449th FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE
449th Fighter Squadron constituted, 2 Aug 1943
Activated, 26 Aug 1943
Inactivated, 25 Dec 1945
Activated, 1 Sep 1947
Redesignated 449th Fighter Squadron (All-Weather), 20 Jul 1948
Redesignated 449th Fighter All-Weather Squadron, 20 Jan 1950
Redesignated 449th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Jun 1951
Discontinued and inactivated, 25 Aug 1960

STATIONS
Kunming, China, 26 Aug 1943
Lingling, China, 26 Aug 1943 (detachments operated from Hengyang and Kweilin, China, Sep 1943)
Suichwan, China, Feb 1944
Kweilin, China, Jun 1944
Chengkung, China, 16 Jul 1944 (detachment operated from Yunnani, China, 23 Jul 1944-Mar 1945; Mengtsz, China, Mar 1945; Posek, China, 12 Apr-May 1945)
Mengtsz, China, c. 13 Jul 1945
India, Sept-Nov 1945
Ft Lewis, WA, 19-25 Dec 1945
Adak, 1 Sep 1947
Ladd AFB, AK, 28 Mar 1949-25 Aug 1960

ASSIGNMENTS
51st Fighter Group, 26 Aug 1943-13 Dec 1945
Alaskan Air Command, 1 Sep 1947

5001st Composite Wing, 1 Jul 1949
11th Air Division, 8 Apr 1953
5001st Air Defense Group, 20 Sep 1954
11th Air Division, 1 Oct 1955-25 Aug 1960

ATTACHMENTS
23rd Fighter Group, 26 Aug-Oct 1943
5001st Composite Group, 1 May 1949

WEAPON SYSTEMS
P-38, 1943-1945
P-61, 1947-1949
F-82, 1948-1953
F-94, 1952-1954
F-89, 1954-1960
F-89D
F-89J
F-94A
F-94B
F-82H
P-38G
P-38J
P-61B
F-82H

COMMANDERS

HONORS
Service Streamers
None

Campaign Streamers
India-Burma
China Defensive
China Offensive

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
None

Decorations
None

EMBLEM
On a disc, divided horizontally by an irregular representation of a mountain range white, lined

black, the upper section of the disc blue, thereon a star white, the lower section black; over the left side a half-Arctic gyrfalcon proper (white, outlined black, beak, claws and eyelid yellow, tongue red, eye black), wings rising and the left wing extending over the edge of the disc. (Approved, 4 Dec 1951)

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

As the Cold War intensified the 449th FS(AW) was withdrawn from Davis Field and reestablished at Ladd Field, Fairbanks. This move took place in March 1949 with the squadron re-equipping with F-82H at the same time.

In late spring and the early summer of 1951 the 57th, now designated as Fighter-Interceptor Group, converted from F-80s to F-94Bs. Their mission was revised from tactical to air defense.

At Ladd AFB the 449th FIS had previously been under the direct supervision of the 5001st Composite Wing, which was the controlling agency for Ladd. On April 8, 1953, the 5001st CW was inactivated and replaced by the newly activated 11th Air Division.

Although the 449th FIS was the first of AAC's all-weather squadrons, they were the last of the six Scorpion squadrons in Alaska. The finally replaced their obsolescent F-94Bs with F-89Ds under Project AAC 4F 281 in October 1954. The 449th FIS, under Colonel Joseph Marsiglia, shared the huge old Hanger One at Ladd with the 18th FIS.

The 449th FIS lost four F-89Ds while operating from Ladd and their satellite airfield at Galena. They were flying in some of the worst possible weather conditions in Alaska—in addition to snow and ice fog, the Fairbanks environs included some of the coldest winter temperatures recorded. Winter temperatures often reached fifty degrees below Zero, which caused severe cold soak of the airframes and congealing of oil and hydraulic fluids. Atmospheric disturbances caused the "swing" of the Ladd Radio Range legs, which made navigation in instrument conditions hazardous. Both Ladd and Galena had rivers crossing the approach course at each end of their runways, which created hazards for under or overshoots on approaches, along with heavy migratory waterfowl in the Spring and Fall seasons.

To improve operating conditions an eight stall alert barn was constructed at Ladd and a four stall barn at Galena. These had doors on either end of the stalls that opened simultaneously, which permitted an F-89 being scrambled to be started and placed in afterburner in the barns before even taking the short taxi strips to the runway. The 449th established a record scramble time of two minutes, twenty-eight seconds from the time the scramble horn went off to airborne while launching from one of these barns with a F-89.

In the summer of 1957 the 449th FIS was informed that they were to receive F-102s, but instead they received F-89Js. Some of these were newly modified Ds by Northrop, while others

were changed to the J configuration "in the field" via modification kits airlifted in from California.

In January 1960 the Air Force decided to replace the 449th FIS Scorpions with F-104As and a phaseout of the F-89J began, with the last one departing Ladd on July 31,1960. By this date two more decisions had been made, the first to bring in F-101Bs, and then to inactivate the squadron instead, which look place in August.

The 449th Fighter Interceptor Squadron was doubled in size with F-94As supplementing their F-82s. At this time their squadron commander was Colonel Thomas H. Beeson, a fighter pilot who had scored three kills during WWII with the 377th Fighter Squadron. Beeson, like Colonel Schilling, was one of the "Boy Colonels," who had risen in rank faster than some of the more jealous types would have liked.

For the 449th FIS it was an interesting period that lasted for three years while they flew both the F-94A and the Twin Mustang. Due to their geographical location at Fairbanks they were faced with far more climactic problems than the 57th FIG was at the more moderate Anchorage. Winter temperatures often dropped well below minus forty degrees Fahrenheit, occasionally dropping as low as minus sixty, which created myriad problems with cold-soak. Hydraulic fluids came close to jelling in the lines. The JP-1 fuel became cantankerous and sometimes the engines would start, while often they would not. With two aircraft parked side by side, it would be impossible to forecast which one could be started and which one would not. Condensation from the aircrews' breath would frost the inside of the aircraft's' canopy and be difficult if not impossible to defrost. The ground crews suffered immensely in the cold in an attempt to get the aircraft airborne, for if it couldn't be accomplished within fifteen minutes after being towed from the hanger it was a lost cause for both man and machine.

The 449th FIS flew the F-82H in Alaska, and was the last USAF squadron to fly conventionally powered fighters. They also received war-weary F-82Fs from FEAF when those squadrons converted to F-94s, and oddly enough, this F-82E that had been modified to H standards that had previously belonged to the 27th Fighter Escort Group. The radar pod was commonly called "the dong."

As the 449th FIS had just taken on their F-94s after the Korean War started, how this altercation would effect Alaskan operations was an unknown. As soon as the squadron terminated their reconnaissance missions from Marks Air Force Base at Nome, that field was essentially abandoned.

During this period the 449th FIS utilized both the F-94 and the F-82 as interceptors. In addition, the F-82 was flown on long range reconnaissance missions over Russia's eastern coastline and the Chukotskiy Peninsula. Also the F-82 was flown in a semi ground support role during cooperation maneuvers with the US Army during Operation Whitesox. (The Army decreed that they could not come under a simulated attack during the night, dawn nor dusk, as, apparently, it would be an unfair practice to disturb their rest or chowlines). One additional role was that of

an ice breaker, where they dropped bombs upon ice flows on the Yukon River that skirted the satellite Galena Air Base/Airport and also on the Chena River on the outskirts of Ladd AFB where ice backups would cause floods on the airfields.

For most of these roles the F-94 was totally unsuitable. As being demonstrated in Japan in a limited role, they could be flown to a degree as a fighter-bomber by replacing the tip tanks with ordnance. (Although an official request to wire the wings and install bomb and rocket shackles, as on the F-80C, was rejected. Colonel Beeson, who took over the command of the 57th FIG on November 19, 1951 modified a F-94B accordingly with the assistance of Lockheed and demonstrated that the modification was feasible. For this, and an unauthorized grounding of the F-94s in his command because of a maintenance problem, he was transfered to FEAF). It did not have nearly the sufficient range for use in a reconnaissance role, and the cramped cockpits limited aircrews movement to such a fatiguing degree that an attempt to extend their range through additional underwing fuel tanks was totally unfeasible. Still, there remains strong rumors that are locked under the guise of secrecy that both F-94s and F-82s operating out of Marks AFB "test fired" their machine guns on Russian submarines in the Bering Straits.

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Marks AFB, in itself, was an interesting place as it was in reality two separate airfields. Built during WWII as a jumping off place for aircraft on the Alaska-Siberia Route, (ALSIB), for lend-lease aircraft enroute to Russia, it had two sets of runways, hangers, and two control towers. A lend-lease aircraft would be landed on the American side by its ferry crew, scrutinized for faults, and then turned over to the Russians. They would run an acceptance check on the aircraft, tow it to their side of the field, takeoff across the Bearing seaj and it would disappear into history.

With any succeeding step in the escalation of the Korean War an unknown, people that were stationed at Marks during the period before Marks AFB was abandoned were given instructions on how to walk out of there overland should it come under attack and in the event that they could not be airlifted out. This included instructions on not to attempt to associate with nor expect assistance from the natives in the area, as most of them had some degree of a Russian heritage and their political leanings were suspect.

Although Marks AFB had been utilized as a forward operating base by both the 57th Fighter Interceptor group and the 449th Fighter Interceptor squadron, it and the city of Nome were considered as undefensible in the event of a Russian attack. Thus, one day some USAF transports arrived and dismantled and removed the Ground Controlled Approach radar and the GCI site at Nome and at Gambell, on St. Lawrence Island. The next day the transports were back and the remainder of the US military personnel removed.

The 449th FIS and the 57th FIG had, and would continue to use King Salmon and Galena as forward operating bases. Also utilized to a limited degree was McGrath.

While the F-94s were based at Ladd the 449th FIS fell under the control of the 11th Air Division, which was established at Ladd and had control of all of the GCI sites in the northern half of Alaska on a line running, roughly, from Romanzof to Clear to south of Ladd AFB to the Canadian border. The 57th FIG was responsible for air defense for everything south of this line, including the Aleutian Chain areas not covered by the US Navy. They were under the control of the 10th Air Division which was located at Elmendorf AFB. When the 57th Fighter Interceptor Group, itself, was inactivated on April 13, 1953, its assigned three squadrons, the 64th, 65th and 65th FIS's came under the direct control of the 10th Air Division.

The 449th FIS continued to fly the F-94A until B models became available as hand-me-downs from the 57th FIG when they finally received their F-89Ds two and a half years later. These B models came from the 66th and 64th FIS's in May and June 1954, respectively. The 449th FIS, having lost six of their F-94As in accidents over four years then sent the remainder of their well-worn "Model A's" to the Lower 48 for use by Air National Guard Squadrons, primarily those in Northeast. The 449th FIS, themselves, would continue with the F-94B version until November of that year when they also began receiving F-89Ds.

Ground support for this system included hangars and weapons storage. Originally, the 449th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) was based out of Hangar 3. In 1954, the 449th moved to Hangar 1 as the F-89s came into Ladd's inventory. A heavy airplane with narrow landing wheels, the F-89D aircraft placed a considerable amount of weight on its small footprint, causing ramps at Hangar 3 to repeatedly buckle under the strain.72 Loading the aircraft with its rocketry also caused difficulties on the ground. In September 1954, workers constructed a special loading zone for the F-89s with a 400-foot dirt barricade adjacent to the south taxi ramp between hangars 3 and 4 (today's hangar 6.) Large enough to accommodate five aircraft, it was located far enough away from other facilities to provide a safety buffer for the high explosives, while still providing access to a Ready Rocket Storage building, planned for completion in 1955 After 1957, the 2200 area, or "missile multicube," stored spare rockets for the F- 89s. The complex of eight buildings had double perimeter fencing and full perimeter lighting. Within the complex stood a guardhouse, a maintenance facility, and six heated storage structures with rollup doors providing access to the missiles. Missile multicubes at Ladd and Elmendorf may have been among the first complexes of their type to be constructed.

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Sources

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