

A HISTORY OF THE 31ST FIGHTER WING

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31 FW Heritage Pamphlet

The 31st Fighter Wing of today draws its heritage from a history of superb performance in peacetime and in combat. It celebrates the WWII heritage and heraldry of its predecessor unit, the 31st Pursuit Group. The Group was activated at Selfridge Field, Michigan, on 1 February 1940, before the wing came into existence. The pursuit group was formed in part from cadres drawn from the 1st Pursuit Group of World War I fame with two squadrons - the 39th and



One of the aircraft assigned to the 31st Pursuit Group prior to World War II. This aircraft was assigned to Capt Frank Hill, who later commanded the Group during the War. The group was participating in the "Carolina Maneuvers" war games in early 1941. (Photo courtesy of the 31st Fighter Group Association, taken by Frank Hill via Tom Kendle)

40th Pursuit Squadrons. In October of that same year, a third squadron, the 41st Pursuit Squadron, joined the group. In January of 1942, the group was redesignated the 31st Fighter Group. The original three squadrons transferred without planes or personnel to the 35th Pursuit Group, and the 307th, 308th, and 309th Pursuit Squadrons were activated to replace them. The

members of the 31st Pursuit Group maintained and flew a mix of P-35, P-39, and P-40 aircraft until being transferred to England in June of 1942.

The Group arrived in England without planes and began training in British Spitfire Mk Vbs at Achem and High Ercall Air Bases. On 19 August 1942, the group entered combat, supporting the Allied raid at Dieppe, France. That day, 2nd Lt Samuel Junkins of the 31 FG became the first American operating in an American combat unit to shoot down a German aircraft operating over the British Isles. The group earned the distinction of being the first complete American combat group in the European Theater of Operations, and the first to engage in combat. From August through mid-October 1942 the group flew patrols and participated in operations over German-controlled France. The group transferred from the 8th to the 12th Air force on 13 October and boarded ships bound for its next assignment.



A Spitfire MkVb prepares for combat from a field in England. The 31st Fighter Group flew these British airplanes with great success in France, North Africa, Sicily, and Italy from August 1942 through March 1944. (Photo courtesy of the 31st Fighter Group Association)

That next assignment included participating in the invasion force that landed in North Africa on 8 November 1942, becoming the first American Air Force unit to see combat in that theater. They flew from Gibraltar to Tafaraoui Airfield, Algeria, where they scored their first victories in the campaign - shooting down three French fighters that were strafing the airfield just

as the 31st arrived. From there they moved quickly from base to base throughout Algeria and Tunisia, engaging in ground attack missions and later escorting P-39s and A-20s on missions to attack German troop positions and convoys. They found themselves as close as 15 miles from the front lines, and this led to a near disaster on at least one occasion. During a major German counteroffensive in February 1943, the group was forced to evacuate their position at Thelepte, Tunisia, only a few miles from the advancing German Army, leaving most of their supplies behind. The counteroffensive, however, was short-lived, and by May 1943 the Germans surrendered in North Africa. During the North Africa campaign, the group claimed 61 Luftwaffe aircraft destroyed. One of the highlights of the group's time in North Africa was the selection of the 308th Fighter Squadron to provide combat air patrols for the arrival of President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Casablanca conference in Morocco.



Living conditions at Thelepte Airfield, Tunisia, during the North Africa Campaign. (Photo courtesy the 31st Fighter Group Association)

As the Allied Forces looked to Europe, the 31 FG once again rose to the challenge as they were the first Army Air Force units in combat in Malta and Sicily, and the first to land in Italy. They distinguished themselves by destroying seven enemy fighters attacking allied shipping

during the invasion of Sicily, and six more attacking the invasion force on the beaches at Salerno. Their missions consisted mainly of sweeps over allied positions and escorting bombers attacking German positions. January 1944 brought the Allied landing at Anzio with the 31 FG the sole provider of air cover for the invasion and beachhead.



Ground crews escort 31st FG P-51s at San Severo, Italy during their taxi-out. The design of the P-51 (and other tail-drag aircraft) limited the pilot's visibility, so ground crews rode the wings of the planes to assist in directing to and from the runway. (Photo courtesy of the 31st Fighter Group Association)

In March of 1944 the group transferred from the 12th Air Force to the 15th Air Force and exchanged their Spitfires for new P-51 Mustangs. This brought about an immediate mission change as the Mustangs enjoyed a much longer range, and were tasked to escort heavy bombers on long-range missions into Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, France, and Northern Italy. During one of their first missions over Ploesti, Romania, on 21 April 1944, the group earned their first Distinguished Unit Citation for covering the raids in spite of severe weather and as many as 50 enemy fighters defending the area. They received their second Distinguished Unit Citation in July 1944 following a mission to escort P-38s on a raid from the Ukraine into Romania and

Poland. By the time they returned to Italy, they had destroyed 37 enemy aircraft, including 21 enemy fighter-bombers on their way to attack Russian ground forces, with no losses of their own.

The 31 FG remained active through the end of the war, not only flying bomber escort, but also photo reconnaissance and troop carrier escort, and took part in Operation Anvil, the invasion of southern France. When the shooting stopped, the 31st Fighter Group sat as the undisputed top scoring allied fighter group in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations and the 5th highest overall for the USAAF, with 570 1/2 confirmed aerial victories. The group sailed for home on 13 August 1945, one of the last units to depart Europe. The unit inactivated on 7 November 1945.



The 31st Fighter Group flew F-80s like these for a short period from August 1946 through June 1947. (USAF Photo. 31 FW History Office collection)

Following the war, the 31st Fighter Group activated at Gebelstadt, Germany, as part of the US Occupation Forces, on 20 August 1946, where they flew P-80s, the first US Jet fighter aircraft. From there the unit transferred without personnel or equipment to Langley Field, Virginia, in June 1947, and then to Turner Field, Georgia, in September of the same year.

The 31st Fighter Wing is Born

When the US Air Force activated as a separate service in September 1947, they chose the wing as their basic combat unit. Subsequently, the Air Force established and organized the 31st Fighter Wing at Turner Field on 20 November 1947, with the 31st Fighter Group and the 307th, 308th, and 309th Fighter Squadrons assigned to the wing. The wing honors the WWII history of the group by flying the group's WWII streamers on the wing flag. (This is called a temporary bestowal.) Originally assigned F-51s, the wing began converting to F-84s in August 1948. On 20 January 1950 the wing redesignated as the 31st Fighter-Bomber Wing. On 1 July 1950, the wing transferred from the Tactical Air Command to the Strategic Air Command. It redesignated once again as the 31st Fighter-Escort Wing on 16 July 1950. The group became a paper organization and eventually inactivated on 16 June 1952. It would not rejoin the wing again until 1991.



Colonel David Schilling leads wing out of Hickam Field, Hawaii, on their way from Georgia to Japan. (USAF Photo, 31 FW History Office collection)

The wing pioneered the development of in-flight refueling tactics. On 4 July 1952, the wing began its flying execution of Operation Fox Peter One, the mass movement of the wing's entire flying operation from Turner Field, Georgia, to Misawa AB, Japan. The wing used aerial

refueling to fly non-stop from Turner to Travis AFB, California, and from Travis to Hickam AFB, Hawaii. The unit then island-hopped across the rest of the Pacific with stops at Midway and Wake Islands, Eniwetok Atoll, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Yokota AB, Japan. The sheer magnitude of the accomplishment was sufficient for the 31st Fighter-Escort Wing to receive its first-ever Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. The wing commander, Colonel David Schilling, won the Air Force Association Trophy. (It was later named after Col Schilling, following his death in a car accident in England). This movement included the longest over-water flight attempted to that date, and was the first trans-Pacific mass flight of jet aircraft. As an encore, on 20 August 1953 Colonel Schilling led a flight of eight F-84s on a 10½-hour non-stop flight from Turner Field to Nausseur AB, French Morocco. This successful flight culminated in the 40th Air Division of the Strategic Air Command receiving the Mackay Trophy for 1953.

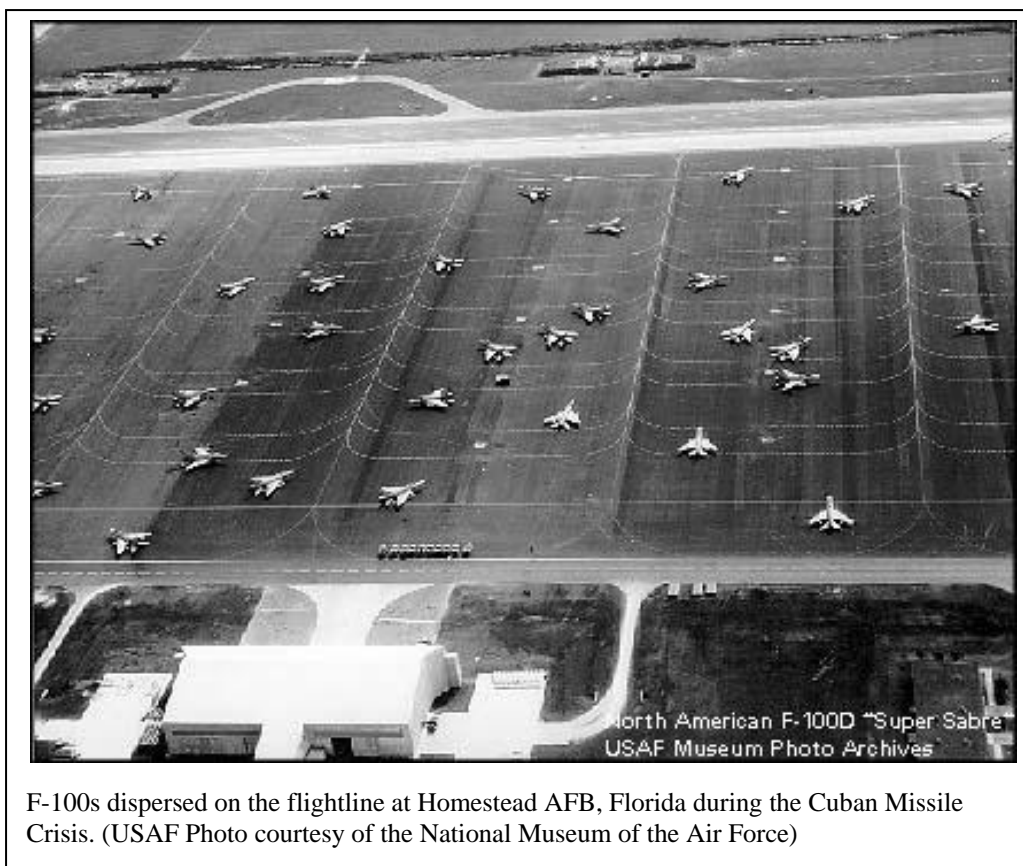


F-100s assigned to the 31 TFW on the ramp at George AFB, CA, 1961. (USAF Photo, 31 FW History Office collection)

The wing was redesignated again on 20 January 1953, when it became known as the 31st Strategic Fighter Wing. During this time the wing deployed (on temporary 30-day assignments) to Japan and Alaska to provide air defense in the northern Pacific. The wing also assumed the role of in-flight refueling with the assignment of the 58th Air Refueling Squadron on 11 May 1956. Then on 1 April 1957 the wing, except for the 58 ARS, transferred back to the Tactical Air

Command, was redesignated the 31st Fighter-Bomber Wing, and converted to F-100Cs. In September 1957 a fourth fighter squadron, the 306th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, was activated and assigned to the wing. On 1 July 1958 the wing's name changed for the fifth time. It became the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, a name it kept for the most part until 1991. (For a four-year period during the 1980s, it was known as the 31st Tactical Training Wing.)

On 15 March 1959 the wing moved without people or equipment to George AFB, California. During the time in California, the wing deployed units for four-month alert rotations to Moron AB, Spain and Aviano AB, Italy. Then during the Berlin Crisis in October and November 1961, the 309th Fighter Squadron deployed to Spangdahlem AB, Germany to bolster the US military forces in Europe. In 1963 the wing earned a second Outstanding Unit Award for achievements in 1962. During that time they moved from George AFB to Homestead AFB, Florida—while simultaneously deploying a squadron to Kadena AB, Japan, for a four-month TDY—without losing any operational capability. Then, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, the 31 TFW planned operational missions and participated in events that ultimately led to the removal of the missiles from Cuba.



On 8 February 1964 the 308th Fighter Squadron flew a non-stop mission from Homestead AFB, Florida, to Cigli AB, Turkey. The 6,600 mile trip required eight in-flight refuelings and set a new record for the longest mass flight of jet aircraft to cross the Atlantic. The flight also led to the wing receiving the Tactical Air Command Outstanding Fighter Wing Award for 1964, the second consecutive year it won that prestigious award.



A 31st Tactical Fighter Wing F-100 comes into Tuy Hoa Air Base over the coast of the South China Sea. (Photo Courtesy of the George Bontya Photo Collection, 31 FW History Office)

In June 1965 the 307 TFS deployed to Bien Hoa AB, Republic of Vietnam; the 308 TFS replaced them in December, having moved there as a permanent change of station. The following April, the 307 TFS deployed, permanent change of station, to Torrejon AB, Spain, and in November 1966 the wing received orders to deploy, permanent change of station, to Tuy Hoa AB, Republic of Vietnam. An unexpected consequence of this move came when the wing commander, Colonel James Jabara, was killed in an automobile accident while driving his family to their new home in South Carolina where they were to await his return from his first tour in Vietnam. Colonel Jabara, a jet ace from the Korean War with one and one-half kills from World War II, is the name-sake of the Jabara Award for Airmanship awarded each year to the USAF Academy graduate whose accomplishments demonstrate superior performance in fields directly involved with aerospace vehicles. In 2006, Captain John Vargas from the 31st Fighter Wing received the Jabara Award.

The 31 TFW arrived at Tuy Hoa AB (a base constructed over a year from the sand up for the wing) on Christmas day, 1966. It was assigned to the Seventh Air Force. The wing provided close air support and ground interdiction for US and RVN Army units in the central region of the

country. In 1968 the wing defended installations against enemy forces during the Tet Offensive and the siege of Khe Sahn, and was later singled out for its outstanding contribution during the extraction of friendly forces from Kham Duc. The wing reached the 100,000 combat sortie milestone in September 1969. It earned two more Outstanding Unit Awards, one with Combat "V" Device, a Presidential Unit Citation, two Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm, and ten Campaign Streamers for its actions in Vietnam. On 15 October 1970, the wing returned to Homestead AFB, Florida, without people or equipment, as part of the US force reduction in Vietnam. At the same time, the wing switched from flying F-100s to F-4Es.



A 31st Tactical Fighter Wing F-4 being maintained at Homestead AFB, Florida. (31st Fighter Wing History Office collection)

In July 1971, the 306 TFS inactivated and the 307 TFS moved without personnel or equipment to Homestead AFB. The wing therefore returned to its original squadrons, the 307th, 308th and 309th squadrons. The wing assumed a dual-role function with the primary mission of air defense of the southern Florida and the secondary as a replacement training unit. The 307 TFS and 309 TFS were designated to perform the pilot replacement training. From April to

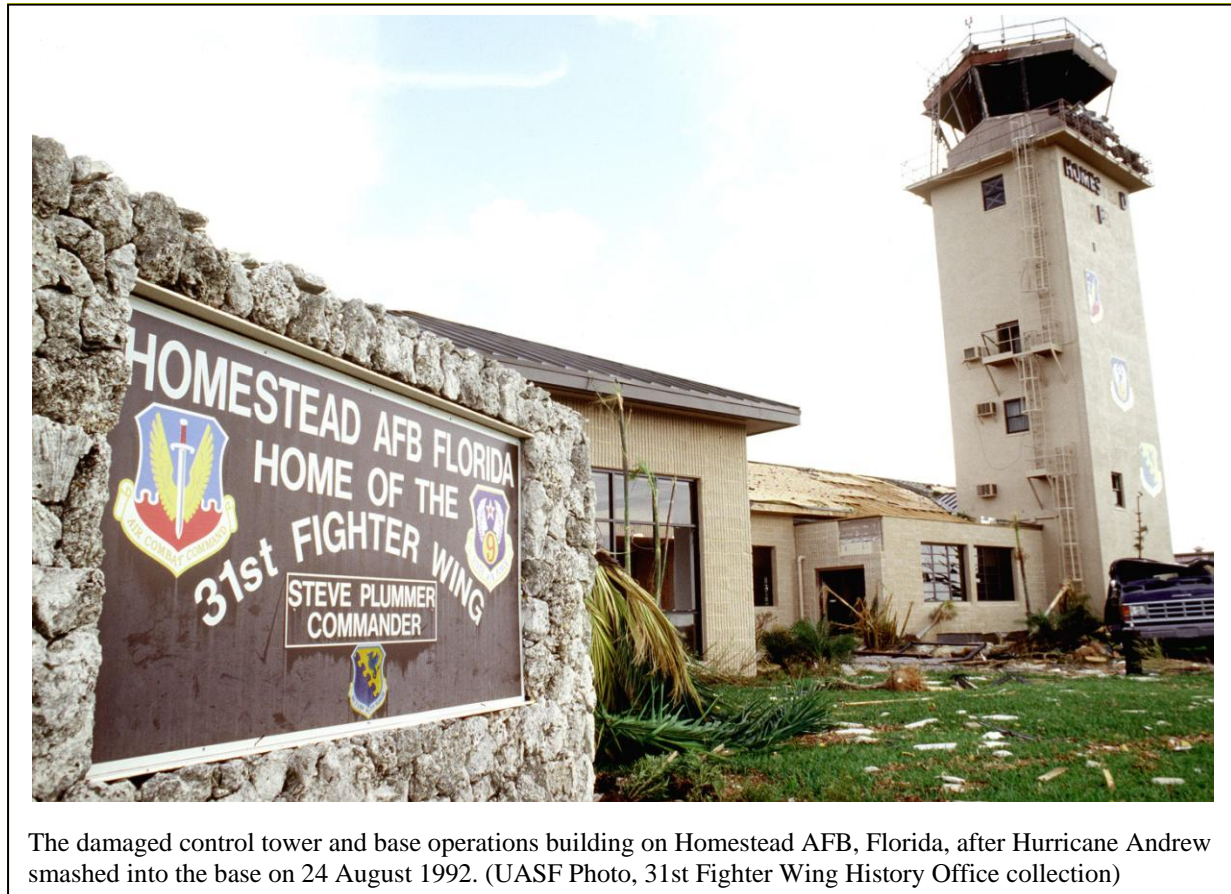
August 1972, the 308 TFS deployed to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand to augment tactical air forces already deployed to that country. It was followed in July by the 307 TFS. In June 1972, Captains John Cerak and David B. Dingee of the 308 TFS were shot down and captured by the North Vietnamese and confirmed as prisoners of war. In March 1973 both were released and returned to the United States. On 15 October 1972, Captains James L. Hendrickson and Gary M. Rubus of the 307 TFS, who replaced the 308 TFS at Udorn, Thailand, shot down a MiG-21 northeast of Hanoi. This marked the first and only aerial victory for the 31 TFW. The 308 TFS completed the wing's final deployment to Southeast Asia from December 1972 to June 1973.



The 31st Fighter Wing received their most current aircraft, the F-16, in 1985. (31st Fighter Wing History Office collection)

In 1979 and 1980 the wing transferred its F-4Es to the Egyptian Air Force and Air National Guard units, and began operating F-4Ds. On 30 March 1981, the wing assumed a larger responsibility for training all F-4 aircrews, and with the change, assumed a new designation as the 31st Tactical Training Wing. Training became the primary mission until 1985 when the wing

received its next aircraft, the F-16, and resumed an air defense mission. With the change, the wing's designation changed yet again to the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing. This designation continued until 1992 when, on 1 June, as part of the most extensive restructuring since the Air Force became a separate service, the Tactical Air Command inactivated and the Air Combat Command activated, and the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing was redesignated to its current name, the 31st Fighter Wing.



Everything changed for the wing on 24 August 1992, when Hurricane Andrew swept across southern Florida, leaving extensive damage in its wake. Every building on Homestead AFB received some damage, many buildings were destroyed. The fighter squadrons evacuated most of the planes before the storm, but were unable to return. In the aftermath, the Secretary of Defense recommended complete closure of the base, but in June 1993, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended to realign the base under the Air Force Reserve and

inactivate the 31 FW. The squadrons were assigned to other wings, and the 31 FW began inactivation proceedings.

Air Force leadership had been looking at the whole realignment process following the end of the Cold War and they discovered that the Air Force was losing its heritage. When a base closed, the unit assigned to the base typically inactivated. With so many base closures taking place, original combat groups and many units with significant WWII heritage were being inactivated. In order to stop the trend, Air Force Chief of Staff, General Merrill McPeak, initiated a program whereby units in danger of being inactivated would be compared to other units to determine the most significant. The most significant units would remain active to help preserve its history. Such was the case of the 31st Fighter Wing. It celebrated the history of its predecessor unit, originally designated as the 31st Pursuit Group in 1940, which after a long absence had rejoined the wing as the 31st Operations Group in 1991. The group was the highest scoring Army Air Force unit in the Mediterranean Theater during WWII. Add this heritage to the wing's combat record during Vietnam and a number of significant firsts during its early years, and the 31st Fighter Wing numbered among the more significant historic units of the Air Force. It was therefore chosen to remain an active unit, rather than to fade into historical obscurity. So on 1 April 1994, the 31st Fighter Wing inactivated at Homestead AFB, Florida, and subsequently activated at Aviano AB, Italy, in place of the 401st Fighter Wing.

The 31 FW received two new squadrons at that time, the 510th and 555th Fighter Squadrons, along with their Block-40 F-16s. The wing immediately became involved with events in Bosnia, part of the former communist country of Yugoslavia, in May 1994, as part of Operation DENY FLIGHT. A year later, the country held its breath as a massive rescue operation took place to extract Captain Scott O'Grady of the 555 FS from behind enemy lines. A US Marine Corps HH-53 picked him up after he evaded capture for six days. In August and September, Operation DELIBERATE FORCE began and the 31 FW conducted air strikes against Bosnian Serbs conducting ethnic purges among the Muslim population of the country. Peacekeeping operations continued in the Balkans through the end of 2004, when the European Union assumed responsibility for the region.



This photo shows the activation ceremony for the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano AB, Italy, on 1 April 1994. (31st Fighter Wing History Office collection)

In 1999 USAFE activated the 31st Air Expeditionary Wing-NOBLE ANVIL at Aviano AB, Italy, for Operation ALLIED FORCE, the NATO operation to stop Serbian atrocities in the Province of Kosovo. Assigned under a joint task force, the 31 AEW flew from Aviano and joined NATO allies in a 78-day air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia). From 24 March-10 June 1999, the 31 AEW, the largest expeditionary wing in Air Force history, flew nearly 9,000 combat sorties and accumulated almost 40,000 hours of combat service over the skies of Kosovo, Serbia, and the rest of the Balkans in support of NATO operations. The wing accomplished much during OAF as the two permanently assigned flying squadrons, the 510 FS and 555 FS, combined for over 2,400 sorties and over 10,000 combat hours. Additionally, as the first Aviano OAF squadrons to fly 1,000 combat sorties, 555 FS reached the 1,000 combat sortie mark on 27 May 1999 and the 510 FS followed suit two days later. Simply, the 31 FW operators, maintainers, and supporters proudly accomplished the NATO mission.

Following the end of Operation ALLIED FORCE (OAF) in June 1999, the 31st Fighter Wing became fully entrenched in the Expeditionary Air Force. With the exception of a deployment to Operation NORTHERN WATCH (ONW) in 1998, the wing had not deployed to support a contingency operation since before it activated at Aviano. Instead, the wing fought “in place,” supporting operations in the Balkans.

Summary of 31 FW Participation in Balkan Operations

Balkan Operations	Days ²	31 FW ¹	
		Sorties	Avg/Day
DENY FLIGHT (14 May 94-28 Aug 95)	471	1,644	3.5
DELIBERATE FORCE (29 Aug-20 Sep 95)	22	418	19
DENY FLIGHT (21 Sep-20 Dec 95)	90	303	3.4
DECISIVE EDGE (21 Dec 95-20 Dec 96)	365	1,088	3.0
DELIBERATE GUARD (20 Dec 96-20 Jun 98)	547	1,884	3.4
DELIBERATE FORGE (20 Jun 98-28 Feb 99)	253	1,327	5.2
ALLIED FORCE (24 Mar 99-10 Jun 99)	78	2,403	30.8
JOINT GUARDIAN (1 July-30 Sep 99)	91	104	1.1
JOINT GUARDIAN (1 Oct 99-31 Mar 02)	912	1,087	1.2
DELIBERATE FORGE (1 Apr 02-31 Dec 04)	791	1,538	1.9

In 2000, the wing began its full-fledged participation in the Expeditionary Air Force. From March to September 2000, the 510th and 555th Fighter Squadrons conducted back-to-back deployments to Ahmed Al Jaber AB, Kuwait, in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW). While at Al Jaber, the squadrons flew over 400 combat sorties providing precision-guided munitions (PGM) delivery while patrolling the southern NFZ. Then, the “Scorpions” of the 603d Air Control Squadron (603 ACS) deployed to Ali Al Salem AB, Kuwait from February to June 2001. As the core of the 386th Expeditionary Air Control Squadron, the 121 personnel of the 603d served as the primary air control squadron for OSW. Significantly, the deployment marked the first-ever deployment of the 603d outside of Europe.

¹ Does not include sorties flown by non-31 FW aircraft temporarily assigned to Aviano.

² The “Days” figures are actual calculations, not flying day calculations. Despite this, the “Average Sorties/Day” should reveal an approximate level of effort useful in comparing the operations.

From June 2001 through May 2002, the fighter squadrons deployed their Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) capability three times to Operation NORTHERN WATCH. From June through December, the squadrons helped enforce the northern NFZ over Iraq, and then the 555 FS returned to Incirlik from March to May 2002. The fall and winter of 2002 saw the wing's largest ever deployment effort since arriving at Aviano. From August to December, the 510 FS and 603 ACS returned to Southwest Asia. The 603d supported Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) while the 510th supported OSW while flying missions over Afghanistan in support of OEF. At the same time, the 555th deployed its personnel and aircraft, including those personnel and aircraft not deployed with the 510th, to Decimomannu AB, Sardinia because the runway at Aviano closed for repairs.



Members of the 603rd Air Control Squadron in Afghanistan in 2003. (31 FW Multi Media Photo)

The wing's support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) began in late 2003. The wing's first major support of OIF occurred during the deployment of the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in late March 2003. Aviano AB served as the launch point for the

airborne/air-land insertion of airborne forces opening a second front in northern Iraq. As the primary supporter, the wing secured, bedded, and fed over 2,300 personnel from the Army and USAF. The operation, the largest airborne operation since 1989's Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, constituted 62 missions transporting 2,146 passengers and 2,433.7 tons of cargo.



A line of C-17s crowd onto the Taxi-way at Aviano AB, Italy, carrying the members of the Southern European Task Force to northern Iraq in the opening days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. (31st Fighter Wing Public Affairs Photo)

Since the beginning of combat operations in Iraq, forces from the wing have been on regular combat rotations into the region. In late 2003 the 603 ACS became the first unit from the 31 FW deployed to Iraq where they provided provide air control for the country. In an air control squadron first, they relocated their entire operation from Baghdad International Airport to Balad AB. Under combat conditions, the squadron transferred \$73 million in equipment and over 100 personnel via 20 convoys. Significantly, the squadron accomplished the move with no loss of command and control services. Unfortunately, the squadron also sustained a loss during its time in Iraq. On 10 April 2004, insurgents launched a mortar rocket attack on Balad, killing A1C

Antoine Holt and injuring two other Scorpions. Airman Holt's death constituted the 31 FW's first combat fatality since the Vietnam War.

From December 2003 to early March 2004, the 510 FS deployed in support of OEF and OIF. Over the course of almost 900 sorties, the squadron conducted close air support (CAS) and airborne forward air control (FAC-A) missions. The 555 FS replaced the 510 FS in the AOR. While in Iraq, the Triple Nickel performed the first true urban close CAS missions in recent history. Finally, the squadron pioneered the Air Force's first operational F-16 employment of Advance Targeting Pods.



Members of the 31st Civil Engineer Squadron during a deployment in 2005. (31 FW History Office collection)

31 FW continued deploying forces to OEF and OIF, with people supporting combat operations every year since 2003. The fighter squadrons and the air control squadron accounted for the largest groups to deploy, but each year upwards of one-third of the wing went to some base in direct support of the Global War on Terror. The only significant deviation from this pattern occurred in 2007 when the 555 FS deployed to Kunsan AB, Republic of South Korea to provide theater support to the US Forces Korea commander. This marked the first time in history that an entire USAFE fighter unit deployed to Asia. In 2008 and 2009, neither fighter squadron

deployed in support of OEF and OIF, as the wing was undergoing a massive aircraft upgrade program. The 603 ACS, however, remained actively engaged in the AOR and deployed in 2008 and 2009 to the Middle East. In 2010, the 510 FS again rejoined the Air Expeditionary Forces and deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. There, the unit employed the GBU-54 for the first time in combat in Afghanistan.



An F-16 from the 510 FS taxis in front of MiG-29s of the Bulgarian Air Force during Exercise RODOPI JAVELIN at Graf Ignatievo AB, Bulgaria in October 2007. (31 FW Multi Media Photo)

Since arriving at Aviano the wing has also participated in numerous training exercises with our international partners. In late November 2002, the 555 FS deployed to Caslav AB, Czech Republic, to provide combat air patrols over the site of the NATO Summit. The deployment included the real world diversion of an unidentified airliner. Covering NATO Summits continued as the wing deployed to Riga, Latvia to provide Presidential support and overflight protection the 2007 NATO Summit, as well as the 2008 Summit in Bucharest, Romania. Members of the 31 FW continue to expand their influence around Europe. With the

addition of former Eastern Block countries into NATO and the European Union, the wing has been working with these new partners to train their air forces to integrate into the NATO community. Members of the wing have deployed to Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and Poland, and those countries have opened up their air to ground ranges for use in joint training exercises.

In 2011, as a result of an ongoing uprising in Libya against the government of Muammar al Qadhafi, the UN adopted Resolution 1973 on 17 March. It established a no-fly zone in Libyan airspace, and authorized member states to “take all necessary measures... to protect civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya...” Aviano flexibility was key to the US/NATO response as the Mission Support Group adjusted to meet a flood of troops. Over a span of 2 weeks the group quickly added bed space, enough for 2,015 personnel, to bed down arriving coalition forces. The wing stood up 226K of decommissioned runway, increased security presence, and established NATO secure communications. US Operations (Operation ODYSSEY DAWN) began on 19 March, but by April, NATO took over in leading the overall coalition effort on 31 March, and Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR began.

The effort consisted of three elements: an arms embargo, an established no-fly zone, and actions taken to protect civilians from attack or threat of attack. The wing flew 172 sorties, 1,138.6 hours, in direct support of operation of OOD. However, over the span from March to October, the wing and coalition forces out of Aviano flew 1,936 sorties, 13,059 flying hours, in support of Operations OOD and OUP. On 21 October, reports came out of Libya that Muammar al Qadhafi had been captured and killed as a result of crossfire (later the circumstances of his death were disputed). Subsequently, NATO declared operations completed on 28 October 2011.



US Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons return to Aviano Air Base, Italy, after supporting Operation Odyssey Dawn on March 20, 2011. (US Army photo by SSG Tierney P. Wilson)

As the 31 FW looks to the future, it looks back with pride on the accomplishments and sacrifices of its members in the past. The 31st Fighter Wing of today continually strives to execute its mission and fulfill its motto—Return With Honor.

31st Fighter Wing Commanders: Col William L. Lee, 20 Nov 1947; Col Eugene H. Snavelly, 16 Aug 1948; Col Alvan C. Gillem II, c. 26 Dec 1950; Col Eugene H. Snavelly, 10 Mar 1951; Col Carl W. Stapleton, 14 Mar 1951; Lt Col Charles W. Lenfrost, 9 Apr 1951; Col David C. Schilling, 1 May 1951; Lt Col Charles W. Lenfrost, c. 27 May 1951; Lt Col William D. Dunham, 22 Jun 1951; Lt Col Gerald W. Johnson, 1 Jul 1951; Col David C. Schilling, 20 Jul 1951; Col Robert P. Montgomery, 16 May 1955; Col Gordon M. Graham, 15 Jul 1955; Col Hubert Zemke, 1 Aug 1955; Col Gordon M. Graham, 13 Oct 1955; Lt Col Harold L. Williams, Feb 1959-unkn; Col Robert W. Stephens, 15 Mar 1959; Col Herbert E. Ross, 26 Aug 1959; Col William D. Ritchie, 5 Oct 1959; Col Jack R. Brown, 2 Oct 1961; Col Frank J. Collins, 14 Oct

1961; Col William E. Bethea, 9 Mar 1964; Col Franklin A. Nichols, 16 Mar 1964; Col Ernest T. Burnett, 30 May 1965; Col James Jabara, 17 Jun 1965; Col Raymond C. Lee, Jr., 17 Nov 1966; Col Warren R. Lewis, 28 Nov 1966; Col William J. Evans, 7 Dec 1967; Col Abner M. Aust, Jr., 3 May 1968; Col Cuthbert A. Pattillo, 8 Feb 1969; Col William B. Yancey, Jr., 8 Aug 1969; Col Gilbert D. Hereth, 15 Jun 1970; Brig Gen Wiltz P. Segura, 15 Oct 1970; Col David E. Rippetoe, Jr., 28 May 1971; Col Alonzo J. Walter, Jr., 16 Jun 1972; Col Dudley J. Foster, 1 Mar 1974; Col Walter J. Bacon II, 7 Mar 1975; Col Samuel R. Johnson, 14 Jun 1976; Col William A. Gorton, 31 Aug 1978; Col Eugene H. Fischer, 2 Jan 1980; Col Robert H. Baxter, 5 Jan 1982; Col Billy G. McCoy, 20 Jun 1984; Col Charles L. Hehn, 27 Jun 1985; Col Hiram H. Burr, Jr., 5 Sep 1986; Col Walter T. West, 28 Apr 1988; Col John L. Welde, 7 May 1990; Col Stephen B. Plummer, 1 Aug 1991; Col William T. Rudd, 6 Nov 1992; Col John H. Campbell, 1 Apr 1994; Brig Gen Charles F. Wald, 24 May 1995; Brig Gen Timothy A. Peppe, 3 Jul 1997; Brig Gen Daniel P. Leaf, 30 Nov 1998; Brig Gen Daniel J. Darnell, 21 Jan 2000; Brig Gen Donald J. Hoffman, 25 May 2001; Brig Gen R. Michael Worden, 9 Oct 2002; Brig Gen Philip M. Breedlove, 18 Jun 2004; Brig Gen Robert Yates, 1 Jun 2005; Brig Gen Craig A. Franklin, 1 Jun 2007; Brig Gen Charles Q. Brown, 9 Jun 2009; Brig Gen Scott J. Zobrist, 22 April 2011; Brig Gen Jon Norman 30 May 2013 to present.



Blazon: Per bend nebule Or and Azure, in chief a wyvern Light Blue, sans legs, endorsed of the second, all within a diminished bordure of the first. Mott: RETURN WITH HONOR. Approved for 31st Group on 28 Jun 1941 and for 31st Wing on 13 Dec 1951 (K&KE 6350).

Significance: The shield is divided per bend nebule in the colors of the Air Force. The partition line is the heraldic symbol for clouds. In the chief or upper portion of the shield is placed a wyvern without legs, the wings endorsed. The wyvern is a strong and fierce mythical animal which may symbolize the overthrow of a vicious enemy.

Updated by Lane M. Bourgeois, 8 January 2014