



December 22, 2016

*“And to all a good night...”  
Commander's Call Topics  
goes on hiatus  
until January 12, 2017.*

## 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): It all began over 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.

Using the number in the ad, a child tried to reach Santa and got the Commander in Chief's hotline at the Continental Air Defense Command. In that moment, the quick-thinking director of operations who answered the phone, Col. Harry Shoup, a Christmas-spirited officer, started a Christmas tradition that continues to this day.

Col. Shoup believed that he saw an opportunity and commanded his staff to check the radar for the whereabouts of Santa and his sleighful of toys. 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, nearly 1,600 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, open for 23 hours, averages 100 calls a minute.

Santa travels at the speed of starlight, and his ability to circumnavigate the globe is greatly enhanced by a fighter jet escort over North America.

Santa's preparations and journey will be followed in real time starting Christmas Eve on a special holiday [website](#). Registering 22 million hits last year, the [website](#) is currently 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 a mobile app for tracking Santa and a countdown clock to install on one's computer in the NORAD HQ section of the [website](#) in the Press Room page.

On Christmas Eve, starting at 4 A.M. MST, 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 51 corporate contributors.

And the best thing about this story: It's true.

## ► 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](#)

## ► CURRENT ISSUES AND NEWS

[New program streamlines safety reporting procedures](#) A new web-based app—available early next year for desktop, laptop, tablet or smart phone—will streamline the process of reporting safety hazards and has the potential of preventing serious problems through early reporting.

[AFVSA to implement new RPA childcare](#) New and evolving child care options will lend unique assistance to parents who support the remotely piloted aircraft enterprise. The programs enhance mission readiness by ensuring proper and flexible care for children of military families.

## ► PERSONNEL ISSUES

[Command opportunity found in financial management leadership program](#) Active-duty officers in year groups 2004 to 2008 can apply for a special command opportunity through the 2017 Financial Management Leadership Program. Details can be found on [myPers](#).

## ► THIS WEEK IN AIR FORCE HISTORY

**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** - 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 aboard. For this sacrifice, Castle received the Medal of Honor.

**Dec. 25, 1949** - The Air Force revealed the development of stupalith, a ceramic that contracts when heated and expands when cooled. Able to withstand temperatures up to 2,000 degrees, it became an important part of jet and rocket engines.

**Dec. 26, 1956** - Two F-100 aircraft achieved the “buddy system” of air refueling (fighter to fighter).

**Dec. 27, 1992** - Operation Southern Watch, two F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 363rd Fighter Wing at Shaw Air Force Base, North Carolina, intercepted two MiG-25s in the “no-fly” zone in Southern Iraq. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Gary North, fired an AIM-120A missile and shot down a MiG-25. The event featured three firsts: the first combat use of the AIM-120A, the first beyond visual range kill, and the first Air Force F-16 air-to-air victory.

**Dec. 28, 1957** – Capt. James E. Bowman (U. S. Army) set a 30,335-foot world altitude record for helicopters in a Cessna YH41 Seneca at Wichita.

**Dec. 29, 1966** - The National Aviation Hall of Fame, Dayton, Ohio, posthumously inducted: aircraft designers Glenn L. Martin and William F. Boeing; Adm. John H. Towers (first attempt for a trans-Atlantic flight); Lincoln Beachey, famous stunt flyer; Brig. Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell, an early advocate of establishing a separate Air Force; and Robert H. Goddard, the world's first rocket scientist.

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

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