

6921st RADIO GROUP, MOBILE

Coincident with rapid growth, the 1st Radio Squadron Mobile was redesignated the 6921st RSM on 8 May 1955, a name change only.⁹⁵ In casual conversations, the squadron continued to be "First Radio." As expansion in the Far East continued, the 6921st RSM became the 6921st Radio Group Mobile on 11 May 1956.⁹⁵ Continued growth involved activation of the 6989* RSM and 6989th Support Squadron at Misawa about midyear in 1958, and 6986th RSM at Wakkanai on 18 August.⁹⁷ The 6989th RSM assumed the 6921st group's intercept mission, with group retaining its second echelon reporting mission. The 6989th RSM personnel "did not even change tricks or move to new barracks." Activation of the 6989th RSM occurred while the group's operations compound was undergoing an upgrade.

Expanding cracks in vertical wooden support posts and trusses within building S-1555 rendered the building unsafe. Bob Wynn, who arrived on the Hill in December 1957, distinctly remembers concerns raised about the possibility of the roof coming down during an earthquake. "Those long vertical cracks in the wooden posts that supported the roof got a little longer during each earthquake." Additionally, with an expanding mission the 6921st group had outgrown its operational workspace. Temporarily evacuating the operations compound for repairs in 1958, the group used the down-time to enlarge the building.

So contractors could remedy safety problems and add two wings to building S-1555, the 6921st ROM relocated its Operations to a refurbished former mess hall on Misawa Air Base and to Quonset huts in the former D Battery AAA facility about 3/4 mile east of 6921st group headquarters.

Col. Gerald Branch faced a bona fide challenge when he assumed command of the 6921st Radio Group Mobile in December 1957. For the better part of 1958, Group Operations was split up—the operations officer, mission management and 2nd echelon analysis relocated to an abandoned mess hall (building S-645) on main base, and the group's shift workers performed its intercept and 1st echelon reporting mission at the former D Battery AAA "Dogpatch" camp. Adding to Col. Branch's difficulties while operating in temporary facilities, the group spun off the trick-workers at Dogpatch as the 6989th RSM, activated the 6986th RSM and 6989th Support Squadron, and accepted an additional mission that transferred from Shiroy Air Base.

6921st RGM Operations Annex

Re furbished and secured inside a tall, barbed wire-topped fence mid a gate shack, the former chow hall was located across the street from Potter Gym on main base. The group moved into this new 6921st RGM Operations Annex, probably in January 1958.

The Ops Annex also became the interim home for the newly arrived "Civ/Nav Air" mission from Shiroy. Analysts William C. "Bill" Budge and Roy Heath reported for duty in the annex when they

arrived from Shiroi in September 1958.

Relocation from Ops Annex

Budge and other airmen lived in Quonsets on main base until at least February 1960, but the Civ/Nav Air mission relocated to building S-1555 in 1959. Most 6921st group functions had relocated back to the repaired and expanded building by the end of 1959; however, the 6921st kept the Operations Annex (S-645) active through at least 1963 to accommodate special missions. The 6989th RSM performed the group's intercept mission in former Dog Battery (AAA) Quonset huts for a much shorter duration.

The 6921st Security Wing held a ribbon-cutting in the new ops building in March 1965.¹⁰² However, as Richard P. "Corky" Bingham recalls, actual switchover of intercept operations from the old facility to building S-1500 commenced on 14 May 1965, the same day that his son was born at Misawa Base Hospital. The 6921st wing converted the former ops building (S-1555) into the Community Center, with a barber shop, BX, post office, etc.

Arriving in 1964 as the new "Gig"—airmen's affectionate name for Operations—was nearing completion, Jerry Ervin remembers the old Gig, replete with reinforced roof support beams.

The earthquake was the most disastrous in the world since the 1964 catastrophe in Alaska and the worst in Japan since 1923 when a quake of similar intensity leveled Tokyo and killed thousands. Off base, at least 45 persons were killed in the quake area, including some in Misawa. Sixty-one homes—some belonging to airmen—were destroyed, with 230 other buildings condemned due to structural damage. Hundreds of military and dependents were housed that night in buildings on base.

The entire base lost power for three days and water pressure was unstable. Using water purification units, 400 gallon mobile water tanks and 1,000 gallon water trucks flown in by the Air Force, Misawa base personnel distributed water both on base and downtown to Americans and Japanese. Aftershocks continued for a week, with an estimated 100 tremors occurring following the initial earthquake.

Back in Business

The 6921st operations compound suffered severe structural damage, but the base civil engineer declared the building safe for occupancy unless another earthquake occurred. Operations personnel began cleanup and restoration of mission capability immediately. At 7:30 p.m., another quake of almost equal intensity to the first rocked the area. After the second quake, Wing personnel again entered the shaky compound and resumed repairs. By 10:00 p.m., the wing had restored partial operations.

LINEAGE

STATIONS

Misawa AB, Japan,

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS