

# 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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In 1940 Parks Air College contracted to train Army Air Force Cadets through their primary flying course. Later groups of English and French cadets were added for training for their respective countries. Naturally this led to congestion at Van de Graaff Field since the CPTP training planes were light piper cubs while the Army primary trainers were larger and faster Stearman biplanes. Since the Army pay was considerably more remunerative than the CPTP pay the CPT Program became the "red-headed step-child" at the Van de Graaff Field.

The conflict was finally cleared by the Parks Air College opening up a

new landing field at or near the Spiller place on the Greensboro highway (No. 69). Although this field had few facilities since it met the CAA requirements the University was glad to shift to the new field in the interest of safety. The new field was named Foster Field in honor of Richard Clark Foster, Pres. U. of A. after World War II activities at the Van de Graaff field slowed down considerably. Parks Air College moved back to St. Louis in about 1945.

J.B. Carl who operated the drug store in the Alston Building undertook the management of the Van de Graaff airport. In about 1950 in

conjunction with R. (Bob) A. Cardinal J.B. Carl organized the Dixie Air, Inc. and this firm has operated the airport to date.

Up to about 1955 there was only a take off strip or runway that was paved. The City of Tuscaloosa realized that the activities at the airport were bound to increase so that an aviation committee which included Col. W. Van Brown, Air Force commandant at the U. of A., as chairman, Herman Burchfield, oil dealer, and others were appointed to serve the city in its aviation endeavors.

Many improvements at the airport are the result of this committee. Paved taxi ways have been added so that the main strip is used only for take-off and landing.

The most noteworthy recent improvements at Van de Graaff Field are the 6500 foot paved jet take-off

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and landing strip with the necessary taxing and loading aprons also paved, and the modern terminal building erected.

Another outstanding accomplishment of the aviation committee is that through their efforts the U.S. Air Force has inaugurated a program that gives students at the U. of A. who are enrolled in the Air Force ROTC a voluntary flight training course. Van de Graaff Field has the honor of having operated the first and now the largest college flight training course of the U.S. Air Force.

But "Old Tuscaloosa" is getting too up to date in its dealings. So for a real historical treatise of Van de Graaff Field I recommend attending the dedication exercises of the new terminal building and jet landing field to be held soon.