

944th MISSION SUPPORT SQUADRON

The defense phase of the Roosevelt Administration also spawned an airfield with a different use in Arkansas. The airport at Southwestern Proving Ground (SWPG) in Hope, constructed in 1941, was not used as a training facility but rather a contributing resource for a proving ground used to test bombers, artillery shells and air bombs. The proving ground was planned for Oklahoma City, but the location was changed to Hope because Arkansas was receiving so many new military facilities at the time that it was considered more efficient to construct the proving ground there as well.

The rumors of such a facility were reported by the Arkansas Agricultural and Industrial Commission in 1940, and Senator Lloyd Spencer of Hope verified its construction in the summer of 1941. Spencer said that he had received news of the proving ground's authorization from the War Department and that it would be located north of Hope on a five-mile wide, fifteen-mile long parcel covering 37,000 acres. The War Department did not consider the location in Hope appropriate at first because it wasn't suitable for an airport, but it was finally decided airport facilities could be built outside the proposed area, southwest of the original reservation on a neighboring tract. With the addition of the airport the total acreage was raised to 50,780.27. The SWPG airport was reported to be the third largest in the United States in 1942, with three, 5,500-foot concrete runways, numerous taxi ramps from the 25,000-square-foot hangar and a 50-foot radius at the end of the runways for planes to make turns rather than traversing the entire length. The size of the runways was larger than those found at municipal airports and was ideal for landing and launching army aircraft of any size in any wind direction.

After executive officers and employees arrived on the site in the summer of 1941, the proving ground began testing in January of the next year. The first test was on the Bolenge velocity of missiles fired from 75-mm caliber guns. Other tests were run on light cannon, anti-aircraft guns, howitzers, ordnance material and ammunition. Military instruments that recorded time intervals of ordnance were investigated at the proving ground and the premature firing of 105-mm shells were determined by the personnel at SWPG to be the result of faulty rotating bands. The 616th Air Corps Detachment was located at the airport for testing the ballistics and tumbling of bombs. Before their arrival, bomber crews from Barksdale Air Force Base; Shreveport, Louisiana, used the runways for "touch and go" landings.

Southwestern Proving Ground was closed after the surrender of Japan in 1945. Since the immediate area around the airport was free of potentially unexploded shells or bombs, the city of Hope received it for use as a municipal field. The remainder of the land was considered contaminated and unsuitable for construction or farming, but between 1993 and 2003 the area was cleaned up under the Formerly Used Defense Sites program, ridding the reservation of over 8,000 ordnance articles.

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources