

386th AIR EXPEDITIONARY WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

386th Air Expeditionary Wing

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

Azure, a fess wavy Or surmounted by two scimitars Sable garnished of the second the dexter point to chief and the sinister point to base, on the fess and between a whippet Brown resting upon five stones Silver Gray fimbriated of the last, all within a diminished bordure Or. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "386TH AIR EXPEDITIONARY WING" in Blue 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 black scimitars

represent the strength and might of combat air power in Southeast Asia. The brown whippet symbolizes the original group's mascot, Marauder, and by extension the first assigned aircraft, the B-26 Marauder. The flat silver stones upon which the whippet rests signify the stepping stones of the original flying squadrons to the present day Wing and show the untiring devotion to duty, extraordinary skills, courage and commitment.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 386th Air Expeditionary Wing in Southwest Asia adopted a new mission, vision, and set of priorities. The new mission is to "project airpower from the ground up to promote regional security, enhance strategic access, and strengthen enduring partnerships," according to a wing release. The revised vision promotes the organization as Air Forces Central Command's "premier air expeditionary wing," and the new priorities include mission readiness, strong enduring relationships, empowered leaders, and forging pride among the wing's airmen. The new MVPs "comprehensively define . . . what exactly our purpose is here in Southwest Asia," and support AFCENT's "big picture" objectives, Col. John Klein, wing commander, told the Daily Report in an Oct. 11 written statement. Klein assumed command in mid-year, as did the wing's new vice commander and command chief, spurring the MVPs' revision, states the wing's Oct. 2 release. The wing provides tactical airlift and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability. Its previous mission focused on empowering preparation, engagement, and defense. The former vision was to generate airpower. The old set of priorities was to prepare, engage, and defend the base, host nation, and Arabian Gulf. 2013

Since its activation in 2002, the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing has provided continuous support in the battle against violent extremism. The wing's primary focus is delivering decisive airpower throughout the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in order to provide stability to the region, a job that currently encompasses three separate flying missions. The wing's traditional role in the fight has been providing tactical mobility airlift to coalition forces in the AOR. While this has been a steady, enduring mission for nearly 15 years, the start of Operation Inherent Resolve has brought new focus to the wing's operations.

"We're the busiest aerial port in the theater," said Col. Charles Bolton, the 386th AEW commander. "The bulk of the equipment and passengers that come to this theater come through us. The rotators predominantly stop here, and we move people to all the bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of this is due to the current fight, but we are moving a lot of equipment to support coalition forces throughout the region." The primary cargo aircraft the wing currently operates is the C-130 Hercules. The C-130 offers an advantage over other cargo platforms in its versatility and ability to operate in rough terrain, said Capt. Benjamin Vail, a 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron instructor pilot. "The airplane was created to do a tactical airlift mission," Vail said. "The primary reason that you've got the C-130 out here is because you can utilize the airplane in all kinds of places to do not only airdrop, but you can land at dirt landing zones, which we've been utilizing, and you can go into short airfields. The airplane was

designed originally to take off and land in short places, short runways, but keep that cargo high, keep that passenger level high.”

The 386th AEW currently transports roughly 6,000 tons of cargo and 7,500 passengers per month to various bases throughout the region, approximately four times what it was responsible for at the start of OIR. As operations continue to heat up, the wing expects the demand from units engaged in the fight to increase. The 737th AES is composed entirely of Air National Guard personnel. Vail notes this fact brings considerable continuity to their operations and, coupled with the C-130’s tactical nature, drastically increases the squadron’s significance in the fight. “The big thing about the Air National Guard is that as pilots, we don’t necessarily transfer to other units,” Vail said. “You can be Air National Guard flying the same mission, the same airframe for 20 plus years. So you’re going to have the same people doing the same mission, providing that experience. We have the capabilities to go into these combat environments and provide that support to those ground troops.”

In addition to standard C-130s, the wing also hosts EC-130H Compass Call aircraft operated by the 43rd Expeditionary Electronic Combat Squadron. These airframes are responsible for a highly specialized, unique mission: electronic warfare. “In order to deliver decisive airpower, we conduct electronic attack with our EC-130s,” Bolton said. “From a non-kinetic standpoint, they have played a significant part in the fight against (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), they will continue to do so, and they’ve done it with very limited assets and with very few crews. It’s been very impressive to watch the squadron accomplish that mission.”

Compass Calls employ a crew of roughly a dozen Airmen, including flight deck personnel, linguists, and electronic warfare officers. On a standard sortie, the crew jams ISIL communications, introducing confusion in their ranks and preventing them from coordinating activities. “Any kind of objective that a group is trying to achieve requires coordination,” said 1st Lt. Christopher Westlund, a 43rd EECs electronic warfare officer. “An analogy is like figuring out, ‘Oh, I want to go out Friday night with my friends.’ You have people trying to coordinate back and forth, where do we go, what do we do, how do we do it. We’re essentially making sure that that coordination doesn’t happen. All of a sudden you’re trying to go out with your friends and you can’t get a hold of X person, can’t get a hold of Y person, it’s likely that if you want to go out with your friends, you’re not going to be able to if you can’t communicate.

That’s kind of what we’re there to achieve: a non-kinetic effect that can have real-life implications.” The wing’s final flying mission consists of operating remotely piloted aircraft. Though the MQ-1B Predator and MQ-9 Reaper are the newest additions to the wing’s portfolio, it’s become a point of pride for unit members to be involved in direct action against enemy forces. “This has always been and will continue to be a logistics hub, but we have found a niche here with our ability to bed down and support MQ-1s and MQ-9s,” Bolton said. “They have the dual role of performing (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) and strike missions as well.” The wing’s RPA unit is the 46th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron. They enable RPA sorties originating in theater by performing takeoffs and landings.

During most of the time an RPA is actually in the air, it is piloted by Airmen in the United States, explained Capt. Christopher, the 46th ERS assistant director of operations. However, slight delays in the equipment used to operate the aircraft require pilots located much closer to the MQ-1 and MQ-9 airframes themselves to launch and recover them safely. “The way I think about it is, let’s say you were driving a car,” Christopher explained. “You had it on cruise control

but you couldn't make any adjustments to the steering wheel for three seconds. It'd be kind of hard to drive straight down the road." Once the MQ-1s and MQ-9s are in the air, they conduct ISR operations in support of OIR. They are also responsible for conducting strikes against ISIL forces, achieving kinetic effects against enemy forces.

While conducting these three distinct, critical missions might seem like a lot for any unit to handle, Bolton is said the Airmen under his command are getting the job done and he's confident they will continue to play a key role in operations across the region for years to come. "I don't worry when I go to bed at night because I know our Airmen are taking care of the mission," he said. "It really is amazing to see how much we are doing, how easy our Airmen make it look even though I know they're working hard. It allows me step back now and not worry about the current fight and try to work on the long term vision for the base, because we're not going anywhere. Our mission will always be a mobility hub, we will always have electronic attack here, and we will always have an ISR platform performing ISR and direct action missions."

"Scarcely a man who began that run expected to come out alive," wrote Donald Mackenzie in an article originally published by the Daily News on June 7, 1944. "Although the crews were briefed to bomb the target from 10,800 to 10,000 feet, they were told just before they took off in the dark that they must come down to 5,000 or even 1,000 feet to get under a lowering cloud curtain, and they realized that their assignment was a suicide parade." At 6:30 a.m. on June 6, 1944, Allied amphibious troops landed on the beaches of Normandy, France. Five minutes prior, the 386th Bombardment Group released its armaments, becoming the last unit to drop bombs prior to the troop landings on D-Day, during World War II.

"At anything under 10,000 feet, the Marauder has a tough time with flak," Mackenzie wrote. "At 5,000 feet, it theoretically has not even a 50-50 chance. But at 2,000 feet carbines and machine guns can stop it, let alone 88 mm anti-aircraft shells." It's not hard to imagine that Mackenzie's words, though not specific to the 386th BG, apply to a unit of B-26 Marauders specifically chosen for its D-Day assignment by Army Gen. Omar Bradley, U.S. 1st Army commander during World War II.

This example is just one of many stories which highlight the weight and scope of accomplishments throughout the 75 years of unit history. On Dec. 1, 2017, the 386th BG, now the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing, celebrates its 75th birthday; a journey that started at MacDill Air Field, Tampa, Florida, in 1942 and continues to this day at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. "When you look at the 386th AEW, its heritage and its current contributions to the global war on terrorism, you can't help but be proud," said Col. Stephen Hodge, 386th AEW, commander. "We are talking about a unit that has participated in countless historic operations including; D-Day, Battle of the Bulge, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and currently Operation Inherent Resolve."

After World War II, the 386th BG was inactivated with only a brief activation during the 1950s to support the Cold War. The unit was officially re-designated the 386th Air Expeditionary Group in July of 2000 and permanently reactivated to replace the 9th Air Expeditionary Group in August 2002. By March 2003, the 386th AEG had been redesignated the 386th AEW and transformed from a steady-state base to the largest air base in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. This transformation was in preparation and build-up to

support Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 2003 invasion and liberation of Iraq from the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Over the next decade, the 386th AEW became the busiest aerial port in the AOR, moving hundreds of thousands of tons of cargo and thousands of personnel throughout Southwest Asia, Iraq and Afghanistan. This time also marked a historical milestone; in 2005, a C-130 Hercules crew assigned to the 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, and deployed from 43rd Airlift Wing, Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, became the first all-female crew to fly a mission in a combat zone. By 2014, the 386th AEW began to play an active role in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria supporting airlift; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; and electronic warfare missions.

Currently, the 386th AEW is composed of more than 4,500 deployed Airmen from active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve with approximately 500 additional Airmen serving at remote or geographically separate locations in the region. "For 75 years, this unit's Airmen have continued to provide boldness, courage, and self-sacrifice while delivering decisive airpower in support of our nation's defense," Hodge said. "I am constantly inspired by the accomplishments that have defined, and continue to define, the 386th AEW."

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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