

116 WEATHER FLIGHT



MISSION

The 116 Weather Flight provides meteorological support to US Army forces operating in the field and under combat conditions, to Aerospace Expeditionary Forces, to state emergency missions and to homeland defense. Traditionally aligned with the 81st Combat Brigade Team and the 66th Aviation Brigade, WA Army National Guard.

In order to accomplish their mission, the members of the 116th Weather Flight divide their training into two areas. The first area of training is to sharpen their skills as weather forecasters and observers. They do this working hand and hand with the Air Force here at Fairchild AFB. Tactical training, the skills necessary to survive and function in a ground combat environment, makes up the second area of training.

LINEAGE

116 Weather Flight

STATIONS

Fairchild AFB, WA

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

LTC Richard Uhlich

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

On a disc Azure, a mountain of rock Sable, snow capped Argent, overall an anemometer in pall, the three cups voided to show the background, its mounting bar ending in a fleur-de-lis in chief Or, all within a border divided per border Blue and Black. Attached below the disc, a Yellow scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "116TH WEATHER FLIGHT" in Black letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** 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 mountain range denotes the rock-solid foundation that unit leadership provides. The anemometer signifies the flight's ceaseless endeavors to achieve full mission accomplishment and complete customer satisfaction. The fleur-de-lis symbolizes purity and enlightenment.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Organized in 1947, this unit is manned by four weather forecasters, ten weather observers, a weather equipment repairman and a clerk.

Equipped with the latest scientific weather measuring devices and manned by professionals, this unit provides support for the 141 Fighter Interceptor Group.

The weather flight gives briefings to pilots either in person or via closed circuit television. Pilots are provided information on runway conditions, visibility, cloud ceilings, winds aloft, turbulence, icing conditions, local and national weather patterns. Because of a sophisticated teletype network, this organization can receive instant weather information from anywhere in the United States and Canada.

Equipment for measuring wind speed and direction at Spokane International Airport is located near the main runway. Vital information is compiled from local weather balloon flights, teletype and facsimile networks. The facsimile network provides weather charts, forecasts and satellite photos prepared by the National Weather Service.

A popular topic of discussion, the weather, is more than just shooting the breeze to the airmen of the 116th Weather Flight, Supporting pilots and soldiers with weather data is a crucial aspect of total force protection in today's military according to Air Force Lt. Col. Nick

Yonker, Commander of the Weather Flight. The company has two teams working at Yakirra Training Center for Task Force Falcon 2001.

One team is operating out of the garrison weather station and supporting the pilots of the 66th Aviation Brigade while also sending forecasts to the second team, which is 'downrange', supporting the 81 Infantry Brigade's operations there. From 3 a.m. until 8 p.m., the airmen of the 116 post and submit three different forecasts and conduct about a dozen pre-flight weather briefings daily. According to Yonker, the Weather Flight is responsible for providing weather support by way of weather forecasts, observations and any special mission forecasts. They also provide a weather affects matrix (chart) for the troops in the field, "Whether you are talking air level, close air support, chemical MOPP4, reconnaissance, infantry, maneuver, there are certain weather thresholds that will affect their equipment and manning," said Yonker, "And this weather affects matrix is used to tell them if weather conditions will be favorable or unfavorable."

In this way the matrix can provide an extra level of stability to the decision making process in the field. According to Yonker, scheduled MOPP 4 training could be curtailed in the event of extremely hot weather. If there are potential wind problems, troops will know in advance to tie down the tent and helicopter blades, and it could affect the way they plan their flight operations. "The most important thing about weather support is that we warn them ahead of time about any severe event that could negatively affect their manpower or equipment," said Yonker. "They need to know because it could cost lives and dollars if they are not warned." According to Air Force Master Sgt. Laura Clark, Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge of the 116th the primary concern at Task Force Falcon, is to make sure the troops are not going to drop out from heat exposure, and whether the pilots are going to be able to fly at all.

Their concern is the wind," said Clark of the pilots. "Primarily we are briefing them on weather conditions, whether or not they are going to have turbulence or flow due to the wind. Any kind of weather hazard that might be present, that we can see, I would consider." Many pilots, of course, agree that knowledge about the weather is important for them to do their job. "Yes, it's very important, it changes rapidly and has a great impact on what we do and how we do it," said Chief Warrant Officer Joel Gaston, UH-60 pilot for the 1st of the 108th Aviation Battalion, Topeka, Kan. "

Actually it is the most important concern of a pilot because we already know how to fly, but we can't predict the weather." The Weather Flight can usually predict the weather, with some thanks to the latest meteorological technology. The trends in meteorology seem to tend toward consolidation of forecasting resources to make the forecaster's job easier. "The future looks more and more to the specialized forecasting centers throughout the U.S. and throughout the world that are going to provide most of the forecasts," said Yonker. "All the actual people on the ground will have to do is take that weather forecast that has been provided in a centralized location, tailor it to the mission, and the rest is just doing some observations."

It will still take people who care about the weather enough to want to make observations and analyze them to create the reliable Weather Flights of the future. "Weather is something that is so much with us, you can't escape it," said Yonker. "It is such an influential aspect of our lives, that to be able to observe it and know what will happen in the future is really quite rewarding. We might not be perfect at it, but we've got an eye on what to expect."

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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