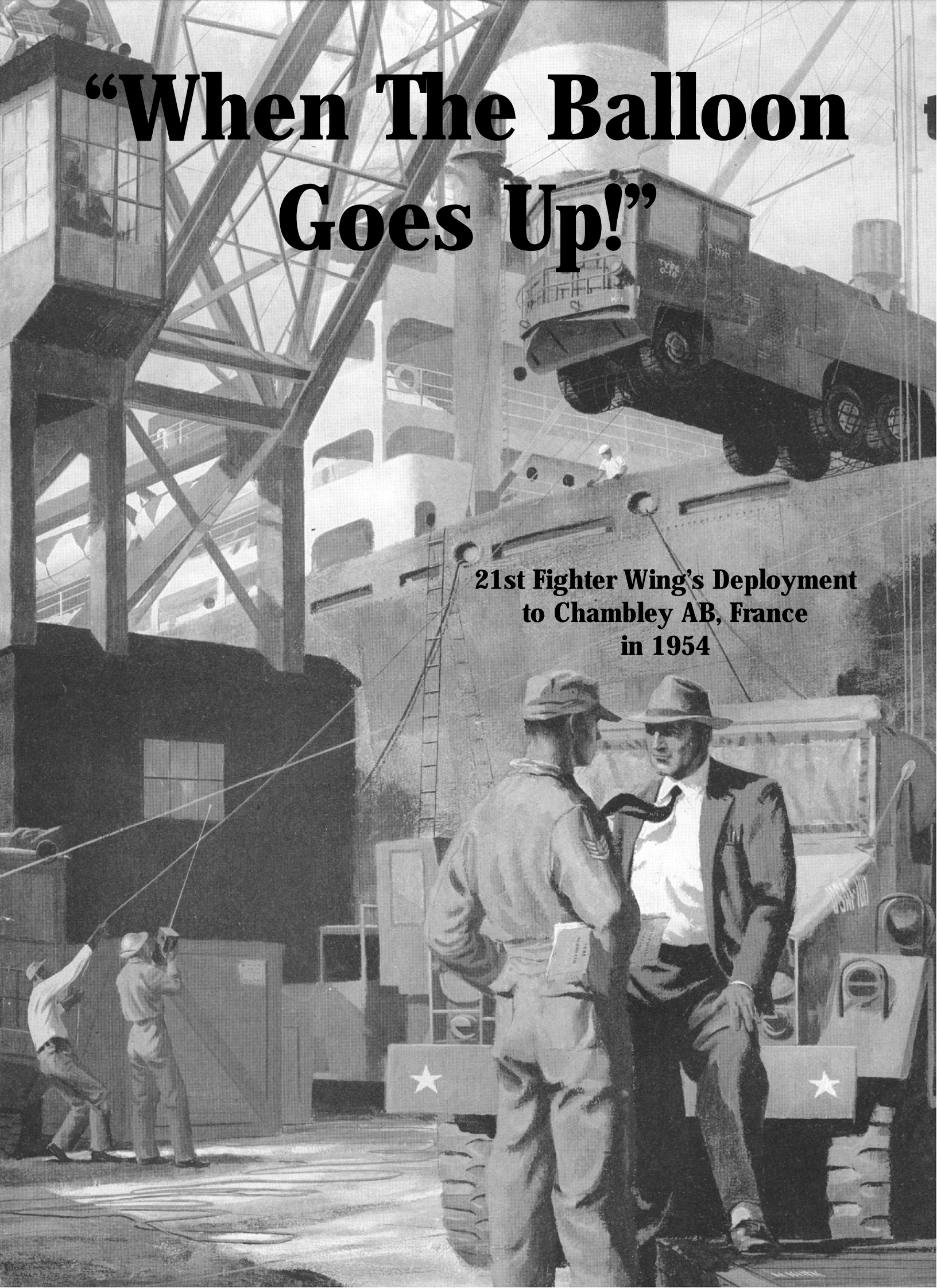


# **“When The Balloon Goes Up!”**

**21st Fighter Wing's Deployment  
to Chambley AB, France  
in 1954**



## *A fighter wing moves to France as part of the NATO build-up to prevent World War III*

### *Part 1 - The Preparation*

**M**ILITARY MEN in Europe have a saying about the possibility of another war. "When the balloon goes up, you've got to be ready." It is put in other ways, too. A wing commander in Bitburg, Germany, says, "When they pull the string." A headquarters general says, "When they blow the whistle." But they all mean the same thing. The United States Air Force in Europe and 384 million people under the North Atlantic Treaty have been preparing for a day they all hope will never come — "When the balloon goes up."

Contrails lace the skies over Europe today, high altitude evidence that the forces under NATO are sharpening their techniques. And the man in the hard hat at the controls of the jet may be from Texarkana or Bury St. Edmunds, or a French Town the GI's call "Shatto Roo." Fresh turned earth and grunting bulldozers in many parts of Europe are signs of new jet bases being built with NATO funds, and there are a great many of them. At the first of 1955, more than 120 jet bases were admitted to be in operation in Europe and many more were being prepared to receive the jet wings of NATO countries.

#### **NATO Gets the 21st**

This story deals with the preparation of a single American outfit, the 21st Fighter Wing from the California desert. George Air Force Base near Victorville, flying F-86 Sabres. The base is a few minutes by jet over the San Bernardino mountain range from Los Angeles and the coast. The 21st Wing was committed to NATO in 1954, and assigned to a new base being prepared at Chambley, in Northeastern France, one of a concentration of jet bases near the Saar Basin.

Col. Robert Rowland, Commanding the 21st Wing, heard the news about mid-year and, squinting at the big maps on the walls of his office at George AFB, discovered that it was in the bulls-eye of the ancient invasion path of armies between France and Germany from the Romans to the Nazis. Nearby Roman

aqueducts attest to the age of established cities in that area of France.

Even before the official movement directive was issued, preparation for the move was begun by the Wing. Colonel Rowland and a small group of officers flew to France to inspect the new home of the base and to bring back information about it to more than 1,500 men, as well as 1,500 wives and children, eagerly awaiting word of the French town of Chambley which had suddenly become important in their lives. The movement of a large military group not only involves the breaking up of an established organization, but the personal lives of everyone. New plans must be made, whether families plan someday to join their men or wait out the 2-year overseas tour someplace at home.

Colonel Rowland knew that many of his men had lived overseas and would not be surprised at any situation on a new base. But it was different with the families. He found himself with two major worries—the first to see that his Wing was combat ready when it touched French soil, and the second was to make the move as easy on the men and their families as was possible. This last worry was a primary reason for his personal inspection of the base at Chambley.

#### **How About Chambley?**

As for the town of Chambley, there seems to be no apparent reason for the settlement. Like most French rural towns, its history dates into the dim past. It is a cluster of ancient stone farm buildings along a common street, used by farm wagons and farm animals as much as by motor cars, which are few in the community. Most Americans would say that Chambley resembles the rural Pennsylvania farm village of the pre-motor car era. In France the farm houses do not dot the countryside as in America, but are clustered together. It has been this way since the Middle Ages and before when people built together for protection from all sorts of vandals and wanderers. There is a rail siding at Chambley now

which carries material to the new base. American veterans may not be familiar with the name of Chambley, but nearby is famous Verdun, Nancy and Metz.

Chambley was by-passed by the Prussians when they made Metz, a few miles away, a German city in 1871. It was in Metz at the close of World War I that American doughboys attacked a famous statue and brought it crashing down. The statue was of Kaiser Wilhelm astride his horse, his finger pointing toward Paris, 188 miles away. The old people of Metz speak German; the younger ones speak French. "Sauerkraut," said a townsman, "is as popular in Metz as French fried potatoes."

Today the countryside between Metz and Chambley is sprinkled with moss covered monuments to the great war of 1871 between France and Germany, the Franco-Prussian War. Many markers point out the scenes of bitter engagements. Chambley was by-passed again in 1914 by a hairs-breadth when Metz again became a battlefield. Barbed wire entanglements of World War I still lay rusting in the fields near Chambley, and souvenir-hunting GI's still find helmets and other litter of armies in the grass grown trenches dug during that great war. Chambley was by-passed in World War II also, but the signs of battle are close by. Many houses in the towns show scars of two wars—the shrapnel bursts of World War I somewhat darker in color than the shrapnel bursts of World War II. Brush-grown gun emplacements and silent pill boxes overlook the rail siding for the new base, and broken bridges attest the hasty retreat of the Nazis from the rushing movements of General Patton, whose roaring tanks were heard clearly in Chambley.

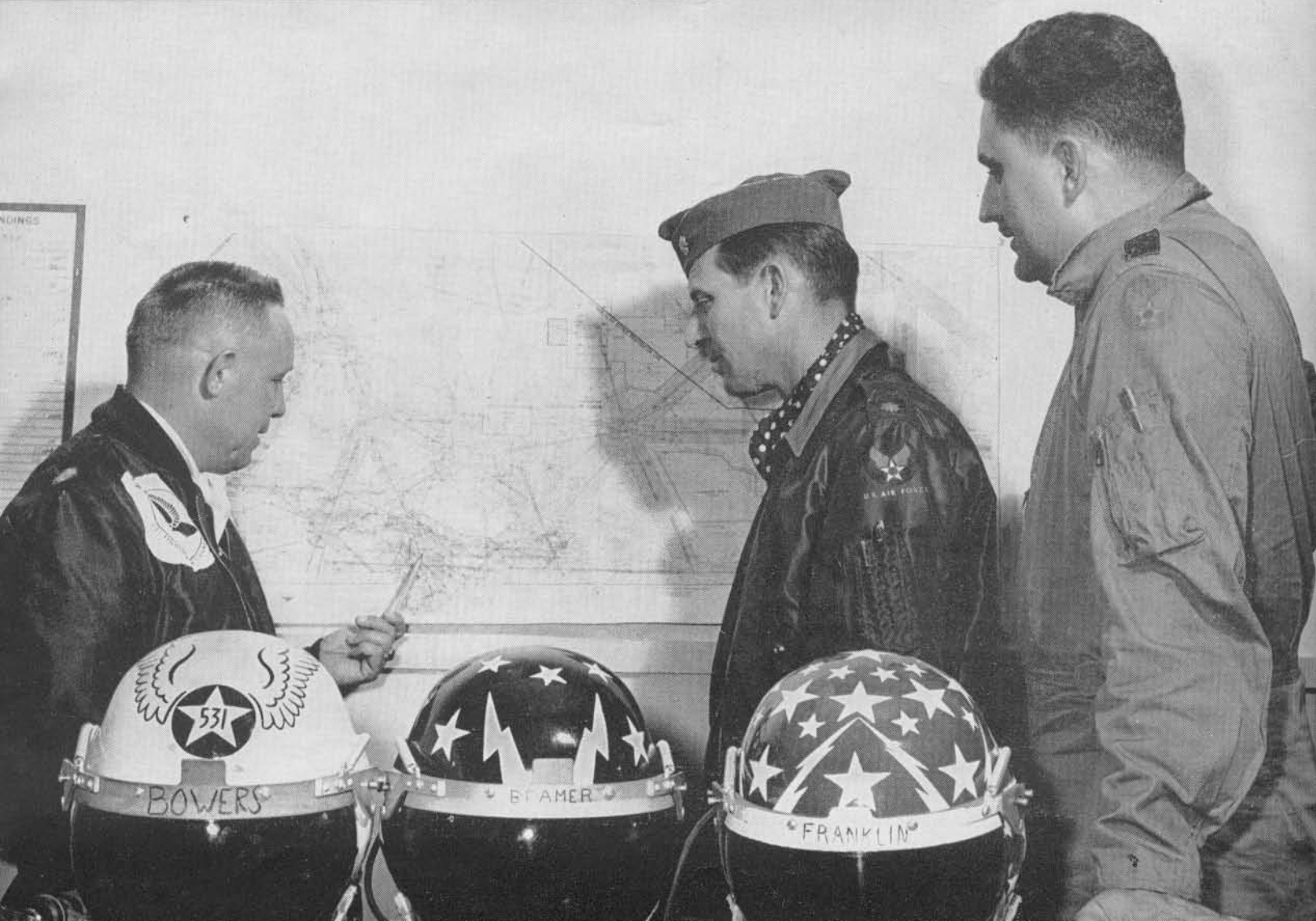
#### **Base in Rural France**

Since the area of France in which the new bases are operating is largely open rural country, housing has been a major problem of visitors for years. The average age of the houses in that part of France is 120 years. Two-thirds have





At left: one of the 375 vehicles taken by the wing from California to Chambley, France.



Below left: The three squadron commanders of the 21st who led the flights over the jet bridge are, left to right, Lt. Col. Charley Bowers; Maj. Ross Beamer and Lt. Col. R. C. Franklin, Jr.



personal cars were taken along to France by many of the men. This one is being prepared for shipment out of the port of New York.

Below right: A/IC Thomas Tuck, holds the position of crew chief of the wing commander's plane. The 21st Wing's boss is Col. Robert Rowland.







Parkas were a must for the men flying the jet bridge through Greenland. A/3C Jack Seifert looks for A/2C Thomas O'Neill hidden under his fur-lined hood.



At right: Maj. John Weed's job was to prepare 2,000 tons of equipment for overseas shipment. One of his many helpers was M/Sgt. James Gilmore.



Freight cars took more than 130 large trucks to the Port of Hueneme. The Ames Victory took them to France.



Some of the equipment, valued at 5 million dollars, which accompanied the 21st Wing to make it self sufficient on its new base.



Col. Dean Luehring, 21st Group Commander, was pleased with the performance of his 78 Sabres on the 6,000 mile flight over the jet bridge through Greenland and Iceland to Western Europe.

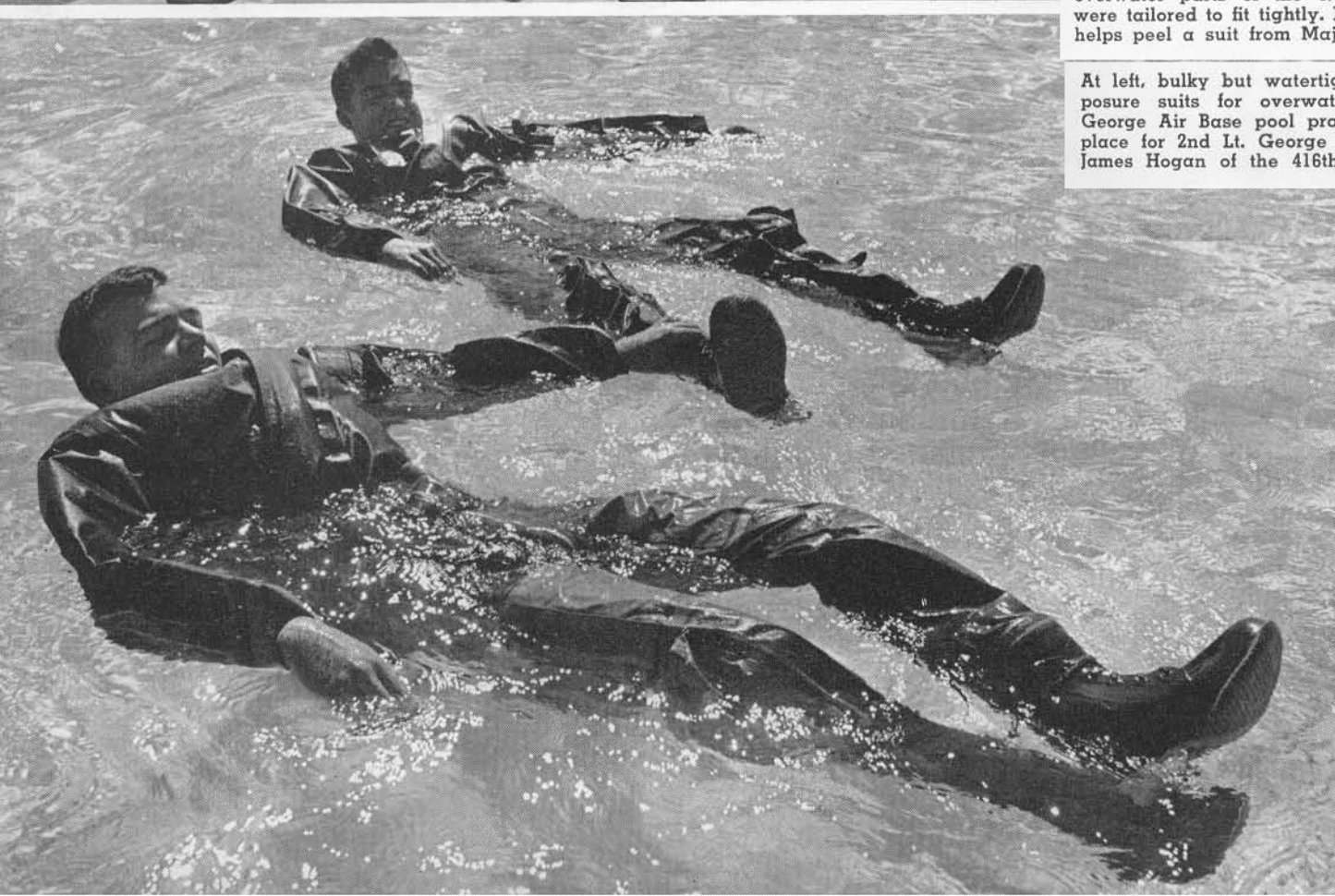


Every man in the 21st Wing was instructed to take 6 weeks of French. Many wives took the course, too. Here instructor Philip Coinson, left, tries out the newly acquired French accents of 1st Lt. Harry Fegley, and 1st Lt. Robert Karsh, both of the 21st TAC hospital.





Top left, exposure suits to be used on the overwater parts of the 6,000 mile flight were tailored to fit tightly. Lt. Paul McCoy helps peel a suit from Major Guy Oliver.



At left, bulky but watertight are the exposure suits for overwater safety. The George Air Base pool provided an ideal place for 2nd Lt. George Carter and Lt. James Hogan of the 416th, to test them.



Top right: Exposure suits ready to be packed along with the gear of the maintenance teams are collected by Lt. George Joseph, Personal Equipment officer.

Below right, Daughter Christy, age 1½, agrees with her dripping wet dad, Capt. Robert P. Smith, that this is a funny kind of swimming suit. He can float like a cork.







Hero worship is registered on the faces of the children of Captain Bill Waller of the 72nd squadron, getting an overseas shot from Nurse Capt. Cleo Swearingen. All family members going overseas had the "shots."



Keeping the "birds" clean is a never-ending but necessary task. Here a Sabre is groomed prior to its next flight, the 6,000-mile hop across the United States and the top of the world to the new base in France.

Time out to play with the cat is taken by these men of the 21st Wing readying equipment for the move overseas. Many pets were taken to France by the men and their families



Overseas shots on a production line basis were given to 1,500 men. Pilot took theirs on week-ends so ill effects would not hamper their flying

dirt floors and practically none have inside plumbing facilities or water piped into the kitchen. Very few places, then, are available for the American GI and his family. To solve this problem, big American-type trailer parks are being built on American bases under NATO, and so it is at Chambley.

This is part of the story that Colonel Rowland wanted to bring home to his men. He returned with photographs of English-built trailers that could be obtained by the men for their families. But he admitted that there would be a waiting list. "Mass production" is an American invention. The only companies selling trailers in Europe or the British Isles are not set up to keep up with the overwhelming demand of the Americans on many bases. There are no French sources for trailers. However, back at George Air Force Base he captivated an audience of wives with his photographs of trailers. Moreover, entire families were intrigued





A scene repeated in many homes at the base was the packing of personal toys by children in the 600 families affected by the move. These are the children of Major Guy L. Oliver, Connie, age 8 and Victoria, 12.



North American Field Service representative Art Smith takes a last walk in the sun with wife Ruth, daughter Tamari and dog King before leaving with the 531 Sqdn. Maintenance Team.



by the location of Chambley.

"You can drive to Luxemburg for a beer," asserted Colonel Rowland, "and a 30-mile drive will take you into Belgium or Germany. Switzerland is only 150 miles south. The Special Services group will work out tours to Paris, and to the cities of Germany. We will try to obtain hunting and fishing privileges with the farmers in the Chambley area."

All these things were true, and the Colonel felt it important, at this time, to let the men discover for themselves that life on a new base in rural France would have its problems for American families. For Chambley is not like Victorville, California, with its neon signs, supermarkets and shops selling an abundance of consumer goods. To GI's in Europe, America is still "the land of the Big PX."

#### Many Professions in 21st Wing

Besides the pilots of the 21st Wing, many other professions and trades were represented in the 1,510 men scheduled for the move. There were the men who service the airplanes, the cooks, doctors, nurses, accountants and truck drivers, plumbers and communications men, all of the skills required of a complete fighting unit, ready to carry on independently on any base in the world. Whereas the movement of these men and all their equipment was the primary job, a personal problem confronted each one, and especially those with families. In all, 600 families had to break up their homes at George Air Force Base and plan for the near future. Many scattered to cities throughout the states, but 230 families, including nearly 600 women and children—from expectant mothers and babes in arms to high school youths—planned to stay temporarily in the states and join their husbands and fathers overseas at the earliest possible time. All of the men, as well as their wives and children, had to have a series of overseas "shots." Sometimes these proved more comical than painful, especially when youngsters watched mom and dad "taking it like a man."

As soon as the word was out that the Wing was moving, each had a multitude of questions: What could they take with them? What to do with houses, furniture, the family car, the children's toys? The family pets? The Air Force had an answer for every question. Most were

Of the 600 families which broke up house-keeping at George Air Force Base when the 21st Wing moved to France, 230 planned to join overseas in the near future.



Wives and members of the maintenance crews wave a final good-bye to pilots ready to begin the long hop to France.

answered through a 26-page, 10,000-word mimeographed instruction booklet, with a foreword by Colonel Rowland.

"It is a common tendency with Americans abroad to make a comparison between our own country and the one they are visiting—and then to denounce the old methods in no uncertain terms," said Colonel Rowland. "Those of you who have spent much time overseas know that this could be labeled as the number one approach on how not to win friends and influence people. *You will be there not by personal invitation, but by agreement for mutual protection.* Be friendly. In the long run it will pay handsome dividends."

#### Families Start Packing

Each man was told how to proceed with the preparation of his family for overseas. "Yes, it was possible to take the family pet. Here's how to do it . . . You can take your car, but be sure the finance company says it's OK. No, you can't ship over a bus or a boat. There will be no housing, or very little, in the area where you are going, so you will have to get housing assured for your family before you can send for them. Trailers will be available, eventually. It would be possible, of course, for some of you to rent a 50-room chateau, but you would find it intolerably expensive."

And the families were told, gently, that the kids would have to give up television. The electric current in that section of France is 50-cycle instead of the 60-cycle common at home. On record



Lt. and Mrs. Arthur N. Till have one last minute alone before the jets begin to roll.



players, favorite singers sing an octave lower, and the favorite band has a slower beat.

To make the men and their families even more familiar with what life in France would be like, the Air Force gave the entire Wing the most thorough briefing ever given to an organization moving overseas. Major Edmund Glavey was sent from an assignment in France to George Air Base to give a series of briefings. The major first went to Chambley with a small camera and shot color slides of the new base and the town of Chambley so that the families could know exactly what their new home would look like.

### Some May Get French Brides

"Some of you men may come home with French brides," announced Major Glavey.

After thus arousing their interest he told them something about Soviet policies in the postwar era. He made it clear that they would face a potential combat situation there, and that elaborate plans had been made for the evacuation of families in the event of war.

Included in Major Glavey's briefing was the warning that the Communist party in France operated openly like any American political party. Of the 42,000,000 people in France, he said, 400,000 are Communists.

"Every American soldier must be a gentleman," he said. "There will be times when you must 'turn the other cheek.' Hostile papers are sold openly on the streets, and you will see many crudely painted signs on stone walls, 'U.S. Go Home.' Friends of America place an 'R' in front of the US to make it read, 'RUS Go Home.'"

"If you lose your temper and strike a French civilian," he continued, "there will be quick and drastic action against you. The United States cannot afford to have such individual differences affect its relations with the French government."

Actually, he pointed out, French politics are more "democratic" than American politics.

### French Take Freedom Seriously

"In America we have two major parties, and the individual is lost in them," he said. "In France, 'splinter' politics is practiced, meaning there are a great many political parties and the individual has his say. To a Frenchman, liberty is a fetish, and you will find out that he exercises his freedom in many ways."

Small talk brightened the major's description of life in France. "You will find the average Frenchman as friendly as the average American," he said, "but he will have some mannerisms that will be strange to you. For example, the French shake hands like working an old-fashioned pump."

A six-weeks course in French would be required of each man in the Wing, he pointed out, but before he came to George Air Base, whole families were already at work with French grammars.

Almost all of our military terms, Major Glavey said, are from France, from 'corporal' to 'squad' and 'army.'

"Get yourself a good suit of civilian clothes," he continued. "The French have had three major wars in 90 years, and the military uniform is not popular."

The men were further told that no "zoot suits," blue jeans or sweat shirts would be allowed to be worn in French communities. The American is always

conspicuous, they were told, and each is an ambassador of good will for his country. The wearing of some types of American casual clothing is frowned upon by the Air Force.

Occasionally, the American can expect ice picks in his tires, and other small unfriendly acts, said Major Glavey.

"The people who do these things may be French, but they are not friends of France," he asserted.

### Big Packing Job Begins

On July 15, 1954, Major John Weed, officer in charge of the preparations for overseas movement, began his huge task of preparing for shipment 2,000 tons of equipment, valued at 5 million dollars. In the next two months Major Weed's construction crews used enough lumber and other materials to build eight 3-bedroom houses in making crates for the Wing's supplies. In addition to equipment, supplies to take care of house-keeping and office work for 30 days at the new base were included in the move. Besides hundreds of tons of equipment, 375 vehicles were taken overseas by the Wing. These included battery carts, specialized mobile units for use on the flight line, a crane, large semi-trailer trucks, jeeps and even five fire trucks. Much of this equipment was moved in twelve freight cars and 130 large trucks to Port Hueneme near Oxnard, California, to be taken abroad the *Ames Victory*.

Preparations went along feverishly, too, in the three squadrons of the Wing. An extensive "refresher" program of instrument training was given the pilots. France, they would find, was as rainy and hazy as California was sunny. Finally, the pilots and the airplanes ceased their flying activity as many of the pilots prepared to go by sea to France. Only the most experienced ones remained behind to take the 78 Sabres on their 6,000 mile hop.

### Troop Train to Houston

On November 25 the main body of the Wing personnel, 1,200 men, boarded a train on a siding at the base and left, amid the tears and good wishes of wives and children left behind, to the Port of Houston for embarkation. The air groups began their departure on December 12, and the last of the Wing personnel—43 mechanics aboard an Air Force transport—lifted from the runway at George Air Base at 4:20 P.M., December 14, and pointed its nose toward Dover, Delaware, the starting point of the move over the jet bridge to Europe.

Col. Robert N. Baker, 21st Wing executive officer, introduced Major Edmund Glavey, USAFE project officer who briefed Wing personnel prior to the move to Chambley, France.





## troop train to Houston

**T**HE 21st Wing personnel moved out in high spirits from George Air Force Base, Victorville, California, on the day after Thanksgiving, 1954. There were tearful farewells from the families, to be sure, but for the most part they were tears of envy. On to France and the excitement of the Old World! The 1,200 men moved to the trains in dress uniform and garrison caps. On the train they soon changed into fatigues for the sake of comfort, but at watering stations along the route where they left the train for a stretch, Uncle Sam's airmen were in dress uniform. At Clovis, New Mexico, the supporting personnel of the 388th Fighter Wing, also flying Sabres, boarded the train. This wing was also committed to NATO late in the year. On the third day after leaving the California desert, the train reached the Port of Houston and the men filed off to board the troop ship *General Le Roy Eltinge* to begin the great adventure.





*. . . troop train to Houston cont.*

**1** Families turned out in force to see the troop train off. Here the family of Tech. Sgt. W. C. Young—wife Wilma, and sons, Galen, David and Marvin—see dad off.

**2** Early morning at George Air Force Base, Victorville. The 1,200 men of the 21st Wing assemble with their personal gear to board the troop train to Port of Houston, Texas.

**3** Col. Martin F. Peters, train commander, and Capt. David H. Perry, train adjutant, get their men aboard. A name on this list was the "ticket" to Houston and on to France.

**4** Each man was allowed a dufflebag and a small handbag for the long journey. Musical instruments, playing cards, magazines and books were carried to help pass the time.

**5** Seeing friends off on the troop train are Lt. J. Walter Hackman and wife Lillian, with 11-month old Craig.





**6** Staff Sgt. Joseph La Borde is accompanied to the train by wife Iris, son Larry, 5-years, and daughter, Veronica, 2-years. He's in the Food Service of the 21st Wing.



**7** The 1,200 men who went by train and ship to France got there long before the jet squadrons, which were flown to other bases to await completion of their base at Chambley.

**8** Their identities hidden in a long farewell embrace, a young airman of the 21st Supply Squadron, Ronald Baker, and wife Carol part until he can get her "over there."



**9** A stop was made by the troop train at Clovis, New Mexico, where the 388th Wing, also flying Sabres, boarded for the trip to France and a new NATO base near the 21st.

**10** Awaiting train time, families and friends made small talk and planned for the day they would all meet again.



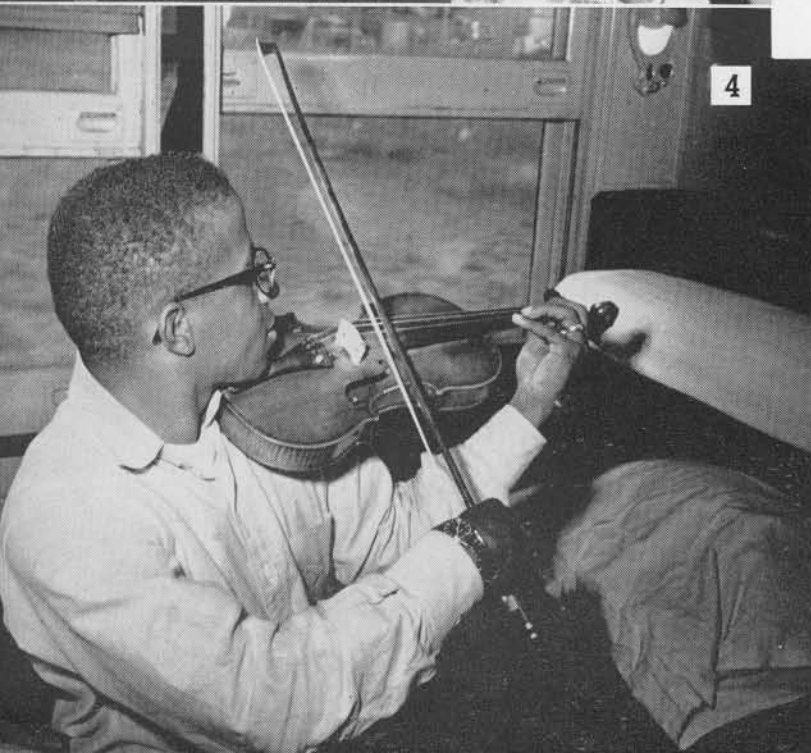




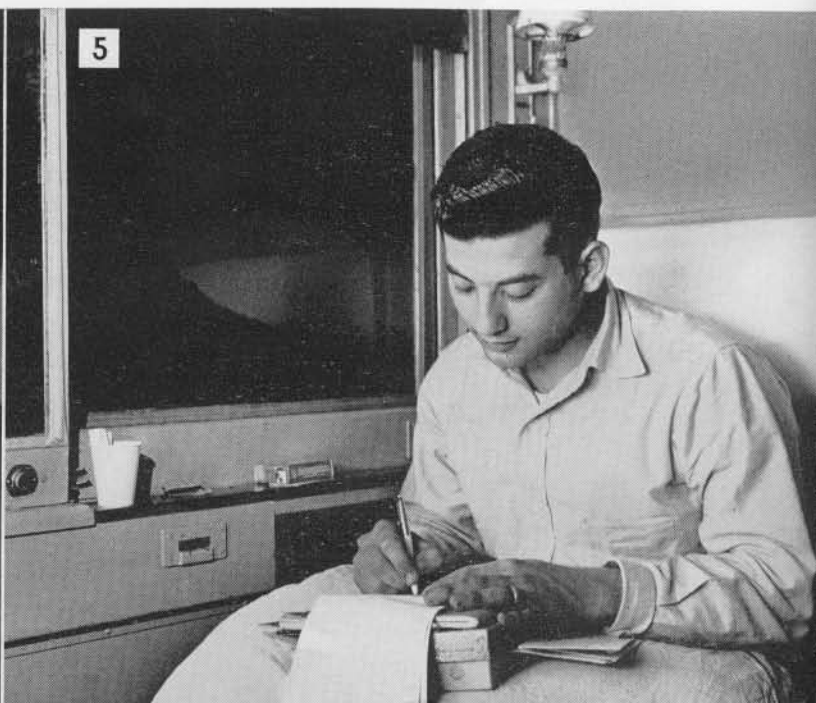
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### *. . . troop train to Houston cont.*

- 1 On the long train ride to Houston port, a game called "Crazy 8s" takes spare time of these men. Airman Second Peter R. Melius and Airman Second Michael McDonough.
- 2 Guitars, played either good or bad, were welcome on the long ride. While a train porter makes up a bunk the men decide what they would like to hear from the strings.
- 3 A welcome pastime during the long two days was chow. Dining car service was a relief from the mess hall operation. Everyone asked, "Wonder how that French chow is?"
- 4 "Carry me back to old Virginny," is scratched out in a plaintive key by Frederic Crooms, food service airman, who studied music back in Illinois and California.
- 5 "Dear Folks: Well, I'm on my way to France, finally," and so on, writes Frank Costa, a young airman first class.



**6** As the train rocked down through New Mexico and West Texas, many an airman dreamed of the great adventure. Home was far behind and France a near reality.



**7** End of the line and a welcome sign in South Texas. Sleepy airmen roused themselves for the first look at Texas.

**8** The bullhorn from the ship, General LeRoy Eltinge, told the men to open their mouths to receive their chow tickets. Most of the men came aboard with hands full.



**9** The transport General LeRoy Eltinge at dockside, Port of Houston. The train took the men to within a short walk of the gangplank. It was their floating home for ten days.

**10** Excitement and adventure await these airmen in Northeastern France, on a newly constructed NATO base.





## Over the Jet Bridge to Europe



"THERE are two nice highs and a stationary front along the route," said Col. Dean Luehring, squinting at the daily weather map at George Air Base. "I'll get my birds off at 0800. With luck we could overfly Clovis and squeeze into Alexandria with no sweat. Looks like a piece o' cake!"

It was December 12, 1954, and the three squadrons of F-86F Sabres of the 21st Group were ready for the 6,000 mile "Fox Able" move to France and the new base at Chambley. Luehring, Commanding the 21st Group's three squadrons, was shooting the breeze in typical Air Force jargon with Lt. Col. Charley Bowers, commanding the 531st squadron. Both were veteran fighter men.

Pilots in flying gear were moving out to their airplanes, suits in plastic sacks and small hand bags, to fit them into small recesses in the fuselage and cockpit. Unlike big airplane pilots, who journey with full bags, fighter pilots must make every inch of space count. Ammunition boxes make handy receptacles for shoes, the odd jacket or hat, or a shirt if it is folded right. And the draping of the spare uniform and the suit of "civvies" over the radio equipment or guns, and fitting the side panels back over them, is a technique known only to fighter men.

### Good-bye to George AFB

The old headquarters building of the 21st Wing echoed with the boots of men preparing to leave. Empty save for personal gear piled and ready to go, there were few to see the men off. The troop train had left with most of the wing personnel days before. A scattering of wives still left at the base were out to watch the take-off, as well as pilots whose elements were scheduled to leave a few minutes, an hour or a day later. The squadrons of Sabres took off in groups of four planes each, ten minutes apart. First to leave was the 72nd, with Wing Commander Col. Robert Rowland in the lead flight with Squadron Cdr. Lt. Col. R. C. Franklin, Jr. The 416th Squadron, commanded by Maj. Ross Beamer, was scheduled to leave the following day, with Charley Bowers' squadron, the 531st,

bringing up the rear.

The three maintenance teams and their twelve tons of equipment to be airlifted to France were assigned to bases along the route, so that all the 21st Wing Sabres would be serviced by men familiar with the planes. In this manner the 72nd Maintenance Squadron was first of the air group to leave, and the 531st Maintenance Squadron remaining until all airplanes had left the base.

### A "Fox Able" Move

The move of the 21st was a re-assignment of an entire organization, and so the actual flight was called a "Fox Able" move. The move of single airplanes in ferry flights over the jet bridge are called "High Flight" moves. The "Fox Able" move of the 21st was to take the pilots through the States, with stops at Clovis, N. M.; Alexandria, La.; and Shaw, S. C., to Dover, Del. Dover is the Military Transport Service staging base for the moves over the jet bridge. From Dover the first leg of the flight is to Limestone, Me. Next comes a 1,000 mile hop to Goose Bay, Labrador, always a welcome one in such moves because "overseas pay" begins with this flight. The first overwater flight comes with the 800 mile leg from Goose to Narsarssuak in Southern Greenland. From there the planes hop to Iceland, then to Prestwick, Scotland, the terminus of the jet bridge.

Colonel Bowers was the only man in the 21st Wing who had been on the original "Fox Able" move of jets to explore the route and to collect data for succeeding generations of airmen. Like Luehring, he is an old fighter man, a Mustang squadron commander in Korea, and one of a number of veterans of two wars who added a mixture of experience to the newer talents of the younger men. Typical of the older fighters was Major Al Nugger, a squadron maintenance officer, a New Yorker who started in the Air Force as a private 15 years ago. He flew Mustangs in Korea with Colonel Bowers. In contrast, cigar-smoking Lt. Ray McCauley is a West Pointer and a Texan, just good enough on a guitar to be pleasant company while waiting for a weather briefing.





Going over his maps of the jet bridge from the United States to Europe in the staging base briefing room at Dover, Delaware is Lt. Charles Campbell.



Those feet belong to a mechanic and not a chimney sweep. He's making a close inspection of turbine blades, with the aid of flight line buddies.



First stop in a "foreign" land was at Goose Bay, Labrador, where the men were met by busses in 10-below weather. Parkas issued in California kept out the below zero cold.







Maintenance teams accompanied the Sabres over the jet bridge to keep them in flying trim. In 10-below zero weather, parka-clad mechanics, T/Sgts. George Haefer and Dan Cordell, use a portable heater to pre-heat engine.



A cold job on a frosty morning at Goose Bay, Labrador was the gassing of Sabres for the next leg of the journey, 800 miles over water to BW-1, now called Narsarssuak, in Greenland and beyond that, Iceland and Scotland.

Some were just a year out of flying school, like Lt. Billy Wier, and among the spare pilots who rode with the maintenance teams was Lt. Al Wuerz, a graduate of the Belleville, Ill., high school in 1949. Al got his first lesson in flying the year the first of the Sabres came off the assembly lines at North American's Los Angeles plant. (When a pilot was grounded because of a cold, Lieutenant Wuerz got his chance to fly a Sabre over most of the route to Europe.)

#### **Pilots Study the Route**

For weeks the pilots of the 21st Group had studied every segment of the long flight, but many more briefings were to come. Each leg of the flight was preceded by a briefing by the flight leaders.

"The airplanes are no good to the NATO Air Forces unless they get safely to Europe," Colonel Rowland had said. For that reason, the most careful plans were laid for the flight. Weather minimums were "3 and 3"—meaning that unless the weather at both ends of each flight leg was at least three miles visibility, with a 3,000 feet ceiling, the airplanes would remain on the ground to await better weather.

As Colonel Luehring had predicted, the flight through the States to Dover was a "piece of cake," with the airplanes needing no more maintenance than the family motor car over a similar distance. At Dover Air Force Base, the Military Air Transport Service took over the briefings of the men, for the responsibility of the moves over the "jet bridge" is on that service. Until the "high flight" officer gives the word, no airplanes can leave the base for the next leg of the flight. However, he cannot take the responsibility alone. It takes two "yes" votes to get the airplanes in the air—one from the "high flight" officer of MATS and one from the squadron commander.

Assembled at Dover to await a weather break, the Sabre pilots had plenty of time to study their maps and get a thorough briefing by Major Carl F. Wood, the high flight officer.

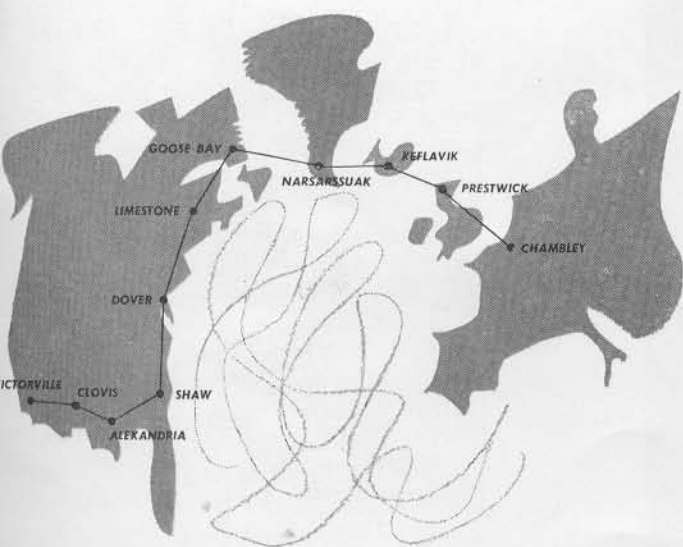
#### **Pilots Get another Briefing**

"There are 500 alternate air bases between here and the Canadian border into which you can go if you get into trouble," he said. "Beyond that you will find alternate fields are few. On the over-water flights, there will be a ship at the halfway mark to assist you in keeping on course. Between the ship and both shores will be orbiting Air-Sea Rescue planes."

If a man has to ditch his bird in the wintry North Sea, explained the briefing officer, his chances of survival depend upon two things—an exposure suit and quick action in getting into the rubber dinghy folded into his seat pack. The exposure suit is nothing a man would



A low noonday sun throws its cold light on a squadron of Sabres, safely down at BW-1, in Southern Greenland. The Sabres flew during the four daylight hours.



Far from their Southern California home, pilots of the 21st were greeted in the north country by sights like this — sled dogs of the United States Army land rescue squadron stationed at Goose Bay, Labrador.





There's a lot of wishful thinking in that sign, as the 21st Wing personnel found. Here, Major Al Nugger, 531st Maintenance officer, makes flight line talk with M/Sgt. Arvol Lusse. Maintenance teams accompanied the Sabres.

Narsarssuak's radio station is the airmen's contact with the outside world. Sgt. Francis Lemmon broadcasts. Sgt. Kenneth Piedra is at the engineer's panel.



want to wear on a picnic or in an Easter Parade. It is grotesque, cumbersome, uncomfortable and so tight at neck and wrists that the wearer, after a little while, may turn a robin-egg blue from lack of circulation.

But it will save a man's life if he is down on his luck and has to "ditch his bird" in the super-cooled northern waters.

"You will have only three minutes to live without the suit," said the briefing officer flatly, "but you've got 15 minutes to get in the boat if you wear it."

This story had been told the men before, so when a troupe of Air Force "tailors" descended on George Air Base early in the fall to give custom fittings to the pilots, they stood patiently for them to finish their work. In trying the suits out, the base swimming pool proved an ideal place to dunk themselves to be certain that the suits had no leaks, for a leaky suit is as bad as no suit at all.

The men were shown the contents of their seat packs, survival gear calculated to keep a man alive in a rubber raft until rescued. Besides the rubber dinghy, the pack contained a knife, fishing gear, candles, food, a sail, cigarettes, matches, a book on survival techniques—and even a Bible.

### Jet Bridge Flights Short

Each leg of the flight was short—less than an hour and a half, Major Wood pointed out, and aircraft at the altitude at which the jets fly can glide with power off up to 70 miles, so the "critical" moments of the flights are cut to a minimum. Although overwater flight jitters are something to expect in novice pilots, like the water hole on the golf course, Colonel Rowland recalled to his men that World War II flights over water were long and boring.

"We thought nothing at all of flying many hours over water," he said. "I don't expect this flight to be a mental hazard for any of my men."

For pilots used to the clear, blue sky of the California desert, the east coast winter weather was a rude shock. Not only were they grounded because of recurring blizzards sweeping the eastern section of the nation at Christmas time, but they were further hampered by their rigid weather restrictions. For the most part of two weeks the squadrons were held down by minimum weather at Dover or at Limestone. For pilots itching to get their "overseas" pay for crossing the Canadian border, the wait at Dover and at Limestone was unwelcome.

"You won't all get off anyway when the weather breaks," said an officer at Dover to Colonel Luehring. "When airplanes sit that long without flying, in the weather we've been having, there will be some birds that won't make it."

Luehring, recalling the weather had ranged from warm rain to sleet and snow, but recalling also that the Sabre was an honest bird being groomed by crack maintenance men, said the weather would be no cause for delay.

### Sabres Don't Mind Bad Weather

"When we crank up 26 airplanes, 26 airplanes will take off," he retorted.

He was as good as his word, for when the weather broke, 26 airplanes were cranked up and soon disappeared into the coastal haze toward Limestone, for a gas stop before the 1,000 mile hop to Goose Bay, Labrador.

In Labrador, far from the customary haunts of men, Goose Bay is an outpost of two air forces—the Royal Canadian Air Force and the United States Air Force. In this empty Santa Claus land of snow-covered pine, where a man can freeze to death in sight of the base if he wanders off without permission, the U. S. Air Force has the status of an occupant.

"We've got two things here they don't have up in Thule, Greenland," asserted Major Grady, the high flight officer at Goose Bay.

"And those are?" questioned Colonel Luehring.

"Women and trees," said Major Grady. "With mail, water, women and trees, we've got things pretty nice here."

Colonel Luehring eyed the ladies in evening dress and men in dinner jackets on their way to a New Year's Eve dance at the Officer's Club.

"I see what you mean," he said.

The men adjourned to the Caribou Room bar at Polaris Hall, the transient barracks. Even on New Year's Eve, men and their wives in evening dress seemed out of place in the North Country, a full thousand miles from the nearest of the "big" little cities of New England. But the Air Force likes to keep life as near to the state-side level as possible in its outposts, and hence the formal New Year's Eve dance. Having traveled light in their jet fighters, the officers of the 21st Wing had left their dinner jackets behind, and therefore did not attend the dance.

### Weather Forecast: More Snow

In the 12-below zero of early morning at Goose Bay, a 12-inch snow blanket had to be cleaned from the Sabres before pilots donned their exposure suits for the first time and began the first of the three over-water flights over the jet bridge—800 miles from Goose Bay to Narsarssuak Air Base in Southern Greenland.

Narsarssuak, "the Miami of Southern Greenland," is the BW-1 or "Bluie West One" of World War II. From this important link in the jet bridge, the Air-Sea Rescue's 51st Squadron operates am-



Danish and American flags fly together at Narsarssuak, on Danish territory. The Americans established BW-1 after Hitler invaded Denmark.



The airport at Prestwick, Scotland, was a welcome sight for the Sabre pilots after the long flight from Iceland to the end of the jet bridge.



phibians, called "Duckbutts," over thousands of square miles of mountains, ice and ocean. As long as the Duckbutts Tango, Papa, Coco, Ice Cap, Fjord and Extra are in the air, pilots can "home" on them with their radio to find a safe harbor at BW-1.

Because weather over Greenland can fool even the most modern forecasting methods, once in a great while a pilot is caught over the base, ringed with mountains and hidden 60 miles inland from the sea lanes on one of the many fjords, with visibility too low to attempt a landing. For this unfortunate pilot, the Air-Sea Rescue Squadron, commanded by Col. Richard W. Etter, has worked out an emergency procedure which gives him a good chance to survive. The Greenland ice cap, remnant of the ice age, is 1,700 miles long, 700 miles wide, covering mountain ranges and ancient waterways and providing a relatively safe surface for a wheels-up landing. But the cap is as large as the entire land mass of Europe and finding a pilot on that huge expanse, a speck of color in

a sea of white, would be impossible unless he was directed to a certain spot on the cap. Such an unlucky pilot starts his emergency procedure over Blue West One at 8,000 feet. He proceeds at 170 knots of speed for 13 minutes with a compass heading of 040 degrees. At the end of 13 minutes he starts a normal let-down at 250 feet per minute. Even under

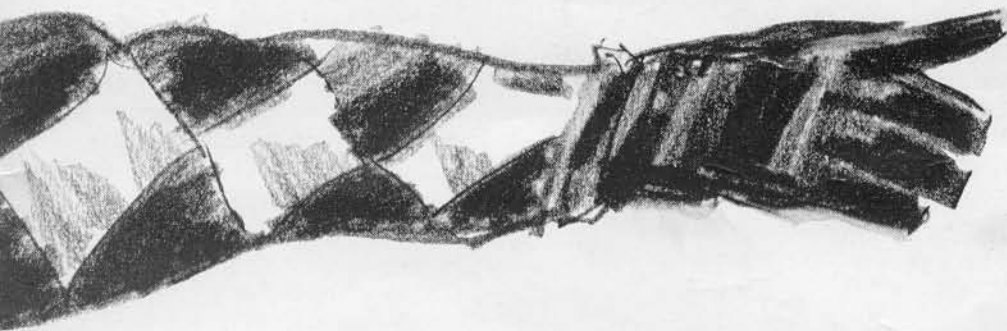
conditions of very poor visibility, he will touch down on the cap with a good chance of keeping his airplane intact until it slides to a stop. He can then burrow under his airplane and remain fairly comfortable with the contents of his survival kit until the Air-Sea Rescue duckbutts find him. The actual rescue is left to one of the base helicopters.





Finally, Chambley! This is a farmer's yard in the village of Chambley, being visited by (left to right) Airmen Glen Medearis, Gay Trueblood, Byron P. Koenig and M/Sgt. J. M. Gilmore.

On to France!



### World's Biggest Ice Cube

"The ice in your drink is 1 million years old," says the sign over the bar at the Officers Club at Bluie West One. It is one of the most famous signs in the Air Force. What better way to impress a stranger than to tell him that within walking distance is a mighty glacier, squeezed down between canyons by the pressure of an ice cap 10,000 feet thick? Should the ice cap of Greenland suddenly melt, all of the world's oceans would raise twenty-five feet, inundating much of the lowlands of the world. Glacial ice, however, is not actually used in the drinks at Narsarssuak, the men of the 21st found. Modern airmen have learned that it is more convenient to have a machine manufacture ice in small cubes.

Although the far north base of Thule gets more attention in the public press—a fact which hurts the pride of BW-1 residents—the base is a most important link in the jet bridge. Most of the airplanes

flown through BW-1 are Sabres on their way to Europe. The majority are produced in Los Angeles by North American Aviation, but some are Mark 5 Sabres produced by the Canadian firm, Canadair, Ltd.

Bluie West One has a unique spot in history. Located on Tunugdliarfik Fjord, it provided the only flat spot in southern Greenland large enough for an airstrip fifteen years ago. The name Narsarssuak means "flat grassy place surrounded by mountains." Before ships came into the fjord with bulldozers and community-builders, Narsarssuak boasted only a handful of residents, Greenlanders of mixed European and Eskimo blood who lived there since the days of Erik the Red, who arrived at that very spot a thousand years ago. Erik's son, Lief Erikson, built the first Christian church in the Western Hemisphere five miles across the fjord from the base. There are located the ruins of Brattahild, the

old home of Erik the Red, built around 982 A.D.

The base was established after the Nazis invaded Denmark, whose officials expressed a hope that the United States would defend their island of Greenland, the world's largest. In turn, the U. S. realized that if it were not defended and the Nazis seized it, a base for strikes against the United States would follow. The agreement with Denmark has been extended because of the strategic position of the base in the North Atlantic, which gives short range fighter craft a place to refuel.

Shortly after the Army Engineers arrived to establish the base they became acquainted with one of the weather hazards of Greenland, a "foehn" wind, which caused great damage. These winds, picking up speed through a natural "wind tunnel," a narrow glacial pass from the ice cap, reach a velocity of 110 miles an hour. Barracks buildings today at Nar-





sarssuak are held down with cables to prevent a recurrence of the big breeze of '41.

### Jet Bridge a "Milk Run"

Although much has been made in fiction and in feature articles of the hazards of this North Sea flight, actually it has become a "milk run" for many pilots. These are the men of the Air-Sea Rescue squadrons, the Military Air Transport Service and jet fighter pilots. Although the elements of danger are present and pilots flying into BW-1 for the first time find threading up the fjord among tower-

ing peaks a bit unusual, still a good pilot can grease a Sabre Jet onto the runway with very little sweat. However, the mountain barrier back of BW-1, and the ice cap rising to 10,000 feet in height, leave not too much room for tooling around over the base before landing.

Pilots of the 21st Wing peeled off over the base for a look-see on their arrival, and very few made a second pass before touching the strip at the edge of the fjord. After a re-fuel stop which, because of weather conditions in Iceland — the next stop — kept some of the birds down for ten days, the Sabres were flown over the next and shortest hop — to Keflavik, Iceland.

Some of the weather hazards offered by BW-1 were not present for the 21st because the fjord was frozen. In the summer months, large sections of the glacier fall into the fjord and, blown by the wind, sometimes move in front of the runway. It has been necessary on occasion to break up the ice with bazookas before resuming air traffic.

The longest hop of the overwater journey for the 21st Wing was the 800 miles from Keflavik to Prestwick, Scotland, the end of "high flight." At Iceland again, some Sabres were down for many days before weather conditions were right for both take-off at Iceland and a safe landing on the British Isles.

### Hop Took 31 Days

On the thirty-first day after it left George Air Base, the first of the wing's

squadrons left Prestwick for Chateauroux, in Central France, temporary squadron base. The total flying time logged for the trip from California was 13 hours. As Colonel Rowland hurried to his uncompleted base, where elements of the wing were already moving in after their journey by sea, the Sabres were gassed and made ready for action.

On January 27, 1955, Colonel Franklin got his "birds" off the ground for the first orientation flight from Chateauroux. Under a cloud layer the sun-browned Californians got their first glimpse of Paris in an early morning mist. On they flew to nearby Chaumont and a look at a neighboring Sabre outfit, then turned toward northeastern France.

In a long, screaming, near-sonic dive, the Sabres gave their new home at Chambley a "buzz job" unlike anything seen before in that part of the Old World. Cooks left their soups unattended. Drivers halted their jeeps. Clerks and construction men, colonels and airmen, jostled each other carelessly at windows to catch a glimpse of the wheeling jets — *their* jets.

The words of the movement directive flashed into Colonel Rowland's mind as he watched from his office window the first of his Sabres to reach the base: "Desire necessary action be taken to prepare for foreign service, and to move the unit — through appropriate ports and thence to Chambley Airfield, Chambley, France..."

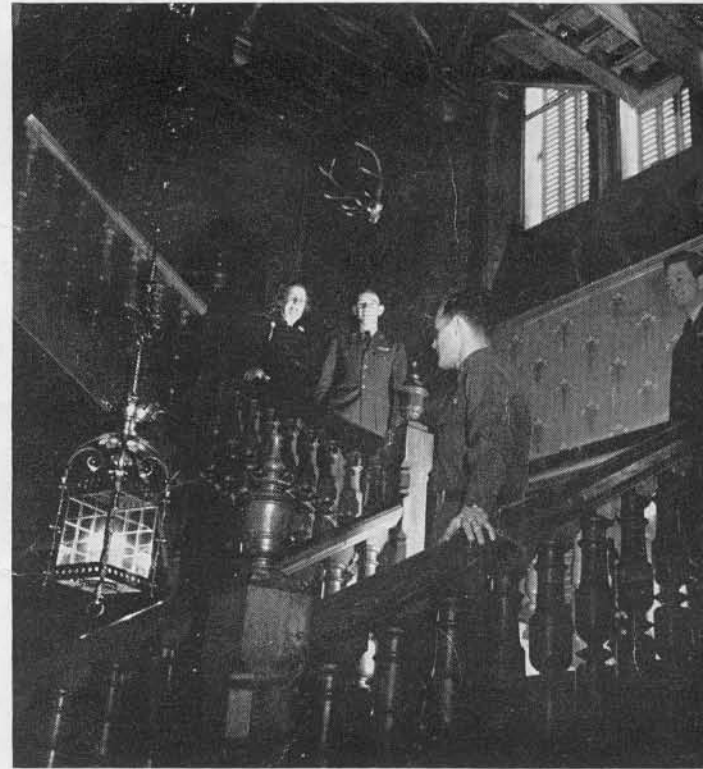
So began the overseas history of the 21st Wing.





Major Gordon Edgett and Major John Weed stroll through the town of Chambley, near the base, and stop to inspect a monument to the men of Chambley who died in World War I.

Inspecting the rooms in an old chateau for rent by the owner are these men of the 72nd Squadron. Their hostess and owner of the 200-year old mansion is the Countess de Bois Renault.



Still a lot of work to be done, says Lt. Col. Charles J. Hooley, commanding the 7002nd Air Base Squadron on the new Chambley base to Col. Robert Rowland, 21st Wing Commander, on an inspection tour. Base tower is in the background.



Good food and pleasant company are found in Chambley, France, by airmen of the 21st Wing, stationed at the new base.

