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## History of Laughlin Army Air Field

**W**HAT was once a portion of one of Southwest Texas' largest ranches is now the site of the Army Air Forces' first pilot school for B-26 Marauders—the world's fastest medium bomber and one of the deadliest planes in combat.

Construction of the field started in mid-1942 and the first men moved into barracks in late December of that year.

Originally intended to be a school for bombardiers, the field was activated on October 29, 1942 as the Army Air Forces Bombardier School, Del Rio, Texas, with Lt. Col. E. W. Suarez commanding.

Headquarters were first set up in offices at the United States Federal Building in Del Rio during October with a small number of officers, enlisted men and civilian employes assigned.

Movement to the field was effected late in December.

On December 26, 1942, command of the post was assumed by Col. George W. Mundy, the present commanding officer.

Already selected as the first Marauder pilot school to be established in the world—on February 2, 1943, the field was re-designated the Army Air Forces Transition Flying School, Medium Bombardment, later to be changed to Army Air Forces Pilot School (Specialized 2-Engine), its designation today.

Flying training started early in February, 1942, shortly after the arrival of Lt. Col. James E. Roberts, first Director of Training.

Early in March, 1943, through the efforts largely of Colonel Mundy, the Commanding Officer, the pilot school was named Laughlin Army Air Field by the War Department.

It was so named in honor of the late Lt. Jack Thomas Laughlin, of Del Rio, who was killed in action in the Far East on January 29, 1942.

On March 28, 1943, impressive dedicatory ceremonies were held at which Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Brant, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces Gulf Coast Training Center, was principal speaker. The late Lieutenant Laughlin's widow, parents and daughter were honor guests.

The field is now turning out large classes of expert Marauder pilots every nine weeks. Students at Laughlin Field are commissioned officers who have already earned their wings at advanced flying schools throughout the country.

Their training at Laughlin Field consists of both flying and ground school.



Tiny Jack Thomas Laughlin, Jr., infant daughter of the late Lt. Jack T. Laughlin, and her mother were the center of attraction at dedication ceremonies Sunday, March 28, 1943. Major Gen. Gerald C. Brant, commanding general of the Gulf Coast Training Center, is seen above holding little Jackie's hand, while her mother and Col. George W. Mundy, past commanding officer, look with interest. Mrs. Laughlin was the former Miss Mary Fundalakis. She married the Del Rio flyer in Salt Lake City, August 7, 1941.



Arriving for dedication ceremonies at Laughlin Army Air Field, Major Gen. Gerald C. Brant, commanding general of the Gulf Coast Training Center, is met by an honor guard and inspects its complement.

Laughlin Army Air Field was named in honor of the late Lt. Jack Thomas Laughlin, who was killed in a flight over Java, January 29, 1942. He was graduated from the Del Rio High School in 1932 and from the University of Texas in 1938. Lieutenant Laughlin was commissioned April 27, 1941. The field was dedicated in his honor Sunday, March 28, 1943.



(left) Thousands of persons from southwestern Texas joined military personnel in honoring the late Lt. Jack T. Laughlin at field dedication ceremonies, Sunday, March 28, 1943. Visitors were escorted through administrative buildings and barracks, and permitted to inspect the Marauders. A dazzling formation flying exhibition climaxed the day's ceremonies.







(right) Everyone who enters or leaves the post must present a pass to Military Police stationed at the gate. Here, the MPs halt an automobile, while the occupants present the pass which entitles them to enter the field.



Soon after these graduation exercises were held in the post theatre these student officers were on their way to Army Air Force Bomber Commands, preparatory to being sent overseas to fly the B-26 Marauder in combat missions. Brig. Gen. James E. Foraker, commanding general of the Third Bomber Command, McDill Field, Fla., is the graduation speaker.

[left] Retreat, held daily at 5:30 p. m., is one of the most inspiring ceremonies conducted at an army post. At the sounding of "retreat" by a bugler, military personnel, wherever they may be at the time, turn in the direction of the flag and salute it. The 458th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron is lined up for this formation in the above photograph.



Post Headquarters.



The Post Headquarters building is situated centrally on the post. Administrative departments and officers in charge function here. Landscaping of the area was done by enlisted men, who dressed up the building's appearance by placing Texas plant life around it.

Daily from reveille until retreat the Stars and Stripes waves proudly. The flagpole is located a short distance south of headquarters. Enlisted men stand retreat formation at 5:30 p. m. This is one of the most inspiring ceremonies observed at an army post.





Visiting dignitaries are greeted by high ranking officials, an honor guard and the 406th Army Air Forces Band. Here the band plays a welcome song for a brigadier general who has just landed. The band also provides music for inspections and parades, as well as a daily concert.



A group of flying officers looks on with interest during their period of calisthenics, while classmates demonstrate judo holds under the watchful eye of the athletic officer.





Officers and enlisted men are trained in the firing of rifles, tommy guns and pistols. Officers are shown here on the firing line for pistol practice. Constant practice has brought forth talented marksmen—and not all of them are from cowboy country.



"King," a German Shepard dog loaned to the army for important use in the war effort, is barking a vicious warning that an intruder is near.



Administrative officers, flying officers and enlisted men are required to take physical training, a minimum of hours for each group being specified in regulations. A class of student officers is taking calisthenics here under the supervision of an athletic officer.





A photographer, with gas mask covering his face, takes an unusual "shot" in the Headquarters Personnel Section during a "gas alert."



[above] A visit to the Officers' Club provides relaxation for administrative and flying officers comprising its membership. Reading matter, games, music, socials and group gatherings are enjoyable pastimes for the members and their guests.



One of the most important departments at a Flying Field is operations. Here a checkup on flights and schedules is maintained and the location of every aircraft may be accounted for instantaneously.



All squadrons have day rooms where the enlisted men may go during off duty hours. There writing and reading facilities are available, as well as various games. Support of the day room is maintained by monthly contributions from each individual's pay.



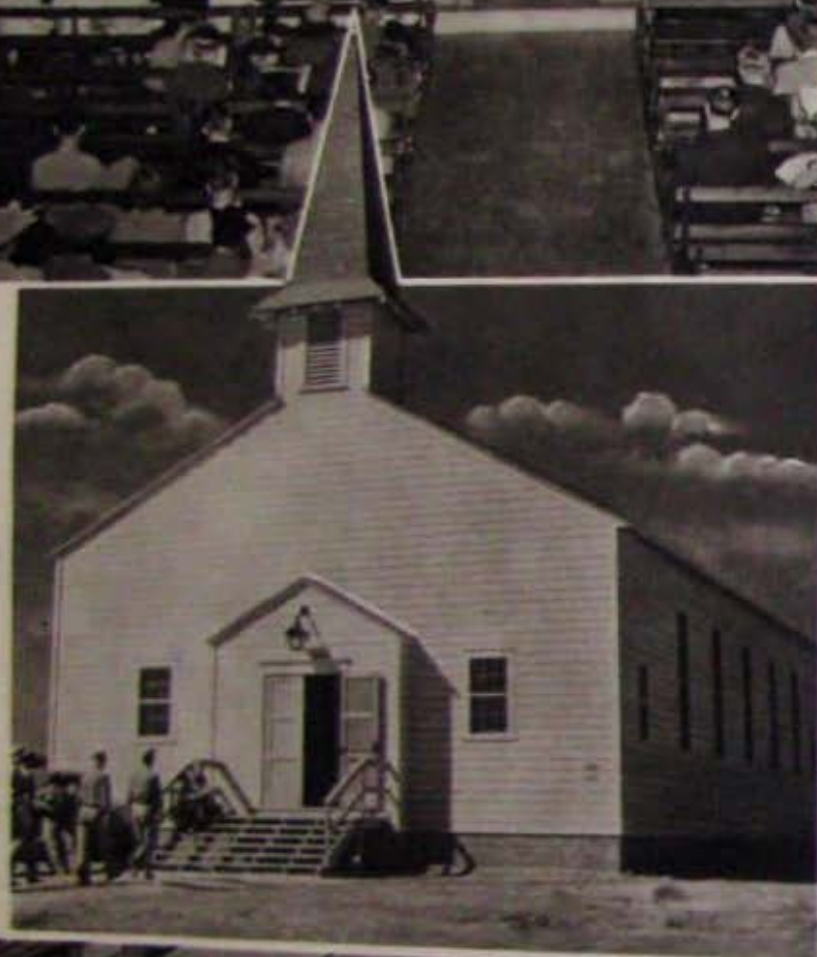
This is a front view of Post Headquarters. On either side of the walk leading to the front door are two empty bomb casings. The walls are margined on all sides by arrangements of limestone.

This photograph was snapped just inside the entrance of Post Headquarters. The officer in the foreground is conversing with an enlisted man on duty in the message center. All important communications are routed through this office.



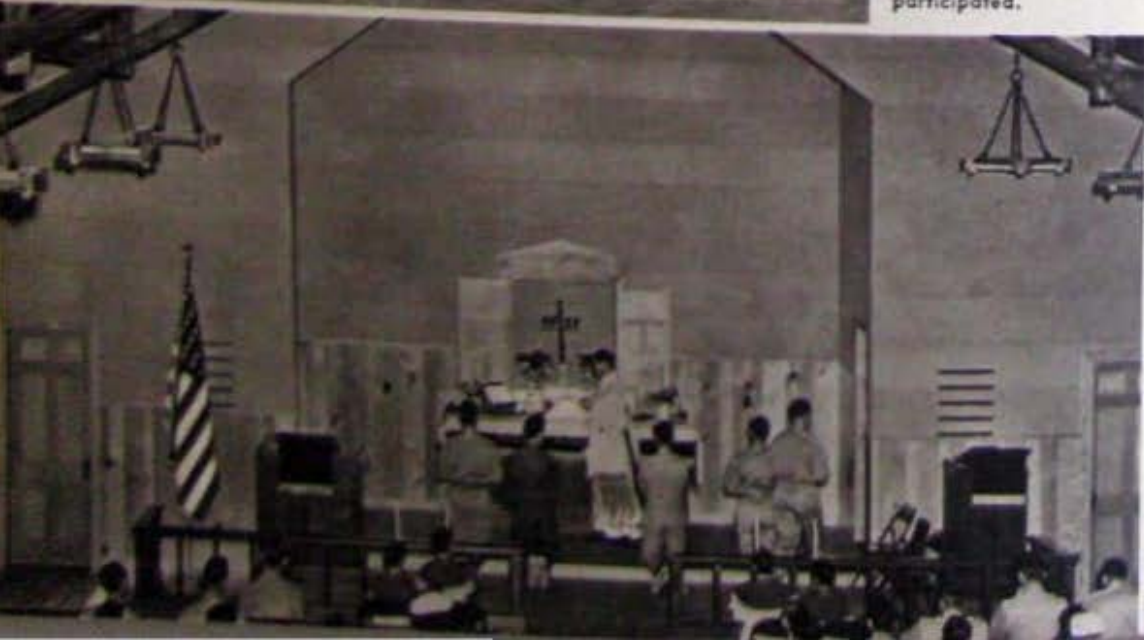


All religious denominations hold services regularly in the post chapels. The chaplain's office is always open for men seeking consultations, and military personnel of all races, creeds and colors find comfort in discussing personal matters with the chaplain.



(left) This is an exterior view of one of the two chapels at Laughlin Army Air Field. Men approaching the chapel are planning to attend services.

This photograph was taken in the chapel on its dedication day in April, 1943. Representatives of all faiths participated.





Pride of the station hospital is the staff of nurses. This sextet ranks highly in the Gulf Coast Training Center in capability, efficiency, attractiveness and popularity. Enlisted men and officers have discovered that there is some pleasure in being confined to the hospital.

(below) Enlisted men are on duty at the station hospital as technicians. Under the careful tutelage of doctors, the men have been trained to fill important positions and carry out essential duties. They have the advantage of working with modern equipment.



(right) The station hospital occupies considerable space and consists of numerous sections. Large wards and private rooms, adequately furnished, are similar to those in civilian hospitals. This pretty visitor cheers a convalescent to a speedy recovery.



Working in the pharmacy at the station hospital are enlisted men who accumulated experience in that field during civilian life. An efficient Army Air Force classification office places every man in the job that he is best suited to fill and in which he shows the most







A 65-foot tower is the nerve center of flying operations at this air base on the Mexican border. Enlisted men, especially trained for the job, operate the controls and give landing and take-off instructions to pilots. The enclosure is polaroid glass.

When preparing to land or takeoff all planes receive their directions from the control tower. The operating force in the tower has many duties, but is always on the alert. Located adjacent the flying line, the glassed-in tower stands high above the field.







Making adjustments in the nose of a B-26 Marauder, this mechanic crouches in front of the bombardier's seat. Before a Marauder takes to the skies everything is in perfect operating condition.





This staff sergeant works in the rear gunner's compartment of a Marauder. Many of the enlisted men who work on planes are aerial engineers and take regular flights for training purposes.





(left) One of the distinguishing features of the B-26 is its tail. Here, two mechanics are seen inspecting the tail rudder. Notice the contrast in size between the men and the rudder.



This unusual picture shows two mechanics making repairs on the rudder of a B-26, as the men on the line get it prepared for a routine training flight. Beneath the tail can be seen the tail gunner's rear vision window. Potent guns that spell death and destruction for the enemy are placed in the openings between the glass, giving the gunner excellent maneuverability.

A parachute rigger raises a parachute in a specially constructed drying room, where it will hang for 24 hours. The Parachute Department is located at Sub Depot and civilian workers are expertly trained to do their assigned jobs.



(left) The cameraman had to crawl underneath the Marauder to shoot this picture of the bomb bay. In all theatres of war Marauder bombardiers have dropped through these openings bombs that have dealt demoralizing blows to the Axis.

(left) These mechanics on the line are pushing a B-26 Marauder from a hangar to the ramp. Soon it will be taken into flight by a student officer who was assigned to this post for a prescribed course in piloting the world's fastest medium bomber.



This silhouette of one of the men on the flying line was taken by a member of the staff of the post photographic laboratory. It shows him about to ascend a ladder to climb in through the plane's rear hatch.



Student officers who are assigned to this flying field on the Mexican border, after graduating at other twin engine schools in the Gulf Coast Training Center, pursue a nine weeks' course to learn to fly the Martin B-26 Marauder.

Termed by men who work on the line, and also by her crews, "the prettiest combat ship in the Army Air Forces," is the Martin B-26 Marauder, seen in flight here. The short winged comet of the skies has dealt severe blows to the enemy in all theaters of war.







This excellent flying "shot" shows a B-26 Marauder after a takeoff at Laughlin Army Air Field. Enlisted men on duty as aerial engineers are required to fly at this specialized two engine Army Air Forces Pilot School and they "love it." After piloting this ship, student officers state they prefer it to any other plane. The B-26 is their ship for combat.







It's "V" for Victory wherever Allied forces are fighting today, and these scrappy mechanics on the flying line show their true spirit by lining up in wedge formation in front of the plane that has given the Axis many headaches.

[right] The schooling of a mechanic is never complete. This group seated in the bleachers is studying and discussing the electrical system of a B-26 in a hangar set aside for this purpose. The instructor is a non-commissioned officer who is qualified to teach the class.



This is a typical hangar. In some hangars mock-ups of planes are set up to familiarize mechanics and flyers with their structure. The buildings are large enough to house two Marauders at least.



Grouped on a wing of the world's fastest medium bomber, these young flying officers were carefully selected for B-26 training as pilots. Men who come to Laughlin Army Air Field to fly this short-winged comet of the skies were top ranking graduates at other twin-engine schools in the Gulf Coast Training Center.



These are the men who keep the Marauders flying. Mechanics who keep the Marauders in excellent flying condition come to this post fully trained to do this work. They are the feet of the men with the wings.

Gas drills are held frequently and military personnel is trained to perform regular duties with face pieces adjusted for as long as four hours at a time. Here mechanics are at work during a "gas alert."







The men in the above picture are West Point graduates who came to Laughlin Army Air Field to receive special instructions in flying the world's fastest medium bomber. They posed for the photographer while standing under the wing of a Marauder.

(below) Standing on the tail of the ship that pilots fly with pride, this mechanic pushes a rudder into a position advised by his crew chief looking on from below. Every man has a job to do at Laughlin Army Air Field to assure an efficient training program that will eventually spell defeat for the enemy.



"The show must go on" and, so, too, must calisthenics. Enlisted men in this photograph continue to exercise during a "gas alert" period.

In hot weather men on the flying line, mechanics and pilots, dress comfortably while carrying on their duties. Flying is hot and dusty business in southwestern Texas on the Mexican border. These men are washing a Marauder and refreshing themselves, too, with sprays of water.





A difficult photograph to take, yet a fine one, is this "shot" of a student officer inside a link trainer. Simulated flying conditions are the feature of link training. Before a student is fully prepared to take to the skies he must pass his link trainer tests successfully and show his aptitude for flying.

The pilot does not obtain all of his schooling in the air. In this picture several are seen in link trainers at the ground school. Cooped up in the trainer the man at the controls handles it as he would a real plane under actual flying conditions. He receives his instructions from an enlisted man seated at a desk who is in direct contact with the trainer by means of interphone.





(below) Milk shakes, soft drinks, ice cream sundaes and sodas are soothing to military personnel during duty hours. These refreshments are obtainable at the coffee shop, located adjacent the P.X. Wives of military personnel, who choose to be near their loved ones, make pleasant, agreeable waitresses. Enlisted men are also assigned to duty here.



Booth, table and counter service is provided in the Coffee Shop. In this picture the patrons are enlisted men and officers, but young ladies working on the post frequent the establishment and boost the soldiers' morale by eating with them.



(left) This is a view of the main Post Exchange and Coffee Shop, as seen from Post Headquarters. The Coffee Shop is in the wing to the right of the parked vehicles. Administrative offices are located at the rear of the building in the connecting wing and there is also storage room for goods sold in the exchange. Civilians and military personnel work here.



In the "coffee shop," adjacent the P.X., enlisted men chat over a cup of coffee and bottles of soda pop. In this picture, the wife of a sergeant accompanies him to the eating spot to partake of refreshments and good fellowship.



Here is the clothing counter at the P. X. Young women and enlisted men work here. A ample supply of masculine apparel is always available for officers and G. I.'s.



Ground school training is an important phase of B-26 training. Before pilots are sent into the air they must master the course taught in the ground school. Radio code, meteorology, identification of friendly and foreign aircraft, and other important things that a flyer must know are taught here.



Instruction in radio code is part of the course given to every student officer learning to pilot the B-26 Marauder.





Wearing the Red Cross seal, post ambulances outside the station hospital and their drivers are ever ready to respond to an emergency. The insignia of the Medical Corps is painted on the side of the ambulance near the passenger's door.



Military requirements state that haircuts must not be more than two inches in length. The barbers are kept busy from 8 a. m. to 6 p. m. daily and especially on days preceding inspection.





Army cooks are specialists and the food that they prepare is the best that can be provided. It is inspected before being served to enlisted men or officers. A co-worker watches interestedly as a station hospital chef tests his broth. From the expression he's wearing, it must taste good.





The Non-Com Club is open daily from 11 a. m. to 11 p. m. and keeps later hours on Saturday nights or special occasions. The 84-foot bar is, perhaps, the largest in southwestern Texas and is always crowded. Members find repasts delightful at the club, especially after working hours.

The Non-Com Club is open to enlisted men with the rank of corporal or above. Socials are held regularly and the members may bring wives or lady friends there at any time. Two nights a week are reserved as "Guest Nights" when members may bring in privates first class or privates.







The post theatre is open for two shows nightly and three on Sundays. Military personnel, their wives and escorts, see the newest releases before they are shown in the larger cities. Civilians who work and live on the post are welcome to attend the movies at the same prices charged soldiers.



Officers and Non Commissioned Officers have their own separate clubs. This is an interior view of the Officers' Club, where members are privileged to go at any time. Socials are held frequently with wives and lady friends participating.





Sidewalk cafes in Villa Acuna, Mex., are patronized by military personnel. Mexican foods and drinks are almost as popular with many soldiers as their G.I. edibles. Soldiers like to take wives, families and "dates" to Mexico and collect souvenirs for others on the home front.

# CERVEZA XX

Laughlin Army Air Field is situated about 10 miles from Del Rio, Tex., on the Mexican border. The nearest Mexican community is Villa Acuna and it offers varied entertainment for the soldiers. Bull fights, Mexican cafes and customs intrigue military personnel who get along nicely with the natives.








Entertainments for enlisted men are sponsored regularly by the Special Service Office. The hilarity in this picture was provoked by enlisted men entertaining at a past show. Wives and lady friends are welcome to attend these shows and many officers also find them enjoyable diversion.

Judo is taught to enlisted men and officers at Laughlin Army Air Field. The physical training officer on the left applies a painful hold to a student flying officer. Military personnel are physically fit at Laughlin Army Air Field.







Pretty girl performers who come to Laughlin Field with U.S.O. and other road shows are great morale boosters. The Camel Caravan presented the cute acrobat shown going through her routine in this picture.



The three zories at the "mike" and the other in the background call themselves "The Four Sad Sacks." As entertainers they have brightened many a dull moment for enlisted men and officers, and joined other military singers, dancers and comedians by participating in a major Red Cross Benefit show sponsored in Del Rio.



This rear view of a B-26 Marauder on the flying line was taken with the photographer looking from underneath another medium bomber.



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