STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND AND THE ALERT PROGRAM:

A BRIEF HISTORY



1 APRIL 1988

OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

HEADQUARTERS STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, NEBRASKA

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DR. HENRY M. NARDUCCI

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SUBJECT: 1988, The Year of SAC Alert

1. Strategic Air Command personnel have fought their war of deterrence every day for over 30 years. Bomber and tanker crews first began SAC ground alert on 1 Oct 57. Those initial alert crews and support personnel formed the cornerstone of America's deterrence--SAC alert. The men and women of our aircrews, missile crews, and all the SAC people who support them should never forget that it is their vigilance and dedication which allow Americans to live in freedom in this great nation. For those reasons, I've declared 1988 "The Year of the SAC Alert Force."

2. The goals of our program are to reaffirm the importance, enhance the prestige, and upgrade the environment of SAC alert. To aid in this effort, I've established a Headquarters SAC working group to gather, develop, and expedite good ideas. We are already working a number of projects which include: upgrading alert facilities, simplifying the SIOP, flying on alert, streamlining procedures, improving intelligence support, revitalizing the public affairs campaign, and examining unit awards programs.

3. I encourage all of you to build the best possible unit programs and implement local initiatives that support "The Year of the SAC Alert Force" program. I also want to share your good ideas with others across the command. Therefore, the numbered air forces and 1st STRAD should catalogue the new ideas and initiatives their units plan for 1988 and forward them to this headquarters by 1 Dec 87. Direct your inputs to my POC, Capt Chip Beck, HQ SAC/XOKM, AUTOVON 271-4464.

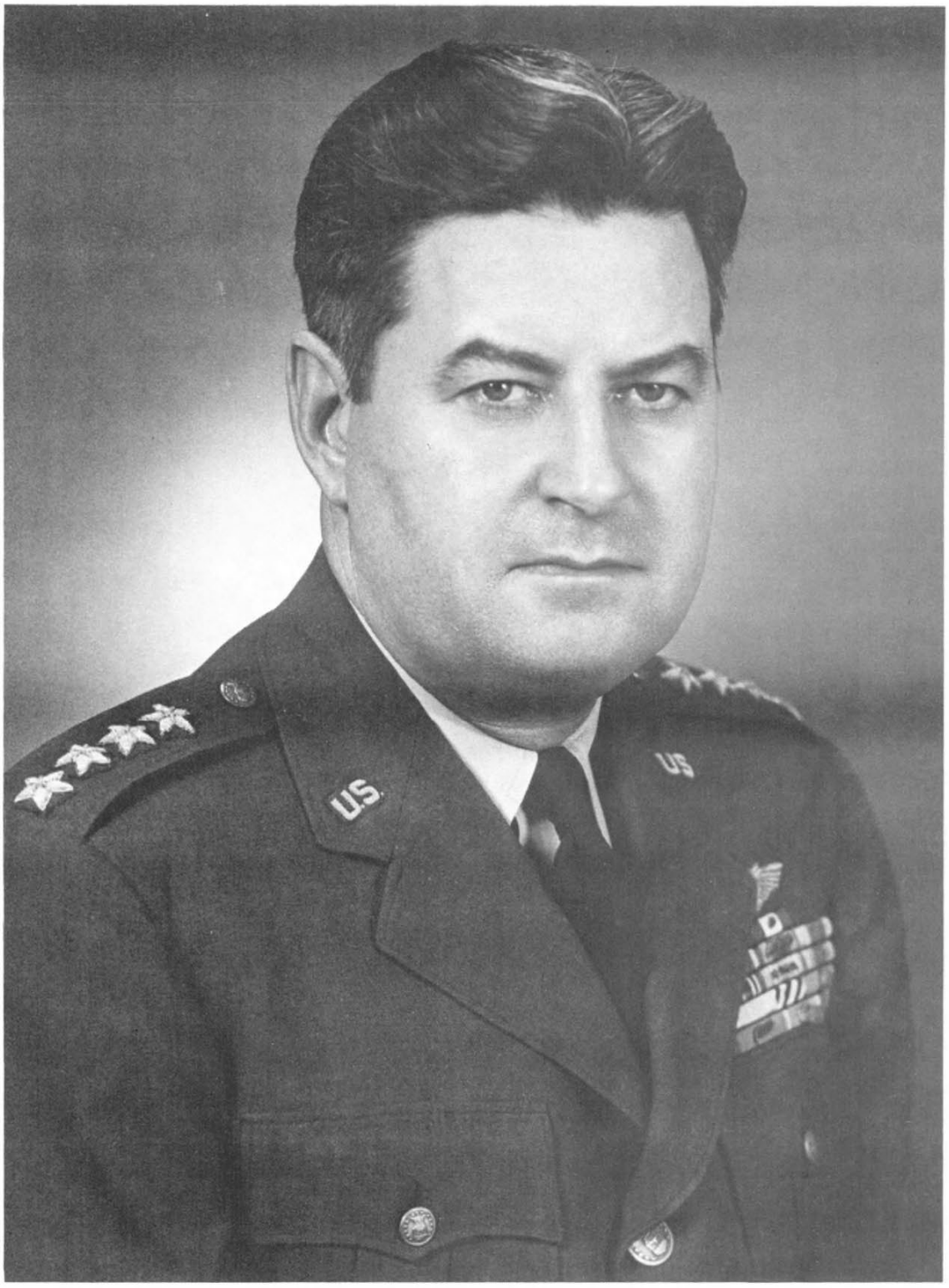
4. SAC alert is the foundation of our mission--and of our nation's defense. The people of this country have entrusted us with providing the deterrent shield that safeguards American liberty. Everyone in SAC shares that responsibility. With your help, we'll achieve our goals and improve the way we carry out our mission. I look forward to working with you as we celebrate the year of SAC alert.

PREFACE

Strategic Air Command began alert operations thirty years ago. Since that time, thousands of dedicated aircrews, missiliers, maintenance specialists, and support personnel have worked diligently to give the nation a credible deterrent force. Their success is the theme of this study. The publication, prepared in honor of the Year of the SAC Alert Force, presents a brief, illustrated overview of the events and decisions that have shaped alert operations within this command. The logo appearing on the front cover was designed by SMSgt A.C. Lofton, JSTPS Graphics, for use throughout the commemorative year.

Dr. Henry M. Narducci prepared the text and finished manuscript. CMSgt Harlan A. Condon ably assisted with the photographic layout work.

JOHN T. BOHN
Command Historian
Office of the Historian



GENERAL CURTIS E. LEMAY
COMMANDER IN CHIEF, STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND
19 October 1948 - 30 June 1957

STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND AND THE ALERT PROGRAM:

A BRIEF HISTORY

Throughout most of its first decade, Strategic Air Command operated from safe sanctuaries located in the United States. This situation began to change in the mid-1950s as the Soviet Union began to build up its long-range bomber force and to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. Defense planners saw these actions as a conscious effort to project Soviet military power worldwide and to place the United States under the direct threat of nuclear attack. Given the inferiority of Soviet forces to those of the United States, it seemed reasonable to SAC planners that, in the event of war, the Soviets would employ a basic military stratagem to quickly gain superiority, that of surprise.

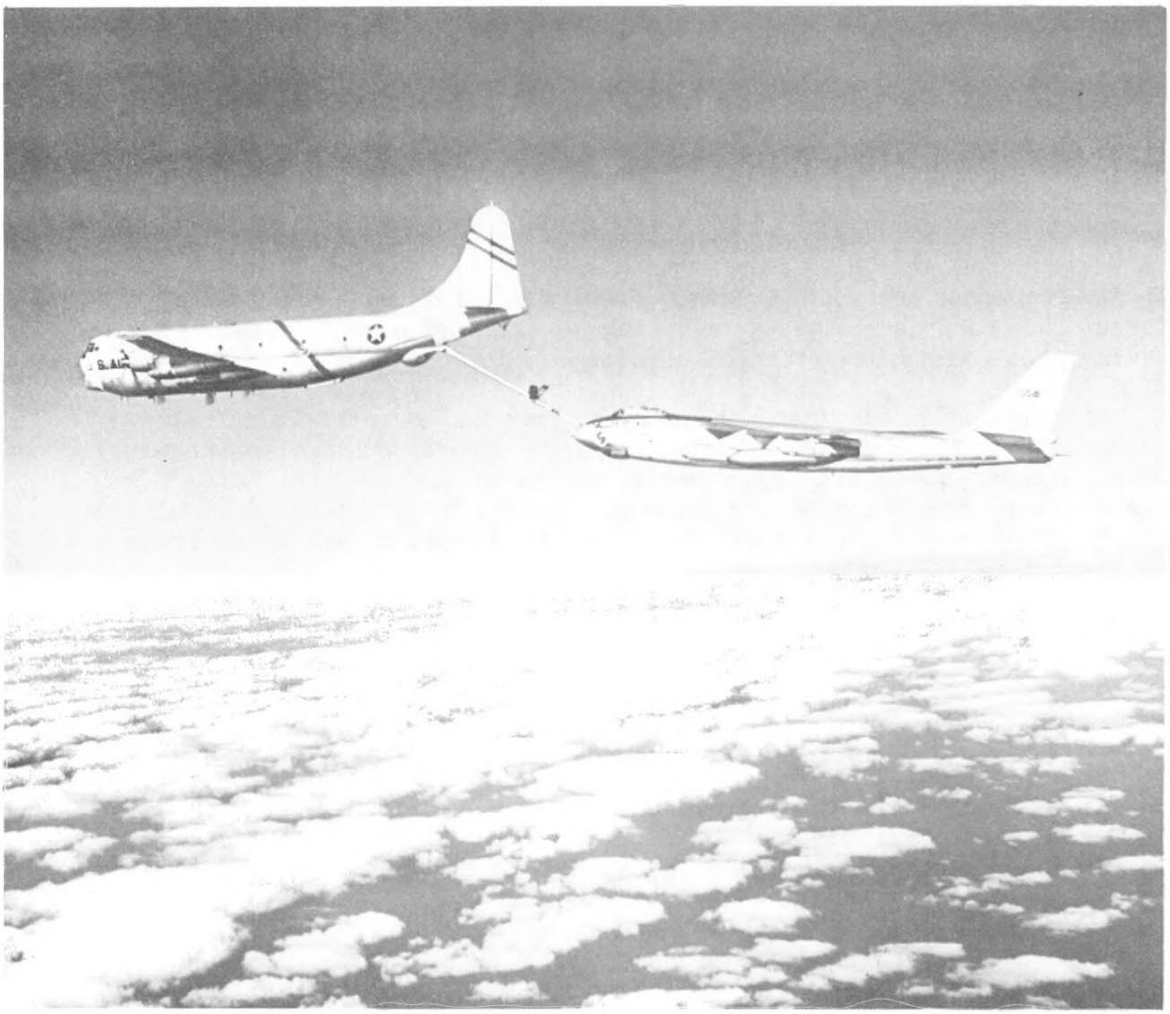
The threats posed by growing Soviet forces and surprise attack demanded immediate attention. Planners at Headquarters Strategic Air Command understood the necessity of an immediate retaliatory response to Soviet aggression. They also knew that to respond effectively, they had to protect the strategic force from surprise destruction on the ground. Their concerns produced extensive studies aimed at neutralizing the threat of surprise attack, assuring a meaningful SAC response, and making the Soviets uncertain of success.

SAC planners devised the alert program to safeguard nuclear deterrence. They proposed to keep SAC's bombers and tankers on alert with weapons loaded and crews ready for immediate takeoff. Their goal was to place one-third of the command's aircraft on ground alert at all times. The one-third figure was dictated by training, manpower, and logistical requirements.

Having formulated the alert concept, the command next undertook three tests to determine its feasibility. The 38th Air Division at Hunter AFB, Georgia, conducted the first test, Operation Try Out, from November 1956 to March 1957. This effort proved that ground alert was feasible. Two additional tests worked out problems identified in Operation Try Out and perfected the alert concept. The second test, Operation Watch Tower, was performed by the 825th Air Division at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas, between April and November 1957. The last test, Operation Fresh Approach, fell to the 9th Bombardment Wing at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, in September 1957.

The success of these tests convinced General Thomas S. Power, the new CINCSAC and the driving force behind the alert program, that the concept would work. Although testing was not completed and many organizational and administrative details remained unresolved, General Power directed ground alert operations to begin, which they did on 1 October 1957 at several bases in the continental United States and overseas.

Preparation for overseas alert began in July, 1957 when four Second Air Force B-47 wings each sent five bombers to Sidi Slimane Air Base, Morocco. Overseas alert operations, more commonly known as Reflex Action, began on 1 October. Under Reflex, SAC units rotated crews and aircraft (B-47s and tankers) overseas to stand alert at bases nearer the Soviet Union. In Alaska, for instance, the aircrew standby alert tour of duty lasted 72 hours. Ground crews served 8-hour shifts. Aircrews rotated back to their home bases after 10-14 days. Reflex tours at SAC bases in the United Kingdom, Spain, and Morocco averaged 90 days.



A KC-97F performs a mid-air refueling of a B-47E

As SAC units were preparing to put their forces on alert, General Power wrote a memorandum to each member of the SAC alert force on the purpose and importance of alert. "As a member of SAC's Alert Force," he informed them, "you are contributing to an operation which is of the utmost importance to the security and welfare of this nation and its allies in the free world." The CINCSAC then informed them that



General Thomas S. Power
Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command
1 July 1957 - 30 November 1964

> the only way of insuring the survival of some of SAC's combat capability, even in the case of the most unexpected and massive attack, is our Alert Force.
>
> As long as the Soviets know that, no matter what means they may employ to stop it, a sizeable percentage of SAC's strike force will be in the air for the counterattack within minutes after they have initiated aggression, they will think twice before undertaking such aggression. For this reason, it is my considered opinion that a combat-ready Alert Force of adequate size is the very backbone of our deterrent posture.

In November, 1957 General Power informed the world press that Strategic Air Command had aircraft at the end of runways, bombs loaded, and crews nearby ready to takeoff within 15 minutes. Eleven percent of SAC's 1,528 bombers and 766 tankers were on alert that year, but the percentage of alert aircraft would grow, to 12 percent in 1958 and 20 percent in 1959, until it reached the goal of 33 percent in 1960.

During this same period, a number of significant technological changes were permanently altering the future of the SAC alert force. On 31 October 1959, the 576th Strategic Missile Squadron at Vandenberg AFB, California, placed the nation's first intercontinental ballistic missile, an Atlas D, on alert. The introduction of the ICBM ushered in a new chapter in the conduct and success of alert operations. The Atlas D and E (the latter placed on alert in October 1961) were liquid-fueled missiles deployed in above-ground launchers. Together, they brought to fruition a program begun in 1946 and demonstrated the reality

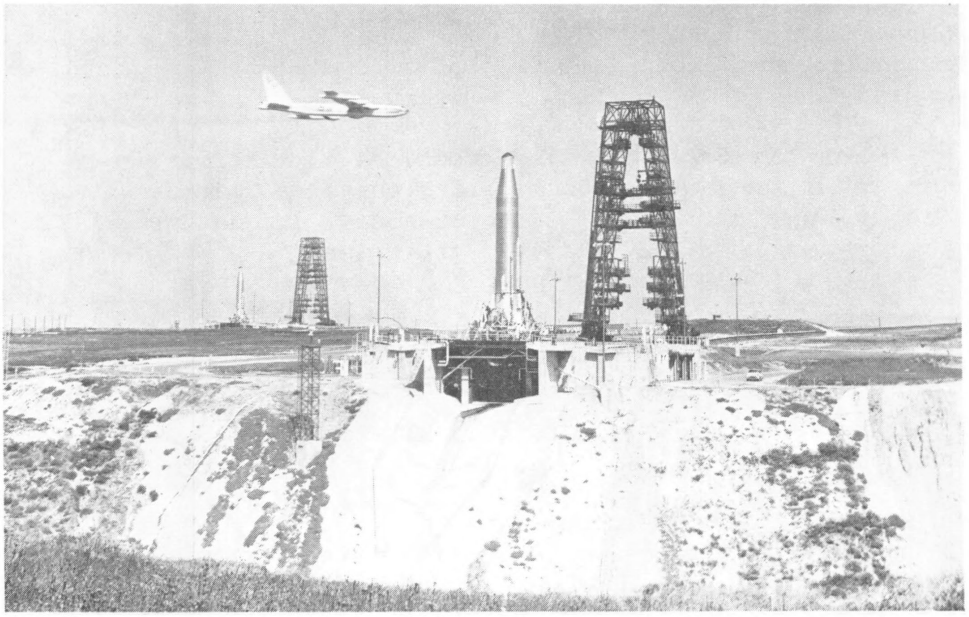
of an effective ICBM weapon system. Another milestone occurred on 18 March 1960 when the 702d Strategic Missile Wing at Presque Isle AFB, Maine, succeeded in placing the first Snark missile on alert. These events foreshadowed a trend that would continue to the present day. Missiles, both ground launched and aircraft launched, would be major components of the alert force and the strategic deterrence equation.



Arrival of the first ICBM in Fifteenth Air Force, an Atlas D at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyoming, 2 October 1959

SAC's alert force activities were not strictly limited to placing aircraft and missiles on alert. In the latter part of 1958, the command reorganized its tactical wings and air base groups to give better support to the one-third alert rate concept. The command's emphasis was on combat-ready aircraft and combat-ready aircrews - the backbone of successful alert operations. Toward this end, SAC centralized maintenance operations by establishing organizational maintenance squadrons to handle all wing maintenance functions. SAC wings also gained a deputy commander for maintenance and a deputy commander for operations. Finally, air base groups were redesignated combat support groups.

When General Power announced to the world in November 1957 that the command had armed aircraft on alert, he also stunned them with another cryptic comment. "Day and night," he stated, "I have a certain percentage of my command in the air." Political sensitivities in Washington prevented General Power from stating precisely what this entailed. He found these sensitivities intolerable because he felt the best deterrent was to convey to the Soviets in clear and deadly terms the military readiness of his command. Although the Washington bureaucrats may have restrained him, they did not prevent him from getting his message across. "These planes," he informed an inquiring press, "are bombed up and they don't carry bows and arrows."



"Power for Peace" is emphasized as a B-52 flies over an Atlas missile complex at Vandenberg AFB, California

Strategic Air Command planners had not been content to protect their forces merely by ground alert. They had also developed a concept for airborne alert. As General Power had alluded, his command was keeping bombers aloft at all times. The command had begun testing a B-52 airborne alert concept and by 1961 had flown more than 6,000 alert sorties. The 92d Bombardment Wing flew one such test, Head Start II (2 March - 30 June 1959), where it kept five B-52 bombers airborne at all times. Each



A B-52 Pilot maneuvers his aircraft during a Head Start II test.

crew flew a 24-hour sortie. Ten KC-135s supported the airborne bombers. Based upon the satisfactory results of such tests, General Power was able to tell Congress in February 1959 that:

> We in the Strategic Air Command have developed a system known as airborne alert where we maintain airplanes in the air 24 hours a day, loaded with bombs, on station, ready to go to target. . . . I feel strongly that we must get on with this airborne alert. . . . We must impress Mr. Khrushchev that we have it, and that he cannot strike this country with impunity.

On 18 January 1961 SAC was able to finally announce that B-52 bombers were conducting airborne alert training.

SAC's aircrews responded favorably to airborne alert training. "I don't mind ground alert because I know it's necessary," one crew member noted. "But I like our air alert so much better," he added. "Instead of sitting around and waiting for something to happen, I do what I know and like best - flying." Another crew member during Head Start II mused that it would be interesting "if General Power could invite that guy Khrushchev to fly a Head Start mission with the 92nd." The experience, he concluded, "would keep him peaceful for a while!" The same individual then suddenly exclaimed, "Gee, and just think of the money we could save because we could do away with the Army, the Navy and the rest of the Air Force!"



A SAC Airborne Command Post Team works aboard a "barebones" KC-135 Airborne Command Post in the early 1960s



President John F. Kennedy visits Vandenberg AFB, March 23, 1962. 1) Receiving honors, 2) departing flight line, 3) viewing Atlas 134D launch, 4) Atlas 134D, 5) viewing missile/space exhibits, 6) at Minuteman site, 7) receiving missile badge.

Yet another initiative designed to preserve and project the nation's nuclear muscle got underway on 1 July 1960. On that date Strategic Air Command began testing the airborne command post at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. Throughout the rest of the year, one of five specially configured KC-135 aircraft assigned to the 34th Air Refueling Squadron at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, was placed on ground alert and periodically tested to determine its ability to takeoff within 15 minutes. Once airborne, the KC-135's primary mission was to serve as an alternate command post, one that could assume control over the SAC combat force in the event an enemy attack destroyed the underground command facility at Offutt and other command posts collocated with the numbered air force headquarters. A SAC general officer and a team of controllers and communications experts manned each flight. Once again, successful testing led to adoption. Continuous airborne command post operations commenced 3 February 1961 with Lieutenant General John P. McConnell, Commander of Second Air Force, serving as the first SAC Airborne Emergency Action Officer.

Shortly after becoming President, John F. Kennedy announced a new defense posture. His purpose was to strengthen the nation's military position in light of Soviet technological advances and worldwide political initiatives. The new posture had a direct bearing on Strategic Air Command because it raised the ground alert level to one-half of the command's bombers and tankers. SAC attained 50 percent alert in July 1961. An aircrew to aircraft ratio of 1.8 to 1 was established to help man the increased alert requirement.

The deterrent strength projected by a higher alert rate was reinforced by the introduction of several new weapon systems. The Titan missile joined the alert force on 20 April 1962 when the 724th Strategic Missile Squadron, Lowry AFB, Colorado, put the first Titan I on alert. In August, the Atlas F joined the alert force when it began alert duty



A B-58 "Hustler" crew races to its aircraft during a practice alert

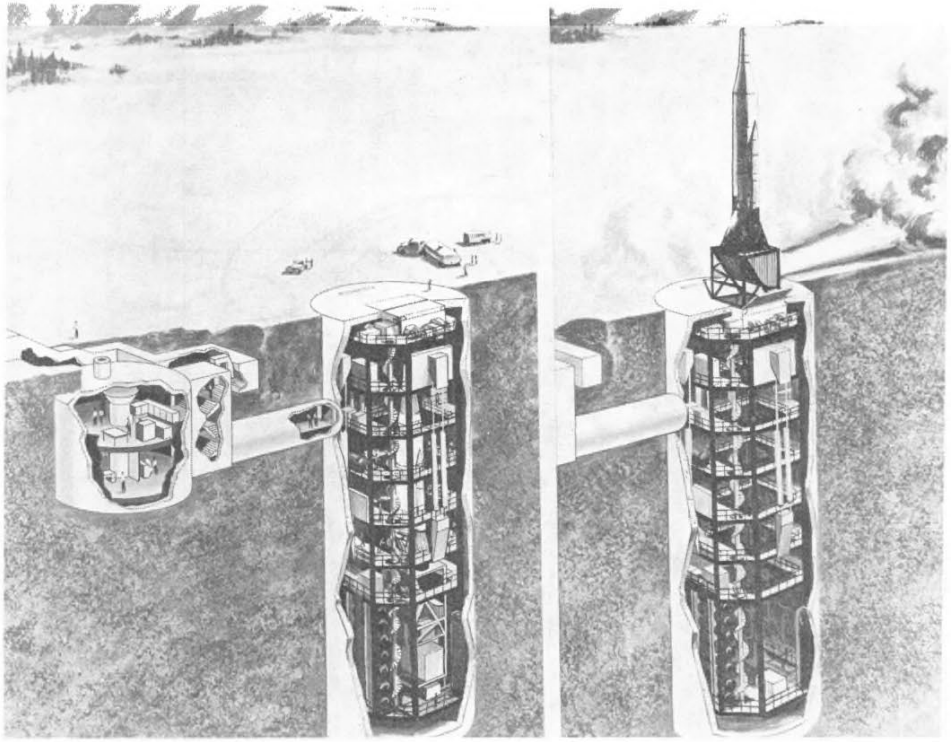


Illustration of an Atlas F Missile Complex

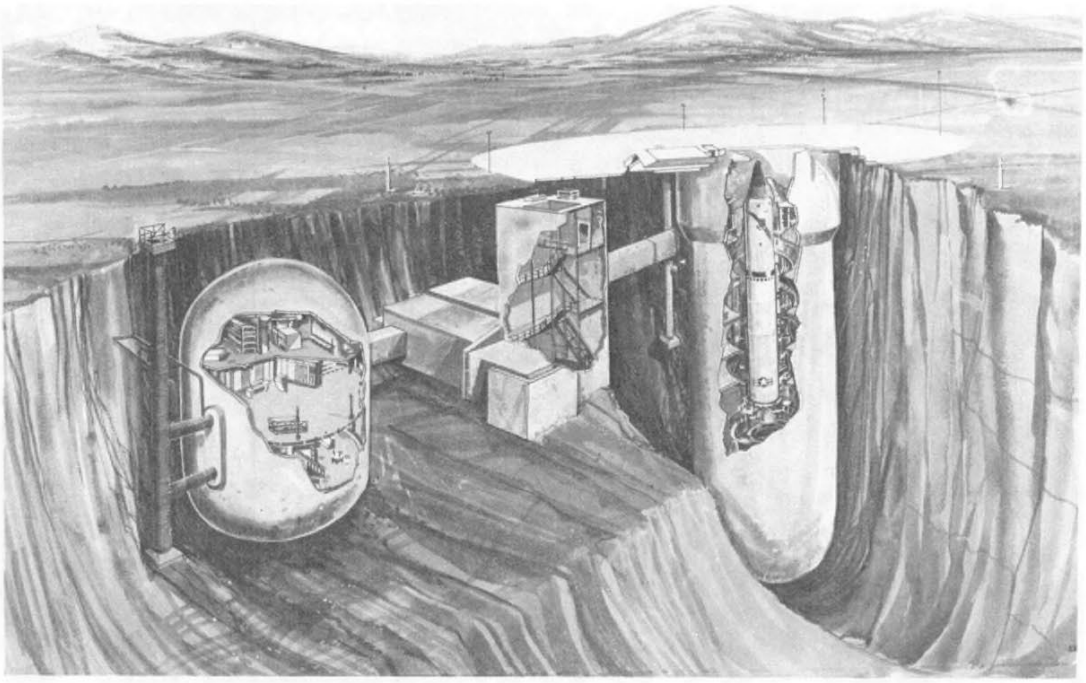
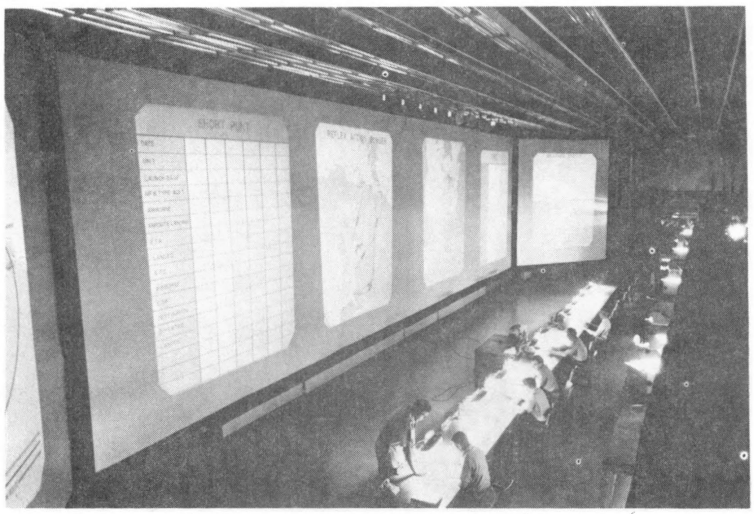


Illustration of a Titan Missile Complex



SAC Command Post in 1962

with the 577th Strategic Missile Squadron, Altus AFB, Oklahoma. The two new weapons were the first to stand alert upright in silos, although they were raised to surface level for launching. An inertial guidance system in the Titan I allowed the missile to operate without ground control during flight. On 1 September of the same year, the B-58 Hustler also joined the alert force, performing its duty with the 305th Bombardment Wing at Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana.

Strategic Air Command also expanded its Post Attack Command Control System. In April 1962, three auxiliary airborne command posts joined the system. The auxiliary airborne command posts were established at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana; Westover AFB, Massachusetts; and March AFB, California. SAC organized four support squadrons on 20 July at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho; Lincoln AFB, Nebraska; Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; and Plattsburgh AFB, New York. The command equipped the squadrons with EB-47L aircraft (B-47s modified with communications equipment) and re-designated them Post Attack Command Control Squadrons.

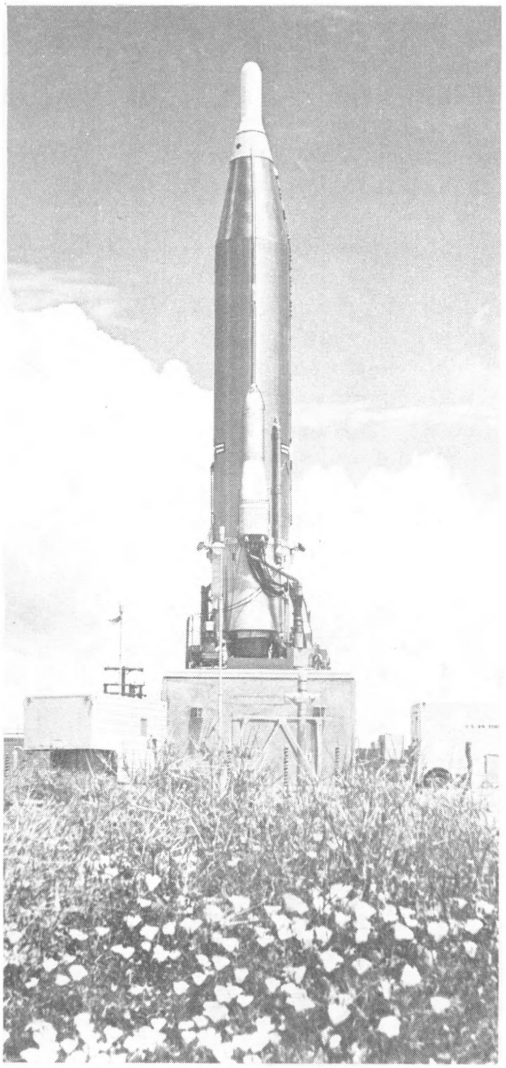


Brig Gen W. W. Wisman commands an Airborne Command Post sortie during the Cuban Crisis

The organizational adjustments and deployments of new weapon systems proved timely. President Kennedy addressed the nation on 22 October 1962 and announced the presence of Soviet intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba. He placed an arms quarantine against shipments bound for Cuba and demanded the removal of the missiles already delivered. Prior to his speech, SAC had begun to intensify its readiness posture. Battle staffs were placed on 24-hour alert duty, leaves were canceled, and personnel were recalled to duty. The command dispersed its B-47 bombers and generated the full force to alert. The B-52 airborne alert indoctrination training program expanded into an actual airborne alert. The ICBM force numbering around 200 operational missiles was brought into alert configuration. Included in this figure was the first Minuteman missile on alert, a feat accomplished by the 341st Strategic Missile Wing at Malmstrom AFB, Montana, on 27 October. The command armed all of its bombers and missiles with nuclear weapons. When generation was completed, Strategic Air Command stood ready to defend national policy with the most lethal array of military firepower in human history. Fortunately, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the missiles from Cuba and on 20 November SAC was able to return to its regular alert posture. President Kennedy visited SAC headquarters at Offutt AFB on 7 December to thank the command and present General Power with a plaque citing the command's outstanding record in flight safety during airborne alert in the Cuban emergency.



SAC Command Post Consoles in 1962



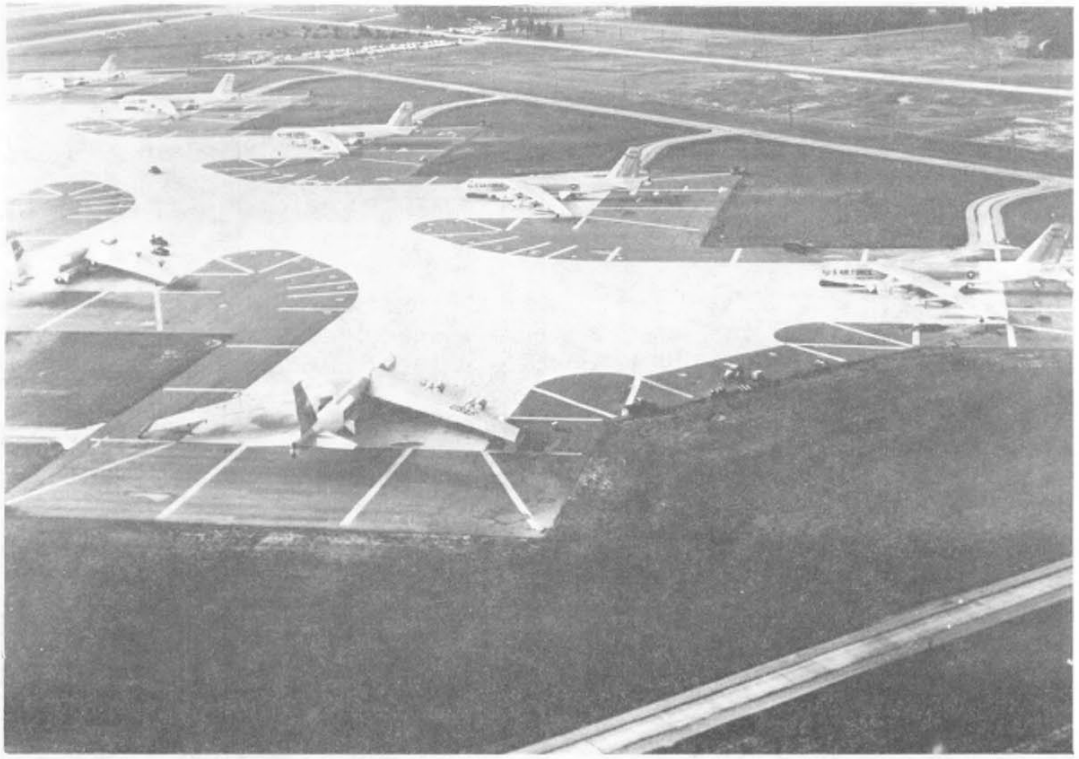
An Atlas F missile raised up from its silo into launch position



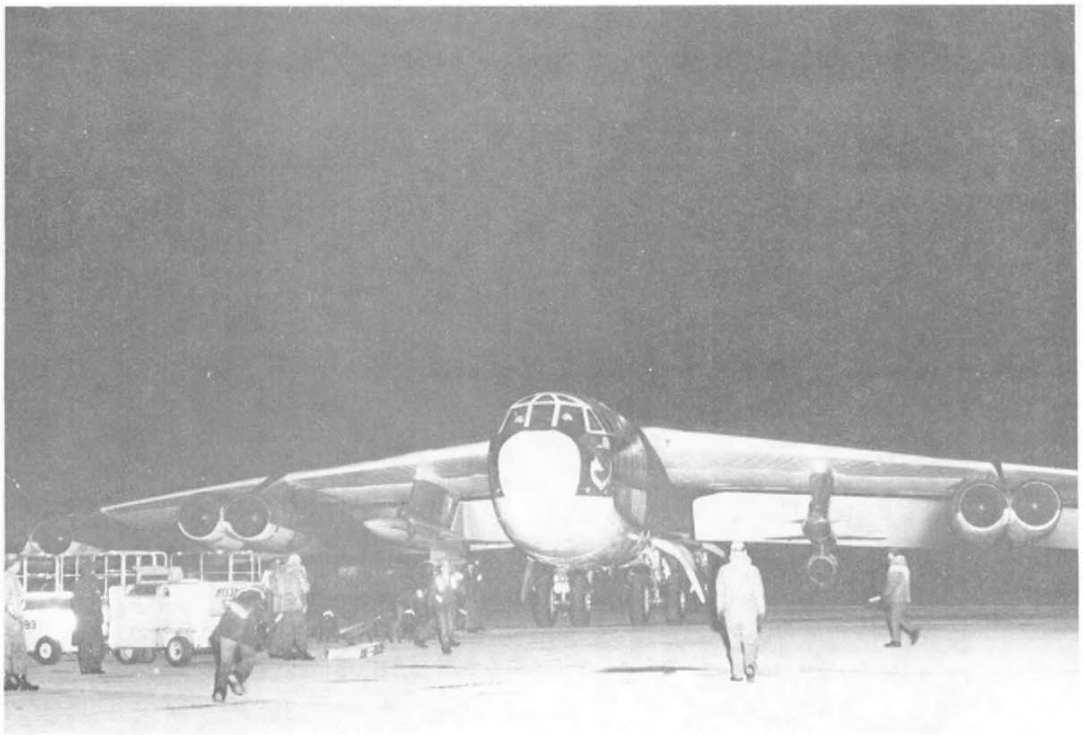
306th BMW B-47Es dispersed to Hurlburt Field, FL, for alert during Cuban Crisis



A maintenance crew from the 4136th SW prepares an airborne alert sortie during the Cuban Crisis



B-52s from the 19th BMW dispersed to Wurtsmith AFB, MI,
for alert during the Cuban Crisis

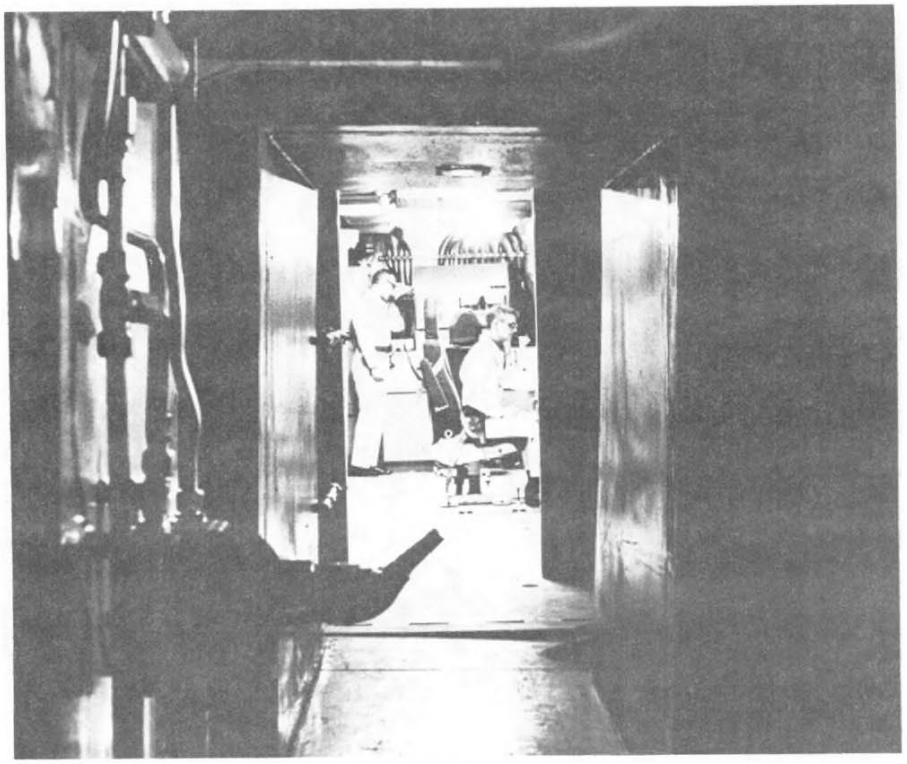


Maintenance crews at Wurtsmith AFB, MI, recover the last airborne alert
sortie flown during the Cuban Crisis, 21 November 1962

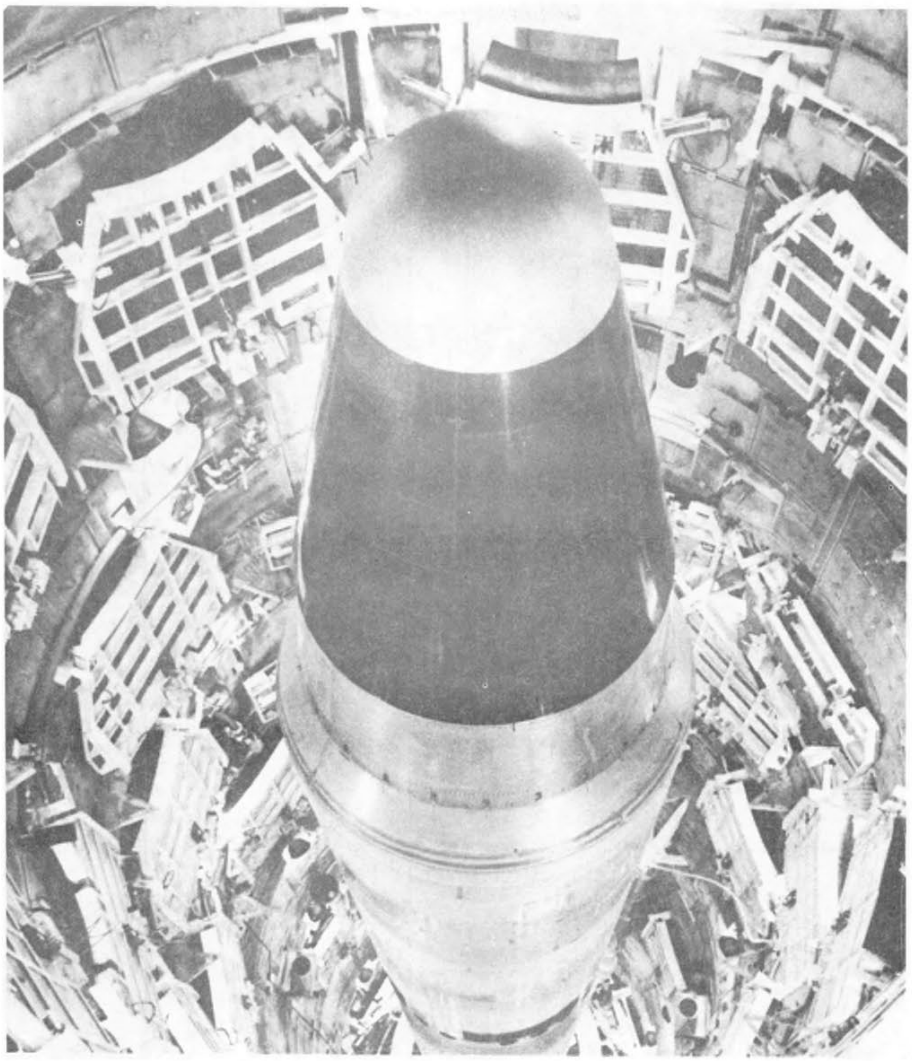
With the introduction of the Minuteman and Titan II missiles (the latter achieving alert status in April 1963 with the 570th Strategic Missile Squadron, Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona), the nation's missile force had come of age. These solid propellant weapon systems, deployed in hardened silos, gave the ICBM alert force the advantages of accuracy, reliability, and a near-instantaneous launch capacity. They had a combined alert rate of over 90 percent and an operational cost significantly lower than that of the manned bombers.

In less dramatic fashion, SAC accepted and declared operational the three Blue Scout Junior launch sites at Wisner, West Point, and Tekamah, Nebraska. This 11 July 1963 event gave SAC another means of ensuring reliable command control communications. The Blue Scout Junior rockets carried UHF recorders with a prerecorded force execution message that could be transmitted to all units within line of sight of the rocket's apogee flight.

The gradual phase out of the B-47 and KC-97 coupled with a serious balance of payments problem brought an end to Reflex operations. The reduction began in 1963 and Reflex ended on 31 March 1965. Ground alert for the KC-97 terminated on 10 November 1965 and for the B-47 on 11 February 1966. The rapid acquisition of Minuteman missiles accompanying the B-47 phase out continued to alter the command's weapons mixture. On 21 April 1964, the number of ICBMs on alert finally equaled the number of bombers on ground alert. From that day forward, the ICBM alert force gradually outdistanced the bomber alert force.



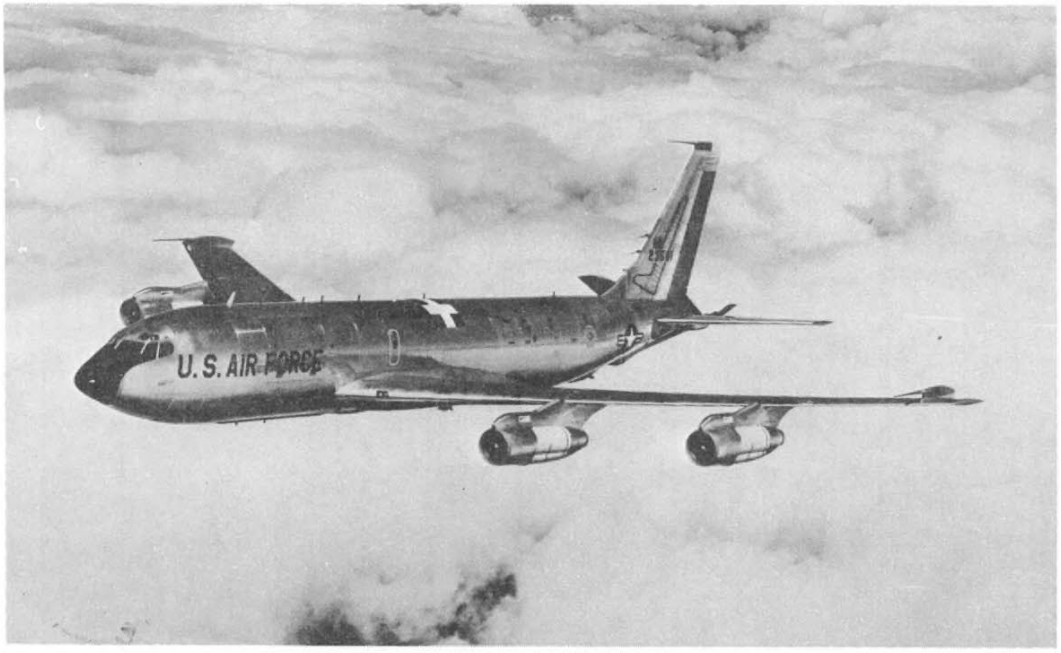
Minuteman crew in Launch Control Facility, late 1960s



A Titan II ICBM in its silo

Another reorganization of the Post Attack Command Control System (PACCS) took place on 25 March 1965. The arrival of EC-135s specially configured for the PACCS mission prompted the phase out of the EB-47Ls. The newly-assigned EC-135s took over the Looking Glass and auxiliary airborne command post missions.

Until 1966, the history of SAC's alert operations had been without incident. This untarnished image changed on 17 January 1966 when a B-52 on a training mission collided with a KC-135 tanker during refueling operations near the coast of Spain. Both aircraft crashed near the Spanish town of Palomares. Seven crew members died and four survived. Some radioactive material was released when two of the bomber's four weapons underwent nonnuclear TNT-type explosions upon impact. All four weapons were recovered, the last after an exhaustive land and sea search. A cleanup operation removed 1,400 tons of slightly contaminated soil and vegetation and transported them to the U.S. for disposal.



An EC-135C Airborne Command Post

A second incident took place on 22 January 1968. This one occurred as a B-52G was attempting an emergency landing at Thule AB, Greenland. The aircraft crashed and burned on the ice of North Star Bay. The U.S. recovered the bomber's four weapons and in cooperation with the Danish government removed all possible traces of radioactive materials.

Airborne alert came to an end shortly after the Thule crash. Although the accidents at Palomares and Thule contributed to the demise of the program, they were not the sole reasons for discontinuing airborne alert. The operating costs of the program were rising at an unacceptable rate. Furthermore, the advent of a responsive and survivable ICBM force permitted the bombers to perform more time sensitive duties.

The most time sensitive duty facing Strategic Air Command's bomber and tankers in 1968 was the conventional operation in Southeast Asia. The first Arc Light mission took place on 18 June 1965. SAC's continued participation in the hostilities produced greater demands for aircraft, aircrews, and support personnel. The command's primary mission remained strategic deterrence, but alert operations for aircraft units became increasingly more difficult as the war drained the command's assets. By 1968, the command normally kept about 40 percent of its bombers and nearly 100 percent of its missiles on alert. As command assets were sent into combat, aircraft units found themselves hard pressed to maintain alert lines. On 12 November 1969, for instance, 75 bombers (38 percent of the regular bomber alert force) were degraded and 53 tankers (27 percent of the required tanker alert force) were not on alert. The generated force also suffered. Thirteen percent of the generated bomber force (66 vehicles) and eight percent (42 tankers) of the generated tanker force could not be brought on alert because crews were not available. Some units remained below a one-to-one aircraft-to-aircrew

ratio, a factor that impeded their ability to generate alert sorties. SAC crew members frequently found themselves rotating between combat tours in Southeast Asia and tours in the United States that were filled with alert duty. The war also placed a premium on maintenance and logistics personnel. Such circumstances evoked extraordinary effort and immense personal sacrifice from the members of Strategic Air Command, both in the theater of combat and on the alert line.

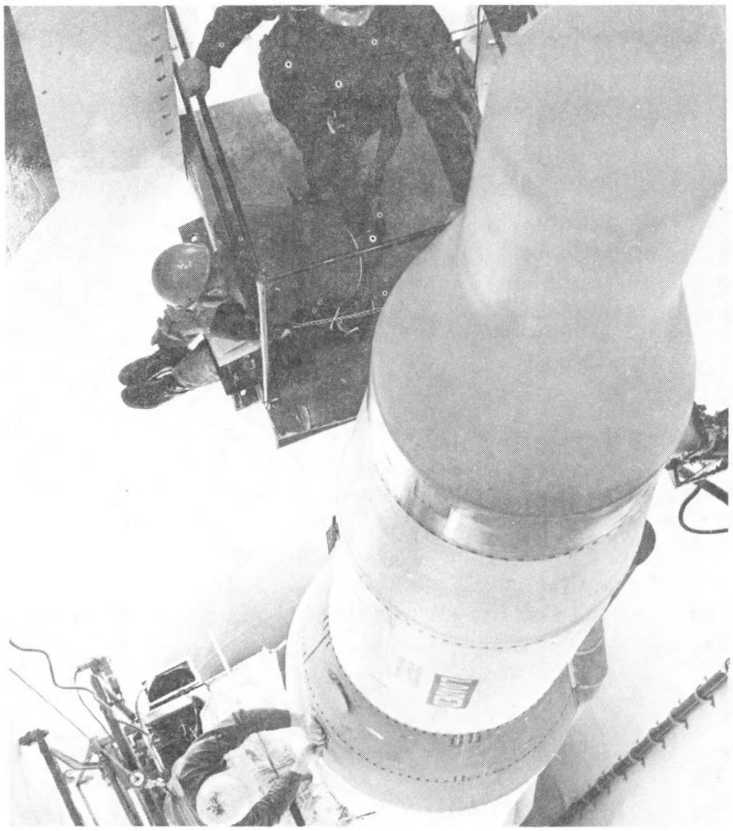
Amid such trying circumstances, Strategic Air Command did perform its primary mission. It was aided in this effort by the continued growth of its missile force. The first Minuteman II went on alert with the 447th Strategic Missile Squadron, 321st Strategic Missile Wing, at Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota, in January 1966. Similarly, the 741st Strategic Missile Squadron, 91st Strategic Missile Wing, at Minot AFB, North Dakota, placed the first Minuteman III on alert on 19 August 1970. The Minuteman III represented a most significant addition to the alert force because it was the first missile to carry Multiple Independently Retargetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs). Each Minuteman III added three warheads to the SAC alert arsenal.

There were other positive developments as well. The Airborne Launch Control System, developed to provide SAC with the means to launch land-based Minuteman missiles from commands given in the airborne command post aircraft, became a reality. On 17 April 1967 SAC successfully tested the system by launching a Minuteman II from Vandenberg AFB, California. This successful test enabled the Airborne Launch Control System to attain initial operational capability on 31 May.



Communications experts working aboard the Airborne Command Post

The first Emergency Rocket Communications System (ERCS) became operational on 10 October 1967 when technicians installed the system on a Minuteman II missile at Whiteman AFB, Missouri. ERCS vastly improved SAC's ability to transmit command control messages to its forces. The new system also made the Blue Scout Junior rocket system obsolete and on 1 December 1967 SAC inactivated the three Blue Scout sites in Nebraska.



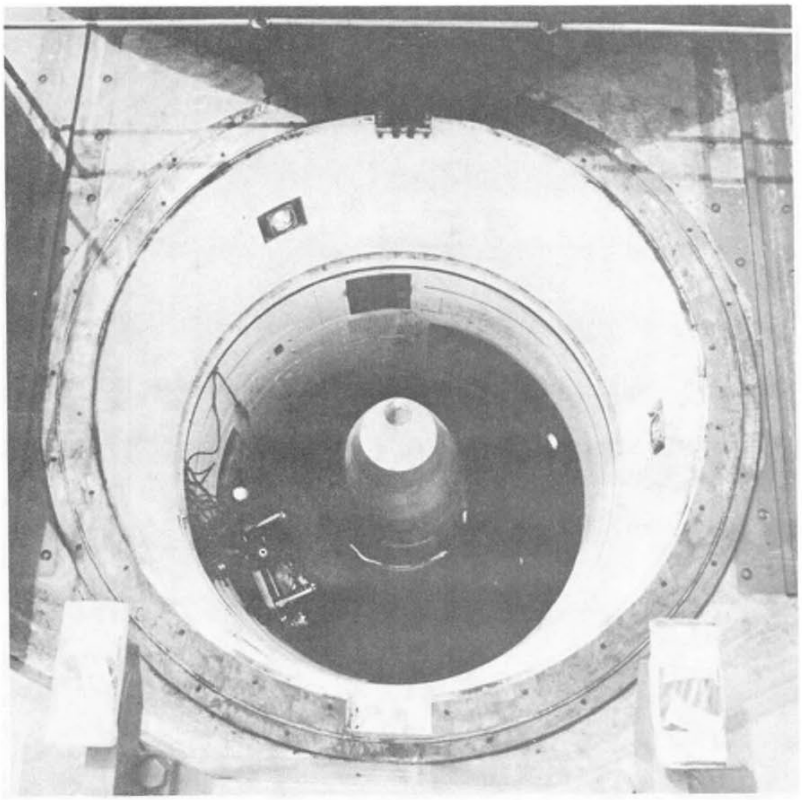
Maintenance crews of the 321st SMW check the guidance system of a Minuteman II missile at Grand Forks AFB, ND

In another effort to preserve the strategic bomber force from surprise attack, SAC revived the B-47 dispersal program it had used successfully during the Cuban missile emergency and applied it to the command's B-52s and KC-135s. This 1968 program gave SAC a means to disperse its aircraft over a large number of bases (both military installations and civilian airfields) during periods of increased tension or international emergency. Dispersal complicated an enemy's targeting problem and allowed more aircraft to become airborne within a given time period.

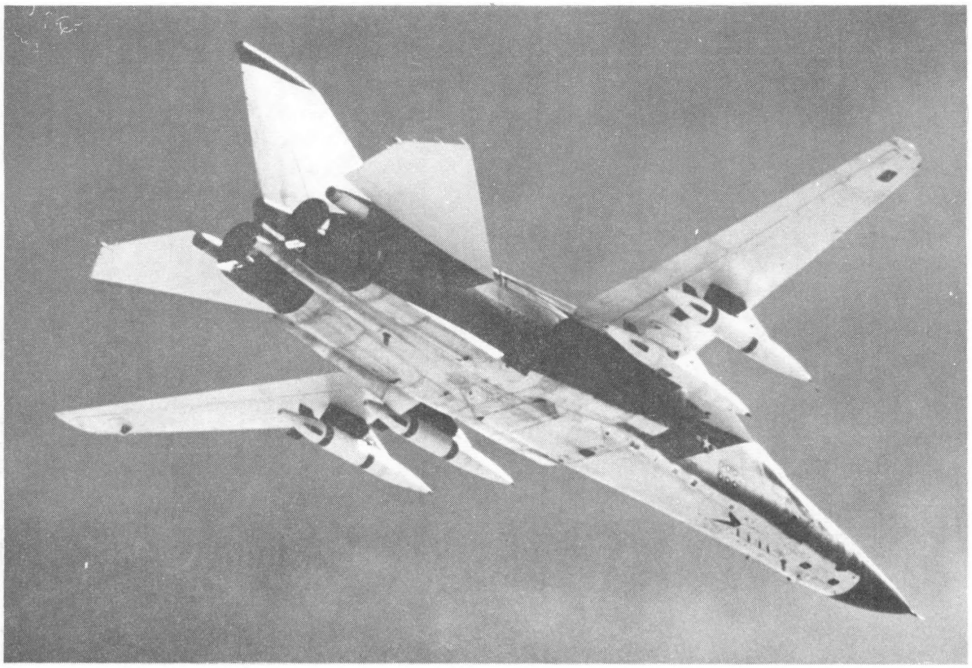
The increasing threat of submarine launched ballistic missiles spawned yet another SAC program to preserve the nuclear aircraft strike force. SAC began testing a satellite basing concept on 20 February 1969. The test relocated B-52s and KC-135s assigned to the 72d Bombardment Wing, Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, to Homestead AFB, Florida, where the aircraft were placed on ground alert. Testing ended successfully on 20 May and SAC added several additional bases to the program in



A KC-135 crew scrambles during a practice alert



SAC's first multiple warheaded Minuteman III emplaced in launch facility H-2 of the 741st SMS, Minot AFB, ND



An FB-111A with an external load of Short Range Attack Missiles



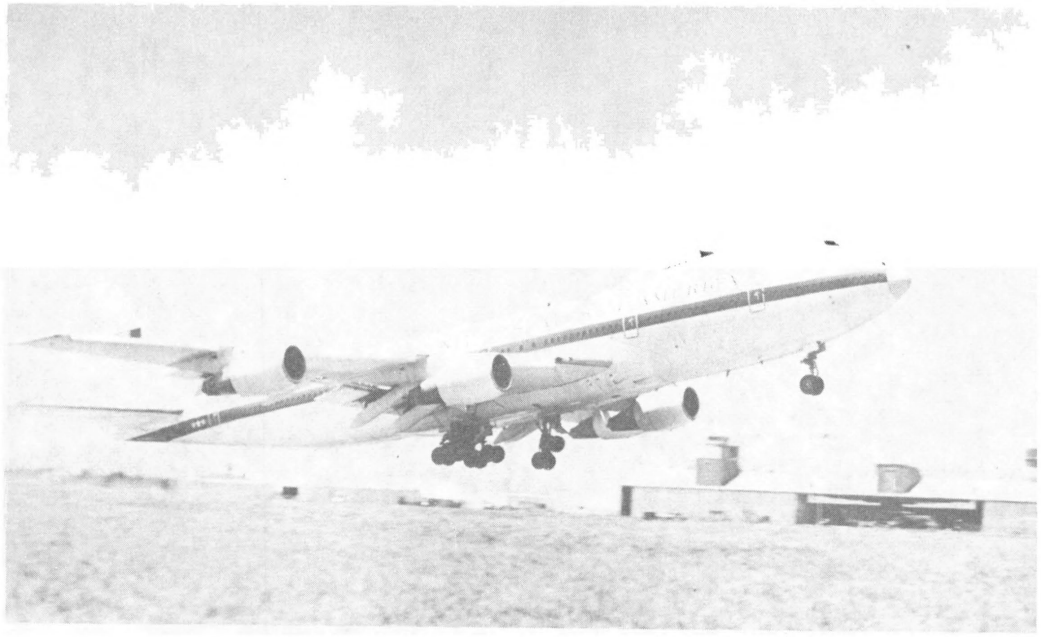
An EC-135 Airborne Command Post heading out for a Looking Glass mission

July. Satellite basing essentially preserved the dispersal program of the late 1950s and early 1960s, wherein large B-52 wings of 45 aircraft were divided into smaller wings of 15 aircraft each and relocated to other bases for alert duty. Once again, the goal was to complicate enemy planning by increasing the number of targets and to reduce the time required to get the alert force off the ground.

Although the B-58 bomber left the SAC inventory in 1970, the arrival of the FB-111 the previous year improved SAC's bomber force. The FB-111 began alert duty on 1 July 1971 with the 509th Bombardment Wing at Pease AFB, New Hampshire. SAC's Short Range Attack Missile (SRAM) further strengthened the bomber force's lethal punch when it went on alert 15 September 1972 with the 42d Bombardment Wing at Loring AFB, Maine.

A consolidation and reorganization of the Post Attack Command Control System took place on 1 April 1970. The EC-135s moved out of Westover, Barksdale, and March Air Force Bases. All were assigned to the 2d, 3d, and 4th Airborne Command and Control Squadrons which were activated at Offutt, Grissom, and Ellsworth Air Force Bases. The reorganization was for administrative purposes and did not alter the basic function of the PACCS.

Shortly after the conclusion of the war in Southeast Asia, Strategic Air Command was pressed into action on behalf of national policy. Tensions in the Middle East had erupted once again into open conflict. Egyptian forces successfully crossed the Suez canal and attacked Israeli forces in the Sinai desert. An Israeli airborne counterattack into Egypt saved the day for Israel, but soon raised the specter of a serious escalation in the conflict. The United States, which was assisting Israel with logistical support, became concerned with the prospect of a



An E-4B National Emergency Airborne Command Post

larger conflict. In support of U.S. interests, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed SAC to a higher readiness posture. Although SAC's generated forces stood ready from 24 to 25 October 1973, they were able to achieve their objective without combat.

Strategic Air Command gained a new responsibility on 1 November 1975 when Headquarters USAF transferred the 1st Airborne Command and Control Squadron from the jurisdiction of Headquarters Command to SAC. The unit moved from Andrews AFB, Maryland, to Offutt AFB. SAC also acquired the unit's E-4 aircraft (modified Boeing 747s), three of which were outfitted with EC-135 type communications equipment and equipped to serve as National Emergency Airborne Command Posts. A fourth aircraft, an E-4B, was at the Boeing plant in Seattle, Washington, being outfitted with advanced communications equipment. The E-4As continued to perform their alert duty at Andrews AFB and on 22 May 1980 the E-4B served its first alert tour. The three E-4As eventually underwent modification to the E-4B configuration, the last being completed on 30 January 1985.

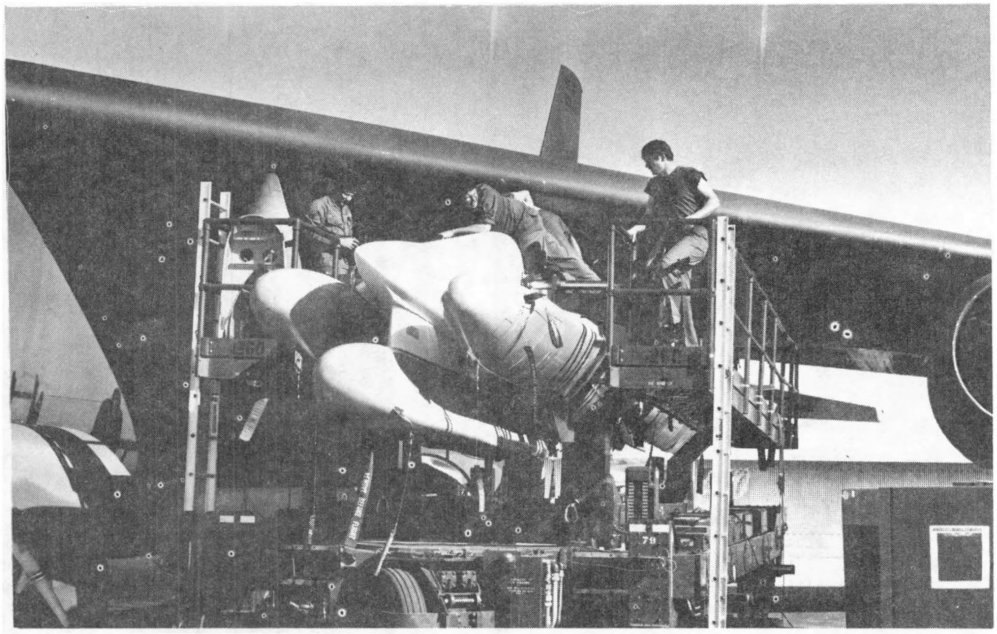


A KC-135 refuels a 1st ACCS E-4B
National Emergency Airborne Command Post

In an unrelated action to consolidate resources, SAC again reorganized the Post Attack Command Control System. On 31 December 1975 the 3d Airborne Command and Control Squadron at Grissom AFB, Indiana, was inactivated. The 70th Air Refueling Squadron and the 2d Airborne Command and Control Squadron at Offutt AFB assumed the unit's functions.

From 8 to 16 July 1979, SAC exercised for the first time every phase of its role in the Single Integrated Operational Plan short of nuclear warfare. Global Shield 79 was one of the most comprehensive exercises of the nuclear war plan in SAC history. It featured the generation of hundreds of bombers, tankers, and missiles to alert status. Aircraft and ground support teams dispersed to preselected bases and flew sorties over radar bomb-scoring sites. General Richard H. Ellis, the CINCSAC, called the exercise "an extremely valuable training experience for the aircrews, missile crews, and support personnel who participated in it."

The Strategic Modernization Program of the 1980s brought significant improvements to SAC's war-fighting abilities. Among these improvements was the Air Launched Cruise Missile which entered the nation's service on 16 December 1982 when the 416th Bombardment Wing at Griffiss AFB, New York, placed the first one on alert. Yet, 1986 was the real watershed in the Strategic Modernization Program. On 1 October of that year, the 96th Bombardment Wing at Dyess AFB, Texas, hosted the first B-1B alert line. Nine days later, the 90th Strategic Missile Wing placed the first of SAC's ten-warheaded Peacekeeper missiles on alert at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyoming. The B-1B represented SAC's first new bomber in seventeen years. Similarly, the Peacekeeper was the command's first new ICBM since the deployment of the Minuteman III in 1970.



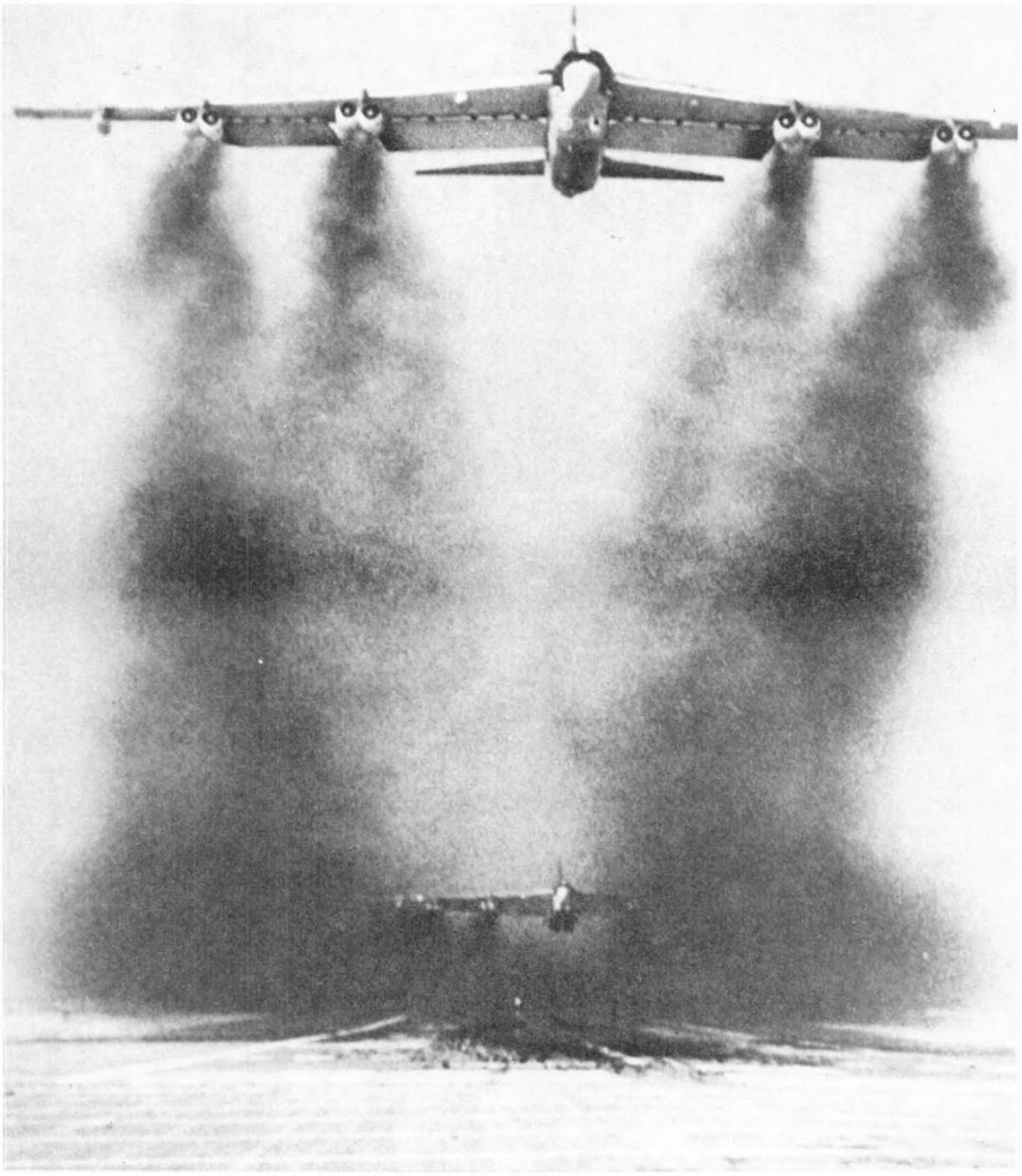
Members of the 7th Munitions Maintenance Squadron load an ALCM pylon onto a B-52H at Carswell AFB, TX, 10 December 1986



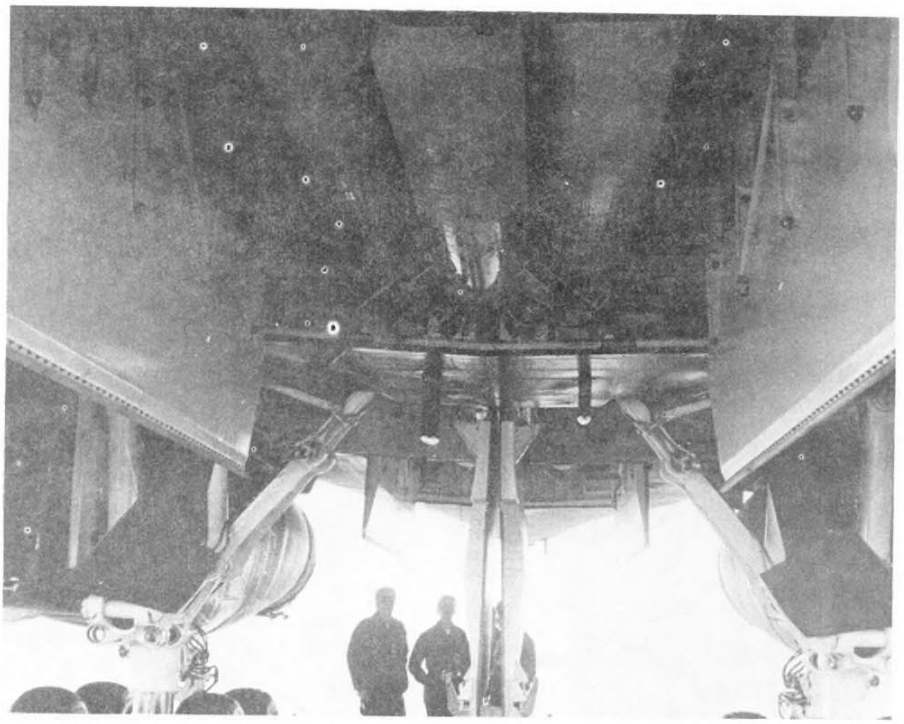
410th BMW crewmembers at K.I. Sawyer AFB, MI scramble toward their B-52 during a Global Shield 83 alert exercise



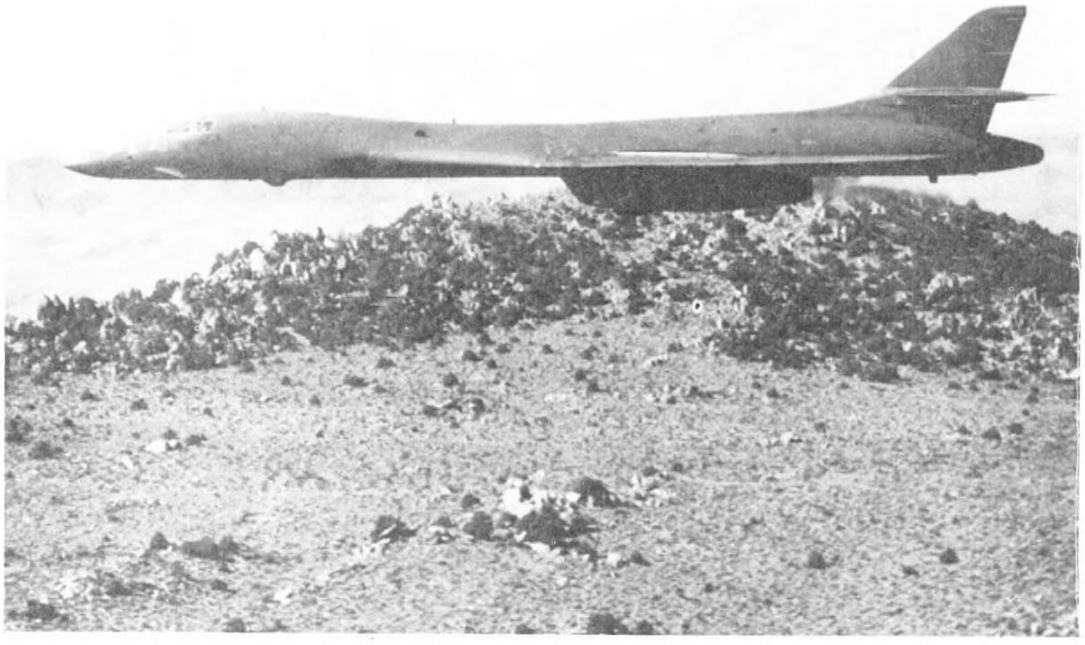
A SAC Security Policeman guards a PACCS aircraft dispersed to Malmstrom AFB, MT, during Global Shield 83



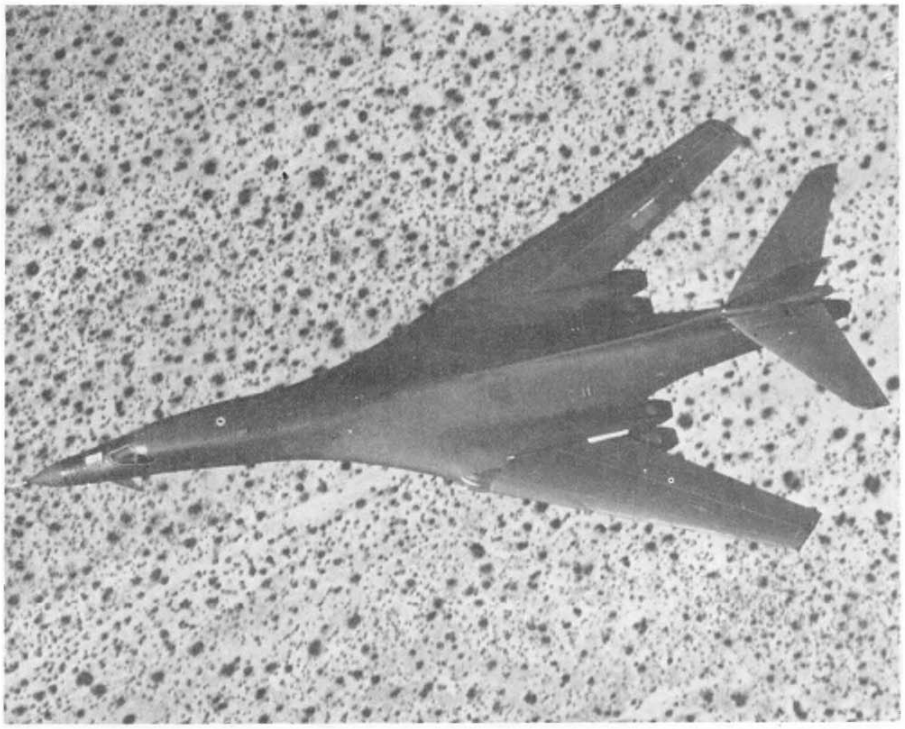
B-52s conducting a Minimum Interval Takeoff (MITO) at
Fairchild AFB, WA, during a Global Shield exercise



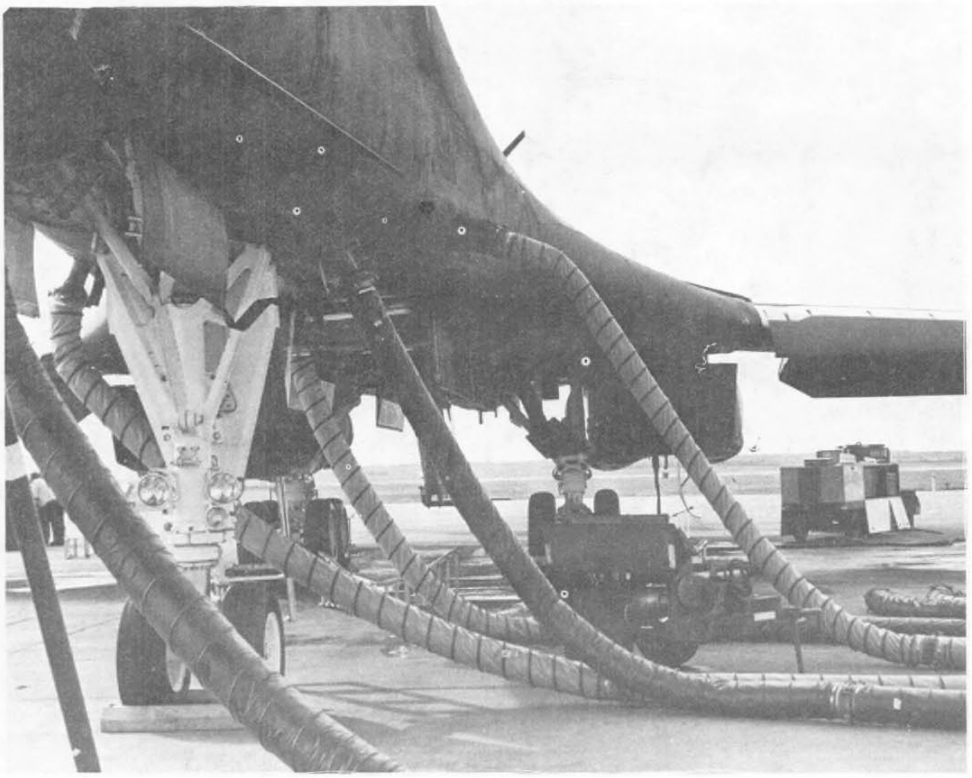
A view of the forward and intermediate weapons bays on the B-1B



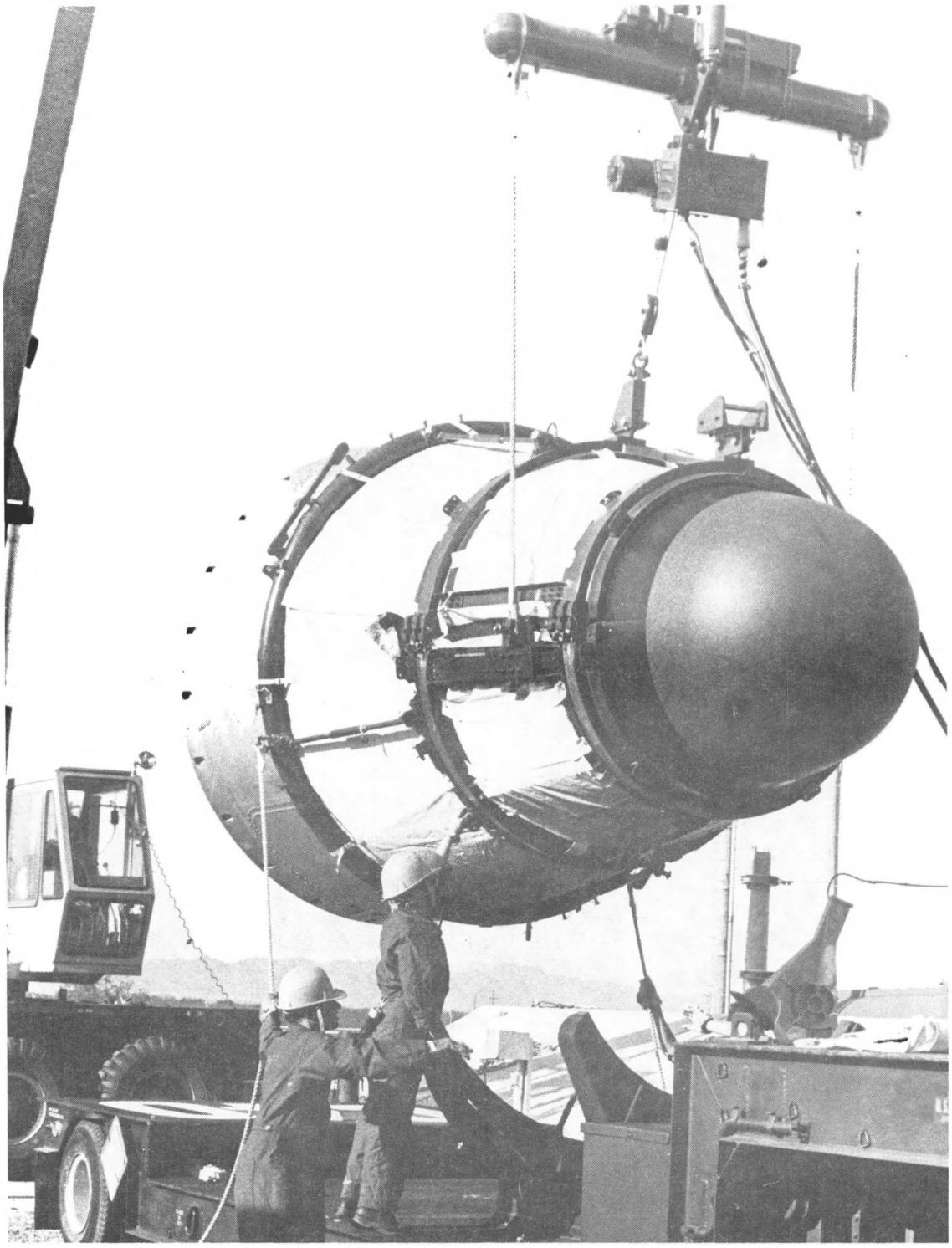
A B-1B demonstrates its low-level flight capability



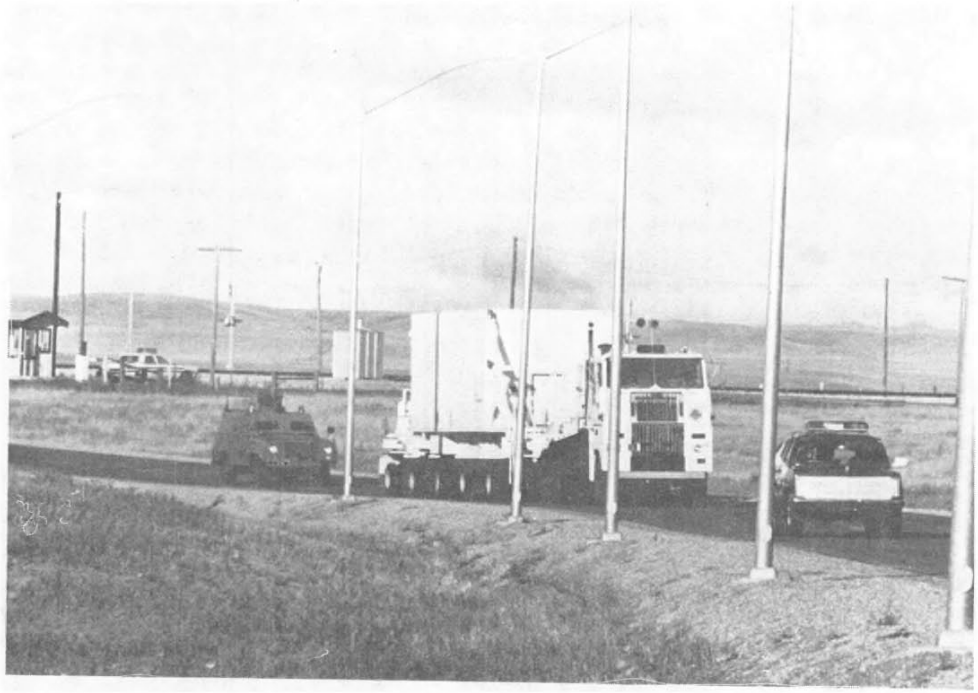
A B-1B in flight



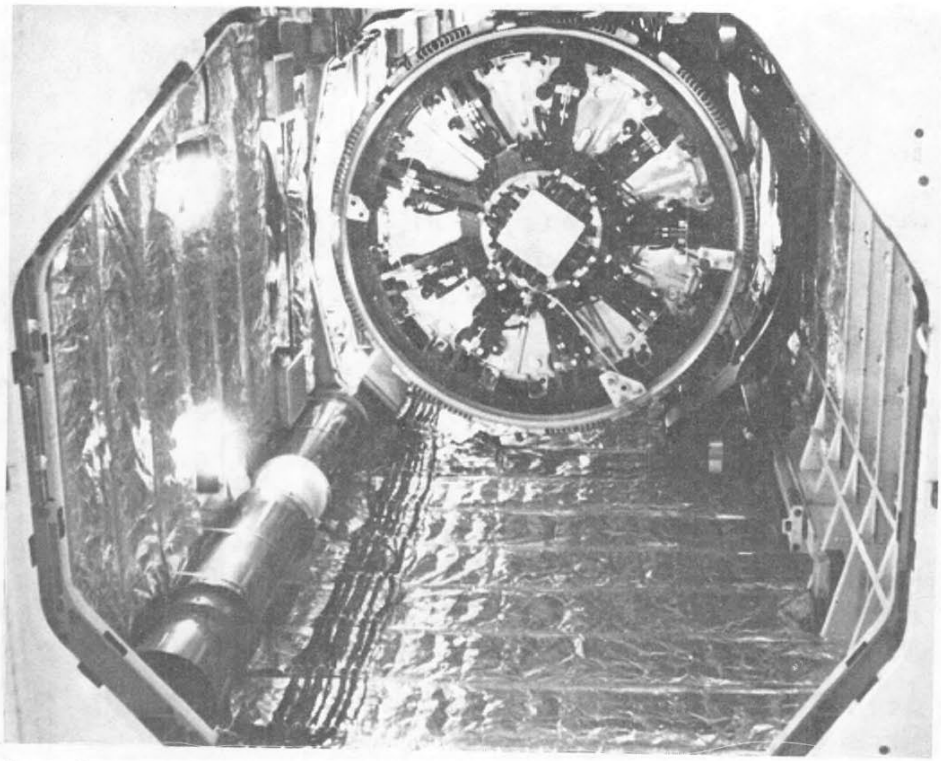
A B-1B undergoing routine maintenance



A Titan II Reentry Vehicle belonging to the 390th SMW,
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, is removed for retirement, May 1984.



A convoy transports a 90th SMW Peacekeeper Reentry Vehicle to its silo for mating, F.E. Warren AFB, WY



A Peacekeeper Reentry System is lowered into its launch facility, 90th SMW, F.E. Warren AFB, WY

Over the last thirty years, Strategic Air Command has experienced some remarkable improvements in the weapons with which it performs its mission. Technology has helped the command keep a credible deterrent force at the ready. Yet, the backbone of deterrence has remained the SAC alert force--its aircrews, missile crews, logistics specialists, security police, and all the other supporting members who have made the operation work. And, it has been their dedication and vigilance that have contributed so fundamentally to the preservation of freedom for the American people and the Western alliance. The crews that pull daily alert, whether on the ground, in the air, or in buried missile launch control centers as well as those who support them continue to form the cornerstone of America's deterrent strength. The importance, the prestige, and the commitment of the SAC alert force are the factors which have led General John T. Chain, Jr., the SAC Commander in Chief, to declare 1988 "The Year of the SAC Alert Force."



Lt Col Jaromin J. Bon, 12th SMS Commander, Malmstrom AFB, MT, explains the LCC Command Message Processor Group to General John T. Chain, Jr, CINCSAC, during the General's missile alert tour, 26 September 1986



General John T. Chain, Jr., Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command, performs duty as the Airborne Emergency Action Officer on the Looking Glass

HEADQUARTERS STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND
Office of the Commander in Chief
Offutt Air Force Base
Nebraska

9 November 1957

MEMORANDUM TO: Each Member of the SAC Alert Force

As a member of SAC's Alert Force, you are contributing to an operation which is of the utmost importance to the security and welfare of this nation and its allies in the free world. The purpose of this memorandum is to discuss with you some aspects of this operation and the importance of your part in it. For you must fully understand the reasons for the establishment of the Alert Force in order to believe in what you are doing and, consequently, do it with all your heart and to the best of your ability.

When SAC was organized, less than twelve years ago, its long-range bombers and stores of atom bombs were unmatched throughout the world and, therefore, represented an effective deterrent to aggression. Initiation of hostile action against this country would have been the signal to launch SAC's strike forces for the counterattack within a few days, and little could have prevented these forces from inflicting unacceptable damage upon any aggressor.

But while SAC's basic mission has not changed, there have been radical changes in the factors which affect the manner in which we must accomplish that mission. We no longer have a monopoly in nuclear weapons and long-range bombers. Many of the rapid advances in military technology which are reflected in our weapon systems are also utilized by the Soviets, permitting them to attack us with greater speed, firepower, and accuracy. Our own strike forces are no longer immune to destruction before they can be launched, and continuous improvements in the Soviet's aerial defenses make successful counterattacks more difficult.

None of these problems is insurmountable but we must devote a great deal of effort and talent toward their solution. I am confident that we can cope with them because SAC is not based on any particular weapon system but on an organization of experienced men like you, flexible enough to be readily adaptable to any new weapon system or technique, no matter how revolutionary. This applies, in particular, to the problems posed by the limitations of warning time.

As most of you know, we deal with two types of warning--"Strategic Warning" and "Tactical Warning." Strategic Warning is defined as that kind of long-range warning which gives the field commander enough time to move into fighting position and configuration. Tactical Warning means there is so little advance warning of an impending attack that the commander must fight from his present position and configuration.

We received a form of strategic warning of communist aggression as early as 1848 when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the "Communist Manifesto." Ever since, all the top men of the communist hierarchy-from Lenin and Stalin to Khrushchev-have made it clear that the ultimate goal of communism is the liquidation of the capitalist countries and, primarily, of the United States.

As for the Tactical Warning, we can expect the Soviets to use the oldest and most successful military stratagem--surprise, because they surely would want to exploit our weaknesses, not our strengths. Therefore, we cannot count on any warning of overt hostile action against this country until after such action has been initiated. This would give us only a few hours to launch SAC's strike forces for the counterattack. And, once ballistic missiles become operational, the tactical warning period would shrink further to a mere fraction of an hour.

It stands to reason that the brunt of the initial attack would be directed against SAC because the Soviets know only too well that the price they would have to pay for aggression would be unacceptable to them unless they succeed in preventing SAC's strike forces from being launched. We can gain a certain degree of protection against overt and covert actions, designed to immobilize our forces, by appropriate means to deal with sabotage attempts, by a limted amount of base hardening, by dispersal, and by similar defensive measures. However, the only way of insuring the survival of some of SAC's combat capability, even in case of the most unexpected and massive attack, is our Alert Force.

As long as the Soviets know that, no matter what means they may employ to stop it, a sizeable percentage of SAC's strike force will be in the air for the counterattack within minutes after they have initiated aggression, they will think twice before undertaking such aggression. For this reason, it is my considered opinion that a combat-ready Alert Force of adequate size is the very backbone of our deterrent posture.

To achieve our goal of maintaining as much as one-third of our strike forces on continuous alert will not be easy, but it can and must be done. I realize that this will entail personal inconvenience and sacrifices to you and your families. But you can be sure that I will do everything possible to ease this aspect of your alert duties. The success of this system depends on you, and I count on you to insure that the Alert Force will always be ready to achieve its vital objectives.

/s/ THOMAS S. POWER
General, USAF
Commander in Chief