B-52 bombers from the 5th Bomb Wing, Minot AFB, N.D., form up over Wyoming during a training mission.

Minot's 5th Bomb Wing keeps ancient B-52s combat ready.

Never-ending Stratofortress

Photography by Ted Carlson

fter nearly 50 years of ser- $\overline{}$ vice—the last one was delivered in 1962-the Air Force's B-52H Stratofortresses continue to serve as a critical element of the nation's long-range strike force. Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota is one of two homes for the B-52s. The other is Barksdale AFB, La. The only USAF bomber still capable of carrying nuclear cruise missiles, the B-52's size allows it to haul a massive ordnance load. I1I At Minot (I-r), TSgt. Kyle Bergstedt, TSgt. Jamie Mikus, TSgt. Shane Martin, and SrA. Ethan Payne download an octet of AGM-86B Air Launched Cruise Missiles from a B-52's bomb bay. With retirement of the stealthy AGM-129, the 1980s-vintage AGM-86 is the only nuclear cruise missile in USAF service. 121 A1C Jorge Miranda





works on a B-52 of the 69th Bomb Squadron. **I3I** A B-52H, engines turning, holds short for takeoff. **I4I** SrA. Alvyna Euta-Filo, SrA. John Williams, and A1C Justin Lowery of the 5th Operational Support Squadron at Minot prepare crew helmets in the life support shop.













III A 5th Bomb Wing B-52 co-pilot's view of refueling from a KC-135 tanker, somewhere over Montana. Aerial refueling is a critical aspect of any mission for the fuel-ravenous B-52, and must be practiced constantly. I2I Payne (I) and Martin download AGM-86Bs from a Common Strategic Rotary Launcher. I3I B-52s await a mission on the Minot ramp. Note the tail of one of the behemoths extend-

ing outside a hangar. **14I** Bristling with antennas, satellite communication domes, electro-optical systems, and electronic warfare blisters, a B-52 banks hard over Montana during a training mission. Wrinkles in the fuselage are a design feature to accommodate flex in the wings, which can be as much as a dozen feet, depending on the maneuver and the amount of fuel in the wings. **15I** B-52 co-pilot Capt. Brandon Wheeler maintains formation with another B-52H during a training mission over Montana. I1I Minot's fire emergency services flight puts out a burning simulated B-52 carcass during a "Broken Arrow" exercise. Broken Arrow refers to an accident involving nuclear weapons. I2I The mock B-52 is made of sturdy stuff and has "burned" countless times. I3I Fire trucks attack the mock burning BUFF with water. 141 Security forces SrA. Brent Thielemier (I) and SrA. Stephen Burt scramble to secure the perimeter around a simulated Broken Arrow during an exercise at Minot. 151 A Litening targeting pod on a B-52 wing is one of many new tools fitted to the bombers in the last decade. The pod permits the aircraft to designate targets for laser guided bombs. I6I Only the B-52 can carry the 750-pound M117 general-purpose bomb.























I1I A B-52H rests on the ramp at Minot. I2I Payne readies a rotary launcher rack of AGM-86Bs. I3I A lineup of B-52s, seemingly freshly painted. I4I A UH-1N Huey bearing security forces patrols the flight line. All aspects of nuclear weapons operations—especially security—have received a huge boost in the last few years. **I5I** "Beauty shot" of a Stratofortress cruising over Montana. The B-52 has always flown in a slightly nose-down attitude, giving it a sinister, shark-like look in the air. Originally built to house a crew member and a cannon, the extended tail now carries an array of electronic warfare systems meant to protect the airplane from ground and missile attack.

I1I A rotary launcher full of nuclear AGM-86Bs fills a B-52's bomb bay. The B-52 can deliver the widest range of weapons in the Air Force inventory. Many of their training versions are pictured on this page. 121 A submarine-killer sea mine designed to be dropped from a BUFF. ISI One of the B-52's newest weapons is the stealthy, conventional AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, or JASSM. I4I CBU-103 Wind-Corrected Munitions Dispenser cluster bombs. 151 Designed to get at deeply buried targets, the 5,000-pound GBU-28 bunker buster was hastily developed during the 1991 Gulf War. I6I The GBU-38 500-pound version of the satellite guided Joint Direct Attack Munition. 171 The ADM-160 Miniature Air Launched Decoy, meant to fool enemy radars; it can also protect fighters operating the same area.

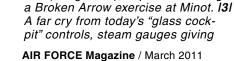












III Looking like something out of

to the B-52's 50-year-plus his-

"Antiques Roadshow" and attesting

tory, this co-pilot's control yoke has

personnel, including SrA. Alex Bal-

lard (foreground), in position during

weathered countless missions but gets the job done. I2I Security forces

status on each of the B-52's eight engines still dominate the aircraft's "front office." 141 Mikus (background) and Bergstedt position a loader to take an ALCM out of a B-52's bomb bay. 151 The well-worn throttles of the B-52-the only jet aircraft flying today with eight engines—belie long and honorable service, but many years of duty still lie ahead. Air Force plans call for retaining the

B-52 as a "standoff" platform for an-other 30 years, meaning the grandchildren of today's B-52 pilots could fly the same machines as front-line combat aircraft—not as air show or museum pieces.

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