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.

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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
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
Activated on 1 November 1991.\textsuperscript{11}
Activated on 1 April 1994.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Honors.}

\textit{Service Streamers.}

\textbf{World War II American Theater}

\textit{Campaign Streamers.}

\textbf{World War II European-African-Middle Eastern Theater}

- Air Offensive Europe [1942-1944]\textsuperscript{13}
- Normandy [1944]\textsuperscript{14}
- Northern France [1944]\textsuperscript{15}
- Rhineland [1944-1945]\textsuperscript{16}
- Ardennes-Alsace [1944-1945]\textsuperscript{17}
- Central Europe [1945]\textsuperscript{18}
- Air Combat [1941-1945]

\textbf{Decorations.}

\textbf{Distinguished Unit Citations}

- European Theater of Operations, 20 February-9 March 1944\textsuperscript{19};
- Holland, 18 September 1944\textsuperscript{20}.

\textsuperscript{11} TAC SO GB-16, 1 November 1991
\textsuperscript{12} AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994
\textsuperscript{13} WD GO 85, 10 October 1945
\textsuperscript{14} WD GO 102, 9 November 1945
\textsuperscript{15} WD GO 103, 13 November 1945
\textsuperscript{16} WD GO 118, 12 December 1945
\textsuperscript{17} WD GO 114, 7 December 1945
\textsuperscript{18} WD GO 116, 11 December 1945
\textsuperscript{19} WD GO 34/1945
\textsuperscript{20} WD GO 34/1945
Decorations. (Continued)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 July 1994-30 June 1996
1 July 1996-30 June 1998
1 July 1998-30 June 2000
1 July 2001-30 June 2003
1 July 2003-30 June 2005
1 July 2005-30 June 2006
1 July 2006-30 June 2007
1 July 2007-30 June 2008
1 July 2008-30 June 2009
1 July 2009-30 June 2010
1 July 2010-30 June 2011
1 July 2011-30 June 2012
1 July 2012-30 June 2013
1 July 2013-30 June 2014
1 July 2014-30 June 2015
1 July 2015-30 June 2016
1 July 2016-30 June 2017
1 July 2017-30 June 2018
1 July 2018-30 June 2019

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Aerial Victories</th>
<th>In 56 FG</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lt Col Francis S. Gabreski</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>POW 20 July 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Robert S. Johnson</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Col David C. Schilling</td>
<td>22.5</td>
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<td>Capt Fred J. Christensen, Jr.</td>
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<td>Maj Walker M. Mahurin</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>24.25</td>
<td>Evaded 27 March 1944; POW 13 May 1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maj Gerald W. Johnson</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>POW 27 March 1944 [Lieutenant General]</td>
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<td>Col Hubert A. Zemke</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>17.75</td>
<td>POW 30 October 1944</td>
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<td>Capt Joe H. Powers</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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<td>Capt Felix D. Williamson</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Maj Leroy A. Schreiber</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>KIA 15 April 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maj James C. Stewart</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.83</td>
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<td>Maj Paul A. Conger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Michael J. Quirk</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>POW 9 September 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sq Ldr Michael Gladych</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1st Lt Robert J. Rankin</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Lt Stanley B. Morrill</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Killed aircraft accident 29 March 1944</td>
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<td>Maj George E. Bostwick</td>
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<td>Maj Michael J. Jackson</td>
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<td>1st Lt Glen D. Schiltz, Jr.</td>
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<td>2d Lt Billy G. Edens</td>
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<td>1st Lt Robert J. Keen</td>
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<td>2d Lt Frank W. Klibbe</td>
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<td>Capt Robert A. Lamb</td>
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<td>Maj Leslie C. Smith</td>
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<td>1st Lt John H. Truluck, Jr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Mark L. Moseley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt James R. Carter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Walter V. Cook</td>
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<td>1st Lt George F. Hall</td>
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<td>Capt Cameron M. Hart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Joseph H. Bennett</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Lt Frank E. McCauley</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<td>[Lieutenant General]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Lt Donovan F. Smith</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>[General-USAFE]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt John W. Vogt, Jr.</td>
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<td>Maj Harold E. Comstock</td>
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<td>1st Lt Joseph L. Egan, Jr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2d Lt Steven Gerick</td>
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<tr>
<td>2d Lt Joe W. Icard</td>
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<td>KIA 8 March 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flt Off Evan D. McMinn</td>
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<td>KIA 6 June 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capt Eugene W. O'Neill, Jr.</td>
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### PAST AND PRESENT UNITS ASSIGNED

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Assigned Units</th>
<th>Time Frame Assigned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Squadrons</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>8 August 1996-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56th Operations Support Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56th Training Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61st Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>25 October 2013-</td>
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<tr>
<td>62d Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Unmanned 2 July 2014-5 June 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>63d Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 August 2016-</td>
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<tr>
<td>308th Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>2 July 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>309th Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Unmanned 30 May-2 July 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>310th Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
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<tr>
<td>425th Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
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<tr>
<td>550th Fighter Squadron</td>
<td>1 April 1994-</td>
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<tr>
<td>607th Air Control Squadron</td>
<td>1 July 2013-</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously Assigned Units</th>
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<td><strong>Squadrons</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>56th Materiel Squadron</td>
<td>Unknown-1 February 1961</td>
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<td>56th Tactical Training Squadron</td>
<td>1 November 1991-20 July 1993</td>
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<td>later, 56th Training Squadron</td>
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<tr>
<td>56th USAF Infirmary</td>
<td>18 August 1955-1 February 1961</td>
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<tr>
<td>later, 56th USAF Dispensary</td>
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<tr>
<td>later, 56th USAF Hospital</td>
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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
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
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)

**Squadrons.**

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

<table>
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<th>Squadrons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11th Crash-Rescue Boat Flight</td>
<td>attached 14 July 1951-Unknown</td>
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**Aircraft.** [Ordered By First Use]

- Seversky P-35: 1941
- Curtiss P-36 Hawk: 1941
- Bell P-39 Airacobra: 1941-1942
- Curtiss P-40 Warhawk: 1941-1942
- Republic P-47 Thunderbolt: 1942, 1943-1945
- Lockheed P (later, F)-80 Shooting Star: 1947-1950
- Lockheed F-94 Starfire: 1951-1952
- 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.** Tenny, 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 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 [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 199481
Col Stanley Gorenc   13 June 199482     [Major General]
Col Gilmary M. Hostage, III    30 June 199583     [General, ACC]
Col Irvin M. Hardin    9 May 199784
Col William C. Louisell   7 May 199985
Col Robert P. Steel    26 May 200086     [Major General]
Col Steven R.F. Searcy   4 January 200287
Col Walter E. Wright, III    2 July 200388
Col Timothy W. Strawther     13 June 200589
Col Robert P. Givens    1 June 200790     [Brigadier General]
Col George P. Schaub    30 June 200891
Col Douglas R. Miller    25 June 201092
Col John T. Hanna    29 June 201293
Lt Col (later, Col) William C. Bailey    25 July 201494
Col Benjamin W. Bishop     8 July 201695
Col Matthew W. Renbarger    8 June 201896
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
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 interdictory 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.


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Locally Updated by Rick Griset