



Western Air Defense Sector

Unit Location: Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Personnel: 343

Breakdown:

220 - Full-Time Guardsmen

64 - Traditional Guardsmen

25 - Title 5

15 - Canadian Forces

16 - Contractors

3 - Navy

Mission:

Federal: The Sector's primary mission along with the Eastern Air Defense Sector (EADS) is "Guarding America's Skies." This 24/7 role involves the use of radar and communications systems to monitor air traffic from the Mississippi River west to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Canadian border south to the Mexican border. The Sector reports to Air Combat Command and NORAD in its federal role.

State: WADS reports to the governor through the Washington National Guard headquarters at Camp Murray. The Sector works with state agencies to provide rapid response in the event of natural or manmade disasters, and participate in disaster preparedness exercises. The Sector is able to provide an air picture to help in rescue operations in the event of disasters.



Col. Gregor Leist



CCMSgt Daniel Rebstock

History of the Western Air Defense Sector

The WADS predecessor unit, the Seattle Air Defense Sector was established by the USAF Air Defense Command on Jan. 8, 1958, with a mission to train and maintain tactical flying units in state of readiness in order to defend the Seattle area, assuming control of former ADC Western Air Defense Force units located in western Washington west of the Cascade Range. The Sector was inactivated on April 1, 1966, as part of an ADC consolidation and reorganization; and its units were reassigned to the 25th Air Division.

Beginning on July 1, 1958 it began operations of a SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) Direction Center DC-12 47°07'18"N 122°30'14"W at McChord AFB. It also operated a SAGE Combat Center (CC-03). SAGE inactivated August 31, 1983.

On April 1, 1966, SEADS was inactivated, as were the other 22 sectors in the country. Most of its assets were assumed by the 25th Air Division. The DC-12 SAGE Direction Center was assigned to the 25th Air Division, remaining in operation until Dec. 31, 1969. Today it is used as the Western Air Defense Sector (WADS) Joint Surveillance System (JSS) Sector Operations Control Center (SOCC).

On July 1, 1987, the Seattle Air Defense Sector (SEADS) became the Northwest Air Defense Sector or NWADS, and was assigned to 25th Air Division, co-locating with the 25th AD. The 25th Air Division was inactivated on Sept. 30, 1990, transferring its assets and responsibility for atmospheric defense to NWADS.

On Jan. 1, 1995, the Northwest Air Defense Sector consolidated with the Southwest Air Defense Sector; its counterpart at March AFB, California, to become the Western Air Defense Sector (WADS). WADS assumed responsibility for the air sovereignty of the western United States from Texas around the west coast and across to North Dakota. Its area of responsibility is approximately 1.9 million square miles, about 63 percent of the continental United States.

On Oct. 1, 1997, the Western Air Defense Sector completed a seamless transition from the active duty Air Force to the Air National Guard. Citizen-soldiers of the Washington Air National Guard are currently guarding America's skies. The Continental NORAD Region (CONR) has responsibility for the Western Air Defense Sector and Eastern Air Defense Sector. It is headquartered at Tyndall AFB, Florida.

At the end of 2005, the outdated Q-93 radar system was replaced with modernized computer systems, which was a major shift in how CONUS is defended since the Q-93 system had been in use since 1983. Also, in 2005, Western Air Defense Sector assumed responsibility of more airspace shifting from down the center of the U.S. to east of Mississippi totalling roughly 75 percent of the U.S. airspace. There have been a few system updates since 2005 but only upgrades to the firmware and program versions, not the hardware itself like what happened in 2005.



2015 Highlights:

In 2015, WADS actively tracked more than 29 million flights over the United States. Of these flights, 456 were identified as tracks of interest, causing additional action by WADS personnel to identify these aircraft. WADS personnel also initiated 10 fighter jet and three rotary wing scrambles to frequently intercept unknown aircraft. Throughout the year, operations also worked to closely monitor 19 presidential temporary flight restrictions (TFR's) over major US cities in the western sector and tracking 185 TFR tracks of interest. During these 19 TFRs, 1584 aircraft were identified as tripping thresholds of the TFR.

On May 2, 2015, the Western Air Defense Sector activated the 225th Air Defense Group, 225th Air Defense Squadron and 225th Support Squadron resulting in the Washington Air National Guard's first Air Defense Group in its' history. This re-designation of the three units now structures WADS, a wing equivalent, more like other Air Force organizations. WADSs will continue to execute its federal mission aligned under First Air Force located at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida.

On July 8, 2015, Deputy Commander of the Continental United States NORAD Region, Canadian Brig. Gen. Alain Pelletier, presided over the Canadian detachment's change of command at the Western Air Defense Sector. Lt. Col. L.M. Wappler assumed command and continues the long standing bi-national cooperation between the United States and Canada to "Guard America's Skies 24/7. "

WADS participated in countless federal and state exercises to include the continent-wide training exercise, Viligant Shield 16, with NORAD, NORTHCOM, and federal, state and local agencies from across the United States and Canada. The exercise is part of an integrated DoD exercise program that supports the national strategy of aerospace warning and control, Defense Support of Civil Authorities and homeland defense. At the state level, WADS participated in the earthquake response exercise, Evergreen Tremor, in preparation for the larger scale Cascadia Rising exercise in June 2016.

WADS was the recipient of the Washington Air National Guard Outstanding Unit of the Year award for 2014. In addition, eight members of the WADS team were also recognized at the Washington Air National Guard State Awards Banquet as the winners in their respective categories. One member went on to garner the recognition as the Company Grade Officer of the Year for United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM).

Throughout 2015, WADS members also participated in a multitude of community relations building events. These included civic group tours, an ESGR Boss Lift, educators tours, ROTC and U.S. Air Force Academy cadets orientations, Civil Air Patrol encampment support, high school STEM program, flag detail for Seahawks, Mariners and Sounders games, Thanksgiving turkey donation deliveries, Holiday ham donation deliveries, and a Habitat for Humanity build.



Col. Gregor J. Leist assumes command of WADS on April 21, 2015, from outgoing commander Col. Peter D. Stavros, who has helmed the organization since March 2011. (Washington National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Peter G. Christian)



Western Air Defense Sector, Vice Commander, Col. Ronald D. Harmon, receives the 225th Air Defense Group guidon from Brig. Gen. John S. Tuohy, Washington state assistant adjutant general - Air, during the activation and assumption of command ceremony, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, May 2, 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Colette D. Muller/Released)



Members of the Western Air Defense Sector Honor Guard post the colors during the Seattle Mariners baseball game at Safeco Field on July 10, 2015. The Honor Guard participates in numerous community events in the Puget Sound yearly. (Photo by retired U.S. Air Force Col. James Siscel/Released) .