



# FACT SHEET

## U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet

### HISTORY OF HOMESTEAD AIR RESERVE BASE

In September of 1942, Lt. Col. William L. Plummer, with a handful of officers and enlisted men, made his way through the long pines and palmetto scrub of rural South Dade County to assume control of an isolated airstrip located about a mile inland from the shore of Biscayne Bay. The airstrip had been turned over to the government by Coconut Grove-based Pan American Ferries, Inc., which had carved it out of the rocky terrain in the early 1940s. Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Army Air Corps officials decided the site would better serve the country's defense needs as a maintenance stopover point for aircraft being ferried to the Caribbean and North Africa. In September, officers with the Caribbean Wing of the Air Transport Command sent Colonel Plummer to the site to begin construction of a fully operational military base.



F-16 departs Homestead Air reserve base on Jan. 24, 2008.

During its first six months of existence, the newly established Homestead Army Air Field served as a scheduled stop on a well-traveled air route from the northeastern United States. On Jan. 30, 1943, the base assumed a more vital role with the activation of the 2nd Operational Training Unit. The mission of the permanently assigned cadre of nine officers, 15 enlisted men, and 12 civilian flight instructors was to provide advanced training for aircrew members who would one day pilot C-54s, C-87s and C-46s along the 188,000 miles of Air Transport Command's globe-spanning routes.

During this period of time the base was under two commands. The runway itself, Homestead Army Air Field, belonged to the Caribbean Wing of Air Transport Command, while the 2nd Operational Training Unit fell under the War Department's Domestic Transportation Division. As the need for trained transport pilots grew during 1943, officials in Washington decided to enlarge the training program at Homestead. As a result, the entire base was transferred to Air Transport Command's Ferrying Division, and by the end of the year, the 2nd Operational Training Unit's sole mission was to prepare C-54 air crews to fly the famed "Hump" from Burma into China.

By 1945, Homestead Army Air Field represented the largest four-engine transport training operation in the entire Air Transport Command. The 2nd Operational Training Unit had graduated 2,250 C-54 pilots, 14,505 copilots, 224 navigators, 85 radio operators, and 1,375 flight engineers. But it all came to a rather abrupt end.

On Sept. 15, 1945, three years to the day after the base's founding, a massive hurricane roared ashore, sending winds of up to 145 miles per hour tearing through the Air Field's buildings. Enlisted housing facilities, the nurses' dormitory, and the Base Exchange were all destroyed. The roof was ripped from what would later become building 741, the "Big Hangar". The base laundry and fire station were both declared total losses. The few remaining aircraft were tossed

about like leaves.

Following an evaluation of the damage, officials announced on Oct. 25, 1945, that Homestead Army Air Field would be shut down, with a target date for complete closure of Dec. 1, 1945. When the Air Force was created as a separate service on Sept. 18, 1947, the old Homestead Army Air Field lay in ruins.

The spirit of Homestead lived on, however, in the many alumni of Homestead's flight training courses who continued to serve. In June of 1948, when the Soviets began the total land blockade of Berlin, the Air Force responded with an unprecedented airlift effort known as Operation Vittles. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for 16 months, Air Force C-54 "Sky Masters", many of them piloted by Homestead graduates, were winging into and out of Berlin, keeping one of the world's great cities alive.

In the early 1950s, as the Korean conflict was winding down, defense officials once again looked toward Homestead with an eye to making the site an integral part of our continental defense. In mid-1954, an advance party arrived at the old base to begin the clean-up effort, and on Feb. 8, 1955, the installation was reactivated as Homestead Air Force Base. The base quickly became home for the 823rd Air Division, an umbrella organization encompassing the 379th and 19th Bomber Wings.

By the end of the decade, Homestead housed more than 6,000 permanently assigned members, twice the size of its busiest World War II days, and a fleet of B-47 "Stratojet" bombers. In June 1960, the last B-47 left Homestead to make way for the mighty B-52 "Stratofortress" and the Strategic Air Command.

The year of 1962 brought two events that shaped the future of Homestead AFB. The 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, a tactical fighter unit with a proud history dating back to 1940, was moved from George AFB, Calif., to Homestead in response to the growing Communist threat from Cuba. In October 1962, it was discovered that the Soviet Union was placing medium-range missiles on the island, giving it an unprecedented offensive capability in the region, and intensifying the Homestead-based mission.

Troops and aircraft were rushed to Homestead, swelling its population by tens of thousands. A tent city of more than 10,000 Army troops sprang up. The 31st TFW, in cooperation with two other tactical fighter wings assigned here for the duration of the crisis, had already identified targets in Cuba and were prepared to strike at a moment's notice. The world was on the brink of war, with Homestead on the leading edge.

After several weeks of tension, the Soviets backed down. The missiles were removed. The crisis was over, but many of the changes to Homestead spawned by the Soviet threat remained. Though still nominally a SAC base, Homestead now maintained a dual mission: to stand ready to project air power around the globe, and to maintain an operationally ready tactical Air Force.

With the now permanent presence of the 31st TFW, the role of the Tactical Air Command at Homestead AFB increased rapidly throughout the 1960s. In late 1966, the 31st TFW was deployed to Tuy Hoa AB, Republic of Vietnam. Two years later, on July 1, 1968, TAC officially took control of the installation, by activating the 4531st TFW as the host wing. In 1970, the 31st TFW returned from Southeast Asia and became the host unit.

In 1981 the 31st TFW and Homestead AFB again took on a new task: the training of F-4 aircrews. On March 31, 1981, the 31st TFW became the 31st Tactical Training Wing. Training was to remain the primary mission of the base until Oct. 1985, when the first F-16 arrived. With the arrival of F-16s, the 31st TFW reverted to the designation of the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing.

During that period, the largest tenant unit on Homestead AFB was the 482nd Tactical Fighter Wing of the Air Force Reserve Command. The 482d TFW was the first Air Force Reserve unit to receive the F-4 Phantom fighter jet. In 1989, the 482nd TFW converted to the F-16s.

In the early morning hours of Aug. 24, 1992, Hurricane Andrew roared ashore at Homestead AFB. The base was ground zero for the powerful, category 4 storm, (recently re-classified as a category 5 storm) which virtually destroyed the base.

On Sept 2, 1992, President George H. Bush and then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney visited the base. He was welcomed by committed airman now working out of the "Bolivar" Tent City. Most military and family members returned to the base only to gather what belongings had been spared while continuing a mass evacuation during this time to new duty assignments. A total of 23,500 additional military personnel from various military units across the United States operated out of tents on and off the base providing around-the-clock law enforcement, security, humanitarian, and rebuilding manpower for the base and community.

In initial rebuilding efforts, the DOD expended in excess of \$100 million in new construction and infrastructure improvements to preserve Homestead AFB as a strategic national defense asset. Demolition of unusable buildings and repair of base infrastructure ensued. Re-constructing the Florida Air National Guard hangar, air traffic control tower and maintenance hangers became priority. Within just a few short years after the hurricane, the base was in the process of building brand new facilities such as the wing headquarters, vehicle maintenance, communications, medical, and security facility buildings.

An Air Force Ball was held on March 5, 1994. The Ball was a bittersweet affair. The event was a "Hail and Farewell" to "hail" the return of the 482nd FW from its post-Andrew relocation to MacDill AFB, Fla., and to welcome its new role as the predominant unit at the "new" Homestead Air Reserve Base. But, it was also a time to bid "farewell" to the 31st TFW. The 31st TFW was deactivated at Homestead AFB and reactivated at Aviano AB, Italy.

In February 1995, the base faced its next serious threat from the Base Realignment and Closure Committee, which sought to close the ravaged base. The civilian community, including state and federal government leaders, rallied in support of the base, and launched a fight for the base's survival and the return of fighter operations to South Florida. The BRAC ultimately withdrew Homestead AFB from the closure list on June 22, 1995.

Homestead Air Force Base was officially re-designated as Homestead Air Reserve Base on March 31, 1994. The first test for the new base came in September 1994 when a multi-service group assembled at the base in preparation for an invasion of Haiti. The newly designated base continued to be a forward joint service operating location for events surrounding Operation Uphold Democracy/Restore Freedom in Haiti. That year also marked the beginning of another major role in the region as Homestead became a forward supply stop for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The base was also a staging area for masses of Cuban immigrants receiving paroles into the United States.

In 1994, the 482nd Fighter Wing became the host unit. The wing then began rebuilding the base. Major construction projects ensued and Homestead made it through another round of base closings in 1995. May of 1995 brought the grand opening of the BX Mart. Homestead ARB was selected by Congress to be the second site in the Air Force for the new concept of a combined commissary and exchange facility for smaller bases.

Through 2001, Homestead ARB units and personnel continued to fulfill their primary mission of training reservists while welcoming and supporting a number of other DOD and international tenant units. The base became a staging ground for numerous exercises and training conferences for Air Force Reserve Command, as well as various Joint Task Force and DOD functions.

Deployments of the Wing's 93rd Fighter Squadron continued through the '90's in support of Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch, and various humanitarian missions continued to operate from the base. All the while, Homestead ARB continued to host training deployments and conferences involving the Army, Navy, British Air Force, the FBI, and the U.S. Forest Service. This high-operations tempo along with on-going post-hurricane construction, and strong, continued local community involvement seemed to cement the base's future in

Homestead.

Upon their return to home station, the 93rd Fighter Squadron began performing Noble Eagle Air Defense alert missions, once again demonstrating the strategic importance of the Homestead location as well as the incalculable value of its trained and ready combat force.

In early March of 2003, as they prepared for yet another rotation to Operation Southern Watch, members of the 93rd Fighter Squadron advance party found themselves on the front lines for the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Two pilots and two F-16 aircraft from the unit contributed to the "shock and awe" campaign over Baghdad, as well as other Iraqi targets, during the first and continued waves of the coalition forces campaign.

Back at home, the resumption of the Operation Noble Eagle Air Defense alert mission added to the high-operations tempo the base faced that year. In total, the 482nd FW contributed more than 200 personnel mobilized in support of Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, predominately from security forces, services, and civil engineering squadrons.

Even with continuing mobilizations and other real world tasking, the 482nd FW received an outstanding rating on a Standardization/Evaluation Program inspection and satisfactory ratings on both a Unit Compliance Inspection in 2003 and an Operational Readiness Inspection in 2004. Additionally, the wing received numerous unit and individual Air Force Reserve Command and 10th Air Force awards during those two years, proving it could not only fulfill multiple missions and role tasking, but also continue to display excellence in every area.

In 2005, Homestead supported El Salvador during Operation New Horizon, providing combined engineer and medical readiness training in the form of humanitarian and civic assistance to the El Salvadoran people.

In November of 2009, Homestead ARB hosted its first Air Force sponsored air show in 18 years, featuring the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds as the headlining act. The air show was a complete success and marked the beginning of many more to come. In November of 2010, Homestead ARB hosted another air show, featuring the U.S. Navy Blue Angels, with an estimated 400,000 spectators entering the gates of the base.

Homestead ARB is used as a staging area for operations and relief efforts in the southern hemisphere and serves as a major focal point in providing assistance in numerous natural disasters such as the Haiti Relief Efforts. Operation Unified Response was a month-long humanitarian effort to provide manpower, food and water and to assist earthquake victims reunite with relatives and loved ones after the devastating earthquake in Port Au Prince, Haiti. From Jan. 13, 2010 to Feb. 13, 2010, components of the Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard staged troops, equipment, and thousands of pounds of supplies to be flown to Port Au Prince airport.

In 2010 Homestead opened a new Coffee Shop, Blazin Beans, as well as a hair care salon. New state-of-the-art facilities are currently being constructed on base are a troop dining facility, fitness center, and a new headquarters building for Special Operations Command South. Homestead ARB has also assisted and continues to assist a myriad of missions as well as the Global War on Terror with numerous individual and unit deployments to include: Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle Air Defense Alert, Viper Javelin, and Operation New Dawn.

Reservists from the 482nd Security Forces Squadron completed a six month deployment in June of 2010 to Kirkuk Regional Air Base in Northern Iraq. Their mission was to provide security and create a safe and secure environment for thousands of U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi troops; U.S. State Department Provisional Reconstruction Teams, and civilian contractors housed and operating from the base. Airmen from the 482nd Civil Engineering Squadron returned from a six month deployment at Kirkuk Air Base, Iraq, in Aug. of 2010. Their mission was to build roads and light infrastructure.

Today, the 482nd FW, the host unit of Homestead ARB, continues to support contingency and training operations of U.S. Southern Command and a number of tenant units, including Headquarters Special Operations Command South, the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Safety and

Security Team, and an air and maritime unit of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In addition, Homestead ARB is home to the most active NORAD alert site in the continental United States, operated by a detachment of F-15 fighter interceptors from the 125th FW of the Florida Air National Guard.

As we look toward the future, the 482nd FW continues to provide the Department of Defense with an efficient, cost-effective air reserve base on the rim of the Caribbean Basin. Its strategic presence at the southernmost tip of the continental United States provides an invaluable platform from which to launch its full range of capabilities. Poised to protect and defend, readiness is its primary mission. Whether responding to real-world contingencies and tasks in support of homeland defense or performing its on-going mission of training America's finest citizen Airmen, the 482nd FW consistently lives its vision of service before self, integrity first, and excellence in all we do.

Information current as of November 2012.

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