

A Short History of the 37th Training Wing

World War II

The history and honors of the 37th Training Wing extended prior to World War II, well before its 1953 establishment. In a major restructuring of the Air Force in 1948, wings generally replaced groups as the principal establishment commanding combat squadrons. However, the US Air Force's principal combat heritage resided in the Army Air Forces combat groups active during World War II. Therefore, the Air Force extended temporary bestowal of combat group histories and honors to wings with the same numerical designations. As a consequence, the wing had bestowed upon it the history and honors of the 37th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) that was constituted on 22 Dec 1939. On 1 Feb 1940, the 37th activated at Albrook Field in the Panama Canal Zone flying P-26 "Peashooters" and P-40 "Warhawks" in defense of the zone.



In May 1942, the group was redesignated the 37th Fighter Group and added the P-39 "Aircobra" to its combat arsenal. On 20 Sep 1943, the group moved its headquarters to Howard Field in Panama. It remained there until being disbanded on 1 Nov 1943. After the war, the group was awarded a service streamer signifying its wartime service within the American Theater.

Korean War

The Air Force established the 37th Fighter-Bomber Wing on 3 March 1953, as a part of the American military buildup launched by newly inaugurated President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Assigned to Ninth Air Force, the wing was active briefly (8 April to 25 June 1953) at Clovis AFB, New Mexico. Although not tactically operational, the additional wings activated by the President aided his political position and provided further encouragement for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to settle on a truce to end the Korean War. The wing was inactivated on 25 Jun 1953.

Vietnam War

With the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965-1966, the Air Force redesignated the wing as the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), and activated it on 26 Oct 1966. Under the command of Pacific Air Forces, the wing received its manpower and equipment when organized on 1 Mar 1967. Personnel for the wing headquarters and tactical components were in transit from the United States and elsewhere, and tactical operations did not commence until mid-April. The wing began a three-year combat tour of duty at Phu Cat AB, South Vietnam where the 37th Combat Support Group (later, Mission Support) was already operational.



Wing pilots flew interdiction, bombardment, escort, and close air support missions in the F-100 "Super Sabre," or "Hun" as it came to be known by crews, from 1967-1969. From Jun 1967 to May 1969, also used F-100F two-place aircraft for visual and weather reconnaissance and forward air control operations. The latter mission came to be known as "Fast FAC." Up until this time, the Air Force used slow propeller-driven O-1, O-2, and OV-10 aircraft for this mission.



In May 1969, the wing completed its conversion to the F-4 "Phantom." During the wing's combat tour in South Vietnam, it was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, eight Vietnam campaign streamers, two Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Valor, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm. On 31 Mar 1970, the Air Force inactivated the 37th TFW.



Aircrew Training

After 11-years in inactivation status, the Air Force activated the wing on 30 Mar 1981 at George AFB, California. The wing's mission was pilot transition training to the F-4G "Wild Weasel" radar suppression aircraft. As the only "Wild Weasel" training wing in the world, it provided instructor pilots and qualified aircrews for the other two "Wild Weasel" wings in the Philippines and Germany.



As part of the training mission, the wing participated in numerous tactical, maritime, and electronic warfare exercises locally and worldwide in hunter/killer tactics, suppression of enemy air defenses, force escort operations and dissimilar air combat training with US Armed Forces,

Air National Guard and Reserves, and various allies. Wing aircrews and ground personnel won the United States Air Force Worldwide Fighter gunnery meet in 1985 and 1987.



On 5 Oct 1989, the 37th TFW turned over F-4G aircraft to 35th TFW and moved to Tonopah Test Range, NV, without personnel and equipment absorbing the manpower, equipment, and the world's first Stealth fighter, the F-117A "Nighthawk," of the former 4450th Tactical Group. In this aircraft, wing members trained to integrate stealth technology with conventional methods of combat operations. On 20 Dec 1989, two wing F-117s dropped the first bombs on the Panamanian Defense Forces at Rio Hato Air Base to begin the invasion of Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE.



Desert Shield and Desert Storm

Immediately after Iraq invaded its neighbor Kuwait in August 1990, the wing began deploying to Southwest Asia to protect Saudi Arabia from further incursion by Saddam Hussein. On 17 Jan 1991, wing crews flying the "Nighthawks" hit 26 high-value Iraqi targets in and around Baghdad. After the initial attacks, the wing's crews continued interdiction missions in Iraq and Kuwait throughout the remainder of the air war.



After combat operations ceased in Feb 1991, wing personnel and aircraft remained on indefinite alert in Saudi Arabia as a component member of Central Air Forces' (CENTAF) post-Desert Storm task force in Southwest Asia. The wing was redesignated 37th Fighter Wing (FW) on 1 Oct 1991. With a restructuring of Air Force fighter assets to Holloman AFB, the wing inactivated on 8 Jul 1992 after departure of its Stealth Fighters in May through July.

Training for the AEF

However, the inactivation was of short duration. On 1 July 1993, HQ USAF redesignated Air Training Command as Air Education and Training Command (AETC). At the same time, HQ AETC replaced all of its training centers with two-digit numbered wings. As a result, the 37th FW was redesignated as the 37th Training Wing (TW) and activated at Lackland AFB. The 37th TW replaced the Lackland Training Center and most of its units that had performed the training mission since 1949. Assigned to the wing were five group-level establishments. The 37th Technical Training Group, the 37th Military Training Group, and the Defense Language Institute English Language Center remained from the former unit. HQ AETC activated the 37th Support and the 37th Logistics Groups at the same time as the parent wing. They replaced the support and logistics groups that had inactivated along with the Lackland Training Center. Additional changes came on 1 April 1994 when HQ USAF redesignated the technical training group as the 37th Training Group and the military training group as the 737th Training Group.



The 37th Support Group's distinguished history goes back to 1940 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's mobilization program in the face of the German and Japanese military threats. The group supported combat forces in North Africa and Italy during World War II and served again in the Vietnam War. The 37th Logistics Group's first sustained mission was at the Tonapah Test Range, helping the 37th FW make the F-117 operational.

The other three groups performed Lackland's three major missions: basic military training, technical training, and English language training. Lackland had conducted this training since February 1946, November 1956, and May 1954, respectively. The 737th Training Group, establishment in August 1972, took over basic military training. The 37th Training Group established in November 1979, offered technical training primarily in the areas of security police, communications, electronics, military working dogs and handlers training, social actions, and recruiting. English language training came under the Defense Language Institute English Language Center that had operated at Lackland since 1966.

The 37th TW also inherited a fourth training mission, one which the Lackland Training Center had gained on 2 June 1993, when the Air Force decided to make Lackland the permanent home of the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA). The academy had brought its technical training mission to Lackland in August 1992 from the hurricane-wrecked Homestead AFB in Florida. The Inter-American Air Forces Academy had trained officer and enlisted members of various air forces in Latin America since its organization in the Panama Canal Zone on 31 October 1948. On 1 July 1993, IAAFA was reassigned to Lackland's new host, the 37th Training Wing.

While the wing gained IAAFA's technical training missions, it lost the officer training mission which AETC reassigned to Air University on 1 July 1993 and shortly thereafter moved to Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The wing also gained extensive technical training courses from two closing bases - Chanute AFB in Illinois and Lowry AFB in Colorado. The courses consisted of much of the Air Force's training for base support and operations. As the new courses began to come on line in 1993, the wing's technical trainee accessions grew significantly. In 1994, technical training entries almost reached 20,000, while basic military training remained at its pre-1986 level of about 35,000. In 1995, the wing reached near parity between basic military and technical training missions in terms of members trained.

Along with its various training missions, the 37th TW also had assigned the United States Air Force Band of the West. The band first activated on 1 October 1941 as the 539th Army Band and spent the war years at West Coast bases. The 539th transferred to Lackland in March 1947 where it remained, except for a four-year inactivation in the late 1950s. While assigned to the 37th TW, the Band of the West performs a major command-level mission as the only band in the command.