

Naval Auxiliary Air Station

Chase Field

Hangar 1015

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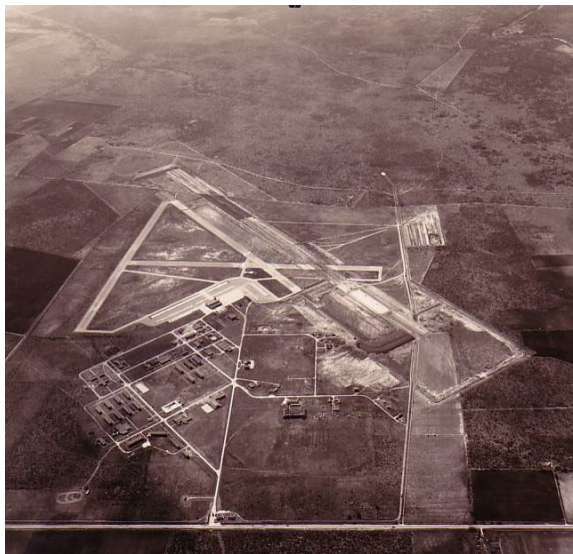


Photo of NAAS Chase Field, 1953. (NAVFAC Archives, Port Hueneme, CA)



Hangar 1015 in 1992. (Daniel Hardy)

Hangar 1015 Contribution to the War

Hangar 1015 was one of the first buildings completed at NAAS Chase Field when it was commissioned in 1943. It was the central defining element of the naval auxiliary air station built as part of the massive nationwide military construction program launched during World War II. Hangar 1015, exemplifies the primary mission of the base to train Navy pilots.

The control tower for the air station originally was attached to Hangar 1015, but was removed in 1957 when a new and larger one was built at another location. With the introduction of larger, more advanced aircraft, the hangar proved inadequate, and the Navy erected more hangars on the base.

Between 1971 and 1992 Hangar 1015 was the headquarters of Training Wing 3, an advanced jet training organization. The Training Wing employed approximately 2,500 military and civilian personnel and graduated approximately 200 pilots each year, about one-fourth of all Navy jet pilots.

Naval Air Auxiliary Station Chase Field

Originally planned as a municipal airport, Chase Field was commissioned as a Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) to Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi in 1943 and trained Navy pilots until 1946. NAAS Chase Field was named for the late LCDR Nathan Brown Chase, who died during a training mission in the Pacific.

Initially, the mission of Chase Field was flight training. Squadron 13-C was homeported at Chase Field for instrument training. As the needs of the Navy changed, the mission was changed to preoperational flight training in January 1944. In addition, more than 200 Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) were stationed at Chase Field during the war, arriving in August 1943. Much like other bases at the time, their duties included operating Link Trainers and maintaining aircraft.

NAAS Chase Field was deactivated in 1947 and was unused until being recommissioned in 1954 to serve as a jet training facility. In 1954, its status elevated to an advanced jet training station. It was designed as the Navy's first swept-wing training center in 1957. It was upgraded in 1968 to a full naval air station producing more than one-fourth of the Navy's total pilot output during the Vietnam War, which adds to the installation's legacy.

In 1943, the City of Beeville offered to lease the Navy the 456-acre parcel for \$1.



Article in the installation's newsletter, "Air Call," celebrating Chase Fields first birthday, 1944. (Corpus Christi, Public Affairs Office)

Training at Chase Field

Instrument training was one of the focuses at Chase Field during WWII which included ground training like the training in the Link trainers. The cadets also completed training in the SNV, SNJ and SNB aircraft. These aircraft transitioned cadets from the N3N and N3S biplanes to mono-planes.

SNV, also known as the “Vultee Vibrator,” because of its shaking during some maneuvers, was developed for basic training. After the start of WWII, the US Navy ordered more than 10,000 SNV planes, making it one of the most important trainers.¹ LT Maurice Dubinsky (Ret) remembers that training in the SNV included “...formation flying and a little instrument flying under a hood and practiced kind of carrier landings on a field not a ship.”²

The SNJ Texan was used for advanced training and as an introduction to carrier landing. They were also used for gunnery and instrument training.³ LTJG William Good (Ret) reflects on the SNJ saying, “if you could fly that, you could fly any single engine that anybody could offer you to fly.”⁴

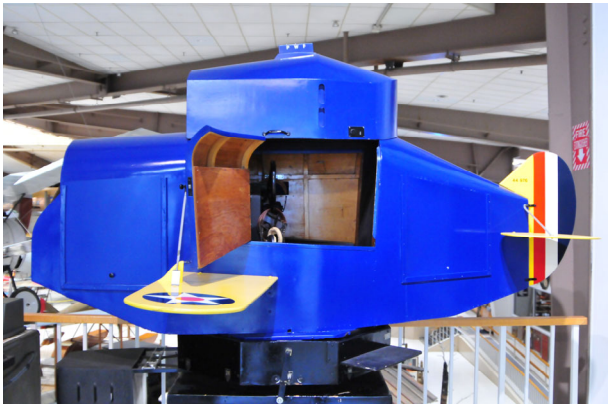


NAS Chase Field cadet regiment standing in front of the SNV, SNJ and SNB planes, circa 1844 (NAS Chase Field 1943-1993 Beeville, Texas Facebook Page)



A Dilbert cartoon used by the Navy to encourage proper flying. (Naval Aviation News Magazine, 15 JUL 1943)

The fear of being dismissed, known as “washing out,” from the aviation program was constantly in the cadets’ minds. Eldon Hill recalls while flying with a student at Chase Field, the student misunderstood [his] instructions and crash landed with wheels still up. Both men were unhurt, but the plane was considerably damaged. Aware that his student would most likely wash out as a result of the accident, Hill assumed sole responsibility. He considered the penalty too severe for a “good cadet, a good pilot, [who] had a lot of promise...so I took the blame and fooled everybody except my commanding officer.”⁵



Link trainer, like one used at NAAS Chase Field, on display at the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. (Jared Galloway)

History of the Link Trainer

In 1929, Edwin Albert Link developed an aviation simulator to train pilots how to fly by instrument controls at night or in bad weather conditions. The 25-year-old private pilot invented the simulator on the basis of the skills he had learned working at his father’s business, the Link Piano and Organ Company in Binghamton, New York. Known as “The Pilot Maker,” the simulator resembled a small airplane with short wings. The cockpit contained a rudder stick and working dials. Link’s knowledge of bellows used on pump organs enabled the simulator to move according to the direction of the rudder stick and provide the sense of being “in flight.” During WWII, the “Link Trainer” --- often called the “Blue Box” for its distinctive color --- was used extensively by the Navy and Army aviation services. By the end of the war, Links had produced over 10,000 “Blue Boxes” that trained over 500,000 men and women involved in flight, gunnery, and navigation operations.



During Link Training, a desk with a “spider” was connected to the trainer to track the progress of the cadet. Displayed at the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. (Jared Galloway)

1. “Vultee SNV-2/BT-13 Valiant.” Cavanaugh Flight Museum. cavflight.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=119. Accessed 10 Nov 2021.

2. Dubinsky, Maurice. Interview by Gary Swanson. Veterans History Project, 6 Nov 2019, memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.9256. Accessed 9 Sep 2021.

3. Kula, Ken. “U.S. Navy Training Aircraft from World War II to Today, Part 1.” 7 Nov 2020, classicwarbirds.net/u-s-navy-training-aircraft-from-world-war-ii-to-today-part-1. Accessed 15 Nov 2021.

4. Good, William. Interview by Richard Patterson. Veterans History Project, 6 Nov 2019, memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.50844

5. Delaney, Norman C, et al. “An Oral History of the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi During World War II.” Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program, 1995.

Special Thanks to Paul Freeman

The Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Southeast expresses its sincere thanks to Paul Freeman who contributed significantly to creating a historical overview of the former NAS Chase Field. Paul, an aerospace engineer and private pilot, created the website "Abandoned & Little-Known Airfields," www.airfields-freeman.com, in 2000. Since its inception, Paul has captured the photographic and narrative history of over 2,500 former airfields in all 50 states. As Paul comments, "Some people tell me that by seeing via my website how many airfields we've lost, it motivates them to support the airfields we still have. That has become my site's most important motivation."

For more information on the use of Naval Auxiliary Air Station, later Naval Air Station, Chase Field after WWII please visit Paul Freeman's "Abandoned & Little-Known Airfields (not Navy affiliated)" at www.airfields-freeman.com/TX/Airfields_TX_Corpus_NW.htm. The site includes many great pictures and interviews with those stationed at the Naval Air Station.



Paul Freeman photographed from a PT-17 Stearman
