



United States Air Force

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SAC HISTORY

The Strategic Air Command was born March 21, 1946, with a mission of deterring aggression by performing long-range strategic air operations.

Gen. George C. Kenney was appointed commander and given the mandate to build an organization capable of conducting long-range offensive operations in any part of the world. He began with 100,000 military people and 1,300 aircraft, including about 300 B-29 bombers. Four months after he started, the atomic bomb test at Bikini displayed the command's nuclear capability and ushered in an era of rapid expansion.

In 1948, deliveries of two new aircraft began -- the B-36 and B-50 -- and Gen. Curtis E. LeMay took command. The headquarters moved from Andrews AFB, Md., to Offutt AFB, Neb., and in-flight refueling was introduced, giving SAC's bombers true intercontinental range.

During the Korean War, B-29s made history in their first real test, dropping 167,000 tons of conventional bombs and destroying every strategic North Korean industrial target in three months. In August 1953, the test explosion of the first Soviet hydrogen bomb emphasized the communist nuclear threat, and all phases of SAC training were pushed ahead at full speed.

New aircraft were introduced to replace old and obsolete systems. By the mid-fifties, SAC was operating its first all-jet bomber, the B-47. The KC-97 was the main refueling tanker. Before General LeMay's reassignment in 1957, SAC had received the B-52 and KC-135. The non-stop, around-the-world flight by three B-52s in 1957 demonstrated the command's worldwide capability.

By the end of the decade, a third of the bomber force was on 15-minute ground alert, and airborne alert and dispersal concepts were being tested to overcome shorter warning times. The B-36 was gone, but SAC had added the B-58, a supersonic bomber.

Gen. Thomas S. Power, SAC's third commander, supervised the entry of intercontinental ballistic missiles into the force. Atlas and Titan wings were activated in 1958, and Snark, Thor, Jupiter, Hound Dog and Minuteman soon became familiar terms in describing the mixed force of manned and unmanned systems.

During the mid-sixties, the B-47 and KC-97 were retired. In 1971, the B-58s were replaced by the FB-111 variable sweep-wing bomber. The Minuteman force continued to improve in quality as earlier versions were replaced by multiple warhead Minuteman II's.

From 1964 to 1973, B-52s, KC-135s and reconnaissance aircraft flew thousands of bombing, air refueling and reconnaissance missions in Southeast

Asia. SAC forces helped lift the siege at Khe Sanh, blunting the 1972 North Vietnamese spring offensive in An Loc, Kontum and Quang Tri. Additionally SAC helped force North Vietnam back to the peace tables with Linebacker II campaign in December 1972. KC-135 tankers increased fighter flexibility and range responsiveness while decreasing the need to base fighters at exposed forward airfields.

In April 1975, SAC started transferring 128 KC-135 tankers to three Air Force Reserve and 13 Air National Guard units. In the event of wartime mobilization, SAC would control these units, units that would become full partners to their active duty counterparts under the total force policy. On a day-to-day basis, each of the 16 SAC-gained units were responsible for one line of tanker alert.

In November 1975, Headquarters U.S. Air Force transferred command of the 1st Airborne Command and Control Squadron, Andrews AFB, Md., from Headquarters Command to SAC. With this action, SAC acquired the new E-4, a modified Boeing 747. The 1st ACCS had three E-4s outfitted with special communications equipment to serve as the National Emergency Airborne Command Post.

The Minuteman Force Modernization Program was also completed in 1975. This project replaced Minuteman I ICBMs with Minuteman IIs or Minuteman IIIs. Currently, a squadron of Minuteman III missiles are being converted to Peacekeeper missiles at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo.

Global Shield

To test SAC's readiness and capability in response to an attack on the United States, it was necessary to simulate a wartime environment. In July 1979, SAC conducted its largest and most comprehensive exercise in more than 20 years -- Global Shield '79.

This was the first comprehensive test of all SAC and associated Air Reserve Forces units to carry out their assigned wartime missions.

Global Shield, now an annual exercise, demonstrates the readiness and effectiveness of SAC's nuclear deterrent forces, letting participating aircrews, missile crews and support people train in wartime tasks. This exercise also lets them experience the link between their operations and the jobs of others.

New Responsibilities

A new SAC responsibility came from the 1979 reorganization of the Aerospace Defense Command. Already the operational manager for space surveillance and missile warning, SAC became responsible for organizing, training, equipping and operating these units. However, operational control of air defense, space surveillance and missile warning assets remained with the commander in chief, North American Air Defense Command. When the Air Force's Space Command was formed Oct. 1, 1983, SAC transferred its space warning and surveillance systems to the new organization. The transfer was complete by Jan. 1, 1984.

A new organization, the Joint Strategic Connectivity Staff, was established in 1980 at Headquarters SAC. The commander in chief of SAC was made the director of this Joint Chiefs of Staff Agency. Its purpose was to analyze strategic connectivity systems and procedures and to make recommendations

concerning them to the joint staff. The joint chiefs assumed responsibility for the connectivity staff and its functions on Sept. 15, 1983. This agency moved from Headquarters SAC to the Washington D.C. area.

SAC also developed the ability to rapidly project conventional forces capable of self-sustained or integrated missions in a time-sensitive crisis. This happened when national command authorities directed U.S. military capabilities be developed for quick reaction and employment in a crisis. The Joint Chiefs of Staff formed the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, redesignated the U.S. Central Command in 1983. Consequently, the SAC commander in chief directed the development of the command's strategic projection force to provide worldwide combat support.

New Systems

In addition to accepting new responsibilities, SAC expanded its inventory of weapons systems. In late 1981, SAC began getting the air-launched cruise missile, which increased the B-52's effectiveness. The missile is a small, unmanned, winged air vehicle capable of sustained subsonic flight. After being launched from an aircraft, it determines its own location and guides itself to a predetermined target. Cruise missiles first became operationally capable at Griffis AFB, N.Y., in December 1982.

To enhance its air refueling mission, SAC is complementing its existing KC-135 tanker force with the KC-10.

The KC-10 primarily supports contingency operation by refueling fighter aircraft and strategic airlifters like the C-5 and C-141. It also carries people and more pallets of cargo than two newer "stretch" C-141s. The first KC-10 was delivered to SAC in 1981.

As part of SAC's modernization effort, reengining the KC-135 fleet with modern, efficient turbofan engines has begun. Reengining not only improves the aircraft's safety, environmental impact and survivability, but also increases its refueling capability by 50 percent, almost doubles its effective range, and greatly improves its takeoff performance.

SAC also began to augment its reconnaissance force of U-2s and SR-71s with the TR-1 aircraft in 1981. The TR-1 is a single engine, fixed-wing aircraft designed for high altitude surveillance and reconnaissance.

The delivery of the first B-1B in July 1985 marked a significant improvement in SAC's ability to penetrate enemy defenses and carry out the Single Integrated Operational Plan. Future SAC plans call for production of a new manned bomber -- the advanced technology bomber -- and two intercontinental ballistic missile systems, the Peacekeeper and the Small ICBM.

The successors of Generals Kenney and LeMay (Gen. Thomas S. Power, 1957-1964; Gen. John D. Ryan, 1964-1967; Gen. Joseph J. Nazzaro, 1967-1968; Gen. Bruce K. Holloway, 1968-1972; Gen. John C. Meyer, 1972-1974; Gen. Russell E. Dougherty, 1974-1977; Gen. Richard H. Ellis, 1977-81; Gen. Bennie L. Davis, 1981-1985; Gen. Larry D. Welch, 1985-1986; Gen. John T. Chain, 1986-present) have molded the command into its present configuration of more than 1,000 ICBMs, approximately 320 B-52s and FB-111s, 640 KC-135s, and a growing number of KC-10As and B-1Bs.

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on mobility and conventional operations, and on SAC's airpower missions of sea search and aerial mining.

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