

Four Munitions Operations Activated Under AFNWC

Air Force Materiel Command Report

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio -- With the activation and assumption of command for the 798th Munitions Maintenance Group at Minot AFB, N.D., August 18, the Air Force significantly advanced one of its top goals -- reinvigorating its nuclear enterprise.

The maintenance group was the last of four similar organizations to stand-up this month. The other assumption ceremonies took place August 4 for both the 15th Munitions Squadron at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., and the 16th Munitions Squadron at Malmstrom AFB, Mont.; and August 5 for Detachment 1 at Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

The activation of these weapons storage area logistics operations are all part of a realignment of organizational responsibilities from Air Force Space Command to the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center. The Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force directed the transfers of the WSAs, which confer two major benefits: streamlined sustainment and positive control of nuclear weapons systems with the goal to continually emphasize rigor and standardization in this critical function.

Although the maintenance responsibilities of these nuclear missions now belong to the AFNWC, Air Force Materiel Command has a role in providing oversight and support for the center.

Gen. Donald J. Hoffman, commander of Air Force Materiel Command, said, "No mission is more important than safeguarding our country's vital capabilities and maintaining nuclear deterrence. The AFMC pieces of this enterprise are acquisition and sustainment, but we didn't have unity of command for those responsibilities until we established the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M."

Brig. Gen. Everett H. Thomas, commander of the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., echoed those comments and described how the new center will affect WSAs.

"While the responsibility for logistics operations in the WSAs has changed hands, now coming under the AFNWC, most of the activities around the WSAs won't change. The facilities themselves and related security operations remain the responsibility of the installation commander," he explained. "However, as we're doing Air Force-wide, we will continue to sharpen the focus on achieving excellence in all areas of nuclear sustainment by streamlining those activities and exercising positive inventory control over all weapons and nuclear-weapons-related material."

According to General Thomas, the bottom line is the AFNWC will meet all nuclear weapons readiness requirements and provide operationally ready assets to the warfighters when called upon to do so.

General Thomas assumed command of the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., on April 17, 2008. He is responsible for the entire scope of stewardship and sustainment of Air Force nuclear weapons and support equipment in the continental United States. It's his job to ensure safe, secure and reliable nuclear weapon systems to support nuclear capable combatant commands and the Air Force nuclear units.

Under AFNWC, installation WSA munitions organizations provide operationally ready nuclear weapons, cruise missiles, and re-entry vehicles/systems when and where needed. Activities include maintaining, handling,

storing, accounting for, and controlling nuclear weapons on a day-to-day basis.

Host installation commands will continue to have responsibility for the WSA facility and provide traditional mission support activities, such as security, infrastructure maintenance and management, vehicle maintenance, personnel support, communications and services to WSA resident units and activities. Roles and responsibilities of those installation activities will be largely unchanged.

The directive goes on to say that consolidating nuclear sustainment activities in the Air Force under a single commander provides an effective mechanism for improved nuclear sustainment force management and development, focused advocacy for nuclear sustainment programs, and clear lines of authority and accountability to ensure compliance with nuclear surety standards.

"Additionally, AFNWC oversight through a first-ever Directorate of Nuclear Surety will facilitate one voice to manage the WSA as a system," added General Thomas. "This was a key recommendation of the Air Force Comprehensive Assessment of Nuclear Sustainment II which provided comprehensive recommendations outlining ways ahead for improving the nuclear sustainment enterprise."

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