

131 FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

333 Fighter Squadron constituted, 18 Aug 1942
Activated, 23 Aug 1942
Inactivated, 12 Jan 1946
Redesignated 131 Fighter Squadron and allotted to ANG, 24 May 1946
Redesignated 131 Fighter Squadron (Single-Engine) extended federal recognition 24 Feb 1947
Redesignated 131 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 10 Nov 1958
Redesignated 131 Fighter Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

STATIONS

Bellows Field, TH, 23 Aug 1942
Canton, 11 Sep 1942
Hilo, TH, 6 Apr 1943
Bellows Field, TH, 28 Jul 1943
Saipan, 6 Jul 1944
Ie Shima, 30 Apr 1945
Okinawa, Nov-Dec 1945
Ft Lewis, WA, 11-12 Jan 1946
Barnes ANGB, Westfield, MA

ASSIGNMENTS

18 Fighter Group, 23 Aug 1942
318 Fighter Group, 11 Jan 1943-12 Jan 1946
Seventeenth Air Force, 1 Oct 1961
104 Tactical Fighter Group, 20 Aug 1962

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

P-39, 1942
P-38, 1944
F-47, 1947
F-51, 1951
F-94, 1954
F-94, 1957
F-86, 1958
F-84, 1964
F-100, 1971
A-10, 1979
F-15

Support Aircraft

L-5 1946
T-6 1947-1955
B-26, 1947
C-47, 1948-1963
B-25, 1954-1957
T-33, 1954-1971
C-54, 1963-1971
U-3, 1968

COMMANDERS

Col Lyle E. Halstead
Maj Stefanik, Apr 1947
Maj Bruno J. Grabovsky, Apr 1956
LTC Fred H. Johnson
LTC David R. Cummock, 1967
Maj Richard Farrell 1 Dec 1984
Maj Geoffrey Giddings, #1987
LTC James Keefe, 2007

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan
Eastern Mandates
Western Pacific
Ryukyus
China Offensive
Air Combat, Asiatic-Pacific Theater
Antisubmarine, Asiatic-Pacific Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

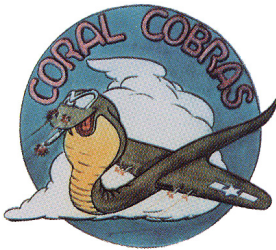
Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Jan 79-May 1980

May 1981-Dec 1982

Jan 1983-Dec 1984

EMBLEM



333rd Fighter Sq.
(Until 1943)





Unit's insignie, designed by MSG Alphonso Willey and Harold Maschin of Westfield approved, 1954

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Patrols over the Pacific, Sep 1942-Jul 1943. Replacement training, Jul 1943-June 1944. Combat in Western Pacific, 20 Jul 1944-14 Aug 1945

The very first step toward the establishment of an Air National Guard unit in Western Massachusetts came in Mar 1946, when the National Guard Bureau authorized its existence. The Bureau gave the task of getting a fighter squadron started to Col's Francis H. King and Lyle E. Halstead. The first gatherings of what was to become the 131 Fighter Squadron were held at the Holyoke Gas & Electric Company building. Later, while still in its formative stages, the unit relocated to the Howard St. Armory in Springfield.

Although they had not yet received official recognition, the 131 started a search for a permanent home. Facilities were not available at Westover AFB, so the unit officials turned their attention to Westfield. The Westfield Aviation Commission agreed to the use of Barnes Airport in Jan 1947. The unit moved its administrative functions into the Westfield Armory on Franklin Street, where they shared facilities with the 104th Infantry's Company "H". Tents were erected at Barnes near the area where the present facilities stand.

On 24 Feb 1947, with the Federal recognition of the 131 Fighter Squadron, the 131 Utility Flight, the 131 Weather Flight and Detachment B of the 202d Air Service Group.

The first plane, a P-47, arrived on Apr 1947, flown in by Maj Charles E. Gilbert II of Logan. The P-47s kept trickling in until early autumn until the base was fully equipped. A few days after the first plane landed, a jeep, two trucks and a refueling unit arrived to start the ground support side of the operation.

In Jun 1947, the Westfield City Council approved the taking of 62 acres of land to be used for hangars, machine shops and other buildings that would become the base. Within the next six months, aircraft and other equipment arrived, pilots were checked out in the P-47s and the unit was on duty.

The squadron's base of operations was a cleared area in the north corner of Barnes Airport. The area was alternately extremely hot and cold, muddy and dusty, and always windy and dirty. The thickness of tentcloth was the only protection from the elements during the "Valley Forge" winters of 1947 and 1948. Everything that was accomplished during those early days reflected the spirit of cooperation and is particularly noteworthy given the conditions under which they operated.

On 19 Jul 1948, the Squadron, led by Maj Stefanik made its first cross-country flight. The flight went to Logan, Otis, and back. Shortly thereafter, the 131 participated in the flyover for the dedication of the new Idlewild Airport, now John F. Kennedy International.

The first field training for the 131 was in Aug of 1948 at Otis Field, then a Naval Reserve facility. 1LT Edward W. Meacham became the unit's first fatality during this period. His P-47 crashed into the Atlantic, off Monomoy Point, near Chatham, MA.

In its first year, it was estimated the unit had a \$1 million economic impact on the local area. The unit grew steadily in size and prominence. Pilots from the 131 performed a flyover in Jan 1949, for President Harry S Truman's inauguration.

For the first of several times in history, the Air Guard units at Barnes reached their full authorized strength in Jan 1949.

The graduation to long range, cross-country flights came with the departure on 4 Feb 1950, of sixteen P-47s and two C-47s for Lambert Field, St. Louis, 900 miles away.

The Administration, Maintenance, Motor Pool and paint-dope-lubricant storage buildings, totaling a half-million dollars, all began construction in the early summer of 1950. Personnel were buzzing with the news that the "Jugs" were to be replaced with the same vintage, but higher performance, P-51s which were ferried in before the annual field training by the squadron pilots. The P-47s were flown to Tinker AFB, OK, for mothballing.

Another subject of great concern at this time was the probability of the unit's activation to participate in the Korean conflict. One ANG unit after another were activated all over the country. When the callups stopped, there were only six groups left untouched: the groups located in the industrial complexes of California and the Northeast.

The first major reorganization of the Air Guard on 1 Nov 1950 was the demise of both the Utility Flight and Detachment B. The former's functions and personnel were absorbed into the

Fighter Squadron, while Detachment B was divided into elements of functional squadrons. These elements were attached to the 131 for administration but housed at Logan.

Conversion to the two-seater jet fighter, the F-94 was the main theme of 1954. Three RO instructors, using two B-25Ks as flying classrooms, trained the second-seat radar observers.

Dawn-to-dusk runway alerts were started in Sep 1954, with a pilot and a radar observer on call fourteen hours a day. They were ready to take to the skies for intercepts, training or actual, on minimum notice

1954 was slated to be a sad one for the Squadron. Maj Robert Anderstrom, flying a F-51 back from Mitchell AFB on Long Island, crashed into a hillside in CT, 7 May 1954.

On the night of 19 Oct 1954, a T-33 accident in Granville took a double toll in the deaths of LT Richard G. Brown, the pilot, and TGT Austin A. Cooper, a mechanic and passenger on the flight.

LT Dewey Durett parachuted to safety with the loss of an F-94 in 1955 in the Quabbin Reservoir.

The fifth aircraft fatality for the Westfield Air Guard occurred on the afternoon of 28 Jul 1956. While maneuvering to land, Cpt Frank A. Gibe crashed his F-94B into the woods near the base.

As the 104th Fighter Group went into its second decade, the city officials of Westfield were pondering the problem of whether to turn Barnes Airport over to the State of Massachusetts. Both sides of the issue were aired, across the conference tables and in the local press. The argument for the suggested shift in ownership was that the State had relatively greater resources which it could tap for the maintenance, improvement and expansion of the facility; when all the smoke had cleared, the field remained in the hands of the City of Westfield.

1956/1957

Late summer 1958 was the period in which the polkadot F-86H made its appearance. The special paint effects on the intake cowling helped to identify the aircraft towing targets for aerial gunnery.

Col John J. Stefanik, deputy Wing commander, walked away, shaken up but safe, from a wheels-up landing with his F-86H. Lt Col Bruno Grabovsky, attending a course at Luke AFB, AZ, bailed out of his F-100C when it developed mechanical trouble and crashed.

On 22 Apr 1961, Maj Richard W. Mahoney was killed as his T-33 plunged into a canal near New Orleans. He was returning from a conference at Houston, Texas, low on fuel, and had radioed Callander NAS for landing instructions. Maj Philip D. Burke, flight surgeon, a passenger in the craft, received only minor injuries.

The sqn got off to a real cool start for 1961 by taking part in Operation Willow Freeze. The 131 supplied close support to the 6500 ground troops fighting it out in war games in Gulkana Basin,

in central Alaska. Eleven pilots and planes, two ground officers and 23 airmen, made up the fighter task force, providing air cover from February 4 through 18. The ground troops made the three day trip to Alaska in C-119s, stopping at Minneapolis and Namao RCAF Station. The base of operations of the "war" was Elmendorf AFB, near Anchorage.

On August first, rumors that had been circulating were confirmed. The Air Force had alerted 71 Air Guard and Reserve units for possible callup in connection with developments in Europe. The entire 102nd Wing was included in this list of alerted units. At one minute after midnight, on the morning of 1 Oct 1961, 730 Airguardsmen of the 104th became members of the United States Air Force "for a period of twelve months unless sooner relieved by competent authority." While a large ceremony in Boston marked the Sunday morning activation of the 102d Wing and the other Logan Airport units, the first day of active duty at Barnes was quiet in comparison. The month of October that year was exhausting as 104th personnel worked long shifts, six and seven days a week. The time flew by as personnel packed necessary gear and equipment, received training, changed records, obtained wills, powers of attorney, I.D. cards, and were given required immunizations. It was an ominous "Friday the 13th" that the word was given about the movement of the first Airguardsmen to Europe. Two days later, 49 members of the base left for a classified destination in France. This advance party, commanded by Maj Leonard B. Murphy, was comprised of representatives from various base work sections. Their mission was to turn the all-but-abandoned airfield into a facility that would be usable and livable. The new home of the Massachusetts Air Guard units became the French province of Lorraine, 35 miles west of Strasbourg, where the Rhine forms the Franco-German border. The Air Guard contingent from Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York, was added to the 104th forming a three-Squadron wing. This wing was the largest of any activated organizations. The pace at Barnes slackened as the shipments went off to France. Only the barest of necessities were left behind to support the work necessary to move the main body of the unit. Pilots received intensified training in preparation for the over-water deployment. The Coast Guard vessels were equipped with radar and rescue gear and stationed along the planned routes to insure a safe journey. These efforts were regarded as every plane in the deployment arrived safely at its destination and one hour after touchdown was ready to meet its commitment. This entire process had taken less than six weeks after activation from civilian to reserve status. This was Operation Stairstep. In the total airlift, MATS planes moved over 10,000 troops from their ANG bases to their new home in Europe. Over 2,000 tons of cargo made the same trip. The Air Force gave much of the credit for the success of the move to the high combat readiness posture of the Air National Guard units. Meanwhile, Lt Col Alexander R. Robertson, MSgt Nelson J. Brown and TSgt James H. Williams remained at Barnes caring for the lonely, and quiet, home base. They were also responsible for handling supplies and working with the families of the men of the 104th who were deployed to Phalsbourg. All the large, heavy support equipment such as desks, machinery, cabinets, benches and bins were shipped to France by sea. While the planes were ready to fly and the ground crews ready to support them, work in the lower priority areas was performed with makeshift facilities for the first few weekends. Boxes and crates were used as desks, chairs, workbenches and bookcases. In the barracks, clothing was hung from steam pipes, window hinges and even light fixtures. The 131 from Westfield, the 101st from Boston and the 138th from Syracuse were entities in themselves; there were mem-

bers of incomplete teams or detached elements of other units. After their arrival at Phalsbourg, twelve F-86 and C-130s with support personnel and equipment, flew to Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli, Libya to undergo aerial gunnery exercises. The North African weather was more suitable for this activity, especially in November. This was the first extended deployment to Wheelus for this particular type of training. In an attempt to fill some of the off duty time a number of extracurricular activities were formed. In early February a dozen officers and nine airmen were transferred to other Stairstep bases.

102d Tactical Fighter Wing, F-86Hs, 7 November 1961 - 20 July 1962

Twenty-six aircraft per squadron. Sabres were flown from Logan Airport, MA, Barnes Field, MA, and Hancock Field, NY to Phalsbourg Air Base, France, by 102d TFWg pilots. Aircraft returned to their U.S. bases by 20 July 1962.

52-2008 - Crashed, low level flight, 11nm S of Chalons-sur-Marne, France, 21 MAR 62, 1 fatality.

The wording on the planes was changed this summer of 1963 from "MASS AIR GUARD" to "US AIR FORCE," with the word "MASS" and the National Guard emblem added on the vertical tail surface. This was for quicker integration into the Air Force in the event of any future callups.

First Lt Joseph F. Crehore was Westfield's only casualty during the year in France. He was killed on 21 Mar **1963** when his F-86 dove into a wooded area near Chalons, in the province of Champagne, while flying a navigational training mission.

The first contact between the 131 Tactical Fighter Squadron and the Russians was made in Aug **1963** as a Soviet fishing vessel, the Johannes Wares, picked up Cpt Hugh M Lavallee after he had parachuted from his crippled F-86H and was floating in the Atlantic in his little inflatable raft. Only three months after his Russian adventure, Cpt Lavallee was killed in an air accident in upstate New York. The F-86H he was flying disappeared into a thick bank of clouds and all contact with him was lost. A search of the area disclosed the wreckage in a wooded area not far from where he had been lost from view.

During the field training on 19 Jul 1964 Cpt John H Paris experienced the loss of control of his F-86H while in the landing pattern with his four-plane formation. He ejected from the stricken plane over Hampton Ponds at 500 feet, but his parachute did not have time to open, while the aircraft glided to a relatively smooth landing in an open field. A large crowd of bathers at the Ponds' beaches witnessed the fatal accident.

The main concern in early 1964 was the expected arrival here of a complement of fifteen B-57. They were to have come here from Yokota AB, Japan, upon deactivation of the 3d Wing there. Boston and Syracuse were also to have received this type of aircraft. The B-57 situation got alternately hot and cold as delivery seemed to be postponed. Eventually, the news got out that the planes that had been earmarked for all three bases in our Wing were given quite another destiny. All were sent to the Vietnam area, where they were considered particularly practical in

view of the mission requirements there. As the year turned, the business of conversions to B-57s was finally written off the books. It was about this time that the official notification that the 131 would be converted to F-84F was received. These sweptback jet fighters were to be an interim aircraft, readying the pilots and ground crews for operation with and on the Century series fighters. Their nuclear capability and that of mid-air refueling were among the characteristics they shared with the first line fighters.

Maj James Romanowicz, who had served 16 of his 23 flying years with the 131, was killed on the night of 1 Feb 1965, when he was returning in a flight of four planes from a gunnery exercise at MacDill AFB, FL. The accident occurred when he failed to negotiate a landing approach into Westover AFB, near here.

Cpt Leonard Bannish was killed on Memorial Day 1968, trying to make an emergency landing in his F-84F at Scranton-Wilkes Barre Airport in PA.

1969 began, not with winter blasts but warm, soft breezes, as over 100 104th members departed Barnes on January 11th for Hickam AFB, HI. The exercise dubbed "Commando Elite II". The 4-week deployment was composed of two periods; January 11-25 and January 25 to February 11. Teams of approximately 60 members supported each period with some overlap of personnel who covered the entire period. While on the exercise, the unit expended over 43,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition, 1300 2.75 rockets and 100 bombs. Missions were flown from Hickam AFB to the Pohakula range on the island of Hawaii.

The first F-100 which was to replace the F-84F, here since 1965, was flown in May by LTC George Pinney, who stayed on as Air Force Advisor to the Group. Although there was no change in mission, the new planes were larger, heavier, noisier and more effective than the craft they replaced.

More than 160 members of the 104th participated in Exercise Brave Shield at Ellington AFB, Texas. Support personnel and equipment left Barnes on 29 Jul **1974** aboard six Air Force C-141s. Eighteen F-100 left Barnes the following day for the 7-day exercise.

Two C-141s full of 104th personnel and cargo and ten F-100 fighters took off in Jan **1976** for Operation "Jack Frost 76" to spend the two middle weeks at Elmendorf AFB, Anchorage, Alaska. They were part of some 14,000 to take part, including Army, USAF, ANG and Canadian Forces. The exercise was to train air and ground troops to defend the new Alaska Pipeline.

In Dec 1977, the Group experienced its first major accident since 1974. While returning from an air tactics mission in New Hampshire Cpt David Clark experienced an engine malfunction and was forced to bail out. Clark landed safely in a field. The airplane impacted in a heavily wooded area with no loss to civilian property.

The Air Force officially announced that the 131 Tactical Fighter Squadron would convert from F-100D to the new A-10 by Jun 1979. While the announcement of the aircraft change would not

affect the overall mission, the change over was greeted with some mixed feelings especially on the part of the aircrews. The aircrews had come to appreciate the speed and responsiveness of the older F-100D. On the positive side, the A-10 would be delivered direct from the factory. The aircraft would require the addition of 33 military personnel including eight full-time air technicians. Also, the maintenance record of the A-10 was outstanding. According to tests, the number of sorties flown was limited more to the aircrew availability than to maintenance.

The most significant development during mid-1979 was the arrival of the A-10. On Jun 12, the first A-10 assigned to the 131 TFS arrived at Barnes flown by LTC Connie Coward. A total of 19 were to provide full manning. The A-10s were delivered directly from the Fairchild Republic plant in Hagerstown MD. The aircraft was officially received during ceremonies at Barnes MAP on 19 Jun Jack Owens, Vice President of Fairchild Industries, presented LTC Myrle B. Langley, Commander, 104th TFG, with the aircraft Historical Record of the first A-10 assigned to the Group.

The first group of 104th support personnel to deploy to RAF Bentwaters, England returned on 15 Jan **1982** full of enthusiasm for the Thunderswap program. This group was the first of three planned deployments designed to allow 104th Guardsmen the opportunity to work hand-in-hand with active AF personnel in a "real world situation".

During Apr **1982** 125 men and women and a complement of A-10 aircraft from the 104th took part in Operation Snowbird at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ. Snowbird is an ongoing exercise for Air Guard units. This exercise gives northern flying units the opportunity to maintain their readiness in the winter months.

The big deployment of the year, code name "Coronet Spur", was a massive move to Yenisehir AB, Turkey. This move involved 12 A-10s and over 280 support personnel. The purpose of the deployment was to allow the 104th to participate in the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Exercise Series Autumn Forge '82. The aims of the Autumn Forge series are to improve combat effectiveness through interoperability among ACE forces, to improve ACE crisis management capabilities and to demonstrate allied solidarity and preparedness.

135 members of the unit deployed to Davis-Monthan AFB AZ in Jan **1983/1984** to take part in Snowbird. This deployment gave 104th pilots the opportunity to use munitions not normally available due to high cost, as well as some night flying.

In 1984, the 131 for the second time in its history, received the Air Force's outstanding unit award. It honored work done by the unit from May, 1981, through December, 1982, in making the conversion to the A-10 and becoming combat ready with the aircraft in an unusually short period of time.

Tragedy struck the 104th on 17 Sep 1986 when two 104th A-10's, while enroute to the Ft. Drum range collided over Wells, NY. The two A-10's were part of a four-ship formation that left Barnes at 2:20 p.m. While flying in tactical formation two of the A-10's collided. One of the

pilots Cpt Michael Kohut ejected safely but sustained injuries to his back. The other pilot, Maj John Southrey failed to eject and was killed.

Two weeks into a mission as part of the NATO Operation Deny Flight peacekeeping effort to the war-torn former Yugoslavia, members of the 104th sent aircraft into combat for the first time in the unit's history. Pilots from the 131 flew 207 missions over Bosnia-Herzegovina that helped pave the way for the signing of a peace accord to end more than three years of violence. The success of the mission to Bosnia, which involved more than 400 members of the unit deployed to Aviano Air Base in Italy, had come on the heels of the 104th becoming the best-rated fighter unit in the nation in an Air Force inspection in 1994.

During Operation Deliberate Force, the 131 Fighter Squadron of the 104th Fighter Wing was TDY to Aviano AB. The 104th Fighter Wing, Massachusetts Air National Guard, is at stationed at Air National Guard Base, Westfield Massachusetts. The unit deployed on August 6, 1995 for a two month deployment to Italy in support of Operation Deny Flight. While at Aviano AB, Operation Deny Flight expanded to include Operation Deliberate Force. During Deliberate Force, the A-10s of the 131 acted as forward air controllers for U.N. ground and air forces, directing ground fire and NATO strike aircraft. In addition the A-10s were tasked for attack missions against air defense missile sites, radar sites, storage and staging areas, and command and control facilities. The A-10s employed their full range of weapons including the GAU-8 30mm cannon and the AGM-65 Maverick missile. The typical mission weapons load was 1,350 rounds of 30mm ammunition, two AGM-65 Mavericks or a selection of general purpose bombs. The self-defense load included two AIM-9M Sidewinder missiles and an AN/ALQ-131 ECM pod augmented with internally carried chaff and flares. 207 sorties were flown by the 104th in support of Operation Deliberate Force with no losses. On one mission six SAMs were launched at A-10A 78-0626, the pilot successfully evaded the missiles. The deployed aircraft returned home to Barnes Field on October 16, 1995.

The unit officially received its sixth Outstanding Unit Award for the period of August 31, 1997 through August 30, 1999. The unit also deployed to Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait in support of Air Expeditionary Force in July. Several unit members also deployed to various locations throughout Turkey, Italy and Saudi Arabia for Expeditionary Combat Support from May through October.

The 131 Fighter Squadron received a rating of Outstanding on their Stan Eval Inspection. Several members of the wing were deployed to various locations in southwest Asia, including two pilots to Afghanistan and Security Forces in Qatar and Kyrgyzstan where they remained into 2002.

Beginning in January, the wing deploys approximately 500 personnel in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom to an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia and to other locations within the same region. There, the wing becomes the lead unit of the 387th Air Expeditionary Wing, a combined unit comprised of 103rd Fighter Wing, Connecticut Air National Guard personnel and personnel from other units. The wing sends 11 A-10s to the deployed location where they fly

each day of the war, compiling a 98 percent Mission Effectiveness Rate with no combat losses or damage.

The Wing is presented its seventh overall Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for the period from January 1 - May 21, 2003, recognizing its service as the lead unit of the 387th Air Expeditionary Group, 410th Air Expeditionary Wing, in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Wing is awarded the National Guard Bureau's Winston P. Wilson Trophy as most outstanding Air National Guard unit equipped with jet fighter or reconnaissance aircraft for 2003. The award recognizes the 104th's role in leading the development of the Litening II Targeting Pod Program for the A-10 aircraft community. The Wing provided 34 modified aircraft, 18 Litening II Pods and 54 qualified pilots in less than three months, an amount triple the initial goal. Upon completion of the project, the Wing deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, where its efforts in combat ensured that no Scud missiles were launched during the conflict and that the sanctity of coalition forces were preserved. In August, the Wing's Operations Group Commander, Col. Michael D. Akey, is named Commander of the Massachusetts Air National Guard. 2005 - Col Marcel E. Kerdauid, Jr., formerly the Wing's Vice Commander, assumes command of the Wing from Col. Michael R. Boulanger in January. Colonel Kerdauid becomes the 13th Commander of the Wing. Also in January, Lt. Col. Jon K. Mott is named Vice Commander. The Wing receives the eighth Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in its history for the period from August 25, 2002 to August 25, 2004, further recognizing its accomplishments leading up to and through its participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

8 September 2007 to Present F-15C Eagle aircraft flying at the 104th

Massachusetts ANG Begins New Mission: The 104th Fighter Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard on Monday began its air sovereignty alert mission, sitting on 24-hour alert with its new force of F-15 fighters. The unit, based at Barnes Municipal Airport, switched from the A-10 to the F-15, courtesy of BRAC 2005. The 104th FW replaces the Vermont ANG's 158th FW, which has flown ASA missions since late 2007. Previously, another Massachusetts Air Guard unit—the 102nd FW at Otis ANGB—had the ASA mission for the northeast sector, but it has switched to an intelligence mission.

Massachusetts Air Guard Helped Deal with Air Threat: Two F-15s from the Massachusetts Air National Guard's 104th Fighter Wing last week scrambled to intercept an Emirates Airlines 777 en route to Chicago as US authorities acted to prevent a possible terrorist attack. They escorted the commercial flight, originating in Yemen, to New York City's Kennedy Airport as a precaution on Oct. 29 after authorities found bombs on two other aircraft destined for Chicago out of London and Dubai, UAE. The Associated Press reported (via National Public Radio) that Canadian CF-18 Hornets operating from Bagotville, Quebec, initially intercepted the 777 in Canadian airspace. They passed escort to the Air Guard F-15s flying from Barnes ANG Base as the flight entered US airspace. US officials found no explosive device on the diverted aircraft, although President Obama declared the seemingly coordinated actions involving the Chicago-bound aircraft that day a "credible terrorist threat" to US security. 2010

The last F-15 assigned to JB Elmendorf, Alaska, has left the base for good, flying to its new assignment with the Massachusetts Air National Guard's 104th Fighter Wing in Westfield. 2010

11 November 1965 F-84F goes into flat spin during simulated combat over Porter, Maine and crashes on Colcord Pond Road in Freedom, New Hampshire. Capt. Edward S. Mansfield has minor injuries; plane is destroyed.

A formation of US Air Force and Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft, including an F-15 Eagle from the 131 Fighter Squadron at Barnes ANGB, Mass., an RMAF SU-30MKM Flanker, a USAF F-22 Raptor from the 154th Wing at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, an RMAF MIG-29N Fulcrum, a BAE Hawk, and an RMAF F/A-18 Hornet fly over Penang, Malaysia, during Cope Taufan 14 on June 18, 2014. Cope Taufan is a biennial large force employment exercise, which took place June 9-20. It was the Raptor's first time participating in an South East Asian international exercise. 2014

8/29/2014 - BARNES AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, 104TH FIGHTER WING , Westfield, Mass. -- Following the fatal crash of a 104th Fighter Wing F-15C aircraft in the remote mountains near Deerfield Valley, Va. the family has asked that the unit share with the public the name of the pilot who was fatally injured Wednesday. "On behalf of the family of our fallen pilot and with a sense of profound sadness, I am sad to share that Lt. Col. Morris "Moose" Fontenot Jr., was killed tragically in Wednesday's F-15 crash," said Col. James Keefe, 104th Fighter Wing Commander. "We all continue to keep the Fontenot family in our thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time," added Keefe. Lt. Col. Morris Fontenot Jr. served with the 104th Fighter Wing as the full-time Wing Inspector General, responsible for the implementation of the Air Force Inspection System and as an F-15 instructor pilot with more than 2,300 flight hours. A 1996 Air Force Academy Graduate, Lt. Col. Fontenot was additionally a Weapons School Graduate with more than 17 years of F-15 flying experience. He served as a squadron commander at multiple locations. Following Active Duty assignments in Washington D.C., Japan, Idaho, Florida, Alaska and numerous deployments to the Middle East, Lt. Col. Fontenot joined the Massachusetts Air National Guard in February 2014. He was a decorated combat veteran, earning the Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Aerial Achievement Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal, and Combat Readiness Medal among others. At approximately 9:05 a.m. Wednesday, Washington Center Air Traffic Control in Washington, D.C. lost radio contact with the F-15C aircraft stationed at the 104th Fighter Wing, Mass., and at approximately 9:30 a.m. the 104th Fighter Wing learned that the aircraft had crashed in a remote site near Deerfield Valley, Va. The single seat F-15C aircraft was en route to Naval Air Station New Orleans to receive a radar system upgrade. The flight was not related to the 104th Fighter Wing's homeland defense mission, and there were no munitions on the aircraft during this flight. The pilot was flying a solo mission when he reported an in-flight emergency prior to the loss of radio contact with Washington Center. Officials confirmed Thursday evening at 5:00 p.m. the pilot was fatally injured in the Aug. 27 crash of an F-15C Eagle in the remote mountains near Deerfield Valley, Va.

Lt Edward W Meacham of Westfield was killed when his F-47 failed to recover from a dive-bombing run in the range area off Monomoy Point, south of Chatham on Cape Cod on August 17th, 1948.

Maj Robert Anderstrom of West Springfield lost his life while returning from a cross-country flight when his F-51 crashed into a wooded hillside near Granby Connecticut, on May 7th, 1954.

1st Lt Richard Brown of Florence and his mechanic, TSGT Austin A Cooper of West Springfield, died when their T-33 dived into a wooded area near Granville, Mass., shortly after they took off on a night-flying mission on October 19th, 1954.

Capt Frank A Gibe of Westfield died when his F-94B crashed into the woods near Barnes Airport while he was maneuvering to land at this base on July 28th, 1956.

The history of the Air National Guard at Barnes Airport representing all Western Massachusetts, has been one of constant progress And recognized accomplishment, both by individuals and by the units themselves.

It all started back in March, 1946, when the formation of a single-engine fighter squadron in Western Massachusetts was authorized by the National Guard Bureau. Lt Cols Francis H King of Holyoke and Lyle E Halstead of Fitchburg were charged with the responsibility of getting it started. The earliest meetings of the men who were to be organized into the unit were held in the Holyoke Gas & Electric Building, where Col King is manager. Temporary quarters were set up for meetings and administrative functioning in the Howard Street Armory in Springfield by the end of the same year.

Use of part of Westover Air Force Base was refused on the logical grounds that it would interfere with the existing activities at that base. So the officials of the homeless, as yet unformed and unrecognized squadron, appealed to the Westfield Aviation Commission for the use of Barnes Airport. With the granting of this request in January, 1947, the unit moved it's administrative headquarters to the Westfield Armory on Franklin Street and proceeded to pitch its tents in an unused corner of Barnes Airport.

The 131 Fighter Squadron, the 131 Utility Flight, the 131 Weather Station and Detachment 'B' of the 202d Air Service Group, all received their "Federal Recognition" on February 24th, 1947, with Col Halstead as commander of the Fighter Squadron and the base, Major John J Stefanik as operations officer, Capt Edward D Slasienski as aircraft maintenance officer and Lt Allan F Bolton as supply officer. Capt Charles F Ward, Lt Lester H Laurin and Capt Glenn C Bach commanded the three support units, respectively.

Lt Col Tarleton H Watkins was the Army Air Instructor. Thirty-two enlisted men and several officers were sworn in on that first night to become the charter members of the new units. Eight of these officers and seventeen airmen are still in the Massachusetts Air Guard.

MSGT's Paul J Paape and Nelson J Brown became the first men to fill full-time positions on the Squadron's Air Technical Detachment.

Federal funds were now made available for the construction of the basic facilities needed by the Squadron to go into business. Contracts and other commitments had to be made within a few weeks time, however, or the funds would be lost. Brig Gen Louis E Boutwell, commanding general of the 67th Fighter Wing, Maj Gen William H Harrison Jr, Adjutant General of Massachusetts, Col Watkins and Col King met with high ranking officials from the Army Air Corps and with a Westfield delegation including Mayor Arthur B Long, City Solicitor Charles F Ely and Aviation Commissioners Edwin W Smith, Jeremiah E Carey and Louis M Fuller.

Gen Boutwell announced that such an undertaking had never been successfully done in such a short time before, but that with the city's help, the funds might be saved for the 131. Since all agreements, leases and similar papers required approval and signatures from the state, the city and the Army, use of the mails would obviously not have accomplished the project on time. Col Watkins volunteered to fly all communications between the three parties, placing the papers in the proper hands, and waiting for the answers and signatures before taking them on to the next stage. The time obstacle was overcome and all the paperwork was completed and signed in good time. Gen Boutwell expressed his appreciation to the Aviation Commission, saying that the Air National Guard would "always be grateful to Westfield for its aid and cooperation. "

Within two months, Maj Stefanik moved up to the command of the 131 Fighter Squadron as Col Halstead became commander of the 102d Fighter Group in Boston, the next echelon of command up from the local Air Guard Squadron.

On April 4th, 1947, the first F-47 Thunderbolt fighter plane was flown in by Maj Charles E Gilbert II, who received a hearty welcome from the handful of full-time men who were on duty. A jeep, two trucks and a refueling unit arrived a few days later to help make the ground support of the lone aircraft possible. The rest of the complement of the fat sturdy World War II fighter craft arrived here at intervals all through the summer and early autumn.

A Halloween dance, held in support of a recruiting program, proved to be neither a social nor a manpower success. The first of the 131's famous New Year's Eve parties followed shortly after, heralding in the advent of 1948. This proved to be so well received both by members of the Air National Guard and the public that it has become a local institution.

By early 1948, the 131 Squadron was very busy seeking pilots to put its 28 F-47's into the air. Many employees of airports and flying companies in this area were joining the Air Guard here about this time and enlistments in general were growing steadily.

A concerted recruiting drive in June of '48', coinciding with the impending passage of the first peacetime draft law, netted fifty men in one single evening. Mechanics pitched in beside clerks and specialists did the same beside the medics to get the enlistment paperwork and physicals

accomplished on a production line basis that night. Of the fifty, fifteen are still in the Air Guard here after more than nine years, including four who are in the Air Technical Detachment.

July 19th, 1948, marks the first mass cross country flight by the 131, although they admittedly did not cross too much country. Maj Stefanik led the flight of eleven 'Jugs', as the F-47's were affectionately named, from Barnes to Boston, to Otis, and back to Barnes.

During all this period, the 131's base of operations was a few tents which had been set up in a cleared area in the leased area near the north corner of the field. Alternately hot, cold, wet, windy, dusty and just plain dirty, it provided plenty of problems for the clerks, mechanics and specialists to over come. The severe winters of '47 and '48 have often been referred to as the 'Valley Forge' period in the local Squadron's development.

The Air Guard units from Barnes went on their first field training encampment from the 7th to the 21st of August in 1948 putting in the two week tour at Otis Field, which was then a Naval Reserve facility. It was during this period that the 131 suffered its first fatality when the aircraft in which 1st Lt Edward W Meacham was flying dove into the Atlantic Ocean off Monomoy Point, south of Chatham, Massachusetts.

Pvt William L Mahoney of the base photo lab has the distinction of being the first of several hundred airmen from this station who have been enrolled in the United States Air Force Service Schools. He attended the photographic course at Lowry AFB, Colorado from April to November 1949. Maj Stefanik obtained a leave of absence in April 1949 from Eastern Airlines where he was a pilot on the Boston to Miami run, to take over the full time command of the ANG establishment here, filling the newly authorized Air Technical Detachment position in that capacity.

The evening of May 4th, 1949, saw the publication and distribution of Volume 1, Number 1 of the "Thunderbolt", a monthly newspaper designed to keep the troops better informed and help morale and understanding. It was edited by Sgt John Lundberg, with much assistance in the first editions by MSGT John H McMahon of the Air Instructor's office.

The 131 took to the skies on May 8th to help put on an air show in support of the Westfield Rotary Club's drive to raise funds for the fight against cancer. Among other events a formation of 16 F-47's, a parachute jump by Sgt Wendell Morrison, a dog fighting demonstration by F-47's and a demonstration of ground firing of a Thunderbolt's guns thrilled the crowd of 30, 000. An F -80 loaned by the Maine Air National Guard from Dow AFB for a static display became the first jet aircraft to land and take off at Barnes.

Not confining the spirit of cooperation which had been the secret of the 131's success, the Air guardsmen here extended a helping hand to the new 'competitor' on the aerial reserve scene when the US Naval Reserve Squadron moved into Barnes, even to the extent of providing aircraft for them to fly when they did not have enough of their own. Such things as crash rescue standby operations were handled by 131 personnel manning both ANG and USNR fire trucks.

The hangar lean-to and fire station were completed in May, 1949, and the operations and aircraft maintenance sections moved out of their tents in July, the former occupying the fire house and the latter going in to the hangar lean-to. Part of the upper floor of the lean-to was devoted to the Squadron headquarters, with that activity moving in from Westfield Armory.

The red and white stripes around the cowlings as identification of the 131's aircraft were adopted this month, which also saw the ground broken for the building of the Pioneer Valley Air guardsmen's club. MSGT Nick Topulas, TSGT Lou Canegallo and Capt Art Knapp became president, secretary and treasurer respectively in the Club's first election.

Major Robert D Wallace replaced Lt Col Tarleton H Watkins in the capacity of Air Instructor in the summer of 1949. In August, the 131 again extended the hand of cooperation with other military agencies by taking on the job of shooting aerial photographs of all the seaway improvement projects 011 the coasts of Connecticut and Rhode Island for the Corps of Engineers. Somebody christened this project "Operation Damsite."

On the social side, the Club set up its first refreshment stand in one corner of the hangar and the Squadron had a very well-attended pre-camp outing in Stanley Park in Westfield.

The 131's second field training was held from August 21st to September 3d at Grenier Field, then an Air Guard base, in Manchester, New Hampshire. 16 Thunderbolt fighters from the 131 joined a similar number from each of the other six ANG squadrons in the 67th Fighter Wing, making up an 84-plane flyover as an ANG salute to Westover AFB during its tenth anniversary celebration. Huge crowds at the MATS base viewed the 67th's mass formation. A B-26 photo plane from this base followed the main body.

A test alert, "Operation Tocsin", saw the planes of the 131 in the air over Boston before those from that city were off the ground. Only 55 minutes had elapsed since the alert had been called and the first officials notified. Maj Stefanik and Us Bruno J Grabovsky, Fred H Johnson, Alphonse N Matera, Charles F Nolin, Walter D Pratt, Arthur J Raiche, Benedict E Tarnauskas and Robert L Thompson. made this historic flight in this, the first post-war readiness test.

The Motor Pool's first vehicle maintenance building was completed in the fall of 1949 at a total cost to the government of \$1.20 for nails. Odds and ends of scrap lumber and an abandoned contractor's shack provided the rest of the building materials. Another item of construction progress at about the same time was the laying of the Club cornerstone on October 25th.

Col Halstead stepped up to the command of the 67th Fighter Wing upon the death of Gen Louis E Boutwell at the National Guard Association convention in Montgomery, Alabama.

131 pilots volunteered for short tours of active duty in which they flew their aircraft in tracking missions for the Army Artillery units from Fort Devens. They took over this detail from the regular Air Force pilots from Grenier AFB, who had previously flown the missions.

A new arrangement entered the picture on November 27th, 1949, with the holding of the first Sunday 8-hour training assembly. In the foul-weather tradition which seems to have become associated with Sunday drills, the first one was held in spite of a moderate snowstorm, and the attendance was good. This gave the food service section the opportunity to show their wares on the home front and they obliged by setting up a kitchen in a disused trailer and a feeding line in one of the tents which had so previously done yeoman service on the 'line.' The food was served in mess-kits and the dining room was wherever each man could find a box to sit on or a wall to lean against.

Sunday training assemblies led to another first two months later with the first church services held in January, 1950. The auditorium, classrooms, the Base Supply warehouse and the great outdoors have all had their turns as the location of the Protestant and Catholic services here. Ministers for the Protestant services were provided by the Westfield Council of Churches, largely through the aid of Rev Edward U Cowles. Priests from the Springfield Diocese were assigned to conduct the Catholic services by Rev MacPherson of the Diocesan office until arrangements were made to have the masses said by Capt (Chaplain) Timothy J O'leary of the 104th Infantry.

On February 4th, 1950, the Squadron embarked on its first long range cross-country flight, complete with its own ground support echelon in the two C-47's which accompanied the fighters. Sixteen Jugs and the two transports made the 900-mile flight to St Louis Missouri, setting down at the ANG base near that city, Lambert Field.

In March of 1950, Lt Col Stefanik and Lt Col Edward J Mclaughlin petitioned for additional land to make it possible to extend the existing runways to the 7000-foot length required to sustain jet operation. Time has since proven the value of their foresight on this move.

Spring of 1950 was an exciting one for the members of the Air Guard here at Barnes. Close on the announcement that the 131's personnel strength figure of 97. 5% was the highest one maintained by any ANG unit in the country, came the much bigger news that the local unit had been awarded the coveted Spaatz Trophy, based on personnel strength, maintenance of aircraft and equipment, ground schools, flying training, flying safety, supply conditions and overall unit proficiency. A large party was held in the Armory in Westfield to celebrate the winning of this award.

Plans to convert the 131 from F-47 Thunderbolts to the faster F -51 Mustangs were announced a short time later. Even this was not progressing fast enough for Lt John J Sevila, who made trips up to Bangor, Maine, and got himself 'checked out' in the F-80 Shooting Star jet fighter and flew it, becoming the first pilot in the 131 to fly a jet aircraft.

A construction project totaling up to nearly half a million dollar was started in July, 1950. This included the Administration building, the Maintenance building, the Motor Pool and the Paint-Oil-Dope Storage building.

Four pilots and several mechanics went to Lockbourne AFB in Ohio during the early summer of 1950 to become familiarized with the F-51 prior to their delivery here, so that they in turn could teach the other personnel here what they had learned and thus speed up the transition training process.

The first F-51's were ferried in by Col Stefanik, Maj Wallace, and Capt Grabovsky soon after. The Jugs were also ferried to Tinker AFB, near Oklahoma City, by pilots of the Squadron.

The Air Guard units at Barnes left on July 29th for their third field training period, again visiting Grenier AFB at Manchester, New Hampshire. It was during this encampment that the Carl A Spaatz Trophy actually was awarded by Gen Earl S Hoag to Col Stefanik. Transition training into the new F-51's was the main task of this encampment.

About this time two of our aircraft which caught fire in mid-air were successfully landed by their skilled pilots. Lt Kenny Warren brought his F -47 to a smooth landing in spite of what proved later to be a frozen engine, coming to a stop just off the runway where the fire equipment was waiting for him. Lt Marshall Swift put his burning F -51 into a wheels-up landing in the grass at Bowles Airport in Agawam, preventing all but minimum damage.

The probability of receiving a call into active Federal service at any moment was about the main interest of all personnel during this period. Many Air Guard units were being taken by the Air Force, and some were already starting to make their marks in the fighting records over Korea. By the time a pattern emerged from the selection of ANG units by the Air Force, it was apparent that they had decided to leave only six groups divided between California and the industrial northeastern area, including Massachusetts.

Lt Lester H Laurin, who had been commanding officer of the Weather Station, became the first Air guardsman here to avail himself of the new Air Force program to train pilots directly from and for the Air National Guard. He completed the course and returned with his wings late the following year.

Ten airmen on the base who were interested in private flying pooled their resources, organized a flying club and bought a Taylorcraft plane. Five were already licensed pilots and five were not, but soon made great progress in the club's flying training program.

The service Club had its grand opening ceremonies on the evening of September 27th, 1950, with both bar and grill set up in the newly covered basement of the building. A short time later, Detachment 'B' of the 202d Air Service Group, slated for dissolution on October 31st, presented the Club with a 19-inch television set as one of its last official acts. Another one was given the Club in December by the departing American Airlines staff as a demonstration of their gratitude for the various items of assistance which they received from the Air guardsmen here from time to time.

When the Wing Base Plan went into effect on November 1st, 1950, not only Detachment 'B', but the 131 Utility Flight as well, faded from the scene. While the latter was, to all intents, merged into the 131 Fighter Squadron, the support functions of the Detachment were divided into the appropriate elements which the new structure attached to the Squadron. The Weather Station remained unchanged except for redesignation as the Weather Element.

Lt Francis Bleasius earned the thanks of the people of Salt Lake City when he volunteered to fly a B-25 loaded with serum from Fitzsimmons Army Hospital near Denver, through known bad weather, to the Utah capital. The serum was to be used to stem an epidemic of food poisoning which was threatening to reach serious proportions. A successful and uneventful flight brought Frank, the plane and the serum all safely into Salt Lake.

The Squadron again reached full strength on February 21st, only to have the authorization again increased by three officers and 45 airmen by the middle of the following month.

While the runway approaches were being surveyed for the job of lengthening which was to come, the 131 was in the process of winning the first award of the newly-instituted 102d Fighter Group Flying Safety Banner. And the Maintenance and Motor Pool buildings were being completed at this time.

On May 22d, 1951, the 131 flew its first fully-armed night reconnaissance alert mission. The Squadron closed out the month by coming back from the ANG gunnery meet at Eglin AFB, Florida, with second place honors. Lts Alphonse N Matera and Richard F Barus finished in top place in air-to-air firing and the dive-bombing and rocketry categories, respectively.

Another contingent from the 131 was putting- in a period of assistance to the two Pennsylvania Air Guard squadrons at Coraopolis who had just received their F-51 Mustang fighter planes.

The Squadron's fourth encampment, again at Grenier AFB, ran from the 28th of July to the 11th of August, and was highlighted by the award to the 131 of the new Meacham-Pelland Trophy for tactical proficiency. In September 1951, Lt Lester H Laurin, former CO of the weather station, became the first pilot to return from the USAF pilot training program for Air Guard Personnel. Completion of the Administration building was accomplished in the same month. Movement of the headquarters functions into their new home had to wait official acceptance of the building, occasioning some delay while small points were ironed out.

Capt John Sevila and Lts Robert Thompson and Fred H Johnson pulled the longest non-stop mission in the 131's history by flying 1300 miles from Miami, Florida, to Barnes in four and one-half hours. They were on a cruise control mission in CAVU weather, carried tip tanks for extra gasoline, and had gas to spare when they landed here. The project of lengthening the 5000-foot north-south runway to 7000 feet was completed in October of 1951, three months after Mayor Richard Fuller broke the ground. A 2000-foot smooth graded area and another 2000 feet of rough grading at both ends of this runway, give it an emergency length of well over two miles.

The first notable step of 1952 was the organization of the 'Pilot's Club' in January. They held their meetings in the center room on the second floor of the Administration building. They have since broadened the scope of their activities and have changed the name rightly to the Officers' lounge, which has been redecorated with club funds in walnut paneling and with a bar to match, making it an attractive social center.

Lt Norman Warner and Airman Ken Frisbie added their efforts to those of the Fire and Police departments both in the fighting of the fire which destroyed the Professional Building in Westfield and took six lives, and in the rescue of many men, women and children who were trapped in the raging blaze. Both were volunteers, Ken working inside the burning building and Norm on the roof of the one next door, with only a five foot alley between.

On the flying front in the spring of 1952, the 131 took home third place in the ANG gunnery meet at George AFB, California, and pulled another of those long cross-country formation flights, this time to Miami, Florida, with eleven F-51's and a Gooney Bird (C-47) with ground support personnel and equipment. And, for the third consecutive time, the Meacham Pelland trophy was again awarded to the local fighter unit.

A religious innovation was introduced for the training assembly of April 20. Following 'Fellowship' services in both Catholic and Protestant chapels, a communion breakfast was served in the hangar. The main course appropriately enough, was pancakes and bacon, as provided by Al Rising and his staff of the Rising Food Service Company.

A change in location was due this year as the 131 made its summer encampment at Spaatz Field in Reading, Pennsylvania. The boys who made that trill still remember the warm hospitality and welcome they received from the people of the Keystone State. But they were much less enthused about the other 'warm' item they met there, the nearly 100-degree weather which hit Reading just about the same time that we did. Many was the meal which received more salting than the recipe called for, thanks to the sweat of the diner's brow.

The 131's acrobatic team, with Capt John Sevila in the lead, Lts Fred Johnson and Al Matera on the wings and Lt Charley Rosseel in the slot, put on their first demonstrations for the public during this field training period at Reading. They were to thrill many an audience both in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts before the changing background of their civilian lives caused the group to disband. The "Rainbows", as the team was christened, can list every man who was in the Air Guard here at the time among those who were strongly impressed by the acrobatic maneuvers which they executed in flawless precision formation with their four F-51 Mustangs.

A mid-air collision between two of our F-51's during the Reading encampment turned out to everybody's satisfaction with both pilots and one of the aircraft returning safely to Spaatz Field. Col Stefanik flew his in despite damage to his prop and the leading edge of his wing. Lt Jimmy Romanowicz found it impossible to fly his craft with most of the tail section chewed away and chose to 'hit' the silk and parachute to safety.

The dedication of the Air National Guard base at Barnes Airport took place on October 19th, 1952 with a crowd of 10,000 spectators present. The festivities opened with the unveiling of the plaque by MSGT Nelson J Brown. TSGT Robert J Lohmeyer and A/2C Joseph P Barry, chosen for being the first airman in the 131, the one with the longest military service and the latest to be selected for pilot training, respectively. A thrilling air show kept the crowd looking up for most of the afternoon with participation by many units of the Air National Guard, the Navy and the Air Force doing formation passes, speed runs at low altitude, aerobatics and even a firepower demonstration.

The flying club was doing so well by the end of '52 that they started to look around for a larger cruiser type plane so that they could make longer cross-country flights, and with larger parties of men participating.

1953 started on a high note with several awards coming our way within the first two months. Col Charles Gilbert, Commander of the 102nd Fighter Group presented the 131 with the first award of the Frederick W Turner Trophy for operational proficiency. The first of a series of twelve monthly Flying Safety Awards were received from First Air Force for having the largest number of accident-free flying hours in the FAF area.

An alert test in February 1953 saw the 131's planes over the waters of Massachusetts Bay 74 minutes after it was sounded. And in a mass turnout to help the Red Cross meet its quota, fifty Air guardsmen reported to the State Sanatorium in one day and gave blood to the blood bank. Another cross-country formation navigation mission saw the 131 hit New Orleans in April.

The sixth encampment was held at Grenier AFB, New Hampshire, from July 25th to August 8th, with the Weather Station sporting a brand new name as the 131 Forecasting Flight. Maj Milton E Sicklesteel took over command of the Air Adviser's office, relieving Maj Robert D Wallace, in the early fall of 1953.

The 8131 Replacement Training Squadron, a manpower pool of skilled air and ground support crews, came into being on October 1st, with Capt Robert Anderstrom as its first Commander. Another new organization which was becoming a reality at about the same time was Air Explorer Squadron 100. The Air Scout unit was sponsored by the 131 Fighter -Interceptor Squadron and all the positions for adult guidance of the youths were filled by men of the Air Guard. The greatest share of the credit goes to MSGT John J Egloff of the Installations section, who in the capacity of Adviser to the unit is in the same status as a scoutmaster. At least half a dozen of the boys, who range from 14 to 17, have graduated into the Air Guard on reaching the latter age.

Our first jet, an F-84 which was flown in here with the understanding that it was never to leave the ground again, activated in October for ground training purposes. The T-33 which followed a month later, however, had a better job lined up. As the first operational jet aircraft assigned to the unit, it was enthusiastically welcomed and saw almost constant use as one pilot after another 'checked out' in it.

Other accomplishments of this year included the man-hour saving gun sight tester engineered and built by MSGT Howard J Redpath, the addition of a new wing to the Air guardsmen's Club providing a kitchen and an additional room upstairs, fourth place for the 102d Wing team in the ANG gunnery meet at Boise, and the waterproofing treatment given most of the buildings on the base.

A mobile training unit activated in January 1954 to teach the pilots, mechanics and specialists about the F -94B. Many of the pilots put in evening sessions on their own time while the MTD was here. The other aircrew position which the F-94 required, that of radar observer, created a procurement problem for the 131 since there were no officers with that particular combination of skills in the unit at that time. (Lt Francis J Foley, a former World War II navigator, came closest, and after further schooling, became the unit's first RO.) Two B-25K's were also assigned to this base as flying classrooms for the radar observers. A visit to the base by a large number of businessmen from the area elicited many favorable comments on what they saw, including the 'instruction' they received from the mobile unit.

Two cross-country flights in February constituted a first and a last. The first ~annual flight of skiing enthusiasts from the Air Guard here to Sun Valley, Idaho, took place at this time, as did the last mass cross-country flight of F-51's, this time to West Palm Beach, Florida. The first F -94B finally arrived in March, was given a full acceptance check by the mechanics, and test-flown by Maj Edward D Slasienski, the Aircraft Maintenance Officer.

The insigne of the 131 Fighter Squadron, now familiar to all of us, received its approval from the Pentagon in April of 1954. It was designed by TSGT Alphonso H Willey of Operations and Mr Harold Maschin, one of Westfield's aviation enthusiasts and a designer for the famous Columbia Bicycle. The jet plane, lightning flash and cloud, over the three red and two white vertical stripes, with the five white stars in the blue area at the top spelling out 1 - 3 - 1, were the end product of much thinking and many ideas, both by the designers and by others in the unit.

Tragedy struck on May 7th when the F-51 which Major Anderstrom, CO of the 8131 and flying training officer on the Air Technical Detachment was flying back from Mitchel AFB, crashed into the hillside at Newgate, Connecticut. The cause of the fatal crash was undetermined.

After five years of publication, the editors of the 'Thunderbolt' decided that the name was not in tune with the progress of the unit and rechristened it 'Airscoop', effective with Volume 6, Number 1, on May 26th, 1954.

The seventh encampment featured a return to the original site, Otis AFB, on Cape Cod, from the 10th to the 24th of July. Since the 1948 encampment that base had changed hands from the Navy to the Air Force. A 'Block Dance' held in the hangar and sponsored by the Pioneer Valley Air guardsmen's Club, turned out to be a definite success, both socially and financially.

The firing-in butts and the 1500-foot taxi strip for them were completed in August, 1954. On the 17th of that month, Lt Robert C Somers flew away the last of the F -51 planes with which the base was once equipped.

A big step forward took place on September 1st with the start here of participation in the dawn -to-dusk runway alert. Two pilot and radar observer teams were on active duty for fourteen hours each day, ready to take to the skies in as short a time as humanly possible whenever the word came in from the control site to do so. This was when the mobile control tower which MSGT Redpath built on the back of one of our small trucks really came into its own.

On one of the alert missions, our aircraft were directed to the aid of a lost Navy plane, doing so and finding out later that the Navy ship claimed not to have been lost but rather were guiding our craft home. The 131 was represented in the 102d Wing team which decided to fly the Bay State's colors in the ANG Gunnery meet at Boise, Idaho, despite the fact that they had very little checkout time on gunnery in the new Jet craft. Coming in second in a field of three teams in the Fighter Interceptor category was considered very satisfactory by the members of the team.

The 131 suffered its only double fatality on the night of October 19th when a T-33 carry Lt Richard G Brown and TSGT Austin A Cooper plunged into the side of a mountain in Granville, Massachusetts, and exploded. As part of the requirements for their aviation merit badges, a group of thirteen Air Explorers from Squadron 100 were flown over most of Western Massachusetts in a C-47 Gooney Bird. It was the first aerial flight for many of the boys.

A sudden snowstorm during the training assembly of April 3d, 1955, was one of the factors which prompted Lt Dewey Durrett to abandon his F-94 over Quabbin Reservoir and parachute to safety. These he did, ending up by hitchhiking back to civilization after making his way out of the woods in which he came to rest. An intensive search of the Quabbin area in the days which followed, however, failed to show any trace of the missing aircraft.

The field training encampment for 1955 was again at Otis AFB, lasting from July 10th to 24th. The innovation this year was that the travel to and from the Cape Cod base was accomplished on a Sunday instead of the Saturday, in an effort to avoid vacation traffic. The Louis E Boutwell Trophy was awarded to the 131 as the highlight of this encampment.

The weather presented a different picture in this area the following month, when a dying hurricane poured a 16-inch rainfall over the land in a few hours, swelling the small streams to river size and causing millions of dollars . damage and taking many lives. Volunteers from the Air Guard were very much in evidence in almost every phase of rescue activity in the Westfield section, manning crews of rowboats, motorboats and DUKW's, reinforcing the weary fire department crews and doing police duties. Col Stefanik lost his car in a washout in West Springfield in a vain effort to get to Barnes to direct the' operations.

Lt Durrett had another brush with fate and was none the worse for it when his F-94 started to smoke up the cockpit. He then cut his engine and proceeded to glide into Barnes from a point

about 20,000 feet above Northampton. He made it in safely with only damage to the aircraft's tail and landing gear. Resurfacing of the runways at Barnes was started on October 13th and lasted about a month, during which period our aircraft did their operating out of Westover AFB, thirteen miles from here. When a test alert, Operation Stopwatch, was called on October 25th, this presented difficulties which had to be overcome, but the test was called very successful in spite of them.

Two of the projects which were handled through the winter of '55 - '56 were the complete remodeling of the basement 'cafe' part of the Air guardsmen's Club and the formation of a volunteer police unit here under the auspices of the Westfield Civil Defense Agency. The latter was eventually disbanded since the CD was concerned over the dual control of the ANG personnel.

The largest organizational step to be taken happened on April 16th, 1956 when the Fighter Squadron type set up was expanded into a full fighter group. This approximately doubled the number of personnel authorized and gave birth to a much more complex administrative structure. The 104th Fighter Group (Air Defense) was the highest echelon of command on the base and Col Stefanik stepped from Command of the Squadron to that of the Group.

Maj Grabovsky then filled the command vacancy in the 131 Fighter-Interceptor Squadron. The 104th Air Base Squadron and the 104th Materiel Squadron were both activated at this time and were commanded by Majors Edward J. Rumanowski and Edward D Slasienski, respectively. The 104th USAF Infirmary (later Dispensary) replaced the former medical element and was headed by Capt Stephen P Ferraro. Maj Richard W Mahoney replaced Maj Sevila in command of the 8131 and Capt Peter Giorgio still headed up the Forecasting Flight.

SSgt's Wallace Shaw and William Rowe answered an emergency call by driving the Unit's ambulance to the area in Oronoco where a construction crew's store of dynamite was struck by lightning and exploded. The rugged vehicle helped to evacuate the wounded from the scene to Noble Hospital in Westfield.

The 23^d of June saw the annual movement of troops, again this time to Otis AFB, where they were to train until July 7th for the ninth encampment. Two major accidents took place in July 1956. In the first, landing gear trouble caused landing damage to an F-94 and hospitalized Capt Marshall Swift and Lt Henry E Quinn. The second, also in an F-94 but of unknown causes, cost the lid fee of Capt Frank A Gibe when it crashed into a wooded area at one corner of the field.

Air guardsmen who were on duty at Barnes when a fire broke out in the American Sumatra Tobacco Co Barn near the approach road to the base sped to the scene before the city trucks could make the trip and started to fight the blaze, soon joining forces with the city firemen and helping subdue the fire, but only after it had consumed five of the twelve barns which were in a row.

A small metal box enters the history of the 104th Fighter Group at this point. It is the 'Maddox'

of wires, switches and lights which was engineered and built by MSG T Edward A Morrisette for the purpose of testing the engine and all its circuits, whether or not the engine is mounted in the aircraft. This saved the man-hour requirement of putting in an engine before it could be tested or before the engine electrical circuits in the aircraft could be checked. This little device gained Morrisette a commendation by the Federal Inspection team in January, 1956, and led to his being presented with the green and white Commendation Ribbon by the USAF in August. This was the first time that a member of the Air National Guard at Barnes Airport was decorated.

Lt Col Stefanik was promoted to the rank of full colonel in November 1956, and received his command pilot rating in January 1957.

Many members of the Group distinguished themselves in fighting the fire which broke out in the O'Connor Lumber Company on Southampton Road, a short way from Barnes Airport. Side by side with the Fire fighting equipment of the Westfield Fire Department, the Air guardsmen battled the blaze with the same skill and determination as the professional smoke-eaters, and are credited by that Department with being the chief factor which saved the whole yard from turning to a pile of ashes. The blaze was confined to the section of the yard in which it started, and although large stocks of lumber were lost, as well as buildings and the machinery they housed, the greatest part of the business was saved. One of the owners called the ANG a 'godsend' in the matter. MSGT Bob LeSage, WO Don Ryan and Capt Frank Golas directed the crew of ANG crash -fire men, Air Technicians and just volunteers, while another group of AP's and other Air guardsmen helped unsnarl the traffic Jam on Route 202.

The 131 Fighter-Interceptor Squadron stepped from the subsonic to the supersonic range with the announcement that it was to convert to F-94C and the arrival of the first one on June 20th, 1957. The pilots are at present undergoing the process of transition training into the new type plane, with several checked out already. The 1957 encampment, the tenth for the Air Guard here, was held at Otis AFB again, from August 3d through the 17th. While the units were at camp and the aircrews were flying the F-94A's and F-94B's, the majority of the complement of F-94C1s were being flown into Barnes.

Major George McCleary has been assigned here to replace Maj Milton E Sicklesteel in the Air Advisor's office, with the latter assigned to Japan.

News with a touch of sadness arrived while the men were encamped at Otis. Rockerbox, who had been the base mascot since 1949, passed away and would bark no more greetings to the men of the 104th Fighter Group and their families, nor warnings to visitors who were strangers to her.