



ICBM Timeline

October 1959

First U.S. ICBM alert at Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

August 1960

First Atlas D complex, F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., operational

June 1961

341st Strategic Missile Wing first to operate Minuteman

April 1962

First Titan I ICBMs go on alert at Lowry AFB, Colo.

October 1962

Cuban Missile Crisis – Strategic Air Command places Atlas and Minuteman Is on increased alert

April 1963

First Titan II goes on alert at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.

April 1964

ICBMs on alert equals, then surpasses, number of ground-alert bombers

January 1966

First Minuteman IIs go on alert at Grand Forks AFB, N.D.

August 1970

First Minuteman IIIs go on alert at Minot AFB, N.D.

April 1985

SAC begins Rivet Minuteman Integrated Life Extension

May 1987

Last Titan II missile removed from alert duty

December 1988

Full operational capability of Peacekeeper reached at F.E. Warren -- 50 missiles

September 1991

Pres. Bush starts de-alerting SAC ICBMs and bombers

July 1993

ICBM mission transferred from Air Combat Command to Air Force Space Command

October 2005

Last Peacekeeper ICBM deactivated at F.E. Warren

August 2008

564th MS at Malmstrom AFB, Mont. inactivated, bringing force to 450 missiles

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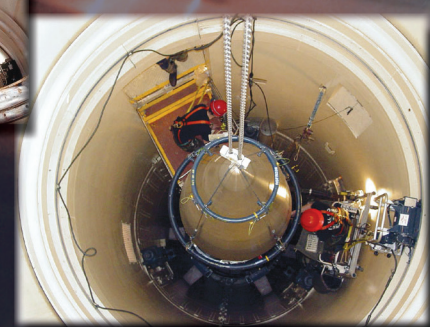
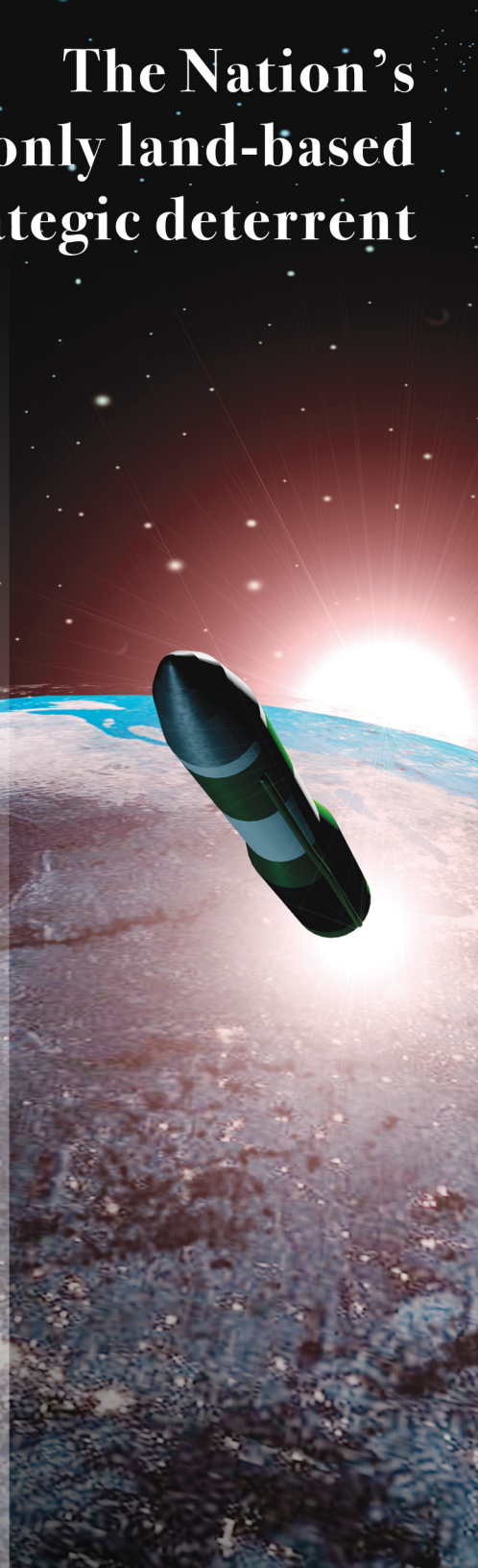
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50 YEARS OF ICBMS

The Nation's
only land-based
strategic deterrent

ICBM 50TH
Golden Legacy
Enduring Deterrent



Deployed across the Great Plains of the United States, dedicated Airmen operate, maintain and secure America's only land-based strategic deterrent, the Minuteman III, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. With an area of responsibility of nearly 45,000 square miles, outstanding security forces Airmen defend our ICBM force while skilled maintenance Airmen boast a 99% alert rate, fundamental to our national security posture. October 2009 marks 50 years since the first Atlas D went on alert, and the start of the Air Force's commitment to the highest standards of performance in maintaining, securing and operating varied ICBM weapon systems.

The Air Force owes 50 years of success to the visionary leaders and technical experts – the pioneers who designed and deployed the ICBM weapon system and fail-safe command and control structure. Their understanding of the vital importance of the strategic deterrence mission and their solemn respect for the awesome power of nuclear weapons influenced the necessary standard of perfection we strive to achieve every day.

Mission

The mission of 20th Air Force is clear: "America's ICBM team deterring conflict with professional people and safe, secure, ready missiles." From the security team on the ground and in the air in UH-1N Hueys, to the support team, and the missileers in launch control centers, these Airmen, civilians and contractors understand the magnitude of responsibility that comes with the nuclear deterrence mission. They accomplish their mission with great skill and professionalism. Nuclear deterrence, after 50 years, remains a critical contributor to our Nation's strategic defense. The Air Force is always there, ready to employ force when directed.

Day in the Life of a Missileer

"Every morning I wake up and put on my uniform and prepare myself for a job that many Americans don't even know exists. I attend mission planning and pre-departure briefings before driving upwards of 150 miles to undisclosed sites in eastern Wyoming, northern Colorado and western Nebraska. I traverse 80 feet underground to take my place in a forward-deployed position. While on a 24-hour strategic alert, I have custody and responsibility of 10 intercontinental ballistic missiles. ICBMs have guarded our Nation's freedom for 50 years. I ensure our Nation's deterrence capability through positive control and nuclear surety of all of our weapons. I am proud to operate a system that can only be executed by order of the President of the United States. And if told to do so, I will perform my job expeditiously and without error. I hold the umbrella of deterrence; I am an Air Force missileer."



-- 1st Lt Derek Arnholtz, 90th Missile Wing, Operations Support Squadron, F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo.

A Brief History

In response to the growing Soviet missile threat, the U.S. Air Force began the rapid development of the ICBM. In July 1954, the Air Force established the Western Development Division, which developed the first-generation ICBMs – the above-ground Atlas as well as the Titan, housed in underground silos.

Once the first alert of a nuclear warhead-equipped Atlas D was achieved at Vandenberg AFB, Calif. in October 1959, the Air Force immediately started work on a solid-fueled, second-generation ICBM called the Minuteman. By the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, ten Minuteman I ICBMs were already on alert at Malmstrom AFB, Mont. Just three years later, the first-generation ICBMs were replaced with the larger and more accurate Minuteman II. By January 1970, the Air Force had deployed the Minuteman III. Throughout the 1970s, in response to the Soviet Union's build-up of multi-warhead ICBMs, the Air Force started work on the Peacekeeper. In 1987, 50 Peacekeepers were deployed in existing Minuteman III silos at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo.

At the height of the Cold War, the Air Force maintained an ICBM fleet of more than 1,200 missiles on alert as a counter force to the approximately 1,400 Soviet ICBMs poised against the United States. Finally, in the late 1970s, the United States and Soviet Union (later Russia) started negotiations toward significantly reducing both countries' long-range nuclear missiles.

The Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty led to the inactivation of the Minuteman ICBM wings at Grand Forks AFB N.D., Ellsworth AFB S.D., and Whiteman AFB Mo., and the destruction of the missiles and silos assigned there. Similarly, the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty brought about the deactivation of the Peacekeeper squadron at F.E. Warren AFB. More recently, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review directed the deactivation of the 564th Missile Squadron and its 50 Minuteman IIIs at Malmstrom AFB, Mont. These actions brought the Air Force's land-based strategic nuclear deterrent force to 450 Minuteman III ICBMs deployed at Minot AFB N.D., Malmstrom, and F.E. Warren.

Today and Beyond

Currently, the Air Force maintains a fleet of 450 on-alert Minuteman III ICBMs: three-stage, solid-fuel, silo-launched guided missiles. This weapon system is undergoing a \$6.7 billion modification program that is updating the weapon system from "nosecone to nozzle." These modifications, along with modernization of security systems, will make the Minuteman III a viable strategic deterrent well beyond 2020.

As the Air Force activates Air Force Global Strike Command, a brand-new major command committed solely to the nuclear deterrence mission, 20th Air Force and the ICBM mission will transfer from Air Force Space Command to AFGSC. For AFSPC, the pride shared today in the heritage and rich history of the ICBM mission will always be a part of the command's contribution to national security. As for the Airmen who meticulously accomplish this mission, they remain vigilant guardians of our Nation's security.

