

"Westminster Airport Dedicated"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

America's entry into World War II rapidly accelerated the development of military and civil aviation in Maryland and directly led to the creation of the Westminster Airport. Airports were created throughout the state for use by the Civil Air Patrol. Westminster's new airport was dedicated with a two-day event beginning on Saturday, June 5, 1943. The story was featured prominently on the front page of the June 11 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"Airport Dedication Was Witnessed By 600 Persons

Mayor Joseph L. Mathias Made The Welcome Address-About 50 Planes Were On Field-Motor Corps Headed By Miss Anne Reifsnider Were Ready for Duty

The first mobilization of the Maryland Wing, Civilian Air Patrol, Saturday and the dedication of the Westminster Airport, Baltimore Base, No. 332, Sunday, resulted in a two-day program which brought fliers from Washington, Baltimore, Cumberland, Hagerstown, Taneytown, Frederick and Hanover, for the ceremonies. By Sunday there were 50 planes on the field, 25 visiting planes and 25 planes housed at the base. There were about 300 members registered for the two days.

Sunday's program began at 11 a.m., with the posting of guards by members of Companies No. 650 and 651, Maryland Reserve Militia Men, under command of Captain Charles Anderson, with Lts. John Woodward and Paul M. Wimert.

The Carroll County Canteen committee, in charge of Miss Adeline Hoffman and Mrs. Milson Raver, prepared and served the luncheon for patrol members, and guests, members of the band, and the guards. The committee had prepared for about 300 and served sandwiches, baked beans, radishes, carrots, ice cream and coffee.

The trophy, a silver cup, for the competitive drill, was awarded to Washington Base No. 334 and the donor of the trophy, Major Arthur C. Hyde, Commander of Maryland Wing No. 33, C. A. P., presented it to Capt. Leo B. Kimball, Washington.

Dedication exercises began at 3:15 o'clock. The president of the base, Lt. E. Ridgely Simpson, Baltimore, presided. The invocation was offered by Rev. Richard M. Lundberg, rector of Ascension Episcopal church. The Maryland State Guard Band furnished special music.

Mayor Joseph L. Mathias, Sr., in making the address of welcome said, "Today we have assembled for no purpose of officially dedicating a new airport, a project which will play an important part in the service of our community, state and Nation. In this time of war, when everything must be done to advance the important science of aviation, Westminster is proud to have a part in this great development . . . This event is a milestone in the history of this community. May it greatly promote the War effort, and when the war is won may this airport be a valuable asset to the commercial life of a better tomorrow."

Other addresses were made, by Dr. Robert McKelroy, Third Regional Office, O. C. D., and former professor of History at Harvard University; Captain Harold R. Bohlman, commander Squadron No. 332; Major Hyde, and Colonel Earle Johnson, National Squadron Commander, Washington.

The raising of the colors while the band played the National Anthem was an appropriate conclusion. This was followed by squadrons passing in review and the inspection of airplanes. During the aerial parade, confetti bombs were dropped.

Capt. Richard Depew, Hagerstown, entertained with stunt flying. Commissioner of Police Beverly Ober was present, also Dr. Thelma Elliott, Baltimore, the first woman in the state to go on active duty, and Lt. Emma Robertson, public relations office of the squadron.

There are 1200 members registered in the State Wing, with about 425 fliers active and 790 active women fliers. This base has been built and financed by the Baltimore Squadron with activities beginning last August and the first ship was housed in the hangar December 1. There are about 50 acres at this location. Lt. Baxter is airport manager and Miss Miriam Guyton is one of the instructors. The C. A. P. was taken over by the War Department on April 28, 1943.

There were about 600 spectators on hand for the exercises. Several rode horseback, some came on bicycles and many walked. The committee from the Chamber of Commerce assisting Lt. Simpson was composed of Scott S. Bair, and Carroll Crawford. The number of visiting planes; Hanover, 1; Taneytown, 6; Cumberland, 1; Frederick, 6; Warrentown, Va., 2; Calverton, Va., 1; York, Pa., 5, and Hagerstown, 5.

The station was in charge of Miss Anne Reifsnider, assisted by Mrs. Belle Fringer and the following Motor Corps members; Miss Elinor Ebaugh, Elizabeth Hampton, Alma Junior, Betty Fringer, Marie Fox, Pauline Magin, Mildred Mitten, Ethel Loy, Opal Foracappo, Mary O'Dell, Emma Crumpacker, Betty Smith Eckenrode, Marie Parker, Virginia Gehr, Mary Ditman, Betty Budell, Beatrice Ensor, Dorothy Perry, Betty Lovell, Rose Todd, Henrietta Essom, Ruth Rickens, and Ruth Robertson."

Mayor Mathias's wish that the new airport would "be a valuable asset to the commercial life of a better tomorrow" proved true.

Photo caption: Prior to the dedication of the Westminster Airport on June 5-6, 1943, visiting aviators, such as this 1930s era biplane pilot, often landed in fields. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.