

# 4<sup>TH</sup> FIGHTER WING HISTORY

## 4 FW History Office

Dr. Roy Heidicker  
DSN 722-0024  
(919) 722-0024

### **4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing History:**

Spanning more than six decades and five wars, the 4th Fighter Wing (FW) is one of the most renowned fighter units in the world. In addition, it has the distinction of being one of only two Air Force units that can trace its history to another country. Before the U.S. entry into World War II, American volunteers were already serving as combat veterans in Royal Air Force Eagle Squadrons (71st, 121st and 133rd). When the U.S. entered the war, these units, and their American pilots, were transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces, 8th Air Force, forming the 4th Fighter Group (FG) on 12 September, 1942.

The 4 FG (with squadrons now designated the 334th, 335th and 336th) was a record setter throughout the air war over Europe, justly earning the motto "Fourth But First." It was the first fighter group to use belly tanks, the first to penetrate Germany, the first to accompany bombers to Berlin, the first to accomplish the England-to-Russia shuttle and the first to down jet fighters. The group was credited with the destruction of 1,016 enemy aircraft, more than any other Army Air Force unit, and produced 81 aces.

The 4 FG was inactivated on 10 November 1945 and reactivated on 9 September 1946. Following a period of training with F-80 Shooting Star aircraft, the 4 FG transitioned to F-86 Sabre jets in March 1949, just in time for the Korean War. In December 1950, the group (now designated the 4th Fighter-Interceptor Group) was the first unit to commit F-86 Sabre jets to that conflict. On May 20, 1951, Captain James Jabara of the 334th Fighter Squadron (FS) became the first jet ace in history. The 4th destroyed 502 enemy aircraft (54 percent of the total destroyed by the USAF), becoming the top fighter unit of the Korean War. Twenty-five pilots achieved ace status.

The 4th Fighter-Interceptor Group moved to Japan following the Korean armistice in 1953. and was redesignated as the 4th Tactical



### **Emblem significance:**

The spear symbolizes the 4th Fighter Wing and her three divisions of the shield are representative of the three original squadrons: 334th, 335th, and 336th. The flames at the base of the shaft are symbolic of jets. The three eagle feathers attached to the head of the spear represent the three eagle squadrons of the Royal Air Force from which the 4th Fighter Group was formed.



Fighter Wing (TFW) in July 1958.

The unit moved to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (SJAFB) in North Carolina, 8 December 1957, picking up a fourth tactical fighter squadron (the 333rd "Lancers" who remained with the wing until reassignment to Pacific Air Forces 4 December 1965) and was redesignated as the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) in July 1958. Aircrews of the 4 TFW flew F-100 Super Sabre aircraft at the new location and, within two years, the wing became the first Air Force unit to convert to F-105 Thunderchief aircraft. Some of the more significant events of the 1960s included the deployment of the fighter squadrons to McCoy AFB, Florida, during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962; tours to Southeast Asia in 1965; and transition to F-4D Phantom II aircraft beginning in early 1967. In early 1968 when the North Koreans seized the *Pueblo*, an American ship, elements of the 4th moved to Korea within 72 hours.

The 4 TFW engaged in multiple deployments to Southeast Asia beginning in April 1972. Operating from Ubon Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand, as the first F-4 wing to augment elements of Pacific Air Forces, aircrews of the 4 TFW flew more than 8,000 combat missions, many into the very heart of North Vietnam. The 4 TFW executed Peace Echo operations in October 1973, a response to critical events in the Middle East.



Elements of the wing deployed to Norway in 1974 and to Spangdahlem AB, Germany in 1975. The highlight of 1976 came when the wing took first place in the William Tell world-wide weapons competition at Tyndall AFB, Florida. The wing executed short-term deployments to Korea and Japan during 1977 and assumed a dual-based mission (with Ramstein AB, Germany) that year. The overall mission commitment was restructured to reflect worldwide contingency emphasis in October 1986.

In late 1980, the wing converted to ARN-101-equipped aircraft. In September 1981 and in October 1983, the wing won the prestigious Gunsmoke meet in the F-4 ARN-101 category. With the assignment of the 337th "Falcons" on 1 April 1982, the 4 TFW was recognized as one of the Air Force's largest operational tactical fighter units.

The 337th was inactivated 1 July 1985. In 1988 the 4 TFW began transitioning to the F-15E Strike Eagle, the Air Force's newest and most advanced tactical fighter aircraft. The transition from the F-4E to the F-15E was completed 1 July 1991, making the 4 TFW the first operational F-15E wing in the Air Force. The 4 TFW was one of the first units tasked to react to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait 2 August 1990. Two F-15E tactical fighter squadrons were deployed to Southwest Asia. The unit earned another first by spearheading nighttime strikes against Iraqi forces 16 January 1991, helping to achieve victory in Persian Gulf War on 28 February 1991.

In 1994 and 1995 the F-15E formal training unit moved to Seymour Johnson. The 333rd Fighter Squadron returned to Seymour Johnson to accommodate the training mission. To train more F-15E aircrews, the 334th Fighter Squadron became a training squadron on 1 January 1996. The 4 FW is one of two on-call rapid response aerospace expeditionary wings. The 4 FW was the first to assume this mission on Oct. 1, 1999.

In response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the Fourth provided coastal protection missions for Homeland Defense. In October, the 335 FS and 336 FS began flying Operation NOBLE EAGLE (ONE) sorties, the first of its kind for the wing. The 4 FW received the tasking of providing 12 F-15E aircraft in support of Operation

SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), in December. The 335 FS provided the aircraft and aircrew bound for Kuwait.

In January 2002, the 4 FW arrived in Kuwait in support of OSW and OEF, flying missions over Iraq and Afghanistan. During the early morning hours of 1 March 2002, Operation ANACONDA was launched with the 335 FS playing a pivotal role.

The operation ended 21 March 2003 with the members of the 4 FW greatest highlight being their performance at Roberts Ridge. On 1 September 2002, the 4 FW transitioned into its final on-call AEW. Though the 4 FW will continue as a lead wing when deployed, it will now assimilate into the more predictable 120-day 10 AEF schedule. In response to the threat of Iraq's ability to produce, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the 4 FW joined other operational units to Southwest Asia. Two F-15E fighter squadrons deployed in January and February 2003 to Southwest Asia in support of OSW, which would later transition into support for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. On 18 April 2003, members of the 4 FW returned heroically to SJAFB after contributing to the resounding US led coalition victory over Iraq.

During 2004, the 4 FW transitioned into the normal AEF deployment rotation cycle. During September 2004, the 4 FW deployed over 1300 wing personnel from various units across the base in support of AEF 1/2. Team Seymour members were deployed to several location around the world, primarily to Southwest Asia in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. In September 2007 the 336th Fighter Squadron deployed to Southwest Asia, to provide the air power needed to fight Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. In January 2008 the 335th Fighter Squadron deployed to continue the OEF mission. Overcoming tremendous obstacles, including a determined enemy, harsh climate and mountainous terrain, both squadrons performed magnificently. These deployments greatly enhanced the already remarkable history of the 4th Fighter Wing.

Today, members of the 4th Fighter Wing continue to have a presence in the Middle East. In addition to the fighter squadron deployments, almost all 4th Fighter Wing Airmen and some civilians deploy all over the world to support the needs of the Air Force. In the past, present and future, the men and women of this great Wing are the tip of the spear confronting the enemies of our nation.

### **Thank you!**

Thank you for taking time to read the history of the 4th Fighter Wing!  
Please contact us for further information.

4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing History Office  
1510 Wright Brothers Ave Suite 100  
SJAFB, NC 27531