

DOCA DESERT CONFERENCE

JUNE 28, 2022, EDWARDS AFB

DOCA Desert Rats Gather at the “EMBASSY”

DOCA conferences usually start at major U.S. Embassies (Beijing, Jerusalem). The closest this expedition came was the exotic Embassy Suites, Palmdale where we had a Monday evening meet & greet. All hands left in anticipation of a full day on the morrow.

Anticipation realized: All aboard (Navy term) 7:45 AM bus, miles of desert ahead:



EDW ESSENTIALS

- CODE = EDW, after Capt. Glen Edwards, WWII 50 mission vet and test pilot killed in 1948 crash of the YB-49 Flying Wing
- 3 Core Components
 - Flying operations
 - Engineering
 - Maintenance
- Command: Brig. Gen. Mathew Higer, Commander 412th Test Wing leads 8,000 personnel in the developmental test and evaluation of:
 - B-1 C-5 F-16 KC-10
 - B-2 C-17 F-22 KC-46
 - B-52 F-35 KC-145and emerging technologies.
- Dimensions: 470 mi.² with 7.8 miles concrete runways, the longest of which is 15,000' (those of us who fly out of John Wayne's 4000' shed some tears). Plus, Rogers Dry Lake several more miles of flat emergency landing, ground speed testing and original takeoff

platform. Hard clay, sand soil. A few days ago, covered with 6 inches of rain, evaporated in 24 hours.

- Location: California, mostly in Kern County, also San Bernardino and LA.
- Brief history:
 - 1882 = water stop, Santa Fe RR;
 - 1910 Homesteaded by Corum Family whose name, frontwards and backwards (MUROC) still appears ubiquitously;
 - 1930s, visionary Hap Arnold leads U.S. government acquisition of land for various testing, no longer possible at Riverside's March Air Force Base;
 - 1937 live ammunition, combat dogfighting drills (P-38, P-41, and others in the then arsenal. Borden bombsight invented and tested here.
- Mind-boggling statistics
 - X – 15A2, piloted by major Pete Knight reaches Mach:6. 72, fastest ever recorded;
 - NASA's Joe Walker reaches elevation, 354,200 feet, highest recorded;
 - BLACKBIRD, On display at blackbird park our last stop, tested at 2070 mph, 80,257' . Full capability remains classified.
- Characters
 - PONCHO BARNES, female aviation pioneer ahead of Amelia Earhart, who bought some ground nearby on which she built the Rancho Oro Verde fly-in dude ranch, capacity 900. Celebrities flew in from Hollywood for ribald weekends. Her hospitality and flying credentials were such as to have the bar at today's MUROC Club named after her.
 - FOOGIE, sergeant Fogleman USAF who in the 1930s lead a five-man detachment from March Air Force Base to staff and develop the growing ground facilities. These five guys were so typical of the U.S. military NCOs, and they live in history.

ARRIVAL AT EDW

Security pre-cleared, we sailed through 99° temperature with a 31mph tailwind to be greeted by George B. Welsh, Director Air Force Flight Test Museum (aka CO in charge of inter service KUMSHAW which skill he frequently uses to keep the ever-expanding museum well stocked). He knows Edwards pre-WWI to the present, and obviously loves each part of this gargantuan patch of sand and concrete. Perfect day long entertaining guide, featuring fascinating info about every facility along the way, starting with a windshield tour in and around miles of roads and runways.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hangar with scales, sunk in the concrete deck, capable of weighing any U.S. aircraft. (NB: in digging the hole to install the scales, the largest silver vein in the Mojave Desert was discovered. It's still there, USAF prevailed over the prospectors);
- Painting hangar. Naturally, all aircraft need constant washing, cleaning, and repainting. A generous private contractor, PP&G, mixes, matches, researches, delivers FOB, and guides

applications for each individual aircraft. This unabashedly patriotic company continues to donate daily to the Air Force. Hooray!

- Flightline openside hangars in the first of which four F-22s were parked, and in the next line approximately twenty F-35s, one of which (F-35 Lightning II marked AA-1) landed perfectly on one of the Edwards' runways during a recent joint strike fighter integrated test.



- Live ammo, live missile firing range, still in frequent use. George related how an A-10 (Warthog) firing its 30mm canons at ground level blew the backend out of the bunker.
- In the distance NASA facility, double fence security, no photos, beyond our line-of-sight vision.

COMMAND BRIEFING

After a few hours under the desert sun, the refrain of a hallowed cowboy song:

We Rode the Burning Sand in Search of Water, Water, Cool Clear Water

led us to the Command Center for a 412th Flight Test Wing mission briefing.

Bird colonel Nick Clementz, Commander 412th Maintenance Group, opened with a pertinent personal history: graduation from the Air Force Academy without wings to become a Maintenance professional. Along the way he and his wife crafted a six-child moving menagerie which has followed and supported him at his many duty stations.

With calm enthusiasm he walked us around the whole Base via slides. Q&A interspersed: lively and informative. From a DOCA perspective and exemplified by Col Clementz, the USAF continues to attract, produce, and promote the finest patriots, on the desert sands as well as in the wild blue yonder.

LUNCH

Lunch with the troops is a hallmark/highlight of every DOCA briefing. Verifying that no air force personnel or guests have ever succumbed to malnutrition at an Air Base, stimulated but hungry we joined the Club MUROC private dining room chow line.

Three USAF 1st Sergeants joined us for lunch. Our table hosted massive 1st Sgt. Joe, about 6'4" and 230 pounds of blue-ribbon steel, recently appropriated from the medical core to base personnel

filled us in on current enlistment, service (fortunately full of patriots) and discipline in and around the ranks. He verified that quality of recruits and morale remains high. Great lunch.

We bussed several miles to Edwards North, home of some of the many historic aircraft being restored and readied for display at the new, enlarged Museum (thank you, George).

Unpadding the rolling hangar doors, we were introduced to:

- B-47, Stratojet designed at and first flown from EDW.
- CARIBOU 007, commonly known as Global Hawk #1. This is the original plane, almost perfectly preserved. On a recent tour, a senior citizen guest, also well preserved, recognized “his” very own Global Hawk. Tearfully he crossed the concrete and gave her fuselage a hug. He was her first pilot in Vietnam.
- SHOOTING STAR, an original.
- F-117 prototype, our first large radar resistant aircraft. Radar transmissions still would disintegrate/dissolve not rebound.
- Finally, and most fittingly a penultimate pleasure for our group, a huge A-3 (all three crewman fit into the cramped cockpit). DOCAian Rick Liebermann conducted our tour from firsthand experience. Here in his own words:

Hi Don

I hope this is the old photo you asked about. The black A-3 aircraft is shown aboard the USS Enterprise in 1968 off the coast of Vietnam (called the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club.). It is called an RA-3B. (“R” for reconnaissance.). It was then, the largest plane to land on a carrier.

The A-3 we saw at Edwards AFB was airframe number one. Same airframe but different set up. Our mission was to fly over Vietnam, North and South, taking aerial pictures, and infrared imagery, to look for targets like truck convoys and missile sites. The film was then removed from the aircraft, analyzed and the resulting information provided to the attack squadrons for aerial strikes. You can see also see A-4’s, an A-6’s and numerous F-4’s up forward. These planes provided the aerial strike capability.



SO LONG OR SAYONARA EDW

- After assuring the hangar door was again padlocked and the facility secured, we were back on the bus headed off-base to the Blackbird Airpark Museum where we walked around to the non-classified surviving Blackbirds and reminisced over their amazing history flying at heights never before achieved. Naturally, the story of Gary Powers' downing over Russia completed the picture.

Our parting memories are preserved in picture snapped by our bus driver just inside the Edwards North hangar.



On this note the entire assemblage bids each other and our hosts:

Adios, hasta la vista

Respectfully submitted,

Don Regan scribe