



# Gun f C o

Out in Idaho's Snake River Valley, the 366th Fighter Wing sharpens its aim.

Photography by Erik Hildebrandt



# ighting country

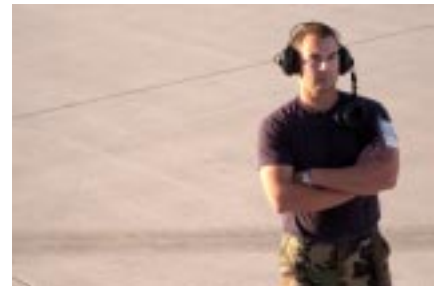
*F-15 and F-16 aircraft from all three squadrons of the 366th Fighter Wing at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, are readied for public inspection as part of the unit's open house. These squadrons have been deployed so frequently that such gatherings are becoming increasingly rare.*

The 366th "Gunfighters" nickname harkens back to Vietnam days. There, the unit flew F-4 Phantom fighters, equipped with external gun pods. The Vietnam-era heritage is evident in the gun-pod-toting "Phantom" logo seen in the first patch in the photo at right.

In addition to F-15Cs, F-15Es, and F-16Cs, Mountain Home hosts a detachment of EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare aircraft and an air control squadron. The Prowler, a Navy aircraft, is flown by joint USAF/Navy crews. Mountain Home pioneered the concept of the air and space expeditionary force, now the benchmark of Air Force organization.



The day begins with the "FOD walk." Flightline personnel line up and walk the tarmac, searching for any bits of debris that could cause foreign object damage to high-compression military aircraft engines. Below, a crew chief keeps an eye on his F-15 as it readies for a training sortie.



This is a view from the "pit"—the backseater position in the F-15E. The term is a throwback to the days of the F-4, whose backseat offered severely limited visibility. The F-15 was the first fighter to offer crews nearly 360-degree visibility. Ahead, two other Strike Eagles taxi out.





*Above, the lead aircraft—an F-15C—would sweep the skies of enemy fighters, while the F-15E (to the right) would focus on ground attack. The multirole F-16 is shown loaded for a defense suppression mission. The Mountain Home wing was the first designed to offer a “package” of airpower for different missions.*

*At right, an F-15E shows off its distinctive conformal fuel tanks, LANTIRN night vision and targeting pods, and hardpoints.*



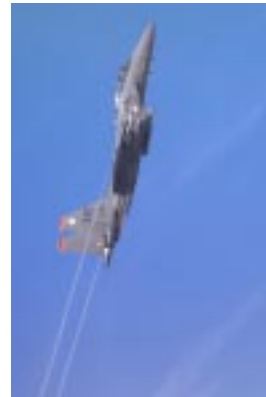
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*An F-16CJ (far left) and an EA-6B (left) protect US aircraft from ground threats, either by blasting enemy radars and SAMs or by jamming and disrupting the foe’s communications and control systems.*

*Like its progenitor, the F-15C, the F-15E (right) is a premier air-to-air fighter. Here, three Strike Eagles head out for training.*

*The F-15—all models—has an unblemished record in air-to-air combat spanning 30 years. Though the F-15 has been sent repeatedly into harm's way by US and Israeli Air Forces, no enemy fighter has ever shot one down.*



*The F-15 was the first fighter able to accelerate straight up. It is still one of the world's friskiest aircraft, and pilots train long hours to master it.*





USAF photo by TSgt. Debbie Hernandez

*The EA-6B joining the flight (above) wears Navy markings but is flown by mixed USAF and Navy crews. The Prowlers are detached from their home base at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash.*

*The 366th once flew F-111s, but they departed for good several years ago. When it was an Air Expeditionary Wing, the unit had its B-1 bombers and aerial tankers. Over the years, this unusual, inventive wing has changed form, but ...*



Photos by Erik Hildebrandt



*... the Gunfighters remain on the leading edge of USAF power projection capability. ■*