

# Commander's Call Topics



December 19, 2013

"I view this opportunity as the privilege and an honor of a lifetime."

Deborah Lee James  
Secretary-Designee of the Air Force  
September 19, 2013  
Before the Senate Armed Services Committee

"And to all a good  
night..."

*Commander's Call Topics*  
goes on hiatus  
until January 9, 2014.

## When Santa Goes Global, NORAD Is There

" 'Twas the night before Christmas..."

With apologies to Clement Moore, there's another traditional Christmas story that bears repeating, especially if you're part of (or related to anyone who is part of) the Air Force. It's about NORAD tracking Santa as he circumnavigates the globe, and the story is updated every year.

It all began almost 60 years ago when a Sears Roebuck and Company store near Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado got the idea to promote their Toyland like no other. "Hey, Kiddies!" the ad began next to a headshot of Santa. "Call me direct.... Just dial...." Unfortunately, that wasn't Santa's phone number. It went directly to the Commander-in-Chief's operations hotline at CONAD, Continental Air Defense Command, the forerunner of NORAD.

The Director of Operations, Col. Harry Shoup, believed that he saw an opportunity and had his staff check the radar, note where Santa was, and the military tradition of giving children updates on Santa's progress began. "Today, the program has its own life," according to Navy Lt. Cmdr. Bill Lewis, a NORAD spokesman. In fact, it's such a worldwide tradition, updates are given in eight languages. This year, 1,250 volunteers in the "NORAD tracks Santa" call center will serve in two-hour shifts, posting to social media, tweeting, answering the phones and responding to emails. The call center is open for 24 hours beginning at 3 A.M. MST Dec. 24.

"Santa travels with the speed of starlight," Lewis noted. Santa's ability to circumnavigate the globe is greatly enhanced by a "fighter jet mission" in North America. This year, it's Canada's turn to go up as Santa makes his approach to the Northeastern Canadian provinces, make sure it's him, verify the flight plan that he gave NORAD, and let him go on his way.

Santa's preparations and journey will be followed in real time starting Christmas Eve on a special holiday [website](#). Currently, it's up and running with a holiday countdown clock, games, movies and daily activities. Free official apps are also available in the Windows Store, Apple Store, Google Play and others so children everywhere can count down the days on smartphones and tablets.

Santa's Countdown Calendar also features Christmas music by the U. S. Air Force Academy Band, a countdown clock that shows how long it is until the famous Christmas Eve flight begins, and FAQs that addresses everything from why NORAD tracks Santa to Santa's age.

Children of all ages can dial the toll-free number, 1-877-446-6723, to get a moment-by-moment update. The program is paid for by 55 corporate contributors.

Believe. It's all at [www.noradsanta.org](http://www.noradsanta.org).

### ► TRENDING...

"All military spouses and families sacrifice on behalf of our country. They deserve our respect and the benefits they are entitled to under the law." Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said in announcing that all eligible service members, dependents—including same-sex spouses—and retirees are now [able to obtain Defense Department identification cards in every state](#).

## ► RESOURCES

Website access to the following resources can be gained by clicking on the name.

[AF.mil](#)

[Airman magazine](#)

[Air Force Outreach](#)

[Military OneSource/HomeFront](#)

[Air Force Personnel Center](#)

[Air Reserve Personnel Center](#)

[Department of Defense News](#)

[Department of Veteran Affairs](#)

[TRICARE](#)

[U.S. Government Website](#)

[Air Force Association Scholarships](#)

[Air Force Safety Center](#)

[Civil Service Employment Opportunities](#)

[NAF Employment Opportunities](#)

## ► CURRENT ISSUES

[CSAF hosts summit to address sexual assault](#)

As part of the ongoing effort to provide education and action on the issue of sexual assault, Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Mark A. Welsh III convened a two-day summit to ensure that all Airmen have the same access to information and best practices.

[Budget woes cause AF to refine funding priorities](#)

Force structure, modernization and readiness will be the currency used to pay the bills even if there is some relief from sequestration.

## ► FAMILY, HEALTH AND SAFETY

[Officials announce 2014 military housing allowance rates](#)

An average increase of about five percent for the basic allowance for housing will take effect Jan. 1.

## ► PERSONNEL ISSUES

[Financial management leadership program open to eligible officers](#)

The four-year Financial Management Leadership Program is open for nominations of interested active-duty officers interested in acquiring this strategic skill.

## ► ENVIRONMENT, SPACE, TECHNOLOGY

[Website allows units to claim repurposed supplies, save money](#)

One person's overage is another's just-in-time supply, and units in U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa can now obtain equipment and supplies for free.

## ► THIS WEEK IN AIR FORCE HISTORY

**Dec. 19 1951**—KOREAN WAR. The 307th Bombardment Wing sent 10 B-29s to bomb marshalling yards at Chongju.

**Dec. 20, 1968**—NASA terminated the X-15 program.

**Dec. 21, 2000**—At Edwards AFB, Boeing's X-32A Joint Strike Fighter concept plane made its first supersonic flight, when Lt Col Edward Cabrera, the USAF's lead X-32 test pilot, took the jet to 30,000 feet and exceeded Mach 1 (660 mph).

**Dec. 22, 1964**—The Lockheed SR-71 strategic reconnaissance plane exceeded an altitude of 45,000 feet and a speed of 1,000 MPH in its maiden flight at Palmdale, Calif.

**Dec. 23, 1970**—A Sprint terminal-defense interceptor missile launched from Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean intercepted a Minuteman I reentry vehicle launched from Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

**Dec. 24, 1944**—MEDAL OF HONOR. Brig Gen Frederick W. Castle led some 2,000 heavy bombers against German airfields. On the way, an engine failed and his unescorted B-17 became a target to enemy fighters. After his bomber sustained serious damage, he ordered the crew to bail out while he remained at the controls. Another enemy attack caused the right wing gas tanks to explode, and the bomber crashed with the General still inside. For this sacrifice, Castle received the Medal of Honor.

**Dec. 25, 1949**—The USAF revealed the development of stupalith, a ceramic that contracted when heated and expanded when cooled. It also withstood up to 2,000 degrees and would be used on jet and rocket engines.

For more information on Air Force heritage, visit <http://www.airforcehistory.af.mil>

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