

158th Fighter Wing's History at a Glance

Humble Beginnings

Vermont's Air National Guard has roots as the fifth guard unit in the United States, federally recognized as a unit August of 1947, literally a month after President Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 which officially separated the U.S. Air Force from the Army. The pilots were part of the 134th Squadron Unit.

As the Air Force took baby steps from the Army, the now-Vermont guard underwent many changes in the infant years, including being part of the 101st Fighter Wing in Maine in 1949. It wasn't until the 1960s that the 134th was reorganized with the 158th Fighter Interceptor Group, now known as the 158th Fighter Wing.

Having no official Air Base as our own, field exercises were performed at army Camp Johnson and air training at the local airport in South Burlington. As the Air Force took shaky steps separating from the Army, the Vermont guard underwent many changes in the early years, including being attached to Maine at one point. The newly-formed Guard unit's primary mission was air defense, its second air-sea rescue over Lake Champlain.

Falling under the Air Combat Command, the Vermont Air National Guard's mission encompasses national defense, counter-drug missions, and air capability. The base's medical and civil engineering components also participated in humanitarian missions to countries around the globe.

The wing has always had a strong reputation as dedicated airmen but we truly earned renown September 11, 2001 when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center. That day changed the face of the United States and even more so that of its military.

9-11 Changed the Face of the Military

Even before official orders had been issued, members of the VTANG had left their civilian jobs to rally at the base, ready to defend Vermont and America against whatever might come next. When orders did come, there about 500 airmen worked the base as an armed camp.

Our F-16s were the first planes in the air over New York skies after the 9-11 attack. For several following months, VTANG's pilots worked beside other Air Force pilots to protect New York and surrounding areas in combat area patrols. Inclement weather interrupted other bases' ability to fly every day, but Vermont pilots flew for 122 consecutive days with no break. Back home, more than 500 airmen worked at the base as an armed camp. Because of our dogged perseverance, the base earned the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for its response to the September 11 attacks.

In March of 2002, the unit began to drop from a "24/7" operation to the more traditional role. But the military, particularly the role of the Air Force, would never be the same. As a unit we would be thrust into over-seas operations such as "Enduring Freedom" and "Joint Forge"

State Partnership Program (SPP)

The VTANG is an active participant in the State Partnership Program, an initiative from Europe Command which pairs National Guard bases with countries who were former Soviet, Yugoslav, and Warsaw Pact countries. This partnership promotes goodwill, global stabilization, and NATO accession.

Vermont has been in partnered with Macedonia, also known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) since 1993.

In 2009 Vermont gained a second partner with Senegal, a country in Africa eager to stabilize itself surrounded by uncertainties.

In 2012 members of the 158th Fighter Wing medical group provided health care to more than 1,800 Senegalese people as part of mission Western Accord 2012. For two weeks they worked with other Guardsmen, Marines, and local physicians to create a temporary health center where they extracted 788 teeth and taught dental and personal hygiene. Toothbrushes, multi-vitamins, and medications were donated to the locals to help with disease prevention.

Vermont Emergencies

Although the nature of the guard has altered to performing many federal missions, the National Guard is first and foremost a protector of its state. We fall under the jurisdiction of the governor, who may choose to activate us for emergencies, natural or otherwise.

VTANG airmen have a joint group with the Vermont Army Guardsmen called the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) that has a mission to support first-responders during emergencies

In most recent memory is Tropical Storm Irene that ravaged Vermont in late August 2011. The VTANG formed a joint headquarters with the Vermont Army Guard at Camp Johnson to team with FEMA and see that Vermonters were safe with basic supplies. With the help of other units, our wing distributed essential life-sustaining supplies like food, bottled water, blankets, and tents to Vermonters who had been stranded in island-towns.

VTANG Fire Department

The VTANG base houses a fire department loaded with specialized training and equipment to tackle plane emergencies. It's staffed by state of Vermont firefighters, two-thirds of which are also traditional Vermont Air National Guardsmen, and keeps a watchful eye over its community as part of the Mutual Aid Agreements with South Burlington and surrounding towns. Its primary mission: To provide firefighting support and medical assistance for the 158th Fighter Wing and the Burlington International Airport.

But the guard fire department can also be called upon by the local communities as first responders for heavy rescue services and emergency medical situations. Generally guard units act as second responders in emergencies, so our base fire department has a unique role in the community.

Most notably, after a terrible accident in June of 2013, VTANG firefighters were first-responders and extracted a Canadian trucker who had slid off the Winooski Bridge and plummeted 70-feet. He was pinned underneath parts of the truck which had become a pile of jagged hot metal. Our firefighters entered the wreck and nimbly got the trucker out, who was then transported to Fletcher Allen Health Care.