

Letters from Col Henry C. Byrd to Gene Hellickson

Letter One

17 October, 1984

Dear Sgt Hellickson

I will be glad to discuss WWII radar with you. I graduated from N.C. State College in 1937 with a BS in Electrical Eng. & a 2nd Lt. Commission in the infantry reserve. In June 1941 I was ordered to Active Duty with the Signal Corps and went to Keesler Field as Post Signal Officer.

In 1942 I went to England and studied radar under the RAF and later commanded an RAF radar station in the British Orkney Islands. In 1943 I returned to the US and became Executive Officer of a Signal Aircraft Warning Bn (The 574th SAW Bn). In 1944 the 574th went to New Guinea and the Philippines.

In 1945 I became C.O. of the 597th SAW Bn which later became the 13th AC&W Group. The 13th AC&W Gp. Staged in the Philippines for the invasion of Japan.

When the Japanese surrendered, the 13th went into Japan to provide air defense against possible Kamikaze attacks.

After WWII I returned to Charlotte, N.C. and joined the NCANG as CO of the 118th AC&W Sq. The 118th was ordered to active duty during the Korean war and ended up French Morocco as air defense for SAC. I was transferred to the Pentagon and became Section Head of the AC&W Section, Directorate of Operations, SCSO, HQ USAF.

I returned to civilian life and the NCANG in 1952.

You may know that the Army Signal Corps operated the radar stations and the filter centers in WWII. The Air Force operated the Fighter Control Centers. After WWII, the Air Force became responsible for both radar and Fighter Control. In addition to Air Defense radar, the Signal Corps operated AAA radar and airborne radar.

The Tactical Control Concept was developed in Europe by the Ninth Air Force. We in the Pacific were only interested in Air Defence because of the small land mass (islands) operations. We developed a TAC Control Gp. (13 AC&W Gp) for the invasion of Japan; personnel from the Ninth TAF came to the Pacific to help us train.

Best Regards

/S/

Henry C. Byrd, Jr.
Colonel USAF (Ret)

Letter Two

November 20, 1984

Dear Gene,

Thanks for the article by Sir Watson-Watt. The British and American developed their radar (the British called theirs RDF, for Radio Direction Finding) (our RADAR for Radio Detection and Ranging) in secret from each other. When we became Allies, each shared their secret with the other. The British went in for Fixed Radar, CH (Chain Home) for distance, CHL (Chain Home Low) for low flying aircraft. We went in for mobile units which were large and heavy; i.e. SCR-270, SCR-584 (GCI).

I went to England aboard the Polish liner "Batory". We disembarked at Grenoch, Scotland and went to Bournemouth for staging. I then went to RAF "Yatesbury" in Wiltshire; our postal address was Calne. Upon completion of my technical training I went to RAF "Deerness" in the Orkneys where I commanded an RAF CHL station. There were 2 CHL stations (the other commanded by a Canadian) and 1 CH station. Our mission, the defense of Scappa Flow, the major British Naval Base. I had a British Army Detachment for ground defense.

As I recall, our HQ was #70 Wing at Inverness in Scotland. The British wing equals a U.S. Group; the British Group equals a U.S. Wing.

When the war ended I was on Leyte Island in the Philippines. I had organized and commanded the 13th AC&W Group which was actually a Tactical Control Group. We were to be the TAC Control for the 13th Air Force during the invasion of Japan. To assist in our training we had two officers from the European Theater; Col Garland - Signal Corps, and Col Myers, Air Force. The day after the Japs signed the surrender, Cols Garland, Myers, and myself flew into Tokyo to set-up an Air Defense System.

We decided to locate the Jap radar sites and put our radar there; locate the Jap Air Defense Center and put our Fighter Control Center there; then use their telephone lines for communication between the two. We found that the Japs had located their center inside the Imperial Palace grounds which was off-limits to us. We did get permission to conduct some studies in their center.

We went across the moat from the Palace and took over a building called the Army Hall and set up our Fighter Control Center there, then extended the Jap telephone lines from their center to ours. I traveled quite a bit around Tokyo locating radar sites but don't remember too much about the details.

The 13th AC&W Group was directed by FEAF to make a study of the Japanese Air Defense System. As I had been overseas 30 months, my points gave me an early return home and I don't know if the study for FEAF was ever completed.

I plan to write to FEAF to see if the study was completed and to get a copy if one exists. This should give you a great deal of info about the Japanese radar (the enclosed photo of me, etc. was taken during this study).

Let me know if I can furnish any info you would like and if I run across anything interesting I will send it to you. By the way, I went to England in one of the Signal Corps Electronics Training Groups; I was in charge of my group.

Sincerely

/S/

Henry C. Byrd, Jr.

Colonel USAF (ret)

Letter Three

22 Mar 85

Dear Gene,

I haven't forgotten you, your letter of 3 Jan is right here on hold. Since FEAF is no longer in business I wrote to HQ/PACAF who has no records prior to 1948 and who forwarded my letter to Maxwell AFB. I haven't heard from Maxwell.

The two articles you sent were most interesting. The author, Roger Wilkinson, rings a bell but this old gray matter doesn't perk like it did 40 years ago. As he was with the 13th AF & FEAF during the same period that I was, we must have tangled A-holes somewhere. The picture, Fig. 7 pg 161, pt II must have come from our report as we had special permission to enter the Imperial Palace Grounds just to make a report on the Air Defense of Tokyo. I still have my pass to the Palace grounds somewhere.

In your letter of 3 Jan you asked about the 13th AC&W group. At the chance of perhaps repeating some things I have already told you, I will explain the set-up for the invasion of Japan.

There were to be 3 Armies, each with its own Air Force; 5th 13th and I believe the 10th. I'm not sure. The 5th and 13th were in the Philippines, the 10th in Hawaii.

Since we were island hopping in the Pacific we had no need for what is now called Tactical Control Groups. The Signal Corps operated the radar; the Air Force operated the Fighter Control Centers. For the Invasion of Japan we were to organize as Tactical Control Groups or AC&W Groups. These were provisional units made up of TO&E units within each Air Force.

In the 13th Air Force all Signal Corps, Signal Aircraft warning Battalions (SAW Bn) and all Fighter Control Sq. were given to me to form a provisional AC&W Gp. This became the 13th AC&W Gp. (Prov) and I became its first Group Commander.

While we were training in the Philippines, the war ended (thank God). When the war ended, the 5th AF was to be the AF of occupation - the 13th AF was not to go into Japan; However, the 5th AC&W Gp must not have been as far advanced as we were for, to the best of my knowledge, the 13th AC&W Gp was the only 13th AF unit to occupy Japan.

There was a concern that the Kamikazes would return to bomb the occupation forces and we had a high priority.

The day before the surrender ceremony 3 other officers, myself, 1 jeep, 1 trailer and a load of rations and ammo were loaded on a C-46 and that night we were in Okinawa; the next day we were in Tokyo.

Our plan was to locate the Jap radar sites and the Jap Fighter Control Center and use Jap land lines for communications. This is what we did and this is how we discovered that the Jap Fighter Control Center was inside the Imperial Palace Grounds which was off limits to our bombers.

Since we could not use their F.C.C. inside the Palace grounds, we strung wire from their FCC across the moat and set up in a bldg next to the Palace grounds. Hope this helps and I will answer any more questions you may have.

Best Regards

/S/

Henry C. Byrd, Jr.
Colonel USAF (Ret)