



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property: Strategic Air Command Ground Alert Facility, Mountain Home AFB

City, State: Elmore County, Idaho

Period of Significance: 1958–1965

NHL Criteria: 1 and 4

NHL Theme: IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
3. Military institutions and activities.
VI. Expanding Science and Technology
2. Technological applications.
VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community
1. International relations.

Previous Recognition: None

National Historic Context: *Protecting America: Cold War Defensive Sites Theme Study (2020)*
Historic American Buildings Survey No. ID-188-E

NHL Significance:

- The Strategic Air Command (SAC) Ground Alert Facility at Mountain Home Air Force Base (AFB) is eligible for designation as a National Historic Landmark (NHL) under Criterion 1 for its association with deterrence strategies that shaped U.S. foreign policy and defense during the Cold War, and under Criterion 4 as an example of an exceptionally important design representing the U.S. Air Force’s SAC ground alert concept, a response to the U.S.S.R.’s development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) armed with nuclear warheads.
- The goal of the SAC ground alert program was to have refueling planes and nuclear-



armed bombers in the air fifteen or fewer minutes after receiving a warning of incoming Soviet missiles. Achieving this goal required new mission-specific base infrastructure, buildings, and design typified by the SAC Ground Alert Facility features constructed at Mountain Home AFB starting in 1958.

- Mountain Home AFB represents an outstanding example of the standard design for a SAC ground alert facility developed by the Leo A. Daly Co. in cooperation with the Air Force. Features intended to reduce the time needed to launch nuclear-armed bombers from several hours to 15 minutes (the time estimated from detection of a Soviet ICBM to its impact) included location at the end of a runway, dedicated aprons for staging bombers in a “Christmas-tree” shape to speed taxiing, a road network to facilitate access to the aprons, and a semi-subterranean alert crew building (150-man type).
- In its development, design, and location, the facility expresses its Cold War context as a physical manifestation of concepts of deterrence through “massive retaliation,” and the importance of strategic bombing and nuclear weapons in U.S. military strategy and foreign policy.
- The Facility’s “northern” egress-tube design with Christmas-tree alert aprons visually expresses the urgency inherent in the alert mission.

Integrity:

- Contributing resources within the boundaries of the facility include the Alert Crew Building (Air Force Building 291), Alert Apron North (Air Force Building 31020), Alert Apron South (Air Force Building 31021), Taxiways B, C, and D (using Mountain Home AFB nomenclature), and the Alert Facility Road System.
- In its original location at the southernmost end of the main runway at Mountain Home AFB, the facility was distinctively positioned to minimize distance and time to take-off.
- The facility retains essential characteristics of the design, including the placement of the Alert Crew Building between and within a short distance of the Alert Aprons, the retention of the size and dimensions of a standardized building, a road network to speed access to more distant stubs (dead-end paved parking pads for individual aircraft), and an alert apron configuration to support a medium wing of B-47 bombers supported by refueling tankers. It has maintained character-defining features of the standardized SAC Cold War alert crew building design; specifically, the low-profile, windowless, upper level over an earth-fill, partially subgrade lower level, rectangular form, and rapid egress tubes and ramps. The building’s interior remains largely consistent with the original floorplan, with extant offices, briefing rooms, and lounge areas in the upper level, and bedrooms and bathrooms lining the axial hallways of the lower level that lead to exit tubes.
- Original materials and workmanship are largely retained for the individual contributing resources. Sections of the alert aprons, taxiways, and road network have been repaved over the years, and some interior alterations were made to the Alert Crew Building.
- Few changes have altered the original setting of the SAC Ground Alert Facility. Some auxiliary, small-scale buildings and structures, including the boiler and emergency generator shed, traffic check house, and jet blast deflects were added to the site after the



period of significance, and the original security fencing was removed, but the contributing resources retain important spatial and visual relationships.

- Whether through the Alert Crew Building with its egress tubes and many exits, Christmas tree alert aprons designed for expedient movement of aircraft, or extant security fencing, the site distinctly captures the feeling of urgency, alertness, vigilance, and retaliation that underlay a specific form of deterrence during the Cold War, one that relied on bombers with nuclear bombs to deter a potential Soviet first strike with ICBMs.

Owner of Property: United States Air Force.

Acreeage of Property: Approximately 103 acres.

Origins of Nomination: Within the broader context of a Congressionally mandated Cold War NHL Theme Study, this property was identified by the NHL Program during a nationwide survey of SAC ground alert facilities as one of the best representatives of the original design. With the assistance of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, a contractor was selected to prepare this NHL nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Students of the Cold War can benefit from the lessons this distinct emblem of deterrence can provide. Cold War-era military veterans, especially those who served with the Strategic Air Command, may also support designation.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: none known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 21, 2023):

- Christopher G. Eyle, Lt. Col., USAF, Commander, Mountain Home AFB (2017)
- Noelle Shaver, Mountain Home AFB Cultural Resources Program Manager
- Tricia Canaday, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Idaho

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Clarify statement that this property is one of the six best properties. Is it the best and why was it chosen for potential designation?
- Include more information about the architect, their firm, and the design for the facility.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Strategic Air Command Ground Alert Facility, Mountain Home AFB in Elmore County, Idaho, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Strategic Air Command Ground Alert Facility, Mountain Home AFB in Elmore County, Idaho, as a National Historic Landmark.