

# 125<sup>th</sup> FIGHTER WING



## **LINEAGE**

125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group (Air Defense) organized 1 Jul 1956

125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group, 1 Oct 1972

## **STATIONS**

Jacksonville, FL

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

#### **Mission Aircraft**

#### **Support Aircraft**

C-130H

## **COMMANDERS**

BG Leon A. Moore, Jr. Nov. 28, 1952 Sept. 30, 1966

Col James R. Higgins Dec. 20, 1966

BG William M. Whittaker Dec. 2, 1976

Col Dean T. Biggerstaff Dec. 19, 1980

Col Marion D. Garrett June 13, 1987

Col Emmett R. Titshaw, Jr. Jan. 30, 1990

Col Craig R. McKinley Oct. 1, 1991

Col Charles V. Ickes II March 2, 1996

Col James A. Firth Aug. 11, 2002

Col Scott K. Stacy Nov. 7, 2004

Brigadier General James O. Eifert

December 2002 - June 2008, Commander, 125th Operations Group

January 2011 - February 2013, Commander, 125th Fighter Wing

Brig. Gen. James A. Firth

August 1999 - March 2001, Commander, 159th Fighter Squadron

August 2002 - November 2004, Commander, 125th Fighter Wing

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

### **Campaign Streamers**

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

### **EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

By 1 July 1956, the Florida air National Guard was reorganized to the 125 Fighter Group (Air Defense). The activation of the 125 Fighter Group, plus conversion to the F-86D resulted in a self-sustaining unit capable of performing the air defense mission in all types of weather day or night.

During the same period, members of the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group participated in training exercises conducted by the Air Force Air Defense Command and Air National Guard Bureau including operations Minuteman, Late Summer, and Winter's End.

In Jul 1960, another major conversion began when the unit converted from the F-86L to the F-102. The new fighter wasn't an all-weather interceptor but provided many obstacles and new challenges to the unit. Throughout this conversion the maintenance section of the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was faced with and successfully solved the problems of training its personnel for the much advanced and highly technical weapon system of the F-102. During the transition period to the F-102, it was necessary to continue operation of the F-86L to perform Air Defense Command alert status on a 24-hour basis. Due to the scope of the technical changes involved in this transition many of the maintenance personnel of the unit were sent to various technical schools. A United States Air Force mobile training detachment was brought to the base for six months to ensure that all members of the unit had successfully completed training in the respective fields.

Changes and advancements continued through 1961 and 1962. During this period the Air Base facilities added approximately \$500,000 worth of additions. This included a new engine shop, alert hanger, supply and equipment shed, weapons calibrator shelter, ammunition maintenance shop and electrical distribution system. Also, during this period the 125 Material Squadron (Air Defense) was organized and assigned to the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group.

The responsibility for training, inspection and the operational control of the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group

was transferred from the 14th Air Force to the first Air Force on 30 Jun 1968 with the continuing support of the 32nd Air Division.

After exactly 21 years, the Florida Air National Guard Goony Bird was reassigned on 5 June 1968 to active Air Force and sent to Howard Air Force Base in the Panama Canal Zone. It was to be used by the 24th Air Commando Wing as a troop transport for troop operations.

To replace the C-47, the Florida air National Guard received a C-54G which previously accrued 22,100 flying hours including use in the Berlin airlift and had been in storage at the boneyard at Davis Monthan AFB, AZ nine months.

One of the most significance events of 1968 and the history of the Florida Air National Guard became a reality on 24 Oct 1968 when the 125 Fighter Group moved into multimillion dollar facility that has been used as a model for other air National Guard bases in other states. The city of Jacksonville began planning the new airport in 1962 to include relocating the Air National Guard facility leased to the federal government. The go-ahead was sounded in May 1965 when the citizens of Jacksonville passing an airport bond referendum. Construction began in Sep 1967 and was completed on schedule.

During 1969, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group deployed to Puerto Rico for second time to release the Puerto Rican Squadron which conducted training missions in the continental United States.

The 125<sup>th</sup> organizational structure and dual deputy management system continued without significant change until 1969 when the organizational structure was changed to include the 125 Civil Engineering Flight. On 1 Oct 1972, the 125<sup>th</sup> was redesignated as the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group with no change in its air defense mission.

Early in 1980 the Air Force outstanding unit award was presented to the unit. The award was for the time between 1 June 1977 and 30 April 1979 and the following units shared in the award headquarters Florida air National Guard, 125 FIG, 159 FIS, 125 CAMS, 125 CSS, 125 United States Air Force Clinic, 125 CEF, and the 125 SPF.

The group commander Col. William M Whitaker was appointed to the assistant adjutant general for air and promoted to the grade of BG. Command of the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group seceded to then LTC Deant J. Biggerstaff. He was immediately promoted to Col on 19 Dec 1980.

On 1 Oct 1972, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was re-designated as the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group with no change in its Air Defense mission. On 1 Oct 1979 the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group received reassignment orders to the Air Defense Division of Tactical Air Command (TAC). The Air Force announced the withdrawal of the Aerospace Defense Command (ADC) as a separate command and assigned the Air Defense role to Tactical Air Command. Outstanding Unit Award; the Larry Elliott Chapel In 1980, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group received its first Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. The award represented outstanding achievement from 1977 to 1979.

The 125th Fighter Interceptor Group flew the F-106 for 12 years, but by the end of 1986 the U.S. Air Force began to phase out the F-106 and convert the units flying the F-106 to the F-4. The F-

4 was not ideal for the 125<sup>th</sup> mission and the Air National Guard Bureau decided to transition the 125<sup>th</sup> to the F-16. In January 1987, the unit converted to the F-16A. On 1 Apr 1987, the 125<sup>th</sup> jets became the first F-16 unit to sit alert in an Air Defense role as a fighter interceptor. That conversion marked the 11th fighter aircraft conversion for the unit. On Friday 17 Apr, 1987 less than three weeks after assuming alert responsibilities two F-16s from the 125<sup>th</sup> intercepted two Soviet TU-142 Bear-F anti-submarine warfare aircraft about 350 miles off the coast of Jacksonville. Counterdrug Mission

On 1 Apr 1988, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group alert mission at Homestead AFB, FL was redesignated Detachment 1. The mission continued without change as a second alert facility for the 125<sup>th</sup>. The 125<sup>th</sup> supported the drug interdiction mission in Florida. In Apr 1989, the 125<sup>th</sup> began providing support to the U.S. Customs Service. 125<sup>th</sup> personnel received training from customs officials on proper cargo search procedures and customs service methods of operation. In February 1990, the 125<sup>th</sup> accepted a C-130H. In 1992, the unit added a C-26 to the 125<sup>th</sup> inventory.

Due to budget issues, the U.S. Congress decided to close several alert operations around the country and so the alert mission that began in Jacksonville in 1957 ceased on 1 Oct 1993. The Homestead alert site became the unit's sole alert site. Jacksonville would not have another alert mission again for another eight years. The 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing continued to play a major support role in the nation's struggle against the import, manufacture, distribution and use of illegal drugs. Florida was one of the first states to receive the C-26, a popular tool for law enforcement agencies to use in the domestic drug war. Serving in a variety of roles to assist federal, state, county and local agencies, the C-26's operating territory encompassed the Southeast Region of the United States including the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Florida Keys.

The 125<sup>th</sup> was redesignated the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing on 1 Aug 1995. In 1995, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing converted from the F-16 to the F-15 as its primary fighter aircraft. Five years after the conversion to the F-15, Fighter Data Link (FDL) technology was incorporated into the F-15 allowing the pilots to link flight data with multiple users, providing realtime information on air and ground threats. The 125<sup>th</sup> continues to incorporate newer technology in its 1970s era F-15s.

During September and October 2002, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing hosted Agile Archer 2002 at Naval Air Station Key West, Fla. The highlight of the exercise was to train with the German Air Force MiG-29 and pilots from Laage, Germany. In addition, the deployment enabled Navy F-18 and 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing F-15 pilots to obtain unprecedented experience in combat tactics against the MiG-29 as the German Air Force was soon to be in the process of transitioning the Laage Squadron from the MiG-29 to the Eurofighter.

**2005 7 Sep** The 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Florida ANG, evacuated one C-130E and five F-15A aircraft from their home station at Jacksonville IAP to NAS Key West in response to Tropical Storm Ophelia. Their remaining fourteen assigned aircraft were placed in hangars at Jacksonville IAP.

The 159<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Louisiana ANG, implemented Force Protection Condition-Bravo at NAS New Orleans.

**19 Sep** In response to Tropical Storm Rita, the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Detachment 1, Florida ANG, located at NAS Key West, evacuated its F-15A fighters to Jacksonville IAP, Florida; its personnel evacuated to Miami. The 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing coordinated the evacuation with First Air Force, the Southeast Air Defense Sector, and the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

Twelve personnel from the 280<sup>th</sup> Combat Communications Squadron, Alabama ANG, deployed from Ocean Springs, Mississippi to Lafayette Airport, Louisiana in preparation for Tropical Storm Rita.

#### 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing Alert Detachment Commanders

(Location: Homestead ARB, Fla. unless noted other)

Lt. Col. Harry B. Hoover (New Orleans) Jan. 7, 1973 July 26, 1974

Lt. Col. Jack H. McDougall Oct. 1, 1983 Sept. 3, 1992

Lt. Col. Jack H. McDougall (Key West) Sept. 3, 1992 Dec. 1, 1993

Lt. Col. Greg W. Visyak (Key West) Nov. 15, 1993 Dec. 31, 1995

Lt. Col. William B. Burney Jan. 1, 1996 Nov. 13, 1998

Major Rolf E. Thyrrre Nov. 13, 1998 July 15, 1999

Lt. Col. David W. Woods July 15, 1999 Sept. 14, 2002

Lt. Col. William S. Bair Sept. 14, 2002 Jan. 7, 2005

Lt. Col. Michael O. Birkeland Jan. 7, 2005



Sources  
AFHRA

## 125th Fighter Wing

Commander

Col. James Eifert

Location: Jacksonville International Airport

Mission: To provide mission-ready Airmen and equipment to combatant commanders in support of operations worldwide. To protect life and property, preserve peace, order and public safety at home. To provide air defense for the southeastern United States, as directed by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), from Charleston, South Carolina to the southern tip of Florida and across the Florida panhandle.

The 125th Fighter Wing is the largest unit in the Florida Air National Guard. Its primary aircraft is the F-15 Eagle fighter jet. The F-15 Eagle is an all-weather, extremely maneuverable, tactical fighter designed to permit the Air Force to gain and maintain air supremacy over the battlefield. The Eagle's air superiority is achieved through a mixture of unprecedented maneuverability and acceleration, range, weapons and avionics. It can penetrate enemy defense and outperform and outfight any current enemy aircraft.

The 125th Fighter Wing Detachment 1 at Homestead Air Reserve Base provides the Continental NORAD Region (CONR) commander rapid response to invasions of the sovereign airspace of the United States and respond with appropriate defense measures against all hostile actions directed at the people and property of the United States.

History: At the conclusion of World War II, work began to organize an Air National Guard unit for Florida. A National Guard Bureau document dated March 16, 1946, gave states permission to request an Air Force unit allotment. Months later, Florida accepted the 159th Fighter Squadron with an authorized strength of 50 officers and 303 enlisted men. Governor Millard F. Caldwell formally accepted the unit on Aug. 30, 1946, and full federal recognition was granted Feb. 9, 1947.

Qualifications for initial enlistment into the Florida Air National Guard required officers, pilots and other specialists to have served on active duty during WWII. Enlisted personnel needed at least six months of active duty service time since 1940 in any branch of the armed forces to be a member. About half of the squadron's original pilots were combat veterans, and a third were bomber pilots. Roughly half the enlisted personnel served in various branches of the armed forces during WWII.

The newly formed unit fell under the command of Lt. Col. William D. Haviland, with an initial assigned strength of eight officers and ten enlisted Airmen. A facility for housing the units became available in temporary WWII buildings on the west side of Thomas Cole Imeson Airport in Jacksonville, Fla. Upon the arrival of the unit's first aircraft, the P-51D Mustang at Imeson Airport, the 159th became the first operational Air National Guard unit in Florida. Manufactured by the North American Aviation Company, these P-51D fighter bombers are the most recognized and celebrated fighters of WWII. The 159th originally consisted of four units: the 159th Fighter Squadron; the 159th Utility Flight; the 159th Weather Station; and Detachment C, 217th Air Service Group.

During the second year of operation, the FLANG became one of the first six Air National Guard

squadrons in the United States equipped with jet aircraft. The conversion from the P-51D Mustang to the new F-80C Shooting Star jet became official Aug. 1, 1948, when the unit was re-designated the 159th Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled (159 FSJ). Major Leon A. Moore Jr. assumed command of the 159th Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled, on July 1, 1952.

Upon release from active duty for the Korean War, the unit returned July 9, 1952, with their new commander to Imeson Municipal Airport. The unit's F-84Es and all its ground equipment were turned over to the U.S. Air Force and left in Japan. On July 10, 1952, the 159th Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled, was re-designated the 159th Fighter Bomber Squadron, dissolving the 159th Utility Flight and integrating it into the unit. Six months later, the 159th Fighter Bomber Squadron was re-equipped with F-51H/Mustangs and re-designated the 159th Fighter Bomber Squadron Augmented (FBSA).

The unit integrated various support aircraft into its inventory during this period. The unit received T-6s for instrument training, B-26s (photo) for target towing, and C-47 and C-45 transports. During the early 1950s, the U.S. Air Force was in the process of rebuilding its squadrons with jet fighters and jet bombers and changes to the Florida Air National Guard aircraft inventory were constant, fast and furious. For example, from October to December 1954, the 159th FBSA was equipped with nine different types of aircraft including the T-6, B-26, C-45, C-47, C-54, F-51H, T-33, F-80, and F-86A. By the end of December 1954, things settled down and the 159 FBSA had an entire squadron of F-80Cs for the second time. There were 43 officers and warrant officers, and 472 enlisted men in the unit. In July 1955, while still equipped with F-80Cs, the unit was re-designated the 159th Fighter Interceptor Squadron with a mission change to Air Defense. By July 1, 1956, the unit reorganized into 125th Fighter Group (125 FG). The activation of the 125th coincided with the conversion to the F-86D Sabre Jet, an all weather interceptor. The F-86 made the 125th a self-sustaining unit capable of performing the Air Defense mission in all types of weather, day or night.

One of the most significant events in the history of the Florida Air National Guard occurred Oct. 24, 1968, when the 125th Fighter Group moved into a brand new, state of the art, multi-million dollar facility. The new Air Guard Base was located on 157.6 acres adjacent to the new Jacksonville International Airport. The new base was the first Air National Guard facility to be designed and constructed specifically for Air National Guard use. The new base became a model for future Air National Guard base construction projects around the country.

Seventeen years later, the FLANG would secure another 174.36 acres, and currently the FLANG holds a lease for a total of 343 acres with the Jacksonville Aviation Authority.

The 125th was re-designated the 125th Fighter Wing (FW) on Aug. 1, 1995. In 1995, the 125th Fighter Wing converted from the F-16 to the F-15 Eagle as its primary fighter aircraft. Five years after the conversion to the F-15, Fighter Data Link (FDL) technology was incorporated into the F-15 allowing the pilots to link flight data with multiple users, providing realtime information on air and ground threats. The 125th continues to incorporate newer technology in its 1970s era F-15s

Five geographically separated Florida Air National Guard units were recently consolidated under the 125th Fighter Wing in Jacksonville, Fla., in conformity with standard Air Force organizational structures. "This reorganization will enable all of us to work as one team to accomplish our missions more effectively," 125th FW Commander Col. Brian Simpler said in a Nov. 25 release. Before the reorganization in November, Florida was one of only two states with geographically separated units that reported directly to the Joint Forces Headquarters, according

to the release. Under the reorganization, the state's communications and REDHORSE squadrons will now fall under the 125th FW's mission support group, while its space control squadron, weather, and training flights will be assigned to the wing's operations group. Florida's 101st Air Operations Group and headquarters detachment at Tyndall Air Force Base are unaffected. The shift will impact some 500 air Guard personnel, officials stated. 2014