

FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, BOMBER ALERT FACILITY
(Building No. 2080)
803G South Taxi Way
Spokane vicinity
Spokane County
Washington

HAER No. WA-134-B

HAER
WASH
32-SPOK.V
1B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Columbia Cascades Support Office
National Park Service
909 First Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104-1060

**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE,
BOMBER ALERT FACILITY (BUILDING NO. 2080)**

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WASH
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HAER No. WA-134-B

Location: Fairchild Air Force Base, Building No. 2080, 803G South Taxi Way,
Spokane County, Washington
UTMs: Easting - 11-452750 Northing - 11-5274905

Date of Construction: 1959

Builder: United States Army Corps of Engineers

Architect: Leo A. Daly Co., St. Louis, Omaha, Seattle

Present Owner: United States Air Force, Fairchild Air Force Base

Present Use: Offices, Life Support

Significance: The Bomber Alert Facility at Fairchild Air Force Base is significant at the national level for its association with the American military policy of vigilance and deterrence during the Cold War years. During this period, which lasted roughly from the conclusion of World War II until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, supported by Western NATO allies, waged a war of ideology and military threat which dominated the headlines, the economies, and the minds of millions of people. As an arms race developed, the most ominous aspect of these years was the possibility of nuclear war, particularly on the part of the U.S. and the Soviets. Deterrence through the threat of mutually assured destruction was the goal of both sides. An important element of this policy was to maintain a first strike possibility or, at the least, rapid response capability. The Bomber Alert Facility represented the front line in this policy, where constant readiness was maintained. Needless to say, this facility and its crews never had to exercise its prime directive which, perhaps, is an indication of the success of the deterrence policy.

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INTRODUCTION

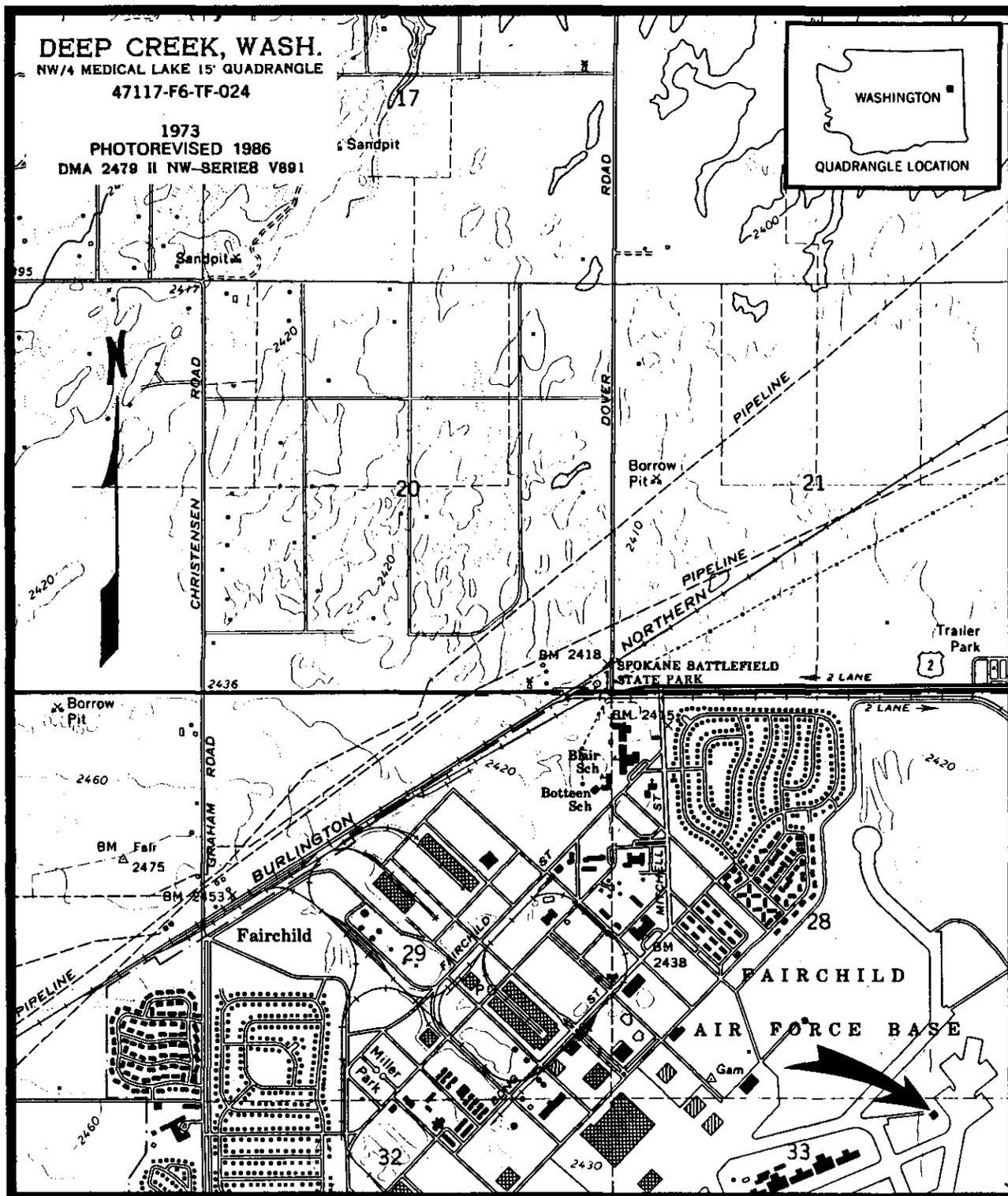
The Bomber Alert Facility, Fairchild Air Force Base Building No. 2150, was constructed in 1959. From that year until The Strategic Air Command (SAC) was reorganized in the early 1990s, it played a major role in the United States' Cold War policy of the containment of Communism and the deterrence of enemy attack through the maintenance of a nuclear threat. Basically, this building was where B-52 pilots and crews were housed so that they would be available at a moments notice in case of nuclear alert. Inclined, enclosed exit ramps on each side of the building allowed crews to quickly get to nearby B-52s and tanker support craft. Between 1991 and 1994, during which time the primary mission of Fairchild Air Force Base changed from bomber assault to logistical support, the building was converted to office space.

The Bomber Alert Facility was constructed to be resistant to a certain measure of enemy attack. As it was originally designed, it was a rectangular, two-story, concrete block bunker partially shielded by a surrounding earthen berm. Inclined ramps enclosed by round metal culverts ascended from all sides of the building's lower level. Inside the building were dormitory units and other rooms which provided for the everyday needs of the men as well as support for their mission. Over the years, alterations were made to the building, the most extensive changes occurring in 1989, when the structure was given further protection by the raising of the earthen berm, the construction of additional access ramps, and the installation of poured concrete retaining walls which enclosed the exits in the bulkheads of the inclined ramps.

Although this building does not meet the requirements of the fifty year threshold for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of historic-period structures, it was granted special consideration as a primary element of the historic context of the Cold War. Since the collapse of Communism in many parts of the world, including in the Soviet Union where the most dangerous threat was perceived to be, Cold War associated structures in the United States have undergone alterations in their functions and many are now deemed to be obsolete. Although the context within which they can be interpreted is relatively recent in time, it is imperative that these buildings be documented as to their appearance and significance before this part of our historic heritage is lost. The Bomber Alert Facility is scheduled to be demolished in the near future.

STRUCTURE DESCRIPTION AND FUNCTION

The construction of the Fairchild Air Force Base Bomber Alert Facility was completed in November 1959. When the architectural drawings were produced in the spring of 1958, the structure was referred to as the Readiness Crew Building. The facility underwent several modifications over the years, the most extensive being that of 1989, when raised earth berms were placed around the structure, retaining walls were added, and additional access ramps were built. The purpose of the



Location of Bomber Alert Facility, Building No. 2080, Fairchild Air Force Base.

facility remained the same, however, during the period of significance, which extended from the 1959 construction date until 1994, by which time SAC had been reorganized and B-52 bombers had been removed from the base. The function of the Bomber Alert Facility was to house the crews of bombers and fuel tankers at a location where they could take flight at a moments notice. Inside the building were sleeping quarters, dining, sanitation, and recreation areas, as well as a debriefing room and communications facilities. The building was constructed of concrete block for durability and placed partially underground to give it a low profile and further protection. Access to the outside was provided by round corrugated metal culverts through which flight crews could dash when ordered to their planes.

The original building, as designed in 1958, was a two-story concrete block structure, with poured concrete foundation and floors. The lower level was situated underground, partly through excavation into the ground surface and partly by the placement of earthen berms about six feet above the natural ground surface elevation. The footprint of the building was roughly rectangular, measuring approximately 80 feet by 110 feet. The lower level had a structural depth of about 12 feet, while the upper level had a height of about 13 feet. The built up tar and gravel roof was nearly flat, but was given a very slightly pitched gable form which provided for drainage. The perimeter of the roof was lined with a metal fascia.

When the Bomber Alert Facility was first built, the northeast elevation, facing the flight line, was considered to be the front of the building (see photograph WA-134-B-20). The adjacent portion of the flight line was referred to as the Christmas Tree because its shape, with craft docking paths angled into the main flight line, created a configuration reminiscent of a triangular conifer tree. The buildings front elevation featured one round culvert entry, accessing the lower level at the center of the structure, and three rectangular entries which accessed the second level at the level of the raised earthen berm. The rectangular entries had double metal doors, with louvers, which accessed flat-roofed vestibules which extended about four feet from the main structure and were about nine feet square. Each of these non-culvert entries was provided with an inclined poured concrete ramp on the exterior of the building.

When it was first built, the Bomber Alert Facility had a total of six round culvert entries, two on each of the northeast and southwest elevations and one each on the northwest and southeast elevations (see photograph WA-134-B-21). Each was about 35 feet long and 9 feet in diameter, leading from the lower level of the main structure to ground level. They were set at a 10 degree slope. All featured concrete walkway ramps with steel pipe handrails (not installed until 1960) and had two-foot-square corrugated plastic windows and gravity roof ventilators at the upper end. Each was situated partially underground, beneath the raised earthen berms that surrounded the main structure. At the exit to the exterior, each one of these enclosed ramps was capped with a poured concrete bulkhead fitted with double steel doors that had wired-glass windows and metal louvers.

In the original architectural drawings, the northwest side of the Bomber Alert Facility was referred to as the left elevation (see photograph WA-134-B-20). This side of the building featured two lower

level round culvert entries, partially covered by an earthen berm, and one central rectangular entry access to the upper level which was similar to those of the northeast side. The appearance of the northwest elevation was a mirror image of the southeast, which is referred to in the original drawings as the right elevation (see photograph WA-134-B-20).

The southwest side of the Bomber Alert Facility was called the rear elevation in the original drawings (see photograph WA-134-B-20). This is where elements of the utility support system were visible (see photograph WA-134-B-19). Components connected to the lower level mechanical room which were visible on this side of the building include the concrete exhaust stack, a large metal louver, and the exhaust fan outlet. The below-ground mechanical room extended out from the main structure and was covered on the outside by a concrete dock area. Another concrete dock area, covered by a flat-roofed metal canopy, extended along the side of the southwest elevation to the east of the mechanical room area. One set of double rectangular metal entry doors, similar to those on the rest of the building, but lacking the vestibule, accessed this dock area. To the west of the mechanical room area was an open rectangular entry which accessed a utility corridor within which were double rectangular metal doors which allowed entry into the building interior. The southwest elevation also had a single round culvert entry identical to those of the other sides.

The interior room configuration of the Bomber Alert Facility, as originally designed and built, was delineated by interior concrete block walls. Basically, the plan consisted of two multiple-room levels, with round culvert entry/exits on the lower level and rectangular double metal door entry/exits on the upper level. The two interior levels were connected only at one point, a concrete block-enclosed stair well at the center of the building. The poured concrete steps were arranged in two sets of double flights which doglegged back on each other. They were equipped with steel pipe handrails. The stairs were serviced by steel doors with latticed metal ports and metal louvers.

The interior space configuration of the lower level, as originally built, consisted of two parallel primary corridors, oriented northwest to southeast, and a central southwest to northeast corridor which accessed the central stair well (see photograph WA-134-B-22). At either end of those corridors was a metal culvert exit ramp. Most of the lower level consisted of bedrooms having a sleeping capacity of two and three (see photograph WA-134-B-14). The mechanical room, which housed most utilities fixtures, was located on the southwest side. Also located on the lower level were two toilets (see photograph WA-134-B-15), one for officers and one for airmen, drinking fountains, and several small utility rooms, at least one of which was used for laundry (see photograph WA-134-B-17). Lower and upper level rooms were accessed by metal doors, some of which had latticed metal ports and metal louvers.

The interior spaces of the upper level were situated around a main northwest to southeast corridor, which could be accessed by the central stair well, and several perpendicular secondary corridors (see photograph WA-134-B-23). Most of the upper level rooms were common-use facilities. They included the following: offices, storage rooms, weapons room, communications rooms, control room, security room, separate airmen's and officer's lounges (see photograph WA-134-B-18) with

cards and television sections, separate airmen's and officer's dining rooms, separate airmen's and officer's restrooms, kitchen and pantry, library, and a briefing room (see photograph WA-134-B-16) with projection booth. Access to outside was provided by double sets of metal doors.

ALTERATIONS

Following completion of the Bomber Alert Facility in November 1959, only minor alterations of the structure were undertaken until 1966. These included changes to the heating and air conditioning systems and such ephemeral things as the installation of towel racks, light fixtures, and sinks. The first major changes to the building were undertaken in 1966 and completed in May. This work involved adding three covered entry walkways and a new addition to the building (see photograph WA-134-B-24). The new walkways, which were later removed, consisted of metal frame enclosures which covered existing poured concrete ramps which were inclined at a 10 degree angle. These walkways were installed at the central upper-level entries on the northwest and southeast sides of the building and at the northernmost upper-level entry of the northeast side. The new walkways were accessed by double sets of metal doors with wired glass windows. The new addition, constructed of concrete block, was attached to the southernmost corner of the existing building at the height of the upper level. It added 770 square feet of space to what was then the dining area. This addition is still visible and contains the only glass windows (fixed metal sash) which allow a view outside the building.

Following the 1966 alterations, only minor changes were made at the Bomber Alert Facility until a major renovation took place in 1989. The minor alterations included the installation of a hot tub on the lower level in 1983. Alterations of the building's appearance and plan in 1989 were extensive, but the function of the structure did not change. The 1989 renovation primarily altered the building's exterior look. Changes included the installation of a new roof, the emplacement of more formidable earthen berms, and the addition of new round culvert entries and concrete retaining walls (see photographs WA-134-B-25 and WA-134-B-26).

The 1989 renovation of the Bomber Alert Facility gave it the exterior appearance that it exhibits at the present (1999). A hipped metal roof replaced the previous nearly flat built-up roof. A wide metal fascia, with vertically corrugated texture, was placed around the building, giving the appearance of a mansard roof. Metal shed roofs, also with metal fascia, were placed over the various entry vestibules. Three new round culvert entries were installed, bringing the total of these to nine. The three new passages access the upper level of the building and are similar in design and scale to the older passages, with flat concrete ramps, pipe hand rails, and double sets of metal exit doors with ventilation louvers.

The most dramatic change in the post-1989 appearance of the Bomber Alert Facility resulted from the creation of higher earthen berms around the building. This was presumably done to give the structure further protection from peripheral damage in the case of enemy assault. The outcome is

that the original concrete block building is now largely obscured by grass-covered and landscaped earth on all sides except the southwest. These berms are partially contained, on three sides, by poured concrete retaining walls which also provide stabilization for the bulkheads at the end of the round culvert passages. The new configuration of these passages following the 1989 renovation is as follows: on the northwest side there are two ramps from the lower level and one from the upper; on the northeast side there is one from the lower level (see photograph WA-134-B-8) and one from the upper level; on the southeast side there are two from the lower level (see photographs WA-134-B-9 and WA-134-B-10) and one from the upper level; and on the the southwest side there is still only one from the lower level. All of the passages leading from the upper level were built during the 1989 renovation. The circular bulkheads of all of these passages are currently painted a contrasting color to differentiate them from the concrete of the retaining walls. Except for the exit on the southwest side, all of these passages are now covered by the heightened earthen berms.

On the northwest side, the new retaining wall gives the appearance that this is now the front facade of the building (see photographs WA-134-B-1, WA-134-B-5, WA-134-B-6, and WA-134-B-7). This is due to the pedimented parapet of the concrete retaining wall which is situated above the central entry. Additionally, the bulkhead of this central entry has been cut out to create semi-circular side lights on both sides of the double metal entry doors. This central ramp is an upper level access passage and utilizes the original central upper level exit and vestibule. With the raising of the berm, only the roof of the vestibule is now visible. When the 1989 renovation took place, a chain link fence with cedar privacy strips was installed to the right of the retaining wall on the northwest side enclosing an area for utility purposes including outdoor equipment storage and garbage disposal. At a later date this fence was replaced with the current poured concrete walls.

On the northeast side, the poured concrete retaining wall contains the earth berm and encloses the bulkheads of the round culvert exits (see photographs WA-134-B-4 and WA-134-B-5). The new (1989) enclosed ramp from the upper level utilizes the original vestibule at the north end of this side. Only the roof of the vestibule is now visible. The other vestibules of this side remain intact.

On the southeast side, there are three round culvert exits, also covered by a heightened earthen berm and with the concrete bulkheads enclosed by a poured concrete retaining wall (see photographs WA-134-B-2 and WA-134-B-3). The central exit descends from the upper level of the building, utilizing the original vestibule of which only the roof is now visible. To the left of the culvert ramps, the 1966 dining room addition, with windows, is visible.

The southwest side of the Bomber Alert Facility underwent the least change during the 1989 renovation (see photographs WA-134-B-1 and WA-134-B-2). No ramps accessing the upper level were added. The remaining lower level access ramp was given a box-like poured concrete retaining wall enclosing the original round bulkhead. To the left of the northernmost entry, the concrete retaining wall of the utility space wraps around to contain the heightened earthen berm of the northwest side of the building. Otherwise the configuration of the concrete stack, the mechanical room, ventilation louvers, and upper level entries remained the same following the 1989 renovation.

Also unchanged was the elevated dock area. The canopy above this, however, was given a new roof with the wide metal fascia of the rest of the building.

Architectural drawings for the 1989 renovation do not include changes to the configuration of the Bomber Alert Facility's interior. Since the purpose and function of the building did not change, it is likely no major alterations were undertaken. The interior configuration was extensively altered, however, following the reorganization of SAC in the early 1990s, and the suspension of B-52 activity at Fairchild Air Force Base. After that, the Bomber Alert Facility was just another building, albeit one with an unusual semi-subterranean appearance. Therefore, the interior of the building was remodeled for use as offices. Some areas retained much of their original configuration. Restrooms (divided into male and female instead of officers and airmen), the mechanical room, and the central stairwell remained in the same places. On the lower level, some dormitory spaces were combined to create larger office spaces, but the hallway door configuration remained the same (see photographs WA-134-B-12 and WA-134-B-13). A number of the original metal doors of the lower level remain intact. Wooden doors of this level, and of the upper level, are recent. On the upper level, alterations were more extensive because of the more irregular room configuration. Some of the larger spaces, such as the lounges and the briefing room, were subdivided into smaller office spaces. Part of the dining area became a hallway/foyer and the rest was made into offices. Major changes in the appearance of the interior rooms of both levels resulted from the installation of lower acoustical ceilings, wall to wall carpeting, and fabric covering on the wall surfaces (see photograph WA-134-B-11). Upright drinking fountains remain in the same positions called for in the original architectural drawings; several of these may be the original units.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Bomber Alert Facility is associated with the second major phase of operations at Fairchild Air Force Base. The first phase was related to air combat operations during World War II. During the second phase, the base housed and maintained B-52 bombers and operated as a major component of the nuclear deterrence element of the Cold War. Currently, during the third phase, the base functions as a logistical support unit, primarily housing and maintaining refueling tankers.

Fairchild Air Force Base has its origins in an Army Air Corp repair depot constructed west of Spokane in the early 1940s. The selected location was in a vicinity long referred to as the Spokane Plains, where a skirmish between regional Indian tribes and a military expedition led by Colonel George Wright occurred in 1858. A monument memorializing this event can be seen near the present site of the Air Force Base. Following white settlement of the area, the land was put to agricultural use. Early settlers referred to the vicinity as White Bluff Prairie, perhaps because most arrived on a trail that originated at White Bluffs, the head of navigation on the Columbia River. The trail was one of the earliest direct road links to Spokane. Farms in the vicinity tended to be only marginally successful, plagued by persistent strong winds and a lack of water. Growers attempted to establish a fruit orchard industry, devising a grandiose plan to irrigate the land with

water diverted from nearby Silver Lake. But the lake did not replenish itself as expected. In 1922, after Silver Lake had been reduced to a mere pond, the irrigation plan was abandoned and the orchards were returned to grain fields. Another problem for early farmers in this area was a lack of transportation. This situation was resolved when the Great Northern Railroad was built through the vicinity in 1891. In 1892, a new station, called Galena, was established along this route. For many years farmers in the Spokane Plains area brought their grain here to be shipped to market. In 1941, it was part of the location chosen for the proposed Army Air Corps repair depot.

The year 1941 was a pivotal year for Spokane and the nation at large. Much of the country was still in the grip of the Great Depression. Spokane had been decreasing in population and business growth was at a standstill. Looming was the prospect of American involvement in the widening conflict that had begun in Europe in 1939. In response to the volatile international situation, the United States Army moved to strengthen its air defenses. At that time the Air Force did not exist as a separate command; airborne units operated under the auspices of the Army Air Corps. Perceiving that airplane repair would become a serious consideration in the near future, the Army proposed to build four repair depots at strategic points within the United States. Such contracts were much coveted by American cities, for they promised an economic boom to those communities selected, a ticket out of the Depression.

Through the active lobbying and financial support of local boosters, including politicians and businessmen, Spokane was selected as the site of the new depot. It provided work for local contractors and created a payroll of at least \$8,000,000, which gave the community a huge economic lift (for further information on how Spokane secured the depot project refer to HAER No. WA-134-A). The depot project continued to grow in size, surpassing all expectations. At its peak the facility employed 10,000 civilians, with a yearly payroll of \$22,000,000. By January of 1943 the project was nearing completion. It included 97 industrial buildings, 15 hospital buildings, and 150 barracks structures. The depot was used heavily throughout WWII, servicing aircraft from both theaters of the war. Following that conflict, the depot continued to be an important factor in the new order following the Allied victory. Tensions generated by the Cold War drove its continued use. In 1947, the United States Air Force was created as a separate command. The repair depot and airfield were transferred to the Fifteenth Air Force unit. In 1951, the name of the facility was officially changed to Fairchild Air Force Base, in honor of General Muir S. Fairchild, an officer who had recently died while on duty. By 1947, the B-17 bomber was largely replaced by the new B-29 bombers and, following 1950, B-36 bombers were serviced at the base. The big propeller driven craft were becoming obsolete, however, destined to be replaced by jet propelled planes like the B-52.

In 1953, the repair depot was decommissioned. Thereafter, until the tensions of the Cold War diminished, Fairchild Air Force Base functioned primarily as a facility for long range bombers. After the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear bomb test in 1949, a nuclear arms race developed. As atomic weapons of greater and greater destructive potential were developed and

the means of delivering them were improved, the specter of nuclear holocaust became a real possibility. Nations with nuclear capability enlarged their arsenals, especially the two major proponents of the opposing ideologies of Communism and Capitalism, the Soviet Union and the United States. Although numerous attempts were made to regulate and limit the expansion of nuclear weapons systems, the Cold War was a period of frequent saber-rattling. The primary threat in this conflict was the bomb itself. The overlying strategy was one of mutually assured destruction and the threat of nuclear war as a deterrent.

In early 1956, the United States exploded the first air-borne H-bomb in the Pacific, opening up the possibility of these weapons being delivered by the long-range B-52 bomber. Although the intercontinental ballistic missile would become the primary means of potential nuclear attack, the B-52 delivered H-bomb became a major factor in America's nuclear weapons policy. It represented a particularly human aspect of that policy, one in which individual human decision making accompanied the weapon from deployment to ground zero.

Installations such as the Bomber Alert Facility at Fairchild were the front line of American military policy during the Cold War. Because of its importance, a veil of secrecy was maintained over its construction and operation. When it was completed in late 1959, no articles appeared in the local Spokane newspapers. The base newspaper, *The Fairchild Times*, also reported nothing. Architectural drawings, on file at Fairchild Air Force Base, indicate that the plans were produced in 1958 by "Leo A. Daly Company, Architects and Engineers, St. Louis, Omaha, Seattle." The work was accomplished by the Army Corps of Engineers and the district engineer is identified on the drawings as D.G. Hammond. Architectural drawings for the major 1989 renovation are less clear on who designed the project and accomplished the work. The job seems to have been at least supervised by engineers of the Strategic Air Command, including base engineer F.L. Zitterkopf.

The daily routine at the Bomber Alert Facility centered around the lives of the officers and crewmen stationed there and a regime of rigorous training. Much of the training took place in the briefing room, which was furnished with rows of chairs, chalk boards, movie projector, and a viewing screen. In addition, crews participated in numerous exercises in their B-52 bombers and KC-135 tankers. Fortunately, they never had to complete the mission for which they were trained, delivery of armed nuclear warheads to the Soviet Union.

The Bomber Alert Facility was designed to house 70 men. On a normal day this amounted to seven bomber crews and four tanker crews. During times of alert, however, or when training exercises were in progress, this number rose. Other than their extensive preparation to execute their duty, the lives of the men stationed at the Bomber Alert Facility was pretty mundane. To provide relief from the tedium, crews occupied the building in shifts, usually seven days on and five days off. Sleeping quarters consisted of two- and three-man units provided with single beds, nightstands and, usually, free-standing metal lockers. One photograph shows drapes hung on the outside walls, giving the illusion that there might be something behind them besides the bleak

concrete blocks (see photograph WA-134-B-14). Restrooms (see photograph WA-134-B-15), separated for officers and crewmen, provided toilet stalls, urinals, sinks, showers and, in later years, a hot tub. Laundry facilities were small and cramped (see photograph WA-134-B-17). Occupants took their meals in separate dining rooms, one for officers and one for crewmen. Leisure hours were spent in the officer's and crewmen's lounge areas. An historic photograph shows a lounge room with a checkered tile floor furnished with a pool table, snack vending machines, pin ball and video games, an ice machine, and wall tapestries (see photograph WA-134-B-18). Television viewing and card playing were evidently popular pastimes, with separate sections of both lounges devoted to these activities. The men were on call at all times.

By about 1990, the Soviet threat was dissipating and the danger of world-wide nuclear holocaust was perceived to be waning. In 1991 the Strategic Air Command (SAC) was reorganized into the Air Combat Command (ACC) which was in turn reorganized as the Air Mobility Command (AMC) in 1994. That year, the B-52s were withdrawn from Fairchild and the base became primarily a refueling tanker facility. The Bomber Alert Facility was therefore obsolete and it was converted for use as office space. It currently is staffed by members of the Life Support unit and is scheduled to be demolished in the near future.

SUMMARY

The Bomber Alert Facility is historically significant at the national level for its association with the international tensions of the post-WWII years, often referred to as the Cold War. Although this period was marked by numerous conflicts, small and large, in which traditional weaponry was used, it was the threat of atomic bomb warfare that was the defining element of those years. The Bomber Alert Facility represented the front line of airborne nuclear assault and was a major factor in the key strategy of deterrence through readiness. The design of this building directly reflects its use and, thus, is one of the most recognizable structures associated with the Cold War years.

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