

The 1<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing receives its first F-15, January 1976

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Blazoned across the August 28, 1975 edition of the base newspaper, *Flyer*, the headline said it all: 1<sup>st</sup> TFW to nest Eagles; F-15s cleared for home here. The excitement did nothing but crescendo for the next four months as the 1<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing geared up to bed down the new air superiority fighter. Target date: January 9, 1976.

An operations order, known as a TAC op-ord, was developed, duties throughout the wing were assigned, funds were allocated, invitation lists compiled and an entire timeline was developed. Transportation, security, safety and every detail of the arrival ceremony was addressed. This was going to be a big deal. What would be the name of the auspicious event? Eagle Day was the designated name.

A total of 25 major projects costing \$3 million were undertaken to prepare for the F-15's arrival. Altering existing avionics shops and changing the electrical wiring in several hangars were just some of the measures taken to prepare the Eagle's new nest.

The Langley Daedalian Flight 34 arranged to have a World War I Sopwith Camel biplane to be trucked in to arrive the day before the ceremony, January 8, 1976 as a part of the displays. They tried to get a World War II P-38 Lightning, but that didn't pan out.

After coordinating with the Air Force's Legislative Liaison office, Congressman Thomas Downing, representing the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District, was invited and agreed to attend. He was joined by the mayors of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson and the York County board of supervisors chairman. McDonnell Douglas executives and myriad high-ranking USAF officers also received special invitations. There were 298

distinguished visitors and about 3,000 of the general public who attended that cold winter morning.

Col. Larry Welch, 1<sup>st</sup> TFW commander, and later AF Chief of Staff, was kept informed of all progress and when milestones were reached. Not everything went perfectly though. A Nov. 26, 1975 memo with his stamp and in green ink asked a succinct question; “How many people will fit on the reviewing stand?”

The only reviewing stand on base was a mere 12 by 12 feet. So two flat bed trailers were used and civil engineers got busy building rails and steps for a platform that could hold the estimated 30 to 40 people.

Another memo had to do with special coverage in the Flyer. The only problem was the publisher went bankrupt, so the base Information Office published a one-page “Extra” which gave details of the event and invited base people to the ceremony. The story for the base paper didn’t get printed until January 22.

The formal program commenced January 9, 1976 at 3 p.m. with various static displays, band music and a bicentennial salute. Then the F-15, tail number 74-083 landed at 3:25 p.m. piloted by Lt. Col. Richard Craft, the commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron.

The Eagle was touted as having secured nearly every time-to-climb world record. So once over the field Lt. Col. Craft accelerated to 300 knots in afterburner and performed the Immelman maneuver – named after the World War I German Ace, Max Immelman. The maneuver is still performed by Langley’s own East Coast Aerial Demonstration Team.

The aircraft was marshaled into its parking area by Sgt. Connie Sobkowiak. A woman was the crew chief for Langley's first F-15.

Kyle Shockley, a seventh grade student at Dunbar Elementary School in Newport News and Terri Ewell, a ninth grader at Benjamin Syms Junior High School, were co-winners in naming the first F-15 at Langley, the Peninsula Patriot. They had the honor of placing the name on the nose of the Eagle.

Speeches proclaiming the significance of the Eagle landing at Langley were made by TAC Commander, General Robert Dixon and Congressman Downing.

For the formal dinner in the evening, the menu selections at the club were Tender Prime Ribs of Beef with Green Beans Almondine. A new special dessert was created, the "Eagle Delight," also known as Ice Cream with Crème Dementhe.

Gen. Dixon was the keynote speaker at the Eagle Day Dinner. "Challenge is not a new thing for the 1<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing or you its members," the general said in his speech. "You will meet the challenges of the present and future – just as your predecessors did throughout the years – that's why you are the first F-15 unit."