

48th FIGHTER WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

48th Fighter Bomber Wing, established, 25 Jun 1952

Activated, 10 Jul 1952

Redesignated 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, 8 Jul 1958

Redesignated 48th Fighter Wing, 1 Oct 1991

STATIONS

Chaumont AB, France, 10 Jun 1952

RAF Lakenheath, England, 15 Jan 1960

ASSIGNMENTS

Twelfth Air Force, 10 Jul 1952

United States Air Forces in Europe, 1 Jan 1958

Third Air Force, 1 Oct 1959

United States Air Forces in Europe, 12 Oct 1959

Seventeenth Air Force, 15 Nov 1959

Third Air Force, 15 Jan 1960

Seventeenth Air Force, 1 Jul 1961

Third Air Force, 1 Sep 1963

WEAPON SYSTEMS

F-84, 1952-1954
F-86, 1953-1956
F-100, 1956-1972
F-4, 1972-1977
F-111, 1977-1992
F-15, 1992
HH-60G

COMMANDERS

Col Joseph H. Moore, 10 Jul 1952
Col Chesley G. Peterson, 27 May 1953
Col William L. Leverette, 1 Jun 1955
BG Albert P. Clark Jr., 1 Aug 1955
Col Stanton T. Smith Jr., Dec 1956
Col Edward F. Roddy, 24 Jun 1959
Col Victor E. Warford, 4 Aug 1959
Col Emmett S. Davis, 1 May 1961
Col Robert L. Petit, 6 Jun 1962
Col Allen P. Rankin, 1 Jun 1964
Col Ross L. Blachly, 3 Aug 1964
Col Edward B. Burdett, 14 Jul 1965
Col Cullen A. Brannon Jr., 7 Jun 1967
Col Henry W. Brown, 2 Jun 1969
Col Frank L. Gailer Jr., 19 Sep 1969
Col William T. Whisner, 1 Feb 1970
Col Don D. Pittman, 29 Mar 1971
Col John R. Paulk, 21 May 1973
Col Richard H. Head, 18 Apr 1974
BG Robert E. Messerli, 17 Jun 1975
BG Buford D. Lary, 26 Mar 1979
Col Thomas A. Baker, 18 Jun 1980
BG Edward R. Bracken, 25 Nov 1981
Col Sam W. Westbrook III, 3 Apr 1984
Col Thomas J. Barber, 16 Jun 1986
Col William M. Douglass, 9 Jul 1987
Col Thomas J. Lennon, 24 Apr 1989
Col Barry L. Ream, 25 Aug 1990
Col Jonas L. Blank Jr., 12 Dec 1990
Col William C. Guth, 10 Jul 1991
Col Dean W. Radueg, 27 Jul 1992
BG Kurt B. Anderson, 11 Sep 1992
Col Dean W. Radueg, 19 Jan 1993
Col Douglas J. Richardson, 3 Jul 1996
Col Carl E. Van Pelt, 5 Feb 1998

Col Irving L. Halter Jr., 31 Aug 1999
Brig Gen John T. Brennan, 9 Mar 2001
Brig Gen Mark T. Matthews, 1 Aug 2003
Brig Gen Robert P. Steel, 24 Jun 2005
Brig Gen John W. Hesterman III, 5 Jun 2007

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Southwest Asia
Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jul 1961-29 Feb 1964
1 Jul 1966- 30 Jun 1968
14 Oct 1976-31 Dec 1977
1 Apr 1978-31 Mar 1980
1 Jul 1984-30 Jun 1986
1 Jul 1986-30 Jun 1988
1 Jul 1988-30 Jun 1990
20 Aug 1990-11 May 1991
1 Jul 1992-30 Jun 1994
1 Jul 1994-30 Jun 1996
1 Aug 1996-30 Sep 1998
24 Mar-10 Jun 1999
1 Oct 1998-30 Sep 2000
1 Oct 2000-24 Sep 2002
1 Oct 2002-30 Sep 2004
1 Oct 2004-31 Oct 2005
1 Nov 2005-31 Dec 2006
1 Jan-31 Dec 2007

Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation

Libya, 10-16 Apr 1986

Bestowed Honors

Authorized to display the honors earned by the 48th Operations Group prior to 10 Jul 1952

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War II
Antisubmarine, American Theater
Air Offensive, Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation
Germany, 6 Dec 1944

Cited in the Orders of the Day, Belgian Army
6 Jun-30 Sep 1944
1 Oct-17 Dec 1944
18 Dec 1944-15 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM



48th Fighter-Bomber Wing emblem





Azure, an orle of mullets Argent, issuant from base overall the bust of the Statue of Liberty facing to dexter Vert, all within a diminished bordure Or. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "STATUE DE LA LIBERTE" in Blue letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The emblem is symbolic of the Wing and its history. On 10 July 1954, the 178th anniversary of United States independence, the Wing was designated as "The Statue of Liberty Wing" in recognition of the long standing friendship between the United States and France. The thirteen stars surrounding the Statue of Liberty represent the original colonies of the United States of America.

Approved on 5 Jul 1962, modified on 21 Nov 1994; replaced emblem approved on 20 Mar 1953 Emblem (Approved on 5 July 1962; modified on 15 June 2007; replaced emblem approved on 20 March 1953).

MOTTO

NICKNAME

STATUE DE LA LIBERTÉ--The Statue of Liberty Wing

OPERATIONS

The 48th served as one of USAFE's fighter wings with a commitment to NATO.

The 48th stood continuous alert with F-84 and F-86, prepared to respond to any threat from the Communist-controlled Eastern Bloc. For its efforts in and contributions to the local area, the wing received its moniker Statue de la Liberté (Statue of Liberty Wing).

The US increased its combat wings in the early 1950s. Under this program, the US Air Force established the 48th Fighter-Bomber Wing on 25 June 1952 and activated the wing on 10 July 1952 at Chaumont Air Base, France. The new 48th Fighter-Bomber Wing inherited a base that was little more than acres of mud where wheat fields used to be. The only hardened facilities were a concrete runway and a handful of tarpaper shacks. Within two years, the wing headed up an engineering project that resulted in the construction of permanent barracks, a wing headquarters, flightline shops, and warehouses.

While trying to raise a functional base out of the mud, the 48th also served as an operational wing, flying the F-84. With the F-84, the wing supported the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE), and participated in exercises with the US Seventh Army. In addition, the wing conducted operational readiness exercises and tactical evaluations. The 48th frequently deployed to Wheelus Field, Libya, for training in bombing and gunnery skills.

Within a year of activation at Chaumont, the wing had become so proficient with the F-84 that it formed an aerial demonstration team known as "The Skyblazers." In 1953 the wing transitioned to the F-86F Sabre, as did the aerial demonstration team. The F-86 team became USAFE's official aerial demonstration team in May 1954.

In late 1956, the Liberty Wing became USAFE's first unit to convert to the F-100 Super Sabre. However, at this time the Chaumont runway was closed for repair, which resulted in the wing deploying to Bullois, Morocco (near Casablanca), to train with its new aircraft.

On 8 December 1957, the 48th Fighter-Bomber Group inactivated and its operational units assigned directly to the wing.

Despite the close relationship between the wing and the people of Chaumont, international relationships between France and the US deteriorated in the late 1950s, resulting in French President Charles de Gaulle demanding the removal of NATO forces from the country. Under a project known as "Red Richard," USAFE relocated its units from France to other locations around Europe. For the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, this meant a move to an empty heavy bomber base, RAF Lakenheath.

On 15 January 1960, jet fighters of the 48TFW landed at RAF Lakenheath for the first time. The Royal Air Force used the base during World War II and Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, both flying bomber aircraft. The wing and its fighters brought a new mission and the first permanent American presence, to RAF Lakenheath. The base required a myriad of construction projects to support the mission. Maintenance and flying operations areas required conversions to support fighter operations, and the base needed the creation of a support structure for a permanent host unit.

Throughout the 1960s the wing's members trained to react to possible aggression from the Soviet Union. They underwent a series of NATO tactical evaluations, for which they earned the wing their first Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, for the period from 1 July 1961 to 29 February 1964. The wing conducted several deployments to Turkey, Italy, Spain, and across the United Kingdom.

On 1 October 1971, the 492d Tactical Fighter Squadron stood down from its NATO commitments, followed by the 493d on 1 December and the 494th on 1 February 1972. This allowed the wing to convert from the F-100 to the F-4 Phantom II. The first F-4 arrived on 7 January 1972 and the wing completed the conversion on 15 April. The incoming F-4s came from units that completed their service in the Vietnam War, and transitioned through Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico. However, the slow turnover resulted in only 17 F-4s being on hand at the time of the transition, and only 26 aircraft available by June 1972. During this time, the 492d and 493d split the available aircraft while the 494th took on a non-operational status. Aircrew struggled to maintain proficiency, averaging less than 10 flying hours per month.

The wing coped with this aircraft shortage for two years, not reaching its full allotment of 73 airframes until July 1974. The 492d became fully operational on 10 December 1974, and the 493d on 13 January 1975, followed by the 494th on 25 March. Overall, the wing assumed its initial operational capability on 1 July 1975, resuming its full NATO and USAFE commitments after a three-year transition.

From 1975 to 1977 the 48th underwent a hectic series of operational readiness inspections and tactical evaluations, while standing on alert and participating in a number of weapons training deployments. However, the F-4 service would be short, as the wing prepared for another aircraft transition.

As early as the summer of 1975, the 48th Fighter Wing began its preparations to receive the F-111 Aardvark. The first public, official announcement took place in October 1976. In a three-way move, the 48th received F-111s from the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing, Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; the 366th received F-111s from Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada; and Nellis received Lakenheath's F-4s.

On 1 March 1977 the first maintenance trainer F-111 arrived at Lakenheath with the last F-4 departing on 22 April. With the assignment of 91 F-111s, USAFE once again activated the 495th Fighter Squadron, which had served under the 48th Fighter Group during World War II.

Unlike the previous F-4 transition, the F-111 change took place quickly and without any significant problems. In fact, the wing received its third Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for such a smooth transition. Almost immediately after changing aircraft, the wing began a series of monthly exercises and deployments that took the Liberty Wing to Italy, Iran, Greece, and Pakistan.

By the mid 1980s the "Red Scare" was not the only American fear for national security; terrorists struck targets from Beirut to Berlin, from Rome to Rotterdam. Some of these attacks were attributed to the Libyan government headed by Colonel Mohmar Qaddafi. In retaliation, U.S. President Ronald Reagan ordered a strike against targets in Tripoli, which were carried out by the US Navy's Sixth Fleet and F-111s of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing.

At approximately 1900 local time, on the evening of 14 April 1986, 24 F-111Fs launched from Lakenheath, including six airborne spares. In flights of four, aircrews flew south through the Straits of Gibraltar and began their orchestrated attack shortly after midnight on 15 April. Simultaneously, Navy and Air Force support aircraft began engaging Libyan defenses around Tripoli.

The grueling 14-hour flight took its toll. "Those guys were so fatigued, the crew chiefs literally had to pull some of the crews out of the cockpits," recalled CMSgt Richard O'Shaughnessy, then a Master Sergeant and weapons flight supervisor. "Most of them actually lost several pounds from sweating so much. When the guys pulled their helmets off, sweat literally poured down their foreheads and necks."

Colonel Sam W. Westbrook, 48th Tactical Fighter Wing Commander, summed up the base's feelings during the 14-hour ordeal: "We held our breath during that fourteen-hour period. People didn't really smile a whole lot and conversation remained somewhat subdued. But when our people saw the first F-111s on approach, the whole flightline workforce let out a sigh of relief and seemed to breathe once again."

However, despite the success of the mission, the reality of the danger experienced by the wing's pilots hit home. As the strike force recovered at Lakenheath, both air and ground crews

were given the somber news that “Karma-52”, aircraft 70-0389, and its crew Major Fernando L. Ribas and Captain Paul Lorence of the 495th Fighter Squadron, were missing.

On 8 September 1986, U.S. Navy Secretary John Lehman presented the Navy’s Meritorious Unit Commendation to the Liberty Wing for its participation in the operation. Today, the Liberty Wing remains the only Air Force unit to have received this prestigious award. Likewise, General Charles Donnelly, Commander-in-Chief, USAFE, visited RAF Lakenheath on 17 February 1987 and presented decorations to those who participated in the operation. The ceremony ended with a presentation to Captain Lorence’s widow Diane, followed by a missing man flyover.

On 2 August 1990, Iraq President Saddam Hussein directed his forces to invade Kuwait and thereby threatened an invasion into Saudi Arabia. Within days of the invasion, US President George Bush directed the deployment of US Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia in what became known as Operation DESERT SHIELD. In an address to the Pentagon on 15 August, President Bush referred to DESERT SHIELD as “...one of the most important deployments of allied military power since the second World War.”

Also in the first week of August, Col Thomas J. Lennon, 48th Tactical Fighter Wing Commander, received a call from Headquarters, US States Air Force, asking if the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing was ready to deploy. Colonel Lennon built a team of 13 members from wing leadership, known as the “Lucky 13,” and preparations began for the eventual movement of personnel and F-111s to Saudi Arabia.

On 25 August 1990, 18 F-111s took off from Lakenheath as the first USAFE unit to deploy. In this first group, nearly 500 men and women of the Liberty Wing departed with the assuredness of years of training behind them and a clearly defined mission before them. By January 1991, the 48th had deployed 66 of its 70 F-111s to Taif, Saudi Arabia, along with more than 1,400 Team Lakenheath members. During Operation DESERT STORM, the war for the liberation of Kuwait, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing (Provisional) flew 2,500 combat sorties. Dropping 7.3 million pounds of precision guided munitions, the wing’s F-111 fleet destroyed 920 tanks and armored personnel carriers, 245 hardened aircraft shelters, 160 bridges, and 113 bunkers. In one of the last missions of the war, on 27 February 1991, the 48th recorded the first combat use of a GBU-28 (Guided Bomb Unit), successfully destroying an Iraqi command and control center. All of this the wing accomplished without one combat loss of a pilot or aircraft.

Incorporating the lessons learned during the desert operations, the Air Force directed changes that led to the Objective Wing Organization. Beginning in mid-1991, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing began restructuring under this program, realigning its maintenance-fighter squadron work force and establishing several command positions to include the 48th Logistics Group, 48th Medical Group, 48th Support Group, and 48th Operations Group (originally designated the 48th Fighter Group). The program also redesignated many of the Air Force’s units by dropping the “Tactical” from their names. Thus on 1 October 1991, the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing was redesignated the 48th Fighter Wing, and the 492d, 493d, and 494th became simply Fighter Squadrons.

In the midst of the organizational changes, the wing switched aircraft again, exchanging the F-111s for the F-15E Strike Eagle. On 15 February 1992, the first F-15E landed at Lakenheath, with the last F-111 departing for units within the US on 16 December 1992. The final F-15E arrived in June 1993, and the wing achieved initial operational capability on 1 October 1993.

On 5 August 1993, the 492d Fighter Squadron conducted the wing's first F-15E deployment when it went to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, under Operation PROVIDE COMFORT (succeeded by NORTHERN WATCH). Thirteen days after the 492d's arrival in Turkey, Iraq violated the exclusion zone by placing surface-to-air missiles outside of the city of Mosul. In spite of repeated warnings to remove the missiles, Iraqi forces failed to comply. On the afternoon of 18 August, Liberty Wing F-15Es struck the site, eliminating the missile threat.

For the remainder of the decade, the 492d and 494th continually rotated to Turkey and to Aviano Air Base, Italy, for participation in Operation DENY FLIGHT, supporting operations in the Balkans. Providing combat air patrol with F-15Cs, the 493d also rotated planes to Turkey and Italy.

In February 1999, while the wing served another rotation in Turkey, acts of aggression by Serbia—the core of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—against its Albanian population in the province of Kosovo resulted in NATO intervention, culminating in Operation ALLIED FORCE.³ Strikes against Serbian targets began on 24 March 1999. Within 72 hours, the 493d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, stationed at Cervia Air Base, Italy, recorded four aerial victories against the enemy. At the same time, the 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, operating from Aviano Air Base, employed its precision guided munitions—including the first combat use of a GBU-28 Bunker Buster by an Air Force F-15E. Starting in May, the 492d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron launched combat operations directly from RAF Lakenheath, the first sustained combat operations flown from England since World War II.

During the air war over Serbia, the wing deployed 1,011 personnel to 18 different locations. The wing's pilots and aircraft flew combat missions from three locations, using 69 aircraft. Those remaining at RAF Lakenheath not only made up for the work of those deployed, but also launched combat missions. Furthermore, they served as a supply point for their deployed counterparts, sending 3,871 tons of equipment to various locations. In all, the pilots of the 48th serving under expeditionary squadrons flew 2,562 sorties for more than 11,000 combat hours in less than three months, dropping approximately 3 million pounds of munitions and scoring four out of five confirmed Air Force aerial victories.

After ALLIED FORCE, the 48th Fighter Wing was given a chance to reconstitute its forces for the first time in six years. During this period, the wing upgraded its F-15E fleet with new Block E-210 models.

At the same time, the wing participated in training with its NATO allies through a series of deployments across continental Europe while receiving USAFE and NATO strike evaluations,

tactical evaluations, and surety inspections. Yet the wing continued to prepare for future taskings, such as its Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) commitments.

On 25 September 2002, the wing completed a transformation based on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's Combat Wing Organization. Some of the changes included consolidation of all maintenance functions in the 48th Maintenance Group that were previously part of the 48th Operations Group. The transformation also affected the 48th Support Group, redesignated the 48th Mission Support Group, when the wing's supply, transportation, and plans activities combined to form the 48th Logistics Readiness Squadron. The 48th Contracting Squadron also became a part of the 48th Mission Support Group in 1993.

On 1 October 2004, the wing gained an additional group. The 85th Group remained geographically separated, stationed at Naval Air Station, Keflavik, Iceland, until 28 June 2006 when it inactivated. USAFE reassigned the 56th Rescue Squadron from the 85th Group to the 48th Fighter Wing at that time, and the squadron continues to fly the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter for its search and rescue mission.

For the first time since the Gulf War, in December 2000, the wing's flying squadrons began deploying to the desert of Southwest Asia. As part of AEFs 2 and 4 respectively, the 494th and 492d Fighter Squadrons served as Operation SOUTHERN WATCH's precision guided munitions squadrons based at Ahmed Al Jabar Air Base, Kuwait. The units employed several munitions against Iraqi targets, racking up 690 sorties for 1,229 hours for the 494th in AEF 2 and 730 sorties for 1,173.9 hours for the 492d in AEF 4.

On 21 March of 2003, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM began with airstrikes and ground attacks against the Iraqi military. Nearly 500 people from the Liberty Wing served in various roles and locations.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 28 Sep 2010

Updated: 3 Aug 2016

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. *48 Tactical Fighter Wing. RAF Lakenheath, England, 1960*. Nd.