

CAP Cadets get an inside look at the Air National Guard's 140th Fighter Wing

By C/SrA Hunter Tran

Edited by Capt. Chris Ashburn, CAP

One by one the F-16 Fighting Falcons rolled down the runway. They were barely visible in the cold, dark night until their afterburners kicked in upon take-off. Each time those afterburners fired up our hearts raced and our chests rumbled. Even with earplugs in we could hear the power of those fantastic aircraft. This was just part of the excitement as the Civil Air Patrol's Mustang Cadet Squadron took a tour of the Colorado Air National Guard's 140th Fighter Wing at Buckley Air Force Base. It was a great chance for the CAP cadets to enhance and enrich their aerospace education as well as get a chance to see what a real air force flying squadron does.

Upon entering the Air Force base, we loaded up on a bus driven by the capable hands of SSgt Gary L Scarsella and were briefed by our guide, Major Daniel "Banzai" Bunts. We entered a briefing room where we saw a presentation depicting what the squadron does. The 140th Fighter Wing is a fighter squadron for the Colorado Air National Guard. Their first mission was in the Korean War and they have deployed to many engagements since then, including the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, flying air support. After the presentation 1st Lt Carson C Bruschi demonstrated the type of gear that the F-16 pilot wears in the cockpit. It was exciting to imagine ourselves someday "suited up" for the Air Force.

We took the bus out to the tarmac and watched the F-16's take off for a night exercise. We saw, felt and heard the jets doing full afterburners as they seemingly went straight up into the night sky. One by one they took off and each time was as exciting as the first. When the last jet had become a flashing light in the sky, we went to a maintenance hangar to see the inside of an F-16. The jets go to this hangar to be totally stripped down for servicing. We saw the cockpit, engine bay, and every other component of the plane. We were greeted there by TSgt Sean Gerdemann and Major James "Swat" Collins who answered every question we could throw at them. It was amazing to see the planes with empty engine bays and all the wiring that makes these Fighting Falcons go.

After a quick Q and A session on the bus, it was time to leave. We thanked our guides and headed home, thinking how great it would be to be in the 140th Fighter Wing as a crewman or a pilot, anything to be around those fantastic "birds". The tour was a great opportunity that not every teenager has the chance to do. This trip was like a "career day" and certainly got the cadets interested in the Air Force, if they weren't already. We all had a fabulous time and we wish to thank all of those who made it possible.