

HISTORY OF CALL FIELD

Call Field was a U.S. Army Air Corps training camp in Wichita Falls during WW I. One of only five such camps in Texas, Call Field was located on either side of present day Call Field Road. By the way, that explains why Midwestern Parkway becomes Call Field Road west of Kemp Blvd.

Partly in anticipation of the U.S. entering WW I, the National Defense Act of 1916 was enacted into law on June 3, 1916. That law sought to expand the size and activity of the army's Aviation Section, and in that year the army announced its intention of establishing a series of camps to train prospective pilots.

At the time the U.S. entered World War I, there were only three pilot training schools (located in San Diego, California, Mineola Long Island, New York, and Essington, Pennsylvania).

Army officials realized that training needed to be standardized, so the U.S. Army adopted a modified version of the Canadian and British training programs. Training was divided into three consecutive stages: ground school, primary, and advanced. The first and second phases were to be completed in the U.S., and the final phase would take place in flying schools in Britain, France, or Italy. Ground school training was held in educational institutions and taught by university faculty. While ground training schools were plentiful, the three flight-training facilities could not keep pace with the ground school expansion.

Wichita Falls businessmen Frank Kell and Joseph A. Kemp and other townspeople saw an opportunity for Wichita Falls to serve the country. They waged a three-month campaign to persuade the U.S. War Department to station an army aviation-training field in Wichita Falls. A public meeting raised funds to secure the training camp, and by August 17, 1917, \$35,000 was pledged. The Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce agreed to pay all expenses associated with extending water and power lines to the camp. Kemp and Kell donated \$20,000 toward the purchase of the land, and City officials persuaded the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad to lay railroad tracks to the camp at no cost.

Almost immediately thereafter, the establishment of Call Field began. On August 27, 1917, construction began. In November, when 85 percent of the work was completed, Maj. John B. Brooks, a former cavalry officer, arrived to inspect the facilities, and he was named commander on November 10. The first six army pilots arrived on November 20, and by late December the field had 600 pilots. On January 15 the army gave final approval of Call Field, which was named for First Lieutenant Loren H. Call, a native of Washington, D.C., who was killed in a plane crash near Texas City on July 9, 1913.

During its operation 3,000 officers, cadets, and enlisted men were stationed at Call Field, and 500 officers received their wings there. Two squadrons left the training facility for overseas duty. Thirty-four men lost their lives during training exercises, the smallest number of fatalities of any training center. After the war the training center closed, and the last military personnel left on October 1, 1919.

At that time, no one knew the closing of the camp was but the first chapter in Wichita Falls's history of training military aviators. Call Field was the forerunner to Sheppard Field, established in WW II, which later became Sheppard Air Force Base, which is still one of the Air Force's top training bases. And that is yet another example of how history has a direct link to our present day lives.

Sources: Material in the Call Field Exhibit; [Texas State Historical Association](#); Wikipedia article, [National Defense Act of 1916](#); Wikipedia article, [Aviation Section, U.S. Signal Corps](#).

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