

A Fireside Chat with the Minot Commanders:

- **Col. Daniel S. Hoadley, Commander of the 5th Bomb Wing**
- **Col. Kenneth C. McGhee, Commander of the 91st Missile Wing**

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Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, good morning and welcome to our Air & Space Warfighters in Action series. I'm Orville Wright, President and CEO of your Air & Space Forces Association. We're so grateful for everyone joining us online today and it's a real honor to be joined virtually by two commanders from Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. Together they command two of the three legs of our nation's nuclear triad. Colonel Dan Hoadley leads the 5th bomb wing, the host wing on Minot. His Airmen fly the B-52 Stratofortress, which is still a mainstay of America's strategic and conventional long-range strike force.

Colonel Kenny McGhee leads the 91st missile wing, one of the Air Force's three intercontinental ballistic missile wings. He leads some 1,800 wing personnel on alert 24/7 to deter nuclear war. Our program today is made possible by these sponsors listed on the screen. Their generous support makes Warfighters in Action possible.

Well, Dan and Kenny, thank you so much both of you for being here today. We know you're busy, so let me get started here. And both of you take the opportunity then to talk about Minot as the only air force base with two nuclear capable wings. Could you talk just a bit about the strategic importance of the base and what it means to be responsible and accountable for two of the three legs of the nuclear triad? Dan, please?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

I'll kick it off. Let me start off by saying thank you to you, Lieutenant General Wright and to AFA for giving us a platform here to talk about our great Airmen and our important mission set up here. As you pointed out, Minot is unique. It's the only location inside the department that has two legs of the nuclear triad station together, so incredible privilege to have the nuclear deterrence mission set up here. But the weight of responsibility is not lost on us. It's something that our Airmen have internalized and take extremely seriously. And we consider it a high honor to be a bedrock of our nation's deterrence on a day-to-day basis. Kenny?

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Yeah, and I would just like to echo what Dan was saying. First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about the Airmen and our important mission here at Minot. Thank you for the sponsors who allow this to go on. Exactly as Dan said, here at Minot we are responsible for forces of two legs of the nuclear triad. The absolute backbone of deterrence for the United States, and we take that mission seriously. The Airmen, the weapon systems, all the things that go into the deterrent posture, integrated deterrence, all those things are extremely important and we are absolutely excited to do the mission and we take it very seriously and glad to be here this morning with you.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, terrific. Well, let's take some time here to dig a bit deeper into the mission. And Dan, if we could talk some more about the B-52. That incredible bomber joined the Air Force inventory in 1962 and it's expected to remain in the Air Force until 2050, making it the longest lived aircraft in military aviation

history. But it's far from old. You're about to see a \$3 billion upgrade of your B-52s as your H-model BUFFs get new engines, radars and cockpits. Could you talk a bit more about the capabilities you'll gain, and how you're getting ready for that transition? And if you would just brag about those B-52 maintainers and the crews that are just amazing. And it was such a gift to be able to visit you all and talk to you and how you're keeping the BUFF flying well into the future to deter aggressiveness around the world, please?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, absolutely. I'll start off there with the last part of your question. The current fleet of H models that we have here at Minot are all over the age of 60. Our youngest aircraft turned 61 this month. And so the fact that we were able to keep those airplanes in the air crushed last year's flying hour program, asked for more hours and crushed through that and then took a week off at the end of September as a testament to our hard work and maintainers out of the line. That said, it's a non-trivial task. Just talking about the TF33 engines that are on the airplane itself in a recent study by AFLCMC. Their forecast to be outside of their service life and unsustainable past the year 2030. And so this upgrade that's coming to the airplane that will result in the B-52 J model is definitely something that we're looking forward to.

There's several things that will come with the J model, one is a commercial engine replacement. We'll put F130 Rolls-Royce commercial engines on the aircraft in place of the TF33s. In addition to that, we're going to put a new radar in the airplane, new avionics inside of the cockpit, and there's another number of other line items with upgrades to data links and some of the avionics on the airplane. That will result in frankly a whole new capability when it comes to B-52 power projection. The range on the airplane will be increased by about 20% with those new motors on the aircraft. Much more power capacity with new generators and new hydraulic systems and plumbing into the airplane. And then the avionics will bring the airplane into a true next gen fight capability, that will be able to project power into the Pacific and across the European AORs where our adversaries are definitely showing their might. But we are definitely going to meet that challenge with the B-52 J model.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Terrific. Kenny, moving to the ICBM force, could you talk a bit about your own modernization as you look forward as the service transitions from the 50-year-old Minuteman III to the Sentinel? How are you looking at accomplishing this transition? And specifically, will you be able to utilize some of the empty silos while upgrading others? And if you could too, don't hesitate to talk about the amazing, young second lieutenant and enlisted force, young officer and enlisted force who's responsible every day and accountable for the most lethal weapons in the world. So please, Kenny?

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Yes, sir. There's a lot there to unpack. First of all, as you're aware, the Minuteman III weapon system has been out there for a long time. The last major modification that we've had to the weapon system occurred in the 1980s. And so the weapon system, though very reliable, still able to meet the challenges, is aging out. And so it's time for modernization, it's time for modernization in a big way. On comes the Sentinel program, and Sentinel is going to be unique in that we're going to be able to leverage new technologies, different modular way of performing maintenance on the system and we're going to gain some advantages when it comes to the technological advances as well as savings on manpower and resources. Some of the challenges that we are facing with the transition possibly are just being able to meet the sustainment challenges right now within Minuteman. And so that's one of the biggest benefits that we'll be experiencing when we get Sentinel online.

I'll take this opportunity as you alluded to brag a little bit about the fantastic men and women that we have out in the missile field right now. As you're aware, significant numbers of our defenders are first term Airmen. About two thirds of our Airmen who are in our security forces units are below the age of 26. And so there's a lot of responsibility, a lot of effort put on their shoulders and a lot of responsibility there. And so we are excited to have those young Airmen doing the work for us out there in the field.

Kind of getting back to the Sentinel modernization efforts. We'll start seeing Sentinel arrive here in 2027. As you're aware, the first base that'll get it will be FE Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, followed by Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. And so by the time that it gets here, hopefully we'll be able to reap some of the benefits and some of the things that they've learned in deploying those systems there. A unique challenge that we're going to have here when it comes to modernization is that we don't have the opportunity to stand down our deterrent posture as we bring on the new system. We're going to be modernizing and updating all 450 silos and 24 launch control centers across all three bases. And as we do this, we won't be losing any of our deterrent posture. We still have to meet the requirement for STRATCOM of 400 ICBMs across the fleet. That's a monumental task that we're definitely up to meeting, and do the assistance of our community partners, contract personnel, and also the Airmen that are across all three missile wings, we're absolutely prepared to meet that challenge.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, you know that, great points on sustaining while you upgrade. Dan, if you could talk a bit about, and you already alluded to this. Sustaining your readiness meeting global commands for long range strike conventional and obviously the nuclear insurance capability as you upgrade to the J model, including great support from Tinker and the logistics center there. That'd be some great background, I think for our audience that really understand the challenge and the opportunity.

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

As you look and zoom out at the game plan for bomber modernization at large. The Air Force plan is to retire the B-1 and the B-2, upgrade those two weapon systems to B-21. And while that's happening, the B-52 remains the bedrock of the bomber fleet. Albeit, while we go through our own modernization, our modernization plan is unique, right? And whereas on the other side, for every B-1 or B-2 that flies away there's going to be a brand new weapon system that lands, our fleet gets upgraded piecemeal. And so as you point out, non-trivial task to maintain solid nuclear deterrence, and as well as the level of support to geographic combat commanders, they've come to expect in recent years. While we send aircraft off for all of these different modernization lines of effort.

In progress, we're going to experience what we call a little bit of transition risk. And something that we're paying very close attention to and planning for right now is a possibility of having multiple different variants of B-52 out on the flight line here at Minot at the same time. And so it's going to take a great deal of preparation for our maintainers and our operators to think through how they're going to tackle that challenge and continue to provide a bedrock of the bomber fleet here across the next decade or more.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense and no small challenge. Dan, to continue a bit. Combatant commander demands for long-range strike, there's two B-52 wings, and as you get taskings around the world, talk a little bit about the challenges of meeting multiple taskings from combat commanders, whether it's INDOPACOM, certainly CENTCOM is ramping up as we're watching the news. And then the continuous requirements we see across UCOM in support of NATO. If you could just step around the world a little

bit and talk about how you're constantly reaching around the world with long-range strike, as well as being in demand?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

You bet. There's two primary ways that were meeting the geographic commander's intent. And those are both for bomber task force deployments where we pack up a team of about 150 to 200 Airmen and hit the road for a month at a Ford operating location or what we call CONUS to CONUS sorties where we're supporting geographic combatant commanders from right here at Minot. And I'll give you a quick once over of what the 5th Bomb Wing's done across the last year or so and hit some highlights. Back in February of last year, and this will resonate in light of recent headlines, we executed a CONUS to CONUS sortie out to the CENTCOM AOR to support an operation called Juniper Oak. And this was a live fire exercise involving over 140 aircraft coalition partners from across the AOR, as well as naval assets.

We executed a live weapons release inside of a range in Israel, integrated with the Israeli Defense Force, and then did a lap around the Mediterranean just to demonstrate our reach and capability. In the aftermath of that caught some headlines inside of the Iranian press so we know that our adversaries are paying attention to what we're doing over there. And that was a 32-hour sortie, so a non-trivial task for our aviators to execute that and for our maintainers to prep an airplane to be capable of executing something like that.

On the BTF side, a number of highlights to bring up. Back in March of this year, we sent a bomber task force deployment to Morón, Spain. On the way out they did a circle of Eastern Europe, flew over a liberation day parade in Estonia, and then landed at Morón on the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was deliberate messaging to our adversaries that we can put air power in their backyard at the time and place of our choosing. And that we are watching.

And then here recently this summer, particularly proud of the team. Tremendous support to the INDOPACOM, AOR. We had two bomber task force deployments simultaneously out of the 5th Bomb Wing. One to Guam, and this team executed an ACE exercise out to Indonesia where they sent a two ship and about 50 personnel to Indonesia for a week right inside of China's backyard there. And set up camp integrated with the Indonesian Air Force and then returned to Guam.

The other bomber task force deployment was up at JBER, set up camp there on another ACE exercise where they line haul all of their equipment up there and were able to make it into JBER with no air fueling support just to demonstrate the agility of our reach. And also brought a number of parts and pieces with them inside of a modular component that goes inside of the bomb bay where we're able to organically sustain ourselves without any ties to the logistics network for a number of days.

And demonstrating the reach and agility of that squadron. And after about a month brought the team back home. Oh, by the way, we're still flying wrap sorties back here at Minot. So, essentially operating from three locations simultaneously. Just tremendous demonstration of the reach and capability of the 5th Bomb Wing.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, Kenny, Dan tells some really interesting war stories and you've got your own. When I was at Minot this summer, and by the way, I need to come back in January just to prove that I can handle the cold weather. But your defenders, your launch control officers, all young, two second lieutenants in a loss control facility is not unusual. A Senior Airman leading a convoy guarding, essentially escorting a thermal nuclear weapon across the wide open spaces in North Dakota. Just take some time if you would, to talk about the challenges of your mission day-to-day, the operational challenges? And once again, talk about

the amazing Airmen that are leading and accomplishing that challenges, responsible for most lethal weapons in the world and accountable.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Yes sir. I'll just start off by saying right now it's the 30th of October, tomorrow's Halloween. And while many places around the nation folks will be celebrating and observing Halloween, wearing all kinds of costumes and it'll be nice and pleasant. Probably in the 50s, maybe the 50s, last week we got about 10 inches of snow. Currently it's about 18, 20 degrees outdoor with a wind chill about eight degrees or so. And we're still out there jobbing it. Our Airmen are some of the finest American citizens that you'll ever meet. They come from all walks of the globe, all corners of the United States, all walks of life. Diversity is extremely important to us up here. And so every single Airman we'll put our arms around and there are challenges here that we need to make sure that we're taking care of them with respect too.

Some of those challenges, as I've already mentioned is the weather. It gets cold here and it stays cold here. I've often said that the temperatures and the snow that falls in October will be the same snow that's on the ground in April when it begins to thaw. We're a little bit isolated, quite different than some of the other bases in the Northern Tier. And there's about a 13-mile hike between the actual base here at Minot Air Force Base and the town of Minot, so we have some unique challenges. And on top of that, some of our Airmen, as I've mentioned before, about two thirds of our Airmen are below the age of 26 and our defender in our security forces group. And we have a lot of young defenders on base for first term Airmen. Within our launch control centers, as you mentioned, it is not uncommon to go downstairs nowadays into the launch control center and find a senior second lieutenant and also who's down there with also another mature second lieutenant on console performing command control of the Minuteman III weapons system.

They are, and this is not to say that they're not capable, they're extremely capable, they're extremely intelligent. Well up to the challenge that exists up here in Minot, and we are extremely proud of them. Now, let me not just talk about the security forces personnel and our operators. Our maintainers are some of the finest maintainers you'll find in the Air Force. The work and the requirements that we put on their shoulders every single day is absolutely amazing. The temperatures that we currently have now and the jobs that we have in going out to do, just to maintain operational capability of the Minuteman III weapon system are absolutely phenomenal. And they stand up to the challenge every single day. As we've talked about before, the Minuteman III is an aging weapon system. It's been out there in the field since the 1960s. Last modernization was in the 1980s.

And so the ability for us to continue to maintain the weapon system and fight some of the challenges here in this environment are significant. And our Airmen across the board, whether they're defenders, operators or maintainers or the support personnel. And I'll also take the opportunity to give a shout-out to the members in the admission support group on the 5th Bomb Wing side. We can't do our work without the outstanding support of our civil engineering squadron, 4th Force Support Squadron. The chefs in the missile field are absolutely phenomenal. So kind of to echo your point, Lieutenant General Wright, our Airmen are absolutely the force that propels the mission here at Minot and we could not be more proud the effort that they put forth every single day.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Thanks, Kenny. That's great. We can't tell that story enough. Dan, you are the host wing, 5th Bomb Wing's host wing. So the basically four facilities, the community partnership that you have, the support of your AFA chapter, one of our most active AFA chapters in fact is at Minot and helps reinforce the relationships, the partnership you have between the wing, host wing and the community. Could you talk

a little bit about ... And we were involved, I had the honor to be part of an award ceremony, AFA chapter-led award ceremony. Talk about some of those unsung heroes, if you will, from education, the Airman leadership school, finance, your civil engineers for example, that are all out there working so hard focused on really the mission of our United States Air Force, please?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

You bet. I mean, I'll start with the civil engineers since they have been near and dear to both Kenny and I's hearts here in the last week or so. I mean, 10 inches of snow is a non-trivial task for them to handle when you put it in the context of a missile field that's about 8,500 square miles that we need to make sure is open for maintenance operations that need to take place across an entire complex. As well as security operations. And in light of the fact that we were executing on the 5th Bomb Wing side, a major exercise last week. And so inside of about 24 hours they were able to get the entire base back open and just a tremendous level of effort from them across the board to make sure that the facilities are operating and that we aren't running into any challenges from that perspective either.

Let me talk about our community partners here a little bit, because it's something that's a unique aspect of serving at Minot. Have been a lot of places in my 23-year Air Force career. And never experienced a level of community support to the level that we see it here at Minot. They truly go the extra mile to support our Airmen. And I think that they really understand that for a lot of our young folks, especially in light of the ages that Kenny pointed out earlier, are a long way from home and this is their first assignment.

And so whether it's military appreciation days at the state fair or Minot state football game like we saw here recently. Or an ongoing program that they've sponsored this year called Home for the Holidays, where they've raised a tremendous amount of money to send over a 100 Airmen home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. They've really embraced the base and made us feel like we're a part of their community, and gone the extra mile to support operations out here. I can't say thank you enough to that team and in enough ways or in enough public places.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Could you go a bit further? We AFA in giving a voice to our Airman and Guardians, talk about some of the local base wing and delta challenges for quality of life. On base and off base housing, privatized housing, the availability of housing off base as well as childcare support. Here's your opportunity to help us give you voice, and I always talk about opportunities. Certainly there are challenges and issues, but I think there's tremendous opportunities for communities for private investment. And certainly we can never stop talking to Congress enough about the importance of funding the childcare that's required to accomplish such an incredible mission. Two legs of the triad responsible for most lethal weapons of the world and the childcare support that you should have to accomplish that mission.

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

I'll kick it off by talking about medical care and then hand it over to Kenny to talk about childcare maybe. I think that's something that's definitely a little bit more of an acute challenge on his side. Minot not being in a somewhat remote area of the country, and in a state that where population centers are pretty spread out. One of the things that we have a challenge here with is availability of specialist care. And just really capacity across the medical care spectrum. And so while there is a decent amount of medical care here inside of the community of Minot, for some of the more specialized care that our Airmen and families need, they're having to travel pretty significant distances either to Bismarck or Fargo, or even out to Minneapolis in some cases. And so tremendous challenge. It requires them to take a number of

days off of work. From a financial perspective there's a burden there and certainly the Air Force, we're doing our part to reimburse them for that, but it's a non-trivial aspect of living in a place like Minot, North Dakota.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

That's helpful. Kenny, please?

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

We've talked a lot about the challenges that our Airmen face and all the requirements that we put on them to accomplish this mission, but one thing we haven't done thus far is we've not talked about the families and the tremendous responsibility that they have, and the requirements, I guess we can say that the family members have here as well. We can order Air Force members the active duty personnel to come to Minot Air Force Base. And they will come sometimes whether they want to or not. But the family members, they don't get a choice. Spouses and the children, they're just doing their duty as members of the families and also as American citizens to support the mission that we have here at Minot. And so I'll get into the weeds a little bit on exactly how we do operations. And it'll probably highlight some of the challenges that we have here when it comes to healthcare.

During a normal operational shift, someone might work an eight to five job and require healthcare or required childcare in that respect, drop the child off first thing in the morning, then come back in the evening and pick them up. Well, the difference between a normal eight to five kind of job and what we do here in the missile field, is that when we send a squadron of missileers and defenders out to the field, they're not there for one, two or three days. They're out there for seven days. And that rotation goes, they'll probably go out, call it a Wednesday or a Thursday, and they'll leave the family members behind. And while the crew members are in the field, the launch control center operators will rotate 24 hours up and down from the LCC day-to-day for that seven-day period.

But however that works, they're in the field for seven days while the family members are back here. That creates sometimes a significant burden when it comes to childcare and just supporting the families back here on base. Even for those members who don't have children or aren't married or in a relationship there, some of our members also have pets. And so that just highlights some of the unique challenges that we have here where we'll deploy squadron of defenders and operators to the field. And there is a significant challenge associated with how we take care of the family members, especially when it comes to childcare back here on base. We have what's called missile care where we do have some providers who the crew members and their families are able to leave their children with family care providers for a period of up to seven days at a time.

That is a expensive and carry a significant burden to those family members. And so sometimes that becomes a challenge and we're always trying to find different ways to alleviate that challenge. But in addition to that, I think a bigger challenge here is just capacity. We've done a lot of work here on base to increase the space that we have in our childcare facilities. But one thing we can't organically do is make more people come to work here and develop the capacity there. So, we're trying to find unique ways, different programs in order order to increase the number of childcare workers to support our men and women every single day.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Thanks, that's helpful. We'll continue as much as we possibly can at AFA to reinforce your voice. Important points. Family readiness means combat readiness, family readiness means credible deterrent. So we can never stop talking about them. We're going to open up the session to our online audience.

Please unmute yourself before you ask a question. You can also type a question in the chat box and I'll do my best to rephrase that for our two or two wing commanders. So let's start with the first question to Greg Hadley from Air & Space Forces Magazine, please, Greg?

Greg Hadley:

Hi guys, thanks for doing this. My question was on that childcare issue that you just raised. How much work is being done and can you give a little more detail on some of the programs that are being implemented to increase that capacity that you were talking about?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, I'll comment on it. There's a number of things that we're doing to try and boost capacity on base. One of the things that is perhaps a highlight of Minot Air Force Base is the family childcare program. And this is where we have spouses that receive some training and then they're able to watch other kids in their home while they're watching their own kids and get paid for it. And so for after duty hours care like Kenny describes, or weekend care, this is a tremendous capability. And we have, actually, we trade off every other week with JBER on being the number one FCC program in the Air Force. That's something that's definitely a highlight up here. For the CDC proper, we are putting as many bonuses and hiring incentives as we can against filling the roles there. And really just trying to create an environment where individuals enjoy coming to work every day. We've also been, Kenny and I have been engaged with the local civic leaders and political leaders inside of the state of North Dakota to amplify this point. And frankly, it's a shared challenge.

I mean, as they had their legislative session this year, one of the primary topics of discussion is the impact of childcare and the role it plays in economic capacity for the state. And so whether you're trying to run a business or provide nuclear deterrence, childcare is a key enabler.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Okay, that's helpful. I've got a couple questions on NC3, command and control and upgrading command and control. And you all are the tip of the spear experts here as you're using the command and control, the very secure command and control capabilities you need. And by the way, our Guardians are involved here. Because you have obviously satellite based secure comms you're using today you're going to need to use in the future, whether it's the 91st Wing mission or the 5th Bomb Wing mission. Upgrading the B-52 will certainly require reliance on precision navigation and timing GPS that's reliant. And we know the Chinese are threatening that capability every day. Similarly, for both wing commanders, absolutely reliable, unhackable if you will, command and control that you must have today and as you move forward is probably a great interest to our audience. And certainly there are modern IT applications involved. So as much as you can talk about that in an unclassified way, your reliance on effective command control how you looked at nuclear command control in the future.

And certainly again, there's a space component of this. I'm sure we can, you'll fill up an hour for that. But if you could kind of just give the audience an overview, I think it'll help summarize a number of the questions.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

I'll start off. In times of crisis when deterrent fails, the line of communication between the President of the United States giving an order to launch to the missileer in the launch control center is very short. We are the most responsible leg of the nuclear triad, so we have to be able to receive accurate, effective and timely communications from the National command authorities. Extremely quickly to provide that

quick response that the nation depends on us for. And so NC3 systems are extremely important to us. And we are daily working hard with our community partners, with our Department of Defense partners to ensure that NC3 is at the top of the list when it comes to making sure that it meets the war fighting requirements that we have.

Moving forward and looking forward to where we'll be going in the future. The Sentinel system will provide us additional capacity when it comes to NC3 systems. I can't really go into exactly the specifics of it, but we will gain some technological advances when that system does come online. Some of you out there, remember some of the old disc that we used to have in the capsule of 5.5 kind of inch floppy disc that we're down there. Now they're souvenirs. But moving forward from that type of technology into what we have in the future is going to be key to ensure that we have proper command and control in communications in the future. But also securing that and leveraging our cyber capabilities across the Department of Defense and also industry are going to be extremely important to ensure that we have reliable communications in the future.

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, I mean, I think Kenny makes some great points and then frankly, many of the systems that he's going to, his team is going to receive message traffic via the same systems that our team is going to be using. And so there's been a number of efforts across the last couple of years here to upgrade systems inside of our command posting here at Minot Air Force Base proper with a heavy emphasis, as Kenny pointed out on cybersecurity as well. The unique aspect of the bomber leg of the nuclear triad is flexibility, right? And so what we provide is a capability to do messaging. We can launch an airplane and send it towards enemy terrain and maybe send the signal that whatever they're doing is not something that we want them to continue, the path that we don't want them to continue down.

And we can recall that bomber all the way up to the point of launching a nuclear weapon. And I don't have that capability unless I have assured NC3 capability. And so there's definitely been a line of effort as part of the B-32 modernization to make sure that the command and control systems inside of the aircraft itself are safe, secure, and reliable.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

And could you also make the point, and then we'll go to Bob Elder, former 8th Air Force commander, but just, Dan, if you could make the point that for bomber task force missions around the world, conventional and nuclear, reliance on space, reliance on a resilient space architecture, that small group of Guardians that operate and defend the GPS constellation. It's like having Guardians in the cockpit with you almost. Could either take issue with that view of the world, or reinforce it?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Oh, absolutely reinforce it. I mean, in the long range strike business we are operating over the horizon and striking targets that are well beyond line of sight. And you don't have that capability unless you can connect the kill chain from the tasking organization, to the shooter, to the target. And that doesn't happen without space and a very resilient C2 architecture.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Thanks. And for Lieutenant General retired Bob Elder, former 8th Air Force commander, you've got your hand up and if you'll unmute your mic, it'd be great to hear from you?

Lt. Gen. Bob Elder, USAF (Ret.):

Great to hear from you Orville, and thanks for the two of you for talking with us today. I actually had a different question originally. But I was going to do a follow on actually to what General Wright asked regarding NC3. And this might be a surprise to some that are listening. Or actually I hope they'll get something from it. But as you, and this really applies probably more on the bomber side of this. But since you do both conventional and nuclear, there's a tendency for us to look at ways that we can take things from the joint to all domain C2 realm and apply it to NC3. But have you found that there are actually quite a bit of a number of things that are done in the nuclear world of things that you do for the bomber that actually apply and could be applied to JADC2?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

For sure. I mean, for years in advance of conventional long range strike being a primary business for the B-32, the reason the airplane was created was to execute nuclear operations, and command and control are part and parcel of that. So, you could really think of B-52s and NC3 as a path breaking capability that has led us down the road of a robust JADC2 architecture. And to your point earlier, there's an interplay, both amongst the work that's already been accomplished on nuclear hardened comm pathways and conventional comm pathways. And also, broadening our thinking a little bit about maybe relaxing some of those hardening requirements and being able to use multiple different methods to connect the entire architecture to make sure that we have seamless pathways from our National Command Authority out to the individual tactical operators that are doing things in the field.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Great, thanks, Bob. We also have a question on whether or not the bomber task force scheduling construct as you have it masters the global force management construct in the integration, if you will, of demands across combatant commands. And you talk about this somewhat already. The tasking systems, if you will, work compatible advice from those who generate bombers around the world and fly them on how the tasking system broadly could be improved or is currently applied correctly?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

In my opinion, I think it is applied correctly. It's centrally managed. There's a number of ways that these bomber task force deployments and CONUS to CONUS sorties are tasked out. And the preponderance of them are planned out across an entire year's worth of a strategic game plan to make sure that we are meeting the needs of each of the geographic combatant commanders, as well as not over tasking any individual unit. Inside of that it's incredibly difficult to predict a year out when there's going to be a strategic need inside of a combatant command. And on occasion we're asked to surge and provide capability when a crisis arises. And in those cases we reserve capacity inside of the entire bomber enterprise to make sure that we have units available that can meet that need when it is required. Whether that means extending a bomber task force deployment unit in place to meet a need that was unanticipated. Or taking a unit that was not previously tasked and putting them into a theater when the situation dictates.

And so from my perspective, having been in a wing leadership team for the last three years plus, and seeing both how a B-1 unit handles this type of tasking, as well as now a B-52 unit, I think it's working extremely well.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

And for both of you, we have a number of questions on the growing proliferation of unmanned aerial system threats, UAS threats. I think we talked about this when I visited you this summer, but Kenny,

starting with you, are you ramping up or concerned about UAS countermeasures across the 91st Wing missile field? And then certainly, Dan, your points.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

We are and we are taking those into consideration and how we are moving forward and how we are equipping and innovating within our security forces group. We are developing and perfecting, I guess to say our counter UAS capabilities out in the missile field, to provide us greater situational awareness of any kind of threat that we might be facing just day-to-day. And also when we have some of our more significant movements going out in the missile field. So we're exercising, we're training to perfect our own UAS capabilities and also to deter and prevent counter UAS capabilities from preventing us from accomplishing our mission.

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, same emphasis on our side. I mean, it's when you're operating at a base that has well over half of the active deployed stockpile of nuclear weapons, you have to be concerned about any form of security threat to include proliferation of UAS. Heavy emphasis on operating, maintaining the counter U.S. systems that we have across the base, as well as upgrading that over time to make sure that we're able to meet the challenge of that technology as it grows in scale and complexity.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

And if you don't mind, let me just pile onto that to say that counter UAS within our business is not new. We've identified the threat and it's been out there for a while. And so we have some relatively recent or legacy systems out there that are providing us the capability to detect and also potentially defeat those systems. And so like I said before, what we've had on the shelf and what we've been operating, combined with what we're looking forward to doing in the future regarding counter UAS, we are prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Question from the former director of the NC3 Enterprise Center, the maintenance challenge of current NC3 systems and limited maintenance technical training of the Airmen who maintain them, great people, spread too thin across the range of skills, operator through maintenance. Do you see that challenge? Are you making progress and are you confident your forces have a strong enough voice, your forces at the wing level into NC3 modernization from the perspective of the operator maintainer? Please, Kenny, we'll start and then Dan?

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Sure. I came into this business early in the early 2000s when we had maintainers in the maintenance group, and then we moved them around, put them in the Comm Squadron. And over time the number, the sheer number of ICBM field running communications experts has decreased over time. However, the expertise within that group of individuals has not decreased. And so they're still very capable. Now, that is not to say that there's sometimes resource constraints and challenges there. But we are able to still meet those challenges when it comes to maintaining and operating our communication systems. And as we move forward to Sentinel, there will be some technological changes that will allow us to leverage some of that capability. Which will make maintaining our NC3 systems just a little bit more effective, a little bit more adequate. But right now, we do have some challenges addressing our NC3 capabilities with just the way that we conduct maintenance operations today. But nothing that has overcome what

we are required to do, we are absolutely able to maintain and sustain our communications capabilities in the missile field, and we'll continue to do so in the future.

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, I more or less agree with Kenny that across the acquisitions enterprise, there's been a reform in the way that we approach thinking about operator integration from a positive perspective in that we're including a very tight-knit relationship with operators from the get-go between the acquisitions community and the contractors as we work our way through the design and fielding process. As well as including sustainment personnel in that conversation from the get-go. And building sustainment into the design of each of these new weapon systems from the outset. And so as we've, definitely the new systems that we filled it here at Minot, the things that are on the horizon, I feel like things are moving in an extremely positive direction.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Just to lump onto that one, I think one thing that I've noticed over time is that there is a greater connectivity between what we do here at The Wing and the support that we receive from the mass come level out through the contractor support. And so when I first came into the military working ICBMs 20 years ago, didn't necessarily see that level of interaction from each of those particular levels. But nowadays we're seeing quite a bit more activity, quite a bit more emphasis on the relationships between how we interact with the number of Air Force, the major command, and also those contractors who support our systems.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, that's great news, and I'm sure the AFMC commander would be happy to hear that too. I know that's certainly his commitment to work closely with our defense industry to ensure you have what you need. Well, let me shift a bit. All of us now are recruiters for our Air Force and our space force. We just stood up an AFA recruiting task force to support Brigadier General Chris Amrhein in a tough job he just took on. As it's proven that the propensity to serve is going downhill across our nation. So Dan, we'll start with you. Why would a high school graduate want to be part of your mission, live at Minot Air Force Base to do so, and pursue an Air Force career either for four or five years or a bit longer? And we may use outtakes from your and Kenny's response and send them to Chris for him to use for additional recruiting MO, so please?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, no pressure, right? I'll say this, pick up a newspaper, right? Take a look at what's going on across the globe. Take a look at what our leaders are saying about the challenges that our nations about to face inside of the arena. We've got a brewing competition that may trip the line into conflict in the Pacific Theater with China. We have a years more worth of conflict between Russia and Ukraine that's been threatening the NATO alliance. And now a conflict inside of the Middle East that there's a lot of concern about tripping the line into a larger theater war.

What are the frontline weapon systems that are going to A, provide a bedrock of deterrence to keep those things from boiling over? And B, respond across long global distances to provide security and defense for our nation and achieve our national objectives? And you can look no further than the two weapon systems that Kenny and I's team operating. My answer would be, if you want to be on the A team, if you want to be on a team that is operating at the core of our national defense priorities, then come up to Minot and join the 5th Bomb Wing or the 91st Missile Wing.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Thanks. And Kenny, your message to high school females and males looking at what to do for the rest of their life?

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Well, I'll be honest with you, these are some of the kind of questions that we talk about up here quite a bit at Minot, we mentioned, we've said it before, it gets cold, a bit isolated. And when you compare what we do day to day to what's out there in industry, and for a graduating senior from high school or someone coming out of you name the academic institution, university. We can't compete and we won't be able to compete with what's being paid out there for some of the more elite professions out there. But I guarantee you 100% hands down that one thing that those institutions cannot compete with is a level of comradery, the level of teamwork, the level of just togetherness that we have here. And particularly at Minot. Sometimes we do get a bad rap, whether it's weather related or isolation. However, most of those comments come from people who've never served here at Minot.

Being here for any amount of time, and you kind of get into what we do here. You get into the mission and you get to know people here. And the level of comradery, the level of togetherness that we have and the bonds that we develop here can't be found in any other location. I guess my part of the answer is, if you want to belong to something that's bigger than yourself, if you want to belong to a community of people who are moving in the same direction, who are working to achieve a common mission, a common goal, then that's what we're about. And you can't find that in many other places outside of where we are in the military today.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

I think Chris will appreciate the vignette, probably repeat that. Thanks, Kenny. Thanks, Dan. Dan, could you part of maybe central to why we need to recruit effectively, educate the public in the demands of national security, the certainly rapid evolution of increased threats, weapon systems, and really commitment of our peer threats, the leadership of our peer threats, China, certainly Russia and Iran, North Korea. Could you talk as much as you can about the recent intercept of a Chinese J-11 with a B-52, I think not from your wing, but what that really means to our operations around the world, air and space, as you see the confidence of our enemies that builds upon then their capability to challenge deterrence and to challenge peace and stability?

Or as much as you want to talk unclassified about that particular intercept that was published by a J-11, by the way, carrying we think PL-15 missiles, live air-to-air missiles. So, it wasn't just a Thunderbird formation approach, it was a weapon system with live missiles within just a few feet of one of our B-52s, please?

Col. Daniel Hoadley:

Yeah, absolutely. I think there's really two sides of this conversation. One is hammering home the point that you're making, that it's tangible proof that the threat is real and that the conflict with these near-peer adversaries is non-trivial. And more and more we're seeing these kinds of adversary reactions to our bomber task force activity. Where when we park air power in their backyard, they're coming out to take a look. And there's a number of reasons and we could speculate about why we're doing that. But to your point, those aircraft are armed with live ordinance. Those are not movie props. That's the real deal. And so it takes a tremendous amount of grit and courage and professionalism on the part of our air crews to maintain their composure, stay on mission, and react appropriately when those kinds of things happen.

I think the opposite side of that narrative is that the adversary is coming out to react. Because they're taking notice of what we're capable of doing. It's a capability they don't have to reach across the globe and provide a long range strike capability at a time and place of our choosing. And so from my side, I think it's equal parts, a demonstration of fear, and that they are taking notice of what we're doing and are trying their best to provide their own assertive reaction to it, albeit with a short-range platform that is reactive, instead of proactive.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Good point. And Kenny, could you, first of all, thanks to both of you, but in your career, Colonel McGhee, you watched the growth of Chinese ICBM capabilities and much of that's out there recently published, but you're an expert. Could you talk just a bit about the real growth of Chinese ICBM capabilities, as well as the sustained capability of Russian ICBM capabilities? I know you and your team look at those threats every day and thank goodness, thank the good Lord that you're so capable and deterring such world ending threats. So please, Kenny, if you'll close us out, we can't thank both of you enough.

Col. Kenneth McGhee:

Absolutely. The rise of the Chinese nuclear program has been dramatic, has been dynamic, and has been impressive, I'll be honest with you, over the past few years. They've developed a capability, especially within their ground-based strategic nuclear force that is impressive. And so it is imperative for us to understand at every level that the threat coming from China is extremely real. There's only, in my opinion, having done this business for so long, I have the opportunity, I have the mission to provide a nuclear deterrent capability across our missile fields, whether it's Minot Mount from, or FE Warren, to deter the rising and the pacing threat that China provides us and that they pose to us.

As our secretary of the Air Force has said, and all senior leaders have said, "China, China, China." That's the mission. That's the pacing threat that right now we have to pay attention to. And we are extremely sensitive to that. And we are extremely looking forward to the challenge to deter adversaries such as China.

Russia has always been there. There was a period following the Cold War where I guess we assumed that the peace dividend was going to pay off, and that would be a significant stand down potentially in nuclear requirements. However, that soon changed. And so right now we also see an emerging and a continually capable adversary in Russia as well. Seeing what they've done in Ukraine has also been very interesting and has given us new focus. And also have continued to provide us the opportunity to really teach and ingrain the importance of what we do, not only to our active duty force, but also to those who are within the community. And so, looking at the future adversaries out there, future competitors, China being the pacing threat, Russia still providing a significant challenge across the international stage when it comes to how they're threatening others within their particular neighborhood and having to deter them, and others out there.

It's extremely important that we understand that through ICBMs, through bombers, through subs the deterrent capabilities of the nuclear enterprise. We are the backbone of deterrent capability for the United States. And we have to continue to meet those challenges. Whether it's with our current legacy systems, the B-52, the Minuteman III ICBM, or the future systems that are coming online, B-52 J, Sentinel, and others, these are our capabilities that we need for the future. These are capabilities that will be there to make sure that we address the future threats that are posed by our competitors. And we are absolutely looking forward to those challenges as we continue to grow our Airmen and meet the modernization challenges of the future.



Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):

Well, thank you both so much for taking time in very busy schedules to allow, and it's an honor AFA to support you. And to constantly reinforce our support for Airman, Guardians, and family members. Please thank the many family members, your own spouses and your command chiefs, your wing command chiefs and their spouses for the amazing leadership you bring to the defense of the greatest constitutional republic in the history of the world. So, thanks guys. We'll stay in touch. It's been an honor.