

# WHAT HAPPENED AT DAYTON?

## SUMMARY OF EVENTS,

### 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY REUNION OF THE RADAR SITES OF ICELAND, 24-27 APRIL 2003, DAYTON, OHIO

By Jerry Tonnell

The purpose of this document is to reveal some of the events and activities that took place at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion of the Radar Sites of Iceland. Hopefully, it will tell enough of the story so that those who could not attend can feel some of the excitement shared by those of us who were there. In addition, it will remind us of the good times we all shared – and might help to recall a few of the things we may have already forgotten.

**Thursday, 24 April 2003.** By Thursday evening, nearly 40% of the veterans and their guests had arrived, picked up their registration packages, and began socializing in the Hospitality Room. Room 1063 soon became a room number to commit to memory because it was there that we renewed old friendships and made new acquaintances. Under the leadership of Andy Holzinger, H-1, 1962-63, Hospitality Chairman, the room was well stocked with the following: coffee, soda, spirits, popcorn, munchies, photo albums, and plenty of tall tales. We were advised that for the next couple of mornings there would be breakfast rolls available. Soon, many of the vets were proudly wearing their Radar Site hats and shirts that had been so professionally designed by Joe Pyrdek, H-3, 1967-68, Memorabilia Chairman. That evening, many paired up with old and new friends and dined in the Hotel restaurant or drove the short distance to one of the many nearby fine eating establishments. Before retiring for the evening, some folks began to read the Reunion History, but put it down as they decided that it was a little more than they could handle in a single late night's reading.

**Friday, 25 April 2003.** In the morning, as we visited the Hospitality Room, little did we realize that the free breakfast rolls were easily big enough to feed a hungry man. The weather was looking ominous which did not bode well with the Iceland Radar Plaque Dedication Ceremony scheduled for that afternoon. Many more veterans arrived, and now about 75% of all those planning to attend had already checked in.

**The Plaque Dedication Ceremony.** At about 1 PM, several vehicle caravans made the 8-mile trip to Memorial Park on the grounds of the USAF Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB. Upon arrival, the rain, which had been threatening all morning, finally began to fall – but only lightly. Jerry Tonnell, H-2, 1959, the Ceremony Organizer, verified that all the principal parties were in place. Diane Zukoski of the USAF Museum staff sought the advice of the Reunion Coordinator, William Chick, H-2, 1959-60, asking him if we should invoke the indoor inclement weather plan. Being a true veteran of the day-to-day weather he experienced in Iceland, Chick made it clear that the ceremony would take place out of doors. In an effort to beat an approaching downpour, the ceremony began a few minutes before the scheduled 2 PM start time.

Nearly 150 people gathered in front of the podium as the Colors were posted by the Wright-Patterson AFB Honor Guard. Then we all joined in the singing of The National Anthem. In the background was a granite memorial stone with a veil covering our Radar Plaque. After Reunion Chaplain, Joe Pischieri, H-1, 1979-80, lead us in the Invocation, Jerry Tonnell, Reunion Historian, stepped to the mike and read the Citation he had written to accompany the Plaque Dedication. By this time, a light rain was steadily falling on both the people and on the ink of the Citation. Fortunately, Jerry had the original Citation under cover and off to the side, glass framed, and placed in a plastic covered container – he was actually reading a copy of the Citation. What saved the day was the bill of the H-2 hat he wore – the one designed by Joe Pyrdek. The bill kept the majority of the rain off of the Citation with the exception of a couple dozen minor water smears. The framed Citation was left in the hands of Ms Zukoski for future display in the USAF Museum -- a copy of this citation can be seen in the 'Reunion Memories' section of the associations' Website: <http://usradarsitesiceland.org/>

After the Citation was read, it was time for Reed Thomas, H-4, 1958-59, our Director of Admin, and William Chick to come into focus. Situated on either side of the veil, they pulled away the cloth exposing the Iceland Radar Plaque. [*The Plaque itself had been the project of Craig Hackett, H-4, 1960-61, and his committee – unfortunately, he was unable to be at Dayton for the ceremony.*] The official presentation of the Plaque was put in the hands of retired Colonel Doug Harper, H-3 commander from 1972 to 1973. Col Harper asked Major General Raymond Moorman (Ret), of the USAF Museum staff, to come to the podium at which time he presented the Plaque to the General. He also presented a complete set of radar site patches donated by Mike Mangone, H-1, 1960-61, as well as a copy of the Reunion History. General Moorman then addressed the assembly and highlighted the importance of the radar vets' contribution to the Cold War effort. A light rain continued to fall. After the Benediction by Joe Pischieri, the Colors were retired by the Honor Guard while a bugler from the Wright-Patterson AFB Band played Taps.

In sum, it was a very moving Ceremony which brought a few tears to some of the most hardened of veterans. Although the weather was less than ideal, it just so happened that the conditions – overcast with light rain, windy, and 55° -- were almost exactly what we all experienced on any given “balmy,” summer day in Iceland. It was only fitting that the weather turned out the way it did.

After the ceremony, all in the audience were gathered around the monument upon which the Plaque had been mounted. Their picture was then taken by a photographer who used a revolving camera. It may seem strange, but no one showed up twice in the photo – that is, on both ends of the picture. Considering the ages of those being photographed, there was probably not a single soul who could still run that fast.

Many decided to stick around after the Ceremony and tour one or more of the several gigantic hangers which house the USAF Museum. While inside, the rain steadily increased, highlighting the good fortune we had in avoiding the downpour during the Dedication. Later, back at the Hotel, more friendships were made as they quickly germinated in the Hospitality Room during the course of the evening. William Chick and his wife, Connie, continued to man the Registration Desk until relieved by Tom McDonald, H-3, 1981-82, our Registration Director. Dinner was once again enjoyed at one of the many places to eat within a couple miles of the Hotel.

**Saturday, 26 April 2003.** By now, all 112 vets and 95 guests had arrived -- for a total of 207 people. Another 23 vets, plus nearly 20 guests were forced to cancel in the two weeks leading up to the Reunion – mostly for health reasons. After breakfast, the veterans prepared for the individual radar site meetings.

**Radar Site Meetings.** Each radar squadron had a room set aside for their meeting. At 9:30 AM the vets arrived at their respective meeting areas armed with their photos, slides, albums, and memories. Most of the meetings lasted over two hours -- this helped to form a bond among the participants as they exchanged mailing and email addresses and relived their days on the “Rock.”

**Business Meeting Highlights.** On Saturday afternoon at 2 PM, a meeting was scheduled of the general membership to discuss the future of the Iceland Radar Site organization. William Chick showed up a full 45 minutes before the scheduled start time and sat alone for some time in the large meeting room. At first thought, to a casual observer, attendance at such a meeting would not seem very interesting. However, as 2 o'clock approached, the vets started trickling in. By 2 PM the room was almost full with several folks standing at the back. There must have been over 100 in attendance – quite a testimony to the interest in continuing the association. *[For purposes of continuity, the Radar Sites of Iceland veterans' organization will hereafter be referred to as, the “Association.”]*

A few key issues were decided at that meeting, including:

- 1) **Dues.** That there would be a collection of annual dues for those who want to continue the “Association.” The amount was set at \$15 per year to be paid starting 1 June 2003. Checks would be sent to our Treasurer, David Hawk, H-1, 1985-86, at 114 Larry Lane, Pauls Valley, OK 73075. All dues payments would be entirely on a volunteer basis and made out to: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniv Iceland Radar.
- 2) **Next Reunion.** That the “Association” should schedule another reunion – possibly in 2 years time – the date and place to be decided by the Executive Committee after taking into account the results of the Reunion Surveys and feedback from the next Newsletter.
- 3) **History Sales.** That the extra copies of the Reunion History would be made available for sale at \$7.00 per copy which would include postage and handling costs. Proceeds would go entirely to the “Association” to help pay for the cost of the printing. The books can be obtained from William Chick, 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036. Checks should be made payable to: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniv Iceland Radar. In the event we receive 100 more orders beyond our present stock, action will be taken to print more.
- 4) **Newsletter.** That a newsletter will be printed and mailed sometime in late June summarizing the status and goals of the “Association.”
- 5) **Website.** That our “Association” Website would continue to operate using the funds provided by the voluntary dues. It was pointed out that there are two Iceland Websites; however, the one named AirForcesIceland is hosted by Yahoo **and is not our website!!**

The “Association” Website is: <http://usradarsitesiceland.org/> and is paid for by the “Association.” One benefit of our Website is that there are no ads and the chance of having cookies placed on your email address by various advertisers is nil – there are no ads on our site. However, there is an annual fee for this service – the Executive Committee felt it worth the cost in order to foster privacy.

The meeting adjourned at about 3 PM. William Chick did an excellent job at orchestrating the session's agenda.

While the meeting was in progress, many of the guests and spouses were visiting the lobby where most of the albums were on display. Several had been lovingly assembled by W.C. Chilton, H-1, 1961-62, Display and Decorations Chairman. He even arranged for a video

cassette machine and a TV to permit the showing of a film of northern radar sites. Also in the lobby was the Historian's Corner which contained enlarged maps of Iceland and annotated maps of each of the radar sites – in addition, a listing of the commanders of all the radar units in Iceland was posted.

**The Reunion Banquet.** By about 6:30 PM, all 207 attendees had assembled in the Banquet Room. The MC was Jerry Tonnell. The proceedings began with the singing of the National Anthem. This was followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance. Reunion Chaplain, Joe Pischieri, then lead us in the Invocation.

Our **“Special Guests”** were then introduced. They included:

Col Frank Herrelko, commander of the WW II 556<sup>th</sup> Signal Aircraft Warning Battalion of the USAAF. Col Herrelko, approaching his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, served in Iceland from 1943-1945 as the commander of 8 or more radar sites. He is considered a radar pioneer.

Lt Col Van Don Kopley, current commander of the 932<sup>nd</sup> Air Control Squadron, at Naval Air Station, Keflavik. He was joined by one of his flight commanders, 1st Lt William Gallian.

Chuck Comstock, H-3, 1973-74, was introduced as the donor of the inscribed wine glasses. He donated enough glasses so that one could be provided to all in attendance.

Einar Jonsson and his son, Jon Einarsson. Einar is an Icelander who was employed by H-4 as a “Cat” driver during the years 1956-1960. Any H-4 member will tell you that Einar played a key role in the survival of all who were assigned to that site.

**Introduction of the Executive Committee.** They included William Chick, Reunion Coordinator; Reed Thomas, Director of Admin; Joe Pyrdek, Memorabilia Chairman; David Hawk, Treasurer; W.C. Chilton, Display and Decorations Chairman; Andy Holzinger, Hospitality Chairman; Tom McDonald, Registration Director; Jack Hamilton, Trailblazers Chairman; Joe Pischieri, Chaplain; and Jerry Tonnell, Reunion Historian and Banquet MC. Absent from Dayton were Craig Hackett, Plaque Chairman; and Bill Boulineau, Website Coordinator.

**Dinner.** After a few brief announcements, it was time for the dinner. Because the food came in buffet style, it took nearly 40 minutes before the last table was able to go through the serving line. This delayed the start of the program until about 7:45 PM.

**Remembrances of Iceland: Life at the site as seen through the eyes of various radar veterans.** The following Iceland Radar Veterans volunteered their time as speakers:

1) Lambert Stammerjohn, WW II Radar in Iceland. Bert spent 1941-1943 in Iceland as one of the pioneers of the military application of radar. He served in a variety of jobs, including Radar Site Commander. He spoke to us about the excitement experienced in landing at Reykjavik (some four months prior to Pearl Harbor), while the surrounding waters hosted German U-boats intent on stopping their lightly protected convoy. He recalled the hardships in setting up and operating their antiquated radar systems under the veil of extreme secrecy. Operating at first from tents, they weathered the harsh conditions and helped bring down several of the marauding Nazi bombers sent to harass their operation. Through trial and error, they perfected their radars and later brought this expertise to England where many ex-Iceland radar men helped plan the D-Day Invasion in June 1944.

2) Jack Hamilton, the 1952-53 Trailblazers. Jack was in the first group of radar men to land in Iceland in post-WW II Iceland. The Cold War was in high gear and Iceland relented, once again permitting American troops to be stationed on the island. He and his comrades set up the temporary radar site that helped protect Iceland for a full year during the months it took to construct the Rockville site. His rendition of the problems they faced and overcame was highly interesting as he spoke about the original members of the 932<sup>nd</sup> AC & W Squadron which was initially manned from two Connecticut National Guard units. They operated under limited support because, while they kept the antenna rotating, the base at Keflavik was still under construction. He, too, was a military radar pioneer.

3) Larry Robin, H-1, 1964-65, the 932<sup>nd</sup> AC & W Squadron at Rockville AFS. Larry represented, by far, the largest number of attendees at the Iceland Reunion. Using some of his down-home Cajun humor, he recollected some of the earlier days of the 932<sup>nd</sup> with his colorful description of events. He struck a chord of understanding with the members of the audience who served at Rockville which was, after all, the Master Direction Center – which has been the hub of radar activity in Iceland from 1953 to the present. A year ago, he was one of a handful of radar men who traveled to Iceland for the 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the 932<sup>nd</sup> AC & W Sq. He revisited the now-closed Rockville site and made some interesting observations as he toured some of the old buildings and haunts of radar men past.

4) William Fremming Nielsen, H-2, 1958-59, the 667<sup>th</sup> AC & W Squadron. Frem spoke on behalf of the men who served on that mountaintop radar site farthest from Keflavik called Langanes AFS. When he summarized the world events that occurred during the years H-2 was in operation, he put an interesting perspective on the topic at hand to those who served at the 667<sup>th</sup>. He spoke with reverence of some of his co-workers who served along side him who are no longer with us today. He described life at the site in terms that made one think back to the comradeship that was enjoyed by all. His delivery reminded us of how a learned judge might hand down a popular decision. You see, Frem is at home with that manner of speaking because he presently holds the job as Federal District Judge of the State of Washington – one to which he was appointed by the first President George Bush.

5) Col (Ret) Douglas Harper, H-3, 1972-73, the 933<sup>rd</sup> and 667<sup>th</sup> AC & W Sq. Doug spoke on behalf of those who served at Hofn AFS from 1955 to 1988. He offered a unique perspective in that he served as the Commander of H-3 from 1972-1973. He shared a few interesting events that occurred during his watch. He recalled when a local Icelandic leader giving him a tour of a brand new jailhouse in Hofn – only to have its first occupant turn out to be an airmen who had been accused of selling a certain illegal substance to the son of a local fisherman. He mentioned the rigors of having to suffer through a higher headquarters inspection – one that ultimately identified H-3 as the outstanding organization that it already was. He concluded that duty at Hofn AFS was not all that difficult as evidenced by the fact that the men assigned were able to maintain a very positive attitude during their tour of duty.

6) John Broughton, H-4, 1959-60, the 934<sup>th</sup> AC & W Sq. John spoke for the men who were assigned to the most remote radar site in Iceland. In fact, he took us on part of the journey he experienced during his first trip to Latrar AFS. He recalled the harrowing ride on the Catalina PBY 5A flying boat as it landed at sea. He recounted his hesitation and disbelief when told by an Icelandic boat captain to “Yump” from the plane into a madly bobbing whale boat. When the order was briskly repeated, John “Yumped.” He explained to us that the trip to the site was so fraught with danger that upon arriving, many H-4 veterans did not want to return. He spoke with affection of the many friends he made not only with his fellow Americans, but also with the handful of Icelanders assigned to the site. At that point, he called one of those very same Icelanders to the podium – Einar Jonsson.

Einar, described by some as a “man of steel,” spoke to us from the heart. He was a caterpillar driver whose job was to keep the steep mountain road open year round so that those at the site could be kept supplied – a job he performed for four long years. He was known by the men of the site as “Highpockets”. He recounted the sad tale of a young airman who was crushed to death when trying to connect a large sea barge to a DS 7 Cat – a long-ago event that still tugs at his soul. He is a living embodiment of the fast friendships that were forged between the American servicemen and their Icelandic hosts.

7) Lt Col Van Don Kepley, 932<sup>nd</sup> ACS, 2001-2003. As the current squadron commander, Col Kepley spoke as a representative of those who are presently serving in Iceland at the 932<sup>nd</sup> ACS at Naval Air Station, Keflavik. He thanked the veterans of the radar sites of Iceland for the rich heritage they left in place for those who now watch the skies over Iceland. He described the work by those of us who preceded them, as a legacy that all the young men and women of the 932<sup>nd</sup> need to know and cherish. He stated that they are simply doing the same job that was done for the past 50 years -- with the exception that their new and advanced equipment makes the job a little easier. He told us that a number of airmen have their families with them, which computes to a two year tour of duty. He thanked us for inviting him to the Reunion, promising he would take back our message of good will and support for the troops in Keflavik.

The MC presented each of the guest speakers with a personalized copy of the Plaque Dedication Ceremony Citation.

**Comments by the Reunion Leaders.** The two principal leaders and organizers of the Reunion addressed the audience.

Reed Thomas, H-4, 1958-59, Reunion Director of Admin, spoke to us about the future of the “Association’s” Website. He then took on the task of officially thanking the many people who had contributed to the success of the Reunion. He called up several people who, while not in a leadership role, nevertheless, contributed much time and effort to the event. They were given an appropriate certificate. Then, Reed called each of the Executive Committee members to the podium. He described their contributions and presented them with a personalized copy of the Radar Plaque Citation. His final act was to call William Chick to the podium and present to him a Plaque which recognized Chick’s dedication and leadership while performing as the “boss” of the Executive Committee. Before Reed could sit down, the MC recognized Reed’s efforts with a special copy of the Citation.

William Chick, H-2, 1959-60, Reunion Coordinator, had the last word. He thanked all the wives and family members that provided help. He gave special recognition to his wife, Connie, who he described as the computer brain in his household. He related the “Association’s” journey from the initial concept of a Reunion to its final realization in Dayton, Ohio. [Through his leadership, this association was born. Peacetime organizations rarely hold Reunions, especially for assignments of short duration where airmen spend only a few months with their fellow servicemen in places where their families were left behind. To bring five such organizations together in one place was a testimony to his extraordinary determination and guidance.]

**Closing Comments.** At 9:30 PM, MC Jerry Tonnell closed the evening’s program when he said, *“After researching and writing the Reunion History and then listening to the men who spoke here tonight, I would like to conclude by saying these words: Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference. The Veterans of the Radar Sites of Iceland don’t have that problem!! Thank you, good night, and God Bless you.”*

**Sunday, 27 April 2003.** Sunday was a day to give thanks for the weekend’s events and to bid farewell to the many old friendships renewed and the new ones made over the past three days. Promises were made to keep in touch and photographs would be exchanged. We returned to the far corners of the USA, with a few flying back to Iceland. All departed on a positive note. However, the story of our Reunion was not yet over – **wait til you read what follows on the next page!!!**

## LATE BREAKING NEWS – THE “BEAR” IS STILL TRYING TO CHASE US.

A few days after we returned from the Reunion, I received an e-mail from Lt William Gallian. As mentioned earlier, he was at Dayton along with his boss, Lt Col Don Kepley, current commander of the 932nd Air Control Squadron in Keflavik. Gallian provided me with some interesting information: Very recently, the Russians decided to test the air defenses of Iceland by sending two late model Bear Bombers into Icelandic air space. Both bombers were intercepted. *"The Russian planes were of the so-called “Bear” Type, Tupolev 142 'Bear F' and 'Bear J.' The F-type is an anti-submarine warfare aircraft and the J-type a communications platform for the Russian nuclear submarine force."*

As your Historian, I find this to be an unusual event in that the Soviets have mostly stayed away from Iceland since 1991 (*which more or less coincides with the end of the Cold War.*) There were very few intercepts between 1991 and 1999 -- in fact; there hasn't been an intercept of a Russian bomber by the 932nd since 1999. That is, until April 2003.

Also of interest is the fact that we have long known that Russian military intelligence agencies are very proficient, and the military leadership of that nation sometimes uses such information to make their own kind of statement. For example, if you look on P. 27 of your Reunion History, you will note the following entry I inserted near the photo of General Chappie James. It reads, *"On 17 Sep 1976, just hours after Gen Daniel "Chappie" James arrived at Keflavik to award AFI and the 932nd the USAF Outstanding Unit Award, two Tu-95 Bear Deltas were intercepted as they entered Iceland's air space..."* Was the timing a simple coincidence or was it a plan to embarrass four-star General James who, at the time, was the Commander of ADC?

Now let's move to April 2003. Were the Russian's aware that the commander of the 932nd and one of his flight commanders were TDY to the United States at the time of their incursion? And more importantly, did the exact timing of the Bear flights have any significance? I'll let you decide. Did you know that this first intercept in four years occurred on Friday, 25 April 2003 -- the very same day and just a few hours before we dedicated the Radar Sites of Iceland Plaque to the USAF Museum? Did the Russians know about the date and time of our Plaque Dedication? Had the 932nd not detected the Bears, or the F-15s not intercepted and escorted them toward home, what kind of victory could the Russians have claimed? Would that have put a damper on our ceremony? We know they are masters of the game of chess. Were they hoping for a Checkmate? However, as in years past, the Radar Sites of Iceland foiled the Russian Bear's game plan and sent them back to their dens. **The outstanding tradition of the “Silent Sentinels” of the Northern skies lives on!!**

Respectfully Submitted

Jerry Tonnell, H-2, 1959  
Reunion Historian