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Defense Orientation Conference Association



LA & Vandenberg AFB Program Executive Summary

March 2017

Eighty-five DOCA members and prospective members recently returned from an all-too-brief visit to Los Angeles Air Force Base and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The heavy rain that had plagued southern and central California in recent weeks had thankfully subsided by the time we arrived and we were able to enjoy more typical sunshine and mild temperatures.

We met at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott in El Segundo and kicked things off with a welcome meeting for eight members on their first DOCA program: Cheryl Ball of Costa Mesa, CA; Johnna Grant of Newport Beach, CA; Mary Hughes of Anchorage, AK; Tom Kandel of Reston, VA; Cassie Kane of Apple Valley, MN; Bruce Kiessling of Anchorage, AK; Trish O'Donnell of Newport Beach, CA; and Phin Upham of San Francisco, CA.

On Wednesday, March 15th, we made the short drive to Los Angeles Air Force Base. The base traces its history back to the Air Research and Development Command's Western Development Division, which was activated on 1 July 1954 in Inglewood, not far from the current base. In 1961, the Air Force developed a plan to consolidate its Space Systems Division and the Research and Development (R&D) Center of The Aerospace Corporation, which had been created in 1960 to support Air Force space programs. The plan involved acquisition of two pieces of real estate adjoining the R&D Center. An aircraft plant owned by the Navy at the northwest corner of Aviation and El Segundo Boulevards, was transferred to the Air Force in October 1962. An adjacent site was owned by a mining company. The Aerospace Corporation acquired that site in November 1962 and built its new headquarters there between February 1963 and April 1964. By April 10, 1964, the Air Force property at the intersection of Aviation and El Segundo Boulevards was designated as Los Angeles Air Force Station, and then re-designated Los Angeles Air Force Base in September 1987.



Today, LA AFB is home to Air Force Space Command's Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) – the “birthplace” of the U.S. Air Force's ballistic missile and military space program. SMC is the Air Force's center of acquisition excellence for acquiring and developing military space systems. Its portfolio includes the Global Positioning System, military satellite communications, defense meteorological satellites, space launch and range systems, satellite control networks, space based infrared systems and space situational awareness capabilities.

Upon our arrival, we were greeted by Mr. Tom Fitzgerald, the Director of Engineering at SMC, and Colonel Charles Roberts, Commander 61st Air Base Group. We then split in to three groups for a “round robin” tour of the installation covering an overview of Space and Missile Systems Center's mission, their Heritage Center and their electric vehicle fleet.





Then we reconvened the entire group for presentations by four of SMC's principal directorates: Military GPS, Launch Enterprise, Remote Sensing Systems and Military Satellite Communications Systems.



After lunch with senior SMC officials, we once again boarded buses for the drive north to Santa Maria, CA, and checked into our hotel in preparation for our visit to Vandenberg Air Force Base the next morning.

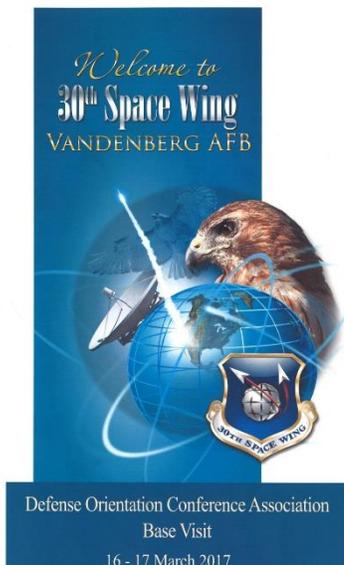
In 1941 the United States Army sought more and better training centers for the rapid development of its armored and infantry forces. In March 1941, the Army acquired approximately 86,000 acres of open ranch lands along the Central Coast of California. With its flat plateau, surrounding hills, numerous canyons, and relative remoteness from populated areas, the Army was convinced it had found the ideal training location, and so established Camp Cooke. The 5th Armored Division rolled into camp and the steady roar of its tanks and artillery soon became part of the daily scene. From then until the end of the war, other armored and infantry divisions kept up the din before they too left for overseas duty.

Besides the 5th Division, the 6th, 11th, 13th, and 20th Armored Divisions as well as the 86th and 97th Infantry Divisions, and the 2d Filipino Infantry Regiment were all stationed at Cooke at varying times during the war. Also trained at Cooke were an assortment of anti-aircraft artillery, combat engineer, ordnance, and hospital units. Over 400 separate and distinct outfits passed through Camp Cooke.

As the war progressed, German and Italian prisoners of war (the latter organized into Italian Service Units) were quartered at Camp Cooke. Both groups were kept separate from each other in accordance with the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, and worked on the post at various jobs including mechanical and civil engineering services, clerical positions, food service, and the main laundry. To help relieve the severe labor shortage in the commercial market created by wartime exigencies, the Germans also worked in local communities – mostly in agricultural jobs.

A maximum-security army disciplinary barracks was constructed on post property in 1946. Confined to the facility were military prisoners from throughout the Army. When Camp Cooke closed in June 1946, personnel at the disciplinary barracks received the additional duty as installation caretakers. Practically the entire camp was then leased for agriculture and grazing.

From August 1950 to February 1953, Camp Cooke served as a training installation for units slated for combat in Korea, and as a summer training base for many other reserve units. On 1 February 1953, the camp was again inactivated. The disciplinary barracks, meanwhile, was transferred to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons to house civilian offenders in August 1959. Today it is known as the United States Penitentiary, Lompoc.



With the advent of the missile age in the 1950s, an urgent need arose for an adequate training site that could also serve as America's first combat ready missile base. In January 1956, a select committee was formed that examined more than 200 potential sites before Camp Cooke was chosen, essentially for the same characteristics the Army found desirable in 1941. Besides its size, remoteness from heavily populated areas, and moderate climate which afforded year-round operations Cooke's coastal location allowed missiles to be launched into the Pacific Ocean without population overflights. This same geographic feature also enabled satellites to be launched into polar orbit directly toward the South Pole without overflying any land mass until reaching Antarctica.

In June 1957, North Camp Cooke was renamed Cooke Air Force Base, and on 21 June 1957 was transferred to the Air Force. In January, however, the Air Force, had received access to the camp, and with the arrival of the first airman in February, established on the 15th the 6591st Support Squadron. The initial mission of Cooke AFB was to serve both as a training site for the PGM-17 Thor, SM-65 Atlas, and HGM-25A Titan I missiles, and as an emergency operational facility for the Atlas ICBM.

On 4 October 1958, Cooke AFB was renamed Vandenberg AFB, in honor of General Vandenberg, the Air Force's second Chief of Staff.



On Thursday morning, we started off with briefings on the 14th Air Force and 30th Space Wing, followed by presentations from the 381st Training Group, which is responsible for training all of the missileers and maintainers in the Air Force's Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) force. We then moved on to the Joint Space Operations Center, the Western Range Operations Center and the 576th Flight Testing Squadron that conducts test firing of Minuteman ICBMs from the nation's three ICBM "fields" in Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming. That evening we had the opportunity to enjoy a reception at the Officer's Lounge with senior leaders from the base, and made a \$5,000 donation from our Defense Fund to the Family Service Center at Vandenberg, a non-appropriated fund organization that supports Airmen and their families at the base.



On Friday, we got a close-up look at one of the Space Launch Complexes on the base, met with Space X officials and learned of their current and planned space operations, and heard from the Missile Defense Agency's Ground-based Midcourse Defense program, which mans anti-ICBM interceptors at both Vandenberg and Fort Greeley in Alaska. A traditional St. Patrick's Day luncheon at the officer's club with Space X officials concluded our program.