

## 53 WING



### **MISSION**

53 Wing serves as the focal point for the Combat Air Forces in electronic warfare, armament and avionics, chemical defense, reconnaissance, and aircrew training devices. The wing reports to the Air Warfare Center at Nellis AFB, NV, a Direct Reporting Unit to Headquarters Air Combat Command.

The wing is also responsible for operational testing and evaluation of new equipment and systems proposed for use by these forces. Current wing initiatives include advanced self-protection systems for combat aircraft, aircrew life support systems, aerial reconnaissance improvements, new armament and weapons delivery systems, and improved maintenance equipment and logistics support. The 53d Wing, which is comprised of three groups, numbers more than 1,800 military and civilians at 16 various locations throughout the United States.

### **LINEAGE**

53 Pursuit Group (Interceptor), established, 20 Nov 1940

Activated, 15 Jan 1941

Redesignated 53 Fighter Group, 15 May 1942

Disbanded, 1 May 1944

Reestablished, and redesignated 53 Fighter Group (Air Defense), 20 Jun 1955

Activated, 18 Aug 1955

Discontinued, 1 Apr 1960

Redesignated 53 Tactical Fighter Group, 31 Jul 1985

USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center organized, 1 Nov 1963

Redesignated USAF Air Warfare Center, 1 Oct 1991

53 Tactical Fighter Group consolidated with USAF Air Warfare Center, 25 Sep 1995

Redesignated 53 Wing, 1 Oct 1995

### **STATIONS**

MacDill Field, FL, 15 Jan 1941

Tallahassee, FL, 8 May-8 Dec 1941

Howard Field, CZ, 1 Jan-10 Nov 1942

Dale Mabry Field, FL, 26 Nov 1942

Drew Field, FL, 7 Jan 1943

Fort Myers AAFld (later, Page Field), FL, 6 Feb 1943-1 May 1944

Sioux City Muni Aprt, IA, 18 Aug 1955-1 Apr 1960

Eglin AFB, FL, 1 Nov 1963

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

22<sup>nd</sup> Pursuit Wing, 15 Jan 1941

3<sup>rd</sup> Interceptor Command, 2 Oct 1941

Caribbean (later, Sixth) Air Force, 1 Jan 1942

XXVI Interceptor (later, XXVI Fighter) Command, 6 Mar 1942

III Fighter Command, 26 Nov 1942-1 May 1944

31<sup>st</sup> Air Division, 18 Aug 1955

20<sup>th</sup> Air Division, 1 Mar 1956

Kansas City Air Defense Sector, 1 Jan-1 Apr 1960

Tactical Air Command, 1 Nov 1963

Air Combat Command, 1 Jun 1992

Air Warfare Center, 1 Oct 1995

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-35, 1941

P-40, 1941

P-39, 1942, 1942-1943

P-51, 1943

P-47, 1943-1944

F-86, 1955-1959

C-119, 1956

T-33, 1957

C-45, 1957

A-4

A-37

B-57

C-119

C-123

C-124  
CH-3  
CH-21  
F-100  
F-101  
F-104  
F-105  
O-1  
OV-10  
RB-66  
T-33  
UH-1  
C-130  
F-4, 1964-1994  
RF-4, 1965-1990  
F-5, 1965-1978  
F-111, 1968-1978  
A-7, 1972-1974  
AC-130, 1972-1978  
EF-111, 1976-1997  
F-15, 1976  
F-16, 1978  
A-10, 1978  
E-3, 1980  
QF-106, 1994-1996  
E-9, 1996  
F-117, 1996  
HH-60, 1996  
QF-4, 1996

### **COMMANDERS**

Maj Hugo P. Rush, 15 Jan 1941  
Maj Eugene C. Fleming, 9 May 1941  
Col Earl W. Barnes, 1 Jun 1941  
Lt Col Don L. Wilhelm Jr., 28 Jun 1942  
Col Morley F. Slaght, 11 Apr 1943  
Lt Col Anthony V. Grossetta, 22 Sep 1943  
Col Bryan B. Harper, Oct 1943-1 May 1944  
Col Malcolm A. Moore, 18 Aug 1955  
Col James R. Wergin, By Aug 1957  
Col Jones E. Bolt, 25 Jul 1958  
Lt Col William D. Chalek, 4 Oct 1959-1 Apr 1960  
Brig Gen Gilbert L. Pritchard, 1 Nov 1963  
Maj Gen Gilbert L. Meyers, 30 Dec 1963

Maj Gen Gilbert L. Pritchard, 21 Apr 1965  
Maj Gen Walter B. Putnam, 2 Aug 1965  
Brig Gen Albert W. Schinz, 1 Nov 1966  
Maj Gen Andrew J. Evans Jr., 30 Jul 1968  
Col Everett N. Farrell, 4 Sep 1970 (Temporary)  
Maj Gen Richard C. Catledge, 1 Mar 1971  
Maj Gen Woodard E. Davis Jr., 1 Aug 1973  
Brig Gen Wayne E. Whitlatch, 21 Jan 1974  
Maj Gen Howard M. Lane, 4 Mar 1974  
Brig Gen Thomas H. McMullen, 1 Sep 1975  
Maj Gen Malcolm E. Ryan, 1 Oct 1976  
Maj Gen Gerald J. Carey Jr., 15 Jul 1978  
Maj Gen Thomas S. Swalm, 17 Aug 1981  
Maj Gen John E. Jaquish, 30 Oct 1986  
Maj Gen John A. Corder, 16 Jan 1989  
Maj Gen George B. Harrison, 4 Oct 1992  
Maj Gen Carl E. Franklin, 9 Dec 1993  
Brig Gen Ronald E. Keys, 2 Oct 1995  
Brig Gen Paul V. Hester, 24 Feb 1997  
Col Gary B. Wood, 7 Dec 1997 (Acting)  
Brig Gen Douglas J. Richardson, 7 Feb 1998  
Brig Gen Jack J. Catton Jr., 23 Jun 2000  
Col Joseph Reynes Jr., 26 Nov 2001  
Col Craig A. Franklin, 25 Jun 2003  
Col William C. Coutts, 22 Jun 2004  
Col Kenneth S. Wilsbach, 25 May 2006  
Col Steven J. Depalmer, 11 Apr 2008  
Col Mick R. Guthals, 18 May 2009; Col Michael E. Gantt, 24 Jun 2009; Col David W. Hicks, 26 Jul 2011; Col Alexis G. Grynkewich, 30 May 2013; Col Adrian L. Spain, 18 Jun 2015-.

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

### **Campaign Streamers**

World War II

Antisubmarine, American Theater

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Jun 1998-31 May 2000

1 Jun 2002-31 May 2004

1 Jun 2004-31 May 2006

Air Force Organizational Excellence Awards

1 Jan 1981-1 Jan 1983

28 Feb 1984-28 Feb 1986

1 Mar 1986-28 Feb 1988

1 Jan 1989-31 Dec 1990

1 Jan 1992-31 Dec 1993

1 Jan 1994-30 Apr 1995

## EMBLEM



53 Fighter Group (Air Defense) emblem



USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center emblem approved, 26 May 1964



53 Wing emblem

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

The group began as the 53 Pursuit Group which was activated on 15 Jan 1941 at MacDill Field, Florida. The group was assigned P-35 and P-40 and had been training for less than a year when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 Dec 1941. When the United States entered World War II, the group was sent to Panama to reinforce defenses at the Canal Zone. In less than one year, the group ferried 80 P-39 to Panama from the U.S. It was during this time the unit was re-designated the 53d Fighter Group.

The group returned to Florida in Nov 1942 and made its home first at Dale Mabry Field, Tallahassee, and then moved on to Page Field in Fort Myers. At Page Field, the group trained fighter pilots to be sent overseas as replacements during WWII. The Group disbanded on 1 May 1944, and was reconstituted 11 years later on 20 Jun 1955, as Headquarters, 53d Fighter Group (Air Defense), assigned to the Air Defense Command. Located at Sioux City Municipal Airport, Sioux City, Iowa, the group flew F-86 providing air defense protection to the central portion of the United States until its inactivation on 1 Apr 1960.

The USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center originated as a result of a U.S. Army request in 1961 for additional air support. The center was originally activated as the USAF Tactical Air Warfare Center on 1 Nov 1963, and re-designated as the USAFAWC on 1 Oct 1991.

Gen. Curtis LeMay, then Air Force Chief of Staff, tasked the USAFTAWC to prove the Air Force could support the Army's need for close air support and tactical airlift more effectively than a separate air arm of the Army. The center's first task was to prepare plans for joint Army Air Force tests and evaluations. Its role expanded to include the general improvement of tactical air in support of ground forces.

In 1964, USAFTAWC proved the Air Force's capability to provide support to the Army during exercises "Indian River" and "Goldfire." As expected, there were shortfalls in equipment, tactics and training. The Air Force broadened USAFTAWC's mission to address these deficiencies and included the acquisition and testing of off-the-shelf equipment items, with emphasis on strengthening the Air Force tactical air capabilities. This was the beginning of USAFTAWC's support to then-Tactical Air Forces, now known as the Combat Air Forces.

Tactical Air Warfare Center serves as the technical focal point for tactical air forces on electronic combat, chemical warfare defense, and tactical reconnaissance matters. It provides battle management training for selected air and land tactical battle managers, forward air controllers, air liaison officers, and tactical air command and control; as well as manages and conducts operational test and evaluation and tactics development and evaluation as directed. It also maintains electronic combat systems operational and maintenance handbooks; initiates electronic-measures software changes; and manages TAC aircrew training devices acquisition, modification, and training programs as directed. The center supports Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center (AFOTEC) projects as directed.

In 1965, the North Vietnamese began launching surface-to-air missiles against U.S. aircraft. The Air Force had little or no defense against these missiles and assigned the USAFTAWC the critical mission of developing effective surface-to-air missile (SAM) countermeasures to protect aircrews over the skies of Vietnam. In response to this new threat, USAFTAWC originated and fielded the Wild Weasel program. Simultaneously, the center was testing radar homing and warning equipment and self-protection electronic countermeasures jamming pods.

Between 1965 and 1966, USAFTAWC personnel saw combat in Vietnam while performing the combat evaluation of the F-5. The center conducted this evaluation to determine if an inexpensive, uncomplicated fighter would be beneficial in lower levels of conflict, such as in Southeast Asia.

In Nov 1966, USAFTAWC established the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCS) for anti-SAM. This became the DCS for Electronic Warfare, a precursor to the 68th Electronic Combat Group. As the Vietnam War continued, USAFTAWC's mission expanded to include new programs dealing with night operations, improved tactical communications, and weapons systems designed to interdict enemy supply lines and troop movements.

In 1971, USAFTAWC absorbed the mission of the tactical airlift and tactical reconnaissance centers and became the Air Force focal point for tactical airlift, reconnaissance, and special operations. The center added the air-to-air weapons system evaluation program in 1972, marking the beginning of the USAFTAWC role in evaluating fielded combat capabilities.

In 1974, Headquarters Tactical Air Command added the acquisition and testing of aircraft simulators, while Headquarters U.S. Air Force transferred the tactical airlift mission from USAFAWC to the Military Airlift Command.

In 1978, the center assumed responsibility for the USAF Air Ground Operations School. In the same year, the Electronic Warfare Evaluation Program became another one of the USAFTAWC's weapons system evaluation programs, ultimately resulting in the activation of the 4487<sup>th</sup> Electronic Warfare Aggressor Squadron in 1990.

In 1979, the center established a command, control, communications and intelligence complex at Hurlburt Field Florida. The addition of the 727<sup>th</sup> Tactical Control Squadron, redesignated the 727<sup>th</sup> Air Control Squadron on 1 Nov 1991, reinforced USAFTAWC's role as the Air Force leader in testing tactical communications.

During the 1980s, the pace of testing quickened. HQ TAC added chemical warfare defense testing to the center's list of missions and activated detachments throughout the CONUS to manage the Wild Weasel program. The E-3 Airborne Warning And Control System program, LANTIRN program, anti-satellite missile program, EF-111 testing, operational testing of the ground launched cruise missile, and the Compass Call program were all part of USAFTAWC's testing programs.

In 1983, the center experienced some major changes its Air-to-Air Weapons System Evaluation Program was transferred to Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., and, in turn, USAFTAWC took on all testing previously conducted by the Air Defense Weapons Center. This included gaining the rooftop radar test facility, a one-of-a-kind facility in or outside the service.

On 1 Jul 1988, the center established Detachment 4 at Kirtland AFB, NM, to plan and direct the transfer to USAFTAWC of a large-scale simulation facility that replicated the North Atlantic Treaty Organization air defense environment. This \$150 million facility explored new air defense concepts, tactics, and procedures before being implemented in the CAF. The 4443<sup>rd</sup> Test and Evaluation Group which activated in July 1988, and was re-designated the 79<sup>th</sup> Test and Evaluation Group on 1 Dec 1991, provided management of the center's extensive flying and logistics activities.

On 1 Oct 1990, HQ TAC activated the 4487<sup>th</sup> Electronic Warfare Aggressor Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base and assigned the unit under the Deputy Chief of Staff, Electronic Combat (Green Flag). Under the aggressor concept, one of the squadron's analysis teams would deploy for two weeks to a unit's home station to conduct evaluations of its tactical electronic warfare systems. Using ramp testers and electronic combat mini-range equipment, EWAS personnel thoroughly check internal and external jamming pods, radar warning receivers, and aircraft identification systems.

On 1 Jun 1992, following the inactivation of Strategic Air Command, USAFAWC gained the 31<sup>st</sup> Test and Evaluation Squadron, Edwards AFB CA, 49<sup>th</sup> Test Squadron, Barksdale AFB, LA, 513<sup>th</sup> Test Squadron, Offutt AFB, NE, and the 3907<sup>th</sup> Systems Evaluation Squadron, Castle AFB, CA. Then on 15 Apr 1993, USAFAWC underwent a massive reorganization from the deputy chief of staff structure to the organizational design of the objective wing.



On 1 Oct 1995, Headquarters Air Combat Command consolidated the USAF Air Warfare Center, Eglin AFB, FL, with the inactive 53d Fighter Group (Air Defense), and redesignated the center the 53 Wing. The Center's mission remained the same.

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

Created: 19 Feb 2025

Updated:

Sources

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

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

Steven E. Clay. *US Army Order of Battle 1919-1941*. Combat Studies Institute Press. US Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Nd.

Unit yearbook. *20<sup>th</sup> Air Division (Defense)*. 1957.