

343rd RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON



MISSION

The mission of the 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron is to provide worldwide reconnaissance for national command authorities, theater CINC's (commander in chiefs), the intelligence community, and warfighters. In order to accomplish this mission squadron personnel collect, correlate, combine, and distribute tactical intelligence to the war fighter in near real time. The squadron gives combat commanders what they need to know, when they need to know it. The missions are normally tasked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff during peacetime operations and by the commander in the field during wartime. The squadron supports the worldwide missions of the Department of Defense to keep the United States aware of potential adversaries.

LINEAGE

343rd Fighter Squadron (Twin Engine) constituted, 21 Jan 1943

Activated, 1 Feb 1943

Redesignated 343rd Fighter Squadron, Twin Engine, 20 Aug 1943

Redesignated 343rd Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, 5 Sep 1944

Inactivated, 20 Aug 1946

Redesignated 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Mapping, 5 Feb 1947

Activated, 24 Feb 1947

Redesignated 343rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Photo-Mapping, 29 Jun 1948

Inactivated, 14 Oct 1949

Redesignated 343rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Electronics, 27 Oct 1950

Activated, 1 Nov 1950

Redesignated 343rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, 15 Jul 1954

Redesignated 343rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, 16 Aug 1966

Redesignated 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron, 1 Sep 1991

STATIONS

McChord Field, WA, 1 Feb-22 Aug 1943
Nuthampstead, England, 16 Sep 1943
Wormingford, England, 16 Apr 1944
Kaufbeuren, Germany, 20 Jul 1945
Giebelstadt, Germany, 30 Apr-20 Aug 1946
MacDill Field (later, AFB), FL, 24 Feb 1947
Topeka (later, Forbes) AFB, KS, 30 Jun 1948-14 Oct 1949
Barksdale AFB, LA, 1 Nov 1950
Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, 3 Jan 1951
Forbes AFB, KS, 10 Oct 1952
Offutt AFB, NE, 16 Aug 1966

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Benguerir AB, French Morocco, 30 May 1955-8 Aug 1955

ASSIGNMENTS

55th Fighter Group, 1 Feb 1943-20 Aug 1946
55th Reconnaissance (later, 55th Strategic Reconnaissance) Group, 24 Feb 1947-14 Oct 1949
55th Strategic Reconnaissance Group, 1 Nov 1950
55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 16 Jun 1952
55th Operations Group, 1 Sep 1991

ATTACHMENTS

55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 19 Jul-26 Oct 1948)
91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 1 Nov 1950-3 Jan 1951
55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 4 Jan 1951-15 Jun 1952

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-38, 1943-1944
P-38E
P-38F
P-38G
P-38H
P-38J
P-51, 1944-1946
P-51C
P-51D
P-51K
P-80, 1946
F-2, 1947
RF-2, 1947
FB-17, 1947-1948
F-9, 1947-1948

F-2, 1948
RB-17, 1948-1949
RB-29, 1948-1949
TB-29, 1949
RB-29, 1950-1951
RB-29A
RB-50, 1951-1954
RB-50G
C-47, 1953-1954
LB-29, 1954
KB-29, 1954
RB-47, 1954-1967
ERB-47 (later, EB-47), 1957-1967
RC-135, 1967-1979
RC-135B
RC-135C
RC-135V
RC135M
RC135W

COMMANDERS

Cpt Dallas W. Webb, 1 Feb 1943
Maj Edward B. Giller, 21 Apr 1944
Cpt Franklin A. Stephenson, c. 28 Jul 1944
Cpt Arthur A. DeYoung, 26 Aug 1944
Cpt Robert D. Brown, 30 Aug 1944
Maj Eugene E. Ryan, 19 Sep 1944
Maj Edward B. Giller, c. Nov 1944
Cpt Douglas A. Parker, c. Apr 1945
LTC Edward B. Giller, 21 May 1945
Maj Douglas A. Parker, 9 Jun 1945
Cpt Joseph E. Dyer, Dec 1945
Maj Arland Stanton, May-20 Aug 1946
Cpt Curtis C. Janney, 24 Feb 1947
Maj Daniel L. Sjodin, 1 May 1947
Maj William A. Somerby Jr., 15 May 1947
LTC Fitzhugh A. Whitfield, 4 Jun 1947
Maj William A. Somerby Jr., 19 Aug 1947
LTC William M. Bowden, 28 Oct 1947
Maj Ernest L. Blanton, Jul 1948
Maj George C. Player Jr., Jan 1949
Maj Leonard J. Jindrick, 10 Jun 1949
Maj Raymond T. Eakes, 23 Sep-14 Oct 1949
Maj Robert F. Stevens, 1 Nov 1950

Maj Rodger L. Howard, 5 Nov 1950
LTC Richard M. Ragland, 1 Feb 1953
LTC Cameron B. Benson, 18 Nov 1953
LTC Calvin H. Smith, May 1954
Maj Cletus C. Kresge, 30 Jun 1954
LTC Calvin H. Smith, 9 Sep 1954
Maj Elmer C. Keppler, c. Jul 1956
Maj Charles D. Rafferty, c. Sep 1956
Maj William Elias, Dec 1957
Maj Daniel C. Emrich, Jan 1959
Maj Harlan L. Laughlin, 21 Oct 1959
LTC George L. Danforth Jr., 29 May 1961
Maj Robert L. Smith, Jun 1963
LTC Donald A. Grant, 13 Aug 1963
LTC Robert L. Smith, Jan 1964
LTC Douglas E. Hagie, 31 Jul 1965
LTC Anthony G. Rais, c. Jan 1966
LTC Robert L. Underwood, 1 Jul 1966
LTC Joseph J. Gyulavics, 31 May 1968
LTC Donald L. Jolly, 1 May 1971
LTC James C. Clary, 1 Jul 1972
LTC William H. Ernst, 9 Nov 1973
LTC Roger H. Bishop, 17 Mar 1976
LTC Edmund P. Smart, 1 Jul 1977
LTC William J. Bima, 29 Aug 1977
LTC Robert E. Jaecques, 21 Feb 1979
LTC Allan T. Smith, 1 Apr 1979
LTC Richard L. Thompson, 1 Jan 1980
LTC Halbert R. Smart II, 16 Jan 1981
LTC Frederick W. Weil, 10 Aug 1981
LTC James J. Ruane, 1 Jul 1982
LTC Victor R. Bey, 16 Jul 1984
LTC Peter J. Glenboski Jr., 17 Jun 1985
LTC Mark W. Smith, 6 Feb 1987
LTC Alan C. Feldkamp, 31 Oct 1988
LTC John J. Caban, 13 Jul 1990
LTC David G. Bell, 21 Oct 1991
LTC David M. Trask, 1 Jun 1993
LTC Michael E. Harris, 9 Jan 1995
LTC Jeffrey C. O'Leary, 7 Jan 1997-unkn
LTC Brian Tingstad, 25 Mar 2005

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Southwest Asia

Defense of Saudi Arabia

Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

ETO, 3-13 Sep 1944

Germany, 19 Feb 45

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

5 Nov 1950-[15 Apr 1954]

Jul 1956-Nov 1957

1 Jul 1963-30 Jun 1964

1 Jul 1966-30 Jun 1967

1 Jul 1972-30 Jun 1974

1 Jul 1974-30 Jun 1976

1 Jul 1976-30 Jun 1978

1 Jul 1978-30 Jun 1980

1 Jul 1987-30 Jun 1989

1 Jul 1989-30 Jun 1991

1 Jul 1992-30 Jun 1994

1 Jul 1994-31 Jul 1995

1 Jun 1997-31 May 1999

1 Jun 1999-31 May 2001

EMBLEM



343rd Reconnaissance Squadron emblem: On a disc Argent, a caricature flying raven Sable, eyelid white, eyeball Gules, beaked Or, riding an electronic beam of the third all fesswise, all within a narrow Red border. Attached below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Red border and inscribed "343D RECONNAISSANCE SQ" in Red letters. 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 electronic beam symbolizes the technological skill surrounding the mission of the unit. The raven signifies the backbone of the Squadron's combat crew. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The raven riding an electronic beam is depicted weary from hours of ferreting as his half-closed eyes and droopy wings indicate, but his tail is held proudly, revealing a still alert, never-say-die spirit. The bolt symbolizes the technological skill surrounding the Black Crows mission. ECM observers of this unit are known as Ravens; the lead position ECM observer is a Black Crow. They constitute the backbone of the squadron's combat crew; they are performing the unit's mission to provide air intelligence of enemy electronic missions throughout the full range of the usable spectrum. (Approved, 25 Jul 1952)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 343d history begins on Feb 1, 1943 as the 343d Fighter Squadron. During the Second World War, it flew the P-51 Mustang and P-38 Lightning fighters, providing escort for heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force in the strategic air campaign against Nazi Germany.

It became the 343d Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron in 1947, part of the Strategic Air

Command. During the early years of the Cold War, the 343d flew the RB-29, RB-50, and RB-47 reconnaissance, or "ferret," aircraft. These were variants of bombers outfitted with sophisticated electronic surveillance gear, some of which are on display at the SAC Museum. Their mission was to probe Soviet air defenses--highly dangerous work.

The new RC-135, which are the same ones we fly today, arrived in 1967. For 15 years we continued to fly our peacetime reconnaissance mission. However, in the early 1980's that peace time mission began to change. The rise of terrorist nations, the fall of the Soviet Union and the realization of the tremendous capabilities of the RC-135 brought new missions and new changes to the 343d. Since then, the 343d has played a role in the liberation of Grenada and Panama, the 1986 Libyan raids, the Persian Gulf War, combat air patrols in the no-fly zones over the northern and southern Iraq, and in the on-going conflict in Bosnia.

The move toward more-realistic training and evaluation was much appreciated by SAC's combat crews. Early in 1952 Lieutenant Warren Austin completed his training as an Electronic Warfare Officer and was assigned to the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Rapid City AFB, flying RB-36Ds. He told the author: In November 1950 Air Training Command took over the flight training of electronic countermeasures officers. The restyled 240-day course was run entirely at Keesler AFB using TC-54Ds, modified Sky-master transports, for the flight training phase. The 324th Squadron at Barksdale, which previously had both the training and strategic Ferret commitments, was disbanded and most of its Ferret modified B-29s and crews transferred to the 343rd Squadron of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, based at Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico. The planes and crews continued flying the same peripheral reconnaissance missions as before, however.

During the summer of 1951 the 343rd Squadron started to re-equip with RB-50G aircraft. Despite its external similarity with the B-29, the RB-50G was a considerable improvement over its predecessor. It was fitted with more powerful and more reliable engines giving a greatly improved performance at high altitude. The Ferret version carried a crew of sixteen: two pilots, three navigators, an engineer, four gunners and six electronic warfare officers. Five of the EWO positions were housed in a pressurized capsule in what had been the forward bomb bay. The sixth position was in the rear pressure cabin — the EWO's position in the bomber version of the B-50. Yet in spite of these improvements, the ELINT equipments carried by the RB-50G were exactly the same as those then being carried by the B-29: APR-4 and APR-9 receivers, and analysis equipment to cover the spectrum from 30 MHz to 12,000 MHz. Direction-finding antennas were housed in a radome under the plane's fuselage. Lieutenant John Marks described what it was like to work in the EWO's position in the RB-50G:

"We flew at around 30,000 feet so the receivers had a good line-of-sight capability. The pressurized cabin for the EWOs, in the bomb bay of the RB-50, was not the greatest. There were no windows. When we were busy with our equipment we didn't listen to the main intercom, so we didn't know what was going on in the rest of the plane. In an emergency we all had to climb forward to the navigator's hatch, nine of us had to try to bail out that one hatch. Sometimes the propellers would pick up ice and throw it against the part of the fuselage where

we were sitting. That was disconcerting, it sounded like a gunshot."

1951 On January 4th, elements of the 343d Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron began arriving with RB-29s and immediate action was taken to convert the unit to RB-50s. Two days later, elements of the 38th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron began arriving at Ramey AFB from Barksdale AFB. On January 8th, air crews and ground support personnel for the 55th Air Refueling Squadron began arriving, joining the advance echelon already in place.

From January 15th to May 17th, the 38th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron was deployed at Bassingbourne RAF Station, England. All of the 55th Wing's tactical units, and later, of the 72d Wing, were frequently deployed away from Ramey AFB. As a matter of fact, a reorganization of the 55th Wing on February 1st resulted in the commander of the 55th Air Base Group becoming the base commander. Previously, the senior officer had usually been the base commander.
1951

An RB-50G-2 from the 343d Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron was shot down on 29 July off the Soviet coast near Vladivostok. Two USAFSS airmen, Staff Sergeant Donald G. Hill and Airman Second Class Earl W. Radlein, Jr., were killed. This event represented the first loss of USAFSS airborne operators in a hostile action. 1953

Aerial photography 1947-1949.

Worldwide strategic reconnaissance 1950-1979.

From 1979 provided worldwide strategic reconnaissance support, which included Grenada, 1983; Libya, 1986; and Southwest Asia 1990-1991.

During initial takeoff from Offutt AFB, Neb. on April 30, a leak in the high pressure oxygen system in the rear cabin of a RC-135V Rivet Joint assigned to the 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron led to a fire that burned a hole through the aircraft's upper fuselage. The pilot immediately aborted the mission, and evacuated the aircraft on the ground as fire crews arrived. The fire, which occurred during a routine training mission in support of an Air Force Special Operations Command exercise, burned through the rear galley area of the aircraft, damaging both the aircraft's structure and its control and mission systems (repair costs are estimated at \$62.4 million). Failure by the contractor depot maintenance personnel from L3 Communications to properly tighten a retaining nut connecting a metal oxygen tube to a fitting above the galley caused the oxygen leak, which led to a "highly flammable oxygen rich environment that ignited." The fire then melted the retaining nut, leading the tubing to detach, which fed more oxygen into the fire, causing "severe damage" to the galley area. Four crewmembers received treatment for minor smoke inhalation. 2015

15 B-50B airframes earmarked to become Electronic Countermeasures RB-50Bs were

completed at Boeing's Plant 2 between 15 March 1949 and 6 May 1949. Five were initially sent to the 91st SRW as B-50Bs and used as aircrew trainers. The remaining 10 were placed in temporary storage at McClellan AFB, CA, until Boeing Aircraft at Seattle could begin the extensive conversions. The RB-50G was the only model to require major structural changes to the airframe to accomplish its mission. To accommodate the five crewmembers who collected the data (known as RAVENS to the crews), the pressure bulkhead separating the forward crew compartment was moved aft into the forward bomb bay. Much of the electronic gear and power supplies for the mission equipment was located in the truncated forward bomb bay.

The first conversion (B-50B 47-161) began on 17 November 1949 at the Boeing Wichita Division. This airframe relocated to Boeing Seattle on 19 July 1950 for the structural modifications. One other airframe (47-136) started its conversion at Wichita in February 1950 and also went to Seattle in July 1950. (It's likely these aircraft were the prototypes for the RURALIST modifications for the RB-50G program.) All other G-model conversions were carried out from start to finish at Seattle's Plant 2. The first operational RB-50G (47-133) was delivered to the 343rd SRS, 55th SRW at Ramey AFB, PR, on 1 July 1951. All 15 RB-50Gs were delivered to the 55th, the last (47-143) arriving on 17 October 1951.

The 343rd SRS provided aircraft and crews to support FEAFF electronic intelligence collection requirements from their entry into service through the end of the Korean War and into the beginning of tensions across the Taiwan Straits. They were temporarily assigned to the 91st SRS at Yokota AB from at least August 1951 through June 1954. The 91st SRS was nominally assigned to the 91st SRW, but in reality it served as the umbrella unit for SAC reconnaissance assets tasked to support FEAFF during and immediately after the Korean War. Its tasking came primarily from HQs FEAFF in support of combat operations on the Korean Peninsula, but it also undertook "special reconnaissance program" missions in support of national intelligence requirements assigned to it through HQs SAC. Crews and aircraft came from the 343rd SRS, 55th SRW on a TDY basis. The first RB-50G combat mission was flown on 9 August 1951 by 47-133.

343rd/91st SRS RB-50Gs flew FEAFF electronic intelligence collection missions over the DPRK, as well as the PRC Yellow and East China Sea coasts. Special reconnaissance missions ranged further south along the South China Sea and on to Indochina from Kadena AB, Okinawa. Northward, the missions flew the Soviet periphery of the Sea of Japan, Sakhalin Island, and the perimeter of the Sea of Okhotsk from Yokota. Shuttle missions from Yokota were flown along the Soviet Bering Sea coast to Eielson AFB, using Shemya AFB as a refueling base if required. From Eielson they would fly out-and-back missions along the Siberian coast of the Arctic Ocean.

The return trip to Yokota would again parallel the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin Island, sometimes refueling at Misawa AB before recovering at Yokota. The first RB-50 combat loss came on 29 July 1953 when RB-50G 47-145 was shot down some 30 miles south-southeast of Vladivostok over the Peter the Great Bay (Zaliv Petra Velikogo) by Soviet Mig-15s of the 9th Air Army from Kratorol airfield north of Vladivostok. Of the 16 crew members aboard, only one survived. This was the third Soviet attack on RB-50s in less than four months.

In Europe, 343rd RB-50Gs made regular deployments to RAF Burtonwood, Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Sculthorpe, and Upper Heyford in the UK for PARPRO missions along the periphery of the Warsaw Pact and the European Soviet Union. Individual TDYs to Thule AB, Nouasseur AB, Morocco and Wheelus AB, Libya, were made in response to HQs USAF tasking. While intercepted frequently, no losses were recorded on these European and Mediterranean missions.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 13 Nov 2010

Updated: 1 Apr 1918

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.

