



## Face of Fillmore

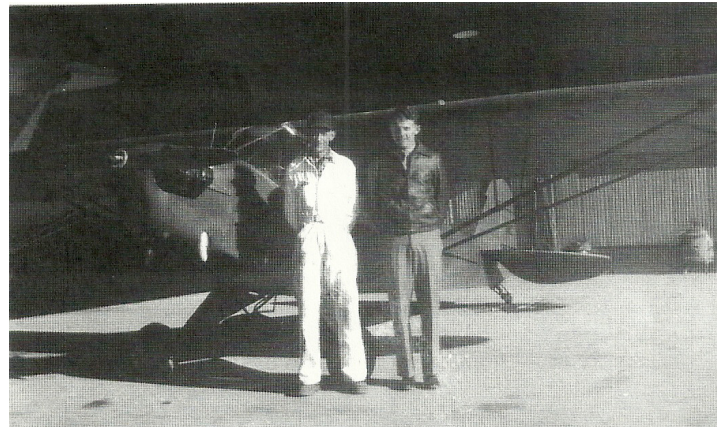
*By Sherry Shepard*  
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Piper Cub J3 and other planes at the airport in the 1940's

The Face of Fillmore looks this week at the Fillmore Municipal Airport. For approximately the last 75 years, the airport has been an important part of Fillmore.

Covering 241 acres southwest of town, the airport had its beginnings as far as I have been able to determine, in the early 1940's. Some names early on associated with its operation are Tony Dearden Sr., Dr. Dean Evans, and Arnold Ashhurst. I am certain there are many others who worked on the improvements and business done there.



Tony Dearden Sr. and Bill Hussman front of the hangar

My interest in the airport began with a telephone call from Chad Carling of Mesa, Arizona who through an article he wrote shared some entertaining memories of Fillmore's airport. Conversations with several others added to my knowledge of a truly fascinating chapter of Fillmore's history.

In 1942 the Fillmore airport became home to a training center for World War II pilots. Wooden tables and benches were set up east of the hanger as a classroom. The instructors and students stayed at the Stevens and Day Hotels, as well as with families who had rooms to rent out, with the government paying for room and board.

The government was afraid the Japanese would invade the coast so they wanted to come inland to train the pilots. They brought about 10 planes and four or five instructors to begin with. This is when the airport was begun.

According to Yvonne Hancock, the current airport manager, near the end of the war, plans were underway for glider training, as gliders were to be used in the invasion of Germany. So many gliders

were housed at the airport at one point that they were suspended by their tails from the hanger's ceiling to make room for them all. The war ended before the glider school became a reality.

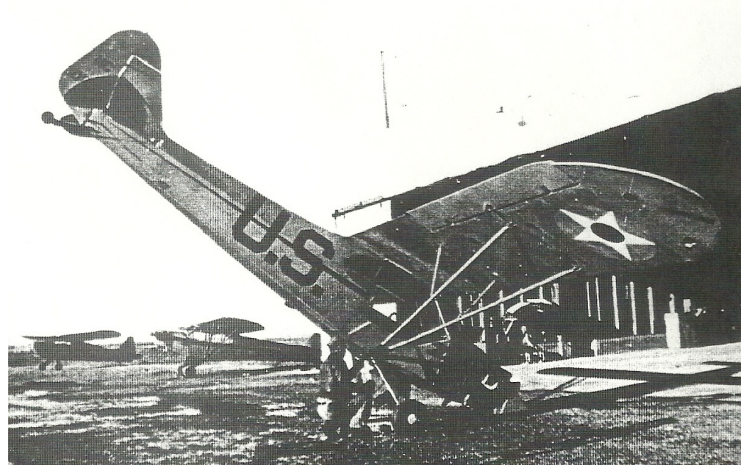
Mrs. Hancock also tells that about that time period, residents were concerned about being invaded by the enemy. All airplanes had identification numbers painted on their wings, so when an airplane flew over, the young people were trained to run outside, look up and copy down the numbers they saw on the wings. These were quickly reported and checked out to make sure they were not the enemy.

Mr. Carling tells that while in grade school in 1942, the school would sell U.S. savings bonds. The students would take their allowance money to school twice a week and purchase savings bond stamps. "When we got the book full of stamps then we would take it to the U.S. post office and get an \$18 savings bond."

He also tells: "One school day, our teachers let all of us students out to see a B-17 Flying Fortress, flying over the school grounds and dropping paper bombs to the ground. We all ran to pick them up. Some bombs had written on them: 'Congratulations, you have won an \$18 savings bond. Take it to the U.S. post office to get your free war bond'."

Mr. Carling tells that one Saturday morning he rode his horse to the Fillmore Airport and tied it up to the fencepost. He remembers the gliders being hung from the roof and aircraft being tied on the flight line. It was then that he met with Tony Dearden and talked to him about the pilot training program.

Tony played an important role in the airport's history. In his personal history, he tells about being injured in his work as a mechanic at Warner Motors so he had to take time to heal his broken arm and a sprain to the other one. While the healing process took place, Tony spent time patching the fabric on the planes. The runway was just dirt and small rocks graded to clear the brush. It was necessary to patch the underneath of the tail and wings



This plane is not wrecked. It is nose down on a dolly that enabled the mechanic to work on the underside of the plane. Planes were also stored in this manner to make more room in the hangar.



where the rocks would tear holes in them. This turned into a good job for him so he ended up there just about every day, earning some extra money.

Tony tells that the student pilots had to learn night flying so he would fill 24 kerosene lanterns and put half on each side so they could tell where the runway was.

He also worked on the old Waco plane that was used for cross country flight. It had an engine that would burn the rings up every nine hours it flew. He would put the new rings in the engine on the pistons every night. If he didn't, the engine would spit out oil and it would get all over the windshield so the pilot couldn't see where he was flying.

Tony and five others bought a Piper Cub J3 at a cost of \$130 each and enjoyed flying it. The others were Howard Johns, Paul McBride, Mark Paxton, and Dr. and Mrs. Evans. It was this plane that Tony learned to fly in. After a short time, the government decided they wanted that plane for a trainer, so they bought it from the group, who in turn bought a Taylorcraft and went on enjoying their flying. This continued until Mrs. Evans crashed the plane near Santaquin.



Airport after the 2006 fire - note the airplane propellers in the wreckage

2008 saw a major project at the airport with the building of a residential facility and hangar and the resurfacing of the runway.

Today the airport is still in operation and its nearly mile long runway is used regularly for air traffic.

The next Face of Fillmore will feature two more aviators from the Fillmore area.

In more recent years, two devastating fires took their toll on the airport. The first took place early in the morning of December 31, 1979, destroying the modular home that was occupied by Ross Johnson and his family while he was the airport manager. Luckily, no one was injured and the community rallied to help the family after their loss.

On August 16, 2006, a massive fire destroyed the hangars including the planes and other equipment that was stored inside.



Fillmore Municipal Airport today