

Taft, California
Greetings from Pete Gianopulos, Class of 1942
The Taft Newsletter

The annual Christmas Luncheon of the Taft High Graduates will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn at 3625 Marriot Dr. in Bakersfield. The luncheon price is \$16.00 which include tax and tip. Last year there wer 83 in atendance from classes 1930 to the 1950's. Send checks for your reservation in by December 7 to Eva Mae Lynch at 3625 Bradford St, Bakersfield, 93304 -- tel: 661-832-7795.

From Dick Snyder, Class of 1955, from Bakersfield

Hi Pete, I just want to let you and your readers know that I have just released a new CD, "**Merry Christmas...From Malcomb**". Malcomb is the Christmas Moose who helped Santa save the holiday when Rudolph's batteries ran down. :-) In addition to the title track, there are 13 other songs, some traditional, some new. Any of your readers interested in learning more about the album and listening to samples of the songs can access it by clicking on the link below. www.geocities.com/dicksadventures/malcomb.html Thank you, Pete. Dick Snyder (Class of '55)

The story about Gardner Field was sent by Joyce (Snyder) Hopkins, class of 1964, from Susanville, CA.

Hey there Mr. Gianopulos!

Joyce (Snyder) Hopkins, class of 1964, here. I am Dick, Joe and Rosalie Snyder's "baby" sister :0)

My husband, John, came across this website today and said: "Hey, I'll bet Mr. Gianopulos would get a kick out of this!" John is a pilot and LOVES anything military and planes. You may have even been to this site before....anyway, check it out, if you will and enjoy.

Joyce

PS: Take care and thank you so much for helping us know more about and appreciate our roots!

http://members.tripod.com/airfields_freeman/CA/Airfields_CA_Bakersfield.html#gardner

Abandoned & Little-Known Airfields:

California: Bakersfield Area

© 2002, © 2006 by **Paul Freeman**. Revised 12/2/06.

Gardner AAF / Gardner Airport (revised 12/2/076)

Gardner Army Airfield / Gardner Airport, Taft, CA

35.11 North / 119.3 West (Northwest of Los Angeles, CA)



Rows of Vultee BT-13 trainers at Gardner, from the back cover of the Gardner "BeeTee", Volume I, February 1942. Photo is courtesy of Pat Thomas, whose father, Howard R. McCullough, was a flight instructor during WW2.

This former WW2-era Army Airfield was authorized in 1940 & was active by 1941. According to the "Bee Tee", a publication by the Aviation Cadets of Class 42-D, Gardner Field, Volume 1, #1, February, 1942 (courtesy of Pat Thomas), the first commander of the field was Major K. C. McGregor.

According to a historical plaque at the site, Gardner Field consisted of a total of 985 acres, and was named in honor of Major John Gardner. Gardner Field was officially dedicated on October 26, 1941 with a gala affair attended by more than 10,000 people.

Fifty eager cadets comprised the first class (41-H) to arrive at Gardner. What a surprise awaited them - no quarters, no field, no planes. After an anxious week of anticipation, planes began roaring in. Tents provided the initial accommodations. Eventually, with 2,000 Air Corps personnel in residence, the base had its own hospital, 40-acre sewage plant, nine administration buildings, four mess halls, supply rooms, officers' quarters, a guardhouse, a chapel, 37 barracks and a landing field.

There was even a swimming pool paid for by Hollywood celebrities such as Joel McCrea, who enjoyed driving up to Taft & hanging out with the hotshot pilots. Swimming star Johnny Weissmuller enlivened the pool's dedication with his Tarzan jungle call.

It was an event that not only remolded Taft's economy for the duration of the war - it also permanently altered the town's social fabric.



Chuck Yeager in front of a BT-13A during his primary training at Gardner Field, 1942.

In July 1942, former aircraft mechanic Chuck Yeager arrived at Gardner after being enrolled in pilot training in Hemet, where he reported experiencing "queasiness" the first couple of times he went up.

The Post Headquarters building was the first to be completed at Gardner Field. There were two flights within Class 41-H, "K" & "T". In the "K" Flight, there were no washouts & no serious damage was done to any ships used by that flight. They flew off an auxiliary field, itself hardly completed. An ambulance always stood by for emergencies.

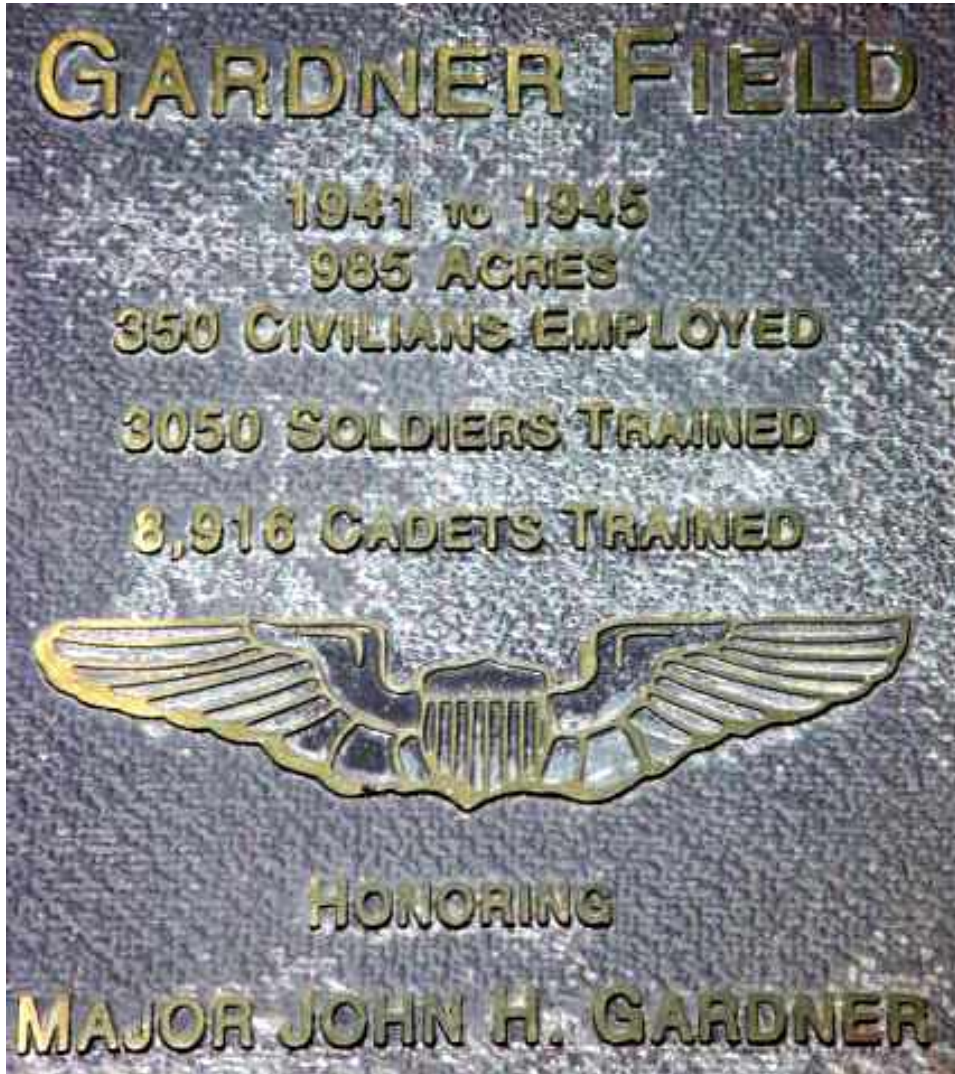
The area around Gardner is very agricultural in use, and as a result no trace remains of any of these former satellite airfields at the present-day. The original configuration of the airfield at Gardner is unknown, but it was depicted on the 1945 Mojave Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of Dan MacPherson) with the symbol indicating that its longest runway was between 5,500-6,500'.

The 37th & last class at Gardner graduated in January 1945, by which point the base had trained a total of 3,050 soldiers & 8,916 cadets. Twenty-six cadets died in training flights, as did 11 of the training officers sharing cockpits with them. Still, the number of crashes in relation to the hours flown out of Gardner Field was low.

Gradually, the planes left, the buildings were removed, and Gardner AAF was evidently closed at some point in 1945. Gardner was evidently reused as a civilian airport at some point between 1945-49. It was depicted as having a 6,000' hard-surface runway.

The Gardner Airport evidently closed at some point between 1949-52, as it was no longer depicted as an airfield of any kind on the 1952 L.A. Sectional Chart (according to Allan Greene).

A 2005 photo by Keith Wood of a monument to Gardner AAF, located at the site of the base's former entrance, at the intersection of Cadet & Basic School Roads.



A 2005 photo by Keith Wood of the plaque on the monument at the site of Gardner AAF.

Thanks to Mel Shettle for pointing out this airfield.

(NOTE: The above picture of the plaque at the entrance wher Gardner Field was built, prepared and located by John J. Miller of Taft. He was born and educated in Maricopa, was a former grocery store and oil perforating businessman in Taft and a former World War II pilot. The plaque was dedicated before a large crowd during the 1995 Taft Oildorado celebration with John Miller, Randy Miller, the president of the Taft Oildorado celebration, Jane Kinsey, the curator of the West Kern Oil Museum, Huell Howser and the two daughters of John

Gardner present, as well as the Lincoln School Band. Pete Gianopulos was the Master of Ceremonies)

Readers Responses

From Wayne Hall of Taft and a former cadet going through training at Gardner Field.

(NOTE: Wayne bought the old Pioneer Chevrolet Co. -- auto body and repair shop at 408 Main Street where you could be buy new and used cars. Later, he built the Pioneer Chevrolet Buick Inc. building at 310 E. Center Street where Westec is now located. In later years Hall did some farming on the Maricopa Flats east of Taft. He was very active in Chamber of Commerce work and in community activities.

Letter to the editor of the Midway Driller, This letter is to thank Mr. Gianopulos for his detailed summary of the history of Gardner Field -- ie Midway Driller story of 16 November 2007.

My time of 13 weeks at the (Gardner) field is one of the most revered chapters of my life's memories. The quirks of residence seem to thrust us into interesting and unanticipated experiences that often are very rewarding privileges. I am my family, quite providentially, returned to Taft for a livelihood in early 1959. Our three children finished school in Taft and have sought their livelihood elsewhere.

The story of Chuck Yeager having gone through Flight School at Gardner, I think is a landmark. I was later privileged to be a classmate of Yeager at the Air University in Montgomery, Ala. If such exists, I have to say Gen. Yeager truly has long been my voyeuristic hero. To me he is our generation's bravest man.

A public thanks is hereby offered to friend John Miller for his sole remnant marker to Gardner's first location with notation of its war contribution.

Sincerely, Wayne Hall

From Michael Enault, Class of 1963, of Yuma, AZ Pete, great article on Gardner Field. My dad was a pilot instructor there. We used to go there in the late 50's early 60's and shoot rabbits and Dad would point out where different buildings were. There was a large dance floor with the Army Air Corp insignia and also still there was the swimming pool (no water, just sage brush). The runways were still there also and we used to drag race on them in the middle 60's..

Michael Enault, Class of 1963

From Steve Barber, Class of 1964

Pete: A note to Linda Talbert, sister of Lee Talbert: Her dad, also named Lee, was a scoutmaster to many of us who were in the classes of '64-'65. It was a Sea Scout (now called Explorers) troop. Mr. Talbert, with the help of Neal Mitchell as his co-scout master, introduced a handful of us to a love of the sea and boating. I can recall our fabricating wet suits out of raw neoprene on the floor of the 1-C clubhouse. We'd lie down on the floor, trace a pattern around our bodies and then cut and glue the neoprene. They worked ok at Anacapa and Santa Cruz Islands as we learned to snorkel and scuba in what was then a paradise of wildlife underwater. It still is rich in sea life in comparison to other areas, but the Channel Islands have been decimated by recreational overfishing and "take" of Abalone as my recent dives there can serve to witness.

Anyway, Mr. Talbert (Linda's dad) arranged for us to stay on the Seabee's base at Port Hueneme which is where we were allowed to keep the boat. When we didn't sleep on the boat due to its being hauled out for the chronic repair to the hull we stayed in the barracks, ate in the mess, and attended the 10 cent admission, first run films at the base. The Channel Islands harbor and marinas and up scale homes/condos/yacht clubs/hotels etc. had not yet been built.

The other members of the Sea Scouts (from Taft of all places!) included Jon & Dell Newsom, Neal Mitchell, Gary Rasmussen, Ron Parham, Robin Hook, John Gibson, Barry Mathis, and others whose faces I picture, but whose names have slipped away. We suspected in our later years that what we really did was serve as cheap labor to keep that old WW2, converted landing craft of Mr. Talbert's alive and floating, but really, that didn't matter then or now. We had a ball, learned a lot, and were introduced in person to a much wider world than we might have otherwise

discovered. Linda, it is with much warmth, laughter, and affection that your dad is held in our memories and “remember when” stories whenever we get together or simply go sailing or boating.

Steve Barber