

Bruce Leffel

My Time in 71st



My Short Time in the 71st

By Bruce Leffel, Crew Chief 71st FIS

The 71st FIS, Malmstrom AFB, was my first permanent duty assignment after 43151C Tech School at Sheppard AFB, TX.

I got to the 71st in Feb 1970 just after the "Cornfield Bomber" incident. Pilot Gary Foust was a young 1st. Lt. Maj. Leland Wolford was our Maintenance Officer and every FCF he'd fly he'd put the F-106 straight up and barrel roll out of sight. We'd all be out there to watch.

I was just a young asst. crew chief working with C.C. Sgt. Jimmy Jackson on "Balls 7" (59-0007) which was our squadron commander Lt. Col. Francis D. Leonard's aircraft. I can remember being just a 19 year old kid from Indiana and being so proud to have my name painted on that NLG door.

My time wasn't long in the 71st as I got my 5 skill level, went on a TDY to Tyndall AFB and then picked up a very quick reassignment to Bitburg AB, Germany in Oct. 1970.

I loved the F-106 and thought it was much easier to work on than the F-4D/E of Bitburg, where I started out in the 53rd TFS before we went to wing maintenance and the 36th OMS. I flew to Germany after a 30 day leave on Thanksgiving Day 1970.

All the other young guys except me were getting long lead time orders for Japan (but ended up in Korea). My 71st Line Chief, SMSgt.

Seward said I must of picked up an assignment that somebody got out of. Had a good time in Europe with many TDYs to Zaragoza, Aviano, and even Bodo, Norway. Probably only spent half my tour actually at Bitburg and got out in Sept. 1973 as a SSgt.

Worked at a couple different jobs after that, then went back to school at Colorado Aero Tech and got my A&P at age 40. Got hired with American Eagle in San Jose, then after that some location transfers, then a transfer to American Airlines.

I retired from AA in Austin, TX in 2015. I was awarded the "Golden Wrench" at American in 2011, but I always missed my F-106s and my F-4s.

The "Flying School Buses" just never gave me the thrill of the fighter jets afterburner & speed.