

4245 STRATEGIC WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

4245 Strategic Wing
Activated,
Inactivated, 1 Feb 63

STATIONS

Sheppard AFB, TX, 5 Jan 1959-1 Feb 1963

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-52, 1960-1963

COMMANDERS

Col Paul N. Bacalis, 14 Jan 1962
Col Frederick D. Berry, Jr., 18 Jun 1962

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

494 Bombardment Wing activated On 1 Feb 63 As Replacement For 4245 Strategic Wing.

Two Bent Spear Nuclear Incidents Occurred During The Month. Sheppard's participation in the Cold War assumed greater significance in the mid-to-late sixties, when the Air Force announced that Strategic Air Command (SAC) would put a B-52 wing at the base. On 5 January 1959, SAC activated the 4245th Strategic Wing. When the wing's first five B-52D Stratofortresses arrived on 15 January 1960, they landed on a new 13,100-foot runway, which the base had built to accommodate them.

On 15 November 1962, Strategic Air Command discontinued the 4245th. In its place, HQ USAF established and SAC activated the 494th Bombardment Wing, Heavy, also on 15 November. However Strategic Air Command did not organize (assign personnel to) the wing until 1 February 1963. The wing continued to operate at Sheppard until its inactivation on 2 April 1966

When the 494th inactivated, it left Sheppard with an empty 13,100-foot runway but not for long. In August 1965, an advanced party from Stead AFB, Nevada, arrived in a single H-19B helicopter to begin the ground work for moving helicopter training from Stead (which would close in 1966) to Sheppard. By year's end, twenty-six H-19Bs were in place for training purposes.

01 Jan 59 Air Training Command redesignated the 3750th Technical Training Wing as Sheppard Technical Training Center.

05 Jan 59 Strategic Air Command brought the 4245th Strategic Wing on line at Sheppard. It was equipped with five B-52D models.

1959 Communications training moved to Sheppard from F.E. Warren AFB.

15 Nov 62 Strategic Air Command disbanded the 4245th Strategic Wing and at the same time activated the 494th Bombardment Wing, Heavy, at Sheppard.

4245TH SW

Activated at Sheppard AFB, Texas on 5/1/59. Inactivated on 1/2/63 when aircraft and personnel resources passed to the 494 BW at the same base.

In June 1956, the Air Force announced plans to station a 1,500-man SAC B-52 wing at Sheppard by 1960. Under this "Dispersal Concept," SAC hoped to enhance American deterrence by scattering its manned bomber fleet to a number of Air Force bases. To accomplish this project, the Air Force requested funds totaling \$17,591,000 in fiscal year 1957. Included in this figure was \$12 million for a new Sheppard 13,100 foot runway with taxiway and parking aprons to accommodate B-52 airplanes, \$3 million for a 150,000 square foot building to house the SAC wing operations, and \$1 million for a hydrant fuel system and base aviation storage facility. Today, the 80th Flying Training Wing occupies Building 2320 that once was the home for the SAC administrative operations on base. A separate facility at the north end of the runway, Building 2560, was built as a crew alert facility with a command center. The building, which currently is the headquarters of the 3750th Communications Squadron, was constructed with living accommodations for SAC crewmembers. Ramps leading from the alert facility enabled crews quick access to the alert aircraft parked on aprons nearby. In the event of a superpower confrontation the bombers could be airborne within 15 minutes.

On 5 January 1959, the 4245th Strategic Wing was activated at Sheppard. The 4245th was an element of the 816th Air Division at Altus, AFB, Oklahoma, under the Second Air Force. Its mission was the same as its parent organization, namely "to be prepared to conduct strategic air operations on a global basis." On 28 April 1959, a three-man advanced party arrived at Sheppard from Altus to expedite a smooth transfer of men and planes from Ellsworth AFB.

On 15 January 1960 the first of five B-52Ds arrived from Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. Formerly part of the 717th Bombardment Squadron, they landed on the 13,100-foot runway built especially to accommodate them. Nicknamed the "City of Wichita Falls," the craft was piloted by Col Frank B. Elliot, Commander of the 4245th Strategic Wing. On hand to meet the heavy bombers were Lt Gen John P. McConnell, Commander of the Second Air Force and Col H. W. Moore, Commander of the 816th Air Division. The ceremony was closed to the public except for J. S. Bridwell, who participated in recognition of his special role in the founding of Sheppard. Subsequently, on the 20 and 25 of January the remaining contingency of B-52 bombers arrived followed by the families of crewmembers and support personnel. By 1 February the wing was fully operational.

On 21 March 1960, the base held an open house for the 4245th Strategic Wing. A crowd of 65,000 persons from Wichita Falls and surrounding communities attended. The dedication included a flyover of B-52 Stratofortresses and KC-135 stratotankers, and a static display of aircraft. Visitors were allowed access to the outskirts of 4245th Strategic Wing headquarters ringed by a security fence and patrolled by sentry dogs. Inside the perimeter bomber crews were on alert status 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even when they were away from the alert area, crew members were always within the sound of "Klaxons" placed throughout the base, and could be recalled to launch an "emergency war order" mission (EWO). Underground in the composite building that made up the facility, controllers in the command post were in immediate reach of the famous red telephone which upon receipt of a message would immediately order the wing's bombers into action.

Getting these giant Stratofortresses airborne on 15 minutes notice required a considerable work force. Compared with previous aircraft such as the B-17 or B-29 during World War II which required a small number of maintenance personnel, around-the-clock servicing on the B-52 required service crews trained in 25 different fields.

In April 1960, the 4245th Strategic Wing flew its first of many operational missions. The following June, the wing participated in exercise "Trail Smoke," to test the feasibility of flight using radar advisory

service to SAC bombers tied into the mission of the North American Air Defense Command. Also, as part of its training, the wing practiced simulated bombing attacks on American cities. On one such exercise in August 1964, "Operation Top Rung Five," B-52s from Sheppard joined other bombers from SAC in flying over Canada. Their line of operation extended westward along a line that moved southward from James Bay, Ontario, to Edmonton, Alberta, and from the Great Lakes West to the Rocky Mountains extending south to the Gulf of Mexico. During these exercises several records were set by B-52 crews with the 4245th. In April 1960, Lt Col Victor Sandacz was the first Air Force pilot to log 3,000 flying hours in the B-52 bomber. One month earlier, the wing was rated the best in SAC on an Operational Readiness Inspection. Lt Gen John D. Ryan, the Commander of the Second Air Force, personally congratulated the wing on this achievement during a visit to the unit.

The ability of Sheppard's B-52s to stay aloft was further enhanced when the 900th Air Refueling Squadron was activated on 1 October 1962, and assigned to the 4245th Strategic Wing. Known as a "flying gas station," the first KC-135, christened "The Wichitan," arrived in early January 1963 from the Boeing plant in Seattle. It was flown by a four-man crew from the 900th Air Refueling Squadron. On February 8th, the 4245th Strategic Wing was reconstituted as the 494th Bombardment (Heavy) Wing with five component squadrons: the 864th Bombardment Squadron; the 494th Armament and Electronics Maintenance Squadron; the 494th Field Maintenance Squadron; the 494th Organizational Maintenance Squadron; and the 494th Combat Defense Squadron.

At Sheppard, key personnel were immediately shipped to Florida to support an ongoing United States military buildup aimed at a potential invasion of Cuba. Included in this movement of troops were seven officers and 40 airmen who were dispatched to air and naval installations. The real impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis at Sheppard, fell on the 4245th Strategic Wing. All leaves were immediately cancelled. Authorities clamped twenty-four hour security on the base. Security police were stationed on the base's perimeter. Armed members of the 4245th Combat Defense Squadron stood guard over the B-52s on the flight line. According to the wing's Vice Commander, Col C. W. Johnson, the shift to a war footing was done "with 100 per cent effectiveness." Roughest of all was strain on the combat alert crews who were required to spend 20 full days out of 30 on duty compared with only 14 days under normal conditions. Flight crews put in 90-hour work weeks. Four crew members were unable even to see their newborn babies during the emergency.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

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