BUCKLEY AIR FORCE BASE: BOOM BASE

IN BOOM TOWN AURORA

by

Thomas John Michel

B.A., University of Colorado, 1996
M.A., University of Colorado, 1999

A thesis submitted to the
University of Colorado at Denver
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for degree

Master of Arts

History

Fall 2006
The thesis for the Master of Arts
degree by
Thomas John Michel
has been approved
by

Thomas J. Noel

James Whiteside

Nov. 29, 2006
Date
Michel, Thomas John (M.A. History)

Buckley Air Force Base: Boom Base in Boom Town Aurora

Thesis directed by Professor Thomas J. Noel

ABSTRACT

The history of Buckley Air Force Base has never been told in depth. The base has grown from a dirt airstrip to a state-of-the-art Air Force facility. Located today in Aurora, Colorado, the base is still expanding as of 2006. Bringing in over $1 billion for the community and area, it is the lifeblood of Aurora not only in terms of activities on the base, but in the development of aerospace industries near the base. As part of the United States Space Command it provides missile launch detection and warning to the government. In addition, the Colorado Air National Guard continues to utilize Buckley Air Force Base in the continuing role of maintaining alert aircraft to safeguard American lives after the September 11, 2001, attacks. The story of the base from its inception in early 1938 as a military airfield depot for Lowry Air Force Base, to its use as a training base during World War II, and to its operation by the United States Navy in the 1950s is fascinating. When it becomes an Air National Guard Base in 1959, it serves as a source of qualified military manpower and aircraft for forty years in all but one major U.S. military operation. Its conversion in 2000 to an active Air Force base is simply the latest chapter in the base’s story. Buckley Air Force Base has a deep history and importance to the United States, and Colorado, as well as Aurora that should not go unrecognized.

This abstract accurately represents the contents of the candidate’s thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed

Thomas J. Noel
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Sharrie Dee Michel and Woodrow John Michel who taught me that nothing was impossible as long as I believed in myself. My father’s lifetime of dedication to the United States Air Force and to the country he loved always inspired me to push myself to be more than I thought I could and to appreciate those who continue to make sacrifices so that we may continue to enjoy our freedoms. I appreciate all the sacrifices you have made for me in my life and I am forever grateful.

I also dedicate this thesis to my wife, Shannon, and my children, Andrew and Emily, for their support, patience, and understanding as I completed this extensive labor of love. Nothing is more important to me than all of you, and I love you with all my heart.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my advisor, Tom Noel, for all of his support, patience, and guidance during my research. I would also like to thank the Denver Public Library staff for their assistance and numerous suggestions for further research.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

1. **INTRODUCTION** .......................................................... 1

2. **THE EARLY YEARS** .................................................... 5
   - A Base Born From a Bombing Range ....................... 5
   - Bombing Range Acquisition ................................. 8
   - Problems Acquiring the Bombing Range .................. 10
   - Preparations for World War II ............................. 15
   - John Harold Buckley ............................................ 17
   - Chapter Two Notes .............................................. 23

3. **WORLD WAR II** ............................................................. 28
   - Expansion at the Base ......................................... 28
   - Opening and Meeting the Public ............................ 29
   - Armament Training Base ...................................... 34
   - Basic Training at Buckley .................................... 37
   - Arctic Training Program ...................................... 40
   - Induction Center and Photography School ............... 42
   - Chemical Warfare Training at Buckley .................... 43
   - Additional Training Programs .............................. 46
Quality of Life for Those at Buckley .................. 50
Accidents, Mishaps, and Trouble-makers .......... 57
Second Open House ...................................... 59
Women and Minorities at Buckley ..................... 60
End of the War ............................................ 62
Chapter Three Notes ...................................... 64

4. POST-WAR AND NAVY YEARS: 1946-1959 .......... 74

Status of Buckley Field After World War II .......... 74
The Army Air Force Leaves Buckley .................... 77
The Navy Saves Buckley .................................. 78
The WAA and Disposition of Excess Buildings ....... 81
The Veterans Village at Buckley ....................... 83
Naval Activities at Naval Air Station Denver ....... 91
Naval and Marine Squadrons at the Base ............. 98
Air National Guard at Buckley ......................... 101
The Minute Men .......................................... 105
The Korean War and Buckley Aviators ............... 106
The Air Force at Buckley in the 1950s ............... 111
Titan ICBM Program comes to Buckley .............. 112
Accidents and Crashes at Buckley .................... 114
UFO Encounter.................................................. 116
End of Naval Involvement at Buckley.................. 117
Chapter Four Notes........................................... 122

5. THE 1960s...................................................... 135
Titan Missile Maintenance and Removal............. 136
Flight Operations Shift from Lowry to Buckley.... 140
Annexation of Buckley................................. 144
Bombing Range Disposition.............................. 145
COANG Activation and Activities at Buckley...... 147
Medical Responsibilities.............................. 149
The Golden Triangle, the Early Years............... 150
National Guard Activations and the Vietnam War... 152
The New Air Force Role at Buckley........... 157
Chapter Five Notes....................................... 160

6. THE 1970S...................................................... 167
Buckley’s Land and Major Units...................... 167
Aerospace Data Facility Becomes Operational...... 169
Buckley’s Financial Impact Along with the
Golden Triangle............................................. 172
Community Activities................................. 176
National Guard and Base Activities.................................. 178
Deadliest Accident at the Base and Crashes......................... 183
Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone Report..................... 187
Chapter Six Notes........................................................... 191

7. THE 1980S................................................................. 196
   Buckley by the Numbers.............................................. 196
   Continued Growth On, and Near, Buckley........................ 198
   Denver International Airport and Buckley....................... 200
   Golden Triangle and the Threat of Closures..................... 202
   Air National Guard Activity......................................... 206
   Buckley and the Community......................................... 209
   Crashes and Emergencies............................................ 212
   The Bombing Range and the Lowry Landfill....................... 215
   Chapter Seven Notes.................................................. 219

8. EXPANSION IN THE 1990S............................................. 225
   The Persian Gulf War................................................ 225
   Air National Guard Activities and Controversies.............. 227
   Death of the Golden Triangle....................................... 230
   Buckley Expansion Before and After the Golden Triangle...... 236
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The idea for this project was a long time in the making. As a native of Aurora, Colorado, my life was filled with military memories as my father, Woodrow J. Michel, served in the United States Air Force. I was born at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in 1974 and baptized at the Lowry chapel. My family moved all around the country until 1982 when my father was stationed in Colorado Springs. We lived in Aurora and my father made the daily commute to the “Springs” by car or by driving out to Buckley Air National Guard Base and flying down to work via helicopter.

I was always fascinated with the military, and my father with his career, and found myself making a habit out of memorizing different planes, military history, and any information I could about the Air Force. I spent weekends at the bowling alley at Lowry, shopped at the Lowry Commissary, saw doctors at Fitzsimons, and watched the different planes takeoff and land at Buckley. Without realizing it at the time, my life revolved around these bases the way many of my friend’s families did.

These bases were the heart of Aurora and many of the people living there. They depended on the work at the bases, or at least from the many
people stationed at the bases that needed to use accountants, retail shops, and restaurants near the base. The bases provided so much to my life that they feel as though they are a part of me. When Lowry closed, even though my father was retired, it still seemed like I was losing something too. When Fitzsimons closed, the base that had treated my mother’s cancer sat alone and remote without the sounds of medivac helicopters landing. But Buckley always remained.

This project really started the day I was born, as my father was stationed at Buckley from 1970-1975 at the Aerospace Data Facility. Had he not be stationed there, he would not have met my mother and I certainly would not be here with a M.A. thesis on the history of the base. When I learned that Buckley lacked a comprehensive history written I was stunned. More attention was given to Lowry and Fitzsimons as they had always been the larger and more prominent facilities. I learned that Buckley was always overshadowed by its sister bases in the “golden triangle” of military bases in Aurora and Denver. Buckley’s history was also shrouded in some secrecy following the construction of the Aerospace Data Facility in the early 1970s. The fact that so few people knew about the history, and the current significance, of the base made this a labor of love.
With the role of Buckley involving some information that is classified, I was very careful in deciding what information would be included in this thesis. Generally information that is considered secret but public has been included as is older programs no longer in use. Specific programs currently operating at the base that I learned of through contacts with personnel stationed at Buckley and aerospace companies have been withheld at either their request or by my own sense of right and wrong in terms of national security. Some purposeful omissions as to the operations at Buckley today are the result of this process.

Buckley Air Force Base is located in Aurora, Colorado. Today it is southeast of Airport Boulevard (old Buckley Road) and Sixth Avenue. It stretches east to portions of Gun Club Road and the single active runway pushes the southern boundary to Jewell Avenue. However, most of the activity at the base is between Sixth Avenue and Mississippi Avenue on the western portion of the facility.

I wanted to tell the story of a base that is significant to me personally as well as to Aurora today. This base trained thousands of men during World War II and then helped many veterans start a life after the war. I wanted to tell the story of a base that has been controlled by the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Colorado Air National Guard which makes it unique among military
bases. Finally, I wanted to tell the little stories that get lost in history, tales from small newspapers or announcements about the base and its activities to provide an enduring picture of change and dedication at the base. I hope the pages that follow remind you of just how important the military was to the Denver metropolitan area in the past, and how much the nation and Aurora continue to depend on the jobs provided on, near, and because of Buckley Air Force Base.
CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY YEARS

A Base Born From a Bombing Range

Buckley Air Force Base has gone through several changes since its official creation in 1942. The base has been controlled by three different branches of the military and the state of Colorado. Its transition from an auxiliary field to a state-of-the-art component of the United States Space Command system is storied and complex. Until now the story had yet to be told in a format such as this. It is my sincere hope that this project will help people understand the fascinating and unique history of the facility and learn about its importance in Aurora and Colorado.

The beginning of the field has its history in the creation of the first Army Air Corps base in Colorado, Lowry Field. The process to bring Lowry to Colorado was a difficult one. The Army Air Corps had been searching for a replacement training facility for their airfield at Chanute, Illinois. By 1934 Chanute was becoming dilapidated and old, having been constructed in 1921. In addition, Chanute Field was not an especially desirable location for flying. A poor climate prohibited year-round flying and lease of the aerial gunnery range nearby was expensive. Following several fires and the continuing
deterioration of facilities at the base, the Army decided to appoint a selection committee in February 1934 to find a new location.\(^1\)

Once the city of Denver had decided to lobby for the base, the Denver City Council and the Colorado delegation to Congress also became involved including Senators Edward P. Costigan and Alva B. Adams. In fact, one of the campaigns used to convince the Army to build the air school was that Denver had over 300 days of sunshine per year through the slogan, "The Skies Are Not Cloudy All Day!"\(^2\)

It was clear that the Army required a base that would also include a bombing range that they would own outright and not one they would have to lease. After investigating fifty-seven locations, the Army decided in June 1935 on a base near Denver, so long as a large bombing range could also be secured nearby. A 64,000 acre range was obtained by the city of Denver to the Army in addition to the land for the base.\(^3\)

However, the base was not created right away as Illinois and its powerful Congressional lobby fought to keep the Technical Training School where it was. Denver began to fear that it might end up losing the base that it had so ardently fought for. The city decided to sweeten the deal for the military and announced to the Military Affairs Committee of the War Department, that it would offer an additional 1.5 square miles for the
construction of the air field, in addition to the land that the city would purchase for the bombing range. 4

By August 1937, Congress accepted a compromise that would allow Chanute to continue with some technical training courses while the new base, Lowry, was constructed in Denver to train airmen in photography and armament specialties. 5 The Army decided to construct Lowry Army Air Field on the site of the Phipps Sanatorium since this already had several structures that could be converted easily to army use. For example, the building that had housed the medical department and x-ray machines at the Sanatorium would become part of the photography department. 6 The Sanatorium had been purchased by Denver for $200,000 and donated to the Army. 7 It was even planned to use the cupola of the sanatorium as an observation deck. 8

With a signature from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to secure funding on August 27, 1937, the financing was in place. 9 Construction on the new base proceeded quickly, with two million dollars secured from the Works Progress Administration. In addition, the US War Department spent nearly five million dollars to build the officers housing, barracks, and two large hangars. 850 men from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were primarily responsible for the construction of the base. The name of the base was transferred from the local National Guard field located at East 26th...
Avenue and Dahlia Street in Denver. Lowry Army Air Field became operational in February 1938. However, the name Lowry Field was not actually assigned to the facility until March 21, 1938.

Bombing Range Acquisition

In order to convince the Army to build the air facility in Denver, the Denver City Council and Mayor George D. Begole had originally promised in 1935 was to secure a suitable bombing range that would fulfill the requirements set by the United States War Department. These requirements included a provision that an area of land, no less than 10 square miles (64,000 acres), would be provided. One problem that came up was trying to determine how exactly to acquire, and pay for, the roughly 64,000 acres that would be needed for the bombing range. Denver decided on several steps to solve this problem. First, the city would assess the land in the area and offer to owners what it felt to was a reasonable price for the land. Second, the city would move to have the land condemned and seized by the city for a lower price. Both of these options would require a substantial amount of money and Denver ultimately decided on a bond issue to help pay for the land for Lowry and for the bombing range. The city favored enacting a bond for $750,000 with which to buy the land needed. It was promoted to the people of Denver
as an easy way to secure millions of dollars in federal funding to the city, amid the Great Depression.¹³

Denver had no problem finding several suitable sites. Three acceptable sites surveyed by the Army included an area twenty miles southeast of Greeley. The second site was fifteen miles southwest of Brush, and the last was located twenty-five miles southeast of Denver.¹⁴ One development that would help finally determine the location of the bombing field was the decision of the city council to obtain options for 800, later 900, acres for an auxiliary air field and ammunition depot near Watkins to complement the air field at Lowry. This would be paid for out of the $750,000 bond passed by the voters of Denver. Several court cases challenged the validity of the bond, which was eventually upheld by the Colorado State Supreme Court.¹⁵

Purchasing of the land for the extra air field started in early 1938 at a cost of ten dollars per acre. 640 acres were purchased while the remaining land was received through condemnation proceedings.¹⁶ Of course this auxiliary field would eventually become known as Buckley Field.

Despite the locations of the three most acceptable areas for the bombing range, the army determined that having the land closer to the auxiliary field would be beneficial. At first the location of the area was kept
secret, in part to prevent people from buying up land to sell to the government for greater profit. In November 1937 it was determined that the sight of the new bombing range for Lowry Air Field would be roughly twenty-five miles southeast of Denver. The first purchase of twenty square miles of land began in January 1938, in an area five miles south of Watkins in Morgan County.

The Army delayed the initial move to Lowry by delaying the departure of two trains loaded with officers, troops and equipment from Chanute Field until the land had been secured. The issue had threatened to delay delivery of specific equipment for the photography and armament schools if the purchasing of the bombing range land did not proceed as promised by the city. It took the efforts of Junius C. Jones, commander of the air school at Lowry and Chanute, along with city officials, including Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton who had replaced Mayor Begole in 1935, to secure the purchase. It was agreed that the completion of the bombing range would occur prior to June 1, 1938.

Problems Acquiring the Bombing Range

Not everyone was excited about selling their land to the city. In some cases land was purchased from owners at varying prices depending on demands, negotiations, and fair market value. Mrs. Caroline A. Goodale sold 160 acres to Denver for $1,120 or seven dollars an acre. Other property
owners did not accept a final offer from the city. When owners could not be found their land was condemned at the suggestion of the War Department. Property owners could contest the amount of the payments through the city tax agent Walter Bennett. He promised that efforts would be made until a settlement acceptable to the city and land owners was reached.²⁰

By the end of January 1938, some 24,200 acres, or nearly 38 square miles, had been purchased for the bombing range. 11,240 acres of this land was obtained in a condemnation proceeding filed in Littleton District Court on January 13, 1938, at a cost of $91,277.50, which came to over eight dollars an acre. In this case the price had been set by independent experts on real estate. The city however was told by the court to be careful in removing people from the land. The city’s Air School Committee of the City Council seemed prepared to negotiate the costs of removal of several tenants in an attempt to be hospitable. The land was purchased to square off the site and also included land purchased to form a safe air corridor from the auxiliary field and ammunition depot to the bombing range. This would prevent bomb laden planes from having to fly over peoples homes.²¹ The final eight-by-twelve mile area for the bombing field was announced to the public on February 9, 1938.²²
By now people had started to see how much the city was willing to pay and various owners began to back out on negotiated prices. Mr. and Mrs. William F. Minshall of Watkins had agreed to sell 1,280 acres to the city for $12,100. At the last moment in April 1938, the couple sent a letter saying they were not going to honor the contract. The city filed a lawsuit against the couple to force them to fulfill their portion of the agreement. The couple claimed that they did not believe their lawyer, acting with power-of-attorney, lawfully enacted the sale with the city. The judge ruled against the couple and the city won the case and acquired the 1,280 acres by the end of April 1938.

Even cities and counties were trying to make money with the land sales. The Arapahoe County Commissioner tried to force Denver to buy land that was two miles to the west of the 8-by-12 mile area, closer to the city of Parker, rather than cheaper land further east. Denver halted the buying of land until the matter could be resolved, and eventually Arapahoe County relented.

Despite all of the issues in obtaining the required land, enough had been purchased to begin use of the range. The 40 percent completed bombing range opened for business in March 1938 only one month after Lowry Air Field officially opened. There were some concerns however, that the bombers would have to continually fly over Airline Road. It was located between the auxiliary landing field and ammunition depot and the Lowry Bombing Range
to the southeast. A compromise was reached and the Army agreed to close the road and patrol the area anytime planes armed with bombs were in the area. In addition, construction of an electric signal and siren on Airline Road would be undertaken and it would sound when aircraft would approach.\textsuperscript{26}

Today, this spot is the intersection of Quincy Avenue (Airline Road) and Gun Club Road in Aurora.

Unfortunately, the cost of the project was going beyond what Denver had originally envisioned and taking longer than the Army would have liked. Human nature and the need to condemn land via legal proceedings were blamed for the cost overruns and delays. By June 1, the original deadline, Denver had only purchased 80 percent of the land, or 51,000 acres. A week after the original deadline to secure the area and give it to the army, the Denver City Council approved an additional $200,000 from the general city fund to quickly complete the purchase of the bombing field. The Army had agreed to extend the purchasing deadline to September 1, 1938 since the purchases were nearly complete. The location of this final purchase of land was all north of Airline Road in Arapahoe County.\textsuperscript{27}

This action brought the total cost of the land for the bombing range and auxiliary air field to $950,000 dollars. Despite several arguments about the appropriation given other needs in the city, Harry W. Risley, president of
the council and a member of the air school committee believed that most of the new appropriation would be found via collecting delinquent taxes. As an example of the types of delays and cost overruns the city had to deal with, Councilman Harry Rosenthal described how the city had attempted to acquire condemned land for nine dollars an acre. The landowner sued and an Arapahoe County jury decided that the value of the land was over seventeen dollars an acre, nearly double the original price.

The city council also tried to alleviate the public’s image of cost overruns by pointing out the benefit to the community in having the air corps school located in Denver. Rosenthal commented to reporters that, “about 3,000 Denver men have been employed on WPA projects at the air school who otherwise would have had to be taken care of by direct relief.” Most citizens agreed that the project was worth the additional cost to the city.28

One of the smaller stories in Denver in 1938 was the construction of a phone line between Lowry and its auxiliary air field (Buckley) to the east. This was the largest job ever handled by the Army Signal Corps in Colorado to that time, as the entire project was over seven miles long. Over 240 poles were erected along Alameda Avenue starting at Dayton and proceeding to the airfield. The purpose was to establish phone communications with the
auxiliary field and to create the ability to remotely control the radio station that communicated with planes from Lowry.²⁹

By the end of 1938, as tensions and worries over war in Europe mounted, the bombing range was complete and Lowry neared the end of its first year. By this time it became clear that the auxiliary airfield (Buckley) for Lowry would become more important as the defense budget began to increase and create additional growth of the military and Lowry Field.

Preparations for World War II

In January 1939, as part of a massive increase in defense spending, Lowry Field received $2.5 million dollars to triple the size of the school. The growing need for qualified pilots prompted the change as Lowry became responsible for advanced instruction of pilots. In addition Lowry trained more photographers, armorer, and built more barracks to handle the increased number of personnel at the school.³⁰ The WPA program also allocated funds to construct additional barracks, classroom buildings, and improvements on the base.³¹ From 1938-1939 the Army spent $4.5 million dollars on facilities and hangars at the base.³²

The creation of a larger auxiliary field, or at least the continued existence of it, was due in no small part to the increasing conflict in Europe.
As German aggression expanded into countries closely aligned with the United States, the US government began to prepare itself. In response to this the Army ordered Lowry to begin moving certain training programs to other locations. For example, the clerical school at Lowry was relocated to Ft. Logan in southwest Denver. In addition schools training civilians in clerical skills moved to Greeley and Fort Collins because room for these classes would soon run out at Lowry. Also, prior to the start of World War II the U.S. military failed to create bases large enough for what would be required in the conflict, in large part due to insufficient funding. This development would help the auxiliary airfield become even more important when the war started.

By mid-1941 the US was clearly anticipating the coming war. At this time the pace of activity at the auxiliary field picked up and the number of takeoffs and landings grew as the training schedules at Lowry were increased to prepare for the war effort. Lowry Field eventually went to a wartime schedule of two shifts of class a day in July 1941. With this schedule, Lowry soon would accommodate some 13,000 troops. More pilots at Lowry meant more landings at the ammunition depot and more take-offs to practice bombing. Recognizing this increased workload the War Department allocated funds in May 1941, for the construction of an additional runway. Increased
activity at the unnamed field required that it be called more than just the auxiliary field. 37

On June 18, 1941, after more than three years without a name, the War Department in Washington D.C. announced that the ammunition depot and auxiliary field for Lowry Field would be designated Buckley Field in honor of John Harold Buckley. This announcement came over a year after it was suggested that the increased workload at the facility necessitated a separate name. 38

John Harold Buckley

Buckley was a native Coloradan and his family among the early settlers of the Front Range. His grandfather, John Albert Buckley, helped found Longmont, Colorado. John A. Buckley owned and operated a small Longmont tin and plumbing business that sold rain barrels, tin plates, sheet iron, and drain pipes. 39 In addition he served as mayor of Longmont from 1892-1893 and as a president of the school board. 40 As chief of the fire department he helped to put a new roof on city hall. 41 He also helped found the Masonic lodge in Longmont. 42

As if John Harold Buckley did not have enough to live up to, his father, Albert H. Buckley was just as popular as his grandfather. As a youth
Albert, became popular by racing his bicycle against horses. He usually lost but started a trend that lasted several years. In addition to his popularity, Albert saved a man’s life. Frank Patten had fallen into a river while fishing and Albert saved him by jumping in and pulling him to safety. During the rescue, Albert’s own fish hook was caught in his leg near the knee. Albert was hailed as a hero. He was also known in the community as a successful businessman for expanding the family hardware and plumbing business to other cities in Colorado.

With a prominent lineage, and his grandfather’s first name, John Harold Buckley had a lot to live up to. As grandson to the mayor, son to a hero, and a member of a very prominent family he would not let down the legacy of his family.

John Harold Buckley was born in 1896 in Longmont, Colorado. Buckley, or “Buck” as he was often called, graduated with honors from Longmont High School and began his college career in Boulder at the University of Colorado. With World War I approaching, John enlisted in the Colorado National Guard in March 1916. He was assigned to Company “B” of the 115th Engineers. Company B was quickly mustered into federal service when the Mexican Border War incident occurred. President Woodrow Wilson had ordered the National Guard activated on 18 June 1916 to deal with
an increased threat from Mexico. \(^{46}\) Private Buckley served for two months at Camp George West in Golden, Colorado until the situation with Mexico settled down and the National Guard was released from active duty. \(^{47}\)

John Buckley returned to his studies at the University of Colorado but remained with Company B where he eventually attained the rank of Corporal. With the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917, John Buckley and Company B were called to active duty. This occurred during Buckley’s senior year at CU. \(^{48}\) At the time he was captain of the school track team and active in campus activities. \(^{49}\) He had also been accepted for officer’s training school at this time. Ordered to report to Fort Riley, Kansas, he earned the rank of Second Lieutenant before volunteering for the air service. \(^{50}\) Buckley received additional pilot training at Rantoul Field in Champaign, Illinois and attended training schools at Essington, Pennsylvania, and Lake Charles, Louisiana. He was ordered to France as a fighter pilot and was assigned to the 28\(^{\text{th}}\) Aerial Squadron. \(^{51}\) In a letter home to his mother Grace Buckley Sapp he wrote,

"Mother, you have always taught me that life is not a thing of days and years, but of thoughts and deeds. We have planned great things for the future, you and I. I have lived much the last few months. Now I am going “over there” where life is still bigger and fuller. If I don’t come back, I shall have rounded out the life I planned." \(^{52}\)
In February 1918 he arrived in France where he completed additional training in pursuit aircraft at Issodan with the 28th Aero Squadron, First Army, First Pursuit Wing. In late August, the 28th Aero Squadron was moved to the front. Buckley’s first experience with combat came during the St. Mihiel offensive where he bombed and strafed the German lines at very low altitude. A squadron mate of Buckley’s in France was a young flier from New York named Quentin Roosevelt. Quentin was the youngest son of former United States President Theodore Roosevelt.

The squadron was the only unit armed with hand bombs which posed a particular risk since the plane had to fly very low to drop the bombs accurately. After only a month of combat exposure disaster struck the young Coloradan. On September 27, 1918, three days into the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Second Lieutenant Buckley volunteered for a strafing mission behind enemy lines.

The circumstances of Buckley’s death are uncertain. Most stories indicate Buckley was shot down and killed during this mission. However, a telegram dated September 30, 1918, from First Lieutenant Charles H. Jones, commander of the 28th Aero Pursuit Squadron, and sent to John Buckley’s father seemed to indicate that the pilot was killed while leaving the field on a patrol rather than in combat. It would seem unlikely that a pilot killed
fighting for his country would be misreported as simply crashing on takeoff, though it is possible. If he was shot down, then apparently his craft managed to crash behind friendly lines because Lt. Buckley was buried September 29, 1918, in a cemetery near Somange, France in the Argonne Forrest with full military honors. His grave marker reads, “The noblest character and most lovable man I ever knew.” In a letter he wrote home and sent shortly before his untimely death he said, “There is nothing in the world I like better than being master of the air. If I knew that tomorrow would be my last flight, I would still go with the same thrill that I have today.” Whether he was killed during takeoff or while on a mission, he was still dutifully serving his country when he was killed.

The naming of the base as Buckley Field was accomplished through political means. Colorado U.S. Senators Alva B. Adams and Edwin C. Johnson had lobbied the War Department to name the new field for Lieutenant John Harold Buckley. They succeeded and the airfield became known as Buckley Field.

As noted, Buckley Field was located northwest of the Lowry bombing range and the property between the field and the range was controlled by the government. Approximately 4,500 acres comprised the runways, small flight line area, and limited barracks that existed in 1941.
The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would change everything for the world, the nation, and Buckley Field. The next stage in the development of Buckley Field would prove that it could expand, and then endure whatever its future might present.
Chapter Two Notes


5 Shaw 21.


10 Noel and Woodward 13.

11 Shaw 21.


24 "City to Purchase 7,080 More Acres for Bombing Field," The Denver Post 30 Apr. 1938: 3.


26 "Where Army Fliers Will Brush Up on Their Bombing," 1.
27 "Bombing Range Costs Mount," 2.

28 "Bombing Range Costs Mount," 2.

29 "Phone Line from Lowry Field is Half Completed," The Denver Post 19 May 1938: 4.


32 Noel and Woodward 13.

33 Craven and Cate 133.

34 Craven and Cate 464.

35 Craven and Cate 126.

36 "Lowry Field to go on Wartime Basis Schedule," The Denver Post 2 July 1941: 1.

37 Craven and Cate 140.

38 "Buckley Field Is Name of Bomb Range," Rocky Mountain News 19 June 1941: 8.


40 "Old Colorado Family Name Given Airfield," The Denver Post 26 June 1941: 17.

41 Lange 30-31.

43 Lange 52-61.

44 “Old Colorado Family Name Given Airfield,” 17.


47 Nearer the Sky: History of the Colorado National Guard 40.

48 Nearer the Sky: History of the Colorado National Guard 40.


50 Nearer the Sky: History of the Colorado National Guard 23.

51 “Buckley Field Honors Name of Colorado World War Hero,” 1.


56 Nearer the Sky: History of the Colorado National Guard 40.

Nearer the Sky: History of the Colorado National Guard 42.
CHAPTER THREE
WORLD WAR II

Expansion at the Base

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, things started happening rapidly for Colorado, Lowry, and for Buckley. The need for additional bases and well trained men guaranteed the growth of the base during World War II through expanded training programs.

Colonel Lawrence A. Lawson, the first commander of the base, was in charge when it was determined that additional construction was needed to meet the requirements of the Army. The War Department appropriated $7.5 million dollars for the expansion of Buckley Field in January, 1942. At the time, the field was simply three dirt runways with minor accommodations for a few workers and soldiers along with areas to service aircraft. Consequently, an additional 1,250 acres was condemned to add land to the western most portion of the base so that the new armament school and barracks could be constructed. This additional land extended the base west to present day Buckley Road/ Airport Road.

At the time the primary purpose of Buckley was not announced to the public, just that more room for the technical school was needed. Ground was
broken on the new expansion site in April 1942, while official construction of
the technical training school began on May 18, 1942. It was estimated that
Buckley required approximately 14,000 men to complement the 16,000 at
Lowry. When ground was broken, only the 850th Ordinance Detachment was
already at the base providing security for the bombs and supplies there. They
would soon have plenty of company.

Buckley, under the command of the Army Air Forces Western
Technical Training Command, was to be the largest air training facility in the
country. So much was to be done that no one knew exactly where the new
additions of the base would be located. When caretakers went to Buckley to
find out where they would be located, not even the base commander knew
where that was.

Opening and Meeting the Public

Somehow, however, the base was completed on time and was
activated July 1, 1942. The first unassigned students arrived about a week
later. The construction, done mostly by local companies, proceeded quickly
with a dual shift system and continued throughout the war on various
buildings. By this time, seventy-five buildings had been completed, barely 30
percent of the total buildings originally planned. Another reason construction
proceeded so quickly was that most of the buildings, except the hospital, headquarters, and instructional buildings were of the theater-of-operation type construction that were usually single level, short-term use buildings.

The cost of Buckley was approximately $20 million dollars and its primary purpose was to operate as one of the Army's largest armament schools within the technical training command. In fact, it was even larger than Lowry Field in total size. Included on the base were four wooden hangars, some of which would be used for classrooms. The base was also constructed with a minimum number of accidents. Government employees worked 10,000 man hours without an accident and private contractors totaled more than 444,000 man hours with only five lost-time accidents. This was a record for safety engineers in the Rocky Mountain region at the time.

The base hospital was not completed by this time but was nearing the end of construction. With Fitzsimons nearby, many felt the large hospital was unnecessary, but with a capacity nearly that of Fitzsimons it would later prove invaluable. It would be staffed by forty medical officers with additional personnel added for dental services.

Two separate headquarters were also located on the base. One was for the educational and schooling responsibility of the base. The other was to function as the primary headquarters for the base itself. The first commander
of the technical training school HQ was Lieutenant Colonel R. P. Todd. The first order of business for the base itself was dealing with transportation issues.  

Previously, bases had received recruits on a monthly basis, but Buckley would modify this to a weekly process in order to alleviate transportation issues for the railroads. Rail lines were being constructed so that supplies could be dropped off at the loading docks with storage areas, troops could be offloaded near their barracks, and ammunition and machine parts could be dropped near the flight line. Denver Tramway Company buses ran nearly 21 hours a day from Buckley Field to the end of the street car line on Colfax Avenue near Poplar Street. This was to accommodate those civilian and military workers who lived off base.  

The design of the base, and others like it at the time, was to maximize efficiency and to feed off simplicity. Most of the buildings on Buckley were designed to be temporary, meaning they would last for only five years or so. The school buildings were located on two streets, D and E, between 3rd and 4th Avenue where students progressed from one building to another. It became clear that the base needed to expand so that when one group of students would leave, another would arrive. Keeping with the idea of simplicity and temporary buildings, most of the base buildings and all of the barracks were
simple rectangular buildings made with only wood, no stone or brick, and would be single level with entrances on either end of the building. There was a central smokestack to help heat the buildings in the winter. For summer cooling, windows were located all around the building about 4 feet apart to help with airflow.

The War Department estimated that housing for a single soldier in a theatre-of-operation style barracks would cost just $44 a year instead of the $175 for the next largest structure which was called mobilization type buildings that were two-story wooden barracks. The theater-of-operation buildings also could be built in one-sixth the time as mobilization type housing. Unlike most airfields, Buckley did not have much of a problem with overcrowding because of its immense acreage. Buckley never required large tent cities although a few small ones existed during construction, or the use of hotels to shelter its personnel.

The layout of the base changed continually throughout World War II, though by late 1943 most of the structures had been finished, and few others would be added. The primary focus of the base was the technical training school. Expediency and ease of use were important and the simplicity of the classrooms and central location played to that.
The 27 dedicated classroom buildings were located from 3rd Avenue to 7th Avenue in between D and E streets. These were buildings that were shaped like an "H" to facilitate larger group activities and instruction. The gas chamber used by the BTC and chemical weapons schools was in building 355 located at the northwest corner of 2nd Avenue and E.21

Buckley Field opened to the public on Labor Day, 1942. This was a major event for the base and for people living nearby who wanted to learn about the training going on at Buckley. The base was not yet completed; as expansion of the field continued, and many roads were not yet paved. John Buckley's mother, Mrs. Grace Buckley Sapp also attended the open house as did her ex-husband and John Buckley's father, Albert H. Buckley. The four-hour open house came complete with driving directions for people and, in anticipation of a big turnout, both East Sixth Avenue and Colfax Avenue were turned into one way roads heading east towards the base.22 However, nearly 35,000 people showed up to see the base creating a major traffic jam despite the one way traffic.23 Visitors were also treated to a parade review of the troops by the base commander Colonel Lawrence A. Lawson, a demonstration of the very tough 320 yard obstacle course, and an examination of the sixteen tennis courts, seven softball fields, seven baseball diamonds, and twenty volleyball courts.24 No major open house would be complete without sporting
events and the Buckley Bombers hosted a baseball game that day against the Zone Cab Company team.25

Armament Training Base

The mission of Buckley was a complicated and diverse one that constantly changed throughout the war. The motto of Buckley was to become “Just ineo alas” which means, “I sustain the wings” and it would hold true for the next half century. The base would fall under the indirect influence of Lowry Field but both were under the control of the Army Air Force Western Technical Training Command (AAFWTTC). There would be a number of training programs instituted at the base but Buckley’s first and primary mission was to act as an armament school that specialized in fighter armament education. Aircraft technicians would learn how to load, maintain, and repair the major machine guns of America’s fighter aircraft as well as arming several variants with bombs. This training focused on .30 and .50 caliber machine guns and on 20mm and 37mm cannons that equipped most American fighter planes.26 The aircraft at Buckley were primarily P-38, P-40, and a few P-51 aircraft but others were added during the war.27

As one of the largest armament schools in the nation, Buckley turned out certified technical armorers in the shortest time possible. Initially the
course was nine weeks long, but would later be shortened. Men started the first nine days in small groups working with models of the various types of guns they would be loading. Next, they worked with actual guns, taking them apart and putting them back together. After those 3 weeks, the fourth week emphasized the importance of the electrical system. Just as the men became proficient at putting them together and operating the electricity, the fifth and sixth weeks were spent learning the art of propeller timing so that they made the machine guns fire through the propeller without striking it. The process was known as synchronization. After they became proficient in that area, officers deliberately sabotaged and placed defective parts within the guns to do two things, first to show what happened if the guns malfunctioned and to help them troubleshoot to locate the exact problem.

In the seventh week they learned the art of clustering and sighting a fighter's guns. If a pilot is in the air and rounds are not on target, it could mean life or death. By spending time on sighting, they maximized the usefulness of the guns. Weeks eight and nine were practical training exercises on the bombing range, watching strafing runs and correcting errors. For many people at the time, the exact types of planes being armed were secret. As stated earlier they were primarily P-38 and P-40 aircraft.
In their final weeks of armament training the men were assigned to squads as they proceeded through the final training sequences. The first class to graduate from Buckley was in September 1942. Horace G. Deaton of the 768th Technical School Squadron graduated first in the class of several hundred. By 1943, the base would be turning out some 100,000 armament graduates yearly. The design of the base and the progression of the classes fit into this streamlined process. Fighter armament training was eventually cancelled altogether in March of 1944. This likely was a result of sufficient crews to handle the anticipated workload. Buckley had done its job so well, it put itself out of a job. However, to maintain effective oversight of armament operations at other bases, officer armament training continued at Buckley.

Though Lowry was primarily responsible for bombardier training, Buckley also helped train men with bombardier proficiency with a particular emphasis on the B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberators. This continued after the fighter armament training had been cancelled. The bomber course was 7 weeks long with twenty days of general bomber instruction, and twenty two days of specialization on a particular bomber type. This was also an expansion of the pre-war tradition of the bombers taking off from Lowry Field, landing at Buckley to be loaded with live ordinance, and then to
proceed to the bombing range via the corridor of land. The base was back to its auxiliary field roots.

Basic Training at Buckley

Besides its primary responsibility as a facility for armorer training in World War II, the base was also used for a multitude of other technical training courses. Some were at the base for a short time, others came and went in a matter of months. The most important of these throughout the war, was Buckley’s use as an army Basic Training Center (BTC).

The Basic Training Center at Buckley was established in early 1943. Initially the BTC in the Army Air Force had only a 4 week course where two-thirds of the 192 training hours dealt with physical training, squad drills, and marches. There was no time allocated for weapons or even teaching recruits to fire a gun. Most of these BTC candidates were flying cadets who would receive their basic training at Buckley before continuing on to flight school. The reason of course was to simply get as many men into the field as possible and then finish training and gun proficiency there. However, by the time the BTC was established at Buckley, the course had been lengthened to 8 weeks for 172 hours of additional formal training, one-third of which was now devoted to weapons training.
One interesting problem that had not yet been addressed at Buckley was the fact that no rifle range existed! This was something the Army apparently neglected to include originally as the base was not slated to actually train recruits. Brigadier General Lawson, commander of the base, ordered the construction of the range which included 3 firing positions at 100, 200, and 300 yards. Completed in July 1943 at a cost of only $1,000, the initiative to build its own range actually saved taxpayers money.\textsuperscript{40}

As part of the BTC training men received schooling on various topics. This included instruction on bayoneting, grenade throwing, basic first aid, proper military techniques, traditions, marching and of course physical training. As part of the infantry training men would move from course to course learning these various aspects of military life and survival. On one course men would learn how to make and detect booby traps. On the grenade course, they would learn how to approach a foxhole and to take out machine gun nests with one good throw. On the close combat course, men would learn how to deal with targets in hand-to-hand combat.\textsuperscript{41} In addition, basic training started to include the teaching of tactics in taking over occupied cities and urban fighting.\textsuperscript{42}

Over 50,000 men completed their basic training at Buckley Field during the war and one of the most interesting areas of the BTC, and of
Buckley during World War II, was the infamous “Burma Road” obstacle course. The course was over two miles long and wound around the base, over the prairie, up and down the sides of the erosion-word waterways, and along the sandy beds of dry streams that ran through the base. The trail continued up seemingly perpendicular hills, down inclines and through the brush lined paths.43

Captain James J. Reid who had been the former football coach at Colorado College designed the course.44 The design of the Burma Road was meant to help increase the stamina and physical strength of the men. The course received its name because, “The natural terrain and pathway seemed to simulate the famed highway in a positive way.” It is possible that many men would have preferred to run the actual Burma Road rather than Buckley’s version of it.

Another interesting aspect of the Burma Road was the signs placed along the path with reassuring messages and slogans. This may have been an imitation of the Burma Shave signs placed along highways in the 1920s and 1930s. The slogans at the base rhymed in the same way the Burma Shave signs did. Signs at the base included the phrase, “Take this course in stride.” Another was, “Burma Road is mighty rough, just the thing to make you tough.” Soldiers were reassured that, “Any soldier who gallops over it will
assume that no truck ever wheezed more after reaching the crest of the
Himalayas," than anyone finishing the Buckley course. The road was
certainly well worn by the end of the war.

Arctic Training Program

Other training programs existed as well. The Arctic School was the
most well known of these other programs, though initially it was kept secret.
The school was designed for many various aspects of arctic training. Some of
this dealt with training men to service aircraft while in winter or extremely
cold conditions. This would be important as the U.S. would fight in Europe
during the winter and the Air Corps would also utilize bases in the arctic
regions such as those in Alaska and Iceland. The men were taught to live on
special rations, to be self-reliant, and to practice safety skills in cold
conditions. The base was established at Jones Pass and then moved to Echo
Lake, Colorado which is only 15 miles from the summit of Mount Evans.
They learned to ice fish, to locate their position, to keep warm when there is
no warmth, and to survive despite the isolation and endless cold. They
learned how to use a parachute to make a teepee for survival and even cut ice
blocks to make igloos. At Buckley, the West Hangar was filled with
classrooms and equipment for arctic and technical training. The troops would
receive initial training at Buckley, before moving on to the real world training at Echo Lake. 48

Besides learning basic survival at Echo Lake, troops also learned the art of rescue in arctic conditions. The troops learned to use Huskies to help move supplies and rescue injured and stranded troops. 49 The dogs would be used often in these training missions and if there was nothing to pull, they would be harnessed to jeeps to pull them around. As part of their ownership by the US army, each dog had its own serial number tattooed to its ear. 50

Additional instruction for the men included rescue training. This involved using aircraft to locate lost men and finding signs of their presence in arctic conditions and to devise a signal system to use if they were lost. Doctors were taught how to parachute in with sleds to get stranded soldiers out or to use snowshoes to hike into an area for a rescue. 51

This training was put to a real world test in April 1944 when 34 people became stranded on Berthoud Pass near Winter Park, Colorado during a raging snow storm. Men from Buckley Field, operating at Echo Lake, made the dangerous trek up the mountain to rescue all of those trapped by the storm. 52 National headlines were made about the rescue bringing honor and admiration to the Arctic training school, Colorado, and Buckley Field.
Induction Center and Photography School

By late 1943, little more than a year after opening, it was clear that Buckley was an integral part of the US Army Air Force Technical Training Command. Buckley was one of over 2,200 Army Air Force installations in the United States.\(^{53}\) The number of men had increased four fold in just over a year.\(^{54}\) In fact more than a division worth of men were said to be stationed at the base, approximately 20,000 men.\(^{55}\) As other needs developed, so did the need for training and expansion at Buckley.

Also in the later portion of 1943 Buckley became a screening and induction processing center for air and ground crews. Buckley was one of seven new centers to complement the three already operating. A few hundred men would be processed daily through the administration of various tests.\(^{56}\) This clearly shows the importance of Buckley as the war was progressing and the need to continue processing new men into the armed forces.

In July 1944, Buckley's hospital was chosen to be the penicillin depot for the area, necessitating additional transportation resources.\(^{57}\) Though not a training program, it certainly came about as a result of the increased duties given to Buckley.

Another area of training at Buckley, though small, dealt with reconnaissance photography that foreshadowed its modern mission. The 311\(^{th}\)
Photo Reconnaissance Unit was assigned to rechart, remap, and rephotograph the world accurately for the first time ever. The unit operated modified B-17 bombers to take photographs during missions over areas such as Guadalcanal, Italy, Eastern Europe, Greece, and Japan. Many of these images were used to construct better maps to help with accurate strategic bombing or invasion planning. Colorado newspapers claimed that the 311th produced images of Japan better than even the Japanese possessed. 58

Chemical Warfare Training at Buckley

Training to become a squadron armament and chemical officer was moved to Buckley from Yale University in June 1944. This was a training program for officers who would be charged with supervising bomb loading and armament maintenance, sometimes with chemical munitions. 59 Buckley was a natural choice for this since the West Coast Chemical School was relocated to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in June 1944.

The chemical warfare school added a touch of realism to the BTC training after the War Department announced that every member of the service had to pass the gas chamber training. 60 Buckley added building D-355 at the western edge of the classroom buildings at the corner of 3rd Avenue and E street. 61
In 1945, Buckley Field became even more important to the Army Air Corps. An overall plan to concentrate Army Air Force Service Training activities at Buckley Field was developed and several training programs were relocated to the base as a result of this plan. This included the Chemical Warfare Service Unit Training Center that was relocated from Barksdale Field in Louisiana to Buckley in early 1945. The service was responsible for teaching the handling, supply, and maintenance of chemical material. The program included training on flame throwers as well as smoke and incendiary devices.

In addition, an Army Air Force wide officers training program that included all officers, not just those specializing in chemical warfare, was started in May 1945. The schools came to Buckley due to a lack of capacity at other schools and locations. The class at Buckley included a chemical munitions and materiel course and also courses for chemical technicians, decontamination-equipment operators, and toxic-gas handlers. The curricula were intended to provide instruction for all chemical specialists needed by the Army Air Force. The most important of these functions were the chemical air operations company, the chemical depot company (aviation), and the chemical maintenance company (aviation). The first of these had the function of filling and decontaminating airplane spray tanks, the second operated chemical.
ammunition depots, and the third was responsible for major repair and salvation of chemical equipment.⁶⁶

Also, chemical warfare classes were given to military police that were training at Buckley in 1945.⁶⁷ This MP program was added late 1944 or early 1945.

One smaller component of the chemical warfare program at Buckley included testing incendiary bombs that would be used during the strategic bombing campaign against Japan. The bombs were produced at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, shipped to Buckley, and loaded on aircraft for use on the bombing range. The effectiveness of the bombs was carefully measured and reported to the arsenal for any adjustments to make them more effective.⁶⁸

During the war, Buckley became the consolidation center for chemical warfare units. This was to help organize and transition units deploying to and from the front lines. At the end of the war Buckley was the deactivation center for many of the chemical units that it had helped train and establish. Some 35 chemical warfare units were moved from Columbia Field, Barksdale Field, and Fresno after September 1945 and deactivated between October 1945 and February 1946 in most cases.⁶⁹
Additional Training Programs

One training program that was set up at Buckley, and not part of the national system, was a driving school. It was discovered in 1942 as the base was completed that many drivers lacked some basic skills, including necessary safety precautions. As a result Buckley set up a driving school for men stationed there. Lieutenant W. O. Earl designed and built the quarter-mile driving course. Most of those trained operated large trucks that delivered equipment and supplies to Buckley and the metro-area. Students were required to study maps and driving regulations and practiced parking, signaling, and safety regulations. It was usually a two-day course but some were assigned for as much as two weeks.  

As mentioned before, the Military Police School, that had been established at Camp Riley, Minnesota, was moved to Buckley in late 1944 or 1945 and eventually became the first organization to function at the proposed Service Training Center at Buckley. Courses offered there, other than unit training, included separate Army air Force guard courses for officers and enlisted men, and a program for training provost marshals and military police commanders. This training included chemical warfare classes in tactics, first aid, map reading, and fighting fires caused by incendiary bombs. The MP
training also comprised on-the-job experience in towns in the vicinity of the Military Police Centers. 73

By spring 1945 other schools were opening and operating at Buckley. A post engineer course was established in 1945, though it was still directed by the Army Corps of Engineers and not Buckley directly. Officers selected to take this eight week course had to be college graduates in engineering or have equivalent experience. 74 A camouflage school, dedicated strictly to training officers, was also established at the base as part of the engineering course. The course was two weeks long and graduates would be responsible for training enlisted soldiers around the country in the art of incorporating simple camouflage techniques with most buildings and facilities. 75

A unique training program was established at Buckley unlike any other in the nation. In April 1945 a “K-9” training program was set up to train dogs for service in the front lines of combat. The various jobs these dogs were trained for included working as mine detectors, messengers, aids in sentry duty, sled and pack work, and in searching for battlefield casualties. 76 Buckley must have seemed to be a logical choice given the previous arctic training done by dogs at the base and at Echo Lake.

In May 1945, Buckley received a continuation flying school. This was set up to allow pilots, for whom there were no combat assignments available,
to continue training. This was to keep up the skills and proficiency of the pilots rather than allowing their training to wane.

A new crash fire and rescue school was added to the Technical training commands list of activities at Buckley in May 1945. The school was created to train fire prevention techniques to civilian fire chiefs operating at air bases as well as enlisted men and officers for overseas deployment. This was done likely to train civilian replacements for military personnel departing for the Pacific theatre in preparation for the invasion of Japan. This was eventually moved to Lowry before the war’s end.

Despite being an Army Air Field Buckley never had any specific flying training program other than the maintenance of skills in the continuation program. This was because the training centers established by the War Department felt that all flight training schools should be south of the 37th parallel where weather conditions were most conducive to uninterrupted flying. However, Lowry had been selected to do bombardier training from 16 July 1940 to March 1941. Part of this was due to the fact that there was the massive Lowry Bombing Range nearby. As a result of the official determination that there was a lack of decent weather in Denver, the bombardier school was later moved to Barksdale Field in Louisiana and later to Ellington Field in Texas. Ultimately this is the reason why Lowry and
Buckley were never designated as initial flying training centers. Buckley did support the primary flying training field in La Junta, Colorado on occasion. In addition Buckley became responsible for fueling and minor maintenance of aircraft that were transiting the Midwest and needed to be serviced. Major repairs were still done at Lowry, but it was just one more role for a base that seemed to do everything.

At the end of the war, while many bases were being closed, Buckley continued to receive new commands. In October 1945, the world headquarters for the Army Air Forces Mobile Training Units was moved to Buckley from its downtown Denver address. The move occurred due to the disbanding of the Western Technical Training command. There was also a chance that the role of the mobile training units would expand after the war.

During the war however, this expansion of Buckley and of its role in training men, almost did not come about. As things began to go well in the war, there were some indications that Buckley would be closed soon. In late 1944 it was announced that Buckley would be a sub-post for Lowry and that the training courses would be moved to Lowry on January 1, 1945. Some training courses had been removed earlier in the year and it seemed a reasonable possibility that the base might close. The base remained open temporarily, with the only the hospital, and 311th Photography Wing promised
by the army to remain intact. Some schools remained such as the officer's armament, military police, chemical warfare and training for camouflage engineers. While it was feared the base would close, Buckley was eventually restored to full active status with the help of Colorado Senators Ed. C. Johnson and Eugene D. Millikin, and Mayor Stapleton, in April, 1945. It was this action that saves the base from being closed down or lowered in importance.

Quality of Life for Those at Buckley

Throughout the construction process, Buckley became a city unto itself and continued to expand throughout the war. By war's end there were nearly 700 buildings on the base organized into city blocks for classrooms, barracks, and operation of the air field. North-south avenues were numerical starting with 2nd Avenue to the west while east-west streets were alphabetical starting with “A” street nearest to 6th Avenue and the northern portion of the base. Buildings were labeled based upon a grid system that gave every building a letter and number for its location.

With ample space available, Buckley was built to be self-contained since it was so far from most services that were located closer to Aurora and Denver. This meant that entertainment, athletics, and other amenities had to
be located on the base. Each squadron had its own day room (lounge or recreation area) in or near their barracks, and the base had ample athletic fields. Men were encouraged to participate in intramural sports but also competitively against other bases and branches of the services. The Buckley Gunners, the term for all sports teams, took on other bases in the region to keep up morale. 88

Many of the everyday items men would want and need could be obtained or created on base. Part of this was convenience and also to keep men from being distraught over being forced to stay on base without leave. Furloughs were generally not permitted while students were in a training status and this policy proved especially irksome to men who might be in a training sequence for six to seven months. It was also noted that many men were in the army against their will and the pressures to turn out trained men quickly forced these restrictions. 89 As a result, Buckley had a number of official amenities right on the base.

Recreation was important at the base since men were not often given much time to leave, and since Denver was not yet a large metropolis, the base created all the recreation and entertainment they needed. The base had two movie theatres creatively named War Department Theater 1 and War Department Theater 2. 90 The theaters were dedicated in July 1942 and usually
showed one morning show, and two evening shows. During the days and
afternoons the theaters were used to show training films. Inside the theaters
were murals painted by Buckley men and WPA artists.

The base included a service club for enlisted men for social time and
contained $25,000 worth of furnishings, equipment and supplies necessary to
run the club. The building was two stories tall, included a library with
several thousand volumes, a reading area, a cafeteria, a dance hall, and an area
suitable for showing films. On many evenings women were employed to
dance there.

During the dedication ceremony in November 1942, base commander
General Lawrence A. Lawson and Senior Hostess at the club Margaret B.
McLaughlin spoke. The newly promoted General Lawson thanked the
soldiers for their hard work and hoped they enjoyed the facility. The Buckley
Field Band played at the opening of the facility.

In fact there were eventually two field bands. One was the 4th Army
Air Force Band and the other was the 29th Army Air Force Band. These were
comprised mostly of men who were musicians before the war. They would
perform often for the men and would play at dances or gatherings held
frequently on the base. Building A-31 was a large bandstand with an open
green area in the northern section of the base, near the entrance to the base,
that was used for performances and special occasions.\textsuperscript{95} This included visits from stars on USO tours.

Big name entertainment was not in short supply during the war. Hollywood’s best and most glamorous came to Buckley. The list of performers was plentiful with Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, Frances Langford, Yehudi Menuhin, Ann Miller and Jane Wyman leading the pack.

For the few men, mostly officers, who were granted leave from the base, two large new USO clubs were available by April 1943. The men’s club was located at 1575 Grant Street in Denver. The men’s club had pool tables, table tennis, a musical and reading library, dance rooms, beds, showers, handball courts and horseshoe pits. For those who wanted to relax with photographs, the club also had a dark room for developing film.\textsuperscript{96} The women’s USO at 1772 Grant St. allowed WAAC’S, WAVES, and servicemen’s wives to utilize similar amenities. Buckley’s finest and their spouses could enjoy some leave off base with permission, and these clubs helped them to pass the time more comfortably.

The base had the usual post exchanges and Commissary for food items. In fact, the Post Exchange was doing over $200,000 a month by April 1943.\textsuperscript{97} The Post Exchange was building 246.\textsuperscript{98} The base had its own newspaper called the \textit{Buckley Armorer} and the 8-page edition was published
weekly. The various mess halls on base provided meals nearly 20 hours a day. The largest mess hall was in building 704 and could accommodate just over 1000 men. Buckley also had a guest hotel, barber, tailor, bank, three telephone rooms and two chapels.

An interesting note was that one could get anything a strong young soldier needed on base. At the Buckley Field Exchange Restaurant there was a full service cafeteria and near the checkout, a large display case of cigarettes awaited soldiers to help complete their meal. When men simply wanted to relax they could gather at the restaurant where there were jukeboxes.99

One of the most popular things to do if they had the time, and money, was to make phone calls to friends and families. This was allowed in order to maintain contact with families and maintain the morale that could suffer from being restricted to the base during their training. There were three phone rooms on the base. One was located in Post Exchange Number 2 (F-432) at the southern end of the base. Another was located at the service club at the north end of the base (A-27). The last was located at the base hospital complex. These telephone rooms all had comfortable surroundings that men could wait and relax in as the long distance calls were placed and completed by attendants for the soldiers.100 The cost of the calls varied based on
distance, with the most expensive calls placed to New York. In 1944, a three minute call to New York cost $3.25.\textsuperscript{101}

It is likely that the centralization of phone calls was done for security purposes. By limiting the number of phone centers that could call off base it made it easier to monitor calls from the base.

Various units posted at the base also found that keeping animal mascots would help occupy their time. A mascot auxiliary had been set up at Buckley lovingly referred to as MUTTS (mothers under terrific tension) The 768\textsuperscript{th} Technical Training Squadron (TTS) had a female Boston terrier named Patsy that gave birth to puppies who were made mascots for various other units. Bo was a wire haired terrier given to the 764\textsuperscript{th} TTS, Captain was a St. Bernard with the 913\textsuperscript{th} Quartermaster Department, and the 765\textsuperscript{th} TTS was given a mutt named Butch.\textsuperscript{102}

Banking history was made at Buckley, as the base bank was one of the first ever on a military base where all the services of a real bank were provided and not simply saving and withdrawing money. The arrangement was made between Denver National Bank and General Lawrence A. Lawson. The building was brand new (A-32) and included a vault with a 2,850 pound steel door and nearly 2 feet thick steel and concrete walls. The procession of funds from the downtown branch of the Denver National Bank on 17\textsuperscript{th} Street
drew the attention of passersby as the truck left and drove with an armed
escort of 6 jeeps and 6 motorcycles to Buckley Field.

The bank was open Monday through Saturday from 11 AM to 4:30
PM. The various services available besides simply depositing and
withdrawing money included selling cashiers checks, money orders, and war
bonds. This was a big deal for Buckley as even Fort Carson and Lowry had
not yet added a dedicated and expanded bank on the post.

But not everything at the base was fun and work. There was a real
side of war displayed at Buckley. In order to make Buckley self-sufficient, a
base hospital complex was constructed for immediate emergencies and to treat
minor sicknesses. This 400 bed hospital was sometimes seen as superfluous
since Fitzsimons Army Medical Center was only a few miles away but it
proved invaluable. Most of the original staff of the hospital was transferred
from St. Luke’s Hospital in Chicago. If men were at the Buckley hospital
for a few days they would be able to watch movies the Red Cross had bought
in to show in the center of the hospital complex. The hospital itself was a
self-contained facility with its own tailor, bank, and phone room. Classes
were offered in English, Spanish, history, and geography at the hospital to
help pass the time. The hospital complex was made up of nearly 90
buildings in the northwest corner of the base. Today part of this area is the location of the modern commissary.

The hospital was used extensively during the war. It was used as a convalescent center to help nurse men back to health physically and mentally. In addition, casualties received from the air force would also be discharged and redistributed on the orders of the Buckley hospital.

Accidents, Mishaps, and Trouble-makers

There were several accidents on or near the base during World War II, many of which were never made public or recorded, but a few pieces of evidence remain. A P-40 crashed at Buckley on November 2, 1942. Also, an AT-6 trainer from Buckley collided in mid-air with a B-24 bomber on July 14, 1945, injuring one man but both planes managed to land safely.

Flight Officer Joseph L. Wolf was flying an unknown training aircraft in July 1945 as part of the continuation flying school established at Buckley to maintain flying skills when trouble developed. The plane suddenly fell out of formation during flight and crashed fifty miles northeast of Buckley near Hudson, Colorado, killing Wolf.

On June 27, 1945, PFC Harold Hooks Jr. was fueling a B-17 at Buckley. Sparks from the fuel truck pump ignited the gas. Apparently Hooks
was trying to go back to the truck to turn off the pump when he was burned. He died the next day from his injuries.113

Training and preparing for the war could also result in injury and death. Numerous accidents and crashes occurred in Colorado, some at or near Buckley, and many of these went unreported during the war for morale and secrecy purposes.

Being self-contained meant having room for troublemakers too. The base had a stockade with six buildings surrounded by a fence in the northeast corner of the base, just south of the warehouse district.114 Two soldiers, Pvt. John Penrod and Pvt. George Watts escaped from the detention hospital, overpowered the guards, invited others to go with them, and escaped by crawling through a ventilation shaft. Penrod was arrested a few days later after a brawl in a Sterling tavern.115

Three men tried to escape guards in June 1943 as they were being returned to the field to be placed in the stockade when they ran. Kenneth Black was shot three times while trying to escape. He survived his injuries while the military released no further information.116

One story that commanders at Buckley would have preferred to keep quiet happened in March and April in 1943. A famed robber known as the "perfumed bandit" had robbed nearly 20 drug stores in the Denver area.
Police had planned to spring a trap for the bandit but when police found a tramway ticket on the road to Buckley Field, they felt it was a soldier. Pfc. Edmund J. La Brecque was arrested and two others detained in connection with the infamous robberies.117

Second Open House

As the war seemed to go better for the US and Allies, Buckley again hosted a major open house, this time in October, 1944. The day was to include a simulated ground and air assault on a mock village at Buckley field. When weather didn’t cooperate, it was replaced with a ground assault with tanks, flame throwers and mortars. To complement the simulated attack, a jeep exhibition with stunt driving and a demonstration of fire-fighting techniques was provided. A performance by chemical warfare units was also put on with smoke and another mock assault on a Nazi occupied village. So many people tried to show up to the field that officials had to open additional gates to handle the traffic. In all, nearly 150,000 are believed to have attended the show, which was the largest turnout in Colorado up to that time. Once again, Buckley showed its value and importance to the community.118
Women and Minorities at Buckley

Women and minorities also served with distinction at Buckley during the war. In the 1940s women were not allowed to serve in combat units. Buckley did however have a dedicated Women's Army Auxiliary Corps Army (WAAC) unit. These women took care of secretarial, nursing, and basic repair jobs on the base. They had their own mess, barracks, and day room. Much of the recorded history of the critical tasks handled by women at Buckley during the war has been lost.

Very little is written or known about African-American activities at Buckley. Through photographs and limited records there is evidence to prove that many were stationed at the base. Blacks were less discriminated against in Colorado, according to a survey taken by the Army during the war. It was determined that placing blacks at technical training schools in the South was not a great idea. The level of discrimination was going to be too much for these soldiers in the South. The Army Air Corps sent out a survey to various installations, including at Lowry Field, and determined that Colorado, including Buckley, would be a suitable posting for blacks. The Army Air Force had already decided that African-American troops would be segregated from whites, but this allowed blacks to be trained at bases already in operation. This seemed to coincide with positive or at least non-negative
images and acceptance of blacks. Given Denver’s history with the Ku Klux Klan this seemed a bit surprising.

African-Americans worked as mechanics, technicians, and motor pool workers and received training in the armament school. The exact numbers or eventual postings are not known, though the story of Sergeant Robert Washington helps give a picture of life at the base. Washington was sent to Buckley in late 1942 and served as a night truckmaster at the motor pool. He was later posted as a payroll clerk. In November 1944, Washington was chosen to attend Officer’s Training School to become an officer. He appears to be the first African-American from Buckley to be chosen for OTS. In addition Washington played in one of the base’s jive bands “The Seven F’s” as a trumpet player. He also wrote a play while at Buckley called “Barracks Sessions” which was a comedy. Washington’s experience is one of the few stories that remain about the life of African-Americans at Buckley during the war.

Just like the nation at the time, African-Americans were segregated in their barracks, mess halls, and Post Exchange. They were housed some several hundred yards away from any other white barracks and areas. They were placed very near the reservoir that existed in the eastern portion of the occupied areas of the base. They had 18 barracks on the base, 2 mess halls,
their own post exchange, and a dayroom.\textsuperscript{123} They did have various dances and events at Buckley throughout the year to keep up morale and provide entertainment for the troops.\textsuperscript{124} It is clear that despite the humiliations of segregation at Buckley, African-Americans served their country effectively during World War II.

End of the War

By the end of the war it is estimated that nearly 100,000 men per year had been trained in all courses at the base. At its peak in 1943, Buckley produced 30,000 armorers, 10,000 basic trainees, and 2,000 arctic warriors in only six months.\textsuperscript{125} Buckley answered the call for young men to be trained and prepared for the reality and hardships of war and did so proudly. As the war ended the situation for many bases was up in the air. Buckley was one of only 429 army installations retained at the beginning of 1946. This was down 80 percent from a maximum of 2252 at the end of 1943.\textsuperscript{126} With the war over the role, and usefulness of Buckley would be questioned.

A major base that was only 4 years removed from an auxiliary status, now facing closing for the second time in 2 years, was supposed to enter the postwar world with some type of mission. Unfortunately, the Air Force would
decide that Lowry was sufficient for its training needs, and Buckley was expendable.
Chapter Three Notes

1 Buckley Field Army Air Force Western Technical Training Command (Washington D.C.: Fourth District Department of the Army, 1943) 42.


4 “Air School Will be Increased to 30,000,” The Denver Post 2 Apr. 1942: 1.


11 “Buckley Field, Built in Three Months, Ready for Occupancy,” 2.

13 "Buckley Field, Built in Three Months, Ready for Occupancy," 2.

14 Buckley Field, Map, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).

15 "Buckley Field, Built in Three Months, ready for Occupancy," 2.


17 Craven and Cate 127.


19 Craven and Cate 149.


21 Buckley Field, Map, Denver: US War Department, 1944.

22 "Buckley Will be Thrown Open to Public," 1.

23 "50,000 Visit Denver’s Army Bases," Rocky Mountain News 8 Sept. 1942: 16.

24 "Buckley Will be Thrown Open to Public," 1.

25 "50,000 Visit Denver’s Army Bases," 16.

26 Craven and Cate 422.


29 “Buckley Field, A Study of Men and Weapons,” Rocky Mountain News 1 Apr. 1943: 18


33 Craven and Cate 642.


36 Craven and Cate 641.

37 Craven and Cate 529-530.

38 “Buckley Field will Get First Flying Cadets,” The Denver Post 12 Feb. 1943: 12.

39 Craven and Cate 532.

40 “Soldiers Build own Rifle Range at Buckley Field” Rocky Mountain News 19 June 1943: 15.


49 Holch 22.


54 “Buckley Field Busy on First Birthday,” Rocky Mountain News 2 July 1943: 9.


59 Craven and Cate 643.


61 Buckley Field, Map, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).

62 Craven and Cate 650.

64 "Buckley Teaching Chemical Warfare," The Denver Post 19 May 1945: 3.


66 Craven and Cate 650-659.


71 Craven and Cate 650.


73 Craven and Cate 663.

74 Craven and Cate 650.


76 "War Dogs Now Being Trained at Buckley Field," The Denver Post 17 Apr. 1945: 3.


80 Craven and Cate 466-468.

81 Craven and Cate 151.


84 "Buckley Field to be Sub-Depot to Lowry After Jan. 1, Army Says," Rocky Mountain News 20 Dec. 1944: 14.


86 "Buckley Field Will Again Be Placed in Full Active Status," The Denver Post 20 Apr. 1945: 1.

87 "Buckley Field Will be Kept Permanently," The Denver Post 4 Feb 1945: 8.


89 Craven and Cate 656.

91 “Buckley Field Theater is Dedicated,” Rocky Mountain News 15 July 1942: 9.


93 “Buckley Will be Thrown Open,” 1.

94 “Buckley Field Commander Made General,” The Denver Post 5 Nov. 1942: 15.

95 Buckley Field, Map, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).


98 Buckley Field, Map, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).


102 “Multiplying Mascots,” Rocky Mountain News 1 Nov. 1942: 32.

104 “Buckley Will be Subpost of Lowry,” 28.

105 “Buckley Will be Thrown Open,” 1.


107 *Buckley Field, Map*, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).


110 “P.40 Crashes at Buckley,” *The Denver Post* n.d. n.p., from the clippings file at Denver Public Library.


113 “Bomber Fire Burns Kill Buckley Man,” *The Denver Post* 29 June 1945: 5.

114 *Buckley Field, Map*, Denver: US War Department, 1944.


Osur 23.


Buckley Field, Map, (Denver: US War Department, 1944).


Colorado Air National Guard 320.

Shaw 42.
CHAPTER FOUR

POSTWAR AND NAVY YEARS 1946-1959

Between 1945 and 1960 Buckley changed hands several times with multiple programs running simultaneously. Many of the structures found new life as housing, while others were converted into classrooms in Adams County, Colorado. The service of the base to the local community continued to expand with the Korean conflict and the Cold War.

Status of Buckley Field After World War II

At the close of 1945 Buckley was made into an auxiliary field for Lowry just as it was before the war. Even before then members of the Denver Chamber of Commerce sensed that the base might be closed. In August 1945, just a week after the announced Japanese surrender, the Chamber went to Washington D.C. to urge the Army to retain the field and bombing range as a permanent facility in addition to Lowry.¹ But the Army decided that one base was sufficient in the metro area. On February 26, 1946, the Army announced to Colorado Senator Eugene P. Milliken that Buckley would be placed on the inactive list. This was surprising to the 3,000 Army personnel still at the base including the 311th Photographic Wing, military police school, and the mobile
training unit headquarters. At the time of the announcement the army requested that cities or universities make an application to use barracks on the base for housing. There was an overwhelming response from the nearly 7,000 Denver homeless who contacted local newspapers for information on how to obtain housing at Buckley.²

Despite the fact that Buckley was going to transfer most of its personnel to Lowry within sixty days, Denver Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton seemed hesitant to immediately acquire the facilities, stating that there may be enough housing in Denver already. The University of Denver expressed interest in acquiring some of the housing for its single veteran students.³ Denver did send out building inspectors to the field in March to review the viability of the barracks to be used for housing.⁴

Governor John C. Vivian and Adjunct General Frazer Arnold, head of the Colorado National Guard, sent messages to the head of the US National Guard, requesting that the field be allocated to the National Guard on February 28, 1946.⁵ In addition General Arnold sent a letter to Colorado representative Dean Gillespie indicating the importance of obtaining a portion of the base and the bombing range that could be used for artillery practice and military maneuvers. The letter also asked for any help the congressman might be able to provide.⁶
During the first week of June 1946, the final and official announcement of the inactivation of Buckley was made indicating that this would occur at the end of the month. However, within that same announcement was the news that would help save Buckley, at least for the time being. The Colorado National Guard was to have access and use of the field in conjunction with the Army. Apparently the efforts of General Arnold, Governor Vivian, and Representative Gillespie paid off since they were among the first to be notified. The Guard was planning to bring in heavy bombers and fighters to the base with over 2000 men. In addition to the air wing, the Guard was planning to have over 3000 men participate in combat training using the bombing field for maneuvers and live fire exercises.7

However, Buckley was still under the control of the Army Air Force, and despite being an inactive base still had men being given their basic training prior to flight school. The 311th Photographic Wing had already been relocated to Medill Field in Florida making room for The 59th Fighter Wing (Colorado Air National Guard) to be located at Buckley. The mobile training unit headquarters was to be transferred to Chanute Field in Illinois.8

Conflicting orders came only a few days later saying that Buckley would remain an active status base. Despite the confusion, the Army continued to decrease its presence at the base, while the National Guard
proceeded with plans to use the facilities and leave Stapleton airport. It was also rumored that Buckley would train Army reserve pilots but this would not happen.

The Army Air Force Leaves Buckley

Before people had time to understand the inactive, active, possible reserve center medley, the Fifth Army, in control of the field, announced Buckley Field was surplus and would be closed in December 1946. When Buckley was declared surplus to the needs of the US Army, many questions arose. Once airfields were declared surplus they were usually turned over to the War Assets Administration. After the military confirmed that the remaining buildings and equipment would not be transferred or retained, local communities were given the opportunity to acquire them.

Since the use of Buckley had already been promised to the Colorado National Guard this created an even greater sense of confusion. Officially the Colorado National Guard was put in control of the field. Buckley had already made history when the 120th Fighter Squadron was activated in April 1946. This was the first unit ever activated for the Air National Guard and this date is widely considered to be the beginning of the modern Air National Guard. Another first occurred on June 30, 1946 when the 120th Fighter
Squadron became the first postwar National Guard aviation unit to receive formal recognition by the Army Air Force.14

With Buckley under the control of the Air National Guard, the question became one of cost. The Army tended to see the ANG as second-rate and did not fund the programs very well. Also, Buckley was almost closed permanently at the end of 1946 when Colorado decided it would not be able to support the costs of the operation of the base. However, several factors came together at the right time to help save the base.

The Navy Saves Buckley

About this time the U.S. Navy was looking to have a major reserve program for its pilots to retain their skills. Buckley became a possible location though fields were also being considered in Pueblo, Boulder, Colorado Springs, and Greeley.15 Interested men were urged to contact the Navy to express interest in the program to establish the viability of a Naval Reserve program.16

Several Navy veterans and political leaders prompted the U.S. Navy to inspect Buckley as a possible Naval Reserve Center. A reserve unit had been established on January 1, 1946, but was only to be located at Buckley temporarily at first.17 Nearly 900 naval veterans were located and agreed to
commit themselves to a reserve program if facilities existed. This helped to save Buckley once again from the possibility of closing. The Navy announced that it would establish a reserve training facility at Buckley comprising two aircraft carrier groups, a patrol squadron, and a Marine Corps squadron as well. The station would occupy the west hangar and various other buildings at the base. The navy expected to train nearly 2000 men a year at the base. The plans also called for a headquarters to be established by December 20, 1946 with actual operations starting in early 1947.18 Official authorization for the takeover postdated the acquisition to December 1, 1946, at which time the field officially became the responsibility of the United States Navy.19

The National Guard would also stay at the base, occupying several buildings and the east hangar. About 150 permanent Guard personnel would be stationed at the field though the planned use of the bombing range for ground maneuvers was cancelled due to the Navy’s need of the range all year long. The National Guard would be shifted to Camp Carson (Fort Carson) for its summer maneuvers. The Navy and National Guard would share the officers club and the enlisted men’s service club at the base.20

On February 8, 1947, the first naval plane, a PBY Catalina number 129, landed at Buckley as operations for the reserve station were about to
On February 16, 1947, the base was formally commissioned as a Naval Air Reserve Training Center. NAS-Denver (as the navy called it) became the 22nd Naval Air Reserve Station in the nation. The base would be the center of all naval activities for Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, encompassing the largest reserve area in the nation at 405,320 square-mile area. At that time there were 150 naval and marine personnel stationed at NAS-Denver, but this grew to nearly 400 by the summer. It was believed that the navy center would bring about $2 million to the metro area each year. NAS-Denver included the following air groups; CVE (escort carrier) group 53 with 36 pilots, and Marine Fighter Squadron 236 with 45 pilots. The official transfer of power did not occur until September 28, 1947, when the base was formally transferred to the Department of the Navy and officially designated NAS-Denver. NAS Denver would fall under the command of Twelfth Naval District in San Francisco until September 1948 when it would be permanently transferred to the Ninth Naval District at Great Lakes, Illinois.

The WAA and Disposition of Excess Buildings

Despite the excitement of a new naval station and home for the Colorado National Guard, the question of housing remained. Many veterans wanted additional housing and universities had shown some interest in the
facilities. With the Navy and National Guard at the base, worries started about how much of the base could really be used for housing or declared surplus.

Following protocol, the War Assets Administration began looking at what buildings could be sold from the base. The use of some facilities and hangars by the Navy and National Guard made this rather confusing at Buckley. The WAA declared that the Navy and National Guard would utilize all permanent facilities and that all other buildings and personal items could be declared surplus. However, at various steps in the process the city of Denver, the base, the Army, the WAA, and the Federal Public Housing Authority, all had conflicting ideas as to what was to occur and in what order. It seemed that things might not get worked out fast enough. The war department claimed there was no conflict in the claims by the city, the National Guard, and the Naval Reserve since the War Department can transfer items directly to the FPHA without the WAA's authorization. It came down to really determining, "When is a surplus building a surplus building and when is it something else?" The Army declared land surplus but the WAA believed that they are not surplus until officially turned over to the WAA. This is where the breakdown in communication occurred in Denver which delayed the issue from being resolved.
Oblivious to the red tape fiasco taking place, the people of Denver wanted to use the land and buildings for important work. In October 1946, when the plans began to take shape, it was believed over 1000 buildings might be declared surplus. It would not be that many as the Navy and National Guard would acquire some of these structures.  

Some buildings were sold for scrap as well. In 1948 Adams County 14 School District bought one of the fire stations, building A-275, as well as three towers from the base and three targets from the bombing range. The district took the wooden structures apart and used them to build a classroom in Derby, Colorado.  

Veteran groups in Denver began a very vocal push to obtain some of the buildings for the creation of a “veteran’s village” that would provide cheap apartments for perhaps 1000 veterans and their families with a minimum of alteration to existing buildings. There was sufficient space for 420 three-room apartments to be easily converted from various hospital buildings that had been declared surplus and it was believed nearly one thousand additional units could be provided later. At this point the problem was getting the Federal Public Housing Authority to turn over the buildings to the city while Army and FPHA paperwork still had to be submitted to the government before that could happen. When veterans showed up at the base in October
1946 to look at possible housing, Buckley Field officials had no authorization to let possible tenants examine the housing. This was just one more part of the confusing process to establish housing at the base while the National Guard and Navy began to take over responsibilities at the field.

The Veterans Village at Buckley

Things started to move in November 1946 when the FPHA regional office in Ft. Worth Texas authorized the transfer of buildings to the city contingent on the approval of the FPHA national office. As the FPHA continued with the paperwork, other important steps were taken to speed up the process. Brigadier General Thomas Lowe, commanding officer of Lowry and Buckley announced that all Buckley field buildings would be cleared of essential army equipment by December 20, 1946. This was the day that the army was scheduled to leave the base.

Veterans groups soon got the process started. On November 13, 1946, applications could be submitted to the Veterans Joint Housing Committee at 1530 Stout St. in Denver. Priorities were announced as being those families with children who had been separated due to housing issues, other families with children, widows of servicemen with children, and finally families'
expecting children. In just two weeks there were 900 applications for housing at Buckley.

The city anticipated that it would cost about $400 per apartment to convert it to livable quarters for people. This included remodeling costs, repair of a heating plant, running water, and electricity. The project required funding and, therefore, the Denver City Council approved a $60,000 loan to take care of these various items. It was believed that by charging $30 a month for a three room apartment, and $3 a month for a stove, the city would recoup most of this money. The project was hoping to get started in December when the army left and it was believed that nearly 420 families would be housed at the former hospital. The village itself was going to be modeled on a similar site at Fort Des Moines, Iowa that had its own stores, societies, and government. At the time, the veterans village was seen as a temporary solution, no more than five years long, to the housing shortage issues.

The FPHA eventually approved the transfer to the city of the property and veterans began moving into converted apartments in early February 1947 when four families, of the more than 100 approved, moved in to their new homes. Over 3,000 applications for housing were received by the opening of the veteran homes. Many veterans and their families stayed at Buckley temporarily while waiting to revert back to civilian life. Even this process
did not go that smoothly as the board of directors that was established by Denver to oversee operations at the village was accused of selling excess property that was not allocated to them. This shows the level of confusion experienced by people trying to establish housing for veterans.

Eventually five veteran villages were built on the former hospital grounds and in areas west of the main hangars on land that is today part of the Aerospace Data Facility. Named Butchtel Village, Pioneer Village, North Denver Village, Fort Logan Village, and Buckley Field Village, they all had their own informal governing body with one mayor for the entire village. Overall, the city still controlled what happened within the property. At one point in 1947 the informal mayor of the village was Mrs. Esther Hazelton.

On July 27, 1948, Joe Stangl was elected the first governing mayor by the citizens of the veteran’s village and was approved by the city. His administration took office on August 1, 1948. Thirteen councilmen were also part of the government and whose job it was to represent the designated district. Robert Talbot was the second mayor and also served as editor of the village newspaper. The Buckley Buckaneer newspaper covered local events and helped veterans make the conversion back into mainstream America.

By December 1947, there were 188 living quarters at Buckley housing about 600 people. Each barracks provided 3 units per building. Since
demands for housing continued, Denver approved funding for an additional 120 units. This cost was estimated at $250,000.47

Things were not great at the villages though, despite the positive aspect of creating more housing. As early as September 1947 people were complaining about the primitive conditions that existed at the villages.48 By mid-1948 things were even worse at the veterans villages. Residents complained about a lack of health care at the base and that people with diseases were allowed to stroll around the base. Most of the units lacked running water or their own bathroom; instead they had a communal bathroom and water system. In addition there were only limited recreational facilities for children. The manager of the Buckley Field veterans village, Canton O'Donnell, claimed that the charges were erroneous and that sanitation and conditions were excellent.49 This would not be the last disagreement O'Donnell had with the village.

In a public hearing held August 24, 1948, over 150 residents, nearly half the adult population of the village, went to their city council meeting to voice their opinions. The council agreed to several demands including the appointment of a village doctor, and an agreement that the board of directors would survey the housing conditions.50 It was for this reason that the election of Joe Stangl took place the previous month. It was learned that the managing
board of directors actually approved such a move. The village had earlier mayors but not with the endorsement of the village directors.

This was not the end of the controversy in the veterans village. Three days after the public hearing, the city refused to pay a bedding bill to the veterans village after they sold material to the Denver Police Department that they may not have had the right to sell. In addition, it was learned that the $30 a month rent for the three room apartments was more than in any other Denver housing project.

By September 1948, there were over 230 families living in the veterans village and over 800 children. The situation with the city grew more tense after 10 year-old Elizabeth Moffitt was killed within the veteran's village by a car as she darted in the road to retrieve a scarf she had lost. Residents used this incident as evidence of a lack of playgrounds and recreational areas for children. They argued that Moffitt would not have been in the street if there was a playground nearby. In addition the lack of protection against the decline of juvenile morals was brought up. With inadequate police protection the board of directors often used eviction as a corrective tactic. In fact there was no police protection at the veterans village until eighteen months after it opened.
When it seemed as though nothing else could possibly go wrong at the village, people became sick and tired. In fact so many people became sick that the Denver public health officials began an inquiry into 22 people that had developed, “a mild intestinal ailment.” It mostly affected residents of buildings 277 and 278 and it was thought that the problem may be related to sinks that were too close to toilets. Another probable cause was the use of sinks to wash out babies’ diapers as well as dishes. Some officials said that the illness might be dysentery. Fortunately no one was hospitalized in connection with the illness. However, state and city health officials were shocked to learn that these types of illnesses had been occurring for several months before the investigations began. It wasn’t until the largest outbreak that the city chose to investigate the matter. As the investigation had started, several more people became sick from a different building, 250.

The drama continued when the councilman from the district most affected by the outbreak, Jack Pickett, accused the project manager of the village, Canton O’Donnell, of being mean and angry at those who were sick and at the elected officials of the village for taking any action over the illness. This was the latest incident in what residents felt was a very irritated and uncaring O’Donnell when it came to fulfilling his duties at the base. O’Donnell denied that he opposed village action over the sudden outbreak.
Nothing was ever proven as the cause of the illness and corrective measures seemed to end the outbreak.

Despite these problems, progress was made by the Denver City Council and the local village council. Sinks were being added to several buildings, a recreation center operated by the Denver Y.M.C.A was to be turned over to the village, and Veterans Village Teen-Age Club was organized to allow for teens to find positive outlets for their energy. The club president was 14-year-old Jack Cargal who said the twenty members were hoping to form a basketball team. In addition to this, nearly $2,000 dollars was allocated to purchase and provide playground equipment.62

With some 230 families and a population of 900, the village was a thriving at the end of 1948. Garbage collection and recreation had improved due to improved bylaws and communication with the city. Over 400 children now were being bused to the nearest schools in Denver which were Stevens Elementary and Morey Jr. High School.63 Stevens Elementary was at 1140 Columbine near Congress Park in Denver and Morey Jr. High, was at 840 E 14th Ave. These schools were a good 10-11 miles away from the base, but it was better than not having the bus transportation. Given the history of the village though, that did not mean there was not a problem with that as well.
Eventually the issue of the cost of busing students to those schools became an issue. Residents felt that the two dollar monthly fee, in addition to a fifteen cent round trip fare they paid to the Denver Tramway company was too much. Only two buses were provided to carry the 173 students requiring transportation. However, the two dollar monthly fee was placed on all families, not just those that used the buses. Denver Public Schools responded that the students were attending for free since the residents did not have to pay property taxes to support the school. Also, people in Denver had to pay to have their children ride the bus. The Denver Tramway company did lower the daily fare to ten cents but still claimed that they needed about $50 a day to operate the bus, hence claiming a loss. Despite these arguments, residents at Buckley still felt they were being unfairly singled out.64

In January 1953 it was announced that the villages would be closed at the end of June that same year. At the time some 200 families comprising 900 residents were still at the base. It was determined that the current buildings in the village were no longer up to code and should be closed. Denver Public Schools complained that each student from the village represented a loss of $250 dollars in funding since the state and federal governments paid only a small portion of the tuition.65 The veteran project turned out to be a money maker for the city. In over six years of operation, the city earned $55,863
from the village while providing housing to several thousand different families.66

This role for Buckley was simply one in a long line of benefits and assistance to the community. The housing of veterans and their families was one that was both necessary and beneficial as many veterans would choose to make Colorado their permanent home. By having this village, many were able to stay instead of leaving for other locations.

Naval Activities at Naval Air Station Denver

The official name of the base, at least to the Navy, was Naval Air Station Denver while nearly everyone else referred to the base as Buckley or Naval Air Station Buckley. With the official establishment of NAS Denver on September 28, 1947, Buckley became a unique base within the Naval Reserve system. In fact, it was the highest Naval Air Station in the world at 5680 feet and it also was recognized as being the farthest away from a major body of water. The Navy was looking forward to utilizing the base for cross country refueling and to provide a training base in the Rocky Mountain area, something they had sought for nearly ten years.67 Initially the base contained 3 squadrons, 316 men, 30 officers plus its weekend reserves.68 However, this would increase rapidly.
The base was soon up and running at full speed with eight Naval Reserve squadrons operational. Within a year, the Naval Air Station was bringing in over $2.5 million dollars a year to the metro area. This included over $1.2 million for payroll, $1 million for fuel and oil for the aircraft, and hundreds of thousands of dollars for repairs, maintenance, and construction on the station.

The large benefit was due to the men and needs of the base. The station expanded to some 350 enlisted men, over 400 officers, and the nearly 1000 members of the reserve who spent time at the base. In addition, the Navy was forced to replace many of the older theater-of-operation buildings that were deteriorating or simply allowed the GSA to sell them to various bidders.

Many have the impression that only naval aviation training took place at Buckley and that is certainly not the case. Other forms of naval training took place including engineering and various weapons training. In November 1948, one of the largest training tools for the Navy arrived at NAS Denver. A 25-ton five-inch single gun mount was shipped to the base to be used in weekly training of men for loading, maintaining, and operation of the weapon. The gun was installed in building 2-A on the base.
Buckley received new equipment in 1948 that was on the cutting edge of technology. The base received facsimile equipment that has the ability to process messages and X-ray negatives sent from around the world. In fact, a map of 12 by 19 inches could be received and printed in about 20 minutes. It was used for the creation of weather maps, a primary duty of the Weather Bureau Army Navy (WBAN). Denver's placement made it ideal for reporting weather approaching the central United States.

In 1949, only two years after opening the base, the Navy began to close down various installations around the United States that it deemed to be surplus to future force structures. Adding to the worries was the announcement that the Navy would be focusing on installations in the Western United States. This would not be the first, or last time, base closures would make the residents of Denver nervous. Eventually, NAS Denver was spared this round of base closures.

In fact, NAS Denver was going to be expanded the following year. In late 1950 the Navy requested an additional $2.8 million for the expansion of its facilities at Buckley. Two years later nearly $5 million would be approved for construction at the base, with $2 million of it to be allocated later. One million dollars would be spent on pavements and extending the runways with the rest spent on airfield buildings including new hangars. A
new barracks and fire and crash building would be built to support the
increased use of the field. As a result of this increase the navy also decided
that the 9th Naval Reserve District would setup a headquarters at Buckley. Some of the construction money would be used to improve the wiring,
plumbing and heating of the existing hangar, construct a new modern hangar,
convert a warehouse into a 300 seat mess hall, repair the existing mess hall,
and construct a 36 bed hospital and dispensary. It is clear that the military
did not plan for things in the long term as these were all buildings that were
built during the war as temporary structures. These were torn down or sold
and the government simply had to pay to build new ones time and time again.

This is evident when considering housing on the base. With the
increased importance of Buckley, and the housing shortage in the area, the
base began to construct new barracks for personnel at the same time the city
was shutting down the veterans village. In late 1952, the Navy requested that
ninety-two units be built for just under $1 million at the same time the over
200 units in the veterans village would be closed soon. The estimated
$920,000 for the housing would be secured through the Navy directly as part
of the construction allocations for Buckley. At the same time the Navy would
attempt to buy back the land on which the veterans village was located.
By Buckley's fourth anniversary of naval control in early 1951 the base had 10 squadrons necessitating further growth. With the advent of jet aircraft, larger runways would be needed to accommodate larger and faster planes as they were given to reserve squadrons. As part of the 1952 construction plan, money would be used to lengthen the east-west runway by 500 feet from just under 7,000 feet to 7,450 feet. The north-south runway was lengthened by 2,000 feet to make it just less than two miles long at 10,000 feet. Not included in the distance figures were to be an extra 1000 feet to each runway to be constructed of concrete since asphalt melts under the extreme heat of jet exhaust. Also dealing with heat in the new construction requests was the conversion of the base heating plant to gas instead of the old boiler system.

As the construction progressed, Congress began to look at various military construction projects around the country, including those at Buckley. The House Expenditures subcommittee was concerned that the Korean War was being used by the military as an excuse for unnecessary or excessive construction projects. The committees concern with NAS Denver dealt with the new hangar being built. To some members it seemed as though the present wood hangar was sufficient and even if it needed replacement it surely did not require expensive brick to be used on the outside instead of simply
using paint. Members of the committee also questioned the overstaffing at Buckley with over 450 officers and men on active duty that seemed excessive to train 200 men or so every weekend.\textsuperscript{81}

Station commander Captain Hal. K. Edwards testified in Washington D.C. before the committee in December 1952 to explain the rationale for building a new hangar and aircraft shop at the base. He said that the wood hangar was in desperate need of replacement but he conceded that he did not know why the walls of the hangar had been faced with brick. Edwards also urged members to understand that maintenance and security were needed around the clock and that Buckley had actually been closing the runways down at night and shifting landings to Lowry or Stapleton since there were not enough personnel to man the tower at all times. Additionally, officers would sometimes conduct training outside of Colorado.\textsuperscript{82} NAS Denver was responsible for handling the training of Naval Reserve men in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming in 1952 and though the men mostly came to Colorado for training, sometimes trainings were conducted within those states. This primarily included an auxiliary air unit in Salt Lake City Utah which was mentioned by Captain Edwards to the committee.\textsuperscript{83}

Despite the controversy with the new hangar, it was completed on time in May 1953 and opened with fanfare. Completed at a cost of $1,716,000 and
known across the country as the “Denver hangar”, the massive structure measured “310 feet long, 240 feet wide, and 66 feet high” and was to serve as a model for the rest of the military in modern hangar construction. Office equipment was moved in by cranes through windows in the second floor with all personnel on the base contributing in moving into the new hangar, including the base commander Captain Hal K. Edwards.

The Navy continued to value Buckley since another construction program was announced several years later in 1957. The east-west runway was increased by several hundred feet to make it 8000 feet. The north-south runway was lengthened by 1000 feet to make it 11,000 feet. In addition, between six and eleven inches of concrete would be added to the ramp areas around the hangars and the runways to support the weight of heavier planes that would use the base. The Marine Corps would also benefit from the extended runways and new radar equipment would be delivered to Marine Air Control Unit 23.

Several criminals also valued Buckley. In March 1957, $31,857 was stolen from the Post Exchange (PX) building at Buckley. Using a hammer and crowbar to smash the safe dial and pry the door open, the thieves were able to obtain the money used to pay naval personnel on the first of the month.
The crime was similar to one at Lowry two years early but no arrests were known to have been made despite the help of the FBI.\textsuperscript{89}

On the 10 year anniversary of the base in 1957, the Navy boasted 43 reserve aircraft stationed at the base, an annual payroll of $2 million dollars, and employed over 500 metro area residents.\textsuperscript{90} The 3515 acre base now had a new hangar for the Navy, a new hangar for the Air National Guard, a new tower, crash house, runways, and jet fuel storage areas. This was a far cry from the 82 reservists and 2 old wooden hangars with which the base started.\textsuperscript{91}

### Naval and Marine Squadrons at the Base

When the base was secured by the Navy it became part of the original 22 bases in the Naval Air Reserve Training system. Initially, the base comprised CVE (escort carrier) group 53, that included Attack Squadron VA-53E and Fighter Squadron VF-53E and, and Marine Fighter Squadron 236 but soon and very often, units would come and go, be activated and deactivated. By the end of 1948 CVE-53 was gone and several more were added. Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron (FASRon) 155 and FASRon-55 were stationed at Buckley. In addition a new Aircraft Carrier Group, CVG-85, was at the base and it comprised VF-85-A and VA-85-A as well as VF-86-A and VA-86-A.
Two other squadrons also at the base were VR-75, a Transport Squadron, and VP-ML-75 which was a Medium Patrol Squadron.\textsuperscript{92} It should be noted that as a Naval Air Station, very few navy squadrons were permanently assigned to Buckley. Aircraft at Buckley were mostly reserve planes or squadrons that were located at Buckley temporarily or for short training periods of time. Those that were stationed here had the tail code P or 7P, on each aircraft to denote that it was an aircraft from NAS Denver.\textsuperscript{93} In October 1952, Reserve Patrol Squadron VP-711 was established at Buckley. This squadron flew the PV-2 Harpoon which was used in a maritime support role, which was primarily tracking submarines. Two additional Reserve Patrol Squadrons, VP-712 and VP-713 were established in November 1956. All three of these reserve squadrons were disestablished in October 1958.\textsuperscript{94} However, one report has VP-713 still in operation as of February 1959.\textsuperscript{95}

Other units that had stays at Buckley included VF-712 which flew the F8F-2, VF-713 which utilized the F8F Bearcat series and VF-718 flying the F8F-2.\textsuperscript{96} Squadron VR-712, a transport squadron flew PV-2’s and R4D transports. VF-711 was also at the base for a time and flew F8F aircraft and later the F9F.\textsuperscript{97} All of these units would be moved off post as part of a
rotation while others transferred during the activation of Naval Reserve units
during the Korean War which will be covered later.

Another first for Buckley in the history of aviation was the
commissioning of Naval Air Reserve Transport Squadron VR-713. At 2:30
p.m. on January 21, 1956, the first ever commissioning of a squadron while in
flight took place. Lt. Commander John S. Reno, commander of the squadron,
read the commissioning orders while more than a mile over Denver in an R5D
transport plane from the new squadron. VR-713 was responsible for
transporting cargo, personnel, and wounded servicemen throughout the
region. At the time in 1956, there were 12 Naval Air Reserve Squadrons
stationed at NAS Denver.98

The squadron with the longest stay at Buckley was Marine Reserve
Squadron VMF-236 that comprised 15 planes in 1948.99 Early on the
squadron used Grumman F-8F2 Bearcats and Vought F4U Corsairs. In 1954
the Marine Corps replaced the prop driven Bearcats and Corsairs with jet
powered F9F-5 Panthers.100 These had been built quickly for the Korean War
to counter the Mig-15 used by the Russians.101 These were difficult to fly out
of Buckley when the temperature was so high since the heat created “thinner”
air and, along with the elevation of the base influencing atmospheric pressure,
made flying the underpowered jet dangerous. The elevation difference
between sea level the base, at more than a mile, automatically meant that aircraft had to land at higher ground speeds.\textsuperscript{102} For these reasons the Panthers were not allowed to fly when the temperatures reached 98 degrees or above.\textsuperscript{103} Later the Marines were given F9F-6 Cougars that had better handling and power. VMF-236 would remain at the base for the duration of its occupation by the Navy.

Air National Guard at Buckley

There have been many books written on the history of the Colorado Air National Guard and this study\textsuperscript{7} will not try to duplicate that work. It will cover the most important aspects of the COANG and discussions that are of particular interest and importance to the history of Buckley.

The primary units at Buckley in the post WWII 1940s and 1950s were the 59\textsuperscript{th} Fighter Wing and the 140\textsuperscript{th} Fighter Group which contained the 120\textsuperscript{th} Fighter Squadron and its 22 pilots. Shortly after the war the 59\textsuperscript{th} FW was redesignated the 86\textsuperscript{th} Fighter Wing, and in November 1950 it became the 140\textsuperscript{th} FW. The first plane received by the COANG at Buckley was a C-47 transport plane in late 1946.

The 140\textsuperscript{th} FW would become the 140\textsuperscript{th} Fighter-Bomber Wing until 1955. At that time the wing was redesignated again as the 140\textsuperscript{th} Fighter
Interceptor Wing (FIW). This was done as part of the Air Force’s realignment with the new needs of the Cold War and it was determined that more interceptor wings were required. This meant that the purpose of the wing was no longer bombing, but to serve as an interceptor aircraft against enemy bombers and fighters. A result of this was that the air-to-ground mission utilized in Korea and trained for extensively at Buckley would now become an air-to-air mission.¹⁰⁴ This change would have a lasting impact on Aurora and the Front Range.

The 60,000 acre Lowry Bombing Range, the land originally given to the Army in 1938 to secure the creation of Lowry, saw a massive decline in usefulness as COANG aircraft from Buckley would not be using it very much for air-to-air target practice with farms and communities nearby. With so much land primarily being used by the Navy, some thought that the land would be transferred to the Army. The question of what to do with this excess government land would soon become front and center among local communities and the military and would be a recurring theme in the history of Buckley. Some portions of the bombing range would be sold off in the 1950s though nearly all of it would remain in government hands under the mid 1960s.
As a COANG base, the men and women stationed there felt a particularly strong tie to the local communities. It was important for the servicemen and women to help those in the surrounding area. At one point, firefighters from NAS Denver/Buckley assisted in extinguishing a fire at a grain elevator in Watkins that local officials could not handle.\(^\text{105}\) There were also car races held at Buckley. The COANG Grand Prix was held several times in the 1950s at the base.\(^\text{106}\) The base would also offer tours to the public to keep up relations with those near the base. Various missions were undertaken by the personnel at Buckley. Flights helped direct aircraft during emergencies, helped locate crash sites, and participated in air shows for the people of Denver, Aurora, and surrounding areas. In addition to these community duties, four pilots from Buckley were part of the film *Target Zero* starring Victor Mature and Charles Bronson in 1954. Lt. Col Walter Williams, Maj. Arch Curran, Capt. Warren Harvey, and Lt. William Axton were used as the primary pilots in filming various bombing scenes in the movie about the Korean War.\(^\text{107}\)

Several accidents occurred in the 1940s with several COANG planes crashing, killing or injuring the pilots. An F-51 Mustang crashed on takeoff from Buckley November 28, 1946, killing Maj. Herbert G. Kolb. Another event was in March 1949 when two F-51 collided over Buckley. One pilot
managed to land safely while the other, 2nd Lt. Keith McGinnis, bailed out safely. His plane crashed just west of the Veterans Village (present day Buckley Road). In August 1949 another F-51 crashed three miles NW of the town of Parker killing 2nd Lt. Elmer A. Splittstoesser. These two crashes illustrate the dangers inherent in flying and the danger to buildings and citizens in the areas around military bases.

Besides the Korean War activation, covered later, the 1950s provided a time for the COANG to become better pilots in their continuous training programs. In 1954 the 140th from Buckley finished first in the ANG gunnery meet. This was significant in that the planes flown by Buckley pilots were older and did not contain more modern avionics such as radar guided gun sights of the newer aircraft. This was a phenomenal day in showing the fortitude and determination of the 140th and the flyers from Buckley.

The men of the COANG flew different planes. In the 1940s started with F/P-51’s Mustangs and a few T-6 Texans. The F-51 seemed fitting since the P-51 was one of the aircraft that Buckley armors had trained with during World War II. They also had six A-26 bombers at Buckley. The F-51s were used until 1953 when they were replaced by F-80A Shooting Stars jets. The F-80A was traded for the F-86E in early 1955. This would remain the primary aircraft at the base into the early 1960s.
As the Navy was improving its hangar, the COANG did the same. The new hangar, built after the older hangar had been torn down, was dedicated in August 1956. The dedication ceremony included the Navy’s Blue Angels as well as Colorado’s own Minute Men.¹¹²

The Minute Men

A little known fact today about Buckley, though well known at the time, is that it was the birthplace of the modern Air Force acrobatic and precision flying teams. Before there were the Thunderbirds and the Blue Angels there were the Minutemen.¹¹³ Now that sounds like something other than a precision flying team but that is what it was called in 1956. However, three COANG pilots were flying as a group in at air shows, rodeos, and local fairs, as early as 1947. They continued flying until the Korean War activation. Upon returning in late 1953 the group began doing more precision flying. They were very popular in 1955 and gained national recognition in 1956 as the official Air National Guard Demonstration Team (ANGDT).¹¹⁴ This occurred after the Secretary of the Air Force witnessed the team at a performance in Spokane, Washington in October, 1956. The recognition meant that the team could replace their F-80 Shooting Stars with the F-86 Sabre.
The team suffered its only accident just prior to their designation as the ANGDT. On June 8, 1956 while performing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. As the team was performing a loop maneuver the controls froze up on Captain Jon Ferrier’s aircraft causing it to role. Instead of ejecting and saving his own life, Captain Ferrer stayed at the controls to crash the plane in a small open space surrounded by a residential area. For his heroism in preventing the loss of civilian lives, Ferrier was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.\textsuperscript{115}

Three years later funding for the Minute Men ran out. The final show for the team was in July 1959. Thirteen different pilots had flown for the team that had performed in five different countries and in front of more than three million people.\textsuperscript{116} The Minute Men showed what several dedicated men at Buckley accomplished with a little dedication and determination.

The Korean War and Buckley Aviators

The story of Buckley involves several calls to war, including the Korean War. In June 1950 the Korean War began. It soon became necessary to call up National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Naval Reserve units. Buckley was there to answer the call.
The naval squadron VF-713 “Vultures” was called to active duty on February 1, 1951, from Naval Air Station Denver. Lt. Commander Robert L. Doering was in command at the time of activation at Buckley. The squadron spent one month training up at Buckley before being deployed. VF-713 was reassigned to NAS Alameda in California in April 1951 and shipped out to Korea in September 1951. The 26 pilots and 17 aircraft of the unit saw its first combat in Korea on 4 October 1951 as part of Carrier Wing 15 (CVG-15) aboard the USS Antietam (CV-36) flying the prop driven F4U-4 Corsair. The USS Antietam was part of Task Force 77 and VF-713 pilots flew bombing and strafing missions against rail targets, truck depots, and other military targets.

On October 25, 1951, Lt. L.W. Dorsey was forced to ditch his aircraft but survived. On November 8, 1951, Lt. H.G. Goodell ditched his F4U-4 off the city of Wonson after his plane was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire. He was successfully pulled from the water. On December 18, 1951, Ensign G.A. Riley’s aircraft was heavily damaged and he bailed out and was rescued. He returned to duty and the next day Ensign Riley’s second aircraft was damaged though he managed to make it out to sea. After successfully bailing out he was observed trying to escape from the parachute but was dragged under the water and was killed. Ensign Riley was a replacement pilot and had
only been with the unit 16 days. Several other aircraft were lost with the crews being recovered.

The unit’s last fatality on this deployment was Lt. W. W. Marwood. His aircraft sustained major damage and crashed into the sea killing him on 4 February 1952. The unit did very well considering that bombing was being done with temporary Mark 5 bombing racks on the wings on the F4 aircraft. Also, VF-713 flew more than 100 percent of their quota for missions between January 16, and February 9, 1952. Not all the information was positive as three pilots were reprimanded for not being proficient enough with carrier landings. Overall it was believed that the extremely low number of casualties for VF-713 could be attributed to the lengthy experience of the pilots before the war and their extensive training prior to their deployment to Korea.

The unit remained on station until May 1952 went the squadron was sent to NAS Moffett Field. In early 1953 the VF-713 was redesignated VA-152 and deployed with CVG-15 aboard the USS Princeton (CVA-37). During the next period of combat two VF-152 members were declared missing in action in early May 1953. Ensign W.M. Quinley and Lt. L.R. Rickey were both reported shot down with no evidence of escape or survival of the crashes. Both had been making strikes on North Korean forces near
Wonsan. These were the last casualties from the USNR squadron VF-713, later VA-152, that had been called to active duty from NAS Denver. The squadron would not return to Denver after the war.

The Colorado Air National Guard was activated just two months after VF-713 on April 1, 1951. This was the second activation for the COANG, the first being the 120th Observation Squadron during WWII. The activation included several units and at the time it was the largest single contribution of trained manpower, such as the reserve or National Guard, the state of Colorado has ever made to the armed forces. This discussion will focus on the 120th Fighter Squadron, and 140th Fighter Bomber Wing.

It was widely known at the time that the Air National Guard was not respected by the Air Force and few units were sent as a group to Korea. The 120th TFS was one of 66 Air Guard squadrons to be activated for the war. Initially it was to be for 21 months but was later extended to 24 months. In most cases organized Air Guard units were broken up to fill the requirements of the regular Air Force. In many cases the Air Force took control over Air Guard aircraft without utilizing the pilots. The 120th Fighter Squadron pilots were assigned directly to Korea with their F-51s where their combat skills would be utilized immediately. Once there, however, they were separated into various units and organizations. As a result of the mixed assignment there
was not a cohesive unit participating in Korea from the Air National Guard. This makes it difficult to ascertain success and losses due to the scattered nature of the assignments but two COANG airmen, Lieutenants Lyle Moore and Bob Olsen, were both killed in action during the war.\textsuperscript{130}

Most of the ANG units activated were sent to bases in Europe to augment NATO forces weakened by the redeployment of regular AF units and also to bases in the United States for that same reason. The 140\textsuperscript{th} FBW remained in the United States and was assigned to Clovis (Cannon) Air Force Base in New Mexico in December 1951 though several pilots were sent to Korea with other units.\textsuperscript{131} Clovis had been reactivated and made part of the Tactical Air Command at the time. The 140\textsuperscript{th} was at Clovis until January 1, 1953 when the unit was deactivated and came back to Colorado.\textsuperscript{132}

During the Korean Conflict American Guardsmen flew 39,530 combat sorties and 101 of them were killed in combat. Over 1,300 medals were awarded for their service in Korean and four of them became aces.\textsuperscript{133} Overall the Korean War was a success for the Navy and COANG units assigned to NAS Denver or Buckley. The airmen proved that Reserve and Guard units could effectively augment the regular military forces and reflected the fine traditions that Buckley, and Colorado servicemen, continue to uphold.
The Air Force at Buckley in the 1950s

The Air Force also played a role at Buckley in the 1950s besides simply upgrading the aircraft given to the COANG. This involvement was subtle and easy to miss at times, as would be the case through much of Buckley's existence. Most of the involvement came as instructions to or changes in assignments to Buckley but others were more obvious, especially in the last half of the decade.

In December 1950, Buckley Field's commanding officer, Walter Grover, led an inspection for Air Force General Carl Spaatz on. The general and his party were looking over the field as a possible site for the new Air Force Academy. The members of the party, which included famed flyer Charles Lindbergh, ultimately decided on a site 8 miles north of Colorado Springs, Colorado. However, while the site was being constructed the temporary home of the Air Force Academy became Lowry Air Force Base.

In early 1957 Buckley Air National Guard Base was selected as one of the locations for the nationwide radar warning system and its system was operational by July. This was the first such location in the western interior states as its primary purpose was the detection and, if necessary, interception and identification of aircraft. This of course was to become part of the air defense network to stop an incoming Soviet bomber force. It also made sense
to locate this facility at Buckley as the 140th had been redesignated a Fighter Interceptor Wing less than 2 years earlier. The radar site itself was hard to miss. It was a 40 foot tall tower visible from great distances.\(^{137}\)

Little information was given out about its abilities at the time. It was in fact an FPS-8 unit that was assigned to the 138th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron (AC&W) that allowed the 140th FIW to become a 24-hour Air Defense Direction Center.\(^{138}\) The 138th AC&W was responsible for reporting the information to 34th Air Division located at Kirkland AFB in New Mexico.\(^{139}\) At first the station was operating 16 hours a day, but by September 1, 1957 it was operating at all times.\(^{140}\) Overall it had a range of 200 miles and was the first step Buckley would take in a continuous role of watching for enemy attacks on the United States.

Titan ICBM Program Comes to Buckley

Buckley would also play a role, albeit a small one, in the first generation of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile sites deployed in the United States. The missile program, called the Titan, was the second program instituted, along with the Atlas missile program, that utilized the latest technology of liquid fueled ICBMs. The Titan was a liquid fueled missile that had a range of over 6,000 miles.\(^{141}\) In 1955, the Air Force began developing
ICBM technology and had started looking for suitable sites in the Eastern, Western, and Central United States. These would be hardened silos, along with deployable missiles. The decision to place Titan Missiles somewhere in Colorado became easier after the Martin Company, responsible for construction of the Titan, purchased 4,500 acres in Waterton Canyon near Denver. The Air Force decided on using the land at the former Lowry bombing range just 3 miles southeast of Buckley in August 1957 since it was government land, was away from major population areas, and was close to the Martin Company. This was also considered logical if other missile sites were destroyed, to have a launch site near the construction facilities. It is possible that the area was also selected in part due to the recent radar installation at Buckley that allowed the base to provide air cover for the missile base in the event of a Soviet attack.

The people of Denver were kept in the dark about the project initially, only hearing that the Air Force was considered the site in February 1958. The timing of this also was in conjunction with the Navy’s plans to lengthen the runways at Buckley, perhaps in conjunction with a Strategic Air Command (SAC) mission with the nuclear bomber force. Formal approval of the Denver site came in March 1958 but this was not announced in Denver until May 21, 1958. In fact, there was so much secrecy that the training squadron
was initially thought to be the controlling squadron but this was soon corrected. 147

The decision was to station the missile squadrons at Lowry, since it was an AFB, while the construction personnel and equipment were set up at Buckley since it was closer to the silos. American Machine and Foundry was awarded nearly $43 million for design and construction of the silos. They were located at Buckley during this process. 148 Construction on the silos was complete on August 4, 1961. 149 The missiles would remain on high alert, with technicians and construction support based at Buckley into the 1960s.

Accidents and Crashes at Buckley

As mentioned earlier with crashes in the late 1940s, several additional crashes around the base served to remind people about the dangers of flying. However, several crashes were not reported in the media, especially if it involved sensitive information, and the COANG records have limited information from this period which makes precise numbers tough to come by. Using what is known is critical in understanding some of the modern issues surrounding Buckley.

In May 1950 a Navy F-8F2 from VF-712 stalled and crashed killing the pilot near the base. On March 17, 1951, an F8-F2 from VF-718 crashed...
during bad weather killing the pilot. On May 7, 1951, another F9F2 from VF-718 crashed during a forced landing, killing the pilot. In July 1951 a VMF-236 force landed after takeoff and the pilot survived. A Marine aircraft crashed en route to Buckley in June 1955 killing the pilot.

The second half of May 1956 proved to be a particularly bad month for crashes at Buckley. First, Major Robert W. Hamilton was killed when his Cougar plane crashed on the bombing range. A week later on May 25 a Cougar crashed 1.5 miles southeast of the field when a fuel system incident shut down the engine. The next day, May 26, a Marine Reserve pilot was killed when his F9F-6 crashed on the bombing range. Finally, on May 27, a R5D naval transport plane crashed on takeoff when the landing gear collapsed. No one was injured seriously when the transport skidded to a halt off the end of the runway.

Additionally, on July 25, 1958 a Navy F9F Cougar lost power and crashed 30 minutes after takeoff from Buckley in a field five to six miles east of Buckley. Lt. George Peart initially survived the crash but died later from his injuries.

These accidents, all in a short period of time, weighed heavily on the minds of nearby residents. One crash that took place earlier in the decade at Lowry, that would have a lasting effect on Buckley, was a B-29 Superfortress.
that crashed in December 1951. The B-29 was trying to land back at Lowry on December 3, 1951, after it had experience trouble in one of its engines. While attempting to land it crashed into several homes just west of the base. It crashed at about 80-95 Eudora near Dahlia Street. 8 people were killed including several members of the crew. This would help create more pressure to cut back on flights from Lowry, which in turn would have an impact on Buckley starting in 1960.\textsuperscript{153}

\section*{UFO Encounter}

Buckley played a role in the 1950s in dealing with mysterious UFO activity. Since the COANG were responsible for identifying unknown aircraft this might seem minor, but in the context of the 1950s it was important. There had been several sighting around Buckley, the most notable was on July 6, 1947, when two men on base spotted a flying object, a round silver disk was spotted rising and sinking. It quickly disappeared and the matter seemed ended. However, a few years later on June 25, 1950, several Buckley aircraft were scrambled to identify a mysterious object. Hundreds of residents of Denver, Lakewood, Arvada, and western portions of the metro area reported seeing the object about 10 miles east of the city. The object was described as being a round sliver ball with blue and red top and bottom though some
witnesses said it appeared green as well. Others said it appeared to be cigar shaped, and not that of a ball. Air National Guard, Navy, and Marine planes from Buckley, along with two aircraft from Lowry, were unable to identify the object which had been reported to be about 75,000 feet in the air. No one ever satisfactorily explained what the object was, as no weather or scientific agencies claimed to have any weather balloons in the area, and no positive identification was made by the military.\textsuperscript{154} It was however, a hint of things to come with Buckley being a part of the air defense network of the United States.

End of Naval Involvement at Buckley

As the 1950s drew to a close, the base was again going through some transitions. Rumors about the Navy closing NAS Denver began to grow louder, especially as most of the squadrons previously assigned to NAS Denver were deactivated or transferred in 1958. The Navy was adamant about the fact that there were no plans to close the base. In fact it was said in April 1958 that Buckley, “would be one of the last to be closed or abandoned” by the Navy.\textsuperscript{155}

Unfortunately, as with so many similar statements by the military, this one was true only for a short time. On December 17, 1958, the Navy
announced plans that it was closing NAS Denver. The planned date for ending naval operations at the base would be June 30, 1959. All U.S. Navy active duty personnel would be reassigned, transferred, or allowed to resign. All pilots were forced to go to NAS Olathe in Kansas if they wanted to continue as pilots in the Naval Reserve. Captain Hallock, commander of Buckley, was ordered to begin deactivation of the base in anticipation of its final closure. All flight operations by the Navy were to end by February 28, 1959.

One of the reasons for the closure may have been related to the failure of expansion plans for the base by the Navy. In February 1958 the Navy wanted to expand its operations at Buckley. They wanted to make the east-west runway 15,280 feet and increase the length of the North-South runway to a massive 19,000 feet. That would have made it the largest paved runway in the United States and would likely have been utilized by the Air Force Strategic Air Command nuclear bombers in the event of an emergency. This development greatly concerned Denver Mayor Nicholson as the flight path to the runway at Buckley would put it in conflict with approach patterns to Stapleton Airport. However, the Navy was already negotiating to buy the land it needed to extend the runways.
Ultimately, with the city fighting against expansion and the Navy looking to cut its reserve program, Buckley no longer seemed like the best place to keep eight Navy Reserve squadrons and one Marine Reserve squadron stationed. NAS Denver was one of twenty-nine other installations ordered closed by the Navy in December 1958. This meant that 473 officers, 1,162 reserves, and 91 civilians working for the Navy would be reassigned, released, or laid off. This provided a less than happy holiday season gift for those assigned to Buckley and to the community since it reaped financial benefits from the base.

Since NAS Denver / Buckley was such an important part of the community, and of the economy, many groups tried to convince the Navy to sell the base to them. In January 1959, the city of Aurora announced plans to buy the base and possibly convert it into a civilian airfield and municipal recreation area. Several city officials from Aurora toured the installation in anticipation of submitting a bid for the location. It was hoped that even acquiring part of the field would be beneficial since there was an adequate water supply for about 20,000 people on base that could be utilized. However, there were also discussions about the Navy transferring the base directly to the Colorado National Guard. It was rumored that the Air Force might use the base as a satellite field of Lowry and shift flight operations from
Lowry to Buckley or even operate it as a separate SAC base. It was also suggested that NORAD might use the base for a command post. Meetings were held in February 1959 to decide exactly what should be done.

The city of Denver, which had fought expansion at the base now found itself fighting to keep or acquire the land. Mayor Nicholson wrote a letter to the regional commissioner for the General Services Administration, Mr. Otto Klein, announcing that the city was interested in acquiring the property saying that there is a “definite need for use of this as airport property.”

Finally it was decided that the base was still useful and should remain in military hands if possible to continue its cooperation with the Air Force on the Titan Missile Base. Ultimately, the Colorado Air National Guard would assume command of the base that would oversee and work with the Ballistic Missile Division, Air Materiel Command, Army Corps of Engineers, and the construction firm Martin Co. for the Titan Missile Sites located on portions of the nearby Lowry Bombing Range. On Tuesday June 30, 1959 the U.S. flag was lowered and given to Commander William H. Hallock, commander of NAS Denver, signaling the end of naval control of the base.

The base was temporarily licensed by the Air Force to the state of Colorado from June 30, 1959 until April 18, 1960. On April 18, 1960, under General Order # 16, the Department of the Air Forced designated NAS
Denver as Buckley Air National Guard Base, retroactive to May 13, 1959. This created the first ever, stand-alone Air National Guard Base in U.S. history. All other Air National Guard units were assigned to active bases or to municipal, county, or local airports. This was a significant date in Colorado history.

Following World War II Buckley underwent the same changes that the country did. It was forced to reorganize itself, to downsize, to modernize, and to adapt to the realities of life in the Cold War. The continued existence of the base through the 1950s allowed Aurora to utilize the military to sustain its growth on the plains of Colorado. However, the 1960s was to be the decade that Buckley would be given a role that would shape and define its future with the Air Force, ensure its importance to Aurora, and solidify it as a critical base within the strategic defense of America for decades to come.
Chapter Four Notes


4 "Officials Inspect Buckley’s Setup for Housing Help,” 8 Mar. 1946: 5.


6 Fraser Arnold, Letter to the Honorable Dean Gillespie, 2 Mar. 1946, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.

7 "Buckley Deactivation By June 30 Ordered; Guard will Get Field,” *Rocky Mountain News* 4 June 1946: 5.

8 Don Davis, “National Guard Will get Use of Inactivated Buckley Field,” *The Denver Post* 4 June 1946: 5.

9 "Buckley Is Restored Active Basis Again,” *Rocky Mountain News* 7 June 1946: 5.

10 "Buckley Field to Train Air Force Reserve,” *The Denver Post* 17 June 1946: 1.


14 Gross 22.


19 Coletta 172.


22 Coletta 173.


27 Harry L. Walker, Letter to F.W. Huston, Director of Warehousing, 12 Dec. 1946, National Archives and Record Administration, Denver.

28 Paul C. Williams, Record of Information from Congress: From the WAA, 31 Oct. 1946, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.


30 L. A. Chapin, “1,100 Buckley Field Buildings Will be Sold Dec. 1 as Surplus,” The Denver Post 7 Oct. 1946: 1

31 War Assets Administration, Administrative memo, 30 June 1948, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.


34 “Regional Unit Backs Buckley Housing Plan,” The Denver Post 6 Nov. 1946: 28.


37 “$60,000 Sought From City for Buckley Village,” The Denver Post 28 Nov. 1946: 1.

38 “$60,000 Sought From City For Buckley Village,” The Denver Post 28 Nov. 1946: 1.


43 Colorado Air National Guard 321.


46 Colorado Air National Guard 321.


54 “Buckley Airs Charges of High Rent and Health Hazards at Project,” The Denver Post 8 Sept. 1948: 3.


58 “City Probing Buckley Malady,” Rocky Mountain News 10 Sept. 1948: 15.


60 “Malady Strikes 3 More Residents at Buckley,” The Denver Post 16 Sept. 1948: 3.


67 Coletta 172.


69 Coletta 173.


71 Lowe 36.


75 “$2,812,000 Sought for Expansion of Buckley Air Station,” Rocky Mountain News 15 Dec. 1950: 5.


77 “Buckley to get $45,000 Allotment,” Aurora Advocate 22 Feb. 1951: 5.


80 “Navy to Lengthen Runways,” Aurora Advocate 31 May 1951: 3.


82 French 15.

83 Coletta 172.

84 “Naval Air Station Moves Into New Home,” The Denver Post 19 May 1953: 19


90 “Ten Years of Naval Aviation,” The Denver Post 10 Feb. 1957: Denver Zone 5.


96 Grossnick 215.

97 "Reservists Called for Buckley," *Aurora Advocate* 30 Aug. 1951: 5.


100 Jim Parker, E-mail to the author, 6 Feb 2006.


103 Jim Parker, E-mail to the author, 6 Feb 2006.

104 Colorado Air National Guard 73, 95.


107 Colorado National Guard 95, 322.

108 Colorado Air National Guard 75-78.
109 Colorado Air National Guard 93.


111 George McWilliams, “Air Guard Unit gets First of 8 Faster Jets,” The Denver Post 23 Dec. 1954: 3.

112 Colorado Air National Guard 95.


116 Colorado Air National Guard 101.


118 Grossnick 216-218.


120 Commanding Officer USS Antietam, Action report letter to Chief of Naval Operations, Action report for 15 Oct.- Nov 16, 1951, written 17 Nov. 1951, Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center, Washington D.C.


124 Grossnick 216.


127 Gross 175.

128 Aurora Advocate 5 Apr. 1951: 1.

129 Gross 59-65.

130 Colorado Air National Guard 85-86.


132 Colorado Air National Guard 87.

133 Gross 80.


138 Colorado Air National Guard 102.

139 Cullen 5.

140 Colorado Air National Guard 102.


143 Neufeld 130.

144 Neufeld 177-178.


154 “Military Planes Fail to Identify Mystery Object,” The Denver Post 29 June 1950: 2.


157 Colorado Air National Guard 448.


168 Colorado Air National Guard 322.


170 Colorado Air National Guard 322.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE 1960S

The 1960s was a decade of great changes at Buckley. The recent ending of major naval air operations, the ending of the Titan missile program, shifting of flight operations from Lowry to Buckley, and the activation of the Air National Guard through various flare ups of the Cold War, all had significant impacts on Buckley. As part of the “golden triangle” of bases in Aurora at the time, along with Lowry AFB and Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Buckley impacted citizens of Denver and Aurora. The future of Buckley was also impacted by the Air Force’s decision to construct a satellite monitoring/listening post at Buckley. This construction dominated the future of Buckley and secured its prominent role in the expansion of Aurora.

After Buckley Air National Guard base became the first official stand alone Air National Guard Base in the country on April 18, 1960, the base did not slow down despite the loss of the Naval Reserve squadrons. The 3,738-acre base still had nearly 30 units and tenants at the base.¹ The base had a military payroll of $606,400 and a civilian payroll of $1.25 million in 1965.² These civilians and military positions included some active and reserve elements of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.
There were several tenants operating at the base in addition to the COANG with the 120th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and the 140th Air Defense Wing. These included the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve units that had remained at the base after the Navy turned over control to the Air Force. In addition the Air Material Command Contract Management Office, the Air Force Ballistic Missiles Division Field Office, the Army Corps of Engineers, and Glen L. Martin Company (later the Martin-Marietta Company) that all dealt with the construction and maintenance of the Titan Missile silos on the Lowry Bombing Range remained at Buckley. These missiles, which protected the United States during the Cold War, would soon become obsolete.

Titan Missile Maintenance and Removal

With construction of the Titan silos complete in August 1961, all that remained to do was place the missiles and activate the unit. The 451st Strategic Missile Wing would incorporate two squadrons of missiles. The 724th Strategic Missile Squadron (SAS) became operational with the first nine Titan I missiles in the nation on April 18, 1962, followed by nine more missiles with the 725th SAS on May 10, 1962. For each squadron there were 3 launch centers, controlling three missiles each, for a total of 18. Four sites were located on the former Lowry Bombing Range, but two were located on
private property with one north of Deer Trail and the other south of
Elizabeth. Each launch center was buried 30 to 60 feet underground, was
self-sufficient for up to six months, and had an 11 man crew on duty around
the clock.6

When these 18 Titan ICBMS came online, they added to the 51 less
capable Atlas ICBM's already operational. This deployment was the first part
of the U.S. nuclear missile deterrent against the Soviet Union.7 The missile
deployment at this time was being done as a crash program, with a $5 billion
price tag.8 For example, in May 1962, there were 69 ICBMs in the inventory.
By the Cuban Missile Crisis in mid-October 1962 there were 123 operational
ICBMs. Initially the Titans in Colorado made up over 26 percent of the US
ICBM force but by the Cuban Missile Crisis it was less than 15 percent. This
is still a significant number, but it illustrates how fast the United States was
rushing to deploy ICBMs in the field.9

As part of the procedure for protecting the Titans, security forces
maintained a 24 hour-a-day alert at Lowry. However, since Buckley was
closer, it was not uncommon for security from Lowry to be positioned at
Buckley. Fences surrounded the missile sites and signs that read “Controlled
Area: Lethal Force Authorized” were along the perimeter. If anything or
anyone was too close, security forces would arrive shortly to investigate and secure the area.10

The Titan was short lived. Since the missile was liquid fueled, it was more volatile and dangerous and created several design and deployment problems. Also, the Titan had to be raised out of the silo prior to launching, making it vulnerable to attack while the 45-minute fueling process took place.11 In addition, the newer Titan II and Minuteman missiles were now operational in large numbers, over 650 in fact. For these reasons, it was decided that the Titan should be deactivated and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced in December 1964 that the Atlas and Titan I ICBM sites would be dismantled due to the "obsolescence" of the missiles.12

The missiles were removed by the Air Force, but Mid-Continent Construction Co. of Salt Lake city had been contracted to remove the sensitive Air Force material that was to be saved and reused. Mid-Continent would stage out of Buckley Air National Guard Base. The missiles, control systems, and other sensitive items were removed by the end of 1965. Other useful materials that remained, and could be salvaged and reused, were sold by Mid-Continent to various bidders. When this process was complete, by the late 1960s, the silos were to be sealed permanently with concrete and steel.13 However by 1968, several remained unsealed, including the silos near Deer
Trail that were not only unsealed, but actually had remained open nearly three years, prompting fears that people or animals could fall in. In addition, some silos were still on land that had not been declared surplus by the Air Force and so were not yet sealed by 1968.\[14\]

Even after the silos were sealed, at least one was accessible into the early 1990s. High school students from Aurora, including the author, would use the empty silo and control center for underground parties and other activities.\[15\]

The last Titan in Colorado went offline at the end of March 1965 and the 451st Missile Wing deactivated in June 1965.\[16\] The entire operational period for the Titan in Colorado had been three years. The total cost of the silo construction program in Colorado had been about $400 million with nearly $50 million in additional costs for construction at Lowry as well as training and maintenance of crews and facilities at Lowry and Buckley. Also, nearly 2000 Air Force and civilian contractors were to be reassigned.\[17\]

The Titan era's end in 1965 signaled a shift in responsibilities once again for Buckley. Playing a small role in the history of the Titan, Buckley was important to the construction, maintenance, and removal of the silos. The old auxiliary field, born from a bombing range that was bought to ensure Lowry was created, now was responsible for the handling of this project. The
short life of the Titan Missile program simply shows that the role of Buckley was fluid; ever changing in a world of change, and that these events would continue to unfold in the 1960s.

Flight Operations Shift from Lowry to Buckley

As a result of numerous crashes around Lowry Air Force Base including a T33 trainer that crashed in the 200 block of S. Jasmine Street in Denver, killing the two airmen and damaging three homes in February 1960, pressure mounted to eliminate flight operations there. The Air Force maintained through the 1950s that the base would continue flight operations and serve as a base for transient aircraft. When the Navy announced it was leaving Buckley, many Denver residents hoped flight operations would shift from Lowry to Buckley. However, the Air Force determined this to be too expensive. The Air Force estimated that it would cost $1.3 million a year to move operations to Buckley and another half-million dollars to upgrade Buckley’s facilities. The Air Force promised it had no intention of using Buckley or eliminating air operations from Lowry.

By October 1959 however, once again the military promises fell through. It was at this time that plans were made to shift transient flights to Buckley starting in March 1960 and being complete by June 1960. This
would still allow flight operations at Lowry while moving all other less important traffic to Buckley. A total elimination of flights from Lowry was called impossible since the Air Force ballistic Missile Division was at Buckley, taking up space. Also, touch and go jet flights would be shifted from Lowry to Buckley, as this made up a significant amount of Lowry traffic.

This planned change in flight operations would mean another first for Buckley. Buckley would now be the only Air National Guard base “providing specific and direct support for Air Force operations” in the nation. With this change in flight operations new maintenance and fuel depots would need to be constructed and numerous upgrades to other facilities would be required, such as an improved control tower. In addition, the Air Force announced that no shift of operations would be made until Buckley’s nineteen man fire fighting crew had increased the number of new O-10 fire trucks equipped with foam to fight aircraft fires. The third truck was delivered to Buckley in late February and put into service the first week of March 1960. These modern fire trucks had nozzles on the front of the vehicle so that fires could be put out without firefighters leaving the truck.

With the transfer of fire trucks complete, the 750 transient flights a month normally handled at Lowry were slowed decreased and shifted to
Buckley with the final conversion done by May 31, 1960. This helped eliminate the noise problems and crash risks associated with Lowry.

As part of the Titan program, one of the two runways at Lowry was closed, setting the stage for even more traffic at Buckley. The construction of two large buildings at the north end of the runway to support the program meant that the north-south runway would cease operations no later than 1961. Since this only left the 8,100 ft. east-west runway operational, any time north-south winds were too strong, the aircraft would be diverted to other fields. Of course this most likely meant Buckley.

With the shift of touch-and-go landings and transient aircraft, it was only a matter of time before all flight operations ceased at Lowry. On November 19, 1964 the Department of Defense declared that flight operations at the field would cease. On March 26, 1965 the last four jet aircraft at Lowry Air Force Base took off for Colorado Springs. This represented the end of jet aircraft at Lowry though several T-29 and C-47 propeller driven aircraft would still operate at the base until the planned closure in June 1966. In May 1965, the last helicopters were flown out of Lowry. The two H-21 had been part of air search and rescue at Lowry since 1958 but were now being sent to the "bone yard" for unneeded aircraft in Arizona.
Flight operations in their entirety moved to Buckley at the end of June 1966. The last plane to leave Lowry and arrive at Buckley was a T-29 flown by General Charles Anderson who was in charge of Lowry. On board with him was Henry F. Zielinski, who had been on the first plane, a B-18, to land at Lowry on Sept. 17, 1939. Once Buckley became the only major military airfield in the Denver area in 1966, flight operations and future expansion of the base and communities nearby would be a recurring issue for the next 40 years.

After transient flights had shifted to Buckley it was clear that this meant that Buckley Air National Guard Base became more important to the Air Force, the other branches of the military for transient flights, and to the community. In fact, the number of takeoffs at Buckley increased dramatically from 1,700 per month previously to 5,000 in March 1960. As a result of this increase in flights, the Air National Guard announced plans in April 1960 to try to keep a four mile buffer zone around Buckley to prevent the type of community construction around the base that ultimately doomed Lowry. However, this would be the first in many controversies about the flight operations at Buckley including the safety of housing around the base and the increased noise generated by the aircraft. These issues would be very similar to those experienced by Lowry Air Force Base.
Annexation of Buckley

As part of the expansion of Aurora, in June 1965 it was proposed that perhaps Aurora should annex Buckley Air National Guard Base to be part of the city. At the time of the proposal, Aurora was not yet far enough east to have a boundary with Buckley, a prerequisite for annexation. However, the plans involved suggested this could be accomplished within several months. The primary reason for this desired annexation was to allow more control over construction in areas near the base. In a prophetic statement, Aurora’s Assistant City Manager, O. James Murray was concerned that someday the city would surround the base. This would likely lead to a crash that would kill civilians or even cause the base to close its air operations as it had done to Lowry.

Initially the city requested that the COANG purchase an area of land around the base to provide an area of separation from the base and the residential areas that may grow towards the base. The Air Force was not authorized to do this, so the annexation plan was put forward and adopted. On September 22, 1965, the Aurora Planning Commission voted to approve the annexation of the 3,742-acre base. On September 27, 1965, Aurora officially acquired the 5.7 square miles in a ceremony at Aurora City Hall in the first of two planned annexations. It was the largest annexation ever in the
metro area at the time. It was said by both the Air Force and city officials that the purpose of the transfer was to limit housing and future expansion around the base to ensure that flight operations would be able to continue at the base.\textsuperscript{37} This was completed just before the end of flight operations at Lowry, which certainly influenced Aurora's decision to try and protect the future of the base.

Bombing Range Disposition

Besides the airfield, the question of what to do with the 64,000 acre Lowry Bombing Range land also needed to be decided. Shortly after World War II, several areas were given away including those used in the creation of the Plains Conservation Center.\textsuperscript{38}

Even while portions of the range were active Titan missile sites, the General Services Administration was planning to declare all or some of the 60,000 acres not being used by the government range surplus in 1962. Denver, the state of Colorado, and Arapahoe County all wanted certain parts of the range. Denver believed it deserved the land since it had purchased it originally and gave it to the government for free. Denver wanted to build a prairie conservation center, airport, and use some of the land for industrial development.\textsuperscript{39} Denver also planned to have a landfill, park, horticulture
experimental farm, a juvenile detention center and a research lab.\textsuperscript{40} Aurora was interested in buying the land to help with the noise issue with Buckley and to create large parks and recreation areas.\textsuperscript{41} In August 1962, 49,000 acres were declared surplus and open for purchase.\textsuperscript{42} The military had claimed some 5,000 acres of land. About 6,400 acres of the land was held for the Department of Corrections as grazing land while the Fish and Wildlife Service wanted to keep some sections for wildlife development. State officials proposed that the federal government trade 28,000 acres of bombing range land for land closer to Colorado Springs and Pueblo.\textsuperscript{43}

In December 1962, the GSA sold 13,280 acres to various individual bidders for just under $750,000. Over 21,000 acres had been offered up for sale but several bids were rejected. By the end of 1965 there were still 56 square miles, or 35,840 acres owned by the federal government. It is not clear why the remainder of the land remained unsold, but what remained was considered as a possible site for an atomic reactor in 1965. Despite the promise of the proposal, this idea was dropped.\textsuperscript{44} There was a different proposal, also short lived, that would have brought a scientific atomic smasher or super-collider to the site.\textsuperscript{45} The federal government would stay in possession of much of the land for another ten to twenty years.
Buckley also sold off 80 acres of a small parcel on the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and Buckley Road (Airport Road). With the sale of the 80 acre section, the base now had about 3700 acres by late 1965.46

With the acquisition of Buckley Air National Guard base, Aurora tied itself to the survival of the base. The continuation of flight operations was deemed important enough to acquire the base, as a means to help expand the city and to maintain a watchful eye over development. At the close of the 1960s the Lowry Bombing range was still part of the legacy of creating Buckley in the first place, and the continuation of the open space in Arapahoe County would help to keep Buckley alive.

COANG Activation and Activities at Buckley

With a new base and new command came a bit more influence. One continuous hazard for the aircraft at Buckley taking off to the north was 2 large towers (265 and 485 feet) that were owned and operated by KOA Radio at their facility at 18500 E. Colfax. Appropriately enough the cross street at this location would become known as Tower Road. The towers were bought by the state in March 1960 for $160,000 and torn down.47 This signaled the first of many problems and issues with the expansion of the base. These towers had been constructed after 1934 when little regard for the needs of the
military were taken into consideration. Now in the 1960s, expansion of Denver and Aurora would continue to be a concern to flight operations at Buckley.

This new influence seemed to include good luck and expansion of responsibilities as well. In 1960 it was announced that the COANG 120th FIS would be receiving 25 supersonic F-100C “Super Sabre” aircraft to replace the much older F-86 “Sabre”. The F-86 was a nearly fifteen year old design, while the “Super Sabre” had only been in operation with the Air Force for five years. This would also mean that the 140th FW left Air Defense Command control and was moved to the Tactical Air Command (TAC). The new 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron started receiving the planes in January 1961. The first crash of the new aircraft occurred in June 1961 as Lt. Col. Coomer crashed on takeoff from the north-south runway when his afterburner failed. He survived the crash that ended up two miles north of the base.

As in earlier decades, Buckley continued to support the community. With Buckley firmly under the control of the National Guard in the early 1960s, entertainment for members and the families of the Guard became important. In June 1962, built entirely with ANG recreation funds, the Buckley Recreation Area was completed. This area included Lake Williams, a reservoir for fishing, swimming, or waterskiing with recreational areas
nearby that allowed for horseshoes, picnic areas, and playgrounds. At the grand opening with more than 900 people attending, free soda and ice cream augmented the fishing contests and horseshoe tournaments that kept people excited. 50 There was also a skeet shooting range near the recreation area. 51

One small creation on base was pretty colorful, both in title subject matter. The infamous Buckley Coloring Book appeared in the 1960s to poke fun at, what else, the military life at Buckley and the chain of command. Though no one ever took credit for creating it, it became a source of fun and mystery to the men at Buckley. Of course, being that much fun, it was soon banned by the upper echelons of command.

To keep up morale, as they did in World War II at Buckley, dogs often were used as mascots or simply fun companions on base. One of these was Sgt. Herman, a small collie mix, that lived in one of the hangars at Buckley. Well liked, though not too bright, he would often be tricked into running across the slippery hangar floor and made to slide into the always closing hangar door.

Medical Responsibilities

Buckley would become, for most of the Vietnam War, the facility utilized by medical flights returning wounded soldiers to Colorado for further
treatment at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. These flights would grow in importance during the war. During June 1966 total passenger traffic for the month was 1,600 people, including wounded vets. In 1968 medical flights alone were arriving 12-15 times a month to drop off between 15-25 wounded soldiers each time. By 1968 the 3rd Detachment of the 375th Aeromedical Airlift Wing stationed at Buckley was responsible for those arriving at Buckley. By the end of 1968, the new C-9A Nightingale medical transport was being utilized to bring wounded Vietnam soldiers to Fitzsimons through Buckley since it had a larger capacity with as many as 30 wounded soldiers on board. This illustrates the important role Buckley would play in cooperation with the other two military bases in Aurora as part of what would become called the golden triangle of bases.

The Golden Triangle, the Early Years

This vital role of supporting wounded soldiers arriving at Buckley was part of an interconnected world of the three major bases in and near Aurora. This larger role would likely not have been possible without the shifting of flight responsibilities of Lowry to Buckley. The key component in the triad of bases was that each facility focused on a particular area or expertise with
regards to services and programs. This reliance on the other bases would be
called the golden triangle among various government employees in Aurora. It
had also been called the military triangle. With the ending of flight operations
at Lowry, Buckley now took on the role of transportation center for Lowry
and Fitzsimons.

Fitzsimons of course would focus on medical needs of the active duty
members of the military at Lowry, Buckley, and Fitzsimons but also the
Reserve, National Guard, and retired members of the military and as well as
their dependents. It would have minor services available on base but nothing
as fancy or as large as Lowry.

Lowry would be the big brother to the other two bases. Lowry would
have the most people, the largest payroll, and the largest facilities for housing
soldiers and their families stationed there. As a result, more of the amenities
needed such as groceries and small items would be provided by the
Commissary and the Base Exchange (BX) at Lowry. There would be a
theatre, a pool, bowling alley, golf course, and plenty of parks.

Buckley would not have any housing, only limited medical facilities,
and limited amenities to provide to the National Guard stationed there.
Buckley would be the transportation hub for both helicopters and aircraft. All
three bases would be forced, after 1966, to rely on one another for services.
This reliance would be most prominent in the 1970s after all flight operations had ceased for some time at Lowry.

National Guard Activations and the Vietnam War

Throughout the 1960s the COANG would be activated from Buckley. The first occurred shortly after obtaining its new role, name, and aircraft. On October 1, 1961, the 120th TFS was called to active duty as a result of the Berlin Crisis. The construction of the Berlin Wall forced President Kennedy to activate several ANG units. The 536 members of the 120th remained on duty for 10 months. For most of this they remained at Buckley but for 3 months they were stationed at George Air Force Base in California while Buckley’s runways were repaired during routine maintenance and improvements. In addition they participated in training missions in Georgia.

One positive note to the activation was that during these exercises in Georgia, the Buckley fliers, nearly all with combat experience, handily defeated Air Force Reserve units with no combat experience. This led to a change in Reserve training that would now mean more time learning air combat maneuvers, also called dog fighting, to make the Reserve more proficient. The activation ended on schedule and the 120th TFS was deactivated on August 24, 1962.
In August 1965 the COANG was ordered to increase its manpower to 100 percent, meaning that they would likely be an Air National Guard unit deployed for combat if needed. With Vietnam deployments increasing in July 1965, that seemed likely to many. This would prove to be the case in just a few years.

The COANG would be activated again in January 1968 in response to the Pueblo Crisis with North Korea. The 140th Tactical Fighter Wing was called to active duty on January 26, 1968. This call up was authorized for up to 24 months and included 900 Coloradans. Many believed the call up for the 140th TFW was due to their outstanding performance while deployed in Turkey in 1967 for combat exercises. This meant that the unit was recognized as being prepared, and well known, to many Air Force generals. The group had also been rated as the number one ANG unit in the nation for combat readiness two years in a row. The 140th TFW was notified that it should be prepared to deploy overseas within 72 hours, but this was not done. It was believed most of the 900 men would remain in the United States for several months.

This changed in April, 1968. The 140th TFW HQ was deployed to Cannon AFB in New Mexico, where they had been stationed during the Korean War. They would be responsible for training pilots for the Forward
Air Controller (FAC) jobs and many other Coloradans from Buckley were separated into other training areas.\textsuperscript{62} By the end of the activation in 1969, men from the COANG would be deployed to 49 bases in the United States and 11 overseas bases, most of those in Korea.\textsuperscript{63}

The Vietnam War would also change things for the COANG. In April 1968 the 120\textsuperscript{th} TFS was ordered to Phan Rang AB in Vietnam and they arrived on May 3, 1968.\textsuperscript{64} Of the newly activated squadron's nearly 50 pilots only 26 were sent to Phan Rang.\textsuperscript{65} Phan Rang AB was located about 30 miles southwest of Cam Ranh Bay.\textsuperscript{66} When they initially departed Buckley the public was not told what their destination was.\textsuperscript{67} While stationed there the unit was attached to the 35\textsuperscript{th} TFW flying ground attack missions.\textsuperscript{68} This is essentially what the F-100C had been designed for and all the flyers from Buckley were experienced in flying them.

In a military first, the 120\textsuperscript{th} TFS became the first reserve component in the U.S. military to be committed to combat as a unit.\textsuperscript{69} In all previous deployments, ANG or reserve squadrons activated by the Air Force were broken up to fill in gaps or their aircraft were given to active duty units. Just five days after they arrived, the 20 F-100C aircraft of the 120\textsuperscript{th} TFS, began flying combat missions on May 8, 1968.\textsuperscript{70} The intensity of air operations is illustrated by the fact that the 120\textsuperscript{th} TFS flew their 1000\textsuperscript{th} mission in only 44
days. For their deployment, their accident rate was zero, and their operational rate was 86.9 percent. The standard for the Air Force was 71 percent.

When the year long deployment was up, Buckley and all of Colorado could be proud. The 120th had flown over 9,000 hours of combat time, nearly 6,000 combat sorties, with the average pilot flying nearly 200 combat sorties. In addition the unit dropped over 18,000 bombs. This translated into nearly 20 million pounds of ordinance, in addition to the 1.8 million rounds of 20mm ammunition expended. The 120th TFS also had the highest munitions-reliability rate and lowest abort rate and of any unit.

The performance of Air Guard units met or exceeded those of regular Air Force units. The Guard units tended to be older, but they were more experienced with their equipment and more knowledgeable of the capabilities and limitations of their aircraft. They also had the benefit of working with the same men, both pilots and crews, for an extended period of time which created a sense of fellowship among the men that helped bring the Colorado Air National Guard together in a time of crisis.

However, the glories of the unit did little to assuage the anguish of experiencing combat losses. Two COANG pilots had been killed in action. Major Clyde Seiler was killed in a strafing mission on 27 March 1969 when
his F-100C was hit by enemy ground fire and crashed. Maj. Seiler was a
veteran pilot in Vietnam with nearly 200 missions flown. His death came
with only two weeks left in the deployment to Vietnam.76 Major Seiler was a
pilot with Continental Airlines who lived in Aurora and had joined the Guard
in 1962.77 The other member from Colorado killed was Capt. Perry H.
Jefferson, who was the 120th TFS historian and intelligence officer. His plane
failed to return from an observation mission on April 3, 1969.78 His status
would be classified as Missing-In-Action for several years before being
changed to Killed-In-Action.

In all, the 120th TFS lost 4 F-100C aircraft in Vietnam. Two were shot
down including the one piloted by Major Seiler and another that was shot
down with the pilot rescued on December 29, 1968.79 In addition, one plane
was destroyed in a mortar attack on the base in early 1969, and another one
was left behind at Phan Rang.80

Celebrations at Buckley continued throughout April in 1969. Joyful
homecomings and reunions marked the ceremonies as each individual unit
returned from their deployments. The formal homecoming was on April 30th
when the COANG was released from active duty during ceremonies held at
Buckley.81
Once again, and for the third time since the end of World War II, the men of Buckley Air National Guard Base answered the call to defend the United States and her allies overseas. It would certainly not be the last time the 140th FW and the 120th TFS would be called to service, and Buckley would be ready to support them in those future missions.

The New Air Force Role at Buckley

Along with the shifting of flight operations, and the end of the Titan program, there was renewed construction activity at Buckley. Construction of the Aerospace Data Facility would be the hallmark moment in the history, and future, of Buckley. It would create a need for Buckley that would sustain its future despite military cutbacks and base closures. It would be based on continuing Buckley’s history of protecting Colorado and the nation from hostile attack.

Ground was broken on the $20 million Aerospace Data Facility (ADF) in early 1969. The nature of the mission and construction was secret other than it would be a ground station for some type of satellite system. In fact, the funding of the construction was secret and not until bids were sent out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was it revealed that this would be placed at Buckley. According to reports Buckley was chosen due to its proximity to the
Rocky Mountains and the ability to use mobile trucks from mountain peaks to calibrate the systems in use. In addition the facility was to have two antennas, each approximately 85 feet high, and their officially recognized purpose would be to monitor objects in space.

Many unofficial theories have been put forward as to why Buckley and not Peterson AFB, Edwards AFB in California, or any other active duty base in the country was selected. Some believe that its location, nearly exactly 40° North Latitude, situated it on a logical position to monitor Soviet nuclear launches from Central Asia, monitor China and North Korea, and keep tabs on communist nations in southeastern Europe. This would be at a time when satellite maneuverability would have been an issue with some in constant motion around the Earth, unable to move in order to change its view, as well as those satellites that were in static geosynchronous orbits that were likely to be been nearly permanent. Others believed that because the facility was at an Air National Guard base it would not draw as much attention to the new radomes. Yet another theory was that since Buckley was so far to the interior of the country, it would make it more difficult for other nations to eavesdrop or intercept the information being sent or received.

Whatever the official determination was based upon, Buckley and the region would reap the benefits of the decision. The projected completion date
of the radomes and ancillary buildings was May 31, 1970. It was at this time that the facility became operational.

As the 1960s came to a close Buckley had received its fighting men back from overseas and Vietnam deployments, had ended its role in maintaining missiles for a nuclear war, had created a recreation center on the base, and most importantly saw the construction of the Aerospace Data Facility. These changes would have a lasting impact on the people on base and on the base itself as it moved into its future and current role in the early 1970s.
Chapter Five Notes


2 Colorado National Guard, Colorado Air Guard circa 1965.

3 Colorado Air National Guard 111.

4 Carl Vincent McFadden and Leona McFadden, Early Aurora (Aurora: Aurora Technical Center, 1978) 446.


15 Author's own experiences and observations.


30 “Last Two Choppers at Lowry to Depart,” Rocky Mountain News 8 May 1965: 90.


44 “Lowry Visited by AEC Team,” The Denver Post 29 Nov. 1965.


46 Colorado National Guard, Colorado Air Guard circa 1965.

47 Colorado Air National Guard 112.


49 Colorado Air National Guard 113.

50 “Buckley Opens New Rec Area,” Aurora Advocate 14 June 1962: 15A.


52 Colorado Air National Guard 116-127.


56 Colorado Air National Guard 115.


60 “800 in Colorado Air Guard Called,” Rocky Mountain News 26 Jan. 1968: 1+.


62 Colorado Air National Guard 130.


64 Colorado Air National Guard 131.


68 Colorado Air National Guard 131.


70 Gross 158.


72 Colorado Air National Guard 144.


74 Colorado Air National Guard 144.

75 Gross 160.


CHAPTER SIX

THE 1970S

The 1970s saw the newest mission at Buckley become one of the most important to the base, community, and the nation. With the Vietnam War continuing in the early part of the decade medical flights at the base continued. The golden triangle of bases solidified their relationship in this decade, specializing in its duty to the nation, but also to the dependents and family members of the military. The Colorado Air National Guard was the dominate group on base but the newest tenant, the Aerospace Data Facility run by active duty Air Force personnel, would solidify Buckley’s continued existence in the face of several rounds of base closures.

Buckley’s Land and Major Units

After adding and selling various tracts of land in the 1960s the base would start to reduce its acreage via land sales/ grants to Aurora. By early 1976 the base comprised 3536.34 acres in three separate land areas. The primary base was the largest area at 3245 acres and the two smaller areas north of the base, just north of 6th Avenue, were 72 and 220 acres respectively. ¹
New construction at Buckley also got underway in the early part of the decade. Newer buildings were needed to replace those still decaying on the base after several tenants and operations came and went. The construction would include new motor pool buildings, buildings to house maintenance equipment for the ADF, an armament area, and a larger taxiway. Certainly modest compared to other projects in Buckley's history but important details none the less.  

The units at the base in 1974 included Det. 3 Space and Missile Systems Organization (SAMSO), the 2nd Communication Squadron, Det. 3 375th Aeromedical Airlift Wing, 1987th Communications Squadron, the ANG 140th TFW and 120th TFS, 154th Tactical Control Group, Marine and Naval Reserve training units, and the Civil Air Patrol. Also at the base was the new Army National Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility which included the 15th Special Forces Group, the 147th Medical Hospital, and the 1157th Aviation Company with attack helicopters. However, the most important tenants at the base were those tasked with running the Aerospace Data Facility.
Aerospace Data Facility Becomes Operational

The background and operation of the ADF is more open today than it was just 10 years ago. The exact operations of the base are still classified, but more is known today than ever before. The heart of the ADF is its mission to watch the skies, and the ground, for any threats to the United States.

As part of the expanding role of space during the Cold War, new satellite systems were being created all the time. The newest of these in the late 1960s was the Defense Support Program (DSP) satellite system. Unlike older satellites which put information on film and was jettisoned to be recovered by aircraft and ships on earth, this system would be totally electronic in nature. The purpose of the DSP program was to provide early warning and detection of missile launches and of nuclear explosions to the Department of Defense and the president. DSP satellites are part of the space based segment of NORAD’s Tactical Warning and Attack Assessment System. The first launch of this system occurred on November 6, 1970, just a few months after the ADF became operational at Buckley.

The largest and most impressive objects at Buckley, or at least the most visible, are the giant satellite dishes at Buckley. However, people are not able to view them due to the interesting covering placed over the dishes. The antennas are covered by giant white radomes that act as a shelter to the
large satellite dish beneath it. Radomes safeguard against environmental design loads, such as wind, blowing sand, rain, snow, ultraviolet sun light, fungus and corrosion. Designed to improve signal quality, radomes help tracking systems by removing random and often large dynamic wind forces. Today these radomes can be constructed of dialectic panels that surround the dish.

These giant “Golf Balls”, “Bubbles”, or “Bubble Farms” as they have been called, also have an important military purpose. These radomes act as a visual impedance to satellites of foreign nations that may try to determine the exact location of spy satellites which may be disguised as commercial satellites. It can also make it more difficult for other countries from being able to intercept or impair the reception and transmission of data. Some also believe that the covering helps to protect the radar dishes from an electromagnetic pulse generated from a nuclear blast.

By late 1971 there were two radomes operational at Buckley. Today these are designated buildings 403 and 404. In June 1972, another radome was added on the southeast portion of the ADF. Further construction added another radome west of the ADF facility sometime before the middle of 1974, bringing the total at the ADF facility to four. Funding was approved for
additional facilities at the ADF in 1974. Nearly $2.7 million was requested for additional construction at Buckley for expansion of the facility there.\(^\text{10}\)

By late 1975 there were 6 total radomes on the base. There were five at the ADF site which included three large radomes and two smaller ones. There were three large radomes to the west of the ADF building in a north-south line while the smaller ones were south of the ADF building in an east-west line. It was believed that these were created to directly support the DSP system. In addition, the sixth radome was operating at the extreme southeast portion of the base, just east of the end of the runway.\(^\text{11}\) This was believed to be operated by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps for meteorological or Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) purposes. It is unclear when exactly between 1971 and 1975 this radome was added.

By 1978 there were seven DSP satellites operational.\(^\text{12}\) At Buckley there still remained the 5 primary ADF radomes and the one at the southern edge of the base. The responsibility of the DSP satellite systems fell to the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Communications Squadron (now the Space Warning Squadron) which was activated in July 1971. It was the responsibility of the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) CS to process DSP mission information and to monitor and maintain the satellite data processing equipment. The 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) CS fell under the command of the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) Aerospace Force of Aerospace Defense Command (ADCOM) until 1979, when ADCOM was
deactivated. At that time the unit became part of Strategic Air Command’s 1st Strategic Aerospace Division.  

One of the benefits of bringing the ADF to Buckley was jobs. It was believed that to start up the program nearly 300 active duty personnel would be assigned to Buckley. In addition civilian technician jobs would be created to support the satellite operations systems from the companies that built them. Hughes Aircraft and Lockheed would bring about 100 civilian contractors to the area to support the program.  

Buckley’s Financial Impact Along with the Golden Triangle  

It is clear that while the Air Force valued the new role at Buckley, very few people outside of the military took the time to notice. In a story detailing the role of the military in Aurora, several opportunities are taken to show that the three bases were a hindrance since no property tax or sales tax was collected, civilians who spent money on the base lowered tax revenue, and that very little money was spent outside of the base by the military. They also believed that the bases themselves were self contained, not requiring much in the way of off base facilities. In 1974 Buckley provided only 800 full time military and civilian jobs and about 1500 reservists who were only temporarily at the base.
Another example of Buckley being the forgotten base of Aurora was in a major article detailing the role of the military in Colorado. In the 1976 story, every major base is covered including Lowry AFB and Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. Buckley is not included in the four page story, and only the Air National Guard is briefly mentioned. In fact even the Rocky Mountain Arsenal with 900 workers is detailed while Buckley is left out. One could think that either Buckley is forgotten, not seen as significant, or that with the new ADF the media was being cautious. Whatever the reason, Buckley seemed to fall through the cracks as far as importance was concerned. However, with the base closures of the 1970s looming over Lowry and Fitzsimons it is possible that they simply took center stage over what was seen as the lesser of the three bases.

The military was very important to the financial well being of Colorado. In 1976, nearly 10 percent of people in the state were directly involved with the Department of Defense. Nearly 53,000 military and 20,000 civilian jobs in the state were directly related to the military and accounted for nearly $700 million in payroll expenditures. Retirees were paid $135 million at the same time. This was extra money coming into the state that would otherwise have been spent elsewhere. All told the military was responsible for 17,000 military and 9,000 civilian jobs in the metro area. Most
of these were at Lowry, Fitzsimons, and Buckley. The three bases brought in some $155 million in payroll to the metro area. In fact the military was the largest employer of civilians in Aurora with 3,200. About 13% of all civilian jobs in Aurora exist as a result of the military presence at the three bases.\footnote{19} By 1978 payroll was $1.1 billion in the state with the metro area receiving about $316 million of that.\footnote{20} Defense spending was a significant factor in the economic livelihood of the metro area and Aurora.

What Buckley did provide to Aurora and Colorado was valuable even if the media didn’t acknowledge it frequently. In 1975 Buckley employed nearly 3000 people. The COANG had 700 civilian employees and 1,400 military personnel. There were 400 active duty Air Force and nearly 540 civilian contractors associated with the ADF or construction projects on base. Overall Buckley had a payroll of just under $30 million which ranked it fifth among all military installations in Colorado. The base spent about $4 million in Colorado on goods and services, of which $335,000 was spent in Aurora. Construction spending was $16 million from 1970-1976.\footnote{21} Of course most of that was associated with the ADF.

Buckley played a critical part with the other three bases continuing to be the foundation of Aurora’s economy. Actually, combined Fitzsimons and Buckley made the military the second largest land user in Aurora in 1974.\footnote{22}
Along with Lowry, despite the fact that the bases were all from different branches of the military, the installations all worked together to provide the services needed to those in the military, their families, and retirees. Buckley was still the smallest of the three, the one most likely to be forgotten, and the one seen by many as only an airfield for those coming to Lowry or Fitzsimons. Lowry continued to grow in the 1970s despite not having flight operations, adding classes and services to those stationed here. Fitzsimons continued to receive wounded soldiers from Vietnam. Buckley continued to be the access point for military transportation. However, the rumors of base closings in the 1970s began to threaten the fragile balance of the three bases.

In 1977 several stories were emerging about further reductions in bases around the country. Lowry was part of an internal Air Force study in 1976 that reported which Air Training Command bases would be the easiest to close or those which could be easily replaced. Lowry made the list along with Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois since both of those bases no longer had flight operations. However, Lowry did not make it onto any closures lists in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{23}

Lowry and Fitzsimons had not been selected to be closed, but the fact that Lowry had been considered for closure, was enough to worry many officials in the area. It was hoped the three bases need for the other two
would keep them out of the base closure lists. Buckley did have a small closure scare when it was announced the ANG was cutting back its hours in 1978. No plans to close Buckley were ever undertaken by the ANG though.

While the national government decided what it needed and didn’t need in the 1970s, Buckley, the Colorado Air National Guard, and the ADF would continue to operate, however quietly, simply doing its job. This included provided services and help to the local communities beyond simple employment and financial measurements.

Community Activities

In continuing its cooperation with communities, Buckley worked to keep kids in school. In 1970 the Department of the Air Force agreed to lease several acres of land at Buckley to the Aurora Public Schools to help with education in the vocational classes covering aeronautics. It was hoped that this would provide training to prepare students in the field of aircraft technical training.

The COANG at Buckley partnered with Adams County Schools in the early 1970s to allow portions of the base to be used as classrooms for various vocational programs. These programs were initiated to help train students in a
field, rather than have them become drop outs. This included programs such as electronics, data processing, and automotive mechanic training. What made the program so attractive was that since the ANG area of the base was not busy during the workweek, the classrooms were providing a substantial benefit to the community when not need by the base. The COANG received national recognition for this program in 1975.

The National Guard also has a critical role in assisting communities and saving lives in times of crisis. In fact, Buckley had the responsibility of being the primary search and rescue site for a large portion of Colorado and other western states. Buckley’s area extended west to Salt Lake City, north to Cheyenne, east to Wichita, and south to Colorado Springs. The Big Thompson Flood in July 1976 was a perfect example of this. Buckley was involved in assisting the flight operations of Army helicopters by providing fuel and maintenance and as a staging point for rescues, supply drops, and quick transportation to damaged areas.

Buckley also lost a little bit more of its land in the 1970s in an effort to help the community. In 1976, Buckley gave 180 acres to Aurora. This land bordered Sand Creek and was north of 6th Avenue and West of Piccadilly on the eastern portion of the base. This small area had previously been used by the Boy Scouts and other groups as a campground. The city planned on
leaving most of the area as it was while adding several picnic tables. A second area of land given up by Buckley shortly after brought the total area of land deeded to nearly 500 acres. Most of these were north or east of the base and this left the base with the 3536.34 acres it would retain into the 1980s.

National Guard and Base Activities

With the successful activation and deployment to Vietnam complete in April 1969, the Air National Guard was in a period of reorganization. Typically Guard units lose nearly 35% of their members after an extended activation since members need only complete 5 years of active service. As a result, the COANG spent the early part of the 1970s rebuilding their personnel strength.

With the Vietnam War experience still fresh in the minds of the pilots of the 120th TFS, another upgrade in aircraft was to take place. In 1973 the Air Force announced plans to replace the older F-100 Super Sabre aircraft used by the COANG with eighteen brand new A-7D Corsairs the following year. It was the first time that Buckley had received planes straight from production, rather than after the aircraft had been used by active duty Air
Force pilots. It was also the first time in two decades that any Guard unit had obtained brand new aircraft. The fact that the 120th TFS was one of the few units selected for the upgrade showed the faith the military had in the Buckley pilots. The area never had a shortage of pilots and they usually had combat experience. In addition, the aircraft could carry 15,000 lbs. of ordinance, which was over twice what a B-17 bomber from WWII could carry. The $4 million aircraft was well received by the pilots. As part of several Air Force Reserve changes the number of aircraft in the squadron was raised to twenty-six by 1977. The new aircraft would soon be put to good use. As part of normal training deployments and exercises independently and as part of the 140th Fighter Wing, the 120th TFS made several trips overseas. The first was to Holland, with the next trip to Panama. In 1979 the group deployed overseas to Turkey.

Various media productions were alive and well at Buckley in the 1970s too. Buckley continued its newspaper tradition by publishing *Contrails* every week. This paper took first place out of more than fifty in the National Guard Association newspaper contest in 1977. There were also films produced at Buckley to help aid in recruiting. The film *Air Force Now* was partially shot at Buckley in 1977 to promote the ANG to active duty Air Force
personnel as a means to continue their involvement with the service. These media endeavors did well to maintain the high level of excellence expected of those stationed at Buckley.  

Buckley was still responsible for all transient aircraft coming through the area on a 24 hour a day basis. By early 1971 the base averaged 9,000 transient aircraft a year, or over 800 per month. These still included regularly scheduled medical flights from Vietnam as well as aircraft from all branches of the military. This was in addition to the COANG planes at the base that flew several hundred training flights a month. This was all handled by the Buckley ground crews that numbered fewer than 60 men. Starting in the 1970s Buckley was also a stopping point for many of the veterans returning from Vietnam during the troop withdrawals. Unfortunately, many veterans returned to less than positive circumstances but since Buckley was a military base with restricted access, no major protests or other offensive behavior towards returning veterans was experienced.  

In fact, the ground crew at Buckley had done such a wonderful job of servicing aircraft that it was recognized nationally in 1971. Buckley had been awarded the “Rex Riley” award for providing outstanding service to transient aircraft, crews, and personnel. This included managing the landings, any problems that may come up during landing, arrangement of accommodations
for overnight passengers, and provided any maintenance that may be necessary. In another national first for Buckley, it holds the distinction of being the only ANG base in the nation to have received the award.  

Not all the news about Buckley was positive in the 1970s. In October 1977, forty-eight civilian employees were fired for alleged drug use. All the employees were working within the Space and Missile Systems Organization (SAMSO) whose mission was tied to the operations at the Aerospace Data Facility. Most of the workers were employees of Lockheed Corporation or of Hughes Aircraft, the primary civilian contractors at the ADF. It was discovered that lie-detector tests and drug use that occurred many years before had been used to bring about the firings.  

A public investigation, brought on by pressure from Colorado Representative Patricia Schroeder and Senator Gary Hart, helped to reinstate twenty-three of the employees by January 1978. This also brought into question the possibility of illegal FBI wiretaps, but that was not pursued. By March, forty-three of the forty-eight employees had been successfully reinstated and were back on the job at Buckley. It was also rumored at the time that the investigation was actually part of an anti-homosexual investigation, but this was never verified.
Other operations at the base continued to expand and in some cases they were closed. One new addition to the base was the 154th Tactical Control Group (TCG) and 154th Tactical Air Control Center (TACC). The group was responsible for organizing the region's former AC&W squadrons now known as Tactical Control Squadrons. This included the 138th TCS now in Greeley, CO. The mission of the TCG was to control various aircraft in air operations and in battle against surface and air targets. The 154th TCG had its own mobile radar systems to assist in this operation.

One part of Buckley that was to be closed after its short existence was an honor camp established as a work program for those in minimum security prisons. Initially established in 1964 with about 50 prisoners, the camp provided labor to Buckley ANG base and served as a mobile forestry unit. It also assisted with labor at the Colorado State Patrol which had a small contingent located at the base. By 1970 it was decided to close the Buckley honor camp while shifting those prisoners to Camp George West in Golden, Colorado. It might have been related to the creation of the sensitive ADF at Buckley but more likely was a result of cost saving measures in consolidating the two camps.

In 1978 the COANG announced that Buckley would no longer be a twenty-four hour a day base. It was decided that the transient operations
would only be from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. as part of a cost cutting measure ordered by the Air Force. In addition about 40 civilian positions would be eliminated, mostly through halting new hiring and utilizing transfers.47

Deadliest Accident at the Base and Crashes

Known for its safety and proven record, accidents at Buckley were mainly confined to plane crashes. However, the deadliest accident to happen at Buckley occurred December 18, 1974. At 1:40 PM a fuel tank exploded on the base while it was being cleaned by technicians. The tank had been emptied of JP4 fuel, which is less flammable than regular gasoline, and was supposed to have been fumigated as well. Two technicians had just lowered themselves into the tank when it exploded. Four men were killed instantly with three wounded, two critically.48

Staff Sgt. Stephen D. Carlson, of the Colorado Air National Guard was killed as were Buckley civilians Floyd Childs and Howard Nyberg along with John Turnbow who was a contractor with the cleaning company. Soon after Wilbur Unruh, another Buckley employed civilian, died at Fitzsimons from his injuries. Robert Soens was critically injured and Steven Childs was injured and released. The container was part of a three tank complex located beneath
six feet of dirt that was being cleaned by the Randall H. Sharpe Co. technicians. The other two tanks, still filled with fuel, did not explode. The explosion caused the formation of a 50 foot crater while blowing off the top of the fuel tank.  

The tanks were located about 100 yards north of the Buckley fire station. An Air Force investigation into the explosion was immediately started. It was noted that the fumes of JP4 fuels are much more volatile than the fuel itself and that may have contributed to the blast. The most likely cause was that one of the workers had inadvertently carried a metal tool that had made contact with the tank, causing the blast.

This shocking tragedy served as a reminder of the hazardous duty faced by many stationed at Buckley, not just the aviators. For a while the 120th TFS had gone six years without an accident, but accidents were inevitable. In July 1971 Capt. John Morris experienced engine trouble in his F-100 as he was landing. He was able to eject from his aircraft safely and the wreckage ended up in the Sand Creek Auto Salvage yard southwest of Tower Road and Colfax Avenue.

Other COANG and transient aircraft also crashed near Buckley. In fact, on July 22, 1972, two crashes took place within 10 seconds of each other. Both planes were Marine Corps jets that had stopped at Buckley to refuel.
The first plane attempted to take off to the north but crashed just over a mile from Buckley, apparently an engine problem. The pilot ejected safely. At nearly the same time the other plane attempted to take off on the east-west runway but never left the ground as it veered off the runway, starting several small fires. Both fliers suffered only minor injuries. Though it was believed at the time the aircraft may have collided this was later ruled out. This may or may not be related to a report that a Marine A-4 aircraft crashed in 1972 where a housing development was planned near 6th Avenue and Buckley just northwest of the base.

That October, a Navy A-3 Sky Warrior from Alameda NAS crashed on takeoff. It was returning to Alameda when it crashed just about one mile north of the north-south runway. Wreckage was scattered over 500 yards and burned for over an hour. Commander Perry Wilkey and Aviation Machinist's Mate Second Class Russell Neynaber were both killed.

Even an aircraft accident without serious injuries can pose risks to those on the ground. In November, 1972, Lt. John A. Pratt of the COANG ejected from his F-100D north of Strasburg, about 2-3 minutes of flight time from Buckley, after experiencing engine problems. He was not injured but the crash site was unsafe for over two hours after firefighters were forced to back
away as the fire began to set off the 20mm practice rounds on board the aircraft.\textsuperscript{57}

In January 1973, Lt. Col. William Neuens ejected safely when his F-100 crashed several miles south of Watkins. This too was just several minutes of flight time to Buckley.\textsuperscript{58}

An Oregon ANG F-101 Voodoo crashed on takeoff in September, 1978. The aircraft was taking off to the south in order to fly to Tyndall AFB in Florida when it seemed to tip over, crashing just beyond the runway. Both Capt. Stephen P. Peglow and Lt. Col. Gerald O. Clark were killed in the crash.\textsuperscript{59}

Along with these crashes near Buckley, nearly 10 other ANG aircraft from Buckley were lost as a result of crashes in other areas of the state.\textsuperscript{60} All of these crashes were regrettable consequences of the need to continually maintain thousands of aircraft in case of conflict. However, the crashes near the base began to weigh heavy on the minds of residents, and elected officials, in Aurora. An official report was developed detailing the need to protect citizens and what could be done to prevent future injuries.
Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone Report

Most of these crashes took place during takeoffs and landings at the base. As a result of these crashes, the ending of flights operations at Lowry, and the continued expansion of Aurora, several ideas were developed to protect those living around Buckley and to maintain the mission of the installation. The first step of that was Aurora’s annexation of the base in 1965. However, only a decade later new construction and housing developments were beginning to encroach on the areas around Buckley where crashes were deemed to be the most likely.

It was ironic that in 1971 a news article noted Buckley had “wide open spaces” surrounding it with nothing crowding its spot on the plains.61 There were even plans in 1969 to develop several recreation areas, including two large dams, to try to limit the amount of development around Buckley but these fell through.62 Eventually expansion and the base would clash.

In 1975 Buckley Air National Guard began research to determine the impact that possible construction around the base would have. In February 1976 the base released the Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone report. The AICUZ report sought to maintain a balance between public safety, noise issues, and the general welfare of citizens with that of the duties of the airfield and the needs of the Air Force. With over 11,000 arrivals and departures in
1974 and planned construction near the base, this was an important question to resolve.

Past issues included the proximity of Stapleton flight paths near Buckley and the construction of nearby housing developments and businesses. The Aurora Mall had been completed in 1975 which forced a flight pattern change on the east-west runway (number 08/26). Eventually this construction, along with the shorter length of the runway would force its eventual closure. The building of homes in what was considered high risk areas was also troubling, and the report sought to end those and ban construction in these areas.

Besides attempting to limit where construction could take place, the AICUZ recommended certain building requirements as part of the building process. By cataloging noise levels around the base, the report created several charts indicating where noise exposure would be the highest and what could be done to reduce noise inside buildings. These included the use of brick and sound insulation to minimize the impact takeoffs and landings would have on those in the structures.

The report itself was not binding and was simply a series of recommendations. The report hoped that the city would use the suggestions in planning future development around the base and to heed recommendations as
much as possible. This could include limiting construction to only light industrial areas in crash risk zones, establishing building codes for home construction, and banning construction in areas too close to the base.

As a follow up to the AICUZ report, the Aurora planning department warned of problems if Aurora did not follow recommendations from the AICUZ report. The problem was if the AICUZ was followed, several land owners stood to lose millions of dollars in land values who could then sue the city. If the Buckley report was not followed, an aircraft accident would be seen as negligence by the city for failing to take the proper precautions in preventing loss of life. Several options discussed by the Aurora planning department included a possible closing of the base, closing the shorter east-west runway, ending flight operations at the base or imposing flight restrictions on the base. One thing the department did not consider was that the military does not need to follow recommendations by the city, or what ending flight operations might mean to Buckley. Certainly it would be prudent to think about what this meant to Lowry in the 1970s as it was considered for closure in part because it no longer had flight operations.

With the end of the decade Buckley was finally coming into its own. The Aurora area bases were operating well together, the city was reaping the financial benefits, and the tenants at Buckley continued to excel in their
respective fields. At the Aerospace Data Facility, Buckley continued to monitor the Soviet Union for a surprise attack while riding out some controversies over drug use. As the base entered the 1980s the Cold War would continue to dominate its role. Seen as the forgotten base in the 1970s, the operations at Buckley became much more prominent in the next decade.
Chapter Six Notes

1 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) A-4.


3 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) II-2.


7 Anonymous, letter to the author, 10 May 2005.

8 Aerial photo RA-20338-12-4, Denver Public Library Collection, Denver.

9 Aerial photo 21063-2-110, Denver Public Library Collection, Denver.


11 City of Aurora, Aerial Photo of Aurora, Colorado in 1975. Aurora History Museum Collection, Aurora.


19 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) II-7.


21 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) II-3, 4, 5.

22 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) II-6.


24 "Buckley Air base to Cut Back Operating Hours, Employees," Rocky Mountain News 17 May 1978: 19.


27 Colorado Air National Guard 166.


29 Colorado Air National Guard 167.


34 Colorado Air National Guard 159.


37 Colorado Air National Guard 171.

38 "Buckley Airport Base Services Best Possible," *Aurora Advocate* 7 Apr. 1971: 30


44 Colorado Air National Guard 174-176.


52 Colorado National Guard 160.

54 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) III-8.


57 “Guard Pilot Injured In Jet Fighter Crash,” Rocky Mountain News 10 Nov. 1972: 5.

58 Colorado Air National Guard 160.


60 Colorado Air National Guard 160.


63 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) III-4-8.

64 Buckley Air National Guard Base, Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (Aurora: Buckley Air National Guard Base, 1976) III-8.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE 1980S

The 1980s could be considered a quiet decade for Buckley. Its position in the metro area was secure, it was still the aviation segment of the golden triangle of bases, and the ADF and National Guard continued on their mission. However, there several events kept Buckley active in the spotlight of the media, within the community, and the military. Growth continued to be an issue for Buckley again this decade both for the area around the base, for activities on the base, and with the construction of Denver International Airport nearby.

Buckley by the Numbers

In 1984 the base comprised 3528-acres. It had over 1000 active duty military, 1380 civilians, and 2245 reservists for a total of 4525 workers including the part time reservists. It also brought nearly $300 million dollars into the economy of the area.\(^1\)

Also, the ADF experienced its smallest decade of growth. In the 1970s the facility was built with two radomes and quickly grew to five. Sometime between 1984 and 1987 another radome was added offset to the
northwest of the ADF about 50 yards away. This radome is today building 402.²

Construction projects continued in earnest at Buckley. General construction funds came to $2.2 million in 1984. A renovation of the ADF, the addition of a 400 person armory, and new security lighting cost $20 million in 1988 with over $15 million for the ADF alone.³ In 1989 $26.5 million was spent on expanding the Aerospace Data Facility as well as upgrading the emergency power system to keep computers online in the event of a power outage.⁴ In 1990 spending dropped significantly to $2.8 million to build a medical clinic and an operations building for the 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron.⁵

One of the largest developments at the base came with the construction of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Reserve Center constructed on the extreme eastern portion of the base. Access to the facility was from Gun Club Road.⁶ These projects allowed Buckley to meet the challenge of expansion and provide a positive impact on the area. However, there still were issues with expansion.
Continued Growth On, and Near, Buckley

With the AICUZ study in 1976 complete, many thought that the problems of expansion near Buckley Air National Guard Base would be over or at least minimized. This proved to be a false hope as the issue came up again. Growth in the Aurora was increasing rapidly with only 70,000 residents in 1970 growing to over 200,000 by 1984. Arapahoe County’s population doubled from 1970 to 1984. The Aurora City Council was facing pressure from developers who were not happy with the study and began to petition the government to allow for more construction. In 1984 the city and base began a new AICUZ study to deal with expansion occurring mostly to the east and south of the base and to examine noise areas as a result of new landing patterns at Buckley that had been shifted as a result of Stapleton International Airport. A noise study completed in 1984 showed that nearly thirty-four square miles of undeveloped real estate were in high noise areas and the COANG urged that no development be allowed around the base. This area included property east of Gun Club Road that had been slated for residential construction.

Many city residents felt that their property rights were being stripped while military and civilian authorities noted that Buckley had been open for over forty years and that the noise and crash dangers were obvious to land
owners prior to purchasing their property. Developers were not keen on the idea of being required to notify home buyers of the noise issues associated with the property. The new study urged limiting residential construction while allowing low-use commercial construction. This meant that the land was significantly devalued since residential construction would have been more profitable than the recommended commercial construction.

Not only was future construction an issue, newly built homes near the base, such as those in Seven Hills near Hampden Ave and Tower Road were found to be in high noise zones. Residents started forming local groups to fight the study, and to some extent the base itself, since the new study likely meant a drop in the property values for homes in the designated areas. It was also disconcerting for metro area officials since the noise area included parts of the E-470 highway that was being planned.

As a result of the noise issues, Aurora announced plans in November 1984 to annex land to the east and southeast of the base to help regulate development. Additional areas of land to be annexed were added in early 1985 to increase the area covered by new AICUZ study. Developers filed suit in an attempt to block the annexation of land slated for restrictions as well against the proposed ordinance enforcing the AICUZ recommendations.
This proved to be unnecessary as the military ultimately said a smaller area would be impacted by the flight pattern changes and crash risks.\textsuperscript{15}

This issue continued to illustrate Buckley’s precarious position with regards to the expansion of Aurora. The fight between citizens and developers against the city and the base was based on self interest. The developers and land owners wanted maximum value for their property while the city and military have significant economic and military interest in maintaining the base due to its role in the city and national interest.

Denver International Airport and Buckley

Another issue to deal with in the 1980s was the proposed replacement of Stapleton International Airport. The relationship between Buckley and Stapleton had always been tenuous, dealing most with conflicts over airspace and landings such as the Navy’s plans to extend Buckley’s runways in the late 1950s that were eventually scrapped due to opposition from Denver and Stapleton. With Denver planning to build a new airport, it was certainly going to create some issues with the Aerospace Data Facility.

In 1984 and 1985 the issue was the proposed location of Denver International Airport. At the time the proposal was to locate DIA on part of
the Rocky Mountain Arsenal land, just to the northeast of Stapleton. The original proposal was not only going to create a problem with landing patterns for Buckley’s aircraft but it would also interfere with satellite operations. The problem for Buckley was that the initial location of the north-south runways at DIA meant the flight path taken by aircraft would be directly over Buckley. The initial design had these runways almost perfectly aligned with Tower Road and Buckley Road three miles north of East 56th Avenue.

Another problem with planes flying over Buckley for landings and takeoffs was the possible interference with the Defense Support Program satellites. The ADF at Buckley was now an integral part of the DSP program and though other stations could be shut down, the Air Force could not allow Buckley to be adversely impacted by the new airport.

For several years Denver, Aurora, Adams County, Buckley Air National Guard Base officials, and the Air Force argued back and forth over the location of the airport, alignment of the runways, and whether or not the new airport could coexist with Buckley. One early proposal was to alter the direction of DIA’s runways to a more northwest-southeast direction to avoid flying over Buckley. Denver did not like this idea because this would create landing patterns over new homes in Green Valley Ranch near the airport. The Air Force recommended that the only real solution to this problem would be
to locate the new airport further to the north and east of the current proposal. A $2 million study done by the Air Force, if the terminal and runways were located about two miles to the northeast and if the runways were aligned in a northwest-southeast orientation, there would be no problem.²²

Eventually the DIA terminal was relocated further to the northeast and the north-south runways were kept but they were built four miles to the east of Tower Road, with the nearest to Buckley more north of the airport. Buckley and the Air Force, directly or indirectly depending on who is asked, were able to at least get some consideration to help avoid any conflict with the runway and ADF at Buckley.

Golden Triangle and the Threat of Closures

The golden triangle thrived in the 1970s and certainly was on pace to continue growing for years to come. In 1983, Lowry Air Force Base had a payroll of nearly $250 million including students training at the base temporarily. With other projects and expenditures the total spent in the area was over $600 million. It employed 15,000 people with nearly 4,000 living off base in Aurora. This did not include an estimated 35,000 jobs that Lowry helped create off base.²³
One of the best examples of how the bases were connected was with the busiest grocery store in the state. The commissary at Lowry sold on average $170,000 worth of groceries a day, which made it the sixth busiest commissary in the United States. When compared with the daily sales of local stores, such as Safeway, the numbers become clearer. Safeway noted that its busiest stores would sell about $100,000 worth of groceries a week, not a day. The biggest reason for Lowry's success was active duty members who shopped to save money and the estimated 30,000 retirees living in the metro area. Both of these groups chose to shop nearly exclusively at the base since items were sold nearly at cost and without sales tax. That meant nearly all of the active duty personnel at Lowry, Fitzsimons, and Buckley as well as retirees and dependents were shopping there on a regular basis.²⁴

At the same time, Fitzsimons logged 700,000 clinic visits per year for the active duty and retired personnel in the area. The $102 million a year earned by retirees was predominately spent in the local economy, with the exception of spending done at the commissary.

Buckley helped as well with additional construction projects and a payroll of about $60 million for its civilian employees in 1983. However, this number did not take into account additional spending by the Air Force to civilians working off base analyzing the information for the DSP program.
Buckley was continuing to play its part in the system of bases dedicated to training, helping the community, and maintaining a watch for a nuclear attack.\textsuperscript{25}

However, not everything was going well. Both Lowry and Fitzsimons faced the threat of closures. Fitzsimons hoped that the prospect for a brand new hospital would keep it off of the closure lists. The hospital on base was responsible for dependents and retirees in a 13-state region.\textsuperscript{26} It was also used as a teaching hospital which many thought would keep it from closing.\textsuperscript{27} Though the base appeared on a list of bases illustrating the use of closure lists, much to the displeasure and irritation to citizens and Colorado Congresspersons, Fitzsimons was spared the ax and did not appear on any official base closure lists in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{28}

Lowry was a different story. Once proposed informally for closure in the late 1970s, the base remained on edge in the 1980s. Lowry was first proposed as one of three technical training bases that could be closed in 1986. The announcement sent panic throughout the community that feared the loss of over 14,000 jobs at Lowry. It was felt that this would devastate the economic well being of the community. The move was seen as political since Denver Congresswoman Pat Schroeder was a frequent critic of the Reagan administration.\textsuperscript{29}
Lowry survived the threat of closure in 1986 but in 1988 it once again faced closure. Many felt secure since no military base had been closed since 1975. Fitzsimons and Lowry were rumored to be on the chopping block but when the list of 20 major bases selected for closure was announced on December 29, 1988, both bases were spared. In fact Lowry was selected to add 400 more positions at the base.

At the close of the decade, the bases of the golden triangle managed to remain open. Bringing an estimated $1.6 billion to the metro area was the most obvious benefit of remaining open, but it did not lay the issue to rest. Lowry employed 14,000, Fitzsimons 2,500, and Buckley about 6,500 (including Reserves and National Guard personnel) and each of these bases provided certain services or necessities to thousands of families. Since each base relied on the other, it was feared that if any one base was closed, the other two would likely follow. However, the fact that Buckley was an Air National Guard Base, and had the only emergency landing system within 400 miles generally guaranteed that it would be less likely to be closed. Fitzsimons was a real possibility for closure because it was an older facility in need of major renovations. Since Lowry did not have an airfield and was unable to grow beyond its current boundaries it seemed likely to be on a closure list in the future.
One role for Buckley that continued was to assist Lowry with its training needs. This included acting as a landing point for aircraft that would be transferred to Lowry. A B-52 Stratofortress, aircraft number 60603, landed at Buckley in January 1980 after being flown from the bone yard at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona. It had been there for two years after an extensive record including combat missions in Vietnam. The plane was to be used as an armament training tool for air crews at Lowry. After the big plane landed, its wings were cut off so that it could be towed down 6th Avenue to Lowry.34

This assistance of Buckley to the other bases was invaluable. The National Guard remained the most visible, and loudest to several people, aspect of the base known to the community.

Air National Guard Activity

Buckley Air National Guard Base still was primarily controlled by the COANG dealing with flight operations. A major honor, now a seemingly regular event for Buckley and its personnel, was earned by the 140th TFW at the 1981 Air Force gunnery meet, called Gunsmoke. Teams and pilots score points for accuracy, kills, and quality of operations. The 140th TFW team placed first in the competition, the first time a National Guard unit had beaten
active duty pilots, with newer and more advanced aircraft, in the tournament. The team scored 8,800 out of 10,000 points and also had one of its members place first overall. Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Schultz, of Aurora, finished first in the individual scoring earning the title of Top Gun.\textsuperscript{35}

In the Gunsmoke competition in 1983, Capt. Charlie Betts placed first among Reserve forces pilot and won the Top Gun award for A-7 pilots.\textsuperscript{36} The 140\textsuperscript{th} finished 5\textsuperscript{th} behind units flying newer aircraft but was first among National Guard teams.\textsuperscript{37}

The 1987 competition saw Capt. Dean McDavid place sixth out of over 100 pilots and finished first among A-7 pilots to earn Top Gun honors for that aircraft. Buckley maintenance and weapons personnel were first in the weapons loading and maintenance competitions.\textsuperscript{38}

In one of the major regular maintenance activities at the base, Buckley closed down its runways for a short time to repair the runways that had accumulated enough patches to be considered a flight risk. Medical flights were switched to Stapleton for several months while the A-7's remained or were sent out on pre-arranged training deployments. Repairs were complete by mid-summer 1986.\textsuperscript{39}

By 1987 the COANG had 25 A-7 Corsair II aircraft at the base, as well as four T-43 aircraft used as transports and training tools with the Air Force
Academy. Elements of the 140th TFW deployed to locations all over the U.S. and the world for training and support missions. These included bases in Hawaii, Alaska, Canada, Honduras, Turkey, and Panama just to name a few. The Panama missions were part of a regular rotation of National Guard units that took part in providing combat air cover for the Panama Canal in the event of an attack.

Some larger training exercises were actually held at Buckley. In June 1983, The Sentry Aspen Flag exercises were designed to have Air Force, Navy, and National Guard units participate in various combat scenarios around Colorado. However, two years later, even with advance notice on television and in The Denver Post that there would be additional war games in Colorado, people were still surprised. As part of a program to gauge a wing’s preparedness, the Colorado Air National Guard simulated moving to a base, and having to fight off attacking aircraft. The surprise for residents though were the nearly 450 takeoff and landings in two days. The Aurora police department received several dozen calls, most within an hour of the exercises starting, about the disturbance or concerned that something serious was happening. As part of the exercise, air raid sirens at the base were sounded and red smoke simulated several attacks on the base. It was eventually
worked out, but during the Cold War it certainly caused some concern to nearby residents.44

Buckley and the Community

Buckley continued to strive to be a good neighbor to Aurora and the surrounding communities in the 1980s. This did not always work out as planned, but both sides began to reap benefits of the relationship.

The issue of water is a common one in the dry climate of the Colorado, and Buckley needed more water as it grew. Buckley officials determined that building a new water source would be too expensive and Aurora agreed to help. The base would be supplied with about 100,000 gallons of water per day or roughly the same usage of 185 homes.45

Buckley personnel continued to assist the citizens of Colorado during severe weather events. The Blizzard of December 1982 stranded motorists and cut off many from medical assistance. The National Guard, many of whom were based at Buckley, helped deliver food via helicopter, assisted stranded motorists and acted as an ambulance service for Montebello. Once again the base provided quick assistance when the community needed them.46

One event in Buckley’s history that was not appreciated by the community was the release of a toxic cloud in August 1987. The phosphorous
cloud was released when a storage tank, previously located at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, had begun to smoke. Phosphorous in the tank, apparently not cleaned out despite three complete rinses, interacted with oxygen in the air when workers attempted to inspect it, which caused a fire to start. Over 1,000 base personnel were sent home and 850 nearby residents were evacuated as a precaution but 1,000 essential Buckley personnel stayed at their posts. No one was seriously injured and some good did come from the event. Evacuees were sent to Rangeview High School in Aurora and with so many people there, football practice was cancelled and the Raider cheerleaders did a very brisk business in snack sales for the day.

Another concern about Buckley was slow in developing. When the Aerospace Data Facility opened in 1970, it comprised only two radomes and people seemed happy to have more workers and security of the base not closing. After several expansions in the 1970s increased the number of radomes to five, people began to wonder what the five radomes were doing by 1985. What was known was that the geodesic domes housed a communication system that was one of two in the world, but even city council members didn’t know for sure what went on there. Air Force officials refused to comment of course but more and more people began to wonder what was really going on in the “golf balls” on the prairie.
In fact a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News*, Stephen Singular, went as far as to try to get an answer from the Air Force about the purpose of the radomes. He was handed off to several officials at the base, all of whom said they could not confirm if they were called radomes or even confirm the existence of the radomes. Of course they existed, but the Air Force continued to shuttle him from person to person who supposedly could answer his questions. Eventually he learned that they were indeed called radomes, and were simply coverings to protect receivers under the domes from the weather. However, with a little persistence he learned that the information they gathered dealt with communicating that a nuclear attack was under way and this information was then sent to the North American Radar Air Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado Springs. He also learned that they were nearly 100 feet in diameter, and made of fiberglass. Much of this was generally public knowledge that had been reported over time, but people apparently had missed the news stories.\(^{50}\)

The real significance was that the Air Force often times is more worried about the question than the answer. With the Cold War on, the information about what went on at Buckley was sensitive, and despite the average person's curiosity, most of the information would be classified until the 1990s.
Crashes and Emergencies

Some of the pressure about Buckley's role centered on the noise produced by the aircraft but certainly the continued crashes on and around the base was a cause for concern among those living nearby. Despite improvements in technology and the use of computers on aircraft, crashes still occurred, though certainly in fewer numbers than in previous decades.

In early June 1981, a Marine Corps F-4 Phantom jet was completing its last touch and go from the west when the controls stopped working. The two crew members ejected from the plane while it was out of control on the ground. Without its pilots the Phantom continued on a journey made of myths. Apparently the aircraft continued east along the east-west runway, across the north south runway, hit a berm and flew into the air, flipped over and barely missed the flight tower, and crashed into a field just northeast of the tower, but still on base. The crash was a scary event but the crew survived with only minor injuries.51

Another incident that month was also kept low-key. One of the Air Force's most secret planes was forced to make an emergency landing on June 26, 1981. An SR-71 Blackbird experienced electrical problems and needed to make a quick landing. Buckley was the nearest base with facilities to accommodate the plane and it landed without incident. However, the Air
Force, even a month later, was not actively discussing the incident. The plane was repaired by a specialized flight crew flown in by the Air Force. On the 28th the plane was able to leave Buckley under its own power.52

A Navy CT-39 transport made a crash landing at the base in November, 1983. As a result of landing gear problems, the plane was forced to make a belly landing, though no one was injured.53

The following year, another Navy plane had to make an emergency landing, though it needed help to stop. While taking off to return to Miramar NAS in California, a Navy F-14 Tomcat had a suspicious plume of smoke appear under it. It was learned that a tire had blown and it was decided that the plane would need to return to Buckley to fix the problem. The pilot requested an emergency landing utilizing an arresting system that would quickly stop the plane. Lt. Marvin Huss was able to use the arresting barrier that brought the plane to a quick stop. After stopping, the landing gear collapsed but fortunately, no one was injured. The incident temporarily closed one of the two runways at Buckley.54

Just two months later, on October 22, 1985, a fatal crash occurred during a landing at Buckley. A Navy TA-4J Skyhawk was on final approach from the Southeast to land at Buckley when witnesses said they saw smoke coming from the plane. These same witnesses said the plane crashed within a
half mile of the Seven Hills subdivision in Aurora, though this was disputed by officials. Other reports placed the crash a little over one mile south of Buckley, north and east of Hampden Ave. and Gun Club Road. Killed in the crash was the pilot, Lt. Commander Steven L. Brandenburg, who had been flying the plane from Fargo, North Dakota, to Buckley and was scheduled to continue onto California. This crash happened just after the updated AICUZ study had been released and may have contributed to the city council preventing several new developments from being built so near the base.

A plane carrying over fifty newly promoted generals and other officers was forced to make an emergency landing at Buckley after a tire had blown on takeoff from Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs. It was decided that the plane should land at Buckley and it did so without incident, though the issue of emergency landings and crashes in and around Aurora would continue to concern residents.

The National Guard also had to deal with potential disasters. During a training flight in September 1986 an A-7 Corsair II the flight system malfunctioned, causing the aircraft to climb and role. Despite an order to eject, Major Thomas Goyette elected to stay with the plane to keep it from crashing into a populated area. Finding that simply repeating the climb and role maneuver over and over again seemed to keep the plane going, he
attempted to make it back to Buckley for an emergency landing. The A-7 was also going to use the same arresting system utilized by the F-14 that had landed at Buckley a few years earlier. The same system was deployed hoping to stop the plane in a similar fashion. Goyette fought the plane down coming in at 270 miles per hour, while a typical landing was only 140 miles per hour. His first two attempted landings failed but he managed to catch one of the cables the third time, and the plane came to a stop.\textsuperscript{58}

Goyette’s efforts did not go unrewarded. Since he saved the plane it was discovered that a mechanical problem had caused the controls to stick and this problem was corrected in all other A-7 Corsairs in the nation, preventing another similar incident from happening. He was also presented with the Air Medal for his heroism and his story was featured in the February 1987 edition of \textit{Reader’s Digest}.\textsuperscript{59}

The Bombing Range and the Lowry Landfill

One part of Buckley’s history that seems to be entirely negative is that of the old bombing range. Much of the land had been sold back via auction, traded from the military to the state or local authorities in return for other land, or returned to landowners who had previously held the rights to the land. However, several sections remained in federal hands, including an area called
the Lowry Annex which was considered a light training area at about Watkins Road and Quincy Avenue.⁶⁰

Many people believed that there was a productive use for some of the old bombing land held by the state. In 1984, Denver, Aurora, and Arapahoe County had decided to recommend the creation of a prison site. The site was proposed just southeast of Gun Club Road and Quincy. The facility was to be a 250-bed medium security prison to help alleviate crowding.⁶¹ However, it later was determined that sites in Trinidad, Delta, and Limon held greater promise.⁶²

Other proposals for the land included one from the 1960s to build a reservoir or recreation area. The proposed Senac Reservoir was to be built about 2 miles east of Gun Club Road and Quincy Avenue, and was slated to have a golf course and possibly a marina with luxury homes situated nearby. While the grand project never panned out, the Aurora Reservoir was built in nearly the same location, but without the golf course or homes around it.⁶³

The most well known area of the former bombing range was the Lowry Landfill, located on the northeast corner of Gun Club Road and Quincy in Aurora. The landfill had been taking toxic wastes and sludge from various military and government agencies since the 1960s. By 1980, people were beginning to worry about the ramifications of the dumping, even with some
minimal precautions. The Arapahoe County Commissioners ordered that all toxic dumping cease before 1983.64

However, the fact that it would stop allowing toxic dumping was just the start of the second battle. In 1987 the Aurora City council began to consider a proposal blocking any construction within a mile of the site. This threatened some existing homes, the Arapahoe Park race track, and the Plains Conservation Center. The proposal was eventually dropped in favor of simply preventing growth via land zoning, but illustrates the concern city officials had about the dump.65 Cleanup at the dump was studied in the late 1980s, when it was discovered that toxic materials were in fact making it into the groundwater.66 Buckley managed to escape great concern when studies were done that detected several dumps on base, with some minor contamination from oils and other liquids, but it seems most of the extremely toxic materials had been transferred to the Lowry Landfill.67

As the decade came to a close, without any golden triangle bases closing, many viewed the 1990s with optimism. Others were concerned that the relaxation of tensions between the Soviet Union and United States with the fall of the Berlin Wall might create another round of cuts and a decrease the importance of the military to Colorado. The situation created a round of base cuts that hurt Colorado and Aurora but Buckley Air National Guard Base,
resolute through the trials and tribulations of its first five decades, would find itself on the front lines of the first computerized battlefield dependent on data from space. This increased need for data helped make permanent what was usually seen by locals as a temporary fixture— the giant golf balls on the eastern plains of Aurora.
Chapter Seven Notes


5 Beth Frerking, “House OKs Bill to Finance Colo. Military Base Projects,” The Denver Post 1 Aug. 1989: 3B.

6 Kate Casa, “City Wants to Know More About Buckley,” The Denver Post 6 July 1983: 4B.


37 Bob Jain, “Guard Unit Flying for 61 Years,” The Denver Post 15 July 1984: 8C.

38 Colorado Air National Guard 210.

39 Fred Gillies, “Buckley to Fix Runways; Medical Flights go to Stapleton,” The Denver Post 9 Mar. 1986: 8B.

40 Fred Gillies, “Air Guard History Zips from Jenny to Super Jets,” The Denver Post 5 April 1987: 3B.

41 “Air Guard Will Serve in Panama,” The Denver Post 5 Aug. 1983: 12D.

42 “Pilots Train for Combat,” The Denver Post 26 June 1983: 10B.

43 Norm Udevitz, “Colorado Air Guard Fighter Unit gets into War Games Rehearsal,” The Denver Post 19 May 1985: 14B.


46 “Guard’s Work Ends Sunday,” The Denver Post 27 Dec. 1982: 8A.


Colorado Air National Guard 185.


"Jet Crash-lands at Buckley Base," The Denver Post 24 Nov. 1983: 4B.


Colorado Air National Guard 203.

"AF Wants to Trade Land with State," The Denver Post 3 Apr. 1986: 3B.


65 Bill McBean, “Keep Homes a Mile from Landfill,” The Denver Post 11 Feb. 1987: 1C.


CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPANSION IN THE 1990S

As the Cold War ended many felt that the military should downsize to keep costs down. Buckley lost both of its golden triangle bases, experienced the largest military mobilization since the Vietnam War, and went through the kind of expansion few military bases dream of. The 1990s brought Buckley into the twenty-first century military modernization early, and surprised people with its expansion.

The Persian Gulf War

Buckley Air National Guard Base continued to play a role in the defense of America. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein ordered the Iraqi army to invade its neighbor, Kuwait. The United States quickly mobilized its forces to help defend the oil rich nations of the Persian Gulf, specifically Saudi Arabia. This mobilization affected numerous units from Colorado and Buckley’s forces were called into action.

The Marine Corps activated the Force Imagery Interpretation unit assigned to the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing stationed at Buckley. The unit’s 28 members prepared for a possible deployment to the Persian Gulf. Since the
mission involved interpreting photographs and satellite intelligence the exact location and nature of the deployment was classified.¹

Though the COANG did not deploy aircraft to the region, the 140th TFW at Buckley deployed some of its security forces responsible for defending aircraft at a secret air base location in the region. These troops were part of the 140th Security Police Flight.² The 140th Tactical Hospital’s 48 soldiers also activated and were deployed to New Mexico’s Holloman Air Force Base.³ The fact that Buckley aircraft did not deploy for action made the Persian Gulf War the only major U.S. conflict in which Colorado aircraft crews did not see combat.

One role that Buckley again performed was that of receiving military casualties headed for Fitzsimons and other military hospitals. Though the war was over in just over a month, multiple casualties were sent to Fitzsimons for medical care and rehabilitation. This included soldiers wounded as a result of friendly fire incidents during the war.⁴

Probably the most important role for Buckley during the Gulf War was also the most secret. The Aerospace Data Facility’s primary mission dealt with monitoring the world for nuclear missile launches. During the war, this mission was carried out with little public knowledge of the critical activities taking place at Buckley. It was the job of the ADF to pick up the launch

226
signatures, or heat, of Scud missiles being fired at U.S. forces and Israel. However, the Air Force at the time only acknowledged that this type of work was being done at the NORAD facility at Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs. In actuality, Buckley was responsible for detecting the initial launch and notifying Air Force Space Command. Buckley would continue to track the missiles to determine a possible threat area and updated that information so it could be forwarded to Patriot missile systems in the area. There are conflicting reports as to how effective these warnings were, but the mission was performed nonetheless.

Air National Guard Activities and Controversies

A key reason the COANG was not deployed to the Persian Gulf was not a lack of ability among the pilots, but the older aircraft they flew. This problem was corrected in late 1991 when the first of 26 F-16 Fighting Falcons arrived at Buckley. The $20 million planes were to replace the older A-7 Corsairs flown by the 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron since the 1970s. The squadron was the first Guard unit in the nation to receive the modern “C” model of the F-16 aircraft. In fact many of the aircraft transferred to the 120th TFS flew combat missions during the war. The COANG were not sidelined in the next conflict on account of older aircraft.
As the United States continued to monitor the "no-fly zone" over Iraq in the 1990s, the COANG was called on to patrol and enforce those restrictions. The Guard had sent aircraft several times including six F-16 aircraft deployed in early 1998. During that deployment the Guard was deployed at Al Jaber Air Base in Kuwait. The month long deployment was a success showing that when given the change, the men and women of the COANG stationed at Buckley were among the best in the nation at their jobs.

One of the largest problems for Buckley in the 1990s revolved around plans to revise areas in the state for flight training operations. With Denver International Airport needing about 40 percent of the airspace in areas where the Guard used to train, it was decided in 1992 to expand their "Redeye Complex" training areas in southeast Colorado and areas in southern Colorado near the San Luis Valley. Local communities in areas near the training areas complained of aircraft noise over their homes and fought the expansion.

A modified plan was proposed in 1993 that took some complaints into consideration though. Two of the most controversial flight paths were eliminated and others reduced. The arguments continued throughout the 1990s with Buckley and the smaller western communities never coming to a complete resolution. Ultimately, the Guard agreed to modify some of its flight paths and increase the minimum attitude that aircraft could fly in transit.
While crashes seemed to be prolific in earlier decades, the 1990s saw a dramatic decrease in crashes, with none taking place near Buckley. The only crash involving Buckley aircraft was when a new F-16 crashed November 9, 1993, outside of Laramie Wyoming during a training flight. The pilot, Lt. Julian Clay, broke his leg after he managed to eject before crashing.\textsuperscript{11}

Another controversy that Buckley was forced to deal with was rodent in nature. The base, always mindful of its location on the plains of Colorado, managed to live with its animal neighbors relatively problem free. However, due to nearby construction and growth near the base an estimated 40,000 prairie dogs called Buckley their home. This was a problem when the prairie dogs began to interfere with flight operations as they ran across the runway while planes were landing and taking off. In addition the 70,000 burrows had started to damage some of the areas around the runways. The only answer for the base was to try and kill as many as possible. This was difficult since protected species were also on base such as the black footed ferret and the burrowing owl.\textsuperscript{12}

The base did not like using poison to kill the prairie dogs, but other methods tried in the past, such as introducing badgers to the base, proved ineffective. Despite several protests and pleas for saving the prairie dogs the
decision to use phosphorous to kill the prairie dogs proceeded as planned and was effective in reducing the population of the animals.\textsuperscript{13}

Death of the Golden Triangle

Even before the conclusion of the Gulf War in 1991, the Department of Defense (DoD) had planned to close unnecessary bases now that the Cold War was over. Colorado managed to avoid the first set of cuts in 1990 but the $14.7 billion spent by the DOD annually in Colorado and $3.5 billion in the metro area's golden triangle was at risk soon after the Gulf War ended.\textsuperscript{14}

The first of two critical decisions that would impact Denver, Aurora, and Buckley Air National Guard Base came on April 12, 1991 when Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney announced the list of 31 bases slated for closure. Lowry Air Force Base, which had avoided closure in the past, was on the list. Colorado Congresswoman Pat Schroeder was shocked by the news since Lowry had been rated the best technical training facility four years earlier. Some felt that the base was targeted because of politics since Schroeder was a Democrat who opposed many of the Republican proposals in Congress.\textsuperscript{15} However, the most likely reason was that Air Force bases without active runways were going to be closed first.\textsuperscript{16}
Regardless of the rationale, Lowry was to lose over 6,000 of 10,400 jobs on the base. The Air Force Accounting and Finance Center was to remain open indefinitely as was the Air Reserve Personnel Center. Despite this the closure of Lowry resulted in a loss of some $300 million in payroll that was spent in the local communities. Also, the positive impact of Lowry on the community would be erased, resulting in an economic loss of nearly $1 billion.\textsuperscript{17}

Of even greater concern now was the impact Lowry's closing would have on the city of Aurora and the other two bases. Fitzsimons and its 4,000 workers were seen as the most vulnerable now that Lowry and its large number of active duty members would be gone in a few years. The loss of both bases was viewed as catastrophic by Aurora Mayor Paul Tauer. Not only would the area lose 10,000 in military jobs, but the small businesses located near the bases that depended on these workers would be at risk as well. It was also believed that nearly $3 million a year would be lost in tax revenue.\textsuperscript{18} Ultimately the city and other bases would have to deal with the announced closing of Lowry.

However, Buckley would be used by those in Colorado as a possible reason to save Lowry. It was discovered that a major argument for closing Lowry was the lack of active runways. But Lowry was in a unique position
with Buckley just five miles away. This provided an opening to argue that the runways at Buckley should have been taken into consideration in determining that Lowry should be closed. It was also brought up that there really was not a need for active runways at training bases that did not teach flight skills. In an ironic review of history, the Air Force had originally decided to close the runways at Lowry in the 1960s because they were not considered critical to its operation. Now they were the reason for its closure. Buckley would be used to try to keep Lowry and the golden triangle alive but the effort was not successful.\textsuperscript{19} Despite assurances that a closed base can in fact benefit a community, the impact of the Lowry closure in 1994 was still significant.

It was hoped that Fitzsimons and Buckley would continue to operate as they had. Fitzsimons was responsible for taking care of 664,000 soldiers, retirees, and dependants in a 13-state area and its $420 million budget each year helped fund the growth of the city.\textsuperscript{20} In fact, since Fitzsimons was spared from the 1991 and 1993 base closure lists many people were hoping for the best.

Fitzsimons also added hope of survival in that $30 million had been appropriated in 1993 to begin design of a new hospital on the base.\textsuperscript{21} There also were hopes that the new hospital might be built on the Lowry site.\textsuperscript{22} However, the funding of $390 million for the entire hospital the following
year was in question since a Senate committee had stripped it from the budget. In addition the new commissary that was to be built to replace the one lost at Lowry was on hold. With both of these developments it was feared that Fitzsimons was next on the closure list.

However, Buckley experienced downsizing in 1993 before Fitzsimons would. In 1993 Buckley faced a $3 million shortfall of funding and it was proposed that the civilian employees all be given 100 hours of unpaid furlough time. This was ultimately avoided but it certainly made people believe that Buckley was vulnerable for closure.

The Air National Guard Base lost just over 100 jobs by the end of 1994 but more damaging to the long term security of the base was the reduction of aircraft stationed there. The loss of twenty-five percent of the F-16 fighters and one transport aircraft was the reason for the decrease in manpower. This reduction made some nervous that this was simply the first step in closing Buckley sometime in the near future. However, several developments put this worry to rest in the next few years.

Fitzsimons was dealt a serious blow at the end of 1994 when the Department of Defense refused to request funding for a new hospital at the base and announced that no funding would likely be requested through 2001. Less than two months later, Fitzsimons Army Medical Center was slated for
closure. The loss of 4,000 jobs was not welcome given that Lowry had closed earlier that same year. It was believed that Lowry and Fitzsimons at one point in the early 1990s accounted for nearly 20 percent of the jobs held by people living in Aurora. The combined loss of Fitzsimons and Lowry was tough to deal with.

The closure of Lowry and the difficulty in securing funding for a new hospital ultimately led to the decision to close Fitzsimons. Without an active military base nearby, the base closure commission felt that retirees and dependents in the area would seek care at a local hospital or would move with their parent/sponsor to another area.

But Fitzsimons was wanted by both the Veterans Administration and the Air Force. The VA wanted to move its operations to the closed hospital that had more room than its cramped location next to the CU Health Sciences Center on University Boulevard in Denver. The Air Force was planning to increase the number of active-duty airmen stationed at Buckley but there was no housing available there. The AF hoped to use the housing at Fitzsimons to provide accommodations for these additional airmen. Ultimately, some of the housing would be used for Buckley personnel and several years later the VA would use the site for a new hospital.
When Lowry closed in 1994, one other area besides the Air Force Accounting and Finance Center and the Air Reserve Personnel Center that remained active was a little known building that supported the Defense Support Program satellite system. Building 1432, located just across Sixth Avenue from the Commissary, was still operating. The unit, the 1001st Space Systems Squadron, was noticed when it was slated for closure along with Fitzsimons. It was responsible for testing software used by the Air Force at Buckley in support of the DSP program. The unit was closed and officially folded into Peterson Air Force Base operations in Colorado Springs.29

The end of the golden triangle was seen as a serious problem for Aurora and the metro area. At the time the closures were seen as a major economic blow, despite some indications that communities can thrive after bases are closed. Buckley was all that remained of the original three bases and it was widely believed that it was only a matter of time before this small, seemingly unnecessary, Air National Guard Base would be closed. In reality, the closure of Lowry and Fitzsimons would be a benefit to the overall usefulness and importance of Buckley.
Buckley Expansion Before and After the Golden Triangle

In the early 1990s, as bases were facing closure and budget cuts, Buckley continued to expand. Its importance to the community was undeniable. In 1995 the 3831 acre base comprised 3,116 licensed acres and 715 fee owned and easement acres. The base employed about 7,000 workers including active duty, National Guard, and civilian staff members. It had a payroll of about $180 million and an estimated economic impact of nearly $900 billion when all spending and construction was taken into account. In 1994 Buckley had the largest construction budget of any base in the military. It also had six National Guard units, 15 military tenants, and 6 civilian run operations. The National Guard units included the 140th Wing, 154th Air Control Group, 200th Airlift Squadron, 227th Air Traffic Control Flight, 120th Weather Flight, and 240th Civil Engineer Flight. The active military units included the Air Force Technical Application Center, 101st Army Band, Navy Reserve Readiness Center and Naval Air Reserve Center, Marine Air Control Squadron 24, the Army Aviation Support Facility, Detachment 3 of the 375th Air Evacuation Squadron, 147th Combat Support Hospital, and of course the 2nd Space Warning Squadron that operated at the Aerospace Data Facility.
These units and tenants at Buckley continued to serve the community, the state, and the nation during times of crisis and in times of peace. With so many units at the base, some expansion was inevitable.

A new $5.8 million composite operations and training facility was built by R.N. Fenton and Company at Buckley in 1992. Funding was provided in 1991 for the expansion of the Aerospace Data Facility. This $42 million expenditure was a reminder as to how important Buckley was to the security of the nation. The addition to the facility added nearly 150,000 square feet to building 401. This was the main operations building next to the 4 largest radomes in a north-south line inside the ADF. At the time the ADF employed some 1,300 personnel. The new building was completed in 1996. It also added some 500 people to the ADF bringing the total to around 1800.

This expansion also was part of modernization program. The six radomes covering the satellite dishes at the base were getting old. The original coverings were still on the three oldest radomes at the base and were in need of replacement. This was done in early 1993 but the surprising thing to many people was that the sight of the domes actually open. One photo shows a radome half open, looking like half of an egg shell. Tragedy struck when a worker was killed when he fell from a platform while replacing the
radome panels of the “golf ball” shields. Greg Hughes was 29 years old and working with Electronic Space Systems Corp., one of three companies hired to do the work, died when he fell and sustained massive head injuries. 37

As Buckley modernized and expanded, many people worried about the impact of the closure of the two major military bases in Aurora on Buckley. It soon became clear that there would be positive impacts for Buckley. There had been a reduction of the number of aircraft at Buckley, but this would be minor to the overall increase in size at the base. In 1995 Buckley announced that there would be an increase of nearly 1000 jobs by the end of 1996. So many people were being assigned to Buckley in the 1990s that it became critical to use some of the facilities at Fitzsimons to house the additional workers. The Air Force wanted 229 single family homes, 56 one bedroom apartments, and 179 visiting quarters located on the base. 38 Most of these eventually were given to the Air Force.

Overall expansion would continue as it was announced in early 1996 that the number of radomes at the base would double. It was also reported that these would be about half the size as the 6 radomes located at the Aerospace Data Facility. In addition some 1,770 new personnel would be added by 1999 with perhaps an additional 1000 support workers and staff on the base. 39 This brought the total at the base to about 10,000 by 2000.
The increase in personnel also translated into more radomes. Aerial photos confirm that several radomes were added in the 1990s at Buckley. By 1993 there were six radomes at the ADF facility. On the eastern portion of the base one small radome might have existed prior to 1990, but by 1994 three were located near the Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Center. There was extensive activity at the southeastern portion of the base as well. The single radome that existed at the end of the north-south runway in the early 1970s was removed sometime between 1994 and 1995. It was replaced at the same time with three new radomes about 50 yards north-northeast of the old one at the southern end of the north-south runway.

A quick review of the base shows that in 1980 there were only six radomes on the entire base. By 1990 there were at least seven, maybe eight at the most. In 1999 the number was at twelve. The expansion at the base occurred quickly and people began to question what was going on at the facility. But the exact reason for the changes that brought this increase to Buckley remained hidden. One story was that since the cutbacks were reducing the size of small satellite bases around the world, it was easier to consolidate the systems at an established base like Buckley.

It was also likely due to the new system being created to replace the DSP system. The Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) was being developed
as a 21st century upgrade. The first operating system, SBIRS high, was designed to use four satellites to monitor and record information on missile launches around the world in real-time. The second phase, SBIRS low, determines impact points based on trajectories and speed so that alerts may be sent out in advance of the impact. In the future it also may allow for the possibility of intercepting it with another missile. The 821st Space Group, which operated at the ADF at Buckley and oversaw the 2nd Space Squadron, was to be in charge of the new system. Two new and smaller radomes were added to the southwest portion of the ADF after 2000. This system became operational in about 2001.43

Expansions at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs also benefited Buckley. When the SBIRS program was announced, additional personnel were assigned to the program at Peterson with about 38 military and civilian personnel added at Buckley to make sure the process of detection and reporting functioned as expected.44

Protests and Concerns about Base Operations

Not everyone was happy about the expansion of Buckley. Many people believed that the base was not dealing extensively with missile launch detection, but more with domestic spying and surveillance. The group
Citizens for Peace in Space had protested numerous times. CPS and others believe the facility was used to intercept voice and electronic transmissions from all over the world and then process them at the base. The group held dozens of protests in the 1990s to call for more information about what was going on at the base. For example, twenty-five protesters showed up in July 1995 to protest the secrecy at the base. Three months later there was another protest, this time to protest the lack of hearings on proposed construction and expansion of the ADF. Protesters hoped that an environmental impact statement would require the Air Force to acknowledge some of what was going on at the base.

The CSP contends that the base is primarily a tool of the National Reconnaissance Office, The National Security Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency. It believes that signal intelligence and imaging data are received and processed at Buckley and then sent back to these agencies. It believes the DSP and Space Based Infrared Systems (SBIRS) is just a screen for the other activities on the base. They also believe that the signals intelligence (SIGINT) developed at Buckley come from these secret satellites and are used to spy against nations like Russia, China, and North Korea as well as spying on U.S. citizens. It believes that secret programs such as Trumpet, Jumpseat, and the U.S. Navy Ranger systems are operating through
Buckley.\textsuperscript{49} It is likely that the nature of the intelligence is accurate though the changing code names may not be.

Of course the military and the government refuse to comment on the exact activities of the base. However, in an attempt to be a bit more open after the loss of Lowry and Fitzsimons, the Air Force allowed city officials and members of the media to tour the ADF facility and even take pictures of the satellite dishes inside the radomes in November 1996. It was at this time that the mission of detecting Scud launches during the Gulf War and monitoring all other rockets was made public. Overall little new information was released but it was an attempt to at least acknowledge the significance of the mission at the base.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Former Bombing Range Developments}

Issues continued to remain with the Lowry Landfill. It was announced that the area was twice as contaminated as previously believed.\textsuperscript{51} After spending $20 million on the cleanup, Aurora sued those companies that had dumped hazardous waste in an effort to recover those costs.\textsuperscript{52} The lawsuits only partially solved the problem as waste still exists there.

There was a positive development on the old bombing range in 1991. In June 1991 Aurora Reservoir opened to the public on what used to be part of
the bombing range. The lake was stocked with fish, and was a great location for activities such as swimming and beach volleyball since the reservoir was about the same size as the Cherry Creek Reservoir. However, the excitement was tempered by the fact several small unexploded munitions were found around the reservoir, and in other areas previously used for bombing and target practice. After several inspections of the area it was declared clear by the Army Corps of Engineers. This was a larger problem nationwide with old bombing ranges. Colorado had fifty-eight sites used by aircraft or for training that were believed to contain small munitions including areas such as Mount Evans, Camp Hale, and the Lowry Bombing Range.

As is usually the case in these situations, munitions were found later at the Lowry Range. In April 1996 several small Vietnam era cluster bombs were found near the recreation area and detonated. This was not made public until May which prompted some heated debate as to how an area could be deemed safe and then have explosives discovered. The city of Aurora, which had bought the former bombing property in the 1980s, thought the area had already been cleared. A fence was to be erected around the old Jeep Range/Demolition range located near the recreation area of the reservoir. This debate continued into the new century.
Activation Announcement

As the decade closed the Air Force announced that there would be a change at Buckley in October 2000. Buckley was going to become the newest Air Force Base in the country when the Air Force took control of the base from the Colorado Air National Guard. It was not a surprise to many working at Buckley but the expansion of the 1990s would continue to make Buckley grow into the 21st century. However, it did come as a surprise to many in the community since they had lost two bases in the last five years. The announcement was greeted warmly but with some hesitation associated with the possible loss of another significant base in Aurora in the future. However, the changes helped make Buckley a significant base for the Air Force, for the nation, and for Aurora. The likelihood of a closure decreased dramatically based on the role Buckley was going to take on in the new century. Both the Air Force and world events also increased the need for Buckley’s mission to be retained well into the future.
Chapter Eight Notes


6 “F-16s Come Flying into Colorado,” The Denver Post 26 Aug. 1991: 6B.


10 Patrick O’Driscoll, “Low-Level Jet Flights to be Cut,” The Denver Post 14 July 1993: 5B.

11 “National Guard Pilot Escapes Injury in Crash,” The Denver Post 10 Nov. 1993: 5B.

12 Mark Obmascik, “Air Base to Poison Prairie Dogs,” The Denver Post 12 June 1990: 1A.

14 Paul Hutchinson, "Colo. at Risk as Defense Ax Falls," The Denver Post 15 Feb. 1990: 1A.


17 Robert Kowalski, "Lowry on Hit List," The Denver Post 13 Apr. 1991: 1A.


22 Renate Roby, "Lowry Seen as Site for Fitzsimons," The Denver Post 22 May 1993: 6B.


24 "Buckley Air Base May Furlough 500 Civilians," The Denver Post 4 Mar. 1993: 2B.

25 Kelly Richmond, "Peterson, Buckley Face Job Cuts in Restructuring," The Denver Post 28 May 1993: 24A.


37 “Death of Worker Probed at Buckley Guard Base,” *The Denver Post* 26 Feb. 1993: 2B.


40 City of Aurora, Aerial Photo of Aurora, Colorado in 1993, Aurora History Museum Collection, Aurora.


46 “Two Dozen Gather to Protest Buckley’s secrecy,” The Denver Post 4 July 1995: 3B.


52 Mary George, “City Sues over Lowry Landfill Cleanup,” The Denver Post 27 Dec. 1991: 2B.


55 Renate Roby, “Old Base Sites may be Risks,” The Denver Post 14 Apr. 1996: 1B.

56 Cindy Brovsky, “Bombs Found by Rec Area,” The Denver Post 10 May 1996: 1A.

CHAPTER NINE

EXPANSION FOR A NEW CENTURY

When Buckley Air National Guard Base became Buckley Air Force Base on October 1, 2000, it was simply the next step in a long history of service to the country. The first few years of the twenty-first century witnessed the type of buildup and construction reminiscent of the World War II years. The base was transformed, recreated really, into a state-of-the-art base with world class capabilities. The role was modified after the events of September 11, 2001, to include homeland defense as well as participation in the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the base looks forward these roles will dominate its mission and increase the likelihood that Buckley will be able to survive additional base closures and downsizing of the military in the years to come.

Going Active

The decision to make Buckley an active Air Force base came as a result of two things. The closures of Lowry and Fitzsimons were definitely part of the reason, as was the need to expand space operations at the base. When Buckley was part of the golden triangle, it did not need to have
extensive medical, recreational, or housing at the base since these were available elsewhere at the two sister bases. When they closed Buckley needed to meet these needs for its active duty members, but also retirees and their families in the area. This meant millions of dollars would be spent to create new facilities on base.

In addition, the expanded space operations and facilities made it financially difficult for the Air National Guard to continue being responsible for all of the activities at the base. The increased personnel and security required put a strain on the capabilities of the base. For these reasons it was decided that Buckley would become an active duty base.

Formal ceremonies took place on October 1, 2000 when the base was handed over by Colorado Governor Bill Owens to Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters, making the transition official.\textsuperscript{1} The base was the first new Air Force installation in the continental Untied States in over fifteen years.\textsuperscript{2} The base almost lost its name though. Initially the Air Force had planned on calling the new facility “Total Force Base” to illustrate the use of the site by all major segments of the U.S. military.\textsuperscript{3} This was ultimately dropped in favor of Buckley Air Force Base. Buckley was also the first Air Force Base to utilize the updated Air Force symbol of a five-pointed star with blue background and wings at the base entrance.\textsuperscript{4}
When activated the base was run by the 821st Space Group operating as the host unit. This changed on September 30, 2001 when the 821st SG deactivated and the Air Force designated the 460th Air Base Wing to be the host unit. The 460th ABW was redesignated the 460th Space Wing in August 2004 under the direct command of Air Force Space Command headquartered at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs.5

Buckley Air Force Base in the New Century

By 2006 Buckley Air Force base employed over 12,000 military, reserve and civilian workers.6 This was a substantial increase from the 2300 in 1974 and from 7,000 in 1990. In fact, in just four years earlier, in 2002 the base employed just over 9,000.7 The base comprised 3,897 acres of active use and leased areas with much of the increase from the acquisition of land on which new base housing was to be built just west of the ADF.

With the 460th SW running the base, under the control of Air Force Space Command, other units continue to operate there. Buckley continued to host major units discussed earlier such as the 140th Fighter Wing of the COANG, the 2nd SWS, and the Colorado Army National Guard. In addition it hosts the 8th Space Warning Squadron, the only space group within the Air Force Reserve Command, and the Joint Force Headquarters which commands
and controls all assigned Colorado Army and Air National Guard units. Also, the Colorado Civil Air Patrol, 566th Information Operations Squadron, 743rd Military Intelligence Battalion, and the Navy Information Operations Center were all tenants at the base.8

Construction and Improvements at Buckley

One of the biggest changes resulting from the transition to an Air Force Base was the level of construction that took place at Buckley. Since the needs of a major Air Force Base are significantly higher than that of an Air National Guard base many basic improvements needed to take place.

It became imperative for the military to create an entirely new infrastructure with support services and amenities. By the end of 2004 several projects had been completed including a new commissary, completed in 2002 and that rivaled the old one at Lowry, a new headquarters building for the 460th Space Wing, a new entry gate at Telluride and Sixth Avenue to access the commissary, a car wash, new 10-story air control tower, a visitors quarters, and two large dormitories, one completed in May 2004. In addition multiple repairs of roads and infrastructure were completed to help sustain movement on the base.9
Also included was a new SBIRS satellite facility built by DMJM Co. at a cost of $14 million in 2001. The 50,000 square foot building was responsible for operating the next generation of missile detection satellites that would replace the DSP program.\(^\text{10}\)

More than $37 million was allocated for construction in 2005 that included a new child development center, a medical clinic, as well as a new chapel.\(^\text{11}\) In February 2006 Buckley opened the newest chapel built in the United States Air Force in twenty years. The $6 million 26,000 sq. foot building was a substantial upgrade from old modular buildings used for the chapel since the new facility also had space that was to be used for classrooms.\(^\text{12}\)

The biggest construction job on the base was the creation of the first ever family housing units on the base for active military personnel. The distinction is important due to the Buckley Veterans Villages that existed after World War II. The 351 units were built by private developers and would also be managed by private companies hired by the military. This was to help minimize the conflicts that may arise if the housing is ever made public.\(^\text{13}\) The $75 million project was scheduled for completion in early 2007 though families began moving in to finished homes in November 2006.\(^\text{14}\)
Buckley planned to spend $150 million from 2004-2009 on new construction projects.\textsuperscript{15} Some of the future projects at the base continued to unfold in late 2006. Plans through the next few years call for a new medical pharmacy, consolidated fuels facility and relocation of present fuel depot away from the new housing development. It also included the creation of a base gas station, a security forces operations facility, an Education Center, a leadership development center, a new addition to the communications center in building 730, a new base warehouse, a vehicle maintenance facility, fire station addition, a youth center, as well as taxiway and weapons loading facilities for the Air National Guard. One very interesting proposal that is not yet official is another expansion of the Aerospace Data Facility, scheduled for Fiscal Year 2007 or 2008. Construction would likely begin sometime in 2008 or 2009.\textsuperscript{16} Plans call for the $50-75 million facility to be 189,000 square feet and also included a new computer operations center, soundproof rooms, a full service cafeteria and conference rooms.\textsuperscript{17} It should be noted that soon after the author inquired directly about this new construction, the Army Corps of Engineers revised its policy of posting solicitations for construction jobs online without the company first registering with the government. It is possible that plans for this facility have changed or that the change in policy is unrelated to my inquiry.
Economic Impact on Aurora and the State

The economic impact of Buckley, especially on Aurora, has grown exponentially since the mid-1990s, or even in the first few years of the 20th century. In 1995 the economic impact was $381 million. In 2001 the base was credited with bringing $587 million dollars to the area. In 2003, Buckley’s economic impact on the area was estimated at $878 million, up from $759 million in 2002. By 2004 it was estimated that the base was contributing $1.2 billion dollars to the economy. This included $548 million in payroll to military personnel and $189 million to civilians and contractors working on the base. Off base, estimates put the total number of indirect jobs created as a result of Buckley’s presence at 8,000. These included businesses that benefit from the workers at Buckley utilizing the restaurants, stores, and services in the area. By comparison, the old Lowry and Fitzsimons bases did not come close to reaching those numbers in the early 1990s.

By bringing in over $1 billion dollars a year, Buckley helped to solidify the economy while at the same time defending the country. The presence of the base continued to pay dividends for the Denver metro area.

Of course Aurora was the primary beneficiary of these numbers. The presence of Buckley was bringing thousand of aerospace jobs to the city. In 2003 there were 7,000 aerospace jobs in Aurora. In fact, two of the top five,
and three of the top nine, largest private employers in Aurora were aerospace
companies. Raytheon employed the most with 2,200, Northrop-Grumman
(formerly TRW) was second at 870, and Lockheed-Martin was third at 600.
By 2006 these companies comprised three of the top six employers in Aurora.
Raytheon was the largest employer in Aurora at the time.\textsuperscript{23} By 2005
Raytheon had grown to 2,650 employees just as they broke ground on a new
150,000-square-foot office building next to the base that was expected to
bring about 750 people within a few years.\textsuperscript{24} By 2006 eleven aerospace
companies had operations in Aurora.\textsuperscript{25}

The state of Colorado was now third in the nation for aerospace jobs.
This was in no small part a result of the military, primarily the Air Force
working through Buckley, Peterson, and Schreiver that all dealt with US
Space Command units as well as the Northern Command headquarters tasked
with protecting U.S. airspace. With 24,600 private sector aerospace jobs
provided by 141 aerospace companies, Colorado passed Florida for the third
spot but was still behind California and Texas. This number does not include
an estimated 33,000 military aerospace jobs in the state.\textsuperscript{26}

Defense spending in the state as a whole was officially listed at $3.7
billion during 2005. This represented an overall increase of sixty percent
since 2001. Some of this can be attributed to the events of 9/11, the activation of Buckley as an active base, and the booming aerospace industry. It is clear that Buckley, and in general the military, was having a positive impact on the community both financially and through job creation. As Buckley continues to expand with jobs and various government agencies place personnel at the base, the impact will continue to grow.

Base Activities and Roles

Aurora was certainly benefiting from the presence of Buckley but the question always remained as to what exactly went on at the base. Mayor Paul Tauer was fond of saying to Buckley or aerospace companies, “I have no idea what you are doing here, but I am damn glad you’re doing it here!” The truth was that the role of Buckley was both becoming more public and more secret at the same time.

Buckley was becoming much happier releasing economic impact figures, and Aurora was happy with the aerospace jobs but much of what was going on there remained classified and secret. Of course the Defense Support Program satellites were monitored there, but it was also announced that the DSP replacement program, the new Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) built to replace it was added at the base. The SBIRS system was built to do
more than just detect launches. It was designed to try and make the process of impact location much more accurate and to provide this type of information to the battlefield as quickly as possible. The SBIRS Mission Control Station (MCS) became operational in December 2001.

But other programs at Buckley were being spoken about only behind the scenes. By 2000 the number of radomes at the base was at 12, with additional satellite dishes numbering four. Two small SBIRS program radomes were added at the southwest portion of the ADF by the end of 2001. But questions remained as to why fourteen radomes were needed to watch for nuclear launches. The answer of course is that there are other purposes for those radomes.

The Air Force publicly acknowledges that it operates the 460th Space Wing with no more than 1,500 military and civilians. In fact, it is the smallest of the 10 Space Wings currently active with the U.S. Air Force. The 2nd Space Warning Squadron, responsible for DSP and SBIRS satellites within the 406th SW operates with about 600 people. This leaves approximately 7,000 active duty and contractors to fill out the Navy and Marine Corps positions in addition to other undisclosed operations. The Air Force likely utilizes Buckley for ELINT and other tracking purposes besides that of
monitoring possible missile launches. Systems such as Jumpseat and Trumpet are likely to have been run and operated from Buckley.

Many believe that the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps operates the three radomes at the southeast portion of the base at the end of the runway. These were added by 1996 to replace a smaller radome once located there. These could be electronic intelligence gathering stations (ELINT) or they could be associated with the Navy’s ocean reconnaissance satellites that track foreign naval vessels at sea. The names have changed over time but it is likely that systems such as White Cloud, Classic Wizard, Ranger, and now Parcae have been and are operated from Buckley.34

In addition, it was widely reported that the National Security Agency was operating facilities at Buckley that kept track of spy satellites capable of intercepting phone conversations and electronic data all over the world. The NSA was reported as having moved a large number of personnel from Maryland to Buckley. Many believe this is also connected to the National Reconnaissance Agency which is responsible for most of the spy satellites controlled by the United States.35

Much of the basis for these assertions is based on other facilities around the world with a large collection of radomes such as Menwith Hill in the United Kingdom and Pine Gap in Australia. All three bases began
utilizing radomes within five years of each other in the late 1960s and early 1970s but the other two had confirmed reports of ELINT and spy uses via the NSA while Buckley did not. It is likely, based on the timing and nature of the creation of all three bases, that Buckley is associated with intelligence gathering as well. What this means, if true, is that Buckley Air Force Base is the largest intelligence gathering site in the western hemisphere.36

It is tough to determine which agencies have a presence at Buckley. However, it can be safely said that the NSA, NRO, Defense Intelligence Agency, Air Force Intelligence, Navy and Marine Corps Intelligence and the CIA have personnel at Buckley. In addition it is likely that the Department of Homeland Security and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency have personnel stationed there as well.37

September 11, 2001

On September 11, 2001, less than a year after becoming an Air Force base, Buckley’s role changed in a way few could have anticipated. The horrific attacks on New York and Washington D.C. put homeland air defense in a perspective not seen since the height of the Cold War. With the new threat of aircraft being used as missiles it was essential to protect Americans from additional attacks. On that fateful day, Buckley’s 140th Wing was called
on to provide Combat Air Patrols (CAP) over much of the Rocky Mountain Region. In fact, 31 out of the 37 pilots of the 120th FS stationed at Buckley immediately reported for duty on September 11 without being ordered to do so. The remaining six were out of town on their full time civilian airline jobs. With all public airline travel shut down for two days, the only sound Coloradans heard in the air was that of armed F-16 fighter jets protecting the region from further aircraft attacks that might include an order to shoot down an American passenger plane.

This mission became known as Operation Noble Eagle. Buckley would be one of 26 Air Force and Air National Guard bases that had aircraft on alert around the clock. This would be a new and constant role for the base, with Buckley aircraft being called upon dozens of times in subsequent years to identify or escort aircraft that had flown off course, experienced an on-board emergency, or posed some risk to the area.

The first official call up came on September 20, 2001, when one hundred members of the 140th Wing and four of that unit’s F-16 aircraft were placed on active duty in support of the war on terror. These were used for aircraft intercepts and for homeland security in the United States and though they were prepared to move overseas, but this did not materialize immediately.
As part of its homeland security duty Buckley maintained aircraft in an alert state to intercept or escort planes in distress. Many of these interceptions occurred but many were unreported or were deemed secret. One that is public occurred in April 2006, Buckley scrambled two F-16s to escort United Airlines Flight 735 from Chicago that diverted to Denver because a man claiming to have a bomb on board had tried to open a door. The plane was escorted to DIA without incident, but these are constant reminders that the aircraft at Buckley are called on frequently.

The role of continental defense, a role the units at Buckley had done in previous decades, became so important that in 2002 Buckley received six brand new climate controlled flight line mini-hangars that allow the aircraft to be readied for takeoff in less than five minutes. This was primarily done to contend with the winter conditions that can develop and to maintain aircraft outside of the blistering heat. The base is also responsible for constant snow removal from runways that in the past had been allowed to build up and removed only when necessary. With the alert status of the aircraft, this was no longer the case and the runways were kept operational at all times.

On 9/11 there were only 20 jets ready to scramble in an emergency. With the creation of Northern Command (NorthCom) there are now 26 bases in the United States, including Buckley, the number is much higher than that.
Though not publicly disclosed it is likely approaching 100-150 if you include aircraft that can be readied in less than 30 minutes.44

In early 2003, the 120th FS would be deployed to support operation Iraqi Freedom. From February to April 2003, the 120th FS was responsible for Scud hunting in the western areas of Iraq during the initial portion of the war to topple Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi Army never fired a Scud missile and through 700 combat missions without a loss the Colorado Air National Guard once again proved its worth to the U.S. Air Force and to the people of the United States.45

Other Buckley units were activated to participate in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. A Marine reserve unit, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 14th Marines, 4th Marine Division was mobilized to Iraq to perform mortuary affairs duties in 2003. This included recovery of a deceased soldier’s personal belongings and documenting their return to the families. In December 2005, the unit returned to Iraq to serve as a provisional MP unit.46 Battery A returned home in October 2006 without having lost a single soldier.47

Another Marine unit from Buckley that deployed to Iraq was Marine Air Control Squadron 23. Seventy members from this unit were activated to specialize in helping civil-military operations between the Iraqi government
and US military in order to speed the transition of control back to the Iraqis. The unit deployed in late 2006 to the Al-Anbar province in western Iraq. 48

The Naval Air Reserve called up members of the Law Enforcement and Physical Security Unit 0189 that is based at Buckley. Portions of the unit were activated September 24, 2001 to serve a two year term. The unit served as military police to provide security at an undisclosed location.49

Also deployed to Iraq was the Air Force’s 460th Security Forces Squadron. The unit deployed in February 2006 to provide security in and around the area of Kirkuk Air Base.50

In a small role, though attached to Buckley’s many training missions, was the use of military dogs in Iraq. Assigned with the 460th Security Forces Squadron were several dogs, among them German Sheppards, which were utilized to search for drugs and weapons and as sentries around air bases.51

In addition, the 9/11 attacks provided some of the basis to increase staffing at Buckley and to increase the spending at the base as the Defense Department began fighting a high-tech war with satellite guided missiles, missile defense shields, and nuclear attack detection. The war on terrorism was credited for creating a number of jobs at the base.52
National Guard Activities

Despite losing control over Buckley, the COANG continued to control flight operations at the base, both training missions for the Guard and transient aircraft that utilized facilities at Buckley.

Through all of the controversies surrounding the proposed training missions and flight patterns for use by the COANG and other military units, the people in rural communities stayed positive in the hope that they would be able to get back to normal without aircraft flying overhead. This proved to be a false hope when the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the flight paths over the San Luis Valley and in southeastern Colorado since Buckley had proven these were safe as well as being necessary to national defense. This is typical when the needs of the national government and military conflict with local and state desires.

In continuing with flight operations at the base, the runways at Buckley were once again in need of repair and resurfacing. The question was, certainly in the post-9/11 world, where to redeploy the aircraft while this took place? When work began June 1, 2002, the 17 F-16s of the 120th FS were relocated to Denver International Airport until October. The aircraft were stationed at a de-icing pad near the cargo complex located at the southern tip of runway 35L/17 R. In addition, Buckley crews also moved to DIA with an
arresting cable to help with emergency landings. The preceding decades had shown this to be a smart move in case of an emergency.\textsuperscript{54}

It is ironic that the very airport whose creation threatened Buckley would now serve as a temporary home in a time of need. 9/11 seemed to put those past disagreements aside for the good of the nation. In addition, the fact that the Air Force chose to resurface the runways after a combat deployment and not during the winter months showed the critical nature of the operations at Buckley and that the base was looked upon for the critical mission of protecting America’s skies.

Accidents and Controversies

As new technology and computers were used in aircraft, the number of crashes and accidents around Buckley decreased sharply. In the first six years of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, only a handful of accidents and mishaps have occurred. Two of these incidents happened on June 29 and June 30, 2005. One involved a Navy F-18 Hornet from VFA-106, “The Gladiators,” that had landed to refuel and was taxiing to a stop on the flight line when the hydraulics failed. As the Hornet approached Hangar 909 it was unable to stop and crashed into the corner of the hangar, causing structural damage to the aircraft and the building. The pilot was not seriously hurt. The crash of the Hornet was just a
day after a Colorado Air National Guard F-16 pilot was forced to attempt an emergency landing at Lamar Municipal Airport in Prowers County. When the pilot realized the plane would not come to a complete stop before the end of the runway, he chose to eject. The plane was heavily damaged, and likely a total loss though the pilot was unhurt.55

One controversy that would come up in 2001 was the reassignment of the commanding officer at Buckley Air Force Base. Col. John L. Wilkinson was removed from command in Feb. 2002 less than a year after overseeing the transition of Buckley into a full fledged Air Force base, amid an investigation over improper use of travel and leave time.56 Col. Craig C. Whitehead was placed in command of the 821st Space Group and Wilkinson was reassigned within the Air Force Space Command. Whitehead held the position until May 2001 when Col. James A. Sands was given command of Buckley.57

Buckley and the Community

As always, Buckley tended to create or deal with a few problems each decade. In the late 1990s, early 2000s, there were several attempts to build a new baseball stadium that would bring in a minor league team to Aurora. The stadium was proposed on the northeast corner of Alameda Avenue and Buckley Road which was near an area slated for new residential construction.
on Buckley. Buckley did not have authority over the land but raised concerns over noise and air operations at the base, especially if more birds were drawn to the area. Eventually the plans fell apart when financial backing could not be secured.

There were other problems at Buckley as well. In such a large community, there are always people who will make bad decisions. Buckley was forced to investigate drug use on the base in 2002. This was on the heels of a drug scandal at Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs. The problem at Buckley was that several airmen were suspected of not only using and selling drugs while on base, but also selling drugs in the surrounding communities. The base called the investigation a minor endeavor but several airmen were given jail time.

The new century continued to bring growth around Buckley that threatened air operations. Plans for a zoning change in late 2006 created a controversy. Developers were ready to build 1,000 new homes under a flight path used often by Buckley. The base urged that the zoning not be changed in accordance with safety recommendations that homes not be built in areas considered to be noisy or at a high risk for aircraft accidents. Buckley officials also warned that continued encroachment might endanger the
viability of the base to continue flight operations.\textsuperscript{60} As of November 2006 this issue is still unresolved.

While Buckley servicemen and women actively looked for ways to keep America safe in the post-9/11 world, they were also taking steps to heal and assuage some of the grief and loss of that day. In February 2004, the Colorado Air National Guard did what it could to fulfill a dream erased by 9/11 the best way it could. Jason Dahl, a Colorado pilot flying United Airlines Flight 93 that morning when it was hijacked, had always dreamed of flying F-16s. His widow, Sandy, was able to live part of that lost dream for him when she was taken on a fifty minute flight over the front range while carrying a photo and an ace of spades playing card she found in one of his jackets. Though Jason Dahl was gone, his wife and the Colorado Air National Guard did what they could to make a lifetime goal come true.\textsuperscript{61}

Buckley also took time to remember those still missing in action from Colorado. In September 2003, a nine-hour ceremony sought to bring attention to the 33 Colorado soldiers that remain listed as missing in action from the Vietnam War. But in a larger sense, Buckley never stops paying tribute to the missing soldiers. A table with a white tablecloth, single candle, an inverted wine glass, and slice of lemon and salt sits undisturbed in the dining hall. This table is always left vacant, reserved for the missing with each item
representing the pain and loss for those loved ones that still grieve. This type of remembrance, for all Coloradans listed as missing, is but a small piece of what Buckley brings to the community.\(^{62}\)

Part of Buckley’s written history ended when the last edition of the *Mile High Guardian* was published at the end of September 2006. Writing for the base continued through the 460\(^{th}\) Space Wing Public Affairs unit but it would only be available online. Buckley’s various newspapers started with the *Buckley Armorer*, which was replaced after World War II with the Lowry papers such as the *Lowry Airman*, only to be resurrected as the *Mile High Guardian* in the 1990s after Lowry had closed. Technology had simply made it faster and cheaper to produce the base publication online.\(^{63}\)

**Lowry Landfill and Bombing Range Issues**

While the situation on Buckley continued to grow, so did the expansion of Aurora around the Lowry Landfill and old Lowry Bombing Range. The need for continued home construction steadily pushed east around Buckley and to the Southeast along Quincy Avenue and Smoky Hill Road. This continued to create pressure and anxiety as to how clean the former bomb range was and whether or not you could build anything on the land safely.
There had been one notable success on the old bombing range, notably the creation of the Aurora Reservoir, but problems persisted when it came to residential construction. The US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), along with state officials, continued to explore the range to find and eliminate dangerous munitions that remained. The ACE determined areas of priority or those areas that would likely need to be redeveloped first or those areas with the highest risk of live munitions in order to determine the order of cleanup projects. The Jeep/Demo range adjacent to the Aurora Reservoir is listed as the highest priority, the bombing range target number six is next, followed by the Rocket Range. As of late 2006, the project had cleaned up nearly 2,000 acres while disposing of 3,850 live or dangerous munitions. Many areas east of the Aurora Reservoir will continue to need clean up, or at least monitoring, during construction in those high risk areas.

As homes are built in the area, the Army Corps of Engineers planned to have the area completely free of munitions by 2008, though that seems optimistic. With 26,000 acres available for development in the future the Corps will need to ensure the safety of the citizens. Even the Cherry Creek School District was more concerned with the number of available schools and teachers, rather than dangers with the land. In fact, Cherokee Trail High School was built on land near the 20mm range, and a new proposed high
school is planned for an area just east of Harvest Mile Road and south of Quincy on the Bombing Range that is near the Jeep/Demo range.\textsuperscript{66}

However, plans for expansion slowed a bit when Colorado announced in late 2005 that much of the remaining 37 sq. miles of land were to be used as open space under the direction of the state. The 28,000 acres of state land could still be leased out for oil and gas production as well as grazing and recreation, but it was not to be developed in the near future.\textsuperscript{67}

The Lowry Landfill site also expanded a bit. The landfill acquired 776 acres of the original Titan Missile Complex 1A that was adjacent to the landfill property. The silos were not to be used for dumping but left alone or filled with dirt. The expansion was part of a planned increase in size of the Denver landfill though it was expected the land would not be needed for another twenty years.\textsuperscript{68}

Buckley and Pollution

Part of Buckley’s history became the focus of additional hazardous material cleaning operations in the state. As part of the cleanup at the Lowry Bombing Range the state began looking at other World War II training sites that might be a health risk to people. Of the 93 locations in the state, one was the arctic training center at Echo Lake and used during World War II and run
from Buckley. It still had a trash dump that was left nearby, full of hazards such as sharp metal, chemicals, and possibly munitions. The cleanup of the dump began in early 2002 and was finished by the end of the year at a cost of $300,000. Further investigation as to whether or not other areas near Mt. Evans, used by those stationed at Echo Lake, were in need of cleanup or that may still be hazardous to people were ongoing.69

Buckley Air Force Base itself was in need of cleanup as well. The World War II loading docks and warehouses located at the northern end of the base and running east from the main gate were in disrepair and eventually torn down. However, the soil in this area was contaminated with waste solvents that were simply poured out onto the dirt during World War II. Various chemicals, the most serious of which was perchloroethylene (PCE) were found in groundwater samples as far north as 2,000 feet from the base. In September 2005 the base began cleanup operations at the site which were ongoing by 2006.70

The Golden Triangle and Redevelopment

For six decades, the bases of the golden triangle grew and shrank. The last portion of Lowry was slated for closure in August, 2005. The Defense Finance Accounting Service Center and the Air Force Reserve Personnel
Center were selected by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to be closed. The 1,500 jobs spared by the closure of Lowry in 1994 would now be lost.\textsuperscript{71}

However, the positive effect of the redevelopment at Lowry at Fitzsimons means that the news is not all bad for the community. Lowry was a shining example of what could happen after a base is closed. Ten years after the base closed it now includes mixed use residential homes, a library, parks, a new high school, and numerous businesses. It even contains the Wings over the Rockies Air and Space Museum, located in one of the two main hangars on the base. Other books have looked at this redevelopment in far greater detail including \textit{From Lowry: Military Base to New Urban Community} by Thomas J. Noel and Chuck Woodward which details the many building changes and improvements in the community since the base closed.

Redevelopment of Fitzsimons exceeded the highest expectations. Some feared that the project would bankrupt investors and the hospitals investing there but this was not the case. In fact, it was the second largest public works project in Colorado’s history, behind only Denver International Airport.\textsuperscript{72} By 2002 the former base employed over 3,000 people, mostly in the medical field. Various medical research centers and hospitals such as University Hospital, Children’s Hospital, and the Veterans Administration
Hospital were all being relocated to the Fitzsimons campus by the twenty-first century. Fitzsimons plans for 2010 called for completing nearly seven million square feet of space, employing over 15,000 workers, and generating over $6 billion in economic benefits to the area. Of course all of this was being done around the historic hospital and other buildings located on the old base.\textsuperscript{73}

Lowry and Fitzsimons had proven that a base could be reborn to benefit the community.

The Future of Buckley Air Force Base

The factors that led to the closing of Lowry and Fitzsimons could lead to the closure of Buckley, but this is not very likely. However, there are a few similarities to what happened at those two bases.

First, Buckley's runway is critical to the mission of protecting the skies over America following September 11. It would not be moved elsewhere without some major construction at the new location. The COANG mission would not easily be sent somewhere else despite growth around Buckley that has, at several times, created controversies. The other significant military airfield in Colorado is limited, at Peterson AFB, and is with the Colorado Springs Airport. Moving the air operations here would not likely be done. Buckley is perfectly situated to handle transient aircraft from all over
the country as well as protect the midsection of the country in the event of a
terrorist attack.

Second, the more important reason to keep Buckley operational is that
which is secret. Some of the missions performed by the 2\textsuperscript{nd} SWS and other
agencies such as the National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency,
the National Reconnaissance Office, and the various military intelligence
organizations of the military branches would not easily be moved. The
mission was important enough to create massive growth in the 1990s and
early 21\textsuperscript{st} century at the base and there is no reason to think that would
disappear quickly.

The key to the value of Buckley, and keeping it open, is also
controlled by how much effort the people of Aurora, and Colorado, wish to
exert to keep it open. By listening to recommendations by the Air Force with
regards to building near the base, the community can coexist with the base
without difficulties. When the Air Force likely convinced the planners for
Denver International Airport to move the runways further north and east to
avoid Buckley this showed the importance of the base and the need to
communicate as to what is in the best interest of all groups involved. This
includes Denver, Aurora, and the various military groups at the base.
Given the nature of the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom it may be that Buckley’s usefulness will continue to grow. If clandestine operations taking place at Buckley need to expand, Buckley certainly has the room to do it. There is plenty of room for additional radomes at the ADF or at various sites east of the runway. The key for Buckley is that it does have room to grow if needed, despite being surrounded by residential and commercial areas.

Conclusion

The history of Buckley Air Force Base is a small history of the United States over the last six decades, reflecting hot and cold wars since 1938. The field originated as a dirt auxiliary armory base utilized by planes from Lowry Field to load munitions for bombing practice. Buckley grew to be the largest armorer training base in the nation during World War II. After the war the base provided housing for veterans and their families trying to transition from a wartime economy to a peacetime one.

The base was transferred to the United States Navy in 1946. During the 1950s both the Colorado Air National Guard and the United States Naval Reserve personnel stationed there fought in the Korean War. In addition the
members of the base would take part in several military activations such as the *Pueblo Crisis* and provide continental air defense in the event of a nuclear war.

As the Cold War heated up, the base became a staging point for ICBMs that would be part of the nation's nuclear deterrent in the early 1960s. It would also experience the growth associated with space technologies and satellites that the U.S. military would use to detect nuclear attacks against the United States. The base would provide airmen and troops for the Berlin Crisis activations and would send airmen into harms way during the Vietnam Conflict. The 1970s would be the decade of stagnation for the economy but Buckley would continue its space mission. The base itself was in transition in the decade of disco.

The 1980s saw the scare of base closures come close. Additions to the base were quiet in nature and the secret planes and golf balls on the base would continue to spark interest. As the Cold War came to an end, many thought that the wars of the future would be technology driven. Buckley was preparing for that eventuality.

The 1990s saw another conflict to which Buckley responded. During the Gulf War Iraqi Scud missile launches were detected by Buckley and warnings sent out. The COANG aircraft sat out of combat for the first and
only time in a major US action. This was due to outdated aircraft and not a lack of ability on the part of the pilots. As part of the space satellites and operations utilized during the Gulf War, Buckley began to expand in the 1990s, doubling the number of radomes on the base by 2001.

In 2000 Buckley Air National Guard Base became Buckley Air Force Base. This was simply the next of many transitions. The economic importance of the base to Aurora can not be overemphasized. The base also is important in providing disaster assistance to communities when necessary whether it is helping to cope with the Big Thompson Flood or the Blizzard of 1982. The events of 9/11 and Operation Iraqi Freedom have made Buckley important not only for the continental air defense but also in monitoring nations such as the Soviet Union, North Korea, and Iran for missile launches. The base is also likely involved with Air Force and Navy intelligence organizations as well as clandestine operations dealing with signal intelligence gathered from space.

For the last sixty-eight years Buckley has done everything asked of it from training men, to deploying for war, to assisting during disasters. The fact that the base remains today is a testament to its versatility and the accomplishments of the men and women of the Colorado Air National Guard, the Army National Guard, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force that
have operated from the base. Buckley is one of just under seventy major Air
Force bases currently operating in the United States at the end of 2006 and is
the oldest active base in Colorado.

The next sixty-eight years will likely see the same change and
commitment that previous years experienced. It would be surprising, though
not unusual, if the Air Force ever closed the base. That might mean Buckley
would, yet again, be controlled and operated by the COANG. Buckley would
handle that as it has done for the last 68 years, simply as one more step along
the path of history. No matter what the name or the mission, Buckley remains
the boom base in boomtown Aurora.
Chapter Nine Notes


4 Author’s own observations.


24 John Rebchook, “Raytheon to get $2.2 Million in Incentives,” Rocky Mountain News 3 Feb. 2005: 1B.


33 Anonymous, letter to the author, 10 May 2005.


37 Anonymous, letter to the author, 10 May 2005.


45 B. Schott Bortnick, “Hostile Skies Turn Friendly,” The Denver Post 1 May 2003: 1B.


48 "Buckley-Based Marines to Deploy to Iraq," Mile High Guardian 2 June 2006: 3.


52 Kelly Yamanouchi, “High Stakes for High-Tech War,” The Denver Post 3 Apr. 2005: 1K.


54 Jeffrey Leib, “Buckley F-16s Moving to DIA,” The Denver Post 22 Nov. 2002: 1A.


Author’s own notes and observations.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


“Admiral Sees No Change at Buckley.” Aurora Advocate 17 Apr. 1958: 3.

Aerial photo RA-20338-12-4. Denver Public Library Collection, Denver.

Aerial photo 21063-2-110. Denver Public Library Collection, Denver.

Aerial Photo of Aurora, 1982. Aurora History Museum Collection.


“AF Wants to Trade Land with State.” The Denver Post 3 Apr. 1986: 3B.


“Air Guard Will Serve in Panama.” *The Denver Post* 5 Aug. 1983: 12D.


“Air School Will be Increased to 30,000.” *The Denver Post* 2 Apr. 1942: 1.


Arnold, Fraser. Letter to the Honorable Dean Gillespie. 2 Mar. 1946. National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.


Aurora Advocate 5 Apr. 1951: 1.


Blackmun, Joni H. “New Airport Won’t Affect Buckley Satellite.” *The Denver Post* 8 May 1987: 2B.


Bortnick, B. Schott. “Hostile Skies Turn Friendly.” *The Denver Post* 1 May 2003: 1B.


"Buckley Air Base May Furlough 500 Civilians." *The Denver Post* 4 Mar. 1993: 2B.

"Buckley Air Base to Cut Back Operating Hours, Employees." *Rocky Mountain News* 17 May 1978: 19.


“Buckley Airs Charges of High Rent and Health Hazards at Project.” The Denver Post 8 Sept. 1948: 3.


“Buckley Airport Base Services Best Possible.” Aurora Advocate 7 Apr. 1971: 30.


“Buckley-Based Marines to Deploy to Iraq.” Mile High Guardian 2 June 2006: 3.

“Buckley Deactivation By June 30 Ordered; Guard will Get Field.” Rocky Mountain News 4 June 1946: 5.


“Buckley Field Busy on First Birthday.” Rocky Mountain News 2 July 1943: 9.


“Buckley Field Theater is Dedicated.” Rocky Mountain News 15 July 1942: 9.


“Buckley is Restored Active Basis Again.” Rocky Mountain News 7 June 1946: 5.

“Buckley Naval Air Station.” Aurora Advocate 1 Mar. 1951: 1.


“Buckley Opens New Rec Area.” Aurora Advocate 14 June 1962: 15A.


“Buckley Teaching Chemical Warfare.” The Denver Post 19 May 1945: 3.


“Buckley to get $45,000 Allotment.” Aurora Advocate 22 Feb. 1951: 5.


“Buckley Wins Service Award.” Aurora Advocate 7 Apr. 1971: 3.


Carabello, Zeb. “Aurora Military Sites in Line for Millions in Expansion Funds.” *Aurora Sentinel* 31 May 2004: 1


Casa, Kate. “City Wants to Know More About Buckley.” *The Denver Post* 6 July 1983: 4B.


City of Aurora. Aerial photo of Aurora, Colorado in 1975. Aurora History Museum Collection, Aurora.

City of Aurora. Aerial photo of Aurora, Colorado in 1993. Aurora History Museum Collection, Aurora.

“City Probing Buckley Malady.” Rocky Mountain News 10 Sept. 1944: 15.

“City to Purchase 7,080 More Acres for Bombing Field.” The Denver Post 30 Apr. 1938: 3.

“City to Sue for Air Field Land Today.” Rocky Mountain News 8 Apr. 1938: 19.


“Colorado Air Guard to be Deactivated.” Rocky Mountain News 12 June 1962: 10


“Court Upholds Buckley-Based Jet Training Missions.” Aurora Sentinel 23 July 2001: 1.


Davis, Don. “National Guard Will Get Use of Inactivated Buckley Field.” The Denver Post 4 June 1946: 5.


“Death of Worker Probed at Buckley Guard Base.” The Denver Post 26 Feb. 1993: 2B.


“First Buckley Field Sergeant of Colo. Evert to go From Denver To Officer’s Training School.” Denver Star 18 Nov. 1944: n.p.


Giles, Fred. "Buckley to Fix Runways; Medical Flights go to Stapleton." *The Denver Post* 9 Mar. 1986: 8B.


“Guard Pilot Injured In Jet Fighter Crash.” *Rocky Mountain News* 10 Nov. 1973: 5.


Jain, Bob. “Guard Unit Flying for 61 Years.” *The Denver Post* 15 July 1984: 8C.

“Jet Crash-lands at Buckley Base.” *The Denver Post* 24 Nov. 1983: 4B.


“Last Two Choppers at Lowry to Depart.” *Rocky Mountain News* 8 May 1965: 90.


Leib, Jeffrey. “Buckley F-16s Moving to DIA.” *The Denver Post* 22 Nov. 2002: 1A.


"Lowry to End Jets May 31." The Denver Post 18 May 1960: 3.

"Lowry Field to go on Wartime Basis Schedule." The Denver Post 2 July 1941: 1.

"Lowry Pilot Saves 15 in Midair Crash." Rocky Mountain News 16 July 1945: 5.

"Lowry Runway to Go in April." The Denver Post 27 Feb. 1960: 3.

"Lowry Visited by AEC Team." The Denver Post 29 Nov. 1965.


“Malady Strikes 3 More Residents at Buckley.” The Denver Post 16 Sept. 1948: 3.


“Marines Come Home.” 9News at 10 p.m. NBC. KUSA, Denver. 20 Oct. 2006.


“Multiplying Mascots.” Rocky Mountain News 1 Nov. 1942: 32.


“National Guard and Navy will Share Buckley.” The Denver Post 9 Nov. 1946: 1.

“National Guard Pilot Escapes Injury in Crash.” The Denver Post 10 Nov. 1993: 5B.


“Navy Hands over Buckley to State Air National Guard.” The Denver Post 30 June 1959: 3.


“Navy to Lengthen Runways.” Aurora Advocate 31 May 1951: 3.


Obmascik, Mark. “Air Base to Poison Prairie Dogs.” The Denver Post 12 June 1990: 1A.


O’Driscoll, Patrick. “Low-Level Jet Flights to be Cut.” The Denver Post 14 July 1993: 5B.

“Officials Inspect Buckley’s Setup for Housing Help.” The Denver Post 8 Mar. 1946: 5.

“Old Colorado Family Name Given Airfield.” The Denver Post 26 June 1941: 17.


“P-40 Crashes at Buckley.” *The Denver Post* circa 1944: n.p. From the clippings file at Denver Public Library.


Parker, Jim. E-mail to the author. 6 Feb. 2006.


"Phone Line from Lowry Field is Half Completed." *The Denver Post* 19 May 1938: 4.

"Pilots Train for Combat." *The Denver Post* 26 June 1983: 10B.


Rebchook, John. “Raytheon to get $2.2 Million in Incentives.” Rocky Mountain News 3 Feb. 2005: 1B.

“Regional Unit Backs Buckley Housing Plan.” The Denver Post 6 Nov. 1946: 28.


“Reservists Called for Buckley.” Aurora Advocate 30 Aug. 1951: 5.


Richmond, Kelly. “Peterson, Buckley Face Job Cuts in Restructuring.” The Denver Post 28 May 1993: 24A.


Roberts, Jeffrey A. “AF Fears Shift at Airport May Affect Buckley.” Rocky Mountain News 22 Jan. 1985: 5A.


Roby, Renate. “Lowry Seen as Site for Fitzsimons.” The Denver Post 22 May 1993: 6B.


Roby, Renate. “Old Base Sites may be Risks.” The Denver Post 14 Apr. 1996: 1B.


“$60,000 Sought From City for Buckley Village.” The Denver Post 28 Nov. 1946: 1.


“Soldiers Build Own Rifle Range at Buckley Field.” Rocky Mountain News 19 June 1943: 15.


“Ten Years of Naval Aviation.” The Denver Post 10 Feb. 1957: Denver Zone 5.


“Two Dozen Gather to Protest Buckley’s Secrecy.” The Denver Post 4 July 1995: 3B.

“$2,812,000 Sought for Expansion of Buckley Air Station.” Rocky Mountain News 15 Dec. 1950: 5.

Udevitz, Norm. “Colorado Air Guard Fighter Unit gets into War Games Rehearsal.” The Denver Post 19 May 1985: 14B.


“War Dogs Now Being Trained at Buckley Field.” The Denver Post 17 Apr. 1945: 3.


Williams, Paul C. Record of Information from Congress: From the WAA. 31 Oct. 1946. National Archives and Records Administration, Denver.


Wolfe, Craig. E-mail to the author. 4 Apr. 2005.


