



THE DEATH OF SAC (20 YEARS LATER) Raymond L. Ruetsch

June 1, 2012 is just around the corner. You may ask why is this date important? It is important because that is the 20th anniversary of the massive reorganization (destruction) of the world's greatest Air Force by Merrill A. McPeak. June 1, 2012 is the day that an individual can retire without having had the honor and privilege of serving in the Strategic Air Command or even being in the Air Force when SAC existed.

McPeak for some reason hated SAC. I am sure he had his reasons. He wanted to destroy it and he did. He wanted everything done his way. People I have talked to said it was his way or the highway for anyone who disagreed with him.

I was told by a museum curator that under McPeak's direction, it was mandated that any old SAC aircraft on static display at any Air Force bases would have the SAC decals removed and be replaced with ACC decals (even though those particular aircraft had never served in ACC). It is my understanding that some refused and the AF Museum (who owns a lot of those aircraft) backed them up. McPeak had nothing to do with it but they even renamed the SAC Museum as the Strategic Air and Space Museum -- another way of deleting any memory of SAC.

He wanted no record of SAC to be recorded anywhere. He said he believed in history but evidently that did not include anything about SAC. SAC in the early days had fighter wings assigned to them so he could have folded TAC into SAC and kept it as SAC. He renamed SAC squadrons with TAC squadron numbers. The 24 Reconnaissance Squadron which flew Cobra Ball aircraft for years was renamed the 45 RS, an old TAC recon unit. The 2 Airborne Command and Communications Squadron (ACCS) had flown Looking Glass missions for over 25 years. They were renamed 7 ACCS, an old EC-130 unit. He even changed the patch of the 55th Wing which they had used for years and reflected their mission to a patch of a World War II fighter wing.

I talked to a friend of mine who knew of the meetings about where command headquarters would be located. AMC Hq was never under discussion since Scott was the only choice. ACC HQ was between Langley and Offutt. A team was set up to make recommendations. Offutt had one building that could hold everybody. There was plenty of housing in the area. A new underground command center had been completed about five years earlier. Basically both on-base and off-base infrastructure could handle the merger (I am sorry, it was not a merger - it was a hostile takeover). Langley did not have the housing necessary. HQ staff offices were scattered among several buildings and more space would have to be leased off-base. Choice seemed logical - Offutt. I was told that when McPeak went to the meeting he opened the meeting with the comment to the team that if their recommendation was Offutt as ACC Hq then they needed to go back and reaccomplish their briefing until Langley was the answer. The meeting adjourned and reconvened the next day. When the SAC people arrived at

Langley and discovered that some of their offices were downtown, they told the command that it was unacceptable because due to security reasons they needed to be in a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) -- an accredited area, room, group of rooms, or installation where sensitive compartmented information may be stored, used, discussed, and/or electronically processed, where procedural and physical measures prevent the free access of persons unless they have been formally indoctrinated for the particular sensitive compartmented information authorized for use or storage within the sensitive compartmented information facility. The ACC people had no clue what it was.

Fortunately a lot of the havoc he caused was reversed after he retired and General Fogleman became Chief of Staff.

He put maintenance under ops. Did not work and maintenance works for maintenance again.

Everyone had to be flight commanders. Unfortunately, by regulation, commanders had to work for other commanders. As the squadron maintenance officer I had a captain and a lieutenant who worked for me. In the old days they would have been Section OICs and I would write their performance reports. But as flight commanders they technically worked for the squadron commanders and he wrote the performance reports. Technically I could not tell them how to run their flights since they did not work for me. Fortunately, my squadron commander knew that he did not have the expertise to run their flights and always deferred to me (as most good squadron commanders did). The operations officer had the same problem since his flight chiefs were now flight commanders and also worked for the commander. Heck of a system. One of my flight commanders went behind my back to the squadron commander after a little discussion with me (more of an ass-chewing than discussion). My squadron commander threw her out of his office and told her that he did not care what the regulations said, she worked for me and she had better listen to me. (She eventually got out of service and two years later she emailed me with an apology for her actions).

We got our uniform back (with epaulets) so we would not be mistaken for the Navy or airline pilots.

We got stripes and officer insignia back on the uniforms so we would not have to stare at a leather nametag to see what rank someone was. (Was frustrating because when I went to the flightline to oversee a problem aircraft, I wanted to look up and see how many stripes were working on the problem. The more stripes I saw, the more relaxed I was.

Total Quality Management (TQM) or as we called it "To Quote McPeak" went by the wayside under General Fogleman.

Other changes too numerous to mention, (like V-neck T-shirts, etc)

ACC received the nuclear mission and basically threw out all the regulations that SAC had written because they had SAC on them. We all know how that turned out when Minot flew nuclear loaded cruise missiles to Barksdale by accident. I know that would never have happened

in the old SAC days since it took an act of God and many signatures, checks, double-checks, etc before we got a nuke out of the Weapons Storage Area (WSA). Of course, that brought Global Strike Command, a cheap imitation of SAC. I wish someone would have had the guts to just call Global Strike Command its true name -- STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND. Even the Air Force Association magazine states on pages 110 - 112 of the May 2012 Almanac under the list of SAC leaders ““Established as Continental Air Forces Dec. 13, 1944. Redesignated Strategic Air Command March 21, 1946. Inactivated June 1, 1992. Redesignated and activated Air Force Global Strike Command Aug 7, 2009.” Under the Air Force Global Strike Command entry it states “Established as Continental Air Forces Dec. 13, 1944. Redesignated Strategic Air Command March 21, 1946. Inactivated June 1, 1992 and activated as AFGSC Aug 7, 2009.” Under Tactical Air Command it states, “Established March 21, 1946. Reassigned to Continental Air Command (1948). Removed from CAC and returned to major command status Dec. 1, 1950. Inactivated June 1, 1992.” If McPeak really believed in history, he would have folded TAC into SAC since SAC was an older command having started as Continental Air Forces in 1944. (refer back to my chapter on McPeak’s love of history - at least his version of it)

People coming to SAC from other commands used to laugh because we did not read the white pages of regulations, we read the yellow pages (SAC Supplements). Most of my career was spent in SAC or with SAC aircraft after they went to ACC. The only exceptions were a year at Osan as Headquarters Squadron Commander (before crosstraining into aircraft maintenance), a year at Kunsan as Assistant RM and Deputy LG, and my final 3 years at Luke in AETC. While at Osan, I ran my squadron using SAC supplements since PACAF had no guidance other than the vague AF regs. My weight management program, meal card program, and several others received outstanding ratings and rated as best on the base by the PACAF IG and they stated that they were models for other squadrons. The Wing Commander told his other squadrons to send his people to see me to get procedures on running these programs. I am sure if they knew I was following SAC rules, I would have flunked. (The assistant DCM at the time had been on the SAC IG team before coming to Osan and we had a few laughs over that).

I feel sorry for those who never served in SAC. I am proud of being **SACumsized**. We knew our mission and performed it. When we flew our reconnaissance birds, we had a real world mission. When the klaxon sounded at Shemya and we launched the Cobra Ball RC-135, we knew we were tracking a Soviet missile launch and ops and maintenance worked as a team. I never felt this way in any other command. When we sat alert, we had a real world mission. ORIs were tough but it proved that we would perform if we had to. Seeing those MITO launches during an ORI really got the heart pounding. Maintenance and Ops worked together and celebrated together at the end. MSET and CEVG were hated but they kept us on our toes.

During my 3 years at a fighter wing (my final 3 years before retirement), I served under three fighter squadron commanders. Only one of them respected maintenance people as people and actually listened to them. The other two saw them as their slaves. There were no squadron parties. Ops had their parties and maintenance had their parties. The only joint thing we did was a Thanksgiving lunch the Friday before Thanksgiving. Maintenance would organize it, clean the hangar, set it up, do all the cooking, and clean it up. The pilots would buy the hams and turkeys and then show up to eat. There were a few pilots that stayed around and helped us clean up. An incident in one squadron involved three F-16 instructor pilots. They were flying a strafing

mission on the range. When they fired their guns they were about 10 miles off target and about 5 miles off the range boundaries. They strafed a civilian's campfire and trailer. Luckily no one was hurt. No action was taken against them and they continued to fly and train future F-16 pilots. Maintenance people would be hammered with Letters of Reprimands and Article 15s for lesser incidents. I am not against pilots or other aircrew members. Without them, we would not have an Air Force. However, my point is that the SAC pilots and crews seemed to treat their maintenance people with more respect.

People who served in SAC had their own language and a camaraderie that in my opinion, other commands do not have. I have served in SAC, ACC, AETC, and PACAF and only feel a kinship to fellow SAC veterans. We are the ones who must keep the memory alive.

I have been retired 12 years now and I miss the mission, the people, but not the bullshit.

God Bless all those who served in SAC.



SAC IS BACK ---- AS GLOBAL STRIKE COMMAND

