

337th FLIGHT TEST SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

337th Fighter Squadron constituted, 29 Aug 1942

Activated, 11 Sep 1942

Redesignated 337th Fighter Squadron (Twin-Engine), 1 Jul 1942

Redesignated 337th Fighter Squadron, Two-Engine, 5 Feb 1944

Disbanded, 31 Mar 1944

Reconstituted and redesignated 337th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 23 Mar 1953

Activated, 8 Jul 1954

Discontinued, 8 Jul 1960

Redesignated 337th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 11 Dec 1981

Activated, 1 Apr 1982

Inactivated, 1 Jul 1985

2874th Test Squadron designated and activated, 15 Jan 1988

337th Tactical Fighter Squadron and 2874th Test Squadron consolidated, 1 Oct 1992

Redesignated 337th Test Squadron, 1 Oct 1992

Redesignated 337th Flight Test Squadron, 1 Mar 1994

STATIONS

Iceland, 11 Sep–26 Nov 1942

Glendale, CA, 26 Nov 1942

Muroc AAB, CA, 1 Mar 1943

Glendale, CA, 6 May 1943

Paine Field, WA, 12 Aug 1943
Glendale, CA, 2 Nov 1943
Ontario AAFld, CA, 29 Dec 1943–31 Mar 1944
Minneapolis-St Paul Intl Aprt, MN, 8 Jul 1954
Westover AFB, MA, 18 Aug 1955–8 Jul 1960
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC, 1 Apr 1982–1 Jul 1985
McClellan AFB, CA, 15 Jan 1988

ASSIGNMENTS

342nd Composite Group, 11 Sep 1942
329th Fighter Group, Nov 1942–31 Mar 1944
514th Air Defense Group, 8 Jul 1954
4707th Air Defense Wing, 18 Aug 1955
4622nd Air Defense Wing (later, Boston Air Defense Sector), 18 Oct 1956
4729th Air Defense Group, 8 Jul 1957
Boston Air Defense Sector, 25 Jun 1958–8 Jul 1960
4th Tactical Fighter Wing, 1 Apr 1982–1 Jul 1985
Sacramento Air Logistics Center, 15 Jan 1988
Air Force Development Test Center, 1 Jul 1994
46th Operations Group, 1 Jul 1994

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-38, 1942–1944
F-89, 1954–1955
F-86, 1955–1958
F-86L
F-104, 1958–1960
F-104A
F-4, 1982–1985
F-4E
F-86D
P-38E
P-38D
P-38F
P-38G
P-38H
P-38J

COMMANDERS

LTC Robert E. Bruce, #1955

HONORS

Service Streamers

World War II

EAME Theater
American Theater

Campaign Streamers

None

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jun 1982–31 May 1984

EMBLEM



337th Fighter Interceptor Squadron emblem



2874th Test Squadron emblems



337th Test Squadron Emblem

337th Flight Test Squadron emblem: On a disc Or, bordered Azure, a falcon, volant, Argent and Sable, surmounting a large flash of lightning Gules. The falcon symbolizes the discipline and fighting spirit required to accomplish the intercept mission. The lightning signifies the all-weather capabilities of the unit and the tremendous striking power of our aircraft. (Approved, 9 Jun 1955, modified, 1 Jul 1982, 1994).

MOTTO

NICKNAME

FALCONS

OPERATIONS

Trained replacement pilots, Nov 1942–Mar 1944, and furnished cadres for fighter squadrons, Jan–Dec 1943.

22 December 1943 Lt. Col. William Edwin Dyess (1916–1943) is killed when the P-38G, of the 337th Fighter Squadron, 329d Fighter Group, he is undergoing retraining in catches fire in flight near Burbank, California. He refuses to bail out over a populated area and dies when his Lightning impacts in a vacant lot at 109 Myers St, Burbank, saving countless civilians on the ground. Dyess had been captured on Bataan in April 1942 by the Japanese, but escaped in April 1943 and fought with guerilla forces on Mindanao until evacuated by the submarine USS Trout in July 1943.

Air defense in the US, 1954–1960.

The year started off on a somber note for the 337th. On 24 January 1956, an F-86D-55 S/N 53-685 crashed about two-miles north of the base while taking off from Westover's runway 05, at 2:22 P.M. local time. 2nd Lt John D. Ritchie, who had only been with the squadron for about three weeks, was killed instantly in the crash.

"After becoming airborne, control tower personnel as well as ground observers noticed that the aircraft appeared to be climbing at a steep angle and a long sheet of orange flame was coming from the tailpipe area. The control tower operator instructed the pilot on two separate calls, to come out of afterburner. Lieutenant Ritchie did not acknowledge; however, on the second call, the characteristic puff of white smoke was observed behind his aircraft and the orange flame momentarily stopped, indicating that he heard the tower and cut off his afterburner.

Black smoke was observed coming from the tailpipe and the orange flame appeared again, this time more pronounced. The aircraft was observed to level off and started a shallow dive to the right until it impacted a stone wall on farm land in Granby, MA and disintegrated, strewing parts of the plane covering an area approximately 120 degrees wide and 350 yards out from the point of impact." Lieutenant Ritchie had completed his advanced flying at the all-weather jet school at Perrin AFB, Texas before reporting to the 337th, and was from Lowell, Massachusetts. He was single and lived on the base.

Nineteen fifty-seven started off on a tragic note in early January and continued through March, with the squadron losing three pilots and four airplanes. At about 4:43 P.M. on January 3 an F-86D-55 S/N.53-747 piloted by 1st Lt Richard B. Caruthers, exploded in flight over Charlemont, Massachusetts scattering wreckage over three-square miles.

"Lieutenant Caruthers had been scheduled for a night intercept mission and was flying in the number four position in a flight of four Sabrejets. The flight departed Westover's runway 23 at 4:34 P.M., with the first three jets departing at so-second intervals, and Lieutenant Caruthers following the third aircraft lo-seconds later. After becoming airborne, members of the formation checked in with the flight leader on the tactical radio frequency. That was the last transmission received from Lieutenant Caruthers."

His body was discovered the next day, some 25-miles east from the point of the explosion, hanging from a tree with his parachute fully deployed. The aircraft exploded at an altitude of 38,000 feet, with the winds aloft accounting for the easterly drift of his open parachute. Lieutenant Caruthers, who resided in Springfield with his wife, was a native of Ft. Worth, Texas. A memorial service was held for Lieutenant Caruthers at Westover's Chapel #2. The squadron

flew a 'missing man' formation over the Chapel, with one position in the lead flight left open in tribute to the deceased pilot. Although very small and a little blurry, the formation can be seen passing over Westover.

On February 28 two F-86Ds collided over the Quabbin Reservoir in Belchertown, MA at approximately 12:41 P.M. local time. Both pilots bailed out successfully and were picked up by Air Rescue Service out of Westover AFB, while both aircraft were destroyed.

"Both pilots were scheduled for an intercept profile mission per paragraph i, Flight Order 176, 337th FIS, Boston Air Defense Sector (SAGE), Westover AFB, Mass., dated 28 February 1957. Local clearance, AF Form 113, was filed for two F-86D aircraft - 53-577, which was designated as 'Gilbert Hotel One,' piloted by Lt. Smyth (Flight leader for this mission), and 53-753 which was designated as 'Gilbert Hotel Two,' piloted by Lt. Young The two aircraft departed Westover Air Force Base at 1210 local with a 30-second take off interval. After becoming airborne, Lt. Smyth contacted 'Eggnog' GCI controller who thereupon took control of Hotel Flight for the profile mission. The two aircraft climbed to 38,000 feet, entering a high overcast at 23,000 feet and breaking out on top at approximately 30,000. The GCI controller vectored Hotel Flight to the target aircraft and two successful intercept passes were completed.

After completing the second pass, Lt. Smyth contacted GCI and requested an en route let down to Westover Air Force Base. Hotel Flight took up position for a 'snake descent' - (Radar lock-on descent) and GCI proceeded to vector the flight down through the overcast. During this let down, Lt. Smyth became concerned about the possibility that GCI might not be 'painting' all aircraft in that area, so he instructed Lt. Young to extend dive brakes and expedite descent through the cloud deck while he did the same. Both pilots became VFR at approximately 23,000 feet. A visual join up for normal formation was accomplished and a release was obtained from GCI control. After checking the amount of fuel remaining in each aircraft, Lt. Smyth instructed Lt. Young to go into trail formation while they flew around the local area to expend additional fuel prior to landing. Lt. Young slipped into trail position approximately two to three ships length behind Lt. Smyth. When trail formation had been established, Lt. Smyth began some diving and climbing turns.

While in the second dive, Lt. Young made a fuel and cockpit check. When he looked out again he found that Lt. Smyth had initiated a left climbing turn, and that he (Lt. Young) had fallen back out of proper trail position. Lt. Young increased his power setting and attempted to regain position, but could not turn tightly enough and found himself on the outside of the climbing turn. This placed Lt. Young in Lt. Smyth's blind spot. At the top of the left climbing turn, at approximately 19,000 feet, Lt. Smyth looked back to the left but could not see Lt. Young in the position in which Lt. Young normally would be. At this point Lt. Smyth reversed position into a right turn to look for Lt. Young on the right side. This placed the two aircraft almost line abreast in a climb, approximately forty feet apart, and turned hard into each other. Both pilots believed a collision at this time was probable, and both pilots attempted to avoid the collision by pulling up and over the other aircraft.

The forward section of Lt. Smyth's aircraft struck the outer left wing and aft section of Lt. Young's aircraft, throwing both aircraft into inverted spins. Lt. Young was unable to regain control of his aircraft and ejected. Lt. Smyth recovered from the spin at approximately 9,000 feet, but was unable to air start his flamed-out engine and had insufficient altitude and

airspeed to accomplish a dead stick landing at Westover Air Force Base. He then elected to bail out and ejected between 5,000 feet and 7,000 feet. Both pilots were picked up and returned to Westover within one hour and ten minutes by the 46th Air Rescue Squadron which is based at Westover."

Lieutenant Young's aircraft 53-753 plunged through the ice in the Quabbin Reservoir and sank in about 200-feet of water. Lieutenant Smyth's aircraft 53-577 landed in a heavily wooded area about one-mile west of the Bobbin Hollow Farm in Belchertown. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Smyth landed about a mile west of the wreckage, near Stebbins St. and close to the Granby border line. Lieutenant Smyth is originally from Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, and Lieutenant Young is from Greenback, Tennessee.

Less than two weeks later on 11 March 1957, one of the unit's T-33S, T-33A 56-1600 crashed in Windsor Locks, Connecticut killing 1st Lt Harold D. Gibson and 2nd Lt John W. Chandler.

A local clearance (Form 113) was filed, signed by Lt Gibson, estimating takeoff at 1645 EST, for 2 hours, with 2 hours and 30 minutes fuel on board. The aircraft was scheduled as Gilbert Target #1, lead T-33 of a two ship flight, to act as dual targets for an F-86D intercept mission Pilots were briefed to climb to 40,000 feet to Dover Omni, check in with GCI station 'Oppose,' steer 030 degrees from Dover, recover to Chicopee Radio after fighters had completed intercepts, and execute practice jet penetration and low approach to Westover GCA or Bradley ILS. Weather briefing was conducted.

The aircraft took off from runway 05, Westover AFB, at 1646 (4:45 P.M. local), climbed on course toward Dover, and contacted 'Oppose' at 1707 EST. Flight proceeded at 40,000 feet as briefed, was intercepted by Gilbert Hotel flight at 1752 EST, and released from GCI control at 1753 EST. Pigeons (steer to home base) was given as 070 degrees 65 miles. The aircraft proceeded to the Bradley Homer (Outer Marker), descending to 20,000 feet, and at 1810 EST requested permission for a VFR jet penetration and simulated low approach at Bradley Field

The pilot was cleared for a VFR penetration and at 1812 EST left the outer marker at 20,000 feet. He proceeded through a normal penetration, but failed to report at completion of the penetration turn. At 1822 EST the pilot reported at the low cone, apparently outbound, (2500 feet, 195 degrees) proceeded toward the turn to final approach, and at 1824 EST reported engine flame out. The aircraft glided toward Bradley Field on a heading of approximately 060 degrees. It could not be determined if the pilot attempted an air start.

The aircraft descended into the tops of trees in a wooded area and flew level through the tree tops for 200 feet. Then the right tip tank struck a large tree (13 feet 5 inches circumference at base) at a point 45 feet above the ground. The aircraft rolled to an inverted position as it continued through small tree tops down a gentle slope for another 440 feet, and crashed nose first in an inverted position at 1826 EST at a point approximately two and one-half miles southwest of Bradley Field."

1st Lt Harold D. 'Hoot' Gibson, Public Information Officer for the squadron, was single and resided on base. 2nd Lt John W. Chandler, a native of Portland, Maine lived in Belchertown with his wife and son. He had joined the 337th in December 1956.

In early 1958 Lt Gen Joseph J. Atkinson, commander of the Air Defense Command, announced that the first F-104 Starfighter to become operational in the air defense of the east coast would

be assigned to the 337th at Westover AFB. The first squadron to receive the F-104, the 83rd FIS at Hamilton AFB, California is currently receiving its complement of aircraft.

The 337th has been preparing as early as September 1956 for the F-104 when they began sending selected technicians to ground schools and pilots who would make up the nucleus of their training program. Delays kept cropping up, and then it was decided that the F-104s that were scheduled for the ADC would go to the Tactical Air Command. Finally, that decision was re-evaluated and the decision was made to send the F-104s, as originally planned, to the ADC. This news was joyfully received by the members of the 337th, and in February 1958, the unit began earnestly preparing for the arrival of the first Starfighter. Orders were also received in February reassigning Lt Col Robert E. Bruce, the squadron commander, to Japan. His replacement was Lt Col James J. Jabara, famed World War II and Korean War ace.

By June 1958 the squadron had received its full complement of aircraft and was actively engaged in aircrew qualifications. Many of the missions involved a new type of supersonic interception, which caused a considerable amount of sonic booms over the New England area. All supersonic flying was being accomplished above 35,000 feet, but the shock wave resulting from level flight at that altitude still resembled a loud thunderclap on the ground and would be quite startling to a person not understanding the phenomenon. This resulted in many speaking engagements to various civic groups by Air Force personnel (85 to date by aircrews), led by Capt Lawrence A. Keefe.

The month of July saw the end of the Sabrejet era at Westover with the transfer of the last F-86Ls. Some of the last Sabrejets out were, 53-0998, 53-0876, and 53-0727. Meanwhile, the aircrews kept up their transition and checkouts in the F-104 before officially starting into combat crew training and learning to cope with the problems inherent with conducting supersonic intercepts.

During the first week of August, a grounding order was received that grounded all F-104s until a manual nozzle switch and other engine modifications could be accomplished in an effort to improve engine reliability. Modification kits were received and installed by August 25 and limited training was resumed.

In December the 337th FIS deployed via MATS to join a Tactical Air Command composite air strike force on Formosa. Needle-nosed Starfighters, stripped of wings, nose cones, and empennages were tucked neatly in the giant bellies of MATS C-124 Globemasters and were flown across the Pacific. Nicknamed 'Jonah Able,' the operation concurred with the movement of other Century Series fighters dispatched from Okinawa and the Philippines by the 13th Air Force. Tactical Air Command F-105s, F-105s, and F-57 jet bombers filled out the Pacific Air Force's strike force.

On 19 October 1959 the flying safety record was broken with the destruction of F-104B S/N 56-3724 and the death of both pilots, Capt James T. Akeley and 1st Lt Peter A. MacBurnie.

"The F-104B using the call sign 'November Juliet 80' (NJ 80), had departed Westover at 9:19 A. M. on a routine training mission. Purpose of the flight was to complete an annual instrument proficiency flight check required by AFR 60-4. At about 9:45 A. M. the aircraft began its return to Westover, and was under the control of the Boston Air Defense Sector (SAGE) recovery director.

Around 10:00 A. M. the SAGE recovery director gave NJ 80 instructions to turn to a heading of 230 degrees and advised him to begin his descent to 10,000 feet. He also requested NJ 80 to call when steady on a 230 degree heading and when passing through 15,000 feet. NJ 80 called steady 230 degrees and at 10:06 A. M. called passing through 15,000 feet. Shortly thereafter, the recovery director gave NJ 80 a corrective directional heading to 270 degrees, but no acknowledgment was given by the aircraft. Radar showed the aircraft to be tracking approximately 270 degrees, but they still did not have radio contact with the aircraft. At 10:07 A. M. radar contact was lost with the F-104. The aircraft went down in a wooded area in Templeton, MA about 26-miles from Westover.

The primary cause of the accident is undetermined. The cause of the fatalities was ejection at too low an altitude for survival." Funeral services for the F-104B Starfighter pilots killed in the crash of their jet Monday in Templeton were conducted Wednesday in the Base Chapel. More than 200 persons attended the services for the 337th Fighter Interceptor Squadron pilots, while three F-104S from the squadron made a 'Missing Man' flyby over the base. The flyby featured the three jets flying over Westover at low altitudes with a space left in their formation representing the downed aircraft. Pilots flying the jets in the memorial service were Capt Ernest C. Dunning, Capt Raymond W. Nyls, and Capt Herbert S. Barnes. The No. 3 slot in formation was left open . . . Meantime, six base officers today were named to the investigating board which will probe the crash of the F-104B Starfighter. They will assist Lt Col Maurice C. Phillips of the Boston Air Defense Sector, board chairman, in attempting to discover what caused the crash Monday in Templeton which took the lives of the two pilots aboard

On June 13 a near tragedy occurred when Maj Emmett S. Barrentine, performing A test hop on F-104A 56-0806, was forced to eject from the aircraft when the engine seized up due to oil starvation. The aircraft was one of two that remained in the squadron before being ferried to the Tenn ANG.

"Major Barrentine had departed the base at 2:37 P.M. local time, to perform a routine test following a periodic inspection of the aircraft. During the performance of the test, he noted an 'oil low level warning light' was on. With the oil pressure dropping off, he decided to return to Westover, but shortly afterward, he heard a scraping sound. At this time the throttle was stop cocked. An air start was attempted but the RPM hung at 35%, EOT 580, throttle at military power. The ram air turbine was deployed, takeoff flaps lowered, and the engine anti-ice light was noted to be on.

Another air start was attempted at 14,000 feet, with the RPM hanging at 30%. The pilot stop cocked the throttle, transmitted IFF, and headed the aircraft west towards a sparsely settled wooded area, and made the decision to eject when he reached an altitude of 5,000 feet. The aircraft crashed in the small town of Phillipston, MA, while Major Barrentine parachuted into a grove of small birch trees and was uninjured."

The crash occurred just about four-miles from the scene of the F-104B crash in October 1959 in Templeton, MA that killed Captain Akeley and 1st Lieutenant MacBurnie.

Flight tested aircraft returning to active service after depot maintenance, modification, or repair, 1988.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 14 Dec 2010

Updated: 3 Feb 2018

Sources

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

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

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

Unit yearbook. *26th Air Division, Defense*. 1956.

Unit yearbook. *32nd Air Division*. 1955.