



FACT SHEET

History of the 376th Air Expeditionary Wing and the Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyz Republic

The 376th Air Expeditionary Wing's roots date from the activation of the 376th Bombardment Group (Heavy) during World War II. The 376th took the name "Liberandos" from the B-24 Liberator bombers it flew during this conflict.

The 376th earned its place in history leading the air raids against Nazi Germany's oil fields in Ploesti, Romania in 1942. Prior to the activation of the 376th, its air crews and B-24s flew the first American bombing mission over Europe in WWII and first mission against Ploesti, code named the Halverson Project, on June 11, 1942.



The wing's air raid against Ploesti on August 1, 1943, holds the distinction of being the most heavily decorated military action in American history. Five Airmen received the Medal of Honor and another six the Distinguished Service Cross.

Led by the 376th BG commander, Col. Keith Compton, 178 B-24s and 1,700 Airmen from the 8th and 9th Air Forces, including the 376th BG, took off in the early morning hours of August 1, 1943 to strike Ploesti's oil refineries. Battling through German Luftwaffe fighters, 163 B-24s reached a target surrounded by 230 anti-aircraft artillery pieces and balloons designed to interfere with attacking aircraft.

Flying at tree-top level at nearly 500 mph, the low flying B-24s were battered as they battled into and back out of the target area. Although the refineries were left engulfed in smoke and flames, 74 B-24s were lost to enemy fire and of the 89 that made it home, only one sixth of those planes ever flew again. Hundreds of Airmen were killed or captured.

The 376th continued its service throughout the war, confirming its reputation as one of the finest bomber groups in the American arsenal. From the North African campaign against Rommel's tanks to the campaigns on the European continent, the 376th earned three Distinguished Unit Citations and fifteen campaign ribbons. These honors were passed on when the group became a wing in 1951.

The 376th Air Expeditionary Wing was initially activated by the U.S. Army Air Corps as the 376th Bombardment Wing (Medium) June 1, 1951. It was first assigned to the 4th Air Division and stationed at Forbes Field, Kan., before moving to Barksdale AFB, La., in October 1951. During this period, the wing did not have operational groups assigned to it, but instead had several squadrons to fly the wing's B-29 Superfortress aircraft.

From 1954 through 1965, the wing and its groups operated the B-47, E-47, and EB-47 along with the KC-97 tanker aircraft. The wing trained in strategic bombardment and at times conducted electronic countermeasures operations, which occasionally overshadowed the bomber mission. Electronic countermeasures activity became the primary mission in 1953, including training for post-attack command and control in the EB-47 aircraft from December 1962 to February 1965. The wing added

aerial refueling to its mission from September 1953 to September 1964 and upgraded from the KC-97 to the KC-135 during that time. The wing was inactivated on March 15, 1965.

The wing was reactivated at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, and designated as the 376th Strategic Wing on January 23, 1970. The wing's B-52 and KC-135 aircraft immediately began participating in ARC LIGHT bombing missions over South and North Vietnam, which continued until September 1970. In 1970, the wing was re-equipped with KC-135 aircraft and focused on electronic reconnaissance and air refueling in the western Pacific. The 376th SW provided aerial refueling to Coalition aircraft during Operation DESERT STORM before deactivating once again on October 1, 1991.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the wing was reactivated and designated the 376th Air Expeditionary Wing and began operations at the Manas International Airport, Kyrgyzstan, in December 2001.

The Transit Center at Manas, as it is officially known, was initially referred to as Ganci Air Base, in honor of Peter Ganci, the New York City Fire Department chief who died in the September 11 World Trade Center attack.

Since 2001, Coalition personnel and aircraft from ten countries have operated out of Manas to support operations in Afghanistan, including Australia, Denmark, France, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and South Korea. Currently, 1,000 personnel from Spain, France and the United States are assigned to the wing, along with 650 U.S. and host-nation contractor personnel that provide daily support to various base missions. Aircraft assigned include U.S. KC-135s, French C135FRs and Spanish C-130s.

The Transit Center at Manas currently serves as the premier air mobility hub for the International Security Assistance Force and Coalition military forces operating in Afghanistan. The around-the-clock missions include aerial refueling, combat airlift and airdrop, aeromedical evacuation and strategic airlift operations, as well as support for Coalition personnel and cargo transiting in and out of Afghanistan.

(Current as of Aug 2009)