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# The Round Tablette

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## Welcome to the January session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight's speaker is Rob Ehlers, author of *Targeting the Reich*, who will discuss the value of aerial intelligence in the European air campaign. Also included in the evening's events, the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Minnesota Air National Guard's 109<sup>th</sup> Squadron.

World War I employed many technological innovations and one, the use of the airplane, complicated military planning throughout the inter-war years. Military aviation issues ran the spectrum from tactical support to strategic bombing — some thought (hoped) airplanes would make land armies and surface fleet navies obsolete. Airpower theorists believed military aviation would dramatically change warfare. Airpower advocates failed to realize bombing proved to be ineffective without intense aerial reconnaissance. During the inter-war period improvements in photography and cartography failed to be converted into a viable operational application. Even though, the *Wehrmacht* Chief Werner Von Fritsch noted that the side with the best air reconnaissance would win the next war. At the start of World War II aerial reconnaissance maintained a focus on battlefield operations, which assumed a Great War like stationary front, and no strategic reconnaissance doctrine development.

Although, the air power doctrine proved to be problematic that did not prevent air units from being formed. The 109<sup>th</sup> Observation squadron began on paper in 1920 when the Minnesota National Guard decided to form an aviation unit. The unit finally passed muster being formally recognized by the militia department on January 17, 1921, and became the first federally recognized National Guard aerial squadron. Assigned as an observation unit for the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 109<sup>th</sup> began their aviation training in 1923 in JN-6H "Jennys". The unit used the "Jennys" until 1927.

In August 1941, the 109<sup>th</sup> Observation Squadron was activated for federal duty and assigned to the 67<sup>th</sup> Observation Group at Eislser Army Air Field in Louisiana. After the attack on Pearl Harbor the Squadron flew anti-submarine missions along the Gulf Coast.

In August 1942, the 109<sup>th</sup> transferred to the European Theater of Operations (ETO) and became part of the VIII Fighter Command of the Eighth Air Force. During their tenure with the 8<sup>th</sup>, the 109<sup>th</sup> trained pilot's fresh out of stateside flying schools in operational training, formation flying and tactical training using the British Spitfires before being sent to fighting units. In addition, the 109<sup>th</sup> performed safety checks on aircraft arriving from the United States and ferried them to North Africa for use in *OPERATION TORCH*.

The 109<sup>th</sup> transferred to the IX Fighter Command of the Ninth Air Force in late 1943. While their number remained the same, the unit bounced between being called a Reconnaissance Squadron or a Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. Whatever their name the unit participated in routine daily weather missions, bomb assessment missions and interdiction missions, which identified important transportation routes, railroads, transportation centers, roads, bridges and major thoroughfares.

One of the 109<sup>th</sup>'s most memorable missions came in March 1944 when it participated in *OPERATION NOBALL*, a part of *OPERATION CROSSBOW* which targeted the German long range reprisal weapons (V-weapons) program. The V-1 flying bomb and V-2 rocket were launched against Britain from 1944 to 1945 and used against European targets as well. The 109<sup>th</sup> photographed Germany's rocket-launching platforms and control buildings used to launch these pilot-less aircraft against England. These images provided the information for bombers and fighter-bombers to destroy the sites. As a result of the unit's efforts, 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force attacked these sites successfully, ending an important part of Hitler's secret weapon for beating England.

Beginning in late February 1944, as part of the 67<sup>th</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Group, the 109<sup>th</sup>'s mission changed from the V weapons mission to providing detailed photographs of the entire coast line from Holland to Cherbourg, France. These pictures showed the fortifications along the beaches, and the terrain for some distance behind the actual shore line. The Supreme Allied Command needed to know exactly what the ground forces would be up against, and the exact spot best suited for landing invasion forces. As D-Day approached, the 109<sup>th</sup> worked feverishly around the clock, furnishing the necessary aerial intelligence

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If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

information required for the invasion. During May 1944, the unit flew a record 278 sorties.

After D-Day, once the Allies gained a large enough continental foothold and airstrips installed, the 109th crossed the English Channel to Le Mele, France. The unit's reconnaissance missions changed again to include artillery fire control and assisting the ground forces in effective employment of firepower and mobility. With these mission changes the 109th assisted infantry troops in the Battle of the Falaise Pocket and the Battle of the Bulge.

During its time on the European continent the 109th stayed close behind the advancing forces, the 109th moved from Le Mele to Buc, an airstrip near Paris, where the unit flew its 1000th wartime mission, and then to Gosselies, Belgium. In the spring of 1945, the unit moved to Limburg and later to Eschwege Air Field Germany – the latter being the final location of the 109th before being disbanded in July 1945. Troop ships then carried squadron members home in late summer and early fall. The squadron would be reactivated in May 1946 and re-named the 109th Fighter Squadron.

The 109th played an important and vital role during World War II. In recognition of its contributions to the Allied effort, the squadron was awarded a Unit Citation. Aircrews amassed a total of 53 Air Medals with 295 bronze clusters and 43 silver clusters, 13 Distinguished Flying Crosses and one Silver Star. Finally, ten aircraft maintenance men received Bronze Star Medals for their outstanding performance. As the oldest unit in the Minnesota Air National Guard the 109th Airlift Squadron holds a special place in our state's military history.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

Robert S. Ehlers Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2015).

Steven Bourque. *Beyond the Beach: the Allied War Against France*, Naval Institute Press, 2018.

#### Announcements:

Vietnam War Roundtable – TBD -  
World War I Roundtable (zoom) 10 Feb. 2021 –  
Post-9/11 Roundtable (zoom) 25 Jan. 2021 –  
– rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org  
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 16 Feb. 2021 –  
*Decapitating the Union: Plot to Assassinate Lincoln* -  
[www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - TBD - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - TBD - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)  
Civil War Symposium -TBD - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org)  
8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.  
Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

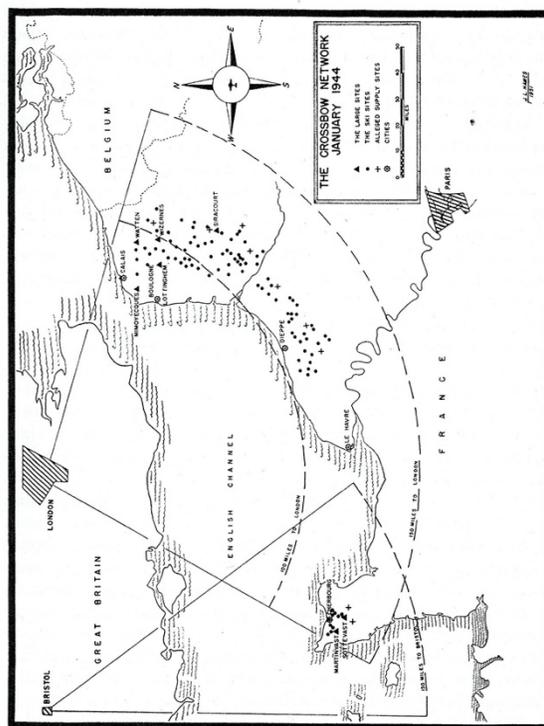
World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>  
Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - TBD - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.  
Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - TBD - 952-746-6100 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org)  
Winston Churchill Book Club - [lin.hopkins@hotmail.com](mailto:lin.hopkins@hotmail.com)  
Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org)  
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com)  
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)  
Selim Center for Life Long Learning, UST, <https://www.stthomas.edu/selimcenter/>  
Western Naval Historical Association [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net)  
MacArthur Memorial, Norfolk VA, <http://www.macarthurmemorial.gov>  
National World War II Memorial, Washington DC, <http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org>

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

#### Round Table Schedule 2021

9 Feb Struggle for Middle East Oil and War  
9 Mar Nazi Art  
23 Mar Nazi Scientists in US Space Program  
13 Apr The Tragedy of Poland: Nazis; Soviets  
11 May The “Mighty Eighth” and Victory in Europe

**The Round Table is a 501.c.3 non-profit. We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2RT!**



Supermarine Spitfire PR Mk XI