

# *An Historical Walking Tour of*



**Major General**



**Oscar Westover**



**Apollo Astronauts**



**John F. Kennedy**

## An Historical Walking Tour of **Westover Air Reserve Base**

Westover Field was constructed as the premier Army air base for the northeast when United States preparations for entry into World War II were precipitated by the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. Up to then, the country had only seventeen unimproved, and ill-maintained air bases. Chicopee's Mayor Anthony Stonina lobbied long and hard to get the Northeast base, arguing convincingly for the town's flat, open tobacco fields as a natural air field. Within two weeks of the Polish invasion, Chicopee was chosen for the Northeast Air Base.

The Army historically had two groups to do its work of building: the Quartermaster Corps and the Corps of Engineers. The Quartermaster Corp, largely a supply rather than construction organization, was nevertheless responsible for constructing military camps, depots, and other facilities which sheltered the military since peacetime armies were small, and mustered units were sent immediately to the field. When the Quartermasters did construct, they built slowly but solidly. The Army Corps of Engineers, on the other hand, historically in charge of fortifications, batteries, roads and bridges, was essentially in the construction business, and involved, as well, in developing new military technology. It was the Quartermaster Corps which was given the task of constructing the base; plans were delivered and publicly announced in October, 1939.

President Roosevelt signed a \$750,000 Works Progress Administration (WPA) project bill for the air base's construction in November, 1939. Fourteen hundred WPA and Civilian Conservation Commission (CCC) workers cleared the land, and actual construction was started in February, 1940. The Quartermaster Corps proved to be unequal to the gigantic task of rapidly designing and building hundreds of military installations across the country, so to ease their burden, the Corps of Engineers was given all Army Air Corps work in November of 1940.

Since the Constructing Quartermaster had already planned the base, the first permanent masonry buildings were constructed to those designs, which were intended to be lasting and attractive. In fact, it is these buildings which have survived, while of the hundreds of temporary buildings later constructed to meet the tremendous needs of the war mobilization by the Corps of Engineers, only a few remain.





On April 6, 1940, "Army Day" nationwide, the dedication, flag raising and ground breaking ceremony was held on site. The new air base was named for Major General Oscar Westover, Chief of the Air Corps, US Army, who had died piloting his own plane in September, 1939.

Building at the base was constant throughout 1941. At first, the base had been planned to accommodate 1,400 men as an airplane overhaul facility, but by 1940 this was increased to 3,000 men. At the start of 1942 there was housing for approximately 3,300 enlisted and 500 officers, and at the close of that year there were quarters for about 8,000 officers and men. All but a few of these temporary buildings are now gone.

The first organization at the base was the 10th Signal Platoon which began working in June, 1940. The first Air Corps arrived in July. Throughout 1941 many organizations passed through being activated and deactivated. For a brief time the all-black 369th Antiaircraft Coast Artillery Regiment, known as "Harlem's Finest" was stationed here. In 1942 Westover Field became the training center for anti-submarine, engineering, chemical platoons, bomber and fighter groups. The following year training mainly focused on fighter groups and anti-submarine combat units, and in the fall of 1943 the base's main mission shifted from fighter training to training heavy bombardment groups.

As victory in Europe was achieved, crews were brought back to be trained for re-deployment to the Pacific. At the end of the war, troops were prepared for inactivation, and in February of 1946 Westover became an Air Transport Command base which meant that it was the terminus for air routes around the world: C-54 and 47 transport planes took supplies and reinforcements to the armed forces and returned with the wounded and discharged troops. Westover was also the launching point of the heroic Berlin airlift for 327 days during the Russian blockade. Altogether 276,926 flights by C-47s and C-54s were flown, bringing an average of one ton of supplies and food to each Berlin resident. Chicopee schoolchildren responded to the plight of German children and organized "Operation Little Vittles" sending ten tons of candy attached to handkerchief parachutes which were dropped from the air.

Detonation in August of 1949 by the Russians of a radioactive nuclear device spawned a new strategy in the military, calling for massive retaliation in the event of an attack. General Curtis LeMay carried the strategy to its furthest conclusion: the military had to carry out a pre-emptive attack if it became clear that there were preparations for nuclear attack by an enemy in progress. This strategy was to be made manifest through the Strategic Air Command (SAC). Meanwhile, Westover took part in the Korean conflict transporting freight and passengers to the forces in Korea, and casualties were brought to the Westover Hospital from 1950 to 1954.



In 1955 the Strategic Air Command, the creation of Curtis LeMay, came to Westover with activation of the 4050th Air Refueling Wing and the Eighth Air Force headquarters. The 99th Bomb Wing kept bombers and tankers on ground alert at all times, and SAC crews lived on 24 hour alert for two weeks at a time. Photography which had always been an important military activity was now a critical activity for SAC. Film made on high-speed spy planes over enemy land was developed and translated to maps in Buildings 1900 and 1875. In case of nuclear war, an alternate SAC command bunker, called "The Notch", was constructed deep within Mt. Holyoke. Nuclear weapons were stored at the Stony Brook section of the base and planes loaded with these devices were kept on the ground ready to take off at a moment's notice. The climax came in 1962 when Russian missiles were being installed in Cuba. The Cuban missile crisis was in large part played out at Westover where U-2 film of the Russian trawler approaching Cuba was developed.

In 1967 SAC crews were sent to Vietnam on B-52 bombing missions and anti-war activists began protesting the war on a daily basis at Westover's main gate. President Nixon ordered the deactivation of the Eighth Air Force in 1970, although the 99th Bomb Wing continued its missions into Vietnam. Many American prisoners of war returned from Vietnam through Westover, but when this operation ended in 1973 the base was in part sold off and in 1974 the remainder was turned over to the Air Force Reserve.

Most recently, between March and July of 1991, soldiers returning from the Gulf War landed at Westover where they were met by families and friends.





## Walking Tour

### Stop #1 Base Headquarters. Building 1100.



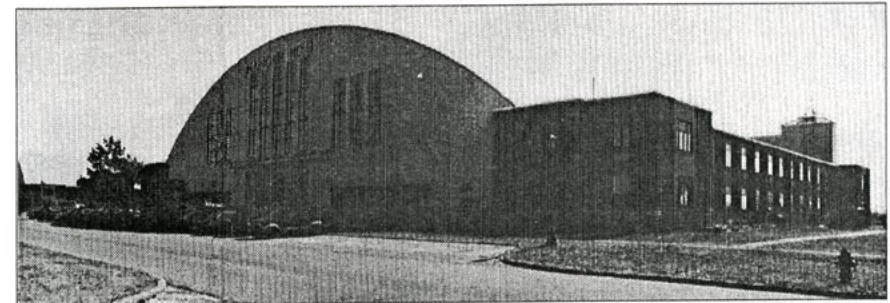
This walking tour begins at Building 1100, Base Headquarters, on Walker Avenue. Deceptively modest in appearance, this building, as headquarters for the air base, was the site of much of the decision-making for which Westover is historically significant. Once it was completed in May, 1942, it was the Commanding Officers' base. Here were an Officers' Assembly and Court Room, offices of the Base Inspector, Operations, Public Relations, Security, Adjutant, and an Air Force engineering office as well. General Curtis LeMay's office was in this building during the years of the Strategic Air Command (1955-1973). This one of the few remaining examples at Westover of the temporary buildings constructed when mobilization began during World War II. Temporary buildings built in great haste, were, in general, the wood frame buildings; while permanent were made of brick. Over five hundred of these temporary buildings spread over the base have since been demolished. The chapel, which contains stained glass windows from the original base chapel, is open to the public.

On the north side of Building 1100 is the Medal of Honor Grove dedicated to significant figures and places from American History. Each person or place is represented by one species of tree which will mature over the next few decades. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, for instance, is represented by a tulip poplar, Robert E. Lee by a chestnut oak, the Minuteman by a silver maple, and the Wright Brothers by red cedars.

*From the entrance to Building 1100 follow Walker Avenue to the intersection with Eagle Drive. Turn left on Eagle Drive and walk to Hangar Avenue. Turn right and stop at the first hangar.*



### Stop #2 Hangar No. 9. Building 7071.



This hangar was built in 1941 as part of the original plan for the Northeast Air Base drawn up by the U.S. Quartermaster Corps. It is one of five similar hangars constructed in 1941, part of a larger scheme to include at least three additional hangars adjacent to the runways. The hangars were designed to be large enough to accommodate four C-54 airplanes at one time for repair and maintenance work. Part of their success was the roof system which was designed without supports enabling full use of the interior. Use of the hangars continued throughout the war and afterward to carry out the Berlin Airlift for 327 days between 1948 and 1949. Overlapping with the Airlift, from 1946-1955, the hangars were used as Air Transport Command centers when airplanes took off from Westover for all parts of the world.

Hangar No.9 was the home of the aerospace ground powered equipment branch which washed and treated the skins of aircraft, of parachutes and life rafts. Inspection, servicing and minor aircraft maintenance also took place in this hangar. Maintenance work continues under the Maintenance Squadron/ Propulsion/ Age/ Branches of the Air Force Reserve.

*An optional stop on the tour is to continue walking to the right on Hangar Avenue until you can see three small, identical masonry buildings on your left.*

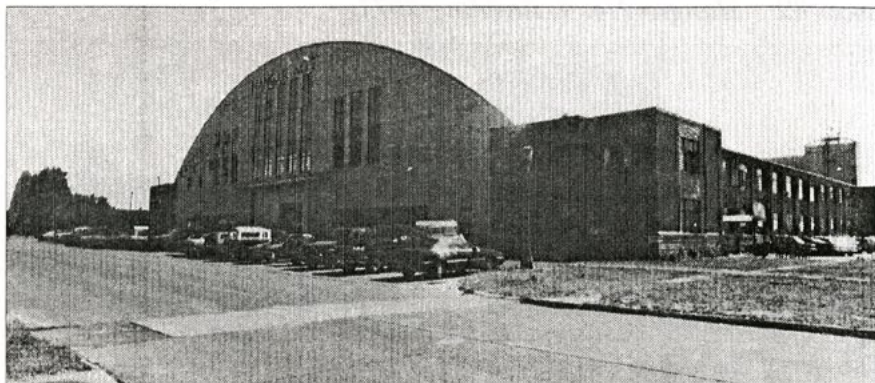
### (Optional Stop) Seg Mag Storage. Building 7010.

The three hollow tile buildings were constructed in 1941 as small arms and ammunition storehouses. From these buildings bullets were taken to the brick wings of the hangars where they were strung together in long chains of ammunition for use on bombing flights. Bombardiers trained over the Quabbin Reservoir, using a mock enemy ship as target, but for the gun operators there was less opportunity to practice. For many the extent of their preparation for combat was shooting into the Atlantic Ocean on their way over to the war zone.

*Continue to follow Hangar Avenue easterly towards the large hangars. Walk past Hangar No. 9 to the next hangar on your right.*

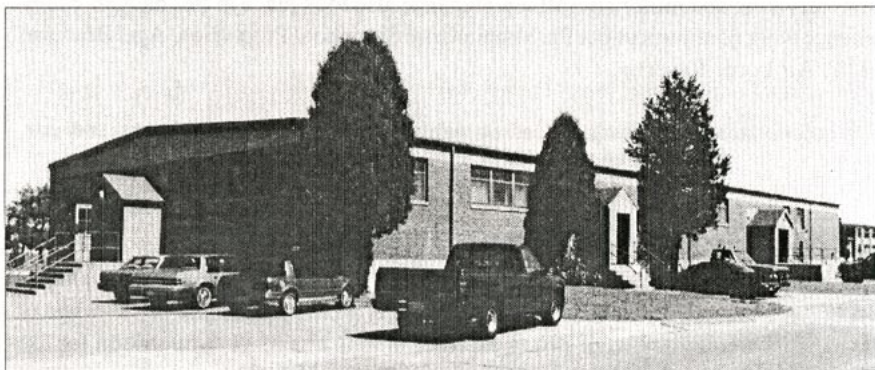




**Stop #3 Hangar No. 7. Building 7072.**

The first plan for Westover called for four flight hangars and a repair hangar together with permanent and temporary support buildings for troops. The plan made allowance for additional hangars to be constructed should the need arise and money be allocated. The five hangars were the most ambitious feature of the construction effort. Through World War II (1941-1946), the Berlin Airlift (1948-1949), the Air Transport Command (1946-1955) and the Strategic Air Command (1955-1974) these hangars played a vital role in US military history.

*Continue to follow Hangar Avenue to the first building after the water tower, on your left.*

**Stop #4 Quartermaster's Warehouse. Building 1310.**

This Quartermaster's warehouse is one of two which were planned, designed, and constructed for the Northeast Air Base in 1939 by the Quartermaster Corps in Washington, D.C. The two warehouses were planned to operate from opposite sides of the five-and-a-half mile spur tracks which connected to the Boston and Maine Railroad in the Willimansett section of Chicopee.



Once the shift was made in base function in 1943 from protecting the coast and training fighter pilots and submarine crews to training combat crews and acting as a staging station, the number of men who passed through Westover for five to six days, who were fed, clothed and supplied, escalated to over a thousand every few weeks. The base was operated by a base squadron and the materials were in part distributed by them through this building. Although soldiers came to the base equipped with flight gear, there was a clothing record kept on each soldier and at a clothing shake-down held just before leaving the base. Any replacement clothing and necessary supplies were processed from this warehouse.

*Proceed on Hangar Avenue to the next hangar.*

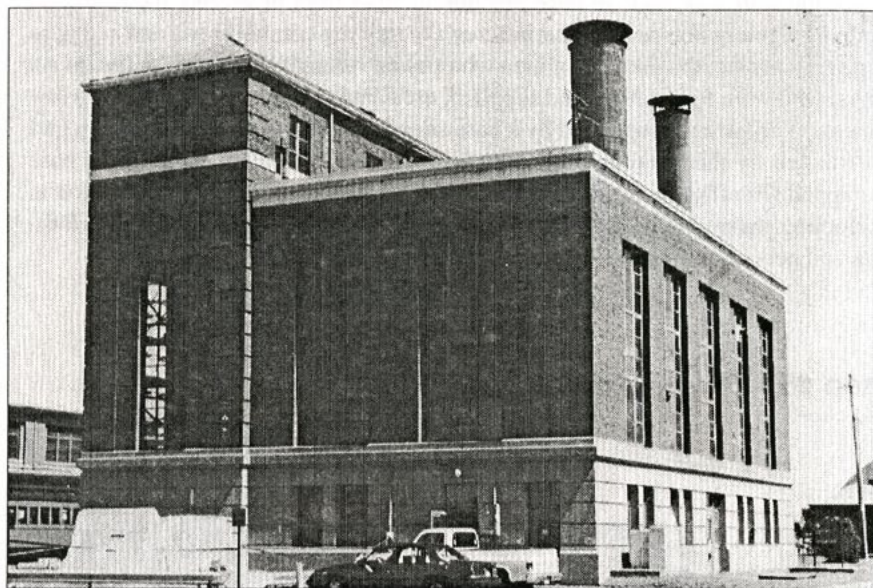
**Stop #5 Hangar No. 5. Building 7073.**

When the base was originally planned, it was anticipated that aircraft would be assembled and maintained in these hangars. US entry into World War II required the hangars be used instead to ready aircraft for flights to England from which they carried out multiple bombing flights. Crews were assembled in Hangar No. 5 and trained to work together. Built at a cost of \$219,419.14 in 1941, Hangar No. 5 is one of five nearly identical hangars arranged around the south east curve of the base ellipse. As the others, it is rectangular in plan (272' x 238' 2 1/4") with the broad center hangar section under a steel beam arched roof. At each side of the arched section, two-story, brick and concrete wings, under flat roofs, support the steel beams and contain office, mechanical and storage rooms for hangar activities. On the street facade the entry doors slid on train rails to close. They are still in place but are fixed in an open position. The runway facade still has its ten original steel and glass sliding panels, but they are fixed in a closed position.

*Continue walking on Hangar Avenue to the corner of Port Street. On your left will be Building 1411. Behind it is Building 1408.*





**Stop #6 Central Heating Plant. Building 1411.**

Westover Field was dedicated in April, 1940 and as early as June a plot plan included the central heating plant in its present location across from the Quartermaster's Warehouse. Key to the location of the two buildings was placement of the Boston and Maine Railroad tracks on the base, as coal to power the plant was transported directly to the building by rail. The central heating plant supplied steam heat through underground pipes to the permanent buildings on base. During the period when the plant was coal fueled, by-products were coke and clinkers. The clinkers were sold for cinder blocks and Westover became one of the region's biggest supplier of clinkers. The plant was converted to oil fuel in 1976 when an oil pipeline was laid to the base.

**Quartermaster's Warehouse, Building 1408.**

Set back from Hangar Avenue, and behind the Central Heating Plant is the QM Warehouse. The Quartermasters retained their function of supplying the military after the Army Corps of Engineers took over base construction. While the other warehouse was designed as an open interior space which could be flexibly used for bulk storage, this warehouse, also known as the commissary, was where food was stored for the base. The first floor was used for office space, pastry, meat, groceries, shipping and receiving. On the second floor were additional offices, and storage areas. During World War II food for three squadron mess halls was served from this building which acted as both a commissary and food supply warehouse.

In 1967 the building was altered to become the Finance Building, and in 1990 its use was shifted to Air Force Reserve aeromedical evacuation training with space devoted to a chaplain, chapel, and lecture room.

*Walk past Port Street on Hangar Avenue. On the corner and opposite Hangar No. 3 is Building 1528.*

**Stop #7 Paint, Oil and Dope House. Building 1528.**

This small brick outbuilding is a part of the Georgian Revival design scheme prepared by the Quartermaster Corps for Westover Field's permanent buildings, before wartime construction forced rapid, impermanent construction. The original function of this building was to hold supplies of paint, dope and oil which were used in the assembly, maintenance and repair of airplanes in the five hangars across from it. These supplies were kept separately for fire protection. Dope was a highly flammable acetone applied to the fabric surfaces of many of the World War II era airplanes. Ailerons, rudders and elevators had fabric surfaces which were stiffened and strengthened with paint and dope so they would not flap around during flight.

*Continue along the curve of Hangar Avenue to the last hangar which is on your right. Behind the hangar you will see the aircraft runways.*





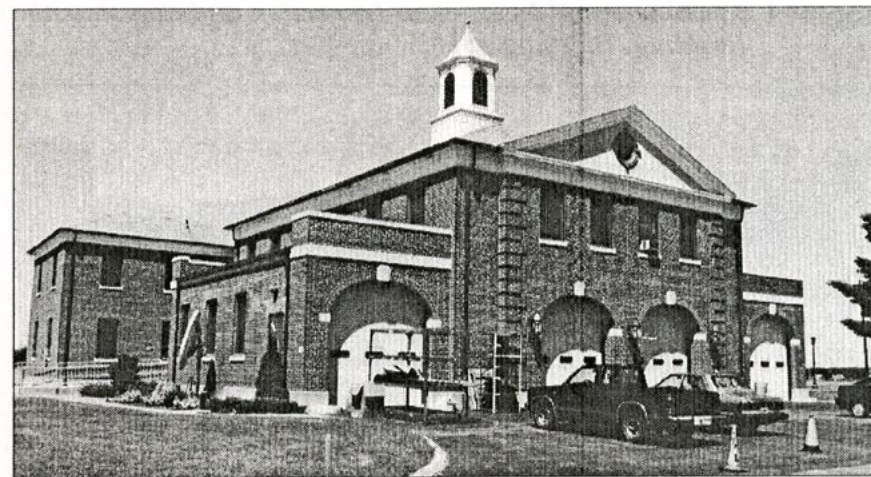
**Stop #8 Runway Crosswinds. Building 1533.**

Although it is actually a structure rather than a building, a portion of the Runway Crosswinds remains in the pattern of runways behind the Base Hangar. One of the features which earned Chicopee award of the Northeast Air Base in 1939 was the fact that the land being offered was flat tobacco fields which varied less than a foot in elevation making it highly suitable for an airfield. The layout of the first four runways constructed for the field was based on the prevailing winds and the need to protect airplanes from any cross wind over 13 miles per hour. Runway #1 designed to be 150 feet wide and 7,053 feet long was the longest runway in existence at the time of its construction in 1940. The Army Corps of Engineers designed the runways to bear the impact of B-17 and B-24 bombers which could weigh up to 140,000 pounds. Much of the significance of Westover's runway system lies in the initial scope of its planning which anticipated use by large aircraft.

**Stop #9 Base Hangar No. 1. Building 7087.**

Design of the Base Hangar came from the office of the Constructing Quartermaster. It was designed as a permanent building to be the main hangar for airplane maintenance and repair when the Northeast Air Base was first conceived. Each of the hangars was designed to hold four C-54 airplanes. Considered permanent buildings, the hangars were constructed for maximum safety with fireproof brick and corrugated asbestos exteriors. In fact, the hangar did serve as the maintenance base as originally planned throughout World War II, housing, repairing and servicing B-17 and B-24 bombers, at their last stop before flying to England on missions. The Base Hangar took care of the most complicated repair work, and was the stopping place for transient aircraft as well. The hangar was organized in the brick wings with rooms at each side for parachute storage, post operations, night lighting, meteorological department, technical library, storage and shipping, with smaller rooms for rubber storage, clothing cold storage, radio repair rooms, and engine shops. At the end of the war the base became an Air Transport Command and from this hangar emerged C-54 and C-47 transport planes which flew food and supplies for 327 days of the Berlin Airlift. From 1955 B-52 superfortress planes, KC137 and 135 fueling jets were readied here for their use on SAC alert. The hangar has been in use during the Korean and Vietnam wars, Desert Storm and world-wide humanitarian flights by the Air Reserves flying the massive C-5A aircraft.

*Directly across from Base Hangar on Hangar Avenue is Building 1520.*

**Stop #10 Fire and Guard House. Building 1520.**

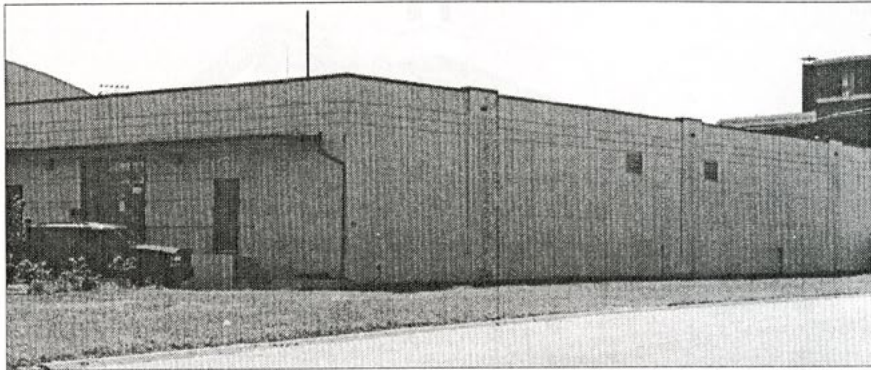
Work was begun on this building in October, 1940 and was completed by September, 1941. The building was dual purpose, combining fire and police stations for the base. The fire station was originally designed with the first floor for fire truck apparatus room and ambulance, and the second floor to house twelve firemen. The two rear blocks were divided in functions: one for guard house use, one for firehouse use. The guard house block provided room and cells for twelve guards and thirty-five prisoners. Prisoners were kept under heavy security, sometimes thirty to sixty days or longer, and were used for work details. They wore uniforms with large "P"s painted on the back and cleaned roads, collected garbage and pruned bushes at the Officers' houses. German prisoners of war were held at Westover, but not at this building. They were housed at the Stony Brook section of the base and worked to maintain the grounds, clear roads and work on construction projects.

*Follow Hangar Avenue to the intersection with Provider Street. Take a left turn on Provider Street, then turn again to the left on Patriot Avenue. On your left, on the second block, is building 1510.*





### Stop #11 *Armament and Instrument Inspection and Adjustment Building. Building 1510.*

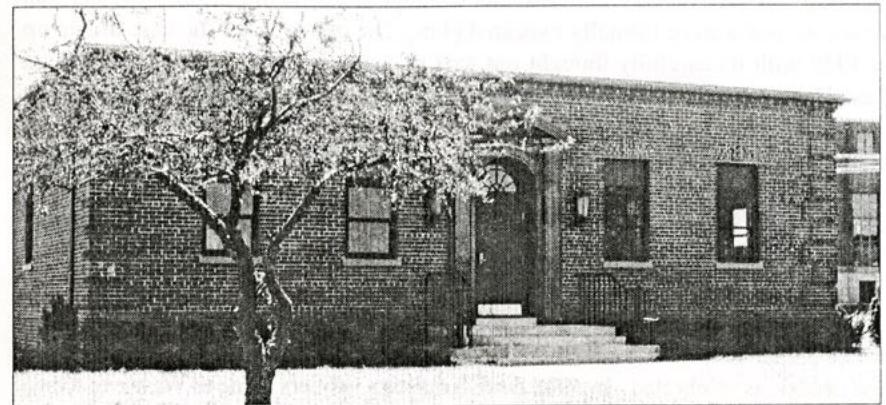


The windowless, all-concrete construction of this building, which was completed in June, 1942, is explained by its original use as an armament and instrument testing and storage building. It was here the Norden bombsights were secretly placed and checked between bombing missions. Bombsights were devices which calculated the correct dropping of bombs correcting for interference from air turbulence and speed changes. The top portion of the Norden was removed from its base in the aircraft and escorted by armed guards through an underground tunnel to Building 1510 when a B-17 or B-24 bomber landed. The mystique surrounding the highly classified secret weapon was a strong psychological factor in maintaining morale among fliers when losses were high.

In 1957 the building became the Communications center for the Strategic Air Command.

*Now continue in the same direction on Patriot Avenue to Port Street. Turn right on Port Street. At the end of the block turn right on Ellipse Drive. On your right will be building 1502.*

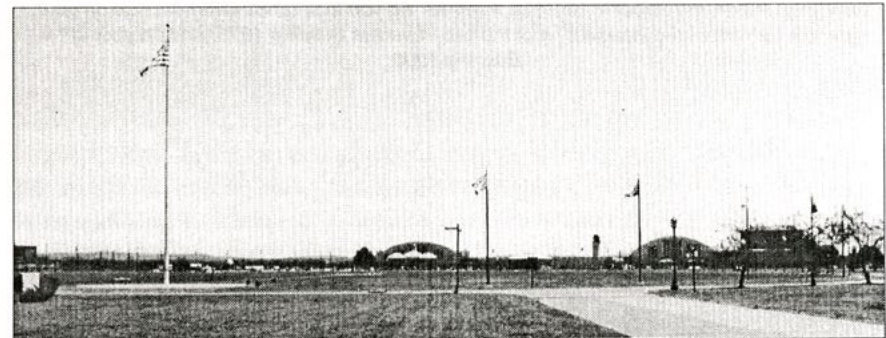
### Stop #12 *The Photographic Laboratory. Building 1502.*



The first building to be constructed at Westover Field was the Photographic Laboratory. It was an important building since Westover's first mission was surveillance of the coastline, in large part through photography. Photography had developed as a means of identifying enemy locations during World War I and played an increasingly significant role during World War II. Through photography, bombing missions became more destructive and accurate; before-and-after photographs were taken to estimate enemy strength, and pinpoint their locations. In this building pictures taken at bomb drops and antisubmarine patrols were processed; photographs taken by cameras attached to guns were used to record the gunner's accuracy. The building continued to operate as a photographic laboratory into the 1970s.

*Now continue in the same direction on Ellipse Drive following the oval roadway.*

### Stop #13 *Ellipse and Flagpoles.*



When the Quartermaster Corps drew up its first plans for the Northeast Air Base, they followed a formal geometric approach making the elliptical parade ground its center, with base buildings constructed on streets outward. Although it has been



reported that the base was modeled after Chanute Air Base in Illinois, it is clear that Westover was a more formally executed plan. The plot plan for the base drawn up in 1939 with its carefully thought out axis of gate, flag pole, parade ground and Base Hangar No. 1, made this the geographic and symbolic center of the base. The center flag pole was, and continues to be a focus of the imagery of this important American military installation, and fifty new flag poles have been added around the edge of the ellipse for the states of the union. Several stone monuments to commemorate the history of the base, the groups and squadrons who trained here during World War II are placed between the flag pole and the main entrance.

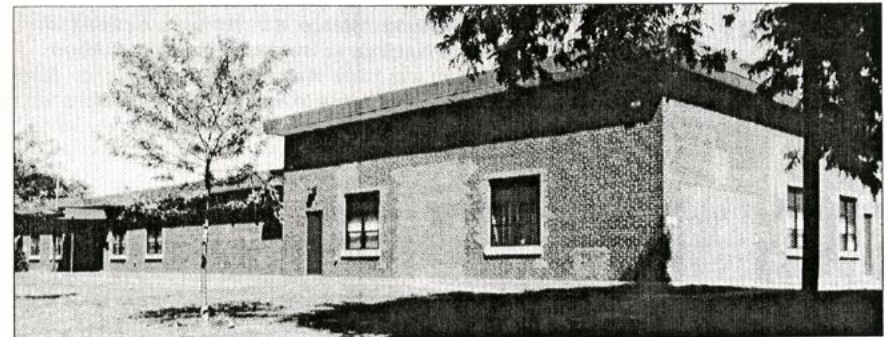
During its history, the parade ground has been the ceremonial center of the base where parade review was held every month during World War II, visitors presented and occasions celebrated. In 1943 British military officers came to Westover to see base operations and were photographed on the field looking over both men and equipment; Generals Patton and Eisenhower visited as well. After the war, personnel continued to be reviewed here to keep their training polished and morale high. The flag was raised to honor individuals on base anniversary dates, such as the fortieth anniversary when the flag was raised to honor Chicopee's Mayor Stonina, through whose perseverance the base was established.

But the base plan was not just created for symbolic reasons. The Construction Division of the Quartermaster Corps laid it out in 1939 primarily for economical circulation. It placed the support buildings housing supplies and mechanical services in close proximity to the main hangars, to save on time and fuel overhauling airplanes. This arrangement continued to be efficient once the base went into wartime operations as well.

*Walk past Pittsburgh Street to Starlifter Avenue. As you look up Starlifter Avenue on your right, set back from the intersection of the two streets is Building 1875, and on your left is Building 1900.*



### Stop #14 Target Intelligence Training Building. Building 1875.



This building was constructed in 1957 during the Strategic Air Command years at Westover base. The Corps of Engineers in Boston oversaw its construction to designs by McClintock & Craig Engineers and Architects of Springfield. It was designated as Target Intelligence Training Building for the Reconnaissance Technical forces in 1957, but its functions were always highly secret. What is known is that this was one of four photographic labs on the base during the SAC era, processing film secretly made by U-2 airplanes. The quantity of film taken was so great that another building on base operated primarily as a silver recovery facility. Original drawings of Building 1875 indicated rooms for radar bomb training, secure storage, predictions, mission support and operational intelligence maps. Here also were Link Trainers which simulated aircraft for training purposes.

### Stop #15 Materials Research testing Laboratory. Building 1900.

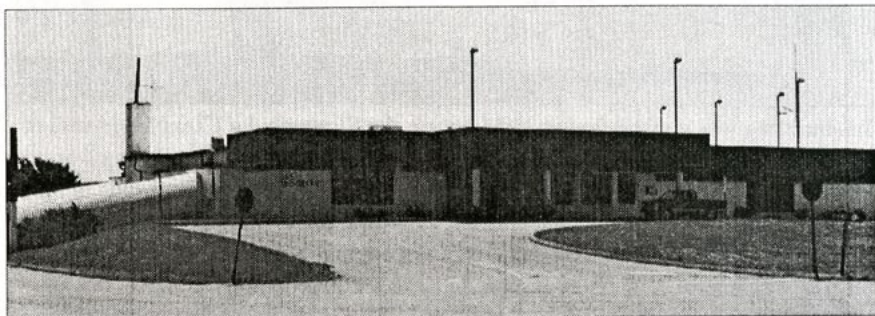
This building was the main location for the 8th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron which converted secretly photographed aerial film into maps. Building 1900 was constructed in 1955. Under the leadership of General Curtis LeMay, the Strategic Air Command photogrammetrists converted film to maps for distribution within SAC to target pre-emptive nuclear attacks. The camera which recorded the sites in the USSR and other countries allied with the US was a Hycon Model 73B aerial camera that could record sites at elevations of 70,000 feet and speeds of 500 mph. It is rumored that the U-2 film taken during the Cuban missile crisis was brought to Building 1900 and to another site in Rochester for development in October, 1962. The building was entirely self-contained, so that employees needs could be met without their leaving during working hours. Work was coordinated between Building 1900 and the Notch, an alternate headquarters for the Strategic Air Command which is four hundred feet below the surface of Mt. Holyoke in Hadley. When President Nixon pulled the 8th Air Force from Westover in 1973, the effect was virtually to shut base operations down. Work in Building 1900 continued, however, until it was closed and "pickled" in 1976. It has remained that way since.





The next stop on this tour is not within easy walking distance. It is, however, included for those who are interested in the Cold War era buildings at Westover. To get to it, follow Ellipse Drive to Walker Avenue. Take a right turn and follow Walker Avenue to the end. Take a left turn on Industrial Road and follow it about 1/4 of a mile to Padgett Street. Take a left on Padgett and follow it to the airport terminal on the right side of the road. It is known as Building 7450.

## Stop #16 The Mole Hole. Building 7450.

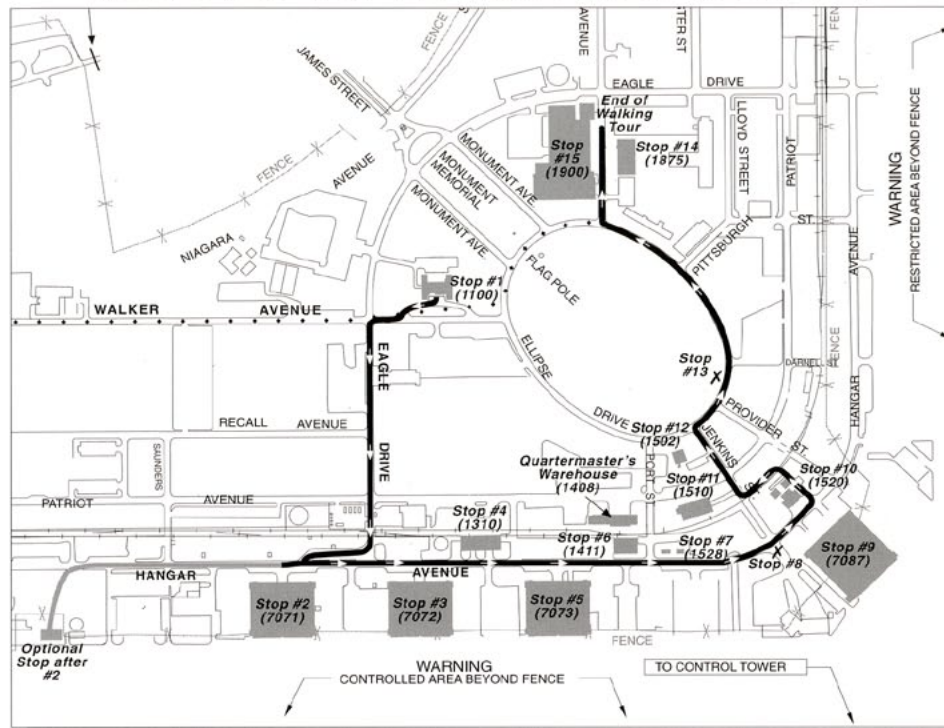


When the Soviets tested their first atomic bomb in August of 1949, the United States military confronted the necessity of preparing for nuclear war. General Curtis LeMay, who had been a co-pilot on the first B-17 flight to Westover and was later to be the operations officer of the 8th Air Force at Westover, developed the theory further, convinced that since no air strike could be entirely stopped, it would be necessary for the US to strike first. As Commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) in the early 1950s, LeMay put this two pronged approach to work, being completely prepared to launch a pre-emptive strike on an almost instantaneous basis should an attack appear to be in the offing. SAC operations began at Westover in 1955 and the 1959 "mole hole", building 7450, was the first building erected as part of the SAC massive retaliation strategy. Here was where long range B-52 bombers armed with nuclear devices were kept on continuous alert on a nearby runway, known as the Christmas Tree. Their crews rotated through the mole hole, spending one week of 24-hour alert in underground quarters, going everywhere together during that week so they were always ready for launch in a few moments. The lower control room outfitted for SAC operations in case of nuclear war may still exist in the building. Nuclear weapons were stored at Stony Brook on the eastern part of the base.

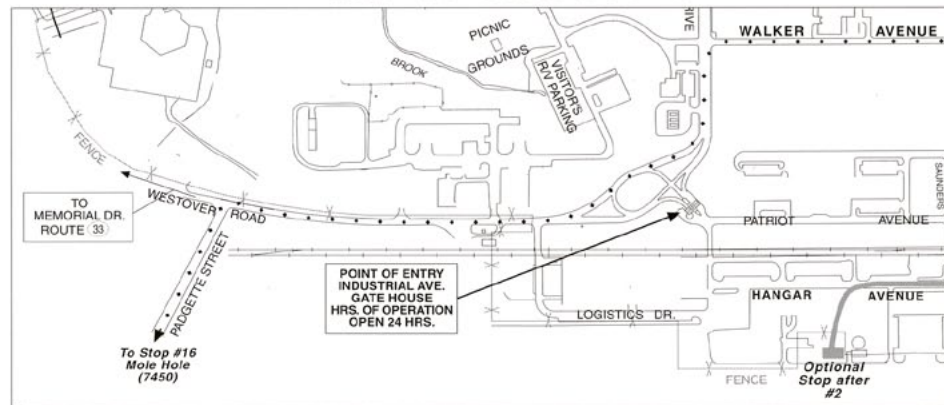
In 1973 the 8th Air Force was pulled out of Westover calling a halt to the air field's role in the Strategic Air Command. In 1975 the Air Force turned the building into a command post for satellite missions. It also served as the headquarters of the 3rd Brigade of the Army until it became a municipal airport in 1986.



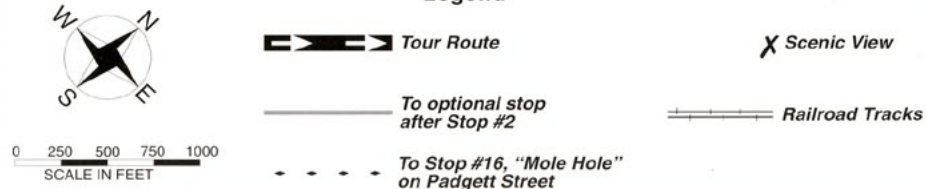
## WESTOVER AIR RESERVE BASE TOUR MAP



## MAP TO STOP #16

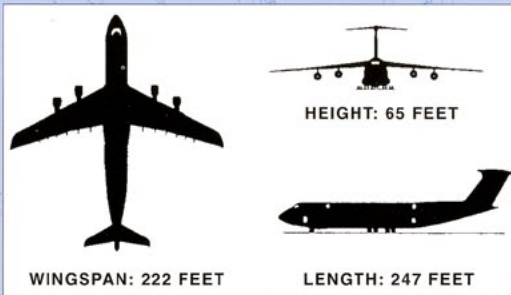


### Legend





## C-5A Galaxy



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This brochure was written and designed by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.