

Kelly Field in World Wars I and II

On 5 April 1917, one day before the United States entered World War I, four intrepid flyers, Captains Bert Atkinson, Carl Spaatz, and George Reinberg, and civilian Eddie Stinson, flew from Ft Sam Houston and landed on a newly prepared field south of the city. This field grew into today's Kelly Air Force Base.

After America's entry into the war, Kelly quickly grew into the largest aviation field in the United States. Even as the contractors were clearing the land, thousands of recruits streamed through the gates of the new camp. As quickly as the cotton and mesquite disappeared, scores of new buildings took their place, buildings such as hangars, barracks, mess halls, warehouses, machine shops, and offices. Despite this construction "boom," most of the men lived in the "tent city" which covered the landscape.

During World War I, Kelly Field served as a reception and testing center for recruits and as a training center for new pilots, mechanics, cooks and bakers, and engineering and supply officers. Kelly officers either processed or taught most of the American-trained World War I flyers--1,459 pilots and 298 instructors graduated from Kelly flying schools during the war. Its personnel tested approximately 250,000 men in 53 different fields, classified them by trade, and organized the men into aero squadrons. The Enlisted Mechanics Training Department, later the Air Service Mechanics' School, turned out a monthly average of 2,000 mechanics and chauffeurs.

When World War II erupted in the fall of 1939, Kelly Field's main mission was pilot training at the Advanced Flying School. The San Antonio Air Depot occupied Duncan Field, once part of Kelly but organized as a separate base in 1925. Initially the expansion of the Air Corps during the war meant enlarging the training mission at Kelly, but within a few brief years the maintenance mission would swallow up the entire base.

Between 1939 and the early spring of 1943, Kelly's Advanced Flying School graduated 6,845 pilots. Another 607 men successfully completed navigator training at the Navigation School established on the base in 1941. As in World War I, a "tent city" sprang up to accomodate the sudden influx of pilot trainees. Candidates for pilot's wings also got their first taste of military life at Kelly. Some 18,349 prospective pilots passed through the Replacement Training Center before flying operations shifted away from the base in 1943.

Expansion of the San Antonio Air Depot at Duncan Field was equally rapid. By 1942 the workforce was twenty times what it had been in 1939. Air traffic congestion posed a dangerous problem, resolved in March of 1943 by the consolidation of Kelly and Duncan under the single name of Kelly Field. The sole mission of Kelly Field became logistics support.

By 1945 Kelly Field was home to over 6,000 military personnel and over 22,000 civilian workers. As elsewhere in America, women were an integral part of this workforce. Over 10,000 "Kelly Katies" labored in the shops alongside men, providing the critical support for aircraft such as the P-51 fighter and the B-29 heavy bomber. By the end of the war, Kelly was the world's largest aviation depot with a critical role to play in the shaping of post-war American airpower.

Kelly Air Force Base and the Korean War

The outbreak of the Korean War in June of 1950 found Kelly in the midst of implementing a new Air Force logistics system and adjusting to reductions in personnel. Once again, almost overnight, Kelly geared up in support of the national war effort. Kelly's supply and maintenance personnel began working round-the-clock shifts in an effort to prepare mothballed aircraft for shipment to the Far East. In five days 22 B-26 bombers underwent full depot inspection and repair, while in rapid succession supply programs accelerated.

By mid-July 1950 the Kelly maintenance line was in the process of reconditioning B-29s for overseas service. Special outdoor lighting was installed so work could continue during the night. The aircraft production line was soon nicknamed the "Great White Way" as the reflected glow of the lights shining on the aluminum skin of the bombers lit up the sky after dark.

Alongside the B-29 production line, Kelly's maintenance crews labored long hours to overhaul other aircraft hurriedly recalled from storage, including F-51 fighters, C-46 transports, T-11 trainers, and helicopters. Kelly's shops repaired and manufactured hundreds of radios, propellers, airframe parts and engine accessories, and also prepared 446 ground vehicles for shipment overseas.

By the end of the fighting in Korea in July, 1953, Kelly's primary mission was support of the immense B-36 "Peacekeeper," the first American bomber capable of spanning the globe. Yet, the B-36, with its six powerful turboprop engines, was already approaching obsolescence. Kelly's mission would soon shift again as it, and the Air Force, entered fully into the jet age.

Kelly and the War in Vietnam

Kelly's association with the long war in Vietnam began early and lasted until American involvement ended in 1975. From 1960 to the late summer of 1964, the San Antonio Air Materiel Area (SAAMA) supplied specific items through the Military Assistance Program. But following the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in August 1964, Kelly's support of the war effort intensified which, in some cases, meant direct involvement in the war for civilian employees. For most of these this simply meant doing their job under difficult and dangerous conditions. A few, however, would pay the ultimate sacrifice in support of this commitment.

During the build-up of American forces in 1965, SAAMA sent eleven joint military/civilian teams to Southeast Asia as part of a command wide effort to establish supply centers throughout the western Pacific, including Vietnam. Other Kelly workers served in Vietnam on special F-5 modification teams; helped reassemble newly shipped F-5 aircraft at Bien Hoa Air Base; assisted in the creation of an engine repair facility at Bien Hoa; served on rapid area maintenance, supply support or area transportation teams; and served weapon system logistic officers.

For those who remained in San Antonio, the Vietnam years were often a time of intense effort as they strove to meet the demands for materiel or aircraft maintenance. Kelly managers oversaw weapon systems such as the F-102 fighter/interceptor, the O-2 observation aircraft, the A-37 attack aircraft, and the F-5 fighter, as well as the T34, T56 and J79 engines. In addition, Kelly was one site for specialized repair of the B-52 bomber. In 1972, under project "Enhance Plus" (part of the on-going Vietnamization effort), Kelly maintenance personnel prepared 66 A-37 aircraft for shipment to Vietnam by working around the clock for nearly 62 hours. Later, Kelly workers assisted in processing 32 Iranian F-5 fighters for delivery to Vietnam, before, in November, preparing 28 T-38 trainers for shipment during another round-the-clock effort. By the end of "Enhance Plus" Kelly's workers had piled up nearly 100,000 hours of overtime. It was, though, only one example of the skill and dedication of the men and women of Kelly. There are many more. Their support of the war effort during the Vietnam years continued the tradition of service to the nation sustained by the people of Kelly for over seventy years and through four wars.



Sculpture pays tribute to all 'Kelly Katies'

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by Dave Stokes
San Antonio Air Logistics Center Public Affairs

KELLY AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFPN) -- Thirty-five women gathered at the Kelly Veteran's Monument Oct. 4 to celebrate the work they did here during World War II which earned them the title of "Kelly Katies."

They came from San Antonio and from across the state to share memories with sister Katies and to receive well-earned recognition.

San Antonio District 3 Councilwoman Debra Guerrero recalled the dedication and countless acts of heroism by Kelly Katies in her keynote address at the ceremony.

"It is wonderful to see so many gathered to pay tribute to Emilia Sanchez and to all the Kelly Katies who grace this audience," said Guerrero. The Kelly Field Heritage Foundation board selected Emilia Sanchez to be recognized and to represent all her sisters who became known as the 'Kelly Katies.' Emilia was one of the first Kelly Katies to step up to fill the jobs of aircraft repairmen who went to war. By 1945, more than 22,000 civilian employees worked at Kelly and 10,000 of them were women."

Emilia Sanchez's contributions to Kelly, the community and the nation were significant. Emilia's father ran a pecan-shelling business on San Antonio's west side, which put her in close contact with hundreds of families in the area. Using those contacts, Emilia Sanchez went through the community looking for women to fill the jobs being left vacant as Kelly airmen and civilian workers left to fight the war. She explained to the women how very important it was to go to Kelly and be part of the effort to help our country.

After the war, many women relinquished their jobs to returning veterans. Emilia stayed. She retired from Kelly in 1974 following 34 years of dedicated service. On Jan. 6 of this year, Emilia learned that her image would be immortalized by a bronze sculpture in the ring of honor, only a few weeks before she died.

"Today we pay tribute to all Kelly Katies who have given of themselves in service to Kelly Air Force Base and our country," said event coordinator Patsy Reeves of the Contracting Directorate. "May their contributions, like those of the other proud members enshrined in this plaza, be long remembered."

Most women who served the war effort at Kelly had loved ones facing death in far corners of a world at war. These women came to work every day and performed valiantly. But their thoughts often turned to loved ones in harm's way. Here are a few examples of the dedication shown by Kelly Katies:

- La Una Kahn, a debit voucher clerk, was relieved to learn that her son was alive and well despite having his 4th ship blown out from under him by Nazi submarines. In spite of her concerns, she came to work every day.
- Julia Macha worked in the maintenance shops. She received a telegram at 10 p.m. one evening notifying her that her son was missing in action. Julia still came to work the next morning.
- The Japanese captured Leona Spielman's son in May 1942. She didn't learn of his internment until nine months later. Then, on Feb. 7, 1944, she saw her son's photo in Life magazine along with a story about how he and nine other prisoners of war escaped from a Japanese prison camp.
- Hazel Hughes' husband, Lt. Lloyd Hughes, was a B-24 pilot. He was killed during an ill-fated raid on the Romanian oil fields. Hazel was presented the Medal of Honor for her husband's heroic efforts.
- Frieda Sanders was a plastics molder. She joined the war effort at Kelly at the age of 16. She had four brothers in the military.
- Clara Davis worked in the publications and distribution branch. She received word that her son was wounded during a mission over Holland. He had received a previous Purple Heart during the Normandy invasion.
- Margaret Meeks was one of only four women who worked in the supply division. Because she would come into work every morning smiling, the people soon nicknamed her "Sunshine." She made the home front a little brighter when times were tough.
- Pearl Murphy worked in the supply division. She was one of the few African-American women employed at Kelly at the time. Before coming to Kelly, she earned \$51 per month as a "domestic." Her government job paid \$124 a month. With that salary, she was able to put her son through medical school.
- Catheryn Albin was a bond clerk in payroll. Her husband was freed from a Japanese prison camp by American troops invading Luzon Island in the Philippines.
- Estella Davis, 68, celebrated 27 years at Kelly. Stella was the first woman to come to work at Kelly Field in December 1917. She retired in September 1945, but only after she was sure she was no longer needed to support the war effort.
- There is even a World War II Kelly Katie still serving her country at Kelly. Theresa Kenny is an F-5 program manager in the Mature Aircraft Management Directorate.

"The Kelly Katies performed magnificently, more out of dedication to a cause rather than a quest for a career," Guerrero continued. "However, the fact is that the 'Kelly Katies' proved they were equal to any challenge. They helped open doors for successors who desired to excel beyond the rivet gun and typewriter."

A modern-day version of the Kelly Katies, Frances Garza-Alvarado, chief of the Financial

Management Directorate's Materiel Management Training Branch, reflected on her federal service career, much of it spent doing jobs formerly thought to be the domain of men.

"All women, in and out of government service, who aspire to equality in the workplace, owe Kelly Katie and her sister, Rosie the Riveter, an undying debt of gratitude," said Garza-Alvarado. "Without them, women would have gained opportunities we now have in the workplace, but it would have been so much more difficult. It is an honor to be in the presence of such women."

Tommy Jordan, Kelly Field Heritage Foundation president, unveiled Emilia's statue. Assisting him were Emilia's niece and nephew, Mary Ann Sanchez-Reyes and Jose A. Sanchez Jr. Sylvia Zamarripa, who nominated Emilia for recognition, joined 16 of Sanchez's relatives at the event.

Bronze busts honoring Kelly heroes will occupy the five remaining stands at the monument before the base closes. Next to be commemorated will be Ethel Minor, a civilian veteran of the Cold War. While Minor will be honored for her work at Kelly following World War II, she was also one of the Kelly Katies and present during the festivities. Dedication of the bronze bust commemorating Minor and other Kelly Cold War veterans is planned for November. (Ross Day of the Kelly History Office contributed to this article.)

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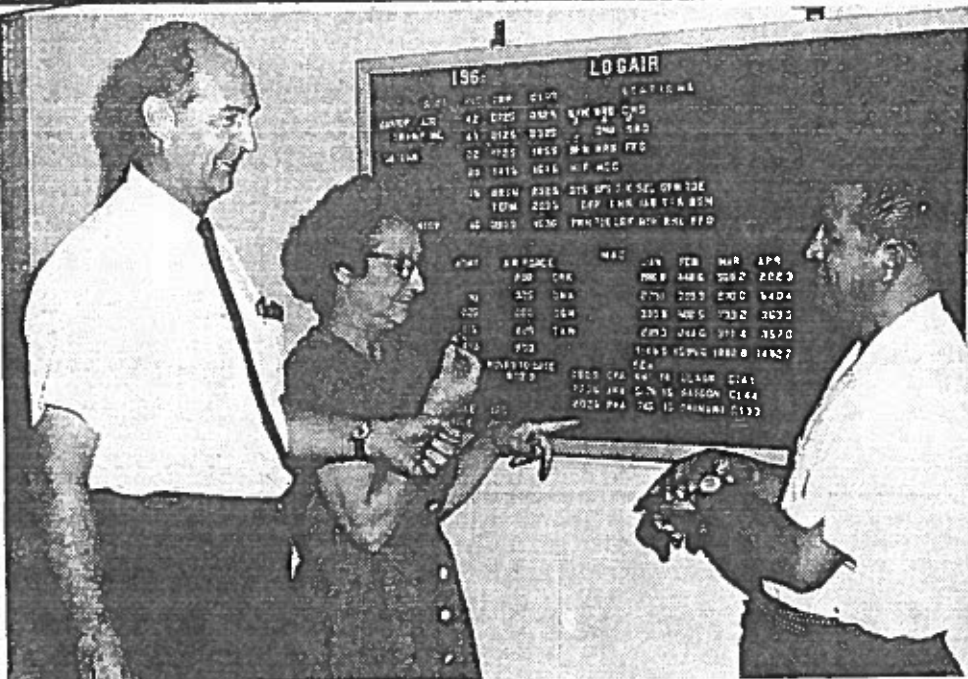
A large reinforced frame is placed inside a patch by Mrs. Anna Burket. Wing repair resembles darning and patching of clothes.



TO VIETNAM EFFORT RECOGNIZED — Nine of the 10 San Antonio Area personnel honored by the Alamo Chapter of the Air Force Association "Salute to SAAMA" dinner in the Kelly AFB Officers Club Friday evening: engraved watches from Jess Larson, lower left, AFA national president, presenting an award to Mrs. Anna Burket, while Maj. Gen. Frank E. MA commander, looks on. Others receiving watches for outstanding logort of the U. S. Air Force in Vietnam were, left to right, John Brotherman, m A. Crockett Jr., Edward Harper and Randolph Gant. The 10th honoree il Rangel. (USAF Photo)

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WATCHES COME IN HANDY — Left to right, Edward L. Schneider, Supply's Air terminal manager; Mrs. Anna Burket, Comptroller's Machine Room Supervisor at the terminal, and Johnny F. Guerra, crater in Supply's Transportation Operations Division, are shown synchronizing their new watches, presented to them by the Alamo Chapter of the Air Force Association at the "Salute to SAAMA" dinner recently. The three SAAMA honorees are proudly checking their watches against the schedule for support of Southeast Asia in order to make sure all flights are at "go." Ten individuals were honored by AFA. (USAF Photo)

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Mrs. Gertrude Threadgill, a "Kelly Katie" during World War II, quit her job at the end of the war. Here Maj. Gen. Clement McMullen welcomes her back. She returned to her same job during the Korean War.

Changes and orders were coming in fast and furious in September. "Stop work on R3350—begin work on R2000—no more overhaul of R985—assume responsibility for R680 Tools and equipment peculiar to the overhaul of the R2000 began arriving from Ogden Air Technical Service Command. There was such chaos concerning what was to be overhauled and who was to do it that resignations began flowing freely. A severe reduction in force had been anticipated through directives sent down from Washington, but if resignations continued in this manner, there would be no force to reduce. However, it was soon discovered that this initial exodus was primarily caused by the departure of women from the work-force. During the war, nearly forty percent of the workers at Kelly were women. They worked in nearly every shop including Engine Overhaul. But now that their husbands and boy friends were finally coming home, they felt that was where they should be. The era of "Kelly Katie" had drawn to a close.

As quickly as the engines of war were shut down, the money drawers slammed shut. On 17 August 1945, a teletype from Headquarters, Air Technical Service Command directed that no further local contracts would be entered into, or purchase orders issued, save for those items of necessity already specified as exempt. Full justification of "demonstrable harm" was required for any contract or order not included in the list of exceptions. As a result, work on the installation of a monoveyor system in the Engine Parts Cleaning Branch was held up. Contracts for this project had originally been approved on 13 July, but a request of continuance was denied. Repeated calls to head-

quarters yielded the same response: "If you can't get what you need from other depots that are shutting down, you don't get it." If a B-29 was grounded because a replacement part was not available, the plane stayed grounded. San Antonio Air Technical Service Command engine production lines were in danger of a complete shutdown. Fortunately, by 8 September, the Command Headquarters realized it had overreacted and began to loosen the purse strings a bit.

Postwar Engine Production

In the months following World War II, stability began to return to San Antonio Air Service Command engine production lines. The monoveyor system, which had been stalled by budget restrictions at war's end, became a reality in February 1946. The 2,150-foot monoveyor was an overhead conveyor system that circled through engine disassembly areas, various parts branches and units, and replaced hand-pulled trucks and dollies. It made one complete circuit of the building every eight hours.

Before the installation of the monoveyor, carts, dollies, and men would often clog the aisles. Parts suffered damage from rough handling and accidental spills. In many cases, men had to go to the work; now the work came to the men. It also revolutionized the cleaning process which all engines had to go through. The monoveyor began near the engine floor conveyors in Engine Disassembly. Engines to be disassembled were moved along by the conveyors. Smaller parts were placed in baskets, larger parts on hooks. All were then attached to arms on the monoveyor. As parts were removed from the engine, metal tags bearing the engine number were attached to the larger parts and to the baskets containing the smaller parts, so that no part lost its original identity and could be reassembled on the same engine if suitable. The parts then moved along through 643 feet of elaborate solvent baths and rinses which removed all grease and dirt. As the parts completed their cleaning process, cylinders and pistons were taken off the monoveyor and sent through the reworking unit. Other parts were inspected and either tagged reparable or condemned. Condemned parts went to salvage, replacement parts requisitioned, reparable parts circulated through rework shops, and all came together in the Engine Assembly Branch. Overhaul of engines under this new system jumped from an average fifty up to seventy-five engines per eight hour shift.

One problem did arise from this bath cleaning process. It not only cleaned the grease off the engines, it cleaned the grease off the Monoveyor wheels as well. Originally, a man stood by with a grease gun lubricating each wheel as it passed out of the bath, but ingenuity prevailed and an automatic lubricating apparatus was invented by one of the shop engineers.

Kelly Katie In High Gear

In increasing numbers, Kelly Kates are leaving their kitchens to help man the expanding workforce at the world's largest air depot here. Women are taking their places in more and more departments, in many highly skilled technical trades. Recently, the local CS Board announced some 5000 jobs open in San Antonio, with more than 3500 of them at Kelly. Personnel officials confidently expect a substantial number of these will be filled by Kelly Kates. Here are but a few of the gals back in the Kelly industrial family—on good jobs, at good pay, ideal working conditions, with the knowledge they're doing critical work for the Armed Forces.



JOSIE SAENZ WIELDS AN ELECTRIC DRILL ON COMBAT CRAFT
She drills out rivets on wing skin of a B-29 bomber