

153 AIR REFUELING SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

153 Observation Squadron designated and allotted to NG, 18 Aug 1939
Activated as 153 Observation Squadron, 27 Sep 1939
Ordered to active service, 15 Oct 1940
Redesignated 153 Observation Squadron (Light), 13 Jan 1942
Redesignated 153 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942
Redesignated 153 Liaison Squadron, 31 May 1943
Inactivated, 15 Dec 1945
Redesignated 153 Fighter Squadron and allotted to ANG 24 May 1946
Redesignated 153 Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, 24 May 1946
153 Fighter Squadron, Single Engine received federal recognition 12 Sep 1946
Redesignated 153 Fighter Bomber Squadron, 16 April 1951
Redesignated 153 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 1 Dec 1952
Redesignated 153 Air Refueling Squadron, 1 Apr 1992

STATIONS

Meridian, MS, 27 Sep 1939
Blumenthal Field, NC, 16 Dec 1941
Meridian, MS, 28 Jan 1942
Esler Field, LA, 17 Feb-12 Aug 1942
Membury, England, 5 Sep 1942
Keevil, England, 28 Nov 1942
Membury, England, 3 Oct 1943
Keevil, England, 28 Nov 1943

Erlestokes, England, 13 Mar 1944
Vouilly, France, 18 Jun 1944
Canisy, France, 6 Aug 1944
St Pois, France, 11 Aug 1944
Couterne, France, 23 Aug 1944
Maillebois, France, 25 Aug 1944
St Cyr, France, 2 Sep 1944
Vuel, Belgium, 10 Sep 1944
Ham, Belgium, 12 Sep 1944
Stree (near Huy), Belgium, 16 Sep 1944
Verviers, Belgium, 20 Sep 1944
Spa, Belgium, 24 Oct 1944
Ohe, Belgium, 19 Dec 1944 (operated from Liege, Belgium, 18-23 Dec 1944)
Tongres, Belgium, 22 Dec 1944
Rutten (Russon), Belgium, 8 Jan 1945 (operated from Tongres, Belgium)
Spa, Belgium, 18 Jan 1945
Duren, Germany, 9 Mar 1945
Euskirchen, Germany, 16 Mar 1945
Bad Godesberg, Germany, 30 Mar 1945
Marburg, Germany, 5 Apr 1945
Bad Wildungen, Germany, 15 Apr 1945
Weimar, Germany, 24 Apr 1945
Brunswick, Germany, 20 May 1945
Augsburg, Germany, 4 Jun 1945
Heidelberg, Germany, 25 Jul-15 Dec 1945
Meridian, MS

ASSIGNMENTS

Mississippi NG, 27 Sep 1939
Fourth Corps Area, 15 Oct 1940
V Army Corps, Dec 1940
67 Observation (later Reconnaissance; Tactical Reconnaissance) Group, 1 Sep 1941 (17 Feb 1942)
IX Fighter Command, 12 Dec 1943
Ninth Air Force, 14 Mar 1944
IX Tactical Air Command, 25 Apr 1944
64 Fighter Wing, September 1945
XII Tactical Air Command, 15 Jul-15 Dec 1945
Strategic Air Command, 26 Mar 1951
Second Air Force
40 Air Division
108 Fighter-Bomber Wing

ATTACHMENTS

First Army, 4 Feb-15 Nov 1944
Twelfth Army Group, 15 Nov 1944-26 Jul 1945
Seventh Army, 26 Jul 1945

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

O-38, 1939
O-47, 1940
BC-1, 1940
O-49, 1941
O-52, 1941
O-43, 1942
P-39, 1942
B-25, 1942
Tiger Moth, 1942
O-49, 1942
P-51, 1942
A-20, 1942 (1943)
L-5, 1942
Spitfire, 1942
DB-7, 1943
P-47, 1946
F-47
RF-51, 1952
T-33, 1953
RF-80, 1955
RF-84, 1956
RF-101, 1969
RF-4, 1979
KC-135 1992

Support Aircraft

A-26, 1946
C-47
C-54
C-131, 1975
C-26, 1989

COMMANDERS

Maj Allison J. Holifield, 27 Sep 39-4 May 42
Maj James R. Cooper,
Maj Henry C. Allen
Maj Fred M. Key, 1946
LTC Eugene Vinson, Sep 1948

LTC Atle G. Mantos #1951
Maj George M. McWilliam, 1952s
Maj James L. Bounds acting 1 Jan 1953
Maj James L. Bounds, 1 Jun 1953
Maj Sam Forbet, Jr.
LTC William Q. Platt II, 2003
LTC Chuck Lutz, #2004

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater
Air Offensive, Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
1 Jun 1982-20 May 1984

Presidential Unit Citation
15 Feb-20 Mar 1944

Belgian Croix De Guerre
6 Jun-30 Sep 1944
16 Dec 1944-25 Jan 1945

Belgium Fourragere

EMBLEM



On a yellow disc with a red border a representation of “Colonel Rebel” astride a blue eagle, looking thru a gray telescope held in his right hand and holding in his left hand white reins attached to the eagle’s bill; the figure shown with flesh colored face and hands and attired in gray suit with white shirt cuffs and collar, gray hat and boots. (Approved, 15 Dec 1953)



MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

On Friday, 4 Aug 1939, it was announced by BG John J. O'Keefe of the Mississippi National Guard that Key Field had been awarded the new Air National Guard Squadron. 14 planes, 35 officers and over 100 enlisted men would be assigned to the unit. The new squadron was designated as an observation squadron, the first of its kind in Mississippi. LTC Allison J. Holifield, of Jackson, a pilot, and Inspector General of Mississippi, was anxious to command the new unit, and he voluntarily accepted a reduction in rank to Major in order to assume command.

The unit was federally recognized as the 153 Observation Squadron on 27 Sep 1939. The mission of the photographic section of the observation units was to provide Army Commanders with accurate pictures of enemy positions, while their intelligence sections reported information for effectively guiding troops

The first Field Training was held at Key Field for 7 days during January 1940 in record breaking cold weather. Personnel of the 153 were in much the same condition as George Washington's Army back in the 1700's. Very few of the troops had complete uniforms and no overcoats. Overcoats and extra blankets arrived the day the weather got warmer.

The second Field Training was for three weeks in July 1940. The first week was at Laurel, Mississippi with routine duties. During the second week the flight line crew, armament section and aircrew members (pilots and gunners) flew gunnery missions from the Gulf port Airport. Quarters at Gulf port consisted of pup-tents. The third week of Field Training was conducted at Natchitoches, Louisiana where the 153 participated in "War Games" with other Guard units.

On 15 Oct 1940, the 153 Observation Squadron was inducted into Federal Service and became part of the US Army Air Corp. The enlistment of 25 selective service men from Louisiana in March, 1941, brought the squadron to its full enlisted strength of 159 men.

The 153 was alerted on 7 Dec 1941. After exchanging its initial O-38E for North American O-47s, Stinson O-49s, and Curtiss O-52s, it was assigned an antisubmarine role at Blumenthal Airport, Wilmington, NC. The squadron worked in conjunction with the Navy for five weeks performing off-shore submarine patrol along the Atlantic coastline.

During a routine training mission an army pilot, 2Lt, Roy Robertson, and his gunner, Cpl Louis Walker, known to us as "Dump", crashed into a beach Wrightsville Beach, Wilmington, NC. The young pilot died several hours later, but "Dump" survived his serious injuries to recount the story to us. @LATE 1941 EARLY 1942

On 17 Feb 1942, the squadron arrived at Esler Field, LA, assigned to the 67th Observation Group. Its mission was to train and ready itself for combat service overseas.

The 153 Observation Squadron was shipped from NY on 31 Aug 1942, and arrived at Membury Field near Reading, England on 5 Sep 1942.

The 153's equipment was diverted about that time to the North African Campaign due to the shortage of aircraft and equipment. Under the command of Maj Henry C. Allen, the 153 was assigned one training plane, a British-made Tiger Moth. The Tiger Moth was a bi-plane without brakes but a tail skid, a holdover from World War I. Within a few days the unit received five "war weary" Spitfire Mark V's for pilot proficiency training. The unit immediately began training missions by photographing all U.S. installations in England and northern Ireland. Some of the first missions were mapping the beaches along the French Cherbourg Peninsula. The unit flew eighty-three missions and brought back 9500 photographs. Those photographs assisted in the planning and execution of the Allied landings in Normandy. On 8 Sep 1943, many personnel of the 153 were absorbed into the 2911th Provisional Bombardment Squadron. When the 2911th was deactivated, personnel and aircraft were transferred back into the 153 Liaison Squadron, and were distributed throughout 9th AF wherever needed, in England.

Reequipped with Stinson L-5s, and under the command of Maj James R. Cooper, the 153 moved to France on June 18, 1944, less than two weeks after the allied landing in Normandy. The 153 flew its L-5s in combat and reconnaissance assignments in support of ground operations in northern Europe, and courier service for 1st Army Headquarters, until the end of the war.

The 153 Fighter Squadron was granted federal recognition on September 12, 1946 and equipped with Republic P-47N.

On 6 Feb 1952, the tactical pilots and number of maintenance personnel were sent to Ft. Benning, GA. The purpose of this temporary duty was to participate in a "fire power" demonstration in conjunction with the Infantry School.

The 153 Fighter Squadron was ordered to active military service March 1, 1951, during the Korean Conflict and was initially assigned to Turner Air Force Base, Georgia. As a part of the Strategic Air Command, the unit was renamed the 153 Fighter Bomber Squadron. On December 11, 1951 the 153 was transferred to Godman Air Force Base, Kentucky, and became a part of the Tactical Air Command. The 153 was released from active duty to state control on November 27, 1952 and was redesignated the 153 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. Equipped with North American RF-51D aircraft, the 153's new mission was photo reconnaissance.

In the Winter of 1952, the 153 began a new era with the arrival of the first RF-51D. Originally designed to escort the then giant B-29, the RF-51D came to Key Field as a relatively new aircraft, designed to accomplish its reconnaissance mission. The 153 made an easy transition to the new aircraft and the new reconnaissance mission.

Former officers and airmen of the 153, now assigned to the 108th Fighter-Bomber Wing, have completed their transfer from Albany, GA, to Godman Air Force base, Ft. Knox, KY, with but a few exceptions of men remaining at Albany as members of the echelon detachment.

The unit was released from active duty and returned to State control 27 Nov 1952, and redesignated the 153 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron on 1 Dec 1952, under the command of

Maj George M. McWilliams. The 153 returned to Key Field equipped with the RF-51D. The Group mission directive for the 117th Reconnaissance Wing, to which the 153 was assigned, stated the mission of the unit was "to provide intelligence information concerning the strength, disposition, movement and activity of friendly and hostile forces through employment of aerial visual and photographic means, and when applicable, electronic and weather reconnaissance". The squadron performed their first field training exercise as a photo reconnaissance organization at Travis AFB, CA, 5-19 Jul 1953.

During the period Oct 1956 to Mar 1958, the 153 moved its maintenance and air operations to Gulfport, MS, while runways and facilities at Key Field were repaired and enlarged. While at Gulfport, the 153 received new RF-84s directly from the Republic assembly lines.

Equipped with their new aircraft, 200 members of the 153 participated in Exercise "Minute Man 59" at Hill AFB, UT, from 12-26 Jul 1959. The first jet was airborne at 0845 on 13 Jul 1959. The primary objective was to complete aerial photographing of targets assigned by 9th Air Force. Over 13,000 exposures were processed and 5,000 prints produced.

During 1963 the 153 took part in many exercises. In the Spring of 1963, the 186TRG participated in exercise "Minutemen Alpha". This was a deployment of 12 RF-84F aircraft from Birmingham, AL, to Anchorage, AK. On 12 Jul, RF-84F aircraft were deployed to GA where they participated in "Swift Strike". In the fall, planes flew missions to Puerto Rico for exercise "Poncho". All of these missions were non-stop with air-to-air refueling.

In Aug 1964, the 153 participated in Operation "READY GO," a non-stop deployment to Europe. This entailed flying reconnaissance missions in West Germany in support of 7th Army Maneuvers. This was the first time an Air Guard unit had flown non-stop to an overseas destination. Approximately 500 photo missions were flown and 18,000 feet of film exposed.

186th received the RF-101s during the winter of 1970. A quick survey revealed the 101's to be a tired and extensively used aircraft which obviously would be a challenge to the maintenance personnel as well as the aircrews. The 186, as usual, was prepared for and eager to embark on the reconnaissance mission with the newly assigned aircraft. Dedication and challenge were not new to the 186th, and the new era was looked to with enthusiasm.

Receipt of the new aircraft meant countless hours of retraining. Pilots and maintenance personnel had to enter a new period of training in learning to fly the aircraft and to maintain it in a combat ready status. The pilots of the 186th received their flying training at Shaw AFB, S.C., Little Rock AFB, Arkansas and at home station, Key Field. The aircraft maintenance personnel completed an intensive training school pertaining to the RF-101. The Air Force sent a Mobile Training School to Key Field from Sheppard AFB, Texas to train the Air Guard members in the accomplishment of maintenance required by the new aircraft.

March brought emotions to a crescendo, with a disaster; the 186th lost an aircraft and crew while flying defensive combat maneuvers over Alabama; the first crash of a unit aircraft since a

mid-air collision in 1968, and the first fatalities since 1957, when the unit lost an RF-80 and pilot at Gulfport, MS. The unit mourned the deaths of Cpt James H. Wells and Cpt Gary A. Mullins.

During August 1972 some 70 members of the 186th Tac Recon Group with four RF-101's and their support equipment flew more than 3,000 miles to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska to participate in the joint Army-Air Force Exercise Ember Dawn Punch Card XVII

RF-101C, tail number 042, piloted by LTC John B. Pearson, Jr. had a mid-air collision with a buzzard on 22 Jun 1974, the Voodoo was totaled. It was later stripped and laid to the side of the runway as a constant reminder that, "things happen."

On October 12, 1979, Col Biffle O. Pittman, and Maj Maxey J. Phillips were flying a high-speed, low level reconnaissance training sortie near England AFB, LA, when their aircraft (RF-4C 66-49) "collided with a large vulture." The force of the birdstrike shattered a portion of the windscreen and struck Col Pittman in the right shoulder, face and neck. Maj Phillips was able to gain control of the aircraft after it began a series of oscillations, and return to England AFB, LA. Col Pittman was able to lower the landing gear and flaps using his left hand and deploy the drag chute during landing rollout. Both Col. Pittman and Major Phillips were cited as the Tactical Air Command "Aircrew of Distinction," for professional airmanship and crew coordination that prevented the loss of a valuable combat aircraft and further injury to themselves.

The remainder of the operations and maintenance personnel at Key Field supported sustained flying operations out of home station in support of BOLD EAGLE 80 in the Eglin AFB, FL area. BOLD EAGLE was an exercise designed to evaluate the effectiveness of tactics, techniques and procedures of multi-service, active and reserve component units, commanders and their staffs. The 186th provided tactical reconnaissance aircraft, photo processing and interpretation, and command post controllers

In Oct, the unit simultaneously supported two major exercises; deploying two aircraft and a major portion of its maintenance and operations experts to Boise, Idaho for participation in Photo Finish. Photo Finish, an annual reconnaissance competition, was a competitive event between all of the ANG Tactical Reconnaissance Groups, as well as two Active Duty units. Although the 186th was new to the RF-4C, it was not new to reconnaissance. The main objective of the two crews was "not" to come in last. They finished 8th among the nine units.

Almost ten years had passed since the unit had to deal with the loss of two of its comrades. The call came shortly after 10:00 A.M. on 4 Dec 1989, that an RF-4C from the 186th TRG crashed and burned in rural west Alabama, near the small town of Sprott, AL, only one mile from the downed crew of ten years ago. The crew members, Maj George Dugas and Cpt Raymond Bryson, were on a routine training mission when the mishap occurred.

Based at Key Field in Meridian, the 153 TRS flew RF-4Cs for 13 years starting in the fall of 1978. During that period, it made more varied overseas deployments than other ANG tactical units. It went to the UK in September/October 1980 (Coronet Cyro), to Southwest Asia in March 1984

(Sentry Tornado) and to Italy in July/August 1986 (Coronet Lake). Conversion from RF-4Cs to Boeing KC-135Rs was initiated in 1991, and the unit was redesignated the 153 Air Refueling Squadron, 186th Air Refueling Group, on 1 April 1992.

7 April 1999 A KC-135R 57-1418, is written off while undergoing maintenance at the Oklahoma ALC, Tinker AFB, Oklahoma, when the cabin is over-pressurized during a test and ruptures, tearing a 35 foot hole in the aft fuselage, allowing tail section to drop to the ground.

Over the years, the 186th has been depended on to serve in Operation Display Determination, Operation Provide Relief, Operation Restore Hope, Operation Support Justice, Operation Deny Flight, and Operation Northern Watch. With the national tragedy experienced on September 11 of 2001, the 186th Air Refueling Wing has been called upon to provide support in Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn.

The 186th Air Refueling Wing also supports a C-26B, modified to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions in the U.S. and overseas. Stateside, the C-26 supports local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in counterdrug efforts while overseas missions support imagery collection taskings for combatant commanders. The C-26 program has worked directly with law enforcement agencies since 1996 providing National Guard unique support to battle illegal narcotics and illicit drugs. The C-26 is manned full-time and the program is managed through the Mississippi National Guard Counterdrug Coordinator's office in conjunction with other counterdrug programs that assist our communities and nation through our Governor's Counterdrug State Plan.

In 2008 the wing was selected as the only unit in the country to provide mission qualification training to service members supporting Project Liberty, the Nation's newest manned Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance aircraft. From early 2009 until 2012 Key Field members trained over 1,200 individuals who immediately put those skills to work by deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently, the 186th is in conversion to the C-27J. Due to immediate demands from theatre commanders, unit members are diligently working to fulfill training requirements while other members are already deployed. By 2014 the wing is expected to support and operational squadron and serve as the formal training unit for all C-27 crew training.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Unit yearbook. *MS ANG. 186th Tactical Reconnaissance Group, 35th Anniversary 1939-1974.*