

## Wartime proclamation reflected somber mood

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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My last column looked at the early years of the Fairfield-Suisun Airbase, a wartime response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although the local newspapers did not report much about the activities, local residents were eager to learn more about the “great flying field.”

The War Department assigned the Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Base to the Air Transport Command (AC) on October 13, 1942, which in turn took command of the base on February 8, 1943.

Housing developments such as Waterman Park and other infrastructure to connect the airbase to Highway 40 (today's I-80) were needed. Consequently, the Solano County Board of Supervisors approved the construction of a six-mile road in February 1943.

On June 3, 1943, the Solano County Courier announced: “The local airport east of Suisun was officially taken over by the Army on last Thursday and sentries have replaced the many officers who were on duty at the field. There were approximately one hundred men stationed at the field, with more coming in each day, the exact personnel not being known when all plans have been completed. It is understood that the new airport will be known as Ragsdale Field, with the address as Suisun.”

The commanding officer, Mayor W. P. Stephenson, explained the name change in an article by the Solano Republican. He “had received word from Washington that the big army base has been officially designated Ragsdale Field. The Major stated that the name honors Lieutenant Ragsdale, a U. A. Army pilot, who met death while transferring 30 women and children from enemy-infested New Guinea, and only after disposing of five of the 12 Jap zero fighter planes that attacked his craft. True to tradition, he landed his precious human cargo safely but gave his life in the heroic execution of his task.”

A few days later, members of the Lions Club received a tour of the new airfield. The Solano Republican quipped on June 24, 1943: “Lions Captured At Ragsdale Aircraft

“All members of Fairfield Lions Club who visited Ragsdale Field yesterday as guest of the officers there, now want to join the Army.”

Setting up the base's wartime mission - preparing tactical bombers for overseas deployment and transporting cargo and troops to the Pacific war theaters - required a

skilled workforce.

With the Army Air Corps still in its infancy, private enterprises contracted to provide these services. Among the contractors was Convair, a company that brought over 800 employees to fly twice-weekly air transport missions.

The Fairfield City Council - Mayor Elwyn Huck, Councilmen William R. Glusen, Joe Gerevas, John E. Freitas, and Leo McInnis - voted on a proclamation on January 27, 1944, welcoming the new members to the community. This was published in the Solano Republican together with a welcome listing all base officers by name and assignment.

The proclamation's format differed greatly from today's proclamation style. The message reflected the somber wartime mood and recognized the need for communities to draw together.

"To Our New Citizens of Fairfield: While we are engaged in a mighty struggle to preserve our free institutions, and to extend the boundaries of liberty in the earth, it is well for us to renew our pledge of devotion to the fundamentals upon which this Nation has been built. I fully realize how painful it often is to break with the past, but only when men and organizations are prepared to do so naturally and graciously, not by edict and confusion, will we realize the meaning of true growth and progress. We are determined to demonstrate to a war-scarred world, by precept and example, that justice and decency still rule supreme.

"Civilization must and will triumph over barbarism and chaos. This is the time when all those concerned with the well-being of people of our City and Nation, should make an earnest effort to strengthen and preserve the democratic ideals of our entire community."

"Many of the ideals for which approximately the millions of our sons and daughters are enrolled in the armed services to defend, are ideals which are all too often lacking in communities such as ours."

"The self-discipline of the community which delegates authority to some, and responsibility to all, creates respect, and is a mandate of good citizenship. Right here in Fairfield, I believe you will find the nearest approach to such a condition - good citizenship and harmony among all groups."

"The advent of the coming of many new people into our community will strengthen and help us. A great poet, Longfellow, aptly said:

"All strength is in your union,

All your danger is in discord.:

“If we but adhere to the thought he left with us, we shall not, we cannot fail in our objectives - to live peacefully, to work harmoniously.”

“To the new citizens of Fairfield and Waterman Park, I extend a cordial and sincere welcome, trusting that you will take part in all our social and civic activities, thus helping us to perpetuate our ideals.”

“Sincerely and cordially

Elwyn Huck

Mayor of Fairfield

And Fairfield City Council”

In turn, the employees of Consairway Division published a heartfelt thank you to Fairfield citizens on Feb. 4, 1944.

“Because so many of you have been so kind to us since our arrival, and because your acts of welcome have been so sincerely and frequently given, we wish to take this means of thanking you all. Let us assure you we shall strive to deserve Fairfield's splendid hospitality.”

Relationships between cities and airbase were off to a good start.

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