

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

RADAR BOMB SCORING 1945 – 1983

**Office of History
1st Combat Evaluation Group
Barksdale AFB, Louisiana
09 November 1983**

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RBS COMES OF AGE

During World War II, allied bomber crews soon discovered that radar was an indispensable aid for strategic bombing. The British employed their bomber forces primarily at night. Thus a means of sighting independent of visibility was required. The American forces also required such a system even though they bombed in daylight. The weather in Europe was so consistently bad during the winter months that strategic bombing could only be accomplished with a radar system. The British were the pioneers in developing such systems while the industrial complex of the U.S. refined and improved their initial efforts.

When victory in Europe seemed assured, military efforts focused in the Pacific. Here it became clear that training procedures for radar bombing were in their infant stages and severely lacking. To correct this, staff work began to develop a training system which would improve crew proficiency in radar bombing through better scoring techniques. Under the jurisdiction of the Army Air Force Tactical Center, an experimental station was established in Jacksonville, Florida to test the training system. These tests proved the value of radar bomb scoring as a means of improving bombing training.

Soon thereafter, the Second Air Force took actions to establish a radar bomb scoring station at Kansas City, Missouri, and later, a scoring detachment at Fort Worth, Texas. HQ Second Air Force originally had jurisdiction over this operation but as it grew in size and scope, it became clear that a formal organization was

needed to control and manage the new training detachment. This need gave birth to the organization of which you are part now.

On 6 June 1945, the 206th Army Air Force Base Unit (RBS) (206th AAFBU), was activated at Colorado Springs, Colorado under the command of Colonel Robert W. Burns. He assumed operational control of the two SCR-584 radar detachments located at Kansas City and Fort Worth, Texas. New detachments were also established at Denver, Chicago, Omaha, Albuquerque and Los Angeles. On 24 July 1945, the 206th was redesignated the 63rd AAFBU (RBS) and three weeks later was moved to Mitchell Field, New York, and placed under the command of the Continental Air Force. On 5 March 1946, the organization moved back to Colorado Springs and on 8 March of the same year was redesignated the 263rd AAFBU.

With the activation of the 8th Air Force the demand for radar bomb scoring training increased greatly. The 263rd was relieved from assignment to 15th Air Force and assigned directly to Headquarters Strategic Air Command. The increase in RBS activity could be seen in the statistics for RBS runs over the years. During 1947 a total of 2,499 runs were scored as compared to 880 runs scored in 1946. During 1948, 12,084 runs were scored. This number increased to 28,049, a tremendous gain over previous years and became a real measure of the effectiveness and popularity of this type training.

On 21 July 1948, the 263rd was redesignated the 3903rd Radar Bomb Scoring Squadron with an effective date of 1 August 1948. On 19 January 1951, this squadron was redesignated the 3903rd Radar Bomb Scoring Group. At this point the Group commanded 12 detachments reporting to three radar bomb scoring squadrons.

THE KOREAN CONFLICT

During the Korean Conflict RBS Detachments provided a service unique in military annals. Three detachments from the 3903rd Radar Bomb Scoring Squadron were used for tactical air support of USAF aircraft in direct action against enemy forces. These detachments provided radar controlled ground direction to aircraft engaged in bombing targets at critical locations. Mobile vans and specially trained crews directed B-26, C-47, B-29, F-80, and F-84 aircraft on all-weather missions against enemy airfields, troop concentrations, key buildings, and other difficult targets.

These units also worked closely with ground forces in Korea from their arrival the last week in August 1950 to their departure in early October 1951. During the next three years the Group underwent various organizational shuffles, but none to match the activities on 10 August 1954.

A NEW NAME, SAME MISSION

On 10 August 1945, the 3903rd Radar Bomb Scoring Group, its three squadrons, and all detachments were discontinued. Simultaneously, the 1st Radar Bomb Scoring Group was activated. This new organization absorbed all personnel and equipment of the 3903rd. By March 1956 the Group consisted of 28 detachments. The numbers of missions scored increased as the size of the organization grew. For example, in 1956 the Group recorded 140,919 attacks against sites. Of these some 127,070 were successfully scored.

The next several years brought few organizational or other changes to the Group. The personnel assigned continued to provide the Command sophisticated and effective radar bomb scoring training.

On 1 August 1961, a major organizational change came to fruition when the Department of the Air Force activated the 1st Combat Evaluation Group at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana. With this action the 1st Radar Bomb Scoring Group and the 3908th Strategic Evaluation Group were merged into one organization. This new organization then had the dual mission of providing radar bomb scoring services as well as standardization and evaluation services. This is the organization of which you are a part today.

VIETNAM

With the advent of B-52 bombing in Southeast Asia in 1965, it soon became apparent that a requisite number of suitable offset aiming points were not available. Secretary of Defense McNamara stated:

We are faced with very, very heavy jungle in certain portions of South Vietnam, jungle so heavily that is impossible to find a good aiming point in it. We know some of these jungles are used by the Vietcong for base camps and for storage areas.... You can imagine that without an ability to find an aiming point, There is only one way of bombing it and that is with a random pattern...With the force we had (B-52s) trained as it was in pattern bombing...the military commanders felt-and I believe this was a proper use of the weapons-that these strikes would destroy certain of the Viet Cong base areas, and, as a matter of fact, they did...There is no other way of doing it. We propose to continue.

In October 1965 the Air Force began further modification of its B-52 force to increase the internal loading from 27 to 84 of the 500 or 750-pound bombs. In March 1966 the modified bombs went into operation. Concurrent with the deployment of the modified B-52, the Air Force installed Combat Skyspot; a ground directed bombing system, in South Vietnam. The system employed existing (1CEVG) mobile ground radar control units and permitted Military Assistance Commander Vietnam (MACV) considerably more latitude because

the selection of targets would no longer depend on nearby, prominent geographical features; they had only to be within range of Combat Skyspot equipment.

Using radar, 1CEVG personnel would direct the bombers along a designated route to a bomb drop point, providing enroute corrected headings and speed as needed. Then, at the proper moment, the pilot received a signal to release his bombs. Combat Skyspot not only provided flexibility in targeting, but its accuracy soon surpassed that of the previously used radar synchronous bombing. In time, practically all combat areas of Southeast Asia were within range of one or more of the growing number of Combat Skyspot facilities. Six 1CEVG personnel lost their lives during the construction phase when they were ambushed and killed near Dong Ha Air Base while conducting a site location survey. Within 1CEVG headquarters today a memorial room has been established to honor the memory of those lost in combat.

The original name for Combat Skyspot was simply Skyspot in 1965. In October of that year the name was changed to Combat Proof. In January 1967 the name was again changed to its final designation, Combat Skyspot.

On 15 August 1973, with the cessation of bombing in Southeast Asia, the last Combat Skyspot sortie was flown. In the seven years and six months of Combat Skyspot operations, 1CEVG personnel manned ground radar sites on a 24-hour per day basis in such locations as Bien Hoa, Binh Thuy, Pleiku, Thuy, Pleiku, Dalat, Hue, Phu Bai, Son Tray, Da Nang, Quang Tri, and Dong Ha South Vietnam. In Thailand, the locations included, Nakhon Phanom, Udorn, and Ubon.

The Combat Skyspot mission was not limited to all-weather weapons delivery however. These sites also directed Commando Vault missions, the deployment of helicopter landing sites zones by releasing 10,000 and 15,000-pound bombs from C-130 aircraft in support of ground forces. Further, Combat Skyspot sites aided in search and rescue missions and provided navigation fixes for a variety of aircraft.

During the 90-month period of service in Southeast Asia, Combat Skyspot crews directed 75 percent of the B-52 strikes in that conflict. Under Combat Skyspot over 300,000 USAF, Navy and Marine sorties were controlled. Additionally, Combat Skyspot members were responsible for more than 150,000 tactical air strikes.

In August 1966, the Third Air Division gave the 1st Combat Evaluation Group the Top Three Award for their outstanding contribution to the war effort through the Combat Skyspot program.

TODAY

The following years saw few dramatic changes within the Group. The focus of the Group turned to the development and acquisition of the new and improved radar bomb scoring equipment. In 1977, for example, the Multiple Threat Emitter System (MUTES) prototype underwent initial operational evaluation. Efforts to improve TLQ-11 jamming capabilities were underway the following year. In October 1978 the MUTES was officially welcomed into the SAC training program.

Into 1979 Group members continued to work on new equipment with the completion of a prototype study and the advent of conceptual tests for a new radar receiver, the Threat Reaction Analysis Indicator System (TRAINS). This new radar receiver would analyze how the crews and their equipment reacted to ground-based threats such as air-to-air missile systems. The development of SEEK SCORE, an improved radar scoring system, was also underway.

Into the 1980's the personnel of the 1st Combat Evaluation Group continued to provide the best radar bomb scoring services in existence. This, combined with the development and acquisition of new and sophisticated equipment, plays a major role in the readiness of the Strategic Air Command and the security of the United States. *(Terry L. Horstead)*