

## Myth Busters: History office sets the record straight

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1/5/2010 - **KADENA AIR BASE, Japan** -- Myths and historical rumors circulate through every culture and society, including the military. Most myths--even if true-are harmless, perhaps even amusing.

Sometimes myths reflect poorly upon an individual, unit, or community. Unfortunately, a negative myth regarding the 18th Wing has spread over the years. More specifically, this myth purports to explain the three distinctive characteristics of the wing: the Fighting Cock on the wing emblem, the "ZZ" tailcode on 18th Wing aircraft; and the fact that the 18th Wing has never been stationed in the continental United States.

Variations exist, but the general story reports that 18th Wing airmen behaved in a cowardly manner during a previous conflict. One account claims that during the Korean War, 18th Wing pilots fled (with their aircraft) in the face of a brutal Communist attack against the operating base.

The remaining ground crews, undefended, faced the wrath of the advancing enemy; some were strung up with wire from hangar rafters. In the face of such cowardice, the myth continues, the 18th Wing was punished in various ways.

First, the emblem of the Fighting Cock is described as a surrendering chicken, transposed on a yellow background for cowardice. Second, some believe, the "ZZ" tailcode branded it as the last and lowest wing of the Air Force. Third, the myth claims that the 18th Wing was prohibited from taking a home station in the continental United States.

The story makes for some interesting gossip. But none of it is true. The 18th Fighter Bomber Wing served heroically in the previous conflicts. Just as importantly, the three characteristics are unrelated and are proud marks of distinction rather than any sort of badges of shame.

The 18th Wing emblem with the Fighting Cock was created in 1927, and approved in 1931--long before 18th pilots went to war. Cockfighting is a particularly brutal sport that pits aggressive birds in mortal combat.



An F-15C Eagle from the 67th Fighter Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Japan, breaks away from a KC-135 Stratotanker assigned to the 185 Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, after being refuled during Red Flag 09-1 at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Oct. 24, 2008. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Kenya Shiloh)



18th Wing Logo

The 18th Pursuit Group officers chose the Fighting Cock for its "fight until you prevail" reputation. The emblem

design signifies courage, aggressiveness, and confidence, characteristics the early 18th Pursuit Group members embraced. The motto Unguibus et Rostro translates to "With Talons and Beak," a unique gamecock twist to the more popularly known "With Tooth and Nail" expression of fighting to the end.

The ZZ tailcode's origins date after the Korean War and have nothing to do with combat performance. In 1968, the Pacific Air Forces assigned a randomly generated letter to each of its 24 wings. The 18th Wing received "Z." Each flying squadron was assigned another randomly generated letter. The two letters were then combined and painted on the squadrons' respective aircraft. Within the 18th Wing, there was: "ZA" for the 12th Tactical Fighter Squadron; "ZG" for the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron; "ZL" for the 44th Tactical Fighter Squadron; and "ZZ" for the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

By 1972, the Air Force reorganized the tailcode system and began to assign two-letter codes to each wing. The 18th Wing would have received "KA" for Kadena during this renaming, but the abbreviation was already in use by the 457th Tactical Airlift Wing in Vietnam. As an alternative, 18th Wing officials and the Pacific Air Forces commander requested the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron's popular "ZZ" markings for the entire wing. In 1975, the 18th Wing officially received its ZZ tailcode designation.

Finally, it is true that the 18th Wing has never been stationed stateside. However, this history is not shameful or due to some rumored banishment. In fact, the 5th and 13th Air Forces also have been stationed exclusively outside the United States. From its origins in Hawaii in the 1920s, the 18th Wing has continuously played a key role in Pacific military affairs through three major US conflicts and countless regional emergencies.

Indeed, its constant overseas status is embraced by 18th Wing personnel who celebrate their role protecting American interests for the safety and security of those back in the states.

The History Office and Public Affairs have published the true stories of the 18th Wing's emblem, tailcodes, and overseas status before. Still, critical myths survive and will likely continue spreading among unsuspecting airmen. After all, everyone loves a good story.

Nonetheless, be sure to help dampen those myths by emphasizing that 18th Wing heritage and symbols reflect pride and success, and are in no way badges of shame.