LINEAGE
Inactivated July 1, 1962

STATIONS
Caribous AFS, Limestone AFB, ME,

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS
Service Streamers
Campaign Streamers
Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
The Administration Area was the headquarters of the 3080th Aviation Depot Group. It was situated outside the maximum-security area, and accommodated the administrative, dormitory, dining, and recreational functions required for the operation of the storage area. Buildings included a headquarters office building, a dining hall, a gym and library building, numerous barracks, and a fire station. The barracks and dining hall were grouped together around a quadrangle and were connected underground, a distinct advantage in the harsh winter weather and in the event of nuclear fallout. The buildings were occupied by personnel of the 3080th from 1951 through 1962. The Service Area, situated southeast of the Administrative Area and outside of the maximum-security area, was the center of station maintenance, repair, and service.
Though not complete, the weapons storage facility was partially occupied and activated on November 1, 1951. This early activation was probably the result of the increased conflict in Korea. On December 15, 1951, the 3080th Aviation Depot Group was activated as a unit of the Air Material Command, and assumed control of the maximum storage area. 3080th personnel occupied the barracks, offices, and workstations, and the area became temporarily known as the 3080th Area. Construction of the weapons storage facility was completed on April 10, 1952. By the end of summer 1952, the 3080th was ready for full operations.

The mission of the 3080th Aviation Depot Squadron/Group was both unique and varied during the ten years it operated. Besides being the first Operational Storage Site for the maintenance, storage, and distribution of atomic and thermonuclear (hydrogen) bombs to the Strategic Air Command, the 3080th also maintained a war reserve of nuclear weapons to be shipped to SAC contingency bases for secondary (follow-on) strike missions. The Air Force assumed that many first strike SAC bases would be destroyed during the Soviet Union's first strike.

Our returning bombers could be diverted to specified alternate airfields for loading of weapons for additional strikes. The 3080th also maintained the warheads for the Snark Missiles. The site also served as the phasing point for receipt, temporary storage, and distribution of tactical and strategic nuclear and thermonuclear weapons to USAF Operational Storage Sites in Europe. These included a variety of nuclear weapons delivered by both USAF and US Navy delivery systems. A large portion of the unit's mission was as a depot level maintenance facility as its name implies. This included providing depot level maintenance and retrofit of nuclear weapons that could not be accomplished by European and US Navy weapons facilities.

Technology, in relation to the early assigned nuclear weapons, was in its infancy. Miniaturization was unknown. These early weapons appear today as having been designed by iron mongers, household electricians, and plumbers. Many of the smaller hardware items such as double-pole, double-throw switches could be identified as "right off the hardware store shelf". Specially designed items were usually large, heavy, and redundant, requiring much "mule hauling". Radar used vacuum tubes requiring large amounts of battery power to operate. Although safety and security were paramount, a reliable weapon was the Holy Grail. It was counterproductive as well as economically unfeasible to ask aircrews to risk their lives delivering anything other than a 100% reliable weapon.

The best way, at that time, to ensure maximum reliability was to completely disassemble the bomb, test and inspect each of its systems and components in a nondestructive manner, reassemble the system - sometimes with additional testing at each stage of re-assembly, and conducting a final assembly test. Upon conclusion of a successful test, the bomb was returned to stockpile storage until its next storage inspection due date or for a CAS (complete assembly for strike).

Training was crucial to the proper use of nuclear weapons, and crews were trained and tested on a regular basis. Unannounced alerts tested crews under simulated wartime conditions. Training weapons identical in every respect to the WR (war reserve) version, minus the high explosives and the live detonators, were used during the groups continuous training when not working on WR material. Working with check sheets condensed from the numerous governing manuals, there was no room for ambiguity, interpretation, or initiative. Explicit torque was specified for nearly every
fastener. Exact tolerance of electrical voltage and current were specified. Precise go-no-go gauges were provided for certain mechanical components. Team members charged up the batteries and began assembly of the training weapon. Live weapons were never used for training. Components were removed from the assembly line for testing at various stages. Assembly personnel took the completed unit, covered to protect its then classified shape, to a waiting convoy surrounded by armed Air Police. The convoy then transported the unit to the aircraft. After the aircraft returned, the bomb was disassembled, tested, packaged, checked by the custodian, and returned to the stockpile.

The 3080th Aviation Depot Squadron was re-designated HQ 3080th Aviation Depot Group, on May 1, 1954, by General Order 20, HQ Air Material Command, dated April 2, 1954. General Order 20 also activated the 3080th Operations Squadron, 3080th Security Squadron and 3080th Support Squadron effective May 1, 1954, and assigned them to the 3080th Aviation Depot Group. On March 1, 1957, the 3080th Security Squadron was re-designated 3080th Air Police Squadron and the 3080th Operations Squadron was re-designated 3093rd Aviation Depot Squadron by General Order 7, HQ Air Material Command, dated February 11, 1957. Both squadrons remained assigned to the 3080th Aviation Depot Group. The older fission and early Thermonuclear (hydrogen) bombs only lasted a few years. Most of these were gone when the B-52 arrived and the B-36 was retired from service.

Throughout the history of the 3080th Aviation Depot Group, the development of nuclear weapons continued and evolved. Along with these developments included mission changes for the group as they went through the transition period in history from the early atomic weapons right on up to the wooden bomb concept. Newer tactical delivery systems in both aircraft and missiles were developed and deployed in the European Theater. Although the wooden bomb type of nuclear weapons were coming into the inventory, this occurred just prior to the deactivation of the 3080th Aviation Depot Group.

During the period of 1956 to 1962 and later, nuclear weapons were moving on a continual basis for many reasons. The primary transport for these weapons were the C-124 followed by the C-141. Almost daily, there were weapons movements in or out of Caribou Air Force Station, which were loaded or unloaded from aircraft flown into the adjacent Loring Air Force Base. Weapons were allocated to the CINCs (Commander's In Chief) of SAC, USAFE, Atlantic Fleet, and the AEC (Atomic Energy Commission).

In April of 1959, the weapons storage and maintenance program at Loring AFB was reviewed. As the wooden bomb concept began to become a reality, the Air Force began to review the necessity of maintaining separate depot level maintenance facilities near SAC bases. Headquarters USAF Air Staff decided to close Caribou Air Force Station in 1961. Air Staff members reviewed the overall Air Force special weapons storage and maintenance program controlled by the Air Force Logistics Command (formerly the Air Material Command).

They concluded that advances in technology made it feasible to reduce the number of people and facilities AFLC used to accomplish the special weapons mission and directed AFLC to implement a reduction and consolidation program. In January 1962, AFLC officials notified the 3080th of its demise, effective on July 1,1962. During the six months from date of notification to actual closure,
AFLC worked closely with SAC and the 42nd Bomb Wing in accomplishing a smooth transition from a depot maintenance facility to an operational SAC weapons storage area. At the same time, the Atomic Energy Commission transferred ownership and control of the special weapons to SAC.

With the transfer complete in late June, the 42nd Bomb Wing assumed responsibility for every aspect of its combat capability including the personnel of the 23rd Munitions Maintenance Squadron. These individuals possessed the technical knowledge and handling skills necessary to maintain and load the armament of the 42nd Bomb Wing. The men of the 3080th Aviation Depot Group and others like them assigned to similar sites are unsung heroes of the Cold War. What they did, and had to endure, while keeping their activities a secret from everyone, including their own family, is a testament to the pride and dedication to their mission, and to their country. They truly were the nation's "Silent Peacekeepers"

3080 Security Squadron Emblem
The motto "SEMPER VIGILES" means "Ever Vigilant."
The emblem symbolizes the Squadron's mission. The interposed circular cog represents the Air Material Command, of which the 3080th Security Squadron is a component part. Inside the cog the octopus embraces seven tiny igloos representing constant and complete security for weapons storage by the faithful and ever vigilant Air Police. On his head the octopus is wearing the winter pile cap signifying the cold climate in which he is accustomed to operating.

Sources