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1. Submitted by: HQ AFSPA/SPSS, Kirtland AFB NM

2. Operation/event name: Reporter Alleges Inadequate Nuclear Security, Various Dates, 1977.

3. Keywords: Flightline Security/Reporter Allegations

4. Title: Reporter Alleges Inadequate Nuclear Security

5. Observation: An investigative reporter for the Atlanta-based Cox Newspapers published a series of articles reflecting poor security practices in effect at USAF nuclear facilities. Portraying himself as a potential bidder for alert aircraft parking area (AAPA) and weapon storage area (WSA) fencing projects, he was allowed escorted entry into AAPAs and WSAs at Mather AFB, California, and KI Sawyer AFB, Michigan. He was allowed to take photographs, question security police personnel, and acquire unclassified blueprints of the facilities in each area. He never had access to nuclear weapons and was under armed escort at all times. He published a series of articles in the Washington Star and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and granted an on-camera interview with the star of the Today Show, where he alleged poor security practices were in effect at SAC nuclear bases. In his articles he stated that he was able to gain entry into restricted areas at both Mather and KI Sawyer, while posing as a bidder on a construction project. He was given tours of the sites containing weapons where the construction was to take place. His observations of visitor identification and verification procedures, along with the security measures and equipment used at nuclear weapon sites, caused him great concern. This concern centered on safety and security of nuclear resources from possible terrorist activity involving damage, capture, and/or theft of nuclear weapons and the ensuing possibilities if such an act were successful. At Mather AFB CA, on 5 December 1977, between 1400 and 1430 hours, the reporter was sponsored onto the base by a civilian assigned to the Civil Engineering Squadron. He was escorted into the AAPA and the WSA and errors in the identification process occurred. No search was conducted of the reporter or his hand-carried articles, and only one piece of identification was examined, however, other entry prerequisites were complied with. The reporter was briefed on the job under contract. He questioned the security forces on their job and the requirements for securing nuclear weapons. He was permitted to take photographs. Throughout this process, his identification as a contractor was never challenged. At KI Sawyer AFB, Michigan on 14 December 1977, between 1015 and 1212 hours, the reporter arrived at the base, where he was not checked out at the base entry point but procedures for entry into Sawyer's restricted areas were met. The reporter's identification as a contractor was never challenged by the security police or the contracting office. He was escorted by a civilian (GS-09) from the Civil Engineering Squadron, however, no access was granted or gained to weapons. Based on his observations at the two bases, the reporter wrote the first of a series of articles entitled, "Chinks in the door to our Atom Arsenal". In this article he alleged that: construction plans for nuclear weapons storage areas are easily obtainable, identification and search procedures are inadequate, and entry control systems are easily defeated. Comments like, "[I]...was able to pass within a stone's throw of six metal tubes that appeared to be hydrogen bombs" and "[I purchased]...blueprints that showed the exact layout of the weapons compounds and nearby alert areas", were blended with ample doses of his view of the dangers imposed by terrorists, thereby creating the perception that USAF security practices were deficient.

6. Discussion: Immediately after the first article, SAC's Assistant Chief of Staff directed the SAC Inspector General to investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident. A five-member panel examined the facts and reported its conclusions on 3 February 1978. It found neither compromise to nuclear security nor any weapons being in danger of capture, theft, or vandalism. Nuclear resources had been under armed protection at all times and the reporter was under constant surveillance when in restricted areas. Other than some procedural errors made during the reporter's admittance to the areas, his movements while in the areas were in compliance with security requirements. Despite the findings, the adverse publicity created a major challenge for SAC and a host of inquiries from Congress were initiated. SAC could not tolerate even the perception that its security standards were inadequate, so four days after the first article appeared, CINCSAC sent out a terse message ordering his wing commanders to "Make certain that all units meet established security standards."

7. Lessons Learned: Shortly after this order, HQ SAC issued four broad directives to thwart any further unauthorized base entries: 1) restrict future contractor visits to restricted areas, 2) tighten restricted area identification procedures, 3) limit access to portions of SAC bases, and 4) institute more stringent search procedures.

8. Recommended Action: See above lessons learned

9. OPR Comments: HQ USAF issued guidance restricting the admission of contractors to secure areas of USAF installations supporting nuclear weapons. This event, coupled with a future incident at Robins AFB, Georgia, led to even greater changes in USAF physical security.