

707 RADAR SQUADRON (SAGE)



MISSION

LINEAGE

707 Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron
Redesignated 707 Radar Squadron (SAGE)

STATIONS

Grand Rapids AFS, MN

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

1956 Four airmen from the Minneapolis Air Base had visited Grand Rapids, MN to meet with a committee of local residents to discuss housing facilities for the nearly 100 airmen scheduled to arrive in a short time. August arrived and so did scores of radar operators and repairmen, most of which were fresh out of technical training school in Keesler AFB, MS. The mess hall has just been completed in time for their arrival. The new troops soon busied themselves preparing for the day when the new radar site would go operational. They built a plotting board - designed by John Carlson, attended classes, and performed other work details around the new base. For those who could not make themselves scarce, there were plenty of details, such as, raking leaves, scrubbing barracks and latrines, and digging in for the rigors of a long Northern Minnesota winter.

1957 Airmen in parkas could be seen scarring through snow from the mess hall to the operations building, which became fully operational in February. The first frostbite victims were treated by Doc Thompson, including one embarrassed A/3 whose pilfering finger was stuck for five hours in a drink machine in the break room. At any one time it seemed more airmen could be found off base than on base. Local haunts, such as the Rapids Cafe, The Oasis, and the Sunset were favorite hangouts to meet girls, get refreshments, tell war stories, and otherwise escape work details. It was this fall that General Matheny inspected the 707th to find only 25 troops standing for his inspection. The others were bedridden with the Asian Flu in the makeshift sickbay in barracks 206.

1958 Many changes came to the 707th. New shipments of airmen, many of them from overseas stations, replaced many of the pioneers, who were transferring or being discharged. Capt. Evans commanded, and his new First Sergeant Hargreaves, would soon announce the "ending of the honey-moon". The Rapids Cafe closed and the Mileage Cafe became the favorite coffee shop, where you could find a group of airmen hanging out until the wee hours of most mornings. In an effort to keep more airmen on base, the newly decorated Enlisted Club was ceremoniously opened, luring airmen with free beer, bingo, poker and blackjack. Perhaps the most memorable events were the State Centennial celebrations culminating that summer, with beard growing contests, a kangaroo court and a grand parade.

1959 The AC&W System was changing, and work was now underway to install the new SAGE system. Marriages between airmen and local girls seemed to be a weekly event now and reason enough for merriment at Forest Lake Lodge. Physical fitness diets were enforced, and intramural flag football and baseball brought keen competition between crews. Airmen bowled at Rapids Lanes, below the Bus Depot, and offered tough competition to local basketball and baseball teams. The Recreation Building was completed and airmen exercised to prepare for required physical fitness test.

1960 Another year of change as the many old troops were discharged having spent virtually their entire enlistment at the 707th. Early outs were often mentioned. Many went TDY to Duluth and to other SAGE training centers.

1961 The Cuban missile crisis extended a few airmen past their discharged date, but most were enjoying the beautiful summer with beach parties at Pokegama Lake.

1962-1963 Airmen and their female guests twisted at the revised and newly decorated Enlisted Club amidst rumors that the 707th would be no more. Finally, in May 1963, the 707th officially closed down, two months after Congressman Blatnik vehemently denied all rumors of such. Twelve to fifteen airmen and a few civilians lingered to care for the deserted radar site. A few years later the Grand Rapids School District purchased the site and buildings.

1970 The site of the 707th AC&W Sqd is being used for special education and for a teen center. The barracks painted in garish colors now stand across from the high school and are used for study halls. With the sale of the off-base housing unit in the spring of 1970, there is nothing left of the 707th but memories.

707	Grand Rapids AFS, MN 01-Aug-63	FPS-3; FPS-6; FPS-20A; FPS-6B; FPS-67	1957
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Grand Rapids AFS became operational in 1957 with an AN/FPS-3 search radar. In 1958 the 707th AC&W Squadron was operating AN/FPS-20 and AN/ FPS-6 sets. A year later Grand Rapids joined the SAGE system, and an AN/FPS-6B height-finder radar was added that year. In 1962 the AN/FPS-20A was upgraded and redesignated as an AN/FPS-67. In March 1963 the Air Force ordered the site to close. Operations ceased on 1 Aug 1963.

Realignment of air defense facilities will mean closing the Air Force radar base at Grand Rapids. Plans for closing the base, manned by the 707th Radar squadron, have been announced by the Department of Defense. The announcement says that activities will be terminated early in the summer. Opened in July, 1956, with 30 men, the base became fully operational in January, 1957, as a manually-operated Aircraft Control and Warning squadron. It became a part of SAGE with the installation of automatic equipment late in 1959.

Major Robert V. Mitchell, commanding officer of the 707th, conferred with Air Defense command officials in Colorado Springs over the week end to discuss the future of the base and its airmen. There are currently 132 airmen and seven civilians on duty with the 707th.

Military personnel will be transferred to other bases, and civilians will be assisted in finding jobs elsewhere, a department spokesman said.

Grand Rapids was a critical area for the air defense chain in 1956, Major Jack C. Shaddeck, commanding officer, told Grand Rapids residents. Bids for sizable additions, including two more radar domes, were called in February, 1957. An 18-home housing unit north-west of the base was later constructed.

Commanding officers since Major Shaddeck have included Capt. Frank Evans, Capt. Edward Stull, Major Lawrence Allard and Major Mitchell.

An annual military pay-roll of approximately a quarter of a million dollars will leave with the closing of the base.

707th Radar Sq (SAGE): activated 8 Apr 56 at Snelling AFS, MN, assigned to 31st AD; moved to Grand Rapids AFS, MN in Jul-56; transferred to 37th AD 1-Jan 59; transferred to 30th AD 1 Apr 59; transferred to Duluth ADS 1 Jul 59; redesignated from ACE4W Sq to 707th Radar Sq (SAGE). 15 Dec 59; discontinued 1 Aug 63.

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Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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