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TAC MISSILEERS

NEWSLETTER

“Serving the mace and matador missile crews and all support personnel who fought and won the cold war”



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In this first Newsletter of 2014 we present a report on the just completed mini-reunion at Cape Canaveral and the final installment of the long running story of *Only 15 Minutes to Atomic Strike*.

MINI-REUNION AT THE CAPE

Report By Missileer **George Mindling**

By the time I pulled into the parking lot at the Holiday Inn Express in Cocoa, Florida, the Marines were up to their armpits in the battle of Peleliu. Traveling the two hundred miles alone from Port Charlotte to the TAC Missileer mini-reunion in Cocoa allowed me to indulge myself in music I normally do not crank up at home, and I relished the opportunity to play all of Richard Rodger's Victory at Sea on my iPod from start to finish without interruption. Through the car's stereo, of course. And as loud as I wanted! Peleliu, by the way, is the 3rd cut on the “B” side of volume 2 in the set. I won't listen to Victory at Sea on the return trip, but it was a blast listening to it once again after all these years! Just like the tour of old memories at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. I was in Cocoa, Florida, to attend a spur-of-the-moment, mini-reunion conceived and planned by **Max Butler**, Membership Director/Treasurer of the TAC Missileers Association. It was all put together in about six weeks.

Max did another one of his bang-up jobs putting the mini-reunion together. Having a get-together for dinner is something many of us missileers who live in Florida, especially during the winter months, have talked about off and on for several years. Max finally said “Let's do it,” so we did. Originally planned as an informal get-together for those who would make a day trip for the meeting, it soon became clear most wanted more than just dinner, and soon the mini-reunion was open to all TAC missileers. Max arranged a very special tour of the Air Force Space and Missile Museum located at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station to be held on Friday, March 21st. Max also arranged an air-conditioned tour bus to pick up our 35 or so members and guests at the Holiday Inn Express in Cocoa

at nine am. Collecting names and license numbers, and some other info required ahead of time, made access to the normally restricted facility easy.

An informal dinner was held Thursday evening at a local Barbeque restaurant for those out-of-towners who arrived a day early. The restaurant cordially handled the unexpected twenty-four guests with aplomb. Most of Thursday's arrivals stayed at the Holiday Inn Express in Cocoa, also arranged by Max. **Jim and Susan Cagle** from Atlanta may have traveled the furthest of the attendees, while many missileers lived in the surrounding area and drove to the hotel on Friday morning. Several missileers brought wives and their grown children, and even grandkids for the tour. Everyone met at the hotel Friday morning to board the big, white bus for a tour of the area, where for some of us TAC Missileers, it all started.

We were soon craning our necks trying to remember where Camp Happiness was located as we drove into the area many of us had only seen from blue Air Force school buses when we toured the facility back in the late 50's and early 60's. Port Canaveral has altered beyond any recognition, and will continue to do so as it grows to its planned facility as the largest cruise ship port in the United States. The old days are long gone. We stopped by the entrance to the Space and Missile Museum to pick up our tour guide, **Jim Hale**. Jim, a retired Air Force veteran, had a clear, resonant voice and an in-depth knowledge of the museum that captured everyone's attention. Our first stop at the Blockhouse on pad 26, launch place of Explorer, the US's first satellite, displayed Jim's astonishing knowledge and familiarity with the Cape and its history. The Blockhouse was the first stop on our four and half hour tour, and gave **Roger St. Germain** the honor of “launching” a missile. From there we toured the open display area known as the “Missile Garden” and the adjacent Exhibit Hall. Again, Jim's fascinating explanations and descriptions brought special meaning to the displays.

The bus tour eventually led to an area many of us have seen in the past, the old maintenance area, and just a few yards beyond, Pads 21 and 22, the Mace B launch pads

that have recently been restored. While we didn't get to walk the area, it was still impressive to see the old launch pads. They looked like they had just been vacated.

The next stop at Complex 14 on ICBM Road allowed us a look at the pad where not only the first American ICBM was launched, but where John Glenn hurtled into space aboard an Atlas LV-3B carrying a Mercury capsule known as Friendship 7, putting an American astronaut in orbit for the first time. The next stop was Complex 34, site of the accident that killed astronauts Virgil Grissom, Edward White II, and Roger Chaffee. The massive complex remains as a silent monument to all those who served and gave their lives in service to our country. We dismounted the bus for an extensive walking tour of the pad.

Hangar "R" was our last stop of the day, and for many of us, was a nostalgic moment. Hangar R has a unique collection of early missiles and rockets, including the original Matador named "Florida Ranger" that graced the entrance to Orlando Air Force Base. Orlando Air Force Base is where almost everyone who served in the Matador or Mace missile programs was trained. Also in the Hangar "R" collection is a Mace sitting on a beautifully restored translauncher. While every missile in the collection has been painstakingly restored, both the Matador and the Mace missiles have been restored to astonishing condition. A group photo was taken in front of the Mace, and of course I had to get a photo of **John Gibbs** in front of the Matador.

One of the amazing, delightful, memories of this tour was meeting **John Gibbs**, a former member of the 1st Pilotless Bomber Squadron. The 1st PBS, the very first operational, combat ready missile squadron in the United States Air Force, trained at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station before its deployment to Bitburg, Germany, in March of 1954. John contributed many details and stories used in **Bob Bolton's** and my book, *U.S. Air Force Tactical Missiles 1949 -1969 The Pioneers*, including the incident when a Matador dumped nose-first over its launcher in an aborted launch. John was in the detail sent into the palmetto scrub to find the missing hold-back bolt. John is also one of the few people we have a photograph of while on duty with a tactical missile. In the section on Wheelus, figure 18, page 138,

John is the airman on the far left with his elbow up. It was a very special moment meeting John and his beautiful wife of 51 years, Dianne. They are tentatively planning on attending the reunion in Boston next year.

I had another highlight of the trip that I hadn't expected: **Jim Hale** asked me to sign his copy of our book! That was an honor for me. I certainly appreciate the time and patience Jim took with our diverse group, answering every question and handling every comment with professionalism and charm. Anyone who gets Jim as a guide of the Space and Missile Museum will have a special insight to the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station and its history.

The Space and Missile Museum web page at <http://afspacemuseum.org/> has details on tours and visiting the museum, as well as a virtual tour that can be taken from your PC. They also maintain a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/afspacemuseum>. Visit both pages, and be sure to like the Facebook page.

The Conclusion of "Only 15 Minutes to Atomic Strike"

Site VII in Rittersdorf and Site VIII in Idenheim were built as planned. As usual, the East German intelligence was also on the spot: "The launch positions consist of partially underground reinforced concrete bunkers, each with eight so-called launching cells", detailing in a report dated April 1963. In addition, there were two underground control centers connected by tunnels. "The launch cells have a dome-shaped reinforced concrete construction that were half buried in the earth and with their openings to the east. Heavy ethylene glycol-water-filled steel doors closed these cells and offer protection and security from radiation occurring from nuclear weapons detonations. The concrete floors of the underground control centers are mounted and isolated away from the rest of the construction. In the event of a near-by nuclear explosion this isolation provides shock protection for the equipment and gauges in the complex. After completions all launch complexes are supposed to have a measuring instrument installed, a so-called 'Sonar', to detect a nuclear blast. This device will cause the steel doors of the launch cells and all the doors inside the facility to be closed automatically if a nuclear weapon detonation is detected." In one detail, however, the busy data collectors were wrong: the filling of the steel doors with water did not work. Instead, the Americans finally filled the doors with lightweight concrete. Originally, the facilities were to be operational not later than 1962. In fact, the positions near the villages of Rittersdorf and Idenheim were not operational until April 1964. Meanwhile, the times had changed significantly. In-

stead of pure, massive retaliation with megatons of warheads in the mode of the Single Integrated Operational Plan 62 (SIOP), the new flexible response strategy of gradually pushed to the front. Now, the proven, fixed, up graded Mace positions were at a marked disadvantage: From the American perspective there was a risk that a pre-emptive first strike by an enemy who had been challenged might actually succeed, the nuclear war - if it broke out would be limited to Europe. New, different, more flexible arms were needed. The Mace A positions at Hahn and Sembach Air Bases were abandoned in September 1966, Mace B positions at Rittersdorf and Idenheim lasted until April 1969. Both were replaced by the new Pershing ballistic missiles. The Pershing had a range of only 740 Kilometers (460 miles), but they were difficult to detect when in the field. With their solid fuel engine, they were lighter and more manageable. And they finally had the mobility that the Matador and Mace had never really obtained in spite of all efforts.

The return of the cruise missile

Time passed and the memory of the Matador and Mace fell into obscurity. In one former position, an electronic listening post was setup; the Mace-B position in Idenheim was converted to an American Patriot air defense missile site. Already in the late 1960s at Kastellaun, a Nike-Hercules anti-aircraft nuclear missile complex was stationed directly next to the old Mace site - but even this blessed beginning of the 1980s was temporary. In April 1985 something that no one had expected happened: The cruise missile, and with them the 38th Tactical Missile Wing returned to the Hunsrück. They were the "retrofit part" of the so-called, Double Resolution of NATO. By the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Union outdated medium-range missiles of the type R-12 (SS-4) and R-14 (SS-5) were being replaced by the modern RSD-10 Pioneer (SS-20 Saber). The Pioneer was mobile, much more accurately than their predecessors and had multiple reentry warheads. The West felt threatened and responded with the Double Resolution initiative of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of 12 December 1979: Bilateral talks over the medium-range systems were offered as the other part of the resolution. The talks came to no agreement, NATO would in turn send more Pershing IIs and bring back modern cruise missiles to Central Europe. To date, it is debatable whether this act was really just a response to the Soviet's missile modernization or more about upgrading the quality of our own unique weapons. In fact, the reaction time to a nuclear attack was drastically reduced by the Pershing II. The response from the Kremlin was not long in coming. The Soviets installed operational-tactical missiles OTR-22 (SS-12M) in East Germany and in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Their targets were the launch positions of the cruise missiles and Pershing II, the arms race started up again. The new U.S. missile, the BGM-109G Gryphon GLCM, Ground Launched Cruise Missile was hardly comparable with the former Matador and Mace. It represents a further development of BGM-109 Tomahawk of the U. S. Navy. With a range of 2500 Kilometers (1550 miles) a GLCM could carry a nuclear warhead of 10 to 50 kiloton deep inside the Soviet Union.. But, above all the issue that had accompanied the Matador and Mace was finally solved: that of a more reliable, precise guidance system.

The Gryphon had an inertial navigation system and the terrain following radar, TERCOM, the stored digital terrain profiles of the flight path allowed for real time comparison with the current flight path. Satellite photography had now helped create much more accurate maps than was ever possible with those used in the Mace A. This allowed the new cruise missiles not only to fly a very low flight profile of less than 325 feet, but the American missiles also achieved a target accuracy of around 100 feet.

Protests Against the Retrofit

And yet something had changed: the Matador and Mace had come and gone without the general public taking much notice. However the deployment of the new cruise missiles in Wüschheim (Germany), Greenham Common and Molesworth (both in Great Britain), Florennes (Belgium), Woensdrecht (Netherlands) and Comiso (Italy), became an enormous political concern. In the Federal Republic of Germany there was a strong active peace movement. On 22 October 1983, 1.3 million people nationwide demonstrated against the retrofit - this protest included a human chain of 200,000 folks stretching the 50 miles from Stuttgart to New Ulm. Also, in the Hunsrück were repeated protests, the culmination was a demonstration in October 1986 with 200,000 participants. But, they could not prevent the deployment of the new systems.

On 1 April 1985, rich in tradition, the 38th Tactical Missile Wing was reorganized once again. The construction work dragged on longer than expected, it took until 1987 before Wüschheim Air Station, as the site was now officially called, was actually operational. The plan was to deploy 96 missiles and 24 launch vehicles. A launcher consisted of a MAN M-1014 tractor unit and trailer with a canister holding four cruise missiles. Four Transport-Erector-Launchers (TEL) and two fire control (LCC) formed a flight and were housed in a hardened, bomb-proof bunker. In Wüschheim there were six such bunkered garages. A flight was constantly on quick reaction alert (QRA), and at a certain readiness level all launch vehicles would disappear into the surrounding woods.

In fact, only 62 of the planned 96 cruise missiles were ever stationed in Wüschheim. Even before the full number was reached, on 8 December 1987 the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) on intermediate-range nuclear systems in Europe was signed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. The INF called for the destruction of all missiles including cruise missiles with a range of 500-5500 km and was the first disarmament treaty between the two superpowers which provided not only upper limits for certain systems, but put an entire class of nuclear weapons into the trash bin of history. However, it would be several years until the last GLCM had left Germany. On 22 August 1990 the 38th Tactical Missile Wing was again deactivated, on 1 May 1991 the last Gryphon missiles were scrapped in the United States. At that time the Cold War had already belonged for quite a while to history.

The End, (Did I hear someone say Finally!)

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2014 TAC MISSILEERS MINI-REUNION ATTENDEES At The CAPE

Photo via George Mindling