



Oscar - 01 launch control facility

7/5/2007 - **WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE, Mo.** -- Whiteman is the home of the only inter-continental ballistic missile launch control facility located on a base anywhere in the world.

From 1963 to 1995, Whiteman was home to the 351st Strategic Missile Wing, which operated the Minuteman II Intercontinental Ballistic Missile weapon system.

The wing consisted of the 508th, 509th and 510th Strategic Missile Squadrons. Each squadron operated five flights, with a flight consisting of a control center like Oscar-01 on base and 10 missiles (designated Oscar-02 through Oscar-11). In total, the wing operated 15 flights, controlling 150 Minuteman II ICBMs.

The original facility dispersion plan called for a 30-mile zone around any missile support base (like Whiteman) free of missiles or command facilities.

The 510th SMS, Oscar flight's parent squadron, was programmed to go in an area southeast of the base, but the water table associated with the Lake of the Ozarks made construction there impractical.

Following a great deal of discussion, the Air Force decided to waive the 30-mile free zone, and place a missile alert facility, Oscar-01, on a base.

Construction of the wing's missile complex began in 1961 and was completed two years, two months and two weeks after the first facility groundbreaking.

To construct the 15 command centers, engineers dug down to the bedrock, built the foundation and then constructed the site before refilling the holes, which ranged from 60 to 90 feet deep.

Nearly 25,000 tons of steel were used to construct the command sites and their 150 missile launch facilities.

Launch control facility sites like Oscar-01 were designed to function even after the initial exchanges of a nuclear war. Self-contained, the underground portion housed batteries, a power generator, telephone switches for the underground cable system, and air regeneration equipment.

Redundancies in the system meant that even a damaged LCF would likely have the minimal capability to perform its mission.

Oscar-01 was manned by 10 people. Two individuals were the crews downstairs. The remaining eight included the facility manager who was usually the ranking enlisted person on site.

The next ranking individual was the flight security controller who insured the security of the site and acted as a liaison with the crews downstairs.

Strategic Air Command experimented with several types of alert schedules during the Cold War, but for most of the wing's history, the two-officer crews served 24-hour alerts every three days while the topside personnel remained on site for three day tours followed by six days off.

The ICBM Minuteman II missiles, which could be launched from Oscar-01 were located in 150 individual sites (15 command centers and 150 launch facilities) scattered throughout Missouri.

The sites had to be separated by at least three nautical miles, and the resulting missile field covered more than 10,000 square miles.

The Hardened Intersite Cable System, made up of more than 1,770 miles of buried cable, connected this web of facilities. Each of the three squadrons operated independently, but was internally interconnected.

If a command facility was destroyed, one of the remaining command facilities in the squadron would take control of that flight's remaining missiles. In theory, one crew could take over and monitor or launch all 50 missiles in their squadron.

The Minuteman II had three stages and a single nuclear warhead. From launch at Whiteman until the missile's impact on the Soviet Union took about 28 minutes.

Of course, once these missiles were launched, there was no calling them back -- they were gone. To prevent an accidental or unauthorized launch, there were numerous fail-safes built into the system.



The missile trailer located in the compound of the Oscar -01 launch control facility. Whiteman Air Force Base is the home of the world's only Intercontinental Ballistic Missile launch control facility located on a military base. From 1963 to 1995, Whiteman was home to the 351st Strategic Missile Wing, which operated the Minuteman II ICBM weapon system. (Courtesy photo)

On July 31, 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Premier Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which called for dismantling and destruction of the Minuteman II ICBMs.

Deactivation of the system began immediately. On Jan. 8, 1993, the wing's first launch control center, India-01, shut down operations. Five months later, on May 7, 1993, the last reentry vehicle was removed from Golf-02.

Later that year, on Dec. 8, the wing imploded its first silo, India-02, and on May 18, 1995, the last Minuteman II missile, located at Juliet-03, was removed from its site.

Custody of Oscar-01 passed to the 509th Bomb Wing in July 1995. The Oscar-01 museum is maintained as a tribute to the thousands of men and women who sustained the ICBM force during the Cold War.

Public tours can be arranged by contacting the 509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs office at 687-6123.

(This article is provided by Dr. Margaret DePalma, 509th Bomb Wing historian.)