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Westover Air Force Base

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Reservists from Westover AFB flew eight missions to Panama during Operation Just Cause. The citizen-airmen from Westover airlifted

Less than 24 hours after military operations began in Panama Dec. 20, 1989, Westover AFB launched the first of eight missions to the war-torn country in support of the national effort.

The mission, dubbed "Operation Just Cause," came as a final option taken by the Bush administration to restore democracy, protect Americans, protect American interests under the Canal Treaty and oust Panamanian dictator, Manuel Noriega.

Westover's participation in the largest U.S. military operation since the Vietnam War is the latest in a long list of vivid reminders reflecting

more than 647 tons of cargo and approximately 300 troops aboard their C-5A Galaxy during the height of the invasion.

50 years of proud service to the needs of the nation.

The dream of having an international airfield in Chicopee to serve Western Massachusetts emerged in 1926, during the "roaring Twenties" and only 23 years after the Wright brothers' first flight.

The vision of a major Greater Springfield airport here was promoted by Anthony J. Stonina, a young Polish immigrant and first-term Chicopee alderman.

Faded newspaper accounts from the late 1920s indicate Stonina could not convince local offi-



ANTHONY J. STONINA

cial of the soundness of his idea to turn the flat tobacco plains into an airport. Local politicians said the concept of air travel was too extravagant for a small industrial city.

When the stock market crashed in the autumn of 1929, Stonina was three years into his political career and a mayoral candidate. He won the election and tried to save Chicopee from slipping into bankruptcy.

Five years later, Congressional leaders spied the gathering war clouds in Europe and passed the Army Air Base Bill, better known as the "Wilcox Act," calling for construction of several air fields deemed vital to the security of the nation. One major military airfield was to be located in the Northeast.

In late 1938, General Henry "Hap" Arnold became Air Corps chief of staff after his friend, Major General Oscar Westover, died in a plane crash. As one of his first acts, Arnold recommended the War Department appoint a board of officers to select sites for the modern airfields authorized by the Wilcox Act.

By then, Mayor Stonina was in his fourth term in Chicopee's city hall.

When he learned of Arnold's recommendation, Stonina fired off a telegram to the Secretary of War suggesting Chicopee as a suitable site for the Northeast Air Base.

In July 1939, a small contingent of officers visited the Pioneer Valley to tour the Springfield Airport, where the GeeBee air racers were born, to examine Bowles Airport in Agawam and to survey the flat Chicopee tobacco plains which extended into Ludlow.



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Within only two months, Chicopee was to garner more interest from the War Department. On September 1, 1939, Nazi forces smashed into Poland and the European War was ignited.

Stonina was angered by the Nazi invasion of his native land and rushed to Washington, D.C. to meet with Arnold and to push for construction of the Northeast Air Base.

Within only two weeks -- on September 15, 1939 -- the Secretary of War announced that Chicopee would "become an important link in the chain of East Coast defense" because the city had been selected as the site for the Northeast Air Base.

A short while later, \$2,070,918 was allocated by the War Department to purchase a 7 1/2 square-mile plot for the Northeast Air Base.

On April 6, 1940 -- which was designated "Army Day" -- Air Corps officers, state and city dignitaries and thousands of Greater Springfield residents gathered for the official dedication ceremonies. In keeping with the American military tradition of naming ships, tanks, forts and airfields to honor departed heroes, the Northeast Air Base approved by the Wilcox Act was named in honor of Arnold's pal, Maj. Gen.



MAJ. GEN. OSCAR WESTOVER

Oscar Westover, the former Army private who had learned to fly.

Westover was a Michigan native, born in Bay City in 1883. He enlisted in the Army in 1901

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and the following year he was accepted at West Point. He was graduated in 1906 and trained in California at the School of Musketry at the Presidio of Monterey before being assigned to the 14th Infantry Regiment in the Philippines.

In 1911, he returned to the U.S. Military Academy as an instructor in the Department of Drawing. Following an assignment in Alaska in 1914, Capt. Westover was again assigned to West Point in 1916 as an assistant professor in the Department of Drawing.

During World War I, Westover rose to colonel and was assigned to the Signal Corps and the Bureau of Aircraft Production. From November 1918 to October 1920 he was acting executive of the Air Service.

In his first 20 years of service, Westover -- the musketry soldier/professor/planner -- had witnessed a dramatic change in the needs of America in the Twentieth Century. He had traveled widely and had seen how modern technology was revamping tactics and defenses. He was determined to learn all he could about aviation.

At age 38 and back to his permanent rank of major, Oscar Westover enrolled in the Balloon School at Omaha, Nebraska. After graduation, he enrolled in the Airship School at Langley



General Westover, and his crew chief, TSgt. Samuel Hymes, were killed when the general's Northrup A-17 attack plane crashed near Burbank, Calif., on Sept. 21, 1938.



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Field, Virginia, graduating in April 1922. Eight months later, he entered the Air Corps Primary Flying School at Brooks Field, Texas, graduating in June. By 1923 he had graduated from Advanced Flying School and was made commander of Langley Field.

In 1926 he entered the Air Corps Tactical School and, two years later, the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After graduation, he stayed on at the school as an instructor and chief of the Air Corps section.

In 1930, he was finally promoted to lieutenant colonel, the temporary rank he had held a dozen years earlier during the war.

By 1932, Westover was a brigadier general and assistant chief of the Air Corps. He was promoted to major general on Christmas Eve 1936 and designated Chief of the Air Corps.

Westover quickly gained attention for his strong endorsement of developing a "so-called flying fortress type of bomber" for long distance



General Westover, who was known as America's "Number One Flier," was also a world-famous balloonist and trustee of the National Geographic Society.

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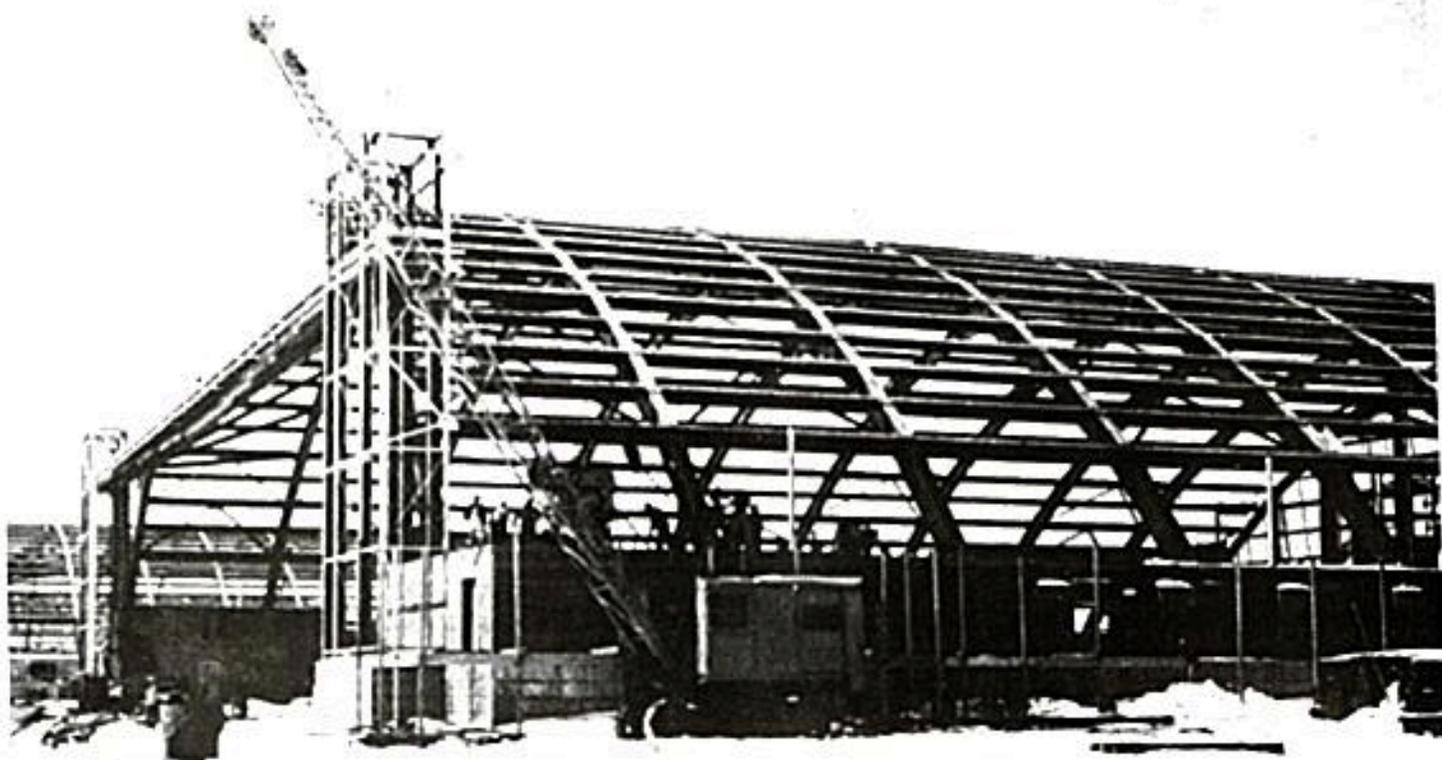
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While the winds of war fanned through Europe, the steel skeletons of airplane hangars rose quickly from the tobacco fields of

Chicopee and Ludlow as the Army began the hurried construction of its major Northeast Military Airbase.

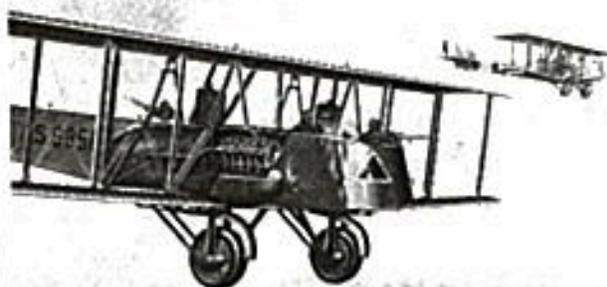
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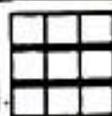


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on it's 50th Anniversary
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439th Military Airlift Wing

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missions.

On September 21, 1938, Westover and his crew chief, Sgt. Sam Hymes, were killed after their plane backfired and exploded while landing at the Lockheed Aircraft Corp. field in Burbank, California.

Fifteen months later, Westover's former assistant, "Hap" Arnold, announced that the modern super-airbase under construction in Massachusetts would be named in honor of the visionary pilot who had guided the concept of long-range airpower.

First unit assigned

Construction of Westover Field began quickly and the building pace soon became hectic. The field was dedicated April 6, 1940, and 18 B-18A Bolo bombers from Mitchel Field, N.Y., and Selfridge Field, Mich., flew over the tobacco plains in salute.

The first unit assigned to the base was the 10th Signal Detachment. Soldiers from Alabama and Fort Devens were assigned to the base and the 26th Air Base Group. Within a year there were more than a hundred buildings on the base, nearly 3,000 troops dozen miles of roadway.



Maj. Gen. Oscar Westover



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The base was officially accepted by the Army Air Corps in June 1941 and on June 10 five B-17s flew over Springfield and landed at Westover Field. One of the B-17 crew members was Maj. Curtis E. LeMay, who later moved his family to Holyoke.

That same month, London was being bombed severely and many in the War Department thought England would not survive the expected Nazi invasion. Many believed America would be drawn into the war and that battles would be fought from bases such as Westover.

In July 1941, Maj. Gen. "Hap" Arnold visited

Westover and watched bombing runs by B-17s. In November, the first B-24s arrived at the base and began Atlantic patrols to watch for German U-boats stalking Lend-Lease convoys to Britain.

The day after the Japanese navy struck Pearl Harbor, there were hundreds of service volunteers arriving at Westover's gates. The base was closed to the public and preparations were made for war.

Anti-submarine warfare remained the most important early mission, but as the German advances slowed, another role was assigned to the base -- aircrew training.

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When World War II ended in 1945, returning GIs processed out of the service at Westover

and received their "final free ride" to the base gate.

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During World War II, German prisoners of war were interned at Westover. The POWs were

assigned KP duties and planted many of the trees which are now located on the base.



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Children in West Berlin await another "Little Vittles" candy drop as a C-54 approaches Templehof.

Thousands of young men arrived at Westover from the many technical schools turning out fresh pilots, navigators, bombardiers, radio operators and aerial gunners. Westover's mess halls stayed open 24 hours a day to accommodate the new trainees. At Westover Field, more than 7,000 aircrews were molded. From Westover, then the 10-man crews deployed -- mostly to England -- to be part of the war against Germany.

Fighter pilots also trained at Westover before being assigned to Europe.

The whole process was nearly reversed when the war ended. The base became a major separation center for the thousands of men returning home after V-E Day.

The Berlin Airlift

The next major mission of Westover was as the East Coast hub for the Air Transport Service, which later became the Military Air Transport Service and eventually the Military Airlift Command. During the next nine years, more than 900,000 passengers departed Westover for

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A C-54, sitting on the tarmac at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, signaled the end of the Berlin Airlift. Westover cargo airplanes played a major role in "Operation Vittles," helping to Europe.

The major event of the MATS era was the Berlin Airlift in 1948. Westover became the U.S. hub for the whole airlift operation. "Operation Vittles" began after the Soviets blockaded the Allied portion of Berlin on June 24, 1948. General Curtis LeMay was the head of U.S. Air Forces Europe and he initiated the airlift on June 27, 1948.

Greater Springfield communities soon became involved after a Westover pilot, Capt. Gail S. Halvorsen, began dropping candy to children

airlift the nearly two million tons of food which kept West Berlin alive after it was blockaded by the Russians.

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In 1950, Westover celebrated its 10th anniversary with an airshow. Throngs of spectators

outside Templehof airfield in West Berlin. School children in Chicopee and Springfield began tying tiny parachutes to candy bars and rolls of sweets to be carried from Westover to Berlin.

When the blockade was finally over, and the airlift ended officially on September 1, 1949, the mission statistics were staggering. In 432 days, the Allies had spent more than \$300 million, lost 72 people, including 35 Americans, to make the 276,962 flights into Berlin to deliver 2,323,067 tons of coal, food, and supplies.

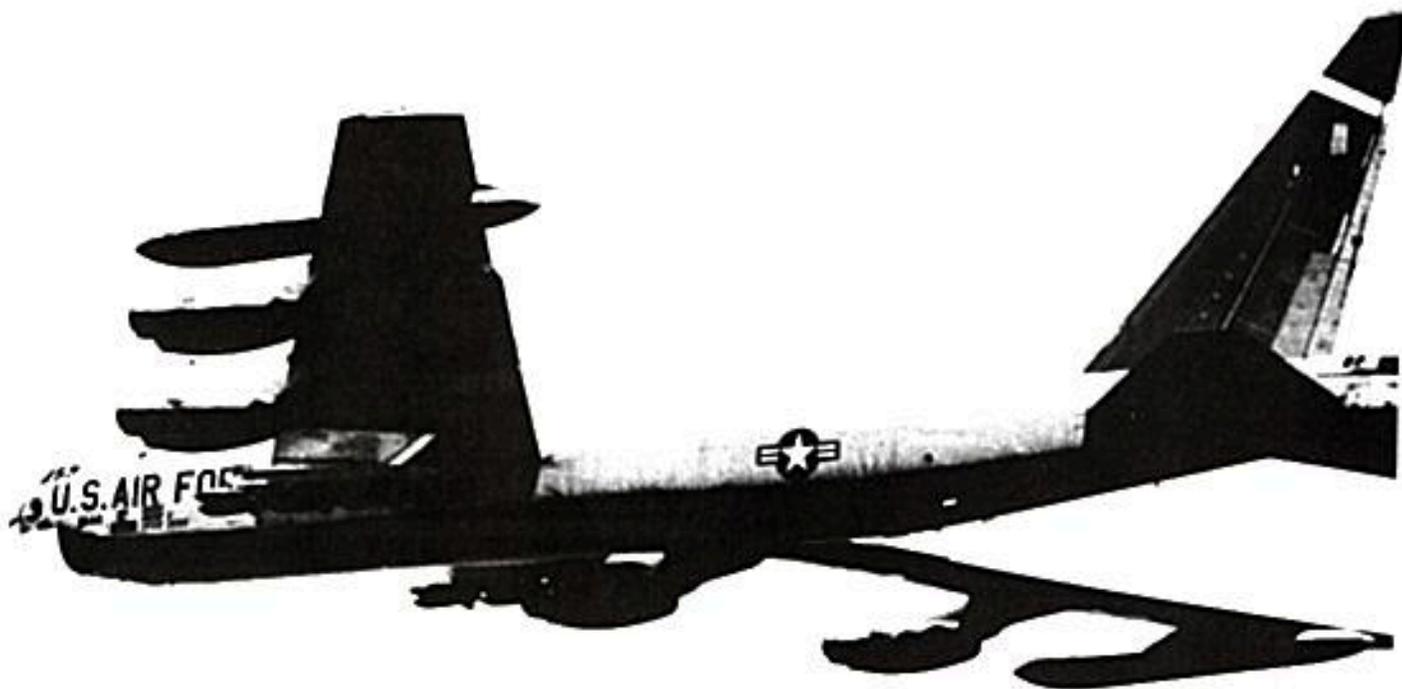
The huge C-5As assigned today to Westover AFB could have conducted the entire airlift with only 23,230 flights.

During the Korean War, Westover AFB became both a major center for many of the 118,000 individual Air Force Reserve members recalled to active duty and a major medical center for casualties.

The first of the Korean War wounded arrived at Westover in the summer of 1950. After the Peoples Republic of China entered the war, Westover's hospital treated more than 2,500 casualties in December 1950.

toured the Military Air Transport Service's C-54 (left) and C-47 aircraft.

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Westover's 99th Bombardment Wing -- a unit of the Strategic Air Command -- flew B-52s out of Westover and played a key role in the national strategy of nuclear deterrence. Westover muni-

tions crews used simulated nuclear devices like the ones pictured above, in drills which tested their ability to rapidly arm the B-52s.

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SAC comes to Westover

The Korean War and detection of the Soviet capability for nuclear and hydrogen weapons increased "Cold War" tensions in the Fifties. President Dwight D. Eisenhower decided on a "New Look" strategy of massive nuclear retaliation if the Soviet Union used nuclear weapons. He turned to Gen. Curtis LeMay and the Strategic Air Command to provide the response to any Soviet threat.

Westover AFB was released from MATS and turned over to LeMay's SAC in the mid-Fifties. The first B-52 of the 99th Bombardment Wing arrived at Westover AFB in September 1956.

For the next 18 years, Westover was world famous as a SAC base for thousands of aircrews flying B-52s, KC-97s and KC-135s.

Also assigned to the base during the SAC era

were F-86s of the 337th Fighter Interceptor Squadron which were based at Westover to destroy Soviet bombers attacking New England. The Sabres were later replaced by sleek F-104 Starfighters and F-106s. Also assigned to Westover were B-57s which were used to simulate Soviet aircraft during alert exercises.

The "Molehole, which is now a civilian aviation terminal in the Westover Air Park section of the base, was the alert shack for B-52 crews. For almost two decades, armed and fueled B-52s stood outside on the "Christmas Tree" ramp awaiting the alert signal.

Besides expansion of base facilities, SAC dug 400 feet into Mount Holyoke to build a secondary headquarters known as "The Notch." An Air Force regional hospital was opened on base and also provided trauma treatment services for local hospitals.



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Westover's base hospital served as a repatriation and treatment center in 1973 for American servicemen held prisoner in North Vietnam.

The aerial refueling capability of Westover's KC-135 tankers gave global range to the B-52 bomber.

The 1958 crash shortly after take-off of a four-engine jet tanker on the Massachusetts Turnpike took the lives of 15 crewmen and journalists in

Media interest in the returning heroes -- some of whom had spent years in brutal captivity -- was keen.

Westover's worst catastrophe.

In 1957 when the U-2 spy plan was super-secret, Westover became the home of the 8th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron. Its photographic laboratory developed reconnaissance film which went directly to the Pentagon



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Five members of the 384th Aerial Refueling Squadron pose before the final flight of a KC-97 tanker from Westover in 1965. The squadron flew the air-to-air refueling tankers out of the base for a decade.

and White House.

The first U-2 film of Russian missiles in Cuba passed through Westover on the way to Kodak laboratories in Rochester, N.Y. Subsequently, while the world held its breath during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, Soviet ships approaching Cuba were tracked in "the Notch" as SAC's B-52s were put in the highest state of alert in the command's history.

Westover's B-52s finally went to war in Vietnam during the late Sixties and early Seventies. Used as tactical bombers with conventional "iron bombs," the B-52s of the 99th Bomb Wing were sent to Southeast Asian bases on six-month tours.

The war in Vietnam also brought thousands of protesters to the gates of Westover. After the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 the protests escalated as the majority of Americans turned against the war. In one day, more than 700 protesters were arrested in Chicopee by city police.

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50 years of flying in Chicopee



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Westover C-5As have flown several relief missions to many parts of the world since their arrival here in October, 1987. Jamaican Defense Forces unload pallets onto military trucks

bound for a warehouse in Kingston. The island nation had been devastated by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988. Aircraft from Westover flew four relief supply missions to the island.

As the war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was winding down, the Defense Department made major cuts at many bases. Westover was one of the hardest hit. Eighth Air Force headquarters had left Westover and soon the 57th Air Division and 99th Bomb Wing were gone.

AFRES takes over

The base was turned over to the Air Force Reserve on April 1, 1974. Following the departure of the last active-duty unit, the 439th Tactical Airlift Wing was reactivated and assigned to Westover.

The 439th Tactical Airlift Wing, descended from the 439th Troop Carrier Wing of World War II fame, turned Westover into a C-123 and C-130 base in 1974. The 439th Troop Carrier Wing had won battle laurels resupplying the besieged but defiant 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne in late 1944 during Battle of the Bulge.

For 13 years the C-130 Hercules, the four-turboprop tactical cargo-hauling workhorse of the 439th MAW flew out of Westover. By the early 1980s Westover was exclusively a Hercules

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The B-52, the backbone of national strategic deterrence, has entered its fifth decade of service. The B-52 first flew in 1954 and

Stratofortress aircraft are still on duty today, flying throughout the world. Built by Boeing, the B-52 has a wingspan of 185 feet.

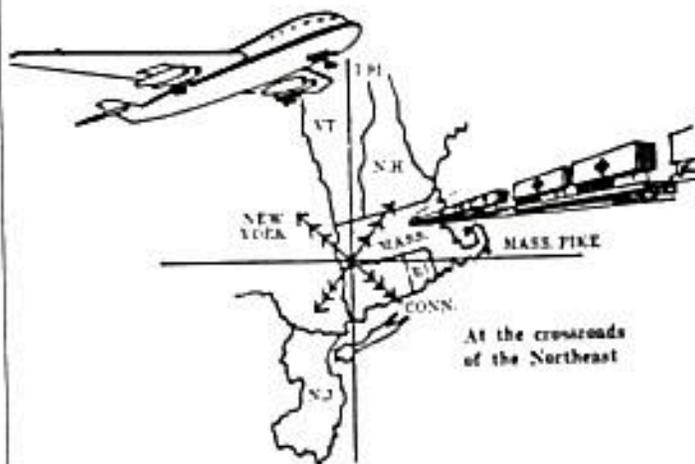
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base with the deactivation of the C-123 Providers and C-124 Globemasters.

The Hercules became a familiar sight in New England skies as the Reserve air crews trained in low-level flying, medical evacuation, aerial supply of ground forces, troop drops and other tasks.

The training paid off in 1979 when Westover crews helped evacuate 150 American civilians caught up in a coup attempt in Bolivia. Each year from 1978 to 1987 the 439th Wing deployed aircraft to Howard Air Base in Panama for a month of aerial resupply of American embassies and other facilities throughout Central and South America.

The era of the C-5 Galaxy, the largest aircraft in the Free World, began at Westover in 1987 with the arrival of the first of 16 of massive planes.

Members of the 439th MAW flew aboard C-5A Galaxies that first year to Hoduf and Dahrain, Saudi Arabia; Manama, Bahrain; Ineh'on, Korea; Tel Aviv, Israel; Adana, Turkey; Yakota, Japan; Cabanatuan, Philippines; Catania, Trieste, Aviano and Sicily, Italy; Cadiz, Rota, and Madrid, Spain; Sondre, Stromsfjord, Green land; Keflavik, Iceland; Frankfurt and Ramstein, Germany; Guam; Brussels; Belgium; Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Holland; Mildenhall, England; Bermuda; Honduras; Panama;

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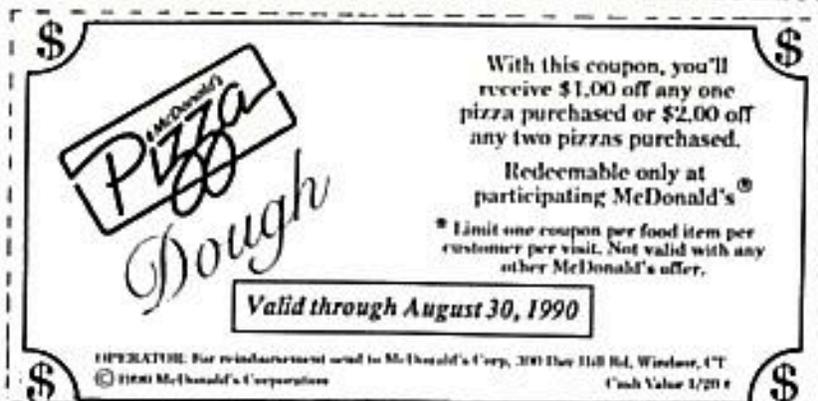
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San Juan, Puerto Rico; Hono lulu, Hawaii; Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska; and in Canada to Trenton and Toronto, Ontario, Halifax and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia; St. John, New Brunswick; Goose Bay, Labrador; Alberta, and Quebec.

Across the country that year, Westover's Galaxies flew missions to Delaware, Florida, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Montana, California, Oregon,

Washington, New Mexico, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Texas.

Capable of carrying the equivalent of six buses at 520 mph, the Galaxy gave Westover a global role. Westover C-5s have been part of headline making news stories. In 1988, they transported U.N. peacekeeping forces to Turkey to supervise the Iran-Iraq cease fire and carried Navy supplies to the Persian Gulf. Westover Galaxies were on duty for missions of mercy when an earthquake devastated Armenia, and also transported firefighting equipment during the

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Mike Burke, 539-2467

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Conference Room,
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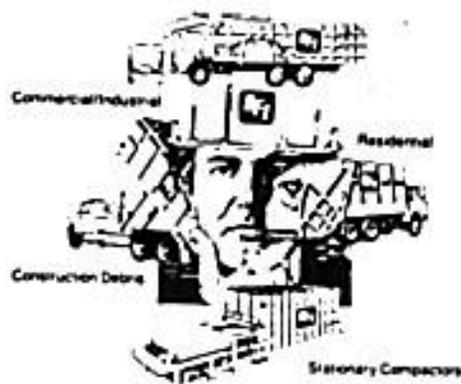
Cardiac Rehabilitation,
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A 439th Military Airlift Wing C-5A takes off over an AFRES C-130 parked on Westover's

ramp. In the background, Westover snow removal equipment clears the runway.



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summer blaze at Yellowstone National Park.

A Westover C-5A flew electrical repair crews and equipment to Jamaica in October, 1988 in the wake of Hurricane Gilbert. When Hurricane Hugo struck the Caribbean and southeastern U.S. in September, 1989, the 439th MAW had three Galaxies winging to the hardest hit areas within 36 hours. Westover crews flew relief supplies to Charleston, S.C., Puerto Rico and St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The first Galaxy into St. Croix evacuated 61 refugees to MacDill AFB in Florida.

Operation Just Cause, the December, 1989

military action that overthrew Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, was a textbook example of the Reserve and active duty "Total Force" team concept.

Westover's Air Force Reserve aircrews and support units responded on short notice, flying eight missions to Howard Air Base, Panama. Between Dec. 20 and Jan. 2, Westover crews transported a total of 647 tons of cargo to the Central American country. This included the transportation of 82nd Airborne and 7th Infantry Division troops and Marine Corps armored vehicles to the combat zone.



A C-5A Galaxy, assigned to the 439th Military Airlift Wing at Westover Air Force Base, swallows a long line of Army vehicles during a training exercise. The C-5As, which were assigned to the base in 1987, are the largest planes

in the Free World with a maximum gross takeoff weight of 769,000 pounds. Westover planes fly world-wide missions in support of U.S. military efforts every week.

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The P-47 Thunderbolt, built by Republic Aviation Corporation during World War II, was touted as one of the best fighter planes of the war. It was not only the largest and heaviest single-engine, single-seater built during the war, it was also an outstanding combat plane.

No less than 15,683 of the planes came off the assembly line (the highest of any American fighter in the course of the war). The Thunderbolts were assigned to Westover AFB for a while. The photo at bottom shows two of the planes sitting on a grass runway at Westover.





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A fleet of KC-97 refueling tankers was assigned to the 384th AREFS at Westover from 1956 until 1966. The big planes, powered by four reciprocating engines, were in service with the Air National Guard until the mid 1970's.

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14th Air Force 'Flying Tigers'

In the annals of military flight, few emblems are as dramatic and widely recognized as the menacing shark's teeth on the fuselage of World War II American Volunteer Group which fought in China.

Legend has it that the fearsome razor teeth were painted on the aircraft by American volunteers in China in the belief that Japanese enemy pilots had a superstitious dread of the shark. The American fighter pilots gave the enemy reason to fear the shark-nose Curtiss P-40s. After their first air battle with the Japanese over Kunming in 1941, the Chinese dubbed the American Volunteer Group the Flying Tigers.

Westover's 439th Military Airlift Wing shares the lineage of the Flying Tigers who prowled the skies of China. The 439th is one of six wings which form the modern day 14th Air Force, descended from the original Flying Tigers of China fame.

The 14th Air Force insignia features a winged tiger, teeth bared and claws aggressively outstretched, which was first worn on the leather flight jackets of the World War II fighter pilots.

The 14th was founded in China in 1943 under the legendary Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault. The unit incorporated General Chennault's Flying Tiger American Volunteer Group, made up of former Army Air Force, Navy and Marine fighter pilots who tangled with the Japanese in China for five months before Pearl Harbor.

After 1943, the 14th Air Force expanded from fighter aircraft to medium and heavy bombers, which preyed on Japanese aircraft, ground forces and South China Sea shipping.

Galaxy Community Council

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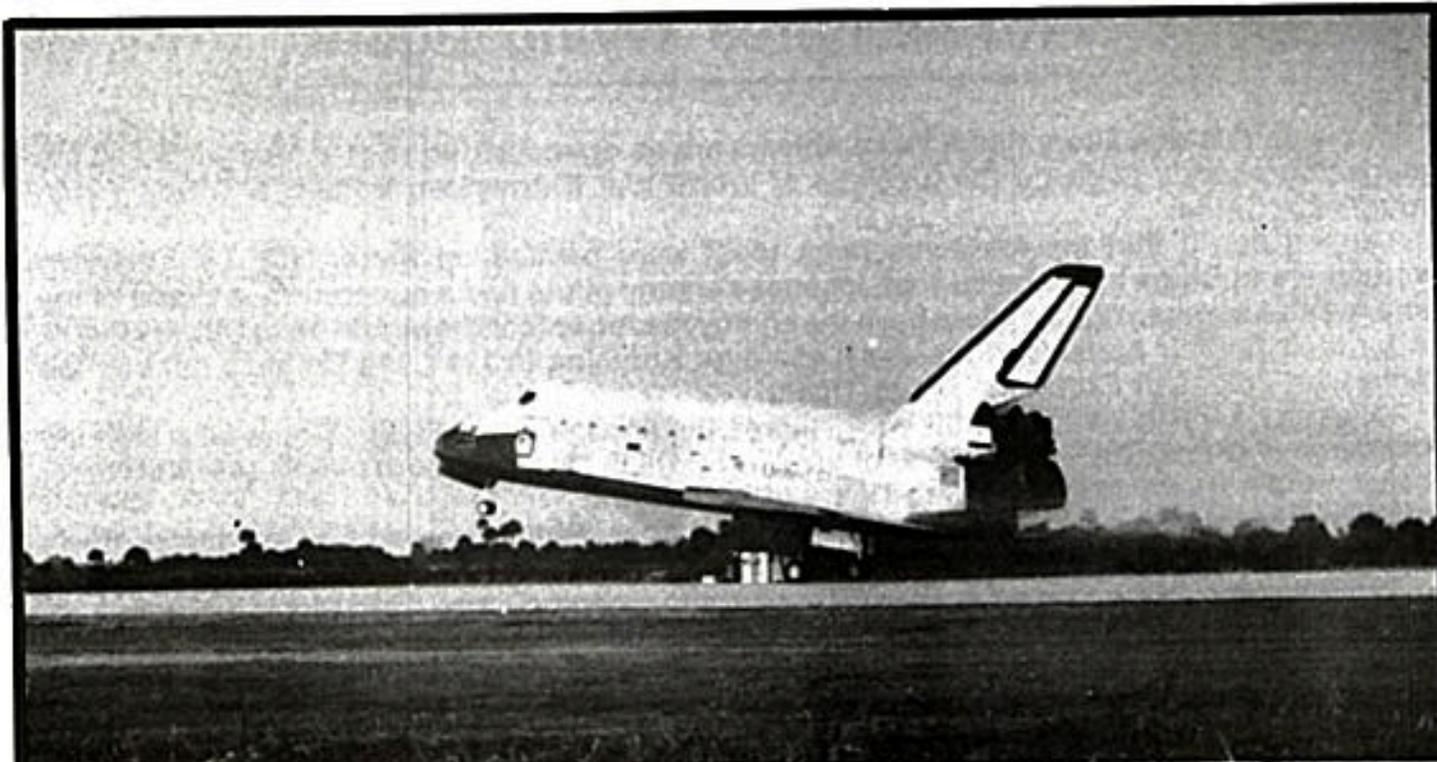
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Westover, with a main runway stretching more than two miles in length, is an emergency landing site for the Space Shuttle. The base fire department's rescue vehicles equipment carry

special tools with which the orbiter could be opened in the event of an emergency landing here.

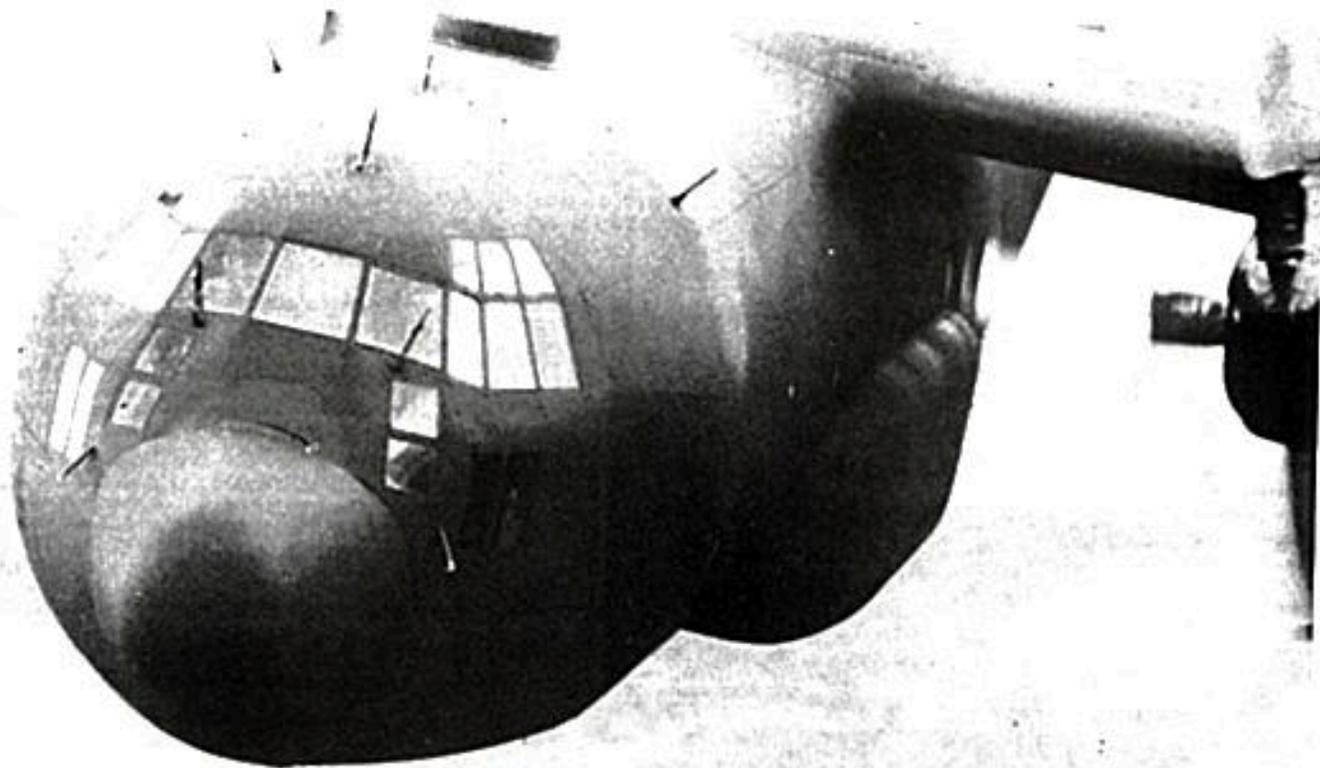


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The Lockheed-built C-130 Hercules, remains the backbone of the Air Force's tactical airlifters. The C-130 is capable of carrying more

than 35,000 pounds of cargo or 92 combat troops. Until 1987, 16 of the sturdy aircraft were assigned to Westover.

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This is what Westover Air Force Base looked like in 1941. The wooden buildings were bar-

racks. The water tower that stands on Hangar Road is still in use.

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C-124 Globemaster II aircraft like the one pictured above were based at Westover for more than 20 years. Although considerably smaller than the C-5A Galaxies which now line

Westover's runway, the C-124 was a real workhorse in the Air Force's cargo transport fleet.

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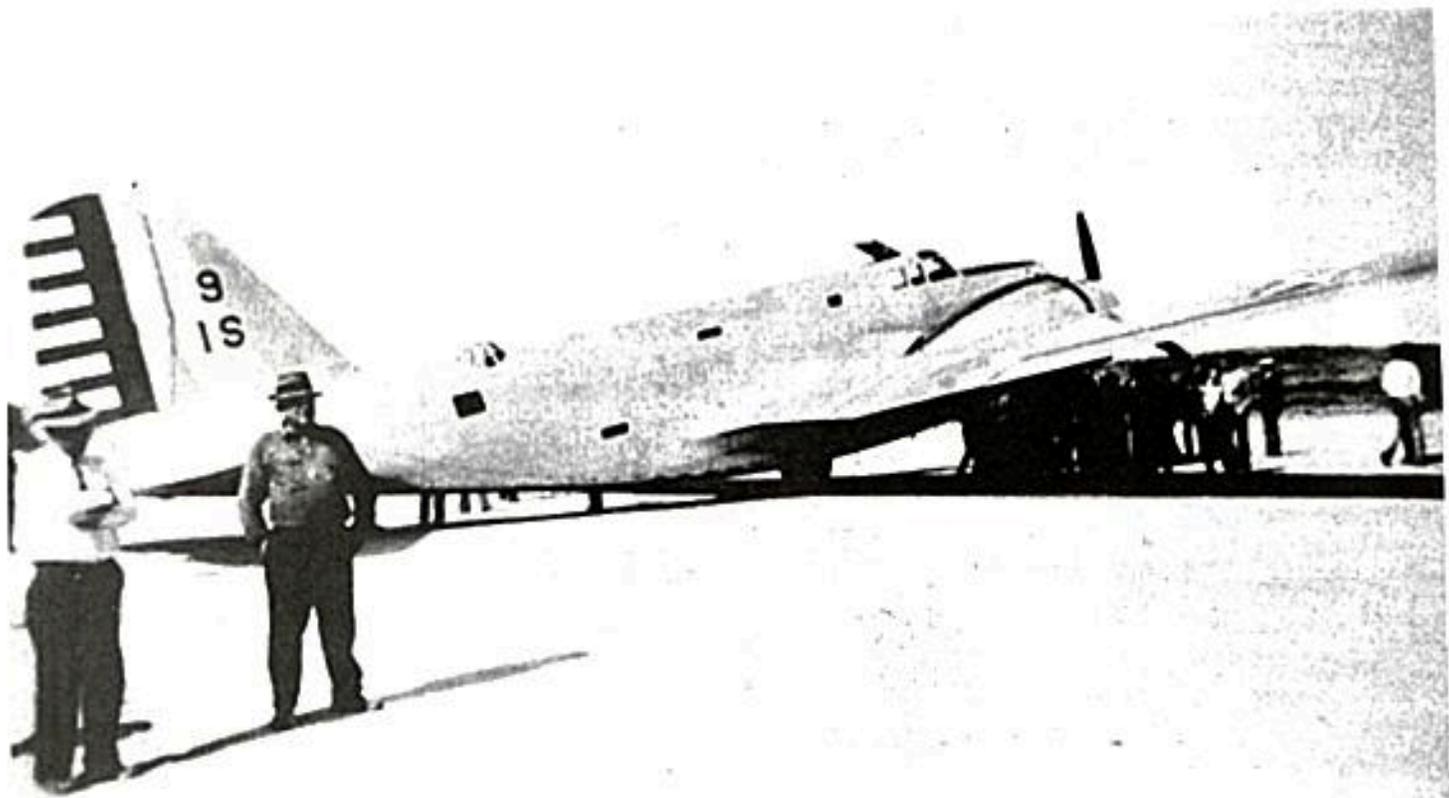
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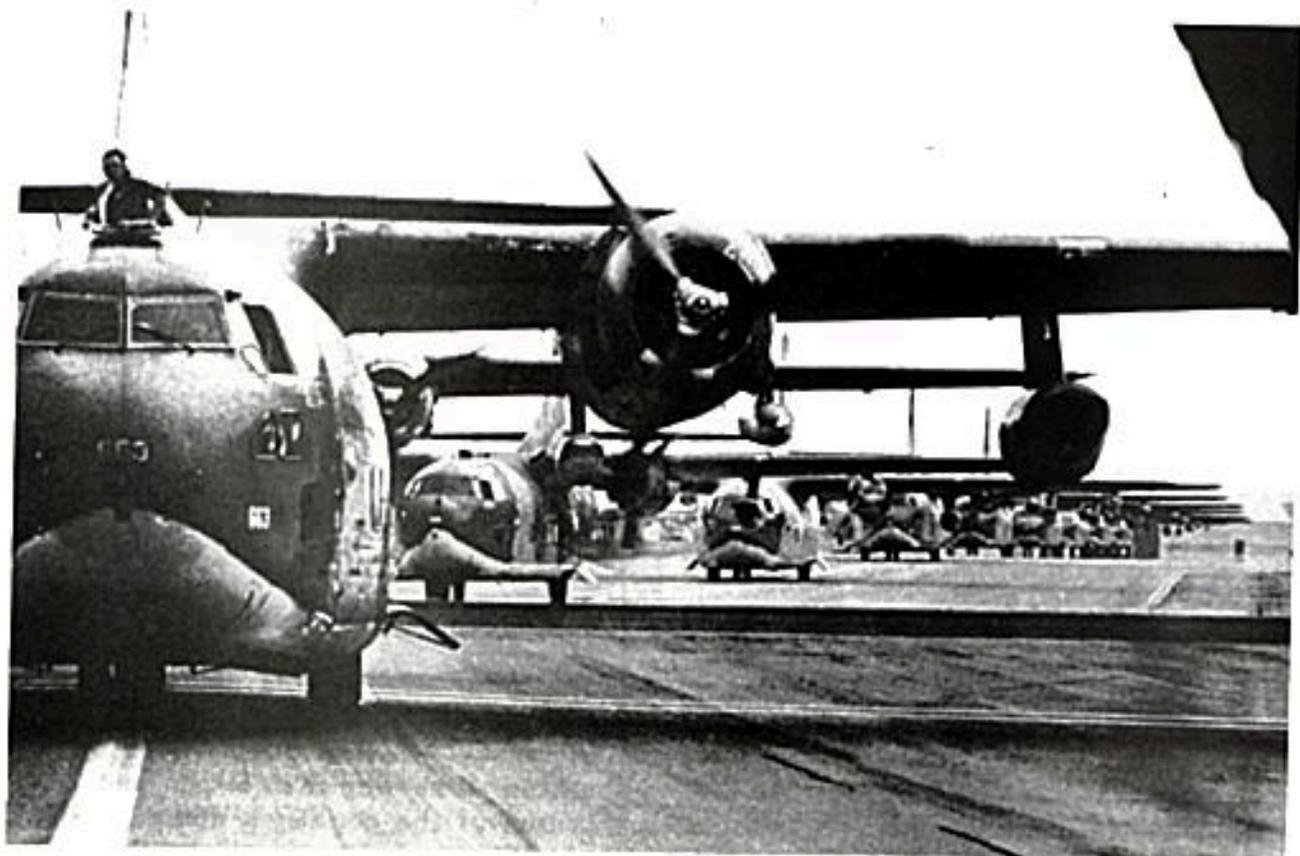


The airplane shown here is a Douglas B-18. The craft landed here on Oct. 10, 1940 from Langley Field, Va. for Westover's opening ceremonies.

Obsolete as a bomber when the war broke out, it was used mainly as a utility plane by the Army Air Corps.

*In memory of
Commander
Doyle W. "Bud" Lynn*





C-123 Providers, 15 in a row, get ready to take off during a training exercise on the ramp at Westover. The Providers, which did yeoman's work during the Vietnam War, were stationed

at Westover from 1973 to 1981. Capable of carrying 15,000 pounds of cargo or 60 fully equipped troops, the plane had a top speed of 230 miles per hour.

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Westover Field was a major training base for B-24 and B-17 crews headed for action in Europe during the early 1940s. Shown above is a crew

standing along side their B-24. The Liberator was one of the country's mainstay bombers during the war in Europe.

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Shown in photo are 1989-90 MassMutual Reserve Duty Participants, (left to right) Barbara Santana, Thaddeus Malyst, Zigmund Skawski and Michael Caccovia.
Not shown are: Laura Cabana, Gregory Swanson, Kathleen Burren, Claire Gaudreau, Vonica Jackson, Armand Touringrau and Joseph Picard.

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The B-17 Flying Fortress (above) was a familiar sight at Westover during the early 1940s. Crews heading for the war in Europe trained here on heavy bombers. Below is a B-26 which entered the Air Corps late in the war. At war's end,

Westover was being converted to a B-26 base. Later the planes were redesignated A-26s and were used as gunships during the Vietnam War.



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