

576th Flight Test Squadron

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An unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile launches during an operational test at 2:10 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time, Aug. 2, 2017, at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ian Dudley/Released)

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Mission

Located at Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, the 576th Flight Test Squadron is America's only dedicated intercontinental ballistic missile test squadron, professionally executing tests that accurately measure the current and future capability of the ICBM force.

Mission Description

In executing the ICBM initial operational test and evaluation and force development evaluation programs, the 576th FLTS prepares for and conducts ground and flight tests to collect, analyze, and report performance, accuracy, and reliability data for the Joint Staff, U.S. Strategic Command, Air Force Global Strike Command and the Air Staff. The 576th FLTS identifies missile system requirements, demonstrates current and future warfighting capabilities, and validates missile system improvements and upgrades.

Vision

To be the premier testing organization of America's best ICBM maintainers and operators, validating, verifying and ultimately improving the nation's most powerful weapon system.

Goals

- Conduct safe, secure and valid operational tests that accurately measure the current and future capability of the nation's ICBM force.
- Develop the world's best nuclear Airmen prepared to lead tomorrow's ICBM enterprise.
- Validate new equipment and provide modern, flexible infrastructure for America's ICBM weapon systems.

Unit History

The 576th Flight Test Squadron was first activated at Davis-Monthan Field, Arizona, on Jan. 26, 1943, as the 576th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), where it participated in the strategic bombardment campaigns of Europe and Germany as part of Eighth Air Force. Its involvement during the Normandy invasion and the Battle of the Bulge resulted in seven European-African-Middle Eastern Theater campaign streamers and one Distinguished Unit Citation.

The 576th was deactivated on Sept. 13, 1945, with the close of World War II. It was reactivated Sept. 24, 1947 as a very heavy bombardment squadron at Barksdale Field, Louisiana, and then changed to a light jet bomb squadron in November 1947. After being again deactivated in November 1949, the squadron was reactivated on March 6, 1958, as the 576th Strategic Missile Squadron, assigned to Cook AFB (later renamed "Vandenberg SFB"). On April 1, 1958, the 576th was assigned to Strategic Air Command as an Atlas ICBM unit, the nation's first. On April 2, 1966, the 576th was once again deactivated.

Redesignated the 576th Test Squadron on Aug. 29, 1991, it was again activated on Sept. 1, 1999, as part of the activation of 20th Air Force, America's only ICBM Numbered Air Force. The 576th designation was chosen to ensure the history and lineage of the squadron would continue with the important job of testing ICBMs. The 576th has almost made a complete circle since the 576th Strategic Missile Squadron tested the Atlas missile in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In July 1993, the 576th was assigned to 14th Air Force at Vandenberg AFB. The squadron was re-designated the 576th Flight Test Squadron on July 1, 1994. Then, on Feb. 22, 1996, the squadron was reassigned from 14th Air Force to Space Warfare Center at Schriever AFB, Colorado.

The 576th FLTS has a long and distinguished history in the Air Force. On March 14, 1996, the 576th, the 30th Maintenance Squadron, and portions of the 30th Logistics Support Squadron merged to form the new 576 FLTS. Whereas the three organizations previously reported through different commanders to the 30th Space Wing at Vandenberg AFB, the merger aligned all personnel directly involved with ICBM testing at Vandenberg under one commander. As part of the merger, the 576th also became a direct reporting unit to the Space Warfare Center.

The 576 FLTS was reassigned to Air Force Global Strike Command on Dec. 1, 2009. The squadron serves as a direct reporting unit to the Director of Operations at HQ AFGSC.

On Oct. 8, 2021, command of the 576th FLTS was transferred to the 377th Air Base Wing at Kirtland AFB, N.M.

Current as of October 27, 2021