



FACT SHEET

History of the Nebraska Air National Guard

The Nebraska Air National Guard is the second oldest Air National Guard unit in the nation. It began with the activation of the 401st Fighter Squadron at Westover Field, Massachusetts on July 1, 1943.

The squadron was based in England during World War II, flying P-38s and P-51s on nearly 250 combat missions. It was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for outstanding serving during the German offensive of Dec. 2, 1944. The unit also took part in the European Air Offensive and campaigns in the Ardennes, Northern France, Normandy, Rhineland and Central Europe. It was deactivated on Nov. 7, 1944.

The 401st was assigned to the National Guard and redesignated as the 173rd Fighter Squadron, Nebraska Air National Guard. The Nebraska unit was activated at Lincoln, Neb. and equipped with P-51 Mustangs on July 26, 1946. The unit has been operational since that date and has been an Air Force gained unit since the U.S. Air Force became a separate branch of service in 1947.

In 1948, Nebraska was one of the first five states to receive the F-80 Shooting Star jet aircraft. The Nebraska Air National Guard also held its first annual training in Lincoln that same year.

One of the Nebraska Air National Guard hangars was destroyed by fire in March 1949. All records and equipment in the hangar were lost including two B-26s that were used to tow targets for air-to-air gunnery. There were no injuries in the fire. One month later the Air Guard was back for Operation Snowbound, an airlift of food and hay for farm families and livestock isolated by a severe blizzard in western Nebraska.

In 1950 the unit was the first Air National Guard organization to win the Winston P. Wilson Trophy as the outstanding jet fighter unit. It was the first of five Wilson trophies to be awarded to the Nebraska organization.

The unit was mobilized on April. 1, 1951, and put into active service for the Korean conflict as part of the 132nd Fighter-Bomber Wing at Dow AFB, Bangor, Maine. The following year, the wing moved to Alexandria AFB, La., where it completed its tour of active duty.

The unit was released from active duty on Dec. 31, 1952, after 21 months of meritorious service. The unit flew P-51s throughout its tour of active duty. The F-80s had been given to the Air Defense Command during the Korean Conflict and would not return to the unit until the fall of 1953.

The first major task when the unit returned from active duty was to rebuild the organization to full strength and combat readiness. The immediate work focused on recruiting personnel and obtaining tactical aircraft, since the unit was still flying the P-51 (which was later redesignated the F-51).

In 1953 Maj. Gen. Guy N. Henninger, already the adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard, switched from the Army Guard to the Air Guard. The transfer made General Henninger the first Air Guard adjutant general in the nation. Four years later Col. John M. Campbell became a brigadier general, the first officer promoted from within the Nebraska Air Guard to flag rank. Campbell remained the senior officer of the Nebraska Air Guard for 19 years. He and then Capt. Fred H. Bailey Jr. were founding members of the unit in 1946. Bailey

served as the full-time base detachment commander from 1948 until 1976, ultimately retiring as the assistant adjutant general for air in 1980 with the rank of colonel.

Although the F-80 Shooting Star returned in the fall of 1953, the flying training program was delayed for several months while all of the jets were sent to the Lockheed factory for a complete modernization. The aircraft returned to the 173rd in time to train pilots and mechanics before deployment to Casper, Wyo. in August 1954. That same year the squadron was redesignated the 173rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron and assigned to the Air Defense Command. The 173rd's mission was to maintain a level of effectiveness to destroy enemy airborne weapons and provide base services to support the flying mission.

An additional unit was authorized for the Nebraska Air Guard in February 1955. The 8173rd Replacement Training Squadron increased the total strength of the unit by 100 personnel, bring the total authorized strength to about 800.

With the reactivation in 1955 of the Lincoln AFB, a Strategic Air Command base, the Nebraska Air National Guard was needed and was authorized new facilities. A new site was located south of the commercial air terminal adjoining the Air Force base. The unit moved to its new facilities in the fall of 1956. The base then consisted of a two-story hangar with offices on each side, base supply building, an installation building and a motor pool. Two years later the unit moved into the vacated Naval Reserve hangar and turned its "old" hangar over to the Army National Guard. Since that time, additional facilities were built on the 166 acres of the Lincoln Air National Guard Base. Army aviation and other Army units remain tenants today.

In January 1957 the F-80s gave way to the F-86D all-weather interceptors. In late 1959, the unit changed to the F-86L all-weather fighter. The unit still had an air defense mission.

On July 1, 1960, the National Guard Bureau reorganized the 173rd as part of the 155th Fighter Group and increased staffing to about 900 people. The new unit consisted of Headquarters, 155th Fighter Group, 155th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 155th Material Squadron, the 155th Dispensary and the 173rd Fighter Squadron. The group was part of the 132nd Air Defense Wing headquartered at Des Moines, Iowa.

In those final fighter years, the unit had won the coveted Spaatz Trophy as the Guard's finest flying unit in 1963, following second and third place finishes in 1961 and 1962 respectively. In 1962, 1963 and 1964 the unit won its second, third and fourth Winston P. Wilson Trophies.

In May 1964 the mission of the Nebraska Air Guard changed from air defense to tactical reconnaissance using the RF-84 Thunderflash aircraft. The 173rd became the 173rd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron and the 155th Fighter Group became the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group. At the same time, the Nebraska Air National Guard was placed under the operational command of the Tactical Air Command.

In 1967 the .50 caliber guns were removed from the RF-84s and the Nebraska aircrews quickly learned the meaning of the unofficial motto of tactical reconnaissance: "Alone, Unarmed and Unafraid."

The first RF-4C Phantom II came to Lincoln in November 1971. In 1972 the unit began its conversion from the RF-84F to the most modern reconnaissance aircraft available. The Nebraska Air National Guard, as the eyes of command, provided visual and photographic intelligence on the disposition, movement and activity of friendly and hostile force.

The unit deployed overseas for the first time in May 1980 to Eskisehir Air Base, Turkey. It returned to the base again in October 1984 and October 1987. While there, the unit provided photographic and visual reconnaissance during North Atlantic Treaty Organization exercises.

Additionally, the unit's Civil Engineering Squadron traveled to Honduras in 1987, Israel in 1990 and Panama in 1991, while the Security Police Flight served in Honduras in 1991.

In April 1992 the unit was directed to convert to the KC-135R Stratotanker mission when the U.S. Air Force decided to begin retiring the last of the F-4 Phantom II aircraft. The conversion to the aerial refueling mission began in January 1993 with the arrival of the first tanker aircraft.

On Oct. 1, 1995, the unit was redesignated as the 155th Air Refueling Wing after achieving initial operational capability in the refueling mission three months early. They successfully passed their first post-conversion inspection and Operational Readiness Inspection conducted by Air Mobility Command in April 1996 and were certified fully combat ready to support wartime tasking in the aerial tanker mission.

Since then, the unit has supported operations around the world including Operation Northern Watch from bases in Turkey, Operation Southern Watch from bases in Saudi Arabia and Operation Deny Flight from bases in Germany, Italy and southern France.

In April 1999, the unit flew its first-ever combat missions. It was the first Air Guard tanker unit to be asked to support Operation Allied Force, the NATO bombing campaign of Serbia and Kosovo. The unit successfully deployed two aircraft and more than 80 personnel to Germany in less than three days and soon became the lead unit for all American tanker operations from the German air base.

During the course of the unit's involvement in the campaign, Nebraska aircrew successfully downloaded more than 800,000 gallons of fuel. They also helped successfully recover a downed F-16 pilot during the operation.

The aircraft and personnel returned to Nebraska in May 1999 when they were replaced by fellow Air Guard and Air Force Reserve units called to federal active duty by President Bill Clinton.

The Nebraska Air Guard's biggest modern challenge, however, came on Sept. 11, 2001, during the moments following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Within hours after the attacks, members of the Air National Guard began voluntarily reporting to the base for expected duty. Among these airmen were members of the 155th Security Forces Squadron who immediately help take the base to its highest security level in the base's history. The Air Guardsmen would remain on duty for nearly two years.

The Nebraska Air Guard flew its first combat missions in support of the Global War on Terrorism on the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001, when tanker crews flew two support missions over the continental United States, refueling aircraft patrolling over American cities as part of the Operation Noble Eagle – the defense of the American homeland.

Nebraska Air Guard crews and support staff were mobilized for duty in October 2001 when they were ordered to Moron, Spain, to begin supporting the air bridge over the Atlantic Ocean as the United States and allies began preparing for Operation Enduring Freedom and the initial bombing campaign of Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Air Guardsmen – the first to be mobilized to active duty since the Korean War – would remain in Spain until May 2002 when the aircraft and crews were released back to Lincoln.

Because of a scheduled transition of the KC-135R Stratotanker to the Global Air Traffic Management system in 2003, Nebraska Air Guard crews and aircraft did not participate in the opening stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom in February 2003. That doesn't mean that the Nebraska Air Guard sat on the sidelines, however. Dozens of Nebraska Air Guardsmen were called upon to serve during the opening months of the war including the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron and members of the 155th Supply Squadron, 155th Security Forces Squadron and

representatives of other Nebraska Air Guard units deployed overseas to provide assistance during the war.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing completed its transition to the GATM system in late 2004 – the first Air Guard unit and among the first Air Force units to transition to the system – and deployed to Incirlik Air Base Turkey from October – December 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While in Turkey, 155th ARW air crews refueled cargo and combat aircraft directly involved in the continuing effort in Iraq.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, approximately 600 members of the Nebraska Air National Guard have deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, serving at locations around the globe including bases in Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, Kuwait, Spain, France, Germany and several others.

On January 7, 2005, the Nebraska Air Guard once again made history with the official federal recognition of the new 170th Operations Support Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., the first Nebraska Air Guard unit to be activated outside of Lincoln. The new unit has an authorized strength of 80 Airmen who are responsible for training new crew members and supporting the flying operations of the 55th Wing, the largest wing in Air Combat Command. The 170th is the first of its kind – an associate unit supporting an active duty combat wing.

Along with its federal mission, the Nebraska unit is tasked with supporting the state government as well. Since its organization in 1946, it has answered the governor's call on numerous occasions including Operation Snow-bound in early 1949 and a special call in May 1975 when 435 Air Guard members were activated to assist in securing a tornado ravaged area in Omaha. In November 1997, Air Guard members were once again called to state active duty to assist in helping Lincoln and neighboring communities recover from an early snowstorm that cut power to nearly one million Nebraskans - as a part of Operation Bush Hog.

Col. Bailey passed command of the group to then Lt. Col. Richard E. Bertrand in February 1976. Bailey became the assistant adjutant general for air until his retirement in 1980.

Bertrand commanded the group until March 1985 when Col. Bruce Schantz took the helm. Bertrand served as chief of staff and then assistant adjutant general for air until retiring as a brigadier general in January 1990. Col. Schantz retired in August 1992, passing command of the unit to Col. Carl A. Lorenzen. He led the unit until 1995, when he handed the unit to Col. Mark R. Musick. Lorenzen went on to serve as chief of staff and assistant adjutant general for air until his retirement in 1999. In August 1998 Col. Robert Bailey, the son of retired Col. Fred Bailey Jr., assumed command of the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing from Musick. Musick was promoted to brigadier general and served as the chief of staff and the assistant adjutant general for Air. Musick was promoted to the rank of major general and served as the Mobilization Assistant to Deputy Commander USSTRATCOM, Nebraska ANG, Offutt AFB, NE. Maj. Gen. Musick retired in 2008 with

In January 2004 Bailey passed command of the 155th Air Refueling Wing to Col. Steve Adams, the former 155th Operations Group Commander. Bailey was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and served as the commander of the Joint Forces Headquarters, Air Guard chief of staff, and assistant adjutant general for Air, Nebraska Air National Guard. Bailey has since been promoted to the rank of major general and serves as the Air National Guard assistant to the commander, United States Air Forces, Europe, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

In September 2007, Col Richard J. Evans III assumed command of the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing from Adams. Evans was the former commander of the 170th Group, Offutt AFB, NE. Adams was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and serves as the assistant adjutant general for Air.

Adams retired in May 2010 and Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac was appointed the assistant adjutant general for Air.