

Preface

San Antonio, Texas, is the home of a handful of military installations whose names are legendary in the annals of military aviation—Fort Sam Houston, Kelly Field, Brooks Field, Randolph Field, and the Johnny-come-lately of the group, the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, now known as Lackland Air Force Base.

The Alamo City's ties to military aviation go back to 1910 when Lieutenant Benjamin Foulois arrived at Fort Sam Houston with the Wright Flyer, the Army's only airplane, packed in crates. There, he literally taught himself how to fly and shared his new-found knowledge with a small band of adventurous Army officers. Like most youngsters, military aviation underwent some growing pains before becoming firmly established in San Antonio.

That happened with the founding of Kelly Field, where the first aircraft landed on April 5, 1917, making Kelly the oldest continuously active military airfield in the United States Air Force. Within a matter of months, the new airfield was providing training for hundreds of flying cadets (the more familiar term "aviation cadet" did not come into use until 1941).

In the fall of 1917, as Kelly Field was flooded with recruits, Army aviators surveyed a field south of San Antonio as a potential site for another airfield, Brooks Field, which opened in 1918. Brooks trained those who had already earned their wings to be instructor pilots. A few months after the armistice, the flying school at Brooks closed its doors, only to reopen them in 1922.

For the next five years all Army pilots received their wings in San Antonio, going through primary training at Brooks Field and advanced training at Kelly Field. Landmark legislation in 1926 led to the construction of another major flying training installation in the San Antonio area—Randolph Field. Dedicated in 1930, Randolph took over primary training from Brooks and March Fields, whose primary flying school reopened in 1927. With the opening of the flying school at Randolph, San Antonio once again became the home of all Air Corps pilot training.

In 1942 the War Department separated a portion of Kelly Field from the main base and made it an independent installation—the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. For most of World War II, the center served as a preflight school and classification center; and when the war was over, the mission shifted to basic military training—a mission forever linked with Lackland Air Force Base.

Since World War II, Kelly, Brooks, Randolph, and Lackland have all remained important contributors to the Air Force mission. Each base, however, adapted its mission in response to the ever-changing challenges of the post-World War II era. These years, marked first by the onset of the Cold War, moved inexorably through regional conflicts in Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf, and culminated in the disintegration of the Soviet empire in the 1980s and 1990s.

Around the turn of the century, both Kelly and Brooks fell victim to the Base Realignment and Closure process, designed to cut defense spending by relocating missions and closing bases. Following a decision made by the BRAC Commission in 1995, Kelly realigned with the adjoining Lackland Air Force Base and the Air Logistics Center closed in 2001. By 2007 Kelly had become Port San Antonio, a major redistribution and transshipment center, the regional home for such aerospace giants as the Boeing Company and Lockheed Martin, and host to 74 tenants that employed over 8,500 workers and added over \$1.5 billion to the San Antonio economy.