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Info on SIDE CAR callword by tim@umcc.umich.edu (Tim Tyler)

Several months ago in a WUN posting, I mentioned that I had figured out who/what/where callword SIDE CAR was, and that I'd post the info to WUN shortly. I delayed doing so for a couple of reasons, but will now follow through with my promise.

For at least a couple of years now, callword SIDE CAR has been heard by HF monitoring enthusiasts on a variety of frequencies. Usually the channels that SIDE CAR is heard on are thought or known to be associated with NORAD (such as 9022/9023USB, a NORAD training channel) and/or airborne warning & control (like 11214USB, a 552nd Airborne Control Wing channel).

NORAD is of course the North American Aerospace Defense Command -- the US DOD/Canadian Forces organization responsible for aerospace surveillance, detection, warning, identification, tracking, and negation of threats. Assets frequently used by NORAD include the Joint Surveillance System, an FAA/DOD RADAR network, the Coastal RADAR System sites on Canada's East & West Coast, as well as the Northern Warning System in Northern Canada, space-based RADAR & infrared systems, and of course E-3 AWACS aircraft. NORAD is headquartered at Peterson AFB in Colorado, although their Cheyenne Mountain Complex (aka Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station), 15 buildings inside 3 separate chambers built 1400 feet inside a granite mountain near Colorado Springs is better known. NORAD was formed in 1958 (until 1981, the A in NORAD stood for Air), and the charter is up for renewal by the US & Canada in May of 1996.

Getting back specifically to station SIDE CAR, analyzing some of their radio traffic easily led me to a couple of basic conclusions. The most important one is that SIDE CAR is a Canadian Forces facility. This is somewhat evident based on the speech & accent of the SIDE CAR communicators. Nothing blatant like hearing them say "Take off, you hoser!" or adding an "eh?" to each transmission, but pronunciation of a few key words (such as "out"). Another lead is that most of the aircraft I'd hear them control would be in Canadian airspace. Thirdly, they were often heard on HF via a phone patch from Trenton Military. Much of the communications heard was with communicators and NORAD battlestaff aboard USAF E-3 AWACS aircraft, and sometime with Canadian military frigates. Specifically, a lot of it had to do with coordinating the Link-11 Tactical Data Link ("TADIL," often miss-reported in loggings as "paddle"). TADILs such as the HF/UHF Link-11 and the Link-16 JTIDS (Joint Tactical Information Distribution System) allow various platforms to share & extend RADAR & IFF images. A land-based facility might be maintaining a TADIL with an AWACS via HF, and that AWACS aircraft might be passing the sensor data on to fighter aircraft via Link-16, which is secure/anti-jam. That way, the AWACS could be orbiting slightly outside of the hostile area, while the fighter aircraft inside the hostile area could be maintaining a "cold nose" (RADAR off) but still have full RADAR/IFF data thanks to the AWACS... Recently, SIDE CAR has been heard communicating with ships, such as the Canadian Warship Terra Nova. Again, most of the comms were voice coordination of a TADIL. This Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) allows for anti-air warfare and anti-surface warfare assets with TADIL net capability to extend their surveillance and identification/negation capabilities beyond their own line of sight, as well as allowing for some friendly platforms to initiate emissions control (EMCON, basically radio-silence) mode while continuing to have real or near-real time active sensor data within the area of responsibility.

So far, the speculation about SIDE CAR focuses on NORAD and Canada, so the next step was to investigate the Canadian segment of

NORAD. North American Aerospace Defense Command is comprised of three regions -- Contiguous United States (CONUS), Alaska, and Canada. The Canadian NORAD Region, known as CNORADR or, in some official NORAD documents, CANR, has the venue of all of Canada. Canada was divided into two geographic sectors, East and West. The CANR East Sector was managed by the 21st Aerospace Control & Warning Squadron, while the West CANR Sector was under the control of the 51st AC&WS. Both sectors had operations centers, called Sector Operations Control Centers (SOCCs, pronounced "socks"). Both SOCCs were located in adjacent, underground bunkers at the Canadian NORAD Region Headquarters & Control Complex, Canadian Forces Base North Bay. CFB North Bay is located near the eastern shore of Lake Nipissing in Ontario, although more accurately, the CFB is located in the community of Hornell Heights. The two SOCCs would then pass their data onto the CANR ROCC -- Region Operations Control Center ("rock"), who would then distribute data to other NORAD and Canadian Forces units as necessary. The SOCCs & ROCC were collectively referred to as the North Bay Underground Complex. A back-up facility was known to be in existence at a facility in St. Margarets, New Brunswick, which nominally operates a GEODDS electro-optical space surveillance system.

Notice that much of the above is written in the past-tense. The reason for that is because in early 1994, CANR decided to consolidate their two SOCCs into one -- ***the Canadian NORAD Region East/West Sector Operations Control Center, static callword SIDE CAR!*** The SOCC & ROCC are operated by the 21st Aerospace Control & Warning Squadron, while the 51st is now the 51st Aerospace Control & Warning (Training) Squadron, responsible for training the personnel assigned to the SOCC & ROCC. Both squadrons are part of the 22 Wing.

The differences between the SOCC & ROCC are somewhat confusing, but basically, the SOCC has the surveillance & warning systems (the "scope dope" people) as well as the command & control function of directing forces to intercept unidentified aircraft, and giving "weapons free" status (permission to fire upon) hostile targets. The SOCC shares their data with the ROCC, and the CANR ROCC is a conduit for information flow between the CANR SOCC and the NORAD Cheyenne Mountain Complex, as well as other NORAD and Canadian Forces assets, such as Canada's National Defense Operations Center in Ottawa and the alternate Canadian Forces national command center at Carp, Ontario.

Initially, SIDE CAR was always heard on HF via a Trenton Military phone patch. Lately though, it seems like SIDE CAR is on HF directly. Either that, or they're now using a dedicated link to Trenton's (or another site) HF facilities, & thus somewhat 'bypassed the middleman' of having the Trenton Military HF operator control the radio & phone link for SIDE CAR. Either way, SIDE CAR should certainly have their own, direct HF capability, albeit perhaps just as a back-up.

Additionally, we should be able to assume that the CANR SOCC (& ROCC) has other callwords besides the static "SIDE CAR" that they would use as an operational security measure during drills or wartime operations. All of the US SOCCs have at least two static callwords in routine use, one by the data operator(s) during voice coordination & the other by the normal voice comms side of the house.

In January of 1994, I heard callword WIND SOCK on an HF channel and was able to verify that the callword was an identifier for a CANR unit at CFB North Bay. I haven't heard it used recently, and don't know if it was just a tactical callword, or perhaps a call word for the old CANR West SOCC. BREWMASTER is another callword that clearly seemed to be a CANR station, but I haven't heard BREWMASTER in many months.

Taking a look in my 'International Callsign Handbook' first edition, by Gayle Van Horn, the listing for BREWMASTER is: "Unknown location, USAF, TAC/EC-125" I'm not sure what an "EC-125" is, perhaps a typo for an EC-135 (aircraft), in which case this isn't the same BREWMASTER I used to hear on HF...

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In addition to the more traditional role of NORAD, both the U.S. and Canadian governments have specifically made provisions for sharing some intelligence derived from the detection and tracking nets with agencies directly involved in the counternarcotic mission. CANR picked up some counternarcotic responsibilities in 1989, a few years after the US NORAD regions, when it was decided that illicit drugs were a serious enough problem to warrant an involvement by the Canadian Forces. Like the U.S. DOD, Canadian Forces are not allowed to have a *direct* role in law enforcement, but with the thawing of the Cold War, the military is becoming more active in indirect support to federal, state and local law enforcement agencies via airborne & maritime detection & tracking systems.

My identification of callword SIDE CAR being the Canadian NORAD Region East/West Sector Operations Control Center was based on simple communications intelligence/traffic analysis and research on the CANR, yet nothing I have indicated in this article actually verifies my conclusion. That is a deliberate effort on my part, because I'm not willing to disclose at this time exactly how I did verify that SIDE CAR is the CANR SOCC. Perhaps some of you will just trust me on it, but better yet, keep listening, form some conclusions, and then try to confirm/deny them!

A few weeks ago, I sent off a reception report for a SIDE CAR intercept. Canadian Forces have never seemed too gung-ho at QSLing, so I'm not holding my breath, but if I do get something back from CFB North Bay, I'll let you know via WUN!

The closest thing to a QSL you might get would be to verify the Transport Canada Flight Service Station located in North Bay, because it is actually in the North Bay Underground Complex! FSS North Bay shares part of SIDE CAR's underground facility in order to make it easier for the civilian FSS and military SOCC to exchange RADAR information, and the FSS has been known to QSL.

Comments/corrections, etc can be emailed to: tim@ais.org or as a back-up, to hooligan@aol.com
COMING SOON, an article about the NIGHTWATCH ## callsigns...

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