

6908 SECURITY SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

6908 Security Squadron designated and activated 1 Jul 1971
Inactivated, 5 Oct 1975

STATIONS

Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base 1 Jul 1971-5 Oct 1975

ASSIGNMENTS

Pacific Security Region, 1 Jul 1971
United States Air Force Security Service, 31 Dec 1972-5 Oct 1975

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
1 Jul 71 - 30 Jun 72

1 Jul 73 - 30 Jun 75

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 6908 SS activated at Nakhon Phanom Airport, Thailand, to operate Senior Book and Compass Flag programs, as well as process and report the intercepts collected from both platforms. 1971

In 1971, the 6990th Security Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, activated Operating Location "AA" (OL-AA) at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) RTAFB in northeastern Thailand. NKP is located 15 kilometers west of Nakhon Phanom City. In the initial cadre of operations personnel were 15-20 6990th TDY troops, mostly Vietnamese linguists. Subsequently, OL-AA, 6990th SS was inactivated, replaced by the 6908th Security Squadron. The first group of airmen assigned to the 6908th SS in mid-year 1971 included: Bert Armijo (NCOIC, Ops), Jim Ray, Robert Rutan, Dave Mauk, Tom Penn, George Durham, Ken Hopkins, Ron Marcoullier and Richard Debosh.

The 6908th did not become fully operational until October 1971, and due to a severe shortage of qualified personnel during its first year of operation, the unit was staffed by TDY personnel from the 6990th and other organizations—including the Army and Department of Defense civilians. In addition, a contingent of ARVN military personnel augmented the 6908th pool of Vietnamese linguists, transcribing voice traffic.

Under Project DANCER, both ASA and USAFSS used native South Vietnamese army COMINT linguists to assist with the transcription of intercepted Vietnamese voice communications.

IISAFSS Vietnamese linguists Thomas Penn and John P. Barnes supervised the DANCER transcription section at NKP. Penn provides an overview of DANCER operations within the 6908th.

DANCERS were a contingent of 12-14 personnel who, beginning in late '71, were rotated every few months between Vietnam and Nakhon Phanom RTAFB under an agreement between the USG, RTG and the government of RVN. The contingent usually consisted of one officer, usually a warrant officer or officer aspirant, one senior NCO and 10 enlisted men who were experienced in transcription of GDRS collection. These personnel were housed in a barracks in Camp Tarbox. They were restricted to the base and were allowed to go only to the chow hall unless they were escorted. More often than not, they cooked their own meals and stayed pretty much to themselves.

The name was changed from DANCERS to BEES in late '72, possibly due to a series of articles that had appeared in the Bangkok Post or The Nation in the late summer or early fall. These articles detailed specifics about the unit and its mission to include the presence of the ARVN personnel. It is my understanding that some of the BEES returned to Vietnam as the south was falling and some were given refugee status.

The DANCERS (and later BEES) worked in a separate H-I van adjacent to two 6908th transcription vans within the secure compound. An undetermined number made their way to the West after the fall of Saigon to the Communists.

A small contingent of DANCER program personnel, known as the BEES, stationed at the AFSS site at Ramasun Station, Thailand, also survived. Their families had been flown out on 24 April on a C-130 "Black Flight" to Guam or to ClarkAB in the P.I.

To meet USAFSS billeting needs on NKP, 7th Air Force constructed a compound of "hooches" right next to the jungle on the base perimeter. The compound that housed the enlisted men and the squadron orderly room became "Camp Tarbox," named after the 6908th Security Squadron's first commander, Lt. Col. Luther A. Tarbox.

Arriving in June 1971, Col. Tarbox was reportedly the first 6908th person on station. Senior NCO's and officers had their own hooches elsewhere, and operational facilities were located within the Task Force Alpha complex, guarded by security teams and dual-perimeter cyclone fencing and razor wire. In 1974, new improved quarters replaced Camp Tarbox, and the squadron consolidated orderly room, operations and training functions in a new building by the south end of the Task Force Alpha building within the TFA complex.

The 6908th Security Squadron (and predecessor OL-AA, 6990th SS) operated two ground-based collection facilities for two distinctly different but complementary downlink SIGINT collection platforms (DSCP's)—Comfy Gator and Olympic Torch.

The Comfy Gator collection facility was tasked primarily against ground military targets—especially General Directorate Rear Services (GDRS) communications associated with the infiltration of men and material from North Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos into South Vietnam and Cambodia. The facility comprised 10 intercept positions, one of which was the Ground Mission Supervisor (GMS) position. With the proper crew mix, Comfy Gator could also provide advisory support to American aircrews. Capable of monitoring any signal from the downlink SIGINT collection platform (DSCP), the GMS directed the mission, assigning targets to the intercept operators. Initially, the Comfy Gator collection facility was located in a sensitive compartmented information facility (SCIF) inside the TFA building. Processing/transcription was accomplished in a series of H-I vans outside the south end of the building near the new 6908th headquarters and operations building. Using the QU-22B (Pave Eagle II) DSCP, the 6908th commenced Comfy Gator operations in late July 1971.

Operating from NKP and orbiting over Laos near the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the QU-22B downlinked data to processing facilities within the Task Force Alpha complex on the base. The platform began supporting the Igloo White program in 1970, relaying signals from acoustic sensors seeded on the ground in advance to the Infiltration Surveillance Center (ISC) in the TFA building.³⁷⁵

The QU-22B assumed a second mission at NKP in 1971. Using a Compass Flag collection pallet developed under Pave Eagle II, the platform downlinked intercepted communications signals to a 6908th Comfy Gator ground collection facility. The Air Force cancelled the QU-22 program in September 1972. Comfy Gator operations continued, with repackaged Compass Flag equipment carried aboard C-130 aircraft operating out of Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

Reconfiguring the palletized Compass Flag collection gear to operate aboard a C-130 aircraft, the 6908th Security Squadron continued Comfy Gator operations at NKP uninterrupted. However, unlike the QU-22B that staged from NKP, the Comfy Gator C-130 DSCP operated from Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

The 6908th kept a small contingent of airborne maintenance technicians (AMT's)—OL-BA, 6908th SS—at Korat to support Compass Flag operations aboard C-130's. An AMT flew aboard each Comfy Gator mission, maintaining the collection equipment and supporting radio relay. In addition to maintenance on the on-board Comfy Gator equipment on the Trump aircraft, the AMT was the comms relay person between Combat Apple and the ground via a KY-8 UHF secure link.

Comfy Gator C-130 operations ended in the summer of 1974. Whereas Comfy Gator's airborne DCSP operated over Laos, the "high-flyer" U-2 Olympic Torch platform operated over the Gulf of Tonkin (GOT).

Olympic Torch consisted of a U-2 SIGINT intercept platform and a ground-based collection facility. Carrying the Senior Book receiver suite, the U-2 high flyer operated from U-Tapao RTAFB on Thailand's southeastern coast (Gulf of Thailand), with a primary intelligence-gathering orbit over the Gulf of Tonkin. As a downlink signal collection platform (DSCP), the Senior Book system aboard the U-2 downlinked intercepted signals to the collection facility at NKP.

CMSgt. Thomas H. Tennant, the last NCOIC of 6908 Operations, transferred with the Olympic Torch ground station to Ramasun. The U-2 Senior Spear/Olympic Torch remote collection and processing system became the Olympic Game system at Osan Air Base, Korea.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.