

Airborne Minuteman

USAF photo



By 1970, increasingly accurate Soviet ICBMs had begun to pose a threat to silo-based US nuclear missiles. Thus began a search for more survivable basing. One idea was an "air-mobile ICBM," which actually was tested. On Oct. 24, 1974, USAF sent up a C-5 stuffed with a 60-foot-tall, 86,000-pound Minuteman. The C-5 carried the ICBM to 20,000 feet above the Pacific. The rear cargo bay

opened and out came two parachutes, shown above. The two chutes yanked out the ICBM, nose first. The hanging missile descended to 8,000 feet, fired its rocket motor, and climbed to 12,000 feet (inset), where it ran out of fuel and fell into the ocean. The test proved the air-mobile concept was feasible, but it was soon discarded because of cost, engineering, and security problems.



USAF photo, courtesy Air Mobility Command Museum