

Commander's Call Topics



December 18, 2014

*"There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle."*

Albert Einstein
Theoretical physicist
(1879-1955)

*"And to all a good night..."
Commander's Call Topics
goes on hiatus
until January 8, 2015.*

Santa Travels at the Speed of Starlight, and NORAD Is There

It has all the earmarks of a heartwarming Christmas classic (or maybe a Hollywood blockbuster): Well-meaning big business botches their newspaper ad for their Christmas call-in to Santa for children. The bungled marketing campaign goes unnoticed until a child tries to access the Santa line and gets the Commander in Chief's hotline at the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) and the director of operations answers the phone. The quick-thinking director, Col. Harry Shoup, a Christmas-spirited officer, commanded his staff to check the radar for the whereabouts of Santa and his sleighful of toys. And a Christmas tradition was born.

It all began almost 60 years ago, when a Sears Roebuck and Company store near Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, got the idea to promote their Toyland as it never had before.

"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 hotline at CONAD, the forerunner of NORAD.

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. Radar, satellites, Santacams and accompanying jet fighters (F-16s, F-15s, F-22s and CF-18s) track Santa's progress as he travels from the North Pole. 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, and his ability to circumnavigate the globe is greatly enhanced by a "fighter jet mission" in North America.

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, daily activities and music by the U. S. Air Force Academy Band. The FAQs address everything from why NORAD tracks Santa to Santa's age. There's also an embeddable tracking map and countdown clock to install on one's computer in the NORAD HQ section of the [website](#) in the Press Room page.

Children of all ages can dial the toll-free number, 877-446-6723, to get a moment-by-moment update. The program is paid for by 54 corporate contributors.

And the best thing about this state-of-the-art tracking that began with a day-saving response to a child's question about Santa: It's true.

*Martha J. Lockwood
Chief, AFPRO Information Products*

► TRENDING...

"Wow! What a year this has been!" said [Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James](#) in the opening remarks of the first ["Open Door" town hall discussion](#) from the Defense Media Activity Broadcast Center, Tuesday, Dec. 16, broadcast around the world from Ft. Meade, Maryland.

► RESOURCES

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

[AF.mil](#)

[Airman magazine](#)

[Military OneSource/HomeFront](#)

[Air Force Personnel Center](#)

[Air Reserve Personnel Center](#)

[Department of Defense News](#)

[Department of Veterans Affairs](#)

[TRICARE](#)

[U.S. Government Website](#)

[Air Force Association](#)

[Scholarships](#)

[Air Force Safety Center](#)

[Civil Service Employment Opportunities](#)

[NAF Employment Opportunities](#)

[Air Force Bands/Outreach](#)

► THIS WEEK IN AIR FORCE HISTORY

Dec. 18, 1958 - The First Atlas satellite, a 4-ton communications relay, was placed in orbit. President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered a Christmas message through the satellite on Dec. 19, which was the first time a human voice had been heard from space.

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, California.

Dec. 23, 1970 - A Sprint terminal-defense interceptor missile launched from Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean intercepted a Minuteman I re-entry vehicle launched from Vandenberg AFB, California.

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.

► CURRENT ISSUES

[Air Force senior leaders share holiday messages](#)

[Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James](#) and her husband, Frank Beatty; [Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III](#) and his wife, Betty; and [Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Cody](#) and his wife, retired Chief Master Sgt. Athena Cody send messages of hope and cheer to Airmen the world over.

[A \\$2 solution to a \\$3,000 problem](#)

Embracing the idea that every dollar counts, the fire truck maintenance shop at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington first tried replacing the \$2 transistor that controlled the light instead of replacing the entire \$3,000 dashboard displaying an erroneous "compartment open" message light. Problem solved!

► PERSONNEL ISSUES

[AF announces no involuntary force management programs for FY15](#)

After a year of significant reductions designed to size and shape the force, there is no need to conduct a second round of involuntary programs in FY15.

► ENVIRONMENT, SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

[Atlas V launch successful](#)

A National Reconnaissance Office Payload was on board the United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket that was successfully launched from Vandenberg AFB Space Launch Complex-3.

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

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