doctrine emerged. While technical developments obviously influenced doctrine, the officers at the Tactical School thought mostly in terms of future rather than of existing equipment. They accepted the three assumptions noted above and went beyond these ideas by adding two distinctive elements to create the American strategic bombing theory.

First, the American bombing advocates maintained the bombers could get to and from their targets without escort. This had been neither their World War I experience, when the airmen used general escort, nor had it appeared in their writings and lectures of the early 1920s.[18] While escort was considered useful, most if not all airmen believed it was technically impossible to build an aircraft with both fighter performance and bomber range. It was late in the 1920s when the "unescorted" bombing theory evolved with key American airmen insisting that bombers maintaining tight formations, mounting heavy defensive firepower, and flying at high speed could nullify enemy fighters; and that high-altitude operations would lessen the impact of flak (antiaircraft artillery). In short, escort was considered desirable, but unnecessary.[19]

Certainly the American airmen attempted to provide fighter escort. The idea that received the most attention was a heavily-armed, multi-seat aircraft — a concept advanced as early as 1920 and known under the generic heading of "convoy defender." While such an aircraft offered the advantages of greater range and heavier firepower, efforts to build one failed.[20] The absence of a practical escort did not upset the bombing enthusiasts. On the contrary, the advent of the B-17 confirmed the bomber advocates' faith in unescorted bomber operations as here was a heavily-armed aircraft that could outfly and outfight fighters. The American bombing theory emerged during 1930-1935 at a time when the bomber had achieved technological superiority over the fighter. Little wonder: "The dominating echelon [in the Air Corps], both numerically and in terms of rank, firmly believed that a bomber, through applying proper formation and mutual defense, could whip opposing fighters, penetrate to the target and destroy it, and that therefore there was no need for fighters."[21] Bomber proponents failed to foresee that the defense would also benefit from advancing technology.

A second idea that made the American bombing theory unique was what could be called the "industrial web" concept: destroying key elements of a nation's economy would be decisive. Early on American airmen shared the views of their European contemporaries who saw cities, people, and factories as correct targets. In 1926, however, an airman instructing at the Tactical School wrote that only key plants had to be destroyed — an idea that came to dominate.[22] If these bottlenecks could be identified and then destroyed, the bombing proponents believed a nation's ability to fight would be broken and the civilian life so disrupted that an enemy would be forced to surrender. This concept was forcefully reinforced in the airmen's minds when deliveries of a new aircraft were delayed. Investigation revealed that a flood at a factory, the sole manufacturing source of the springs used in the controllable-pitch propeller, had stopped production. The instructors at the Tactical School used this as an example in their lectures during the early 1930s. Bomber proponents emphasized the destruction of vital physical objectives, not killing or terrorizing populations.[23] The airmen attempted to identify these bottleneck targets during the interwar years. Vulnerable points such as transportation, steel, and electric power were noted in the lectures given during 1933-34 at the Tactical School. As the airmen studied the U.S. economy for other clues to economic bottlenecks, they added finance, utilities, raw materials, oil, and the food supply. In 1939 an Air Corps lecture listed electric generating plants within the U.S. and synthetic oil refineries within Germany as examples of bottleneck targets.[24]

The key to the bombing doctrine was accuracy; therefore, daylight bombing operations and navigational precision were essential. The American emphasis on high-altitude and high-speed formations of heavily-armed aircraft necessitated compromises in other performance. For example, as altitudes were increased to lessen the impact of enemy antiaircraft artillery, bombing accuracy decreased. Other areas of compromise concerned bombload and range. The airmen favored range at the expense of bombload and thereby further increased the need for accuracy. Because of the location of America and her potential enemies, range was one of the most difficult and obvious problems for the airmen. To overcome range limitations, they discussed technological developments such as air-to-air refueling and the use of foreign air bases.[25] Together these elements became basic to the American strategic bombing theory which held that unescorted, heavily-armed aircraft in formation could accurately bomb and destroy industrial targets from high altitude in daylight, and thus win wars.

Since the American bombing theory depended on bombers being self-defending, armament became a key factor. As early as 1930 officers at the Tactical School debated the value of the .30-caliber machine gun with a 400-yard range and firing 1,200 rounds per minute, against the merits of the .50-caliber machine gun firing more destructive bullets 1,000 yards at a rate of 375 rounds per minute. The Americans settled on .50-caliber machine guns.

The additional weight and recoil of the .50-caliber machine guns, as well as their increased slipstream at the higher speeds, necessitated power turrets. Here the U.S. proved delinquent for, while competitive in the field of manual turrets, it trailed other nations in the development of power turrets despite the continued recommendations of airmen for their use since the end of World War I. In 1934 the British built a successful power turret followed in due course by the French (1935) and the Italians (1937). In America power turrets met resistance as illustrated by the case of the B-17. Although the Air Corps considered the bomber known for its heavy firepower as deficient in armament and so reported in 1937 and 1939, Boeing saw power turrets as only adding drag, complexity, and weight. Consequently power turrets did not appear on American heavy bombers until 1941.

Even more damning was the American reluctance to provide tail armament. The prevailing belief was that fighters could only intercept fast bombers from the rear as head-on attacks would be impractical because of the problem of positioning fighters directly ahead of the bombers, and even then the rapid closing speeds would render such attacks ineffective. As early as 1931 and as late as 1940, American armament experts assumed that 80 percent of the fighter attacks on bombers would come within a 45-degree cone to the rear. The experiences of the Sino-Japanese and Spanish Civil Wars prompted a number of Tactical School papers to recommend tail guns for bombers. Yet in 1939 Boeing refused to add tail guns to the B-17 because it would create weight and balance problems requiring a complete redesign of the tail. As with power turrets, tail guns were not mounted on the B-17 until the first flight of the B-17E in September 1941. Meanwhile, combat over Europe forcefully demonstrated the inadequacies of the armament, as well as other deficiencies.[26]

Combat Lessons

The Spanish Civil War was the most significant of the interwar conflicts. There were extensive tactical air operations, but

few strategic ones, as both sides were understandably reluctant to bomb cities they hoped to seize. A number of cities were severely mauled, yet despite heavy damage and casualties — 1,654 killed in one day in Guernica and 875 in three days in Barcelona — civilian morale did not crack. Bombing proved less effective and civilian morale more resilient than had been expected.[27]

As the air forces of the combatants were small and consisted of both modern and obsolescent equipment their operations led to mixed results and therefore permitted observers to draw varying conclusions. Nevertheless, two aspects of these operations, which escaped neither American nor German airmen, were that unescorted, fast modern bombers were rarely intercepted and speed seemed to be the bomber's best protection.[28] On the other hand, the heavy toll taken by fighters on slower bombers demonstrated to some the need for escort. One highly placed RAF officer wrote in August 1938:

> *Experience both in China and in Spain seems to clearly indicate that with the aircraft in use in these two theaters of war at present, fighter escorts are considered absolutely essential for the protection of bomber aircraft . . . [although] I am aware this policy runs counter to the views long held in the Air Staff.*[29]

Some Americans echoed this view. "The peacetime theory of the complete invulnerability of the modern-type bombardment airplane no longer holds," wrote one; while another stated that "the comparison of an airplane to a flying fortress is possible only in the minds of the theorists."[30] Others maintained that Spain did not represent a true test of air power, and it would be dangerous to draw conclusions from the conflict.[31] Arnold, for example, wrote: "The powers, capabilities and limitations of bombardment aircraft were not properly tested in Spain. So, let us be careful not to draw lessons about heavy bombardment from air work in that theater."[32] In any case, there was little time to reflect on the lessons of Spain.

Political affairs in Europe worsened when Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938 and threatened war with Czechoslovakia during the summer of 1938. The British and French bought peace at Munich in September 1938, but Czechoslovakia lost her independence. In addition, Germany benefited more from the additional year's grace than did the Allies.[33]

The Munich Conference triggered a frantic European and American rearmament effort. But in September 1939 when war erupted in Poland, America was still woefully unprepared. Compared to the German Air Force's (GAF) 3,750 first-line aircraft and 500,000 men, the Army Air Corps consisted of only 800 first-line aircraft and 26,100 men. Even these numbers favorably distort the situation, as seven hundred of these aircraft, A-17s, B-18s, and P-36s, were obsolete and only thirteen were B-17s.[34] Fortunately, America was not yet in the conflict.

The war went Germany's way in the early years. The Germans won smashing successes in Poland, Norway, the low countries and France, and demonstrated a new kind of warfare, the Spanish-tested Blitzkrieg. The effective combination of tactical air power, armor, and mechanized infantry brought to Germany and to the Luftwaffe a reputation of invincibility, striking fear into the hearts of Germany's enemies. Great Britain presented an altogether different problem.

Germany did not have a strategic bombing force in World War II. She flirted with the concept in the interwar years, but rejected it, planning instead to capture and exploit, not destroy. German decision makers also realized that they had limited resources at their command. Heavy bombers required materials equal to four or more fighters or dive bombers to build and larger crews and more fuel to operate. The Germans also encountered technical problems, primarily with engines. Another factor is that strategic bombing had no institutional or individual patron after the death in 1936 of General Walther Wever. So the country that initiated strategic bombing in World War I, after due consideration, turned instead to another battle concept that was dependent on a different kind of aviation. The later German attempt to build a long-range bomber, the He 177, is a case study in technical disaster. As a result, the GAF had to rely on converted commercial aircraft (FW 200) and even captured US aircraft for some of their long-distance operations.[35]

In 1940 the British won the Battle of Britain and without air superiority, the Channel could not be bridged and the heretofore invincible German Army could not be employed. A superb tactical air force failed in a strategic role because of German shortcomings and mistakes, and because the RAF performed better in a defensive role than the GAF did in an offensive one.[36] British pilots and fighters were at least equivalent to their foes; and the RAF had the additional advantages of radar and fighting over its own territory. While the British victory is the most significant result of the Battle of Britain, the defeat of bombers in daylight and their subsequent night operations should also be noted. Civilian morale was not broken by the pounding. More to the point was the demonstration that bombers could get through, but only by paying a high price.

Meanwhile, the British also engaged in strategic bombing. During the interwar years, the RAF developed plans for strategic bombing and gave it priority until December 1937. Even so, British preparations for strategic bombing trailed American efforts. The RAF did not have a bombsight comparable to the Norden and armed its bombers with rifle-caliber .303 machine guns, which proved little better than morale boosters in combat. They did, however, have powered gun turrets. The British did not draft specifications for a four-engine bomber until 1936, and thus the major bombers used by the RAF in World War II did not fly until 1938 (Stirling) and 1941 (Lancaster). Therefore, when war began the few British bombers in service were obsolescent. It should not be surprising then that the brave, but few, poorly-equipped, and ill-trained British bomber crews were cut to pieces by modern German fighters guided by radar.

At the same time, 1939 and 1940, the RAF discovered the weakness of German night defenses while flying leaflet missions and this, along with the heavy losses on daylight missions, encouraged the British to switch to night operations. The RAF attacked German industrial targets and cities at night, but inflicted little damage due to the small numbers, low performance, and navigational problems of the bombers. It was not until 1942 that the British could mount a powerful air offensive at night by using new bombers, equipment, and tactics.[37]

During the first years of the war, the RAF tested the AAF's vaunted B-17. After much discussion and at President Roosevelt's insistence, the British received twenty Fortresses which were thrust into combat in July 1941, although American officers urged the RAF to use the B-17C only for training. American conservatism proved correct as combat demonstrated the Fortress was not yet a first-line bomber. The British flew twenty-two daylight missions with eighteen of thirty-nine sorties aborted, losing five B-17s to the German defenses and two to accidents. In the process the Boeing bombers delivered less than twenty-six tons of bombs, and these were not dropped very accurately. Understandably, the RAF formed a low opinion of the B-17, which confirmed their doubts about American strategic bombing theory.[38]

The British praised the Fortress' ruggedness, but little else. They criticized its bomb release mechanism, interphone, de-icing equipment, and oxygen systems, as well as its lack of powered gun turrets. American observers pointed out in the B-17's defense that the British used ill-trained crews, overloaded the bomber, operated it in small numbers, and insisted on flying at over thirty thousand feet. Hap Arnold expressed the view of American airmen: "The British never gave the Flying Fortress a chance."[39] In any case, the RAF disliked the B-17 and preferred another U.S. heavy bomber, the B-24, and it only for night operations.

The prototype Consolidated B-24 first flew in December 1939 in rapid response to Arnold's request for a long-range bomber with performance superior to the B-17. Compared to its Boeing rival, the "Lib" proved less photogenic, glamorous, and publicized. Yet early in the war, the B-24 outperformed the B-17, carrying a heavier bombload farther and faster. Although the U.S. built more B-24s in World War II than any other aircraft — 18,200 B-24s to 12,700 B-17s — the Fortress proved to be a superior combat aircraft. The B-17 had a higher ceiling (lessening damage from flak) and more stability (making formation flying and bombing easier); but most of all, the Fort proved to be more rugged and less prone to catching fire. The Army Air Forces modified both bombers during the war to improve combat performance, which decreased the flying performance of both, especially that of the Liberator.[40] For all its fame and faults, two aspects associated with the Fortress stand out: it was a rugged and forgiving aircraft. It could take a pounding from the elements, the enemy, as well as from its own crews, and still return. This may well have been its outstanding virtue as hastily-trained air and ground crews flew and maintained these planes during the war. The AAF used both the B-17 and B-24 in the war against Germany; the B-17 equipped the 301st.[41]

American Preparations for War

The Americans began to prepare for war in late 1938 as a result of foreign events. Not that this change from a peacetime footing took place overnight; the metamorphosis into a wartime giant required time to plan and organize, to train men and produce weapons, not only for the undertaking itself but also to alter the wretched condition of the American military. In November 1938 the Air Corps quickly raised its 1939 goal from fifty-five hundred aircraft to ten thousand; in May 1940 Roosevelt asked for an American production capacity of at least fifty thousand aircraft per year.

Congress belatedly fell into step. While it slashed a request for 166 aircraft to 57 and cut all procurement of four-engine bombers in April 1940 because they were "aggressive" weapons, the Battle of France one month later changed everything. "In forty-five minutes," Arnold recalled, "I was given $11,500,000,000 and told to get an air force."[42] With financial restrictions removed, it was now a matter of translating determination into production. As all would learn, the translation would take time.

The number of aircraft rose rapidly as production for the European Allies helped the American buildup effort. Before 1939 ended, the President eased the effect of the Neutrality Acts by passing a Cash and Carry Act benefiting the Allies. As a result of these measures, American aircraft production increased dramatically. In 1939 the U.S. turned out 2,100 aircraft compared with 7,900 built that year in Britain and 8,300 in Germany. In 1942 America built 153 fewer airplanes than did Germany, Japan, and Britain combined. For the rest of the war, the U.S. not only out-produced these three powers in numbers of aircraft, but even more impressively, overwhelmingly outproduced them in airframe weight.[43] Since the U.S. sent large numbers of aircraft to her Allies, the AAF did not directly benefit from the expanding production until 1941. While the number of American aircraft manufactured almost tripled between 1939 and 1940, the airplanes on hand in the U.S. Army rose only by 50 percent. The airmen did not accept their five hundredth B-17 until April 1942 and their five hundredth B-24 until June 1942.

At the same time, America moved closer to war with the approval of Selective Service (the first in peacetime), the call up of the National Guard and Reserves, and the destroyer-base deal in 1940, which sent fifty old American destroyers to Britain in exchange for leases on British bases in the Western Hemisphere. In the next year America enacted Lend Lease in March and occupied Iceland in July. American-British cooperation grew closer with a meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill at the Atlantic Conference, and secret consultations between the Anglo-American military staffs.[44]

On 9 July 1941 President Roosevelt ordered a study of production requirements to defeat America's potential enemies. The AAF contribution, AWPD-1 (Air War Plans Division), set forth far more: it was an air plan for the war, including targets and forces, while also indicating some of the problems to be encountered by the air arm.[45] The planners selected 154 targets for destruction, assigning top priority to the electric power grid, and after it, transportation and oil. They believed that heavily-armed and armored bombers, operating at high altitude and high speed in mass formations making simultaneous penetrations at a number of points in daylight, could survive.[46] Yet the airmen saw the need for an escort fighter and recommended its development. They envisioned a large, multi-place, heavily-armed "convoy defender," and suggested an experimental squadron of thirteen aircraft.[47]

Questions concerning the unescorted aspect of the American bombing theory had increasingly arisen in the late 1930s. As already mentioned, some air observers in Spain saw the need for escort fighters, as did some officers in America.[48] Early information from the war in Europe increased these growing doubts about bombers operating alone. For example, in November 1939 an American attache reported "the high loss rate in day bombardment raids encountering pursuit units will either demand fighter support of such raids or force bombardment to operate at night."[49] General Arnold agreed, writing the same month that the unescorted doctrine, "has now been proven wholly untenable."[50]

In January 1940 the Air Corps Board advised that, although firepower of American bombers greatly exceeded that of European bombers, it should be further increased with more guns, better sighting systems, and greater emphasis on gunnery training. The Board considered escort desirable, but not essential. In addition to the long-range fighter, the AAF investigated such ideas as bombers refueling accompanying fighters and bombers carrying escort fighters. Arnold's concern prompted a study of aircraft types needed for bombardment protection; it discussed a large escort aircraft and advocated a study of the effectiveness of increased bomber firepower versus fighter escort.[51]

"Lessons" from The Battle of Britain in 1940 did not disturb American airmen as they believed neither side had really tested daylight bombing as both lacked the proper equipment, doctrine, and tactics. This confident attitude persisted despite American reports from Europe in 1941 criticizing the U.S. neglect of the defensive capabilities of bombers, especially the lack of gun turrets. One observer baldly stated: "with present equipment,

day bombing is only possible with fighter escort, or by using cloud cover."[52] The B-17 might be able to operate without escort, but multiple turrets and mutual support (formation) were essential. One observer, Colonel Ira Eaker, reported that British views on escort paralleled American thinking: an escort would be welcome but was technically unlikely, although one possibility might be a convoy defender aircraft.[53] Nonetheless, in a book published in 1941, Arnold and Eaker presciently wrote: "During daylight in good weather, when pursuit aviation is present in strength in an area, it can pretty nearly bar the air to the bomber."[54]

Thus, American airmen realized the desirability of escort, had increasing doubts about the unescorted operations, but were ambivalent about the need for a long-range fighter escort and dubious about the technical feasibility of producing one. The chief solution proposed, a large aircraft or bomber performing as a convoy defender, had serious flaws, but no other aircraft in the air or on the drawing board appeared capable of the desired performance. Therefore, while airmen saw fighter escort as desirable, such aircraft appeared unobtainable. Consequently, when America entered the war it lacked fighter escort, which was to prove the most costly flaw of the American bombing theory.

There were other problems with the American strategic bombing theory as well. Although the airmen planned daylight operations to reduce difficulties of navigation and bombing accuracy, they downgraded or overlooked the difficulties of European weather, target selection, and bomb damage assessment. While American airmen believed heavily-armed bombers could fight their way through enemy defenses to the target, they neglected both gunnery technology (power turrets) and flexible gunnery training. Advancing technology, particularly radar, was to upset the airmen's assumptions and calculations as well. "If our air theorists had had knowledge of radar in 1935," one of the contributors to the theory later wrote, "the American doctrine of strategic bombing would surely not have evolved."[55] Radar stripped the cloak of invisibility and the element of surprise from the attacking bombers. The defender was no longer dependent on visual and aural warning — so frail, fickle, and limited — but could now effectively spot enemy aircraft and control (direct) friendly aircraft at a distance. Radar, along with the modern fighter, shifted the advantage away from the offense. Two other problems were manpower and logistics. Valuable time would be required before difficulties with equipment and organization could be solved and before there would be sufficient numbers of aircraft and trained crews to effectively strike the enemy. Inadequate force would prove costly as it would prolong the war and permit the Germans to adjust and counter American bombing efforts. No one seriously considered the enemy's response — the American airmen believed the bombers would get through, destroy their targets, and win the war. But the Germans created not only capable defenses, but also proved both flexible and innovative by modifying their economy to circumvent bomb damage.

When war came, America had a bombing doctrine, plans, aircraft in production, crews in training, and well-trained, dedicated leaders. However, they proved inadequate for the task as combat operations would challenge the adequacy of these preparations and call into question the basic assumptions behind the entire concept, which were logical in theory but deficient in practice. To a large degree, the drama of the AAF's battle was not only combat against a clever, tough, and determined enemy, but the airmen's adjustment to their own mistakes in doctrine, equipment, planning, and training, as well as to the nation's inadequacies of technology, preparation, and production.

Drop of twelve 500 lb Bombs (W. Williams)

These obstacles were overcome and the 301st was part of the process. SAC grew in size, professionalism, and most of all, capability. It met the challenge of the day by providing a ready, long-range, nuclear strike capability that could operate day or night, regardless of season or weather, under secure control and that could devastate the Soviet Union, and by demonstrating this ability, deter aggression. The Command accomplished this with a change in philosophy and new technology. SAC's attitude emphasized constant readiness for war, which was reflected in its procedures, training, and working atmosphere. SAC was essentially at war in peacetime, doing everything short of dropping its weapons. The 301st is a microcosm of how SAC changed into the potent weapon it is today. The Unit was also involved in the three revolutionary technologies that markedly improved USAF capabilities and changed how air wars would be fought — jets, air-to-air refueling, and atomic weapons. The 301st was there at the conception and went through the pains of birth during those exciting and turbulent years in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The 301st Reborn

In August 1946 the 301st Bomb Group Very Heavy (32d, 352d, and 353d Bomb Squadrons) was activated at Clovis, New Mexico, and assigned to Strategic Air Command. In July 1947 the Unit moved to Smoky Hill AAFB, Kansas, and was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force. This was strictly a paper change as no personnel were yet involved. The 301st was not fleshed out with people until the fall, with men from its old sister group of World War II, the 97th. On 5 November 1947 SAC assigned the 301st Bombardment Group (Very Heavy) to the 301st Bombardment Wing (VH), along with the 32d, 352d, and 353d Bombardment Squadrons and support units. Most of the men were World War II veterans, although few of the air and ground crews had had any experience with B-29s.[10]

Col George L. Robinson
1 Aug 47 Sep 47 (G. Robinson)

Lt. Col. Frank W. Ellis
Sep 47-20 Jun 49 (R. Fentress)

Compared to those eager youths of World War II, these men were a bit older, more mature, and many were married. In contrast to the citizen-soldiers of the Big War who had served their country and then returned to peacetime pursuits, the postwar airmen were long-service professionals, most of whom went on to retire after twenty or more years of faithful service and an Air Force career. Many, perhaps half of the officers, had left the service after the war but found civilian life less hospitable than they hoped, and had returned to active duty. A special word is due to Lieutenant Colonel Frank Ellis, who commanded the 301st during the years between 1947 and 1949. He guided the development of the Unit from a handful of crews and aircraft in one squadron into three bomber and one tanker squadron. Many airmen have commented on his positive leadership.

Smoky Hill, located southwest of Salina, Kansas, was a wartime B-29 training base. It consisted of rather rudimentary facilities and dilapidated tarpaper shacks. There were open-bay barracks for the enlisted men, with wooden floors heated by three potbellied coal stoves, which left coal dust everywhere. The officers were little better off. In the winter the snow, cold, and wind whined through the walls. Memories of Kansas consist mainly of the extremes of weather, the wind, and of course flying training missions across the plains. The Wing historian wrote that Smoky Hill had the best runways and worst living conditions in the country.[11]

During one of these flights, 10 November 1947, tragedy struck. First Lieutenant Donald Quillin (32d) was taking off from Tinker Field at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, when he lost an engine. He ran off the runway, regained control, returned to the runway, and got airborne — briefly. About halfway down the field the bomber stalled and crashed into a group of parked, decommissioned P-47s. The accident killed two of the crew, injured five, demolished the B-29, and destroyed or severely damaged twenty-eight Thunderbolts. The estimated cost of the destruction was close to two million dollars.[12]

During this early period, the 301st completed a number of long distance flights. On 5 December 1947 SAC Commander General George Kenney was on hand to welcome home Lieutenant Marcus Hill and crew (352d) from a 4,081-nm, twenty-four hour flight. That same month First Lieutenant Greene Poore flew 3,934 nm in twenty-one hours and thirty-one minutes, while First Lieutenant Paul Von Ins stayed aloft one day and twenty-four minutes. The Unit kept up the pace in 1948, flying more than thirty flights exceeding four thousand miles, including five to Hawaii, two to the Caribbean, and one to Alaska. Despite these distances, the B-29 was being eclipsed as the USAF acquired the longer-ranged, prop-powered B-50 and B-36 that same year. Therefore, in May 1948 the Unit's designation was changed from "very heavy" to "medium."[13] Perhaps the most notable events during the Unit's B-29 period were the 1948 deployments to Germany.

A brief diversion is in order to put the 301st activities into the context of the broader history of the day. Following America's successful, but not always harmonious, wartime alliance, relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union deteriorated. There were facedowns over Turkey and Iran, as well as a Communist-supported civil war in Greece. When the British made it clear in early 1947 they could no longer finance the embattled anti-communist forces in Greece and Turkey, the U.S. took up the burden. In March 1948, President Truman declared the Truman Doctrine — that America would help free people protect themselves from aggression. With bipartisan support, the U.S. adopted the policy of containment, initially consisting of aid for Greece and Turkey and later the famous Marshall Plan to rebuild western Europe. To back up this economic and political policy, the U.S. relied on its trump card — technology. Although weak on the ground, the U.S. had an advantage in air power and, of course, atomic weapons.

As early as April 1946 SAC considered rotating all of its units except those armed with the atomic bomb to Europe for 30-day TDYs. It was not, however, until July 1947 that the first B-29 unit was deployed to Germany, for one week.[14] On 18 February 1948 Headquarters Air Force ordered SAC to rotate its B-29 groups to Europe for three-month TDYs. These deployments were to begin around 1 April and to continue indefinitely. A week later the communists took over the friendly and neutral government in Czechoslovakia, greatly increasing tensions.[15]