

56th Operations Group



Col George R. Watkins

Lineage.

Established as 56th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) on 20 November 1940.¹

Activated on 15 January 1941.²

Redesignated 56th Fighter Group on 15 May 1942.³

Inactivated on 18 October 1945.⁴

Activated on 1 May 1946.⁵

Redesignated 56th Fighter-Interceptor Group on 20 January 1950.⁶

Inactivated on 6 February 1952.⁷

Redesignated 56th Fighter Group (Air Defense) on 20 June 1955.⁸

Activated on 18 August 1955.⁹

Discontinued, and inactivated, on 1 February 1961.¹⁰

Redesignated 56th Tactical Fighter Group on 31 July 1985.

¹ WD Ltr. AG 320.2, 17 October 1940 M (Ret) M-C, dated 20 November 1940

² Savannah AB, GA, GO 2, 11 January 1941

³ WD Ltr. AG 320.2, 20 January 1942 MR-M-AAF/A-1, dated 31 January 1942

⁴ ASF, GO 79, 16 October 1945

⁵ 15 AF, GO 15, 26 April 1946

⁶ 10 AF, GO 6, 20 January 1950

⁷ ADC, GO 4, 11 January 1952

⁸ DAF Ltr. 322 (AFOMO 660g), 20 June 1955

⁹ ADC GO 35, 18 July 1955

¹⁰ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

Redesignated 56th Operations Group on 28 October 1991.
Activated on 1 November 1991.¹¹
Inactivated on 4 January 1994.

Activated on 1 April 1994.¹²

Honors.

Service Streamers.

World War II American Theater

Campaign Streamers.

World War II European-African-Middle Eastern Theater

Air Offensive Europe [1942-1944]¹³

Normandy [1944]¹⁴

Northern France [1944]¹⁵

Rhineland [1944-1945]¹⁶

Ardennes-Alsace [1944-1945]¹⁷

Central Europe [1945]¹⁸

Air Combat [1941-1945]

Decorations.

Distinguished Unit Citations

European Theater of Operations, 20 February-9 March 1944¹⁹;
Holland, 18 September 1944²⁰.

¹¹ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

¹² AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

¹³ WD GO 85, 10 October 1945

¹⁴ WD GO 102, 9 November 1945

¹⁵ WD GO 103, 13 November 1945

¹⁶ WD GO 118, 12 December 1945

¹⁷ WD GO 114, 7 December 1945

¹⁸ WD GO 116, 11 December 1945

¹⁹ WD GO 34/1945

²⁰ WD GO 34/1945

Decorations. (Continued)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

- 1 July 1994-30 June 1996²¹
- 1 July 1996-30 June 1998²²
- 1 July 1998-30 June 2000²³
- 1 July 2001-30 June 2003²⁴
- [1 July] 2003-30 June 2005²⁵
- 1 July 2005-30 June 2006²⁶
- 1 July 2006-30 June 2007²⁷
- 1 July 2007-30 June 2008²⁸
- 1 July 2008-30 June 2009²⁹
- 1 July 2009-30 June 2010³⁰
- 1 July 2010-30 June 2011³¹
- 1 July 2011-30 June 2012³²
- 1 July 2012-30 June 2013³³
- 1 July 2013-30 June 2014³⁴
- 1 July 2014-30 June 2015³⁵
- 1 July 2015-30 June 2016³⁶
- 1 July 2016-30 June 2017³⁷
- 1 July 2017-30 June 2018³⁸
- 1 July 2018-30 June 2019³⁹

²¹ AETC SO GA-18, 15 November 1996

²² AETC SO GA-12, 9 November 1998

²³ AETC SO GA-9, 8 December 2000

²⁴ AETC SO GA-55, 29 April 2004

²⁵ AETC SO GA-0052, 22 June 2006

²⁶ AETC SO GA-045, 8 May 2007

²⁷ AETC SO G-054, 28 February 2008

²⁸ AETC SO G-071, 3 April 2009

²⁹ AETC SO G-025, 11 March 2010

³⁰ AETC SO G-086, 9 May 2011

³¹ AETC SO G-171, 17 April 2012

³² AETC SO G-036, 1 March 2013

³³ AETC SO G-017, 1 February 2014

³⁴ AETC SO G-029, 8 January 2015

³⁵ AETC SO G-006, 14 October 2016

³⁶ AETC SO G-022, 22 March 2017

³⁷ AETC SO G-015, 19 Dec 2017

³⁸ AETC SO G-057, 20 May 2019

³⁹ AETC SO G-013, 18 Dec 2019

56th Fighter Group World War II Aces

<u>Name</u>	<u>Aerial Victories</u>		
	<u>In 56 FG</u>	<u>Total</u>	
1. Lt Col Francis S. Gabreski	28	34.5	POW 20 July 1944
2. Capt Robert S. Johnson	27	27	
3. Col David C. Schilling	22.5	22.5	
4. Capt Fred J. Christensen, Jr.	21.5	21.5	
5. Maj Walker M. Mahurin	19.5	24.25	Evaded 27 March 1944; POW 13 May 1952
6. Maj Gerald W. Johnson	15.5	16.5	POW 27 March 1944 [Lieutenant General]
7. Col Hubert A. Zemke	15.25	17.75	POW 30 October 1944
8. Capt Joe H. Powers	14.5	14.5	
9. Capt Felix D. Williamson	13	13	
10. Maj Leroy A. Schreiber	12	12	KIA 15 April 1944
11. Maj James C. Stewart	11.5	11.83	
12. Maj Paul A. Conger	11.5	11.5	
13. Capt Michael J. Quirk	11	11	POW 9 September 1944
14. Sq Ldr Michael Gladych	10	10	
15. 1st Lt Robert J. Rankin	10	10	
16. 1st Lt Stanley B. Morrill	9	9	Killed aircraft accident 29 March 1944
17. Maj George E. Bostwick	8	8	
18. Maj Michael J. Jackson	8	8	
19. 1st Lt Glen D. Schiltz, Jr.	8	8	
20. 2d Lt Billy G. Edens	7	7	POW 9 September 1944
21. 1st Lt Robert J. Keen	7	7	
22. 2d Lt Frank W. Klibbe	7	7	
23. Capt Robert A. Lamb	7	7	
24. Maj Leslie C. Smith	7	7	
25. 1st Lt John H. Truluck, Jr.	7	7	
26. Capt Mark L. Moseley	6.5	6.5	
27. Capt James R. Carter	6	6	
28. Capt Walter V. Cook	6	6	
29. 1st Lt George F. Hall	6	6	
30. Capt Cameron M. Hart	6	6	
31. Capt Joseph H. Bennett	5.5	8.5	
32. 1st Lt Frank E. McCauley	5.5	5.5	
33. 1st Lt Donovan F. Smith	5.5	5.5	[Lieutenant General]
34. Capt John W. Vogt, Jr.	5	8	[General-USAFE]
35. Maj Harold E. Comstock	5	5	
36. 1st Lt Joseph L. Egan, Jr.	5	5	KIA 19 July 1944
37. 2d Lt Steven Gerick	5	5	
38. 2d Lt Joe W. Icard	5	5	KIA 8 March 1944
39. Flt Off Evan D. McMinn	5	5	KIA 6 June 1944
40. Capt Eugene W. O'Neill, Jr.	5	5	

PAST AND PRESENT UNITS ASSIGNED

Currently Assigned Units	Time Frame Assigned
<i>Squadrons</i>	
21st Fighter Squadron	8 August 1996-.
56th Operations Support Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴⁰
56th Training Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴¹
61st Fighter Squadron	25 October 2013-. ⁴²
62d Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴³
(Unmanned 2 July 2014-5 June 2015)	
63d Fighter Squadron	1 August 2016-. ⁴⁴
308th Fighter Squadron	2 July 2018. ⁴⁵
309th Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴⁶
(Unmanned 30 May-2 July 2014)	
310th Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴⁷
425th Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴⁸
550th Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-. ⁴⁹
607th Air Control Squadron	1 July 2013-. ⁵⁰
Previously Assigned Units	Time Frame Assigned
<i>Squadrons</i>	
56th Materiel Squadron	Unknown-1 February 1961. ⁵¹
56th Operations Support Squadron	1 November 1991-4 January 1994
56th Tactical Training Squadron	
later, 56th Training Squadron	1 November 1991 ⁵² -20 July 1993
56th USAF Infirmary	
later, 56th USAF Dispensary	
later, 56th USAF Hospital	18 August 1955-1 February 1961. ⁵³

⁴⁰ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

⁴¹ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

⁴² AETC SO G-13-22, 25 September 2013

⁴³ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994; AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994

⁴⁴ AETC SO G-16-28, 28 June 2016

⁴⁵ AETC SO G-18-10, 30 April 2018

⁴⁶ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

⁴⁷ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994; AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994

⁴⁸ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994; AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994

⁴⁹ AETC SO G-17-8, 2 March 2017; AETC SO G-17-9, 3 March 2017

⁵⁰ AETC SO G-13-15, 19 June 2013

⁵¹ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

⁵² TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁵³ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

Previously Assigned Units (Continued)	Time Frame Assigned
<i>Squadrons.</i>	
61st Pursuit Squadron later, 61st Fighter Squadron	15 January 1941-18 October 1945
61st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron later, 61st Fighter Squadron	1 May 1946-6 February 1952; 1 November 1991 ⁵⁴ -12 August 1993; 1 April 1994 ⁵⁵ -30 September 2010. ⁵⁶
62d Pursuit Squadron later, 62d Fighter Squadron	15 January 1941-18 October 1945;
62d Fighter-Interceptor Squadron later, 62d Fighter Squadron	1 May 1946-6 February 1952 (detached c. 28 December 1946-c. 10 April 1947 and c. 28 July 1950-6 February 1952); 18 August 1955-1 February 1961. ⁵⁷ (detached 1 August-30 September 1959); 1 November 1991 ⁵⁸ -14 May 1993;
63d Pursuit Squadron later, 63d Fighter Squadron	15 January 1941-18 October 1945;
63d Fighter Squadron later, 63d Fighter-Interceptor Squadron later, 63d Fighter Squadron	1 May 1946-6 February 1952; 18 August 1955-8 January 1958; 1 November 1991 ⁵⁹ -25 February 1993 ⁶⁰ 1 April 1994-30 September 2009. ⁶¹ 1 May 1992-1 October 1993. ⁶²
71st Air Control Squadron	1 November 1991 ⁶³ -19 June 1992.
72d Fighter Squadron	Unknown-20 May 1951 ⁶⁴
97th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron	attached 21 July 1951-6 February 1952. ⁶⁵
136th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron	attached 1 May 1951 ⁶⁶ -6 February 1952.
172d Fighter-Interceptor Squadron	1 April 1994 ⁶⁷ - 25 June 2015. ⁶⁸
308th Fighter Squadron	

⁵⁴ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁵⁵ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

⁵⁶ AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

⁵⁷ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

⁵⁸ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁵⁹ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁶⁰ TAC SO G-12, 1 November 1991; ACC MO-1, 23 February 1993

⁶¹ AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994; ACC MO-1, 23 February 1993

⁶² TAC SO GB-47, 23 March 1992; ACC MO-10, 26 July 1993

⁶³ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁶⁴ EADF GO #64, 8 May 1951

⁶⁵ EADF GO 81, 16 July 1951 and 56 FIW GO 23, 20 July 1951

⁶⁶ EADC GO #58, 25 April 1951

⁶⁷ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

Previously Assigned Units (Continued)	Time Frame Assigned
<i>Squadrons.</i>	
311st Fighter Squadron	1 January 1995-1 December 1995. ⁶⁹
461st Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-5 August 1994. ⁷⁰
550th Fighter Squadron	1 April 1994-31 March 1995. ⁷¹
11th Crash-Rescue Boat Flight	attached 14 July 1951-Unknown ⁷²

Assignments. Southeast Air District (later, Third Air Force), 15 January 1941 (attached to 17th Bombardment Wing [Light], 15 January-16 May 1941; III Interceptor Command, c. 17 June-1 October 1941); III Interceptor Command, 2 October 1941; I Interceptor (later, I Fighter) Command, 15 January 1942; New York Air Defense Wing, 11 August 1942; VIII Fighter Command, c. 12 January 1943; 4th Air Defense (later, 65th Fighter) Wing, 4 July 1943; 66th Fighter Wing, 28 August-October 1945. Fifteenth Air Force, 1 May 1946 (attached to 65th Combat Fighter Wing, Very Long Range, Provisional, January-14 August 1947); 56th Fighter (later, 56th Fighter-Interceptor) Wing, 15 August 1947-6 February 1952. 4706th Air Defense Wing, 18 August 1955; 37th Air Division, 8 February 1956; 30th Air Division, 1 April 1959; Sault Sainte Marie Air Defense Sector, 1 April 1960-1 February 1961⁷³ (attached to 30th Air Division, 1 April-14 June 1960). 56th Fighter Wing, 1 November 1991⁷⁴-4 January 1994. 56th Fighter Wing, 1 April 1994-.⁷⁵

Stations. Savannah Air Base, Georgia, 15 January 1941; Charlotte Army Air Base, North Carolina, 26 May 1941; Charleston Municipal Airport, South Carolina, c. 10 December 1941; Teaneck Armory, New Jersey, 17 January 1942; Bridgeport, Connecticut, 6 July- December 1942; Kings Cliffe, England, 12 January 1943; Horsham St Faith, England, 5 April 1943; Halesworth, England, 9 July 1943; Boxted, England, 19 April 1944; Little Walden, England, c. 15 September-11 October 1945; Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, 16-18 October 1945. Selfridge Field (later, Air Force Base), Michigan, 1 March 1946-6 February 1952. O'Hare International Airport, Illinois, 18 August 1955; K. I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Michigan, 1 October 1959-1 February 1961.⁷⁶ MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, 1 November 1991⁷⁷-4 January 1994. Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, 1 April 1994-.⁷⁸

⁶⁸ AETC SO G-15-9, 18 June 2015

⁶⁹ AETC SO G-12, 27 December 1994; AETC SO G-4, 20 November 1995

⁷⁰ AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994; AETC SO G-52, 29 July 1994

⁷¹ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994 and AETC SO G-40, 20 April 1994; AETC SO G-23, 15 February 1995

⁷² 56 FIW GO 22, 14 July 1951

⁷³ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

⁷⁴ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁷⁵ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

⁷⁶ AFOMO 536m, 28 December 1960

⁷⁷ TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991

⁷⁸ AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

Aircraft. [Ordered By First Use]

Seversky P-35	1941
Curtis P-36 Hawk	1941
Bell P-39 Airacobra	1941-1942
Curtis P-40 Warhawk	1941-1942
Republic P-47 Thunderbolt	1942, 1943-1945
Republic P (later, F)-47 Thunderbolt	1946-1947, 1951-1952
North American P (later, F)-51 Mustang	1946-1947, 1951-1952
Lockheed P (later, F)-80 Shooting Star	1947-1950
North American F-86 Sabre	1950-1952, 1955-1959
Lockheed F-94 Starfire	1951-1952.
McDonnell F-101 Voodoo	1959-1961
McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle	1994-1995
Lockheed F-16 Fighting Falcon	1991-1993, 1994-.
Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II	2014-.

Emblem. [Group uses wing emblem with group designation in the scroll.] Emblem approved 16 May 2013.

Blazon. 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 "56TH OPERATIONS GROUP" in Blue letters.

Motto. None.

Significance. 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 colors represent the Air Corps and commemorate the service of the 56th Fighter Group, whose honors and history the Wing inherits.

Commanders.

56th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) [15 January 1941-15 May 1942]

Unknown	15 Jan-May 1941
Lt Col David D. Graves	May 1941-15 May 1942

56th Fighter Group [15 May 1942-18 October 1945; 1 May 1946-20 January 1950]

Lt Col David D. Graves	May 1941
Col John C. Crosswaithe	c. 1 July 1942
Col Hubert A. Zemke	16 September 1942
Col Robert B. Landry	30 October 1943 [Major General]
Lt Col David C. Schilling	11 January 1944
Col Hubert A. Zemke	19 January 1944
Col David C. Schilling	12 August 1944
Lt Col Lucian A. Dade, Jr.	27 January 1945
Lt Col Donald D. Renwick	c. 31 August-c. October 1945

Col David C. Schilling	1 May 1946
Lt Col Thomas D. DeJarnette	14 July 1948
Lt Col David C. Schilling	August 1948
Lt Col William D. Ritchie	by January 1949
Lt Col Irwin H. Dregne	by May 1949
Maj Ralph A. Johnson	15 September 1949
Col Francis S. Gabreski	5 October 1949-20 January 1950

56th Fighter-Interceptor Group [20 January 1950-6 February 1952]

Col Francis S. Gabreski	5 October 1949
Lt Col George L. Jones	May 1951
Col Ernest J. White, Jr.	May 1951 ⁷⁹ [thru Sep 51][Brigadier General]
Unknown	1 February 1952-6 February 1952

56th Fighter Group (Air Defense) [18 August 1955-1 February 1961]

Unknown	18 August 1955
Col John R. Murphy	January 1956-15 July 1957 ⁸⁰ [Lieutenant General]
Unknown	16 July-3 November 1957
Col Leo C. Moon	4 November 1957
Lt Col Bacchus B. Byrd, Jr.	15 August 1959
Lt Col Russell C. Jackson	c. September 1959
Col Phillip N. Loring	1 October 1959
Col James W. Holt	19 November 1960
Col James F. Reed	c. 13 Jan-1 February 1961

⁷⁹ 1 February 1952 Bio & 575 ABG L&H

⁸⁰ 15 January 1974 Bio

Commanders. (Continued)

56th Operations Group [1 November 1991-4 January 1994; 1 April 1994-.]

Col Patrick T. Sakole	1 November 1991	
Col John L. Barry	3 August 1992	[Major General]
Col Vincent J. Santillo	2 August 1993	
Lt Col Ralph B. Brown	December 1993-4 January 1994	
Col Bron A. Burke	1 April 1994 ⁸¹	
Col Stanley Gorenc	13 June 1994 ⁸²	[Major General]
Col Gilmary M. Hostage, III	30 June 1995 ⁸³	[General, ACC]
Col Irvin M. Hardin	9 May 1997 ⁸⁴	
Col William C. Louisell	7 May 1999 ⁸⁵	
Col Robert P. Steel	26 May 2000 ⁸⁶	[Major General]
Col Steven R.F. Searcy	4 January 2002 ⁸⁷	
Col Walter E. Wright, III	2 July 2003 ⁸⁸	
Col Timothy W. Strawther	13 June 2005 ⁸⁹	
Col Robert P. Givens	1 June 2007 ⁹⁰	[Brigadier General]
Col George P. Schaub	30 June 2008 ⁹¹	
Col Douglas R. Miller	25 June 2010 ⁹²	
Col John T. Hanna	29 June 2012 ⁹³	
Lt Col (later, Col) William C. Bailey	25 July 2014 ⁹⁴	
Col Benjamin W. Bishop	8 July 2016 ⁹⁵	
Col Matthew W. Renbarger	8 June 2018 ⁹⁶	
Col George R. Watkins	10 July 2020-Present. ⁹⁷	

⁸¹ [58 MSS SO SO-G-67, 11 June 1992]

⁸² 56 OSS SO SO-GC-001, 20 June 1994

⁸³ 56 FW SO SO GC-002, 22 June 1995

⁸⁴ 56 OSS SO SO-GC-002, 8 May 1997

⁸⁵ 56 OG SO GC-002, 12 July 1999

⁸⁶ 56 OG SO GS-001, 22 May 2000

⁸⁷ 56 OSS SO GC-002, 17 December 2001

⁸⁸ 56 OG SO 56OG GS-1, 2 June 2003

⁸⁹ 56 FW SO 56OG-G-2005-11, 9 June 2005

⁹⁰ 56 OG SO G-2007-006, 1 June 2007

⁹¹ 56 OG SO G-028, 16 July 2008

⁹² 56 MSG SO G-017, 24 June 2010

⁹³ 56 MSG SO G-017, 26 June 2012

⁹⁴ 56 MSG SO GS-31-14, 28 July 2014

⁹⁵ 56 MSG SO G-19-16, 6 July 2016

⁹⁶ 56 MSG SO G-16-18, 7 June 2018

⁹⁷ 56 MSG SO G-20-021, 9 July 2020

Narrative.

Established on 20 November 1940, the 56th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) activated on 15 January 1941 at Savannah Air Base, Georgia. It was assigned to the Southeast Air District (later, Third Air Force), but was immediately attached to 17th Bombardment Wing [Light], until 16 May 1941. On 26 May 1941, the group moved to Charlotte Army Air Base, North Carolina. About 10 December 1941, the group moved to Charleston Municipal Airport, South Carolina. On 15 January 1942, it was assigned to the I Interceptor (later, I Fighter) Command. Two days later, it moved to Teaneck Armory, New Jersey. On 15 May 1942, it was redesignated as the 56th Fighter Group. The 56th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) trained with the Seversky P-35, Curtis P-36 Hawk, Bell P-39 Airacobra, and Curtis P-40 Warhawk aircraft, participated in maneuvers, served as an air defense organization, and functioned as an operational training unit until June 1942. In June, the group began receiving the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt and began training for combat. Around 17 June 1941, the group was attached to the III Interceptor Command, and then assigned to it on 2 October 1941. On 6 July 1942, the group moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut. On 11 August 1942, it was assigned to the New York Air Defense Wing. In December 1942, the 56th left the United States to join the war in Europe.

On 12 January 1943, the group arrived at Kings Cliffe, England, and was assigned to VIII Fighter Command around that time. On 5 April 1943, the group moved to Horsham St Faith, England. As the first US P-47 fighter group to enter combat in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), the 56th entered combat with a fighter sweep in the area of St Omer, France, on 13 April 1943. On 4 July 1943, the group was assigned to the 4th Air Defense (later, 65th Fighter) Wing. Five days later, the 56th moved to Halesworth, England. Nine months later, on 19 April 1944, it moved to Boxted, England. The group flew its last combat mission on 21 April 1945, and the war in the ETO ended on 8 May 1945. On 28 August 1945, the group was assigned to the 66th Fighter Wing. Around 15 September 1945, the 56th moved to Little Walden, England. On 11 October 1945, the group left for the United States. It arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, on 16 October 1945, and inactivated there two days later. During the group's two years in the ETO, the 56th destroyed 677 enemy aircraft in aerial combat, more than any other fighter group in the ETO. It flew combat missions over France, the Low Countries, and Germany to escort bombers that attacked industrial establishments, V-weapon sites, submarine pens, and other targets on the Continent. The group also strafed and dive-bombed airfields, troops, and supply points; attacked the enemy's communications; and flew counter-air and interdiction missions during the invasion of Normandy in June 1944. The 56th supported the Allied forces for the breakthrough at St Lo in July 1944, the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945, and helped to defend the Remagen bridgehead against air attacks in March 1945. It was awarded its first Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for aggressiveness in seeking out and destroying enemy aircraft and for attacking enemy air bases, 20 Feb-9 March 1944, and a second DUC for strikes against antiaircraft positions while supporting the airborne attack on Holland in September 1944.

On 1 May 1946, the 56th Fighter Group was reactivated at Selfridge Field (later, Air Force Base), Michigan and assigned to Fifteenth Air Force. The group initially flew its old friend the Thunderbolt. That same year, it added the North American P (later, F)-51 Mustang to its inventory. The next year, the group converted to the Lockheed P (later, F)-80 Shooting Star. In January 1947, the 56th was attached to the 65th Combat Fighter Wing, Very Long Range,

Provisional. On 15 August 1947, the group was assigned to the 56th Fighter (later, 56th Fighter-Interceptor) Wing. 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 December 1948. The group added an air defense mission in the northeastern US in April 1949. On 20 January 1950, the group was redesignated as the 56th Fighter-Interceptor Group.

In 1950, the group transferred the F-80s out and added the North American F-86 Sabre. The next year, the group added back to the Thunderbolt and the Mustang, as well as the Lockheed F-94 Starfire. On 6 February 1952, the group was inactivated.

On 20 June 1955, the group was redesignated as the 56th Fighter Group (Air Defense). On 18 August 1955, the group activated and replaced the 501st Air Defense Group at O'Hare Intl Airport, Chicago, Illinois. Flying F-86 Sabres again, the 56th assumed the air defense mission and operations of base facilities there. The group was assigned to the 4706th Air Defense Wing, the 37th Air Division on 8 February 1956, and the 30th Air Division on 1 April 1959. Moving without personnel or equipment to K. I. Sawyer AFB, Michigan, on 1 October 1959, the group absorbed the resources of the 473d Fighter Group, flying the McDonnell F-101 Voodoo. On 1 April 1960, the 56th was assigned to the Sault Sainte Marie Air Defense Sector and immediately attached to the 30th Air Division until 14 June 1960. On 1 February 1961, the 56th was inactivated and discontinued.

On 31 July 1985, the group was redesignated as the 56th Tactical Fighter Group and the 56th Operations Group on 28 October 1991. On 1 November 1991, the group activated at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, 1 November 1991-4 January 1994. As part of the 56th Fighter Wing, the group conducted Lockheed F-16 Fighting Falcon transition training, from 1 November 1991 to August 1993. It phased down at MacDill AFB, in mid-1992 to inactivation on 4 January 1994.

56th Operations Group reactivated and replaced the 58th Operations Group on 1 April 1994 at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. It conducted McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle combat crew training until March 1995, combat crew training for U.S. and Allied services with the F-16 to present, and began flying the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II for pilot training of U.S. and Allied services on 10 March 2014.

Locally Updated on 21 September 2020

Locally Updated by Rick Grisct