

# Remembering the day the Russians came to PARI

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FOR THE T. TIMES

*Editor Note: Author Craig Gralley's book, "PARI: An Untold History of Spacemen and Spies" tells the story of how a small community in the North Carolina mountains helped to win the space race, the Cold War and became a model for student science education. An earlier book excerpt chronicled the Rosman Tracking Station's NASA years (1963-1981) and the site's pioneering role in weather forecasting. This article highlights how the Rosman Research Station under the Department of Defense (1981-1995) intercepted secret*



**PARI played a significant part** during the Cold War.

*foreign communications that helped the country's top leaders successfully navigate the Cold War.*

At the conclusion of the Cold

War, the United States was looking for a "peace dividend."

The Department of Defense (DoD) began scaling back its

network of military bases and facilities.

The Rosman Research Station had survived three rounds of congressional budget-related closures but by 1995 Rosman's time had come.

In preparing for its departure, the DoD created a sales brochure that identified four satellite dishes it was leaving behind and the frequencies each dish antenna was tuned to receive.

The frequencies of these antennas matched precisely the

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transmitting frequencies of military communications associated with least two Soviet satellites, called Raduga (“rainbow”) and Gorizont (“horizon”), and possibly a third, called Molniya (“lightning”). Each satellite was within “reach” of the Rosman Research Station’s antennas.

During the early 1980s the Soviets used these satellites to communicate with their military forces scattered throughout the western hemisphere including eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America.

Among other responsibilities, the Rosman site, a

National Security Agency “research station,” likely had a responsibility to collect and break the encryption that masked the highest priority communications signals from these satellites.

Decrypting these signals offered the potential of opening important new streams of information which would give our president the insight needed to counter Soviet military plans.

That the Department of Defense spent over \$200 million to upgrade the Rosman Research Station in 1985 speaks to the site’s success.

Rosman Research Station probably took on the most

difficult tasks, collecting and decrypting signals that closely tracked the highest priorities established by then President Ronald Reagan.

At the top of the president’s list was rolling back Soviet military influence in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Cuba, and countering Cuban military expansion throughout Latin America — including on the island of Grenada.

While Rosman was involved in collecting against many other intelligence priorities, a focus of attention was reading the communications traffic between the Soviets’ orbiting satellites and its massive

intelligence collection site in Lourdes, Cuba.

Because of its classified work, the Rosman Research Station was off-limits to Soviet and then Russian diplomats and military officials.

But after PARI took over in 1998 the facility was opened up once again for domestic and foreign visitors.

Dave Clavier, former vice president for administration, tells of the day in 2003 when a group of Russian scientists toured PARI:

“One day I got a call from a professor from Brevard College. Some Russian scientists were coming through town on a tour arranged by

the Library of Congress and he asked, “Would you mind if they came to visit PARI?” I said, “Sure, bring them in.”

“There were about 30 Russians and two interpreters. We showed them around, gave them an overview of our STEM education program and played our PARI video. When we finished I asked if they had any questions.

“One man stood up and began speaking in Russian. Now, I don’t speak Russian but it was clear that the longer he went on the more agitated he became. After he stopped, the interpreter put her head down and shook it from side-to-side. In a low voice she said, ‘I’m sorry to

say this, but this man claims what you’re saying is all a big lie and that you are still spying on Russia from this location.’

“Well,’ I said, ‘there’s nothing I can say to convince him otherwise, so I won’t even try . . .’”

“PARI: An Untold History of Spacemen and Spies,” will be published April 24 and is available for pre-order at [www.pari.edu/shop](http://www.pari.edu/shop) and at Highland Books in Brevard.

All author profits are being donated to further PARI’s student science programs.

For more information about Gralley and his work, visit [www.craiggralley.com](http://www.craiggralley.com).