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AIC Kenneth E. Brannon, Missile Maintenance Technician of Strategic Air Command's Titan Combat Missile Crew at Lowry tells his story of Air Force Technical Training on Page ATC 10.

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Serving With a Missile Crew Offers Challenge, Adventure

By A1C KENNETH E. BRANNON

(See Photo, Page ATC 1)

"MLO, THIS IS MMT. Request clearance to fuel terminal." A green light indicates no explosive hazard inside. A "blast" door opens. It closes again when the two men pass through. For safety, there is always a two-man buddy team in danger areas.

A maze of gauges and indicators give a full reading on fuel levels, pressures, valves, gaseous contamination. Everything checks. You move to another level. Another clearance check with the Missile Launch Office. More readings and calibrations on the sub cooling of LOX (liquid oxygen). The clearance and checklist process is repeated on other equipment in the silos, topside, and power house.

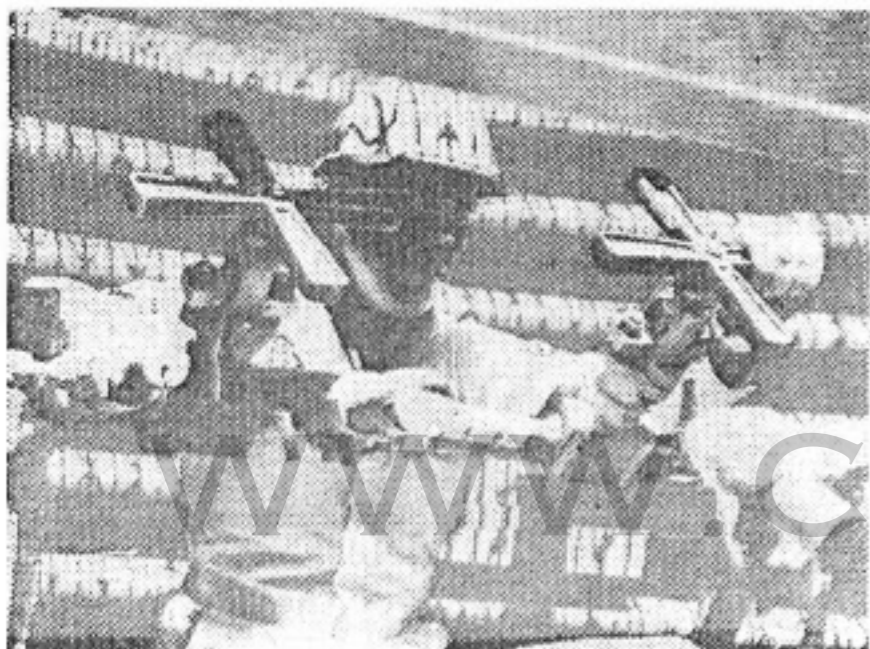
It takes four hours to run a full check at a Titan Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Site.

Four years ago I had no thought of being part of a combat ready missile crew. Doloris, my wife, and I were living in Miami Beach. I was 21, a grocery warehouse foreman, inexperienced. We now live comfortably in a Denver, Colorado, apartment close to Lowry. From here, I commute to the missile site as Missile Maintenance Technician on the six-man crew.

It has taken the best part of the four years to reach this status. They have been memorable years. Not all easy. Not all hard. Enough of a mixture to leave a lasting impression.

Choosing and following an Air Force career is largely a question of how you look at things. Being married, the choice was difficult.

Recruiting tests indicated placement in the



Fuel Storage Checkout

mechanical field. I had never dreamed these tests would eventually lead to missile duty. It didn't at first. What lay ahead was a long road of training and unusual circumstances.

With test scores and a little knowledge of Air Force life passed on by friends who preceded me, I arrived at the Air Force Basic Military Training Center at San Antonio, Texas.

To most, there is an abrupt awakening at Lackland. Most trainees are out from under the wing of parental guidance for the first time. The first two weeks may be described as a "shock treatment." You are kept on the go from the first strains of daylight until darkness and exhaustion demand sleep. At the end of five weeks, the normal stay at Lackland, you gain self-discipline. I think this is the most important aspect of basic training. It's something that rides with you and the need to call upon it is frequent. But this is a by-product, something you don't realize until you finish.

Finally, the day of assignments. Munitions school? It caught me by surprise. I couldn't connect my choice of mechanics with munitions. It wasn't a disappointment so much as being caught off guard like a play going around you in a ball game and having to rush to catch up with the play.

My rush was in the direction of Denver, to Lowry AFB, and Air Training Command schooling. It was December 20, 1959, a bad time for school assignment. Most classes shut down for the holidays and new arrivals wait. This waiting turned into my first break.

Missiles were being accepted by the Air Force in increasing numbers. The Thor, first IRBM, and the Atlas, first ICBM, had become operational. Titan and the Minuteman were in the first stages of test flight. People had to be trained and in a hurry. Unknowingly, I was to be one of the group.

Qualifying for Munitions and Weapons School also qualified me for another school. I was told by the first sergeant. There was an immediate opening. Would I be interested? "Training on the Mace Missile?" You bet.

Missiles sounded exciting and rewarding. Talk at Lackland had pointed to missiles as the coming thing. Training was at Lowry. After 37 weeks, I was a Mace Tactical Missileman. From here, I was to go with a TM-76 Mace crew to Orlando, Florida, next door to Miami and home. It was appealing — but for me, the summer of 1960 was not meant to be spent in Florida.

Again the summons to headquarters and the first sergeant's office. A new missile, the Titan 1, ICBM, was being developed and in the testing

stage. Training of Strategic Air Command crews had to begin if the men were to be ready when the missile became operational. New orders kept me at Lowry, and I was assigned to the 451st Strategic Missile Wing (ICBM-Titan).

The 18-week apprentice school started in September 1960, at Sheppard AFB, Texas.

Our class was the third to enter training at Sheppard. Instructors from defense industries conducted the school. The Air Force was later to take over all instruction. Intermixed in our class were some of the sergeants destined to enter this role. They took the identical course being given future crew members.

For the first time since completing the Mace course at Lowry, I could find reason for the diversion from tactical to strategic missiles. The former had reached its apex as a combat system. Strategic missiles were in the building stage and the fundamentals of missile maintenance received in the Lowry training had a direct relationship to the Titan apprentice course.

So rapid was the pace at times that continuity seemed to be lacking. When the 18 weeks ended however, those who made the course had a sound basic knowledge of ballistic missile maintenance. We felt we were qualified. We had the title — Missile Maintenance Technician. What we didn't know was that training had just begun.

March 5, 1961, Operational Readiness Training, Phase I, started at Vandenberg AFB, California. I think, perhaps, the training of our group was a little different from the present day schedule. Console checkout equipment was not installed at Sheppard for our class. It is now. This is a delicate system. There are hundreds of indicators. You have to know each of them intimately and without direct association with the equipment, there is hesitancy in operation. Phase I filled in the holes and a month later, the class returned to Lowry.

More training followed. This time it was practical training. We were assigned to the civilians, the test conductors and engineers at the site. Our work was over-the-shoulder type—observing, questioning, troubleshooting. It was valuable experience.

We went to work with them and got off with them. Ten-hour days were routine, including weekends. Familiarity with the site and equipment was to help immeasurably in the final phase of training — combat crew training.

It was back to Vandenberg. A year had elapsed since my first arrival at the west coast missile launch center. I was assigned to an 11-man crew before the crew structure was changed to six. Training during Phase I had been on installation checkout equipment. This was on total crew operation, the final act of placing all the training pieces into one puzzle. The full act of missile site operation, culminating in the ready-for-launch position, was the goal. Malfunctions of all types were purposely placed into the console by instructors. My job was to correlate the console malfunction with the checkout system, find the source and type of trouble and get it fixed. It's a six-man operation and the reason for Operational Readiness Training.

The first site, 4A, became operational April 18, 1962. Our crew was formed the month prior and declared combat ready three months later.

Our crew is now the Senior Combat Crew of the 724th Strategic Missile Squadron. On-site shift is 24 hours. It is not a sit-and-wait job. Each missile, each launch area, powerhouse, fuel storage, equipment and propellant terminal must be inspected daily. In a five-story deep installation, it takes time.

Hours are long but the job is rewarding. Advancement has been steady and the future looks bright. Prestige also goes along with the job but training and sense of accomplishment are the big factors.

Had I chosen a similar profession in civilian life, cost of training would have been beyond my means. It's something I like and hope to stay with. Now, after four years, I still feel like a babe in the woods. You only learn a small portion of the missile at one time. No one in the crew claims to know the whole system. And, after a particularly hard shift, you sometimes wonder why you keep looking forward to extending yourself more and more into the intricacies of missile work.

It is hard on Doloris. Our work hours don't always coincide. As a result, some of our limited time that should be spent together is lost. The schedule isn't to her liking but she considers it necessary. There is contact if anything goes wrong at home. A family service system is set up for this. Home problems don't worry me while on duty. Everything is taken care of.

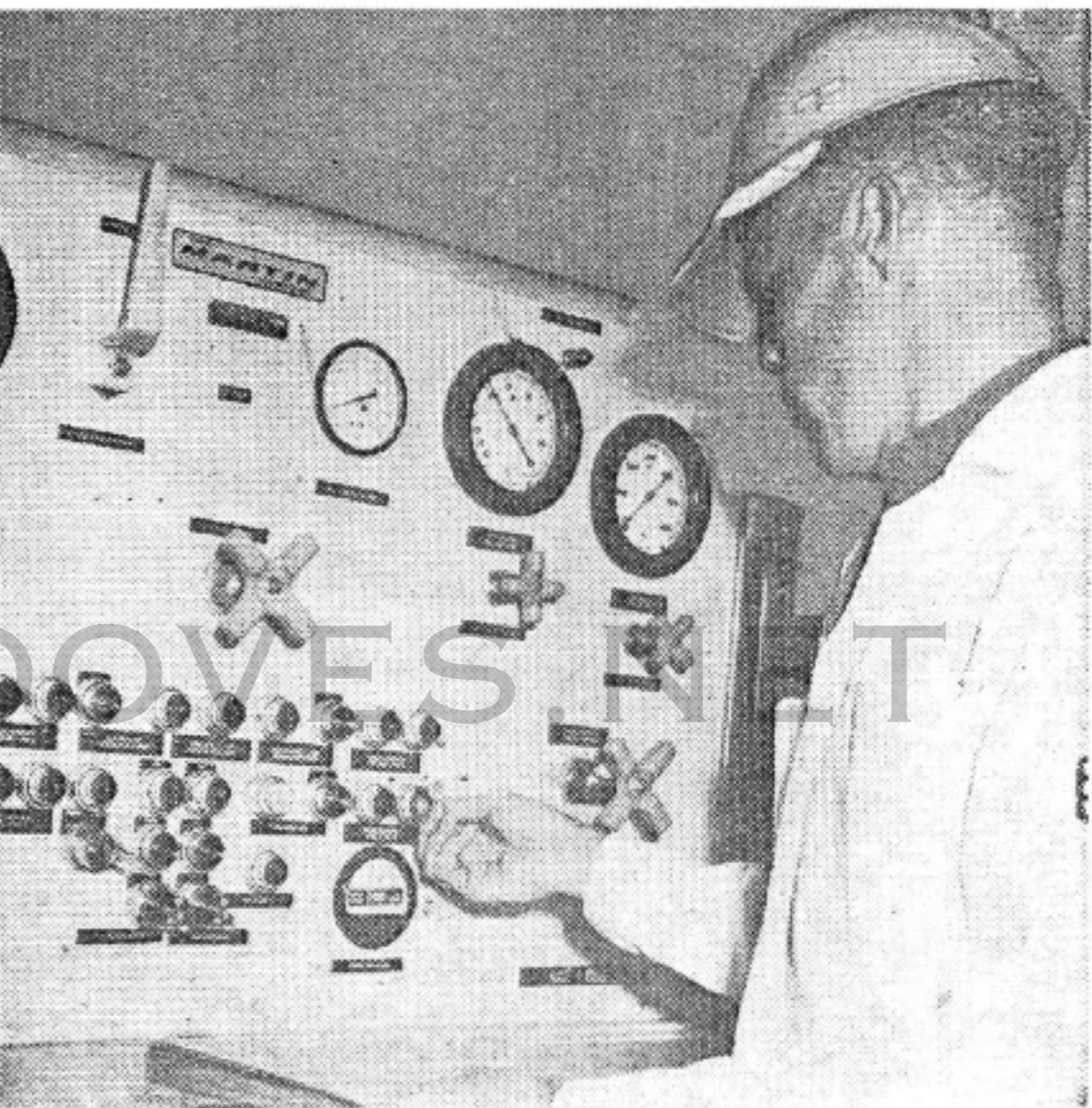
In my own way, I feel my work at the SAC missile site provides the same sense of security for many others.



"MLO, this is MMT Brannon"



... Fuel Intake System



... Hydraulics, Ground Life for the Bird