



FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE HISTORY

During World War I, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker advocated an expanded role for aviation. Business and political leaders on both sides of the Mississippi River wanted the Midwest to be chosen as a site for one of the "flying fields." These factors led to the establishment of Scott Field.

Young men left the comforts of home to take up temporary residence in barracks. They learned the skills of warfare that would help them as they traveled across the sea to defend their nation.

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It took a tremendous amount of time, money and manpower to build the aviation field. Congress appropriated \$10 million for its construction and 2,000 laborers and carpenters were immediately put to work. The government gave the Unit Construction Company 60 days to erect approximately 60 buildings, lay a mile long railroad spur to connect the field with the main line of the Southern Railroad and level off an airfield. Construction was well underway when the government announced it would name the field after Corporal Frank Scott on July 20, 1917, the first enlisted person to be killed in an aviation crash.

Frank Scott enlisted in the Field Artillery at Fort Slocum, N.Y., at the age of 24. A lengthy illness in July 1911 caused his reassignment to the Signal Corps Aviation School at College Park Flying Field, Md., where he served as a mechanic for one of the Wright Type-B biplanes. Corporal Scott asked Lieutenant Lewis Rockwell if he would take him along on a flight. The opportunity came Sept 28, 1912.

First, Lieutenant Rockwell made a solo run over College Park at the remarkable speed of 40 miles per hour with a crowd of 300 watching below. Confident that everything was in good order, he landed and brought Corporal Scott on board. After reaching 150 feet, the pilot leveled off and soared for about 10 minutes. But as he brought the plane in for a landing, the craft developed engine trouble and crashed to the ground in a crumbled heap of splintered wood and torn canvas. Corporal Scott was killed instantly, and Lieutenant Rockwell died later that evening.

Both men were buried in Arlington National Cemetery on Oct. 1, 1912. The decision to name the aviation site at Belleville after Corporal Scott is a lasting tribute to those who lost their lives during the early years of the military aviation.

In September 1917, four of the 72 airplanes ordered for the field arrived and soon the actual training of airplane pilots began. Wartime “crates,” a far cry from the sleek, fast planes of today, became a familiar sight to O’Fallon people.

With the arrival of the 11th and 21st Aero Squadrons from Kelly Field, Texas, Scott’s training mission was soon underway. Scott’s first flight occurred on Sept. 2, 1917, in a Standard Trainer biplane. However, most training ultimately took place in Curtiss JN-3D “Jennies,” because the eight cylinder, 90-horsepower craft could be operated from either the front or rear seat position.

Flying instruction began Sept. 11, 1917. Seventeen days later, pilot cadet trainee Cadet Merrit White made the first solo flight. Everything moved fast in a wartime environment, even the often-dangerous act of flying airplanes.

The early days of aviation were fraught with danger as daring young aviators entered the skies in airplanes held together with glue, string and canvas. Sometimes there were gruesome accidents. It became apparent that the medical evacuation system needed to keep pace.

Determined to improve the recovery of downed Scott pilots, Captains Charles Bayless (post surgeon), Early Hoag (officer-in-charge of flying) and A.J. Etheridge (post engineer), along with Second Lieutenant Seth Thomas, designed two air ambulances, or hospital ships, by modifying Jenny aircraft to carry patients. On Aug. 24, 1918, Scott’s air ambulance transported its first patients after an aviator broke his leg. This early aeromedical evacuation was just the beginning of what would eventually become a primary role for Scott Air Force Base.

Upon learning that the Belleville area had been selected as a site for an aviation field, people in the community were immediately curious and supportive. Sightseers traveled long, dusty, rutted roads to watch construction or catch a glimpse of airplane activity. They supported the “Sammies,” (“Uncle Sam’s boys”) by hosting dances and receptions, establishing a library branch on the field and inviting soldiers into their homes for Thanksgiving dinners.

Likewise, the field hosted sporting events with their community neighbors and invited the public to attend a Field Meet and Flight Exhibition on Saturday, Aug. 17, 1918. This was Scott Field’s first Open House (Air Show).

On Nov. 20, 1918, with the armistice signed, the field’s squadrons were demobilized, and the men were formed into a Flying School Detachment. An air of uncertainty hung over Scott as personnel received transfers and discharges. However, welcome news regarding Scott’s future came early in 1919 with the War Department’s decision to purchase Scott Field. Scott’s central location and the exceptional price of \$119,285.84 influenced this decision and set the stage for Scott Air Force Base’s amazing military future.

In 1920, the government decided that the field should be turned over to the lighter-than-air branch of the Air Corps. The field became the only inland airship port in the nation. Here the lighter-than-air development was carried on, balloon observers and airship pilots trained. It was the day of the blimps, sausage balloons, and round free balloons. This lasted until May 14, 1937 when the lighter-than-air crafts were discontinued at the field and the War Department changed Scott to a heavier-than-air field. The field was designated as the new home of the General Headquarters of the Air Forces of the entire United States Army on June 2, 1938, making the field the nerve center of the entire Army Air Corps. To prepare for the new role the old buildings on Scott Field had to come down, demolition began July 18, 1938.

The huge hangar, now useless to the army, was sold to the wreckers for \$20,051.00. The mooring mast, the old wooden barracks and administration buildings were all wrecked. Colonial style administration buildings, family quarters, barracks, together with new hangars and other buildings (in all 73 major buildings) were erected through a \$7,500,000.00 building program.

On June 1, 1939, Scott was designated as the Scott Field branch of the Army Air Corps. Technical Schools and the basic section of the school, which was located at Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill., was transferred to Scott Field.

An allotment of \$1,710,150.00 was made in August 1941 for the construction of 160 new buildings for with the designation of Scott as the communications training center of the Air Force more housing was needed for students. Cantonment areas were constructed in the southeast and northeast sections of the field. A short time later the Army built an induction center across the Southern Railroad tracks. This area was later annexed to Scott Air Force Base.

In 1952, two additional housing areas were added: Paeglow Apartments, 80 units for officers, and a 1,000 unit “city” north of the base under the provisions of the Wherry Housing Act. Also in 1952 a modernization program was begun to provide quarters for bachelor officers and bachelor non-commissioned officers, training areas, and warehouse space at a cost in excess of \$14,000,000.00.

Today, Scott is home to three headquarters: United States Transportation Command, Headquarters Air Mobility Command and the Defense Information Technology Contracting Organization. The 375th Airlift Wing is also host to more than 30 tenant units, including the Air Force Communications Agency; the Air Force Office of Special Investigations 3rd Field Investigations Region; and Air Force Reserve wing; and an Air National Guard unit.

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