

US RADAR SITES of ICELAND NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2013

NEWSLETTER #24. EDITOR: JERRY TONNELL, H-2, 1959.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN. William Chick H-2, 1959-60. The hotels we had previously contracted early this year for our 2013 reunion are no longer available – in fact the Magnuson Hotel is closing. However, we have worked out an agreement with a better hotel – **The Wyndham Garden Hotel - Oklahoma City Airport**. It is \$23 per night more expensive than the Magnuson, but, it is a newer, nicer, and recently renovated hotel. We have lined up an agenda for the reunion with plenty of interesting events that you are sure to enjoy. See the schedule and rate details below: Hope to see you in OK City.

--The 2013 Iceland Radar Reunion-- Oklahoma City, October 7-11

The Wyndham Garden Hotel - Oklahoma City Airport, at 2101 South Meridian Avenue,



provides room rates for two at an affordable cost of \$101.35 per night (tax included) with two free breakfasts each day registered. They have a free 24-hour shuttle to the airport which is only 2.5 miles away. You must make your own reservations. To do so, call the hotel's telephone number at **1-(405) 685-4000**. Ask for *In-House Reservations* and tell them you are with the "US Radar Sites, Iceland." Photos & info about the

hotel can be found at:

<http://www.wyndham.com/hotels/oklahoma/oklahoma-city/wyndham-garden-oklahoma-city-airport/hotel-overview>

NOTE: For those who have earlier made reservations at the Magnuson or Hilton Garden Inn, your reservation will be automatically transferred to the Wyndham. If the extra cost restricts you from going, there will be no charges for removing your reservations. For those planning to register, see details below to make reservations for the reunion itself.

Payment for Registration, Breakfast Meeting, and All Events. We will have our breakfast meeting in the Wyndham Garden Hotel. The Breakfast Meeting buffet will be in our own banquet room to insure privacy for our meeting and speaking facilities for our



staff & guest speaker. They promise seasonal fruit, scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, pancakes, biscuits and gravy, coffee, tea or orange juice. For the Hospitality Room, we have a very large area which is very suitable for us to renew old friendships. **ALL EVENTS COSTS:** In all, the "All Events" fee for two, including registration, breakfast, Wed & Thurs lunches, and all tours amounts to \$240 – or \$120 for one person. Make checks payable to "Iceland

Reunion" and mail to **William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036**.

Schedule of Events.

Monday, 7 Oct. The Hospitality Room opens at 6 PM at the Hotel and will be open before and after each tour every day – it shuts down at 10 PM on Thurs, October 10th.

Tuesday, 8 Oct. 8:35 AM: Fort Sill Military Museum Tour. Lunch is a Dutch Treat at the PX Food Court. **1:30 PM:** Comanche National Museum Tour. Buses provided. **5-6:30 PM:** Manager's Special at Hotel – free finger food including beer, wine, & soft drinks.



Wednesday, 9 Oct. 7AM Breakfast Meeting for our organization. **10:35 AM** Bus to Cattlemen's Restaurant for a great steak & chicken dinner – same plate. Buses provided. **PM:** Free time - on your own visit the Tinker AFB Aircraft Park, Bricktown, or other choice.

Thursday, 10 Oct. 9 AM: Cowboy Heritage Museum Tour. Paid Lunch. **1 PM:** Alfred Murrah Building National Memorial Tour. Buses provided.

Friday, 11 Oct. We bid Farewell and Depart.

WEBSITE PHOTO CHAIRMAN. Jerry May, H-1, 1962-63. We are still in need of new photos for our website. If possible, E-mail the photos - please provide a caption, including date taken, if known, so we can properly label the picture. mayjw60@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN – HELP! Jerry Blackwell, H-2, 1960-61. Please look up those old orders and pass them on to me. I know there are a couple thousand radar site vets out there, especially from the 50s, 60s, & 70s. Even if you just recall a name, please pass it on to me at: 2300 E. Silverado Ranch Blvd #1047, Las Vegas, NV, 89183. My email address: blckjerr@aol.com Phone: 702-768-0080

WEBSITE DIRECTOR. Reed Thomas, H-4, 1958-59. If you haven't checked out our brand new radar Website, please do so. Our web address is <http://usradarsitesiceland.com/> Reed's email is: reedt934@gmail.com

FROM THE HISTORIAN: Jerry Tonnell, H-2, 1959. jtonnell@mindspring.com



Books are still available for sale (*just over 900 have already been distributed.*) We have received the 10th and, possibly last, printing of the book – however, only about 20 remain. It would make a good birthday gift for your kids or grandchildren. They can be purchased for **\$10** including postage (our cost.) Order by writing a check payable to "Iceland Radar Sites Reunion" and mail to: **William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036**

TREASURER. William Chick, H-2, 1959-60. We are still looking for a treasurer. In the meantime, I am the 'acting.' Our annual voluntary membership dues run \$15 per year. Make checks payable to "Iceland Radar Sites Reunion" and mail to William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036. littlechick@msn.com Our reunion cost is \$120 per person for the breakfast meeting, registration, hospitality room, two lunches, and tours. **Please forward your payment by July 1, 2013 -- that helps us plan events.**



SAD NEWS. One of our more active members, David Alcorn, H-3, 1962-63, passed away April 2013. You might recall he was the creator of the detailed, very professional model of H-3 that is now on display at the Peterson Air and Space Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The Trailblazers – The Iceland Radar Site Men of 1952-1953. By Jerry Tonnell

The vast majority of us who served at H-1, H-2, H-3, and H-4, knew at least a little about where we were going, how we would get there, the nature of our housing, what kind of equipment we would operate, and our general living conditions. However, that was not the case for those in the 932nd AC&W Sq who were the first post-WW II radar men to arrive in Iceland in 1952 and lay claim to a lava field as their new residence. Below is the story of that 1st year of operation.

The Threat. With the start of the Cold War in 1947, Russia's detonation of an Atomic Bomb in 1949, plus the Korean War in 1950, it was clear that the US could be in danger of an imminent nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. As a



result, a vast array of radar sites designed to detect and deter enemy bombers headed toward our homeland sprang up across the US and Canada and eventually spread to the strategically-located shores of our NATO ally, Iceland. The goal was to protect both Iceland and the US from a devastating war.

Meeting the Threat. Trying to locate experienced radar men seven full years after the end of WW II was not an easy task during the Korean War. A National Guard unit stepped up to the plate -- the 103rd AC&W Sq from Connecticut. By supplementing the unit with some radar men assigned to various reserve & active duty units, the manpower was now available. They were given cold weather training at Camp Drum, NY -- and then they waited for an assignment. Meanwhile, they became the 932nd AC&W Sq.

Getting To Iceland. In Jul 1952, after the advance party of 27 took off on an "Old Shaky" (C-124), they were told that their destination was Iceland --they thought they were headed for Korea. With their radar & com equipment strapped



to the center of the plane, the men--sitting in bucket seats--embarked on a hair-raising flight across the arctic that barely cleared the mountains of southern Greenland before finally landing at the forlorn, semi-completed airbase near Keflavik. Soon after setting up a temporary tent-housed radar facility, the word was passed back to bring on the rest of the 932nd. Since an entire squadron and their equipment would have to be sent all at once, going by air was not feasible. Therefore, on 12 Sep 1952, they

boarded the 522' USNS General M.B. Stewart. It was not an easy trip -- apparently there weren't enough sea-legs to go around, generating the following comments, courtesy of Boris Burrack and Ed Doerr: "grab the butter as it slides by" -- "blue ocean and green faces" -- "don't look down at your shoe laces" and "rock and groan with the Fantail Follies..."



Facilities. Upon arrival, what did the 186-man contingent find as a future location for their radar site? All they had was an open lava field with a few temporary huts. For equipment, they carried with them an early post-WW II apparatus named the AN/TPS-1B -- a limited-range radar to track the F-51 Mustangs assigned to the base. It was housed in a tent -- the radar maintenance facility was located inside an even smaller tent. Other work stations were set up in tents & Quonset Huts.

Housing. The first arrivals were housed in Jamesway Huts -- canvas covered units designed for arctic settings. By October, the rest of the squadron had settled in slightly larger Quonset Huts. The average high temperature in October was 44 F with an average low of 36 F. But with the constant 13 mph airstream, the wind chill numbers were more like 38 F & 30 F. The troops had to contend with those cold temperatures while living in modestly insulated quarters while working round-the-clock in tents. The men spent a good deal of time trying to keep the fires in their stoves from going out because it just never got warm in Iceland -- even in July, the average high was only 55 F.

The Men. Who were the men of the 932nd that had to contend with this situation? Many of these Guardsmen were exceptional citizen-soldiers. Nearly all of the officers were WW II vets -- as were a large percentage of the noncoms. They had been toughened by wartime service and took on the hardships of an Iceland assignment in stride. These veterans knew that a permanent site was under construction just 6 miles away at Rockville. But the progress was so delayed by bad weather that the majority of those who first landed in Iceland completed their tours never having lived or worked at the promised new station. The following remarks should help set the tone for life at the temporary site.

Anecdotes. Robert Brauch recalled "firing up the TPS-1B the first time and seeing Mt Hekla on the PPI and some Yahoo standing over my shoulder asking if we could keep it on the air. I said 'how the hell do I know, we just fired it up.' It just happened to be the commanding General..." He also remembered "knocking off the outer wings of the



antenna reflector to allow us to turn into that constant wind blowing up there. It increased our beam width a little, but we stayed on the air." Jack Hamilton said that "Squadron moral was an important item on the mind of 'the old man'...my assignment was 'entertainment'...which included a Dance every two weeks with girls...from Reykjavik." He also noted that "the saying in the 932nd at that time was when a guy starts taking his pet rock to bed with him..."

then it was time for him to go back to the States." Jack related about the mysterious 'Major Donovan' -- "John Donovan was an airman but got the "major" title because of his acting ability...and when new replacements were coming in...and probably on their first duty assignment...John would put on his major's uniform and along with Captain Joseph



Doolittle, would go to each of the huts and welcome the newcomers... Donovan pretended to be the Squadron Adjutant and one mean SOB, while Doolittle pretended to be his enlisted aide who would follow John around... taking notes...this was the initiation into the squadron that the newcomers had to go through..." Hamilton also spoke of the talent in the squadron when he wrote, "Our guys had their own track team, basketball team, swimming team, singing team (the Blue Notes) and a band where we competed locally and internationally...Our band would play at the various clubs on the base along with singers from the singing team...we also set up a military affiliate radio system (MARS) for the base." The men also produced a 60-page blue hard-cover professional 1952-53 Squadron Yearbook.

Conclusion. The commander of the 932nd, Lt Col Ruel Luckingham wrote, "...This new squadron was formed to accomplish a particular overseas mission & the men were handpicked for this job. The care with which these personnel were chosen paid dividends when this squadron assumed its role as an integral part of the Iceland Air Defense Force."

ICELAND REUNION
932-933-934-667

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Reunion Chairman
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December 2013

NEWSLETTER #25. EDITOR: JERRY TONNELL, H-2, 1959.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN. William Chick, H-2, 1959-60. From all the feedback I have received, our reunion was outstanding. Comments about the tours, the food, and hotel hospitality were great. The breakfasts and meeting area provided by our host hotel - Wyndham Garden Inn - was more than adequate. Thanks goes out to our main workers, Jerry May, Pappy Papworth, and Peter Holland. I heard several comments saying "let's



have another reunion" – so, now we will start planning for our next one. I have received suggestions of reunion sites east of the Mississippi river. Namely: New Orleans, Memphis, St Louis, Dayton, and Lexington, Ky. All are centrally located and have things to offer in the way of tours. Our hospitality room has become our favorite event – it seems we have become family. **WC Chilton, H-1, 1961-62,** will have a new scrapbook ready for our next

reunion; those with OK City photos please mail your 4X6" prints to WC Chilton at: 210 Parish Lane, McMinnville, TN 37110. Thanks again for showing confidence in me as your chairman. Until we meet again, stay safe and keep enjoying life.

WEBSITE PHOTO CHAIRMAN – Help! Reed Thomas, H-4, 1958-59. Jerry May, our long-time photo chairman, is retiring from this position – he has faithfully posted somewhere around 2,000 photos, put them in order, and dutifully transcribed those with captions for over 9 years. Therefore, we are looking for a volunteer to take on this task. In the meantime, Reed Thomas is filling in. E-mail your photos to Reed at: reedt934@gmail.com We ask that you please provide a caption, including date taken, if known, so the photos can properly be labeled.



FROM THE HISTORIAN: Jerry Tonnell, H-2, 1959. Books are still available for sale (*just over 1,000 have already been distributed.*) We have received the 11th and, possibly last, printing of the book – however, only about 25 remain. It would make a good Christmas gift for your kids or grandchildren. They can be purchased for \$10 including postage (our cost.) Order by mailing a check payable to "Iceland Radar Sites Reunion" to: William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036

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2015 REUNION SITE SELECTION VOTE. During our time at the OK City reunion, the location of the 2015 reunion was discussed. As mentioned above by Chick, several sites were suggested by members and four surfaced for our consideration. In alphabetical order, they were: Dayton, OH, Lexington, KY, Memphis, TN, New Orleans, LA, and St Louis, MO. Members, please vote for your preference by the end of **March 2014.** Also, indicate the month of the year you prefer for our gathering. We will track the votes and the results will be published in the June 2014 newsletter. All votes should be sent to **Jerry May, H-1, 1962-63,** via email at mayjw60@gmail.com

What Happened In Oklahoma City?

Monday afternoon: Upon arrival and check-in, we hurried to the Hospitality Room where we were met by **Jerry May** who was manning the registration desk where we got our nametags and had an opportunity to purchase or pick up a Reunion Hat or Shirt, or purchase a Radar History Book or Coin. Some of the early arrivals included Ed Morris, Pappy Papworth, Jerry May, John Tienen, David Gillespie, Larry Robin, William Chick, Doug Harper, and David Hawk, all of whom engaged in swapping Iceland war stories. The Hospitality Room Chairman was **Peter Holland, H-3, 1966-67.** He was ably assisted by his wife, **Iona.** Together, they provided an outstanding assortment of drinks and snacks and kept the coffers full so that we never ran out. In fact, they came in under budget.



One of the attendees was a WW II Iceland vet by the name of **Robert (Bob) Moore.** Bob, who hails from Clarksville, TX, served during WWII in 1944-1945 at a radar site named **Vail.** It was perched on top of an 800' mountain. The site location allowed low flying aircraft to fly under their antiquated radar coverage – but only if the plane maneuvered very carefully. Bob is a spry 92 years old and still going strong.



David Hawk brought a specially struck coin of historical value in that it was actually made from the remnants of the very first E3A AWACS which was initially named the TS-3. The aircraft was scrapped in 2012, and only 300 of the coins were struck. David

served on that particular aircraft during the 1970s.

Tuesday: Most everyone slept well, although, some were awakened by sounds that were reminiscent of a tornado warning -- only to later realize that it was probably a plumbing sound. But, when in Oklahoma, one never knows. After breakfast, we boarded two



buses and proceeded southwest for the 90 mile trip to Ft Sill, OK where we visited one of the US Army's major military museums. We presented a copy of our Iceland Radar History Book to **Dr Scott Neel,** Museum Curator. The Army now has access to the history and work of those of us who served in Iceland. After lunch at the Post Exchange Food Court, we traveled to Lawton, OK and the Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center where we were greeted and briefed by

their curator, **Phyllis Wahahrockah-Tasi.** She also received one of our Radar Books. As we left for home, a C-130 just happened to fly directly over our buses and it "appeared" to be escorting us back to OK City – with a sly smile, Chick quickly took credit

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for arranging the unofficial "Flyover." Once back in OK City, **Duane Tron**, H-2, 1963-64, a US Navy sonarman, shared dozens of striking photos he had taken at Langanes Peninsula during his tour. He graciously gave many of them to fellow attendees. That night, the hotel had arranged a special Manager's Special food treat which very nicely took the place of trying to find a restaurant for our supper.

Wednesday: We assembled in the Birch Room for our official breakfast meeting. **Larry Robin**, our Deputy Chairman, opened the meeting and led us in the blessing. We then joined in and sang along to a recording of the *National Anthem* made by the Harmony Express Quartet. This was followed by a presentation of both a framed map of Iceland and a copy of our History Book to **Bandi Bishop**, the superb manager of our host hotel. Next, Jerry Tonnell



introduced our guest speaker, **Col Doug Harper**, who provided an interesting speech as he narrated slides he had taken during his year in Iceland as Commander of H-3, 1972-73. Later that morning we again boarded our buses and went to the famous Cattlemen's



Restaurant for steak and chicken – while there, we were entertained by two young singers who sang well but overpowered our ears with their amplifiers. We presented a Radar History book to Charlie Alvarado, general manager of Cattlemen's. From there, we went into the heart of OK City for a river cruise through the city's famous Bricktown River Walk area. After our return, the hotel came through again and served a large platter of sandwiches for our supper -- most took advantage of this and "ate in."

Thursday: We bused to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and presented a Radar History Book to Dominique Mitchell a senior representative of their Curator. After touring this amazing place, we ate lunch at the museum and then headed for the Alfred Murrah Building Memorial & Museum. While there, we presented a book to



Julie Likes, staff administrator to Kari Watkins, the museum's Executive Director. The museum was a sober reminder to us as to the effects of domestic terrorism. Later, Chick called an Executive Committee meeting & related that the cost of reunion was less than what was collected – which allowed us to give a partial rebate to those vets who had paid in advance, but had to cancel out at the last minute. Jerry May announced that he is stepping down as our Website photo chairman. As promised, our next reunion will be in two years somewhere

east of the Mississippi. Meanwhile, at the hotel, **Forrest "Butch" Freeman**, former commander of H-1, 1982-83, dropped in to spend some time reminiscing with some of his troops including his former superintendent of maintenance, Paul Goldschmidt. Next, **Jessica Harvey**, a young scholar from the Chicago area doing research about the military role in Iceland, came down & paid us a visit & received one of our Iceland Radar History books -- and was further tutored on our website by Reed Thomas. That evening, we partook of a shot from a giant bottle of Jack Daniel's Black Label donated by **Fred Schulte** and toasted him in group formation as **Ed Morris** took our photo. This was the only reunion Fred has ever missed – unfortunately, his chemo treatment got in the way.

Friday: Once again, we ate one of the scrumptious breakfasts provided by the hotel and then bid fond farewell to our comrades in arms. Special thanks go to **William Chick**, our Chairman, and his wife **Connie**, for the flawless handling of all the details and events that such a reunion incurs.

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