

force called Air National Guard. Some of them fly super equipment many European countries only can dream about. Down in the deep south – in Alabama – photoreporter Greg “Cactus” Davis was fascinated by a very special F-16 from the ANG – with a flaming red tail. Here is the story about the red tailed viper – illustrated by Gregs outstanding photos.

TALE OF THE RED TAILED VIPER





The 187th Fighter Wing is based at Dannelly Field in Montgomery, Alabama and fly F-16C Fighting Falcon aircraft. The 160th Fighter Squadron operates the jets in the multi-mission role and shares the runway with the Montgomery Regional Airport.

The "Dixie Demolition" has been called upon in the last few years to participate in Operation Noble Eagle, the combat air patrol missions over US cities following the Sept. 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks and twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 187th FW deployed over 500 personnel along with unit aircraft to the desert from Jan. 2003-April 2003. In Sept. 2004 the unit was again

deployed to the Middle East where they made a significant contribution to Operation Iraqi Freedom by becoming the first unit in the US military to use the GBU-38 in combat. The GBU-38 is a GPS guided 500-pound bomb. The GBU-38 was used by the 187th during the Battle of Fallujah.

Currently the 187th flies a specially painted F-16C with a bright red tail and markings that honor the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II fame. Tuskegee, where the original unit trained, is near Montgomery, Al. (see sidebar story, Tale of the Red Tailed Viper)





Besides the color found on F-16C serial 86-0341, colors have been toned-down in the markings of the 187th FW aircraft. This is directly attributable to the unit's continuing participation in overseas combat operations. The unit aircraft are still unique in the fact that each jet wears the name of a major population center within the state on its tail. The 187th FW is the only unit within the USAF/ANG/AFRC to do this.

Question: What do Tuskegee Airmen P-51s, a particular 1965 Corvette, and an F-16C of the AL ANG all have in common?

Answer: Matching bright red paint!

The idea to paint an F-16 of the Alabama Air National Guard with a special scheme to honor the Tuskegee

Airmen came directly from the top. Col. Stanley "Sid" Clarke, the Commander of the 187th FW, had the idea after learning that Lt Gen. Daniel James III, the Director of the Air National Guard, is the son of the first black General Officer in the USAF, General Daniel "Chappie" James. Chappie James was one of the original Tuskegee Airmen.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first all-black flying unit within the Army Air Corps (later the USAF) and underwent flight training at Tuskegee Army Airfield in Tuskegee, Alabama. The unit flew bombers and fighters but only aircraft assigned to the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later the 99th Fighter Squadron) had the famous red tails painted on their P-51C Mustangs.



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Col. Clarke made his suggestion to a few fellow officers within the unit to get the ball rolling and generate ideas. Since the Wing Commander can authorize a one-time deviation in markings for a jet within the unit there was little doubt that a special paint scheme could be accomplished. After initial ideas were reviewed it was decided they would paint the tail bright-red to emulate the red tails of the P-51C Mustangs flown by the 99th Pursuit Squadron

Before starting any painting, the committee had to first answer the question, "What color red should the tail be painted?" Col. Dickey recalls that Col. Clarke said he

thought the original red color on the Tuskegee Airmen P-51s would be close to the red color of his 1965 Corvette. Armed with this bit of advice, the Corrosion Control team members, who would eventually paint the jet, went to a local automotive paint supplier in Montgomery, Al. and got paint to match the Corvette. The tail of F-16C, 86-0341, was then painted overall "Corvette" red while the serial numbers and "City of Tuskegee" was changed from tactical grey to white. The markings were completed with the addition of specially made Tuskegee Airmen decals that were applied to both sides of the jet.

