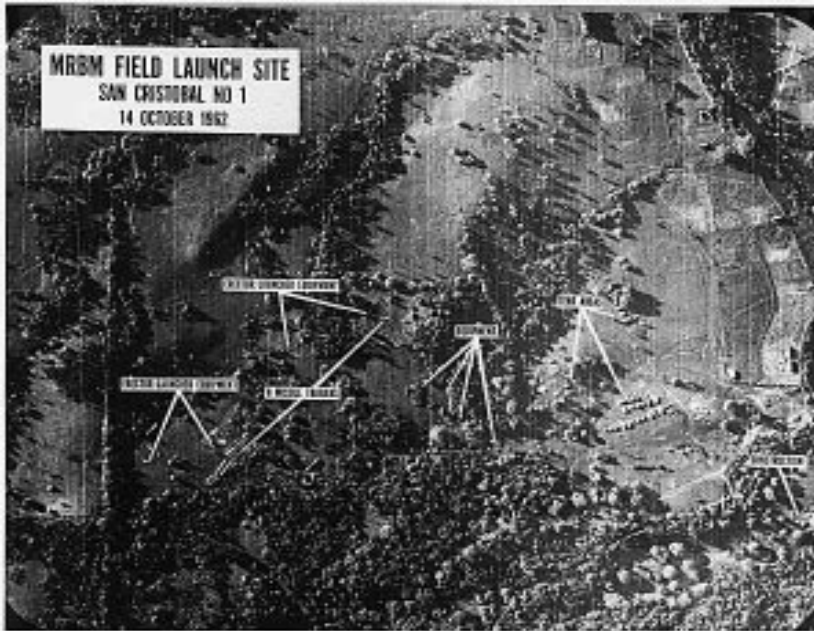




ICBMs in the 1960s - Part III



U-2 Photo and President Kennedy signing Quarantine order

Missileers and the Cuban Missile Crisis- by Col (Ret) Charlie Simpson, AAFM Executive Director

All of us who were missileers in 1962 were very busy - many of us had recently reported to the newly activated Atlas F and Titan I squadrons. We were working long hours in maintenance or pulling lots of alerts trying to get our new liquid-fueled systems up to speed. Others had already spent a year or more with the Atlas D and E, or were in Europe and the Pacific working on the Matador and the new Mace. Others were in England, Italy or Turkey working with the locals on Thor and Jupiter IRBMs. Many were in training preparing to head for their first assignment as missileers, especially since Minuteman and Titan II were coming fast. Some were in place at the first Titan II and Minuteman wings to activate. Others were working with BOMARC or with a variety of air-launched systems. And many weren't missileers yet, still working in aircraft maintenance, as pilots or navigators or in other Air Force specialties.

The SAC ICBM force had grown rapidly in early 1962 - at the end of 1961, SAC had 30 Atlas D, 32 Atlas E, one Titan I, 230 Hound Dogs and 397 Quail. A year later, we had 30 Atlas D, 32 Atlas E, 80 Atlas F, 62 Titan I, 20 Minuteman, 547 Hound Dog and 436 Quail. All of the Atlas F and Titan Is had become SAC assets in the few months before October.

I reported to the 569SMS at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, in February, after spending almost five months in training at Sheppard. My first three months were anything but busy - we had no missiles, (Continued on page 5)

The Mission of the Association of Air Force Missileers -

- Preserving the Heritage of USAF Missiles and the people involved with them
- Recognizing Outstanding Missileers
- Encouraging Meetings and Reunions
- Keeping Missileers Informed
- Providing a Central Point of Contact for Missileers

A Word from the Association

National Meeting - By the time you read this, we will be nearing the time of our fifth AAFM National Meeting. There is still time to attend events - contact AAFM if you haven't registered and still want to attend.

Tenth Anniversary - Believe it or not, AAFM will be ten years old in January. The strong support of more than 2,500 missileers has allowed us to continue to grow and to support our programs.

Board Discussions - During the Santa Maria meeting, your board will discuss several topics that relate to your association and its future. Topics will include the financial status of AAFM, future National Meetings, board structure and elections, ways to increase membership, association management and record backup, AAFM programs and other subjects recommended by the membership and the board. The discussions will be open to all attending our National Meeting.

Tech Orders - Your Executive Director is scanning dash-ones as quick as possible, although a repaint project of my old Alfa Romeo this summer did take priority for a while. It takes a long time to scan each tech order - for those waiting for copies of Titan II and Minuteman documents, be patient - they are coming.

Weapons Inspectors - Col Walt Frant, of UNMOVIC,

is once again looking for UN Weapons Inspectors. The UN will train those who have expertise in machine tools used in the production of missiles with either solid or liquid propulsion; those able to identify the special fixtures and modifications on dual-use equipment to make them missile specific and those who can recognize dual-use equipment operated in the missile area and familiar with dual-use items agreements and treaties. Call him at 202-647-1617 or e-mail FrantW@T.state.gov.

Letters to the Association

Address your letters to *AAFM*, Box 5693, Breckenridge, CO 80424, or send by e-mail to aafm@afmissileers.org. Letters may be edited to fit - content/meaning will not be changed.

AAFM Newsletter - I gotta tell you... ..I love getting this newsletter. I very seldom recognize any of the personal names that are included, and have very little connection with most of the units that are identified, but regardless, the mere reading about the missile program practically brings tears to my eyes. I guess I must have loved that old career. And I certainly have a great deal of respect for those that stuck with it and those that are still somehow involved. Thanks a bunch for publishing this newsletter. You have no idea how much it means to me.
Tom Manson, mbrno A2021, Frederick, MD

Tom, you are one of many who have compliments about our newsletters. My job as editor is easy because I get so many good articles and stories - and it is fun putting them together in each issue.

National Meetings - Having our meeting during the period between 7 June and 24 August would help a lot. Most school districts are off during that period of the summer. During the school year it is hard to break away for more than one or two days, and many teaching contracts prohibit teachers from being gone during the last four weeks of school. *Scott Mattson, mbrno L217, Cheyenne, WY*

Scott's comment was only one of several we got when we asked for feedback for future meetings - your board of directors will discuss future meeting dates and places in October in Santa Maria.

Ellsworth LCFs - Thirteen of the 15 Ellsworth LCFs have been sold to private landowners. One site, A-01, will be offered for sale to the public shortly. Contact Linda Perry of the Ft Worth TX GSA office for information, 817-978-4246 or email linda.perry@gsa.gov. The Minuteman Missile National Historic Site (D-01/D-09)

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(Continued on page 3)

Letters (Cont) - transfer ceremony will be held Friday, 27 Sept, at 1000 at D-09 LF. If you haven't seen it, a feature article on the sites, entitled "Rethinking the Un-thinkable" by Bob Thompson, appeared in the July 28 Washington Post Sunday magazine. *Tim Pavek, 28BW Civil Engineering Squadron, Ellsworth AFB, SD.*

Several members have asked about the sites at closed bases. The LFs at Ellsworth are long gone - except for D-09. Most of the fences have even been removed, returning the land to its original pre-Minuteman state. Your President and Executive Director will have attended the ceremony in South Dakota by the time you read this.

Last Titan II Launch I - Can you find out anything about the scheduled launch of the last Titan II? I would walk on glass to see that last beauty fly! I saw a launch in the Fall of 1971 during ORT - probably B-100? HMMM - don't see how that could be - I started at Sheppard 15 Sep 71 and went to Vandenberg about 10 December - Dr. Stumpf says 27 Aug 71 - I wouldn't have been there yet???? Maybe during Olympic Arena '74?? B-85 on 1 Mar 74? I will have to dig out my 'comp books' and check the dates. I didn't go out to see B-17 - after 3 months working it up, I was pretty tired! When the train pulled out Friday afternoon - we all said 'GOOD Ride-dance!' The next afternoon, I was playing golf, and found both railcars parked behind the 4th Tee! I ran all the way back to the clubhouse to call 308SMW Commander Col Bailey at the Command Post! He drove his staff car across the fairway right up to the railcars and parked until the Union Pacific rep arrived to explain why the two stages were parked out there under their nice blue covers! I think I learned a few new words! SOOOOOO, how about it? A big Titan II Reunion in the brewing for the last launch???? *Bill Howard, mbrno A1196, Milton-Freewater, OR*

Last Titan II Launch II - I'm an AAFM member and former MMIII guy (Grand Forks and Warren) currently working as Chief of Training at the 2nd Space Launch Squadron, Vandenberg. This spring we will launch the final Titan II. My Operations Officer, LtCol David Thompson, was wondering, given Titan II's history of ICBM-Manned Mission-Unmanned Booster, if AAFM would like play in the party that will be surrounding that launch, possibly in the form of a Titan II crewmember's

reunion or something. *Capt Stosh Kowalski, mbrno A1322, 2SLS, Vandenberg AFB, CA*

AAFM will keep members informed on the plans for April - and yes, the missile is one of the former ICBM Titan IIs.

Missile Badges and FM's - I recently joined AAFM - I was on Atlas F missile crew at Lincoln AFB, Nebraska. After that tour I was awarded a Senior Missile Badge. In 1981 I became a facility manager in the 740SMS and was eventually Superintendent/ acting First Sgt of the facility managers of the 740SMS. I retired on 1 March 1987. During my tenure as Superintendent I went to a conference that stated that all facility managers should be able to wear a missile badge. As far as I remember, it was approved. My question is and I hope someone can answer it, is whether or not I qualify for the "Master Missile Badge". I have always been a proud missileer, and Air Force member. I would be extremely happy to be able to wear a "Master Missile badge. I just missed wearing the "Combat Crew" badge because the 551SMS was dissolved just before it came out. *MSgt (Ret) Robert H. Brickner, mbrno A2162, Mukilteo, WA*

We have told Bob and others who have asked about "retroactive" missile badges to contact the USAF OPR for the badge - not sure where else to turn - if you have an idea, let us know.

Atlas F Door - I own and have been renovating an Atlas F site in Oplin, TX (578SMS). Last year, I located and purchased a ram (silo door actuator) for one of the doors. This week, I was able to open the door and install the ram. As soon as the hydraulics are worked out, and door attachment plate cast, the door should - should - be operational. At least that is the plan. It is close enough to actually happening I thought you might want to know. My web site at www.atlasmissiletours.com has a few photos of the installation. It is the first step in cleaning - and if possible restoring in some fashion - the silo. Anyone interested in helping provide technical assistance is certainly welcome to contact me at this address. It has turned out to be a sort of community project so the more the merrier *Bruce Townsley, mbrno SA043, Oplin, TX*

Bruce's article about owning a site is on page 8.

AAFM's Growing Library - by Charlie

Simpson, AAFM Executive Director

Over the almost ten year life of AAFM, our collection of documents, photographs and publications has continuously grown. This collection started with my personal "missile library" but has increased in size considerably due to donations by members and others. The collection provides an excellent resource for research, newsletter articles and support of writers, television producers and just generally for missileers looking for information about missile history, systems, units and people.

The AAFM photo collections are available on CD-ROM for a donation of \$10 for each of two disks, one with earlier systems and air-launched systems and the other with later systems, space and the competition. Technical orders on CD-ROM include the Atlas F and Titan I dash-one tech orders, with the Titan II and various Minuteman dash-ones currently being scanned to disk. These should all be available by the end of 2002. Each CD-ROM includes the manual, all photos for the specific system and all newsletters with articles about the system. Each is available for a donation of \$20. A collection of all AAFM newsletters is also available on CD-ROM for a donation of \$10. A "Historical Documents" CD-ROM includes Greg Ogletree's "History of the Missile Badge", several of Bob Wycoff's poems and a number of other documents that have been scanned to disk and is also available for a \$10 donation.

Our magazine collection includes Air Force Magazine's AF Almanac beginning in the mid-1950s, and the Space Almanac issue from the same period. Other magazines include early Aviation Week special issues, Missiles and Rockets and a variety of USAF level and command level magazines with articles about missiles and missileers, like Combat Crew and the USAFE Missileer. Documents include a variety of contractor and USAF publications about various weapons systems - member CMSgt (Ret) Bob Griffith just sent us about 50 pounds of Minuteman documents. Also in the collection are many Olympic Arena/Guardian Challenge publications, missile regulations and manuals and letters and papers concerning missiles.

The book collection includes several missile histories (ICBMs in the 1960s, Titan II, etc.), unit history books and official histories. Our own "Air Force Missileers", published in 1998, is part of this collection. Finally,

we have several videos and films converted to video on several missile systems.

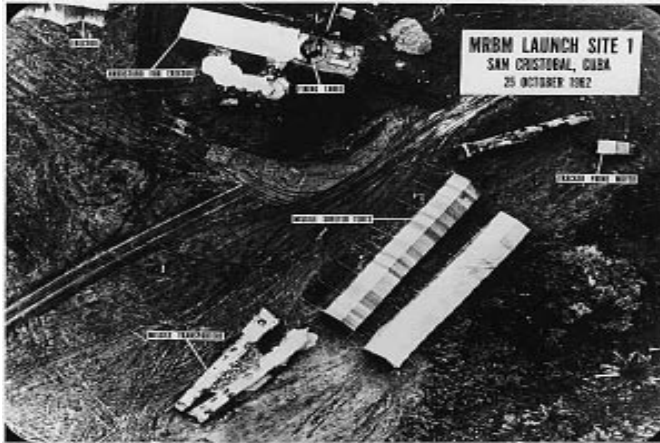
If you are looking for specific information about a missile, unit or person, don't hesitate to ask us if we have a reference document. A listing (always being added to) is available from AAFM, too. For this list, or to donate and obtain any of the CD-ROMs listed above, send your check to AAFM, Box 5693, Breckenridge, CO 80424, or log on to www.afmissileers.org and use your credit card.

DOD Eyes Conventional Bombs For Minuteman

- from an article by Amy Butler,

Inside the Air Force August 2, 2002

A formal analysis of alternatives for the land-based strategic nuclear deterrent is scheduled to begin in FY-04, although some informal industry studies will be conducted in FY-03 to gather information, according to AFSPC's future concepts branch chief. Officials are informally referring to the future missile as the Minuteman IV, but plan to consider a variety of options during this AOA. The AOA, expected to take about a year to complete, is limited to a land-based system and it will not consider options that would breach current treaty obligations. Officials could begin acquisition and development of the future missile as soon as FY-06, if a more complex system is needed. The future missile system would be focused on the nuclear mission, although MGen Tim McMahon, 20AF Commander, said the ability of a land-based missile to strike a target within 40 minutes has incited some "discussion" about the potential of those systems to carry conventional munitions. The issue has "attracted some interest once again," McMahon said. "There is probably a good chance we will see a lot of work going on in Minuteman IV that deals with conventional munitions," particularly as an option to penetrate and destroy deeply buried bunkers. Although the general said while prompt global strike for heavily defended sites, an initiative of high interest to top Pentagon planners, using missiles with conventional warheads is a "fascinating question," he added the systems carry with them sensitive political baggage. "What is the perception of a missile being launched at Minot?" McMahon said, noting a launch could signal to other nations the "leading edge of Armageddon" because they are historically associated with the stigma of nuclear war.



Cuban Missile Sites

Cuba (Cont) - no sites and only empty rooms in the squadron. I was the Job Control Officer - with no Job Control. By May, we were starting to accept our new sites missiles. By October, we failed a practice ORI (like every other unit) and run a lot of PLXs (propellant loading exercises). In maintenance, we were working seven days a week, sometimes 20 hours a day, and the ops crews were on alert ten to 13 alerts each month. In late summer, SAC decided that all units had to find out how good our new systems were - we were directed to run ten consecutive PLXs on each missile, with the last two successful.

A PLX was a long and complex procedure. The RP-1 was removed, the ordnance was removed or disconnected and television cameras placed in the silo, equipment terminal and topside to monitor the exercise. We loaded lox, nitrogen and helium. The loading took about eight to ten minutes, and then the missile was raised on the silo elevator to the launch position. Once up and locked, the crew only had a short time to complete the launch sequence - in our PLXs, the guidance system locked on and the flight was simulated with the missile still sitting on the launcher. Then came the hard part - the missile was returned to the silo (or at least it was supposed to - sometimes we had to leave a "popsickle" topside for a couple of days to boil off) and the lox was offloaded back into the lox storage tank. It took a couple of days to prepare for the next exercise - longer if something failed, which happened over half the time. We could only prepare and exercise one silo at a time - the only time we exercised all three was during the final acceptance from Martin.

On Sunday, 14 October, a U-2 flown by Maj Richard Heyser captured images in western Cuba that Airman First Class Michael Davis, a Headquarters SAC photo interpreter, determined to be SS-4 medium range ballistic

missiles. The Soviets had placed missiles with nuclear warheads only 90 miles from our shores. Over the next six days, only the senior civilian and military leadership of the US was aware of the presence of these missiles - the Joint Chiefs recommended to President Kennedy that we prepare for an immediate invasion of Cuba to destroy the missiles.

On Saturday morning, 20 October, I was in Job Control monitoring maintenance, as maintenance began preparing the second C-Site missile for the series of ten lox loadings. They had just removed the RP-1 and the ordnance, and were installing the television cameras so we could do the first test on Monday. The 9th Bomb Wing Command Post senior controller, a lieutenant colonel, called and, said "Lieutenant, SAC had directed that Charlie-2 be returned to alert immediately and all missiles are to stay on alert until further notice. They told us to ask no questions - just to do it now."

I called the Site Commander, LtCol Tom Pasco, and passed along the message. Our maintenance supervisor, Maj Ted Grossholz, asked me for more specific information - I told him he had better talk to the command post. He called me back a minute later and just said "We are returning the missile to alert."

Over the next two days, there was a lot of anxiety around our missile squadron and the base. We knew something big was going on - but weren't told a lot. B-47s and C-97s began departing, along with the EB-47 post attack command and control aircraft, and we began manning the sites with two crews. We found



Atlas Crew on Alert

(Continued on page 6)

Cuba (*Cont*) - out the reason when President Kennedy addressed the nation on Monday evening, 22 October. There were missiles in Cuba - and we were ready to go to war. As the president spoke, the US military - and SAC - went to Defcon 3.

Almost all our bombers and tankers left - we missileers were left alone and on alert. SAC increased the B-52 airborne alert force from 12 to 66 bombers, and 1,519 bombers were armed with nuclear weapons and dispersed around the world ready. Almost 200 new Atlas and Titan I missiles sat on full alert, needing only lox or lox and fuel for launch. Overseas, Mace, Thor and Jupiter missiles were also ready, and our BOMARC and air-launched missileers were equally busy and on alert. Everything was manned 24 hours a day, and we continued keeping two combat crews at each site.

On Wednesday, 24 October, the Joint Chiefs directed us to Defcon 2 - SAC was at its highest Defcon in history. General Tom Power, the CinCSAC, broadcast a personal message on the Primary Alerting System to all SAC wings, "This is General Power speaking. I am addressing you for the purpose of reemphasizing the seriousness of the situation the nation faces. We are in an advanced state of readiness to meet any emergencies, and I feel that we are well prepared. I expect each of you to maintain strict security and use calm judgement during this tense period. Our plans are well prepared and are being executed smoothly. If there are any questions concerning instructions which by the nature of the situation deviates from normal, use the telephone for clarification. Review your plans for further action to insure that there will be no mistakes or confusion. I expect you to cut out all nonessentials and put yourself in a maximum readiness condition. If you are not sure what you should do in any situation, and if time permits, get in touch with us here." All of us now realized how serious the situation was - we were very close to nuclear war. We called it Defcon 2, but we were as close to Defcon 1 as we could be. For the liquid fueled systems, crews sat ready to start the lox loading sequence - they were fifteen minutes from launch.

Our maintenance folks learned a lot of ways to keep missiles on alert. We shortened the time that work platforms were lowered for system checks, and there were "workarounds" probably not recognized by Martin - piano wire works wonders to ensure a valve that must open when the launcher starts up really opens.

On Friday, October 26, the first Minuteman I missile at Malmstrom was placed on alert due to the hard work of wing and contractor personnel. Four more attained alert by 30 October.

Saturday, 27 October, was called "Black Saturday" - an RB-47 crashed on takeoff from Bermuda, killing all four crewmembers, and Maj Rudolph Anderson's U-2 was shot down by a Soviet SAM over Cuba. A giant invasion force was being formed in Florida - and war seemed unavoidable.

The civilian and military leadership continued to work to resolve the crisis. Messages and letters went back and forth between Khrushchev and Kennedy, and options about the US missiles in Turkey and Italy were discussed. The Soviet leader agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba and we slowly returned to normal. SAC stayed at an increased alert until 20 November, when we finally returned to Defcon 4. Thanksgiving was only two days away, so we were kept busy and on base over the weekend - probably to keep us safe over a "long weekend"

The crisis was over - and even Robert McNamara attributed our success to SAC - as he stated, "Kruschchev knew without any question whatsoever that he faced the full military power of the United States, including its nuclear weapons." McNamara considered SAC's nuclear might to be "the reason, and the only reason" Khrushchev withdrew his missiles. SAC's calm, disciplined, methodical operation proved to be the key to the successful outcome of the crisis. All of us who were Missileers in that October forty years ago can be proud of our contributions at a critical time in our history.

References:

Strategic Air Command, The Story of SAC and its People, Turner Publishing, Paducah, KY, 1995

Development of Strategic Air Command, Office of the Historian, Headquarters, SAC, March 1976

Cuban Missile Crisis: Timeline, <http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/days/timeline>

The Cuban Missile Crisis, A Chronology of Events, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/

There are a many good references on the web - just search for "Cuban Missile Crisis." The recent film "Thirteen Days" was a "history" of this event - but many reviews commented on how the movie modified history. A better historical drama was broadcast on television in the 1970s, "Missiles of October." AAFM has a copy of this drama available for loan. The Turner SAC book has a good review of the crisis and was the source of quotes in our article.



Titan I Dining Area

The Yuletide Dinner of 1962 - W. F.

(Rob) Roberson, AAFM Mbrno A1471, Bellevue, WA

Unlike the Titan II ICBM sites, a Titan I site had a full mess with cooks and a complete kitchen. The meals were the same as served at the main base, but for the most part they were prepared with a little more care. Notice that I did not say that they were better, any GI even this long after the fact knows never to admit to having an excellent meal while in the service, but there was one meal, one very special dinner that I do remember. There was this Airman who had been on remote assignment for 18 months, in training for another 15 months now finding himself missing his children's third Christmas because he was on alert. He was what we would later call not a happy camper.

Somewhere around 2000, this airman was sent off to the far reaches of the complex to take readings on some equipment. You could hear his slow disappointed foot steps echoing down the tunnel ways as he moved off. He had only spent one Christmas with his wife. While he was in one of the silos, an announcement is made for the airman to return to the control center.

Opening the door to the control center he finds the lights are off, but right in the center of what is normally the maintenance area stands a Christmas tree, lights, tinsel, ornaments, presents, the whole works. And then out came the kids, not only his, but the families of everyone on the site that night. The Launch Control Officer, Guidance Control Officer, two electrical Power Production Operators, a Missile Maintenance Technician, a Security specialist, the Food Preparation Specialist, 6 wives, one girl friend, and 12 kids. I know for a fact that the best food ever served by the USAF was served that night in

that place. Not only did we have the standard issues, but each of the wives had brought their home cooked specialty. The cook had even spent the day cooking pheasants supplied by the security force! It was well past midnight when the families left and for the rest of the night we sat around trying to remember a better Christmas eve. MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT.

We will have a special issue of the AAFM Newsletter next year titled "Food and Missileers". Send us your stories about foil packs, MREs and whatever else you have dined on during your time as a Missileer.

Air Force One - a New Book by Robert Dorr

Many of you recognize Bob Dorr as the columnist and author who appears in Air Force Times. Bob has been in contact with AAFM many times and we have provided him resources for some of his articles. You may have seen a recent one about Matador that was a superb review of the early history of the missile many of our members were involved with. Bob has a new book about Air Force One. Air Force One is the aircraft that carries President George W. Bush on his travels. "Air Force One," published by MBI Publishing on August 10, is the book that pushes aside the curtain of secrecy to give a no-holds-barred look at the president's plane, presidential travel, and its significance to a nation now at war. The book is available in bookstores or from the distributor at (800) 826-6600 or at www.motorbooks.com

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Matadcor

More Things Remembered - by Maj

(Ret) Gene Siegel, AAFM mbrno A1241, Winter Park, FL

The first Matador missiles (Confidential weapon, MX-771) we were testing at Holloman AFB took about four hours to count down. We subsequently moved to Patrick AFB with a improved model. Count down had been reduced to two hours. At some time later, our commander, Col Burns went to Washington to make a presentation on the Matador. During this presentation some smart Artillery Officer asked, "What is your rate of fire?" Col Burns had some difficulty with that one. When he got back to Patrick he brought the problem to the Martin Co. We formed a group and went to work on the problem after duty hours. We massaged the countdown to obtain a one hour load, lock, and fire. Sometime in 1953, I lost track of what was going on as I was transferred to AACS (That is what you get for crossing a Personnel Officer.) When I got back in the missile business at Orlando AFB we were taking graduating crews to Cape Canaveral for live firings. During early 1960 we took a team or two over to the Cape and in one day fired (launched) six missiles. I don't think anyone else has fired that many in a day. A little later the author of this article retired from the USAF.

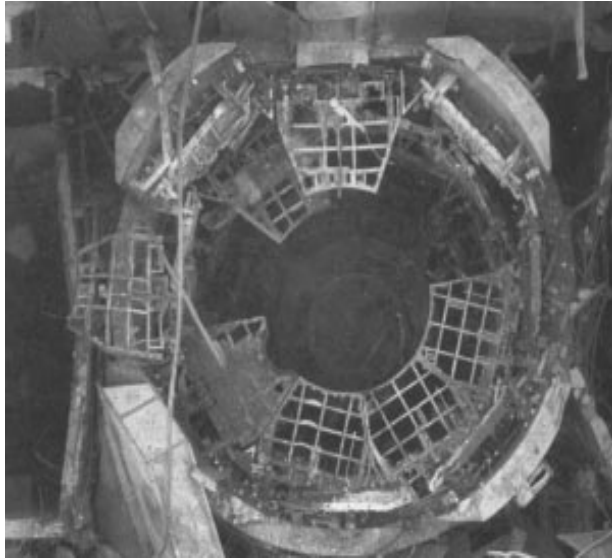
Tactical Nuclear Weapons

How many nukes are out there? Not counting our ICBM/SLBM weapons, the US has 800 warheads deployed for fighters. Russian has 1,000 warheads on land-based surface-to-air missile launchers, 1,600 warheads on 400 fighters or bombers, 500 warheads on submarines., 400 warheads on naval-based attack aircraft., 300 warheads on anti-submarine rockets and torpedoes. (From a recent military news summary)

Missileers and UFOs - by Robert Hastings, AAFM mbrno A2096, Placitas, New Mexico. Bob's father was at Malmstrom in the late 1960s.

For nearly thirty years, I have been engaged in a research project that may be of interest to AAFM members. Since 1974, the Freedom of Information Act has been utilized by researchers to declassify thousands of documents relating to the UFO phenomenon. A number of these documents concern UFO sightings near ICBM Launch Facilities and Launch Control Facilities during the Cold War era. Specifically, the documents summarize reports by Security Alert Team members, as well as launch, targeting, and maintenance personnel, describing repeated observations of luminous, silent, disc-shaped craft capable of hovering and high-velocity flight. Since 1973, I have interviewed nearly thirty former missileers and security personnel who have described personal experiences identical to those referred to in the documents. Based on the available official documentation, it appears that most of these UFO sightings took place in 1966-67 and 1975. There are, however, as yet unconfirmed accounts by former missileers which suggest that this type of incident also occurred during other periods — for example, near Malmstrom between 1992 and 1995. In those instances, the UFOs were described as triangular-shaped and, as was the case with the discs reported decades earlier, capable of hovering as well as erratic, high-velocity flight. To further my research, I am seeking information from AAFM members who were involved in, or may have heard about, an incident involving UFOs and ICBMs. While I would prefer that my sources go on the record, I can assure those requesting anonymity of complete confidentiality. I am also interested in hearing from AAFM members who would just like to comment on my research. I will provide documentation to corroborate my statements to anyone who responds. I may be e-mailed at r.l.hastings@worldnet.att.net or contacted at 1 Six Range Point, Placitas, New Mexico 87043.

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Help support AAFM Programs
See the inside back cover for details



Damascus Silo after Explosion

Missile Mishap

- by CMSgt (Ret) Ed Burns, AAFM
Mbrno A2043, Bee Branch, AR

The headlines read, "Explosion Hurls Big Warhead From Its Roost." The scariest news in Arkansas in recent times occurred just before 3 am, September 1980 about 3 and a half miles north of Damascus. A fuel explosion rocked an underground Titan II nuclear missile silo shooting flames and debris hundreds of feet into the sky and jolting the countryside for miles. The blast threw the missile's multimegaton nuclear warhead 200 yards. The crater, normally a 50 foot opening, is now about 250 feet in diameter.

The 750-ton concrete roof/cover of the silo was also tossed a great distance. Approximately 1,400 people within a five-mile radius were asked to evacuate their homes and businesses for a period of 12 hours. Residents for miles around the silo had been relocated about six hours earlier when a socket wrench had been accidentally dropped 70 feet into the silo puncturing the missile's fuel tank. The warhead, hundreds of times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, was never in danger of being detonated; according to officials. It is designed so that only a carefully orchestrated series of events can cause it to fire, once the command is given. The explosion occurred as two airmen were leaving the silo after attempting to repair a leak. One airman died and 21 others were injured. (The above data was taken in part from the Rural Arkansas magazine dated October 2000.)

As I now live in the area of the mishap (about 5 miles away) and a retired airlaunch missileman myself, I decided to go around the neighborhood and quiz some of the people who lived through the event and see what they remembered about the incident. They were all very willing to talk about it and most had a short story to tell. The surprising thing is, most of them did not wish to talk about the fear, danger and panic that must have been so prevalent at the time. Most of them remembered a funny situation that happened during the evacuation. The stories were more antidotal than critical.

One lady told me that she had a hard time convincing her husband to leave the area because he couldn't take all his dogs. Another lady left home so fast that she had on one bedroom slipper and one regular shoe. She had to live with the mismatched footwear for 12 hours. One lady reported that the person calling her to evacuate asked her if she had on "clean drawers." A local retired Air Force guy said that a deputy sheriff came by and told him that a nuclear missile was about to explode near by and advised him to run. He told the deputy that he was driving an American Motors Pacer six-cylinder car and he doubted if he could out run the missile. He went back to bed. My neighbors across the road felt and saw the explosion and it is etched in their minds to this day. It left cracks in their storm cellar walls and loosened the windows in their home. When a government agent came around weeks later to review any damage and see if they wished to file a claim, they declined. Their only regret is, the husband left home without his cap and had to purchase a new one. He now wishes that he had filed for the cost of the new cap. It is alleged that some in the area did file inflated claims and received large settlements. I did not visit them. I was most struck by the fact that no one that I spoke with had any ill feelings toward the military and the missiles being located in their back yards. They seem to understand the necessity of having a strong missile force and bore no ill feelings. The missiles are all gone now and the silos have been filled in. The roads and locked gates are still around. For the trained eye they are easy to spot. They are only a memory now, including the mishaps. Within days after the mishap there were tee shirts printed and sold that read, "I Survived the Big One, Titan II." There was also a TV movie made accident. It was rumored that the state is considering making the site a monument.



Control Center before Renovation

Owning an Atlas F Site - by Bruce Townsley, mbrno SA042, Oplin, TX.

Throughout the almost ten years that AAFM has been in existence, we have gotten many requests for information from people looking to buy old Atlas and Titan I missile sites. My first question is always "Why." When we worked to maintain these sites forty years ago, they leaked, corroded, smelled and were very difficult to maintain. Most of us were only too eager to get topside and head home at the end of an alert tour or maintenance visit. Obviously, though, a lot of people think the sites would make great homes or locations for a business, and a number have been converted. We have featured articles about the Atlas E site in Kansas and Bruce's Atlas F site before, and there is a Plattsburgh site that has been on the market recently that has a house topside that is really the entrance to the "real" living area. On a number of occasions, we have provided requestors with names of some of you who have expertise in a specific system to help them learn more about these complex old facilities, and some of our members have explored many of the old sites in recent years. Some of the current site owners are now AAFM members. Some of these owners are preserving part of our history, and the group in Abilene that Bruce is involved with has been one of the most active - they are called the Atlas Missile Historical Society and offer tours of the Dyess sites. The article below gives you some idea what ownership is like. - your Editor.

When I purchased the Atlas F site in Oplin, Texas

in 1997, I saw it as a creative adventure in home remodeling. My interest was primarily in the LCC and converting it to a comfortable and unique living space. The silo was sort of like an unwelcome niece or nephew - something you tolerate out of obligation rather than desire. While there is considerable structure remaining in the silo, it is such an overwhelming area, it seemed there would little I could do with it. And so the focus was on the living space.

But as the project unfolded, I found myself becoming more and more involved with the silo and its preservation. Over time, lighting was installed and more recently the 50 feet or so of water that had accumulated in it was pumped out. These efforts, minimal as they have been were, to do what I could to preserve the silo and minimize the deterioration as much as possible. It seemed that actual rehabilitation would have to be done by some future owner.

Opening the 60 ton doors that have been closed for nearly 40 years would have to be the first step in this process. While many owners have opened their doors using a variety of methods, the real secret to "renovation", it seemed to me, would be to not just open the door, but to provide access "on demand" for those times when work could be done by persons with the necessary skill and equipment - and more importantly, the interest. Most doors that have been opened have been left that way or subsequently closed after a brief period of time. The key to any long term effort - beyond that of simply trying to prevent harm - was to make one of these doors operable.

Bruce's Door on the Way Up



Atlas (Cont) - In the case of the Oplin site, opening the silo doors presented more than the usual problems. The east door of this site had the crane mounting/lift attachment point removed. The attachment point was a large piece of C-channel embedded in the door itself. Without it, opening the door was an even greater obstacle. In spite of this, when the opportunity came along in 2000 to purchase a door ram (or "door actuator for guided missile silo", as stated on the General Dynamics ram identification plate) I began to seriously consider doing just that. Finally, after a year of vacillating, I went to Houston, Texas to see the ram first hand. And when it seemed to work (using compressed air), I purchased it from the owner, Surplus Supply.

While there still was no prospect of opening the door itself, the motivation for doing this was if I ever had the chance to open the door, I'd be very upset NOT to have the ram. And so the ram sat as a "static display" on the silo cap for a year. During this time, a friend and ex-missileer, whom I had met in the Atlas Missile Historical Society, kept telling me that he would see to it the door was opened. And, on 13 July 2002 he was good to his word. The door was opened and the ram installed. Now, of course, it remains to make the ram operational. Still, opening the door was a big step and arrangements are being made to complete the work on this part of the project. When this is accomplished - soon, I hope - I will let you know. For anyone interested, pictures of the opening can be viewed at www.atlasmissiletours.com. So far so good.



Bruce Townsley's Control Center

Reunions

44BG/BW/SMW - Omaha, Nebraska, 7-11 Oct 2002, contact 44BGVA, PO Box 712287, phone 801-733-7371, email 4thbgva@xmission.com

556th SMS Plattsburgh, is holding a reunion in conjunction with AAFM, 23- 27 October 2002, Santa Maria, CA.. Information, contact: Bruce Raleigh, 8273 Burning Bush, Grosse Ile, MI 48138

69th, 586th, 701st Tac Missile Reunion Association - 9 Sept 2002 in Washington, DC. Fred Herbert, email frederick.herbert@gte.net.

548SMS, seeking former members interested in having a unit reunion during 2003. Contact Don Peoples, 55 Bucknell Ave. (609-587-6487), Hamilton, NJ 08619 (njpeeps@att.net), or Stan Bieleski, 104 Teakwood Court (865-457-4317), Clinton, TN 37716, (sbieleski3@comcast.net).

551SMS, Lincoln, Nebraska, 24-27 April, 2003, contact Ken Fisher, sms551@aol.com, 2890 Lafayette Ave, Bronx, NY 10465-2231, phone 718-792-2360

Matador Units (1st, 69th and 11th TMS) 2-6 October 2002, Town and Country Inn and Conference Center, Charleston, South Carolina, Contact Quint (Mickey) and Emalu Hart, 156 East 200 South, reston, ID 83263, phone 206-852-1863, email qhart@dcdi.net

**Get Your Notices in as Early as Possible
so we can get the word out for you**

Taps for Missileers

Col (Ret) Edward L. Bailey, an AAFM member, served in the 308SMW, 381SMW, 341SMW, and commanded the 91SMW, was AFSPC/LG and lived in Greer, SC

LtCol (Ret) Chad Fossen, an AAFM member, served in Minuteman in the 455SMW, 91SMW and 90SMW and in the 4315CCTS. He lived in Boulder, Nevada

SMSGt (Ret) Neal Balmer, an AAFM member, served in Matador and Mace in Germany, as an instructor at Lowry and with the Eastern Test Range. He lived in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania.

LtCol (Ret) Kenneth Byrd served in the 390SMW in Titan II and was a sergeant pilot in WWII, and lived in Colorado Springs

MSgt (Ret) Andrew Fitzgerald, an AAFM member, served in Hound Dog, Drones and in the 90SMW and 321SMW and lived in Lakeland, FL

Minuteman on Alert at Vandenberg Cuban Crisis October 1962 - by CMSgt (Ret) Bob Kelchner, AAFM Mbrno

L0014

As part of an instructor Minuteman Targeting & Alignment Team at VAFB in October 1962, we were busy training a team down from EILsworth AFB, South Dakota. Many long, 12-hour days. Our Team, T&A 03, consisted of 2Lt Bob Hale, myself (Sgt Bob Kelchner) and Sgt Harold Garber, assigned to the 394SMS. The training was going well, although it was mostly a case of the "Blind leading the blind." We were the most experienced maintenance people in Minutemen at the time, with a year under our belts. We had been the first people to factory schools in 1961, consequently our instructor status at Vandenberg AFB, Lompoc, California.

For the first ten months of 1962 we observed the completion of the six Minuteman sites at VAFB (no missiles installed), lots of contractor people, and many trips to the sites to stand around and watch. On Sunday afternoon 21 October I received a call from my Team Chief, 2Lt Hale. He would be by to pick me up in 15 minutes to attend an emergency meeting at the base. Well, after being in SAC for six years babying B-47s, I knew something was up.

With half the 394th at the beach, the other half attended a briefing at the 394th. The best I can remember, Officers from the 1STRAD briefed us that SAC was beginning to get ready for something, and to go home and "Stand By." We would be on 15 minute telephone alert, meaning, when the phone rings, answer it within three rings and be ready to get to your work center within 15 minutes. We were then dismissed and went home.

On Monday morning, 22 October 1962, at 0600 I received that call, and got to my work center in 15 minutes along with the rest of my team. Most of the day we spent checking our optical alignment and support equipment, Targeting Van, Technical Orders, etc.

It was later in the day while watching President Kennedy on TV that we learned the Soviet Union had placed Missiles in Cuba and the US didn't like that. Within an hour we went on DEFCON 3. I had experienced Alerts at my previous assignment at McCoy in Florida, but not like this one.

At McCoy, we had aircraft to get ready, but at Vandenberg we didn't know what the heck we were going to do. Well, we soon found out: my team was to go home and return for an 0700 Tuesday morning (23 Oct.) departure for LF-02 to Align, Target and bring the missile to Strategic Alert. We had questions about doing this. We had never seen a loaded/live missile in the new

launch facilities, nor an operational Guidance & Control System (G&C).

During that week, Vandenberg AFB became an operational missile base. We departed the maintenance area with classified targeting tapes, side arms and orders to not return until our site was on "Alert." We were still unsure what to expect, but when we arrived at LF-02, we saw a change right away. No contractor vans, trailer, or personnel. Everyone was military, and had just completed G&C and RV installation.

Where normally we just walked onto the site for training, this time at least six security guards verified our authorization, and the process took 30 minutes! We were in charge of the site for the next 16 hours, and we observed some very surprising things. All the steel collimator plates had been cut from the launcher liner, and the collimator was moved completely down to the end of the bench.

A live RV was installed, so we had an RV maintenance person in the equipment room to ensure compliance with the Two Man Policy. The maintenance diving hoard was down, and the RV technician stood out there. We watched him, and he watched us. He was armed with a loaded .45, which he dropped, and it fell to the bottom of the launcher where it stayed for at least ten days (I'm saving that story for a later date — watch for it.)

We brought the site to Alert, secured it, then departed for the main part of VAFB. During the week of 22-29 October, our Job Control people informed us that for a short time, all six Minuteman Sites were on Strategic Alert (Green). As the week progressed, we replaced two or three guidance systems that failed, and found one missile with a downstage problem. Our team brought three sites Green before the Cuban Crisis officially ended.

Did we bring Vandenberg Minuteman on Alert before the 341st SMW Malmstrom Sites that week? Did we have more birds on alert than Malmstrom for a while? I guess only a few Ops. Guys can say for sure. However, as part of a Targeting & Alignment team, we loaded the targeting tapes, saw the Green Strategic Alert light on the Targeting console, and got confirmation from the only operational LCF Crew at Vandenberg. There were three Targeting teams doing the same thing. We confirmed what we did.

What a week! Six Minuteman Missiles on alert at Vandenberg. I hope we never see that again.