

63 FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

63 Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) constituted 20 Nov 1940

Activated, 15 Jan 1941

Redesignated 63 Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) (Twin Engine), 31 Jan 1942

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron (Twin Engine), 15 May 1942

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron, 1 Jun 1942

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, 28 Feb 1944

Inactivated, 18 Oct 1945

Activated, 1 May 1946

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled, 24 Apr 1947

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron, Jet, 14 Jun 1948

Redesignated 63 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 20 Jan 1950

Inactivated, 8 Jan 1958

Redesignated 63 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 12 May 1975

Activated, 30 Jun 1975

Redesignated 63 Tactical Fighter Training Squadron, 1 Oct 1981

Redesignated 63 Fighter Squadron, 1 Nov 1991

Inactivated on 30 Sep 2009

Activated on 1 Aug 2016

STATIONS

Savannah AB, GA, 15 Jan 1941
Charlotte AAB, NC, 26 May 1941
Myrtle Beach, SC, 10 Dec 1941
Farmingdale, NY, 15 Jan 1942
Bridgeport Muni Aprt, CT, 2 Sep–27 Dec 1942
Wittering, England, 12 Jan 1943
Horsham St Faith, England, 5 Apr 1943
Halesworth, England, 9 Jul 1943
Boxted, England, 19 Apr 1944
Little Walden, England, 15 Sep–11 Oct 1945
Camp Kilmer, NJ, 16–18 Oct 1945
Selfridge Field (later, AFB), MI, 1 May 1946
Oscoda (later, Wurtsmith) AFB, MI, 5 Jan 1951
O'Hare Intl Aprt, IL, 18 Aug 1955–8 Jan 1958
MacDill AFB, FL, 30 Jun 1975
Luke AFB, AZ, 25 Feb 1993 –30 Sep 2009
Luke AFB, AZ, 1 Aug 2016

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Myrtle Beach, SC, Oct–Nov 1941

ASSIGNMENTS

56 Pursuit (later, 56 Fighter) Group, 15 Jan 1941–18 Oct 1945
56 Fighter (later, 56 Fighter Interceptor) Group, 1 May 1946
4708 Defense Wing, 6 Feb 1952
4706 Defense Wing, 1 Jul 1952
527 Air Defense Group, 16 Feb 1953
56 Fighter Group, 18 Aug 1955–8 Jan 1958
56 Tactical Fighter (later, 56 Tactical Training; 56 Fighter) Wing, 30 Jun 1975
56 Operations Group, 1 Nov 1991
58 Operations Group, 25 Feb 1993
56 Operations Group, 1 Apr 1994 –30 Sep 2009
56 Operations Group, 1 Aug 2016

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-35, 1941
P-36, 1941
P-39, 1941–1952
P-40, 1941–1942
P-47, 1942, 1943–1945
P-47, 1946–1947
P-51, 1946–1947
P (later, F)-80, 1947–1950

F-86, 1950-1954, 1955-1957

F-89, 1955-1958

F-4, 1975-1981

F-16, 1981

COMMANDERS

Unkn, 15 Jan 1941-Unkn

Maj Philip E. Tukey Jr., Jun 1942

Maj Sylvester V. Burke, 30 Sep 1943

Maj Gerald W. Johnson, 22 Feb 1944

Maj Robert A. Lamb, 28 Mar 1944

Maj Don M. Goodfleisch, 29 May 1944

Capt Joseph L. Egan Jr., 17 Jul 1944

Unkn, 20-21 Jul 1944

Maj Harold E. Comstock, 22 Jul 1944

Maj Paul A. Conger, 20 Jan 1945

Maj George E. Bostwick, 19 Mar 1945-Unkn

Unkn, 1-16 May 1946

Maj George W. Orr, 17 May 1946

Lt Col John S. Loisel, May 1947-Unkn

Maj William L. Jacobsen, Dec 1948

Maj Charles J. Bowers, 15 Sep 1949

Maj William B. Hawkins Jr., Dec 1949

Lt Col Charles W. King, Jun 1950

Maj William F. Shaeffer, 1951

Cpt Morris B. Pitts, By Apr 1952

Lt Col William F. Shaeffer, Apr 1952-Unk

Lt Col J. T. Jarman, By Apr 1957-Unkn

None (Not Manned), 1 Nov 1957-8 Jan 1958

Lt Col Lawrence R. Brehm, 30 Jun 1975

Lt Col Jerome D. Siderius, 10 Apr 1976

Lt Col Lester P. Brown, 25 Jun 1977

Lt Col Robert W. Lambert, 4 May 1979

Lt Col Gary G. Nelson, 1 May 1981

Lt Col Robert W. Highley, 6 May 1983

Lt Col Edward A. Hopley, Jun 1984

Lt Col Bruce R. Lamping, May 1986

Lt Coll Billy J. Hall Jr., Jun 1988

Lt Col William T. Edwards, 5 Jul 1990

Lt Col Ronald E. Fly, 17 Jul 1992

Lt Col William H. Christian Jr., 12 Mar 1993

Lt Col Gary D. Brunner, 1 Jul 1994

Lt Col Thomas J. Schrader, 17 May 1996

Lt Col Philip M. Rhulman, 12 Jun 1997

Lt Col Robert R. Topp, 15 Jun 1999
Lt Col Michael J. Stuart, 26 Jan 2001
Lt Col Todd P. Harmer, 4 Jun 2002
Lt Col Scott L. Pleus, 25 Jun 2004
Lt Col Jeffrey C. Lovelace, 25 May 2006
Lt Col Jack W. Maixner, May 2008-30 Sep 2009
Lt Col Matthew J. Vedder, 1 Aug 2016

HONORS

Service Streamers

World War II American Theater

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

ETO, 20 Feb–9 Mar 1944

Holland, 18 Sep 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jan 1977–1 Jan 1979

1 Jul 1980–30 Jun 1982

1 Jun 1984–31 May 1986

1 May 1987–30 Apr 1989

1 May 1989–30 Apr 1990

1 May 1990–30 Apr 1991

25 Feb 1993-31 Mar 1994

1 Jul 1994-30 Jun 1996

1 Jul 1996-30 Jun 1998

1 Jul 1998-30 Jun 2000

1 Jul 2001-30 Jun 2003

1 Jun 2003-30 Jun 2005

1 Jul 2005-30 Jun 2006

1 Jul 2006-30 Jun 2007
1 Jul 2007-30 Jun 2008

EMBLEM



Over and through a light blue teardrop shaped figure, a caricatured figure in flight suit proper, wearing red scarf about the neck, tan parachute strung out to back, riding a white lightning bolt guided by reins held in left hand, while firing an aerial machine gun proper mounted on front point of lightning bolt.







Gules, on a triangle Azure three lightning flashes issuant from dexter Argent surmounted by a panther stalking inverted to dexter base Sable garnished and winged at its forepaws White, enfiling an orbit ring charged with a flight symbol of the first; all within a diminished bordure of the second. Approved on 26 Jan 1956; replaced emblem approved on 22 Jun 1943. The original emblem of the 63 FS was stylized device based on the shape of the P-38 Lightning, the fighter with which the squadron expected to be equipped in 1942. This was replaced by caricatured pilot prostrate on a lightning bolt firing a machine gun. The lightning bolt represents the P-47 Thunderbolt, whilst the pilot was known unofficially within the unit as Gus the Gunner. This emblem was the winning submission in a contest carried out at the Republic factory, which was judged by then CO of the 63 FS. The design was the work of a woman employed in the plant and she received a prize of \$50 for her efforts.

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 63 was activated Jan. 15, 1941, at Savannah Air Base, Ga., as the 63 Pursuit Squadron. It was originally assigned to the 56 Pursuit Group, which, like many pursuit squadrons organized in the early 1940s, initially flew Curtis P-35 and P-36 Hawks. A year later the 63 came under control of the 1st Interceptor Command and switched to the Curtiss P-40 Warhawks. A few months later it was re-designated a fighter unit and began flying the new Republic P-47 Thunderbolt.

November 1942

On November 13th 63 FS pilots Roger Dyer and Harold Comstock are tasked with checking out a new type of radio mast due to structural failures of the original type during high speed dives. From 35,000 feet and flying at over 400 mph the pair dive the P-47s and almost immediately both aircraft's control surfaces become jammed due to the effects of compressibility on the airframe. It's only when the aircraft reach the thicker air at lower altitude that the pilots are

able to attain normal control of the aircraft. During the dives the cockpit speed indicators had shown a maximum speed of 725 mph. Faster than the speed of sound! While in reality the actual speed was probably more in the region of 500mph the Republic press office take full advantage of the opportunity to declare that the P-47 Thunderbolt had broken the sound barrier.

December 1942, The 56 Fighter Group is ordered to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to be ready for the move overseas. Around the same time the 33rd Service Group also move to the camp.

6th January 1943, The 56 Fighter Group personnel are amongst almost 12,000 troops packed on the Cunard liner Queen Elizabeth which has been pressed into service as a high speed troop transport ship. Members of the 33rd Service group are also aboard.

12th January 1943, After six days at sea the Queen Elizabeth docks at Gourock in Scotland.

13th January 1943, The 56 Fighter Group arrives at RAF King's Cliffe in Northamptonshire., Due to insufficient accommodation being available the 63 FS is allocated barrack space at nearby RAF Wittering.

29th March 1943 Around this time white recognition bands are ordered to be painted around the P-47's cowling, rudder, and elevators to avoid the Thunderbolts being mistaken for the only other radial engined fighter in Europe, the German FW190. The three squadrons are allocated code letters. The 61st is HV, 62nd LM, and the 63 UN.

30th September 1943 Cpt Sylvester Burke assumes command of the 63 FS.

7th November 1943

Robert Sheehan of the 63 FS fails to return from the mission today. He evades capture and later becomes the group's first pilot to successfully return to the UK.

19th February 1944 Maj Gerald Johnson returns to Halesworth from the 365th FG and takes command of the 63 FS.

27th May 1944 Maj Robert Lamb finishes his tour of duty and Capt Donald Goodfleisch takes command of the 63 FS.

17th July 1944

On his return from leave Joseph Egan begins his second tour and takes over command of the 63 FS. Only two days later he is killed in action. Harold "Bunny" Comstock takes over command of the squadron.

23rd December 1944 A historic day for the 56 and Col Schilling. Anticipating that the break in the weather would encourage the Luftwaffe to be up in force supporting the German counter offensive, the 56, under MEW control, was over the Bonn area. After spotting no less than

three German formations Schilling asked MEW control why they hadn't spotted them he was told "Don't worry, stay on original vector for bigger game at 22'000 to 23'000 feet".

The "bigger game" turned out to be two huge formations of Fw190s, estimated to be around 250 in total. Outnumbered by five to one, but with the advantage of height and surprise, Schilling ordered the 61st and 63 squadrons to attack one formation while he led the 62nd to hit the second formation. In the battle that ensued, ranging from 26'000 feet to ground level, the 56 destroyed 32 fighters confirmed, one probable and fourteen damaged. At the briefing before the mission Schilling had informed the pilots that the 56 had been responsible for 25% of the 8th Air Force victories. On this day however, the 56 accounted for over 50% of the enemy aircraft to fall that day.

They not only created another group record but took the 56's total to well over 800 aircraft destroyed. 3 of the 56's pilots failed to return and two of these were killed. Schilling destroyed 5 enemy aircraft in this action and was awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Service Cross and a commendation for "outstanding heroism and splendid leadership."

30th December 1944 Maj Harold Comstock led his 130th and final mission of his second tour although he retained command of the 63 FS for another three weeks.

20th January 1945 Paul Conger takes command of the 63 FS.

17th February 1945 The 63 FS starts its own conversion to the P-47M and also retains many of its P-47Ds while the group continues to experience trouble with the new arrivals.

26th February 1945

More engine problems with the P-47M, traced to split poppet valve diaphragms in the Bendix carburetors, lead to all 67 of the aircraft currently at Boxted being grounded. Engineers from Bendix are able to manufacture replacement gaskets using British materials and all aircraft were modified with 24 hours. The group's operations were affected by the P-47M's unreliability and most of the 14 missions flown that month were only 2 squadron missions using the 62nd and 63 squadrons P-47 Ds. A frustrating time for all, although by the end of the month it is believed that all the problems with the new model have been overcome and the last P-47Ds are withdrawn from Boxted.

15th March 1945 Another engine failure results in the death of 63 FS's Lt Willard Scherz.

16th March 1945 Once again all the P-47Ms are grounded. War Weary P-51 Mustangs are sent to Boxted. Pilots reluctantly begin transition training while ground crews, Republic technicians, engineers from Pratt and Whitney and 8th Air Force Technical staff renew their efforts to solve the problems with the P-47M. One crew chief notices that it's becoming easier to pull the propeller of his assigned P-47M through, and compression tests are conducted with telling results. A stripped down engine revealed that rust was present on the iron piston rings and that on engines with low compression readings oil was being pumped up the breather line increasing the pressure and causing failures. The cause of the rust being traced to inadequate

protection against the salt water atmosphere of the Atlantic crossings. It was decided to change all engines in P-47Ms with less than 50 hours engine time and over three quarters of the group's aircraft received new engines. 9 days after the group was taken off operations, the P-47M's problems were finally resolved and the group returned to operational duty on March 25th. Much to the ground crews', and many of the pilots' relief, the Mustangs left Boxed. The Wolfpack was back in business!

13th April 1945 The second anniversary of the group's first combat mission sees the 56 head out over Europe on its 458th combat mission. A Freelance mission finds Eggebeck airfield in Denmark occupied by approximately 175-200 enemy aircraft. Strafing attacks over the next 70 minutes by the 63 FS followed by the 62nd and 61st result in claims of 95-0-95 with the loss of only one pilot, Lt W. Hoffman of the 63 FS. "King Of The Strafers" that day is Lt Randel Murphy of the 63 FS who sets a new ETO record with 10 confirmed ground kills and 5 damaged. When the 56 left the area smoke from around 100 fires had risen to nearly 1000ft.

Flying escort for fighter sweeps ahead of U.S. bomber fleets, the pilots destroyed 167.5 enemy aircraft in the air and 110 on the ground. After Germany's surrender, the 63 returned to Camp Kilmer until inactivation on Oct. 18, 1945.

A year later, it reopened with the 56 FG at Selfridge Field, Mich., and briefly transitioned to the North American P-51 Mustang. In 1947, the 63 became one of the first fighter squadrons equipped with the new Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star.

Three years later, North American F-86A Sabres arrived, and then in 1954, Northrop F-89 Scorpions became the 63's newest fighters. The squadron was again inactivated on Nov. 1, 1957, and reactivated June 30, 1975, as the 63 Tactical Fighter Squadron at MacDill AFB, Fla. Its mission was to train pilots and weapons systems officers for the F-4D Phantom II.

Airmen of two units participated in final exercises as the 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, Fla., and the 63 Fighter Squadron at Luke AFB, Ariz., prepare to close down. The 33rd FW sent an F-15 force to Savannah, Ga., earlier this month for East Coast Dissimilar Aircraft Training. "The maintainers prepped and repaired the mighty Eagle jets while the Eagle drivers meticulously cleared the skies of all hostile adversaries while protecting our fellow Navy and Air Force aviators as they destroyed their ground base objectives," said Col. Jeffery Gustafson, 33rd FW vice commander. Col. Glenn Ferguson, 33rd Maintenance Group commander, noted that the unit's maintainers "produced an average 95.7 percent aircraft mission capability rate for all deployed aircraft, 14.7 percent higher than standard." The 33rd FW is inactivating as Eglin picks up the F-35 joint schoolhouse mission. For the 63 FS, the last deployment came in late April, when unit airmen participated in Exercise Balikatan '09 in the Philippines, flying F-16 close air support training missions with other service and Philippine ground controllers. Just getting there was half the battle, according to Lt. Col. Jack Maixner, 63 FS commander, who said, "We re-learned that logistics is key to any operation." The 63 FS stood down on May 22

On January 14th, 2008 the 63 Fighter Squadron started a course that caught a few aviation

headlines. They began training pilots selected to fly the F-22 Raptor, pilots who have never flown a fighter before. Up to this point F-22 pilots were hand picked from the existing fighter community. In the first of what will be many classes started with four pilots. The course, called the Raptor Lead-in course, is a five-week introduction to fast aircraft. Training pilots can get themselves comfortable in the F-16 before moving on to the \$169 million single seat F-22. Planning for this course started back in early 2007. The four pilots have some flight time already with the T-38 Talon. Some of the key things these trainee pilots will learn are; night flying, day and night landing, air-to-air refueling and to increase their ability to perform anti-G straining techniques. Once the course is completed the student pilots will move on to the 43rd Fighter Squadron out of Tyndall AFB, Florida where they will spend the next two years training with the F-22.

In February of 2008 the base commander Brig. Gen. Tom Jones announced that the 63 FS will be inactivated. The General based his decision on the squadrons historical heritage. This ultimate decision had to be made as a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Committees decision that Luke AFB give up twenty-five block 25s. Although the 63 FS does not fly the block 25 it will give up its F-16s to the 61st FS which does operate the block 25. The first of these block 25 F-16s are set to leave Luke AFB in November 2008 with the squadron being closed out by the spring of 2009.

On April 4th, 2009 the 63 graduated its last class of F-16 pilots at which time it continued the process to inactivate. Officially the squadron stood down on May 22nd, 2009 after 68 years of service.

63 FIS Wurtsmith AFB, Michigan, commencing Spring 1955 with F-89Ds replacing F-86Ds. Replaced by 445th FIS @ Wurtsmith under Project Arrow August 18, 1955.

The 63 FIS was the only squadron of what had originally been the famous WWII 56 Fighter Group, "Zemke's Wolfpack," to fly the F-89 while assigned to the Air Defense Command. When stationed at Wurtsmith AFB, Oscoda, Michigan, the 63 FIS switched from F-86Ds to F-89Ds in early 1955, and by the end of June they had twenty-seven Scorpions assigned.

While at Wurtsmith, the 63 FIS was attached to the 4706th Air Defense Wing, which was based at O'Hare IAP, Park Ridge, Illinois. On August 18, 1955, under Project Arrow, the 63 FIS designation was transferred to O'Hare to replace the 42nd FIS, a F-86D squadron whose designation was thus transferred to Greater Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Replacing the 63 FIS designation at Wurtsmith was the 445th FIS.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

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Steven E. Clay. *US Army Order of Battle 1919-1941*. Combat Studies Institute Press. US Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Nd.