

87 Air Base Wing History



“Win as One”



Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst

Current as of Jan 2011

The 87 Air Base Wing

87th Fighter Group

The 87th Air Base Wing traces its heritage to the 87th Fighter Group of World War II in the form of bestowed honors. A late comer to the WWII effort, the 87th had a short but useful career from October 1943-1944. Assigned to remain on American shores, the 87th Fighter Group began the mission of support and dedication that can be traced to the current day unit. Initially stationed at Richmond Army Air Base, Virginia, the group's two squadrons, the 450th and the 535th, trained replacement pilots for the war effort in their P-47 airframe. Led by Lt. Col Robert N. Maupin, the unit's only commander, the group performed their mission, sending qualified pilots forward to support the fight.

Eventually, the need for additional pilots waned and the 87th Fighter Group would be relocated to Camp Springs Army Air Field, Maryland, 21 Jan 1944. The 450th was pulled away from the group and assigned to the Philadelphia Fighter Wing to provide additional training and air defense for the region. The 87th Fighter Group would inactivate on 10 April 1944, the result of a successful war effort.

87th in the Reserves

After WWII, the 87th Fighter Group was reconstituted and allocated to the Air Force Reserve. After a fitful start when the group received the label the 87th Fighter Escort Group but was never populated with men or equipment, the group was renamed to reflect a different focus, the 87th Troop Carrier Group. Another short lived career, this version of the 87th would only operate for three-fourths of a year (15 Jun 1952 - 1 Feb 1953) at their assigned Indiana location, Atterbury AFB. Again sustaining forward forces, the 87th Troop Carrier Group performed a training mission in support of the Korean War.

Col George C. Riley, the only commander of the reserve 87th, coordinated closely with the 2466 Air Force Reserve Training Center in order to accomplish this training and support mission. The 87 Troop Carrier Group had no assigned airframes and used the installation's stable aircraft which included the Gloster Meteor T-7s, C-46 Curtiss "Commando", Douglas C-47 Skytrain, North American B-25 "Mitchell" and North American T-6 "Texan".

Between 1953 and the Wing's current designation, the 87th also underwent another minor redesignation in 1985. Unfortunately, the budding 87th Tactical Airlift Wing was never activated and the unit was shelved for future need.

87th Air Base Wing

The correct circumstances would manifest as the result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission. With the new concept of joint basing, the former 'one wing, one king' theory needed to be revised. The new model allowed flying wings to concentrate on the flying

mission and the newly developed Air Base Wings to focus on the more grounded mission of installation management and customer service to joint base partners. The 87th Tactical Airlift Wing was dusted off and redesignated on 19 Feb 2009 as the 87th Air Base Wing (ABW).

Col Gina M. Grosso accepted command of the newly activated wing on 3 March 2009. The unit was assigned the critical responsibility of installation management for the nation's first tri-service joint base; the new installation was a combination of Fort Dix, Naval Air Engineering Station –Lakehurst and McGuire Air Force Base. Populated largely from existing Air Force and Navy units from McGuire and Lakehurst, the 87th Air Base Wing responded with vigor and enthusiasm, eager to prove their ability in this unusual non-flying focus. During their first year of operation, the USAF recognized the outstanding contribution of the 87th Air Base Wing to the Air Mobility Command mission and the sister services by awarding the outstanding unit award.

Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, locally called JB MDL, was formed as the result of the 2005 Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC). On Oct. 1, 2009, three previously independent service organizations were joined into a single, powerful military installation. The former historic institutions of Fort Dix, Naval Air Engineering Station Lakehurst and McGuire Air Force Base currently comprise one of the most diverse military complexes in the United States.

The oldest portion of the installation began as an ammunition proving ground near the resort town of Lakehurst, N. J. Deep in the sandy pinelands, the Eddystone Ammunition Company tested munitions for the Russian Imperial Army. In 1917, following the Russian Revolution and supporting the U.S. entry into the war, the Eddystone Testing Ground was procured by the Ordnance Department of the Army. The Army named the area Camp Kendrick and used the many buildings as a munitions and mustard gas testing location.

Nearby Camp Dix was also formed in 1917 serving as a training and staging location to meet the heavy troop requirements of World War I. Named for Maj. Gen. John Adams Dix, a U.S. Senator, Governor of New York, Secretary of the Treasury, Minister to France and a well respected Civil War general, Camp Dix quickly became a leading military reservation in the Northwest. In the next few years, Camp Dix would train and deploy the 87th and 34th Infantry Divisions. It also became the birthplace of the fabled 78th 'Lighting' Division, the "Point of the Wedge" in World War I's final offensive.

After the war, both installations experienced rapid reductions in manpower and personnel. However, the Navy, wishing to continue its lighter-than-air efforts from before the war, saw Camp Kendrick as a likely location for airship operations. It worked closely with the Ordnance Department and began in 1919 to build the foundation for its air station. Hangar one, a \$4 million expense, was built to house and support the fledgling Lighter-than-Air program. Its massive size, 961-feet long, 350-feet wide, and 200-feet high, was intentionally built oversize in order to comfortably construct and house the first of the United States' rigid airships, the Shenandoah. In 1921, the Navy formally purchased Camp Kendrick from the Army and renamed it Naval Air Station Lakehurst.

Between the wars, Camp Dix and NAS Lakehurst maintained steady operations. Dix, once it completed the post World War I demobilization mission, became a training facility for National Guard and Reserve Army units. It served as the location for the Army War College "Red/Blue Exercises" and as a testing and exercise location for the Joint Anti-Aircraft Services in 1925. The Civilian Concentration Corps also used Camp Dix as a primary location for reception, training and discharge. As the center of airship development in the United States, NAS Lakehurst was home to three of the four rigid airships owned by the Navy (ZR-1 Shenandoah, ZR-3 Los Angeles and ZRS-4 Akron). It served as the nation's first trans-Atlantic international airport and was the U.S. berthing location of the largest airship in the world, *LZ 129 Hindenburg*. The shocking accident that resulted in the loss of 37 men on May 6th, 1937 marked the end of the public's romance with lighter-than-air ships, but not the Navy's. The Navy would utilize their airships to great advantage during World War II.

The needs of WWII would see all facets of the installation expand. NAS Lakehurst would purchase an additional 5,892 acres making it the largest naval installation east of the Mississippi at 7430 Acres. As the Navy's primary location for LTA vehicles, Naval Lakehurst was a thriving hub of home defense activity. The airships of Fleet Airship Wing One patrolled the Atlantic Ocean waters and escorted 89,000 surface ships safely to their destination. The First Marine Paratroopers trained in the skies over Lakehurst and two important schools, Parachute Riggers and Aerographer's Mate, churned out specialized Sailors to meet the enormous war need.

Camp Dix officially became a permanent Army installation on 8 March 1939. Expanding to meet the needs of the Army, Fort Dix absorbed surrounding farm fields and wooded acres, nearly doubling to more than 35,000 acres. At least one small town, Pointville, was completely absorbed by the installation's rapid growth. The newly acquired farmlands and pine woods were used to create the enormous artillery grounds and training ranges that remain one of the installation's strongest physical assets. The additional room augmented the fort's reception, training and staging mission as ten divisions and numerous small units moved through Dix on their way to the front. Adding even more capacity, the CCC runway that was constructed in 1937 formed the foundation for the new Fort Dix Army Air Base. The airbase provided aerial support to the Army post, a home for coastal defense aircraft like the 3rd Anti-Submarine Squadron, and a waypoint for transient aircraft traveling overseas.

The end of World War II reshifted priorities to demobilization. More than 1.2 million Soldiers would return home through the gates of Dix. As that mission reached completion in 1946, Fort Dix Army Air Base would close its doors. In just two years, the fledging Air Force would reopen the installation and name it for one of World War II's leading pilots, Major Thomas McGuire.

In the post war years, all sections of the installation would see rapid and meaningful changes. Fort Dix's permanent status ensured that it would remain an important Army troop training location. On July 15 1947, Fort Dix became a Basic Training Center and in 1956, an Army Training Center- Infantry. Just a year later, Dix would reveal their lasting icon, the "Ultimate Weapon" based on this infantrymen mission. Shifting to 24-hour operations, Fort Dix swung into high gear and produced thousands of raw recruits to support the Vietnam conflict. To better simulate the battlefield conditions these recruits would face, Fort Dix constructed a mock Vietnamese village to provide realistic training simulations and augment the already robust training offered on the post.

NAS Lakehurst's mission would also be remolded. Strong through the 50's, the LTA mission would eventually give way to more modern conveyances in 1962. Lakehurst would become host to the Navy's first helicopter squadrons, as well as one of the Navy's only overhaul-and-repair service to heavier-than air and rotary winged aircraft (the forerunner of a Fleet Readiness Center). They would also add Aviation Boatswain Mate ratings to their specialized training offerings.

Across the installation, young McGuire AFB base opened in Aug 1948 and rapidly grew into an eastern air hub. Beginning as a Strategic Air Command (1947-1948) location, McGuire passed through several command structures over the years including the Continental Air Defense Command (1949- 1951), Air Defense Command (1951-1954), Military Air Transport Service-MATS (1954-1966), Military Airlift Command (1966-1994) and Air Mobility Command (1994-Current). Although the time as a primary defensive base was short lived (1948-1954), a contingent of the defensive role remained on McGuire until 1972. McGuire's 46th Air Defense Missile Squadron became the first operational Boeing - Michigan Aeronautical Research Center (BOMARC) missile site in 1959 and remained an active system until 1972.

Complementing this defensive mission was McGuire's ever present mobility mission. Joint from the beginning, MATS was a collaboration of Air Force and Navy squadrons. The 3 VR Navy Transport Squadron and the 1611th Air Transport Wing assisted in flying a regular schedule passenger and cargo service to numerous European service bases. Across the years, McGuire assigned aircraft, the C-54 Skymaster, C-118 Liftmaster, and the C-135 Stratolifter made the air base well known as the "Gateway to the East" as military service members depended on Military Airlift Command for travel to bases and battlefields around the world.

In the waning years of Vietnam, Fort Dix would realign under the newly formed Training and Doctrine Command. Women would arrive at the newly constructed Active Duty Reception Station and a new concept in Army training- Self Paced One Unit Training would be introduced with great success. NAS Lakehurst would undergo a name change in 1977 as the Naval Air Engineering Center would relocate from the Philadelphia area. Critical design, prototyping, manufacturing and testing facilities vital to naval air operations were constructed to support Naval Air Systems Command. The most visible and readily identifiable of these facilities was the 1986 constructed TC13 Mod 2 Catapult system.

Five rounds of BRAC have left an indelible mark on the installation. As the result of the 1988, 1991 and 1995 BRACs, Fort Dix saw its active Army training mission depart, ending forty-five years as basic training location. Dix would become an important Regional Reserve Training location and serve proudly as a critical reserve troop training location for the entire eastern region. Additional diverse missions flooded into the installation. The Atlantic Strike Team arrived, calling Dix home in 1991 and the Federal Correctional Institution-Dix built their compound in 1992. The Air Mobility Warfare center (now the USAF Expeditionary Center) arrived in 1994, and the re-emergence of a regional Military Entrance Processing Station occurred in 2000.

The 1993 BRAC raised some contentious issues for McGuire AFB but ended with increased mission and capability for the new Air Mobility Command. KC-10 Extenders joined the extensive C-141 Starlifter fleet stationed on McGuire since the introduction of the cargo airframe in 1967. Close partnerships with nearby Fort Dix and the strong McGuire airlift support provided to mobilizing soldiers heading to Desert Storm and Desert Shield, cemented the need for a strong Air Force location on the eastern seaboard. This opinion was further strengthened as the C-141 fleet was gradually phased out and replaced by the new C-17 Globemaster airframe.

The 1995 BRAC targeted NAES Lakehurst and initially slated the important engineering facility for closure. However, that decision was soon reversed. Lakehurst's singular support role to Naval Aviation, specialized testing equipment and dedicated air corridors were simply too valuable to be relocated. Shortly thereafter, the additional specialized missions of the US Army Recruiting Battalion- Mid-Atlantic, the Army CERDEC testing mission and a number of local support mission and training functions would join the NAVAIR on NAES Lakehurst.

The latest round of BRAC confirmed what units on the installation had already recognized. Working together for mutual advantage enhances every service mission. Meshing the three installations into one simply formalized the cohesive and cooperative relationship that began in 1917.

Entering the modern age, Dix, Lakehurst and McGuire have settled into their enduring roles. McGuire remains the "Gateway of the East" and serves a critical mobility role of Air Mobility Command through the strength of her active, Reserve and Guard units. The Marines share the airfield and bring an airborne fighting capability to the installation. Lakehurst continues as an elite test and development facility, hosting several developmental missions for the Army and Navy, as well as serving as a training location for many of the Joint Base Partners. The primary mission on Dix continues to revolve around training as Army, Air Force, Coast Guard and Navy forces engage in the numerous developmental programs and facilities situated on the installation.

A truly joint integrated installation, JB MDL mission partners represent all five services and all elements of active, reserve and guard service. Multiple civilian agencies pepper the installation fashioning an inimitable blend of capabilities and services elsewhere unmatched. Together, we provide a unique combination of global vigilance, reach and power that makes Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst undeniably the "nation's premier" Joint Base.

87 ABW Commanders

Col George C. Riley (87 Troop Carrier Wing)

15 Jun 1952 - 1 Feb 1953

Col Gina M. Grosso

3 Mar 2009 – Current

Honors

Campaign streamers

World War II- American Theater

Decorations

Outstanding Unit Award

3 Mar 2009 - 30 Sep 2010

Stations

Atterbury AFB, IN

15 Jun 1952 - 1 Feb 1953

McGuire AFB

3 Mar 2009 - 30 Sep 2009

Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst

1 Oct 2009 – Current

Aircraft

T-7, C-46, B-25

1952-1953

C-47, T-6

1953

Wing Organization

87 Air Base Wing

87 Mission Support
Group

87 Medical Group

87 Comptroller Squadron

87 Contracting Squadron

87 Communication Squadron

87 Security Forces Squadron

87 Logistics Readiness Squadron

87 Civil Engineer Squadron

87 Force Support Squadron

87 Aerospace Medicine Squadron

87 Medical Support Squadron

87 Medical Operations Squadron

87 Dental Squadron