

Saratoga County Plane Spotters Occupy Site Used as Vantage Point in Revolutionary War

Radar Plays Vital Role on Hills Between Saratoga Lake, Hudson

By ELLEN QUA
Times-Union Correspondent

SARATOGA SPRINGS, Jan. 25 — High hills circling Ketchum Corners, between Saratoga Lake and the Hudson River to the East, were once vantage points for the British-hunting scouts of the American Revolution. Today, the same area, headquarters site of the 656th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron, still has a strategic function in defense of this country and the North American Continent.

Through a complex network of defense radar segments, the planeless Air Force base, opened in March, 1952, carries out the same mission of the freedom-loving Revolutionists. In this missile age, however, tactics and equipment have changed to cope with an enemy which might strike at any time from the skies. Highly technical radar instruments allow the men to scan the skies for more than a 200-mile radius. Every type of aircraft aloft within its range is detected and its mission, military, commercial or just pleasure, is recorded. The radar operations section, on continuous duty, is manned by approximately 25 technicians.

Three huge tubular "radomes" which house the search radar, attract all eyes to the hill topping the 40-acre layout. In winter, the antennae are covered as a protection against ice, snow and wind which slashes one "Old Glory" a month. The squadron, formed in 1950, had temporary

quarters at the Schenectady Army Depot. Since the million dollar base opened, additional funds have been spent for operational units, a recreational hall and housing units.

BASE WINS AWARD

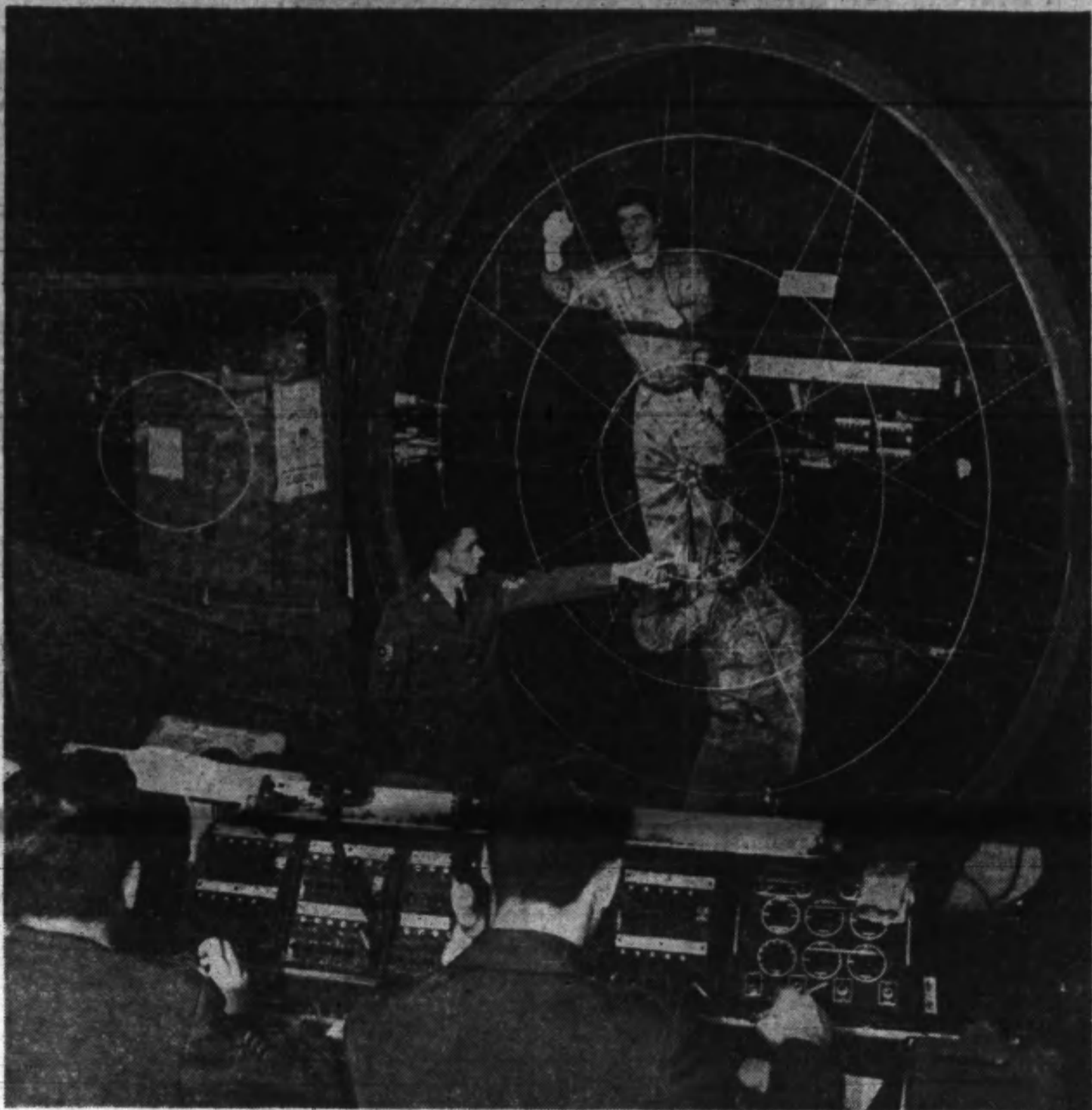
Major Joseph D. Elsberry, commanding officer since August, points with pride to a coveted Air Defense Command "A" Award which he recently accepted on behalf of the base. It was presented to him at Westover Air Force Base in recognition of outstanding accomplishment in operational effectiveness.

According to Major Elsberry, the evaluation was accomplished under simulated combat conditions with high-speed "unknown" targets penetrating the New England area at high altitudes in all weather conditions at all times of day and night.

While government agencies rally to expedite missile projects and other related defense programs, the radar stations stand even more alert against enemy planes that might escape the northern-most radar lines. The first line of continental defense is the "DEW" (distant early warning) Radar Line that crosses North America from Alaska to Greenland. South of that is the coast to coast battery known as the Mid-Canada Radar Line.

FROM SEA TO SEA

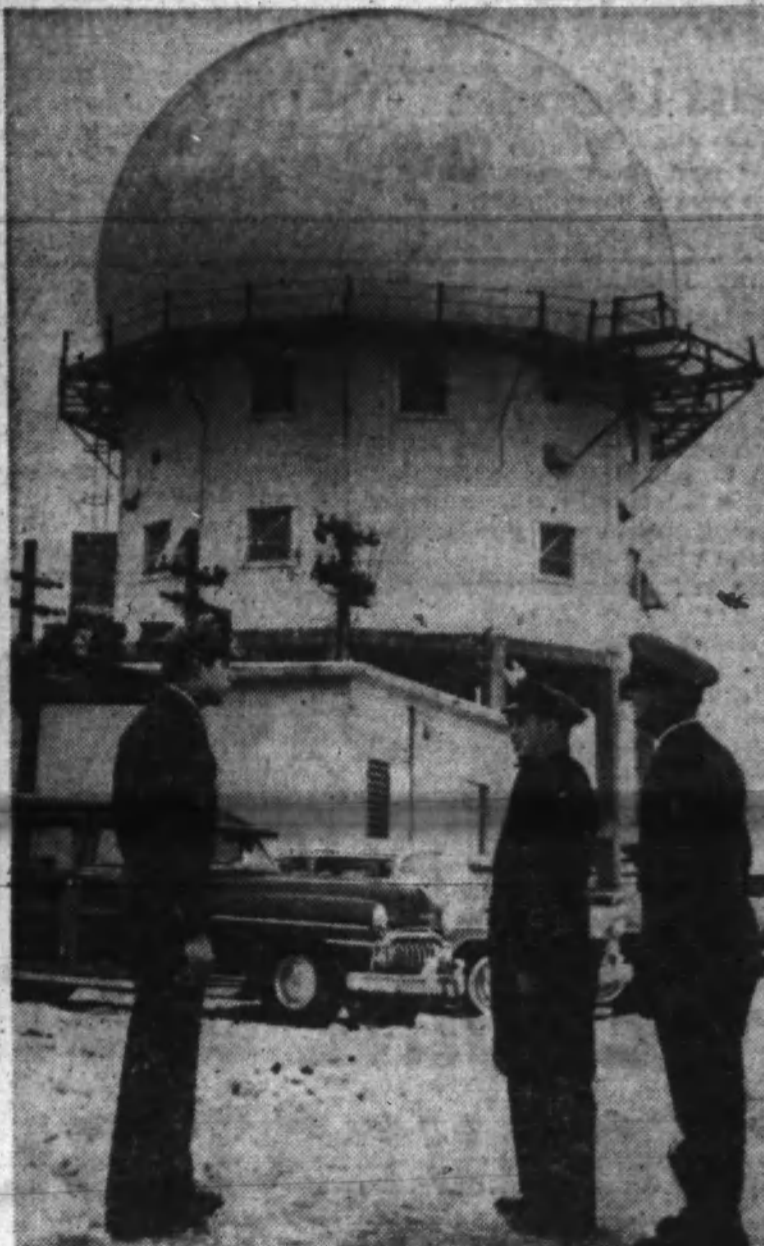
The 656th Base is one of several warning stations giving solid coverage on the East coast of the United States. Anchored off-coast are the radar "Tex" towers so named because of their similarity to Texas oil towers. The same set-up guards the West Coast. Navy blimps and airborne early warning planes augment the patrol duty of ocean radar station ships and radar picket escort vessels.



Technical Sgt. Harold Oister, surveillance section crew chief, pointing, directs the plotting of path of aircraft being tracked by radar at the 656th Air Control and Warning Squadron base at Ketchum's

Corners in Saratoga County. Men working behind glass oval have learned to write backwards so their notations may be read from the opposite side of the chart.

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The dome of this radar tower at the Saratoga Air Force Base is plastic and is held upright by 15 pounds of air pressure. 1st Lt. James Chaplin, of Sewickly, Pa., center, discusses an exercise with Airman 2/C Benjamin Torrent, left, of Puerto Rico, and Master Sgt. William H. Venneman, of St. Louis, Mo.



MAJ. JOSEPH D. ELSBERRY
Commanding Officer

At the base operations section, lights are dimmed to accent the blinking signals of instruments that check movements and identify aircraft. All maneuvers are plotted on a ten-foot diameter plexiglas scope by a writer. Standing behind the transparent scope, he chalks up locations of aircraft according to information

relayed to him mechanically by a teller. In order that the plotting is legible to others, he must be adept in writing backwards.

Through the geo-reference system, the 656th Base is able to communicate track positions from one radar site to any other. Radio and direct telephone lines speed up com-

munications. Navigational assistance is given to aircraft and weather reports are dispatched.

sends up a "scramble" fighter. Control fighters are guided by radar to determine the exact altitude of the intruder as well as its speed and line of flight. Should it prove to be an enemy craft, the entire area would be warned. While underway, the action is being plotted simultaneously to give a full picture of operations. The

surveillance and control section makes the tactical decisions and prescribes the course of action in emergencies. Anti-aircraft and Nike (missile) installations are alerted if the unknown plane escapes the fighter-interceptors.

Lt. Francis Tow, often assigned as senior director in charge of operations, sums up the attitude of his men on their mission of alertness with "we darn well better not

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