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AFA's Mission

Our mission is to promote a dominant United States Air Force and a strong national defense and to honor airmen and our Air Force heritage. To accomplish this, we:

Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure US national security.

Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.

Support the Total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

Let the Army Have Them

I couldn't agree more with the comments by [C. J.] Lingo and Colonel Smith in the September issue [*Letters: No A-10, Really?*] p. 8]. Clearly the best replacement for the A-10 is a 21st century version of the aircraft. If the Air Force does not want to support the A-10, perhaps it is time to transfer it to the Army and allow the Army to procure ground support aircraft in the future.

Don Chrissinger
Crofton, Md.

Policemen Don't Retire

And they say, "America can't police the world." In the very excellent article, "Out From Italy" in the September 2014 edition [p. 74], the F-16s of the 31st Fighter Wing prove otherwise. America must police the world.

For roughly a hundred years plus, since the Spanish-American War and the beginning of World War I, American sea- and airpower have been projected upon all the regions of what we would call the "Free World." Europe has sustained American military power on its soil for almost a century now, and [the host countries] approve of it.

And how appropriate this article in light of the recent slaughter of American journalists and noncombatant men, women, and children by ISIS killers in Syria and Iraq. Because we project US airpower out to Italy and beyond, the 31st FW stands ready to answer the call to action on short notice. Combat time!

With my very rough, and very rusty calculations, I projected the Aviano F-16s could reach Ar Raqqa, with three loads from the tankers en route to Syria, and dump a load of high explosives right on the ISIS commander's doorstep, today!

Shades of Rolling Thunder and North Vietnam, attacking from Thailand; my fervent hope is that the White House and the Pentagon do not attempt to micromanage the air campaign and that they allow our gallant F-16 airmen (and others) to achieve and savor victory.

ISIS must be struck down and killed, on their turf, to the last man—and not on North American soil. Let's hope we are all allowed this victory. No prisoners; remember, "Gitmo" is closed.

Michael W. Rea
Savannah, Ga.

PANAMAX 2014

Having served as an Air Force enlisted man in the Panama Canal Zone '73-78, your photo and caption coverage of PANAMAX 2014 caught my eye [*Air Force World: A Panama Chat*, September, p. 20].

I took exception to your portrayal of the exercise as focused on protection of the "Panama Canal zone." The use of the term "zone," even with a small "z," is really a misnomer.

The Panama Canal Zone passed into history in 1979 when under the terms of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties

Do you have a comment about a current article in the magazine? Write to "Letters," *Air Force Magazine*, 1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209-1198. (Email: letters@afa.org.) Letters should be concise and timely. We cannot acknowledge receipt of letters. We reserve the right to condense letters. Letters without name and city/base and state are not acceptable. Photographs cannot be used or returned.—THE EDITORS

60 percent of the Canal Zone territory was returned to Panama. The remaining territory was known as the Canal Area. On Dec. 31, 1999, it was also returned to Panama.

Your coverage inspired me to do some research on the PANAMAX 2014 exercise. The entire exercise, save for a lone B-52 sortie, was conducted in simulation at locations in CONUS. The aircraft, with a crew of seven, departed Ellsworth AFB, S.D., and flew a 15.5-hour ISR mission to the US Southern Command area of operations. It later recovered at Barksdale AFB, La., the aircraft's home station.

Col. Bill Malec,
USAF (Ret.)
O'Fallon, Ill.

Yeah, Pretty Sure Missiles Helped

In reading the recent article by Ms. Rebecca Grant, "The Reagan Buildup," I was surprised to find out that the world was saved by single-seat fighter aircraft only [September, p. 82]. This was a shallow single-focus article that left out the "real" reasons that the Russians came to the table.

During the 1980s, for Ms. Grant's information, USAF had approximately 1,000 ICBMs that were about 30 minutes away from any soccer field in the USSR. Incidentally, the Air Force had also proven the feasibility (while not practical) of a Minuteman air-mobile platform.

To fill in some of Ms. Grant's historical gaps, during the mid-1980s a small group of Systems Command engineers along with their SAC counterparts in Southern California were developing a small ICBM that was land mobile, a rail-mobile multiple independently targetable ICBM, and fielding the Peacekeeper ICBM with 10 individually targetable warheads.

I would contend that these ICBM weapons systems were certainly more of a threat and created a little more apprehension with the Russians than single-seat fighter aircraft.

Part of the issue the Air Force suffers from today is that it can't get beyond single-seat manned aircraft, which ups the cost of the platform by some 40 percent. Sadly the Air Force then buys what it doesn't need—reference your article, same issue, "The Saga of the Spartans."

Many of us believe that the SAC ICBM force had a hand in winning the Cold War.

Col. Quentin M. Thomas,
USAF (Ret.)
Las Vegas, Nev.

Rebecca Grant did a good job of covering the aircraft developed in "The Reagan Buildup," but she never men-

tioned the most powerful Air Force weapon in that buildup, which made its first flight in June 1983 and met initial operation capability in November of 1986. It was the (MX) missile system (LGM-118A), named The Peacekeeper by President Reagan himself.

Lt. Gen. Aloysius G. Casey,
USAF (Ret.)
Redlands, Calif.

To give complete details of the subject in Rebecca Grant's latest article would perhaps require a book, so it is understandable that not all the buildup activities of the period were mentioned. That said, I submit that some important programs should have been included in the discussion.

In the mid- to late-1980s, 50 Peacekeeper intercontinental ballistic missiles were deployed in former Minuteman III ICBM silos. In that time frame the Peacekeeper rail garrison system (50 Peacekeepers in a mobile and therefore more survivable basing mode) was being developed. The small ICBM program was also underway, which would add another mobile system to our arsenal of deterrent forces.

It was said at the time that one of the key factors in the breakup of the Soviet Union was the inability of its economy to sustain the cost of its military modernization efforts. That the ICBM programs mentioned above helped drive the USSR toward more

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defense spending—and thus its demise—should have merited their mention in the article.

Lt. Col. Dennis R. Lyon,
USAF (Ret.)
Layton, Utah

The missiles on the Soesterberg F-15Cs in the lead photo were misidentified. They were AIM-9Ls and AIM-7Fs. The AIM-120s didn't show up until much later (the first few were carried by 33rd TFWF-15Cs from February 1991 during Operation Desert Storm). It is questionable if they ever armed the 32nd TFS, which disbanded in early 1994.

Maj. Jim Rotramel,
USAF (Ret.)
Lexington Park, Md.

Not Those Bad Guys, Other Bad Guys

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Sims gives his biases away at two points in his letter in the September issue [*“Not Made in Our Image,”* p. 8]. In the very first paragraph he states—as factual—that “we supported Iraq against Iran” and that “we supported the Taliban in their efforts to expel the Russians” from Afghanistan. The first assertion is questionable, as we probably supported both sides. Remember arms for hostages? But I don't think anyone can validly claim that we supported the Taliban, which was founded after the Soviet occupation ended.

The Taliban seem to be creatures of the Pakistan ISI, formed from veterans of the mujahedeen who had been supported by that agency during the Soviet occupation. The United States supported other resistance groups that also sought to expel the Soviets. The Taliban was founded in 1994 and came to power in Afghanistan several years after we unwisely left that sad country to its own devices following the Soviet withdrawal. The Taliban had to defeat those who had been supported by the US to take power. Is it likely that some members of the Taliban had been with US supported groups? Certainly, but that is not what the letter said. In fact, there was no Taliban *per se* during the period of the Soviet occupation.

Readers should remember that the Taliban assassinated their enemy and American ally Ahmad Shah Massoud on Sept. 9, 2001, as preparation for the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

But the true giveaway is the use of the term “neocons” as a pejorative in his final paragraph. Readers will probably know that this is not a term used by neutral observers.

MSgt. Bill Brockman,
USAF (Ret.)
Atlanta

Even Earlier Recon

I enjoyed John T. Correll's unusual story on Pancho Villa and the 1916 American excursion to find him [*“Chasing Pancho Villa,”* September, p. 120]. Readers might be interested to learn that a group of French aviators had visited the US as early as 1910 for a year, bringing several different types of aircraft and a number of newly breveted (licensed) pilots to demonstrate their planes to the American public at large and especially the US Army, which was putting a lot of time and effort into investigating the new vehicle's use and advantages on or above the battlefield. The French put together a train with a steam locomotive and several cars in which they placed their aircraft, living quarters and maintenance facilities. Starting in Richmond and heading south/southwest through Tennessee and Louisiana (where the group organizer and leader, John Moisant, was killed in a crash of his Bleriot in New Orleans on the last day of 1910), the group spent considerable time in Texas. They stopped at several cities, including Fort Worth, Dallas, San Antonio, and El Paso, to put on their show. One of the young pilots was Roland Garros. In four years he would put his stamp on aviation history when he attached deflectors to the propeller of his Morane-Saulnier Parasol so that he could fire a single Hotchkiss machine gun along the plane's line of flight. Garros gained three kills with his “fighter” before he was forced down and captured in 1915. He escaped in February 1918 and after making his way back to France and going through retraining, he joined a Spad XIII squadron. He got one more kill before he, himself, was killed in action, although it is not certain whether he was shot down by one of the numerous Fokker D. VIIIs he was engaging, or his synchronizing gear had failed and he had simply shot off his propeller. (There was no damage to his Spad's engine.) He died a day before his 30th birthday. Although he is not the ace historians often claim (of course, you need five kills for such designation), his friends did manage to get his name applied to the major tennis stadium that hosts annual contests of international players.

At any rate, in February 1911 Garros flew some of what might be considered some of the earliest reconnaissance flights to “observe” the various groups of Mexican rebels of the time, not all of whom were directly in support of Pancho Villa but were often offshoots of his main force fighting the different warlords or chieftains who sprang

up against the Mexican government of the time. Photos of these colorful men made them look like they had stepped right out of Wallace Beery's 1934 biopic “Viva Villa.”

Cmdr. Peter B. Mersky,
USNR (Ret.)
Alexandria, Va.

Kremlin Fears

Having worked partly in the media and partly for our government on defense matters during the events of 1983, permit me to briefly annotate some of Peter Grier's assertions in his pithy article, “Able Archer” [*September, p. 106*].

First, Mr. Grier speaks of what he calls Soviet “worries” over Reagan's missile defense program (the Strategic Defense Initiative). Yet as Gorbachev's Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze freely admitted after the demise of Communism and Sovietism in Russia, the Soviets had themselves violated the 1972 ABM Treaty that had forbade ABM. At that time, many years before Reagan's SDI proposal of March 1983, the Soviets had begun erecting at Krasnoyarsk an elaborate coast-to-coast “SDI” of their own. Too, the Soviets had already deployed an impressive anti-missile defense around Moscow (permitted under the treaty) while the US had built none around any of its cities. The Soviets kept upgrading their Moscow ABM.

Thus, what the Kremlin feared about SDI was that the US would get one step ahead of them in the effort to shoot down enemy missiles. Too, they feared, as some informed, retired Soviet officials admitted after 1991, that meeting the US challenge would bankrupt the already overstressed Soviet economy. It was excessively burdened with the colossal Brezhnev-Andropov military buildup and expansion of bases overseas, the biggest such expansion in modern times.

Second, Mr. Grier should have pointed out that the NATO decision to deploy Pershing II and GLCM in Western Europe in the late 1970s was in response to prior Soviet deployments of its so-called “medium-range,” nuclear-tipped SS-20 missiles. Beginning in 1976, these were being deployed in the Soviet bloc and targeted Western cities.

Third, it is not true that the Reagan Administration greatly increased defense expenditures above what President Carter's security team had projected in DOD expenditures for the coming year (1980-81)—that is, following the shocking Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979.

In some respects, the Carter-projected defense spending was scaled back under Reagan.

Finally, Secretary Gates is quoted in Grier's last paragraph with the cautionary statement that the "Soviets may not have believed a NATO attack was imminent in November 1983." In other words, Moscow wished to depict Washington as an aggressor. Indeed, Moscow and some Western interpreters of its behavior depict the Soviets as merely responding to US "aggressiveness." They implicitly echo the Moscow line. One prominent Stateside writer alleged that the plane could not be seen clearly by the Sukhoi (Su-15) pilot since the shutdown occurred, he falsely claimed, on a "moonless night." In fact, a nearly full, gibbous moon shown brightly that night, Sept. 1, 1983, illuminating the white fuselage of the Boeing 747-230B of Flight 007 with its 246 passengers.

2nd Lt. Albert L. Weeks,
USAF (Ret.)
Sarasota, Fla.

The Great, Greasy Ground Guys

Thank you! As a retired enlisted member of USAF, I read *Air Force Magazine* with great appreciation for the continued commitment of the Air Force airmen to keep our nation safe.

I read with interest your article, "Looking East," September [p. 32], where you reported about the forward operating base team at Lask AB, Poland. The team members were listed by career field. As a retired AGE person, I smiled and want to thank you for giving credit to the unheralded supporters of the flight line operations. If it is on the flight line and doesn't fly, it most likely will be a piece of aerospace ground equipment. This important equipment is necessary to launch, recover, service, repair, and test those aircraft that support the defense of our nation. In many articles, your photos give glimpses of this equipment being used for their intended purposes. This equipment provides the electrical power, hydraulic pressure, air pressure, heating, cooling, munitions handling, etc., for proper testing and servicing of our front line aircraft. Wherever you have aircraft or plan to have aircraft, you need to have AGE to keep that aircraft available for flight.

As a retired AGE superintendent, I want to give kudos to our unheralded men and women who for years have gotten dirty, oily, greasy, been assigned great assignments or been assigned to those austere locations like Lask AB, Poland, to provide this small but

significant task in the defense of our nation.

DINSTAAR (Danger is no stranger to an AGE ranger).

SMSGt. Robert W. Gramley,
USAF (Ret.)
Defuniak Springs, Fla.

Hats off to General Larson

It was nice to see the RC-135 finally make its way into the "Airpower Classics" section [September, p. 136]. The bird, in all its versions, has been around for a long time, yet today, still is one of the best real-time and near-real time intelligence sources available to a combat commander.

In the "Famous Fliers" section, there is one notable omission, the name of Maj. Gen. Doyle E. Larson. General Larson began his Air Force career as an enlisted Russian linguist and completed it as the USAF Security Service commander and the first Electronic Security Command commander. Before that, however, a sizable portion of General Larson's midcareer years was wrapped around the RC-135. He successively activated the 6985th Security Squadron at Eielson AFB, Alaska; the 6949th Security Squadron at Offutt AFB, Neb.; and the 6990th Security Squadron at Kadena AB, Okinawa. All three squadrons provided the mission crews for the Rivet Joint (RJ) missions. He proudly wore the red mission scarf that symbolized 100 missions on the RJ. After retirement, he was very active in the Air Force Association, serving as AFA President from 1996 to 1998 and Chairman of the Board from 1998 to 2000.

Just thought you'd like to know.

Maj. Mike Conley,
USAF (Ret.)
Cucamonga, Calif.

Correction

In the August issue, p. 7, we ran a letter entitled "Put Up or Shut Up," by James Slagle. We misstated Mr. Slagle's rank, and should have identified him as a retired colonel.—THE EDITORS

Update Your Info

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