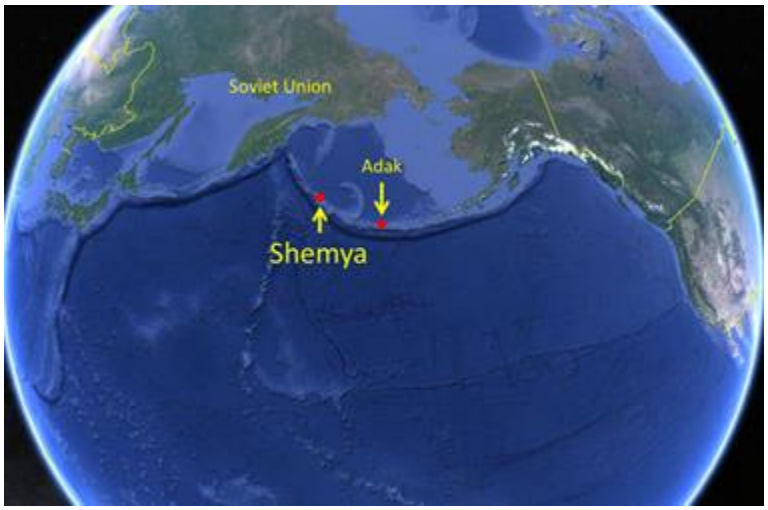
NSGC SHEMYA ALASKA



Special thanks to CWO3 Marv Hagedorn (Ret.) and CTMC Larry Wetham (Ret.) for updating this post.

The U.S. Naval Security Group Detachment Shemya, AK, with part time Communications Technician (CT) personnel TAD from NSG Dept, NCS Adak, AK, was officially established in 1963. In 1965, the Detachment shifted to full time activation, with its own complement of CT's. Sometime, shortly after 1968, NSG Det Shemya disestablished and closed. All personnel, assets, mission and functions were transferred to NSG Dept, NCS Adak.

In 1976, Cobra Dane was built to support the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II, or SALT II. The giant radar structure is located on the tip of Shemya island and is so large it is easily located from space. The structure itself is 120 feet tall, with a radar array 94.5 feet across. Cobra Dane's main component is a L-Band phased array radar operating in the 1175-1375 MHz ranges. The slab-like radar consists of 34,768 elements, including 15,360 active radiating

elements, set in a pattern that enables 136 degrees of radar coverage. The result is a radar so powerful it is capable of watching a 2,000-mile corridor within Russia and the former Soviet Union, keeping an eye out for missile and satellite launches. It can detect and track up to 120 targets and maintain precise tracking data on 20 of them. Cobra Dane also provides tracking data to the U.S. Ground Midcourse Defense anti-ballistic missile system, which can shoot down a small number of intercontinental ballistic missiles headed for the Continental United States.

Classic Owl Det

The 1980s saw increased interest and many new projects on Shemya Island. In 1986, the Army constructed Queen's Match, a Star Wars missile defense research facility, on the northeast side of the island. Most World War II facilities and equipment were dismantled and disposed of during the 1980s. In 1989, a massive military construction effort called "Fix Shemya" was used to build replacement facilities and repair existing facilities.

In October of 1990, CTRCM Bob Tuggle (GX Facilities Dir) and CTMC Larry Wetham (Det AOIC) did an initial site survey for placement of the initial Classic Owl AN/TSQ-161 system. The old NSA Anderson building, no longer in use, was chosen to house the mission equipment and house the various CTs who would rotate from mainland Alaska. CWO2 Marv Hagedorn was selected early on as the OIC of NSGSD Shemya (All of these detachments later changed in 1993 to detachment numbers 1, 2, 3 & 4 because of various potential deployment locations). In the spring of 1991, the first NSGSD Three CTs started to arrive to Elmendorf AFB. Having been trained in Winter Harbor for 6 months on the Classic Owl system dynamics and abilities, they were sent to Anchorage and initially worked out of the same offices that housed the NSGA Anchorage crew. As more Classic Owl crew arrived, a temporary building was constructed in the woods not far from the CDAA operated by the Air Force in the late summer of 1991.

While awaiting for a temporary/permanent building the crew traveled a great deal between Shemya, California and Florida to prepare the Classic Owl systems for deployment to their final home inside and outside of the Shemya Anderson building. In the summer of 1991, the final acceptance testing was completed of the AN/TSQ-161, that was comprised of 7 tractor trailers and a 5

ton cable truck, that was deployed to a very hot Camp Roberts, CA. The crew learned a great deal about deploying in very hot conditions and the nasty critters that seemed to thrive that heat. Once the system testing was completed and the system returned to the factory for minor upgrades and fixes, the detachment crew flew it from Travis AFB via a C-5, using ALL the runway to land, to Elmendorf AFB in Anchorage. It was then set up at it's temporary site in the woods and tested where it continued to be upgraded for more capabilities while the crew continued to train with it.

Marine Lt. Gen. Ronald Christmas was the Ops Chief and directed operations of the Detachment for CINCPAC in 1991. He came to Anchorage and Commissioned NSGSD Shemya on 22 November 1991 (picture attached).

In February of 1992 the "new" NSGSD Shemya crew took the system to Ft. Richardson for the NSG's first Classic Owl Alaskan winter deployment of the AN/TSQ-161. Having outfitted the Cable truck with a very large snowplow to be used to clear LZ's and other areas of snow for the setup of the system, many lessons were again learned about chaining tires, getting tractor trailers un-stuck, frozen air brakes, winter critters and frostbite in the cold Alaskan weather. When not deployed to an LZ for training, the crew spent a great deal of time between Florida preparing the AN/TSQ-181 system and Shemya preparing the Anderson building for operations and creating crew spaces.

In the summer of 1992, the AN/TSQ-161 was flown via an Air Force C-5 to Shemya for its forward deployment into and outside of the Anderson building. Again, using ALL the runway to land in Shemya, the system was set up for operations in the constant high winds of the island. The Anderson building was located on the NE corner of the island, it was about 150' above

sea level, where the snow always flew sideways only to land in Adak some 350 miles to the East. The large HF antennas were set up in the weather and initially worked well, but over time faltered due to terrible weather.

While some of the crew worked on setting up operations at Shemya, the rest of the crew was continuing work with the AN/TSQ-181 to prepare its deployment to the island. While CTRCM Tuggle was struggling to create a large enough radome next to the Anderson building to fit the 181 system's 40' trailer, others were doing cold weather soak testing of that Classic Owl system at Eglin AFB in Florida. While cold soaking the system alongside the "new" Air Force C-17 at -80' the crew got to experience operating the system inside the freezer and, again, learning about how quickly frostbite occurs… even in Florida! Once all testing was completed, that system was returned to the manufacturer and was then transported, again by an AF C-5, from Pope AFB FL to Shemya. C-5 break downs seemed too regular an occurrence so the trip took 8 days of flying/repair along the way. After the second attempt to try to land at Shemya in the early spring of 1994, the A/TSQ-181 was finally forward deployed to the Anderson building, minus the radome that had flown away with the wind just too many times.

Hangar 2 on Shemya Island remained an aircraft hangar for 45 years, and as the AR Cobra Ball program phased out, many elements of the Classic Owl program were moved into the hanger. Facility 110 (Hangar 2) was utilized to house both the NSG Support Det, and the 381st Intelligence Squadron (381st IS USAFSS), performing the Classic Owl and Sensor Reach missions. In 1993, Shemya AFB was renamed Eareckson Air Station in honor of Col William O. Eareckson. In 1995, NSG Support Det Three, Shemya, AK merged with NSG

Support Det Seven, and was renamed the NSG Support Det Seven FWD (Forward Deployed), Shemya, AK. Also in 1995, Eareckson Air Station went through a draw down phase and converted to contractor support and maintenance for operation of the Cobra Dane radar. NSG Support Det Seven FWD was officially disestablished on March 31, 1995.

After 50 years of service to the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Coast Guard, the base at Shemya was turned over to caretaker status on March 31, 1995, to be operated by the DoD contractor firm of PMC. The Island remains a strategic refueling stop for military aircraft, as well as a link in the U.S. long-range early warning radar system.

Sources:
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https://stationhypo.com/2021/12/30/nsgd-shemya-alaska-established-guest-post/comment-page-1/