

# **6937<sup>th</sup> COMMUNICATIONS GROUP**

## **LINEAGE**

## **STATIONS**

PESHAWAR AS, PAKISTAN

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

In July of 1955 the Commander of the 6900th Security Wing of the US Air Force Security Service (USAFSS) in Germany issued temporary duty (TDY) orders for a team of intercept operators to survey various locations in West Pakistan for their suitability as radio signals intercept sites. It is not known if any particular world event triggered the need for a listening post in West Pakistan. What is known is that in 1955 the US and the Soviet Union were in the midst of the Cold War. The US wanted to know everything that could be learned about the strategic military capabilities of the Soviet Union. West Pakistan had consented to assist the US in obtaining information by hosting various US sensor activities.

It was determined that the survey orders could best be implemented by assigning operators from an existing site in Libya to the survey team to be led by officers and senior NCOs from other locations. Several plane loads of men and equipment were flown to West Pakistan to conduct the survey. After evaluating a number of other sites, the survey team strongly recommended that the new site be located near Peshawar in the Northwest Frontier of West Pakistan.

In 1958 the USAFSS began marshalling equipment for a site at Peshawar as Project SAND BAG. Then Capt. Luther A. Tarbox was placed in charge of the effort to collect men and materiel and get them all to Peshawar. The tasks included finding equipment, getting the equipment refurbished to "like new" conditioning, getting visas and health processing for the men, making transportation arrangements, and getting everyone and everything to Peshawar. The personnel were assigned both on TDY from Europe and PCS from the US. The movement to Peshawar took place in the summer of 1958. Roughly twenty plane loads of men and equipment were flown to Peshawar. A temporary operating location was setup at the Peshawar airport. Several vans contained the equipment.

While permanent facilities were under construction, the personnel were housed in local hotels (photo on right is commander's office at Deans Hotel). By the end of 1958 enough of the new facility was completed to provide partial support to the temporary site. Most important was a quiet place to sleep and uncontaminated food. Many men of the initial cadre had suffered severe bouts of dysentery.

Construction of Peshawar Air Station included administration buildings, H-type barracks, dining hall, movie theater and a gym. Of course, an operations compound was included to house the specialized equipment used for collection of a variety of data types. Additional construction projects added a bowling alley, a nine-hole golf course, dependent housing, dependent school for grades K through 7, and expansion of the operations compound. By 1968 the operations staff at Peshawar had grown to 800. Another 500 support personnel provided essential services ranging from mail handling and cooks to recreation and chaplains. The dependent population is uncertain.

Also, in 1968 the Government of Pakistan advised the US Government that, when the ten-year lease expired in July of 1969, the lease would not be renewed. After considerable negotiations, the US vacated the station in July of 1970 bringing an end to an era of US operations in Pakistan.

The above is but a thumbnail sketch of the history of Peshawar Air Station. The following chapters will provide additional detail about the installation, the people, and the mission of Peshawar Air Station.

(The intention for this section is to provide some background on why the operation at PAS was needed and how the location was selected. This will be a challenge because only one person from the survey team has been found. Research into the State Department documents from the period has not yet begun because an archive of the papers has not been located.)

It is still unclear what the original purpose of PAS operations were. Further research is needed in this area. Speculation is that the US wanted information on Soviet ballistic missile and missile launch capabilities. Intelligence sources had located a number of launch complexes within the

Soviet Union. These complexes served as both ballistic missile research facilities and space program launch facilities. A number of US university professors had proven to US intelligence agencies that much information about capabilities could be obtained from telemetry.

This was no small feat because these agencies initially thought that there was no chance that anything useful could be obtained. The professors took this as a challenge. They outfitted a number of vans and took them to the hills overlooking the US missile test range at White Sands, NM. They recorded telemetry from several missile tests and took the data back to their university for analysis. They were successful in determining specific parameters associated with each launch. The professors took their results to the test conductors at White Sands and briefed them on what they were able to learn from the telemetry. This served as proof to the intelligence agencies that the professors were correct about the potential for getting useful information from telemetry.

The problem then became that of collecting telemetry for analysis. The nature of telemetry signals is such that they can only be recorded while in near line of sight with the source. That means the recording facility has to be close to the telemetry source. Since a number of the Soviet complexes were in the southwestern regions of the Soviet Union, Pakistan became a prime candidate as a recording facility. A number of other US facilities in the region also were identified as candidates.

The survey team consisted of roughly 50 USAF personnel. The enlisted operators were from a site in Libya. The NCOs and officers were from USAF Europe. Indications have been noted that the Libyan site was in the process of closing at this time, so perhaps the enlisted operators were a convenient source of operators for the survey of site in Pakistan.

Various PAS veterans have described a number of different routes that were used in getting GIs to PAS. The changes in routes are primarily associated with the introduction of various new transport aircraft. The route described below was used in the late 60s and was implemented with USAF C-141 Star Lifters.

Charleston AFB served as a main terminal for the USAF personnel passenger service. Flights departed on a regular basis to points east and south. Travel orders typically assigned each individual to a MATS flight number with instructions to check in a few hours before the scheduled departure time. Everything seemed to be very routine.

However, in the case of a friend that departed a few weeks earlier than the author it was anything but routine. When he checked in at the passenger desk, the clerk pointer to a Braniff Airlines contract Boeing 727 aircraft outside and said that was his flight. He asked the clerk if that plane was going all the way to Pakistan. The clerk repeated that was his flight and he should get boarded. Sometime during the progress of the flight he learned that it was bound for Panama instead of Pakistan. The plane was loaded with special operations troops on their way to Jungle School in Panama.

On arrival in Panama he checked in with the clerk there. The clerk checked his orders and told him that he was in the wrong place. He told him to get back on the same plane and go back to Charleston. So back to Charleston he went and then caught the flight to Pakistan.

The stop at Torrejon was for crew rest. We arrived in the wee hours of the morning. The ground crew at the base shuttled us off to the transient airmen's quarters so we could get some sleep. The flight was due to depart in about 8-10 hours, so we decided to get a few hours sleep and then go sightseeing in Madrid. Once in Madrid, we piled into a taxi and had the driver show us around the city. Since we were there between Christmas and New Years Day, the seasonal decorations were still on display.

The stop in Dhahran was primarily for fuel. I suppose there was probably additional diplomatic pouches loaded also. The passengers were escorted to a roped-off area of the terminal to await departure. There were Saudi guards with machine guns to make sure we didn't stray off. Later, it occurred to me that the guards might have been there to protect us from the potential evils of that sort of place. During our wait there was what appeared to be a Saudi domestic flight loading for departure. The aircraft appeared to be a very old DC-3 Gooney Bird. The aircraft had a number of patches in the skin that seemed to be about the right size and pattern for bullet hole patches. The aircraft reminded me of the one portrayed in the "L'il Abner" comic strip. The crew got it loaded and it took off without incident before we departed.

During my final weeks at PAS, I had a number of recurring bad dreams about being mobbed at Peshawar Airport in the process of leaving for Karachi on the way out of the country. When my transportation out was finally arranged everything seemed to be going well on the PIA flight until we got to the scheduled stop at Lahore. Our plane was met by a guy from some US agency. He said we were to deplaned in Lahore with our baggage and await further instructions. All of the GIs on the airplane were taken to a local hotel. The hotel was straight out of one of the Shirley Temple movies. We were told not to unpack and be ready to leave on short notice.

Finally, around 3:00 AM, we were taken back to the airport and loaded onto another airplane. During all of this time, no explanation was given as to what was going on. We arrived at the Karachi airport at about 5:00 AM and were loaded on a bus to the Karachi Intercontinental Hotel. Along the way it became obvious why we were detained in Lahore. There had been a huge anti-American riot in Karachi the previous evening. The last thing the US authorities wanted was a bunch of GIs trying to get through the mob. Well, it wasn't exactly the same as my nightmare, but it was close enough.

When we finally got to the hotel the clerk didn't want to give us a room because we had not registered for that night but the night before. We were all tired and wanted to get cleaned up before getting on the C-141 that afternoon. Finally, the hotel relented and assigned about five to a room to get freshened up for the next leg of the trip.

It was pretty easy to get around the Peshawar area. The station operated a shuttle base from the station into town on a regular schedule as long as the political situation in town was considered safe. Once in town the easiest and safest transport was by horse-drawn two-wheeled cart. There also a Cushman scooter version of the same that was considered a suicide cart. If there was a accident with on of these the passengers went out the front head-long.

The Khyber Pass had at least two major thoroughfares. One was an asphalt paved two-lane motor vehicle road. The road was relatively well maintained. The traffic was mostly trucks with a few buses and cars sprinkled in. The Pakistani vehicles usually had no unused space. Buses had people packed inside, hanging on the outside, and sitting on top. Cars were similarly packed. We were once passed by a 1950 Chevrolet that had about seven people inside and another two sitting in the truck.

The village of Landi Kotal was also known as Thieves City. This name came from the belief that most of the goods on sale in the city was stolen from transports passing through the Khyber Pass. The shops were stocked with a wide variety of products at reasonable prices. One quickly learned that the prices were very negotiable.

The hills around the border area had very large clock faces constructed from white rocks with a single clock hand made from a white wooden pole. On other hills in the area were large numbers also constructed from rocks. One theory on the purpose of this was to provide coordinates to aircraft without the use of radio communications. A primitive solution in a primitive part of the world.

Many of the PAS veterans have mentioned trips to the Mangla Dam and the construction community there. The PAS softball team played the team from Mangla. A number of the guys made some lasting friends among the folks.

Following list of Peshawar Air Station / 6937th Commanders has been compiled from various exchanges with either the individual commander or people that were there during the period. It is easy to see that there may be gaps in the information

Col Ethyl Branham

Dates: Apr 58 - Apr 59 (est.) Col Branham was the 6937th commander during the initial operations setup at the temporary location at the Peshawar civil airport. He essentially received the unit, both men and materiel, from Capt Luther A. Tarbox when it was shipped from Rhien-Main AB, Germany. The dates of his command need to be confirmed.

Col Long

Dates: Apr 59 - Apr 60. Col Long was identified as a possible commander. This needs to be confirmed. His full name needs to be completed. The command dates given are estimated from what is believed about tour lengths during that period.

Col Julius Spooner

Dates: Apr 60 - Jun 61. Col Spooner was identified as a possible commander. This needs to be confirmed. His full name needs to be completed. The command dates given are estimated from what is believed about tour lengths during that period.

LTC Skinner

Dates: unknown. LTC Skinner was acting base commander until Col Hanley arrived. (Grant)

Col Tom Hanley

Dates: I need to confirm this name with Mrs. Goerder

Col Robert Goerder

Dates: Jun 61 - July 9, 1963. Col Hyde identified Col Goerder as the commander he relieved. The beginning date is an estimate and needs to be confirmed. The ending date is from Col Hyde's orders and should be accurate. Col Goerder passed away in 2000.

Col Thomas C. Hyde

Dates: July 9, 1963 - July 4, 1965. Col Hyde provided this information from his orders.

Col Henry Taylor

Dates: July 4, 1965 - Jun 67. Col Hyde identified Col Taylor as the commander that relieved him. The beginning date is from Col Hyde's orders and should be accurate. The ending date is an estimate and needs to be confirmed.

Col Graydon K. (Rocky) Eubank

Dates: Jun 67 - Jul 69. These dates are from an e-mail message from Col Tarbox that summarized a conversation with Col Eubank. It would be nice to have the dates down to the day.

Col Bill Hezlip

Dates: Jul 69 - Jul 70? This information is also from the above conversation with Col Eubank. An ending date is needed. Need to also confirm that the ending date is the actual closing of the station, i.e., nothing further was happening at Peshawar.

6937TH COMM GP AFOUA 1 JUN 63 - 31 MAY 65  
AFOUA wV 1 JUL 68 - 31 DEC 69

The 6937th Communications Group, at Peshawar, Pakistan, situated just west of the historic Khyber Pass, began operations in April 1958. The command also operated units at Samsun and Trabzon, Turkey, Zweibrucken and Weisbaden in Germany, Kirknewton, Scotland and other places. As 1959 drew to a close, the USAFSS intelligence team included 21,602 airmen, officers and civilians.

1968 The Government of Pakistan refused to renew USAFSS's lease on the Peshawar site, home of the 6937 CG. The unit closed by the end of 1969.

1970 A small ceremony on 7 January, attended by American and Pakistani Air Force representatives, closed a USAFSS "communications unit," the 6937th Communications Group at Peshawar, Pakistan, to end 15 years of valuable intelligence support at the site.

Peshawar Airport—Temporary Operations

6937th Comm Group, Peshawar, Pakistan  
April 1958

Communications Flight, Provisional 6937th Security Flight, Provisional 6937th Communications Flight 6937th Communications Group OL-2, 6937th Comm Group, Karachi Detachment 2, 6937th Comm Group, Karachi.

For several months in 1958, arriving Air Force personnel lived in the Dean Hotel while construction of barracks and other infrastructure proceeded on the air station. When the intercept teams arrived, the unit commenced intercept operations in a temporary fenced compound at Peshawar Airport. Former radio maintenance technician Jack Karp, who arrived in late 1958, lived in the hotel a week before moving into a newly built brick barracks on base.

There appears to have been no formal "ribbon-cutting" to open Peshawar Air Station. Construction of essential facilities—barracks and dining hall, together with water and sanitation system, and power generation and distribution took top priority. Uradley Spencer, a 6937th ELINT intercept operator (Dec 1958-Dec 1959), dates the opening of the station's first barracks as January 1959.

When our small group, about four or five, arrived, we stayed at Oberoi Dean's for a month; brick barracks were under construction. We flew from Karachi to Peshawar on a Pak AF British Bristol—what a ride! I have B&W photos of the water tower while under construction, barracks construction, friends, etc.

Fred Blair estimated in an email that there were 75 people on site when he arrived in April 1959. There was an outdoor movie, but "no BX, no club, no bowling alley." There was lots of improvising during those early days,—such as bringing your own chair to watch reruns and second rate films under the stars. A mini BX did offer bare essentials. Two of the first amenities that most remember were sports fields and the bowling alley—15 cents a line and five cents to rent shoes. With few recreational activities to occupy off-duty time, Peshawar was a remote assignment, a 12-month unaccompanied tour.

#### Operations Moved to Air Station

Although details on the move from Peshawar Airport are unavailable, Col. Branham most likely relocated the H-1 vans housing operations to Peshawar Air Station in early 1959 in

#### HF Mission—FLR-9 Antenna not Delivered

The 6937th Comm Group had an HF mission—Morse, non-Morse (printer) and voice, plus ELINT and Telemetry associated with Soviet missile testing and nuclear testing. Sylvania Electronic Systems (then GTE Systems) was under contract to install a FLR-9 circular antenna at Peshawar, but that antenna was diverted to an intercept station in Thailand due to the tenuous situation in Pakistan in the later years of Peshawar Air Station.

#### Peshawar—Memories

With the recreational facilities that had evolved by the time Walter Rosenstrom arrived in November 1960, Peshawar Air Station became more tolerable.

The club (all ranks) -was open when I got there, as -was the bowling alley. The pool opened in mid- '61 and was used a lot. Also, they opened a separate NCO Club -while I was there as well as base housing.

A gymnasium, expanded BX and commissary followed, and by the time Rosenstrom left in June 1962, some officers and senior NCO's were serving accompanied tours with their families. With (lie families came a dependent school (grades K through 7); older

#### CLOSING DOWN 6937TH COMM GROUP

In October 1969, the American Embassy in Rawalpindi mailed a message announcing the closing of USA-60 ("Badaber"), USAF Communications Station, Peshawar.157

#### Peshawar AS—Final Days

Replacing Colonel Graydon K. Eubank in a formal change of command ceremony on 16 May 1969, Col. William H. Hezlep was the 6937th Comm Group's final commander. The phasedown of operations was on the home stretch when Col. Hezlep arrived. Major Joseph Tortorete "had the honor of being appointed the project officer for base closure." When Maj. Tortorete and his family arrived in July 1967, he had expected a routine two-year tour of duty as unit operations officer—closing down a large USAFSS intercept unit is anything but routine. Operations were phasing down when he departed on 22 July 1969, the day after the United States landed the first man on the moon.

Indents attended boarding school in Turkey. The air station even liwl its own nine-hole golf course. With the more livable conditions, Peshawar became a 15-month unaccompanied tour— .VI months for personnel accompanied by their families. The base Inul its hardships, and everyone departed with indelible memories—some good and others not so good.

Pleasant memories included: cheeseburgers grilled by the pool, leu cent beer at the club, the yellow flag flying by the consolidated mail room when mail was received and lots of intramural sports. Weather was memorable—some liked the hot, dry summers; others, who found the heat unbearable, were thankful for air conditioning in most on-base facilities. Carlos Washburn's recollections are typical.

Learned how to play Hearts, Bridge, Pinochle and how to drink. Watched movies outside sitting in our own chairs— drinking beer and eating hamburgers. Some climbed the water tower for kicks. Played a lot of softball, lifted weights and...worked.

Some of the less pleasant memories relate to powdered eggs and powdered milk, dust storms and the smell of dried camel dung burning at mealtime. Cobras scurrying across the road leading to operations also got much attention, and driving on the wrong (left) side of the road was strange. To many, the aroma that hit them when they arrived in Peshawar was (is) their most memorable



experience. Fred Blair—former diesel generator repairman (1959-60)—is philosophical about his Peshawar experience.

The isolation took a lot of getting used to, but we made it. A tour to PAS had a way of seeing just how strong you were. I wouldn't want to go again but wouldn't take anything for the experience. Charles "Chuck" MacFarlane has many unusual memories of the two tours he served at Peshawar (1959-1960 and 1963-1964). He was one of the first inexperienced Morse intercept operators to be sent directly from Morse code school/Keesler AFB to Pakistan. Previously, only experienced operators had been assigned to the 6937th Comm Group. MacFarlane was impressed that USAFSS flew his group—eight lowly A2C—to Pakistan aboard the 6900th Security Wing aircraft. They arrived in Peshawar in June 1959.



Sam Curran (Actg. & Finance, 1967-68) provided this unofficial Accounting and Finance patch that was worn on their hats. Believed to have been designed by Henry Disch.



George Wigginton (Able, 1967-69) provided this Able Flight patch. Many were produced at a tailor shop in downtown Peshawar but were never authorized for official use.



Bill Hurlbut, (29450, Special Projects, Aug. 64 - Oct. 65) provided this Peshawar Bandits patch of Yosemite Sam



PAS Pamphlet 190-1-1, Peshawar Air Station, dated 13 Feb 67 offers the following regarding the PAS Unit insignia: "Our station insignia, shown on the front cover, is designed to represent and encourage good will. The plaque represents the shield of the United States. The Lightning Bolt symbolizes Air Force Communications and this group in particular. The Punjabi Shoe symbolizes the traveler. The Mystic Lamp is the lamp that lights his way. The Handclasp symbolizes the warm welcome received at the journey's end, in this instance the northwest frontier area of West Pakistan. The expression "Khair Sagalie" is a combination of Persian and Urdu and means goodwill".



Jim Hill (Charlie Flight, Oct. 67 - Feb. 69, 202xx) provided this Charlie Flight patch.