

Brief History of the 394th Combat Training Squadron

Each Air Force unit has its own distinctive history and the 394th Combat Training Squadron is no exception. The 394th's history dates back to the earliest days of aviation history and, in a sense, the history of two entirely different squadrons. The 394th was born during the massive expansion during World War I when President Woodrow Wilson led the United States in the "war to end all wars." On May 5, 1917, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, the 4th Aero Squadron was organized (activated). Later in the month, the unit moved to an area simply referred to as South San Antonio, Texas. The unit remained there until September 24, 1917 when it transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. During these early years, the 4th's pilots began flying the R-4 (an Air Service racer), the JN-4, and JN-6 (a multi-purpose aircraft that were outfitted for a variety of jobs.) In November 1917, the squadron made another move, this time to Post Field, Oklahoma. During the Post Field days, the 4th operated as an observer-training unit. The unit remained in Oklahoma until January 2, 1919, when, as a part of the massive drawdown following World War I, the unit was demobilized.

A few short months later, on June 23, 1919, the Air Service organized another 4th Aero Squadron at Hazelhurst Field, New York, and assigned it to the Eastern Division. Shortly thereafter, the squadron began receiving its primary aircraft, the DH-4, a multi-purpose aircraft that flew in many variations. The new 4th called Hazelhurst home from its inception until November 19 when the squadron moved to Mitchel Field, New York, where further adventures awaited the 4th. First, the aero squadron became part of the 5th Observation Group on Dec 15, 1919 (although it was attached to the Eastern Division until 1920). Then, on January 8, 1919, the squadron left the cold climate of the Northeast for the tropics of Luke Field, the Hawaiian Islands.

The squadron's tenure on Hawaii was marked by changes. On March 14, 1921, the unit became known as the 4th Aero Squadron. Less than two years later, on January 25, 1923, the Army Air Service renamed the unit the 4th Observations Squadron. Also during this period, the squadron took to building airfields. Specifically, a lieutenant and 20 enlisted persons from the 4th began construction of Wheeler Field. Within a month, the group had completed the landing strip. The Hawaiian era also found the 4th moving several times. The squadron transferred to Schofield Barracks (February 6, 1922), back to Luke (January 11, 1927), and Hickam (January 1, 1939). The squadron also received two different higher headquarters throughout the period: the Hawaiian Department (January 31, 1922) and the 5th Composite (later, Bombardment) Group (January 11, 1927). During its Hawaiian Department days, the squadron was involved in another unique mission. In 1926, the squadron sowed seeds from the air for the U.S. Forestry Division.

The 4th also flew several different types of aircraft during this period. From 1919 through 1929, the 4th flew B-12s (light bombardment) and P-12s (pursuit aircraft) as their primary aircraft. Still, this did not prevent the 4th from mastering other aircraft. During this era, aviators went aloft in the OA-1 (Artillery Observation/Surveillance) and O-19 (Observation).

It was also during this period that the Air Service sought to straighten out the histories of its units. The 4th's turn came in 1924 when the 1917 4th Aero Squadron and the 1919 4th Aero Squadron had their histories consolidated. From 1919 on, the two units were one and the same.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the squadron received three more name changes as well as new aircraft. On January 25, 1938, the now called Army Air Corps renamed the unit the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron. Later, December 6, 1939, the unit became the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium Range) and finally, on November 20, 1940, the organization became the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron (Heavy). As in the past, the squadron also received new aircraft to accompany its new name. In 1938, the squadron began specializing in the B-18 (medium bomber) Bolo.

Meanwhile, war clouds had been gathering over the Pacific as well as in Europe. America sought to keep out of the fight, choosing instead to arm and aid its allies. However, on the fateful December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Hawaii. Personnel from the 4th fought bravely from Bellows Field, Hawaii, (where, ironically, Lt. George A. Whiteman, the namesake of the squadron's current home, was killed in action) against the sneak attack as did everyone on the islands. Sadly, the attackers took their toll on the squadron as it lost three enlisted men. Six others, five enlisted and one officer, were wounded in the melee.

For weeks after the attack, the squadron responded by patrolling the area around Hawaii to prevent another attack. The 4th also began gearing up for combat when it received its first B-17 Flying Fortress. The unit also had several LB-30s assigned at the same time.

As 1942 dawned, the 4th went through further alterations. First, it received yet another name. In recognition of the squadron being equipped with heavy bombers, the Army Air Forces decided to give the 4th an entirely different name. On April 22, 1942, the unit became the 394th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy). Still assigned to the 5th Bombardment Group, the 394th moved once again—this time to Bellows Field in May 1942. Also during January-May 1942, the 394th rendered an important service to the Pacific theater. Populated with experienced pilots, the organization acted as a training unit for incoming B-17 crews. During this time, the 394th also possessed at least one LB-30.

The remainder of 1942 and early 1943 saw the 394th move three more times. From Bellows, the squadron proceeded back to Hickam on July 24, 1942. The stay there was short-lived, however, as the unit once again returned to Bellows on September 28, 1942. The squadron remained there until Christmas Day 1942 when it began the long, hard task of pushing the Japanese back to their homelands. Quite naturally, the 394th was leading the way as it transferred to the island of Fiji (although in January and again from April-June 1943, the unit operated from Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal). Also sometime in 1943, the squadron began swapping its B-17s for the B-24 Liberator.

By now, the Japanese were slowly reeling from America's gathering strength. The 394th played a key role as it continued to apply pressure to the retreating forces. From June 1943 through April 13, 1944, the 394th called Guadalcanal home although from February 28-April 9, 1944, the squadron called Munda, New Georgia, home. From Guadalcanal, the 394th ventured to Momote Airfield, Los Negros, in April 1944.

Throughout the remainder of 1944, the 394th continued to press. After Momote, the squadron moved to Wakde (August 1944), Noemfoor (September 1944), and Morotai (November 1944). The 394th remained at Noemfoor until March 1945 when it flew to Samar where it remained until the end of the war in September 1945. One more move followed for the squadron as the 394th operated from Clark Field, the Philippines, until April 29, 1946, where, due to the massive demobilization after World War II, the 394th was inactivated.

For the next 41 years, the 394th designation waited for the chance to serve again. That opportunity arose in 1996 when the Air Force redesignated the squadron as the 394th Combat Training Squadron and turned it over to ACC for activation. Headquarters ACC exercised that option and on November 7, 1996, the squadron was activated at Whiteman AFB as part of the 509th Operations Group, 509th Bomb Wing.

Since then, the 394th has supported the 509th in a myriad of ways including Operation ALLIED FORCE. From March 23 through May 22, 1999, the squadron sent its aircrews and aircraft almost nightly into harm's way attempting end the strife in the Kosovo region.

Members of the 394th participated in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) by flying the first of a series of long duration missions. Two B-2s, the *Spirit of Georgia* and the *Spirit of America*, departed Whiteman AFB on October 7, 2001, bombed targets in Afghanistan, and then went on to land at a forward location following missions lasting 40.3 and 44.3 hours, respectively. Following engine running crew changes, the B-2s and crews returned to Whiteman October 9 after sorties lasting 29 hours each for the two bombers. Total engine run time for the two B-2s was 69.3 and 73.3 hours, respectively. The sortie accomplished in the *Spirit of America* (73.3 hours) was the longest combat sortie in the history of the U.S. Air Force to date.

Commanders¹

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date Assigned</u>
Lt Col James F. Whitney	7 Nov 96
Lt Col Curtiss R. Petrek	5 Nov 97
Lt Col Paul S. Land	12 Jul 99
Lt Col Robert C. O'Neal	11 Apr 01
Lt Col Andrew J. Cernicky	13 Dec 02
Lt Col Stephen Moulton	29 Jun 04
Lt Col Troy A. Van Bemmelen	24 Mar 06

¹ A roster of squadron commanders from 1917-1946 is not available.

**Honors of the
394th Combat Training Squadron
Campaign Streamers**

Central Pacific
Guadalcanal
New Guinea
Northern Solomons
Eastern Mandates
Bismarck Archipelago
Western Pacific
Leyte
Luzon
Southern Philippines
China Offensive
Air Combat, Asiatic-Pacific

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations:
Woleai Island, 18 Apr-15 May 44
Borneo, 30 Sep 44

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (1942)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Jun 95-31 May 97
1 Jun 97-31 May 99
1 Jun 99- 31 May 01
1 Jun 03-31 May 05



Emblem Significance

The half gold and half blue represent day and night observation, while the four-point figure represents the number of the organization. (This was approved when the 394th was still known as the 4th Aero Squadron; hence, the reference to the 'four-point figure represents the number of the organization.) (Approved 19 June 1931)