

(U)Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U)NSA's Field Sites

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~~(C)~~ When I came to work at NSA, a generation and a half ago, NSA had an overseas empire of field intercept sites located all over the world. They were located in Europe, Asia, [redacted] There were a lot of field sites, and now there aren't. Where did they come from and where did they go?

(U) During World War II, Army and Navy COMINT sites were spread out across the globe in small, mobile organizations providing tactical support to fighting forces. There were a few fixed sites, most of them in the United States, but service resources were concentrated in the mobile units.

~~(C)~~ When the war ended, most of the personnel went back to civilian life, and by 1947 the Army and Navy had only a small residue of mobile teams. They relied instead on [redacted] fixed sites each. (Only [redacted] of the [redacted] were relocated outside U.S. territory.) When the U.S. Air Force Security Service (USAFSS) was created in 1948, it inherited [redacted] mobile Army Security Agency (ASA) units but no fixed field sites.

~~(C)~~ When the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) was formed in 1949, the theory was that all intercept positions were to be under AFSA control. This was generally true of ASA and Naval Security Group (NSG) sites, but the Air Force took advantage of a loophole in the regulations and designated all of its sites as "mobile," thus exempting them from AFSA control. It was not until the demise of AFSA and the creation of NSA in 1952 that field intercept was brought under a centralized control. This was facilitated by the necessities imposed by the world situation. From 1948 to 1957, the "era of expansion," the number of field sites increased almost frantically because of the Cold War and Korea-- from [redacted] Most of these were to be

~~(C)~~ The austere military budgets of 1958-1960 resulted in a small decline in the number of field sites, down to [redacted] in 1960, but Vietnam ended this. The congressionally mandated consolidations of the [redacted] did not result in a reduction of field site resources since these resources were simply transferred to Southeast Asia. By 1967 the count was back up to [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ In 1969, when American troops began to leave Southeast Asia, another decline set in. The withdrawal from Vietnam was one cause of this. Another was the desire to reduce the adverse effect on our balance of payments by reducing negative "gold flow." The overall contraction of the intelligence community because of the 1975 hearings by House and Senate committees investigating U.S. intelligence operations also had a strong influence. In addition, there was now a perception that increased nationalism in Third-World countries was making it dangerous to maintain intercept sites on their soil. This led eventually to the loss of our sites [redacted]. The decline bottomed out at [redacted] sites in 1981. There was some increase when the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis in 1979 forced a reevaluation of the situation. As a result, Presidents Carter and Reagan built up defense resources in general, including SIGINT resources. These budgetary increases did not, however, materially increase the number of intercept sites, which stayed under [redacted] because in the new, high-tech era the necessary equipment was considerably more expensive. Classical HF sites did not grow, but [redacted] collection expanded considerably, and the new [redacted] techniques made it both palatable and possible to downsize the overseas establishment.

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(U) After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union after 1991, the ending of the Cold War resulted in further reductions. The number of field sites today is the smallest since the Korean War. Remoting technology and overhead collection have absorbed most of the remaining assets, and the field site system as we old-timers knew it has become a thing of the past.

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