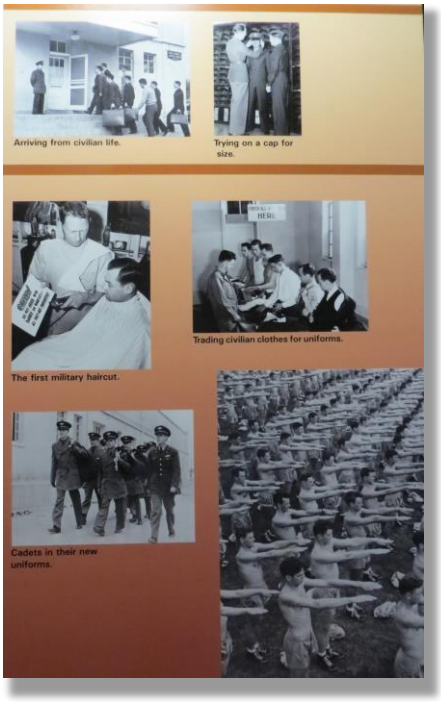
<u>The Army Air Forces Classification Center - Nashville Tennessee</u> - January 1943

> *"At long last a use has been found for those extra coat hangers that always fall to the floor," commented Guy Redmond, Red Cross Field Director, in his plea to Nashvillians in August of 1943 to send their extra hangers to the Army Air Forces Classification Center on Thompson Lane. Some 2,500 were needed. Everything had been planned and considered: housing, hospital, mess halls, roads, sewers, and electricity. Nice new lockers, no hangers. So the call went out to wartime Nashville.*

The Army Air Forces Classification Center was brand new in the summer of 1943. As early as the spring of 1942, plans had been underway to build a training center for Army Air Force cadets. The Center was an induction station where cadets were brought for preliminary training, aptitude tests, and physical examinations. They were classified according to their skills and talent and then shipped on for further training. Many became pilots, bombardiers, navigators, and gunners in the war against Germany and Japan.

The Center eventually encompassed approximately 560 acres along Thompson Lane and Franklin Road. The close proximity of Radnor Yards and the L & N Railroad lines helped win the contract for Nashville. The City Council, in special session, passed resolutions authorizing the city to enter into contracts with the Federal Government to furnish water, electrical power, and sewer facilities for the site.



The local railroads agreed to build spur lines into the facility and the Nashville Electric Service committed to bring electric power into the site. To win the $5,000,000 project for Nashville, Mayor Cummings worked successfully with local contractors, businessmen, and the Federal Government. Warfield and Keeble, Foster and Creighton, and other architectural and engineering firms provided the expertise to build the complex. When completed, the complex contained hundreds of buildings including barracks, mess halls, fire halls, warehouses, recreation halls, several theaters, and a chapel.

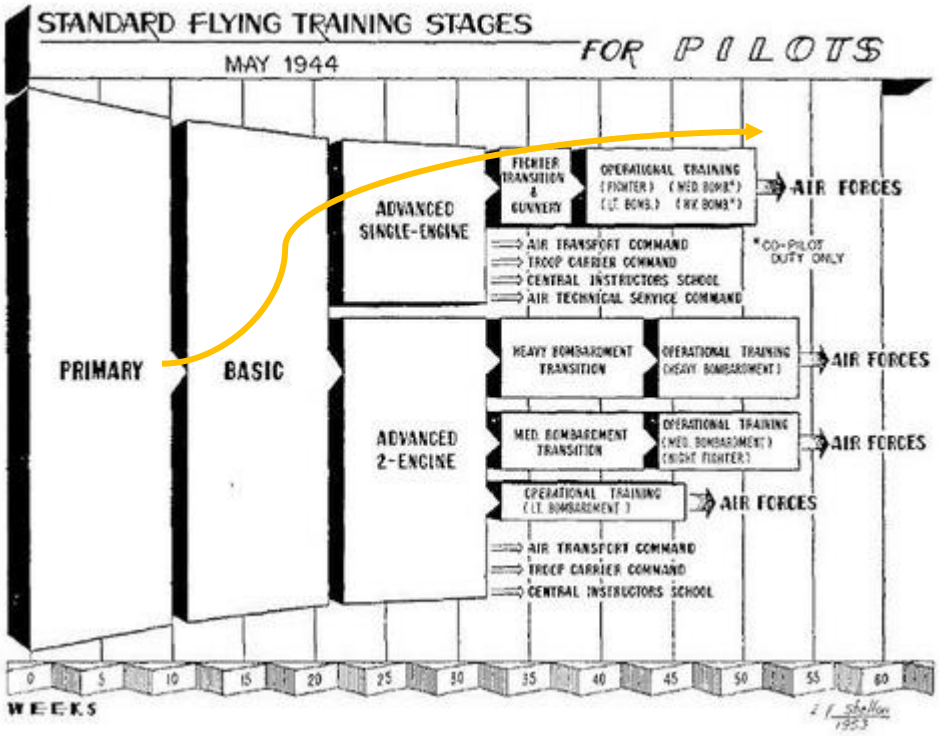
At its height, the Center had a staff of 200 officers and 500 enlisted personnel and was the largest of the three Army Air Force centers in operation in the United States. The Center housed, on average, 10,000 soldiers per year.

The Center operated from 1942 until 1944 as a classification center, housing WACs (Women's Army Corps) and Army Air Corps cadets. In early 1945, the classification center was shut down and a portion of the facility served as a separation center for U.S. Navy personnel. Sailors were sent to the Center for final separation from service and were given orientation on civilian life, proper discharge papers, and transportation to their homes.

Army Air Force Cadet Training

Both Britain and the US mounted major training programs when war broke out but the supply of pilots early in the war often did not keep up with demand resulting in shortened and compressed training.

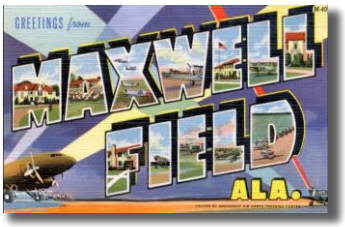
Here's an overview of the USAF training program as of May 1944.



In the 1930's, US flight training lasted twelve months. In 1939, total training was cut to 8 months and then seven months with 10 weeks allotted to each of the primary, basic and advanced stages. After Pearl Harbor, the training program was compressed again with 9 weeks each for primary, basic and advanced training. By mid 1944, the stages were lengthened to 10 weeks apiece and after Victory over Japan to 15 weeks.

Even though the Air Force shortened the duration of the training phases, it tried to keep the flight hours up: 70 - 75 hours of flying in the primary phase went to 65 hours in 1939, with around 200 hours of flight time logged by the end of advanced training.

<u>Pre-Flight School – Maxwell Field, Alabama</u> – February 1943



Following five weeks of testing and classification at the Nashville Classification Center there were nine weeks of pre-flight school. Pre-flight taught the mechanics and physics of flight and required the cadets to pass courses in mathematics and the hard sciences. Then the cadets were taught to apply their knowledge practically by teaching them aeronautics, deflection shooting, and thinking in three dimensions. Typically, cadets reported to a pre-flight school at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center; Maxwell Field, Alabama, or Santa Ana Army Air Base, California. Cadet James Harrison was assigned to Maxwell Field in Montgomery. Successful completion meant being assigned to a flying school for training. "Washouts" were returned to the regular Air Corps ranks for reassignment.

Primary flying schools were next where cadets were taught basic flying using two-seater training aircraft. Beginning in 1939, the Army contracted with nine civilian flying schools to provide primary

flying training. The number of primary contract schools expanded to 41 by the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and to 60 at various times in 1943.

To the flying cadets, the Contract Flying Schools (CFS) were just another training assignment—although the flight instructors were civilian contractors, the cadets still experienced the discipline and drudgery of military life. The CFS's were assigned to the various Flying Training Commands, and each had a designated USAAF Flying Training Detachment assigned for supervision and liaison with the command. During the course of the war, the schools graduated approximately 250,000 student pilots. All of the CFS's were inactivated by the end of the war.

After nine weeks of primary flight training Cadet James Harrison was assigned to pilot school at Gunter Field in Montgomery, Alabama for Basic Training with class 43J.

Gunter Field, Mongomery, Alabama – June 1943

Air Corps Basic Flying School/Army Air Forces Basic Flying School/ Army Air Forces Pilot School (Basic), 8 August 1940-10 September 1945.

Gunter Annex is a United States Air Force installation located in the North-northeast suburbs of Montgomery, Alabama. The base is named after former Montgomery mayor William Adams Gunter. Until 1992 it was known as Gunter Air Force Base or Gunter Air Force Station. It has been a military training base since its opening in 1940.

The facility is named after William Adams Gunter (1871–1940), a long-time mayor of Montgomery Alabama. Mayor Gunter was an aviation advocate who championed aviation and was a major force behind the construction of the original Montgomery Municipal Airport at this site in 1929. There were several efforts to have the airport officially named in his honor while he was still living. Although he successfully resisted these efforts, the site is still commonly referred to by residents as 'Gunter Field'.

In 1940, the 'Plan for the Expansion of the Air Corps Training Program' was published and indicated a need for a preliminary flying school in the Montgomery area. The Commandant of the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Colonel Walter Weaver, picked the Montgomery Municipal Airport and the surrounding area as the location for the flying school. This included a newly built, but as yet unoccupied state hospital for tuberculosis patients. In June 1940, the War Department approved the recommendation to lease the land.

In August 1940 the first military personnel arrived and construction began. The hospital was used as a headquarters building and Colonel Aubrey Hornsby was the project officer and later the first commanding officer. The Army leased the 187 acre municipal airport and purchased an additional 300 acres for the cantonment area. Complicated leasing agreements delayed construction and the Army facilities were not completed in time, so the first two classes, Class 41-A with 107 students and Class 41-B, trained at Maxwell Field on the other side of town. The first class to train at Gunter was 41-C which began instruction on November 28, 1940.

In late 1940, Mayor Gunter died and, on the recommendation of Colonel Hornsby, the flying field was officially named 'Gunter Field' in early 1941. By July 1941, construction of the field was largely complete. In addition to the main airfield, the following known sub-bases and auxiliaries were used:

In 1943, 3,500 foot long hard surfaced runways were added.

Gunter was the first base established by the Southeastern Training Center exclusively for Basic Flight Training. As such, it also trained instructors and other personnel for the other Basic Training bases opened in the Southeast that included Cochran AAF in Macon, Georgia; Bainbridge AB, Georgia; Greenville AAF, Mississippi; Shaw AAF in Sumter, South Carolina; and at Augusta, Georgia's civilian-run Bush Field. Students would come to Basic Flight Training after completing Primary Training. In 1941, the Basic course was 10 weeks in length in which the student received 70 flying hours. After completion of the course, students would be chosen for advanced single or multi-engine training.

During World War II, the field served as a flying school for not just Army pilots, but for British, French and Canadians as well. By 1944, there were nearly four hundred aircraft assigned to Gunter Field. The primary aircraft used for Basic Training, by both the Army and the Navy early on was the Boeing P-17 Stearman, also called the Kaydet, and, during most of the war, the fixed gear Vultee BT-13 and BT-15 Valiant and the North American AT-6 Texan. By later 1944, the BT-13s and 15s were worn out and they began to be replaced by the exclusively by the AT-6's.

Cadet James Harrison's first solo flight was in a P-17 Stearman. It was an experience he never forgot and he forever fell in love with that plane. One can understand why as in the immediate postwar years they became popular as crop dusters, sports planes, and for aerobatic and wing walking use in air-shows. However, it was also his nemesis resulting in a court martial for flying acrobatic loops and leaving the authorized flying area. James had tasted the freedom of the open sky and, with apologies to the movie Top Gun, he was becoming a maverick which, as with Tom Cruise, would suit him well in combat.

P-17 – Boeing Stearman Model 75 (Kaydet)

The Stearman (Boeing) Model 75 is a biplane used as a military trainer aircraft, of which at least 10,626 were built in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. Stearman Aircraft Corporation was an aircraft manufacturer in Wichita, Kansas. Although the company designed a range of other aircraft, it is most known for producing the Model 75, which is commonly known simply as the "Stearman" or "Boeing Stearman".

Lloyd Stearman established the Stearman Aircraft Corporation in 1927. Initially, the company was founded as Stearman Aircraft Corporation in October 1926 at Venice, California, where four C1 and C2 biplanes were built before production halted for financial reasons. On 27 September 1927 a new Stearman Aircraft Corporation was founded.[1] The factory was then established in Wichita, Kansas with financing of Walter Innes where the new model Stearman C3 and Stearman 4 Speedmail were constructed. Two years later, he sold it to the United Aircraft and Transport Corporation.

In September 1934, United was forced to separate its airline and aircraft manufacturing operations. At this time, Boeing became a separate business once again, and Stearman was made a subsidiary of it. Stearman officially ceased to operate as a brand at this point, but it was at this same time that the Stearman plant created its most successful and enduring product, the Model 75 "Kaydet". The Kaydet would become the primary trainer aircraft for the US military during World War II.

The Kaydet was a conventional biplane of rugged construction with large, fixed tailwheel undercarriage, and accommodation for the student and instructor in open cockpits in tandem. The radial engine was usually uncowled, although some Stearman operators choose to cowl the engine, most notably the Red Baron Stearman Squadron.

North American AT-6 Texan

The North American Aviation T-6 Texan is a single-engine advanced trainer aircraft used to train pilots of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), United States Navy, Royal Air Force and other air forces of the British Commonwealth during World War II and into the 1970s. Designed by North American Aviation, the T-6 is known by a variety of designations depending on the model and operating air force. The United States Army Air Corps (USAAC) and USAAF designated it as the AT-6, the United States Navy the SNJ, and British Commonwealth air forces, the Harvard, the name it is best known by outside of the US. After 1962, US forces designated it the T-6. It remains a popular warbird aircraft used for airshow demonstrations and static displays. It has also been used many times to simulate the Japanese Mitsubishi Zero in movies depicting World War II in the Pacific.

Having paid his $50 court martial fine and three days of confinement to the air base, Cadet Harrison was off to gunnery school at Eglin Field, Florida. There he would learn the trade of aerial gunning. He was also told he could earn back some of his court martial fine in performance awards given to top gun performers. He intended to be nothing less than a top gun.

Elgin Air Base, Valparaiso, Florida – Gunnery School – September 1943

Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) (IATA: VPS, ICAO: KVPS, FAA LID: VPS) is a United States Air Force base located approximately 3 miles (5 kilometers) southwest of Valparaiso, Florida in Okaloosa County.

Eglin AFB was established in 1935 as the Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base. It is named in honor of Lieutenant Colonel Frederick I. Eglin (1891–1937), who was killed in a crash of his Northrop A-17 pursuit aircraft on a flight from Langley to Maxwell Field, Alabama.

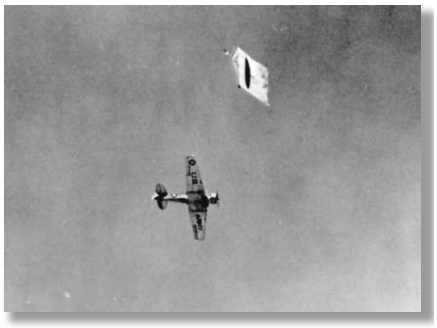
Eglin Air Force Base evolved from the 1933 creation of the Valparaiso Airport, when an arrowhead-shaped parcel of 137 acres (0.55 km^2) was cleared for use as an airdrome.

In 1931, personnel of the Air Corps Tactical School, newly relocated to Maxwell Field, Alabama, sought a location for a bombing and gunnery range. They saw the potential of the sparsely populated forested areas surrounding Valparaiso and the vast expanse of the adjacent Gulf of Mexico.

With the outbreak of war in Europe, a proving ground for aircraft armament was established at Eglin. The U.S. Forest Service ceded over 340,000 acres of the Choctawhatchee National Forest to the War Department on 18 October 1940. At its peak during World War II, the base employed more than 1,000 officers, 10,000 enlisted personnel and 4,000 civilians.

Army Air Forces Gunnery Schools were World War II organizations for training fighter pilots and bomber crewmen at several United States Army Airfields and gunnery ranges (3 schools opened in 1941). "Flexible Gunnery" training developed diverse skills for various aircraft and differing positions within bombers, e.g., waist gunner, rear gunner, etc. The number of graduates had reached 19,789 by 7 July 1943, with another 57,176 men completing the course by the end of the year.

Aerial target competition involved shooting color coded rounds at a variety of towed targets. The tow planes were expendable retired aircraft. Nonetheless, they were painted in bright colors so they could be distinguished by the trigger happy pilots in training from the mostly white towed targets. Colored rounds left identifiable marking on the targets so the hits could be tabulated. The pilots were told over and over again, "you have to get close to hit it."



Cadet James Harrision was one of the top finishers in the competition pocketing $35 to offset his court martial fine. It was also noted that he put three splits in the target with his propeller causing his instructor in the back seat to yell, "that's close enough!"

Earning high marks at Eglin Field Cadet Harrison returned to Alabama where he graduated with class 43J as 2nd Lt. James W. Harrison, Jr., fighter pilot. He had his wings.

The next stop would be Goldsboro, North Carolina and Transition Flight Training where he would finally be introduced to his warhorse, the P-47 Thunderbolt

<u>Seymour Johnson Army Airfield – Goldsboro, North Carolina</u> - November 1943

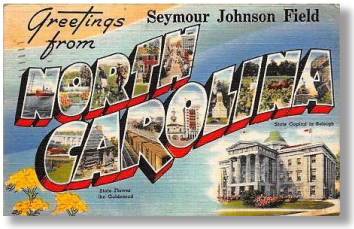
Transitional and operational training was the most important preparation for combat. Pilots were trained on the planes they would actually fly in combat and were introduced to gunnery, bombing and tactics for the first time.

Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (IATA: GSB, ICAO: KGSB, FAA LID: GSB) is a United States Air Force base located to the southeast of Goldsboro, North Carolina. The base is named for Seymour Johnson, a native of Goldsboro, a Navy test pilot who died in an airplane crash near Norbeck, Maryland, on 5 March 1941.

Construction of Seymour Johnson Field started on 9 March 1942 and by 10 July 1942 the 333d Base HQ and Air Base Squadron was established as the host unit. Col Walter J. Reed was the first commander. The airfield's initial mission was Field Aviation Cadet Pre-Technical School Training in bomber mechanics.

The 76th Training Wing was activated at Seymour Johnson on 26 February 1943 and the airfield's mission was changed to training replacement pilots for the P-47 Thunderbolt. Many trained pilots and crews went directly to combat in many parts of the world.

At the end of World War II in Europe, Seymour Johnson was designated as a central assembly station for processing and training troops being reassigned in the continental United States and Pacific theater of operations. The 47th Bombardment Group was reassigned to Seymour Johnson from Twelfth Air Force in Italy during June. Its mission was to prepare for redeployment to the Pacific theater for night pathfinder operations against Imperial Japan. Its black-painted Douglas A-26Cs were equipped with radar however the surrender by Japan in August 1945, cancelled all redeployment plans.



P-47's At Seymour1943

With its operational training mission ended, in September 1945 and the field became an Army-Air Force Separation Center under the 123d AAF Base Unit. On 15 August 1947, Seymour Johnson Army Airfield was closed, and remained inactive for nearly a decade.