

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE 177th FIGHTER WING

# THE CONTRAL



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*On the Cover: Col. Kerry M. Gentry, 177th Fighter Wing Commander, takes off in his F-16C Fighting Falcon for the last time on March 8, 2015. Gentry retired with 28 years of service to the Air Force and Air National Guard, and over 3,000 flight hours. ANG/Airman 1st Class Amber Powell*



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# COMMANDER'S COLUMN



Story by Col. Kerry M. Gentry, 177th Fighter Wing Commander

Jersey Devils,

By the time this letter is published I will be wrapping up the backside of an incredibly humbling Command experience that allowed me to be your biggest advocate and cheerleader for the past three years. On behalf of my family and myself, I would like to say thank you to all of the men and women of the 177 FW for your dedication and sacrifice that you demonstrate each and every day. It has been an incredible honor to have served with you over these past 13 years of my time here in the 177 FW. As I prepare for the “Next chapter” in my life, I can’t help but reflect on what it has meant to serve my country with some of the finest individuals in the world...the men and women of the 177 FW. And yes, I am getting sentimental...I will truly miss this place and the people whom I have served with.

When I look at the 177 FW, I have come to know our Airmen as incredibly resilient, adaptable, tenacious, mission oriented, and most importantly *devoted* to our State’s and Nation’s cause. When you have the privilege of sitting in the Wing Commanders seat, you can’t help but see things from a slightly different perspective than in previous positions. With a more “complete” view of the Wing, what I have observed and come to respect and admire most about our Wing, and the Air National Guard for that matter, is how incredibly devoted our folks are. Since I was a brand new Lt. in the late 80’s until today, we have been an Air Force at war. This constant state of conflict has driven countless challenges to our Air National Guard, our Wing, our Airmen, and our Families. Over the past three decades we have gone through multiple conversions, deployed repeatedly to the Combat AOR, successfully negotiated countless inspections, and even handled a few state emergencies thrown in lest we get bored! This has proved to be an incredible challenge, especially when you con-

sider the ever-increasing operations tempo and constantly receding budgets we have faced, and will surely continue to face for the foreseeable future. The incredible devotion displayed by our Airmen day-in, and day-out is nothing short of astonishing to me. 20 years ago If you had asked me to predict what the resultant morale and retention statistics would show after subjecting our Airmen and their families to this tempo, I would have told you we would be in a dire situation as people bolted from the Guard at their first opportunity. I couldn’t have been more wrong! In reality, the exact opposite has occurred. What I had failed to recognize, until this Command, was the level of commitment our Airmen and their families have for the Wing, State, and Country. Instead of recruiting and retention rates trending downward, surprisingly they remain consistently strong across the board. To me, the only plausible explanation is the unwavering devotion of our Airmen and the support they receive from their families. As I have said many times before, “Without the family support at

home, I don’t have the support of the best Airmen in the world, and therefore we wouldn’t have the best Wing in the Air Force”.

As my family and I move into the “next chapter” of our life, I leave this honorable service with the utmost confidence that the men, women, and families of the 177 FW, under the exemplary Command of Col DiDonna, will continue this tradition of excellence and unparalleled *devotion* that is our legacy. Those that have gone before us would expect nothing less. So as I head out the main gate this weekend for the last time as an active member of the 177 FW I will, more than ever before, appreciate the Wings mantra of “Once a Devil, Always a Devil”.

Proud to have served,

Col. Kerry M. Gentry

Wing Commander

177th Fighter Wing

“On behalf of my family and myself, I would like to say thank you to all of the men and women of the 177 FW for your dedication and sacrifice that you demonstrate each and every day.”



# 177THFW CHANGE OF COMMAND

Story by Senior Airman Shane S. Karp, 177th FW/PA



Col. John R. DiDonna, center, accepts command of the 177th Fighter Wing from Brig. Gen. Robert C. Bolton, left, commander of the New Jersey Air National Guard, while Col. Kerry M. Gentry, right, looks on here on March 8. ANG/Senior Airman Shane S. Karp

Members of the 177th Fighter Wing gathered in the main hangar to take part in a change of command ceremony here on March 8.

The event symbolized the passing of the torch from Col. Kerry M. Gentry, 177th Fighter Wing commander since March 2012, to the new commander of the 177th Fighter Wing, Col. John R. DiDonna, Jr., who served as vice commander of the 177thFW since March 2013.

The ceremony signifies the end of an illustrious Air Force career for Gentry, who served since 1987 and accumulated more than 3,000 flight hours in the F-16 Fighting Falcon, including five combat deployments.

“What a phenomenal three years,” said Gentry of his time as commander. “I’m proud to have served with you; I’m proud to have served for you.”

Some of those in attendance at the ceremony were local elected representatives, military dignitaries from the Army, Coast Guard, and Air Force, family members, Airmen of the 177th Fighter Wing, and three most recent generations of 177th Fighter Wing commanders.

“If you look up the definition of leadership, warrior, professionalism, family man ... it’s Col. Gentry,” said Brig. Gen. Robert C. Bolton, current commander of the New Jersey Air National Guard and former 177th Fighter Wing commander.

DiDonna, who joined the 177FW in March of 2003, had previously served as 119th Fighter Squadron commander, 177FW Operations Group commander, and 177FW vice commander before taking over as wing commander.

“I’ve had the pleasure of serving with you

since 2002,” Gentry said to DiDonna, “I’ve seen what you can do, I know what you can do ... you won’t even feel the rudder shift when the flight controls get handed over to you.”

The confidence in the new commander’s ability to lead was also shared by Bolton.

“Col. DiDonna is going to learn from Col. Gentry’s experience and raise this wing to another level,” said Bolton.

DiDonna closed by saying, “It’s a tremendous privilege to stand here before you, and serve with you, and I will do my very best each and every day to serve you admirably, and with honor.”



Left: Col. Kerry M. Gentry, 177thFW commander, speaks prior to relinquishing command. Center: Col. John R. DiDonna speaks to the crowd after becoming the new commander of the 177FW. Right: Col. Kerry M. Gentry renders his final salute to the men and women of the 177th Fighter Wing, as he retires from the New Jersey Air National Guard. ANG/Senior Airman Shane S. Karp



# Youth Advisory Council meets at 177<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing

Story by Tech. Sgt. Andrew Merlock, Jr, 177th FW/PA



Above: Tech. Sgt. Jay Hurley, left and Staff Sgt. Joseph Coates, right, help a member of the Youth Advisory Council into a protective bomb suit during a base tour here on March 7. ANG/Tech. Sgt. Andrew Merlock, Jr.

A local youth advisory council poses for a group photo in front of the 177th Fighter Wing Headquarters building on March 7 ANG/Tech. Sgt. Andrew Merlock, Jr.



**“For them to understand that this is their country and they’re giving up Saturday on a regular basis to do things like this, they’re a cut above.”**

**A** local youth advisory council met here on March 7 to discuss current events and issues in the United States with a member of Congress.

The council was comprised of students from various high schools located within New Jersey’s Second District and meet with U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo monthly for a four-month period. Members of the council were nominated by their principal and met with the congressman at various locations throughout his district.

“It gives me a chance to hear directly from a generation that I don’t get to interact with”, said U.S. Rep. LoBiondo. “For them to understand that this is their country and they’re giving up Saturday on a regular basis to do things like this, they’re a cut above”, the congressman concluded.

In addition to meeting with the congressman, the council received a base tour to learn about the 177<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing’s mission and capabilities. During the tour, the council received and participated in various demonstrations provided by airmen assigned to different Air Force specialties.

“What you see here are called citizen airmen, people that have primary jobs in the community and serve when called upon”, said Col. Bradford Everman, commander of the 177<sup>th</sup> Operations Group. “We have a federal mission to go overseas and fight a war and we also have a state mission to protect life and property”. “Our motto is community based, global impact”, concluded Everman.

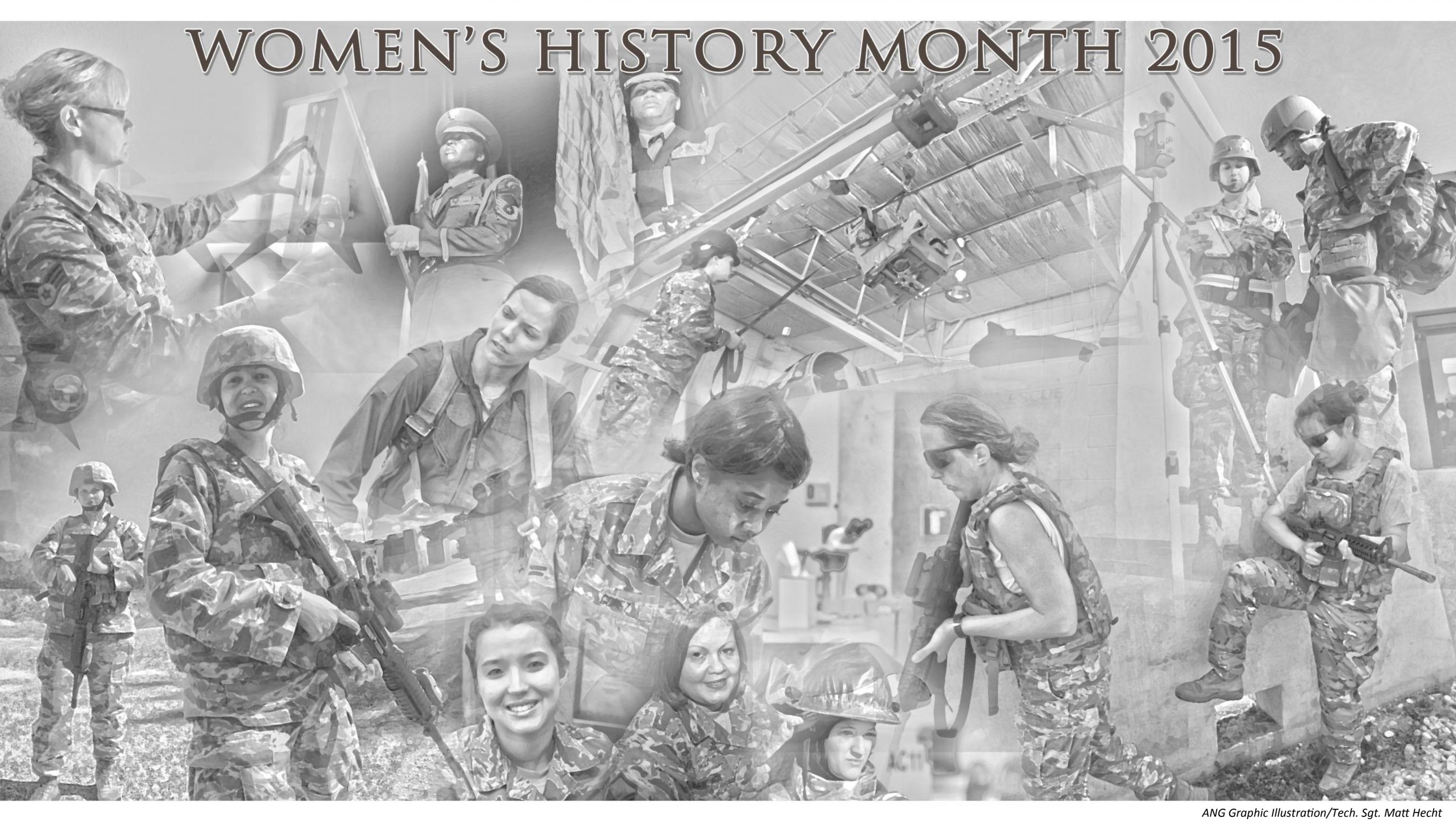
During one of the demonstrations, Capt. Arnold Lucchesi, a pilot with the 119th Fighter Squadron, provided

members of the council with an opportunity to operate the flight simulator, a component utilized by fighter pilots for training exercises.

“We train for primarily emergency procedures, from engine malfunctions to electrical malfunctions”, explained Lucchesi. “We can practice things that we cannot practice in an airplane”, he continued, “we do this at least once a month and it is a requirement for us.”

At the conclusion of the tour, many members of the council, whom intend to serve their country upon completing high school, expressed a new-found interest in the Air National Guard. “Today was a different experience for us”, said Sam Karabashian, a senior at the Atlantic Christian School. “I have a plan to go into the military and the Air National Guard is an excellent opportunity to get paid for your education as well as serve your country”. 

# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH 2015



# NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

PRESENTED BY THE  
U.S. AIR FORCE



*Story by Airman 1st Class Amber Powell, 177th FW/PA*

**The Department of Defense is celebrating Women's History Month throughout the month of March. Ever since women were permitted to join the National Guard, around 1950, they have had a consistent presence. According to Air National Guard statistics, right now women make up approximately 18.5% of the ANG force.**

The chance to serve their country and give back to their community are reasons Master Sgt. Dreama Heath and Master Sgt. Patricia Hughes joined the New Jersey Air National Guard.

"Being part of the military has made me a stronger person and has provided opportunities I wouldn't get anywhere else," said Heath, with the 177th Fighter Wing's Comptroller Flight.

Heath, who recently received an award for Leadership last month, says serving in the Air Force is rewarding, but it's not about rank or awards. "It's the pride that you are a part of something bigger and you contribute towards a better future for all of us."

Heath and Hughes have served in the New Jersey Air National Guard for a combined total of 56 years. Through that time many events have taken place in the world that have led women to take an active role in the leadership of our country.

"Women have always played a vital role in the history of the military, whether as a member or as a spouse. Being a woman in the military has been a pleasure and I take great honor in my position," said Hughes, with the 177th's Medical Group.

"I see more and more young, talented, and motivated women joining and wanting to get involved," said Hughes. "They bring a refreshing, diverse aspect to the workforce."

Even though the military offers wonderful training, there are opportunities to learn more than what's written down in a book.

"You learn new skills, but you also learn how strong you are and that you can do anything you put your mind to," said Heath. "We need to continue to

demonstrate that we are an integral part of society and the military, and that we can be successful in both."

"We sometimes forget how fortunate we as women are in this great country to have the freedoms to choose what we want to do with our future," said Hughes. "We can be caregivers, mothers, leaders, office workers, even a public health technician serving this great nation. The opportunities are all there, we just have to reach out and believe that it can be obtained."

As we celebrate Women's History Month, let us be grateful for the women have come before us to lead the way, and may we encourage each other to continue on strong as we move forward. 🇺🇸



*Master Sgt. Dreama Heath, right, receives both a Meritorious Service Medal and the 2014 177th Fighter Wing Leadership Award from Col. Kerry M. Gentry, 177th Fighter Wing Commander during a ceremony on Feb. 8, 2015. ANG/Airman 1st Class Amber Powell*

# 177th AIRMAN PARTICIPATES IN "READ ACROSS AMERICA"

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht, 177th FW/PA

**T**he sounds of chattering children, musical instruments and teachers instructing students echoed through the halls of Atlantic City's Brighton Avenue School. With the creak of the front doors opening, the noise level dipped as Airmen from the New Jersey Air National Guard entered the building.

The five Airmen, representing Joint Force Headquarters, the 108th Wing, and the 177th Fighter Wing, all came together to participate in Read Across America.

Founded by the National Education Association, Read Across America coincides around the time of renowned children's author Dr. Seuss' birthday on March 2, and features military and community members coming together to read to children in local schools.

The Airmen were greeted by Courtney Mitchell, who acted as the teacher-military liaison.

"It means so much to the kids to have the National Guard here," said Mitchell.

Mitchell then led the Airmen to the classrooms

where they would be reading to students.

Tech. Sgt. Archie Mason lightened the mood with a short question-and-answer session before he began reading, asking students if they liked books as much as their siblings.

"To come out and talk to the children is really great," said Mason, a recruiter with the 177th

Fighter Wing. "I have older children, so I really don't get a chance to sit down and have these interactions, so it's nostalgic for me, but, more importantly, the children, the looks on their faces, the surprise; it's amazing to be a part of that type of transaction."

Airman 1st Class Hannah Bartlett, an administrator from the 108th Wing, read Peggy Rathmann's "Officer Buckle and Gloria"

to Tayler Adams' fifth-grade class. After she finished, Bartlett answered student's questions on everything from military food to what adventures she had been on.

"I went to Guam with the Wing," said Bartlett.

"That was fun, but it was a lot of hard work."

Tech. Sgt. Janeen MacGray, from New Jersey



*Inset: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Archie Mason reads to kindergartners at the Brighton Avenue School, Atlantic City, N.J., during a Read Across America event, Feb. 24, 2015. Mason, a recruiter with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing, along with other NJANG Airmen participated in this year's event at the school. Read Across America is sponsored by the National Education Association to encourage young people to read by holding special reading events involving military and community members. Below: Mason reads to second graders at Brighton Avenue School.*

Joint Force Headquarters, was overwhelmed with all of the smiles she faced as she read to the second graders.

"It meant a lot to see how much they enjoyed listening," said MacGray. "It's a very rewarding feeling."

"You know they're getting something out of it, and at the same time we're getting something out of it," said Mason. "It was a great experience."

In New Jersey, Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey National Guard volunteer to participate in these events. The Department of Defense encourages all members of the armed services to participate in the Read Across America program.

Each Airman received a card from their classroom signed by the students thanking them for their time and for promoting literacy. 🇺🇸

# 177th Maintenance Off-site Leadership Seminar

Story by Chief Master Sgt. Ray Morales, 177th Maintenance Group

**T**he New Jersey Air National Guard's 177<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Group from Egg Harbor Township, N.J., held its first ever off-site Leadership Seminar at the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton, N.J. on Feb. 12, 2015.

The Airmen participating consisted of approximately 40 senior enlisted members and officers who gathered together for a full day of leadership discussions. The seminar opened up with a two hour session of questions that were submitted by the senior enlisted leaders of the organization with topics ranging from general leadership issues and decisions, mission related concerns, and the future of the organization. The commanders addressed all the questions in an open format.

Dr. Andrew Savicky, the 177<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing's Director of Psychological Health, gave a presentation on the trials and tribulations of Leadership/Mentorship and spoke about how to become a more efficient leader.

Brig. Gen. Michael Cunniff, The Adjutant General, spoke in an open forum discussing present and future National Guard issues and future missions. Chief Master Sgt. Raynaldo Morales, Maj. Joseph Leonard and Col. Patrick Kennedy, all from the 177<sup>th</sup>'s Maintenance Group, gave presentations on topics ranging from effective communication, Active Guard Reserve and Technician discipline rules,

and general leadership.

The discussions concluded with Lt. Col. John Cosgrove, 177<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Squadron Commander, sharing the goals and expectations for the Maintenance Group's future.

While at the Old Barracks, the Airmen were placed in formation where they were sworn into the Colonial Revolutionary Army by one of the museum's reenacting commanders.

The Leadership seminar came to a close with a consensus from the group that it served as a positive team building event, with the hope to provide future seminars for the junior enlisted. 



Above, left: Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing's Maintenance Group pose for a group photo in front of the State Capital in Trenton, N.J. on Feb. 12. ANG/Chief Master Sgt. Ray Morales

## The Republic F-84F Thunderstreak In Air National Guard Service

**A**s mentioned in the last issue of the *Contrail*, the Air National Guard began receiving the swept-wing Republic F-84F Thunderstreak shortly after the type's acceptance by the regular Air Force. Initially assigned to the Strategic Air Command as an escort fighter, SAC began to transfer Thunderstreaks to the Air National Guard in August 1954. The other Air Force user, the Tactical Air Command, transferred all of its F-84Fs to the Guard by July 1958; newer aircraft including the North American F-100 Super Sabre replaced them in the "big" Air Force squadrons.

A total of 25 ANG fighter squadrons eventually operated the F-84F between 1954 and 1972. The earliest ANG user was the 146th Fighter Squadron (112<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Group) of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard flying from Pittsburgh Airport. They received their initial complement of 24 Thunderstreaks from the Strategic Air Command and were tasked with the fighter-bomber/tactical fighter mission. They were followed in 1955 by three other Pennsylvania Air National Guard squadrons. The PAANG's 103<sup>rd</sup>, 111<sup>th</sup> and 147<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadrons undertook the fighter-interceptor role flying from the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia airports, respectively. Although it was great in air-to-ground, it was not as good an air-to-air fighter as the Sabre; still a number of ANG units, including the NJANG, stood air defense alerts with F-84Fs through the late 1950s. The ANG Thunderstreak squadrons were, with one exception, based in eastern and central states. The roster included the Air National Guards of Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois (4 squadrons each); New Jersey, Massachusetts, Indiana and Georgia (2 squadrons each); Arizona; Missouri; Virginia; Iowa; and Texas (1 squadron each).

F-84F Thunderstreaks from the 119th Fighter Squadron return to Atlantic City Airport from a training mission at Warren Grove Range in 1962. ANG photo



In the New Jersey ANG, two fighter squadrons received the F-84F in 1958. These were our own 119<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron (177<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Group) at Atlantic City and McGuire Air Force Base's 141<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron (108<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Group). Both relied heavily on the Warren Grove Bombing Range that at that time was under the control of the 108<sup>th</sup> TFG. While the 119<sup>th</sup> mission was as a tactical fighter squadron, the 141<sup>st</sup> was initially a fighter interceptor squadron before transitioning to a tactical fighter role.

Interestingly, McGuire's 141<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron was one of 5 ANG squadrons that received the "special" designation, meaning they were given a nuclear strike mission (referring to "special" weapons, the Cold War euphemism for nukes). This special assignment, however, was mainly on paper. In reality, the training of ANG Thunderstreak

units in nuclear strike was limited and more importantly, having nuclear weapons on ANG bases never actually happened.

In the summer of 1961, the specter of a separate treaty between Russia and the German Democratic Republic (communist East Germany) caused concern over the continued access by the Allies to Berlin. It must be recalled that after the end of World War II, Germany was divided into 4 sectors (US, British, French and Russian). Berlin was also divided into 4 corresponding sectors, but the city itself was deep within the Russian sector, which became East Germany. Therefore the worry about access through East Germany to Berlin was valid.



A 119th Fighter Squadron F-84F sits on the flight line at Atlantic City Air National Guard base in this undated photo. ANG photo

In response, in August President John F. Kennedy announced a military buildup in Europe and the intended mobilization of Air National Guard flying units. On August 13, while the preparation for mobilization was just getting underway, the Soviets and East Germans began to erect the infamous Berlin Wall and threatened further restrictions on access to Berlin. In response, on October 1, 1961 28 ANG squadrons were mobilized. These included 18 tactical fighter (three with F-100C Super Sabres, three with F-86H Sabres, and twelve with F-84F Thunderstreaks), four tactical reconnaissance (RF-84F Thunderflashes) and six air transport (C-97A Stratofreighters) squadrons. One month later, three ANG fighter interceptor squadrons flying the Lockheed F-104A Starfighter were also mobilized. To man these squadrons, 2,760 officers and 18,392 enlisted guardsmen were called to active duty – representing 30%

of the total Air National Guard strength. Both of New Jersey's Thunderstreak squadrons were mobilized.

The Air National Guard responded quickly and by the end of October, *Operation Stair Step* was organized under the direction of NJANG's own Maj. Gen. (and WWII Mustang ace) Don Strait. A total of 216 ANG tactical aircraft gathered for the transatlantic crossing to Europe. Three squadrons of F-86Hs (two from Massachusetts, one for New York) gathered at Loring AFB (Maine). The remaining squadrons (composed of F-84Fs, RF-84Fs plus

some T-33s) assembled at McGuire AFB. On October 30, the three F-86H squadrons flew to Phalsbourg AB, France, via stops in Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland and Scotland. Two days later, the five squadrons of F-84Fs and RF-84Fs plus T-33s left McGuire for a number of French bases following a similar route. The 163<sup>rd</sup> TFS (Indiana) went to Chambley AB; the 141<sup>st</sup> TFS (New Jersey) went to Chaumont-Semoutiers AB; the 106<sup>th</sup> TRS (Alabama) to Dreux AB; the 166<sup>th</sup> TFS (Ohio) to Etain AB; and the 110<sup>th</sup> TFS (Missouri) to Toul-Rosieres AB. The flights were not non-stop since at the time, most ANG tactical fighter units had not been trained in air-to-air refueling. Therefore, for the longest legs over the ocean, Maj. Gen. Strait's staff devised a number of tricks to extend the range of the Thunderstreaks, including jacking them up while refueling on the ground to fill every cubic inch of the downward sloping drop tanks, and towing the aircraft to the end of the runway to save taxiing fuel. In the related *Operation Brass Ring*, the three fighter interceptor squadrons, had their short-ranged F-104A Starfighters airlifted in C-124 Globemasters of the Military Airlift Command, and ended up standing alert at Ramstein AB (Germany) and Moron AB (Spain).

All 216 ANG jets arrived safely in Europe, without so much as a scratch, a strong testimony to the experience and skill of their ANG pilots and ground crew. In total eight ANG squadrons were operating in Europe just five short weeks after being called to active duty. The remaining mobilized tactical squadrons stayed at their stateside bases, including the 177<sup>th</sup> TFS at Atlantic City. They trained under the Tactical Air Command for possible deployment to Europe, but the need did not materialize. Personnel from these squadrons, however, rotated to Europe to relieve guardsmen from the deployed squadrons, with Atlantic City guardsmen relieving those from McGuire AFB.

In Europe, the ANG F-84F squadrons were assigned to three provisional Tactical Fighter Wings. Personnel and aircraft of New Jersey's 141<sup>st</sup> and 119<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadrons (along with Virginia's 149<sup>th</sup> TFS) became part of the 7108<sup>th</sup> Tactical Wing headquartered at Chaumont-Semoutiers AB. They flew countless training missions to local

bombing ranges as well as occasional detachments to Wheelus AFB in Libya. One of the best flying books ever read by this author, "Stranger To The Ground" by Richard Bach, gives a vivid "in the cockpit" description of what it was like for a mobilized New Jersey ANG pilot flying over the unfamiliar European terrain and dealing with the less than pleasant European weather. (Richard Bach, best known for writing "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" was a pilot with New Jersey's 141<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron/108<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing).

The ANG units were demobilized on August 31, 1962 and many units returned to the home stations with their aircraft at that time. However, the Air Force retained a large number of F-84Fs to equip three new tactical fighter wings activated in Europe. Over the next years, as those squadrons received later model aircraft, the "borrowed" Thunderstreaks were eventually returned to the Air National Guard. New Jersey's 141<sup>st</sup> TFS was one of those units that returned to the US minus its aircraft. Upon their return to McGuire AFB they reequipped with North American F-86H Sabres. The New Jersey ANG's 119<sup>th</sup> TFS flew F-84Fs until 1964 when it too re-equipped with the F-86H, the subject of next month's column.

However, the deployment overseas, the heavy training schedule in the states, and lack of spare parts took their toll on the airframes. All ANG F-84Fs were grounded for a time to replaced corroded control rods. The deployed aircraft needed further modification to improve their weapons carrying capability and reliability.

Of the remaining Thunderstreak units, despite their age and flight hours, the ANG Thunderstreak fleet soldiered on into the early 1970s. The final unit, the 183<sup>rd</sup> TFG (Springfield, Illinois) was still flying 56 F-84Fs in 1972 when a fatal crash was linked to structural failure. Inspection of the remaining aircraft showed serious stress corrosion cracking throughout the fleet, forcing the immediate retirement of the Thunderstreak.



*Below: A New Jersey Air National Guard F-84F parked at Chaumont Air Force Base, France in 1961.*

*Right: a group of four F-84F's fly in formation over Chaumont AFB. The NJANG aircraft were at Chaumont as part of the United States response to the Berlin Crisis. ANG photos*



Generally, pilots liked the Thunderstreak despite some of its limitations. In the early versions, before modifications were made to the “poor man’s” two-piece flying tail, elevator control was very heavy. Its replacement with an all-moving stabilator or “flying tail” took a number of years to complete. It was also underpowered. The jet was barely supersonic; it needed a dive from 40,000 feet, straight down, to “just nudge the Mach meter to 1.01 where it stayed,” according to Korean and Vietnam War veteran Air Force pilot, the late Col. Jack Broughton. Then the pilot had to fight the controls to pull out of the dive in the denser lower altitudes, trying “not to make a ‘smoking hole in the ground’ just for the honor of joining the (then) elite Mach 1 club.”

There was no nose-wheel steering, so taxiing required the use of differential braking. Fortunately, the wide stance of the landing gear made this a minor issue. Its nickname, “Hog”, came from its “appetite” for long runways even when not loaded to full weapons carrying capacity. The joke among Thunderstreak pilots was that Republic should install a bag of gravel in front of the nose wheel that could be released by the pilot to “fool the aircraft into thinking that it was at the end of the runway” because it seemed that no matter what, a Thunderstreak needed every inch of pavement to get airborne. In truth, Guard pilots learned to start their takeoffs from the departure end runoff area to gain a few extra feet of runway and once airborne, to nurse the jet out of the ground effect. In the air, the lack of power made formation join-ups difficult unless the leader held his throttle to no more than 85% thrust, allowing his wingmen to catch up.

Later, it gained the name “Thud’s Mother” in honor of the next Republic fighter, the F-105 Thunderchief, nicknamed the “Thud.” (The source of that name and the story of this incredible aircraft will be the subject of a later column in the *Contrail*.) Thunderstreak pilots faced both fascination and frustration. The airframe was very strong, as were all products of Republic Aircraft. The Thunderstreak was small by today’s standards, with a 33.6-foot wingspan swept at 30 degrees, and a length of just over 43 feet. It carried 3,575 pounds of jet fuel internally and in ANG service was always fitted with two 450-gallon, downward sloping drop tanks. The cockpit

was a bit cramped for taller pilots but was well laid out with nice features such as a dial to adjust the rudder pedals. It had an on-board high-pressure (3000 psi) air system linked to a small high-speed turbine for engine starts without the need for a ground cart. This sounds convenient, but if the starting turbine failed to disengage properly it would disintegrate when the throttle was advanced with a spectacular explosion and wrecked airframe. In cold climates, failure to properly warm up the systems would result in burst hydraulics if the control surfaces were moved prematurely.

The main strength of the Thunderstreak was its ability to cruise at 35,000 feet, at Mach 0.78, with a true airspeed of 465 knots using 92% power and consuming only 2,300 pounds of jet fuel per hour. ANG pilots learned the best attack profile was a high-speed, high altitude approach, never getting below 450 knots, punch off the external tanks, make one pass at the target and get out as fast as possible. Bingo fuel was about 3,000 pounds.

It was said it was impossible to overstress a Thunderstreak because it would stall well before it reached the airframe’s maximum 8.67 G! It could suffer an “accelerated stall pitch up” where if the pilot failed to heed the impending stall warnings, the nose would pitch sharply upward as the aircraft attempted to swap ends. A loud bang would accompany a compressor stall (since due to the high angle of attack, the inlet would not longer supply air to the engine) and if strong forward stick was not applied promptly control would be lost. At high Mach numbers, this maneuver possibly resulted in the disintegration of the aircraft. But experienced ANG pilots used this odd behavior to their advantage in mock dogfights, pulling the nose up in a mild stall buffet, forcing the pursuer to overshoot, then pushing his Thunderstreak nose-down into a dive. If mishandled, however, this ploy would result in departure from controlled flight and a spin. And very few Thunderstreaks were recovered from spins!

The six 0.5 caliber machine guns (four mounted in the upper nose and one in each wing root) packed a good punch. Each gun had 300 rounds and fired at 1,250 rounds per minute. From the ground it sounded much like the “erratic burping” of a Gatling gun.

Air-to-air gunnery and air-to-ground strafing, bombing and rocketry were fairly accurate thanks to the A-4 gun sight and AN/APG-30 ranging radar, but still ANG pilots found the need to apply “Kentucky windage” to adjust for winds in attacking ground targets. Skip-bombing was a favorite mission, where pilots approached the target a 35 feet altitude and 380 knots; when the pipper was over the target they released the bombs and immediately pulled up, usually achieving extremely accurate results.

The landing gear stance made landing relatively easy, as the nose wheel was held off the pavement for aerodynamic drag. Although fitted with a drag chute, ANG pilots felt that their use was a mark of a poor pilot “who could not maintain a proper approach speed” and disdained their use! After landing, the Thunderstreak held “one final trick up its sleeve.” On engine shutdown, if the battery switch was turned off before the engine wound down, hydraulic fluid could leak past the landing gear selector valve and cause the release of the gear uplocks, with the embarrassing result of a Thunderstreak fuselage crashing to ground as the landing gear collapsed.

In summary, the Thunderstreak was a remarkable aircraft. It was designed as an air superiority fighter, briefly used as an escort fighter, but found its forte in the historic role of all Republic Aircraft, ground attack. Teething problems delayed its entry into service and its years with the regular Air Force were limited as more advanced types replaced it. It was, however, a stalwart of the Air National Guard, and the New Jersey Air Guard in particular, during some of the most dangerous years of the Cold War. 🇺🇸

USAF F-84F’s are towed to the end of the runway in Newfoundland for takeoff to Europe during Operation Stair Step. Operation Stair Step was the code name for the rapid aerial movement of the fighters to Europe. Aircraft supplied by ANG wings totaled one hundred four F-84Fs, twenty RF-84Fs, seventy-eight F-86Hs, and seventy-two F-104As. ANG photo



# Around the Wing



For more awards photos, check out the 177th Fighter Wing Facebook page!



## HILLMANN RE-ENLISTS



1st Lt Ryan J. Carlson, 177 Maintenance Squadron, re-enlists SSgt. Victoria E. Hillmann, an Aircraft Electrician, also with the 177 Maintenance Squadron on Feb. 26, 2015. ANG/Master Sgt. Michael Passeri

## BOMBS AWAY



Senior Airman Andy Nguyen from the 177th Fighter Wing's ammo team loads practice munitions onto an F-16 on March 7. ANG/Airman 1st Class Amber Powell

## CINCOTTI CAUGHT BY A CHIEF



Senior Airman Nicholas Cincotti was awarded Caught by a Chief for his outstanding leadership qualities. During two exercises during the February 2015 UTA. SrA Cincotti single-handedly stood up the LRS Unit Control Center. He made sure any information that flowed from the Emergency Operations Center flowed to all of Logistics Readiness Squadron. During the FPCON Exercise he immediately began to utilize the Cobra System and downloaded the appropriate checklist and ensured it was followed and forwarded all actions to the Emergency Operations Center. ANG/ Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley

## DEFENDER OF THE FORCE



Senior Master Sgt. John Sacchetti, 177th Security Forces Squadron Operations Superintendent poses next to a Bulgarian MiG-29 Fulcrum during a site survey to Plovdiv, Bulgaria on March 6. ANG/Courtesy photo

## TOOL TIME



Senior Airman Eiler Gomez Mejia stencils the shape of tools onto foam to be placed in tool boxes on Feb. 26, 2015, at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. Gomez, with the 177th Fighter Wing's Logistics Readiness Squadron, does this to help keep accountability of where tools are placed. ANG/Airman 1st Class Amber Powell

**FINAL  
PHOTO  
BULLET TIME**



*Tech. Sgt. David Sigwart, left, instructs Senior Airman Kevin Stewart on the loader used to store ammunition on an F-16C Fighting Falcon here on March 7, 2015. Sigwart and Stewart are both Weapons Systems Specialists with the 177th Fighter Wing. ANG/Airman 1st Class Amber Powell*