

FIFTY YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

A History of Aviano Air Base

1955-2005



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By

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Aviano Air Base, Italy**

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FRONTISPIECE



Aviano Air Base, or Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, is located 2 miles south of downtown Aviano, 7 miles north-northwest of Pordenone, and about 50 miles north-northeast of Venice, Italy.

PREFACE

This 50th Anniversary edition of the Aviano Air Base Heritage Pamphlet is designed to familiarize you with the distinguished history of Aviano Air Base. It is intended to inspire pride among all members of the Aviano community—military, civilian, Italian, and American.

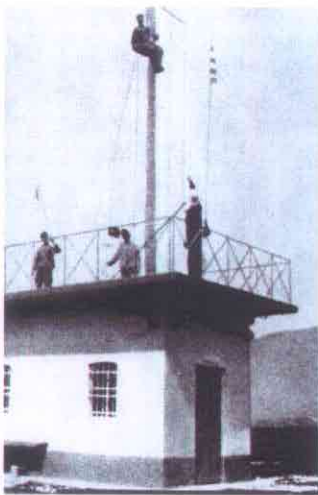
I would like to express my sincere thanks to the staff of the United States Air Forces in Europe Office of History for their research assistance. Thanks also to my wife Elizabeth Waller and Mr. William Butler, Sixteenth Air Force Historian, for their helpful suggestions and kind editorial assistance. Special thanks to Col Edward Ryder, Vice Commander of the 31st Fighter Wing, Lt Col Andy Uribe, Director of Staff, and Mr. Paolo Tarchi, 31st Fighter Wing Community Relations Advisor, for their help. Thanks to Mr. Lawrence Chiarotti, Sixteenth Air Force Host Nation Advisor, for translating the pamphlet into Italian. Finally, as with many historical products, much of this work is built upon that of my predecessors. Thus, great appreciation goes out to the Air Force Historians who have served at Aviano Air Base since 1955.

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1 February 2005

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A History of Aviano Air Base

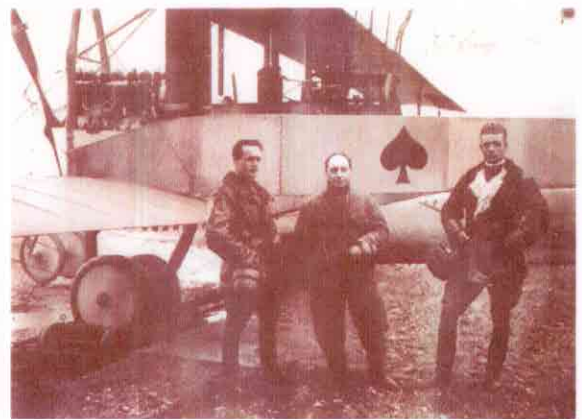


Aviano Weather and Control Station, circa 1911. ITAF photo.

On 19 April 1911, the Italian government established its first flight training school at Aeroporto Aviano, an airfield just south of the town of Aviano. During World War I, the Italian Aeronautical Corps flew Caproni bombers from this field and nearby La Comina airfield on missions against Austro-Hungarian forces.

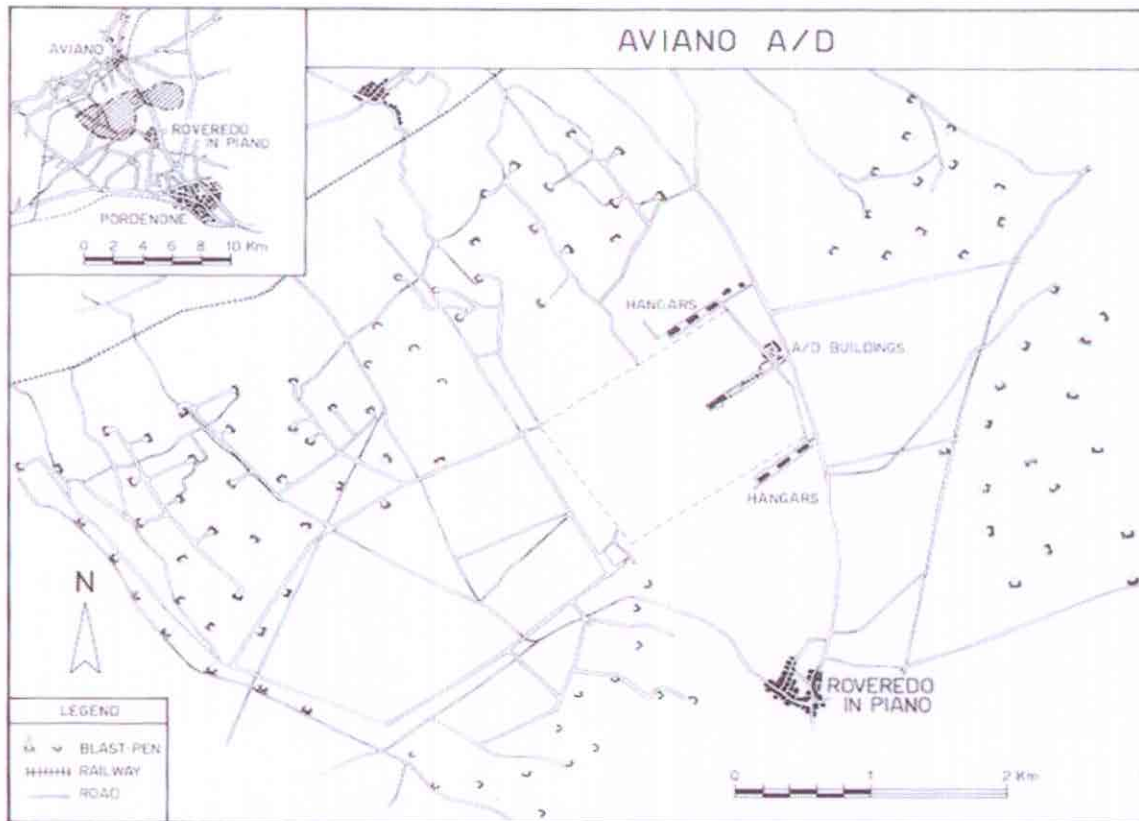
Two heroes from World War I provided the airfield with a new name. On 10 May 1916, Italian aviators, Cap. Maurizio Pagliano and Ten. Luigi Gori, conducted an unauthorized, but heroic and successful air raid on the Austrian naval yards at Pola, Yugoslavia. This raid earned both men immediate status as national heroes.

By December 1917, the battle line between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces had stabilized along the Piave River. In order to maximize the effect of each sortie Pagliano and Gori flew, the two aviators adopted the practice of strafing enemy lines along the Piave whenever they returned from a mission. Unfortunately, the two aviators died while flying one of these low-level strafing missions. On 30 December 1917, their Caproni bomber fell near Santa Lucia di Conegliano. In 1919, in honor of the two heroes, the base became “Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori.”



(Left to right) Captains Maurizio Pagliano and Aurelio Barbarisi and Lieutenant Luigi Gori. ITAF photo.

From 1919 to 1939, the base returned to a flight training mission, hosting fighter and bomber training schools. During the later half of the 1930's, the six Savigliano hangars on the airfield—now known as Hangars 1, 2, and 3 on the north side and Hangars 4, 5, and 6 on the south side—were built. A grass field comprised the actual airfield and was so large that the Italians actually divided the base into two airstrips: Aviano Nord (North) for the bombers and Aviano Sud (South) for the fighters. Support buildings located mid-field divided the airfield into its northern and southern portions. The drawing below clearly depicts the layout of the airfield.



A schematic drawing of Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori showing its layout during World War II. Note the many well-dispersed revetments for aircraft. Drawing from *Air War Italy, 1944-45*, by Nick Beale.

During WWII, the Regia Aeronautica and Luftwaffe flew combat missions from Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori. Aircraft based at the field included Ju-88 medium bombers and Me-109 fighters. United States Army Air Force fighters and bombers from the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces attacked the Aeroporto nine times during the war.

U.S. Army Air Forces Missions against Targets in the Vicinity of Aviano

DATE	UNIT	ACTION
5 Dec 1943	12 AF	Fighters and fighter-bombers attack airfield
28 Jan 1944	15 AF	B-17's bomb airfield with fighter escort
31 Jan 1944	15 AF	B-17's and B-24's bomb airfield. Escorted by P-38's and P-47's.
14 May 1944	15 AF	48 P-38's strafe airfield.
6 Jul 1944	15 AF	B-17's and B-24's bomb oil and gasoline storage. P-51's and P-38's provide escort.
4 Oct 1944	15 AF	Heavy bombers attack airfield.
11 Nov 1944	15 AF	Heavy bombers attack airfield with fighter escort.
18 Nov 1944	15 AF	Heavy bombers attack airfield with P-51 escort.
2 Mar 1945	12 AF	Fighters and fighter-bombers attack airfield.

The 31 January 1944 attack against the airfield at Aviano provides a closer look at one of these missions. After launching from their bases at Grottaglie and Manduria in the “heel” of Italy, the B-24 *Liberators* from the 449th and 450th Bombardment Groups, Fifteenth Air Force, rendezvoused over Lake Varno, northeast of Foggia, and proceeded to the target. Once over the airfield, the aircrews met a significant flak barrage, with the 449th calling it “... the largest yet experienced by this Group.” Two 449th aircraft fell to the “intense, accurate, heavy flak,” including the lead ship, *Lurchin' Urchin'*, piloted by the 449th's commander, Col Darr H. Alkire. Other bombers sighted nine parachutes before the aircraft slammed into a mountainside; three of the crew died in action and eight became prisoners of war. Also lost to flak was *Brady's Gang*, with two crewmen killed in action and eight taken prisoner. Though eight of 450th's aircraft were damaged by flak, none were lost and gunners claimed two Me-109's destroyed and one damaged.



An aerial photograph taken during the 31 January 1944 mission by 15 AF bombers against the airfield at Aviano. Air Force photo.

Despite the losses, the mission met with some success. In all, 41 aircraft released 114 tons of general purpose bombs on the airfield with many of the bombs falling among the administrative and quarters buildings (the area in an around our base theater and Mensa) and along the northern line of hangars, completely destroying two of the hangars.

Following the surrender of German forces in northern Italy on 3 May 1945, the British 6th Armored Division liberated the area. Later, the Royal Air Force's (RAF) 55 Squadron moved from Udine to Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori and flew Boston medium bombers (Douglas A-20 *Havocs*) from the field until September 1945. Following the squadron's departure, the RAF maintained control of the field until 1947.

After the RAF departed Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, the Italian Air Force, known as the Aeronautica Militaire, resumed control of the base. Three years later, the Aeronautica Militaire loaned the southern half of the base, called the Zappala, to the Italian Army for use in housing and training an armored division. In 1952, Italy joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in August, the 51° Stormo Caccia (Fighter Wing) and 20° and 21° Gruppi (Groups) moved to the airfield and converted from the Republic F-47D *Thunderbolt* to the Republic F-84G *Thunderjet*. In February 1954, the Stormo transferred to Istrana Air Base (AB), near Treviso, where it still resides today.



Aeronautica Militaire F-84's lined up in front of Hangar 3, circa 1952. ITAF photo.

On 2 June 1954, personnel from United States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) utilized Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori as a temporary station until permanent facilities at Campoformido, near Udine, were completed. Later, in October, the U.S. and Italy signed a basing rights agreement allowing USAFE to use several Italian air bases, including Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori.

On 22 November, Tactical Air Command transferred the 629th Air Control and Warning Squadron (629 ACWS) to USAFE. In turn, USAFE based the unit at Campoformido. Arriving at the port of Livorno on Thanksgiving Day 1954, the 629 ACWS was the first Air Force unit stationed in Italy since the withdrawal of United States Army Air Forces units after WWII. The squadron temporarily billeted in today's Area 2 until their facilities were completed at Campoformido. Using the call sign "Charlie," the squadron operated search radars and a target directing post, provided ground control and approach services to aircraft flying into Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori, and trained the Aeronautica Militaire in the maintenance and operation of the equipment. In September 1957, with the Italian personnel fully trained, the



The MPS-7 search radar of the 629 ACWS at Campoformido, Italy, circa 1954. Photo provided by Edward M. Renna.

629th turned its equipment over to the Aeronautica Militaire and inactivated. Today, the Italian controllers still use the call sign “Pedro,” as they did in the 1950’s.

Two months after the 629th arrived in Italy, on 15 February 1955, USAFE designated and activated “Aviano Airfield #1” to support NATO-committed rotational units from Tactical Air Command. The next day, 16 February 1955, the 7207th Air Base Squadron moved from Giebelstadt AB, Federal Republic of Germany, to Aviano Airfield #1. The 7207th, consisting of personnel from Detachment 1, Seventeenth Air Force (located at Udine) and some personnel from the 629 ACWS, served as the base’s first USAF host unit.

Following the activation of the 7207th in 1955, the Air Force made improvements to the airfield by constructing a weather observation site, replacing revetments, installing special lighting, resurfacing the runway, and paving the overruns. The 7207th had two C-47 *Dakotas* assigned for liaison duty—the first USAF aircraft permanently assigned to Aviano. Aviano AB became an operational NATO base on Christmas Eve 1955 when F-84s from the 390th Fighter Bomber Squadron arrived from Alexandria AFB, LA. On 1 January 1956, HQ USAFE redesignated Aviano Airfield #1 as “Aviano Air Base.” On 1 July 1957, the 7227th Support Group transferred from Udine to Aviano, becoming the new host unit.



Emblem of the 7227th Combat Support Group

Aircraft shelters under construction in Mike Loop, Aviano AB, 1971. The aircraft pictured are U.S. Air Force F-100 *Super Sabres* temporarily deployed to the base. Air Force photo.



Emblem of the 40th Tactical Group

On 1 April 1966, USAFE inactivated the 7227th and activated the 40th Tactical Group as the new host unit. In 1970, Aviano became one of three weapons training sites in USAFE. While rotational alert deployments continued, units deployed to Aviano AB also conducted weapons delivery training at the nearby Maniago Bombing and Gunnery Range. Training at the range continued through the mid-1990’s until noise complaints and budgetary constraints ended Aviano’s tenure as a weapons training site.

Despite continuous alert activity and a heavy exercise schedule, Air Force personnel at Aviano also extended a helping hand to the surrounding communities. For instance, on 6 May 1976, an earthquake registering 6.5 on the Richter scale shook northeastern Italy. Though Aviano AB was not damaged, several towns north of Spilimbergo were severely damaged or destroyed. The 40th Tactical Group leapt into action clearing 15 miles (24 kilometers) of roads, hauling 19 tons of debris, and erecting 159 tents in nine villages in the affected area.



Civil engineers and volunteers from Aviano AB clear debris in Forgaria, Italy. Air Force photo.

The 1970's and 1980's saw deployments of various aircraft and units to Aviano for rotational deployments and exercises. The base hosted many CORONET readiness exercises, in addition to the DISPLAY DETERMINATION deployments held as part of REFORGER exercises. The base also supported U.S. Army airborne exercises.



Two F-4's await take off while a C-130 lands at Aviano AB, circa 1983. Air Force photo.

On 30 July 1990, USAFE redesignated the group as the 40th Tactical Support Wing. The mission of the wing included maintaining one of a few large War Reserve Material (WRM) sites in Europe. The wing also maintained a large stockpile of mobility assets, construction equipment, and munitions. With the start of Operation DESERT SHIELD in 1990, the wing deployed much of its WRM, mobility and construction equipment, and munitions in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. All told, the 40th deployed over

200 personnel, over 4,000 short tons of cargo, and over 13,000 short tons of munitions. As well, it assisted in the bed down of units deployed to other bases in southern Europe in support of operations in the Persian Gulf.

The early 1990's saw many organizational changes at Aviano AB. On 4 May 1992, USAFE moved the 401st Fighter Wing from Torrejon AB, Spain, to Aviano and inactivated the 40th Wing, making the 401st the new host unit at Aviano. Three months later, Sixteenth Air Force completed its own move from Torrejon to Aviano.

Though USAFE planned to relocate of the 401st to Aviano as only a temporary expedient until another site in the Southern Region could be found, operations in the Balkans starting in April 1993 demanded the permanent presence of a large USAF operating unit at Aviano. In November 1993, the U.S. and Italian governments signed a memorandum of understanding for basing two squadrons of F-16s at Aviano and, on 1 January 1994, USAFE moved the 603rd Air Control Squadron from Sembach AB, Germany, to Aviano and assigned the squadron to the 401st. This was the first unit movement to establish a major permanent force presence at Aviano.



**Emblem of the 401st
Fighter Wing**



**Italian Army tanks train in the Zappala. This area now holds the Base Exchange, Commissary, and dormitories.
Air Force Photo.**

With the start of Operation DENY FLIGHT in April 1993 and the signing of the basing agreement in November, the base population quickly outpaced the base's infrastructure. Designed to support about 1,500 military personnel, Aviano grew to 3,500 personnel in 1993. For the base to support its population and new mission, the Air Force programmed \$50 million in funding for urgently needed infrastructure improvements. By 1996, NATO funding also started to flow and emergency construction projects were underway.

Additionally, the Italian Army returned the Zappala to the Aeronautica Militaire, increasing the usable space available for growth. In 1995, the Aviano 2000 Program began. Because of the scope of the project, Sixteenth Air Force created the Program Management Office to oversee the largest construction program in the Department of Defense—almost 300 projects valued at over half a billion dollars.

On 1 April 1994, USAFE transferred the 31st Fighter Wing from Homestead AFB, Florida, to Aviano AB, replacing the inactivated 401st as the base's host unit. Also on that day, USAFE activated the 555th Fighter Squadron at Aviano and assigned it and the 603rd to the wing. In light of these reassignments and the pending activation of the 510th Fighter Squadron, on 1 July 1994, NATO upgraded Aviano to a major operating base. The 31st's aircraft came from Ramstein AB, Germany, as part of USAFE's effort to transfer Ramstein's fighters to the Southern Region. With the signature of a technical agreement on 11 April 1994, Aviano's permanently assigned force structure had finally stabilized.



**Emblem of the 31st
Fighter Wing**



Sting of the Black Viper, by Rick Herter.
Air Force Art Collection.

In the midst of these organizational changes, Aviano continued supporting NATO operations over the Balkans. On 28 February 1994, two F-16 pilots deployed from Ramstein AB to Aviano AB in support of Operation DENY FLIGHT downed four Federal Republic of Yugoslavian *Super Galebs* in the Bosnian no-fly zone. The pilots, from the 526th Fighter Squadron, 86th Wing, performed NATO's first combat engagement in its 45-year existence. The painting at left depicts one of the three aerial victories gained by Capt Robert Wright that day.

From the start of DENY FLIGHT, through Operations DELIBERATE FORCE, DECISIVE EDGE, DELIBERATE GUARD, and DELIBERATE FORGE, Aviano played an important role in restoring and maintaining the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 1999, the 31st formed the core of the Air Force's largest air expeditionary wing, the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing (31 AEW). Comprised of 150 aircraft and over 6,000 personnel, the 31 AEW conducted the 78-day Operation ALLIED FORCE air campaign, putting an end to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. From 24 March to 10 June 1999, the 31 AEW flew nearly 9,000 combat sorties and accumulated almost 40,000 hours of combat service over the skies of Kosovo, Serbia, and the rest of the Balkans in support of NATO operations.



Maintenance personnel from the 510th Fighter Squadron prepare an F-16 for a mission during ALLIED FORCE, 26 April 1999. Air Force photo.

On 11 June 1999, the day after Operation ALLIED FORCE sorties ceased, Operation DELIBERATE FORGE (NATO air support to Stabilization Forces in Bosnia) resumed and Operation JOINT GUARDIAN began. JOINT GUARDIAN involved enforcement of the no-fly zone over Kosovo and support of NATO's Kosovo Forces. Reporting for JOINT GUARDIAN ended in March 2002, and all subsequent sorties fell under DELIBERATE FORGE. With the transfer of the Balkan mission from NATO to the European Union, Aviano's air support to DELIBERATE FORGE ended on 31 December 2004. However, the 401st Air Expeditionary Wing, based at Aviano, continued to provide administrative control of USAF units supporting Balkan operations—a mission previously performed by the 31st and 16th Air Expeditionary Wings—until the complete transfer of operations to the European Union.



C-17 Globemaster III's lined up on Aviano's Bravo Taxiway in support of IRAQI FREEDOM, 24 March 2003. Air Force photo.

In March 2003, the base's first major support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM occurred during the deployment of the Southern European Task Force, based at Vicenza. Aviano AB served as the launch point for the airborne/air-land operation that opened a second front in northern Iraq. Air Force units at Aviano secured, bedded, and fed over 2,300 personnel from the Army and USAF. The operation, the largest airborne operation since 1989's Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, constituted 62 missions transporting 2,146 passengers and 2,433.7 tons of cargo.

For 50 years, Aviano has stood as a symbol of Italian and American unity. This partnership helped bring the Cold War to a successful conclusion. Today's Global War on Terrorism ensures Aviano AB an important role in the future. Continued cooperation and friendship between Italian and U.S. forces guarantees unsurpassed support to NATO forces in the Southern Region.

ITALIAN AIR FORCE COMMANDERS OF AEROPORTO PAGLIANO E GORI

Magg. Francesco Secondo	1955
Ten. Col. Maurizio Laureati	1956
Col. Aldo Dominutti	1963
Ten. Col. Aldo Boni	1972
Gen. B.A. Harry Warglien	1973
Cap. Gianfranco Da Forno	1976
Col. Danilo Franzoi	1976
Col. Renato Marozzi	1982
Col. Giorgio Pentericci	1991
Col. Riccardo Ziliani	1991
Ten. Col. Roberto Santi	1993
Col. Fermo Missarino	1993
Col. Luigi Stracciari	1996
Col. Orfeo Durigon	1997
Col. Alessandro Tudini	1999
Col. Rosario Scarpolini	2001



U.S. AIR FORCE HOST UNIT COMMANDERS OF AVIANO AIR BASE

7207th Air Base Squadron moved to Aviano AB from Giebelstadt, Germany, 16 February 1955

Maj Ovid M. Rey	16 February 1955 (temporary)
Lt Col Eugene F. Miller	8 May 1955 (temporary), 24 May 1955 (permanent)
Lt Col Donald E. Ewing	early 1956

7227th Support Group moved to Aviano AB from Udine, Italy, 1 July 1957

Col Kenneth D. Kienth	1 Dec 1957
Col Clarence C. McPherson	5 May 1958
Col Glenn A. Stell	15 April 1961

7227th Support Group redesignated 7227th Combat Support Group 1 May 1962

Col Carl E. Lovell	22 June 1964
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7227th Combat Support Group inactivated, 1 April 1966

40th Tactical Group activated at Aviano AB 1 April 1966

Col Carl E. Lovell	1 April 1966
Lt Col George M. Dwight Jr.	18 May 1966 (temporary)
Col Robert R. Fowler	3 June 1966 (temporary)
Col Richard L. Hamilton	27 June 1966
Col Glyn W. Ramsey	31 March 1967
Col Thomas A. Barr	7 July 1969
Col Morton C. Mumma III	10 May 1971
Col John L. Piotrowski	7 January 1972
Col Robert L. Miller III	16 July 1973
Col William L. Gibson	9 July 1976
Col Henry M. Yochum II	22 May 1980
Col Dean F. Vikan	8 July 1981
Col Lester P. Brown, Jr.	1 July 1982
Col Frederick A. Zehrer III	16 March 1984
Col George W. McKenna	10 May 1985
Col James T. Hannam	19 June 1985

Col Frank Plescha	25 June 1986
Col John W. Hawley	28 January 1988
Col James C. Evans	16 July 1989 (temporary)
Col Wayne Mayfield	10 March 1990
<i>40th Tactical Group redesignated 40th Tactical Support Wing 30 July 1990</i>	
Col Thomas K. Speelman, Jr.	30 July 1990
<i>40th Tactical Support Wing inactivated 4 May 1992</i>	

401st Fighter Wing moved to Aviano AB from Torrejon AB, Spain, 4 May 1992

Col James D. Kula	4 May 1992 (temporary)
Col Timothy A. Kinnan	30 June 1992
<i>401st Fighter Wing inactivated 1 April 1994</i>	

31st Fighter Wing activated at Aviano AB 1 April 1994

Col John H. Campbell	1 April 1994
Brig Gen Charles F. Wald	24 May 1995
Brig Gen Timothy A. Peppe	3 July 1997
Brig Gen Daniel P. Leaf	30 November 1998
Brig Gen Daniel J. Darnell	21 January 2000
Brig Gen Donald J. Hoffman	25 May 2001
Brig Gen R. Michael Worden	9 October 2002
Brig Gen Philip M. Breedlove	18 June 2004



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