



# FACT SHEET

## U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet 58TH SOW HISTORY

### A Brief History of the 58th Special Operations Wing

Located on Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB), the 58th Special Operations Wing (58 SOW) serves as the premier training site for Air Force special operations and combat search and rescue aircrews. The wing provides undergraduate, graduate and refresher aircrew training for special operations, rescue, missile site support and distinguished visitor airlift helicopter, fixed-wing, and tilt-rotor operations.

The 58 SOW employs more than 1,800 personnel and trains over 2,000 students a year. The wing operates eight different weapon systems: UH-1H, UH-1N, HH-60G, MH-53J, HC-130P/N, MC-130P, MC-130H, and CV-22 totaling more than 60 assigned aircraft. The wing teaches more than 100 courses in 18 different crew positions including pilot, navigator, electronic warfare officer, flight engineer, communications system operator, loadmaster and aerial gunner. Additionally, the wing responds to worldwide contingencies and provides search and rescue support to the local community.

The 58 SOW enjoys a long and prestigious history, but it has not always served as a special operations wing. While the history of the 58 SOW officially began with the activation of the 58th Fighter-Bomber Wing (FBW) on 10 July 1952, its bestowed lineage traces back to the 58th Pursuit Group of World War II. As a lineal descendant of this unit, the wing displays the streamers and awards earned by the 58th Pursuit Group.

### Bestowed History

The Army Air Corps established the 58th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) on 20 November 1940 and activated it at Selfridge Field, Michigan on 15 January 1941. In October 1941, the group moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and then to Dale Mabry Field, Florida, in March 1942. During this time, the group provided replacement training for pilots in a mix of fighters such as the P-35, P-36, P-39, P-40 and P 43. In May 1942, the 58th Pursuit Group was redesignated as the 58th Fighter Group (58 FG). Before seeing combat in the Pacific, the 58 FG served as a flying training group, training Chinese and South American pilots and some of America's Tuskegee Airmen and Flying Sergeants. The 58 FG also had the mission of protecting the East Coast and the nation's capital from attack from September 1942.

Between October and December 1943 the 58 FG deployed to New Guinea via Australia. Equipped with the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, nicknamed "The Jug," the group served under Fifth Air Force. The 58 FG entered combat in February 1944, flying protective patrols over American bases and escorting transports. The 58 FG also provided fighter support for bombers attacking Japanese airfields and installations and escorted convoys to the Admiralty Islands. The 58 FG moved to Noemfoor Island in August 1944. From there, they bombed and strafed enemy airfields on Ceram, Halmahera and the Kai Islands.

The group moved to the Philippines in November 1944 in preparation for the invasion of Mindora. Aircrews assigned to the 58 FG strafed Japanese naval forces around Mindora saving the allied

beachhead on Mindoro, earning the group a Distinguished Unit Citation for its actions on 26 December 1944. The group continued to operate from bases in the Philippines and received a fourth fighter squadron in May 1945--the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, the only Mexican unit to see combat in World War II. The 58 FG moved from the Philippines to Okinawa in July 1945 and attacked railways, airfields and naval units in Korea and Kyushu. After the war ended, the 58 FG stayed in the Pacific Theater flying reconnaissance and surveillance missions over Japan until inactivated on 27 January 1946.

### **Wing History**

The wing's official history starts with the activation of the 58th Fighter-Bomber Wing (58 FBW) on 10 July 1952, at Itazuke Air Base, Japan, flying the F-84 Thunderjet. The original composition of the 58 FBW consisted of personnel and equipment from the 136 FBW, a Texas Air National Guard Unit. The 58 FBW moved to K-2 Air Base, later known as Taegu Air Base, South Korea, in August 1952. Fighter-bomber units like the 58 FBW provided close air support for United Nations ground forces. Often flying deep into North Korea's "Mig Alley," the 58 FBW targeted airfields, railways, enemy positions, bridges, dams, electric power plants and vehicles. The 58 FBW fought many battles and inflicted serious damage on the enemy, but these missions were not easy and they came at a cost. By the end of December 1952, the war claimed 18 members of the 58 FBW. By war's end the toll rose even higher. Many wing pilots never came home. According to recent listings from the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, the fates of 14 members assigned to the 58 FBW are still unaccounted.

As the war raged on, the 58 FBW continued to play a vital role. Truce talks between North Korea and the United Nations stalled in the spring of 1953. As a result, the Air Force began attacking previously excluded targets in the north. On 13 May 1953, Thunderjets from the 58 FBW struck the Toksan Dam, near Pyongyang causing a massive flood. Floodwaters from the breached dam destroyed ten bridges, ruined several square miles of rice crops, flooded over 1,000 buildings and rendered the Sunan Airfield inoperable. Three days later, the wing attacked the Chosan irrigation dam with similar results. The Far East Air Forces commander later credited the 58 FBW by stating the destruction of the Toksan and Chosan irrigation dams resulted in the enemy coming to the truce talks in earnest.

The 58 FBW served in three Korean War campaigns and earned the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation for its actions in combat. The wing remained in South Korea after the war to provide air defense. The wing converted to F-86 Sabres in 1954 and moved to Osan Air Base in 1955, where it inactivated on 1 July 1958.

On 22 August 1969, the Air Force redesignated the 58 FBW as the 58th Tactical Fighter Training Wing and activated it under the Tactical Air Command at Luke AFB, Arizona. The unit trained pilots in the F-100 Super Sabre and A 7D Corsair II, along with German pilots in the F-104G Starfighter and other Allied pilots in the F-5 Freedom Fighter. The wing became the primary training unit for the F-4 Phantom II in 1971 and received the first F 15 Eagle in November 1974, with President Gerald Ford heading the welcoming committee. The wing's designation changed to the 58th Tactical Training Wing on 1 April 1977, it graduated the last F-4 class on 29 June 1982, and received its first F-16 Fighting Falcon on 6 December 1982. Then, during a major reorganization in 1991, the Air Force redesignated the wing as the 58th Fighter Wing.

The post-Cold War drawdown caused many organizational changes across the Air Force. On 1 July 1993, the Air Force placed training and education under a single command, redesignating the Air Training Command as the Air Education and Training Command (AETC). At the same time, AETC activated the Nineteenth Air Force to oversee flying training. The Air Force also reassigned many bases from Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command to AETC, including Luke AFB. As a result, the 58th Fighter Wing at Luke AFB now reported to AETC and Nineteenth Air Force. Senior Air Force leaders were also concerned with keeping those units with

the longest and most illustrious histories on active status and so moved the unit designations of several Air Force wings; inactivating the least prestigious. Since the 58th ranked 22d in prestige, the Air Force moved the designation of the 58th to Kirtland AFB to take up another long-standing training mission on 1 April 1994.

### **Mission History**

Drawing upon the experience of combat search and rescue in Southeast Asia, the Air Mobility Command activated the 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing (1550 ATTW) at Hill AFB, Utah, on 1 April 1971 to serve as a test center and school house for rescue aircrews and technology. Moved to Kirtland AFB on 20 February 1976, the 1550 ATTW continued training helicopter and fixed-wing aircrews. The Air Force redesignated the unit as the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing (1550 CCTW) on 15 May 1984 and then inactivated it on 1 October 1991, transferring the training mission to the 542d Crew Training Wing (542 CTW). The 542d inactivated in turn on 1 April 1994, transferring the mission to the 58th, now redesignated as a Special Operations Wing (SOW).

The wing also plays a vital role in local/regional search and rescue missions. While training is the primary mission at Kirtland AFB, search and rescue members assigned to the wing are typically called upon two or more times each year to support civilian rescue operations. To date, aircrews from Kirtland AFB have participated in more than 300 rescue operations and its members have been credited with saving more than 225 lives.

On 11 September 2001, immediately following a series of terrorist attacks launched against the United States, the 58 SOW flew an MC-130H carrying a federal emergency response team to the crash site of United Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. Since then, personnel and aircrews from the 58 SOW have supported and played a significant role in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM and other contingencies around the world.

To aid the war on terrorism the 58 SOW began providing a variety of specialized mission rehearsal simulator training courses including high altitude, low-visibility dust-out and visual threat recognition and avoidance training for special operations helicopter students and crews projected to deploy. By better preparing these aircrews, the 58 SOW has made high altitude combat helicopter operations safer. Since 2001, the wing has deployed more than 200 personnel in support of the global war on terror. On 23 November 2003, the 58 SOW suffered its first casualty of the war on terrorism, when Maj Steven Plumhoff, an MH-53J pilot, died in a helicopter crash while deployed to Afghanistan for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

In addition to training at Kirtland AFB, the 58 SOW also oversees UH-1H specialized undergraduate pilot training-helicopter (SUPT-H) at Fort Rucker, Alabama. The first Air Force SUPT-H students began attending Army sponsored helicopter pilot training at Fort Rucker in 1971. From 1971 to 2004, SUPT-H at Fort Rucker primarily operated as an Army owned and controlled program. In 2004, while the training remained at Fort Rucker, the Air Force assumed ownership/responsibility for conducting Air Force SUPT-H and the first "All-Blue" SUPT-H class graduated in 2005.

Members of the 58 SOW will continue serving at the leading edge of technology, training and development. As the Air Force's premier special operations aircrew training wing, the 58 SOW will train America's best in tilt-rotor aircraft--the CV-22. The wing received the Air Force's first operational CV-22 Osprey on 20 March 2006, with the first class scheduled to report in February 2007. In the near future the 58 SOW will continue to train world class rescue aircrews in the next-generation aircraft, the as-yet undetermined CSAR-X.

For more on the heritage of the 58th Special Operations Wing, click [here](#) [to link Adobe File].

