

Punta Gorda Army Air Field (PG AAF)

Fact Sheet and Timeline

7 May 2015

All Punta Gorda Army Air Field data came from the archived military files of the A.F. Historical Research Agency. Punta Gorda Army Air Field history is contained on microfilm reel #B2479.

5 May 1942

Internal Army Air Corps memorandum with the 225 acre lease in Charlotte County for the Punta Gorda Airport.

27 May 1942

Initial air field site survey rejected a site 2 miles south of Punta Gorda and a site 7 miles north of Punta Gorda was also rejected. A desirable site was selected 2 miles southeast of the city. (Note: The site 2 miles southeast would have placed the airfield at the intersection of present day Airport Road and Taylor Road). The final selected site (present location) was 3 miles southeast of the city).

Thursday, 1 October 1942

Punta Gorda Herald headline: "Army Air Field to be Built"
Cost of air field project announced at \$700,000

- Construction of the first building began on/about **19 October 1942** (source: p 66, article)
- Runways under survey began on/about **27 October 1942** (source: p 67, article)
- Runway construction and roadway equipment arrived on 4 November 1942 (source: p 68, article)
- Additional land purchases **12 November 1942** (source: p 69, article)
- Land clearing for runway construction work continued the week of **14 January 1943** (p72)

5 October 1942 (Completion Report for Punta Gorda Air Field – no date listed for report)

Punta Gorda Airfield, an Operational Training Unit Station (Medium Bombardment) was authorized October 5, 1942 by Directive A 6187.

16 October 1942

The officer in charge of the construction project, Captain Henry J. Tebow, C. E. (civil engineer) arrived at Punta Gorda late Friday, 16 October 1942. The Chief Clerk, Mr. Coy C. Turner detached from Drew Field arrived October 17, 1942 and an Engineer Office was opened that day in downtown store space, contributed by Capt. Johnson, one of the County Commissioners. Later, decision was made to maintain the office in downtown Punta Gorda, and a rental agreement was made for the property.

17 February 1943 - First airplane to land at PG AAF (while under construction) was a mistake.

- Lt H. L. Harvey (a Texan) of the 13th fighter squadron at Page Field, Fort Myers landed his P-39 fighter on the barely graded No. 3 (northerly) runway at 9:00 pm on **17 February 1943**. He was disoriented during a night training flight and came down to land on what he thought was a concrete roadway. He landed safely and only sustained a small hole in one wing where it

struck a wood state when he landed. He spent the night at the Princess Hotel. He took off the next morning and flew back to Fort Myers.

23 June 1943 (Official Memo – Headquarters of the Army Air Forces, Washington)

The Army Air Forces Commanding General authorized the Chief of Engineers to proceed with the construction of facilities (tent camp and a limited amount of theater of operations type construction for maintenance purposes).

On/about **19 August 1943** – A B-17 Flying Fortress was damaged upon landing at the PG AAF. The left main landing gear wheel gave way which allowed the propellers to hit the ground and were bent. The B-17 was from Hendricks Field, Sebring. The aircraft was repaired and departed PG on **25 August 1943**.

Establishment

Headquarters Third Air Force, Tampa, Florida

General Order Number 331, **4 September 1943**

Punta Gorda Army Air Field was designated as a sub-base of Sarasota Army Air Field.

- **14 November 1943**- First Army personnel (10) arrived Sunday evening
- Air Base building job is completed, announced on **23 December 1943** (PG Herald article - *hard to read*)
- Base theater was activated 23 Dec 1943

Air Base Activated

Headquarters Punta Gorda Army Air Field, Punta Gorda, Florida

General Order Number 2, **11 December 1943**

Punta Gorda Army Airfield is organized by order of Lieutenant Colonel Jernigan.

15 December 1943 (Message traffic from HQ Third AF, Tampa, Fla to CG AAF, Washington DC)
Control tower at Punta Gorda Army Air Field in operation from 0800 to 2000 Eastern War Time Daily, CMA received on 4495 Kilocycles, CMA transmits on 4357.5 Kilocycles and on Channel Baker very high frequency. Attention Air Communication Officer. Runway Marker lights on all runways. No repeat no flood lights. No repeat no fuel available for transient aircraft. Above information is quoted for information and publication in weekly notices to airmen.

23 December 1943 – The PG AAF Theater was activated 23 December 1943. The program consisted of five shows per week with ten performances. The staff consisted of Chief Projectionist, Assistant Manager, Cashier, and Ticket Taker. On the 30th of December 1944, orders were issued from Army Service Forces to conserve film and thus to reduce the number of performances. New Years Day 1945 marked the beginning of five shows per week with approximately seven performances, attendance permitting. The mission of the PG AAF Theater is in accordance with Special Services functions, namely, the promotion of higher morale. This theater has been very fortunate being on the same circuit as Fort Benning and other large posts. Pictures are show here approximately thirty days after release.

31 December 1943 - Primary Mission and Objective

The primary mission of the Base Detachment is servicing the operation of the Base for the tactical units. The objective is the rendering of all possible assistance to the tactical units in order that they may fulfill their primary mission that of training pilots for combat duty overseas.

1 January 1944 (Squadron Orders Number 1)

Squadron O, 344th AAF Base Unit (CCTS F) Punta Gorda Army Air Field
43 officers named are appointed principal duties (initial cadre)

10 January 1944 - The Punta Gorda AAF Post Exchange was activated by Sarasota Army Air Field Exchange approximately 10 January 1944. The primary mission of an army exchange is to contribute to activities which will foster and increase the physical and spiritual welfare of military personnel. The PG AAF branch has tried in all sincerity to keep the men happy. Beer and cigarettes have been plentiful, which are the main benefits which the majority of enlisted men want. Personal checks are cashed to a maximum sum of \$50.00. Government checks and money orders have no set sum.

14 January 1944 - First U.S.O. show at PG AAF was shown Friday.

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29 January 1944 - The Air Field's Athletic Program was inaugurated by Max Baer, former world's heavyweight champion, who lectured on athletic proficiency at the base theater after eating in the mess hall.

31 January 1944 – Strength of Organization

On 1 January 1944 the strength of the Base Detachment was as follows, five (5) Field Officers and Captains, Two (2) First Lieutenants, Four (4) Second Lieutenants, and one Hundred and Eleven (111) Enlisted Men – assigned. On 31 January 1944 there were six (6) Field Officers and Captains, Two (2) First Lieutenants, Seven (7) Second Lieutenants, and One Hundred and Forty Two (142) Enlisted Men. There was a net increase of the (1) Captain, Three (3) Second Lieutenants, and Thirty One (31) Enlisted Men from 1 January 1944 to 31 January 1944.

11 February 1944, base was visited by Major General Westside T. Larson.

17 February 1944 (Letter from HQ Sarasota AAF to CG Fourth Service Command, Atlanta Georgia)
Request to initiate a lease for occupancy a portion of the City Pier, Punta Gorda for use as a crash boat dock for the Punta Gorda Army Air Field.

Headquarters Third Air Force, Tampa, Florida
General Order Number 50, **22 February 1944**

Punta Gorda Army Air Field was reassigned as a sub-base of Venice Army Air Field, Venice Florida effective **1 March 1944**.

Headquarters Venice Army Air Field, Venice Florida

General Order Number 3, **1 March 1944**

Colonel V.B. Dixon assumed command of the PG AAF.

9 March 1944 - Death

Flight Officer Edward B. Harrison, a trainee officer pilot, crashed after engine trouble had developed on a demolition bombing mission, on 9 March 1944. The accident was attributed to material failure and constituted the first fatality on this base.

10 March 1944, base was visited by Brigadier General Adlai H. Gilkeson.

Official Dedication

On **19 March 1944** at 2:30 o'clock P.M. this field was officially dedicated. United States Senator, Claude Pepper (D-FL) and Congressman Hardin Peterson (D-FL), were introduced by Major Forrest H. Munger, the former Base Commander. The flying schedule was not interrupted and except for the fact that the visitors were barred from the line itself, the entire field was thrown open for inspection, including a P-40 type aircraft next to which a ramp had been constructed for inspection by the civilians. All equipment of a confidential nature in this aircraft was blocked off and could not be seen.

- Air Base opening ceremony, 2:30 pm on Sunday, **19 March 1944**. Senator Claude Pepper (D-FL) was the guest speaker; Co-operation was the theme of his speech. Ceremony was open to the public. The air field was dedicated by Chaplain John A. Douglass to the "Unknown Soldier . . . that he shall not have died in vain." The Venice Air Field Band played during the ceremony.

Death – 31 March 1944 – Death

Captain Dorrance C. Zabriskie, crashed on a dive bombing mission and was instantly killed on 31 March 1944. His was the second fatal accident on this base. The cause of the crash is not known. Captain Zabriskie was Operations Officer on the staff of the 490th Fighter Squadron and presided over the Crash Investigation Board. His quiet unassuming attitude, his untiring efforts and vast technical knowledge, were of great aid to the members of the board. His untimely passing was a great loss, he is genuinely mourned by all who knew him.

7 April 1944 (Sarasota Herald-Tribune newspaper article under column, Air Base News)

13 April 1944 (Memo)

Approximately 500 transient aircraft utilized Punta Gorda Army Air Field each month.

29 April 1944 - The U.S.O. Center opened at the Woman's Club on Saturday. It was under the direction of Mr. Elliot Paul of PG. Earl D. Farr, chairman of the county USO committee turned over a check for \$660, a two month's allotment to the local center.

30 April 1944 – History of Punta Gorda Army Air Field Report

- There have been built sixty-one (61) buildings with a total of 152,531 square feet floor space area. Two hundred sixty-eight (268) hutments, board floor and walls for pyramidal tents with area floor space of 91,952 square feet. Three and one half (3 ½) miles of bituminous roadway

have been built within the limits of the post. Three (3) miles of bituminous roadway outside of the post to feed the main gate.

- An East-West runway one hundred fifty (150) feet by five thousand (5,000) feet, a North-West-South-East runway one hundred fifty (150) feet by five thousand (5,000) feet have been constructed of asphalt.
- Taxiways totaling five thousand nine hundred thirty-nine (5,939) lineal feet, fifty (50) feet wide of asphalt concrete have been constructed.
- An apron has been constructed with an area of forty-nine thousand (49,000) square yards of concrete.
- The buildings on the post include two (2) six aircraft maintenance hangers each with a floor space area of 10,960 square feet, one synthetic training building and Quartermaster warehouse each with a floor space area of nine thousand six hundred (9,600) square feet, a Chapel-Theater Building with an area of four thousand two hundred eighty (4,280) square feet, an Officers' Club and Mess with a floor space area of four thousand four hundred forty (4,440) square feet.
- The Base Detachment – Was organized 11 December 1943. Present strength one hundred sixty-three (163) enlisted men and twenty-three (23) officers, three (3) of whom are attached; ten (10) enlisted men and two (2) officers with 27th Service Group Detachment on detached service from Venice Army Air Field.
- Units Stationed on this Base
 - 502nd Fighter Bomber Squadron date of arrival: 3 December 1943
 - 490th Fighter Squadron date of arrival: 4 December 1943
 - 27th Service Group Detachment date of arrival: 9 December 1943from Venice Army Air Field
Designation changed to 4500th Service Group Detachment, 1 April 1944

April 1944 - Aircraft on the Base – 103 total

66 P-40 N	1 UC-43
2 BC-1	3 P-40 N in repair
6 BT-13E	1 P-40 K in repair
6 RA-24B	7 P-40E school purposes
1 RA-25A	1 BT-13 survey
1 UC-64A	4 P-40 E survey
1 UC-78	1 BC-1 survey
1 L-2M	1 L-2A survey

- Since **30 April 1944** there had been seven U.S.O. shows presented at PG AAF

1 May 1944 – Activation of the Replacement Training Unit

Designated as Sub-Section, 337th Fighter Group, Headquarters at Sarasota Army Air Field, Sarasota, Florida, in December, 1943, the Punta Gorda Replacement Training Unit (F) was activated 1 May 1944, pursuant to authority of General Order No. 126, Headquarters, Third Air Force, dated 24 April, 1944. By authority of the same General Order, Sections "T" and "O" were designated to carry on the functions of the 490th Fighter Squadron and the 502nd Fighter-Bomber Squadron of the 337th Fighter Group, Sub-Section, respectively. Personnel assigned to the original Squadrons were transferred to

the newly activated Sections by authority of General Order No. 126, Headquarters, Third Air Force, dated 24 April, 1944.

- **11 May 1944** a dinner dance was held at the Eagle's Nest in honor of the second graduating class of trainee pilots. The affair was well attended and a good time was had by all
- **16 May 1944** – second class of trainee pilots graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field
- **16 May 1944** – fourth class of trainee pilots arrived for training

26 May 1944 - Death

On 26 May 1944, 2d Lt Harris L. Kimble was killed while on a routine flight. He was flying a P-40N type aircraft. Lt Kimble resided at 3001 Hoyt Ave, Everett, Washington, and was survived by his mother, Mrs. Margaret Kimble of the same address. Lt Kimble was mourned by all of the men of his squadron and all on this Base who knew him. His death was a loss to the Air Forces and the Army.

A record of fifty-seven days without an accident was marred by the fatal accident of 2nd Lt. Harris L. Kimble on 26 May 1944. Lt. Kimble was returning from an aerial gunnery mission and was approximately six miles from the field when his engine burst in flames. His flight leader ordered him to abandon his ship. He jumped and fell to the ground without making use of his parachute. It is believed he struck the tail surface as he left the plane. Lt. Kimble's body was found 30 May 1944 after a four day search.

- **16 June 1944** – third class of trainee pilots graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field
- **16 June 1944** – fifth class of trainee pilots arrived for training
- **15 July 1944** opening celebration and dedication of the NCO Club in the City of Punta Gorda
- **20 July 1944** – fourth class of trainee pilots graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field
- **20 July 1944** – sixth class of trainee pilots arrived
- **Summer of 1944 (July)** - Although the Charlotte Harbor Hotel is closed for the summer the facilities of the pool and the golf course have been made available by the management to military personnel assigned to the Base. Use of the Swimming pool in the hot summer months comes as a welcome relief to the trainee pilots as part of their physical training program, as well as to permanent personnel.

1 August 1944 - Punta Gorda Army Air Field hosted an open house

3 August 1944 – Punta Gorda Herald article

Review at Army Air field Here is Impressive

Hundreds See Men Parade, Planes Fly, and Inspect Some Planes

As fighter aircraft in perfect formation roared overhead, hundreds of Punta Gorda army air field soldiers marched in review before high ranking officers and an audience of more than 500 Charlotte county citizens Tuesday morning in ceremonies marking the 37th anniversary of the army air forces and the 35th anniversary of the first purchase of aircraft for military purposes. The marching soldiers were reviewed by Brig. Gen. Charles H. Danforth, Lt. Col. Fred G. Hook, jr., commanding officer, and Lt. Col. Horace A. Hanes, deputy commander, of the replacement training center, and Major John K. Coughlan, base commander. In was a part of a nation-wide observance in which the air forces, most powerful on earth, showed the people of America the remarkable growth accomplished in this

branch of the armed forces in the 37 years of its existence. An outstanding feature of the review was a flying exhibition by Lt. Co. Fred G. Hook, jr., commanding officer of the fighter replacement training unit. Col. Hook's silver P-40 brought gasps of admiration from the big crowd as it twisted and turned and flashed in the sunlight. The Venice army air base band played during the review, which ended shortly after nine o'clock as the business of operating a busy air field was resumed. The concrete runway apron on which the review was held was quickly filled with aircraft, others took to the air from the nearby runways, and tow planes with targets flew off toward the west for aerial gunnery practice over the gulf. Hundreds of the visitors were escorted through unrestricted portions of the base during the morning. Chief attraction seemed to be the big B-24 Consolidated Liberator four-motored bomber, which shared attention with a Mitchell B-25, a P-40 fighter plane, a dive bomber, a liaison type plane, and an advanced trainer. There was also a display of various types of guns currently in use for various purposes in the air forces. Air Forces men photographed the entire ceremony.

7 August 1944 - Missing, presumed dead, Lt. Donald R. Smith, flying the return trip of the scheduled mail run from Drew Field, Tampa, to Punta Gorda, Florida, was reported overdue and is listed as missing. A sea-air rescue search was initiated. Radio appeals were broadcast from WINK Ft. Myers; WSPB Sarasota, WFLA Tampa; WSUN St. Petersburg. These broadcasts continued for a period of seven days. Information in the form of a factual statement and appear for any available reports was issued through the associated press to all dailies and weeklies on the Florida west coast area. Upon specific instructions issued by the Public Relations Section, Headquarters Third Air Force, permission was requested Headquarters Army Air Force, Public Relations Division, to make this newspaper and radio appeal.

- This request was granted and the appeals printed and broadcast as set forth above.

Tragedy cast its gloom over Unit Headquarters when, on 7 August 1944, the mail plane disappeared on the return trip from Drew Field, Tampa, Florida. Piloted by Lt. Donald R. Smith of Squadron "T", the BT-13B has not been found and despite the continued efforts of searching parties the loss of pilot and plane remains a mystery.

10 August 1944 - Punta Gorda Herald article

General Danforth speaks at Air Base

On Program in Series of Talks Sponsored by Major Coughlan, Base Commander

Brigadier General Charles H. Danforth, U.S.A., retired, was guest speaker at the Punta Gorda Air Base, Wednesday afternoon. General Danforth's subject, "Combat and the Obligations of Command" was included in a series of talks on military affairs sponsored by the base commander, Major John K. Coughlan. In the large audience which heard General Danforth, who was the first chief of air staff, were officers assigned to the replacement training unit (fighter) commanded by Lt. Col. Fred G. Hook, jr., and the commanding officers of the squadrons. General Danforth has a long record of service. He enlisted in 1898 and served in Cuba and the Philippines; at Mindanao and Joho, 1899 to 1905; and in Cuba again in 1906. He was with the American forces at Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1914. He was assigned to Kelly Field in 1918, and was at Langley Field, 1921-24; Selfridge Field, 1928-30; and Randolph Field, 1930-34.

14 August 1944 – Death

While on a routine high altitude gunnery mission, Lt Robert M. Day, flying a P-40N type aircraft, was killed in a mid-air collision with an aircraft piloted by Harold E. Hanson. Lt Hanson successfully bailed out, despite his injuries, and is rapidly recovering from the effects of the crash.

Lt Day was a supervisor of "A" Flight of Squadron "T", had been with the squadron since the 30th of September 1943, before Squadron "T" moved to Punta Gorda Army Air Field. He was a graduate of the Flight Training School of Yuma Army Air Field, Yuma, Arizona.

17 August 1944 – Punta Gorda Herald article

Punta Gordans Invited to Air Field Theater

Punta Gorda people are invited to the post theater at the army air field here, Friday, August 18, at 7:30 p.m. to see the film "For God and Country," Chaplain John Douglas announced yesterday. This film was produced by the government and shows much of the training and work of chaplains.

Originally the film was used for purpose of military orientation only. Recently, however, it has been released for showing to the general public, Chaplain Douglas said. A cordial invitation is extended by the Chaplain, especially to all church folks, and to parents with sons in service, no admission being charged on this occasion

7 September 1944 - Punta Gorda Herald article

Tear Gas Wafts Over City; Citizens Weep, School Disrupted

All Punta Gorda, and some surrounding territory, dissolved in tears about nine o'clock this morning, real, honest to goodness tears that welled from the eyes and trickled down the cheeks of all citizens. School was disrupted for some 30 minutes. A. S. Taylor and his high line crew of the Florida Power and Light Company, working on hot lines near here, had to suspend operations, and, in fact, everything in the city came to a standstill while the citizens had a good cry. Telephone calls were made in all directions, but it was the air field that provided the answer. Captain R. H. Rehm, base adjutants, said the field was having its monthly gas alert. The wind caught the fumes and scattered them all over everywhere. Out at the field, everyone had gas masks. Here there were none. This was the first time the tear gas, which results in temporary discomfort and does no injury to the eyes, has gone wild. Officers say it won't happen again.

30 September 1944

Pursuant to authority contained in General Order No. 7, Headquarters, Punta Gorda (CCTS F), Punta Gorda Army Air Field, Punta Gorda, Florida, dated 7 September 1944, Squadron "T" 344th AAF Base Unit, Replacement Training Unit (Fighter), was redesignated Squadron "T", Combat Crew Training Station (Fighter). Although the new designation will not affect personnel or change the training procedure, a complete reorganization will become effective 1 October, 1944. Commencing on that date the squadron will become training Section I under the Three-Director Plan required by Third Air Force Regulation No. 20-5. The entire Base will be a component of III Fighter Command which should eliminate much duplication of effort and also establish one channel of command.

The strength of the squadron on 1 September 1944, was sixty eight (68) officers and three hundred and seventy two (372) enlisted men. On 30 September, 1944 the officer personnel was reduced to sixty two (62), while the assigned enlisted personnel was increased to three hundred and seventy six (376).

The training program is progressing satisfactorily and the fifth class of trainee pilots will complete its requirements on Saturday, 7 October 1944. They will depart from Punta Gorda on Sunday, 8 October at which time the seventh class will arrive from Dale Mabry Replacement Depot. The outgoing class has been here for fifteen weeks and has completed more than the 120 flying hours required. They have likewise received more than the minimum number of hours of ground training outlined in III Fighter Command Memorandum No 50-50, dated 16 September, 1944.

1 October 1944 - reorganization

The biggest event of September, however, in the opinion of every member of the Squadron, has been the preparation for the reorganization of the field on 1 October 1944. Under the reorganization plan, Squadron "O" will be virtually disbanded as a unit, although all personnel will continue in approximately the same duties as they have in the past. Since these changes will end the squadron as a unit, this installment of the squadron history will be the last regular installment; however, there is much historical data and many photographs relating to Squadron "O" (Formerly the 308th Bombardment Squadron-L, then the 308th Bombardment Squadron-D, and thirdly the 502nd Fighter Bomber Squadron.), and the Historical Officer will arrange these materials as a final historical installment and submit them at some future date to be added to the installments already submitted.

As a final word to his last installment of the Squadron History, it might be added that every member of the old 308th Squadron, 502nd Squadron, and Squadron "O" regrets that the unit did not have the opportunity to fight as a group overseas; yet every man feels partly responsible for the aerial victories of those pilots who trained with the squadron, and the friendships built up in two years of training over the entire United States will be remembered for many years after the "duration and six" is over.

- **8 Oct 1944** – fifth class of trainee pilots graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field
- **8 Oct 1944** – Seventh class of trainee pilots arrived for training

Hurricane of October 1944

- **12 October** (Thursday) – a hurricane developed over the Caribbean Sea
- **17 October** (Tuesday) – PG AAF aircraft were evacuated (to airfields outside of the storm's projected path); the base was readied by striking all the tents. The base was nearly evacuated with only alert crews and military police to protect the property.
- A B-24 Liberator bomber from Buckingham Army Air Field was forced to land at PG AAF with engine trouble immediately following the evacuation of aircraft from the base. The base engineering officers sandbagged and tied the bomber down to ride out the storm. The aircraft was slightly damaged.
- Many military personnel and their dependants were quartered as an emergency measure in the Charlotte Harbor Hotel as the hotel was made available by owner, Floyd Alford. 315 enlisted men, 86 enlisted dependents and 44 officers' dependents were sheltered in the hotel. In addition, 274 military personnel, including trainees, enlisted men, and permanently assigned officers were quartered in town at the grammar school and high school buildings during the storm. The base medical officers set up first aid stations throughout Punta Gorda to handle emergencies. During the storm they provided aid to eight military and four civilians.

Military Police from the base assisted with patrols of downtown Punta Gorda during the storm.

- **19 October** (Thursday) – the hurricane made landfall approximately 40 miles from the PG AAF
- Base reported heavy rain and winds with gusts in excess of 160 mph that caused extensive damage to the local area and air field. Base damage estimates were estimated in excess of \$20,000.
- **21 October** (Saturday) – Evacuated aircraft returned to PG AAF

1944 Cuba–Florida hurricane (also known as the Pinar del Río Hurricane of 1944 and 1944 Havana Hurricane). The season’s third major hurricane developed over the Caribbean Sea on October 12. It intensified and struck Pinar del Rio, Cuba as a Category 4 hurricane (gusts exceeded 160 mph). The hurricane accelerated and made landfall near Sarasota on October 19. The hurricane diminished to a tropical storm off the Georgia east coast on October 20. The late-season October storm was eventually responsible for very heavy rains, a wide swath of destruction, and over 300 deaths, especially in rural areas of Cuba. (Source: Monthly Weather Review, “The North Atlantic Hurricane of October 13-21, 1944,” Weather Bureau, Wash. D.C., Dec. 1944).

26 October 1944 - Punta Gorda Herald

Lt. Bruce Oliphant Is Reported Killed in War

Lt. Bruce Oliphant, P-51 fighter pilot in the AAF, has been reported killed in an airplane crash somewhere in India, his wife, the former Eileen Brooks of this city, was advised Tuesday by the war department. The crash was reported to have occurred Oct. 13. Lt. Oliphant was a member of one of the earlier classes to be graduated from the fighter training program at Punta Gorda Army Air Field. Investigation of the crash is proceeding, and additional information is expected soon, Mrs. Oliphant said. Lt. Oliphant’s mother is expected to arrive here shortly.

October 1944

The base continued to operate with a strength averaging 1200 men of enlisted and officer status, including trainee pilots. The base has continued to operate with approximately 75 civilian employees. For this base the “D” Squadron was a new-type squadron. It incorporated all of the maintenance carried-on on the base. It became apparent during the month of November that this squadron in itself was encountering and would constitute the largest single administrative problem which had been anticipated. Squadron “D” consisted of approximately 600 men. These men worked in 27 different places on this base and in almost as many activities.

November 1944 – 7,979 hrs flown on aircraft on this base.

December 1944 - Aircraft on the Base – 98 total

1 P-51D	1 C-45
75 P-40 N	1 L-5
2 RP-40N	2 C-64A
1 P-40K	3 UC-78
3 BT-13A	3 P-40N
6 BT-13B	

New Year's Eve 1945 – A dance was held at the Officer's Club.

16 Jan 1945 - About 250 enlisted Men attended a U.S.O. dance in Punta Gorda. Personnel Services Department furnished the orchestra and transportation. A bus was sent to Sarasota, Florida, to bring Sarasota U.S.O. girls to the dance. Flowers were donated by Personnel Services Department.

22 January 1945 – A gala March of Dimes dance was planned in the Punta Gorda's Community Hall. Newspaper articles, posters, and signs were distributed. The night before the dance a parade made up of the Charlotte County High School Band and students carrying signs advertising the dance, made its way through the main streets of Punta Gorda. This parade was organized by the personnel Services Department. As a result of numerous advertisements and the parade, the dance turned out to be a huge success. A fine 15 piece orchestra from Buckingham Army Air Field and a floor show furnished the entertainment. Over \$1,000.00 was raised in the community.

1 March 1945 – Punta Gorda Herald article

Air Field Official Paper "Air Scoop" is Published

"Air Scoop," official newspaper of Punta Gorda Army Air Field, made its appearance Monday when the first issue came off the Herald Press. Editor of the new publication is Cpl. Richard R. Conrad, and Cpl. Don D. Zahner is associate. Amply supplied with "cuts" of movie stars, the four-page, four column newspaper reports on activities in various departments of the field, and carries programs of future activities. In addition to regular news coverage, the paper has features, including the "Chaplain's Corner," "Buzzin' the Field with the Editors," "Movie Previews," and "Sports." Cartoons and pictures are supplied through a national service. In giving blessing to the paper, Lt. Col. H. A. Hanes, base commander, said "It's your paper, Let's get behind it and make it a good one."

Post News Paper "Air Scoop" - Published regularly each Monday

- First edition (Vol. 1, No. 1) published 26 Feb 1945 p843
- No. 2 – 5 March 1945
- No. 3 – 12 March 1945
- No. 4 – 19 March 1945
- No. 5 – 26 March 1945
- No. 6 – 2 April 1945
- No. 7 – 9 April 1945
- No. 8 – 16 April 1945
- No. 9 – 23 April 1945
- No. 10 – 30 April 1945
- No. 12 – May 8, 1945

15 March 1945 – Death

Punta Gorda Herald article

Capt. Robert R. Sherbondy Killed on Training Flight

Capt. Robert R. Sherbondy of Punta Gorda Army Air Field, on temporary duty at Pinellas Army Air Field, was killed March 7th during a routine training flight over the Gulf of Mexico, west of Egmont Key. With a record described by Air Scoop, local air field newspaper, as "brilliant," Capt. Sherbondy, a fighter pilot, had seen combat service in many sections of the European, African and middle eastern

theaters. He had been awarded the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the air Medal with seven Oak Leaf clusters, and four bronze combat stars for his campaign ribbon. He had completed 101 missions as a bomber escort in P-47 Thunderbolt fighters. Capt. Sherbondy was assigned to the field here in July 1944 as squadron "T" flight commander. Survivors include the widow, Mrs. Frances C. Sherbondy, and his parents who reside at Opa Locka.

1 April 1945 – Estimated 500 Punta Gorda civilians joined the large assemblage of enlisted men and officers at the base for a sunrise Easter Service. A choir of 60 voices led in the hymns and anthems. The chorus was made up of 20 male voices from the base along with choirs from the Punta Gorda Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches. The improvised amphitheater, with the firing-in buttment serving as a backdrop for the outdoor stage, draped flags in the center behind the temporary pulpit, the choir seated at one side and the pastors of the city's several churches at the other side, with the dawn breaking in a clear sky in the rear of the setting and lighting up the east as the services proceeded, it has been pronounced by many who were in attendance as an exceptionally impressive occasion. (Source: PG Herald article, dated 5 April, 1945)

April 1945 – Marked a high point for sales at the Base Post Exchange. Gross business was approximately \$20,000.00. Pay roll dropped over two hundred dollars with the elimination of a branch manager. Average soldier spends approximately \$11.00 to \$12.00 per month, but Branch #8 exceeded the average for the month.

April 1945 – A game room was completed and will be open every day from 1500 to 2300.

About **April 1945** – a B-29 bomber crashed approximately 10-12 miles north of PG AAF. Two crash accidents on the base, one resulted in major injuries to the pilot. (Note: probably in the vicinity of Fort Ogden).

By **10 April 1945** a pilot trainee suffered a broken arm when he bailed out of a P-40. April 1945 – Three major accidents occurred during this month. Two of these were attributed to 100% pilot error; one was attributed to 100% material failure.

10 April 1945 – 20 trainees graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field

13 April 1945 – A U.S.O. Tabloid Troupe gave a performance on the evening of Friday, April 13th. The eight o'clock show proved to be popular enough to warrant an additional 15-20 minutes of encores, thus stretching the show until approximately 9:29 p.m. As an added special service, permission was obtained to take the troupe to the PLI hangar where they put on a 45 minute show for the night personnel.

25 April 1945 – The Base Chaplain had the first of a series of monthly "Socials" April 25th in the Base Chapel and this department arranged for the refreshments and also provided transportation for the girls from the Methodist church in Punta Gorda who attended the affair.

27 April 1945 – The Punta Gorda U.S.O. held a dance in the U.S.O. Clubhouse and Personnel Services obtained a band from Page Field which provided music for the occasion.

28 April 1945

"T" Squadron held an enlisted men's stag party in the mess hall. The party was very successful and climaxed a hard month's work by all personnel. Beer, cold cuts, cokes, etc were served as refreshments supplemented by music from a juke box. As the party progressed individual members of the squadron contributed to the entertainment with exhibitions of dancing. The refreshments were gone by 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. and being Saturday night, generally the same personnel turned up in the various places of entertainment in Punta Gorda an hour or so later.

8 May 1945 – Air Scoop Post News Paper

A Prayer for V – E Day by Chaplain K. L. Mumford

Eternal God, Father of all mankind, who dost look with favor on all righteousness, we bless Thee for the solemn joy of this occasion of victory. Yet we must confess that our sins, personal and national, are heavy upon us. Keep thy children, Father, from the great sin of false pride and arrogance. Endure our nation not only with insight and vision, but also with true with their lives for this triumph; and make us mindful of our debt of gratitude to them. Let Thy Spirit enlighten the minds and enliven the hearts of those statesmen upon whom the mantle of leadership has fallen; upon the San Francisco Conference, and all who are in authority. Hold ever before our eyes the hope of a complete victory, as speedy and merciful as may be achieved. And renew in us from day to day the confident faith that as men and nations learn to serve and obey Thee, we may yet build under Thy guidance a world of peace and brotherhood. Amen.

11 May 1945 - First marriage ever to be solemnized on this base, took place in the chapel.

11 May 1945 - Aircraft accident without injury occurred on base.

May 1945 - The Charlotte Harbor pool was used for survival aquatics program. The Charlotte Harbor swimming pool was opened for both military and civilian personnel. The army has use of the pool every morning till 1200 in return for which we chlorinate the pool and test it for bacteria count. The civilians have it afternoons and Sundays.

May 1945 - The base baseball diamond is still in the process of being built. It should be completed in July 1945.

May 1945 – Base Chaplain report

Since V–E Day (8 May) occurred during this month, it was the outstanding event of May. A military formation was held with attendance of all officers and enlisted men on this base. The Chaplain offered prayers, read a Psalm and Kipling's "Recessional" for the religious part of the V–E Day program. The evening of V-E Day a special Vesper Service was held in the Chapel. Total attendance at five Sunday Services was 125. Total attendance at 34 weekly services was 1064.

9 June 1945 – 27 trainees graduated and departed for Dale Mabry Field

Hurricane of June 1945

22 June 1945 (Friday) All PG AAF airplanes were flown to Courtland, Alabama.

The first tropical storm of the 1945 season formed in the western Caribbean Sea on June 20. It moved northward through the Yucatan Channel, and rapidly intensified to a 100 mph (160 km/h) Category 2 hurricane on June 23. It turned northeast over the Gulf of Mexico, and steadily weakened to a minimal hurricane at the time of its western Florida landfall near Cedar Key on June 24. It continued northeastward, hitting Cape Hatteras on June 26, and became extratropical on June 28 over the northern North Atlantic, and the system later dissipated on July 1. The hurricane caused only minor damage. (Source: aoml.noaa.gov)

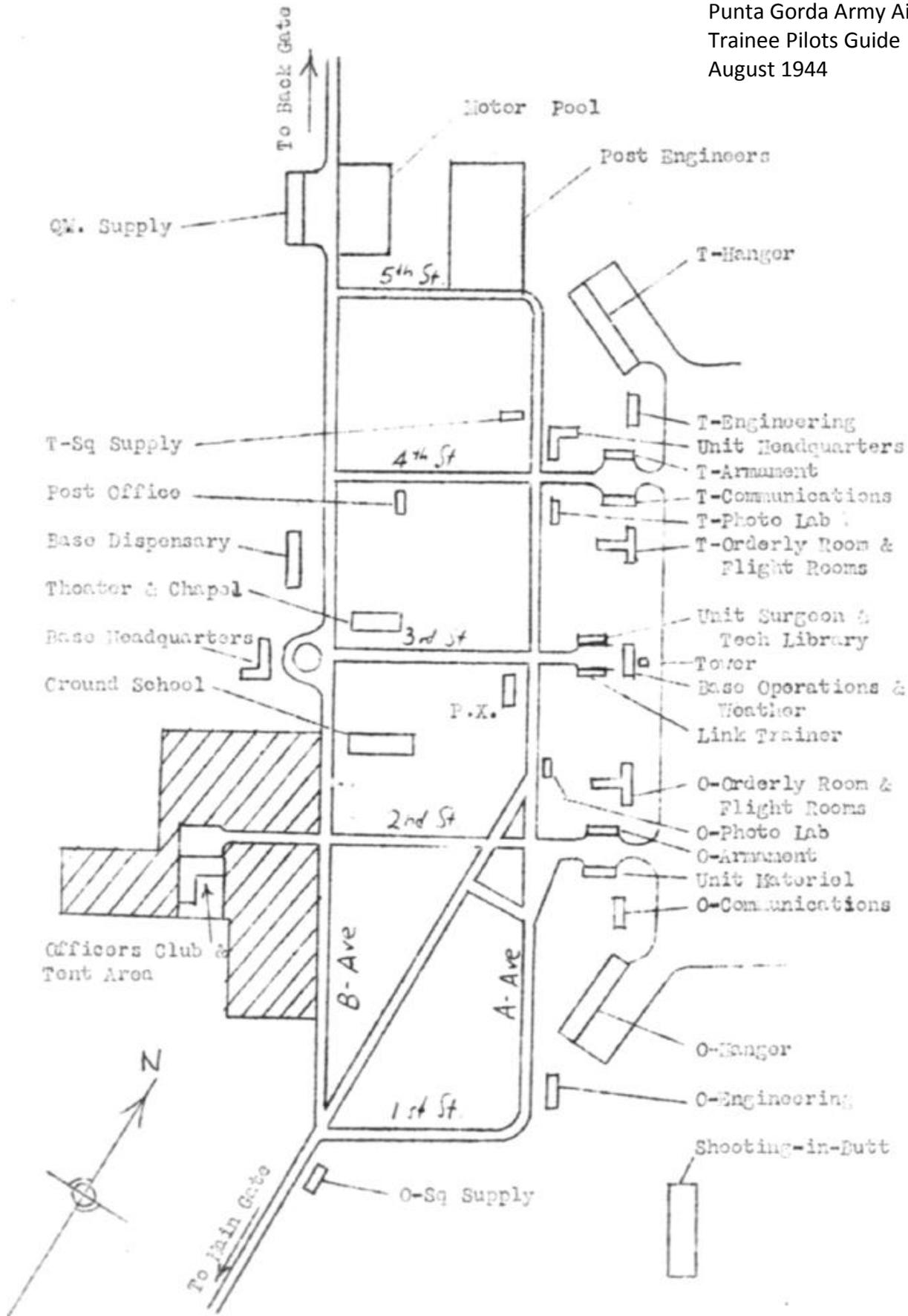
27 June 1945 (Wednesday) – No damage reports were found for the base and all evacuated aircraft returned to base.

June 1945 – “T” Squadron received 14 new P-51D-25 airplanes (p982)

1 September 1945 – PG AAF placed on inactive status

Punta Gorda Army Air Field was placed on inactive status by letter order, Headquarters Third Air Force, file 3AF 322 (1 Sep 45), subject, “Change of Status, Punta Gorda Army Air Field”, dated 1 September 1945. The effective date of inactivation was 1 September 1945.

Punta Gorda Army Air Field Map
 Trainee Pilots Guide
 August 1944



Additional research notes -----

Base Officers

Major John K. Coughlan	PG AAF Change of Command: 6 April 1944
Major Forrest H. Munger	PG AAF Change of Command: 26 September 1943 as Sub-Base CC
Major J. H. Bertolet	PG AAF first commander of the PG AAF arrived 5 August 1943 Was reassigned 12 August 1943 to Sarasota Army Air Field

April 1945

Post softball League

Post Volley ball

Baseball team

Basketball

Crash boat

PG AAF Officers' Club

There was a slight turnover in personnel. The original number of 17 enlisted employees has been dropped to 16 due to the transfer and replacement of enlisted men. The number of civilian employees consisted of ten men and women employed throughout the bar, mess and office. Activities during the month consisted of two bingo nights preceded by free buffet suppers, one Monte Carlo Night, two dances sponsored by the club, and two graduation parties sponsored by squadrons "T" and "O". Prices of the supper meal was reduced, and the cost of the trainees monthly mess pass was proportionately reduced. Painting was done in and about the club, and additional decorating was completed in the bar. The front lawn was graded and enclosed by a picket fence. New furniture was purchased for the cocktail lounge and sheets were purchased for the trainee tents. A juke box was rented for the bar, and new slot machines were placed in the lounge to replace old ones. The financial condition of the club shows a surplus of seven and a half thousand dollars consisting mostly of liquid assets.