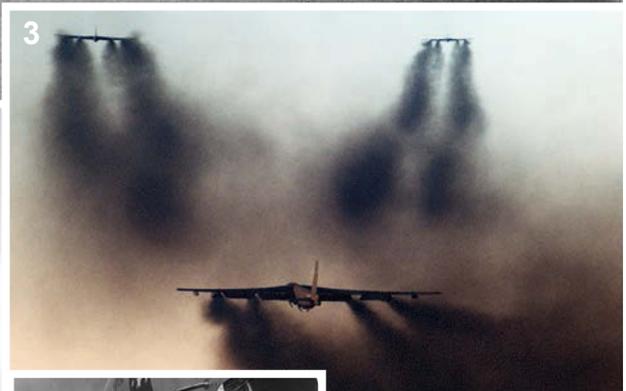


Scramble



USAF photos



1: B-52 alert exercise at Fairchild AFB, Wash.

2: B-58 crew scrambles.

3: BUFFs, in an alert exercise, get airborne.

4: B-47 alert crew boards its bomber.

It was an iconic Cold War scene: With klaxons blaring, USAF's "alert" aircrews dash madly—scramble, really—out of "mole holes" to their bombers, which roar into the air in close succession. In the mid-1950s, the US worried about a Soviet surprise attack on "sitting duck" aircraft. Strategic Air Command responded by putting many bombers and tankers on ground alert. The alert began on Oct. 1, 1957. A month later, the US announced SAC had aircraft at the end of runways, bombs loaded, and crews ready to "flush" all alert aircraft within 15 minutes. Eleven percent of SAC's 1,528 bombers and 766 tankers were on alert that year; by 1960, the figure was 33 percent. The alert continued for 34 years. In September 1991, with the Cold War at an end, President George H. W. Bush ordered the alert force to stand down.