

The Historic Landscape of Kirtland Air Force Base

Prepared by the 377th Air Base Wing History Office
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Note on Images

All images in this booklet are courtesy of the 377th Air Base Wing History Office and 377th Air Base Wing Civil Engineering Division.

Introduction

Kirtland Air Force Base's (AFB) past is embedded in its landscape and architecture on the East Mesa of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

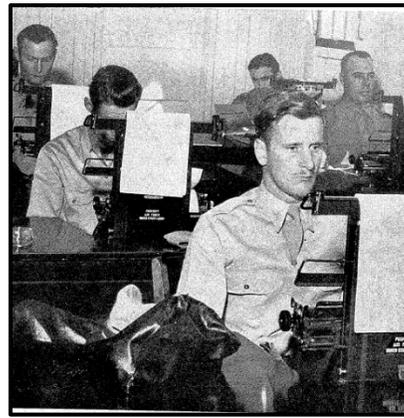
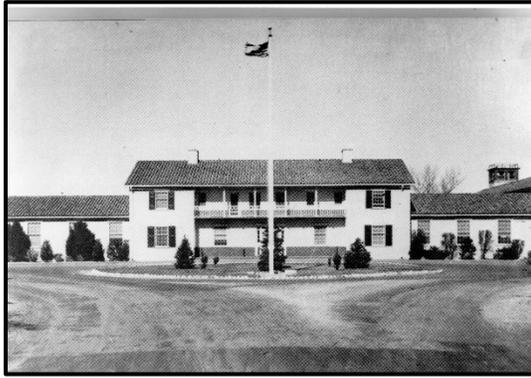
First trod by indigenous pre-historic tribes around 15,000 BCE, then by several bands of the Ancestral Pueblo people who made their homes throughout the Middle Rio Grande Valley, the area of Kirtland AFB has also been inhabited by ranchers, miners, and homesteaders.

It is most notably the cradle of Albuquerque's aviation history, and later transformed into a sprawling, sophisticated military complex beginning in 1941. During World War II and through the decades of the Cold War, it provided critical support to the nation's deterrence and special weapons enterprises, and has sustained those efforts through to the present day. Since the late 1970s, it has been home to training schoolhouses for aircrews in special operations, personnel recovery, and pararescue. In the 21st Century, following the attacks on September 11th, 2001, it supported multiple contingencies during the Global War on Terror. It currently provides a home for over 100 tenant units and organizations, and its presence continues to dominate the geography of southeast Albuquerque.

Each building and landmark at Kirtland AFB has a history. By examining their past, we are provided with a window into that of Kirtland, the nation's defense, and the rich heritage of the City of Albuquerque and the State of New Mexico.

Kirtland's Historic Landmarks

Sandia School for Girls



Clockwise, upper left: Sandia School for Girls, ca. late 1930s; Sandia Girls School students in class; Recovering soldiers receive vocational training at the Army Air Forces Convalescent Center; Building 1900, August 2021.

Location: Buildings 1900-1910, Maxwell Housing Area

Date Constructed: 1936-37

History: The Sandia School for Girls was founded in 1932 by political activist and former Illinois Congressional Representative Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms, to serve as a preparatory academy for graduates to attend elite schools in the northeastern United States. In 1936, Simms moved the school to a 125-acre campus. The buildings were designed by John Gaw Meem in the Territorial Revival style. In 1942, the school closed due to the growing Kirtland Field military complex nearby, and the US Army briefly used the campus as a convalescent hospital from 1944-45. The school complex, located in the Maxwell Housing area has gone through multiple uses during its existence. It has served as an ordnance and atomic energy research laboratory, an Officer's Open Mess, a conference center, a recreation complex, and a training center for the Department of Energy.

Albuquerque Airport/Oxnard Field



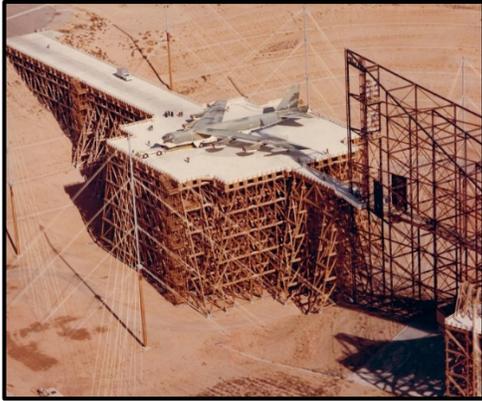
Clockwise, upper left: Oxnard Field, ca. 1929; Oxnard Field offices and passenger terminal; Building 20600; Buildings 20344 and 20348.

Location: Buildings 20344, 20348, and 20600

Date Constructed: 1928-29

History: Albuquerque's first operational airport was established by Frank Speakman and William Franklin on the East Mesa near the Tijeras Arroyo, about 10 miles southeast of downtown. With the aid of grading equipment loaned by City Commissioner Clyde Tingley, they constructed two hangars (Buildings 20344 and 20348) and a runway complex. The hangars are the oldest known buildings on Kirtland AFB. James G. Oxnard, an aviation booster from New York, soon bought out Franklin's share of the airport, and it eventually became known as Oxnard Field. In 1929 a terminal facility (Building 20600), designed in the Pueblo Revival architectural style, opened just a short walk east of the hangars. The building contained offices, pilots' quarters, passenger waiting areas, and a Harvey House restaurant. The US Army purchased the land through eminent domain proceedings in 1942, bringing Oxnard Field to a close.

The Trestle



L-R: The Trestle during testing preparations, ca. 1980s; The Trestle in the present day, 2021.

Location: Southwest of the intersection of Wyoming and Pennsylvania Avenues

Date Constructed: September 1973-April 1979

History: Constructed over a period of five and a half years at a cost of \$59.6 million, ATLAS-I (Air Force Weapons Lab Transmission-Line Aircraft Simulator), popularly known as the Trestle, is one of Kirtland AFB's most distinctive landmarks. The Trestle is made of over 410,000 pieces of lumber, glued together in over 15,000 laminated members, making it the largest free-standing wooden structure on the planet. The bolts and nuts, numbering over 8,500, are made of laminated beechwood and pressurized with phenolic resin. The Trestle was designed to simulate threat-level electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks against in-flight aircraft, primarily during the detonation of nuclear devices, and can support a weight load up to 550,000 pounds, able to bear aircraft as large as a B-52 or C-5. It can withstand winds up to 100 miles per hour unloaded, 40 miles per hour loaded for months-long periods. Two test pulsers generated up to 4.5 megawatts, supported by 400 miles of grounded wire mesh connected to wooden towers near the structure. Although EMP testing ended in 1990, the instrumentation area remains in use.

Kirtland NCO Academy



Clockwise, L-R: The Kirtland NCO Academy, ca. 1955; Building 916 today; CMSAF #8 Sam E. Parrish, Kirtland NCOA graduate; SSgt Earline Taylor, SSgt Catherine Jones, SSgt Cecil Lofton, and TSgt Yvonne Menzel became the first women NCOA graduates in August 1969.

Location: Building 916

Date Constructed: 1954

History: The Kirtland Non-Commissioned Officer Academy opened its doors in January 1955 under Air Research and Development Command, with Major Woodrow Wilson as the first commandant, delivering instruction in leadership, management, and communication skills, along with drill, ceremony and uniform inspection exercises. The 8th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Sam E. Parrish, became the Honor Graduate in Class 64-D, while the first four female Airmen to be enrolled in the course graduated with Class 70-1 in August 1969. The Academy earned five Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards and three Organizational Excellence Awards during its tenure, and graduated over 27,000 NCOs before it was deactivated in August 2009.

Hangar 333



Top-Bottom: Hangar 333, ca. 1966; Hangar 333 in 2021.

Location: Building 333

Date Constructed: 1942

History: During World War II, Kirtland AFB, then Kirtland Field, served as a training base for B-17 and B-24 bombardier crews. Hangar 333 was constructed to accommodate these aircraft, and provide a home for the base operations center. Its construction in 1942 coincided with an extremely active build-up of the base's functional offices, training squadrons, and infrastructure, which up to that point had operated mostly out of tents or temporary shacks. Hangar 333 has continued in its capacity as the base operations center during its entire lifespan, currently serves as the hangar for the Albuquerque Civil Air Patrol, and is also the home of the 377th Maintenance Squadron.

Sandia Base Headquarters Complex



Clockwise, top left: Sandia Base Hospital (Building 20203), ca. 1970s; Sandia Base Administration Offices, Building 20200; One the Sandia Base Division Headquarters structures, Building 20201; Sandia Base Hospital, present day.

Location: Building 20200-20204

Date Constructed: 1947-48

History: Following World War II, the area that became Sandia Base in July 1945 was employed by the Manhattan Engineer District as a center for the research and development of nuclear weapons and technology. As nuclear testing activities increased in the ensuing years, the US Army placed it under the auspices of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project and began construction on the base's headquarters complex near the base's former parade ground. These included the main administration building, two division headquarters buildings, the hospital, and the hospital mess hall surrounding a courtyard complex. Like other nearby buildings in the vicinity that were part of the initial Sandia Base headquarters complex, they were constructed in the International Style, with southwestern accents such as Spanish tiles, arched entrances, and geometric features, providing a unique showcase for the base's distinguished visitors. These buildings are now home to the Missile Defense Agency, Joint Navigation Warfare Center, the 377th Contracting Division, 377th Security Forces Group, and other tenant units.



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