

# 6550<sup>th</sup> AIR BASE GROUP

## LINEAGE

## STATIONS

Patrick AFB, FL,

## ASSIGNMENTS

## COMMANDERS

Col David J. Munson, #1957

Col Robert E. Northcutt, #1959

## ASSIGNMENTS

## COMMANDERS

## HONORS

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## EMBLEM

## MOTTO

## OPERATIONS

The 6550th Support Wing (Range) was designated and organized on 1 April 1962 to replace the Air Base Group as the administrative and logistical support unit for AFMTC. It was discontinued 1 March 1964. The 6550th Air Base Group was separated from the Air Force Eastern Test Range (AFETR) when the latter was inactivated on 1 February 1977. The 6550th subsequently operated as the 6550th Air Base Wing and served as Patrick's host unit until the Eastern Space & Missile Center was organized and activated on 1 October 1979.

The fourth new wing under AFMTC was the 6550th Air Base Wing. It was created from the Base

Commander's organization, and so was the 6555th Air Base Group which was placed under it. The 6550th Air Base Wing was discontinued on 1 March 1953, but its resources were transferred to the 6550th Air Base Group. The 6550th Air Base Group became one of Patrick's longest lived units. Apart from two short periods (i.e., 1 April 1962 to 1 March 1964 and 1 February 1977 to 1 October 1979), it operated as the 6550th Air Base Group until 1 October 1990.

When the Eastern Space & Missile Center was transferred to Air Force Space Command on 1 October 1990, the 6550th was redesignated the 1040th Space Support Group, and it operated under that name until 12 November 1991. The 1040th Space Support Group was redesignated the 45th Support Group on 12 November 1991, and it continues to serve Patrick and the Cape under that designation.

On 1 October 1990, ESMC was transferred from Air Force Systems Command to Air Force Space Command in a ceremony at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The 6555th Aerospace Test Group remained with AFSC, but most of its resources were placed in Combined Test Forces serving both commands or in the 1st Space Launch Squadron under ESMC. The 6550th Air Base Group and its civil engineering and security police squadrons were replaced by "1040th" unit designations.

On 7 September 1954, a major reorganization of AFMTC discontinued four of the Center's five group-level organizations and consolidated most routine support functions in the hands of the 6550th Air Base Group. That action allowed the Headquarters to concentrate on policy matters, long-range planning and overall management, but it also heralded the demise of the 6555th Guided Missile Group and the 6541st Operations Group (Range) mentioned earlier. Though there were many organizational changes in the years that followed, the Center's functional role as planner and coordinator and the Air Base Group's role as base support agency were firmly established. Pan American and RCA operated the Eastern Range under contract to the Air Force for the next 34 years (until early October 1988). In 1988, the old Range Contract was divided into the Range Technical Services (RTS) and the Launch Base Services (LBS) contracts. The RTS Contract was awarded to Computer Sciences Raytheon (CSR) in June 1988, and the LBS Contract was awarded to Pan American World Services (later known as Johnson Controls) in August 1988.

The Air Force Eastern Test Range supported a wide variety of missile and space programs in the 1960s, but the demise of the APOLLO space program and the end of land-based ballistic missile development at the Cape signaled a downturn in AFETR's fortunes. While range support for the U.S. Navy's submarine ballistic missile programs continued, a dramatic shift in AFETR's responsibilities occurred on 1 February 1977. On that date, AFETR was inactivated and the 6550th Air Base Group assumed host responsibilities for Patrick AFB as the 6550th Air Base Wing. The Air Force Eastern Test Range's other resources were consolidated as Detachment 1 of the Space and Missile Test Center (SAMTEC). Detachment 1 became a tenant unit at Patrick, and it reported to SAMTEC at Vandenberg AFB, California.

Detachment 1 took no part in the 45th Space Wing's heritage, and it may be viewed as a short-term organizational experiment in an era of budget austerity. The Eastern Space & Missile Center

succeeded Detachment 1 on 1 October 1979. The new center reported to the Space and Missile Test Organization (SAMTO) at Vandenberg. It was formed by gathering AFETR's splintered resources and adding the 6555th Aerospace Test Group as a subordinate organization. Under ESMC, the 6550th Air Base Wing's resources were reconstituted as the 6550th Air Base Group. Detachment 1's resources became a new group-level Eastern Test Range organization not to be confused with AFETR. The new ETR organization requested a group-level emblem in August 1986, and the Eastern Test Range shield was approved in April 1987.

On 1 February 1977, AFETR Headquarters was inactivated and control of the Range passed to the Space and Missile Test Center (SAMTEC) headquartered at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. (SAMTEC was the parent organization for the 6595th Aerospace Test Wing, mentioned earlier). Elements of AFETR's old 6550th Air Base Group were reorganized as the 6550th Air Base Wing, which was given host responsibility for Patrick Air Force Base.

The 6550th Air Base Wing was inactivated and its resources were reassigned to the 6550th Air Base Group, which was resurrected under ESMC. The 6595th Shuttle Test Group, 6595th Satellite Test Group and 6595th Missile Test Group were assigned to WSMC, and the 6555th Aerospace Test Group was assigned to ESMC. Both new centers reported to SAMTO, and SAMTO reported to Space Division (formerly the Space and Missile Systems Organization [SAMSO]) headquartered at Los Angeles Air Force Station, California. After nearly twenty years as a tenant unit on the Cape, the 6555th returned to the command relationship it had enjoyed under the Air Force Missile Test Center in the 1950s

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Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.