

History of the 144th

The origin of the 144th Fighter Wing dates back to April 4, 1948, barely six months after the formation of the Air National Guard in September 1947. On that date, the 61st Fighter Wing received federal recognition at Alameda, Calif., followed by activation of the 194th Fighter Squadron on June 25, 1948. The 61st Fighter Wing was re-designated as the 144th Fighter Bomber Wing on November 1, 1950.

The first aircraft assigned as of June 1948 included two T-6s, one B-26, one C-47, one L-17, and two borrowed P-51s. Shortly after, the designation P-51 (P for pursuit) was changed to F-51 (F for fighter) due to a new designation scheme throughout the U.S. Air Force. Technically, they were P-51s when the 144th received them and changed to F-51s while the 144th flew them. The P-51D and later the P-51H were flown from 1948 until October 31, 1954. During its early years with the P-51D/H, the unit earned prominence as one of the Air Force's most respected aerial gunnery competitors. In June 1953, while still flying the P-51, the unit qualified for the first all-jet, worldwide gunnery meet. Using borrowed F-86A Sabre jets, the 144th, which represented the Air National Guard, placed fifth in competition.

On July 7, 1955, the Wing was re-designated as the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing, with the 194th becoming the 194th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. On November 1, 1954, the 194th accomplished the transition from the piston-engine, propeller driven P-51 to its first jet aircraft, the F-86A. At the same time, the 194th relocated to Fresno, Calif., followed by the wing in 1957. The site of the Fresno Air National Guard Base has been used for military aviation since World War II, when it was known as Hammer Field.

The 144th continued to fly the F-86A from 1954 until March 31, 1958. On April 1, 1958, the transition was made to the F-86L, which was flown until June 30, 1964. On July 1, 1964, the 144th began flying the F-102 and continued flying this aircraft until July 24, 1974. On July 25, 1974, the 144th brought the F-106 into service, and continued to fly this aircraft until December 31, 1983. On January 1, 1984, the F-4D became the wing's new aircraft, and was flown until September 30, 1989.

In 1979, the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing was reassigned from the Air Defense Command to the Tactical Air Command. On October 1, 1989, the wing began a new era by completing the transition to the air defense version of the F-16A Fighting Falcon, the Air Force's most advanced tactical fighter. The 144th continued to fly this aircraft until September 1995, when the transition to the newer F-16C became complete. These transitions included new engines and upgraded avionics, making the F-16C among the most potent air defense weapons in the world. The wing's inventory of aircraft included 18 F-16Cs, and one RC-26B aircraft.

In 1992, the 144th was reassigned to Air Combat Command. Effective March 16, 1992, the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing was re-designated as the 144th Fighter Wing, with all related Fighter Interceptor Groups and Squadrons becoming Fighter Groups and Fighter Squadrons.

The 144th Fighter Wing started the conversion process to the F-15C Eagle with the arrival of the first of 21 F-15 Eagles in June of 2013. The last F-16 departed on November 7, 2013 and the wing was declared a fully operational capable F-15 Eagle unit on June 23, 2016.

The 144th Fighter Wing is comprised of the Headquarters Staff and four subordinate units: Maintenance Group, which consists of the 144th Maintenance Squadron, 144th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, and 144th Maintenance Operations Flight; Operations Group, which consists of the 194th Fighter Squadron and 144th Operations Support Flight; Mission Support Group, which consists of the 144th Civil Engineer Squadron, 144th Security Forces Squadron, 144th Logistics Readiness Squadron, 144th Force Support Squadron and 144th Communications Flight; and the Medical Group.

Throughout its history, the 144th has earned a number of honors and distinctions. The wing received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in 1967, 1973, 1978, 1988 and 1994. Other honors include winning the William Tell air-to-air weapons meet at Tyndall AFB, Fla., and numerous maintenance and safety awards.