

THE EFFECTS OF MILITARY BASE CLOSURES ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES:  
THE US ARMY AIR CORPS IN WEST TEXAS

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“A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.”

– Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND RELEVANT HISTORIOGRAPHY

#### *The Army Air Corps in Texas*

The United States did not officially enter World War II until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941; however, as early as 1938, while Adolf Hitler was waging war without declaration in the Sudetenland, the US was gearing up for the war and was specifically making preparations for an air war. In 1938, the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) began surveying existing airports and possible future sites for conversion to or construction of Army air bases and instructional schools. One-hundred-forty-nine sites were eventually chosen, and almost half of those were in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

The CAA officials chose Texas for so many of the sites for several reasons. Texas in 1938 offered 77,391,536 acres of treeless hills and plains, a landscape that appealed to aviators because it offered up fewer mountains for pilots to fly into. Texas' inordinate amount of clear-weather days made it an even safer environment for flight instruction. The state's vast petroleum resources, its location in the center of the United States, and its adjacency to the Gulf of Mexico further made the state a good area for a large concentration of military bases. Finally, a large number of existing air facilities, some military and some civilian, already called Texas home.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Alexander, *The Stars were Big and Bright: The United States Army Air Forces and Texas During World War II* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2000).

A large area of the southern United States was designated the Gulf Coast Training Center, and Texas became the focal point of this center with most of its large complement of airbases being set aside specifically for pilot and crew. Texas bases were specialized, some offering gunnery and bomber crew training, others basic flight training, others flight instructor training, and still others advanced flight training on specific classes of aircraft.<sup>3</sup>

These bases affected the mostly small towns in which they were constructed in a number of ways. Members of the local communities and base personnel participated in a variety of social interactions, ranging from attending parties and social gatherings together, to soldiers marrying young townswomen, and even to violent conflicts. The bases brought a population surge to the towns, and such surges resulted in elevated economic prosperity for these communities. The crime rates in these towns were also affected by the bases, though sometimes in unexpected ways.

These bases did not stay open forever, however, and when they closed, the effects on the local community ranged from annoying to catastrophic. The purpose of this thesis is to determine what these effects were, how detrimental they were to the local communities, and what sort of factors partially contributed to a local community surviving the deleterious effects of losing a military base. For this study, I have selected three Army Air Corps bases that opened during World War II and closed at some later date. The reason for doing three case studies rather than a single, deeper case study is to

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander, 9.

<sup>3</sup> The Gulf Coast Training center refers to the Army Air Fields opened by the Army Air Corps during and immediately preceding World War II in Texas. The mission of the Gulf Coast Training center was, as its name implies, to train members of the air corps. Robert Hays Jr., "Air Force Pilot and Instructor Training in Texas, 1940-1945," *Texas Military History* 4 no. 2 (1964): 95, 117.

be able to compare and contrast different communities, because every situation was different.

The bases and communities selected for this study were Camp Gary and the city of San Marcos, Hays County, Texas; Marfa Army Air Field and the city of Marfa, Presidio County, Texas; and Rattlesnake Bomber Base and the cities of Pyote and Monahans, Ward County, Texas. These bases were chosen because each represents different levels of both negative effects caused by the loss of a military base as well as different levels of recovery from those effects. It is my intention to demonstrate the effects that each base closure had on its respective local community and also to attempt to uncover what sort of factors led to each community's level of recovery. Such a study has relevance in today's age of military downsizing. I hope to show that the most important factor in determining whether or not to close a military base is not necessarily the base itself, but the community and what sort of assets that community has that may help it to recover from the loss of the base.

### ***Historiography of the Army Air Corps in Texas***

It is important that the relevant historiography be discussed. In this historiography, I have attempted to collect all materials relevant to the study of Army Air Corps bases in Texas. I also will use this historiography to demonstrate why there is a need for this particular thesis.

In the winter 1963-1964 issue, *Military Affairs* published the first scholarly study dealing with Army Air Corps installations in Texas: Edward A Miller, Jr.'s "The Struggle for an Air Force Academy." Miller's study did not focus just on Texas, but rather dealt

with the state as part of a larger context. The article told the story of how the United States Air Force Academy came into existence and how the location for it was chosen. According to Miller, the Air Force base in San Antonio, Texas, Randolph Field, was one of the front-runners in the bid for the location of the new service academy. Texas Representative Paul J. Kilday planned as early as 1947 to “introduce legislation to authorize an academy at Randolph Field.” The United States Senate decided to build the base in Colorado, instead, prompting criticism from around the nation. For Texas’s part, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and Air Force Secretary W. Stuart Symington suggested that various personal interests had caused Randolph Field to be overlooked in the selection process.<sup>4</sup>

Miller’s article discussed the nation-wide search for the location for the United States Air Force Academy. Miller dealt with a nationally significant issue here. Although Randolph Field was important to the story, Texas really only received cursory attention while the issue of base closures was not even mentioned. As the first study to deal with the Army Air Corps in Texas, Miller’s article holds an important position in the historiography; however, the study’s limited scope leaves a need for an examination of Texas military aviation such as this thesis.

In 1964, Robert E. Hays, Jr. wrote a short history of the Army Air Corps bases in Texas during World War II. Published in that year’s edition of *Texas Military History*, “Air Force Pilot and Instructor Training in Texas, 1940-1945” was the first scholarly work devoted to a specific study of Army Air Corps bases in Texas. Hays examined the various bases from a standpoint of the sort of training the various bases offered. He also

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<sup>4</sup> Edward A. Miller, Jr., “The Struggle for an Air Force Academy.” *Military Affairs* 27 no. 4 (Winter, 1963-1964): 166, 173.

looked at the subject chronologically, discussing each base as it opened in order to meet the training demands of a military preparing for and then fighting an air war. According to Hays, Air Corps officials believed as early as the 1930s that a basic pilot training program was necessary in the event of war, and Randolph Field near San Antonio opened for this purpose. As war loomed on the horizon in 1940, the Air Corps began opening other bases in what came to be designated the “Gulf Coast Training Center.” Hays went on to describe the escalation in base building in Texas throughout the war. As the war continued, numerous bases were created for both basic pilot training and for advanced or specialized training. These bases included the twin-engine advanced flying schools at Lubbock and at Ellington, Brooks, and Kelly Fields, the gunnery school at Moore Field, and the revolutionary Full-Panel Attitude System training school at Bryan Field.<sup>5</sup>

Hays’ work is important to the historiography of Army Air Corps bases in Texas for two reasons. First, the study dealt directly and only with the bases in Texas during World War II and was the first to do so. Second, Hays’ article is important because he looked at the causes of these bases being opened. Unfortunately, the study lacks any explanation of what happened to these bases after the war was over.

The next scholarly study of the Army Air Corps in Texas studied one particular base. Kenneth B. Ragsdale’s *Wings Over the Mexican Border: Pioneer Military Aviation in the Big Bend* examined the emergency landing field built by the Army Air Corps at Johnson’s Ranch in the Big Bend area of Texas. Ragsdale argued that this base was important to the history of military aviation because of its unique positioning near the

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<sup>5</sup> Hays, 95, 99, 101, 116.

Texas-Mexican border and because the pilots that flew there were pioneers in the field of military aviation.<sup>6</sup>

The book went on to tell the history of the Big Bend Air Field in the context of the Escobar Rebellion in Mexico (an attempted *coup de tat* perpetrated by General Jose Escobar in 1929). Ragsdale wrote that the base was created for the purpose of border security during the rebellion. His history of the base was mostly social and dealt with various anecdotes and humorous occurrences. For example, the book includes the story of Elmo Johnson, the owner of the ranch that the landing field was built on, using his pick-up truck headlights to guide a lost pilot to the landing strip. Ragsdale also examined the technical aspects of the evolution of military aviation that took place at the base such as the invention of the new B-10 bomber. A B-10 from the squadron to make the first historic flight from Virginia to Alaska made Big Bend Air Field famous after landing there in 1934. Finally, Ragsdale discussed the closing of the base because of the end of the Escobar Rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

Ragsdale's study holds an important place in the historiography of Army Air Corps bases in Texas for a number of reasons. First of all, the book was the first to give a detailed history of a specific base and the first to examine the base in a national, regional, and local context. Secondly, Ragsdale discussed Big Bend Air Field's technical achievements as well as the interaction between the base and community. Finally, the book discussed the base's closing; why it closed and how this affected the local community.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth B. Ragsdale, *Wings Over the Mexican Border: Pioneer Military Aviation in the Big Bend* (Austin: University of Texas, 1984): xx-xxi, 78, 165.

<sup>7</sup> Ragsdale, 78, 165.

The problem with Ragsdale's study of Big Bend Field is that it dealt with a unique base. Its period of operation and its status as an emergency landing field rather than as an instructional school made it unsuitable for a comparative study with other Army Air Corps bases in Texas.

In 2000, the historiography of military aviation in Texas leapt forward dramatically. That year, Thomas E. Alexander, Commissioner for the Texas Historical Commission, published his study of Army Air Corps bases in Texas, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: The United States Army Air Forces and Texas During World War II*. In this book, Alexander wrote short histories of eight different World War II era bases in Texas. Alexander's reason for choosing each base concerned the field's origin, mission, or ultimate fate. In the sequel to this book, *Volume II*, Alexander examined ten more bases. In both books he argued the importance of the study of these bases because he believed that they opened up the state of Texas to the rest of the world. The strength of these two books lies in their comprehensive nature. First of all, the books examined the histories of a combined total of eighteen different Army Air Corps bases in Texas. While Alexander did not treat his chapters as comparative studies, the different histories give the reader a broader understanding of the history of the Army Air Corps in Texas.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, each individual history, while short, examines the base from start to finish. Each of these histories discussed how and why the base was built, what the base's mission was, what life was like on the base, what the fate of each base was, why each base ended up the way it did, and how this affected the local community. As an example, Alexander credited the civic leaders of the city of Midland, Texas with the War

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander, 2-3.



Department's 1941 decision to build the Midland Bombardier School there, and the history of Rattlesnake Bomber Base in Pyote, Texas explains how the closing of the base began an economic collapse that reduced Pyote to a virtual ghost-town.<sup>9</sup>

In writing short histories over a large number of bases, Alexander succeeded in drawing a broad picture of the institution of Army Air Corps bases in Texas. These short histories limited him from giving the detailed data and subsequent analysis of that data which the current historiography on the subject lacks, however. These brief histories, while well researched and written, do not examine closely the economic and social consequences of the closures of these bases on their respective local communities.

In 2003, Tom Killebrew published his study, *The Royal Air Force in Texas: Training British Pilots in Terrell During World War II*. This book examined the British Royal Air Force training school in Terrell, Texas. This school was mostly autonomous from the Army Air Corps, though it was issued supplies and equipment from the Army Air Corps as though it were just another base within the Air Corps training system. Killebrew examined in his study the origins of the RAF training program in the United States, its inception, and its closing.<sup>10</sup>

Killebrew's study had two strengths. First of all, it was an interesting departure from previous studies of air bases in Texas during World War II because it dealt with the Royal Air Force rather than the Army Air Corps. Thus, Killebrew was able to examine the institution of pilot training in Texas from a different perspective than that offered by authors such as Thomas Alexander or Kenneth Ragsdale. Secondly, the history of this

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: The United States Army Air Forces and Texas During World War II – Volume II* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001): 103, 181.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Killebrew, *The Royal Air Force in Texas: Training British Pilots in Terrell During World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas, 2003): 25.

base was comprehensive in its scope. It discussed the reasons for and circumstances surrounding the inception of RAF pilot training in the United States, the how and why Terrell was chosen as the site for a base, what the training was like on the base and how it evolved over the course of the war, how and why the base closed, and what the effects of this closure were on the community of Terrell. For example, after the base closed the Texas and Pacific railroad discontinued passenger service to Terrell, prompting the city to tear down the historic 1901 passenger terminal.<sup>11</sup>

This history failed to contribute significantly to the historiography of the Army Air Corps for a number of reasons, however. First of all, the only real link between this history and the Army Air Corps was that the base in question was organized and supplied by the Air Corps. Also, this history suffered from the same problem as Kenneth Ragsdale's history of the Big Bend Air Field. While Killebrew's study was interesting and fairly extensive, it dealt with a unique base that made it unsuitable for a comparative study.<sup>12</sup>

An examination of the base's closure also was neglected. In the epilogue to *The Royal Air Force in Texas*, Tom Killebrew discussed how the air field at Terrell was bought up a piece at a time by various businessmen. He also looked at what happened to the various buildings there and how the local population felt about the closure. This explanation left some unanswered questions, though. What happened to the local economy? Did the population drop significantly? Did the local community lose political power at the state level?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The base at Terrell had originally been a commuter airport; Killebrew, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Killebrew, 11.

In 2005, Thomas Alexander once again greatly aided the historiography of the Army Air Corps in Texas with the publication of his in-depth case-study of Rattlesnake Bomber Base in Pyote, Texas. *Rattlesnake Bomber Base* followed the history of the base from before start to after finish, so to speak. Alexander began by discussing the history of the boomtown of Pyote, chronicling the town's painful cycle of boom and bust over the years. He then discussed the formation of Rattlesnake Bomber base and followed the history of the base throughout its four missions, first as a bomber training base, then as an aircraft storage facility, then as a facility for the destruction and smelting of aircraft, and finally as a radar station as part of a Cold War early warning system. Along the way, Alexander discussed at length the social relationships formed between the base personnel and members of the local communities in Pyote and Monahans and elsewhere in the county. Alexander concluded the book with a discussion of the final closure of the base and its effects on the local community, as well as briefly discussing the West Texas Children's Home, a juvenile prison built on part of the former base.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis still has relevance, even after Mr. Alexander's impressive efforts.. *Rattlesnake Bomber Base* was an in-depth study of the base and the community, and much of the information in my chapter on the base is thanks to this book. The book does still leave room for my study, however. First of all, Alexander's study was very in-depth, but for only a single base rather than a comparative study of several bases as in this thesis. Secondly, Alexander's study did discuss the effects of the closure of the base on the local community, but in a mostly anecdotal manner. My study, while drawing on

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<sup>13</sup> Killebrew, 151-2.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas E. Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base* (Abilene: State House, 2005): 18-182.

such evidence, also relies heavily on quantitative population, economic, and crime data that were at least somewhat absent from Alexander's study of the base.

There has been some scholarly research into the factors contributing to the closing of military posts in recent years. In 1992, Steven G. Koven examined the political processes behind recommending which bases should be closed. He looked at this subject by examining how each branch of the military goes about determining which bases ought to be closed and which should not. All of the approaches he discusses use a practical method of analysis in order to determine a base's desirability based on military value, return on investment, and economic and environmental impacts on the local communities of the base either closing or staying open.<sup>15</sup>

In 1995, Kenneth R. Mayer examined the use of congressional delegation in determining base closures. His study showed that by delegating the decisions over base closures to a committee, Congress was able to avoid the "collective dilemma" in which legislators sought to keep bases open in their districts while simultaneously trying to avoid a bloated military budget. The problem with this, however, is that by taking the local interest out of the issue, the effects on the local communities could get overlooked or at least not focused on.<sup>16</sup>

Both of these studies were important strides in the study of military base closures; however, they do not fit into the general historiography discussed in this chapter as they dealt with modern base closures rather than with the closing of World War II bases in Texas. These World War II era Texan bases were unique in that they were opened during

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<sup>15</sup> Steven G. Koven, "Base Closings and the Politics-Administration Dichotomy Revisited," *Public Administration Review* 52 no. 5 (Sep.-Oct., 1992): 526, 528.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth R. Mayer, "Closing Military Bases (Finally): Solving Collective Dilemmas Through Delegation," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 20 no. 3 (Aug., 1995): 396.

an historically unprecedented period of armament for a heretofore unequalled world war. The closing of these bases, therefore, should not be looked at in the same manner as the closing of military bases in what is now a relatively small, peace-time military. Further, these studies examined the subject of base closures from a national standpoint whereas this thesis is a regional study that deals only with Texas. Finally, these studies examined the legislative process of selecting bases for closure rather than examining specific bases themselves.

All of the various works described in this historiography have greatly benefited the study of the Army Air Corps in Texas. A study such as the one contained in this thesis, however, will benefit it further. This thesis is a comparative study of three bases, their effects on their respective local communities, and most importantly, the effects of the bases' closures on those communities. Such a study will demonstrate just how detrimental the loss of a military base can be for a community and also what sort of prosperity-generating assets contribute to a community's ability to recover from the loss of a base. This study has relevance not only for the historiography of the military aviation in Texas, but also for the process of deciding whether or not to close a military base in the future. Government decisions on base closures often are passed off to blue-ribbon committees for the purpose of keeping local interests out of the equation. The problem with such a process, however, is that local interests are at the heart of the matter, as I believe this thesis will show. If the government looks beyond the base in question and instead focuses on the local community, examining the community's history and its current assets, then perhaps a disaster like the one discussed in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER II

### CAMP GARY AND THE CITY OF SAN MARCOS, HAYS COUNTY, TEXAS

For over sixty years, a five hundred-acre tract of government-leased land has called San Marcos home. Situated six miles outside the San Marcos city limits, San Marcos Army Air Field, activated as part of the Gulf Coast Training Center in 1943, became a permanent, though constantly changing, fixture in the community of San Marcos and Hays County. Originally opened as San Marcos Army Air Field on 13 February 1943, the base trained around 10,000 navigators for the Army Air Corps. In May 1946 the base became a helicopter training school for the Army and, following the National Defense Act, was transferred to the Air Force in 1947, becoming San Marcos Air Force Base. In October 1949, the base was temporarily deactivated, though not abandoned, until reactivation in January 1951, at which point it began its longest mission: serving as the Air Force's largest helicopter pilot training school. On 16 May 1953, the base underwent yet another name change, becoming Gary Air Force Base, named after Second Lieutenant Edward Gary, the first San Marcan killed in World War II. In 1956, Gary Air Force Base was transferred to the Army and became Camp Gary, serving as a helicopter and fixed-wing pilot training base.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Hays, Jr., "Air Force Pilot and Instructor Training in Texas, 1940-1945," *Texas Military History* 4 no. 2 (1964): 95.

The Army finally declared the base a surplus asset in December of 1963, though it had been closed for all intents and purposes since June of 1959. Being declared surplus was not, however, the end for the base. The non-runway areas of the base soon became Gary Job Corps<sup>2</sup>, part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society project, in March 1964.<sup>3</sup> Under the Federal Surplus Act, the City of San Marcos gained control of the runway areas of the former Camp Gary,<sup>4</sup> converting them into San Marcos Municipal Airport. Gary Job Corps and San Marcos Municipal Airport have continued to occupy the former military base to the present day.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the deleterious effects of military base closures on the local communities in which they played a role, and Camp Gary played an important role in its local community. Naturally, the closing of the base had an impact on San Marcos and Hays County; however, this impact was not a devastating one, such as those described in subsequent chapters, because of other important institutions and sources of prosperity within the community.

### ***Interaction of the Base and the Community***

During its years of operation, Camp Gary played a social role in the local community, and the community, in turn, played a social role for Camp Gary. The *San*

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<sup>2</sup> The Job Corps program, instituted in 1964 by the Economic Opportunity Act, is a vocational training program for underprivileged youths.

<sup>3</sup> Shirley Rattiseau, "Gary Air Force Base." *The Handbook of Texas Online*, 6 May 2003, available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online>, accessed 27 January 2006; *San Marcos Record*, 5 June 1959, 1 December 1960. Hereafter referred to as *Record*; *Record*, 17 December 1964;

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of clarity and brevity, hereafter I will refer to the base as Camp Gary.

<sup>5</sup> Lee Hudman, "San Marcos Municipal Airport...a Valuable Resource," *San Marcos Business Journal* (May 1991), accessed from Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, vertical files, San Marcos Public Library, San Marcos, Tx, File: *Airports*.

*Marcos Record* published constant reports and editorials on the relationship between Camp Gary and the local community of San Marcos and Hays County during the years of base operation. The citizens of San Marcos seemed to hold Camp Gary as special and vital to their community. Camp Gary often played host to San Marcos and Hays County residents, especially the children. ‘Kids Day’ became a popular event at Camp Gary; a day on which hundreds of children visited the base and toured a Link trainer<sup>6</sup> and various aircraft. Camp Gary also often played host to local Cub Scout troops, which regularly visited the base to learn about helicopters and military life. And every year, Camp Gary held an open house during which area residents could come and tour the base and watch an air show.<sup>7</sup>

Camp Gary and its personnel also participated in a community service capacity. The helicopter pilots and firefighters at the base participated in various life-saving activities, such as rescuing people from cars and homes during heavy flooding. In the 1953 summer blood drive, the personnel of Camp Gary exceeded their two-hundred-pint quota by twenty-five-pints, compared to the local citizens who fell sixty-seven-pints short of their own two-hundred-pint quota. The personnel of the base donated more than blood; they regularly donated money to various charities, such as the Hays County Crippled Children’s Society. On a lighter note, Camp Gary personnel spent a considerable amount of money and personal time promoting the local little league baseball program.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A Link trainer was a stationary airplane cockpit, mounted on a universal joint and a turntable, allowing pilots to train in instrument flying more safely and more often than training in an actual plane allowed. *Bryan Daily Eagle*, 5 June 1943.

<sup>7</sup> *Record*, 3 October 1952, 26 June 1953, 11 September 1953.

<sup>8</sup> *Record*, 12 September 1952, 7 August 1953, 30 March 1956, 26 June 1953.



The citizens of San Marcos and Hays County reciprocated in this social relationship. For instance, the residents often organized going-away parties for the higher ranking officers whenever the latter transferred from Camp Gary, as was common during the war. San Marcos had its own local chapter of the United Services Organizations (USO) that held regular dances and other parties for camp personnel. In 1955, the city of San Marcos donated sixty acres of land to Camp Gary for the purpose of building free housing for one-hundred families of airmen stationed there. By the time the base closed, the amount of land donated by the people of San Marcos totaled over 625 acres.<sup>9</sup>

When Camp Gary closed in the summer of 1959, a part of the San Marcos community's heart went with it. Townspeople held a big going-away party for base personnel in the form of a Texas barbeque, with Senators Lyndon Johnson and Ralph Yarborough and Representative Homer Thornberry as honored guests.<sup>10</sup> After the base closed, San Marcos went through an emotional depression; however, the future did not hold much of an economic depression for the town.

### ***Population and the Economy***

Having a military base in a town affects the local community financially, simply because the base brings more people to the town. Base personnel often live off-base and contribute to the local community by paying taxes, paying for utility services, patronizing local businesses, renting and buying land and houses, also building houses, and using city services such as the delivery of babies at the hospital. Thus, the changing population of a

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<sup>9</sup> *Record*, 12 September 1952, 14 Jan 1955, 30 April 1959.

<sup>10</sup> *Record*, 23 April 1959.

military base town implicitly indicates changes in the economy.

At the height of its operations in 1955, Camp Gary employed over 4,700 civilian personnel. Of these employees, around 3,800 of them were permanent residents of San Marcos while about 1,500 of them were temporary student workers. Camp Gary’s payroll in 1955 totaled \$13,500,000, according to Major Robert C. Hammond, a staff officer at the base. The Major estimated that \$3,000 per month of this payroll “stay[ed] in San Marcos. At first this estimate seems like a small amount of the payroll; however, as Hammond was speaking to the monthly meeting of the Retail Merchants Association of San Marcos about how to increase their business with the base personnel, it is likely that he meant that \$3000 a month was spent specifically in San Marcos retail establishments, not taking into account things like rent, utilities, and service industries.<sup>11</sup>

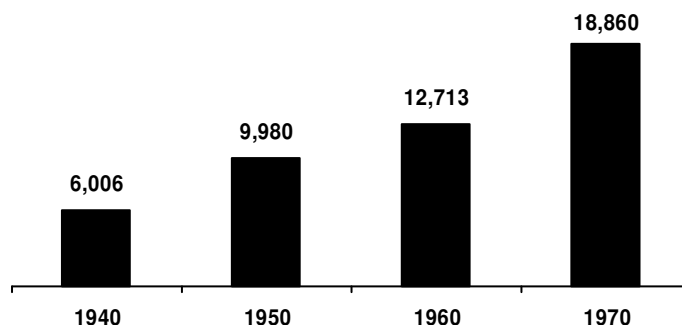


Fig. 2.1. The population history for San Marcos, Texas from 1940 to 1970.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Record*, 21 January 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Chart created by author. Data from Planning and Development Services Department of the City of San Marcos, *San Marcos Horizons: City Master Plan, Chapter 2: San Marcos Today* (San Marcos, TX: Planning and Development Services Department, adopted by city council February 1996), 7.

As shown in Figure 2.1, the population of San Marcos increased each decade, though more slowly between 1950 and 1960 than between 1940 and 1950 or between 1960 and 1970. The United States Census Bureau only checks the population every ten years, making it difficult to determine population changes precisely. Births are recorded on a daily basis, however, and thus provide a more accurate idea of the population during a given year. Because there is no way to accurately determine the exact population from year to year, the birthrate does at least give some indication.

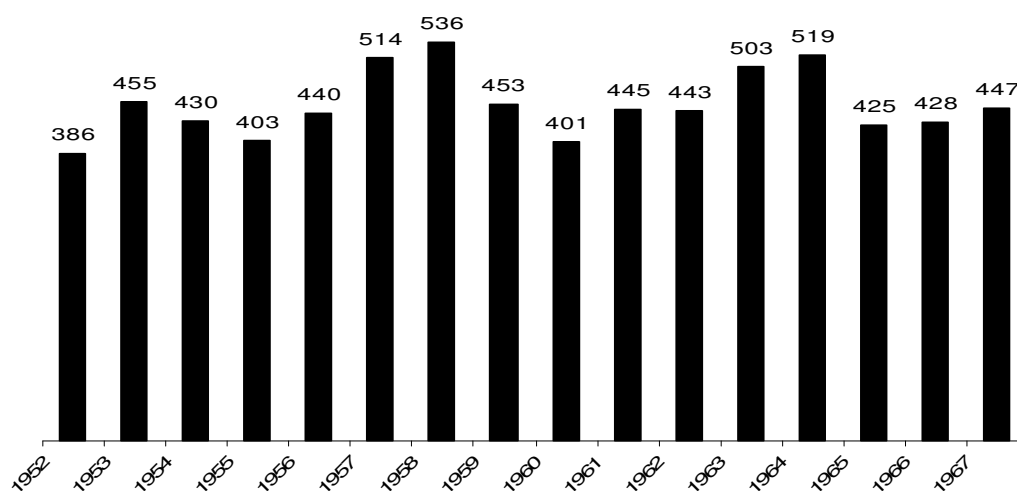


Fig. 2.2. The birthrate for Hays County, Texas, from 1952 to 1967.<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1956, Camp Gary was transferred to the Army and became a fixed-wing training school under the management of a civilian contractor, William J. Graham & Son. Under this new management, Camp Gary went from having a peak personnel of over 4,700 to around 1,350, only 750 of whom were permanent residents.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved by author from *Adoption Searching*, <http://adoptionsearching.com>, HRG Inc., David T. Gray trustee. Database, first accessed 30 March 2006.

As shown in Figure 2.2, the birthrate did not decline, and even rose, when the base changed management and lost a large number of personnel; however, the change to Army management meant that many of the base personnel who had previously been members of the military, and thus less likely to settle down in San Marcos, were replaced by civilian contractors who were more likely to put down roots in the community. So, while the population probably dropped when the base changed ownership from the Air Force to the Army, the birthrate naturally rose with the influx of non-military residents to the community. The editorials of the time reflected the same sentiment on the part of the people of San Marcos and Hays County. The local community viewed the military personnel of Camp Gary as temporary citizens and welcomed the civilian contractors, whom they viewed as more permanent.<sup>15</sup>

Then, in 1959, the base closed and many of these people left town as well. As shown in Figure 2.2, the birthrate dropped dramatically in 1959 and 1960. The closing of Camp Gary seems to have had a negative impact on the community of San Marcos and Hays County in terms of population growth. However, the birthrate began to slowly rise in 1961 and was back above the five hundred mark by 1963. Also, the number of children enrolled in public schools in the San Marcos Independent School District did not decrease appreciably after the closure. Superintendent Joe Hutchinson said that records indicated that attendance declined “only slightly” in the 1959-1960 school year.<sup>16</sup> So, while the closing of Camp Gary had a negative impact on the local community in terms

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<sup>14</sup> *Record*, 26 September 1956, 7 December 1956.

<sup>15</sup> *Record*, 21 September 1956.

<sup>16</sup> *Record*, 2 June 1960.

of population growth, this impact was not a devastating one and the community quickly recovered.

As shown in Figure 2.3, the transfer of the base to the Army actually corresponded to a dramatic rise in tax revenues. The influx of civilian contractors did not just mean an increase in childbirths, it represented an increase in home-buying as well. In a 1957 survey of San Marcos realtors, the realtors noted: “The average individual here now...is older – with more money to invest in a home, and more children to encourage them to do so.”<sup>17</sup>

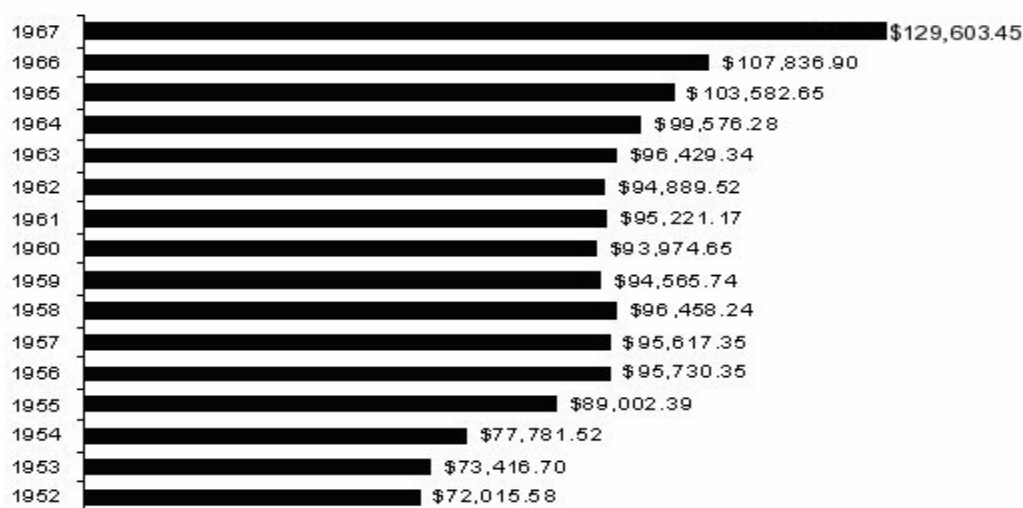


Fig. 2.3. Adjusted tax revenues for Hays County from 1952 to 1967.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Graham Roundup* 2, no. 47, 16 January 1959, found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, vertical files, San Marcos Public Library, San Marcos, Tx. File: *Gary Air Force Base #1*.

<sup>18</sup> In 1959, in order to finance a new hospital, the tax commissioners for Hays County permanently increased property evaluations by 50%. This increase is noted in Hays County Tax Roll, 1956-1961, Land Tax, Hays County Annex, Tax Assessor’s Office, San Marcos, TX, and explained in *Record*, 18 June 1959. The original values and rates are recorded in the appendix 1, table 1; Chart created by author. Data retrieved by author from Hays County Tax Roll Statements, 1952-1967, Hays County Annex, Tax Assessor’s Office, San Marcos, TX.

The data support the realtors' sentiments, as 1956 brought a dramatic rise of \$6,727.96 in property tax revenues for the county. And when the base closed in 1959, property taxes dropped; however, the revenues only dropped by \$1,892.50 from 1960 to 1959 and then another \$591.09 in 1960. So, when Camp Gary closed the community of San Marcos and Hays County experienced a negative impact in terms of tax revenues; however, this impact was only temporary.

Building permits (shown below in Figure 2.4) issued during the period give another indication of prosperity in the town. Building permits for the city of San Marcos dropped significantly when Camp Gary closed; however, within two years, the permit revenues were already on the rise. The loss of Camp Gary had a slight impact on the community in terms of the number of new buildings being erected but, again, not to a devastating degree. In spite of an exodus of around five hundred civilian employees from Camp Gary in just one week, the month of June 1959 saw a record \$80,640 in new building permits. Construction went ahead on the new hospital, already in the final phases of planning when the base was closed in 1959. Later in 1959, Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos began over \$1,000,000 in new construction. By December 1959, the construction on the campus reached a total cost of \$2,250,000. Construction also began that year on a new post office that cost approximately \$576,000. Many downtown and area businesses received major renovations or new buildings, and a number of new businesses came to San Marcos in spite of the base closure, including two large industrial plants. For instance, Westwood Corporation of San Antonio began construction in November 1959

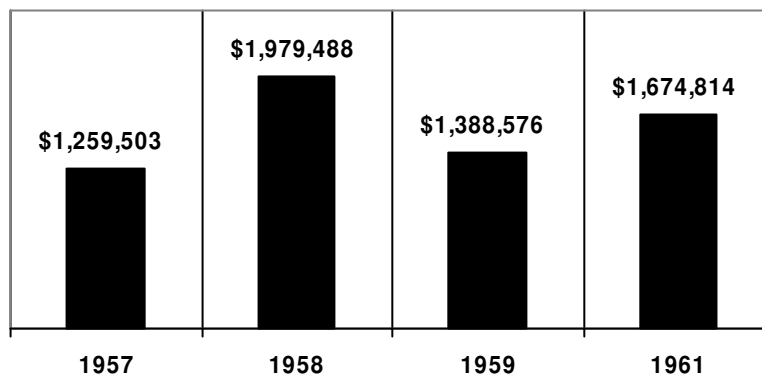


Fig. 2.4. Building permit revenues for San Marcos from 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1961.<sup>19</sup>

on a new furniture factory in San Marcos, large enough that it later employed about two-hundred San Marcans. Also, a major Austin nylon manufacturing company bought a closed ceramics plant and began operations in San Marcos in 1961.<sup>20</sup>

On top of all this construction, retailers in San Marcos reported high sales in the years following the closure of Camp Gary: \$18,575,000 in 1960 and \$18,880,000 in 1961.<sup>21</sup> New construction and high retail sales from this period indicate that San Marcos prospered in spite of the closure of Camp Gary. An editorial from the period ran a headline stating “Business, building booming in spite of Gary Closing,” and went on to say that, though the closure of Camp Gary had been hard on the town emotionally, the

<sup>19</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved by author from *Record*, 4 January 1962. Data for 1960 was omitted because it could not be found.

<sup>20</sup> *Record*, 9 July, 1959, 23 July 1959, 10 December 1959, 5 November 1959, 10 December 1959, 6 August 1959, 5 January 1961.

<sup>21</sup> Only these two years were reported in *Record*, 4 January 1962. The San Marcos Chamber of Commerce, which made these annual reports, has since destroyed the records from this period. Thus, the data for 1959 and earlier is irretrievable.

city economy was booming.<sup>22</sup> In December 1963, an editorial writer looked back on the previous four years and stated that “The economy of the community has not been seriously affected one way or the other”<sup>23</sup> by the closure. The evidence suggests that the editorial writer overstated his case; however, these opinions and the data do demonstrate that the community took the loss of Camp Gary in stride and quickly recovered. How, then, can one account for the apparent prosperity of San Marcos in light of the loss of Camp Gary and the dip in the population?

During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s San Marcos gained wide popularity as a tourist destination. The underwater show at Aquarena Springs brought visitors from all around the United States and sometimes from foreign countries, as did the adjacent Texana Village. The two attractions together had 265,000 visitors in 1959. Wonder Cave, a natural cave and park a few miles south of San Marcos, had 73,000 first-time visitors (repeat visitors did not have to pay and thus were not counted). San Marcos also played host to a bi-monthly golf tournament that brought in players and spectators from as far away as Houston, Texas. People from the surrounding Texas Hill Country traveled to San Marcos in order to hold various social gatherings at the town’s Memorial Park.<sup>24</sup> This substantial tourism industry contributed to the economy of the town by providing retailers with customers, but it was not the only institution in San Marcos to do so.

During this period of time, San Marcos was home to three schools: San Marcos Normal School, San Marcos Baptist Academy, and Southwest Texas State University.

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<sup>22</sup> A photocopy of this editorial was found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, file: *Gary Air Force Base #1*. A note made in pencil states that the editorial is from the *San Marcos Record* but there is no date and this author was unable to find the editorial in that paper.

<sup>23</sup> *Record*, 10 December 1963, found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, File: *Gary Air Force Base #1*.

<sup>24</sup> *Record*, 9 June 1960.



These schools, in the words of a *San Marcos Record* editor, “cost [San Marcos] nothing, yet ... add greatly to [its] community wealth – outside dollars coming to San Marcos.”<sup>25</sup>

The enrollment for Southwest Texas State University during this period broke the previous year’s record every semester between 1959 and 1964.<sup>26</sup> College students rented houses, patronized local retailers, and sometimes ended up staying in the town after graduation, becoming a part of the tax-paying populace, permanent customers of retailers, home-buyers, employees, and employers. The constantly increasing enrollment at the university resulted in financial gain for the local community, on top of also necessitating more and more expensive building projects on and adjacent to campus. In addition, while the enrollment figures for the other two schools were not nearly as high, the Baptist Academy, which had a mostly high-income student body, and the Normal School both added their own small populations to that of San Marcos and helped to support the community’s economic growth.

When the federal government announced that Camp Gary would close in 1959, the city of San Marcos immediately began looking into possible civilian uses for the base. After its procurement from the federal government, city leaders considered leasing the land to businesses for industrial use, but kept municipal use as their first choice. They also considered leasing the land to Southwest Texas State University, converting the land into classrooms for the San Marcos Independent School District, or building a new municipal airport on the runway section of the base.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Record*, 2 July 1959.

<sup>26</sup> This information was found in the *San Marcos Record*, 1959 – 1964. For specific enrollment figures and dates, see table 2 in the appendix.

<sup>27</sup> *Record*, 19 December 1963, found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, file: *Gary Air Force Base #1*.

On 20 November 1964, President Lyndon Johnson formally announced the creation of Gary Job Corps on the grounds of the former Camp Gary.<sup>28</sup> The Job Corps center opened the next spring and was officially dedicated on 10 April 1965.<sup>29</sup> The *San Marcos Record* reported that the citizens of San Marcos were thrilled and thankful to receive the new Job Corps installation. The U.S. federal government constructed the facility at no cost to San Marcos or Hays County on the non-runway section of Camp Gary, thus not interfering with San Marcos citizens' efforts to convert the runway section into a new municipal airport. Not only was the Job Corps cost-free for the city, but also it meant new jobs, both for the installation's construction and for security once construction was finished.<sup>30</sup> New jobs meant more people, and more people meant higher retail and tax revenues. As indicated in Figure 2.3, tax revenues jumped by over \$3,000 in 1964 and continued to rise at an ever-increasing rate each year up to 1967.

The new municipal airport also added to the prosperity of San Marcos. San Marcos originally built a municipal airport in November of 1957. However, the original airport suffered from a number of problems. First of all, it had a very low capacity for storing planes - only thirty-two at its peak. Secondly, the base lacked paved runways, making it unable to service larger planes or commercial planes. Finally, the base lacked indoor plumbing, a detraction that convinced many pilots to fly farther on to another

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<sup>28</sup> *Gary Job Corps* newsletter, 10 April 1965, found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, vertical files, San Marcos Public Library, San Marcos, Tx. File: *Gary Job Corps Training Center #2*.

<sup>29</sup> "Dedication Ceremonies" program pamphlet dated 10 April 1965, found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, file: *Gary Job Corps Training Center #2*.

<sup>30</sup> *Record*, 26 November 1964, 7 January 1965.

airport. And yet, a municipal airport meant a valuable asset to San Marcos as it was the only small town in a wide area that had one.<sup>31</sup>

In 1961, the city of San Marcos paid to have the runways paved at the old municipal airport, and this simple improvement increased business at the airport by 100 percent. In early 1964 the city had Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspectors come to San Marcos to inspect Camp Gary in order to evaluate the possibilities of using it for a new municipal airport.<sup>32</sup> Construction followed, and in 1966 the city of San Marcos gained control of the airport under the Federal Surplus Properties Act, under the condition that the city maintain it as an airport.

The new San Marcos Municipal Airport became a source of revenue for the town in a number of ways. The airport brought in visitors (pilots and their clients) who patronized the hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, and other retail businesses of San Marcos. The airport also brought tax revenues to the city and the schools.<sup>34</sup> Owners of airplanes by law had to declare a home airport for their craft and then pay taxes on their multi-million-dollar airplanes to the local government of said airport, though the brunt of the tax burden fell on the local residents, of course.<sup>35</sup>

The community of San Marcos and Hays County suffered a negative impact when Camp Gary closed down; however, the community quickly recovered from this impact.

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<sup>31</sup> *Record*, 18 December 1958, 16 July 1959.

<sup>32</sup> *Record*, 22 June 1961, 13 February 1964.

<sup>34</sup> At the time the airport was built, it was just over the county line in Caldwell County, so Hays County did not receive direct tax revenues as a result of it, though San Marcos and San Marcos Independent School District did. Lee Hudman, "San Marcos Municipal Airport," found in Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, file: *Airports*.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Hudman, "San Marcos Municipal Airport," Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, file: *Airports*.

Tax revenues, when adjusted for increased land evaluation rates, dropped after the closure of the base, but soon began to rise again. The population apparently dropped after the base closure but that, too, began to rise again soon enough. And while business suffered slightly in the form of decreased building permit revenues, the overall economy of the city bounced back quickly. Businesses, new and old, found homes in San Marcos, tourists frequented the city's various tourist attractions, college students flocked to its university and patronized its retail establishments, and the federal government brought Gary Job Corps and an FAA-approved municipal airport to the former site of Camp Gary. As important as Camp Gary was to the community, San Marcos took the loss in stride and prospered in spite of losing the base.

### *Crime*

Camp Gary, both in terms of its existence and then of its absence, impacted the crime rate of the community of San Marcos and Hays County. The personnel at the base contributed to the crime rate. And yet, the felony crime rate actually increased when the base closed.

Personnel at the base, especially during its time as a large air force installation, participated in all manner of crimes; however, they mostly committed misdemeanors. When one considers that military personnel at the time were likely to be young and then further considers that military personnel stationed at Camp Gary were away from their home communities, the idea that Camp Gary personnel were heavily involved in misdemeanor crimes seems predictable. In 1952, for instance, two airmen from Camp Gary pleaded guilty to desecrating graves. The airmen and two other young men and

four young women got drunk and then went to a local graveyard and pushed over tombstones.<sup>37</sup>

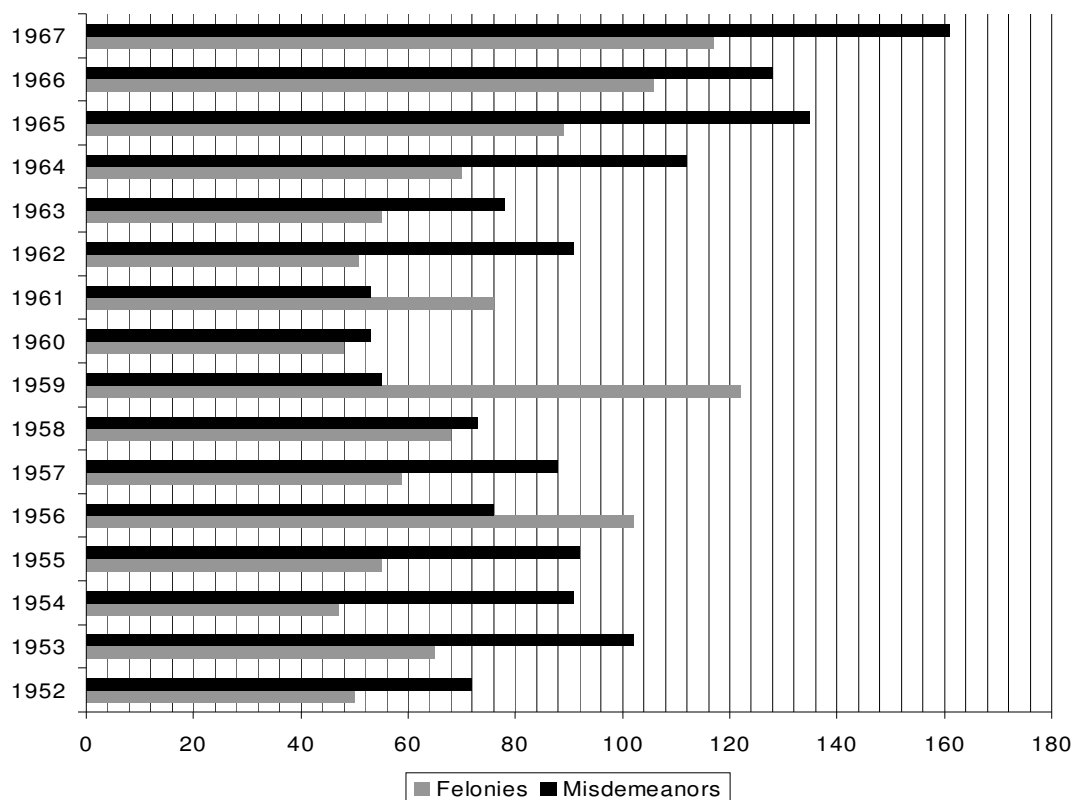


Fig. 2.5. Felony and Misdemeanor Crime Statistics for Hays County from 1952-1967.<sup>38</sup>

Also, according to the *San Marcos Record*, Hays County built a reputation during this time for being especially vigilant in catching people Driving While Intoxicated

<sup>37</sup> *Record*, 12 September 1952.

<sup>38</sup> Chart created by author. Data for felonies retrieved by author from Court Docket, Felonies, 194?-1975, Office of the District Clerk, Hays County Courthouse, San Marcos, TX. Data for misdemeanors retrieved by author from Misdemeanor Criminal Index for County Court, 1952-1970, Hays County Clerk's Office, Hays County Courthouse, San Marcos, TX. Two notes to those who may wish to find this data on their own: first, it is illegal to make copies of either the Felony Court Docket or the Misdemeanor Criminal Index, so, you have to count out the number of crimes by hand. Second, when I retrieved the data on 16 and 17 March 2006, both items existed only in hand-written, paper form. Since that time, the District Clerk has had the Felony Court Docket digitized for convenience and efficiency.

(DWI).<sup>39</sup> During the time the base was open, nearly every single weekly issue of the *San Marcos Record* had at least one and usually two or three stories about car accidents in and around San Marcos, most of them resulting from DWIs. In fact, the second week of March 1953 set a record in the number of car accidents.<sup>40</sup> A large number of the stories involving alcohol-related car accidents reported that a member of Camp Gary's military personnel was involved. In fact, the commanders of Camp Gary were so concerned about this problem that in 1959 they began Operation Life Saving, a program that aimed to reduce the number of Camp Gary personnel involved in car accidents.<sup>41</sup>

The data support the suggestion that the military personnel of Camp Gary were especially responsible for misdemeanors. As shown in Figure 2.5, misdemeanors reached as high as 102 in 1953, one of the years that Camp Gary was at its peak operational capacity as the Air Force's largest helicopter school. The misdemeanor rate stayed at over ninety incidents a year for the next two years and then dropped to seventy-six in 1956, the same year that Camp Gary downsized significantly and came under the management of civilian contractors. Then, in 1959, the year that Camp Gary closed, the misdemeanor rate dropped to fifty-five and stayed that low for three years. The misdemeanor rate did not jump back to above the hundred mark until 1964, the same year that Gary Job Corps came to town.

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<sup>39</sup> The Felony Court Docket and Misdemeanor Criminal Index both list DWI cases because it was up to the discretion of the court whether or not to treat the crime as a misdemeanor or as a felony. I discuss DWI charges in this paragraph mostly because DWI is a traffic related charge and also because it made up the bulk of misdemeanor charges listed in the Index. The information about Hays County's reputation in regards to catching DWIs comes from *Record*, 12 September 1952.

<sup>40</sup> *Record*, 1952-1959, 13 March 1953, 11 September 1953.

<sup>41</sup> *Record*, 7 January 1955.

While the fluctuations in the misdemeanor rate coincide logically with the fluctuations in the status of Camp Gary, fluctuations in the felony rate seem to follow a totally different pattern. During the years of peak operations at Camp Gary, the felony rate was low. It spiked above one hundred in 1956, the year the base downsized and again in 1959, the year the base closed. When the newspaper reported on felony cases, the cases very rarely involved base personnel. One incident in which a case did involve base personnel, it involved a statutory rape charge against an enlisted man in the summer of 1952; however, judging from the *San Marcos Record* from the time, such cases of base personnel being involved in felonies appear to have been rare.<sup>42</sup> The increased felony rates coincide with dips in the birth rate, dips or stagnation in the tax revenues growth rate, and the 1959 dip in building permit revenues. A possible explanation, then, is that in times of relatively lower prosperity for the town, people became more desperate and more likely to commit felonious crimes.

### ***Conclusions***

Camp Gary played an important role in the community of San Marcos and Hays County. When the base closed, many in the community felt feelings of resentment and of having been used and disregarded.<sup>43</sup> The loss of Camp Gary impacted the town negatively. The birthrate dropped, adjusted tax revenues decreased, building permit revenues decreased, and the felony rate skyrocketed.

So, how did San Marcos and Hays County survive and even prosper? The answer rests in just how central a role Camp Gary played in the community of San Marcos and

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<sup>42</sup> *Record*, 26 September 1952, 1952-1959.

<sup>43</sup> *Record*, 9 July 1959.

Hays County. Unlike the bases discussed in subsequent chapters, Camp Gary was not the only prosperity-generating institution in its community. San Marcos and Hays County played host to a number of tourist attractions, a thriving business community, three institutions of higher education, and, later, an installation of Lyndon Johnson's Job Corps program. There was also construction of a municipal airport, the only small-town municipal airport in the area at one time. Thus, while the community of San Marcos and Hays County suffered a temporary setback as a result of the closure of Camp Gary, the closure did not devastate the community, which survived and thrived. That is more than can be said for the communities to which we now turn our attention.



### CHAPTER III

#### MARFA ARMY AIRFIELD AND THE CITY OF MARFA, PRESIDIO COUNTY, TEXAS

The small, West Texas town of Marfa lies on the Marfa Plateau, a highland plain, nestled between the Davis Mountains to the north, the Chisos Mountains to the southeast, and the Chinati Mountains to the southwest.<sup>1</sup> The county seat of Presidio County, Marfa owes its modest fame to its proximity to Big Bend National Park, the filming of the 1956 James Dean and Elizabeth Taylor film, *Giant*, and the famous Marfa Lights.<sup>2</sup> There was and is more to Marfa, however, than just these tourist attractions. During World War II, Marfa was home to Marfa Army Airfield, another installation of the Gulf Coast Training Center.<sup>3</sup>

Marfa's affair with the US military actually began long before Marfa Army Airfield (AAF).<sup>4</sup> In 1911, the US Army stationed cavalry units at what they eventually named Camp Marfa in order to patrol the Rio Grande because of the turbulent Mexican Revolution. The camp remained on a permanent basis and was renamed Fort D. A.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Bennet, "Marfa, Texas," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, 6 June 2001. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/hjm4.html>. Accessed 11 October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The Marfa Lights are an unexplained phenomenon in which lights with no discernible source bob and dance around the desert outside of Marfa. A tourist attraction for the city, the Marfa Lights have garnered so much attention that a viewing platform and small, outdoor museum has been erected on the highway just outside of town.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter II, first footnote.

<sup>4</sup> AAF is the accepted abbreviation for Army Airfield. The base underwent various name changes, but for the duration of this thesis I will refer to it as AAF in order to avoid confusion.

Russell in 1930 but closed, presumably permanently, in 1933. Only two years later, however, the fort reopened as an army officer training school. Fort D. A. Russell remained active until 23 October 1945; however, the fort employed only around 700 personnel, and while this definitely contributed to the town's prosperity, it did not really compare to the more than 5,000 total permanent personnel plus pilot trainees of Marfa AAF, the subject of this chapter.<sup>5</sup>

Planning for the construction of Marfa AAF began in March 1942, and the base was officially activated on 17 August 1942 as an advanced flight training school for multiengine aircraft. As stated above, more than 5,000 permanent personnel were stationed at the base, and flight training officially began on the first anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1942. At the peak of flight training, there were nearly 500 aircraft assigned to the base, with the Cessna AT-17 as the primary trainer. In total, nearly 8,000 cadets graduated from the Marfa Advanced Flying School.<sup>6</sup>

Relative to the other bases examined in this thesis, Marfa AAF had a short lifespan closing with the graduation of its final flight class on 23 May 1945. Only five weeks later, however, the base reopened under Troop Carrier Command as 818 Air Base. This phase of the base was short-lived, too, and the facility went on standby status on 30 November 1945 and almost totally was abandoned by 20 December. The military finally declared the base surplus on 22 October 1946, but between the deactivation date and the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: Volume II* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001), 119-120; Lee Bennett, "Ford D. A. Russell," *The New Handbook of Texas 2* (1996): 1096; Alexander, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Marfa Advanced Flying School was the official designation of the base for most of its lifetime. However, to avoid confusion I will continue to refer to it as Marfa AAF or Marfa Army Airfield. The official designation was found in *Big Bend Sentinel*, 2 October 1942. Hereafter referred to as *Sentinel*.

surplus date, the base had only around a dozen officers at any given time and only a small service crew to keep the base from deteriorating.<sup>7</sup>

The buildings on the base were sold at auction, some going to Marfa and some to nearby Alpine. The land was turned back over to grazing for cattle, and the runways and roadways of the base suffered the inevitable decay of time. Today, all that remains of a base once crawling with activity are a few cracked strips of concrete, a building foundation or two, fields full of dried-up grass and brush, and two low, crumbling walls that once framed the main gate to the base.<sup>8</sup>

Marfa Army Airfield played an important role for the community of Marfa and Presidio County. Continuing this thesis' purpose of examining the deleterious effects of military base closures on local communities, this chapter will attempt to determine the effects of Marfa AAF's closure on its local community. Similarly with the case of Camp Gary and the community of San Marcos and Hays County, the closure of Marfa AAF was a damaging blow to the local community of Marfa and Presidio County. Also similarly, this blow was not a killing one, because of the presence and creation of other prosperity-generating institutions. The cases differ, however, in that although Marfa did recover from the closure of the airbase, it was only a partial recovery.

### ***Interaction of the Base and the Community***

During its three and a half years of operation, Marfa AAF played a social role in the community of Marfa and Presidio County, and the community in turn played a social role for the base. The *Big Bend Sentinel*, the only newspaper of record for many miles

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander, 121-134; *Sentinel*, 21 December 1945, 25 October 1946, 23 August 1946.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, 136; Personal visit by author, August 2006.

and based in Marfa, demonstrated a community interest in the goings-on at the base. For the entire lifetime of the base, nearly every single issue of the paper reported news on it. These reports included news of the arrivals and departures of base officers, a weekly column on the promotions of base officers, a big “Marfa AAF AFS Issue” full of human interest stories about the base personnel, welcoming advertisements from local businesses, and other various articles on the social events associated with the base.<sup>9</sup>

Newspaper articles from this period reflect a vast number of social interactions between the personnel of Marfa AAF and their families and people within the local community. The base had a basketball team that competed with local high school teams, and some of the games were even held at the base gymnasium. Young men considering service in the Army Air Corps were invited to tour the base, and the base’s public relations officer wrote a series of editorials in favor of the Army Air Corps in the *Big Bend Sentinel*. As one might expect, the men of Marfa also married local girls, and the local paper’s society pages were constantly announcing such marriages. Local churches often featured base officers as guest speakers, presentations from the wives of base personnel, and even choir soloists from amongst the men of Marfa AAF. The sons of Marfa personnel competed in regional Boy Scouts competitions. Parades were held at the base for Army Day and Victory in Europe Day, an open house was held for the local residents to come tour the base, and the base color guard performed in the county rodeo. The base even held a beauty contest one year for local girls, with the winner representing Marfa AAF at the El Paso Sun Bowl. On a more serious note, the base personnel helped serve the community. On one occasion, a Marfa airman saved two women from drowning in nearby Alpine. On another occasion, the base personnel contributed to

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<sup>9</sup> *Sentinel*, 1942-1945; *Sentinel*, 19 February 1943.

Marfa's donation to the Red Cross War Fund Drive, with 430 civilian workers and more than 1,500 airmen giving at least \$1 each and making up about half of the town's entire contribution.<sup>10</sup>

The community of Marfa and Presidio County in turn gave back to the base on a social level. Marfa residents donated recreation equipment and furniture to the base for use in their clubs and recreation areas. They also gave the young airmen without cars rides to local sporting events. For those airmen who were far from home, local residents invited them to Christmas dinners, and local women played substitute mothers for Mother's Day. The Rotary clubs of Marfa and Alpine paid for the construction of an adobe block entrance to Marfa AAF, and the community held a big celebration in honor of the base's two-year anniversary. When the base finally closed, the townspeople held a number of going-away parties, dances, and barbeques for the departing airmen and their families.<sup>11</sup>

Just as with the case of San Marcos and Camp Gary, the closure of Marfa AAF was an emotional blow for the community of Marfa and Presidio County. As reflected in the local newspaper, the local community suffered an emotional depression and in the words of the mayor, the town "fell on its face."<sup>12</sup> Sinking spirits and a sense of loss would not be the only blow dealt to the community by the base closure.

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<sup>10</sup> *Sentinel*, 25 December 1942, 9 February 1945, 2 July 1943, 22 October 1943, 26 May 1944, 18 August 1944, 14 February 1945, 6 April 1945, 18 May 1945, 11 May 1945, 3 August 1945, 8 September 1944, 15 December 1944, 27 August 1943, 9 March 1945.

<sup>11</sup> *Sentinel*, 11 December 1942, 4 December 1942, 18 December 1942, 7 May 1943, 9 February 1945, 11 August 1944, 1 June 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, 135.

### *Population and the Economy*

As stated in the proceeding chapter, having a military base in a town affects the local community financially, simply because the base brings more people to the town. Base personnel living off-base also contribute to the local community by paying taxes, paying for utility services, renting and buying land and houses, and also building houses. Whether they live on the base or off and whether they are permanent personnel or just flight cadets there for a month, people at the base patronize local businesses and use various city services such as sending mail through the post office or having babies at the hospital. Thus, the changing population of a military base town implicitly indicates changes in the economy.

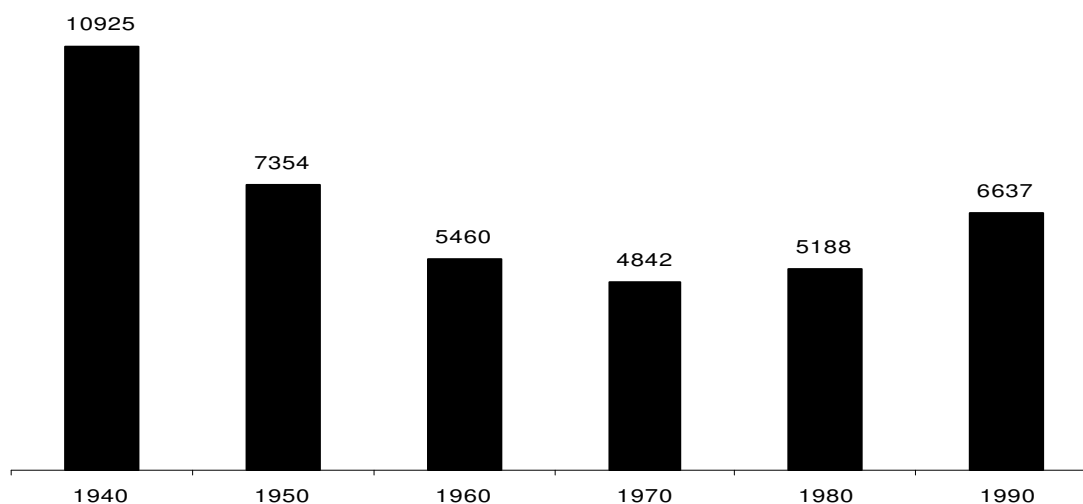


Fig. 3.1. The population history for Presidio County, Texas from 1940 to 1990.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Chart created by author. Data from United States Census Bureau, *County Population Census Counts 1900-90*. <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tx190090.txt>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.

As indicated in the figure above, the official population of Presidio County was 10,925 in 1940, almost three years before Marfa AAF opened, and was down to 7,354 by 1950, just four years after the base closed – a population drop of 30 percent in only ten years. When taking into account that the base was opened and closed in the same decade as this drop, it would seem that the base closure had a negative effect on the county’s population; however, as the census is only taken every ten years, one cannot make any conclusive statements based on those data. Instead, one must look to other sets of data which can supplement the census data and give a more detailed picture of population fluctuations in the county during the period. Just as with the previous chapter, we look to birth data, recorded on a daily basis, to gain a clearer picture of the population trends.

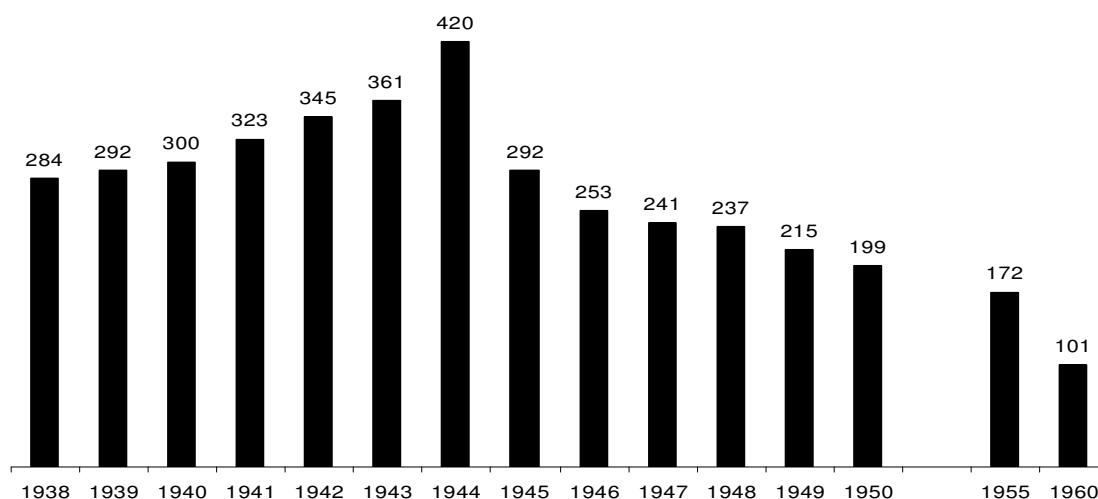


Fig. 3.2. The birthrate for Presidio County from 1938 to 1950, 1955, and 1960.<sup>14</sup>

The data from the figure above are based on the number of children born in hospitals in Presidio County for the given years. The data show a steady increase in

<sup>14</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved by author from *Adoption Searching*, <http://adoptionsearching.com>, HRG Inc., David T. Gray trustee. Database, accessed on 27 September 2006.

childbirth from 1938 through 1943, the first year the base was operational. In mid-1943, there were 3,131 people assigned to Marfa AAF.<sup>15</sup> The big jump in the birthrate, and presumably the county population, occurred in 1944. It is impossible to ascertain how many people were stationed at the base during any particular time aside from the mid-1943 number stated above, which was the result of a private rental survey; however, it is known that 1944 witnessed a large expansion of the base's mission and the number of different occupations that came to be trained or employed there.<sup>16</sup> It would stand to reason that the peak of the base's personnel complement was in 1944 and possibly in early 1945 (early 1945 only, because of the dates of the base closure in mid-1945). As shown in the above figure, the birthrate dropped by a massive 30 percent between 1944 and 1945. There may be other explanations for why the birthrate and presumably the population would drop so dramatically; however, the base closing, reopening, and closing again all in 1945 would seem to indicate at least some connection.

The data in Chapter II would cause one to expect a drop in population and the birthrate after a base closure. In the case of Marfa, however, the birthrate actually continued to decline in the years following the closure of Marfa AAF. In fact, the birthrate continued to decline steadily for the rest of the time studied, and as shown in Figure 3.1, the population of the county continued to decline decade by decade until 1970. Judging from the dates of the base closure, the census data, and the birthrate data, the local community did not begin to recover from the deleterious effects associated with the closure of Marfa AAF, in terms of population, for at least twenty-five years.

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Bennet, "Marfa, Texas."



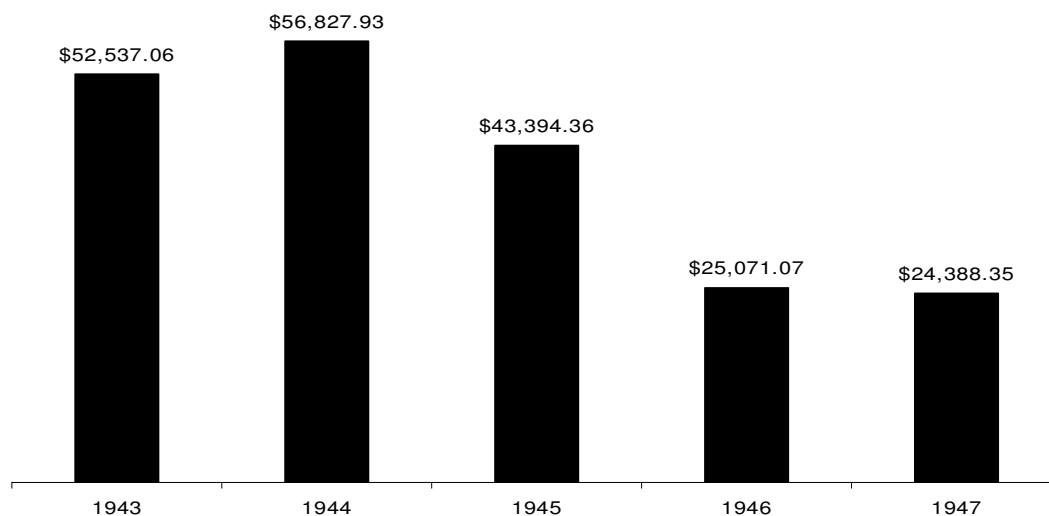


Fig. 3.3. Postal receipts in Marfa, Texas from 1943 to 1946.<sup>17</sup>

Postal receipts (shown above in Figure 3.3) create a good segue from the topic of population to the very much related topic of economic prosperity. Postal receipts include rental of post office boxes as well as money generated by sending mail with stamps or metering. While the receipts do not give exact population numbers, just as with the birthrate data they directly correlate to the population. They also represent a source of income for the city. As shown above, the receipts fluctuate in the same fashion as the birthrate data from earlier, peaking in 1944 and the dropping dramatically in 1945 and again in 1946, and then declining at a less drastic rate in 1947, yet declining nevertheless. Here is another example in which it would appear that the closure of the base caused a drop in both the population and the economic prosperity of the local community.

This conclusion is further supported by a look at the postal receipts on a quarterly basis. As stated earlier, the base closed in May 1945. It reopened in July 1945, but with

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<sup>17</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from *Sentinel*, 9 January 1945, 10 January 1947, 23 January 1948. Only the receipts for Marfa were used as they were the only ones available.

a more limited complement of around 1,800, and then closed again in November 1945.<sup>18</sup> In the first quarter of 1945, the postal receipts for Marfa totaled at \$13,419.59 and for the second quarter they totaled at \$12,117.28. If the receipts had stayed at generally this amount per quarter for the rest of the year, the total receipts would have reached around \$50,000, a number fairly commensurate with the 1943 and 1944 totals. Such was not to be the case, however, as the third and fourth quarters of 1945 showed postal receipts totaling \$8,095.30 and \$9,762.19, respectively, giving the total of \$43,394.36 as shown in Figure 3.3. So, the 24 percent decrease in postal receipts between 1944 and 1945 can be attributed to the half-year period in which the base was either closed or on relatively limited status. This decrease in the latter half of 1945, along with the 42 percent decrease in the following year, indicates that the closure of Marfa AAF was directly responsible for a decrease in at least one area of the community's prosperity.

As demonstrated in the Chapter II, tax revenues offer a very concrete picture of the state of economic prosperity in a given county. Before discussing the results contained in Figure 3.4, it is important to understand how the tax data are compiled, or more specifically, when. These tax rolls were compiled by the county tax assessor and recorded in the fall of the year in which they reported. This fact is important to keep in mind when considering the following data. As the data were compiled in the fall of each year, the totals for 1945 reflect only the latter part of 1944 and then the early part of the year, when the base was still open, and the totals for 1946 reflect the end of 1945, when the base was in the process of closing or was closed, and the early part of 1946, when the base was totally shut down, and so forth.

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<sup>18</sup> *Sentinel*, 22 June 1945, 21 December 1945.

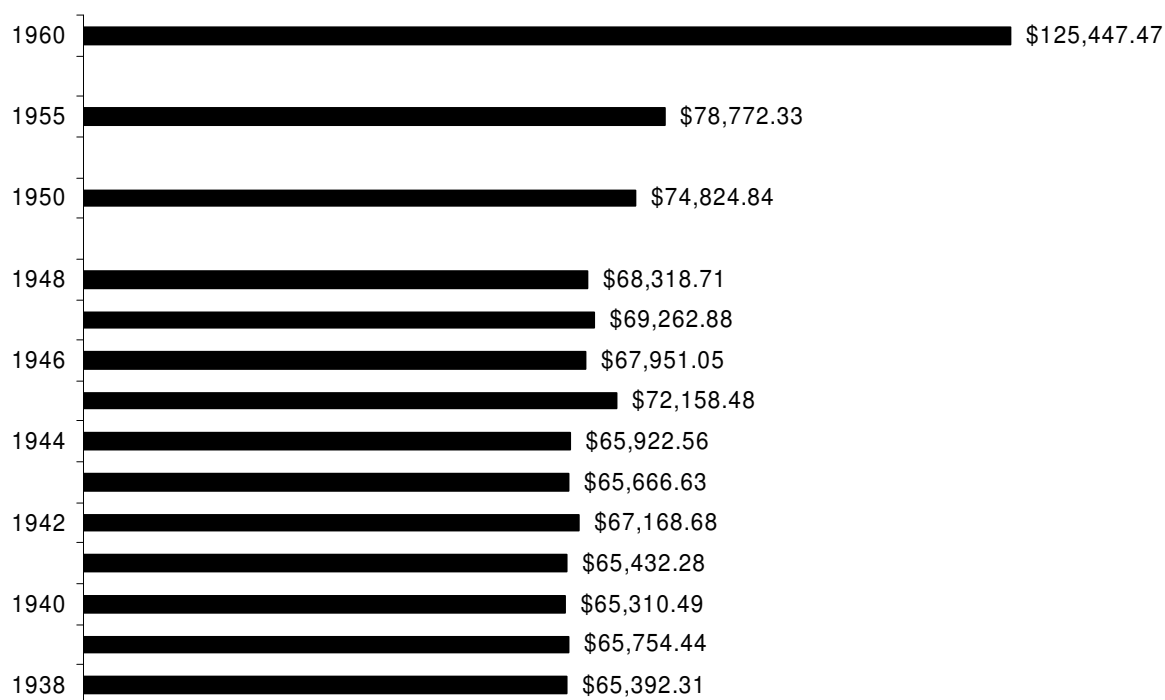


Fig. 3.4. Adjusted tax revenues for Presidio County from 1938 to 1948, 1950, 1955, and 1960.<sup>19</sup>

As shown in the figure above, adjusted tax revenues peaked in 1945 and then dropped by around 5 percent in 1946. Keeping in mind the fact stated above, these data support the assertion that the closure of Marfa AAF had a deleterious effect on the economic prosperity of the community. The decline in the adjusted revenues was only 5 percent or around \$4,000; however, the county did not recover from this decline, so far as we can know, until 1950, five years after the base closed. Thus, the adjusted tax revenue data indicate that the closure of the base negatively affected the economic prosperity of the local community. The community did eventually begin to prosper again, though, as

<sup>19</sup> These values have been adjusted to a common rate of \$1.00 per valuation in order to make them easier to compare. The original values and rates are recorded in the appendix 1, table 3; Chart created by author. Data retrieved from Presidio County Tax Roll Statements, 1938-1948, 1950, 1955, 1960, Presidio County Courthouse Archives, Marfa, Texas. 1949 data missing because the tax roll for that year itself is missing.

there was a massive 37 percent increase in the adjusted revenues between 1955 and 1960.<sup>20</sup>

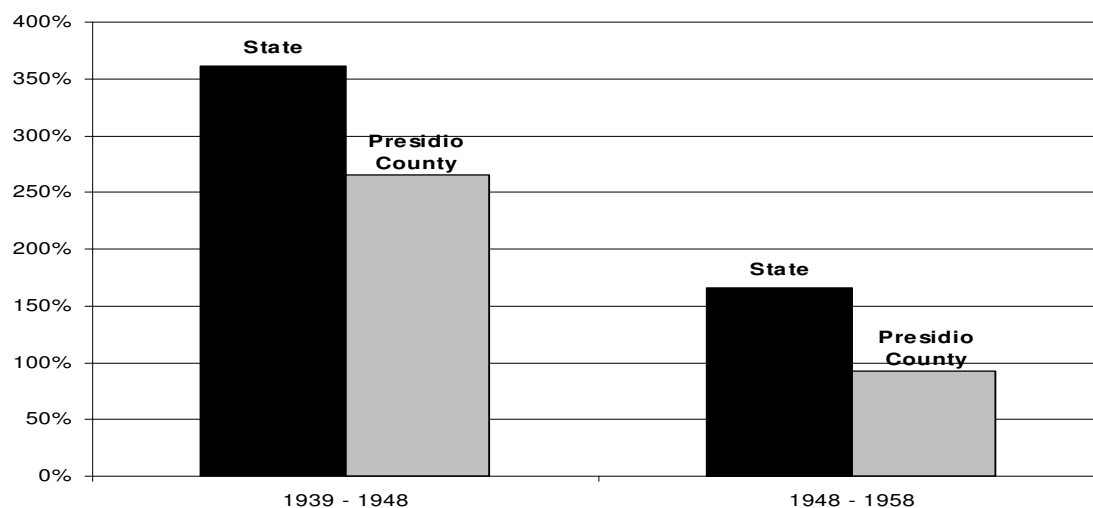


Fig. 3.5. Retail sales percent increase for the state of Texas and Presidio County from 1939 to 1948 and 1948 to 1958.<sup>21</sup>

Another indication of a town's prosperity can be found in its total retail receipts for a given year. These data are collected during the census taken every ten years by the US Census Bureau. Because the data are only taken once every ten years, these data, just like the census data discussed earlier, cannot definitively show effects of the base closure. Comparing the percent change in retail sales of Presidio County with that of the entire state of Texas, we see that the trends in retail sales show an actual decline in prosperity coinciding with the closure of the base.

From 1939 to 1948, retail sales for the state of Texas increased by more than 361

<sup>20</sup> Some explanations of this increase will be addressed in the conclusion to this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from Retail Sales, *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: 1947-1948, 1952-1953, 1961-1962* (Dallas: A.H. Belo).

percent while those for Presidio County increased by 265 percent. From 1948 to 1958, those numbers dropped to 166 percent and 93 percent, respectively. This set of data tells us two things. First of all, the data show that for whatever reason, the economic prosperity for Presidio County increased during the ten-year period encapsulating World War II, as would be expected. Secondly, the data tell us that, although the prosperity did increase, it did so to a lesser degree than did that of the rest of the state. Third, the data tell us that the economic prosperity of both Presidio County and the rest of the state increased at a far lesser rate in the decade following World War II, as would again be expected. Finally, the data tell us that Presidio County's prosperity increased again to a lesser degree than did that of the rest of the state. No definitive conclusions can be made from these trends and changes, but we can speculate that the closing of the base contributed to this disparity.

### ***Recovery***

The impact on the community of Marfa and Presidio County in terms of population and economic prosperity was obviously a devastating one, more devastating than the one discussed in the San Marcos chapter. The community was able to eventually recover to some degree, however, because of a number of factors. The collective community of San Marcos and Hays County, discussed in Chapter II, recovered thanks to prosperity-generating assets such as a booming tourism industry and a state university. The collective community of Marfa and Presidio County was also able to recover, though not nearly to the same degree, because of its own tourism industry.

Marfa and nearby Alpine, the latter of which is about thirty miles to the east of the former, are the only towns of any size in the county. Marfa is in close proximity to various tourist attractions such as Capote Falls, the Ruidosa Hot Springs, Shafter ghost-town, and the nationally famous Big Bend National Park. Marfa has also been a popular location for glider pilots since 1963, which makes sense because glider-pilot training was part of the base's mission during its final years.<sup>22</sup>

Marfa has also gained a tourist following because of its location for the 1955 shooting of the James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson film, *Giant*. Most of the evidence of the film was lost with time; however, many scenes from the film were shot in the historic El Paisano Hotel, which has been dutifully preserved. A gift shop and small museum in tribute to *Giant* can be found adjacent to the hotel lobby.<sup>23</sup>

The famous Marfa Lights provide a further source of tourism for the community of Marfa and Presidio County. These lights are as yet an unexplained phenomenon occurring only at night. The lights have been attributed to everything from astronomical anomalies to ghosts to UFOs. Eight miles east of Marfa, the Texas State Highway Department has built a parking area for the purpose of tourists viewing the lights. More recently, local philanthropists, with the assistance of a group of high school students, have erected a large viewing platform for the lights. The platform overlooks the former site of Marfa AAF, facing the Chinati Mountains and features several historical markers and scientific markers, discussing the lights, the base, and the local geography. Every Labor Day weekend, the city of Marfa holds the annual Marfa Festival of Lights. The

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<sup>22</sup> Lee Bennett, "Marfa, Texas," *The New Handbook of Texas* 4 (1996): 503; *Sentinel*, 3 August 1945.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, 135-6; Personal visit by author, August 2006.

festival includes food and crafts booths, a main street parade, contests, concerts and street dances.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, beyond these sources of tourism, Marfa has itself been renovated into a historic, West Texas town. The downtown area resembles Marfa as it was during the 1940s or 1950s. Historic buildings, adapted for modern use, bear historical placards on their front facades indicating each building's individual history and often a photograph of the building from some date in the early twentieth century. Especially well-preserved buildings include the large courthouse, which overlooks the main street at its dead end, and the aforementioned El Paisano Hotel, which stands farther down the main street from the courthouse. Finally, the town also is home to a number of art galleries and boasts a thriving artist community.<sup>25</sup>

The partial recovery can be quantified. As shown in figure 3.4, tax receipts began increasing at a great rate in 1960. In figure 3.1, one can see that the population for Presidio County bottomed out in 1970 but then increased again to 6,637 by 1990. Accordingly, at least in terms of population, the town never regained the prosperity it held while home to Marfa AAF, but the town did partially recover.

### ***Crime***

The subject of the community's crime rate offers a complicated and not totally conclusive facet to the study of the effects of the closure of Marfa AAF. Still, some

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander, 136; Personal visit by author, August 2006; Julia Smith, "Marfa Lights," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, 6 June 2001. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/lxm1.html>. Accessed 14 March 2007; "Marfa Festival of Lights 2006," Marfa Chamber of Commerce. Available from [http://www.marfacc.com/marfa\\_lights.htm](http://www.marfacc.com/marfa_lights.htm). Accessed 14 March 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Personal visit by author, August 2006.

discussion can be made and some conclusions drawn from the data found. In Chapter II, the crime data indicated that when the base was at its height of activity, and thus the town was heavily populated with mostly young men far from home, the misdemeanor crime rate went up. In the case of Marfa, the crime data do not lead to this conclusion. The

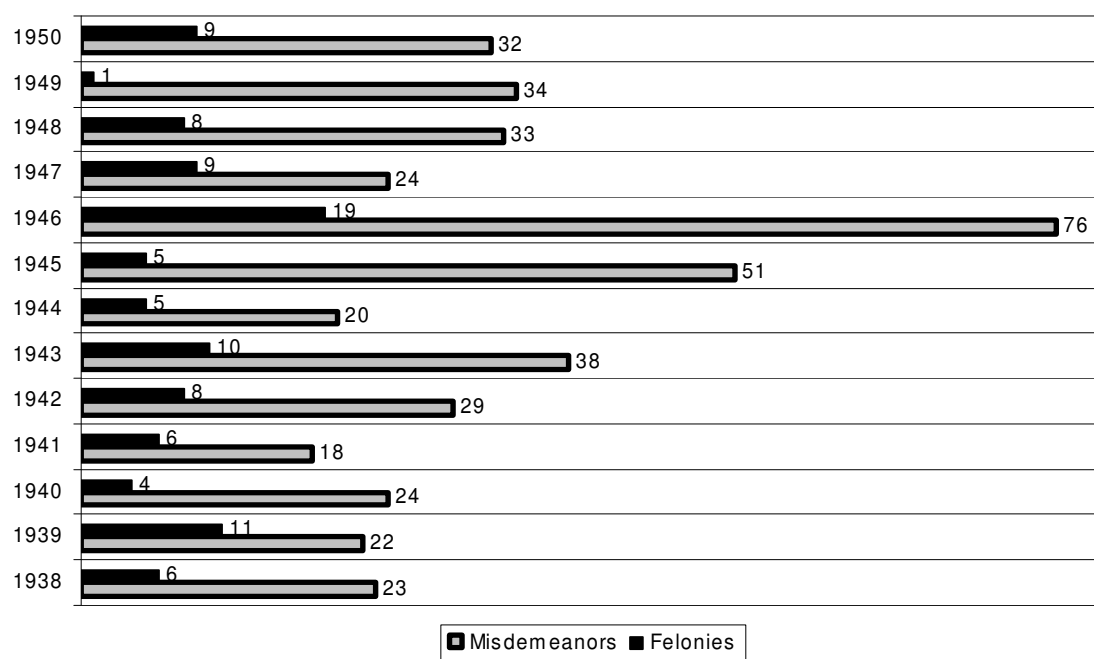


Fig. 3.6. Felony and Misdemeanor crime statistics for Presidio County from 1938 to 1950.<sup>26</sup>

misdemeanor rate (as shown in Figure 3.6 above) did go up the year that the base opened and the following year, but then dropped down again in 1944. The final years that the base was open, when the base was losing personnel and finally completely closed, 1945 and 1946, the misdemeanor crime rate was at its highest. So, the misdemeanor crime

<sup>26</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from Misdemeanor Court Docket, 1938-1950, Office of the County Clerk, and Felony Court Docket, 1938-1950, Office of the District Clerk, Presidio County Courthouse, Marfa, Texas.



data do not necessarily tell us much. The conclusion that this author has come to is that there was an initial surge of petty crimes when the base first opened, but this surge was contained within two years.

The felony crime rate, as with the case of San Marcos, actually did increase the same year the base was closed, 1946. As before, this increase can be partly attributed to the relative lack of prosperity that year. And, that lack of prosperity may account for the record high misdemeanor crime rate; however, the surges in both the misdemeanor and felony crime rates for that year might also be attributed to some other factors. One possible common cause for these surges could be related to the end of World War II. In 1946, many soldiers would be coming home, possibly to find themselves without jobs. This influx of soldiers back into the population might have contributed to the crime rate

### *Conclusions*

Marfa Army Air Field played an important role in the local community of Marfa and Presidio County. The base was a focal point of town pride and attention, and its loss was certainly a devastating one for the local community. The town lost a significant source of revenue and population when the base closed. Postal receipts plummeted, tax revenues dropped, the population declined dramatically, and the crime rate skyrocketed, all events which coincided with the closure of the base.

Marfa eventually did recover. Tax revenues rose again, crime rates reached a baseline commensurate with preclosure rates, and the population eventually climbed back up, though never to pre-closure levels. This recovery was very likely rooted in the growth of Marfa's vast tourism industry, which includes a proximity to various tourist

sites, the filming of James Dean's final film there, the preservation of an historic downtown area, a thriving art community, and of course the famous Marfa Lights. Consequently, while Marfa did not fully recover and excel and thrive as did the community of San Marcos, it did manage to survive and partially recover. The same cannot be said for our final town, to be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RATTLESNAKE BOMBER BASE AND THE CITIES OF PYOTE AND MONAHANS, WARD COUNTY, TEXAS

Situated south of the Texas panhandle about thirty miles from the New Mexico border, Monahans is a picturesque, West Texas town. Small businesses operate from historically preserved buildings around a small downtown district, and city buildings bear folksy, metalwork signs saying “library” or “courthouse.” The town is small, with only a few thousand residents, but it seems to be prospering overall.

About fifteen miles west down Interstate 20 in the little West Texas town of Pyote, things do not look nearly so nice. There are no small businesses or historically preserved buildings. There is no library or other public buildings to adorn with folk-art, and the city police station consists of a single camper-trailer with a squad-car parked in front. The few town residents mostly live in dilapidated houses or trailers, and the only signs of civilization are the worksites of various oil companies, a small public golf course, and a museum dedicated to an all but forgotten military base. During World War II, Pyote was home to Rattlesnake Bomber Base, another installation of the Gulf Coast Training Center.

Construction on Rattlesnake Bomber Base, or Pyote Army Air Field (Pyote AAF) as it was officially designated, began in September 1942. Built from the ground-up on nearly 3,000 acres of sun-bleached, snake-infested land leased from the University of

Texas, the base opened that December as an advanced bombardment crew training facility. Within four months, Pyote AAF was the largest bomber training base in the United States, boasting a complement of nearly 7,500 officers, enlisted personnel, and trainees.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1945, Pyote AAF ended its life as a training facility, entering service under the San Antonio Air Technical Service Command with the mission of preserving and storing military aircraft for possible reactivation. These aircraft included *The Swoose*, the only B-17 to survive the Japanese attack on the Philippines and General MacArthur's personal plane, and the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. After the Korean War, Pyote AAF personnel began cutting up the planes stored there and smelting them into aluminum ingots for use in American industry. On 31 December 1953, the base went on standby status, leaving only a twenty-seven man caretaker crew to maintain the base. In April 1958, the base was reopened as Pyote Air Force Station, a radar installation acting as one link in a chain of installations that were part of an early warning network in case of Soviet attack during the Cold War. This phase of the base's operation ended in December 1963, and the base was declared surplus. Finally, in 1965, the site became home to the West Texas Children's Home. The facility, now a juvenile prison, still occupies the site today.<sup>2</sup>

As an oil town, Pyote had suffered the boom and bust cycle for its entire history. The population fluctuated from thirteen in 1900 to nearly 40,000 in 1928 to one hundred

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: Volume I* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2000): 173-5; Thomas Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base* (Abilene: State House Press, 2005): 68-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-172, 176-180; Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: Volume I*, 180.

in 1940.<sup>3</sup> The nearby, much larger town of Monahans had managed to survive all those years without a bust. When the Army Air Forces came to Ward County, it triggered a boom for the collective community of Pyote and Monahans. When it left, Monahans managed to survive without a total bust; but Pyote was less fortunate. Unlike the towns discussed in the previous chapters, Pyote did not in any meaningful way survive being home to an Army Air Forces installation.

### *Interaction of the base and the community*

During its many years of operation, Pyote AAF played an important social role in the local community of Pyote and Monahans, which in turn played a social role for the base. This social interaction was especially active during the base's period of peak activation during World War II. In 1940, only one-hundred people had lived in Pyote; however, that number had risen to approximately 3,000 only a few years later. This large population, along with that of Monahans, interacted in various ways with the large number of base personnel, which reached 8,372 in 1945.<sup>4</sup>

The people of Pyote and Monahans and the other small surrounding villages were of course excited by and interested in the base. Some of them were so excited and interested in fact that they had to be warned at one point for gossiping too publicly about the goings on at the base. As in the previous chapters, the local newspaper — here, *The Monahans News* — provides the best examples of interest in the base. For instance, the

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Cook, "Ward County and Pyote Texas," accessed from vertical files, Ward County Historical Commission Archives, Monahans, Tx, File: *Pyote History – General*. The history actually claims that there were 30,000, but I believe it be a typo for 3,000, based on the other information I was able to find; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 161.

paper published such things as the schedule of United Service Organization (USO) shows appearing at the USO club. The paper also announced the weddings of base personnel to local girls. The paper even reported when the base set various flying records such as highest number of hours flown in a single week. The paper also kept the local people informed of any news about the status of the base. Such reporting comes as no surprise when one considers the social and economic importance of the base and its nearly 9,000 personnel. The paper reported any and all changes or even rumored changes to the base and to its personnel complement. The paper even gave a detailed history of the base when the base changed its mission from pilot training to aircraft repository in 1945.<sup>5</sup>

Citizens from the local community provided a variety of social services to the base personnel. For the base's first Christmas, citizens of Monahans held a dance for the soldiers. Because there was no USO building or even an officers' club at that time, the dance was held at the local high school gymnasium. After the dance, local citizens invited soldiers to their homes for a Christmas dinner and gave each one a package of Christmas candy to take back to the base. This generosity was not confined to Christmas. Local churches took up special collections to form emergency funds for Pyote AAF personnel and preachers urged their parishioners to invite the soldiers to Sunday dinner.<sup>6</sup>

Ward County citizens also made numerous monetary donations and other sorts of donations to the base personnel. For instance, in the base's first summer, the nearby Kermit Lions Club donated two-hundred books to the base library. On 10 January 1943, two days after the field's official opening, Monahans opened a soldier community center.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Monahans News*, 28 April 1944, 28 September 1945, 10 August 1945, 21 February 1946, 2 November 1945.

<sup>6</sup> *The Monahans News*, 24 December 1942; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 78, 128.

This center was paid for by private donations from the people and businesses of Monahans. A few months later, the local American Legion donated a building to the USO, because the base did not have its own USO club. The club hosted parties, game nights, craft classes, seamstress services, a library, a music room, a darkroom, and showers. The club stayed open until December 1945, when the base had lost most of its personnel. Local businessmen also donated money to pay for servicemen to call home at Christmas for those unable to go home for whatever reason. When the base's new band needed instruments, local citizens were enlisted to donate used instruments for them, though the band did eventually receive instruments from the Army.<sup>7</sup>

Base personnel also provided a number of services for local citizens in one form or another. Prior to the construction of the hospital in Monahans, locals received emergency care at the Pyote AAF base hospital. The hospital actually won an award in 1945 for its high standards in emergency care and preventative medicine. The base held open houses that allowed the local townspeople a tour of the base. At least once, war bond receipts served as passes for the open house. A similar event was held on Army Air Force Day in August, and crowds of local community members thronged the base for the event. The base radio show, though primarily for the benefit of base personnel, became a form of entertainment for the surrounding towns, which could also pick up the station. The base also held regular parties catered by the famous Odessa Chuck Wagon Gang. The Gang's famous barbeque brought in party-guests from as far as one-hundred miles away.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Rattler*, 9 June 1943, 5 January 1944; *The Monahans News*, 24 December 1942, 8 January 1943, 26 March 1943, 20 December 1945; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 96.

The base also often opened its facilities to the public for various social uses, especially once the base was no longer at peak operation. The base allowed locals to play bingo at the officers' club and allowed the local March of Dimes chapter to hold a dance at the base. In fact, the base itself put on numerous dances and other shows at the officers' club, the noncommissioned officers' club, and the service club. These shows included a talent show, the Funtime Revue, to which locals were invited to attend. And when the *Enola Gay* came to Pyote, local residents were invited to visit the base to see the famous plane.<sup>9</sup>

The interactions between the base and the community were not always free of tension, however. First of all, the base brought about a huge population surge for the local community not only in terms of military personnel but also in terms of civilian workers. This surge caused a serious housing shortage that lasted until after the end of World War II, in spite of numerous government housing projects attempting to alleviate the problem. That there was a housing shortage comes as no surprise when one considers that during the war, Pyote AAF was the largest "city," in terms of population, for at least one-hundred miles. Tensions continued to build when the activities of the base infringed on the lives of the local citizens. Incidents included farm animals injuring themselves in panic when the huge B-17s flew too low over Pyote, and base personnel inflicting extensive damage to a local school building while setting off some excess explosives.<sup>10</sup>

The obvious problems associated with very young men being stationed in the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Monahans News*, 26 October 1945, 24 September 1943, 3 August 1945, 21 April 1944; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 140-1.

<sup>9</sup> *The Monahans News*, 25 November 1948, 26 January 1953, 27 August 1953, 10 April 1947; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 97-8.

<sup>10</sup> *The Monahans News*, 1 January 1943, 2 July 1943, 29 December 1944, 8 August 1946; Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright*, 179; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 106.



desert, far from home, also caused some tensions. The city council of Monahans passed a city ordinance forbidding women from wearing short shorts or swimsuits on public streets, presumably to discourage lewd conduct by the young soldiers at the base. There was also a fair amount of crime caused by the huge influx of military personnel and civilian workers into the community that will be discussed to a further degree later in this chapter. This crime mostly consisted of drunken brawls between soldiers and local citizens that were mostly just fistfights; however, they sometimes involved weapons. In one particularly violent case, a fistfight in a bar resulted in two soldiers being run down by a civilian in his car. At one point, this unbecoming conduct resulted in the base commanding officer, Major Clarence Hewitt, confining all personnel to the base. Major Hewitt cited “deficiencies of training such as military courtesy and discipline [and] proper wearing of the uniform” as reasons for the confinement.<sup>11</sup>

Interaction between the men of Pyote AAF and the citizens of the local community of Pyote and Monahans and the other surrounding towns was a daily matter. Sometimes this interaction was less than harmonious. More often, however, the people of the local community provided essential social benefits to the base personnel, and the base personnel in turn became an integral part of the community; however, the effects of having a military base on the local community were not only social.

### ***Population and the Economy***

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the huge influx of military and civilian population brought about by the construction of a military base had an effect on the

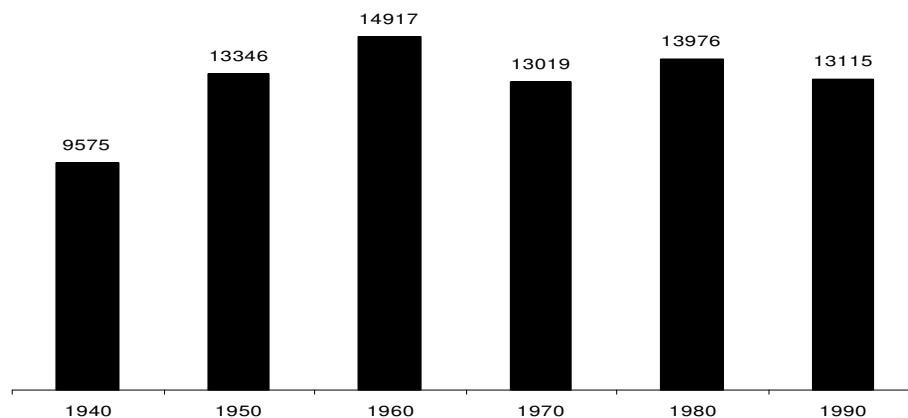
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<sup>11</sup> Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright*, 176; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 131-2, 107; *The Monahans News*, 16 July 1943.

economy. These people used city services such as electricity, postal service, and the maternity wards at local hospitals. They patronized local businesses and deposited their paychecks at the local banks, and many of them rented or even bought houses. Thus, changes in a local community's population, brought about by changes in the status of the base, had an impact on the local economy.

Pyote AAF and the community of Ward County offered a certain difficulty in terms of attempting to point out drastic changes related to the loss of the base because Pyote AAF did not close immediately, but instead its status and personnel complement fluctuated over more than two decades. Because of this, a study of the effects of the base closure required a longer data range than in the previous chapters. Furthermore, because the loss of the base was gradual, the immediate effects may not have been as drastic as those in the case of Marfa AAF, even if the overall effects were worse. Still, it is important to analyze the available data, even if definitive conclusions cannot be made.

The bomber crew training facility at Pyote AAF closed in 1945, so one might not expect a large increase in the county census between 1940 and 1950. If one considers, however, that Pyote had a population of one-hundred in 1940, then it does not seem so out of the question for the population to have been much higher after Pyote AAF opened. More importantly, Pyote AAF was still operating with a large personnel complement until 1953. In fact, from 1945 to 1953, the base's mission was either the cocooning of planes in plastic wrapping for storage, or the destruction and smelting of the planes, as mentioned earlier; both of these were jobs requiring civilian personnel rather than military personnel. And it stands to reason that civilian workers would have been more likely to become permanent residents counted in the census than would military



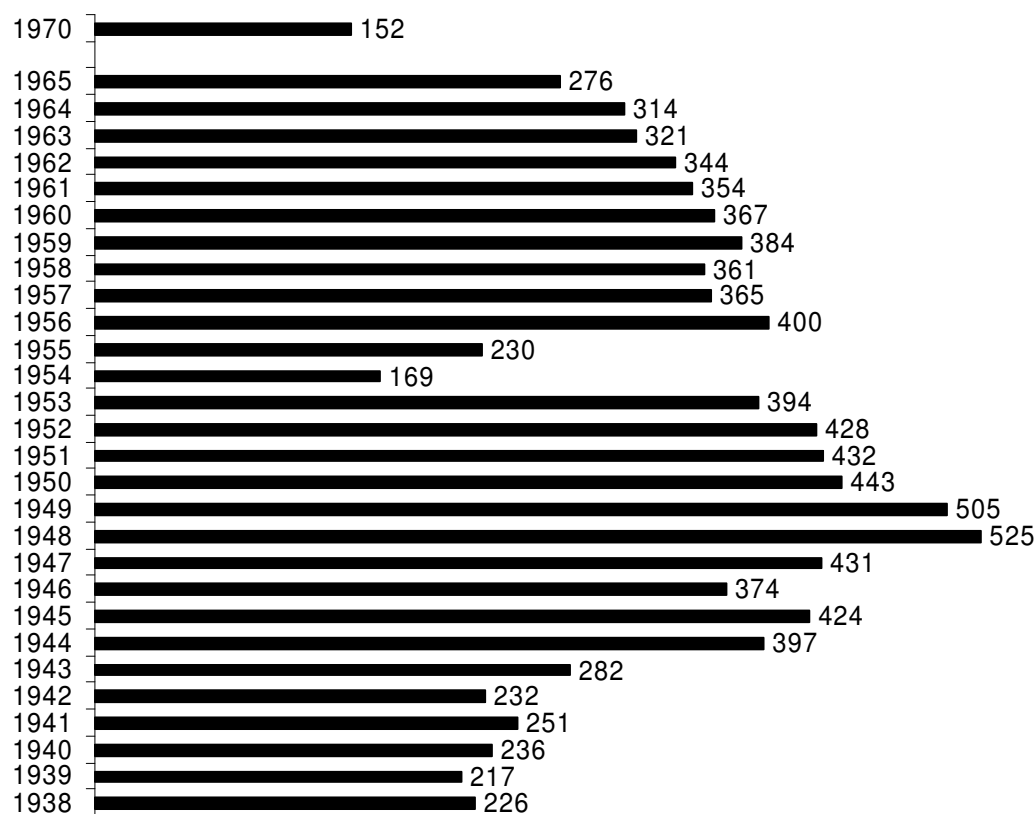
4.1. The population history for Ward County, Texas from 1940 to 1990.<sup>12</sup>

personnel who were likely constantly coming and going. The base reopened in a limited capacity from 1958 to 1963, this time with mainly military personnel who were probably less likely to stay in Ward County after the final closure in 1963. The data in Figure 4.1 would seem to follow along with this line of reasoning. The population increased greatly from 1940 to 1950, far more gradually from 1950 to 1960, and declined from 1960 to 1970, the decade in which the base finally closed for good.<sup>13</sup>

As in previous chapters, county birthrate data give the best possible idea of population changes on a year by year basis. Figure 4.2, below, shows a large increase in the birthrate in 1943, the year the base opened and an even greater increase the following year. The timing of these increases makes sense when one considers the time required for human gestation. In this same vein, it was in 1946, the year after the base closed, that

<sup>12</sup> Chart created by author. Data from United States Census Bureau, *County Population Census Counts 1900-90*. <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/tx190090.txt>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 165-6, 176, 178.



4.2. The birthrate for Ward County from 1938 to 1965 and 1970.<sup>14</sup>

the birthrate dropped for the first time since the opening of the base. The birthrate recovered, reaching record highs, before beginning a slow decline in 1950. In 1953, when work at the base had begun to wind down, and the base was nearly closed, the birthrate dropped again. The base closed later that year, as mentioned earlier, and the following year, 1954, the birth rate reached a low it had not seen since before World War II. The data go on to show that while the birthrate did bounce back it never returned to its record highs and indeed continued to decline into the 1970s. When comparing the data

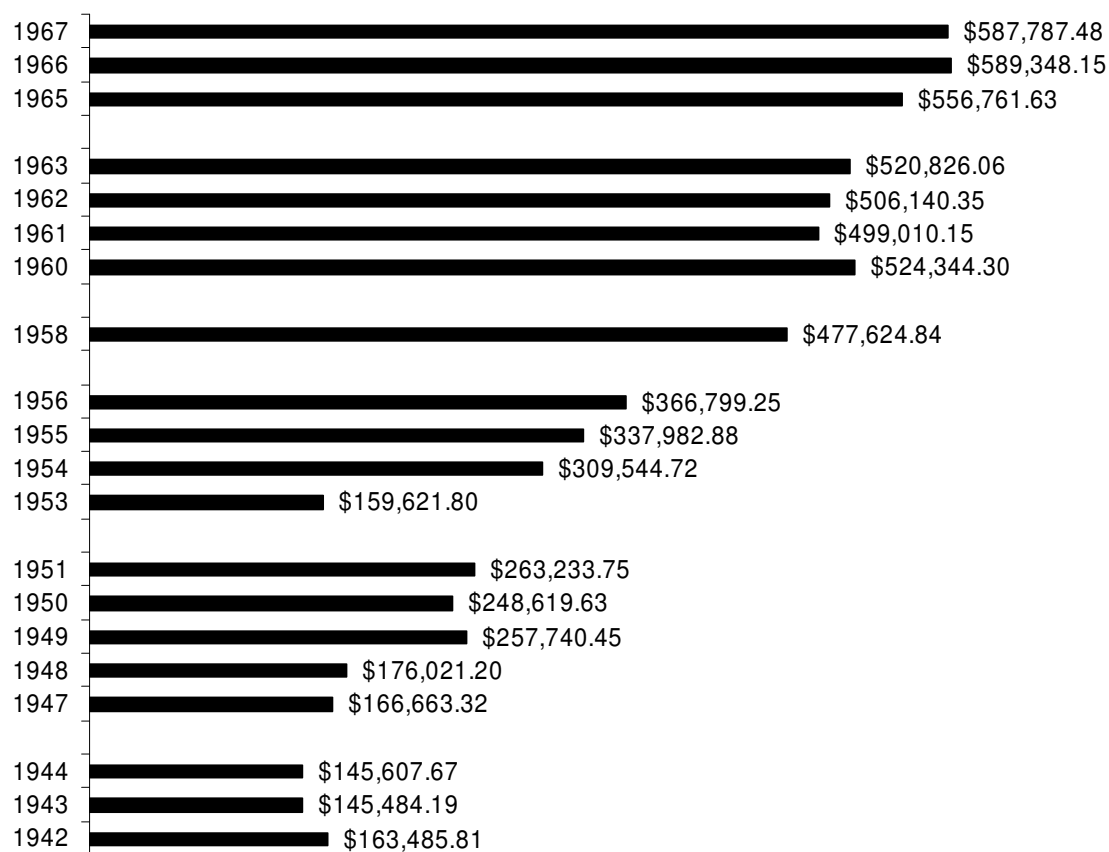
<sup>14</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved by author from *Adoption Searching*, <http://adoptionsearching.com>, HRG Inc., David T. Gray trustee. Database, accessed on 27 September 2006.

from this figure to the data from Figure 4.1, they coincide. As shown in Figure 4.1, the population of Ward County experienced its greatest increases in the 1940s and the 1950s, and its greatest decrease in the 1960s, and the data from Figure 4.2 support those data.

When analyzing the economic impact of Pyote AAF's closure on its local community, a problem arises. Ward County and its county seat, Monahans, have managed to survive, economically, if not necessarily flourish. Pyote, on the other hand, imploded on itself, for lack of a better word, and was reduced to nearly a ghost town. The problem is that only Ward County and Monahans have any sort of retrievable economic data. It is hard to effectively demonstrate any clear economic impact on the local community of Pyote, even if it is obvious to the modern observer that Pyote suffered economic devastation. The remainder of this section, then, will focus on the community of Monahans and on Ward County in general.

The tax revenues for Ward County are reflected in Figure 4.3 below, adjusted to a common rate of 1.0. Unfortunately, the tax data for the key years of 1945 and 1946 are missing, so it is impossible to determine the impact Pyote AAF's 1945 mission reassignment had, if any, on tax revenues. In 1953, however, there was a drastic drop in tax revenues coinciding with the closure of the base. The revenues did increase again from 1954 to 1956. The construction of a new hospital in 1955 and a new school in 1956 may help to explain this increase. Also, Pyote AAF reopened as a radar installation from 1958 to 1963, which may partially explain the more than \$100,000 increase in tax revenues between 1956 and 1958. Finally, in 1965, the state of Texas allocated \$560,173 to buy and refurbish the base for the creation of the West Texas Children's Home, which

remains open to this day. That would surely explain the high tax revenues from 1965 to 1967.<sup>15</sup>



#### 4.3. Adjusted tax revenues for Ward County from 1942 to 1944, 1947 to 1951, 1953 to 1956, 1958, 1960 to 1963, and 1965 to 1967.<sup>16</sup>

Another explanation for the increasing tax revenues may lie in Ward County's oil industry. Pyote was an oil boomtown, and the surrounding area was and still is dotted with numerous oil wells. For decades prior to the construction of Pyote AAF, Ward

<sup>15</sup> *The Monahans News*, 6 January 1958; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from Ward County Tax Roll Statements, 1942-4, 1947-1951, 1953-6, 1958, 1960-3, and 1965-7, Ward County Courthouse Archives, Monahans, Texas. Missing data because of those rolls being missing from the archives, possibly caused by a previous fire in the building.

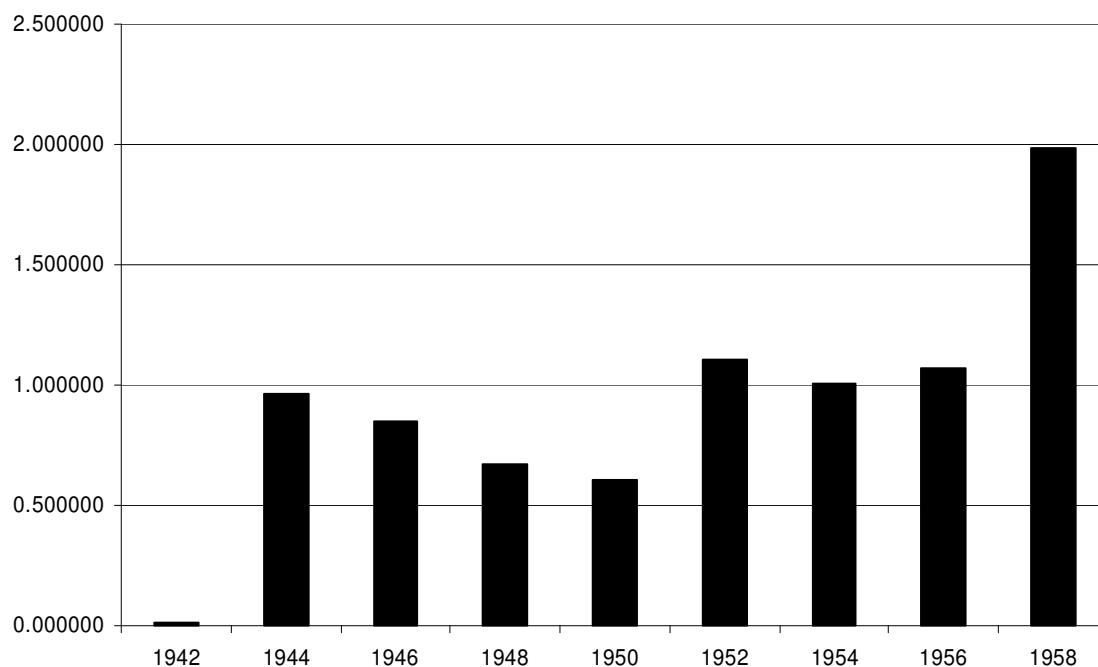


Fig. 4.4. Oil production in Ward County as a percentage of totals for the state of Texas from 1942 to 1958.<sup>17</sup>

County had relied on oil production and would continue to do so. The data in Figure 4.4 represent the production of oil in Ward County as a percentage of total state production. For most of the years, there is not a clear correlation between the data in Figure 4.4 and the tax data in Figure 4.3; however, in 1958, Ward County oil production reached nearly 2 percent of the state total, nearly twice what it had been in the other years reflected in the graph. That increase in production does coincide with the increase of more than

<sup>17</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: A.H. Belo): 1943-4, 1945-6, 1947-8, 1949-50, 1952-3, 1956-8, 1958-9, and 1961-2. Totals for 1942 to 1946 and 1950 based on the State Comptroller's fiscal report. Totals for 1948 based on Railroad Commission's estimate for the fiscal year. Totals for 1952 based on US Bureau of Mines' report for the calendar year. Totals for 1954 to 1958 based on Texas Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association's report for the calendar year.

\$100,000 in tax revenues that same year.<sup>18</sup>

While the oil production data are for Ward County in general, there is an interesting story that may help to partly explain why Pyote did not seem to benefit from the oil industry in the same manner as Monahans. In 1930, Texas and Pacific Railroad Company built a new railroad spur from Monahans to nearby Kermit and from there to Hobbs, New Mexico, another rich oil area. The construction of this spur only fifteen miles from Pyote moved all of the oil support industry from Pyote to Monahans and effectively ensured that the Ward County oil industry would benefit Monahans and not Pyote.<sup>19</sup>

The next two sets of data are incomplete, but some conclusions can be drawn from them. Records of building permits for Monahans were destroyed by the city after they had been stored for around twenty years, but the data were reported, if infrequently, in *The Monahans News*. The most complete and telling years recorded were 1955 to 1959 and are shown in Figure 4.5. As mentioned earlier, the city built a new hospital in 1955 and a new school in 1956, so the decrease from 1956 to 1957 may not be based on anything in particular. In 1958, however, the year the base reopened for its final phase as a military installation, there was an increase in building permits from \$1,151,442 to \$2,247,655.

As mentioned in previous chapters, building permit revenues indicate a number of things. They can represent huge building projects such as the hospital and the school. They can also represent home building by new residents or by residents moving from rented housing to their own homes. They can represent repairs and renovations to homes

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-4.



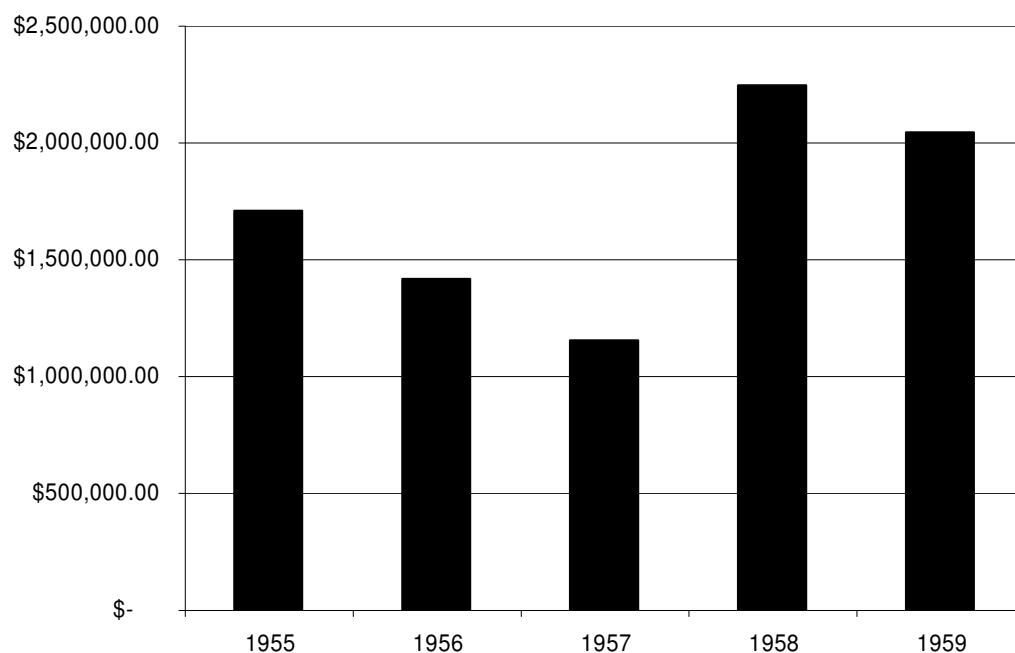


Fig. 4.5. Building permit revenues for Monahans from 1955 to 1959.<sup>20</sup>

and businesses. Finally, they can represent new building by businesses moving to the city. Whatever these building permit revenues may actually represent specifically, they in any case represent an economic upswing for the local community which coincided with the reopening of nearby Pyote AAF.

Some newspapers from this time period recorded postal receipts (as shown in Figure 4.6) on a yearly or sometimes even a monthly basis. An example of this diligence was *The Big Bend Sentinel*, cited in Chapter III. *The Monahans News* did not do nearly so good a job, with the consequence that the data on the postal receipts for Monahans are missing some key years. From 1940 to 1946, the increase would seem to correlate with the opening of the base and the population increase it brought to the town; however,

<sup>20</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from *The Monahans News* 6 January 1958, 1 January 1959, 29 December 1959.

without year-by-year data, no definitive conclusions can be made about that time period.

The slight decrease

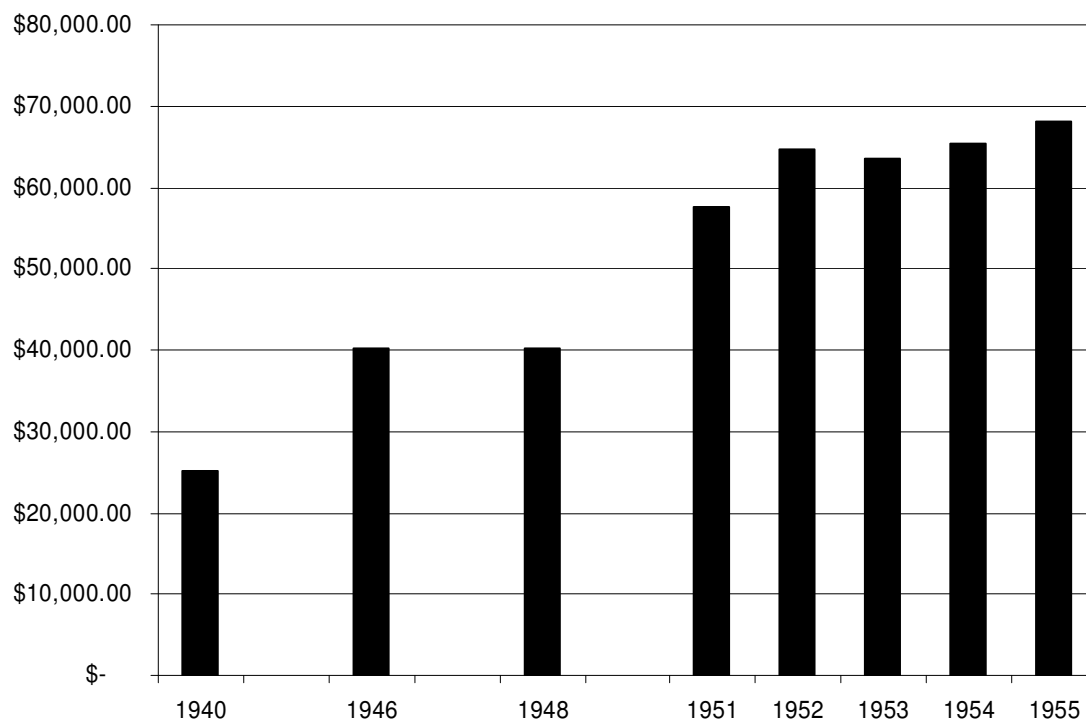


Fig. 4.6. Postal receipts in Monahans, Texas 1940, 1946, 1948, and 1951 to 1955.<sup>21</sup>

from 1952 to 1953 might indicate a drop in population because of the closing of the base in that year. The base did not close until December of that same year; however, by the time it closed in December, there were only three officers and 200 civilian employees still working there, so a decrease in population that year, and thus a decrease in postal receipts, would seem to make sense. The receipts did increase again in 1954, but the city

<sup>21</sup> Chart created by author. Data partially retrieved from *The Monahans News*, 9 January 1947, 14 January 1954, 6 January 1955, 5 January 1956. Remaining data retrieved from *Ward County History*, 270.

postmaster said that this increase was because of a rate increase and if the rate been kept the same, the receipts would have been lower than in 1953.<sup>22</sup>

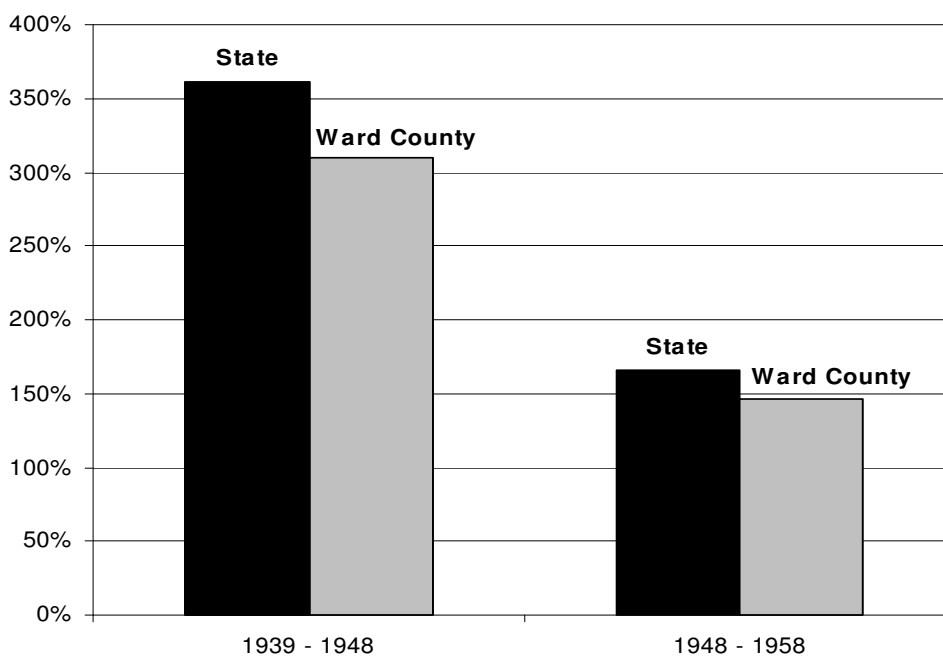


Fig. 4.7. Retail sales percent increase for the state of Texas and Ward County from 1939 to 1948 and 1948 to 1958.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 4.7 represents the percent increase in sales receipts for the state of Texas and Ward County. The data show that from 1948 to 1958, sales receipts for Ward County increased by 146 percent, as opposed to 166 percent. Such a small discrepancy between the county and the state increases does not indicate a catastrophic economic impact. It does, however, still indicate that the retail economy in Ward County was not progressing as well as one might hope. The increase might also have been lower had the

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 178; *The Monahans News*, 6 January 1955.

<sup>23</sup> Chart created by author. Data retrieved from Retail Sales, *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: 1947-1948, 1952-1953, 1961-1962* (Dallas: A.H. Belo).

base not reopened in 1958, the year the data were collected. The data cannot definitively say that the loss of Pyote AAF was economically detrimental to Ward County, but they do point in that direction.

As with the other communities discussed in this thesis, a quantitative analysis of census, birth rate, and various economic data cannot yield completely definitive conclusions. The data do, however, suggest that the loss of Pyote AAF was detrimental to the local community of Pyote and Monahans in terms of population and the economy, and that Ward County and, specifically, Monahans, managed to at least partially recover.

### *Crime*

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from the crime statistics for Ward County. The data for Presidio County in Chapter III were especially troublesome in this regard, and the data for Ward County – presented below in Figure 4.8 – are no different. Still, the data are important to the overall analysis in this chapter, and some conclusions can be drawn from them.

Aside from a dip in the felony rate in 1943, both the felony and misdemeanor crime rates in Ward County were stable from 1942 to 1946. In 1947, the misdemeanor rate increased dramatically and continued an increase for the next few years. The misdemeanor rate spiked in 1952 and then decreased over the following years. In 1951, the felony rate reached new highs and did not decline to previous levels until the late 1960s.

None of these changes travel along the patterns discussed in previous patterns. After studying Camp Gary and the community of Hays County, one would expect the

misdemeanor rate to be higher when the base was populated with many young soldiers and for the felony rate to increase after the closure of a base; but neither of these things seems to have happened in those years. The misdemeanor rate did reach previously unseen highs from 1958 to 1964, and such high rates could have been connected to the base being open again from 1958 to 1963. The difference between the 1943 to 1953 activation period and the 1958 to 1963 activation period was that the former was mostly during time of war while the latter was during peacetime. Furthermore, the people stationed at Pyote during this latter activation may have been less warmly welcomed by the local community as their small mission did not represent the same sort of expected economic boom as the huge mission from 1943 to 1945 did.

While the actual data taken from the court dockets do not necessarily say that Pyote AAF and its personnel or lack thereof caused any sort of increase in the local crime rates, there is other, less quantitative data that tells another story. The local newspaper mostly spoke positively of Pyote AAF and its personnel, but it did still report a number of crimes involving base personnel as have local historians.

The incident in which two Pyote AAF soldiers beat up a local man in a bar, only to be run down by that man in his car later that night, has already been discussed. Fighting in Pyote and Monahans was a sometimes nightly occurrence, and in fact it was considered a pastime by some to sit on the Pyote depot dock and watch fights develop. Brawls between Pyote AAF personnel and local citizens sometimes could escalate, as already mentioned. In another such incident, a Pyote serviceman had his throat cut in the

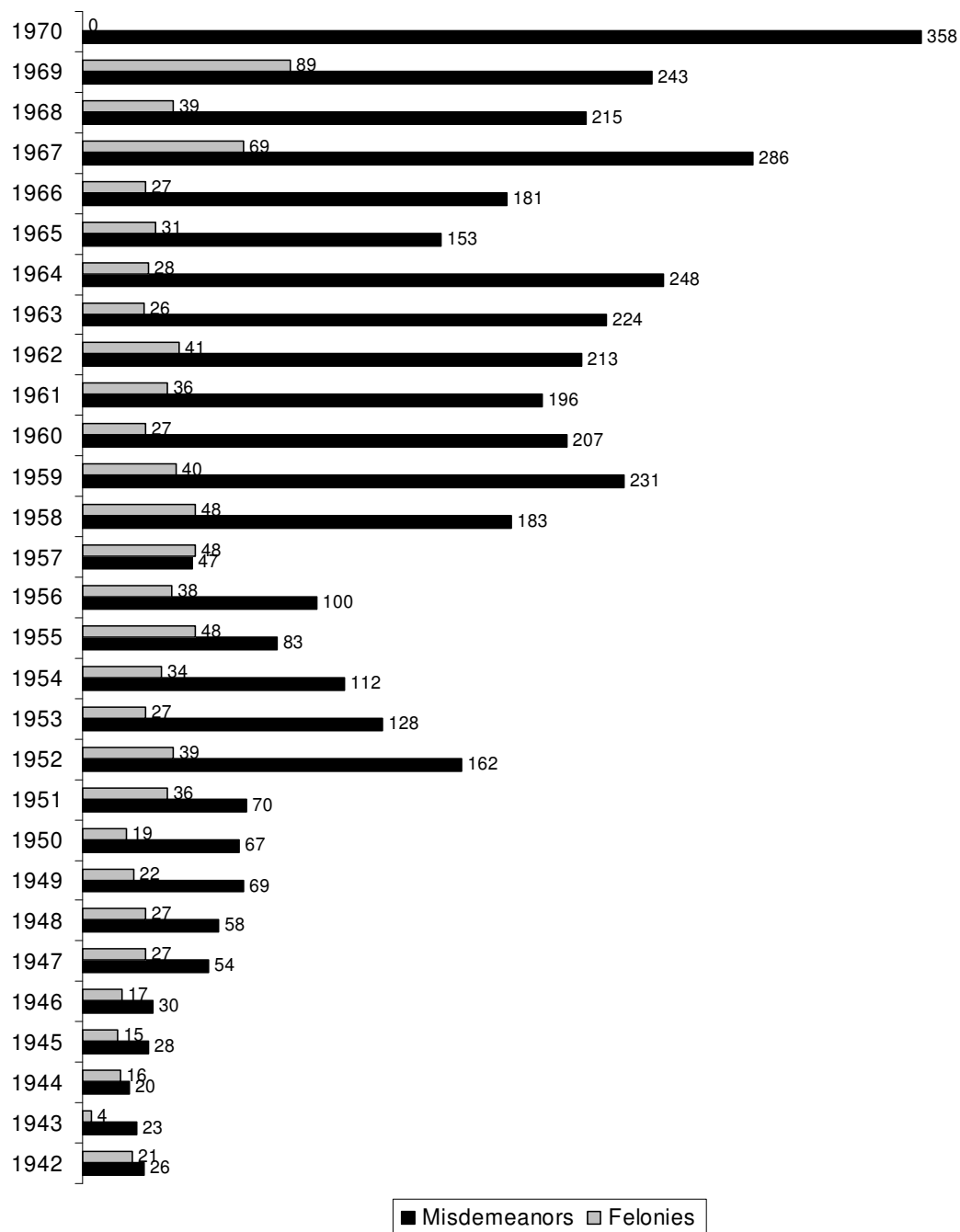


Fig. 4.8. Felony and Misdemeanor crime statistics for Ward County from 1942 to 1970.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Chart created by author. Data for felonies retrieved from Criminal File Docket: District Clerk, Office of the District Clerk, Ward County Courthouse, Monahans, Texas. Data for misdemeanors retrieved from Ward County Criminal File Docket, Office of the County Clerk, Ward County Courthouse, Monahans, Texas.

middle of the street in Monahans. One violent incident involved a black military policeman employed at Pyote AAF who died by his own pistol while arguing and physically fighting with this mistress, a black resident of Monahans.<sup>25</sup> Early in 1953, a Hispanic civilian employee of Pyote AAF got drunk a bar in Pyote. When he was asked to leave, he became violent and ended up assaulting a sheriff's deputy. The deputy shot and killed the employee. In a less violent incident, a civilian Pyote AAF employee was arrested for burglary. As one might expect of a military base town, when the court docket was posted in the newspaper, it consisted mostly of DWI charges.<sup>26</sup>

It would seem that though the crime data do not definitively show a causal link between the base or its absence and the crime rate, the anecdotal data in books on the base and in the local newspaper do suggest such a link. Did the closure of Pyote AAF cause a rise or a drop in either the misdemeanor or felony crime rates? Unfortunately, the data are too inconclusive to answer that question.

### ***Conclusions***

Pyote Army Air Field played an important role in the local community of Ward County, specifically to the towns of Pyote and Monahans. Base personnel had a long-lasting social relationship with the local citizens and the base itself created jobs and great

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<sup>25</sup> Up to this point, race has not been mentioned. When this thesis is expanded into a dissertation, I will more than likely get into topics of race and class; however, for the purposes of this thesis, the data simply is not there. Local newspapers from this time period for the most part ignored issues of race. Pyote may have been slightly different if only because of the demographics there.

<sup>26</sup> *The Monahans News*, 27 July 1945, 23 February 1953, 3 January 1946, 15 March 1954; Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright*, 175; Alexander, *Rattlesnake Bomber Base*, 131-2.

economic prosperity for the community. Pyote was quite literally transformed by the base.

When the base finally closed for good, it did left a lasting impression on the local community. The county population dropped and never fully recovered. In fact, a 2005 population estimate by the US Census Bureau estimated the population of Ward County at 10,237, almost 3,000 less than the 1990 total, and almost 5,000 less than the 1960 total, the last time the base was still active. The birthrate also dropped off and continued to decline into the 1970s.<sup>27</sup>

The economic data are less telling than the population data, but some conclusions may still be drawn. The building permit, postal receipts, retail revenue, and tax revenue data all suggest economic downturns during periods of base deactivation although not necessarily during all such periods; there are explanations for this deviation, however. The petroleum industry was perhaps the greatest saving grace for Ward County. While the damage caused by the loss of Pyote AAF could not be totally erased, as the ghost-town like appearance of the now nearly deserted Pyote attests, the petroleum industry did help the county and particularly Monahans to survive. For instance, in 1954, the year after the base closed for the first time, unemployment nearly doubled; yet the oil business continued to grow. Six major oil companies operated twenty-two pools in Monahans at that time. Martin Water Labs, Gulf Oil Corporation, Paso-Tex Petroleum Distributorship, Shell, and Halliburton all brought oil industry jobs and revenues to Ward County. Consequently, there was definitely a major prosperity generating asset in Ward

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<sup>27</sup> United States Census Bureau, People QuickFacts, Ward County, Texas. Available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/484751k.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.



County in the form of the oil industry; however, as explained earlier, after 1930 this would benefit Monahans but not Pyote.<sup>28</sup>

Along with the petroleum industry, there were a few other prosperity-generating assets. The Permian Coca-Cola Bottling Company had a bottling plant in Ward County that employed a large number of residents. Monahans also built a municipal airport during World War II. In 1957, Monahans Sandhills State Park opened, consisting of a museum, campground facilities, and a series of large sand dunes. As unappealing as the idea of going to a state park to see a bunch of sand dunes probably densely populated by rattlesnakes may sound, by April 1959, Monahans Sandhills State Park was ranked sixth in attendance among all Texas State Parks. And because the county charges admission to the park and also receives stated funding for it, the park should definitely be prosperity generating asset. Finally, the creation of one of Texas' several major juvenile prisons is a source of prosperity for the county. First called West Texas Children's home, the prison receives state funding and employs members of the local community.<sup>29</sup>

If Pyote received any of this prosperity, however, it is not apparent today. Walking through the cracked and dusty roads of Pyote, it is hard to imagine that there was ever a town there. Many of the few remaining buildings bear large cracks or even holes in their walls, their roofs damaged by tornadoes, their windows boarded-up. Touring the town on a weekday afternoon for several hours, this author saw only one living person besides the prisoners and guards at the juvenile prison. Who would have thought that this town once boasted a population in the thousands? Who would have

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<sup>28</sup> *The Monahans News*, 22 April 1954; Ward County Historical Commission, *Ward County 1887-1977*, 311, 314, 322, 324.

<sup>29</sup> Ward County Historical Commission, *Ward County 1887-1977*, 307-310, 268, 230; *The Monahans News*, 27 May 1957, 30 April 1959.

thought that Pyote was once home to Rattlesnake Bomber Base, one of Texas' many Army Air Forces installations during World War II?

## EPILOGUE

### FLOURISH, SURVIVE, OR BUST?

Over the past year, I have been asked on numerous occasions what my thesis is about. I always explain the purpose and scope of my thesis, that I am studying the effects of military base closures on small communities in West Texas. Whenever I tell them which bases I have been studying, people from this area invariably say, “There was a military base in San Marcos?” When I went to Marfa to do my research for Chapter III, I made two visits to the Marfa Lights viewing platform that happens to overlook the land that formally held Marfa AAF. Among the other sightseers at the platform, only one of them had any idea that he was looking out over the ruins of a military base. The local townspeople do know about Marfa AAF, however, and have even erected unofficial historical markers there. As I walked down the sandy, sun-scorched dirt roads and cracked pavement streets of Pyote, there was not even anyone to ask about the base. A museum dedicated to Rattlesnake Bomber Base stands next to the local community center, though.

I think my above observations really speak to the differences between each of the case studies in this thesis. Many people in San Marcos do not even know that a base was once here, that it was once a vital part of the community. That is hardly the case in Marfa or Pyote, however. In each case studied in this thesis, the loss of a military base had numerous negative effects upon the base’s respective local community, in terms of

population, economics, the loss of a social relationship, and in some cases the crime rate. Then why is it that the loss of a military base is forgettable in one town and unforgettable in another?

In the case of Camp Gary, the base closure had negative effects on the local community of San Marcos and Hays County. The community, however, had certain prosperity-generating assets that allowed it to recover from these effects very quickly. San Marcos boasted a strong tourism industry at the time of the base's closure in the 1960s. More importantly, San Marcos was home to three institutions of higher learning, chief among them being Southwest Texas State University, what is today Texas State University-San Marcos. And so, while the loss of the base was an emotional loss for the local community, it amounted only to an economic hiccup.

In the case of Marfa AAF, the base closure had negative effects on the local community of Marfa and Presidio County, just as in the previous case. The problem here, however, was that Marfa was a very small town with very little in the way of prosperity-generating assets. Marfa partially recovered, mostly because of its very diversified tourism industry, but never to the same extent as San Marcos.

In the case of Rattlesnake Bomber Base, the base closure, as well as the periods of demobilization and deactivation prior to that final closure, had negative effects on the local communities of Pyote, Monahans, and Ward County. Pyote, a town with a long history of booms and busts, did not survive the loss of the base. Monahans and the rest of Ward County were able to survive and to partially recover, in large part because of the petroleum industry that benefited the area in general, but not Pyote. The formation of a

large juvenile prison on the site of the former base also brought jobs and tax dollars to the community, but for Pyote it was too little, too late.

So, what is the relevance to this study? I have given brief histories of three Army Air Corps bases opened in West Texas towns during World War II, demonstrated the effects of the closures of these bases on their respective local communities, and uncovered what sort of factors allowed some of the communities to recover while the others did not.

The relevance here is that many towns across the United States are home to at least one military base. Given the nature of military funding during peacetime, it is natural to assume that some of these bases will close at some time in the future. When the federal government decides on which bases to leave open and which to close, will they focus on the bases themselves and what they do for the military? Or will they instead focus on the local communities and what assets those bases have to help them recover from the loss of a base? Will they focus on what those bases represent for those communities in terms of population, economics, and social relationships? It is my hope that this thesis will help for people – and hopefully the government – to realize that when it comes to military base closures, the local communities must be considered.

**APPENDIX A: TABLES**

Table A1. Unadjusted and adjusted tax revenues for Hays County, Texas from 1952 to 1967.<sup>1</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>County Tax</b>	<b>County Tax (adjusted)</b>
1952	1	\$ 72,015.58	\$ 72,015.58
1953	1	\$ 73,416.70	\$ 73,416.70
1954	1	\$ 77,781.52	\$ 77,781.52
1955	1.1	\$ 89,002.39	\$ 89,002.39
1956	1.1	\$ 95,730.35	\$ 95,730.35
1957	1.1	\$ 95,617.35	\$ 95,617.35
1958	1.1	\$ 96,458.24	\$ 96,458.24
1959	1	\$ 141,862.80	\$ 94,565.74
1960	1.1	\$ 140,976.08	\$ 93,974.65
1961	1	\$ 142,846.04	\$ 95,221.17
1962	0.9	\$ 142,348.52	\$ 94,889.52
1963	0.9	\$ 144,658.48	\$ 96,429.34
1964	0.9	\$ 149,379.36	\$ 99,576.28
1965	0.9	\$ 155,389.52	\$ 103,582.65
1966	1	\$ 161,771.52	\$ 107,836.90
1967	1	\$ 194,424.61	\$ 129,603.45

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<sup>1</sup> Table created by author. Data retrieved by author from Hays County Tax Roll Statements, 1952-1967.

Table A2. Enrollment figures at Southwest Texas State University for selected semesters from 1959 to 1964.<sup>2</sup>

Date	Spring	Summer	Fall
1959	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	2434
1960	<i>Unknown</i>	1613	2602
1961	2439	1802	<i>Unknown</i>
1962	2797	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
1963	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	3767
1964	3666	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>

Table A3. Unadjusted and adjusted tax revenues for Presidio County, Texas from 1938 to 1948, 1950, 1955, and 1960.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Unadjusted Revenues</b>		<b>Rate</b>	<b>Adjusted Revenues (adjusted to 1.0 rate)</b>	
1938	\$	55,583.46	0.85	\$	65,392.31
1939	\$	55,891.27	0.85	\$	65,754.44
1940	\$	48,982.87	0.75	\$	65,310.49
1941	\$	52,345.82	0.8	\$	65,432.28
1942	\$	53,734.94	0.8	\$	67,168.68
1943	\$	52,533.30	0.8	\$	65,666.63
1944	\$	49,441.92	0.75	\$	65,922.56
1945	\$	57,726.78	0.8	\$	72,158.48
1946	\$	54,360.84	0.8	\$	67,951.05
1947	\$	55,410.30	0.8	\$	69,262.88
1948	\$	54,654.97	0.8	\$	68,318.71
1950	\$	59,859.87	0.8	\$	74,824.84
1955	\$	63,017.86	0.8	\$	78,772.33
1960	\$	95,340.08	0.76	\$	125,447.47

<sup>2</sup> Table created by author. Data for this table was found in *Record*, 22 September 1960, 22 September 1960, 9 June 1960, 2 February 1961, 8 June 1961, 15 February 1962, 19 September, 1963, 20 February 1964. The data is incomplete because it was not always reported in the newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> Table created by author. Data for this table retrieved from Presidio County Tax Roll Statements, 1938-1948, 1950, 1955, 1960, Presidio County Courthouse Archives, Marfa, Texas. 1949 data missing because of the tax roll for that year itself being missing.

Table A4. Unadjusted and adjusted tax revenues for Ward County, Texas from 1942 to 1944, 1947 to 1951, 1953 to 1956, 1958, 1960 to 1963, and 1965 to 1967.<sup>4</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Unadjusted Revenues</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Adjusted Revenues (adjusted to 1.0 rate)</b>
1942	\$ 85,012.62	0.52	\$ 163,485.81
1943	\$ 61,103.36	0.42	\$ 145,484.19
1944	\$ 75,715.99	0.52	\$ 145,607.67
1947	\$ 129,997.39	0.78	\$ 166,663.32
1948	\$ 140,816.96	0.8	\$ 176,021.20
1949	\$ 206,192.36	0.8	\$ 257,740.45
1950	\$ 198,895.70	0.8	\$ 248,619.63
1951	\$ 210,587.00	0.8	\$ 263,233.75
1953	\$ 127,697.44	0.8	\$ 159,621.80
1954	\$ 294,067.48	0.95	\$ 309,544.72
1955	\$ 388,680.31	1.15	\$ 337,982.88
1956	\$ 421,819.14	1.15	\$ 366,799.25
1958	\$ 549,268.57	1.15	\$ 477,624.84
1960	\$ 602,995.94	1.15	\$ 524,344.30
1961	\$ 573,861.67	1.15	\$ 499,010.15
1962	\$ 582,061.40	1.15	\$ 506,140.35
1963	\$ 598,949.97	1.15	\$ 520,826.06
1965	\$ 640,275.87	1.15	\$ 556,761.63
1966	\$ 677,750.37	1.15	\$ 589,348.15
1967	\$ 675,955.60	1.15	\$ 587,787.48

<sup>4</sup> Table created by author. Data for this table retrieved from Ward County Tax Roll Statements, 1942-4, 1947-1951, 1953-6, 1958, 1960-3, and 1965-7, Ward County Courthouse Archives, Monahans, Texas. Missing data because of those rolls being missing from the archives, possibly caused by a previous fire in the building.



Table A5. Oil production for the state of Texas and Ward County, Texas from 1942 to 1958.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>State (barrels)</b>	<b>Ward County (barrels)</b>	<b>percentage of State Totals</b>
1942	489,280,927.00	63,540.33	0.012986%
1944	711,386,923.00	6,873,394.00	0.966196%
1946	756,649,000.00	6,447,642.00	0.852131%
1948	900,688,846.00	6,074,293.00	0.674405%
1950	819,918,613.00	4,963,485.00	0.605363%
1952	1,015,027,750.00	11,261,798.00	1.109506%
1954	959,416,013.00	9,628,994.00	1.003631%
1956	1,065,610,726.00	11,430,371.00	1.072659%
1958	909,943,167.00	18,039,716.00	1.982510%

Table A6. Retail sales percent increase for the state of Texas and Hays, Ward, and Presidio Counties, 1939, 1948, 1958.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>% increase</b>	<b>Hays</b>	<b>% increase</b>
1939	\$ 1,803,716,000	NA	\$ 2,999,000	NA
1948	\$ 6,518,877,000	361%	\$ 10,314,000	344%
1958	\$ 10,792,559,000	166%	\$ 16,823,000	163%
<b>Year</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>% increase</b>	<b>Presidio</b>	<b>% increase</b>
1939	\$ 3,795,000	NA	\$ 2,102,000	NA
1948	\$ 11,760,000	310%	\$ 5,573,000	265%
1958	\$ 17,190,000	146%	\$ 5,185,000	93%

<sup>5</sup> Table created by author. Data for this table retrieved from *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: A.H. Belo): 1943-4, 1945-6, 1947-8, 1949-50, 1952-3, 1956-8, 1958-9, and 1961-2. Totals for 1942 to 1946 and 1950 based on the State Comptroller's fiscal report. Totals for 1948 based on Railroad Commission's estimate for the fiscal year. Totals for 1952 based on US Bureau of Mines' report for the calendar year. Totals for 1954 to 1958 based on Texas Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association's report for the calendar year.

<sup>6</sup> Table created by author. Data for this table retrieved from Retail Sales, *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: 1947-1948, 1952-1953, 1961-1962* (Dallas: A.H. Belo).

Table A7. Current census data for Hays County, Texas.<sup>7</sup>

Population, 2005 estimate	124,432
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2005	27.5%
Population, 2000	97,589
Persons under 5 years old, percent, 2005	6.7%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2005	22.9%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2005	7.7%
Female persons, percent, 2005	49.9%
White persons, percent, 2005 (a)	93.0%
Black persons, percent, 2005 (a)	4.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2005 (a)	0.8%
Asian persons, percent, 2005 (a)	1.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2005 (a)	0.2%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2005	1.0%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2005 (b)	31.2%
White persons not Hispanic, percent, 2005	62.9%
Living in same house in 1995 and 2000, pct 5 yrs old & over	41.4%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2000	5.6%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	23.1%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	84.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2000	31.3%
Persons with a disability, age 5+, 2000	13,219
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2000	28.0
Housing units, 2005	44,427
Homeownership rate, 2000	64.8%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2000	23.1%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	\$129,400
Households, 2000	33,410
Persons per household, 2000	2.69
Median household income, 2003	\$45,822
Per capita money income, 1999	\$19,931
Persons below poverty, percent, 2003	12.4%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	677
Persons per square mile, 2000	143.9
Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area	Austin-Round Rock, TX Metro Area

<sup>7</sup> Table created by United States Census Bureau and edited by author. Available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/484751k.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.

Table A8. Current census data for Presidio County, Texas.<sup>8</sup>

Population, 2005 estimate	7,722
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2005	5.7%
Population, 2000	7,304
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	10.0%
Persons under 5 years old, percent, 2004	9.3%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2004	31.6%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2004	14.9%
Female persons, percent, 2004	52.8%
White persons, percent, 2004 (a)	98.9%
Black persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.3%
Asian persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2004 (a)	0.0%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2004	0.1%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2004 (b)	84.0%
White persons, not Hispanic, percent, 2004	15.5%
Living in same house in 1995 and 2000, pct age 5+, 2000	56.6%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2000	35.8%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	84.4%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	44.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2000	11.7%
Persons with a disability, age 5+, 2000	1,897
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2000	17.3
Housing units, 2004	3,620
Homeownership rate, 2000	70.3%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2000	8.1%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	\$35,500
Households, 2000	2,530
Persons per household, 2000	2.85
Per capita money income, 1999	\$9,558
Median household income, 2003	\$24,254
Persons below poverty, percent, 2003	27.7%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	3,856
Persons per square mile, 2000	1.9
Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area	None

<sup>8</sup> Table created by United States Census Bureau and edited by author. Available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/484751k.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.

Table A9. Current census data for Ward County, Texas.<sup>9</sup>

Population, 2005 estimate	10,237
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2005	-6.2%
Population, 2000	10,909
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	-16.8%
Persons under 5 years old, percent, 2004	7.4%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2004	28.5%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2004	15.2%
Female persons, percent, 2004	50.4%
White persons, percent, 2004 (a)	93.3%
Black persons, percent, 2004 (a)	5.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.9%
Asian persons, percent, 2004 (a)	0.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2004 (a)	0.0%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2004	0.3%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2004 (b)	44.1%
White persons, not Hispanic, percent, 2004	50.2%
Living in same house in 1995 and 2000, pct age 5+, 2000	59.9%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2000	6.6%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	36.1%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	70.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2000	12.4%
Persons with a disability, age 5+, 2000	2,042
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2000	19.3
Housing units, 2004	4,884
Homeownership rate, 2000	78.1%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2000	9.4%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	\$34,400
Households, 2000	3,964
Persons per household, 2000	2.66
Per capita money income, 1999	\$14,393
Median household income, 2003	\$31,448
Persons below poverty, percent, 2003	17.1%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	835
Persons per square mile, 2000	13.1
Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area	None

<sup>9</sup> Table created by United States Census Bureau and edited by author. Available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/484751k.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2006.

APPENDIX B: PICTURES

Figure B1. Map of military installations open during World War II.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Map by Erwin Raisz. Appears in World War II pamphlet by Texas Historical Commission.

Figure B2. Camp Gary helicopter flightline.<sup>2</sup>



Figure B3. Gary Air Force Base front gate.<sup>3</sup>

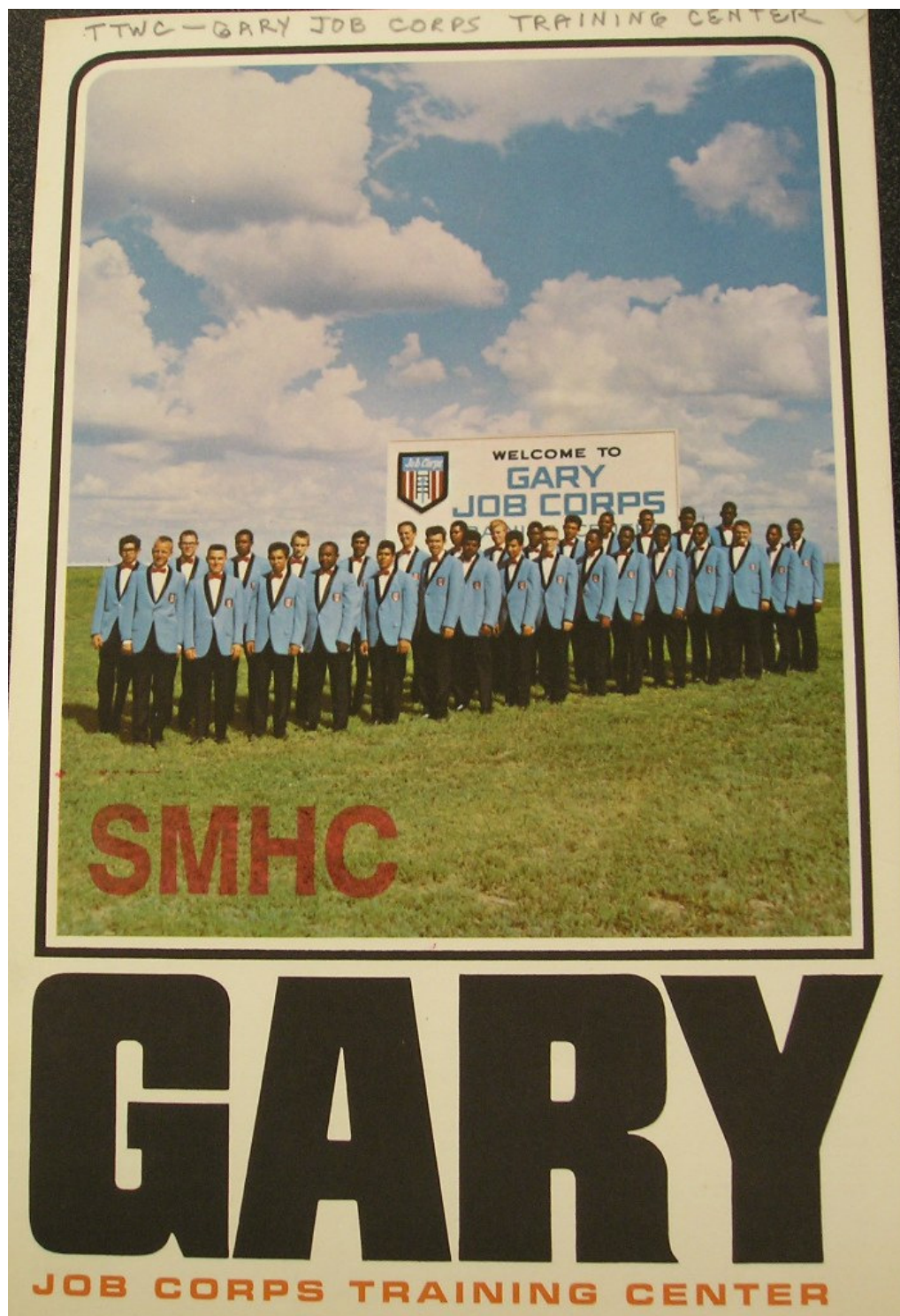


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<sup>2</sup> Vertical files, Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, San Marcos Public Library, San Marcos, TX.  
File: *Gary Air Force Base*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Figure B4. Gary Job Corps informational pamphlet.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Vertical files, Tula Townsend Wyatt Collection, San Marcos Public Library, San Marcos, TX.  
File: *Gary Job Corps Training Center #2*.

Figure B5. The front gates of Marfa AAF as they appear today.<sup>5</sup>



Figure B6. An aerial view of Marfa AAF, circa World War II.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> Photo accessed from <http://www.airfields-freeman.com>, 16 September 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Figure B7. Marfa downtown district.<sup>7</sup>



Figure B8. The famous Hotel Paisano in Marfa.<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Photo taken by author, August 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Figure B9. Pyote main thoroughfare, circa World War II.<sup>9</sup>



Figure B10. Restored front gate to Pyote AAF.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Photo found in Vertical Files, Ward County Historical Commission Archives, Monahans, Texas.

<sup>10</sup> Photo accessed from TxGenWeb Project. Available from [www.rootsweb.com/~txgenweb](http://www.rootsweb.com/~txgenweb). Accessed on 16 September 2006.

Figure B11. Welcome to Pyote.<sup>11</sup>



Figure B12. This is what tax rolls look like.<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Photo taken by author, August 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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## VITA

Kerry Chandler is a native of Conroe, Texas. After graduating from Conroe High School in 2001, Kerry attended Texas A&M University in College Station, where he double-majored in History and English on a Secondary Education track. He eventually left the Secondary Education track in order to attend graduate school, turned his English major into a minor, and graduated Cum Laude in December 2004 with a BA in History. He began pursuing his MA in History from Texas State University-San Marcos in January 2005. After researching and writing this thesis, Kerry has come to consider himself a Social-Military historian, but his interests also lie in twentieth century American political history and labor history. In March 2005, Kerry spoke on the history of Bryan Army Air Field at the Historic Preservation Conference at Texas A&M University, held by the Center for Heritage Conservation of the College of Architecture. Later that month, Kerry was part of a three-person panel on military aviation in West Texas at the 82<sup>nd</sup> annual conference of the West Texas Historical Association, held in Abilene.

Aside from a BA in history, Kerry also holds several probationary teaching certifications. After graduate school, Kerry plans to teach at either the elementary or high school level. He hopes to someday teach history at a school for the deaf, or deaf education at a public school. He plans to eventually return to graduate school for a PhD in Social-Military History.