

A REORGANIZED AIR FORCE

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(U) The United States Air Force's experience during the Gulf War served as a catalyst for major organizational changes the service made in the early 1990s. First, the composite wing concept demonstrated its utility during Operation Desert Storm, and the Air Force adopted this organization service-wide immediately after that conflict. Then, in June 1992, the Air Force dissolved five major commands and created three new ones as part of the service's most fundamental restructuring since its creation in 1947.

(U) The first of the organizational changes emerged immediately from the Gulf War: the introduction of composite wings made up of a variety of aircraft. The concept dated to the interwar period between the first and second world wars and to the air commando units that served in Burma during World War II. During the early 1990s the composite wing concept benefited from the support of Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill A. (Tony) McPeak,¹ and it demonstrated convincing advantages during Joint Task Force (JTF) Proven Force's operations during the Gulf War. Flying from Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, JTF Proven Force contributed a valuable "second front" to the coalition's air campaign against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.²

(U) Traditional wings, with a few exceptions, had a specialized function and flew a single type of aircraft. Composite wings integrated several different aircraft into a single organization, giving it the capability to perform a variety of missions. JTF Proven Force fielded "packages" of fighters, tankers, and electronic combat, reconnaissance; and command, control, and communications aircraft.³ The Gulf War experience of this joint task force showed that a

composite wing could deploy rapidly and effectively and could meet the wide variety of contingencies likely to challenge the Air Force during the 1990s.⁴

(U) Building on the success of JTF Proven Force, the Air Force tested a composite wing organization at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (AFB), North Carolina. On April 22, 1991, the

Image 1



F-16 Fighting Falcon

Air Force combined KC-10 Extender tankers with F-15E Strike Eagle fighters and officially designated the new test composite unit as the 4th Wing. The Air Force's first true composite wing was the 366th Wing, based at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, and originally assigned a mix of F-15 Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon, B-52 Stratofortress, and KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft.

The bombers and tankers operated out of Castle AFB, California, but remained under the control of the 366th. The service's second true composite wing, the 23d Wing, was a battlefield support wing—with F-16, A/OA-10 Thunderbolt II, and C-130 Hercules tactical airlift aircraft—and operated from Pope AFB, North Carolina. A third composite wing, the 347th Wing, featured the same aircraft as the 23d Wing, and formed at Moody AFB, Georgia, in mid-1994. As these composite wings replaced their traditional predecessors, General McPeak declared in January 1992: “The era of *disintegrated* airpower is over.”⁵

(U) Along with the introduction of the composite wings came a change in nomenclature—one that reflected a transformation in the nature of air operations. Mission designators such as “strategic” and “tactical” were dropped from the names of wings. “Tactical fighter squadrons,” for example, became simply “fighter squadrons.”⁶

(U) This change in the way Airmen thought about the terms strategic and tactical also emerged from the Gulf War. As one Strategic Air Command (SAC) briefing noted soon after Operation Desert Storm, a “further blurring of the lines between strategic and tactical”⁷ became apparent during that conflict. The B-52, a classic Air Force strategic bomber, performed a *tactical* mission during the Gulf War when the bombers dropped conventional weapons on Iraqi ground forces. On the other hand, an aircraft with an “F” or fighter designation—the F-117 Nighthawk—conducted *strategic* attacks over Baghdad and throughout Iraq. And A-10s, whose close air support role made them as tactical as any aircraft in the inventory, flew against Scud missile sites and other *strategic* targets.⁸

(U) This blurring of traditional strategic and tactical roles also contributed to the most extensive realignment of major commands in the history of the Air Force. On June 1, 1992, the Air Force inactivated three of its oldest and most iconic major commands: Strategic Air Command (SAC), Tactical Air Command (TAC), and Military Airlift Command (MAC), replacing them with two new major commands. Air Combat Command (ACC) took over operation of all bombers, fighters, and missiles, and Air Mobility Command (AMC) took responsibility for airlift aircraft and most of the Air Force’s tanker force.⁹

(U) In addition to reconsideration of customary concepts of strategic and tactical air

Image 2



F-117 Nighthawk

operations prompted by the Gulf War, the end of the Cold War also contributed to the realignment of the major commands. The most obvious change was the demise of SAC. General George Lee Butler, SAC's final leader, pointed out that although the command had served well during the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf wars, he readily agreed that SAC was not a conventional war-fighting outfit. From the beginning, SAC's principal mission was nuclear deterrence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of its military threat to the United States diminished the need for a major command dedicated solely to nuclear deterrence. The mission remained, but could be parceled out to other organizations.¹⁰ The Air Force's manned bomber mission would be assumed by a new command, ACC, organized specifically for the employment of both tactical and strategic forces. The nation's residual nuclear assets and forces would be consolidated in a unified command, U.S. Strategic Command.

(U) Had SAC continued as a major command despite the end of its nuclear deterrence mission, it would have taken severe cuts in its resources. General Butler fully expected it to downsize to fewer than 85,000 people; operate no more than 16 bases; and deploy at most 200 bombers, with none of them on alert. The entire command would become smaller than Second Air Force had been in 1961. "Is that a major command?" General Butler asked rhetorically. He strongly believed inactivating SAC provided a better option than "trying to maintain a Strategic Air Command that was a shrunken, truncated version of its former self."¹¹

(U) Driven by the end of the Cold War and changing definitions, the new major command alignment addressed several broad Air Force objectives set by General McPeak. The Air Force chief believed that the 1992 reorganization would streamline the chain of command, reduce organizational layering, eliminate ambiguous and conflicting responsibilities, and by reinforcing the introduction of composite wings, decentralize authority to the wing level. When

the new major commands were introduced to the public, McPeak stated: “We are set to recover what should be a hallmark of any military organization, simplicity in our command relationships. We will organize ourselves along mission lines, not functional lines.”¹²

(U) The mobility mission became the responsibility of AMC, established on June 1, 1992, and headquartered, as MAC had been, at Scott AFB, Illinois. AMC initially comprised three numbered air forces, the Fifteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second. The Fifteenth Air Force, at March AFB, California, controlled all of the new command’s air refueling assets, while Air Force planners originally intended that Twenty-First Air Force, at McGuire AFB, New Jersey, would have responsibility for all east coast airlift aircraft and Twenty-Second Air Force, at Travis AFB, California, would be responsible for west coast airlifters.

(U) However, in little more than a year this initial numbered air force structure changed. On July 1, 1993, Twenty-Second Air Force stood down while Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force moved to Travis and took responsibility for assets there. With active-duty operations at March slated to end by 1995, the Fifteenth’s departure for Travis made sense. Also, during the autumn of 1994 AMC activated two air mobility wings, the 60th at Travis and the 305th at McGuire—multipurpose units that flew the KC-10, C-5 Galaxy, and C-141 Starlifter.¹³

(U) The other major command created on June 1, 1992, ACC, initially was composed of six numbered air forces—the First, Second, Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, and Twentieth—but, as in the case of the new AMC, its composition soon changed. On February 2, 1993, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced that ACC

Image 3



C-5 Galaxy

would transfer Twentieth Air Force and its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force to Air Force Space Command. General McPeak explained this move was made to “more closely align the organization, training and equipping of [Twentieth Air Force] and its ICBM mission with the major command whose core business is space launch and control.”¹⁴ More than 10,000 personnel transferred from ACC.¹⁵ As the gaining command’s official history pointed out, “At one stroke, [Space Command] nearly doubled its personnel.”¹⁶

(U) Second Air Force also had a relatively short life with ACC. It inactivated on July 1, 1993, distributing its units between Ninth and Twelfth Air Force. On that same date, Air Training Command (ATC) became the Air Education and Training Command (AETC), gaining Second Air Force in the process and also acquiring Air University and Nineteenth Air Force. In its “new life” as an AETC component, Second Air Force, took charge of two technical training centers, Chanute and Lowry, and four training wings: the 17th, 37th, 81st, and 82d.¹⁷

(U) Among the four numbered air forces still under ACC after its initial period of organization, First Air Force was the smallest. Headquartered at Tyndall AFB, Florida, it had responsibility for defending the continental United States against air attack and providing the U.S. component to the North American Aerospace Defense Command.¹⁸ Its fighters, Air National Guard F-15s and F-16s, were originally controlled through four Air Defense Sectors (ADSs). On January 1, 1995 this number dropped to three, when the Northwest and Southwest sectors combined to form the Western ADS.¹⁹ During the mid-1990s the responsibility for First Air Force and its three regional operations centers moved from Air Combat Command to the Air National Guard, a process completed by September 30, 1997. This numbered air force came to national prominence on September 11, 2001.²⁰

(U) Eighth Air Force, arguably the numbered air force best known outside the DoD, took pride in its heritage of combat in the European theater during World War II and in its service in SAC during the Cold War. From its headquarters at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, the organization controlled ACC's manned bombers: the B-1B Lancer, B-2A Spirit, F/EF-111 Aardvark/Raven, and B-52H. Eighth Air Force also provided the air component of the new unified command, U.S. Strategic Command.²¹

(U) The third of ACC's numbered air forces, Ninth Air Force, stepped into the spotlight during the Gulf War when it provided the air component of U.S. Central Command. And Operation Desert Storm proved to be only the beginning of a period of sustained operations in Southwest Asia, which would continue well into the next century. Ninth Air Force made its headquarters at Shaw AFB, South Carolina, and was best known for its F-15, F-16, and A/OA-10 aircraft, although it operated other types as well.²²

(U) The fourth of ACC's numbered air forces, Twelfth, supplied the air component of U.S. Southern Command. Headquartered at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, its aircraft primarily operated from installations scattered throughout the western United States. Among ACC's numbered air forces, the Twelfth probably flew the most diversified variety of aircraft. Its inventory included the F-15C/D/E, F-16C/D, KC-135R, B-1B, U-2, F-117, EC- and RC-135, EC-130, A/OA-10, E-3, and assorted helicopters and trainers.²³

(U) Only a month after the new ACC began operations, the Air Force conducted another major command reorganization. This change had its roots in the July 1989 Defense Management Report to the President, a thorough review of the DoD's acquisition system and management practices. As a result of this and other studies, on July 1, 1992, Air Force Systems Command (AFSC), responsible for researching and developing new weapon systems, and Air Force

Logistics Command (AFLC), charged with sustaining the new systems, were inactivated. Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), an enormous organization with 19 centers located across the United States and 125,000 uniformed and civilian personnel around the world, was activated and assumed the functions of the inactivated commands. The new command's mission statement declared: "Through integrated management of research, development, test, acquisition, and support, we advance and use technology to acquire and sustain superior systems in partnership with our customers."²⁴

(U) With the creation of AFMC and other profound changes, the United States Air Force responded to the end of the Cold War and to its experiences during Operation Desert Storm. The Air Force undertook its most fundamental reorganization since its creation as a separate service. The new alignments were to be tested immediately by operations in Southwest Asia that continued for many years.

¹ (U) William T. Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis: The Air Force Approaches the Next Century," in Bernard C. Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword: A History of the United States Air Force*, 2 vols (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1997), vol 2: p 548.

² (U) Diane T. Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign 1989–1991* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004), pp 303–304; Richard G. Davis, *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp 209–210.

³ (U) John T. Correll, "New Flags for the Fighting Forces," *Air Force Magazine* 75:4 (Apr 1992), p 30; Putney, *Airpower Advantage*, p 303; Davis, *On Target*, p 212.

⁴ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 548.

⁵ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 548; Correll, "New Flags," *Air Force Magazine* 75:4, p 30 [note: Unclassified portions of secret Headquarters Air Force documents corroborated the sources cited here. After Operation Allied Force—the Kosovo air campaign of 1999—the Air Force leadership concluded that the composite wing organization worked better in training than in operational deployments]; Discussion (U), Gen. (ret.) John P. Jumper, Air Force Chief of Staff, Sep 01–Sep 05, interview with Perry D. Jamieson, Office of the Director of the Air Force History and Museums Program, November 7, 2008.

⁶ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 548; Correll, "New Flags," *Air Force Magazine* 75:4, p 28 (photo) and p 30 (caption).

⁷ (U) Briefing (U), Headquarters Strategic Air Command [SAC], "Strategic Air Command: Nuclear Deterrence and Conventional Warfighting," n.d.

⁸ (U) Briefing (U), Headquarters SAC, "Strategic Air Command: Nuclear Deterrence and Conventional Warfighting," n.d.; "The New Eagles: Reports from the Major Commands," *Air Force Magazine* 75:5 (May 1992), p 53.

⁹ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 549; "The New Eagles," *Air Force Magazine* 75:5, p 53; Correll, "New Flags," *Air Force Magazine* 75:4, p 30.

¹⁰ This concept was reconsidered in the decade after 11 September 2001 in light of several embarrassing incidents involving the Air Force's nuclear arsenal.

¹¹ (U) Correll, "New Flags," *Air Force Magazine* 75:4, p 30.

¹² (U) History of Air Combat Command [ACC], Jun–Dec 92 (S), vol 1: p 1 (info used is U).

¹³ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 550.

¹⁴ (U) History of ACC, Jun–Dec 92 (S), vol 1: p 32 (info used is U); History of Air Force Space Command [AFSPC], 1992–93 (S), 1994, vol 1: p 21 (info used is U); History of ACC, 1993 (S), vol 1: p 22 (info used is U).

¹⁵ (U) History of AFSPC, 1992–93 (S), 1994, vol 1: p 85 (info used is U).

¹⁶ (U) History of AFSPC, 1992–93 (S), 1994, vol 1: p 22 (info used is U). On this transfer, see also History of ACC, 1993 (S), vol 1: pp 21–25 (info used is U).

¹⁷ (U) History of ACC, 1993 (S), vol 1: p xxiv, p 68 (info used is U); History of Air Education and Training Command, 1 Jul 93–31 Dec 1995 (FOUO), vol 1: p 6, p 13 (info used is not FOUO).

¹⁸ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 549; Unpublished manuscript (U), Charles J. Gross, "Volunteers," (Air National Guard History Office, n.d.), pp 12–13.

¹⁹ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 549; History of North American Aerospace Defense Command, 1995 (S), p 29 (info used is U).

²⁰ (U) "Reports From the Major Commands: Air Combat Command," *Air Force Magazine* 77:5 (May 1994): p 59; "Major Commands: Air Combat Command," *Air Force Magazine* 78:5 (May 1995): p 72; Unpublished manuscript (U), Gross, "Volunteers," pp 12.

²¹ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 549; "Bad to the B-One," *Air Force Magazine* 90:3 (Mar 2007): p 60.

²² (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 549; Perry D. Jamieson, *Lucrative Targets: The U.S. Air Force in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2001), p 17.

²³ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 550.

²⁴ (U) Y'Blood, "Metamorphosis," in Nalty, ed., *Winged Shield, Winged Sword*, vol 2: p 547; History of Air Force Materiel Command, 1 Jul 92–30 Sep 93 (FOUO), vol 1: p 1, p 4 (info used is not FOUO).