

HISTORY OF THE 31st FIGHTER WING

The 31st Fighter Wing activated on 20 November 1947 at Turner Field, Georgia and flew the P-51 *Mustang*. In August 1948, the wing converted to the F-84 *Thunderjet*. The wing made aviation history on 22 September 1950, when Colonel David Schilling, wing commander, flew an F-84E from Manston, England to Limestone, Maine, in 10 hours and one minute. He earned distinction as the first pilot to fly non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean in a jet aircraft and received the Harmon Trophy for this feat.



On 4 July 1952, the entire 31st Fighter Escort Wing executed "Operation FOX PETER ONE," the first trans-Pacific mass flight of jet aircraft using aerial refueling. The wing flew from Turner Field, Georgia, to Misawa Air Base, Japan, in just a week and half, less than half the time normally required to ship the aircraft across the Pacific Ocean. For its accomplishments, the 31st received the first ever Air Force Outstanding Unit Award.

Cuban Missile Crisis

On 15 March 1959, the wing moved, without personnel and equipment, from Turner Field, Georgia, to George Air Force Base, California. Three years later, on 1 June 1962, the wing moved to a new home, Homestead AFB, Florida. There the wing played a key role in the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of the same year. Throughout the crisis, the wing maintained constant air defense alert and for its performance in this critical role received its second Air Force Outstanding Unit Award on 10 May 1963.

Vietnam

On 24 June 1965, the wing's 307th Tactical Fighter Squadron deployed to Bien Hoa Air Base, Republic of Vietnam, to augment U.S. forces. During its six-month tour the squadron flew 3,502 missions in the F-100 without a single combat loss. On 25 December 1966, the entire 31st Tactical Fighter Wing transferred to Tuy Hoa Air Base, Vietnam, and was assigned to Seventh Air Force, Pacific Air Forces. From February to April 1968, the wing provided extensive air support during the Tet offensive and the siege of Khe Sanh. For outstanding service in Vietnam from 1 June to 16 December 1966, the wing received its third Air Force Outstanding Unit Award and received an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with combat "V" device for exceptional combat service in Vietnam from 17 December 1966 to 30 April 1968.

The wing returned to Homestead AFB on 15 October 1970 and converted from the F-100 to the F-4 *Phantom*. By 11 June 1973, with its Vietnam commitments over, the wing resumed training operations in the F-4. On 7 June 1985, the wing received its first F-16B *Viper* and by March 1991, converted from the F-16A/B to the Block 40 F-16C/D.

On 24 August 1992, Hurricane Andrew severely damaged and destroyed much of Homestead AFB. During the 1993 round of base closures and realignments, the

Secretary of the Air Force recommended the closure of Homestead AFB. As a result of this recommendation, on 1 April 1994, the 31st Fighter Wing (FW) moved from Homestead AFB to its current home, at Aviano AB, Italy. The wing also received two new fighter squadrons, the 510th and 555th, flying the F-16.

From the start of DENY FLIGHT in 1993, through DELIBERATE FORCE, DECISIVE EDGE, DELIBERATE GUARD, DELIBERATE FORGE, and continuing with Operation JOINT GUARDIAN, the 31st played an important role in restoring and maintaining the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1999, the 31st built up, added aircraft from other bases, and formed the core of the Air Force's largest air expeditionary wing, the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing. The Air Expeditionary Wing conducted the 78-day Operation ALLIED FORCE air campaign, putting an end to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

The ongoing conflict in the Balkans prevented the 31 FW from participating fully in the Air Expeditionary Force construct. With the exception of a single Operation NORTHERN WATCH deployment in 1998, all of the wing's real world operations originated from Aviano. However, the end of the 1990's saw the wing transform from a wing accustomed to fighting in place to one firmly rooted in the expeditionary culture.

Since 2000, wing personnel and aircraft have deployed in support of Operations NORTHERN WATCH, SOUTHERN WATCH, ENDURING FREEDOM, and IRAQI FREEDOM, each time serving with distinction and RETURNING WITH HONOR.

31st Fighter Wing Heraldry



The significance of the wing patch: "The Air Force colors, ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow, are separated by a wavy line symbolizing clouds. The wyvern, a mythological dragon, represents strength. It is depicted without legs to indicate that all of the unit's fighting is done in the air." Its motto is, "Return With Honor."
