

## 186 FIGHTER SQUADRON



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

404 Fighter Squadron constituted, 25 May 1943  
Activated, 15 Jul 1943  
Inactivated, 10 Nov 1945  
Redesignated 186 Fighter Squadron, and allotted to ANG, 24 May 1946  
186 Fighter Squadron (SE) extended federal recognition, 27 Jun 1947  
Redesignated 186 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, Nov 1951  
Redesignated 186 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Nov 1953  
Redesignated 186 Fighter Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

#### STATIONS

Richmond AAB, VA, 15 Jul 1943  
Camp Springs AAFld, MD, 30 Sep 1943 (detachment operated from Millville AAFld, NJ, 17 Nov-31 Dec 1943)  
Richmond AAB, VA, 18 Jan-14 Feb 1944  
Bisterne, England, 7 Mar 1944 (operated from Ibsley, England, 21 Apr-14 May 1944)  
Beuzeville, France, 23 Jun 1944  
Perthes, France, 16 Sep 1944  
Dole/Tavaux, France, 26 Sep 1944 (operated from Dijon, France, 12 Nov-22 Dec 1944)  
Tantonville, France, 20 Dec 1944  
Metz, France, 15 Feb 1945  
Frankfurt/Eschborn, Germany, 7 Apr 1945  
Furth, Germany, 5 May 1945  
Horsching, Austria, 16 Aug 1945  
Stuttgart, Germany, 13 Sep-Oct 1945

Camp Shanks, NY, 9-10 NOV 1945  
Great Falls, MT

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

371 Fighter Group, 15 Jul 1943-10 NOV 1945

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

#### **Mission Aircraft**

P-47, 1943-1945

F-51, 1947

F-86, 1953

F-94, 1955

F-89, 1956

F-89, 19858

F-89, 1960

F-102, 1966

TF-102

F-106, 1972

F-16, 1987

F-15

#### **Support Aircraft**

L-5, 1947

T-6, 1947

C-47, 1947

B-26, 1947

B-25K, 1951

T-33, 1953

C-45H, 1954

L-5

AT-6

C-45

C-47

B-25

B-26

C-54

### **COMMANDERS**

LTC Sperry

Maj Clifford Owen

Maj John H. Brown, Jr.

LTC Jack A. Blacker, June 22

Cpt Roger D. Young, Jul 12

LTC George W. Porter

LTC Leonard A. Gremaux

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

None

### **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France, Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citation

Germany, 15-21 Mar 1945

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army

6 Jun-30 Sep 1944

## **EMBLEM**



The 186 Fighter Interceptor Squadron adopted its official "Charlie Chicken" patch in 1954. While the actual designers of the patch are lost to history, the patch sported a character form of an eagle pacing across and guarding the northern perimeter of the world. The two pistols held by the eagle represent the "Montana Cowboy" and symbolize the shooting down of any prospective enemy.

## **MOTTO**

**NICKNAME**

Charlie Chicken  
Vigilantes

**OPERATIONS**

Combat in ETO, 12 Apr 1944-9 May 1945

Shortly after the end of WWII the planning for a Montana Air National Guard unit was undertaken. Each state had been assured of one air unit and Great Falls was selected as the site for Montana's. The unit was to be stationed at the Great Falls Municipal Airport in some of the buildings that had been built to house the Seventh Ferry Group during the war.

In late April, 1947, LTC Willard Sperry began building the Montana Air National Guard at Gore Field. began interviewing prospective guardsmen in his Gore Hill office during the day and at the downtown Chamber of Commerce office in the evenings. In May 1947, local newspapers began running articles about the soon-to-be-formed air unit and Sperry expanded his recruiting efforts by visiting groups like the American Legion Club to answer questions posed by interested ex-servicemen.

On 27 Jun 1947, the 186 Fighter Squadron was activated and federally recognized. Within two weeks, six P-51Ds arrived.

At about this same time the Montana Adjutant General received word that the new Great Falls unit would be equipped with 25 P-51, two C-47, two A-26, several L-5 and two AT-6. It was rumored that the P-51s would be replaced by P-80 during 1948.

First five members of the new Air Guard unit were Cpt Robert Dardis, Maintenance Officer; Cpt Edmonds, Supply Officer; MSg Eino KM, Inspector; SSg Charles Van Diest, and Sgt Don Burditt, Aircraft Mechanics. They were sworn in on 1 Apr 1947, and joined the original Army Air Force instructor team of LTC Sperry, Msg McCarthy, Administrator; and TSg Jack Van Kirk, Maintenance.

By 27 Jun 1947, the unit had grown to 74 members: 35 officers and 39 enlisted men. On that date the 186 Fighter Squadron was activated and Federally recognized. On its date of activation, the new organization's manning document authorized 49 officers and 303 enlisted personnel. Also activated were the 186's subordinate units, the 227th Services Group, Detachment "C"; the 186 Utility Flight, and the 186 Weather Station, Type A.

When activated, the 186's aircraft and equipment were in short supply. It possessed no fighters, but had one L-5 and two AT-6s on hand for the recognition ceremony.

Six P-51Ds arrived within about two weeks after the unit was activated and on 26 Jul 1947, two fighters and the two AT-6s participated in an airshow at Glasgow.

Early days of the organization were ones of growth and challenge. There was a shortage of almost everything: money, supplies, and equipment. According to retired Col Rex Tanberg, Sr., when the first P-51s arrived, the unit borrowed a 300 gallon fuel tank from a downtown Texaco station. "All we could scrounge up at the time was a hand pump that put out a quart of gas per revolution," Tanberg recalls, "and it took three guys to refuel an airplane: one to pump, one to hold the hose in the airplane tank, and another resting his arms until it was his turn to pump again." The P-51 held 453 gallons of fuel.

LTC Willard S. Sperry Commander and Air Advisor for the 186 Fighter Squadron from 27 Jun 1947 to 17 Sep 1947. Born in CA, killed 17 Sep 1947 in B-26 crash on a mountain southeast of Helena Charles L. Glover, Sgt. ANG, age 22 married, 3 children. Airplane and Engine Mechanic for the 186 Fighter Squadron Just 89 days after the 186 was activated, LTC Sperry and Sgt Charles Glover left Great Falls in the unit's A-26 and headed toward Helena to pick up Montana Adjutant General A.H. Mitchell who was scheduled to attend a conference in Columbus, OH. As Sperry neared Helena he entered a heavy snow storm and reported that his plane was icing as he began his descent over mountains north of the city. The aircraft was heard high over Helena airport, but radio communications were broken and a short time later the craft was assumed down. The most extensive air search in Montana history for the men and machine was conducted without success. Aircraft from the Army, National Guard, and private sector spent weeks searching the mountains around Helena. Ground search was not possible due to deep snow and even an approximate location of the mishap was not known. The A-26 had crashed at the 9,000 foot level of a mountain 40 miles southeast of Helena and had been covered by snow during the fateful storm.

After LTC Sperry's death, Maj Clifford Owen assumed command of the unit while Col Harold E. Kofahl was named Senior Air Instructor.

Gore Field was the location of the 186's first encampment in June 1948 and most activities were directed at conversion to the F-51D

1948 also saw the first call for the unit to perform a state mission when the Yellowstone River was plagued by several large ice jams and threatened serious flooding. Squadron F-51s bombed the jams, successfully breaking them up. Then in early 1949 the unit was called upon by the Pondera County Sheriff to help with an aerial search for villains who had robbed the Conrad bank. Four aircraft responded but they were unable to spot the culprits. In April a spring blizzard blanketed portions of northern Montana, especially the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Fighters flew scouting missions to locate remote cabins and stalled vehicles, and were followed by C-47 cargo aircraft that dropped food and clothing. Urgent pleas from ranchers in Cascade, Glacier, Liberty, and Toole counties were answered by the dropping of hay from C-47's to starving livestock.

On 15 Aug 1946, 1LT John R. Honeychurch was killed in the crash of his F-51 at the foot of Gore Hill. Honeychurch was returning from Glasgow when his fighter ran out of fuel.

The day of our birth was 27 June 1947. The 186 Fighter Squadron was formed with Lt. Col. Willard S. Sperry as Commander. Our first encampment was June 1948 at Gore Field, that year we won the Air Race from Idaho Air Guard with the blazing speed of 368 mph flown by a F-51.

Encampment in 1949 was held at Moses Lake, Washington. This was a very notable year in our history . The founding of the original "Guard Club", later known as "Kinky Curley's Lost Horizon Club", and which is now known as the "120 Club" . The 1950 encampment was held at Walla Walla, Washington.

18 January 1951. Active duty - Korea . We were ready for our first assignment which was Moody AFB, Georgia, and then later on to George AFB, Victorville, California. The group was split up with some personnel serving in Korea, and others in Ohio and Malmstrom AFB. 31 December 1952 - Home Again!

The unit was reorganized again January 1953 with Capt. Rodger D. Young as Commander.

The 1953 encampment was held at Boise, Idaho. (The JET AGE began in October of 1953.) We were the first Guard unit in the USA to receive the F -86A - the fighter of Korean fame . The expansion program of 1954 gave us six new buildings. The 1954 and 1955 encampments were again held at Boise . We received the F - 94 for a very short period of time .

A new aircraft the F -89C brought us new frontiers to conquer. We moved into new quarters and the encampment was held at Gore Field. The Group organization changed, the 120th Fighter Group came into existence on 16 Apr 56.

We were awarded the National Flying Safety Award for 1957. The encampment was held at Casper Wyoming in 1958 and 1959. The O&T building opened for use in 1959.

During 1960, \$850,000 was spent on a runway extension when we took in to our midst the F - 89J aircraft.

A black day - January 25, 1962 - we lost many friends, along with our Governor Donald G. Nutter in an air tragedy near Wolf Creek.

On 30 July 1966 we received the F -102 Delta Dagger. Retraining began with tremendous success, but many new problems .

The 186 was notified on 4 Jul 1950, to prepare 10 F-51s for transfer to California as part of the Korean War buildup. Spare parts and equipment were loaded aboard a C-47 and the aircraft were ferried south. While the fighters were loaded aboard an aircraft carrier bound for Korea, the 10 pilots returned to Montana with the C-47.

Then on 18 Jan 1951, the 186 Fighter Squadron and the 186 Weather Station were placed on alert in preparation for call-up for active duty. When the units were ordered to active duty on 1 Apr 1951, manning consisted of 41 officers, one warrant officer, and 342 enlisted men. The Weather Station was disbanded and its personnel transferred to various active duty bases

By 15 May the unit was in operation at Moody AFB, GA, where it joined the 146th Fighter Wing. On 16 Apr the unit was transferred from the Continental Air Command to the Strategic Air Command and work was rapidly directed at changing from peacetime to wartime taskings. Another move took place in Nov when the 186 was transferred to George AFB, CA, where it was reassigned to the Tactical Air Command with a new mission of Ground Support as opposed to its previous one of Fighter Escort. During the last half of 1952 the 186 began its preparation for return to National Guard status.

In July, the squadron had been committed to assisting the Air Defense Command by performing the role of a fighter-interceptor squadron. As part of that mission, unit aircraft began standing runway alert from one hour before sunrise to two hours after sunset.

15 Oct 1952, was a memorable day for the 186 because on that day it received a T-33. By the end of the year pilots had logged almost 332 hours in the T-33. It would be "turned in" when the squadron was released from active duty.

The first T-33 was assigned the 186 on 24 Sep 1953

1 Jan 1953, saw the 186 officially transferred back to state control and settling in again at Gore Field. At that time, the organization was commanded by Cpt Roger D. Young

The jet age arrived on 2 Oct 1953 when the first F-86A arrived and began replacing the F-51s. That was the first jet fighter ever to land at Gore Field, and the first F-86 to be assigned to an Air National Guard Squadron. A T-33 had been permanently assigned on 24 Sep but, as one member said, "that one didn't count because we couldn't fight with it." The T-33 made its first flight from Gore Field on 6 Oct and the F-86 made its first operational flight on 8 Oct. By mid-Nov the unit had three of the JP-4 burners.

Arrival of the F-86s presented the unit with several challenges. Just starting the jet engines of the fighters was initially a problem since the fighter required an external source of electrical power and the 186 didn't possess an auxiliary power unit large enough start one. Being ever resourceful, maintenance people made a temporary fix by using a 400 amp APU connected in series with a 200 amp APU plus a 200 amp rectifier. By "overloading" all three units, line crews were able to obtain a start. Within a few months, new APU's arrived that allowed the crews to start three jets at once.

Squadron members wasted no time in showing off their new fighters. They hosted their first jet airshow in Nov and even gave then Governor J. Hugo Aronson a ride in the T-33.

By early 1954 there were 10 F-86s and two T-33s on station. Each of the fighters was named after a Montana city, based on population: Great Falls, Butte, Billings, Helena, Missoula, Anaconda, Bozeman, Kalispell, Miles City, and Cut Bank. The T-Birds were named Miss Yellowstone and Miss Glacier, while the C-47 was named Miss Montana.

Summer camp was again at Boise, Idaho's Gowen Field in 1955, with 35 officers and 335 enlisted men attending. That represented 88 percent of the unit's assigned strength. The main objective of the 1955 camp was aerial gunnery where unit pilots flew 240 sorties and fired 32,580 rounds of .50 Cal. ammunition. In addition to the gunnery flights, pilots flew 100 instrument and 37 night sorties.

Another component of the camp was completion of Basic Training for newly assigned airmen. A requirement existed for them to complete the last 56 hours of their basic program, but due to changes by the 142nd Wing, only 26 hours were actually performed. The remainder had to be made up upon return to Gore Field.

Shortly after its return to Great Falls from Idaho, The first F-89 arrived in August and flying opportunities expanded since the F-89 has a two man crew, pilot and radar observer. Conversion continued into 1956.

On April 16, 1956, the 120th Fighter Group (Air Defense) was activated and the 186 Fighter Squadron remained as the group's flying squadron. By the end of 1956 the unit had reached a strength of 550 men and with a new authorization to go to 1,000 people, recruiting became a permanent concern. About 150 people were recruited during 1957 and the group earned its first National Flying Safety Award.

Fighter Group began standing 5-minute alert on 1 Oct 1958, a tasking that would bring unanticipated change to the organization and that would continue for the next 38 years. Cold War tension, the "space race," and more advanced development of long range bombing tactics were factors influencing the shift in military strategy that called for rapid response capability.

Under control and direction of the 29th Air Division at Malmstrom AFB, the F-89's and two man alert crews stood ready in 14 hour shifts. The idea was that if distant early warning radars spotted unidentified radar targets approaching from the northern polar regions, alert interceptors could be scrambled and guided to the targets before they were within range to deliver weapons on U.S. and Canadian assets. The first unit members to go on alert were Cpt K.R. Dahlquist, Cpt H.S. Olson, 2LT R. E. Jones, 1Lt R. Souder, and Cpt E. Morris.

In Mar 1960 the 120th entered the nuclear arena when the unit's F-89H were replaced with F-89Js which were armed with the "Genie" nuclear missile.

An F-89J piloted by Air Force advisor Maj William D. Lewis, with Radar Observer 1Lt Ronald K. Poland crashed on takeoff on 18 Apr 1960. The fighter had just become airborne on a southwest heading from Gore Field when it failed to gain altitude and crashed about 1.5 miles



from the runway. The jet disintegrated on impact and a fire ensued. Both crewmen were killed. The cause of the accident was later determined to be a mechanical failure in the jet's elevator system. Lewis had been the group's Air Force Advisor for three and a half years, and Lt Poland had been assigned as Air Force Advisor for just three weeks before the fateful crash. The last fatal aircraft crash had been in 1949.

On 22 Mar 1962 a 120th F-89J crashed while attempting a landing at Gore Hill. Witnesses reported that the interceptor "bounced" when it landed, then nosed down hard, tearing off the landing gear and sliding into the dirt where it burst into flames. The fire was quickly extinguished by guard firemen. The pilot, 1Lt Paul E. Jones, suffered a broken foot and lower back injuries, and was unable to get away from the burning jet. His radar observer, 2Lt Kenneth J. Wickham, suffered burns to his face, but was still able to help Jones away from the fire.

In 1966, the big news was once again, conversion. After a decade and some 50,000 flying hours with the 120th the F-89 was being replaced with the F-102. The first F-102 was flown into Great Falls on 30 Jul 1966, by Maj Jim Aiken, a former member of the 120th. On 1 Aug, an active duty Air Force team arrived to assist with all aspects of the conversion. The team stayed just six months.

The morning of 4 Nov 1966 was a bittersweet one for many members of the 120th as the last F-89 left for Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, to be placed in storage.

"Deuces" were given unit markings and fuselage stripes were added to some. A jet with four stripes indicated General Young's airplane, while three stripes denoted LTC Whalen's fighter. Two stripes were on LTC Gremaux's plane, and one strip indicated a flight commander's bird.

In Aug, LTC Emmett Whalen and Maj Henry Olson narrowly escaped death when their F-102's collided in midair. The two were practicing a rocket intercept maneuver at 26,000 feet about 17 miles north of Joplin. As the two jets closed at a combined speed of about 1000 M.P.H., their wing tips scraped, throwing both aircraft wildly out of control. Both pilots ejected seconds later at an altitude of about 20,000 feet while their F-102's crashed just over 10 miles apart in sparsely populated areas. During the ejection LTC Whalen's helmet was torn off and the oxygen mask slammed into his face, knocking out some lower teeth and causing facial cuts. A local rancher, Lloyd Wolery, picked up Whalen and drove him to the Joplin hospital. Later that day he was flown to Malmstrom AFB hospital via USAF helicopter. Maj Olson ejected without injury, but when he landed in a plowed field he broke his ankle in several places. He was picked up by Lynn Edwards and Jesse Penley and also taken to Joplin. He too was later flown to Malmstrom's hospital.

Sep 1968 found Maj Harold Juedeman, the first 120th pilot to volunteer for a 6-month tour in Southeast Asia, landing his F-102 at Udorn, Thailand, in a heavy rain storm. His jet collided with another plane landing in the opposite direction. Juedeman's jet veered off the runway, and struck some parked equipment. He was thrown from his aircraft, suffered a concussion, and fractures of the nose, ribs, and right wrist. He fully recovered and returned to Great Falls to

continue his flying career.

The day of 24 Jun 1971 started normally enough for 1Lt Larry P. Lindseth as he left the runway headed towards Chester. Lindseth was the "target ship" in a two ship sortie planning to practice intercepts north of Chester. Lindseth was at 12,000 feet shortly after takeoff when the engine of his F-102 simply quit; it just flamed out. He put the jet into a glide (it seemed like it had a glide ratio about like a brick, he later quipped) and repeatedly attempted a restart, all to no avail. When he reached 4,000 feet he ejected. The fighter crashed and Lindseth landed safely a short distance away. He was picked up by an area rancher and later flown by helicopter to Malmstrom AFB Hospital where he was checked and released.

The big news in 1972 came at the first of the year when unofficial word was received that the 120th would convert to F-106s. By 1 Apr when the official order was received, the group was well on its way to accepting the newer jet. A substantial amount of pre-planning and proactive preparation had already taken place and unit members were "pumped up" well in advance. While some experts had predicted that it would take the unit six months or more to convert, the process was actually accomplished in just 59 days.

Technical training for maintenance and logistics functions were initiated in March and four pilots had been sent to instructor training. Further, the F-106 simulator had arrived on the "Hill" that month. In Apr the 120th received its first F-106 together with auxiliary equipment.

On 1 May the group stood down from its alert commitment and all F-102 flying ceased. Pilot ground training was begun and the four instructor pilots had returned. On 1 Jun flying training began. Also in Jun six weapons loading teams became operationally ready. When the 120th Fighter Group resumed alert status at 1200 hours on 30 Jun, 1972, more than 500 F-106 hours had been logged by pilots and several hundred personnel had been cross-trained to various specialties associated with the new weapons system.

F-106 was lost on 30 Oct 1972, about 10 miles south of Rudyard. The F-106B departed controlled flight at 0935, forcing the two pilots to eject. The pilots, 1Lt Jerry R. Shanahan and LTC Robert G. Colgan, USAF Flight Examiner, were uninjured. The aircraft crashed in a field, started a grass fire, but no one was injured.

Six weeks later a F-106 piloted by Lt Robert Livesay crashed 30 miles south of Big Sandy. Lt Livesay safely ejected from the stricken fighter. Again, no damage or injury was done on the ground.

A third F-106 was lost in July 1973 when it crashed into Red Plume Peak in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Moments before the crash, the pilot, Lt Dan Judge, radioed that he had departed controlled flight and that the aircraft was in a spin. He ejected from the jet which crashed on the 7,047 foot mountain and started a small forest fire. Judge landed safely and was picked up a short time later by an Army National Guard helicopter that happened to be in the area. The fire was controlled the next day by U.S. Forest Service crews after it had burned about five acres.

Two squadron pilots escaped serious injury on May 29 when their F-106's collided on the runway during a formation landing. The jets had touched down and were in their landing roll when one fighter, piloted by 2Lt Daniel Judge, veered into the other which was piloted by 2Lt Harold Rubin. Judge's jet basically sheared everything in front of the cockpit off Rubin's jet, then left the runway and overturned. Rubin's aircraft continued on for about 150 yards and then stopped just off the runway. When firefighters and security personnel arrived at the scene moments after the mishap, Lt Judge had already extricated himself from the overturned fighter by breaking out a section of the canopy and crawling through a narrow space between the canopy rail and the ground.

Tragedy struck the group on 9 Jun 1977, during unit participation in a large scale North American Air Defense Command exercise over Canada. 1Lt David L. Denning was flying an intercept during the exercise when his jet crashed in a heavily wooded area near the top of Crows Nest Pass near Blairmore, Alberta, Canada. There was speculation that Denning had mistaken the lights on a forest fire spotting tower for those of a target aircraft. Denning's jet crashed into the mountain, killing him instantly and starting a small forest fire.

3 Sep 1979 was a tragic day for the Montana Air Guard and the City of Dillon. A flight of two F-106's were launched to perform flyovers at White Sulfur Springs and Dillon as part of Labor Day celebrations. Cpt Joel O. Rude was flight leader and Cpt Charles Schultz was his wingman. Rude planned the flight and coordinated with officials in both communities before taking off in clear weather. After the White Sulfur Springs flyover the flight headed for Dillon at 13,000 feet. In Dillon the parade had gotten off to a late start 12 minutes behind schedule. The F-106's arrived on time and set up their approach for the first pass over the parade. The jets flew over the parade lowered their landing gear and began a final low speed pass. As they reached the Dillon Livestock Market grain elevator, the left wing of Cpt Rude's aircraft hit the 106 foot level of the 109 foot tall structure. The impact sent flaming jet fuel cascading down on the town, and the interceptor was thrown out of control. Rude ejected, but as the jet had started to roll, he was ejected downward and his chute did not have time to open. The F-106 rolled into the ground, adding to the inferno started by the falling fuel. The burning debris ignited a 17,000 gal. fuel storage tank at the Dillon Exxon bulk plant. Pandemonium understandably ensued as townspeople attempted to flee the scene. A major portion of Dillon was evacuated and fire crews from neighboring areas were called to help fight the blaze. Some 15 minutes after the initial impact, the grain elevator burst into flames. Most of the fires were quickly controlled but the elevator burned for about 24 hours. Two helicopters from a geological survey company were pressed into service to drop water on the flames and a US Forest Service air tanker was called to drop fire retardant on the elevator. While 16 people on the ground were injured, one critically, Capt Rude was the only fatality. It was fortunate that the crashing aircraft missed most of the parade and spectators.

Between Apr and Oct of that year, the 120th Fighter Interceptor Group was tasked to perform alert duties for the 84th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Castle AFB, California. The 84th was in the process of being inactivated during that time. Seven guardsmen and two of the unit's F-

106's were involved in that mission.

1981. But the crown jewel of awards that year was the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, the 120th's second.

Two long time members of the 120th left the unit in Oct to become members of the Mexican Air Force. Two of the unit's T-33 Shooting Stars were transferred to the Mexican government and were to be refitted with .50 caliber machine guns. The 120th received the T-Birds in Jun and Sep 1955, with less than 10 hours total time on each. They were the first and only "new" aircraft ever assigned to the group and had been used as trainers and target jets throughout their lives. When they left "the Hill" for the last time, they had 7,085 and 6,702 hours on them. Their function as targets was replaced by contracted civilian aircraft reconfigured from small passenger jets.

Beginning 1 Apr 1987, the group's alert commitment was assumed by other units while the transition to F-16s.

With the new fighters also came the gyrations that an organization goes through to choose new unit aircraft markings. A couple different ones were tried out before a final design was selected. It was the work of SSg Robert J. Marquard.

A third presentation of the US AF Outstanding Unit Award was made during the May Unit Training Assembly. The award was for the period 1 Jul 1984 to 31 Dec 1985.

On 14 Sep the unit lost an F-16 during a routine training flight out of Detachment 1 at Davis-Monthan AFB. The jet and another were engaged in Basic Fighter Manuever Training when Capt John Zink departed controlled flight and entered a "deep stall." Zink ejected and parachuted safely to the ground.

During Dec the group was awarded its third Air Force Outstanding Unit award for the period January 1 through December 31, 1988.

On 15 Mar one of the unit's F-16's assigned to Detachment 1 at Davis-Monthan was lost when it went out of control during a routine training mission. The pilot, Cpt Bill Schultz, successfully ejected and landed without injury, but the aircraft was completely destroyed. No injuries and only minor damage was experienced on the ground.

Six F-16's and 100 support people deployed to Eielson AFB, AK on 3 Jun for a five day exercise of Dissimilar Air Combat Tactics with F-15s from Eielson. Then on 21 Jun, a contingent of F-16s and personnel again made the deployment to Panama for Sentry Nighthawk.

During Aug, three group F-16s had the unique experience of escorting two Russian MiG-29 on a leg from Elmendorf AFB, AK, to Minot AFB, ND. The MiGs were appearing at airshows in the U.S.

For some time since the alert mission went away there had been rumors and more official indicators that the 120th could be in line for another aircraft conversion. Indeed, a 1992 DOD budget item sent by the President to Congress included \$2.8 million to convert the 120th to C-130's. In addition, at one time or another during that process, there had been indications that the 120th would convert to KC-135. Not surprisingly, these possibilities were not well received among some group personnel, particularly the pilots. On the other hand, other segments of the unit were quite receptive to the idea.

A low key but vigorous debate raged within the unit over the merits of such a conversion while a much more vocal and obvious effort in opposition was communicated to the state's congressional delegation. Arguments against converting to C-130's, as put forth by senior unit leadership, included a strong record of success in the fighter business, what was viewed as an already existing excess of transport aircraft in the northwest, a significant reduction in full-time and part-time workforce, and a perceived difficulty in recruiting necessary aircrews given the state's demographics. In late Jun, it was announced that conversion to C-130's would not take place and that the F-16's would stay for the time being.

A Class A aircraft accident occurred on 5 May, Maj Charles Morrison was on a routine training sortie when he experienced throttle control problems with his jet. While flying back to Great Falls, he was able to regain control of the F-16's engine and made what appeared to be a normal touchdown. As he attempted to slow the fighter he suddenly experienced an auto-acceleration. As the F-16 rapidly approached the end of the runway, Maj Morrison ejected. Morrison landed unharmed, but his F-16 continued across the airport, struck a county road embankment, and the aircraft cartwheeled, coming to rest inverted. A small grass fire was started but it was quickly extinguished.

As part of the 120th's preparations for a return to the William Tell Fighter Competition, aircraft were deployed to Tyndall, AFB, FL, for the Weapons System Evaluation Program. During that stint, Cpt Jeffrey D. Connors was on a routine flight when his jet lost power. Unable to restore thrust, Connors ejected to safety. His fighter crashed about 120 feet from a rural home and started a small fire. Nobody was injured on the ground.

Early in 1995 it was announced that the squadron would assume a General Purpose unit and would be equipped with C and D model F-16's. As part of the conversion, the number of fighters would be reduced from 15 to 12. The group began receiving C and D models in Jul. Pilots underwent training with the newer jets and a number of maintenance people were either away at training or scheduled for it. Since a reduction in assigned aircraft numbers would mean a loss of some 40 jobs at "the Hill" there was considerable resistance to the idea. Several affected states enlisted the support of congressional delegations in efforts to keep the assigned aircraft numbers at 15. That effort was successful, even over the objection of the Air Staff. , since there were not enough C and D model airframes in the inventory to comply with the congressionally mandated 15 aircraft level, the conversion process was cancelled. All of the C's were therefore returned to the Air Force in September, school scheduling was cancelled, and

pilots had to requalify in the older fighters.

The Montana Air National Guard's 120th Fighter Wing at Great Falls Airport conducted its first F-15 Eagle sortie Jan. 15, Great Falls' KRTV news reported. The unit began replacing its F-16s with F-15s last year, courtesy of BRAC 2005, and expects to have all 18 of its Eagles in place before the end of 2009, said wing spokesman Maj. Rick Anderson. Unit pilots are spending about five months making the transition from the smaller air-to-ground F-16s to the larger air-to-air F-15s. 2009

Montana Air National Guard F-15s last week handed over responsibility for protecting the airspace around Hawaii back to the Hawaii ANG's 190th Fighter Wing at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, reports Montana's Great Falls Tribune. F-15s from the 120th Fighter Wing deployed to Hickam from Great Falls in August 2010 to cover Hawaii's aerospace control alert mission while the Hawaii Air Guard transitioned from the F-15 to the F-22. Because the Air Force grounded the Raptor fleet for five months in 2011, the Hawaii ANG's 199th Fighter Squadron-together with its Active Duty associate unit, the 19th FS-experienced delays in commencing initial operations with their Raptors, achieving that milestone only last month. As a result, Montana's F-15 deployment stretched from 14 months to more than two years. A detachment of approximately 40 Montana Guardsmen was deployed to Hickam at any one time, and all but a dozen rotated back and forth, according to the newspaper's Dec. 7 report. Upon their return, the 120th FW airmen were slated to exchange their F-15s for C-130s, but that is something Montana lawmakers are still resisting 2012

Charles 1. Glover, Sgt. ANG, age 22, married, 3 children. Airplane and Engine Mechanic for the 186 Fighter Squadron from 27 June 47 to 17 Sep 47. Born in Illinois. Killed in plane crash Sept 17, 47, on a mountain southeast of Helena

John R. Honeychurch, 1st Lt. ANG, age 24, single. Fighter Pilot, 186 Fighter Squadron, from 1 Aug 48 to 15 August 49. Born in Butte, Montana, killed in F -51 crash at foot of Gore Hill on August 15, 1949

Willard S. Sperry, Lt. Col. USAF, age 39, married, one child, Commander and AirAdvisor for 186 Fighter Squadron from 27 Jun 47 to 17 Sep 47, Born in California, killed Sep 17 47, in B-26 plane crash on a mountainside east of Helena.

William D. Lewis, Maj., USAF, Pilot, age 39, born in Texas, married and had three children. Air Force advisor, Nov 56 - Apr 60. Killed April 18, 1960 in an F89J immediately after take off from Gore Field.

Clifford E. Hanson, Maj . , ANG, Pilot, age 44, born in Missoula, Mont. Married and had two children. Killed Jan 25 62 in a C -47 west of Wolf Creek, Montana.

Ronald K. Poland, Lt., USAF, RO, age 25, born in Illinois, married and had two children. Air Force Advisor from 3 Apr 60. Killed Apr 18, 1960 in F -89J immediately after take off from Gore Field.

Joseph H. Devin, Maj., ANG, Pilot, age 42, born in Sigoruney, Iowa, Married and had four children. Killed Jan 25, 62 in a C- 47 west of Wolf Creek, Montana.

Charles W. Ballard, MSgt. , ANG, Flight Engineer, age 40, born in Great Falls, Montana. Married and had one child, killed Jan 25 62 in a C -47 crash west of Wolf Creek, Montana.

The 186 Frs was organized on 27 June 1947 with a total compliment of 34 officers and 39 enlisted men uncler the command of Lt. Col. Willard S. Sperry, Senior Air Instructor. The First encampment in June 1948 was commanded by Capt. Robert L . Dardis. In June 1949 the 186 Frs was camped at Moses Lake, Washington under the command of Lt. Col. Floyd Robberson. The 1st of April 1951 the young unit was called to active duty for the Korean conflict. During this time they served in Georgia at Moody AFB, and Victorville, California. Some of the men saw action in Korea, with some going to Iceland for a tour. Upon the unit's return to Montana in January 1953 the unit was headed by Capt. R . D. Young . He served as commanding officer until 16 April 1956 when command of the unit went to Maj. E. L. Haggarty. At this time the mission of the 186 FIS changed from one of a tactical nature to air defense. The Unit then entered into the 24 hour runway alert program which they have maintained to the present time. On 1 October 1959 Capt. R. B. Sherman took Command of the squadron. On 15 August 1964 the reins of the 186 FIS were handed over to Maj. E. J. Whalen. On 1 November 1965 Lt. Col . L. A . Gremaux took over as squadron commander, and is presently guiding the unit through our conversion to the F-102A.

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USAF Unit Histories

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