77 WEAPONS SQUADRON

MISSION
The 77 Bomb Squadron mission is to maintain the highest level of combat readiness and to be able to deploy anywhere in the world on moment's notice.

LINEAGE
77 Bombardment Squadron (Medium) constituted, 20 Nov 1940
Activated, 15 Jan 1941
Redesignated 77 Bombardment Squadron, Medium, 9 Oct 1944
Inactivated, 5 Nov 1945
Redesignated 77 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 15 Jul 1946
Activated, 4 Aug 1946
Redesignated 77 Bombardment Squadron, Medium, 28 May 1948
Redesignated 77 Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, 16 May 1949
Redesignated 77 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Photographic, 1 Apr 1950
Redesignated 77 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Heavy, 16 Jul 1950
Redesignated 77 Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, 1 Oct 1955
Redesignated 77 Bomb Squadron, 1 Sep 1991
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1995
Activated, 1 Apr 1997
Inactivated, 19 Sep 2002
Redesignated 77 Weapons Squadron, 24 Jan 2003
Activated, 3 Feb 2003

STATIONS
Salt Lake City, UT, 15 Jan 1941
Boise, ID, 4 Jun-14 Dec 1941
Elmendorf Field, AK, 29 Dec 1941 (air echelon operated from Umnak beginning 30 May 1942)
Adak, 3 Oct 1942 (air echelon operated from Adak beginning 12 Dec 1942, from Amchitka beginning 9 Mar 1943, and from Attu beginning 10 Jul 1943)
Amchitka, 11 Sep 1943
Attu, AK, 11 Feb 1944-19 Oct 1945
Fort Lawton, WA, 29 Oct-5 Nov 1945
Grand Island AAFld, NE, 4 Aug-6 Oct 1946
Elmendorf Field, AK, 20 Oct 1946-24 Apr 1947
Rapid City AAFld (later, Rapid City AFB
Ellsworth AFB), SD, 17 Apr 1947 (air echelon), 3 May 1947 (ground echelon)-31 Mar 1995
Ellsworth AFB, SD, 1 Apr 1997-19 Sep 2002
Dyess AFB, TX, 3 Feb 2003

DEPLOYED STATIONS
Andersen AFB, Guam, 26 Apr 1955-24 Jul 1955

ASSIGNMENTS
42 Bombardment Group, 15 Jan 1941
28 Composite (later, 28th Bombardment) Group, 2 Jan 1942
Eleventh Air Force, 20 Oct-5 Nov 1945
28 Bombardment (later, 28 Strategic Reconnaissance) Group, 4 Aug 1946
28 Strategic Reconnaissance (later, 28 Bombardment) Wing, 16 Jun 1952
28 Operations Group, 1 Sep 1991-31 Mar 1995
28 Operations Group, 1 Apr 1997-19 Sep 2002
USAF Weapons School, 3 Feb 2003

ATTACHMENTS
28 Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, 10 Feb 1951-15 Jun 1952

WEAPON SYSTEMS
B-18, 1941, 1942-1943
PT-17, 1941
B-26, 1941-1943
B-25, 1942-1945
B-29, 1946-1950
B-36, 1949-1950
RB-29, 1950
RB-36, 1950-1957
B-52, 1957-1966, 1966-1968, 1968-1969, 1970-1986
B-1, 1987-1995

B-1, 1997-2002

COMMANDERS

1st Lt Elbert O. Meals, 15 Jan 1941
Maj Harry Wilson, 23 Jan 1941
Major Robert O. Cork, 1 Aug 1941
Maj Elbert O. Meals, 27 Feb 1942
Maj John G. Pickard, 27 Oct 1942
Maj Richard D. Salter, 7 Mar 1943
Maj James L. Hudelson, 12 Sep 1943
Maj Robert S. Hamby, 23 Jan 1944
Capt Edward A. Fenker, 31 Jan-Sep 1945
Unkn, Oct-5 Nov 1945
Maj Gordon F. Goyt, 4 Aug 1946
Lt Col Kenneth S. Steele, 16 Dec 1946
Maj Marshall Nelson, 1 Jan 1949
Lt Col Solomon Cutcher, 17 Jan 1949
Lt Col Albert F. Fahy Jr., 25 Jul 1950
Lt Col Richard Taylor, 1 Jul 1951
Lt Col Clare H. Royce, 24 Jun 1952
Lt Col Frank L. Amend, Jan 1953
Lt Col Darold K. Barker, May 1954
Lt Col Lewis R. Riley, Feb 1955
Lt Col Charles E. Kammer, Nov 1955
Lt Col Donald E. Stout, 1 Mar 1959
Lt Col James S. Connell, 16 Aug 1960
Lt Col John R. Henton Jr., 26 Jul 1961
Lt Col William F. Cochran, 1 Jul 1962
Lt Col James E. Ferguson, Jan 1963
Lt Col Howard R. Catlin, c. Nov 1966
Lt Col Richard C. Blackburn, 15 Nov 1969
Lt Col Paul F. Marsh, 15 Jul 1971
Lt Col Leland A. Schmoker, 8 Jun 1972
Lt Col Joseph B. Hunt, 19 Jul 1973
Lt Col Ronald R. Kadera, 22 Apr 1974
Lt Col William F. Mohr, 15 Aug 1975
Lt Col Robert F. Durkin, 13 Apr 1976
Lt Col Richard H. Brodeur, 1 Jul 1977
Lt Col Robert L. Murphy, 13 Nov 1978
Lt Col William O. McCabe, 17 Apr 1980
Lt Col Kenneth J. Hacker, 3 Mar 1981
Lt Col Dennis P. McGuirk, 13 Jan 1983
Lt Col Larry Saunders, c. Jul 1984
Lt Col Terrance W. Bott, 1 Oct 1985

Maj Christopher P. Moore, 22 May 1986
Lt Col Terrance W. Bott, 1 Oct 1986
Lt Col Paul T. Shorock, 1 Feb 1988
Lt Col Anthony C. Beat, 30 Oct 1989
Lt Col James F. Long, 27 Nov 1991
Lt Col Wendell L. Griffin, 16 Sep 1992
Lt Col John S. Chilstrom, 3 Sep 1993-31 Mar 1995
Lt Col Robert B. Bush, 1 Apr 1997
Lt Col Steven P. Dickman, 24 Apr 1999
Lt Col Michael McGauvran, 28 Jul 2000

HONORS
Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers
World War II
Aleutian Islands
Air Offensive, Japan
Air Combat, Asiatic-Pacific Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations
Distinguished Unit Citation
Kurile Islands, 1 Apr 1944-[17 Jul] 1945

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device
19 Aug 1969-23 Mar 1970

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Sep 1957-30 Jun 1958
1 Jan-31 Dec 1966
1 Jan-1 Mar 1968
2 Mar-1 Jul 1968
9 Jun-10 Jul 1972
1 Jul 1976-30 Jun 1978
1 Jul 1978-30 Jun 1980
1 Jul 1981-30 Jun 1983
1 Jul 1988-30 Jun 1990
1 Sep 1991-1 Jul 1993
1 Jun-30 Nov 1994
[29] Mar-10 Jun 1999

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

19 Aug 1969-23 Mar 1970

EMBLEM

77 Bombardment Squadron emblem: Another characterization of Walt Disney's "Little Hiawatha" was sought after by the 77th Bombardment Squadron. They were an organization of wind-blown, two-fisted fighters reared among the sharp-ridged hills of Boise Air Base, Boise, Idaho. Its glorification was the embodiment of action, and they wanted something of the dash that comes with a fast and furious attack. So the roly-poly little redskin baby became the main character of the insignia. Into his hands was placed the taut bow, an aerial bomb substituted for an arrow and fitted to the string. He was braced firmly against the head of a mammoth arrow in swift flight. "Little Hiawatha," not undignified, yet expressing the characteristic whimsy of a Disney creation, will ride with the ships of the squadron wherever duty may call them, a portrait in motion of the immortal spirit of the corps.

The 77 Bomb Squadron has proudly worn variations of the same emblem since December 1941. At that time the squadron's first commander, Lt Elbert O. Meals, received artwork from the Walt Disney Studios in reply to his request for an insignia for his new unit. This was one of more than 200 designs created by these talented cartoonists to support America's war effort. It depicts the character Little Hiawatha from the 1937 Walt Disney cartoon of the same name.

Blue and yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence require of Air Force personnel. The bald eagle represent the unit and its long history of service to the country. The flying bird in attack position denote the determination and courage of past and present unit personnel. The lightning bolts reflect the units speed, accuracy and precision strike capabilities. The arrows indicate power and the destruction capabilities of the armament and weapons delivery system maintained by the squadron.

In February of 1997 it was decided by the leadership of the soon to be reactivated 77 Bomb Squadron that it was time for a change for the image of the Squadron. Recent ethnic ramifications regarding the “Little Hiawatha” emblem helped provide the impetus for the change. It was decided that the new name for the 77 would be the “War Eagles”, and thus started a frantic effort to create, design, coordinate and receive approval for our new emblem. Captain Mannis provided the eagle and invaluable insight for the approval procedure. With these basic items SMSgt Blumenfeld, working in conjunction with the base graphics lab created the emblem that exists today. The US Army Department of Heraldry office certified the emblem in just five days, a process that usually takes up to six months. It became official on 17 March 1997, and was ready for its unveiling during the activation ceremony on 1 April 1997.

On a disc Argent, a zenith of fourteen points Gules, voided of the field, surmounted by a Native American brave armed with bow and bomb as an arrow descending bendwise Proper, riding a stylized native arrow Azure detailed of the first, all within a narrow border Black. Attached below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "77 WEAPONS SQUADRON" in Black letters. **SIGNIFICANCE** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The Native American brave represents the warfighting spirit embodied by all members of the unit. He is swiftly riding on an arrow toward the enemy, representing the unit's constant position at the forefront of battle. The bomb and bow are intertwined to represent the unit's goals of accuracy and lethality. The red zenith behind, with seven points on each side, infers the unit number and is symbolic of a setting sun, representing the persistence of the unit in the nation's fights. (Approved, 17 Mar 1997)

27 Mar 2023

MOTTO

Initially the emblem included the squadron emblem, however with its inclusion the patch being developed for the flight suit was too big for wear. The motto, which literally means, “our spirit will prevail” was translated into Lacota Sioux and reads “UNNAGIPI KIN OKINHI KTE”. This phrase is very similar to a blessing that was bestowed upon Sioux warriors prior to battle, and as such is fitting for all of the Eagle warriors as well.

OPERATIONS

In January 1939, feeling that America's air arm was "utterly inadequate," President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to strengthen United States air power. Although it took more than a year to materialize, the Army responded by expanding the number of its individual air components. As part of this effort, the United States Army Air Corps constituted the 77 Bombardment Squadron (Medium) on the inactive list on 20 November 1940. Like dozens of its fellow units, it didn't have long to wait before it saw its first active duty.

On 15 January 1941, on a wintery day at Fort Douglas, Utah, the Air Corps activated the 77 Bombardment Squadron as a part of the 42nd Bombardment Group, Second Air Force. One officer and 27 enlisted men, all transferred from the 22nd Bombardment Squadron, made up the original cadre. The unit's first officer, 1st Lieutenant Elbert O. "Jack" Meals, became the squadron's first commander.

While at Fort Douglas, the men dedicated themselves to training as much as possible with their single airplane, a B-18 Bolo. By early summer, the squadron had grown to six officers and 174 enlisted men. On 3 June 1941 they moved to Gowen Field, near Boise, Idaho. For a brief period while in Idaho, Major Harry ("Light Horse Harry") Wilson--an All-American football player at West Point and one of the Army's all-time great backs--also commanded the squadron.

By July 1941 the squadron's aircraft fleet had grown to three planes. Training continued through the summer and then the squadron moved to Ontario Airport, Oregon, to participate in its first simulated combat (field maneuvers) on 23 September 1941. Despite shortages in just about everything, the squadron's four pilots gained valuable experience. In October, several of the 77's fliers travelled to the Glenn Martin factory in Baltimore, Maryland to be checked out on the Army Air Force's newest medium bomber, the "hot" B-26 Marauder. Soon thereafter, headquarters added several of these aircraft to the 77's inventory, which now totaled 13 aircraft.

By the end of November 1941, the squadron was a fighting unit. Although the men were not fully trained, they were ready for war. Two days after President Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on the Axis powers, the 77 was already training for coastal patrols from Paine Field, Washington, to Muroc Lake, California. Just over three weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the squadron was on its way to Elmendorf Field, Alaska, and its first action. Even the transfer to Alaska was a major undertaking. Ground personnel preceded the air echelon's arrival by nearly a month. In late January 1942--after having picked up 14 new B-26s in California--and losing five to crashes along the way--the rest of the squadron finally reached Elmendorf. Apparently, the extended range of the B-26 was almost exactly the distance from Boise to their new base. Several planes on the verge of fuel starvation crash-landed in a remote area in Alaska which later came to be known as "Million Dollar Valley." While the planes landed in relatively good shape, the rugged terrain made salvage efforts impractical. Surprisingly, there was only one injury during this operation when a piece of propeller penetrated an aircraft and struck a chief mechanic. He returned to the U.S. but did not rejoin the unit.

Headquarters administration soon caught up with the 77's physical transfer. During the first two months of 1942, after several intermediate reorganizations, the 77 Bombardment Squadron joined a fighter unit and two heavy bomber outfits to become part of the famed 28th Composite Group, under the Eleventh Air Force.

In Spring 1942, new landing strips were under construction in the Aleutian Islands. By late May they were ready, and six B-26's flew to the island of Umnak via Cold Bay. The 77 crews immediately began searching for a Japanese task force which was reportedly in the area, but this first effort met with no reward. Then on 4 June, the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor. After an initially unsuccessful intercept, five of the 77's B-26s hit their targets. Captain Jack Meals and his copilot, Lieutenant Northamer, sank a Japanese heavy cruiser with a direct torpedo hit. Enemy dive bombers and pursuit planes retaliated with an attack on the facilities at Umnak, but the 77's aircraft and personnel were unhurt.

That spring and summer weather conditions were extremely hazardous. Still, the 77 flew many patrols and continued training. To maintain communications security, crews could not use their radios to help navigate. Pilots often had to fly as low as 50 feet above the icy waters, through treacherous fog, and could not see the end of the runway when they landed. To compound matters, living and working conditions on the Aleutian ground installations were bleak. There

were no permanent buildings, no hangars, no shops, and sometimes not even enough tents. Aircraft maintenance had to be done out in the open, unprotected from the harsh elements. Besides looking out for enemy attacks, ground crews grew to dread the arctic wind, known locally as williwaw, that had a bitter reputation even with the islanders.

In September, headquarters ordered the squadron to move to the island of Adak. The ground echelon left on 25 September 1942 and arrived on 3 October. Ground facilities were ready for a sister unit by 13 October. The 77's planes finally arrived on 12 December. During this transition period, on 4 December, the new 77 Commander Major John G. Pickard, led a formation of six of the unit's newly arrived B-25s in a daring attack on Japanese shipping at Kiska harbor. Despite heavy antiaircraft fire, he pressed on and scored a direct hit on an enemy vessel.

For the next six months, the 77's ground crews maintained the aircraft and facilities for the 73rd Bombardment Squadron, as well as its own 77. Meanwhile, the squadron's bomber crews continued to brave dangerously inadequate airstrips, made-do with less than enough supplies, and struggled against steadily worsening weather to attack enemy sea and ground forces on the island of Kiska. In March 1943, part of the squadron's air echelon moved west to even more challenging facilities on the island of Amchitka, and from there launched attacks against Japanese forces on the islands of Attu and Kiska. Nevertheless, for the first half of 1943, six to ten of the 77's B-26s and B-25s would leave Adak, often two or three times a day, to pound the enemy. During these six terrible months the 77 flew 70 missions (354 sorties) against the enemy at Kiska and Attu at the cost of only two planes lost and 25 damaged.

On 10 July 1943, eight of the 77's B-25's, each carrying four 500-pound bombs, took off from Attu to bomb an enemy naval base at Paramushiru, in the Kuril (also known as Kurile) Islands. At the time, this was the longest mission ever flown by land-based bombers: 1,600 miles in 9 1/2 hours. Throughout July and August the squadron flew missions whenever weather permitted. Then on 11 September, the same day the squadron headquarters moved from Adak to Amchitka, the unit suffered the worst operational loss in its short history.

A dozen 77 B-25's took off on a low-level bombing and strafing mission against Japanese shipping in the Paramushiru Straits. The bomb bay doors on one plane jammed and it aborted. Then a score of enemy fighters pounced upon the remaining force. The action was fierce. All the bombers suffered hits, but two B-25s exploded in mid-air. One enemy fighter went down in flames. Of the eleven planes that reached their targets, only four managed to return to base. Headquarters listed 27 crew members as interned in Russia, and eleven as Missing-in-Action. The Japanese retaliated by bombing Attu on 13 October, but most of the bombs fell harmlessly into the ocean. Besides three men receiving minor injuries, the vengeance attack had little effect. For the remainder of the winter the 77 conducted training and responded to shipping alerts.

The Deck Leveler, a unit morale newsletter published during the period (and after which this booklet's cover design was derived), created a 1943 Christmas issue that has survived to this day. It reveals some of the positive spirit of the squadron members despite the terrible living

conditions in those days (see next page). The newsletter, unlike many personal letters, complied with censorship regulations and was allowed to be mailed home. One cartoon depicted two men dressed in heavy clothing trudging through thick snow against a head-on wind. One remarks to the other, "What's this stuff about the 'wild blue yonder?'" Another cartoon shows a line of troops marching by, all of them leaning forward at a sharp angle. One onlooker remarked to another, "I understand that those men just returned from the Aleutians."

On 11 February 1944 the squadron was on the move once again. This time the unit moved to Attu, where they continued to endure horrible weather and primitive living conditions. It was not a pleasant spring. By the end of April, however, housing, messing, and other facilities were slowly improving. The unit flew tactical missions, and whenever weather permitted, westward offensive sweeps toward the Kuril Islands.

In August 1944, headquarters ordered the squadron to discontinue shipping alerts. Formerly, six crews had to play these tedious waiting games, and were now free to fly bombing missions or be assigned to gunnery practice. The squadron was now able to send three flights of two planes each on the Kuril sweeps, which provided more effective coverage of the area. Offensive sweeps were planned for nearly every day, but the August weather cancelled all but six. An August 10th mission sunk a Japanese picket boat and downed an enemy fighter. The next day, two more Japanese picket boats fell victim to the 77's strikes.

Improvements continued on the tiny island base to include an officer's lounge and an enlisted day room. These were welcome retreats for the hard-working, often frustrated crews. In September 1944 aircrews sank six Japanese ships and listed two more as "probables." Also during this period headquarters gave the unit a new photographic reconnaissance mission. The Kuril Islands were their target, especially along the shorelines of Paramushiru and Shimushu. The squadron usually dispatched four planes for these duties, two to do the camera work, and two to bomb and fend off fighters. All four engaged in strafing whenever suitable targets appeared.

Often, the weather protected the enemy. Bitter arctic conditions cancelled many photo missions, and others were unsuccessful as clouds obscured their targets. The last three months of 1944 were especially frustrating as the unit could only fly 22 photo runs. Nevertheless, the 77 made the most of these actions by destroying six enemy aircraft, tagging another half dozen as "probably destroyed," and severely crippling many more. In addition, they downed five enemy ships and left major damage on another pair. These wins did not come easily. Six aircraft and five crews fell victim in this heavy action.

The first duty for 1945 began in January as the squadron flew a coverage sortie and two bombing and strafing missions. On 24 January, eight enemy fighters attacked a 77 formation in an action that lasted 20 minutes. No B-25s suffered serious damage, but squadron gunners claimed two more "probable" kills. Like a broken record the foul weather persisted through February and March, thwarting eight bombing attempts and allowing only two coverage missions. On 19 March, the unit claimed a successful strike against the enemy's food supply by

slamming fishery targets at the villages of Masugawa and Asahigawa on Paramushiru Island. On 6 April, eight B-25s pounded the Hayake Gawa Cannery on the east coast of Paramushiru. On 10 April four planes set out to bomb enemy installations at Minami Cape, Shimushu Island but this time antiaircraft fire turned the 77 back to base with their payloads intact. The B-25s soon returned to strike many of the same targets later in the month, but weather again gave the enemy a reprieve.

During May and June 1945 the 77 experienced both wins and losses. On 10 May, a mission destroyed two Japanese ships and damaged two others, but at the expense of one bomber shot down in flames, another badly damaged, and two with wounded men aboard which had no choice but to land in Russia. Three more B-25s suffered damage, but managed to return to base after evading six enemy fighters. In June the unit flew six missions, including successful bomb runs against Masugawa and the cannery on Araido Island. During the fray the squadron destroyed one enemy ship, damaged three others, fought off a total of eleven fighters, and listed two as "probables." The enemy wounded all the 77's attacking force, including shooting down one bomber and destroying an engine on another, but its crew managed to coax it to safety in Russia.

By July 1945, time was running out for the enemy. The 77 inflicted serious wounds on Japanese shipping off the coast of Paramushiru at the cost of one B-25 downed by antiaircraft fire. Two other squadron aircraft suffered in this battle and forced their crews to land in Russian territory. On 12 August mission planners briefed--then cancelled--the day's sorties. The squadron's fliers were waiting on alert for their next launch orders when word reached them that the Japanese had finally surrendered.

Thus ended the 77's role in World War II. The squadron gave four years of service and many lives on and around a string of bitterly cold islands. The Aleutians, with their thick, icy fog, and williwaw winds, were a bleak assignment. While there, however, the unit racked up an impressive combat record. The squadron's score against enemy aircraft becomes more striking when one considers that Japanese aircraft were fewer in number and harder to find in the North Pacific than in other combat areas. On the other hand, Japanese antiaircraft on the islands of Attu, Kiska, and in the Kurils was unusually effective; the squadron lost 49 of it medium bombers during the war. Other American and Allied fighting units may have enjoyed greater victories, but certainly not under such harsh and frustrating weather conditions. And not to be outdone, maintenance crews on the ground battled against unbelievable hardships to uphold capability rates under conditions fit for neither man nor machine.

The squadron left Attu Island, Alaska on 19 October 1945, aboard the USS Lew Wallace, and arrived in Seattle ten days later. Upon arrival at Fort Lawton, Washington, on 5 November 1945, headquarters inactivated the 77 Bombardment Squadron, Medium.

On 15 July 1946, higher headquarters redesignated the 77 Bombardment Squadron, Medium, to the 77 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy. On 4 August the 77 activated again, this time at Grand Island Army Air Field, Nebraska, and was once again assigned to its old parent unit (also

sporting a new name) the 28th Bombardment Group, Very Heavy. The squadron's new leadership staff and resources (including its B-29 Superfortresses) came from the recently inactivated 449th Bombardment Group and the 716th Bombardment Squadron, respectively. This time the 77 worked alongside the 717th and 718th Bombardment Squadrons, its fellow units under the 28th Group.

After a positive new start with the more sophisticated large bombers, however, tragedy struck the 77 almost two months later. On 1 October 1946, one of the squadron's B-29s left Grand Island for a routine trip to Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Base, California. While enroute, the aircraft exploded in mid-air and plummeted to the earth near Battle Mountain, Nevada. All eleven crewmembers died in the crash.

Five days later, the squadron left Grand Island to return to Elmendorf Field, Alaska, for what had originally been planned as a permanent change of station. Along the way the squadron passed through its old haunts at Fort Lawton, Washington, to process through the Seattle Port of Embarkation. By the time the unit arrived in Alaska on 20 October, they learned they were only going to be there for approximately six months. Additional aircrews and B-29s from the 77's air echelon continued to arrive during December.

As if the 77 hadn't already seen its share of tragedy, early in the morning of 24 February 1947, one of its sister unit's B-29s took off on a routine mission. When its estimated return time passed and headquarters received no further word, every available plane launched to search for the missing aircraft. In typical arctic fashion the weather turned for the worse and search efforts grew more difficult. On 28 February the weather cleared and search efforts intensified. One of the 77's B-29s involved in the search then developed propeller trouble. An engine caught fire, its propeller could not be feathered, and the 14 crew members had to bail out. Thirteen landed safely and were rescued within a few hours by civilian bush pilots. The fourteenth man, a sergeant, was listed as missing for several days before rescuers eventually recovered his body. As far as the original missing plane from the 717th Bomb Squadron, historical data is contradictory. One account states that the plane and its crew were found and recovered safely in Greenland. Another states that they were never located.

In March 1947, the 77 received word that their new higher headquarters--Strategic Air Command (SAC)--had transferred the entire 28th Bombardment Group to Rapid City Army Air Base, South Dakota. The vast majority of the organization's personnel were unhappy over the decision. But the realization that their time in Alaska would soon end, and that they would soon return to the Zone of the Interior, eased their discontent somewhat.

An advance echelon from Elmendorf left on 28 March 1947 for Rapid City. They arrived in early April after some weather delays. On 16 April the 77's aircraft and crews left Alaska and--flying non-stop-- arrived at Rapid City early the next morning. The remainder of the group's ground personnel found passage on the USS Goucher Victory and finally joined their comrades on 3 May. The Rapid City community and base personnel extended a friendly welcome, erasing initial fears about the new station. The 28th Bombardment Group and its associate, the 62nd

Air Service Group, were able to foster a cooperative relationship with the base, in contrast to that which had developed at Elmendorf.

Effective 15 August 1947, SAC assigned the 28th Bombardment Group, along with its component squadrons including the 77, to the newly organized 28th Bombardment Wing, Very Heavy, under 15th Air Force. The wing also included additional maintenance, supply, services and medical groups.

The squadron spent most of late 1947 and early 1948 conducting crew training, although there was some rotation of planes and crews to southern bases during the winter when South Dakota weather was unsuitable for flying. During this period, on 28 May 1948, SAC redesignated the squadron to the 77 Bombardment Squadron, Medium. (The "Medium" label came only from the fact that the unit's B-29s--large as they were--were dwarfed by newer "Heavy" bombers soon to appear on the horizon.) Training was intense, for the general state of affairs around the world was troubled. On the other side of the globe, the Soviet Union had drawn what came to be known as an "Iron Curtain" between Eastern and Western Europe and had plans to lay siege to the city of Berlin. SAC and other commands strove to maintain their forces in a high state of readiness in order to respond to any demands the new Cold War asked of them.

In late June 1948, during the Soviet blockade of Berlin, SAC alerted the 28th Bombardment Group for temporary duty in England. The U.S. took a gamble that the mere presence of several squadrons of B-29s, within easy striking distance of Soviet strongholds, would be a powerful persuader to convince the communists that any further advances on their part would be met with overwhelming force. On 16 July, 77, 717th and 718th Bombardment Squadron Superfortresses, carrying among them some 600 men, took off from Rapid City Air Force Base (AFB). They landed the following day at Royal Air Force (RAF) Station Scampton, England, located approximately 100 miles north of London. Within a few weeks, more than 260 additional personnel arrived on transport aircraft and by sea. The original 30 days of TDY languished into 90 long days. On 4 September 1948, 27 of the group's 30 aircraft participated in a joint British-American exercise to test England's radar and fighter defenses against "hostile" bombers. British Meteor, Vampire, Mosquito, and Hornet aircraft formed the defending force.

The 77, as part of the 28th Group, left Scampton on 17 October 1948 and arrived back at Rapid City three days later. Most of the personnel felt that, for various reasons, they had not accomplished their mission. Certainly, they had posed a threat to be reckoned with. But since RAF resources and facilities were so limited, the traditional English weather such a handicap, and work practices between U.S. and weary British forces so different, it had been impossible for the group to meet SAC requirements and maintain combat readiness 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Nevertheless, the group's staff bombardier believed that his crews had accomplished as much training during three months in England as would normally be achieved in six months in the U.S.

Soon after the unit's return from England the 77 entered a crew competition at Castle AFB, California, one of the first the squadron ever participated in, and took first place. Also for the

first time in its history, the 77 celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas at home in Rapid City--in peacetime--while otherwise engaging in normal routine training. The European situation had not flared up into the Third World War, and there was much to be thankful for by the close of 1948.

While it was nothing new to Alaskan war veterans, a week-long blizzard hit Western South Dakota on 2 January 1949 and hampered--if not totally prevented--all activities on base. The prairie winds caused extensive damage, and deep snow and cold temperatures plagued the area all month. By late February, with most of the snow melted, it was finally cleanup time. The squadron devoted March and April to helping expedite its upcoming conversion from B-29s into the mammoth B-36 Peacemaker. As part of the impending transition, SAC once again redesignated the squadron, this time to the 77 Bombardment Squadron, Heavy. Both the parent group and overall wing took on the "Heavy" (H) designations as well. Finally, on 13 July 1949, the first huge B-36 arrived on base. By 1 November the 77 had three. The group still possessed 10 B-29s during this period.

More changes were in store for 1950. Up until this time, three strategic reconnaissance wings of the Second Air Force ably represented SAC's aerial intelligence capabilities. The Second, however, had no fighter or bomber units. In Spring 1950, at less than five years in existence, SAC drastically reorganized itself to make each of the command's three numbered air forces a functionally self-sufficient entity.

The new plan included giving a fighter and bombardment capability to the Second Air Force, and sharing reconnaissance taskings with the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces. At the same time, all units in the western part of the United States would be administratively reassigned to Fifteenth Air Force, those in the central part (including Rapid City AFB) to the Eighth, and those in the eastern part to the Second.

Thus the 77, 28th Group, and 28th Wing, in addition to receiving a new mission, all received new names again. On 1 April 1950, the 28th Bombardment Wing (H) became the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. The 28th Bombardment Group (H) became the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Group. Finally, the 77 Bombardment Squadron (H) became the 77 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Photo. Simultaneous changes also occurred in the 717th and 718th Squadrons. Later in mid July, SAC returned the (H) designations to all wing, group, and squadron names. Now that their primary mission had changed from long-range bombardment to long-range reconnaissance, 77 members hoped that bombardment might be retained as a secondary mission.

Headquarters Air Force called upon Rapid City's B-36s for their first photo mapping project in May 1950. The first mission required imagery of Arnold Engineering Development Center at Camp Forrest, Tennessee; the Syracuse, New York, urban area; and Limestone, Maine. More photographic missions appeared as the year progressed. Much like the 77's early photographic experience during World War II, many missions were less than successful either due to weather, cloud cover, or mechanical problems. On 16-17 May 1951, however, the 77 proved

that it could continue to make history when one of its B-36 crews flew a routine reconnaissance training mission lasting 41 hours without refueling. This was the longest mission on record ever flown by any crew in the entire 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing.

By 1952 the number of RB-36s (standard bomber airframes with reconnaissance modifications) assigned to the 77 varied from 10 in January to 14 in June. However, with aircraft absent on ferrying missions, temporary duty, or undergoing complex maintenance, there were generally no more than six or seven planes available for local duty on a daily basis, and aircrews were often hard-pressed to get enough flying time to maintain their proficiency.

On 21 August 1952, an Eighth Air Force operations order directed the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (and an additional unit from another base) to conduct visual and radar photography of Western Europe. The wing assigned its portion of the mission to the 77 Squadron. On 1 September, four 77 crews left Rapid City for Fairford, England. The 7th Air Division took command of the 77's RB-36s and other air assets as they arrived. Several more crews and aircraft joined these units for tours of varying lengths. This mapping project continued through November 1952, with crews from the 77 rotating between Rapid City and Fairford. The last RB-36 finished work in England in November and returned to the U.S. in early December. All maintenance and support personnel returned home by 10 December. In the final analysis, the 77 had originally been assigned to photograph 722 ground targets in nine countries. They flew 350 radar imagery runs, 321 of which produced acceptable film. They also flew 204 visual imagery runs, 157 of which were successful. Weather was, more often than not, the only limiting factor.

During another project in the winter of 1952, two 77 crews worked in Greenland. The exercise was designed to test the support capability of Thule Air Base as well as the 28th Wing's night photography and high altitude gunnery skills. Four C-124's from the 1st Strategic Support Squadron from Biggs AFB, Texas supported the mission.

In January 1953 the 77 once again made the record books. A squadron crew flew an RB-36 west from Fairford, England, to Rapid City--a distance of 3,882 nautical miles--in just 19:02 hours. This was, in its day, the fastest time ever recorded over a similar route on an east-west crossing of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Then on 18 February 1953, the squadron's good luck took a bad turn when the unit lost one of its RB-36s; the first such loss for the relatively young 28th Wing. As the 77 aircraft was making an apparently normal landing at Walker AFB, New Mexico, its crew noted an explosion in the vicinity of the number-two engine, followed by extremely bright fire in the left wing, and then a second explosion. The flight crew managed to wrestle the giant bird to the ground safely, but intense heat and exploding ammunition prevented the fire department from putting out the blaze. The plane was almost completely engulfed in flame. Miraculously, all members of the crew escaped with only minor injuries.

Only one month later, however, a 718th Squadron crew was not so fortunate, and their accident became the worst air tragedy in the history of the 28th Wing. On 18 March 1953, a 718th RB-36 en route from Lajes Field, Azores, to Rapid City crashed in a remote coastal area in Newfoundland. A total of 23 men died, including Brig Gen Richard E. Ellsworth, then 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Commander. Three months later, on 13 June 1953, 77 personnel took part in a solemn ceremony during which President Dwight D. Eisenhower personally rededicated the Rapid City installation as Ellsworth AFB.

The 77 continued to train for its long-range aerial reconnaissance mission as 1953 eased into 1954. By 12 October 1954, however, the 28th Wing's primary mission, once again, returned to that of long-range offensive bombardment. Nevertheless, the "reconnaissance" title remained unchanged for almost a year. The squadron even carried its version of the ungainly moniker during a 90-day deployment its B-36s made to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, from April-July 1955. Full recognition of the renewed primary mission finally appeared in the form of a SAC general order, effective 1 October 1955, when the wing, once again, became the 28th Bombardment Wing, Heavy. At that time, the 77 and its pair of fellow tactical units, became bombardment squadrons once again.

In late 1956, SAC formulated plans to convert the wing and its component bomber units--including the 77 Bombardment Squadron--from B-36s to the new B-52. By March 1957 the 77 began to deliver its Peacemakers to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, for long-term storage and after doing so, to disband its B-36 crews. The wing launched its last B-36 training mission on 7 May 1957. On 29 May, the last B-36 that had been assigned to Ellsworth left western South Dakota forever.

With the arrival of the B-52 came a major change in the squadron's mission. As it was no longer responsible for conducting long-range weather reconnaissance, the Air Force phased out all of Ellsworth's weather gunner crew members. The wing's first B-52 arrived on 14 June 1957 and was immediately assigned to the 77. By November the squadron and wing were fully-equipped with an entire complement of 45 D-model Stratofortresses; 15 assigned to each of the 77, 717th and 718th Bomb Squadrons.

Not only had the 77 received the first of the wing's new bombers, but unfortunately, it was the also the first unit to lose a B-52. On 11 February 1958, a 77 crew crashed when fuel system ice cut off engine power just as their aircraft was coming in for a landing. The plane lost altitude rapidly and crashed just short of the end of the runway, destroying not only the aircraft, but also a section of the base's perimeter fence and a small service building. Two airmen and a civilian who had been working in the small facility, as well as two of the plane's six crewmen, lost their lives in this accident.

The leaders of that day could not have known, but the B-52's arrival in the 77 during the late 1950s signaled the beginning of a relationship that would last longer than with any other aircraft they had flown before. The squadron would also be singularly unique in that aspect due to the fact that in February 1960, SAC inactivated both its fellow bomber units, the 717th and

718th squadrons. This left the 77 to serve for many years as the 28th Wing's only offensive team.

In early 1961, as part of new U. S. national defense strategies to counter Soviet aggression in other parts of the world, the 77 began to participate in airborne indoctrination sorties, code named "Chrome Dome." The 77, in carrying out the wing's mission, played a major role in this operation which kept a certain percentage of the SAC bomber force aloft at all times to provide a reflex capability in case of enemy attack.

In the mid-1960s, as American involvement in Southeast Asia increased, SAC started deploying B-52 units to the area on a rotational basis. The 77's contingent first began their duty in September 1966. While in theater SAC assigned them--tasking as many as seven squadron aircraft at a time--to the 4133rd Bombardment Wing (Provisional), based at Andersen AFB, Guam. Their initial missions, known as "Arc Light," were designed to use massive high-explosive bomb drops to cut off communist insurgent transportation by cratering roads, creating landslides over known supply routes, and shattering heavily wooded jungle encampments and staging areas inside South Vietnam. Right from the beginning 77 aircraft had the distinction of participating in the first B-52 missions ever flown over Vietnam, and one squadron aircraft was the first B-52D ever to actually drop munitions in Vietnam.

Over the next nine years the unit was involved in three Southeast Asian deployments where it flew thousands of combat hours in "Arc Light" and later "Linebacker" missions. During these latter sorties, aircrews had to conduct their strikes within strict rules-of-engagement over key areas inside North Vietnam. These attacks--usually conducted against strongly-defended targets of the enemy's war-making capability--earned the reputation of having been the heaviest aerial assaults of the entire Vietnam War. During "Linebacker II," in which the 77 participated, SAC committed more than half of its entire B-52 fleet to the fighting.

The Air Force credited the 77 Bombardment Squadron with flying both the 1,000th and 5,000th sorties against the enemy in Vietnam. Of all these thousands of missions, one story serves as an example of both the sheer terror and workaday heroism so often found in members of this unit:

> On the night of 27 December 1972, a 77 B-52D under the command of Capt John D. Mize, lifted off with several other bombers from their forward base in U-Tapao, Thailand, and headed for North Vietnam on a "Linebacker II" mission. Capt Mize's target for the night: a surface-to-air (SAM) missile site near Hanoi. Along the course to the drop area they had to evade several SAMS, but none inflicted any wounds on his aircraft. Upon arrival over the target area, at an altitude of 30,000 feet, Mize's crew scored a successful hit with their 108 500-pound bombs. Unfortunately, the enemy launched a salvo of SAMs at almost the same moment. A total of 15 explosive-laden rockets raced toward them simultaneously to blow them out of the sky.

All but one missile streaked harmlessly past the jet. The last one exploded on the left side of the aircraft, knocked out all four engines on that wing, started an engine fire and sent shrapnel through the fuselage. Jagged pieces of metal wounded Mize, his gunner, and his radio navigator. The plane went into a flat spin. Despite their painful injuries, damaged instruments, and unresponsive flight controls, the crew wrestled the aircraft back under control. With half its engines gone, however, it was losing altitude fast. Mize began a slow "roller-coaster" maneuver--repeatedly dipping to pick up enough airspeed to climb another 1,000 feet or so. He and his men knew their plane was so badly crippled it could not make it back to U-Tapao--and it could have broken apart at any moment--but they chose to risk staying with it to try to reach friendly territory.

For more than an hour the crew of six professionals flew on dead reckoning--in the dark--with only the occasional faint signals of other friendly aircraft in the area to help them stay on course. They coaxed the stricken bomber another 250 miles closer to their base. Meanwhile, aircraft systems began to short out, the bomb-bay doors dropped open, and the landing gear began to cycle up and down on its own. Fifteen miles into Northern Thailand the plane let out a tell-tale structural groan. It was almost too late. One-by-one Mize instructed each crewmember to eject. When the navigator's seat wouldn't move, however, Mize elected to remain with his plane for three minutes longer, just enough time to allow his fellow crewman to unstrap from his seat and jump to safety. Before the time was up, however, the aircraft lost all remaining power. Mize was forced to punch out before the B-52 plunged to a fiery death just a few miles further.

Rescue helicopters picked up all six crewmembers, injured but alive, within minutes of their touching the ground. For his superb airmanship and willingness to sacrifice himself to allow fellow crewmembers to escape, Capt John D. Mize received America's second highest medal for heroism: the Air Force Cross.
His crewmembers each received the Distinguished Flying Cross, and all received the Purple Heart for wounds and injuries they sustained in that incredible night's ordeal. Mize was convinced, for the miraculous way his plane held together to carry its crew to safety, that there must have been a Seventh Man aboard.

B-52 G-models began replacing the older D-models in early 1971. Six years later the 77 replaced its G's with still more advanced H-models. Also during 1977 the 37th Bombardment Squadron joined the 77 to share mission responsibilities under the 28th wing, then one of the largest combat flying organizations in SAC. The 77 continued training and, as it had since the early 1960s, carried out strategic alert duties to meet wartime objectives as designated by the President of the United States.

Internationally the superpower arms race continued in full swing. Clashes among non-aligned and Third World nations also began to heat up. There was increased tension in Southwest Asia--more specifically, the Persian Gulf. The 77 Bombardment Squadron, as well as all of SAC, conducted frequent large-scale exercises such as "Global Shield," "Red Flag," and others to maintain a continual readiness posture. Upholding its share of one leg of the U.S. deterrent triad was a weighty responsibility and required the highest caliber of professionals. In addition to these major headquarters activities, the 77 also took the opportunity to showcase its talent during annual bombing, navigation, and munitions loading competitions such as "Giant Sword," etc., where squadron personnel brought many coveted awards back home to the wing and Ellsworth.

Responding to international crises was another major responsibility the squadron met with zeal. In December 1979 SAC ordered three 77 crews, several 37th Bomb Squadron augmenting personnel, and six crew chiefs to deploy to Andersen AFB, Guam (its long-used forward basing area in the Western Pacific) to participate in "Busy League Charlie". This diversified training mission involved a 22-hour westward outbound flight to Guam via Alaska and Japan, a low-level bombing run near South Korea, and over-water navigation nearly all the way. The return trip would eventually bring the crews back through another bombing range run before turning homeward, but with the tailwind, the trip would take only 14 hours. This was the 77's first major overseas undertaking since its Vietnam service days.

Just one month later, in January 1980, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In response, already having had the previous "Busy League" experience so recently behind them, SAC directed the wing to return for duty in the same region. The wing deployed one 77 and two 37th B-52s for forward basing in the area and staging out of Darwin, Austrailia. From there the crews flew "Busy Observer," aerial sea surveillance missions to find and photograph ships belonging to the 24-vessel Soviet flotilla then under way in the Indian Ocean. Besides the obvious intelligence value of real-time photo observation, a defense department official later explained, "We did this to show the Russians that we can fly B-52s all the way into that part of the world."

In 1982 the 77 shared in the wing's newest mission of assuming the role of Strategic Projection Force (SPF), formerly a tasking belonging to the 319th Bombardment Wing. This responsibility specified using the wing's B-52s--which were modified to carry both internal and external conventional weapons--for use in global conventional bombing operations, a show of force, or a limited sortie role. The SPF was SAC's contribution to the interservice organization known as the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF). As a result of outstanding squadron performance during this and a variety of other national defense duties at this time, the 77 received the "Best in 15th Air Force" award, as well as the General John D. Ryan Outstanding Bombardment Squadron Award for 1982.

By the end of 1982 the 37th Bombardment Squadron inactivated. Once again all the wing's long-range bombing chores rested in the 77's capable hands. In February 1983 the squadron's

B-52s underwent a complete offensive avionics system upgrade. Using the new system, and following a long precedent, the unit continued to train and prepare for its various mission roles. While SAC required all its crews to achieve a level of proficiency in their duties in order to fly and fight, few earned the distinction of standing out ahead of their peers. That, however, is precisely what happened with 77 crew R-33 when 15th Air Force named them its Crew of the Year for 1984. Shortly thereafter, the numbered air force bestowed the same honor on the entire 77 Bombardment Squadron, another first.

In 1985 the unit faced new challenges, while at the same time, continued to set new standards. Headquarters plans were already under way for the 77 to sever its nearly 30-year relationship with the B-52, in favor of the new B-1B. In anticipation of that change to occur within the next two years, squadron crew numbers began to decline as new crews were being trained on the more advanced aircraft. Meanwhile, still viable with the older B-52, the 77 worked with Air Force developers to help test minimum-interval takeoffs with the service's newest update to its airborne refueling fleet, the KC-135R. The squadron also took part in another SAC-wide Global Shield exercise, as well as deployed--for the wing's first time ever--three B-52s to Cairo West Air Base, Egypt for Bright Star '85.

Ellsworth's last B-52--a 77 plane--left the base for the last time in March 1986. All through the remainder of that year, construction crews worked steadily to complete facilities to support the most sophisticated aircraft the wing had ever flown. New flight crews trained continually on the systems they would operate as soon as their new aircraft arrived; planes so new they hadn't all yet even left the production facility at Palmdale, California. Then, on 21 January 1987, Ellsworth finally received its first B-1B Lancer (more commonly known as Bone, for "B-one"). Although the 37th Bombardment Squadron activated again to share in the new bomber duties, that first plane went to the 77.

The B-1B's aerodynamic lines accentuated the fact that this plane had many improvements over the squadron's previous workhorse. For the next several months, despite the upheaval as new airframes arrived regularly to fill the wing's stable, the 77 carried out various training duties to maintain the highest capability level possible. The squadron helped develop operational procedures--and tested them later in such major events as "Red Flag" and composite force exercises with the U.S. Navy--to evaluate the B-1's munitions delivery capabilities under a variety of situations to meet SAC's needs. Unlike the B-52's vulnerable high-altitude sorties in Vietnam, or even its limited low-level abilities, the swing-wing B-1B was specifically designed for the high-speed, terrain-following tactics used most effectively to evade enemy detection.

There were some inevitable growing pains for so advanced an aircraft, which gave it an undeservedly poor reputation in some circles. Nevertheless, the 77's B-1Bs persevered through 1990 and demonstrated how eminently capable their weapons system--the new mainstay of America's strategic defense--truly was. That was one of the primary reasons no B-1s took part in the fray over Iraq during the Gulf War. The Air Force kept them poised on alert to meet national defense need had they been called upon.

Still more changes were afoot for the 77 Bombardment Squadron. On 1 September 1991, SAC made a number of organizational adjustments that included changing the wing's name to the 28th Wing and making it Ellsworth's host unit. Less than a month later, in response to the decreasing Soviet threat in Eastern Europe and the imminent dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, President George Bush ordered all the wing's B-1s taken off alert. The 77 immediately began to focus on a transition, which later came as a mandate from the new Air Combat Command (SAC's successor in June 1992), to make its B-1Bs full-time conventional weapons carriers.

Part of the massive reorganization that flowed out of the major command change in mid-1992 included a move to reincorporate maintenance functions back into the operations squadrons they were so closely allied with. Rather than keep the expensive overhead for separate maintenance squadrons, the new technicians within the 37th and 77 Bomb Squadrons now were responsible for the daily launch and recovery of peacetime B-1 training missions, as well as providing airworthy aircraft to uphold combat readiness.

Throughout the 1993-94 period, the 77 was continually on the go. The squadron had a full plate, from local exercises, to headquarters missions, to presenting its B-1s in good-will appearances at various air shows around the country, to continued cooperation with the U.S. Navy, Canadian forces, and other services at flag events, the Gunsmoke gunnery meet, etc.

The highlight of 1993 was undoubtedly the 77's and 37th's close collaboration to complete "Global Enterprise". The intention of this mission was to demonstrate the B-1B's global capabilities in a changing international environment. This exercise, which ran from 1725 local on 11 August 1993 and finished at 0725 local on 14 August, involved two wing bombers (plus another pair of spares which returned to base within a few hours of takeoff), double the number of crews to allow for 'first and second-leg' duties, more than two dozen support personnel at the approximate half-way point, and additional help from a number of other units who provided aerial refueling. After flying to Europe, making a brief pass to drop bombs on a practice range in the Netherlands, winging across the Mediterranean and Red seas, and skirting the Arabian peninsula, the first pair of crews brought their aircraft down at the tiny island of Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean. Following a short stop for aircraft servicing and crew changes, the second half of the team picked up the relay. They flew from southwest Asia to Japan, then over the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, made another brief pass to drop bombs on a sea range in the North Pacific, then crossed a large chunk of Canada before finally returning to South Dakota. Averaging just under 48 hours overall flight time, the Ellsworth bombers set the record for being the first B-1Bs ever to circumnavigate the globe. In addition, they established an Air Force standard for the longest flights ever accomplished by B-1Bs.

In 1994 the 77 shared in a wing mission that was, by far, the most comprehensive tasking ever levied on the B-1B to date. Congress mandated that the bomber's mission capability be thoroughly scrutinized over a set period of time. Leaders felt that conclusions drawn after that evaluation would either validate the allegations that the aircraft was a liability to the military budget, or vindicate the aircraft and prove that it was all the Air Force had bragged about, and

then some. After consulting with ACC, Ellsworth became the location of choice to hold this large-scale operational capability assessment, which came to be known locally as "Dakota Challenge".

Every member of the entire 28th Bomb Wing, as well as many other organizations, contributed in some way to the outcome of the test. The test began on 1 June 1994 and ran through early December. Test ground rules required that the Air Force provide the 77 and 37th with all the manpower, all the funding, and all the supply support originally intended for the system, which, for one reason or another since the B-1s first arrived in 1987, had never actually materialized. The goal was to see if the B-1, given this full backing, could sustain a mission capability of 75 percent or better over the long haul. Over the next several months other B-1 wings, who also had a big stake in the outcome, sent personnel--first on temporary duty then on a permanent basis--to fill Ellsworth's long-vacant slots. Resources, both financial and logistical, began to flow in to provide the kind of support the B-1 was first designed to receive. Results were almost immediate. As the wing and its flying squadrons went about their daily business, flying their normally full schedule of sorties to meet headquarters requirements and crew training needs, they were now under the watchful eyes of evaluators. Mission capability rates lifted, first to the established base-line, then beyond. As the months passed by, despite inevitable unforeseen delays or the occasional bottlenecks in the pipeline, rates averaged above the goal and stayed that way. At the end of the test, the wing had one more challenge: to deploy for a short period to a bare-base environment (in this case Roswell Industrial Air Center, New Mexico), conduct missions as they would normally be done in war, and still sustain the capability rate.

For this unique tasking the wing once again relied on the 77 to represent Ellsworth. The squadron deployed nine of its 14 aircraft and 250 personnel to New Mexico. From 4-17 November 1994 the squadron flew all 109 of its scheduled sorties (656 flying hours) at an unprecedented 100 percent launch rate. Even under Roswell's austere conditions--and flying an ambitious daily sortie schedule without resupply for a week--the squadron maintained its B-1Bs at an 86.9 percent mission capable rate.

By the end of November 1994 and the conclusion of "Dakota Challenge," not only had the wing maintained the established 75-percent bottom line, but cumulatively over the entire six months of the test--whether on base or deployed--the wing sustained a rate almost 10 percent higher! The people of the 77 had taken a leading role in proving the immense value of the B-1B aircraft to the Air Force, and ultimately, to national defense.

Throughout the squadron's history, rarely has the unit ever been able to predict its next headquarters tasking. Such was the case within a week of the 77's return from Roswell. In early December 1994 the Air Force announced that--although many of its aircraft would remain in reserve at Ellsworth--the 77 Bomb Squadron would soon be inactivated. This public release marked the beginning of a new phase of the unit's service to the Air Force, as plans had already been underway to upgrade B-1 precision conventional munitions capability. In these lean fiscal times, however, funds needed for research, development, and production of improved

weapons could not be made available without a significant sacrifice from other areas. The 77's inactivation, set to take place on 31 March 1995, met just such a need.

Unit planners began to make shut-down preparations. Meanwhile, the tempo of activity did not slow down for the rest of the squadron. In January 1995 the 77 was at the center of a wing-directed Operational Readiness Exercise. Once again, the squadron demonstrated its ability to deploy aircraft and personnel for combat. Then, from 21 January through 4 February, the unit deployed to Nellis AFB, Nevada, for its final "Red Flag" exercise. Even within weeks of closure the squadron continued to carry its share of the wing's workload by hosting "Dakota Thunder '95," a composite force training exercise with Air National Guard and Canadian fighter units. On 11 March the 77 flew its last "Global Power" mission--over 17 hours in duration--across the Pacific.

The squadron launched its farewell "Bone" sortie on 29 March 1995 when Lt Col John Chilstrom (aircraft commander), Capt Jeff Kubiak (pilot), Capt Robert Loy (offensive systems officer), and Capt John Wallace (defensive systems officer) took the squadron's "flagship," aircraft #85-0077 Pride of South Dakota, to the air. As the mighty thunder of its afterburners faded away and the dark jet with the 77's familiar blue tail flash disappeared into the western sky, an era ended.

Rather than assume this signals the demise of a noble fighting unit, however, those in today's 77 recognize that their unit has inactivated before. After a time, when its country needed it, the squadron came back stronger than ever. For more than half a century thousands of men and women assigned to the 77 Bomb Squadron have frequently placed themselves in harm's way, putting the good of others before their own. The unit now accepts this new mission: to take a well-deserved "leave of absence" from active rolls to offer up its resources to the advancement of national defense. Perhaps the developments that are realized during its quiet time will be the very tools new members of this unit will use in the 77 Bomb Squadron of tomorrow.

Although the 77 Bomb Squadron was not officially to stand up until 1 April 1997, planning for that event began with the compiling of the initial cadre of personnel on 2 Jan 1997. From a very small beginning (a list of the initial squadron personnel can be found in appendices), the squadron grew in numbers of both personnel and aircraft. The first aircraft assigned to the squadron was 85-0085. This aircraft bore the entire flying schedule for over two months. It was then joined by 85-0077, which became the squadron command aircraft. There was plenty to do during the months leading up to the reactivation on 1 April 1997, not the least of which was to set up a temporary facility from which to operate. The 77 was initially located in building # 8227. Just getting the facility up and running was a big challenge, as the unit didn’t even exist on paper, so acquisition of furniture, partitions, communication equipment, computers, and vehicles involved the age old art of “scrounging”. In addition, establishing the support section and all requirements for personnel gear were also difficult. SRA Lubinski helped meet the challenge by obtaining enough MOPP equipment for all assigned personnel from the Air Guard free of charge. Meantime SSgt Eaton brought together an adequate amount of test equipment and tools to get the squadron started. The 37th Bomb Squadron “Tigers” displayed a

tremendous degree of cooperation helping the Eagles to maintain by loaning out all the additional equipment the new squadron needed.

As the 1 April 1997 date drew near, the squadron building was shaping up and more attention was placed on getting the new squadron emblem approved (see “The Emblem” in a following paragraph), and the new tail flash finalized and applied to the “fleet” (85-0085). The distinctive tail flash was designed by SMSgt Blumenfeld (see “New Tail Flash” in a following paragraph), and brought from design to reality by SSgt Wentz from the corrosion shop. SSgt Wentz’s creative method for applying the tail flash and the emblem saved hundreds of man-hours, and eliminated the need for touch-ups between depot visits. In addition to applying these items to the aircraft, SSgt Wentz recreated them for use as hanging memorabilia. The tail flash sign has since been put to use as the VIP signature board. In addition a beautiful lighted abstract stained glass replica of the emblem was ramroded by CMSgt Schwab and is dedicated as a remembrance to “all those who follow us as we have followed those before”.

The reactivation ceremony was conducted at 1000 hrs on 1 April 1997 in Dock 90. During the ceremony, General Croker, commander of the 8th Air Force unfurled the squadron colors and presented them to the new Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Byran Bush. The next day the initial sortie for the war eagles was flown on aircraft 85-0085. On the 8th of April, the 77 was faced with its first critical situation.

After an uneventful 2nd flight, during transition pattern work, it was determined that 85-0085 had blown two tires, numbers 6 and 10. This was a bad situation, as this left only two good tires on the right main gear. Lt. Col. Bush, who was in command of the aircraft at the time, expertly guided the jet to a safe landing. Immediately following the landing it was determined that the #5 tire was virtually worn through. After two weeks of intense troubleshooting it was determined that the brakes had frozen causing the tires to rub through.

Early in May 1997 the second aircraft assigned to the squadron, 85-0077, arrived from depot. SSgt Pat Johnson did a thorough inspection of the forms and found discrepancies on the documentation of work performed on the ejection seats. This was a precipitous find, as when the seats were removed for verification, damage was found on two. Had it not been for the diligence of SSgt Johnson and the professionalism of the 28th Maintenance Squadron Egress shop, this error may have un detected and uncorrected. The resulting repair actions required the jet be impounded for almost a month. It seemed as though bad luck was following the “Eagles”. This idea was hard to shake, especially after the first six days of the first overseas deployment.

The 77 went to Anderson AFB, Guam in November of 1997 to support an ambitious “Asian theater” exercise. Shortly after arriving it became obvious that the deployment was in jeopardy as Super Typhoon Keith bore down on the island. The unit successfully generated a four ship “Typhoon Evac” mission to Hawaii, and then hunkered down to weather the storm. Fortunately, sustained winds were limited to 100-mph with the top gust of just over 120-mph, as the storm moved quickly by the island. All aircraft returned two days later, and the remainder of all

scheduled sorties was flown. Just as it seemed that luck had changed, a real world requirement for airlift delayed the return of the deployed maintenance personnel for another five days.

The next challenge for the “War Eagles” was the support of a Det 1 Weapons School deployment at Hill AFB, Utah. This support had been being provided by the 37th bomb squadron, but due to an ORI at home station, they were unable to support this requirement. When the unit departed for the deployment, their entire supply parts kit consisted of one engine and a single gel cell battery. Utilizing the call sign "MAJIC” (if we pull this off it will be quite a trick) the “Eagles” provided 100% of all required taskings and flew an additional five unscheduled sorties in support of staff training requirements that had been previously missed. The weapons school commander assigned to Hill stated “you guys really did pull the rabbit out of the hat, providing the best B-1 support to date”.

The initial building assigned to the “War Eagles” was adequate until the squadron outgrew it in April of 1998. The unit then moved to building # 7504 the old “Pride Hanger”. Arrival at this building was like “old home week” for many of the members who had been previously assigned to the 34th Bomb Squadron and had just left the facility a mere 11 months earlier.

The squadron continued to support all required training during the next several months while preparing to accept the new “Block D” modified B-1s coming from depot. The 77 was the first unit to be assigned these aircraft and as such would receive the “fast seven”, or the first seven jets to be modified. In addition to the basic “Block D: equipment, these jets would also be equipped with the AN-ALE 50 tow decoy system. The addition of this modification would have ramifications for the 77 in the very near future.

With the arrival of the first block d jet 85-0091, came the notoriety of having the newest type of B-1 available. ACC decided that it would be good publicity for the commander Gen. Hawley to fly the first operational sortie for the block d, to include dropping a Joint Defense Attack Munition (JDAM). Although two test sorties had been flown on 85-0091, it was no easy job to prepare it for its initial flight for the squadron. In addition to the pressure of flying the ACC commander, the sortie became a media event with the attendance of local, state and national political figures. The aircraft had an on time take off, “shacked” the weapon, landed on time – code one, and taxied up to the ceremony right on time. The entire exercise was a complete success and set the tone for the block d program.

As more of the block d aircraft arrived at the squadron, the pace of training aircrews increased, as did the completion of more in-flight tests on the new systems. These tests included radio validation and up grade multiple JDAM drops, and AN-ALE 50 utilization. In addition, new tactics were developed and validated by Det 2, Test and Evaluation squadron. All of these programs were aimed at achieving the goal of having the 77 Initially Operational Capable by 1 April 1999. With the arrival of aircraft 86-0104 in mid March, the delivery of the fast seven was complete, and we could now concentrate on bringing the jets and aircrews up to the rigid standards of the squadron. The 77 was also preparing for the first overseas deployment of the “Block D” to

England in support of the “CENTRAL ENTERPRISE” exercise. Little did any of us know that we indeed would be deploying, and soon, but it be instead for OPERATION “ALLIED FORCE”.

During the last ten days of March 1999, there was a lot message traffic about a pending deployment of the B-1 to England. No one knew which squadron was going, but signs pointed to the 77. Even though the squadron had no mission statement, no parts kit, and too few trained crews, supervision began planning in earnest to overcome these obstacles.

On March 29 the main body of maintainers departed Ellsworth AFB on two C-5s for RAF Fairford, England. One group was delayed by a combination of maintenance and weather but departed the next day. Home station launched four B-1s (85-0073, 85-0075, 85-0083, and 85-0091) on 31 March. When these aircraft arrived in England they were turned and launched in only 14 hours for the first two combat missions.

During the next seventy days the 77 Expeditionary Bomb Squadron (deployed) launched an additional 98 combat missions, bringing the total to 100.
In addition to the 100 combat missions an additional 21 missions were flown for sustainment, flight-testing, and in support of (you won’t believe it) “CENTRAL ENTERPRIZE”. Several “firsts” were accomplished during this campaign to include; first use of the AN-ALE 50 tow decoy system in combat, first use of Multiple Source Targeting System (MSTS) in combat, two short notice four ship surges, and one two ship launched on three hours notice to attack during on on-going tactical engagement.

Those personnel who remained at home station also provided support for the Kosovo Theater. Five sustainment sorties were launched to replenish airframes sent home for phase. All training required to upgrade additional seven aircrews was accomplished. Two aircraft had MSTS fitted, ground tested, flight tested, and approved for use in less than ten days. Aircraft 86-0104 served as a source for the initial deployment of block d parts. Once it became apparent that the aircraft would be needed overseas, it was rebuilt in just eleven days. This time included 14 TCTO's and special inspections.

The last combat sortie from RAF Fairford was flown on 8 Jun 1999 by aircraft 85-0075. The aircraft all returned home on 27 Jun 1999, and the last of the maintainers returned to Ellsworth on the 30 June 1999. Many people distinguished themselves during "ALLIED FORCE". Numerous Meritorious Service Medals, Air Medals, and Air Force Commendation Medals were awarded, but the following personnel require special recognition for earning the Distinguished Flying Cross:
Lt. Col. McGauvern (2 each), Capt. Payne (2 each), Lt. Col. Bush, Lt. Col Leitzel, Maj. Backes, Capt. Bell, Capt. Goodfellow, Capt. McKenna.

On 1 October 1999 the 77 took over full responsibility for all Det 2 Test and Evaluation Squadron flying support requirements. This commitment, validated by Headquarters ACC, finally established a stable source of aircraft and maintenance for B-1 testing programs. Based on this new contract all requirements could be requested well in advance, and resulted in much more efficient use of manpower and airframes. As a result the 77 supported and completed installation and testing of two NVG modifications, advanced AN-ALE 50 equipment and software, and the final "Block D" radio modification all in less than the projected time. The Det was also able to fly all required tactics and training missions.

The biggest change for the 77 Bomb Squadron took effect on 1 Jan 2000. At this point the squadron assumed full responsibility for the Det 1 Weapons School. In an agreement mandated by Headquarters USAF and ACC the 77 became a split squadron. In essence this means that 6 of the assigned B-1 aircraft are dedicated to war fighting, and the other 6 are used to support the requirements of Det 1 and Det 2. Although this is at times a nightmare to manage, all three units work to deconflict requirements, and as a result the 77 has been able to provide 100% support to all concerned.

Because the 77 supports Det 1, it has picked up four deployments per year to include two to Nellis AFB, Nevada and two to either / or Hill AFB, Utah and Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. In addition to these ongoing commitments, the squadron also tries to participate in at least one Det 1 sponsored "Viper Flag exercise at Nellis

28 Feb 2000 The 77 provides three jets in support of ASCIET-00.

7 Apr 2000 The 77 deployed four jets to support Red Flag 00-3 at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

17 Apr 2000 The 77 deployed four aircraft to Hill AFB, Utah to support “Wasatch Slapper 00-2” in support of the Det 1 weapons school.

16 May 2000 A 77 jet, 85-0073, flew the lead during an Asian Global Power Mission including stops at Diego Garcia and Korea.

30 May 2000 The 77 deployed four jets in support of the Det 1Weapons school at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

20 Jul 2000 Two jets support the Air Fete at RAF Cottsmore, England.

5 Sep 2000 Two War Eagle Jets deploy to Waterkloof AB, South Africa to participate in the 80th Anniversary airshow. First deployment to Africa.

8 Sep 2000 Deployed three aircraft to support JEFEX 00 for Det 2 Test and Evaluation at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

16 Oct 2000 Deployed four jets to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska to support Det 1 KLONDIKE SLAPPER.

26 Oct 2000 Deployed one aircraft to support the New Orleans Airshow.

28 Nov 2000 Deployed four jets to support Det 1 Mission Employment at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

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