

Saturday, March 30, 1991

Guard to christen new piloting aide

By Todd G. Dickson

Of the Sun-News

LA MESA — A 750-foot-tall antenna, an integral part of a high-tech navigation station on the edge of desert southwest of here, will be commissioned Wednesday by the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard began building the navigation signal transmitter station almost a year ago as the final step of a \$10-million contract to erect several of the towers across the United States.

The object is to fill in a mid-continent gap of the guard's Loran-C, or Long-Range Aid to Navigation network, said Chief Bob Finsted of the station.

The system was first developed by the guard for ships to navigate without any land or sky references, Finsted said, and is now being used by small airplanes flying over the continent.

Once fully operational, Finsted said equipment would be

able to triangulate a plane's position using the La Mesa signal and the signal from two of the other Loran stations — Gillette, Wyo. and Havre, Mont. These and other stations form two Loran chains for navigation by the estimated 100,000 general aviation aircraft in the United States equipped with Loran receivers.

Finsted said the transmitter sends out a continuous, precisely-timed signal for the airplane equipment to check against the other signals and determine the plane's position and course. This system is especially helpful for private aircrafts trying to find small airports, he said.

Presently, Finsted said the workers at the station are testing the signal, which should be fully operational by mid-April.

The commissioning ceremony makes the station an official Coast Guard unit, he said. A commissioning officer from the guard's district office in New Orleans will conduct the ceremony at 10 a.m. Wednesday at the station about 18 miles south of Las Cruces.

In a related matter, El Paso's Airport Hilton will be location of a Loran-C Users' Forum on May 15 to help pilots learn how to use the navigation system.

Pilots from around the United States — as well as Canada, Mexico and other countries — will attend programs on what the complete Loran coverage means to aviation and aircraft operations and how it works.