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SPECIAL HISTORICAL STUDY: Tracing of Organizational Structures, Weather
Reconnaissance Squadrons, End Of WW II to
Present (i.e. February 1959)

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First Steps Toward Weather Reconnaissance

The Army Air Force organized its first weather reconnaissance unit in August 1942 at Patterson Field, Ohio. The AAF Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Test) No. 1 -- sometimes called the 1st Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Test) -- was organized on 16 August 1942 at Patterson Field and received its first aircraft, a C-45, on 16 November 1942. The squadron was moved to Truax Field, Wisconsin on 20 April 1943 and in June 1943 moved again, this time to Presque Isle, Maine.

The squadron began operations in the North Atlantic in the summer of 1943. The squadron headquarters remained at Presque Isle AAB, Maine; Flight A flew between Goose Bay, Labrador and BW-1 Greenland; Flight B flew between BW-1 and Meeks field, Iceland; and Flight C flew between Meeks Field and Stornoway, Scotland. Nine B-25 aircraft were employed and each crew contained a qualified weather forecaster.

Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Test) No. 1 was redesignated as the 30th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron on 21 December 1943 with no change of station, and was assigned to Headquarters Air Transport Command.

With each approach of the winter season, twin-engine aircraft operations over the North Atlantic was deemed too hazardous and the flights of the reconnaissance squadron were sent to cover the South Atlantic ferry route from Morrison Field, Florida to Puerto Rico to Trinidad to Brazil.

Sometime between 21 December 1943 and 21 August 1944, the 30th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron was redesignated as the 30th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium - ATC. In August 1944, the unit became the 1st Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium – ATC. Headquarters of the 1st Squadron moved from Presque Isle, Maine to Grenier Field, New Hampshire on 5 and 6 September 1944. The squadron was inactivated on 21 December 1945.

The 2nd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium was activated in January 1945 at Key Field, Meridian, Mississippi and was assigned to III Reconnaissance Command. The first person was assigned to the 2nd Squadron on 1 February 1944. In August 1944 the squadron departed for the China-Burma-India theater and reached India on 14 October 1944. Control of the unit fell to the 10th Weather Region, Eastern Air Command. The 2nd Squadron was inactivated sometime in the latter part of 1945, probably during the month of November.

The 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium began its existence at Grenier Field, New Hampshire on 31 August 1944. It was redesignated as the 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Weather, Heavy with no change of station on 15 February 1945. On 20 June 1945, the squadron was redesignated as the 53rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather with no change of station. It took over the North Atlantic missions of the 1st Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium – ATC when that organization was inactivated in December 1945.

Several weather reconnaissance squadrons were formed and operated out of the British Isles under the command of General Roosevelt during World War II. These squadrons flew both target and synoptic reconnaissance missions, using B-24 and B-17 type aircraft. During the early part of 1945 a P-38 target weather reconnaissance squadron operated in the Italian theater.

Formation of the Present-Day Reconnaissance Force

Presently assigned weather reconnaissance squadrons of the Air Weather Service can trace their beginnings back to WW II organizations in almost every instance. They were not then assigned under the weather service, however.

The long-laid plans for weather reconnaissance in the post-war Air Force took shape in March 1946 with the forming of the Weather Reconnaissance Branch under the Operations and Training Division of Headquarters AWS at Langley Field, Virginia. This new branch was to form the nucleus of the 1st Air Weather Group (Provisional). The branch was headed by Lt Col James B. Baker, who had been the commanding Officer of the 2nd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Medium) which has served in the CBI theater under the 10th Weather Region during WW II.

In June 1946, Headquarters AWS moved from Langley Field, Virginia, to the Washington D.C. area, and the Reconnaissance Branch prepared to move to a new base to launch the reconnaissance program.

The establishment of the 1st Air Weather Group (Provisional) at Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida, by AWS General Order #19, 13 July 1946 to administer, train, equip and organize the four weather reconnaissance squadrons then assigned to the AWS was the first important step in the growth of the present reconnaissance fleet.

Assigned to the 1st Group were:

1. The 53rd Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather. This squadron had been activated as the 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Air Route, Medium at Grenier Field, New Hampshire on 31 August 1944. On 15 February 1945, it was redesignated as the 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Weather, Heavy with no change in station. On 20 June 1945 it was redesignated as the 53rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather with no change of station. On 13 March 1946 it was redesignated as the 53rd Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather still at Grenier Field. This squadron moved to Morrison Field, Florida in November 1946.
2. The 54th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather. This squadron had been the 8th Reconnaissance Squadron (Special), activated in England on 23 March 1944 and redesignated as the 654th Bomb Squadron, Heavy (Reconnaissance) in August 1944. The 654th returned to the ZI in August 1945 and was redesignated as the 54th Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather on 29 September 1945, located at Drew Field, Tampa, Florida. On 17 January 1946 the unit was redesignated as the 54th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather and moved to Buckley Field, Colorado. It was assigned to the AWS in March 1946. In June 1946 the squadron moved to Langley Field, Virginia and on 21 July 1946 moved to Morrison Field, Florida.
3. The 55th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather. This squadron was the 655th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) during WW II. On 16 Jun 1945, it was redesignated as the 55th Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather. The unit was then at Guam with an advance echelon at Iwo Jima. It was redesignated as the 55th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather on 19 November 1945. Personnel reductions brought the unit down to a "paper

organization" status and it moved to Buckley Field, Colorado in February and March 1946, arriving there on 20 March 1946. It was then assigned to the AWS and, on 1 April 1946, moved to Langley Field, Virginia. It moved to Morrison Field, Florida in July 1946.

4. The 59th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather. This squadron was the 59th Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather which, on 7 December 1945, was redesignated as the 59th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather at MacDill Field, Florida. In January 1946 the 59th Squadron moved from MacDill Field to Castle Field, California.

When the 1st Air Weather Group (Provisional) was activated at Morrison Field, Florida, only two of the assigned reconnaissance squadrons -- the 53rd at Grenier Field, New Hampshire and the 59th at Castle Field, California -- were active. Personnel for the 1st Group, therefore, came from these two squadrons and the 65th AAF Base Unit.

Operation of the Weather Reconnaissance Branch officially ceased at Langley Field at 0100 hours, 19 July 1946 and the 1st Group opened at the same time at Morrison Field. The two "paper organizations" -- the 54th and 55th Reconnaissance Squadrons, VLR, Weather -- were transferred to Morrison Field at this time. Both of these squadrons were scheduled for manning, training, and eventual overseas movement.

On 17 October 1946 the 1st Air Weather Group (Provisional) was discontinued and the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) was activated at Morrison Field, Florida. The two active and two in-training reconnaissance squadrons were assigned to the 308th Group.

In December 1946 the 59th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather moved from Castle Field, California to Fairfield-Suisun Field, California. The squadron flew missions between California and Alaska. (The first Ptarmigan mission was flown by this squadron on 7 March 1947.

The 53rd Squadron, during this period, was flying missions in the North Atlantic. Flight A of the 53rd, located at McChord Field, Washington in 1945, had ceased operations in that area on 23 May 1946 and had moved to Morrison Field, Florida, where it flew its first familiarization mission on 21 May 1946. Flight B of the 53rd had moved to Kindley Field, Bermuda on 8 January 1946 and the squadron headquarters was moved to Morrison Field, Florida in November 1946.

At the start of 1947, then, the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) had its headquarters and the 53rd, 54th, and 55th Reconnaissance Squadrons, VLR, Weather located at Morrison Field, Florida and the 59th Squadron at Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California.

Morrison Field had become crowded by this time and a new home was sought for the 308th Group. The active squadrons were scheduled to move, also; the 53rd was to

move to Kindley Field, Bermuda and the 59th was to move to Ladd Field, Alaska. The 308th Group was busy during the first few months of 1947 preparing the squadrons for deployment. Also scheduled for movement were the 54th Squadron to Guam and the 55th Squadron to Fairfield-Suisun, to replace the 59th at that location.

The 59th Squadron moved to Ladd Field, Alaska in May 1947, completing the movement about 1 June 1947. The squadron headquarters was established at Ladd Field, a detachment was located at Elmendorf Field, Alaska, and B Flight remained at Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California.

The 55th Squadron, having completed its training period at Morrison Field, moved to Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California on 1 June 1947.

The 54th Squadron, also having completed its training at Morrison Field, deployed to North Field, Guam on 11 June 1947.

The 53rd Squadron deployed from Morrison Field, Florida to Kindley Field, Bermuda in June and July 1947.

Plans which had called for the permanent assignment of the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) on the east coast were changed when it was decided that administrative control could be more efficiently maintained from the west coast, since three of the four squadrons would operate in the Pacific area. Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California was selected as a new home and the advanced echelon of the Group headquarters began operating at Fairfield-Suisun AAB at 0001 hours, 1 July 1947.

Thus, by mid-1947, the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) had its headquarters at Fairfield-Suisun AAB and had the following squadrons under its supervision:

53rd Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather
Kindley Field, Bermuda

54th Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather
North Field, Guam

55th Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather
Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California

59th Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather
Ladd Field, Alaska

Redesignations of 1947

All squadrons of the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) were inactivated on 15 October 1947. New organizations were activated on 16 October 1947 to replace the units lost. The new units bore 3-digit designations:

The 373rd Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather replaced the 53rd and was assigned to the 8th Weather Group, Fort Totten, Long Island, New York.

The 514th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather replaced the 54th and was assigned to the 43rd Weather Wing, Tokyo, Japan.

The 374th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather replaced the 55th and was assigned to the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather), Fairfield-Suisun AAB, California.

The 375th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather replaced the 59th and was assigned to the 7th Weather Group, Fairbanks, Alaska.

The 308th Reconnaissance Group continued to serve as the training organization for all the squadrons.

The 1st Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special)

Several major problems in connection with reconnaissance training resulted in the activation, on 1 June 1948, of the 1st Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special) at Fairfield-Suisun AFB, California, with a mission of training replacement personnel for weather reconnaissance and for conducting special research studies for development of equipment and reconnaissance techniques.

The 1st Squadron was redesignated as the 2078th Air Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special) on 1 October 1948 and moved to Tinker AFB, Oklahoma in October and November of 1949.

Reconnaissance Units at the start of 1949

In recapitulation: at the start of 1949, Air Weather Service reconnaissance units included the following:

308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather), Fairfield-Suisun AFB, California
2078th Air Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special), at Fairfield Suisun AFB, California.

The 373th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Kindley Field, Bermuda

The 374th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Fairfield-Suisun AFB, California

The 375th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Ladd Field, Alaska

The 514th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, North Field, Guam

Activation of the 512th Squadron

The long-awaited activation of the 512th Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather, resulting from an expanded aerial weather reconnaissance program, became a fact effective 13 February 1949 when the unit was activated at Fairfield-Suisun AFB, California. The new squadron was assigned to the 308th Group for manning, equipping and training of personnel pending stabilization of the reconnaissance units already present and active at Fairfield-Suisun AFB.

Background of this new unit was:

The 512th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) was activated on 31 October 1942. It was redesignated as the 512th Bombardment Squadron, Heavy on 22 February 1944 and redesignated as the 512th Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy on 19 May 1945. The squadron was inactivated on 26 March 1946 at Roswell Army Air Field, New Mexico. Redesignated as the 512th Reconnaissance Squadron, Very Long Range, Weather, the unit was activated as a reserve unit (apparently) on 23 May 1947 and was inactivated once again on 20 September 1948. It remained inactivated until its reactivation on 13 February 1949 as part of the 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather).

Movement of the 375th

The 375th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, moved from Ladd Field, Alaska to Eielson AFB, Alaska on 6 March 1949 with no change of mission.

Mid-1949 Status

Fairfield-Suisun AFB was to be transferred to SAC and the crowded conditions at the base meant that the 308th Group would have to move. Plans were made in mid-1947 for the 308th Group headquarters and the 2078th Squadron to move to Tinker AFB, Oklahoma and for the 374th Squadron to move to McClellan AFB, Calif. The 512th Squadron's training was speeded up in anticipation of an early movement date.

Activation of the 513th Squadron

The 513th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather was activated effective 10 August 1949 at Fairfield-Suisun AFB. Because of the pending movement of the 308th Group and its squadrons from that base, the 513th was manned as a "paper organization" with complete manning delayed until subsequent to the movement to Tinker AFB.

Movements

The 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) with its squadrons – the 2078th, the 374th, the 512th and the 513th – was committed to depart Fairfield-Suisun AFB not later than 16 November 1949.

Movement of the 308th, the 2078th, and the 513th to Tinker AFB began in mid-October 1949 and was completed by 11 November 1949.

The 374th moved from Fairfield-Suisun AFB to McClellan AFB, California in October 1949.

The 512th was transferred from the 308th Group to the 2143rd Weather Wing, Tokyo, Japan and received movement orders in September 1949. The movement of this squadron took place mostly in December 1949 and January 1950 to Yokota AB, Japan.

Status at Start of 1950

At the start of 1950, Air Weather Service reconnaissance units included the following:

- 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather), Tinker AFB, Oklahoma
- 2078th Air Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special), Tinker AFB, Oklahoma – assigned to the 308th Group
- The 513th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Tinker AFB, Oklahoma (a paper organization) – assigned to the 308th Group
- The 374th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, McClellan AFB, California – assigned to the 308th Group
- The 375th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Eielson AFB, Alaska – assigned to the 7th Weather Group
- The 373th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Kindley Field, Bermuda – assigned to the 8th Weather Group
- The 512th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Yokota AB, Japan – assigned to the 2143rd Weather Wing
- The 514th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, Andersen AFB, Guam – assigned to the 2143rd Weather Wing

Discontinuance of the 2078th

On 20 March 1950, the 2078th Air Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Special) was discontinued at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. All of the personnel of this unit were transferred to the 513th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, which had moved to Tinker AFB in the status of a “paper organization”. Almost immediately the 513th was alerted for a special project at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Flight B of the squadron deployed to Arabia, leaving Flights A, C, and D at Tinker AFB.

The Changes of 1951

The 308th Reconnaissance Group (Weather) began to outlive its usefulness in the latter part of 1950. The Group was inactivated at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma effective 5

January 1951. This action was the start of an overall change in the reconnaissance program.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 373rd Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather was inactivated at Kindley AFB, Bermuda. The 53rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated on 20 February 1951 at Kindley AFB, Bermuda.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 514th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather was inactivated at Andersen AFB, Guam. The 54th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated on 20 February 1951 at Andersen AFB, Guam.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 374th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather was inactivated at McClellan AFB, California. The 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated on 20 February 1951 at McClellan AFB, California.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 512th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather (which had moved from Yokota AB, Japan to Misawa AB, Japan on 1 August 1950) was inactivated at Misawa AB, Japan. The 56th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated on 20 February 1951 at Misawa AB, Japan.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 513th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather, which was then in the process of deploying from Tinker AFB, Oklahoma to the Pacific area to support Operation GREENHOUSE, was inactivated at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. The 57th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated at Hickam AFB, Hawaii on 20 February 1951.

Effective 19 February 1951 the 375th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather was inactivated at Eielson AFB, Alaska. The 58th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated at Eielson AFB, Alaska on 20 February 1951.

In September 1951 the 56th Squadron moved from Misawa AB, Japan to Yokota, AB, Japan.

Move of the 53rd Squadron

The 53rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather moved from Kindley, AFB Bermuda to Burtonwood RAF Station, England in November 1953. Flight A of the squadron remained at Kindley AFB, Bermuda to accomplish hurricane and synoptic reconnaissance in that area.

Redesignation of Reconnaissance Units

Effective 15 February 1954, all of the Strategic Reconnaissance Squadrons, Medium, Weather of the Air Weather Service were redesignated as Weather Reconnaissance Squadrons. This action gave the AWS the following units:

53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Burtonwood RAF Station, England
Flight A, 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Kindley AFB, Bermuda
54th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Andersen AFB, Guam
55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, McClellan AFB, California
56th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Yokota AB, Japan
57th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Hickam AFB, Hawaii
58th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Eielson AFB, Alaska

Activation of the 59th Flight

The 59th Weather Reconnaissance Flight was activated on 8 May 1955 at Kindley AFB, Bermuda, assuming the mission of the discontinued Flight A, 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron.

This organization is not to be confused with the old 59th Reconnaissance Squadron, VLR, Weather which, through a series of Redesignations, ultimately became the 58th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron.

Effective 1 April 1956 the 59th Flight at Bermuda was redesignated as the 59th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron.

1958 Changes

Organizationally, the AWS experienced a reduction in the number of reconnaissance squadrons during the last half of 1958. Air Force manpower reductions had resulted in a special USAF "Manpower Reduction Working Group" which had decided that the AWS should lose two of its reconnaissance squadrons. The AWS drafted a proposal which conformed to the spirit, if not the letter, of the working group's recommendation, calling for the inactivation of the 57th and 58th Squadrons with transfer of most of their personnel and aircraft to the 55th WRS. The 55th would then set up detachments at Hickam, Ladd, and McChord AF Bases.

The last 58th WRS mission was flown on 30 June 1958. In May and June 1958 the aircraft, crews and most of the maintenance and administrative personnel were transferred to McChord AFB, Washington, forming Detachment 3, 55th WRS, effective 1 July 1958. Many of the 58th's maintenance personnel and some administrative personnel were transferred from Eielson AFB to Ladd AFB, Alaska, to form Detachment 1, 55th WRS, also effective 1 July 1958. Actual inactivation of the 58th WRS was effected on 8 August 1958.

The 57th WRS, meanwhile, was engaged in support of Operation HARDTACK in the Pacific and its inactivation was deferred until completion of the operation. Detachment 2, 55th WRS was organized at Hickam AFB, Hawaii on 1 July 1958, but the detachment was not completely staffed and equipped until October 1958, when the 57th was inactivated.

Status of Reconnaissance Organization

The status (as of February 1959) of the reconnaissance organization within the Air Weather Service was as follows:

- 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Burtonwood RAF Station, England
- 54th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Anderson AFB, Guam
- 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, McClellan AFB, California
 - Det 1, 55th WRS, Ladd AFB, Alaska
 - Det 2, 55th WRS, Hickam AFB, Hawaii
 - Det 3, 55th WRS McChord AFB, Washington
- 56th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Yokota AB, Japan
- 59th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, Kindley AFB, Bermuda