

Editor's note: The historic information presented below is the notes created by Al Seibert for the purpose of giving a talk on Freeman Field history. With the exception of fixing some spacing and spelling errors these notes are exactly as Al typed them into his computer. We are grateful to Al Seibert for his contributions to this website.

A BRIEF HISTORY ON FREEMAN FIELD

TWO EXCELLENT BOOKS ABOUT THE HISTORY, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED ON FREEMAN FIELD.

ONE IS "FREEMAN FIELD AND SEYMOUR, THE HOME FRONT IN INDIANA" BY LOUIS OSTERMAN OF INDIANAPOLIS, AND THE OTHER IS "FORGOTTEN FIELDS OF INDIANA" BY LOU THOLE OF CINCINNATI. THESE PROVIDE EXCELLENT IN DEPTH COVERAGE OF FREEMAN FIELD AND ARE THE BASIS OF MUCH OF MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD BEFORE 1947. DURING MOST OF THE TIME THE FIELD WAS IN OPERATION, I WAS IN SERVICE AND OVERSEAS.

NAME

THE FIELD IS NAMED IN HONOR OF CAPT. RICHARD S. FREEMAN, A 1930 GRADUATE OF WEST POINT. HE HELD THE DSF, WAS AWARDED THE MACKAY TROPHY AND WAS ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE ARMY AIR MAIL SERVICE.

CAPT. FREEMAN WAS KILLED IN 1941 IN THE CRASH OF A B-17 IN NEVADA. THE PLANE WAS EQUIPPED WITH THE TOP SECRET NORDEN BOMBSIGHT AND SABOTAGE WAS SUSPECTED AT THE TIME.

LOCATION

CAPT. PAUL PREUSS, A NATIVE OF SEYMOUR WAS ON THE SITE SELECTION INSPECTION TEAM, ALONG WITH A MAJOR STANANATHAN. THEY FLEW INTO SEYMOUR ON APRIL 1, 1942.

SEYMOUR, TERRE HAUTE, BELLEVILLE, ILL, AND PADUCAH, KY WERE LOOKED AT – AND ON APRIL 3RD, THEY TOLD THE WAR DEPARTMENT THAT SEYMOUR WAS SELECTED.

INSTEAD OF EXPANDING THE THEN PRESENT AIRFIELD, THE AREA TO THE SOUTH OF IT WAS SELECTED. THE SOUTH BOUNDARY OF THE OLD CITY AIRPORT IS THE NORTH BOUNDARY OF FREEMAN FIELD.

STARTUP

THINGS MOVED QUICKLY AFTER THE SELECTION WAS ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 3, 1942.

MONDAY APRIL 6, COL W.A. MAXWELL MET WITH LANDOWNERS IN THE SELECTED AREA SOUTHWEST OF SEYMOUR.

FRIDAY APRIL 10, EIGHT TEAMS OF ENGINEERS FROM THE AIR CORPS ARRIVED TO SURVEY THE AREA

WEDNESDAY MAY 6, 1942, IT WAS ANNOUNCED FOR CERTAIN SEYMOUR WAS THE SITE AND THE MAIN FIELD WOULD BE A TRACT OF 2,500 ACRES

THERE WERE ALSO TO BE FIVE AUXILIARY FIELDS TO BE CONSTRUCTED ALSO. THESE WERE WALESBORO, GRAMMER, ST. ANNE, ZENAS AND MILPORT. WALESBORO AND ST. ANNE WERE CONCRETE, THE OTHERS GRASS.

MAY 12, THE ENGINEERING FIRM TOOK OVER SHIELDS GYMNASIUM FOR ENGINEERS AND ARCHITECTS, SETTING UP 50 DRAFTING TABLES ON THE PLAYING FLOOR.

MAY 25TH THE STAFF STARTED TO WORK IN THE GYM

FIRST CONTRACT FOR THE FIELD WAS AWARDED ON JUNE 20TH

JUNE 25TH SAW THE FIRST CONSTRUCTION START ON THE FIELD- THE WAREHOUSES -ONE STILL STANDS

JULY 2ND, THE CONTRACT FOR CLEARING WAS AWARDED

JULY 23RD, THE AREA WAS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC AND DEMOLITION OF STRUCTURES STARTED.

A CEMETERY OF THE "FRIENDS" FAITH, THAT WAS LOCATED IN THE PRESENT R.R. DONNALLY FACTORY AREA WAS MOVED TO AZAILA

DURING CONSTRUCTION, THE NORTH-SOUTH RUNWAY CONCRETE WAS POURED UNDER RINGLING BROTHERS CIRCUS TENTS

FREEMAN FIELD WAS ACTIVATED ON DECEMBER 1, 1944, 6 MONTHS FROM GROUND BREAKING.

FIRST TROOPS ARRIVED ON DECEMBER 8, 1942.

250 BEECH AT-10 TRAINERS HAD ARRIVED BY FEBRUARY 22, 1943.

FIRST CADETS TO FLY THE AT-10S AT FREEMAN WERE MEMBERS OF CLASS 43-D, WHO ARRIVED ON MARCH 2, 1943

NIGHT FLYING COMMENCED ON APRIL 5, 1943.

FIRST CLASS - 43-D, GRADUATED ON APRIL 29, 1943.

PILOTS WENT ON TO FLY MILTI ENGINE AIRCRAFT SUCH AS THE B-24, B-17, B-29 AND THE VARIOUS TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

19 CLASSES OF CADETS -43-D THROUGH 44-K - GRADUATED FROM FREEMAN FIELD - A TOTAL OF 4245 CADETS

24 CADETS OR INSTRUCTORS WERE KILLED DURING TRAINING IN CRASHES.

THE LAST PILOT KILLED WAS NOT A CADET BUT WAS A COMBAT VETERAN OF THE ETO, AND WAS KILLED IN THE CRASH OF A CAPTURED GERMAN FW-190 WHILE BEING EVALUATED AT FREEMAN FIELD. THIS HAPPENED IN SEPTEMBER, 1945

FREEMAN ARMY AIR FIELD WAS SELECTED TO BE THE FIRST HELICOPTER TRAINING BASE IN THE ARMY AIR CORPS.

SIKORSKY R4-A HELICOPTERS WERE USED

PROGRAM ACTIVATED ON JANUARY 29, 1944

JUNE 30,1944, SIX INSTRUCTOR PILOTS AND THIRTY MECHANICS ON DUTY AT FREEMAN.

FIRST CLASS OF HELICOPTER PILOTS GRADUATED ON AUGUST 11, 1944.

HELICOPTER SCHOOL MOVED TO CHANUTE FIELD DECEMBER 1, 1944

44-K WAS THE LAST CLASS TO GRADUATE, RECEIVING THEIR WINGS ON FEBRUARY 1, 1945.

THE FIELD WAS TO BE PUT ON INACTIVE DUTY, BUT THE 477TH BOMB GROUP MADE UP OF TUSKEGEE AIRMEN WAS ASSIGNED TO THE FIELD IN MARCH 1945.

COLORED TROOPS AT FREEMAN

WWII TROOPS WERE SEGREGATED

SEVERAL HUNDRED COLORED TROOPS WERE STATIONED AT FREEMAN IN ADDITION TO THE TUSKAGEE AIRMEN THAT TRAINED HERE

320TH AVIATION SQUADRON (COLORED) ARRIVED AT FREEMAN IN JANUARY 1943.

THE 477TH BOMB GROUP COMPLEMENT WAS 1300 BLACK PERSONNEL.

THEY TOOK TRANSITION TRAINING ON NORTH AMERICAN B-25s AT FREEMAN FIELD.

THE SO CALLED "MUNTINY" AT FREEMAN TOOK PLACE WHEN THREE PILOTS OF THE 477TH ATTEMPTED TO ENTER THE WHITE OFFICE'S CLUB ON POST.

THEY WERE PUT UNDER QUARTERS ARREST AND IN THE NEXT 24 HOURS THEY WERE JOINED BY 58 MORE BLACK OFFICERS.

ALL THE ARRESTED WERE TRANSFERRED TO GODMAN FIELD WHERE THEY WERE HELD AWAITING COURT MARTIAL.

IN APRIL, CHARGES WERE DROPPED AGAINST ALL EXCEPT THE ORIGINAL THREE, AND OF THESE, ONLY ONE WAS TRIED AND FINED \$150 FOR OFFER VIOLENCE TO A MP.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE 477TH TRANSFERRED, AND ON MAY 2, 1945, FREEMAN FIELD WAS PUT ON INACTIVE STATUS.

THE PROTEST HELPED FOCUS A RETHINKING OF THE SEGREGATION POLICES OF THE MILITARY.

ON JUNE 11, 1945 THE FIELD WAS REACTIVATED AS THE FOREIGN AIRCRAFT EVALUATION CENTER FOR THE AIR FORCE.

CAPTURED FOREIGN AIRCRAFT PLUS ENGINES RADAR EQUIPMENT AND OTHER TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT - PLUS V-1 AND V-2 ROCKETS WAS BROUGHT TO FREEMAN AND EVALUATED.

IN ADDITION, 71 TYPES OF U.S. AIR FORCE PLANES WAS ALSO BROUGHT HERE ALSO FOR EVALUATION. THESE INCLUDED THE AIR FORCE'S FIRST JET POWERED AIRCRAFT, THE BELL P-59, AND THE LOCKHEED P-80.

THE FILM OF THE OPEN HOUSE IN AUGUST OF 1945 YOU SAW (OR ARE ABOUT TO SEE) SHOWS MANY OF THE AIRCRAFT THAT WERE HERE AT FREEMAN FIELD.

THE EVALUATION CENTER WAS THE LAST AIR FORCE OPERATION AT FREEMAN. BY MID 1946, THE PROGRAM HAD WOUND DOWN. SEVERAL OF THE AIRCRAFT WERE SENT TO ORCHARD PLACE AIRPORT (NOW O'HARE - RECOGNIZE THE "ORD"-FOR ORCHARD-O'HARE DESIGNATION), TO BE PUT IN STORAGE AWAITING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AIR FORCE MUSEUM.

IN 1946, SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES ON WHAT TO DO WITH FREEMAN WERE CONSIDERED.

AN "ALL WEATHER AIR UNIT WAS INTERESTED IN MOVING TO FREEMAN, BUT DID NOT.

A COMMITTEE WAS CONSIDERING MAKING THE AIR FORCE MUSEUM AT FREEMAN, BUT IT ENDED UP AT DAYTON.

IN THE MEANTIME, AUCTIONS WERE BEING HELD, SELLING OFF ALL THE BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT.

AERONCA AIRCRAFT CORPORATION HAD CONSIDERED PURCHASING THE FIELD FOR MANUFACTURING, BUT DID NOT.

THE FIELD WAS TURNED OVER TO THE CITY OF SEYMOUR IN EARLY 1947 TO BE USED AS A MUNICIPAL AIRPORT.

IN JULY OF 1947, A FBO - TRANS-AIR, INC. - OPENED FOR BUSINESS AND OFFERED FLIGHT TRAINING ON THE GI BILL
OVER 70 STUDENTS TOOK TRAINING ON THIS PROGRAM.

IN EARLY 1957, CENTRAL AMERICAN OF LOUISVILLE HAD AN ARMY CONTRACT TO TRAIN ARMY LIASION PILOTS INSTRUMENT FLYING AT FREEMAN FIELD. THE LINK TRAINER BUILDINGS WERE REFURBISHED AND USED FOR THE TRAINING. ARMY CESSNA L-19s WERE THE AIRCRAFT USED.

THIS WAS AN 8-WEEK COURSE, WITH 6 INSTRUCTORS DOING THE TRAINING. THIS TRAINING CONTINUED AT FREEMAN UNTIL FEBRUARY 1958.