

20 Years of Dynamic Deterrence

The Need for Professionals

(Part 3 of a 22 part series)

In December 2014, Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) is recognizing the 70th anniversary of the Continental Air Forces, the predecessor of Strategic Air Command (SAC) and today's AFGSC. To commemorate this, the Command History Office is re-publishing a series of stories detailing the first 20 years of SAC. The SAC Press Service originally published these stories in 1966 to commemorate the first 20 years of Strategic Air Command. They were re-published in 1971 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of SAC. Though the AFGSC History Office has edited the original text to correct syntax and to provide insight, the context of the original text remains and the reader must view these articles looking through the lens of history.

In December 1944, the Army Air Forces created the Continental Air Forces to coordinate the activities of the four Numbered Air Forces (First, Second, Third, and Fourth) stationed in the United States. However, strategic bombardment operations during World War II showed the need for a major command devoted exclusively to strategic, long-range air combat operations. So, in March 1946, the Army Air Forces re-designated the Continental Air Forces as the Strategic Air Command. The Strategic Air Command served as America's greatest deterrent to the threat of nuclear attack on the continental United States from the early 1950's until May 1992. To accomplish this mission, the command maintained a stable of long range strike bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles along with a fleet of air-to-air refueling tankers and reconnaissance assets. However, during 1992, as a result of the diminishing danger of massive nuclear warfare and the disappearance of a meaningful distinction between strategic and tactical missions, the United States Air Force disestablished the Strategic Air Command, dividing its assets and missions among the newly created Air Combat Command, Air Mobility Command, and Air Force Space Command. Seventeen years later, on 7 August 2009, the Air Force reactivated Strategic Air Command and then re-designated the organization as Air Force Global Strike Command. Air Force Global Strike Command with its six wings contains the nation's entire inventory of Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear capable B-2 and B-52 bomber aircraft with the Air Force's newest Major Command perpetuating the proud heritage of the Continental Air Forces and Strategic Air Command.

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SAC PRESS SERVICE

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A few days before the War Department published an official directive creating Strategic Air Command, General Carl Spaatz, the Army Air Force's commander, passed a short note to the commander of the Continental Air Forces. It was just one paragraph describing SAC's mission.

"The Strategic Air Command," the note said, "will be prepared to conduct long-range offensive operations in any part of the world, either independently or in cooperation with land and naval forces...to conduct maximum range reconnaissance...to provide combat units...to train units and personnel in maintenance of the strategic forces in all parts of the world."

It was an impressive mission, but at the time ambitious. It would require years of difficult work before the Strategic Air Command could claim to carry out that mission in the sense we know it today.

Of course, SAC could have, at almost any time, assembled a striking force and delivered a few weapons. But, this was not what the mission required. The plain fact is that from 1946 until the Berlin Blockade in 1948, political and economic forces were at work in the United States and Europe that made building a military force of any kind almost impossible. It is a great tribute to the skill and determination of the Air Force men, that the job was done, and in a remarkably short time.

Only professionals could have survived those first few years and laid the foundation of SAC. It was a hard, frustrating task, but served as the first step in creating a professional organization.

The Burden of Leadership

In 1946, the United States was occupied almost completely with the problems of winding up the war. The guns had stopped, but millions of men were still under arms and the battered and bankrupt western world was looking to the United States for help.

All this troubled the U.S. government, but there was growing suspicion that war might not be over after all. This stemmed from the Soviet's conduct in Eastern Europe. However, this fear was submerged in the general rush to rebuild, reconstruct and get back to business.

Still, the United States needed a military force on the chance that the Communists could not be trusted. Yet, the United States also needed to demobilize immediately. Public opinion demanded it. Furthermore, the United States had to put every spare cent into rebuilding a Europe that could protect itself.

So, The United States conceived and expanded the Marshall Plan, supported the United Nations relief and rehabilitation activities and other reconstruction projects, and pledged to support wartime allies in every way, including military help.

But, the return to peacetime was straining the U. S. economy. Inflation began and the cost of supporting the rest of the western world was fantastic.

Thus, while military forces, particularly strategic air forces were an obvious requirement in 1946, 47, and 48, there was little money left for defense and less public support for rearmament of any kind.

Defense Reorganization

In the face of national and international tensions, the defenses of the United States were completely and radically reorganized in July 1947, by the National Security Act. This law united the armed forces, the Army, Navy and a new separate Air Force, under the control of a single secretary of defense, coordinated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

At the same time the military forces were required to demobilize, they were directed to rebuild and reorganize. Rebuilding was to be accomplished with obsolete World War II weapons and a relative handful of partly trained men, many of whom were demanding to leave the service. It was a task that almost equaled winning the war.

The Air Force, in particular, experienced difficulty. This was because in separating from the Army, the Air Force had left behind large numbers of trained support people. The volunteers for the new Air Force were mostly operations and maintenance specialists. And frankly, the Air Force had little experience in performing many support functions itself and, of course, there were few men available of any kind in the rush of airmen to return to civilian life.

Air Force weapons systems and facilities also raised problems. The weapons systems inventory contained many types of aircraft, most in poor repair and without parts, other inaccessible in overseas areas and other suffering from design faults inherited from accelerated wartime development. There was a multitude of large and small bases, too, but many were inadequate, make-shift airstrips and unsuitable for permanent, peacetime operations.

It was, therefore, a time of desperate shortages in the midst of giant surpluses.

Austerity and cost consciousness became watchwords even at a time when the Air Force enjoyed the highest defense priority.

(NEXT STORY: Part 4, SAC Before the Berlin Blockade)