

23rd FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

23rd Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) constituted, 22 1939
Activated, 1 Feb 1940
Redesignated 23rd Fighter Squadron, 15 May 1942
Redesignated 23rd Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, 20 Aug 1943
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1946
Activated, 15 Oct 1946
Redesignated: 23rd Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled, 27 Oct 1947
Redesignated 23rd Fighter Squadron, Jet, 17 Jun 1948
Redesignated 23rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 20 Jan 1950
Redesignated 23rd Fighter-Day Squadron, 9 Aug 1954
Redesignated 23rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, 8 Jul 1958
Redesignated 23rd Fighter Squadron, 1 Oct 1991

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX, 1 Feb 1940
Brooks Field, TX, 1 Feb 1940
Langley Field, VA, 17 Nov 1940
Losey Field, Puerto Rico, 6 Jan 1941
St Croix, 31 May 1941
Losey Field, Puerto Rico, 15 Nov 1941
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, 13 Dec 1941 (detachments operated from St Thomas, Mar 1941–
6 May 1943; and Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 11 Mar–16 May 1943)
Morrison Field, FL, c. 21 May 1943

Mitchel Field, NY, 16 Jun 1943
Charleston, SC, 22 Jun 1943
Galveston AAFld, TX, 18 Sep 1943
Dalhart AAFld, TX, 27 Oct 1943
Bruning AAFld, NE, 24 Dec 1943–11 Mar 1944
Kingsnorth, England, 6 Apr 1944
Brucheville, France, 3 Aug 1944
Le Mans, France, 6 Sep 1944
Athis, France, 26 Sep 1944
Juvincourt, France, 3 Oct 1944
Le Culot, Belgium, 28 Oct 1944
Aachen, Germany, 28 Mar 1945
Niedermennig, Germany, 8 Apr 1945
Kassel/Rothwesten, Germany, 21 Apr 1945–15 Feb 1946
Bolling Field, DC, 15 Feb–31 Mar 1946
Howard Field, CZ, 15 Oct 1946–22 Jul 1948
Furstenfeldbruck AB, Germany, 17 Aug 1948
Bitburg AB, Germany, 17 Nov 1952
Spangdahlem AB, Germany, 31 Dec 1971

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Incirlik AB, Turkey, 17 Jan–15 Mar 1991

ASSIGNMENTS

36th Pursuit (later, 36th Fighter) Group, 1 Feb 1940–31 Mar 1946
36th Fighter (later, 36th Fighter-Bomber; 36th Fighter-Day) Group, 15 Oct 1946
36th Fighter-Day (later, 36th Tactical Fighter) Wing, 8 Dec 1957
52nd Tactical Fighter (later, 52nd Fighter) Wing, 31 Dec 1971
52nd Operations Group, 31 Mar 1992

ATTACHMENTS

7440th Composite Wing, 17 Jan–15 Mar 1991

WEAPON SYSTEMS

YP-37, 1940
P-36A, 1940
P-39D, 1941
P-40C, 1941
P-40E
P-47D, 1943
P-47N
P-80B, 1947
F-84E, 1950
F-86, 1953

F-100C, 1956
F-105, 1961
F-4D, 1966
F-4E
F-4G
F-16C, 1987

COMMANDERS

Cpt Joseph A. Bolger, 1 Feb 1940
1LT Frederick W. Baggett, Dec 1940
Cpt Ralph E. Holmes, Nov 1941
Cpt Holmes, 1 Feb 1940
Maj James B. League, 6 Dec 1940
Maj Dunham, 20 Jul 1942
Cpt Joseph Kirkup, Dec 1942
Maj Joe Giltner, 6 May 1943
Maj Hallock P. K. Walmsley, 16 Jun 1943
Maj H. C. Junkerman, Mar 1944
Maj Richard T. Deabler, 13 Apr 1944
Maj Alexander W. Cortner, 10 May 1944
Maj Albert E. Miles, Jul 1944
Maj Alfred A. Weegar, 22 Jan 1945
Cpt Walter B. Walker Jr., Jul 1945
Maj Louis Yeager, Oct 1945
Maj Louis H. Norley, 10 Nov 1945-unkn
LTC Hallock P. K. Walmsley, 15 Oct 1946
LTC Rodney E. Gunther, 14 Apr 1947
Maj Wallace B. Frank, 19 Nov 1948
LTC Rodney E. Gunther, 14 Dec 1948
LTC Charles W. Boedeker, 3 Feb 1949
Maj George H. Crist, Oct 1949
Maj Harold H. Broach, 10 Feb 1950
LTC George F. Ceuleers, 28 Aug 1950
LTC Lawrence J. Pickett, 26 Dec 1950
Maj Charles V. Garino, Dec 1951
LTC Marvin E. Childs, Dec 1952
Maj Riegel W. Davis, Oct 1953
LTC Sylvester V. Burke, 9 Dec 1953
Maj Carl J. Luksic, 1954
LTC Donald S. Glover 1954
Maj Robert D. Brown, 1 Jul 1955
LTC Edward C. Fletcher, 1 Sep 1957
Maj Erwin A. Hesse, by Jul 1958
LTC Elmer E. Springer Jr., Dec 1960

LTC Robert E. Wayne, 1 Sep 1963
Maj William W. Pinner, Jun 1965
LTC Parks M. Rea, 1 Jul 1966
LTC Robert L. Larsh Jr., 1 Sep 1966
LTC Charles P. Busick, Dec 1968
LTC Paul S. Cleland, Jun 1969
LTC John J. Gaudion, 24 Aug 1970
LTC Delbert M. Corum, 1 Jan 1972
Maj Thomas A. Baker, 26 Feb 1973
LTC Thomas E. Rowney, 1 Mar 1975
LTC Henry V. Hall, 16 Jul 1976
LTC Charles P. Winters, 1 Jul 1977
LTC Richard C. Fairlamb, 19 Dec 1978
LTC Ronald E. Henry, 3 Aug 1979
LTC Robert W. Thompson, 30 Jul 1981
LTC Douglas M. Nix, 4 Apr 1983
LTC Lesley L. Kersey, 15 Jun 1984
LTC Curtis H. Emery II, 12 Jul 1985
LTC Dale E. Hollrah, 20 Oct 1986
LTC Anthony W. Groves, 30 Dec 1987
LTC David L. Moody, 3 Oct 1989
LTC Jeffrey G. Blanchette, 12 Jun 1991
LTC William F. Rake, 26 Mar 1993
LTC Leslie D. Fielder, 10 Nov 1994
LTC Robert P. Steel, 10 Jun 1996
LTC Michael R. Boera, 5 Jun 1997
LTC Richard A. Reynolds, 3 Jun 1999
LTC Steven S. Kempf, 12 Jun 2001
LTC John W. Specht, 19 Jun 2003
LTC William A. Woodcock, 26 Aug 2005
LTC Steven A. Vlasak, 6 Apr 2007
LTC Michael D. Lay, 30 Oct 2008

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Southwest Asia
Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
France, 1 Sep 1944
Germany, 12 Apr 1945

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device
1 Sep 1990–26 Feb 1991

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

May 1956–May 1958
1 Jan–31 Dec 1968
1 Jul 1978–30 Jun 1980
1 Jul 1991–30 Jun 1993
1 Jul 1993–30 Jun 1995
1 Aug 1995–31 Jul 1997
1 Jul 1997–30 Jun 1999
24 Mar–10 Jun 1999
1 Jul 1999–30 Jun 2001
1 Jul 2001–30 Jun 2003
1 Jul 2003–30 Jun 2005

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army

1 Oct–17 Dec 1944
18 Dec 1944–15 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM



On a Grayed Yellow Orange disc, a caricatured Red, White, and Blue hawk, wearing Tan flight jacket and aviator's helmet, Blue goggles, and Brown boxing gloves, diving toward sinister base, and emitting White speed lines to rear. COPYRIGHT—Walt Disney. (Approved, 23 Sep 1943)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Antisubmarine patrols, 12 Dec 1941–Apr 1943.

Departed 2 January 1941 from the port of Newport News on the U.S.A.T. Chateau Thierry for duty stations in Puerto Rico. Arrived 6 January 1941 at Ponce, PR. Transferred to Losey Field, PR, and, as part of the 36th Pursuit Group, assigned to the Caribbean Defense Command. Transferred on 31 May 1941 to St. Croix, VI. Transferred on 15 November 1941 to Losey Field, PR.

After Dec. 7, 1941, the 23rd PS patrolled the islands of the Caribbean for enemy aircraft and submarines. The squadron was renamed the 23rd Fighter Squadron in 1942, and converted to the P-47 Thunderbolt in June 1943. In March 1944, the 23rd FS deployed to Royal Air Force Kingsnorth, England, and 9th Air Force's 36th Fighter Group. The squadron earned the Distinguished Unit Citation in September 1944 for missions flown from England and forward bases in France supporting the D-Day invasion and the Battle of the Bulge.

Between October 1944 and January 1945, while operating from airfields in Belgium, the squadron earned two citations in the Belgian Army Order of the Day as well as the Belgian Fourragere. The unit was awarded a second Distinguished Unit Citation for action in Germany during April 1945.

Occupational force, Germany, May 1945–Feb 1946.

Regular gunnery training by USAFE's F-80's was resumed on 22 March 1950, with the arrival at Wheelus of several aircraft of the 23rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron. The F-80's ran into trouble during the first week of April due to fuel contamination, and they were grounded until 16 April. Two days later, the jet fighters left for Germany. Investigation revealed rust and other foreign matter in the fuel furnished by Shell-Petrolibya and the need to replace a pipeline connecting the storage tank with the filling point.

Throughout 1951, USAFE's F-84s continued to use Wheelus for gunnery training and transition flying. On 1 August the 526th Fighter-Bomber Squadron arrived to replace the 23rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron, which had left for home on 18 July. The last unit of the year was the 92d Fighter Squadron from Manston, England, which arrived at Wheelus on 30 November 1951 and departed for home on 19 December, the first for 1952 was the 53rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron which arrived on approximately 15 Jan 1952. This unit was, in turn, replaced on 25 Feb by the

23rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron, which brought with it approximately 27 officers, 150 airmen, 25 F-84s and two B-26 tow target aircraft. The 23rd was at Wheelus primarily for transition training.

In January 1991, at the outbreak of the Gulf War, the 23rd FS deployed to Incirlik AB, Turkey. During Operation Proven Force, squadron F-16Cs and F-4Gs flew nearly 1,000 defense suppression, combat air patrol and interdiction missions over Iraq without a single loss. The squadron earned the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor for its part in driving the Iraqi army from Kuwait.

In September 1991, the squadron's remaining F-4Gs were replaced by F-16Cs. In July 1993, the 23rd FS was the first U.S. unit to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina for Operation Deny Flight. In January 1994, the squadron received the first F-16CJ Block 50 aircraft.

The squadron completed conversion to the latest version of the F-16CJ in January 1995 and became U.S. Air Forces in Europe's only defense suppression squadron. In September of that same year, members of the 23rd FS took part in Operation Deliberate Forge -- the largest air assault in NATO history. The unit flew 224 sorties during the air campaign against Bosnian Serb forces.

Pilots from the 23rd FS were the first to employ high-speed anti-radiation missiles (HARM) in combat. The squadron's efforts contributed to the peace process and the resulting Dayton Agreement, which ended more than four years of bloody conflict in the Balkans.

February to June 1999, the 23rd FS deployed to Aviano AB, Italy, where it was assigned to the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing for Operation Allied Force. The squadron supported the NATO mission to degrade and damage the military and security structure that the Yugoslav President used to destroy the Albanian majority in Kosovo. During Allied Force the 23rd FS flew over 1000 combat sorties and fired 191 HARM shots to silence the over 100 surface to air missile sites in Kosovo and Yugoslavia. The squadron was repeatedly noted for bravery in the face of danger while flying these combat operations in Allied Force.

From November 2000 to March 2001 the 23rd FS deployed in support of Operation Southern Watch to patrol the southern no-fly zone over Iraq. During the deployment the squadron provided suppression of enemy air defenses in both air-to-ground and air-to-air roles. In March of 2001, the 23rd provided SEAD for the largest strike in Iraq since Operation Desert Fox. During the strike to take out command and control facilities in Iraq, the 23rd ensured the safety of all allied strikers.

On 20 March 2002, at 2108L (2008Z), an F-16CJ assigned to the 52d Fighter Wing, Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, impacted the ground in a wooded area 1.9 nautical miles northeast of runway 23 at Spangdahlem Air Base. The F-16CJ mishap aircraft, Serial Number 91-0415, was destroyed upon impact. The mishap pilot, Capt. Luke A. Johnson, 26, assigned to the 23d Fighter Squadron, 52d Fighter Wing, was fatally injured. The mishap pilot, call sign Wolf 03, was number 3 of a 4-ship formation conducting a night tactical intercept training mission. He was

current and qualified to fly the planned mission. Mission supervision, preparation, and planning were sufficient. Preflight, departure and training engagements were uneventful. Upon reaching bingo fuel, Wolf 03 departed the formation and began his return to base. The pilot flew a PAR approach to runway 23. The radar final controller, a trainee, conducted the approach under supervision of a qualified trainer. The pilot was qualified to fly the PAR to approach minimums of 300 ft and 1 mile visibility. The forecast recovery weather briefed to the mishap pilot was 1000 ft broken, 2000 ft overcast, visibility 8000 meters (5 miles) and light rain. The weather encountered by Wolf 03 on departure was a 3000 ft ceiling and 8000 meter visibility. The weather provided to the pilot during arrival was an inaccurate 1924Z pilot report (PIREP) for an aircraft breaking out at 3000 ft above ground level with 2 mile visibility. Based on observations, PIREPs, and witness testimony, the weather on final approach at the time of the mishap was most likely a 500 ft ceiling, visibility 6000 meters (4 miles), and light rain. The approach was flown in darkness, 2 hours and 22 minutes after a 1746Z sunset. The mishap aircraft was functional at the time of the mishap. The aircraft was fully mission capable at launch time and the mishap pilot contacted the squadron 10 minutes prior to the mishap reporting no maintenance problems. Based on clear and convincing evidence, the primary cause of this accident was the mishap pilot's failure to initiate a missed approach as directed by the radar final controller. While still in the weather and too far right of course for a safe approach, the pilot acknowledged the controller's safety alert, lowered the aircraft nose and turned toward the runway in a continued attempt to position the aircraft for landing. An inadequate crosscheck then resulted in an excessive rate of descent followed by controlled flight into terrain.

F-16s of the US Air Forces in Europe began a two-month rotational assignment at Incirlik AB, Turkey, in January, after a hiatus of more than sixteen years. F-16 pilots from the 52nd Fighter Wing's 22nd Fighter Squadron at Spangdahlem AB, Germany, arrived 3 January. They were replaced when pilots from the 23rd FS arrived on 2 February. More than 650 sorties were flown between the two squadrons. The successful rotational training concluded at the end of February. Access to the Konya AB bombing range was granted by Turkish officials. The weather in Turkey was considerably better than the winter weather in Germany, which improved the quality of the training flights. 2007

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

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Unit history. *36th Fighter Bomber Wing. @1952*

Unit yearbook. *36 Fighter Bomber Wing, Germany, 1954.*

History. Wheelus Field; *The Story of the US Air Force in Libya. The Early days 1944-1952.* R. L. Swetzer.

Historical Division Office of Information USAFE. 15 Jan 1965.