

## 20 Years of Dynamic Deterrence

1950 – 1954

Mission: Deter and Fight

(Part 7 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 29 April 1966 [edited for clarity]*

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Several chains of events that started immediately after the war [World War II] came to deadly conclusions during the first five years of the “fifties.” For one thing, the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the Free World became a hot war in Korea. For another, the Soviet Union secretly developed and suddenly demonstrated two long-range strategic delivery systems and a hydrogen bomb for them to deliver. These events both profoundly affected U.S. defense policy and gave even greater importance to the deterrent mission of the Strategic Air Command.

While SAC had not prevented the Cold War from turning hot in Korea, it still was carrying out its mission of preventing general war. Seldom in history [up to this time] has a war been more consciously “limited” in scope than the war in Korea.

The End of the Cold War

Still recovering after the Berlin crisis, our European allies recognized U.S. leadership in opposing the spread of [left blank but denoting Communism] and even encourage it. The United States had the money, strength and motive for leadership and the Europeans were glad to be “followers” in such a potentially expensive conflict.

Also the United States was willing. In signing the precedent-breaking North Atlantic Treaty [on] 4 April 1949, we [the United States] ended almost 200 years of “non-entanglement” with Europe and set the stage for a multi-national NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] military force. This show of allied common resolve, backed up by armed force including SAC bombers on rotation in Germany, undoubtedly convinced Premier Stalin that the Berlin Blockade was having an opposite effect to the one he intended.

But, the Communists were not to be discouraged so easily. Their doctrine did not predict quick success and the post-war world was full of potential trouble spots waiting to be stirred up.

The military stand-off at Berlin was just the first move in a now and “warmer” stage of the Cold War. The next stage was to be more decisive, and test U.S. ability to stay firm in the face of combat losses.

This testing ground was the Korean conflict, a long expensive war that took lives of 33,639 Americans.

It was an unusual war for the United States Air Force because it was fought to achieve limited, specific objectives that forced strict limits on the way the U.S. air power could be used. It was also unusual because armistice negotiations were in progress for two of its three years of hard, bloody fighting.

### SAC Bombers in Korea

At the end of World War II, [Imperial] Japan's 40-year possession of Korea was ended. Both American and Soviet troops then temporarily occupied the small country separated by the 38th parallel. In their northern [occupation] zone, the Soviets set up a puppet Communist government and trained a Communist army to support it. All efforts to establish a free government were blocked by the Russians who eventually vetoed the admission of a free South Korea [American occupation zone south of the 38th Parallel] to the United Nations.

After nearly four years of expensive occupation, American troops withdrew from South Korea about the time the Berlin Blockade ended in May 1949. Just over one year later, a North Korean army, Russian-trained and Russian-equipped, suddenly attacked United Nations-sponsored South Korea across the 38th Parallel.

Within two days, President [Harry S.] Truman ordered U.S. air, ground and naval forces to resist the aggression and the United Nations Security Council called on the member states for military assistance. There was no Soviet veto [on the Security Council] because the Russians had walked out of the UN Security Council when Red China [People's Republic of China] had been earlier refused a UN seat.

In nine days after being alerted at March AFB, California [on] 1 July 1950, the 22nd and 92nd Bomb Groups flew their first mission against the Communists. SAC mobility training paid off.

Strategic Air Command units [deployed for the Korean War] were under the operational direction of the Far East Air Forces' Bomber Command in Korea until 1953. These units took just three months to destroy every strategic industrial target in North Korea – with conventional bombs. In all, SAC B-29s flew 21,328 combat sorties to deliver 167,000 tons of bombs on Communist targets. With no industrial targets left, B-29s bomber systematically destroyed transportation lines, enemy air fields, and even flew close support missions.

These strategic bombers were prevented from bombing Red Chinese industry supplying North Korea by a U.S. policy to limit the war to Korean soil. And, they were also restrained by a U.S. national policy of restricting the use of even tactical atomic weapons. Therefore, while B-29s played a key role in the Korean War their use cannot be called any sense a test of modern

strategic bombing. However, their deployment did prove the flexibility of SAC training, people and concepts.

SAC units that flew against North Korean and Chinese Communist forces were the 19th, 92nd, 22nd, 98th and 307th Medium Bomb Wings, the 31st (later re-designated as the 91st) Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium Photo and the 27th Fighter Escort Group [the only unit from Eighth Air Force to deploy to the Korean War].

(NEXT STORY: Part 8, Deterrence Still Comes First)