

AAC & AAF Civil Primary Flying Schools 1939-1945

by Robert F. Schirmer, Col. USAF (Ret.), Class of 40-A

Part VIII SANTA MARIA PRIMARY

Santa Maria, Calif. (Air Corps Training Detachment).
Hancock College of Aeronautics, Santa Maria Airport (Established 1928).
1st AAF Flying Training Detachment (As of July 1942).
Owner/Operator Captain G. Allan Hancock (1895-1965).

Preface—This school was one of the original nine civil contract schools in the Air Corps' primary flight training program of 1939. The first class of Army Flying Cadets began training here on 5 July 1939-

Captain Hancock, founder of this school—one of the country's outstanding non-military flyers. He was taught to fly in 1924 by Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, the man who pioneered transpacific flying by his memorable flight with Capt. Charles P.T. Ulm, from the North American continent to Australia in 1928. Captain Hancock sponsored that flight. Actually, the flight of the *Southern Cross*, a Fokker trimotor, was the major reason why Captain Hancock decided to start his school in 1928.

Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith and his associate, Captain Ulm, were stranded in Los Angeles with their great trimotored Fokker monoplane when they met Captain Hancock. He flew with them over Los Angeles. They let him get the feel of the pilot's controls. They were looking for a backer. But the skipper was reticent. They were his guests aboard the *Oaxaca* (Hancock's boat) to Mazatlan, Mexico. While the skipper studied the doughty Australians, they gave him details of their flight plan. Their plane was heavily encumbered with debt. The sheriff attached it. Then the skipper stepped in and assumed all obligations, taking title to the plane. The *Southern Cross* was made over into an air-worthy craft, equipped with every safety device known in that day.

Besides the equipment, and knowing the Tropics as he did, Captain Hancock insisted that the aircrew learn to fly by instrument, or "blind-flying," before they started their daring exploit. They had to learn to trust implicitly the dials on their instrument panels. They had to learn the use of radio as a navigational aid. He flew with them and worked with them. When he was satisfied they were all equipped and ready, he gave the "Go" signal and they were off for the Antipodes. When "Smitty" had completed the epochal 8,000-mile trailblazing flight across the vast Pacific, he received a cable making him a gift of the *Southern Cross*. Afterwards he flew around the world and ended his globe-girdling tour on Hancock Field in Santa Maria, whence he had started.

On the flight to Australia they had flown 3,138 miles to Suva in the Fiji Islands for their first stop; then two more hops to Brisbane, Australia, in the summer of 1928.

Out of the flying enthusiasm engendered by the flight of the *Southern Cross* grew the Hancock College of Aeronautics (initially the Hancock Foundation College of Aeronautics). For within three months of that epochal crossing of the Pacific, the Santa Maria Airport was dedicated and a school was established to train young men in aviation. The school's most earnest student of flying was its founder, Captain Hancock himself.

Sir Charles presented to Captain Hancock the historic compass from the *Southern Cross* which had guided the plane across the turbulent Pacific from Oakland, California, to Australia that summer of '28. This happened after the round-the-world flight was completed at Hancock Field, Santa Maria.

Captain Hancock was a man of wide interests. He was a banker, a scientist and explorer, in addition to being a flyer and aviation enthusiast.

The fleet of aircraft owned by Captain Hancock included an American Transport plane, a Bach trimotor transport, a Lockheed 12 and a Lockheed 14 (both twin-engined transports). Captain Hancock had over 2,000 flying hours, mostly in these planes.

Dedication Program—Allan Hancock College of Aeronautics was rededicated on Sunday, 17 September 1939, to the "future security of the United States of America." President Hancock gave voice to the idea that the school was training airmen who may someday be called upon to defend the nation. He pledged 100 percent cooperation with the Primary Training Program of the United States Army Air Corps.

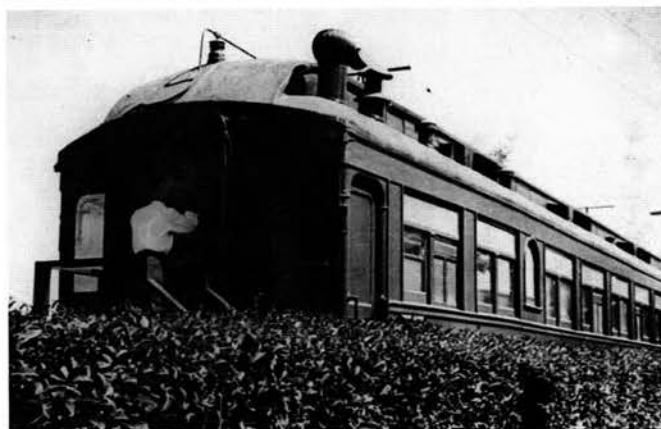
Dedication of the new administration building, dormitories and the cafeteria took place that Sunday morning in order to accommodate high-ranking officers of the Air Corps, National Guard, and Naval forces, who had to return to their posts in the afternoon. Over the weekend the officers and guests had been entertained by the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce. A barbecue at the Santa Maria Club was a high spot of the occasion.

Among the high-ranking officers at the dedication were Adjutant General J. Patrick Farrell of the California National Guard; Col. Rush B. Lincoln, Commanding, March Field; and Col. Henry W. Harms, Air Corps officer of the Ninth Corps Area from the Presidio at San Francisco. Lt. Col. Ernest Harrison, Capt. K.P. McNaughton, Capt. Edwin M. Day, and Capt. John C. Horton represented Air Corps Training Detachments of Glendale and San Diego, respectively. Major Ralph W. Coane, Capt. Henry Coles, Lt. Col. L.W. Hasslock, Capt. Harry Bullock, and Lt. Thomas G. Wallace represented other branches of the service. The program was outstandingly

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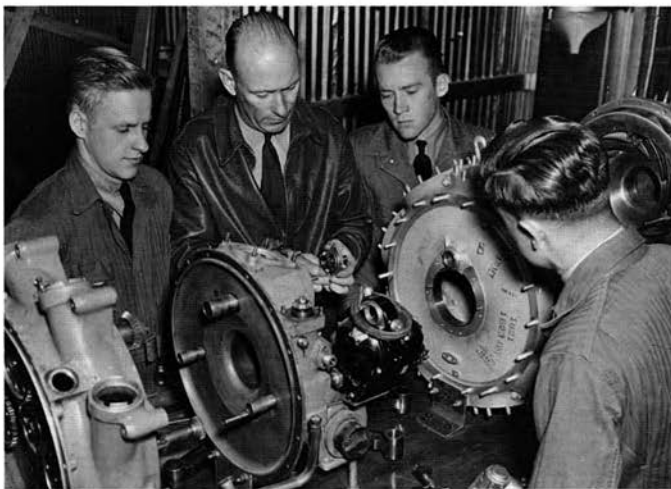
1 Captain Allan Hancock, president, Hancock College of Aeronautics.
(Photo from Jack A. Nendell, Class 40-A)

2 Captain Allan Hancock's private railroad car near Santa Maria, California,
1939.
(Photo from Jack A. Nendell, Class 40-A)

3 Class 40-A in dungarees and caps, lined up in formation.

4 Hal Browne, 40-A, leaning on a Stearman PT-13.
(Photo from Thornhill, 40-A)

5 2Lt. John R. Kilgore of Air Corps Detachment Staff.
(Photo from Thornhill, 40-A)



patriotic.

History—Hancock College of Aeronautics was established on 21 October 1928 and has graduated thousands of pilots. Its graduates went into commercial and military flying; many became aircraft engineers, designers and factory executives; others became flight instructors and many became airline pilots. First class started 1 May 1929: 36 Flying Cadets (Civ.).

The college pioneered the teaching of instrument flying. It offered its facilities to the late Col. William C. Ocker, A.C., to carry out his experiments which were to convince the Army and Navy of the value of instrument flying training.

Santa Maria was chosen by Captain Hancock as an ideal spot for aviation training because of its climate. The air school is located 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean in a valley approximately 12 miles wide and 30 miles long, bordered by low coastal foothills. It is in a thermal zone which accounts for prevailing westerly winds of moderate intensity. The claim has been made, but is often disputed, that Santa Maria has more year-'round flying weather than any other spot in the United States. Annual average temperatures are 54 to 74 degrees fahrenheit.

The college has been an Approved Flying and Ground Training School (Department of Commerce and Civil Aeronautics Authority) since 1 May 1930. The college is also an approved Repair Station. All classes were taught in hangars and modern classrooms at Santa Maria Airport, one of the largest and best-equipped private airports in the country away

from traffic of commercial airways. By a special arrangement with Santa Maria Junior College, these ground school courses and preparatory work were available to resident students without tuition. Thus, these young men were enabled to earn college credits while learning to fly.

Summary—Air Corps Training Detachment (Primary Flying School). Hancock College of Aeronautics, Santa Maria Airport, Santa Maria, California (as of July 1939).

Detachment C.O., Capt. E.H. Alexander, A.C.; Adjutant, 2nd Lt. John R. Kilgore, A.C.; Commandant of Cadets, 1st Lt. Otho R. Deering, A.C.; Medical Officer, Capt. Tobe, M.C.. Enlisted personnel, several.

List of students in Class 40-A. Quota: 35 students then 50 (actually 49 for 40-A).

1) Allen, Franklin S.; 2) Bechtel, Paul S.; 3) Brown, Harry L.; 4) Browne, Hal, Jr.; 5) Bushnell, Kenneth; 6) Cole, James L.; 7) Coxwell, Jonathan E.; 8) Foster, Leo J. (graduated 40-C); 9) Hail, James H.; 10) Hedman, Robert P.; 11) Hogg, James A.; 12) Jacobs, Louis K.; 13) Johns, Robert G.; 14) Kittel, Louis R.; 15) Kramer, Glen H.; 16) Marts, Kenneth E.; 17) Mayne, Reuben W.; 18) McCallum, Gerald; 19) Mills, Charles W., Jr.; 20) Nendell, Jack A.; 21) Seaman, Owen M.; 22) Slough, Andrew E.; 23) Smith, Robert E.; 24) Smith, Stephen M.; 25) Soper, Ray E.; 26) Thornhill, John J.; 27) Tower, Harry N.; 28) T aylor, John H.; 29) Waddleton, Thomas R.; 30) Wuertele, Carl E.

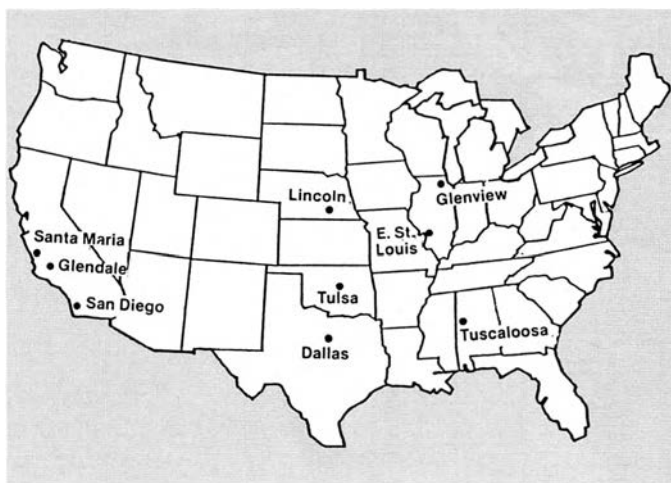
Plus 19 others who were eliminated: 16 in Primary; two in

Hancock College of Aeronautics, Santa Maria, California, 1939. Front row, L-R: Coxwell, Cole, Harrington, Kramer, Kittel, H.L. Brown, F.S. Allen, Hail, Hal Browne, Jr. Second row: Hedman, Foster (40-C), Bushnell, Waddleton, Marts, R.E. Smith, Mills, Mayne, S.M. Smith, H.N. Tower. Back row: 2Lt. Ewing, Bechtel, Seaman, Wuertele, Nendell, Greenwood, Hogg, Slough, Johns, McCallum, Moore, Soper, Jacobs, Thornhill. Missing: J.H. Traylor.
(Photo from F.S. Allen, 40-A)

Aircraft engines in Ground School, Santa Maria Primary, Class 40-A, July 1939. L-R: Flying Cadet F.S. Allen; Instructor Mr. Metz; Flying Cadet K.E. Marts; Flying Cadet Jim Hogg.
(Photo from Waddleton, 40-A)

Hancock College of Aeronautics—1939. Back row: Jacobs, L.K., Allen, F.S. Front row: Hogg, Johns, Browne, Hal, Kittel, Bechtel, Smith, R.E., Smith, S.M. in a typical classroom during ground school instruction.
(Photo from F.S. Allen)

Original nine Civil Primary Schools of 1939. Western District included Santa Maria, Glendale and San Diego. Central District included East St. Louis, Glenview (Illinois), and Lincoln, Nebraska. The other three schools at Tuscaloosa, Tulsa and Dallas were controlled by Hq. AC Training Center, Randolph Field, Texas.



Basic; and one in Advanced. One held over to Class 40-C.

SCHOOL OFFICIALS

President/Operator: Capt. G.A. Hancock

Vice-President: Mr. E.A. Olson

Director of Training: Capt. R.L. Jones

Dispatcher: James A. Booth

Ground School Instructors: Prof. McKellar (Math/Aero), of Calif. Tech; John J. Harrington; Delbert G. Van Ornum; Mertz (engines)

Chief of Maintenance: James B. Stone

Flying Equipment: Stearman PT-13 (seven each)

FLIGHT INSTRUCTORS

Chief Pilot: Joseph B. Potter

Instructors: J.B. Bennett; Andrew J. Burke; Fielden A. Creech; Capt. Elmer G. Da Rosa; Herman G. Denner; Capt. Frank Durfee; Lowell P. Lamareux; Horace S. Mazet; Walter D. Olson; George D. Omer; Augustus R. Parrish; Argyle L. Smith; Ira D. Snyder; Foster C. Townsend; James F. Whisenand (later a Maj. Gen., USAF, now deceased, per Larry Cole; he was Cole's instructor in Primary); Don R. Woods.

Facilities—The Hancock College of Aeronautics was one of the most elaborate schools in the training program. It was almost a city in itself. The cadet barracks were permanent-type buildings and the school maintained a cadet club near the airport with trained hostesses in charge. Activities included dancing, games and movies.

Ground school facilities included very adequate classrooms in Santa Maria Junior College located on the field. There were eight hangars, a machine shop, mess hall and dormitories. Covering 178 irregular acres, it had oiled, level surfaces with natural drainage for flight operation; one paved runway (N-S) 100 feet wide and 3,000 feet long suitable for all-weather flying. It could accommodate all sizes of planes and was equipped for night flying.

Training Results—Of the first 49 students assigned to this school in 1939 (Class 40-A) 19 were eliminated—16 in Primary, two in Basic, plus one in Advanced, and one was held over to 40-C because of a broken shoulder. This left 29 students to graduate (or 60.4 percent) and receive their wings on 23 March 1940 at Kelly Field, Texas. This was Hancock's contribution to the class of 40-A. (Elimination rate: 31.2 percent in Primary.)

Pilot Production 1939-1941—At Santa Maria Primary, the pilots entered in Classes 40-A through 40-H totaled 405. This included the period from 5 July 1939 to 17 May 1940. With a 60 percent graduation rate, there were 243 graduates.

From 3 August 1940 (Class 41-B) through 7 June 1941 (Class 42-A), 1,064 students entered in Primary training at Hancock, and 617 graduated (graduation rate of 57.9 percent).

A.R. (Gus) Parrish—Gus was one of the instructors for Class 40-A at Hancock. Parrish was selling Fords in 1928 when he had his first brush with aviation. He went up for a ride in a plane in Tacoma, Washington, and he was sold. Parrish had been admitted into the Club of the Incurables.

He made his solo flight after four and a half hours of instruction. He flew an F-17 *International*, "an old plywood ship," with an OX-5 engine. He had started to fly as a hobby, but by the time he had had 35 hours, he decided to take aviation seriously. He took a flying course of 14 months with the Standard Flying School in Los Angeles. Standard was part of the old Aero Corporation of California, headed by Jack Frye, who later was president of TWA. Parrish got a limited commercial license and paid for part of his training by hopping passengers and ferrying ships. He was still selling Fords, too, besides pumping gas at the field.

In those days he charged \$2.50 per hour for hopping passengers. When the *Graf Zeppelin* came to California and was moored at Mines Field, Inglewood, Parrish had a field day. The money flowed in from passengers who wanted to see the *Zeppelin* from the air. He was soon flying a four-passenger cabin job for a fleet owner and the charge was \$40 per hour. Then he went into business in Palm Springs and operated as a winter resort from October to May. He trained students and catered to private flyers who owned their own planes. Soon Hollywood celebrities began to use the airport. Then he had 1,500 planes on the field, all privately owned. He started some Hollywood people flying, including Amos 'n' Andy. In 1939, after operating the Palm Springs Airport for seven years, Parrish sold his lease and went to Randolph Field to take the instructor refresher course. He completed the course in two weeks and was assigned to the Hancock school. The Army gave him a training plane—a PT-13—with instructions that he was to ferry the ship to the school.

Parrish said: "You got your diploma when and if you delivered the training ship to its destination."



He arrived at Santa Maria in time to be one of the 17 instructors to be assigned to the first group of 48 Army Flying Cadets to be trained under the then-untried civil primary training program.

These veteran pilots were known collectively as the Incorrigibles—those who would rather fly than eat. So they accepted their “role” as instructors just to be able to keep flying. This was how they expressed their sincere love of flying—they trained the youth of our country to fight in the skies of the world.

Precision Flying 1939—One instructor pilot, who had learned to fly at 17, and was 37 when he went to Hancock College of Aeronautics to join the staff as a flight instructor, learned how the Army system worked. When he took the Army refresher course at Randolph, which he had to pass in order to qualify for the job at Hancock Primary, he found out the difference between just flying and flying the Army way. He took the flight check with an Army Captain Elmer Da Rosa and on that flight he decided then and there that for all the years he’d been a pilot he’d been flying in a daze. Precision flying was something he had never learned. “But, by God, I know it now,” he said. “While flying with Captain Da Rosa I was ashamed to think I didn’t know what I was doing. I had had 1,000 hours when Captain Da Rosa was learning to fly. All I can say is, I’m glad I took that flight check course, and I’m glad I stayed at Hancock.”

So it was difficult for the old barnstormer or duster pilot to settle down to the Army’s disciplined flying routine for instructing. He found that either he had to accept and integrate the idea of flying in a precise way or he would not be accepted as a flight instructor for the Army’s Aviation Cadets. For precision flying was a prerequisite for good formation flying for bomber pilots and for good aerobatics for a fighter pilot.

Instructor’s School at Randolph Field 1939—In February 1939, the Air Corps Training Center decided that approximately 125 student civilian instructors who had been selected to train the first class of Flying Cadets at the nine civil primary schools would be sent to Randolph Field for a special flying instructor course (called a “refresher”). Details of the results of this training course are set forth in the article including Lincoln Primary (Spring 1992 *Journal* pg. 18). Three classes were conducted. Certificates of Proficiency were granted to 138 students, while 75 students failed this refresher course. **Training Contract**—Initial contract for flying cadet primary training was entered into between Hancock College of Aeronautics and the United States of America, effective 1 July 1939.

Contract No. W535 ac 12871 (2902) between the United States of America and Hancock School of Aeronautics (Santa Maria School of Flying, Inc.) dated June 19, 1939, contained the following information:

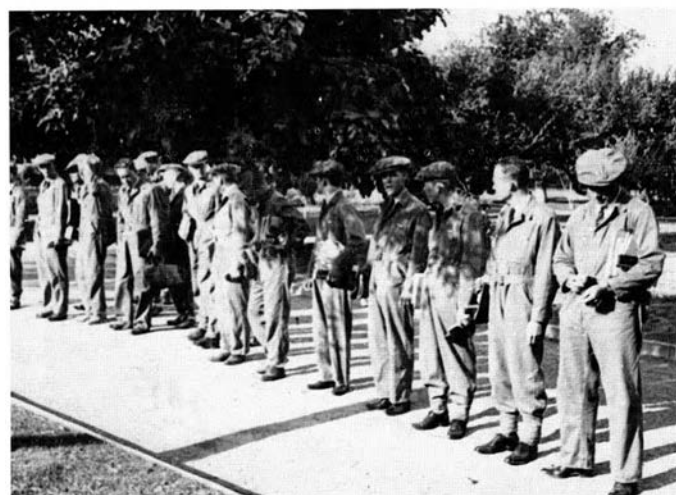
Cadets lined up for inspection in front of hangar flight line. Front row: L-R: Cadets Seaman, F.S. Allen, Johns, Kramer, Bechtel, G.E. Moore.
(Photo from Bechtel, 40-A)

Flight instructor Delbert G. Van Ornum (L). (Photo from Thornhill, 40-A)

Flight instructor Da Rosa (R). (Photo from Thornhill, 40-A)

L.K. Jacobs in Stearman PT-13. (Photo from Jack A. Nendell, Class 40-A)

Class 40-A lines up for a formation to go to ground school classes.
(Photo from Jack A. Nendell, Class 40-A)



School was to furnish Primary Flying Training and Ground Training to Army personnel to matriculate before January 1, 1941. Classes were not to exceed 60 per class; the duration of the course was for 12 weeks, with two classes in training at one time. The school was to train five students per airplane loaned by the government. The job of furnishing and maintaining equipment, flying fields, supplies and facilities (except airplanes and parts) needed for the instruction was assigned the school. Also it was to furnish competent flying and ground school instructors as needed and approved. Flying regulations were to be complied with to maintain safety under CAA standards. Transportation to and from places of lodging and sites of instruction if the distance was over one mile was also the school's responsibility. Records of flying time were to be kept by the school and open to government investigation with actual time from takeoff to landing counted. Payments were to be made by Finance Officer, U.S. Army, Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio.

2nd Contract: w535-ac-15362, 18 July 1940—This contract provided for Santa Maria Primary to receive a maximum of 132 cadets per class. Hancock started with seven PT-13s for Class 40-A in July 1939; this was increased to 24 by the time Class 40-B arrived (Aug. '39). This went to 40 PT-13s by 1940; and to 68 by 30 June '41; and to 80 by 1 Dec. 1941.
Notes from 40-A Classmates—Bob Smith relates: "Lt. Ewing was a West Pointer, who had a rough time at Santa

Maria Primary. But he did go on to Randolph for Basic, where he 'washed out'." Paul Bechtel, 40-A, adds to this: "Ewing was from the U.S. Army Infantry and they were unhappy about Ewing trying to join the Air Corps; they said, 'If he washes out,' they would send him to Ft. Huachuca in Arizona; well, he did and they did!" Bob Smith continues: "Skeeter Moore was also on probation when he arrived at Randolph Field. I remember that he, Slough, Tower and I journeyed in Slough's car to San Antonio." Moore washed out at Randolph. Bob Smith continues: "Marvin Harrington washed out at Randolph. Very good friend of mine. He introduced me to Margie (Bob's wife). Have kept up with him ever since. He was in the Marine Corps during the war. Has now retired from his plastic pipe business. Greenwood is now (1977) president of Greenwood Corporation, a machinery concern in Houston. I believe he resigned just before graduation from Kelly. About Simon (who was Cadet Captain at Santa Maria), he washed out in Primary, but remained there, working for Hancock College of Aeronautics. Part of us were housed at the barracks for the school which was located at Hancock's chicken farm; others were at the Hotel Betteravia." Paul Bechtel relates: "Foster didn't wash out. He hurt his shoulder playing baseball at Randolph Field and washed back to Class 40-C. We dug up his address and had him to the 1975 Class 40-A reunion and have the info on him for the class history book."



The following is reported by Ray Soper (in 1967): “Elmer Gould’s pungent descriptive language on ‘flying’: ‘You push on the GO LEVER, pull on the UP LEVER, and steer by the EYEBALL GAUGE—and by golly, it works!’” (Elmer Gould is in 40-A).

Peak Enrollment—During the peak of Air Corps training period (1944) there were more than 300 aviation cadets in a class and occasionally the school had more than 600 enrolled at one time.

The school produced 5,000 pilots during its contract life with the Army Air Corps and the Army Air Forces (1939-1944).

Hancock College of Aeronautics closed out its contract operation in the production of pilots through primary flight training on 27 June 1944 (Class 44-J).

General H.H. Arnold, 1944, commented regarding the value of the Civil Primary Flying Schools: “The Army Air Forces appreciate the vital part the contract flying schools have played in accomplishing a job which we were told couldn’t be done, but which we are doing!”

Lt. Gen. Barton K. Yount had this to say in 1944: “I can remember back in 1939 when we had only nine contract schools and we worried about what would happen to our

safety program in the huge expansion we were called upon to undertake. I can tell you today that the accident rate per thousand hours of flying is lower now than it was in 1939, despite the tremendous increase in total number of hours flown. This record has been achieved without any sacrifice in the efficiency of the training program. You have played a vital part in this effort and I am very proud of the primary schools. Your contributions to flying safety have been superb. It is your solemn obligation to the nation to maintain the efficiency of your flying schools. Your record has been truly remarkable. You are doing a splendid job. Keep it up . . . and better it if you can.”

In 1948, President Truman gave Captain Hancock the President’s Certificate of Merit for Hancock’s meritorious service in aiding the United States during World War II.

In 1960, the Secretary of the Air Force awarded Captain Hancock a Gold Medal and an Illuminated Citation in recognition of his distinguished patriotic service from 1928 to 1960. This was presented to Captain Hancock at Vandenberg AF Base, California, by the Commander of SAC’s 1st Missile Wing, MGen. D.W. Wade, USAF.

Hancock College of Aeronautics trained 8,000 aviation cadets and student officers for the Army Air Corps/ Air Forces



Stearman PT-13s lined up ready for flying.

(Photo from Thornhill)

Ground School Class of 40-A flying cadets looking over the Curtiss Conqueror liquid-cooled engine during primary training, July-September 1939. L-R: Cadets F.S. Allen, L.R. Kittle, A.E. Slough.

(Photo from F.S. Allen, 40-A)

2Lt. Kilgore, Instructor. Front row: Mayne, Lamar, H.L. Brown, Jim Hail. Background: Hogg, Johns, Slough, Nendell, Jacobs, Kittel, F.S. Allen, Bechtel, Bushnell, R. Smith, Marts, S.M. Smith.

(Photo from Nendell Collection, 40-A)

This is part of Class 40-A at Hancock Primary School, Santa Maria, California, in 1939 striding towards their PT-13s to fly their aerobatics after having soloed several weeks ago.

(Photo from Nendell, 40-A)

from 1939 to 1944, and in 1950-1951 trained more than 1,000 airmen as Aircraft & Engine Mechanics for the Korean conflict.

CLASS 40-A PROFILES

Replies to the question: "What circumstances led to your applying for Flying Cadet Training in the Army Air Corps?"

Colonel Paul S. Bechtel (WWII Ace)—

"In April of 1939 I was advised by a sergeant in the PMS&T's office at the University of Wyoming that all of us seniors in ROTC would take the Flying Cadet physical exams when a special examining board visited the university in the next couple of weeks. I told him that I wasn't interested because I was already wearing glasses and I



had hopes for a good job after my graduation in the Panama Canal Zone. He said that was interesting but the 'Old Man' had said ALL seniors in ROTC would take the exam. So . . . I took the exam and was quite surprised when I passed. But it all did not really excite me because after four years of working

my way through college that job as a junior engineer in the Canal Zone (at \$2,000 per year) looked mighty good to me.

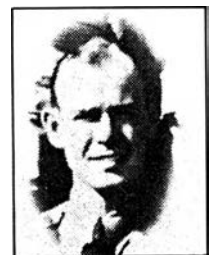
"As graduation neared, the offer for the junior engineer came through and I accepted. I was scheduled to board a ship at New Orleans on 1 July 1939, en route to the Panama Canal. Meanwhile I had applied for and had been called to two weeks active duty with the Infantry at Ft. Warren, Wyoming, immediately following graduation from the university.

"I was about halfway through my two weeks at Ft. Warren when my appointment as a Flying Cadet arrived. Everyone was congratulating me and telling me how lucky I was but I answered that I wasn't about to pass up that \$2,000/year job in Panama just to learn how to fly an airplane. But a week later, after many drinks and bull sessions with my second looney peers, I changed my mind, canceled out on my junior engineer job, went to Denver and enlisted as a Flying Cadet.

"After enlistment I was sent, along with two college classmates, Larry Cole and Tom Waddleton, to Santa Maria. When we three got to Randolph Field we found Larry Birleffi, another college classmate who was in Class 40-A also. All four of us graduated from Kelly but I never did get to the Panama Canal." (End of statement: 23 Sept. '86.)

Major Kenneth Bushnell—"I was going to college at Texas A&M at College Station, near Bryan, Texas, and went over to San Antonio and Randolph Field just for the purpose of seeing what it was and how one would go about getting in. I liked what I saw and took an application and the information as to how to apply. I was in ROTC cadet uniform and was allowed to go anywhere I wanted. I talked to a lot of flying cadets.

"My father had some financial reverses in the depths of the



Depression and I was having a tough time getting a college education with never any money to spare. I conceived the idea of applying for the flying cadet training, getting active duty for two or three years and finishing the remaining two years straight through on money I could save as a second lieutenant on flight pay. I also applied for and was accepted by the Naval Flying Cadet training program at Pensacola. But their orders to report came after I had accepted the Air Corps enlistment and was already in Santa Maria and had started flying. I didn't get back to get that last two years in engineering school for 12 years, 1950.

'There was one professor there at A&M that I had had class under 12 years before. I was back in the States from the Pacific and heard that they were closing Santa Maria. Read it in the L. A. newspaper, I guess. It was almost five years exactly from the time it was opened by Hancock for Cadet Training for the Air Corps. I took a B-24 from Muroc (now Edwards AFB) and buzzed the hell out of it on the closing day.' (End of statement: 14 Dec. 1986.)

Lt. Col. Louis R. Kittel—"I was a college student at North Dakota State College at Fargo, North Dakota (1936-1939), when I became a charter member of the 'Carl Ben Eielson' Flying Club (named after the famous Arctic explorer). We were exposed to the wonders of flying in a Curtiss *Pusher* (with three-cylinder motor) and a Curtiss *Robin*.



"In 1937, after my sophomore year, I figured that the quickest way to pursue the adventures of flying was to join the Air Corps. So, I applied, took the physical at Minneapolis, Minnesota, and passed. When I wasn't called up in many months later, I inquired of a friend in Washington, D.C., to find out what the holdup was.

"Seems as how the Army was waiting for me to finish college. In 1938, I again went to Minneapolis and passed my physical again. In the spring of 1939, I finally received my call and two of us North Dakota boys and two from Minnesota departed for Santa Maria Primary (Hancock College of Aeronautics).

"If I remember right, Harry Caldwell from Minnesota and I from North Dakota survived the training with the others washing out." (End of statement: 5 Dec. 1986.)

Col. Kenneth E. Marts—"In July of 1938, I was attending ROTC summer camp at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. One evening at sundown we saw three Air Corps airplanes in formation come over low and land at the Leavenworth Air Corps Field. A few of us were fascinated and received permission to hike over to the field and get a better look. When we arrived the planes were locked up in a hangar. An Air Corps officer wearing wings saw us and offered to let us in for a short look. He said they were B-10 bombers—the 'latest' thing. He also gave us a sales talk on applying for the Air Corps flying school and *fly* with them rather than *walk* with the Infantry.



"When I returned to the University of Wichita that fall, I



Class 40-A 40th Anniversary Reunion at San Antonio, Texas, 23 March 1980. From Hancock College of Aeronautics, Santa Maria, California. L-R, back row: Tower, Jacobs, Wuertele, Foster, Waddleton, Nendell, Bob Smith, H.L. Brown (died in 1980). Front row: Bushnell, Soper, Cole (died 1982), Bechtel, Harrington (washed out in Basic), Kittle. Alive but not at reunion: Hedman, Hogg, Johns, Mills, Thornhill and S.M. Smith (died 1985). (Author's Collection)

remembered this and that I had a classmate already in Flying School. His name was Bob Mueller. Bob had dropped out of college after his junior year and had joined the Air Corps as a cadet for flight training. I wrote to him at Randolph and we corresponded for a while—long enough for him to convince me to apply. I did and was accepted for the class beginning right after graduating from college in June 1939. Bob graduated from flying school in the Class of 39-A and after one year of active duty left the Army to fly for TWA. He stayed with TWA through the war and on into retirement. I never saw him again." (End of statement: 30 Nov. 1986.)

Lt. Col. Robert E. Smith—"In 1936, I observed a blurb in a newspaper, I think it was, that the Marines were looking for prospective pilots. I answered and was told to report to Randolph Field for a physical examination. I did but failed the exam. Not for the 1,001 usual things, but because I couldn't look cross-eyed. How did I know that you had to be able to look cross-eyed to be a pilot?



"Anyway, I returned to Texas A&M and darn near drove the profs crazy as I would practice looking cross-eyed during classes. Finally, I got so that I could look cross-eyed at will. Then I joined the National Guard as I always had had the desire for the military. I applied for the Army Air Corps in 1938. I was ordered to Randolph again for a physical in February 1939. With two National Guard buddies, I headed for Randolph. One had already passed his physical but knowing that our eyes were to be dilated, thus incapacitating us for driving, he volunteered to drive. En route, we found out that the other buddy could not look cross-eyed either, so we put him in the backseat and ordered him to start practicing. He did.

"Long story made short: 14 went in for physicals; two came out. You guessed it. 'Twas me and my N.G. buddy. He almost lost on account of his teeth, but he thought fast when the doctor asked him if he was trying for the next class. He

answered yes, although he had no idea which class he would be lucky to enter. The doctor replied: 'In that case, I will pass you and you can get them fixed when you report for flying.' There we were, three happy fellows! You might have known them: Howard Cook and Donald Hall of Class 40-B." (End of statement: Sept. 1986.)

Lt. Col. John H. Traylor stated in *The Aerie*, the cadet paper at Santa Maria Primary in 1939 that he had attended Allen Military Academy in Bryan, Texas, where he graduated in 1934. He put in another year there in 1937. Then he attended Millard's Preparatory for West Point in Washington, D.C., in 1938. He then joined the 9th Infantry at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, where he attended the West Point preparatory school operated by the government. Then deciding that the Army Air Corps was where he belonged, he took the entrance examinations in April of 1939, passed successfully, and arrived in Santa Maria 1 July, to be cadet captain of the first class to attend this school under the new Air Corps training arrangement with a civilian flying school to produce combat Army pilots. (Note: Traylor died in 1968.)



Col. Thomas R. Waddleton—"I had decided several years before that I wanted to try a military life. I fell in love with flying following my solo in 1936. I flew with Fred Wahl and Clyde Pangborn, both early barnstormers. I washed airplanes and cleaned up hangars for time-credit in a 40-hp Aeronca and a Standard Eaglerock. (It had wings and should have flown, but commonly flew like a rock. Aptly named.) In 1938, I took my flying cadet physical, passed it, and with three years college credit, applied for cadet training. I was told to go back to school and get my degree to improve my chances. I did, it did! Simply put, I applied for cadet training because I have been hooked on flying since I saw my first airplane. From the leverage point of actual experience, having been an enlisted man in the horse cavalry, and a second lieutenant, Infantry Reserve, flying, in place of walking or taking care of a horse seemed like a hell of an improvement. 'Twas!'" (End of statement: 2 Dec. 1986.)



Major Carl E. Wuertele—"I was in my senior year at Wichita University (Kansas) in 1939. When not in school I worked as a city fireman. I couldn't see being a fireman the rest of my life. I liked the idea of the Air Corps so I applied. I don't know how many of us applied at Leavenworth, Kansas, but three of us passed: Ken Marts, Stephen M. Smith and myself.



"We were sent to Santa Maria, California (Hancock College of Aeronautics). Frank Allen and I almost didn't graduate from Primary there ... we were caught dogfighting out over the Pacific Ocean one day!" (End of statement: 21 November 1986.)

(Second Highest U.S. Decoration) Distinguished Service Cross
1st Lt. Gerald McCallum—Awarded DSC posthumously for his gallantry over Java, fighting Zeros in his P-40, was shot down, parachuting out of his plane successfully; but was savagely machine-gunned by Jap fighters on the way down. Had served in Philippines, Australia and Java before he lost his life.

Capt. Stephen M. Smith—Flew his P-40 in combat in 1942 over New Guinea, attacking a horde of Jap Zeros, breaking up their formation; had his left arm shattered by gunfire; returned to base and landed safely. He had a two-year recuperation period after being returned to States. He was assigned as General Arnold's aide in the Pentagon for a period from Mar. '44 to Sept. '45. Awarded DSC, 1942.

ACES OF 40-A

Robert P. "Duke" Hedman, Flying Tigers, from July 1941-July 1942. Then flew over Hump in China with Chinese National Airways (515 missions); also with American Export Airlines. Was one of nine AVG pilots who organized Flying Tigers Airline; flew continuously until 1976 (age 60); had been an ace since Dec. 1941 (with five Jap planes destroyed in one day). Flew Boeing 747s with Flying Tiger Airlines (1974-1976).

Capt. Paul S. Bechtel—Flew P-39s, P-40s, P-38s, and even shot down a Jap Zero while flying a U.S. Navy F-4U (his fifth victory). Won both USAAF DFC and U.S. Navy DFC during WWII.

Decorations Won by Graduates of Santa Maria Primary:

Silver Star: Four (Kramer; Thornhill; Wuertele, 2).

Legion of Merit: Four (Cole; Marts; Soper, 2).

Distinguished Flying Cross: 23 (Allen, F.S.; Bechtel, 2; Bushnell; Coxwell, 2*; Foster; Jacobs; Johns; Kittel; Kramer; McCallum; Nendell; Smith, R.E., 3; Smith, S.M.; Thornhill; Tower, H.N.; Wuertele, 4). 'Note: Posthumous Award.

Soldier's Medal: One (Allen, F.S.).

Air Medal: 70 (Allen, F.S., 11; Bechtel, 5; Bushnell, 5; Coxwell; Foster, 10; Jacobs; Johns, 4; Kittel, 6; Kramer, 12; McCallum; Nendell, 4; Smith, R.E., 5; Thornhill; Tower, H.N.; Waddleton, 3).

Bronze Star: One (Smith, S.M.).

Army Commendation Medal: Seven (Allen, F.S., 2; Bechtel; Waddleton, 4).

AF Commendation Medal: Five (Cole, 2; Waddleton, 3).

Aerial Victories: 17.5 (Bechtel, 5; Hedman, 7.5; Kittel, 4; McCallum).

Purple Heart: Eight (Bechtel; Nendell; Smith, S.M.; Wuertele, 2; Coxwell*; McCallum*; Seaman*). *Posthumous.

Graduates Killed in Action (KIA): Three (Coxwell, '43; McCallum, '42; Seaman, '43).

Prisoners of War (POW): One (Nendell, '44).

Postscript on Santa Maria—Hancock Field, located on the Santa Maria Airport, was taken over and turned into a real estate development. Right after World War II it became part of the University of Southern California, and was known as USCCA, the CA meaning "College of Aeronautics." It conducted aeronautical engineering courses besides the flying school itself. Joe Potter was the chief pilot. (Per Mauno Salo, letter of 10 August 1987.) □