the Red Flag aggressors, "simulate bad aircraft very very well," emphasized Capozzella. The F-16 aggressors replicate Flankers, the most capable former Soviet threat. And, according to Capozzella, they do a pretty good job replicating them, except in size. The Flankers, SU-27s, are much larger than the 16s.

The 492nd FS during Red Flag has made good use of the F-15Es' multi-role capabilities.

"We can go and do both (missions), we can go in alone. We can shoot someone who gets in our way, act as air-to-air sweepers, destroy the enemy air defenses, and then complete our interdiction role and bomb our targets," explained Capozzella. But for Nov. 4's afternoon run, the Eagles' were primarily interdiction.

There were losses on both sides of this battle, but through regeneration, "killed" aircrew returned to the fight.

"There are no winners or losers," explained Capt. Marco Fiorito, 492nd FS chief of intelligence. "At RAF Lakenheath, we know how to work among ourselves and our F-15C squadron. Here, we learn how well we work with other units, services and other allies. Pretty much everyone gets killed here; but it's good because they get their mistakes out of the way."

The core unit for this Red Flag is the 355th out of Davis Monthan, AFB, Ariz., acting as the lead wing. They brought A-10s and EC-130s.

The last battle was viewed by operation managers who ensure the aircrew get the training they need before they step to their jets and who track each aircrew's flying hours and various other data for the aircrew in a database. Special pods placed on the aircraft allowed the Nellis Air Combat Tracking System to track the battle. Back at Lakenheath, this is now done with the new URITS, explained Staff Sgt. Ted Fryzlewicz, 492nd FS operations manager, who during Red Flag operates the NACTS. The aircraft show up on the screen, red for aggressors, green for interdiction, blue for sweepers and pink for suppression of enemy air defenses. Chatter between AWACS, aircraft to other aircraft and notifications of kills and calls of "you're alive" complemented the video display.

After the battle, aircrew members returned to ops and viewed their mission.

"It raged," according to Capozzella.

The war drew to an end Nov. 5; the good guys - victorious, the bad guys - they just flew home. For the aircrew that participated, the experience gained is worth the temporary "deaths" they endured before being allowed back into the fight.

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Capt. Marco Fiorito,  
492nd Fighter Squadron

