

AAF WESTERN FLYING TRAINING COMMAND

MISSION

LINEAGE

AAF Eastern Technical Training Command

STATIONS

455 Lake Ave, St. Louis, MO

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The Army Air Forces Western Flying Training Command was founded in August 1940, when a handful of officers armed with orders from the War Department took over a few desks at Moffett Field, California (until their advent a tactical base). Previous to this, flying training in the Air Forces had been restricted to Randolph Field and its few branches in Texas.

The eleven Western States: California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana—plus the small westernmost portions of Texas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota—was the territory assigned to AAFWFTC. Its quota was, and is, one-third of the nation's flying officers.

In those opening months three years ago AAFWFTC had under its jurisdiction only three flying schools—Glendale, Santa Maria and San Diego, all primary—with a total enrollment of 250 Aviation Cadets. Its sights were aimed at 2,000 flying officer graduates a year.

Within a year, by August 1941, AAFWFTC was expanding at a rapid pace. Its schools grew to 17 activated and five under construction. Basic schools like Minter Field at Bakers-field, advanced schools like Albuquerque and Mather and Stockton, supplemented the primary schools. Three thousand Cadets were enrolled.

Today, with AAFWFTC going into its fourth year, its jurisdiction covers dozens of schools throughout the Western States. The exact number, of course, cannot be published, but it's a far cry from those starting days of two years ago.

Headquarters of AAFWFTC moved from Moffett Field to Santa Ana, California, when the former was returned to the status of a Navy lighter-than-air base in April 1942.

The first Commanding General and organizer of the AAFWFTC was Brigadier General Henry W. Harms. After slightly less than a year he was ordered to Washington in June 1941, and Colonel (now Brigadier General) Edwin B. Lyons temporarily assumed Command. In July 1941, Major General (now Lieutenant General) Barton K. Yount arrived from a tactical command in Florida to take over.

After six months as head of AAFWFTC, General Yount was called to Washington in January, 1942, and appointed head of the new Training Command, now headquartered at Fort Worth, Texas. His successor was Major General Ralph P. Cousins, West Point graduate and member of the staff of Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold.

Today AAFWFTC includes War Service Training Detachments, many college training detachments, a huge classification and pre-flight training center at the Santa Ana Army Air Base; primary, basic, single-engine, and twin-engine advanced pilot training schools; twin-engine and four-engine transition schools, three gunnery schools in Nevada and Arizona, and bombardier schools throughout the Southwest.

The prospective loss of Moffett Field as an Air Corps Training Center in 1941 led to the consideration of various other sites for a proposed Cadet Replacement Training Center. Believing that the center of training activities was moving toward the Southwest, and that a location there would be more convenient to the bulk of the Civil Aviation Schools which it was proposed to use for more advanced training, higher authority finally, on 16 June 1941, recommended that the Cadet Replacement Center be located on its present site near Santa Ana. The ground selected was known as the Whittier Estate. It was formerly the Berry Rancho, and before that was part of the Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana, a grant of the Spanish crown to Jose Antonio Yorba in 1810. The site contained a little over 400 acres and was ideally located from the standpoint of accessibility and transportation facilities. It had often been considered as the site for a civilian aviation school, and the immediate vicinity was the location of the

Glenn Martin plant and experiment? in 1911. The ground was flat, with few obstructions, and before construction began was planted to beans, beets, and alfalfa. Climatic conditions were very favorable for training activities, there being few days of the year on which outdoor work cannot be carried on.

Arrangements were made between the War Department and the City of Santa Ana for the leasing of the land at \$1 per year. The U. S. Engineers started advertising for bids on the building construction on 18 October 1941. The prime contract was awarded to the Griffith Company of Los Angeles; and formal groundbreaking ceremonies were held on 23 October.

Meanwhile, on 12 October, the present Commanding Officer of the Base, Colonel (then Major) William Abbott Robertson, a veteran flyer and experienced organizer, arrived at Santa Ana and set up temporary headquarters at the Federal Building. Choosing a cadre of officers from Moffett Field and other stations, and studying other replacement centers throughout the country, he gradually built up the organization necessary for the project. Additional officers, enlisted men, and supplies poured into Santa Ana. The events of 7 December 1941 caused all plans to be revised upward, however, and even before the first installations on the new base were ready for occupancy it was known that they would be quite inadequate for the program being evolved by the heads of the Army Air Forces. Colonel Robertson's chief assistant in the early organization was Lieutenant Colonel (then Captain) Thomas P. Atkinson, who was Adjutant and Commander of Troops.

On 15 February 1942 the headquarters was moved from Santa Ana to the new base. Some buildings were ready for the cadets, 350 of whom arrived, mainly from Williams and Minter Fields, in the last week of February. The training of Aviation Cadets for aircrew was the primary objective of the new base, and it was thus named the Air Corps Replacement Training Center (Aircrew): this name was changed to Santa Ana Army Air Base on 7 April 1942. After the first week cadets began to pour in until, during the first week in March, the officers in charge were told on Thursday that they were to star-school the following Monday with 5,000 cadets. At this time the Aviation Cadet Section was organized and arranged into companies, the infantry system being used since a good deal of the ground training was in basic military subjects. In May 1942, this system was changed into an organization of Wings, Groups, and Squadron in view of indoctrination in Air Corps organization.

For the training of the future aircrew officers procurement officials went out to the high schools and colleges and recruited a faculty of trained and experienced teachers, a staff which increased until it numbered over 250. Most of these men had advanced degrees, and their presence and duties actually made the base a great university. The instructors were uniformed for disciplinary and morale reasons, and were, within the year, almost completely militarized, most of them being commissioned as officers in the U. S. The training program at first was the same for future pilots, bombardiers and navigators, and consisted of military training, physical training, and academic training in proportioned doses. The academic training included courses in mathematics, physics, Morse Code, maps and charts, naval and aircraft recognition, organization and use of ground forces, military customs and courtesies, safeguarding military information, military hygiene, and War Department publications.

On 15 June 1942 most of the kinks in the training program had been ironed out and on that date the Aviation Cadet Section was split up into the three schools: Air Force Classification Center; Air Force Pre-flight School (Pilot); and Air Force Preflight School (Bombardier-Navigator). The latter are self-explanatory in title; the Classification Center was responsible for the testing of putative aircrew trainees, the elimination of the unfit, and the placing of those who passed in the most appropriate category. For these purposes the trained scientists and educators in charge have developed batteries of tests of all types for mental alertness, mechanical aptitude, etc., which have gained great attention from the educational authorities outside of the Army. The testing work in Classification Center is largely performed by Psychological Research Unit No. 3 and by the 33rd Altitude Training Unit, which cooperate with the Flight Surgeon in physical and psychological examination of the fitness of the candidates. It may be noted that Santa Ana was the only base in the country training all three types of preflight training— Pilot, Bombardier, and Navigator, and also the only one having a Classification Center as well as the preflight schools.

Other Schools developed on the Base have been the Student Officers School, started on April 12, 1943, for the preflight training of officers transferring from other services to the Air Corps, and the Chinese Detachment, for the indoctrination, English language training, and preflight training of Chinese officers, cadets, and enlisted men of the Chinese Air Forces under a Lend-Lease arrangement with the Republic of China. The Chinese School was started in September 1943.

The Base has had, of course, the aid provided by other services and branches of the Armed Forces. The Quartermaster Corps has supplied it adequately and well; the Corps of Engineers has constructed appropriate buildings and built roads, pavements, and parade grounds; the Finance Department has looked after the large payrolls; the Ordnance Department has taken care of ranges, weapons and ammunition; the Chemical Warfare Service has given training and supplies in the vital program of Chemical Defense.

Morale has always been high on the Base, and this, of course, has been largely due to the fine equipment and services provided by various Army morale agencies, whose activities have been sought and encouraged by the Commanding Officer and his aides. These include: the Army Postal Service, with its main Post Office and five branches; the Post Exchange, with five branches and various concessions; the Army Theater Program, with three movie theaters; the Special Services Branch, with its operation of Public Relations, Army Emergency Relief, the Service Club, the Post Library, and the "Cadet" Newspaper; the American Red Cross, with its Field Office and Hospital Service; and above all the Chaplain's Department, with its four chapels staffed by devoted ministers of various faiths.

The Station Hospital is a most important activity. Not only has it developed into a 1500-bed hospital with all modern facilities, but it has proved to be a training ground from which many Medical Officers have gone out to organize and head other installations. It has also done considerable valuable original research, the results of which have been made available to, and used by, the entire Armed Forces, and it has cooperated in the examination and selection of aircrew candidates. In September 1943 higher authority changed the objective of the Base from the single one of

training aircrew to include also the training of enlisted men. Since then, under the direction of the Base Plans and Training Office, here has been a strong program of basic military training for enlisted men, resulting in preparation and shipping of many men for overseas duty.

The Base has contributed greatly to the Army Air Forces Training Program in the development of new methods, techniques, and training aids; it has contributed, in practically every department to the training of officers who have taken over higher positions in other installations; but above all it has had a most important part in the training of the Pilots, Bombardiers, and Navigators who are the principal cogs in the mighty machine of the Army Air Forces. General Arnold has released for publication the fact that we have trained since 1941 over 100,000 pilots, over 18,000 navigators, and over 20,000 bombardiers. We cannot give figures but every officer and man of the Santa Ana Army Air Base is proud of the fact that no small proportion of these men have received their preflight training at Santa Ana, "The Cradle of the Crew".

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.