

Freeman Army Airfield Fact Sheet

Revised February 7, 2016 by Larry Bothe

Named for Capt. Richard Freeman (killed in a B-17 accident near Denver in 1941), Freeman Field was started in May, 1942. It replaced 27 farms totaling 2600 acres. Construction time was 9 months, 5/42 to 2/43. A cemetery had to be moved but no environmental impact study was conducted. The concrete for one runway was poured under circus tents during cold weather.

Originally there were 4 paved runways, each one 5580 feet long and 150 feet wide, with 9 taxiways out to the runways. Today there are 2 paved runways remaining, 5500 x 100, with 6 taxiways, and 2 grass runways for ultralight aircraft 1600 x 150 and 1000 x 150.

The wrap-around parking ramp was 600 feet wide and 5600 feet long, about 75 acres. Approximately half of it remains in use in today. All the concrete covered about 175 acres; equal to a 2-lane highway 80 miles long.

There were 413 buildings, 12 mi. of roads, 24 mi. of drainage ditches, 27 mi. of storm sewers, 8 mi. of sanitary sewers, 14 mi. of water lines, and almost a mile of rail siding. Only 11 of the original buildings remain today (2016).

Aircraft & Cadets: 250 Beech AT-10's (no civilian designation, none remaining) were used to train 4245 pilots. 19 classes were graduated from 4/23/43 to 2/1/1945. 23 cadet pilots were killed in training, There were over 5000 men and women stationed here at the peak of operations. The pilots who trained at Freeman Field already knew how to fly; they were here to learn multi-engine aircraft operations so they could go on to fly bombers and transports.

February, 1944: Future astronaut Gus Grissom enlisted in the Cadet program at Freeman Field.

September, 1944: The first US helicopter training base was established at Freeman Field using the primitive Sikorsky R4 "Hoverfly". After a few months it was moved to Chanute Army Air Field in Rantoul, IL.

March 1, 1945: The 477th Bomb Group, known as the Tuskegee Airmen, was transferred to Freeman Field. The "Freeman Field Mutiny", an attempt to integrate the white Officer's Club, ensued. There were no serious injuries and only 3 black officers were court-martialed; only one found guilty. The incident was a catalyst for the desegregation of the US armed services.

June, 1945: Freeman Field designated as the Foreign Aircraft Evaluation Center. 160 enemy aircraft, including German jets plus V-1 buzz bombs and V-2 rockets, were shipped here. One combat pilot was killed in 1945 while evaluating a Focke-Wulf Fw-190.

November, 1945: USAAF glider branch flight test and engineering operations were moved to Freeman Field from Clinton County Army Air Field, Wilmington Ohio. In March 1946 these operations were moved to Wright Field, leaving at Freeman the aircraft and equipment not deemed necessary for future glider branch engineering operations. Some of these unnecessary, experimental and test, glider flight articles were designated for Orchard Field (now Chicago – O'Hare) storage by General Arnold. Other (powered) aircraft from Freeman Field ended up at Orchard Field as well.

Because there were already so many collectible planes here it was suggested by Gen. Hap Arnold that Freeman Field be designated as the Air Force Museum, but it ended up in Dayton, OH (Wright-Patterson) because they had bigger/better hangars.

In 1947 Freeman Army Air Field was deeded to the City of Seymour and is now mostly an industrial park. Today (2016) there are approximately 60 businesses or organizations located in our industrial park, and approximately 1,400 agricultural acres are leased to five (5) area farmers.