

545th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, MEDIUM



MISSION

LINEAGE

545th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted, 25 Nov 1942

Activated on 1 Dec 1942

Inactivated on 28 Feb 1946

Redesignated 545th Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy on 9 Jul 1947

Activated in the reserve on 16 Jul 1947

Inactivated on 27 Jun 1949

Redesignated 545th Bombardment Squadron, Medium on 3 Jun 1955

Activated on 1 Aug 1955

STATIONS

Gowen Field, ID, 1 Dec 1942

Wendover Field, UT, 2, Jan 1943

Sioux City AAB, IA, 3 Apr-9 May 1943

Grafton Underwood, England, 3 Jun 1943

Istres, France, 2 Jul 1945-28 Feb 1946

Nashville Mun Aprt, TN, 16 Jul 1947-27 Jun 1949

Little Rock AFB, AR, 1 Aug 1955

ASSIGNMENTS

384th Bombardment Group, 1 Dec 1942-28 Feb 1946

384th Bombardment Group, 16 Jul 1947-27 Jun 1949
384th Bombardment Wing, 1 Aug 1955

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17, 1942-1946
B-47, 1956
B-17F
B-17G
B-47E

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Germany, 11 Jan 1944
Germany, 24 Apr 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
15 Feb-30 Dec 1957

EMBLEM



MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in ETO, 22 Jun 1943-25 Apr 1945. Transported redeployed personnel from ETO to North Africa, Aug-Sep 1945.

Disaster struck Little Rock when a B-47 (serial number 52-1414) operated by the 384th BW's 545th Bombardment Squadron exploded in midair over the city. The aircraft departed Little Rock Air Force Base at 0555 hours on March 31, en route to Houston, Texas. Thirteen minutes later, while cruising at somewhere between 3,500 and 10,000 feet, southbound over the Arkansas River, the plane tilted to the left and began a sharp banking turn back toward the base. Copilot First Lieutenant Thomas G. Smoak noted the tilt and queried the aircraft commander, Captain Herbert Aldridge, who began to bring the plane back to a level attitude. Just then, at 0608 hours, the aircraft exploded.

Lieutenant Smoak later recalled that his ejection seat failed to operate and that he was trapped in the burning plane. Unable to unfasten his restraints due to severely burned hands, Smoak "sat there squealing and hollering, actually wanting to die because the pain was so excruciating." Just then, the aircraft's airframe disintegrated and Smoak found himself tumbling free of the flaming vehicle as it plummeted toward the earth. Seconds later, Smoak's parachute opened and slowed his descent, but quickly began to burn. Falling ever faster, his parachute aflame, Smoak could only watch as the nightmare unfolded. With debris trailing behind the main portion of its fuselage, the B-47 streamed smoke and fire as it fell. Its nose and other components were later found on the west wall of Allsop Park's canyon. The crew section of the aircraft and three of the engines impacted at 0610 hours near the Maryland and Summit Avenue intersection. These pieces struck the home of Mrs. Andrew L. Clark at 211 Colonial Court (now a parking lot associated with Arkansas Children's Hospital). Mrs. Clark, who was home alone at the time, was killed on impact. The main fuselage struck the ground just north of the intersection partly in the yard of 816 Summit, which was directly behind the 1st Church of the Nazarene (on the corner of Battery and Maryland). A crater six and a half feet in depth and 35 feet in diameter marked the point of impact. Within the crater, a broken natural gas line fed a magnesium flame that burned for hours.

Aircraft navigator Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds S. Watson and Staff Sergeant Kenneth E. Brose were killed on impact, as was Captain Aldridge. The body of one crewman remained in the wreckage of the crew section. Another crewman's body was found in Mrs. Clark's driveway. One block north, a third crewman's body lay in the Pulaski Heights athletic field near a damaged ejection seat and a partially inflated and charred parachute. Molten metal and jet fuel sprayed from the point of impact, igniting houses in the immediate area. James Hollabaugh, a dance instructor at Arthur Murray Dance Studio, perished as he slept in the attic of his home at 1918 Maryland, when his house succumbed to flames after being struck by fragments of the aircraft.

Debris rained over an extended area. One engine fell into the back yard of Jack Davis' house at 349 Crystal Court. A pod containing two engines landed in the front yard of Mrs. Tom Scott's home at 314 Ridgeway, embedding itself in the ground before its magnesium compressor blades ignited from friction. Nine blocks west of the main impact, a major section of a wing plowed into the 700-block of Appian Way destroying five houses in a 100-yard stretch (near present day 1-630). Strips of Aluminum chaff, carried by the bomber to confuse enemy radar, drifted surrealistically in the clear blue sky. With it fell the paper upon which Lieutenant Smoak had copied *Psalms* 145: 14 earlier that morning: "*The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.* "

Although a series of well-deserved claims would have to be settled due to the accident, the city recovered. Captain Aldridge's father would later express his appreciation for the understanding citizens of Little Rock showed of the inherent danger of military aviation and the necessary mission of the Strategic Air Command. The city, though shocked, shook off the incident and reaffirmed their continued commitment to the necessities of national security. Copilot Thomas Smoak, who suffered burns over one-third of his body, attributed his survival to ardent prayer - and a flippant decision to wear Nomex instead of a more comfortable nylon jump-suit. He would later become a missionary.