

# 154<sup>th</sup> AIR CONTROL GROUP



## **LINEAGE**

Organized 7 Dec 1971  
154<sup>th</sup> Tactical Control Group  
154<sup>th</sup> Air Control Group

## **STATIONS**

Buckley Field (Later, ANGB), CO

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **COMMANDERS**

Col Richard E. Saltmarsh, 1971  
Col Thomas Barfoot, 1973  
Col Jack D. Abercrombie, 1978  
Col Sal Villano, Jr., 1981  
LTC James N. Hagenson, 1988

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

The emblem is symbolic of the unit and the Air Force; Tactical Air Command colors are used in the design. The color blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations, and yellow to the sun and excellence of personnel in assigned tasks. The color red is from TAC colors. The clenched fist indicates the strong determination and perseverance of assigned personnel. "The lightning bolts indicate the electric energy utilized in radar and radio; they are attached to the aircraft to signify control of the sky. The white diagonal bank signifies unity and excellence of assigned units.

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

The mission of the Headquarters, 154th Tactical Control Group (TCG) is to coordinate time-phased reception and onward movement of Tactical Air Control System (TACS) reinforcement units with appropriate authorities. The group commands, organizes, equips, trains and administers assigned TACS elements. The group coordinates the availability of TACS units for transfer to appropriate theater commanders including sustaining operational capability and logistics. HQ 154th also monitors logistical support and replenishment of life support, equipment and personnel resources for TACS units and provides augmentation personnel for U.S. and Allied wartime requirements.

The 154th TCG was organized at Buckley ANG Base, Dec, 7, 1971. The new group provided an enhanced dimension to the nation's military capability, supporting air and ground commanders with specific information of enemy positions and movements.

The group's first home was a former Navy servicemen's club (Bldg. 27) at Buckley. The World War II-era relic was shared with the 532nd Air Force Band and 154th TACO. When the band transferred to Tennessee, several of its members remained and became members of the group headquarters and the TACO.

In December 1971, three tactical air control groups were established east and three west of the Mississippi River, each responsible to HQ TAG as well as a numbered Air Force. The 154th TCG became a vital link within the structure of tactical Air Forces.

The nucleus of personnel for the new 154th unit was derived from the deactivated 233rd Flight Facilities Flight, along with an initial assignment of officers and airmen by Headquarters, COANG. A contingent of full-time air technicians was included in the assignment; their task was to operate and manage the unit on a day-to-day basis. In addition to the new group headquarters, the co-located 154th Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) and the 138th Tactical Control Squadron (CRC) at Greeley ANG Station were formed. Two years later, the 154<sup>th</sup> TACC was deactivated and the 154th Tactical Control Flt was activated at Colorado Springs

The up-channel flow of tactical air control information required in a system training exercise, or real-world scenario, would begin with the highly mobile radar and radio-relay equipment belonging to the flights and squadrons located in five western states. Information would then be consolidated at the control and reporting center before being passed on to the Tactical Air Control Center and group headquarters, where it would be evaluated and acted upon.

Short staffing and manning in the Colorado units presented problems; strength was just over 50 percent and many key positions lacked trained and qualified personnel.

The first Air Force adviser, Maj. Dana Anderson, was a welcome addition to the group staff. His TACS knowledge and experience was the glue needed to hold the organization together until

accelerated recruiting, training and material resources could ease the numerous problems in meeting very complex mission requirements.

In late 1973, the 154th group headquarters originated and implemented the first in a series of combined air-to-ground exercises. The "Hot Wheels" concept focused on employing TACS, using tooth interdiction and close air support activity, to direct aircraft against simulated ground enemy targets; to control search and rescue missions', to exercise forward air controller operations; and to coordinate large amounts of ground troops in simulated exercises. The highly successful exercises continued through March 1979.

TACS equipment was becoming available to Air Guard units from activities winding down in Southeast Asia. Ingenuity was tested as the pieces of outdated and abused, war-worn equipment were reconstructed into serviceable condition. The group's first recognition came to the Utah units in 1972. In spite of slow equipment deliveries, they had the first operational radars.

The first annual field training period for the group was performed on the Texas Plan (year-round training). The motion of the pendulum quickened and expanded very noticeably. Directives were issued to the assigned field units; many procedural and training guidelines were published. Practices to achieve present and future standardization, evaluation and mission effectiveness were developed.

On July 1, 1973, Col. Thomas Barfoot succeeded Saltmarsh as commander. Although manpower, training and equipment shortfalls were still problems, earlier growing pains had eased somewhat by this time. Mission considerations began to drive the group. It was widely rumored that "Tom Barfoot ate rusty nails for breakfast, excuse-makers for lunch and procrastinators for dinner." The pendulum started swinging in a wider arc! Barfoot set up firm lines of command and control and increased staff visits to the family units. His "can-do" attitude finely tuned battle-staff operations.

Cols. Saltmarsh, Barfoot and Abercrombie all wanted to develop an organizational emblem for the 154th. It needed to represent the five states and their units under the command and leadership of the group. Walt Leiker put his creative talents to work and designed the symbol.

A proposal was made in 1973 to conduct a series of exercises to provide real-world authenticity to the TACS training programs — a controversial concept never attempted by National Guard units. The name "Hot Wheels" was chosen to designate a series of exercises employing a "building block approach" to allow the concept to grow in scope and complexity. The group headquarters completed its first inspection by HQ TAC in 1972. The group passed successfully with no failures.

With the inspection over, no time was wasted in getting the Hot Wheels program to the front burner, beginning with a modest exercise for the Buckley TACC, with the control and reporting center in Greeley reporting on flying activities in their airspace. Designed to provide air and ground training in countering enemy aggression, elements in the limited exercise included tactical fighter and refueling units; Army defense artillery, airlift and paradrop units; and medical evacuation and air rescue units.

Subsequent Hot Wheels exercises expanded to permit broadened participation by other ARNG,

ANG and USAF units. The exercises accelerated the 154th TCG beyond its contemporaries and into the TACS limelight.

In 1974, all units of the group coordinated their training weekends to permit better command and control. "Hot Wheels II" was the first full TACS exercise providing a highly realistic environment for training and mission effectiveness. It was the first time an ANG unit had the responsibility for the conception, operational planning and execution of a full-scale war exercise. A comprehensive article on the exercise appeared in the June 1974 issue of National Guardsman.

The operational area for "Hot Wheels III" was switched to the Salt Lake City unit's airspace, and in September 1974, "Hot Wheels IV" was conducted in Colorado Springs with the group headquarters and the TACC deployed to Peterson AFB. An S-80A operations shelter and a tent city to quarter personnel were set up. Operations included the control of aircraft in the newly dedicated airspace in and around the Fort Carson area. The operations shelter, which was left intact after the exercise, later served as the focal point for air operations in a JCS exercise, "Brave Shield X." HQ 154th TCG and TACO were the only ANG units selected to participate in the exercise. They provided augmentees to the 602nd Tactical Air Control Wing and other USAF units to assist with air operations, mission planning and communications — resulting in further enhancement of "Hot Wheels V" and "VI" exercises.

Long anticipating a major reorganization, the 154th TCG began plans in the mid-1970s for the creation of a new radar unit. By the spring of 1976, plans were well under way to locate the new 154th TCF, a forward air control post (FACP), on Peterson Field in Colorado Springs and to draw personnel from the 154th Tactical Air Control Center (TACC), which was deactivated, and the 138th Tactical Control Flight (TCF). In April 1976 the organization completed its first unit training assembly and received a successful federal recognition inspection.

The early years were not without some measure of inconvenience and growing pains. Their first home, Building 1602 on Peterson Field, was quickly condemned as unfit after part of the roof caved in under heavy rain. In May 1976, the unit received the AN/TSQ 61 van, a mobile van used in conjunction with the radar van to increase the unit's number of control scopes by two. Other essential equipment trickled in one piece at a time for well over a year. The unit saw four commanding officers before a federal airspace letter of agreement was finalized in 1978.

An early 1976 reorganization of the ANG Tactical Air Control System had a profound impact on the future of the 154th TCG. The time had come when radar operations and state-of-the-art communications would add a new chapter to the rich aviation history of the Colorado Air Guard. The ANG TACS for the western two-thirds of the U.S. had been restructured and placed under the command and operational control of HQ 154th TCG. Colorado's 154th TACCS was deactivated and so was the group's sister unit in Oregon — HQ 153rd TCG. The 154th TCG — almost doubling in size — took over its radar units and mission.

Many former 154th TACOS personnel were assigned to group headquarters and the newly activated 154th Tactical Control Flight (FACP) in Colorado Springs under the command of Maj. George Fisher. The new unit would eventually change its designation to the 139th TCF. At the same time, the 138th TCF in Greeley was reduced in size and relinquished its control and reporting

center mission to become a forward air control post (FACP).

The group's workload tripled, since there were now nine subordinate units in five states falling within its scope of responsibility and command. The successes of the Hot Wheels exercises were a decisive factor in determining which headquarters would serve as the parent group for the subordinate units.

Group staff members met their Pacific Northwest counterparts in the field during the "Brave Shield XIV" exercise in 1976. Col. Barfoot was in charge of all ANG exercise participants and provided liaison between USAF and ANG forces.

Accelerated exercise participation and training emphasis continued with the "Jack Frost" exercise in Fairbanks, Alaska. the first opportunity for the group to participate in an exercise conducted outside the continental U.S.

"Hot Wheels VII" was the most ambitious, complex and noteworthy exercise in the continuous series. Long and tedious hours were the norm; even the "greenest" group members were fast developing a "combat mentality" and rapport with field units. Joining units from Washington and Oregon, the entire group deployed to Boise, Idaho, along with Army and Air Force elements. A communications network was established across 900 miles of mountainous terrain, linked by isolated relay sites which could be reached only by air. Col. Monroe Mathias was the exercise commander; Barfoot was the TACS commander. The exercise captured the attention of many service VIPs and general officers. Ground TACS in the ANG was growing in size, scope and recognition.

Maj. Charles Parnell replaced Lt. Col. Dana Anderson as senior Air Force adviser to the group in November 1977. Two months later, Lt. Col. Jack Abercrombie moved from director of operations to become the third group commander.

154th TCG units then provided the entire TACS for "Brave Shield XVIII" at Peterson AFB. Tent cities were home for two weeks. Realism in training was one of the primary objectives of the exercise; infiltrators, gas attacks and very strict security procedures gave the troops an idea of what to expect in a TACS battle environment.

TACS operation using the Checkered Flag scenario. Many additional exercises and deployments (CONUS and overseas) were conducted over the last two decades — perhaps more than any other unit of the COANG.

In March 1979, the group successfully passed another general inspection and received the USAF Outstanding Unit Award for the period beginning in January 1977.

More exercises were planned and executed, including cold weather operations such as "Empire Glacier" (New York) and "Jack Frost 79" (Alaska). "Brave Shield XX" in August 1979 at Fort Lewis, Wash., was the last JCS exercise for the group that used the classical TACS structure. Future exercises would be more limited in scope and reduced to one or two radar elements. Further changes in fine-tuning of the TACS presented challenges stretching into the '80s.

In September 1979, the TACS was again restructured. The Tactical Air Control Center as a functional entity was eliminated, resulting in the deactivation of the 153rd TACO; the Control and Reporting Center (CRC) in Portland, Ore., picked up the workload and personnel.

With the implementation of a program called "Checkered flag," overseas deployments became a special interest item in 1979. Checkered Flag was designed to familiarize and actually deploy personnel to their overseas operating locations. Area studies expanded to include familiarization with the people, culture, religions, customs, language and geography of the new locations. Besides serving as an excellent training scenario, the program became a powerful motivational force, creating improvements in recruiting, retention, morale and enthusiasm. "Let's Train Like We're Going to Fight" and similar slogans appeared; specialized bulletin boards, films, language teaching aids and posters were created. TACS thinking at all levels had reached global proportions.

The group's first overseas operating location was Turkey. Capt. Don Michels collected information and kept enthusiasm for the program at a high level even though no group personnel were able to visit the country.

The 154th TCG could look back at an extremely productive decade, one in which they established their organization, accepted many challenges and made their mark in the nation's Tactical Air Control System.

The 1980s established a new concept for TACS exercises. The 154th TCG developed several "Sentry Eagle" exercises for its nine subordinate units, concentrating on a "classical" TACS operation using the Checkered Flag scenario. Many additional exercises and deployments (CONUS and overseas) were conducted over the last two decades — perhaps more than any other unit of the COANG.

January 1981 154th TCG and COANG state staff take part in "Brim Frost" at Eielson AFB, Alaska.

Command of the group went to Lt. Col. Sal Villano, a Denver native who had been a high school, college and semi-professional athlete, had more than 16 years of military service. Knowing the ins and outs of the group at all levels, he led the organization to new levels of achievement in the 1980s. Villano's stated goal was to make the 154th TCG the "best in TACS." The overall result of a 1982 general inspection was a successful rating, with several branches and sections earning superlative ratings.

Group personnel continued to answer many calls to state active duties. In the summer of 1981, the 154th and the 139th TCF provided transportation to Forest Service firefighters trying to control a blaze in south-central Colorado. The winter "blizzard of the century" hit Colorado and the Denver area during Christmas 1982. Once again, the people of the 154th and 138th pitched in to assist those in need.

The group's busy exercise schedule was expanding: slogans like "Have TACS will Travel!" and

You asked for work when you joined this outfit!" appeared on office walls. A 1983 "Brim Frost" exercise in Alaska was in sharp contrast to the subsequent deployment to Honduras with the intriguing title "Ahaus Tara" ("Big Pine I"). Following the deployment, the 138th TCF sponsored a shoe drive for Hondurans as well as Nicaraguan refugees who had crossed over the border between the two countries. Called "Operation Silver Slipper," more than 3,000 pairs of shoes were collected, sorted, shipped and distributed to the needy.

Villano hadn't forgotten the spirit and intent of the Hot Wheels exercises as he took the entire group headquarters into the field at Camp Rilea, Ore., for "Sentry Eagle '83." The 154th established a TACS network of radars and radio relays covering the Pacific Northwest from the coast to the mountains of Idaho.

Sentry Eagle training, complete with rain and mud, included working with chemical warfare gear and combat arms. Nevertheless, morale and esprit de corps soared. Especially noticeable were the reactions of the newer and younger troops; they seemed to enjoy the "live training." As their boots became muddier and fatigues more worn and torn, there was justifiable pride and expanding combat awareness.

In 1984, the 139th TCF was relocated from Colorado Springs to Buckley, sharing facilities, knowledge and expertise with the group headquarters.

After Sentry Eagle, exercise participation was scaled down to focus on the group's forthcoming management effectiveness inspection and provide assistance to operational units. While several group people volunteered for short tours in Saudi Arabia and others gained valuable experience from exercises in Germany, the group's collective energy was directed toward the inspection and attaining the highest rating.

In May 1986, the TAC inspection team arrived to begin an inspection of group headquarters — the most thorough inspection received to date. The inspection team presented their findings in a critique long remembered by all who attend and the U.S. The group and its units would play an important role in the defense of Western Europe.

Construction of a new headquarters building was begun in November 1986, and deployments to Europe were increased and expanded. All personnel in the group headquarters had the opportunity to travel to their overseas operating locations in Europe, working directly with their active-duty counterparts. Knowledge, training and experience thus gained were constantly being applied to further enhance combat readiness and assure accomplishment of new missions.

The 154th TCG reception teams were being trained and organized to provide logistical support to radar units deploying to overseas operating locations and participating in NATO exercises. In 1986 and 1987, the unit deployed to Europe in a series of "Sentry Adler" exercises. All 154th TCG personnel studied the geography, demography, governments, religions, languages, culture and geopolitical/economic facets of various locations while at the same time fine-tuning combat skills.

The group also became involved in another kind of battle closer to home — the drug war. The unique ability of their tactical radar to pinpoint low-flying aircraft was used to assist the U.S. Drug

Enforcement Agency in fighting airborne movement of drugs in the Southwest.

In May 1988, the 154th dedicated their new \$1.7 million, 25,600-square-foot communications and electronics facility. The new structure serves as headquarters to more than 230 group and 227th ATCF personnel.

- 1970 Nellis AFB, Nev: Dismantle modular buildings
- 1971 Kulis ANGB, Alaska: Erect modular dormitory
- 1972 Nellis AFB, Nev: Wartime engineering training
- 1972 Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz: Level aircraft parking area
- 1973 Ramey AFB, P.R.: Rehab barracks and install BAK-12
- 1974 Buckley ANGB, Colo: Integrate with civilian forces
- 1975 Tyndall AFB, Fla: Wartime engineering training
- 1975 Fort Hood, Texas: Augment base fire department
- 1976 Tyndall AFB, Fla: Wartime engineering training
- 1977 Whiteman AFB, Mo: Construct fire training pit and gas storage building
- 1978 Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. Construct parking lot and rehab VOQ
- 1979 McGhee Tyson ANGB, Tenn: Rehab VAQ
- 1980 Howard AFB, Panama: Rehab Airmen's club, raze post office, enhance airfield drainage and construct fire station addition
- 1981 Fairchild AFB, Wash: Convert ANG warehouse area and build LOX storage bldg.
- 1982 Great Falls IAP, Mont: Rehab hangar crypto area and CE shops
- 1983 McGhee Tyson ANGB, Tenn: Raze building, install radio tower foundation, improve ramp and relamp base
- 1983 Eglin AFB, Fla: RRR training
- 1984 Hickam AFB, Hawaii: Remodel dining facility, PACAF HO and base gym, convert rec. center and install concrete slabs
- 1985 Camp Ripley, Minn: Repair roofs and construct biathlon range
- 1986 Eglin AFB, Fla: Base recovery after attack training
- 1987 Palmerola AB, Honduras: Support "JTF Bravo" with construction of a customs building and improvements to post office, base electrical systems and showers (the most realistic combat support training to date, for which the unit received an "outstanding" rating)

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Air Force Order of Battle

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#### Sources

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