

## 20 Years of Dynamic Deterrence

### SAC and the Berlin Blockade

(Part 5 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.

*Originally released 15 April 1966 [edited for clarity]*

SAC PRESS SERVICE

UNCLASSIFIED

20 YEARS OF DYNAMIC DETERRENCE

SAC and the Berlin Blockade

When the Soviet Army closed the gates of Berlin in the summer of 1948, a fact which had been hard to accept up to then became crystal clear: The Soviet Union was willing to use military force to dominate Europe.

Considering the state of the U.S. and its allies' military preparedness in mid-1948, the decision to use air power was obvious. More remarkable, it was used in ways that had been conceived in theory but only barely tested before. First, airlift was used to transport vast amounts of heavy cargo over a sustained period. U.S. and other Free World aircraft alone kept the city of [West] Berlin fed and heated during the entire fall and winter of 1948 and spring of 1949.

Second, the threat of strategic air power was used as a deterrent to a major [Soviet] ground invasion. At that moment, the deterrent mission of SAC achieved its full stature and U.S. leadership took a new look at its emerging strategic bombing forces.

Soviet actions ended speculation about where the threat or war would next originate. From June 1948 until the Korean conflict [started June 1950], Europe was the primary center of SAC training and [unit] rotation and the Arctic [North Pole region] and Far East [Asia] became secondary.

Among the many actions taken by the United States in response to the Soviet blockade, SAC sent three bomb groups to Europe, place major Soviet target areas well within B-29 range. The presence of these bombers in Europe with their awesome World War II [era] reputation was a powerful weight in the Free World's favor. Who could doubt what they would do if the Soviet [Red] Army was to move west?

During the period of the blockade, SAC's capability was displayed constantly for anybody to see and then draw their own conclusions. In July [1948], SAC B-29s of the 43rd Bomb Group circled the globe. [This 14-day round-the-world flight began on 22 July 1948 from Davis-Monthan AFB with B-20s named *Lucky Lady* and *Gas Gobbler* completing the 20,000 mile flight in 103 hours, 50 minutes making eight en-route stops. Both bombers landed at Davis-Monthan on 6 August.]. In August [1948], a B-29 of the 301st Bomb Group set a long-distance record of 5,120 miles from Germany to Kansas. In December 1948, a B-36 and B-50 left Carswell AFB, Texas, bound for Hawaii. Both made round-trip nonstop flights. The B-36 of the

7th Bomb Group made the more than 8,000-mile trip without refueling. The B-50 of the 43rd Bomb Group was air refueled [by KB-29 tankers] three times en-route. [Flight time for the B-36 was 35 hours, 30 minutes. The B-50 with aerial refueling covered 9,870 miles in 41 hours, 40 minutes.]

High point in SAC's series of dramatic [aerial flight] demonstrations was the 23,452-mile nonstop flight around the world made by the "Lucky Lady II," a B-50 [serial number 46-010] from Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona on 2 February 1949 [actually flight was conducted from 26 February to 2 March]. It was a 94 hour, one minute flight made with four inflight refueling [from KB-29 tankers]. More than an isolated, max-effort, this flight dramatized SAC's world-wide refueling and support network and its coordinated, tactical competence. It won SAC is first Mackay Trophy [awarded by the National Aeronautics Association for the most meritorious flight of the year]. [Additional recognition included the *Air Age Trophy* from the Air Force Association and individual awards and decorations received by the crew members of *Lucky Lady II*.]

That Spring [specifically 12 March 1949], while the airlift was still supporting [West] Berlin, a new B-36 of the 7th Bomb Group showed its capability by setting a long-distance flight record by flying 43 hours, 37 minutes – over 9,600 miles without refueling or landing. [This flight started and ended at Fort Worth, Texas; piloted by Captain Roy Showalter.]

The SAC record flights and long-distance deployments made during the Berlin blockade were effective weapons in the Cold War. They were a constant warning to the Soviet leaders of U.S. military capability during a time when the Communists were deciding what their next step would be.

(NEXT STORY: Part 6, SAC After Berlin)