

History of the 82nd

The mission of the 82nd Reconnaissance Squadron is to deliver timely, accurate, reconnaissance airpower critical to war fighting commanders and national leadership.

The 82nd Reconnaissance Squadron had its beginnings prior to the start of World War II. Originally constituted as the 82nd Observation Squadron on 1 June 1937, the 82d flew a variety of light observation aircraft until 1942, when it was redesignated the 82nd Observation Squadron, and later the 82nd Reconnaissance Squadron.

The squadron flew fighters, photographic, and armed reconnaissance missions in the A-20, B-25, P-39, and P-40. Active throughout the Pacific theater, the unit saw action in New Guinea, the New Britain Islands, and the Shouten Island Group. Re-equipped with the P-51 "Mustang", the 82nd continued to support landing operations in Borneo and the Philippines. On 11 January 1945, during the Philippines operations, Captain William A. Shomo, Commanding officer of the 82nd, shot down seven enemy aircraft while his wing man shot down three aircraft during the same engagement. Despite being outnumbered 13 to 2 during the engagement, Captain Shomo and his wing man both escaped without injury. Captain Shomo subsequently received the Congressional Medal of Honor for "extraordinary gallantry and intrepidity in attacking such a far superior force".

In August 1945, pilots from the 82nd flew pre- and post-strike reconnaissance missions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The unit was temporarily inactivated in 1949 and reactivated in 1954 as the 82nd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron flying the RF-61 and RF-84 until it was inactivated in 1957.

The 82d entered the Cold War in 1967 as the 82nd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron at Yokota Air Base, Japan. Under the 4242nd Strat Wing, 3rd Air Division (SAC), the squadron moved in January 1968 to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan. From the latter part of 1967, reconnaissance sorties were flown by RC-135s on COMBAT APPLE missions in support of the Vietnam conflict. COMBAT APPLE missions averaged 19 hours in duration and involved 12-hour orbits over the Gulf of Tonkin, and later over Laos. The 82nd routinely flew other Strategic Air Command (SAC) reconnaissance missions as well, performing peripheral reconnaissance missions over the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and Gulf of Tonkin. By the end of the Vietnam conflict, the 82nd had flown over 3,250 operational sorties and 39,268 orbit hours. The unit flew its last combat sortie on 1 July 1975, and reverted to a peacetime reconnaissance posture. Unit crews flew their final mission on 10 Sept 1976 and inactivated on 30 Sept 1976.

After the 82nd SRS inactivation, Kadena became a forward operating base for RC-135 operations with the 376th Strategic Wing managing the operations, intelligence, and maintenance functions. RC-135 aircraft and crews were deployed to Kadena from the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

The 82d Reconnaissance Squadron reactivated on 2 October 1991, as a standalone unit, at Kadena AB, Okinawa, Japan and operated first under the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and then under Air Combat Command (ACC). The 82d is subordinate to the 55th Operations Group, 55th Wing, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska which is subordinate to the 12th Air Force at Davis Monthan AFB and Headquarters Air Combat Command at Langley AP.