

1973 AIRWAYS AND AIR COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

1973 Airways and Air Communications Service Squadron

STATIONS

Taegu, Korea

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 1808th AACS Wing, with headquarters in Tokyo, was responsible for air traffic control and air communications services for the entire Far East and Pacific areas. The wing commanded the 1809th AACS Group based in Japan, the 1810th AACS Group in Hawaii, and the 1811th AACS Group on Okinawa. Each of these groups was assigned squadrons and detachments for the various airfields, operating control towers, direction finder stations, and several Military Air Traffic Control (MATCon) communications centers. The only AACS facility in Korea at the time,

however, was a low-power homing beacon at Kimpo Airport, outside the capital city of Seoul, which soon fell into enemy hands.

Representatives of the 1808th AACS Wing and Headquarters, Far East Air Forces, met on 26 June 1950, to determine air traffic support needs in Korea. The 1809th AACS Group, stationed at Nagoya, Japan, was tasked with getting air navigation aids into Korea to help the airlift of men and supplies. It was a race to infuse enough aid to prevent the total collapse of the Republic of Korea Army before American ground forces could arrive in force. A two-man AACS team, sent to ascertain what were the immediate needs for navigational aids and air traffic control decided that the first priority was installation of a homing beacon at Pusan. This port on the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula had been selected to be the main United Nations logistical base.

There was also an urgent need to provide men and equipment to operate 10 advance airfields in Korea. Since the necessary equipment was not in depot supply, it was quickly gathered from the emergency backup equipment at operating airfields in Japan and from reserve stocks in the United States. Three hundred AACS officers and enlisted personnel skilled in the installation, operation, and maintenance of mobile communications equipment, were selected, processed, and rushed from the United States.

The 1808th AACS Wing had requested permission in 1948 to organize a mobile communications squadron for just such emergencies, but Headquarters USAF had denied the request because of monetary restraints. However, the Korean War was to emphasize the value of these units, which remain an important part of AFCC today. On 20 July 1951, the long-sought and badly needed 1859th AACS Mobile Communications Squadron was organized in Tokyo to provide mobile units to handle emergency situations.

AACS veterans found Korea, with its mountainous terrain, choppy dirt airstrips, heavy rains, and impossible flying weather, even worse than the Pacific campaigns of World War II. One news correspondent, who made several flights to Korea during the first weeks of fighting, described the primitive facilities on one of her first flights. The cargo plane was forced to wait in Japan for 36 hours for the weather to clear because there were no navigational aids yet set up in Korea to assist in landing. The airplane finally landed on a single muddy airstrip ringed by rugged mountains. There were no flare pots to mark the edge of the airstrip if the visibility turned bad. There was no control tower, no operations office, and no shelter to protect the unloaded supplies from the heavy rains that had turned the field into a thick, goopy carpet of mud. "Fortunately," she commented, "the field was open when we sat down."

AACS detachments were operating at Pusan, Taegu, and Pohang within a week after President Truman authorized American military involvement. Beginning with the original two-man team sent to determine AACS's requirements, the number of AACS personnel in Korea soon swelled to over 400 men. They operated under the control of the 1955th AACS Squadron in Japan for the first several weeks. On 1 August 1950, the 1973d AACS Squadron was organized and established at Taegu to handle the growing AACS responsibilities on the peninsula.

The northern route over the Pacific from the United States to Japan traveled north to Alaska and down the Aleutian Islands chain. There were air bases at Anchorage, Adak, Shemya, Cold Bay, and Kodiak. Several of these former World War II bases had to be reactivated. AACS operated control towers, ground controlled approach radars, radio and radar beacons, radio ranges, high and very high frequency direction finders, cryptological facilities, and point-to-point communications. These facilities, all of which were operational by mid-July, were under the control of the 1804th AACS Group in Alaska.

The central route over the Pacific via Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, and Okinawa was already fully established and did not require the reactivation of any additional airfields. But, additional facilities and personnel had to be provided to control the increasingly crowded skies over Japan. By the end of 1950, the 1808th AACS Wing had an authorized strength of 283 officers and 3,375 enlisted men.

The victorious United Nations forces crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea in pursuit of the fleeing North Korean Army units. AACS detachments traveled with the forward units often entering captured North Korean airfields before the enemy had fully vacated them. The war appeared to be nearly over as allied units approached the Yalu River, the country's northern border, in November 1950.

Then, unexpectedly, the war took another dramatic turn when the Chinese Communist Army entered the conflict in overwhelming numbers. The United Nations forces were rapidly pushed back out of North Korea. Everything had to be packed up quickly and sent south to safety as the Fifth Air Force evacuated the recently won airfields.

For 24 hours after enemy pressure forced the evacuation of the airfield at Pohang, the ground controlled approach radar detachment remained to direct the air evacuation of the wounded. AACS personnel spent their last two nights in foxholes with rifles defending the doomed airfield. They finally trucked their radar equipment 12 miles over sniper-infested roads to the coast where it was loaded onto a waiting Landing Ship Tank (LST). The entire 45-man detachment escaped without injury, losing only a jeep and two small power units to the enemy.

The 1973d AACS Squadron received a Distinguished Unit Citation for the "extraordinary heroism and fidelity" its detachments displayed in remaining at their stations until the last minute, directing the landings and takeoffs of cargo airplanes evacuating United Nations soldiers and wounded, often under fire.

The intervention of the Chinese Communists brought increased air operations and the first air combat between jet aircraft. The system of controlling aircraft, geared to piston-engine airplanes, proved inadequate for the faster jets. The mountainous terrain of Korea and Japan, often shrouded in rain and fog, compounded the problems.

The 1808th AACS Wing, accordingly, received approval for a reorganization, effective on 1 July 1951, to provide expanded functions and services, as well as closer supervision of AACS duties in

Korea. The 1818th AACS Group was established at Pusan to command the 1973d and 1993d AACS Squadrons at Taegu and Kimpo. They operated the MATCon centers and controlled airfield operations in their respective sectors. The 1818th AACS Group moved briefly to Seoul, but soon returned to Taegu.

1973rd A.A.C.S. (Aircraft and Airways Communications) has one of the most important jobs on the base, as it controls the airways and provides numerous services in the way of navigational and weather aids to total aircraft operating in this vicinity. The 1973rd is part of the 1808th A. A. C. S. Group and 1818th A. A. C. S. Wing, the first of which is at Taegu, while the second is in Japan. The Control Tower is operated by the 1973rd, and it directs the landings and take-offs from this field. The Communications Center, also under the 1973rd, operates such navigational aids as the radio homers, and coordinates its efforts with the Base Weather Office to broadcast the current weather twice every hour. Possibly the most important part of the 1973rd is the G. C. A. (Ground Control Approach) which provides an all-weather radar service to enable pilots to land in the thickest "soups." Beginning in Autumn of 1953, the 1973rd assumed the additional duty of instructing members of the ROKAF detachment in airway control methods.

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 25 Jun 2021
Updated:

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