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# UNITED STATES NAVY AND MARINE CORPS BASES, DOMESTIC

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torical Center, Operational Archives Branch); "History of Naval Airship Reserve Training Unit, Lakehurst, June 2, 1947 to December 31, 1952," and supplements (Washington: Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives Branch); "History of Naval Air Technical Training Unit, NAS Lakehurst, Jan. 1 to June 30, 1949," and supplements (Washington: Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives Branch); U.S. Navy, Bureau of Yards and Docks, *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1947), I:226, 251-57; Record Group 72, Bureau of Aeronautics, VF and ZR files (Washington: National Archives).

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### LEMOORE, CALIF., NAVAL AIR STATION, 1961-

As the site for its newest and most modern master jet air station, the Navy chose a location in the San Joaquin Valley ten miles west of Lemoore, Calif., with a population of 4,000, and about forty-five miles southwest of Fresno, with a population of 50,000. The beautifully planned site contains three distinct areas, with administration and operations separated by six miles to lower the noise level for the former, and a Capehart housing area. Involved are 30,000 acres, of which 19,841.67 are owned by the Navy and 11,041 are used under an easement contract. The whole exists within a "Green Belt," a belt three miles around the station established by the Kings and Fresno County Planning Commission to control the buildup of commercial enterprise and urban development creep.

At a cost of more than \$100 million, the Navy acquired a station capable of supporting twenty carrier air groups (CAGs). Indeed, its mission was to support fleet carrier squadrons, occasionally train personnel, and provide services and material support to aviation activities and units of the operation forces. In the operation area were built two concrete runways 13,500 and 7,200 feet long. Between them are four aircraft maintenance hangars with aircraft parking aprons; an aircraft maintenance hangar and jet engine test cells; communication and

navigation aids; a fuel storage and distribution system; a crash fire station; utilities and disposal plants; an ordnance facility; and branch galley and Navy Exchange shops. For housing there were thirteen enlisted men's barracks, a BOQ, 1,300 Capehart family quarters, Wave's barracks, Navy Exchange, Navy commissary store, Radar Air Traffic Control Center (RATCC—pronounced rat-see), an FAA office, training group detachments, and a Fleet Air Electronics Unit Pacific Detachment. Among the fleet activities and units were five carrier air group staffs, three squadron group staffs, and twenty-two air squadrons. Commissioned on 8 June 1961, the field on 20 November was named in honor of the pioneer naval aviator Adm. Joseph Mason Reeves.

Plant investment at Lemoore included \$2,244,462 for equipment, \$5,906,016 for buildings, and \$4,820,910 for land. The annual payroll for personnel for 1962 was \$17,793,000 for military, and \$2,307,156 for civilian employees. Allowed complement was for 103 station officers and 1,023 enlisted; 378 civilians; and three Marine officers and fifty men. The latter lived in the Marine Barracks and provided security. Involved were 748 fleet offices and tenant activities that employed a total of 6,313 military and 375 civilian personnel, or a total station population of 6,688.

In charge of Lemoore NAS from August 1960 to February 1961 was Comdr. Vernon E. Binion, USN, and from February 1961 to May 1962 Capt. Howard M. Avery, USN. Four years before Comdr. Binion came on board, however, a resident officer in charge of construction had been established in the Bank of America building at Lemoore. Even before that, in 1954 and 1955, site surveys had been conducted for Lemoore, Porterville, Mendota, Firebaugh, and Kerman. Lemoore was then chosen because of its flat topography, adequate distance from commercial air routes, relatively low land values, and enthusiastic community support. General development plans were provided by the firms of Tudor Engineering, Blanchard and Maher, and Keller and Gannon. While some funds were provided in fiscal year 1957, the first contract, of 22 November 1957, called for three hangars, an operations building, and other structures that would house a service information office, chaplain, legal officer, aviation safety, administration, communications, comptroller, industrial relations, aircraft maintenance, medical department, Marine Barracks, Navy Exchange, operations department, ordnance facility, weather service, photographic division, flight support division, public works department, security department, and supply department. Tenant activities included Fleet Airborne Electronics Training Unit, Pacific Fleet, Detachment IV (which transferred from Moffett Field [q.v.] on 18 July 1961); Naval Air Maintenance Training Group—really six groups of thirty instructors each; and Commander Fleet Air Detachment, whose duty was to provide liaison between Lemoore and the fleet.

After the first fleet squadrons arrived at Lemoore on 20 August 1961, systematic transfers of aircraft of all their A4D squadrons came from Moffett Field, NAS Alameda (q.v.), and NAS Miramar (q.v.).

Lemoore has always followed an aggressive community relations program and

prides itself on its beautification program. Its service information office has put out a 50-page (later 100-page) guide to the station, publicizes the Lemoore drill team, and publishes the station newspaper. Called the *Golden Eagle*, the paper started as a monthly, went to a biweekly, and then to a weekly publication that helps spread the word about the base. Every April an open house and air show (often with the Blue Angels performing) attracts between 35,000 and 50,000 people. There is also the annual community picnic and Hanford-Navy National Day. The station conducts guided tours, and each year about a hundred speakers are provided to the community and some 900 news releases are made.

Between 15 December 1963 and 15 December 1964, Lemoore was one of four stations to evaluate the Pilot Landing Aid Television System. Like the one aboard aircraft carriers, the system permits men in rooms below to witness landings and to learn from them—and perhaps to see why accidents occur. Also on board were five arresting units on the two runways, three of the E-5-1, or chain type, on one runway and two of the E-14-1 water squeeze type on the other. Some examples of operations may be gauged by noting that in 1965 Lemoore had 255,434 flight operations; its Air Terminal Branch processed 16,547 passengers and 482,944 pounds of cargo; the medical department served 78,589 outpatients, gave 23,672 X-rays, and 4,060 complete physical examinations, and filled 59,300 prescriptions. Lemoore serviced about 200 transient aircraft per month, had two nuclear weapons loading teams and a resident agency office for Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), and was also the primary stock point for the distribution of A-7A parts to the Pacific Ocean area and stations west of the Mississippi.

As the master training center for carrier-based squadrons of the Pacific Fleet and the home of all Light Jet Attack aircraft, Lemoore continued to grow. In 1968 it added 100 Capehart housing units, undertook a \$7 million construction program, on 1 July commissioned a naval hospital, and was host to a group of New Zealanders who came to study the A-4 *Skyhawk*. That year brought a 25 percent increase in its workload, as attested by its having 348,391 flight operations and the moving of 33,774 passengers and 311,252 pounds of cargo (or a 33 percent increase over 1967). Needed were 775 pieces of rolling machinery that during the year covered 2,979,182 miles. PX sales that year amounted to more than \$6 million.

The first A-7E *Corsair* arrived at Lemoore on 14 July 1969. During the year squadrons returned there from the *Constellation*, *Enterprise*, *Ticonderoga*, *Bon Homme Richard*, and *Oriskany*, some of these having served in Vietnam. On 1 December the first UH-2C *Seasprite* arrived to engage in utility work and air and sea rescue. In addition to having 251,916 flight operations and handling 21,968 passengers and 265,330 pounds of cargo, Lemoore serviced 2,234 transient aircraft.

The year 1970 provided Lemoore with another \$7 million in construction funds and Construction Battalion Unit 406. 1972 brought the first Weekend Warriors, who flew A-7s, and a wage and price freeze that lowered the em-

ployment of civilians. Nevertheless, 278,465 flight operations occurred, and the Weapons Department shipped out or received more than 10 million pounds of ordnance. If flight operations were slightly fewer in 1973 than in 1972, 1,224 transient aircraft still carried more than 15,000 passengers and 630,000 pounds of cargo. In addition, a Night Carrier Landing Trainer and an Automatic Carrier Landing System were installed. Construction during the year was funded at \$4,983,480.

As early as 1961 an elementary school with a capacity of 900 children had been built at the base, and in 1962 a second school for 860 children was added. Available in the Lemoore Union High School District are high schools and also Coalinga Junior College, which provides bus service to and from the station. Fresno State College is only thirty-seven miles away, while Chapman College, West Hills Community College and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University have established residence centers at the station that offer upper division and graduate level courses. In addition to athletic fields, bowling alleys, and other station facilities, one can reach the Sierra Mountains to the east or the Pacific Ocean to the West in a two-hour drive.

Approximately 5,000 military and 1,600 civilian employees work on board, and the average annual payroll is \$82 million.

Headquartered at Lemoore is Commander Light Aircraft Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet, comprised of F/A18 *Hornets*, A-7E *Corsairs*, and TA-4 *Skyhawks*. The other subordinate light attack facilities are at NAS Alameda and NAS Fallon, Nev. (q.v.). On board also are Light Attack Wing Weapons Schools; Carrier Air Wings 5 and 9; Readiness Squadrons VA-122, VFA-125, VA-127; Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 5 (at Naval Weapons Center, China Lake [q.v.]; and twelve fleet squadrons. Two of the fleet squadrons are deployed to USS *Midway*, which is homeported at Yokosuka, Japan.

Originally under the control of Commander Fleet Air, NAS Alameda, since 1969 NAS Lemoore has been under the control of Commander Fleet Air Lemoore. The VF-125 Rough Raiders, commissioned at Lemoore on 13 November 1980, have as their mission the training of pilots to fly *Hornets* and teach Navy and Marine Corps aviation personnel how to maintain the aircraft's sophisticated systems. All personnel involved will be transferred to the *Hornet* when the Navy's A-7s *Corsairs* and the Marine Corps' F-4 *Phantoms* are phased out. The Fighting Gamecocks of VA-22 have progressed through many earlier types of aircraft to the A-7 *Corsair*. VA-22 pilots flew more than 10,000 missions in Korea and Vietnam. They helped mine Haiphong Harbor, responded to the *Pueblo* incident of 1968, participated in the evacuation of Saigon in 1974, joined the rescue of the *Mayaguez* in 1975, and rescued Southeast Asian refugees between 1979 and 1981. In January 1982, VA-22 deployed to the USS *Enterprise*.

Like VA-22, Attack Squadrons 25, 27, 94, 97, 113, 122, and 127 have long histories. For example, VA-25 was originally a torpedo squadron commissioned in 1943; VA-27 has served in the *Enterprise* off Vietnam and during 1979 in the *Coral Sea* in the Indian Ocean; VA-94 served seven tours in Vietnam, with

VA-97 not far behind. VA-122 is a training squadron that serves not only at Lemoore but Fallon and various fleet carriers as well. Similarly, VA-127 specializes in all-weather training. Carrier Air Wing 9 served in the Pacific throughout World War II, in the Persian Gulf in 1974, and in October 1980 deployed to the Western Pacific. VA-146 has been extensively deployed to various carriers, as has VA-147. VA-192 flew F4U *Corsairs* for the film *Flight Surgeon* in 1953, and F9F *Panthers* for *Bridges of Toko-Ri* and *Fighting Lady* in 1956, and has also deployed to Vietnam. Other squadrons have similar histories.

While Fleet Aviation Specialized Operational Training Group, Pacific Fleet, Detachment, maintains and operates three major training simulators, the Air Intermediate Maintenance Department, the largest department on board—with 450 persons in more than seven different buildings—“keeps 'em flying.” Similar work is undertaken by the Naval Air Maintenance Training Detachment, while CBU-406, established in 1970, performs and offers training in construction and maintenance work. The Naval Air Reserve Center, under the control of NARU, Point Mugu (q.v.), has four units on board. Rescue is provided by four Bell UH-1Ns; weather by the Naval Oceanographic Detachment; and the Air Traffic Control Facility, the largest organization of its kind in the Navy, has jurisdiction over more than 28,000 miles of airspace up to 15,000 feet.

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#### LINCOLN, NEB., NAVAL AIR STATION, 1948–1958

In 1948 the Navy decided to add four naval air stations to its inventory, thus bringing the total to twenty-six. Among the new ones was Naval Air Station Lincoln, fifty miles southwest of Omaha, chosen because the site was on flat terrain near but not at congested Omaha. On 26 November 1948 Comdr. Leif S. Melson, USNR, and three officers arrived at Lincoln's municipal airport (also used by commercial airlines and the Air National Guard) in zero weather during the worst snowstorm there in sixty-two years. Establishing a recruiting office downtown, eight miles away, they soon enrolled enough civilians to act as stationkeepers and by 15 December had patched up a twin hangar and two academic buildings so that commissioning ceremonies could be held. A recruiting program for a Naval Reserve Air Training Unit was established by having officers visit nearby colleges and universities. On 8 January 1949, with a staff of 12 officers and 130 stationkeepers on board, the first plane to be homeported at NAS Lincoln arrived in a blinding snowstorm, an SNB *Navigator* from Spokane, Wash. Things looked brighter in March, when the weather improved and the first two service-type planes, F6F *Hellcats*, arrived. On 2 April commissioning ceremonies took place for the Organized Reserve Air Group, CVEG-85. By

February 1950 there were 75 officers, including 49 pilots, and 186 men on board under the command of a highly decorated combat pilot, Lt. Comdr. James A. Seybert, of Ottumwa, Iowa.

While fighters sortied on air-to-air training flights and fired at towed sleeves, attack bombers flew their bombing and strafing runs, and all types of craft participated in air shows over various Nebraska towns as a regular part of training. NAS Lincoln also hosted the Flying Leathernecks, a Marine Corps Air Detachment.

On 10 November 1949 the Organized Reserve allowance was more than doubled by the adding of a Wing Staff, more men, and a Fleet Air Service Squadron (FASRON). During the first half of 1950 there were on board one Air Wing Staff, VF-761, VA-768, CV FASRON-761, and a Volunteer Air Unit. Use was made of the infantry firing range at Ft. Riley, Kans., for aerial strafing, bombing, and rocket targets. During the second half of 1950, while some squadrons took their two-week active duty for training at MCAS El Centro, Calif. (q.v.), VMF-113 was mobilized and with FASRON-761 was sent to the West Coast for further training before being deployed to the Western Pacific.

So successful was the recruiting of naval aviation cadets during the first half of 1952 that 100 percent of the quota was readily fulfilled, and two more officers and sixteen additional men were added to the station's complement. However, in a reorganization of its air facilities the Navy Department declared Lincoln NAS in excess and disestablished it on 1 February 1958.

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#### LITCHFIELD PARK, ARIZ., NAVAL AIR FACILITY, 1944–1966

During the latter part of World War II, NAF Litchfield Park was used by the Navy to commission aircraft modified at an adjacent Goodyear Modification Plant. When the plant ceased functioning, the NAF was placed in reduced status and then was designated by the Bureau of Aeronautics in 1946 as a long-term storage area for aircraft. The bureau first considered the LTA hangars at Glynco, Ga. (q.v.), Houma, La. (q.v.), Santa Ana, Calif. (q.v.), South Weymouth, Mass. (q.v.), and Tillamook, Ore. (q.v.). However, the combination of high humidity and salt air was not suitable for inactive aircraft. Moreover, one by one the facilities mentioned were closed. The answer: Litchfield Park.

NAF Litchfield lies some 400 miles from the sea, 18 miles southwest of Phoenix, Ariz., and is reached by U.S. Highway 80 and the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad. It has the lowest humidity in the United States—an