

197 AIR REFUELING SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

412 Fighter Squadron constituted, 25 May 1943
Activated, 15 Aug 1943
Inactivated, 7 Nov 1945
Redesignated 197 Fighter Squadron, and allotted to ANG, 24 May 1946
197 FS (SE) extended Federal recognition 12 Dec 1946
Redesignated 197 Fighter-Bomber Squadron
Redesignated 197 Pilot Training Squadron
Redesignated 197 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Mar 1954
Redesignated 197 Air Transport Squadron, 1 Oct 1962
Redesignated 197 Military Airlift Squadron, 1 Jan 1966
Redesignated 197 Aeromedical Airlift Squadron 16 Aug 1968
Redesignated 197 Military Airlift Squadron, 1 Dec 1969
Redesignated 197 Air Refueling Squadron, 1 Aug 1972

STATIONS

Westover Field, MA, 15 Aug 1943
Norfolk, VA, 23 Oct 1943
Richmond AAB, VA, 15 Feb-14 Mar 1944
Woodchurch, England, 5 Apr-27 Jul 1944
Tour-en-Bassin, France, 30 Jul 1944
St-James, France, 20 Aug 1944
Reims, France, 23 Sep 1944
Le Culot, Belgium, 27 Oct 1944
Venlo, Holland, 12 Mar 1945
Lippstadt, Germany, 23 Apr 1945

Illesheim, Germany, 20 May-Ju11945
Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, 4 Aug 1945
Seymour Johnson Field, NC, 20 Aug 1945
Mitchel Field, NY, 28 Sep-7 Nov1945
Phoenix, AZ

ASSIGNMENTS

373 Fighter Group, 15 Aug 1943-7 Nov 1945
161 Operations Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

P-47, 1943-1945
F-51, 1946-1954
F-51,
F-84, 1950
F-51,
F-86 1954-1958
F-86, 1958-1960
F-104 1960-1962
C-97, 1962-1972
KC-97, 1972-1977
KC-135, 1977

Support Aircraft

T-6, 1946-1954
C-47, 1946-1962
T-33, 1953-1962

COMMANDERS

Lt Albert L. Burns, 7 Jul 1949
Lt Lawrence R. Schwab, 28 Jan 1959
Maj Erich J. Hettlinger, 9 Apr 1961
LTC Manning
LTC James Floor, #1981

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation
Rhine River, 20 Mar 1945

French Croix de Guerre with Palm
Aug 1944

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army
1 Oct-17 Dec 1944
18 Dec 1944-15 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM



During 1947 a statewide contest was held to give a nickname and unit insignia to Arizona's new 197 Fighter Squadron. An eighteen year old art student at Arizona State College at Tempe, Dave Manning, submitted the winning entry and as a prize was awarded free introductory flying lessons. Today, LTC Manning is the Commander of the 197 Copperhead Squadron.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

Copperheads

OPERATIONS

Combat in ETO, 8 May 1944-4 May 1945.

On 5 May 1946, the announcement was made that a National Guard would be formed in the Phoenix area. The unit was to be an air unit, based at Luke Field, west of Phoenix. The organization became official on 24 May 1946 as the 412th Fighter Squadron was officially redesignated the 197 Fighter Squadron. In June of 1946, LTC Robert Lacey was assigned as advisor for the 197 and recruiting began for the unit.

Authorized strength for the new unit was set at 300 enlisted and 50 officers. Most recruits were young and energetic and, as recruiting progressed, the unit began to develop a youthful vitality. Federal recognition came on 12 Dec 1946. On that day, the first inspection was held and the 197 Fighter Squadron was officially a unit of the National Guard.

The Luke Field era was a relaxed and fun-filled period, but one in which all members of the unit pitched in to make the squadron a viable fighting unit. To be certain, there were many problems involved with building a brand new unit, but the people involved were up to the task right from the beginning.

Initially, the Luke Field operations began in a wooden hangar on the southwest corner of the base and also in a supply building located nearby. Since the only aircraft available at the time were two T-6, all flying was accomplished in these planes. In the meantime, unit drills were held in Phoenix.

In the summer of 1947, the unit moved to more adequate facilities at the north end of Luke Field. Shortly thereafter, the P-51 arrived. The arrival of the P-51's helped recruiting, which was not going well at the time. It seemed that most veterans of the war were not interested in further military service and the distance from Phoenix to Luke Field to attend drills was a discouraging factor. Nevertheless, every member of the unit did his part in recruiting friends and acquaintances and, gradually, the strength of the unit increased.

Flying was conducted during the week and on weekends. Aerial gunnery and ground strafing were accomplished at the Gila Bend Gunnery Range. In addition to the 25 P-51s and the two T-6s, the unit had two A-26s which were used to tow the aerial targets, a C-47, and two L-5s. There were plenty of airplanes, but not enough pilots.

The first operational test of the unit came in June of 1948. The unit packed up everything and headed for the first summer encampment at Love Field, Prescott, Arizona.

In August of 1949 the unit performed field training at Victorville, CA and in Aug 1950 at Santa Rosa, CA. These two encampments were combined encampments with air units from Van Nuys and Ontario, CA, fellow members with the 197 of the 62nd Fighter Wing. It was during these initial summer camps that the intense rivalry developed between the Arizona and California units. This rivalry extended to everything from In November of 1950, the F-51s were phased out as the new F-84 were received. Within a month, word was received that the 197 was to be activated for federal service during the Korean Conflict. Activation came on 1 Feb 1951 and many of the members of the unit were reassigned as augmentees to other units. The remainder

of the 197 was to remain at Luke and was redesignated the 197 Pilot Training Squadron. Once more, Luke Field assumed its World War II mission of training combat pilots.

1 Feb 1951: Called to active duty as part of the Korean War call-up but remained at Luke AFB to serve as a component of the 127th Pilot Training Wing (with F-84E/Gs later supplementing and finally supplanting the initially assigned F-84B/Cs).

While the 197 and its members continued on active duty, the Adjutant General and his staff were busy completing the planning and constructing of new facilities on 15 acres of land leased on the south side of Sky Harbor Airport. Under construction was a new hangar, supply warehouse, motor pool facilities, and a POL system. Additionally, new taxiways were under construction to provide access to the south runway. By late 1952 the building had progressed to the point where the facility could be occupied by the 197 upon its release from active duty.

On 1 Nov 1952, the 197 and most of the mobilized officers and enlisted personnel were released by the U.S. Air Force and returned to the control of the State of Arizona. Upon its release from active duty, the 197 again reverted to its former designation as the 197 Fighter Squadron. The squadron was returned to state control, minus aircraft and most of its equipment. Although the new facility at Sky Harbor was nearly complete, it lacked most of the tools and equipment necessary to maintain a flying unit. The National Guard Bureau had promised that the unit would receive F-51D, but they hadn't arrived yet. The first few months after deactivation, therefore, were spent trying to requisition the needed equipment and supplies. By the summer of 1952, the unit had received the F-51's and most of the support equipment that was needed to keep the Mustangs flying.

In May of 1953, the first F-86A arrived at Sky Harbor, beginning a transition to the jets that would last more than a year. Since many of the unit's pilots had flown the F-86 during the Korean War, there was considerable anticipation of their arrival at Sky Harbor. When the 86's began to arrive in the spring of 1953, the transition to the jet mission began. Although it would be more than a year before the last of the F-51's were gone, the changeover was exciting and the jet mission a real challenge for the Phoenix airmen.

Now that the unit was located in the Phoenix area, recruiting seemed to progress considerably better than it had while the unit was based at Luke Field. Young, non-prior service people seemed quite eager to join and serve their military obligations with the local guard unit. Prior servicemen were also showing a renewed interest in joining a unit that seemed to constantly make the local news with its accomplishments. Soon, for the first time in its history, the 197 had a waiting list of prior and nonprior service people eager to join the unit.

1954 was a sad year for the Arizona Air Guard. During the year, four pilots were killed in plane crashes. F-51 crash on 30 May 1954, in which Lt. Hugh P. Kelly was killed. Only three months later, on 23 Aug, Lt Norman M. Atkin was killed at a summer camp near Boise, Idaho, when he tried to land his crippled F-51. On 14 Oct Cpt Victor C. La Nassa and Lt Donald E. Penny were killed at Lowry AFB, CO, when their T-33 crashed during a rainstorm.

The 197 continued to be a unit of the 146th Fighter Wing based in Van Nuys, CA. Each summer, the 197 and its California counterparts would participate in field training together. Encampments were held at Gowen Field, ID, in 1953, 1954, 1956 and 1957.

Increased personnel authorizations also caused some growing pains for the 197. The first building addition at the Sky Harbor installation was the unit supply building. Other additions to the facility later followed, including an operations and training building, started in 1956.

In 1955 it was announced by the Adjutant General, MG Frank E. Frasher, that Arizona would receive another Air National Guard unit to be based in Tucson. In April of 1956, Maj Donald E. Morris was reassigned from command of the 197 Fighter Squadron to command of the new 152nd Fighter Squadron. A small nucleus from the 197 transferred with Major Morris to start the unit in Tucson.

The 197 FIS began converting from F-86As in March 1958 at Sky-Harbor Airport, Phoenix. The unit received F-86Ls mainly from the 329th FIS at George AFB when the latter converted to the F-102A.

This era saw the last of the summer deployments. In 1958 and 1959, the 161st journeyed to Casper, WY for summer training. After that, training sessions were held at Sky Harbor on a year-round basis.

The F-86Ls in turn began to be replaced by F-104A in Apr 1960. The last Sabres left Phoenix in July of that year, inevitably bound for Davis-Monthan.

With the new equipment and aircraft, increased manning was necessary. Recruiting went well and most vacancies were filled by prior service personnel eager to participate in the exciting fighter mission. New buildings were also necessary, and expansion was authorized for the Sky Harbor facility. New buildings for the 161st included an aircraft engine overhaul shop, rocket storage building and an Operations and Training building, which included a dining hall and kitchen in one wing and medical facilities in another. A club building and swimming pool were also built from funds derived from raffles, donations and club memberships.

9 Oct 1961, word was received that the unit would be activated as of 1 Nov 1961. Coordination with TAC and the requisitioning of personnel mobility equipment became the priorities for October. Activation came as promised and the month of November was spent in final preparation for the deployment to Europe. Word came on 11 Nov that the 197 Fighter Squadron would deploy with all aircraft and personnel to Ramstein AB, West Germany. By 23 Nov, the last members of the unit and all equipment had cleared the Sky Harbor base. All personnel not required to man the 197 were declared excess and made subject to reassignment with other TAC units. Members of the 161st were sent all over Europe and the United States for the duration of the mobilization.

In Jun 1962, after 8 months in Germany, word came that the unit would soon be sent back to Arizona. Deactivation became official on 15 Aug 1962, as ceremonies at Sky Harbor officially released the 161st from active duty, MG Winston P. Wilson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, told those gathered that the 161st Fighter Group would soon be redesignated the 161st Air Transport Group. He went on to explain that the unit would soon trade its F-104s in for C-97G.

The first C-97s began arriving in Sep 1962. Maintenance personnel and aircrews were kept busy right from the start with transition training. The transition was made more difficult by the fact that navigators, flight engineers and loadmasters had to be recruited for the new mission, whereas these positions had not existed in the fighter group. By Feb 1963, enough aircrews had qualified in the C-97 that an overwater flight to Tachikawa AB, Japan, was scheduled. The flight departed on 22 Feb with 19 crewmembers on board. Mike Polowy, Clifford Gipson, Tom Kincaid, Charlie Row, Ollie Manwaring, Danny Blanton, Jim Faircloth, John Leverette, Byron Thurston, Jim Pleasants, Terry Kidd, Ed Eherenberg, Bill Christy, Al Medrow, Bill Merchant, Tom Barnard, George Encinas, Jess Moody.

Although the transition was going well, it was probably hardest on the pilots. For many of them, it was the first time they had flown anything but a fighter. But flights to far away places served as morale builders and most of the pilots eventually got used to the slow, lumbering aircraft.

By Mar 1964, the unit was making monthly flights to Japan and Germany. Other destinations were also common as the 161st became involved in Operation Guardlift. During the Vietnam War, the 161st flew 55 missions to Vietnam even though the unit was never mobilized for the conflict.

During the C-97 era, construction at the Sky Harbor base continued with the completion of the \$800,000 C-97 maintenance nose dock hangar on 15 Feb 1965. Other minor construction continued as the base continued to adapt to its changing mission.

In Dec 1967, a severe snowstorm hit northern Arizona. The storm dumped 8 feet of snow on Flagstaff. Governor Jack Williams requested the assistance of the 161st to drop hay to stranded cattle on the Indian reservations. Over a period of 8 days, the unit was able to drop over 403 tons of hay and 8 tons of food to the Indians stranded by the blizzard. This was "Operation Haylift".

The squadron was to retain the C-97 in its refueling configuration, known as the KC-97. While pilot transition would not be difficult, due to the fact that the basic aircraft was not changing, for some crew members, the transition was extensive. No longer was there a need for loadmasters. The new mission required a boom operator instead of the loadmaster. Loadmasters were given the option of retraining as boomers. Many accepted the assignment while others cross trained into other fields.

The TAC mission also meant some changes in other areas. Mobility plans had to be modified and the unit had to be fully equipped for a mobilization. Mobility Kits were put together and

housed in a supply warehouse for this purpose.

The refueling missions reduced some of the extensive travel that had become a way of life during the MAC years. Nevertheless, missions were still flown to Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico and Europe, in support of refueling assignments in those areas. Several times each year the 161st participated in Operation Creek Party, an operation based in West Germany. Operation Creek Party was a NATO support mission, almost fully manned by Air National Guard units from the continental United States on a rotating basis.

Over the years that the 161st was a participant in Creek Party, many members of the unit had the opportunity to spend their 15 days of annual training in Europe. This provided a morale builder for the unit as those assigned to Creek Party usually had some free time to tour Germany's rich cultural and historical sites. In addition, the unit compiled an excellent record of maintenance and mission completion and was often cited for superior performance.

Early in 1977, a change was announced which would transfer the 161st Air Refueling Group from the control of the Tactical Air Command to the Strategic Air Command. Along with the change would come a new aircraft for the unit, the KC-135.

The first KC-135s began to arrive in the late summer and early fall of 1977. The change to SAC became official on 1 Oct 1977. By 1 Dec the KC-135's had all arrived on station. In the meantime, the old KC-97s had been shipped either to other units or to the depot at Davis-Monthan AFB near Tucson for mothballing or scrapping. The last of the venerable '97s left Sky Harbor on 5 Oct 1977, having been transferred to the Wisconsin ANG.

The change to SAC meant a lot of authorized changes for the unit. Unit manning was increased, aircrews went on TDY for KC-135 training, and maintenance personnel began the transition from the prop-driven KC-97 to the jet powered KC-135. Once the transition was complete, other changes were in the offing, such as 24 hour alert duty and increased base security requirements.

Flying out of Edwards AFB, CA in 1982, 161st KC-135E #1495 took off with a gross weight of 299,000 pounds, then refueled a B-1 with a record 160,000 pounds of fuel. The refueling surpassed an earlier KC-135 record of 120,000 pounds.

On 13 March 1982, KC-135A, 57-1489 crashed south of Luke AFB, Arizona. The KC-135 was on an instrument approach to Luke when a Grumman AA-1 Yankee, N6160L, collided with it aft of the wings, causing the tail section to separate from the rest of the aircraft, leading to loss of control and crash. All four crew members in the KC-135 and the two civilians in the Yankee were killed.

Volunteers began flying missions in support of Operation Desert Shield, Aug 1990. Called to active duty as part of Operation Desert Shield call-up, 20 Dec 1990, 15 May 1991: Released from active duty after taking part in Desert Shield/Desert Storm

In 1994, 1995 and 1997 the unit deployed to Pisa, Italy where our tankers supported NATO operations in Bosnia. 1997 also saw the 161st facing challenges in the United Arab Emirates. The unit was vital to the success of Operation Deny Flight and Operation Southern Watch.

Due to the expansion of Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport, plans were approved for construction on a new base in 1995. Today, the new Phoenix Air Guard base is complete. The \$60 Million project includes 275,000 square feet of facilities, pavement, infrastructure and aircraft runway surfacing.

The 161st sent about 130 personnel to Operation Northern Watch early in 1999. Based at Incirlik Airbase, Turkey, the unit supported flight operations within the northern no-fly zone over Iraq. Early in the second quarter of 1999, 161st Copperheads were quickly pressed into service over Kosovo for Operation Allied Force. Nearly 200 unit airmen served on active duty for about two months, flying 125 missions to offload almost 2.5 million gallons of fuel. The airmen returned to Phoenix in late Jun 1999.

On 2 May 2003, at 0406L (0806Z), a KC-135E, S/N 56-3638, was damaged at Pease ANGB, New Hampshire. The KC-135E, assigned to the 161st Air Refueling Wing (ANG), Phoenix, Arizona, was flying to Pease ANGB to sit alert. There were no injuries to property or personnel due to the mishap, but the aircraft sustained major damage. After an uneventful flight from Bangor, Maine, to Pease ANGB, New Hampshire, a turkey was ingested in the number 2 engine of a KC-135 while it was being brought to a full-stop landing on the ground during the hours of darkness. The turkey ran across the runway in front of the nose of the mishap aircraft during the roll. The crew did not see the turkey until it entered the illumination of the landing lights. The crew brought the aircraft to a full stop seconds later without further mishap. A post-flight inspection of the mishap aircraft revealed significant damage to the number 2 engine and its strut, cowlings and fairings. Collateral damage was sustained to the number 1 engine, along with the starboard inboard and outboard wing flaps. The AIB president found by clear and convincing evidence that the mishap was purely accidental in nature. The mishap occurred due to a completely unforeseen ingestion of a turkey into the number 2 engine of the aircraft upon landing. According to what the AIR determined of wild turkey habits, which are not nocturnal, the fact that this occurred during the hours of darkness in an area with no natural cover demonstrates this was an exceptional event. The crew bears no culpability for the mishap. The BASH plan at the time of the mishap was sufficient to deal with known bird populations. Now that a new threat to aircraft at Pease ANGB has surfaced, the 157th Air Refueling Wing Safety Office, which is based at Pease ANGB, has taken several proactive steps to prevent any future situations of a similar nature from occurring. They are additionally developing and implementing a comprehensive plan to establish a long term solution for the problem.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

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