



B-52 bombers from the 5th Bomb Wing, Minot AFB, N.D., form up over Wyoming during a training mission.

Minot's 5th Bomb Wing keeps ancient B-52s combat ready.



Never-ending Stratofortress

Photography by Ted Carlson

After nearly 50 years of service—the last one was delivered in 1962—the Air Force’s B-52H Stratofortresses continue to serve as a critical element of the nation’s long-range strike force. Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota is one of two homes for the B-52s. The only USAF bomber still capable of carrying nuclear cruise missiles, the B-52’s size allows it to haul a massive ordnance load. **11** At Minot (l-r), TSgt. Kyle Bergstedt, TSgt. Jamie Mikus, TSgt. Shane Martin, and SrA. Ethan Payne download an octet of AGM-86B Air Launched Cruise Missiles from a B-52’s bomb bay. With retirement of the stealthy AGM-129, the 1980s-vintage AGM-86 is the only nuclear cruise missile in USAF service. **12** A1C Jorge Miranda



works on a B-52 of the 69th Bomb Squadron. **13** A B-52H, engines turning, holds short for takeoff. **14** SrA. Alvyna Euta-Filo, SrA. John Williams, and A1C Justin Lowery of the 5th Operational Support Squadron at Minot prepare crew helmets in the life support shop.



11 A 5th Bomb Wing B-52 co-pilot's view of refueling from a KC-135 tanker, somewhere over Montana. Aerial refueling is a critical aspect of any mission for the fuel-ravenous B-52, and must be practiced constantly. *12* Payne (l) and Martin download AGM-86Bs from a Common Strategic Rotary Launcher. *13* B-52s await a mission on the Minot ramp. Note the tail of one of the behemoths extend-

ing outside a hangar. *14* Bristling with antennas, satellite communication domes, electro-optical systems, and electronic warfare blisters, a B-52 banks hard over Montana during a training mission. Wrinkles in the fuselage are a design feature to accommodate flex in the wings, which can be as much as a dozen feet, depending on the maneuver and the amount of fuel in the wings. *15* B-52 co-pilot

Capt. Brandon Wheeler maintains formation with another B-52H during a training mission over Montana.

111 Minot's fire emergency services flight puts out a burning simulated B-52 carcass during a "Broken Arrow" exercise. Broken Arrow refers to an accident involving nuclear weapons. **121** The mock B-52 is made of sturdy stuff and has "burned" countless times. **131** Fire trucks at-tack the mock burning BUFF with water. **141** Security forces SrA. Brent Thielemier (l) and SrA. Stephen Burt scramble to secure the perimeter around a simulated Broken Arrow during an exercise at Minot. **151** A Lit-ening targeting pod on a B-52 wing is one of many new tools fitted to the bombers in the last decade. The pod permits the aircraft to designate targets for laser guided bombs. **161** Only the B-52 can carry the 750-pound M117 general-purpose bomb.





11 A B-52H rests on the ramp at Minot. *12* Payne readies a rotary launcher rack of AGM-86Bs. *13* A lineup of B-52s, seemingly freshly painted. *14* A UH-1N Huey bearing security forces patrols the flight line. All aspects of nuclear weapons operations—especially security—have received a huge

boost in the last few years. *15* “Beauty shot” of a Stratofortress cruising over Montana. The B-52 has always flown in a slightly nose-down attitude, giving it a sinister, shark-like look in the air. Originally built to house a crew member and a cannon, the extended tail now carries an array of electronic

warfare systems meant to protect the airplane from ground and missile attack.

111 A rotary launcher full of nuclear AGM-86Bs fills a B-52's bomb bay. The B-52 can deliver the widest range of weapons in the Air Force inventory. Many of their training versions are pictured on this page. 121 A submarine-killer sea mine designed to be dropped from a BUFF. 131 One of the B-52's newest weapons is the stealthy, conventional AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, or JASSM. 141 CBU-103 Wind-Corrected Munitions Dispenser cluster bombs. 151 Designed to get at deeply buried targets, the 5,000-pound GBU-28 bunker buster was hastily developed during the 1991 Gulf War. 161 The GBU-38 500-pound version of the satellite guided Joint Direct Attack Munition. 171 The ADM-160 Miniature Air Launched Decoy, meant to fool enemy radars; it can also protect fighters operating the same area.





11 Looking like something out of “Antiques Roadshow” and attesting to the B-52’s 50-year-plus history, this co-pilot’s control yoke has weathered countless missions but gets the job done. **12** Security forces personnel, including SrA. Alex Ballard (foreground), in position during a Broken Arrow exercise at Minot. **13** A far cry from today’s “glass cockpit” controls, steam gauges giving

status on each of the B-52’s eight engines still dominate the aircraft’s “front office.” **14** Mikus (background) and Bergstedt position a loader to take an ALCM out of a B-52’s bomb bay. **15** The well-worn throttles of the B-52—the only jet aircraft flying today with eight engines—belie long and honorable service, but many years of duty still lie ahead. Air Force plans call for retaining the

B-52 as a “standoff” platform for another 30 years, meaning the grandchildren of today’s B-52 pilots could fly the same machines as front-line combat aircraft—not as air show or museum pieces. ■