

HISTORY OF THE 401st FIGHTER WING

The 401st Fighter Wing traces its illustrious beginnings to the 401st Bombardment Group (Heavy) of World War II fame. The War Department constituted the 401st Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 20 March 1943 and activated it at Ephrata Army Air Base in the state of Washington, on 1 April 1943. Four flying squadrons, the 612th, 613th, 614th, and 615th Bombardment Squadrons were simultaneously activated and assigned to the group.

The group stayed at Ephrata Army Air Base long enough to receive personnel and equipment, then moved to Geiger Field, Washington, on 15 June 1943, to begin initial B-17 flight training. After three weeks, the group relocated to Great Falls Army Air Base, Montana, to complete its training. Following this final phase of B-17G aircrew training, which lasted until 19 October, the group began deployment to Deenethorpe, England, to join the war effort. The ground forces made the journey aboard the Queen Mary, while the aircraft followed a route to Newfoundland, then across the Atlantic to Scotland before reaching their final destination. The unit reached full operational strength on 19 November 1943. The 401st entered the war on 26 November 1943 and conducted its first bombing mission against Bremen, Germany. Poor weather conditions prevented visual targeting and forced aircrews to use radar bombing techniques to penetrate the heavy cloud cover, but the group lost no aircraft on this mission. Later attacks centered on factories, oil refineries, power plants, V-1 and V-2 sites, marshalling yards and port facilities throughout Europe. The group participated in attacks on many strategic targets in France, Holland, Luxembourg, and Germany, but the majority of its early missions focused on oil reserves in order to deny fuel to the Nazi occupation forces.

The group earned two Distinguished Unit Citations during its early combat missions. The first was for a daring but highly successful 11 January 1944 attack on aircraft production facilities in Oschersleben, Germany. Because the target was so near to Berlin, the Germans had large numbers of flak batteries and other defenses in the area. In addition to the heavy anti-aircraft fire, Nazi fighters attacked the bombers for over three hours. On 20 February 1944, the group earned its second award by successfully bombing, and thereby closing, the Erla Maschinewerk aircraft assembly facilities near Leipzig.

The group continued to bomb Industrial targets near Berlin throughout the early months of 1944, which helped to impair the Nazi war fighting capability. Later it switched to such tactical targets as coastal defense guns and transportation centers in preparation for the Normandy invasion. Five minutes before the D-Day landing, the 401st bombed gun emplacements less than 1,000 yards from the beach at one of the landing zones. Following the 6 June 1944 invasion, the group supported ground forces during the St. Lo breakthrough, the Siege of Brest, the Battle of the Bulge, and the assault on the Rhine. The group flew its last combat mission of the war on 20 April 1945 bombing a marshalling yard in Brandenburg.

Following the victory in Europe, the group departed England on 20 May 1945, enroute to the United States. With the war against Japan still in progress, the 401st began training for conversion to B-29 bombers at Sioux Falls Army Air Base in South Dakota. Japan surrendered before the group had completed the conversion; demobilization after V - J Day resulted in its inactivation on 28 August 1945.

After remaining on the inactive, list for almost two years, the group was redesignated the 401st Bombardment Group, (Very Heavy) and activated as part of the Air Reserve forces. While in Reserve status, the 401st operated from Brooks Air Force Base, Texas, until June 1949. Redesignated the 401st Bombardment Group (Medium), it moved to Biggs Air Force Base, Texas, During this post-war period, the group flew a variety of aircraft, including AT-6 and AT-11 trainers and B-26, B-29 and B-50 bombers. The 401st remained a part of the reserves until it rejoined the active force on 1 May 1951, as part of the Strategic Air Command. However, less than two months later, on 25 June 1951, it again inactivated.

The group remained inactive for two and half years, Redesignated the 401st Fighter-Bomber Group on 8 February 1954, it reactivated at Alexandria (later England) Air Force Base, Louisiana. A component of Ninth Air Force, it was attached to the 366th Fighter-Bomber Wing. Three former squadrons-- 612th, 613th, and 614th--were redesignated fighter-bomber squadrons and activated with it, while the 615th remained on the inactive rolls. This new assignment to the Tactical Air Command brought a new mission and a new aircraft. The group conducted tactical operations in the F-86 "Sabre" jet fighter. One year later, older F-84F "Thunderstreak." aircraft replaced the F-86s.

While at Alexandria, the 613th and 614th Fighter-Bomber Squadrons participated in the filming of Warner Brothers' "The McConnell Story." From 10 January to 10 February 1955, the two squadrons flew 125 sorties during the aerial combat sequences of the film, using eight unit F-84 aircraft painted to resemble enemy MIG-15 aircraft flown in the Korean conflict.

The group gained F-86s in June 1956, when the Sabres replaced the F-84F's, which transferred to the Air National Guard. On 30 June 1957, the 401st transitioned to "Super Sabres," receiving a total of 57 F-100D aircraft. Soon after, on 25 September 1957, the group was inactivated and replaced by the 401st Fighter-Bomber Wing, which absorbed the assets of the group. The 615th Fighter-Bomber Squadron reactivated, assigned to the new wing. Though the 401st Fighter-Bomber Wing was constituted on 23 March 1953, part of an Air Force reorganization which replaced combat groups with wings, it remained on the inactive list until 25 September 1957.

This reorganization left most units without a World War II heritage, so the Air Force enacted a program to "temporarily bestow" the history and honors of World War II groups on the like-numbered wings which replaced them. Under this plan, the two units remained separate entities, with the wing keeping the history of the inactive group alive by having partial claim to its World War II honors so long as the group remained on the inactive list.

About nine months after its initial activation, on 1 July 1958, the 401st Fighter-Bomber Wing became the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing. Participating in various exercises, the wing set several deployment records, flying from Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, to Chaumont Air Base, France. An early deployment in March 1958 accomplished the trip non-stop for the first time and a later deployment made the trip in a record seven hours and thirteen minutes.

The wing responded to the Cuban Missile Crisis in late 1962 by deploying to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida. Beginning 19 October, the wing remained on alert, ready to respond to any emergency tasking caused by the blockade of Cuba, until resolution of the crisis on 5 December 1962.

During 1963, the 401st participated in numerous exercises and deployments, including various NATO exercises, overseas rotations and firepower demonstrations. The exceptional skill with which it met this heavy tasking earned the wing an Air Force outstanding Unit Award.

The wing became involved in the Vietnam conflict, in 1964. Although the unit as a whole remained at England Air Force Base, its squadrons rotated to Clark Air Base in the Philippines, from which one squadron operated at all times. Squadrons flew combat missions from such deployed locations as Da Nang and Bien Hoa Air Bases in South Vietnam, Takhli Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand, and Tainan Air Base, Taiwan.

On 3 November 1965, the 612th Tactical Fighter Squadron left the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing for a new assignment at Misawa Air Base, Japan. The 401st gained two additional squadrons, but these units were attached rather than assigned. The wing took operational control of the 531st Tactical Fighter Squadron on 19 November 1965, and the 90th Tactical Fighter Squadron on 5 December 1965. The 531st served less than a month with the 401st before returning to its parent organization the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, at Bien Hoa Air Base on 10 December 1965. Additional organizational changes occurred in 1966, when the 614th and 615th squadrons transferred to the 834th Air Division on 27 April. A few months earlier, the 90th was relieved of its attachment to the 401st. These actions prepared the wing for a change of station. On 27 April 1966, the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing was reassigned to Torrejon Air Base, Spain, as part of Sixteenth Air Force. Its non-flying components and the 613th Tactical Fighter squadron accompanied the wing to Torrejon, where it gained the 307th and 353d Tactical Fighter Squadrons, returning to full operational strength.

At Torrejon, the wing continued to fly the F-100D "Super Sabre." Major operations consisted of maintaining combat readiness; rotating units to other bases in Europe or the Middle East and participating in various United States Air Force, North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Spanish Air Defense exercises. In addition, the 401st served as the host United States organization at the Spanish base, supporting Air Force tenants.

Wing operations remained relatively unchanged until 9 January 1970, when the wing replaced its aging F-100 fleet with F-4E "Phantom II" fighters, completing the conversion in 1971. The 612th and 614th Tactical Fighter Squadrons rejoined the wing, returning from combat assignments at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, on 15 July 1971, replacing the 307th and 353rd squadrons, which departed on the same date.

In 1973, the Air Force decided F-4 units should have only one variation of the Phantom in their inventories. While the 401st had only F-4E's, other wings possessed a mixture of F-4 models. The 401st F-4E's moved to various other units and were replaced by F-4C's. Although this resulted in a partial loss of the wing's combat capability, the exchange helped other units gain full contingents of the more advanced F-4E. In 1979, the wing upgraded to F-4D aircraft.

The wing began a new chapter in its history on 5 February 1983, transitioning to the new F-16 "Fighting Falcon" aircraft. Again, this transition took place gradually, with the wing reaching full operational capability on 1 January 1985. The wing's exceptional performance during this transition earned it a second Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. With the upgrade to one of the world's most advanced and versatile fighters, the 401st enjoyed capabilities unprecedented in its history, making it a vital link in defense of the United States and its allies.

The Air Force decided in 1984 to consolidate the lineage and honors of inactive groups with their like-numbered wings. This meant that the 401st Bombardment Group and the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing shared a common heritage. Instead of enjoying “temporary bestowal” of World War II honors, the wing now claimed the group’s history as its own.

In late 1987, the 401st underwent another aircraft conversion, this time to the C and D models of the F-16. By September 1988, the wing had completed the transition and resumed normal operations.

The governments of Spain and the United States announced on 15 January 1989, that an Agreement on Defense Cooperation negotiated between the two nations, required the 401st to leave Spain by 4 May 1992. An intense search to find an alternate location for the wing was interrupted by a crisis in the Persian Gulf Region: Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait in August 1990.

The United States, together with a coalition of allies, conducted Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM, from 7 August 1990 to 28 February 1991, the 401st provided logistical support to deployed forces at numerous locations in the gulf region. The 614th was the first American force to deploy to Doha, Qatar, where squadron members worked alongside Qatari, British, Canadian, and French troops. The squadron’s pilots flew 1,303 sorties and dropped 3.7 million pounds of bombs on Iraq’s Republican Guard, and Iraqi refineries and weapons factories.

The 612th supported NATO’s Joint Task Force “Proven Force” at Incirlik, Turkey, as part of the 7440th Composite Wing which consisted of 100 fighters, interceptors, tankers, and other aircraft. The unit launched 1,093 combat missions and dropped 3.9 million pounds of bombs while maintaining the lowest abort rate of any unit involved in the Gulf Crisis.

Back at Torrejon, wing organizations supported 10,000 Military Airlift Command sorties carrying 85,000 troops and 130,000 tons of cargo through the base to and from the Middle East. They also supported Spanish, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, German, and Czechoslovakian forces which formed the allied response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

During the war, the wing lost four aircraft but not one life. Two 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron pilots, Major Jeffrey Tice and Captain Mike Roberts, withstood 45 days as prisoners of war in Iraq. However, they returned with honor on 5 March 1991. The wing earned a third Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for its superior accomplishments 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1991.

With the end of the Gulf crisis, as well as the declining tensions with the Soviet Union, the Air Force began streamlining its operations. This resulted in the unit’s redesignation as the 401st Fighter Wing on 1 October 1991. Headquarters, United States Air Forces in Europe announced in late 1991 that the 401st would relocate to Aviano Air Base, Italy, to maintain a presence in the Europe’s Southern Region. The wing’s aircraft were redistributed worldwide and the 613th Tactical Fighter Squadron, the first squadron to inactivate, departed Torrejon on 28 June 1991. The 612th followed on 25 September 1991 and the 614th on 30 December 1991. A ceremony on 4 May 1992 inactivated the 401st Fighter Wing at Torrejon Air Base and transferred its flag to Aviano, Italy.

401ST FIGHTER WING

Emblem

SIGNIFICANCE: Our emblem is symbolic of our wing's primary mission. The light blue background represents the sky, our primary theater of operations. The four lances denote the weapons stacked ready for instant use as needed. A black and white checkerboard battlefield, crossing the lances in a horizontal position, indicates our wing is willing to go into battle anywhere in the sky. The colors of the squadrons, attached to the wing, form a banner which sweeps across the entire emblem, indicating support to the overall mission.

APPROVED: 9 September 1955



MOTTO: CAELUM ARENA NOSTRA - "The Sky is Our Arena"

401ST FIGHTER WING

Commanders

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Colonel Neil B. Harding	circa 1 April 1943
Colonel Harold W. Bowman	June 1943
Colonel William T. Seawell	December 1944
Colonel Harry G. Libbey	26 June 1947
Lieutenant Colonel James L. Fletcher	circa October 1948
Unknown	27 June 1949
Lieutenant Colonel William N. Hensle	1 May 1951
Colonel Walter G. Benz	8 February 1954
Lieutenant Colonel Ralph F. Newman	1 March 1956
Colonel Chester L. Van Etten	2 June 1956
Brigadier General Ivan W. McElroy	1 April 1959
Colonel Albert W. Schinz	10 June 1960
Colonel Niven K. Cranfill	11 March 1962
Colonel Richard V. Travis	15 March 1962
Colonel William P. McBride	22 September 1964
Colonel Harold G. Shook	14 June 1965
Colonel Clayton N. Isaacson	7 May 1966
Brigadier General Sanford K. Moats	20 April 1967
Colonel Herndon F. Williams	2 November 1968
Colonel James N. Hoag, Jr.	8 January 1970
Colonel Wilbur L. Creech	17 November 1970
Colonel Tony H. Greget	19 July 1971
Colonel Richard G. Collins	6 September 1972
Colonel Charles L. Donnelly, Jr.	1 November 1973
Colonel Benjamin B. Battle	17 July 1975
Colonel Anthony T. Sheehan	14 July 1977
Colonel Kenneth W. North	12 June 1979
Colonel Wilfred L. Goodson	8 May 1981
Brigadier General Albert L. Logan	25 January 1982
Colonel John C. Fryer, Jr.	29 June 1984
Colonel Walter C. Hersman	4 October 1995
Colonel Lawrence P. Farrell, Jr.	17 August 1987
Colonel Patrick W. O'Brien	10 August 1988
Colonel Jerry L. Nelson	16 July 1991
Colonel James D. Kula (Temporary)	4 May 1992

401ST FIGHTER WING

Awards and Citations

Campaign Credits

Air Offensive, Europe	26 November 1943 - 5 June 1944
Air Combat	26 November 1943 - 2 September 1945
Normandy	6 June 1944 - 24 July 1944
Northern France	25 July 1944 - 14 September 1944
Rhineland	15 September 1944 - 21 March 1945
Central Europe	22 March 1945 — 11 May 1945
Ardennes-Alsace	16 December 1944 - 25 January 1945

Distinguished Unit Citations

11 January 1944

20 February 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 January - 31 December 1963

1 July 1983 — 31 June 1985

1 April 1989 — 31 March 1991