

3 SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON



MISSION

The 3 Special Operations Squadron accomplishes global special operations tasking as a member of the Air Force component of United States Special Operations Command. It directly supports theater commanders by providing precision weapons employment and persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. It also plans, prepares, and executes MQ-1B missions supporting special operations forces.

LINEAGE

Photographic Section No. 1 organized, 4 Apr 1918

Demobilized, 3 Jul 1919

1 Photographic Section authorized, 15 Aug 1919

Organized, 27 Sep 1919

Photographic Section No. 1 Reconstituted, and consolidated with 1 Photographic Section, 1924.

Consolidated organization designated 1 Photographic Section.

Redesignated 3 Observation Squadron, 1 Jun 1937

Redesignated 3 Observation Squadron (Medium), 13 Jan 1942

Redesignated 3 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942

Redesignated 3 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 11 Aug 1943

Disbanded, 2 Jul 1944

Reconstituted and redesignated 3 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, 9 May 1952

Activated, 28 May 1952

Inactivated, 1 Jul 1958

3 Air Commando Squadron constituted and activated, 5 Apr 1968

Organized, 1 May 1968

Redesignated 3 Special Operations Squadron, 1 Aug 1968
Inactivated, 15 Sep 1969

3 Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron constituted, 13 May 1976
Activated, 15 May 1976

3 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, 3 Special Operations Squadron and 3
Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron consolidated, 19 Sep 1985. Consolidated
organization designated 3 Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron.

Inactivated, 30 Sep 1991
Redesignated 3 Special Operations Squadron, 20 Oct 2005
Activated, 28 Oct 2005

STATIONS

Ourches, France, 4 Apr 1918 (detachment at Flin, France, 15-28 Jun 1918)
Saints, France, 29 Jun 1918 (detachment at Ourches, France, until mid-Jul 1918)
Francheville, France, 9 Jul 1918
Moras Ferme (near La Ferte-sous Jouarre), France, 25 Jul 1918
Lizy-sur-Ourcq, France, 4 Aug 1918
Coincy, France, 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, 28 Nov 1918
Colombey-les-Belles, France, 5 May 1919
port of embarkation, France, May-Jun 1919
Garden City, NY, 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

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 1st Cavalry Division, Jun 1922-Jun 1926, and with 2 Division, Jun 1926-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, 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
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, 14th 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 Group, 28 Oct 05
27 Operations Group

ATTACHMENTS

432 Observation [later, 432 Reconnaissance; 432 Tactical Reconnaissance] Group, 27 Mar-1 Nov 1943)

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-10M
O-25
O-43
O-47
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-3C, 1943
C-45
L-1
P-39
P-43
YB-10A
YG-1B
YRB-47, 1953-1954
RB-47, 1954-1958
B-47, 1958
AC-47, 1968-1969

COMMANDERS

Unkn, 4 Apr 1918-3 Jul 1919
2LT George R. Smith, 1 Jun 1937
Maj Glenn C. Salisbury, 18 Jun 1937
Maj Percival E. Gabel, 9 Feb 1941
Unknown, 11 Aug 1941-7 Dec 1941
Unkn, 27 Sep 1919-2 Jul 1944
None (not manned) 28 May 1952
Maj Henry M. Henington, 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
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
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
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, 31 May 2007
Lt Col Robert Brock

HONORS

Service Streamers

World War II American Theater

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

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation
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

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

EMBLEM



3 Observation Squadron emblem



3 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron emblem



3 Tactical Electronic Warfare Training Squadron



3 Special Operations Squadron emblem: On a disc Or, a delta removed point to base Azure, overall a dragon Sable, wings extended, eyed and incensed Gules, all detailed of the field, grasping a dagger palewise point to base Proper, the dragon tail entwining the blade; all within a narrow bordure Black. Attached above the disc, a Yellow scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "PRO PATRIA PRO LIBERUS" in Black letters. Attached below the disc, a Yellow scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "3 SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQ" in Black letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The black winged dragon signifies protection and guardianship, its red flamed mouth represents strength of weapons. The dagger symbolizes swift and silent mobilization of forces. The blue delta signifies the flight camera lenses used by the unit. (Approved, 23 Jul 1932)

MOTTO

PRO PATRIA PRO LIBERUS

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 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 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 14th Air Commando Squadron. It flew combat missions in AC-47Ds in close air support of ground forces, providing flare illumination and gunfire in support of strategic hamlets, outposts, 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 offensive. It began transferring its gunships to the Vietnamese Air Force in Jun 1969 and flew its last mission on 7 Aug 1969.

The significant downturn in Air Force Spooky strength marked the mounting stress on Vietnamization of the war, a highly publicized national policy embraced by the Nixon administration. The arrival of the follow-on AC-119G gunships began the one-for-one tradeoff that was to make the AC-47 surplus to Air Force needs. On June 26, 1969, all Spookies of D Flight, 3 Special Operations Squadron, were flown from Binh Thuy to Nha Trang, where their ceremonial transfer to the Vietnamese Air Force took place on June 30. The 3 SOSq flew its last mission on August 7 and was inactivated on September 1, 1969. This left the 4th SOSq the sole surviving Air Force Spooky unit and it was scheduled for inactivation on December 15, 1969. As the 3 Special Operations Squadron left the scene, the 4th SOSq had to reshuffle its AC-47 forces. It closed out its forward operating location at Phu Cat and took over the former 3 SOSq forward operating location at Bien Hoa.

Spooky successes in Laos also gave impetus to a program for converting Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) C-47s to gunships. Originally, four were to be modified. A series of events caused abandonment of the conversion. The transfer of eight Vietnamese C-47s to the Laotians was arranged instead. The first five Vietnamese Air Force aircraft were turned over on July 5 and the

last one on October 2, 1969. By September 30, 1969, five of these aircraft had been modified into gunships. This equipping of the Royal Laotian Air Force with gunships was assisted by transfer of the 3 Special Operation Squadron's AC-47s to the Vietnamese Air Force

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 U.S. 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.

On 17 December 2007, an MQ-1B, Predator. S/N 05-03155. crashed at a forward operating location The aircraft, assigned to the 3 Special Operations Squadron impacted the terrain in a forward location in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). There were no reported injuries, fatalities, damage to private property, or media interest. The aircraft was damaged beyond economic repair The mishap aircraft was flying an operational mission in support of OIF. Approximately 6.5 hours into the scheduled 9.5 hour flight, the Ku band command and receive link between the aircraft and the ground control station (GCS) was unexpectedly severed. The MA's transponder switched to its emergency mission code, indicating that it was accomplishing its lost link profile. The aircraft departed controlled flight and crashed.

On 21 July 2008, an MQ-1B, Predator, S/N 05-003135, was lost at a forward operating location. The MQ-1B assigned to the 3 Special Operations Squadron, lost command and return link while flying a sortie in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). Link with the aircraft was never reestablished and the aircraft was presumed crashed with no known injuries, deaths or reported property damage. The Mishap Investigation Board President determined, by clear and convincing evidence, that the main cause of the mishap was failure of the student pilot and instructor pilot to recognize that the aircraft's speed was too low for the weather conditions at KVCV. The most significant contributing factor was the mishap pilot's experience level and lack of preparatory training.

On 28 July 2010. an MQ- 1B Predator, serial number (S/N) 07-3200 crashed, while taxiing, into a perimeter fence at Cannon Air Force Base. The Predator and Launch and Recovery Element crew were assigned to the 3 Special Operations Squadron. There were no injuries or deaths, but the mishap did result in minor damage to non-military property (corn).

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

Created: 19 Nov 2010

Updated: 24 Jul 2022

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

USAF Accident Investigation Board Reports.