

## OPERATION SKY SHIELD

By Marjorie Kriz

Some things are forgettable. Some aviation events are even forgettable. But how FAAers and airline people who lived through them could forget the three Operations Sky Shield seems unfathomable. Amazingly, few people I asked about Operation Sky Shield remembered it.

Operation Sky Shield, a military exercise in 1960, Operation Sky Shield II in 1961, and number three in 1962, shut down all U.S. and Canadian civil aviation for part of one day.

Major airlines were operating both jets and propeller-driven aircraft in those years. And, there was far, far less air traffic then than now. Thus, absence of civil aircraft in the skies undoubtedly was less noticeable than would be true today.

However, it must have been strange not to be able to look up in the sky around a busy airport, either a major commercial airport or a smaller one serving general aviation and not see an airplane. Contrails of high-flying bombers and pursuit planes were visible from the ground in many areas during the exercises, but unless one lived near an air base that's about the only clue that aircraft were in the sky.

True, some Americans heard sonic booms as well, but few compared with the number of aircraft in the air.

Thus, only in some areas were military aircraft - fighters, bombers, refuelers - roaring overhead, jets flaming - visible as Dew Line (distant early warning), the Mid-Canada Line, and the Pine Tree Line along the U.S.-Canadian border were tested toward the north as far as the polar regions and coastal defenses east and west.

Operation Sky Shield was on September 10, 1960, Operation Sky Shield II on October 14, 1961, and number three on September 2, 1962. Each was a defense exercise conducted by the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) and the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and involved thousands of military aircraft.

On the ground, airports and airlines took advantage of the ban on civil aviation, especially during the exercises, particularly the last two,

and made a party of the day. Open houses were at major airports as airlines showed off their planes to visitors who walked through the aircraft, often looking for souvenirs such as soap in the lavatories or magazines in the pockets on the backs of seats. Many airlines proffered souvenirs such as miniature pilot wings, coloring books, and balloons to students.

Operation Sky Shield was the shorter test, from 1 a.m. to 7 a.m. CDT. It was estimated that some 1,000 U.S. commercial flights carrying about 37,000 passengers and 700 general aviation aircraft were affected.

In Canada, 310 flights with 3,000 passengers were grounded. Also, 31 foreign airline flights landing in North America, were canceled.

Strategic Air Command (SAC) B-52 and B-47 jet bombers were the enemy, trying to wipe out, in theory only, every major city in the U.S. and Canada, as well as every major military base.

While flights involving a real emergency were permitted, dropping of chaff by the bombers effectively wiped out radar air traffic control, making it unsafe for commercial and general aviation operations.

The news media paid comparatively little attention to Operation Sky Shield. More magazine and newspaper space was given to Sky Shield II, which shut down civil aviation in the U.S. and Canada for 12 hours, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. CST and Sky Shield III from 1 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. CST.

Federal Aviation Agency Administrator Najeeb E. Halaby issued a special civil air regulation on October 9, 1961, which was published in the Federal Register about the exercise and the ban on civil aviation. The Federal Register published Special Civil Air Regulation SR-452, for Sky Shield III, on August 7, 1962. The original Sky Shield closing down of civil aviation apparently was accomplished simply with a NOTAM.

"It has been determined that the conduct of this exercise is in the interest of the national defense," the Halaby regulation stated.

In this document, too, it was pointed out that dropping of chaff and use of electronic countermeasures would jam agency air traffic control radars and air-ground

communications, making it unsafe for civil aircraft to fly.

"On October 14-15, 1961, Operation SKY SHIELD II, the largest defense maneuvers ever held in the western world, pitted a force of about 250 bombers against 250 missile sites and 1,800 fighter planes flying more than 6,000 sorties," the annual report of the Secretary of the Air Force stated. NORAD fighters, F-101s to F-106s, numbered 1,800. Altogether, with the addition of British and Canadian military aircraft, they added up to more planes than there would have been civilian aircraft in the skies.

This time, some 2,900 airline flights, carrying about 125,000 passengers in the U.S. and Canada were involved. "Sterilized" skies extended 1,000 miles over the Atlantic and 800 miles out over the Pacific. U.S., Canadian, and British bombers jetted along approach routes enemy aircraft would use.

Two RAF officers, Air Marshals Sir Kenneth B.B. Cross of the bomber command and Sir Wallace Kyle of the technical training command, monitored the exercise with the U.S. commander, Gen. Laurence S. Kuter.

The only prospective air passengers claiming to have problems with Operation Sky Shield II were those attending out-of-town football games.

At Chicago's O'Hare and Midway airports, crowds jammed airline areas, often waiting in long lines to board and examine jet aircraft. At O'Hare, Illinois Bell took advantage of lack of flights to complete installation of its \$4 million telephone system, which included 2.5 million miles of wire and cables to unite all subscribers at the airport.

Meanwhile, in Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Norway, an exercise called Seven Pillars dramatized dropping of 40 atomic bombs on the six countries during a 22 hour civil defense exercise.

Though the exercises were announced as successful, details are still vague because of national security. Sky Shield IV was planned for 1963, but SAC objected and instead there were smaller exercises called Top Rung.

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