BALLISTIC SYSTEMS DIVISION

LINEAGE

STATIONS
Norton AFB, CA, 30 Jul 1962-1 Jul 1967

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS
MG T. P. Gerrity, #1961

HONORS
Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
BALLISTIC SYSTEMS DIVISION—BSD Norton AFB, California
BSD manages Air Force ballistic missile acquisition programs and DOD programs for Advanced Ballistic Re-Entry Systems. Responsibilities begin with system concepts, include development, production, delivery of operational systems and site activations

Establishment of Western Development Division (WDD) of the Air Research and Development Command (ARDC), 1 Jul 1954

WDD assigned responsibility for intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) initial operational capability (IOC). Nov 1955

WDD redesignated Air Force Ballistic Missile Division (AFBMD). 1 Jun 1957

The Air Research and Development Command's Western Development Division (on 1 June 1957 redesignated the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division), commanded by Brigadier General Bernard A. Schriever, was established in Los Angeles as the single central manager for intercontinental ballistic missile development on 1 July 1954. The Division was assigned responsibility in November 1955 for achieving "the Nation's initial operational capability with the intercontinental missile, and also for developing an intermediate range weapon.

In the technical area, the first reported Russian Sputnik in October 1957 gave added stimulus to a United States Air Force desire to hasten assimilation of the intercontinental ballistic missile into operational units. One result was the transfer of certain organizations and responsibilities from the Air Research and Development Command to the Strategic Air Command. Transfer of the 1st Missile Division (beaded by Major General David Wade), its subordinate units, Cooke Air Force Base, and follow-on ballistic missile bases, along with the responsibility for attaining an initial operational capability for the missiles became effective 1 January 1958. Despite its loss of this responsibility, the Air Research and Development Command continued active participation in the buildup of ballistic missile installations at Cooke. The Command's Ballistic Missile Division retained responsibility for design and installation of all ballistic missile facilities, and for the installation and checkout of launch sites before their operational turnover to the Strategic Air Command. To meet the task of earliest possible operational readiness, the Ballistic Missile Division and its associate. Space Technology Laboratories, established a field office at Cooke in June 1958. The office functioned as the Division's representative in supervising and aiding contractor activity in the installation and checkout of all missile facilities to insure they met the using agency's operational criteria.

In late November 1957 the Department of Defense directed the Ballistic Missile Division to proceed with plans for peacetime system exercises to meet an urgent Air Force requirement. The Air Force Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations signed an agreement in March 1958 for joint peacetime operations which would fully utilize the Pacific Missile Range. This arrangement permitted live firings from Cooke without duplicating the Naval Air Missile Test Center facilities at Point Mugu.

The Air Force Ballistic Missile Division's plans for the over-all Atlas construction program included three launch pads and three blockhouses (Complex 576-C) for the all-inertial guidance Atlas. Accordingly, construction started on the first semihardened launcher at Vandenberg on 23 July 1959. Shortly thereafter, the Secretary of Defense approved an operational system test facility for the silo-lift Atlas configuration, and construction of Vandenberg's prototype silo installation got under way in early November 1959. Installation and checkout of ground support equipment was taking place by the end of June 1960, and had reached the same stage, with completion of the hardened facility expected in January 1961. Since the later versions of the Atlas were designed for deployment in hardened underground silos, the missile was to be lifted to the surface by elevator prior to launch. The in-silo launcher, a relative latecomer to Vandenberg's family of missile facilities, was for the all-inertially guided "F" series Atlas. By November 1960, the underground operations center and silo were under construction.

In contrast to the aspect presented at its inception, the Nation's first operational ballistic missile installation had come a long way from the windswept area of scrubby vegetation and empty sand dunes of General Schriever's initial inspection. Revisiting Vandenberg Air Force Base in June 1960, he could survey the immense spread of facilities and engineering equipment that had been assembled to constitute the most unusual array of armament in the western world. A giant launching gantry and an Atlas missile on the stand provided a fitting background for the man who had meanwhile become Commander of the Air Force's Air Research and Development Command. With the General were Colonel J. J. Cody, Jr., Commander of the 6565th Test Wing (Development), and Major P.. M. Mulcaire

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Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources
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