

## 56 OPERATIONS GROUP



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

56 Pursuit Group (Interceptor) established, 20 Nov 1940  
Activated, 15 Jan 1941  
Redesignated 56 Fighter Group, 15 May 1942  
Inactivated, 18 Oct 1945  
Activated, 1 May 1946  
Redesignated 56 Fighter Interceptor Group, 20 Jan 1950  
Inactivated, 6 Feb 1952  
Redesignated 56 Fighter Group (Air Defense), 20 Jun 1955  
Activated, 18 Aug 1955  
Discontinued and inactivated, 1 Feb 1961  
Redesignated 56 Tactical Fighter Group, 31 Jul 1985  
Redesignated 56 Operations Group, 28 Oct 1991  
Activated, 1 Nov 1991  
Inactivated, 4 Jan 1994  
Activated, 1 Apr 1994

#### STATIONS

Savannah AB, GA, 15 Jan 1941  
Charlotte AAB, NC, 26 May 1941  
Charleston, SC, 10 Dec 1941  
Teaneck Armory, NJ, 17 Jan 1942  
Bridgeport, CT, 6 Jul-Dec 1942  
Kingscliffe 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 Mar 1946-6 Feb 1952  
O'Hare Intl Aprt, IL, 18 Aug 1955  
K. I. Sawyer AFB, MI, 1 Oct 1959-1 Feb 1961  
MacDill AFB, FL, 1 Nov 1991-4 Jan 1994  
Luke AFB, AZ, 1 Apr 1994

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Southeast Air District (later, Third Air Force), 15 Jan 1941  
III Interceptor Command, 2 Oct 1941  
I Interceptor (later, I Fighter) Command, 15 Jan 1942  
New York Air Defense Wing, 11 Aug 1942  
VIII Fighter Command, c. 12 Jan 1943  
4<sup>th</sup> Air Defense (later, 65<sup>th</sup> Fighter) Wing, 4 Jul 1943  
66<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, 28 Aug-Oct 1945  
Fifteenth Air Force, 1 May 1946  
56 Fighter (later, 56 Fighter Interceptor) Wing, 15 Aug 1947-6 Feb 1952  
4706<sup>th</sup> Air Defense Wing, 18 Aug 1955  
37<sup>th</sup> Air Division, 8 Feb 1956  
30<sup>th</sup> Air Division, 1 Apr 1959  
Sault Sainte Marie Air Defense Sector, 1 Apr 1960-1 Feb 1961  
56 Fighter Wing, 1 Nov 1991-4 Jan 1994  
56 Fighter Wing, 1 Apr 1994

### **ATTACHMENTS**

17<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Wing [Light], 15 Jan-16 May 1941  
III Interceptor Command, c. 17 Jun-1 Oct 1941  
65<sup>th</sup> Combat Fighter Wing, Very Long Range, Prov., Jan-14 Aug 1947  
30<sup>th</sup> Air Division, 1 Apr-14 Jun 1960

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-35, 1941  
P-36, 1941  
P-39, 1941-1942  
P-40, 1941-1942  
P-47, 1942, 1943-1945  
P (later, F)-47, 1946-1947, 1951-1952  
P (later, F)-51, 1946-1947, 1951-1952  
P (later, F)-80, 1947-1950  
F-86, 1950-1952  
F-94, 1951-1952

F-86, 1955-1959  
F-101, 1959-1961  
F-16, 1991-1993  
F-15, 1994-1995  
F-16, 1994

## **COMMANDERS**

Unkn, 15 Jan-May 1941  
Lt Col David D. Graves, May 1941  
Col John C. Crosswaithe, 1 Jul 1942  
Col Hubert A. Zemke, 16 Sep 1942  
Col Robert B. Landry, 30 Oct 1943  
Lt Col David C. Schilling, 11 Jan 1944  
Col Hubert A. Zemke, 19 Jan 1944  
Col David C. Schilling, 12 Aug 1944  
Lt Col Lucian A. Dade Jr., 27 Jan 1945  
Lt Col Donald D. Renwick, 31 Aug-Oct 1945  
Col David C. Schilling, 1 May 1946  
Lt Col Thomas D. Dejarnette, 14 Jul 1948  
Lt Col David C. Schilling, Aug 1948  
Lt Col William D. Ritchie, Jan 1949  
Lt Col Irwin H. Dregne, By May 1949  
Maj Ralph A. Johnson, 15 Sep 1949  
Col Francis S. Gabreski, 5 Oct 1949  
Lt Col George L. Jones, May 1951  
Col Ernest J. White Jr., May 1951-Unkn  
Unkn, 18 Aug 1955-Unkn  
Col John R. Murphy, By Apr 1957-15 Jul 1957  
Unkn, 16 Jul-3 Nov 1957  
Col Leo C. Moon, 4 Nov 1957  
Lt Col Bacchus B. Byrd Jr., 15 Aug 1959  
Lt Col Russell C. Jackson, Sep 1959  
Col Phillip N. Loring, 1 Oct 1959  
Col James W. Holt, 19 Nov 1960  
Col James F. Reed, 13 Jan-1 Feb 1961  
Col Patrick T. Sakole, 1 Nov 1991  
Col John L. Barry, 3 Aug 1992  
Col Vincent J. Santillo, 2 Aug 1993  
Lt Col Ralph B. Brown, Dec 1993-4 Jan 1994  
Col Bron A. Burke, 1 Apr 1994  
Col Stanley Gorenc, 13 Jun 1994  
Col Gilmary M. Hostage Iii, 30 Jun 1995  
Col Irvin M. Hardin, 9 May 1997  
Col William C. Louisell, 7 May 1999

Col Robert P. Steel, 26 May 2000  
Col Steven Searcy, 4 Jan 2002  
Col Walter E. Wright III, 2 Jul 2003  
Col Timothy W. Strawther, 13 Jun 2005  
Col Robert P. Givens, 1 Jun 2007  
Col George P. Schaub, 2008  
Col Douglas R. Miller 25 June 2010  
Col John T. Hanna 29 June 2012  
Col William C. Bailey, 25 Jul 2014  
Col Benjamin W. Bishop, 15 Jul 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 Award**

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  
1 Jul 2008-30 Jun 2009

1 Jul 2009-30 Jun 2010  
1 Jul 2010-30 Jun 2011  
1 Jul 2011-30 Jun 2012  
1 Jul 2012-30 Jun 2013  
1 Jul 2013-30 Jun 2014  
1 Jul 2014-30 Jun 2015  
1 Jul 2015-30 Jun 2016

## EMBLEM



56 Fighter Group emblem Tenne on a chevron azure fimbriated or, two lightning flashes chevronwise of the last. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The shield is in the colors of the Air Corps. The lightning bolts are symbolic of the speedy concentrated striking power of a fighter group. (This coat of arms approved originally for the 56 Pursuit Group and the original motto was Ready and Waiting but upon the redesignation of the 56 from a pursuit interceptor group to a fighter group, the motto as it appears on the painting and was agreed upon and approved by the Quartermaster General.



56 Operations Group emblem: Tenné, a chevron Azure fimbriated Or, charged with two lightning bolts conjoined chevronwise of the third, all within a diminished bordure of the like. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "56 OPERATIONS GROUP" in Blue letters. The insignia of the 56 FG was devised while the group was training in the eastern US, the emblem receiving official approval on 4 Apr 1942. It was expected that the group would eventually be equipped with P-38 Lightnings, hence the double lightning flash of the chevron. This served equally well to represent the Thunderbolt. Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The emblem is symbolic of the Wing. The heraldic chevron represents support and signifies the Wing's support of the Nation's quest for peace. The lightning bolt represents the speed and aggressiveness with which the unit performs. The specific colors represent the Air Corps and commemorate the service of the 56 Fighter Group, whose honors and history the Wing inherits.

### **MOTTO**

CAVE TONITRUM--Beware of the Thunderbolt

### **OPERATIONS**

14th January 1941 The 56 Pursuit Group is activated when 3 officers and 150 enlisted are ordered to report to the National Guard armory in Savanna Georgia.

June 1941 The Army Air Corps becomes the Army Air Force. The 56 Fighter Group receives its first aircraft. Ten well-worn Curtiss P-36s followed later in the month by three equally worn Bell YP-39 Airacobras.

October 1941 To aid the 56's effectiveness in a series of US Army exercises, the group receives its first new aircraft in the form of 10 Bell P-39s.

7th December 1941 Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor earlier in the day, Major Graves warns the groups' personnel to be ready to move at short notice.

10th December 1941 In order to provide air cover along the Atlantic coast of North and South Carolina, the 56 Group is split into three sections. The group HQ and 61st FS move to Charleston. 62nd and 63rd squadrons move to Wilmington and Myrtle Beach respectively.

Late December 1941 A selection of aircraft is allocated to the group. These include Seversky P-35s, Curtiss P-36s and Republic P-43s. Along with these new aircraft more worn P-39s and P-40s are delivered. Captain Richard Games and Captain Loren McCollum are tasked with checking out newly arrived pilots on the various types of aircraft arriving. This takes place at Wilmington. The 56's aircraft at this time would later be described by one squadron's Engineering Officer as "an assortment of junk"

January 1942 The anniversary of the group's activation sees a move to the New York area where the 56 is to provide air cover for the city. Group HQ is set up at the National Guard armory at Teaneck, New Jersey. 62nd FS make their new home at Bendix Airport, New Jersey.

February-April 1942 Pilots begin to train on the Lockheed P-38 Lightning, which the 56 is expected to become the standard aircraft for the group in the months ahead.

March 1942 It becomes obvious that production of the P-38 Lightning at that time cannot meet demand and the three squadrons start to re-equip with the Curtiss P-40F. The first production P-47B's are produced by the Republic facility at Farmingdale. Being based so close to the factory the 56 Fighter Group is an obvious choice to be equipped with the new fighter.

26th May 1942 The 56 becomes the service troubleshooter for the P-47.

July 1942 Major organizational changes take place. The Headquarters Squadron is disbanded and Group HQ joins the 61st FS at Bridgeport. Lt Col John Crosthwaite takes over command of the group when Lt Col Graves leaves to take command of the New York Air Defense Wing. The 62nd Fighter Squadron moves to Bradley Field due to the runway at Newark being deemed too short for safe operation of the P-47.

September 1942, The decision is taken by Army Air Force Command to prepare the 56 Fighter Group for service overseas.

On Thanksgiving Day 1942 the 56 Fighter Group is alerted for movement overseas.

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.

25th January 1943, The first P-47C Thunderbolts arrive at King's Cliffe.

February 1943, Arrangements are made for the 56 to undertake gunnery practice on RAF ranges. Seven P-47s are temporarily based at Lanbedr in Wales. Goxhill and Matlaske in the east of England are also used.

10th March 1943, The P-47 Thunderbolt flies its first operational mission with the 4th FG. American and British media visit King's Cliffe to see the new fighter for themselves.

5th April 1943 The 56 move again. This time to Horsham St Faith near Norwich. For the first time since the early days at Charlotte, all three squadrons are now based on the same airfield.

8th April 1943, The first operational flight takes place when the 56 provided a flight of four aircraft in a combined operation fighter sweep with the 4th and 78th group. Pilots are Hubert Zemke, David Schilling, John McClure and Eugene O'Neill.

13th April 1943 The 56 FG flies its first operational mission. A Fighter sweep of the St Omer area.

29th April 1943, The group meets enemy aircraft for the first time and sustains its first casualties. Lt Winston Garth and Cpt John McClure of the 62nd FS are forced to bail out and become the group's first prisoners of war.

4th May 1943 The group flies its first RAMROD. (Bomber escort) covering B-17s on a mission to Antwerp.

8th July 1943 The group moves from the comforts of the prewar buildings at Horsham to the new, and still unfinished Station 365 at Halesworth, Suffolk. The enterprising 62nd FS commander David Schilling takes possession of the abandoned High Trees farmhouse and turns it into the squadron headquarters. It soon becomes known as Schilling's Acres. Nearby Holton Hall, which has been standing empty, becomes the Officer's Quarters.

16th May 1944 The 56 Fighter Group is awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation for its performance in combat during the period 20th February to 9th March 1944.

Throughout the month the 56 flies extensively in support of the Allied invasion forces. A combination of the type of mission flown, mostly dive bombing attacks, and bad weather over the continent, coupled with the Allied supremacy over the area keeps air kills by the 56 lower than might have been expected during this period of action.

4th July 1944 The 56 celebrates Independence Day by becoming the first fighter group to pass the 500 destroyed mark.

August 1944 The month's missions continue to consist mainly of dive bombing and strafing in support of the Allied invasion.

11th August 1944, Gen Griswold at 8th Fighter Command informs Col Zemke that he wants Lt Col Schilling to take over command of the latest fighter group to arrive in the ETO. The 479th FG based at Wattisham and flying P-38s who had just lost their commanding officer over France. When informed of this, Schilling's reaction was most unfavorable and he is reported as having expressed his feelings on the matter with a succession of expletives. Nobody in the 56 was more surprised than Schilling when Zemke, having predicted Schilling's reaction and already having made the decision in his own mind, announced "Ok Dave, you take the 56 and I'll take the 479th!" After receiving official approval from 8th Fighter Command, Zemke addresses personnel in the Number 1 hangar at Boxted before leaving for Wattisham.

12th August 1944 Lt Col David C Schilling takes command of the 56 Fighter Group, leading his first mission as Group Commander on a dive bombing mission against the marshalling yards at Charleville.

18th September 1944 Flak Busting-Holland - the costliest mission in the history of the 56 Fighter Group. Sixteen pilots failed to return. Of the returning P-47s, 15 had suffered battle damage. Of the sixteen pilots who didn't return, 8 had bailed out or force landed in Allied held territory, 3 were wounded and returned to the USA, 1 was killed when belly landing his stricken P-47, another was known to have become a POW and 3 were posted missing. 3 of the 56 pilots, G.Stevens; E. Raymond; and T. Edwards lost their lives that day. For this mission the 56 Fighter Group was awarded its second Distinguished Unit Citation.

26th January 1945 Biggest change in the 56 is Col Schilling's transfer to the 65th Fighter Wing.

27th January 1945 Lucian Dade becomes the new 56 Fighter Group Commanding Officer.

August 1945 Lt Col Dade is transferred to a staff position in Paris and Lt Col Donald Renwick becomes the Commanding Officer of the 56 Fighter Group.

9th September 1945 The 56 is officially transferred to Little Walden.

14th September 1945 The last P-47s leave Boxted and are flown to Speke, Liverpool to await scrapping.

15th September 1945 The last personnel leave Boxted and the airfield is returned to RAF control.

11th October 1945 The last of the officers and enlisted men board the Cunard Liner Queen Mary and head across the Atlantic for home.

18th October 1945, At 2359 the 56 Fighter Group and its associated support units are inactivated.

During its two-year involvement in the air war in Europe, the group damaged or destroyed 1,598.5 enemy aircraft. What seemed incredible was that the 56 posted that record while losing only 25 fighters in aerial combat. The 56 also produced 39 fighter aces.

From May 1946, the group trained to maintain proficiency as a mobile strike force; including bomber escort mission until transferred from Strategic Air Command to Continental Air Command on 1 Dec 1948.

The group added an air defense mission in the northeastern US in Apr 1949, and continued through Feb 1952.

It replaced the 501st Air Defense Group at O'Hare Intl Aprt, Chicago, IL on 18 Aug 1955, assuming its air defense mission and operation of base facilities at O'Hare.

Moving without personnel or equipment to K. I. Sawyer AFB, MI on 1 Oct 1959, the group absorbed the resources of the 473d Fighter Group.

As part of the 56 Fighter Wing, the group conducted F-16 transition training, Nov 1991-Aug 1993. It phased down at MacDill AFB, mid-1992 to inactivation.

The Group replaced the 58th Operations Group on 1 Apr 1994.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

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