

The Strike Eagle's

**Airmen at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base
keep 96 F-15Es ready for action.**

Photography by Rick Llinares



A four-ship of F-15Es cruises the burning blue on a recent training mission from Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C. They are part of the 333rd Fighter Squadron.

Nest



Based on the F-15C air superiority fighter, the F-15E is a newer, tougher machine, built to withstand the stresses of low-level heavy ordnance delivery. The Strike Eagles are distinguished from their F-15 brethren by conformal fuel tanks and the dark gray paint scheme of a strike fighter, not to mention racks usually full of bombs. Despite their attack emphasis, F-15Es retain all the Eagle's dogfighting power. **11** Like many USAF aircraft, this F-15E sports the "Let's Roll" insignia honoring passengers aboard Flight 93, who on 9/11, fought the terrorist hijackers and prevented their airliner from being used as a missile. **12** The life support shop keeps aircrew flight gear—helmets, hoses, oxygen bottles, parachutes—in good working order. Working here are SrA. Kevin Boyne (background) and SSgt. Jonathan Rivera (foreground).



13 Capt. Drew Bures (l) and 1st Lt. Mark Russell preflight their Strike Eagle. **14** Seymour Johnson's F-15Es have the luxury of tankers located at their base. Here, an F-15E tops off from a KC-135 of the 916th Air Refueling Wing.



11 A landing F-15E deploys its huge dorsal airbrake, known as the “board,” to slow its speed and rollout. The pilot will also hold the nose up to slow the big jet aircraft down. **12** A1C Kelsey Brown disconnects a grounding wire on an F-15E. **13** Afterburners lit, an F-15E prepares to blast off on a training flight, carrying LANTIRN pods and a Sidewinder air-to-air missile. **14** A 333rd Strike Eagle pulls up to a tanker.

Visible under its air intakes are LANTIRN pods used for navigation and targeting. The LANTIRN system, which saw its first combat use in the 1991 Gulf War, is gradually being replaced by Litening and Sniper targeting pods. Typical for such photos, the combat systems officer in the back seat affects a relaxed pose. **15** In a classic shot, a pair of F-15Es shows off the type’s large fuel tanks.

1 Capt. Sriram Krishnan (l) checks in at the 333rd FS ops desk. Running the show (left to right) are Lt. Col. Thomas Hazlebeck, SrA. Cassandra Guzman, and SrA. Kristina Hood. Seymour Johnson is home to four Strike Eagle squadrons. The 333rd and 334th are training units, while the 335th and 336th are operational. There are also two support squadrons. **2** A 335th FS Strike Eagle prepares to taxi out from a weather shelter adjacent to the ramp. Such shelters can make a huge difference for maintainers working on aircraft in the North Carolina summer heat. **3** Although Seymour Johnson's runway 8/26 has a length of nearly 12,000 feet, this F-15E on afterburner will use considerably less to take off. **4** While the pilot keeps the aircraft steady, the backseater monitors the progress of a tanker's boom into the aircraft's aerial refueling port on the left side.





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11 An F-15E gets airborne. More than 63 feet long and with a max takeoff weight of 81,000 pounds, the F-15E is huge for a fighter. The upper fuselage between the vertical tails is sometimes referred to as “the tennis court.” *12* A 916th tanker maneuvers with an F-15E for

an air refueling hookup. *13* The Air Force has 221 F-15Es, almost all bought in the 1980s and 1990s. The 4th Fighter Wing has 96 of them. *14* Maj. William Johnson suits up for a flight, donning G pants. The garment, sometimes called “speed jeans,” automatically inflates with

air when the airplane pulls heavy G loads, compressing blood vessels in the legs and preventing too much blood from draining from the pilot’s upper body. Along with tensing of the stomach muscles, this keeps the pilot or CSO from blacking out.

11 The last stop before stepping to the aircraft is at the ops desk. These aircrew are wearing the harnesses that will connect them to the parachutes integral to their F-15E ACES II ejection seats. **12** The 4th Fighter Wing received its first F-15E at the end of 1988, and the 336th FS became the first operational Strike Eagle squadron the next year. **13** An F-15E prepares to leave the weather shelter for a mission. A typical training sortie will take the crew out over the Atlantic Ocean near North Carolina's Outer Banks, but there are nearby ranges where ordnance can be dropped. **14** The Strike Eagle has been a fixture at Seymour Johnson since it began replacing the F-4 Phantom II. **15** Bures and Russell get ready to lower the canopy and taxi out.



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1 The “Lancers” of the 333rd FS date to 1957, when they flew the F-100 Super Sabre. *2* The front-on angle shows the conformal fuel tanks mounted on the side of the two air intakes and fuselage, as well as the “ramps” at the top of the inlets; they change shape depending on the engines’ need for air. *3* The airmen of the 334th FS have perhaps the most coveted nickname for an F-15E squadron: “The Eagles.” *4* The F-15E was supposed to be replaced by the F-35 at some future date, but the type is highly effective and has plenty of life left in it. USAF expects to keep the Strike Eagle in service well into the 2030s. ■