The TRIAD

A Periodic Review of the Nuclear Enterprise

August 2025

Table of Contents

STRATCOM Synergy

Components in Action

Frontline Focus

Voices of Deterrence

STRATCOM Synergy

Senior leader commentary

Adm. Daryl Caudle

Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command; U.S. Naval Forces Northern Command; U.S. Naval Forces Strategic Command; and U.S. Strategic Command Joint Force Maritime Component Commander

Undetectable. Survivable. Ready to strike at a moment's notice. Our fleet of ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) forge a persistent reality for our adversaries: assured second strike. No matter what lethal actions they take or how hard they attack first, they can never escape the crosshairs of a robust set of devastating response options. The highly trained men and women, the warriors, serving aboard our ballistic missile submarines work around the clock to bring this reality to life. A single moment does not pass without the unmatched vigilance of our submarines operating around the world, poised to unleash overwhelming firepower within minutes of receiving the Presidential order.

The worldwide presence and self-sufficiency of our SSBNs guarantee a crucial assumption that underpins our national security and every one of our operational war plans. You may not find it explicitly written, but it is nonetheless true: our nation's continuity of government, our continuity of decision-making, and our continuity of operations must be maintained for our contingency plans to be executed. Our nation under strategic attack would invalidate this assumption. That is a non-starter.

In fact, those who consider such an attack are dissuaded and ultimately deterred by the knowledge that our SSBNs are out there - unseen and unheard by any who attempt to find them. They are the only survivable leg of the nuclear triad. Our adversaries know with certainty that any move against our nation that disrupts our way of life or our internal security will be met with an array of overwhelming response options, across the escalatory spectrum of our capabilities. This includes nuclear weapons. And, most feared by our adversaries are weapons launched from ghosts in the water – because there's simply nothing they can do to stop it.

Fielding this deterrence day in and day out demands the most capable platforms, maintained at the highest state of readiness, manned by the most proficient operators who vigilantly and persistently stand the watch around the globe. The unmatched self-reliance of our SSBNs requires meticulous logistical planning to operate alone in remote areas of the world's oceans, including provisioning, maintenance, and secure communication links. The expert training of the men and women onboard, combined with advanced stealth technologies and rigorous operational security measures, guarantee that the elusiveness and survivability of our SSBNs are always at the ready.

As we look to the future of maintaining our unquestionable advantage in the undersea domain, the COLUMBIA-class submarine will bring our dominance to new levels. Technological improvements, including electric propulsion drive, advanced sonar and communications systems, and state-of-the-art quieting and stealth technology will ensure our SSBN fleet can operate undetected around the world with impunity for decades. The COLUMBIA-class will be deployed in a phased manner, each new hull replacing an OHIO-class submarine that reaches the end of its service life, allowing for a seamless transition with no gap in our continuous at-sea deterrence posture, cementing our undersea strategic dominance for generations to come.

The stealth, endurance, and mobility of our SSBN fleet are a cornerstone of our nuclear deterrence strategy. No adversary knows exactly where they are. No adversary can stop their response. It's the uncertainty and credibility that keeps the peace, assured by the strength of our extraordinary SSBN force and warriors onboard.

Strengthening Strategic Ties

Written by U.S. Strategic Command Public Affairs

To reinforce the enduring alliance and enhance security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Gen. Anthony Cotton, commander, U.S. Strategic Command, Sgt. Maj. Howard Kreamer, command senior enlisted leader, and a team of USSTRATCOM senior leaders, traveled to Australia in June for key leadership engagements with Australian Defence officials and U.S. Embassy leaders in Canberra.

A central objective of the trip was to cultivate a shared understanding of several key areas. The bilateral discussions focused on the unique security environment each nation faces, Australia's strategic planning process, and USSTRATCOM's strategic deterrence efforts. Additionally, the leaders discussed electromagnetic spectrum operations, recognizing the increasing importance of this domain and the need for enhanced operations and capabilities. Engagements with our long-time Australian Allies fosters integration across all domains, improving interoperability and strengthening regional stability and security across the free and open Indo-Pacific.

As part of honoring the enduring bonds between the nations, Gen. Cotton participated in the Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Alongside Royal Australian Air Force Air Vice-Marshal John Haly, Gen. Cotton laid a wreath on behalf of USSTRATCOM. The ceremony, held at the end of each day, honors the ultimate sacrifice made by Australians during military campaigns and operational service, in addition to those who have served in times of conflict.

U.S. Strategic Command leaders pose for a photo with senior Australian Defence Force officials after holding bilateral discussions June 19, 2025, in Russell, Australia. (Australian Defence Force photo by Nicole Mankowski)

U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton, left, reviews an honour guard conducted by Australia's Federation Guard during a welcome ceremony June 18, 2025, in Russell, Australia. (Australian Defence Force photo by Nicole Mankowski)

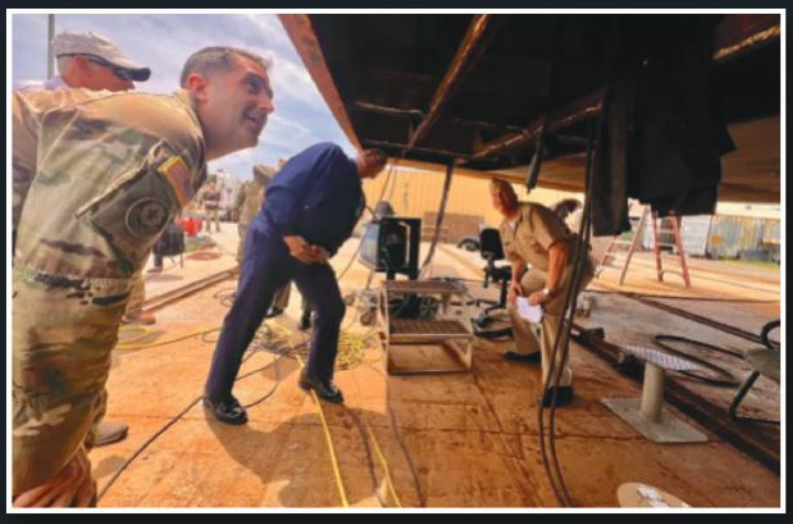
U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton, second from right, and U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Howard Kreamer, second from left, pose for a photo alongside Royal Australian Air Force Air Vice-Marshal John Haly, right, head of military strategic plans, RAAF, and RAAF Warrant Office Ken Robertson, senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of the Defence Force, June 18, 2025, in Campbell, Australia. (Australian Defence Force photo by Nicole Mankowski)

Visit to Kwajalein Atoll

On their way to Australia, Gen. Cotton and Sgt. Maj. Kreamer passed through Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Their time on the ground included a tour of government facilities, where they received progress updates on vital infrastructure repairs and improvements to support nuclear enterprise modernization efforts. Kwajalein Atoll plays a key role in national defense, hosting the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command's Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. This site enables crucial research capabilities for U.S. missile defense and space programs

U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton, middle, and U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Howard Kreamer, right, receive a briefing at U.S. Army Garrison-Kwajalein Atoll about the site's mission from the garrison commander, U.S. Army Col. Matthew Cannon, left, June 16, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Sherman Hogue)

U.S. Army Col. Matthew Cannon greets U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton on the flightline, June 16, 2025, during a visit to USAG-KA in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. (U.S. Army photo by Sherman Hogue)



U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton, middle, receives a tour of the U.S. Army Garrison-Kwajalein Atoll dry dock in the Republic of the Marshall Islands from U.S. Army Col. Matthew Cannon, left, June 16, 2025. The dry dock is a major maintenance function to a fleet of U.S. Army watercraft and a significant support element to the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site in Kwajalein Atoll. (U.S. Army photo by Sherman Hogue)

COMPONENTS in Action

Operational test launch is a 'Glory Trip' for wing

Story by Tech. Sgt. Elora McCutcheon, 341st Missile Wing, Vandenberg Space Force Base

First Lt. Travis Evans, 10th Missile Squadron combat crew commander, left, and 1st Lt. Kalvin Sutherland, 10 MS deputy combat crew commander, complete a series of simulated checklist procedures in a launch control center trainer May 21, 2025, at Vandenberg Space Force Base, California. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Elora J. McCutcheon)

VANDENBERG SPACE FORCE BASE, Calif. -- In the dark hours of May 21, a flash of light split the night sky along California's coast, marking the successful launch of an unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile during operational test Glory Trip 253: an operational test designed to verify the accuracy and reliability of the United States' land-based nuclear deterrent.

Vandenberg's 377th Test and Evaluation Group oversaw the test launch. It is the nation's only dedicated ICBM test organization professionally executing tests that accurately measure the current and future capability of the ICBM force.

Behind the ignition that propelled the missile more than 4,200 miles from Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif., to a target in the Marshall Islands, were Airmen from Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana, who played a critical role in ensuring the launch was a success.

U.S. Air Force 1st Lts. Travis Evans and Kalvin Sutherland, missileers from the 341st Operations Group, were responsible for initiating the launch sequence. While the test was conducted at Vandenberg, the task was familiar; one they routinely rehearse and execute on alert back home in Montana. This time, however, their actions would send a live missile into the sky, testing the readiness, reliability and precision of the system.

"I think every Glory Trip we have serves the same purpose," said Evans, 10th Missile Squadron combat crew commander. "For decades now we've been testing our weapon system to demonstrate its security and reliability, and our credibility as a nation...if it came to it, whenever the president authorizes us to carry out our job, we are able to do so.

"Evans described that he and Sutherland were well-prepared for launch night thanks to their experience standing alert duties and conducting constant training, but that didn't negate their feelings of anticipation for the event.

"As we got closer to the launch night, it kind of set in that there aren't many people who have actually been given the opportunity to give that final key turn on a test missile," he explained. "Knowing that we're contributing directly to the mission, and the test mission, is very rewarding."

Glory Trip 253 was more than just a routine test—it was the latest demonstration of strategic readiness. The unarmed missile, randomly selected from Malmstrom's operational inventory, was equipped with a single Mark-21 High Fidelity Re-Entry Vehicle to provide valuable telemetry data to the 576th Flight Test Squadron and reaffirm the effectiveness of the Minuteman III weapon system.

As the clock counted down to the launch window, the pair of missileers completed all checklist procedures from a subterranean control center hidden away from the cool, briny air of the cloudless Southern California night.

But long before any countdown began, another team of Malmstrom Airmen was already hard at work behind the scenes.

A 17-person task force from the 341st Maintenance Group was responsible for preparing the missile ahead of the launch. Their work included removing the missile from alert status, inspecting and disassembling critical components, and helping facilitate transport to Vandenberg in coordination with depot personnel from Hill AFB, Utah.

Staff Sgt. James Lynch, 341st Missile Maintenance Squadron team chief, said the process was both routine and extraordinary.

"We've been training for this day in and day out through the operational work we routinely do," Lynch said. "[We've] been in the field for the last two years sweating, bleeding, to get the job done. None of us have been part of a test launch before, so getting to actually see [the missile] come out of a hole and launch like fireworks is like the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl."

Once on the ground at Vandenberg, Malmstrom's maintainers joined forces with the 576th FLTS to prepare the missile for final emplacement. Their days were long, and their margin for error was nonexistent.

"We have the best people in the business doing the best job in the world, and we don't have room for mistakes," Lynch said. "[Missile maintainers] are the epitome of 'not all heroes wear capes,' because they're getting it done no matter the conditions. That's why there's more pride in this job than there is anywhere else in the Air Force."

The team stayed on site for several weeks, performing systems tests and ensuring the missile was in perfect working condition. Meanwhile, Malmstrom's missileers reviewed launch procedures and engaged in readiness drills alongside their California-based counterparts.

"Operational test launches like this reinforce the fact that our legacy systems are still lethal, capable, and ready."

- Col. Dan Voorhies, 341st Missile Wing commander

Lynch and his team were among the crowd gathered at Missile Alert Facility O1-E, beneath several overhead lights that bled yellow-white pools into the observation area. Dozens of silhouettes faced toward Launch Facility 10, the site a few miles northwest and separated by rolling valleys filled with coastal sage scrub, where the missile would be fired.

At approximately 11:58 p.m. Pacific Time, all the lights at O1-E suddenly snapped off, indicating to the buzzing crowd that the launch would soon commence. The 576th FLTS monitored every aspect of the mission at the integrated launch center, a control room with more than a dozen military and civilian specialists communicating on headsets while live video feeds of LF-10 projected from large monitors.

As the final countdown began, launch teams confirmed system readiness across the board. Inside the launch control center, Evans and Sutherland simultaneously turned their keys to complete the sequence that would send the Minuteman III roaring into the sky.

"Stand by for terminal count," a voice boomed over the public address system at O-1E.

At precisely 12:01 a.m., the dark horizon was consumed by a blooming dome of orange. The missile emerged as a brilliant burst of fire and smoke, rising into the onyx sky and arcing in a perfect curve toward the test range. Approximately ten seconds later, the viewers at O-1E were struck by the ground-rumbling roar of the missile's rocket motor.

For the Airmen who made it happen, watching the launch wasn't just about seeing a missile fly—it was a moment of validation.

"Operational test launches like this reinforce the fact that our legacy systems are still lethal, capable and ready," said Col. Dan Voorhies, 341st Missile Wing commander. "They also give our Airmen, from missileers to maintainers, an opportunity to see just how their training and expertise contribute to strategic deterrence on a global scale."

The Glory Trip series of operational test launches is designed to validate the Minuteman III system's capabilities and ensure continued confidence in the Air Force's land-based strategic deterrent. Each launch provides valuable data to the Air Force Global Strike Command and the Department of Defense, supporting modernization efforts and force readiness.

Malmstrom's Glory Trip 253 serves as a visible reminder of the Air Force's nuclear mission, and the Airmen who execute it with precision and pride every day.

Rear Adm. Christopher Nash assumes command of Submarine Group Nine

Story by Lt. Zachary Anderson, Submarine Group Nine, Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor

SILVERDALE, Wash. - Rear Adm. Christopher Nash relieved Rear Adm. Thomas Wall as commander of Submarine Group 9 during a change of command ceremony held April 29, 2025, at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor in Silverdale, Washington.

Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander, Naval Submarine Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, presided over the ceremony held in Deterrent Park—a full-length replica of the Lafayette-class ballistic-missile submarine USS Woodrow Wilson (SSBN 624) serving as backdrop.

“Since 1981, Submarine Group 9 has stood the watch carrying out a top priority mission for the Department of Defense: strategic deterrence. A credible and ready strategic deterrent force is the foundation of our nation's defense, and it is increasingly important in today's security environment," Cavanaugh said. "We owe a debt of gratitude to Tom for his outstanding leadership of Submarine Group 9, and for the professionalism and ingenuity of each Sailor, civilian and contractor that enabled our Submarine Force in the Pacific Northwest to achieve its mission every day."

Under Wall’s leadership, SUBGRU-9 helped achieve several of U.S. Strategic Command’s key lines of effort. With a renewed focus on operations in the Western Pacific, submarines assigned to SUBGRU-9 projected power abroad at a time of increased regional contestation, helping to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Wall enhanced overall force readiness with a focus on improving expeditionary logistics, leveraging lessons learned during Global Thunder 25. Designed to increase nuclear readiness, the large-scale exercise involved joint and combined operations to ensure a safe, secure and effective strategic deterrence force.

Wall’s coordination with U.S. Air Force and Army manned and unmanned close-air-support aircraft demonstrated the feasibility of joint service armed aerial escorts for submarine surfaced operations, improving upon the concept of integrated deterrence.

With an eye to the future, Wall worked with local commands such as Trident Refit Facility – Bangor, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and Naval Sea Systems Command, to sustain and modernize the Bangor Submarine Force, balancing current maintenance needs of the existing Ohio-class while preparing for the arrival of the new Columbia-class of submarines.

“This tour with SUBGRU-9 has been the most rewarding of my career,” Wall said. “From the dynamic environment today across our area of interest, to the excellent relationships and outstanding level of performance by members of the teams here today. Our submarine force is the most lethal in the world because the PAC Northwest team is rightly focused on supporting the warfighter.”

Nash comes to SUBRGU-9 from Maritime Headquarters and Theater Sustainment, U.S. Pacific Fleet, where he served as director. Over his three-decade-spanning career Nash served at sea as the navigation/operations officer of USS Montpelier (SSN 765), executive officer of USS Key West (SSN 722), and commanding officer USS Wyoming (SSBN 742) (Gold).

Ashore, Nash served as commodore of Submarine Squadron 16 unmanned underwater vehicles and Tomahawk Land Attack Missile requirements officer for the Chief of Naval Operations, Submarine Warfare Directorate, deputy chief of staff of Submarine Group 10 and executive assistant to the vice chairman of the joint chiefs of staff.

“Our pride runs deep. It stems from a history of submarine engineering and warfighting innovation that began over 125 years ago,” said Nash. “We will strive together to ensure Submarine Group 9 crews have the best training, ready equipment, the most prepared and thoughtful leaders, and the most caring support for their families to continuously sustain deployment of conventional and strategic forces. [We will] be ready to protect our homeland from the depths.”

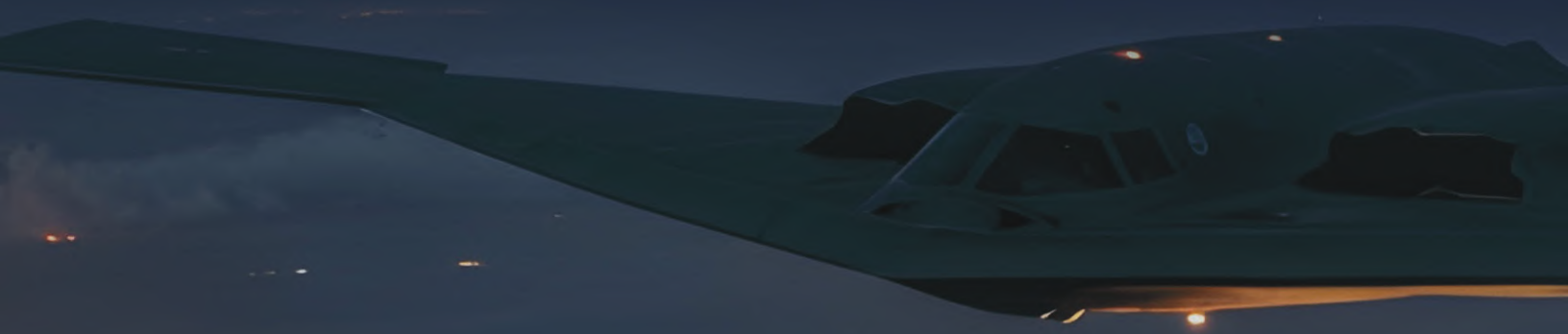
SUBGRU-9 exercises administrative control authority for assigned submarine commands and units in the Pacific Northwest providing oversight for shipboard training, personnel, supply and material readiness of SSBNs and their crews. SUBGRU-9 is also responsible for nuclear submarines undergoing conversion or overhaul at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington.

SUBGRU-9’s subordinate commands include Submarine Readiness Squadron 31, Submarine Squadrons 17 and 19 and eight SSBNs and two SSGNs, and four SSNs homeported in the Pacific Northwest.


COMSUBGRU NINE
DEFENDING FREEDOM SINCE 1981

OPERATION MID

Narrative summary of the post-mission press briefing from Secretary of Defens



Mission and Execution

On Saturday, June 21, 2025, EDT (Sunday, June 22, 2025, in Iran), U.S. Central Command executed Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER, a targeted strike against Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan, with the objective of significantly degrading Iran's nuclear program. The complex mission involved a coordinated effort of air and sea assets, supported by a wide network of U.S. military commands. The operation commenced with the nighttime launch of seven B-2 Spirit bombers, each with a two-member crew, from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. The bombers relied on multiple in-flight refuelings during the 18-hour flight, and once over land, they integrated with escort and support aircraft in a complex, coordinated maneuver with limited communication.

Deception and Precision Strikes

To preserve the element of surprise, planners implemented a tightly guarded deception strategy. Early in the operation, decoy aircraft headed west across the Pacific to divert attention from the main strike force, which advanced quietly to the target area. Before the strike package entered Iran, a U.S. submarine launched more than two dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles aimed at infrastructure in Isfahan, timed to strike last for maximum surprise. As the strike package crossed into Iranian airspace, other deception tactics and decoys provided protection. Meanwhile, fourth and fifth-generation aircraft moved ahead to counter potential threats from enemy fighters and missile threats. At the target, the lead B-2 dropped two massive ordnance penetrators on Fordow, followed by the remaining bombers striking assigned targets with 14 MOPs deployed in total.

"Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine Hold a Press Conference," June 22, 2025.

*Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Dan Caine Hold News Conference," June 26, 2025.

Timeline graphic adapted from Joint Staff Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER graphic on June 22, 2025.

The graphic is an illustration of the strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Layout and design by Paul Wedig

NIGHT HAMMER

se Pete Hegseth and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine

Key Assets and Personnel

Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER marked the largest B-2 operational strike in U.S. history and one of the longest missions ever flown by the aircraft. More than 125 U.S. military platforms supported the mission, including the B-2s, fighters, refuelers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft, and a submarine. The mission also marked the first combat use of the 30,000-pound GBU-57 MOP. In total, U.S. forces employed approximately 75 precision-guided weapons, including 14 MOPs. Aircrews from both the active-duty Air Force and the Missouri Air National Guard executed the mission, with ranks ranging from captain to colonel.

Impact and Outcome

All MOPs aimed at Fordow struck their targets, generating powerful blasts and overpressure effects specifically designed to disable hardened underground facilities. Throughout the operation, the strike package encountered no direct fire, suggesting Iranian defenses were either unaware or unable to respond. Preliminary analysis concluded that Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER significantly degraded Iran's nuclear capabilities, demonstrating the U.S. military's ability to carry out long-range, coordinated precision strikes against heavily fortified targets.

TIMELINE

Maritime Launch	Bombers and Support Package enter Iran	Time on Target	Bombers exit Iran	Bombers return to Whiteman AFB
21 June 1700 EDT	21 June -1800 EDT	21 June -1840 EDT	21 June -1930 EDT	22 June Sunday

Space and Missile Defense distributed aperture research team wins Army award

Story by Jason Cutshaw, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command

The deputy assistant secretary of the Army for research and technology names the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command Technical Center's distributed aperture research team a 2024 recipient of the Science and Technology Outstanding Technical Achievement Award. The team includes, from left: Andrew Vernetti, Korensia Siford, Dr. Russell Vela, Dr. Theresa Scarnati and Christopher Paulson. The award recognizes an individual or team whose outstanding contributions and achievements advanced the research or development accomplishments of the laboratory, group or project. (U.S. Army photo by Carrie David Campbell)

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – The U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command Technical Center's distributed aperture research team was named a 2024 recipient of the deputy assistant secretary of the Army for research and technology's Science and Technology Outstanding Technical Achievement Award.

The award recognizes an individual or team whose outstanding contributions and achievements advanced the research or development accomplishments of the laboratory, group or project. The team members honored were Christopher Paulson, Dr. Theresa Scarnati, Korensia Siford, Russell Vela and Andrew Vernetti.

Vela, Multi-Domain Technologies Division chief, said he and the team consider it a privilege to represent the technical accomplishments of the Technical Center.

"The electromagnetic support of the Soldier across present and future warfighting domains is a key focus for the team and this award helps to highlight the Army's recognition of this importance," Vela said. "This in-house interdisciplinary team works hard each day to develop novel applications and experimental validations of their research to meet the present and next generation warfighter requirements."

During the past year, the team led technology development efforts entailing cutting-edge parabolic dish antennas, high-power amplifiers, power-combining technology, multiband radio frequency and flexible and adaptable signal generation, said Vela.

“These technologies provide the warfighter with options to operate successfully in the complex and ever-evolving electro-magnetic domain,” Vela said. “Our technologies add force multiplying capabilities with a wide range of applications during contingency operations. An example of this could be overcoming degraded communication during inclement weather or other atmospheric conditions.”

This technology has been designed and adapted into both fixed-site and transportable prototypes. The delivered transportable prototype has enabled proof-of-concept verification and risk reduction for radio frequency energy coherence, techniques, tactics and procedures for time, phase and polarity management during multiple successful test events across the country. The system has verified its deployability by ground in the U.S. and by water overseas.

The fixed site, currently in development, entails a 20-acre complex with multiple 12-meter carbon fiber parabolic antennas and a state-of-the-art research facility on Redstone Arsenal. Along with these robust science and technology prototyping initiatives, the team has conducted multiple demonstrations utilizing existing apertures to demonstrate the underlying technology and hone signal generation and processing capabilities.

“I’d like people to know that there are brilliant teams working tirelessly in government laboratories who play a vital role in the Army's ‘Transformation in Contact’ initiative,” Vela said. “The Distributed Aperture Research Team is one example of those who spend the late nights, work the long hours, and meet head-on the global technical challenges to provide the warfighter overmatch capabilities in defense of the nation.”

The team is currently focused on the first mission to provide a means for tactical and strategic communications into contested and congested radio frequency environments while preparing for additional missions utilizing the developed distributed apertures and bi-static technologies, also called space domain awareness.

“This in-house interdisciplinary team works hard each day to develop novel applications and experimental validations of their research to meet the present and next generation warfighter requirements,” Vela said.

> “These technologies provide the warfighter with options to operate successfully in the complex and ever-evolving electro-magnetic domain.”
>
> -Russel Vela, Multi-Domain Technologies Division chief

Scarnati, a mathematician, serves as the modeling and simulation lead on the Spatially Enhanced Communications, Tracking, Reconnaissance and Engagements, or SPECTRE. She said she often engages with customers for the team to ensure the technology continues to develop to meet warfighter needs.

“I am extremely proud of the work our team has accomplished. It is an honor to be part of a team that has made such great technological advancements within this community,” Scarnati said. “For me, receiving this award reflects the hard work and tremendous contributions of each member of our technical, contracting, logistics and support teams. Together we’ve been able to develop, build and demonstrate this novel capability in a relevant environment.”

Scarnati said the Technical Center is an Army laboratory that is uniquely positioned within the command to receive reoccurring feedback from Soldiers while being informed by requirements written in-house.

“This cycle of requirements review, technology development and Soldier evaluation ensures that we are consistently fielding capabilities that benefit the warfighter, which is an extremely rewarding endeavor as a researcher in this field,” Scarnati said.

Vela said this award also recognizes other cross-service agencies and partners who have helped the team over the years to be capable of providing this distributed aperture research portfolio to the community for multiple mission space.

“My thanks and appreciation go out to them as well,” Vela said.

USASMDC commanding general, Lt. Gen. Sean A. Gainey, said the team is rightly being recognized for their outstanding achievements to improve the Army’s technical capabilities and deliver innovative technologies to the warfighter.

“During the last year, this team has led tremendous technology development efforts, proven through demonstrations on Redstone Arsenal and at other continental U.S. and overseas locations,” Gainey said. “Each day, they work to provide essential technology for global strategic communications, which contribute to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities for multidomain operations and SMDC’s space and high-altitude requirements.”

USS Henry M. Jackson (SSBN 730) returns from patrol

U.S. Coast Guard and Military Sealift Command vessels escort the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Henry M. Jackson (SSBN 730) as the boat returns to Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor following a routine strategic deterrent patrol, May 15, 2025. Commander, Submarine Group (SUBGRU) 9 exercises administrative control authority for assigned submarine commands and units in the Pacific Northwest providing oversight for shipboard training, personnel, supply and material readiness of SSBNs and their crews. SUBGRU-9 is also responsible for nuclear submarines undergoing conversion or overhaul at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton. SUBGRU-9's subordinate commands include Submarine Readiness Squadron 31, Submarine Squadrons 17 and 19, eight SSBNs, two SSGNs, and four SSNs homeported in the Pacific Northwest.

U.S. Coast Guard and Military Sealift Command vessels escort the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Henry M. Jackson (SSBN 730) as the boat returns to Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor following a routine strategic deterrent patrol, May 15, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gwendelyn L. Ohrazda)

The Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Henry M. Jackson (SSBN 730) arrives at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor following a routine strategic deterrent patrol, May 15, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Lt. Zachary Anderson)

Behind the flight: aircrew flight equipment personnel power Bomber Task Force readiness

Story by Airman 1st Class Mattison Cole, Pacific Air Forces

MISAWA AIR BASE, Japan -- From bright and early in the morning to late in the night, the B-1B Lancer and its aircrew soar in the sky, working with allies to deter aggression. Aircrew operate anytime, anywhere to defend U.S. interests and support U.S. Allies. Who verifies that aircrew's equipment is operable and up to par for these missions?

The unsung heroes of the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, aircrew flight equipment Airmen prepare all the essential equipment needed by the aircrew, such as PCU 15P harnesses and HGU 55P helmets. While following all safety precautions during equipment inspections, they confirm it is mission-ready while being timely and precise.

"AFE ensures the safety of aircrew members during flight operations," said U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Eric DeLaMater, 9th EBSAFE supervisor. "This includes providing life support systems such as oxygen masks, survival vests, and parachutes, which are essential in case of ejection or emergencies. Properly maintained and equipped flight equipment ensures that aircrew members can perform their duties effectively and respond to emergencies without delay. AFE is essential for the protection, readiness and effectiveness of aircrew members in the U.S. Air Force."

Missions like Bomber Task Force 25-2 play a vital role in showcasing military strength, building strong alliances and demonstrating unwavering resolve. The primary goal of BTFs is to deter aggression and uphold peace and stability both in the region and globally. Without the aircrew, the B-1B Lancer wouldn't take flight, the mission wouldn't be carried out, and without AFE personnel, the mission couldn't even begin.

"Flyers rely on critical flight gear for mission success, and AFE ensures our gear is properly maintained, repaired and preflighted before every flight," said Maj. Daniel Sessions, 9th EBS pilot. "Their attention to detail guarantees our gear works every time, locally or at higher headquarters. The trust they've earned allows me to do my job to my highest ability, knowing my gear won't fail when I need it most."

Working together, AFE personnel make certain that the 9th EBS aircrew is always ready to respond, guaranteeing that crews are highly trained and fully prepared to defend the U.S. homeland and collaborate with allies worldwide.

U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Tyler Goeke, 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron weapons system officer, adjusts his PCU 15P harness before taking off for a Bomber Task Force mission at Misawa Air Base, Japan, April 21, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Mattison Cole)

SSBNs: silent, lethal, increa

Story by Lt. Zachary Anders
Naval Base K

PACIFIC OCEAN -- The sun reflected on the ocean's surface as two MH-60R "Romeo" Seahawk anti-submarine and surface warfare helicopters approached a metal behemoth cruising quietly on the horizon. As the helicopters approached the vessel, they were joined by two U.S. Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters for a first-of-its-kind armed air escort exercise led by U.S. Strategic Command.

The Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737) under helicopter cover was no stranger to historic operations. In 2023, the "Thoroughbred of the Fleet" became the first U.S. submarine in four decades to make a port call in Busan, South Korea.

As the most survivable leg of the nuclear triad and often referred to as boomers, SSBNs remain a top Defense Department priority due to their unmatched stealth and second-strike capability. Their strategic importance necessitates the strongest protection available during critical surfaced operations — protection increasingly provided by armed air escorts.

Today, the SSBN was making history again as an integral component of the joint exercise utilizing rotary-wing assets for the first time.

In the Romeo's front seat was Lt. Cmdr. Stephen "Skinny" Poppe, a weapons and tactics instructor assigned to the Easyriders of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 37. The unit is the largest expeditionary squadron in the U.S. Navy and supports all Pearl Harbor-based Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and Ticonderoga-class cruisers. Romeos are also the cornerstone of the Navy's helicopter concept of operations, designed for next-generation anti-surface warfare and, ironically, submarine hunting.

Despite the exercise being outside his normal mission profile, Skinny's experience working with U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army pilots, as well as the skillset he developed providing air defense for surface assets, translated directly to the task at hand.

The morning of the exercise Skinny was thinking about the state of the weather. It was not ideal, and any further degradation could have canceled the event all together. Luckily, conditions remained steady enough for the sortie to run its course, leaving him increasingly confident that the Army and Navy helicopters could serve as armed escorts for SSBNs in real-world operations.

nsingly part of the joint force

son, Submarine Group Nine,
Kitsap-Bangor

Submarine Group 9, charged with leading the nine SSBNs based in the Pacific Northwest, is no stranger to joint operations. While this was the first AAE with rotary-winged assets, the command executed a similar exercise in 2023 using the U.S. Air Force's A-10 Thunderbolt II close air support aircraft.

That morning, the submarine and escort were different, but the mission remained the same: to increase the joint force's capabilities to protect SSBNs. Nearly 3,000 miles away in Bangor, Washington, Capt. Nate Murray, one of the lead planners, waited anxiously to hear that the mission was a success. Joint operations, which involve piecing together disparate elements like a jigsaw puzzle, increase tactical complexity with the reward of strengthening multi-service cooperation for future operations.

"AAE exercises underscore the joint force's unwavering commitment to the defense of our nation's strategic deterrent," said Murray, who serves as SUBGRU 9's director of maritime operations. "These operations demonstrate our readiness to protect ballistic missile submarines, ensuring they remain a credible, reliable and survivable force capable of operating anywhere in the world in support of global security and national defense."

Aboard the Kentucky, Cmdr. Robert Perris, commanding officer of their Blue Crew, looked up at the Apache helicopters and reflected on his childhood. As the son of an Army pilot, this exercise represented a full-circle moment for the submariner who grew up surrounded by aviators and their unique culture. The air assets' low altitude served as a visual reminder of the strength and flexibility provided by joint force operations.

"The presence and close proximity of the escorts represented a new and unique aspect of deterrence I had not experienced in my last 18 years of naval service," said Perris. "[It] created a visceral feeling [that reinforced] the protection capability of both the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade and [Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 37]."" I'm certain my Sailors will be able to look back on [this] joint exercise with exceptional pride in Kentucky's accomplishments," reflected Perris.

As the boomer passed below, the Romeo aircrew watched as a submariner looked up and waved excitedly, taking in the historic moment - a reminder that behind the submarines, aircraft, and hardware across the DOD enterprise, there are the most capable warfighters standing watch, manning weapons systems and leading from the front, one joint exercise at a time.

U.S. Army AH-64 Apache helicopters, attached to the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter, attached to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 37, and a Military Sealift Command submarine support vessel MV Malama escort the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737) during a routine armed air escort exercise, April 24, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gwendelyn Ohrazda)

Air Force Global Strike Command releases Comprehensive Health Risk Assessments for Missile Community Cancer Study

Story by Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. -- Air Force Global Strike Command presented the results of its Comprehensive Health Risk Assessments for its three active missile bases during a virtual town hall recently.

The risk assessments, conducted by the United States Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine, are an assessment of the risk to human health, particularly the risk of cancer, caused by the presence of chemicals detected during the three rounds of environmental sampling conducted in 2023 and 2024.

The assessments determined a range of risk based on occupancy times a notional person might have spent in the launch control centers, spanning from a minimum of eight years for up to a maximum of 70 years for 24 hours a day. The risks were slightly different at each of the three missile bases. Samples collected from the environments where the missile community works indicate the risk of getting cancer is low, but it is not zero. The lifetime cancer risk for all Americans is approximately 39% according to American Cancer Society data.

The Comprehensive Health Risk Assessments for each base were:

F.E. Warren AFB estimated an excess cancer risk between <1 and 11 incidences per 10,000 Missile Alert Facility personnel, for the 8-to-70-year range of occupancy times considered by the study. This correlates with a 0.0 to 0.11% increase in lifetime cancer risk.

Malmstrom AFB estimated an excess cancer risk between <1 and 23 incidences per 10,000 MAF personnel, for the 8-to-70-year range of occupancy times considered by the study. This correlates with a 0.0 to 0.23% increase in lifetime cancer risk.

Minot AFB estimated an excess cancer risk between <1 and 7 incidences per 10,000 MAF personnel, for the 8-to-70-year range of occupancy times considered by the study. This correlates with a 0.0 to 0.07% increase in lifetime cancer risk.

“However, just because you may or may not be above the general population risk doesn’t mean there is no cancer risk,” said Gen. Thomas Bussiere, AFGSC commander, said. “I am example number one of that. My cancer was number two on the top 20 list of cancers for aviators, but that doesn’t mean I was above the risk for the general population.”

This health risk assessment suggested the increased risk is from the presence of benzene, which was detected in trace amounts in a few of the LCCs. Other contaminants, including polychlorinated biphenyls detected on some surfaces in the LCCs, and chloroform, which has both natural and artificial sources, drove a smaller portion of the increased risk.

Although only polychlorinated biphenyls were detected at levels above the Environmental Protection Agency’s standards for clean-up and remediation, the environmental sampling was sensitive enough to detect chemicals such as benzene and chloroform at levels well below standards for remediation. These values, as well as statistical extrapolations for LCCs where environmental sampling was unable to detect any contaminants, were used to calculate the risk assessments.

The assessments measured against federal limits and a statistically based exposure hazard quotient determined continued monitoring of the missile community is warranted. While the trace amounts of chloroform and benzene detected do not pose adverse health concerns, local bioenvironmental engineers will continue sampling efforts.

The CHRAs are a model of the estimated health risk, both cancer and non-cancer, based on sampling data. They do not directly measure cancer incidents or other health issues. The ongoing epidemiological review being conducted by the Missile Community Cancer Study is examining the total population of the Air Force missile community who served between 1976 and 2010 and every incidence of cancer within that population reported to the Department of Defense or Veterans Affairs medical systems.

“The level of interest and oversight with the Department of the Air Force and Congress has not waned, and I’m very thankful and happy with the interest and actions on the part of the VA,” Bussiere said. “They’ve been great partners, and I anticipate they will continue to be great partners.”

The CHRAs and slides from the latest town hall can be found at the Missile Community Cancer Study website: https://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/Resources/Missile-Community-Cancer-Study/

Minot AFB continues nuclear modernization with Detachment 12 activation

Story by Airman 1st Class Wesley Davies, 5th Bomb Wing, Minot Air Force Base

U.S. Air Force Gen. Thomas A. Bussiere, Air Force Global Strike Command commander, (left) presents the Site Activation Task Force (SATAF) Detachment 12 guidon to U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Nicholas Conover, SATAF Detachment 12 commander, for the detachment's activation ceremony at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, May 21, 2025. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Wesley Davies)

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. – Gen. Thomas A. Bussiere, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, activated Sentinel Site Activation Task Force Detachment 12 during a ceremony here, May 21, 2025.

The event, which followed the stand-up of Sentinel SATAF Detachment 11 at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana in April, marked a crucial step in preparing the base's infrastructure to support the establishment of the next-generation LGM-35A Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile system that will replace the LGM-30G Minuteman III ICBM system currently stationed across the continental United States.

The Sentinel system is part of a comprehensive modernization program focused on providing the land leg of the nation's nuclear triad for decades to come. All 400+ Minuteman III missiles are slated to be replaced by the new Sentinel system. The program will replace all key delivery components with updated technology. Although the missile and launch facilities are being completely rebuilt, the nuclear warheads themselves, which are provided by the Department of Energy, will remain unchanged in number, size, configuration and design.

The activation of Detachment 12 is a vital step toward ensuring Minot's infrastructure is ready to support the next generation of ICBMs. This activation comes amid ongoing construction and preparation activities at ICBM bases across the country. The U.S. Air Force and its industry partners are continuing to execute the Sentinel roadmap, including the establishment of SATAF detachments tasked with laying the groundwork for Sentinel support operations by overseeing and coordinating transition and establishment activities.

"The men and women of the 90th, 91st, and 341st Missile Wings rely on us to have a very coherent and disciplined transition plan between the Minuteman III and Sentinel weapon systems," said Bussiere. "This base is the center of gravity in our Air Force and our nation's defense."

The ceremony at Minot Air Force Base was not only a formal activation but also a symbol of commitment to strategic readiness and modernization. It highlighted the dedication of both military and civilian personnel involved in the Sentinel program, and the importance of collaboration between Air Force and industry teams.

"I'm extremely excited to be back in the Minot community. As a returning Roughrider, I know firsthand how critical this incredible community is to the strategic strength of Minot AFB," said Lt. Col. Nicholas Conover, SATAF Detachment 12 commander. "The dedication and partnership we share are essential to our success."

As the Sentinel program progresses, its impact will be seen not only in technological advancements but also in the strengthening of partnerships within local communities such as Minot. The transition from Minuteman III to Sentinel signifies a generational leap in ICBM capabilities, ensuring that the United States' most responsive leg of the nuclear triad remains safe, secure, reliable and strategically positioned in a rapidly changing global landscape.

Submarine Group 9 sailors win Hugh McCracken Award, Sailor of the Year

Story by Lt. Zachary Anderson, Submarine Group Nine, Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor

Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander of Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, presents the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Nebraska (SSBN 739) blue crew chiefs mess with the Hugh McCracken award during a ceremony at Naval Base Kitsap – Bangor, May 1, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Lt. Zachary Anderson)

Cmdr. Vance Scott, commanding officer of the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Nebraska (SSBN 739) blue crew, and Command Master Chief Christopher Olin, Nebraska's former chief of the boat, pose for a photo with the Hugh McCracken Award, May 1, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Lt. Zachary Anderson)

SILVERDALE, Wash. -- Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander of Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, presented the Hugh McCracken and Sailor of the Year awards in a ceremony held at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, May 1, 2025.

Every year, the commanders of, Submarine Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet and SUBPAC recognize two chief petty officer messes per coast belonging to one fast-attack and one guided or ballistic missile submarine. Each nomination is carefully screened according to their overall performance and ability to lead their commands through training, personnel readiness, qualifications, and operational mission success.

This year the chiefs mess from the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Nebraska (SSBN 739) blue crew earned the award due to their sustained superior performance across a number of key areas demonstrating their commitment to warfighting excellence and successful execution of their strategic deterrence mission.

During 2024, the SSBN operated at the tip of the spear, completing two patrols, the latter of which they were able to get underway one day early – a remarkable achievement considering the arduous maintenance period.

“Calendar year 24 was tremendously successful for the crew, for the boat, and for the submarine force,” said Command Master Chief Christopher Olin, Nebraska’s former chief of the boat. “Our chiefs mess and our crew deserve this award because they bought into the captain’s vision and ensured it was implemented successfully.”

When asked about how the boat was able to get underway a day early, Olin described the crew’s can-do attitude and accountability in between patrols.

“It really started with the chiefs mess finding ways to do things more quickly and more efficiently,” he said. “If anything came up that might impact the schedule, we worked to identify and solve the issue before it compounded and became a more significant problem.”

The crew used their high operational tempo to aid in Sailor development rather than allowing that critical mission to fall by the wayside. This is evidenced by the selection of three of their Sailors for promotion to chief petty officer and the voluntary inclusion of four additional Sailors to their crew affording them an opportunity to earn valuable qualifications.

“This award is a testament not only to our top-notch chiefs mess but the Nebraska crew as a whole,” said Cmdr. Vance Scott, commanding officer of Nebraska's blue crew. “In all my years serving in the submarine force, I’ve been privileged to serve amongst some of the finest crews in the Navy, but getting to lead this current group of outstanding men and women is special. Life in the nuclear Navy is not for the faint of heart, and our Sailors embrace trials head on with unmatched grit. Go Big Red!”

"Our chiefs mess and our crew deserve this award because they bought into the captain's vision and ensured it was implemented successfully."

- Command Master Chief Christopher Olin, Nebraska's former chief of the boat

Immediately following the Hugh McCracken Award, Cavanaugh recognized Electrician's Mate (Nuclear) 1st Class Matthew Rogers, assigned to Submarine Readiness Squadron 31, as Sailor of the Year. Rogers earned the designation due to his actions aboard the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737) from January to December 2024. As the electrical division’s leading petty officer, he was instrumental in getting his vessel through a tough dry dock period and back to sea.
While underway, the boat would go on to lead five weeks of sustained midshipmen operations – a key aspect of training and retaining future junior officers – and the successful completion of a reactor safeguards exam.

As the command fitness leader, he orchestrated the 2024 physical readiness test during the intensive pre-deployment period, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to physical readiness.

Selection as Sailor of the Year is a multi-tiered process beginning with selection from one’s boat, then competing at the squadron, group, and ultimately SUBPAC level during a week-long event involving interviews with a collection of command master chiefs from the submarine community, held in San Diego.

“Just being selected to compete was an honor,” said Rogers. “When I got out to San Diego and started seeing the accomplishments of the other Sailors, I began to rethink my chances. The fact that I was selected amongst such a talented pool is validation for all the hard work I’ve put into my career.”

Rogers attributes his success to simple fundamentals.

“Punctuality and honesty,” he said “My dad was always big on showing up on time, and I really feel that about a third of being a good Sailor is being where you’re supposed to be when you’re supposed to be there. Also, honesty. Honesty during the interviews was really important and then being honest both with those you work for and those that work for you is invaluable for developing strong relationships.”

Both the Sailor of the Year and Hugh McCracken award are a testament to the breadth and depth of talent throughout the Pacific Northwest and the submarine force as a whole.

Airmen, aircraft deploy in support of first Bomber Task Force mission to Japan

Story by Senior Airman Emma Anderson, Pacific Air Forces

MISAWA AIR BASE, Japan -- A Bomber Task Force deployment of U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer aircraft, Airmen and support equipment from the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, arrived at Misawa Air Base, Japan, April 15, 2025, to support Pacific Air Forces' training efforts with Allies, partners, and joint forces and strategic deterrence missions to reinforce regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

These deployments continue the enduring security cooperation with Japan and support our combined capability to quickly and decisively respond to any challenge presented in the region.

Bomber Task Force deployments familiarize aircrew with air bases and operations in different geographic combatant commands' areas of operation. This deployment to Japan showcases the United States' commitment to the Indo-Pacific region and our Allies and partners.

"BTF 25-2 showcases the U.S. commitment to deterring threats and maintaining regional stability," said Lt. Col. Christopher Travelstead, 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron director of operations. "These missions in the Indo-Pacific ensure our B-1 crews are highly trained and ready to respond anytime, anywhere, to defend U.S. interests and support our allies, securing a stable Indo-Pacific—where joint and multinational forces cooperation demonstrates our shared commitment to stability, peace and prosperity."

The U.S. remains committed to maintaining resilient alliances and partnerships, which reflect our shared values and ironclad commitment to global security and stability and will continue to take opportunities to train with Allies and partners to demonstrate interoperability and build lasting relationships.

(U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Alondra Cristobal Hernandez)

U.S. Strategic Command tackles invisible wounds through moral injury campaign

Story by Master Sgt. Taylor Drzazgowski, U.S. Strategic Command

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, Neb. – To better protect its forces' well-being and readiness, U.S. Strategic Command is directly addressing Moral Injury. Launched in 2023 by Gen. Anthony Cotton, commander of USSTRATCOM, this initiative provides support to service members grappling with the psychological, spiritual and emotional consequences of actions conflicting with their beliefs.

Moral injury, as defined by the Air Force Chaplain Corps and adopted by USSTRATCOM, is the psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs. It differs from conditions like traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, manifesting in symptoms such as social withdrawal, loss of trust, aggression, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

"We're addressing a critical issue that impacts our combat readiness: moral injury," Cotton said. "Understanding and addressing moral injury is essential for maintaining a strong, resilient force."

Central to USSTRATCOM's MI approach is the Aware, Assess, and Assist (Triple A) initiative. This three-year plan, led by the Office of the Command Chaplain and aligned with Cotton's "Sustain the Force" line of effort, recognizes that proactively addressing moral injury can improve PTSD outcomes and strengthen resilience.

The Triple A initiative unfolds in three phases. The awareness phase took place in fiscal year 2024 and focused on educating the command. This involved distributing materials, including videos, designed to help personnel recognize moral injury's signs and symptoms. The initiative explained moral injury, leadership's role and available support groups.

Fiscal year 2025 launched the assessment phase, which evaluates the existing MI programs. The Air Force Chaplain Corps established a working group that recommended MI programs across the Defense Department, leading to a moral injury playbook and a training video on prevention.

Now underway, the assist phase is the initiative's culmination in fiscal year 2026. The Command Chaplain section is working with personnel at 11 USSTRATCOM sites, offering support to lessen moral injury's effects.

Chaplain (Col.) Rolf Holmquist, USSTRATCOM command chaplain, said they will do this by helping individuals reconnect with their personal warrior ethos.

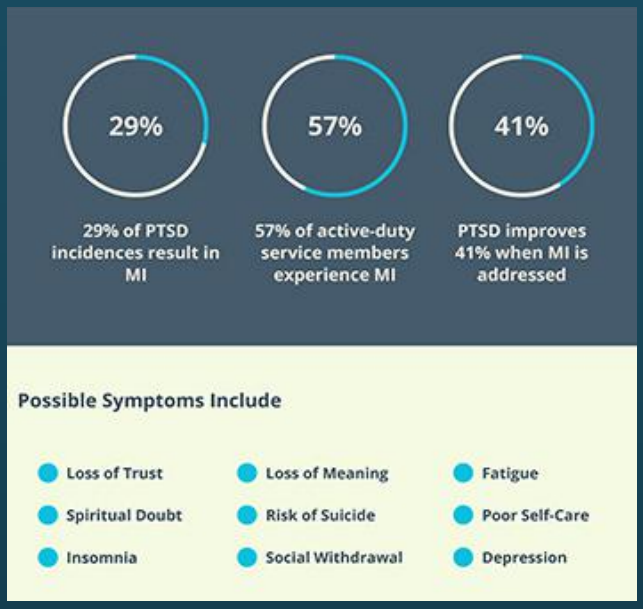
"Restoring warrior ethos, as emphasized by the [Secretary of Defense], is key to readiness," said Holmquist. "A strong personal warrior ethos will help combat moral injury, strengthening the resiliency of the member. This type of outlook is like a moral compass."

Holmquist said that moral injury is a normal process of humans in conflict.

"Moral injury is as old as war itself," Holmquist said. "If we can get left of the bang with the warrior fighter and their morality, they will be ready for the right of the bang."

By empowering individuals to confront moral injury, USSTRATCOM aims to alleviate suffering and enhance its force's readiness and resilience.

"Moral injury impacts the health and readiness of our force. By giving people the time and tools to heal, they can get back in the fight," Cotton said. "We are committed to providing the resources and awareness necessary to combat the effects of moral injury within our ranks. This campaign is about ensuring our people have the support they need to overcome moral injury and return to their full potential."



FRONTL

SSBN: THE S

Ballistic Missile Submarines: Ensuring Peace Through Strength

The fourteen Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines constitute 70% of our nation's daily nuclear deterrent and serve as the most survivable pillar of the nuclear triad. Operating stealthily around the globe 24/7/365, the SSBN fleet's primary mission is to guarantee national security through strategic deterrence. Each submarine carries up to 20 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), with each missile armed with one or more nuclear warheads, and crews ready to respond within minutes if called upon. Starting in 2027, the Ohio-class will gradually be replaced by the cutting-edge Columbia-class, ensuring continued dominance beneath the waves.

Features and Capabilities

While the fleet life for the Ohio-class has been extended by an unprecedented 42 years, the readiness of SSBNs has not faltered, due to state-of-the-art sonar, fire control, and radio suites. All of our SSBNs are nuclear powered, resulting in endurance limited only by the amount of food carried aboard for the crew. SSBNs are self-sufficient, producing their own water and conducting their own repairs. As the Ohio-Class submarine is phased out, the new Columbia-class will provide a life-of-hull reactor, improved combat control systems, electric propulsion drive, and other technological advancements will deliver unparalleled operational capabilities and stealth to ensure our SSBN fleet maintains its strategic advantage in the undersea domain into the 2080s. The Ohio-class submarines are equipped with Trident II D5, the latest generation of SLBM. The Trident II D5 life extension 2 (D5LE2) program will field a modern, reliable, flexible, and effective missile with advanced technology capable of adapting to emerging threats.

Source:
LT Sawyer Kaye, LT Natalie Lemek
JFMCC STRAT Operations Branch

LINE Focus

SILENT SERVICE

Always on Alert: Maintaining Constant Readiness

Unyielding vigilance defines the SSBN mission, with multiple ballistic missile submarines constantly deployed worldwide. Crews stand ready to execute national orders at a moment's notice, maintaining secure communication with national command authorities. The submarine's precise location remains known only to its commanding officer and a select few onboard, preserving an elusive posture that guarantees adversaries cannot challenge the SSBN's capacity to deliver an undetected retaliatory strike. This persistent uncertainty underpins global stability and day-to-day deterrence.

Operational Structure and Management Features and Capabilities

Strategic oversight of the SSBN fleet rests with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, executed through U.S. Strategic Command. Day-to-day operational control is delegated to the Joint Force Maritime Component Command, Strategic, which, through Commander Task Force 114, directs SSBN employment. Administrative and personnel support is provided by Commander, Submarine Force Atlantic and Commander, Submarine Force Pacific via their respective Submarine Groups and Squadrons. Together, this integrated command structure ensures our SSBN fleet operates with maximum flexibility, maintaining the nation's most powerful strategic asset at peak readiness.

The Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Kentucky (SSBN 737) sails alongside a submarine support vessel during a routine armed air escort exercise, April 24, 2025. (U.S. Navy photos by Mass Communications Specialist 1st Class Ryan Riley)

From Pasadena to the Puget Sound: A Submarine Group Nine sailor spotlight

Story by Lt. Zachary Anderson, Submarine Group Nine, Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor

Yeoman (Submarines) 1st Class Daniel Teixeira-Pinto, assigned to Submarine Group (SUBGRU) 9, reenlists on the field of Cheney Stadium during a Tacoma Rainiers game, June 1, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ryan Riley)

SILVERDALE, Wash. -- It's spring in Washington, and Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Teixeira-Pinto, leading petty officer of the Personnel and Manpower Directorate, is in his garden, tending to a colorful array of budding tulips. The Submarine Group 9 Sailor of the Year picked up the hobby after his move from Guam to the significantly less tropical Pacific Northwest.

Teixeira-Pinto, known as "Tex" to his friends and coworkers, was stationed in Guam for three years but was only on the island for about one of them due to being underwater. After operating at the tip of the spear of attack submarine operations, the transition to SUBGRU-9—with its emphasis on persistent presence and strategic deterrence—affords him the opportunity to foster interests off the boat.

Tex planted the bulbs in the fall, giving the seasonal flora the cold period needed to develop roots. Tulips are unique in that way—the dormant bulbs bide their time, preparing for the perfect window to emerge from the dirt into sunlight.

Tex's life and Navy career have seen their share of chilling periods. His first tour aboard USS Asheville (SSN 758) exposed him to the demanding operational tempo of the Submarine Force, which wore on the junior Sailor.

"I was feeling really down," Tex said. "We were constantly gone or having underways extended. Further, COVID had just started, so everyone was racked with anxiety."

At his lowest, he received advice he still carries: "The [boat's] doc looked at me and simply said, 'Tex, stop feeling sorry for yourself.'"
That blunt assessment, Tex said, was exactly what he needed.

"That has stuck with me," he said "These jobs are demanding, and they're all difficult in different ways. It doesn't get better by complaining or dwelling on the negatives. Here is this difficult task—make it happen. I now thrive with those impossible challenges."

That's not to say Tex is hardened to the acute mental and psychological challenges that come with mastering the art of undersea warfare. Far from it. In addition to gardening, Tex is an avid motorcycle rider who founded Ride4Life, an organization that raises awareness and funds for veteran suicide prevention. In May, he completed a six-hour ride around the Olympic National Forest.

Solemnly, he reflects on former shipmates who, unlike himself, didn't survive their chilling periods to bloom again in the spring.

"I've seen the toll high OPTEMPO takes on Sailors—especially young ones who don't have the personal tools to manage that stress," he said "Just the other week I went to a funeral where the deceased committed suicide. It was heartbreaking to see the cost on the loved ones left behind. It's a very avoidable tragedy that my time in Guam opened my eyes to." Tex's journey to SUBGRU-9 Sailor of the Year started in Pasadena, California. His family's socioeconomic status made a traditional path less realistic, and the Navy offered a way to provide financial stability and broaden his education.

"I knew the GI Bill was really a golden ticket for people from a background like mine," he said. "My original plan was to do four years and get out. But after using programs like [tuition assistance], I decided I would reenlist and make this a career."

It's a decision he doesn't regret. The California native gained not only financial stability, but also a sense of meaning and camaraderie in the Submarine Force.

With his first tour complete, Tex transferred to SUBGRU-9 and immersed himself in the world of strategic deterrence—a far cry from fast boat life.

"From here I can see the emphasis the DOD places on strategic deterrence and how Washington State is the focal point for this part of the nuclear triad," said Tex. "The kid gloves are off. The mission has to happen."

One trait Tex credits for his success is flexibility.

"If you come in with a set idea of what you're going to do today and aren't willing to amend your priorities, you need to reevaluate," he said. "Mission needs come first."

Another is teamwork.

"The most valuable resource you have is the friends you can ask for help—and that's not weakness. Letting people help you is strength. It deepens trust. And those relationships are what I treasure most now."

It was one of those relationships—a friend's connection to a Washington realtor—that helped Tex buy his first home. He now lives there with his parents, fulfilling a lifelong goal of providing for his family.

It's spring in Washington. Tex is outside in his garden as his mother watches, appreciation in her eyes, as her favorite flower—the tulip—emerges from the thawed soil, roots deep and strong.

For the full written story, see: https://www.dvidshub.net/news/499417/pasadena-puget-sound-submarine-group-9-sailor-spotlight

Yeoman (Submarines) 1st Class Daniel Teixeira-Pinto, assigned to Submarine Group (SUBGRU) 9, puts on his motorcycle helmet, May 27, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gwendelyn Ohrazda)

Capt. Micah Maxwell, chief of staff for Submarine Group (SUBGRU) 9, presents Yeoman (Submarines) 1st Class Daniel Teixeira-Pinto with the Navy Commendation Medal for being named the command's Sailor of the Year, May 27, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gwendelyn Ohrazda)

Ready to launch: the Navy's missile technicians

Story by Petty Officer 1st Class Travis Alston, Submarine Group Ten, Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay

KINGS BAY, Ga. -- Above the waterline is an expanse of unpredictable beauty, a calm sea reflecting a tranquil sky. Beneath the surface, in the U.S. Navy ballistic missile submarine's missile control center, beauty is irrelevant and the unwavering execution of the mission is what matters.

The MCC is where U.S. Navy missile technicians (Submarines), operate the United States' most advanced missile systems.

In the MCC Senior Chief Missile Technician (Submarines) Steven Dotson meticulously inspects the Trident missile system, a task he's performed countless times since enlisting on July 13, 2005. Although routine, the weight of this responsibility never diminishes.

An Oklahoma City native, Dotson wasn't attracted to the surface fleet. He envisioned a different kind of service, a more intimate and specialized brotherhood.

"I saw the submarine force as a smaller, but more elite group," said Dotson. "A tight-knit family that is focused on the mission."

Becoming an MT wasn't a predetermined decision. Presented with a range of options, Dotson chose the one that resonated most.

"It was the best of the options I was given, and when I got the details of the job it sounded pretty cool to work on missiles," said Dotson. "That initial intrigue blossomed into a deep understanding of the intricate systems that safeguard national security. "

Dotson added that life as a junior MT aboard a submarine was a crucible of learning.

"During my early career, I was constantly studying," said Dotson. "I had to master the complexities of a nuclear-powered submarine to earn my submarine qualification and then immerse myself in the technical details of my rate.

The challenges were immense, but the camaraderie forged in the close confines of the submarine proved invaluable. I made a lot of friends who pushed me to learn more, to become better."

Years of dedication have propelled Dotson to a more senior role, allowing him to shape the next generation of missile technicians. His perspective has shifted, evolving from a focus on personal achievement to a deep appreciation for the vital role MTs play in the nation's strategic defense.

Currently, Dotson is the Submarine Group Ten strategic weapon system master chief. He advises senior leadership on all matters related to the strategic weapons system.

He also oversees the training and development of enlisted personnel and ensures the operational readiness and effectiveness of the fleet's ballistic missile submarines. "I think the role of the MT and the SSBN force is incredibly important," said Dotson.

"SSBNs are the most survivable leg of the U.S. nuclear force, and the MTs who do their job day in and day out play an important role in ensuring the missiles and associated systems are ready to complete the mission at all times."

He points to the increasing global tensions as evidence of the SSBN force's continued relevance.

"Other countries are starting to see our presence in different portions of the world, and that is making an impact and continuing to remind the world who we are," said Dotson.

Drawn to the relative stability of the role, Missiles Technician 1st Class Jean Gnonlonfoun, an Omaha, Nebraska native, answered the call to a challenging career path, enlisted in the Navy in March of 2021.

"When I learned about the submarine service, I was intrigued," said Gnonlonfoun. "My recruiter told me it wasn't for everyone and that made me even more determined." The journey, however, proved more demanding than initially anticipated.

From environmental monitoring to daily preventative maintenance of ballistic missiles, to countless training exercises and actual countdown procedures, MTs must always be ready to perform their duties flawlessly.

"The initial learning curve was steep," said Gnonlonfoun. "I was quickly immersed into a wealth of information and expected to learn not only my own job but also the intricacies of other roles and systems. It was stressful, but I developed a system to manage my time and help me focus on my goals."

Currently Gnonlofoun serves as leading petty officer of the missile division aboard USS Maryland (SSBN 738)(Gold). As a seasoned MT, he understands the critical importance of their role.

Beyond the technical aspects, he is also committed to mentoring junior Sailors.

"I'm in a role where I help junior Sailors," said Gnonlonfoun. "They are the future of the MT (rating). If they are unable manage their time and not fall behind, that is a direct reflection of my leadership. I refuse to allow that to happen."

The MT rating is a highly specialized field that requires dedication, technical proficiency, and a commitment to excellence. Sailors like Dotson and Gnonlonfoun are essential to maintaining the security and stability of the United States.

Their work ensures peace through strength, serving as a testament to the dedication of the silent service and a reminder of the immense responsibility that MTs bear. It's a calling to protect the nation, one missile at a time.

VOICES OF Deterrence

Aviation enthusiasts are putting U.S. military lives at risk

Opinion by Mr. Drake Bray, U.S. Strategic Command hard target strategist

We must begin to define where responsible aviation enthusiasm ends and where inadvertent intelligence-gathering begins.

Aviation enthusiasts—often referred to as "avgeeks," as seen in popular online communities such as Reddit's r/AvGeeks and r/flightradar24—are people who share a deep passion for aircraft, airlines, military aviation, and all things flight-related. The roots of this community stretch back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the rise of commercial aviation and the prominence of military aircraft captured the public imagination.

Over the decades, this fascination has evolved into a technologically sophisticated hobby: plane spotting, aircraft photography, flight simulation, collecting memorabilia, and now, tracking individual aircraft across the globe in near-real time. The same data collection and analysis affects all U.S. Strategic Command and other Combatant Command high-value assets and operations, including ICBM related security movements, SSBN operations and deployments, and key U.S. Government aircraft such as the E-4B, E-6B, Air Force One, strategic bombers, refuelers, logistics movements, and more.

It's easy to see the appeal. Flight is a marvel of human ingenuity—something fundamentally impossible before the Wright brothers achieved powered flight in 1903. And for many, aviation as a hobby serves as a gateway into professional aviation careers—no small contribution in a time of global pilot shortages. But in the digital age, this well-meaning passion may be producing dangerous, unintended consequences.

Military enthusiasts and tail spotters use open-source trackers to find and share these sensitive assets to show off their skills or take pictures and post them to social media. As a result, these enthusiasts regularly put the security of high-value assets and the personnel that accompany them at risk and further inform adversaries of potential U.S. exercises and operations.

The problem lies in how enthusiasts now use publicly available flight-tracking platforms, such as FlightRadar24, to monitor aircraft movements. These open-source platforms aggregate signals transmitted by aircraft, allowing users to observe flights in near-real time, even those not intended to be tracked. Once detected, this information is frequently shared on public forums and social media—where it is not just fellow enthusiasts who are watching. U.S. adversaries are also monitoring these channels, often gaining valuable indications and warnings of upcoming U.S. military operations—at zero cost, courtesy of well-meaning civilians.

Consider an event from Spring 2025: it appeared that several B-2 Spirit stealth bombers were deployed to Diego Garcia, a remote military installation in the British Indian Ocean Territory. On March 24, posts began appearing on X (formerly Twitter) suggesting the bombers were en route—an assessment made by aviation enthusiasts and open-source intelligence accounts after observing U.S. Air Force KC-135 refueling tankers departing Guam toward Diego Garcia, according to publicly available FAA flight data. One user also reported intercepted air traffic control communications referencing military call signs "PITCH11-13" and assessed them to be B-2 bombers. Just days later, commercial satellite imagery allegedly confirmed the presence of at least four B-2 bombers and several KC-135 tankers at the base.

Even more recently, an E-6B Mercury aircraft was tracked via publicly accessible flight data by open-source analysts during operations near Portugal's Azores Islands. The Mercury's movements were then broadcasted in real time on social media channels and later amplified by several major news outlets.

This type of spotting activity occurs daily, from military aircraft, to submarines, to personnel movements and more.

Spotters even recognize increased activity at installations and restaurants during abnormal hours, such as increased order traffic at the Pentagon's Domino's pizza shop at 2 a.m., which is livestreamed and posted to the Internet.

Given how quickly this information spreads, it would not be unreasonable to assume that adversary forces in Europe and the Indo-Pacific —and other regional actors—may use it to anticipate imminent U.S. operations. That kind of forewarning can drastically alter outcomes, allowing adversaries to reposition assets or prepare defenses—actions far more difficult without advanced notice. If the open tracking of sensitive military movements continues unchecked, it may only be a matter of time before it contributes to the downing of a U.S. aircraft—or worse, the loss of American lives and strategic deterrence failure.

As an enthusiast myself, I understand the excitement that fuels this community. The aviation world is filled with awe and admiration, and the men and women who serve deserve recognition and respect. But there is a line between appreciating aviation and unintentionally aiding hostile forces. When everyday users can observe and broadcast the movements of military personnel and equipment in active operational theaters, that crosses into unacceptable territory—one with real-world consequences for U.S. national security.

We must begin to define where responsible aviation enthusiasm ends, and where inadvertent intelligence-gathering begins. When highlighting aviation and sea-faring assets, we ask that hobbyists put safety ahead of their interests. It may in fact be time to establish a more protective process regarding how U.S. military assets are being tracked in real time—before it's too late.

Drake Bray is a defense analyst and aviation enthusiast. The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of any U.S. government entity.

USSTRATCOM

Peace is Our Profession...