



History of the **OOZLEFINCH**

On 6 July 1956, the Oozlefinch, legendary featherless bird of the Coast Artillery Corps, awakened from his sleep of several years, tucked a Nike in the crook of his nude left leg, and, traveling by ways known only to himself, arrived at Fort Bliss, Texas, the home of the Antiaircraft and Guided Missile Center—there to become the guardian of all missilemen.

Since, as it is well known, the Oozlefinch always flies backwards to keep dust, trivia, and other inconsequential out of his eyes, the Nike is always positioned at the correct attitude.

The birth and beginnings of this fabulous bird were humble, almost inconsequential, and extremely vague. But, in true Horatio Alger fashion, this ancient, ageless bit of improbability has risen to a position of high honor. The Oozlefinch has focused his benevolent gaze over the men of the guided missiles. He is at once the confidant of generals, the protector of Very Important Persons, and above all, the guardian, patron, and monstrous mentor of modern missilemen.

The first recorded history of the Oozlefinch came through the somewhat rambling mumblings of a Captain H. M. Merriam of Fort Monroe, Virginia. Presumably a raconteur of no mean talents, the captain must be given the credit for discovering the bird about 1905. He apparently was the only man who had seen the creature, and he was loathe to describe appearance, habits, or habitat. One physical characteristic he did emphasize, however: the great bird's eyes. These eyes, as vividly described by the captain, remain today as the outstanding physical mark of the Oozlefinch.

These eyes are large, all-seeing, unshaded by eyelids or eyebrows, and rather seriously blood-shot. Just why the eyes are so prominent and red, no one seems sure. But being all-seeing, the bird can gather more information in a shorter period of time than mere mortals who have conventional sight. Because his eyes were unshaded by eyelids or eyebrows, the bird is forced to move tail foremost to protect his powers of observation, but also, he can turn them 180 degrees to gaze inwardly when he desires the maximum value from self-contemplation.

In the chronological history of the Oozlefinch, the wife of Colonel E. R. Tilton, also of Fort Monroe, follows Captain Merriam. Sometime before Christmas of 1905 or '06, while shopping in Hampton, Virginia, Mrs. Tilton came across a model of a bird which appeared to duplicate Captain Merriam's description of the Oozlefinch. A purchase was made for an amount unrecorded. Colonel Tilton transported the bird to the Fort Monroe Officers Club, and there it was accorded a perch behind the bar, where it remained for many, many years while gradually assuming its powers of guardianship. It appears that several unprincipled individuals attempted to remove the bird from his perch, and it was necessary, finally, to provide him with a glass cage for safekeeping.

Early in 1908, new construction was initiated at Fort Monroe for the Coast Artillery School. The constant shake, rattle, and roll of the dice and dice box in the bar disturbed the bar itself, and a separate room was provided for those individuals addicted to such gambling. The Oozlefinch insisted on joining these festivities and moved—glass cage and all—to the mantleshelf of an adjacent room in the Casemate Club. This room became famous as the "Oozlefinch Room," and the sessions of the Artillery Board were held there every afternoon until long after retreat, winter and summer. The Oozlefinch never missed a meeting, and with his all-seeing eyes, took in all of the work of the Board, becoming so deeply interested in its proceedings that he practically became a member. This room became known eventually as the "Gridiron Room" and the Oozlefinch became a member of the "Gridiron Club" (an organization, no doubt addicted to drinking and gambling, but mostly to "roasting" nonmembers).

Time passed; individuals came and went; the Oozlefinch spent much time in deep professional thought, particularly as World War I approached. Most of this time he was under the constant care of Keeney Chapman, the Club Steward who spent over 40 years in this position.

During World War I, three regiments of Coast Artillery (the 42d, 43d, and 52d) formed the 30th Artillery Railway Brigade in France. Just as the eagles of Napoleon crossed the length and breadth of Europe, so the spirit of the Oozlefinch proceeded to France with the Railway Artillery. He, himself, remained at Fort Monroe, but he kept both eyes focused on the proceedings "over there."

It was sometime during this period that those who remained at Fort Monroe thought it desirable to initiate a crest or coat-of-arms for the Gridiron Club. The design created quite a sensation among the noninitiated and the secrets of its composition were never divulged to outsiders. However, it is believed that the heraldic story ran something like this:

The body of the shield "parti per fess, divetailed" indicates the general woodenness, not of the Artillery Board and the other members of the "Gridiron Club" but of the passing throng who paid not their toll cheerfully in passing through the Sanctum to the bar. "Gules and Sable:" The color of the shield is red and black—red

awkward angel of the artillerymen during World War I, which prompted the establishment of the "Old Timer" degree.

Captain Baker's old unit, the 42d Railway Artillery Regiment, was the parent unit of the 42d Field Artillery Group, now in Europe, which was one of two field artillery organizations which trace lineage to the Oozlefinch. The other unit laying claim to the bird was the 64th Field Artillery Battalion (Lancers) in Hawaii, which traced its history to the 3d Battalion of the 43d Coast Artillery Regiment (RR). When first informed of these units' claims, the Oozlefinch issued only an outraged "Quid ad sceleratorum curamus," and flapped-tail foremost—to a remote missile firing range to sulk and brood. Later, however, he disclosed that the birds claimed by these two units are progeny of his still in oversea service. The sage old bird, in a burst of magnanimity, bestowed on each of the units the degree of "Oozlefinchling, Old Timer," and returned to his many duties at the AAA&GM Center.

On 1 July 1957, the U.S. Army AAA&GM Center was redesignated the U.S. Army Air Defense Center. Simultaneously, Major General Sam C. Russell assumed command of the Center and became Chief Oozlefinchling II. He was followed by Brigadier General Stephen M. Mellnik, Lieutenant General (then Major General) Marshall S. Carter, and Major General Tom V. Stayton. Since the command of Major General Russell, the numbering of the Oozlefinchlings has been discontinued.

In July 1959, after extensive talks between the Oozlefinch and Chief Oozlefinchling, still Major General Russell, it was decided to drop all "degrees" except the 24-hour Expert. Prompting this decision was the fact that the Ancient and Honorable Order of the Oozlefinchling had grown to over 48,000 strong. To be qualified for this award, one must now be a civilian guest of the Center and attend all briefings and missile firings during the prescribed period.

It was not until 2 years later, February 1961, that the Oozlefinch recognized the female human earthling as a guest to the Center and came up with a second "degree," the Powder Puff Oozlefinchling. The requirements, however, remained the same as for the 24-hour Expert.

During the next few years and through thousands of missile firings, the legendary bird seemed to turn up everywhere, and sometimes the skinny-necked fellow was even thought to be in two places at once. His farthest known migration over the years occurred in 1962 when he went to the outer Hebrides in Scotland where he observed with much gusto the Corporal missile firings by the 1st U.S. Army Missile Command stationed in Italy.

It was shortly thereafter, in January 1963 to be exact, that our intellectual friend barely escaped disaster. The featherless bird, overseer of missilemen, had become lost in a San Francisco fog. The exact circumstances of this all but fatal mishap are shrouded in official secrecy. Because, after all, the Oozlefinch up to that time had a reputation for infallibility.

But this much was made known. Enroute from McChord Air Force Base, Washington, on what should have been a routine flight, the fabulous bird, 24 hours overdue, was reported to have overshot the 40th Artillery Brigade helicopter strip and nearly crashed during a heavy fog that blanketed Fort Scott. The venerable warm-blooded vertebrate then became disoriented and, after barely missing a tail-on (remember he flies backward) collision with the Marin County Countryside tower of the Golden Gate Bridge, became totally confused. Needless to say, he was immediately rescued, although how is again shrouded with red tape and mystery.

Questioning of the Oozlefinch himself brought an unmitigated "no comment," and eventual public disclosure of the incident by the Information Officer of the 40th Brigade almost brought the creature's incredible career to a heartbreaking finish.

He is presently brooding at Fort Bliss, again in deep meditation, waiting for the unusual occurrence to be forgotten. Don't be fooled, however, for though he is quiet, "the guardian of all missilemen" is ever present in spirit.