

MOBILE AIR MATERIEL AREA

MISSION

LINEAGE

Southeast Air Depot established, 27 Jul 1939
Redesignated Mobile Air Depot, 16 Jul 1941
Redesignated Mobile Air Depot Control Area Command, 1 Feb 1943
Redesignated Mobile Air Service Command, 22 May 1943
Redesignated Mobile Air Technical Service Command, 14 Nov 1944
Redesignated Mobile Air Materiel Area, 2 Jul 1946
Inactivated, Jul 1969

STATIONS

Brookley AFB, AL

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Maj Gen Fredrick R. Dent, Jr., #1955
Maj Gen D. F. Callahan, #1961
Maj Gen Paul E. Grenier, #1966

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The military buildup prior to and during World War II caused US Army to expand across the country, including south. In 1938, the US Army Air Corps bought the Bates Field municipal airport and established the Brookley Army Air Field, renamed to Brookley Air Force Base in 1948. Bates Field relocated approximately 10 miles west and is known today as the Mobile Regional Airport.

The Army chose Brookley primarily because of its waterfront location and flying-suitable weather conditions. The Base served two purposes: a fighter overhaul and maintenance base, and an Air Material Command supplying the Air Force bases around the world. To fulfill its mission, the Army built hangars, large warehouses, its own cargo plane fleet, and took advantage of the existing Arlington Point dock. The dock's function was to allow ocean-going vessels to offload aircraft and transport them to the repair facilities within Brookley without using public roads. Repaired aircraft then flew back into service.

During the war, the Brookley Army Air Field became Mobile's largest employer, with about 17,000 skilled civilians capable of performing delicate work with fragile instruments and machinery. In 1944, the Army decided to take advantage of Brookley's large, skilled workforce for its top-secret "Ivory Soap" project to hasten victory in the Pacific. The project required 24 large vessels to be re-modeled into Aircraft Repair and Maintenance Units that had to be able to accommodate B-29, P-51s, R-4B, and amphibious vehicles. The Air Force delivered all 24 vessels to Mobile, Alabama in spring 1944 to start remodeling. Some 5,000 men underwent a complex training process that prepared them to rebuild the vessels and operate them once on the water. By the end of the year, the vessels departed Mobile.

The military repaired and calibrated the Norden Bomb Sight at Brookley in a secret facility.

By the 1960s, Brookley base had nearly 13,000 employees. Rumors about closing Brookley Air Force Base started to surface in early 1960s. The Secretary of Defense announced its closure in 1964, widely believed to be President Lyndon Johnson's retaliation for Alabama voting for his opponent Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential elections. When Brookley closed officially in June 1969, nearly 10% of the local workforce lost their jobs. This was the largest base closure in history.

The chain of events that eventually led to the closing of the three air materiel areas actually began in the middle of August 1963 when Secretary McNamara asked the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force for valid figures on how much it cost to support the aircraft that were assigned to each service. At the time, the Army was increasing its aircraft inventories, while the Air Force was reducing its inventories because it was replacing some of its aircraft with missiles-in Fiscal Year

1961, the Air Force had 2,500 strategic bombers and tankers and about 100 strategic missiles; in Fiscal Year 1966, it had 1,200 bombers and 1,500 missiles.

Headquarters AFLC submitted its plan to Headquarters USAF on September 24, 1964. This plan listed the air materiel areas in order of their retention value to AFLC, based on their facilities and the nature of their work loads. Mobile, Middletown, and San Bernardino received the lowest ratings. At the same time, Headquarters AFLC advised Air Force headquarters that it was opposed to the proposed consolidation because it would have a serious impact on the command's personnel skills, since experience had shown that people did not readily transfer with their functions."

Immediately after Headquarters AFLC submitted its plan to Headquarters USAF, Secretary of the Air Force Zuckert directed AFLC to prepare another plan which would contain a comparative evaluation of all the air materiel areas and a justification for closing the three that would be inactivated. This plan was presented to Secretary Zuckert at the end of October 1964. Three weeks later, Secretary McNamara announced that the Mobile, Middletown, and San Bernardino Air Materiel Areas would be inactivated.

After Secretary McNamara made his announcement, Headquarters AFLC established a special task force to develop a plan for inactivating the three air materiel areas. The task force completed the required plan on November 30, 1964.

According to the plan, three of Mobile's systems—the B-66, HIM 6, and BQM-34A(Q2) Drone—would be transferred to the Warner Robins Air Materiel Area, while its two remaining systems, the F-84 and F-105, would be transferred to the Sacramento Air Materiel Area.

When it became evident that only a relatively small percentage of the civilian personnel at Middletown, Mobile, and San Bernardino would transfer with their positions, Headquarters AFLC permitted the command's five remaining air materiel areas to hire additional personnel before they actually received the required manpower authorizations.

The Mobile Air Materiel Area was not inactivated until June, 1969, the date originally established by Secretary McNamara. Mobile's closing was delayed because it had served as a storage point for a great deal of materiel that belonged to the Defense Supply Agency and it took some time to transfer this materiel to other locations, and because difficulties were encountered in finding some civilian use for all of Brookley Air Force Base.

USAF Unit Histories

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.