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Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake, USAF

1962 - 1965

Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake was born in Charles City, Iowa, in 1910. He secured an appointment to West Point in 1927 and, upon graduation, chose to enter the Army Air Corps. He became a command pilot, and in 1939 was assigned to Hickam Air Force Base (AFB) in Hawaii. There he assumed his alternate Air Corps occupation of communications officer, and directed the communications system for the first land-based aircraft flight from Hawaii to the Philippines in 1941, made by B-17 bombers on their way to reinforce General Douglas MacArthur in Manila. Only three months later he was operations officer at Hickam Air Force Base when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Following the Japanese attack, Lieutenant General Blake established the vital air route from the west coast of the United States to Australia, which was used during the remainder of the war. He then set up the Army Air Corps communications system in the Pacific and ran the system for the Pacific Theater during World War II.

The World War II experience marked Lieutenant General Blake for command. After completing Air War College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, in 1947, he served a tour with Air Force research and development at Wright AFB, Ohio, specializing in electronics, and in 1951 was placed in charge of twelve development laboratories. His research and development experience was followed by a series of staff jobs at the Pentagon, and then in 1957 his first major command, Air Force Security Service in San Antonio. For Lieutenant General Blake, this was his first immersion in cryptology, and served as a stepping-stone to the job as Director, NSA. Two years later he became vice commander and chief of staff at Pacific Air Forces in Hawaii, and in 1961 assumed his second major command, this time Continental Air Command. Only a year later he became Director of NSA following the transfer of then-Director Vice Admiral Laurence Frost.

Lieutenant General Blake came to NSA in 1962, just three months before the Cuban Missile

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Crisis erupted, and managed the Agency during the hectic scrambling to increase collection and processing. He made very high marks for his handling of the cryptologic system during the events. It was Lieutenant General Blake who carried NSA's information to the White House and interpreted the arcane indicators to a president and cabinet unfamiliar with their meaning. He played a role in keeping things calm downtown, by placing the right spin on the information. He also became caught up in the day-to-day NSA response to the crisis. At one point he found himself in the office of his chief action officer on the crisis, Juanita Moody. Ms. Moody had worked several days and nights without rest, and, seeing that she was close to exhaustion, he asked for a job. He was set to work answering phones, saying with each incoming phone call, "This is General Blake for Ms. Moody. May I help you?" History has not recorded what the startled callers said in response.

Once the crisis ended, his job had only begun. So that the Agency could respond to crises, Lieutenant General Blake established NSA's first round-the-clock command center, and its chief, the SNOO (Senior NSA Operations Officer) represented the cryptologic system when others had gone home. Downtown, NSA participated in the establishment of the White House Situation Room, both from a technological and personnel standpoint. Lieutenant General Blake used every opportunity to advance the process begun during the Cuban Missile Crisis of making the Agency more visible to downtown policy makers, and a more active participant in policy-making fora.

It was often said that no one disliked Lieutenant General Blake. He was one of the most genuinely likeable individuals ever to occupy the director's suite. His easy-going style and pleasing personality masked very high competence at top-level management. Under his direction, the cryptologic system moved significantly ahead without the workforce understanding the critical role that Blake played in its advancement.

Lieutenant General Blake died in San Antonio, Texas, on 1 September 1997 at the age of 87.

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