

"TRIPLE ZILCH"

A PICTORIAL MARKINGS HISTORY OF AN OPERATIONAL JET FIGHTER

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In cooperation with COL. RAYMOND F. TOLIVER, USAF

In any attempt at recording historical data many factors present themselves that tend to confuse the issue and result in inaccurate information. This seems to be prevalent where information on markings or color schemes of aircraft is concerned.

Inaccurate information has been published in the past that adds to the problem of the air-historian. A case in point is the many articles concerning the aircraft flown by the great World War I ace, Baron Von Richtofen, at the time of his death. Incorrect data on the planes serial number and color scheme, or rather incomplete data, has resulted in a wide variety of conflicting stories. This apparent confusion is not too unusual when one considers the lapse of time. However, this same problem appears in obtaining markings information on World War II aircraft. Most flyers were not too interested in how their planes were marked, but rather how they fought while playing the deadly game of war.

What of modern jet aircraft? Although we can record the standard color schemes, the many individual unit markings seem to be constantly changing. This article will attempt to show the colorful and unusual markings of a particular aircraft, and how these markings have changed in a few short years of its operational life.

It is interesting to note that this aircraft has had three distinct color-scheme changes since May, 1957, an excellent example of the confusion that can result in recording aircraft markings, even though the aircraft is still operational.

Rarely in peacetime does a military aircraft become well known because of its markings. This is the story of such an aircraft! To the United States Air Force she is officially a North American F-100D-65-NA, Super Sabre serial #56-3000A. To her pilot, Col. Raymond F. Toliver and the officers and airmen of the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing, she is known as "TRIPLE ZILCH". The name resulted from the unusual buzz-number FW-000.

In May, 1957, the 20th TFW, stationed at RAF Wethersfield, Essex, England, was re-equipped with F-100D aircraft, under Project Delivery #AFE6F-390. From the listing of aircraft to be delivered, Col. Toliver chose this aircraft as the Wing Commander's airplane because of the distinctive buzz-number. He also had hoped to receive FW-555 for the commanding officer of the 55th Tac. Fgt. Sqdn., FW-777 for the C.O. of the 77th, and FW-999 for the C.O. of the 79th, the three squadrons that make up the 20th Wing. Only FW-999 was received and did eventually become the aircraft of Lt. Col. Al

Below, official USAF photos.

1. Col. Raymond F. Toliver, USAF, Wing Commander, 20th Tactical Fighter Wing
2. F-100D-65-NA, Serial No. 56-3000A in markings of the 55th Tactical Fighter Squadron
3. "Triple Zilch" in markings of the 77th TFS, in which scheme it remained from December, 1957 to early 1960
4. Col. Toliver on his mount



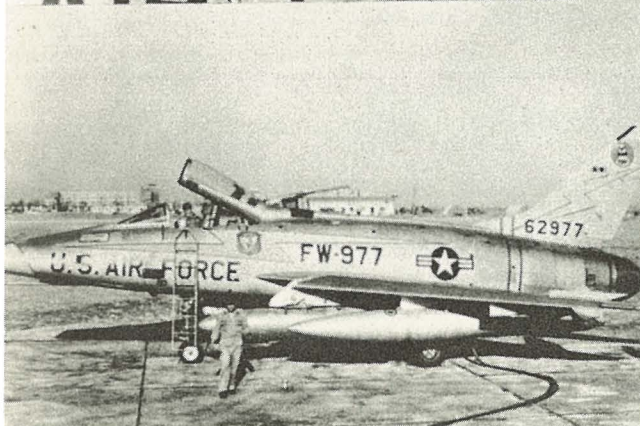


At left (Photo 7) the color identifications of the insignia of the "FIGHTING FIFTY FIFTH" Tactical Fighter Squadron. (USAF Photo). At right (Photo 5) "Triple Zilch" as of May 28, 1960, taken at RAF Wethersfield. (Photo - George Pennick)

Below - Official USAF Photos

6. Col. Toliver seated in "Triple Zilch". The many markings required for a modern jet fighter were described in the JOURNAL, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Spring 1960)
8. Markings of the 79th TFS. F-100D-65-NA, S/n 56-2977. Pilot - Lt Tawney.

9. To represent the USAF Europe at the Annual Gunnery Meet, the 20th TFW sent F-100D-25-NA, S/n 55-3665 with special markings.
10. The members of the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing Gunnery Team.



Harte, then C.O. of the 79th.

As Wing Commander, Col. Toliver flew with each of his squadrons, and when FW-000 was assigned to the Wing, he was flying with the 55th so the aircraft was assigned to that squadron under crew chief T/Sgt Paul Spratt, and the blue markings of the 55th were originally applied. (Photo No. 2)

The design of the special markings was Col. Toliver's and Capt. Robt Bazley's. The 20th Pursuit Group had originally developed the design of the lightning streaks and to perpetuate the tradition, the Wing used the flashes for the fuselage and fin design. Each squadron was assigned a color: 55th - Blue; 77th - Red and 79th - Yellow. A fuselage and fin flash in the particular squadron color was used on each of their aircraft.

Since FW-000 was assigned to the 55th TFS, the design used the blue color as predominant. The nose stripes were narrow bands of blue-red-yellow-blue (4 stripes of a Wing Commander). The fuselage flash was blue, and the fin flash was blue-red-yellow-blue. The Wing insignia was placed high on the fin, above the fin flash. The 55th Sqdn. insignia was superimposed on the blue fuselage flash below the cockpit, the 77th Sqdn. insignia was placed just ahead of the buzz-number, and the 79th Sqdn. insignia was placed aft of the buzz-number, next to the national insignia.

In December, 1957, Col. Toliver began flying with the 77th TFS, and the aircraft was transferred to that squadron; the markings were changed at this time to show the red color of the 77th as the predominant color. It was repainted by its new crew chief, T/Sgt W. Emmert, with a red fuselage flash, and the nose stripes were changed to wider bands of red-blue-yellow-red. The fin flash was also changed to show the red color on the outside edges. The three squadron insignia were moved forward of the buzz-number, and superimposed on the red fuselage flash. The Wing insignia was retained on the fin, and the Outstanding Unit Award ribbon was added next to the Wing insignia on the fin, (Photo No. 3). The Wing was given this award because the conversion to century-series aircraft was planned and carried through in an unprecedented manner. A red rectangle, with the names of the pilot and crew chief in white letters, was added to both sides of the fuselage just below the windshield, (Photo No. 4). The markings remained this way until early 1960.

In June, 1959, Col. Toliver's 4 year tour of duty was up, and his Deputy Commander, Col. Jay T. Robbins, a 22 victory ace of World War II in the Pacific area, became Wing Commander of the 20th TFW. Col. Robbins remained attached to the 55th TFS for flying duties, and did not take over "TRIPLE ZILCH" as his airplane until late July, 1960.

In May, 1960, another change was made in the color scheme of FW-000. It was found that the red fuselage flash was easily scarred by the mechanics while working on the plane, so the red fuselage flash was removed. The Sqdn. insignia were left in the same position on the fuselage, ahead of the buzz-number. A short time later a major change was made in the markings for all the aircraft of the Wing, whereby all aircraft would have the same markings to denote the Wing rather than the individual colors used by each Sqdn.

The tail flash on FW-000 was changed according to this directive, being made up of the three squadron colors; red, yellow, blue, and the nose bands were also changed to three wide bands, from front to rear, of red-yellow-blue. Photo No. 5 was taken at RAF Wethersfield, May 28, 1960 during an Armed Forces Day celebration. The markings have remained the same since.

Other markings on the aircraft besides the Wing and Sqdn. markings are standard USAF markings and insignia. (For a description of standard USAF Markings, see AAHS Journal, Vol. V, No. I, Spring 1960 Page 25). The usual warning markers and a great profusion of stenciled instructions are shown in Photo No. 6. Photo No. 7 is a

color-identified close-up of the Sqdn. insignia applied to the starboard side of the fuselage of FW-000 as of March, 1961.

What of the flying history of TRIPLE ZILCH? Col. Toliver reports "Triple Zilch was stymied right from the start. Lt. Col. C.L. Miller, then C.O. of the 55th was flying it down in Africa when the control stick, more or less "let go", and he was barely able to effect a safe landing with the use of throttle, speed brakes, and very little stick control plus trim tab. A malfunction of the control system caused the trouble".

"Then a few weeks later, again near Casablanca, a Lieutenant in the 55th was flying it and was working with a KB-50 tanker, using the probe and drogue refueling system. After making contact, and while taking fuel aboard, the tanker hose came apart at the drogue. The hose flipped madly about spraying fuel at about 600 gallons per minute and a lot went into the nose intake, causing a big explosion in the intake. The engine flamed out but the pilot restarted a few minutes later and landed safely, with the drogue from the tanker still on the probe. The explosion nearly blew the nose off Triple Zilch, and it took quite awhile to get her back in the air again."

"Some weeks later another Lieutenant over shot the field at Tripoli and ended up out in the desert - no damage this time. Twice she was damaged by trucks running into her tail. That finishes the bad luck, though, as she became the flyingest of the Wing's aircraft and was the first to reach 1000 flying hours. She was a perfect LABS Bird and I could beat almost anyone while flying '000'. We painted two trucks, a sand dune, and a KB-50 tanker on her, somewhat like the boys used to paint swastikas, etc., during the war. The name "Triple Zilch" was not painted on her - those three big zeros were enough, I reckon." That is the markings history of one aircraft while assigned to the 20th Tac. Fgt. Wg.

Other aircraft of the Wing, while not as well known as TRIPLE ZILCH, also have very distinctive markings. Photo No. 8 shows F-100D-65-NA Serial #56-2977 of the 79th TFS, pilot Lt. L. Tawney. Flashes are bright yellow with a black border. Nose is also yellow with black border. Insignia of the 79th superimposed on the fuselage flash.

Photo No. 9 shows F-100D, Serial #55-3665, as marked for the USAF Gunnery Meet in which the 20th TFW participated as the USAF representative. The nose stripes are from front to rear; blue-yellow-red. Tail streak is from top to bottom; blue-yellow-red. Fuselage streak is the same as tail streak. USAF insignia superimposed on fuselage streak. The last photograph is of F-100D-25-NA Serial #55-3666, with members of the USAF Gunnery Team, From left to right: 1/Lt. Ed Palanek, Capt. Robt. Shofner, Maj. Tony Greget, Col. Jay T. Robbins, 1/Lt. James Thompson, Capt. Don Aasen, 1/Lt. Eugene Beresik.

AUTHOR'S NOTE - I wish to thank Col. Raymond F. Toliver for providing most of the information and photos in this article. Without his very willing cooperation it would not have been possible to accurately record the markings of his "bird". For the reader who might be interested in constructing a model of TRIPLE ZILCH, there is an excellent detailed 4-view plan drawing in the March, 1959 issue of the British model magazine "Aeromodeller", showing the aircraft as marked when attached to the 77th TFS.

The reader's attention is also called to the article, overleaf, by John T. Wible, giving the serial numbers of the F-100's, and to the drawing of "Super Sabre" F-100D-65-NA by Bernhard C.F. Klein. Your response, as Members, to these types of articles and combinations is of interest to the Editor. If you like to see more of these, please advise, and submit some of those you have in your own files. Editor.

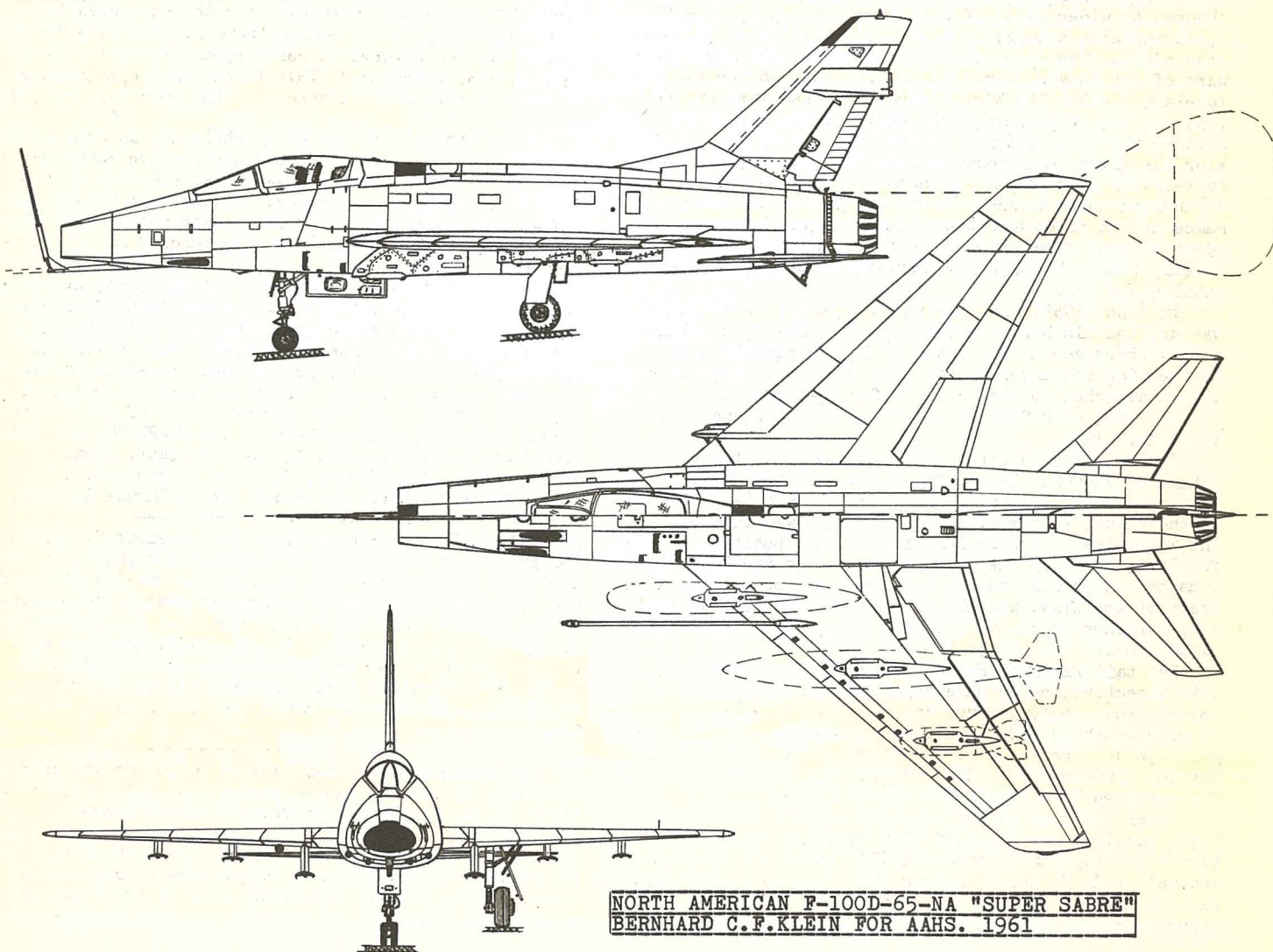
The F-100

SERIAL NUMBERS submitted by AIRMAN 1/c JOHN T. WIBLE, USAF.

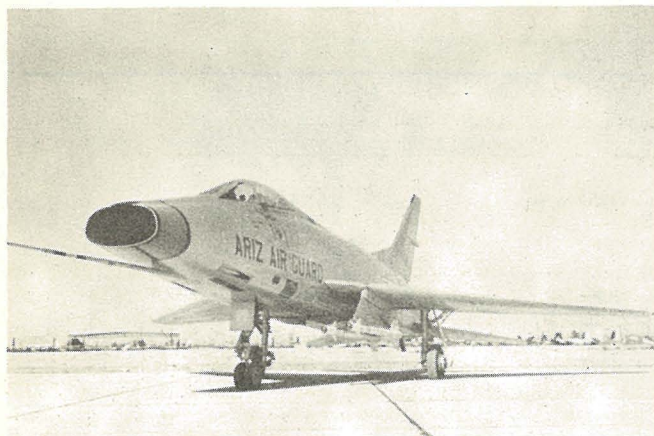
Series	N.A.A. Model	USAF Serial Range	Illust. of:	No.	Series	N.A.A. Model	USAF Serial Range	Illust. of:	No.
YF-100A-NA		52-5754 thru 52-5755		2	F-100D-80-NH	245	56-3351 thru 56-3378	3357	28
F-100A-1-NA		52-5756 thru 52-5765		10	F-100D-85-NH	245	56-3379 thru 56-3463		85
F-100A-5-NA		52-5766 thru 52-5778		13	F-100D-90-NA	235	56-3199 thru 56-3346		148
F-100A-10-NA		53-1529 thru 53-1568		40	F-100F-1-NA	243	56-3725 thru 56-3739		15
F-100A-15-NA		53-1569 thru 53-1608	1585	40	F-100F-5-NA		56-3740 thru 56-3769		30
F-100A-20-NA		53-1609 thru 53-1708		100	F-100F-10-NA		56-3770 thru 56-3919	3870	150
F-100C-1-NA	214	53-1709 thru 53-1778		70	F-100F-15-NA		56-3920 thru 56-4019	3988	100
F-100C-5-NA	217	54-1740 thru 54-2120	1746	381	F-100F-15-NA	261	58-6975 thru 58-6983		9
F-100C-10-NH	222	55-2709 thru 55-2733		25	F-100F-15-NA	262	59-2558 thru 59-2563		6
F-100D-1-NA	223	54-2121 thru 54-2132		12	F-100F-20-NA	255	58-1205 thru 58-1233		29
F-100D-5-NA		54-2133 thru 54-2151		19	Total				2294
F-100D-10-NA		54-2152 thru 54-2221		70					
F-100D-15-NA		54-2222 thru 54-2303		82					
F-100D-20-NA		55-3502 thru 55-3601		100					
F-100D-25-NA		55-3602 thru 55-3701		100					
F-100D-30-NA		55-3702 thru 55-3814		113					
F-100D-35-NH	224	55-2734 thru 55-2743		10					
F-100D-40-NH		55-2744 thru 55-2783		40					
F-100D-45-NH		55-2784 thru 55-2863		80					
F-100D-50-NH		55-2864 thru 55-2908		45					
F-100D-55-NH		55-2909 thru 55-2954		46					
F-100D-60-NA	235	56-2903 thru 56-2962		60					
F-100D-65-NA		56-2963 thru 56-3022		60					
F-100D-70-NA		56-3023 thru 56-3142		120					
F-100D-75-NA		56-3143 thru 56-3198		56					

PRODUCTION SUMMARY

Series	First Flight	Columbus (NH)	Los Angeles (NA)	Total
YF-100A	25 May 53	---	2	2
F-100A		---	203	203
F-100C	17 Jan 55	25	451	476
F-100D	24 Jan 56	334	940	1274
F-100F	12 Aug 56	---	339	339
		359	1935	2294



NORTH AMERICAN F-100D-65-NA "SUPER SABRE"
BERNHARD C.F.KLEIN FOR AAHS. 1961



F-100A-15-NA, S/n 53-1585 with "Sidewinder" missiles.
(Photo - Arizona National Air Guard, via Ray Ruhe)



F-100C-5-NA, S/n 54-1746, with standard military markings plus bands on rudder (from top) gray, white, & yellow. (photo - E.W. Munzing)

"The production block number is used to show normal production changes affecting the aircraft design and/or installed equipment. The block numbering system consists of the assignment of production blocks, starting at 05 and progressing multiples of five. Intermediate block numbers will be reserved for assignment of AMC as considered necessary. As many changes as possible will be accumulated for release in a production block to insure that as many aircraft as possible will be of a standard configuration."

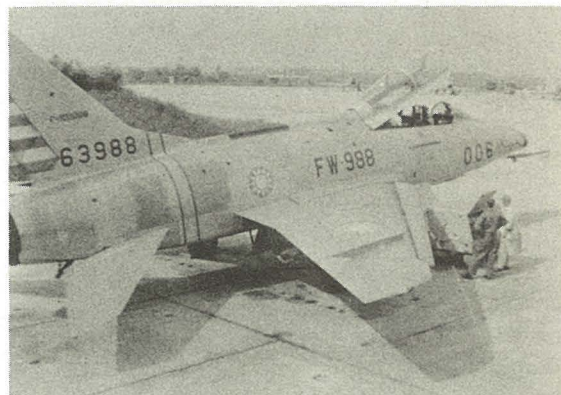
(Quoted from the "Aircraft Recognition Manual, issued by the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, now BuWeps.)

Below left

F-100D-80-NA, S/n 56-3357, of the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing, until mid-1960 under Col. Frances Gabreski.
(Photo - USAF official)

Below right

F-100F-10-NA, S/n 56-3870, of 354th TFW. (Photo - John T. Wible)



F-100F-15-NA, S/n 56-3988, of the Chinese National Air Force. (Photo - John T. Wible)

