

The History of The 190th Air Refueling Wing



*Kansas Air National Guard
190th Air Refueling Wing
Forbes Field, Topeka, KS*

THE BEGINNING ~ Before the 117th / 190th

The 190th can trace its history back to the early years of World War II. Early in the war, the need for different types of missions was the reason for the Army Air Corps to begin to put together several different types of bomb groups, the most famous of which would become the groups flying the heavier types of bombers, i.e., the B-17's and the B-24's early in the war and the B-29's during the later war years.

But a medium bomber, the B-26, also known as Martin Marauders, would be the aircraft that the 319th Bomb Group, received as their primary bomber. The 319th was made up of 4 squadrons of B-26's, the 337th, the 338th, the 339th and the 440th.



THE SQUADRON LOGOS FOR THE 319TH BOMB GROUP



It is from the 440th that the 190th can trace its heritage. The group formed at Barksdale Field in June 1942, and trained there and at Harding Field. After only three months of intensive training, they were shipped to England during the fall of 1942. Ground elements traveled by troop ships, while the aircrew picked up brand new B-26's at the Martin plant in Baltimore and then took the northern route to England. It wasn't easy, as the winter storm season had begun over the North Atlantic, and only about half the total aircraft reached their destinations with no damage, some were never heard from again. Nevertheless, they soon found

themselves on their way to North Africa to join the efforts against the Axis powers. Only 17 of the original 57 aircraft that departed the U.S. arrived in Africa. Ground elements of the group took part in the invasion of North Africa on the 8th of November and began the heavy work of building the airfields from which the B-26's could be launched. The bombers soon arrived on the hastily built fields and began combat operations on the 28th of November, 1942. Early losses were high, but with a shift in tactics, the B-26 became the bomber with the lowest loss rate in the War.

Over the next year, the unit would move whenever the need arose, flying from several fields in North Africa, and later from the islands of Sardinia and Corsica. Sometime during this time frame, they developed a unique method of takeoffs and landings, for which they became famous as "Col. Randy's Flying Circus". Named for their Commander at the time Col. Randy Holzapple, this consisted of six abreast takeoffs and landings.

This reduced join-up time considerably and gave the B-26 increased range, since not as much fuel was used flying in circles waiting for the rest of the group to be launched. Because of innovative approaches to improving flight performance, bombing accuracy, and safety, the group would achieve one of the most remarkable bombing records of the war.

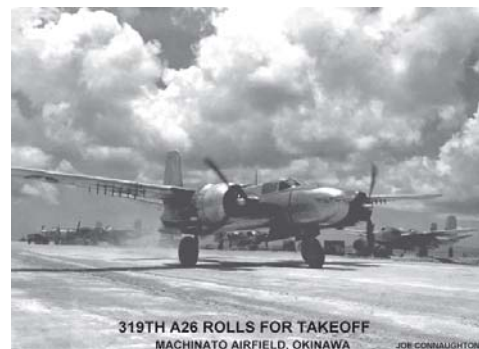


By the spring of 1944, they would become so proficient that they were awarded two Distinguished Unit Citations for precision bombing of the rail yards at Rome and Florence during Operation Strangle; the Allies attempt to cut German supply lines to southern Italy. They also received the French Croix de Guerre with Palm for action in southern Italy.

By the fall of 1944, the B-26 was no longer being built and parts were becoming scarce, the unit began to train on B-25s, another medium bomber, while still flying the B-26 and on 1 November of 1944 the unit made the conversion without losing a single day of combat operations. During January of 1945 the 319th was withdrawn from combat and was the first AAF unit to be transferred to the Pacific theater of operations. Most of the men of the unit had served their tour of duty, so it was mostly with new men that the unit trained in the U.S. and received a new aircraft before proceeding to the Pacific. However,

one story goes that some of the senior NCOs were asked to volunteer for extra duty to provide leadership and experience for the new troops. When asked for several to volunteer, all stepped forward and so provided the core for the next phase of the war that the 440th would participate in. The A-26 Invader was the bomber that the men of the 319th would fly once they began operation in the Pacific. It was a medium bomber like its predecessor and they flew missions from several different Islands in the Pacific. In fact, they had the distinction of being the only bomb group to fly all of the medium bombers of World War II.

The unit flew 515 missions and was awarded twelve battle streamers while in the Pacific. At the wars conclusion, they were brought back to the U.S., where the unit was deactivated in Washington State.



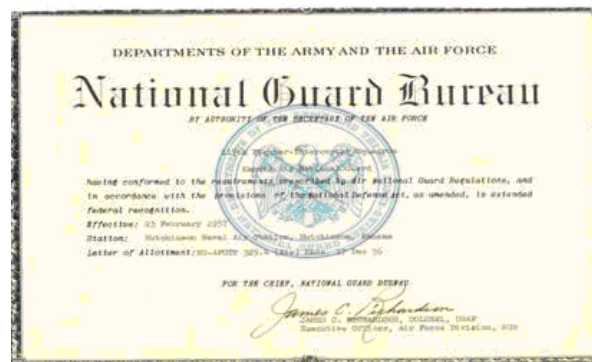
AFTER THE WAR

Perhaps realizing that the nation needed to prepare for the Cold War, the 440th Squadron was separated from the 319th, and was reactivated in 1946 at Philadelphia Municipal Airport, as part of the Pennsylvania National Guard, and the soon to be United States Air Force. Again the aircraft to be flown would be the A-26 Invader.

It was redesignated as the 117th Bomb Squadron, Light, and trained with nighttime bombing as their main mission. During the Korean War in 1951, the unit was called to active duty and served as a training squadron at Langley AFB. After being returned to state control in 1953, their mission changed, and they were equipped with F-80Cs. This was a first generation jet fighter. Their designation was changed to the 117th Fighter Inceptor Squadron. They would continue with this mission until January of 1957, when they failed to maintain their manning levels, federal recognition was withdrawn, and they no longer existed.

ON TO KANSAS

At about this same time, General Joe Nickel, the Adjutant General of Kansas was looking for a way to expand the Kansas National Guard. Upon learning of the demise of the 117th in Pennsylvania, he began the process of bringing it to Kansas. Hutchinson Naval Air Station was to be the home of the new unit. Other Kansas locations were already in heavy use, as the other Kansas Air Guard unit was already based out of Wichita and the active duty bases at Salina and Topeka were crowded. Assurances had to be made that enough men could be recruited to maintain the unit. By raiding the 127th at Wichita, and with an aggressive recruiting campaign to bring men on board, the unit achieved its goal. On the 23rd of February 1957, federal recognition was granted and the 117th Fighter Inceptor Squadron came in existence.



Captain Bill Fry was temporarily in Command, since the units new Commander, Major Carl Boggs was at school. Major Boggs returned on July 1st, assumed command, and a legend was about to begin. Colonel Boggs would serve as the unit's commander for the next 19 years, and oversee major changes in the unit. After retiring, he would be elected to the Kansas National Guard Hall of Fame.



Along with the 117th designation, came the F-80C as the unit's primary aircraft. Early on, the jets were kept at Wichita, with 117th men were scattered all around Hutchinson, both at the base and downtown, as the Navy didn't have room until new facilities could be built. That problem was soon solved when the Navy shut down their operations at Hutchinson early in 1958. At that point it became Hutchinson Air National Guard Base.

From the time that the F-80cs were first assigned to the Kansas Air National Guard, it was understood that it would only fill the gap from the units first days until the transition to another type of jet. It was thought that another, more modern fighter jet, possibly F-86s, would be the unit's next aircraft. When the new aircraft was finally announced, it would come as quite a surprise. In fact, Major Boggs was in Washington at the Guard Bureau to ask for more funding, personnel, and facilities, when General Winston



Wilson, a friend of the Majors, informed him of which new aircraft the unit would be flying. “Well Curly, how do you think you’ll like these B-57 Canberras?” “What about them?” Replied Major Boggs. “That’s what you’re getting for new equipment,” said General Wilson.

To which Major Boggs exclaimed, “@&*#\$!@!!! I can’t even spell it.”

The Martin Canberra would be the unit’s next jet. It would be the beginning of a twenty year love affair.



The RB-57s the 117th received in August of 1958, were a photo-reconnaissance version of the jet, with night time capabilities (when using flares). Their primary mission was to photograph bomb damage in the event of a nuclear war, since by this time, the Cold War was in full swing. They also provided aerial photos of natural disasters, such as the Topeka tornado of 1966.



In the summer of 1962 the unit would learn that it had a new name, the 190th Tactical Reconnaissance Group. In response to the Air Force’s desire to make units more self sustaining, the unit was expanded to include more personnel and capability to respond to national needs. The 117th designation would stay with the unit, but as the flying squadron within the larger 190th. Tragedy did strike the unit, when in 1963, Capt Charles W. Simmonds was killed in the crash of his RB-57 when the canopy blew off. In spite of this setback, by the mid Sixties the 190th became so proficient with the B-57 that they were chosen by the Air Force to train active Duty crews that would fly the B-57s in Vietnam.

The next big change was right around the corner, when in 1967, 190th members learned that they would have a new home. Forbes AFB in Topeka, would be the new base for the unit. The Air Force had decided that Hutchinson no longer suited their purposes and would be closed. So during the summer of 1967, the 190th used its summer camp to move all of the unit’s equipment and personnel to

Topeka, Kansas. It was difficult for some, since Hutchinson was their home, but by and large, the move went well. On the 11th of August, 1967 all 190th jets flew in a farewell formation down the main street of Hutchinson, and later that same day landed at Forbes to begin a new era in the unit’s history.

But just because it’s a new era, doesn’t mean that everything else changes. For the 190th the mission stayed the same; photo recon. So new surroundings or not, the work was the same, and would be for the next four years. There was one change that would take place at this time. The Air Force needed to find a way to tell the difference between the active duty radio traffic and the Air National Guard radio traffic. Because of many encounters with coyotes on the runway back at Hutchinson, the unit used to make “coyote runs” to clear the runways from the roving coyotes, so that the unit jets would not be endangered upon takeoff or landing. One of the units most colorful members, Capt Bill Miller used to joke before a mission that he was going out to see the coyotes. And so Coyote Mobile was born. Of course, “Kansas Coyotes” would not be far behind.

But as the war in Vietnam began to wind down, a new mission in on the horizon for the 190th. Photo recon is out, night time bombing is in.



And as the picture shows, the unit acquired a new patch at the same time. Sgt. Zerger (who modified the first unit patch), had begun to design a new unit patch some years before, and it finally was accepted by the Air Force. The patch has a helmeted warrior, wings to show the air heritage, and a Kansas tornado as its basic elements.

It shouldn't be a surprise when the Air Force's most experienced B-57 unit is given the all of the B-57G's being withdrawn from Vietnam. They would become the only unit in the world to be equipped with the odd looking bombers. The jets' nose is filled with infrared cameras and other electronic equipment to handle the job of night interdiction. The 190th would fly with



the G model for the next three years. It wasn't the

favorite of the men flying it, as all of that weight in the nose made it hard to control, and bomb runs were just a matter of flying straight and level. In the mean time, other changes were coming to the 190th.



In 1973, the Air Force announced that they were closing Forbes AFB. This was quite a shock to the city of Topeka, and for a while no one seemed to quite know what would become of the unit. The city of Topeka acquired most of the south end of the base, and the 190th began to migrate to the north end and its present day location. Lots of new construction gave the Kansas Coyotes a new and more convenient home. No sooner had the unit settled into its new home that it

learned that even more changes were on the way for the 190th. A new mission, again with B-57s, was coming to Forbes Air National Guard Base.



The 190th would convert from the G model B-57 to another version of the jet, the EB-57. This version was packed with electronic countermeasures to enable it to fly against U.S. air defenses. The new designation would be the 190th Defense Systems Evaluation Group, and its purpose was to test U.S. defenses, both Air Defense and Early Warning Systems.



This was the aircrew's favorite role as they got to do some really fancy flying, and they usually fared pretty well against the more modern active duty forces.

1976 would be the end of another era at the 190th. Their Commander since the unit's inception, Col. Carl (Curly) Boggs retired. But as with Col Boggs, all good things must end, so it would be with the Canberra's. By the mid seventies, they were beginning to show their age.

The last days of the Canberra weren't all good. Tragedy again strikes in 1977, when Lt. Carl D. Camp and Lt. Ross C. Keller were killed when their EB-57 went down east of Forbes. Later that same year, during August, the 190th learns it would finally end its long association with the B-57. In fact, on 18 April, 1978, the last B-57 left Forbes, and the 190th, twenty years to the day from which they were first assigned to the 117th back in Hutchinson. Just a few days later, a new mission began.

Air Refueling was the new mission.



On 22 April, 1978 the unit received its first KC-135A. This was a training jet, used only to start the conversion. The first tanker officially assigned to the unit was 57-1495, which arrived in early May. The first mission was flown on 25 May refueling an E-3A weather reconnaissance jet from Tinker AFB. Tempo 01 was their call sign. It would be the beginning of a whole new era.



It was quite a change from the former mission. The A-model KC-135 was capable of world wide refueling of U.S. and allied aircraft. And the Kansas Coyotes took to these new jets with immediate enthusiasm and pride.

As part of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), over the next few years, the unit would score "OUTSTANDING" in the Organizational Readiness Inspections that were a yearly fact of life in SAC. In fact, after having these tankers for only a few years, in 1983 the 190th earned the Saunders Trophy as the best refueling unit in the U.S. Air Force, and then followed it up in 1984 with the Spaatz Trophy as the best flying unit in the Air National Guard.



1984 also saw the unit begin to receive the newer version of the KC-135, the E-model. This upgraded version of the KC-135 had quieter engines, used less fuel, flew farther, offloaded more fuel and generally was a great improvement over the earlier A-models. This is the jet that the unit flew for the longest period of any model of any aircraft model they had ever flown. It is also the jet that in 1990, would take the unit to the Gulf during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. In fact, the 190th would play a leading role in that Conflict. The 190th acted as the lead unit at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and its commander, Colonel "Mick" Baier would become the commander of an Air Wing consisting of over 100 tankers, and 1,250 airmen, making the 1709 ARW (Provisional) the largest Air Refueling Wing ever assembled, and it would later also include a bomb wing made up of active duty crews, maintenance people, and B-52 bombers. At the end of the war, the 190th came home to an amazing sight; almost 10,000 people turned out for Forbes Field to welcome them home.

Later that year, Col Baier and the entire 190th ARW were recognized as "Kansans of the Year" by the Topeka Capital-Journal.

The Air Force would begin to use a new concept, Air Expeditionary Force, for the deployment of large parts of the unit's assets to support Department of Defense needs. Over the next 10 years, the 190th would continue to perform at a high level, being involved in almost all of the nation's actions. Provide Comfort, Restore Hope, Deliberate Forge, Deny Flight, Northern Watch, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, are only a few of the names of operations in which the 190th played a part.





The 190th played an active role in the days following 9-11, when the unit flew one of the first sorties that resulted from that day.

Answering the call from the Department of Defense wouldn't always be in the form of air refueling, as small groups or even individuals would be tasked to provide support. Kansas Coyotes travel wherever needed to serve the needs of the country.

With twenty years experience with the E-model KC-135, the unit would still be flying it when in 2004 when they again would win the Spaatz Trophy as the Best Flying Unit in the Air National Guard.

2006 found the 190th ARW again gaining new missions; as the result of the Base Alignment and Closure process, the unit

learned that they would convert from E-model tankers to the R-model. In addition, the unit grew to 12 of the more efficient tankers. Unit strength also grew to reflect the larger aircraft numbers.

With over thirty years experience as a refueling unit, and four Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards, among other citations to prove their capabilities, presently the 190th is flying the latest model of the KC-135, the R-model. The 190th Air Refueling Wing's outstanding record will allow it to continue to serve the nation and the State of Kansas.



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