

## ROA fighting for skilled aviation corps

*ROA is urging defense and congressional leaders to assign follow-on missions to the 442nd Fighter Wing and other similarly positioned units.*



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The Reserve Organization of America is fighting for a follow-on mission for the U.S. Air Force Reserve's 442nd Fighter Wing, stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. In recent weeks, ROA has written to the president, defense secretary and members of Congress, urging continued support for the wing and other similarly positioned units directed to retire the A-10 Thunderbolt without an assigned follow-on mission.

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*ROA acting chief executive,  
Col. (Ret.) Don Brown, U.S. Air  
Force Reserve*

“Sustaining the 442nd Fighter Wing's mission is vital to preserving airpower and readiness,” wrote ROA's acting executive director, retired USAFR colonel Don Brown, in a letter to lawmakers late last week. “As the A-10 is retired, it is essential to retain these combat-proven pilots and maintainers to ensure continued mission capability.”

Testifying before the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations on May 22, Chief of the Air Force Reserve Lt. Gen. John Healy endorsed assigning a follow-on fighter mission to the 442nd and highlighted the “significant decrease” in America's fighter portfolio over the past decade. He also drew attention to other reserve

component units facing divestment without replacement programs, noting that each represents a further erosion of Total Force capabilities.

Echoing these concerns, ROA's Air Force Service Section Vice President, retired Air Force Colonel Susan E. Lukas, urged ROA members nationwide to support key priorities: assigning modern aircraft to reserve units losing legacy platforms, funding aviation incentive pay parity, fully funding the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account, and ensuring concurrent and proportional fielding of equipment across all components.

These priorities are essential to sustaining a skilled and ready aviation corps by ensuring that

experienced aircrew and maintainers remain engaged, equipped, and incentivized to serve.

“We cannot afford to delay. We must act decisively,” Lukas wrote in her letter. “The fighter fleet has fallen to under 2,000 aircraft—down from more than 4,000 during the Cold War. Without urgent changes, our ability to recapitalize and sustain a combat-ready reserve aviation capability will continue to erode, beyond the point of no return.”

The 442nd has a long-standing record of readiness and an illustrious history spanning more than 70 years. From its heroic origins in World War II to its service in Operations Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom, the unit has consistently answered the nation’s call.

The 442nd has also demonstrated its exceptional capabilities recently in high-level exercises such as Defender Europe, Ozark Thunder, and CAS 3.0, effectively integrating with NATO partners in complex operations. These accomplishments underscore not only the unit’s tactical excellence, but also its continued relevance in today’s dynamic global security environment.

Speaking about the 442nd during the hearing, Lt. Gen. Healy stated, “These are the guys and gals who specifically are the warrior ethos.” With the unit currently scheduled to divest its A-10s in 2028, he noted that its airmen have volunteered to continue flying into 2027.

With reserve fighter capacity projected to decline by 48 percent by Fiscal Year 2030, retaining experienced and mission-ready Reserve units like the 442nd Fighter Wing is a strategic imperative.

Earlier this year, that imperative was acknowledged by President Trump, who announced that Selfridge Air National Guard Base would receive new F-15EX fighter jets and a follow-on mission to replace the retiring A-10 aircraft of the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard.

As the Air Force Reserve confronts a shrinking fighter fleet and increasing global demands, the decision to assign follow-on missions to proven units like the 442nd Fighter Wing is imperative for our national defense.

ROA urges national leaders to act with the same urgency and foresight demonstrated in the case of Selfridge to ensure that the 442nd Fighter Wing and similarly positioned units, including those at Davis-Monthan AFB, Moody AFB, Nellis AFB, and Homestead ARB, remain an enduring part of America’s airpower advantage.

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