



McConnell Air Force Base

A B r i e f H i s t o r y

INTRODUCTION

This booklet briefly tells the story of the development of McConnell AFB, including the buildings and structures that represent its rich history. From its origins as the site of a 1920s air show to becoming the Wichita Municipal Airport and a hub of aviation design and manufacture, and ultimately McConnell AFB, the base has been a vital element of our national defense since World War II (WWII).

The McConnell Air Force Base (AFB) property has played an important role for nearly a century in the development of the aviation industry and in our national defense. Wichita's flat, open land and location at the center of the country quickly made it a favored place to stop during early transcontinental journeys, spurring construction of the Wichita Municipal Airport in 1929. A relationship between the U.S. Department of War and the Boeing Company (Boeing), enhanced by Boeing's proximity to the adjacent Wichita Municipal Airport, elevated the company and the City of Wichita to new production levels in the years leading up to and during WWII. In 1951, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) acquired the Wichita Municipal Airport and converted it into its primary training facility for pilots and crew of Boeing's B-47 bomber. Construction of the new base was rapid and comprehensive. The USAF erected a wide range of structures, including hangars, simulators, classrooms, barracks, warehouses, and recreation facilities, many of which are still in use today. The base continued to evolve to meet the needs of the military through the end of the Cold War and into the decades that followed. McConnell AFB is situated in the Great Plains and Lower Arkansas River watershed, a landscape used by various American Indian tribes prior to and during the European settling of North America. While, no prehistoric archeological materials of American Indians have been identified at the base the installation's management protocol includes consultation with federally-recognized tribes.



View of the Administration Building and Wichita Municipal Airport (ca. the late 1940s). The KANG Armory and Hangar (now headquarters for the 22nd Operations Group) are in the background. The Administration Building/passenger terminal, a two-story buff brick building with stylized aviation-themed ornamentation, was completed in 1934 and formally opened March 30, 1935.



McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE ORIGINS

Although McConnell AFB was officially established in 1951, its roots as an airfield – both municipal and military – extend nearly three decades prior.

The first air exhibition in the Wichita area was held in an alfalfa field north of Wichita in 1911. Aviation fever began to spread, and a year later (in 1912), 250 Wichita amateur pilots and aviation enthusiasts organized one of the nation’s first Aero Clubs.



The Kansas Aviation Museum now occupies the former Wichita Municipal Airport Administration Building, just outside McConnell AFB (date unknown).

Aviation manufacturing first came to Wichita in 1916. Clyde Cessna, a mechanic and self-taught pilot from Iowa, received financing from a local entrepreneur and began moving his operation to Wichita to build airplanes and train pilots, establishing Jones Field.

As aviation continued to grow in Wichita, Jones Field and Hillside Field, established in 1919, competed to be Wichita’s official airport. However, both lacked necessary facilities, including hangars.

In 1924, Wichita hosted the National Air Congress, a series of races and exhibitions featuring 47 civilian and military aircraft. It was held on the California Section, a 640-acre tract of land southeast of Wichita, so named for its out-of-state owners. Clyde Cessna and future founders of major Wichita-based aircraft manufacturing companies, including Walter Beech of Beech Aircraft (now a subsidiary of Raytheon Corporation) and Lloyd Stearman of

Stearman Aircraft Company (now part of Boeing), were among the participants in the National Air Congress. By the end of the decade, aviation was a major industrial and recreational force in Wichita, and local media hailed Wichita as the aviation capital of the country. Civic and business leaders decided the city needed a formal airport, rather than crude airfields, to support and encourage the growing aviation industry, and began a search for a better location to establish a new airport.

After much deliberation Wichita purchased the 640-acre California Section in 1928 to establish its new airport. Three buffalo grass runways were laid out in 1929, consisting of a north-south alignment, an east-west alignment, and a northeast-southwest

alignment. This original configuration remains visible today, although the original runways have been upgraded to support the modern aircraft that operate at McConnell AFB. Plans also included construction of an administration/ terminal building, three recreational areas, and facilities for private aircraft companies, fifteen of which had already formed in Wichita.

One building associated with the early history of the municipal airport is still present in the western portion of the base. Built in 1929 for storage and display of aircraft, the Stearman Aircraft Company Hangar (Building 9) is still used today by the Kansas Air National Guard (KANG) and others.

The original Wichita Municipal Airport Administration Building, and former Building 1 of McConnell AFB, is extant as well. This building is no longer within the boundary of McConnell AFB, but is owned by the City of Wichita and houses the Kansas Aviation Museum.

BUILDING 9 – STEARMAN AIRCRAFT COMPANY HANGER

Thirteen years after Clyde Cessna announced plans to build airplanes in Wichita, seven other companies were also manufacturing aircraft in Wichita. One of the most notable was the Stearman Aircraft Company. In 1929 Lloyd Stearman constructed a private hangar (Building 9) northwest of the Art Deco municipal hangar for the storage and display of aircraft. He hired local architects Schmidt, Boucher and Overend and the Blaser and Vollmer Construction Company to design and erect this simple Spanish Mission style building. The hangar was the first Stearman Company building associated with the Municipal Airport. The following year Stearman constructed a large new aircraft manufacturing plant adjacent to the Municipal Airport property, providing access to the airport runways. Building 9 is the only building on McConnell AFB constructed during the era of the Municipal Airport. It is an intact example of an early twentieth century hangar with masonry walls, a steel frame, and a bowstring roof. Building 9 has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its association with the development of the aviation industry in Wichita and as an excellent example of a commercial aircraft hangar built in 1929.



ca. 1930



2010

One building associated with the early history of the municipal airport is still present in the western portion of the base.

The Wichita aviation industry continued to expand during the pre-WWII years, as Travel Air merged with the Curtiss-Wright Corporation. In 1932, Beech purchased the old Travel Air plant in Wichita and established the Beech Aircraft Company. The Municipal Airport became a major stopover point on the Chicago to Dallas air route, and the city saw the rise of many early airlines, including Trans World Airlines (TWA), Braniff, Central, and Continental.

WORLD WAR II

Kansas Air National Guard and U.S. Army Air Forces at Wichita Municipal Airport

U.S. government concern about events in Europe during the late 1930s led to increased production of military supplies and equipment, including military aircraft. With its secure mid-continent location and proximity to major aircraft manufacturing plants, the Wichita Municipal Airport became central to the nation's defense. Between 1938 and 1941, Works Progress Administration (WPA) and War Department funds were secured to finance the construction of hard-surface runways. Orders for military aircraft started pouring into Wichita's aircraft manufacturers in 1940. In 1941, the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) (precursor to the USAF) Materiel Center, Midwest Procurement Division established an office in the Wichita Municipal Airport Administration Building. As military activities escalated abroad, the office grew quickly, occupying entire floors and wings of the Administration Building by the end of 1942.

Kansas Air National Guard

As early as 1940, a number of Wichita officials and local dignitaries traveled to the Kansas state capital to lobby the governor and adjutant general to base the National Guard's air arm in Wichita. On August 4, 1941, the Kansas National Guard's air arm was activated as the 127th Observation Squadron (OS) at Wichita Municipal Airport. The 127 OS was called to active duty almost immediately after it was established, thus becoming Wichita's first permanent USAAF presence at Wichita Municipal Airport.

The mission of the 127 OS was to scout and photograph enemy troop activities from the air. War Department and WPA funds were used to finance construction of a Glen H. Thomas-designed two-story Art Deco armory and airplane hangar (Building 1218) for the KANG unit.

On August 4, 1941, the Kansas National Guard's air arm was activated as the 127th Observation Squadron (OS) at Wichita Municipal Airport.

The squadron moved to several bases around the country before departing for India and the South Pacific in 1944. Even after the war, the squadron received several reassignments and did not return to Wichita to occupy the armory and hangar until 1947. While the 127 OS was on active duty during WWII, the USAAF used Building 1218 for pilot training.

Military Aircraft Production and Procurement

By June 1940, Wichita began to reap the economic benefits of the escalation of WWII in the form of U.S. Government orders for military aircraft from Wichita's aircraft manufacturers. Among the aircraft manufactured in Wichita were Cessna's UC-78 transport and T-50 trainer aircraft, the Beechcraft AT-11, Stearman's Kaydet trainer (now a Boeing product), and Boeing's legendary B-29 Superfortress.

Between September 1943 and October 1945, 1,644 B-29s were built by Boeing at their Wichita plant. The B-29 program alone resulted in the construction of two federal housing districts, Hilltop Manor and the aptly named Planeview, adjacent to the airport to accommodate the large influx of Boeing employees brought in to manufacture the USAAF bombers.



B-29 Superfortresses in the assembly line of Boeing's Wichita plant (ca. 1944 to 1945, public domain).



The 1,000th B-29 and the 10,244th Kaydet produced at the Boeing Wichita plant (February 1945, public domain).



B-29 Superfortresses outside of Boeing's Wichita plant (ca. 1944-1945, public domain).

Between September 1943 and October 1945, 1,644 B-29s were built by Boeing at their Wichita plant.

GENERAL H.H. “HAP” ARNOLD AT McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE

General H. H. “Hap” Arnold, the commanding General of the USAAF during WWII, played a personal role in the “Battle of Kansas” at the Boeing Wichita plant and was a pioneering military aviator. General Arnold was instructed in flying by the Wright Brothers in 1911 and was one of the world’s first military pilots. He supervised the expansion of the Air Service in World War I, was a proponent of air power in the years between the world wars, and rose to command the Army Air Corps prior to WWII. During WWII, General Arnold directed the expansion of the USAAF from a small organization of less than 20,000 personnel to the largest, most powerful air force in the world. General Arnold was a proponent of the strategic plan to bomb Japan with B-29 Very Long Range aircraft. He visited the Boeing Wichita plant on January 11, 1944, and requested that 175 combat ready B-29 aircraft be delivered by the first of March. When none of the planes were combat ready by that date, General Arnold personally intervened by flying to Kansas on March 8, 1944, appointing Maj. Gen. Bennett E. Meyers as the coordinator of the program, and giving him priority over all other USAAF programs. The B-29 aircraft that would help win the war were supplied and the “Battle of Kansas” was won, in no small part due to the personal attention of General Arnold.

Boeing B-29 Production and the “Battle of Kansas”

A key strategic priority of the USAAF during WWII was the bombing of the Japanese homeland with the Boeing B-29 Very Long Range bomber, known as the “Superfortress.” Development of this sophisticated aircraft was the most expensive program of WWII – more expensive than the Manhattan Project, which developed the Atomic Bomb. The B-29 Superfortress was a revolutionary aircraft, featuring a pressurized cabin and machine-gun turrets controlled by a remote control system. Because of the pressures of the war, these new technologies were developed very quickly, and not without significant problems.

The B-29 aircraft were constructed at four plants around the country, with the highest number built at Wichita’s Boeing (formerly Stearman) plant. Due to development difficulties, most of the early planes were grounded while design and production issues were sorted out. All of the early aircraft were sent to modification centers in Pratt, Salina, Great Bend, and Walker, Kansas, to get them combat ready. The program was of such vital importance to the war effort in the Pacific, General H.H. “Hap” Arnold, the commanding General of the USAAF, personally intervened (see sidebar). In what became known as the “Battle of Kansas,” 1,200 workers (civilian and military) were gathered at the Wichita Boeing plant and the four modification centers to quickly prepare the planes for deployment. Due to the large size of the aircraft, many of the modifications were performed outside, often in harsh winter conditions that limited workers to 20 minute increments before warming up with portable heaters. Rudders were replaced, engines were removed and upgraded, wiring was modified, airframes were reinforced, and canopies were replaced. The first B-29s were completed and on their way to battle in the Pacific in just 5 weeks, and the “Battle of Kansas” was won.



B-29s of the 462nd Bomb Group, West Field, Tinian, Mariana Islands (1945, public domain). In 1945, Tinian had the largest airfield in the world from which the USAAF launched B-29 bombing raids on Japan, including the “Enola Gay”, which, piloted by Col. Paul Tibbets, dropped the first atomic weapon on Hiroshima.

World War II-Era Buildings at McConnell Air Force Base

Buildings extant today that were built during WWII or represent this era at McConnell AFB include the KANG’s armory and airplane hangar (Building 1218) and garage (Building 1219). The Airport Administration Building (currently the Kansas Aviation Museum) is also significant to this period for its role as the offices of the USAAF Materiel Center, Midwest Procurement Division, which was instrumental in the procurement of training and combat aircraft pivotal to the Allied victory in WWII. The Stearman Hangar (Building 9), constructed in 1929, is also significant to the WWII era, because it was leased by the USAAF and used as a maintenance facility for B-29s.

WWII-ERA McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE BUILDINGS ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Buildings 1218 and 1219 are eligible for listing in the NRHP for their association with the development of the Wichita Municipal Airport during and immediately following WWII. They are also significant as excellent examples of an Art Deco Style National Guard Armory and Hangar, and garage, constructed in 1942 and 1948, respectively.



Building 1218, the north side of the Air National Guard Hangar, with the Armory just visible at left (2008).



Building 1218, the north side of the Air National Guard Armory, with the Hangar visible at right (2010).



Building 1218, the east side of the Air National Guard Armory (2010).



Building 1219, the east side of the Air National Guard Garage (2010).

THE AIR FORCE ESTABLISHES McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE

After WWII, the U.S. military believed post-war national security depended on “technical air supremacy” and was developing, in coordination with Boeing, the next generation of long-range bombers to replace the B-29. In the fall of 1948, Boeing announced plans to build the B-47 at its Wichita plant. With six jet engines and a swept wing design, the B-47 represented a new generation of aircraft and it required a new training program. In 1950, the USAF assigned Col. Paul Tibbets, pilot of the B-29 Enola Gay on the Hiroshima bombing mission, to lead the B-47 testing at Boeing’s Wichita plant.

In 1951, the USAF entered into negotiations with the City of Wichita to acquire the Wichita Municipal Airport in order to establish a training center for B-47 Stratojet combat crews. In June 1951, the USAF acquired the Wichita Municipal Airport in exchange for funds sufficient to build the City of Wichita another municipal airport, eventually named the Mid-Continent Airport and, in 2014, renamed Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport. While property value negotiations would continue for almost two years, the Air Training Command’s (ATC’s) 3520th Combat Crew Training Wing (CCTW) was activated at the new base on June 5, 1951.

Naming of McConnell Air Force Base

Complex and protracted legal negotiations with the City of Wichita resulted in the final sale of the Wichita Municipal Airport to the USAF in 1953, after the City completed its new Mid-Continent Airport southwest of downtown. On May 15, 1953, Wichita Municipal Airport officially became Wichita AFB. At a formal dedication ceremony on May 15, 1954, Wichita AFB became McConnell AFB in honor of the “Flying McConnell Brothers” of WWII (see sidebar).

Construction of the Air Force Base

At the time of the acquisition of Wichita Municipal Airport by the USAF in 1951, infrastructure at the airport was limited to three hard-surface runways and seven buildings, of which only the Administration Building, the Stearman Hangar (Building 9), and the



Photo of B-47 Stratojet during takeoff employing the Jet Assisted Take-Off rockets (date unknown).

THE “FLYING McCONNELL BROTHERS”

Wichita AFB was formally dedicated as McConnell AFB in 1954. McConnell AFB is named in honor of three famous local military aviators. Born in Wichita, Fred was 23, Edwin 21, and Tom 18 when they enlisted together in the USAAF in 1942. The brothers were to train together and earn their wings at Luke Field in Phoenix. After advanced training in B-24 Liberator aircraft, all three brothers were assigned to the 13th Air Force Bomber Command, 307th Bomb Group, 424th Squadron, in Guadalcanal. Nicknamed the “Flying McConnell Brothers,” they were lionized by the local press for their service in WWII.

Second Lieutenant Tom McConnell, the youngest of the three “Flying McConnells,” lost his life in July 1943 when his B-24 crashed in heavy fog while returning to Guadalcanal from a bombing mission against a Japanese airfield. The surviving brothers, Fred and Edwin, continued their service in the Pacific campaign, recording more than 60 combat missions before the end of the war. Capt. Fred McConnell died in October 1945 in a private plane crash en route to an assignment at Garden Plains AFB, Kansas. Edwin served in the USAF until his retirement in 1981 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

For their service, Tom was awarded the Purple Heart and an Oak Leaf Cluster; Fred was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters; and Edwin was awarded the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross. In 1954, what was then Wichita AFB was renamed McConnell AFB after Tom and Fred McConnell (not Edwin, as it was against USAF policy to name bases after living persons). Edwin McConnell passed away in 1997. At a rededication ceremony on June 14, 1999, base officials added Edwin’s name to the installation, making McConnell AFB the namesake of all three brothers.



The proud mother, Anna McConnell, pins pilot’s wings on her sons, from left, Fred, Edwin, and Thomas (January 1943).

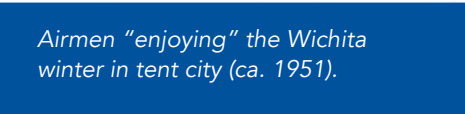
Thomas, Fred, and Edwin McConnell (ca. 1943).



National Guard Armory and Hangar (Building 1218) and Garage (Building 1219) still exist. The airport facility lacked nearly all of the primary and support structures necessary for a functioning training base with 6,500 personnel dedicated to the B-47 combat crew training mission. For the first 6 months after the activation, a “tent city” consisting of 174 tents in the Planeview Area, a fire tower, and a few leased buildings in Wichita housed assigned personnel while permanent barracks were under construction.



Tent city (ca. 1952).



Airmen “enjoying” the Wichita winter in tent city (ca. 1951).



These barracks, completed in 1952, were mostly demolished by 2008. Base development between 1952 and 1954 increased with the construction of training buildings (classrooms [Building 750]; and flight simulators [Buildings 732 and 804]); storage buildings for food, materials, fuel, and ammunition (Buildings 950 and 1099); maintenance buildings for vehicles and aircraft (Buildings 710 and 1106); recreation facilities (chapel [Building 510] and movie theater [Building 520]); and numerous operational buildings (Buildings 1110 and 1210). All of the aforementioned buildings are still in use today, though none are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

From 1954 to 1956, a \$22 million construction program transformed the old airport into one of the USAF’s major bases. These improvements included housing units, 10 miles of paved streets, and two hangars. Other improvements included clubs, a theater, a commissary, a bank, a hospital, and a Base Exchange.

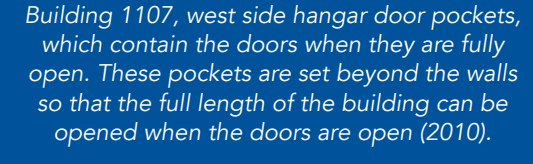
Two of the most important buildings constructed at McConnell were enormous hangars (Buildings 1106 and 1107) to store and maintain the B-47 aircraft as they were received from the adjacent Boeing Wichita plant. These hangars illustrate the two-bay system, designed to accommodate multiple medium-sized bomber aircraft, and the Double Cantilever roof truss system. These hangars have arched steel trusses cantilevered out from a central concrete core and a relatively uninterrupted floor area measuring 350 feet by 250 feet. Retractable metal doors on the north and south sides of the hangars maximized the space through which

aircraft could pass. The doors contained removable metal panels so they could close around portions of the aircraft, such as the tail section, that remained outside the hangar. These features made the hangars highly adaptable as the base mission and aircraft types evolved.

Built in 1954, Buildings 1106 and 1107 are eligible for listing in the NRHP for their association with military history of the USAF and the development of McConnell AFB as the primary training facility for the newly designed B-47 produced in the adjacent Boeing plant, and as excellent examples of the Double Cantilever Medium Bomber Hangar.



Building 1106, south side hangar doors (2010).



Building 1107, west side hangar door pockets, which contain the doors when they are fully open. These pockets are set beyond the walls so that the full length of the building can be opened when the doors are open (2010).



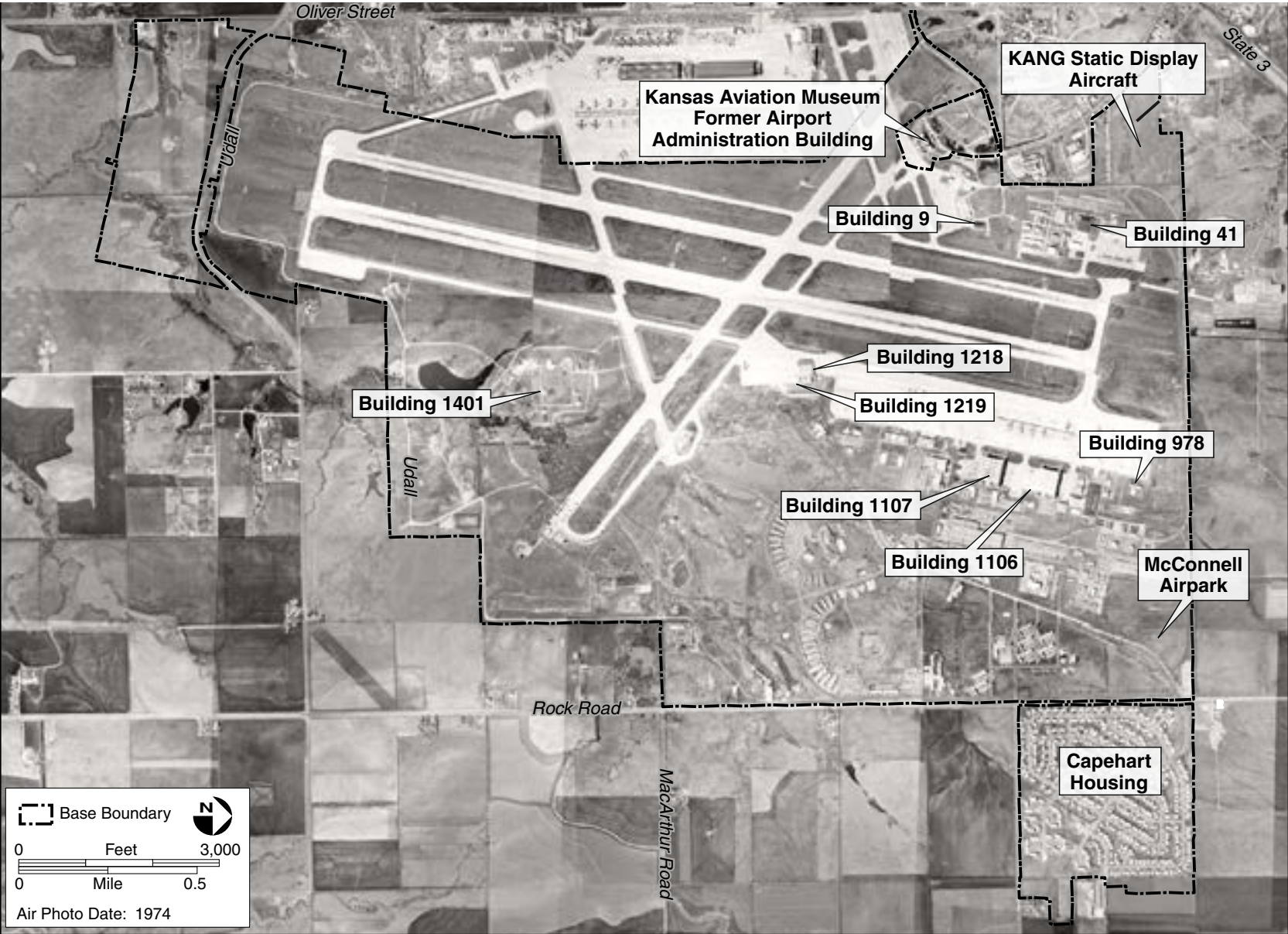
Building 1107, north side hangar doors (2010).



Building 1107, center support block for interior truss system (2010).

Two of the most important buildings constructed at McConnell were enormous hangars (Buildings 1106 and 1107)...

McConnell Air Force Base Historic Resources Locations



McConnell Air Force Base Buildings Through Time

Wichita Municipal Airport Construction (1929-1936)



Former Airport Administration Building now Kansas Aviation Museum (ca 1940s)



Building 9 (1930)



Building 9 (2010)

World War II-Era and Kansas Air National Guard (1941-1948)



Building 1218, KANG Hangar and Armory (2008)



Building 1218, KANG Hangar and Armory (2010)



Building 1218, KANG Hangar and Armory (2010)



Building 1219, KANG Garage (2010)

Wichita Municipal Airport becomes McConnell Air Force Base, Early Cold War (1951-1956)



Building 1107, Medium Bomber Hangar (2010)



Building 41, KANG Aircraft Maintenance Hangar (date unknown)



Building 1401, Underground Storage Igloo (2010)



Capehart-Type House at McConnell AFB (2014)

Cold War (1970s)



Building 978, Alert Facility south-west sides (2010)



Building 978, Alert Facility north-east sides (2010)



Building 978, Alert Facility north-west sides (2010)

During the 1954-1956 build-up of McConnell AFB, 490 housing units were built using funds appropriated under the Capehart Act, “Title VIII – Armed Services Mortgage Insurance Act.” The one-story wood-frame houses built on McConnell AFB had brick walls, side-gable roofs, and minimal architectural ornament. Most of these small Ranch House dwellings were constructed for enlisted men and their families as a “subdivision,” separated from the base by South Rock Road. An enclave of slightly larger dwellings designated for officers (Buildings 181, 182, 183, 184, and 185) is located on the main base.

Housing neighborhoods built under the Capehart Act at McConnell AFB may be eligible for the NRHP as embodying the community and housing design principles of the period to accommodate the expansion of the armed forces to meet the national challenges the U.S. faced during the Cold War.

Another extant facility built during the early build-up of McConnell AFB is the Munitions Storage Bunker (Building 1401). Built in 1952 at the southern end of the base, east of the flightline, Building 1401 is a storage igloo designed to safeguard McConnell’s supply of B-47 Jet Assisted Take-Off rockets.

COLD WAR

The Korean Conflict

Wichita AFB jumped into an essential and defining role early in the Korean Conflict. Training B-47 combat crews for ATC, the 3520 CCTW was instrumental in readying crews to fly the B-47 Stratojet – the plane that launched the USAF’s age of jet bombers.

While active duty USAF focused on the B-47 bomber crew training mission, the KANG continued their fighter mission, which they were assigned in 1946 when they were designated as the 127th Fighter Squadron (FS). Known as the Flying Jayhawks, the KANG’s 127 FS flew assigned F-51 “Mustang” aircraft at McConnell (still the Wichita

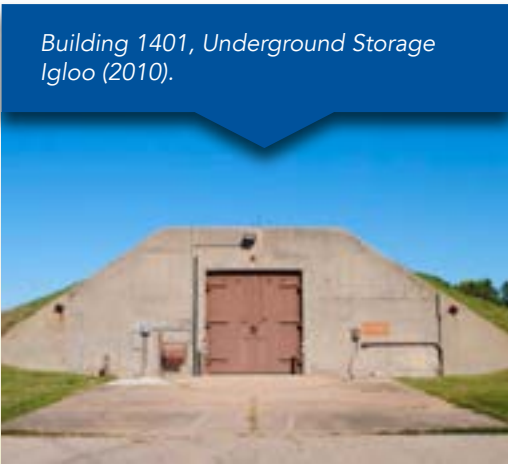
Municipal Airport at the time) until December 1949, when the unit received the F-84 “Thunder Jet.” At the Outbreak of the Korean Conflict in 1950, the 127 FS was mobilized into Federal service as the 127th Fighter Bomber Squadron (FBS) and was deployed to Chaumont, France, for 21 months of active duty. The Squadron returned to Wichita in July 1952, once again flying the F-51 aircraft due to a shortage of F-84s created by the Korean Conflict.

F-80 “Shooting Star” jet fighters were assigned to the 127 FS in 1954, followed by designation of the unit as the 127th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and assignment of the F-86 “Sabre Jet” in January 1958. The unit converted to the F-100 “Super Sabre” and was designated the 127th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) in April 1961. The unit was again reorganized as the 184th Tactical Fighter Group on October 1, 1962.

After the Korean Conflict, the 3520 CCTW at McConnell AFB continued to serve as the USAF’s primary B-47 crew training resource until the unit was redesignated as the 4347 CCTW in 1958, when Strategic Air Command (SAC) took over as host unit at McConnell AFB. By 1955, 1,000 B-47 crews had been trained, and by 1963, when the B-47 was phased out, McConnell had trained 60,000 B-47 crew members and maintenance personnel.



Capehart-type house at McConnell AFB (2014).



Building 1401, Underground Storage Igloo (2010).



Two of the fighter aircraft flown from McConnell AFB by the KANG, the F-51 Mustang (t), and F-100 Super Sabre (b). The KANG has an interpretative trail (located in the northwest corner of the base) with static displays of many more of the aircraft flown throughout the Unit’s proud history.



Building 41, KANG Aircraft Maintenance Hangar. Built in 1953 for the KANG’s fighter aircraft maintenance, it is typical of small aircraft maintenance hangars built throughout the Army, USAF, and ANG. Building 41 is still in use today by the KANG, though it is not eligible for listing in the NRHP.



B-47 Stratojet Crew Training (ca. 1955).



B-47 refueled by the KC-97 tanker, precursor to the KC-135 (date unknown).



Location of 381 SMW Titan II missile silos circling Wichita.



Titan II missile in a silo (date unknown).

Titan Missiles (1962 to 1986)

The Cold War made nuclear deterrence the primary focus of American defense. By the early 1960s, McConnell was squarely on the “front lines” of a war without boundary or border. Spurred by the Soviets’ successful deployment of Sputnik I and II in 1957, the Titan II and Minuteman missile series were developed under USAF’s intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program. Funding began for the Titan II missile system in 1960, and SAC, still the host command at McConnell AFB, began the process of site selection, land purchase, and construction of 18 missile sites. The missiles were installed in an arc northeast, south, and west of McConnell AFB and Wichita at distances ranging from 20 to 50 miles from the city. In 1962, SAC activated the 381st Strategic Missile Wing (SMW) at McConnell AFB, comprised of two missile squadrons, each with nine Titan II ICBMs.

As these 18 ICBMs were brought into the SAC inventory, they were placed on alert status. Although not located directly on McConnell AFB land, the ICBMs influenced the mission of McConnell AFB. Titan support aircraft included the U-6A “Beaver,” later supplanted by the UH-1F Huey helicopter, followed by the HH-1H Iroquois. These helicopters supported the 381 SMW Titan II operations, while the missile sites maintained around-the-clock alert schedules. Maintenance of and training with the Titan II missiles was not without incident. An oxidizer leak at one of the missile sites in 1978 killed two Propellant Transfer System Team members. By 1986, the Titan II missile alert mission was completed and the complexes were dismantled, in accordance with arms control agreements.

McConnell Air Force Base during the Vietnam Era (1961 to 1973)

The 388th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), a Tactical Air Command (TAC) unit, arrived at McConnell in 1962, equipped with the F-100C “Super Sabre.” TAC assumed control of the base in 1963, with the 388 TFW as the host unit. Soon after, the 388 TFW’s F-100Cs were replaced by the F-105D “Thunderchief” Fighter-Bomber. The 388 TFW was inactivated in 1964 and the 23 TFW, heir to the historic 23rd Pursuit Group “Flying Tigers” of WWII (see sidebar), replaced it as the host wing at McConnell.

The United States’ deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict from the early 1960s into the 1970s was felt throughout the military. At McConnell AFB, the effect could be seen in the mission changes and associated aircraft, although the 23 TFW continued McConnell’s training mission by training F-105D pilots and maintenance personnel for duty in Thailand. The 23 TFW was joined at McConnell AFB by the 355 TFW from George AFB, California. The 355 TFW and some of the 23 TFW left for Southeast Asia in 1965. Some units remained in Asia until 1970. The 23 TFW returned to McConnell with the new mission of replacement training for the F-105D Fighter Bomber. Their aircraft included the AT-33 and T-39.

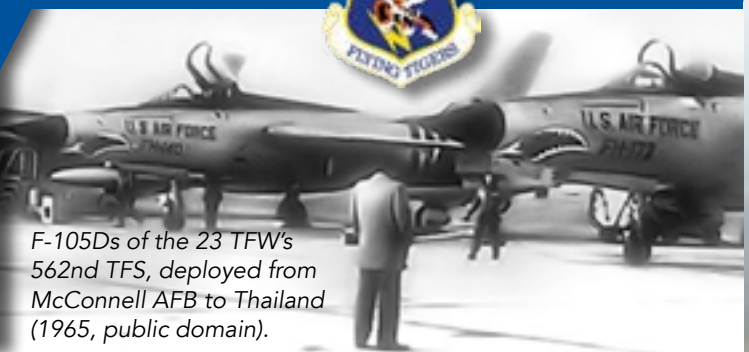
THE “FLYING TIGERS” AT McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE

The “Flying Tigers” were originally formed in China as the 23rd Pursuit Group in July 1942 from a cadre of volunteer personnel from the disbanded 1st American Volunteer Group (AVG) of the Chinese Air Force (1941 to 1942). During WWII, the 23rd Fighter Group was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation and credited with the destruction of 621 aircraft in air combat plus an additional 320 aircraft on the ground. The 23rd was also responsible for the sinking of 131,000 tons and damage of another 250,000 tons of enemy shipping.

In February 1964, the “Flying Tigers,” with their illustrious and decorated air combat history, were relocated to McConnell AFB as the 23 TFW. Until it was relocated to England AFB, Louisiana, in 1972, the 23 TFW continued McConnell’s training mission by training F-105D crews for duty in Thailand.

The 23rd Wing aircraft carry the “shark teeth” nose art that originated on the P-40 Warhawks during WWII. The 23rd Wing aircraft are the only USAF aircraft authorized to carry this distinctive marking.

1st AVG “Flying Tigers” in flight (1942, public domain).



F-105Ds of the 23 TFW’s 562nd TFS, deployed from McConnell AFB to Thailand (1965, public domain).

The 388th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), a Tactical Air Command (TAC) unit, arrived at McConnell in 1962...

**PIONEERING WOMEN IN THE AIR FORCE AT
McCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE**

During the 1970s, the USAF began to take major steps forward in expanding the roles of female Airmen in the USAF. McConnell AFB played a meaningful part when women were allowed to serve on SAC's post-attack command control (PACCS) aircraft and on Missile Combat Crews.



In 1973, McConnell's Airman 1st Class Peggy Simmons became the first female to serve on the regular battle staff crew of SAC's PACCS aircraft.



In 1978, Airman 1st Class Tina M. Ponzer became the first female enlisted person to perform Titan II alert duty at McConnell.



Also in 1978, First Lieutenant Patricia Fornes, pictured here as a Captain, became the first female officer to serve on a combat missile crew at a McConnell Titan II facility.

In 1968, the KANG's 127 TFS deployed to Kunsan Air Base, South Korea. The unit was assigned as part of the 354 TFW's composite wing until it was released from active duty and returned to state control in June 1969. In 1972, the 23 TFW was reassigned to England AFB, Louisiana; SAC and the 381 SMW became the host unit at McConnell AFB. The KANG took over the 23 TFW Replacement Training Unit mission, along with their F-105Ds, as part of the 184th Tactical Fighter Training Group.

Also in 1971, the 91st Air Refueling Squadron (ARS) arrived with KC-135A Stratotankers, followed soon after by the 384th Air Refueling Wing (ARW), making McConnell a dual wing SAC base with both aircraft and missiles.

As with the B-47, the KC-135A occupied a unique position at McConnell AFB, with Boeing, the jet tanker's manufacturer, operating a plant in Wichita. The plane began flying from McConnell in 1971, and was replaced by the updated KC-135R in 1984, providing more than 30 years of continuous service of KC-135 aircraft at McConnell.

Post-Vietnam (1974 to 1989)

With the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the end of major U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1973, and as the hot war turned cold, the nation's armed services regrouped. Having arrived at McConnell in 1972, the 384 ARW continued its tour at the base, now under the auspices of SAC.



First "R" model KC-135 in the USAF inventory leaves Boeing military plant (ca. 1984).



KC-135A refueling B-52 (date unknown).

The Titan II missiles had been part of McConnell's mission from the 1960s through the 1970s. Soon after, however, the Titan II ICBMs that had played a key role in McConnell's mission were phased out, reflecting the strategic modernization and advances in technology of the 1980s. The deactivation of the Titan missiles from the force structure was announced by President Ronald Reagan in October 1981; by mid-1986, the last of McConnell's Titans were removed and the 381 SMW was deactivated.

Two new aircraft and missions made their appearance at McConnell AFB in the 1980s. In 1984, the 384 ARW received the KC-135R Stratotanker, an aircraft to be operated in support of the strategic bomber mission. To reflect that change in mission, the 384 ARW became the base host in 1985. McConnell was the first base to be completely equipped with the new model KC-135R tanker. The 384 ARW was redesignated the 384th Bombardment Wing (Heavy) (BW) in 1987; as the 91 ARS was inactivated later that year, the 384 ARS remained as the sole refueling unit.

Adding to the complement of aircraft at the base, the B-1B Lancer arrived at McConnell in January 1988, quickly followed by the first alert duty mission. McConnell AFB was one of only four bases to host and operate the B-1B Lancer. Fueled by four General Electric F101 engines, the Lancer was flown by the 384 BW from 1988 to 1994, and by the KANG 184 BW from 1994 to 2002.

Base Historical Resources of This Period

Although not considered significant enough for listing on the NRHP, Building 978, Bomber/Tanker Alert Facility, does represent the immediately post-Vietnam, Cold War-era construction and mission at McConnell. Built in 1974, it consists of two wings — sleeping wing and recreation wing — for the tanker crews that would live there while on 24-hour alert during the Cold War. It was constructed adjacent to the Alert Apron where the alert aircraft were positioned for the most rapid and efficient take-off.



Pass Review of the 381 SMW deactivation (8 August 1986).



B-1B Lancer of the KANG 184 BW (date unknown).



Building 978, Alert Facility south and west sides (t), north and east sides (b) 2010.

POST-COLD WAR

As the Cold War ended in 1989, McConnell AFB began to adjust to a changed political climate. Before personnel could process the implications of the new geopolitical boundaries and the effect this would have on their mission, a natural disaster tested the command and organization. The April 25, 1991 tornado that traversed the base destroyed nine major facilities, including the hospital, and most of the base services facilities. Over 100 housing units were lost and other facilities were damaged. Because of advance warning from McConnell's weather forecasters, there were no deaths and only 16 injuries on base. Recovery from the tornado merged with previously scheduled construction, as new housing, medical facilities, a skills training center, and other service facilities debuted in the first half of the 1990s.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin speaking at McConnell AFB, against a backdrop of 384 BW B-1B Lancers (18 June 1992).



McConnell KC-135R Stratotankers in formation while taxiing on one of the runways (2007).

The 1992 visit to McConnell AFB by Russian President Boris Yeltsin underscored the changed political climate of the 1990s.

Beginning in 1991, SAC strategic forces began the stand down from alert status, including the B-1B mission at McConnell AFB. SAC, TAC and Mobility Air Command stood down in 1992, to be replaced by Air Combat Command (ACC) and Air Mobility Command (AMC). McConnell took its place in the newly-formed ACC, reflected in the renaming of the 384th Bombardment Wing as the 384th Bomb Wing. The redesignation reflected the addition of a conventional bombing role to the wing's strategic mission. By 1993, the 384 BW was redesignated the 384th Bomb Group, with a transfer of its conventional B-1B mission to the 184th Fighter Group (184 FG) of the KANG. The 384 BG was inactivated for good in 1994 after transferring all of its B-1B Lancers to the Air Reserve. The 184 FG became the 184 BW in July 1994, as part of ACC assuming the B-1B Lancer mission. The 184 BW was the first ANG unit to be assigned a heavy bomber mission and fly the B-1B, which they did from 1994 to 2002.

AMC assumed host major command responsibilities in January 1994; meanwhile, as part of a USAF policy of preserving the lineage of historic units, 22 ARW from March AFB,

California, was reassigned as the host wing of McConnell AFB (see sidebar). This also initiated the build-up of the wing's four KC-135R tanker squadrons.

McConnell units were augmented by the Air Force Reserve associated unit, the 931st Air Refueling Group, in 1995. McConnell AFB continued to stand out when it was selected as the test site for the Pacer Compass, Radar and Global Positional System (CRAG) avionics modernization program in 1996. The base also trained Singapore's KC-135R aircrews and maintenance personnel.

THE 22ND: FROM BOMBARDMENT GROUP TO AIR REFUELING WING

The history of the 22nd pre-dates America's entry into WWII. First constituted as the 22nd Bombardment Group (Medium) on 22 December 1939, the group was activated on 1 February 1940, at Mitchel Field, New York. In November 1940, the group moved to Langley Field, Virginia, where they received the first 55 B-26 aircraft to enter AAF inventory in February 1941.

Just three months after the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the 22nd was deployed to bases in Australia, and on 5 April 1942, launched its first combat mission, becoming the first B-26 bomb unit to participate in combat. The group used its B-26 bombers to attack enemy shipping, installations and airfields on New Guinea and New Britain. Throughout WWII, the highly decorated 22nd flew B-26s, B-24s and B-25s, striking targets on the Philippine islands, Borneo, Formosa (present-day Taiwan), and China. After the battle of Okinawa, the unit moved to that island's Motobu Peninsula and initiated reconnaissance missions over southern Japan.

In April 1946, the AAF re-designated the 22nd as a "Very Heavy" bomb group, and the unit then switched to the B-29 Superfortress. The group remained in the Pacific until it moved to Smoky Hill AFB, near Salina, Kansas in May 1948.

Following the 1948 reorganization, the new 22nd Bombardment Wing moved to March AFB, California, in 1949 and to George AFB, California the following year. After deployment to Okinawa in support of the Korean Conflict, the 22nd added the 22nd Air Refueling Squadron with Boeing's KC-97 "Stratofreighter" tankers. The 22nd continued its bomber mission with B-47s and B-52s and its air refueling mission with KC-97s and KC-135s through the Cold War (including the Vietnam War), until 1982, when the 22nd was re-designated an air refueling wing, and received the KC-10A. At a 3 January 1994 ceremony conducted by General Walter Kross, 15th Air Force Commander, the 22 ARW succeeded the 384th Bomb Wing as McConnell's host unit leading four squadrons of KC-135s.



The "cougar paw" in use today has remained the 22nd's emblem since activation in 1941.



Consolidated B-24L of the 33rd Bomb Squadron, 22nd Bomb Group (USAF, 1945).

Crew and maintainers of the 22 BG's B-29 "Mule Train" at Kadena Air Base, Japan (ca. 1950)



Global War on Terror

Although it seemed as if everything changed after September 11, 2001, McConnell AFB service personnel continued at their jobs while taking on new responsibilities. In 2002, the B-1B mission ended at McConnell. The 22 ARW deployed jets and provided air refueling support for Operation Noble Eagle, with McConnell tankers heading to Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Southwest Asia and other locations.

The 184 BW was redesignated as the 184 ARW in September 2002, and would fly the KC-135R as well until 2007. However, in response to the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure recommendations, the KANG’S KC-135R aircraft were relocated from McConnell AFB to Forbes Field Air Guard Station, Topeka, in June 2007. In April 2008, the 184 ARW was designated the 184th Intelligence Wing, making it the first Intelligence Wing in the Air National Guard. With the loss of the flying mission, the “Flying Jayhawks” are now the “Fighting Jayhawks”. The 22 ARW and associate units at McConnell AFB continue to support Homeland Defense, Operation Enduring Freedom, and global air refueling missions.

Aerospace Industry

McConnell AFB and the USAF continue to maintain close ties with the aerospace industry in Wichita. Specialists with local presence are working on the next generation of tankers, fighter jets, and bombers.

Today

Today, the 22 ARW is the host unit at McConnell (includes the 22nd Maintenance Group, Medical Group, Mission Support Group, and Operations Group), with the 184th Intelligence Wing and 931st Air Refueling Group as primary tenants. McConnell AFB plays an integral role in the future of the USAF as it readies itself for the beddown of the KC-46A “Pegasus”, the next generation of refueling tankers. McConnell AFB continues to interact with the surrounding community of Wichita through personal links with the City and on an economic level through jobs and services.



The Boeing KC-46A Tanker demonstrates its ability to simultaneously refuel two F/A-18 Super Hornet aircraft from wing air refueling pods (Boeing photo illustration).

There are few bases that can claim such a wide variety of weapons systems, missions, and skillsets as those that McConnell AFB has based since WWII. However, this is hardly the end of such an impressive history; the page turns to yet another chapter. Team McConnell will serve as the nation’s first KC-46A operational base, fulfilling a critical mission and continuing McConnell AFB’s rich USAF heritage.



KC-46A refueling B-2 Spirit (Boeing photo illustration).

There are few bases that can claim such a wide variety of weapons systems, missions, and skillsets as those that McConnell AFB has based since WWII.

McConnell Air Force Base

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