

107th Squadron World War I Overview

Compiled by Tech. Sgt. Dan Heaton
127th Wing Public Affairs

The modern 107th Fighter Squadron traces its lineage to the 107th Aero Squadron, one of numerous U.S. Army Air Service units created as the United States entered World War I. The squadron spent almost all of 1918 in France as part of the American Expeditionary Forces. The unit spent the bulk of the war at the 3rd Air Instructional Center, Issoudun Aerodrome, in central France. Though the 107th is one of the oldest flying squadrons in today's Air National Guard, its service in World War I consisted of primarily an aviation support role.

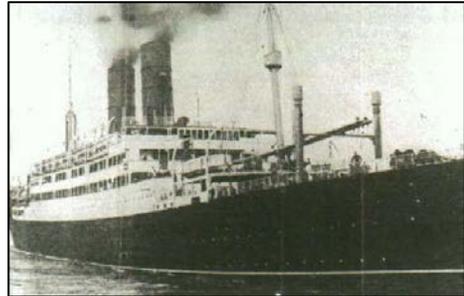


French-built Nieuport 28 pursuit (fighter) aircraft at the 3rd Air Instructional Center, Issoudun Aerodrome, 1918.

The U.S. declared war on Germany and the Central Powers on April 6, 1917. The first U.S. troops began arriving in France in late May 1917, but it would be October 1917 before the AEF was in place and fully prepared to engage in its first major operations at the front lines of the war.

The 107th Aero Squadron was organized at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, on Aug. 27, 1917, formed of approximately 150 recruits primarily from Vancouver Barracks in Washington state and Fort Thomas, Kentucky. The 107th Aero Squadron organized at Kelly was completely separate from the 107th Aero Squadron (Service) that would later be created, in March 1918, at Rich Field in Waco, Texas.

After two months of basic indoctrination, the 107th was sent to the Aviation Concentration Center, Garden City, Long Island, New York, on Oct. 26, 1917. After additional training at the AIC, the squadron moved by train to St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, where, on Dec. 7, 1917, it boarded the SS Tuscania, a cruise ship pressed into duty as a troop transport vessel, for passage to England. The squadron arrived in Liverpool, England, on Christmas morning, Dec. 25, 1917. (The Tuscania would be sunk by a German U-boat on Feb. 5, 1918, resulting in a loss of more than 200 soldiers and crews. Among the units that were on board at the time were elements of the 32nd Infantry Division, made up of soldiers from Michigan and Wisconsin National Guards.) After further travel, the 107th arrived at the AEF Replacement Concentration Center, St. Maixent Barracks, France, on Jan. 2, 1918. At St. Maixent, the 107th was redesignated as the 801st Aero Squadron, and later as the 801st Aero Squadron (Repair), and used as a pool of general labor around the camp for about two months.



SS Tuscania in 1914.

Finally, the squadron was deployed to the Issoudun Aerodrome on February 21, where it remained through the end of the war. At Issoudun, American pilots were given their final combat flight training prior to being sent to front-line squadrons. The American pilots were given their initial flight training at air fields in the U.S., including the newly-created Selfridge Field in Michigan. During the war, Issoudun was the largest "aerodrome," or airport, in the world, with a total of 15 adjacent air fields (only 10 of which were completed and in use by the war's end). While at Issoudun, the 801st was assigned to the facility's Field 1, working in the aircraft assembly and test departments. In June, the squadron sent a detachment of about 100 men – more than half of its strength – to Issoudun's Field 2 and was tasked with the general operation of the field.

The squadron remained at Issoudun, conducting air field operations and assembling, servicing and repairing aircraft through the armistice to end the war on Nov. 11, 1918. The unit remained at Issoudun until January 1919, winding down operations at the field. After a brief stay in the French port city of St. Nazaire, awaiting transport across the Atlantic, the squadron was returned to the U.S. in March and arrived at Hazelhurst Field (later named Mitchel Air Force Base) in Long Island, New York, where on March 18, 1919, the unit was officially demobilized and most its personnel returned to civilian life.

In 1925, a group of 20 officers and 90 enlisted men began meeting weekly in a Detroit garage and created the Michigan National Guard's first flying unit. On May 7, 1926, the unit received federal recognition and was designated as the 107th Observation Squadron. In 1936, the lineage and honors of the 107th Aero Squadron/801st Aero Squadron were consolidated with those of the 107th Observation Squadron. The squadron has remained a component of the Michigan National Guard since that time.



The 107th Observation Squadron in 1926. The squadron had begun meeting in 1925 and received federal recognition the following year.