

Floyd Bennett Field

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway National Recreation Area
Jamaica Bay Unit



World War II 1941 - 1945



Naval Air Station - New York 1941-1945

Floyd Bennett Field was a significant United States “home front” site during the Second World War, and is among the most important in regard to naval aviation. As Naval Air Station - New York, nearly all of the U.S. Navy’s aviation roles were carried out at Floyd Bennett Field. Among these were training, patrols, and the largest of the operations on the field: the acceptance, testing, and ferrying of aircraft for delivery to various combat theaters. Through these activities, the men and women who served at Floyd Bennett Field made vital contributions to the Allied war effort around the world.

Naval Aviation’s Home in Brooklyn

Floyd Bennett Field was opened as New York City’s first municipal airport on May 23, 1931. When it opened, Floyd Bennett Field was among the most modern airports in the world. As a result it was the site where many record breaking, or significant flights originated, or were completed during the 1930’s. The field’s facilities were constantly being upgraded and improved. This kept Floyd Bennett Field in the forefront of the world’s airports. However, lack of easy access to the airport, and New York City’s inability to lure the lucrative air mail contracts away from Newark Airport in New Jersey meant that Floyd Bennett Field was destined to lose money for the city.

With the opening of Municipal Airport Number 2 (LaGuardia Airport) in 1939, the city government began to look for a buyer for Floyd Bennett Field. At the same time, the United States was finding it increasingly difficult to stay out of the World War II (which had been raging in Europe since 1939). The U.S. Navy began looking to expand its aviation capabilities around the nation’s largest city and

seaport. The Navy agreed to purchase the field from New York City for \$9 million in 1941. The last civilian flight took place on May 26, and Naval Air Station – New York was established on June 2, 1941.

The U.S. Navy had already been an established presence at Floyd Bennett Field when the airport was purchased from the city. A Naval Air Reserve Squadron had been established on the same day the airport opened, and carried on the training of pilots and ground crews throughout the 1930’s. First based in Hangar 5, and later in Hangar 1 along Flatbush Avenue, the Navy facilities were designated Naval Air Station – Brooklyn during the municipal airport period. The establishment of Coast Guard Air Station – Brooklyn on the east side of the field followed in 1936. With the 1941 purchase of Floyd Bennett Field by the Navy, and the subsequent expansion of the Navy and Coast Guard facilities, a vital step in America’s pre-war preparedness was achieved.

“Lend-Lease” and the “Neutrality Patrols”

In March of 1941, vowing to make the United States the “arsenal of democracy,” President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed legislation creating the Lend – Lease program. This allowed Great Britain and other Allies to borrow or lease vital war materials from the United States. To protect the convoys of ships carrying these crucial materials from New York to Great Britain, “Neutrality Patrols” were established. Ostensibly these patrols were flown to protect ships within United States

territorial waters, as well as all ships sailing under the American flag. Flying PBY Catalinas, and other naval patrol aircraft, crews from Floyd Bennett Field and other naval air stations escorted the convoys from above to protect them from the German U-boats below. Had these convoys not been conducted safely across the Atlantic Ocean, the Allies might not have been able to withstand the Nazi war machine during the early years of the war.

The Battle of the Atlantic 1941 - 1943

When the United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941, Naval Air Station – New York’s activities expanded dramatically. The anti-submarine patrols were expanded, as the Germans had declared unrestricted submarine warfare against the no longer neutral American merchant fleet. These ships were now carrying American troops, in addition to the still vital war materials. While many ships were lost in the early stages of the war, increased patrols and improved antisubmarine weapons and tactics turned the tide of what Winston Churchill called the “Battle of the Atlantic”. By late 1943, the vast majority of merchant ships were arriving at their destinations. If they had not, the invasion of Normandy, and the liberation of Europe would not have been possible.



A Consolidated PBY “Catalina” patrol plane. These aircraft were flown by the U.S. Navy and provided to the Royal Air Force through Lend -Lease.

The Aircraft Delivery Units and the Ferry Squadrons



Grumman F6-F “Hellcats” on the deck of the USS Bennington. Thousands of these fighters were delivered by the ferry squadrons from Floyd Bennett Field.

Floyd Bennett Field was the busiest naval air station in the United States during World War II. This was in large part due to the activities of the aircraft delivery units and the ferry squadrons. The pilots and ground crews of these units were responsible for the acceptance, testing, and delivery of newly built planes. The biggest manufacturers of naval aircraft were largely located in the New York metropolitan area. Grumman, Chance-Vought, and General Motors built nearly every type of airplane in the Navy’s inventory, from carrier borne fighters and bombers, to amphibious patrol planes. Because of the factories’ proximity to New York City, the most logical place to send the planes after they rolled off the assembly line was Floyd Bennett Field. While at the field, the planes were tested, fitted out, and commissioned into the Navy. Once commissioned, these planes were flown to their next destination. In most cases, this was to the west coast for shipment to Navy and Marine Corps aviation units in the Pacific Theater. At the start of the war, this process could take 10 days. By 1943, it took just 3 days.

This vital function was carried out by the Aircraft Delivery Units, which were re-designated as the Naval Air Ferry Command in 1943, and headquartered at Floyd Bennett Field. There were two ferry squadrons based at Floyd Bennett Field, designated VRF-1 and VRF-4. All told, Naval Air Station- New York, received and commissioned well over 40,000 aircraft, the largest amount of any naval air station during the war. Since the war in the Pacific was fought in large part by naval aviators and their aircraft, the activities at Floyd Bennett Field were integral in helping the Allies defeat Japan.



Helicopter Training



Floyd Bennett Field had been at the forefront of developing aviation technology since it opened in 1931, and the World War II period was no different. The Navy had been interested in the helicopter as an aircraft for use in air-sea rescue operations. With the acceptance of the Sikorsky R-4 helicopter for military use in 1943, pilots were needed to fly them. Thus, the Navy established the first helicopter training facility in the world in November of 1943 in the Coast Guard hangar on the east side of Floyd Bennett Field. Pilots from the Navy, Coast Guard, Army Air Force, and Britain’s Royal Navy were trained to fly the new aircraft. Most of these pilots and their helicopters were sent to the Pacific and China-Burma-India Theaters. The helicopter’s vertical takeoff and landing capabilities were invaluable in rescuing downed airmen and other troops from areas inaccessible to other types of aircraft. Although the helicopters arrived in too few numbers to have a significant impact on World War

II, the pilots trained at Floyd Bennett Field to fly these aircraft would have a lasting impact on the future of aviation.



The first helicopter rescue winch is demonstrated by Coast Guardsman Sergei Sikorsky, the son of its inventor Igor Sikorsky, on land (left,) and in Jamaica Bay off Floyd Bennett Field in 1944. This device proved invaluable in the air - sea rescue role.

For More Information:

Superintendent
Jamaica Bay Unit
Gateway National Recreation Area
Building 69 Floyd Bennett Field
Brooklyn, NY 11234

Telephone (718) 338 - 3338
Internet: www.nps.gov/gate

Printed on paper containing at least
50 % post - consumer waste.

