

494 FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

494 Fighter Squadron trains for its mission as a combat-ready fighter squadron capable of executing strategic attack, interdiction, and counter air missions in support of USAFE, USEC and NATO operations. It employs the full array of air superiority and surface attack munitions to include the most advanced precision-guided weapons in the USAF inventory. The squadron is capable of deploying to any theater of operations in the world.

LINEAGE

57 Bombardment Squadron (Light) constituted, 20 Nov 1940
Activated, 15 Jan 1941
Redesignated 57 Bombardment Squadron (Dive), 28 Aug 1942
Redesignated 494 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 10 Aug 1943
Redesignated 494 Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, 30 May 1944
Inactivated, 7 Nov 1945
Redesignated 494 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 25 Jun 1952
Activated, 10 Jul 1952
Redesignated 494 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 8 Jul 1958
Redesignated 494 Fighter Squadron, 30 Nov 1991

STATIONS

Savannah, GA, 15 Jan 1941
Will Rogers Field, OK, 23 May 1941
Savannah, GA, 7 Feb 1942
Key Field, MS, 28 Jun 1942
William Northern Field, TN, 15 Aug 1943
Walterboro AAFld, SC, 27 Jan–13 Mar 1944
Ibsley, England, 29 Mar 1944
Deux Jumeaux, France, 4 Jul 1944

Villacoublay, France, 29 Aug 1944
Cambrai/Niergnies, France, 15 Sep 1944
St Trond, Belgium, 30 Sep 1944
Kelz, Germany, 26 Mar 1945
Kassel, Germany, 17 Apr 1945
Illesheim, Germany, 29 Apr 1945
Laon, France, 5 Jul–Aug 1945
Seymour Johnson Field, NC, 9 Sep–7 Nov 1945
Chaumont AB, France, 10 Jul 1952
RAF Lakenheath, England, 15 Jan 1960

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Taif, Saudi Arabia, 2 Sep 1990–15 Mar 1991
Incirlik AB, Turkey, Sep–Dec 1991

ASSIGNMENTS

48 Bombardment (later, 48 Fighter-Bomber; 48 Fighter) Group, 15 Jan 1941–7 Nov 1945
48 Fighter-Bomber Group, 10 Jul 1952
48 Fighter-Bomber (later, 48 Tactical Fighter; 48 Fighter) Wing, 8 Dec 1957
48 Operations Group, 31 Mar 1992

ATTACHMENTS

48th Fighter Wing [Provisional], 2 Sep 1990–15 Mar 1991
7440th Composite Wing, Sep–Dec 1991

WEAPON SYSTEMS

A-18, 1941
A-20, 1941–1942
A-35, 1942–1943
P-40, 1943
P-39, 1943–1944
P-47, 1944–1945
F-84, 1952–1954
F-86, 1953–1956
F-100, 1956–1972
F-4, 1974–1977
F-111, 1977–1992
F-15, 1992

COMMANDERS

1st Lt R. D. Callaway, 15 Jan 1941
Unkn, Jan 1942
Capt Ward P. Robinson, Unkn
Capt J. O. Cimaglia, 16 Nov 1943

Capt J. D. Collinsworth, 4 Jan 1944
Maj James P. Mulloy, 9 Jan 1944
Capt Homer A. Forsythe, C. 19 Jan 1944
Capt Harold L. Mcneely, 13 Feb 1944
Maj Richard P. Morrissey, 21 Feb 1944
Maj Charles R. Fischette, 19 Jul 1944
Capt Norman S. Orwat, 16 Oct 1944
Maj Victor N. Cabas, 21 Nov 1944
Maj Jerome I. Steeves, 4 Apr 1945
Maj Lloyd V. Bradbury, 12 Jun-7 Nov 1945
Lt Col Arthur D. Thomas, 10 Jul 1952
Maj Woodfin M. Sullivan, 3 Apr 1953
Maj Otto C. Kemp, 7 May 1955
Maj Ira A. Swope, 3 Feb 1957
Maj William T. Whisner Jr., C. Jun 1957
Lt Col Bernie S. Bass, 23 Feb 1959
Maj John E. Pitts Jr., 10 Jul 1961
Maj Norman H. Todd, 28 May 1964
Maj Vance T. Leuthold, 2 Aug 1964
Lt Col Warren D. Curton, 15 Nov 1964
Lt Col William J. Holton, 2 Aug 1965
Lt Col Shelby A. Evans, C. Jul 1967
Lt Col Gerald D. Ray, 22 Sep 1969
Lt Col Carl R. Wiedenhoeft, 1 Sep 1970
Lt Col Terance E. Cawley, 1 Nov 1970
Lt Col Norman H. Rushton, 1 Sep 1972-26 Jan 1973
Not Manned, 27 Jan 1973-9 Jun 1974
Maj Robert J. Herculson, 10 Jun 1974
Lt Col Ronald M. Miller, 18 Jul 1974
Lt Col James W. Grassman, 1 Jul 1975
Lt Col James C. Sharp, 1 Jun 1977
Lt Col James E. Salminen, 14 Oct 1977
Lt Col Philip E. Davis, 16 Mar 1979
Lt Col Richard W. Balstad, 17 Apr 1981
Lt Col John L. Grozier, 10 Jun 1983
Lt Col Paul F. Fazackerley, 10 May 1985
Lt Col Patrick F. Nolte, 17 Feb 1987
Lt Col Ronnie A. Stanfill, 10 Sep 1988
Lt Col Tommy F. Crawford, 30 Jun 1989
Lt Col James M. Young, 1 Dec 1990
Lt Col Kenneth A. Combs, 14 Jun 1991
Lt Col Wayne I. Mudge, 14 Aug 1992
Lt Col Mark G. Beesley, 5 Sep 1994
Lt Col Joseph R. Wood, 7 Aug 1995

Lt Col John W. Hesterman Iii, 12 May 1997
Lt Col Warren L. Henderson, 21 May 1998
Lt Col Steve J. Depalmer, 12 May 2000
Lt Col Ronald K. Laughbaum, 8 Feb 2002
Lt Col William D. Miles, 2 Jun 2003
Lt Col Daniel Debree, 21 May 2004
Lt Col William A. Reese, 17 Apr 2006
Lt Col Shawn D. Pederson, 1 Jul 2007
Lt Col John Bunnell

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II
Antisubmarine, American Theater
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

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation
Germany, 6 Dec 1944

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

20 Aug 1990-11 May 1991
1 Jul 1992-30 Jun 1994
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

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



57 Bombardment Squadron emblem: Upon and over a blue disc a yellow drop bomb palewise, charged with a black cougar, eyed red, tail entwined around wing of bomb and barbed. (Approved, 22 Aug 1942)



On a White disc bordered Red a predominate Red striped Air Force Yellow and Air Force Blue "Mach" chevron in flight diagonally to upper dexter, a Gray-edged White vapor trail curving from upper sinister of chevron to Gray aircraft/missile over to dexter in parallel flight line with chevron. Horizontally at bottom Gray-edged White cloud formations. A Black panther shaded White and Gray, face front, Red eyes and tongue, Yellow extended claws, springing forward from center over vapor trail. **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 tri-colored "Mach" chevron denotes the "Forward Look." The aircraft/missile and the clouds symbolize the unit's air mission. The Black Panther, emblematic of this squadron since 1942, represents stealth, silence, and speed of attack, thus taking a victim quickly and unaware

On a disc White, a predominate Red striped Air Force Yellow and Air Force Blue "Mach" chevron in flight diagonally to upper dexter, a Gray-edged White vapor trail curving from upper sinister of chevron to Gray aircraft/missile over to dexter in parallel flight line with chevron. Horizontally at bottom Gray-edged White cloud formations. A black panther shaded White and Gray, face front, Red eyes and tongue, Yellow extended claws, springing forward from center over vapor trail, all within a narrow border Red. Attached below the disk, a White scroll edged with a narrow Red border and inscribed "494 FIGHTER 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 tri-colored "Mach" chevron denotes the "Forward Look." The aircraft/missile and the clouds symbolize the unit's air mission. The Black Panther, emblematic of this squadron since 1942, represents stealth, silence, and speed of attack, thus taking a victim quickly and unaware. (Approved 6 December 1963; modified 30 April 2007)

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Antisubmarine patrols, Mar–Apr 1942. Replacement training unit, 1942–1943. Combat in ETO, 20 Apr 1944–4 May 1945. Not operational, Feb 1972–Jun 1974. Participated in air raid on Tripoli, Libya, 14/15 Apr 1986. Combat in Southwest Asia, Jan–Feb 1991.

The first types of aircraft flown during 1941 were the A-20 and B-18, but in September of 1942 the group was redesignated the 48th Bombardment Group (Dive) and now operated a succession of different types including the A-24, A-31, P-39 and P-40. After moving to England in March of 1944 the unit was re-assigned to the Ninth Air Force and began training with the P-47. After the war the unit returned to the States in 1945 and was deactivated.

Credits

1Lt Bernard L. Kupersmith 1.0, 24 Dec 1944
1Lt Charles W. Riffle 0.5, 24 Dec 1944
2Lt Jesse D. Lefforge 0.5, 24 Dec 1944
1Lt Nelson W. Koscheski 2.0, 27 Dec 1944
1Lt William R. Johnson 1.0, 27 Dec 1944
1Lt Kenneth T. Jones 1.0, 27 Dec 1944
1Lt Garret D. Wakefield 1.0, 27 Dec 1944
2Lt Willard B. Lenton 1.0,

On 24 September 1956 the first F-100D arrived at Chaumont Air Base. The initial F-100Ds delivered to the unit were 1954 series aircraft in natural metal finish. The squadrons soon began applying their individual colors to their aircraft. The squadron colors were: 492nd Blue, 493rd Yellow and 49 Red. The earliest scheme consisted of the trapezoid shape (centered on the fin) painted in the particular squadron color with a small squadron insignia carried below the windscreen on the port side and a wing insignia in a corresponding position on the starboard side. An F-100D (54-2222) became the Wing Commander's aircraft and carried a Blue, Yellow and Red trapezoid with the 48th Wing Insignia on both sides of the nose in the usual positions. While the 48th Wing was based at Chaumont, special ceremonies took place on 4 July 1956 and the wing had the Statue de la Liberte motto bestowed on it, making it the only USAF Unit to officially have both a numerical and descriptive title.

During 1957 the wing began to receive the 1956 production series of F-100D/Fs and the earlier 1954 versions were

Desert Shield/Desert Storm (August 1990 to February 27th 1991) On August 2, 1990, the United States began Operation Desert Shield to protect Saudi Arabia following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The first USAF Wing to deploy from Europe was the 48th TFW from RAF Lakenheath. The initial contingent of 19 aircraft left for Taif on August 25, 1990. It was made up of contingents of both the 492nd TFS and the 494 TFS. A second group of 14 followed on September 25, made up mostly of aircraft of the 493rd TFS. The remainder of the 492nd TFS and 494 TFS, which stayed behind at Lakenheath, was reorganized as the 492nd TFS. This new 492nd TFS was deployed with 12 aircraft to Taif on November 29. The next group of 11 aircraft deployed on December 11. A final group of six aircraft transferred to Taif brought the total to 67 aircraft deployed at the start of Operation Desert Storm on January 17, 1991.

After one mid-1970s NATO exercise in which bad weather had grounded all flights except Upper Heyford's F-111Es, it was decided NATO needed more F-111s. The result was Operation Creek Swing/Ready Switch, which transferred the F-111 Fs to RAF Lakenheath, England. Under Operation Creek Swing/Ready Switch in July and August 1977, the 366th converted from F-111FS to F-111 As. The F-111FS of the 366th TFW transferred to the 48th TFW at RAF Lakenheath. The 48th TFW consisted of three Tactical Fighter Squadrons; the 492nd TFS, 493rd TFS, and the 494 TFS. A fourth squadron, the 495th TFS activated within the 48th TFW in 1977 to provide difference training for aircrews coming from other F-111 models.

The last elements of 48th TFW returned from Taif to Lakenheath during May 1991. The F-111 Fs were transferred to the 27th TFW at Cannon during 1992 as they were replaced at Lakenheath with F-15s. The 492nd and 49 converted to F-15Es in 1992. The 493rd and 495th were inactivated in December 1992. The 493rd was activated with F-15C/D s on January 1, 1994.

F-111 70-2397 The aircraft was delivered to the USAF on January 25,1972, and was Pave Tack modified. It was one of the first three delivered to RAF Lakenheath as part of Operation Ready Switch. 70-2397 is seen here on July 16,1983, with the yellow tail cap of the 493rd TFS, 48th TFW. It crashed and was destroyed on April 5, 1989 while assigned to the 494 TFS, 48th TFW. It was flying with the callsign GREEBIE 54 on a RED FLAG mission over the Nellis Range complex. The aircraft slowed to below 200 knots while crossing ridge lines. The aircraft impacted at the crest of one of the ridges, killing the crew, 1Lt Bob Boland and Captain James Gleason. When the aircraft crashed, it had accumulated 1,526 flights and 3,868.0 flight hours.

F-111 72-1441 was delivered to the USAF on February 12,1973. It is seen here in markings of the 390th TFS, 366th TFW. It was the first Pave Tack modified aircraft delivered to the 48th TFW. While assigned to the 494 TFS, 48th TFW, the aircraft crashed and was destroyed on February 4,1981, while on approach to RAF Lakenheath, UK. The crew ejected successfully without injuries to the crew. The aircraft had a total of 690 flights and 1,808.5 flight hours when it crashed.

F-111 74-0179 was delivered to the USAF on December 4,1975. It is seen here in August 1979, with the red tail cap of the 494 TFS, 48th TFW. It crashed and was destroyed on September 16,1982 at RAF Leuchars while on approach for landing. After a Wheel Well Hot fire light and probable fire, hydraulic pressure was lost and while on final approach, the aircraft entered an uncontrolled left roll. The crew ejected safely, receiving only minor injuries. When the aircraft crashed, it had accumulated 714 flights and 1,745.7 flight hours.

F-111 74-0188 was delivered to the USAF on November 22,1976. It is seen here on May 29, 1982, with the red tail cap of the 494 TFS, 48th TFW. It was Pave Tack modified. 74-0188 crashed and was destroyed on April 26,1983 in the North Sea off Germany's Borkun Island. The cause of the loss is still unknown. The crew, Captain Charles Vidas and 1 Lt Steven Groak, was killed. The aircraft had accumulated 572 flights and 1,407.1 flight hours when it crashed.

After achieving victory in Europe in 1945, the 494 returned to Seymour-Johnson Field, North Carolina. However, as tensions with the Soviet Union increased during the early 1950's, the Panthers received order to redeploy to Europe. On 25 June 1952 the squadron was assigned to Chaumont Air Base, France, flying the F-84 Thunderstreak, the F-86 Sabre and the F-100 Super Sabre.

On 1 January 1960, they made another move, this time to RAF Lakenheath, England. To this day, RAF Lakenheath serves as the home airbase for the Mighty Black Panthers.

Although active, from 1972 through 1974, the 494 was not operational and had no personnel, aircraft, or equipment assigned. It returned to operational status when it began flying the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II in 1974. The F-4's lasted until the wing transitioned to the General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark in 1977.

When the call again came to defeat a foreign threat, the Panthers were ready. During Operation Eldorado Canyon in April, 1986, 48th Fighter Wing F-111s attacked targets in Tripoli, Libya to eliminate that country's support and training of international terrorists. Colonel Michael Hoyes, who participated in the mission, recalled: "A couple of years prior to Eldorado Canyon, while I was attending TLP, an old German Luftwaffe pilot came up to me and said, in reference to World War 2, 'We like it better now because we lost.' This comment will always remain with me. Imagine years after a conflict being happier about losing rather than winning a war! This was not the sentiment going through our minds as we were briefed by General Gabriel, CSAF, and sent on our way. We knew we were doing the right thing. Nevertheless, my crewmate wondered throughout most of the mission when we would be recalled. He didn't think that we had "the nerve" as a nation to really say "No" to terrorism. Then we began our TFR [terrain following radar] descent over the Mediterranean. I know that this is hard for Strike Eagle crews to imagine, with the advantage of a FLIR enhanced HUD or NVGs, but think about descending to low level when you CANNOT "see" outside. It was pitch black at low level over the water during our approach to Libya."

"Our mission became much more challenging when we lost our TFR and both radar altimeters. As we progressed over the Med, I "instructed" my crewmate on how to "hand-fly" the jet using the e-scope. To this day we each give credit to the other for staying alive. The missiles and AAA began their beautiful but deadly glow immediately after Lead's bombs struck. We were number 3, 60 seconds behind. Without an air-to-air radar, we accomplished spacing purely by timing. Once I had to remind my crewmate not to "tap burner", fearing that we would be helping the enemy guide their weapons towards us. Post-flight video review showed a missile "coming up" the Pave Tack line of sight during our target attack."

"It was eerie waiting to hear Nando's [Fernando Ribas-Dominicci] voice, and not hearing it. And we waited for quite some time. Later, we tuned the HF to the Armed Forces Network and heard President Reagan's announcement of our attack even though we were many hours away from England. We didn't know how we would be received. It seemed that, with the exception of Britain, world opinion was against the attack. After a while, prior to the Straits of Gibraltar, over

the HF we heard the Navy and Marine Anthems then our USAF song... and we sang along with tears of pride. When we landed, the crew chiefs at our shelter were cheering, and we actually felt as if we had done something special. For a moment it felt like we were in a movie, where the warriors return as heroes."

"Then the news reports hit, questioning America's actions with concerns about reprisal. Suddenly we did not feel as if what we had done was appreciated, though in our hearts, we knew it was right. I lost two friends that night, Nando and Paul Lorrence, but the world gained peace from that particular breed of terrorist... and he has remained 'silent' to this day."

Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 Aug 1990. What to many seemed to be just another localized squabble evolved into one of the United States' largest mobilizations since World War II. The United States, the United Kingdom, and a large coalition of other nations demanded the total withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwaiti territory. On 25 August 1990 the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing deployed to Taif, Saudi Arabia. The initial purpose of this deployment was to serve as a defensive force for Saudi Arabia. In recognition for containing Iraqi aggression, the "Defense of Saudi Arabia" campaign streamer was awarded to the 494 Fighter Squadron.

After Iraq failed to comply with a United Nations demand to leave Kuwait, Iraq felt the brunt of a coalition military offensive. The purpose of this offensive, known as Operation Desert Storm, was to forcibly eject Iraq from Kuwait. Major Troy Stone (then 1Lt Stone) recalled: "We were the first wave on the first night. As we 'fenced-out' crossing from Iraq into Saudi Arabia, I realized the success of my first mission in wartime had been the direct result of every debriefing admonishment, every check-ride critique, and every instructor rebuke I had ever hatefully endured in peacetime. Even though my mind had raced with concern, I had double-checked my target coordinates because I'd been admonished for not double-checking my target coordinated in peacetime. Even though my hands had shook with adrenaline, I had fine-tuned my pod because I'd been critiqued for not fine-tuning my pod in peacetime. And finally, even though my heart had pounded with fear I had updated my INS because I'd been rebuked for not updating my INS in peacetime. As we passed the Saudi-Iraqi border southbound, I realized peacetime lessons learned are truly the foundation of wartime successes."

Liberty Wing F-111s unleashed their lethality using precision-guided and optically guided munitions. Throughout the offensive, wing aircrews participated in a number of operations including bridge busting, airfield destruction, and tank killing. Liberty Wing crews also participated in a number of unique missions. In mid-January the Iraqis damaged an oil pumping station in Kuwait, resulting in thousand of barrels of oil being dumped into the Persian Gulf. This event was considered one of the worst ecological disasters on record. Using GBU-15 television guided munitions, Liberty Wing aircrews stopped the flow of oil by destroying the station's delivery mechanism.

On day 27 of the war the wing flew its only daytime mission. Five F-111Fs, employing GBU-24 bombs, struck five buildings in Kuwait City housing the Iraqi high command. This action severely disrupted Iraq's command and control over its military forces within Kuwait. Another unique

mission occurred on 26 February when two F-111Fs dropped the newly developed GBU-28 4,500-pound bombs on the Taji command and control bunker outside of Baghdad. These laser guided weapons, literally made from the barrels of a 14-inch battleship gun and filled with over a ton of high explosive, severely damaged the Taji bunker and damaged Iraq's military machine.

In total, the Liberty Wing flew 1,919 combat sorties during Desert Storm, destroying 2,203 targets. In recognition for their contribution toward victory over Iraq during Operation Desert Storm, "Liberation and Defense of Kuwait" streamer was awarded to the 494 Fighter Squadron.

The unit received its current designation of 494 Fighter Squadron on 30 Nov 1991. It then transitioned to the McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) F-15E Strike Eagle in 1992 during the midst of the objective wing restructure that reassigned the 494 from the wing to the 48th Operations Group on 31 Mar 1992, where it remains today.

On 3 Nov 1993, the 494 Fighter Squadron deployed back to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. The mission of the 494 in Operation Provide Comfort expanded from its previous ground attack role to include defensive counter air and reconnaissance missions. The 49 Fighter Squadron employed their air-to-air capability of the Strike Eagle to enforce the "No-Fly" zone and protect high value assets by established air combat patrols in Northern Iraq. The 494 mission also included the protection of the mission coordination center in the town of Zahku in northwestern Iraq. The Strike Eagles were tasked to provide air power in the event of a limited ground threat. In the reconnaissance role, the 494 provided targeting pod video of target sites within the area of responsibility.

The 49 deployed again to Operation Deny Flight in Jun 1995. On the night of 29 Aug, the 494 led NATO's first and largest airstrike against Bosnian Serb Command and Control facilities. The next four weeks would include interdiction strikes against Bosnian Serb integrated air defenses, C3 facilities, ammunition storage sites and bridges. The 494 also were called upon to employ the GBU-15, the first time this weapon was employed in combat by the F-15E. By the end, the 49 achieved the highest success rate of any NATO unit.

In March, 1999, the Panthers deployed to Aviano AB, Italy, to participate in Operation Allied Force. The primary purpose for Operation ALLIED FORCE was to stop the Serbian military repression of Kosovo. During the conflict the 49 Fighter Squadron led 46 percent of all NATO strike missions. Moreover, the Panthers delivered 3.1 million pounds of munitions, and accounted for 38 percent of all NATO precision weapons expended. The 494 also led the way with the first combat use of the Rapid Targeting System, and the first F-15E employment of the GBU-28.

In Sep 2006, the Panthers departed REF Lakenheath for the middle east in support of both OIF and OEF. However, this time the Panthers rode into war aboard a mighty warhorse on steroids, the upgraded F-15E Strike Eagle. Suite 5 and the GBU-39 small diameter bomb (SDB) were tactical capabilities brand new to the combat air forces of the world. For 4 months the Panthers flew out of Al Udeid (nicknamed by aircrew as the "Dirty Deid") providing continuous overwatch

of coalition ground forces and the Iraqi government, as well as providing non-traditional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The enemy did not wait long to challenge the Panther prowess; and, true to the Panther tradition, the enemy did not live long either.

Continued action brought on the first combat drop of the GBU-39 SDB. On 11 Nov 2006, veterans day, the Panthers released two GBU-39s on mortar positions. Although not their style of weapon since Panthers prefer lots of fire and flying hot steel, that precise, little bomb did just fine.

In addition to combat missions the Panthers were called upon to provide defensive counter air alert for the Doha Asian Games and to open F-15E ops in Afghanistan. With the completion of the Middle East's largest games, the Panthers loaded a small contingent of aircrew, support personnel, and equipment onto C-17s and headed for the mountains of Afghanistan. The "Bagram Eagles" validated Strike Eagle ops out of the Afghan air base. In Iraq, however, the work was far from over. Throughout the rest of the deployment, the Panthers vigilantly watched the skies over Baghdad. At the end of Jan 2007, the Panthers waved goodbye to Al Udeid and returned to RAF Lakenheath having expended 19 GBU-12's, 6 GBU-38's, 3 GBU-39's and 2769 rounds of 20 mm ammo.

The demand for the Strike Eagle's presence in Afghanistan continued to grow in 2008. For AEF 3/4, from May through Sep 2008, the Panthers deployed to Bagram AB, Afghanistan. With eighteen aircraft and well prepared meat-eating black Panthers it didn't take long to draw enemy blood. The Panthers delivered over 540 weapons with an incredible 98.6 % overall hit rate. The Panthers set new AEF standards: flying 30% more sorties and hours, filling 30% more JSTARS, and supporting 30% more TIC's than any squadron previously or since.

On Christmas Eve 2009, the 494 EFS began their deployment to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Equipped with 18 F-15E Strike Eagles, the 49 deployed as part of AEF 03/04, covering 24 December 2009 to 6 May 2010. During this deployment the Panthers flew 1,980 combat sorties and 7,560 combat hours and expended 39 GBU-12's, 56 GBU-31's, 121 GBU-38's and 5,850 rounds of 20 mm ammo.

Airmen and F-15E Strike Eagles of the 494 Fighter Squadron and Aircraft Maintenance Unit at RAF Lakenheath, England, returned home from a deployment to the US Central Command area of operations earlier this month. While deployed, the Panthers flew a total of 1,651 sorties and dropped more than 1,700 bombs targeting ISIS as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. The Strike Eagles returned home Oct. 9, with airmen following Oct. 14. In addition to the fighter squadron and airmen, pilots, special mission aviators, pararescumen, and combat rescue officers from the 56th and 57 Rescue Squadrons, along with maintainers from the 48th Maintenance Group at Lakenheath, also returned from a deployment in late September. 2015

Strike Eagles Train With Estonians: The 494 Fighter Squadron at RAF Lakenheath in Britain dispatched several of its F-15E Strike Eagles to participate in Baltic Region Training Event IV Alpha where they worked with Estonian Forward Air Controllers, who will soon deploy to

Afghanistan. Lt. Col. John Bunnell, 494 FS commander, said the BRTE exercises help ensure interoperability among NATO and partner nations. "There are many difficulties involved in complex military operations that never show themselves until you exercise in a live environment," said Bunnell, who added that the training was valuable for both the FACs and aircrews. MSgt. Jay Lemely, a Joint Terminal Attack Controller at HQ US Air Forces in Europe, has been working with the Estonian FACs to provide standardization and ensure they can operate with various airpower assets and ground artillery because they will be "the key element tying all these pieces together."

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency, U.S. Air Force, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

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