Air Defense 101: War and Expansion

As we covered in the Fall 2009 edition of Echoes, the tensions of the late 1940s including the Berlin Blockade, the fall of Nationalist China to communism and the detonation of the Soviet Union's first nuclear device in 1949 (designated "Joe 1" by the United States and "First Lightning" by the Sovs) helped drive improvements in the United States' air defense capabilities and operations. Still, defense budgets came under constant assault, forcing the young Defense Department to reduce and consolidate resources, in the name of greater efficiency (and how many of you air defense vets have heard that before?).

However, what really threw things into overdrive was the 25 June 1950 invasion of the Republic of Korea by the forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This provided the final impetus and directly resulted in the re-establishment of Air Defense Command as a major Air Force combat command at Mitchel AFB, NY, on 1 January 1951. Notably, the Air Force had inactivated the command on 1 July 1950, less than a week following the DPRK's invasion.

The reactivated ADC found itself in a classic, massive "hey Rubel!" moment: in order to fulfill the continental air defense mission it had to get up and operating ASAP, with limited personnel, equipment and aircraft. This mandated heavy reliance on the Air
Message from the President (Continued from page 1)

health is great, so I’m not forecasting anything—this will all cease overnight. It is very difficult to find the kinds of technical skills needed to do the online museum maintenance, and in 11 years, I’ve only had a very small amount of technical backup support. Even simple web page coding and photo or file uploads takes a certain amount of technical skills, and nobody has stepped forward to do that. When you consider the software that’s been developed to drive the online museum, a programmer with a much higher skill level is also required. These are skills that I’ve been blessed with, and I’ve not been able to find a replacement.

3. Radomes and the new AFRMA have a very closely related mission. The only significant difference is the establishment of a physical museum somewhere. It seems foolish to keep the two entities separate. There are just too many things in common. AFRMA will certainly be a bigger project than that of Radomes, and our current association fits pretty nicely into the new one. While Radomes has had to rely on my skills for both the administration and technical needs, the new association will be in a better position to hire these skills. Radomes is in good financial shape for what it is, but cannot hire a professional web designer and programmer. The new association is going to have to do this. The AFRMA museum will be located where there is a good volunteer base (retired USAF primarily) so that finding “front desk” folks should be easier.

I’ve floated the idea of this merger to the AFRMA, but nothing has been decided at this time. Before making any further plans, I wanted to get this information out to the Radomes membership, and get some feedback about it. What do you think? I welcome your input, your ideas, your support.

If any of you are interested in the AFRMA, there’s a special forum available. You’re encouraged to sign on and participate. You’ll find it at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ AirForceRadarMuseum-SpecialForum/.

Thanks for your ongoing support,

Gene

Radomes, Inc., The Air Defense Radar Veterans’ Association, is a member-supported non-profit corporation.

Our mission is to preserve the history of the defense of North America from enemy bomber or missile attack during the Cold War period. Memberships are open to U.S. and Canadian citizens, veterans and non-veterans alike.

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In Memoriam: Col Harry Shoup, USAF(Ret)
29 September 1917-14 March 2009
NORAD’s First Santa Tracker

This last Christmas, for the first time in its 54-year history, NORAD tracked Santa Claus without the good-humored officer who started the whole thing.

Col Harry Shoup was the guy in 1955 who picked up the “hotline” deep in the underground command center at Colorado Springs on a December afternoon, only to hear a child ask to speak to Santa. The local Sears had set up a phone line for Santa, but the newspaper mistakenly published the secret number intended to alert a very nervous North American military of pending Armageddon.

CONAD’s Director of Operations, Shoup rolled with it and began a tradition that has lightened the load of heavily-burdened NORAD staff and given a human perspective to the grim purpose of NORAD itself. He had his staff check the radar for indications of Santa making his way south from the North Pole. Children who called were given updates on his location and a tradition was born. NORAD continued the tradition after its establishment in 1958.

Since that time, NORAD men, women, family and friends have selflessly volunteered their time to personally respond to Christmas Eve phone calls and emails from children. In addition, NORAD now tracks Santa using the internet. Last year, millions of people who wanted to know Santa’s whereabouts visited the NORAD Tracks Santa website.

Shoup may have died, but his decision to keep the light of the season burning in the shadow of some pretty intense geopolitical gamesmanship has evolved into a tradition that’s keeping up with the times.  Said Gen Victor E. Renuart, Jr, Commander NORAD/Commander US Northern Command:

I have the greatest admiration for Col. Shoup and found delight in his remarkable humor with taking the first-ever call regarding Santa’s whereabouts back in 1955. His kind and thoughtful gesture will forever be a legacy at NORAD, and with the millions of people around the world who follow the NORAD Tracks Santa program each year. Truly, forever in the minds of millions he will be fondly remembered as the “Santa Colonel” and his legend will live on forever.

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Air Defense 101 (Continued from page 1)

National Guard, not just in the United States but also in the defense of other major command installations elsewhere in the world. Also, notably, ADC didn’t regain control of its previously-assigned air defense numbered air forces: First (Mitchel AFB), Fourth (Hamilton AFB, CA), Tenth (Benjamin Harrison AFB, IN) and Fourteenth Air Force (Robins AFB). Those air forces remained under the operational control of Continental Air Command (CONAC) to administer Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard activities.

What ADC received from CONAC, however, were two air defense named air forces – Eastern ADF at Mitchel (which relocated to Stewart AFB, NY, in August 1950) and Western ADF, Hamilton AFB. Central Air Defense Force joined the mix on 1 March 1951, standing up in leased spaces in Kansas City, MO.

The named air forces or NAFs held operational control of the following air defense divisions, listed in order of activation: 25th Air Division (Defense), Silver Lake, WA; 26th Roslyn, Long Island, NY; 28th, Hamilton AFB; 29th, Stewart AFB; 30th, Selfridge AFB, MI; 27th, Norton AFB, CA; and 31st, Fort Snelling, Minneapolis, MN. Each division, in turn, controlled an operational component, an aircraft control and warning group with aircraft control squadron (ACS) to run divisional air defense operations and aircraft control and warning squadrons (AC&W) in the field, manning long-range radar sites.

Again, activated Air Guard personnel and units filled many of the important positions and set up several of the radar sites. For example, when the 34th Air Division (Defense) activated on 5 January 1951 at Kirtland AFB, it did so without an assigned AC&W. In October, the Texas ANG’s 158th AC&W received its call from the Federal government and moved to Kirtland to provide the 34th with its operational command and control component. ADC gained several other divisions over the following year, including the 29th AD(D) at Great Falls AFB, MT, on 1 March 1951; the 33rd at Tinker AFB, OK, on 19 March 1951; the 35th at Kansas City, on 1 July 1951 (it transferred to Dobbins AFB, GA, to cover the southeast in September); and the command’s first division located outside the lower 48, the 64th, at Pepperrell AFB, Newfoundland on 8 April 1952.

Changes regularly took place during this period of stand-up/move/out/take control. As the Air Guard AC&W and fighter interceptor units reached the end of their Federal service, ADC activated regular Air Force squadrons to take their place and continue the mission. Many Guardsmen decided to augment to active duty and went on to long careers...and some were even given a choice! Until the advent of SAGE during the late 1950s, these divisions would continue to hold both operational and administrative responsibilities for their respective portions of the country.

To be continued...

Mt Lemmon Re-Use (Continued from page 6)

(WSMR) just east of Las Cruces, NM. However, it seems equally likely the radar was actually used to help monitor missile tests at WSMR in case any missile went astray. Or, maybe it was actually a communications dish used to monitor distant transmissions, which is part of Fort Huachuca’s primary mission.

Whatever the true purpose, the U.S. Army ceased operating this “tracking radar” circa 2006 when it was finally removed. Once again, there is talk of converting the tower into an astronomical observatory. Based upon what happened with the first two towers, one has to wonder if this one will be sufficiently stable, or if it will likewise be torn down. Only time will tell.

Several other original Air Force buildings and structures also still remain, such as the barracks, the multi-purpose recreation building, the headquarters / administration building, the diesel power plant, the motor pool, and a few others. The two-story NCO barracks is closed off, reportedly due to asbestos contamination. The multi-purpose recreation building is now used for meetings and lectures.

Now, one part of the original AF Station was returned to use back in 1972 when the Southern Air Defense Sector (SADS) was formed. The Mt. Lemmon Ground-Air Transmitter-Receiver (GATR) facility “rose from the ashes” (so to speak) as the radio site for the Phoenix joint-use long-range radar site atop Humboldt Mountain located northeast of Cave Creek, AZ. The Mt. Lemmon GATR radio facility then remained in use until the end of the SAGE era (late 1983) when it transitioned into use for the Joint Surveillance System (JSS) as Radio Site G-29. That facility reportedly remains in use today, maintained first by the 1903rd Comm. Sq., and now by the 355th Comm. Sq., at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson.

In June 2003, the entire site came very close to annihilation as the Aspen fire raged out of control for several weeks over large portions of Mt. Lemmon. Indeed, without the heroic work of scores of firefighters, the former AF Station and modern observatory might very well have been lost to that enormous inferno. The firefighters, though, were able to successfully divert the flames around the entire facility, at the same time saving dozens of radio and television transmitter buildings also on the mountain top. It was a very close call. Refer to the Radomes, Inc., website for dramatic photos.

The facility today is known as the Steward Observatory and the Mt. Lemmon SkyCenter. The primary astronomical research organization there is the University of Arizona whose main campus is located in nearby Tucson. Other universities such as the University of Wisconsin also operate telescopes on the mountain. A new educational center for the Mt. Lemmon SkyCenter was recently constructed near the former NCO barracks.

Finally, the Astronomy Department at the University of Arizona is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. For more information on the anniversary and the department, go to http://skycenter.arizona.edu/.

- Tom Page
Reunions & Coming Events

High PRF!

03 Apr 2010—McChord AFB 25th NR/AD/NWADS/WADS Recall Group meets at Bur's Restaurant, 6151 Steilacoom Blvd, Lakewood, WA 98499. All personnel ever assigned to 25th at McChord and attached radar or FIS units including Canadian are welcome. Buffet breakfast, $11.00, includes coffee and gravy, collected at the door. Program by Steven Gill, VA Rep from the Washington State VA Office in Olympia. Please RSVP by 30 March to Frank Pearce, CMSgt (USAF, Ret) at lionpaco@comcast.net.

25-30 Apr 2010—601st and 615th ACWRON (Germany), in Santa Fe, NM. Contact Francis X. Gosselin at fgosselin@tampabay.rr.com or JB Vaughan at jblucy@hughes.net.

06-08 Jun 2010—102nd AC&WS/ACS, MAANG, in Falmouth, MA. Anyone who served with the 102nd from 1948 to 1998 is eligible to attend and become a member of our group. For further information contact Hank Connors at hank.connors@cox.net.

06-12 Jun 2010—794th AC&WS, Cape Newenham AFS, AK, reunion in Mystic, CT with local tours to Newport, RI and NYC. For further information contact Bob Workman at rgworkman@verizon.net, also http://groups.yahoo.com/group/capenewenham/.


19 Jun 2010—2nd annual Air Force Reunion Pot Luck Breakfast, Acushnet River Safe Boating Club, 80 Middle Street, Fairhaven, MA, 08-1400. This is a cook-it-for-yourself, bring what you like for breakfast as well as your photos and memories. For further information contact A1C Fred Boutin, fboutin2@verizon.net.

25-27 Jun 2010—664th AC&WS/RADS, at 2280 State Route 540, Bellefontaine, OH. Contact Larry Lewis at katenlarry@embarqmail.com for additional information and details.

Jun 2010—903rd AC&WS/RADS, Gettysburg AFS, SD. Details are coming, in the meantime please contact Rick Roue at droue@gvtel.com.
terceptor Wing and the 2152nd Communications Squadron, in Biloxi, MS. For information or to check in, contact Dave Hammond at dahammond13@msn.com or call (228)388-3085.

24-26 Sept 2010—739th AC&WS/RADS, Wadena AFS, in Wadena. Please contact Jim White at jswhite@wcta.net for additional information.

01-04 Oct 2010—Air Force Radar Site Veterans Unit Reunion; if you served at a radar site anywhere in the world at any time, you’re invited to attend. Reunion site is the Crowne Plaza Phoenix, 2532 W Peoria Ave, Phoenix, cutoff for reservations is 1 Sept 2010, call (800)227-6963. For suggestions, activities and planning, contact MSgt Ken Taylor, USAF (Ret) at (719)972-3574 or taylorpatken9@aol.com.

03-06 Oct 2010—Sampson AFB/3650th Military Training Wing reunion, in Rochester, NY. For further information contact Walt Steeys at samafbvet@aol.com.

18-21 Oct 2010—758th AC&W/RADS, Neah Bay AFS, WA, in Charleston, SC. Hotel to be announced soon, in the meantime contact Bob McLeod at bob33mac@aol.com.

15-23 Jan 2011—Salute To Veterans Cruise/Reunion in MV Carnival Freedom. Eight-night cruise to Central America sailing from Fort Lauderdale with stops in Cozumel, Limon and Colon. Organized by veterans for veterans, prices start at $589. For additional information, contact Beverly Poitrast, MCC, at Beverly@cruisingsmart.com.

01-03 Jul 2011—Opheim, MT, 100-Year Anniversary. Opheim resident Janet Bailey wants all Opheim AFS veterans to know how much the site meant to the town and would like all who are interested to attend the celebration. For further information, contact D. Murrell—son of site veteran Joseph Murrell—at dmurrell99@yahoo.com.

13-15 Jul 2011—753rd AC&WS/RADS vets, Sault Ste Marie AFS, MI, in SSM. Contact George Taylor at GBT8530@aol.com.

Announcements

766th RADS (SAGE), Caswell AFS, 1961-1965—Anyone interested in holding a reunion for the aforementioned years, possibly here in Las Vegas (I know of two others living here who were stationed there during those years) or in the Limestone area (my preference). Please contact me at Johnnyposox@aol.com.

689th AC&W/RADS, Mount Hebo AFS, OR. A group of vets are hoping to have a reunion some time this year, location TBD. If you’re interested please contact David E. Casteel at davidecasteel@yahoo.com.

GEEIA/MDA/EI Reunion, planned for Biloxi, MS in 2011. The GEEIA/MDA/EI Reunion Committee plans a gathering every two years, normally in the odd-numbered years, exact dates TBD. For further information as planning develops, call up www.geeia-mdai-ei.org/.

Local/Regional Alerts

Anchorage, AK—Monthly radar site veterans luncheon, for information contact MSgt James W “Sammy” Samson, USAF(Ret) at ruasamson@gci.net.

Barberton/Northeast Ohio—Second Thursday of each month, contact Robert Walker at rwalker698@aol.com.

Bellefontaine, OH—Quarterly luncheon, contact Larry Lewis at katenlarry@embarqmail.com.

Charlotte, NC—Quarterly luncheons in March, June, September and December, contact Mike Gordon at gordwoody@carolina.rr.com.

Colorado Springs, CO—Monthly gathering, all radar site veterans are welcome to attend! Contact Joe Coughlin at arousa1@yahoo.com.

Dallas/Fort Worth, TX—Quarterly luncheon at the Golden Corral on Belt Line Rd, just south of Hwy 183 across from the Irving Mall. Call Don Simmons, dona7112@sbcglobal.net.

Dayton/Beavercreek, OH—Breakfasts held first Saturday of April, May, June and November, starting at 0830 at the Golden Corral, 2490 Commons Blvd, Beavercreek. For additional information contact William “Bill” Greenawalt, bgreenawalt2002@yahoo.com.

Houston, TX—Quarterly luncheon at the Methodist Hospital-Willowbrook, 18220 Tomball Parkway/TX 249 in Houston. Second Tuesday of February, May and August at 11:00 hours, please bring some ideas to expand our group. Call Marvin Lash, (281)469-5777 or m.lash@att.net for more information.

Reunions and Upcoming Events

All Reunions/Events: Generally all previously assigned or currently assigned military/civilian personnel or members are invited. Check with appropriate contact person (or visit their web site) concerning spouses/dependents, latest updates and other details. Data is subject to change without notice.

All Units Not Listed -
Check with these on-line sources:
http://www.radomes.org
http://www.vets.org/AirForce.htm
http://www.thewallusa.com/reunion/
http://www.usaf.com/reunions.htm
http://www.reunionsmag.com/military_reunions.html
Beneficial Re-Use of Former US Air Force Air Defense Radar Stations

No. 1 in a series

Introduction: In the Cold War years, ADC constructed almost 200 manned long-range radar stations in the continental United States alone. After the sites' original purpose was served, they met many different fates ranging from complete demolition to remaining in use as modern air defense/air traffic control radar facilities. This series examines our former radar sites that found other beneficial re-uses.

Mount Lemmon AFS, AZ (M/92/Z-92)

Just north of Tucson, Arizona, in the Catalina Mountains, sits scenic Mount Lemmon, home to the southern-most ski area in the continental United States. Atop this 9,157-foot peak, the 684th AC&W Squadron (Defense), later the 684th Radar Squadron (SAGE), conducted radar operations from August 1956 until 31 December 1969.

Circa 1972, this former air-defense long-range radar station was sold to private users primarily for use as an astronomical observatory. The original idea was to re-use the three radar towers as housings for large telescopes; however, the two-story metal radar towers proved insufficiently stable for precise astronomical work. The slewing of the telescope assemblies plus the strong winds at this mountain-top location caused excessive vibrations in the towers, intolerable for telescopes that had to be trained on distant points of light for hours on end. So the former AN/FPS-67B search radar tower and one AN/FPS-6 height-finder radar tower were torn down, and replaced by more-stable dome structures to house the large telescopes. Other Air Force structures such as the Radar Operations building were also removed to make way for new telescope domes.

Sometime later, the remaining radar tower, that for second AN/FPS-6 height-finder radar, was turned over to the U.S. Army at Fort Huachuca, AZ, for installation of a “tracking radar” on Mt. Lemmon. The exact purpose of this “tracking radar” has not been disclosed.

The “official” reason given to the public was that the radar was used to track the space shuttle in case it had to make an emergency landing at White Sands Missile Range.

(Continued on page 3)