

# 108 AIR REFUELING SQUADRON



## MISSION

### LINEAGE

108 Aero Squadron organized, 27 Aug 1917  
Redesignated 802 Aero Squadron, 1 Feb 1918  
Demobilized, 11 Jun 1919

108 Squadron (Observation) constituted in the National Guard in 1921  
Redesignated 108 Observation Squadron on 25 January 1923  
Organized and Federally recognized on 1 July 1927

802 Aero Squadron reconstituted and consolidated with 108 Observation Squadron, 1936.  
Consolidated organization designated 108 Observation Squadron.

Ordered to active service, 3 Feb 1941  
Redesignated 108 Observation Squadron (Medium), 13 Jan 1942  
Redesignated 108 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942  
Redesignated 108 Reconnaissance Squadron (Special), 25 Jun 1943  
Inactivated, 1 Nov 1943  
Redesignated 108 Bombardment Squadron (Light), and allotted to ANG, 24 May 1946  
Federally recognized, 19 January 1947  
Redesignated 108 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 1953  
Redesignated 108 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Jul 1955  
Redesignated 108 Air Refueling Squadron, 1 July 1961

## STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX, 27 Aug 1917  
Garden City, NY, 1 Nov-7 Dec 1917  
St Maixent, France, 2 Jan 1918  
Issoudun, France, 21 Feb 1918-c. Apr 1919  
Mitchel Field, NY, 27 May-11 Jun 1919  
Chicago, IL, 1 Jul 1927-28 Dec 1941  
Rio Hato, Panama, 14 Jan 1942  
Howard Field, CZ, 19 Jan 1942-1 Nov 1943  
131st Infantry Armory, Chicago, IL  
Chicago Municipal Airport, Chicago, IL, 19 Jan 1947  
O'Hare IAP, Park Ridge, IL  
Scott AFB, IL 1999

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Unkn 27 Aug 1917-Feb 1918  
Third Aviation Instruction Center, Feb 1918-Apr 1919  
Unkn, Apr-11 Jun 1919  
Illinois NG (divisional aviation, 33<sup>rd</sup> Division), 1 Jul 1927  
Second Army, 3 Feb 1941  
II Air Support Command, 1 Sep 1941  
72 Observation (later Reconnaissance) Group, 26 Sep 1941-1 Nov 1943

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

#### **Mission Aircraft**

PT-1  
BT-1  
O-2, 1927  
O-38, 1931  
O-47, 1939 (1940)  
B-18  
P-39, 1943  
O-2 1931  
O-31, 1935  
O-49, 1941  
O-52  
A-18  
P-36, 1943  
B-26  
F-51  
F-51  
F-86  
F-84, 1955  
F-86, 1957  
KC-97, 1961  
KC-135, 1976

## **Support Aircraft**

T-6

C-47

T-33

## **COMMANDERS**

LT Merrill D. Mann, 1 Jul 1927

Maj Clifford A. McElvain 25 Jun 1935-24 Apr 1942

Cpt Frank Allen, 25 Apr 1942

Maj James Welch, 2 Nov 1943

Maj Russell B. Daniels, 1946

Maj Donald J. Smith, 1 Apr 1951

Maj Joseph J. Kovacs, 1953

Maj William C. Schell, 1956

LTC Joseph J. Kovacs, 1 Jul 1961

LTC Milton B. Stutzman, 1 Jul 1962

LTC Harrie B. Markham, Jr., 1 Jul 1972

LTC Dean A. Meucci, 1 Feb 1976

LTC Morris A. Weaver, 6 Apr 1978

LTC Richard W. Godfrey, 2 Apr 1979

LTC Peter Nezamis Aug 1998 - Dec 2003

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

World War I

Theater of Operations

World War II

American Theater

### **Campaign Streamers**

### **Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

None

## **EMBLEM**



Perched on a white cloud a brown and white eagle with gold beak and claws, and outlined in black, applied to his eye a black monocular with gold and black eye reflection showing in open end, all on and over a blue disc outlined in orange, the bird to face to the front of the aircraft, with a sky-bomb tucked under the right wing of the eagle. (Approved 5 Dec 1950)

Perched on a white cloud. a brown and white eagle with gold beak and claws, and outlined in black, applied to his eye a black monocular with gold and black eye reflection showing in open end, all on and over a blue disc outlined in orange, the bird to face to the front of the aircraft, with a sky-gray bomb tucked under the right wing of the eagle.

Created by Mr. Vernon Taldwell of Walt Disney Studios it represents the Squadron function in a picturesque way.

Originally approved by the War Department for the 108 Observation Squadron, 27 Mar

The addition of the sky-gray bomb tucked under the wing was approved Dec 1950.

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

This Squadron was organized August 27, 1917, as the 108 Aero Service Squadron at Kelly Field, Texas. The enlisted personnel at the time of organization was composed principally of men from the upper Southern and middle-western States, coming from the recruit depot at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. At the time of the squadrons organization there was a scarcity of Officers at Kelly Field. The first commissioned Officer to have command was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. B. L. Carson. This Officer was simultaneously in command of the three other Squadrons at Kelly Field. Lieut. Carson was succeeded by Capt. J. A. Dunnigan on Oct. 1, 1917, and on October 13<sup>th</sup> Cpt Dunnigan was relieved and Lt (now Cpt) Oliver B. Wynn was assigned to command of the Squadron. Capt. Wyman has remained continuously in command to this date. 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. Henry W. Gante, was assigned to the Squadron October 25<sup>th</sup> at Kelly Field as Medical Officer—remaining until the Squadron reached France, This Officer became Adjutant of the Care hospital at St. Maixent.

At Kelly Field the personnel of the squadron as it existed at the time of organization was changed by numerous transfers. When the squadron was finally under orders for overseas no less than eighty transfers were made, due to the fact that the original personnel could not show a proper record of typhoid inoculation and vaccination. The Squadron was under canvass in the recruit camp and before entraining for Garden City on Oct. 26<sup>th</sup> experienced a number of Texas "northerns", which were found to be the last word in terrible sand and dust storms.

The trip from Kelly Field to Aviation Concentration Depot at Garden City, Long Island, New York, covered a period of six days but was made in tourist sleeping cars and proved to be the best traveling that the squadron was to have for many a long day. Enroute, the squadron had its first experience with the practical work of the American Red Cross. Hot coffee, cakes and sandwiches, as well as other refreshments and smoking material were received at various points.

At Garden City the Squadron was in barracks; a decided change from the living under canvass at Kelly Field. Construction work had by no means been completed at the Garden City camp and in

addition to guard duty and drill the squadron personnel was used to very good advantage in the construction work.

The squadron entrained at Garden City, December 7<sup>th</sup>, for St. Johns, New Brunswick. Prior to this date the following Officers were assigned to the squadron 1Lt George W Howard, 1Lt Max Chapman, 1Lt James F. Frersol, 1Lt Albert E. Galvin, and 1Lt Wendell A. Robertson. The three last named were flying officers. 1Lt McCrea Stephenson and Eric P. Hodge were also assigned to the Squadron for a short time--as was also 1st Lieut. John J. Donohue. Lieutenants Stephenson and Hodge were transferred to other organizations before the squadron departed for Garden City and Lt Donohue was taken ill. He later came overseas and was killed in France while in training at an aerial gunnery school.

After a 4 day trip through beautiful New England and Canada with its carpet of white, the squadron arrived at West St John, New Brunswick, and there embarked on the RMS Tunisian, steaming out that night, Dec 10<sup>th</sup>, through the Bay of Fundy to the Atlantic and thence to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we arrived the following morning and set anchor in Bedford Basin—at the upper extremity of the wonderful land-locked Bay. At Halifax we saw devastation on every hand. The terrible explosion had occurred just a few days prior to our arrival. In the harbor itself we saw several submerged vessels.

After laying to in the basin at Halifax for five days the remaining ships in our convoy arrived and, on the afternoon of December 15<sup>th</sup> the "Tunisian," with the remainder of the convoy steamed out of the harbor.

The escort was furnished by a British converted light cruiser. Included in the convey were the "Adriatic," the "Northland" the "Manchuria" and the "Tuscania." The latter was torpedoed and sunk off the north coast of Ireland scarcely more than a month later when on her next voyage from north America to Liverpool. Every ship in the convoy followed a zigzag course from the moment we left Halifax harbor. This zig-zag became more and more accentuated as we approached the submarine zone. Our course took us around the North of Ireland. We did not strike any German Tin Fish although as we were traveling through the real danger zone the ship was full of narrow escapes.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> we were picked up by a convoy of English Torpedo Boat Destroyers. There were eight of these protecting ships. December 25<sup>th</sup> Christmas Day, brought us into the Mersey River off Liverpool. The weather was cold and we were not boarded by any officials until the following morning. As we steamed up the Mersey we saw the "Leviathan" (formerly the "Fatherland") anchored alongside the "Landing Stage." This gigantic ship had just discharged about 12,000 American soldiers. The Squadron Xmas dinner consisted of fish and a dessert of English plum pudding. The sailors; and men aboard got up a concert and danced and all made merry in the saloon on deck.

December 26<sup>th</sup> we were lightered off ship and proceeded immediately by rail to Southampton. At Southampton we had our first "rest camp" experience. This rest camp was two and half miles

from the city. The squadron was marched out at night thru dimly lighted streets, and on arrival was disposed of in tents. Each man drew three blankets from the USMC detachment. The camp itself was British and at the time was being used various detachments of British troops just back from Flanders. These Tommies were very gay: most of them were full of Christmas cheer" and other things.

At this camp we existed on British rations. We left Southampton December 28th and boarded a side-wheeler named the "Monas Queen" bound for Le Havre, France. Crossing the Channel proved to be a short but very rough journey. The squadron was assigned to guard duty, but as practically every soldier on the ship succumbed to sea-sickness there was very little of this duty performed. The "Monas Queen" was a fast boat and ran at 17 or 18 knots, through rain and pitch blackness, with lights out. We felt no anxiety whatever so far as submarines were concerned, but estimated that the possibility of a collision was fairly good. We arrived at Le Havre just before midnight December 29<sup>th</sup>. At that part we were sent to another British "rest camp" where for three bitterly cold days the squadron lived under canvass; and on more British rations. At 6 o'clock the morning of 1 January 1918, orders were received to entrain for St Maixent. The train equipment furnished for the trip consisted of the "40 hommes, 8 cheveaux" cars, with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class coaches for the Officers. We traveled in these cars until the evening of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, when we arrived at St Maixant (Deux Sievres). The trip was very rough from start to finish. The weather was exceedingly cold; rations were very limited and it was impossible to take any comfort in the box cars. The squadron resembled an outfit recruited from Central Africa when detraining at destination.

The Squadron remained at St. Maixent, a town of 5,000 inhabitants, until February 20<sup>th</sup> and during the entire time was in quarantine, due to the prevalence of mumps. At this station the Squadron was in the Coiffe Barracks. These barracks were of modern French construction situated at the edge of town. Mess facilities were not to be had at first, but were shortly provided by the erection of Adrian barracks, which were used as kitchens and mess halls. Black French bread was the regular issue.

No duties in connection with aviation were performed by the Squadron at St. Maixent, and the time was devoted to drill, hikes and exercises calculated to keep the man in condition. The town of St. Maixent itself was of great interest and the people were found to be very cordial. When the squadron arrived at this post major Robertson was in command and Cpt Roosevelt was his Adjutant. Cap Leo R. Sack was Camp Supply Officer and acting quartermaster. Major Robertson was shortly after relieved and was succeeded by LTC Rubottom, who was later succeeded by Col. Eskridge.

Before the squadron left St. Maixant 2Lt LeRoy Gurderson was assigned but a few days later was relieved and sent elsewhere for training as an observer. At St. Maixent Lt Chas. E. Barber, 1Lt Chas. Alexander, and 2Lt Robert L. Mahornay and S. A. Segitz also joined the Squadron. 1Lt Geo W. Howard was relieved and assigned to the command of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Aero Squadron.

1Lt Max Chapman was relieved and assigned to the command of a detachment of the 106<sup>th</sup>

Aero Squadron. 1Lt Frensel, Galvin and Robertson, the flying officers who had been attached to the squadron at Garden City, were also relieved preparatory to flying training. Lt Frenzel, after completing his training at the Allied Aviation Instruction Center, became a monitor at Clermont Ferrand the American Bombing School. He was ordered to the front about the time of the Armistice. Lt Robertson saw active service at the front. He was flying over the lines with the celebrated American Ace Lt Putnam at the time the latter was brought down by the fire of enemy aircraft. Lt. Galvin, after finishing the course of training at Third Aviation instruction center was assigned to the Testing Department. He rapidly demonstrated his ability as a pilot of unusual skill and rendered valuable service as a tester.

The Squadron left St. Maixent February 20th, arriving at the Third Aviation Instruction Center on the morning of the following day, February 21st. This Camp was found to be fairly well submerged in mud about twelve kilometers north-east of Issoudun (Department of Indre). We arrived in a heavy rainstorm and were assigned to Barracks #14. At the moment of our arrival the Third Aviation Instruction Center was not by any means completed, and the personnel which was in the Post was constantly changing. Numerous construction squadrons were employed in opening and completing roads, erecting barracks and making other improvements. This squadron was very shortly assigned to the Aero Repair Department then housed in hangars at what later was designated Field 2. This Department was very shortly put in charge of then Lieut. (now Capt.) Duncan Dana. The Squadron was green so far as actual work on aeroplanes or aeroplane motors was concerned. , the men proved to be excellent material and very shortly adjusted themselves to the work and began to deliver the goods in a manner that was most gratifying and satisfactory to those in charge of the Department. After several weeks at Field 2 the Aero Repair Department was moved to permanent shops on the main field.

Here the Squadron worked on major repairs and is still engaged in that duty at the time this history is being written. The major repair work-- has been most important at all times. One of the great problems in the operation of the Field has been to keep the maximum number of ships in commission so that the training of pilots might go forward at the greatest possible rate of speed. The statistics of the Post Engineering Department form a remarkable record of efficiency--and this Squadron can cite these statistics with pride--in view of the fact that the major part of its personnel was on duty in the Engineering Department.

Early in June the Commanding Officer of the Post decided to regroup the personnel and on June 5th the Squadron received about forty men--by transfer from other Squadrons. These "special duty" men included men at work in practically every Department of the post. Many of them, were noncommissioned officers, and almost without exception they proved, to be very efficient and men of excellent character.

When the Squadron first arrived at this Post Lieut. Col. Walter G. Kilner was the Commanding Officer. He was succeeded by Major Carl Spaatz. Major Spaatz was succeeded by Lieut. Col. Hiram Bingham.

During the months that the Squadron has remained at this Field it has witnessed a remarkable



development of the program for the training of American pilots. Early in the spring and at the time of the squadron arrival it was expected that orders might be received any moment sending the squadron to the front or to some other Post. At first it was difficult for the members of the outfit to reconcile themselves to the thought of continuing in the Service of Supply, for any length of time. Later the squadron was assigned to the Post Engineering Department and was spoken of as a squadron permanently assigned to this post. Gradually the men and Officers came to accustom themselves to the life of the Post and came to realize that so far as the air service was concerned it was of vast importance that the best personnel available be utilized in carrying forward the work of the field. It was realized that unless the training of pilots here went forward steadily and smoothly there would be an inadequate supply of pilots at the front.

Fortunately the constantly expanding facilities of the Field served to absorb our attention when off duty. While work in the shops was robbed of every suggestion of the spectacular nevertheless the possibility of witnessing the training of pilots and the testing of airplanes was always present and furnished a very interesting aspect to camp life. The opportunity to watch marvelous aerial combat and the latest circus stunts furnished relaxation from the work in the shops and was some consolation to the men who were so eager to see the organization in the zone of advance and serving as a base for the flight of ships over the lines.

In the athletic life of the post the squadron took a leading part. The Decoration Day track meet, May 30<sup>th</sup> was won by the squadron. The Volley Ball championship was also won by the Squadron. In the Fourth of July track meet we tied for second place.

The administration of the squadron has been carried on with very little resort to guardhouse confinement or court-martial proceedings. In the entire time that the squadron has been at this post but three men have been confined to the guardhouse and there have been no cases more serious than summary court. The favorable sanitary conditions which have been maintained through the squadron mess hall and barracks have repeatedly brought comment from inspecting officers. The present Commanding Officer on his last visit to the pantry and kitchen, remarking its customary immaculateness observed that, "It is always a pleasure to come into this pantry and kitchen." The squadron has prided itself on being an especially efficient service unit and scarcely without exception--the men here have taken an interest in maintaining a good name for the entire outfit.

The only enlisted man who was recommended for and received a commission, flying status was 2Lt Harry G. Sherritt. This officer started with the organization as a private and after attaining the rank of Master Electrician qualified for flying and received his commission on 11 November 11th. SFC Mark H. Walker was also commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt, his commission being receive in the quartermaster corps. SFC Charles D. Turner was recommended for a ground commission and was awaiting his commission when the war department almost simultaneously with signing of the armistice announce its policy of making no more original appointments or promotions.

It should be said that this squadron has been favored in its non commissioned officers

personnel. Had authorization existed excellent officer material could have been selected from among the non-commissioned officers.

The Squadrons generally good health record was completely broken the month of October when an epidemic of Spanish Flu was prevalent in the field. At that time high as thirty-five members were on sick report in the hospital. In three cases this sickness was fatal. Pvt Mitchell L. McClurg died Oct 1st, Sgt. Edward 7M. Moriarty died October 2, and Cpl Leon Brannon died October 3<sup>rd</sup>. These soldiers were buried with military honors in the post cemetery. No other deaths have occurred in the squadron. The loss of these three comrades was a most was a most severe blow.

Among the commanding officers who led the 802nd Aero Repair Squadron during World War I in France was a Maj Carl Spaatz, who later became Gen Spaatz in World War II, and Chief of Staff of the Air Force after the war.

The 108 Observation Squadron, after more than a decade of service, is housed in a new \$600,000 modern hangar at the Chicago Municipal Airport, a huge building providing facilities equaled to no other state in the Union. This squadron is one of 21 state aviation units of the National Guard in the United States. Most officer-pilots won their wings in the Army Air Corps training or in the rigorous army schools during the World War. Others worked their way up from the ranks.

In June, 1927, Major General Roy D. Keehn, 33rd Division commander, selected Merrill D. Mann, U. S. Army Air Corps Lieutenant and air officer of the Armys Sixth Corps Area, to form Illinois' National Guard Air Squadron. Fourteen Officers were selected as Men with mechanical and other desired qualifications were also chosen, the squadron being organized at the 131st Infantry armory. After being promoted to Major, Mann served as commander of the unit and as Regular Army instructor.

Original officers still active with the unit are Major McElvain, Captains McElvain, Fenwick, Bovey, Kuhn, Wilcox, Newhall, and Lieutenant Westlake. Original enlisted men still active are Sergeants Eric Trostman, Eugene Ahern and Patrick Rickard. Joseph P. Dunne and Walter Baryl, two original enlisted men, are now Lieutenants. Lorenz Letson, one of an early group of enlisted men, is now a Lieutenant and pilot.

Since being Federally recognized July 1, 1927, the units planes and pilots have piled up more than 30,000 hours in the air, without a single fatal accident. In August, 1927, the entire unit went to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, for its first 15-day period of active duty with the other units of the 33rd Division. At this camp, the squadron became a unit with airplanes (four Consolidated Training Planes with Hispano Suiza motors) and sold the air service to the other units.

The first visiting plane housed in the squadron hangar at the Chicago airport was Colonel

Charles A. Lindbergh's famous "Spirit of St. Louis."

Since its organization, the squadron has served on various state duty missions, including flood relief work. The equipment of the unit has been improved from time to time, and this year the squadron received the first of the North American, three-place, 200-mile-an-hour observation planes, six of the O47s, Type A, and three of the O47Bs. It also has four O38Es and one O31B Gull-wing.

The squadron has taken part in various army maneuvers, including the 1931 Air Corps maneuvers in the Middle West and throughout the East, and the Second Army maneuvers, 1936, operating from a base at the Battle Creek Airport. The National Guard units demonstrated during these maneuvers their proficiency not only to the public but to their brothers in the Regular Air Corps. Among other activities of the squadron, the training of pilot and observer "teams" has been carried out, and qualification in aerial gunnery has also been an important part of the training program.

The Illinois 108 Observation Squadron, within the past three years, has been consolidated with a previous 108 Aero Squadron, and now the Illinois unit has an official record of service overseas during the World War. Records show that the 108 Aero Squadron was organized at Kelly Field August 27, 1917, and sailed overseas in December of that year. Later it was designated the 802nd Squadron and classified as an aero supply squadron and, although not entitled to recognition for battle service overseas, was officially credited with service in France. The first 108 Squadron returned from France in May, 1919, and was disbanded on June 11, 1919, at Mitchell Field, New York. By War Department order in October, 1936, the original 108 was reconstituted and consolidated with Illinois' own unit, preserving the traditions for the state unit of its illustrious predecessor.

After more than eight years of service as commanding officer, Major Mann reverted to his Regular Army status and was succeeded as unit commander by Major Clifford A. McElvain and as Regular Army instructor by Captain Charles Douglas. When Captain Douglas died in 1937, Major Bernard T. Castor became Regular Army instructor, who was succeeded in 1939 by Captain Robert R. Selway, Jr., present Regular Air Corps instructor.

Ordered to active duty from the Illinois National Guard on 3 February 1941, the 108 Observation Squadron was destined to become one of the subordinate units of the 72nd Observation Group on 26 September 1941.

The Squadron was assigned to the 5th Infantry Division, Camp Custer, Michigan, but remained officially part of the 46th Observation Group, and participated in major maneuvers during the 1941 period.

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The Squadron entered into a three-month training cycle, both in the air and on the ground. A portion of the aerial training was done at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where tow-target missions were flown for anti-aircraft guns. These included day and night tows at low level for 50 caliber machine guns, and up to 12,000 feet for the 90mm guns. The balance of the missions was devoted to training flights in conjunction with ground troops at Camp Custer, and general proficiency of the aircrews. Special projects assigned to the Squadron included photographing all Government construction projects throughout the Mid-West, and field artillery spotting for the Army's 75mm guns.

In June 1941, the Squadron participated in maneuvers around Murfreesboro, Tennessee, after which it returned to its home base at Midway Airport, Chicago, and prepared to move again for more maneuvers and exercises to Arkadelphia, Arkansas. These maneuvers involved approximately one million U.S. Army and Air Corps personnel in the central southeastern States.

In August 1941, orders transferring most of the squadrons qualified pilots to form other units were received, and their replacements were all new 2nd Lts, graduates of the Army Air Corps flying schools.

As the maneuvers progressed southward, the 108 Observation Squadron was required to move to an advance base at Tallulah, Louisiana. In October 1941 the Squadron moved back to Tennessee (Memphis) and then back to Chicago, where it received orders changing the period of active service from one year to 30 months, and the unit was alerted for shipment to Iceland, but the movement to Iceland was later canceled after it was determined that the O-47 type aircraft was unsuitable for such cold weather operations.

December 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbor) found the 108 Squadron back home at its Chicago Midway base, but not for long.

On 28 Dec 41, the rail and motor convoy left Chicago on a permanent change of-station movement to New Orleans, Louisiana, where the aircraft and aircrews joined the 72nd Observation Group, when on 9 Jan 42 the Squadrons ground personnel boarded the ship "Algonquin" for the Panama Canal Zone, arriving four days later.

All of the Squadrons elements were re-united on 19 Jan 42 at Howard Field.

The transfer of aircraft and personnel to the Canal Zone was accomplished and the 108 Observation Squadron, under the command of Major Clifford A. McElvain, was operationally combat ready in less than 30 days after the formal declaration of war against Japan (8 Dec 41) was made by the Congress.

The 108 Squadron was at first based at Rio Hata, Panama Canal Zone, and later relocated to a more permanent site at Howard Field.

The Squadron performed a number of missions. Due to the extensive enemy submarine activity in the Caribbean Sea and nearby Pacific Ocean area during the early months of World War II, the primary mission of the Squadron required daily extensive anti-submarine patrols. In addition to its O-47s, the Squadron was now equipped with one B-18, used for antisubmarine patrols, and which carried two 30-caliber machine guns and two 450-pound depth charges. Other aircraft added to the squadron were an A-17, several A-12s and L-1s used for search and rescue, and also a commandeered vintage Stinson tri-motor aircraft.

In addition to anti-submarine patrols and search and rescue missions, the men of the 108 Observation Squadron made RONS to Central and South America, with the return flights consisting of defense penetration missions.

Another chore that fell to the 108 Squadron during its assignment in Panama was operating the mail run from Howard Field to other parts of the Canal Zone and to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and back to Howard Field.

The 108 also flew many photo missions for both the U.S. Army and Air Corps, including photo mosaics of mountain areas, airports, towns and coastlines of the area, plus one mission to the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific.

On 4 July 1942, the "Medium" suffix was dropped from the unit designator, and, with its sister units, the Squadron was kept very busy on a myriad of patrol and communications flights along the coast lines and within the far-flung Command. Initially equipped with North American O-47s, the Squadron also acquired several Stinson L-1s during this period. The earliest Form 43 (Weekly Operations Report), dated 17 January 1943, showed the unit with five O-47As, one P-36A, one A-18, two L-1s and two L-4As all based at Howard Field. The unit's first B-18 was added in February 1943. The Squadron conducted one operational mission, with this aircraft, along the "Pacific coast of Colombia" on 24 February.

One of the L-4As was transferred to the dedicated Tow Target Squadron at Howard Field on 28 February 1943, while the Curtiss A-18, to the relief of the hard-pressed maintenance crews, was transferred to the Technical School at Rio Hato on 3 April 1943.

The Form 43 for 4 April 1943 showed the same five O-47As, the B-18, P-36A, two L-1s and (now) two L-4As, but also reflected a single Waco CG-4A glider. No record can be found detailing the use to which this unusual Sixth Air Force aircraft may have been intended. The aircraft was on hand only until 11 April when it was apparently transferred to another Sixth AF unit.

By the end of May 1943, the unit Form 43 reported that the Squadron had one Major, four Captains, and four First Lieutenants with over 1,000 hours flying time, and the unit is ready for combat duty. The report went on to relate that "the unit also has seven completely trained O-

47 crews.

By 25 June 1943, by which time the designation had been changed to 108 Reconnaissance Squadron (Special), the missions handed the Squadron were ever more complex and demanding, and the alterations to the equipment mix reflected this. Another B-18 (36-275) had been added in May 1943, although it required considerable work by the PAD between then and November, and the Squadron also gained small numbers of Piper L-4As, Curtiss O-52s (undocumented, but recalled by Squadron members), and four Bell P-39Ns.

As the threat of attack lessened in Central America, following the Battle of Midway, the war moved to areas remote from the Canal Zone, the highly qualified members of the 108 Squadron were gradually transferred to strengthen and build other flying units in combat theaters all over the world. In September 1943, the 108 Observation Squadron was inactivated.

By the time the unit was inactivated on 1 November 1943, aircraft hand three Bell P-39N-75s (42-18505, 18512 and 18538), an old Curtiss RP-36A (38-50), two Douglas B-18s (36-275 and 294), six of the original North American O-47As it brought to Panama (37-272, 290,313, 321, 38-288 and 314) and six Piper L-4As (42-36728, 36741, 36791, 36691, 38417 and 38430). Most of these aircraft were reassigned to either the 1st Recon Squadron or the 23rd Tow Target Squadron upon the deactivation of the 108, and these units took up the multitude of duties previously performed by the 108.

After World War II, the 108 Squadron was assigned to the newly formed 126th Wing back at its original home base, Chicagos Midway Airport, and its history made synonymous and included in the history of the 126th Air Refueling Wing since that time.

CAMP WILLIAMS WISCONSIN-1949 During the formative period, immediately following World War II, regular Thursday night meeting drills were held and administrative work accomplished, leaving week-ends free to fly practice missions.

Summer field training was held at the newly activated Camp Williams, Wisconsin (present-day Volk Field), an ideal locale for concentrated air-to-air and air-to-ground tactical training that aided greatly in bringing the unit up to combat proficiency.

As a result of the Korean War, the squadron was called to active duty on 1 April 1951, and later deployed to Europe to reinforce NATO forces stationed there. Activated with the Wing were 25 officers and airmen who were with the 108 Observation Squadron in 1940, when it was ordered to active duty during World War II. These "Old Timers" formed the nucleus of the Illinois Air Guard after the Second War.

At activation, the Wing had 201 Officers assigned, out of an authorized 284, and 1,175 enlisted men, out of an authorized 1,360. Filler personnel were gradually provided by the gaining command, Tactical Air Command. This activation of Air Guard units for policing duty, without a declared war, called for great personal sacrifice from all personnel, but the Air Guardsmen knew their obligation

and accepted this duty without hesitation. The last of the Wings 48 B-26s and two C-47s arrived at Merignac Base 27 days after the first flight had left Langley, Virginia, Considering that during World War II this same route (Goose Bay, Labrador; Bluie West, Greenland; Keflavik, Iceland; Prestwick, Scotland; Burtonwood, England; and Bordeaux, France) had been closed a month earlier, and that the B-26 aircraft were not equipped for cold weather operation, the crossing proved to be a major accomplishment for the Illinois Air National Guard up to that time, surprising even the top brass of the regular Air Force. The main echelon of personnel and equipment crossed the North Atlantic on the transport ship "USS General Hodges", arriving at their final destination, Merignac, on 7 December 1951. The fly-over was accomplished without loss of aircraft or personal injury despite the adverse weather conditions. Movements of large units of American forces to Europe during peacetime was a new policy. This was the first invitation of one major power to another to be in "residence" during peacetime. Said the then NATO Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower: "Our job is to build a wall of security around the Free nations of the world." Merignac Air Base had been greatly damaged by Allied bombers during World War II, when it was occupied by the German Luftwaffe from 1940 to 1944. One collapsed hangar still contained the remains of German aircraft. In spite of very poor facilities and almost non-existent logistical support, the B-26s were kept operational, training missions accomplished and living conditions improved, although the perimeter of the camp still contained uncleared German mines. On 12 May 1952, the 126th Wing received orders for another permanent change of station, this time to Laon Air Base, 75 miles north of Paris, but conditions there were a repetition of Merignac Air Base -tents, mud, paper-devouring mice, and bad weather. , training and flying were kept at a high level, and an elaborate building program initiated, sidewalks installed, tents "winterized" and permanent buildings started. On 1 January 1953, the 126th Bombardment Wing designation was returned to the State of Illinois. Preceding this, the Air Guardsmen who had not signed extended active duty statements were returned to the States in gradual increments during the first three months of 1953.

The Wing and its assigned and support units had grown to 1,336 assigned personnel with drill assemblies being held on two Thursdays and one full Sunday per month.

The 1954 field training, again, was held at Collins Field, Alpena, Michigan (some 500 miles northeast of Chicago) which was a permanent Air National Guard training site used by other Air National Guard units from Midwestern States.

In July summer Field Training was again held a Collins Field, Alpena, Michigan, but for the first time, personnel of the 126th Wing were flown to the base by commercial airline. Prior to this time the main body of troops were transported to the Michigan site with Greyhound busses, in a motor convoy that took approximately 18 hours through Indiana and Michigan.

Since the fall of 1957, when the last tactical unit of the regular Air Force had departed from O'Hare Field, the responsibility for providing air defense security for the Chicago metropolitan area and other heavily industrial and populated centers in the Upper Mid-West, fell upon the 126th Air Defense Wing and its tactical elements.

A rare thing happened during the 1957 summer Field Training at Collins Field. Major Hiltgen

crashed on takeoff in his F-84 jet bottom side up in the swamp at the end of the runway, but was rescued unharmed from the wreckage, thanks to the quick action by the men working on the flightline and others, who rushed and waded waist-deep in the JP-4 fuel-coated swamp. The fuel took the skin off the rescuers up to their waists.

August 1958, a spectacular fire destroyed the hangar being demolished at O'Hare Field. The hanger, built by the Government for the Douglas Aircraft Corp. during World War II to manufacture bombers, once housed the 126th Wings aircraft and the operations section.

Operating out of the Air Forces previous hangars and alert shacks, on 18 February 1960, the 108 Air Defense Squadron went on an ADC "Runway Alert", maintaining two F-86L aircraft on 5-minute alert and two F-86Ls on 2-hour back-up alert, with five pilots on active duty each day.

1960 was the last year that the 126th Wing and all its assigned and support units were to pull Field Training at Collins Field, Alpena, Michigan. There were changes in the wing - a new mission and new aircraft - for the Chicago O'Hare-based Illinois Air Guardsmen.

1960 RUNWAY ALERT BEGINS for the 126th Air Defense Wing ( 1 Jan) The 126th Air Defense Wing participated in Air Defense Command alert program for fourteen hours daily, from 0700 to 2200 hours for the next year. They were required to maintain two F-86Ls on five-minute alert and two more planes on two-hour back up, with five combat-ready fighter pilots from the 108 F/I Squadron and crew chiefs from the 126th CAMRON on duty each day of the year. They did their tours of duty in the ANG alert hangar, Bldg. T-405, at the end of runway 32R, With a direct line from Chicago Air Defense to Sector SAGE at Truax AFB, Madison, Wisconsin to combat alert control in Bldg. T-400. They stood ready "to Scramble" ANG gets mess hall bldg. T-321.

1961 Runway Alert Ends: the 108 Fighter Interceptor squad ended its runway alert program for Air Defense Command at O'Hare (31 Jan) Flying F-86Ls, all weather interceptors, the 108 FIS had maintained alert status for a year in the Chicago Air Defense Sector, under Air Defense Command.

The 126th Air Refueling Wing became the first and only such Air National Guard Wing. But even before it became official, the Wings tactical air crews were undergoing conversion training in KC-97, and by 30 June 61, there were 12 qualified aircraft commanders, with Major Milton R. Stutzman being the first to qualify.

The first KC-97 was received by the unit on 8 August, the second on 11 August and the third on 31 August 1961. Wing flies first air refueling mission in Air National Guard, 1961. 6 September 1961: Just 29 days after receiving its first stripped KC-97, the squadron successfully accomplished the first all-time, Air National Guard wet in-flight refueling. 1961 - Wing flies first air refueling mission in Air National Guard KC-97F tail number 10346 as unit equipment (8 Aug) The boom had been removed because it was to be converted to a C-97 but a boom was on in



2nd tail & 3rd(31 Aug), flown from Nashville Term, to O'Hare : The crew was: AC Maj Matterson  
C. Brooks USAF ADV, Lockridge Hafer SSG Vernon Bower

Michigan to El Paso 16 RF-84Fs & 5 KC-97Fs qualifying an entire unit in A/R Hawaii to O'Hare...  
Nonstop in 18 hours 30 minutes First record nonstop distance and duration flight. Two KC-97s  
employed on an overwater nav flight to Hawaii. On the redeployment they tested the long  
range capability, required a heavy weight (176,000) takeoff included 32 tons of fuel.

(Mar) 3 More KC-97Gs were picked up from Hayes Aircraft Company, Birmingham, Alabama.  
That gave us a total of eleven KC-97Gs. The three remaining "Fs" were ferried out to Davis-  
Monthan AFB Ariz.

108 is the first to mid-air refuel the Air Force Thunderbirds, 1963

Operation READY GO: first air bridge mission across Atlantic Ocean, 1964 Air National Guard  
unit to deploy overseas during peacetime, without being Federalized in support of first non-  
stop flight of other ANG fighter aircraft deployed to Germany under Operation "READY GO".

On 6 September 1961, just 29 days after receiving its first stripped KC-97, the 108 Air Refueling  
Sq successfully accomplished the first all-time, Air National Guard wet in-flight refueling mission  
with an F-84F from the 169th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Peoria, Illinois, as the receiver aircraft.

Also in January 1962, the 108 Squadron was re-designated as the 108 Air Refueling Squadron  
(TAC) with Lt Colonel Joseph Kovacs Commander.

A World War II and Korean call-up veteran pilot, Col Kovacs joined the Illinois Air National  
Guard in October 1947 and was the Squadrons Operations Officer prior to assuming its  
Command.

The Field Training period, 8-22 August 1964 for the aircrews and tactical tankers of the 126th  
Air Refueling Wing took place far from home station, across the Atlantic at Torrejon, Air Base,  
near Madrid, Spain, in support of the first non-stop flight of Air National Guard fighter aircraft  
to West Germany under Operation "READY GO".

Twenty-eight KC-97s of the 126th Wing - nine from Chicago- O'Hare, ten from the Wings 128th  
Air Refueling Group of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Air Guard, and nine from Ohios 160th Air  
Refueling Group, were deployed and furnished the ANG jets with their vital drinks of fuel  
enroute.

The Ohio tankers rendezvoused with the jets near Newfoundland; the Milwaukee tankers  
refueled the jets near the Azores in mid- Atlantic; and the Chicago tankers gave them their final  
drink near the Spanish coast.

This concept of stationing air refuelers at strategic points along the way serving as flying gas

stations was first conceived by Brigadier General Howard Markey, the 126th ARW Commander and the idea implemented during Operation "READY GO".

In 1961, during the Berlin crisis, a similar deployment of jet aircraft took place, but without air refueling. At that time, it took three full days for a jet fighter, island-hopping, to reach their overseas bases.

Operation "READY GO" was the first time an ANG composite strike force deployed to Europe for annual Field Training. All the jets got to Europe without incident, spanning more than 4,500 miles in nine hours.

"The energetic and professional execution of Operation "READY GO" has clearly demonstrated a new dimension in Air National Guard global responsiveness" said General J.P. McConnell, the then Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

The concept of replacing the wing tanks with jet engines from the phased-out KB-50s was developed by the Illinois Air National Guard at Chicago-O'Hare under the direction of Chief of Staff (Air) Brigadier General Donald J. Smith.

It became obvious to Gen Smith and other Officers that the standard KC-97G, the final Boeing model, had speed and altitude limitations when refueling the newer Century series jet fighters.

"Tobogganing" (putting the KC-97G in a slight dive) frequently was required to gain necessary refueling speed, resulting in descent into weather, limiting hook-ups and requiring additional fuel for the receiver jets to climb back to cruise altitudes.

Learning that a KC-97G had been fitted with a wing from a KB-50J after an accident, General Smith's group reasoned that, with wings so interchangeable it might be possible to add a KB-50J jet engine to the KC-97G.

Fuel tank pylons of the KC-97 were replaced with jet engine pylons from a KB-50, using the same outboard wing mounting points. The KB-50 radar rendezvous equipment was also added to the jet augmented KC-97L, with the entire conversion cost averaging less than \$ 38,000 per plane.

Lt Colonel Kovacs was the project test pilot, putting the jet augmented tankers to the test and proving their feasibility beyond expectation.

The addition of these two jet engines improved the capability of the Air Guard tankers in many ways:

1. Air refueling altitudes increased by about 10,000 feet.
2. Air speeds were raised by almost fifty knots.
3. Takeoff rolls reduced to half, enabling tankers to operate from shorter runways.
4. Added two engines to the available safety factor.
5. Reduced engine power requirements, extending engine life to the reciprocating engines,

cutting overhauling costs.

Another accomplishment of the 126th ARW air crews was the demonstration of the KC-97s ability to land, refuel another aircraft on the ground and depart in record time.

This operation was carried out in conjunction with an Air Force Reserve C-119 and with a NAVY FJ-4 aircraft at Rockford Airport, Rockford, Illinois.

Also during 1963, the 126th ARWs 108 Squadron air crews engaged in the first air refueling deployment of 18 F-100 ANG fighters to Puerto Rico in Operation "CANE CUTTER" and later twelve F-100s and eight F-84Fs again to Puerto Rico in Operation "ABBEY TOWER".

Another operation in which the 108 Squadron participated was in August of the same year nicknamed Operation "MINUTEMAN ALPHA", a non-stop deployment of the Alabama

Air Guard from Birmingham, Alabama to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, while in October, the 108 performed another "First" by refueling six FJ-4s of the Marine Reserve over Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The 1963 Field Training period was again accomplished at home base, O'Hare Field.

On 11 September 1963, the National Guard Bureau approved the conversion of five Air National Guard groups, including the 126th, to jet augmentation configuration for the KC-97G .

The KC-97G was too slow to effectively handle most high performance jets.

No need to go tobogganing any more in the KC-97L tanker.

1964 Jet-Modified KC-97G 52-2697 in operation flying flight tests. They began in late May. Rigorous flight tests by 126<sup>th</sup> AREFW Flight Test Crew, plus demonstration flights at Andrews AFB and performance results confirmed during this test phase, it was called a JKC-97G

1967- Operation Creek Party kicks off in Rhein-Main AB, Germany, 1967

From May 1967 to September 1976, aircrews, tankers and support personnel of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, together with other air refueling groups from other States, participated, on a rotational basis dozens of times per year, in the longest- running joint Active Air Force-Air National Guard Operation dubbed "CREEK PARTY", over the skies of Western Europe.

It was September 1967 when it all began for the Illinois Air Guardsmen and women, and it was love at first sight, starting perhaps with the call letters "Romeo Two Two", but it matters not what the exact words were. What counts is that it was successful from the start.

It was the secret rendezvous high above the clouds, when each "flying Nymph" would flutter its wings at first sight of the "Pegasus" tanker and, with a sigh of relief, nuzzle up close to partake of its life-sustaining potion, in measurable delight, in order to continue on its graceful glide in its assigned mission of safeguarding the ramparts of the Free World.

Rhein-Main AB, near Frankfurt, West Germany, "The Home Away From Home" for Illinois Air Guardsmen and women several times per year, and the hub of all Air National Guard refueling operations in Europe.

From 1967 to 1976, Operation CREEK PARTY had its headquarters at Rhein-Main, from where Air Guard tankers and aircrews sallied forth to provide up to 80 percent of USAF's aerial refueling needs over West Germany, Belgium, Holland, and the North Sea, in the longest-running Active Air Force - Air National Guard operational mission.

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From 1967 to 1976, Operation CREEK PARTY had its headquarters at Rhein-Main, from where Air Guard tankers and aircrews sallied forth to provide up to 80 percent of USAF's aerial refueling requirements over Germany, Holland, Belgium, and the North Sea in support of NATO's defenses.

CREEK PARTY headquarters and aircrew briefing room stood on the same spot where the Zeppelins were moored in their heyday.

CREEK PARTY was the first time in American history that Air Guardsmen carried out a continuing mission overseas in support of the regular U.S. military forces without going on fulltime active duty, furnishing up to 80 percent of USAF's air refueling requirements.

Illinois Air Guardsmen made more than 600 trans-Atlantic crossings and logged over two million miles in support of the operation, in addition to their normal States-side training missions and other operational air refueling requirements, demonstrating their ability and professionalism to successfully perform the 126th ARW's combat mission at minimum cost to the American taxpayer.

During the ten-year span of Operation CREEK PARTY, the skilled aircrews from Illinois, and other air refueling groups in other States, chalked up an impressive record of JP-4 fuel off-loaded (almost 150 million pounds) in keeping USAF's and NATO's aircraft flying.

During the more than 16 years in the aerial refueling business and over 57,000 flying hours, the 126th ARW's Chicago-O'Hare based units achieved a perfect flying safety record of no major or minor accidents.

C-47A 43-15140 After 20 Years Makes Final Flight to Disposal facility "Boneyard at Davis-

Monthan AFB, Arizona. (15 Dec 1972)

The first of eight KC 135 arrived at O'Hare TAP on 1 Dec 1976. The new tanker, tail number 59-1487 was formerly assigned to the Strategic Air Commands 380th Bombardment Wing, Plattsburgh AFB, NY. The jet was flown to O'Hare by the following 126th ARW personnel: Cmd Pilot, LTC Donald Skocz-ynski; Co-Pilot, Capt Craig Davis; Navigator, Maj Henry Simmons; Boom Operator, MSG James Koncar. On the flight were Regular Air Force Advisor Col Murray Norman and SMS Arthur Bentz. Both men are members of the -"-019

TEN AIRCREWS CHECKED OUT AS EWO MISSION READY on schedule (30 Jun 1977)'. After six months of training, Wing will-begin performing missions for SAC in CONUS, Spain, England and Alaska. (30 Jun 1977)

Operation Business Agency. To RAF Mildenhall UK as part of KC-135 Tanker Task Force in Europe (16-19 Jul 1977)

CONVERSION TO KC-135s COMPLETED with the arrival and acceptance of KC-135A 59-1452. (30 Aug 1977)

THE 126th AREFW DEPLOYED A KC-135 TO THE RAF MILDENHALL UK as part of Detachment 1, 306th AREF Wing SAC, For the next two weeks they flew refueling missions as part of the "Tanker Task Force" in Europe (ETTF) for operation Business Agency, SAC OP OPD 15-79, As part of the Task Force they supported SAC reconnaissance operations, fighter ferry movements, USAFE aerial refueling training, and other requirements as directed. The Wings 108 ARS was the first unit to assume this deployment. (9-20 Apr 1979)

1982, March A KC-135A 58-0031, assigned to the 126th Air Refueling Wing crashed near Greenwood, Illinois. The KC-135 was returning from K.I. Sawyer AFB, Michigan to its home base at Chicago O'Hare International Airport when an explosion occurred at 13,700 feet due to an overheated fuel pump. All four crew members, Maj. William S. Dixon, aircraft commander; Capt. Robert J. Nicosia, aircraft co-pilot; Capt. Kenneth L. Herrick, aircraft navigator; and Master Sgt. Richard A. Crome, aircraft boom operator were killed. Also killed were 23 passengers from the 928th Tactical Airlift Group, Air Force Reserves, also stationed at Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

1990 Sqn mobilized to support Operation Desert Shield, 1990

1990 members assigned to United Arab Emirates to support Operation Desert Storm, 1999

Air Guard presence ends in Chicago: Sqn moves to Belleville, Illinois, 1999

Sqn becomes the first to convert to Pacer CRAG cockpit, 2000

Sqn activated to support war on terrorism after September 11th attack, 2001

250 members mobilized to support Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003



Maj William C. Schell

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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