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HISTORICAL NOTES

on the

ORLANDO AIR FORCE BASE

Orlando, Florida

From August 30, 1940

Through October 28, 1949

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FOURTEENTH AIR FORCE

from

Official Documents, Interviews and

Orlando Newspapers

Chapter I

THE DAY CHOSEN FOR AIR WAR

On August 30, 1940, a truck convoy of 50 Army officers and men from Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, rolled into the little city of Orlando, Florida.

Five days later, on September 4, at 1710 hours, approximately a dozen planes in flights of three from the same installation, roared across the northwestern horizon. After circling over the city, awaiting their signals for landing, those planes, one by one, settled within the boundaries of the Orlando Municipal Airport, an area not much larger than the size of four city blocks.

However, the arrival of those soldiers and those planes in no way constituted what, in the subsequent years of World War II, was to become known as a "blitz". On the contrary, for hours previously, automobiles had been parked bumper to bumper for miles along all streets and highways leading to the Orlando airport, as practically the entire populace of the town scanned the skies for the first glimpse of the approaching aircraft.

Although Orlando was becoming more and more air conscious, there had been few times when so great a number of planes had arrived simultaneously.

Thus came to Orlando the 23rd Composite Group. The airport at which this advanced echelon landed was, after many changes of name and a war involving practically the entire world, to become known as the

**Orlando Air Force Base.** Little did the most farsighted leaders in the community realize then, that the arrival of those soldiers heralded an era which, during the next five years, would bring fame to the Orlando installation throughout the length and breadth of the earth; that the training which would be offered there would prove a deciding factor toward saving the world from the onslaught of despotism.

Today, the Orlando Air Force Base, so named in 1947, after the recognition by Congress of the importance of the Air Forces of the United States, and the granting of autonomy to that branch of the service, is composed of a multitude of impressive buildings, runways, airplanes, hangars, light and water facilities and other heavy installations.

On that day in August 1940, however, two short paved runways crossed the airport, and a few hurriedly erected tarpaper buildings, their second stories reached by outside ladders, constituted the sole accommodations on the base.

While there is no available official history, giving a chronological account of events leading up to the arrival of the 23rd Composite Group, a great deal of local color has been obtained from various newspaper accounts during the previous months.

For a number of weeks the greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce had been quietly working, on a program to bring the army detachment to Orlando. A. C. Slaughter, secretary of the C of C had been in contact with Colonel B. H. Hale, one of the highest ranking officers connected with the Army Air Forces and who, to a great extent, determined locations for bases. Colonel Hale had obtained knowledge of the desirability

of such a location upon his visit to Orlando in 1935, with the 20th Bombardment Group from Langley Field.

The 23rd Composite Group was selected as the organization to be sent to Orlando as a result of a recognized need for a model Air Corps unit, which would be used in cooperation with the Air Corps Board in the development of tactical doctrines. The 23rd, stationed at Maxwell Field in 1939, had been utilized, but only to a limited extent, and it was believed that the work could be facilitated by removal to Orlando, pending its anticipated permanent location at Myrtle Hill Field, Florida, within the next year or so.

Representative Joe Hendricks, in his message to Orlando groups, telling of the transfer said:

"Orlando should cooperate in every detail to provide housing and other necessary things for the War Department, so as to facilitate the establishment of the unit here.... This is only a beginning. There is much more to come to Orlando yet.... Orlando should not hesitate to call on me for cooperation in any way possible."

#### FIRST PLANS FOR AIR GROUP

Many changes became necessary at the Orlando Municipal Airport, including enlargement of the whole field, the extension of runways to lengths almost double their dimensions, the erection of batteries of large barracks, construction of auxiliary buildings to house specialized detachments such as radio control and weather divisions, and the installation of thousands of dollars worth of special aeronautical equipment.

Orlando long had had plans for a master airport which would permit runways of 4,500-foot length, permitting the landing and take-off of planes so large that they still existed only in the minds of aeronautical engineers. To a great extent, the person who had advocated Orlando as an air center for many years previously, and to whom much credit should go, was G. Wayne Gray, at that time one of the commissioners of the city of Orlando.

Plans for the air installation called for the construction of miles of roads and highways through and adjoining the field for the movement of all types of transport needed for the servicing of the field and its equipment. Already the county was engaged in preliminary real building in the vicinity of the port.

It had been indicated by War Department officials that those groups based at municipal air fields would eventually become permanent bases as the strength of the Air Corps was increased under the air expansion program.

On June 24th, 1940, Mr. Gray revealed that the government would need a large section of desolate country about 20 miles from Orlando for gunnery practice.

"That", said Mr. Gray, "is one of the major requirements for warplanes which will be incessantly at target practice. But, since we have many desolate sections outside the city, that need will not constitute any kind of a problem".

All bombing practice performed by the bombers of the Composite Group was to be on the Tampa bomb range. Intense machine gun practice

be conducted at the strafing range near Orlando. Later march of events, showed that Mr. Gray, though exceptionally farsighted, fell far short of predicting the magnitude of developments during the next five or six years.

Already, the municipality of Orlando had taken options on more than 40 acres of land adjacent to the airport. With the signal from the army that the move was to be consummated, a special purchasing commission swung into action. Another 40 acres would extend the boundaries of the base to the southern side of the Cheney highway.

With only one exception, owners of adjoining property cooperated promptly and gladly, but, although the acquisition of this particular acreage would straighten the boundary lines of the land needed by the base, the owner delayed action for many months, until it became necessary to condemn the area as being necessary to the safety of the nation.

#### FUNDS ALLOCATED BY WAR DEPARTMENT

On July 6, 1940, the War Department allocated \$88,226 to the Orlando Municipal Airport for the establishment of an army aviation base here, although the dispatch from Washington gave no indication as to when work would begin it was generally understood that construction would start as soon as the acreage could be acquired.

More details from Washington a few days later included information that 17 barracks buildings, a hospital and five administration buildings would be erected in addition to miscellaneous other structures - totaling 57 buildings.

As the days passed, information coming from the nation's capital added plans for other buildings - such as a hospital, four supply rooms, one motor repair shop, and one for a beacon radio. Also, the project was to cover the erection of one tower, four powder magazines, three bombsight buildings, four bomb storage buildings, one firehouse, four day rooms, one recreation building, and a school structure.

The building program announced was one of the largest ever recorded in the city's construction annals, and meant that hundreds of workmen, both skilled and unskilled would have employment for months to come.

As weeks passed, estimates and plans increased, until a short time later, the United Press in outlining salient points in the vast air base activities in Florida as prepared by the War Department reported that eventually \$3,500,000 would be spent on the Orlando Air Base.

#### BASE NEARLY CANCELLED

For a while the city fathers faced the difficult task of meeting their proportionate share of the expenses.

The city council was in conference on July 24, 1940, when it was told flatly by a telegram from Colonel C. L. Tinker, commanding officer of MacDill Field, Tampa, that unless Orlando met the requirements of the Army by noon that day, Orlando would be classed as a city not acceptable for the establishment of an Army air base.

However, City Comptroller W. C. Lanier, dramatically came to the rescue with an eleventh hour solution to the dilemma as follows:

The Orange County Board of Commissions had in their road and bridge fund a certain sum, 85% of which would eventually go to the city of Orlando. By using this sum as city collateral, the municipality was able to go ahead and secure a loan from a bank with which to sponsor a WPA project for the construction of the extension.

As soon as the council was convinced that the money could be obtained, Colonel Tinker was telephoned that the city would meet the requirements of the army.

With this decision, bids were received from various construction companies, and by August 6, Orlando was squarely in the middle of the nation's defense program.

However, notwithstanding the far-reaching plans, at the time of the arrival of the first truck convoy and the first flight planes, accommodations were still meager.

Such planes as were retained for the time being, were parked at different points around the Orlando Airport, which still retained its limited capacity. Their wings secured from sudden gusts of wind by ropes tied to stakes driven into the ground, each plane had its guard throughout the night, said guard depending upon a small pup tent for protection from sudden Florida showers. While, during this period, the planes were never subjected to strafing, the same could not be said of the men who stood guard. Loud and long those men complained about the dangers which were constantly shot into their bodies, especially at night, when hordes of mosquitoes descended upon them, their joyous singing indicating their certainty that this abundance of food had been placed outside for their special benefit.

since the few hurriedly erected buildings furnished only enough space for the officers, and the acreage then at the disposal of the base was not sufficiently large nor in condition to take care of the enlisted men (now designated as airmen) it became necessary at the very start to billet them elsewhere.

Exposition Park at Orlando, furnished the place. In years previous the Central Florida Exposition had used this space for display of truck and grove products which grow so abundantly in Florida. In addition, a few ambitious souls had conceived the idea of building a zoo adjacent to the exposition property. For various reasons, inhabitants of the zoo had not flourished though the enclosures were still intact. Ironically, those inclosures became the first guard-house of the base.

Within a few days, 120 six-man tents from the Fourth Corps headquarters in Atlanta temporarily relieved the housing proposition at Exposition Park, where the airmen had been sweltering in the unventilated exposition buildings.

The Commanding Officer of the 23rd Composite Group was Lt. Col. Thomas S. Voss. Prior to his assignment at Orlando, Colonel Voss had been executive officer at Maxwell Field, Alabama, during its period of augmentation. Previously, he had served in the Philippine Islands, where he had commanded another composite group, consisting of pursuit, observation and bombardment squadrons, situated at Nichols Field.

Colonel Voss, who rose from the enlisted ranks to commissioned status, entered the service as a bugler in the Cavalry in 1911. He attained the grade of Captain, Air Service, during World War I and

during the intervening years had been promoted to Major, then to Lieutenant Colonel.

Major Melville Phillips, who had been connected with the Group since its formation, was made executive, and all officers and men who flew in connection with the Orlando base were under his command.

#### OFFICERS APPOINTED BY COLONEL VOSS

On 12 September 1940, Colonel Voss made public a number of appointments for positions in the Orlando Air Base. The offices were to be permanent, pending further orders.

Captain Charles A. Bassett was made Provost Marshal, in charge of military police, intelligence and prisons.

Captain Davis D. Graves was designated post operation officer and Captain Kenneth A. Rogers, station engineering officer and technical inspector.

Captain Delmar F. Slyvay was named station Air Corps supply officer, with First Lieutenant Charles V. Passford as assistant.

Captain John H. Davis was detailed as post educational and recreational officer, while First Lieutenant Joseph D. Lee was made post signal officer.

Captain Lester C. Gray, Medical Corps, was designated post surgeon, with assistants Captain Stuart P. Pantivere and Captain Robert J. Mansell.

Major Robert S. Williams had been designated commanding officer, quartermaster detachment and post quartermaster.

Captain George A. Andy, post . col officer and Captain Dudley D. Hale, post recruiting officer. Captain Robert L. Easton, post Adjutant and public relations officer.

#### ORLANDO DECLARED "DEFENSE AREA"

On September 21, it was learned that Orlando had been designated as a "defense area". This was interpreted to mean that Orlando was in line for continuous expansion as a military operations point. Also, it was expected that the city would be in line for army highways connecting it with other military developments in Florida, such as the Naval Aviation Base on the Banana River, near Cocoa, and the Army's MacDill Field at Tampa. At that time there were no wide direct highways connecting Orlando with either Cocoa or Tampa. Parenthetically, it may be said that although Air Force activities did develop into mammoth proportions, the wide highways did not materialize. The construction of such transportation conveniences is still being discussed at the present time (26 October 1949).

#### ORLANDO AIR BASE PRAISED

On 19 October 1941, Colonel Ralph A. Cousins, arrived in Orlando, to visit his friend, Colonel Voss.

Colonel Cousin was loud in his praise of the new Orlando Air Base. "It is one of the finest in the country and, with extensions to the present runways and the construction of a new runway, it will be thoroughly adequate", he declared.

One month later, when General Davenport Johnson, assistant chief of the air corps, accompanied by Major Robert Webster (now major general)

Commanding General of the First Air Force, Fort Slocum, N. Y. expressed his satisfaction with the installation.

Voss made full colonel

Effective October 28, 1940, it was announced that Lieutenant Colonel Voss had been promoted to full colonel. News of this action was received with much pleasure both by his Army colleagues and many friends.

General Arnold expected

Another high ranking officer of the Air Corps was scheduled to make an inspection tour of the base - none other than Major General (now General of the Air Force, Ret) Henry H. Arnold. While there is no official record of the actual arrival of General Arnold at that time, there is no doubt but that he did arrive. Also, he made several visits to the installation during subsequent months.

DECEMBER 1940 to MARCH 1944

On 1 December the Orlando Air Base was officially opened in what is now known as Operations Area. A few days later, Mayor S. V. May of Orlando named a committee of citizens to meet with one from the air base for the selection of a name for the new installation, as had been requested by Colonel Voss.

For some reason, a name was not agreed upon at that time, nor has a name yet been selected, though there is presently another move on foot for the same purpose in accordance with an Air Force-wide policy to name the major Air Force bases for outstanding heroes of World War II.

#### ARMY AIR FORCE BOARD

Later in the history of the Orlando Air Force Base, as it is now named, much will be said about the Army Air Forces Board -- for convenience called the AAF Board.

It might be well at this point to speak of the type of work which had been carried on since 1922 by organizations operating under different names, but carrying out virtually the same policies.

Back in 1922, at Langley Field, Virginia, the Air Service Board had been established "to consider such subjects as may be referred to the board by the Chief of Air Service, and to originate and submit recommendations looking to the improvement of the Air Service."

Members of the board consisted of the Commandant and assistant Commandants of the schools and from two to five other officers.

In 1933, the Air Corps Board, as it was then called, was located at Maxwell Field, along with the Air Corps Tactical school, of which the, then, Major Hums Peabody was Assistant Commandant. Membership of the Board was composed of officers holding similar duties as those above.

In July 1934, a committee headed by the honorable Newton D. Baker, former Secretary of War, was appointed to make a survey of the needs of the Army Air Corps. In its analysis of training requirements, the committee states:... "Only minor attention has been paid to the proper preparation and promulgation of sound training doctrines. Each air commander has trained his command according to his individual ideas... the result: Air Corps unit training is not at this time satisfactory."

Among the recommendations of the so-called "Baker Board" were the following:

"To assist in correcting the present unsatisfactory condition of unit training, the committee recommends the early creation of the Air Corps Board and that, when created, this board give prompt attention to the formulation of uniform tactical doctrines for all types of Air Corps units....

"The committee recommends the creation of a model Air Corps unit at the Air Corps Tactical school for demonstration and exercises in the training of student officers, and for cooperation with the Air Corps Board in the development of tactical doctrines."

Although six years elapsed before serious attention was given to the recommendations of the "Baker Board", yet by the summer of 1940, as a result of the current Air Corps expansion program and in all probability under the impetus of the unfavorable developments of the European war, most of the recommendations had been put into effect.

One of the recommendations had called for a model Air Corps unit, for cooperation with the Air Corps Board in the development of tactical doctrines. By 1940, some such unit was urgently needed by the Board as a testing agency. The 23rd Composite Group, formerly stationed at Maxwell Field, but moved to Orlando pending "permanent" location at Eglin Field, had been utilized for the furtherance of Air Corps Board projects, but only to a limited extent, since the group was not under the Board's operational control.

As a result certain recommendations were made, which were of considerable importance in the development of the rapidly expanding Air Corps:

....the 23rd Composite Group be permanently stationed at Eglin Field and that it be moved thereto at the earliest possible date.

The Commanding Officer, 23rd Composite Group, be designated as an ex-officio member of the Air Corps Board.

AR BB-20, 3 July 1941 gives the following information:

..."Location of the Board be designated as Eglin Field and its composition revised to include the commanders of the Proving Ground and the 23rd Composite Group as ex-officio members."

## AIR DEFENSE OPERATIONAL TRAINING UNIT

Following the events of 7 December 1941, with the United States under attack by temporarily stronger adversaries, an adequate and unified air defense system became a primary and critical necessity. In March 1942, a specially organized Air Defense Operational Training Unit was activated at Orlando, Florida under direction of the Third Air Force, with the following primary missions:

1. To train key personnel in the performance of duties involved in a unified air defense, to include fighter, aircraft warning, anti-aircraft artillery, service units, air defense control, and liaison personnel.
2. Air defense doctrines, tactics and techniques were to be developed and unified. Additional training would be furnished in order to standardize air defense operational procedures and to develop and recommend organization for air defense.
3. To service test air defense equipment which would include day and night pursuit aircraft, signal corps equipment, both ground and airborne, and camouflage of fighter stations, airdromes and other air defense establishments.

## INTERCEPTOR COMMAND SCHOOL

In April 1942, the name of the school was redesignated as the Interceptor Command School, which one month later was changed to:

## FIGHTER COMMAND SCHOOL

This school was to be an exempted activity under the Commanding General, Army Air Forces.

Three months later, Colonel William R. Taylor was made commanding officer of the Fighter Command School, succeeding Colonel Thomas S. Ross, who was transferred to MacDill Field, Tampa, where he became commanding officer. Colonel H. F. Newman was named Executive of the school.

With the activation of the Fighter Command School, there was an immediate expansion of operations. Many changes took place, as plans and policies were worked out.

The Signal Hill area of the Air Base was developed. This area extended east from the base to the shores of Lake Barton. As a precautionary measure against possible bombing, many of the planes were parked within the southern section of Signal Hill, carefully guarded, and separated by sufficient distances to prevent mass destruction in case of an enemy attack.

## NEW AREA

On October 30, 1942, the contract was let for 342 buildings of concrete block construction which was known as the "new area", and subsequently housed the Headquarters of the Air School of Applied Tactics, AA/ Tactical Air Center, Air Force Center, AF Proving Ground Command, and the Fourteenth Air Force.

The total area of the Orlando Army Air Base was 2757 acres, total number of buildings on this acreage 790, with 34 miles of streets and

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roads. In addition, a spur track seven and one-half miles long, had been added by one of the railroads.

ARMY AIR FORCES SCHOOL OF APPLIED TACTICS

In November 1942, the name of the school was again changed to "Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics" (AAFSAT).\*

Pending assignment of permanent personnel, Colonel Willis H. Taylor assumed command of the new organization on 8 November 1942. Later, Brigadier General Gurn Peabody was made Commandant of the school.

General Peabody, a graduate of the U. S. Military Academy in the class of 1919, was first assigned to 3rd Cavalry at Brownsville, Texas, on border patrol duty.

He also graduated at the Air Corps Tactical School, 1929; the two year course at Command and General Staff Schools, 1931; Army War College, 1935.

A veteran of World War I, with the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, he served at Luke Field and Fort Shafter, Hawaii, as well as in many vital positions in the country. He remained in his capacity as Commandant AAFSAT until 1 November 1943, when he became Commanding General of the newly organized Army Air Forces Tactical Center, Orlando. He left Orlando in March 1945, to become Commanding General of Army Air Forces Eastern Flying Training Command, Maxwell Field, Ala.

There were four departments in AFM&AT: Air Defense, Air Support, Bombardment, and Air Service. Each department was under a Commandant, who was also designated Assistant Commander of the School. It was estimated that the school would expect 1800 officers and 3800 enlisted men each month.

The School of Applied Tactics was a war-time installation, and the requirements of the Army Air Forces for training personnel, new equipment, and improved tactics were constantly emerging.

Since the new school was to be responsible not only for tactical training but also for the development of new tactics and techniques for the prosecution of the war, a brief explanation might help at this point:

"Commandant, AFM&AT will perform the following functions:

"1. Exercise command jurisdiction over all activities at the school.

"2. Supervise and coordinate all training and development conducted by the school. He will allocate all facilities to insure their maximum use and efficiency.

"3. Maintain constant, close, and direct liaison with Army Air Forces Proving Ground Command, in order to make the maximum use of both activities and to prevent duplication of effort."

Winter of 1942-1943 saw much construction of buildings and other installations, with satellite installations spread throughout the central and northern portions of the state, from Gainesville in the north to Sebring in the south, with a bombing range over the Gulf of Mexico at Cedar Keys.

While definite information is not immediately available as to which locations provided training grounds for specific types of combat, we are able to state that these locations were situated at Brooksville, Pinecastle, Minerville, Kissimmee, Zephyr Hills, Cross City, Leesburg, Montbrook, Alachua, Bushnell, Ocala, and many other points. Some of them were so highly top secret at the time that their locations are still not definite in the minds of personnel formerly assigned here.

One such range constituted a phase of training for senior officers.

It was located in the approximate vicinity of Pinecastle. To insert a bit of local color: during the so-call "boom" in Florida in 1926, a network of highways had been paved in the southeastern section of Orange county. While these roads had provided a certain amount of convenience to hunters and occasional travellers, they had never seemed to justify their initial cost. One of the pioneer citizens of the area, indignant at the extravagance, had insisted that Indians who

lived in the Everglades, in trying to reach Orlando by following the new highways had often become lost in the mystic maze and consequently had starved to death.

This seclusion, however, proved ideal for the top secret training.

Types of instruction provided at these locations included heavy, light and medium bombardment.

Fighter planes were constantly in use. Many Orlandians remember the dog fights overhead by these fast planes, when it seemed that they would inevitably dash into one another, and fall upon the city.

Pilots were trained in exactly the type of planes they would use when in combat overseas.

Searchlights swept the skies at night, and the familiar drone of planes whose flights were followed by those powerful instruments is still vividly recalled by Central Floridians. In addition, many impressive demonstrations overhead gave Orlandians a certain degree of confidence as to the protection which could be afforded in case of an attack upon the community.

The manufacture and development of radar equipment had been greatly accelerated throughout the country, and many laboratories sent their products, accompanied by technicians, to "Xent" for field tests. Since the war, we have learned that radar tests were made over Orla Vista, a small suburb of Orlando. Whether Xent was the name applied to that installation is still not certain.

Shortly following the move into Headquarters Area, Spring 1943, another group of military personnel began to report for duty. This group was composed of women, who had enlisted in the service of their country for the primary purpose of relieving male personnel for overseas shipment.

Under the command of Major Celestina Mackay, who afterwards became WAC Staff Director, this detachment of Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) numbered many hundreds. However, if an accurate estimate could be made of the total number who reported here for duty, stayed for a few months, and were then assigned elsewhere in the United States or overseas, the figure would reach into the several thousands. At peak, the largest numbers at one time reached 1,000 enlisted women, 40 officers. At regular intervals, they were sent overseas, as quotes were received. They served in all theaters of operations.

At the beginning of the war the organization had been called the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps. Later the name was changed to Women's Auxiliary Corps (WAC).

By far the largest majority of these women had joined the service for patriotic motives, though, as is often the case in other groups, some had been temporarily carried away by the spirit of adventure. From an overall opinion of the work which they performed at the Orlando installation, however, it can safely be said that the service which the WAC rendered during World War II became a deciding factor toward the winning of that conflict -- toward the preservation of democracy throughout the world.

When the Proving Ground Command moved to Eglin Field on July 1, 1946, the SAC detachment was also transferred to the same place, and by the next day, none remained on the base.

#### ARMY AIR FORCES TACTICAL CENTER

In October 1945, in order to provide more economy in administration, the name of the school was again changed, this time to "Army Air Forces Tactical Center". Although the alphabetical name for the organization immediately became "AAFTAC", the third "A" in the abbreviation was merely used to make the lettering pronounceable.

At this time, the academic phases of instruction remained under the school, of which Colonel Harlan A. Holden was made Commandant, and the tactical training was put under Colonel J. D. Lee, Jr., Director of Tactical Development.

In all, during the course of the school, 200 different courses were taught. Officer and enlisted personnel from the school were sent to combat zones all over the world to observe methods and techniques, and to ascertain if instruction in the school, was proving of highest value to our soldiers.

In addition, our allies sent instructors in order that we might have the advantage of the knowledge they had gained in combat.

As the fundamentals of the American air defense system had been originally borrowed from the British, the school profited from the experience and counsel of several Royal Air Force officers. These officers provided valuable school instruction and assisted in projects dealing with, for example, radio-telephone procedure,

an air defence grid system for the United States, and the production of field manuals.

One of the most colorful of these instructors was Wing Commander W. C. Donaldson of the Royal Air Force. Commander Donaldson was officially credited with 20 Nazi planes, more than 300 hours of combat flying time, and having been shot down nine times.

Some facts which have been learned of the school, and for which information has not been recorded in exact chronological order, nor arranged logically, are still of much interest. They will be given below for the purpose of adding color to this narrative.

At the school, many short courses constituted the last bit of instruction afforded before our men were sent overseas.

Often groups came here for intensive study, then were sent back to their original assignments where they instructed other personnel of the organization.

At one time there were three 3-star generals in the school.

One particular course was attended by officers from the Canadian Air Staff College at Ottawa, who came here for two-week courses of instruction. Also, one of our instructors was requested by the college to come to Ottawa for the purpose of giving a series of lectures.

In March 1944 Brigadier General Penbody was transferred, and Major General Edwin J. House assumed command.

General House was a graduate of West Point, Air Corps Tactical School, and Command and General Staff School. At the beginning of World War II, General House was assigned as commanding general of the

Antilles Air Command, which included all islands of the Caribbean and the Guineas. In May 1943 he was transferred to the Mediterranean theater of operations and served under General Carl Spaatz, with command of 12th Air Support Command, composed of fighters, and medium and light bombers. This command supported General George Patton in the Sicilian Campaign and, later, General Mark Clark in the invasion of Italy, including the battle of Salerno and Anzio.

Shortly thereafter General House, because of ill health, was returned to the United States where he assumed command of AAFMAC.

At one time there were 26,000 personnel attached to this installation.

Headquarters AAFMAC operated as a wing. During that period, the Air Force at Orlando was declared an autonomous, unnumbered Air Force, directly under the commanding general of the Army Air Forces. In order that it might carry out its function unhampered, it was declared for all practical purposes an overseas unit. A customs unit was assigned and the headquarters could clear all overseas flights which were to be accomplished for specific missions.

### CHAPTER III

Spring 1944 to July 1946

In the spring of 1945, another change of name was found necessary, when ~~Army Air Forces Tactical Center~~ was changed to Army Air Forces Center, and the name of the school was changed to Army Air Forces School. A few weeks later the school was again re-named — this time to Army Air Forces Special Staff School. Colonel Holden still remained at the helm.

Further experimentation and training involved the use of Air Forces equipment in the Arctic and in the Tropics. The facilities of Ladd Field, Alaska, were made available.

#### JUNGLE SURVIVAL

One interesting project carried on at the school entailed the sending of groups of personnel out into the waste and marsh lands of Florida where they were required to discover different types of food which could be used in the event of forced landings in the tropics. Many interesting dishes were concocted, such as rattlesnake steaks, cabbage palmetto salads, turtle egg omelets, and many roots to supply the starch elements needed for a well rounded diet.

Later, demonstrations of these foods at the school brought forth many exclamations of surprise at the delectability of the menus.

## AIR SEA RESCUE

Another course demonstrated the use of inflated floats to be used by flyers who had been forced down at sea. A unique method of distilling water by the use of reflected rays of the sun on a piece of glass was credited with saving many lives of former ANFTAC students.

Army Air Forces Regional hospital was assigned at the AAF Center, and a number of very important projects involving airport control of commercial aviation were assigned to the command. One especially, leading to the present-day system of tracking aircraft and bringing them in for landing with ground control approach equipment (GCA). This project was continued over a period of approximately six months.

Aircraft equipment involving the use of localizer radio sets, local beam sets, marker beacon sets or, in other words, a complete instrument landing system (ILS) was developed, so far as a systematic procedure was concerned. This is an all-weather project and involved in its last phases approximately 75 aircraft converging on an initial stack which was maintained by radar, fed into a secondary stack and filtered in to blind landings, one place every three(s) minutes. This was the first time these aircraft control was accomplished by using this system, and there were no mishaps.

Another phase of the project involved the use of television sets (transmitters and receivers).

Other projects involved the tracking of hurricanes and thunderstorms,

using ground radar equipment. For example, one such project was directed to the command in 1945, with a three-year limit indicated for its accomplishment.

It so happened that a tropical hurricane was approaching the vicinity of Orlando, so all personnel involved worked feverishly to detail the project. It was assigned to the Orla Vista radar station on Wednesday afternoon of the same week, three days after the start of the entire project. The hurricane hit on Friday, and the radar operators were able to get the first photographs of the wind and rain current actions inside of an approaching hurricane, and to complete the project by Saturday morning. The following Monday morning the report was in Washington, and approximately two weeks later the photograph appeared in Life magazine.

One important policy which was rigidly followed at the Orlando installation throughout, was that of training all groups of personnel in exactly the same type of aircraft they would use overseas.

#### TACTICAL TRAINING

No record of the training afforded at Orlando would be complete without mention of one specific instance and its far-reaching results. We have read much of the strategic bombing over Germany by our mighty fortresses of the air. But for the accomplishment of those bombing missions, vital oil concentration points and aircraft factories located far back in the German territory would have furnished planes and fuel indefinitely, thus prolonging the war.

Time and again our bombers were sent out to destroy those possessions so valuable to the enemy. Time and again, with deadly accuracy, German fighters attacked our escorting Thunderbolts and Lightnings, out-maneuvering from above, on the same level, and from underneath.

Obviously, our bombers could not carry out their missions successfully without the aid of fighter escorts. Accordingly, by nightfall, two fortress pilots were far out over the Atlantic, en route to AAFTAC in Florida.

Twenty-four hours after the Luftwaffe's surprise performance, the two overseas fortress pilots had landed in Florida and were describing in minute detail the previous day's battle over Germany. That very night, operation orders were worked out and early the next morning -- the day immediately following the German attack -- began on their job of solving the problem confronting our bombers in Europe.

Over and over maneuvers were planned and executed. Repeatedly, Thunderbolt and Mustang squadrons attacked "enemy" bombers. The work was fast and dangerous. But, a solution to the vital problem finally reached, the information was instantly flashed to England. The next day American fortresses, on an apparently similar mission, with apparently similar escorts, took off for German territory. Joyously, enemy fighters rushed in for another "kill" -- but this time the Luftwaffe was on the receiving end of a costly and deadly surprise.

The foregoing is merely one instance of problems brought to AAFTAC for solution. On the great bombing ranges of Central Florida, solutions

were worked out for the destruction of Japanese pillboxes in Tarawa — that point which had cost the Marines the heaviest casualties of the war.

As a result of this "proving and testing", total operations in the Marshalls cost 236 men killed, and 1143 wounded. The lives of an untold number were spared. Instead of the 4,000 casualties which we had suffered during our first landings on the Gilberts the number killed when we took the Marshall Islands was reduced to 236.

To the training received at AAFTRAC is due a great deal of credit for our being able to more speedily overcome our enemies.

The commander of nearly every combat group in the United States flew his key men to the Orlando installation for final training before departure for overseas. Also, Army and Navy staff officers attended AAFTRAC.

The most capable instructors to be found anywhere in the world were brought to AAFTRAC to train those who were to go out for the purpose of overcoming the enemy.

#### PROVOST / GUARD COMMAND

On 1 May 1945, General Rose was transferred to Army Air Forces Hospital at Miami, and remained there for three months, then was retired for physical reasons. Brigadier General Ormond Gardner, commanding general of the Training Guard Command at Eglin Field, served as acting commanding general of the Air Defense Center for a time. General Gardner

retained his headquarters at Eglin but co-muted between the two installations in the performance of his duties.

In July 1945, Major General Donald Wilson, formerly Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Operations, Comintments and Requirements, was designated commanding general. Later, with the cessation of hostilities in the Pacific, the name of the installation was changed once more -- this time to that of "Roving Ground Command".

The mission of the Roving Ground required the testing of methods and aircraft and all instruments of war, as they continued to develop, even during peace time.

On 1 July 1946, the Florida Roving Ground Command was moved to Eglin Field, Florida, and the recently re-activated Fourteenth Air Force, under the command of Brigadier General Leo A. Walton, set up its headquarters at the base.