



The Silent Deterrent

Airmen at Minot AFB, N.D., work below ground, on the surface, and in the air to keep their ICBMs at peak readiness.

**Photography by Ted Carlson
Text by June Lee**



SSgt. Keith McClain (left) and SrA. Malcolm Salyards maintain an LGM-30G Minuteman III in a silo. Minot AFB, N.D., is home to the 91st Missile Wing, one of USAF's three intercontinental ballistic missile wings.

Much has changed at Minot AFB, N.D., since the 91st Missile Wing transferred from Air Force Space Command to Air Force Global Strike Command in December 2009. Since then, USAF has made sweeping changes in its nuclear enterprise. 111 A1C Jonathan Bruce (left) and SrA. Cody Higginbotham, both with the 742nd Security Forces Squadron, guard the entrance to Lima-01, one of Minot's missile alert facilities. 121 SSgt. Kemuel Abrams is with the 54th Helicopter Squadron. The squadron's primary mission is to support the 91st Missile Wing by making sure the missile facilities dispersed throughout North Dakota are safe and secure.



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131 A bird's eye view of the Minuteman III missile alert facility Lima-01. 141 TSgt. Justin Heersink checks the acidity level of the water at the Lima-01 facility. A small team of airmen lives and works at each MAF at all times.



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1 Second Lt. Amanda Shirley and 1st Lt. Matt Vallerand of the 742nd Missile Squadron work in a launch control center. **2** An LGM-30G Minuteman III in its silo. The ICBM fleet is at 450, and they are scattered throughout sites in North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. The 91st has responsibility for 150 ICBMs. **3** The exterior of the Minuteman III missile alert facility Lima-01. The

electronics and sensors show that this is no farmhouse. **4** Airmen at the 91st Missile Wing attend a briefing, led by 91st Missile Wing Operations Group Commander Col. Robert Walker, before heading out to their alert facilities. **5** Lt. Col. Donnie Holloway, commander of the 742nd Missile Squadron, stands in front of the squadron's shield. "Clavis Pacis" means "key to peace" in Latin.

Holloway, shown here at the gate to Lima MAF, is charged with ensuring that his crews have what they need to perform their mission.

11 Higginbotham scopes out the land for any suspicious activity around the Lima-04 launch facility. *12* McClain does maintenance work on an LGM-30G. *13* Bruce secures the gate to Lima-04 after patrolling the grounds. *14* Lt. Col. Jay Tewksbury, commander of the 54th Helicopter Squadron, stands in front of a UH-1N Huey on the ramp at Minot. The squadron uses the helicopters to provide security and to support the 91st Missile Wing.





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1 Bruce keeps a watchful eye as he patrols the interior of the Lima-04 silo site. *2* Seen here are the rocket nozzles on an LGM-30G Minuteman III missile. With the missile's guidance system leading the way, the rocket nozzles can adjust to keep the ICBM on course. *3* An aerial view of another

Minuteman III launch site, Kilo-02. Aside from the various antennae and sensors, not much is seen from above as the silos are located underground. 4 A UH-1N Huey flies above North Dakota against the backdrop of a fiery sunset.

111 Higginbotham goes on foot patrol searching for any threatening activity around Lima-04. The massive plug covering the missile silo is directly behind him. 121 Shirley and Vallerand ensure the emergency air-conditioning unit at their launch control center is working properly. 131 An LGM-30G sits in its hardened underground silo. The Minuteman III has the capability to reach targets more than 6,000 miles away in 35 minutes or less. 141 A UH-1N of the 54th whirs up on the ramp at Minot for a night mission.





1|1 A top view of an LGM-30G ICBM in its silo. *12|* The headquarters building for the 91st Missile Wing at Minot. *13|* A UH-1N passes over a missile launch facility. The other two ICBM wings are the 90th Missile Wing at F. E. Warren AFB, Wyo., and the 341st Missile Wing, Malmstrom AFB, Mont. *14|* First Lt. Michael Dommer, copilot, Maj. Michael Galluzzo, pilot, and Abrams, the flight engineer (l-r), depart their UH-1N at Minot. The ICBM force is largely unseen, but its airmen ensure the nuclear missiles are secure and more than 99 percent reliable. ■