



The 501st Combat Support Wing: Whenever, Wherever, Whatever

The 501st Combat Support Wing (501 CSW) has a long history within the USAF and USAFE. The 501st has an episodic history based on the needs of the USAF. The 501st and its airmen have proven that they can accomplish a variety of missions in various locations when needed.

The 501st started as a heavy bombardment group that served in the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II. It was activated on 1 June 1944 and saw service for just over two years. In that time, the 501st participated in the strategic bombing campaign against Japan in 1945. In the push to downsize the military after the war, the 501st was inactivated in June 1946 and would not see service for another thirty-six years.



In 1982, the USAF activated the 501st for a second time. Instead of flying heavy bombers, the 501st had the mission of launching Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs).



Resurrected as the 501st Tactical Missile Wing (501 TMW), and based at RAF Greenham Common, United Kingdom, 501 TMW was a key part of USAFE's deterrence posture in the 1980s, an era of increased Cold War tensions. 501 TMW's lineage and honors was consolidated with that of the 701st Tactical Missile Wing, which operated cruise missiles in USAFE during the 1950s. 501 TMW carried out its mission until the end of the Cold War when USAF inactivated the wing in May 1991 as part of the post-Cold War downsizing.

In May 2005, the USAF once again activated the 501st with a completely different mission. Faced with the challenge of managing several small bases across the UK, USAFE needed a unit to help administer and support these bases and the disparate tenant units operating from them; many of which were assigned to other MAJCOMs. To meet this task, the USAF again activated the 501st, this time as the 501 CSW. Headquartered at RAF Alconbury, 501 CSW has remained active in this role ever since. During this time, USAFE has expanded the breadth of its mission to include supporting based not only in the UK, but also facilities in Norway and Cyprus. In this role, 501 CSW enables USAFE to support missions that enable the completion of strategically important missions to the United States and NATO.





Today, the 501st empowers Pathfinders to “Light The Way” by providing agile combat support enabling intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), global strike, and command, control, and communications (C3) missions for US and NATO operations across the UK, Norway and Cyprus. Pathfinders, working out of 10 geographically separated units, serve 9 Combatant Commands and 65 DoD, DoS, NSA, and NATO missions. Headquartered at RAF Fairford, the 501st continuously implements our priorities of being ready, reliable and responsive.

Ready: Be combat proficient

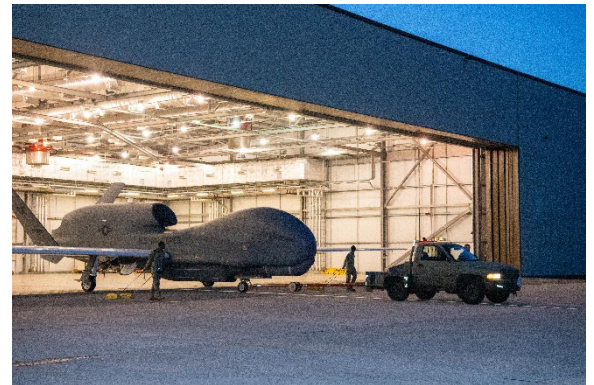
Reliable: Foster mutually supporting partnerships

Responsive: Provide agile, scalable, and exportable combat support



As USAFE's only bomber-forward operating location the 501st supports the full-spectrum of flying operations. Bomber Task Force (BTF) deployments bring airframes such as the B-52H Stratofortress, B-1 Lancer, and B-2 Spirit. Strategically bedding down at RAF Fairford allows bombers to fly higher headquarters tasked missions and conduct integrated operations with European nations, increasing military interoperability among partner forces. These missions continue to assure allies and deter adversaries across the region.

Additional airframe support in recent years includes the F-35A Lightning II, KC-135 Stratotanker, RC-135 Rivet Joint, C-17 Globemaster III, the first ever RQ-4B Global Hawk deployment in England and ongoing support of the 99th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron's U-2 Dragon Lady. RAF Fairford also annually hosts the Royal International Air Tattoo, the world's largest military airshow. Furthermore, we deliver Base Operating Support (BOS) to the 1st ERS deployed to RAF Akrotiri; providing forces with the resources and infrastructure necessary to meet NATO objectives and promote peace and security in the region.



Moreover, Pathfinders provide Base Operating Support – Integrator (BOS-I) at RAF Fairford. This construct allows the deployed teams to focus on maintenance and operations, while the BOS team provides all airfield, logistics, communications, security, force support, and civil engineering support. Our BOS capabilities are mobile and expeditionary, with Pathfinders recently providing forward support to BTF deployments in Norway, Iceland, and Sweden.

