

RAF Bampton Castle

Military presence in Bampton goes back a long way. The Romans originally occupied a site in the south of the village but abandoned it 2,000 years ago because of the tendency of the River Thames to flood. The 20th Century saw the return of the military and, the area has become home to Army and RAF signals units of one sort or another.

An army communications unit of 14 Signals Regiment, Royal Corps of Signals originally occupied Bampton Castle. In 1970 Bampton Castle was handed over to the RAF Communications Control Centre (RAFCCC) to act as receiver site for the network, and in doing so, brought all RAF communications under one controlling authority.

Up until 1980 each radar station, flying unit and command had its own high frequency radio services for communications with its flying assets. During the 1960's it was realised that these networks would no longer be able to provide reliable all round cover, particularly when it was announced that the aircraft carrier force was to be phased out and the RAF would provide air cover for the Fleet. Consequently, in the early 1970's it was decided that Strike Command would establish a new communications network employing modern radio equipment and antennae. Rationalisation of these facilities then took place and in February 1977 work started on HQ 81 SU and a new receiver site, which was completed in November 1978.

On 1 November 1979 Bampton Castle became the operational home of HQ 81 Signals Unit and Detachment South to provide an Integrated High Frequency Radio service to Strike Command stations and units.

The Headquarters was located at Bampton Castle, and two detachments were formed to provide geographic diversity, resilience and survivability in case of war. They were the Southern Detachment at Bampton Castle, with its associated transmitter site at RAF Chelveston. The Northern Detachment is located at RAF Kinloss, on the Moray Firth, with its associated transmitter site at RAF Milltown.

In 1996 the system was up graded, and a 3rd unit, the Western Detachment, which was formed at RAF St Mawgan, with its associated transmitter and receiver sites at RAF St Eval and Royal Naval Wireless Station Penhale Sands respectively.

The Units are responsible for providing strategic, long haul frequency radio communications to all military agencies requiring their services. To do this they utilise the Strike Command Integrated Communications System (STCICS), and Maritime Aeronautical Telecommunications Organisation System (MATELO). The systems provide HF voice communications to the RAF aircraft, RN ships, tactical communications units and any other unit with a requirement for high frequency voice communications. It is even used occasionally by the military sailing clubs for weather information and Air Training Corps squadron for radio familiarisation training.

Using the call-sign "Architect" 81 SU provides radio communication links to RAF aircraft flying anywhere in the world. This is achieved by the constant monitoring of 10 guard frequencies. These are predetermined frequencies that are permanently

monitored by personnel through which a mobile agency can contact us at any time of the day or night for insecure voice communications. The Unit provides a Broadcast service to its users. The service provided includes Airfield Colour States, and Barometric Pressure Settings. These are transmitted at predetermined and published times. Agencies requiring more detailed weather information can receive this, for almost any airfield world-wide, by contacting us on one of the guard frequencies and asking for their particular requirement. The STCICS operator can then provide the information requested within seconds, and if required can connect them through the telephone network to their home bases. The main objective is to provide a reliable communications system for flight safely.

During 1998 the Master Control Centre (MCC) for the MATELO radio system was relocated from Northwood to Bampton Castle. This utilises similar resources to the STCICS system and from the same locations. The main difference between the two systems are that MATELO is used mainly for Nimrod aircraft and can provide a secure message relay, as well as insecure voice and phone patch. This facility is backed up with an Alternate Control Centre (ACC) at RAF Kinloss.

The Unit Badge is a flash of lightning set in front of a terrestrial globe all within an annulet, and the motto "SEMPER DILIGENS", translated as "ALWAYS ATTENTIVE", symbolises the continuous monitoring of the airwaves. The Units role of providing world-wide radio communications is represented by the globe and the flash of lightning, the encircling annulet, or ring, symbolises the ionosphere, the medium used for sky-wave propagation using high frequency radio waves.

The other Signals Unit to be housed and Bampton Castle was No 2 Signals Unit. 2 SU were formed on 1 November 1964 in RAF Changi, Singapore Island. It was formed from the Radio Relay Signals Unit and carried voice, telegraph and remote signalling circuits, as well as digital data for Surface to Air (SAM) batteries, between its detachments that were spread throughout the island alongside the numerous military installations. With the disbandment of Headquarters Far East Air Force RAF Changi, No 2 Signals Unit ceased operations on 1 December 1970.

But then in October 1978 the RAFCCC at RAF Stanbridge was renamed as No 2 Signal Unit, with the RAFCCC motto of "UNITER". —

Then on 28 June 1985 the Headquarters and System Control Point (SCP) of 2 SU were moved to RAF Bampton Castle, to be co-located with their receiver site. The SCP and associated HF radio Transmitter and Receiver assets provided a variety of long range communications services to the Controller Defence Communications Network and other users as required.

Since its origins, 2 SU has been the focal point for many circuits. Links to Hong Kong, Canada, Belize, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus and the Falkland Islands have all been anchored at, and controlled by personnel from No 2 Signals Unit. At its peak, the SCP managed up to 17 HF radio links and at that site alone was staffed over 100 service personnel. However, with the advent of modern satellite communications the level of tasking for the Unit decreased.

~~Until~~ On 01 Jan 1999 2 SU was integrated into 81 SU, then on 01 Mar 1999 2 SU was disbanded again. With that the SCP became a service-manned unit within RAF Strike Command and a lodger unit at RAF Bampton Castle.

In Apr 2001 81 SU was integrated into the Defence Communications Services Agency (DCSA) Radio Business Unit and 81 SU HQ was relocated to HMS Forest Moor where it amalgamated with its Royal Navy colleagues to form the Radio Operations Management Cell (ROMC).