



CRYPTOLOG

NAVAL CRYPTOLOGIC VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Vol. 8. No. 2

Eugene, Oregon

Winter 1987

"ON-THE-ROOF" GANG (OTRG) Pensacola Dedication

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Naval Technical Training Center, Corry Station, Pensacola, Florida...Important history fades further away with each generation, until reminders such as monuments, books or holidays bring them back to prominence.

Naval Technical Training Center, Corry Station, Pensacola, Florida made sure on 20 November 1986 the pioneers of cryptology will not be forgotten as they dedicated a Cryptologic Training Exhibit in honor of these men who have come to be known as the "On-the-Roof" Gang (OTRG).

According to available records, the Navy's CT rate got its start in 1928 when a select group of Navy and Marine Corps radio operators were given specific cryptologic training in a steel reinforced concrete blockhouse on the roof of the sixth wing, old Main Navy Building in Washington, D.C., thus the name, "On-the-Roof" Gang.

As the training and technology continually expanded, roof classes were moved during the early years of WWII to Bainbridge Island, Washington. After the war, the CT school was moved to Imperial Beach, California where by 1955 it had grown into a major

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Photo by Graydon Lewis

The original "On-the-Roof" Gang (OTRG) Memorial at Naval Security Group Headquarters (NSG).

activity. In 1960 the growing school was once again relocated, this time to Corry Station. Since the station's first graduating class in 1961, Corry has graduated over 50,000 CTs. Today Corry Station trains most of the Armed Forces' Cryptographers through Class "A" (Basic) and "C" (Advanced) Schools.

While Corry's Cryptologic Training Exhibit is not the first to honor the OTRG (one exists in Washington, D.C.), it is probably the most significant.

"I can't think of a more fitting place to have a memorial like this than right here at Corry Station where we bring all our young sailors into the fold," said Commander, Naval Security Group Command, Rear Admiral James S. McFarland who visited Corry to take part in the dedication ceremony.

The exhibit contains old and new photos of U.S. security bases and operations worldwide, old photos of OTRG members at work and on graduation day, and antiquated communications equipment donated by the Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association. It also features such memorabilia as 1941 Traffic & Decryption Intelligence Charts of the Japanese Navy and charts of U-boat position estimates.

The OTRG exhibit will serve as a source of education and motivation for service members entering the CT field, and, said RADM McFarland, "will give each CT a much better appreciation of what they represent--reinforcing a stronger sense of history throughout the Security Group." The exhibit will also serve as a source of nostalgia for OTRG members and others who have served with the Naval Security Group and give visitors a chance to see what CTs do and how far they've come.

Five members of the OTRG attended the dedication. During the day the veterans, along with about 85 guests, toured the exhibit and modern-day cryptology classrooms.

OTRG member Captain Albert J. Pelletier (Retired) of Milton, Florida said he never really imagined CT technology would advance like it has. "In the early days we didn't have much" said Pelletier. "A shack, a few typewriters, radios and batteries...whatever we could borrow, bum or steal. We were unofficial so we couldn't get very much.

"We got payed; that's about it," he said, breaking into a laugh at the memory. The aging pioneer points to an old picture on the exhibit wall. "That's my class right there," he says with nostalgic pride. "1937..."

Pelletier was a young second class petty officer on a destroyer in the mid-1930s when he became part of the OTRG. Pelletier recalls a lieutenant approaching him one day and saying, "I got a job for you, but I can't tell you what it is...Would you like it?" Pelletier replied, "I'll take anything to get out of here." The next day he had orders to Washington, D.C., to begin his secret training. He received his commission in 1943.

OTRG member Lieutenant Commander Glenn E. Evans (Retired) of Quitman, Georgia also enjoyed his tour of the modern CT equipment. "I expected it to be highly improved over what we had, but I didn't realize it could be anything like they've got now." Evans, reunited with some of his buddies and looking for others in the old OTRG graduation photos that line the exhibit, said he enjoyed reliving old times with his buddies. Adding, "We've had a good talk."

The OTRG exhibit dedication comes nearly 10-1/2 years after Corry dedicated five of its cryptologic buildings in honor of OTRG members. The buildings bear the names McGregor Hall, Daniels Hall, Gunn Hall, Kidder Hall and Dennis Hall. With the exhibit dedication, the base further reassured that the pioneers who opened the door to a new Navy rating will live vividly through time.