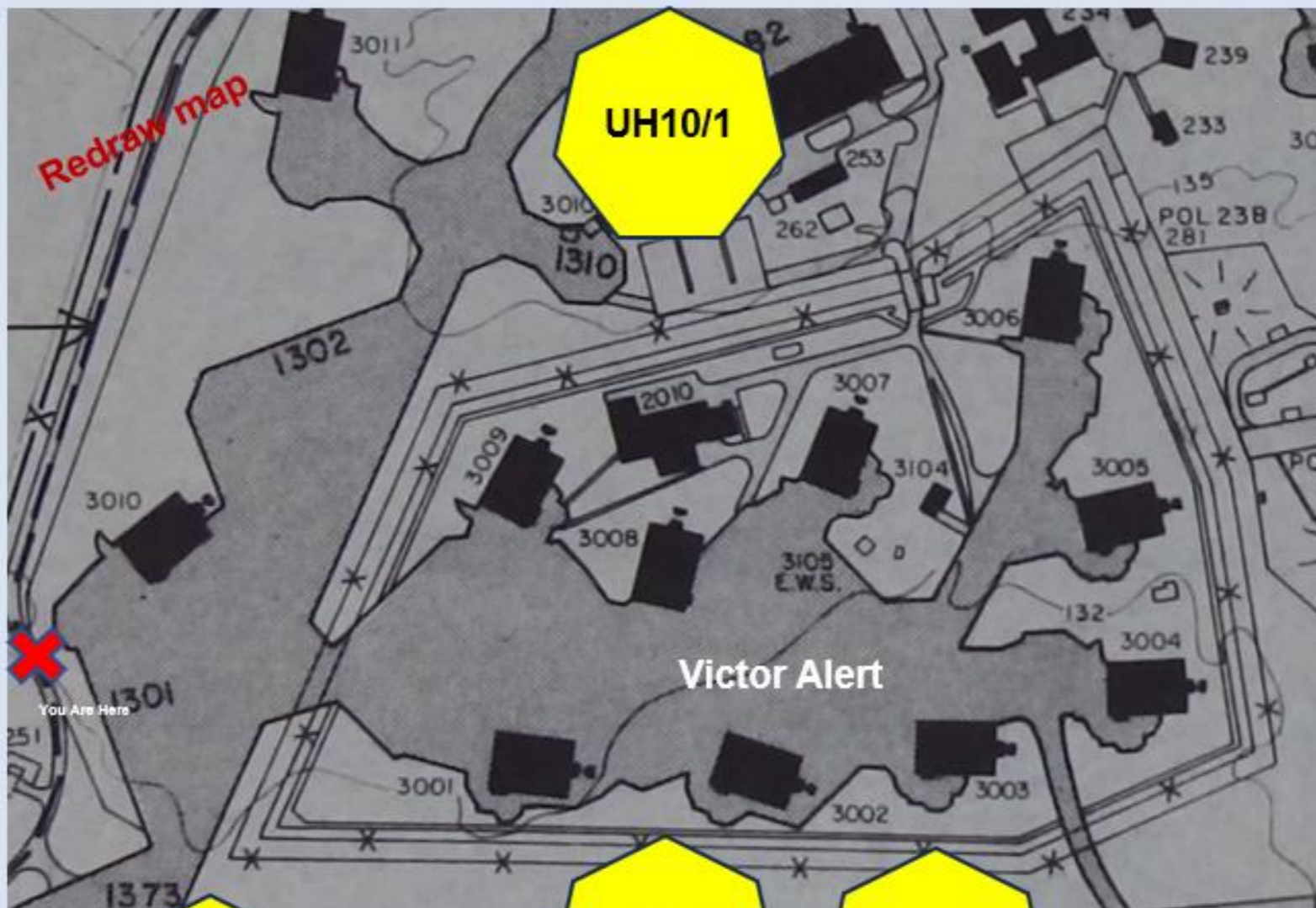




Nuclear Strike

Victor Alert (VA / QRA)



"VA identified the aircrew members, aircraft crew chiefs and nuke-loaded fighter jets ready to respond 24/7/365 from a dozen American bases across Europe – a formidable deterrent against Soviet aggression. The possibility we could have been ordered, with no warning, to take off and drop a nuclear bomb somewhere in Communist-held Europe left a career long imprint. In some cases lifelong scar, on all of us who did it. Our primary mission in Europe – a one-way trip to Armageddon."
 Colonel Lee Downer, Wing Commander, 20th TFW, RAF Upper Heyford 1988-1990



Nine F-111E nuclear bombers were protected by Hardened Aircraft Shelters (HAS) in the Victor Alert. Each HAS could withstand a direct hit from a 500 lb (227 kg) high explosive bomb. Aircraft engines could be started inside the HAS.



The Victor Alert facility was built to house the 20th TFW's nuclear weapons. The facility was built around the Victor Alert site.



Victor Alert at Upper Heyford began in 1971 after the 20th TFW arrived. A facility was opened near the Control Tower with open ended 'weather shelters'.



The threat of attack from Soviet aircraft increased in the 1970s.

A new highly secure Victor Alert (VA) opened in 1981. Until November 1988 Alert crews worked 72-hour shifts. They slept and ate in the facility which included a cafeteria. Often it was called the QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) to avoid confusion with the original VA facility.



"We keep a bulk target folder locked in a safe at the VA facility. The folder contains an eye patch. As we strap in and crank up the airplane we're supposed to put the patch on. It's tough enough navigating with two eyes but, inbound to the target, nuclear bombs will be going off all around us, with a real risk of flash blindness. Using the patch, we'll protect one eye, giving us two shots at getting there".

Colonel Merrill A. McPeak, Wing Commander, 20th TFW, RAF Upper Heyford 1988-1981



The finale of *Wonder Woman* was filmed in the Victor Alert ?

DID YOU KNOW ?



Main Runway

'Buster' Sipes Lindh & McGuire



Major Robert Ray 'Buster' Sipes, 13th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, USAF, 15.2.1934-12.5.1988. "By remaining with his RF-101 Voodoo for an attempted landing after material failure resulted in power loss on take-off Major Sipes sacrificed his life but ensured the safety of the people and village of Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire". Lieutenant-Colonel Richard T White, officer commanding, 18th TRS, RAF Upper Heyford.



RAF Upper Heyford. Between 1950 and 1953 the main runway was widened and extended from 3500 feet (1067m) to 9604 feet (2927m). The closeness of villages to the runway caused noise and the danger of crashes during take-offs and landings.



Pilot Captain Jerry Lindh, 56 Fighter Squadron, USAF, 28.7.1984-17.8.1992.

"Had they ejected their aircraft would most likely have crashed in to the village causing an unknown number of deaths and injuries on the ground. They decided to remain with the aircraft and try to get clear of the village. This must be one of the clearest examples on record of men of outstandingly high moral principle sacrificing themselves for the benefit of others."
Robert Menzies, Chair of Upper Heyford Parish Council



McDonnell RF-101C Voodoo uses its brake parachute to slow down after landing at RAF Upper Heyford in 1969.



F-111E 68-0062 which crashed RAF Upper Heyford on 17 September 1982.

"Heard the radio traffic between crew and tower. The aircraft turned too tight on approach and was being told he was too low and to go round. The aircraft did not abort the approach but applied power too late. The F-111E had a low power to weight ratio. The aircraft hit the approach lights and impacted the ground. The lights were mounted on poles to make them level with the end of the runway. This was due to the slope of the land. The WSO pulled the ejection handle and the capsule separated from the aircraft. The aircraft was too low. Also, the push gear had been pushed in to the bottom of the capsule when it struck the ground. It damaged the capsule rocket motor".

Master Sergeant Cjld Vries, 20th Engineering Maintenance Squadron, USAF



WSO (Weapon Systems Operator) Major David 'Mike' McGuire, 56 Fighter Squadron, USAF, 28.2.1966-17.8.1992.

Main Runway



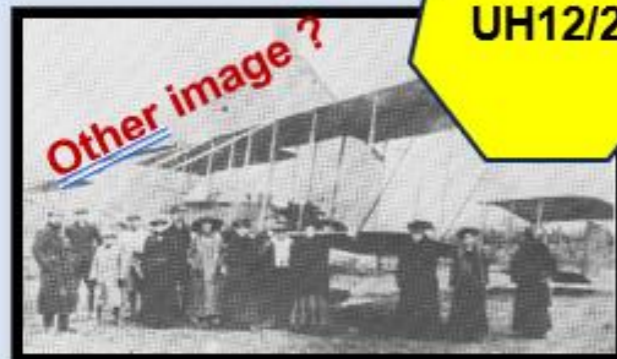
UH12/1



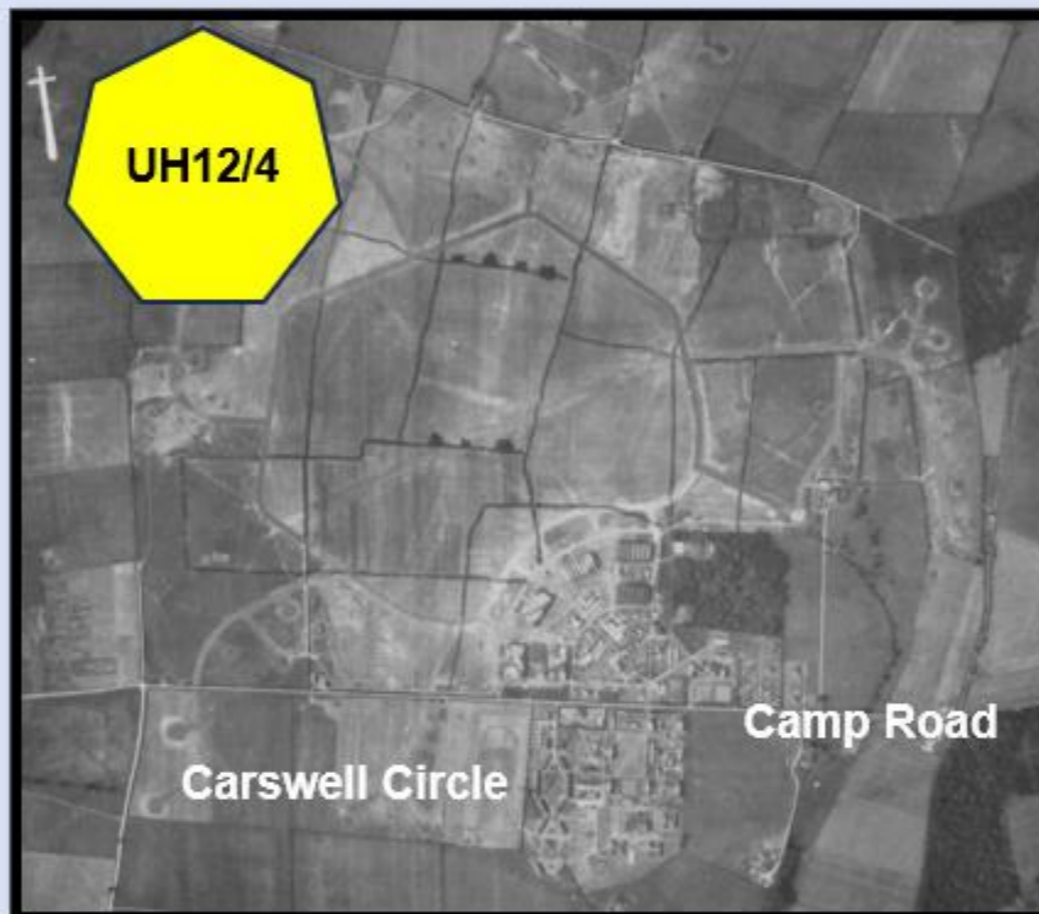
On 13 February 1913 Captain Daves landed near Ardley to ask for directions to Scotland.

This was the first aeroplane to land on what was to become the airbase.

UH12/2



UH12/4



Camp Road

Carswell Circle

UH12/5



Main Runway

Camp Road

Carswell Circle

The Boeing B-47 was based at RAF Upper Heyford, 1953-1967.

UH12/3



JATO (Jet Assisted Take Off) was available for rapid take-off of heavily loaded bombers on Alert if war broke out. It was not used for exercises because of the fire hazard.

"Under wartime conditions additional thrust was needed. This was provided by the JATO system rocket bottles that were first embedded in the fuselage and later fastened to a jettisonable rack mounted underneath the fuselage near the tail. JATO was effective when it was used and functioned properly. When it didn't, the tail burned off". Lieutenant Colonel Earl J McGill, USAF.

"Recognizing early on that even six J-47 jet engines were not powerful enough to lift a fully combat-loaded B-47 off the runway, Boeing engineers provided two innovations to improve take-off performance. When the throttle was advanced beyond 97%, water-alcohol was injected at a rate of 850 pounds per minute for eighty seconds, increasing engine output by 25%. This caused a trail of black smoke that could be seen half way across the country". Lieutenant Colonel Earl J McGill, USAF.

UH12/6



DID YOU KNOW?

The main runway is 9640 feet (2938 m) long. That is 1.83 miles!

UH12/7

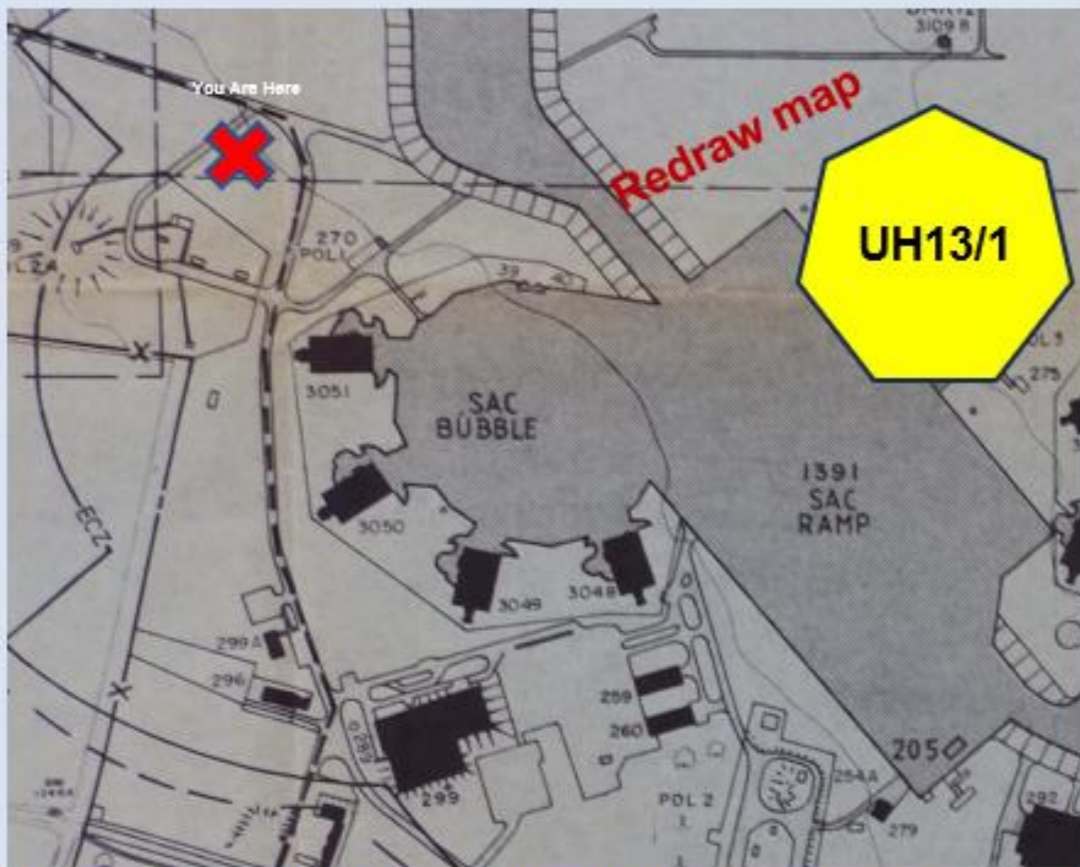
Boeing B-47E, 22nd Bombardment Wing.



February, 1964, Boeing B-47E, 22nd Bombardment Squadron, 22nd Bombardment Wing, was making night landing at RAF Upper Heyford. As the pilot turned on the landing lights he realized he was too low. He saw trees ahead, tried to climb rapidly, and stalled. The B-47 hit Stoke Wood and exploded. All of the crew were killed. The accident investigation revealed that the pilot's altimeter was set incorrectly which meant that the B-47 was 162 m (500 feet) lower than the pilot thought.

Protecting the Aircraft

Hardened Aircraft Shelters



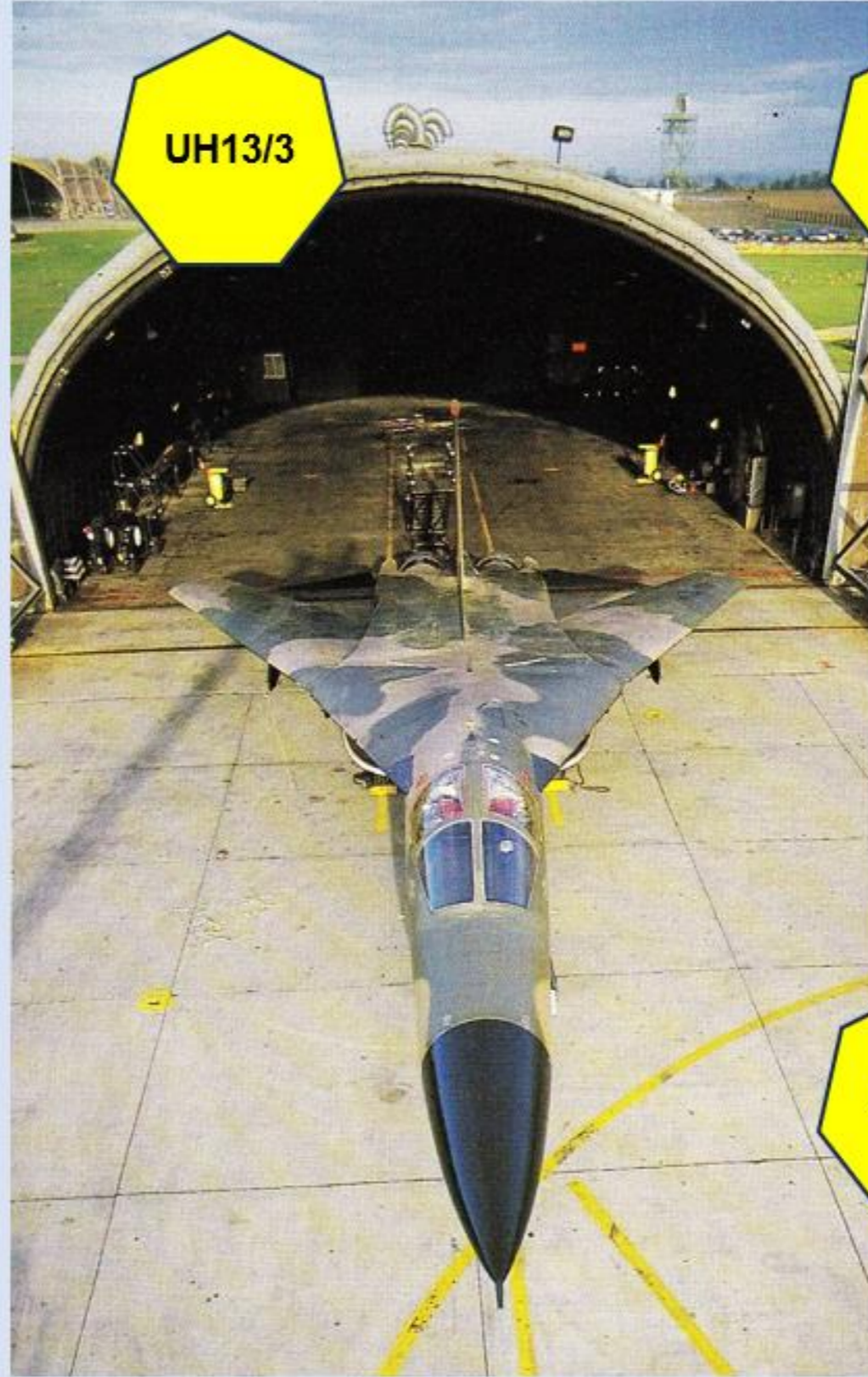
UH13/1

These four TAB-Vs (Tactical Airbase Hardened Aircraft Shelters or HASs) 3048-3051 were completed in June 1979. They can withstand a direct hit from a 500 lb (227 kg) high explosive bomb.

UH13/2



Until 1965 Strategic Air Command (SAC) nuclear capable bombers were ready to take-off in less than 15 minutes. The hard standing they were parked on became known as the 'SAC Ramp'. An extension was called the 'SAC Bubble'.



UH13/3

UH13/4



DID YOU KNOW ?

UH13/5



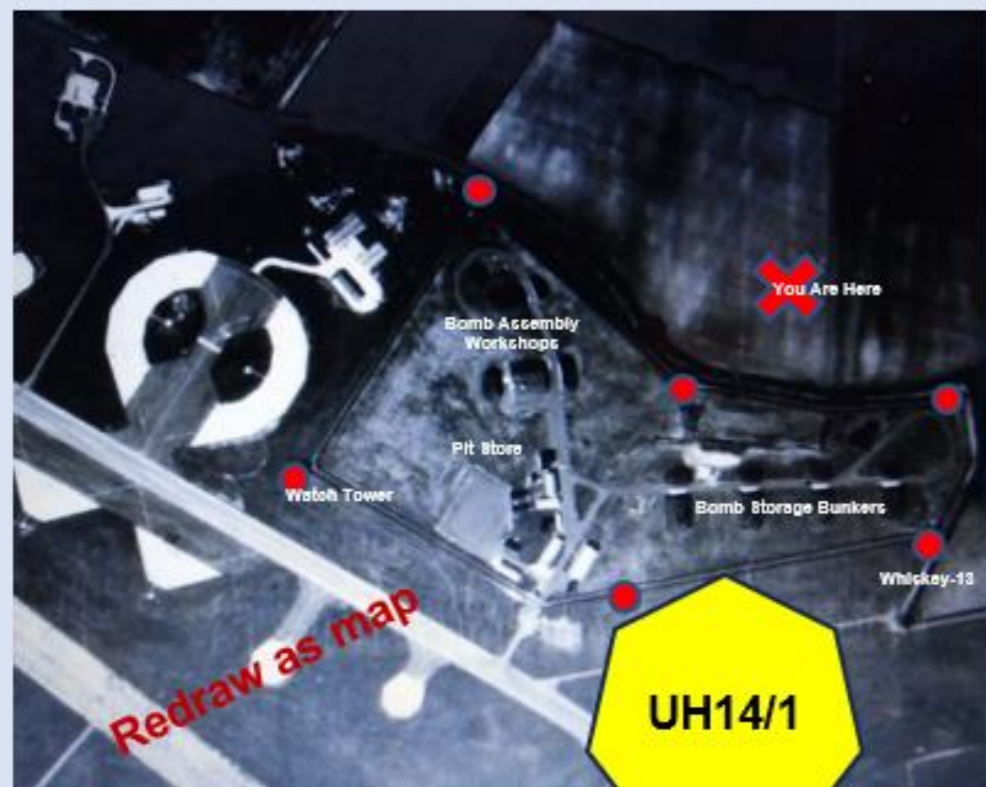
Each HAS door weighs 85 tons ((86364 kg).

UH13/6



Strategic Nuclear Bomb Store

Sophisticated Arms Store (Q Area)



Sophisticated Arms Store 1961.



Plant II (B) Bomb Assembly Workshop

Nuclear bombs were stored as component parts.

The Plant II (B) workshop was built for assembling thermonuclear or H (hydrogen) bombs.

It has earth covered concrete walls intended to contain the blast of an accidental explosion and divert it upwards.

"We can neither confirm nor deny the existence of nuclear weapons at RAF Upper Heyford".

RAF Upper Heyford became a fully operational US Air Force Strategic Air Command airbase in 1953. The Sophisticated Arms Store (SAS) was completed by 1956.

The SAS was controlled by Armed Forces Special Weapons Project personnel with the high security clearance. The SAS was not officially part of the airbase until 1962 when control passed to USAF.

Nuclear bombs were stored as component parts. The nuclear 'bits' (triggers) were brought to the airbase only when the bombers were on high alert.

No nuclear bombs were based here permanently until 1970. Between 1952 and 1965 bombers came for short stays. Some were kept on alert.



Pit (trigger) store

The nuclear bomb 'pit' (trigger). A structure store was a single storey building. It was disguised by making it appear to be a two-storey with fake windows.



Nuclear Bomb 'pit' (trigger)



Bomb Storage Bunkers

The four bomb storage bunkers were for storage of the non-nuclear parts of bombs. They are similar to conventional (high explosive or incendiary) bomb bunkers. Opposite each doorway is an earth reinforced concrete wall to contain accidental explosion blast through the open doors.

This area was redesignated the North CAS (Conventional Arms Store) by the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing when the new WSA (Weapons Storage Area) was created.

The North CAS was not used after the South CAS was extended.



Known to the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing as Whiskey-13 this is the only remaining perimeter watchtower of the original Sophisticated Arms Store (SAS).

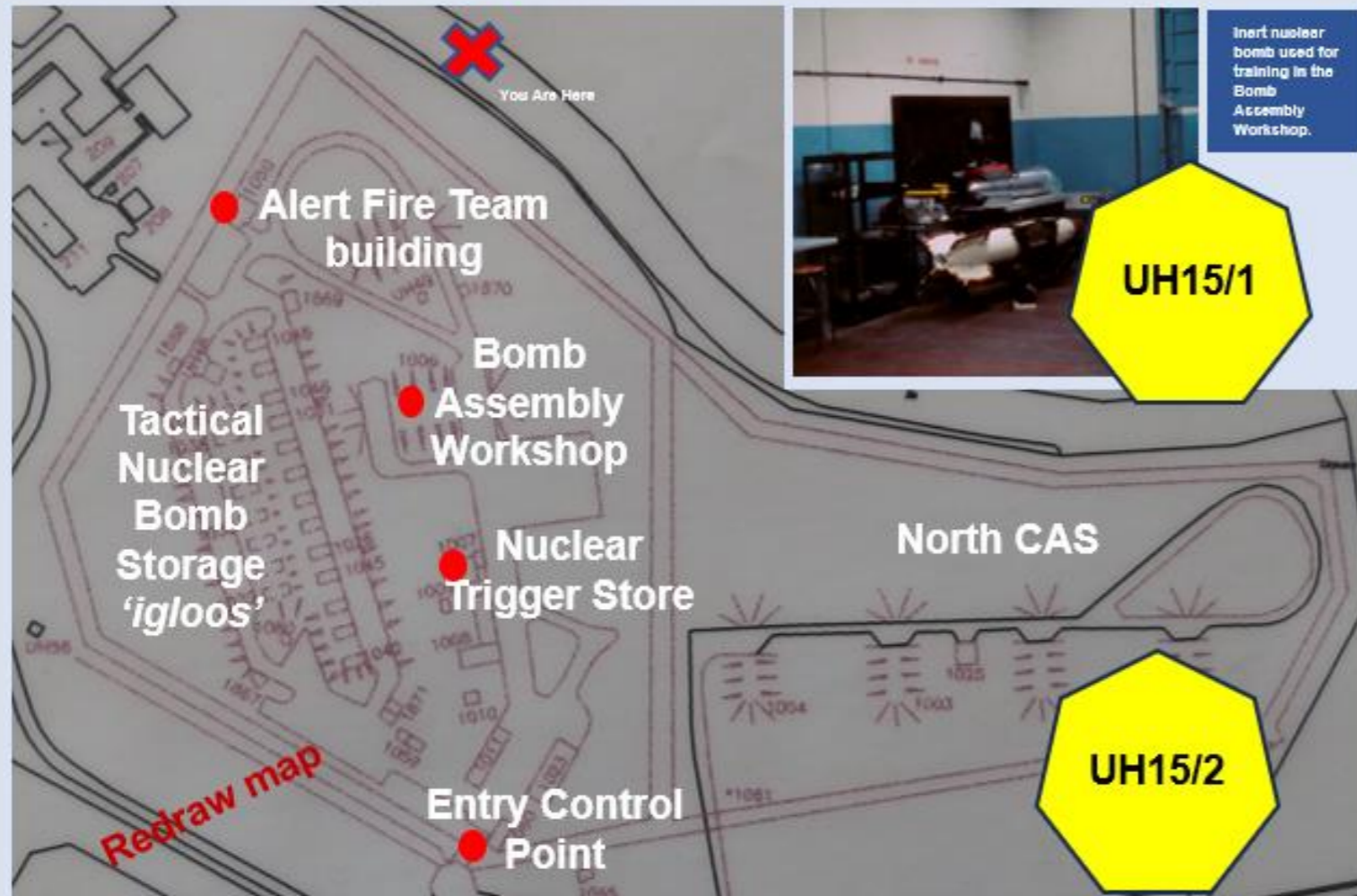
There are stories of it being haunted...

DID YOU KNOW ?

The SAS appeared as a Russian gulag in the film *Muppets Most Wanted*.

Tactical Nuclear Bomb Store

Weapons Storage Area



A new Weapons Storage Area (WSA) was built for the tactical nuclear bombs of the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing which arrived in 1978. New storage 'igloos' were constructed by the Civil Engineering Squadron of the Nebraska Air National Guard.

The nuclear 'pit' (trigger) store and the Bomb Assembly Workshop of the original Sophisticated Arms Store was reused.

The new WSA was surrounded by a double fence line with an Entry Control Point (ECP) and Brunswick observation tower. A Security Police Fire Team was based in the WSA.



A Chrysler Peacekeeper was based in the WSA. "Patrolled in one, froze in one, tried driving it with a gas mask on, bent the turret shield when the garage door wasn't in the fully raised position, and lost a wheel on one when the lug nuts sheared off". J Matthew Phipps, 20th Security Police Squadron



The new WSA was surrounded by a double fence line with an Entry Control Point (ECP) and Brunswick observation tower. A Security Police Squadron Alert Fire Team was based in the WSA.



B-81 'Silver Bullets' tactical nuclear bombs inside a storage 'igloo'. These are the non-nuclear 'shells'. The nuclear triggers were stored separately.



From 1979 the nuclear 'pit' (trigger) store was used to store the nuclear parts of tactical nuclear bombs.

Supposedly the design resembled the Strategic Air Command Headquarters. The window frames are for camouflage. The upper storey is solid concrete.



Bomb Store

Southern Conventional Arms Store



High explosive bombs and small arms ammunition were stored in the South Conventional Arms Store (South CAS). It was built by the 801st Engineer Aviation Battalion, US Army, in the early 1950s when the base was upgraded for US Strategic Air Command (SAC) bombers.

More earth covered bunkers were added in 1978 and 1980



"One night on patrol I hopped the South CAS gate while someone was doing his shelter checks. I got up on one of the shelters and dropped a pebble on him when he came to rattle the lock. Said "BOO" when he looked up and I about had a stroke. I'm really lucky he wasn't a quick artist with his rifle!" Erik Forry, 20th Security Police Squadron

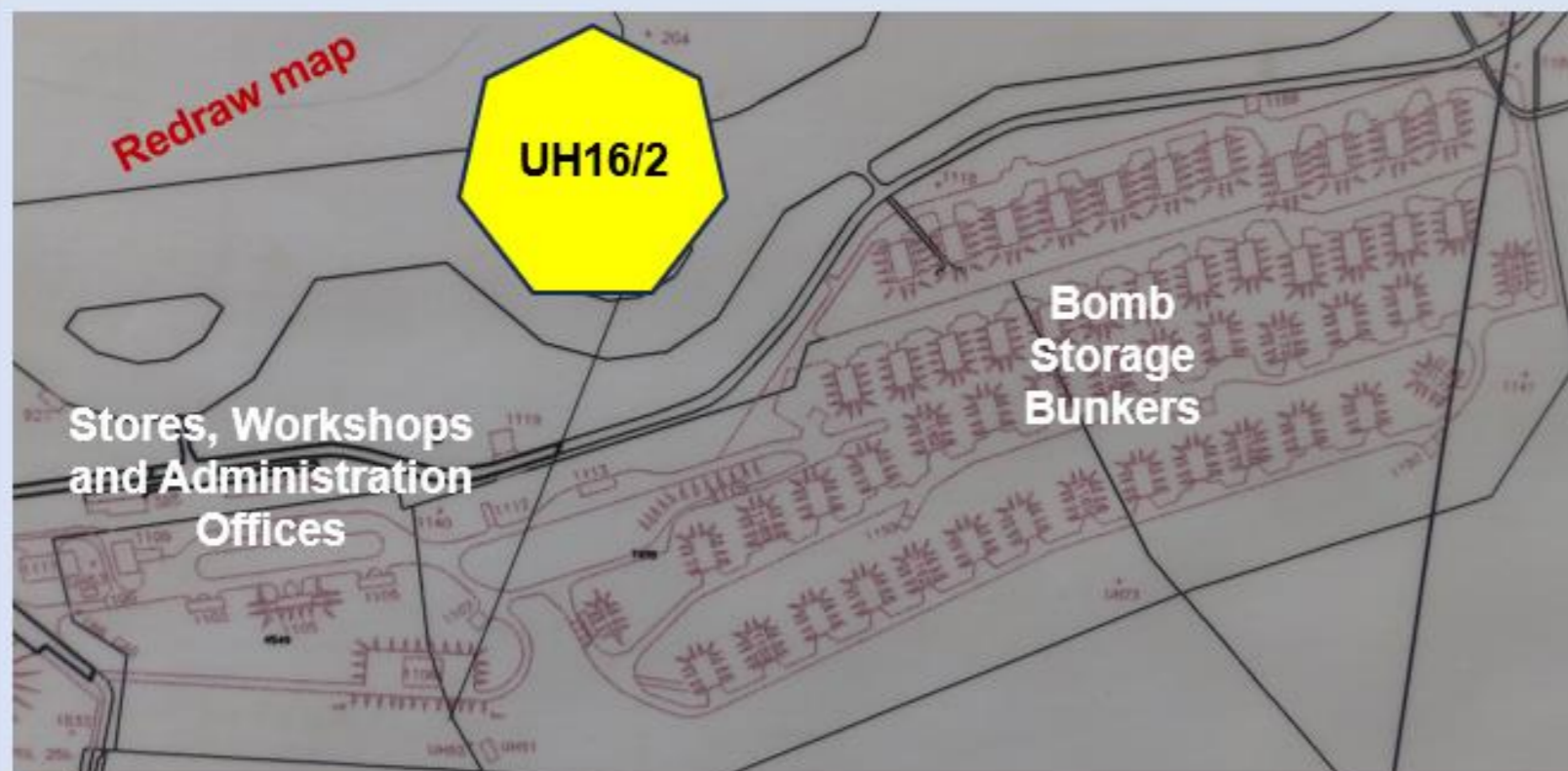
UH16/3



UH16/4



Airman First Class Steve Baldwin, 20th Munitions Maintenance Squadron, driving a MJ1 'Jammer' Weapons Loader in the Southern Bomb Store.



Before the Americans Arrived



RAF Upper Heyford opened as a training aerodrome in 1918. New squadrons were formed [here](#) and specialist training was completed before the unit went overseas.

The aerodrome closed in 1919 and became farmers' fields again.



From 1946 until 1950 paratroopers trained at Heyford.



When the Second World War started in 1939 Heyford's Blenheim bombers moved to bases in France. They did not return.

Every day trainees marched from barracks at Middleton Stoney.

Training jumps were made over RAF Weston-on-the-Green.



In 1927 a newly built RAF Upper Heyford opened to house part of Britain's strategic bomber force. These Handley-Page Hyderabads could carry 1,100 lb (499 kg) of bombs 500 miles (800 km). Planning assumed the next war would be with France.



During the Second World War (1939-1945) RAF Upper Heyford trained bomber crews to fly, navigate and bomb at night.

In 1942 bombers from Heyford joined the 1,000 bomber raids against Germany.

DID YOU KNOW ?

The Canadian Air Force was formed at RAF Upper Heyford in November 1918

On this site...

Building 457



Building 457 was built as a Sergeants' Mess for the Royal Air Force in 1925. It was for to be for 28 Sergeants but was increased in size for 47 Sergeants as the RAF intended to have more Sergeant pilots. This cost more but saved money as fewer Officer pilots' houses had to be built.



"Food in the Sergeants' Mess was terrible." Flight Sergeant Bert Cole, 18 Operational Training Unit, RAF



IWM H 7249

The Mess had a billiard room.

A building extension was added by 1931, possibly as a toilet block.



By 1938 RAF expansion needed a larger Mess for more Sergeants. The RAF decided to convert Building 457 in to sleeping quarters for 28 single Sergeants. Building 455 became the new Sergeants' Mess.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) Sergeants were billeted off base in requisitioned buildings with their own Mess facilities.



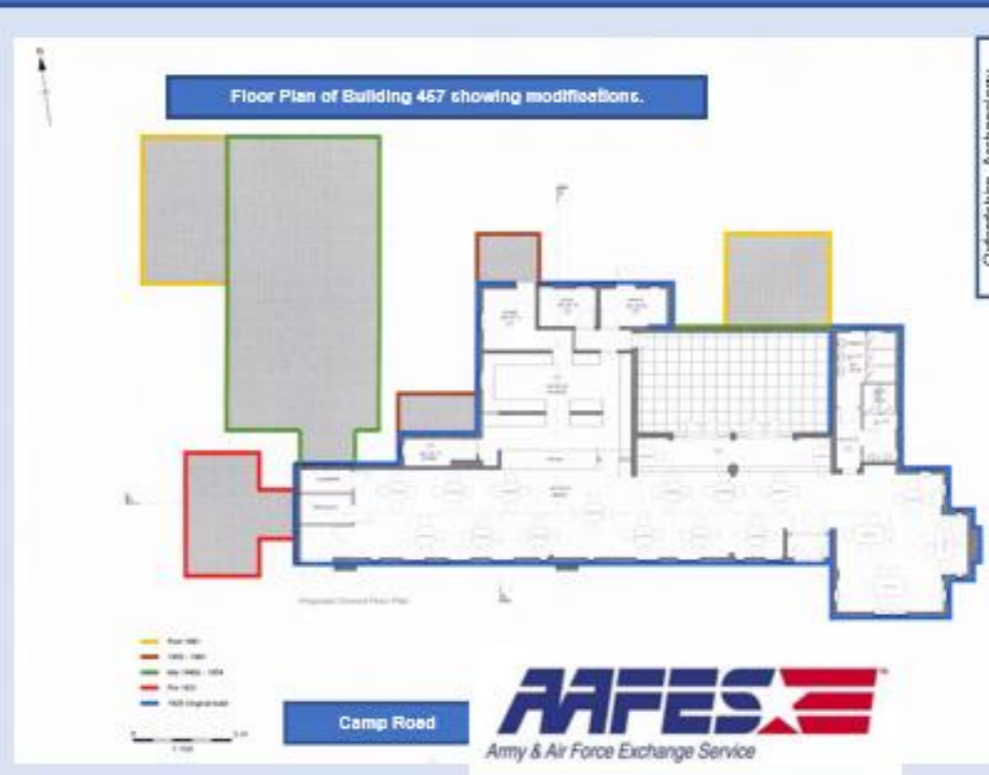
Work to make RAF Upper Heyford a U3 Air Force Strategic Air Command (SAC) airbase began in 1950. Building 457 became an Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) snack bar. After the 1982 remodelling it was named The Swing Wing.



"We went to the Brown Derby so we could buy beer by the case and take it to the canal. You bought a pizza, hung around until there were no adults and paid 340 (restocking fee). This was the best way all of the military brats had to have a good time without risk of getting caught by the MPs." (Military Police) Jonathan Gromatzky, Class of '88



"The Brown Derby was the go to place for lunch when on BAFE. Where else could you get Pizza and Ice-cream under the same roof in Oxfordshire! I had my first pizza here. It was sausage and pepperoni. I remember because I chipped a tooth on the crust." Marie McDonald, visiting in 1985.



Oxfordshire Archaeology



"My Dad Larry worked for the Property Services Agency. Heyford did the best chocolate ice cream I've ever tasted." Larry Mobbs

