

29 RADIO SQUADRON, MOBILE

MISSION

LINEAGE

29 Radio Squadron, Mobile

STATIONS

Brooks AFB, TX, 8 Feb 1952-1 Aug 1952

Clark AFB, Philippines, 1 Aug 1952-8 May 1955

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

In the spring of 1952, USAFSS activated the 29th Radio Squadron Mobile at Brooks AFB, Texas. Lt. Col. Thaddeus L. Woltanski was the unit's first commander. Colonel Woltanski, squadron support personnel and equipment sailed aboard the USNS Fred C. Ainsworth to Manila, Luzon, Philippine Islands. They crossed the International Dateline on 21 August 1952 and arrived at Clark Air Base on

3 September. The 29th RSM reported to the 6920th Security Group, Johnson Air Base, Japan.

Twelve Morse intercept operators (the initial operations cadre) flew on a PAN AM charter flight from San Francisco International to Haneda Airport, Tokyo, Japan. They were told when they signed into the 1st RSM, Johnson Air Base, "You guys are going to a new outfit in the Philippine Islands."

Arriving at Clark Air Base 3-4 days after the main group, the "dirty dozen" operators found billeting with other squadron members in the lower bay of a motor pool barracks. The 29th RSM airmen spent the next couple of weeks cleaning out and making habitable a group of "Sawali" huts that became their home— Sawali being Tagalog for "bamboo structure."

Located some 45 miles from Manila, Clark Air Base was America's largest overseas military facility—a former cavalry post that was home to Thirteenth Air Force. The base had few modern facilities when the 29th Radio Squadron arrived. Built on rectangular concrete slabs, Sawali huts had corrugated tin roofs, a screen door at each end and woven bamboo siding, then metal screening from the bamboo panels to the roofline.

Bare bulbs provided lighting, and huts had no indoor plumbing. Communal latrines provided showers, sinks and toilets. Mount Arayat stood as a backdrop in the distance. Each hut housed about a dozen troops.

All the guys of the 29th RSM were happy to get out of the motor pool barracks and into their own area." The squadron upgraded airmen billeting to Quonset huts with two-man rooms and indoor plumbing in 1954, followed by permanent two-story concrete barracks a few months later. Other 29 RSM facilities were no better. The orderly room, supply, small mess hall, and radio maintenance and typewriter repair operated in similar Sawali huts.

There was no building for 29th RSM operations upon arrival at Clark, but the Morse intercept operators had no intercept experience anyway. They had learned Morse code at Keesler AFB, Mississippi, then sat in front of a Hammarlund SP-600 receiver for the first time at Brooks AFB—spinning the tuning dial a bit, but lacking operational "spinnin 'n grinnin" field experience. At Brooks, they copied code played back from tape, primarily to teach them code equivalents for six Russian Cyrillic characters not included in standard Morse code.

USAFSS arranged with the Army Security Agency for 29th RSM Morse operators to acquire operational training with the 6th ASA Field Station collocated at Clark Air Base. Split into four shifts, each airman sat with an experienced ASA troop at an intercept position—each with an MC-88 typewriter typing intercepted Morse signals.

The army operations building was out in the boonies, far away from other base facilities, but it had a rare creature comfort for Clark Air Base at that time—air conditioning. The airmen trained in "sidesaddle" mode with ASA for about a month until a Quonset hut had been assembled to house 29th RSM Operations. The 29th established the USAFSS intercept site near the ASA field station.

With a guard shack at its entrance, 29th Operations included a room for the operations officer and a communications center immediately inside the Quonset's front door. A large room—the majority of the building—ultimately housed 12 positions, six along each side.

There was also a latrine in the rear of Operations, and an incinerator (a perforated 55-gallon drum contraption for burning classified materials) located behind the building. Later, a new small building behind the ops Quonset housed four additional intercept positions and an analysis office for three or four analysts.

By Christmas 1952, several new operations personnel—mostly new Morse intercept operators but a few veteran operators and traffic analysts from other USAFSS units—arrived in the 29th RSM. Now considered "old-timers" within the squadron, the twelve original Morse operators became trainers for new operators. Soon the unit was operating six positions around the clock. Over the years the mission and manning continued to expand, with 29th Operations moving into a new compound.

Det 1, 29th RSM—Air Force Security Service used Clark Air Base and the 29th Radio Squadron Mobile as a springboard from which to launch new SIGINT sites in Southeast Asia. As the squadron's first detachment in Southeast Asia, Detachment 1, 29th Radio Squadron Mobile, Yontan Field, Okinawa, was a bare-bones facility. Det 1, 29th RSM deployed to Yontan in 1954, replacing Flight A that was deactivated. Det 1 moved its headquarters and billeting to Kadena in early 1955 but continued intercept operations at Yontan. Finally during a USAFSS-wide reorganization in May 1955, Det 1, 29th RSM inactivated, at the same time the 6927th Security Flight was activated.

Det 2. 29th RSM—In 1953, 6920th group commander Col. Sawyer assigned Maj. Paul A. Tisdale the project of deploying direction finding stations in southeast Asia. The DF sites would be detachments of the 29th Radio Squadron Mobile, and Tisdale evaluated widely dispersed locations to provide good crosscut bearings for triangulation. He chose Palawan Island southwest of Luzon as one of the sites. With no facilities to support operations on Palawan, Tisdale scouted military areas in Japan for an existing prefabricated structure. He located a barracks-type barge with living quarters and field kitchen anchored near Yokosuka. Belonging to the U.S. Department of Interior, the barge had supported research in the past but was not presently in use. Afraid that DOI would deny an official Air Force request to acquire the barge, Tisdale made a "midnight requisition" and had the barge towed to Palawan. On Palawan he hired local tribesmen to dig a canal and float the barge inland a few feet. Filling in the canal and restoring the beach and flora, they camouflaged the barge in dense jungle foliage. In 1954, the 29th RSM activated Detachment 2, 29th RSM on the barge at Tarumpitao, Palawan. The unit inactivated and Det 2, 6925 RSM was activated in May 1955. To Tisdale's knowledge, the Department of Interior never realized the barge was missing.

Det 3 29th RSM — For a second DF site, Major Tisdale investigated two areas: a former Japanese airstrip outside Taipei, Taiwan, and a French military facility at Da Nang, Vietnam. Da Nang had suitable facilities, but due to guerrilla warfare in Vietnam the desolate, abandoned airstrip on Taiwan got the nod for the next 29th RSM detachment. In 1954, the 29 RSM activated Detachment 3, 29th Radio Squadron Mobile at Clark Field, with ultimate deployment to "Nan Szu Pu," Taiwan.

On 8 May 1955, the 6925th Radio Squadron Mobile was activated at Clark Air Base, and the 29th RSM was inactivated. Under an administrative change of assignment, it was business as usual for squadron personnel as the 6925th assumed the 29th mission. The 6920th Security Wing also replaced the 6920th Security Group.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

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

Larry Tart, Freedom Through Vigilance