

GUARDIANS OF THE NORTH



by A.T. Lloyd, Editor, Boeing AIRLINER Magazine

"Guardian of the North" is the motto of the 28th BWG stationed at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. The unit has lineage back to the 28th Composite Group which was constituted on 22 December 1939 and activated at March Field, California, on 1 February 1940. The unit moved to Moffett Field, California, where it resided between 10 December 1940 and 12 February 1941. The group relocated to Elmendorf Field, Alaska, on 23 February 1941. Between 1941 and 1943, the group was equipped with Lockheed P-38 *Lightnings*, Bell P-39 *Airacobras*, Curtiss P-40 *Warhawks*, Martin B-26 *Marauders*, Douglas B-18 *Bo/os*, Boeing B-17 *Flying Fortresses*, and Consolidated LB-30 *Liberators*.

On 14 March 1943, the 28th moved to Adak. In December 1943, the unit was redesigned as the 28th Bombardment Group and transitioned into Consolidated B-24 *Liberators* and North American B-25 *Mitchells*. Between 26 February 1944 and 20 October 1945, the 28th operated out of the 2x4 island—Shemya.

The 28th trained for arctic warfare during 1941, and served as part of the defense system for the Alaskan region. The group helped force the withdrawal of Japanese ships that had attacked Dutch Harbor in June 1942, and also flew missions against Kiska until the Japanese evacuated the island in August 1943. The 28th is credited with flying bombardment and strafing missions against harbor installations, fisheries, canneries, and military facilities

in the Kurils. These attacks caused the Japanese to divert some of its airpower to these northern regions, thus weakening their opposition in the southern theaters. The 28th also flew photographic reconnaissance missions. While the 28th flew its last bombardment mission on 13 August 1945, the group continued to fly reconnaissance missions in the Kurils after the war.

Experience had shown that the B-18s were poorly suited for arctic operations. One-third of the fleet of 14 was grounded due to maintenance problems, and five had crashed.

The B-17s and B-24s were equipped with SCR-521 radar, as identified by the Yagi antennas mounted under their wings. This radar assisted not only in navigation over the barren arctic regions during foul weather, but also helped in tracking enemy targets. The B-17s developed skip-bombing tactics and flew their last mission against the Japanese fleet in Kiska Harbor on 13 February 1943.

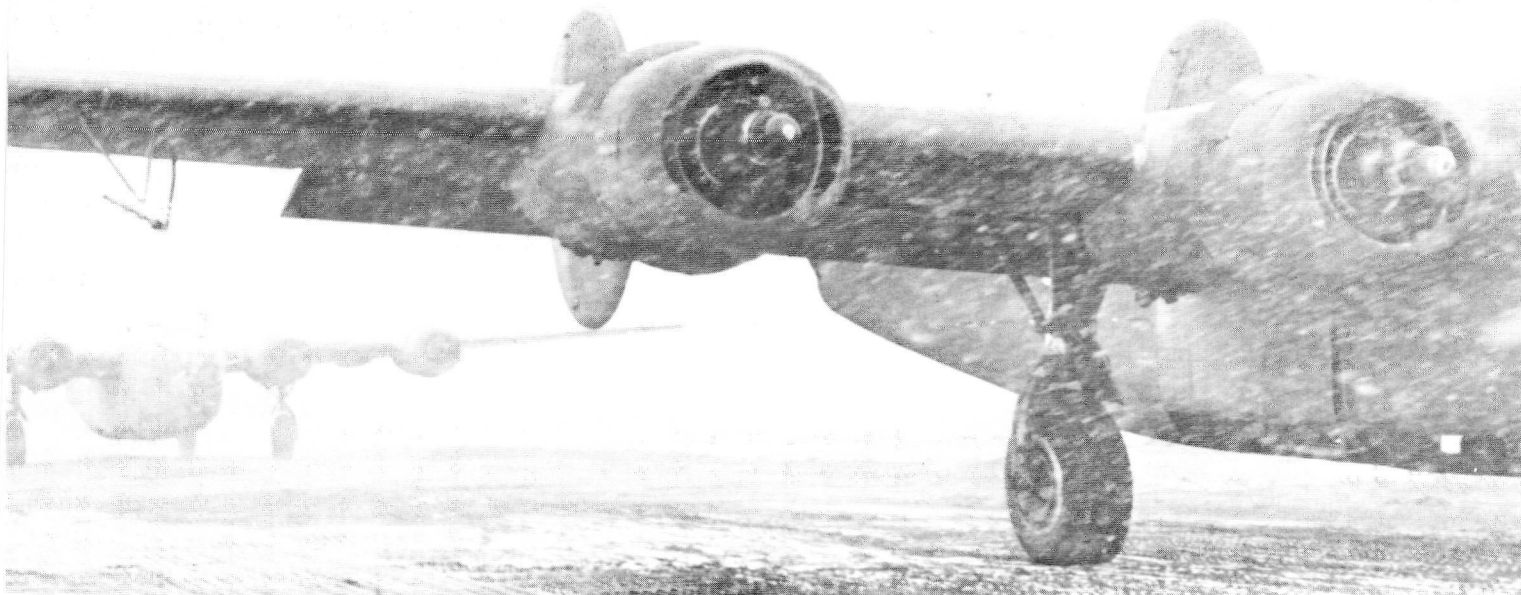
The B-26 fared poorly in getting to Alaska due to the weather; however, once there, they performed reasonably well. While the four-engined bombers were employed in long-range patrols, the *Marauders* were maintained on alert status at Elmendorf to fly missions within 300 miles of the base. Informal discussions between Army and Navy pilots at the Kodiak Naval Air Station resulted in Naval torpedoes being slung under these flying cigars. During one attack, the weather precluded a normal torpedo run at the carrier *Ryujo*. Conse-

quently, the pilot of the lead aircraft dove the aircraft to spin the torpedo propeller thereby arming the weapon so as to make a normal bombing attack. The carrier turned towards the aircraft presenting a much smaller target. The second B-26 managed a broadside attack, but the torpedo skimmed over the carrier's deck.

Frustration was probably the most often felt emotion by the men assigned to the 28th in Alaska. The weather took a heavy toll on the success of any mission. It provided a safe harbor for the enemy and provided dangerous situations for the flight crews, not to mention added difficulties for the ground crews. For their efforts in the Alaskan Campaign, the 28th Bombardment Group was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for its operations in the Kuril Islands between 1 April 1944 and 13 August 1945. The 28th BG was inactivated at Shemya on 20 October 1945.

Reactivation—The 28th Bombardment Group (Very Heavy) was activated at Grand Island AAFld, Nebraska, on 4 August 1946, and assigned to Strategic Air Command. The group remained in Nebraska until 6 October 1946, and then deployed to Elmendorf Field where it remained between 20 October 1946 and 24 April 1947. During this time frame they were equipped with B/RB-29s. Assigned to the group were the 77th, 717th, and 718th Bombardment Squadrons. On 15 May 1947, the 28th Bomb Wing deployed 13 B-29s





B-24D Liberators from the 28th Composite Group taxi in on Shemya. The ASV Vagi radar antennas, for the SCR-621 search radar, may be seen beneath the wings. The dog flew on some of their missions. (USAF)

from Rapid City AAFld to Selfridge AAFld, Michigan, to take part in a major exercise. On the following day they participated in Operation BIG TOWN, in which a force of 130 B-29s made a simulated bombing run over New York City.

On 3 May 1947, the 28th BG returned to Rapid City AAFld. The 28th Bombardment Wing was established on 28 July 1947 and organized on 15 August of the same year. The wing was discontinued on 12 July 1948, and redesignated the 28th Bombardment Wing, Medium. On 16 May 1949, the

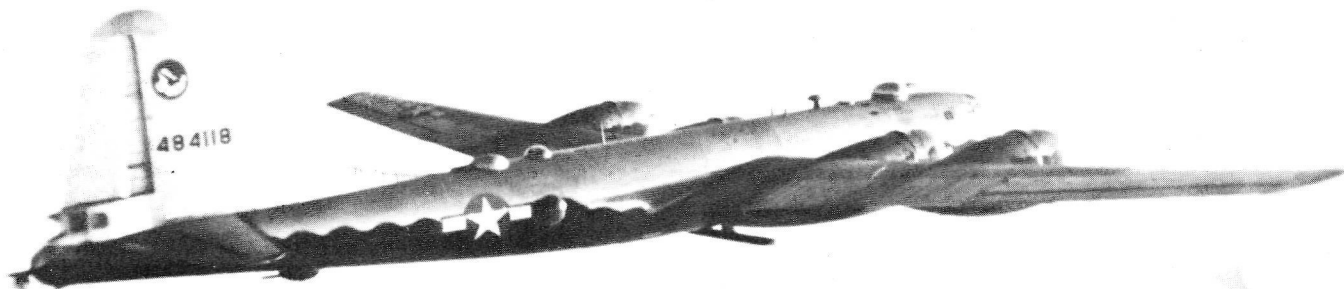


B-29-65BA, 44-84118, was flown by the 28th BG, 714th BS, as indicated by the squadron insignia on the tail. These airplanes were equipped with an AN/APQ-7 Eagle radar which had a 60-degree sweep and a wing antenna suspended between the bomb bays. The tail guns were controlled by an AN/APG-15 gun-laying radar. This picture was taken in 1947, while the unit was deployed to Alaska. (E.L. Bailey)

Legal Eagle was B-29-65BA, 44-84112, flown by Lt. E.L. Bailey, from the 28th BG, 714th BS. The nose art was created by her crew chief, MSgt. J.L. Dlussick, because of the pilot's adherence to minimum equipment requirements. (E.L. Bailey)

unit was redesignated as the 28th Bombardment Wing, Heavy, and scheduled to be equipped with Convair B-36 Peacemakers. Redesignated as the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing on 1 April 1950, and then the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Heavy, on 16 April of the same year, the wing was equipped with RB-36s which they operated until 1957. In addition, at least one C-47 was utilized as an ECM trainer. Component squadrons were the 77th, 717th and 718th Reconnaissance Squadrons.

Between 1 September and 3 Decem-



ber 1952, the 77th SRS, in conjunction with the 3rd Strategic Support Squadron, deployed to RAF Fairford, England, where they engaged in both photographic and radar mapping of Europe.

The Jet Era—Boeing B-52 *Stratofortresses* entered the inventory on 14 June 1957, and the unit became a strategic bombardment wing. Tall-tailed B-52Ds were in the inventory until 1971. Components of the wing at this time were the 37th, 77th, 717th and 718th BSs. The 28th BMW became the first unit to deploy B-52Ds for combat in Southeast Asia. In addition, the wing operated the B-52C between 1967 and 1971. The new short-tailed B-52Gs replaced these aircraft in 1971. The 28th BMW transitioned into B-52Hs in 1977.

On 26 September 1958, a pair of B-52Ds from the 28th BMW established world speed records while flying over two different routes. One aircraft without a payload, flew at 560.705 mph for 10,000 kilometers in a closed circuit. The other aircraft, also sans payload averaged 597.675 mph for 5,000 kilometers over a closed course. The pilot

were Lt. Col. Victor L. Sandacz and Captain Cholett Griswold.

A refueling capability was added in 1959 when the KC-135s, with the 928th AREFS, were assigned to the wing. The 928th was replaced by the 28th AREFS on 1 October 1960.

On 6 January 1964, the 28th AREFS

supported Tactical Air Command in the first nonstop tactical fighter deployment from the West Coast of the United States to Europe. More than 100 refuelings were required for this mission.

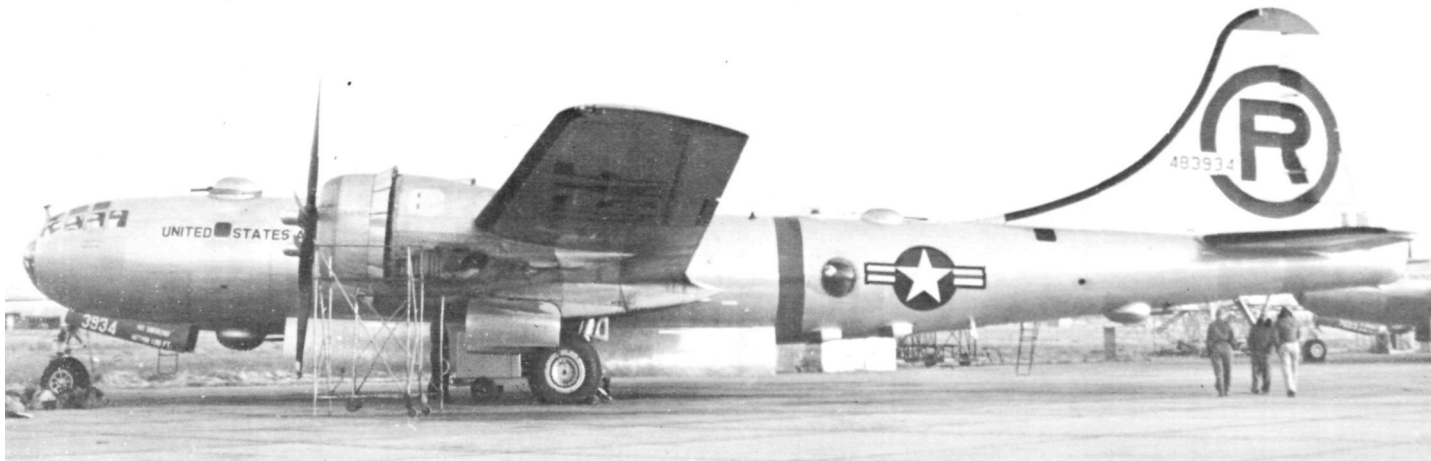
While initially equipped with KC-135A *Stratotankers*, the 28th AREFS



Spirit of Mt. Rushmore was B-52G-110-BW, 58-0235, from the 77th BS, which returned from the RAF bombing competition with the *Blue Steel Trophy*. (via N.E. Taylor)

RB-36s were Down by the 28th SRW which shared the ramp at Ellsworth AFB, between 1953-1954, with these F-84s from the 54th FIS. (USAF)

This B-29-45-BA, 44-83934, was operated by the 28th BG, 718th BS, as indicated by the Circle R on the tail and the red trim on the nose gear doors, waistband, and fin cap. ECM blisters appeared along the waist. The unit was based at Rapid City AFB during the early 1950s when this photo was taken. (G.S. Williams)

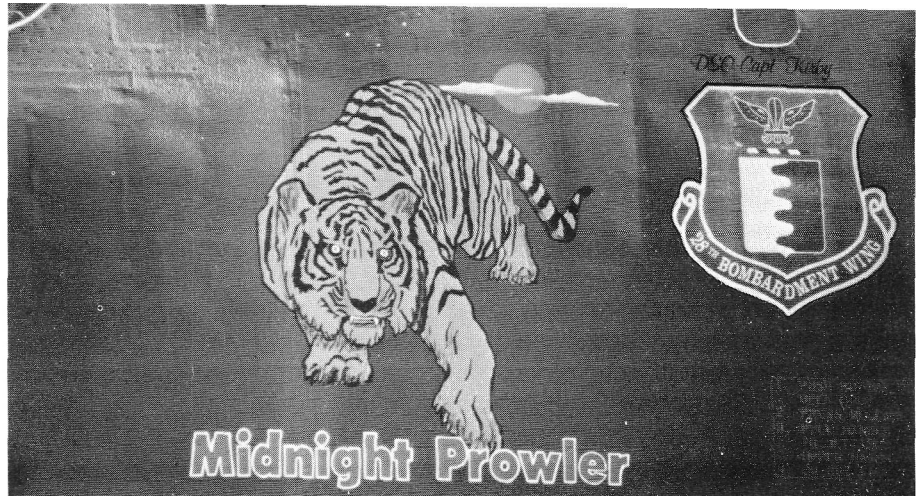
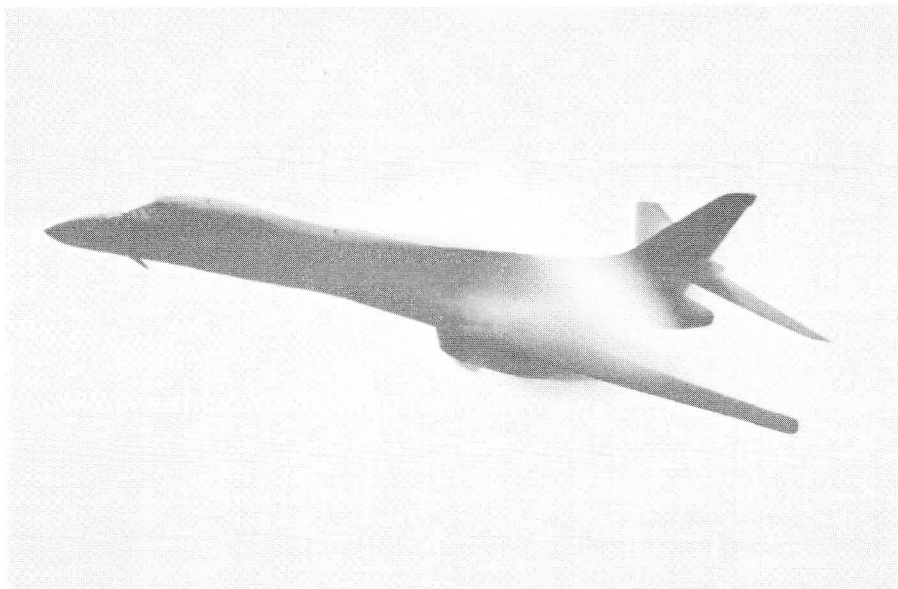


now operates the KC-135R. This conversion was completed on 10 February 1986. The latter aircraft was derived from the retrofit of GE/SNECMA CFM-56 high-bypass turbofan engines between April 1972 and October 1973. Though somewhat limited, this support continued until 1975. During this time frame, the PACCS mission for HQ 15th Air Force was retained by the EC-135 force which remained at Ellsworth AFB.

Competitions—The 28th BMW has garnered its share of trophies over the years. In 1972, the 28th BMW took the coveted *Blue Steel Trophy* in the RAF Bombing Competition. The trophy is awarded for the crew with the highest combined score in bombing and navigation. The aircraft used in the competition was a B-52G named *Spirit of Mt. Rushmore*.

While hosting *Giant Sword*, the SAC Weapons Loading Competition in 1982, the 28th BMW took the *Barrentine Trophy* for the best munitions loading team and the best crew chief award. They repeated these achievements in 1984.

B-1B— The first of 35 Rockwell B-1Bs came into the inventory of the 28th BMW on 21 January 1987. These aircraft are flown by both the 37th and 77th Bombardment Squadrons. The 28th BMW is the only SAC wing equipped with two B-1B squadrons. When the Soviet Chief of Staff came to the United States in 1988, a visit to Ellsworth and a view of the B-1 were on the agenda.



The B-1Bs assigned to the 28th BMW have a collection of first-class artwork applied to their noses.
(Photos by Major J. LaSalvia)

Quality nose art abounds on the aircraft of the 28th BMW. Some of the B-1s are now receiving a distinctive tail band which features the faces on Mt. Rushmore.

Summary—The 28th BMW currently operates three different types of aircraft (B-1B, KC-135R and EC-135A), making it somewhat unique in today's air force; however, it has come a long way from its beginnings when it operated six different types.

The EC/KC-135s assigned to the 28th BMW are not to be outdone in the nose art field.
(Photos by Capt. D. Bronson)

The 28th BMW has also adopted the Mt. Rushmore theme for the tails on a number of their B-1Bs.
(A.T.Lloyd)

As this B-1B from the 28th BMW arrived at the Abbotsford International Airshow in August 1988, it was shrouded in vapor which pleased the crowd to no end.
(A.T.Lloyd)

