

# **4701 AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING AND CONTROL SQUADRON**

## **MISSION**

## **LINEAGE**

4701 Airborne Early Warning and Control Squadron  
Activated, 1 Oct 1953  
Inactivated, 8 Mar 1955

## **STATIONS**

McClellan AFB, CA, 1 Oct 1953-8 Mar 1955

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

## **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

The Sacramento Air Materiel Area received responsibility for yet another aircraft in 1953, one for which McClellan employees developed a remarkable fondness—the RC-121 Constellation, affectionately known as the "Connie". The USAF announced on September 20, 1953, the activation of the 4701st Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEWC) Squadron at McClellan AFB.

Already in June 1953, the base awarded a contract for the construction of nose docks and shop buildings for this new Air Defense Command unit. Officers and men began arriving in October and on December 21, 1953, a solitary C-121 emerged from the grey winter sky and touched down at McClellan.

McClellan workers had seen some unusual birds in their time, but no one recalled ever having seen anything like the RC-121 Constellation—a streamlined fuselage, four piston engines mounted on straight wings, a three-fin tail, and two radomes (a "guppy" radome underneath the fuselage and one on top of the fuselage resembling a dorsal fin). Lockheed had first flown the Constellation in 1943 as a commercial airliner. The USAF and U.S. Navy directed Lockheed to produce a stretched version of the aircraft in 1949 capable of housing both extensive radar and communications equipment. Its task—to spot Russian aircraft and alert the Air Defense Command, providing advanced early warning of a threat to national security. Other Air Defense Command units were to follow. On May 1, 1954, the USAF activated the 8th Air Division headquarters at McClellan to command and control AEW units. On May 25, the Air Defense Command transferred the 4712th AEW Squadron to McClellan.

In the winter of 1953, a dozen officer and airmen arrived at McClellan AFB to initiate a new concept in national defense-airborne early warning and control. They formed the first AEW&C Squadron, the 4701st, and received their first RC-121 "Flying Radar Station" in December.

October 2 1953 —4701st AEW&C Squadron assigned to McClellan AFB within the 8th Air Division, on WADF General Order No. 39 dtd 17 Sep 53 begins operations in building S-31 located in "splinter city" area of McClellan AFB.

December 21 1953—4701st received its first RC-121 aircraft, tail no. 51-3838A.

December 28 1953—4701st received its second RC-121 aircraft, tail no. 51-3839A.

December 31 1953—Some 55 officers and 275 airmen were assigned to the 4701st against an authorization of 74 officers and 382 airmen. The original authorized strength was 26 officers and 109 airmen.

On September 20, 1953, news was released to the public press that the 4701st Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) Squadron was being activated with McClellan as its home base. Preparations for receiving the Squadron were begun in June 1953 when a contract was let for construction of nose docks and shop buildings for its use. The purpose for the buildings, the unit they may house, and the mission a new tenant might have, was all a closely guarded secret until the September announcement.

On Oct. 1, 1953, a provisional unit, the 4701st Airborne Early Warning and Control Squadron, was established at McClellan AFB, Calif. and equipped with RC-121D aircraft.

Location of the 4701st AEW&C Squadron at McClellan, while it did not add greatly to the base workload, made this base a much more vital link in Uncle Sam's defenses. In October, the squadron of some 130 officers and airmen arrived and were given quarters. This number increased to about 350 officers and men by the end of the year. Lt. Col. Russell E. Cheever was its commanding officer.

The RC-121C aircraft used by the squadron was described as a flying radar station and was to be used for extending the country's warning net far beyond the range of fixed radar stations. The first RC-121 landed at McClellan on 21 December. Inasmuch as it was a product of Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, the C-121 became a prime responsibility of SMAMA in August.

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USAF Unit Histories  
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Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.