

1st AAF FLYING TRAINING DETACHMENT (PRIMARY)



MISSION

LINEAGE¹

1st AAF Flying Training Detachment (Primary)

STATIONS

Santa Maria Municipal Airport, California

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

PT-13

PT-17

PT-19

PT-22

PT-23

PT-27

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

¹ Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS²

Allen Hancock College of Aeronautics

In May of 1939, with war clouds gathering throughout the world, Allen Hancock was among eight flying school operators summoned to Washington by General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, chief of the Army Air Corps.

Addressing the group, Arnold came right to the point. The Corps desperately needed pilots, but the government lacked the means with which to provide the training. When he asked the men to contract with the government to provide such training, Hancock was one of the first to agree to the request. From that time on, all of the captain's energy, experience and facilities were centered on the country's defense efforts.

Hancock brought in the people he felt could do the job and do it well. Lt. Ross McBride, of Los Angeles, was recruited to head the faculty. W.E. Strobridge, already well known in Santa Maria as the conductor of the Community Orchestra, was brought in as the head of welfare.

All of the flight instructors holding certificates of proficiency from the Air Force Training Center were graduates of the flight instructor's course at Randolph, with most of them being rated as airplane pilots and members of the Air Corps Reserve.

Both the mechanical and flying divisions were under the highest-trained experts that could be found and were the school's last word in efficiency. The students, in general, were introduced to anything that could be flown.

Other buildings, including eight barracks structures, were put up as needed. Four auxiliary flying fields were added, three of them two-way fields.

The Hancock School was the only school of the original nine that sent instructors to Randolph Field for a two-week refresher course in flying-related subjects.

Since the school had been in operation for more than 10 years at the time that the contract had been signed with the government for use as a Civilian Contract School, Hancock Field came ready equipped with runways, hangars, shops and barracks.

By the time World War II ended in 1945, civilian school contractors had trained more than 200,000 pilots for the Army, thereby saving the government \$1 billion in that particular phase of the war effort.

In addition to being an experienced pilot, Hancock was a mariner of long experience and licensed to master any ship of any tonnage on any ocean. After passing an exam for master mariner's license, the resulting document authorized Hancock to "captain" a vehicle of any size. In addition to funding the 1928 flight of the Southern Cross, he had spent many years in conducting voyages of scientific exploration throughout the eastern Pacific.

With the Hancock School of Aeronautics being a far cry from other drab duty stations, the new cadets began to wonder when they'd have to start paying dues to this "country club." The dream ended, though, when the newness wore off and the men began to buckle down to the job at hand.

Men came and went, with not everyone making the grade. Those who were to be eliminated were brought before the academic board and within 24 hours were returned to their prior duty stations for reclassification. The remaining men were ready to begin intensive training.

In 1942, when the 12-week course was reduced to nine weeks, the classes remained the same. Instructors just needed to cram more information into a smaller time period.

Hancock paid for everything except for the telephone and wire services.

Although the school had a chaplain, it had neither an official chapel nor much time in which to hold services.

On Sundays, when the school was virtually deserted, there was no need for services. However, when a new class was in quarantine, both Protestant and Catholic services were held at the school.

Since a cadet could not go home, except for a most urgent emergency (such as sickness or a death in the family), most other problems resulted in a visit by the cadet to the chaplain. The chaplain also met with the cadets' wives and became their adviser.

The Little Theater, which Hancock had built many years before as a community center for theatrical and motion picture entertainment, was reconditioned for the use of the members of the Cadet Club. Its floors were sanded and waxed to create an ideal dance floor, and its stage accommodated a full dance orchestra.

Mrs. Wallace Van Hise was the Cadet Club's founder and first hostess. Mrs. Louis Crawford, a longtime teacher at Santa Maria Union High School, was hired by the college to help look out

for the welfare of the cadets as well as their wives and friends. Mrs. C.B. Fergusen served as her assistant.

Working tirelessly on behalf of the cadets, Crawford served as principal hostess at the cadet club until the government's contract with the school was terminated on June 30, 1944.

The 8,414 cadets who completed the required courses went on to distinguish themselves in battle, with some giving their lives in the service of their country.