

Smoke Trails

Journal of the F-4 Phantom II Society



Volume 23/Number 1

F-4 Phantom II Grove Community Foundation

HONOR THE PAST, INSPIRE THE FUTURE



By Beverly Helms

The Idea

The initiative by Grove, Oklahoma citizens Pete Norwood and Dave Helms to obtain a F-4 *Phantom II* military jet for Grove and its citizens started several years ago as they fantasized about bringing an F-4 to Grove. When they enjoyed their first PhanCon 2012 at David Monthan, the idea was formulated into a plan to bring this F-4 to Grove. The intention is to maintain this aircraft as a historical artifact to educate and inspire future generations. Pete states, *“As long as man imagines what he has not yet accomplished, this aircraft will be in use to stimulate the mind and the heart of any visually stimulated aviators, past current and future! How long? Permanently, to infinity and beyond.”* This aircraft will stand to honor those who served in the military and those who continue to serve.

The steps needed to acquire it were extensive, and only after combining efforts with Dave and Beverly Helms could the application process be completed.



Pete and Dave met a few years ago in Grove, but shared a common interest in the F-4 *Phantom II*, as both served in the USAF when the F-4 was the primary fighter in use by the US military. Dave served as a Staff Sergeant from 1970 to 1974 as an aircraft structural mechanic. Pete, on the other hand, retired from the military as a lieutenant colonel after serving in the USAF from 1975 to 1985 and the Kansas National Guard from 1986 to 1989.

At the 2012 PhanCon in Davis Monthan Dave and his wife Beverly joined Pete's quest to bring a *Phantom* to Grove. However, they soon learned that such an attempt would require going through dense red tape. Only 4 years later, at the 2016 PhanCon at Holloman AFB they learned how to properly apply for the F-4.

Two months later, the three got together to form the group “*Friends of the F-4 Phantom*”, and on November 15th, 2016, formally petitioned the Grove City Council for a letter to be sent to the National Air Force Museum to request an F-4. Unfortunately, this process couldn’t be initiated at the time.

That opened the door to more networking opportunities. Soon, a F-4 was discovered destined for GSAXcess that had only two other applicants.

It was in March of 2017 that the “*Friends of the F-4 Phantom*” again appeared before the council for a Letter of Intent. The letter was written and approved by the council at the March 21st meeting of the Grove City Council, and the City of Grove was awarded the F-4 on April 5th.

71-0247

The F-4 in question, F-4E-48-MC s/n 71-0247, made her first flight on October 10th, 1972, after which she entered service with the 4th TFW at Seymour Johnson AFB, NC.



She would remain 7 years in NC, before moving to the 52nd TFW at Spangdahlem AB (Germany) in 1979.



For an unknown reason, the F-4 received serial 71-1247 in that period.

After returning to the USA in 1988 she was assigned to the 37th TFW at George AFB, CA. The mission of the 37th was to provide pilot transition training to the F-4G 'Wild Weasel'.



In 1988, George AFB was part of the BRAC program. As part of the phasedown of operations at George AFB, the 37th transitioned to the F-117 'Nighthawk', and moved to Tonopah Test Range Airport, NV. The aircraft were transferred to the 35th TFW in 1989.



In March 1990 71-0247 was removed from service, and parked at AMARG / Davis Monthan AFB, AZ as 'FP0469'.

Holloman AFB needed a ground trainer, and #247 was selected. She was assigned to the Crash, Damaged or Disabled Aircraft Recovery (CDDAR)-unit in July 1995.

Over the years 71-0247 was also used as a so-called 'Floater', an aircraft used as display, but without a fixed spot on base.

The last year she has been collecting dust in a hangar at Holloman, until being brought up for auction.

Transport

Dave and Beverly Helms, along with Pete Norwood, have shared the tasks of securing and following this acquisition through to its completion. Although the F-4 has been awarded to Grove, there is a time constraint: the *Friends of the F-4 Phantom* have only 1 year (until April 5th, 2018) to conclude the 'deal'. Now 4 months have passed, and there are still some hurdles to be taken. The main cause of concern is the safe and dependable disassembly, transport and reassembly of the F-4 from Holloman AFB to Grove, OK.

The initial bid to do this is at a cost of \$75,000. Many other negotiations continue to reduce that cost. First and foremost, the safe and complete process is the top priority. In addition to moving costs, an additional \$25,000 will be needed to create and build the memorial. At this moment, it is the goal to raise the \$100,000 through public / private donations. Local donations are being made directly to the Grove Community Foundation's bank account. A GoFundMe account was established and can easily be accessed.

Location

With only 8 months to go on getting the F-4 moved, the group feels the pressure to get the job done as soon as possible. On top of moving the aircraft, one of the other limits placed on the project has been the site of the static display. The City of Grove has already committed the labor and materials for some of the site prep of the display.

The original site was to be the new Grove Airport terminal office off of E283 Rd which would have put it off of the main thoroughfare.

Ferra Aviation has stepped up in the greatest way by beginning the process of deeding a site to the City of Grove so that the static display will be on a major highway very near the airport and the high school. Ferra will provide the long term general grounds maintenance, camera surveillance, lighting, overflow parking for weekend F-4 events, etc.

This aircraft will be maintained as a historical artifact to educate and inspire future generations. Grove will provide a magnificent home and an educational experience for the youth, providing a lasting memorial for those who served, maintained, whose lives were saved by and those who flew the F-4 aircraft. The picturesque site will add to the already active decades old full Veterans Day Grove Public Schools celebration where veterans are invited to be honored at student performance programs at all grades of the school. This F-4 will also be an active Grove Civil Air Patrol aviation history tool as many of their 15 active members will also be involved in ongoing programs and projects related to this F-4. Also, Dave Roberts, Civil Air Patrol Oklahoma Wing Commander, has committed his support. A Historical account of area pilots and those whose lives were protected and in many cases saved by the ominous presence of the F-4 during its history serving the USA will be documented for future generations.

A memorial display will also be attached to the site to honor those who have served, commemorate the F-4, and those who supported the effort to bring it to Grove. The preliminary design of the donor panel will be in the shape of a blast shield behind the Phantom. The elevated static display area which will offload the weight of the running gear and will be flanked by a xeriscaped garden of poppies, forget-me-nots and yellow flowers to honor the Gold Star Families and those who have served.

Oklahoma's Delaware County population 41K has a poverty rate of over 20%, with the median household income being under \$38K. The citizens and Veterans need this memorial and the youth need this inspiration. Although there is a lot of support in Grove for this project and several large donors are going through their own paperwork processes to support the project, support from outside of the community is vital. Every possible means of donating has been recently made available as the funding is needed ASAP. We simply MUST make the deadline. Failure is NOT an option. Time is of the essence. Too many F-4's are already set for demolition; we cannot allow this one to suffer that fate.



The driving force of the 'Friends of the F-4 Phantom': Beverly Helms, Pete Norwood and Dave Helms, holding a poster of 71-0247, a photo made by Helen Thompson during the Holloman AFB Open House 2014

(all profiles by Mads Bangsø / aircraftprofiles.net)

Should you wish to support this project, please visit :
<https://www.gofundme.com/GroveF4Phantom>