



PEACE IS OUR PROFESSION
THE STORY OF STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND
AT EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE



For a brief time during its tenancy at Eglin Air Force Base, from 1963 to 1965, the 4135th was officially redesignated the 39th Bomb Wing. It was essentially the same unit, with the same equipment and personnel, as the 4135th Strategic Wing. The men who were interviewed for this history still think of themselves as members of the 4135th, despite the fact that the wing had a new designation. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, the SAC Wing at Eglin Air Force Base is referred to throughout this history as the 4135th Strategic Wing.



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Prepared for
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Eglin Air Force Base, Florida

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FOREWORD

At the height of the Cold War, during the “escalation” period of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the stratosphere over the northern hemisphere was patrolled by the most powerful air force in the world. These were the aircraft of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), the branch of the United States Air Force (USAF) charged with the task of scrambling from bases stationed in the United States and Canada to attack the heartland of the Soviet Union, should the Cold War suddenly turn hot. SAC – the primary nuclear strike force of the United States in the first two decades of the Cold War – grew out of major advances in military technology during World War II that had culminated in the dawn of the atomic age in 1945. In that year, the United States detonated the first nuclear weapons, devastating Hiroshima and Nagasaki and forcing the Japanese to surrender, ending the war. Within the space of a few years, while the world moved from the age of piston-driven propeller planes into the jet age, the United States lost its nuclear monopoly as the Soviet Union tested its first atomic device in 1949. By 1955, both superpowers also possessed the hydrogen bomb.

Each superpower wondered whether the other would unleash such apocalyptic destruction in an all-out nuclear war, either in a surprise first-strike or as an escalation of a conventional “proxy” conflict somewhere in the world. As strategists for each superpower warily studied the other’s moves, the two nations’ strategic bomber fleets, with their perceived nuclear delivery capabilities, were regarded on both sides as “deterrent” forces against the possibility of nuclear warfare. Hence, SAC’s motto, “Peace Is Our Profession,” while it

appears to be ironic in light of the destructive forces that SAC wielded, was actually a straightforward statement of SAC’s mission – that is, deterrence and defense.

The fact that the Cold War never flared into a “hot” war involving direct confrontation between the superpowers seems to have borne out the hoped-for deterrence through overwhelming potential force that lay behind the motto. The idea supporting this mission of deterrence and defense was “mutually assured destruction,” or MAD, as United States policymakers of the 1950s called it. Behind the decades of mutual deterrence between superpowers lies a story of a long and intricate chess match, one that involved world leaders and policy-makers moving military pieces across a global board. One of the most important of those pieces was SAC.

Beginning in the late 1950s, in response to the nuclear threat from the Soviet Union, USAF bases all over the United States became home to a new kind of unit, called a “SAC Alert Wing.” Depending on the size and make-up of the bases, these were comprised of air tankers, that is, planes that were used to fuel intercontinental bombers in mid-flight, and of the strategic bombers that carried nuclear armaments to enemy targets. At first the bombers were propeller-driven aircraft, the most important (and largest) of which was the Convair B-36. Later aircraft included the B-47, the first mid-sized swept-wing jet bomber, and

The Strategic Air Command Emblem.
Source: Development of Strategic Air
Command 1946-1986.



the signature aircraft of the Cold War, the giant B-52 Stratofortress. SAC also commanded the “Looking Glass” Post-Attack Command and Control (PACC) aircraft. These were airborne Air Combat Command posts that were intended to provide logistical direction and communications capabilities for SAC in the event of nuclear war. Looking Glass aircraft were based at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, Nebraska. The tankers used for in-flight fueling were the propeller-driven KC-95 and then later the jet-propelled KC-135. In the early years, before the advent of the B-47 and B-52 in the mid-1950s, SAC also maintained fighter escort wings to help protect the lumbering propeller-driven bombers from enemy fighter attacks.

This history tells the story of Eglin Air Force Base’s SAC Alert Wing and the SAC Alert area that it built there. The SAC Alert Wing, known for most of its existence as the 4135th Strategic Wing, built the SAC Alert area at the base from the ground up, beginning in the late 1950s. It housed at least seventy of its men at a time in a crew readiness alert quarters at the base, and maintained its aircraft and ordnance nearby. Then, by 1965, the SAC Wing was gone, replaced at its existing facilities by the 33d Tactical Fighter Wing of Tactical Air Command (TAC). Eglin Air Force Base’s SAC Alert Wing was unique, since it was the first in the USAF to receive the Hound Dog-Quail missile tandem, a pairing of a nuclear-tipped cruise missile (the GAM-77, or Hound Dog), and a “drone” decoy missile (the GAM-72, or Quail). The Eglin Air Force Base SAC Alert Wing was also the first unit to receive the B-52G aircraft, the

second-to-last production model of the B-52, which was specially equipped for the purpose of carrying the GAM-72 and GAM-77. The placement of this test mission at Eglin Air Force Base, under the host command of Air Research and Development (ARDC), was in keeping with Eglin’s role as the USAF’s main proving ground for aircraft and munitions systems.

In many ways, the story of the 4135th Strategic Wing at Eglin Air Force Base is a microcosm of the story of SAC when its primary mission was to provide deterrence against nuclear war through its strategic bomber force. For the seven years of the SAC mission at Eglin from 1958 to 1965, most of the same men lived and worked in the same facilities, and they flew together in their B-52s, patrolling the skies over the northern hemisphere, prepared to go to war if the call came. They developed a closeness that for many of them continues to this day, in the form of monthly reunions at the Officer’s Club at Eglin Air Force Base, more than forty years after the 4135th SAC Wing was inactivated and its facilities turned over to a TAC fighter wing.

“Those were truly wonderful times,” remembers former B-52 pilot Tom Goodwin, a regular attendee at the SAC reunions at Eglin Air Force Base. “I think that any history of the 4135th should take care to mention that we were all very close to each other – we had a wonderful sense of companionship and camaraderie that came out of those years together, and it continues to this day.”

SAC TIMELINE

- December 15, 1944: Continental Air Forces (CAF, predecessor to SAC) activated
- March 21, 1946: USAAF (United States Army Air Forces) Divided into Tactical Air Command (TAC), Air Defense Command (ADC), and Strategic Air Command (SAC).
- September 18, 1947: U.S. Air Force (USAF) is established, replacing U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF).
- October 19, 1948: Lt. General Curtis LeMay takes command of SAC.
- October 25, 1948: Boeing presents Air Force with proposal for B-52s powered by 8 jet engines. The B-52 will become the signature aircraft of SAC.
- April 15, 1952: YB-52 prototype makes first flight, in Seattle, Washington.
- June 29, 1955: First SAC B-52 Aircraft delivered to 93d Bomb Wing at Castle Air Force Base, California.
- 1957: General Curtis LeMay leaves SAC to become USAF Vice Chief of Staff. Succeeded by General Thomas S. Power.
- December 1, 1958: SAC 4135th Strategic Wing designated at Eglin Air Force Base.
- May, 1960: 4135th Strategic Wing at Eglin increased from 3 to 5 crews and B-52 aircraft on alert status.
- October, 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis. Eglin's SAC Alert Wing on High Alert during weeks of the standoff.
- 1963: SAC 4135th Strategic Wing redesignated the SAC 39th Bomb Wing.
- 1964: General Power Succeeded by General John Ryan.
- June 1965: SAC Alert leaves Eglin AFB; SAC Alert area becomes a TAC area (33 d Tactical Fighter Wing and Subordinate Units: 4th, 16th, 25th, and 40th Squadrons).
- 1989-1991: Collapse of the Soviet Bloc; End of the Cold War.
- 1992: SAC and TAC replaced by Air Combat Command (ACC).



USAF Roundel. Source: United States Air Force

THE ORIGINS OF SAC



Hap Arnold. Source: United States Air Force.

SAC had its roots in the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) that evolved over the course of World War II. Until 1943 the USAAF was known as the "Army Air Corps." By war's end, it had evolved in importance and prestige to the point that it was a nearly autonomous military branch. It had developed

rapidly under the command of General Henry "Hap" Arnold, an officer whose own flight training came under the Wright brothers, and who had guided the USAAF since the beginning of the war.

General Arnold transformed the USAAF into a fearsome weapon that brought enormous firepower to bear on German and Japanese civilian, industrial, and military targets. The USAAF employed long-range bombers that could deliver large conventional payloads to targets with an accuracy that had greatly improved by war's end. By VJ-Day, due to many advances in military technology and tactics, air power had emerged as

the pre-eminent offensive weapon at the military's disposal, to the extent that some military commanders had already begun to proclaim that ground forces would soon be obsolete. Their confidence in this notion seemed to be borne out by the course of the war's final months: The USAAF played a decisive role in the events that brought the war to an end, delivering crippling blows to military and industrial centers in Japan through strategic incendiary bombing, and then dropping the atomic bombs in August 1945, using the new long-range B-29 bomber.

After the war's end, on March 21, 1946, the USAAF was divided into three major commands: Strategic Air Command (SAC), Tactical Air Command (TAC), and



Air Defense Command (ADC). SAC was based at Bolling Air Force Base, near Washington, D.C. Its first commander was General George F. Kenney.

In October of that year, its headquarters was moved to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. Barely two years after the end of the Second World War, on September 18, 1947, the USAAF became the United States Air Force (USAF) – the last independent branch of the United States military services to be formed. The three major commands were kept intact as distinct units with important, distinctive responsibilities within the USAF. Simply expressed, TAC was in charge of battlefield support for ground forces, most often employing smaller "interceptor" or fighter aircraft (hence the



(Left) B-29 Bomber. Source: *Development of Strategic Air Command 1946-1986*. **(Above) General George F. Kenney.** Source: *Headquarters, Strategic Air Command, Key Personnel*.

“Tactical” part of its name). ADC was in charge of the air defense of the continental United States. And SAC was the unit responsible for offensive air strikes against targets in the enemy’s homeland, which meant that the major part of its arsenal consisted of long-range “strategic” bombers.

Perhaps the most important single event in the history of SAC was when General Curtis E. LeMay became the overall commanding officer for SAC, on October 19, 1948. A gruff, hardworking, no-nonsense leader, LeMay had been the commander of the 600 B-29s that had been deployed for the decisive strategic bombing attacks on the Japanese homeland that helped to hasten the end of the Second World War.



B-29s releasing bombs. Source: United States Air Force.

GENERAL CURTIS E. LEMAY AND THE GROWTH OF SAC

In many important ways, the story of General Curtis Emerson LeMay (1906-1990) is the story of SAC. LeMay, who transformed SAC from an undermanned, under-trained, and under-equipped division of the United States Air Force to a quick-strike nuclear delivery

force capable of destroying up to seventy Soviet cities, was already highly distinguished when he earned the command in 1949. The son of a Columbus, Ohio, ironworker, LeMay rose from humble origins to military greatness in a meteoric career that spanned most of the twentieth century. A civil engineer by college training, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Corps Reserve in 1929, and first distinguished himself by locating and “water-bombing” the battleship Utah during military exercises off the coast of California, despite being given the wrong coordinates by the Navy.

The Second World War brought rapid advancement and promotions for the ambitious LeMay. Beginning with the rank of captain in 1940, LeMay received a series of promotions as he distinguished himself in combat, and by 1945 he was a Major General in the Army Air Forces. By this time, as the leader of the Army Air Forces’ strategic bombing of the Japanese homeland, LeMay had masterminded incendiary bombing raids designed to sap the Japanese will and bring the war to a more rapid conclusion. But when the continued devastation to their cities did not alter Japanese resolve, and a land invasion of the Japanese archipelago by American forces seemed inevitable, the atomic bombs were finally dropped to end the war.

In 1948-1949, LeMay personally supervised the Berlin Airlift to bring supplies to the besieged citizens of West Berlin. The Berlin Airlift was instigated by the Soviet blockade of land routes to West Berlin through the surrounding Communist-held areas of East Germany. By the end of the operation in 1949, the Berlin Airlift had transported the per capita equivalent of one ton of food and supplies into the city for every West Berliner, before the Soviets relented and reopened land supply routes through East Germany.



General Curtis LeMay. Source: *Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command 1957-1991*.

In 1948 LeMay was again promoted, this time to head up SAC. As the architect of the U.S. strategic bombings of Japan in the final months of the war, LeMay was the ideal commander for SAC's mission. SAC had languished since its formation after the end of the war. It suffered partly from the massive post-war personnel and materiel drawdown due to budget cuts as the nation transitioned to peacetime. LeMay worked furiously to reverse SAC's decline and provide a force that would protect the U.S. from the new Soviet nuclear threat. He saw to it that the B-29 was replaced by the Convair B-36 bomber, the first true intercontinental bomber. By the early 1950s, LeMay had supplemented the B-36 bomber force with a speedier mid-range jet bomber, the Boeing B-47, and eventually replaced the B-36 with a more nimble jet-powered long-range bomber, the Boeing B-52.

Meanwhile, the ambitious LeMay's string of promotions continued. When LeMay left SAC to become Vice Chief of Staff for the USAF, in 1957, SAC's role as the

centerpiece of nuclear deterrence was fully established, much of it by virtue of LeMay's hard work and force of personality. U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy was based on the idea that a long-range, quick-strike retaliatory force that was ready to destroy targets within the Soviet Union would deter the Soviets from striking the United States first. Long-range B-52 aircraft, armed with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles and thermonuclear bombs and waiting on concrete alert aprons across the United States, represented a formidable deterrent force, and likely prevented the Soviets from launching a preemptive strike against the United States.

LeMay became Chief of Staff of the Air Force in 1961. He held strong views on the superiority of a strategic, all-out approach to war, including the deployment of both manned aircraft carrying nuclear weapons and the ICBMs which later replaced bombers as the primary strategic weapon of the superpowers in the 1960s. But his views were already beginning to be eclipsed by the tactical, limited response-approach advocated by President Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. LeMay's disagreement with this tactical approach to warfare, and with the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, may have helped precipitate his retirement as Chief of Staff of the Air Force in 1965.

LeMay subsequently ran as the vice presidential half of the American Independent Party's ticket alongside Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1968. LeMay feared that Republican presidential nominee Richard Nixon would be "soft" on the Soviet Union, and ran with Wallace because he believed Wallace shared his views on taking a tough stance against the Soviets. Although the Wallace-LeMay ticket lost, it garnered over thirteen percent of the popular vote, and was one of the more successful third-party bids in recent American history.

THE AIRCRAFT OF SAC

From its establishment in 1946 until shortly after the end of the Cold War, SAC used an array of different aircraft through 1992, when its mission was discontinued. Aircraft of the early post-World War II era were mainly propeller planes; jet aircraft technology was still under development. Thus, early SAC planes were mainly piston-driven aircraft, falling into several categories, including attack and cargo planes, bombers, transport planes, command aircraft, fighters, tankers, reconnaissance planes, and trainers.

EARLY AIRCRAFT

Early bombers included the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, the largest of World War II bombers, which came on line in 1944 and was the primary aircraft used in the incendiary bombing of Japanese cities. Two specially designed B-29s also carried Fat Man and Little Boy, the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan. A direct descendent of the famed B-17 Superfortress, from which it got its nickname, the B-29 saw continued use up through the Korean War and into the 1960s. Several modifications of the B-29 ensued from the highly successful World War II aircraft, including the Boeing B-50 Superfortress, which is usually classed as a distinctly different model but which is an obvious successor to the B-29, but with larger, more powerful engines.

The aircraft that was at first tabbed as the successor to the B-29 Superfortress was the Convair B-36 – a “Very Very Heavy Bomber”



B-36 Peacemaker. Source: *Building a Strategic Air Force.*

(VVHB) that was the largest piston-engined aircraft ever mass-produced. Nicknamed the “Peacemaker,” the Convair B-36 had six “pusher” propeller engines mounted on the trailing edge of its swept-back wings and was the first long-range bomber with intercontinental range, capable of carrying a bomb payload of 72,000 pounds over 6,000 miles. Later, it also featured four jet engines in addition to its piston engines. The idea for the B-36 intercontinental bomber was conceived as early as 1941, when it appeared that if Britain fell, the United States would be left without bases in Europe from which to bomb Germany, therefore necessitating transoceanic bomber missions originating in North America. Until the B-52 became operational in the mid-to-late 1950s, the B-36 was the only aircraft that SAC could rely on to carry thermonuclear weapons to the Soviet Union.

An early propeller transport plane was the Boeing KC-97 Stratofreighter, which was used to carry cargo and to extend the long-range capabilities of bombers by acting as an in-flight refueling tanker. The slow KC-97 was even used to fuel jet aircraft through the middle 1950s, by employing a practice known as “tobogganing,” whereby the

B-50 Superfortress. Source: *Development of Strategic Air Command 1946-1986.*

KC-97 Stratofreighter. Source: *Building a Strategic Air Force*.



freighter and the jet aircraft would go into a shallow dive together, thus enabling the KC-97 to accelerate and keep pace with the jet to facilitate mid-air refueling.

SAC also employed the last of the propeller-driven fighters, including the F-82 Twin Mustang, which was a double-fuselage aircraft intended for use at the end of the war, but which did not come on line until 1946. Equipped with radar, it was the first aircraft to be used over North Korea by the USAF.

An early reconnaissance aircraft of the USAF was the Lockheed EC-121 Warning Star, which was used in the 1950s as a transport and reconnaissance plane; a modified version of this plane was used by the Eisenhower Administration as Air Force One. In the mid-1960s, this plane, which Howard Hughes helped design, was used as a radar surveillance aircraft over North Vietnam. In its civilian application, the Lockheed EC-121 became the basis for the Constellation series of airliners. It was discontinued in 1968.



Early training vehicles included the North American T-28 Air Force Trainer, of which thousands were produced from the late 1940s well into the 1960s. A two-place training plane, with room in the cockpit for a pilot-trainee and instructor, the T-28 was also used in tactical support in Vietnam during the 1960s. At almost the same time that T-28s began production, another, jet-propelled trainer, the famous Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star, also came on line. This plane was designed as a transitional trainer for pilots who were already proficient in flying propeller planes. T-33 Shooting Stars are still in use all over the world by many different air forces.

The next generation of planes employed by SAC and by the USAF would reflect the technological shift toward jet propulsion, and toward greater speed and range, and would also reflect the new emphasis on the 24-hour-a-day vigilance and readiness necessary to maintain the balance of power and deterrence in the Cold War era.

LATER AIRCRAFT

The beginning of the “jet age” for SAC really began with the B-47 Stratojet, which was a strategic mid-range, high-altitude bomber,

(Left) B-47 Stratojet. Source: *Post-World War II Bombers 1945-1973*. (Below) T-33 Shooting Star. Source: United States Air Force.





KC-135 Tanker. Source: *The Development of Strategic Air Command 1946-1986.*

the immediate predecessor to the B-52, and the model on which most subsequent swept-wing, multi-engine jet aircraft were built. The B-47, like the B-52, was a foundation of SAC Alert, and was employed at many SAC Alert bases. It was first used in active duty in 1953, two years before the B-52, and it set many speed records in its early years.

All B-47s, and the subsequent B-52s, that flew long missions requiring refueling in flight were serviced by KC-135s. Unlike the propeller-driven KC-97 Stratofreighter, which was the predecessor to the KC-135, the newer plane was a jet-propelled aircraft, and so did not need to perform maneuvers such as “tobogganing” to keep pace with the airborne jets that it refueled. During their longer missions, Eglin Air Force Base’s B-52s were refueled by KC-135s, although the tanker missions originated from other USAF bases. Like the B-52s, KC-135s are among the few aircraft in the world that have seen over fifty continuous years of military service; like the B-52s, they are still in service today.

No SAC history would be complete without mention of the Boeing EC-135, the Airborne Command Post plane, otherwise known as “Looking Glass.” These aircraft, of which there were several, were based



at SAC headquarters. Beginning in 1961, until the end of the Cold War, one of the “Looking Glass” aircraft was in the air twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with the purpose of providing coordination and communications for the SAC network in case of a nuclear attack. The presence of Looking Glass aircraft on constant airborne status ensured that there was always a mobile command post that could coordinate an attack response if the chain of command on the ground was broken or destroyed.

Save for the B-52, none of the aircraft mentioned here were stationed and deployed by SAC at Eglin Air Force Base. But the litany of airplanes that preceded the B-52 is testimony to the period of rapid adjustment and experimentation within SAC, as it evolved its methods of weapons delivery systems to make it into the most important and central of America’s strategic forces.

EC-135 Looking Glass Aircraft. Source: *Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command 1957-1991.*



Eglin Air Force Base B-52G, launching a Hound Dog Missile. Source: *Post-World War II Bombers 1945-1973*.

SIGNATURE AIRCRAFT OF SAC: THE B-52 STRATOFORTRESS

The signature aircraft of SAC, and arguably of the entire Cold War, was the Boeing B-52 bomber, which was powered by four double-clusters of turbojets at the leading edge of its swept-back wings. The B-52 could carry a large payload of conventional or nuclear bombs and missiles at speeds of nearly Mach 1, at altitudes of up to 55,000 feet. The B-52 has proved to be so durable, in fact, both as an aircraft and as a design, that it is still in service in the USAF today. It is one of only four aircraft designs in the world to be in continuous use for at least the past fifty years. Its affectionate nickname is the Big Ugly Fat Fellow, or "BUFF." (Some maintain that the final "F" stands for something else.)

B-52s were a direct outgrowth of the Boeing B-47 Stratojet program. B-47s were another backbone plane of SAC, and its design, with swept-back wings and engines hung on pylons from the wings, became the basis for subsequent bomber designs and for most modern passenger airliners as well.

Eglin SAC Alert pilot Tom Goodwin, who had experience flying previous SAC aircraft, recalls the B-52's advent with genuine fondness. "I flew B-36s before coming to Eglin," he said. "They would take forever to achieve any kind of altitude. . . The B-52, on the other hand, would climb with a full load to 35,000 feet in what seemed like no time at all."

After they came into service in the mid-1950s, B-52 Stratofortresses were the mainstay of SAC, and were used as the primary instrument of nuclear deterrence before ICBMs replaced them in this capacity in the latter part of the 1960s. B-52s continued to be used during the Vietnam War as a high altitude bomber employing conventional ordnance, and thousands of sorties were also flown in the Gulf War in the early 1990s, as well as in Afghanistan and in the Iraq War of the 2000s. During these latter conflicts, in fact, B-52s logged the longest bombing missions in history, in at least one case flying 14,000 statute miles over 35 hours through the mission's completion.

The United States Air Force plans to continue to use B-52s through the year 2040. From prototype development through the B-52H, at least 700 planes have been manufactured in thirteen different models since the first test model, the YB-52, was flown in 1952. They have ranged from two XB-52s, which were prototypes adapted from the single YB-52, through subsequent versions to the 100 B-52Hs that were produced beginning in 1961.

B-52S AT EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE: SAC ALERT

Lt. Colonel Clyde Morehouse, who was assigned to Eglin's SAC Alert mission from its inception in 1958 to the time of the SAC Alert area's conversion into a TAC area, recalls the "G" models of the B-52, the second to the last Stratofortress model to be manufactured by the Boeing Company of Seattle, Washington. The B-52G was the aircraft that was used at Eglin's SAC Alert area by the 4135th Strategic Wing.

"They really did give us a marvelous aircraft to fly," Morehouse said. "The B-52G was a terrific plane."

The importance of the "G" model lay in the fact that these were the first B-52s that could carry and launch cruise missiles, from pylons under each wing. The first B-52Gs were delivered to Eglin Air Force Base's SAC Alert mission for the purpose

of trying out its missile-carrying capability. The GAM-77, the Hound Dog cruise missile, was unique in that it could not only be carried on armatures under each wing of the “BUFF,” it could also supplement the “lift” power of the aircraft by adding its own engine thrust to that of the four double-clusters of Pratt & Whitney turbojet engines, giving the B-52G model a potential total of ten engines that could be used simultaneously.

The GAM-72 was an additional missile carried by the B-52, and was part of a “tandem” with the GAM-77. While the GAM-77 was an

offensive, nuclear-tipped cruise missile, the GAM-72 was a type of “drone” missile – a “decoy” that would lead enemy radar to believe that not one, but an entire formation of B-52s was approaching, and thus confuse enemy anti-aircraft targeting capabilities.

The B-52G models were used up until the first Gulf War, in which they flew conventional gravity-bombing sorties. Because it was a missile-launching platform, the B-52G was discontinued as a result of the Strategic Arms Limitations (SALT) II agreement in 1991. All that remain today are B-52H models, which are still employed by the Air Force.

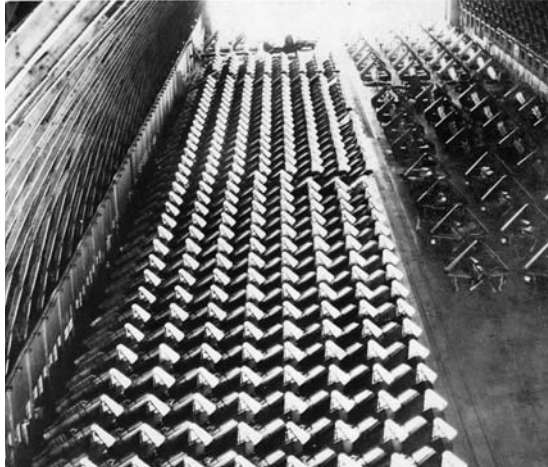
SIZING UP THE B-52

- Wingspan: 185 ft.
- Length: 157 ft. 7 in.
- Height: 40 ft 8 in.
- Wing area: 4,000 ft sq
- Powered by: Eight Pratt & Whitney J57-P-43W turbojets (B-52G model).
- B-52 crew complement: six members -- two pilots, a navigator, a radar navigator, an electronic warfare operator, and a gunner.
- Fuel capacity: 46,000 lbs
- Weight (empty): 195,000 lbs
- Bomb capacity: 60,000 lbs
- Bomb capacity, long-range flights: 43,500 lbs
- Cruising speed at altitude: 509 mph
- Maximum speed at altitude: 595 mph
- Takeoff run: 9,500 ft
- Ceiling: 55,000 ft
- Range with 30,000 lb payload, no refueling: 7,139 miles (B-52G)
- Range, with one refueling: 8,982 miles (B-52G)



Diagram of a B-52. Source: *Post World War II Bombers 1945-1973* .

THE EARLY COLD WAR



Surplus World War II Aircraft, Stored at a Dirigible Hangar in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Source: Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

After World War II, all branches of the military experienced a massive drawdown in personnel and equipment, as the nation prepared for peacetime and a new era of prosperity. Although prosperity did come to America in the post-war era, the hoped-for peace was not to be. Following the surrender of Germany and Japan, a new threat began to emerge in the

world, as the Western powers struggled with their former Soviet allies over management of the post-war world. The U.S.S.R. controlled vast territories in eastern Europe as a result of its push toward Berlin in the closing months of the war. New Soviet satellite states were established in these territories in the post-war years, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's expansionist ambitions were at odds with the western Allies' efforts to re-establish peaceful democracies among the war-torn nations of Europe. It became evident to leaders in the West that new military strength, using new technology and new strategies, would be necessary to counterbalance the growing threat from the Soviet Union.

When General Curtis LeMay took command of SAC in 1948, he began to transform it into the main strategic arm of the entire United States military apparatus. LeMay was a great believer in the strategic importance of air power in maintaining military superiority. He also believed that the primary weapons in the USAF's arsenal should be manned bombers that could destroy military and civilian targets in the enemy's heartland. At the beginning of LeMay's command, however, SAC was only a remnant of the force that it was at the end of World War II. In addition, as LeMay worked to rebuild it during the 1948-1955



The Big Three at Yalta, 1945 – L-R: Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin. Source: The National Archive.

An Eglin B-52 Crew Posing with a Hound Dog Missile. Source: Chuck Hargrave.



period, SAC deployed large numbers of bombers and tankers at only a few bases in the United States. This led to some potentially undesirable results.

“A single base would hold two SAC wings – which meant 50 bombers to a wing – and two squadrons of tankers – which meant 30 or so tankers per squadron,” recalled retired Lt. Colonel George Meyers, a B-52 pilot who served in Eglin Air Force Base’s SAC Alert Wing from 1958 until 1965. “It became evident that having so many aircraft concentrated at a few air bases left the aircraft vulnerable to enemy strikes – they could destroy many planes on the ground with a single attack. Also, when you had that many aircraft at one base, it took a long time for all of them to get off the ground.”



As Meyers tells it, USAF strategists began to think about new ways both to protect the aircraft on the ground and also to get them into the air more quickly in the event of a “scramble.” “The thought pattern was that having a smaller ‘SAC Alert Wing’ consisting of maybe fifteen planes would



B-52 with Hound Dog missile under each wing, taking off. Source: United States Air Force.

be conducive to having a faster take-off for the group from one air base,” said Meyers. “And it would make it harder for the enemy to target all of the SAC bases, since they would be dispersed around the country.”

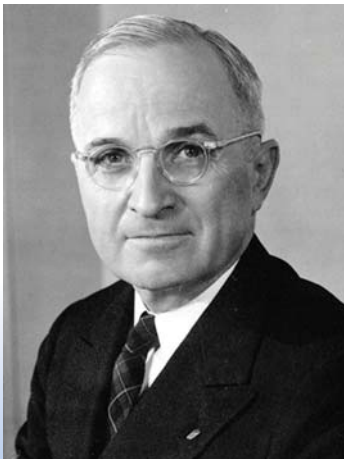
According to Meyers, the resulting smaller, “dispersed” SAC Alert Wings – along with the development of the B-52 – were perhaps the most important innovations of the SAC era, which made possible a quick-strike alert force distributed across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada.

The new SAC Alert Wing concept began to be deployed in the latter part of the 1950s, as B-52s began to be delivered in numbers to SAC. It would be late 1958 before the SAC Alert concept came to Eglin Air Force Base. By that time, the newest version of the B-52 – the B-52G model – would be delivered to Eglin Air Force Base, for a special mission and purpose. The B-52G was the first of the B-52s to be deployed as a missile carrier and launcher.

The arrival of the SAC Wing at Eglin would also entail a build-up of men and facilities to accommodate them. By December of 1958, when the first men began to report to Eglin Air Force Base, that process had already begun.

ESCALATING COLD WAR TENSIONS

The events that heightened SAC's importance as a strategic component in nuclear deterrence – and as a central player in what came to be known as Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD – came about in the later 1940s and early 1950s, when the Soviets demonstrated first that they had the atomic bomb in 1949, ending the U.S. nuclear monopoly, and then within four years demonstrating that they also had the hydrogen bomb. During this time the Soviets also revealed that they had aircraft capable of delivering long-range strategic strikes within the United States. By the mid-1950s, it appeared that the Soviet Union not only had thermonuclear weapons, it could also drop them on American cities.



Harry S Truman.



Tu-95 "Bear," the Soviet Bomber that was the Cold War Counterpart to the B-52. Escorted by a USAF F-18 "Hornet" (Foreground). Source: Department of Defense.

In the years immediately following World War II, the Truman Administration moved quickly to counter what it perceived as Soviet aggression in several global spheres, including not only in weapons development, but also in the Soviets' strong disagreement with the Western powers on how to manage the post-war world. Truman's policy of "containment" (called the "Truman Doctrine"), announced in 1949, was augmented by the Eisenhower Administration's policy of MAD -- which depended on a scenario of the possibility of all-out nuclear war acting as a "deterrent" to such a war being initiated. The MAD scenario led to what some critics felt was an unsustainable and undesirable long-term stand-off between the superpowers, based as it was on each superpower's skepticism about the other's willingness to retaliate with nuclear arms for localized adventurism in third-party nations. But Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, his Secretary of State, believed that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were settling into a prolonged era of deterrence, and thus believed it was necessary to devise a strategy for either first-strike pre-emptive attack forces or retaliatory attack forces, able to respond to a "scramble" call at a moment's notice.

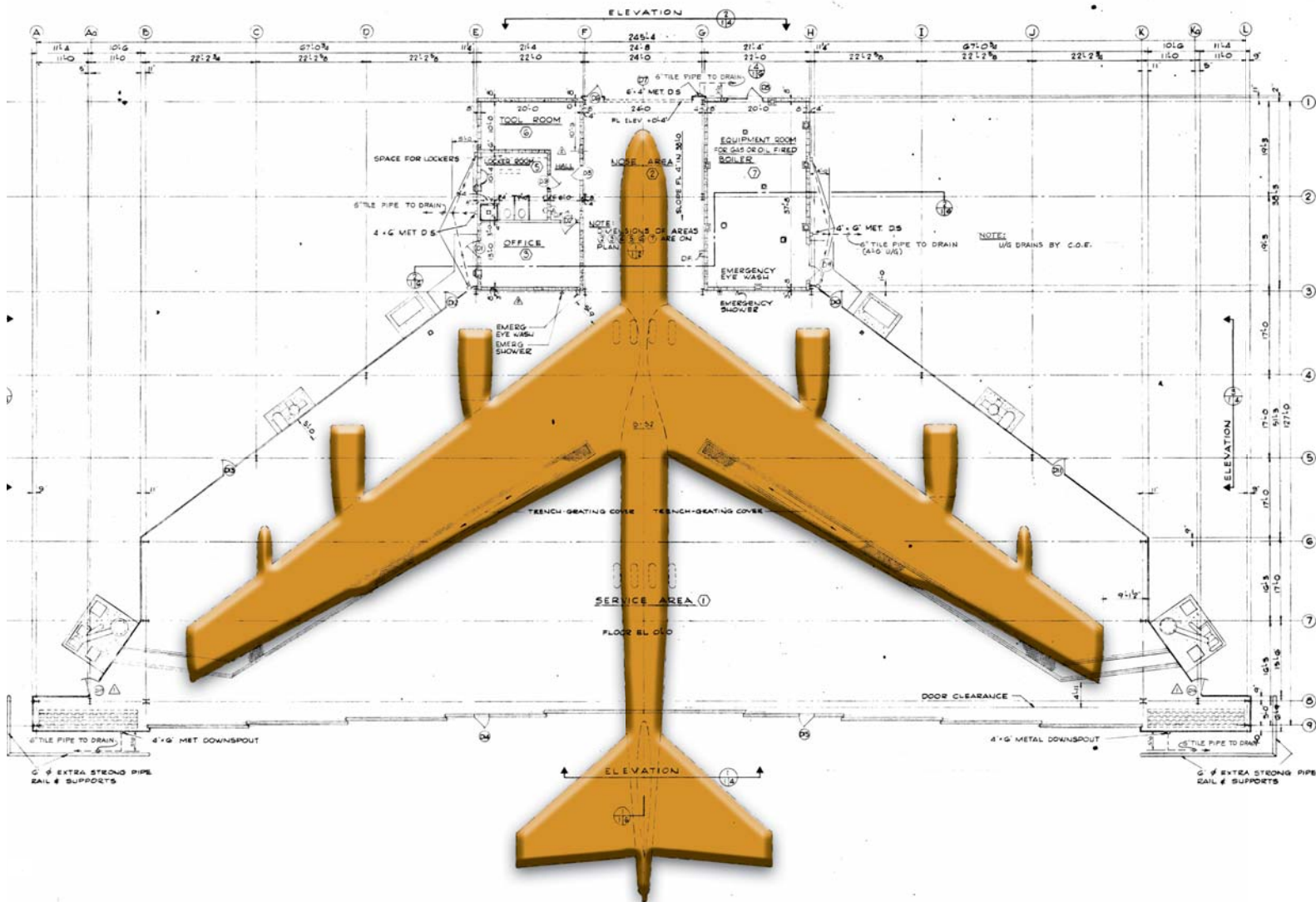
SAC Alert was developed and deployed beginning in the late-1950s, with the newly operational long-range B-52 bomber envisioned as the principal weapons-delivery system of the long-term mission. B-52s would essentially remain on alert at SAC bases indefinitely, trading duties on a rotating basis with other B-52s that would cruise within striking distance of the Soviet Union, ready to launch nuclear attacks against Soviet targets.

During ensuing political and diplomatic crises such as the building of the Berlin Wall (began in 1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), SAC would put its bases on heightened alert a number of times. Fortunately SAC aircraft never did have to deliver nuclear weapons to their strategic targets, but for many years they were prepared to do just that.



Building 1339 Today. (Source: Field Photo).

Building 1339 Drawing, Showing Outline of B-52 in Hangar. (Source: Eglin Air Force Base, Cultural Resources Division).



SAC AT EGLIN AFB

The advent of the earlier-model B-52 bombers in the mid-1950s had signified two important developments for SAC: the end of the necessity for fighter escorts for long-range heavy bombers, and the arrival of a plane that could carry thermonuclear bombs while significantly outperforming the huge and ungainly Convair B-36. Up until that time, the B-36's lesser speed had necessitated the presence of fighter wings in SAC.

At the same time that the first B-52 "G" model aircraft were rolling off the assembly line and being delivered to Eglin Air Force Base in late 1958, personnel from other stations also began to arrive at the base, prepared to fill the ranks of the newly designated 4135th Strategic Wing. Because these men arrived at the SAC Alert area before its facilities had been finished, they were housed at first in dormitories on the base.

The SAC Alert area at Eglin, activated in December of 1958, had much the appearance of many other SAC Alert areas that were coming online at the same time around the country and in Canada and Puerto Rico, where the smaller, dispersed SAC Alert Wings were being deployed by the USAF. During the heyday of SAC Alert missions, the basic pattern for a SAC

Alert area was as follows: the aircraft at a SAC facility were arranged along a "Christmas tree alert apron," a herringbone-shaped concrete taxiway with a number of angled "stubs" on which the aircraft waited. The herringbone pattern allowed planes to move toward the runway and take off quickly. Bomber crews and, if present, tanker crews lived in nearby "readiness crew quarters," from which the airmen were "scrambled" during a ready alert. At SAC Alert areas around the nation, there was also an array of other support buildings, including missile magazines and maintenance nose-docks, which in some cases contained a B-52 training simulator.

**Emblem of the 4135th Strategic Wing.
Source: Chuck Hargrave.**

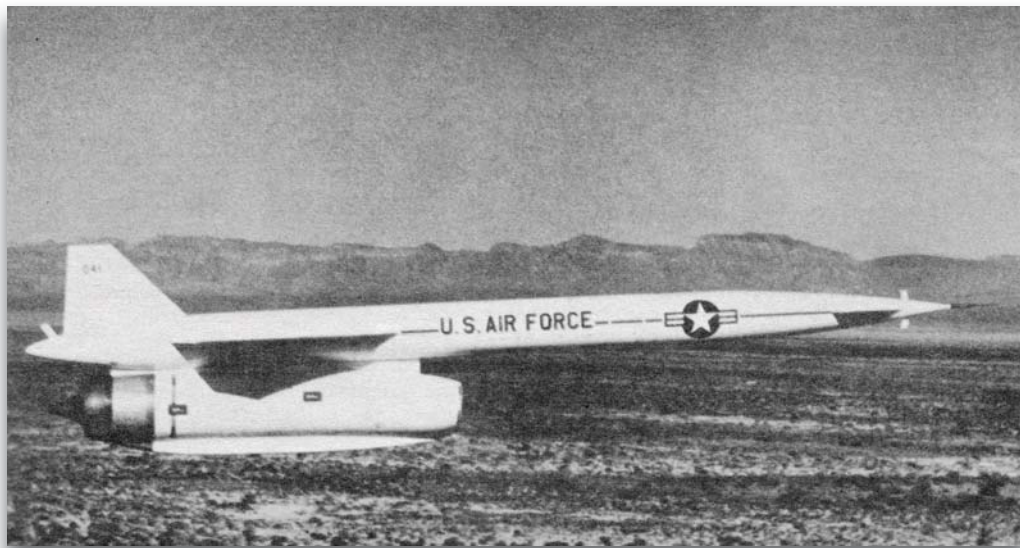


A B-52G taking off. Source: United States Air Force.



The 4135th Strategic Wing, newly designated in December 1958 for its duty at Eglin Air Force Base, had "tenant" status at the base, which meant that another unit was the "host" unit. The host command unit at Eglin Air Force Base was, from December 1957 until the end of the Cold War, the Air Research

accommodate them. At the northwest end of this runway the Christmas tree concrete apron, known at Eglin Air Force Base as Taxiway C, was built. This consisted of five "stubs" upon which the B-52s stood in ready, or "cocked" position; because four of the stubs were angled at forty-five degrees (instead of ninety-degrees)



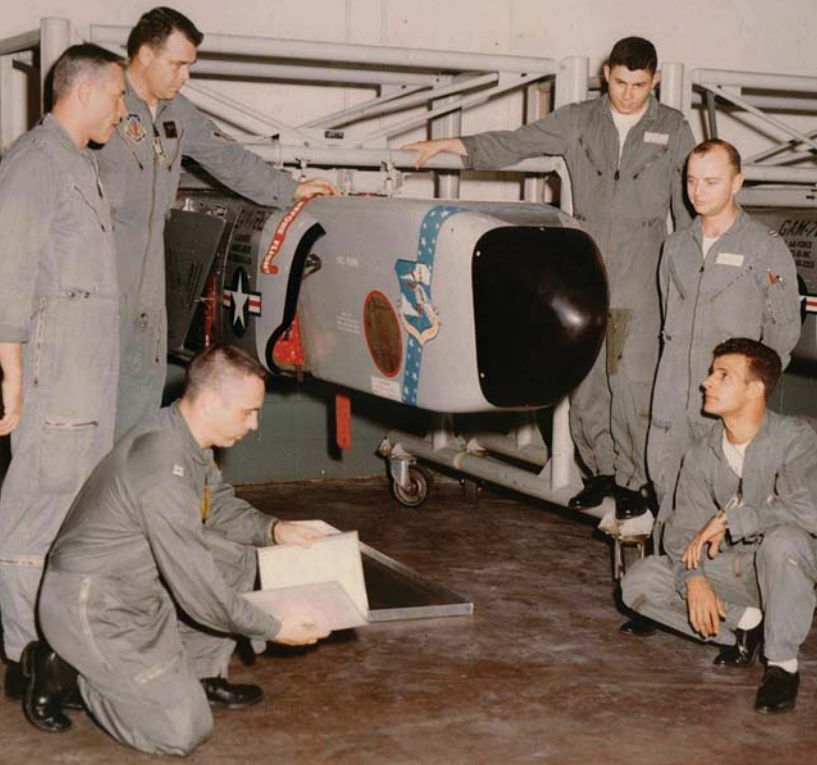
& Development Command (which became Air Force Systems Command in 1963), in keeping with Eglin Air Force Base's role as the testing and proving ground for USAF aircraft and munitions systems.

Eglin Air Force Base's SAC Alert mission played a pioneering role in systems testing. Not only was it the first out of the sixty-five SAC Alert Wings in North America to employ the B-52G, it was also the first to try out the Hound Dog-Quail missile tandem.

All of the buildings and structures that composed the SAC Alert area at Eglin were built between 1958 and 1961, at Eglin's Main Air Field. Because B-52s were large aircraft that required runways of 12,000 feet in length, Eglin's 10,000-foot-long northwest-southeast runway was lengthened to 12,000 feet to

to Taxiway C, the aircraft could taxi more quickly from their parked positions to the end of the runway. The fifth stub formed the "base" or "trunk" of the Christmas tree pattern, and was in line with the taxiway.

The airmen on Ground Alert status lived in the readiness crew quarters, which was to the immediate east of Taxiway C. This special building, which consisted of a ground story and an underground story, was more commonly known as a "Mole Hole," because its exits from the underground story were corrugated steel tunnels angling upward from the underground story to the edge of the taxiway. These ramps were included in the Mole Hole's design so that aircrews would not have to negotiate stairs as they hurried from their living quarters toward the waiting planes during a ready alert.



(Left) Hound Dog missile. Source: *The Development of Strategic Air Command, 1946-1986*. (Above) Bill Anderson's flight crew examines a Quail missile. Source: Bill Anderson.

To the south of Taxiway C and the Mole Hole was constructed the maintenance area for the aircraft. This consisted of Taxiway A, a large concrete apron with five stubs leading to three large "nose docks" or hangars (Buildings 1343, 1344, and 1345), plus a fourth hangar (Building 1339) that was a fuel systems nose dock. The "nose docks" were so named because they could accommodate the front end of the fuselage of the B-52, but were not large enough to accommodate the entire airframe of the huge bomber.

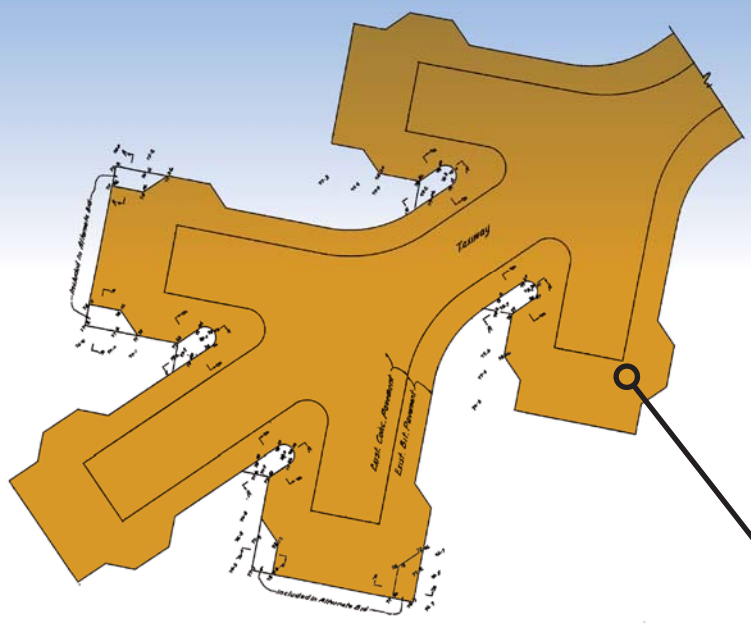
Also constructed in the vicinity of these nose docks were more shops and operations buildings. These are the squadron operations and target intelligence facility (Building 1315); an armament and electronics shop (Building 1328); a Quail run-up shop, where Quail missiles were readied for deployment (Building 1351); and a service shop for Hound Dog and Quail missiles (Building 1352). In this area there was also a supply and equipment warehouse (Building 1321) and an oil and grease storage building (Building 1341). The pilots and crews spent most of their duty time divided between the Mole Hole and the squadron operations building, where they studied for their regular ten-hour flight missions.

In another area, two miles to the northeast of Taxiway A and Taxiway C, were the storage buildings for the Hound Dog nuclear-tipped cruise missile. Buildings 1285, 1286, and 1287 were part of an ordnance area purposely segregated from the others for the storage, checkout, and assembly of the nuclear weapons. Building 1285 contained the checkout and assembly rooms, with a high-bayed area for the actual missile checkout, and lower-ceilinged control rooms bracketing the checkout room to either side. Buildings 1286 and 1287, both long, single-story reinforced concrete buildings with a series of roll-up metal doors on each long-side elevation, contained bunkered storage bays in which the Hound Dog missiles were secured when they were not in use on B-52 aircraft.

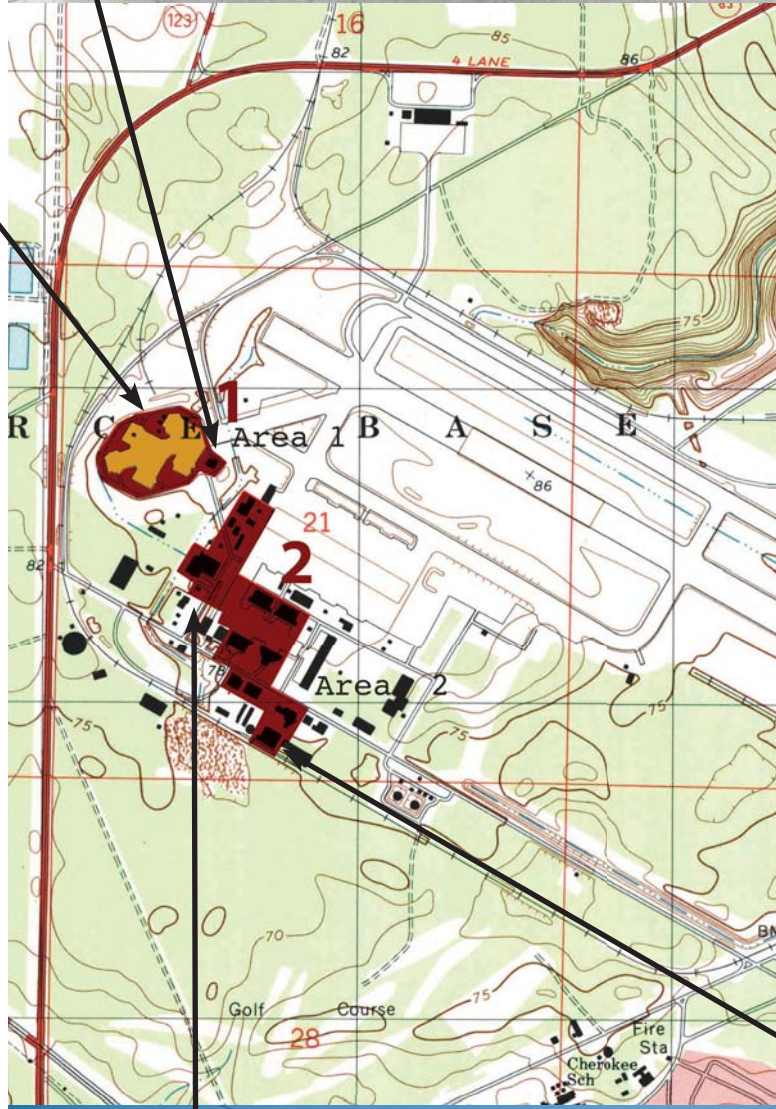
Colonel George Meyers recalled that the security that was imposed on the nuclear missiles while in storage was extensive and impressive. "You had to 'check out' the missiles to take them aboard the B-52s," he said. "We had a system in place to make sure that the nuclear weapons could not be misused. The security was really quite extraordinary." Not only did the missiles have to be "checked out" of their bunkered and locked magazines, they also had to be carefully moved two miles to the area where the B-52s waited to be loaded with armaments.

The intensive security measures continued once the missiles were brought on board the aircraft. "It took at least three different crewmembers to sign off on the arming and use of a nuclear missile," Colonel Meyers said. "There really was no opportunity for someone to 'go renegade' and start a nuclear war all by himself."

A

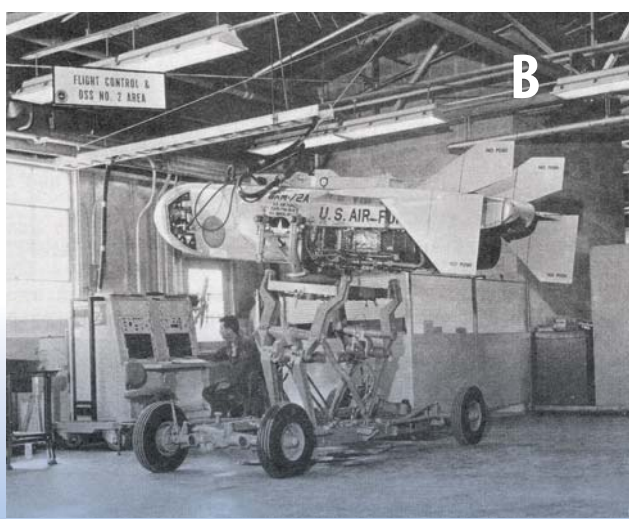


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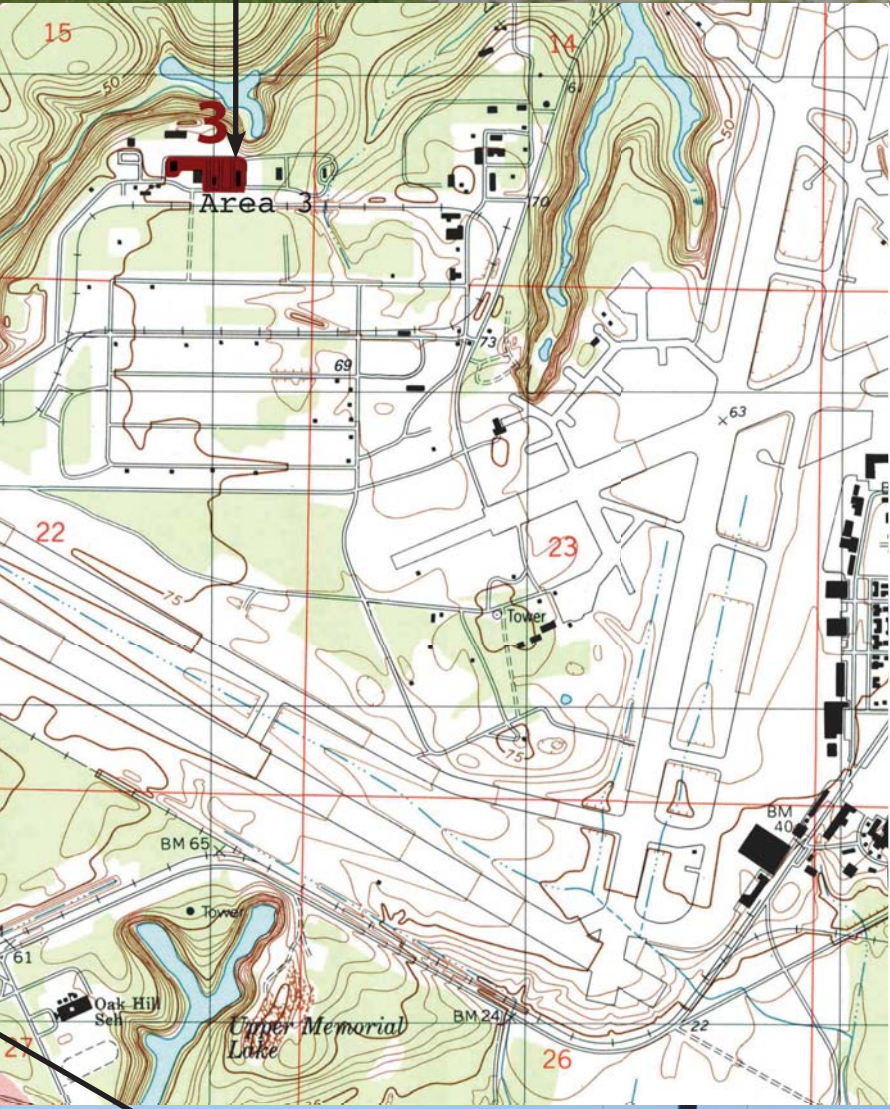
- AREA 1: Christmas Tree Alert Pattern and Mole Hole.**
- AREA 2: Maintenance Area, Including Nose Docks.**
- AREA 3: Ordnance Storage and Checkout Facilities.**

B



C





- A Concrete Alert Pattern (Christmas Tree).
- B Typical Quail Missile Checkout.
- C Area 2: Building 1352. Hound Dog and Quail Service Shop, as it Appears Today.
- D Mole Hole at Elgin Airforce Base, in 2000.
- E Area 3: Building 1287 Today. Hound Dog Missile Storage Facility.
- F Area 2: Building 1315 Today, Squadron Operations and Target Intelligence Facility Today.





BEDROOM SKULL SESSION -- Part of the planning behind every bomber mission gets done in comfort by Capt. Gordon R. Blenis (left), pilot, and Capt. Albert L. Thompson, electronic warfare officer.



HOME LAUNDRY -- Clean clothes are no problem, thanks to this washer-dryer combination. Giving it a whirl are MSgts. Richard E. Williams (left) and Oscar J. Smith, tail gunners on two of the SAC crews.

The routines of the B-52 crews were regular, but they were anything but dull. Ground alert, during which flight crews lived in the Mole Hole, lasted from early Thursday morning to the same hour of the following Thursday. While living in the Mole Hole, the crews stayed in dorm rooms with space for two men per room.

Following their seven-day ground alert duty, the flight crews would get from Thursday to Sunday off, and then return on a Monday for a brief intensive period

of study, during which they would prepare for a flight mission. During the course of the week following their return they would fly one or two ten-hour missions.

Much of the routine while crews were on ground alert and living in the Mole Hole centered around "practice alerts." These could come at any time of the day or night during the seven-day period that the crews were on ground alert. At times the men would be "scrambled" just to run out to their planes and get them ready to fly before the alert was called off. At other times, they would be required to taxi the planes out to the runway before the alert was cancelled.



Lt. Colonel Clyde Morehouse, a retired SAC B-52 pilot who was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base from 1958 to 1965, recalls the practice alerts. "Sometimes the alert call would come at three o'clock in the morning," said Morehouse. "It didn't matter – you still had to run out through the tunnels of the Mole Hole and out to the waiting aircraft. An ideal time-frame within which to get the call, get out to the plane, and get it ready to take off was about fifteen minutes."

Bill Anderson's Flight Crew Attending a Mission Briefing. Source: Bill Anderson.

(Left) News Clipping, Showing Photos of Men Relaxing in Mole Hole at Eglin Air Force Base. Source: Chuck Hargrave. (Right) B-52 Being Refueled in Mid-air. A Fuel Boom from a Tanker is Attached to the Top of the B-52's Fuselage. Source: United States Air Force.

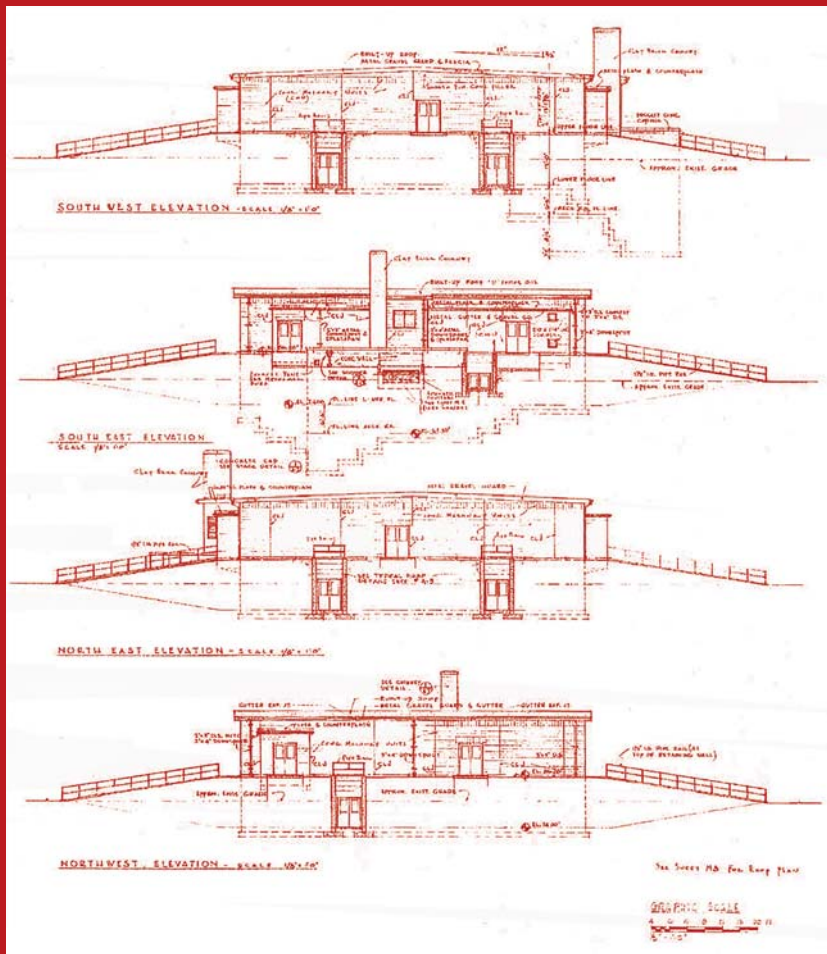


Some of the regular flight exercises that the men performed included an operation known as "Chrome Dome," in which B-52 aircraft armed with nuclear weapons flew to points near the Soviet Union and cruised nearby for a period of time, so that readiness to attack targets within the U.S.S.R. was always maintained. For the crews at Eglin Air Force Base, Chrome Dome missions meant flying their armed B-52s across the Atlantic Ocean to Spain, where the Stratofortresses were twice refueled by KC-135 tankers as they "orbited" over the Iberian Peninsula, and then returned to Eglin Air Force Base. Chrome Dome exercises were routinely repeated, as were other exercises in which crews flew over the United States, into Canada, over the Caribbean, and to other points. Some operations also involved flyovers of the U.S. Army's Nike missile installations in the United States, in which the B-52s would pretend to be Soviet strategic bombers in order to participate in an exercise with the crews of the defensive anti-aircraft missile installations.

Leave time for the airmen at Eglin Air Force Base was variable and depended on how much active duty the

men had performed. Colonel Morehouse recalls that the duty, with study periods and time off accounted for, was quite easy, so that the crewmembers were not unduly "stressed out" over time by the routines of alert duty.

The one time that Colonel Morehouse recalled as being particularly stressful was the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. The missile crisis would prove to be a watershed event in the history of SAC. It was the only time in SAC history that its alert status reached DEFCON-2 – the level of alert immediately below that of actual combat for the armed forces of the United States. Of this time, which lasted for a period of weeks, Morehouse said, "We really didn't know whether we would see our families again."



SAC ALERT MOLE HOLES

Elevation drawing of Eglin Mole Hole. Source:
Eglin Air Force Base, 1931-1991.

A central part of every SAC Alert base was its “Readiness Crew Building,” more popularly known as a “Mole Hole.” These were the primary living quarters of B-52 crewmembers while they were on SAC Alert shifts, which were generally a week in duration for any given cadre of crewmembers. At some bases they were also crew quarters for the propeller-driven KC-97s and, later, jet-driven KC-135s, the tankers that performed in-flight refueling of the bombers. Their nickname, Mole Hole, comes from the fact that during “scrambles,” airmen could exit quickly from the building via several angled corrugated steel tunnels that led from the underground story out to the SAC Alert concrete apron, where their aircraft stood ready.

Mole Holes came in three different configurations, depending on how large a crew complement was stationed at a given base. Around the continental United States, ten of the Mole Holes were 150-man facilities, ten were 100-man facilities, and 45 were 70-man facilities. Eglin Air Force Base’s SAC Alert Mole Hole was of this last, and most numerous, variety. Mole Holes were first built in 1958, replacing dozens of other temporary facilities that had been used during the middle years of the decade, including house trailers that were used for flight line crew alert.

Seventy-man Mole Holes, designed by Leo A. Daly of Omaha, Nebraska, were one-story concrete buildings with a basement level, featuring seven above-ground entrances and six corrugated steel tunnels leading from the underground level. The buildings had 16-inch thick concrete walls, and contained dormitory facilities, a latrine, a kitchen, a briefing room, and several classrooms, in addition to a recreation area.

SAC AND THE FAMILY MAN

Colonel George Meyers, a pilot and squadron commander within the 4135th Strategic Wing, remembers that a different notion than today's of family life held true in the late 1950s and early 1960s for B-52 crewmembers. In that time, he said, the armed forces hired the servicemen for pay, but they were also acquiring the free labor of the servicemen's families. Labor, in Meyers's definition, meant that the servicemen's families not only took care of housekeeping duties for the servicemen, they also performed various volunteer functions at the base – including upkeep of the on-base housing that the families lived in, as well as office tasks. In today's multiple-income families, this kind of volunteer labor is no longer practical.

"Back then, the thought pattern was that in the military services, when you hired [one serviceman], you hired an entire family to work for you. I'm sure that has changed now, because I don't think you could get all the ladies and kids to work for free any more. I don't think that could be duplicated [today]. Back then, that's how we were able to function and get the job done, and that just seemed like a natural thing."

Katie Morehouse, wife of Eglin B-52 pilot Clyde Morehouse, agreed. "We couldn't complain because the fellows had to go on [ground] alert, and they would be gone for a week at a time" she said. "We were allowed to come out to the Mole Hole, the alert facility, and the fellows would come out of the Mole Hole to the picnic tables during that time, and we would bring out sandwiches, or cookies, and we would sit and talk. But the men had to stay right there, because they were on ground alert."

Some families lived in base housing, and some lived off base. For those who lived on base, there was a built-in sense of community, which continues to this day. Many of the wives who lived off-base were also part of the extended community that the airmen and their families enjoyed.

Pilot Tom Goodwin, whose wife, Betty, lived on base during their time at Eglin, stressed how important that sense of community was for everyone, including the airmen and their wives. "These are some of the greatest people in the world," he said, speaking of pilots and their families. "The sense of togetherness we had has lasted down to this very day."

Photos from an unknown Eglin Air Force Base publication, depicting a SAC aircrew member's transition from time off with his family to ground alert. Source: Bill Anderson.





A VERY HIGH LEVEL INSPECTION

(Left) Newspaper clipping of President Kennedy (R, in sunglasses) at Eglin Air Force Base, with General Curtis LeMay (In Forward Seat), at Eglin Air Force Base, May 1962. Source: Chuck Hargrave.

(Below) Minimum Interval Take-Off (MITO). Source: *Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command*. (Bottom) JFK briefing crew in front of their B-52 at Eglin AFB. Source: Chuck Hargrave.

During early May of 1962, the SAC Alert Wing at Eglin Air Force Base was scheduled to receive a very high level inspection indeed – by the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, along with high-ranking members of the various military services (including the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Curtis LeMay), and several important foreign dignitaries. Originally called “Silk Hat,” the operation would feature the 4135th Strategic Wing’s B-52Gs conducting what was known as a “Minimum Interval Take-Off,” or MITO, by eight of the bombers assigned to the wing; a “static display” of a B-52G equipped with Hound Dogs, Quails, and Mark 28 missiles; and a B-52G launch of a GAM-72 Hound Dog over Eglin Range 52. One of the wing’s crews was also scheduled to give a pre-demonstration briefing to the president in the Mole Hole just before the MITO takeoff.

The official 4135th Strategic Wing history mentions that the president skipped the briefing, although all of the other events went on as scheduled, and were observed by the visiting dignitaries from a reviewing stand. But according to pilot Clyde Morehouse, there were ripples of discontent over the briefing well in advance of President Kennedy’s visit. This was because the B-52 commander whose crew had been chosen to conduct the briefing refused to comply with an order.

“This man was told that his mustache had to go, because the president was not fond of facial hair,” Morehouse chuckled. “He refused, on the grounds that he had had the mustache since before Kennedy was president, and he declared that he planned to have it long after Kennedy was done being president, too.”

Squadron commander George Meyers said that the real reason that the Mole Hole briefing was cancelled was because there was limited space inside the alert facility for the president’s entire entourage. “We weren’t sure we could tell the president which of his people could come into the Mole Hole, and which ones couldn’t. So the whole idea of a briefing was scrubbed,” Meyers said.



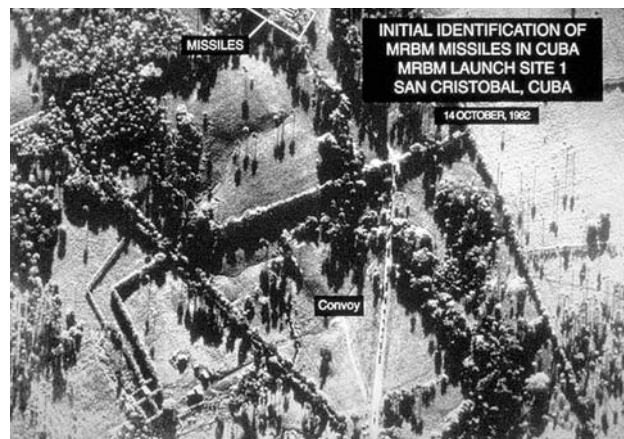
SAC & THE MISSILE CRISIS

During the Cuban Missile Crisis of late 1962, when it was discovered that the Soviets had emplaced missiles in Cuba that could reach most if not all major American cities, SAC Alert missions, including that at Eglin Air Force Base, were on high alert status for several weeks. Other confrontations during the post-World War II era, such as the Korean War (1950-1953), the blockade of Berlin (1948-1949), and the building of the Berlin Wall (1961), are regarded as important potential flashpoints of the Cold War, but none drove the superpowers closer to the brink than the missile crisis.

During early 1962, Fidel Castro's government had formally allied itself to the Soviet Union, and began to improve its military forces with direct aid from the Soviets. Tensions between Cuba and its large neighbor less than one hundred miles to the north had escalated steadily with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, in which a United States-backed military incursion of Cuban exiles was quickly snuffed out by Castro's forces. Several subsequent covert operations,



Fidel Castro.



U-2 photo of missile installations in Cuba, October 1962. Source: Central Intelligence Agency.

all failures, launched by the Kennedy administration against Cuba's communist government also heightened tensions between the United States and the Castro government.

In early October, a U-2 spy plane's reconnaissance photographs revealed missile sites under construction in Cuba, which potentially threatened most major population centers in the continental United States.

In response to this new threat close to home, Strategic Air Command bases around the U.S., including the SAC Alert crews at Eglin Air Force Base, were placed on airborne alert priority, which meant that aircraft were flying missions of twenty-four hours in length, more than double the routine, ten-hour missions that B-52 aircraft usually flew. Fueled in mid-air by KC-135 tankers, at least two Eglin SAC Alert B-52s at a time cruised within range of the Soviet Union, prepared to strike targets

U-2 Spy Plane. Source: United States Air Force.



within the U.S.S.R. if the standoff escalated to warfare. The “BUFF” crews were provided with mattresses on the plane so that they could take sleep shifts during the long airborne alert flights.

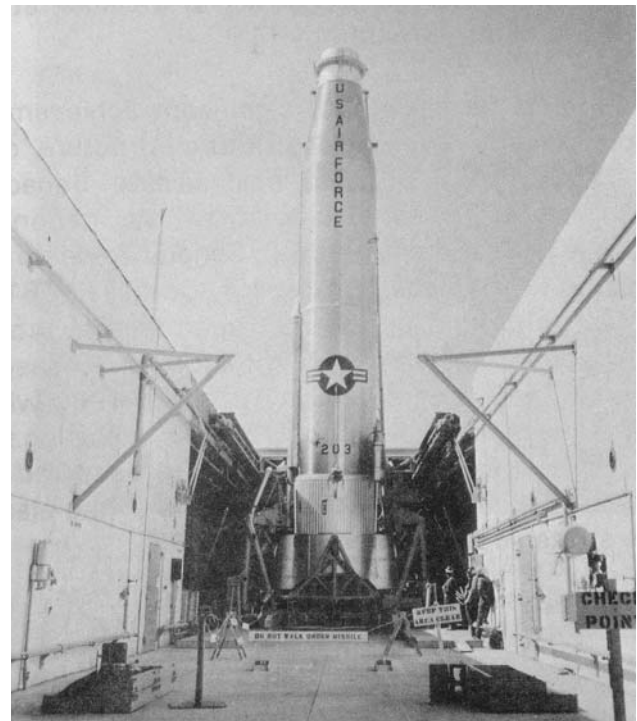
During the crisis, SAC was placed on DEFCON-2. Of all the U.S. Armed Forces, only SAC was placed on this elevated level of alert during the Missile Crisis. It meant that from October 23, 1962, when DEFCON-2 was declared for SAC, through the end of October, all facilities at Eglin’s SAC Alert area used in maintenance of complete wartime operations worked round-the-clock schedules.

“That was a tense time,” said B-52 pilot Colonel Clyde Morehouse, who flew some 24-hour missions during the crisis. “Not only did you have to fly much longer missions than normal, you just never knew what was going to happen – whether we were going to be entering into a world-changing nuclear holocaust at any moment...that was the most stressful time of all for us.”

The crisis was finally defused on October 28, 1962, when the Soviets agreed to remove their missile emplacements in exchange for the removal of American ICBMs from Turkey. The SAC Alert crews from Eglin returned to their normal routines after October 1962.

THE END OF SAC ALERT

After the end of the crisis, SAC Alert gradually became less prominent in United States strategic military policy. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) became the new focus for strategic planning, and the USAF, which had been in charge of the United States’ land-based ICBM arsenal beginning in the late 1950s, placed less emphasis from the mid-1960s onward upon the



An Atlas missile, part of the SAC arsenal of ICBMs. Source: *Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command 1957-1991*.

deployment of strategic long-range bombers armed with nuclear weapons, and more upon the deployment of tactical aircraft. SAC continued to control the United States’ land-based ICBM force after the mid-1960s, while the U.S. Navy controlled submarine-launched ICBMs (such as the Polaris missile).

With the new strategic emphasis on ICBMs, by the mid-1960s long-range strategic bombers were no longer viewed as the primary means of offensive or retaliatory strikes against the Soviet Union. ICBMs traveling several times the speed of sound could deliver nuclear weapons to enemy targets far more quickly and safely than manned bombers. SAC Alerts began to stand down and be inactivated nationwide during the mid-1960s, and Eglin Air Force Base’s SAC Alert area was transferred to TAC in 1965.

SAC’s mission continued, however, with some remaining SAC Alert bases in the northern tier of the country and in its ICBM complexes, also stationed in the northern tier of the United States. The SAC area at



(Left) McDonnell-Douglas F-4C Phantom II Fighter. Source: United States Air Force. (Below) F-15 Eagles from Eglin AFB 33d Fighter Wing. Source: United States Air Force.

Eglin became a TAC area – an unusual fate for a SAC Alert facility – when the 33d Tactical Fighter Wing moved into the former SAC facilities in mid-1965. Four squadrons under the 33d moved to Eglin with the wing: the 4th, 16th, 25th, and 40th. With a growing emphasis in the USAF upon tactical warfare, SAC receded somewhat in importance, although bombers (including B-52s) would continue to be used in tactical, conventional weapons applications thereafter. The re-use of the SAC Alert area by a TAC squadron was typical of the military's resourcefulness in adapting and recycling existing facilities to new applications in the face of budgetary challenges.

When the newly reactivated 33d Tactical Fighter Wing moved into the Eglin SAC facilities on July 1, 1965, its assignment was to be an F-4C "Phantom" unit. Highly maneuverable and fast, the F-4C was part of the new

emphasis on the tactical side of the USAF. Fittingly, it was to be commanded through its re-activation period by a former SAC bomber pilot, Colonel Davey Jones, who had trained on F-100s and then F-4 fighters in order to facilitate his own conversion from SAC to TAC.

The TAC wing used the existing nose docks and the fuel systems dock that had housed the SAC wing's B-52s. The unit history from mid-1965 mentions that with the 33d wing's limited staff, preparing the SAC area for re-use as a TAC area was challenging. Renovations and new construction included squadron operations buildings, a command post for the 33d, and a radar calibration building. In 1971, a five-hangar building for fighter aircraft was added to the east end of taxiway A, near where the older B-52 hangars stand.

Today the 33d is still stationed at Eglin's former SAC alert area, although it is now part of Air Combat Command (ACC), one of the major commands to supersede TAC and SAC. Now armed with F-15 Eagles, the 33d Fighter Wing is a storied unit that has experienced many highly successful combat missions in Vietnam, both Iraq wars, and in Afghanistan.

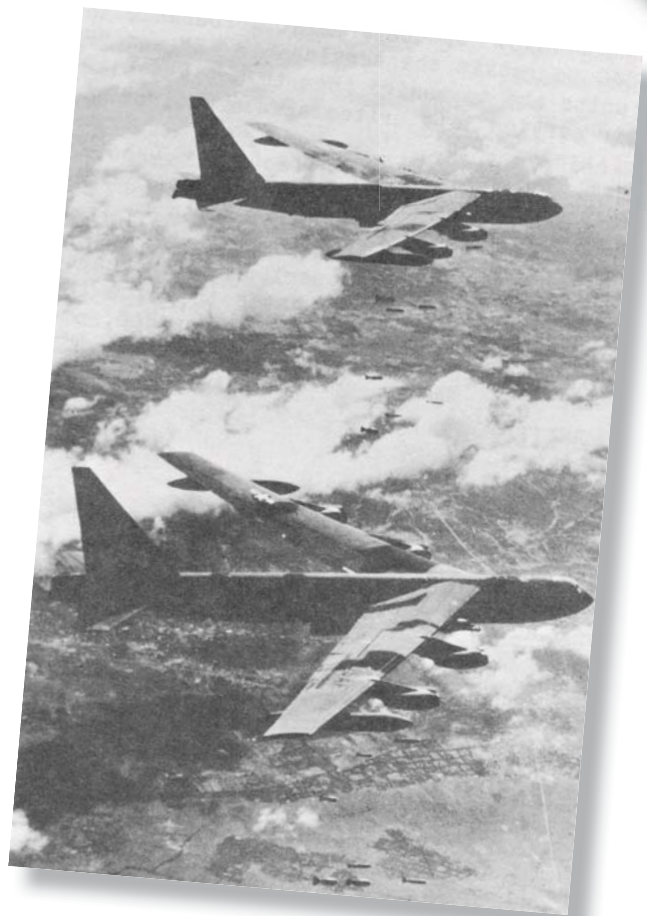




END OF THE COLD WAR

In 1989-1991, a stunning series of events changed the balance of global power. The Soviet Union, tottering under the weight of maintaining the prolonged military build-up and arms race of the Cold War, and staggering from the cost of an unsuccessful long-term entanglement in Afghanistan, began to lose its grip on its communist satellite nations. One by one, members of the Warsaw Pact began to drop away from the Soviet Union, beginning with Poland, where a labor movement spearheaded by a factory worker named Lech Walesa led to the downfall of that country's communist leadership and the election of Walesa to the presidency of that nation in 1989. This event signaled the beginning of the end for communist party leadership in Eastern Bloc nations. Perhaps the single greatest symbolic event heralding the loosening of the Soviet stranglehold in eastern Europe was the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when the two halves of that divided city were reunited for the first time since the end of World War II.

As one communist government after another collapsed like dominoes in eastern Europe, and as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's progressive reforms (characterized by his *glasnost*, "openness," and *perestroika*, "restructuring" policies) took hold, the Soviet Union itself fell, bringing in its wake the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new world order in which nuclear war was no longer the imminent threat it had been for forty years. When the dust finally settled, the United States had become the world's sole superpower.



The end of the Cold War signaled another shakeout for U.S. military forces at home and abroad. Although SAC's manned strategic bomber force had been de-emphasized in favor of ICBMs by the late 1960s, it had continued alongside TAC as an important part of the USAF's arsenal. In the mid-1960s, B-52s began to fly tactical bombing missions over Vietnam, and they continued to perform a similar function in subsequent conflicts. With the fall of the Soviet Union, and with the nuclear threat abated, a drawdown in military forces was inevitable. As SAC and TAC were subsumed under ACC, the USAF command structure underwent its largest reconfiguration since World War II.

(Opposite) Germans Celebrate the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Front of the Brandenburg Gate, November 1989. (Left) Lech Walesa. Source: www.solidarity.gov.pl (Above) B-52s over Vietnam, 1968. Source: *The Development of Strategic Air Command 1946-1986*.



U.S. President Ronald Reagan, left, and Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev at a Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, November 1985.

Today, the physical legacy of the SAC Alert mission at Eglin Air Force Base consists of over a dozen buildings located in three distinct areas of the base. Two of these areas are a part of the current 33d Fighter Wing, an F-15 Eagle unit within the Ninth Air Force under ACC. The third area, the old Hound Dog storage facilities two miles east of the first two areas along the east-west runway at Eglin Air Force Base's Main Air Field, is also substantially intact, although the buildings are no longer used for nuclear weapons storage.

Another legacy of SAC, and of the SAC Alert missions once based across North America, are the lasting decades of security against nuclear attack that the United States and the rest of the free world enjoyed during the Cold War era. A forty-years-long standoff between superpowers that bred many conventional weapons conflicts all over the world, in places like Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, and in many Latin American and African nations, the Cold War nevertheless did not end in a direct superpower confrontation, nor was a single nuclear weapon ever used in a wartime application.

Part of the reason for this prolonged peaceful standoff between superpowers is undoubtedly SAC, which, as Eglin B-52 pilot Clyde Morehouse has said, always had "defense and deterrence" as its primary mission. Through the awe-inspiring offensive forces that SAC had at its disposal, it actually functioned as perhaps the most effective defense that the United States possessed during the tense early years of the Cold War. For the members of Eglin's SAC Alert Wing, "Peace Is Our Profession" was not simply a motto; it was a way of life.

EPILOGUE

Today, the former SAC Alert area at the northwest corner of Eglin Air Force Base's Main Air Field is occupied by the 33d Tactical Fighter Wing. Equipped with the highly maneuverable and speedy F-15 Eagle – a much smaller plane than the old "BUFFs" – the 33d occupies many of the same buildings and facilities formerly occupied by SAC.

The three large maintenance nose docks and the fuel systems nose dock on Taxiway A are used for maintenance of the F-15 fighter jets. Whereas the B-52 nose docks by definition could only accommodate a portion of each giant bomber, in their current application the nose docks are easily capable of containing an entire F-15 airframe. To the immediate east of the old SAC maintenance area, on a stub once intended for a fifth nose dock, stands a newer set of five small, connected aircraft maintenance docks, aircraft hangars used for the maintenance of the fighter wing's planes. These were constructed for TAC in 1971.

The readiness crew alert facility, or Mole Hole (Building 1355), that occupies an area just east of the Christmas tree alert apron, is now used as a dining hall. It still retains the distinctive long, angled ramps leading up from the underground story to ground level that gave this building type its nickname.

Taxiway A, Looking East. The Four Large SAC hangars, now used by the 33d Fighter Wing, are Visible in this Photo. To the Right is One of the 33d's F-15 Eagles. Source: Field Photo.



The Mole Hole, in its Current use as a Dining Facility. Source: Eglin Air Force Base, Cultural Resources Division.

Taxiway C – the Christmas tree alert apron upon which SAC's B-52 bombers once sat ready to taxi onto the main runway within fifteen minutes of the receipt of a "scramble" order – now accommodates F-15s of the 33d Fighter Wing. Other F-15s belonging to the wing are arrayed along the northwest-southeast runway of Eglin Air Force Base's Main Air Field, immediately adjacent to the Christmas tree alert apron.

South of Taxiways A and C is a second area where SAC once had operations and planning facilities. The SAC squadron operations building, Building 1315, serves a similar purpose today for the 33d Fighter Wing. Building 1321 still serves as a large supply and equipment warehouse, as it once did for the SAC wing.





(Left) Insignia of the 33d Fighter Wing at Building 1315, Squadron Operations Building. Source: Field Photo.

(Above) Hound Dog Missile Checkout Facility as it Appears Today. Source: Field Photo.

The Hound Dog storage and inspection facilities in the ordnance area two miles to the east of the alert and maintenance aprons, while also largely intact, are no longer used for the storage of nuclear weapons.

All of the buildings and structures mentioned have been proposed for inclusion in a special historic district, commemorating their one-time use as the site of a pioneering SAC Alert Wing's operations. The SAC Alert "dispersed wing" concept existed in actuality for less than a decade; the 4135th Strategic Wing was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base for a period of only seven years. But most of the buildings and structures that SAC built at Eglin Air Force Base's Main Air Field remain, a tangible reminder of America's involvement in the Cold War, and a tribute to the airmen who served in SAC during one of the most volatile periods in our nation's history.

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