

## 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>



Awaiting a redraw by TIOH

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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>

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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, 26 September 1991

## Decorations. (Continued)

### Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards (Continued)

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>  
1 July 2001-30 June 2003<sup>22</sup>  
[1 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>  
1 July 2014-30 June 2015<sup>30</sup>  
1 July 2015-30 June 2016<sup>31</sup>  
1 July 2016-30 June 2017<sup>32</sup>  
1 July 2017-30 June 2018<sup>33</sup>  
1 July 2018-30 June 2019<sup>34</sup>  
1 July 2019-30 June 2020<sup>35</sup>  
1 July 2020-30 June 2021<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> AETC SO GA-18, 15 November 1996

<sup>20</sup> AETC SO GA-12, 9 November 1998

<sup>21</sup> AETC SO GA-9, 8 December 2000

<sup>22</sup> AETC SO GA-55, 29 April 2004

<sup>23</sup> AETC SO GA-0052, 22 June 2006

<sup>24</sup> AETC SO GA-045, 8 May 2007

<sup>25</sup> AETC SO G-054, 28 February 2008

<sup>26</sup> AETC SO G-071, 3 April 2009

<sup>27</sup> AETC SO G-025, 11 March 2010

<sup>28</sup> AETC SO G-086, 9 May 2011

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

<sup>30</sup> AETC SO G-006, 14 October 2016

<sup>31</sup> AETC SO G-022, 22 March 2017

<sup>32</sup> AETC SO G-015, 19 Dec 2017

<sup>33</sup> AETC SO G-057, 20 May 2019

<sup>34</sup> AETC SO G-013, 18 Dec 2019

<sup>35</sup> AETC SO G-013, 16 Dec 2020

<sup>36</sup> AETC SO G-009, 15 Nov 2021

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

<u>Name</u>	<u>Aerial Victories</u> <sup>37</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	KIA 6 June 1944
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	

**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 July 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>38</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>39</sup>-.

<sup>37</sup> SOURCE: AF Historical Research Agency's Aerial Victory Credit database

<sup>38</sup> AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

<sup>39</sup> AETC SO G-34, 25 March 1994

**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-.

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

**Blazon.** Or, a caricature bulldog head couped 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 [Ace]  
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 [Ace]  
Lt Col Francis S. Gabreski 13 April 1944 [Ace]  
Maj Gordon E. Baker 20 July 1944  
Maj Donovan F. Smith 26 September 1944  
[Ace][Lieutenant General]  
Maj James R. Carter 10 January 1945 [Ace]  
Lt Col Gordon E. Baker 3 May 1945-Unknown  
  
Unknown 1-2 May 1946  
Maj Donovan F. Smith 3 May 1946-24 April 1947  
[Ace][Lieutenant General]

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

Maj Donovan F. Smith 24 April 1947 [Ace][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

## Commanders. (Continued)

### ***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 July 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
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

[General CSAF]

## Commanders. (Continued)

### **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>40</sup>	
Lt Col Thomas W. Hyde	11 August 1994 <sup>41</sup>	
Lt Col Daniel W. Jordan, III	11 August 1995 <sup>42</sup>	
Lt Col Robert J. Locke	7 March 1997 <sup>43</sup>	
Lt Col Michael J. Carter	26 March 1999 <sup>44</sup>	
Lt Col Randel A. Lane	6 November 2000 <sup>45</sup>	
Lt Col Patrick W. Christopherson	11 June 2002 <sup>46</sup>	
Lt Col Jeffrey A. Hausemann	30 March 2004 <sup>47</sup>	
Lt Col Douglas R. Miller	24 May 2006 <sup>48</sup>	
Lt Col James R. Sears, Jr.	12 July 2007 <sup>49</sup>	[Major General]
Lt Col Philippe R. Malebranche	6 October 2008-30 September 2010. <sup>50</sup>	
Lt Col Michael T. Ebner	25 October 2013 <sup>51</sup>	
Lt Col Michael L. Gette	26 June 2015 <sup>52</sup>	
Lt Col Rhett S. Hierlmeier	12 June 2017 <sup>53</sup>	
Lt Col Thomas E. Hayes	31 May 2019 <sup>54</sup>	
Lt Col Christopher K. Leong	14 Jun 2021-Present. <sup>55</sup>	

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<sup>40</sup> [58 MSS SO SO-G-73, 7 August 1992]

<sup>41</sup> 61 FS SO SO-GF-002, c. 11 August 1994

<sup>42</sup> 61 FS SO SO-GF-001, 11 August 1995

<sup>43</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 6 March 1997

<sup>44</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 26 March 1999

<sup>45</sup> 61 FS SO GF-008, 31 October 2000

<sup>46</sup> 61 FS SO GF-002, 24 April 2002

<sup>47</sup> 61 FS SO 56OSS-2004-G-5, 30 March 2004

<sup>48</sup> 61 FS SO 56 OG-G20o6-07, 28 April 2006

<sup>49</sup> 61 FS SO G-2007-008, 9 July 2007

<sup>50</sup> 56 MSG SO G-003, 6 October 2008; AETC SO G-10-42, 13 August 2010

<sup>51</sup> 56 MSG SO GS-02-14, 21 October 2013

<sup>52</sup> 56 MSG SO GS-08-15, 10 July 2015

<sup>53</sup> 56 MSG SO G-16-17, 8 June 2017

<sup>54</sup> 56 MSG SO G-19-022, 20 May 2019

<sup>55</sup> 56 MSG SO G-21-019, 26 May 2021



**Narrative:** Constituted Nov. 20, 1940, the 61st Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) activated at Savannah, GA, on January 15, 1941, in reaction to global threats prior to the United States entry into World War II. The squadron trained in Seversky P-35, Curtis P-36 Hawk, Bell P-39 Airacobra, and Curtis P-40 Warhawk. In May 1941, the 61st moved to Charlotte, NC, and six months later to Charleston, SC, to help defend the East Coast. In 1942, the squadron converted to the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt. In January 1943, the squadron moved with 56th Fighter Group to England and in April settled at Boxted Airfield, UK. 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.

Deactivated in October 1945 at Camp Kilmer, NJ, it reactivated at Selfridge Field, MI, training in P-47's while transitioning to North American P-51 Mustang. In April 1950, the 61st transitioned to the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star and later became the first squadron to fly the North American F-86A Sabre. In 1951, it converted to the Lockheed F-94 Starfire. Three years later, the squadron converted to the Northrop F-89 Scorpion. In 1957, the 61st converted to the Convair F-102 Delta Dagger. The 61st deactivated on July 25, 1960, at Truax Field, Wisconsin.

In June 1975, the 61st reactivated at MacDill AFB, FL, flying the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom conducting fighter aircrew training. In April 1980, the flying mission changed to fighter pilot training in the Lockheed F-16A/B Fighting Falcon. The 61st transitioned to the F-16C/D in June 1988 and deactivated in January 1994.

The squadron reactivated on April 1, 1994 at Luke AFB, AZ, replacing the former 314th Fighter Squadron flying the F-16C/D Fighting Falcon conducting fighter pilot training. The squadron stood down August 27, 2010.

On 25 October 2013, the 61st Fighter Squadron reactivated. The 61st was Luke AFB's first squadron to fly the Lockheed F-35A Lightning II, the Air Force's newest fighter continuing its mission of fighter pilot training.

**Locally Prepared on 25 February 2022**

**Locally Prepared by Rick Griset**