

612th RADAR SQUADRON (SAGE)

LINEAGE

Activated as 612th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
Redesignated 612th Radar Squadron (SAGE), 15 Oct 1961
Inactivated 31 Dec 1969

STATIONS

Kirtland AFB, NM, 8 Mar 1957-12 Feb 1958
Luke-Williams Range, AZ, *12 Jan 1958-31 Dec 1969*

ASSIGNMENTS

34 AD
Los Angeles ADS, 1 Jan 1960
Phoenix ADS, 1 May 1961
27 AD, 1 Apr 1966

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

612th Radar Sq (SAGE): activated 8 Mar 57 at Kirtland AFB, NM, assigned to the 34th AD;

moved to Luke-Williams Range, AZ in Jan 58; transferred to Los Angeles ADS 1 Jan 60; transferred to Phoenix ADS 1 May 61; redesignated from AC&W Sq to 612th Radar Sq (SAGE) 15 Oct 61; transferred to 27th AD 1 Apr 66; inactivated 31 Dec 69.

612th

Aircraft Control & Warning Squadron

Activated: 23 July 1946, Japan

Subordinate to: 527th AC&WG

Inactivated: June 1948

Located: 1958, Ajo Air Force Station, Arizona

Mission: 1958, To operate and maintain a Direction Center under the operational control of the 684th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron, Mount Lemmon Air Force Station, Arizona.

Commanders:

q948, Major Clarence M. Caldcleag

Lt. Col. Branstetter

Equipment: 1958, AN/FPS-20A, AN/FPS-6A

ARIZONA

TM-181/Z-181 - Luke-Williams Range/Ajo

Construction costs came to approximately \$7.4 million for 100 structures located within housing, cantonment, operations, ground-to-air transmitter receiver (GATR) areas. This site became active in 1959. At that time, the 612th AC&W Squadron operated AN/FPS-20A and AN/FPS-6 sets. In 1961 Luke Range became a SAGE center. By 1963 an AN/FPS-7C had assumed search duties and height-finder radar chores were being performed by AN/FPS-6A and AN/FPS-26 radars. The 612th was deactivated on December 31, 1969.

In April 1946, all of these early units were deactivated except the 35th Fighter Control Squadron (Separate), which had began operations at Saitozaki on Hakata Bay on 25 March 1946. According to the records, the first American to arrived at Itazuke, on the other side of Hakata Bay. was Army Col. McBride, who landed at Sasebo in October 1945 and drove a jeep to Fukuoka, where he took control of the base from a Japanese major. Later that month, Fifth Fighter Command, under Col. H.A. "Lefty" Parker, occupied the base. He made his headquarters in building T-1.

On 23 July 1946, the 35th Fighter Control Squadron was deactivated and the unit at Saitozaki was designated as the 610th AC&W Squadron. The next month, Lt. Lawson P. Wynne was named Operations Officer and Chief Controller. He later started a training program for enlisted men in talking to pilots and tracking plots. He then lectured on air control at Fifth AF headquarters in Nagoya and when Fifth started a controllers' school at Johnson AB, Lt. Wynne was invited to help write the curriculum. He retired as a colonel and was inducted into the Air Controllers' Hall of Fame. The relocation of Fifth Air Force to Nagoya also resulted in the creation of the 528th AC&W Group based at Johnson AAB there. The 528th was assigned command responsibility for AC&W units in Japan and thus was the SJRG's first command group.

In September 1946 the 610th began operations at Shikanoshima, where controllers, under the guidance of then-Lt. Wynne, began practicing intercepts with the Black Widows of the 421st Fighter Squadron at Itazuke. It moved its headquarters to Itazuke in October, 1951.

The same order that established the 610th also established the 612th AC&W Squadron at Mikage, near Osaka on Honshu, also reporting to the 528th Group, through the 315th Composite Wing at Itazuke. Also in September 1946, the 527th AC&W Group was cut loose from 13th Air Force in the Philippines, where it had been formed from the much-decorated 595th Aircraft Signal Battalion. The 527th was assigned to Fifth Air Force in Japan, with its headquarters at Itazuke Air Base. Initially it consisted of one officer, Lt. Col. Oliver Laird and one EM, MSGT John Chambers.

Another major piece of the SJRG, the 618th AC&W Squadron, which had been activated at Rizal in the Philippines, was transferred to Fifth Air Force in Japan. It set up its headquarters at Kashikawa, near Osaka, Honshu, in April 1947. It took over a radar site, formerly operated by Australian forces, on the beach near Matsue. In effect, the 618th assumed responsibility for the area of Honshu that had formerly been assigned to Commonwealth Forces.

In June 1949 the 618th moved its HQ to Miho AB. After two more moves, finally on 1 October 1951 the 618th moved its HQ to Itazuke, thus consolidating the group and its three squadron headquarters at Itazuke AB, just outside Fukuoka, Kyushu. The 610th had moved its HQ to Itazuke earlier that year. The 612th remained the SJRG's "orphan child". By the time the 527th arrived at Itazuke, the group history notes that the 612th was "non-operational on Kyushu" because of a shortage of personnel. Histories in 1947 report that the 612th had moved in HQ to Itami AB, but shortly after that, moved back to Itazuke. On 30 June 1948, the 612th was inactivated.

Another big piece of the SJRG puzzle was the Air Defense Control Center at Itazuke, the center of the spider web of the group's EW detachments. The master plan for the ADCC was formed in late 1947 when a site was selected at the Itazuke Annex and work began on a bunker, which was excavated under the former Officers' Club. Over the following months equipment arrived and was installed and a massive on-the-job training program was started to train plotters, tellers, assistant controllers, radio operators and the rest of the supporting cast. One of the biggest projects, installation of the big horizontal plotting table, was finished on 14 May 1948. Limited coverage by the ADCC began on 13 Sept. 1948 and the ADCC went on full operational status 11 days later. Captain Harry Swain was transferred from the 610th as the Operations Officer.

In those days, operational control of the ADCC was under the 315th Air Division, which also supplied the personnel to man the center, with the 527th responsible only for security and maintenance.

That situation prevailed until the establishment of the 850th AC&W Squadron on 1 October 1951. The 850th became the group's headquarters squadron and ADCC personnel were transferred from the 315th AD to the 850th. The 850th remained in that role until it was deactivated in late 1952.

On 25 June 1950 troops from North Korea, supported by armor, invaded South Korea in massive numbers and rolled down the peninsula like a juggernaut. The SJRC, at this point, was like a little

kid riding a bike with training wheels, but it soon found itself in the middle of the action as a stream of aircraft from bases in Japan, notably Itazuke, Ashiya, Itami and Miho, moved supplies and troops into South Korea and flew interdiction missions against NK Forces.

All U.S. forces in the Far east went on the highest alert level following the North Korean invasion. All SJRG units went to a 7-day work week and USAF HQ ordered that all enlistments be extended for one year.

When the North Koreans rolled across the border, the SJRG was in what can best be described as a semi-ready state. EW sites of the 610th at Fukaeshima (15), Shikanoshima (3), Nomosaki (13, later 25) and Nomaike (11) were fully operational, with Shikanoshima doubling as GCI control. Seburiyama was operational as a DF site only. This left Japan's northwestern flank wide open and that's where the threat lay. That's also where the 527th concentrated its efforts, with the result that by the end of 1950, Unishima (19), Tsu Tsu (21) and Mishima (17) had gone on line, all under the 618th.

Unishima was formed on paper in April 1950 by the transfer of personnel and equipment from Misake (5) but it didn't become operational until July 1950. It went on to become one of the busiest of the DF sites for the duration of the war. In May 1951, 19 set a 527th group record by becoming the first detachment to track more than 1,000 aircraft four days in a row. And in January 1952, Unishima took on offensive responsibilities when it began to assist the B26s of the 452nd Bomb Wing at K9 (Pusan) with letdowns during Operation Strangle, a series of interdiction missions against communist supply lines in N. Korea.

Tsu Tsu, on the south end of Tsushima Island, was established in October 1950 with personnel and equipment transferred from the site at Susa on Honshu. Site 21 was established to provide low-level (500-1,500 ft.) coverage of the approaches to Itazuke and Ashiya.

Mishima was established in October 1950 by personnel and equipment transferred from Moriyama (7) It became operational on the last day of 1950. Moriyama (also known as Takeoyama), in turn, was reactivated in December 1950 as a an EW/DF site and also as a temporary Tactical Air Control Center.

Less than a week after the start of hostilities, Moonshine Control at Shikanoshima was so busy with emergency letdowns and DF stations were so busy with fixes that no accurate count or narrative of details was kept. More than 80 percent were due to emergencies, such as planes returning with battle damage, low on fuel or lost in bad weather.

(Shikanoshima's old Camel Control call sign, which had become known all over the Far East, was replaced by Moonshine on 15 Jan. by a Fifth AF edict that changed all call signs. That didn't stop pilots from continuing to call "Camel Control" out of force of habit.)

On 29 June alone, the group's DF stations provided 70 fixes in a 24-hour period. Gen. Earle Partridge, acting commander of FEAF, ordered continuous surveillance of the Tsushima Strait, putting an added burden on Moonshine Control and flying units based at Itazuke.

It's still a puzzle to many of us, despite the passage of all these years, as why the powers-that-be in FEAF failed to recognize adequately the work of controllers and DF operators and their support crews. In the 527th history for December 1951, tribute was paid to the job being done in aiding lost, strayed, fatigued and sometimes injured pilots, trying to get their weary and wounded birds back from Korea.

It pointed out the case of Site 3 commander Capt. George Middleton and chief controller Lt. McDonagh: "They aided the Korean War effort by directing aircraft. . .and troubled pilots to their home strips 24 hours a day. Oftimes the chief controller worked with more than four aircraft at the same time. Weary pilots and aircrews were saved by these alert, untiring controllers and their airmen crews.

"Due to the secrecy of their operations, isolated on lonely mountain outposts, they have not received due publicity, and for this reason, and this reason alone, they were not rewarded with Bronze Stars for which they were all so nobly recommended." Those were the words of 527th commander Col. Houston Longino. On 27 June, Col Charlie Stark moved his 8th Fighter Bomber Wing, flying F-51s, from Itazuke to Taegu, and with a few S. Korean airmen, established a composite fighter-bomber group. The 8th FBW was the SJRG's parent organization at the time and was also the base command group at Itazuke. On 19 July, Col. Stark's boys destroyed 15 aircraft on the ground near Pyongyang. The following day they shot down two YAK-15s.

Shortly after that, as the noose tightened around the Pusan Perimeter, the 8th moved back to Itazuke and remained there until the Marines' landing at Inchon and the almost -simultaneous breakout from the Pusan Perimeter permitted the establishment of permanent USAF bases in S. Korea in late September.

Also on on 27 June, an F-82 Twin Mustang of the 8th FBW's 68th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, on detached duty from Itazuke to Kimpo AB to support the evacuation of civilians from Seoul, scored the first "kill" of the Korean War when pilot Lt. William Hudson and his RO, Lt. Carl Fraser, shot down a N. Korean Yak-7U. That same day the U.N. voted to aid South Korea and Fifth Air Force established its advance echelon at Itazuke

The 68th FIS will forever be considered the airborne "brothers" of the SJRG. When the call went out from Moonshine to scramble a fighter, it was the 68th that responded, first in its F-82s, then in F-94s, then F-86Ds, finally in F-101s.

By July 1950, transfers from the 610th and 618th to units in Korea occurred daily, often with just a few hours notice. The situation became so acute that three DF stations had to be closed temporarily. The motor pools at Itazuke, Saitozaki and Miho and were cannibalized for vehicles that were sent to units in Korea. Several SJRG officers who were qualified in single-engine aircraft were reassigned to duty in Korea, flying T-6s and T-5s as artillery spotters and airborne controllers.

In May of 1951, the SJRG set a record by carrying 55,156 tracks, no less than 21,394 of them by Unishima. That same month, controllers at Shikanoshima ordered a record 616 intercepts - an average of 20 a day - with 97.4 of them successful. All the action wasn't in the air. Those of you

who served with the SJRG during the Korean War recall the many ground defense exercises, the emphasis on having a ready-to-go M2 carbine or other weapon handy and a general feeling of nervousness about the entire situation.

Those of us who worked out of group HQ at Itazuke had our assigned ground defense weapons and positions. Our primary mission was to protect the ADCC which was located just down the road from the seldom-used North Gate.

For keeping the baddies away from the ADCC, we had a pair of 2.5-in. bazookas, a .50-cal. machine gun, a pair of .30-cal. Brownings and a pair of BARs. All airmen were armed with M2 carbines, all officers carried .45 Colt M1917A-1 pistols. I was “captain” of a three-man BAR team. Our duty station was a snug little sand-bagged hole just outside the ADCC entrance.

In December 1950, while the Marines were trying to extricate themselves from the Chosin Reservoir, the Japan Communist Party decided to probe the SJRG’s defenses. They chose a poor spot for it. If they had consulted some of the local fishermen, they might have re-thought their plans.

Their boat, carrying the JCP insurgents and a load of weapons and grenades, tried to land on Unishima. As anyone who has been there knows, the currents, both north of the island and in the narrow strait between Unishima and Tsushima, can be treacherous.

The boat of the would-be invaders was swamped, their weapons went overboard, they were detained by site personnel and eventually were turned over to the Japanese police. At almost the same time, a cache of weapons and grenades washed ashore at Unishima.

As the result of this incident, group HQ issued SOP 555-55 on 22 January 1951 dealing with the possible evacuation of sites in the event of an attack by “subversives or enemy troops“. At about the same time, an infantry major, fresh from combat in Korea, visited each detachment, reviewed defensive plans and fine-tuned placement of machine-gun positions. Camouflage netting was also provided to each detachment.

In October 1951, Capt. Dale Funk and TSGT John Ocha were assigned to the 527th, specifically to initiate the group’s electronic countermeasures program, the first one in FEAF. Their first project was to convert a C-47 belonging to Base Flight to an ECM aircraft capable of both electronic jamming and jamming with chaff or “window”.

Eventually their operation expanded to include a B-26 with the same capabilities. Lt. Harold Stubbs joined the group two months later and by December the C-47 was ready for its first trials runs. An ECM training program for controllers, radar officers and radar operations began at the detachments in January 1952.

Given that many of the group’s sites were either on islands or on mainland locations easily accessible by water, the need for water transportation of both personnel and materiel was obvious, but it was slow to develop.

Initially the group had just one contract vessel, the Narushio Maru, operating out of Hakata Port. When it was damaged in a docking incident and had to be dry-docked for several weeks, the group had to rely on the 22nd Crash Rescue Boat Squadron for sea transport, a situation that was far less than ideal from either the 527th's or 22nd's standpoint. In Nagasaki, the colorful Hana Maru, another contract vessel, was used exclusively for supplying Nomosaki with material brought into the port at Nagasaki.

Eventually Military Sea Transport Service made the ALK 24, a small coastal freighter-type vessel available, but it operated out of Sasebo so the group had to establish a small administrative unit there as a result. Finally, under some pressure - a very strong letter from Col. Longinio bearing on this problem and the likely consequences if it wasn't resolved appears to have been a strong motivator - the AKL 24 was moved to Hakata Port. Shortly thereafter, it was joined by the LSM 335, giving the group the capability of arranging supply runs to the island detachments on a regular basis.

28 June 1950: The pilot of a B-26 from the 3rd Bomb Group contacted Moonshine. His plane was badly shot up and he needed a fix for Ashiya. The plane exploded on landing and all aboard were killed . . . the same day, Lt. Bryce Poe of the 8th Tac Recon Squadron at Itazuke flew the first jet recon mission in history, photographing advancing elements of the NK army . . . the ADCC handled a record 53,956 tracks in March 1951. . . on 16 March 1951 FEAF recorded a single-day record of 1,122 combat sorties flown. . . on 20 May 1951 Maj. James Jabara of the 4th FIW at Kimpo AB became the world's first jet ace. . . in October, Typhoon Ruth caused damaged at all Kyushu sites, with 11 and 15 the hardest hit. . . at year's end, strength of the 527th stood at 68 officers, 691 airmen. . . in February 1952 Col. John Crawford, fresh from his assignment as Director of Communications and Electronics for Fifth AF in Korea, replaced Col. Longino as CO of the 527th . . . the group's ECM section expanded its scope by flying missions against Fifth AF radars in Korea the same month. . . on 1 March 1952, Fifth Air Force moved its HQ to Korea and the Japan Air Defense Force was created to command all air defense units in Japan. At the same time, the 43rd Air Division assumed operational control of the southern sector, the 527th's area. Its first commander was Col. Charlie Stark, who relinquished command of his beloved 8th FBW. . . on 29 May, 12 F-84s of the 116th FBW departed Itazuke to take part in the first combat mission to be refueled in flight. They successfully attacked NK targets near Sariwon and all returned safely. Units of the 527th continued to be involved in controlling nine more of these "High Tide" missions. . . In November, Site 15 on Fukaeshima rescued the residents of the fishing village of Miiraku near the site from a severe water shortage. One of the detachment's water trailers delivered enough chlorinated water to each family to see the village through the dry spell. One of the Nagasaki newspapers applauded the site's action. . . on 1 Dec. 1952 all 52th detachments were on high alert as President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower flew from Naha, Okinawa to Seoul to make good on his promise that "if elected, I will go to Korea." . . . at the end of 1952 the strength of the 527th was 93 officers, 1,057 airmen. . . In January 1953 three airmen were injured seriously and seven Japanese were hospitalized when a truck ran off the road to Seburiyama and dropped into a rice paddy on 20 January, the 527th flag was carried in Pres. Eisenhower's inaugural parade. It was the only flag in the parade representing a FEAF unit. . . on 10 April an airman from Nomosaki DF was killed in a Jeep accident. . . on June 1, Col. David Terry, a WWII veteran of 197 combat missions as a fighter pilot in the CBI, replaced Col. Crawford as CO of the 527th . He remained CO of the group until it was deactivated on 8 March 1955.

On 10 November 1952, the 610th, 618th and 850th ceased to exist on paper, with 527th HQ assuming direct command of all detachments. Personnel of the 850th were assigned to 527th HQ and a headquarters detachment was formed in its place. This arrangement lasted until October 1954, when the 610th and 618th, but not the 850th, were reconstituted as squadrons with approximately the same “mix” of detachments as before. Essentially, the 610th was the “southern” squadron, the 618th had the “northern” group of sites.

June 1953 was the wettest June since records had been kept in Japan. More than 42 inches of rain fell that month. There was widespread flooding in the Kukuoka- Kurume area. The final death toll was 284.

Flooding was extensive at Saitozaki and the Itazuke Annex. Among 527th detachments, Moji was the hardest hit. Flood water unleashed a monstrous landslide that virtually inundated the downtown area. Personnel from Moji DF worked with Japanese rescue teams to pull the dead and injured from the rubble. The detachment itself was supplied by air drops from the 39th Air Rescue Sq. at Ashiya.

The truce ending the Korean War was signed at 10 a.m. on 27 July 1953 after more than two years of negotiations. More than 35,000 Americans were killed and thousands more were wounded in an undeclared war that was largely forgotten for years.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources