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## Introduction

The 57th Wing, located at Nellis Air Force Base just north of Las Vegas, Nevada, has a mission like no other in the Air Force. On any given day, a visitor is likely to see large numbers of fighters, bombers, transports, helicopters or maybe even the Thunderbirds in the traffic pattern. Numbers of aircraft parked on our ramp will vary from just over 40 to in excess of 220, and our flying operation frequently begins before 5 am and doesn't end until after midnight. The 57th Wing is, indeed, a busy place.

The centerpiece of Nellis for over 40 years is the USAF Weapons School. Formerly known as the USAF Fighter Weapons School, the school was established in the later days of World War II as an aerial gunnery school for instructors. In the 1950s, the school changed its focus from being an aerial gunnery school to one teaching pilots to be expert instructors, both in the air and on the ground. In the early 1990s, the School changed its name to the USAF Weapons School as its focus shifted from only fighter aircrews to include bomber, intelligence and command and control specialties. In 1995, the school expanded once again to include Search and Rescue while losing the F-111 to retirement. In each of the Weapons School's nine divisions (two of which are located at other bases), the focus is first and foremost to produce expert instructors who then return to their units to teach others. In the process of learning to be expert instructors, these students also learn to physically master the many skills associated with their particular weapons system.

The 57th Wing is also host to the USAF Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds. Nellis has been their home since the late 1950s and the Thunderbirds have performed for millions of people around the world. Their show season typically begins in March of each year and ends in November. During the season, the Thunderbirds are "on the road" nearly every week, returning home for only a few days each month. During the off season, the Thunderbirds are here training new team members in preparation for the next season. They can often be seen practicing both at Nellis and at Indian Springs Auxiliary Airfield, just 45 miles north of Nellis. Their museum and hangar draw thousands of visitors each year.

For the past twenty years, the 57th Wing has been host to the largest, most highly instrumented airborne training exercise in the world - Red Flag. The Nellis Range Complex offers a "one of a kind" experience for aircrew training, with aircrews and aircraft coming from each of our sister services plus air forces from all over the free world to participate in this realistic, combat oriented training. The goal of Red Flag is to properly prepare aircrews for their first combat missions. Using Operation Desert Storm results as a guide, Red Flag earned its rightful place. A typical Red Flag mission will include 60-70 aircraft launching, employing and recovering together. Once each year, a Green Flag exercise replaces Red Flag, Green Flag is limited to United States Military only participation and focuses on electronic combat.

Another valuable joint forces training exercise based in the 57th Wing is Air Warrior. Air Warrior is the air portion of the US Army's ground maneuver training exercises, located at the National Training Center near Fort Irwin, California. Like its counterpart Red Flag, Air Warrior provides highly instrumented, combat oriented training for aircrews in providing close air support to Army maneuver forces on the ground. A typical Air Warrior mission will include sixteen

to twenty fighter aircraft plus an occasional bomber.

An often overlooked operation at Nellis is our involvement in the operational test and evaluation of improvements to our combat aircraft, to include detachments at B-1, B-52 and F-117 bases. The 57th Test Group is deeply involved in test plan development and flight test of aircraft hardware and software, plus evaluation of foreign equipment and tactics. The Test Group evaluates current tactics as well as develops new tactics to both employ our own new technologies as well as develop counters to potential enemy capabilities. All of the tactics manuals for the Air Force are written and revised by the test group.

Two operational flying squadrons are also part of the 57th Wing, The 561st Fighter Squadron flies the venerable F4G Wild Weasel aircraft. These aircraft were designed to seek out and destroy enemy surface to air threat systems before they can threaten friendly aircraft. These aircraft and aircrews have been on a nearly continuous deployment to southwest Asia since before Desert Storm, The US Air Force recently announced the inactivation of the squadron and the retirement of the F-4G (the Wild Weasel mission will be performed by modified F-16 aircraft). The 66th Rescue Squadron flies the HH-60 "Jolly Green" helicopter designed to go into hostile territory and rescue downed friendly aircrew members. These highly capable aircraft and aircrews are capable of around the clock rescue and are frequently called upon for peacetime, civilian rescue. Soon to appear in the 57th Wing is an unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle (UAV) squadron featuring the newly developed "Predator" UAV. In addition to our day to day operations, the 57th Wing is also host to "Gunsmoke" and "Longshot" exercises. Gunsmoke is the Air Force's biannual world wide gunnery competition. Aircrews and support personnel from all over the Air Force come together to compete for both individual and team awards during this ten day exercise. Longshot is an ACC sponsored, one day, large force employment exercise that attacks targets on the Nellis range complex. During this exercise, aircraft from ACC's 8th, 91h and 121h Air Forces launch from their home bases and rendezvous in the air to form a large strike package that then attacks targets on our ranges. All aircrews then recover at Nellis where their exercises are critiqued and graded, with an overall winning team named.

Supporting Air Combat Command's largest and most diverse flying operation are the 57th Logistics Group and the 57th Operations Group. The logistics group provides maintenance expertise and support for six different types of aircraft assigned to the 57th Wing: F-15, F-15E, F-16 (three different models), A/OA-10, HH-60 and F-4G. In addition, the 57th supports seven different types of jet engines and provides all munitions support for the various flag and Air Warrior exercise. The Operations Group provides daily scheduling, air traffic control, weather, airfield operations and supervisory support to a flying schedule that averages from nearly a hundred sorties each day (without Red Flag) to over two hundred when Red Flag is in town. In addition, the 547th Intelligence Squadron operates the Adversary Threat Facility (known as the "Petting Zoo") where students and visiting aircrew members alike can gain "hands-on" experience with captured or donated foreign military weapons systems.

Nellis, and the 57th Wing, is a busy place. The wing bustles with activity throughout the year and is the focal point for combat air power employment not only for the Air Force, but for the free world. There is an old saying that goes: "As Nellis goes, so goes the combat capability of the United States Air Force." A more appropriate saying today might be: "As Nellis goes, so goes the combat capability of the free world.

-- Brigadier General John F Miller, Jr.  
Commander-57th Wing, Nellis Air Force Base