

US RADAR SITES of ICELAND NEWSLETTER

June 2010

NEWSLETTER # 18. EDITOR, JERRY TONNELL, H-2, 1959.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN. William Chick, H-2, 1959-60. After our 2009 Reunion in San Antonio, I did not think we could find a better place in 2011. After a 4-



day search in Nashville -- with Larry & Marguerite Robin and David Alcorn -- I think we found a better place. Nashville, Tennessee is a tourist town -- or as Hank Williams might have said, 'the honky tonks, the shows, and the good times are in Nashville.' Our hotel is the Gaylord Radisson which is just a short way from the new Grand Ole Opry and just a few miles

from downtown -- the Radisson is a great place for our reunion. We have planned a vacation week which begins on Monday night at the Wildhorse Saloon -- for food, music, and the show. Then on Tuesday morning, we have scheduled a breakfast meeting. On Tuesday night we will have free transportation to a Grand Ole Opry show. On Wednesday (before noon) we will have free transportation to the General Jackson Show Boat where we will



enjoy the ride, the food, and the show. Next door to our hotel is the Gaylord Hotel Complex -- a 17-acre area under glass, with shops, restaurants, trails, flowers, and flowing water. Next to it is a very large shopping center. This is our plan, so start making your reservations now. If you arrive early

or leave late, our special hotel room rates begin 2 days before and last 2 days after the reunion. In our December newsletter, if necessary, we will refine the details, so make your plans now. By the way, more folks will be getting this newsletter than ever before thanks to our dependable Membership Chairman, Jerry Blackwell, who keeps finding new members each week. Hope to see you all in Nashville.

NEXT STOP -- NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

29 May-2 June 2011

Where: Nashville, TN. We will be housed at the Gaylord Radisson Hotel.

Hotel Costs: \$85 per night for two. Parking is free. For reservations, call 1-800-333-3333 or use the local number 1-615-889-0800. Say you are with the Iceland Reunion.

Registration Only Costs: Each person is expected to pay \$27 per person which includes \$10 for the Hospitality Room and \$17 for the Breakfast Meeting on Tuesday. Bus transportation to all scheduled events is free.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: 29 May, Sunday Afternoon: Hospitality room open.

30th. Mon Night: Wildhorse Saloon & dinner. Bus leaves at 5 PM. Cost: \$47 per.

31st. Tues: Business Breakfast meeting catered by the hotel, commencing at 8 AM.

31st. Tues Night: Grand Ole Opry Show. Bus leaves about 6 PM. Cost: \$38 per.

1st. Wed Noon: Gen Jackson Showboat/lunch. Bus at 10 AM. Cost: \$53 per.

2nd. Thurs. Departure Day. Social time in the Hospitality Room, 7 AM until Noon.

PAYMENT for REUNION REGISTRATION & EVENTS: For registration and all events, make your \$165.00 check (per person) out to *Iceland Reunion* and mail to: David Hawk, 500 N Ash St., Pauls Valley, OK 73075. Refunds honored before May 1, 2011. For each event you skip, subtract the appropriate amount from the total. However, the minimum payment is \$27 per -- for Registration and the Breakfast Meeting.



ADMINISTRATOR and WEBSITE DIRECTOR. Reed Thomas, H-4, 1958-59. Our Site address is www.usradarsitesiceland.org No need for a password or to sign-in. Again, I have a new home address: Reed Thomas, 9001 Sweetbrook Lane #104, Raleigh, NC 27615. My new phone number is: (919) - 846- 4764.

HISTORIAN. Jerry Tonnell, H-2, 1959. The *History of the US Radar Sites of Iceland* book heralds the accomplishments of those of us who served in Iceland. It is the story of what you did for your country during those very warm Cold War years while stationed in Iceland. Books cost **\$10 including postage (our cost.)** Write checks to "Iceland Reunion" and mail to: William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036. littlechick@msn.com

WEBSITE PHOTO CHAIRMEN. Jerry May, H-1, 1962-63, majw60@suddenlink.net and Bob Haines, H-4, 1957-58, and RAMAC1440@aol.com. We are still in need of new photos for our website. If possible, E-mail them - please provide a caption, with date if known, so we can properly label the picture.

TREASURER. David Hawk, H-1, 1985-86. Special thanks to those who have paid their annual voluntary dues of \$15 per year. Please make your \$15 check out to "Iceland Reunion" and mail it to: David Hawk, 500 N Ash St., Pauls Valley, OK 73075.

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN. Jerry Blackwell, H-2, 1960-61. If you have any old orders with names or if you recall a name please pass it on to me at: 2300 E. Silverado Ranch Blvd #1047, Las Vegas, NV, 89183. email BlckJerr@aol.com

BOOK REVIEW. Dave Alcorn, H-3, 1962-63, found an interesting book written by one of Iceland's finest mystery writers. In his fiction thriller, *The Draining Lake*, author Arnaldur Indridason relates, "Following an earthquake [in 2000], the water level in Lake Kleifarvatn drops precipitously, exposing the partially buried bones of a long-decayed body, weighted down with what appears to be an old Soviet radio transmitter."



We are sad to announce that our Memorabilia Chairman, **Mike Mangone**, H-1 & H-4 1960-61, passed away on March 11, 2010. Mike apparently died from a heart attack. He will be missed.

TO THOSE WHO SUPPLIED THE SITES

Your editor would like to include a story of how the US Navy provided key support to H-3 from 1961-88 by the weekly supply flights from Keflavik to Hofn. This is how Lee Corbin, USN, recalled his days as a crew chief on a C-117 Gooney Bird in '75-76.

"Prior to my arrival, I had learned that the station [Keflavik] maintained two C-117 "Super DC-3" aircraft for the H-3 supply missions, and a C-118 for the weekend R & R flights down to Europe... my sponsor took me to the hangar to meet the division chief. After exchanging initial greetings I said 'Chief, I want to fly,' which started the most enjoyable tour of duty during my 4- year enlistment in the Navy.

"The Air Force flew these supply missions... until July of 1961 when the Navy took over the MATS mission. In fact, not only did the Air Force hand over the mission to the Navy, they handed the aircraft over as well...The C-47 was used until the C-117's were brought to Iceland, sometime in the early



Photo by Lee Corbin

70's... Trips to H-3 normally occurred three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The normal routine would be to push the aircraft out of the hangar, hop in and start the engines and, after doing a runup to ensure all was working, taxi the aircraft to base operations... An Air Force truck would back up to the doors and we'd start loading everything that was needed that day at the site into the aircraft. Our loading philosophy was 'If it fit through the doors we'd take it, and if it was heavy

put it over the wings.' One side of the aircraft would be configured for cargo, with the other side having about 8 or 10 rows of double seats. This usually left a very narrow aisle to reach the back of the aircraft. The guys who drove the truck and loaded the aircraft were H-3 personnel who would be rotated for a week or so back to Keflavik to give them a change of scenery. The following month they'd be greeting the aircraft at Hofn.

"After loading the aircraft... off we'd go for the two hour flight up the southern coast. After takeoff, there wasn't much for me to do but enjoy the scenery. Unless we flew into icing conditions. The C-117's propellers were de-iced with isopropyl alcohol. Depending on the severity of the icing, at times the reservoir for the alcohol needed refilling. This tank was located back near the cargo doors, in the floor of the passenger compartment. I would take great delight in running to the back of the aircraft as if in a panic, grabbing a 5 gallon plastic jug of alcohol, and furiously pouring it into the tank. With the passenger seats facing aft, every neck was strained to see what was going on. Invariably, I'd mutter something about "extra gas" to any inquiries about what I had been doing.

"We would land on the gravel runway outside the town of Hofn. The arrival at Hofn was always an event, sometimes for us if the weather was bad, but always for the H-3 folks that came to meet us. Our arrival meant mail, fresh fruit and vegetables, and an occasional USO show... When it came



Photo by Lee Corbin

time to leave, the same routine took place although the outbound cargo load was nothing like the inbound. But the passengers always seemed to be happy. And that was the routine three days a week...I consider myself very fortunate to have had the experience of crewing the C-117 and knowing some of the H-3 folks.

"I'd like to hear from anyone who was at H-3 during the mid-70's. Especially one Doug Baggett, who I remember greeting almost every C-117 flight into

Hofn. I'd also be interested in hearing about the air travel to the other sites in the 50's and 60's. Aircraft photos would also be of interest." My email address is: KeflavikOMD@yahoo.com



May 31 - June 2, 2011

William A. Chick
Reunion Chairman
104 Summit Point Court
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December 2010

NEWSLETTER #19. EDITOR, JERRY TONNELL, H-2, 1959.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN. William Chick, H-2, 1959-60. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. Last May, the Nashville area had the flood of the century.



However, as of today, the city is back and ready for our Iceland Reunion. We have a great program and lots of activities scheduled for this, our 5th general reunion. There are plans for three tours with plenty of time left over for everyone to look around this vacation wonderland. Our hotel is the Radisson Hotel at Opryland. Everyone needs to register soon. One can always cancel (as late as 30 Apr) if they find they cannot come.

Our great price is good for a few days before and 3 days after. Our hospitably room will be open for 5 days starting Sunday, May 29th. Thanks to all who have offered to help. See you at the 5th Iceland Reunion.

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Where: Nashville, TN, at the Radisson Hotel at Opryland, 2401 Music Valley Drive.

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WANTED: Interesting Anecdotes About Life at the Radar Sites. We are in the process of expanding the Library portion of our Website. For as many folks as we have in our data bank, we should have a lot of anecdotes from members recalling their days at the sites. Our History book – *History of the Radar Sites of Iceland*, finished in late 2002, contains about 75 anecdotes written by radar vets when our association membership was around 400. Now we number over 2,000 – surely there are many more interesting stories out there. Share them with the rest of us by sending them to Reed Thomas at: reed934@yahoo.com

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50th Anniversary of THE NIGHT the H-2 BUBBLE was BLOWN AWAY
By Matz Malone, H-2/H-3 1960-61

It really was a dark and stormy night, no fooling!! There are some things that are hard to forget. For those of us at H-2 on Jan 11, 1961, it was one of those unforgettable events. That was the night the bubble blew and the days of H-2 as an active radar site during the Cold War ended. It will soon be 50 years since that action-packed night. Some recollections of specific details have faded over time, although most remember that the wind took the bubble. The wind! Always the incessant wind at H-2!

"That's been a long time ago," remarked **Gene Nezat**. He was on duty in Radar Ops when the wind kept rising higher and gusting stronger. They were keeping an eye on the anemometer. "It

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932-933-934-667**

William Chick, Chairman
(803) 932-9596
104 Summit Point Court
Chapin, SC 29036



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hit 140 knots, that's the last I remember." The rubberized radome had started to rip and Nezat was holding a ladder while someone was trying to patch a rip in the radome. **Ray Trammell** was the radar crew chief that night. When the gusts went to 140 Knots [about 161 mph], the radar antenna was put in "freewheel." H-1 was contacted and informed that H-2 was off the air.

Rick Rochat, a Radar Tech on duty, said, "I was there. I remember an NCO tried to climb up a ladder to patch the radome. He had the ladder propped against the antenna. I thought he could have been sucked out of there if it let go. The anemometer pegged at 100. At that time it let loose. We went outside and the bubble looked like a paper bag blowing in the wind. When the bubble came off with a big 'whoosh', we were all hiding. I'll never forget that."

"When we went back we could see outside. It was raining and blowing," said Nezat. **Bob Wofford** was on scope in Ops that night. He said the Site Commander, **Major Paul Coke**, was aware of the seriousness of the impending storm that was coming across the North Atlantic. Coke was kept informed of the increasing winds and left orders that when the winds reached 120 knots to "clear out." "... we had to go across that open space outside between Operations and the barracks area...It's hard to believe it's been 50 years," said Wofford.

Gary Pittman had finished the early shift in Ops and was off duty. "I was in bed and didn't know anything about it until the next morning. I heard the wind, but as any veteran of H-2 will tell you, the wind blew all the time." **Joe Ferraro** also worked the early shift and was in the barracks when the wind hit the bubble. The next morning he walked to the Ops area and was looking at a piece of the rubberized material from the dome. "I tried to rip it, but couldn't. I couldn't believe how strong that material was. All I could think was 'that must have been some wind.' I remember people talking about the bubble being caught on the antenna and flapping like a flag. They said the anemometer was pegged when the bubble blew." **Jerry Blackwell**, the Orderly Room boss, said, "What a night that was! I was playing cards in the mess hall and having a great night when **Sgt. Allen** came in yelling 'get out, get out, the bubble is going.'" **Matz Malone** was scheduled to

work the second shift in Radar Ops on **Ed Vitatoe's** crew. "I remember going to the chow hall and someone said don't bother going up the hill, the bubble blew. I thought it was a joke, but it wasn't," said Malone.

A day or so later, after the radar was down, Major Coke selected the crew to move to H-3 at Hofn and reactivate that site. It was to be a move via "Kef" and then on to H-3. The Gooney Bird was loaded to the gills with equipment and troops. The take-off roll from the H-2 strip was definitely a "Come to Jesus" moment for anyone on that



plane. **Richard McBournie** remembers the night before the crew left H-2, he and his roommate, **John DeAndrea**, made a visit to the club for a farewell to H-2 celebration. "I wasn't much of a drinker," recounted McBournie, blaming his roommate for his hazy condition the next day. "I don't know if we were hung-over," but he recalls the C-47 was loaded down with equipment and troops. "I remember someone saying something about hoping we made that last bump before going into the sea. That aircraft just scared the tar out of me."

Mike Bonjo remembers the order to pack-up and evacuate H-2, then getting on the plane with all the equipment in the mid-section of the cargo plane. "I don't know how many guys were on the plane, but I remember **Ed Vitatoe** sitting next to me holding his guitar." **Jerry Blackwell** added, "I was sitting next to Maj. Coke when we took off on that flight. It felt to me that we went up a little and started back down over the water. I kept looking at him and he never said a word. In 1985, while Coke was in the hospital in Fort Worth recovering after a civilian airliner crash, we talked about that C-47 flight and I told him I was pretty worried, but that he looked fine." Coke said, 'Yea, I bet I did...I was too scared to even move. I thought we were too overloaded.' Blackwell added, "He said he always thought that was almost one of the biggest mistakes he made in his military career... not taking his men off that plane."

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