THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

THREE

A WEAPONS TRAINING CENTER

The Need for a Command-Wide Training Base

As has been seen, in order to give their crews more opportunity to fire gunnery than local ranges afforded, both EADF and WADF established central gunnery camps to which all of their squadrons could be rotated. WADF acquired use of the Air Training Command's Williams Range in Arizona and set up a staging base at nearby Yuma County Airport. EADF secured use of the Air Proving Ground Command's ranges at Eglin AFB, Florida and of the Eglin Auxiliary Field number six. Use of the APGC facilities were on a temporary basis only, however, and plans were made to establish a permanent gunnery camp at another location. For EADF, ADC programmed facilities at Punta Gorda, Florida in the 1953 construction budget.[1] To provide CADF with a similar installation, ADC programmed construction of facilities at Houma AFB, Louisiana.

These plans to provide a gunnery base for each of the three Defense Forces were abandoned, however, by early 1952 in favor of establishing one central gunnery training base for the entire command. ADC made this decision primarily because of the extreme Air Force-wide shortage of the equipment and personnel required for a successful gunnery program. There were not enough training aids,

THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

experienced armament maintenance personnel, test equipment, qualified instructors, fire control mock-ups, and associated line equipment to go around. If three bases had to share the existing resources, the result would have been that none would have been adequately equipped or manned, at least in the immediate future. But by pooling all of the people and materiel at one base, it was felt that this base could be fairly well equipped and manned.

Of all the possible locations for this center, the one at Yuma, Arizona had the greatest number of advantages. There was enough land at the field to accommodate considerable expansion and the range was large enough for either gunnery or rocketry. The weather in southwestern Arizona permitted almost year-around operation. Finally, there was little question of the continued availability of the field and the portion of the range given to ADC.

For these reasons, early in 1952, ADC chose Yuma as the site for its weapons training center and began construction of additional facilities.[2] To obtain USAF Headquarters approval of its plans which was granted in mid-1952, ADC cited the following interesting facts: of 50,000 gunnery sorties required to train the forty squadrons then assigned, only some 9,000 could be accomplished at home bases; as a direct result of this situation, only approximately one-third of its crews were qualified in gunnery; and when ADC strength reached fifty-seven squadrons and the entire force was all-weather equipped, the sortie requirement would be raised by fifty percent.[3]

THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

The need for this central training base was expressed perhaps most clearly of all by Major General Frederic H. Smith Jr., ADC's Vice Commander, in these words:[4]

> The philosophy behind this...is this: it is true that Training Command is required to turn out young pilots who have a fairly good basic grounding in gunnery and in such tactics as the Training Command is able to teach. But 90 percent of our on-hand strength are pilots whose proficiency must be maintained, and who have to be taught new techniques to fit new weapons as they come along. We have far too small a force in our programmed 57 squadrons adequately to defend this country. It means that when you do vector one or two all-weather fighters into an approaching hostile bomber, that if they don't kill we are in the soup. We either have to ram, which is expensive and a little difficult to teach Americans I think, or a man gets through.
>
> We believe that with a centralized gunnery establishment at Yuma, we can get a lot of these so-called qualified marksmen -- possibly experts. And we think we can do it fairly cheaply.

Build-Up of the Training Center

To fulfill the fifty-seven squadron training requirement, according to ADC's calculations at this time, the Yuma center had to be able to handle as many as one-hundred aircraft at one time.[5] As planned, construction of the facilities to handle this load, such as additional ramp space, extensions of taxiways and runways, maintenance shops, warehouses, airman barracks, officer quarters, messing facilities, fuel and oil storage, and utilities, was to be completed at least on an austerity basis by around mid-1954.[6] Prior to this time, the capacity of the base, one squadron, was to be increased in phases so that two, then three, and finally four squadrons could be handled rather than simply staying at a one squadron

level until the base was ready for four. The capacity of the first phase was to be sixty aircraft and was to be reached by September 1952. The capacity of the second was to be eighty aircraft and was to be reached by mid-1953. By the time the final phase was reached (100 aircraft), ADC planned to have a radar station in operation so as to provide training for controllers, as well as pilots, in radar interception. Control of Yuma was to be left in the hands of WADF which was to direct the development and operation of the center.

The development of the training center as established in this original plan fell short of the goals. To the end of 1953, when the last gun-firing aircraft visited Yuma (development of the center for rocketry training which occasioned many changes in the original plan is discussed in subsequent chapters), the maximum number of aircraft being sent by each Defense Force monthly was twenty, or a total of sixty -- the capacity set for the first phase.[7] Among the causes for this delay in development were lags in construction of such facilities as maintenance shops, barracks, and warehouses; a shortage of skilled maintenance personnel and gunnery instructors;[8] and insufficient spare parts and equipment. The latter shortage resulted partly from the problem of one base attempting to provide support for a large number of aircraft of different types including jet and conventional.

In addition to the reduced number of aircraft that the weapons center could handle, the training program was limited in effectiveness by a lack of high speed and high altitude tow aircraft.

THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

There were sufficient numbers of F-51s at Yuma Airport (eighteen were assigned by October 1952) to provide the required sorties.[9] These aircraft could not, however, provide realistic training for jet interceptor pilots. At mid-1953, nine T-33s were assigned to the Yuma center.

During the last six months of 1953, with a great number of ADC squadrons equipped with or in the process of converting to rocket-bearing interceptors (none of which went to Yuma until early 1954), the volume of aircraft in training at the center declined. The greatest number of aircraft at this base at one time during this period was forty-four.[10]

The radar station which ADC envisioned in its original plan was established early in 1953. Late in January, a search radar set (AN/CPS-5) and a height finder (AN/CPS-4) were installed in a remodeled training building.[11] The station became operational in March, but the first intercept was not run until around May first.

To keep up with the continued growth of the training center, the support organization was reorganized many times to permit expansion. Originally, in June 1951, WADF had established the 4750th Air Base Squadron with an initial authorization of six officers and 122 airmen.[12*] Because of the increasing workload

* It is to be noted that the strength figures given here are indications of the relative strengths at specific times only and are not to be taken as the absolute strength over a period changed only by the various reorganizations. This unit was organized as a table of distribution unit initially and therefore it was possible to vary the personnel strength as the requirements changed.

and the greater number of people required, on 2 June 1952 this unit was reorganized into a group, the 4750th Air Base Group (Weapons Training), and three squadrons were established under it -- a base service squadron, a materiel squadron, and a training squadron.[13] The strength authorized was seventy-one airmen and 331 officers. A second change was made on 16 February 1953 when the organization was renamed the 4750th Training Group (Air Defense).[14] The purpose of this change was simply to provide it with a name which more aptly described its mission. Greater responsibilities and personnel requirements resulting from the launching of a rocketry and research program at Yuma necessitated a second reorganization in September 1953. At this time, the unit was moved up to wing status -- the 4750th Training Wing (Air Defense).[15] Two groups and four squadrons were set up and placed under it. The authorized strength was eighty-six officers and 881 airmen.[16]

A final change in unit designation was made on 1 September 1954. In order to more properly identify the Yuma organization and to avoid conflict with Air Training Command units, the 4750th Training Wing (Air Defense) was renamed the 4750th Air Defense Wing (Weapons).[17] There were at this time two groups and five squadrons assigned to the wing. The authorized strength of the wing and all subordinate organizations in October 1954 was 145 officers and 1154 airmen.[18]

Transfer of Control to ADC Headquarters

The very great importance that the Yuma training center had assumed by October 1953 plus the additional heavy responsibilities

THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

given to the organization, caused Headquarters ADC to take over direct control from WADF. Consideration of the need for command headquarters control of this organization had been going on for some time prior to this. As early as March 1952, ADC's Directorate of Operations and Training had recommended, after a study of the situation,[19] that:

> The Central Gunnery Camp at Yuma be placed directly under the control of Headquarters ADC. This is considered mandatory for the following reasons:
>
> a. To be effective, with command-wide equality, the operational control must be from a central agency. Therefore, if operational control is to be had by ADC, it is important also that support and logistics functions fall under the same line of command...
>
> b. Problems have already arisen because EADF has been dissatisfied with their participation in gunnery activities under control of WADF...
>
> c. The importance of a central gunnery camp to air defense combat effectiveness readily qualifies the need for direct attention and control from the overall command headquarters.

Again in February 1953, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations at ADC Headquarters recommended placing the Yuma organization directly under this headquarters.[20] Among the reasons cited was the inability of WADF to properly man the base. Under WADF, "personnel requirements of Yuma are weighed against those of the tactical squadrons [with assignments made] as tactical considerations dictate...The skilled personnel required to do the job should be carefully selected to provide use of command-wide availability of skills rather than an inordinate drain of resources in one of the defense forces."[21]

Because of these considerations plus the assignment of numerous research projects and the whole rocketry training program to

the Yuma center, on 1 October 1953, ADC Headquarters assumed direct assignment of the 4750th Training Wing (Air Defense) and all subordinate organizations.[22]

Use of the Eglin Range Discontinued

The Eastern Air Defense Force continued to use the range at Eglin AFB, along with the Williams range, up to 1 July 1953, the expiration date of the agreement with APGC. The 4611th Air Base Squadron (Gunnery Training) was discontinued and the troop spaces authorized to this unit were transferred to the 4750th Training Group at Yuma Airport.[23]

EADF had more squadrons than the other two Defense Forces and therefore requested in late 1952 that it be allowed to send whole squadrons to Yuma rather than the specified maximum of twenty aircraft allowed each Defense Force.[24] ADC refused at that time because EADF still had the use of the Eglin range. A readjustment was promised after the first of July when EADF moved out of Eglin. By this time, however, a wholesale conversion to rocket-armed interceptors was underway, gunnery training was curtailed, and the change was not made. Not until rocketry training began in 1954 was an effort made to send more EADF squadrons to Yuma than were sent by the other organizations.

THIS PAGE IS UNCLASSIFIED

SECRET

part two

THE ROCKETRY PERIOD