U. S. AIR FORCE ACTIVITIES IN AND NEAR DEL RIO, VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS

By

E. Robuck Daughtrey
409 Pulliam Street
Del Rio, Texas

Researcher for Val Verde County Historical Commission, Del Rio, Texas

FOREWORD

I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to Col. Chris O. Divich, Commander 47th Flying Training Wing, Col. Anthony J. Farrington, Jr., 47th Air Base Group, and their staff for the interest shown and the cooperation given during the months the facts of this history were being collected and edited for application for a Texas State Historical Marker to recognize the importance of Laughlin Air Force Base in the history of

U. S. AIR FORCE ACTIVITIES IN AND NEAR DEL RIO, VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS

The Air Age began on December 17, 1903. On that day the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, piloted the world's first flight in a motor-driven, heavier-than-air plane. Due to lack of interest shown by Governmental agencies and the general public, the Wright brothers did not vigorously pursue the development of their invention until 1908, when they again demonstrated their plane in Fort Myer, Virginia and in France and Italy.[1]

In commenting on the state of the Air Service at the time the United States entered into World War I, Major General Benjamin D. Foulis, USAF (Ret.) points

out that; "When war was declared in 1917, we had done practically nothing on the aviation program even though the war had been going on in Europe since 1914. Up to this time our government had bought 28 airplanes, of which 16 had been wrecked; had trained 40 pilots, of which 11 had been killed."[2] Seven of these planes were located in San Antonio. The air service at this time was known as Aviation Section, U. S. Army Signal Corps.

The present United States Air Force traces its antecedents through the following organizations:

1. Aeronautical Division, U. S. Army Signal Corps - August 1, 1907
2. Aviation Section, U. S. Army Signal Corps - July 18, 1914
3. Bureau of Aircraft Production, U. S. War Department - May 21, 1918 and Division of Military Aeronautics, U. S. War Department - April 27, 1918
4. Air Service, U. S. Army - May 24, 1918
5. Air Corps, U. S. Army - July 2, 1926 and General Headquarters Air Force (Later Air Force Combat Command) - March 1, 1935
6. Army Air Forces, U. S. Army - June 20, 1941
7. United States Air Force - July 26, 1947.

The Air Corps and the Air Force Combat Command were subordinate Units of the Army Air Forces, June 20, 1941 - March 9, 1942; they ceased to exist on the latter date.

The "birthdate" usually celebrated by the USAF is September 26, 1947, when the first Chief of Staff was sworn in.[3]

Way back in 1911, Galbraith Perry Rodgers made an historic flight in a plane resembling a box kite. This was the first transcontinental flight in history, and this plane landed in Del Rio, Texas. Seventy years later memories of that occasion are still treasured by several residents of Del Rio who fondly remember their first glimpse of the new "flying machine." "Rodgers came flying in all right, but he didn't 'drop out of the sky' as some news accounts indicated-he was just barely above the tree tops" recalled District Attorney Douglas A. Newton this morning.[4]

Sergio Gonzalez, who was attending Guadalupe School at the time of the flight, said, "Some of the men from town came by and asked the Priest to declare a holiday at the school so that children could see the plane. He did, so all of us went over to see the plane land. People traveled in buggies and wagons with horses in those days and I remember everybody had a hard time with the animals when the plane landed and took off," Gonzalez recalls.[5]

Reports are that Del Rio had reconnaissance activity as early as 1915.[6] Then in 1917 and 1918, Mrs. Earnest (Irene) Cardwell, who resides at 502 Plaza, Del Rio, Texas, related that military planes were in Del Rio numbers of times. She was nine years old when, in 1916, her family, the Serapio Cardenas', father, mother, six brothers, a sister and Irene, moved to a new home at the site that is now the intersection of Chapoy Street and San Felipe Ave. This was at the edge of the area chosen for the first landing field for airplanes here, because the ground was relatively level and covered with small brush with no trees.

For many years now this area has been known as the Blum Addition--it is just East of Highway 277 S., South of San Felipe Creek and the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, extending back to the hills further South and East.

Soon after this move, and through 1917, 1918 and 1919, Mrs. Cardwell remembers the excitement of planes landing near their home. When the planes were to remain overnight, the Lieutenant in charge of the planes would ask permission to tie them to the posts of the fence around the Cardenas home in order to protect them from wind damage. When the weather was bad, she remembers the Lieutenant asking her father if the men who were guarding the planes might sleep on the porches around three sides of the adobe house, and Mr. Cardenas allowed them to do so. To show their appreciation, the men, who were brought food four times a day, would save some and bring a platter to the house on some days. Irene recalls how much they (the children) enjoyed these treats, because there were more sweets than they were usually allowed, and the food was often different from the usual fare. The military personnel could not speak Spanish, and at that time the Cardenas family did not speak English, but "favors" such as food and a good place to sleep, made them friends. Irene says that one English word has always been special to her--CONTACT--it was many years before she really knew what it meant, but every time she heard it, she, her sister and brothers, knew to run to a vantage point because there was to be the excitement of seeing the men "spin" a propeller and a plane take off to fly![7]

On the week-end of June 14-16, 1919, the national press reported that the

Mexican rebel, Pancho Villa, had just attacked Juarez, Mexico for the third time. The account also indicated that United States Troops from Fort Bliss had promptly crossed the border to assist the Juarez garrison of Federal troops in driving Villa's rebel forces from the town. The immediate purpose of the United States intervention was to prevent Villa's soldiers from shooting across the Rio Grande into El Paso, causing casualties.[8]

Villa's attack prompted Maj. Gen. Charles T. Menhor, Chief, Army Air Service, Washington, D. C., on June 16, 1919, to order units of his command into action. Two flights of six planes each from Ellington Field, Houston, Texas and one flight of six planes from Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, proceeded without delay to Fort Bliss to form an Aerial Border Patrol.[9] These planes came through Del Rio on their way to Fort Bliss at El Paso. The first of the planes left Ellington Field on June 20th and arrived at Fort Bliss on the 22nd. The detachment of twelve planes, which belonged to the 20th Aero Squadron, carried eighteen flying officers and six enlisted men. The planes from Kelly field, units of the 11th Aero Squadron, had arrived earlier at Fort Bliss on June 17th. That is, five planes had arrived on the 17th, but one, flown by Lieutenants Lloyd Harvey and R. Baez, had been damaged enroute at Del Rio, Texas, and had arrived four days late.[10]

Bad luck pursued the planes from Ellington Field. The planes of Lieutenants O. E. Grazier and W. S. Baer crashed and burned at Del Rio, and three other planes were wrecked between Del Rio and Fort Bliss because no

6285

other landing facilities were available.[11] Mrs. Stillman Long (Dorothy), a native resident, who, with her husband, operates an Insurance Agency, recalls witnessing the crash of the plane of Lieutenants Grazier and Baer as it attempted to take off. She relates, "At that time there were only a few houses at the edge of Del Rio in an area known as Blum Addition. The land was practically level, often used for horse racing and then used for a landing strip." Dorothy Long remembers the pilot letting a handful of dirt be blown by the wind to get the wind direction before take-off. Mr. Douglas Newton, retired District Attorney, and Mr. Major Dobkins, proprietor of Dobkins Men's Wear, also recall those exciting times when these planes were in Del Rio.

The Army surveillance Group was organized at Kelly Field, Texas, on July 1, 1919. In August 1919 the group was redesignated 1st Surveillance Group. Headquarters of the group moved from Kelly Field to Fort Bliss, Texas on November 12, 1919, and remained there until returned to Kelly Field on July 2, 1921. The Group's primary mission, July 1919-June 1921, was to patrol the United States-Mexico border from Brownsville, Texas to Nogales, Arizona, using D H - 4Bs aircraft. Del Rio was one point along the border patrol.[12]

The 90th Aero Squadron became part of the Army Surveillance Group on July 1, 1919. It was then at Kelly Field, equipped with DH-4b's. A flight of the squadron operated from Eagle Pass, Texas from September 2, 1919 to June 11, 1920 and from Del Rio, Texas from June 12, 1920 to June 30, 1921.[13]

Del Rio, located approximately halfway between Brownsville, Texas and El Paso, Texas on the Rio Grande River was one of the points or settlements visited on these surveillance flights.

Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle USAF (Ret.), famous as leader of "The Tokyo Raiders", writes, "The patrols were flown daily by the Army Air Service in Liberty Motored D H 4 Airplanes. I was with 'A' Flight of the 90th Aero Squadron, which was stationed at Eagle Pass, and we started flying patrols on September 3, 1919. 'B' Flight of the 90th and the Commander of the Squadron was stationed at Sanderson, Texas. For some reason, which I do not now recall, our station was moved from Eagle Pass to Del Rio. It is not clear from my pilot book exactly when this move took place. I served there until assignment to the 'Bombing Maneuvers' off the Virginia Capes in mid-May of 1921. I should point out that, except at San Diego, the air strips--with the tent hangers - were usually located near an Army Base. (The 3rd Infantry in Eagle Pass and the 12th Cavalry in Del Rio.")[14]

In recent conversation with Douglas Newton, Major Dobkins and Ima Jo Fleetwood, they recalled that then Lieutenant James H. Doolittle was at that time greatly admired by the community, mostly due to his interest in the youth of the town and his adventuresome spirit.

The ensuing years until World War II saw sporadic participation of interest in flying. SInce this was the embryonic age of aviation, much development and growth in airplanes took place. There were two primitive landing strips with relatively favorable terrain in Val Verde County--one to

0285

the East and one to the West of the settlement of Del Rio. As popularity of of aviation grew and aircraft became safer, the 1930's discovered that the airplane was an economical means of transportation. Willie Kessler recalls Mr. Emery Davis having the first private owned airplane in Val Verde County for his use in going to and from his ranch. Val Verde County (3328 square miles) was and still is sparsley settled. Most ranches contain an average of 5,000 to 20,000 acres, or more, thus making Val Verde one of the larger counties with relatively small population in the state.

In 1942, due to the extreme urgency to bring the U. S. Air Force up to a "formidable fighting machine" the government was in desperate need for more pilots very quickly. At the outset of World War II, our forces were very inadequate. Time was such an important factor, that there was no time taken to negotiate or bargain for land use. The alternative was "That the United States of America is entitled to acquire property by eminent domain for the purposes as set out and prayed for in the petition."[15]

"Land Acquisition for Laughlin Air Force Base:

3,862.48 acres purchased from Mr. B. S. Harrison of Bexar County, in Civil Action Suit #16 for Laughlin AFB site. Acquired through condemnation December 9, 1942,Deed of Trust Records, Vol. 44, Page 236-238 of the Val Verde County. Purchase price $101,500.00. 45.93 acres acquired in Civil Action #232 through condemnation procedures. Filed May 1956. Land was located at end of runways. (Base was occupied and activated in July 1942 but Deeds and paper work were not completed and filed until December)".[15a]

The 3,862.46 acres making up the original land size of Laughlin Field obtained from B. S. Harrison in 1942 was of the I. & G. N. Ry Co., Block 3, and all or parts of J. JOnes Survey #871 and H. C. Tardy Survey #196¼ and El Paso Irrigation Company Survey #196½ as described further in the Deed Records. Mr.Harrison accumulated this land from many individuals over a period of years in the early 1900's, as shown in the records. 15b

Confirmation of land ownership, dating back to date of patent, as early as 1880 is evident in the Deed Records of Val Verde County, Texas, Volume 15, Page 382-390, in the files of Southwest Abstract Company, Inc., Del Rio, Texas. The land has been owned by numerous persons and sometimes in small portions, making for voluminous files which are reduced to Micro Film consolidated storage. 15c

Laughlin Field was originally activated on July 2, 1942, under the Army Air Corps, as the Army Air Forces Bombardier School, Del Rio, Texas, with Lt. Col. E. W. Suarez commanding. The base was first intended to be a bombardier's school.

On December 26, 1942, command of the post was assumed by Col. George W. Mundy. The base was already selected as the "First" Marauder, B-26 pilot school to be established in the world. On February 2, 1943, the field was re-designated the Army Air Force Transition Flying School, Medium Bombardment, later to be changed to Army Air Forces Pilot School. (Specialized two-engine)

Laughlin Air Force Base is located in Val Verde County, Texas and is situated 6 miles Southeast of Del Rio, the county seat, near the United States-Mexico border. The main entrance to the base is 6 miles East of Del Rio on U. S. Highway 90 East. The secondary entrance is 8 miles South of Del Rio on U. S. Highway 277 South. The base is located at 29 deg. 22 min. North Latitude and 100 deg. 47 min. West Longitude. The Rio Grande River is located 10 miles West of the base. Amistad Dam was built on the Rio Grande River, 12 miles North of Del Rio, immediately South of the confluence of Devil's River. The dam was constructed for flood control, which in turn formed Amistad Reservior (the average release of the dam has been 2454 cubic ft. per sec. based on monthly averages). The Amistad Lake is accessible from Del Rio and Laughlin by U. S. Highway 90 W. and U. S. Highway 277 N. Laughlin lies within the boundaries of the Edwards Plateau Physiographic Province. The base lies near the edge of the Balcones Fault Zone, but there are no active faults or seismic activity in the area. Laughlin covers an area of approximately 3,961 acres in the South part of the county of Val Verde, Texas. The topography of the surrounding area is low rolling hills and the terrain provides good irrigation for farming. Lake Amistad, man-made, is about 20 miles from Laughlin and covers about 67,000 acres. The only mountains in the immediate area are located in Mexico, approximately 67 miles West of the base.

Laughlin Field was named in honor of Lt. Jack Thomas Laughlin, of Del Rio, who was the first World War II pilot casualty from Del Rio. Lt. Laughlin was killed while flying a B-17 mission over Java on January 29, 1942. On March 28, 1943, impressive dedicatory ceremonies were held at which Maj. Gen. Geral C. Brant, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces Gulf Coast Training Center, was principal speaker. The late Lt. Laughlin's widow, parents and daughter were honor guests.

Laughlin Field remained active until World War II was over. Shortly afterward, in August 1945, the base was closed and the facility turned over to the Army Air Corps of Engineers. It was subsequently leased to local ranchers for grazing.

By 1945, one of the years that Laughlin was closed, due to an increase in the use of airplanes in general, a county airport was constructed North-east of the City of Del Rio on Highway 90 E., North of the site of Laughlin. When Laughlin Air Force Base was reactivated in May 1952, the county airport had to be relocated because the air spaces overlapped. The Del Rio International Airport was established West of Del Rio at the end of West Tenth Street. It has been enlarged and modernized as necessary, and is equipped with the latest devices for its operation. (Just a note of interest and comparison: When Lt. Doolittle was here in 1919, this location for the airport was the site of the tent hanger which he spoke of as being the "most sophisticated installation" in this part of Texas at that time.)

On November 18, 1950, a report on possibilities of having Laughlin Field re-activated was made at a special meeting of the Del Rio Chamber of Commerce directors. John L. Dodson, Jr., President of the Chamber of Commerce; Roger Wheeler, Manager, with City Commissioners, Phil A. Ricks and L. B. Duke made a trip to Washington, D. C., where they appeared in an effort to have the field re-activated. They and their spokesman, Congressman O. C. Fisher, talked with Kenneth McNaughton, director of training of the Air Force.[18] On November 20, 1950, more than $3,400 was subscribed for a special fund to promote re-activation of Laughlin Field at a meeting in the District Courtroom. John L. Dodson,Jr., President of the Chamber of Commerce, called the meeting with invitations to anyone interested in seeing the Air Force Re-activate the field. L. B. Duke gave a report on his trip to Washington, D. C. in connection with the re-activation. The re-activation finally became a reality in May 1952.[19]

The advantages of this location for an air base had a definite influence on the re-opening of Laughlin Air Force Base. These advantages are found in Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) conditions (ceiling less than 1,000 ft., a minimum less than 3 miles) prevail on an average of 6 per cent of the time. An historical record of flying conditions shows that Laughlin Air Force Base cancels only 22 per cent of scheduled training sorties due to weather.[20] With its allocated 9,200 square miles of airspace, approximately 310,000 aircraft operations per year took place at Laughlin Air Force Base in 1975.

These operations involve landings, take-offs, and touch-and-go events.[21] The high volume of aircraft movements associated with the training of new pilots require the application of distinct criteria regarding urban development in the vicinity of an Under Pilot Training base. The current and proposed development of land under airfield traffic patterns as well as the presence of nearby airfields impact upon a base's flight operations must be favorable.[22] The land area around Laughlin meets these criteria.

The importance of the base to the economical growth of the county is that the area has developed from an agricultural/ranching economy to one primarily dependent upon Laughlin AFB, Amistad Recreation Area and related services. Studies have shown that Laughlin AFB payroll and procurement expenditures are approximately 1/3 of Val Verde County Regional annual total output.[23]

Laughlin's Commanders:

Col. Edward W. Suarez.....August 15, 1942-December 26, 1942

Col. George W. Mundy.....December 26, 1942-June 20, 1944

Col. Emmet F. Yost.....June 20, 1944-September 8, 1945

Col. Joseph C. O'Neal.....September 8, 1945-October 30, 1945

Shortly after World War II came to a close in August 1945, Laughlin Field was closed and the facility was turned over to the Army Corps of Engineers. It was subsequently leased to local ranchers and used for goat grazing.

Under the U. S. Air Force, Laughlin AFB was re-activated in May 1952, and the 3646th Pilot Training Wing came into being. The planned mission of the

base was basic single-engine pilot training. This program however, was never implemented.

Laughlin AFB came into the jet age in October 1952, when, under the Crew Training Air Force, the mission of the base became F-84 Jet figher training. The wing designation was changed to the 3645th Combat Crew Training Wing (Fighter).

Col. William T. Samways.....May 1, 1952 -November 19, 1952

Col. Thomas L. Mosley.....November 19, 1952-August 1, 1955

Col. Samuel C. Gurney.....August 1, 1955-April 1, 1957

Col. Hubert Zemke.....April 1, 1957-November 12, 1957

April 1957 saw the base change again. This time it was turned over to the Strategic Air Command (SAC). The 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing moved here from Turner Air Force Base, Georgia, and using as its basic aircraft the RB-57, began a program of high-altitude weather reconnaissance. The 3645th Pilot Training Wing, along with the 3645th Air Base Group, was discontinued.

Brig. Gen. A. J. Russell.....November 12, 1957-December 16, 1958

Col. Andrew J. Bratton, Jr.....December 16, 1958-July 27, 1960

Col. William W. Wilcox.....July 28, 1960-June 30, 1961

Col. John A. Des Portes.....July 1, 1961-July 12, 1963

Shortly after SAC took over control of Laughlin AFB, a contract was awarded for the construction of 500 Capehart Housing Units. These were the first on base quarters available to Laughlin personnel.

The Texas State Senate honored the 4080th Wing in May 1959, when they

named the unit the "Ambassadors of Good Will for the State of Texas".

The highlight of 1960 was a visit to Laughlin AFB by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The President came to the base in conjunction with a meeting with Mexican President Lopez Mateos. The two Chiefs of State met to sign a treaty which culminated in the construction of the gigantic Amistad Dam on the Rio Grande.

Since 1962, when the 3646th Pilot Training Wing again became active at Laughlin AFB, the unit has been in continuous operation in the business of training pilots for the Air Force. The first graduating class in 1962 had only 18 members. This number had grown to 50 in the class that graduated in May of 1967. Into 1980 the classes averaged approximately 250 per year excluding foreign student pilots, which is a variable number.

In February 1967, the wing graduated the 1,000th pilot since its re-activation in 1962.

Col. A. F. Taute.....October 16, 1961-February 17, 1964

Col. R. O. Mosher.....February 17, 1964-August 27, 1965

Col. Frank M. Madsen, Jr.....August 27, 1965-March 7, 1967

Col. William R. Goade.....March 8, 1967-June 3, 1969

Several important "firsts" were inaugurated at Laughlin from the time pilot training was reinstated in 1962 until the middle of 1969. In 1965 the base started using the Cessna T-41 single-engine airplane as the first phase in the student's training. Previously the training was started in

the T-37 Jet trainer, and the students progressed from there to the supersonic T-38 as their final phase of training. Now, with the T-41 as the student's introduction to flying, instructors were able to readily identify those who needed additional help, and potential eliminees. Use of this aircraft also made a substantial contribution to reducing training cost.

Another innovation in the program was the inclusion of "para-sail" training.

Automated scheduling in the Pilot Training Program is another Laughlin AFB "first". Under the system, daily reports from the two Pilot Training Squadrons are fed into a central area where they are programmed into the Burroughs 263 computer in the Comptrollers Section. Daily printouts are made available which show at a glance the students progress, his status in the program at any given time, and other information vital to instructors and other training personnel.

"Checkpoint Charlie", another of the Laughlin AFB innovations came into being in December 1966. It provides a final check of each aircraft just prior to its taking to the runway. Maintenance personnel stationed on the taxiway make a last minute inspection of the aircraft, and catch such obvious hazards as missing panels, oil and hydraulic leaks and bad tires. Commanders, instructors, and pilots have praised the system.

In December 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson visited Laughlin AFB in conjunction with a meeting with Mexican President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz.[24] The two presidents inspected the nearly completed Amistad Dam.

In 1968 Laughlin AFB joined the space program. Two astronauts, Dr. Anthony England and Dr. William Lenoir, underwent pilot training at Laughlin AFB. The two men were a part of the sixth group of astronauts in the manned flights into space.[25]

On September 8, 1969, President Richard Nixon was at Laughlin AFB when he came to Del Rio to participate in a joint ceremony with President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz of Mexico in the dedication of Amistad Dam. Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Ordaz were also present at the ceremonies beneath the towering eagles marking the center of the dam.[26]

Col. Donald J. Ferris.....June 3, 1969 - December 14, 1970

Col. Guy E. Hairston.....December 14, 1970 - June 8, 1972

Col. Charles E. Woods.....June 8, 1972 - June 8, 1973

Col. Harry Falls, Jr.....June 8, 1973 - July 8, 1975

Col. Lawerance D. Garrison.....July 8, 1975 - August 16, 1977

Col. Ralf M. Miller.....August 16, 1977 - March 21, 1979

Col. Chris O. Divich.....March 21, 1979 -

Recent awards given to Laughlin Air Force Base:

47th Flying Training Wing - Outstanding Unit Award -
January 1, 1973, December 31, 1973

47th Flying Training Wing - Outstanding Unit Award -
January 1, 1976 - February 28, 1977
(2nd Oak Leaf Cluster)

47th Flying Training Wing - Outstanding Unit Award -
January 1, 1979 - April 30, 1980
(3rd Oak Leaf Cluster)
received August 15, 1980, Special
Order GB 398[27]

During 1979, Laughlin AFB pilots flew 35,372.7 T-38 hours with 32,124 sorties, and 40,150.4 T-37 hours with 32,629 sorties without a major aircraft accident. As a result of this enviable record, the 47th Flying Training Wing received the first annual Daedalion Flying Safety Award for outstanding achievement in flying safety.

In December 1979, the 85th PTS received the ATC Flying Safety Award, achieving a milestone in flying safety with eight years and 300,000 accident free flying hours. Additionally, the 85th was rated "excellent" during the latest ATC, Standard Evaluation formal evaluation. The squadron also conceived and hosted two ATC T-37 check section conferences to foster cross-feed within the command. In an effort to enhance information and understanding of the role of tactical aircraft by base personnel and members of the local community, the 85th organized and conducted a Wing "TAC DAY" involving briefings, static displays, and aerial demonstrations of TAC weapon systems and capabilities.

In December 1979, the new Instrument Flight Simulator was dedicated. Laughlin AFB has the distinction of being the first base to operate training consoles with contractor personnel versus civil service personnel.

These contractor personnel are former military members with background as pilots, RAPCON chiefs, and others with extensive experience in RAPCON, tower operations and synthetic trainer instructors. Highly qualified console operators were trained in days rather than months. Based on Laughlin's success, ATC made the decision to convert other UPT bases to contract simulator operations. The 47th FTW was also selected as a test base for the "day to dusk capability for computer imagery", an important modification of simulator system.

The personnel Division recieved numerous awards including the Outstanding Class III Education Program in the Air Force and the ATC Outstanding CBPO Achievement Award. The Professional MIlitary Education Center hosted the only Junior ROTC Leadership Academy in ATC and the Education Office hosted Laughlin's first Air Command and Staff Seminar. Laughlin was a test base for a compressed UPT assignment program which reduced the lead time for processing assignments by one-fourth.

The Security Police Division was selected by ATC to conduct the test program for the small breed dog detection program.

The Laughlin Readiness Division was used as a model for other ATC bases. Laughlin's Plans program was implemented Command-wide.

The Base Hospital was the first to secure civilian services contracts for the employment of civilian physicians in the emergency room on weekends and holidays, eliminating one of the major career irritants for military doctors.

The Flight Surgeons Office initiated a "first" by seeing flying personnel by appointment, which minimized office waiting time for pilots and made medical care more accessible to pilots throughout the day. This system was so successful that other ATC bases requested information for adoption of similar systems.[28]

Note (Other achievements and recognitions have been received by Laughlin Air Force Base. Some of the ones that are typical and that seemed most important have been chosen. The complete List of the most recent recognitions is included in the Supplementary material enclosed-Citation for the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, General Bennie L. Davis, USAF)

Laughlin is a highly developed training complex with a three (3) runway main base and an auxiliary field, all of which have been rebuilt in recent years. It has an airtraffic and radar control facility, completed in 1973, which plays an important role in aviation traffic control in the Del Rio area, both military and civilian. It has a four and one-half (4½) million dollar hospital.[29]

Laughlin's personnel has been involved with Del Rio and Val Verde County community activities such as Operation Joy, Special Olympics, First Termers' Appreciation Day, National POW/MIA Banquet, and Open House. The community culture has been enriched by having many excellent teachers and students who have shared with it their unique experiences and knowledge of other countries. Other professional people have contributed to our culture also.

Likewise, the community, as civic organizations and as individuals, has shown its appreciation by accepting the Laughlin personnel into all phases of community life.

The Val Verde County Historical Commission thinks that Val Verde County has an unseen birthright in playing an important role in the development of aviation which the significant events narrated in this history show . The "First" Transcontinental Air Flight landed in Del Rio, en route to the West Coast. It may be recalled, that only a few short years previous "NO" Airplanes existed. Man was now beginning a new mode of transportation.

Just before the World War I days, several of the few airplanes in existance came through Del Rio on reconnaissance trips along the border or passed this way going from East to West, as that part of the U. S. was settled. This southern route was selected and used because of the flatter terrain, because of excellent weather and the railroad had chosen this route and was a good guide on the long trip.

During World War I years, when Pancho Villa was harrassing the people along the United States-Mexico border, a flight of the 90th Aero-Squadron stationed in Val Verde County at Del Rio was committed to aerial surviellance, another step in man's ability to demonstrate and improve his means of mobility.

World War II saw Laughlin Field, which has since earned an enviable record of service to Texas, the U. S. and the World, come into being.

"The record of operational efficiency at Laughlin Air Force Base is substantiated by its impressive performance as a vital element of peace," wroteSenator John Tower in 1976.[30]

Two U. S. Air Force groups from Laughlin are more definitely outstanding than the others in their contributions to the world peace and national security. In everyday language, they are the B-26's and the U-2's.

Laughlin was the "First" B-26 medium bomber pilot training base. The nation is indebted to Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle USAF (Ret.): he was responsible, by his testing, and by his recommendations, for solving the earlier problems and for proving the B-26 to be the most efficient, fast, powerful, safe medium bomber in the entire arsenal which the allies could command. This plane is credited for have contributed greatly to shortening World War II.

The Cuban crisis of 1962 caused recognition to be given to the famous high altitude Reconnaissance plane, the U-2, which was stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base. While in residence at Laughlin Air Force Base the 100th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SRW) exerted an impact that was <u>global</u> in its reach.

This organization was orginally established as the 4080th SRW (Light) on 1 May 1956. On 15 June 1960, however, it was redesignated the 4080th Strategic Wing and then on 25 June 1966, it was changed to its present name - 100th SRW.

The 100th SRW was originated as the 4080th SRW (Light) on 1 May 1956 at Turner AFB, Albany, Georgia, to conduct stratetic reconnaissane and to gather weather data for operational forecasting on a global scale. At that time members of the organization flew the RB-57C and RB-57D aircraft. Shortly after its activation at Turner AFB, the 4080th moved to Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, Texas, on 1 April 1957. A few months later, on 11 June, the first U-2 aircraft arrived at Laughlin AFB. The 4080th remained at Laughlin until its transfer to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, on 12 July 1963.

COMMANDERS	DATE	ORGANIZATION AND BASE
Col Gerald W. Johnson	1 May 1956	4080SRW (L), Turner AFB, Ga.
Col Hubert Zemke	1 Ap 1957	4080SRW (L), Laughlin AFB,Tx.
Brig Gen Austin J. Russell	12 Nov 1957	" " " "
Col Andrew J. Bratton	17 Dec 1958	" " " "
Col William W. Wilcox	28 Jun 1960	" " " "
Col John A. Des Portes	3 Jun 1961	" " " " and Davis-Monthan AFB, Az.
Col Julius H. Baughn	10 Jun 1965	4080SW, DMAFB,Az.
Col William D. Kyle, Jr.	12 Feb 1966	" " "
Col Marion C. Mixson	15 Aug 1966	100SRW, DMAFB, Az.
Col Raymond L. Haupt	1 Aug 1970	" " "
Col Donald S. White	29 Jun 1972	" " "
Col Charles B. Stratton	7 May 1973	" " "

While at Del Rio, 4080th personnel were active in all facets of community relations and at a banquet on 18 May 1959, Texas State Senator Dorsey Hardeman presented a Senate Resolution to Colonel Andrew J. Bratton, Jr., 4080th SRW Commander, designating the personnel of the 4080th as Ambassadors of Good Will for the state of Texas. That resolution was introduced into the State Senate by Senator Hardeman since the missions performed by the 4080th SRW took wing personnel to numerous parts of the

world and such missions, when undertaken and accomplished, provided an opportunity for establishing and cementing friendly relations with the people of those areas. Prior to the 4080th departure from Laughlin AFB, Lieutenant General John D. Ryan, Second Air Force Commander, presented the Mayor of Del Rio, Texas, Mayor A. C. Kennedy, a plaque on 31 March 1962 which read: "To citizens of Del Rio in appreciation of the community's support of the SAC Mission, and their acceptance of military personnel as an integral part of the community. 1957-1962."

On the military side, some of the activities accomplished by the wing that brought considerable recognition included the High Altitude Sampling Program (HASP). That program was requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff after they realized the seriousness and complexity of the problem of contamination of the entire world population by radioactive fallout from nuclear tests or atomic warfare. On 11 October 1957, therefore, a HASP was started utilizing the U-2 Aircraft. Designated "Crow Flight", six Defense Atomic Support Agency (DASA) configured U-2's were assigned and the task of carrying out the assignment was given to the 4080th SW. To meet the HASP tasking, the wing flew missions from many parts of the world including Australia, England, Alaska, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, and the Canal Zone. Although the program was discontinued at the beginning of 1965 due to increased wing involvement in other programs, i.e., South-east Asia (SEA), the capability to conduct sampling missions still exists and the 100th remains in an on-call status for any future requirements.

During its seven years, however, the HASP data gathered played an important role in testing the validity of theories on world-wide fallout and contributed substantially to the solution of the major problem on the behavior of stratospheric fallout. In recognition of those contributions, the wing received its first Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (AFOUA) on 29 March 1960 for the period 1 August 1957 to 1 September 1959.

During the HASP, other reconnaissance activities were also conducted utilizing the U-2. On 14 October 1962 for instance, a U-2, piloted by Major Richard S. Heyser of the 4080th, made photographs that provided the United States Government with the first conclusive evidence of suspected introduction of Soviet long-range offensive missiles into the island of Cuba. While the nation's military strength was mobilized, the 4080th SW continued intensive aerial reconnaissance operations. Those activities provided information that was a major contribution to safe-guarding the national interests in that the surveillance provided the President and the National Security Council with much timely and accurate information to help establish the nation's diplomatic posture and to plan its diplomatice actions. It was during those reconnaissance activities that Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., was shot down and declared missing over Cuba on 27 October. It was later confirmed that Major Anderson was killed and was thus the only casualy of the crisis. As a result of the wing's activities prior to and throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John F. Kennedy presented the first Oak Leaf Cluster to the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award to the wing on 26 November 1962 and stated that the 4080th SW "contributed as much to the

security of the United States as any unit in our history and any group of men in our Country."

Also initiated while the wing was principally involved in HASP operations, and played a decisive part in ending the HASP, was the deployment of wing personnel to SEA for the first time in February 1964. It was also during this time frame that the wing was assigned DC-130 aircraft to launch drones for reconnaissance purposes and CH-3 helicopters for recovery of the drones. From the time the wing first deployed to SEA until the present, 4080th and 100th aircraft and personnel contributed significant reconnaissance information pertaining to enemy activities within SEA and as a result received the second, third and fourth Oak Leaf Cluster to the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for the periods 11 February 1964-30 April 1965; 1 May 1965 - 25 June 1966; and 1 July 1968 - 30 June 1970, respectively. A recommendation for the award of the Presidential Unit Citation to the wing was also submitted for the wing's exceptional meritorious service involving extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy from 1 July 1972 to 30 June 1973.

Two former wing commanders went on in their military careers to attain the three star rank. Lieutenant General Gerald W. Johnson, 4080th SRW(L) Commander - 1 May 1956 to 1 April 1957, was Eighth Air Force Commander, headquartered at Andersen AFB, Guam, from September 1971 to September 1973 during the height of the bombing of North Vietnam. His next assignment, October 1973-October 1974, was as Headquarters USAF Inspector General in Washington D. C. Lt. Gen. Johnson retired in October 1974.

The other commander was Lieutenant General Austin J. Russell, 4080th SRW (L) Commander - 12 November 1957 to 16 December 1958. From 1966 to 1969, General Russell was Commander, Second Air Force at Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, following that assignment, he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel at Hq USAF until 1970 when he became the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff. While holding that position, General Russell was also the Senior Air Force Member, Military Staff Committee, United Nations. General Russell retired on 30 September 1973.[31]

Laughlin Air Force Base continues until this date, 1981, to pioneer pilot training techniques that are vital to our national security. Under competent and dedicated leadership and personnel, Laughlin has earned many distinguished flying awards and many awards pointing out the numerous achievements of "Firsts" which have been adopted into the national programs instrumental in saving lives and money for our nation.

E Robuck Daughtrey

E. Robuck Daughtrey
February 1981

FOOTNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia, 1956, Vol. 15, Page 309,310

2. Texas Military History, Vol. 3, Spring, No. 1. Page 3

3. Hg. Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Research Division (R.I.), Maxwell, AFB, AL 36112, James N. Eastman, Jr. Chief, Research Division, 5 Dec 80. Page J & K

4. Del Rio News-Herald, 12 Oct 1961 - "Old Timers Recall Flight Vividly" - by Ima Jo Fleetwood. A quote of District Attorney Douglas A. Newton, (Ret.),Still lives in Del Rio.

5. Ibid, Sergio Gonzalez, Val Verde County Judge

6. Letter, by Bob Watson, Director of Programs, Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Texas 78711, 13 Feb 1976

7. Quoted from a Conversation with Mrs. Earnest Cardwell (Irene) 502 Plaza, Del Rio, Texas 78840, 23 Jan 1981.

8. "Wings and Saddles" - The Air and Cavalry Punitive Expedition of 1919, by Stacy C. Hinkle, Page 3

9. Ibid Page 3

10. Ibid Page 4

11. Ibid Page A

12. Hg. Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Research Division (RI), Maxwell AFB, AL 36112, James N. Eastman, Jr. Chief Research Division, Page A, 5 Dec 1980.

13. Ibid Page e

14. Personal letter to E. R. Daughtrey (in answer to inquiry written) from Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle, USAF, (Ret.) dated 26 Nov 80.

15. Recorded Val Verde County Deed Records, Vol. 103, Page 290 - 292, Page I

15A. Land Acquisition for Laughlin, summary taken from "Interior and review of records, 16 Oct. 80, with Ms. Gloria Gonzalez, 47 CES/DEI, 5784. Deed of Trust Records of Val Verde County Vol. 44, Page 236-8.

15B. Recorded Val Verde County Deed Records, Vol. 103, Pages 290-292 Page Tract No. DR-1

15C. Recorded in Deed Records of Val Verde County, Texas Vol. 15 Pages 382-290, Dates of Patents, April 1901, Nov 1880 and many small acreages dating 1880, 1888, 1893, 1901, etc. C.E. Ridman deed to B.S. Harrison. Records involve Travis and Kinney Counties, information furnished by Billie C. Lewis, Sr. of Southwest Abstract Co., Del Rio, Texas. (9 pages)

16. Extracts from Environmental Impact Analysis Process, Environmental Impact Statement Proposed Closure of Craig AFB, Alabama, and Webb AFB, Texas. Department of the Air Force, undated Circa 1976/1977, Laughlin AFB, Page I-37.

17. Information copied from Wing Historical records with permission of Col. Anthony D. Farrington, Jr., Base Commander, - "History of the Laughlin ArmAir Field" - (Yearbook). A story of Lt. Laughlin.

18. Del Rio New-sHerald, "Del Rio Back When", 18 Nov 1950

19. Ibid 20 Nov. 1950

20. Extracts from Environmental Impact Analysis Process, Environmental Impact Statement Proposed Closure of Craig AFB, Alabama, and Webb AFB, Texas. Department of the Air Force, Undated Circa 1976/1977, Laughlin AFB, Page I-39.

21. Ibid Page I-46

22. Ibid Page VIII - 2

23. Ibid Page IV - 16

24. "25 years of Vigilance for Freedom" - Laughlin Air Force Base. 1942 1967, compiled by Harry W. Carroll, used for facts - not quoted completely or necessarily verbatim for preceeding paragraphs of summary of LAFB activities.

25. Del Rio News-Herald, 20 Mar 79, Page 3D

26. Del Rio News-Herald, 20 Mar 79, Page 7C

27. Interview with Dottie McElhannon, 17 Oct 80, 47 AB6/DPMAP, 5828, recorded by Chris Weaver, 47 Flying Training Wing, Historian

28. Announcement to All Staff Agencies by Col. Chris O. Divich of Citation for the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, General Bennie L. Davis USAF, Commander, 10 Apr 80. (6 Pages)

29. Environmental Impact Analysis Process, 27 Oct 76, Record of Public Hearings, Del Rio, Texas - Statement of Lonnie Ricks, Page D-127.

30. Ibid Page D - 6b, Senator John Tower, U.S. Senate, Letter 27 Oct 1976.

31. Report submitted to Texas Historical Commission in 1975 to give the history of the 100th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, prepared by Richard J. Callahan, Vice-President, Del Rio Bank and Trust Company, Del Rio, Texas.(Former U-2 pilot, statiomed at Laughlin AFB.)

GLOSSARY

The terms "Field" and "Base" are sometimes used interchaneably when referring to an Air Base. The term "Field" is used to designate an Air Field when it was under the jurisdiction of the earlier armed services, such as The Signal Corps and Army Air Service. When the command was changed to the United States Air Force, it became an independent Air Force, pertaining solely to aviation activities and designated as an Air Force Base.

A F B	-	Air Force Base
A B G	-	Air Base Group
A F O U A	-	Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
A T C	-	Air Training Command
C B P O	-	Consolidated Base personnel Office
Col	-	Colonel
D A S A	-	Defense Atomic Support Agency
D H	-	De Haviland
D M A F B	-	Davis - Monthan Air Force Base
F T W	-	Flying Training Wing
Gen.	-	General
Brig. Gen.	-	Brigadier General
Lt. Gen.	-	Lieutenant General
Maj. Gen.	-	Major General

H A S P	-	High Altitude Sampling Program
I F R	-	Instrument Flight Rules
L A F B	-	Laughlin Air Force Base
Lt.	-	Lieutenant
M I A	-	Missing In Action
Para-Sail	-	Parachute Training Term
P O W	-	Prisioner of War
P T S	-	Pilot Training Squadron
R A P C O N	-	Radar Approach Control
R O T C	-	Reserve Officer Training Corps
Ret.	-	Retired
R I	-	Routing Identifier
S A C	-	Strategic Air Command
S E A	-	Southeast Asia
S R W	-	Strategic Reconnaissance Wing
S R W (Light)	-	Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (Light)
S T A/ Eral	-	Standard Evaluation
T A C	-	Tactical Air Command
U P T	-	Undergraduate Pilot Training
U S A F	-	United States Air Force
W W I	-	World War (1) one
W W II	-	World War (2) two

ORAL INTERVIEWS

Beverly, Brig. Gen. George H., U.S.A.F., Ret.
106 Lantana Lane — Ph. 775-1231
Del Rio, Texas — 15 Feb. 81
78840

Callahan, Richard J., Vice Pres., Del Rio Bank & Trust Co.
P.O. Drawer B — Former U-2 Pilot
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — Sept 1980

Cardwell, Mrs. Earnest (Irene), Ret. School Teacher
502 Plaza — Native born citizen
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — 23 Jan 81

Carroll, Harry W., Retired, LAFB, Public Affairs Officer
105 Maude Lane
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — 14 Sept 80

Dobkins, Major, Proprietor, Dobkins Men's Wear,
742 S. Main — Native born citizen
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — 24 Nov 80

Fleetwood, Ima Jo, Associate Editor, Del Rio News Herald
321 S. Main — Native born citizen
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — 24 Nov 80

Gonzalez, Sergio, Val Verde County Judge
V.V. Co. Courthouse — Came to Del Rio as a very small child
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — Nov 1980

Hays, Dennys, Retired Upholstering Shop, Owner and Operator
701 Ave B — Native citizen
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — 23 Nov 80

Johnson, Rogers, Vice Pres. Del Rio National Bank, Del Rio, Texas
Long time resident — Nov 1980

Kessler, J. Willie, J.W. Refrigeration Sales & Service
1404 Ave C, — Long time resident, among the first civilian pilots
Del Rio, Texas 78840 — Dec 1980