

## 61st Fighter Squadron

### Lineage.

Constituted as 61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) on 20 November 1940.

Activated on 15 January 1941.

Redesignated: 61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) (Twin Engine) on 31 January 1942.

Redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron (Twin Engine) on 15 May 1942.

Redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron on 1 June 1942.

Redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron, Single Engine, on 28 February 1944.

Inactivated on 18 October 1945.

Activated on 1 May 1946.

Redesignated: 61st Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled, on 24 April 1947.

Redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron, Jet, on 14 June 1948.

Redesignated 61st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron on 20 January 1950.

Discontinued, and inactivated, on 25 Jul 1960.

Redesignated as 61st Tactical Fighter Squadron on 12 May 1975.

Activated on 30 June 1975.

Redesignated: 61st Tactical Fighter Training Squadron on 1 January 1980.

Redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron on 1 November 1991.<sup>1</sup>

Inactivated on 12 August 1993.<sup>2</sup>

Activated on 1 April 1994.<sup>3</sup>

Inactivated on 30 September 2010.<sup>4</sup>

Activated 25 October 2013.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> TAC SO G-12, 1 November 1991

<sup>2</sup> ACC SO GB-112, 19 July 1993

<sup>3</sup> AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

<sup>4</sup> AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

<sup>5</sup> AETC SO G-13-22, 25 September 2013

**Honors.**

***Service Streamers.***

**World War II American Theater**

***Campaign Streamers.***

**World War II European-African-Middle Eastern Theater**

Air Offensive Europe [1942-1944]<sup>6</sup>

Normandy [1944]<sup>7</sup>

Northern France [1944]<sup>8</sup>

Rhineland [1944-1945]<sup>9</sup>

Ardennes-Alsace [1944-1945]<sup>10</sup>

Central Europe [1945]<sup>11</sup>

Air Combat [1941-1945]

**Decorations.**

**Distinguished Unit Citations**

European Theater of Operations, 20 February-9 March 1944<sup>12</sup>;

Holland, 18 September 1944<sup>13</sup>.

**Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards**

1 July 1977-1 January 1979<sup>14</sup>

1 July 1980-31 May 1982<sup>15</sup>

1 June 1984-31 May 1986

1 May 1987-30 April 1989<sup>16</sup>

1 May 1989-30 April 1990<sup>17</sup>

1 May 1990-30 April 1991<sup>18</sup>

1 July 1994-30 June 1996<sup>19</sup>

1 July 1996-30 June 1998<sup>20</sup>

1 July 1998-30 June 2000<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> WD GO 85, 10 October 1945

<sup>7</sup> WD GO 102, 9 November 1945

<sup>8</sup> WD GO 103, 13 November 1945

<sup>9</sup> WD GO 118, 12 December 1945

<sup>10</sup> WD GO 114, 7 December 1945

<sup>11</sup> WD GO 116, 11 December 1945

<sup>12</sup> WD GO 34/1945

<sup>13</sup> WD GO 34/1945

<sup>14</sup> DAF SO GB-719, 30 November 1979

<sup>15</sup> DAF SO GB-117, 22 February 1983

<sup>16</sup> TAC SO GA-053, 29 August 1989

<sup>17</sup> TAC SO GA-048, 16 August 1990

<sup>18</sup> TAC SO GA-069/1991

<sup>19</sup> AETC SO GA-18/1996

<sup>20</sup> AETC SO GA-12/1998

<sup>21</sup> AETC SO GA-9/2000

**Decorations. (Continued)**

**Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (Continued)**

1 July 2001-30 June 2003<sup>22</sup>  
1 June [July] 2003-30 June 2005<sup>23</sup>  
1 July 2005-30 June 2006<sup>24</sup>  
1 July 2006-30 June 2007<sup>25</sup>  
1 July 2007-30 June 2008<sup>26</sup>  
1 July 2008-30 June 2009<sup>27</sup>  
1 July 2009-30 June 2010<sup>28</sup>  
25 October 2013-30 June 2014<sup>29</sup>

**Squadron – 233 Total Aerial Victory Credits. 18 Squadron Aces:**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Aerial Victories</u> <sup>30</sup>	
	<u>In Sq</u>	<u>Total</u>
Capt Joseph H. Bennett	5.5	8.5
Capt James R. Carter	6	6
Capt Paul A. Conger	6.5	11.5
Lt Col Francis S. Gabreski	28	34.5
2d Lt Steven Gerick	5	5
Sq Ldr Michael Gladych	10	10
Capt Gerald W. Johnson	7.5	16.5
Capt Robert S. Johnson	25	27
1st Lt Robert J. Keen	7	7
2d Lt Frank W. Klibbe	7	7
Capt Robert A. Lamb	7	7
1st Lt Frank E. McCauley	5.5	5.5
Flt Off Evan D. McMinn	5	5
Capt Joe H. Powers	12	14.5
1st Lt Robert J. Rankin	10	10
1st Lt Donovan F. Smith	5.5	5.5
Maj Leslie C. Smith	6	7
Maj James C. Stewart	11.5	11.83

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<sup>22</sup> AETC SO GA-55/2004

<sup>23</sup> AETC SO GA-0052/2006

<sup>24</sup> AETC SO GA-045/2007

<sup>25</sup> AETC SO G-054/2008

<sup>26</sup> AETC SO G-071/2009

<sup>27</sup> AETC SO G-025/2010

<sup>28</sup> AETC SO G-086/2011

<sup>29</sup> AETC SO G-029, 8 January 2015

<sup>30</sup> SOURCE: AF Historical Research Agency's Aerial Victory Credit database

**Assignments.** 56th Pursuit (later, 56th Fighter) Group, 15 January 1941-18 October 1945. 56th Fighter (later, 56th Fighter-Interceptor) Group, 1 May 1946; 4708th Defense Wing, 6 February 1952; 575th Air Defense Group, 16 February 1953; 64th Air Division, 6 August 1953; 4731st Air Defense Group, 1 April 1957; 327th Fighter Group, 15 October 1957-25 Jul 1960. 56th Tactical Fighter (later, 56th Tactical Training; 56th Fighter) Wing, 30 June 1975; 56th Operations Group, 1 November 1991-12 August 1993. 56th Operations Group, 1 April 1994<sup>31</sup>-30 September 2010.<sup>32</sup> 56th Operations Group, 25 October 2013-.<sup>33</sup>

**Stations.** Savannah Air Base, Georgia, 15 January 1941; Charlotte Army Air Base, North Carolina, 26 May 1941 (deployed at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, October-November 1941); Charleston Muni Airport, South Carolina, 10 December 1941; Bridgeport Municipal Airport, Connecticut, 15 January -27 December 1942; Kings Cliffe, England, 12 January 1943; Horsham St Faith, England, 5 April 1943; Halesworth, England, 9 July 1943; Boxted, England, 19 April 1944; Little Walden, England, c. 15 September - 11 October 1945; Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, 16-18 October 1945. Selfridge Field (later, Air Force Base), Michigan, 1 May 1946-25 July 1953; Ernest Harmon Air Force Base, Newfoundland, 6 August 1953; Truax Field, Wisconsin, 17 October 1957-25 July 1960. MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, 30 June 1975-12 August 1993. Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, 1 April 1994<sup>34</sup>-30 September 2010.<sup>35</sup> Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, 25 October 2013-.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Aircraft.**

Seversky P-35, 1941  
Curtis P-36 Hawk, 1941  
Bell P-39 Airacobra, 1941-1942  
Curtis P-40 Warhawk, 1941-1942  
Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, 1942, 1943-1945, and 1946-1947  
North American P-51 Mustang, 1946-1947  
Lockheed P (later, F)-80 Shooting Star, 1947-1950  
North American F-86 Sabre, 1950-1951  
Lockheed F-94 Starfire, 1951-1954  
Northrop F-89 Scorpion, 1954-1957  
Convair F-102 Delta Dagger, 1957-1960  
McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II, 1975-1979  
Lockheed F-16 Fighting Falcon, 1980-1993, and 1994-2009.  
Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning 2014-.

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<sup>31</sup> AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

<sup>32</sup> AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

<sup>33</sup> AETC SO G-13-22, 25 September 2013

<sup>34</sup> AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

<sup>35</sup> AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

<sup>36</sup> AETC SO G-13-22, 25 September 2013

**Emblem.** Originally approved on 15 September 1943; newest rendition approved on 18 July 1995.

**Blazon.** Or, a caricature bulldog head coupé affronté Proper winking its sinister eye garbed in an early aviator's helmet Sable, buckled Argent with goggles of the like and grasping in its mouth a lightning flash fesswise of the first; all within a diminished bordure Black.

Attached below the disc a Yellow scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "61st FIGHTER SQ" in Black letters.

**Motto.** None.

**Significance.** Blue and 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 bulldog represents the tough fighting spirit of the unit and his flying gear suggests readiness to engage in combat. The lightning bolt denotes the weapons systems used by the squadron to defend the peace.

**Commanders.**

***61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) [15 January 1941-31 January 1942]***

Unknown 15 January 1941-31 January 1942

***61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor)(Twin engine) [31 January 1942-15 May 1942]***

Unknown 31 January 1942-15 May 1942

***61st Fighter Squadron (Twin Engine) [15 May 1942-1 June 1942]***

Unknown 15 May 1942-1 June 1942

***61st Fighter Squadron [1 June 1942-28 February 1944]***

Capt Merle C. Eby by February 1943  
Maj Loren G. McCollom by 27 February 1943 [Major General]  
Maj Francis S. Gabreski 9 June 1943  
Maj James C. Stewart 12 January 1944-28 February 1942

***61st Fighter Squadron, Single Engine [28 February 1944-18 October 1945***

***1 May 1946-24 April 1947]***

Maj James C. Stewart 28 February 1944  
Lt Col Francis S. Gabreski 13 April 1944  
Maj Gordon E. Baker 20 July 1944  
Maj Donovan F. Smith 26 September 1944  
Maj James R. Carter 10 January 1945  
Lt Col Gordon E. Baker 3 May 1945-Unknown

Unknown 1-2 May 1946  
Maj Donovan F. Smith 3 May 1946-24 April 1947

[Lieutenant General]

***61st Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled [24 April 1947-14 June 1948]***

Maj Donovan F. Smith 24 April 1947 [Lieutenant General]  
Lt Col John W. Gaff, Jr. May 1947-Unknown  
Lt Col William D. Ritchie by January 1948-14 June 1948

***61st Fighter Squadron, Jet [14 June 1948-20 January 1950]***

Lt Col William D. Ritchie 14 June 1948  
Maj Ralph A. Johnson by December 1948  
Lt Col Albert S. Kelly by Jul 1949-20 January 1950

***61st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron [20 January 1950-25 July 1960]***

Lt Col Albert S. Kelly	20 January 1950
Lt Col Wallace B. Frank	20 June 1951
Maj Warren S. Patterson	c. July 1952
Lt Col Max E. Wolfson	December 1952-Unknown
Maj Phillip A. Rand	6 December 1954-Unknown
Maj Phillip Coady	c. 1957
Lt Col Lassiter Thompson	by January 1958
Maj William B. Myers, Jr.	c. 15 January 1959
Lt Col Lassiter Thompson	c. 15 April 1959
Lt Col John W. Singleton	September 1959
Maj Clay E. Herbst	c. April 1960
Maj Wilbur C. Schneider	c. May 1960-25 Jul 1960

***61st Tactical Fighter Squadron [30 June 1975-1 January 1981]***

Lt Col James C. Woods	30 June 1975
Lt Col Richard G. Fero	1 June 1977
Lt Col Michael E. Ryan	27 April 1979-1 January 1981
	[General CSAF]

***61st Tactical Fighter Training Squadron [1 January 1980-1 November 1991]***

Lt Col Michael E. Ryan	1 January 1980	[General CSAF]
Lt Col Milan Zimer	20 March 1981	
Lt Col Frederic E. McCoy, II	20 August 1982	
Lt Col Edward B. Carter	23 November 1983	
Lt Col Harry C. Morgan	November 1985	
Lt Col Dale C. Hill	December 1987	
Lt Col Nicholas Holoviak	14 July 1989	
Lt Col Ralph B. Brown	3 May 1991-1 November 1991	

**61st Fighter Squadron [1 November 1991-12 August 1993;  
1 April 1994-30 September 2010;  
25 October 2013-.]**

Lt Col Ralph B. Brown	1 November 1991
Lt Col Donald B. Ellis	10 November 1992-12 August 1993.
Lt Col Ronald D. Woodward	1 April 1994 <sup>37</sup>
Lt Col Thomas W. Hyde	11 August 1994 <sup>38</sup>
Lt Col Daniel W. Jordan, III	11 August 1995 <sup>39</sup>
Lt Col Robert J. Locke	7 March 1997 <sup>40</sup>
Lt Col Michael J. Carter	26 March 1999 <sup>41</sup>
Lt Col Randel A. Lane	6 November 2000 <sup>42</sup>
Lt Col Patrick W. Christopherson	11 June 2002 <sup>43</sup>
Lt Col Jeffrey A. Hausemann	30 March 2004 <sup>44</sup>
Lt Col Douglas R. Miller	24 May 2006 <sup>45</sup>
Lt Col James R. Sears, Jr.	12 July 2007 <sup>46</sup>
Lt Col Philippe R. Malebranche	6 October 2008-30 September 2010. <sup>47</sup>
Lt Col Michael T. Ebner	25 October 2013 <sup>48</sup>
Lt Col Michael L. Gette	26 June 2015-Present. <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> [58 MSS SO SO-G-73, 7 August 1992]

<sup>38</sup> 61 FS SO SO-GF-002, c. 11 August 1994

<sup>39</sup> 61 FS SO SO-GF-001, 11 August 1995

<sup>40</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 6 March 1997

<sup>41</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 26 March 1999

<sup>42</sup> 61 FS SO GF-008, 31 October 2000

<sup>43</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 24 April 2002

<sup>44</sup> 61 FS SO 56OSS-2004-G-5, 30 March 2004

<sup>45</sup> 61 FS SO 56 OG-G20o6-07, 28 April 2006

<sup>46</sup> 61 FS SO G-2007-008, 9 July 2007

<sup>47</sup> 56 MSG SO G-003, 6 October 2008; AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

<sup>48</sup> 56 MSG SO GS-02-14, 21 October 2013

<sup>49</sup> 56 MSG SO GS-08-15, 10 July 2015

**Narrative:**

Constituted on 20 November 1940, the 61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) activated at Savannah, GA, on 15 January 1941, in reaction to global threats prior to the United States entry into World War II. The squadron was assigned to the 56th Pursuit (later, 56th Fighter) Group, and trained in the Seversky P-35, Curtis P-36 Hawk, Bell P-39 Airacobra, and Curtis P-40 Warhawk. On 26 May 1941, the 61st moved to Charlotte Army Air Base, North Carolina. In October-November 1941, it deployed to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. On 10 December 1941, it moved to Charleston Municipal Airport, South Carolina, to help defend the East Coast. In 1942, the squadron converted to the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt. On 15 January 1942, it moved to Bridgeport Municipal Airport, Connecticut. On the last day of that month, it was redesignated as the 61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) (Twin Engine). On 15 May 1942, it was redesignated 61st Fighter Squadron (Twin Engine) and the 61st Fighter Squadron on 1 June 1942. It remained at Bridgeport until 27 December 1942.

On 12 January 1943, the squadron moved with 56th Fighter Group to England and arrived at Kings Cliffe, on 12 January 1943. On 5 April 1943, the squadron moved to Horsham St Faith, England, then Halesworth, England, on 9 July 1943. On 28 February 1944, the unit was redesignated as the 61st Fighter Squadron, Single Engine. On 19 April 1944, it moved to Boxted, England. In 1944, it was recognized as the first fighter squadron in the European theater to score over 100 victories. During 1943 to 1945, the 61st produced 18 Aces, the highest of any squadron in Europe, destroying 233 aircraft in the air and 67.5 aircraft on the ground. Around 15 September 1945, the squadron moved to Little Walden, England, where it remained until 11 October 1945. It arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, on 16 October 1945. Two days later it inactivated there.

On 1 May 1946, the squadron reactivated at Selfridge Field (later, Air Force Base), Michigan. Reassigned to the 56th Fighter (later, 56th Fighter-Interceptor) Group, it trained in P-47's while transitioning to North American P-51 Mustang. In 1947, the unit converted to the Lockheed P (later, F)-80 Shooting Star. On 24 April 1947, the squadron was redesignated as the 61st Fighter Squadron, Jet Propelled. On 14 June 1948, it was redesignated as the 61st Fighter Squadron, Jet, and then the 61st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron on 20 January 1950. In 1950, the 61st transitioned to the North American F-86A Sabre. In 1951, it converted to the Lockheed F-94 Starfire. On 6 February 1952, it was assigned to the 4708th Defense Wing and then the 575th Air Defense Group on 16 February 1953. On 6 August 1953, the squadron moved to Ernest Harmon Air Force Base, Newfoundland and was assigned to the 64th Air Division. The next year, the squadron converted to the Northrop F-89 Scorpion. On 1 April 1957, the unit was assigned to the 4731st Air Defense Group. That same year, the 61st converted to the Convair F-102 Delta Dagger. On 15 October 1957, the squadron was assigned to the 327th Fighter Group and two days later moved to Truax Field, Wisconsin. The 61st discontinued and inactivated on July 25, 1960.

On 12 May 1975, the squadron was redesignated as the 61st Tactical Fighter Squadron. On 30 June 1975, the 61st reactivated at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, under the 56th Tactical Fighter (later, 56th Tactical Training; 56th Fighter) Wing, flying the

McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II. On 1 January 1980, it was redesignated as the 61st Tactical Fighter Training Squadron. That year, it began flying the Lockheed F-16A/B Fighting Falcon. On 1 November 1991, it was redesignated as the 61st Fighter Squadron, and reassigned to the 56th Operations Group. The squadron inactivated on 12 August 1993.

On April 1, 1994, the squadron reactivated at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. It replaced the former 314th Fighter Squadron flying the F-16C/D Fighting Falcon, and was reassigned to the 56th Operations Group. The squadron inactivated on 30 September 2010. It reactivated at Luke Air Force Base on 25 October 2013. Reassigned to the 56th Operations Group, the 61st is Luke Air Force Base's first squadron to fly the Lockheed F-35A Lightning II, the Air Force's newest fighter.

**Lineage, Assignments, Stations, and Honors through 7 May 2009.**  
**Commanders, Aircraft, and Operations through 30 September 2008.**  
**Prepared by** Patsy Robertson.  
**Reviewed by** Daniel Haulman.

**Prepared** 10 July 2015  
**Prepared by** Rick Griset