Paton Field Centennial Moment – June

1939-1944: Federal Programs Bring Aviation to Universities

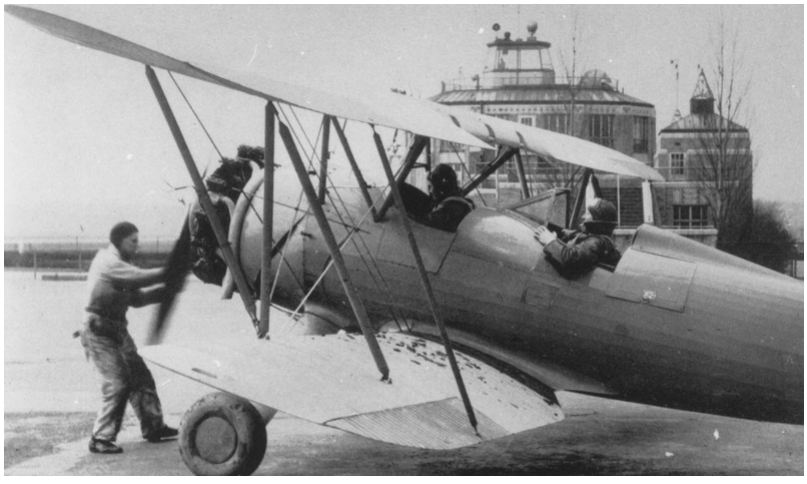
By the late 1930s, tensions were rising in Europe, and as a result most countries were investing heavily in training civilian pilots. If war were to breakout, then a pool of civilian pilots could easily be repurposed as military aviators. In the US, most of the country had emerged from the Great Depression while the aviation industry lagged behind. To bolster the nation's aviation industry, President Roosevelt approved the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP). It partnered universities, which provided the students, with local flight schools who would provide the free flight training.

Aviation Comes to Kent State

On September 10, 1939, Kent State became one of the first 166 schools accepted into the CPTP. The program was open to any student between 18 and 25 years old who had a basic understanding of physics. Kent State was allotted 40 slots with 10 percent reserved for female students. Akron Airways was the contractor selected to provide flight training for both Kent State and Akron University students. Due to the poor condition of Stow Field, training occurred at Mid-City and Akron Airports.

Kent State Aviation Firsts

The first flight training for Kent State students took place at Akron Airport on November 30, 1939, with all ten students getting into the air that day. The remaining ten students began in January at Mid-City Airport. On January 11, Donald Dietz, became the first KSU student to solo. Two weeks later, on January 28, Mary Sherriff also soloed at Mid-City, becoming the area's first female CPTP student to do so. On April 10, the first KSU students earned their private pilot licenses. Frank Petee finished first, with Henry Russell Kenyon following later the same day. Then on April 18, Mary Sherriff became the first female CPTP student to earn her license at Kent State and the first to do so in the State of Ohio. News of her accomplishment was reported throughout the region.



Courtesy of the *Kent State University Special Collections and Archives*

War Brings Changes

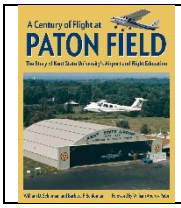
The December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese brought an end to the CPTP as it shifted to training pilots for the military. Initially students could still apply for flight training as long as they committed to enlisting. A year after Pearl Harbor, student recruitment ended, and only army or navy trainees were enrolled. With this change, the CPTP was renamed the War Training Service (WTS). Flight training was still a growing activity on campus as army and navy trainees were brought in from other Ohio schools and from neighboring states.

Courtesy of the *Kent State University Special Collections and Archives*

The WTS lasted at Kent State until March 1,1943, when it was discontinued. Shortly before the end of the WTS the War Department reached out to Kent State about participating in a program that would create a College Training Detachment on campus. On March 30, five hundred army cadets arrived in Kent as the 336th College Training Detachment. The army cadets were given rudimentary ground and flight instruction before they were transferred to other military training facilities. This program continued for another year and was finally terminated on June 28, 1944. This ended Kent State involvement in aviation until after the war ended.

DID YOU KNOW?

Henry Russell Kenyon, the second KSU student to earn his private pilot license, enlisted in the navy before the US entered WWII. He earned his navy wings and flew the Douglas TBD Devastator in Torpedo Squadron Eight (VT-8). On May 28, 1942, Kenyon was killed in the Battle of Midway. The destroyer escort USS Henry R. Kenyon was named in his honor.



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