

# **The History of Tinker AFB**



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**70+ Years  
in the  
Heartland  
of  
America**

# Tinker AFB History

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In October 1940, as German troops rolled through Europe and Japan expanded its empire, a dozen Oklahoma City businessmen formed the Oklahoma Industries Foundation to attract a bomber base, an aircraft plant or an air repair depot to the area. Their efforts proved successful when the War Department announced, on April 8, 1941, Oklahoma City as the site of a new air materiel depot that



would cover more than 1,500 acres and employ 3,500 people. Construction on the new Midwest Air Depot began

on July 18, 1941. Since the airfield was not ready for occupancy until March 1, 1942, official depot operations began in a downtown office building on January 15, 1942. Just eight days later, Oklahoma citizens learned that the Army Air Forces had decided to build a huge Douglas Aircraft Assembly Plant next to the depot.

Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker, an Oklahoma native and part Osage Indian, lost his life while leading a group of LB-30 bombers on a mission against the Japanese in the region of Wake Island on June 7, 1942. Accordingly, Gen. H.H. "Hap" Arnold ordered the installation named Tinker Field effective Oct. 14, 1942. During World War II, more than 18,000 military and civilian employees repaired and modified B-17, B-24 and B-29 bombers as well as C-47 and C-54 cargo



planes. They also overhauled thousands of aircraft engines and shipped supplies around the world. Meanwhile, the Douglas Plant, employing close to 24,000 people, produced more than 5,300 C-47 Skytrain aircraft and parts to build 400 C-54 Skymaster cargo planes and 900 A-26 Invader attack bombers.

At the end of the war, the Oklahoma City Air Depot acquired the adjacent Douglas Plant complex and moved new workloads into the facilities after the War Department declared Tinker Field a permanent air base. Renamed the Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area (OCAMA) on July 2, 1946, the depot continued work on bombers, engines and aircraft parts and played an important role in supporting the Berlin Airlift. Following the creation of the Department of the Air Force in 1947, the installation officially became Tinker Air Force Base (AFB) on January 13, 1948.



In the 1950s, Tinker AFB modified and repaired the B-29 Superfortress, the B-47 Stratojet, and the C-97 Stratofreighter. In 1953, OCAMA's engine line became 100-percent jet propulsion. Throughout the decade, the depot performed maintenance on such powerplants as the J47, J57 and J75. In the mid-50s, Tinker assumed management responsibility for the KC-135 Stratotanker and the B-52 Stratofortress, and in 1959, completed maintenance of its first B-52 and KC-135 aircraft. With the increased importance of OCAMA in the national defense network, the base soon grew and expanded its western boundary from Air Depot Boulevard to Sooner Road. The area later housed a new chapel, hospital, dormitories, enlisted and officer clubs, and modern military family housing.

In the 1960s, Tinker accelerated production due to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the continued Cold War. Soon, OCAMA shifted its focus to support the Vietnam War and Tinker AFB became an inland aerial port for Southeast Asia activities. In January 1968, Tinker employment reached an all-time high of 24,778 civilians and 4,404 military members assigned to OCAMA and its associate organizations.

Tinker AFB gained new work in the 1970s as skilled employees repaired F-4 and F-105 fighter jets as well as the A-7 attack aircraft and the new TF41 engine. OCAMA became the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center (OC-ALC) on April 1, 1974. The next year, the OC-ALC assumed management responsibility for the E-3 Sentry aircraft and the 552nd



Aircraft Warning and Control Wing activated its units at Tinker AFB on July 1, 1976.

In the 1980s, the OC-ALC added management responsibilities for the B-1 Lancer and B-2 Spirit bombers and completed maintenance work on its first B-1 in 1988. More depot work on the F101, F107, F108 and F110 engines started in the mid-1980s along



with management responsibilities for a host of engines. Despite a near disastrous fire in Bldg. 3001 in November 1984, ALC workers continued their support of warfighters throughout the world.

Even as Tinker people prepared to celebrate the golden anniversary of the airfield, they supported the war efforts of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1991. A year later, the Navy's Strategic Communications Wing ONE completed its move to Tinker, the first time a Navy wing had relocated to an Air Force base. In 1993 and 1995, Tinker and Oklahoma City survived rounds of base closures, becoming one of three remaining ALCs. After terrorists bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, Tinker people provided humanitarian support and relief efforts. Base workers responded in a similar fashion after a May 3, 1999, tornado destroyed homes and businesses throughout central Oklahoma and damaged the northwest section of the base. The decade ended with the 1999



announcement that Tinker and the OC-ALC had won the largest-ever public-private competition for an engine workload. It would be transferred from the closing ALC at Kelly AFB, Texas.

With the dawn of a new century, Tinker AFB celebrated its role as the premier U.S. Air

Force propulsion facility with the official transition of the new Fighter Propulsion Division from Kelly AFB on Sept. 1, 2000. Then on Sept. 11, 2001, after foreign terrorists hijacked civilian



airliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and a field in Pennsylvania, Tinker workers responded by providing support to U.S. troops at home and abroad in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. As in all previous wars and conflicts, the spirit of Oklahoma and America's military resolve could be vividly seen at Tinker AFB.

The OC-ALC continued its reputation as a leader in both military and social milestones. Just as it had welcomed the first female, African-American general in the Air Force, Brig Gen Marcelite Harris, in 1990, the Center showcased the first, female two-star general to lead an air logistics center, Maj Gen Terry Gabreski, in 2003. She would be followed by the first civilian to lead a major military installation, Robert Conner, in 2005. Likewise, such advanced business concepts as lean logistics, continuous process improvement, transformation and supply chain management found root in the organizational landscape. Then in the fall of 2008, the OC-ALC and Tinker AFB took



another major step forward as the adjacent, 50-million square foot, former General Motors assembly plant was added to the installation's resources. The new Tinker Aerospace Complex presented the pathway for a modern facility to entice future growth, added workload and a lasting legacy.

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