

Throughout History, Crows Have Been Colorful Characters

The following article was published in the November 2024 issue of the Journal of Electromagnetic Dominance (JED) as part of the AOC's 60th anniversary celebration.

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The focus this month is "Colorful Characters of AOC's History." As much as possible, I have tried to cover individuals who have not been mentioned in previous columns and to cover individuals who were volunteers and not paid AOC staff members.



John Paup

The colorful history of the AOC begins with the origins of "old crows" and where it came from! **John Paup**, a student at the newly re-established electronic countermeasures (ECM) program at McGuire AFB (now Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst) in New Jersey in the late 1940s after the creation of the US Air Force, started referring to his instructors, mostly ravens who had flown in World War II, as "those old crows." His fellow students started using the term and soon the whole

school was using the term. The rest, as they say, is history.

So Paup has to be the original “colorful character” actually preceding the establishment of the AOC as a formal organization. After retiring from the Air Force in the late 1950s, Paup worked for a company named North American and went on to become its program manager for NASA’s Project Apollo during the early years of that program.

The second colorful character has got to be another veteran ECM officer, **Mel Jackson**, who just a few years later, in the mid-1950s, had the idea of creating an association for old crows. He had membership certificates printed and coins minted and began passing these out to military personnel with whom he dealt while conducting his civilian career as a marketing manager for an ECM company. The logo became quite popular and lives on as a legacy logo of the AOC.

Sadly, this loose-knit, unofficial organization went dormant in the late 1950s/early 1960s as Mel moved onto other non-EW pursuits. Yet, an all-important seed had been planted, one that would take root just a few years later when a few other former ravens/ECM officers would formally establish the Association of Old Crows in late 1964.



Dan Graves

By 1967, the AOC already had 2,300 members. One of those was a man named **Dan Graves**. He is our next colorful character of the AOC's history. He began publishing a collection of newsworthy items and humorous accounts of activities of chapters and members that he titled "Operator 750," which was derived from his AOC member number (75). Both this newsletter and Dan became icons of the AOC for decades. For fundraising for the AOC Education Foundation, if the AOC Store ever sells an "Old Crows Trivia Game," certainly Operator 750 and Dan Graves will be the basis for many trivia questions. Or if the AOC Store ever contracts with Parker Brothers to produce an AOC version of Monopoly for fundraising purposes, certainly there will be a "Dan Graves Boulevard" on the board.

In AOC's early days, fundraising was certainly an important concern. Another colorful character was **Bernie Zettl**, who paid AOC operating expenses from his own personal funds in the early days to keep the fledgling non-profit afloat. Whom of us would do that today? According to those on the current AOC History Committee in a position to know, Bernie Zettl contributed more than any of the other early AOC founders "by a bunch." In addition to contributing personal funds to keep the AOC financially afloat, he also served as the second and fourth AOC president. It is likely that had it not been for Bernie Zettl, the AOC would have ceased to exist as a formal organization just like it had as an informal organization under Mel Jackson.

At a regional level, there are too many colorful characters to mention, so I will discuss one I knew personally. **Daniel A.K. "DAK" Proctor** was the driving force behind the creation of the Billy Mitchell Chapter shortly after the creation of the AOC. He served as the chapter president and was always a guiding force behind the Billy Mitchell Chapter even when he was not the president.

Another of his significant accomplishments was the creation of the FiestaCrow regional conference in the late 1980s. I had

the privilege of meeting DAK once at a FiestaCrow 2009 planning meeting, and it was obvious he was still the old crow everyone in the room listened to, although he was quite frail at this point in his life. I had the honor of speaking at his funeral at Ft. Sam Military Cemetery shortly after I became the AOC President in 2013. There were no empty seats at the gravesite service that day, no dry eyes, and the eulogies were done by many old crows.

Throughout AOC's history, it's been blessed by the right old crow coming along at the right time to continue its important mission. *Will that be you?*