

Brief History of the 13th Bomb Squadron

The 13th Bomb Squadron started life as the 13th Aero Squadron at Camp Kelly, Texas, on June 14, 1917. The “Devil’s Own Grim Reapers” as they came to be known, would eventually rack up the most heraldry points of any bomber unit in the history of the United States Air Force. Sometime between 1917 and 1918, one of the unit’s aircraft bore the emblem that was to be forever associated with the 13th. It was described as: “Against a dark blue field, a white skeleton mowing with a yellow scythe.” This logo, known as “Oscar,” was officially approved on February 14, 1924. Six months after its organization, the 13th was sent to fight in World War I flying the SPAD XIII, a French-made biplane armed with two Vickers 303 machine guns. The unit flew reconnaissance, interdiction and escort duties over France and saw combat over the sectors of St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne.

After the 13th Aero Squadron returned the United States, it was demobilized in March 1919. Then, in March 1936, it was reconstituted and consolidated with the 13th Attack Squadron, which had originated as the 104th Aero Squadron. In September 1939, the squadron became the 13th Bomb Squadron (Light). The Group moved to Savannah, Georgia, in October 1940, acquiring A-20s as replacements for its B-18s and B-12s.

When war came to the nation in December 1941, the Reapers embarked on an accelerated training program while also engaged in anti-submarine patrols against German U-boats along the Atlantic coast. Because every ranking and experienced man from the unit was pulled and assigned overseas to train other units, the Reapers were left without personnel and planes. When the unit arrived in Australia in January 1942, they were still without airplanes. While waiting for aircraft, the Reapers learned there were 24 brand new B-25s sitting on the ramp in nearby Melbourne, but the planes were earmarked for the Dutch. Soon after, 24 Reaper pilots arrived in Melbourne, presented a confused Officer of the Day with an authorization letter, and nonchalantly flew away with the airplanes before anyone realized the mistake. The Reapers used those planes, and later A-20s, to attack bridges, transports, airfields, troop installations, seaplanes, docks, warehouses and enemy targets. At the end of the war, the squadron had earned four

Distinguished Unit Citations for actions over the Philippine Island, Papua and New Guinea, and also took home the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.

From the end of World War II to 1950, the 13 BS remained in Japan as part of the Army of Occupation. When North Korea invaded the south in 1950, the squadron, Flying A and B-26s, conducted interdiction missions during daylight raids on enemy troops and lines. On June 25, 1951, the squadron was redesignated the 13th Bombardment Squadron (Light-Night Intruders) to reflect the unit's "Hoot Owl" night missions. Following the end of the Korean War, the 13th remained forward deployed to Kunsan Air Base, Korea until ordered to Johnson Air Base, Japan, in 1954 to begin conversion to the B-57. On October 1, 1955, the unit was redesignated the 13th Bombardment Squadron Tactical. The unit's next move was to Clark Air Base, Philippines, on April 10, 1964.

During the Vietnam War the Reapers took part in numerous campaigns flying the Canberra, a light twin engine jet bomber, and with the upgraded B-57G model was one of the first units to fly with a targeting pod, which was used to release some of the first ever laser guided munitions. Deployed to Ton Son Nhut, South Vietnam, by June 1964, the squadron had flown 119 combat sorties. In February 1965, an enemy attack destroyed six 13 BS B-57s at Ben Hoa and rendered the airfield unusable. Flying from Danang and Phan Rang, Vietnam, the unit continued to fly combat sorties until 1968. The 13th BS was then inactivated.

The squadron remained on the shelf until February 8, 1969, when it was activated at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., where the mission of the 13th trained members on B-57G tactics, techniques, and state of the art computer systems. On 15 September 1970, the 13th deployed to Ubon Royal Thailand Air Force Base, Thailand, and on October 17, 1970, flew its first combat mission in the B-57G. The squadron flew combat missions until April 12, 1972, when personnel and equipment moved to Forbes Air Force Base, Kan., as the squadron was reduced to paper status. The 13th was again inactivated on September 30, 1973.

On 14 June 2000 after more than 26 years in hibernation, the Grim Reapers returned to the active Air Force as part of the 7th Bomb Wing at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. Shortly after September 11, 2001, the Reapers deployed with the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron and performed notably in Operation Anaconda to Afghanistan in early

2002. Upon returning the Reapers were named the 7th Bomb Wing's executive agent for support of the B-1 Test program. Additionally, the Reapers were responsible for supporting the B-1 Weapons Instructor Course. This relationship put the 13th in the enviable position of being the first in the operational bomber community to train on the latest upgrades, and often with the Air Force's premier instructors.

The Reapers were deployed in early 2003 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom to Andersen AFB, Guam. Upon returning from Guam, the 13th BS was charged with devising and running the first Iron Thunder, an audacious plan calling for the scheduling of 120 missions over three days with the stated objective of the execution of 75 sorties flying 90%, or 108 sorties. The crews began flying sorties on October 7, 2003 and continued round the clock until late on October 9. Starting in the fall of 2003, the B-1 fleet initiated a transformation with major computer and software upgrades and the Reapers were at the forefront. The 13th BS was the first operational unit assigned to fly Block E B-1s, a revolutionary upgrade which allowed a mixed load of GPS guided and unguided weapons, as well as a new air-to-air radar capability to increase the combatant commander's options and flexibility. As the initial cadre, the Reapers were responsible for training the core of the wing's bomber crews.

The 13th Bomb Squadron was deployed in early 2004, again flying missions over Afghanistan. Upon returning, the squadron was tasked with leading Iron Thunder 04-4 with the goal of delivering massive concentrated firepower in another bomber surge, which carefully integrated limited range space, jet availability, and realistic threat and target scenarios. The plan resulted in 77 effective sorties in less than 68 hours. More astounding was the fact that 47 of the sorties released a record 383 training weapons. In December 2004, for the fourth time in less than four years, the B-1s answered the call to war with all Reaper crew members and most enlisted support staff deployed as members of the 40th Air Expeditionary Group.

In June 2005, the Air Force announced the 13th Bomb Squadron would replace the 325th Bomb Squadron at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, and fly a new aircraft, the B-2 Bomber. On September 23, 2005, the 13th Bomb Squadron passed the flag and time honored traditions of the unit to future Reapers at Whiteman AFB.

Among its first assignments as a unit of the only stealth bomber wing in the United States Air Force, the 13th Bomb Squadron was deployed to Andersen AFB, Guam, in June 2006, to take part in the ongoing rotation which provides the U.S. Pacific Command a continuous bomber presence necessary to maintain stability and security for the Asia-Pacific region. Notable squadron achievements during this period was the first-ever B-2 deployment on the continent of Australia. The historic event took place July 25-27, 2006 and featured training sorties on Australia's Delamere Air Weapons Range and a B-2 Engine Running Crew Change at RAAF Darwin – the first time the B-2 landed on Australian soil.

COMMANDERS OF THE 13TH BOMB SQUADRON

(Unit Activated on 14 Jun 2000)

Lt. Col Robert S. McCormick	14 Jun 00
Lt. Col Gerald P. Plourde	27 Jul 01
Lt. Col Karl J. Shawhan	8 Jul 03
Lt Col Thomas A. Bussiere	9 Sept 05
Lt Col William G. Eldridge	13 Jun 06

13TH BOMB SQUADRON HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War I

St Mihiel

Meuse-Argonne

Lorraine

World War II

Philippine Islands

Antisubmarine, American Theater

East Indies

Papua

Bismarck Archipelago

New Guinea

Leyte

Luzon

Southern Philippines

Western Pacific

Air Offensive, Japan

Korean War

UN Defensive
UN Offensive
CCF Intervention
1st UN Counteroffensive
CCF Spring Offensive
UN Summer-Fall Offensive
Second Korean Winter
Korea, Summer-Fall 1952
Third Korean Winter
Korea, Summer 1953

Vietnam

Vietnam Advisory
Vietnam Defensive
Vietnam Air
Vietnam Air Offensive
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II
Southwest Monsoon
Commando Hunt V
Commando Hunt VI
Commando Hunt VII
Vietnam Ceasefire

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

Philippine Islands, [12-14 Apr] 1942
Philippine Islands, 11-14 Apr 1942
Papua, 23 Jul 1942-23 Jan 1943
New Guinea, 17 Aug 1943
Korea, 27 Jun-31 Jul 1950
Korea, 22 Apr-8 Jul 1951
Korea, 1 May-27 Jun 1953

Presidential Unit Citations (Southeast Asia)

10 Oct 1966-10 Apr 1967
6 Jun 1967-18 Jan 1968
1 Jan-1 Apr 1971

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with the Combat "V" Device

19 Feb 1965-19 Feb 1966

15 Sep-31 Dec 1970

1 Oct 1971-31 Mar 1972

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jun 1958-30 Jun 1960

1 Jul 1960-31 Mar 1962

5 Aug 1964-31 Mar 1965

8 Feb-31 Dec 1969

1 Jun 2002-31 May 2004

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (WWII)

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation: 27 Jun-31 Jul 1950

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm: 1 Apr 1966-9 Feb 1967

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm: [28 Sep] 1970-24 Dec 1972

EMBLEM



BLAZON

Azure, a human skeleton contourné at stride Argent grasping in both hands a scythe bendwise sinister blade to base, hafted Brown, poll Or, blade Gules embrued by five drops of blood of the like, all within a diminished bordure Sable.

Attached below the disc a White scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "13TH BOMB SQ" in Black letters.

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 white skeleton reflects the purity and truth of the Squadron's mission. The yellow blade of the scythe suggests the honor of the unit's heritage and the commitment to future excellence. The brown handle of the scythe represents the earth from which all missions begin and end. The scythe is stained and dripping with blood signifying the courage and patriotism of every mission, past, present and future and the sacrifice of blood spilled on both sides.

Emblem: Approved on 14 Feb 1924.