

# 3901 STRATEGIC MISSILE EVALUATION SQUADRON



## MISSION

## LINEAGE

3901 Strategic Standardization Squadron  
3901 Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron

## STATIONS

Vandenberg AFB, CA, 1 Jul 1961

## ASSIGNMENTS

## COMMANDERS

## HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

## EMBLEM



3901 Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron emblem: On and over an AF blue disc, within a wide border composed of concentric rings of color reading outward, AF golden yellow, white, AF blue, white, red and AF blue, a white cloud formation issuing from the extreme outer edge of the border in sinister chief surmounted by a white scroll bendwise, originating in sinister base, shade medium blue; all surmounted in dexter by a stylized white missile in upward flight palewise, shaded medium blue, leaving a red and white trail to the extreme edge of the border in base and AF golden yellow quill pen bend wise extending-to the extreme edge of the border in sinister base, outlines and details red; a[ other outlines and details AF blue. Significance: Against a deep blue background to suggest the sky, a white cloud formation from the SAC emblem indicates that the Strategic Air Command is our parent command. The pen and scroll indicate the unit's primary mission of evaluation and analysis, and the missile in flight symbolizes the principal area of squadron interest. The concentric circles of golden yellow, red and blue, which comprise the border, represent the three SAC numbered Air Forces whose missile units fall within the sphere of activity of the squadron. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. National colors, red, white, and blue. (Approved, 6 July 1962) Designed by TSgt Harry F. McHarvey.

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

Headquarters SAC activated the 3901st Strategic Standardization Squadron (Missiles) (later to be designated the 3901st Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron) at Vandenberg AFB, California, 1 Jul 1961.

The 3901 SMES was activated in 1961 to provide the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) equivalent of Strategic Air Command's (SAC) Combat Evaluation Groups (CEVG) and Maintenance Standardization Evaluation Teams (MSET), the organizations that evaluated the operations and maintenance programs in the bomb wings. While the SAC Inspector General (IG) inspected missile and bomb units at least annually with operational readiness, mission capability and compliance inspections.

The IG team visits looked at almost everything on a SAC base, but were more general in nature than the annual or semi-annual evaluations by the 3901 SMES and its aircraft counterparts. While the IG team watched bomber, tanker and missile crews simulate the wartime mission to assess combat capability, and they did detailed inspections of offices and shops to ensure compliance with Air Force and SAC directives, these inspections weren't of the detail and depth of the SMES. CEVG and MSET visits. The IG visits represented a look at everything on base across the board, while the other evaluations were specific task and program evaluations of the people involved in the operation and maintenance of SAC aircraft and missiles. In the early days of missile unit IG visits, 3901 SMES members often joined the team to provide detailed expertise in areas that the IG team had not yet developed.

Throughout most of the life of the 3901 SMES, a team of maintenance, munitions, communications, missile civil engineering and operations evaluators, both enlisted and officer, visited each wing every six months. The majority of these visits were scheduled, but for a few years in the early days of the 3901` SMES, no-notice evaluations were sometimes conducted. Each team included a team chief, a lieutenant colonel from the squadron's senior staff, a team chief in each area, and evaluators for each type of team or task evaluated. Visits lasted 10 to 12 days, with the team usually arriving on a Sunday or Monday and departing the Thursday or Friday of the following week.

In operations, the team was led by a major or lieutenant colonel, usually head of the Minuteman or Titan II Operations Evaluation branch, along with two or more missile crew evaluators and program evaluators for training, evaluation, emergency war order training and missile procedures trainer (MPT) operation. In Minuteman, there were two crew evaluators for each system at the wing being visited – for example, at Malmstrom AFB, MT, there were evaluators for both Minuteman Mod and Minuteman II. During the modernization process at each wing, there were usually evaluators to check both pre-mod and post-mod crewmembers. In Titan II, the crew evaluator team was made up of two officers and two noncommissioned officers, one for each crew position. The crew evaluators gave annual evaluations to each wing senior standardization crew in the MPT, and observed them performing an evaluation of a wing crew, certifying them for the upcoming year. The crew evaluators checked or watched unit evaluation crews check 12-14 wing crews, using both wing scripts and scripts developed by the 3901 SMES. These checks met all the requirements of an annual evaluation for the crew being checked, and took 3 to 4 hours or more to complete. The evaluators also visited several crews who were on alert, for an on-site evaluation. Some of these evaluations were notice, some were no-notice.

The 3901 SMES usually selected crews for checks conducted in the MPT, but also let the wing evaluation crews select some of those being checked. While the crew evaluators were busy conducting checks both in the MPT and on-site, the team chief and program evaluators were busy digging into records and checking procedures for all aspects of crew training and evaluation.

The maintenance effort was similar – a team chief each discipline (maintenance, munitions, communications and civil engineering) along with evaluator teams for specific areas like combat targeting, missile handling and various communications, munitions civil engineering tasks. At the same time, the team chiefs and others were checking details on the wing training and evaluation programs.

The last couple of days of each visit were filled with report writing and briefing preparation. Each team chief briefed his counterpart area leadership in the wing, and the overall team chief presented a classified wing summary in the base theater. Each major program, such as operations evaluation or maintenance training, was rated Outstanding, Excellent, Satisfactory, Marginal or Unsatisfactory. Ratings less than Excellent were rare, but they did occur on occasion, and the visits resulting in Unsatisfactory ratings were difficult for both the wing and the members of the 3901 SMES. Most of us much preferred being part of visits where little went wrong – we knew all the people in the wings well, and it was tough to spend two weeks with them and then advise them that their work was below the SAC standard.

The unit was inactivated when the ICBM force transferred to Air Force Space Command in 1994, with the evaluation function assumed by new organizations within that command.

The 3901st Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron, commanded by Col. Jack D. Lander, is the only Strategic Air Command unit stationed at Vandenberg that is not assigned to the 1st Strategic Aerospace Division it is assigned directly to Hq. Strategic Air Command, under the operational control of the SAC deputy chief of staff for operations. This arrangement is logical because of the SAC-wide nature of the squadron's activities, particularly in its role as evaluator of the technical proficiency of SAC's entire ICBM alert force. Combat crews, missile maintenance teams and technicians involved with reentry vehicles, explosive ordnance disposal, missile communications and real property installed equipment are all subject to the close scrutiny of the well qualified evaluators who comprise the 3901st SMES.

As a result of its evaluations, the squadron is able to determine for SAC the overall effectiveness of the missile units, correlating individual proficiency with the efficiency of the units' training and self evaluation programs. In this respect, the 3901<sup>st</sup> works very closely with the 4315th Combat Crew Training Squadron to develop and maintain adequate combat crew job performance task lists upon which all crew training and evaluation are based. The squadron also acts as SAC's representative in its interface with other commands and civilian contractors on matters dealing primarily with missile technical data.

Because of the nature of its responsibilities, the 3901<sup>st</sup> SMES has had to maintain the technical proficiency of its own personnel at the highest possible level in the entire gamut of missile connected functions. As consequence, the squadron has achieved over the years the unique distinction of being the only unit within SAC with the technical ability to prepare and launch any series of operational ballistic missiles in the inventory. Although the 3901st SMES is not now a part of 1STRAD, its heritage is firmly rooted in the division — its direct

predecessor was the 1st Missile Division's standardization section which was created in February 1959. In May 1961, the section was redesignated the Ballistic Missile Standardization Team, but two months later, July 1, it was disbanded to form the nucleus for the 3901st Strategic Standardization Sq. which was activated on that date and assigned-directly to Hq. SAC. The unit received its present designation as a Strategic Missile Evaluation Sq. Sept. 15, 1961, but its mission remained essentially the same. In fact, there has been little change in mission since the unit was first organized.

A major deletion occurred at the beginning of 1964 when the squadron lost its requirement to actually launch missiles though retaining the capability. Prior to that time, starting with the first launch of an Atlas D Jan. 17, 1961, the 3901st crews had launched 11 Atlas, Minuteman I and Titan II missiles into the Pacific. Over the years, however, the squadron continued to visit and evaluate all of SAC's operational ICBM units to include the three Atlas, both Titan and all three Minuteman weapon systems. This has been no easy task since the 3901st is the only unit in SAC in which standardization and evaluation of missile launch crews, missile maintenance, and direct support areas of munitions, communications and civil engineering are conducted under a single commander. As a consequence, squadron evaluators perform almost half their duty on TDY away from Vandenberg, amassing a total of over two million man-miles of travel each year.

The effective manner in which the 3901st SMES has accomplished these essential and diversified tasks is amply illustrated by the two Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards it has already won; the first for the period July 1962 through June 1964, and the second for July 1966 through June 1968.

**THE 3901st SMES EMBLEM** The emblem authorized for the 3901st SMES by Hq. USAF July 6, 1962, is almost identical to the one designed in 1961 by TSgt. Harry F. McHarvey, a member of the unit at that time. The only major difference between the two is the direction in which the pen is pointing. The Heraldic Section, Hq. USAF altered McHarvey's design to point the pen from left to right rather than vice versa as he had it. This made for better symbolism, because in its original position — sinister bendwise — it could have been interpreted as indicating something "unlucky" or "inauspicious." Specifically, the golden yellow and red pen superimposed on the white scroll with its light blue shading is symbolic of the unit's primary mission of evaluation and analysis. The white cloud with the dark blue half-moons is taken almost exactly from the SAC emblem to indicate that the unit is assigned directly to the Strategic Air Command. The white missile shaded in light blue and emitting alternate red and white exhaust streamers, represents, of course, the principal area of squadron interest. The entire design is set off by the usual Air Force ultramarine blue background, in this instance bordered by concentric circles of yellow, blue and red to represent SAC's three numbered Air Forces "whose missile units fall within the sphere of activity of the squadron." A rather broad dark blue border encases the emblem to which is attached a white scroll outlined in dark blue and containing the unit's numerical designation. Sergeant McHarvey originally had recommended a motto for the 3901st—"Proficiency, Quality, Strength"—but no motto was authorized by Hq. USAF with the emblem.

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USAF Unit Histories  
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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Charlie Simpson, Colonel, US Air Force (Retired). Executive Director, Association of Air Force Missileers. 15 Dec 2017