

FROM JENNIES TO JETS TO STEALTH BOMBERS:

100 YEARS OF THE 131ST BOMB WING AND 110TH BOMB SQUADRON

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WHITEMAN AFB, Mo. — From Jennies to jets to stealth bombers, the 131st Bomb Wing's history really began with its co-located flying squadron, now the 110th Bomb Squadron, which traces its roots back to the 110th Observation Squadron.

The 110th OS was organized by Maj. Bill Robertson and his brothers, Lieutenants Frank and Dan Robertson, owners of Robertson Aircraft Company. The Robertsons were aviation pioneers, noted for being the first two pilots from Missouri to enlist in World War I (Dan was too young). Among their associates were a number of former Army Air Corps veterans and visionary young men who shared an interest in organizing a National Guard unit in St. Louis.

They strove to make this vision a reality; they worked with local newspapers to get the word out.

These outlets informed the public that "along with aviators, a number of young men who wanted to learn to fly or maintain flying equipment would also be taken as enlistments."

Members would be paid for a maximum of 60 "drills" a year, which were described as periods of instruction in ground work, machine-shop practice and flying. They would receive instruction in war maneuvers, and conduct bombing and machine-gun firing practice with targets on the nearby Missouri River. Personnel assigned to the photo section would learn to "make pictures



Members of the 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard 35th Division, Aviation Section. Taken in Saint Louis, Missouri, circa 1928

for use in war" and intelligence personnel would be "trained as Scouts of the Air (observers) and probably will have radio equipment."

A five-day "recruiting drive" enlisted a total of 110 men, most of whom were World War I veterans. On June 23, 1923, the 110th OS, 110th Photo Section and 110th Intelligence Section (35th Division Aviation Section) of the Missouri National Guard were federally recognized and Maj. Robertson became the first commanding officer.

The first headquarters for the unit was located in a gas station on Manchester Avenue in St. Louis. From there, it moved to a small room over a grocery store on Olive Street Road in St. Louis County. Members participated in training at the airport, which at that time was little more than a pasture.

At first there were no uniforms for the enlisted men. Their first flying equipment was a Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny," which was pur-



The filling station headquarters of the 110th Observation Squadron on Manchester Road, Saint Louis, circa 1923.



Unidentified members of the 110th Observation Squadron pose with a Missouri Mule at Robertson Field, Saint Louis, MO, 1925. The Missouri Mule has long been identified with the 110th Bomb Squadron and 131st Bomb Wing as the mascot of the unit and appears on patches and aircraft.



Pilots of the 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard, pose in front of a Douglas O-2H observation aircraft, circa 1929.



Newly-constructed 110th Observation Squadron's "Hangar One" at Robertson Field, Saint Louis, 1932.

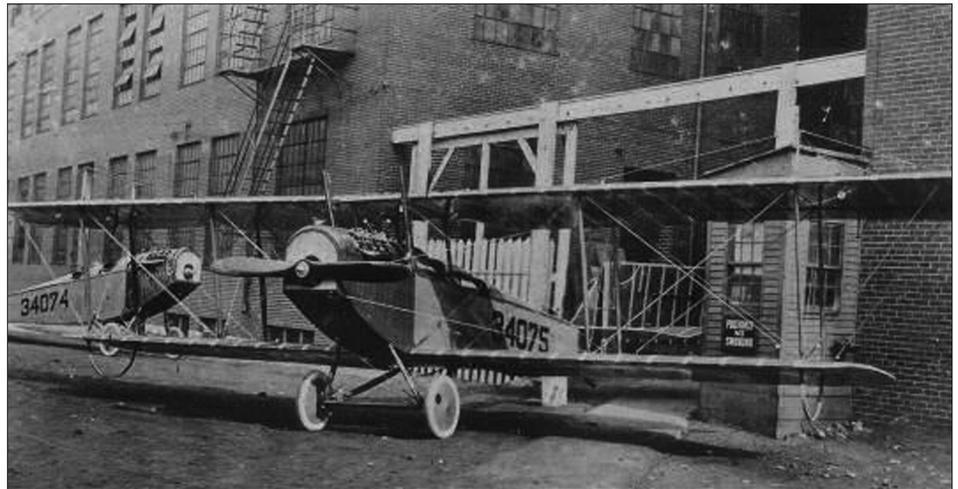
chased through officer donations and used for flight training until early 1924, when they received three additional World War I surplus JN-4Hs. The pilots were eager to train; they would often fly three men to an aircraft, with one man strapped to a wing so they could switch off in midflight without having to take time to land.

The planes were housed in corrugated sheet-metal hangars erected on the field that had been built for the International Air Races of 1923. The 110th received additional aircraft and equipment throughout 1924, and by year's end, they had established a well-planned training program.

The chief pilot on the St. Louis-to-Chicago mail run for the Robertson Aircraft Company was a young aviator named Charles "Slim" Lindbergh, who soon joined his employers at the 110th. He was a captain in the National Guard in 1927 and had to seek permission from his commanders to make his historic transatlantic 33 hour solo flight from New York to Paris in the "Spirit of St. Louis." He was rewarded for his efforts by a special act of the Missouri legislature that promoted him to the rank of colonel.

The squadron flew 10 different aircraft from 1925 to 1940, including the De Havilland D-4, the Consolidated PT-1 "Trusty" and TW-3. Aircraft such as the Curtiss Falcon O-11, Douglas O-2H and O-38B were employed for observation and reconnaissance missions. Squadron photographers honed their skills using the K-17 observation camera.

On Dec. 23, 1940, the unit was called to serve in World War II as a fighter and medium bombardment unit, and commenced



Curtiss JN-4 "Jennys," the first aircraft used by the 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard, parked on South Grand Blvd., Saint Louis. Circa 1924.

training in Little Rock, Ark., and Salinas, Calif. Members flew the Douglas A-10 "Havoc" bomber, Bell P-39 "Air Cobra" and Curtiss P-40 "Warhawk" fighters. The unit was based in Australia, New Guinea and the Philippines, and was credited with destroying approximately 123 Japanese aircraft and approximately 12 ships, earning the squadron a Presidential Unit Citation in 1944.

Upon returning home, the unit was demobilized and in the early summer of 1946, plans were formulated to organize the Air National Guard. Unlike the pre-war unit, which consisted of some 24 officers and 120 enlisted men, Missouri was to receive a fighter wing, utilizing nearly 10 times as many personnel. An extensive recruiting drive was undertaken, facilities at Lambert Field in St. Louis were reoccupied and the unit was designated as the 57th Fighter

Wing and 110th Fighter Squadron. Federal recognition was granted in September. The unit was equipped with the North American P-51 "Mustang," then recognized as the fastest fighter aircraft of World War II.

In 1947, the wing was re-designated the 71st Fighter Wing. During this period, Maj. Charles DuBois, World War II ace and former member of the famed Flying Tigers, took command of the 110th Fighter Squadron and soon gained recognition as one of the unit's most aggressive commanders.

Three years later, on Nov. 1, 1950, the wing was re-designated the 131st Composite Wing, and began pursuing intensive training to raise the wing's readiness to the highest possible degree.

On March 1, 1951, as a result of the Korean emergency, the wing was recalled to active federal service for a period of 21 months, with moves to Strategic Air Com-



Capt. Charles Lindbergh, 110th Observation Squadron, 35th Division, Missouri National Guard, poses beside the "Spirit of Saint Louis" at Robertson Field with a representation of how much fuel was required to complete his historic 33½ hour solo flight from New York to Paris in the "Spirit of Saint Louis" on May 21, 1927. He had to seek permission from his commanders at the 110th to make this flight.



An aerial view of Camp Lambert at Robertson Field, August 1928. The training site of the 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard, Hangar 1 on the top right is under construction. Towards the center of the photo by the darker colored hangars is an aircraft which some have identified as Lindbergh's "Spirit of Saint Louis."

mand at Bergstrom Air Force Base, Texas, and then later in the year to George Air Force Base, Calif., with the new designation as the 131st Fighter-Bomber Wing.

The medium bomber North American B-25 "Mitchell," the North American T-6 "Texan" trainer, the Douglas B-26 "Invader" and military transports Douglas C-47 "Skytrain" and Beechcraft C-45 "Expeditor" joined the 131st fleet throughout the 1950s.

During the Korean conflict, the wing took on an increased role of flying bombers, but the mission would change quickly to that of a fighter role. Fighters would be the 131st mission

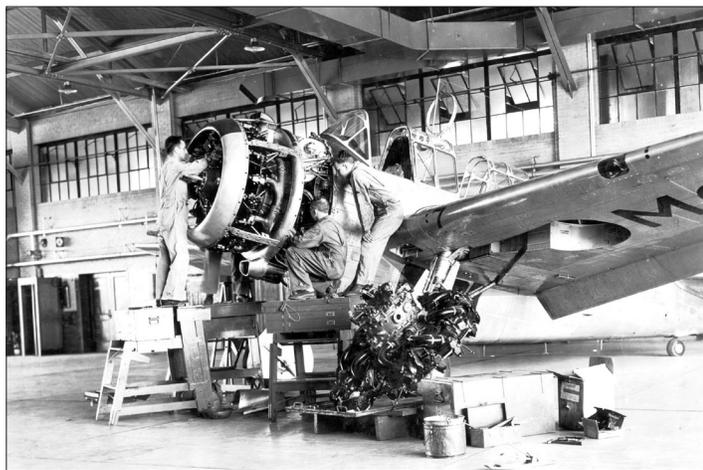
for 40 more years, but bombers would ultimately become the future.

During assignment to George AFB, a large number of personnel were sent to overseas assignments. Tactical units were rotated in support of NATO operations in Iceland and many individuals saw action in the Korean arena. By November 1952, demobilization was completed and the wing was returned to Lambert Field.

After the Korean call-up, the wing was re-designated as the 131st Light Bombardment Wing. The wing entered the "jet age" in the late '50s with the arrival of the Lockheed F-80 "Shooting Star" and the Republic



Members of the 110th Reconnaissance Squadron flew the Douglas A-20 "Havoc" during the early part of World War II.



Aircraft maintainers of the 110th Observation Squadron service a North American O-47A observation aircraft in Hangar 1 at Robertson Field, Saint Louis, circa 1939.



North American B-26 Bombers of the 131st Fighter-Bomber Wing, Missouri Air National Guard, at an unknown forward location.



Members of the 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard, fly a North American O-47A observation plane with pilot, navigator, and photographer onboard, circa 1938.

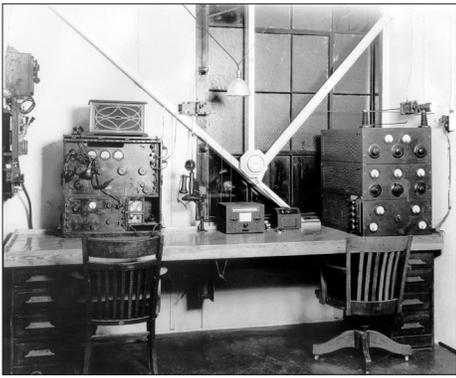
lic F-84F "Thunderstreak." The Lockheed T-33 "T-bird" entered service as the wing's training aircraft.

During the Berlin Crisis, the wing was again recalled to active service, this time deploying to Toul-Rosieres Air Base, France, to augment NATO forces. They stayed in France from October 1961 to August 1962, helping to airlift food and medical supplies into Germany. Returning home in 1962, the unit received the North American F-100 "Super Sabre," which remained an integral part of the now 131st Tactical Fighter Wing and 110th Tactical Fight-

er Squadron for more than 17 years.

In 1977, Ann Morrow Lindbergh, Charles Lindbergh's widow, gave the governor of Missouri permission to designate the 110th TFS as "Lindbergh's Own." Today, the words remain a unit slogan of the 110th Bomb Squadron.

In the summer of 1978, the F-100 was replaced by the F-4C "Phantom," which was built across the runway from the wing's hangars by McDonnell-Douglas. In 1989, the wing's F-4E (tail number 68-338) was honored with a special paint scheme to com-



The 110th Observation Squadron, Missouri National Guard, radio section at Robertson Field, Saint Louis, 1934.



Left: Betty Robertson-Uhl, one of the nation's earliest pilots, takes part in the ribbon cutting ceremony at the dedication of the Missouri Air National Guard's Robertson Building 131 at Lambert Air National Guard Base. She is the sister of the Robertson brothers, who founded the 110th Observation Squadron.

memorate the 30th anniversary of the Phantom's first flight and the unit hosted a gathering of F-4s to celebrate.

In 1982, Betty Robertson, sister of the three Robertson brothers and a pioneer aviator in her own right, helped dedicate the new wing headquarters as Robertson Building 131 in their memory.

Tensions in the Middle East impacted the Air National Guard along with the rest of the military. Members from the 131st deployed in support of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the early 1990s. Deployments continued in support of Operations Provide Comfort, Northern Watch and Southern Watch.

In September 1991, the F-4 Phantoms gave way to another St. Louis-built fighter when the unit transitioned into McDonnell-Douglas F15-A and B model "Eagles"



North American P-51 Mustang of the 110th Fighter Squadron, Missouri Air National Guard, at an unknown location, circa 1947.



Members of the 110th Reconnaissance Squadron in the Philippines, circa 1942.

and went to an air superiority mission. The conversion was completed in a minimal time frame and the wing was back up to full speed within 18 months.

Called to service again to assist in battling the Great Flood of 1993, more than 500 Citizen Airmen served throughout the St. Louis area in support of this natural disaster. 1993 also saw the arrival of the Fairchild C-26A Metro Liner, a twin-engine turboprop with the capability to quick change

to passenger, medevac or cargo interiors.

The F-15s of the 131st would be put to test with deployments to Turkey in 1996, 1997 and 1998, Denmark in 1999, Saudi Arabia in 2000, and Iceland in 2001 and 2006. Between the overseas trips, the tempo was kept at a high pace with various deployments to stateside exercises such as Red Flag and Combat Archer.

The dramatic events of Sept. 11, 2001, led the wing to stand up to full alert with-



Airman 1st Class Banjo A. Burro, the beloved mascot of the 131st for many years could often be as stubborn as a...well, you know. Banjo, actually a Missouri Mule, joined the wing in the late 1950's and appeared at many wing events and parades. Nominated for the First Sgt. position at one time, but recommended by Director of Personnel to "Second Sgt." position since First Sgt. position was presently filled. The Missouri Mule has long been identified with the 110th and 131st as the mascot of the unit and appears on patches and aircraft, including the "Spirit of Saint Louis."

in eight hours of the initial terrorist attack, with several units mobilized within days. Throughout the following months, wing members mobilized or deployed in support of Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. Despite the demands of high tempo global operations and response to natural disasters, the 131st continues to fulfill its daily training missions and excel in higher headquarters-directed inspections.

During the winter of 2001 to 2002, the 131st FW completed a 90-day air expeditionary force rotation in Keflavik, Iceland, allowing other units to support other global operations.

In fall 2004, the unit began its transition from the F-15A/B to the F-15C/D model aircraft, becoming the first combat-coded F-15 unit in the ANG to have the C-models. In August 2005, the 131st FW became the first operational ANG unit to fully fly the F-15C model.

In the late summer of 2005, 131st FW members were among those to deploy to the Gulf Coast to assist with hurricane relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In St. Louis, wing personnel worked in concert with local officials to establish a shelter for evacuees expected to arrive in St. Louis. Although it was prepared, the shelter was never used.

The Department of Defense's Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) in 2005 ushered in yet another change for the 131st FW and 110th Fighter Squadron, proving to be both dramatic and historic. As a result of BRAC law, the F-15 Eagles were scheduled for withdraw from the Missouri ANG, but 100 percent manning remained in place, readying the wing to accept a new mission.

In March 2006, the Department of Defense announced that the 131st would become an ANG associate unit at Whiteman AFB. While the active duty would have primary



Republic F-84F "Thunderstreaks" and North American F-100C "Super Sabres" of the 131st Light Bombardment Wing, Missouri Air National Guard, parked at Robertson Field, Saint Louis, 1962.



A McDonnell Douglas F-4E of the 131st Tactical Fighter Wing, Missouri Air National Guard, flies high in 1989. It is painted in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the F-4 Phantom.

ownership over the aircraft, Missouri's Guardsmen would maintain and fly the B-2 Spirit stealth bombers alongside their active duty counterparts.

In September 2006, the B-2 "Spirit of Pennsylvania" became the first B-2 to land at Lambert International Airport when it made a visit to the 131st FW to familiarize wing members with their upcoming mission.

2007 and 2008 saw planning and preparation to fully implement the new B-2 mission and the start of the departure of F-15C aircraft for their new homes at other bases. The first four aircraft left Lambert Field mission ready to assume their new duties in Montana in

August, 2008.

Flooding again struck the Missouri region in summer of 2008 and Citizen Airmen answered the call around the metro region in support of the natural disaster. While not as devastating and far reaching as the flood of 1993, the 131st FW proved yet again their willingness to help in their communities.

During 2008, members began to transfer to Whiteman AFB, Missouri, in support of a new mission to maintain and fly the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber. The Missouri ANG would operate alongside the 509th Bomb Wing of the active duty Air Force in classic associate

role becoming the first ANG unit in the B-2 mission, as well as the only Air National Guard unit certified to conduct nuclear operations.

On June 18, 2008, Col. Gregory Champagne, 131st FW vice commander, and Maj. David Thompson, 131st FW, achieved a major milestone in the transition to the B-2 mission by completing the first B-2 sortie flown and launched by Missouri ANG personnel. Fall 2008 saw the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Whiteman AFB of Bldg. 3006, soon to be wing's new headquarters.

At a Lambert Field ceremony on June 13, 2009, more than 2,000 people saw the launch of the last F-15s to their new home with the Hawaii ANG at Hickam AFB. With the send-off of the remaining Eagles, flight operations at Lambert airport ceased after 86 years. It was the "End of an Era."

On April 11, 2011, a category EF-4 tornado swept across Lambert International Airport, the south side of Lambert ANG Base, and down the I-70 corridor past the city of Bridgeton. Thankfully, no lives were lost, but property suffered heavy damage in the area, including more than \$10 million of damage at the Guard base and the total loss of the base community center, the supply warehouse, and the Lambert headquarters building. Missouri Guardsmen banded together for cleanup efforts and brought operations back online quickly with no major disruptions to service to the 131st members stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base.

Throughout the history of the wing, many members with historic significance have served. Charles Lindbergh is obviously the most famous, but the 110th Fighter Wing had the distinction of having three air-to-air World War II aces serving at the



A 131st Fighter Wing F-15A Eagle in front of "Hangar 1" at Lambert Air National Guard Base, Nov 2004.



Senior Airman Ian Smith, a 131st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief, pulls wheel chocks from a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber on the flight line at Whiteman AFB, Missouri, Dec. 5, 2020. The 131st is the Air National Guard's only B-2 wing, providing global strike and strategic deterrence capability worldwide. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua Colligan)



The Northrup Grumman B-2 Stealth "Spirit of Pennsylvania" becomes the first B-2 to ever land at Lambert Air National Guard Base, Sept 9, 2006. 131st Missouri Air National Guardsmen were given the opportunity to see the aircraft up-close and be introduced to the wing's upcoming mission.



A Team Whiteman Airman prepares a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber for takeoff from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, March 15, 2021, in support of a Bomber Task Force mission. The B-2 Spirit can deliver large payloads of precision ordnance over long distances, and provides the ability to rapidly project military power across the globe. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Whitney Erhart)

same time. Maj. Gen. Charles DuBois had five kills, Brig. Gen. Glennon Moran had 17 ½ kills and Maj. Robert Garlich had six kills; all served in the years following World War II. Brig. Gen. Jon Kelk, who was an F-15 Eagle pilot, scored the first air-to-air kill in Operation Desert Storm and in 2009 became the first U.S. pilot to reach the 5,000-flying hour milestone in the F-15. Around two dozen current and former Missouri ANG B-2 pilots hold 1,000-plus flying hour records, including some of the most experienced pilots in the B-2 community.

The B-2 Spirit mission is the crown jewel of the Air Force's "Total Force Integration" concept, in which active-duty and Air National Guard units train and work side-by-side with each other to accomplish the nation's strategic objectives. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper lauded the 509th and 131st Bomb Wings' efforts as an impressively seamless partnership during a 2020 visit to Whiteman AFB.

Every day, Airmen across the 131st continue to serve in roles supporting operations around the globe as well as deploying with their active-duty counterparts with the B-2 Spirit for training and integration operations with allies and partners worldwide.

The 131st Bomb Wing has been a full partner for combat operations in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, Operation New Dawn in Afghanistan. 131st members have also played key roles in support of Missouri state-sponsored agricul-

tural development teams in Afghanistan.

The 110th Bomb Squadron led the first Bomber Task Force mission to Iceland in 2021, marking the first time B-2s conducted operations out of that country, and providing an unmistakable symbol of America's commitment to partner and allied forces, as well as credible deterrence towards any potential adversaries.

At home, 131st Airmen have responded to natural disasters and emergencies across the state and nation, including flooding,

tornadoes, and hurricanes, as well as civil disturbances and the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the 131st-led task force kept call centers and food pantries open across the state, and distributed more than 450,000 vaccinations to Missourians in some of our most vulnerable communities.

At a ceremony held at Lambert Field in the 1970s, Maj. Gen. DuBois spoke of the history and future of the ANG, the wing and general aviation.

"The spirit of the 110th, like its equipment, was originally inherited from the Airmen of World War I who first fought from the sky and from men like Billy Mitchell, Jimmy Doolittle, Eddie Rickenbacker, and many others," said DuBois. "Like all aviation, its roots are in the recent past, but its eyes look to the future of aerospace. Our squadron grew up with general aviation and it is this theme that we intend to stress, that it is a part of a broad based civil and military aerospace program. Our purpose is to recognize the richness and glory of the past as generating the future of all phases of aviation and contributing to the health of every segment of flight."

(Tech. Sgt. Christopher Boehlein and Master Sgt. John Hillier, 131st Bomb Wing, and Mr. Charles Machon, Missouri National Guard Museum Curator, contributed to this story.)



131st and 509th Bomb Wing crew chiefs prepare to launch a B-2 Spirit bomber as part of a Bomber Task Force Europe deployment to Keflavik Air Base, Iceland, Aug. 31, 2021. U.S. forces enjoy mutually beneficial military cooperation with Nordic allies and partner countries with respect to the Arctic region, continually coordinating together on operations and exercises. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. John E. Hillier)