

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

(Editor's Note: This is a continuation of last week's column on the air fields of Tuscaloosa.)

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After acquiring the Van de Graaff Field property the City of Tuscaloosa was confronted with the necessity of proper development of its airport.

One of the most urgent adjuncts needed was a hanger for the housing, storing and repairing of airplanes together with an office, lobby and other pertinent facilities.

The existent large hanger was obtained through a Government PWA grant augmented by a loan of necessary additional funds from the University of Alabama. Dr. John M. Gallalee supervised the construction of the hanger. The University was granted certain priority rights in the use of the airport including the use of the landing field and the right to construct hanger, laboratory and classroom buildings in a designated area.

In 1939, with World War II already underway in Europe our Government awoke to the face of the paucity of airplane pilots in this country. A Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) was inaugurated to provide a backlog of pilots and

when if needed. It was planned to have no connection with our military establishments and to be handled (with a few minor exceptions) through accredited colleges and universities.

Thirteen Universities were selected in 1939 to run a trial program. The University of Alabama was one of the 13 chosen. In each case the school was to give the ground school portions of the training while a licensed local commercial flying school would give the actual flight training. Each school was allotted a quota of 25 students.

Professor Leslie A. Walker of the U. of A. faculty was chosen as the Director for the local project.

For the flight training an experienced and first rate flying school. Parks Air College of St. Louis, Mo. was given a lease on Van de Graaff Field for \$1.00 a year and a contract to teach the 25 selected students to fly up to the proficiency of obtaining a private pilot's license issued by the Civil Aeronautic Authority.

It is unique that the U. of A. CPTP was the only one of the 13 trial programs that completed its training which the scheduled time and qualified all 25 students for their pilot's license.

It was also logical that Prof. Walker was called to Washington to administer the next college program.

As a colateral duty to my job as Prof. of Electrical Engineering I was made Director of the CPTP at the University of Alabama.

The 1940 CPTP was expanded to 450 colleges and universities. The quota of students for each school was limited to 50.

Due to the excellent record set in 1939 in addition to our regular quota of 50 students we accepted the offer to:

- Pioneer an advance course to include acrobatics.

- Pioneer the inclusion of coeds in the course.

- Pioneer a non college course to be given in Montgomery (Competant instructors were recruited at Maxwell Field.)

- Accepted an additional class of 35 students from a school that defaulted.

Many interesting stories could be told about some of the graduates of CPTP. After Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941 many of these graduates went

into military flying in the Army, Navy, Marine and Air Corps.

While attending an Alabama Press Association meeting last November in Colorado Springs, Col., we were entertained by Lt. General T.K. McGehee at NORAD and ADC. After the banquet Major General William S. Harrell told me that he remembered me as the Director of CPTP in 1940 who got him interested in flying by accepting him in the CPTP course. He went into the U.S. Air Force and was still on active flight duty.

All five coeds completed the course with "flying colors." Miss Sue Clarkson, Now Mrs. Reese Phifer of Tuscaloosa kept up her flying since her husband was a military pilot and they owned their own plane. Miss Nancy Batson continued her flying after her CPTP course, owned her own plane after graduation. She joined the WAFTS and delivered B-24 and B-26 Bombers from the factory to their assigned air fields during World War II.

(Editor's Note: To be continued.)