

Ever Hear About The Fighter Dispersal Airfield At Camp Springs?

"Now, if any of you folks have got the jitters about the prospective bombing of Washington I wish you could have seen what I saw the other day."

The speaker was radio announcer Claude Mahoney and the "....other day" was sometime before May 31, 1943, the date he broadcast reassurances to Washington's jittery populace about safety from the danger of enemy attack.

What Claude Mahoney had seen that reassured him was the new Fighter Dispersal Airfield at Camp Springs. If the location has a familiar ring to it, it's because the Fighter Dispersal Airfield, is of course, now Andrews AFB. But back to 1943

Carved, bulldozed and otherwise constructed from Prince Georges County farm land and forest, the airfield was so

new it didn't have an official name. President Roosevelt referred to the project as "... an army air base camp at Camp Springs Meadows...." when he directed the Secretary of War to acquire the necessary land August 25, 1942.

The Secretary of War, however, seemed to prefer the name, "Camp Springs, Maryland, Airfield." At least that's how he described it in a letter to the Attorney General two days later. His letter directed the start of condemnation proceedings that produced approximately 3,250 acres of land for the base.

Whatever the name, the project was begun and by early April 1943, three of the four runways were finished-each more than one mile long and 150 feet wide. Fourteen miles of taxiways, 50 feet in width, had already been poured.

(Many of the taxiways are still in use as roadways today).

Shop and barrack space for three squadrons were ready for occupancy.

The field was constructed to minimize potential destruction from aerial attack. Aircraft were scattered in isolated revetments and the administration or headquarters building was disguised as a farmhouse.

Barracks and smaller service buildings were scattered throughout the pine woods. Taxiways were engineered to permit takeoffs without use of the runways by any aircraft then in use with the exception of the B-29 Stratofortress.

Eight months of work following President Roosevelt's order had produced a nearly operational airfield. All that remained was to add the aircraft. The first of these, a Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, arrived May 2, 1943. By the end of that month more than 75 P-47s were on the line. Manned by men whose mission was to train pilots for combat duty across the Atlantic they were also primed and ready to defend Washington in the event of attack. That day never came and two years later the war in Europe ended.

Claude Mahoney was impressed by his tour of the base "We roughed it all day. We rode out in a truck ..." When lunch time came, Capt. Andrew Salter, the first base commander, led the broadcaster "... down through the Maryland woods on boardwalks to a rough mess hall."

After his lunch-one hesitates to say because of it-Claude Mahoney reported, "... I tell you I feel better about the defenses of Washington now."

Washington was safe. Claude Mahoney was safe. But the fact that neither was tested by more than a ride in an open truck or dinner in a field mess tent in no way detracts from the labor of the men who built Camp Springs Army Airfield nor from those who served, now as well as then for our Nation's security and peace.



HELPERS HELP ... Like pulling smiles out of his hat. Recently, at the Edgemead School, Airman First Class Charlie Kelly (r) put on a 40-minute one-man magic show for the boys. Kelly is a member of the 1001st Civil Engineering Squadron at Andrews AFB, and also a member of the Helpers. This group visits and entertains hospitals, orphanages and nursing homes. Future free benefit shows will be given at the Suitland Nursing Home, German Orphan Home and the Forestville Nursing Home.

(USAF Photo)