

FACT SHEET



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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HISTORY OF WHEELER AIR FORCE BASE

Wheeler Air Force Base was named Wheeler Field on November 11, 1922 in honor of Major Sheldon H. Wheeler who had been commander of Luke Field, Pearl Harbor, from November 4, 1919 until he was killed in an aircraft crash on July 12, 1921. Clearance of land south of Schofield Barracks was begun by a detachment of twenty men on February 6, 1922. Construction of hangars and storage tanks was completed by June 30, 1923.

A number of historical first flights during the twenties and early thirties brought Wheeler Field to public attention. In 1926, the first known reforestation by plane was accomplished from this airfield. The first non-stop mainland to Hawaii flight from Oakland, California, to Wheeler Field was made June 28-29, 1927 by Lieutenants L. J. Mailand and A. F. Hegenberger in a Fokker C2-3 Wright 220 named "Bird of Paradise." They flew the 2,407 miles in 25 hours and 50 minutes and were awarded the Mackay Trophy for 1927 as well as the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On June 1, 1928, Charles Kingsford-Smith of Australia, on the first flight from the United States to Australia, landed his tri-motored Fokker monoplane "Southern Cross" at Wheeler Field,

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where he was greeted by approximately 5,000 spectators. The first solo flight from Hawaii to the mainland was made by Amelia Earhart in a Lockheed Vega from Wheeler Field to California in 18 hours and 16 minutes flying time.

Wheeler Field became a separate permanent military post officially on August 31, 1939, although transition to independent status had been gradual. Units stationed at Wheeler Field by the end of 1939 included the 18th Pursuit Group and the 4th and 5th Reconnaissance Squadrons, under the jurisdiction of the 18th Bomber Wing, with Headquarters at Hickam Field.

At the time of the Japanese attack on Hawaii, December 7, 1941, units of the Hawaiian Air Force stationed at Wheeler Field included the 14th Pursuit Wing, 15th Pursuit Group, 18th Air Base Group, 17th Air Base Squadron, and the 24th and 25th Materiel Squadrons. In spite of handicaps, four P-40s and two P-36s took off from Wheeler 35 minutes after the initial Japanese attack and flew a total of 25 sorties in an hour. Other effective sorties were carried out by pilots of the 47th Pursuit Squadron, a small Wheeler detachment training at Haleiwa. In all, these fighters shot down nine of the attacking aircraft.

Casualties at Wheeler Field included 37 killed, 6 missing, and 53 wounded. Of a total of 231 Hawaiian Air Force aircraft, 153 of which were stationed at Wheeler, only 63 tactical aircraft remained usable after the attack, including 27 P-40s.

During the years of World War II and until 1949, Wheeler Field was under the command of the 7th Air Force (previously the

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Hawaiian Air Force) and successor commands.

During March 1949, roll-up of Wheeler began and on June 1, 1949, upon deactivation of Pacific Air Command (successor to 7th Air Force) jurisdiction of the field was transferred to Hq Pacific Division (PACD), MATS. Actual responsibility for inactivation and establishment of minimum caretaker status was given to the Commanding Officer of the 1500th Air Transport Wing (MATS) at Hickam.

Expansion of the Air Force during the Korean conflict resulted in reactivation of Wheeler Air Force Base. On February 24, 1952, the 1508th Support Squadron was designated and organized at Wheeler, assigned to Hq PACD (MATS) and further assigned to the 1500th Air Transport Wing. Its mission was one of support for activities at Wheeler.

On April 1, 1955, when the 1500th Air Base Wing, MATS, was redesignated 6486th Air Base Wing and assigned to 7th Air Force, of Far East Air Forces, the unit at Wheeler also changed. The 1508th Support Squadron was redesignated the 6487th Support Squadron.

Upon return of Hq Far East Air Forces to Hawaii, its redesignation as Hq Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) on July 1, 1957, and concurrent deactivation of 7th Air Force, the Commander of the 6487th Support Squadron was designated Commander of Wheeler Air Force Base. The Squadron remained assigned to the 6486th Air Base Wing (PACAF). Its mission was: support tenant units stationed at Wheeler AFB including the 326th Air Division (Hawaiian Air

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Defense Division) and ancillary units of Pacific Air Forces. The Squadron gave various types of support to a total base population of 1,884 at Wheeler. This included all Air Force military and civilians, 261 Army, and approximately 500 Navy personnel. The Army members, part of the 25th Aviation Company, were actually quartered at Schofield Barracks but required mess and logistic support at Wheeler. Navy personnel at the Navy Control Center operation in Kunia Tunnel required billeting, transportation, and mess facilities.

On December 1, 1959, the Wheeler Commander and 6487th Support Squadron assumed limited operational and maintenance responsibility for Dillingham Air Force Base, previously under jurisdiction of the 6486th Installations (6486th ABW). By the end of 1959, tenant units at Wheeler AFB, in addition to the 326th Air Division and other PACAF units, included Hq Air Materiel Force Pacific Area (AMFPA); a number of MATS components such as Detachment 3, 1st Weather Wing and Hq and Det. 1, Pacific Airways and Air Communications Service (AACS); Det. 1, 8th Air Rescue Group; and Office of the Field Representative, 6930th Security Wing. With approximately 300 Army and 500 Navy personnel, the base had a population of 2,480.

During 1960, increased support responsibility resulted in placing the Photographic Laboratory on permanent status and the opening of a Wheeler Base Library. A new underground cable system was installed for \$55,185.40 to carry the increased load from household appliances. Hq AMFPA, returned to Japan. Also

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in 1960, responsibility was given to the 6487th Support Squadron for support of the PACAF Control Center at Kunia in addition to the Navy Kunia operation.

On January 9, 1961, the 6487th Support Squadron was redesignated 6487th Air Base Squadron. Modification of the 2nd floor of the Airmen's Dormitory, Bldg 102, was completed in April 1961 at a cost of \$57,662 to accommodate the expanding base population. The Hickam Aero Club, which used Wheeler facilities, required certain support. Army units at Wheeler required additional maintenance when the 81st Transportation Co. arrived with 18 of their 20 H-21 helicopters, bringing total Army aircraft at Wheeler to 89. Phase I Medical Kits were placed at Fall-out Shelters and the Wheeler Engineer was made responsible for storage of the Phase II Medical supplies in Base tunnels.

The 1962 Pacific Air Forces Rifle Match was held at Wheeler May 19-26. Hq Pacific Ground Electronic Engineering Installations Agency (PACGEEIA) arrived from Fuchu Air Station, Japan, in July 1962, the original complement of 40 personnel having arrived in December 1961.

A heavy storm in January 1963 caused extensive damage; the gate guardhouse blew over; theater marquee and parts of roofing of the bowling alley and Butler Hangar blew away; a large tree demolished one house and 50 other units were damaged; water main and utility lines needed repair. Cost of renovation was estimated at \$42,000.

The Wheeler Riding Academy opened on March 31, 1963 at the

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site of the WWII Army Motor Pool. A revised cross-servicing agreement with the Army 25th Aviation Company stipulated three meals a day instead of two for 110 Army personnel at Wheeler.

The new Wheeler control tower was opened January 28, 1964 by the U. S. Army. A critical housing shortage resulted in 1964 from arrival of "Clear Water" units from Japan, although completion of three large barracks gave some relief. Tenant space allocations for additional Air Force components precluded granting Army requests for more facilities.

A tidal wave alert on March 28, 1964, caused 100 Air Force personnel living on the north shore and leeward Oahu to seek shelter at Wheeler, where they were accommodated in the Base Gymnasium.

By end of December 1964, there was a total base population of 2,480 plus dependents. This figure included 571 Army Aviation Maintenance personnel and 578 Kunia Navy Fleet Control Center personnel.

Approximately 220 Hawaii Air National Guard (HANG) members also required base support when the 169th AC&W Sq was transferred from Koko Head to Wheeler in July 1965 to operate the joint FAA/HANG facility at Mt. Kaala AFS.

By end of December 1966, the base population had reached a total of 2,505 assigned personnel of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and HANG, in spite of the decrease in Army personnel following departure of the 25th Infantry Division for Vietnam. Most of the increase from the 1957 total of 1,884 was attributable to

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location of additional Air Force tenants at Wheeler Air Force Base.

In May 1971 the 22nd Tactical Air Support Squadron was assigned to Wheeler from South Vietnam to replace the 604th Direct Air Support Squadron which was rotated to the mainland without men or equipment. The 22nd TASS was phased-in without personnel and equipment, thus absorbing the personnel and facilities previously assigned to the 604th.

The mission of the 22nd TASS is to provide a direct air support center and tactical air control parties capable of deploying anywhere in the Pacific Air Forces area of responsibility.

The following August, in support of the 22nd TASS, three Cessna 0-2As arrived at Hickam Air Force Base via Lockheed C-5A Galaxy to be assembled by personnel of the 22nd TASS. On August 12, the three 0-2As departed Hickam Air Force Base, landing at Wheeler Air Force Base at 10:15 a.m. The arrival of these aircraft marked the return of operational flying at Wheeler for the first time since 1949.

A military version of the Cessna 337 Super Skymaster, the 0-2A has been modified for forward air controller and observation functions. Its unique center-line mounted twin engines, one forward on the nose and one pusher-prop in back of the cabin between the twin tail booms, provide excellent handling characteristics. It can be equipped with four wing pylons for carrying rockets, flares and other light conventional ordnance.

With the deactivation of the 6487th Air Base Squadron's

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parent unit, the 6486th Air Base Wing at Hickam Air Force Base on November 1, 1971, came the deactivation of the 6487th. Concurrently with the activation of the parent 15th Air Base Wing at Hickam on this same date, came the activation of the 15th Air Base Squadron at Wheeler Air Force Base. The 15th Air Base Squadron assumed the duties and mission of the deactivated 6487th with no gain or loss in personnel.

NOTE: The 15th Air Base Wing originally was constituted the 15th Pursuit Group on December 1, 1940 and assigned to Wheeler Field.