

552nd AIR CONTROL WING



MISSION

Through its squadrons, detachments, and operating locations, it extended air defense radar coverage and fighter control seaward beyond the range of shore-based stations.

The 552nd Air Control Wing is responsible to the commander of Air Combat Command for the operations, maintenance, logistics, training and combat support of E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System and TC-18E training support aircraft. The wing provides combat-ready theater battle management forces at the direction of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It deploys, operates and supports these forces worldwide ensuring combat capability for all peacetime and contingency operations.

LINEAGE

552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing established, 30 Mar 1955

Activated, 8 Jul 1955

Redesignated 552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Group, 1 Jul 1974

Inactivated, 30 Apr 1976

Redesignated 552nd Airborne Warning and Control Wing, 5 May 1976

Activated, 1 Jul 1976

Redesignated 552nd Airborne Warning and Control Division, 1 Oct 1983

Redesignated 552nd Airborne Warning and Control Wing, 1 Apr 1985

Redesignated 552nd Air Control Wing, 1 Oct 1991

STATIONS

McClellan AFB, CA, 8 Jul 1955–30 Apr 1976

Tinker AFB, OK, 1 Jul 1976

ASSIGNMENTS

8th Air Division (Airborne Early Warning and Control), 8 Jul 1955

Western Air Defense Force, 1 Jul 1957
28th Air Division (SAGE), 1 Jul 1960
Fourth Air Force, 1 Apr 1966
Tenth Air Force, 15 Sep 1969
Aerospace Defense Command, 15 Nov 1969–30 Apr 1976
Tactical Air Command, 1 Jul 1976
28th Air Division, 1 Apr 1985
Tactical Air Command, 29 May 1992
Air Combat Command, 1 Jun 1992
Second Air Force, 1 Oct 1992
Twelfth Air Force, 1 Jul 1993

WEAPON SYSTEMS

RC-121, 1955–1959, 1961–1963
TC-121, 1959–1961, 1967–1969
EC-121, 1963–1976
C-121, 1967–1976
EC-130, 1976–1985, 1992
WC-135, 1977–1982
E-3, 1977
EC-135, 1979–1986, 1992
C-135, 1979–1981, 1983–1986, 1992

COMMANDERS

Col Leeman J. Hipson, 8 Jul 1955
Col Richard W. DaVania, 1955
Col Septime S. Richard, Jr., 1956
Col Charles R. Heffner, 18 Oct 1957
Col Charles F. Knierim, 28 May 1959
Col Robert J. Loughry, 17 Oct 1960
Col James P. Lyle, 18 Oct 1963
Col Wright J. Sherrard, 28 Aug 1964
Col William R. Nevitt, 2 Feb 1966
Col Olin E. Gilbert, 31 May 1968
Col Henry L. Timmermans, 1 Nov 1969
Col Robert P. Halpenny, 28 Apr 1972
Col Harold P. Knutty, 26 Jul 1974
Col Francis B. Henkel, 27 Jun 1975–30 Apr 1976
MG John L. Piotrowski, 1 Jul 1976
BG Neil L. Eddins, 29 Aug 1979
Col Jerry D. Holmes, 20 Jul 1981
BG William K. James, 16 Sep 1982
Col James R. Sterk, 1 Mar 1985
Col Wylie J. Koiner, 16 Jun 1988

Col Gary A. Voellger, 17 May 1990
BG William J. Ball, 29 May 1992
BG David Oakes, 10 Aug 1992
BG Silas R. Johnson Jr., 27 Jun 1994
BG Robert T. Newell III, 6 Sep 1996
Col John M. Howell, 24 Oct 1996
BG James W. Morehouse, 26 Nov 1996
BG Maurice L. McFann Jr., 7 Aug 1998
BG Ben T. Robinson, 15 Mar 2000
BG Gilmary M. Hostage, 29 Aug 2002
BG Joseph F. Mudd Jr., 2 Mar 2004
BG James M. Kowalski, 9 Nov 2005
BG Lori J. Robinson 18 May 2007
Col John T. Rauch, Jul 2010

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Southwest Asia

Defense of Saudi Arabia

Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Grenada, 1983

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device

1 Jul 1969– 30 Jun 1970

1 Jul 1971–31 Dec 1972

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jul 1961–30 Jun 1963

15 Apr 1965–1 Jul 1966

2 Jul 1966–1 Jul 1968

1 Jul 1970–30 Jun 1971

1 Jul 1974–30 Jun 1975

1 Jul 1977–30 Jun 1978

1 Jul 1978–30 Jun 1980

1 Jul 1982–30 Jun 1984

1 May 1985–30 Apr 1987

1 May 1987–30 Apr 1989

1 Dec 1989–1 Dec 1991
1 Apr 1992–31 Mar 1994
1 Jun 1994–31 May 1996
1 Jun 1996–31 May 1998
1 Jun 1998–31 May 2000
1 Jun 2000–31 May 2002
1 Jun 2003–31 May 2004

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm
1 Apr 1966–28 Jan 1973

EMBLEM



552nd Air Control Wing emblem: Per bend Celeste and per bend sinister Azure and Argent a bendlet Or, in sinister chief a compass rose White shaded Sable, in base a winged tower silhouette of the last and issuant from dexter two lightning flashes radiating to fess point of the third, all within a diminished bordure Yellow. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "552D AIR CONTROL WING" in Blue letters. The eight-pointed star represents a mariner's compass and is symbolic of the wing's surveillance capabilities. The light blue represents the skies where the wing operates. The Air Force yellow band stands for the Air Force, while the lightning bolts symbolize the electronic equipment that supports the wing's mission. The black-winged battlements depicts the mission of the unit: guard the nation's borders with air power. 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 eight-pointed star represents a mariner's compass and is symbolic of the Wing's surveillance capabilities. The light blue represents the skies where the Wing operates. The Air Force yellow band depicts the Air Force, while the lightning bolts symbolize the electronic equipment that supports the Wing's mission. The black-winged battlements recall the mission of the unit: to guard the nation's borders with air power. (Approved, 6 Feb 1956)

MOTTO

Robur Ex Vigilantia--In Vigilance is Strength

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

During the mid-1950s, the nation's defense planners devised the idea of extending the wall of powerful land-based radar seaward. This was done by equipping C-121s with radar and communications equipment which could maintain an air defense barrier several hundred miles off the shores of the United States. The new defense concept was designed to provide greater early warning time in case of an enemy attack upon the nation.

In the winter of 1953, a dozen officers and airmen arrived at McClellan AFB to initiate a new concept in national defense-airborne early warning and control. They formed the first AEW&C Squadron, the 4701st, and received their first RC-121 "Flying Radar Station" in December.

The 552d Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing soon grew to four flying squadrons with the 1 May 1963 assignment of the 966 AEW&CS. Beginning in April 1965, the 552 AEW&CW kept part of its resources deployed in Southeast Asia as part of the "Big Eye Task Force" (later dubbed "College Eye Task Force"). Nearly every member of the 552 AEW&CW served one or more tours of duty, on a rotational basis, with that force. The task force vectored and controlled friendly aircraft and provided airborne early warning services to allied aircraft throughout the war. By late 1968, the task force had become a 552 AEW&CW formal detachment.

The Southeast Asian unit's duties ceased in June 1970, ending more than five years of continuous service and control of more than 210,000 aircraft involved in combat operations, almost 3,300 MiG border warnings, and the successful rescue of 80 downed crew members.

On 1 July 1974, the Air Force redesignated the 552d Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing as the 552d Airborne Warning and Control Group. Then, in line with the Air Force's plan to relocate the airborne warning and control mission to another, more centrally located base, reductions soon hit the unit. By mid-1975, these cutbacks had limited the 552d Airborne Warning and Control Group to one flying squadron, a training squadron, a maintenance squadron, and a single detachment. From then until 30 April 1976, the unit operated on a vastly reduced scale. The 552d Airborne Warning and Control Group and the 963 Airborne Warning and Control Squadron ended their transformation with their inactivation 30 April 1976.

On July 1, 1976, the 552d Airborne Warning And Control Wing moved to Tinker Air Force Base, Okla., with a new airframe. Its mission was to train crews and to provide maintenance, computer and logistics support for the Air Force's operational inventory of 33 E-3s.

The first E-3 arrived at Tinker on March 23, 1977

In early 1979 the wing assumed a commitment to support the North American Aerospace Defense Command. Today wing crews still stand ready to fly daily on short notice to the borders of the United States and Canada providing additional radar coverage required in defense of the North American continent.

That same year, 552 AWACW activities increased in the Pacific theater following the Soviet military air forces downing of a Korean Airlines, Flight 007. From 1 to 15 September 1983, the 552d supported the salvage operation and earned an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in the process.

In October 1983 the wing was redesignated the 552d Airborne Warning and Control Division. Under a second reorganization in April 1985, the division was once again redesignated a wing, becoming a subordinate unit of the newly activated 28th Air Division.

In 1986 the wing, in accordance with former President Ronald Reagan's National Security Decision Directive, further expanded its counter-narcotic operations. This marked the beginning of the wing's intense anti-drug commitment. Within six months, the wing had assisted in 13 arrests and the seizure of 3,200 pounds of illegal drugs.

On 3 May 1999, Oklahoma residents including Tinker AFB, and 552 ACW personnel witnessed the most powerful and destructive force in Oklahoma history. Commonly referred to in Oklahoma as the "May 3rd Tornado," the twisters touched many lives and affected many communities in Oklahoma and Kansas. The storm began in southwestern Oklahoma, near Apache. It gained momentum near Newcastle and headed northeast towards Moore and Oklahoma City. It remained on the ground several hours causing massive destruction. The tornado struck the city of Moore ten miles southwest of Oklahoma City and continued its northeast path toward Tinker AFB. The Tornado smashed into the Tinker AFB gate on Sooner Road just south of the Southeast 29th and Sooner Road intersection, causing major damage to dormitories, softball fields, football field, golf course, horse stables, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation warehouses, as well as other structures. The base also sustained moderate damage to its far northwest corner enduring large hail and 300 plus miles per hour winds. The neighboring communities of Del City and Midwest City saw huge portions of their cities demolished. The May 3rd Tornado registered, the strongest wind speeds ever measured on the Fujita scale in Moore, 318 miles-per-hour. Meteorologists assigned the storm an F-5. Overall damage to the base included the total destruction of eight buildings. Other buildings received some type of damage from flying debris including nine dormitories. The tornado also destroyed a mile of the base's northwest fence line. The 552d Air Control Wing responded to the bases call for assistance by setting up a mobile command post. The 552 ACW sent more than 1,000 members out to the base and local communities to help with the cleanup efforts. A total of 1,389 wing personnel were submitted for the Humanitarian award in recognition of their volunteer efforts in the May 3rd Tornado.

1-2 May 2008 – During the late evening of 1 May and into the early morning of 2 May, Severe weather hit Tinker AFB. A fast-moving wall cloud extending from the north border of Oklahoma down past the south border into Texas traveled across the state from West to East creating violent straight-line winds between 60-75 MPH, large amounts of deadly lightning, and large violent hail. The hail storm which hit Tinker AFB pounded the base with baseball-sized hail and damaged 11 E-3s. The 552 ACW Commander immediately called an emergency Battle Staff Meeting and requested assistance from the Tinker AFB OO-ALC. Maintenance teams worked non-stop to repair the battered fleet to ensure that the 552 ACW could support Higher Headquarter taskings. The support from the ALC, NDI, and 76 MXG was overwhelming. The E-3 fleet was back to full strength and ready for normal operations in under 48 hours.

ACC merged four ground radar squadrons into the 552nd Air Control Wing, home to most E-3 at Tinker AFB, OK. Commanders hope combining ground and airborne units will create a focal point for developing skills and deciding how to deploy airmen. The merger also creates a single organization to handle software upgrades for the E-3s and ground radar systems. The four squadrons joining the 552nd are the 726th Air Control Squadron, Mountain Home AFB, ID; the 728th Air Control Squadron, Eglin AFB, FL.; the 729th Air Control Squadron, Hill AFB, UT; and the 607th Air Control Squadron, Luke AFB, AZ. The squadrons are staying put at their home bases, but now answer to the 552nd instead of their host fighter wings. The merger doesn't affect air control and AWACS squadrons assigned overseas, which will have been aligned under fighter wings so airmen in the squadrons could train and deploy with the fighter wings. But the squadrons rarely deployed with their fighter squadrons to combat zones because they were filling their own overseas commitments running control centers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Plus, being under four wings meant there wasn't a single commander over the squadrons until the chain of command reached Air Combat Command headquarters. If a combatant commander wanted additional control capability, there wasn't a single wing or numbered air force to contact. Now, most of those requests will come through the 552nd. The wing will dispatch AWACS aircraft or ground radars depending on the situation. The ground-based units are best suited for deployments that require a round-the-clock presence, while an E-3 can quickly reach a battle zone or remote region, Robinson said. The merger also creates a center for airmen with air control expertise, making it easier for airmen to learn new skills. An enlisted weapons director could go to technical school with the training squadron at Luke and then spend most of his career in the 522nd, with the exception of overseas assignments. Officers serving as air battle managers could also spend most of their operational assignments in the wing, working aboard E-3 AWACS or with the ground squadrons.

A modernized E-3G Sentry AWACS deployed to combat for the first time after completing Block 40/45 upgrades, arriving in the US Central Command area of operations on Nov. 18. "Tied with the deployable ground system, this allows both operators and intelligence personnel capabilities far beyond" the legacy Block 30/35 AWACS, 552nd Air Control Wing Commander Col. David Gaedecke. The \$2.7 billion upgrade program is the most comprehensive refresh of the Sentry's systems, and includes modern communications, enhanced computer processing, and improved threat tracking, among other advances. The first E-3G was redelivered to the 552nd ACW at Tinker AFB, Okla., back in June, and nine of Tinker's 27 airframes have been

upgraded to date, according to the release. The E-3G reached initial operational capability in July, and has already taken part in counter narcotics and domestic air defense missions, in addition to proving its abilities during Exercise Northern Edge.2015

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 18 Nov 2010

Updated: 7 Feb 2019

Sources

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

Unit yearbook. *Tinker AFB, OK, Vol 4, 2002 Yearbook*. 2002.

Unit yearbook. *Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center, Tinker AFB, OK. 40th Anniversary*. 1982

Unit yearbook. *552nd Airborne Early Warning and Control Wing*. 1957.