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HISTORY OF THE AIR FORCE FLIGHT TEST CENTER: 1 JULY 1962 – 1 DECEMBER 1962

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AIR FORCE FLIGHT TEST CENTER
EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE,
CALIFORNIA

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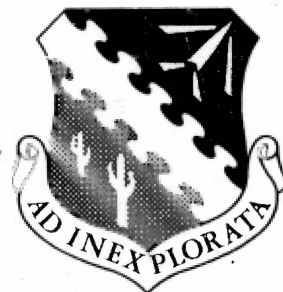
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Chapter 5

THE CUBAN CRISIS

Center activity during the Cuban situation beginning 22 October was limited somewhat to the first nine days of the crisis. On the first day immediately following receipt of Defense condition (DEFCON) III from Air Force Systems Command, General Branch put in motion the applicable portions of his War Capabilities Plan. Concurrently, his Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Colonel Clay Tice, alerted center personnel who were most concerned with Strategic Air Command aircraft dispersal support. In addition, all key personnel who held responsibilities under the Centers War Capabilities Plan for emergencies, security, and evacuation were called together and briefed on the general situation.

Strategic Air Command dispersed four B-47's, a C-47, and 18 support personnel to the Center that first day. The small contingent set up a command post and were ready for emergency war operations.

The second, third, and fourth days turned somewhat routine with General Branch and his staff keeping an eye on the Cuban situation while reviewing the Center's emergency capability and readiness posture. On the fifth day or 26 October, General Branch conducted a series of tests for

General Schreiver to determine the effect of supersonic booms on missile check out equipment. Center pilots flew a T-38, an F-104, and an F-106 at maximum allowable speeds directly over the check out electronic gear with no appreciable effect on the devices. From these tests and contact with others having performed sonic boom tests, General Branch concluded that the possibility of a sonic boom knocking out missile launch site mechanisms was very remote.¹ Had it been possible to disable missiles by the sonic boom tactic, however, it probably would have been tried against Russian missiles in Cuba if the need arose.

Twenty-one specialists left the Center on 28 October for the Florida area where thousands were poised for the invasion of Cuba. The 21 consisting of an officer and nine airmen from the Center and 11 from the 6511th Test Group (Parachute) were skilled in such fields as transportation, intelligence, operations, and aircraft loading. Temporary duty loss of these personnel had no adverse affect upon the flight test mission nor on the quality of support furnished other commands. However, the 6511th curtailed five test projects during the week of 29 October for lack of qualified loadmasters.

The ninth and final day (30 October) of any consequence was marked by arrival of Military Air Transport

Service C-135's at the Center carrying emergency war supplies as part of that command's emergency dispersal program. The Military Air Transport Service at one time planned to disperse two C-135 squadrons and 1,500 personnel at the Center to provide a continuous air fleet operation under emergency war conditions. But their requirement for dispersal lessened as the Cuban situation abated.

Strategic Air Command's B-47's departed for their home station 24 November, the strategic command post closed, and Strategic Air Command Operations at the Center terminated officially on 26 November. On 28 November, Air Force Systems Command changed the Centers Defense Condition III to DEFCON V or normal.²

Although Center personnel became concerned about the Cuban crisis as announced by President John F. Kennedy on 22 October, the situation was accepted without alarm and the flight test mission continued routinely. In nearby Los Angeles following the President's speech, food markets were swamped with customers buying up stocks, but the Edwards Commissary Officer, Captain Charles R. Hall, noticed only a mild run on canned items. Perhaps fear of an atomic war erupting out of the crisis was allayed by the comforting knowledge that the Borax Mine Fallout Shelter was just 18 miles away. Reliance in that 150 miles of tunnel for protection was a

part of the Center's War Plan. Center personnel spear-headed by Major Thomas Kirk the Center Disaster Control Officer in conjunction with the United States Borax Company and nearby civilian communities had joined and worked together over the past two years to make the mine livable and to stock it. The 25 foot square entrance to the main artery was 300 feet below the surface in an open pit. The Center's living area was almost $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles inside the mine and was equipped with watering stations, a command post, hospital, and dried foods.

Chapter 5

NOTES

1. Attachment #6 to Ltr., Hq AFFTC (FTNH) to AFSC (SCEH), 29 Nov 1962, Subj: Documentation of Current Contingency. SD PP. Vol 5.
2. Msg., AFSC to ALAFSC-CP-SCGC-28-11-55, 28/1547Z Nov 62.