

STRATOJETS IN BLIGHTY



STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND'S FIRST UK B-47 DEPLOYMENTS

Some 65 years ago the UK experienced its first encounter with the futuristic Boeing B-47 Stratojet, when Strategic Air Command's 306th Bombardment Wing became the first of three B-47 Wings to deploy to "Blighty" during 1953. The co-authors of a new definitive book on the type, **C. MIKE HABERMEHL & ROBERT S. HOPKINS III**, detail the introduction of the six-engined nuclear bomber to British skies



BOEING BW/90188

ABOVE Three B-47 pilots of the 368th BS walk in at Fairford after a sortie in B-47B 51-2277 during the 306th BW's UK visit in the summer of 1953, Strategic Air Command's first operational deployment of the type to Europe.

MAIN IMAGE A 306th BW B-47B at Fairford on a rare sunny day during the Wing's 1953 UK deployment. Fairford opened as an RAF base in early 1944, but in 1950 was placed under the control of the USAF's Seventh Air Division, which set about lengthening the runway and enlarging the airfield.

HAROLD SIEGFRIED VIA AUTHORS

BY 1952 THE USAF's Strategic Air Command (SAC) had a problem when it came to international air power projection. The lack of range of its early Boeing B-47 Stratojets was creating a significant operational shortfall — the bombers simply could not reach targets in the Soviet Union when launched from bases in the USA without at least one aerial refuelling. Even then the type lacked the range to reach post-strike bases for reconstitution. Problems with refuelling the six-jet-powered B-47 from piston-powered Boeing KC-97s, ranging from technical issues to incompatible speeds to lack of crew mastery, made in-flight refuelling a risk that SAC planners sought to mitigate. They elected to use the same temporary solution for the B-47 as they had for SAC's B-29 and B-50 force: forward basing in the UK and North Africa.

Early plans called for 195 B-47s and 65 RB-47 photo-reconnaissance variants at British bases during any pre-war buildup, reaching 390 B-47s and 130 RB-47s by the time the prospective war erupted. In January 1953 SAC sought to validate these plans by deploying B-47Bs of the 306th Bombardment Wing (BW) from MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) in Florida to the UK in May that year. The Commander-in-Chief of SAC (CINCSAC), Gen Curtis E. LeMay, rejected this proposal as "premature", owing to the lack of combat-ready crews, and because the 306th BW had yet to execute a successful simulated Emergency War Plan (EWP) evaluation.

Efforts to assess the operational readiness of the newly delivered B-47 had been planned since August 1952, but were repeatedly deferred owing to delivery delays,