

576 FLIGHT TEST SQUADRON



MISSION

Forces assigned to the 576 Flight Test Squadron conduct all force development and evaluation testing for our nation's ICBM force. The unit's key test missions include: evaluation of all REACT Emergency War Order software; conduct of simulated electronic launches at northern tier ICBM bases; and the test launch of our nation's LGM-30G Minuteman III ICBMs

LINEAGE

576 Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted, 15 Jan 1943
Activated, 26 Jan 1943
Redesignated 576 Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, 20 Aug 1943
Inactivated, 13 Sep 1945
Redesignated 576 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 5 Sep 1947
Activated in the Reserve, 24 Sep 1947
Redesignated 576 Bombardment Squadron, Light, Jet, 27 Jun 1949
Inactivated, 10 Nov 1949
Redesignated 576 Strategic Missile Squadron (ICBM-Atlas), 6 Mar 1958
Activated, 1 Apr 1958
Discontinued and inactivated, 2 Apr 1966
Redesignated 576 Test Squadron, 29 Aug 1991
Activated, 1 Sep 1991
Redesignated 576 Flight Test Squadron, 1 Jul 1994

STATIONS

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 26 Jan 1943
Biggs Field, TX, 1 Mar 1943
Alamogordo AAB, NM, 18 Apr–18 Jul 1943

Wendling, England, 31 Jul 1943–c. 9 Jun 1945
Charleston AAFld, SC, 25 Jun–13 Sep 1945
Barksdale Field (later, AFB), LA, 24 Sep 1947–10 Nov 1949
Cooke (later, Vandenberg) AFB, CA, 1 Apr 1958–2 Apr 1966
Vandenberg AFB, CA, 1 Sep 1991

ASSIGNMENTS

392 Bombardment Group, 26 Jan 1943–13 Sep 1945
392 Bombardment Group, 24 Sep 1947–10 Nov 1949
704 Strategic Missile Wing, 1 Apr 1958
1 Missile (later, 1 Strategic Aerospace) Division, 1 Jul 1959
392 Strategic Missile Wing, 18 Oct 1961
1 Strategic Aerospace Division, 20 Dec 1961–2 Apr 1966
310 Operations Group, 1 Sep 1991
30 Operations Group, 1 Jul 1993

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B–24, 1943–1945
B–26, 1947–1949
SM-65D/E/F Atlas, 1958-1966
Minuteman III, 1991
Peacekeeper, 1991

COMMANDERS

Capt Francis M. Zeigler, 26 Jan 1943
Maj Clyde T. Gray, 17 Apr 1943
Maj Charles L. Lowell, 29 Jan 1944
Maj Leonard Barnes, 24 Sep 1944
Capt Olen F. Lavell Jr., 22 Mar 1945-unkn
Unkn, 24 Sep 1947-10 Nov 1949
Col John J. Easton, 1 Apr 1958
Col Richard E. Barton, c. Dec 1959
Col Francis S. Manda, 30 Apr 1962
Lt Col Lorenzo Caliendo, 1 Oct 1963-c.Feb 1965
None, not manned, c. Feb 1965-2 Apr 1966
Lt Col John B. Perroni, 1 Sep 1991
Lt Col John M. West, 12 Jun 1992-unkn
Lt Col Larry D. Shaffer, 12 Jun 1995
Lt Col Robert E. Wood, c. Jun 1997
Lt Col James L Wyatt III, by Mar 1999
Lt Col Kenneth P. Van Sickle, c. Apr 1999
Lt Col Douglas E. Kelley, 10 May 2000
Maj Eric Batway, 18 Sep 2001
Lt Col Michael E. Fortney, 13 Nov 2001

Lt Col Anthony L. Blaylock, 9 Jul 2003

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

Gotha, Germany, 24 Feb 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jul 1962–30 Jun 1964

1 Nov 1991–30 Sep 1993

Distinguished Unit Citation: Gotha, Germany, 24 Feb 1944.

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jul 1962-30 Jun 1964

1 Sep 1991-15 May 1993

1 Nov 1991-30 Sep 1993

1 Oct 1996-30 Sep 1997

1 Sep 2004-31 Aug 2005

1 Sep 2005-31 Aug 2006

1 Sep 2006-31 Aug 2007

Air Force Organizational Excellence Awards

1 Aug 1999-31 Jul 2001

1 Sep 2002-1 Sep 2003

EMBLEM



On a disc divided per fess enhanced arched, AF blue and light blue, an AF blue globe, land areas green, surmounted by a white cloud formation issuing from base edged AF golden yellow and red; issuing from the cloud an armored hand launching a missile in pale, all white, shaded light blue, outlines and details AF blue, the missile trimmed red and leaving trail of red and AF golden yellow flame to base, all between two red lightning flashes and two green olive branches radiating from cloud; in dexter chief six stars forming the Southern Cross and in sinister seven stars, all white, forming the Big Dipper and Polaris. Significance: The divided background of light and dark blue represents day and night operations. The globe indicates intercontinental capability, the Southern Cross and Big Dipper with Polaris indicate the southern and northern hemispheres. The mailed hand launching the missile indicates our ability to release protective power, while the lightning represents the speed of instant retaliation and the olive branches symbolize constant and continuing desire for world peace. Approved: 5 March 1959.

576 SMS

On a disc divided per fess enhanced arched. Air Force blue and light blue, an Air Force blue globe, land areas green, surmounted by a white cloud formation issuing from base edged Air Force golden yellow and red; issuing from the cloud an armored hand launching a missile in pale, all white, shaded light blue, outlines and details Air Force blue, the missile trimmed red and leaving trail of red and Air Force golden yellow flame to base, all between two red lightning flashes and two green olive branches radiating from cloud; in dexter chief six stars forming the Southern Cross and in sinister seven stars, all white, forming the Big Dipper and Polaris. MOTTO: On a white scroll edged and inscribed Air Force blue, DUCIMUS, We Lead. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Our emblem is symbolic of the squadron's primary mission. The divided background of light and dark blue represents day and night operations. The globe indicates intercontinental capability. The Southern and Big Dipper with Polaris indicate the Southern and Northern Hemispheres. The mailed hand launching the missile indicates our ability to release protective power, while the lightning represents the speed of instant retaliation and the olive branches symbolize constant and continuing desire for world peace. Our emblem bears the official Air Force colors, ultramarine blue and golden yellow, and our national colors, red, white, and blue.

Per fess enarched enhanced Azure and Celeste, a globe of the first, land masses Vert, overall a rocket palewise Argent nose cone Gules between in dexter chief six mullets in the form of the constellation Big Dipper and in sinister chief seven mullets forming the constellation Southern Cross of the fourth; and issuant an engine blast of the fifth garnished Or culminating in a cloud of smoke in base White issuing pilewise two lightning flashes Red between two olive branches Green; all within a diminished bordure of the first. (Approved, 5 Mar 1959, modified, 2 Mar 1995)

576 FLTS

On a disk divided per fess enhanced arched, Air Force blue and light blue, an Air Force blue globe signifying the Earth with land bodies in green, surmounted by a white cloud formation issuing from base edged Air Force golden yellow and red, launching through the cloud, a missile in pale, all white, shaded light blue, outlines and details Air Force blue, leaving a trail of red and Air Force golden yellow flame to base, signifying the flight testing mission of the squadron, between two red lightning flashes and two green olive branches signifying the squadron's support of the nation's deterrent mission, in dexter stars forming the Southern Cross and in sinister seven stars, all white, forming the Big Dipper and Polaris signifying the medium through which the flight test mission occurs. Unit Designation: On a white scroll above, edged and inscribed in Air Force Blue, 576 FLIGHT TEST SQ. Motto: On a white scroll below, edged and inscribed in Air Force Blue, DUCIMUS, We Lead.

MOTTO

DUCIMUS—We Lead

OPERATIONS

Combat in ETO, 6 Sep 1943–25 Apr 1945. Trained crewmen, tested, and evaluated Atlas missiles, 1958–1966. Tested Minuteman III and Peacekeeper missiles, 1991.

SAC missile operations

Turned over to SAC 15 Jan 1959

1st ICBM off Alert 1 May 1964

On July 1, 1957, the 704th Strategic Missile Wing was activated to oversee activities of specific missile training squadrons scheduled to be activated in the coming months. One of these squadrons, the 392nd Missile Training Squadron assumed the duties of training prospective missilemen on the Great Britain-bound Thor IRBM. The first launch facilities completed included seven launch pads and three blockhouses for the conduct of Thor IRBM testing. These complexes would later become known as SLC-1, SLC-2, and SLC-10. On December 16, 1958, a crew from the First Missile Division successfully launched a Thor IRBM, inaugurating the intermediate-range ballistic missile portion of the Pacific Missile Range. The following April, a Royal Air Force crew duplicated the feat.

In January 1958, ARDC transferred the base to the Strategic Air Command (SAC). With facilities under construction for America's first ICBM, on April 1, 1958, Headquarters SAC activated the

576 Strategic Missile Squadron.

The first Atlas launcher to be completed (576A-1) was accepted from the contractor by the 1st Missile Division on October 16, 1958. The first Atlas D missile arrived the following February. Initially, the squadron's Atlas D missiles were deployed at complexes 576A and 576B. Complex 576A consisted of three above-ground gantries; 576B had three above-ground coffin launchers of a type that would be constructed at other sites. Each complex had one launch control center.

The 576 SMS launched its first Atlas D on September 9, 1959. Immediately following the launch, SAC's Commander in Chief, General Thomas S. Power declared Vandenberg's Atlas missile operational. A month later, the squadron's Atlas missiles were placed on an alert status. The activation had more psychological value than military value as the reliability of the Atlas D missile was highly questionable. Improved versions were already undergoing production along with launch facilities to support them. As the above-ground sites became operational, construction continued on a buried coffin launcher to hold an Atlas E missile (designated launch site 576C) and work began on two Atlas F silo lift launchers (576D and 576E).

By 1962, 11 prototype Atlas complexes had been constructed at Vandenberg AFB.

Last Atlas missile squadron, the 576 Strategic Missile Squadron at Vandenberg AFB, California, was inactivated. 2 APR 1966

Headquarters SAC activated the 576 Strategic Missile Squadron (ICBM-Atlas) at Cooke AFB, California. It was SAC's first ICBM squadron and first Atlas squadron. Initially, it consisted of two "soft" Series D Atlas complexes (576A and 576B). The first had three gantries while the second had three above ground coffin launchers similar to those planned for the first squadron in the field. Each complex had one launch control center. Thus, the squadron had a 3x2 configuration. Later additions to the 576 SMS were one Series E Atlas buried coffin launcher (576C) and two Series F Atlas hardened silo-lift launchers (576D and E). The Series D Atlas was the first operational configuration of the one and a half stage liquid fueled Atlas. It had more powerful engines than early research and development models, improved ground radio-inertial guidance and an ablative reentry vehicle. The Series E/F Atlas missile had even stronger engines, used all inertial guidance and an improved ablative reentry vehicle. Each successive model had a better reaction time and improved survivability. 1 APR 1958

The 576 Flight Test Squadron executes the Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed ICBM Force Development Evaluation test program and executes AFSPC's operational tests for the Department of Defense. The 576 FLTS performs ground, flight and space system tests in operationally representative environments and collects, analyzes and reports performance accuracy, anomaly assessment, reliability, aging and surveillance data to the Joint Staff, Air Staff, U.S. Strategic Command and other higher headquarters.

Today, current 576 Test Squadron tested LGM-118 Peacekeeper, 1991–2004 and LGM-30G

Minuteman III, 1991–present.

The 576 Flight Test Squadron, 30 Maintenance Squadron, and some sections of the 30 Logistic Support Squadron will merge by March 20. The new 475 person squadron will keep the 576 designation but will move under the operational command of the Space Warfare Center at Falcon AFB, Colo. The operational move officially took place Thursday for the 576. "The huge squadron will bring virtually everyone involved in ballistic testing together."

The 30 MXS designation will be retired into the history book but the 30 LSS will remain as a squadron. Most people will not notice any drastic changes, in their day-to-day jobs. But at the flight level and above there will be a lot of changes, the most dramatic is that we will now be dealing with a supervisor who is a 1,000 miles away. That's a challenge, but I'm sure we will be able to make it work smoothly." Colonel Shafer also believes the move under the Space Warfare Center will bring new opportunities through an expanded mission.

The Space Warfare Center is also excited about the transition. "With the addition of the new, bigger 576 we will triple in size," said Col. Jack Fry, Space Warfare Center commander. "But more importantly, we bring all the operational testing under one roof. The 576 and the 17 Test Squadron at Falcon AFB, Colo., which conducts the space testing, are now both a part of the Center. "We talked about changing the center's name to the Space and Missile Warfare Center, but with all the name changes already taking place in Space Command, we decided against it." said Colonel Fry. "That in no way diminishes the importance of the ICBM side of the house. In fact, the move recognizes the importance not only in the command, but Air Force wide,"

Colonel Fry also said the consolidation will give space and missile operations a unity of focus. "We will be able to react and change quickly," he said. With all the units belonging to Air Force Space Command it sets the stage for immediate success, said both commanders "One of the best things we get out of the move is the continued support of the 30 Space Wing's units," said Colonel Fry.

Colonel Shafer echoed the team concept. "The center has been extremely supportive and positive about the move," said Colonel Shafer. "There will still be a learning curve there as they become more familiar with ballistic test operations" Back here, the squadron looks forward to continuing the great working relationship they have with the wing, said Colonel Shafer. "The 30 Space Wing commander will remain the launch decision authority for our launches.

The 576 is different from most other tenant units here we are still part of Air Force Space Command." The new squadron will keep most of its phone numbers, but its office symbols will be dramatically changed "Air Staff just approved the changes," said Colonel Shafer. 1996

TRANSPORTER-ERECTOR (TE) NSN 1450-01-261-2835AH Rig # 90W00014 CONTAINER NSN 1450-01-261-0306AH Rig # 90W00036 GROUND TEST MISSILE (GTM) # 078 SERIAL # 0000060 VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA On 29 June 2001, at 1010 PDT, 1710 Zulu, a Minuteman ICBM TE carrying a Minuteman III GTM overturned on to its top on Vandenberg AFB, CA while negotiating an ascending left curve. The TE, assigned to the 576 Flight Test Squadron (FLTS), VAFB, CA, was involved in a four-day training mission at a Launch Facility in preparation for a Minuteman III ICBM Force Development Evaluation launch from the Western

Range. The mishap operator assigned to the 576 FLTS, suffered minor injuries that were immediately treated and he was released and declared fit for duty. The passenger also assigned to the 576 FLTS, suffered a major injury to his right shoulder that was not life threatening. Damage to the Minuteman ICBM TE and the GTM is extensive. The TE tractor is repairable and the TE container bogie is salvageable. The TE container and GTM are not repairable. Total damage was \$12,253,230.71. The fully operational TE departed Launch Facility 26 at approximately 1000 hours local having been properly configured for transport. It transited the approximate five miles to the mishap site without incident. The mishap operator approached the first in the series of "S" curves at approximately 50 miles per hour. He successfully negotiated the first curve having a broad right-hand turn and a downhill grade. The next 200 feet of roadway is gradually inclined and is in transition from a right-hand to a left-hand curve having a tighter turn radius and an uphill grade. The mishap operator entered the mishap curve at speeds ranging from 49 to 53 mph. As the mishap operator proceeded through the turn, the loaded container's path of momentum and travel resisted the turn and pursued a straight path. This caused the front of the container to apply a strong downward pressure on the rear portion of the TE tractor lifting and rotating the tractor in the direction of the turn. It also caused the TE container to tip precipitously. The TE container's landing gear footpad contacted the pavement and acted as a pivot point causing the right side of the TE to impact the pavement and slide. In the final mishap sequence the TE departed the roadway and rolled over on to its top and came to its final resting position, partially off the road, and inclined radically down a counter inclined embankment. The mishap operator extracted himself from the TE but the mishap passenger required emergency assistance to be extracted. By clear and convincing evidence, excessive speed for the roadway conditions presented is the cause of this mishap. Substantial evidence shows that the lack of sufficient experience and inadequate training of the mishap driver are significant contributing factors. The mishap operator was operating the TE within TE operating parameters and within the 50 mile per hour speed limit. Given the calculation that a loaded TE cannot, under any circumstances, successfully negotiate the mishap curve at 56 miles per hour, the speed limit of 50 miles per hour is imprudent for this vehicle. The mishap operator failed to exercise sufficient judgment and adjust his speed to the configuration of the roadway. The mishap operator had, at most, driven a similarly configured TE under near-similar conditions only once before. While the TE operator's training includes a TE-specific orientation, it is conspicuously deficient of multi-axle, articulated vehicle fundamentals. This deficiency makes the mishap operator a minority among the current population of certified, licensed TE drivers in the unit. No member of the unit has attended this training since May 1999, apparently resulting from a unit-level decision to no longer avail itself of fundamentals drivers training courses such as those offered at the operational missile wings and at Vandenberg AFB CA. Furthermore, the unit's failure to require this training of its prospective TE drivers renders the unit in non-compliance with a governing Air Force Space Command Instruction. This Accident Investigation Board President finds this to be significant.

The Air Force is expected to conduct an operational test launch of a Minuteman III ICBM on Thursday from Vandenberg AFB, Calif. If the mission goes off as scheduled, it will be the second MM III operational test in five days. On Sept. 22, an unarmed MM III lifted off from Vandy, according to an Air Force Global Strike Command release. During these tests, the missiles head

westward over the Pacific Ocean to the Reagan test site in the Kwajalein Atoll. "The invaluable data we collect helps us to validate the functionality and performance of system components," said Col. Lance Kawane, Vandy's 576 Flight Test Squadron commander. Members of the 91st Missile Wing at Minot AFB, N.D., and 90th MW at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., supported the Sept. 22 launch. 2013

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. (AFNS) -- The Air Force Global Strike Command Operations Directorate will transfer administrative control of the 576 Flight Test Squadron to the 20th Air Force Commander effective Oct. 1. According to Col. Craig Ramsey, the 576 FLTS commander, the purpose of this realignment is twofold: provide a clear administrative chain of command in a more typical military construct (a commander working for another commander) and realign the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile test unit under the ICBM Numbered Air Force. Previously, the unit was administratively aligned under the Operations Directorate at AFGSC. "Administratively and functionally, this aligns the squadron with the professionals within the ICBM Numbered Air Force," Maj. Gen. Anthony Cotton, the 20th AF Commander, said. "While the operational-level mission of the squadron differs from the other 20th (Air Force) units (test unit versus operational), the tactical-level actions and problem sets of the 576 (FLTS) parallel those of sister units."

Aside from a new senior rater signing administrative documents, this change should be transparent to the members of the 576 FLTS, and while administrative control will realign under the 20th Air Force, test mission activities will remain under AFGSC.

"Test management and oversight will continue to be provided by the AFGSC Operations Directorate in accordance with existing instructions," said Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Stoss, the A3 director. "This provides the dual benefit of 'commanders working for commanders' in an administrative control relationship with 20th Air Force while executing the command's operational test program in a streamlined relationship with the headquarters." The 576 FLTS is the United States' only dedicated ICBM test squadron, "professionally executing tests that accurately measure the current and future capability of the nation's ICBM force," Ramsey said.

The 576 FLTS was originally activated in 1943 as the 576 Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) under the 392nd Bombardment Group and 8th Air Force, where they flew B-24 Liberators during World War II. Following a post-war inactivation, the 576 Strategic Missile Squadron was reactivated in 1958 at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, under U.S. Strategic Air Command. Ramsey said the squadron, under various names, has been launching ICBMs since September 1959, including Atlas, Minuteman and Peacekeeper missiles.

"As an Air Force Global Strike Command unit, I think it's very fitting that we have a tie to 8th Air Force and bomber heritage as well as the early days of ICBM testing," Ramsey said. "We are very proud of our long legacy." As the only operational test unit for all Minuteman III operational testing, the 576 FLTS works with the AFGSC Operations Directorate's test branch to plan, schedule, execute and report results on all manner of ICBM tests. "The 576 FLTS has a responsibility to the nuclear community to thoroughly test all components, equipment, and facets of the ICBM weapon system and support infrastructure to ensure it meets the needs of the warfighter," Ramsey said. "Before it ever reaches the field, we're supposed to make sure it's right!" 2016

USAF Unit Histories

Created: 14 Dec 2010

Updated: 17 Dec 2022

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.