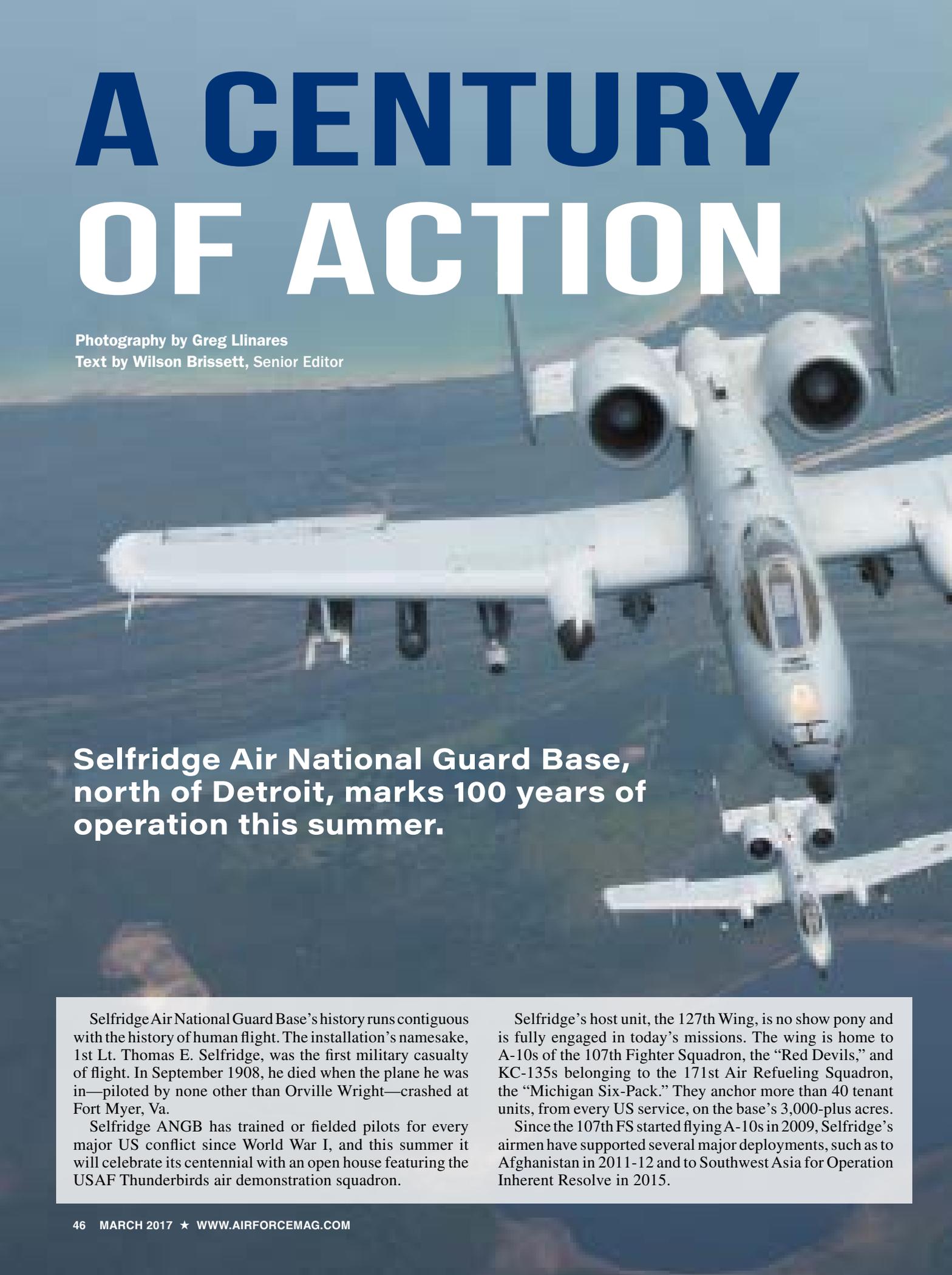


A CENTURY OF ACTION



Photography by Greg Llinares

Text by Wilson Brissett, Senior Editor

Selfridge Air National Guard Base, north of Detroit, marks 100 years of operation this summer.

Selfridge Air National Guard Base's history runs contiguous with the history of human flight. The installation's namesake, 1st Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge, was the first military casualty of flight. In September 1908, he died when the plane he was in—piloted by none other than Orville Wright—crashed at Fort Myer, Va.

Selfridge ANGB has trained or fielded pilots for every major US conflict since World War I, and this summer it will celebrate its centennial with an open house featuring the USAF Thunderbirds air demonstration squadron.

Selfridge's host unit, the 127th Wing, is no show pony and is fully engaged in today's missions. The wing is home to A-10s of the 107th Fighter Squadron, the "Red Devils," and KC-135s belonging to the 171st Air Refueling Squadron, the "Michigan Six-Pack." They anchor more than 40 tenant units, from every US service, on the base's 3,000-plus acres.

Since the 107th FS started flying A-10s in 2009, Selfridge's airmen have supported several major deployments, such as to Afghanistan in 2011-12 and to Southwest Asia for Operation Inherent Resolve in 2015.



Four A-10C aircraft and a KC-135R fly in formation from Selfridge ANGB, Mich.



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The 2015 deployment involved 350 airmen supporting the A-10s, including a healthy maintenance contingent, and some 200 KC-135 personnel. By the end of that deployment, the Red Devils had flown 1,600 sorties and logged 11,000 combat flight hours. Other Selfridge airmen flew three of the most heavily used KC-135s in the Air Force at the time, chalking up some 300 missions and 2,200 combat flight hours. The six-month stretch was the longest mass deployment of Selfridge airmen since the Korean War, according to wing officials.

As 2016 ended, approximately 100 airmen from the 127th Wing were on duty in the US Central Command region for Operation Freedom's Sentinel and other contingencies. The deployed airmen were from the 127th Air Refueling Group, encompassing both the 171st Air Refueling Squadron and 191st Maintenance Squadron for KC-135 operations.

"In the past year, airmen from the group have performed short-term deployments in the European, Pacific, and Central Command areas of operations," read a Selfridge news release.

Clearly, Selfridge is no stranger to a high operating tempo. Sustaining these operations has been "an all hands on deck effort," said TSgt. Daniel Heaton, 127th Wing public affairs officer. But it hasn't stopped Selfridge's airmen from taking on additional missions. Beginning in January 2016, the base became a staging ground for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's response to the Flint, Mich., water crisis. The wing set up a FEMA storage and distribution depot, supply-



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/1/ An A-10 rolls away while deploying flares from dispensers underneath the fuselage. /2/ Markings indicating OIR missions are displayed on a fuselage of an A-10. /3/ Maj. John Rubin in the cockpit of his Warthog. /4/ SrA. Brandie Nosakowski works on a boom unit on a KC-135 tanker. /5/ SSgt. Joseph Shonk chooses a tool needed during a preflight routine on an A-10. /6/ A KC-135 on the runway. /7/ Four A-10s maintain a tight formation.



ing nearly three million liters of bottled water to residents of Flint, which is 70 miles from Selfridge.

The FEMA mission illustrates how Selfridge sees itself as “Michigan’s hometown Air Force,” Heaton said. “We try to lift the bar a little higher.”

The hard work in both international combat operations and the local humanitarian missions has been recognized: In 2016, the wing received an Air Force Meritorious Unit Award for superior performance during its 2015 combat deployments.

Preparations for the 2017 centennial celebration, Aug. 19-20, are in full swing. In addition to the Thunderbirds, the wing is planning a display of historical aircraft from past missions. It’s even trying to find a JN-4 Jenny, the first aircraft assigned to Selfridge Field, where pilot training began in July 1917.

The celebration will be forward looking, though, and Selfridge’s immediate future looks exciting.

In December, the Air Force named the base as one of five finalists for the location of one of the new F-35A Lightning II ANG squadrons. There will be two Guard F-35 squadron locations.

/1/ A 30 mm GAU-8/A seven-barrel Gatling gun mounted on an A-10 at Selfridge. /2/ Rubin and Shonk preflight an A-10. /3/ A Warthog trailed by a Stratotanker. /4/ TSgt. Shaun Hover shows the marshalling signal for stop. /5/ A tanker on the ramp at Selfridge. /6/ SrA. Robert Akers, a boom operator, secures an exit door on a KC-135 before a mission. /7/ SSgt. Garrett Pillown (l) and SrA. Adam McMann (r) inspect survival kits carried by A-10 aircrews. /8/ The 127th Wing’s 107th Fighter Squadron is nicknamed “Red Devils.”



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Brig. Gen. John D. Slocum, 127th Wing commander, thinks the new mission is a logical next step.

“The F-35 is a natural fit at Selfridge,” he said. “Fighter aircraft have been operating at Selfridge for 100 years. We believe an enduring fighter mission makes sense. . . . The Michigan National Guard operates two world-class training facilities in northern Michigan, just a 30-minute flight from here.”

Slocum said the cross-service relationships Selfridge maintains offer a unique opportunity to deploy the strike fighter “to work closely with the Army, Marine Corps, and some of our allied partners in a joint environment.”

The final F-35 decision should be made sometime in 2017, and if selected, Selfridge would begin receiving the fifth generation fighters in the mid-2020s.

An F-35 squadron at Selfridge would put the Air Force’s newest fighter at the same base where 2nd Lt. Curtis E. LeMay, future head of Strategic Air Command and USAF Chief of Staff, flew in his first Air Corps assignment nearly 90 years ago—in pursuit planes, of course. ✪

/1/ Airmen work on an A-10. The equipment in the foreground loads and unloads rounds for the Gatling gun. /2/ SSgt. Logan Lyon (l) and Nosakowski perform maintenance on a KC-135 boom. /3/ An A-10 maneuvers beneath a refueler. /4/ L-r: Rubin, 1st Lt. Chris Ellsworth, SrA. Jordynn Horner, and Capt. Jason Holm at the front desk for wing operations. /5/ Ellsworth and Rubin head out to their aircraft. /6/ MSgt. Rich Gibbs places unit markings on a KC-135. /7/ SSgt. Kenneth Stokely conducts preflight operations. /8/ SrA. Scott Lange and other wing members helped the citizens of Flint, Mich., during their water crisis in 2016.