

903 RADAR SQUADRON (SAGE)



LINEAGE

903 Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
Redesignated 903 Radar Squadron (SAGE)
Inactivated

STATIONS

Great Falls AFB, MT, 20 May 1953-25 Oct 1955
Gettysburg AFS, SD

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



903 Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

903rd Radar S (SAGE): activated 20 May 53 at Great Falls AFB, MT, assigned to 29th AD; moved to Gettysburg AFS, SD Jan 56; transferred to 31st AD 1 Mar 56; transferred to 29th AD 1 Jan 59; transferred to Grand Forks. ADS ca, Apr 59; redesignated from ACFW Sq to 903rd Radar Sq (SAGE) 15 Jan 60; transferred to Sioux City ADS 4 Sep 63;; transferred to 30th AD 1 Apr 66; discontinued 18 Jun 68.

Manned by the 903rd AC&W Squadron, Gettysburg became operational in 1956 with an AN/MPS-7 search radar and an AN/MPS-14 height-finder radar. In 1958 an AN/FPS-20A search radar replaced the AN/MPS-7, and an AN/FPS-6A height-finder radar was installed. Gettysburg joined the SAGE system in 1959. The search radar subsequently was upgraded and redesignated as an AN/FPS-66 in 1961. In 1963 an AN/FPS-90 joined the AN/MPS-14 in performing height-finder duties. In 1964 an AN/FPS-27 was installed, and the AN/FPS-66 was retired. The Air Force deactivated the 903rd Radar Squadron (SAGE) on 18 June 1968. The FAA continues to operate long-range radar there today using an AN/FPS-67B search radar atop the old AN/FPS-27 radar tower.

903 Gettysburg AFS, SD MPS-7; FPS-20A/-66; MPS-14; FPS-90 FPS-27; MPS-14;

FPS-90 1956 18-Jun-68 Located north of town. FAA now operates an AN/FPS-67B search radar in the old AN/FPS-27 tower.

Between March 1954 and September 1962, a total of 41.61 acres were acquired for constructing and operating Gettysburg Air Force Station Z-99. Improvements constructed between 1955 through 1959 included operational and administrative buildings, dormitories, a dining hall and maintenance shops. DOD announced on 13 May 1968 that the site was scheduled for inactivation, and it was declared excess to GSA on February 1969. 1.11 acres were transferred to the FAA on July 1969 with agreements for joint use access easement and reserved use and occupancy of various improvements (not identified in the report). The FAA, at the time of the 1993 report, conducted long-range radar operations seven days a week on the 1.11 acre site, using an FPS-27 Radar Tower structure.

According to FAA personnel, some buildings had been removed from the remainder of the site; however, two radar tower bases, the auto maintenance shop, recreation multipurpose building, mess hall, and dormitories remained. FAA personnel reported the former auto maintenance shop and dining hall had been rented to local residences and for car body repair work. They also reported the current owners had resided in the recreation multipurpose building for a short time. Local residents indicated remaining structures were used by the current landowner to store machinery, surplus Army equipment, and other miscellaneous items.

Construction of the installation began in the spring of 1955. The squadron became a reality on 25 Oct 1955 when Cpt Alerd M. Hedvall brought the squadron from Malmstrom AFB, MT to Gettysburg, SD. His first act as squadron commander was the acceptance of the operations and diesel power buildings for the AF so that installation of radar equipment could begin several days later.

During November and December radar equipment was being installed in the building and on the steel towers. This installation hot checked and accepted by the AF as was the rest of the station by the middle of December.

The squadron was part of the 29th AD. By Christmas of 1955, the 903rd was a reality with construction completed

During the first months of 1956 the main activity at the station was the unloading and storage of supplies. Barracks no 3 and no 4 were used as storage while the men lived in barracks no 1 and no 2.

At this time initial installation of telephone equipment began. This phone equipment was deemed inadequate at the time but was the only equipment available.

The squadron supply section was very busy at this time because all the station's furnishings had to be obtained along with all maintenance parts and equipment.

The squadron's electronic supply support came from the 475th Fighter Group at Minneapolis, MN while all the rest of the supply support came from the 28th ABG at Ellsworth AFB, SD. That base also supplied us with two vehicles to start our motor pool a 1.5 ton stake bed truck and carryall. It was obvious that additional vehicles would be necessary to carry out our assigned mission.

On the first of March 1956 our HQ was changed from the 29th AD to the 31st AD. At the date of this transfer there were four officers and 62 enlisted men at the station. Four civilian worked in IEO and five contract technicians were assigned by RCA to the communications and electronics section.

On 15 Mar 1956 the NCO open Mess was officially opened.

By the end of April the installation of equipment including the telephone plant was completed and the station went on the air from 0600 hours to 1800 seven days a week. This was broken down into two six hour shifts using three crews. When the station went on the air it became necessary to bring the personnel originally assigned to operations but used elsewhere back into operations. This left some other sections short of personnel for several months until new people arrived.

In May 1956 Cpt Gabosch became commander

The air to ground radio facility was installed and accepted by last of May at which time it went into eight hour operation.

Finally on 5 Jul 1956 the big moment arrived the station began 24 hour operations of both radar and radio. Four crews were used each working an eight hour shift. Since there were not enough directors to put one on each shift directors were on duty only during the day. At this time there were 32 airmen and 3 officers manning the operations section. Part of the time several of the officers were absent on temporary duty.

On 2 Aug 1956, 32 radar operators arrived from school in Keesler, MS. At this time there were sufficient number of airmen to adequately run operations.

In July 1956 the Wickers Construction Company broke ground for the permanent arctic towers to house the radar. These towers enclose the radar antenna in a rubber bubble supported by air thus protecting the antenna and allowing it be heated making maintenance much more pleasant during the winter months.

The video mapper a device which projects lines drawn on a glass plate onto the radar scope was installed in October. This is used to project airways and airfields on the scope so that by flicking a switch the scope operator can see the relationship of an aircraft to these fixed geographic points.

On 6 Aug 1956 Maj Lawrence N. Willis became squadron commander

During these months much happened at 903rd. The NCO club was enlarged. The Day room and exchange were established. And the wives club was organized.

In Oct the motor pool received a rotary type snow plow from Ellsworth AFB in anticipation of the winter ahead.

On 9 Nov 1956 a condition of increased readiness was declared because of of the crisis in Czechoslovakia. It was necessary for a director to be on duty 24 hours a day. On the first of December operations returned to normal manning.

On 4 Mar 1957 the radar sets were shut down to move them to the new arctic towers. Since the radar was off the air, a little construction work was begun in the operations room. Acoustical tile was placed on the ceiling and whole room was painted. The top level in the operations room was separated from the rest of the room by a glass partition which allowed personnel to work in the back without disturbing the rest of operations. The internal phone system was rewired at this time to reduce complexity and duplication and to make it more effective.

The last section to be set up was the cryptographic section which became operational in January.

On 15 Jun Cpt Trembly became commander

On 16 Sep 1957 Maj Owen P. Farmer, Jr. became commander

During the summer construction started on a third arctic tower, and was complete in Jan 1958

Manned by the 903rd AC&W Squadron, Gettysburg became operational in 1956 with AN/MPS-7 and AN/MPS-14 radars. In 1958 an AN/FPS-20A search radar replaced the AN/MPS-7 and an AN/FPS-6A height-finder radar was installed. Gettysburg became a SAGE center in 1959. The search radar subsequently was upgraded and redesignated as an AN/FPS-66 in 1961. In 1963 an AN/FPS-90 was performing height-finder duties. Later in the 1960s an AN/FPS-27 was installed. The Air Force deactivated the 903rd in June of 1968.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

Created: 29 Jul 2020

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.