



# 20th AF celebrates 60 years of history



Photos courtesy of 20th Air Force

## From bombers to ICBMs 60 years of tradition continues



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The story of Twentieth Air Force began in the midst of World War II and foreshadowed the birth of the United States Air Force as an independent service. As far back as 1939, the eventual activation of Twentieth Air Force originated as an idea advocated by General of the Army Henry H. Arnold, commanding general of the Army Air Forces.

Early in his career, General Arnold recognized the need for a true, long-range, heavy bomber force and the capability to conduct truly strategic operations to defeat the enemy. As durable as the B-17 and the B-24 were, he envisioned a bomber able to fly over 1,000 miles carrying heavier bomb loads and destroying any en-

emy threatening the United States.

The B-29 Superfortress and 20th AF were the result of that vision.

The Army Air Forces, at General Arnold's determined urging, pushed the development of the B-29 as early as 1939. By early 1943, test flights of the new heavy bomber were well under way.

The makers of the Superfortress, the Boeing Company, expected the bomber to be combat ready in sufficient numbers by early 1944. As the war progressed, General Arnold and American planners proposed a plan to use the new weapon directly against Japan and its war effort. The bombers would first attack the Japanese from bases in China in missions code named MATTERHORN.

As bases closer to the Japanese

home islands in the South Pacific became available, the B-29 crews would begin devastating attacks against the industrial and military centers of Japan.

General Arnold believed the B-29s should be focused on the strategic bombardment of Japan and not put under a theater commander who might divert the bombers from that mission. Because of this, General Arnold suggested that control of MATTERHORN remain with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, exercising "executive direction" of the B-29 forces. On April 4, 1944, 20th AF was activated and two days later, General Arnold, by that time promoted to four-star rank, assumed command of 20th AF. As the numbered air force's first commander, he

directed the strategic bombing mission of the Superfortresses through the field commands of the XX and later the XXI Bomber Commands.

As the war neared its end and the invasion of Japan loomed, General Arnold relinquished command to Major General Curtis E. LeMay and Headquarters, 20th AF was transferred from Washington D.C. to Harmon Field, Guam.

Under General Arnold's command, 20th AF struck at the very heart of Japan. Later under General LeMay, strategic bombing against the Japanese homeland including the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought an end to the war.

From bombers to ICBMs and from strategic bombing to strategic deterrence, the women and men of 20th AF continue a tradition born 60

years ago.

In 2004, 20th AF celebrates its 60th anniversary and hearkens back to another tradition initiated by General Arnold. Under the direction of General H. H. "Hap" Arnold the U.S. Army Air Corps began what was to be called his "Wing Dings."

Probably first held in 1933 at March Field, the Wing Dings were held to enhance esprit de corps among the airmen. The close bonds enjoyed by the Air Corps officers and their British colleagues of the Royal Air Force during World War II added to the custom of what would become the Dining-In/Dining-Out.

On Sept. 18, the people of 20th AF return to that tradition to commemorate their anniversary and the commitment to mission they share with their World War II heritage.