



FACT SHEET

3RD SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet

Mission

Executes global Special Operations taskings as a member of the Air Force component of United States Special Operations Command. Supports theater commander by providing precision weapons employment and persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Plans, prepares, and executes MQ-9 Reaper aircraft missions supporting special operation forces. Organizes, trains and equips personnel.

Background

The 3 SOS traces its heritage to World War I, when the squadron was first activated as Photographic Section I on April 4, 1918. As part of I Corps Observation Group, the unit processed aerial photographs taken for intelligence use. The unit was demobilized in July of 1919 after moving back to the United States. In September 1919 the unit was reactivated as the 1st Photographic Section, 1st Surveillance Group, processing aerial photography for associated observation squadrons until becoming the 3d Observation Squadron on June 1, 1937.

In 1937, the unit moved to Langley Field, Va., where it was attached to the Coast Artillery School flying P-39 aircraft until being disbanded in July of 1944. The unit was reconstituted on May 28, 1952 as the 3d Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, operating the RB-47E aircraft until deactivation in July of 1958.

On May 1, 1968, the unit was reactivated as the 3d Air Commando Squadron at Nha Trang Airport, South Vietnam. Absorbing the resources of the 14th Air Commando Squadron, the unit flew the AC-47 gunship in close air support of ground forces until deactivation in August 1969. On February 24, 1969, A1C John Levitow was serving as a loadmaster aboard an AC-47 when his aircraft was struck by an enemy mortar round. A1C Levitow received over 40 wounds, but overcame his injuries to secure a burning flare in the back of the aircraft and throw it overboard prior to it igniting completely. A1C Levitow saved the aircraft and its crew from certain death, and on May 14, 1970, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

On May 15, 1976, the 3rd was reactivated and renamed the 3d Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron. Operating out of Camp O'Donnell, Philippines, the PACAF Electronic Warfare Range, and the Crowe Valley Gunnery Range, the 3rd was responsible for realistic conventional, tactical, and electronic warfare training in a simulated combat environment for U.S. Marine, U.S. Navy, and allied fighter crews. This unit was deactivated on September 30, 1991.

On Oct. 28, 2005, the unit was reactivated as the 3d Special Operations Squadron, flying the MQ-1 Predator. The initial cadre of squadron members attended training in the spring and summer of 2005, and by the end of that year the 3 SOS was flying 23 percent of all Predator hours in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. The squadron became the largest Predator squadron in the Air Force within 20 months of its inception.



In 2014, the squadron began transitioning to the MQ-9 Reaper. The transition was completed and the last AFSOC Predator flight was flown in February of 2016.

Assignments

I Corps Observation Group, Apr 1918; First Army Observation Group, Nov 1918-Apr 1919; unkn, Apr-3 Jul 1919. 1 Wing, 27 Sep 1919; 1 Surveillance Group, c. 12 Nov 1919; Eighth Corps Area, Jun 1922 (in association with 12 Observation Squadron, affiliated with 1 Cavalry Division, Jun 1922-Jun 1926, and with 2 Division, Jun 1926-c. Oct 1931); 3 Attack Group, 8 May 1929; 12 Observation Group, attached 1 Oct 1930, assigned 31 Oct 1931, attached 1 Mar 1935; Eighth Corps Area, 1 Jun 1937; Third Corps Area, 20 Jun 1937 (attached to Coast Artillery School); Coast Artillery School, c. 1939; I Air Support Command, 1 Sep 1941 (attached to Coast Artillery School to 5 Apr 1942); 73 Observation Group, 12 Mar 1942; Second Air Force, 12 Aug 1942 (attached to II Ground Air [later, II Air] Support Command to 23 Sep 1942); IV Ground Air (later, IV Air) Support Command, 7 Sep 1942; Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics, 21 Jan 1943; Air Support Department, AAF School of Applied Tactics (later, Tactical Air Force, AAF Tactical Center), 18 Feb 1943 (attached to 432 Observation [later, 432 Reconnaissance; 432 Tactical Reconnaissance] Group, 27 Mar-1 Nov 1943); Tactical Air Division, AAF Tactical Center, 4 Jan 1944; Orlando Fighter Wing, 20 Feb 1944; AAF Tactical Center, 28 Mar-2 Jul 1944. 26 Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 28 May 1952-1 Jul 1958. Pacific Air Forces, 5 Apr 1968; 14 Air Commando (later, 14 Special Operations) Wing, 1 May 1968-15 Sep 1969. 3 Tactical Fighter Wing, 15 May 1976; 6200 Tactical Fighter Training Group, 1 Jan 1980-30 Sep 1991. 16 Operations (later, 1 Special Operations) Group, 28 Oct 2005; 27 Special Operations Group, 1 Oct 2007-Present.

Stations

Ourches, France, 4 Apr 1918 (detachment at Flin, France, 15-28 Jun 1918); Saints, France, 29 Jun 1918 (detachment at Ourches, France, until c. mid-Jul 1918); Francheville, France, 9 Jul 1918; Moras Ferme (near La Ferte-sous Jouarre), France, c. 25 Jul 1918; Lizy-sur-Ourcq, France, c. 4 Aug 1918; Coincy, France, c. 10 Aug 1918; Chailly-en-Brie, France, 13 Aug 1918; Toul, France, 24 Aug 1918; Remicourt, France, 19 Sep 1918; Julvecourt, France, 3 Nov 1918; Vavincourt, France, c. 28 Nov 1918; Colombey-les-Belles, France, c. 5 May 1919; port of embarkation, France, May-Jun 1919; Garden City, NY, c. 20 Jun-3 Jul 1919. Fort Bliss, TX, 27 Sep 1919; Kelly Field, TX, 2 Jul 1921; Fort Bliss, TX, 24 Jun 1922; Fort Sam Houston, TX, 22 Jun 1926; Brooks Field, TX, 31 Oct 1931; Langley Field, VA, 20 Jun 1937; Camp Cooke, CA, 22 Apr 1942; Blythe, CA, 30 May 1942; Keystone Heights, FL, 21 Jan 1943; Alachua Army Airfield, FL, 3 Feb 1944; Orlando AB, FL, 6 Mar-2 Jul 1944. Lockbourne AFB, OH, 28 May 1952-1 Jul 1958. Nha Trang Airport, South Vietnam, 1 May 1968-15 Sep 1969. Camp O'Donnell, Philippines, 15 May 1976-30 Sep 1991. Nellis AFB, NV, 28 Oct 2005; Cannon AFB, NM, 1 Jun 2008-Present.

Commanders

Unkn, 4 Apr 1918-3 Jul 1919. Unkn, 27 Sep 1919-2 Jul 1944. None (not manned) 28 May 1952-1 Jun 1953; Maj Henry M. Henington, by 1 Jun 1953; Maj Robert C. Householder, 18 Jul 1953; Lt Col Henry M. Henington, 11 Jan 1954; Maj Carl A. Kluender, 4 Jul 1955; Maj John J. Mason, Jun 1956; Lt Col Roger A. Stevenson, Oct 1957; Maj Alvin G. Schuering, Dec 1957-15 Apr 1958; none (not manned), 15 Apr-1 Jul 1958. Lt Col Charles W. Hodgson, 1 May 1968; Lt Col Donald W. Feuerstein, 26 May 1968; Lt Col James R. Hyde, 2 Jan 1969; Lt Col Robert A. Davidson, 25 Feb-1 Sep 1969; none (not manned), 1-15 Sep 1969. Lt Col Thomas W. Wilson Jr., 15 May 1976; Maj Joshua T. Day III, 1 Aug 1977; Lt Col David F. Tippett, 7 Sep 1977; Lt Col Richard R. Sheppard, 15 Feb 1979; Lt Col Harold W. Stoll, 19 Sep 1980; Lt Col Paul H. Miller, 26 Aug 1983; Maj Jeff O. Prichard, 9 Jul 1985; Lt Col Charles F. Turk, Nov 1985; Lt Col David A. Geraldson, 24 Sep 1987- Dec 1989; Unkn, Jan 1990-Jun 1991; None (not manned), Jun-30 Sep 1991. Lt Col Gary L. McCollum, 28 Oct 2005; Lt Col Paul M. Caltagirone, 1 Oct 2007; Lt Col Robert W. Brock, 8 Oct 2008; Lt Col Stewart A. Hammons, 27 May 2010; Lt Col Travis L. Norton, 24 May 2012; Lt Col Eric Schmidt, 6 Jun 2014; Lt Col Jonathan Graham, 28 Jan 2016; Lt Col Andrew Kenney, 13 Jun 2017.

Aircraft

None, Apr 1918-Jul 1919. None, Sep 1919-May 1937; included B-10, L-2, and apparently O-25 and O-43 during years 1937-1942; O-47, c. 1938-1942; O-49, 1941-1942; O-52, 1941-1942; L-4, 1942; P-39, 1943-1944; A-20, 1943; DB-7, 1943; L-2, 1943; L-3, 1943. YRB-47, 1953-1954; RB-47, 1954-1958; B-47, 1958. AC-47, 1968-1969. None, 1976-1991. MQ-1, 2005-2014. MQ-9, 2014-Present.

Operations

Organized in France in Apr 1918, the Photographic Section No. 1 processed aerial photographs taken by flying units working with the I Army Corps (American) and French XXXVIII Army Corps, 5 Apr-Nov 1918. The 1 Photographic Section, from Sep 1919 until becoming the 3 Observation Squadron on 1 Jun 1937, processed aerial photography of associated observation squadrons in Texas. At Langley Field, VA, the squadron engaged in aerial observation work with the Coast Artillery School until Apr 1942. It supported ground forces on maneuvers during 1942, and served as a training and demonstration unit Jan 1943-Feb 1944. The squadron was not manned or equipped, 1 Mar-2 Jul 1944. Activated again in May 1952, the squadron did not receive its first aircraft until 1 Jul 1953, when it immediately began familiarization training, followed by in-flight refueling training in Feb 1954. It received RB-47E aircraft in Mar 1954, and conducted its first long-range mission (6 planes to Alaska for 10 days) in May 1954. The squadron deployed at RAF Upper Heyford, England, 14 Sep-3 Nov 1954. It photographed numerous Air Force bases and American cities, 1954-1958, and participated regularly in Strategic Air Command (SAC) exercises, but was not operational, 15 Apr-1 Jul 1958. As the 3 Air Commando Squadron in South Vietnam, it absorbed resources of the 14 Air Commando Squadron. It flew combat missions in AC-47D gunships in close air support of ground forces, providing flare illumination and gunfire in support of strategic hamlets, out-posts, and friendly forces under night attack. From 16 Feb-1 May 1969, all squadron aircraft were maintained on ground alert when not flying, due to the TET (New Year) offensive. It began transferring its gunships to the Vietnamese Air Force in Jun 1969 and flew its last mission on 7 Aug 1969. The 3 Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron although having a "tactical" designation, was not equipped with aircraft. Rather, it operated Camp O'Donnell, Philippines, the Pacific Air Forces Electronic Warfare Range, the Crowe Valley Aerial Gunnery Range, and associated facilities. It provided realistic conventional, tactical, and electronic warfare training in a simulated combat environment during COPE THUNDER exercises. These exercises provided combat training for fighter aircrews of not only the US Air Force, but also fighter crews of the US Marine Corps, US Navy, and allied air forces in the western Pacific area. Following the eruption of Mt Pinatubo in Jun 1991, personnel were evacuated, and the squadron remained unmanned until its inactivation. Provided remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) support to special operations forces, 2005-Present.

Campaign Streamers

World War I: Champagne-Marne; Aisne-Marne; St Mihiel; Muese-Argonne. Defensive Sector Streamers: Lorraine; Champagne; Ile-de-France. Vietnam: Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III; Vietnam Air/Ground; Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV; TET 69/Counteroffensive; Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969. Afghanistan: Consolidation III. Iraq: Iraqi Surge; Iraqi Sovereignty.

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation: Vietnam: 21 Jun 1968-30 Jun 1969. Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device: 1 May-20 Jun 1968; 1 Jul 1968-30 Jun 1969; 1 Sep 2006-30 Jun 2007. Meritorious Unit Awards: 1 Jun 2007-31 May 2009; [1 Jun]-30 Sep 2009; 1 Oct 2009-30 Sep 2011; 1 Oct 2011-30 Sep 2013; 1 Oct 2013-30 Sep 2015. Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards: 21 Mar-9 May 1956; 1 Apr 1980-31 Mar 1982; 1 Jul 1985-30 Jun 1987; 1 Jun 1988-1 Jun 1990; [28 Oct 2005]-31 Aug 2006. Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm: 1 May-30 Aug 1968; 1 May 1968-15 Sep 1969