

Wyoming Air National Guard History

The Wyoming Air National Guard was first organized in a small hangar on the southwest side of Cheyenne Municipal Airport, Wyoming, as the Army Air Forces' highly decorated 402nd Fighter Squadron was deactivated 10 NOV 1945, and reactivated as the 187th Fighter Squadron. The unit was allotted to the National Guard on 10 AUG 1946, under Maj Robert E. Sedman. Flying P-51s, the Wyoming unit was activated 01 APR 1951 for service during the Korean Conflict, with personnel assigned to Clovis AFB, New Mexico, Germany, Okinawa, and South Korea. In Korea 18 Wyoming pilots flew 1,500 combat missions. In 1956 the WY ANG became the 187th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. Two years later, during 1958, it received its first F-86L "Sabre Jet," and re-designation as the 153d Fighter Interceptor Group.

The most dramatic change came for the Wyoming unit in 1961 when it changed from a fighter unit to flying C-119 "Flying Boxcars" and airlifting medical patients, as the newly designated 187 Aeromedical Transport Squadron. On 21 JUN 1963 it received C-121 "Super Constellation," aircraft and expanded its military airlift role to worldwide mission capabilities. Entering the realm of South East Asia and Vietnam, the Wyoming Air Guard flew its first mission into the Southeast Asia Theater "combat zone" in late 1964, and continued to do so through the take over of South Vietnam by its enemies. During early 1966 the unit became the 153 Military Airlift Group [153rd MAG], under the Military Airlift Command [MAC].

In 1972, the Wyoming Air guard received its first turbo prop C-130 HERCULES aircraft, which has proved to be one of the toughest and most versatile aircraft ever built, and which the unit continues to fly over 30 years later. In 1975, the Wyoming Air Guard was selected for the unique role of aerial fire fighting. Two Wyoming C-130s were equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS) and began water/fire retardant bombing of fires throughout the United States. Those fire fighting mission still continue through the present.

In the meantime, the 153d TAG expanded to regularly flying missions with the US South Command out of Howard AFB, Panama, as part of OPERATION PHOENIX OAK. From supplying embassies in Central and South America, to searching for sinking ships in the middle of tropical storms, the Wyoming C-130s and aircrews have carried out military and humanitarian missions, right up to the present day. Those missions continued through OPERATION JUST CAUSE in 1989-90 when Panama was designated a "combat zone."

Beginning 09 AUG 1990, the first day of OPERATION DESERT SHIELD, and into OPERATION DESERT STORM the Wyoming Air Guard flew continental U.S. and Central and South America missions. During that time, the Wyoming 187th Aeromedical Evacuation Flight and the 153d Clinic were both activated by order of the President of the United States, with a large number of those medical personnel being sent to Saudi Arabia. After the hostilities, Wyoming Guard members continued with OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT, which supplied humanitarian aid to Kurdish people displaced by the Iraqi military.

During 1993 and early 1994, the 153d Airlift Group traded its older C-130-B model aircraft for new Lockheed C-130-H3 models, which greatly enhanced the Wyoming unit's world wide flying capabilities. From JULY 1993 through FEB 1994, the 187th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, provided volunteer medical personnel for the Egypt/Somalia humanitarian effort in eastern Africa, OPERATION PROVIDE HOPE. Three of those medical personnel subsequently received commendations for saving US Army Rangers lives while under attack in Somalia in OCT 1993. During 1993-94, a number of "spirited" Wyoming pilots, navigators, and loadmasters volunteered to fly missions into and over Bosnia/Serbia, while temporarily assigned OPERATION PROVIDE PROMISE.

The years between the Gulf War and 2001 proved to be a period of continued activity for the Wyoming Air Guard. Major unit deployments included OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY (Haiti) in 1995, OPERATION SOUTHERN WATCH (Iraq) in 1996 and 1998, OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR (Bosnia) in 1996, OPERATION SHINING HOPE (Bosnia) in 1999, OPERATION JOINT FORGE (Bosnia/Kosovo) in 1999, OPERATION CORONET OAK (Panama) in 2000, and the yearly MAFFS mission as directed. During this same period numerous individuals volunteered for such missions as OPERATION SEA

SIGNAL (Guantanamo, Haitian refugees) in 1995 and OPERATION NEW HOPE (El Salvador) in 1999, along with the missions listed above.

In April 1997 the Wyoming 153d Airlift Wing was reassigned to the Air Mobility Command [AMC], and continued its federal and state airlift, fire fighting, and humanitarian missions. From 10 NOV to 05 DEC 1997 the Wyoming Air National Guard flew 250 airborne fire-fighting missions in the jungles of Indonesia as OPERATION TEMPEST RAPID, No. 1. This was the first time U.S. airborne fire fighting had ever been done outside of the continental U.S.

As with the rest of the U.S. military, the wing's focus changed abruptly on September 11, 2001. Responding immediately, the 153 AW became the first unit to resume flying, by answering the call to ferry blood donations around the western United States. By the end of September virtually all of the 153rd Security Forces Squadron had been called to active duty and assigned to active Air Force bases. As a result numerous individuals volunteered to be activated as security forces augmentees, an assignment that lasted half a year for many. Three others volunteered for temporary civilian airport security duties.

In December, 2001 the expected call up for more of the unit arrived. This resulted in five aircraft, their crews, and support personnel deploying to Oman as part of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. During the unit's eight-month deployment, it flew 5,500 hours (including 4,000 combat hours in Afghanistan), and earned the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor. In addition, the unit's air traffic controllers served in Pakistan during this period, while numerous other members answered the call in their individual AFSC capacity.

As the Global War on Terrorism expanded to include operations in Iraq and continued operations in Afghanistan, the 153d Airlift Wing repeatedly answered the nations call. In addition to its ongoing commitment to MAFFS, Operation Joint Forge in Europe, and Coronet Oak in Latin America, the 153 AW maintained a two year long, two aircraft commitment to Operation Iraqi Freedom during 2004-2005. In 2000 and 2007 the unit returned to Afghanistan for two and three aircraft Aerospace Expeditionary Force rotations. On the home front, the end of 2007 found four aircraft responding to the great southern California wildfires.

In Cheyenne the period 2004-2007 witnessed the 153 AW receiving a remodeled dining facility, a new POL facility, a new air operations building for Air Traffic Control and Aerial Port, and approval of a new squadrons operations building. Numerous temporary modular buildings also supported the unit.

The time period 2006-2007 also witnessed a unique combination of active duty and National Guard forces in Cheyenne. In 2006 the 30th Airlift Squadron, an active duty unit, stood up in Cheyenne, under the operational control of the 153 AW. Known as an active associate unit, the addition of the 30 AS resulted in the 153 AW receiving an additional four C-130 aircraft during 2007, and increased the wing's aircraft strength to twelve aircraft.

For the years 2008-2009, the 153 AW continues to stands ready to fulfill its dual commitment to both state and federal authorities.