*On the Road with the Wyoming Wing’s ‘Dr. Bob’ in Tucson, Arizona*

*by Lt. Col. Bob Ditch, CAP, Arizona Wing*

TUCSON, Ariz. – While on the road visiting air and space museums across the country, I discovered a unique underground southwest Aerospace Education treasure among the cactus, rattlesnakes, and scorpions of the isolated Sonoran Desert region of southern Arizona.

So… What is sitting underground, is 103 feet tall, 10 feet wide, weighs 300,000 pounds, can climb 900 miles up, but hopefully never goes above the surface of the earth?... How about a Titan II intercontinental ballistic missile in its alert silo? That’s right, an ICBM and a museum built around it for to explore below the hot desert, south of Tucson, AZ – the Titan Missile Museum.

This Cold War vestige is the only remaining Titan II missile silo site open to the public, allowing you to return to an era when the threat of nuclear war between the two international superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, was a day-to-day reality. As an Air Force weapon system, the Titan II could launch from its underground silo in 58 seconds, delivering a nine-megaton thermonuclear warhead in just 30 minutes to its target over 6,000 miles away.

For more than two decades, the Air Force Strategic Air Command (SAC) operated 54 Titan II missile complexes across the United States, standing “on alert” 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Titan II missiles were part of our nation’s nuclear defense triad of manned bombers, ground-based ICBMs, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

In addition, 12 Titan IIs launched NASA's Gemini crewed space program in the mid-1960s. In the late 1980s, some Titan IIs were converted to launch vehicles that carried a variety of payloads including multiple satellites for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Defense. For the Titan II, in 2003, the final mission launched a weather satellite from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.

In April 1994, the Titan Missile Museum site was designated a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of the important role that the Titan II played in the defense of the free world, and the history of the nation that provided that assurance. There are fewer than 3,000 historic places in the United States that bear this national distinction, and this status is rarely conferred on sites that are less than 50 years old. However, the Titan ICBM launch complex 571-7 was just 31 years old when it achieved its historical landmark status. It is further distinguished by being one of only two ICBM sites in the entire world that have been preserved for the benefit of the public.

SAC was the hosting command of the Titan and its motto was “Peace is our Profession.” As a result, the Titan Missile Museum provides a tribute to those professional peacemakers of the Cold War, contributing to public education about the history of nuclear conflict and a history of the peacekeepers of the Air Force.

For more information on this great museum that showcases a memorable aspect of the history of the Air Force and our nation, visit [the museum's website.](about:blank) Take advantage of this Aerospace Education oasis in history lying deep beneath the Arizona desert … while *On the Road.*

Photo # 1: The launch sequence from initiation to Titan missile liftoff was just 58 seconds. *(Photo: U.S. Department of Defense)*

Photo # 2: The control room at each Titan missile silo was staffed 24/7 by a four-person missile combat crew who deployed to the missile sites for 24-hour shifts, called alerts. *(Photo: Titan Missile Museum website – titanmissilemuseum.org)*

Photo # 3: The 103-foot-long Titan missile rests in a silo that is 146 feet deep and 26 feet in diameter. *(Photo: Titan Missile Museum website – titanmissilemuseum.org)*





