

83rd FIGHTER-DAY WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

83rd Fighter-Day Wing established, 24 Feb 1956

Activated, 8 Jul 1956

Inactivated, 8 Dec 1957

STATIONS

Seymour Johnson AFB, NC, 8 Jul 1956-8 Dec 1957

ASSIGNMENTS

Ninth Air Force, 8 Jul 1956-8 Dec 1957

WEAPON SYSTEMS

F-80, 1956

F-86, 1956-1957

F-100, 1957

COMMANDERS

Col Robert C. Richardson III, 8 Jul 1956

Col Ralph L. Merritt, Jr., 9 Jul 1956

Col Robert C. Richardson III, 1 Sep 1956-8 Dec 1957

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

None

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

None

EMBLEM

On a shield per pile transposed azure and or; overall on an escutcheon per bend gules and medium blue, a bend embattled inverted, vert, fimbriated throughout argent; superimposed over the chief area of the escutcheon a stylized demi-falcon bend-wise, in profile, sable, his head and wings raised upward above the escutcheon; his eyes gules, the falcon fimbriated throughout argent. (Approved, 29 Mar 1957)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Carry out visual interception and destruction of enemy aircraft in the air. Operate under direction of Aircraft and Warning systems during visual intercepts. Provide point defense (against enemy aerial attack) or area cover for friendly forces. Locate and destroy enemy surface targets as required.

Replaced, and absorbed resources of, the 4435th Air Base Squadron in Jul 1956. Trained with C-45, C-47, C-119, B-25, T-33, and F-80 aircraft until F-86Hs began to arrive in Oct 1956. Fully operational and flying firepower demonstrations by Jun 1957. Converted to F-100Cs in late 1957. Replaced in Dec 1957 by 4th Fighter-Day Wing.

The 83rd FDW was activated as a unit of the 9th Air Force at Seymour Johnson AFB on 8 July 1956, as directed by General Order #35, dated 19 June 1956. Col Robert C. Richardson III was assigned commander. The wing was tasked to maintain combat effectiveness in the following areas:

F-86H aircraft for the wing were to come from the 312th FBW, then stationed at Clovis AFB, NM. In October, a decision was made to accept the incoming aircraft as expeditiously as possible by accepting delivery of 120 aircraft. Those aircraft that could not be maintained and operated would be placed in storage. This plan soon changed and 9th Air Force approval was sought to establish an IRAN (Inspect And Replace As Necessary) Program to absorb surplus aircraft. Approval was given and by the end of January 1957 the wing had received, processed and was maintaining in flyable condition its full complement of aircraft.

The wing started operations with only two aircraft, a C-45 which was assigned to the wing, and a C47 which was on loan. Two F-80s were assigned in September and in October another C-45, two F-

80s and two T-33s were received. Two C-119s and three more T-33s were received in October. Flying operations, which were slow to begin due to limited equipment and growth problems associated with getting the wing up on its feet, began to pick up.

The F-86H checkout and transition began the second week in October when Col Timothy F. O'Keefe, Deputy Wing Commander (DCM) and LtCol James J. England, 83rd Fighter Day Group Commander, received their initial checkout at Cannon AFB, Clovis, NM. The first four F-86Hs arrived on 12 October, and were assigned to the 83rd FDG.

Pilot checkouts in the F-86H at Seymour Johnson began the first week of November. The Sabres continued to be delivered until the end of December 1956, when the group had a total of 42 assigned, 14 planes being assigned to each squadron. Also at the end of December, 33 of 45 assigned pilots had completed transition to the F-86H.

To its credit, the wing handled the transition to the F-86H remarkably well. Less than 10% of the maintenance personnel assigned to the wing had even seen an F-86H, much less worked on one and, initially, the wing didn't have the advantage of having North American Aviation (NAA) technical representatives (tech reps) available. Further, most of the assigned technicians were just out of school or hadn't been out very long. Problems were compounded by the lack of aircraft electricians, engine mechanics, hydraulic specialists and armament personnel.

The three squadrons assigned to the 83rd FDW carried four tail stripes outlined in white on the vertical tail. The 532nd's stripes were red, the 533rd's were blue, and the 534th's were green. Three red-striped 532nd F-86Hs with the last one being the CO's aircraft.

That it handled the situation as well as it did is all the more remarkable when the way the wing came into being is taken into account. Initially, there had been some question as to whether the wing would even be activated. Then there was the question of when it would be activated. The question of what type of aircraft the wing would operate compounded the problems, and the problems didn't end there. Shortly after the wing was activated in July 1956, news came that the aircraft would come from the 312th FBW. That in itself was not a problem, but the 312th was converting to the F-100 Super Sabre and much of the ground handling equipment and special tools could be used on the F-100. The 312th naturally wasn't going to let the equipment go.

In addition, the supply situation aggravated an already difficult situation. The Air Force had purchased the F-86H in limited numbers (475) and the amount of spares, special tools and ground handling equipment was also limited. By the time the 83rd began transitioning to the plane, it had been in service for about two years and the supply system couldn't meet the demands being placed on it.

The tech reps arrived, apparently prior to November, and set up class-es to train the maintenance people, but it quickly became clear the magnitude of the task called for a Maintenance Training Detachment (MTD). The MTD arrived in early November and formal training of maintenance personnel began on the 26th.

The 83rd FDW worked toward fully operational status between January and June 1957. The wing's full allotment of F-86H aircraft had all arrived by mid-February. 52 pilots were assigned to the wing at the beginning of January and 50 had been transitioned into the aircraft. The wing had, at that point, three Fighter Day Squadrons (FDS), the 532nd, 533rd, and 534th.

The wing went through a brief transition period and, with that completed, made arrangements to occupy a gunnery camp at Eglin No. 2, an Eglin AFB, FL, auxiliary field, beginning around 1 April 1957. Consequently, April and May found the wing's major effort going toward supporting the gunnery exercise being held at Eglin AFB.

The gunnery program was completed in June and the wing was declared fully operational. Ninth AF assigned the wing a majority of the Firepower demonstrations to be given, in addition to numerous other tasks usually associated to normal peacetime operations.

The attainment of fully operational status was marred when, on 22 April, an F-86H was lost when the pilot lost control of the aircraft and ejected at 20,000 feet. The pilot survived the crash which took place approximately nine miles from the base.

The wing turned in a good record of tactical flying hours flown and number of hours flown per pilot during the January through June period. 5,348 hours were flown and the average hours per pilot was 73; just over 12 hours per pilot per month.

Gunnery training at Eglin ended on May 21st with a Wing Gunnery Meet. Events included dive bombing, skip bombing, rockets, panel strafing and aerial gunnery. The fighter squadrons participated with each squadron fielding a 5-pilot team. Wing and Group Headquarters fielded a 5-pilot team as well. Top honors went to the 534th FDS which scored 1621.59 points. The 532nd FDS came in second with 1413.58 points and the 533rd FDS scored 1273.92 points. The Headquarters team scored 1072.57 points.

While at Eglin, 51 pilots were qualified in air-to-ground gunnery and 9 pilots qualified in air-to-air gunnery.

During the first half of 1957, the wing participated in several activities 34 sorties were flown in support of the Seymour Johnson AFB Rededication Ceremony on 26 April. From 24 April through 7 May, five F-86H aircraft and their pilots were on TDY to Eglin AFB FL, in support of a JCOC exercise there. Seven aircraft flew 2 sorties each in support of Armed Forces Day activities on 18 May. One aircraft was flown to England AFB, LA, for static display. Four sorties were flown on 10 April in support of Army calibration of AAC radio equipment at Fort Bragg NC. Six sorties were flown to support Group Radar Calibration at Pope AFB, NC. Seven pilots on TOY from other 9th AF wings transitioned into the F-86H during the period.

July through December 1957 was a period of great activity for the wing Now fully operational, the wing provided two Firepower Demonstrations in July, one in August, three in September and

one in November. To these were added a number of fly-bys, ground radar calibration missions and air support missions in support of Army exercises.

The number of tactical aircraft assigned to the wing varied. 50 were assigned at the beginning of the period and a high of 65 aircraft was on hand in October. The wing's maintenance statistics reflected a significant improvement during the period, despite supply difficulties brought on by budget restrictions. Sending two-thirds of the aircraft through IRAN inspection process at Ontario, CA, helped greatly improve the overall maintenance situation.

In early October 1957, the wing was told it would make the transition from the F-86H to the newer F-100C Super Sabre. Sixteen of the wing's more experienced pilots received transition training at Foster AFB and at George AFB. The first F-100Cs arrived in November. An F-100C simulator had arrived in October.

The wing continued transitioning pilots into the F-86H and in October 21 pilots completed the transition. In November, continuation training for the pilots who had completed transition to the F-86H was central to the major portion of the wing's flying activity. These pilots, for the most part, were recent graduates of Flying School and needed a maximum amount of flying time, in the time available, to prepare them for the transition to the hotter F-100C.

Training didn't relieve the wing of its responsibilities to carry out other missions, and sometimes even the best efforts resulted in a letdown. Ten aircraft and fifteen aircrews went to Fort Bliss, TX, in November 1957 to prepare for a Firepower Demonstration. The team dutifully carried out a full rehearsal of the demonstration, only to have it cancelled on the 22nd.

Ten aircraft and twelve aircrews were sent to Fort Sill, OK, to carry out a Standard Firepower Demonstration from 11 to 20 November.

Two aircraft and crews were given a daily commitment to support the Army for a period of twelve days, between 7 and 21 November, as part of the wing's participation in TAC Mission 5-39 at Fort Bragg, NC.

By November, the wing had 79 F-86H pilots and 6 F-100C pilots. The transition process continued as thirteen F-86Hs were ferried to Niagara Falls, NY, for transfer to the Air National Guard. Meanwhile, eight pilots attended transition training to the F-100C at Foster AFB and an additional eight attended similar training at George AFB, CA. At home base, six pilots transitioned to the F-100C and two transitioned to the F-86H.

Three major accidents were recorded during this period. Two resulted in the pilots escaping without injury. The pilot involved in the third accident received major injuries. The first accident occurred on 13 August when F-86H 52-2108 crashed as a result of fuel starvation off of Deal Island, MD. The accident investigations revealed the pilot had become lost and attempts by ground personnel to assist him resulted in the radio being cluttered with transmissions that only confused the pilot more. The second accident resulted in the loss of F-86H-10 53-1391, when the pilot,

attempting to land at Webb AFB, TX, landed 2,400 feet short of the runway. The major injury accident occurred when F-86H-5 52-5752 was lost in California when the airplane flamed out during a go-around at San Francisco. Fuel starvation was stated as the cause of the accident.

The 83rd FDW, though active at Seymour Johnson AFB for a relatively brief period, performed its assigned mission well. That it successfully initiated and carried out what it could, in the time remaining, its portion of the transition from the F-86H to the F-100C, while continuing to meet Ninth Air Force taskings, is commendable.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 15 Mar 2011

Updated:

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. *83rd Fighter-Day Wing, Seymour Johnson AFB, NC. 1957.*