

## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 38<sup>th</sup> Tactical Missile Wing Strike Force Stand Down



Today, August 31, 2016 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the stand down of the 38<sup>th</sup> Tactical Missile Wing from its Quick Reaction Alert responsibility. The 38<sup>th</sup> TMW was headquartered at Sembach Air Base, Federal Republic of Germany, it consisted of 5 tactical missile squadrons: the 822<sup>nd</sup>, 823<sup>rd</sup> and 887<sup>th</sup> out of Sembach Air Base and 2 squadrons, the 89<sup>th</sup> and 405<sup>th</sup> out of Hahn Air Base.



In December 1964, the 38<sup>th</sup> TMW received a (then) secret message from HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Ramstein Air Base. The message from the 17<sup>th</sup>, phrased in typical Air Force jargon, read;

*Subject: Change in strike force availability.*

*1. The following information is provided for your planning and guidance.*

*2. The entire 38 TMW's Mace Alpha (MGM-13A) weapon system will not, repeat, will not be available for strike force tasking commencing 1 April 1966. Effective on that date, complete phase-out of this strike force will take place at all missile Sites thereby obviating the residual strike force capability. However, in the interim, the total Mace Alfa missile force consisting of 64 QRA and 10 follow-on vehicles, will continue to provide target coverage as now planned in both the 1 Jan and 1 Jul 65 target programs up to and including 1200Z, 1 Apr 66.*

However, that original stand down date of 1 April 1966 would be cancelled and reset twice to later dates. The 38<sup>th</sup> TMW strike force would remain on 15 minute quick reaction alert 20 more months until the end of August 1966.

At 2400 hours Zulu, 31 August 1966, the operational end came for the Mace missile weapon system. Although my launch crew was scheduled off duty that night I went to the Grünstadt launch site where I had invested 4 and 1/2 years of my life to the Mace weapon system and the 887<sup>th</sup> TMS. I wanted to be a eyewitness to its finale, if not on duty in one of the Launch Control Centers, at least in an informal capacity by attending its end. I was proud then and I am proud now to have been an significant part of it all...

In that mid-night darkness I and fellow off-duty missileers gathered outside the double security fences that surrounded the launch complex as the hour struck and the stand down order was commenced. Soon, an unusual calm settled over the Wing's squadron launch sites. It was the quiet from the constant deep throated hum of the Nose Temperature Control Units. The sound had been a constant at Grunstadt and the other launch sites. So constant and so ingrained in the missileers of the 38<sup>th</sup> TMW that on the very rare occasion when a power outage occurred, when the noise stopped, even for a moment, if at night, it would wake those sleeping. But now the drone was gone for ever. The missiles were off Victor Alert.

Administratively the 38<sup>th</sup> TMW remained operational until late September 1966. By then only a handful of officers and enlisted missileers remained to make the last entries into the records and turn off the final switches to close out the front line, operational history of the MGM-13A Mace weapon system.

It was an honor to have served with the missileers I've never forgotten and still have contact with to this very day 50 years later.

Parts of this report were extracted from the book, *U.S. Air Force Tactical Missiles 1949 – 1969 The Pioneers*, of which I was one of the two authors and researchers.