

FEATURE

12th TFW reunites in Fort Worth this autumn

By Robert Goetz
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This October, a group of former Air Force officers, enlisted personnel and civilians bound by their common experience during the Vietnam War will meet again to share their stories.

They were assigned to MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., and Cam Ranh Bay and Phu Cat Air Bases in South Vietnam, but they also have much in common with past and present personnel of Randolph's 12th Flying Training Wing.

They are 12th Tactical Fighter Wing Association members, who share more than just their numerical designation with the 12th FTW.

"They are us and we are them," said Lane Bourgeois, 12th FTW historian. "Those are our veterans. We belong to each other."

The wing was activated as the 12th Fighter-Escort Wing at Turner AFB, Ga., Nov. 1, 1950, then moved to Bergstrom AFB, Texas, about a month later. The unit remained at Bergstrom

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when it was redesignated the 12th Strategic Fighter Wing in January 1953 and the 12th Fighter-Day Wing in July 1957, but was inactivated less than a year later, in January 1958.

In April 1962, the unit was redesignated the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing and was activated at MacDill AFB, where it became the first Air Force combat wing to convert to the F-4C Phantom II before beginning its perma-

nent deployment at Cam Ranh Bay AB in 1965. In Southeast Asia, the F-4Cs flew air-to-air missions against North Vietnamese fighters and attacked ground targets.

In March 1970, flight operations at Cam Ranh Bay relocated to Phu Cat AB as part of the "Vietnamization" process. The wing was inactivated in November 1971, but was redesignated the 12th FTW in March 1972 and activated in May 1972 at Randolph. It's been at Randolph ever since.

Mr. Bourgeois said the 12th FTW also has ties to the World War II-era 12th Bombardment Group first based at McChord Field, Wash., which he called a "predecessor unit."

"The bomb group is a different unit with its own lineage and honors," he said. "It is now the 12th Operations Group. As long as the group is with us, we're authorized to fly their streamers and awards on our flag."

But the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing is an actual part of the 12th FTW's history, Mr. Bourgeois said.

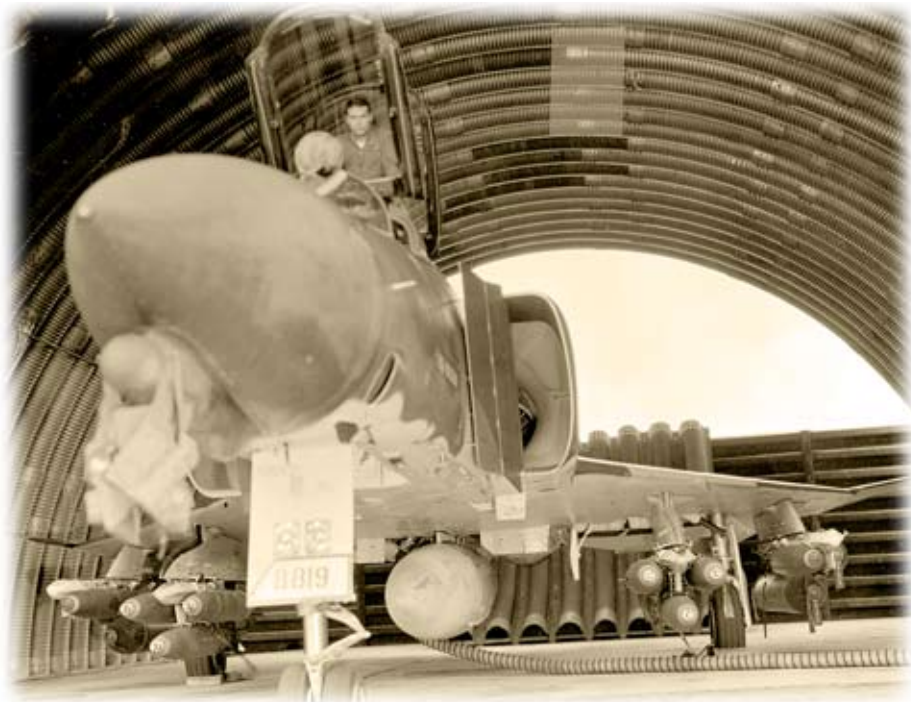
"It's great that we have an organization out there that keeps that history alive," he said.

The 12th TFW Association will



Courtesy photo

Two F-4 Phantoms fly over the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing building at Phu Cat Air Base in Southeast Asia.



Courtesy photo

A crewman performs a cockpit inspection on an F-4 Phantom as it sits under an open air hangar in Southeast Asia.

reunite Oct. 7-11 in Fort Worth, an event that will include general business meetings, a display of photos and military memorabilia and a banquet.

Mr. Bourgeois said the reunion provides a great opportunity for 12th FTW leadership and squadron commanders to celebrate a compelling era in the wing's history.

"This is a group of veterans keeping alive the time when we were a tactical fighter wing," he said.

They also belong to the 12th Flying Training Wing, Mr. Bourgeois said.

"Their organization is still alive," he said. "It's a different mission – a flying training mission – but the line is unbroken. They have a home here at Randolph."