A Look Back...

AFMC 30TH ANNIVERSARY LOOK BACK – PART ONE

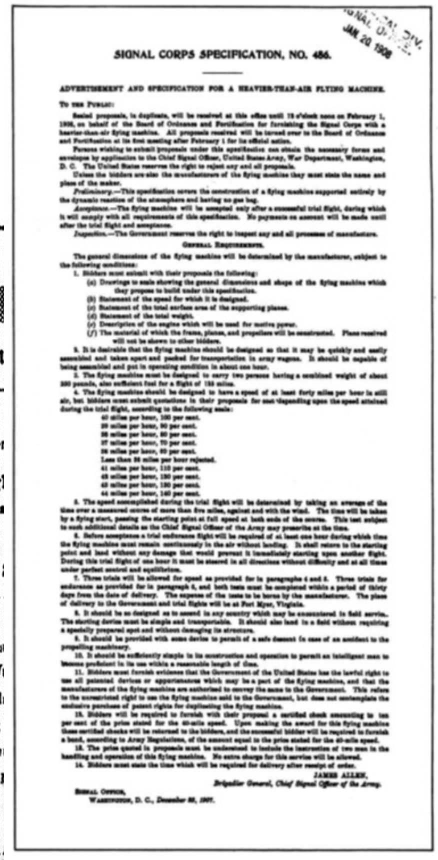
> "Air Force Materiel Command was established on 1 July 1992, and is both an old and new command, which is why it is unique and why its story is interesting. It is an old command—certainly one of the oldest in the Air Force—because its roots go back to the earliest days of U.S. military aviation and because its heritage belongs to two venerable predecessors, the Air Force Logistics Command and the Air Force Systems Command…"
>
> Gen Ronald W. Yates, AFMC Commander, 1992

At just 30 years old, Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) has a long and distinguished heritage. On 10 January 1991, Secretary of the Air Force Donald B. Rice announced the inactivation of AFSC and AFLC, and the activation of AFMC at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, to occur on 1 July 1992. This announcement signified the beginning of a complete overhaul of the Air Force structure to meet the demands of a new environment marked by the termination of the Cold War and the existence of a large federal deficit. Throughout the years one thing has remained, we who are in the Command and the Command itself are connected to the past through common threads. There are four major threads found in the Command; Research, Testing, Acquisition and Sustainment. We support these four threads through our core mission areas of Nuclear Systems Management, Discovery & Development, Test & Evaluation, Life Cycle Management, Sustainment & Logistics and Installation & Mission Support.

AFMC emblem in OCP conversion colors and montage of foundational command heritage emblems.

BY: JACK WAID
HQ AFMC HISTORY OFFICE

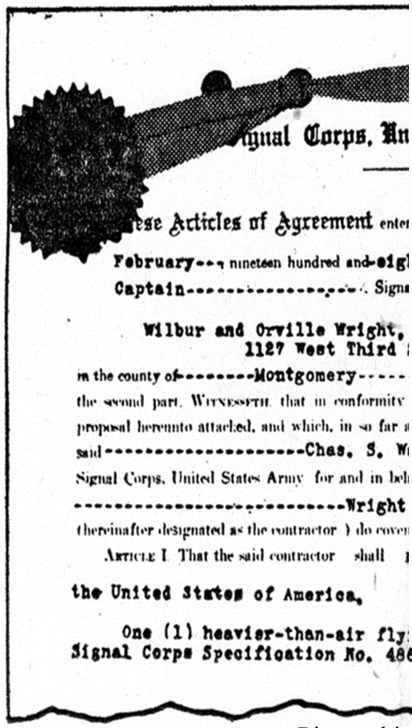
How it began:


SIGNAL CORPS SPECIFICATION, NO. 486.

ADVERTISEMENT AND SPECIFICATION FOR A HEAVIER-THAN-AIR FLYING MACHINE.

Military aviation in the United States developed slowly following the Wright brothers' first powered flight in 1903. Four years later, the U.S. Army established an Aeronautical Division within its Signal Corps.

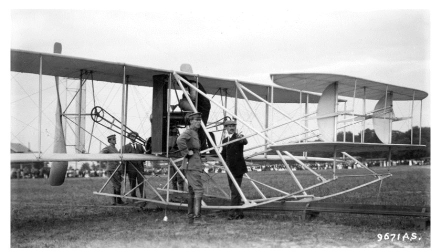
Following this purchase, between 1908-1909, the Signal Corps completed multiple tests with aircraft No. 1 at Ft Meyer, Virginia. Also during this period the Wright Company incorporated and manufactured their first Wright Company aircraft in 1910. Over time, the various military facilities in Dayton hosted organizations responsible for procurement, supply, engineering and maintenance of Army aviation. While tradition dictated drawing pilots from the ranks of commissioned officers, there were enlisted pilots for a time. The Army aviation arm soon realized the pressing need for a well-trained enlisted force to perform duties in supply, construction and to serve specialized functions in emerging aviation related fields such as photo reconnaissance and aerial communication.


...gnal Corps, Un...

...ese Articles of Agreement enter...
February-- nineteen hundred and eig...
Captain------------------ Signa...
Wilbur and Orville Wright, ...
1127 West Third ...
in the county of--------Montgomery-----
the second part, Witnesseth, that in conformity ...
proposal hereunto attached, and which, in so far a...
said--------------------Chas. S. Wa...
Signal Corps, United States Army for and in beh...
---------------------------Wright ...
(hereinafter designated as the contractor) do coven...
Article I. That the said contractor shall ...
the United States of America,
One (1) heavier-than-air fly...
Signal Corps Specification No. 486, dated December 23, 1907.

Pictured is the first contract for a military aircraft.


The Wright Company , commercial aviation business.


Aircraft No. 1 trials taking place at Ft Meyer.


Inside The Wright Company manufacturing plant.

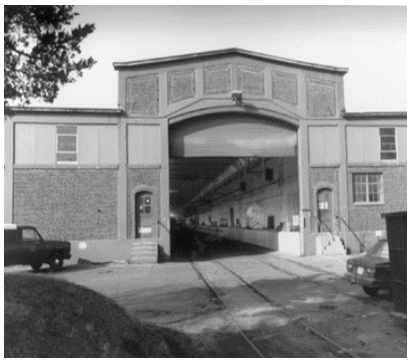

Enlisted personnel display early aerial cameras.

As the United States slowly gravitated toward involvement in World War I, our earliest foundational units activated. The first was the Airplane Engineering Division located about five miles west of today's Wright-Patterson, AFB's, Area B, at McCook Field in 1917. McCook Field started as a World War I-era experimental engineering facility. Standing up on 4 January 1918 was the Fairfield Aviation General Supply Depot at Wilber Wright Field (or todays Wright-Patterson's Area A). These are the foundations of Air Force acquisition, logistics and sustainment. Along with McCook Field, Wilbur Wright Field and Fairfield Aviation General Supply Depot, World War I spawned multiple installations in the Dayton Area and elsewhere. The US Army activated Kelly Field in Texas, Langley Field in Virginia, Middletown General Supply Depot in Pennsylvania, Mitchell Field in New York, Engine and Repair Depot in Alabama. These organizations performed multiple missions such as aviation and general supply, training in aviation, flight mechanics, testing, aerial photography and depot maintenance to name a few.

Civilian guards working at the main entrance to McCook Field.

US Army, Engineering Division official emblem

McCook Field main hangar.



Building 1 with its covered trainway is the oldest military building at Wright-Patterson AFB.

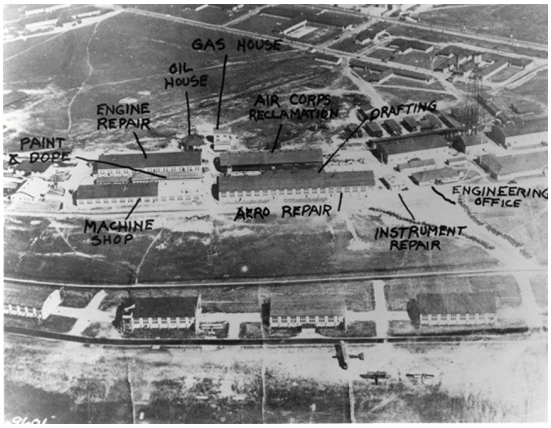
McCook Field was the home of the Army Air Service's Engineering Division. As such, it was a major center of aeronautical research and innovation in virtually every area. Here, static tests on aircraft occurred, captured aircraft went through the reverse engineering process, and engineers developed crew safety items as well as aircraft. Lieutenant Harold Harris of McCook Field became the first American aviator saved by a parachute.

The Airplane Engineering Division and Fairfield Aviation General Supply Depot inactivated on 14 October 1926 and its functions combined to form the Air Corps Materiel

Wright Field main gate.

Wright Field Insignia for aircraft and uniforms. The "Spearhead" insignia is believed to have been designed by Major (later General Hugh Knerr). Note Jimmy Dolittle with this insignia on his flight jacket.

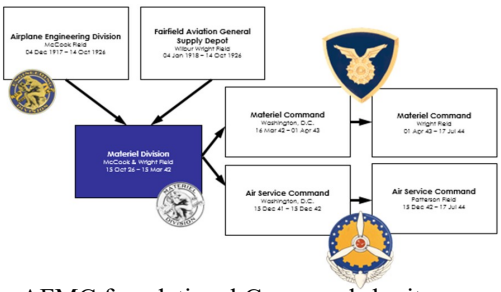
Division. This Division, at the time, was the largest branch of the Air Corps and maintained responsibility for all aircraft and equipment research, development, procurement, maintenance, supply and flight test.



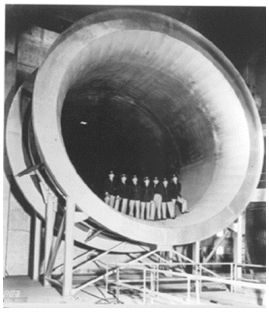
Wilbur Wright Field depot processing.

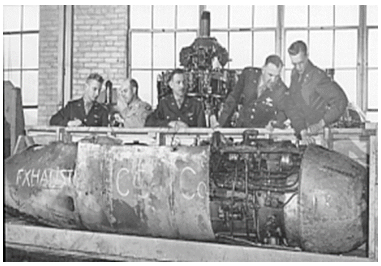
World War II:

By 1939, the Air Corps remained a small, ill-equipped and outdated force compared to Germany, the leading air power in Europe. During this time, the Army constructed new aviation installations including Brookley Field, Alabama, Hill Field, Ogden Air Depot, McClellan Field, California, and the Sacramento Air Depot. Research, development, acquisition, test, sustainment and logistics functions divided during World War II into Air Materiel Command (AMC); however, they subsequently reunited for several years during the late 1940s (31 August 1944) under the Air Technical Service Command (ATSC) headquartered at Patterson Field, Ohio.



AFMC foundational Commands heritage timeline.


Early wind tunnel for testing.

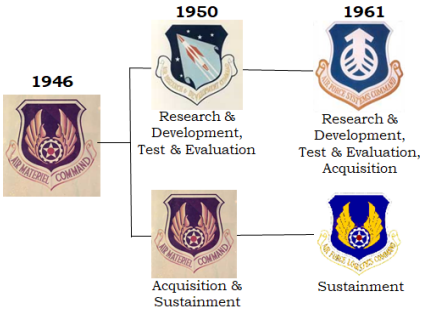

Military scientist reverse engineer an enemy aircraft.

By 1944, Patterson Field continued primarily as a logistics installation. Major activities included supply operations and engine maintenance along with overhaul. Patterson field also trained personnel in maintenance and repair and trained newly recruited nurses. Wright Field likewise ramped up and continued its prewar role in research and testing, as well as procurement of aircraft and weapons. Wright Field personnel also evaluated captured German and Japanese aircraft and technologies. Flight Test personnel assigned to Wright Field included Chuck Yeager, who came to Wright Field in 1945 and performed his first flight test missions there. Also notable was Ann Baumgartner, who joined the Fighter Test Section at Wright Field in 1944.


Women working a maintenance line at Wright Field during WWII.


Ann Baumgartner

October 1944, she flew the YP-59A, becoming the first woman to pilot a turbojet-powered aircraft.



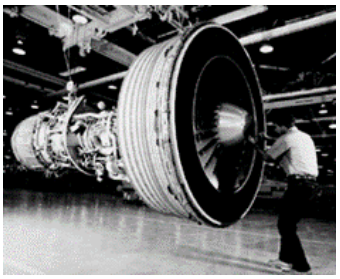
AFMC foundational Commands heritage timeline.

As World War II ended and the Cold War heated up, our foundational commands performed the same missions as before, but on a different scale and with different emphasis. In the closing years of World War II, flight test activities for new aircraft were already moving west to Muroc Army Air Field, now Edwards AFB and the Test Pilot School, started at Wright Field during the War, likewise transferred to Edwards AFB. On the logistics side, the end of World War II brought about a drawdown. Fairfield Air Depot inactivated in 1946 and its functions transferred to the Air Materiel Areas (known today as Air Logistics Centers).


Grumman X-29A Experimental Aircraft

A New Service, a New Command:

The Army Air Forces created Air Materiel Command (AMC) in March 1946 with headquarters at Wright Field. The establishment of a separate Air Force in 1947 and with the multiplying sophistication of Air Force hardware, in January 1950, the new service created the Air Research and Development Command (ARDC). This command, headquartered at Andrews AFB, dedicated itself to research and development; AMC's mission continued to focus on sustaining the current fleets logistics.


Aircraft engine testing.

As the US drifted deeper into a Cold War AMC's workload continued to increase. Leaders placed greater emphasis on research and development (R&D) and the acquisition and development of jet aircraft. By the direction by the CSAF, AMC also had the responsibility of creating a brand new supply system separate from the Army's. The consolidation of acquisition, logistics and their related components did not last long.


EC-135E, a mobile tracking and telemetry platform to support the Apollo space program and other unmanned space flight operations.

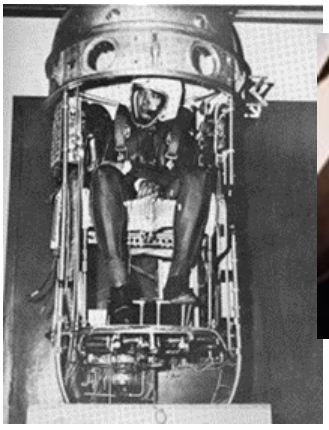
Lockheed C-141A

Meanwhile the creation of ARDC in January 1950, allowed the Air Force to accelerate the development of new systems—capabilities badly needed in the face of several growing Cold War threats. The effort to develop an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) prompted the Air Force to develop more effective acquisition processes. Brigadier General Bernard A. Schriever became the ICBM Project Chief and proved the value of concurrent development by fielding the Atlas missile in 1959, America's first ICBM. As ICBMs moved forward, the "space race," grew in complexity.

Early anti-gravity experiment.

Many individuals have contributed to our understanding of these complexities. They directly aided in accomplishments within the scientific study of space and the space race. One of these individuals was Captain Joseph W. Kittinger who, in 1960, made highest jump in the world (at the time). This and similar simulated bailouts help our understanding of high altitude aircraft and spacecraft bailouts. Another interesting character involved in the space race, among many, was Airman Second Class (A2C) Alton Yates who went on to become a Lieutenant Colonel, worked for Colonel John P. Stapp on the sled track and other space race projects. Lest we forget, we had our furry friends such as Ham and Enos supporting the space effort.

A2C Alton Yates



Major David Simons seated in a Project Manhigh Gondola.

Captain Joseph Kittinger steps from the balloon-supported Excelsior Gondola in 1960, at an altitude of 102,800 feet.

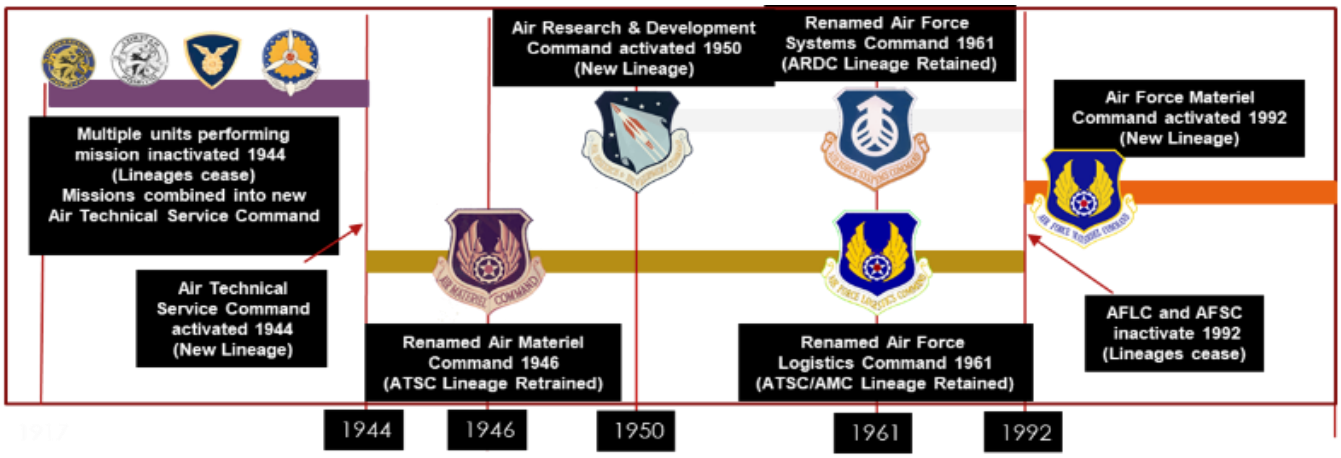
HAM the first space chimpanzee.

Another space chimpanzee named Enos with his support staff.

Colonel John P. Stapp during sled track experiments.

During the space race, the Air Force continue to streamline its processes and organization, and on 1 April 1961, it inactivated ARDC and activated Air Force Systems Command (AFSC). AFSC assumed ARDC's R&D, weapons systems acquisition and test responsibilities, as well as AMC's acquisition and procurement missions. At the same time, the Air Force redesignated AMC as Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC) which retained responsibility for maintenance and supply management. Under the new arrangement, the System Program Office (SPO) (formerly WSPO) remained responsible for program management well into the production phase before shifting to one of AFLC's logistics centers through formal program management responsibility transfer (PMRT). These organizational adjustments remained throughout the Cold War until 1992.

Emblems of Air Force Systems and Air Force Logistics Commands.



Lineage Key (separate lineages)

- Multiple Units / Multiple Lineages (1917 – 1944)
- Air Force Logistics Command Lineage (1944 – 1992)
- Air Force Systems Command Lineage (1950 – 1992)
- Air Force Materiel Command Lineage (1992 -)

AFMC foundational Commands heritage timeline from 1917 to AFMC activation in 1992.

Units active prior to 1992 are *functional* predecessors of AFMC (AFMC performs the same missions), but are not lineage predecessors. AFMC may not claim their honors and awards.

AFMC use of the emblem first approved for Air Materiel Command, *later* Air Force Logistics Command is by exception to policy, since the lineages of the two commands are separate.

AFMC History & Heritage Program

HQ AFMC/HO

4225 Logistics Ave., Room S133 • Wright-Patterson AFB 45433-5006 • DSN: 713-1797 • Comm: (937) 713-1797

For inquiries, contact: R. Ray Ortensie • For heritage and exhibit questions, contact: Jack Waid

E-mail: *HQAFMC.HO@us.af.mil*