

AOC History: Creating the AOC

Editor's note: This is the first of a 12-part series looking back at the 60-year history of the Association of Old Crows.



It formally began in the summer of 1964 with plans for a backyard cookout in the Washington, DC, suburbs. A small group of current and former US Air Force EW0s, who had served together at Strategic Air Command (SAC), formed plans to get together periodically as friends and colleagues and talk about the latest happenings in the EW world. Known as Crows, the informal name for electronic countermeasures officers, they wanted to create a more organized group of EW professionals.

The idea of an Association of Old Crows had been started more than a decade earlier, in 1953, by Mel Jackson, a former EW0 and at the time a marketing manager for CGS Technology Associates in New Jersey. Jackson wanted to form an association for EW professionals, and he even had some AOC membership certificates and coins produced. The idea gained some momentum for a few years, but eventually it became inactive by the late 1950s. However, Jackson's AOC identity and Crow logo lived on until the SAC Crows put the AOC plan into action again.



Most of the early Old Crows were assigned to Strategic Air Command. □ USAF photo

The first of these AOC gatherings was envisioned by Col Frank Witry as a cookout in his backyard. By 1964, he had been assigned to HQ USAF, and he thought other Crows in the Washington, DC, area would enjoy getting together. However, as the planning moved forward, the guest list of active duty EWOs, EW industry professionals and others in the field kept growing and growing until it was decided the group was too large for Witry's (or anyone else's) backyard.

Witry and a small group of fellow Crows met several times that summer and planned a larger reunion. However, one of the clear objectives of the reunion was not just to get together, but also to obtain pledges of support for establishing the Association of Old Crows as a permanent organization and formalizing its operations.

The most viable date when other Crows would travel to Washington, DC, was the 1964 Air Force Association meeting in September. The first annual AOC meeting was held on Sept. 9 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington. As word about the

banquet got around, the guest list continued to grow from 150 to 350 attendees. On the night of the banquet, 360 Crows came from all over the United States from all three military services, as well as from industry and universities engaged in ECM research.



An early AOC logo. □AOC photo

The banquet consisted of a business meeting at which a draft of a proposed constitution and by-laws were discussed, thereby taking the first step in establishing the Association of Old Crows as a permanent organization. The aims and purpose of the organization were as follows:

“The Association of Old Crows is formed to foster and preserve the art of electronic warfare; to promote the exchange of ideas and information in this field; to recognize advance and contributions to electronic warfare; to document the history of electronic warfare, and to commemorate fittingly the memory of fellow Crows.”

A slate of officers and directors were presented, elections were held, and the Association of Old Crows was officially born. There were 10 recognized founders who formed the AOC: Richard Amido, Warren G. Austin, William S. Crawford, Carl England, Guy S. Kirby, Earl Merrit, Danny Papp, James Trutter and Frank Witry. Colonel Witry was elected as AOC president and he began his term of office at a swearing-in ceremony that evening. Of those who attended, 150 joined the organization and paid five dollars for the initiation and first year's dues.

Next month, we'll take a look back at the first AOC Chapters.