

NAVAL AIR STATION CHASE FIELD
Texas State Highway 202, 4.8 miles
east of the intersection of Texas
State Highway 202 and U.S. Highway 181
Beeville Vicinity
Bee County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3397

HABS
TEX
13-BEEVI.V
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NAVAL AIR STATION CHASE FIELD

HABS No. 3397

HABS
TEX
13-BEEVILLE
1-

For information about other buildings at Naval Air Station Chase Field, see:

- HABS No. 3397-A Naval Air Station Chase Field, Building 1001
(Administration Building)
- HABS No. 3397-B Naval Air Station Chase Field, Building 1009
(Enlisted WAVES Barracks)
- HABS No. 3397-C Naval Air Station Chase Field, Building 1015
(Landplane Hangar)
- HABS No. 3397-D Naval Air Station Chase Field, Building 1040
(Auditorium/Gym/Chapel)
- HABS No. 3397-E Naval Air Station Chase Field, Building 1042
(Brig)
- HABS No. 3397-F Naval Air Station Chase Field, Quarters R
(Commanding Officer's Quarters)
- HABS No. 3397-G Naval Air Station Chase Field, Quarters S
(Executive Officer's Quarters)

Location: State Highway 202, 4.8 miles east of the intersection of State Highway 202 and U.S. Highway 181, approximately 5 miles east of Beeville, Beeville Vicinity, Bee County, Texas

Present Owner: The United States of America

Present Use: Vacant (in caretaker status)

Significance: Naval Air Station (NAS) Chase Field is noteworthy for its contributions to naval aviation during the World War II and Cold War eras. Established in 1943 as an auxiliary naval air station attached to NAS Corpus Christi, the base assisted with the training of naval pilots and crewmen for combat duty for much of the succeeding 50 years. The Department of the Navy decommissioned the base soon after the conclusion of World War II, but recalled it into service in 1953 during the Korean War. When it granted "permanent" status to the base in the following year, the Navy demonstrated its commitment to the expansion and upgrading of NAS Chase Field. The Navy subsequently implemented a major building program to accommodate the new kinds of aircraft then being used by the Navy. Further development and improvements occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s with United States' military involvement in Southeast Asia. As part of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, NAS Chase Field was permanently closed in 1993; however, its operation for almost a half century

reflects the legacy of naval air training in the defense of the United States.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

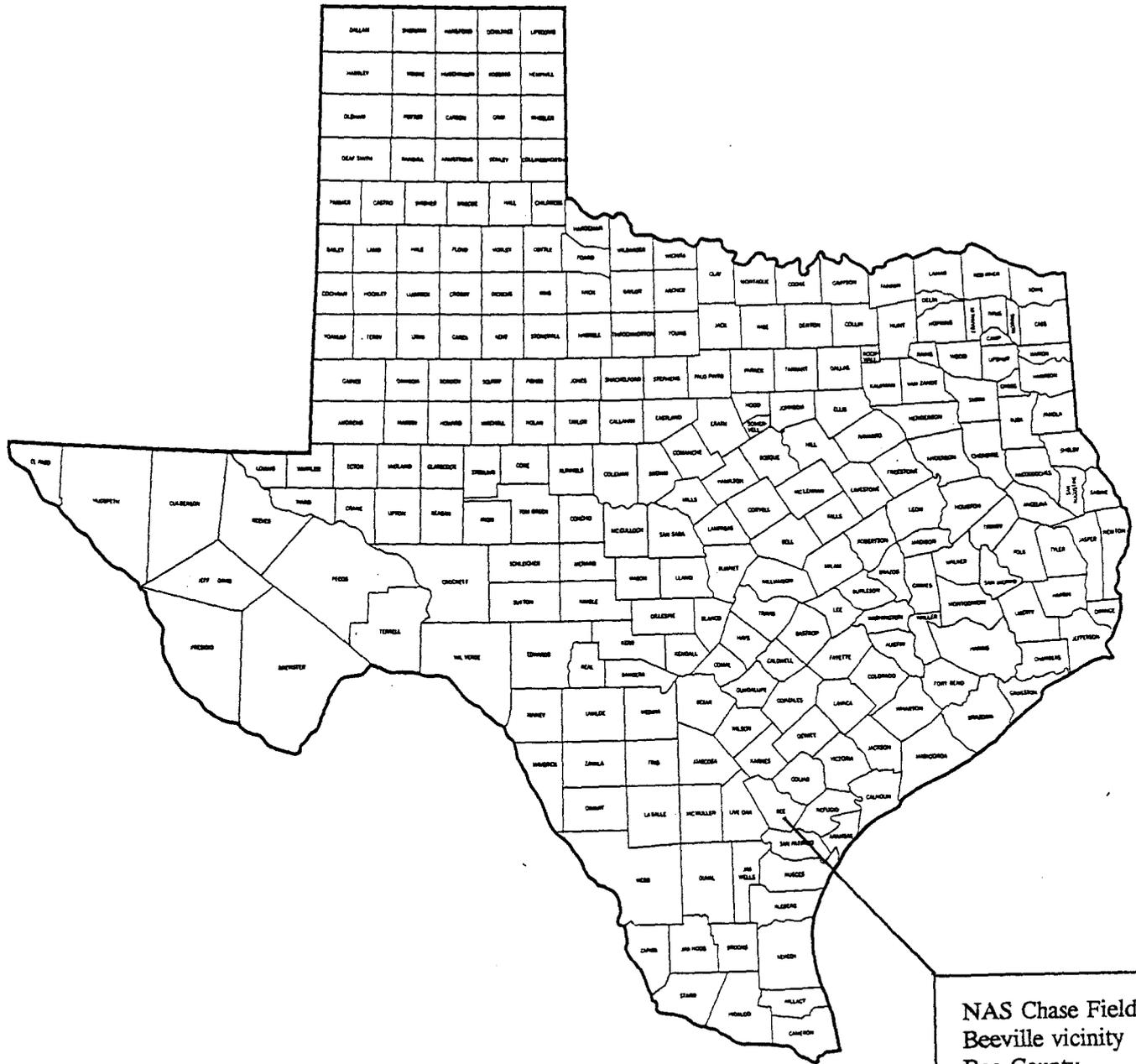
1. Date(s) of Erection: Major phases: 1943, 1954-59, 1967-1971
2. Architect: Robert & Company of Atlanta, Georgia, drew most of the plans for the initial phase of construction (1943). The Bureau of Yards & Docks, Department of the Navy, provided standardized plans for most of subsequent building programs.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:
 - The United States of America (1943-1946)
 - City of Beeville (1946-1953)
 - The United States of America (1953-1993)
4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: The original contractor for the base was Brown Bellow & Columbia of Houston, Texas. Since then, numerous general contractors have worked on the base.
5. Original Plans and Construction: The Public Works Office at NAS Chase Field maintains blue-line reproductions of plans and drawings of the major buildings. The drawings are bound and filed by the Navy's building number designation. Since the base has been closed and will be deeded to the State of Texas, these drawings are scheduled to be moved to Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Charleston, South Carolina.

B. Historical Context:

Introduction

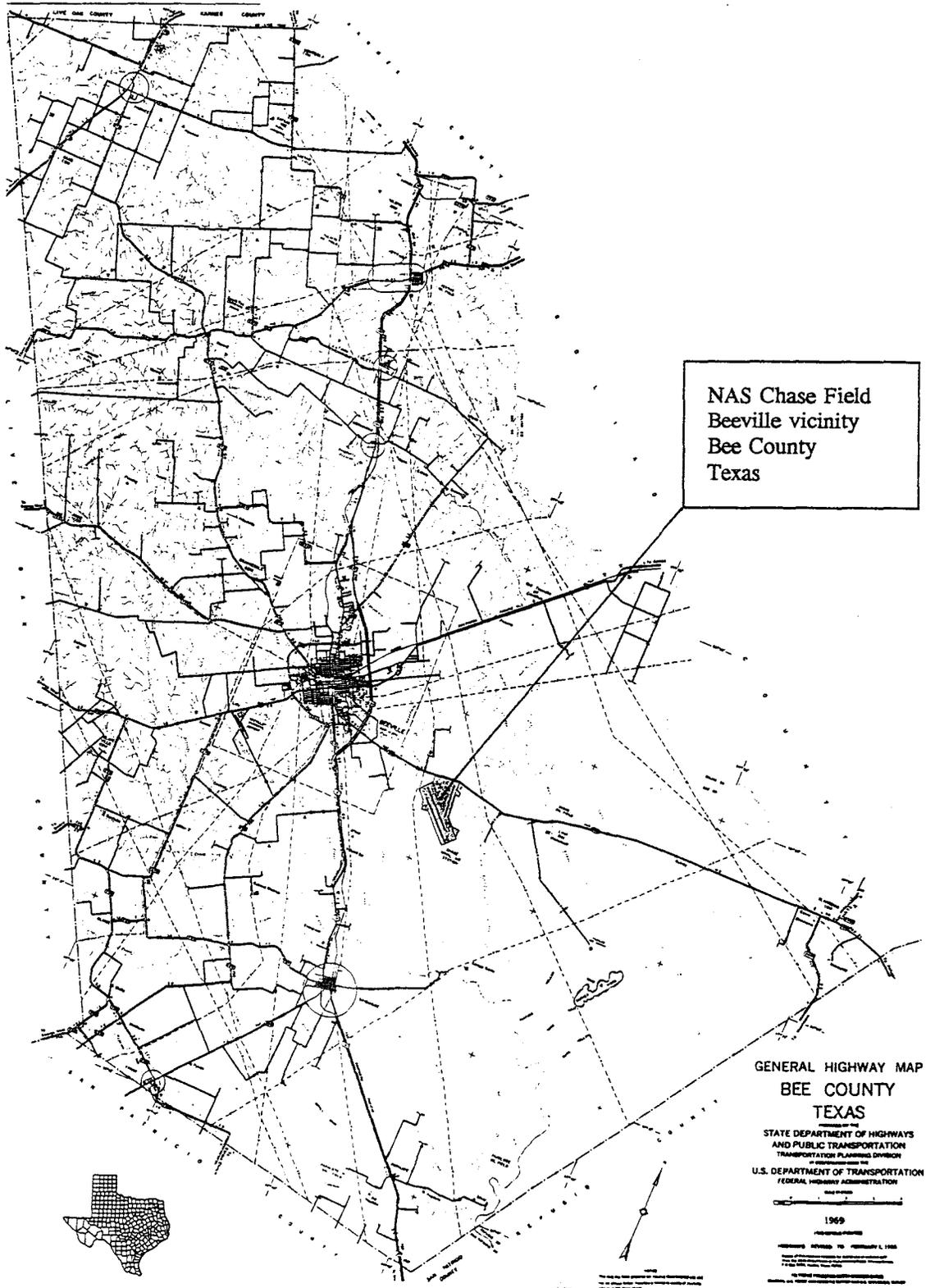
The Navy established NAS Chase Field in 1943 as an auxiliary naval air station serving NAS Corpus Christi to partially satisfy the increasing demand for trained pilots necessitated by World War II. The new base joined a nationwide network of naval air stations, auxiliary posts and landing fields which represented the culmination of a long and protracted effort by the Navy to incorporate aviation into naval service. In a retrospective of the Navy Bureau of Yards and Docks, which oversaw all the Navy's World War II building programs, Rear Admiral J.J. Manning clearly defined the role to which the naval air station had risen: "During a war which saw the aircraft carrier assume at least equal importance with the battleship in fleet operation, the air station took its place with the navy yard, the training center, and other important shore units as an indispensable and major element of the Navy."¹ As an adjunct to the great naval air

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NAS Chase Field
Beeville vicinity
Bee County
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NAS Chase Field
Beeville vicinity
Bee County
Texas

GENERAL HIGHWAY MAP
BEE COUNTY
TEXAS
STATE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS
AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING DIVISION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

1969

REVISIONS: NONE TO DATE
DATE OF REVISION: NONE
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1969

station at Corpus Christi, NAS Chase Field contributed thousands of trained aviators for combat in World War II.

The Navy's early interest in aviation was reflected in the establishment of its first flight school at Pensacola, Florida, in 1914. Naval experimentation with aircraft accelerated after America's entry into World War I, during which naval aviation increased tremendously in scope and responsibility. The Navy continued to pursue its interest in aviation in the decades following the first world war, but it was not until the late 1930s — in response to dramatically heightened world tensions — that Congress substantially increased appropriations for new bases and flight equipment. These expenditures were part of a comprehensive National Defense preparedness program that the United States embarked upon in anticipation of the country's impending involvement in World War II. Realizing that the Pensacola air station could not supply the projected demands for naval aviators, naval officials began scouting locations for new air stations and training centers. By 1938, they had selected Flour Bluff, on the Gulf of Mexico near Corpus Christi, Texas, as the site of a major new naval air station to be similar in size and scope to Pensacola. NAS Corpus Christi, commissioned March 12, 1941, was the largest naval air training station in the world at the time of completion, requiring six auxiliary air stations in South Texas to assist in the fulfillment of its flight training mission. The Navy built four of these auxiliary air stations near the main station at Flour Bluff, and constructed two other, self-contained stations at Kingsville and Beeville, in adjacent Kleberg and Bee counties.

The auxiliary naval air station at Beeville, commissioned as Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) Chase Field on June 1, 1943, was established and operated in response to the United States' full-scale involvement in World War II. Its mission, to train naval pilots for wartime duty, was carried out in the context of a national emergency that permeated every aspect of military and civilian life. NAAS Chase was not initially intended to be a permanent base and consequently, most of the war-era facilities were hastily built structures of temporary construction. Subsequent, post-World War II re-occupation of Chase Field resulted in the construction of a permanent facility with more substantial buildings. Nevertheless, a handful of the original wood-frame, asbestos-clad structures survive on the base as tangible links to the World War II period.

Early History of Naval Aviation Training

The United States Navy began its involvement with aviation soon after the Wright brothers took their first flight in 1903. In 1910, the Navy assigned Captain Washington Chambers to simply "monitor the progress of aviation" for possible future relevance to naval affairs. An eager supporter of the new flying machines, Chambers immediately began nurturing the development of a naval air service. Through Chambers, the airplane builder Glenn Curtiss attempted to persuade the Navy to invest in his product. In 1910-11, Eugene Ely became the first man to take off and land an aircraft (a small Curtiss biplane) from the deck of a ship. Intrigued by the demonstrated potential of aviation at sea, the Navy sponsored the education of Lieutenant T. Gordon Ellyson at the Glenn Curtiss Aviation Center — a civilian training program — in San Diego, California.² Upon completion of the program,

Ellyson became the Navy's first pilot in 1911, and on May 8 of that year — called "the official birthday of naval aviation" — the Navy purchased its first airplane.³ The first naval air station (an "air encampment") was soon established at Annapolis, Maryland in September 1911.⁴

In October 1913, the Secretary of the Navy appointed an Aeronautics Board to "consider the future of naval aviation." The board recommended establishing an Aeronautic Center at Pensacola, Florida, and attaching an aircraft to every major battleship and cruiser.⁵ Heeding this and the advice of Captain Chambers, the Navy transferred its existing naval aviation personnel - 9 officers and 23 men - from Annapolis to Pensacola in January 1914, and by February, the Navy's first flight school commenced operations.⁶ The Navy began a steady, deliberate campaign to incorporate the emerging field of aviation into an expanding naval force that President Woodrow Wilson hoped would eventually become "a Navy equal to any other in the world." To accomplish Wilson's goal, Congress appropriated almost \$500 million for a massive three-year expansion program.⁷

In 1917, when the U.S. entered World War I, naval aviation grew tremendously in both size and scope: "flying boats and seaplanes increased from 51 to 1,865; land planes from 3 to 242; officers from 48 to 6,716; and men from 239 to 30,693".⁸ On March 19, 1918, Ensign Stephen Potter became the first naval aviator to shoot down an enemy aircraft — a German seaplane over the North Sea.⁹ Naval aircraft logged almost 800,000 miles in bombing and patrol missions, dropped over 126,000 pounds of bombs on German targets on land and at sea, and sank or damaged 12 German submarines.¹⁰ To senior naval officials, such statistics demonstrated the impressive firepower, flexibility, and destructive capabilities airplanes could contribute to modern warfare.

Consequently, during and immediately following the war, the Navy aggressively sought ways to strengthen and refine its growing air fleet. On May 27, 1919, the Navy completed its first aerial crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, thus adding long-distance capability to its aircraft. On March 20, 1922, naval officials commissioned the *Langley*, their first aircraft carrier.¹¹ In addition, the Navy changed its organizational structure to accommodate aviation's growing military stature. Congress authorized the creation of a Bureau of Aeronautics in August 1921, to emphasize elemental aircraft improvements: the Bureau "grasped the need for basic development if aircraft were to play an important role in war at sea",¹² and paid for essentials such as better radios and instruments and more accurate bombsights, and also developed the turntable catapult which allows planes to turn around while on board a ship. Further organizational changes in the Navy included the creation of a position for the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air, in 1926. A five-year procurement program for naval aircraft was authorized the same year, establishing "immediate goals and a basis for orderly expansion".¹³

Naval aviation in the 1930s was characterized by increasing numbers of aircraft and pilots and increasing specialization. Pilots were trained to specialize in certain types of warfare, such as patrolling, scouting, dive bombing, or launching torpedoes.¹⁴ In 1934, the Navy commissioned its first true aircraft carrier, the *Ranger*, which was followed in 1937-38 by the *Yorktown* and the *Enterprise* (The *Langley* had been

converted from the collier *Jupiter* into a carrier; the *Ranger* was the first carrier built exclusively for that purpose). Also in the 1930s, the Navy continued its experimentation with rigid aircraft — dirigibles — which it had begun in the mid-1920s. While some successful trial runs were carried out with these airships (such as mooring onto a cruiser at sea), the program was ultimately a failure: of the five rigid aircraft built, only one did not meet a violent end.¹⁵ Despite the setbacks of the rigid aircraft program, naval aviation in general made great strides during the 1920s and 1930s, with more planes, more pilots, and improved technology all indicating a significant role for aviation in the Navy's future. As one historian noted, "Air power had gone to sea, ready to play a major battle role".¹⁶

In the late 1930s, after almost two decades of relative peace, all naval aviation training still took place at the Pensacola Naval Aeronautic Station. Yet the station had originally been designed as a Navy shipyard, not as an air training center. Many facilities were outdated and had improved little since the Navy's large initial investment in the station during the 1910s.¹⁷ While plans to upgrade and rebuild many of Pensacola's buildings during the late 1920s fell on sympathetic ears in the House Appropriations Committee, the nationwide depression "necessitated cutbacks in the training program and in physical improvements to the [Pensacola] station".¹⁸ It was not until escalating world tensions in the late 1930s forced the development of a National Defense preparedness program, that the Navy was at last provided the funding to begin substantially upgrading its aviation training program. Over the course of the National Defense and World War II periods, nearly 80 naval air stations and auxiliary outposts were commissioned, among them a second major naval air training center at Corpus Christi, Texas, and its six auxiliary air stations. The events that led to this phenomenal defense building and training program are well known but deserve repeating as the impetus for such an extensive construction project.

Period of National Defense: 1938-1941

Several years before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, officially drawing the United States into the war, events overseas combined to convince President Roosevelt and his military advisors, if not the American people as a whole, that their involvement in the conflict was inevitable. National Socialist Germany had rearmed in 1935; Japan invaded China in July 1937; and Germany overpowered Poland in September 1939, with Britain and France declaring war on Germany immediately afterward. In June 1940, when Germany defeated France, a country previously "regarded as the world's premier military power", President Roosevelt and American military strategists understood they had to accelerate their preparations for war.¹⁹ By that time, it was clear to nearly all Americans that the United States had to embark upon a full-scale military building and training program to successfully oppose German aggression in Europe and Japanese militarism in the Far East. The three or four years preceding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and encompassing governmental efforts to upgrade the United States military defenses, have been defined as the National Defense period.

On May 17, 1938, in a step toward securing the national defense, Congress passed the Vinson Navy Bill (the Naval Expansion Act), which authorized increasing

the fleet by 20% and tripling the number of naval aircraft from 1,000 to 3,000.²⁰ Testimony presented during hearings on the bill revealed that existing naval air facilities could not accommodate such an increase and that the procurement of 2,000 additional airplanes would require building additional air stations to service and house the new aircraft and training more pilots to fly them.²¹ Under the provisions of the Vinson bill, Secretary of the Navy, Charles Edison, appointed a board of Naval officers led by Rear Admiral Arthur J. Hepburn, "to investigate and report upon the need, for purposes of national defense, for the establishment of additional submarine, destroyer, mine and naval air bases on the coasts of the United States, its territories and possessions".²² After an exhaustive study of the country's strategic needs and the existing facilities for addressing those needs, the board recommended the establishment of new air bases and the expansion of existing bases to provide major air facilities on each coast, the Canal Zone, Hawaii, the West Indies, Alaska and the Pacific island possessions.²³ Upon presentation of its report, in December 1938, Congress approved the recommendations of the Hepburn Board, as it became known, to construct a system of naval air stations and greatly expand the existing air training station at Pensacola.²⁴ The construction program was crucial not only for the provisions of the Vinson Bill, but because then-current shore facilities were inadequate to handle earlier authorizations, let alone thousands of new aircraft.²⁵ Years of relative neglect had left the Navy woefully unprepared for the possibility of war but under the provisions of the Hepburn base program, it began to remedy the situation.²⁶

In 1939, before the Hepburn base program was initiated, the Navy had only 11 inadequate air stations and eight reserve air bases. The principal ground facilities of pre-National Defense period air stations included seaplane ramps, seaplane parking areas, seaplane hangars, landplane hangars, landplane runways, shops, schools, and personnel buildings. Sites which provided some landplane facilities on a protected bay for seaplane operations were considered adequate.²⁷ When the United States entered World War I, Pensacola had three steel seaplane hangars, a brick hangar, and a barge-mounted airship shed. After the war, the Navy maintained Pensacola as a permanent aviation training station,²⁸ but there was little expansion of the facility until the passage of the Vinson Navy Bill and the adoption of the Hepburn base program.

When the Hepburn base program was approved by Congress and signed by the President on April 25, 1939, millions of dollars were authorized for the construction of new naval facilities and the expansion of existing air stations. Under this program, the Navy's aircraft ground facilities grew to comprise almost 80 air stations and a host of satellite fields during the National Defense and War periods.²⁹ Ultimately, the work included building a system of air bases to support 27,500 airplanes and 200 lighter-than-air craft.³⁰ Increased world tensions in the months that followed prompted further appropriations for naval aircraft until that figure rose to a total of 27,500 planes by early 1942. Airplane attrition caused by destruction in battle, accidental loss, and general deterioration, compelled the Navy to procure a total of 67,000 planes over the course of the National Defense and War periods, to maintain its full strength figure of 27,500 planes.³¹ Appropriations for the Hepburn bases included \$17,000,000 for expansion at Pensacola, the Navy's major Gulf Coast facility where all its advanced air training was conducted. The funding provided for the acquisition of additional acreage

- to a total of 1,406.3 acres at the main site³² - and a 50% increase in pilot training facilities.³³ The first contract, let in July 1939, authorized under the Hepburn base program was for the construction of a landplane hangar at Pensacola. Later in 1939, contracts for an aircraft storehouse, three landplane hangars, a seaplane hangar, runways and personnel facilities were awarded.³⁴ This expansion was considered adequate for the purposes of the authorized 3,000 plane program, but the Hepburn Board, anticipating further increases in naval aircraft, recommended the construction of a second training center with a capacity equal to that proposed for Pensacola.³⁵ As events transpired, it was an accurate assessment.

Immediately following the establishment of the Hepburn Board, Texas Congressman Richard M. Kleberg began lobbying efforts with the Secretary of War and board members to select Corpus Christi, Texas, a city in his congressional district, as the host of the second naval air station.³⁶ Armed with data supplied by Kleberg and the findings of their own inspection tours which detailed its similarities with Pensacola including, "moderate year-round climate, room for expansion, and plenty of air space", the Hepburn Board selected Corpus Christi, Texas, as the site of a new facility to supplement their existing training programs. The Navy believed:

The Corpus Christi and coastal bend area offered site criteria favorable to the development of the new naval air station. Aviation fuel and lubricants were accessible locally. The flat terrain and workable soils...were ideal for construction as was the availability of aggregate for concrete. Naval activities were in close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, noted for its ideal flying weather and southeast prevailing breeze. The...site, located on the Flour Bluff peninsula with Corpus Christi Bay to the north, provided an excellent opportunity for the development of a seaplane landing area.³⁷

With their selection of Corpus Christi, Navy officials intended to make the Gulf Coast "more secure against hostile naval attack than any other continental coastal region".³⁸ Corpus Christi's Gulf location also provided greater protection from attack than bases on the Atlantic or Pacific coasts and it was nearly equidistant from both coasts in the event of an emergency. At the same time, the site had little existing air traffic to interfere with flight training. Its proximity to the existing base at Pensacola was another factor in Corpus Christi's selection, since training operations between the two stations could be easily coordinated.³⁹ In addition, the state of Texas, which had lobbied fiercely for the base, offered the land for its construction free of charge to the Navy.⁴⁰

Though officials chose the Corpus Christi site in late 1938, construction still had not begun by the spring of 1940, on the eve of the French surrender. By that time, overseas conflicts prompted Congress to authorize an increase in naval aircraft from 3,000 to 10,000 airplanes,⁴¹ thus confirming the Hepburn Board's foresight in recommending a second major air training station. Accordingly, the Navy planned to expand the "size, design, and mission" of the new base planned for Corpus Christi.⁴² On June 13, 1940, President Roosevelt signed the Naval Expansion Act of 1940, which increased the Navy's fleet strength by 11 percent.⁴³ Within days, Admiral Harold R. Stark, chief of naval operations, requested that Congress allocate funds to build a "two-

ocean Navy." Congress and the president approved Stark's request under the new Naval Expansion Act, allocating \$4 billion to "more than double the 1,250,000 tons of the existing combat fleet" and build an additional 15,000 naval aircraft.⁴⁴ The act provided increased funding for further expansion at Pensacola, already in the midst of its 1939 building program. By the end of the war, NAS Pensacola would be enlarged to include 11 hangars and personnel facilities to accommodate 15,000 cadets, officers, and enlisted men.⁴⁵ The act also provided the necessary funding to begin construction at Corpus Christi on a scale "comparable to the nation's greatest seaplane base and training station at Pensacola".⁴⁶

According to the *Corpus Christi Times*, President Roosevelt "signed a contract with Brown & Root, Inc., of Houston, for the construction of a \$25,000,000 Navy air training base.... It was the first contract signed by the President under the new national defense program"⁴⁷ In fact, construction began at NAS Corpus Christi on June 11, 1940, the very day Congress approved the bill, before the President actually signed it into law.⁴⁸ and proceeded at a rapid pace to make the new base fully operational as soon as possible. Brown & Root, the Houston firm with whom President Roosevelt signed the contract, was actually one of three contractors who formed a consortium to build the base; the others were Columbia Construction of Oakland, California, and W. S. Bellows of Houston. Robert and Company, an architectural engineering firm based in Atlanta, developed the building plans under the direction of the Navy Bureau of Yards and Docks.⁴⁹

Official groundbreaking took place on June 29, 1940, and the project was 70 percent complete at the time of its commissioning ceremony on March 12, 1941 — just nine months later and eighteen months ahead of schedule. The original 2,050 acre site was roughly rectangular in shape and lay in an east-west direction on a peninsula 10 miles south of Corpus Christi and facing Corpus Christi Bay to the north. Hydraulic fill operations added another 450 acres during construction.⁵⁰ The western third of the area was consigned to the landplane field while the waterfronts on the north and east were devoted to seaplane activities and included 17 seaplane ramps. Although the Corpus Christi site was chosen, in part, because it comprised many acres of flat, undeveloped land, once the brush and mesquite-covered sand was cleared, the loosened soil drifted into excavations and failed to support equipment. In addition to that problem, quay walls and bulkheads had to be constructed along the waterfront to combat the eroding effects of wind and sea.⁵¹

Despite these obstacles, construction proceeded at an unprecedented pace. With up to 9,000 construction personnel, the project utilized earthmovers and heavy dredging equipment to reshape the entire Flour Bluff peninsula where the base was to be located; many dunes were leveled and channels filled to prepare a vast, open, level space on which would sit hangars, runways, barracks, and administration buildings.⁵² The initial work consisted of three seaplane hangars, a reinforced-concrete assembly and repair shop, a three-story fireproof general warehouse; and aviation storehouse; 18 H-type barracks; 10 two-story wood-frame E-type general-utility buildings; and necessary utilities. The hangars and aviation storehouse were of permanent steel-frame construction. Subsequent construction to August 1945, accommodated 23,000 officers and enlisted men and more than 400 airplanes.⁵³

Upon its completion, the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station was the largest naval air training station in the world, equipped to handle the multiplying numbers of student aviators the Navy was training in preparation for the intensifying World War. More than any other training facility, the Navy intended the Corpus Christi air station to be a "University of the Air," and the "central element" in its "developmental plans" for the Texas coastal bend region.⁵⁴ The first students arrived at Corpus Christi on March 20, 1941 to begin ground school, and took their first training flight on May 5, 1941. The class graduated November 1, and by the end of the year the NAS was producing 300 new aviators every month, which increased to approximately 600 after Japan's attack at Pearl Harbor. Over the course of World War II, over 35,000 student pilots received their training at NAS Corpus Christi.⁵⁵

Auxiliary Air Stations

In addition to its Flour Bluff facility, NAS Corpus Christi was adjacent to large, undeveloped tracts of inland property suitable for landplane runways and other auxiliary functions. In the pre-National Defense period, site criteria for naval air stations included a limited amount of landplane facilities alongside a protected body of water where seaplanes could alight and take off under a variety of weather conditions.⁵⁶ As the United States involvement in the war appeared inevitable, however, the Navy developed and used faster and larger landplanes for air transport and patrol operations. Such aircraft required longer, more stable runways than seaplanes but they were not limited to water availability.⁵⁷ Since Corpus Christi's mission, like most of the new war-era naval air stations, was to train air and ground personnel, the availability of land suitable for auxiliary facilities was critical to keep abreast of these technical developments and to train sufficient numbers of flight personnel. In response to the war-driven demand, Pensacola and Corpus Christi, both re-classified as intermediate training centers for the duration of the war, acquired numerous auxiliary fields built exclusively for landplane operations. These auxiliary posts were of sufficient size that each would have qualified as separate air stations had they not been attached to a mother station.⁵⁸

Pensacola and Corpus Christi each had three auxiliary fields in operation before the United States entered the war. The auxiliary fields were vital to the training mission due to the high volume of cadets who were processed through the naval air stations in preparation for combat. The need was particularly acute at Pensacola because the runways at the main station, in use since the 1920s, had a maximum length of 2,750 feet and were too short for the newer aircraft. Further, the flying field, wedged between Pensacola Bay and a knoll upon which the officers quarters were situated, was severely limited.⁵⁹ Pensacola's auxiliary fields, therefore, were essential to its mission. Although NAS Corpus Christi had no such limitations - three of its four runways were 5,000 feet long and the fourth, 6,000 feet - the extent of its training mission demanded auxiliary fields from its inception. By September, 1941, three auxiliary stations, all located within a few miles of the Flour Bluff station, were commissioned and in operation. Rodd Field (commissioned June 7, 1941) contained 858 acres; Cabaniss Field (commissioned July 9, 1941) contained 1003 acres; Cuddihy Field (commissioned September, 1941) contained 789 acres.⁶⁰

The Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, not only hastened the pace of training programs at Pensacola and Corpus Christi; it also provided the impetus for the Navy to commit funds to the construction of additional stations around its two main bases to serve as auxiliary landing fields and support bases. After the initial authorization and construction of new naval air stations begun during the National Defense period, a second major phase of naval air station construction took place in 1942, following the U.S. declaration of war. Construction at naval air stations nationwide was characterized by the expansion of the major air bases through the addition of many new auxiliary fields and lesser satellites. Establishing auxiliary fields enabled the large fields to care for the increased operational and training load which could not be passed to the new inland stations. As developed, some of the auxiliaries surpassed a number of the independent air stations in size. The more notable auxiliary systems were attached to naval air stations at Pensacola, Norfolk, Alameda, Oregon, Quonset Point, Rhode Island and Corpus Christi.⁶¹ NAS Corpus Christi, the hub of the Navy's training activities in South Texas, eventually served as the "main field" for six other fields constructed throughout the region, including Rodd, Cabaniss, Cuddihy and Waldron auxiliary air stations, which border NAS Corpus Christi; Kingsville Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) in Kingsville; and NAAS Chase Field in Beeville. The four facilities located near the main field were smaller fields intended to handle some training exercises but primarily serve as alternative landing fields. NAAS Kingsville and NAAS Chase Field, however, were larger facilities designed and built to house several training squadrons each. Later, in 1968, both fields had grown to the point that they were upgraded to NAS status.

In 1942, three additional auxiliary fields were constructed to serve Pensacola. Each field was located between 10 and 30 miles from the mother station. Barin Field consisted of three wooden hangars, barracks for 1,400 enlisted men and 450 cadets, a landing mat 2,500 feet in diameter and storage facilities for 215,000 gallons of gasoline. Bronson Field was a combination landplane and seaplane station of temporary construction. The field contained one seaplane hangar, two seaplane ramps, two landplane hangars and barracks for 1,350 enlisted men and 150 cadets. The largest of Pensacola's auxiliary stations was at Whiting Field, 27 miles northeast of the mother station. Two separate landing fields were built and all support buildings were located between the two fields, including quarters for 1,900 enlisted men and 1,584 cadets, and 580 officers. Whiting also had two hangars, each with a control tower.⁶² Corpus Christi's first three auxiliary fields, similar in plan and capability to those built at Pensacola,⁶³ were intended primarily as alternative landing fields with limited training exercises. Its fourth (Kingsville) and fifth (Chase) auxiliary fields, commissioned in 1942 and 1943, were considerably larger and more self-contained.

The Kingsville and Beeville sites were both originally intended to serve as municipal airports as authorized by the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) in 1941, prior to Pearl Harbor. The two sites were among hundreds of small airport projects, consisting of a single landing field and runway lights, which the CAA had approved for construction early with the stipulation that they be relinquished to the government in the event of a national emergency. As the war progressed in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and U.S. entry into World War II, the

increased demand for trained pilots and practice airfields constituted such an emergency. Both the Kingsville and Beeville facilities were needed to supplement the training activities of NAS Corpus Christi.

Brown Bellows & Columbia, a coalition of three separate companies organized as a single contracting firm to oversee construction at Corpus Christi, also served as the general contractors for each of its auxiliary fields. When completed in 1943, the Navy had spent over \$100 million on the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, its six auxiliary stations and a Technical Training Center at Ward Island.⁶⁴ Of the six auxiliary stations, Kingsville and Chase Field were fairly autonomous entities, separated as they were from Corpus Christi by distances of 40-60 miles.

The Navy commissioned NAAS Kingsville (then called "P-4") on July 4, 1942, little more than one year after the official startup of its parent field in Corpus Christi. The Kingsville station featured an administration building almost identical to the one built at Chase Field a year later. P-4 in Kingsville initially housed four squadrons, serving as a training base for student aviators learning fighter and bomber tactics, and as a gunnery school for combat flyers.⁶⁵ The station continued to train pilots throughout World War II before being placed in caretaker status, due to reductions in training, on September 12, 1946. The sixth and final auxiliary air station, NAAS Chase Field, was commissioned on June 1, 1943, almost one year after Kingsville. This field, too, trained naval aviators for the duration of the war until, on March 7, 1946, it was declared inactive and placed into caretaker status.

NAS Chase Field, Beeville, Texas

New naval construction for 1943, consisting primarily of additions to existing stations, proceeded under the general momentum of 1942 work plan. No new naval air stations were initiated during the year, although several auxiliary stations were put under construction. At NAS Astoria, in Oregon, added barracks for 675 men, a wooden hangar, and storage for 100,000 gallons of gasoline. NAS Alameda at Fallon, Nevada commenced work on a new auxiliary field in November, 1943 with two wood-frame hangars, a synthetic trainer building, a dispensary and barracks for 2,000 men and gasoline storage for 200,000 gallons of gasoline.⁶⁶ At Klamath Falls, Oregon, the Navy converted an existing municipal airport just outside the city to serve as a naval air station by constructing an additional 80 buildings including hangars, shops, storehouses, barracks, magazines, and a sewage-disposal plant.⁶⁷

One of the largest naval air station projects of 1943 included expansion at NAS Corpus Christi and two of its four existing auxiliary stations, and the establishment of two new auxiliary fields. The two new fields were located at Beeville, Texas and Field 21305 (later named Waldron Field), near the main station at Corpus Christi. Both the new and expansion projects followed the pattern set by previous auxiliary bases at Corpus and Pensacola, although in a somewhat barebones fashion in accordance with new wartime guidelines calling for cheaper materials and temporary construction. At Kingsville, quarters for 150 students and 900 enlisted men were added and Rodd Field acquired a hangar and a small barracks. Field 21305, the smaller of the two new stations, was similar in size and function to the original three auxiliary fields adjacent to NAS Corpus Christi. Initial construction at Field 21305 consisted of quarters for

450 enlisted men and 260 cadets, and a hangar. The first completed buildings at Chase Field, near Beeville, included quarters for 600 cadets and 1,650 enlisted men, and a landplane hangar.⁶⁸ Shortly afterward, construction crews finished the administration building and other features to support a self-sustaining station. NAAS Chase Field was the last and largest of auxiliary air stations built to serve NAS Corpus Christi.

Beeville Municipal Airport

The origins of NAAS Chase Field lay in the nationwide network of municipal airstrips proposed by the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) in October 1940. These proposed airstrips, which could be converted to military use if needed, were funded by Congress on July 1, 1941, with an appropriation of \$94,977,759.⁶⁹ Among the 191 contenders for the 149 airports approved by the CAA, were three South Texas towns: Beeville, Kingsville, and Mathis.⁷⁰ Beeville civic leaders, believing that the presence of an airport would lead to improved economic conditions by making the town more accessible to travelers and creating new jobs, urged its citizens to support the airport. The city of Beeville wholeheartedly embraced the notion of building a municipal airport under the CAA program and authorized a bond of \$50,000 to purchase suitable land, by a margin of six to one in a March 15, 1941, vote.⁷⁰ Soon afterwards members of the Beeville Chamber of Commerce, the mayor, and the city manager met to purchase a mowing machine to clear a 200-foot wide mock landing strip in preparation of a site inspection by Roland Potter, a representative of the CAA.⁷² Apparently Potter's impressions were favorable, because on August 1, 1941, Congressman Richard M. Kleberg announced the CAA's decision to allocate \$198,000 for site improvements — including clearing land, building runways, and installing lighting for a new airstrip. In exchange for the airport authorization and construction, the City of Beeville agreed to purchase the roughly rectangular, 600-acre site owned by Bee county resident Webb Hearn, and to operate the new airport upon its completion. The *Bee-Picayune* noted that "another agreement to be entered into by the city provides that the airport may be taken over by the Federal government at any time deemed necessary".⁷³ At the time, it seemed a distant, if plausible, possibility.

Although slated to be a civilian project, the military oversaw the construction of the Beeville Municipal airport from the earliest stages of development. Lieutenant Colonel Lucius D. Clay, charged with assisting in the management of regional CAA airport defense work since the fall of 1940, supervised the project. Within a week of Kleberg's August 1, 1941 announcement, the War Department sent survey crews, led by H. M. Mapps, to the Hearn tract to conduct a preliminary survey of the airport site. The War Department forwarded notes and drawings from this survey to the design section of the Galveston Corps of Engineers for completion and blue printing, and afterwards advertised for contractors. The CAA planned to award contracts for runways, lighting and other field improvements within 90 days of the completion of the preliminary survey. In a show of support for the airport project, the Bee County Commissioner's Court agreed to fund the construction of a county road to run 3/4 mile from the Refugio Highway (Highway 202) to the center of the proposed airport.⁷⁴

Although bids were to have been opened on November 7, 1941, problems with land titles and incomplete plans delayed the contract awards. After resolving these

issues with the CAA, the city filed the warranty deed for the purchase of the 600-acre tract from Webb Hearn for \$36,000, or \$60 per acre, on November 12, 1941. In addition to purchasing the land for the airport and promising to operate and maintain the airport, the city agreed that:

The [Federal] Government shall have the right to develop the Airport as it sees fit, including the right to determine the exact nature of the improvements to be made under the Project, the manner in which the Project is to be conducted, the amount of Federal funds to be expended, and all other matters relating to the Project. The City will cooperate with the Government to ensure prosecution of the Project without interference or hinderance, and agrees to permit the agents and employees of the Government, and all persons authorized by the Administrator, to enter upon, use and occupy the Airport as the Administrator may deem necessary or desirable in connection with the conduct of the Project.⁷⁵

The CAA awarded the construction contract to the Houston firm of Brown and Root, one of three firms participating in the construction of NAS Corpus Christi. Improvements authorized under the CAA's July 1, 1941, appropriation included the "clearing, grading, grubbing, seeding, sodding, and fencing of the landing area and the construction of two, 100 x 3,000 foot runways and the installation of basic lighting".⁷⁶ After completing the runways and lighting, however, Brown & Root stopped work on the Beeville Municipal Airport because, by that time, the United States was entrenched in World War II and national defense dictated the future use of the air field.

Airport Site Becomes Auxiliary Air Station: 1943

The United States' full-scale involvement in World War II required thousands of trained pilots, and such demand overwhelmed the available training facilities at NAS Corpus Christi and its nearby auxiliary fields. Accordingly, the War Department began investigating the possibility of converting one or more of the CAA airports in Texas into naval air fields. In 1942, the Kingsville airport was tapped to serve NAS Corpus Christi as its first off-site naval auxiliary air station. Still, it was insufficient to meet the critical need for pilots and training facilities necessitated by the world war and the War Department turned its attention to other sites. In January, 1943, shortly after the completion of the Beeville airport lighting and runway facilities, city commissioners faced the prospect of relinquishing their new facility to the government and issuing the remaining \$13,000 in approved bonds for the purchase of additional airport land. In fact, local officials felt that the town would benefit as much from an auxiliary air station as from the airport and they encouraged the War Department to choose Beeville. As he had done earlier for Corpus Christi, Congressman Kleberg lobbied the War Department on behalf of Beeville. To sweeten the pot, the city commission purchased an additional 463-acre tract of land, adjacent to the municipal airport, and offered the entire parcel to the Navy, which was apparently satisfied with the arrangement.

On February 11, 1943, the Beeville *Bee-Picayune* formally announced the Navy's intention to build a base at the airport site. The City of Beeville issued its

remaining bond monies to purchase the additional 463 acres immediately north of the CAA airport site to augment the original 600-acre Webb Hearn tract.⁷⁷ The additional acreage was essential because, while the Hearn tract could accommodate the 3,000 foot runways of a Class 2 municipal airport, Beeville's CAA designation, it was not sufficient for an auxiliary naval air station. The larger, faster naval aircraft required runways with a minimum length of 4,500 feet. The purchase of additional land brought the total acreage to 1,063 acres, an area somewhat larger than earlier auxiliary bases at Pensacola and Corpus Christi. The rectangular tract lay in a north-south direction with the new road forming the northern boundary.

Earlier that week, Beeville Chamber of Commerce Manager, I. F. Cherry announced the imminent construction of the base at the regular meeting of the Rotary Club and "told briefly how the air field project developed almost overnight after almost two years of waiting". At the same meeting, Lieutenant D. M. Coover of the U.S. Naval Reserves stated that the "go-ahead" came from Washington on February 9, 1943, after the government received notification that the City would purchase the additional acreage. Navy officials were ordered to begin construction of the auxiliary air station immediately.⁷⁸ Commander M. B. Orr, Naval Construction Superintendent, who had recently overseen the completion of NAS Corpus Christi's auxiliary air station at Kingsville, was the officer in charge of the Navy's construction at Beeville.

The Navy hired the same consortium of contractors who completed the facilities at NAS Corpus Christi to undertake the construction at Beeville. Under a contract scheduled to commence February 11, 1943, Brown Bellows & Columbia had four months to erect: "Quarters, mess halls, [a] hospital, and other buildings to accommodate an expected 1,500 to 2,000 officers, cadets and enlisted men".⁷⁹ Robert & Company, an Atlanta, Georgia-based firm with offices in Corpus Christi, completed architectural and engineering design plans for the new base, as it had done for NAS Corpus Christi. A complex of administrative, training, personnel and support buildings was planned for the northern half of the base. The complex was skewed in a northwest-southeast direction with intersecting runways occupying the southern portion of the tract.

Anticipating the arrival of hundreds of construction workers and new residents to the Beeville area, the Chamber of Commerce registered all apartments, rooms, and houses available for rent within the community. Beeville was soon swamped with more than 400 construction workers, including plumbers, electricians, engineers and pipefitters, who flocked to the city. Housing was scarce, but the pay (\$40 per week), "added considerably to Beeville's prosperity."⁸⁰ The construction of the base and the arrival of hundreds of military personnel and their families initiated a relationship between the city of Beeville and the naval air base that would last for the next half-century.

NAAS Chase Field: 1943

Prior to its acquisition by the Navy, construction on the Beeville municipal airport proceeded at a languid pace until December 1942, when rumors surfaced about possible naval interest in the site. After Navy and local officials confirmed that an air base would indeed replace the civilian airport, the pace of construction quickened

dramatically. By the middle of January 1943, the gatehouse and the firehouse were completed, and within the month many other building foundations were laid out and concrete piers poured. In March 1943, Chase Field began receiving supplies for the operation of Squadron 13-C, a training squadron made up of student pilots originally stationed at NAS Corpus Christi. The first draft of 32 sailors came aboard at Chase Field on April 19, 1943.⁸¹

At that time, construction crews had been working day and night but no administration buildings or airplane hangars were finished. Only one barracks existed for both officers and enlisted men to share, though this arrangement lasted only 10 days until the officers' quarters were completed. Cooking was done on an army range from a field kitchen, and there was no hot water. To facilitate the first flight training operations, transport and service planes used Highway 202, which paralleled the northern boundary of the station, until the first runway was completed. In accordance with the urgent nature of its mission, the first training flights at the new air base took place as soon as the first runway was completed, on May 1, 1943, a full month before the new facility was commissioned.⁸² Upon the base's commissioning on June 1, 1943, the *Corpus Christi Caller* wryly commented on the incomplete state of construction, noting that the Beeville field "kept the tradition of the Naval Air Training Center, throughout whose history training has kept abreast, if not ahead of, construction." By the summer of 1943, when flight cadet Bus Ellsworth arrived at Chase Field for one of the first two instrument flight training programs, Chase had "one hangar, a control tower, wooden barracks, dirt roads, lots of rain, lots of frogs and crickets and good food".⁸³

All of the construction at Chase Field conformed to guidelines established under the duress of war. At the close of 1942, after the United States had been at war for a year, all branches of the military experienced difficulties obtaining construction materials for its building projects. On November 4, 1942, Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, issued a letter to all bureaus and offices of the Navy Department calling for a reduction in the public works program and careful screening of all new projects with regard to the shortages. Knox outlined basic requirements to be observed for the duration of the war-construction program. The new mandate governed all current and pending projects, including NAS Chase Field. Knox determined that no projects would be undertaken unless they had "a direct and important effect on the conduct of the war" and unless there were no existing facilities available to serve the same purpose. In addition, projects could not utilize men, materials, equipment or services that might be needed for more important war-related operations. In the same vein, any new construction was to be "of the cheapest temporary character, with structural stability sufficient only to meet the needs of the service which the structure is intended to fulfill during the period of its contemplated war use". Finally, post-war needs were "not to be considered in the extent or character of a project nor in the decision as to its present necessity".⁸⁴ Constructed under these guidelines, then, Chase Field was considered a crucial project whose mission could not be duplicated elsewhere or in existing facilities. Nevertheless, building materials used in its construction conformed to Knox's dictate to be of the "cheapest temporary character". Therefore, most of the buildings that survive

from the World War II period, were of simple frame construction and clad with "galbestos" — galvanized metal-reinforced asbestos — shingles.

Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) Chase Field was formally commissioned in a ceremony on June 1, 1943, before many of its buildings were ready for occupancy. Rear Admiral Alfred E. Montgomery, commandant of the Naval Air Training Corps, delivered the dedication and assigned the first command of the NAAS Chase Field to Lieutenant Commander George T. McCutchan.⁸⁵ Like other naval air fields throughout the country, the new field was named for a naval aviator killed in the line of duty.⁸⁶ Though originally called the Auxiliary Air Station at Beeville, by the time it was commissioned, the Navy had named the new field in honor of Lieutenant Commander Nathan Brown Chase, who was killed on a training mission near Pearl Harbor in 1925. Chase Field, along with NAS Corpus Christi and its other auxiliary stations (NAAS Kingsville, Cabaniss, Cuddihy, Rodd, and Waldron), was a part of the Eighth Naval District, headquartered in New Orleans, and was responsible at that time for intermediate air training activities. As the map shows, the Navy chose to concentrate most of its air training near the Gulf of Mexico.

War demands set a grueling pace at Chase Field. Navy personnel were required to work 14 consecutive day shifts, at the end of which they received one or two days off. Training flights went out seven days a week, from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m. Until the frame buildings were completed, squadron leaders conducted all flight operations from three 12-by-20 foot temporary tar-paper buildings.⁸⁷ All flight schedules were posted on outdoor blackboards, and all plane repairs were made outdoors, as well. The quonset landplane hangar (Building 1015) was not completed until the fall of 1943, but as soon as a portion was finished, it was occupied. Among the first facilities completed at Chase Field were the Administration Building (Building 1001), barracks buildings (WAVES Building 1009), runways, post office, chapel (Building 1040) and even the swimming pool (Building 1071).⁸⁸ By the time of the base's commissioning, most of the more "permanent" of the temporary buildings had been completed.⁸⁹ After 100 days of furious building, construction costs totalled \$3,500,000.⁹⁰

Although the bachelors' barracks were among the first buildings constructed at Chase Field, married officers and civilian defense workers had to seek housing off-base, and the city of Beeville had no surplus to offer. In response to the housing shortage, the community lobbied Congress to authorize the construction of more emergency shelters. On July 1, 1943, the Home Loan Corporation approved 15 new housing units for the Beeville area, with defense workers receiving top priority for occupancy.⁹¹ Ann Burke Parke, the new housing development located east of St. Mary's Street between Poesta Creek and Crockett Street, consisted of 10 units, each of which contained five apartments.⁹² The apartments were completed by September, 1943.⁹³

Chase Field During World War II: 1943-1946

Due to wartime security, the Navy released very little information about specific military-related activities at NAAS Chase Field during the two years following its commission. Though changes in command and social events were noted in the local

newspaper, details of training exercises and missions were not subject to public scrutiny.⁹⁴ Lieutenant Commander E. S. Spangler, Commander A. R. Nash, and Commander W. L. Guthrie served as base commanders during the war years.

Chase Field's original mission at the start of World War II was to "provide instruction to naval aviation cadets in instrument flying," though soon after the base's commissioning the mission changed to "preoperational training"⁹⁵ According to one base historian:

Instruction classes began on 1 May, 1943, and flight operations on 1 June, the day the station was commissioned, Lieutenant Commander George Thurston McCutchan, USN, commanding. The authorized component was for 75 officers, 1,180 men, and 600 cadets. Those cadets found qualified in flight instruments...were transferred to Cuddihy Naval Air Training Base. Flight training...was undertaken by training squadron VN13D8-C, the largest of its kind in the world. More than 8,000 cadets completed the course....Among those trained were a number of Frenchmen.⁹⁶

In addition to the thousands of pilot-trainees and crewmen, more than 200 WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), were stationed at Chase Field during the war. The first WAVES arrived in August 1943, one year after Navy bill, P.L. 689 was signed, authorizing the establishment of the Navy Women's Reserve.⁹⁷ Their duties included operating Link Trainers and maintaining aircraft. Chase Field's only surviving barracks building (Building 1009) from the World War II period was constructed to house the enlisted women who augmented the technical and clerical force at Chase Field during the war. Like virtually all of the post-1942 war-era buildings, Building 1009, the Enlisted WAVES barracks, is a wood-frame, asbestos-clad building, of temporary construction. The Bureau of Yards and Docks, under whose auspices the buildings were designed and constructed, made certain allowances for the women enlistees by adding "special features such as a laundry room, ironing boards, extra outlets for electric irons, and comfortably equipped lounge rooms." Despite economic and war-era constraints, some naval stations provided WAVES with recreation buildings that included a PX (post exchange), soda fountain, and beauty parlor.⁹⁸ Chase Field offered no such luxuries.

Caretaker Status in the Post-War Period: 1946-1950

Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the Navy announced plans to retain Chase as an active auxiliary field. Reductions in Navy budgets, however, forced a reversal of that plan,⁹⁹ and on July 1, 1946, Chase Field was placed on "caretaker" status. Aircraft were transferred to Clinton, Oklahoma, for storage; all preoperational flight training was moved to NAS Pensacola; and the number of personnel at Chase Field dropped to six officers and 90 men.¹⁰⁰ During this time, the Navy agreed to lease the field back to the city of Beeville at no charge, with the stipulation that the buildings and property would immediately revert to the Navy in the event of national emergency.¹⁰¹

Beeville was then faced with the dilemma of what to do with a multi-million dollar military base complete with an administration building, hangar, barracks, and

support buildings — a much different facility than the municipal airport that was originally planned. A number of possible uses for the base were suggested, including: a tuberculosis sanitarium, an experimental station for Texas A&M University, and a four-year Baptist college.¹⁰² The last suggestion gained the most favor, and on December 19, 1946, the City of Beeville granted control of the facility, including the buildings and all base equipment, to the Baptist General Convention,¹⁰³ which raised funds for renovations necessary to convert the base to the "South Texas Arts and Technical College." Despite the formal announcement that the college would open its doors on September 1, 1947, the South Texas A&T trustees voted instead to move their campus to Corpus Christi (July 25, 1947), where it later became Corpus Christi State University.¹⁰⁴

NAAS Chase Field ultimately served the city in a variety of non-military capacities during the years following World War II, as "much of the property" was "loaned to various civic activities and offices during the time the City of Beeville had the field under lease".¹⁰⁵ The base did serve as a municipal airport for a brief period, when Trans-Texas Airlines operated from the field and flew short routes to nearby cities. The small airline operated until Chase Field's reactivation in 1953. In addition, the Beeville 20-30 Club leased the pool (Site No.1071) and offered swimming lessons to local children, while farmers used the hangar (Site No.1015) for hay storage and other agricultural uses.¹⁰⁶ Most of the other buildings remained vacant in the interim between World War II and the base's reactivation.

The Korean Conflict and the Cold War: 1950-1954

Chase Field languished in its "caretaker status" for four years before the outbreak of the Korean War, in the summer of 1950, prompted Navy officials to consider recalling both Chase Field, and NAAS Kingsville, into service once again.¹⁰⁷ As early as June 1951, the Navy began preparations to reactivate Chase Field by requesting and gaining authorization for repairs and renovations to the airfield. Included in the Navy's rehabilitation proposal were the construction of a new runway with a connecting taxiway and apron, the installation of lighting for the taxiways and runways, and tests and surveys of the airfield for other necessary improvements. The Navy spent more than \$2,150,000 on such preliminary improvements; Word-Texas-Dellinger Associates, based in Corpus Christi, and the Shilstone Testing Laboratory of Houston performed the work.¹⁰⁸ The Navy remained ambivalent, however, as to whether Chase Field would be officially upgraded to a permanent facility. As the Korean conflict dragged into its second year, demanding more men, machines, and facilities than the War Department originally predicted, the Naval Air Advanced Training Command (headquartered at NAS Corpus Christi) found its existing training facilities overloaded. The command observed that Chase Field could serve as a practice landing field for the single engine jet aircraft that the Navy was beginning to phase into service at that time.¹⁰⁹ One of the first steps taken by the Navy in its efforts to upgrade the facilities at Chase was the purchase of additional land to lengthen the World War II-era runways to 8,000 feet, thus accommodating jet flight training.¹¹⁰ By late summer the Navy decided to purchase Chase Field outright from the City of Beeville, in addition to the parcels it had already acquired from private citizens. On

August 14, 1952, the Navy paid the town \$100,000 for the base. The community of Beeville welcomed the purchase as an indication of the Navy's commitment to remain at Chase Field regardless of the outcome or duration of the Korean conflict. On May 21, 1953, the Navy formally announced plans to reactivate Chase Field.¹¹¹ Soon afterwards, on June 11, the first group of 22 sailers arrived at the base for duty.¹¹²

During July 1953, the Navy received two large appropriations to complete its reactivation of the base: the first amount (\$1,640,000) was requested on July 9, followed by a second request (\$2,500,000) on July 16, 1953.¹¹³ The proposed physical upgrading and improvements began immediately at Chase Field, reflecting the Navy's determination to transform the base into a permanent naval training facility.

On July 27, 1953, only thirteen days after Congress approved the additional improvement funds, the United Nations brokered an armistice for the Korean conflict, and though the United States was no longer officially at war, the country entered into an uneasy truce which necessitated a continuing American military presence in South Korea. Despite the end of the Korean conflict, the Navy proceeded with its reactivation and improvement program at Chase Field, bolstered by the growing climate of apprehension and distrust of Communist-bloc countries that became known as the Cold War. On November 23, 1953, Chase Field was re-designated a Naval Auxiliary Air Station, its mission to train pilots for military service.¹¹⁴

On June 17, 1954, nearly a year after the truce, Congress authorized an additional \$12,000,000 for physical improvements at Chase Field. The appropriation was another indication of official support for a permanent and ongoing military presence at Beeville regardless of the end to hostilities in Korea.¹¹⁵ Navy officials believed Chase Field would continue to be valuable as an auxiliary training facility to supplement the training activities of NAS Corpus Christi. Indeed, the second major building program at Chase Field, begun near the end of the Korean conflict in 1953 and lasting through the end of the decade, was primarily a response to increased Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, rather than a reaction to hostilities in Korea.

NAAS Chase Field Builds a Permanent Facility: 1954-1959

On July 1, 1954, all downtown Beeville stores closed in the early afternoon so that hundreds of local residents could witness the recommissioning ceremony of NAAS Chase Field and view a performance by the Navy's precision flight team, the Blue Angels.¹¹⁶ The same day, Chase became the designated headquarters for three new training Advanced Training Units (ATUs): 802, 203, and 204. To accommodate the hundreds of new student pilots and their planes — mostly straight wing jets, F9F-2s, and TV-2s — officials began administering a large-scale upgrading of the base's facilities, principally funded by the \$12,000,000 authorized by Congress one month earlier. The construction program, intended to transform NAAS Chase Field into a permanent base capable of supporting a large naval and civilian workforce, lasted from 1955 to 1959.

Chase Field's second major phase of construction was characterized by the addition of permanent buildings and considerable financial investment. Among the earliest buildings erected at Chase Field after the reactivation were two World War II-

era hangars (Buildings 2009 and 2015) that were moved to Chase from Rodd Field, another auxiliary station near Corpus Christi. These 100 x 300-foot hangars, built by the engineering firm of McClendon and Associates of Corpus Christi, have been used continuously since that time for aircraft repair and storage. Although they retain their original wooden decks and other features typical of 1940s construction, the hangars were altered by the addition of a 100-foot concrete cadet ready-room in the 1970s.¹¹⁷ Other new buildings constructed as part of the mid-1950s building program included a new Enlisted Men's Club (Building 2023); a new Public Works building (Building 2048); an Officer and Cadet Swimming Pool (Building 2045); a Theater (Building 2042); two 252-unit Enlisted Men's Barracks (Buildings 2039 & 2040); and a new Operations Building and Tower (Building 2051).

In addition to the construction of new base facilities, one of the most ambitious undertakings of the second phase of construction was the completion of the Capehart naval housing addition. Located just east of the Beeville city limits, the Capehart addition consisted of 208 single-family dwellings on 63 acres. The two-, three-, and four-bedroom houses further emphasized the Navy's commitment to maintaining a permanent presence in Beeville. Named for the congressman who recommended this type of military housing, the area is officially known as Chase Park, although the Capehart name has persisted to the present.¹¹⁸ The Navy completed a similar off-base housing addition near NAS Kingsville, called the Texas Terrace, about the same time. Other housing constructed at Chase Field during the mid-1950s included 17 similar units for command level officers and their families on Constellation Drive on the base grounds.

The large-scale investment in permanent family quarters at the Capehart Housing area represented a major, long-range dedication to the Beeville community on the part of the U.S. Navy, and signalled a new level of social and economic interaction between the military families and the local townspeople. Military families attended local schools and availed themselves of local services and recreational facilities; Navy personnel and their dependents shopped at local stores. The reactivation of Chase Field also created job opportunities for Beeville residents, as many support and administrative positions on the base were filled by civilians. In this way NAAS Chase Field and the city of Beeville have enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship from the field's recommissioning in 1954 until the present.

Introduction of Jet Aircraft: 1954

The physical improvements at NAAS Chase Field not only reflected the Navy's increasing desire to maintain a presence in Beeville; they also resulted from advancements in naval air technology and training techniques, and the Navy's desire to keep abreast of such developments in the climate of the Cold War. The Navy began experimenting with jet aircraft in the mid-1940s, just after the end of World War II, though it was not until the early 1950s that the planes were found in significant numbers in the naval air fleet.¹¹⁹ On August 26, 1954, thanks to its lengthened runways and improved facilities, Chase Field was able to commence jet training, using straight wing F9Fs and TV-2s.¹²⁰ Chase Field's updated mission in the 1950s and 1960s along with NAS Kingsville, was to provide advanced jet training to Navy student

pilots. The three ATUs at Chase Field were renamed Training Squadrons 24, 25, and 26 (VT-24, VT-25, and VT-26) on May 1, 1960.¹²¹ These squadrons provided training in instrument flying, jet systems, formation flying, weapons delivery, air-to-air combat, and weapons systems.¹²²

During the 1950s and 1960s the Naval Air Advanced Training Command supervised all naval advanced training from its headquarters at NAS Corpus Christi. Qualified student pilots who had completed basic pre-flight and primary training at Pensacola would be directed to enter one of two training "pipelines" — propeller aircraft or jets — which would prepare them for flight in advanced aircraft. Students entering the jet pipeline left NAS Pensacola for NAS Meridian, Mississippi, where they studied the Basic Jet syllabus for roughly 25 weeks. Next, they proceeded either to NAS Chase Field or NAS Kingsville for advanced jet training, which lasted for approximately 20 weeks. The advanced jet training program at Chase Field consisted of introduction, familiarization, instrument panel, night flying, formation and air combat tactics, weapons, mission planning and strike techniques, field carrier landing practice and carrier qualifications.¹²³ Upon successful completion of both ground school and flight training at Chase Field, a pilot would be given his Navy "Wings of Gold" and assigned to a particular type of aircraft for service in the naval fleet.

The Vietnam War: 1967-1971

The third and final major building program undertaken at Chase Field was initiated as the United States began its large-scale involvement in Southeast Asia in 1967. The first building completed under the new program was a 40-man Bachelor Officer's Quarters (BOQ), whose construction kicked off a \$33 million physical improvements program projected to last from 1967 through 1971.¹²⁴ As part of this program, a new Fire Station (Building 2142), an intermediate maintenance hangar for VT-26 and the Aircraft Maintenance Department (Building 2137), a 480-man Bachelor Enlisted Quarters (Building 2179), and dining and recreation centers (Buildings 2177 and 2189) were added to the air station. In July 1971, workers completed 100 new houses for married personnel at the Capehart Housing complex.¹²⁵ New construction during this period required the demolition of many of Chase Field's World War II-era properties. Seven World War II-era barracks were disassembled and lumber, shingles, and plumbing fixtures from these buildings were used for construction of some of the new buildings.¹²⁶ The extensive construction undertaken at NAAS Chase Field in 1967 necessitated the temporary closure of the base, during which all planes and flight training were moved to NAS Corpus Christi, where personnel reported that at least 90 officers, 300 enlisted men, and 25 civilians were required to "keep the planes flying".¹²⁷

In July 1968, during this last major construction period, Navy officials designated NAAS Chase Field a full Naval Air Station (NAS). At that time, the United States was fully engaged in the Vietnam War, and Chase Field was under pressure to train as many pilots as possible in a brief period of time. Thus, in addition to the new buildings and runway improvements at the base, the Navy funded the construction of an auxiliary landing field (NALF) for NAS Chase Field near the community of Berclair, about 18 miles north of Chase Field in Goliad County. Construction on the new field,

called NALF Goliad, commenced on May 16, 1968. The \$5,000,000 allocated for the field resulted in the completion of two 8,000-foot auxiliary runways and several accompanying support buildings. Additional funds of \$1.1 million paid for the erection of a control tower, fire and crash station, a refueling facility and runway lighting. The completion of NALF Goliad provided Chase Field with five 8,000-foot runways. NAS Chase Field also maintained a target site complex in McMullen County, about 60 miles west of Beeville.¹²⁸

At the height of its jet pilot training in the late 1960s during Vietnam, NAS Chase Field maintained approximately 100 TA-4J *Skyhawks* and 60 T-2 *Buckeyes* for advanced jet training. In keeping with the demand for naval pilots during the Southeast Asian conflict, the Navy intensified its training program; consequently, Chase Field produced between one-fourth and one-third of all Navy jet pilots in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with about 225 Marine and Navy jet pilots receiving their wings each year at Chase. During that time more than 3,000 military and civilian personnel were actively employed at the station.¹²⁹

Training Air Wing 3: 1971-1992

On October 1, 1971, Training Air Wing 3 was established at NAS Chase Field as part of a reorganization of the naval air training structure. Under the new plan, the Naval Air Training Command phased out the Office of the Chief of Naval Air Advanced Training (which oversaw activities at NAS Chase Field), along with the offices of basic and intermediate training, and replaced them with six Training Air Wings, located at various naval air stations throughout the country. Today, the headquarters of the various Training Air Wings are located at stations in Meridian, Mississippi; Pensacola and Whiting Field, Florida; and Corpus Christi, Kingsville, and Chase Field (Beeville), Texas. The reorganization allowed for the consolidation of the flight training syllabus, and allowed pilots to "undergo the entire jet training syllabus at one location, thus improving the quality and efficiency of training".¹³⁰

Training Wing 3, headquartered at NAS Chase Field, directed the operations of Chase Field and its three training squadrons — VT-24, VT-25, and VT-26 — each of which maintained its own hangar. VT-24 and VT-25 operated out of the World War II-era hangars brought to Chase from Rodd Field in 1954 (Buildings 2009 & 2015), while VT-26 utilized Chase Field's original quonset hangar (Building 1015). The Training Wing maintained approximately 2,500 military and civilian personnel and graduated about 200 pilots each year, about one-fourth of all Navy jet pilots. In addition:

[Chase Field] follows the "single base" concept, in which many earlier flight training organizations are now merged with the primary mission. After ground training and instruction in actual flight, the student pilots engage in simulated carrier landing practice and then actual carrier qualification aboard the USS Lexington in the Gulf of Mexico.... Training Wing Three is administered by a Wing Commander and a staff of twelve officers and ten enlisted men.¹³¹

The annual payroll for NAS Chase Field in the 1980s was approximately \$10,000,000. In 1982, the base received over \$17,000,000 in funding.¹³²

End of an Era of Flight Training at Chase Field: 1991-1993

Although Chase Field has maintained a constant presence in Beeville and Bee County the last half-century, the Navy has concluded its operations at the base and is transferring the property to others. On June 30, 1991, the Base Realignment and Closure Committee, appointed by Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney to recommend military bases from throughout the country for closure or downsizing, voted 6-1 to close NAS Chase Field and its auxiliary field NALF Goliad, along with scores of other bases and posts across the country as part of a nationwide military cut-back.¹³³ Base officials immediately began to initiate strategies to reassign personnel, cease flight operations, dispose of federal property and equipment, and comply with environmental concerns. On January 30, 1992, NALF Goliad ceased operations. By August 1992, the base's mission, equipment, and military personnel was being reassigned to naval air stations at Kingsville, Texas, and Meridian, Mississippi. Flight training operations at Chase Field ceased in October 1992, and the Navy readied NAS Chase Field for permanent closure. Disestablishment ceremonies were observed in February, 1993.¹³⁴ Throughout the closure proceedings, Navy and local officials discussed possible future uses for the base facilities. Alternatives considered for the disposal and re-use of NAS Chase Field were considered in the execution of the Navy's responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Through the NEPA process, the community was able to identify potential future uses of the installation. As of June 1993, the city of Beeville planned to retain part of the property with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice assuming control of the remaining facilities for use by the state prison system.

During its 50-year career, first as a naval auxiliary air station for NAS Corpus Christi and, since 1968, as a primary naval air station, NAS Chase Field has served the Naval Air Training Command by providing facilities, services, and material to support its pilot training program. Highlights of Chase Field's history include its commissioning as an auxiliary air station during World War II, its reactivation and elevated status in the 1950s as an Advanced Jet Training station, its designation as the Navy's first swept-wing jet training center in 1957, its upgrading in 1968 to full naval air station, and its production of more than one-fourth of the Navy's total pilot output during the Vietnam War. Extant buildings from NAS Chase Field's three major periods of construction reflect the base's evolving mission as a naval air training station. The station has had a profound impact on the small city of Beeville, Texas, particularly after the construction program of the 1950s assured a continued presence in, and broad support of, the local community and economy.

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7. Sweetman, *American Naval History*, p. 134
8. Cagle, *The Naval Aviation Guide*, p. 32.
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14. *Ibid.*, 34
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88. *Bee-Picayune*, 27 June 1992, sec. C, p.5; 6-20 May 1943.
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The 130 extant buildings at NAS Chase Field include a diverse collection of both "temporary" and "permanent" properties. Although they are used for a variety of purposes, these buildings all support the operation of the base as a naval air training facility. Distinctive building types are expansive hangars, runways, barracks and other living quarters, administrative offices, recreational buildings and support facilities. The buildings generally are functional and utilitarian, with only modest, if any, amounts of stylistic ornamentation. The earliest buildings are of wood-frame construction, although those structures erected after the base's re-classification to "permanent" status in 1954 are larger and more substantial than those of the World War II era.
2. Condition of Fabric: Because of its active status, the buildings at NAS Chase Field are generally in good and stable condition.

B. Site:

1. General Setting: NAS Chase Field encompasses a 2,689.24-acre parcel, south of Texas State Highway 202, about 4.8 miles east of Beeville, in rural Bee County, Texas. The land is flat to gently sloping, with elevations ranging from 165 to 195 feet above sea level. There are no major creeks or drainages within the confines of the base, although Poesta Creek is beyond the west boundaries and Spring Creek is to the east; both waterways flow south and drain into the Aransas River. State Highway 202 bounds NAS Chase Field to the north, and open pasture land that is used primarily for grazing purposes surrounds the remaining sides of the base.
2. Historic Landscape Design: NAS Chase Field is in a natural region known as the South Texas Brush County, which consists mainly of brush land savannah. The semi-arid climate and the abundance of native grasses in the area made the land, on which NAS Chase Field was built, better suited for the raising of livestock, rather than for the cultivation of crops. Since the establishment of NAS Chase Field, however, the landscape has changed considerably. A variety of non-native plantlife has been introduced in those areas used most extensively by base personnel. Bermuda and St. Augustine grasses cover the golf course and the lawns, and are accented by various ornamental shrubs and trees including Live Oak, Chinese tallow, oleander, Arizona ash, and American

elm. Undeveloped areas within NAS Chase Field are open pastures with native coastal Bermuda grass, western ragweed, and Johnson grass.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings: The Public Works Office at NAS Chase Field maintains blue-line reproductions of plans and drawings of the major buildings. The drawings are bound and filed by the Navy's building number designation. Since the base has been closed and will be deeded to the State of Texas, these drawings are scheduled to be moved to Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Charleston, South Carolina.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

- A. Federal Agency: Department of the Navy, Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Charleston, South Carolina
- B. Project Causing Alteration or Demolition: The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission directed that NAS Chase Field be closed. The Department of the Navy complied with that directive and ordered the deactivation of NAS Chase Field and transferred all military personnel to other bases. The Navy plans to deed the property to State of Texas for use by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
- C. Names and Affiliations of Those Preparing Documentation
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