

163rd RECONNAISSANCE WING



LINEAGE

163rd Fighter Interceptor Group, 17 May 1958

Reached group status with federal recognition of 163rd FIG, 12 May 1958

Redesignated 163rd Tactical Air Support Group, 8 Mar 1975

Redesignated 163rd Tactical Fighter Group, Oct 1982

Redesignated 163rd Tactical Reconnaissance Group, Jul 1990

Redesignated 163rd Air Refueling Wing, 1 Oct 1993

Redesignated 163rd Reconnaissance Wing 28 Nov 2007

STATIONS

March ARB, CA

ASSIGNMENTS

North American Defense Command

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

KC-135R

Support Aircraft

COMMANDERS

Col Arthur H. Bridge

Col Donald L. Frisbie

Col Cecil L. Sanders, 1 Feb 1969

LTC Lloyed Hutton

Col Randall Ball, #2012

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Serving with distinction, the unit received two Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards for extended periods ending in 1964 and 1974.

EMBLEM

Per fess abase nebuly Light Blue and Argent, on the first a representation of the Southern California land area and the Pacific Coast line Azure garnished Or, below two flight symbols ascending bendwise of the second, garnished Gules and Azure, in base a bear statant Proper, all within a diminished bordure Yellow. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "163D RECONNAISSANCE WING" in Blue letters. 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 top one-third of the shield contains a silhouette of the Southern California coastline against a sky, identifying the unit as part of the California Air National Guard and recognizing the unit's heritage as a long-term resident of the State and region. Two stylized aircraft, represent past, present and future aircraft flown by the Wing. They soar in the sky representing the flying mission of the Wing. The middle one-third of the shield depicts the Pacific Ocean, and the gridlined area represents the cities, towns, farms and ranches served and protected by the unit. The lower one-third of the shield contains an image of the Southern California Grizzly, representing the unit's state mission and their close ties to the Southern California people, communities, resources and history. The fact that this bear is now extinct serves as a constant reminder that the missions of the unit are essential to the preservation of our freedom and the American way of life.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

During the latter part of 1957, the announcement was made that the unit would expand to an Air Defense Group and that the authorized strength would nearly double, Lt. Col. Arthur H. Bridge said, "The local squadron will receive a number of F-86D within the year. The changeover from a squadron to a group and the use of rocket-bearing planes will not change our mission, Our job is still to defend the southern California area against any air attack."

A ceremony on 12 May, 1958, marked the beginning of the 163rd Fighter Group. LTC Arthur H. Bridge assumed command of the group. Taking his place as commander of the 196th Fighter Squadron was Maj Robert J. Love. New units assigned to the group at this time were the 163rd Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commanded by Maj Rafael Galcerin, the 163rd Air Base Squadron commanded by Cpt William H. Warren, and the 163rd USAF Dispensary commanded by Maj Daniel J. Rothenberger. At the same time twenty-five F-86As came under the Air Defense Command for call in the event of an emergency. At approximately this same time the unit started converting from the F-86A to the F-86D. This model was retained until February 1961. By late summer or early fall, the unit assumed the Air Defense Command alert commitment. "ADC Runway Alert" comprised two aircraft on five minute status and two on

fifteen minutes standby. Pilots volunteered for active duty status for periods up to fifty-nine days. The alert program was scheduled for fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. The "five minute scrambles" simply defined that the pilot has five minutes to get his airplane airborne from the time the alert call is received. It is interesting to note that the "ADC Runway Alert" program was later expanded to twenty-four hours a day and is still in effect today.

At this time, the 163rd Fighter Group was reassigned from control of the 146th Tactical Fighter Wing located at Van Nuys and reassigned to the 144th Air Defense Wing headquartered at Fresno, CA

1959 was a year of expansion for the Air Guard's facilities at Ontario. A 1200 foot extension to the existing 7200 foot runway was begun on 1 June at a cost of \$348,931. The aircraft parking ramp was expanded and a 10,761 square foot addition to the administration building was made. In addition to its military role, the unit has supported community projects and humanitarian endeavors.

Another incident took place in 1959 when Lt. Col. Donald L. Frisbie flew the "City of Ontario" (the assigned C-47) loaded with clothing, food and medicines destined for the Navajo Indians at Houck, Arizona. At one time the "City of Ontario" made hay drops to starving cattle trapped by deep snows in Arizona and New Mexico. These are only examples of many involvements in community projects that the Group pursues today.

1959 was the last of seven consecutive summer encampments at Gowan Field, Boise, Idaho. The men of the Group each year looked forward to the field training exercises at Gowan, but because of budget limitations this was to be the last of the deployments for a number of years,

The 1961 annual field training was performed at Ontario Air National Guard Base. Because of the lack of a dining hall, improvisation was made by erecting a large circus tent to provide dining facilities for the 800 officers and airmen in attendance. This was a decided improvement over cooking on the black top south of the fire house and eating on the hangar floor, as we had been doing since 1953. Wherever we were, WO Art Smart and his crew always put out excellent meals. Training emphasized proficiency in the various aspects of the Air Defense Mission. In July, the unit went on 24 hour ADC alert, seven days a week. Up to that time the Group was performing a 14 hour per day alert.

A new concept of field training was inaugurated during 1962. The "Texas Plan, increment field training or year-round field training as it is sometimes called, is a program where an individual may attend field training for a few days at a time throughout the year until he has attended a total of fifteen days. This concept still prevails today. An exception to this plan occurs when the unit deploys to another base for field training.

The year 1964 was devoted not only to the training of assigned officers and airmen, but to some of our allies as well. Members of the Thai Air Force, the Philippine Air Force, and South Korean Air Force were attached for training and operation of the weapon control system of the F-86L. All in all 27 members of our allied military forces, including Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea and Iran passed through the training program provided by the 163rd Fighter Group.

In February 1965, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, was presented by Major General William B. Keese, Chief of Staff, Headquarters, Air Defense Command. Colonel Arthur H. Bridge, Commander of the 163rd Fighter Group accepted the award on behalf of the officers and airmen. It is second only to the Distinguished Unit Citation Award for extraordinary heroism during wartime. The citation reads: By order of the Secretary of the Air Force, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award is awarded to the 163rd Fighter Group for exceptionally meritorious achievement in support of military operations from 1 July, 1962, to 31 May, 1964. During this time period, the outstanding professional ability and devotion to duty of the members of the 163rd Fighter Group resulted in an outstanding rating in an operational readiness inspection and an accident free flying record. Through their resourcefulness and outstanding efforts, the members of the 163rd Fighter Group and component units successfully initiated a smooth and effective training program for foreign students. The distinctive accomplishments of the members of the 163rd Fighter Group reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

In the latter part of February 1965, the F-102 was assigned to the Group. Once again, the challenge to convert to a new aircraft was present. The tremendous job of qualifying pilots in the F-102 and the training of maintenance crews in the varied and complex systems was paramount. In the traditional fashion, the guardsmen overcame these hurdles to become a viable air defense fighter unit in a relatively short time. Throughout the years of 1965 and 1966 the activities of the Group were pretty much confined to proficiency training in the various functions and phases to support the Air Defense mission.

1968 began with something new being added! Thanks to the efforts of Major Bronco Aleksich and CMSGT. Elbert H. Wright, the F-102's were sporting a new and distinctive tail insignia. The design, four white stars on a strip of blue. The first change of command occurred on 14 July, 1968, when Lt. Col. (later Colonel) Donald L. Frisbie succeeded Colonel Arthur H. Bridge, who had been in command since the Group's inception in 1958. The ceremony was marked by Colonel Bridge's inspection of the 800 officers and airmen and a pass in review for the new commander, Lt. Col. Frisbie. It was at this time that Colonel James Bradford of the National Guard Bureau, presented the Missile Safety Award to the Group. During the presentation, Colonel Bradford said, "The accomplishments of this tactical organization required a high degree of dedication and proficiency and reflects excellent supervisory, coordination and maintenance support, The effective accident prevention efforts of the 163rd Fighter Group perpetuate the highest traditional and standards established for the award,"

COOL RIDE was the code name for the exercise, and an apt one it proved to be, "Initial planning for a deployment by the 163rd Fighter Group was begun in early January. At that time only a partial deployment was suggested, but four months of planning saw it grow into a mass deployment. Things jelled in June when a contingent from the 163rd met with host commanders of the Alaskan Air Command, 21st Composite Wing, U. S. Army and the Alaska Army and Air Guard. "The deployment began 30 July when an advance party was flown to Alaska to prepare the assigned billets at Camp Thomas P. Carroll, located on Ft. Richardson, adjacent to Elmendorf AFB. The detachment was responsible for receiving all expendable supplies, equipment and vehicles from the training site commander in addition to cargo airlifted from Ontario. Five C-97's from the 146th Military Airlift Wing carried more than 50 tons of cargo during the week

preceding the deployment. On 2 August, most of the Group's F-102's and two T-33's departed Ontario enroute to Elmendorf via Comox Royal Canadian Air Force Base, Vancouver, BC, and White Horse, Yukon Territory. A command post was established at White Horse, Yukon Territory, to maintain control of aircraft movement. An HC-97 rescue aircraft from the 303rd Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Sq., AFRes, March AFB, Riverside, California, provided airborne rescue stand-by in the vicinity of Biorka Island for the deployment to and from Alaska. The main body mustered at the Ontario Base, 3 August. The troops were loaded on ten C-97's from the Guard's 146th MAW at Van Nuys and the 151st and 161st Groups from Salt Lake City, Utah, and Phoenix, Arizona, respectively. Ahead lay an eleven hour flight. By early next day Sunday - most personnel were settled-in at the Army Guard Camp. Location posed one problem, for it entailed providing bus and taxi service 18 hours a day to get 500 officers and men to and from Elmendorf. There, they trained alongside Regular Air Force counterparts, supporting units of the 21st Composite Wing. To do this, vehicles assigned to the Group logged 50,000 miles during the 15-day exercise. At Camp Carroll, primary support services were provided by Personnel, Motor Pool, Supply, Fire/Rescue, Communications, Security Police, Food Services, Civil Engineering, Special Services and USAF Dispensary Sections. An estimated 600 men were processed through records check by personnel staff. Group training NCO's conducted general military training classes in code of conduct, first aid, disaster control, accident prevention, security, firearms, and range firing. The Dispensary provided routine and emergency medical aid including instruction of first aid classes. Airmen in the section also worked with personnel at the Elmendorf USAF Hospital. The whole purpose of 'COOL RIDE,' was to put interceptors into the air on realistic missions and there were plenty of those. The Group's 37 pilots, operations people and maintenance crews were melded-in with the 317th to fly tactical missions at the keystone of America's air defense network. Under supervision of the Alaskan NORAD Region, the California pilots flew their Delta Daggers' on 158 sorties in seven flying days. They did those not only from the Elmendorf Base, but from smaller fields at King Salmon, Fairbanks (Eielson AFB) and Galena, accumulating about 273 flying hours. Departure saw the Group's F-102's refueling at Come; the T-33's and TF-102's at White Horse. The same comradely airlifters who flew the troops North plus two Tennessee ANG C-124's hauled them home. From the Commander's viewpoint, Lt. Col. Donald L. Frisbie concluded: The deployment was satisfactory and beneficial in all respects. The experience we have gained will be a definite asset to us in case of mobilization and deploy, And at the Indian level, the consensus was similar. Specifically, several section chiefs said it provided an opportunity for their men to observe and receive training that they couldn't have had under ordinary circumstances: in fact, some went so far as to state that where Air Guardsmen worked alongside Active Air Force people, the Guardsmen's performance was equal or even superior to that of their career counterparts.

In April 1969. came the announcement that the 163rd Fighter Group would move to Norton Air Force Base by 1971, and become an associate unit of the military Airlift Command. This meant converting from the F-102A Fighters to the C-141 and participating in worldwide missions as scheduled by the Military Airlift Command. By October 1969, the National Guard Bureau announced a change in policy which set aside the controversial "Associate" unit concept, The 163rd was to continue the Air Defense mission and retain the F-102.

Kingsley Field, Klamath Falls, Oregon, was the site of the field training exercises for 1971. In some ways, logistics for this deployment were more difficult than the 1968 Alaska deployment.

Kingsley was simply not prepared to handle the total needs of the 700 men involved in the deployment. To alleviate some of the problems two C-119 aircraft were dispatched from Hayward ANG Base to Paso Robles, California, to meet a team headed up by Major Giles R. Miller to load cots and mattresses borrowed from Camp Roberts, California. A C-130 from Van Nuys ANG Base was dispatched to Gowan ANG Base, Idaho, to transport required bedding to Kingsley. It was commented that if anyone had stubbed his toe during this particular segment, there could have been individuals sleeping on the floor with or without blankets or sheets. But as was typical, the Air Guard came through without a hitch. The main body of troops arrived at Kingsley on 31 July. It was about seven days later before the F-102's arrived. All the F-102's had been grounded the previous Thursday pending the results of an investigation of a recent accident involving an F-102 of another unit. Once the Delta Daggers arrived, time was made up by the pilots by flying 30 sorties a day.

In November, 2006, the Wing was redesignated to the 163d Reconnaissance Wing. The Wing was the first Air National Guard unit to receive the MQ-1 Predator and was the first to become a fully functional ANG Flying Training Unit (FTU) and Field Training Detachment (FTD) for the Predator. The FTU falls under the ACC and trains pilots and sensor operators to become Predator aircrew. The FTD, which falls under AETC, trains enlisted personnel to build, maintain and repair the Predator.

The 163rd Reconnaissance Wing's Formal Training Unit for Predator remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) pilots and operators has almost doubled its class size to keep up with an increase in Defense Department demand. The unit graduated its 13th class Aug. 31, and 28 students were deemed qualified aircrew members, opposed to the normal 16 students. "The reason for the increase in class size is because the Air Force wants more mission capability before the troop drawdown [in Iraq] is complete," said Lt. Col. Matthew Dutkiewicz, commander of the Formal Training Unit. "So [Air Combat Command] requested we increase our class size to produce more mission-ready personnel in a shorter period of time." Col. Randall Ball, commander of the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing, said the wing volunteered early to meet the Air Combat Command surge training requirements. "We have the most experienced RPA instructors in the Total Force, nearly unlimited airspace, new aircraft and equipment, and excellent facilities designed for this mission," he said. "As the only Air National Guard unit flying RPAs in U.S. airspace, we were the common sense solution to meet the increased demand for trained Predator crews." In addition to increasing class size, the 163rd has increased the number of contractor instructors. "Before the increase, we had 10 weeks to get the students through the course," Dutkiewicz said. "Now we have eight weeks, but we aren't compromising quality for quantity." The Air Force will need robust MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper aircrew training through 2020, Ball said. "As MQ-9 production continues and the MQ-1s are retired, we hope to share in Reaper aircrew training." The 163rd runs one of two Predator schoolhouses. The other is on Holloman Air Force Base, N.M. Senior Master Sgt. James Blucher, operations group superintendent for the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing, said the wing's FTU plans to further increase class size to 32 students per class. "With this increase in RPA production, the FTU student schedule is full for the next year," Blucher said. The 163rd also trains maintainers for the Predator through its Field Training Detachment 26. In 2010, the detachment produced more than 75 percent of the Predator maintainers for the Air Force, said Detachment 26 production superintendent Master Sgt. Jennifer Oberg. "There was a lot of work involved to make this increase in student production

happen," Dutkiewicz said. "But in true Grizzly fashion, our team pulled together to make this RPA surge a huge success."

8/16/2006 The sun heats a Nevada desert landscape as a small group of warriors focus on computer terminals. These men and women know their actions directly support others facing the heat of another desert half a world away. Members of the California Air National Guard's 163rd Air Refueling Wing have spent the last several months training in one of the Air Force's most prominent emerging mission areas: unmanned aerial vehicles. The 163rd ARW, which until recently flew the KC-135, is now one of the Air National Guard's newest Predator units. The "Grizzlies" sent an initial cadre of MQ-1 Predator crews to train at Creech Air Force Base, Nev., in January. The six crews, composed of one pilot and one sensor operator each, graduated in April and have been supporting the 15th Reconnaissance Squadron at Nellis AFB, Nev., while facilities for the new mission are being completed at March ARB. Another class of seven crews graduated July 28. Senior Master Sgt. Jim Blucher was a boom operator on the KC-135 and is now working as a sensor operator with the Predator. "There are times when there's non-stop action. You're following vehicles, motorcycles, people, there are troops in contact (with the enemy) and you feel like you're right there helping them out," he said. "It's 24-hour operations, 365 days a year and most of us work odd hours. You get in the mindset that you're in the (combat) theater. When you walk out, you realize you're on Nellis time and it might be the middle of the night." The Predator MQ-1, a remotely piloted aircraft, has proven highly valuable to the nation's execution of the war on terrorism. It is not just an aircraft; it is part of an entire weapons system. A fully operational system consists of four aircraft (with sensors), a ground control station, a primary Predator satellite link and approximately 55 people for deployed 24-hour operations. "This is the future," said Col. Al Aimar, the 163rd ARW commander, as he unveiled the capabilities of the MQ-1 Predator in March. It was at that unveiling that the "Grizzlies" had a chance to see a static display of the Predator for the first time since the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission transferred the wing's refueling mission and aircraft to another Guard unit. "We joined the military because we want to make a difference, and we did that in the (KC-) 135. We flew it all over the world doing the mission the Air Force wanted us to do," Colonel Aimar said. "We're going to have the opportunity to continue to make a difference. We're going to be on the forefront of one of the most important missions in the Air Force today, and our leaders couldn't have picked a better organization or group of people for this critical task," he said. The colonel told the members about an event that occurred on Sept. 11, 2005, near Mosul, Iraq. Early in the morning, a Predator engaged an insurgent vehicle loaded with weapons. When the vehicle was struck by a Hellfire missile, the explosion was so great it leveled a nearby building. "It was determined that the Predator hit a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. That vehicle could have hit one of our convoys and could have been devastating. We know this vehicle (the Predator) saves lives. It's in huge demand with our combatant commanders. Our task is to get up to speed on this new mission as quickly as possible so we can start making a difference," Colonel Aimar said. To demonstrate the demand for unmanned aerial vehicles, Colonel Aimar highlighted the accomplishments of the 15th RS from July 2005 to June: the squadron participated in more than 242 separate raids; engaged 132 troops in contact-force protection actions; fired 59 Hellfire missiles; surveyed 18,490 targets; escorted four convoys; and flew 2,073 sorties for more than 33,833 flying hours. Already, the wing is anticipating what a new manning document might hold and preparing personnel for realignment. "There's a lot going on, but Airmen remain our priority," Colonel Aimar said. "When BRAG came along, it

looked like so many positions were going away. I lost sleep trying to figure out what to do. We quit hiring and dropped over 100 (military) positions in case we lost them. No one has to worry about not having a job now. If you want to be a part of this new mission, we're going to find you a job, and that's the way it is." The wing's major concern, the commander said, is bringing affected personnel up to speed on the mission as quickly as possible. Since the wing is the first unit in the Air National Guard to receive the Predator, and because the Predator is a relatively new asset, wing training members are challenged in scheduling and arranging training. The first class of intelligence troops have already graduated from Nellis AFB with several more classes planned. More intelligence specialists will be required to fulfill the new mission. "This is a very dynamic career field," said Senior Master Sgt. Heather Nester, wing training supervisor. "We're evolving our training plans as the situation evolves. Because we're trying to stand up the mission so fast, we're sending new pilots through the full pilot track." "We're in the lead," she said. "We're showing our flexibility and sending people off for training with little or no notice. People are calling us already and asking us what we're doing. The feedback we get is that we're exceeding expectations." Wing pilots are required to attend a two-week joint firepower course at Nellis AFB before attending the 98-day Predator basic course at Creech AFB. Once they finish the basic course, they return to Nellis for 60 to 90 "seasoning days" where they complete actual missions under observation. Crews are made up of two types of pilots, one who handles takeoffs and landings and the other who flies the Predator during missions. Pilot candidates are currently being sent through the Academy of Military Science and Undergraduate Pilot Training. Whether future Predator pilots will attend full undergraduate pilot training remains to be seen. According to Sergeant Nester, nearly every current Air Force Predator pilot was laterally moved to unmanned aerial vehicles from traditional aircraft. Intensive construction will be required to modify 163rd ARW facilities for the new mission. Work has been under way since April, and full transition of operational capability is expected by October.

Having successfully surpassed two years of combat operations flying the MQ-1, the nation's first Air National Guard Predator unit is poised to spread its history making wings once again. With only minor details remaining, the 163d Reconnaissance Wing, based at March Air Reserve Base, Calif., is ready to begin training the Air Force's next generation of unmanned aerial system warriors. Beginning in January, the unit expects to fly its first live training sortie at home from the Southern California Logistics Airport, located about 40 miles from March. "We are really excited about taking this critical next step in our employment of the Predator," said Col. Randall Ball, 163d Operations Group commander. "We've been working toward this since getting the Predator mission in 2006 and it has taken a total team effort to go from concept to reality as quickly as we have." Since transitioning from its support mission flying the KC-135 to conducting active combat flying the Predator, the wing has proven itself capable of adapting to an ever-evolving Air Force. Shortly after beginning Predator flight operations the wing was charged to provide three continuous combat air patrols over Southwest Asia. As a result of the surge, the wing has amassed more than 21,000 flying hours supporting combat operations overseas by providing combatant commanders with 24-hour a day, seven-day-a-week aerial surveillance and precision strike capability. "This has truly been an historic event for us," said Col. Al Aimar, 163d commander. "It's been quite an exciting time and we're eager to begin the next chapter in this remarkable mission." Once the facilities and infrastructure needed to support the flying program at SCLA are in place, the wing will begin flying the Predator locally in preparation for its first class of Predator aviators, which is scheduled to begin in April 2009. "We

need to make sure we take a steady approach to starting the flight training program here so we can ensure we are training the best Predator pilots possible, able to step out of the classroom and into the combat theater providing the kind of support commander need and have come to expect,” said Lt. Col. Kirby Colas, 196th Reconnaissance Squadron commander. Initially the wing will begin training Air National Guard personnel as Predator aircrews, but the program is expected to expand to include training active duty aviators, as well relieving some of the load for Creech Air Force Base, Nev., the only base presently training Predator aircrews. Since the wing already has extensive experience with the platform, providing the training to both Guard and active duty aircrews is expected to be a smooth process. In fact, several of the unit’s current senior-level pilots and sensor operators have already gained valuable experience in the academic environment having served as instructor pilots and sensor operators at Creech.

2009 The sounds of cheers and applause filled the air Feb. 25 as an MQ-1 Predator lifted off the runway at Southern California Logistics Airport (SCLA) in Victorville, Calif., marking the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing’s and the Air National Guard’s first Predator flight in the United States. The Predator, an unmanned aerial system (UAS), has been in use for more than 10 years, but only active duty Air Force operated the system until the 163rd received the mission in 2006. Since then the unit has been a trailblazer for the National Guard: It was the first Guard wing to receive the Predator mission and the first to open a Predator-maintenance schoolhouse. Now the wing has added to its accomplishments that it is the first Guard wing to fly the Predator in the United States and the first to open a school to instruct Airmen to fly and operate the aircraft. The Predator’s maiden U.S. voyage for the 163rd was piloted by 196th Reconnaissance Squadron (RS) pilot Maj. Eric Fagerland, whose main objectives on the flight were to scout the surrounding area for factors that might hinder future operations and to evaluate the aircraft’s equipment and functionality. The 196th is a squadron within the 163rd. During the flight, Master Sgt. Justin Ciasullo of the 196th operated the “sensor ball,” which houses the Predator’s optics, lasers and video cameras. Ciasullo used the sensor ball to explore the airport’s four runways and to ensure the Predator’s approach and landing systems were properly configured for the airfield. “The aircraft performed as advertised, and the main goals of the mission were accomplished,” Ciasullo said. He and Fagerland had planned to hand control of the aircraft over to a crew at March Air Reserve Base about 40 miles away, but weather constraints prevented them from completing that part of the mission. “We didn’t accomplish everything we wanted to on this flight due to the weather; , the impact of this first flight to the Formal Training Unit’s (FTU) development is as important as anything we’ve done so far,” said Lt. Col. Kirby Colas, 196th RS commander. “It definitely feels good to have a tangible success under our belt to validate the years of effort we’ve put into making the FTU happen.” During the Feb. 25 flight, the Predator was flown in the immediate area of SCLA. Since then the aircraft’s route of travel has included the restricted airspace over Edwards Air Force Base, 20 miles north of SCLA, and the unpopulated desert between Edwards and SCLA. The first FTU class began in late March and will last nine weeks. The 163rd is planning to hold five classes each year, with about 10 students per class. The only other training unit for flying MQ-1 Predators is run by active-duty Airmen at Creech Air Force Base, Nev. There are two operational Predators based at SCLA, though only one aircraft flies at a time. The 163rd has received a third Predator, but leadership has not decided if the aircraft will be stored at SCLA or at March Air Reserve Base. Colonel Randall Ball, 163rd Operations Group commander, said the first Predator flight at SCLA was a great display of “Grizzly can-do attitude, innovation and teamwork,” which he expects to continue as

UAS technology advances. "As the Predator production line closes, we look forward to transitioning to the MQ-9 Reaper, which is a more capable and advance [UAS] platform," he said. "The horizon is wide open for the UAS. It's a growing industry, which eventually could encompass aerial combat, electronic warfare and cargo platforms."

Operator Mistakes Caused Predator Crash: Student pilot error caused the crash of an Air National Guard MQ-1B Predator remotely piloted aircraft during a training mission April 20 in southern California, Air Combat Command investigators have determined. The pilot's failure to recognize that the Predator's speed was too low during final approach caused a stall and subsequent hard landing of the aircraft at Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, according to the findings of ACC's accident investigation board. Upon impact, the Predator left the prepared runway and subsequently broke apart, resulting in its total loss and the loss of the inert Hellfire training missile on its wing. Total damages are estimated at about \$3.7 million. The Predator belonged to the ANG's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing at March Joint Air Reserve Base. The student operator was from Cannon AFB, N.M., and was training under the Air Guardsmen's supervision. Monday August 23, 2010

The California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing at March Air Reserve Base has broken ground on a new remotely piloted aircraft hangar at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville. It is the Air Guard's first-ever hanger designed specifically for RPAs. The multi-million dollar building will support the wing's Predator formal training unit, which instructs Air Force RPA aircrews. "This is a great day for the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing," said Maj. Gen. Dennis Lucas, California ANG commander, during the Aug. 24 groundbreaking ceremony. Currently, the wing's Predators are launched and recovered from a temporary facility at SCLA, which is about 70 miles north of March. Student pilots at March control the Predators after launch and before landing. The wing has been operating Predators since 2006 in combat and, more recently, also for training purposes. Earlier this month, it surpassed 50,000 total flying hours Monday August 30, 2010

The 163rd Reconnaissance Wing at March ARB, Calif., has begun using Air Force Reserve Command-owned T-41C to serve as chase aircraft to support its MQ-1 training activities. Previously the wing was using civilian-contracted chase airplanes. For safety reasons, the FAA requires a chase airplane to accompany the Predators from their takeoff at Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville until they reach the airspace of Edwards Air Force Base. The Predator training unit worked out a deal with AFRC's 452nd Air Mobility Wing at March to rent Cessnas belonging to the latter's aero club. This change is expected to save almost \$100,000 annually and give 163rd RW pilots the opportunity to keep their commercial pilot ratings current. "This is the first time in history that an aero club has become mission capable," said Jerry Cardinal, AFRC services director. Monday September 27, 2010

The 163rd Reconnaissance Wing ended 2010 by surpassing the 50,000-hour mark flying MQ-1 Predator combat support missions and by beginning construction on a new maintenance hangar at the Southern California Logistics Airport (SCLA) in Victorville. The 196th Reconnaissance Squadron continued providing critical combat support to deployed Marine and Army personnel in the U.S. Central Command Area of Operations. The squadron's Predator crews have accumulated the most combat flight hours and experience in the Air National Guard. The wing's Formal Training Unit (FTU) graduated five classes of Predator pilots and sensor operators in

2010, and it expanded class sizes from 10 to 16 students, for a total of 40 Predator crews. In addition FTU personnel established a Launch and Recovery Element Formal Course, participated in Army Green Flag exercises at Fort Irwin, Calif., and laid the groundwork for future support of Marine Corps exercises at the base in Twenty-nine Palms, Calif. An Intelligence FTU was also implemented, which will prepare future mission intelligence coordinators. Maintenance Group productivity was at an all-time high. In the midst of a transition to a newly renovated facility at SCLA, the group generated 188 sorties for 69 newly qualified Predator air crews. Operationally, 163rd maintainers ensured the wing's three ground control stations were able to log more than 13,000 hours and 874 combat sorties at an astounding 96 percent fully mission-capable rate. The installation of an additional ground control station allowed the FTU to double production of Air Combat Command, Special Operations Command and Air National Guard crews. Five maintenance personnel also deployed to support theater operations, and the Field Training Detachment trained 173 Air Force and Air National Guard maintenance personnel.

2010 The 163rd Reconnaissance Wing recently received three Block 15 MQ-1 Predator unmanned aerial vehicles, making the 163rd the first Air National Guard unit to receive the brand new aircraft. The unit took possession of the first aircraft Sept. 29 from an operational testing facility in Grey Butte, Calif. A few months later, the unit received two more Block 15 aircraft. The wing is slated to take possession of at least four more new Predators. The Block 15 is the latest reconnaissance unmanned aerial system from General Atomics. "This new block has an infrared camera in the nose," said Jordan Manns, a General Atomics airframe and power plant mechanic. "Another nice feature it has over the Block 10: The under-engine cowling, or cover, can be taken off without the removal of the prop, which is especially nice for maintainers." The 163rd uses the high-tech system to train active-duty, Guard and Reserve personnel at the Flying Training Unit to repair the aircraft, pilot the aircraft and operate the sensor ball, which houses optics, lasers and video cameras. Currently two of the three aircraft are stationed and maintained at Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, Calif., while the third is at the field training detachment on March Air Reserve Base in Moreno Valley, Calif.

Members of the California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing at March Air Reserve Base employed two MQ-1 Predator remotely piloted aircraft during exercise Grizzly Field 2012 to help with search and rescue efforts after a simulated earthquake struck southern California. The Predators provided full-motion video that helped civil and military responders locate mock stranded survivors during the recent exercise, according to an Aug. 9 March release. "The exercise was an overall success," said Lt. Col. Keith Ward, commander of March's 163rd Operations Support Squadron. Grizzly Field established a baseline for further integration of civilian disaster-response agencies with Air Guard assets and capabilities, such as overhead FMV, said Col. Randall Ball, 163rd RW commander. 2012

Members of the California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing at March Air Reserve Base inaugurated the unit's new \$5 million, 17,500-square-foot hangar at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville. The state-of-the-art facility, meant to support the wing's remotely piloted aircraft schoolhouse, is the Air Guard's first hangar specifically designed for RPAs. It accommodates two MQ-9 Reapers or three MQ-1 Predators; an adjacent fabric "big top" hangar can protect an additional two Reapers or five Predators, according to the wing's July 2 release. Construction of the hangar commenced in August 2010. The facility's ribbon-cutting

ceremony took place on June 15 2012

From Predator to Reaper Members of the California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing earlier this month flew the unit's final mission with the MQ-1 Predator remotely piloted aircraft, according to a unit release. After more than eight and a half years of consecutive Predator flights in support of US forces overseas and also helping civil authorities during wildfires and floods at home, these airmen are now flying MQ-9 Reapers in similar roles, states the April 16 release. Col. Dana Hessheimer, 163rd RW commander, praised his airmen, saying safely performing the Predator mission over those years "couldn't have been done without their dedication and professionalism." He piloted the MQ-1 on April 1 on the wing's last sortie. 2015



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