

## A Narrative History of Lackland Air Force Base

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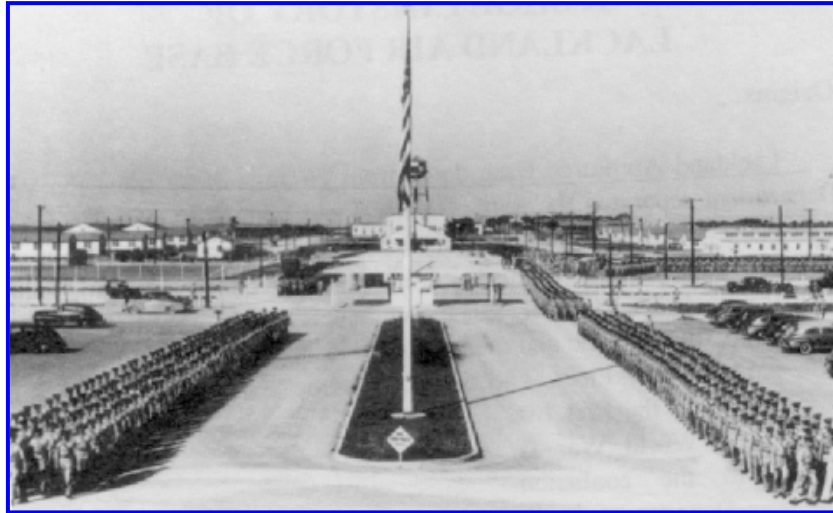
### Origins

Lackland Air Force Base dates from July 4, 1942, when the War Department separated the part of Kelly Field lying west of Leon Creek and made it an independent installation, naming it the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. From its acronym (SAACC), many people called the base sack, sack-c, or, less affectionately, sad sack. Even with its own name, townspeople and most military leaders continued to think of it as a part of Kelly Field. The base bore three awkward and innocuous designations in the first two years after World War II, adding to the confusion. The War Department finally resolved the identity crisis on July 11, 1947, by naming the base for Brigadier General Frank D. Lackland. Lackland had originated the idea of an aviation cadet reception and training center for Kelly.

Prior to 1941, the portion of Kelly Field beyond Leon Creek known as "the Hill" had served at various times as a bivouac area and bombing range for advanced aviation cadets. Construction on the Hill began on June 15, 1941. Contractors could not keep up with the quickening pace of world events as they cleared mesquite and prickly pear; laid out water lines, sewers, and streets; and erected frame buildings with asbestos siding for an Air Corps replacement-training center. The first class of 1,906 cadets began training in mid-November 1941, even though barracks were not ready until mid-December. Until then, cadets marched a mile up-and-back each day from a tent city on the northwest edge of Kelly's runway.

The demand for aircrews became urgent in America's mobilization after Pearl Harbor. Inductees picked as aviation cadets (future pilots, navigators, and bombardiers) began to pour into Kelly Field. Army Air Forces officials decided to separate pre-flight training, indoctrinating future pilots on the Hill and future navigators and bombardiers at Ellington Field, near Houston, Texas. With this decision, Kelly officials set up an informal reception and classification function to take on these added duties. It now received all aviation inductees from the Army Air Forces' Gulf Coast Training Region (much of the American south and southwest) and classified each for pilot, navigator, or bombardier training.

On April 30, 1942, the War Department redesignated the replacement-training center as a preflight school and established a classification center. However, the center was not activated until June 10. This expansion in classification operations caused a need for additional facilities. As a result, in June contractors began building on the Hill west of Military Road.



**World War II – Cadets march through the main gate at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. The Center, located on present day Lackland, was one of three that processed and classified aircrew candidates for training.**

Managing this explosion of activity on the Hill became increasingly burdensome for the commander of Kelly's advanced flying school, whose focus was on the urgent demand for bomber pilots. Between April and June 1942, the United States Army Adjutant General sorted out a separation of the two installations, involving a series of command directives, general orders, and construction projects that relieved the advanced flying school and Kelly Field of both aviation cadet classification and preflight training.

The Adjutant General took action on June 26, 1942, when he directed that the Hill be separated from Kelly Field and that it be operated as an independent military installation designated as the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. By then, the preflight school and the station hospital had moved into just completed facilities on the Hill east of Military Road. The classification center could not begin its move until new facilities west of the road were ready for occupancy in September.

The Gulf Coast Army Air Forces Training Center, an intermediate higher headquarters, formally transferred the preflight school, the classification center, a station hospital, an Air Force band, and several other units to the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, activated on July 4, 1942. On the same day, Colonel Michael F. Davis assumed command of the aviation cadet center headquarters. The classification and preflight establishments remained assigned to the Gulf Coast Army Air Forces Training Center, headquartered at Randolph Field, while their commanders reported to Colonel Davis.

The physical plant of the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center did not take final shape until the summer of 1943, when construction of facilities finally caught up with the need. By then, the station hospital had joined the classification center and preflight school as a major mission organization. It had taken on significant medical training courses, in addition to its primary function of servicing the installation.

### **Mission**

With general mobilization following Pearl Harbor, the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center grew rapidly. Cadets of Class 42-F began training in November 1941 for a nation at peace; they graduated in late December facing warfare. Instructors for that first class had to devise the four-week curriculum as they taught it. The course taught military indoctrination (36 hours), administrative indoctrination (23), academics (42), and physical conditioning (32). The course gradually lengthened to 10 weeks as the war dragged on. Approximately 90,000 candidates for flying training passed through the preflight school before the need diminished, and the War Department ordered the school closed on April 30, 1944.

On 5 November 1942, the SAACC Recruit Detachment received the first raw recruits for enlisted basic military training to fill the ranks of the Gulf Coast Training Command. BMT was conducted in tent city where the present day Wilford Hall Medical Center stands. Later, the 884 Pre-Flight Squadron conducted BMT.

The San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center performed a variety of other training missions late in the war; among them were officer candidate training for enlisted men, indoctrination for officers directly commissioned, and preparation for officers to pursue advanced college courses. Within days after announcing, on March 23, 1944, plans to

disband the preflight school, the War Department reversed itself and added to the school's mission: preparing Turkish Air Force lieutenants for undergraduate pilot training. The school finally discontinued on June 30, 1945.

With the end of preflight training, the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center's name was no longer appropriate. On July 1, 1945, the installation was redesignated as the San Antonio District, Army Air Forces Personnel Distribution Command, signaling a new mission: receiving veterans from the combat theaters and either reassigning or separating them. The base's 1,500-bed regional hospital played a large role, tending to the rehabilitation and physical evaluation needs of those arriving from wartime assignments. With that task largely accomplished by early 1946, the base became subject to the general demobilization.

Instead of closing operations on the Hill, as happened to most wartime training camps, the War Department redesignated it as the Army Air Forces Military Training Center, on February 1, 1946, and gave it the sole basic military training mission for the Army Air Force. Reinforcing the military training center's indoctrination mission, the Officer Candidate School also transferred here from Maxwell Field, Alabama.



**Still the most popular time, mail call.**

On November 1, 1946, Air Training Command redesignated the military training center as the Indoctrination Division. Then on August 26, 1948, Air Training Command added the newly organized 3700th Basic Training Wing to the Indoctrination Division.

However, Air Training Command discontinued the wing less than a year later on April 22, 1949. In its place the 3700th Air Force Indoctrination Wing was organized on October 28, 1949. At the same time, Air Training Command disestablished the Indoctrination Division. The wing was now the host unit on Lackland. In January 1953, Air Training Command redesignated the 3700th as a military training wing, and six years later, on January 1, 1959, the wing again changed its name, becoming the Lackland Military Training Center.

"The Gateway to the Air Force" accurately described Lackland after 1946. Much of the time, it had sole responsibility for the military indoctrination of basic trainees. Only when manpower requirements increased during the Berlin Airlift crisis and during the Korean and Vietnam Wars did the Air Force find it necessary to conduct basic military training elsewhere. Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, provided recruit training from August 26, 1950, during the Korean War. Later, the Air Force sent more recruits to Parks Air Force Base, California, and Sampson Air Force Base, New York, until shortly after the war ended. Crowded conditions and a meningitis outbreak caused Lackland to shift some basic trainees to Amarillo Air Force Base, Texas, between February 17, 1966, and December 11, 1968. With those exceptions, after February 1946 all enlisted airmen began their Air Force careers at Lackland. Over the same period, Lackland had a large role in training future officers. Officer Candidate School produced reserve officers from the enlisted corps until July 1962; the Officer Training School (OTS) activated on July 1, 1959, and commissioned college graduates with no prior service, as well as airmen who had earned undergraduate degrees.



**Officer Training School graduates celebrate their commissioning as second lieutenants in the United States Air Force.**

Throughout most of its history, Lackland provided military orientation for officers directly commissioned on enlistment, especially clergy and lawyers recruited for the chaplain and judge advocate corps. Only Air Force Academy cadets, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets, and a very small number of direct commissions won gold bars without a stint at Lackland. However, that changed in 1993 when the command moved the Officer Training School, as well as chaplain and legal training, to Maxwell AFB, Alabama.



**In December 1950, in response to the situation in Korea, the Air Force announced a policy of unlimited recruiting. The enlistees arrived much faster than USAF officials had anticipated and soon overwhelmed Lackland.**

The Korean and Vietnam Wars severely tested Lackland's capacity to train the airmen being recruited. When Air Force officials lifted recruitment ceilings on December 21, 1950, Lackland saw a dramatic rise in the number of enlistees arriving daily. That number peaked at 6,007 recruits on January 12, 1951, before the Air

Staff suspended enlistments. By then, the trainee population topped 55,000 on a base with a maximum capacity for 25,000 trainees. Lackland officials suspended all training, while instructors and support personnel worked overtime just to provide for the essential needs of the recruits. Lackland had become a tent city, with row upon row of squad tents, mess tents, and latrines on virtually every open space, including the main parade ground.





**The answer to the 1951 surge of trainees at Lackland: Tent City**

The training surge for the Vietnam War was less chaotic but still challenging. Between mid-1965 and mid-1966, the military training center regularly handled recruit populations of 20,000 and more, while manned and equipped for 17,770 basic trainees. Even though the center split training shifts, reduced the course length from 30 to 24 days, and increased flight size, some recruits still had to live in tents.

Lackland's technical training mission grew out of the Korean War. During the war, the 3700th Instructor Squadron had periodically taught a one-week training course for recruiters. This unit not only trained instructors and recruiters, but also taught several technical subjects, including career counseling and band.

Lackland gained its first permanent technical training responsibility in May 1954, when the Officer Candidate School implemented the USAF Recruiting Course.

**Resident in front of his dorm; 1952**



The base received its first technical training unit on November 20, 1956, when the 3275th

Technical Training Group transferred from Parks AFB, California, bringing with it all air police training. Then in July 1957, the 3275th acquired cryptographic equipment

maintenance training from Scott AFB, Illinois. In 1958, the Air Staff gave the 3275th two new missions connected with air police training: the USAF Marksmanship Center and a sentry dog handler course. Training began later that year.

With the closure of Chanute AFB, Illinois, in 1993 and Lowry AFB, Colorado, in 1994, Lackland gained a number of training programs, including vehicle operator and maintenance, electronic principles, contracting, logistics plans, services, and supply.



**Electronic Principles training (left) and the Food Services Course (right) came to Lackland after the closure of Lowry and Chanute Air Force Bases**

Teaching English to military personnel from foreign countries is one of Lackland's other principal missions. Such instruction began informally in 1953. As the United States increased military aircraft sales to friendly governments, more of the contracts included pilot and maintenance training clauses. The 3746th Pre-Flight Training Squadron (Language) activated in May 1954 to establish a formal English training program. The squadron gave way to the USAF Language School, activated on January 1, 1960. The Department of Defense took over the mission in July 1966, and gave it to the Defense Language Institute, under the executive agency of the US Army. Finally, in



October 1976, the Air Force became the executive agent for the Defense Language Institute English Language Center.

**The Defense Language Institute English Language Center has taught military members from more than 100 countries**



Not as visible as basic military training, the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) provided distinct, preeminent training in technical training for students throughout the Americas.

Chartered by Public Law 101-511, IAAFA personnel trained and educated foreign nationals from Central/South American and Caribbean nations in support of US national interests since 1943. Spanish speaking Air Force instructors, provided instruction to both officers and enlisted personnel in over sixty supervisory, specialization, and technical academic courses, including aircraft systems and maintenance, helicopter maintenance, electronics, communications, intelligence, supply, logistics, air base ground defense, security, pilot instrument procedures, computer resources, and information systems management.

**IAAFA students in an aircraft electrical repair course**



### **Physical Features**

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the base retained the appearance of a World War II temporary training camp. Facilities erected initially (1941) and in two great mobilizations (1942-1943 and 1951) continued to dominate the Lackland landscape. The World War II buildings were typical of mobilization construction: set on exposed concrete piers, exterior plank walls covered by tar paper, studs exposed on the interior, single plank interior divisions attached to studs, low- pitched composition roofs. The Air Force had long since either closed or rebuilt most of the bases opened during the 1941-1943 mobilization. Lackland was a principal exception.

When the War Department decided to give the base a postwar mission to indoctrinate basic trainees, not a single permanent structure stood on the installation. Most of the approximately 1,400 buildings erected for World War II were in place when the Korean War began in June 1950, many having been upgraded during the late 1940s. Korean War manpower needs greatly exceeded the physical plant's capacity, even with other bases joining in the basic military training effort. The result was another mobilization building project, including 129 I-type dormitories to increase the base's trainee/student capacity. While these two-story, flat-roofed frame buildings included several amenities absent from the 1942-1943 barracks, in essence they were simply the next generation of temporary housing for troops.



**WWII type  
dormitories at  
Lackland**

The first dismantling of World War II structures came in 1952-1953, when most of the barracks hastily thrown up in the second wave of wartime construction (1943) were removed. These single-story, tar-papered barracks with detached latrine/ shower buildings were more durable than quonset huts, but less substantial than the two-story barracks. The last of the 129 barracks were dismantled after the cryptographic equipment maintenance school moved out in 1961.

In 1957 Lackland got its first visible sign of permanence. A new nine-story, 500-bed hospital dominated the north rim of the base, displacing most of the 94 temporary buildings that had made up the hospital complex. The hospital added a 500-bed wing in 1961.

**The 59th Medical Wing now operates what is highly regarded throughout the Air Force as Wilford Hall USAF Medical Center, the largest medical center in the US Air Force.**



It was between 1966 and 1971 that perceptible change began. First, contractors razed or moved 109 World War II barracks from the east (or permanent party) side of Lackland. The main Base Exchange complex took their place in 1971. At the same time, on the west (or training) side of Lackland, contractors built more facilities for recruit housing and training.



### **Recruit Housing and Training Dormitory**

Lackland commanders, starting with Major General Andrew P. Iosue in 1976, began removing the old, temporary structures as rapidly as possible. With less training and housing footage on the books for Lackland, Air Training Command could better justify requests for new classrooms and dormitories. New construction in the 1980s was almost exclusively for unaccompanied permanent personnel quarters and technical trainee dormitories. The former opened for occupancy in 1981; the latter came in four projects completed in 1983, 1986, 1987, and

1989. With the completion of the visiting airmen quarters in 1990, along with yet another round of World War II barracks demolition, Lackland stood poised at the threshold of permanence.



### **The 37th Training Wing Headquarters**

To accomplish this final phase, base leaders launched "Fix Lackland" in the mid-1980s. The first phase tackled crumbling infrastructure: sewers, sewage treatment, water mains, and roads. Lackland already had pledges of command and Air Staff support for major construction in the early 1990s when the deepening federal fiscal crisis and the Desert Shield/Storm contingency put most projects on indefinite hold. Since the war, Lackland has made giant strides in its rebuilding project.

In June 1997 the Air Force activated the Force Protection Battle Lab at Lackland. Dedicated to keeping the US Air Force one step ahead of the terrorist threat, the lab opened in response to the 1996 bombing at Khobar Towers, Saudi Arabia, when 19 airmen died in a terrorist attack. Later in the year, a new Security Forces Center opened to house Security Forces headquarters, which had moved to Lackland from Kirtland AFB, New Mexico.

As a result of numerous sexual harassment incidents in the military services in the 1990s, Congress established the Kassebaum-Baker Committee in 1997 to study whether military training, especially that of newly enlisted personnel, should be integrated by gender or not. At the same time,





the Department of Defense set up its own advisory committee. In congressional testimony, the AETC commander firmly advocated maintaining gender-integrated basic training at Lackland, which the Air Force had been conducting since 1990, thus the service could continue to train as it operated. The Air Force instituted several actions to insure better recruit safety and privacy following the Kassebaum-Baker report, but retained its gender-integrated recruit training.

In October 1999 the 37th Training Wing made a major change to its basic military training curriculum with the implementation of Warrior Week. While not changing the six-week length of basic military training, this week long encampment exposed trainees to living conditions they might expect to find during a real world deployment and included a realistic combat exercise.



**Trainees on patrol during Warrior Week**



On 1 April 2001, the 37th Training Wing took over airfield operations of the oldest active airfield in the Air Force-Kelly Field. With the activation of the 37th Operations Support Squadron, the Air Force transferred the airfield operations mission and real property west of Kelly Field's hanger line to the wing and Lackland



AFB. This action effectively consolidated the history of two of the Air Force's more famous military aviation sites. The original Kelly Field was acquired and developed to provide aviation training for a fledging Air Service just prior to World War I. That mission outgrew the original boundaries of the field, requiring additional space for flying operations and training. Thus, Kelly Field number two was acquired and developed in July 1917. During the 1920s, the Kelly Field number one was renamed Duncan Field while Kelly Field number two became Kelly Field. The two fields were joined together as Kelly Field in 1942 due to wartime needs. Lackland's history as an Air Force property began in 1922, when the Air Service leased the area as a bombing and training range for Kelly Field aviators. As stated earlier, on 4 July 1942 the property was separated from Kelly Field and became the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center and by 1947 became Lackland AFB. The resulting accession of the Kelly Field Annex made Lackland one of the more heavily populated bases in the Air Force. With a daily population of more than 33,000, these people worked and trained in 1,799 buildings consisting of over 13 million square feet. There are 177 miles of roads to access the 8,881 acres of the "The Gateway to the Air Force."

### **Humble Beginnings: Air Corps Replacement Center, November 1941**

