

On March 27 one of history's worst earthquakes hit Alaska. With normal communications out, SAC was ordered to use its new low-level, high-speed recon ability to survey the damaged areas. A pair of B-58s flew a photo mission to Anchorage even as the aftershocks continued. It was a fine example of the newest dimension in SAC's global capability . . .



Portrait of an earthquake's aftermath from 500 feet up. The photograph was made from a Strategic Air Command B-58, part of SAC's new quick-response reconnaissance capability. A pair of B-58s, sent to Anchorage the day after the disastrous March 27 quake, brought back scores of pictures like this one.

EARTHQUAKE!

THE pictures showed a school broken in half. You could see smashed automobiles and collapsed pavement in sharp detail. One photo showed black scars of earth in the snow cutting across streets and homes. You could even make out a few bewildered people looking up.

They were watching a Strategic Air Command bomber—a B-58 Hustler—flashing over the wrecked streets of Anchorage, Alaska, at high speed. It was taking pictures—clear, perfect photographs that would show as nothing else could what it looks like when the earth lifts up and smashes a modern city. The pictures would be in Washington in hours, ready to brief the President and Department of Defense on the extent of Alaska's wounds. And in the next few days the same pictures would appear on front pages the world over.

There were two B-58s over Anchorage by late afternoon the day after the earthquake. They were part of a seven-aircraft reconnaissance mission sent by the

Air Force to photograph seven cities and a highway. They were to photograph their targets and bring back accurate information on the extent of damage to property, to the earth itself, and to vital defense installations.

The seven aircraft, all from SAC, included three U-2s, two RB-47Ks, and the pair of B-58s. The first five of these are old hands at photo reconnaissance. SAC U-2 aircraft took photographs from the stratosphere during the Cuban crisis, giving the President irrefutable evidence of Soviet offensive missiles in the Western Hemisphere.

The U-2s and RB-47s were to cover all targets: Anchorage, Seward, Whittier, Valdez, Cordova, Kodiak, Gulkana, plus the highway from Gulkana to Seward. On that first day the B-58s—from SAC's 43d Bomb Wing at Carswell AFB, Tex.—were assigned to cover only Anchorage. It was their photographs—taken from 500 feet over the shattered streets—that touched the world.

(Continued on following page)



The day after the B-58 recon flights described in this article, two more SAC Hustlers flew to Alaska to photograph other hard-hit cities from low level. Above is the scene they found at Seward, a port city south of Anchorage. Oil storage tanks are still smoldering, upper right corner.

Left, wrecked fishing boats litter the ruined waterfront at Kodiak, Alaska, on an island down Cook Inlet from Anchorage. The March 27 earth shocks followed by tsunamis, or "tidal waves," caused heavy damage here and all along the coast. The photo was made by a SAC B-58 on March 29.

EARTHQUAKE!

CONTINUED

Why had SAC taken on the job of photographing Alaskan earthquake damage? The answer to that question tells the story of a SAC reconnaissance capability and how it came about. Even more, it shows how the inherent flexibility of manned aircraft can be used in unpredictable ways.

The Cuban crisis underscored the importance of high-quality, timely, reconnaissance photography. Accordingly, the decision was made to take advantage of the existing capability of the SAC manned bombers to improve our ability to take pictures, on short notice, anywhere on the globe.

SAC combat crews were already on alert twenty-four hours a day. SAC for years has been geared to get heavy aircraft in the air at a moment's notice—including high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft. SAC tankers are prepositioned to support bomber operations anywhere in the world. SAC, as a matter of routine, can fly to any spot on the face of the globe at almost any airspeed and altitude that a planner could desire. This capability is the basic ingredient in the free world's nuclear deterrent.

A global low-level recon capability for SAC was a normal outgrowth of SAC low-level operations with its high-performance B-47, B-52, and B-58 bombers. All types of SAC's bombers fly low-level training missions every day. All could reach any target in the world.

The B-58 was selected for good reasons, however. First, it had performance—the B-58 holds fourteen

world speed and altitude records. It can fly up to twice the speed of sound. It can fly either on the deck or in the stratosphere.

Second, it is adaptable. The B-58's external pod can be used to carry cameras as easily as fuel or weapons. Also, the B-58 is the smoothest flying aircraft in SAC's inventory. Its broad, delta wing gives it the best low-level ride of any bomber. This talent—a valuable asset in pinpoint, low-level bombing—also makes the B-58 an ideal low-level camera platform.

And finally, the B-58 is a relatively new aircraft, scheduled to stay in the SAC force into the future. The aircraft and their experienced combat crews can be depended upon to do the job.

All these factors made the B-58 the logical choice when in March 1963 SAC nominated the Hustler for the new global, low-level reconnaissance task.

In a rush program, low-level cameras were fitted to pods belonging to SAC's 43d Bomb Wing at Carswell. Then this entire wing of bombers was modified to use the new pods. First flight tests were made last November—less than nine months after Air Force approval of the plan.

These tests showed that the B-58 was a great camera aircraft. But further improvements were required to increase photo image sharpness. So in March of this year a second series of flight tests was given to the improved camera installation—with excellent results. The B-58 was ready to assume its new role.

(Continued on page 67)

At Carswell a pair of bombers was put on informal standby with camera pods attached. They were in addition to the 43d Bomb Wing's normal fifty percent ground alert.

That was the situation on March 27 when hell broke loose in Alaska.

At 7:30 p.m., Omaha time, Friday, March 27, the SAC Command Post at Offutt AFB, Neb., lost its wire circuits to Alaska. An immediate radio check with SAC units near Fairbanks told the SAC duty controller that something terrible was happening. But disaster or not, the SAC aircraft were safe and able to fly their missions. SAC quickly started to assess the damage and assist its distressed people in the quake area.

The next morning an exchange of telephone calls between Hq. Air Force and Hq. SAC resulted in a wired message that said, in part: REQUEST SAC ACCOMPLISH ON A PRIORITY BASIS AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE OF ALASKAN DISASTER AREAS AT SEWARD, KODIAK, VALDEZ, WHITTIER, CORDOVA, ANCHORAGE, AND HIGHWAY FROM GULKANA TO SEWARD. OBJECTIVE IS TO PROVIDE DAMAGE INFORMATION TO HQ. USAF AND HQ. ALASKAN AIR COMMAND. . . .

At 12:58 Central Time, SAC decided to use its B-58 aircraft. A rush call to Carswell sent the two alert crews to their wing operations for a special briefing. Within the next hour and forty-five minutes their mission was planned, the cameras loaded, and the aircraft inspected. At 3:00 p.m.—a scant two hours after the decision to go—the two special B-58s were airborne and on their way.

Five other SAC aircraft were also on their way to the quake areas. They were two U-2s from Eielson AFB near Fairbanks, Alaska; one U-2 from Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.; and two RB-47K aircraft from Forbes AFB, Kan. All but the B-58s were to photograph from high altitude.

High-altitude photography was to be difficult and spotty. A low hazy overcast was spread over the Alaskan coastal region. Some targets assigned to the U-2 and RB-47K aircraft were covered. Anchorage, in particular, was obscured by a layer of clouds at about 1,000 feet. This was the B-58's low-level specialty.

Speeding north, the two B-58s met their tankers on the Canadian border at about 4:30 p.m. local time. Weather at their 26,000-foot refueling altitude was good and the refueling was routine. Each bomber hooked up to a SAC KC-135 tanker from Minot AFB, N. D., and took on a fresh supply of jet fuel.

At 4:30 p.m., Alaska time, about twenty-four hours after the earthquake shattered Anchorage, the two B-58s swept in over the city's broken streets. They made five photo runs at 500 feet, under the overcast. The automatic cameras worked perfectly.

This was a difficult business. Mountains ringed the photo targets and the overcast made precision navigation a critical factor. But in minutes the bombers were in and out—heading back with their precious photographs.

One refueling and five hours later, at about 1:30 a.m., both B-58s dropped out of the black sky over Offutt and touched down to safety. In minutes the



Still alert after touchdown at Offutt AFB, one of the B-58 crews poses. From left they are Maj. Cosimo B. Mallozzi, Navigator, who is from South Barre, Mass.; Capt. Roger Gerrish, Defense Systems Operator, Brunswick, Me.; and Aircraft Commander Maj. John C. Kennon, Auburn, Calif.



Crew of the second B-58 in the earthquake reconnaissance mission included, from left, Capt. Robert J. Hill, Defense Systems Operator, of Madison, W. Va.; Lt. Richard F. Arens, Navigator, Grafton, N. D.; and Capt. I. M. Glass, Aircraft Commander, whose hometown is Independence, Mo.

cameras were unloaded and the film rushed to the high-speed processors of the 544th Aerospace Reconnaissance Technical Wing at Hq. SAC. It took just fourteen hours and thirty-eight minutes from the time SAC was told to do the job until the processed photographs were available.

A SAC T-39 jet Sabreliner had prints in Washington before 7:00 a.m. Monday.

On their flight the SAC B-58s flew a total of ten hours and twenty minutes, covering a round-trip distance of 5,741 miles.

The next day, two more B-58s from Carswell flew the entire mission over again, covering all seven targets—without a hitch.

What does this capability mean? It means that if, tomorrow, smoldering Communist subversion were to flare up in a remote spot on the globe, the US Air Force could have photographs of the scene taken from low level in a matter of hours. A B-58 reconnaissance aircraft could fly nonstop from its US base to the target and back again with little extra effort.

This is a mission that—like precision bombing of strange targets—can only be performed by an aircraft manned by skilled professionals.

SAC's photo recon of the Alaskan earthquake disaster area is a dramatic peacetime demonstration of the performance and versatility of our manned strategic forces.—END