

## AIR FORCE SYSTEMS COMMAND



### MISSION

Air Force Systems Command (AFSC) is a major Air Force command. It researches, develops, tests, evaluates, acquires, and contracts for the production of aerospace systems. The command provides basic research, exploratory development, advanced development, and the development and acquisition of aerospace systems within the management structure set up by the Department of Defense (DOD), the secretary of the Air Force, and Headquarters USAF.

The command is organized into product divisions, laboratories, test organizations, ranges, and supporting divisions.

Product divisions develop, test, and procure systems and equipment. They contain system program and project offices and operate as subcommands. These may also include a system engineering and technical integration contractor that operates as a nonprofit corporation established to advise the Air Force on system engineering and technical division. The supporting divisions analyze and evaluate technological threats; conduct biotechnology research, development, and education programs; and provide contracting liaison.

Test organizations and ranges provide development, test, and evaluation facilities for the command. They have other specialized facilities such as rocket test stands, wind tunnels and simulators, sled test tracks, electronics, and test ranges. The eastern and western ranges have the capability to form a single global-tracking network for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), space satellites, launch vehicles, and space probes.

The laboratories, in addition to providing research and development support to system and equipment acquisition programs of the product divisions, seek to improve the foundation of

advanced technology. Discretionary funds are provided to the laboratories to support opportunistic research and development that, because of timing or other circumstances, are not funded during the normal budgeting cycle. The Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR), Bolling AFB, Washington, D.C., manages the total Air Force investment in fundamental research by executing contracts and grants to universities, industrial research, and nonprofit institutions as well as overseeing in-house laboratory research activities. The AFOSR grant authority is unique in the Air Force.

Space systems responsibility centers around the Space Division, Los Angeles, California, and its launch and tracking stations around the world. The responsibility encompasses engineering, testing, program managing, installing, launching, on-orbit tracking, plus command and control of military space systems.

Space systems support communications, early warning, meteorology, surveillance, and navigation needs of operational commands. In addition to managing Air Force space programs, Space Division participates in space programs conducted by other US military services, governmental agencies, the United Kingdom, and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. Ground terminal development is a major role of the unit. Space Division also conducts technology development programs and space defense programs.

Space Division is the DOD manager for military activities in the National Space Transportation System (space shuttle). Although the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) manages the overall space shuttle program, Space Division is responsible for military payloads from low-earth orbits of the shuttle to high-altitude orbits and interplanetary trajectories. Space Division is developing a West Coast launch complex for the shuttle at Vandenberg AFB, California. Space Division units include the Space and Missile Test Organization, the Air Force Satellite Control Facility, the Air Force Space Technology Center, and the Manned Space Flight Support Group.

#### **LINEAGE**

Research and Development Command established, 23 Jan 1950

Organized as a major command, 1 Feb 1950

Redesignated Air Research and Development Command, 16 Sep 1950

Redesignated Air Force Systems Command, 1 Apr 1961

Inactivated, 1 Jul 1992

#### **STATIONS**

Andrews AFB, MD

#### **COMMANDERS**

Maj Gen David M. Schlatter, 1 Feb 1950

Lt Gen Earle E. Partridge, 24 Jun 1951

Lt Gen Donald L. Putt, 30 Jun 1953

Lt Gen Thomas S. Power, 15 Apr 1954

Maj Gen John W. Sessums (acting), 1 Jul 1957  
Lt Gen Samuel E. Anderson, 1 Aug 1957  
Maj Gen John W. Sessums (acting), 10 Mar 1959  
Gen Bernard A. Schriever, 25 Apr 1959  
Gen James Ferguson, 1 Sep 1966  
Gen George S. Brown, 1 Sep 1970  
Gen Samuel C. Phillips, 1 Aug 1973  
Gen William J. Evans, 1 Sep 1975  
Gen Lew Allen Jr., 1 Aug 1977  
Gen Alton D. Slay, 14 Mar 1978  
Gen Robert T. Marsh, 1 Feb 1981  
Gen Lawrence A. Skantze, 1 Aug 1984  
Gen Bernard P. Randolph, 17 Jul 1987  
Gen Ronald W. Yates, 1 Apr 1990

#### **EMBLEM**



Air Research & Development Command: A shield of azure (dark blue) studded with five stars argent, representing the darkness of night; the field fracted by a guided missile bendwise, argent, markings gules, power streams proper, the missile fracting and rolling back the night, portraying the light blue sky, and the reverse of the field of the second. Significance: The field of the shield is symbolical of the star-studded darkness of night. This field of darkness is fracted and rolled back by a powerful futuramic weapon, developed through scientific research, to symbolically portray a blue sky or the light of day. Allegorically, through study, research, and knowledge, light of understanding replaces the darkness of ignorance. Approved: 26 January 1955.

The new emblem of the Air Research and Development Command portrays a missile rolling back the darkness of the unknown. The missile is red and white, the background is dark blue with light blue showing through the tear. Col. A. A. Arnhym, Special Assistant to ARDC Commander, Lt. Gen. Thomas S. Power, won a \$100 savings bond for submitting the winning

idea.



Air Force Systems Command emblem: Azure, a stylized directional arrow point to chief palewise emerging from an annulet argent and all within a diminished bordure of the like. Significance: The emblem, which depicts the bringing together of elements into a single directional purpose, represents the Air Force Systems Command, uniting in its own circle many diverse channels, fusing all into a power that has direction and purpose. (Approved, 15 Nov 1961)

## OPERATIONS

In November 1944, Gen Henry H. Arnold requested Dr Theodore von Karman, chairman of the Scientific Advisory Group, to conduct a survey of existing and future technical problems of concern to the Air Force. The result was two special studies that discussed these problems over a projected 20-year period. These studies defined the policies, organizational changes, and major facilities required to achieve the goals.

Following establishment of the Air Force as a separate military service, the search to improve the organization and the means for conducting research and development within the Air Force accelerated. In early 1949, Gen Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force chief of staff, asked Dr von Karman again to appoint a committee to study Air Force research and development. Simultaneously, Air University conducted an independent study.

Reports of the committee and Air University stressed the importance of a single agency with responsibility for the total Air Force research and development program. As a result, the Research and Development Command was officially established on 23 January 1950. The command was redesignated the Air Research and Development Command on 16 September 1950.

On 1 April 1961, Air Research and Development Command's systems development and test functions were combined with the systems acquisitions of the Air Materiel Command to form Air Force Systems Command, with headquarters at Andrews AFB, Maryland. The new command retained all former functions, except basic research responsibility of the newly created Office of Aerospace Research. On 1 July 1970, the Office of Aerospace Research was inactivated, and its units were transferred to Air Force Systems Command, the field unit now responsible for the US Air Force research and development mission. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Air Force Systems Command was reorganized to bring all components into a consolidated acquisition alignment.

The Air Research and Development Command bears a large part of the responsibility for these plans, as well as for the research, development, and test of the systems that implement these plans. The burden of formulating operational concepts has become an important element in the evolution of new aerospace systems.

---

#### USAF Unit Histories

Created: 27 Feb 2023

Updated:

#### Sources

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

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.