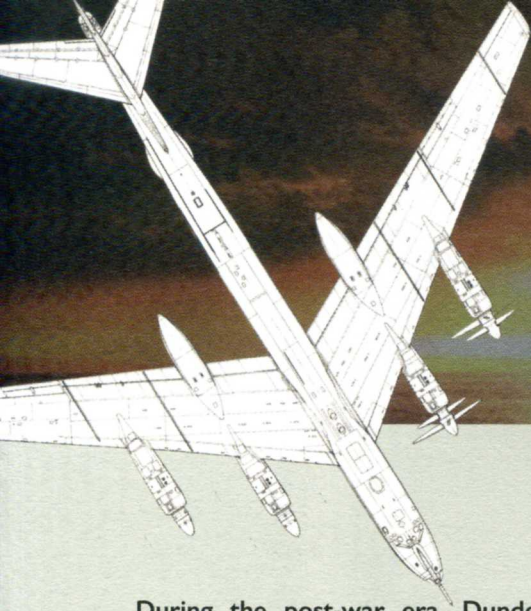


Dundee's Cold War -Royal Observer Corps

by Tony Jackson



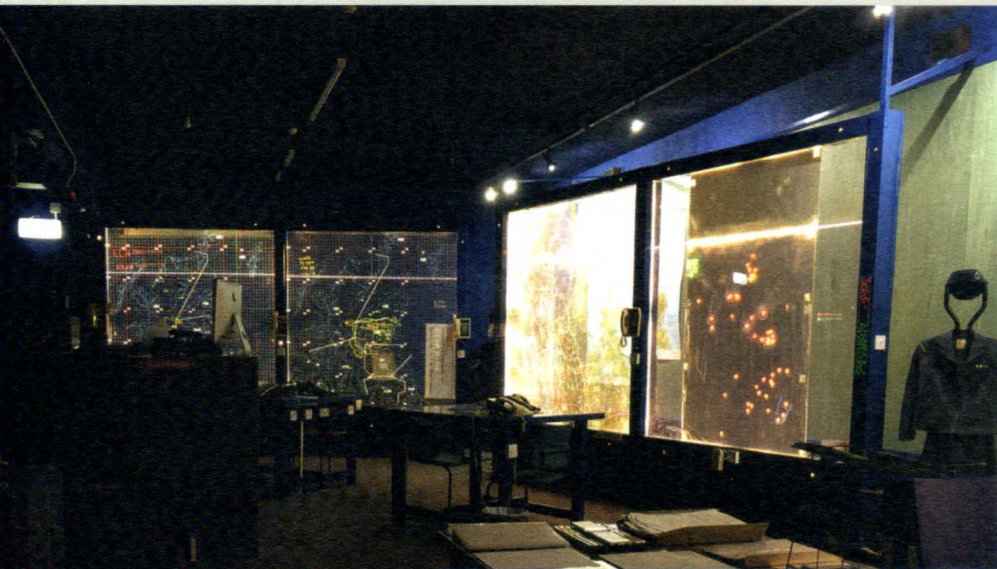
During the post-war era, Dundee played a central role in the UK's preparations for coping with the threat of nuclear attack. Located in a large bunker at Craigiebarns on the fringes of Dundee and Angus College, the Caledonian sector control of the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation (UKWMO) co-ordinated the nuclear attack warning and monitoring system for the whole of Scotland, operating as part of a nation-wide network with NATO links. It was opened in 1976, replacing a facility in Aberdeenshire.

As one of the volunteers who helped run Craigiebarns, I retain fond memories of the camaraderie amongst those involved in discharging the vital tasks undertaken there.

In the 1930s Sir Robert Watson-Watt from the University of Dundee (then a part of the University of St. Andrews) pioneered the radar system which provided an early warning of impending attack by enemy aircraft during the Second World War. Supplementing the radar masts was a network of observation posts operated by the Royal Observer Corps (ROC), a body of volunteers granted the right to wear RAF grey uniforms when undertaking their tasks. Reports from the ROC together

with those from radar stations were sent to control centres, which used them to plot an ongoing picture of enemy air attacks that was quickly communicated to RAF Fighter Command. In 1957, the Government drew on these wartime arrangements to create a warning and monitoring system capable of addressing the threats posed by nuclear attack, linking this with its NATO counterparts. The UKWMO became one of the UK's early responses to the rising tensions of what became known as the Cold War.

The new system was given five main functions: to warn the public of any air attack; to provide confirmation of a nuclear strike; to warn the public of the approach of radioactive fallout; to supply the UK's military and civilian authorities and neighbouring NATO countries with details of nuclear bursts and with a scientific assessment of the path and intensity of fallout; and to provide a post-attack meteorological service. Warning of an impending air attack would come from the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System at Fylingdales on the Yorkshire coast, backed up perhaps by further information from other points of the NATO system in Alaska and Greenland. Home Office staff stationed at the UK Regional Air Operations Centre (UK RAOC) would then determine whether to activate the national warning of attack arrangements. The UKWMO network was linked to 250 carrier control points located at major police stations throughout the UK. These could activate 7,000 power-operated sirens in urban areas, supplemented by another 11,000 sirens in rural locations such as local police and coastguard stations, and a range of other suitable establishments. Each warning point operator could sound the alarm by operating a hand siren, and warnings could also be broadcast through television and radio channels.



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