

## 579<sup>th</sup> STRATEGIC MISSILE SQUADRON



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

579<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted, 15 Jan 1943  
Activated, 26 Jan 1943  
Inactivated, 13 Sep 1945  
Redesignated 579<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 9 Sep 1947  
Activated in the reserve, 26 Sep 1947  
Inactivated, 27 Jun 1949  
Redesignated 579<sup>th</sup> Strategic Missile Squadron and activated, 14 Mar 1961  
Organized, 1 Sep 1961  
INACTIVATED, 25 MAR 1965

#### STATIONS

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 26 Jan 1943  
Biggs Field, TX, 1 Mar 1943  
Alamogordo AAB, NM, 18 Apr-18 Jul 1943  
Wendling, England, 1 Aug 1943-7 Jun 1945  
Charleston AAFld, SC, 25 Jun-13 Sep 1945  
Selman Field, LA, 26 Sep 1947-27 Jun 1949  
Walker AFB, NM, 1 Sep 1961

#### ASSIGNMENTS

392<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group, 26 Jan 1943-13 Sep 1945

392<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group, 26 Sep 1947-27 Jun 1949

Strategic Air Command, 14 Mar 1961

6<sup>th</sup> Bombardment (later Strategic Aerospace) Wing, 1 Sep 1961

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

B-24, 1943-1945

B-24E

B-24H

B-24J

SM-65F Atlas, 1962-1965

### **COMMANDERS**

### **HONORS**

#### **Service Streamers**

None

#### **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

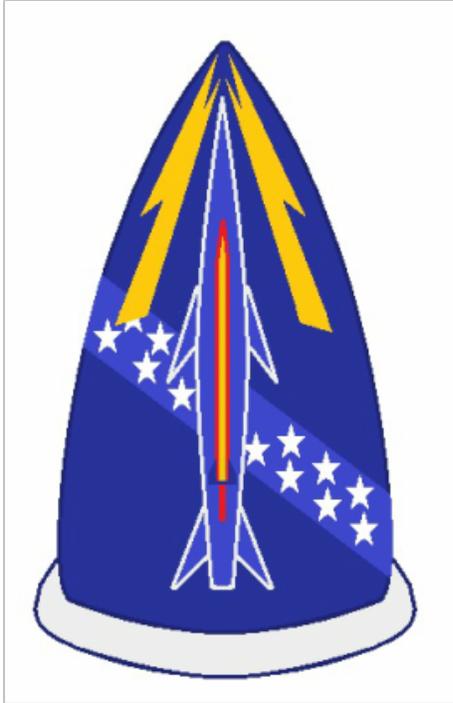
#### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citation

Gotha, Germany, 24 Feb 1944

### **EMBLEM**



On an Air Force blue design area shaped like a missile nose cone, a SAC band bendwise, light blue spattered with white stars, surmounted by a stylized white missile in pale pointing upward, shaded light blue, its nose flanked by two Air Force golden yellow lightning bolts converging and pointing to chief; the missile charged with a sword palewise pointing upward, the blade Air Force golden yellow shaded golden brown, the pommel red shaded Air Force blue, and the hilt Air Force blue. (Approved, 11 Feb 1963)

#### **EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **MOTTO**

PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH.

#### **NICKNAME**

#### **OPERATIONS**

Combat in ETO, 6 Sep 1943-25 Apr 1945.

SAC missile operations

Turnover to SAC, 30 Nov 1962

Operational, 30 Nov 1962

First ICBM off alert, 5 Jan 1965

Last ICBM off alert, 4 Feb 1965

Last ICBM shipped, 9 Feb 1965

The 579th Strategic Missile Squadron (SMS) had originally been activated as a member of the 392nd Bomb Wing on January 26, 1943 at Davis-Monthan Field, Arizona. After training at Biggs Field, Texas and Alamogordo Army Air Base, New Mexico, it was committed to the European Theater of Operations. The 579th Strategic Missile Squadron (SMS) received on Distinguished Unit Citation for an outstanding performance against the enemy over Gotha, Germany, February 24, 1944.

September 1, 1961--The 579th Strategic Missile Squadron (SMS) was activated as an ICBM unit under the 6th BW.

June 30, 1962--The 579th Strategic Missile Squadron (SMS) became fully operational.

After its reactivation, the squadron received its first ICBM on January 24, 1962 and became fully operational during the Cuban Crisis of October-November, 1962. Bad luck dogged its footsteps and three of the 12 sites were lost by explosions on June 1, 1963, February 13, 1964, and March 9, 1964.

Just when it seemed that the future existence of Walker Air Force Base was assured, two announcements by the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Robert S. McNamara, eliminated it from long-range defense considerations. On November 18, 1964, it was announced that liquid-fueled missiles would be phased out three years early due to the increased reliability of solid-fueled missiles such as MINUTEMAN and POLARIS. Accordingly, the 579th Strategic Missile Squadron (SMS) inactivated March 25, 1965.

The 579th SMS was based at Walker Air Force Base in Roswell, New Mexico from 1962 thru 1965. There were 12 sites built in a ring around Roswell. These sites were manned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year during the time the Squadron was active. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, all operational 579th sites were at a high level of alert and were ready to launch the Atlas missile should it have become necessary. The squadron was armed with the SM-65 weapon system, more commonly know as the Atlas. The 579th was an Atlas F unit which meant the missile was housed in a "silo launcher" style complex. The missile was kept in a vertical position at all times. In order to launch, two 75-ton overhead doors were opened and the "bird" was lifted out of the silo.

The Atlas ICBM required RP1 and Liquid Oxygen for powering the rocket engines. The RP1 fuel was kept on board the missile at all times during alert. Before the missile was lifted to the launch position, it was filled with the Liquid Oxygen fuel. Internal pressure was maintained by a "head" of gaseous Nitrogen. After the missile was "up and locked", if there was a "hold" of any sort, which could not be very long, the launch crew had the ability to "top off" the Liquid Oxygen before the "Missile Away" command was given. This is one reason that the response time of the Atlas F system was quicker than that of the Atlas D and E systems. The Atlas F used a General Electric Mark IV re-entry vehicle which carried a type W-38 warhead with a nuclear

yield of approximately 4 megatons of TNT. The Atlas had a range of about 6,000 miles. Developed by General Dynamics, the Atlas weapons system became a national priority during which no expense was spared in the development, testing and implementation of this first generation ICBM system. The Atlas rocket was also used by NASA during the early days of manned space travel and was the booster used to put John Glenn into Earth orbit.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Updated:

#### 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.