

Hi again,

In regards to the SAC radar bomb scoring squadron mounted on railroad cars. That's absolutely correct. I was in RBS for 17 years, and spent a couple of tours on the train, the RBS Express. Let me take a minute to set this up for you. When General Lemay got a hold of SAC, he wanted his people to be professionals and ready and able to perform the mission at any time. Part of that was being able to accurately hit the target. In order to do that he trained his aircrews 24/7. And of course he evaluated them continuously to see that they were ready. To get there, he handed out incentives. Such as spot promotions to the better crews increased hours in the air for the weaker crews.

He created the 1st Combat Evaluation Group to assess how well the aircrews were doing. Under this Group he had 3 Squadrons, the 10th, 11th and 12th RBS Squadrons. They were located in 3 separate sections of the country. Under each Squadron he had about 7 or 8 RBS detachments or radar sites. Squadron did not have any radars, they were administrative/ support in nature only.

Each detachment had about 50 or 60 personal assigned primarily 303x3 auto-track radar troops. 276's were not assigned, as the equipment was small, working areas were compact and to ensure the equipment remained accurate, constant tweaking of the components required the maintenance guy to operate it also.

I was initially assigned to the 11th RBS Squadron, (which was the western U.S.). While the 10th was in the middle and the 12th on the east coast. My initial assignment was to Astoria, Oregon, then to Boise Idaho, then to St George, Utah, all under the 11th RBS Squadron. We also had sites in Hawthorne, Nevada, and in Glasgow, Montana, Winslow, Arizona, and LaJunta, Colorado.

Operations and all requirements were directed 24/7 from our Group Hq. Like I said, Squadron was only administrative. (Our Squadron HQ was at March AFB, CA.)The aircrews trained constantly. When the aircrew was scheduled to simulate bombing a target in our area, (we had about 15 or 20 targets, which could be a barn, a building, a cross roads, a fence post, or just coordinates on a map), they would contact us and we would position the target they were going after on our plotting board, track them in and measure how well they did. We would give them their results, and of course send them back to their Wing and SAC also for evaluation.

Well, the aircrews flew against these targets so often, that they became good at hitting them, Damn good. So good, they could do it in their sleep. So, to ensure they were able to actually keep remembering how to set up and find the target, SAC set up even more targets all over the country. As they were well beyond the reach of our detachments, each Squadron was given a choo choo train. The trains were 21 cars long, 17 support and 4 radar cars. The radar cars were basically flat cars with the radar vans and equipment mounted on them. The other 17 consisted of a generator car, two box cars (one for radar equipment maintenance, and one for support maintenance). A dining car, two day-room cars, supply cars, admin car, and 4 Pullman sleepers. The sleepers were nice. Each was self contained. All had grain paneling, private rooms, about 4 x7 feet, included a fold up bunk to be used as a table, a built in wall closet and a sliding locking door for entrance. Each also had a huge picture window with light darkening curtains so night workers could sleep. Also the center area, had several potties, showers and Laundromat, dryer/washers in a stack and of course all the cars were interconnected so we could walk through

the whole train. The Commander had the very last room on the tail of the train. Actually it was two rooms with the wall knocked out between them.

The trains would go to some area in the U.S. which was selected for that period by a regular contracted locomotive which then just parked us there and left, usually pulled onto a siding.

Targets were already programmed. We would set (plumb bob) in our radar on a lat/long coordinate on the railroad tracks. That is where the train was parked. It would sit there normally about 6 months. Then go elsewhere. Quite often several hundred miles away. The manning was supplied from several detachments in that squadron, with separate detachments each supplying a scoring crew and some support people. Total assigned at one time to the train was about 30 personnel. C/C could be a 1/Lt up to a Lt Col. TDY tours of duty were initially for 6 weeks, but later changed to 3 months. So, you can see, that over a few years, most of the personnel would get to know most all the people in the whole squadron, and maybe in the entire group, as had spent a TDY with them at one time or another.

Of course to display a proper image of our Air Force, we always had to dress appropriately, conduct ourselves as professionals, and also had to maintain our train in top condition. This included constantly painting all 21 cars in Air Force and SAC colors, i.e. Blue cars, with the SAC shield on each car. The radar vans were white with the shield, the under carriages were all black. And when we were done there we would wax them to make it look real pretty.

Yep, life on the train kept you busy. But we were proud of it. The trains were in existence from about 1960 to the early 70's. Every year or two one would pull into Hill AFB in Provo, UT for reconditioning. The Vietnam War started pulling all our available manpower away from the trains and other commitments, the same as today's air force is stretched so thin also. Now you know.

Don Ross