

Where on Earth is Mount Santa Rita ?

Wild pigs, monkeys and snakes. Isolation, brush fires and torrential rains.

It's enough to intimidate even the saltiest of Navy bluejackets, but for the 26 men and women assigned to the U.S. Naval Link Station, Mount Santa Rita, it's a part of their everyday life. And they all agree that this small, backwoods communications complex in Hermosa on historic Bataan just may be the most uncommon and the best duty they're ever likely to run across.

Perched on the summit of Mount Santa Rita (1,558 feet), the complex overlooks Subic Bay Naval Facility, 12 miles to the west. The link station provides communications for 53 commands throughout the Republic of the Philippines and for the entire Seventh

Fleet. To reach it, sailors wind their way daily up a narrow, serpentine road constantly threatened by the encroaching jungle.

"Mount Santa Rita is the heart of an essential communications set-up which is the largest microwave system in the world," said assistant officer in charge Master Chief Electronics Technician Jim Taylor. "All communications support provided by Naval Communications Station Philippines for ships and aircraft of the Seventh Fleet is made possible by Mount Santa Rita. The automatic dial telephone system alone can support a city of more than 60,000."

All phone and military radio message traffic between the Subic Bay area and the rest of the Philippines, the United States and other countries is

sent via microwave through Mount Santa Rita with the help of its 12-story tower.

Easily identifiable, Santa Rita is a perfect navigation point; it points the way to Cubi Point's 9,000-foot runway. The Tactical Air Navigation mast on top of "Rita's" red and white structure is 1,702 feet above sea level. Its navigational signal enables aircraft to home in on the air station and determine their distance and bearing.

For Navy people driving to Cubi or Subic, the tower is an always visible signpost along the winding mountain road that stretches from Subic Bay, across Bataan, to Manila and Clark Air Base.

Cattle cross the narrow, winding road leading to Mount Santa Rita Naval Link Station on the peak of the 1,558-foot mountain.

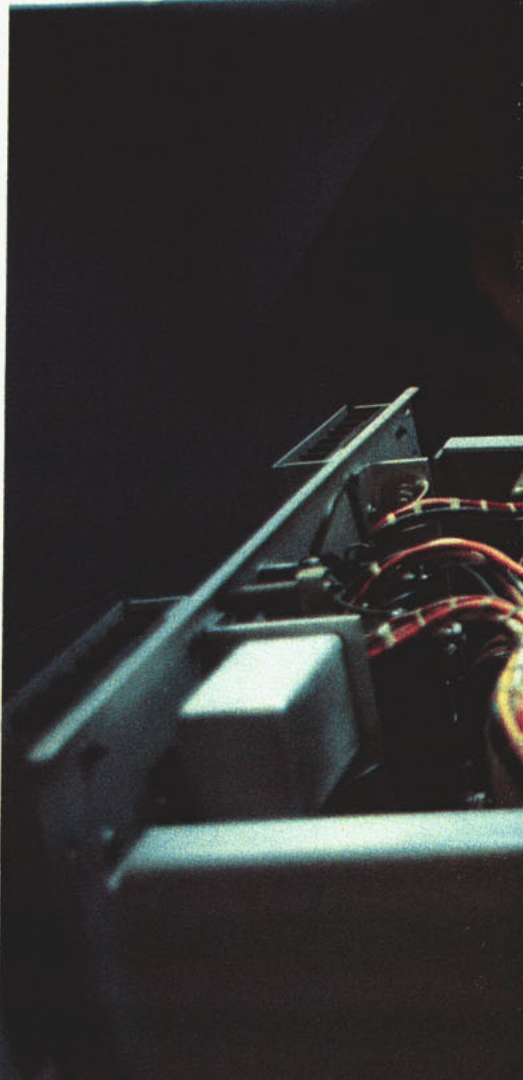


Uncommon Duty



It wasn't long after World War II that the Navy realized the need for a modern point-to-point telephone and communications system between local U.S. military activities in the Philippines. However, the cost of installing and maintaining landlines traversing miles of exposed jungle terrain and dense forests was prohibitive. Thus, the radio microwave system was selected.

Construction of the multimillion dollar complex began in April 1953. The builders encountered incredible



problems caused by the elements, the site's location and the jungle.

According to officer in charge Lieutenant Frank Phillips, the original construction cost was only \$1.5 million. "Today, Mount Santa Rita is priceless."

"Santa Rita is unique because of the critical nature of its mission," said Taylor. "Without it, rapid communications in the Philippines would pretty much come to a halt."

"An interesting fact," said Phillips, "is that with all the messages relayed

through Mount Santa Rita (100,000 a month), the station cannot initiate a message into the system. Any message drafted by us has to pass through Subic and then back to Santa Rita on its way to its destination."

The daily routine for the people at this semi-isolated facility could be described as "unreal."

"It's certainly not like anything I've experienced," said Taylor, a 16-year Navy veteran. "One minute the troops will be conducting normal maintenance and the next, we'll find ourselves hur-

rying down a mountain trail with shovels and rakes to fight a raging brush fire. Acting as fire warden is one of our additional responsibilities."

From the moment they board their yellow work bus at 6:30 each morning, these mountain dwellers find that "up" is a way of life. "Down" is a nasty word until they again board their

Opposite page: ETCM Jim Taylor and ETC Lewvino Maguyon inside the compound of the link station. Below: ET2 Robert Stone replaces a component in a microwave radio power supply.



Uncommon Duty

bus in the afternoon for the roller-coaster-like ride back to Subic.

Once at the station, normal maintenance evolutions are dictated by schedule. Taylor said, "If no equipment is malfunctioning, our attention turns to the continuous process of 'tweaking,' adjusting and checking performance of the gear to ensure it never degrades."

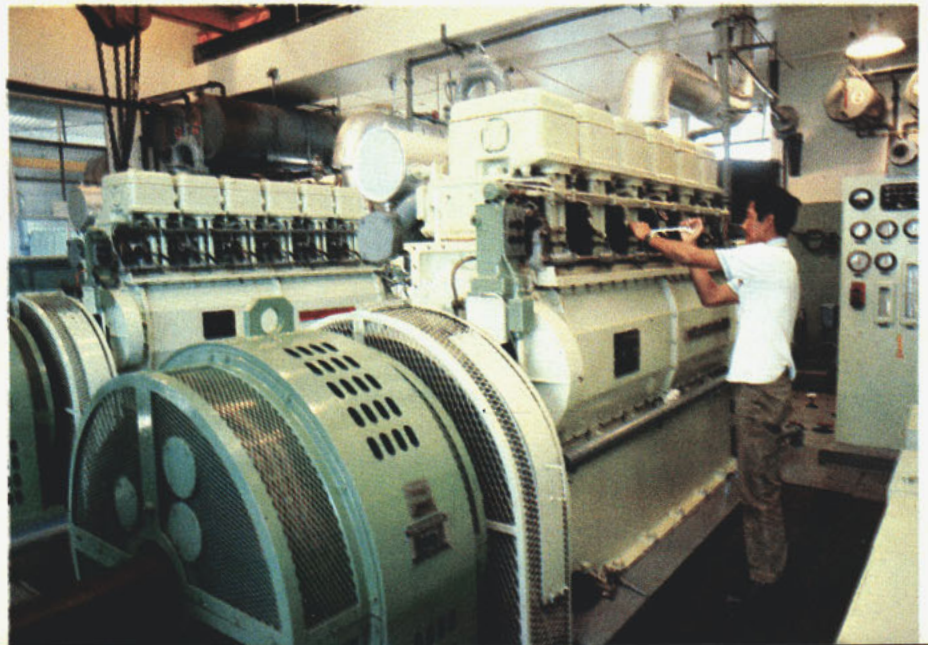
Because of the importance of Santa Rita as the communications hub for the area, the people there have no choice but to keep the equipment in tip-top shape. As Taylor put it, "We simply are not allowed to go off the air."

Mount Santa Rita's "lifeline" is a one-lane road over which traffic is

Below: Lt. Frank Phillips conducts the monthly personnel inspection. Upper right: The San Miguel microwave antenna is on the 10th deck of the 12-story building and the view is magnificent. Lower right: Santiago Novero, one of two full-time civilian employees at the station, performs maintenance on a 275-kilowatt diesel generator he helped install more than 25 years ago.



SAN MIGUEL ANTENNA
DIAMETER - 8 FT.
AZIMUTH - 243° 58.1'
PATH LENGTH - 22.01 MILES
ELEVATION - 84 FT.



dispatched in one direction at a time. Filipino and U.S. Marine security guards are posted with a phone line for communication. They ensure the road is clear of traffic—and jungle entanglement—before allowing automobiles to pass. Monthly, Rita's communications people don jungle fatigues and boots, and with bolo knives and saws in hand, slash their way through heavy foliage that constantly encroaches upon the asphalt trail.

"Because of the relay station's remote location, it's necessary that we be nearly self-sufficient," explained Taylor. "We have our own power system, water reservoir, water purification unit and a store of rations that will last about 30 days."

The station's power is supplied by two, 25-year-old, 275-kilowatt diesel generators, of which only one is employed at a time. In addition, there is a 200-kilowatt generator for emergen-

cies. A large store of diesel fuel is kept in reserve.

Water comes from a small creek at the foot of the mountain, which supplies a 40,000-gallon reservoir. The water is then pumped to three 6,000-gallon tanks at the top where it is purified and pumped into a fresh-water holding tank.

There are seven different Navy ratings at Mount Santa Rita: boatswain's mate, electronics technician, interior communications technician, mess management specialist, radioman, storekeeper and yeoman. A five-man Marine security force remains on the mountain 24 hours a day.

Whether boatswain's mates or mess management specialists, all are required to learn the operation of technical control, normally the job of a radioman. If one is a yeoman, that person can expect to operate an OCR typewriter, or a shovel or a rake, whenever there's a grass fire.

Despite the remote location, wild animals, and the daily trek up and down the mountain, the men and

women assigned to Mount Santa Rita enjoy their surroundings.

Morale is high and most of the men and women are eager to extend their tours. The crew is a tightly-knit family that works and plays together. Evidence of this is revealed by the three Defense Communications Agency awards on the walls in the OIC's office; most notable are two very ornate plaques dated 1979 and 1980.

"It's like a big family," said the master chief. "We live comfortably. In our small Bay View dining facility, contract workers prepare and serve some of the best chow I've ever tasted. We have our own small Navy Exchange outlet, TV lounge, library and recreation room. And we have our pet monkeys, led by an old geezer we call Chief George (no relation to the writer) who visits the station almost every morning for breakfast.

"The only thing that annoys me about being up here," said Taylor, "is when people ask me, 'Where on earth is Mount Santa Rita?'"

—Story and photos by PHC Ken George

Hundreds of thousands of cross connection panels meshing communication facilities in the area are housed on the fourth deck of the link station.

