



# FACT SHEET

## *United States Air Force*

### History of Offutt Air Force Base

Offutt has played a major role in American military history for more than a century. This great heritage began with the construction of Fort Crook between 1894 and 1896, 10 miles south of Omaha and two miles west of the Missouri River.

The fort's namesake was Maj. Gen. George Crook, a renowned Indian fighter and Civil War hero. He was the Commander of the Department of the Platte from 1875 to 1882, with headquarters at Fort Omaha in North Omaha, Nebraska. During this period, in 1879, he spoke on behalf of the Ponca tribe and Native American rights during the trial of Standing Bear v. Crook.

Many of the original structures built on the post before 1900, including the guardhouse and various enlisted and officers' quarters, are still in use today.

The 61st Balloon Company became the first air unit to command the post Sept. 10, 1918. In the spring of 1921, the plowing, leveling and seeding of 260 acres of land at Fort Crook created an airfield suitable for frequent takeoffs and landings by heavier-than-air aircraft.

A permanent steel hangar was built to provide a landing and refueling point for military and government planes on cross-country flights.

The flying field was designated Offutt Field, in honor of 1st Lt. Jarvis Offutt, May 6, 1924. Offutt, killed while flying with the Royal Air Force in France, was Omaha's first World War I air casualty.

In late 1940, the Army Air Corps picked Fort Crook as the site of a new bomber plant. The plant's construction included two, mile-long concrete runways, six large hangars and an enormous 1.2 million square-foot assembly building.

Operations began under the Glen Martin-Nebraska Company in January 1942, with the plant reaching full-scale production June 8, 1942.

A total of 531 B-29 "Superfortresses" and 1,585 B-26 "Marauders" were built at the Martin-Nebraska Bomber Plant before the end of World War II. Included were the "Enola Gay" and "Bock's Car," the B-29s that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Production ended Sept. 8, 1945, when the last B-29 rolled out of the assembly building.

In June 1946, the Army Air Force redesignated Fort Crook and the Martin-Nebraska facilities as Offutt Field. Just 18 months later, Jan. 13, 1948, Offutt Field transferred to the new Department of the Air Force and became Offutt AFB. At 12:01 a.m., Nov. 9, 1948, Offutt gained national prominence when it became the host base for Strategic Air Command headquarters. Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington chose to headquarter the U.S. Air Force's crucial long-range atomic striking force at Offutt primarily because the base was centrally located on the North American continent, placing it as far as possible from the borders of the continental United States.

The old frontier fort underwent startling changes in the Cold War years following World War II. Operations at Offutt included the basing of alert bombers and tankers in the 1950s and 1960s, support for intercontinental ballistic missile



**1st Lt. Jarvis Offutt**

sites in Nebraska and Iowa in the 1960s, and worldwide strategic reconnaissance from the mid-1960s to the present. The establishment of the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff in 1960, the "Looking Glass" airborne command post in 1961, the activation of Air Force Global Weather Center in 1969 and the arrival of the National Emergency Airborne Command Post mission in 1977, further enhanced Offutt's role as a center of strategic importance throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1957, SAC headquarters moved from the Martin-Nebraska complex to Bldg. 500. New facilities in the 1960s and 70s included a hospital, base exchange and commissary.

Increased defense spending in the 1980s brought additional operating improvements. New facilities included the 55th Wing special operations building, completed in 1986; the Bennie L. Davis aircraft maintenance complex, finished in 1987; and a SAC headquarters underground command post, opened in March 1989.

With the disestablishment of SAC June 1, 1992, Offutt transitioned to Air Combat Command and became the host for the United States Strategic Command's headquarters.

In October 1997, the Air Weather Service Headquarters, Scott AFB, Ill., and Air Force Global Weather Center combined to form Air Force Weather Agency, as part of an overall reengineering of Air Force weather. AFWA operates the largest computerized weather facility in the world. Its mission is to enhance combat capability by arming the National Command Authorities, Department of Defense, major Air Force commands, and United States combat forces with quality weather products, specialized technical training and standardized weather equipment, communications and technologies anytime, anywhere.

The former Army outpost, once hard pressed to support a few hundred soldiers, now accommodates a combined military and civilian workforce of some 12,000 while supporting more than 22,000 family members.

*(Current as of August 2005)*