



MILITARY AVIATION IN FLORIDA

With four major Air Force bases, four Naval air stations, and the Coast Guard's largest air station, as well as a variety of auxiliary airfields, command centers, testing ranges, and other support facilities, military aviation has a long and storied history in Florida, not to mention major economic implications. While these military facilities play important roles in their local economies, the economic impact of military aviation extends to public use airports as well, which often accommodate military training operations and support military-related tenant businesses.

Early History - Over 100 Years of Military Aviation

During World War I, as it became apparent that aircraft had wide-reaching applications in combat, the U.S. Army decided to establish multiple facilities to train military aviators. Due to its favorable weather and flat terrain, Florida was chosen as the home for many of these bases. The U.S. Army initially selected four sites in the state: Carlstrom Field, about six miles southwest of Arcadia; Dorr Field, about 12 miles southwest of Arcadia; Valentine Field in Labelle; and Chapman Field in Miami. When Germany surrendered in World War I, Brigadier General Billy Mitchell, commander of American air combat units in France, noted, "the only damage that has come to [Germany] has been through the air." Florida's pilot training sites were credited with producing some of the most skilled pilots that lead to the air superiority of the Allied forces.

1941's attack on Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service was early proof that World War II would be a battle in the skies as much as it would be on the ground. The U.S. military invested tremendous funding to construct and improve a number of airfields in Florida. By the mid-1940s, there were 40 airfields within Florida where military pilots were being trained. By the end of the war, there were approximately 172 military installations within the state, spanning from Key West to Pensacola. At the same time, as many as two million servicemen and women lived in Florida.

Modern Day - A Continuing Legacy

Upon the end of World War II, many military airfields throughout the state were deactivated and transferred back to local governments. Some were re-purposed for non-aviation use, but most are now operated as commercial service and general aviation airports, which has contributed to the extensive system of 129 public-use airports operating in Florida today. One example is Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, formerly known as Sarasota Army Airfield, a combat training base for new pilots. The airport was returned to civil use in 1946 after World War II and now serves as a public-use commercial service airport, accounting for over 100,000 annual aircraft operations and almost 1.2 million annual passenger enplanements.

Cecil Field - Exploring the Final Frontier

The most recent former military aviation facility to become a public use airport in Florida is Cecil Airport in Jacksonville. The former Naval Air Station Cecil Field was decommissioned in 1999 and subsequently turned over to what is now the Jacksonville Aviation Authority. Today, Cecil Airport is one of Florida's most dynamic general aviation airports, accommodating over 100,000 aircraft operations per year with 23 based civilian aircraft and 69 based military aircraft. In 2010, Cecil Airport became the second licensed spaceport in Florida, the other being Cape Canaveral Spaceport. However, Cecil is the first Florida spaceport authorized to accommodate space vehicles that take off and land horizontally.



MacDill Air Force Base - Command Central

Located eight miles south of downtown Tampa, MacDill Air Force Base is one of the U.S. military's most important installations. MacDill is home to the headquarters of both the United States Special Operations Command (which oversees the special operations of each service branch) and United States Central Command (which oversees U.S. military activity in the Middle East). MacDill directly employs nearly 15,000 people, including over 4,000 civilians, resulting in an estimated economic impact of \$2.3 billion on the Tampa Bay area.

Eglin Air Force Base - A Unique Arrangement

Encompassing over 460,000 acres, Eglin Air Force base is the largest Air Force base in the United States by land area. Located in Okaloosa County in northwest Florida, Eglin is a center for Air Force weapons development and testing. It is also home to important training units for the Air Force, Army, and Navy. While Eglin itself directly employs over 17,000 servicemen and women and about 6,000 civilians, the 300-plus defense contractors located in Okaloosa County bring the total number of military-related jobs to more than 70,000, resulting in \$7.5 billion dollars in economic impact. In addition to its military role, Eglin also supports commercial aviation in Northwest Florida through a joint-use agreement with Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport, a commercial airport co-located at Eglin that accommodated over 1.1 million passengers in 2017.

BY THE NUMBERS

Eglin Air Force Base

- *Directly employs 17,000 military personnel and 6,000 civilian personnel*
- *When including the 300-plus military contractors who support Eglin's mission, the total economic impact of the base is estimated at \$7.5 billion*

Cecil Field

- *Founded as a Naval air station in 1941, today Cecil Field accommodates over 100,000 annual operations with 23 based civilian aircraft and 69 based military aircraft*

MacDill Air Force Base

- *Employs nearly 20,000 people, both military and civilian, resulting in approximately \$2.3 billion in economic impact on the Tampa Bay area.*

Military Operations at Public Airports Benefit Florida

Though none of Florida's 26 military aviation facilities – which include 11 major military airfields and 15 supporting facilities – are considered part of Florida's airports system, public use airports throughout the state still support training operations for all branches of the U.S. military and subsequently benefit from the military's use of these public facilities.

Based on the most current information from the Federal Aviation Administration, approximately 63 percent of Florida's public use airports currently report military operations, of which there are nearly 400,000 annually. Additionally, about two-thirds of Florida's airports report hosting based military aircraft, with a total of 222 military aircraft based at Florida airports. These based military aircraft are typically part of the Florida Air National Guard or other reserve units and contribute to the economic impact of the airports through hangar and land leases, fuel sales, and indirect impacts associated with military personnel based at these locations.