

APPENDIX E

United States Army Air Corps Training

- **Pre-Flight Classification and Training - Military Operational Specialty (MOS) Classification - Tennessee**

Classification - All men were tested during the recruit training and indoctrination period to determine their eligibility for assignment to meet the enlarged technical training goals. A soldier's qualification card (WD AGO Form 20), which occupied a central place in the scheme of classifying and assigning enlisted men, was filled out partly at the AAF reception center prior to entering training and more fully later at the BTC. This form was kept current throughout their career by the addition of pertinent information; it followed him wherever he went until he died in the service or was discharged, at which time the form was forwarded to The Adjutant General for permanent filing.

The AAF used a series of test batteries and interviews to ascertain the job experience and mental equipment of recruits. An important phase of the classification of recruits was the interview which uncovered such civilian experiences as skills derived from employment or hobbies and the extent and type of schooling. The objective was to establish a relationship between civilian occupational experiences and a job specialty that would be most useful to the AAF. After the interview a classifier reviewed the recruit's papers and made a recommended assignment to an MOS.

Once the trainee was evaluated, tested and given a recommended MOS assigned, after graduation they were assigned to various Advanced Technical Schools for specialization training. Recruits who were classified as possible flying personnel were sent to one of the three preflight and classification centers of the Flying Training Commands (Eastern, Central or Western) for further classification as a flying air cadet for, bombardier, navigator or flexible gunner training.

Pre-flight Training - As had been the case in the First World War, when ground schools for air cadets had been established at selected colleges throughout the country, it became necessary to provide for prospective pilots, bombardiers, and navigators extensive preflight instruction previous to their assignment to flying schools. During the interval between the two wars this had not been necessary. The small peacetime air establishment permitted the setting of high educational requirements for selection of cadets, and sufficient time was allowed for military indoctrination in the flying schools. The rapid expansion that began in 1939, however, presented special problems of military training for prospective officer--leaders of combat crews, and the early necessity of lowering educational standards for admission to cadet programs forced attention to means whereby a minimum level of academic preparation could be assured. The preflight school provided a solution to this two-sided problem.

In February 1941 the War Department authorized establishment of three Air Corps replacement training centers for classification and preflight instruction of candidates for pilot, bombardier, and navigator training. The official designation of "preflight school" was authorized on 30 April 1942, and the term replacement training center was dropped. By that time preflight schools were in operation at Maxwell Field, Alabama; Kelly and Ellington Fields, Texas; and Santa Ana Army Air Base, California. The school at Kelly Field was soon afterwards moved to an adjoining site, designated the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center.

There was a difference of opinion as to whether pilot and nonpilot candidates should be assigned to the same preflight school. At first, all trainees were included in the same organization, but soon thereafter separate schools were provided. The general rule of separate, though similar, training was followed until April 1944. By that time the downward trend in the number of students called for consolidation, and the Training Command directed that pilot and bombardier-navigator schools be combined. Students thereafter entered preflight schools with only a general aircrew classification and were not assigned to a specialty until near the end of the preflight course. As the

war moved to a climax, the unified school proved more adaptable to the shifting demands for each type of aircrew personnel. In November 1944, when the flow of students had been reduced to a trickle, all training was consolidated in one preflight school at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center.

Although agreement existed on the need for some kind of pre-flying training, ideas regarding the content of the course were vague when the schools first opened. In announcing the decision to undertake such instruction, OCAC stated that the preflight period would consist of "physical training, military training, supervised athletics and the complete processing of assigned students," as well as "additional instruction and training as may be practicable . . . to further qualify trainees for instruction as pilots, bombardiers, or navigators." Brig. Gen. Walter R. Weaver, commanding the Southeast Air Corps Training Center, leaned toward military discipline and physical conditioning as the primary aims of preflight, and his view was supported by many officers who viewed the academic program as sub-ordinate. Curricular development, however, followed the direction favored by those who stressed the need for technical knowledge on the part of aircrew members. There was a steady increase in the relative amount of time and recognition given to academic subjects, and this phase of the program became the paramount function of the preflight schools. Military training doubtless suffered from this trend, but the development was a logical response to the increasingly technical nature of air combat.

Four weeks was the standard length of training at the replacement training centers until March 1942, when a nine-week course was instituted. Separate curricula were issued at that time for pilot and nonpilot training; the distinguishing feature of the latter curriculum was greater emphasis upon mathematics, target identification, photography, and meteorology. Until 1943 each preflight school exercised broad discretion in executing the prescribed program. The lack of uniform instruction proved a handicap in subsequent stages of aircrew training, and to correct this situation a single curriculum for all preflight students was published in April 1943. Final developments of the course were incorporated in a revision of May 1944, when the period of training was extended to ten weeks.

Under the various preflight curricula, students spent four to five hours daily in academic training. Many students entering preflight were so deficient in the fundamentals of mathematics and physics that considerable time had to be given to rudimentary drills, with emphasis upon problems related to performance of flying duties. Theory was reduced to a minimum, and matter inapplicable to aviation was progressively screened out of the courses. Since ability to use aeronautical maps and charts was basic to flying operations, an elementary course in that subject was also developed in the preflight schools. The course became increasingly practical as the necessary materials were made available for teaching purposes; a large portion of the allotted hours was reserved for student exercises in simulated operational problems which required use of aeronautical charts.

The subject of aircraft and naval vessel recognition slowly gained acceptance in recognition of its combat importance. Early teaching of planes and ships was largely ineffectual because too much was attempted with too little time and equipment, but by 1943 the pre-flight recognition program was fairly satisfactory. The time allotted to the course was extended, and the number of visual aids greatly increased. During 1944 and 1945, with an adequate supply of projectors, slides, and screens, the schools were quite successful in training students to recognize, almost instantly, close-up views of the principal American and British aircraft. The scope of naval vessel recognition was gradually restricted to identification of ships by general type, including merchantmen and landing craft, rather than by nationality or individual class.

Pilot trainees, in particular, were unhappy in having to take radio code instruction. It was admittedly a dull subject, requiring concentration and repetition. Student motivation was weakened by the fact that flyers returned from combat generally declared that overseas they had little use for code. Headquarters, AAF, however, repeatedly directed that code be taught, and all preflight students, except those who demonstrated proficiency, had to attend one hour of code daily. By 1944 both sending and receiving of code, by aural and visual means, were taught. The proficiency required was six words per minute.

Of the 175 hours of instruction called for in the official academic program of 1944, 110 were allotted to basic military and officer training. One-half of this time was set aside for close order drill, ceremonies, and inspections; the remainder went to classroom or squadron instruction in customs and courtesies of the service, chemical warfare defense, small-arms familiarization, and related military subjects. The West Point code of cadet discipline and honor was regarded as the model for the preflight schools. The traditional class system, with its more or less stereotyped forms of hazing, was introduced at first, but this practice came under severe public attack, and in spite of its defense by the responsible military authorities, the class system was abolished by order of the Flying Training Command in May 1943. While there may have been disciplinary advantages in the supervision of each lower class by upperclassmen, the hazing associated with the system interfered with the primary mission of the schools and was ill suited to the temperament of the civilian soldier.

Physical conditioning was one of the major purposes of preflight, and after initial uncertainty regarding the nature of such training, a comprehensive and balanced program was evolved. Experimentation was the rule during the early period, when calisthenics, in varying amounts, were mixed with competitive sports, cross-country hikes, and obstacle courses. In September 1943 a weekly minimum of six hours of physical training was established for all aviation cadets. The trend toward uniform conditioning culminated in November 1949 when the Training Command published a detailed outline of exercises for each stage of aircrew training. This memorandum provided for a steady progression of physical hardening and a specified division of time among standard drills, team games, and aquatic exercises.

The chief problem in developing an effective preflight program was the lack of qualified academic instructors. Because few military personnel were available and they were inadequately prepared as teachers, it was realized that they could not be depended upon exclusively, and in July 1941 authority was granted to hire civilians. Within a year it was recognized that professional training and educational experience were prime requisites of academic instructors, and such men were procured in large numbers. Although these civilians were generally satisfactory, their status as civilians proved troublesome. They were authorized to wear military-type uniforms, but such quasi-military status did not make them feel at home in Army schools. Some of the men, furthermore, were in the process of being drafted by their selective service boards, and others were accepting commissions offered by the Navy. To hold on to these teachers, the AAF in the latter part of 1942 and during 1943 gave direct commissions to civilian instructors at the schools, as well as to several hundred procured directly from colleges, and sent them to the AAF administrative officer training school. Instructors under thirty-five were allowed to enlist and were then assigned to the officer candidate school. Practically all of the men who thus became officers were returned to their preflight teaching positions. In addition, a few instructors who were physically ineligible for commissions remained at the schools as enlisted men, and a small number of civilians were also retained.

Although most of the instructors were experienced college or high school teachers, some had almost no knowledge of some of the subjects they were assigned to teach. In order to deal with this problem, practical in-service training, consisting of classroom observations, individual study of textual materials, and conferences with veteran pre-flight teachers, was given at each school. Attention was limited at first to preparing each instructor in the subjects he was required to teach, but programs to improve teaching techniques and develop familiarization with the entire curriculum were later developed. In the summer of 1943 these local efforts were supplemented by a special course at the central instructors school at Randolph Field. After a considerable number of teachers had attended the six-week program there, the course for ground-school instructors was dropped in January 1944.

The typical aviation cadet was an eager learner in preflight school. Ground training in any form was viewed with some misgivings by the average cadet, but he responded willingly to preflight instruction. Pilot and navigator students usually showed the highest morale, because their classification most commonly coincided with their first preference. Many of the bombardier students, up to 1943, were eliminees from pilot training who, required to repeat preflight instruction, naturally resented the delay and repetition of subject matter. In 1943 bombardier morale was greatly improved when it was decided that an eliminee from one type of aircrew training, who had completed preflight, would no longer be required to retake that phase of training. As the war neared its end, the

attitude of all students be-came less inspired. Delays in the progress of training, caused by curtailments in the aircrew program, proved especially disheartening.

The preflight schools formed an integral part of aircrew training throughout the war. In 1943 an additional phase of pre-flying instruction was introduced: the aircrew college training program, which lasted until July 1944. The college program, to put it bluntly, came into existence not so much to meet an educational need as to hold a backlog of aircrew candidates. As has been previously noted,* the AAF had found it advisable in 1942 to recruit aviation cadets in excess of its immediate needs and to hold them in an inactive enlisted reserve until needed. By December 1942 approximately 93,000 men were awaiting classification and instruction, and many of them had been in this limbo for six or seven months. Not only did this extended in-active period discourage some of the men, but the pool of idle man-power received increasing notice from selective service boards and the War Manpower Commission. Accordingly, General Arnold proposed to the War Department that these men be called to active duty and given a period of college training designed to make up educational deficiencies.

In January 1943 the Secretary of War, after making certain modifications, ordered Arnold's recommendations into effect. The Services of Supply, then in the process of establishing the Army specialized training program in various colleges, was directed to set up aircrew college training as a separate project. The curriculum was planned to cover a five-month period, and all aircrew candidates were to be assigned from basic training centers to the colleges unless they could pass a special educational test. The relatively few who passed this test were sent directly to preflight schools. Special boards within the Flying Training Command made preliminary selection of colleges for the program, and the contracts for instruction, housing, messing, and medical care were later negotiated by the AAF Materiel Command. Implementation of the project suffered because of the haste in which it was conceived and executed; by April 1943 over 60,000 men were in aircrew college training detachments at more than 150 institutions. Since the AAF viewed the college enterprise primarily as a personnel rather than a training activity, it failed to establish a clear definition of its educational purpose. The educational objectives, as stated by the Flying Training Command, varied from a limited "Preparation . . . both mentally and physically, for intensive ground training in the Preflight Schools" to the broader "attempt to diminish individual differences in educational background for subsequent air crew training."

Academic subjects, taught by college faculty members, included mathematics, physics, current history, geography, English, and civil air regulations. Military indoctrination, the responsibility of the officers of each detachment, consisted of drill, inspections and ceremonies, guard duty, customs and courtesies, and medical aid. Military training was carried into the academic phase by having the students march to and from classes and by insisting upon proper military courtesies at all times. Although there was a great variance in the degree of emphasis upon discipline at the colleges, this phase of the program was probably more valuable than any other, in that it at least helped adapt students to the standard regimen of Army training. Physical conditioning, required one hour daily, included calisthenics, running, and competitive sports.

Perhaps the most controversial phase of the curriculum was the ten hours of flight indoctrination. The AAF did not desire this instruction in the college program; it was prescribed by the War Department and conducted in cooperation with the Civil Aeronautics Administration. Flying schools located near the colleges provided the training under contract. Since the purpose of this flying was only familiarization, operations were restricted to simple maneuvers in light aircraft, under dual control by instructor and student. AAF observers criticized the training as of little value, charging that the students were "merely riding around for 10 hours." A study conducted in 1944 showed that the indoctrination course helped students materially in the regular primary stage of flying training but gave them no appreciable advantage in later stages. Whatever its long-range value, the course was a morale booster for men who had waited months to learn to fly.

As early as November 1943 moves were made toward liquidating the college program. By that time sufficient aircrew personnel were in the training pipeline, and the backlog of men on inactive status was relatively small. The Training Command took the view that the college program was not essential and that it was creating an unfavorable public attitude by holding combat-age personnel in colleges while fathers were being drafted into

military service. In January 1944 entrance of aircrew students into college was cut almost in half, and contracts with many institutions were terminated. In March, as a consequence of the general manpower shortage, the AAF was directed to return to the Army Ground Forces and Army Service Forces all personnel recruited from those branches who had not reached the preflight stage of aircrew training. This order resulted in large withdrawals of students from the college detachments and sealed the fate of the program. Shortly thereafter, the Secretary of War approved its final liquidation by July 1944; since procurement of aircrew candidates had been suspended, there appeared to be insufficient personnel in the backlog to sustain the program beyond that time.

Although the number of enlisted reservists awaiting training had been greatly diminished by the middle of 1944, the general problem of backlogs, or personnel pools, was by no means ended. During the year requests from combat theaters for aircrew personnel declined sharply; entry of students into the flying stages of training was accordingly reduced, and this had created pools in intermediate stages of the training sequence. The Training Command concluded that the best solution to the problem was to distribute personnel from the pools to flying fields for on-the-job instruction. AAF Headquarters accepted the recommendation and authorized the beginning of on-the-line training, with a dual objective: to provide storage and training of delayed students and to alleviate the growing shortage of regularly assigned personnel at the airfields. On-the-line training was first put into effect in February 1944, and after termination of the college program in July, it became the principal holding device for pre-flying personnel pools.

Higher headquarters provided little guidance in the development of an instructional program for on-the-line students. The Training Command advised only that "trainees will be given duty assignments with aircraft maintenance and servicing where they will get more practical training for their future instruction." Responsibility for implementing the program was left almost entirely to individual station commanders, and this fact resulted in considerable variation in the training. Some commanders reasoned that the students would shortly be returned to the normal sequence of aircrew instruction and gave them slight attention; others saw the possibility of a longer period of delay and devoted a great deal of consideration to their training, work, and recreation.

Some stations offered a few elementary academic courses, but attendance was voluntary; a formal thirty-day mechanic course was established at stations of the Western Flying Training Command. At every field, however, student training consisted chiefly of apprentice experience in aircraft maintenance. Because of the increasing shortage of regularly assigned enlisted personnel, permission was eventually granted to use trainees for administrative and nontechnical duties, as well as on the flight line. Such permission tended to draw students ever closer to enlisted and further from cadet status. As progressive cuts in the aircrew program continued, large numbers of aircrew candidates were transferred to regular enlisted status and classified in their appropriate military occupational specialties.

In no other stage of aircrew training was the problem of morale so serious as in on-the-line training. Lack of an explicit program was partially responsible, but delay and uncertainty concerning the students' future were of primary importance. Each step in curtailing the aircrew program was an added blow to morale. Although many of the trainees eventually reached flying schools, large numbers remained in the pools; by the end of 1944 some men had been in pre-aircrew status for almost a year. Higher headquarters showed concern over the attitude of such students and explained each curtailment of air-crew training quotas as the result of unexpected combat success. To young and ambitious men this explanation was hardly satisfying; as they moved toward enlisted status, many experienced bitter disappointment and sense of failure.

- **Navigator Training¹ - Selman Air Field, Monroe Louisiana**

Before 1933 instruction in navigation was given only as part of pilot training. After 1933, though some specialized instruction was provided in combat units, the small number of long-range aircraft in the Air Corps required only a few specialized navigators. Even in 1939 plans called for only about 500 officers to be trained in that classification. In drafting these plans it was assumed that all individual training of navigators would be conducted in specialized Air Corps flying schools, but no such organizations were in operation until 1941. Meantime, besides continuing training in combat units, the Air Corps sent students to Coral Gables, Florida, for specialized instruction by the Pan American Airways System. Navigation training was also started on a temporary basis at Barksdale Field, Louisiana, in November 1940. Toward the close of 1943 individual navigator training by the AAF was consolidated in four specialized schools of the Central Flying Training Command, and after September 1944 the contract with Pan American Airways was discontinued.

Beginning in 1942 navigator trainees were given flexible gunnery instruction in addition to their specialized training. On occasion, the quotas for both bombardiers and navigators at gunnery schools had to be canceled, however, because the facilities were required for career gunners. By early 1943 gunnery school capacity had been expanded so that the flow of navigation trainees to gunnery schools could be stabilized, and by the middle of 1944 gunnery instruction was provided for all students before their entry into navigation schools.

Before April 1943 special instruction had been limited to fifteen weeks, but at that time an eighteen-week curriculum was placed in effect. Another two weeks were added in December 1944. The directive establishing the program of April 1943 was the first to prescribe uniform instruction in all navigation schools, including the Pan American contract school. The stated objective of navigation training was to qualify students as precision dead-reckoning navigators with basic proficiency in pilotage, radio, and celestial navigation. Dead reckoning was a method of navigation which involved charting a given course, noting the required directional bearings, and computing the airplane headings and airspeeds necessary to fly the charted course. Pilotage involved holding a course by following approximate compass headings while observing certain terrain features used as checkpoints. Radio navigation depended upon signals received from selected ground stations, while celestial navigation was the technique of holding to a course by reference to the stars. To insure the greatest possible accuracy, the navigator was trained to use all available information.

The overwhelming proportion of training time was given to ground instruction, with some 500 hours devoted to teaching the several methods of navigation. Theory was reduced to a minimum in the effort to teach the cadets how to do a job and do it well. Students were first introduced to the basic principles of navigation and were then taught to use the fundamental tools: the compass, drift-meter, altimeter, plotting sheet, logbook, and other devices. Problems were then presented for solution. In the final stage of ground instruction the cadet participated in flights, with critiques of his performance as navigator. Instruction on weather and instrument calibration, together with standard aircrew military and physical indoctrination, rounded out the ground program. Air training was carried on concurrently with ground instruction, beginning usually in the fourth week of the course. Some 20 navigational flights were scheduled, adding up to a total of approximately 100 hours. Rendezvous, search, and patrol problems, in addition to straight flights, were included in missions flown by night as well as day. Each plane normally carried three trainees, their instructor, and the pilot. One student navigated to direct the pilot, as a regular navigator would do; the other two usually followed the pilot, recording on their charts the actual course being covered. Upon completion of a flight, the planned course of the first navigator was then checked against the recorded course. Each of the three students rotated into the position of first navigator on succeeding flights. Experience showed a close correlation between the ground and air performances of navigation trainees, although some students proved unable to adapt to air conditions.

¹ The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume VI – Men and Planes, Chapter 17 – Individual Training of Personnel, Edited by W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate

Probably no other aircrew program was started with so few qualified instructors, and the shortage lasted longer than in other programs. The demands of the operational air units for navigators far exceeded the supply of qualified specialists during the first year of war; as a result, practically no experienced personnel could be spared for teaching, and reliance had to be placed upon new graduates of the navigation schools. Though not classed as instructors, pilots assigned to fly the planes used in navigation training were important for its success, and there was also a serious shortage of this type of personnel--a shortage aggravated by the policy of rotating such pilots, as well as navigation instructors, to combat organizations. The several schools provided their own indoctrination of teachers until late in 1943. At that time a central instructors school (navigator) was established at Mather Field in California. Soon transferred to Selman Field in Louisiana, this school served not only to supply needed instructors but to help in standardizing the methods of instruction.

The AAF failed to provide standard textbooks, syllabi, and training aids until mid-1944. Before that time the individual schools supplied students with a variety of materials. Maps and charts of all types were procured from standard sources; reference handbooks for navigators were prepared by the instructors themselves. In June 1944 a standard work, the Air Navigation Textbook, a comprehensive and satisfactory manual, was produced for distribution to the schools. Numerous films on navigation were made available, large-scale mock-ups of the navigator compartments of medium and heavy bombers were fabricated, and instruments and instrument mock-ups were widely used as training aids. Various types of synthetic trainers were tried as a means of simulating navigation flights, but none of these proved very successful; the first to be obtained in considerable numbers was the G-2 dead-reckoning trainer. It was built like the navigation compartment of an airplane, was similarly equipped, and was mounted on rollers. A number of these devices were usually installed in one room. The G-2 instrument readings for airspeed, altitude, wind direction, and other factors affecting navigation could be changed at will by the instructor from a control desk. The students, who operated the electrically driven trainers, noted the changing instrument data and set courses for the G-2's to follow across the floor of the room. By the time these trainers could be distributed in sufficient numbers, the supply of aircraft at the navigation schools had become adequate, and the need for substitute devices accordingly declined. The G-2 trainer, furthermore, was unduly complex for practical purposes.

A variety of airplanes were used during the early months, but the Beech AT-7 became the standard trainer after the middle of 1942. The principal shortcoming of the AT-7 was its limited passenger capacity and the lack of sufficient range for long navigation missions; during 1945 a number of C-47's, the work horses of the AAF, were converted for use on long flights. After V-J Day it was recommended that four-engine planes, preferably C-54's, be substituted for the C-47's then in use at navigation schools. Until 1945 it continued to be difficult to get the navigational instruments needed for proper instruction of cadets. The competition between the requirements of combat units and the needs of the schools became especially acute in the recently developed items in a field marked by rapid technological progress. It was often necessary to train the navigator without the equipment he would use upon assignment to a combat unit.

Early in 1942, in accordance with a growing emphasis on heavy bombardment and with the demands of operational commitments that were literally global in their extent, the AAF revised upward its previous estimates of requirements for navigators. The training program was expanded still more rapidly in 1943, and in late 1944 the monthly number of cadets receiving navigation instruction reached a peak of over 2,500. By V-J Day more than 50,000 students had graduated from the specialized navigation schools.

Since mathematical ability was one of the most important qualifications of a successful navigator, in determining navigator competence the heaviest weight was assigned to the scores on arithmetical reasoning, dial and table reading, and general reading comprehension. Only those students with the highest scores in these areas had a good chance of completing their training successfully, so that their selection became more restrictive than that for either pilots or bombardiers. Although fewer young men desired navigation training than pilot training, no special difficulty was experienced after 1942 in procuring a sufficient number of qualified candidates. The morale of these students was in general good, and many of them looked forward to using their training after the war as navigators for civilian airlines.

The chief reason for failure of students in the navigation schools was inability to meet basic proficiency requirements on air missions. The trainee had to demonstrate his ability to navigate by day within a course error of 11 degrees and a time error of 1 # minutes per hour of flight; he had to navigate during darkness by celestial means, over distances up to the full range of the training aircraft, to within fifteen miles of his objective. The average rate of attrition in specialized navigator training was approximately 20 per cent.

- **Eastern Flying Training Command**

Active 1940-1945

World War II American Theater

Insignia



Locations of Airfields Controlled



Eastern Flying Training Command was an inactive United States Air Force unit. It was assigned to the Army Air Forces Training Command, stationed at Maxwell Field, Alabama. EFTC was inactivated on 15 December 1945, being consolidated into the new Central Flying Training Command at Randolph Field, Texas, as part of the consolidation of the Army Air Forces after World War II ended.

EFTC also operated aircrew schools for Navigators, Bombardiers and flexible aerial gunners. Radio operators were centrally trained at Scott Field, Illinois. Other aircrew positions, such as B-29 flight engineers and RADAR operators were also trained later in the war as training requirements presented themselves. This included the first jet pilots in 1945.

- **Sewart Air Force Base – Smyrna Army Airfield – Smyrna, Tennessee**

Active 1941-1971



Sewart Air Force Base (1941–1971) is a former United States Air Force base located in Smyrna, about 25 miles southeast of Nashville, Tennessee. During World War II, it was known as Smyrna Army Airfield.

The War Department ordered the construction of a Bombardment Air Base near Nashville on 22 December 1941, shortly after the US had entered World War II. A tract of land consisting of 3,325 acres (1,346 ha) located off US Route 70 in Rutherford County, Tennessee near Smyrna, Tennessee, was selected and acquired by the United States Army Air Forces for use as an Army-Air Force Training Command Base. Six thousand workers erected 200 buildings and an airfield to accommodate the training needs of the Army Air Force.

In January 1942, Smyrna Army Airfield was assigned to the AAF Southeast Training Center with the Army Air Force Pilot School (Specialized 4-Engine) activated (phase 3 pilot training). In this phase, cadets flew B-17 Flying Fortress and B-24 Liberator heavy bombers. Pilots graduating this phase were sent on to group combat training with the Second Air Force. Graduates were commissioned as Flight Officers (Warrant Officers), and those who graduated at the top of their class were commissioned as Second Lieutenants.

On 8 January 1943, the War Department constituted and activated the 76th Flying Training Wing (Specialized 4-Engine) at Smyrna and assigned it to the AAF Eastern Flying Training Command.

Throughout the war, numerous military personnel were stationed at Smyrna. At the end of hostilities, demobilization and defense reductions followed, resulting in the base being deactivated and placed in caretaker status in 1947. However, the installation's inactivity was short-lived and the newly created United States Air Force re-activated the facility as Smyrna Air Force Base in 1948.

