

## FAIRFORD

The month of April will be long remembered as one of the most important in the history of this airfield as, you will all be very well aware, OPERATION EL DORADO CANYON - The Libyan air strike was launched from here at 1812Z on Monday April 14th when KC-10A 30080 of the 22nd ARW took off. Below is a brief account of associated activities at Fairford over the period 11.4.86 - 25.4.86

The first signs of unusual activity here came mid-afternoon of the 11.4 when the four KC-10As which comprised the detachment at Zaragoza in Spain began to arrive.

91713 (2BW)                      91949 (22ARW)                      30076 (22ARW)                      40186 (unmarked)

These were followed on late Saturday night/early Sunday morning (12-13.4) by further KC-10A arrivals in the form of

20193 (22ARW)                      30078 (22ARW)                      30080 (22ARW)

all of which landed during the 'curfew' period.

On the 14.4 two further arrivals were

91950 (22ARW)                      90434 (2BW)

The first aircraft having re-positioned from Mildenhall whilst the second arrived from Aviano in Italy.

Therefore at 1600Z on the 14th there were a total of Nine KC-10A's on the base plus 11 KC-135s.

KC-135As: 63600, 63615, 71419, 71439, 72602, 91471, 00364, 38000, 38018, 38880  
KC-135Q: 91471

In total the tanker force available for that night's operations at Mildenhall and Fairford numbered 24 KC-10As, 22 KC-135As, 1 KC-135E and 8 KC-135Qs. This represented over 100% increase in the number of aircraft available over normal activities but, in terms of capacity, the figure is nearer 300%.

As previously mentioned the first aircraft to depart Fairford that evening in support of the mission was 30080, followed over the next 30 minutes by (in order) KC-10As 20193, 30076, KC-135As 38018, 63615 and KC-10A 40186, while KC-10A 91713 took off at 1934Z and was followed by 30078 at 2054Z and 91949 at 2055Z. It would seem that the KC-135As were used to 'top-up' some of the KC-10As as both of them returned to Fairford at approx. 2115Z, followed by KC-10A 40186 at about 2300Z. Fairford's launch is thought to have been entirely in support of the 5 EF-111A Ravens despatched from Upper Heyford (see section) to provide the attacking force with ECM capability. After the attack the KC-10As arrived back at Fairford on the 15.7 at the following approx. times. 30076 0415Z, 91949 0520Z, 20192 and 30080 0700Z and finally 91713 and 30078 by 1000Z. Other interesting arrivals early on the 15th were 305th ARW KC-135A - ARTS 81024 and 80126, joined by 80018 on the 22.4. They arrived from 'elsewhere' in Europe (probably somewhere South !) and must have taken a part in the action. ARTS are ex-Command Post aircraft which have been re-worked back to normal KC-135A configuration but retain the ability to be in-flight re-fuelled themselves (a capability that normal KC-135As do not have). There are only very few known examples and all operate with the 305ARW at Grissam AFB. They are extremely rare visitors to Europe, the last recorded visit being prior to the abortive Iranian hostage rescue attempt in 1980.

Following the attack the base was kept at a high state of readiness over the next week, should another attack prove needed. It would appear that on the 22.4.86 the decision was taken to disband the tanker force and although KC-10A 50028 arrived that day 90434, 91713, and 40186 all departed back to the USA. 91950 left on the 23.4 whilst the remaining 6 aircraft all departed on the 25.4. Thus another chapter in aviation history was written.