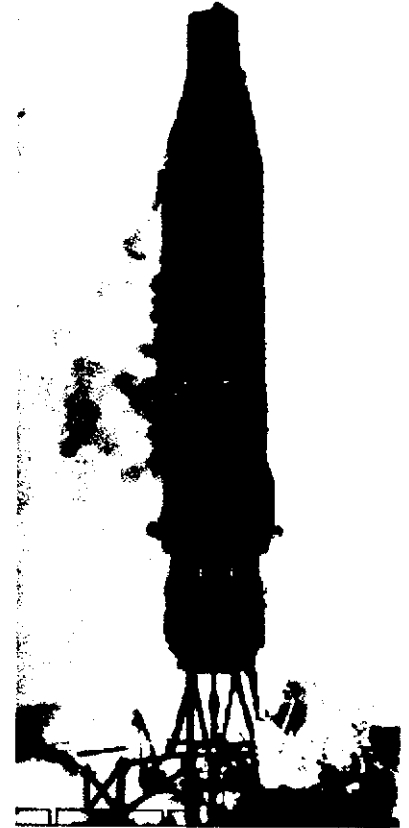
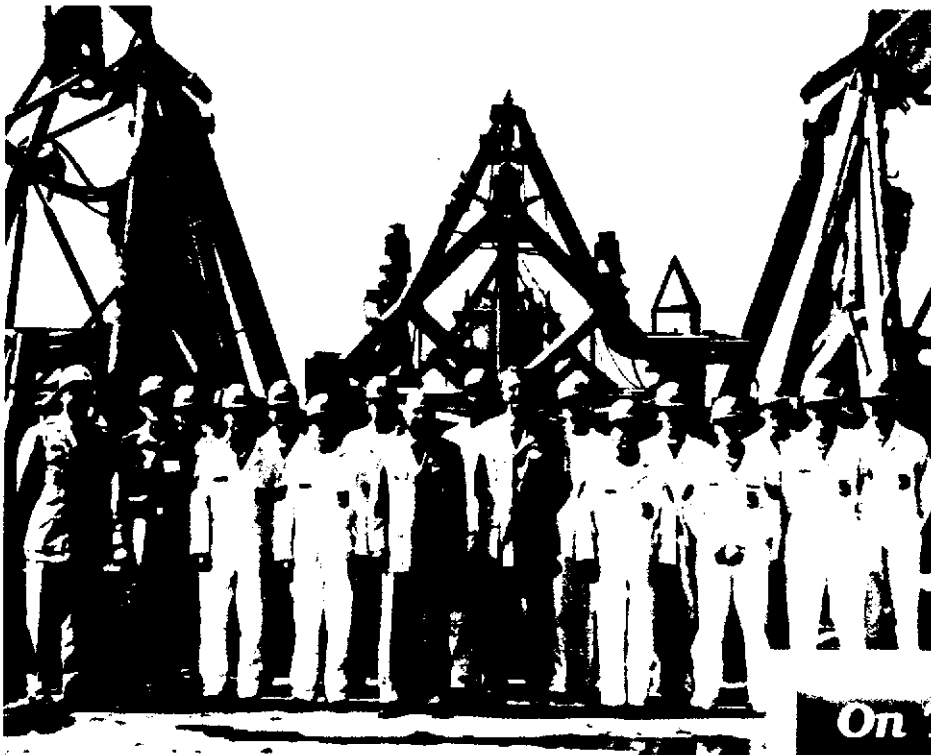


Vandenberg Celebrates 35th Year Reunion of the First Atlas "Blue Suit" Launch

9 September 1959



First SAC Crew to launch the Atlas from Vandenberg AFB with SAC Commander in Chief, General Thomas S. Power and 1st Missile Division Commander, Major General David Wade. History maker missilemen, front - left to right: Col John J. Easton, 576th SMS Commander; Maj Ernest E. Barkey, Site Commander; TSgt B.R. Pottorff, MSgt R.L. Struxness, Gen Power, MGen Wade, TSgt R.W. King, MSgt R.G. Hartz, A1C D.L. Dasner. Back Row - Left to right: MSgt A.E. Meyers, MSgt J.G. Fiotti, SSgt B.M. McLean, SSgt E.E. Slade, A1C K.L. Ballman, SSgt G.F. Oberpriller and SSgt H.E. Taylor. USAF Photo. 9 September 1959. Photo courtesy of Col Gerald Winchell USAF, Retired.

First Atlas Warriors Return to Vandenberg

Their hair looked a little more gray or was disappearing altogether, and they were carrying a bit more paunch under their belts, but the memories of the men of the 576th Strategic

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Congratulations Atlas Warriors

9 Sept 59 to 9 Sept 94

Editor's Desk

Hello Again - - So much for Summer and the World Series. And just when the Indians were about ready to hang some Central Division scalps!

We had a real nice celebration here at Vandenberg on the 9th and 10th of September. (*Front Page Story*) Some of our super pioneer crew members from the Atlas days had a chance to meet again and trade stories from the past. The function lasted the weekend and everyone had a great time.

Many thanks to Capt Dorian Hodgé and Capt Richard Burchfield of the 576th Flight Test Squadron for Co-Chairing the event. You can't imagine how many hours they worked to make sure everything turned out right. They had some super direct support from all of the following: Capt Ted Koch, Capt Galen Mays and SrA Theo Cintora. All of the active duty USAF people mentioned above carried out the Atlas Reunion duties as "add ons" to their normal full plate of day-to-day tasks. We also had the services of some retired warriors who took part in the first launch. Lt Col Dewey Garwood and MSgt Walt Cooperider (both USAF Retired) provided invaluable support. Jill Moeller of Martin Marietta Astronautics (formerly General Dynamics) and Ray Rice (Retired) of the Western Range provided "above and beyond" type support. As always there were many others, not named here, who helped with facility tours and with carrying out the details of an event of this type. Many, many thanks to all of you !!

One of our members, Bob Kelchner, is the owner of an American Speedy Printing Center in Torrance, California, and has offered to provide the printing for our newsletter. The quality of our printing has had its ups and downs over the past quarters. Quality printing is almost always expensive and that fact has had an impact on our publication. I am sure that the membership will appreciate Bob's efforts on our behalf. Thanks Bob, for your assistance and patience.

*Rodger S. Phillips, Major, USAF (Retired)
Newsletter Editor*

From The President

It's truly a pleasure to serve as the AAFM president, renewing old acquaintances, and flashing back to those days when we all wore blue. The membership diectory alone is worth the cost of the association's dues. Its only limitation is its size - - too small.

An association such as ours can only move in one of two directions: (1) growing by expanding our membership roles, or (2) atrophying, stagnating, and eventually, withering away. Obviously, option #1 is the only acceptable alternative, but that requires the support of all our members. Our executive director, Charlie Simpson, has done an exceptional job in launching this outfit, but he need our help now in identifying and soliciting new members.

I ask that all of you survey your personal correspondence, Christmas or other mailing lists, old duty rosters, and whatever, and provide Charlie with the addresses of those potential members. Please include your former associates who elected to use their talents in the civilian world. Any missileer, past or present, active, retired or separated, counts.

Keep 'em in the green and have a great Fall.

*Jim Crouch, Brig. General, USAF (Retired)
President
4010 Long Champ Drive, #26
Austin, Texas 78746*

From the Editor: Letters to our President, the Executive Director, or the Editor can be sent to any of the addresses listed, by mail or by FAX. If you FAX the Editor, get me on the line first and I will switch over to the FAX.

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First Atlas Warriors *Continued From Page 1* **Return to Vandenberg**

Missile Squadron who made the first Atlas launch possible on September 9th, 1959, were still clear and sharp.

Vandenberg was host, this past September 9th and 10th, to more than 100 former members of the 576th SMS, the ancestor of today's 576th Flight Test Squadron, to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the first Atlas "Blue Suit" launch. The 576th FTS planned and organized the reunion.

Although former members and wives had the option of attending a luncheon, a dinner and two tours of Vandenberg, they did not come for the food or to see improvements in the base. They came to see each other and to share some of those memories.

"There are some guys here who were just voices in headsets to me," said former SSgt. Richard DeVaux, a track analyst on that first Atlas shot. "I talked to them, knew their names, but it's the first time I've met some of these guys."

Some of "these guys" were there when that first Atlas left the pad in '59.

"It was a thrill, man," said Ray King, who was a technical sergeant working on the hydraulic and pneumatics on the Atlas at the time of the launch. Code name for the shot was "Desert Heat."

It was a part of history we were looking at," he said of his reaction as he watched the liftoff from the block house, a concrete reinforced structure nearby. "We knew it was a first."

There were two crews, launch and guidance. King was on the launch crew; DeVaux was on guidance. DeVaux was a transmitter specialist at the launch. The crew nearly didn't make it to the launch. "We got up at 3 a.m. and left for the pad in the crew bus. When we reached the checkpoint, the security police wouldn't let us in. No one had told him about us coming in." By the time they got to the guidance station, the crew they were supposed to relieve had already started the countdown.

"It was a long day. There was a lot of anxiety," DeVaux said. "After every step there was a sigh of relief. As the last members were called, I had an adrenaline rush, my stomach flipped. At liftoff, we watched it from a window over my console, my mind just went blank for a second, then the training took over."

DeVaux and his crew guided the Atlas, transmitting radio signals from the ground station during the first ten minutes of powered flight. Then the automatic tracking from computers on board the ICBM took over.

Thirty minutes later, as the crews waited tensely, it was announced that the Atlas had reached its destination, near Wake Island. "I said to myself, "Thank God, it's over." You have to remember that up to that point the Atlas had not had all that good of a history.

Retired MSgt Ray King said, "We put in a lot of hours, but it was all so fascinating that I didn't get tired. We knew we had a mission and we worked at it." King reported that when the Atlas splashed down near Wake, he and his crew "hollered" for a few minutes. "It was wonderful. We accomplished what we set out to do. It was such a great crew, highly qualified . . . a real privilege to work with them."

Meeting with old missileers also brought back memories of a fledgling Air Force Base . . . one that doesn't share many of the amenities of today's Vandenberg. "Those were hard times in those days," he said. "When I got here, there were only 34 enlisted guys on base and I was the third enlisted in the 576th. The living conditions in the places we had to rent outside of base were terrible. We would normally work a 12-hour day. We had to work for 42 straight days at one time. Sometimes we'd only have time to shower and shave and be out the door again. Our families couldn't understand that, but they stuck by us."

"There was a closeness then," he continued. "We rallied in the hard times. We worked hard and played hard. This (reunion) has restirred some of those feelings."

By SSgt Austin Carter, VAFB Public Affairs Office

MSgt Ray King, USAF, Retired, is a member of AAFM and lives in Templeton, California. Ray provided pictures for the reunion and our newsletter.

Comments From Our Membership

We receive many letters from members commenting on our Association. I hope the presentation of selected submittals helps to make our newsletter more interesting for everyone. Letters or comments should be sent to the Editor or to our Executive Director, Charlie Simpson. Addresses and FAX numbers are listed on page 2, with the subscription data.

From Gerald R. Taft, Major, USAF (Retired)
Anchorage, Alaska - Member Number A0237

I enjoy the AAFM Newsletter very much and feel grateful that we have our Association to help preserve and commemorate a very important part of our Nation's history, the Air Force's heritage and my personal contribution. Over half of my twenty years of Air Force service were involved in ICBM operations; crew commander - evaluator at Whiteman AFB (351st SMW) 1968 to 1974 and instructor to section chief with the 4315th CCTS at Vandenberg with the Minuteman Modernized Section (1974 to 1979).

I am interested and concerned about the deactivation of the Minuteman system and organizations. Last February I had the pleasure of visiting the one remaining Titan II site near Tucson, Arizona. This bit of history was preserved thanks in large measure to a small group of concerned veterans of the Titan force. I hope that some examples of the Minuteman systems, both Launch Control Facilities and Launchers can be saved from demolition and disposal. I would hope a site at each base could be preserved and maintained in display status, open to the public to help tell the story of our strategic land based missile deterrent force of the 1960's through 1990's.

Finally, I am particularly interested in the status of the deactivation of the 351st SMW at Whiteman. I would enjoy any information this newsletter could provide or information from members. It seems strange that something that was such a big part of our lives for so long and such a vital part of America's history is rapidly being torn up, destroyed and could disappear totally lest we make an effort to preserve the memory.

Sincerely,

Gerald R. Taft, Major, USAF (Retired)

REUNIONS

390th SMW - 10 Yr Deactivation Reunion

The 10 yr deactivation reunion of the 390th SMW will be held on 13-16 October 1994, in Tucson, Arizona. Please call John Lasher, Chairman, (602) 886-3430 or Warren Stoppkotte, Asst Chairman, (602) 722-1487 for a list of events, information and reservations.

551st SMS

The 551st SMS is seeking all former unit members for a reunion (still in the planning stage). More information will be provided as the event firms up. All interested please contact R.L. Haun, 7709 99th Avenue SW., Tacoma, WA 98498. Telephone: (206) 584-3938.

All agencies/persons requesting reunion announcements: Please make sure you provide complete data regarding personnel contacts, phone numbers and area codes, to the AAFM Executive Director or AAFM Editor. We want to ensure that you have the best opportunity possible to reach distant friends.

Museum Fund Grants

The March Field Museum returned the \$820 grant that we gave them because the Air Force Museum told them that they cannot display missile-related items. The Air Force Museum said that March had no missiles, ignoring the fact that March was the home of 15th AF, the "Missile Numbered Air Force" for several years. AAFM has let the AF Museum staff know that we think March should be allowed to reflect the history of 15th AF, which means that they should have some missile-related displays. Feel free to express your opinion to the museum.

Thanks Gerald, for your thoughts. I served at Whiteman and with the 4315th, in the wave just before you, and it is a strange feeling to see the changes taking place. Sorry for the delay in printing your letter, Gerald, but we finally did it. Have a great Fall up there in Alaska.

Part 2 of a Series - By Charlie Simons

GLCM - The Ground Launched Cruise Missile

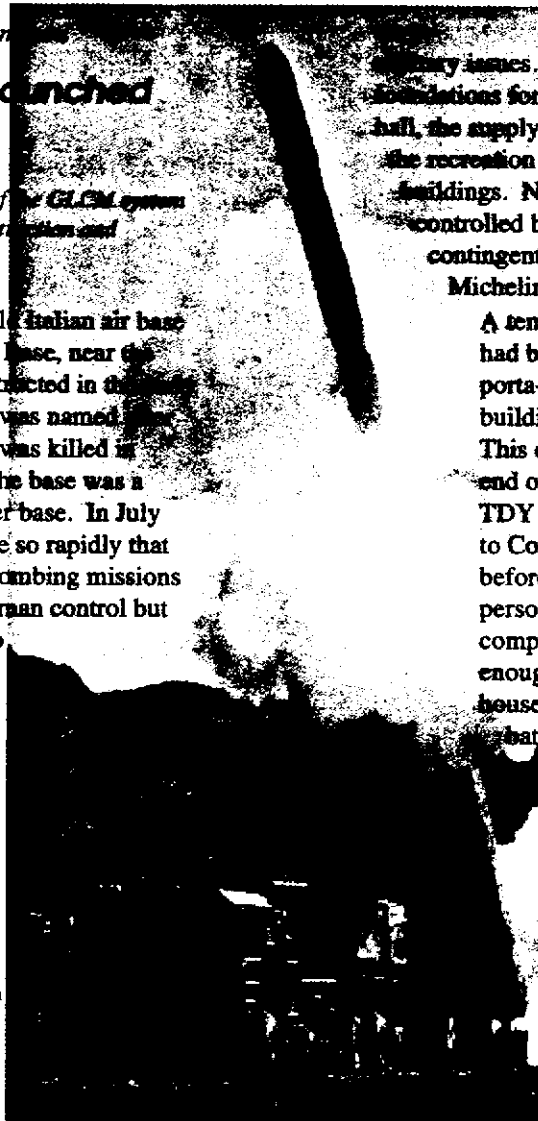
Part 1 provided a brief description of the GLCM system and its deployment - this month, construction and activation of one of the GLCM bases.

The second GLCM base was an old Italian air base in southern Sicily, Magliocco Air Base, near the town of Comiso. Originally constructed in the late 1930's by the Italian Air Force, it was named after an Italian Air Force general who was killed in Ethiopia. During World War II, the base was a German and Italian fighter-bomber base. In July 1943, Patton's troops took the base so rapidly that some German pilots took off on bombing missions when the base was still under German control but landed at the end of the mission to be met by American soldiers.

The base had a number of brick and concrete buildings and a single runway about 5,000 feet in length. All of the buildings had been severely damaged during the battle for Sicily, and the base had little use after World War II. In 1982, the bombed out structures still stood, and only a small Italian Air Force communications unit occupied the base.

When construction started in 1982, the first task was to demolish all the old buildings. One two story dormitory was retained for Italian Air Force use, a former power substation was converted into a small base exchange facility and the original concrete monument to General Magliocco was left intact near the base entrance.

When I arrived on 30 April 1983, there were two U.S. Navy construction officers, a civilian contract construction management office, six TDY Reserve/National Guard food service personnel and twelve TDY civil engineers (two officers and ten NCO's). There were also three USAF officers stationed at Sigonella Naval Air Station, about 50 miles north, working logistics services and political-



...ary issues. The steel was rising out of the foundations for the first two dormitories, the dining hall, the supply building, the maintenance building, the recreation center and some small support buildings. No roads were in, and security was controlled by a small Italian Air Force contingent commanded by Lt Col Aldo Michelini.

A temporary housing and office complex had been planned using Italian-built porta-cabins, prefabricated modular buildings that were assembled on site. This complex, to be completed by the end of April, was behind schedule. The TDY civil engineers had been dispatched to Comiso to get the complex completed before the first PCS and TDY USAF personnel arrived. This 45 building complex included a dining hall, offices, enough 800 square foot "dormitories" to house over 200 people (12 per room), bathroom buildings, laundries and a power house water storage facility.

The leader of the TDY engineers, Col Gene (Junkyard Dog) Whittenberg, motivated the Italian contractor with some strong words, and porta-cabins, lights and the water system quickly began to take shape. On Wednesday, 4 May, I met the first twelve PCS officers and NCOs, all key staff members for the base opening. We served our first meal in the dining hall the next day at breakfast. The next few days were a busy time for our small group - the first 180 "Palace Trippers," specially selected NCOs and officers who were sent to Comiso to get the base ready for the permanent party mission people, the "Ready Merlin" force, was due to arrive early the next week. The Palace Trip program selected the initial cadre of support people for temporary duty to Comiso for up to six months. Other support personnel arrived PCS each week, with the inflow growing to replace the TDY people over a period of several months. The PCS people were quartered in apartments

Continued on Page 6

GLCM - The Ground Launched Cruise Missile

From Page 5

in towns around the base, while the Palace Trippers troops lived twelve per room in the porta-cabins. Large numbers of other TDY people, mostly short term, stayed in hotels in beach resorts and nearby cities. Many, especially cooks and engineers, were National Guard and Reserves who were called to active duty to help open our new base.

The porta-cabin complex was completed quickly, and construction was at a rapid pace on the permanent buildings. We built a softball field, a three hole sand green golf course, basketball courts and other rudimentary recreation facilities to use during our limited leisure time. A temporary GLCM alert area, with a command post and weapons support buildings, was also nearing completion.

On 30 June 1983, the 487th Tactical Missile Wing was activated, with the arrival of Colonel Tom Bowen, the first commander. He had spent the past several months at Davis Monthan AFB, training with the Ready Merlin force, the group of operations, maintenance and security personnel who would arrive in January 1984, to man the first GLCM flight. With activation of the wing, the flow of incoming permanent party increased significantly, as key ops and maintenance staff, as well as more permanent support personnel arrived. By the end of 1983, almost 800 people called Comiso home.

In early fall, we began moving into our permanent buildings. The rec center, a dorm, maintenance and supply buildings, the first BX and the CE building were completed. Roads turned from mud into pavement, and more buildings began to rise from the ground. The porta-cabin residents moved from twelve man rooms to four man rooms in



our first dorm, and had the luxury of having a bathroom of their own, rather than sharing the small temporary latrines and showers. Comiso was rapidly becoming a "real base."

In January 1984, the Ready Merlin troops, their equipment and the first missiles arrived. Comiso now had everything it needed to become mission ready - and work progressed at a rapid pace to meet the goal of operational readiness by mid-summer. The first NATO Tac Eval was scheduled for mid-June, so the first half of 1984 was filled with exercises, training and preparation. The initial Tac Eval was delayed for a few weeks by an Italian election, but by late summer 1984, Comiso was an operational GLCM wing with missiles on alert.

Comiso continued to grow until almost the very end, with families beginning to arrive in 1985, and construction of the permanent GAMA, support facilities, family housing, a school and much more taking place over the next six years. The base grew to more than 2,400 people, and was active until the INF Treaty closed it down in May 1991, when it became just another chapter in the history of the Cold War.

The author, Colonel (Ret) Charles G. Simpson (Mbr No L0001) was the first PCS USAF member at Comiso.

Memories of the GAR

By Charles Dunnet
TSgt USAF (Retired)

As an Air Launch Missileer, I feel dwarfed by the Titans, Atlas, etc. I have been retired from the Air Force since 1959, but I will submit an article on some of the early Air Launched missiles.

I entered the missile business in 1957, and was stationed at Hamilton AFB, California (ADC). We had F-101 aircraft, which carried the Hughes Falcon (Guided Air Rockets) GAR-1 Radar, GAR-2 Infrared Heat Seeking, and the F-104 which carried the GAR-9 Infrared Sidewinder Missiles. All had solid rocket motors.

Since that time obviously there have been many improvements and modifications. The GAR is now known as an Air Interceptor Missile (AIM). The marriage between the aircraft fire control system and the missile was made through the aircraft launcher rail via an umbilical interface.

For maintenance purposes, missiles we retrieved from storage in their desicated containers (resembled a coffin with latches and carrying handles) and were periodically inspected on a stationary main frame console. The console simulated a radar or an infrared target and performance was visualized by observing meter scopes, etc. Hydraulics were also applied to test control surface responses. In later years, for mobility purposes, this checkout console was miniturized to the approximate size of the missile storage container.

I was transferred to Bitburg AFB, Germany in 1958, to help activate the 525th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. The squadron had F-102 aircraft which also used the GAR-1 and GAR-2 missiles. As with any activation most of the buildings, equipment and power sources had to be put in place.

I am sure many of our members have had that proud feeling of being charter members.

In 1959, three of us missileers were sent (TDY) to Tripoli AFB, Libya, to set up another Hughes Falcon missile checkout console. I don't recall when Kadaffi kicked the U.S. out of Libya or know what ever happened to the Air Force Squadron.

Maybe one of our readers has the story on this squadron?

Donate to The AAFM Museum Fund

Our Museum Fund supports museums that display missiles and missile related items. In 1993, we gave \$2,000 to three museums. In 1994, we will provide more than \$3,000 in grants to qualified museums. You can donate to this fund and receive one of several items from the association. All of the items were donated to us for distribution, and your gift is tax deductible. Donate the following amount and we will send the item listed.

- \$3.00 AAFM Lapel Pin
- \$5.00 Bill McKee's "Missile Business" Cartoon Book or copies of all six of Bob Wycoff's poems, including "Missileer"
- \$10.00 AAFM Golf Cap
- \$20.00 44 th Missile Wing Commomorative Book

Send donations to: AAFM, Box 5693,
Breckenridge, Co 80424

Thanks to the 44th Missile Wing

When the 44th Missile Wing deactivated on July 4th, the wing's commemorative committee donated the remaining 200 plus books and a check for over \$1,300 to the *Association of Air Force Missileers*.

A special thanks to the men and women of the 44th for their support and generosity!

Take a Tip From Charles Dunnet and Keep Those Articles Coming

You just had a chance to read some of the experiences of TSgt Charles Dunnet, USAF, Retired. He did a great job and you can too. You Whiteman guys, there must be some interesting stories with everything that is going on there. How about giving it a shot and let our members hear about the current status of the 351st?

Many thanks to you Charles. You came through with one of those stories we are always excited to receive. Your experiences as a Missileer are the real stories that will make us a success. Charles sent us this article from his home in Santa Rosa, California. Hope you are having a super retirement! It was great hearing from you! The Editor