

# 107<sup>th</sup> Squadron World War II Overview

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One of the oldest flying units in the U.S. National Guard, the 107<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron of the Michigan Air National Guard played a direct role in the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944, which helped the U.S. and allied nations secure victory in World War II.

Operating at the time as the 107<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron and later at the 107<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, the Michigan Airmen were deployed to England in August 1942. There, the 107<sup>th</sup> flew L-4, L-5, A-20 and Spitfire aircraft, before being equipped with the F-6A, the reconnaissance version of the P-51 Mustang. In December 1943, the 107th became the

first operational photographic reconnaissance squadron in Northern Europe. In preparation for the Allied invasion on D-Day, the squadron flew missions over the French coast and was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its efforts. Assigned to support the First U.S. Army during the Normandy Campaign, the 107th was the first reconnaissance unit to operate from French soil.



**The 107th over France. Full caption below.**

Sixty years later, in 2004, the 107<sup>th</sup> Fighter squadron became the first F-16 unit to be based in Iraq during operations there.

Prior to arriving in England for World War II operations, the 107<sup>th</sup> briefly was assigned to anti-submarine patrols, operating from Charleston Army Airfield in South Carolina.

A noted World War II Airman later became a member of the 107<sup>th</sup> squadron and helped organize the post-war Michigan Air National Guard. Urban L. "Ben" Drew was a Detroit native who became the first pilot to shoot down two enemy jet aircraft in a single mission - while flying a propeller-driven P-51 Mustang -- in the later stages of World War II. Drew, who left the military as a major in 1950, also served as the first assistant adjutant general for air for the Michigan National Guard, helping to guide the organization of the Michigan Air National Guard in the years after the Air Force became a separate military service.

A native of Detroit and later an alumnus of both Wayne (now Wayne State) University and the University of Michigan, Drew was flying with the Yellowjackets of the 375th Fighter Squadron, 361st Fighter Group, in Europe when he became an ace, recording a total of six aerial victories. While flying in Europe, Drew's P-51 was nicknamed "The Detroit Miss" after his hometown.

Part of the Eighth Air Force flying out of England, Drew and his fellow Airmen were assigned to fly escort missions to U.S. bombers on missions into Germany. On Oct. 7, 1944, on a flight near Hamm, Germany, Drew engaged and shot down two German ME-262 jet aircraft - the first U.S. pilot or allied Airman to do so. That action drew a request from his squadron that he be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, but the medal was rejected due to a lack of supporting evidence. During the combat, the gun camera aboard the Detroit Miss jammed leaving no film of the victories. His Wingman during the flight, 2nd Lt. Robert McCandliss, was shot down by anti-aircraft fire during the flight and spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner of war.

Several decades later, the actions of Drew were reviewed by the Air Force - and confirmed by war records of the German Luftwaffe - and he was awarded the Air Force Cross for the action, one of only two such medals awarded for actions during World War II. Drew was finally awarded the medal in 1983. (The Air Force was not established as a separate service until two years after the war.)

After World War II, Drew left the active Air Force and became a member of the newly-re-designated 107th Bombardment Squadron (Light) of the newly-created Michigan Air National Guard. Through several name changes, the 107th today operates as the 107th Fighter Squadron, flying the A-10 Thunderbolt II. The 107th is nicknamed the "Red Devils." When Drew was assigned to the unit as an instructor pilot, the squadron had recently begun flying F-51 Mustangs - essentially the same aircraft as the P-51, but re-designated in a new naming convention. Drew served with the Michigan Air National Guard 1947-1950.

Incidentally, the 375<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron drew flew with during World War II was based alongside the 374<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron throughout the war. Following WWII, the 374<sup>th</sup> became the 171<sup>st</sup> and was assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard.

Today, the 107<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron operates A-10 Thunderbolt IIs at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

## **Key Dates – 107<sup>th</sup> Squadron in World War II**

### **October 28, 1940**

The 107<sup>th</sup> arrives at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, for training. The unit had been mobilized and placed in active federal service on Oct. 15, 1940, in response to growing world tensions.

### **December 20, 1943**

The 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, formerly the 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan Air National Guard, commenced combat operations over France from the United Kingdom with its F-6A's in preparation for the Allied invasion of Europe.

### **February 23, 1944**

The 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, formerly the 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan National Guard, and other units of the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group were assigned the responsibility of photographing the French coastline in preparation for the Normandy invasion, Operation Overlord.

### **June 27, 1944**

Personnel and several F-6As from the 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, formerly the 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan National Guard, became the first Army Air Forces tactical reconnaissance unit to operate from France. The squadron continued to move to forward locations along with the advancing U.S. Army. On Sept. 16, 1944, it relocated to Belgium; on March 23, 1945, it relocated to the first of three air fields it would operate from in Germany during the final stages of the European campaign.

### **July 5/September 16, 1945**

On July 5, the unit departed its final location in Europe, Eschwege Airfield in Germany, for transport via Navy troop transport to the U.S. The unit arrived at Drew Field, Florida, on Sept. 16, 1945.

### **Nov. 9, 1945/May 24, 1946**

The unit is inactivated on Nov. 9, 1945 – after more than five years of continuous operation outside of Michigan. On May 24, 1946, the unit is re-constituted as the 107<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (Light) and returned to the Michigan National Guard, assigned to what is now Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

### **60 years later: February 27, 2004**

The 107th Fighter Squadron, Michigan ANG, deployed ten F-16C aircraft on their AEF rotation to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom. They were the first F-16 unit Air Force to operate from Kirkuk AB, a former Iraqi Air Force installation, thus becoming the first U.S. F-16s to operate from a base inside Iraq. They employed the Theater Airborne Reconnaissance System pod that had been developed by the ANG in actual combat conditions.

## **OFFICIAL CAPTION OF THE “Mission Over Normandy” PAINTING (A National Guard Heritage Painting)**

The 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan National Guard, one of 29 National Guard observation squadrons, was ordered into active Federal service on October 15, 1940. Along with 4,000 other National Guard Air Corps personnel,

the men of the 107th expanded the rapidly-growing U.S. Army Air Forces. After taking part in antisubmarine patrols, the redesigned 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron deployed to England in August 1942. They flew L-4, L-5, A-20 and Spitfire aircraft, before being equipped with the F-6A, the reconnaissance version of the P-51 Mustang. In December 1943, the 107th became the first operational photographic reconnaissance squadron in Northern Europe. In preparation for the Allied invasion, the squadron flew missions over the French coast and was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its efforts. Assigned to support the First U.S. Army during the Normandy Campaign, the 107th was the first reconnaissance unit to operate from French soil. The 107th achieved an illustrious record during World War II, a record which is proudly maintained by the 107th Fighter Squadron, Michigan Air National Guard.