

AirScoop



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104th Fighter Wing

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From the 104FW Commander

To the Men and Women of the 104th Fighter Wing,

As we look back on a historic few months and prepare for a monumental summer, I want to take a moment to reflect on our shared heritage and update you on the exciting road ahead. The strength of this wing has always been rooted in our people and our deep connection with the local community. Recent events have highlighted both of these pillars brilliantly.

First, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who attended and supported the F-100 Re-dedication Memorial Ceremony. The event was a success and was exceptionally well attended by both our service members and alumni. The F-100 Memorial represents a critical piece of our Fighter Wing's history. Seeing so many gather to honor that legacy—and the Airmen who flew and maintained those airframes—was a profoundly proud moment. Honoring our past is how we ground ourselves for the future.

Speaking of the future, we have officially reached a major milestone in our F-35 transition. In partnership with Lockheed Martin, we are ready to accept our first jets. Preparing a wing for a fifth-generation fighter is a massive, complex undertaking that requires seamless coordination. Reaching this milestone with Lockheed Martin is a direct testament to the tireless work, precision, and dedication of our planners, maintainers, operators, and support staff.

Because of that hard work, we are ready for our first F-35A Lightning IIs in mid-June. This is a transformative moment for the 104th Fighter Wing and the surrounding community. The arrival of these aircraft ensures that we will remain at the tip of the spear, fully equipped to execute our national security missions and project decisive airpower for decades to come.

Thank you all for your continued dedication, professionalism, and unwavering support. We have a lot of work ahead of us as we bed down this new aircraft, and there is no team more devoted or prepared than you.

Sincerely,

*Colonel Michael Glass
Commander, 104th Fighter Wing*



104th Fighter Wing Honors Fallen Barnestormers

STORY BY Melanie J. Casineau, 104FW/ PA

BARNES AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Westfield, MA- Since 1987, the 104th Fighter Wing has gathered annually to honor the memory of its members who gave their lives in service. On May 15, 2026, the Wing once again came together to pay tribute to their fallen comrades and remember all who have sacrificed for their country. Base personnel, alumni, families of the fallen, and distinguished guests assembled around the F-100 static display for the solemn ceremony, with Colonel Michael Glass, 104th Fighter Wing Commander, serving as the presiding officer.

“Honoring the fallen is one of the greatest commitments we hold as active service members,” said Glass. “To the families of the fallen, I know nothing I can say will assuage your loss. But please know that we think of you. We honor their names. We hold this F-100 in honor because of you.”

Distinguished guest Councilman Bill O’Nihski, City of Westfield was present.

In keeping with tradition, the ceremony featured the reading of the names of the fallen. This year, for the 39th annual Rededication ceremony, the tribute was enhanced. Attendees entering the base were greeted by honor flags displaying photographs of each of the 13 fallen service members, positioned along 13 light posts on the main drive.

Additionally, the stories of these heroes were expanded with greater detail in the program, offering a more complete recognition of their lives, service, and the communities they touched.

Please take a moment to read the 13 short stories of the fallen members. They were not only pilots but also cherished family members and active participants in their communities.

1st Lt. Edward W. Meacham- Flying a P-47 Thunderbolt during a post-war training mission, 28-year-old Meacham’s aircraft entered an uncontrolled dive and crashed into the Atlantic off Monomoy Point, Massachusetts, 17 August 1948. A member of the 131st Fighter Squadron, Meacham had served in the Army Air Force Reserve after WWII and recently rejoined the 131st Fighter Group. He was also a bus driver and had just completed a new home for his family. Meacham graduated from Westfield High school where he received his varsity letter in track. When not serving he was a bus driver and member of the junior class at Westfield State Teachers College. He, his wife, and almost 3yr old son had just

completed building a new house and were set to move in when he returned from training.completed building a new house and were set to move in when he returned from training.

Maj. Robert Anderstrom- Maj. Anderstrom, 33, a veteran of over 12 years including combat in the Pacific during WWII, died when his F-51 Mustang crashed into a wooded hillside in East Granby, Connecticut, 7 May 1954. He served as Commanding Officer of the 131st Replacement Training Squadron. A respected union leader and technical draftsman, his contributions extended both in and out of the Air Force. One of Anderstrom's achievements was that he was the first president of the AFL Draftsmen's Union Local 140 at the Pittsfield General Electric plant**. He left behind his wife and three daughters.

1st Lt. Richard Brown & TSgt. Austin A. Cooper- 1st Lt. Brown, pilot, and Technical Sgt Cooper, aircraft mechanic, were flying a T-33, when it malfunctioned. The two stayed with the aircraft to avoid hitting houses, and were killed when the aircraft crashed in Granville, Massachusetts, 19 October 1954.

Brown, 38 years old, served 11 years in service and left behind his wife and young son.

Cooper, 28 years old, served 8 years and left behind his parents. Cooper is the only enlisted member whose name is inscribed on the F-100 monument and in his honor one of the roadways around the installation was named after him, Tech. Sgt. Austin Cooper Blvd.

Capt. Frank A. Gibe- Capt. Gibe was flying an F-94 Starfire when it crashed ½ mile from Barnes Air Force base. He chose to crash into a patch of woods rather than risk the lives of a crowd of swimmers at Hampton Ponds, Westfield, Ma, 28 July 1958. He sensed something wrong when coming in for a landing and dropped his fuel tanks before crashing.

Capt. Gibe, 35 years old, former Navy pilot, with 14 years in service, left behind his wife, two young daughters and his parents.

Maj. Richard W. Mahoney- Maj. Richard Mahoney, the aircraft's pilot, and Maj. Richard Burke, the squadron's flight surgeon, were returning from a commander's conference when their aircraft suffered a critical in-flight emergency. In an emergency landing, Maj. Mahoney remained at the controls to guide the aircraft down, a decision that cost him his life in





New Orleans, LA., 22 April 1961. Maj. Burke successfully ejected and survived the crash.

16 April 1956, he became the Commander of the 131st FS. Mahoney, a lifelong resident, was first cousin of Mayor John D. O'Connor of Westfield, MA. He was a graduate of Westfield High School and a member of the Kiwanis Club. Maj. Mahoney, 39 years old, had served 19 years, including WWII service in Europe, was a lifelong resident of Westfield and he left behind his wife.

1st Lt. Joseph F. Crehore- 1st Lt. Crehore was killed while flying F-86 out of Phalsbourg, France in support of the Berlin Airlift and crashed in Chalon, France, 21 March 1962. He is the only 104th member killed on foreign soil. Crehore, 28 years old, former Harvard football and hockey star, with 4 years in service, left behind his wife and parents.

Capt. Hugh M. Lavallee- Capt. Lavallee first made national headlines on 17 August 1963, when he was rescued by a Russian fishing trawler after his F-86 Sabre was disabled during a training mission. His survival and recovery became a rare Cold War human-interest story, briefly bridging the divide between two rival nations.

Just three months later, while flying F-86 Sabre over upstate New York, Capt. Lavallee disappeared in heavy cloud cover, 16 November 1963. His wingman, Lt. Col. William McClure, later reported losing visual and radio contact as they climbed through dense weather, moments before the fatal crash.

Capt. Lavallee, 29 years old, with 8 years of service, left behind his wife and two sons.

Capt. John H. Parris- Capt. Paris was killed when he remained with his crippled F-86 Sabre, long enough to steer it away from the crowded beach at Hampton Ponds, Westfield, MA, where more than 150 people were swimming. Although he ultimately ejected, there was not enough altitude for his parachute to deploy on 19 July 1964.

Capt. Parris 33 years old, had 13 years of service**, ** a former Navy pilot who transitioned into the Air Force, he had recently applied for astronaut training.

He left behind his wife, his eight-year-old son, and his mother.

Maj. James Romanowicz- Maj. James Romanowicz was killed when his F-86 Sabre, crashed during a snowstorm over Granby, Massachusetts, 1 February 1965. He was one of 3 pilots returning from aerial gunnery operations held in Fl.

When not in the service, he was a price estimator of special tools and cutters for the Union Twist Drill company in Athol, MA . Proficient sportsman, having won his spurs in skating, swimming, hunting, baseball and basketball. Before working with Union Twist Drill, he had been a machine operator, a bookkeeper, and firefighter in the US Forestry.

Maj. Romanowicz, 45 years old, WWII veteran, a command pilot with 23 years of service**,** left behind his wife and 6 children.

Capt. Leonard E. Bannish- Capt. Bannish was killed when his F-84 Thunderjet, suffered a major electrical failure that forced him to attempt an emergency landing in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 30 May 1968. Capt. Bannish made several attempts to bring the aircraft down safely, but on the final approach the jet ran off the runway and exploded after striking a hillside.

Bannish 30 years old, had completed 8 years of service, left behind his brother John, who was a former member of the unit, a sister and his recently engaged fiancé, Patricia Zavorski-Coon.

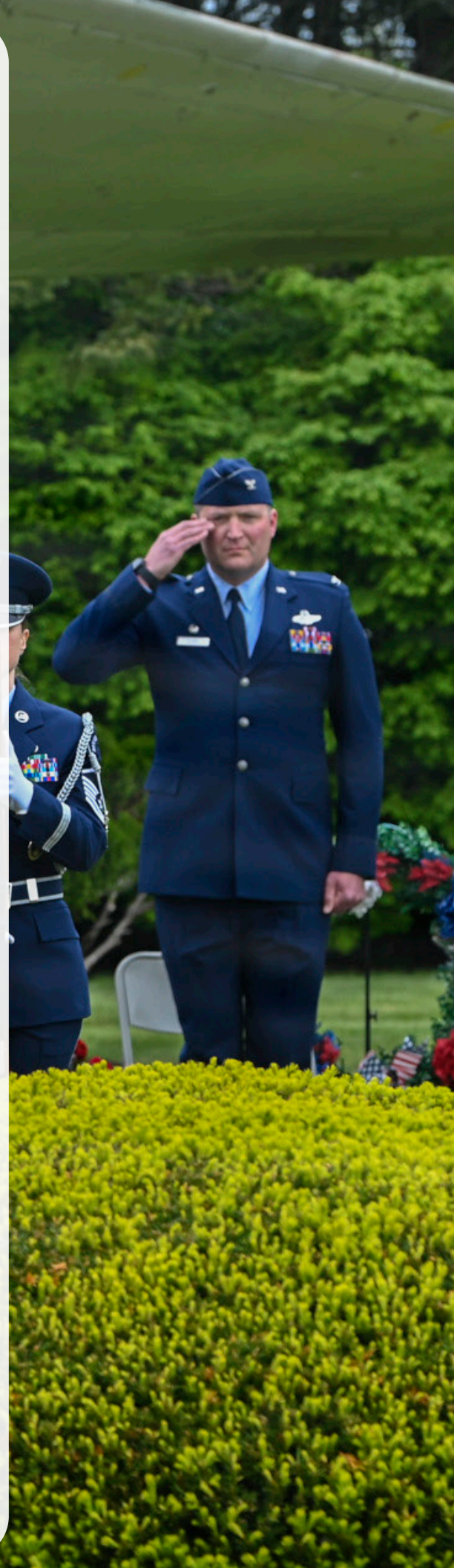
Maj. John Southrey- Maj. Southrey was killed over Wells, New York, 17 September 1986 when the A-10 Thunderbolt II he was flying collided with another A-10 during training maneuvers in the Adirondack region. The second pilot successfully ejected but sustained a back injury during the descent.

Maj. Southrey, 32 years old, with 9 years of service, a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, and Instructor at the Air Force Fighter Weapons School, left behind his wife.

Lt. Col. Morris Fontenot- Lt. Col. Fontenot was killed in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, 27 August 2014, when he became incapacitated in flight and was unable to eject from his F-15C Eagle. Despite an extensive investigation, the accident board found insufficient evidence to determine the cause of his sudden incapacitation.

Lt Col Fontenot, 41, with 22 years of service**,** graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, an F-15 instructor pilot, who recently moved to Longmeadow, MA, left behind his wife, two daughters, and his parents.

This ceremony not only honors the ultimate sacrifices made by these brave airmen but also ensures their stories are remembered for generations.



HEADLINES & HIGHLIGHTS



Base Spares Package



F-35 Milestone Reached



Major Accident Response Exercise

BARNESTORMER COMMUNITY



104FW Place Flags on Graves



Honor Flags



Westfield School Tour

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS

A REGULAR COLUMN BY KINDA-HISTORIAN
MELANIE J. CASINEAU

After 29 Years, an A-10 time capsule at the 104th Fighter Wing reveals its secrets

After 29 years, A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft tail number 78-0648 finally revealed its secrets. A time capsule placed inside the aircraft's weapons bay on September 26, 1997, was reopened by one of the crew chiefs who helped place it there.

Throughout aviation history, placing items inside an aircraft has been a way to preserve its story, honor its pilots and maintainers, or sometimes hide a few secrets. During World War II, aircrews often tucked personal belongings into bombers and fighters before deployment. Mechanics wrote messages on airframes, while pilots carried letters, patches, and small keepsakes hidden within the aircraft. Many of these items remained undiscovered until decades later when the aircraft were restored.

By the late 20th century, intentionally placing time capsules inside retired aircraft became a way to preserve history for future generations. In the case of A-10 tail number 78-0648, those who sealed the capsule believed it would never be opened again.

Technically, the aircraft never flew after its retirement. However, it was recently lifted by crane and will soon "fly" once more when transported by a Chinook helicopter to its new permanent location. During preparations for the move, the time capsule was discovered and opened—something none of its creators ever expected to happen.

On May 28, 2026, an event was held at Barnes Air National Guard Base, bringing together former A-10 pilots, crew chiefs, and current members of the 104th Fighter Wing. Historical records documented the placement of the capsule, but not its exact location or its contents. Fortunately, records did identify many of the people involved in the project, allowing them to be located and invited to witness the opening.

As attendees gathered around, retired U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Rob Roy and Technical Sgt. Sam Edinger carefully removed a large ammunition can from the belly of the aircraft.





Inside were books, photographs, documents, and personal mementos that had remained untouched for nearly three decades.

Throughout the event, stories were shared about why this particular aircraft was chosen for display and what led to the end of its flying career. Veterans reminisced about simpler times on base and reflected on the A-10's remarkable 30-year service with the wing—the longest tenure of any aircraft assigned to the 104th Fighter Wing.

Rob Roy, who was a technical sergeant when the aircraft was retired in 1997, shared the history of the aircraft. "It's a Gulf War veteran, with no kills, and at the time it was nicknamed 'Georgia Girl*,'"* said Roy.

Among the items discovered were the dog tags, name tape, rank insignia, and photographs of retired Master Sgt. Mike Pijar, who served as a crew chief on the aircraft. Pijar passed away on December 20, 2024, making the discovery especially meaningful to those who knew him.

Another item that sparked conversation was a "key" labeled for aircraft number 79-0100. The find led to discussions about why the aircraft's tail number had changed over time. The story is tied to Maj. John Southrey, who lost his life on September 17, 1986, while flying A-10 tail number 78-0648. In a unique tribute, members of the wing later dedicated the display aircraft in his honor.

In the 1997 Air Scoop 50th Anniversary Edition newsletter, Technical Sgt. Wayne Brown, a 104th Fighter Wing aircraft mechanic, spoke about the significance of preserving the aircraft.

"There is a lot of personal pride here," Brown said. "When you work at a place you call home for a long period of time, it has to affect you."

Current members of the wing have now been given the opportunity to add their own items to the time capsule before it is sealed once again. The aircraft will be relocated to the wing's aircraft display area, known today as the "Field of Dreams," where it will join other historic aircraft that have served at Barnes.

As far as anyone knows, the A-10 is the only aircraft on display at the wing that contains a time capsule—making its story even more unique and ensuring that a new generation will one day uncover another piece of 104th Fighter Wing history.

