

26 RADIO SQUADRON, MOBILE

MISSION

LINEAGE

26 Radio Squadron, Mobile

STATIONS

Brooks AFB, TX, 17 Dec 1951-23 Oct 1953

March AFB, CA, 26 Oct 1953-8 May 1955

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Under direct control of HQ USAFSS, the 26th was operating five Morse intercept positions at Brooks—marking time awaiting relocation to its planned operational site on March AFB, California. Traveling to March air base in February (and again in March), Capt. John K. Carter the squadron commander, paved the way for a 26 RSM advance party to transfer to March. CWO Charles E. Isaacson was the 26th operations officer. At Brooks, 72 unit airmen were living in

Barracks 189, which had a capacity for only 52 airmen. In the crowded conditions, morale was bad and more airmen were expected soon.

The 26th RSM first sergeant arranged with the post tailor, barbershop and cleaners for his troops to obtain credit payable monthly, helping squadron airmen maintain a neat, clean military appearance throughout the month. No vehicles were assigned to the squadron yet, and its cooks were assigned to the base food service section instead of having a separate 26n RSM mess hall. Working 24/7 on six-hour shifts, the 26th was achieving 90% effectiveness on its assigned mission, and traffic analysis was performed for the first time in February. Analytic functions included callsign and network analysis, and the analysis of message text. Squadron strength was 131 airmen on 28 February 1953.

The 26 RSM deployed the advance party to March AFB on 19 March 1953, alleviating barracks overcrowding. Relocation of the entire squadron to California had to be deferred to November due to delayed completion of new 26 RSM barracks at March AFB. The squadron operated as two sections—rear section at Brooks and an advance section at March. By August, Lt. Col. Emil W. Polivka had replaced Capt. Carter as commander; Capt J C Thigpin was the squadron operations officer, and CWO Isaacson commanded Detachment 1, 26th RSM—activated at March AFB on 15 July 1953 with an authorized strength of ten officers and 125 airmen. Detachment 1 strength at the end of August was five officers and 81 airmen.

The period October-December 1953 saw further progress towards consolidation of 26th RSM operations and further build-up of USAFSS activities at March AFB. MSgt. Kenneth R. Meyers had assumed duties as first sergeant, while Maj. Blythe T. Bradford Jr. and MSgt. Allen E. Schrock became the operations officer and NCOIC of Ops, respectively. The squadron officially moved its headquarters to March AFB on 26 October 1953, leaving a rear party of one officer and five airmen at Brook AFB on 1 November.

The new operations building at March lacked full power, but was being partially used. At the end of the year, commercial power was delayed by an underground cable that did not arrive on schedule. Meanwhile, two three-story barracks, a mess hall and an administrative building were getting the finishing touches but were not ready for occupancy.

The 26th RSM accepted its new operations building at March AFB from the contractor on 4 January 1954, and the new mess hall finally opened, saving unit airmen the trouble of trekking five miles to the main base at March for meals. Col. Polivka and Maj. Bradford continued in their respective jobs, while TSgt. Benjamin K. Candelaria arrived in early 1954 as the new Ops NCOIC. In another change during the first half of 1954, USAFSS placed the 26th RSM under operational control of the Air Force Special Comm Center. At the same time, the squadron discontinued all training except non-Morse intercept training.

The 26 RSM assumed responsibility for training USAFSS electronic maintenance personnel in a 12-week course at Brooks AFB on 20 July 1953. The unit discontinued the training at Brooks on 14 August to prepare for relocation of electronic maintenance training to March AFB. The 26th RSM

resumed the maintenance training at March on 9 November but discontinued it during the first half of 1954.

In November 1953, WOJG Leon M. Matheny, officer in charge of non-Morse training, created a seven-week course to train non-Morse (radio-printer) intercept operators at March AFB. The following month, he attended a conference at NSA, while non-Morse intercept training commenced at March. From 19 December to 4 January 1954, the school suspended classes permitting 40 trainees and ten instructors to enjoy the Christmas holidays away from the classroom. The 26th RSM performed its Morse and non-Morse intercept and non-Morse training missions at March AFB until May 1955 when the unit was deactivated, replaced by the 6983rd RSM.

Earlier years had witnessed the activation of large numbers of ground-based intercept sites in Europe, the Mediterranean area, Alaska and the Far East. The year 1956 involved other seminal changes for USAFSS—some that continue to affect U.S. signals intelligence operations even today. Changes included the creation of a mobile tactical SIGINT support capability, a major reorganization of USAFSS resources and the start-up of airborne communications intelligence reconnaissance in Europe.

During 1956, USAFSS developed a new concept of mobile operations to satisfy increased tasking for tactical SIGINT support during contingencies. The new mobile systems were self-contained emergency reaction resources that could be airlifted on short notice to trouble spots anywhere in the world, complementing existing radio squadrons mobile that operated essentially as fixed intercept sites.

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency, U.S. Air Force, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.