

World War II Nebraska Army Airfields

Scope Study
And
Directory of Sources

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INTRODUCTION

World War II was a watershed event in United States history, producing unique political, social, and economic forces that shaped the nation and prepared it for a new international role in the postwar period. The impact of the war was no less impressive in Nebraska, where the War Department built 11 new airbases for the training of airmen and soldiers before their deployment overseas. The airbases (located in Ainsworth, Alliance, Bruning, Fairmont, Grand Island, Harvard, Kearney, Lincoln, McCook, Scottsbluff, and Scribner) dramatically changed the relatively insular social and economic life of each the towns in which they were located, and connected Nebraska to the world in a way it had never been before.

The purpose of this project is to explore the unique ways in which each airbase impacted their host communities, make connections and analyze similarities between the towns where bases were located in order to extrapolate broader, statewide trends; and finally, to develop a concise historical narrative.

During the summer of 2003, my task was to research available material on each airbase, and to develop a scope study and working bibliography for those interested in future work on the project. I visited 10 of the 11 airbases (the base at Bruning is currently being used as a feed lot) and the archives at the Nebraska State Historical Society to get the information listed in this report. I also developed a primary contact (several, in some cases) in each town, whose information is included in the report on each base.

This report is organized as follows: it begins with a bibliography of available sources at the Nebraska State Historical Society Archives. Each airbase is then covered, beginning with a general overview of the base, followed by a complete documentation of the resources available on the base in the host community. Though this report may not list all the resources that might be available, it is definitely an excellent research aid for those interested in working on the project in the future.

I would like to thank the following individuals whose help was instrumental in getting this project off the ground. In particular, I owe gratitude to Ron Parks for his wisdom, interest and support in opening all the doors that needed opening, and to his wife, Judy, for her friendship and the many hours spend flying me to the bases in western Nebraska. Don Cunningham, with Research/Publications at the Nebraska State Historical Society, whose help with getting the NSHS to back the project was instrumental. Also, I would like to thank the individuals in each of the ten towns I visited for their kindness and willingness to share their knowledge: Wiley Lentz, Ainsworth; Becci Thomas and the Knight Museum, Alliance; Ruth Black and the Fillmore County Museum, Fairmont; Gene Budde, Grand Island; Dean Godtel, Clay Center and Della Keasling, Harvard; Brad Driml, Mardi Anderson, and the Buffalo County Historical Society; Russ Dowling, the Great Plains Historical Society, and Dale Cotton of the McCook Army Air Base Historical Association, McCook; John Versluis and the North Platte Valley Historical Society, Gering; and finally, the Musbach Musuem in Scribner.

RESOURCES AT THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Books / Main Stacks:

- 355.7 O52e Olson, Mary M. “Effects of a Military Base on the Economy of a Small City”. 152 pp.
 - An analysis of war-related bases/installations on the economies of small towns. Includes Kearney and Grand Island as cases; work seeks a broad theoretical approach to explaining the economic impact of military bases. Attacks the thesis that military installations always bring wealth and prosperity to communities. Thesis and Table of Contents attached.

- 358.4 P484s Petersen, Todd L. “Kearney Army Air Field, 1942-1949”. 227 pp.
 - Graduate thesis on the history and impact of Kearney AAF. Extensively researched; covers social, political, economic aspects of the field’s construction and interaction with the town (see especially pp. 184-205). Thesis and TOC attached.

- 358.4 Un3c War Department, Office of the Chief of Engineers. “Completion Report – Ainsworth Satellite Field”.
 - Collection of documents, photographs, and a little narrative detailing the construction and completion of Ainsworth AAF. Lots of payment sheets, diagram, balance sheets, and graphs. Indicates companies, individuals, etc. involved in the base’s growth and construction – good contacts for oral history or in demonstrating economic/social impacts of the field.

- 940.531 C593i Clark, Gloria J. “The Impact of World War II...on Alliance”.
 - M.A. thesis focusing on the history of Alliance airbase. The work includes lots of social history, and highlights the conflicts between servicemen and townspeople as well as their normally harmonious relationship. Discusses housing problems, population increases, culture shock, etc. This thesis was adapted to a book highlighted later. Abstract and TOC attached.

- 940.531 C593i Clark, Gloria J. *World War II: Prairie Invasion*
Kearney, NE: Morris Pub., 1999.
 - An elaboration on previous author’s M.A. thesis. Includes greater detail, more interviews. Introduction with TOC attached. I also own a copy.

- 940.5443 B894a Thayer County Historical Society. *Bruning AAF History*
 - An extensive compilation; no particular narrative or unifying writing. Consists of personal accounts from soldiers and locals, newspaper

clippings, and the Baafler (base newspaper @ Bruning) from 8/14/1943 to 11/25/43.

- 940.5443 B894n *The BAAFLER*. Vol. 1, No. 10 – June 30, 1943.
 - News and views from Bruning AAF – includes serious news, jokes, base news, sports news, etc. Good for a picture of day-to-day life on the base and soldiers' view of Nebraska living.
- 978.2 N362g Nebraska State Historical Society. “Nebraska Goes to War”.
 - An immensely valuable compendium to archival manuscripts/documents available at NSHS – a thorough list and must-see for any researcher. Lists some sources not otherwise listed in card catalogue, etc.
- 978.237 Sc6n Scribner, NE Centennial Book pp.100-109.
 - Very little on Scribner AAF, but includes some viewpoints on the base's role in the town's social life during WWII.

Photographs:

- RG 538 – Collection in Drawer 29J (at very back wall) features photos, diagrams, etc.
- RG 1805 – Ruth Can Ackeran Collection: Alliance AAF during WWII – paratroopers, exercises, etc.
- RG 2934 – Pictures of Scottsbluff AAFB

Moving Images

- RG 4692 MI – Universal Studios wartime information film features Alliance AAF, including shots of gliders, paratroopers, etc.
- AV 2.207 – Movietone News Reels includes a segment on the dedication of Alliance AAF.

Manuscripts

- 629.13 xB63 (microfilm) – Bomb Bay Messenger (Kearney AAF base newsletter)
- 629.13 qF16 (microfilm) – Fairmont Army Air Field News
- MS 1331 – United Service Organizations (USO) records. **Outline attached**
- RG 538 (microfilm) – Official U.S. Air Force records for all 11 AAFs, with varying degrees of detail. Base newsletters, diagrams, etc. Includes narrative history for each AAF. Though the focus is military, there are incident reports and letters written by COs discussing community relations. **Outline attached**
- RG 1392 – Merle E. Bogue's account of life while stationed at Lincoln AAF, 15 January-21 February 1945; it was here he met his wife, Pauline. Item 2, 4 pgs. **Outline attached**
- RG 2331 (Boxes 98-101) – Papers of Hugh Butler, U.S. Senator 1941-1954
 - Box 98 **Outline attached**
 - Alliance – mostly dealing with the bases deactivation. At least 100 documents relating to the battle to keep the base open, location of

U.S. Air Force Academy, and the eventual sale of the base to the city.

- Bruning – paperwork concerning the postwar status of the AAF. Consideration of locating the Second Air Force dashed; decision to sell back land options. Correspondence to and from the Senator; final document is a letter from farm families wanting to purchase their land back.
- Grand Island – AAF considered it as a post-war base for B-36s; when this fell through, the city took it over for its Muni airport. Correspondence between Butler, Mayor Cunningham.
- Harvard – Correspondence between Millicent Ayton and Butler trying to convince the Air Force to keep Harvard AAF, otherwise tear it up and have it returned to the original landowners so cattle could use it to graze.
- Kearney – competing positions for municipal airport, AFB, use of buildings for local businesses (such as Mother Hull Home).
- Lincoln – Extensive correspondence from Senator Butler, Lincoln pols; documents the reactivation of Lincoln AAF for use as an AFB. Also includes letters documenting efforts to have the base sold to the city due to problems of waste of utilities.
- McCook – Letters written lobbying for reactivation of AAF – Air Force rejected this.
- Scottsbluff – No lobbying whatsoever for reactivation of the airbase; transfer to city.
- Scribner – landowners wanted land back – petitions signed by landowners; AF decided to keep base to use as communications satellite of Offutt.

Nebraska History Articles:

- Hurst, Robert. “Nebraska Army Air Fields: A Pictorial Review”. Nebraska History, V. 76 (Summer/Fall 1995). pp. 129 – 131.
- Larsen, Lawrence. “The Alliance Army Air Base Case”. Nebraska History, V. 67 (1986). pp. 239-255
- Petersen, Todd L. “Kearney, Nebraska, and the Kearney Army Air Field in World War II”. Nebraska History, V. 72 (1991). pp. 118 - 126.

City/County Histories (all attached):

- 978.219 T143a Tales of Brown County, NE Brown Co. Historical Society. pp.186-193
- 978.217 C581a City of Alliance and Box Butte County, NE Centennial Committee pp. 25-29
- 978.295 B896c Bruning Centennial History Book pp. 166-167
 - includes a map of those who owned the land upon which the base sat
- 978.240 G 736f Fillmore County, Nebraska: A Pictorial History Jane Graff. pp. 88-111
- 978.240 F1720 Fairmont, NE 1873-1998 pp.10-11

AINSWORTH ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

The story of the Ainsworth, NE Army Air Field began in August of 1942, when Army Corps of Engineers site surveyors came to Ainsworth to scout out the location of a new army air field to be located there. Soon after the first U.S. Army officials established an office in Ainsworth, the U.S. government requisitioned 2,578 acres of land from area landowners including the Francher, Carpenter, Frasier, Casselman, Griffith, and Miles families.

Soon thereafter, 1200 workers converged on Ainsworth to build the field, including 200 Indians from the Pine Ridge Reservation. The flood of workers caused a housing crisis, leading to the construction of two camps for workers, one at the airbase site and one in Ainsworth.

The completed air base had 64 structures built to house 564 enlisted men and 112 officers. Married couples and families sought housing in nearby Ainsworth or in Johnstown. The base also had a ten-bed hospital, a 1,400 square foot warehouse, a camouflage and bombing practice building, and featured three 7,300 foot runways.

Relations between the surrounding communities and base personnel were congenial. Ainsworth families frequently welcomed soldiers into their homes for dinner and were overall very accepting of the presence of the soldiers in their midst. The old REA show barn was converted to a dance hall, and townspeople supplied rides to the Catholic Church in Long Pine for Catholic soldiers. Several soldiers moved to Ainsworth at war's end. The base also proved a boon to local businesses. After the war, the city bought the air base for use as a municipal airport.

Primary Contacts in Ainsworth:

1. Wiley Lentz
706 E. 3rd Street
Ainsworth, NE 69210
(402) 387-2387
wslentz@threeriver.net
2. Brown County Historical Society / Log Cabin Museum
Hwy 20 & Main Street
c/o Carol Larson
PO Box 158
Ainsworth, NE 69210
(402) 387-2061

Resources available in Ainsworth:

The Log Cabin Museum does not contain much on the base – a small display with the larger WWII display is all that is there. The information listed here is from Wiley Lentz's collection.

Papers/Manuscripts:

- Larson, George A. "Army Air Force Bases in Nebraska – Ainsworth".

- A thorough paper detailing the construction and operational history of the Ainsworth base. Describes in great detail the local politics and economics of the base's sale to the city of Ainsworth.
- Lentz, William E. "Ainsworth Satellite Field: NE Sandhills Contribution to the War Effort".
 - Describes thoroughly the construction of the base and the relations between the workers and the community. The rest of the paper describes the war contributions that the base made.
- U.S. War Department. "Pilots' Directory of Air Bases, January 1944".
 - Interesting pamphlet highlights all the technical specifications of each of the 11 NE airfields, and includes some interesting pictures of the bases.

Computer/Multimedia:

- 2 Disks containing photographs and the completion report of Ainsworth AAF described in the section on sources available at NSHS.

Newspapers (all Ainsworth Star-Journal; all are attached):

- 9/10/1942 – "Work on Bomber Field Nicely Started": describes the beginning of construction at Ainsworth AAF.
- 9/24/1942 – "Air Base Hums as Construction Goes on Full Swing": Lists contractors and describes relations between workers and the community as well as efforts to create entertainment for base workers.
- 10/28/1942 – "Football Games cancelled; Students on Bomber Base": Like many of the other 11 towns, high school students and other citizens helped with the base's construction in order to complete it in the shortest time possible.
- 12/3/1942 – "Ainsworth Airfield Essentially Complete": Announces the transfer of Chief Engineer Eustrom as well as the near completion of the base.
- 2/3/1944 – article describing the base's participation in a war loan drive
- 6/23/1983 – "Ainsworth Airfield Important Part of National War Effort": article by Wiley Lentz describing the history of Ainsworth field. Focuses mainly on wartime contributions of the base as well as the base's construction
- 2/1989 – "Ainsworth Airport – It's History": Same information as detailed above
- 6/17/1992 – "50th Anniversary of Ainsworth Air Base to be Soon"
- 7/1/1992 – "Don Metcalf Remembers Time Spent at Ainsworth Air Base"

ALLIANCE ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

The Alliance, NE Army Air Field had its beginnings with the establishment of an office by a U.S. Army officer in April 1942. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. government acquired the rights to 31,256 acres of land two miles SE of Alliance for the purposes of building a defense airport. The land was previously used as grazing land by area ranchers, which sparked a great deal of animosity from the local ranching families.

The base was an impressive facility. Boasting four 9,000 foot runways and 775 structures, the base was the largest in Nebraska. The base trained paratroopers and glider divisions for the D-Day invasion. On the day of the base's dedication, some 66,000 spectators from Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, and South Dakota gathered in Alliance for a demonstration by paratroopers stationed at the base

From a local standpoint, the base at Alliance carried mixed fortunes for the community. Business increased by 50 percent between 1941 and 1942, and the community was generally welcoming of the soldiers. During the construction phase however, the presence of 5,000 construction workers, mostly Native American, strained race relations.

The city of Alliance acquired the base in 1953.

Primary Contacts in Alliance:

1. Becci Thomas – Museum Director, Knight Museum
908 Yellowstone
P.O. Box D
Alliance, NE 69301
(308) 762-5751
bectho@premaonline.com
2. Knight Museum
(308)762-2384
museum@panhandle.net

Resources available in Alliance:

Books/Documents/Manuscripts:

- “History of the Alliance, NE USO”
 - Part of the collection in the black binder, this paper details the history of the Alliance USO, and includes some great personal stories of civilians and townspeople involved in providing entertainment for soldiers. Good on social narrative.
- Clark, Gloria. World War II: Prairie Invasion¹
 - An excellent source for Alliance AAF history, including personal interviews with civilian employees and an entire chapter on the base's impact on Alliance society.

¹ One copy owned by Sloan Dawson, one in NSHS archives. Available for purchase at Knight Museum

- Flyer from Alliance Army Air Base Dedication – 8/22/1943
 - Pamphlet highlights the events planned for the base dedication and open house – copy is attached to this report.
- “Alliance, Nebraska Invites the U.S. Air Force Academy to the Great Middle West”
 - Dossier compiled by Alliance Chamber of Commerce to the Air Force to locate the U.S. Air Force Academy in Alliance. As one could probably guess, the bid failed, but it plays up the harmonious relations between the community and the base as well as the support facilities Alliance had to offer.

Multimedia:

- Video from 50th Anniversary Celebration at Alliance AAF, 1943²
 - Features speeches, interviews, and flyover by WWII-era aircraft. Not particularly a scholarly resource, but interesting and fun nonetheless.

Newspaper Articles:

Newspaper articles were so numerous and most were without date, so it would be pointless to list them below. I attached all the newspaper articles I copied; all offer a unique and interesting perspective into the relationship between the town and the base. I did the best to arrange them into some sort of loose chronological order based on the article’s proximity to major events.

Photographs:

- 85.29.5B.-37 : Shows the base under construction
- 85.29.1R : Storage Depot – Alliance AAB
- 85.29.1Q : Maintenance Building
- 85.29.2H.2 : Base Hospital
- Picture of FBI / MP men at Alliance, 1941-1945
- Picture of Dismantled Hangar skeleton
- 85.29.5B-32 : Club Room complete with flags of the Allied Powers
- 85.29.5B-9 : Enlisted Mens’ Leisure Hour Club
- 91.3.56 : Cafeteria/Mess
- 85.29.5B-23 : Post Engineer’s Carpenter Shop/Repair Shop
- 85.29.5B-12 : Bowling Alley
- C-47s flying over a field during the opening ceremonies
- 92.10.14 : Control Tower with barracks in the background
- 82.8.57qq : photographs of Privates outside of barracks
- 82.8.57.44 : Stick of paratroopers jumping from a C-47
- 82.8.57 TT : Parachute stringing
- 85.29.5-B-1 : Base Library – exterior

² Owned by Sloan Dawson, available for purchase at Knight Museum

BRUNING ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

Construction began at Bruning Army Air Field in 1942, much as was the case throughout the state. In September of 1942, twelve landowners received a notice from the government that their land was being requisitioned, and were ordered to move out within ten days. Some 1,764 acres of land were requisitioned

A little under a year later, in August 1943, the Bruning Army Air Field was activated. Over 4,000 people were stationed at the base at all times, including some 700 civilian employees. The base housed most of the soldiers, but a housing unit and a recreation hall were built in Bruning. The influx of base personnel caused an expansion in the population of Hebron and Bruning.

The base housed B-24s and also served as a training base for P-47 fighters. After the war, the state Department of Aeronautics took over the air base, and kept it until the late 1970s, when it was sold to a cattle feeding operation.

Primary Contact:

1. Virginia Priefert / Thayer County Historical Society
546 Jefferson Avenue
Hebron, NE 68370
(402) 768-2256
virg@navix.net
<http://www.angelfire.com/ne/virg/index.html>
<http://www.geocities.com/bruningairfield/index.html>

Resources Available about Bruning:

The Thayer County Historical Society produced a large, 300 + page collection of all the materials available on the Bruning Army Air Field. This collection is in the Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, and is described earlier in greater detail.

FAIRMONT ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

Construction on the Fairmont Army Air Field began in September of 1942, and was largely completed by November of the same year. The Field covered nearly 2,000 acres, including three 7,000 foot runways and 75 buildings. The base could accommodate 3,700 personnel and had a hospital that could hold 350 people.

In addition to training many Bomb Groups to prepare them for action in Europe and elsewhere overseas, the Fairmont Army Air Field left an indelible mark on the communities surrounding it. First, the requisition of 2,000 acres of land affected many local farming families; some lost their entire land holdings to make way for the base's construction. This however, did not in any way impact the manner in which local residents treated the young soldiers that lived in their midst. In May, 1943, a USO servicing Fairmont Army Air Field was opened in Geneva, NE. As was the case in many other Nebraska communities, the USO was the means by which soldiers could meet and connect with members of the community.

Fairmont encountered a severe housing shortage during the war; in many cases, people rented out their closets. Overall, the relationship between base and town was exceptionally warm and congenial.

Primary Contacts:

1. Ruth Black – Curator, Fillmore County Museum
PO Box 373 – 601 Sixth Avenue (Museum physical address)
Fairmont, NE 68354-0373
(402) 268-3607
(402) 268-2231

Resources available at Fairmont:

Fairmont has the most extensive collection of documentation of the base's history and its place within the history of Fillmore County. The classification system is very loose, so I had to list available sources according to what binder they were in.

Binder with "The Women's Memorial 1994 Special Edition Calendar" on Front:

- Jessie Patton Philson memoirs – civilian employee at FAAF
 - Telephone operator and Gray Lady
 - Worked at FAAF hospital – largest in NE
 - Lots of good stories – including soldiers and social life in small town Nebraska
- Evelyn Mitchell
 - Quartermaster's secretary: stenographer and records keeper
 - Testimonial includes only existing picture of the FAAF hospital
- Pearl MacDonald-Jacobsen
 - Lived on a farm one mile south of base
 - Remembers 2,500 men stationed at the base – 5:30 planes would warm up; take-off over their farm
 - Often performed in her high school band on-base

- Cilian Field – small testimonial, memorabilia
- Evelyn P. Garrett West – Geneva native
 - Worked in WPA and heard of the new base at Fairmont
 - Half of her family's farm was requisitioned; knew a lot of neighbors whose homes were demolished
 - West's grandfather was paid \$56.67/acre for 80 acres = \$4,535; did not contest
 - West worked at the base because there were good wages
 - Memoirs describe her family's hospitality, as well as regular bus service from Fairmont 2 nights/weeks for dances
- Corrine Baruth Kautzman
 - Secretary for H. Miles at Bruning Army Air Field
 - 18 yrs old at the time, talks about various escapades – became USO girl
- “Around Town” article by Dianne Girmus – war's impact on Fillmore County
 - Excellent article talking about airbase, etc.
- Dorothy Vnoucek Skrivanek – typist at Post Engineer's in Bruning and Fairmont
- Dolores Sasek-Keller
 - Worked in base signal office (telephone operator)

Red Binder

- July 15, 1944 Fairmont Army Air Field (FAAF) News

Black Binder – Fairmont Army Air Field Then and Now

- “Historian and WWII Aviation Buff Researches History of FAAF” Nebraska Signal, Geneva, July 6, 1989
 - describes housing projects/trailer camps built hastily to relieve housing shortage
- Mr. Ed Coffey
 - Memoirs describes father, who built the hangars at FAAF and many other Nebraska Army Air Bases (Alliance, Bruning, Harvard, McCook, Scottsbluff); worked for Foster Engineering Company
 - Hangars built in 14-17 days with 8-hour shifts
- Evelyn Truhbar's account of husband's service at Fairmont
- “Bruning and Fairmont Airbases vital to World War II” Adviser, November 1995 pg. 13

Brown Binder

- Fillmore Chronicle article – Thursday 9/10/42; relates plans for satellite air base at Fairmont
 - Describes \$2 million cost and housing problem in Fairmont – Geneva area
- Photograph of FAAF, 1943
- FAAF News – Feb. 18, 1944
- FAAF News – Jan. 21, 1944

White Binder – Jean Harrington Collection

- FAAF News
 - 1/21/1944 – Vol. 1, No. 1
 - 4/7/1944 – Vol. 1, No. 13
 - 4/14/1944 – Vol. 1, No. 14
- Personal ID Card, photos

Fairmont Army Air Field (Gray) Binder

- Pictures of Officers' Club
- Crew pictures

Green Binder – “Fairmont AAB Remembered”

- Testimonials – Law enforcement, housing shortages, Red Cross office (she worked in the Base office), entertainment on base / base hospital, weddings, USO in Geneva, visit by Geneva High School. A good insight into social history of the base

Blue Binder – FAAF Reunion

- Lots of photos, memorabilia from the 1996 reunion
- Frank Otte testimonial
- Profile of Base chapel / chaplain
- FAAF News – 12/16/1944; 12/23/1944
- Letter from Shirley Hartford
 - Grandparents' farm acquisitioned (part of); lived adjacent to base

Attached to this segment on Fairmont is a copy of the Fairmont's Application for the National Register of Historic Places. It includes a complete history of the airbase and its effects on the surrounding communities of Fillmore County.

GRAND ISLAND ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

Construction began at the Grand Island Army Air Field in September of 1942 and was completed in November of the same year. The field was actually an expansion upon an already existing airport; the 1942 expansion meant the addition of 1,280 acres. The base was dedicated on June 12, 1943, with a fairly good-sized crowd in attendance. Grand Island was one of the major nodes of wartime Nebraska; it was home to the army air field as well as a major munitions factory (Cornhusker Munitions Plant).

The base had an immeasurable impact on the town. Gene Budde, the primary contact at Grand Island, cited the location of two war-related installations as the primary reason behind Grand Island's doubling in population during the war years. The ubiquitous housing shortage was a major strain, but was solved with the construction of a large housing complex called "Broadwell Courts". Numerous entertainment facilities were opened on base, including the Esquire Room and the Pep Club. In town, residents kindly opened their doors to servicemen; the Gaylord's home was a shining example of this. For three years, the Gaylord family operated their home much like a bed and breakfast, cycling thousands of airmen through their doors for a good night's sleep and some home-cooked meals.

The base also proved a boom time for Grand Island businesses. Cash flowed through the town like never before or since, leading to the opening of many new businesses. The Claberra Ballroom was opened to soldiers; additionally, the B-29 Café became the premier place to meet and greet in town.

With the end of the war in 1945, the city of Grand Island lobbied Sen. Butler to have the air force locate some sort of operation at the base, but the failure of this enterprise led the city to buy the field for its municipal airport. Today, much of the old base is gone, but several hangars remain standing.

Primary Contact:

1. Gene Budde
9283 West One-R Road
Cairo, NE 68824
(308) 485-4413

Resources available at Grand Island:

No resources exist beyond what is in Gene Budde's collection. The Hall County Historical Society does not operate any museum except the Stuhr Pioneer Museum, which does not contain anything war-related. Mr. Budde is the best resource available; he knows the complete history of the base and has many photographs which nicely supplement his narrative.

Documents/Manuscripts:

- Copy of the program for the base's opening, June 12, 1943
- Department of the Air Force documents: History of the 424th sub-depot
 - Narrative history

Photographs:

- Grand Island airbase view from the south
- Grand Island, NE aerial shot down Locust Street – 1943
- Grand Island airbase postwar photo
- Base hospital
- Downtown Grand Island, 1944
- Pictures of Broadwell Courts
- Picture of Legion Club B-29 memorial in Grand Island

Multimedia:

- Target Tokyo video
 - Features men who trained at Grand Island in first bombing raid over Tokyo; narrated by Ronald Reagan
- Trails and Contrails
 - Video produced by Gene Budde for an airbase reunion; tells the history of Grand Island the G.I. airbase – an excellent source of information

HARVARD ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

In November 1942, a small contingent of U.S. Army officers arrived to establish a base in Harvard, NE as a satellite for the base in Kearney. The Harvard Army Air Field was established in December 1942, and construction began in early 1943. Construction was finished by April of 1943, at which time HAAF was given “independent aerodrome” status.

The base sat on 1,740 acres of land and was home to 1,515 servicemen. The town of Harvard had a population of only 725; its population was nearly tripled during the war. A 400-unit housing project was constructed in the northeast part of the town. The USO was the center of Harvard social life, as the town was so small.

In 1946, the base was closed and the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics took it over.

Primary Contact:

1. Della Keasling
510 N. Clay
Harvard, NE 68944
(402) 772-7271³
2. Dean Godtel / Clay County Museum
320 West Glenville
PO Box 1683
Clay Center, NE 68933
(402) 762-3737

Resources Available at Harvard:

The Clay County Museum in Clay Center has a collection of photographs reproduced in this report. The only other source of information is an unpublished collection put together by Mrs. Della Keasling. This collection is thorough, and includes a complete narrative history, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Mrs. Keasling gave me an original copy of the collection, and I plan to give it to the NSHS Archives.

³ At the time I visited her, Della was in the Harvard Assisted Living Home. The phone number listed is her number there

KEARNEY ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

On August 24, 1942, the Army announced that it was considering the new Keens Municipal Airport in Kearney as the perfect site for an army air base. Construction began in September 1942. Along with the 532-acre existing airfield, the U.S. government acquired some 2,227 acres of additional land to provide more room for the new Kearney AAF.

Kearney suffered from an acute housing shortage as over 3,000 workers arrived to help build the base. By November 1942, most of the buildings were erected and the runways poured, and in December 1942, the commanding officer and the first contingent of airmen arrived on base. The construction phase of the base proved a boon to local business; many of the local construction firms were intricately involved with the base's construction. The community at large was also involved in building the base, as was the case in many of the other small towns hosting army air fields.

The air base had a tremendous impact upon the city and citizens of Kearney. The severe housing shortage encountered during the base's construction was worsened with the arrival of several thousand military personnel. Local homes threw open their doors to the servicemen; many residences became home to as many as three or four families. A trailer court and numerous other housing projects were built to help alleviate the crisis, but housing was still a problem.

In addition to the issues any such boom town would face, the arrival of several hundred African-American servicemen imposed a unique burden. Separate housing and entertainment facilities were hastily improvised to prevent racial tensions.

Kearney women were heavily involved in supporting the base. Jean Lynch helped to organize Kearney's USO, and it was in this endeavor that she met her husband, Chandler Lynch, who was an airman at the time. Active Gray Ladies and Junior Hostess Corps were formed in Kearney. Overall, activist and interested Kearneyites helped create the most shining example of military-civilian cooperation in any of the 11 army air fields built in Nebraska.

A final interesting note on the local impact of the Kearney air base was the sheer number of servicemen who married Kearney women and settled in the environs of Buffalo County. Some 150 former personnel stationed at the base returned to Kearney after the war to marry and raise families.

The Kearney army air field became the city's municipal airport in 1951, but the military presence has remained in the form of a unit of National Guardsmen.

Primary Contacts:

1. Brad Driml
73 Villa Drive # 8
Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 234-1297
bdriml@hotmail.com

2. Mardi Anderson (chief archivist, Buffalo County Historical Society)
4320 W. Hwy 30
Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 237-7334
cottonmill@charter.net

Resources available at Kearney:

While at Kearney, I went to the Buffalo County Courthouse to research deeds and land ownership at the site of the Kearney air base. The results of that research are attached to this segment.

Manuscripts/Reports

- Buffalo County Historical Society. “The Kearney Army Air Base: The Military”. Buffalo Tales Vol. 11, No. 4 (April 1988)
 - This article was part of a series of two articles written by Alice Howell (now deceased). It is an immensely useful article, well-written and researched.
- Buffalo County Historical Society. “The Kearney Army Air Base: The Civilians”. Buffalo Tales Vol. 11, No. 5 (May 1988)
 - This article is even more useful than the first, given the scope of this project. A wide-ranging and extensive narrative covering well the impact of the base on the community and vice-versa.
- Transcript from Interview with Cecil Jackson, a carpenter who lived in Kearney for one year while working on the air base. Copy attached to this segment.

Photographs

- P-51s lying on the tarmac at Kearney – taken 1/15/1947
- B-29 taking off from KAAFB (official USAF photo)
- 11/24/1943 photograph of KAAF (Kearney Daily Hub)

Newspaper Articles

- 4/20/1945 The Duster (official base newspaper) – “Handle Paper Work to Keep ‘Em Flying”, “Supervisor of Message Center AC Supply”
 - Articles about women civilian employees of the base. Attached
- 11/24/1945 Kearney Daily Hub – “First Published Aerial Photograph of KAAF”
- 8/26/1947 Omaha World-Herald – “Kearney’s ‘Splinterville’ Homes Just Aren’t So Hot for Family-Type Life”
 - Interesting article on housing conditions at KAAF
- 9/24/1963 Kearney Daily Hub – “Army Took Over Airport Shortly After Dedication”
 - 20-year retrospective on the air base’s construction

Jean Lynch Collection

NOTE: My contact in Kearney arranged for me to see the personal collection of Mrs. Jean Lynch; Mrs. Lynch’s son was planning on donating the collection to the Buffalo County Historical Society, and I spoke to him about donating it to the NSHS

archives. Status of the collection is pending. All items were posters created for the 1988 airbase reunion, and each poster had a title. I list the title and have arranged them in the order they appear in the box.

- Photograph of KAAF in 1946 (attached)
- Photo of KAAF in 1987 (attached)
- “Harry Collins” – describes a popular bandmaster and his efforts in entertaining base personnel; highlights the visits of other popular musicians and stars, including Clark Gabel’s time at Kearney
- “100th Bomb Group” – documents the time spent by this bomb group in Kearney, includes articles, pictures, etc., some of which are attached
- “Base Chapel” – pictures, history...base chapel moved into town and set up as a church; picture of its move included
- “Newsy Bits – Officers” – stories of different officers stationed on base
- “KAAB Military Personnel” – features the backgrounds of every one of KAAB’s commanding officers
- “WACs, MPs, and News” – features pictures, stories, testimonials by WACs and MPs at Kearney
- “Sub Depot Personalities” – see attached for a history of the Sub Depot
- “Sub Depot Parachute Depot” – story of Marjorie Pflaum and others; newsletters and photos included
- “Gray Ladies – Red Cross” – the story of the active chapter of the Red Cross Gray Ladies at Kearney AAF; includes photos, narrative, ID’s, programs from induction ceremonies, etc.
- “Sub Depot Maintenance News” – stories of interest to Sub Depot Maintenance, including pictures and complete list of buildings moved from the base after the war
- “Civilian Service Club” – documents the efforts of townspeople and other civilians in entertaining and housing the servicemen.
- “Sub Depot Personalities” – details extensive civilian involvement and good relations between civilians and military personnel
- “Base Construction” – details the work done on the base; shows employment records, contracts from Kiewit-Condon, maintenance records, etc.
- “USO” – memorabilia relating to the Kearney USO, including pictures of Junior Hostesses, articles, pictures of dance hall...pointers for Junior Hostesses is especially illuminating
- “Kearney, NE and the KAAB” – features a brief on the history of Kearney for servicemen coming to Kearney; two Daily Hub articles attached
- “General Information” – odds and ends such as the KAAB open house in 1943, most decorated crewman
- “Airbases in NE” – military groups/units stationed at each of the 11 air fields in Nebraska
- “KAAB Entertainment” – Clark Gabel, Les Brown, Doris Day, Nat King Cole, Tommy Dorsey – all these celebrities visited Kearney at some point during the war

LINCOLN ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

Nothing much is available on the Lincoln Army Air Field. There is one web site with some information on the construction and operation of the Lincoln Air Base during World War II. Merle E. Bogue's memoirs, listed in the section of resources at the NSHS archives, are all I could find on the base. I do not know where else to look for information on the air base's role in World War II or its place in the community during that period.

Primary Contacts:

1. Robert "Bob" Hurst
PO Box 82302
Lincoln, NE 68501
(402) 476-9719

Resources Available in Lincoln:

See www.formerbases.com/nebraska.htm

MCCOOK ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

Activated in April 1943, the McCook Army Air Field was an important training site for B-17, B-24, and B-29 crews. Construction began in August 1942, and was a difficult process. The base was connected to McCook by a dusty, windy road that proved treacherous after rain; housing was lacking, and the refusal of the government to build and new housing projects led to sub-standard trailer parks on the outskirts of the city. Local citizens opened their homes to workers.

When completed, the base had two 7,525 foot runways and one 7,454 foot runway. Four large hangars were also built. Staffing and supplying the base was a problem because of the difficulty of accessing the base. The plentiful civilian labor supply that the bases drew upon in other Nebraska towns was nonexistent in McCook. Staff had to be imported, as did food and other necessities. The base sat on 1,830 acres and supported 2,800 officers and enlisted men. A 118-bed hospital serviced the base and the town of McCook.

The relations between the town of McCook and the air base it hosted were congenial. A USO was opened in town, and presented a variety of activities, such as dances and bingo nights.

The base was closed on December 31, 1945, and has since been sold and large portions of the original complex turned into cornfields.

Primary Contacts:

1. Russ Dowling (President, High Plains Historical Society)
High Plains Museum
423 Norris Avenue
McCook, NE 69001
(308) 345-3661
2. McCook Army Air Base Historical Society
c/o Dale Cotton
PO Box B-29
McCook, NE 69001
(308) 345-6097

Resources Available in McCook:

As of the writing of this report, I have not been able to talk with Mr. Cotton directly...any information I receive from him in the future I will immediately send to the NSHS as an addendum to this report.

“McCook Army Air Base” – prepared by McCook Army Air Base Historical Society

attached

- “Army Air Base: B-24, B-17, and B-29 Crews Trained Here”
 - article written in the McCook Daily Gazette; premier source of information at this point on the history of the McCook Army Air Field
- “Traveling Soldiers Found McCook Pleasant Stopover on Way to Battle”

- Describes efforts of McCook inhabitants to greet troop trains, treat base personnel and traveling soldiers with the utmost hospitality
- Pictures of McCook Army Air Base, 1990
 - Sign at guard gate
 - Sub-depot Hangar No. 201
 - Sub-depot Hangar No.169
 - Transient Aircraft Hangar No. T-16
 - Bomb Aircraft Hangar No. 629
 - Bomb Sq. Hangar No. 602
 - Water Tower
 - QM Warehouse No. 318

SCOTTSBLUFF ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

In September of 1942, the military announced that Scottsbluff would be the site of a new army air field. The government requisitioned 28 farms, compensating the displaced persons for the value of the land and the improvements made to it, but not for the value of the crops. The farmers, angry over the loss of their crops so close to harvest, sued the government, to no avail.

Construction began on September 7, 1942. Some 2,500 workers converged on Scottsbluff, but more labor was needed to meet the urgent deadline. Furthermore, the contractors building the base ran into some serious difficulty with the labor unions. To solve this problem, males in their junior and senior years of high school were recruited to help pour cement. Within 45 days, the cement for the runways was poured.

The air base was completed by February of 1943, and boasted three runways over 8,000 feet long. Relations between the community of Scottsbluff and the air base were congenial from the beginning. As the base helped to train aircraft and radio maintenance workers, many local businesses and individuals donated old radios.

Not much is mentioned in any of the available documents of a housing shortage in Scottsbluff; but there is mention of local families renting out space in their homes to military families. Local businessmen pitched in to provide funding for entertainment venues for servicemen, as was the case in other Nebraska towns hosting air bases.

After the war, the city of Scottsbluff bought the air base for use as its municipal airport, in which capacity it continues to serve today.

Primary Contacts:

1. John Versluis (outgoing director); Barb Netherland (incoming director)
North Platte Valley Museum
11th & J Streets
PO Box 435
Gering, NE 69341
(308) 436-5411
npvm@actcom.net

Resources available at Scottsbluff:

Air Base collection (All Newspapers Scottsbluff Times-Herald)

- Newspaper excerpt – “Warning for Public to Stay Away from Army Bombing Area”
- Summary of Air Base history (attached)
- Property ownership records (attached)
- Newspaper article – 9/4/1942: “Air Bases will be built in Nebraska; Names Four Points” – talks about the establishment of Bruning, Fairmont, Harvard, and Scottsbluff fields
- 9/4/1942: “Contract Awarded for New Airfield Project”
- pictures of Officers’ Club
- 2/16/1943: “500 at Work on Project; Need More”

- 2/10/1943: “35 Radio Sets are Given to Air Base” – concerning people giving old radios for use by military personnel
- Photograph of a historical marker
- 5/10/1943: “Order Restriction on Scottsbluff and Alliance Air Bases” (attached)
- 9/5/1942: “Scottsbluff Named as Site for Satellite Air Base”
- 9/12/1942: “Air Base Contract Goes to Terieling” – talks about main contract awarded to Terieling Co.
- 9/25/1942: “Work Progresses at New Satellite Army Air Field”
- Blueprints at Scottsbluff Army Air Field
- Historical marker descriptions of Fairmont, McCook, and Scottsbluff army air fields
- 9/23/1942: “Run 1st Concrete at Army Air Field Here” – concrete beginning to be poured
- 9/25/1942: “AFL Asking Closed Shop for War Base” – describes trouble with the labor unions
- 9/29/1942: “Students asked to Work at Army Air Field” – jr./sr. in high school help in pouring concrete for the runways
- 2/26/1943: “New Structure for Army Air Base”: describes building of new barracks, Officers’ Club
- 10/2/1942: “65 Businessmen Go to Work on Jobs at Army Air Field Project” – support of local businesses shown for the Scottsbluff Army Air Base
- 9/7/1942: “Scottsbluff Army Air Field Lost over \$2 million, Washington Says”
- Scottsbluff County Airport/William Heilig Field History (written Dec. 1987) (attached)

Photographs:

- Control Tower – Scottsbluff AAF
- Officers’ Mess
- Airmen in Front of Barracks
- Airmen and Hostesses dancing at the USO club
- Aerial shot of Scottsbluff
- Soldiers being entertained by a live band
- SAAF baseball team
- Barracks
- Flight tower
- Hangar @ SAAF
- Signal Corps personnel, 1943
- Pictures of civilian workers
- Picture of hangar with personnel nearby
- Red Cross office
- Shooting Range near the bluffs
- Aerial shot of air base
- Barracks interior

SCRIBNER ARMY AIR FIELD

Background:

In August 1942, the announcement was made sections 16, 17, and 20 of Everett Township in Dodge County. NE would be requisitioned by the government to build an army air field. On October 15, 1942, farmers were given eviction notices; the following week, construction began and crops were plowed under. Some 360 workers were housed in the town of Scribner. The base took only three months to complete. The finished base sat on 2,060 acres of land.

The base's first commander, Major A.J. Guffanti, was interested in giving as much business to Scribner as possible and in working as closely as possible with the town's citizens. To this end, he outfitted the base with furnishings purchased largely from Scribner businesses. This helped to create a great deal of goodwill between the town and the base.

The Scribner Army Air Field was a unique installation, as it was a camouflage and air reconnaissance training facility. The entire base was painted to look like a small town to fool flights of bombers sent from other Nebraska bases.

Postwar, the base was maintained as a communications satellite of Offutt AFB until the 1960s, when it was sold to the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics. Part of the base is now a drag strip.

Primary Contacts:

1. Musbach Museum
PO Box 136
Scribner, NE 68057-0766
(402) 664-2788

Resources at Scribner:

Manuscripts/Papers:

- Boyle, Duane A. "Past, Present, and Future of Scribner Airbase" M.A. thesis, UNO, April 30, 1996
 - The most extensive secondary source on the airbase's history...not too thorough and mostly military-related, but the A.J. Guffanti anecdote merits further investigation
- "History of Scribner Air Base" Official USAF publication, available at NSHS archives (see RG 538 in NSHS section)
- Marjorie Schram memoirs (worked for Area Engineers/Camouflage school)
 - Contact information:
 - 4201 Poppleton St.
Omaha, NE 68104
(402) 558-1553
schram@neonramp.com
- Blueprint and Index – complete description of each building listed on accompanying blueprints

Photographs (c. 1960):

- Building T-301
- Chief Engineer's Office, T-514
- Hangar, T-106
- Officers' Club, T-103
- Theater, T-5
- Hangar, Brig, Theater
- Gym, T-704
- Fire Station, T-306
- Car repair, T-308
- Barracks, T-301

Newspaper Articles (all Scribner Rustler):

- 8/13/42: "Area Near Scribner Surveyed for Airport"
- 10/1/42: "Army Airport Announced for Location Here"
- "Air Base Land Cases Settled" – names prior owners; list reproduced below
 - Frank Rezilek – 80 acres (\$9,275)
 - Sophie Knieriem – 80 acres (\$9,757.30)
 - Marie Mohr – 80 acres (\$8,937.55)
 - Augusta Goder – 20 acres (\$3,074)
 - Elsa Fischer – 120 acres (\$15,716.70)
 - Herman Holsten – 280 acres (\$36,453.30)
 - August Lahn – 200 acres (\$27,722.95)
 - William Mohr – 80 acres (\$9,040)
 - Dora Mueksch – 160 acres (\$20,750)
- 12/3/42: "Airfield Finished; Ready for Occupancy"
- 12/2/43: "Scribner now Independent Airbase"
- 2/17/44: "Air Base Digest" – insert in Scribner Rustler; outreach program
- 2/24/44: "Air Base Digest" – news and views from the air base
- 3/9/44: closing of the air base