

MINOT AFB

HISTORY WALK

Total Length: About 1 3/4 miles

Purpose: To give participants a general overview of Minot AFB History and to highlight a handful of interesting events and facts.

Note: If you did our Geo Scavenger Hunt in 2020, this history walk contains more than 50% new information.



By the **Minot Air Force Base Library**

Supporting the Air Force mission, education for all ages, and quality of life through information, resources, services, and programs

Minot AFB Library

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Updated June 2021

MAP/ROUTE



Notes: The History Walk can be completed all at once or be divided into two trips: Stops 1-10 and Stops 11-16.

The route is all on sidewalk with ramps and crosswalks (this is why the route doubles back). The alternative (Alt) routes include areas with no sidewalks, sidewalks without ramps, parking lot areas, and uncontrolled crosswalks, so they are not entirely recommended. You can see everything from a distance while staying on the main route.

STOP 16: 5 MSG HQ



The building that now houses the 5th Mission Support Group used to be the base dispensary. Until 1988, the base used the John Moses Air Force and Veteran's Hospital in town but had an on-base dispensary (pharmacy) and dental clinic. When the base was built, Minot already had a Veterans' Hospital, but it was underutilized, so Senator Milton Young suggested that the base use the existing hospital instead of building a new one.

At least one baby was born here at the dispensary! In January 1975, a blizzard trapped an expectant mother on base. When her labor started, she called for an ambulance. The ambulance picked up the expectant mother and a neighbor who was a nurse, but the EMTs discovered that the blizzard made Hwy 83 too hazardous to travel on, so they headed for the base dispensary emergency room instead. They arrived just in time, and a healthy baby was delivered by the neighbor/nurse at the dispensary.

In the late 1980's, a new hospital was built just outside of the base, and the building in town was demolished. The new 857th Strategic Hospital opened in April 1988 and was located just outside the fence so that it could be easily used by veterans as well as Air Force personnel. Later, the hospital was enclosed onto the base and became a clinic.



STOP 15: MINUTEMAN III



The construction of Minot AFB's missile field started in January 1962. 455th Strategic Missile Squadron activated on Nov. 1st, 1962 as did the 740th Strategic Missile Squadron. The 741st and 742nd activated on the following Dec. 1st and Jan. 1st. Minot AFB's first Minuteman I missile arrived on Sept. 5, 1963 and was emplaced 3 days later. The last Minuteman missile was emplaced on 26 Feb 1964, and the 455th SMW was declared combat-ready on April 17, 1964. The 455th Strategic Missile Wing was replaced by the 91st Missile Wing (91 SMW) on June 25, 1968. The Missile Wings and Squadrons at Minot AFB had several firsts including:

In 1971, the 91st SMW became the first fully operational Minuteman III wing in the Air Force after updating to the new platform from Minuteman I.

On June 17, 1993 then-Lt. Col. Patricia Fornes became the first woman to command an operational missile squadron when she took command of the 740th Missile Squadron. In doing so, she not only marked an important milestone for women in the missile career field, she also realized a personal dream. Her father, Lt. Col. Glenn Fornes, commanded the same squadron almost 25 years previously when Patricia was a teenager.

INTRODUCTION

Minot Air Force Base is a Cold War era base. It was built for a specific mission: to provide air defense against Soviet bombers attacking the U.S. and Canada over the North Pole through the SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) Project, a plan that united radar bases, giant computers, and fighter-interceptor squadrons in the Minot Defense Sector: western North Dakota, eastern Montana, the Canadian province of Saskatchewan and a few surrounding areas. The base was officially activated on 10 January 1957.

The arrival of B-52s in 1961 and the start of missile site construction in 1962 brought the nuclear deterrence mission to the base and brought about the transfer of control from Air Defense Command (ADC) to Strategic Air Command (SAC).

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent dismantling of SAC lead to a lot of changes from Minot AFB. The base went from an Air Division headquarters to it's current arrangement of two wings with the 5th Bomb Wing as the host organization (with a pause for a one base-one wing model in the mid-1990s).

As you proceed through the walk, you learn about some of the different aircraft, missiles, and units that have been stationed at Minot AFB as well as more information about the base's origins and some interesting historical tid-bits.

Special thanks for helping with parts of this history walk go to:
5 FSS Marketing
5 BW Historian Rob Michel
Northern Sentry

STOP 1: B-52 STATIC DISPLAY



The first B-52H at Minot AFB, named “Peace Persuader,” arrived on July 16, 1961. The other B-52s had arrived by September, and by November, they were assigned to the 525th Bombardment Squadron and declared combat ready. The 525th Bombardment Squadron was part of the 4136th Strategic Wing, the first B-52 wing at Minot AFB. In 1963, the 4136th was replaced with the 450th Bombardment Wing which was replaced by the 5th Bombardment Wing on July 25, 1968. The B-52s at Minot AFB set a number of firsts and records, including:

On January 11, 1962, a crew and B-52H from Minot AFB flew from Kadena AB, Okinawa to Torrejon AB, Spain, a distance of more than 12,500 miles, in 21 hours and 52 minutes *without refueling*. They broke or set 11 speed or distance records, some of which still stand, and proved the B-52’s dominance as a long-range bomber. The operation was called “Persian Rug.”

From their construction until 1981, B-52H’s were used solely for nuclear deterrence. Any conventional bombing was done by the earlier B-52 models. In 1981, a crew and B-52H from Minot AFB was chosen to participate in a trial to demonstrate the B-52H’s ability to conduct remote conventional operations.

On March 23, 2003, a crew from Minot AFB became “the first B-52 crew to successfully launch conventional air launched cruise missiles and joint direct attack munitions on the same sortie” while evading ground defenses during a high priority mission as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

STOP 14: LODGING



Originally, the Jimmy Doolittle Center was the officer’s mess, and later it was the officer’s club. Lodging (the Sakakawea Inn) was originally the Bachelor Officer Quarters.

In the 1970’s there were 3 clubs on base: the Officer’s Club (now the JDC), the NCO Club (now Rockers) , and the Airmen’s Club (now the Airman Leadership School).

Sakakawea Inn is named after the famous guide of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. If the spelling looks odd, there’s a reason for that! The generally accepted story is that Sacagawea was born a member of the Shoshone tribe in the Rocky Mountains. As a girl or pre-teenager, she was captured by the Hidatsa tribe and brought to North Dakota. The Hidatsa call her “Sakakawea” which means “Bird Woman.” The Shoshone call her “Sacagawea” which means “Boat Launcher.” The Shoshone pronunciation and “Sacagawea” spelling were the ones chosen by the US Geographical Board and consequently used most throughout the US, but North Dakota, as the home of the Hidatsa, uses the Hidatsa pronunciation and their preferred spelling.



STOP 13: HOUND DOG MISSILE



The AGM-28A Hound Dog missile was an air-launched missile with a 4-megaton thermonuclear warhead. It was carried up into the air beneath the wing of a B-52. Because it had its own jet engine, it could fly more than 600 miles after being launched from the B-52 which would have made it much safer for the B-52's crew had it ever been used in combat.

An interesting feature of the Hound Dog is that the B-52 could use the missile's engine to supplement the B-52's engines during take-off or in flight. The B-52 could even top-up the Hound Dog's fuel tanks prior to launch.

The first Hound Dog missile at Minot AFB arrived on Dec. 31, 1961. They were replaced by Short Range Attack Missiles (SRAMs) in 1973.



STOP 2: 5 BW HEADQUARTERS



The multi-story part of building 167 was originally used as a bank and finance office. Later, it became a credit union and still later the headquarters for the services squadron. It appears on maps and aerial photographs as early as 1961. The one story part of building 167 has been a command headquarters of one sort or another throughout most of its history, and it was among the first buildings built on the base.

There was a little bit of controversy over building the base near Minot. Originally, the Air Force considered building bases near Bismarck and Fargo, ND because they had modification centers at both cities during World War II. Minot and Grand Forks city governments lobbied for their cities, and the Air Force went out to inspect the areas. In the end, Air Force officials decided that Bismarck and Fargo were too far south to and didn't have ideal geography and geology. The controversy part happened when the word accidentally got out that the bases were going to be at Bismarck and Fargo before the official announcement about Minot and Grand Forks, so naturally those cities were less than pleased when they found out that they would not in fact be getting bases.

Of the two, Minot AFB is a little older than Grand Forks AFB. At various times between 1962 and 1991, Minot AFB served as an Air Division headquarters while Grand Forks AFB was a part of each Air Division.

STOP 3: RICHARDSON DORM



These dorms were called the “ADC” dorms or barracks for a long time because they were built when the base belonged to Aerospace Defense Command and, even after control of the base was turned over to Strategic Air Command in 1962, they housed personnel from Minot’s remaining ADC unit, the 5th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron (5 FIS). The 5 FIS was stationed at Minot AFB from 1960-1988.

The Richardson Dorm was named after Captain William D. Richardson who died when his Delta Dart crashed south of Bismarck on December 19, 1963. The plane had a major mechanical fault and the ejection seat failed to work. It was discovered that the ejections seats on all the Delta Darts were non-functional and the emergency back-up was out of the pilot’s reach. Afterwards, the 5 FIS commander at the time, Lt. Col Jacksel Broughton, successfully spearheaded a push to get the seat manufacturer to replace the seats with ones that worked.

Richardson Dorm was originally named as such sometime in the 1960’s. In 2005, the building was rededicated and a memorial plaque was added inside the dorm.

STOP 12: DRAINAGE DITCH



The land that would become Minot AFB contained numerous sloughs (pools of standing water that act as mini-ponds in times of high moisture but often dry up in drought) and two small creek tributaries. When the base was built, most of the sloughs were drained, and two drainage ditches were created to channel storm runoff and try to keep new sloughs from forming.

This drainage ditch is called the “east drainage ditch” and drains into Egg Creek in the far northwest corner of the base.

So why build the base here? AF planners were thinking ahead. They specifically looked for a location with geography that COULD support a B-52 runway even though it wasn’t official yet that B-52’s would be stationed here. The bedrock in this area of North Dakota is strong and capable of holding up a lot.

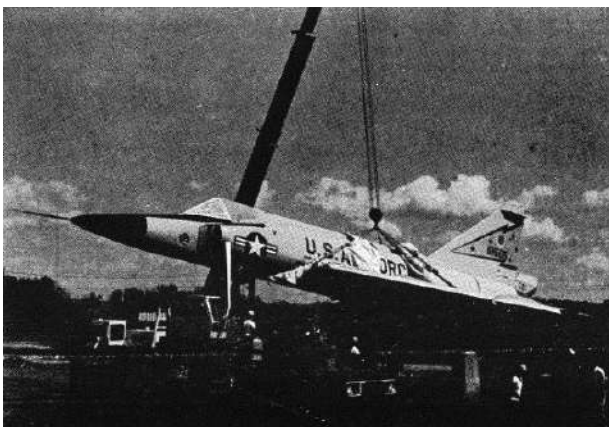
That geological advantage came up again after the Cold War ended in the 1990’s. One of the reasons Grand Forks AFB’s missile sites were chosen for elimination as part of the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and Minot AFB’s were kept is that the better geology in the Minot area meant that Minot’s missile sites were cheaper to maintain.

STOP 11: DELTA DAGGER



The F-102 Delta Dagger is a slightly odd static display. Delta Daggers were never assigned to Minot AFB, not even unofficially for a multi-year TDY like the U-2, so why do we have one? It was given by the Minnesota National Guard to the 5th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron because, although the 5 FIS didn't fly Delta Daggers at Minot AFB, they flew them from 1955-1960 at their previous base, Suffolk County AFB in New York.

The F-102 Delta Dagger was carried to Minot AFB from Minneapolis by a helicopter. It was then repaired by a joint team of 5 BW and 5 FIS maintainers, put in place, and dedicated on Northern Neighbor's Day



This F-102 Delta Dagger, erected Monday, is now a part of Minot AFB's static heritage display. (U.S. Air Force photo by Fred Jones)

in 1982. (Photo thanks to the Northern Sentry)

STOP 4: TANKER TRAIL



Tanker Trail is named after the KC-135 Stratotankers which were assigned to Minot AFB from 1959 to 1994. The Stratotankers



were operated by the 906th Air Refueling Squadron, the first Strategic Air Command (SAC) unit on the base, and their mission was in-flight refueling for the sector.

A KC-135 Stratotanker named "Miss Minot" was the first plane to be permanently assigned to Minot AFB on September 23, 1959. Miss Minot was also the first jet aircraft to be permanently assigned to North Dakota, and her arrival was eagerly greeted by over 300 people from the base and community.

The Francis X. Deignan Library and Education Center was named after the commander of the 906th Air Refueling Squadron from 1983-1985.

STOP 5: CHOPPER PATH



Copper Path was named for various helicopter and helicopter organizations that have been stationed at Minot AFB. The first helicopters at Minot AFB were two H-43B Huskies that were assigned to Detachment 20 of the Central Air Rescue Services in August 1960. Their mission was Local Base Rescue (LBR). In 1963, Sikorsky H-19s arrived to better serve a new helicopter mission at Minot AFB: supporting missile field operations. The H-43B Huskies and their crews were deployed to Vietnam in 1964 where they were badly needed. The H-19s were replaced by Bell UH-1Fs in 1965. At that point, the helicopters were part of the Bombardment Wing with the B-52s. In 1973, the helicopters were transferred to Detachment 3 of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron which took on both missile support and rescue operations. Depending on when you take this history walk, you might be able to see one of the UH-1F's on the parade ground at stop #9. They were replaced with HH-1Hs in 1980. In 1993, the 37 ARRS was replaced by the 54th Rescue Flight flying Bell HH-1s and (starting in 1996) Bell UH-1Ns. The 54 RF were re-designated the 54th Helicopter Squadron in 2005.



STOP 10: PARADE GROUND



The parade ground is the future home of an Air Park to which most of the static displays around the base will be moved over the next several years. The base is on waiting lists to acquire a KC-135 and a B-52, and space will be left in the park to house them whenever they can be acquired.

One plane with an interesting connection to Minot AFB that WON'T be included in the park is the U-2 Spyplane. From September 1958 to May 1960, Detachment 9 of the 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing flew up to 3 U-2s out of Minot AFB as part of the top secret "Operation Crowflight." Their mission was to take samples of the upper atmosphere in order to find how much and where radioactive "fall-out" was present. Their presence at Minot AFB was kept as secret as possible; this was before U-2s became common knowledge after one was shot down over the Soviet Union.

Probably, the best story about Operation Crowflight came from Glen Chapman and was published in the Minot Daily News in 2019. He tells of how a U-2 experienced engine trouble on its way to the North Pole and had to make an emergency landing on a frozen Canadian lake. After mechanics were flown in to make repairs, the US Air Force asked the Royal Canadian Air Force to assist by removing snow from the lake so that the plane could take off. They did it but asked if they could paint a Canadian maple leaf on the plane. Permission was granted, and the U-2 returned to Minot AFB with a giant red maple leaf painted on its side.

STOP 9: PRIDE BUILDING



Minot AFB was originally built specifically to run a SAGE Project direction center (see stop 8), but the direction center didn't fully activate until June 1961 and was deactivated in May 1963 when the computer intercept responsibility was moved to another base. As technology rapidly improved in the 1960's, Air Force planners were able to save money by consolidating direction centers and defense sectors. Minot's center was one of the first chosen to close because leaders thought that B-52s, ICBMs, fighters, and the direction center made the base too big a target.

The building was soon put to alternative use by various base agencies (including the Library, at one time). It was re-named the PRIDE Building in 1966 as part of a SAC quality program. PRIDE stands for "Professional Results in Daily Efforts," and "PRIDE BUILDING" was painted on the building with "PRIDE" in very big letters which remained in place until the building was covered in stucco sometime in the 1980's.



STOP 6: DELTA DART



F-106 Delta Darts arrived at Minot AFB straight from the manufacturer in January 1960. They were flown by the 5th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron (5 FIS) until they were replaced with F-15 Eagles in December 1984.

The job of the 5 FIS was to intercept any enemy aircraft that may have come over the North Pole.

Members of the 5th FIS were nicknamed the "Spitten Kittens" because the squadron flew Spitfires from 1942-1944, and their mascot was a lynx. In 1963, the 5th FIS commander at the time, then Lt. Col. Jacksel "Jack" Broughton, purchased 2 kittens from a local farmer that were either Canadian Lynx or Bobcats. Named "Spitten" and "Kitten," the kittens were the first residents of the Lynx Lair cage that was set up near the 5 FIS HQ. In 1980, the Lynx Lair became the AF's only licensed zoo, home to Spitten and Kitten's descendants and several cats that were acquired later on. When the squadron was deactivated in 1988, the cats were sent elsewhere, two of them to Minot's Roosevelt Park Zoo.



STOP 7: TRAINER TRAIL



Trainer Trail used to be called “Rail Road” because it runs parallel to where there used to be rail road tracks. To assist with the construction of the base, the Great Northern Railroad (now BNSF) constructed a railroad branch line that ran from Minot up to and across the base in 1957. The branch line was named “Tatman Branch” after Tatman Township. The railroad played a critical role in base construction and continued to be used for many years, supplying equipment and fuel. Among other things, it supplied a heating plant that provided heating in the form of steam for numerous base facilities. The steam was delivered across the base through pipes that were either above or below ground. Those that were below ground also heated the sidewalks and melted any snow. After the heating plant was closed, the railroad line fell out of use on the base. BNSF formally abandoned the branch line in 1997. Today, Tatman Branch is Tatman Trail, an unpaved walking trail that runs 10 miles from opposite the Minot Gate to the bypass east of Hwy 83.



STOP 8: WATER TOWERS



The front water tower was one of the base’s first permanent structures, but the back one was originally built to support the PRIDE Building and help keep the two giant 275-ton IBM computers that were once housed in the building from overheating. The building was originally Minot’s SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) project direction center, and the computers it held took inputs from radar bases around the Minot Defense Sector and calculated routes for the fighters to intercept any approaching enemy aircraft.

One of the radar bases in the Minot Defense Sector was the Minot Air Force Station (AFS) located about 16 miles south of Minot. Originally called the Velva AFS, the base was activated in 1951 and renamed Minot AFS in 1963. When the Minot SAGE facility activated, Minot AFS’s 786th Radar Squadron went from manually monitoring their radar scopes to a more automated system. Often called the Minot Radar Base, the South Base, or Bubble Hill, Minot AFS was deactivated in 1979.

You can see the remains of the radar base on a hill on the west side of Hwy 83 near mile marker 185, a little south of the South Prairie School. It is private land now, but you can see many of the buildings from the highway.

