

MORE THAN MEETS

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst

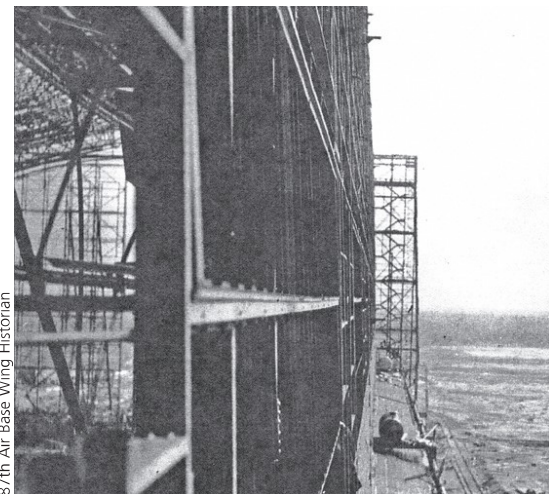
by Jill Ocone



87th Air Base Wing Historian

Historic Hangar One at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

With a storied military history, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JBMDL) is the Department of Defense's only tri-service base, which comprises 42,000 acres and spans more than twenty miles in Ocean and Burlington Counties. Lakehurst, however, is more than just the site of one of America's worst historic disasters. It is an integral part of the tri-service base with military traditions and roots dating back more than one hundred years.



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Hangar One, under construction, circa 1920.

THE EYE

Naval Air Station Lakehurst

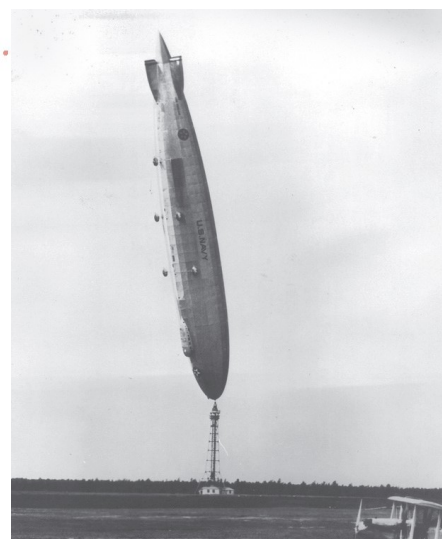
In 1916, the Eddystone Chemical Corporation bought the first parcel of land from the Manchester Land Company, with the intention of using it as an ammunition testing ground for the Imperial Russian Army. Not long after, the United States Army purchased the property and renamed it Camp Kendrick. The facility was used for testing munitions shortly after the United States entered World War I. Following the war, the United States Navy purchased almost 1,500 acres of property to use as an airship station, and the based was renamed Naval Air Station Lakehurst (NAS Lakehurst) in 1921.

Historic Hangar One and The Rigid Airships

One of the most historic buildings in New Jersey is found on NAS

Lakehurst's grounds. Now a registered historic landmark, Hangar One was constructed for four million dollars between 1917 and 1921. All four of the Navy's rigid, helium-filled airships once called Hangar One home.

The *USS Shenandoah* (ZR-1) was the first rigid airship commissioned and constructed by the United States Navy. It was built at Lakehurst from 1922 to 1923, with its first flight in September 1923. The *Shenandoah* flew from Lakehurst to California, then on to Washington state in October 1924, becoming the first flight of a rigid airship across North America. The *Shenandoah* departed Lakehurst for her 57th flight on September 2, 1925 on a promotional trip to the Midwest, but the following day, the ship was destroyed by violent storms and crashed in three pieces in Ohio. Twenty-nine crew survived and four-



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The USS Los Angeles (ZR-3) going vertical in a gust of wind, August 25, 1927.

teen died in the harrowing ordeal.

While tethered to a mast at Lakehurst, The *USS Los Angeles* (ZR-3) created a spectacle on August 25, 1927 when a gust of wind lifted her into colder, denser air, causing her tail to lift even higher. With crew on board, the airship eventually reached an angle of eighty-five degrees before it descended. Surprisingly, no injuries were reported, and the ship was able to fly the next day. On January 31,

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Now a registered historic landmark, Hangar One was constructed between 1917 and 1921 for four million dollars. Shown here under construction circa 1919.

1930, the airship returned to New Jersey and tested the launching of a glider over Lakehurst.

The USS Akron (ZRS-4) and her sister ship, the USS Macon (ZRS-5), were among the largest flying objects ever built and the world's first purpose-built aircraft carriers. Each was 785 feet long and big enough to carry several F9C Sparrowhawk fighter planes inside that could be launched and recovered while the airships were in flight.



The engine room on board the USS Akron (ZRS-4).

The Akron operated between September 1931 and April 1933, when she crashed off the New Jersey coast on April 4 during a thunderstorm, killing seventy-three of the seventy-six people on board. The incident remains the greatest loss of life in any airship crash.

The Macon operated between April 1933 and February 1935 until she was damaged in a storm and lost off Point Sur, California. Out of the eighty-three crew aboard, two Navy sailors lost their lives in the incident. In 1990, researchers discovered the Macon's remains 1,500 feet below the surface of the Monterey Bay



The infamous Hindenburg disaster, May 6, 1937.

National Marine Sanctuary, and the site is now listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

The Graf Zeppelin (LZ 127) was one of two German hydrogen-filled rigid airships that also visited Hangar One. In October 1928, the airship made its first intercontinental trip and arrived in Lakehurst on August 4, 1929. From July 1928 through June 1937, she ultimately travelled over one million miles on 590 flights, carrying 13,330 passengers. She earned the title of "the world's most impressive airship" by flying for 17,177 hours (717 days) without any injuries to or losses of passengers or crew.

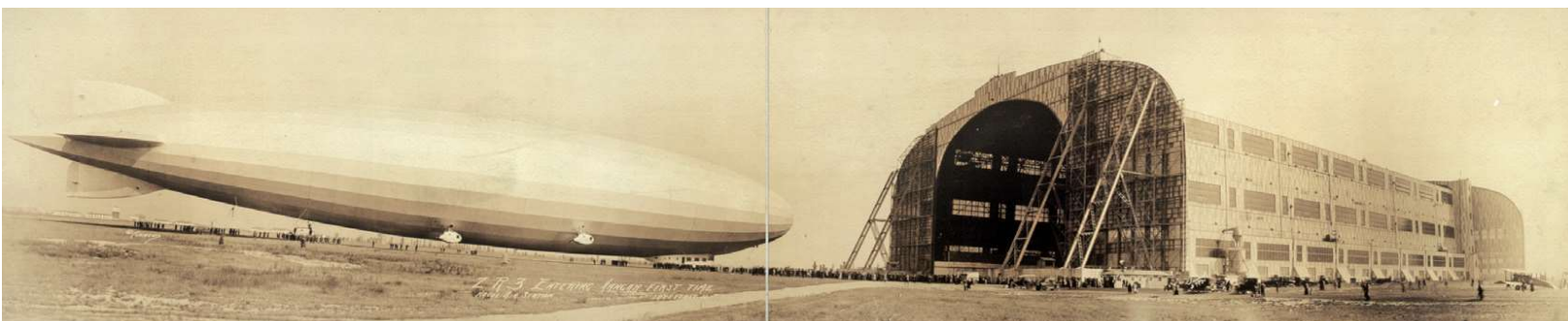
The Hindenburg (LZ-129), the largest aircraft ever to fly and the most notable of airships, was also housed in Hangar One with only eighteen inches of clearance at its bow and stern. Her commercial flights pioneered the first transatlantic air service, with NAS Lakehurst becoming the country's first international airport. The ill-fated airship carried hundreds of passengers and traveled thousands of miles before the infamous evening of May 6, 1937, when, with ninety-seven people on board, she burst into flames while attempting to dock with its mooring

mast. The hydrogen-fueled flames consumed the airship in thirty-seven seconds, and it crashed just west of Hangar One. The accident resulted in the deaths of thirteen passengers and twenty-two crew, and one fatality on the ground. The famous, emotionally-charged declaration "Oh, the humanity!" by radio announcer Herb Morrison as he described the disaster also made history by being part of the country's first coast-to-coast radio news broadcast.

"While many draw an immediate connection to the Hindenburg when they hear 'Lakehurst,' what many do not realize is that nearly all of the Naval flying operations have their beginnings here," said James J. Warrick, who serves as the 87th Air Base Wing Historian. "The airships were the first, which continued into World War II with airship squadrons that escorted shipping across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. Airship Squadron 12 has the distinction of escorting over 89,000 ships without one single loss to German U-Boats." Warrick also said that helicopter aviation for the Navy has its genesis at Lakehurst, with the first Navy helicopter squadrons, HU-1 and HU-2, commissioned there.

Hangars 5 and 6

When Hangars 5 and 6 were completed in 1943, they were the largest, single arch wooden structures in the world at the time, each with 241,000 feet of floor space. The massive buildings housed the Navy's expanding fleet of antisubmarine patrol blimps during the World War II era, which numbered just six in 1940 and rose to one hundred thirty by the end of the war. Such patrol blimps routinely



The USS Los Angeles (ZR-3) entering Hangar One for the first time, 1924.

Library of Congress

flew up and down the coast looking for signs of enemy submarines that could potentially cause harm to the vessels sailing off the Jersey Shore, the people and crews onboard those vessels, and to everyone on land.

The Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training and the Naval Air Test Facility

The Naval Air Technical Training Center, now called the Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training, was established at Lakehurst in 1951. Its mission has prepared countless sailors to serve as Aviation Boatswain's Mates, Aircrew Survival Equipment Personnel, Aerographer's Mates, Naval Security Guards, and Marine Corps Expeditionary Airfield Technicians.

Hangar One also houses the largest training aid in the Navy, The Carrier Aircraft Launch and Support System/ Equipment Simulator, which is a one-third scale model aircraft carrier. The simulator provides training on catapults, arresting gear assemblies, and other equipment with which Aviation Boatswain's Mates must be familiar.

In 1957, NAS Lakehurst welcomed the Naval Air Test Facility (NATF) to the base. NATF's mission was to test and evaluate aircraft launch and recovery systems and aviation support equipment, but by 1962, the Navy discontinued all lighter than air operations. Antisubmarine helicopter squadrons became a part of the station's mission from 1965 to 1973.

Many Names

NAS Lakehurst is no stranger to name changes as it has been renamed with numerous Scrabble-worthy acronyms several times over the last fifty years. In 1973, the Naval Aircraft Factory moved from Philadelphia to Lakehurst and was renamed the Naval Air Engineering Center (NAEC); then in 1977, the Naval Air Test Facility (NATF) and NAS Lakehurst merged with the NAEC to all become the NAEC.

The station was once again renamed in 1994 and became the Naval Air Engineering Station (NAES) and served as the host com-

mand to the Lakehurst contingent of the Naval Air Warfare Center, Aircraft Division (NAWCAD), which is part of the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR).

Then in 2009, Lakehurst became a part of the United States military's first tri-service joint base when it merged with McGuire Air Force Base and Fort Dix (U.S. Army) to become Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. While JBMDL is under the management of the Air Force, NAVAIR continues its Navy mission at the Lakehurst base.

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR)

Today, NAVAIR Lakehurst serves as a critical link between Naval Aviation support and the Navy Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups worldwide. More importantly, NAVAIR Lakehurst is the only faction in the world responsible for maintaining fleet support and infusing modern technology across the entire gamut of equipment needed to launch, land, and maintain aircraft from ships at sea.

The first aircraft, an F/A18E Super Hornet, launched from the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System from NAVAIR Lakehurst in December 2010. Less than a year

later, the next generation fighter, the F35C, was launched from the base.

The NAVAIR complex at Lakehurst includes a 12,000-foot research, development, test and engineering runway with two fleet representative aircraft carrier steam catapults, a CVN-78 class new generation electromagnetic catapult, two fleet representative arresting gears, a full-scale fleet representative jet blast deflector site, and three active mile-long jet car test tracks used to propel dead loads weighing up to 100,000 pounds into arresting gear.

An advanced engineering campus, a 5.7-acre complex of manufacturing and prototyping shops, and engineering laboratories are found within the NAVAIR Lakehurst facilities, all of which directly support naval aviation.

In addition to the station's rich airship history, it has served as a center for research into aircraft ejection seats and carrier aircraft launch and recovery techniques. The first Navy Helicopter Squadron and the first live ejection seat test were at NAVAIR Lakehurst.

NAVAIR Lakehurst's merging to be a part of the tri-base in 2009 led it to become a sibling with two other military installations, each with their own lineages and stories.

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USAF F-16 Viper demonstration at "Power in the Pines," the largest public event held at JBMDL. The air and space open house event, showcasing air superiority from both the ground and sky, returned after a five-year hiatus in May 2023.

87th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

McGuire Air Force Base

McGuire Air Force Base was named after Major Thomas B. McGuire, who was born on August 1, 1920 in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He left Georgia Tech University in his third year of studies to join the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1941 and reported as an aviation cadet to Randolph Field. His natural abilities and impressive record in World War II battles led him to become one of the finest pilots in Air Force history. He was killed on January 7, 1945 in a fierce battle over a Japanese-held airstrip near Negros Island, Philippines. McGuire was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, six Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Purple Hearts, and fifteen Air Medals all before he was twenty-five years old. McGuire Air Force Base was dedicated in his honor in January 1948.

Aircrews from McGuire transported troops and supplies to South Vietnam often under sniper fire during the Vietnam War and supported operation HOMECOMING after, which brought home thirty-three POWs released by North Vietnamese communist forces, with the last POW arriving on April 4, 1973.

Hundreds of base personnel participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and provided humanitarian aid and relief to countries such as Turkey, Kenya, Somalia, and Croatia.

In 1991, crews from McGuire helped write history by airlifting Terry Anderson, the longest held Western hostage and the last of three remaining American hostages held by pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim groups.

Fort Dix

Fort Dix is the third piece of the unique JBMDL puzzle. On June 1, 1917, Capt. George W. Mulheron and nineteen soldiers from Company C of the Twenty-sixth New Jersey Engineers arrived in Wrightstown armed with the mission to establish a camp dedicated to training U.S. Army soldiers for the Great War. The Wrightstown location was selected

because of its proximity to the ports of Philadelphia, Trenton, and close to New York City. Originally named Camp 13, the name changed to Camp Dix on July 18, 1917 to honor Civil War Veteran Maj. Gen. John Adams Dix, who served as a United States Senator, Secretary of the Treasury, and Governor of New York who died in 1879.

Camp Dix served as a training and staging center during World War I and World War II, and after the armistice, the site served as a demobilization center for Active Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard United.



The Hangar One Museum.

In March 1939, the site became a permanent U.S. Army Post, and its name was changed to Fort Dix. Fort Dix served as a Basic Training Center and an Infantry Training Center. In 1978, the first female Army recruits entered basic training at Fort Dix.

The base also deployed troops in support of Operations Desert Shield and Storm, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo. In 1999, over 4,000 displaced people from Kosovo were helped by the base with resettling into new homes here in America.

After merging to become JBMDL, Fort Dix was transformed into the U.S. Army Support Activity Fort Dix. The base continues to be one of the largest mobilization sites in the country and a major training center for the northeastern United States for Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers. Army Support Activity Fort Dix also plans and executes Army directed mission support.

Today, JBMDL is home to more than 46,700 airmen, soldiers, sailors,

marines, coast guardsmen, civilians, and family members and is one of the largest employers in New Jersey. Many Department of Defense missions are located at JBMDL, including the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, the 174th Infantry Brigade, the 99th Regional Support Command, and the 514th Air Mobility Wing, as well as several federal, state, and local agencies such as the New Jersey National Guard, the United States Coast Guard Atlantic Strike Team, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Agriculture.

Despite there being few ocean-related missions, the shore community is an integral part of JBMDL. "The support from community leaders and organizations plays an important role in bridging the connection between soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and those folks outside the base perimeter who may have always wondered what's happening on the base," Warrick said.

Active duty, reservists, and guardsmen preserve the homeland defenses of the air, land, and sea of the United States while sustaining global contingency operations right here at the Jersey Shore as a part of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. ♦

Editor's Note: Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Naval Air Station and the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society are located on Route 547 in Lakehurst. Tours to experience its amazing history are offered by the Historical Society every Wednesday and the second and fourth Saturdays of the month from April through October. From November through March, tours are available every Wednesday and the second Saturday of the month. Tours include The Cathedral of The Air, The Hindenburg Crash Site, The Navy Lakehurst Heritage Center, The Ready Room, The POW-MIA Room, and Historic Hangar One. Due to security requirements, tour guests must pre-register two weeks prior by calling (732) 600-8055 or emailing tours@nlhs.com. No walk-ins or additions to the group will be accepted on the day of the tour. For more information, call the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society at (732) 323-6547 or visit www.nlhs.com.