



KTTC HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH

KEESLER FIELD

THE WAR YEARS

1941 TO 1945

OFFICE OF HISTORY

**KEESLER TECHNICAL TRAINING CENTER
KEESLER AFB, MISSISSIPPI**

VIII

KEESLER FIELD:

THE WAR YEARS

1941 — 1945

By

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**Office of History
Keesler Technical Training Center
Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi**

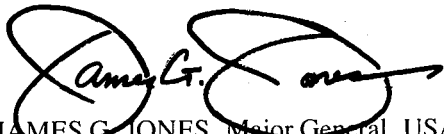
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FOREWORD

After Japanese naval and air forces attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, a new recruit on Keesler Field turned to another soldier and asked: "Where's Pearl Harbor?" Within hours, as all leaves were canceled, gates closed and armed sentries patrolled the base, the men of Keesler realized America was at war. Pearl Harbor became the rallying cry of Americans everywhere and at Keesler Field the training mission was suddenly accelerated to a full wartime effort.

This monograph tells how Keesler Field and its personnel contributed to victory in World War II. In a concise narrative, it retains the memories of hardship, perseverance, and dedication of the recruits, instructors, and permanent party cadre during the fast-paced war years. Because airplane mechanics were critically needed in large numbers, the rapid base expansion caused unforeseen problems. In those first months after war was declared, the students endured an unsuitable classroom environment, and comfortable living quarters were nonexistent. Construction pressed ahead quickly to complete the B-24 mechanics school in 1942. By V-J Day more than 78,500 men had graduated from Keesler's technical courses, and most of them were assigned to overseas bases.

In this volume, the author tells of this important part of the Air Force's—and Keesler Field's—history during World War II.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James G. Jones", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

JAMES G. JONES, Major General, USAF
Commander

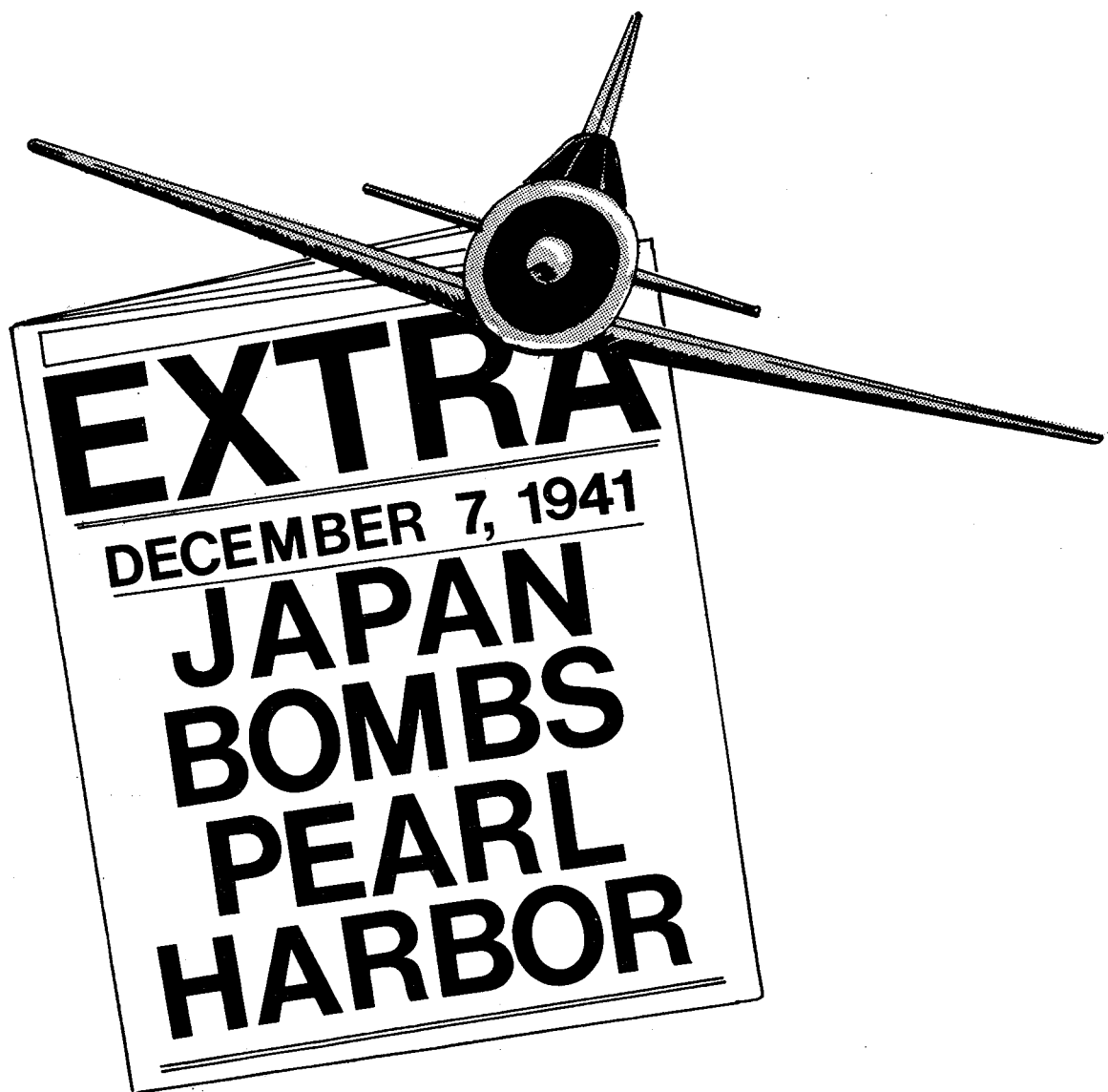
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CHAPTER I

WAR IS DECLARED



Chapter I

CONGRESS DECLARES WAR ON JAPAN

The day after Japan's disastrous attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in an address before a joint session of Congress, said:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor, looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing on Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seems useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope of continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

This morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken in our defense.

Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through absolute victory.

I believe I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounding determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God.

I ask that Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

This was the war message heard throughout the United States from the President; a message that left no one untouched. The Senate passed the war resolution by a vote of 82 to 0 and the House by a vote of 388 to 1. The United States was once again at war.¹

Many Americans who heard of the bombing of Pearl Harbor were unaware of the full impact of the aggressive attack by the Japanese Empire. They asked: "Where is Pearl Harbor?" and "What strategic armament does the military have there to make it a bombing target and plunge the US into war?" Louis A. Rotundo, the first Mess Sergeant assigned at Keesler, remembered the onset of the war:

"I had just got a furlough and was in Biloxi at the train station, ready to board and go to New Jersey. We were stopped and directed to return to the base because war had broken out. We thought Hawaii was a place for pleasure and vacations, so why the sudden attack? It was all so quick and confusing."²

The sudden change to a war footing and the almost total lack of military weapons at the time was indelibly impressed in Rotundo's memory. He recalled:

Everyone was ordered back to their barracks. We were instructed to take broom handles and mop sticks for defense, and were assigned to interior and exterior guard duty. Some units removed drain pipes from the buildings, mounted them on tripods, and painted them with camouflage colors. Then they mounted them on the roofs to simulate machine guns. Soon after that, a unit from Camp Shelby Mississippi, brought real armament. Then everyone had weapons and pulled guard duty.

What was our reaction when we finally realized we were at war? We were scared. Most of us were in our teens; I was just nineteen and a lot of the other enlisted soldiers were about my age. Every time a new overseas shipping roster came in we looked at each other and said, "Well, kiss it goodbye...It's the last I'll ever see of it." We felt scared...there was no joking about it. When I traveled on the troop trains and saw those young boys going up gang planks on military ships, I cried. With one breath I cried and with another I was glad I wasn't going up that gang plank with them because I knew many of them wouldn't come back. A lot of my friends walked up those gang planks and I never saw them again.³

KEESLER FIELD GEARS FOR WAR

When the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor plunged the United States into World War II, all training activities at the newly opened Keesler Field were accelerated into unanticipated expansion. Overnight there were new parameters in the scope and size of the military training effort.

Air-Raid Defense

Two days after Pearl Harbor, headquarters of the Fourth Army Corps* area requested all posts and stations in its area to organize a specific air-raid defense plan and provide sufficiently trained personnel to work the plan. Immediate steps were taken to organize every Keesler department and squadron for action in case of an air attack.⁴

The first detailed air-raid defense directive was published on 24 December 1941. It divided air-raid defense preparations into three phases: (1) immediate preparation; (2) preparation which went into effect when the field was declared "on alert"; and (3) steps to be taken when warned of an actual or simulated air raid.⁵

The immediate preparations were instructions to organization commanders. They governed the appointment of wardens, sub-wardens and utility men, and analyzed the work assigned to the post utility officer, fire marshal, construction engineer, security officer, transportation, and operations officers.⁶

To make the defense program more effective, Biloxi and the surrounding county were included in the precautionary plans. The civilian organizations formed quickly and cooperated fully with Keesler Field air-raid officers. On 26 March 1942, Keesler Field, with the Mississippi Gulf Coast, observed its first black-out test. During the simulated attack, several hundred air-raid wardens surveyed their assigned precincts along the entire coast. They reported practically complete observance and described the trial as nearly 100 percent effective.⁷

On 12 June, restrictions on shore lighting were put into effect. But a week later, Keesler Field was reported to the Southern Defense Command at San Antonio, Texas, as a source of "brilliant illumination." Immediate action was taken to correct the situation. Keesler officials reduced all lighting outside and around the hangars to a minimum and discontinued all nonessential street lighting. This reduced the wattage of the main substation by one-half. Also, they eliminated the glow reflected from night classrooms by keeping the shades drawn half-way and reduced the lighting to the minimum amount needed to operate. To make certain the dim-out precautions worked, officers made periodic surveys of the field from a crash boat some distance offshore. Throughout the year, military and civil defense organizations provided training to improve the air-raid defense program. Air-raid wardens and sub-wardens met periodically for lectures and demonstrations on all phases of air raid precautions and defense.⁸

Local defense and Federal agencies finalized a detailed plan to prepare the Mississippi Gulf Coast area for a possible evacuation. These agencies made a complete survey of medical facilities and developed plans to convert hotels and dwellings into emergency hospitals. They also appointed committees to administer and operate the standby facilities, and to complete the conversion if and when it should become necessary.⁹

CONSTRUCTION AND FACILITIES

The constant student expansion, as well as the need for structures and facilities to accommodate the base and training functions, continued to tax the efforts of construction engineers. Although the barracks were completed and occupied a month before Pearl Harbor was attacked, "tent city" had to be reoccupied by the incoming students. On 6 May 1942, a new tent city was established between Gates 1 and 2 (Appendix III shows the strength figures). Three squadrons occupied the area and six more followed.¹⁰ (Chapter II has a more detailed discussion on housing.)

During late 1941 and until mid 1942, the area engineers combined the entire Keesler Field construction program into one central project known as A (41-1), and two supplementary jobs: A (2) and A (3). Job A (41-1) provided for the new airplane mechanic school, to include housing and technical facilities. Also included was the construction needed for approximately 24,560 officers, cadets, and enlisted men; streets and roads; and an Air Corps oil storage and distribution system. Although wharfage facilities were part of the job, they were not constructed for the field because Col Arthur W. Brock, Jr., the Commanding Officer, did not approve them in the original plans. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, base construction was only 75 percent completed. However, on 3 June 1942, with the exception of the runways, the US Engineers declared final completion.¹¹

*The area of responsibility of the Fourth Army Corps was Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida. The headquarters were in Atlanta, Georgia.

Among the additional construction projects of Job A (2), begun on 6 April 1942, were a 2,000-man mess with combined recreational facilities, taxiways and runways, and an oil storage and distribution system. Other work called for the surfacing of the base streets, extension of the aircraft warm-up apron, the fertilizing and seeding of the airfield site, and the installation of radio range facilities. Night lighting was installed and power lines were relocated. Shops, warehouses, temporary housing for officers and enlisted personnel, and theatres were also constructed, as well as chapels and public utility shops and yards. The work was completed on schedule by 30 November 1942.¹²

The main construction elements of Job A (3) were the engine test buildings, housing, mess facilities, recreation facilities for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) personnel, two academic buildings, and civilian war housing space. Work began on 3 September 1942 and all major projects were completed by mid 1943.¹³

During the early part of July 1945, when the end of the war was well in sight, some additional Keesler Field construction projects were still in progress. On V-J* Day, however, orders from higher headquarters directed all work to stop on the latest construction projects. The order was immediately obeyed and the crews assigned to the projects were reassigned to maintenance and repair duties. This enabled the post engineer to bring all outstanding local work orders up to date. However, those projects that were near completion at the time, were finished.¹⁴ (Appendix IV contains a complete list of major construction projects.)

Chapel Services

The first religious services were conducted on Christmas Day, 1941. The interior of the uncompleted chapel was stained in a rustic wood finish and had a seating capacity for 300 people. The organist was Private Raymond Watkins, a former musician with the National Broadcasting Company. The uninterrupted services extended from 0700 to 2000 hours.¹⁵

By January 1942 the construction of the first Keesler Field Chapel was sufficiently advanced to allow regularly scheduled services. The chapel was named in honor of Brig Gen William Mitchell, well-remembered officer of the US Army's Aviation Section during the First World War. His predictions on the future role of aviation were borne out by the expanded use of air power in World War II.¹⁶

Keesler Field Hospital

During the first few months after the outbreak of war, the principal activities of the Medical Department were to organize and operate the outpatient services, and prepare and mobilize the personnel and equipment needed to open the station hospital. The medical staff began as an organization of 36 officers and 34 enlisted men on 7 December 1941, with only two dispensaries in operation. Between that date and 7 March 1942, when the hospital was activated, the organization expanded rapidly in strength and the scope of its services.¹⁷

Medical personnel strength rose steadily. By 28 February 1942, there were 35 medical officers, 20 dental officers, 4 medical administrative officers, and 4 nurses on duty, with 567 enlisted men assigned to the medical detachment. At that time, most of the field's dispensaries were in operation. The station hospital, however, was still not ready for occupancy, so all cases that required attention other than routine outpatient care were diverted to hospitals in the vicinity. Serious cases were handled by the nearby Veteran's Administration Facility, and others went to the station hospital at nearby Camp Shelby. This arrangement was not satisfactory and proved increasingly inadequate during the winter months. The cold weather and incomplete heating facilities in the barracks caused a marked increase in illness among Keesler personnel, particularly for those who suffered upper respiratory diseases. The number of patient days in quarters increased from 15 in December to 176 in January and decreased only slightly to 139 in February. The situation forced a premature opening of the station hospital at Keesler Field.¹⁸

*Victory over Japan – 14 August 1945

Food Service Facilities

The first general mess facility was operational in mid-August 1941 (see monograph: Keesler Field, *Inception to Pearl Harbor*). Prior to that time there was no dining facility other than the great outdoors where cooks prepared food on fifteen wood burning field ranges and six gasoline ranges.¹⁹

By 7 December 1941, Keesler Field's mess organization, with its expanding facilities, had evolved into an efficient and well planned function. The open-air brick ovens and improvised outdoor pavilion mess halls were now history and modern equipment in standardized mess halls simplified the task of providing food to thousands of soldiers. On that day, however, the main gas line from Gulfport to Keesler ruptured. The base was without gas most of the day, and the cooks, forced to abandon their newly acquired gas ranges, returned temporarily to the old field ranges.²⁰

Five of the nine programmed central mess halls were in operation when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and by 13 January 1942 all were complete and operational. In addition to the central mess halls, several smaller mess units were also under construction. The first completed was the guard house mess hall, that served 250 men. The unit opened on 13 January and relieved a difficult situation. Previously, armed guards escorted the prisoners from the confinement area to central mess hall No. 3, where they ate either before or after the regular meal schedule. The expansion of the Replacement Training Center (see Chapter II), was a factor that made it necessary to reinstate tent city, where a mobile mess unit was established to serve the troops. The unit, with its "circus tent" mess facility, opened for operation on 22 July 1942.²¹

Until 28 February 1942, the field general mess organization was responsible for meal service to all enlisted men of the station's medical detachment. On that date the hospital patients' mess hall opened and thereafter the medical detachment maintained its own mess hall for the hospital patients, as well as a mess for the detachment itself. A third mess unit served the hospital nurses.²²

Post Exchange

The Keesler Field Post Exchange (PX), with an estimated two weeks supply of stock on hand, opened on 13 September 1941. Its first temporary establishment was a pavilion in Naval Reserve Park (see monograph, Keesler Field, *Inception to Pearl Harbor*). By Pearl Harbor Day, the PX occupied a new warehouse which made possible larger purchases of stock merchandise and lower prices for the soldiers. This was the main post exchange which was completely remodeled in July 1943.²³

There were several PX annexes. One of these, Exchange No. 5, was opened on 6 June 1942 to accommodate the troops of tent city. It was situated in a large mess tent and had a modified procedure to serve customers. Because part of the tent interior was used for storage, the soldiers were not permitted to enter, so were served over outdoor counters. Unlike the other exchanges, and because of the daily training schedule of the men assigned to tent city, business was conducted with peaks and surges.²⁴

Branch No. 6 opened on 28 January 1943 to provide exchange facilities for black soldiers. It contained various services, and included sections for tobacco, drugs and sundries, and beverages. The facility was located in a building formerly used by the base contractors and later by the post police. This branch had thirteen employees when it was established and the manager, a black, was a former warehouse employee.²⁵

FLIGHT OPERATIONS

The first flying operations were directed from the old Biloxi Municipal Airport, which was included in the Keesler Field site. The airport facilities were used until September 1941, when the start of construction on the large concrete warm-up apron caused the transfer of Keesler flying operations eight miles west to the Gulfport Municipal Airport. Operations continued there for three months and on 8 January 1942, flying activities resumed from Keesler Field. The newly completed part of the concrete apron temporarily served as a landing field. The two arms of the L-shaped apron measured 2900' X 400' and 1500' X 400' respectively, with an area of approximately 180,000 square feet. Only small military aircraft could land on the apron. In early March 1942,

runway construction forced flying operations to return to the Gulfport Municipal Airport. Thereafter, all aircraft that visited or were assigned to Keesler used the municipal field until runway construction was completed in August 1942. The runways and taxiways were of macadam construction. One of the runways extended 6600 feet southwest to northwest; the other extended 5000 feet southwest to northeast. Both were 150 feet wide. Although they were completed 5 August 1942, the first flight was not cleared until 13 August and the field opened for general flying on 8 September.²⁶

A steel skeleton radio-control tower, with a floor 52 feet above ground and an overall height of 62 feet, was completed in the spring of 1942. It began daylight operation when the Keesler Field runways opened to air traffic in September. Throughout the remainder of 1942, the tower directed take-offs and landings by voice control because other radio navigation aids had not been installed. Installation of the airfield lighting system was completed during the fall of 1943 and it was placed in operation on 16 November 1943. This contributed to safer and more efficient night flying.²⁷

On 3 March 1942, Hangar No. 5, designed as the operations hangar, was sufficiently near completion to accommodate the operations office. The building structure, of the double hangar type, was identical to the four hangars used for airplane mechanic training.²⁸

DEDICATION OF KEESLER FIELD

On 27 February 1942, a cold, cloudy day, the first class of airplane mechanics trained at Keesler Field graduated from the Army Air Forces Technical School. Officials formally dedicated the base that same day. Military and Biloxi High School bands presented a joint concert, after which Colonel Brock, Commanding Officer of the field, opened the program with the introduction of Mayor Louis Braun of Biloxi. Mayor Braun welcomed the guests and praised the field as one of Mississippi's greatest assets. Following the Mayor's address, Maj Gen (Retired) and Mrs Samuel R. Keesler, parents of the man to whose memory the field was to be dedicated, were introduced. General Keesler said in part and in behalf of Mrs Keesler, "This is war, and this Gold Star mother's heart goes with you. Every night, as she goes to bed, she will pray for you and, if you're lonely or blue, just drop her a card. She'll answer you."²⁹

Col Early E. Duncan, Commanding Officer at Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado, delivered the dedication address. He said: "The proposed 210,000 technicians are not enough...to win this war, we must build an air force superior to any the world has ever known. You must fight; some of you must die; but you will keep America for the Americans. You will learn self-reliance that will bring us victory."³⁰

Other distinguished individuals at the dedication were Col Harold H. Carr, Chief of Staff, Army Air Forces Technical Training Command (AAFTTC), Tulsa, Oklahoma; Lt Col William P. Stone, Assistant Commandant of the School (but acting G-4, AAFTTC); Lt Governor Dennis Murphree and Gen Thomas Grayson of Mississippi; Col Llewellyn O. Ryan, G-3, AAFTTC; and Lt Col Reed B. Harding, Surgeon, AAFTTC. Other guests came from all parts of the United States and Cuba for the ceremony.³¹

The graduation exercises were held at Post Theater No. 2 and were open only to graduates, their families and friends, and to other military personnel. Colonel Brock presided and introduced Lt Col William P. Sloan, Assistant Commandant, who delivered the graduation address. Its keynote was contained in Colonel Sloan's exhortation: "Your work, while not as romantic as that of the flying pilot, is as important to the future of the Air Corps; for each pilot's life and service will depend on how well you do your job. This is serious business. The game we are now in is for keeps." He praised the students for their work under the adverse conditions of field construction and the accelerated wartime schedule.³²

Of the 803 men who began their studies in the school on 29 September 1941, 462 were included as graduates in the statistical report of 27 February 1942. Other students, original members of the first class whose graduation was delayed due to sickness or other reasons, graduated in succeeding classes. Approximately 25 percent of the graduates in the first class became training instructors. The average academic grade of the eight top students in the first class was 89.3.³³

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

On 22 and 23 March 1943, Keesler Field hosted its most illustrious visitors to that time. Mr Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, Field Marshal Sir John G. Dill, Chief of the British Joint Staff Mission; and Gen George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army (accompanied by Lt Col Frank McCarthy and Maj H. M. Pasco, his assistant secretaries, and his aide, Capt Reginald Winn). Upon their arrival aboard an Army transport plane, the party was met by Maj Gen Jacob E. Fickel, Commanding General, Third District, Army Air Forces Technical Training Command and Col Robert E. M. Goolrick, who became the Keesler Field Commander on 15 April 1942.³⁴

Thousands of troops from Keesler's Basic Training Center marched in review before the dignitaries. Following the review, at a gathering of officers, Mr Eden made this statement:

It has been a great privilege to be here this morning and witness the splendid marching of your men. I was tremendously impressed.

I could tell by their marching that these men were well trained and well disciplined and I commend their leaders heartily.

We are in this war together. We will win together and I am looking forward to meeting all of you again on the day of victory.³⁵

As Mr Eden and Field Marshal Dill toured the work shops and hangars of the B-24 mechanic school, they displayed a lively interest in the apprentice ground crews training to service and maintain the Liberator bombers. They stopped often to speak with trainees. Later, one greenclad student reviewed the experience this way:

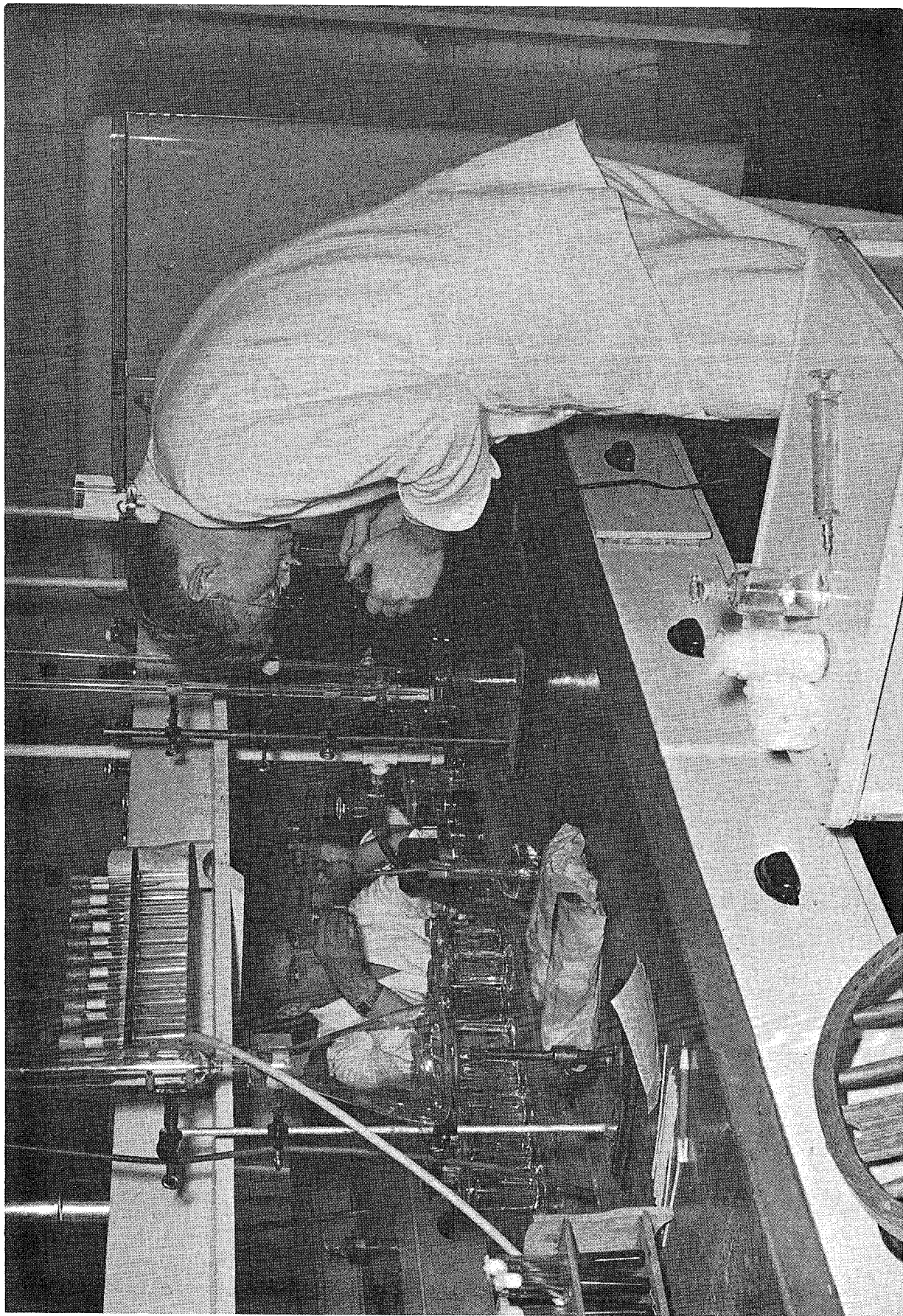
He [Mr Eden] shook my hand and asked me how I liked this training. I told him I liked it fine, and I meant it. Now I want to finish this course in a hurry and get over to England. I want to help keep those Liberators in good shape when they take over the day shift on the round-the-clock bombing of Hitler.³⁶

Lt Gen Barton K. Yount, Command General of the Army Air Forces Training Command (AAFTC), of which Keesler Field was a unit, headed an inspection tour of the post on 19 October 1943. Accompanying General Yount on his first official inspection tour of Keesler's vast training facilities were General Fickel, Maj Gen Thomas J. Henley, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces Eastern Flying Training Command. Also in the party was Brig Gen Charles R. Glenn, surgeon general of the AAF Training Command who inspected the Station Hospital with Col Frederic H. Thorne, post surgeon and commanding officer of the Station Hospital. The four generals, greeted at Keesler flight operations by Colonel Goolrick, comprised the largest and most important official group to tour the field since the visit of General Marshall and Anthony Eden in March.³⁷

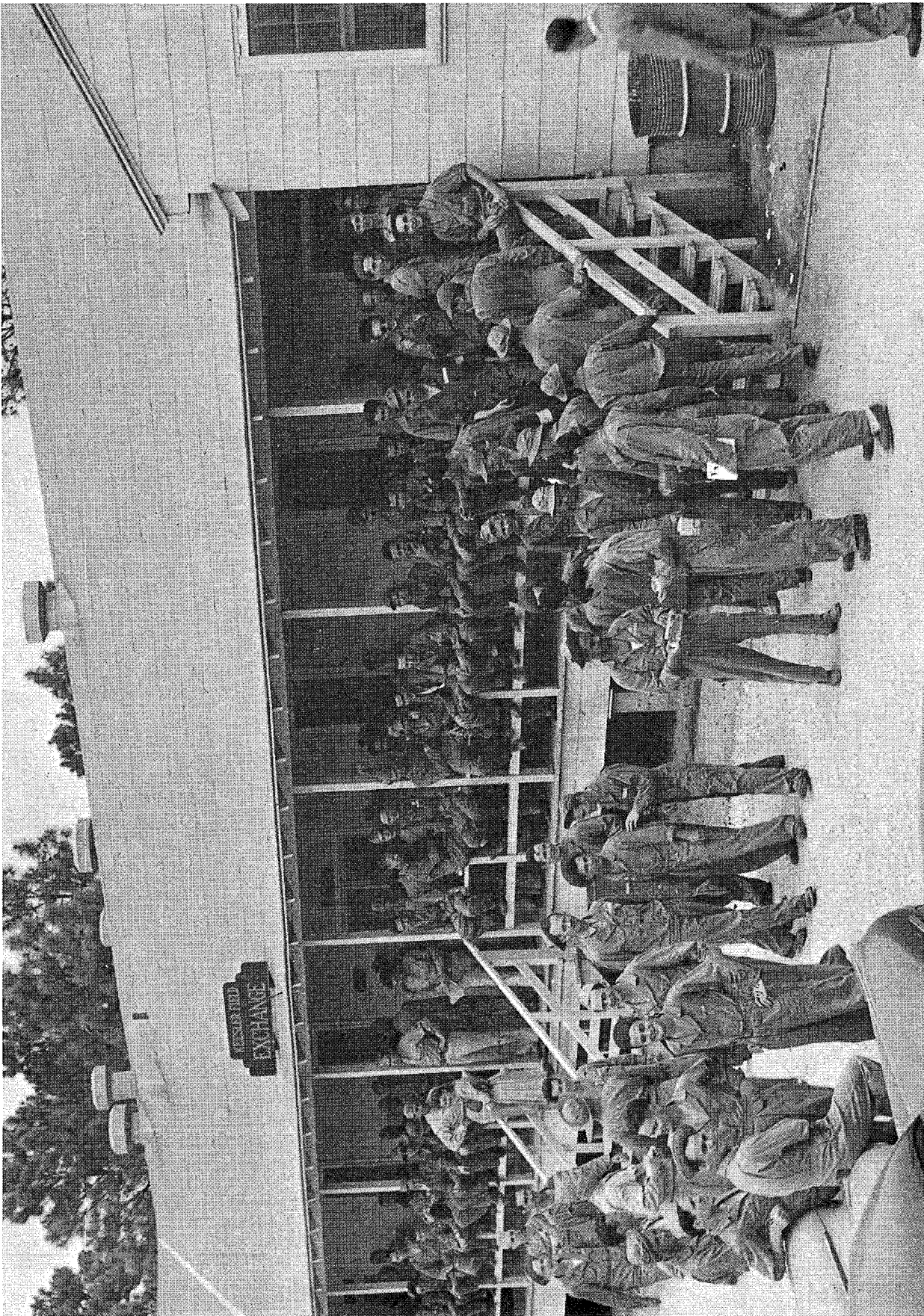
General Yount's visit was part of an extended inspection tour of his command, the largest in the AAF. While at Keesler, he made a thorough inspection of the Airplane Mechanics School (AMS) and the Basic Training Center (BTC), which included the Graduation Field Test branch of the school and the BTC's rifle range. The general praised all phases of instruction and expressed his appreciation of all the training efforts.³⁸



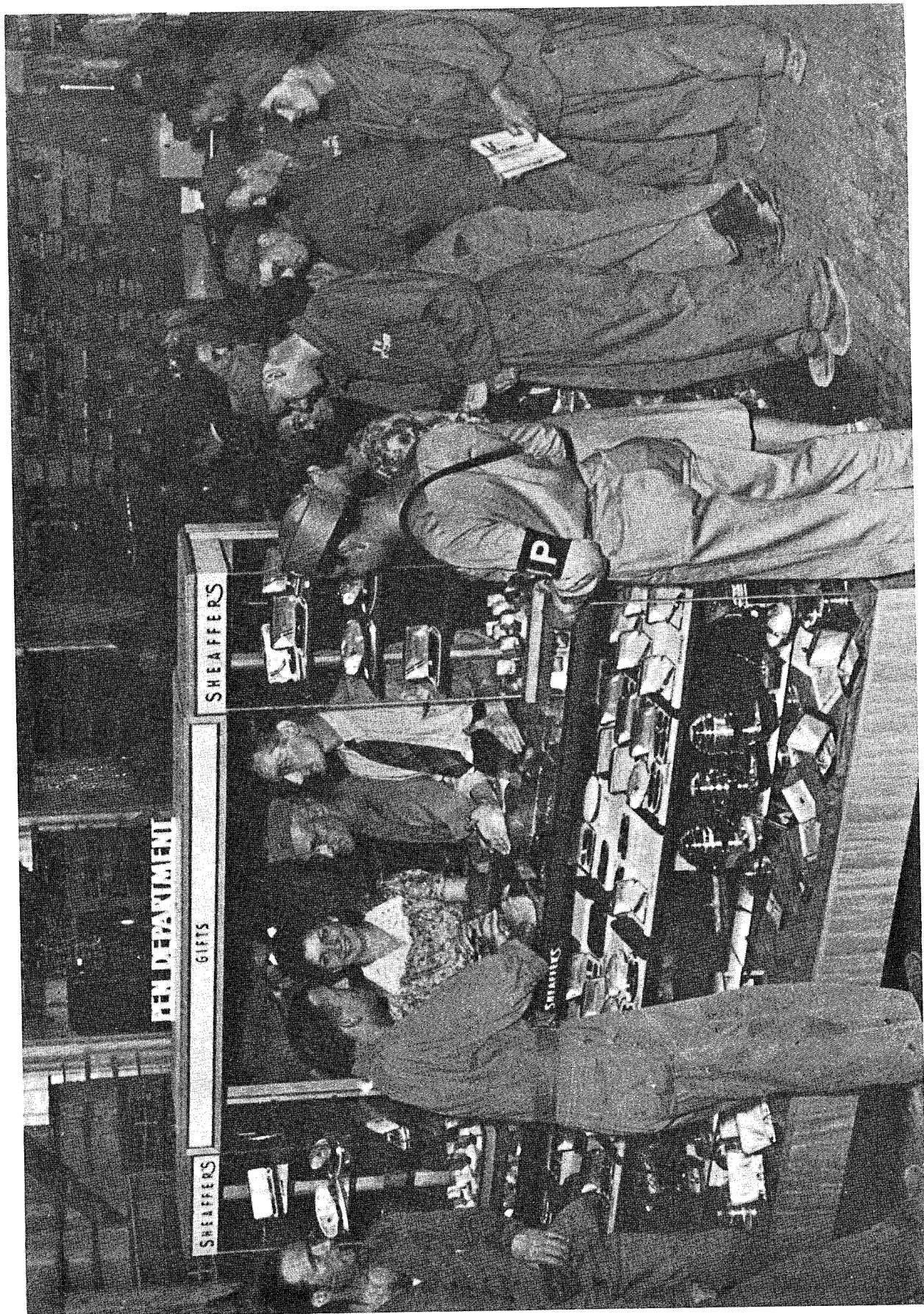
The original staff of the Keesler Field Station Hospital, March 14, 1942. Standing left to right: Capt S. H. Hamilton, Adjutant; 1st Lt A. M. Johnson, Principal Chief Nurse; Lt Col R. J. Platt, Commanding Officer; Lt Col H. E. Smalley, Dental Surgeon; Lt Col R. D. Henderson, Hospital Inspector; Lt Col A. Tripodi, Chief of Surgical Service. Front Row: Capt E. D. Epstein, C O, Detachment Medical Department; Capt F. B. O'Conner, Medical Supply Officer; 1st Lt R. D. Franks, Station Veterinarian; 1st Lt M. F. DeSalvo, Medical Inspector; Capt L. F. Rogel, Chief of Medical Service.



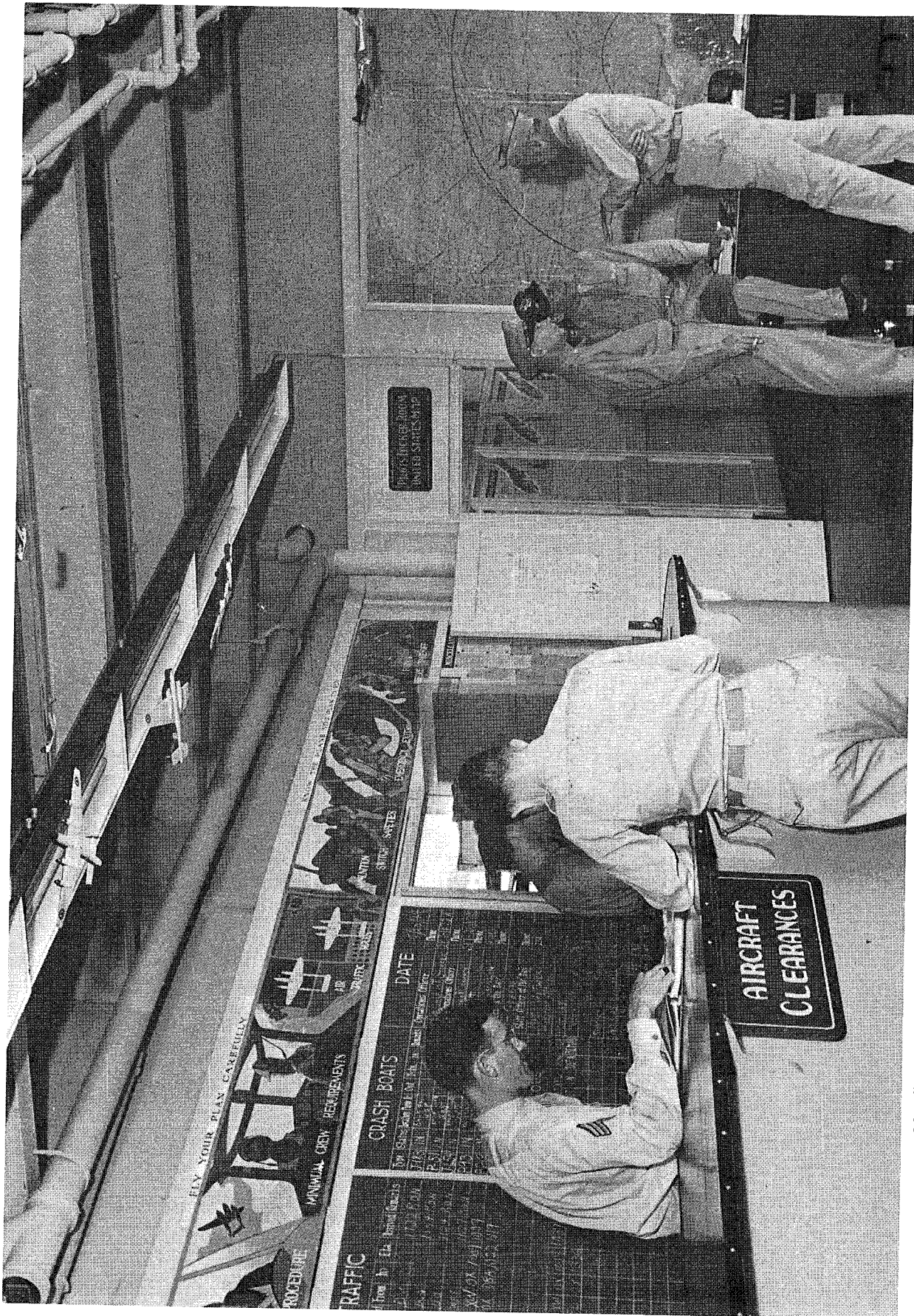
A technician at work in the hospital laboratory. The station hospital opened in March 1942.



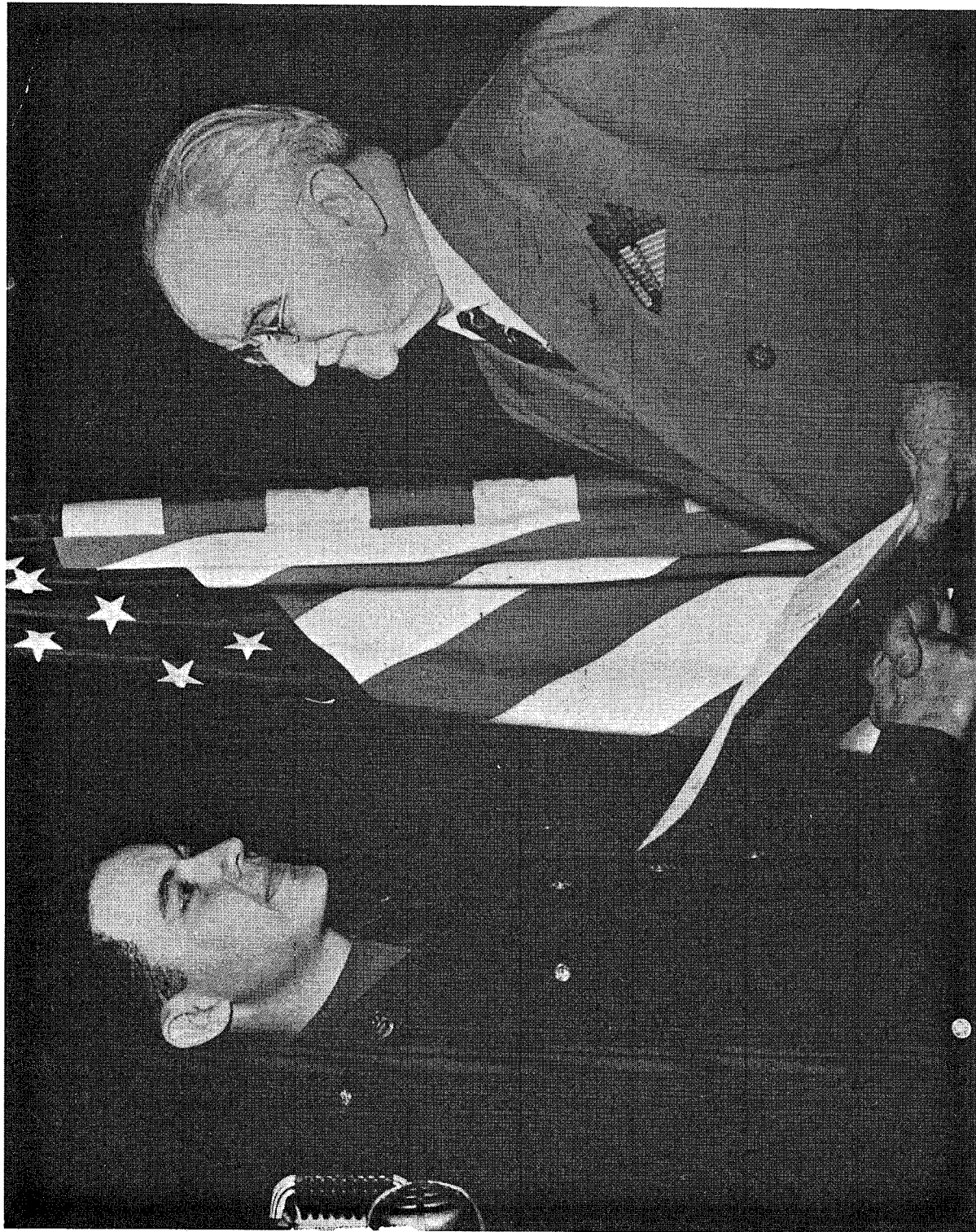
Exterior of the Keesler Field Main Exchange prior to its renovation in July 1943.



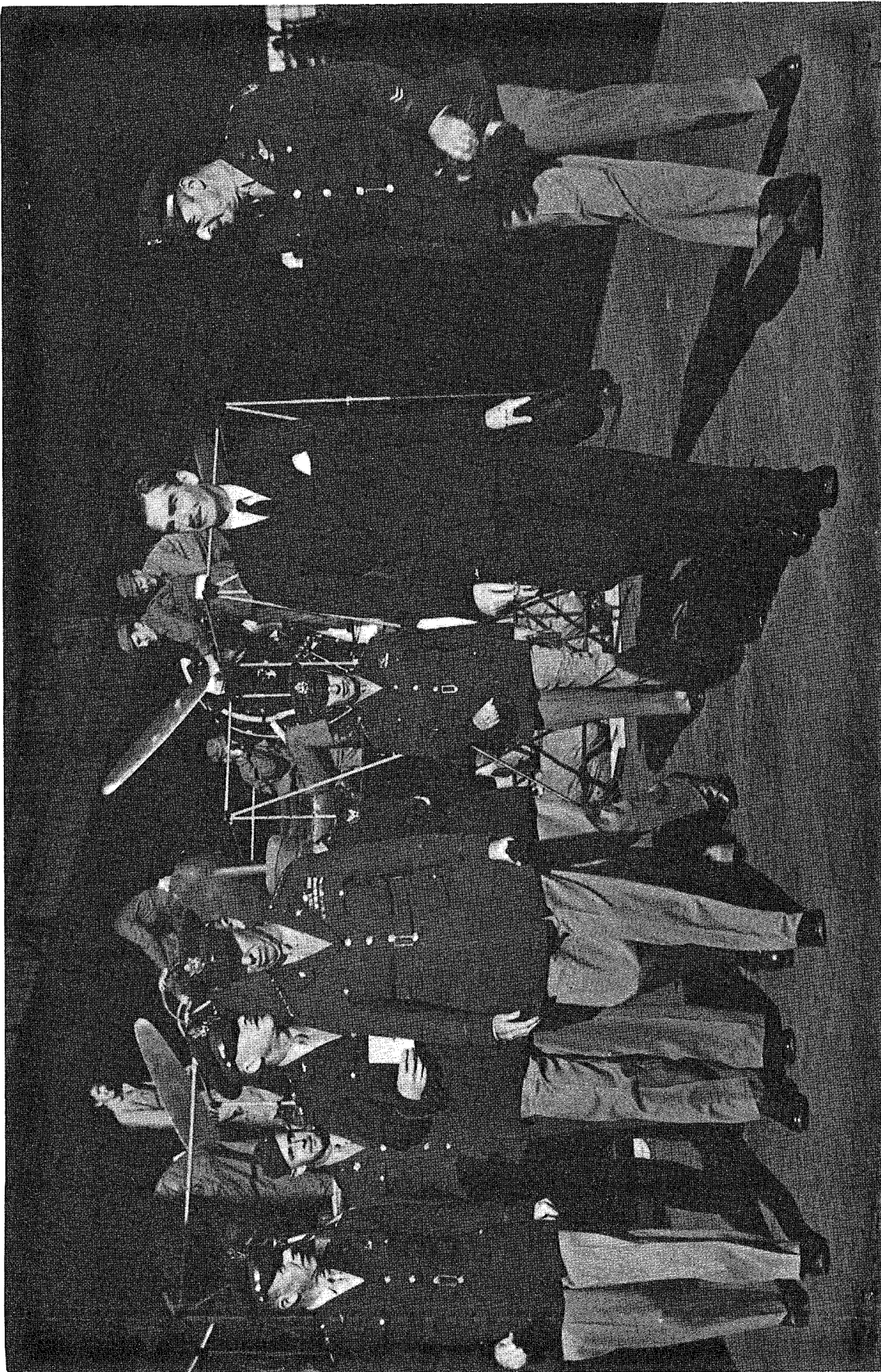
The interior of the Post Exchange prior to renovation in July 1943. Many items could be purchased at a reduced rate.



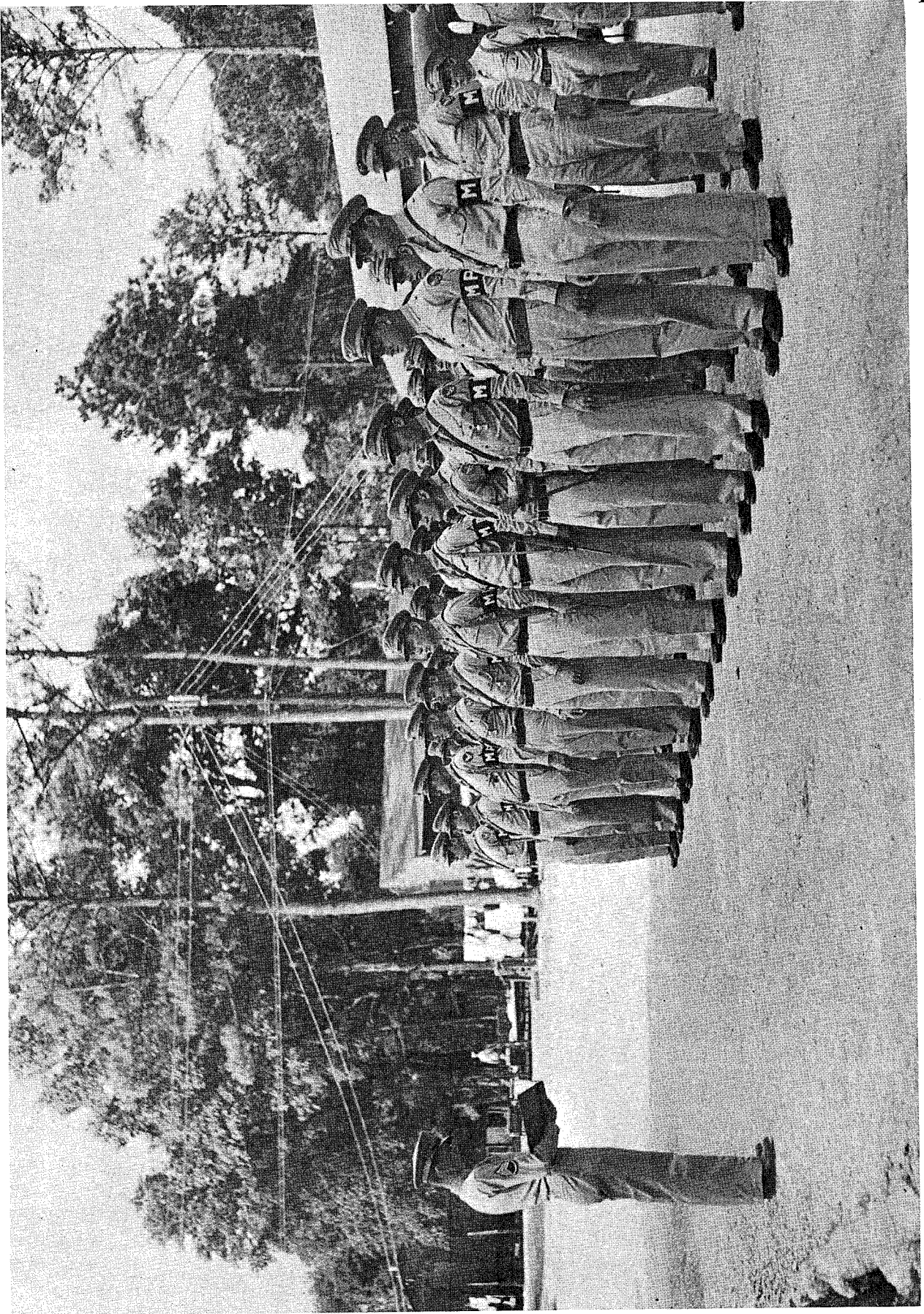
The flight dispatcher's desk cleared local and cross-country flights and controlled all aerial operations at Keesler Field.



Major General Samuel Reeves Keesler, father of the WW I flier in honor of whom Keesler Field was named, congratulated Pvt Willie J. McManus of Pollock, Louisiana, the honor student of the first Aircraft Mechanic class on 27 February 1942.



The most notable visit to Keesler occurred on 23 March 1943, when General George C. Marshall, US Chief of Staff; Mr Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary; and Field Marshall Sir John Dill, inspected training operations. Maj Gen Jacob E. Fickel, Commander of the Third District, AAFTC, and Col Goolbrick, Commanding Officer of Keesler, were on hand to greet the dignitaries.



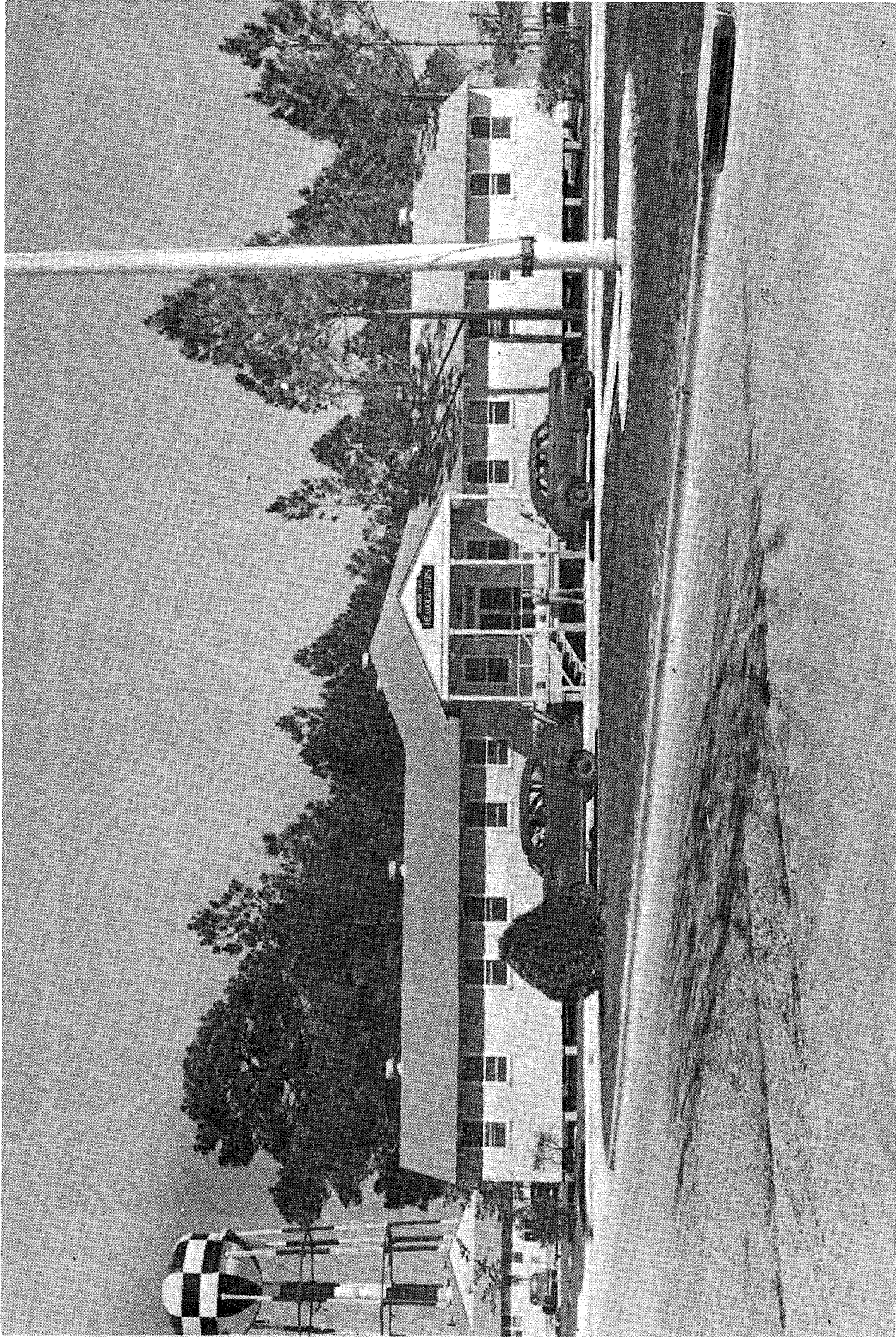
Keesler Field Military Police receive their assignments prior to shift duty.



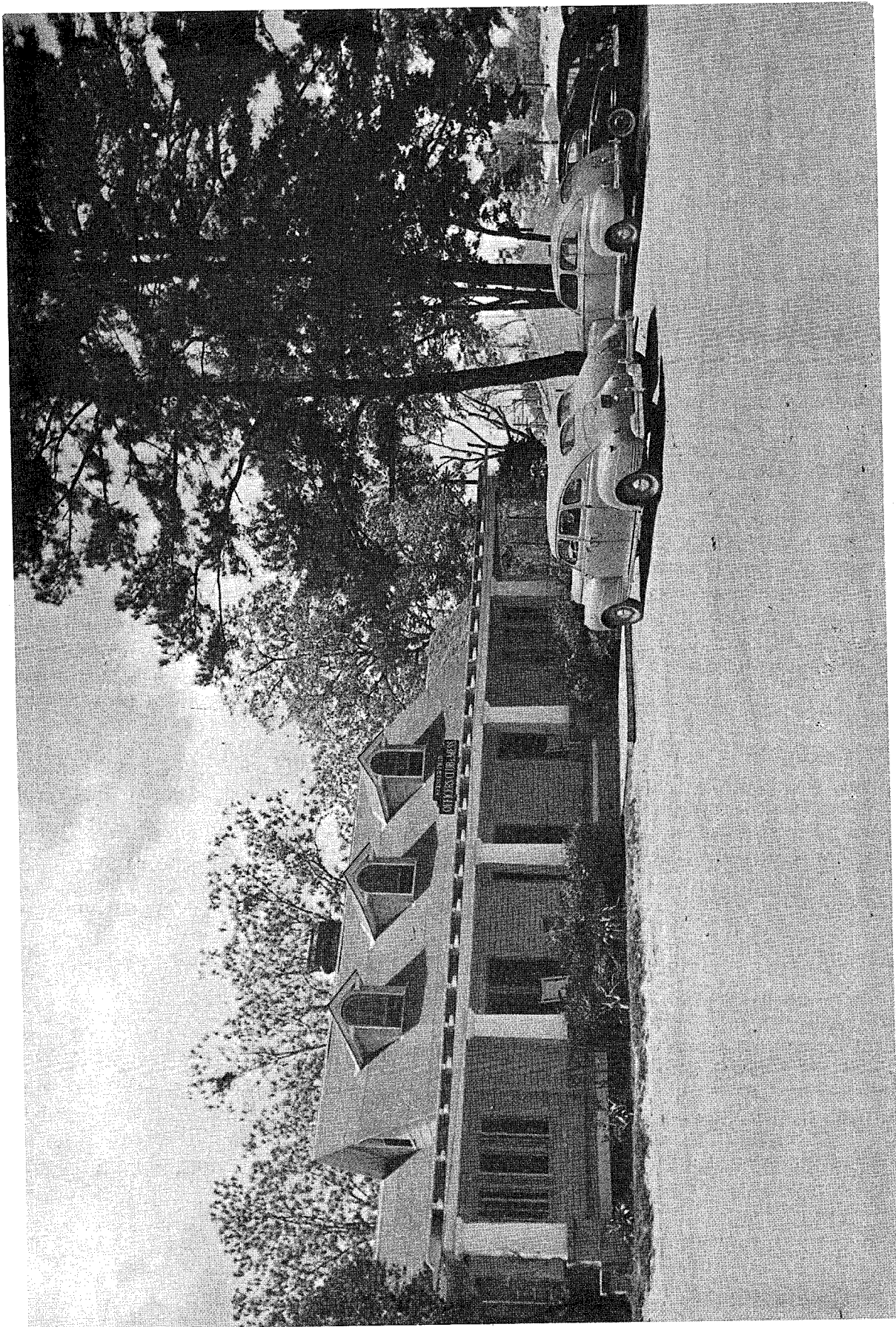
Shown with their sentry dogs are, left to right, Cpl Carl Ellison, Trainer, and Shep; Cpl Arch Ingraham, with Nip; SSgt William Moore, with Maki; and Sgt Roger P. Loupe, with Duke. Standing at the rear is Capt Morris E. Moore, Station Veterinarian. The dogs, donated by private owners, were used on Keesler guard details during WW II.



A second visit by the Keesler family on 4 March 1944 was to dedicate the "Lady Keesler." The B-24 Liberator, named in honor of Mrs Samuel Reeves Keesler, mother of Lt Keesler, was purchased with cash investments of base military and civilian personnel during a war loan drive.



The base flagpole marked the site of the newly constructed Keesler Field Headquarters in 1941. The structure was one of the first to be completed on the base.



The exterior of the Officers' Club after it was remodeled in 1943. Many morale functions were held at the club during World War II.

POST POLICE

In the early days of the post police there was a pressing need for trained enlisted men to direct the work of the department. With few facilities available and little time to train personnel, men were accepted by the department regardless of rank, and assigned to duty without training. Approximately 18 men, all specialists in construction, engineering, and electrical work, or with an ability to supervise, served in the department on 7 December 1941.³⁹

In March 1942, General "Hap" Arnold directed that the Office of the Air Provost Marshal be established. The principal features were increased centralization and increased supervision of all security activities by the provost marshal.⁴⁰

With the arrival of 1st Lt Eli Bernheim, Corps of Military Police, and a detachment of men from the 721st Military Police Battalion, Norfolk, Virginia, a Military Police (MP) unit, the 865th Military Police Company (Aviation), was activated at Keesler on 24 July 1942. The field MP and Post Security Section remained under the supervision of Capt John R. Rea, Post Provost Marshal and officer-in-charge of the Security Section.⁴¹

The new company had an authorized strength of 100 men. Some Keesler MPs were transferred from the Army Air Forces to the Corps of Military Police to increase the company to full strength. Men from the 593rd and the 411th Technical School Squadron (TSS) continued to be used for supplementary MP and interior guard duty. Three jeeps and two six-by-six trucks were used by the new company, and motorcycles arrived shortly thereafter.⁴²

The most important MP detail was the town patrol. It operated in the neighboring city of Biloxi and adjacent areas to maintain order and discipline and enforce curfew and off-limits regulations for Keesler personnel. Other responsibilities of the detail were to route troop convoys through the area, check train and bus stations, and conduct a patrol on gambling and vice control. Due to the activities of the latter, prostitution was held to a minimum in the locality, nationwide rumors to the contrary notwithstanding. Because Biloxi had a large colored residential section which was frequented by the black soldiers assigned to the field, a special Negro MP detail was formed in April 1943 to patrol the area, with a white noncommissioned officer in charge. The system proved highly effective and in the fall, of 1942, the provost marshal said: "The colored military police of this station have performed their duties in a superior manner."⁴³

Four members of the Canine Division, Fort Robinson, Nebraska, were placed on detached service to Keesler Field as guard sentries in May 1943. The dogs, with their acute sense of hearing and smell, and with vision as effective in darkness as in daylight, were mainly used for night patrol duty. Because the sentry dogs were trained to seek out small recesses and secluded places which a police officer might overlook, but where a fugitive might likely hide, their service was worthwhile. One guard handler and one dog was considered the equal of six to eight men and, in addition, the team was far more flexible and efficient. The dogs, whose organization was popularly known as the "WAGS," were enlisted for the duration and returned to their owners at the war's end.⁴⁴

KEESLER FIELD WAC DETACHMENT

The first contingent of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) arrived at Keesler Field on 10 May 1943. Included in the group of 153 women, which came from the 2nd WAAC Training Center, Daytona Beach, Florida, were two officers and several noncoms, with the remainder auxiliaries or privates. The detachment was assigned quarters in buildings constructed especially for their use. The quarters area consisted of three barracks, a mess hall, and an orderly room. Attached to the orderly room were officers quarters, an unfurnished day room, and an additional room which was later a beauty shop.⁴⁵

The purpose of the WAAC was to release physically fit male soldiers for combat duty. After they were classified and assigned, the WAACs replaced a number of soldiers at various duty offices on the field. Among these were positions in the message center, locator files, morning report, post headquarters, special services and other areas.⁴⁶

The daily schedule of the detachment varied little from that of the average permanent party unit. Personnel arose at the same time, attended mess and were on duty during the same work hours as their male counterparts. In addition, they participated regularly in physical training and close order drill.⁴⁷

Effective 1 September 1943, all elements of the WAAC were redesignated as the Women's Army Corps (WAC). In the new WAC, the women soldiers had the right to post their mail free. They were also allowed to enroll in the National Service Life Insurance program up to \$10,000, which carried the same benefits as those afforded to male soldiers. Members of the WAC also had regulation Army titles, ranks, and privileges.⁴⁸

The first issue of the semi-monthly "Keesler Kwac," the detachment paper, was published on 1 December 1943. The "Keesler Kwac," produced by an editorial staff composed of WAC members, was managed by Lieutenant Riditsky and edited by Emma Conyers. One of the main features of the Kwac was a series of articles that concerned positions held by the WACs in the Army Air Forces.⁴⁹

In the months and years that followed, until V-E* and V-J days, the WACs held key positions throughout the installation. Some were directly involved with flying activities such as control tower operations. Others, in positions not as glamorous but equally important to the success of the field's mission, served in routine clerical and administrative jobs. In addition, there were the technical jobs that ranged from parachute rigging and repair on the flight line, to positions as physiotherapy specialists in the station hospital.⁵⁰

LADY KEESLER DEDICATION

A gracious, elderly lady and a highly promising young lady played dominant roles in one of the most impressive ceremonies ever held at Keesler Field. A new B-24 Liberator bomber, purchased through war bonds by Keesler personnel, was dedicated on 9 March 1944. *Lady Keesler* was the prize winning name given to the latest model Liberator and christened by Mrs Samuel Reeves Keesler, mother of the young lieutenant for whom the field was named. The name, chosen from hundreds of entries in a war bond contest held on Keesler, was submitted by Private Earl W. Hauls, a former AMS student in the 305th TSS, and Mr John D. Wiles, Aircraft Inspector in Production Inspection at the 10th Sub Depot**. Each received a \$50 war bond.⁵¹

The colorful ceremony provided a fitting climax to Keesler's participation in the 4th War Loan drive. Final figures revealed a total of \$777,348.75 in cash, allotments, and pay reservations during the January and February drive. Of that amount, \$449,440 was actual cash in new increased allotments and reservations for military and civilian personnel, respectively.⁵²

Immediately after the christening ceremonies, the bomber crew manned the plane, the engines were warmed and the *Lady Keesler* rolled forward on its takeoff run before the reviewing stands. To the accompaniment of the field's band, thousands of basic trainees assembled in formation and sang the Army Air Corps song. As the bomber lifted from the ground and roared past the stand, hundreds of spectators applauded enthusiastically. The plane circled, flew low across the field and dipped its wing in a farewell salute. Then it headed for the combat missions that carried the name Keesler to distant parts of the world.⁵³

The B-24H model aircraft, serial number 42-94856, was manufactured by the Ford Motor Company, Willow Run, Michigan, and delivered to the USAAF on 10 February 1944. It departed the US in May 1944 for England and was assigned to the Eighth Air Force. The aircraft was turned over to the Royal Air Force in October 1944.⁵⁴

BARRIER ISLANDS WARTIME MISSIONS

Keesler field was involved in early experimental use of the offshore islands for war purposes. The three main islands, Cat, Ship, and Horn, all uninhabited, lie about ten miles offshore. All but invisible from the mainland,

*Victory over Europe, 8 May 1945

**A Field installation under Supply and Maintenance

they are narrow and several miles long. Their relative isolation in the early 1940s made them ideal for secret wartime military operations under the War Powers Act.

Cat Island

A secret experiment on Cat Island, loosely termed the Nisei project, was well under way in late December of 1942 when a chance meeting in the Mississippi Sound (the waterway between the barrier islands and the shore) nearly exposed the undercover Army operation. This happened at the time when Keesler personnel and Coastal Mississippians, worried about a possible submarine invasion from the Sound, were suspicious of anything that appeared Japanese. Their fears were fed by rumors of "Japanese" who were living on Ship Island*. The excitement began with the desire of several American soldiers for a meal of tempura shrimp and ended with an investigation by the Secret Service and other intelligence agencies.⁵⁵

Two men with distinctly oriental features had rowed from Ship Island to purchase some freshly-caught shrimp from a passing fishing trawler. They told the surprised shrimpers the food was for their Christmas celebration. When the fishermen returned to the mainland, they commented on their suspicions that the shrimp buyers were actually Japanese agents. A quiet investigation followed, but the results, and the presence of the orientals, were suppressed. No one was supposed to know that 27 men from the 100th Infantry Battalion, with headquarters at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin were quartered on Ship Island. The fishermen were justified in their suspicions that the men appeared Japanese. They were Nisei, Americans of Japanese descent, and were part of a secret mission to train war dogs to become enraged by the scent and appearance of Japanese soldiers. The Nisei lived as natives on Ship Island, but worked with the dogs on nearby Cat Island. There, amid dense semi-tropical vegetation, facilities had been built to eventually house 400 dogs and their trainers. In addition to the hate-Japanese training, other dogs were schooled to become scout, messenger, trailer, sentry, suicide and attack canines.⁵⁶

The Nisei project was based on the theory that dogs could be taught to bite only Japanese. Such specially conditioned dogs would be invaluable in America's Pacific island-hopping campaign.⁵⁷

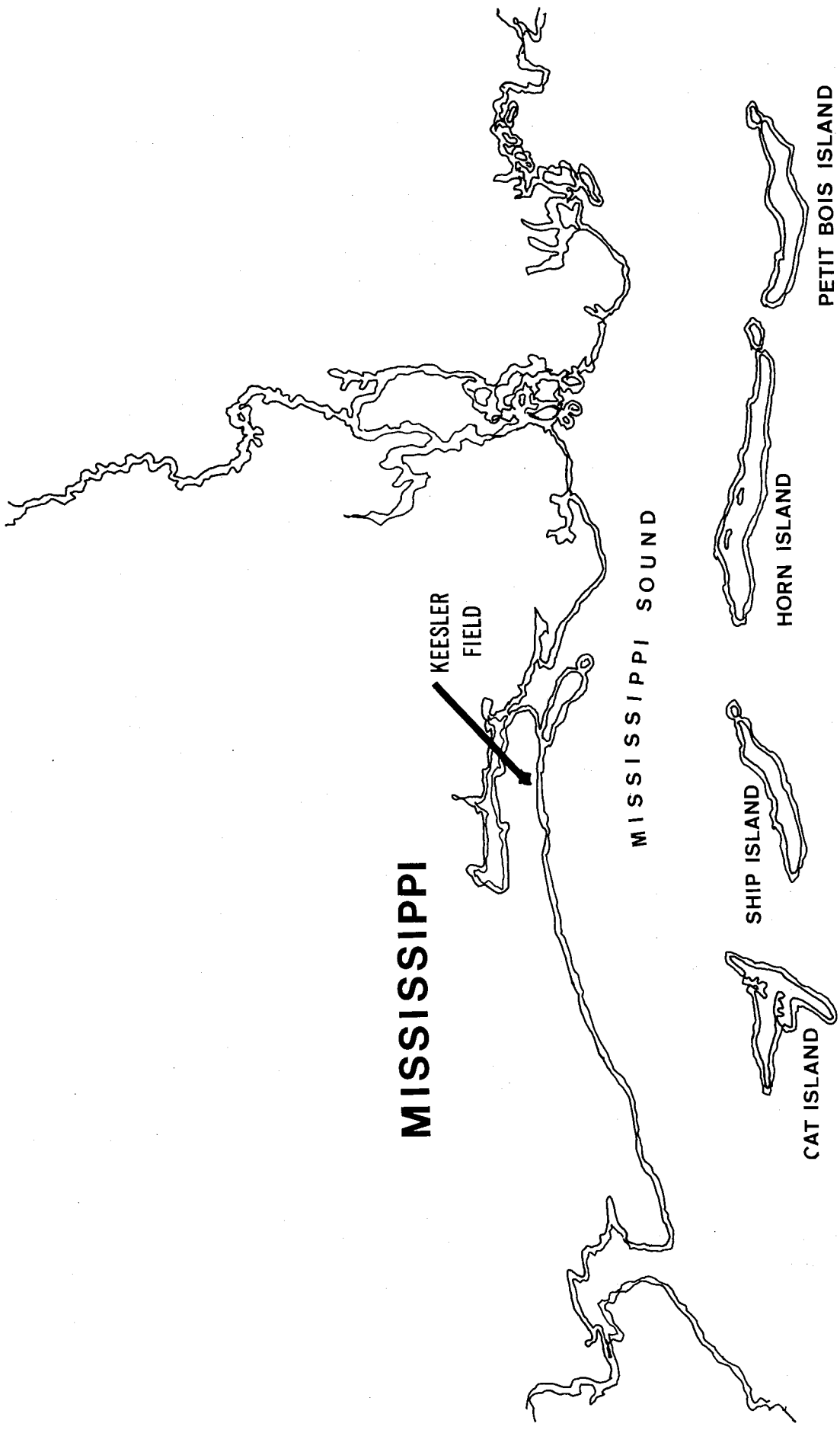
It was later learned that the groundwork of the project (begun in early September of 1942), was directed by Maj James W. Lovell, commanding officer of the 100th Infantry Battalion. In company with a Colonel Gaither and three other officers from the Army's special project section in Washington, Lovell set out to survey the island site. "We flew into Keesler Field and then went by launch to Ship and Cat Islands to inspect the facilities," Lovell said. "We spent the night at Keesler Field and flew out the next day. At that time only the dogs and their trainers were on Cat Island. Colonel Nichols was in charge and the launch** was assigned to him." The survey party flew back to Washington to finalize plans, after which Major Lovell returned to Camp McCoy. His orders were to select the men and officers who would participate in the project.⁵⁸

On November 3, Major Lovell, Lt Rocco Marzano, and Lt Ernest Tanka, with 24 Nisei members of the 3rd Platoon, Company B, plus Herbert Ishii of Headquarters Company, were transported on an assignment of strictest secrecy to nearby Camp Williams where they boarded two DC-3s. After a three-hour flight, they landed at the New Orleans airport. In recalling the events that followed, (now) Colonel (retired) Lovell said in 1980: "When we arrived at the airport, the entire field was vacated and ringed by MPs so that no one could possibly see who had arrived. I walked out of the door of the plane and into the back end of a two and a half-ton truck; the others followed. We were immediately transported dockside and put on a launch to go to Ship Island." Lovell recognized the military launch as the one that transported the inspection party from Biloxi to Cat Island earlier.⁵⁹

Mr Torrance Sneed of Gulfport was the prime civilian contractor for certain construction work on Cat Island. "I built the kennels under contract with the Corps of Engineers out of Mobile," he recalled in 1984. He had an old 65-foot, three-masted schooner that was converted to transport his lumber and materials from the mainland. On one occasion, after he delivered a load of lumber to the island on a Friday, he returned the following Monday to find the personnel there had cut it up and made sidewalks.⁶⁰

*See map for locations of Ship and other barrier islands

**One of the power launches operated by Keesler Field personnel and docked at the Biloxi Harbor.



GULF OF MEXICO

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Barrier Islands

As to Keesler's role in the Cat Island operation, he said:

The dog trainers had a large yacht that took the dogs and their people back and forth between the Gulfport small craft harbor and the Island. Then, when the engineers from Mobile would come over to inspect the Cat Island facilities, the engineers who were still building on Keesler at that time took them there on a launch. It wasn't frequent, but whenever they came to inspect, the Keesler engineers took them out.⁶¹

Colonel Lovell recalled the unusual nature of the experimental training conducted there 38 years earlier. He said:

The training procedure was that two men would be put in to fight the dogs. Some were bitten, but not seriously. The tests proved absolutely false. Blood and perspiration of our Nisei boys did not attract the dogs any more than the blood and perspiration of others. The project ended up with our boys hiding in trees and the dogs becoming scout dogs, whereupon, after four months the camp was disbanded and the dogs taken to Monterey, California, to the dog scout training center. The collection of dogs, about fifty in number, was probably one of the greatest ever assembled. Russian Wolfhounds, Dobermans, German Shepherds, and Airdales. It was absolutely frightening to walk through the camp and have a dog lunge at you, only to be stopped by a heavy chain. I saw a sergeant take his dog and heel at a mannequin with an open throat. Then he'd put a chunk of meat in the throat, take the leash off the dog and say "Strike!" and the dog would go from a sitting position to that pound of meat—on the fly!"⁶²

Raymond Nosaka, one of the Nisei men of the 100th Infantry Battalion assigned to the Cat Island mission, remembered the training procedure well.

For German Shepherds, Labradors, and Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, we were live targets. To train attack dogs to hate us, we began by beating one dog at a time that was chained to a tree, with a knotted burlap bag. Can you image the dog growling, snarling and springing at you everytime you hit him with a burlap bag? It didn't take too long before the dogs were growling and pulling on their chains when they saw us coming. Going though this process we had no protection except our fatigue clothes.

We had better than banker's hours during those dog training days. For those who did not want breakfast, they could get up at 9:00 a.m.; then go out and train with the dogs for one to one and a half hours and come back for lunch. In the afternoon, we trained with the dogs at 1:00 p.m. for about two hours and quit for the day. The gang was getting fat, with all the eating they did and the beer they drank. When we rejoined our battalion at Camp Shelby*, we were in no condition for infantry training.⁶³

In retrospect, many who later learned of the unusual experiment wondered how a President of the United States could accept the theory that the blood and sweat of one race smelled differently from another. On the other hand, under the exigencies of the times, the President was susceptible to any well-intentioned idea that would exact yet another pint of blood from those who had perpetrated "The Day of Infamy."⁶⁴

Horn Island

Among sites surveyed for field test areas where secret biological agent tests could be conducted was Horn Island in the Mississippi Sound. It lies ten miles offshore from Pascagoula and Biloxi. The island was first visited by survey personnel in January 1943 and acquired for the Chemical Warfare Service (CWS) by the Corps of Engineers the following March. When engineers visited the island in May to plan test facility construction, they learned that restrictions on the movement of vessels in adjacent waters had recently been lifted. Considerable

*In March 1943 the 100th moved from Camp McCoy to Camp Shelby, Mississippi during the Nisei project.

numbers of commercial craft were again using the intercostal waterway. Although an effort was made to halt the island's use as a test station, construction started on 16 June 1943. However, when survey officials visited Granite Peak, Utah, in early June, they declared that site superior to the proposed test installation on Horn Island. The Chief of the Technical Division, CWS, was apprised of this but, inasmuch as construction had already started, officials decided to use the island site for limited tests with only two toxins, botulinum and ricin.⁶⁵

In the beginning, the Horn Island experimental site was a substation of Camp Detrick, Maryland. Not until June 1944 did it become a separate installation at the same level as other installations for the Special Projects Division. No special construction, such as the type necessary at Camp Detrick, was required on Horn Island. Aside from quarters for the test personnel, animal housing, and munition magazines, the only other construction necessary was a grid area for field testing, with adjacent technical buildings.⁶⁶

Mr Maurus Elder of Biloxi was with the Keesler Field post engineers during and after the construction of the testing site. Along with other workmen of the carpentry, sheetmetal, electrical, and plumbing shops, he was sent when needed to the Horn Island site to maintain the facilities. He remembered the occasions when he left Keesler by truck at 4:30 a.m. to arrive at a Pascagoula pier in time to meet the LST* that shuttled between the mainland and the island. If they were late and missed the barge, they were taken over on a faster, PT-type vessel. "It was an experimental station for some kind of germ warfare," Elder recalled, "a security station. They'd herd us all up on the end of the pier to wait for a little train on a small track. It was just a little engine and a bunch of tiny flatcars they loaded the troops and equipment on." Elder said if they missed the train at the pier or if it was overloaded, a half-track** took them over the sand dunes to their destination. "We loaded on the train," Elder remembered, "and went past the main part of the site — the mess hall and living quarters — that was right in the middle of the island, but adjacent to the pier more or less. Then we'd ride to the east end of the island where they had hospital-like facilities. That's where the experimental station was located, and that's where we did our plumbing work." He recalled too that when any type of maintenance work was needed there, people from Keesler's post engineers office were sent. It included any type of construction or repair work, or new changes and modifications. Elder estimated he made about eight trips to Horn Island for plumbing work and modifications on the experimental facilities. "Sometimes," he said, "we might make two trips a week and then go for a month without going out again."⁶⁷

Mr Howard M. Blomberg, also of Biloxi and a former civilian employee with the Post Engineers on Keesler Field, told of his experiences on Horn Island. He remembered especially the security precautions.

The Post Engineers on Keesler Field was strictly a maintenance organization back then. I was in charge of the sheet metal shop at the time and our work involved the maintenance of flashings and sinks on the Horn Island buildings out there...I don't recall that many Keesler people were called to work there for the simple reason that most of the buildings were temporary types. There was some plumbing run to them naturally...and they had generators. My responsibilities were centered around the kitchen which, as everybody knew, was in a restricted area. And while we were working we were partially under guard. We were not permitted to go anywhere. We were told what was expected of us and we did it, then we reported back to the landing and were brought back into Pascagoula and returned to Keesler.⁶⁸

An unusual feature of the Horn Island facilities was the construction of a narrow gauge railroad with 7.66 miles of track. It was necessary because roads were not practical on the sandy island. Because of dunes and scrub vegetation, the beaches furnished the only passage from one end of the island to the other. The entire railroad consisted of the track, two 14-ton steam locomotives, twenty 10-ton wooden cars, a 3-ton narrow gauge motor car (known as a Kalamazoo), and a 1000-pound car trailer. All of the rolling stock was shipped from Fort Benning, Georgia, and installed by a company of Navy Seabees who were especially detailed to work on the island for the secret project.⁶⁹

*Landing Ship Tank. An armored powered barge for carrying personnel and equipment.

**A personnel vehicle with wheels on the front and tracks on the rear to provide better traction in loose sand or soft terrain.

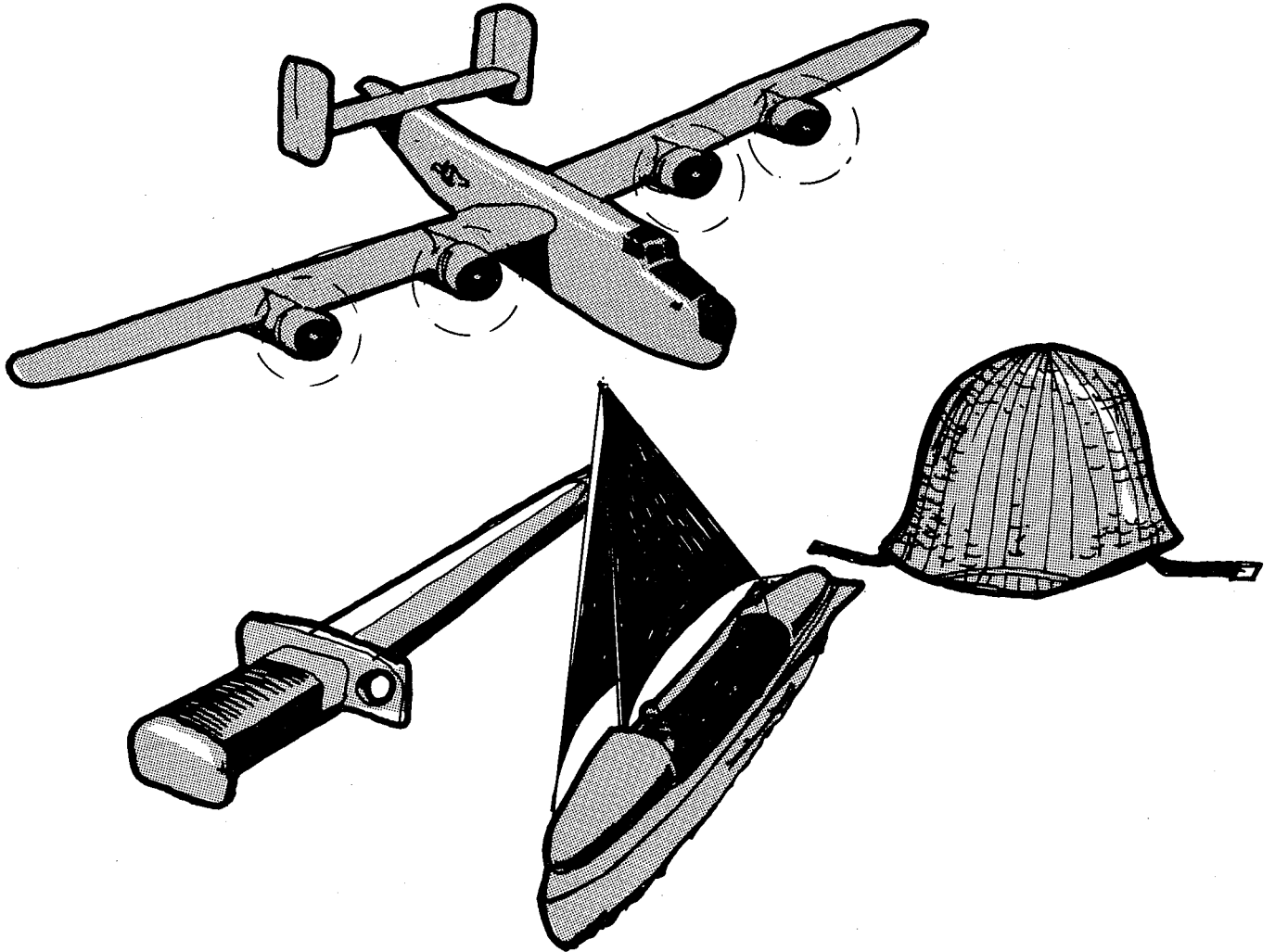
The barrier island was wrapped in such tight security that few Keesler and Coast residents suspected hazardous studies were conducted almost at their doorstep. Nor was it known at the time that sheep were possibly used in the biological testing. This came to light in 1947, when W. B. Curtis, former Horn Island landowner, returned to the island to dismantle and sell the railroad tracks laid by the Seabees. Curtis recalled that as he removed the rails, he saw sheep roaming the island—sheep with wool so thick he was certain they would die in the summer heat. "I understand the Army experimented on sheep..." Curtis said, "so the sheep I saw on the island that year probably were those that were left behind."⁷⁰

When War Department scientists belatedly discovered that, for two-thirds of the year the prevailing winds blew toward the mainland, the project was immediately abandoned. Local residents later agreed that if the Horn Island project had not been abandoned, an accident could have affected people on the Mississippi mainland and seriously endangered the training operations on Keesler Field.⁷¹

At the close of the war, there were 122 CWS officers and 88 enlisted men, as well as a Navy contingent of one officer and 19 enlisted men still assigned to duty on Horn Island. On 25 September 1945, its mission completed, the Navy unit returned to Great Lakes Naval Station, Illinois. A month later, after all laboratory equipment and remaining supplies were returned to Camp Detrick, the last of the CWS personnel transferred the island installation and surplus property, valued at approximately \$448,000, to the Corps of Engineers for disposal and returned to Camp Detrick. The unit was formally deactivated on 18 November 1945.⁷²

In November 1982 the Mississippi Attorney General's Office announced it had found documentation that linked another government facility on Horn Island to WW II's top secret Manhattan Project—the research program that produced the atomic bomb. Details of the exact experimentation and results were not revealed.⁷³

CHAPTER II



TRAINING

Chapter II

WARTIME TRAINING—FROM RECRUIT TO TECHNICIAN

COMMAND

Headquarters Squadron, 69th Air Base Group (ABG), was the command unit for Keesler Field until 22 June 1942. On that date it was redesignated the 59th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron. On 1 May 1944, the command unit became the 3704th AAF Base Unit and so remained until the end of the war. Colonel Arthur W. Brock, Jr., who became commander of Keesler Field on 17 July 1941, was reassigned to District No. 1 of the Technical Training Command at Greensboro, North Carolina, on 14 April 1942. He was succeeded by Colonel Robert E. M. Goolrick who entered military service in 1914 and was commissioned in 1917. He was a contemporary of 2Lt Samuel Reeves Keesler. All of Keesler's initial developments, with its rapid expansion into the nation's largest Aircraft Mechanics School, were accomplished during Colonel Brock's tenure.¹

Colonel Goolrick, whose military service began in 1908, was commissioned in the regular Army. He served in France during World War I and participated with the American forces in three major offensives. The French government awarded him the Croix de Guerre. He served in the Coast Artillery until 1920, then transferred to the Air Service. Colonel Goolrick was a rated command pilot and aircraft observer whose previous assignment was commanding officer of Moffett Field, California.²

During his tenure, Keesler Field received several commendations from AAF Headquarters, as well as from AAFTTC. They resulted from Keesler's excellent presentations during the visit of Mr Anthony Eden, Field Marshall Sir John Dill, and General George C. Marshall. Also recognized was the conversion of the airplane mechanics course from unspecialized training to a system in which a basic course was offered prior to advanced specialist courses on a specific aircraft type. Commendations awarded from several higher command sources recognized the morale services programs under Colonel Goolrick's command. Goolrick remained Keesler's commander until 30 April 1945 when he was reassigned to the 78th Training Wing, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, Texas. Colonel Thomas S. Voss from the Miami Beach redistribution center succeeded him.³

Colonel Voss, a veteran of 17 months service in the European Theater of Operations with the Ninth Air Force, came to Keesler with 34 years of Army service. He took command of the 3704th AAF Base Unit and Keesler Field on 1 May 1945, two months after his return from overseas. Voss, a pioneer in the field of AAF technical training, was also a rated command pilot and combat observer. He held the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star for outstanding performance as the commander of a unit that served both troop carrier and bomber aircraft of the invasion air force on D-Day. He also saw border service with General Pershing's Mexican Expedition. Colonel Voss was the Keesler Field Commander when World War II ended.⁴

BASIC TRAINING

Basic Training Commanders

All activities of the Replacement Training Center (as it was designated in September 1941) were originally coordinated under the direction of a senior officer who was identified as the executive. This position was held by Lt Colonel William J. Hanlon from 18 July 1941 to 2 January 1942. On that date, Colonel Hanlon was transferred to the 69th ABG as commanding officer, (promoted to Colonel on 5 January 1942), from which he was transferred on 28 April 1942 to the position of post executive officer, which he held until 19 September 1942. Major Samuel H. Patterson was assigned as the executive of the Replacement Training Center on 2 January 1942 and held the position until 19 September 1942. On that date a major reorganization occurred and the organization was redesignated as a Basic Training Center (BTC). Colonel Hanlon was named the commanding officer and Major Patterson was transferred.⁵

On 1 May 1944, both major training activities, the BTC and the Technical School, were placed under the supervision of the deputy for training and operations at Keesler Field. The commanding officer of the BTC was redesignated the director of basic training. Colonel Hanlon served at the BTC commanding officer until the field reorganization. He served only one day in the positions of deputy for training and operations, director of basic training, and commandant of BTC students, because of his transfer to Amarillo Army Air Field, Texas, on 2 May 1944. Upon his transfer, Colonel Kreider was appointed deputy for training and operations. Lt Col Calvin C. Crowder was named director of basic training and Lt Col James M. Pellettieri was designated as commandant of students. Colonel Pellettieri later became the director of basic training and served at that position until the end of the war.⁶

The Basic Training Center

The instruction of recruits in the basic military fundamentals that prepared them for specialized training in an Army Air Force Technical School, was an important part of the Keesler mission throughout the war. Until August 1942 basic training was carried out by the Replacement Training Center, after which it was designated as the Basic Training Center. Recruits who received basic training at Keesler Field came from many sources. Most were Army inductees assigned to the AAF. Some recruits had been transferred from other branches of the service and were required to complete the training.⁷

The flow of recruits into the BTC was highly erratic throughout the war. Most of the new basic trainees were housed in Technical School Squadron (TSS) barracks in blocks 5 through 8 and 10 through 13 (see map, facing page 54) which were located north of the mess halls. Only eight squadrons could be accommodated in this area, however, and in the spring of 1942 it became necessary to house the remaining men in a tent camp. This was established in the southeast corner of the base. The site was low and marshy, and adequate drainage was difficult in rainy weather. It was not unusual for the recruits to wade through knee-deep water to move from their tents to the road. The tents were unheated and many had no floors, which caused uncomfortable living conditions during the winter months.⁸

Work began in October 1942 to convert tent city into a more permanent housing area. Some of the tents were removed, and one-story hutments were constructed. Each hutment was designed to house 15 men, but the increased flow of recruits quickly forced the maximum occupancy to 18 men. Although the construction project was not completed until late January 1943, a number of the hutments were rushed to completion and occupied by 31 December 1942. From February to April 1943, approximately 50 percent of the trainees were housed in shelters other than barracks, with the majority of them quartered in huts or tents. A gas burner in the end of each structure provided the only heat. There was no way to heat the tents, however, and the recruits were forced to use a separate building near their quarters for shower and latrine facilities. In March 1943, the overcrowding problem became more acute when a large number of personnel suffered from respiratory ailments. It was impossible to accommodate the growing numbers of trainees in huts and tents and for several weeks during this period approximately 1,500 men were quartered in Hangar No. 2. At first, nearby shower and latrine facilities were nonexistent. As they became available long queues of men formed at lavatories and latrines. It was necessary for some of the Keesler basic trainees to occupy the nearby Gulfport recreational area until the latter part of the year when the field was again able to accommodate them. By November 1944, barracks construction caught up with the input of students and trainees, and tent housing was no longer needed.⁹

During basic training, the recruits were subject to more rigid discipline than was imposed on the airplane mechanic students and permanent party personnel. There were frequent inspections of troops and barracks. Extra duty and suspension of privileges were given to men who failed to meet satisfactory military standards. The restrictions applied in particular to pass privileges. After their first 28 days of training, recruits became eligible for Class B passes*. This privilege continued throughout the spring of 1942. For the next 3 years the sanction was arbitrarily withdrawn on occasion. Commanders were also directed not to grant passes to recruits during their basic training, except in cases of emergency. Exceptions were made on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day for recruits not on duty. In lieu of passes, they were allowed to leave the post if they displayed their "dog tags" to guard personnel at the gates.¹⁰

*A Class B pass allowed a trainee to remain overnight within a restricted 50 mile radius. The Class A pass could cover a three-day period.

Qualified recruits who completed basic training were assigned to one of the established AAF technical schools throughout the continental United States. The objective of the basic training program was to prepare them for technical training. A number of recruits were transferred directly to the Keesler Technical School; others were assigned to training schools for aerial gunners, radio operators, aircraft armorers, and to learn other military skills in support of the AAF mission. Many recruits who did not qualify for technical training became permanent party members at Keesler and were assigned either to one of the squadrons or to special duty. Some were transferred to other AAF stations or to overseas bases.¹¹

Life of the Trainee

The basic trainee arose at 0430, swept and mopped under his bed, attended reveille, ate breakfast, and put his equipment in order. Approximately one morning out of four he was assigned duties with a barracks work detail in addition to the routine morning activity. At 0645, he met his squadron formation for training, which began at 0730. Between 0645 and 0730 he had a personal inspection by his flight leader or squadron commander to assure he met the standards for a proper haircut, shoeshine, and personal cleanliness.¹²

His morning training lasted from 0730 to 1130, and between 1130 and 1245 he had lunch and mail call. At 1245, he met formation again and arrived at the afternoon training site by 1330. Until 1730 he was active in field training. When he was required to return equipment to the supply room, he did it "on his own time." He was also urged to read the training manual during his off-duty periods.¹³

A trainee could not use the laundry unless he secured a "laundry slip" which was not available until he had been with his organization for several weeks. He washed his clothing in the evening at least once a week and "sweated out" a line of men for an hour or more to use the only laundry tub in the barracks. If he elected to miss evening mess call, he could wash his clothes without waiting. On days he was scheduled for kitchen police (KP) duties, which averaged twice a week, he was awakened at 0145 to complete his usual barracks detail duties first. Then he met formation between 0245 and 0300 for assignment to a mess hall. He arrived by 0330 and remained on duty until 1730 or 1800. At the end of the duty day, he answered mail call after he returned to his squadron area. On KP days, he was busy for 19 consecutive hours with breaks only to eat his meals.¹⁴

Ordinarily the recruit changed barracks locations three or four times during his basic training period. Sunday was an official day of rest unless he was scheduled for a work detail. This occurred approximately once a month. In many instances, however, sleep was difficult or impossible after 0430 on Sundays. The night NCO in charge of quarters continually repeated announcements over the public address loudspeaker or inter-barracks communications system. The volume dial was turned to fortissimo and phrases such as "rise and shine!" and "get on the ball!" were directed to the men scheduled for details that day.¹⁵

Persons who received "gigs" during the week were punished with extra barrack details or drill after regular training hours or on Sunday. Individual cases that involved an infraction of Army regulations required the man to drill for 3 hours on Sunday with a full field pack. Discipline remained at a high level under this system.¹⁶

If the recruit planned to attend the 1800 motion picture at the post theater he could miss his evening meal, or he could limit himself to 6 hours of sleep if he chose to attend the 2000 show, which ended at 2200.¹⁷

After the basic trainee was on the field for 28 days he became eligible for a Class B pass every night, if he had not received a gig during the week, or unless passes were temporarily withdrawn. To obtain the pass, or to enter a public recreation facility on the post, he had to change into his Class A uniform. The trainee was usually so weary at the end of the day that the uniform and pass regulations discouraged him from attending entertainment he might have otherwise enjoyed. To obtain a pass he had to wait his turn in another line. During the early part of the week, the line was relatively short, but on weekends or holidays it often extended to several hundred men. Those in the rear of the line often waited in vain. If the trainee was fortunate, he could obtain a weekend pass that extended from 1800 Saturday until 2330 Sunday several times during his training.¹⁸

The manner in which trainees were marched to the mess hall depended on the preference of their squadron leader. Some leaders marched formations in their usual order, while others adopted the principle of first come,

Keesler Field 1943

first served. Obviously, trainees whose legs were short, those who were least agile, or whose barracks was distant, consistently brought up the rear of the line.¹⁹

On the average, a recruit worked 100 hours during the 6-day training week. Increased emphasis was applied to training that would be of practical value in combat situations, and there was little doubt that, by the end of basic training, he was better able to confront the enemy.²⁰

Processing

The BTC recruit at Keesler Field spent the first week in orientation activities and military formations. Although not part of the actual basic course, they were a necessary preliminary for the training that followed. This was known as "processing" and included procedures that prepared and equipped the new trainee for military service. Lectures and presentations covered these topics:

- Organization of the Army and the Chain of Command
- Introduction to Military Courtesy
- Post Rules and Regulations
- Conduct Off Post
- Classification and Trade Testing to Discover Mechanical Aptitude
- Aerial Gunnery Qualifications
- Articles of War
- Sex Hygiene
- Preliminary Drill Instruction²¹

Academic Training

During the early part of the war, the academic portion of basic training was in two distinct categories. The first included basic subjects taught to recruits throughout the Army. This indispensable introduction to the general conditions of Army life included instruction in practical subjects such as first aid, military sanitation, and defense against chemical attack. There were discussions on national service life insurance, the organization of the Army (in more detail, as compared with the "processing" orientation), ratings and pay, military courtesy and citizenship. The second category included subjects of particular value to the Air Force recruit. He was provided with a selected semi-technical background in aeronautics, lectures on military aviation, and the organization of the AAF. Demonstrations, mainly in chemical warfare and first aid, were also presented.²²

Field Training

The largest part of basic military instruction at Keesler Field consisted of field training, as opposed to academic training. The objective of field training was to prepare each man to become a soldier with basic military skills, then school him to act as part of a combat group. The program included close-order drill and without weapons instruction in the care and use of weapons, physical conditioning with calisthenics, obstacle course training, and instruction in interior guard duty. Because of the lack of ordnance, there was no weapons training in the fall and winter of 1941-1942, nor was training conducted in the actual firing of small arms throughout most of 1942. It was delayed until the range became operational in the fall of that year.²³

The rigid drill program caused training difficulties during the hot summer of 1942. In June, there were a number of heat exhaustion cases, one of which resulted in the death of a trainee. To prevent recurrence, medical

officers investigated all cases related to heat exhaustion. They suggested that basic trainees have an hour of rest after the noon meal. They also recommended that recruits on the drill field should have a supply of drinking water that contained salt. Further, they cautioned drill instructors to be especially alert for trainees who showed signs of heat exhaustion. Simultaneously, medical officers arranged for the mess supervisor to provide noon meals that were light and easily digestible. These recommendations reduced the heat exhaustion cases among recruits. It was apparent that the extreme summer temperatures and high humidity of the coastal region did not offer the most satisfactory training environment for recruits who came to Keesler from the more temperate climates.²⁴

Camouflage Training

Camouflage training began in March 1943, by order of General Arnold, Commanding General, AAF. By July, Keesler Field had an operational staff, training and demonstration areas, and headquarters buildings. The training objective was to teach recruits the fundamentals of practical camouflage; how to conceal themselves, their weapons, supplies, and equipment. The entire training and demonstration site was contained in six and one-half acres of wooded terrain in the extreme northeastern part of Keesler Field. The area was carefully sub-divided with winding pathways and roadways, and fenced in for traffic control. The camouflage area personnel trained approximately 1500 men daily.²⁵

A new feature, a scale model of part of the coast of France, was added to the camouflage area early in 1944. It included: terrain details, cities, air fields, roads, airplanes, tanks, landing craft, and naval support aircraft. The model measured 158 feet by 30 feet. A catwalk, constructed twenty-five feet above three sides, allowed the trainees to view the site from an equivalent (simulated) altitude of approximately 4500 feet. About 250 men received instruction simultaneously. In addition to the new trainer, an individual concealment area of general field fortifications was constructed. It replaced the bivouac area. The fortifications included small barbed wire entanglements, entrenchments, and bunkers for machine gun emplacements. One part of the site was reserved to demonstrate booby traps and land mines. The area was reserved primarily to teach advanced trainees how to use live explosives.²⁶

Chemical Warfare Training

When enough gas masks were received in December 1941, eight hours of chemical warfare training were given to the recruits of the Replacement Training Center.* This short course included the history, use, and nomenclature of all types of war gases, their identification, and first aid for casualties. Regular drills were held in the practical use of the masks. Although a gas mask training chamber was available, chamber drills with masks were not held until 1 April 1942 because tear gas capsules were not available. By that date, sufficient capsules were stockpiled and the training chamber was put into operation.²⁷

On 1 September 1942, the Basic Training Center (redesignated, August 1942) schedule called for two one-half days of defense training against chemical attacks. Every recruit who passed through the center was required to receive the training. The first half-day consisted of a three-hour lecture period with three short training films on the service mask and gas training. The lecture period, which introduced the history of chemical warfare, included British and German research; chemical agents; protection and first aid against chemical agents, and decontamination methods. The lecture was followed with a field demonstration and practice drills in the use of the gas mask.²⁸

The second half-day was divided into two phases: students first had a gas mask drill with tear gas released in the confined training chamber. Then, under field conditions, they passed through clouds of various gases to identify chemical agent odors.²⁹

*See section on Replacement Training in this chapter.

THE TECHNICAL SCHOOL

The commanding officer of the field was also the commandant of the Technical School, and important training matters received his attention. The executive duties for the school, however, were vested in the assistant commandant and the executive officer who were responsible for matters of school organization and operation. They also formed general training policies, and interpreted and applied orders from higher authorities. The majority of the duties were administered by the executive officer, Major Harold L. Kreider, because the assistant commandant, Lt Colonel William P. Sloan, was also S-4* for the post with other duties that required most of his time and attention. Also, early in 1942, Colonel Sloan became acting G-4** for the AAFTTC, a duty that caused his absence from the field for long periods. Thus, when Colonel Sloan was absent and Major Kreider became assistant commandant, there was minimal change in the training school operation. (Major Kreider was promoted to lieutenant colonel on 15 May 1942 and to colonel on 13 August 1943.) On 1 June 1942 the titles of Commandant and Assistant Commandant were changed to Commanding Officer and Director of Training respectively.³⁰

Colonel Theodore B. Anderson was appointed director of training and operations on 10 May 1945 when Colonel Kreider, director of technical training, and later director of training and operations, was assigned overseas.³¹

Instruction Schedules

On 8 December 1941, two major changes occurred in the training schedule. First, the class size that entered that day, and on each succeeding class entry day, increased from 800 to 900 students; second, the school classroom instruction week was extended from five days to six days. By 1 February 1942, as the field moved steadily into a full wartime program, all personnel except airplane mechanic students worked a seven-day week schedule. During October, the airplane mechanics school also converted to a 24-hour, seven-day week.³²

The changes were not a direct result of the attack on Pearl Harbor; they were planned earlier in anticipation of possible United States entry into the European and Far East conflicts. One direct result of America's declaration of war, however, was the curtailment of the Christmas recess*** scheduled from 18 December 1941 to 5 January 1942. Because the leave and vacation period was already scheduled, to allow the contractors to finish the school buildings as much as to benefit the students, it could not be entirely omitted. Training, therefore, was suspended on 18 December and reconvened on 31 December.³³

Military Training

When a student entered the airplane mechanics course and was assigned to a mechanic-trainee class he did not cease to be a soldier, nor did he spend all of his time in academic study. His military duties were merged with his technical training. His work clothing was the fatigue uniform which, prior to 10 July 1942, was a one-piece coverall or two-piece herringbone twill suit. The coverall, however, was the authorized uniform. In July, efforts were made to supply the same clothing style and each student was issued the one-piece coverall fatigue uniform. The student wore a white tape above the left breast pocket, with his name stenciled in black. Directly above his name tape a smaller tape with the letter A, B, C, or D indicated the shift to which he was assigned.³⁴

Because some of the graduate aircraft mechanics would be assigned to airfields close to combat areas, emphasis was placed on training them in defense tactics. In November 1942, 1Lt Frank R. Hunt, director of

*See Monograph, *Keesler Field, Inception to Pearl Harbor*, p 55.

** "Assistant Chief of Staff" as used in the Army, as in G-1 for personnel, G-2 for intelligence, G-3 for training and operations, G-4 for supply, and G-5 for plans.

***The first Christmas at Keesler is discussed in Chapter III.

training, scheduled the troops for hikes and overnight bivouacs.* He approved a program that required a 25-mile hike to be completed in one day, and a 3-day practice march to the rifle range, 8 miles north of Back Bay. Both marches were intended to harden the men and accustom them to field conditions. In the course of these operations the students learned reconnaissance and combat procedures, camp sanitation and hygiene, small arms firing, and how to use camouflage. In practice, however, 12 hours were allotted to the hike and 36 hours, rather than 3 days, were designated for the overnight bivouac. The men departed for the rifle range at 0730 and returned at 1800 the following day. The first one-day hike, with 194 men, occurred on 17 November 1942. The first bivouac began on 11 November 1942. Groups of 400 men took the overnight hike, and groups of 200 to 300 men participated in the 25-mile march. On the marches, which included scouting and skirmishing practice, the men carried light packs, gas masks, and rifles. The first hiking groups also carried rations because a mess facility was not available at the firing range until the following month.³⁵

A pistol marksmanship area for 600 men was constructed on the Keesler drill field in February 1944. It had sighting and aiming bars, targets for slow and rapid fire, and bomber and parachutist targets for simulated fire.³⁶

School Training Branches

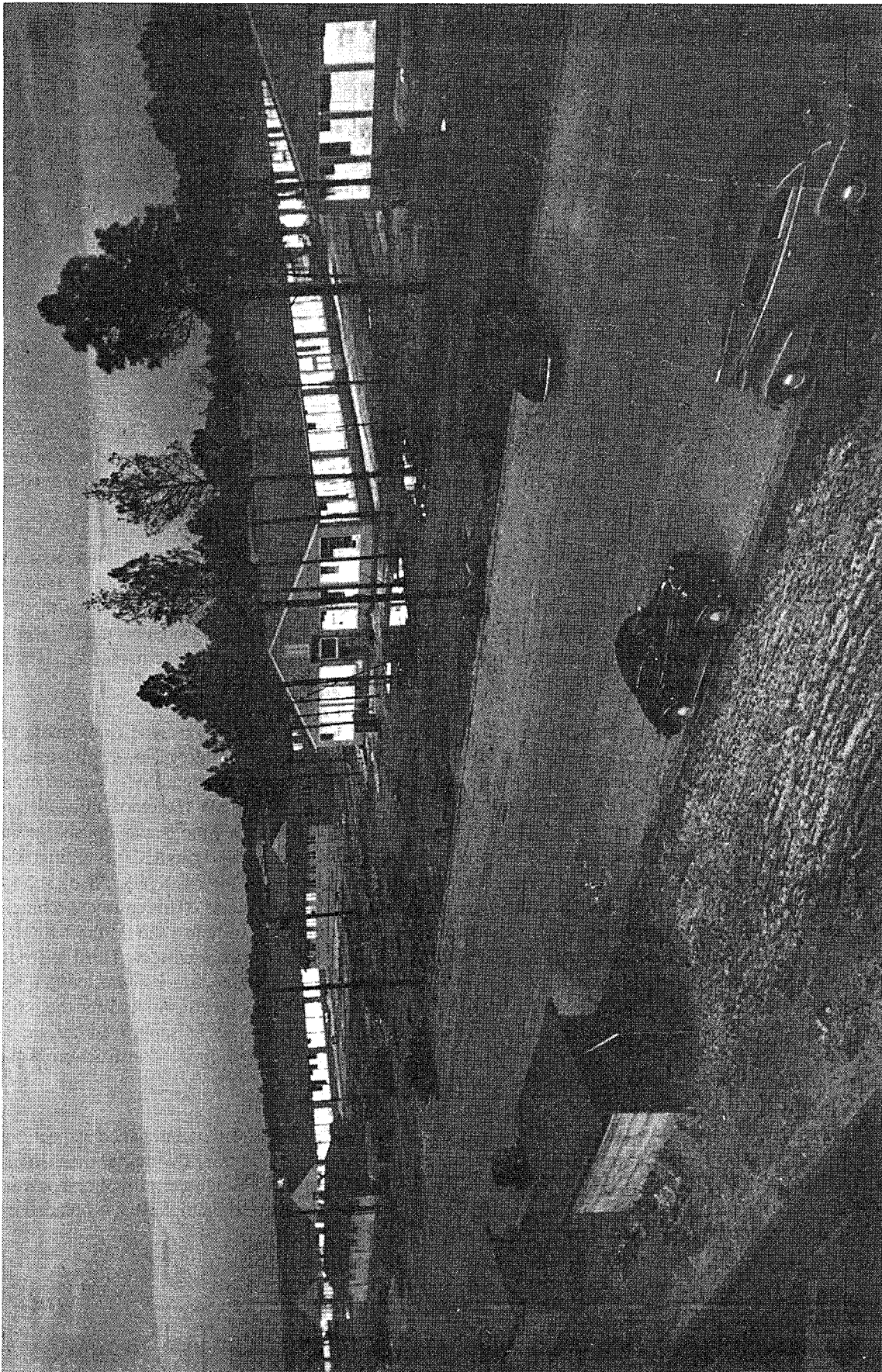
Maintenance Fundamentals. The first branch of the Airplane Mechanics Course introduced students to AAF maintenance policies and procedures. Instructors presented basic technical information which would be applied later, in the forthcoming school branches. On 15 February 1942, the Maintenance Fundamentals Branch moved to its permanent location in academic building No. 1.³⁷

Airplane Structures. The Airplane Structures Branch familiarized the students with an airplane's main construction components and flight operation systems. The branch was still housed in large tents on 1 January 1942, where it remained until the first hangar, Hangar No. 4, was completed on 25 January 1942. Although Hangar No. 4 was intended to house the Engine Branch, it was first used by the Structures Branch because the tents were too small for adequate instruction on large aircraft components. The Structures Branch remained in Hangar No. 4 until 14 February 1942, when it moved into Hangar No. 3 which was designed for that use.³⁸

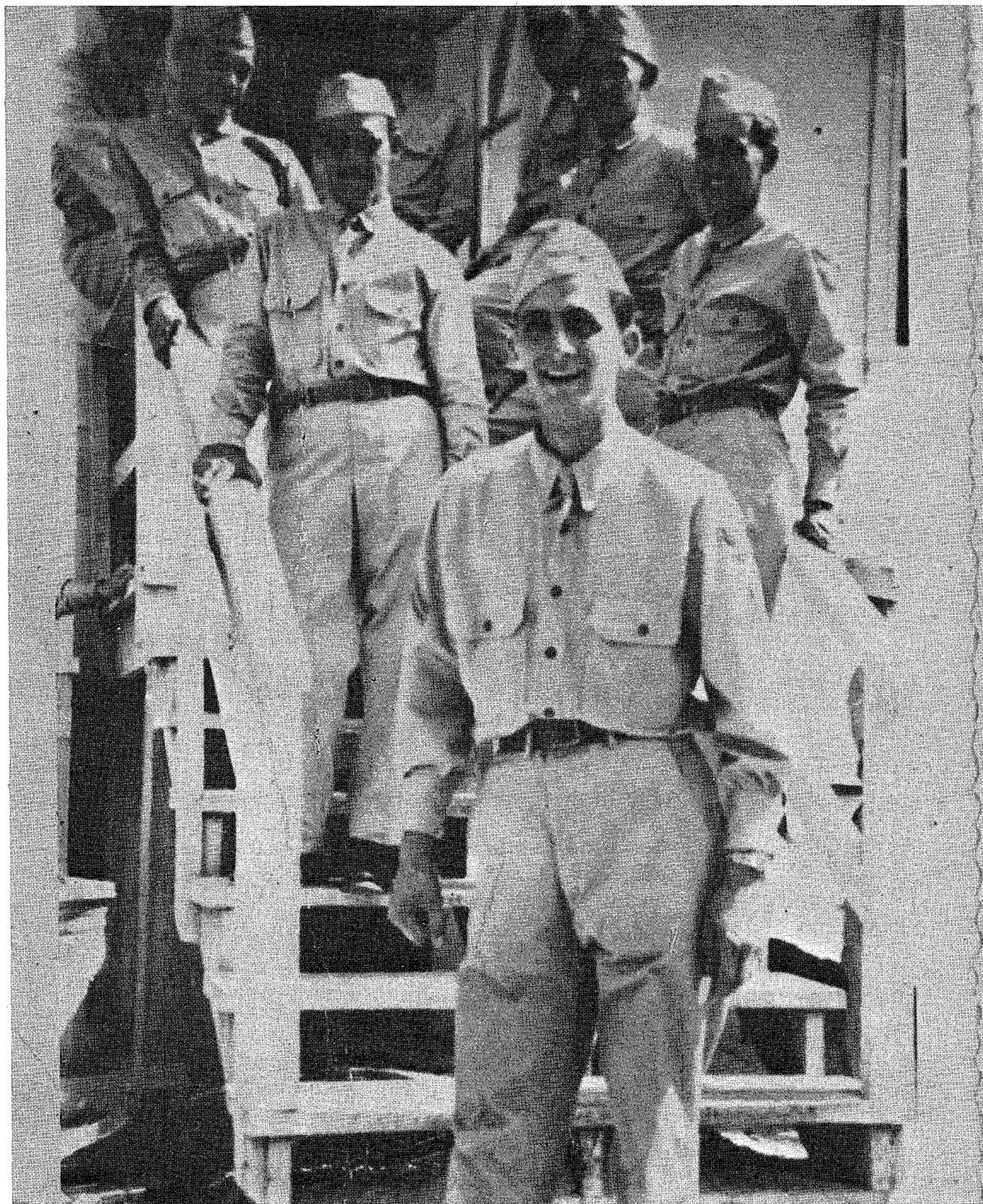
Airplane Engines. Instructors in this branch taught the repair and replacement phases needed to maintain an aircraft's power plant assembly. The Engineer Branch was first housed in academic building No. 1, constructed for the use of the Maintenance Fundamentals Branch. This was necessary because the hangar under construction for the Engine Branch was not completed when instruction began. The Engine Branch remained in academic building No. 1 until mid-February 1942 when it moved to Hangar No. 4. During the time it was housed in the academic building it was discovered that, with the proper distribution of engines throughout the building, the branch could operate more effectively in an academic structure of that type than in a hangar. Also, school administrators decided that Hangar No. 4 could be used more efficiently to house airplanes. This caused Technical School Headquarters to request the construction of an additional academic building to house the Aircraft Engine Branch. The request was transmitted by the commanding officer, Keesler Field, to Headquarters, Third District, AAFTTC. In the request, and based on the foresight of training planners, Keesler headquarters suggested that not only should another academic building be built on Keesler, but that similar buildings be constructed for the other three fields in the command that offered airplane mechanics training. The first request was disapproved but, on 31 July 1942, the district engineer was given authority to erect an additional academic building. Construction began in the fall of 1942 and the structure was ready in the late spring of 1943.³⁹

Aircraft Inspection. The Aircraft Inspection I Branch taught students how to perform maintenance inspections they would eventually conduct on operational airplanes in the field. Students applied their hydraulic, mechanical and electrical knowledge and skill from the preceding branches. Airplanes in this branch were low horsepower, single engine types best suited for practice on preflight and 25-hour inspections. Special emphasis was placed on the correct use of technical publications and maintenance manuals.⁴⁰

*A temporary encampment with little or no shelter.

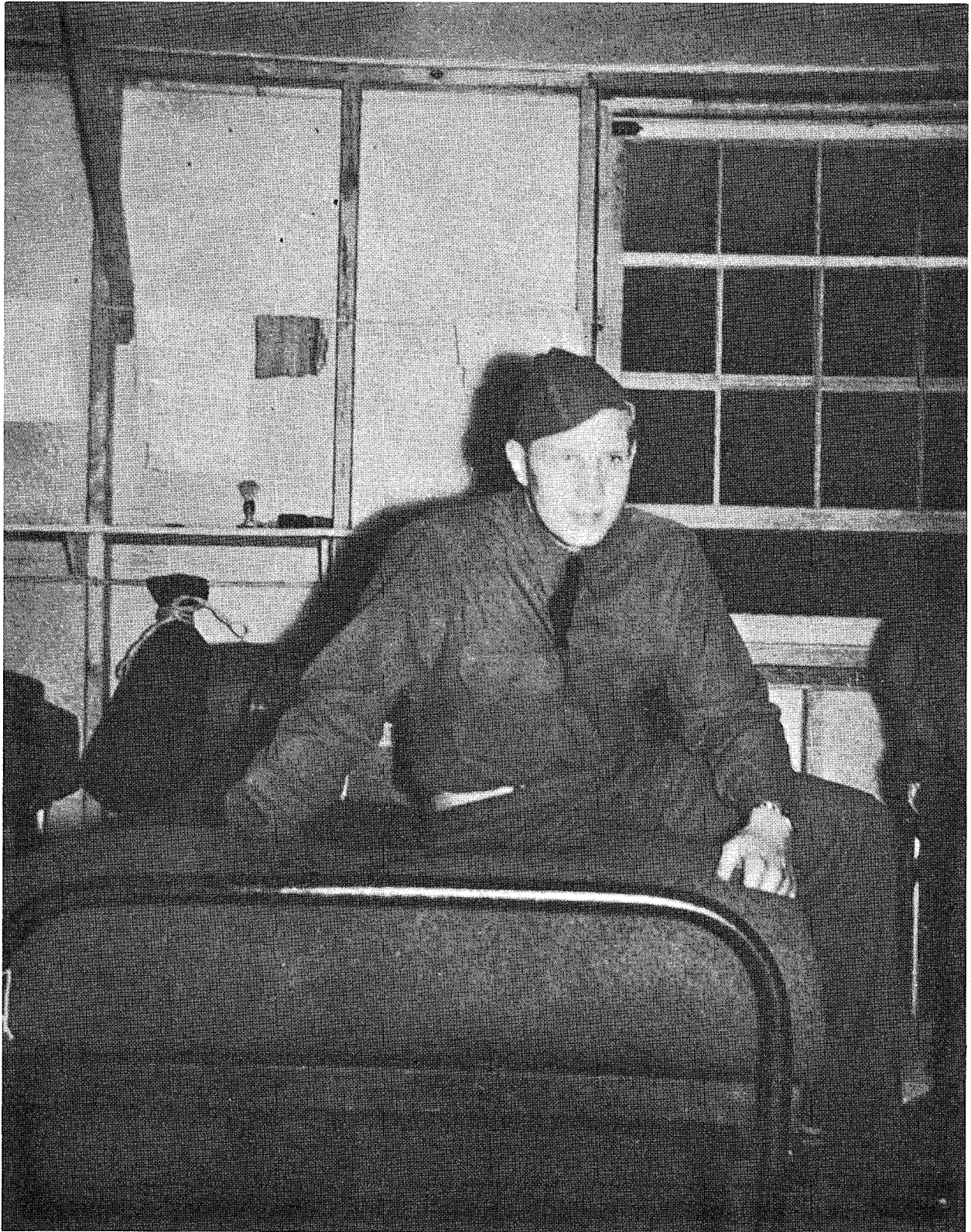


Training administrators lost no time in scheduling four around-the-clock shifts in the newly completed airplane mechanics training classrooms. Shown here February of 1942 at dusk, the nighttime lighting was reported off-shore as a source of "brilliant illumination." The window shades were lowered half-way to solve the problem.



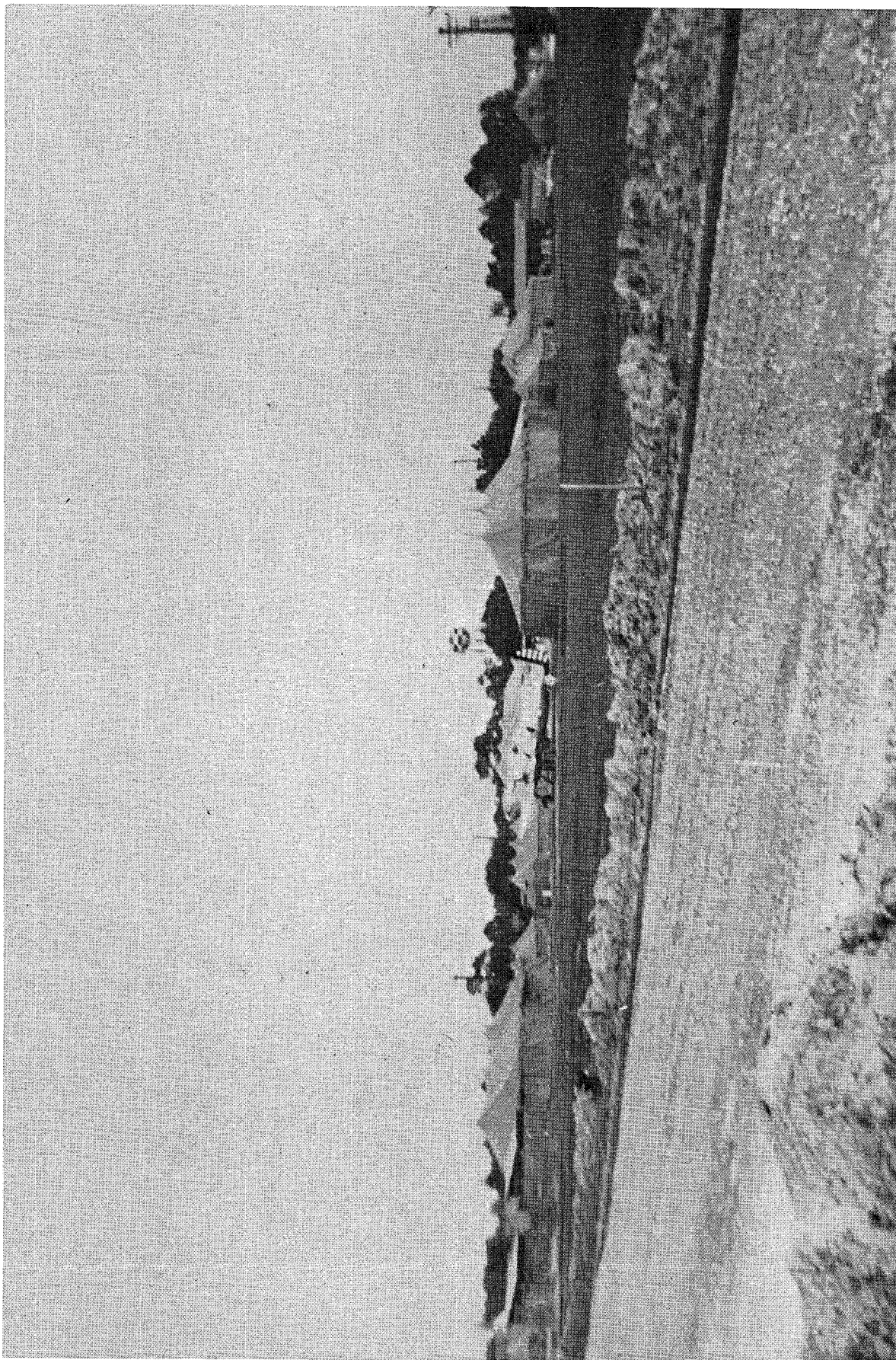
On pass. After the regular Saturday morning barracks inspection, Keesler Field soldiers became eligible for a pass if they could recite the General Orders to their barracks chief. Here Corporal Louis A. Rotundo of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, with other members of the 303rd Squadron Mess Detachment, prepares to leave for downtown Biloxi. Rotundo returned to Keesler in 1971 as an Air Force civilian employee.

Louis A. Rotundo photo

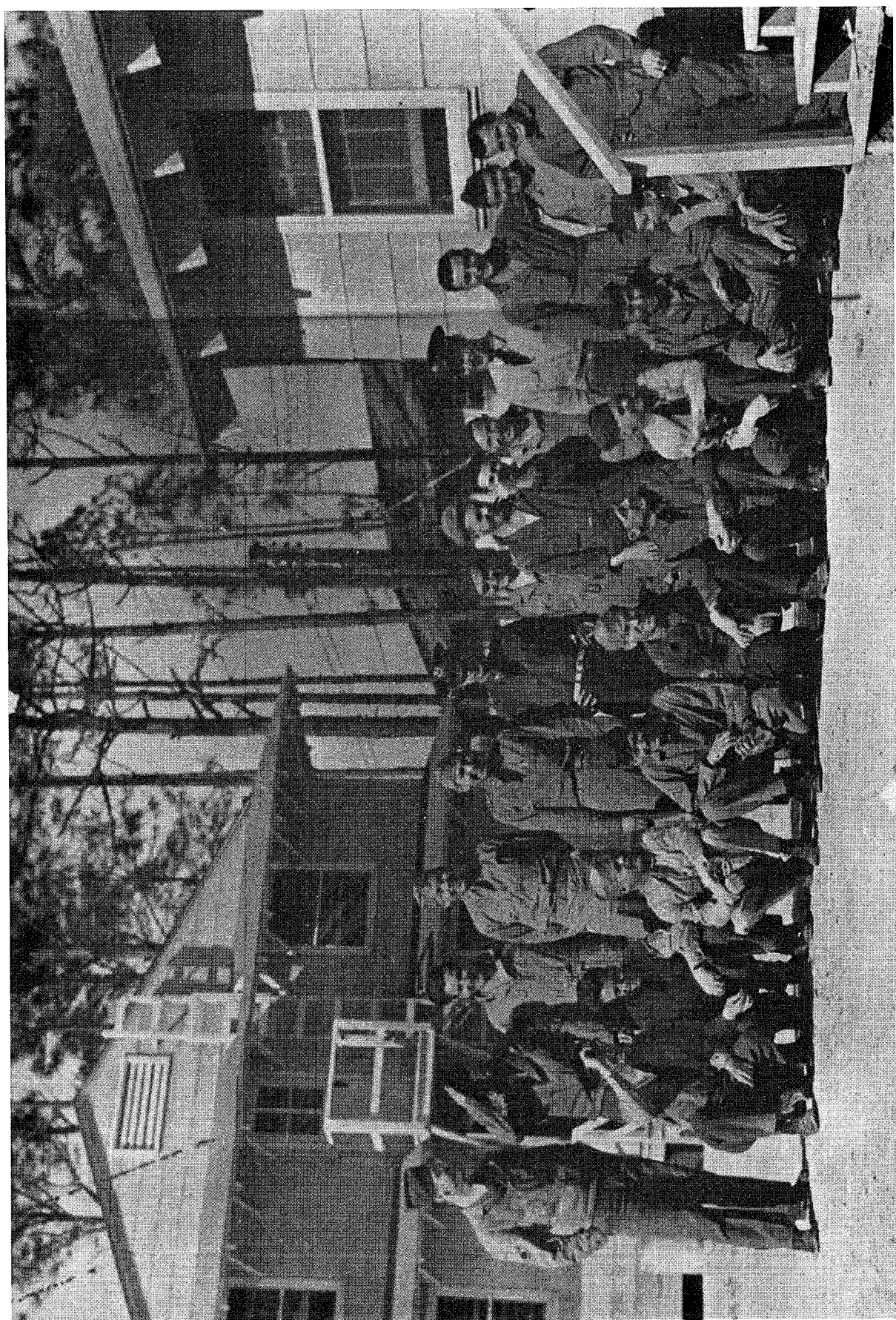


Private Douglas Franklin of upstate New York, who was later killed in action in the European Theatre of Operations, sits on his cot in an open bay barracks. Although they were better than tents, the first Keesler wartime barracks were austere. The interiors had unfinished and unpainted walls, exposed studs, book shelving, oiled pine floors and an iron cot for each man. Because footlockers had not yet been issued to the soldiers, they stored their clothes and personal belongings in a barracks bag that was tied against the wall.

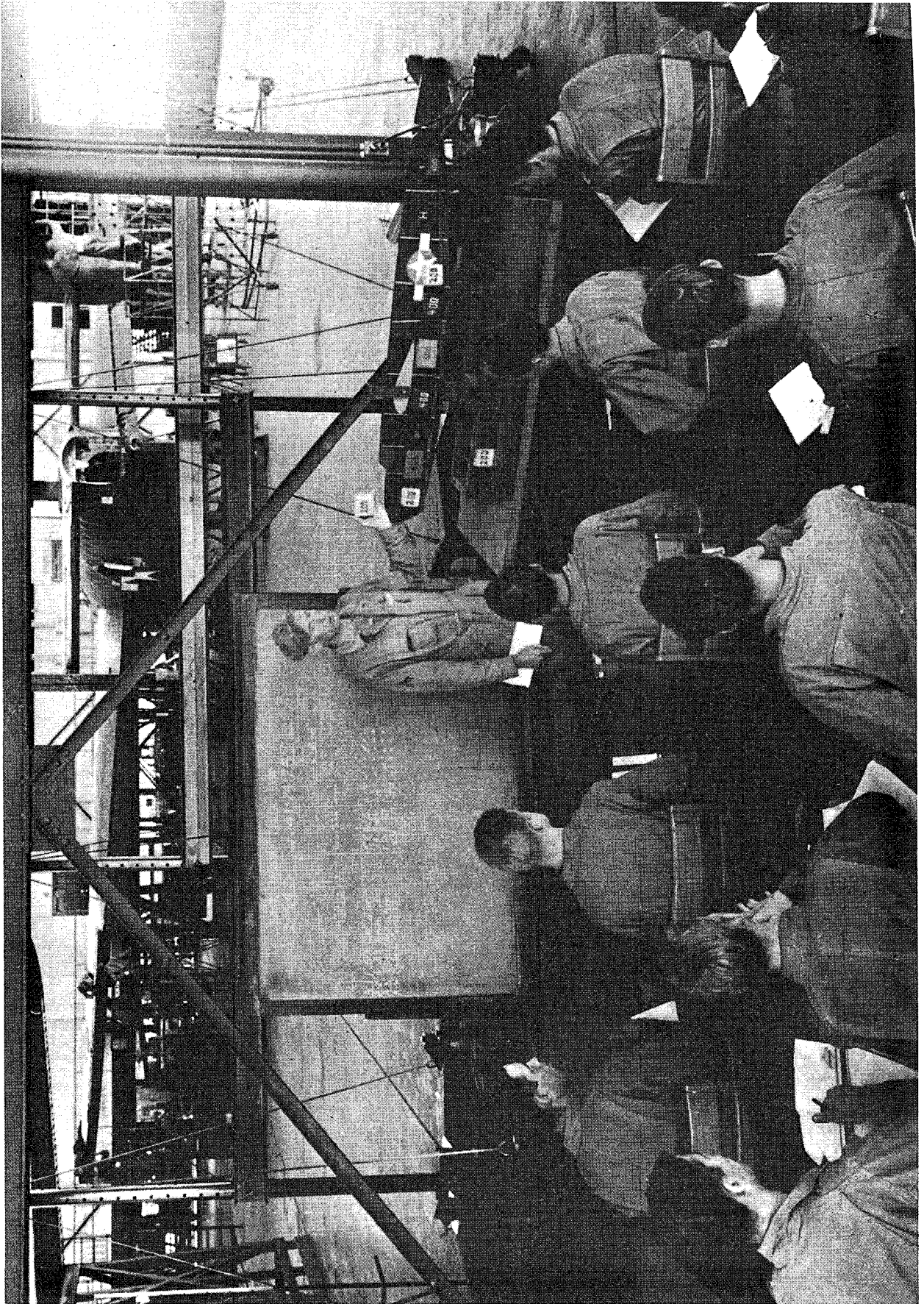
Louis A. Rotundo photo



This was the area southeast from the present site of the Training Services Division. Keesler Field's first mechanics training classes were held in large circus tents erected on the old Biloxi airport. In early 1942 a few nonflyable aircraft were available for student training. Courtesy Richard E. Florea



Squadron officers and permanent party soldiers pose informally outside a barracks in a squadron area. The many uniform and fatigue dress combinations are evident in this early Keesler Field photo. Courtesy Richard E. Florea



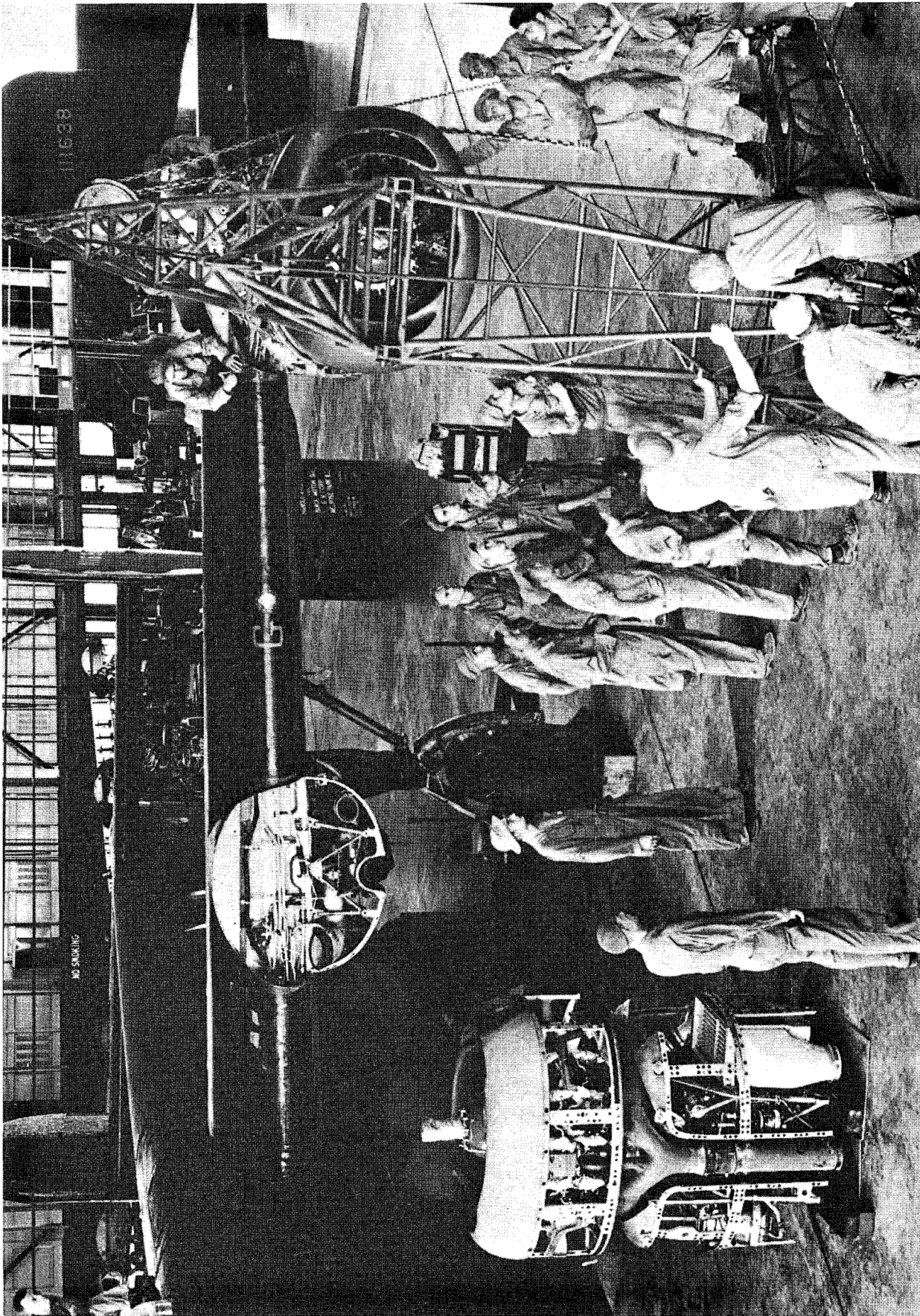
One portion of the airplane structures branch included instruction on aircraft weight and balance procedures.



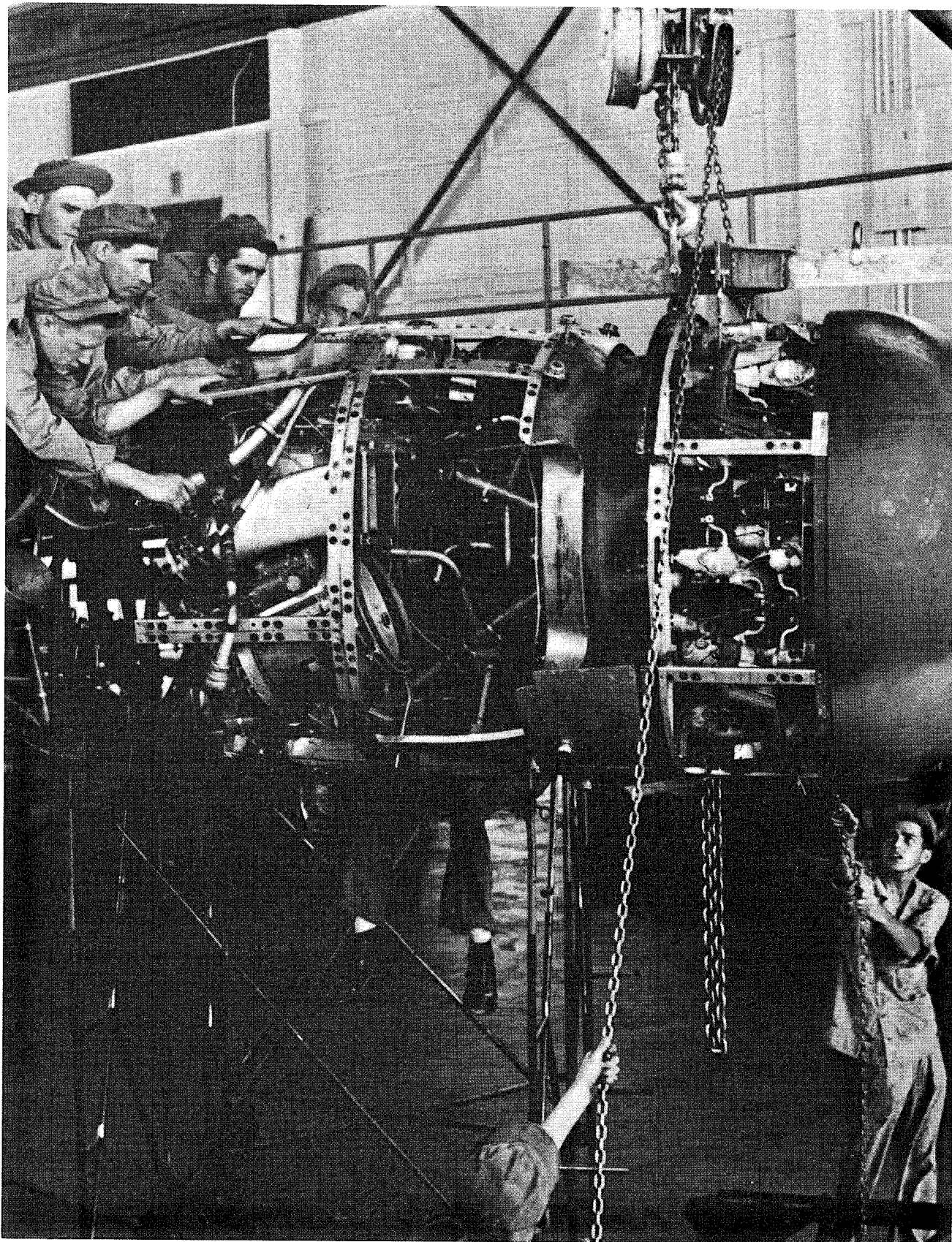
Deep inside a B-24 bomber, a mechanic trainee troubleshoots the plane's electrical system.



Students use a heavy duty winch to mount an airplane engine in the nacelle of a B-24 Liberator.



Students remove complete engines from the airplanes as part of their training in Inspection Branch II.



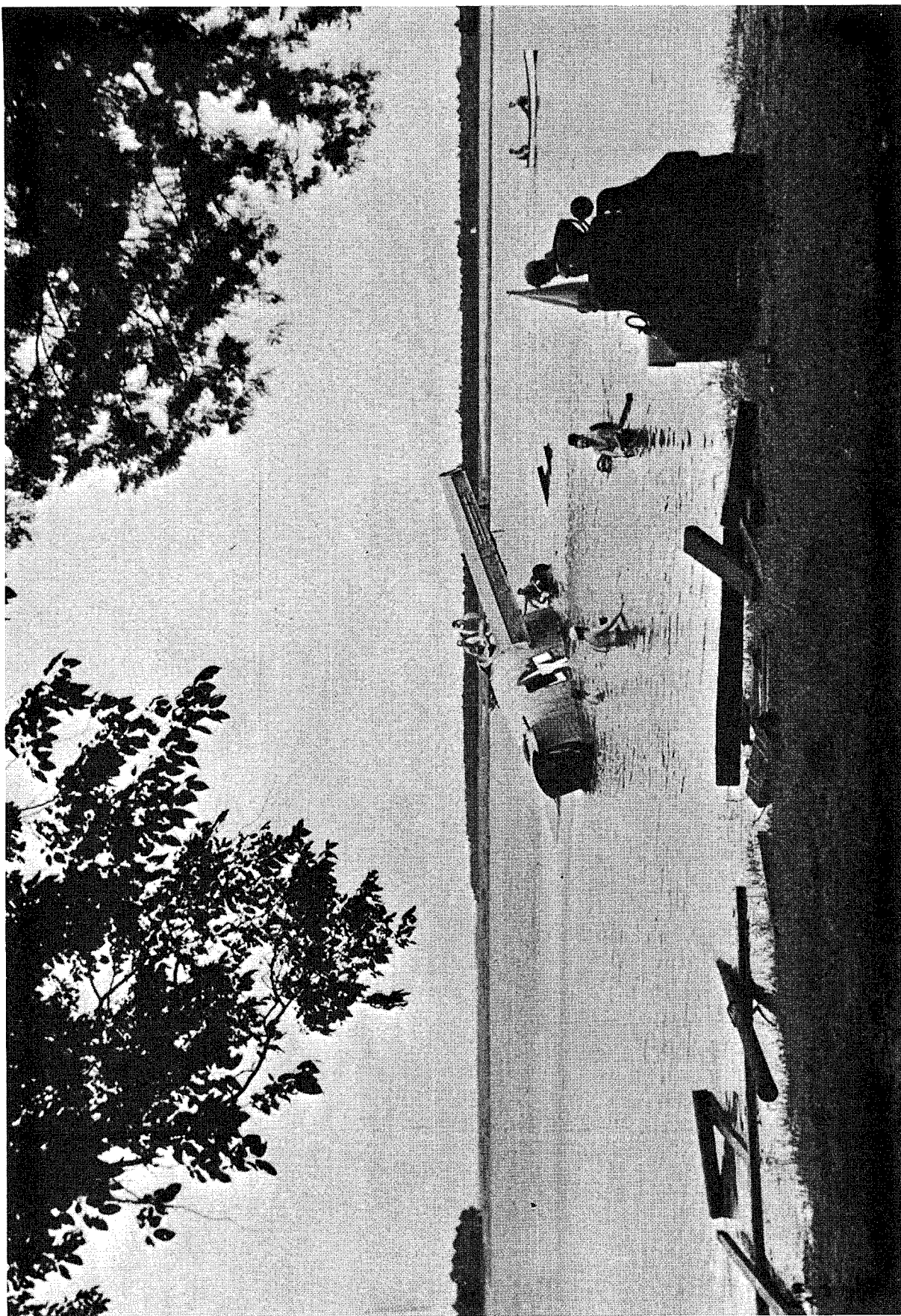
Installation of engine and nacelle to the airplane was part of the airplane inspection branch training on the floor of Hangar No. 4.



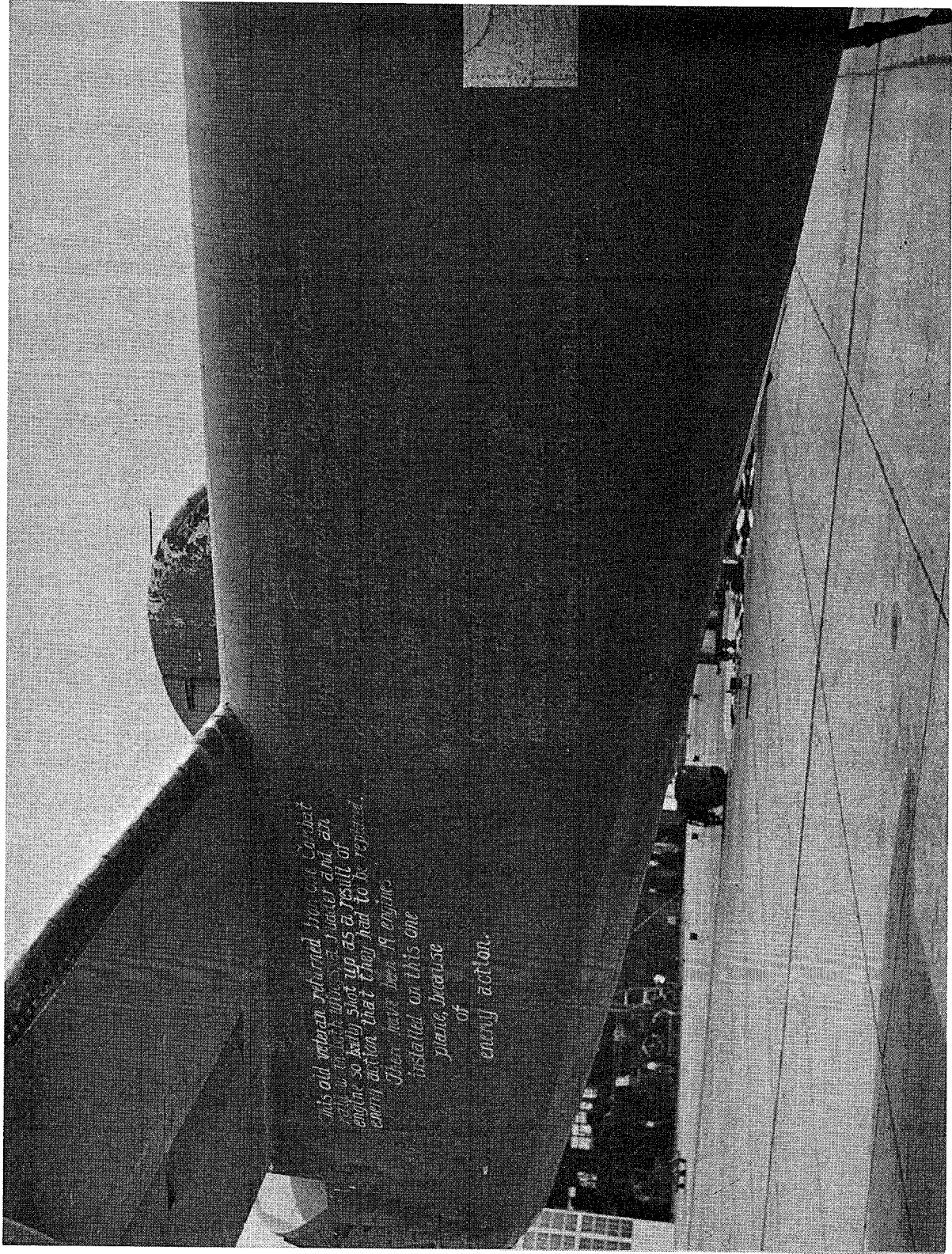
Students in the Graduation Field test training phase change an engine on a single-engine fighter plane under simulated war-time conditions.



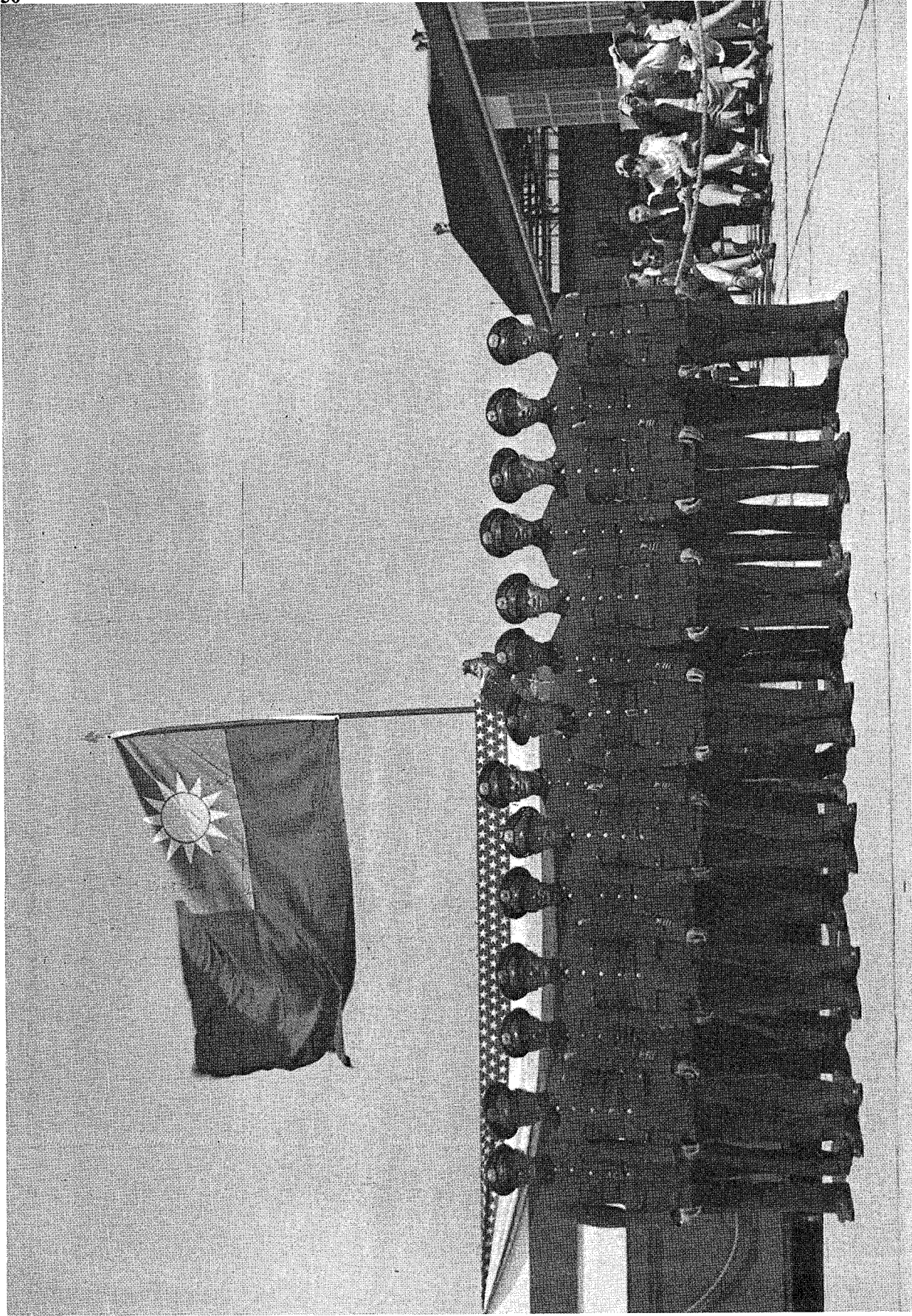
As part of the graduation field test trainees were required to replace a landing gear under simulated war-time conditions.



The flight procedures branch of the Technical School trained mechanics in aircraft ditching procedures with the hulk of a B-24 ditched in the Back Bay of Biloxi.



The war record written on the fuselage of the "Blue Streak" after 110 missions. A number of B-24's, in Class 26 status, were used to instruct students at the Technical School.



The first group of Chinese officers graduated at the Technical School on 6 April 1944, with a class average of 3.75.



Col William E. Hanlon, Commanding Officer of the Basic Training Center at Keesler Field, 1943.

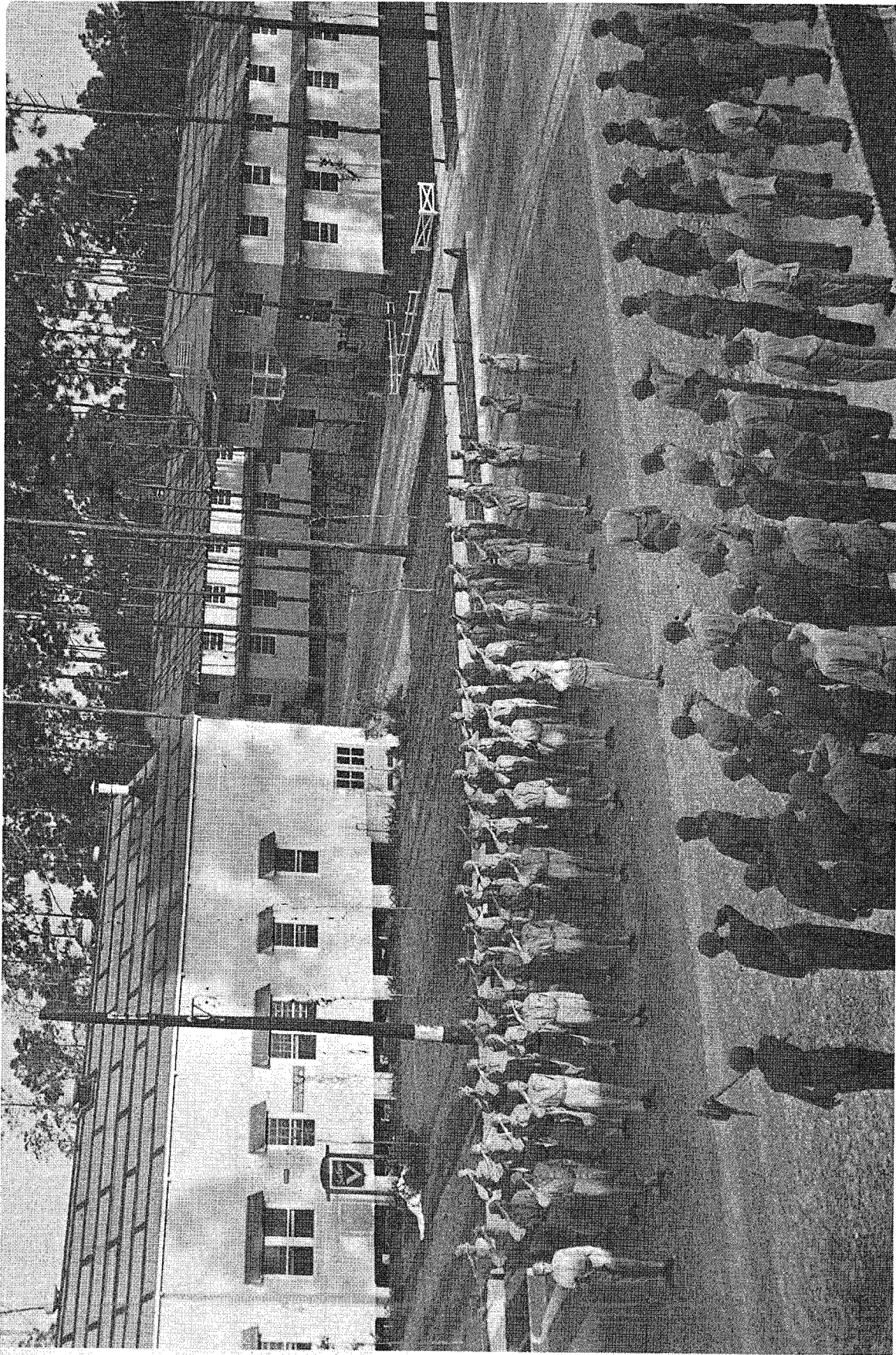


A Keesler Field recruit marches with full pack in 1943 basic training.

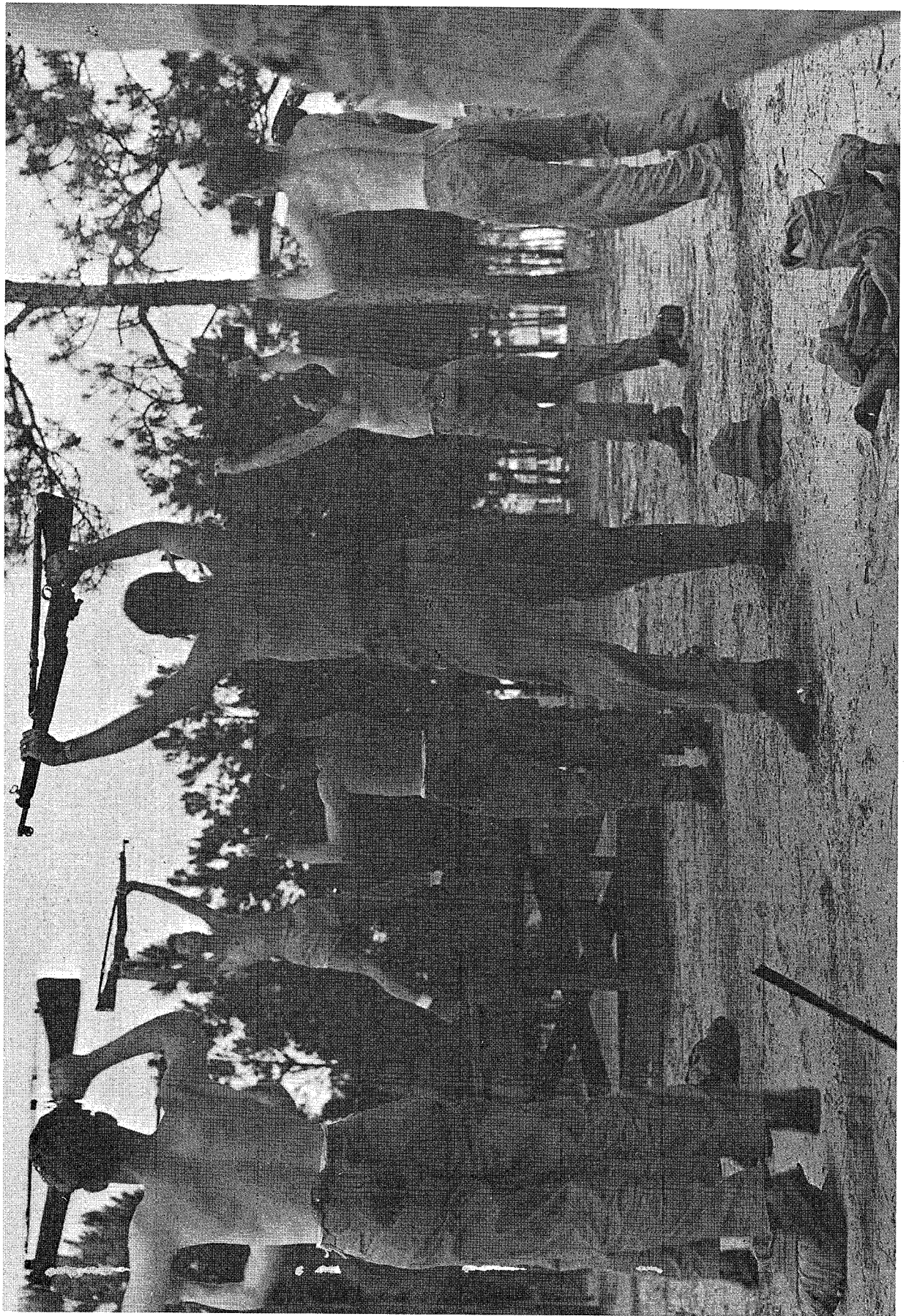


Torrential rains followed by freezing temperatures caused many hardships for Keesler Field personnel during WW II. Courtesy Richard E. Florea

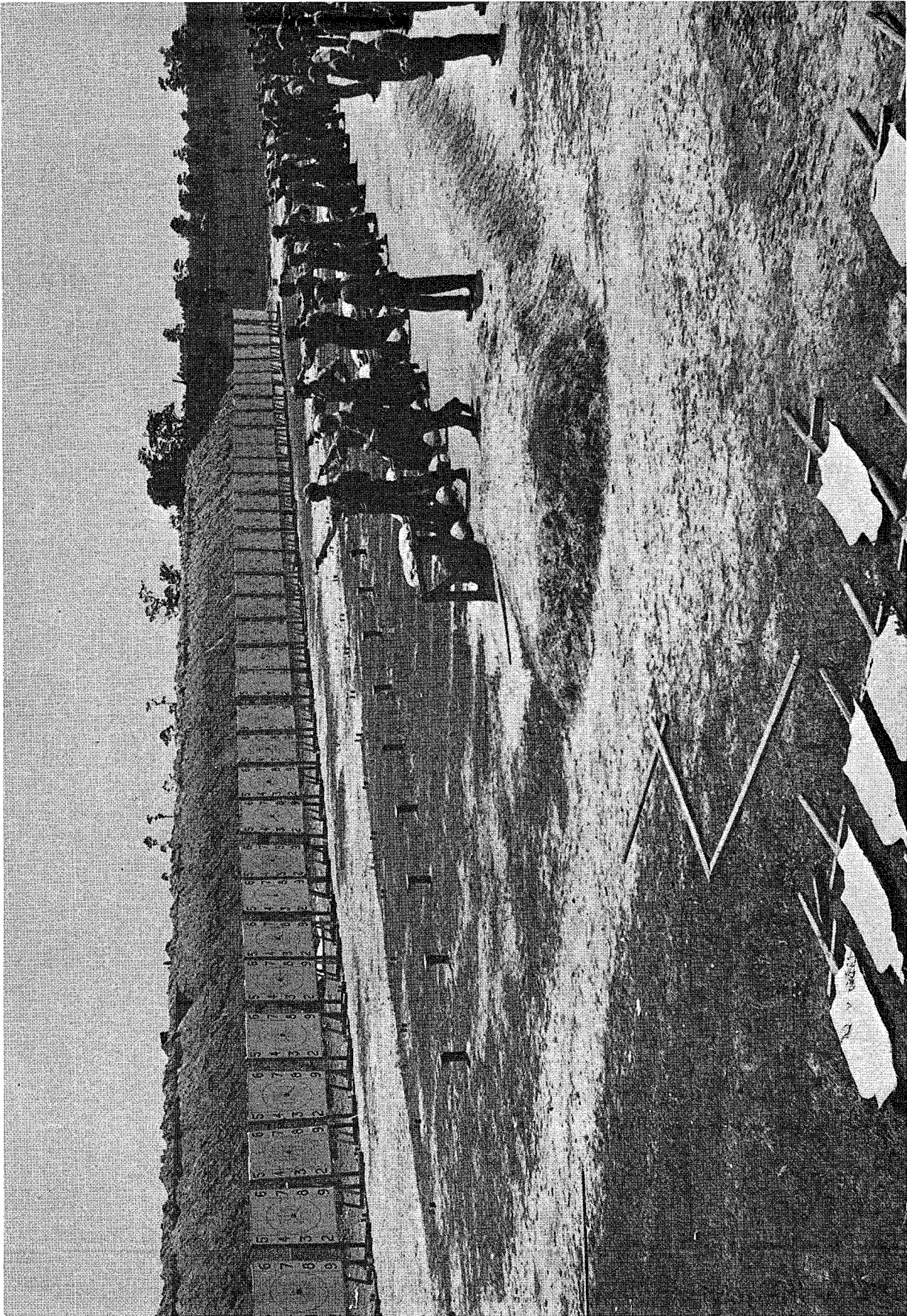




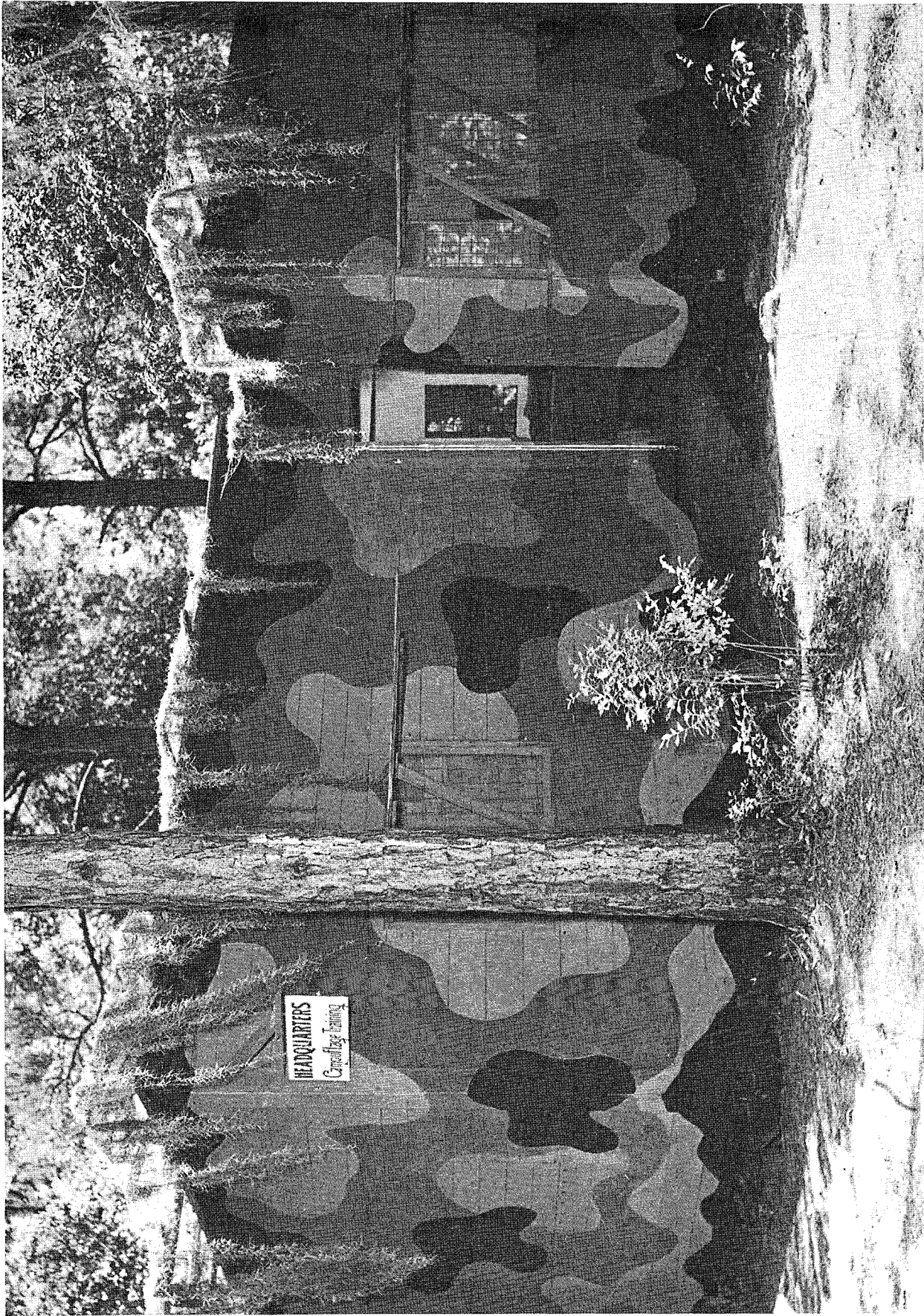
Those classes of the Basic Training Center with outstanding training records received special recognition. A neat and well kept appearance of the section area was especially noted. Col Goolrick encouraged the improvement of section areas because he believed the physical appearance of a station played an important part in the morale of its troops.



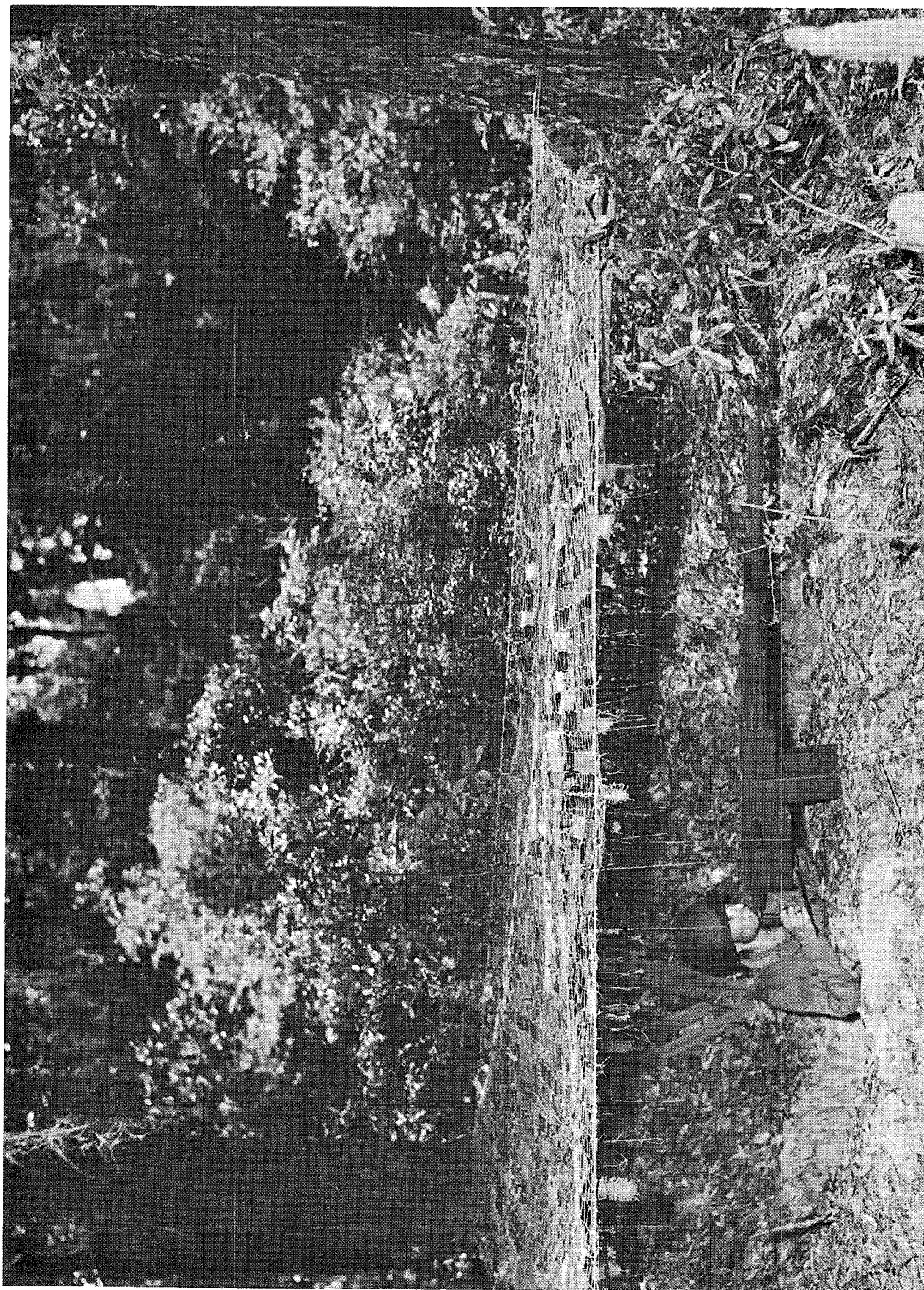
Physical training at Keesler's Basic Training Center.



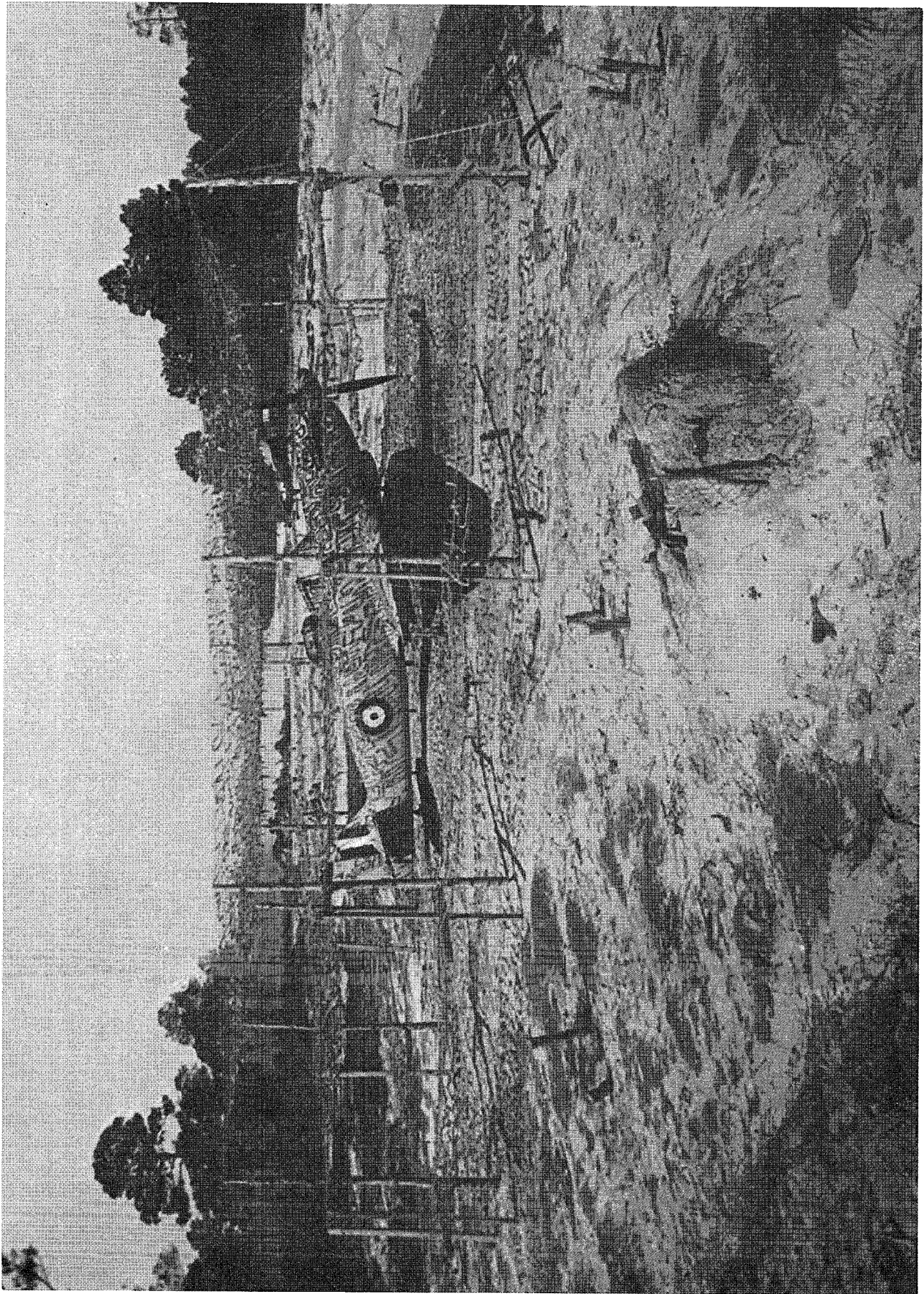
Basic training recruits qualified with the Colt .45 on the pistol range.



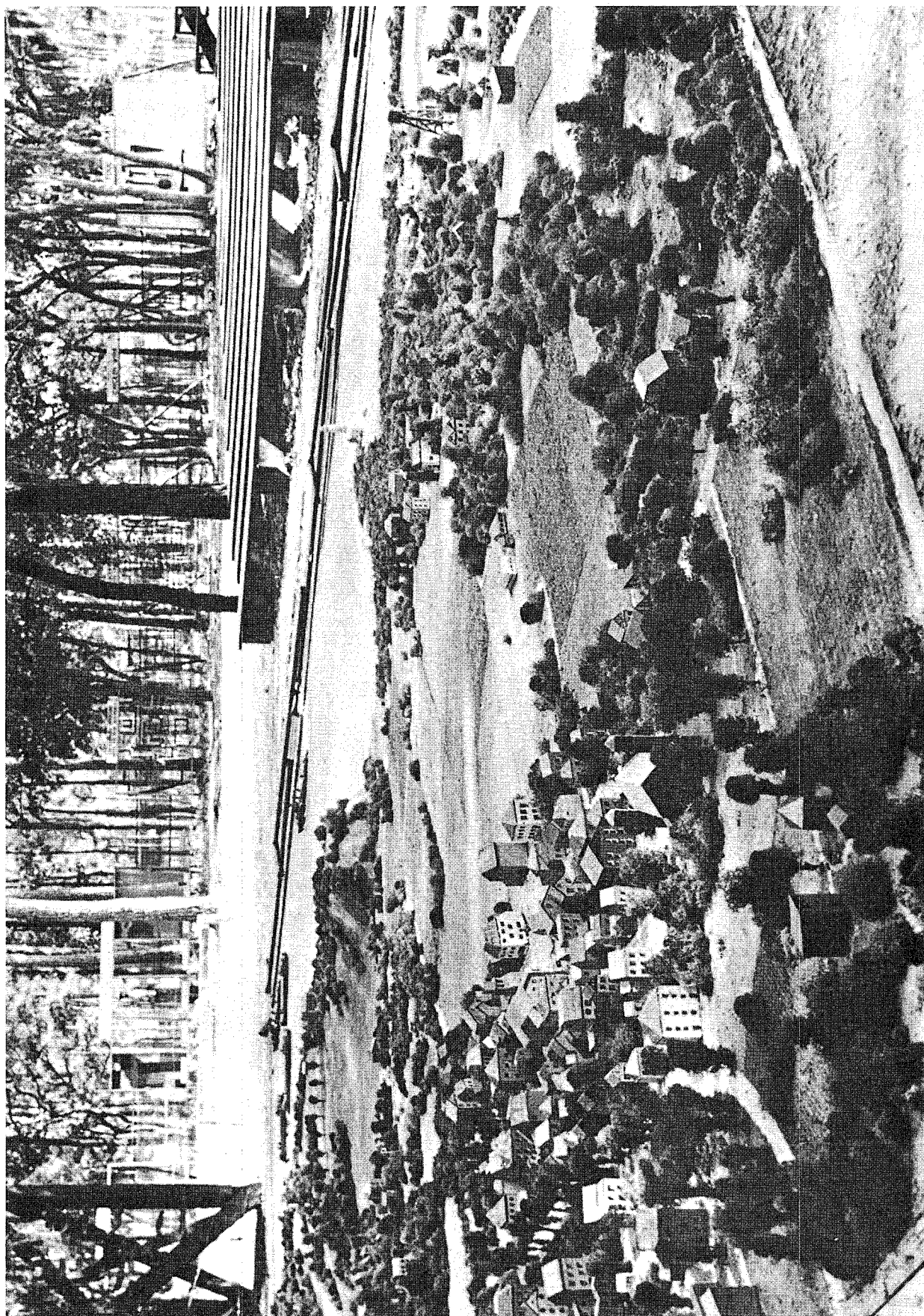
The headquarters building of the Keesler Field camouflage training area in 1943.



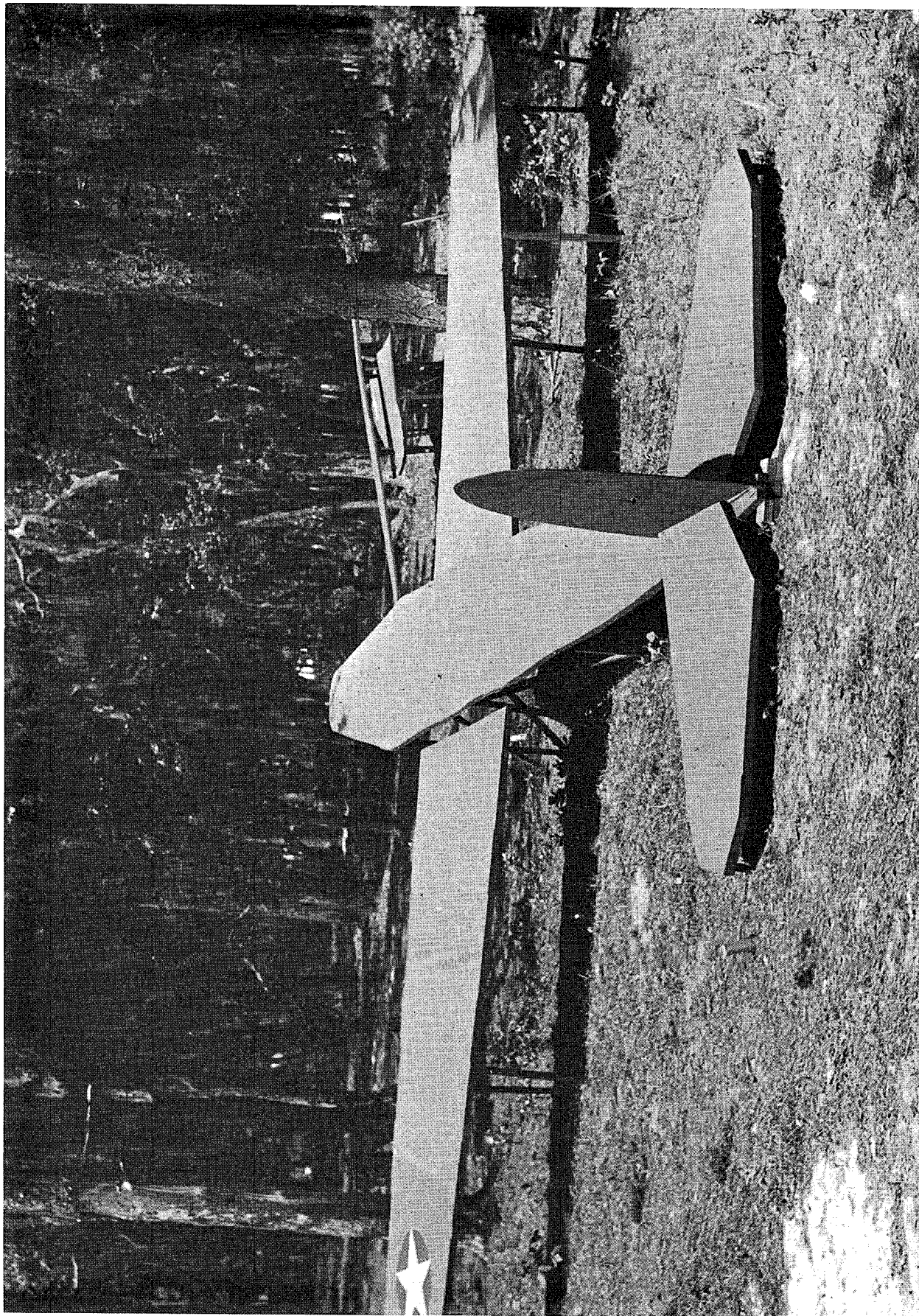
One form of concealment taught in the camouflage area was the cantilever flat-top over a machine-gun emplacement.



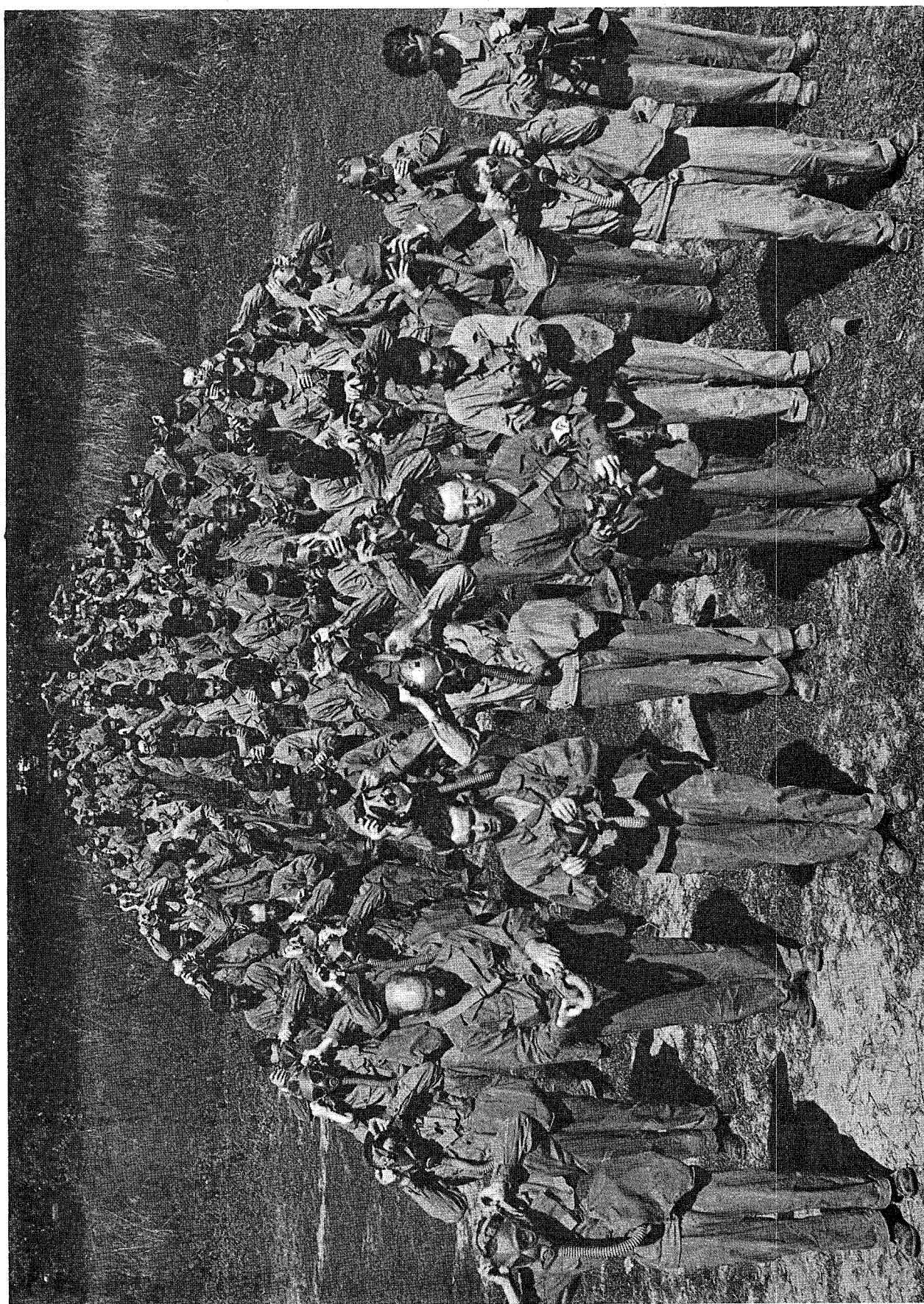
Aircraft area in the camouflage training site.



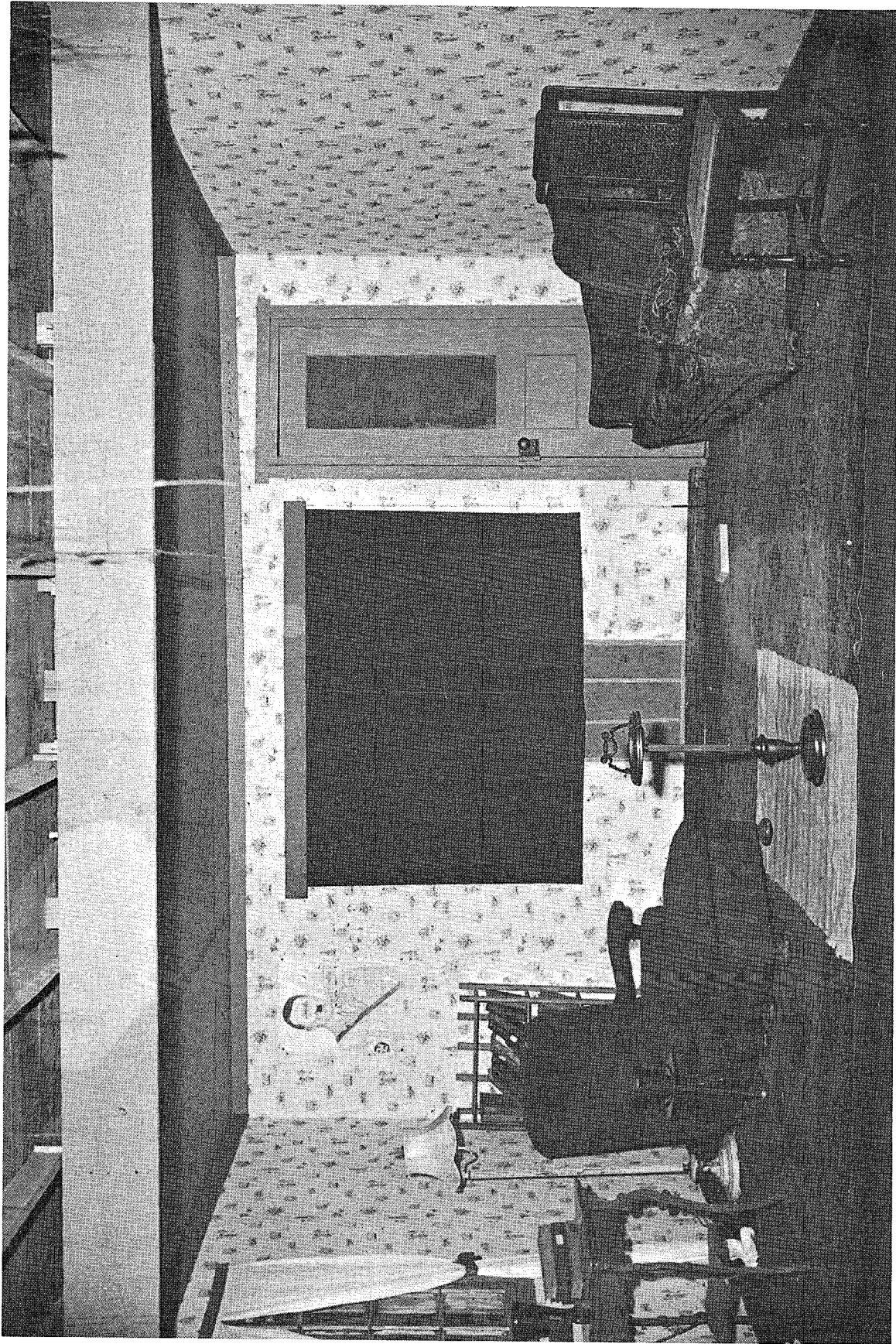
A terrain model was used in 1944 as part of camouflage training at Keesler.



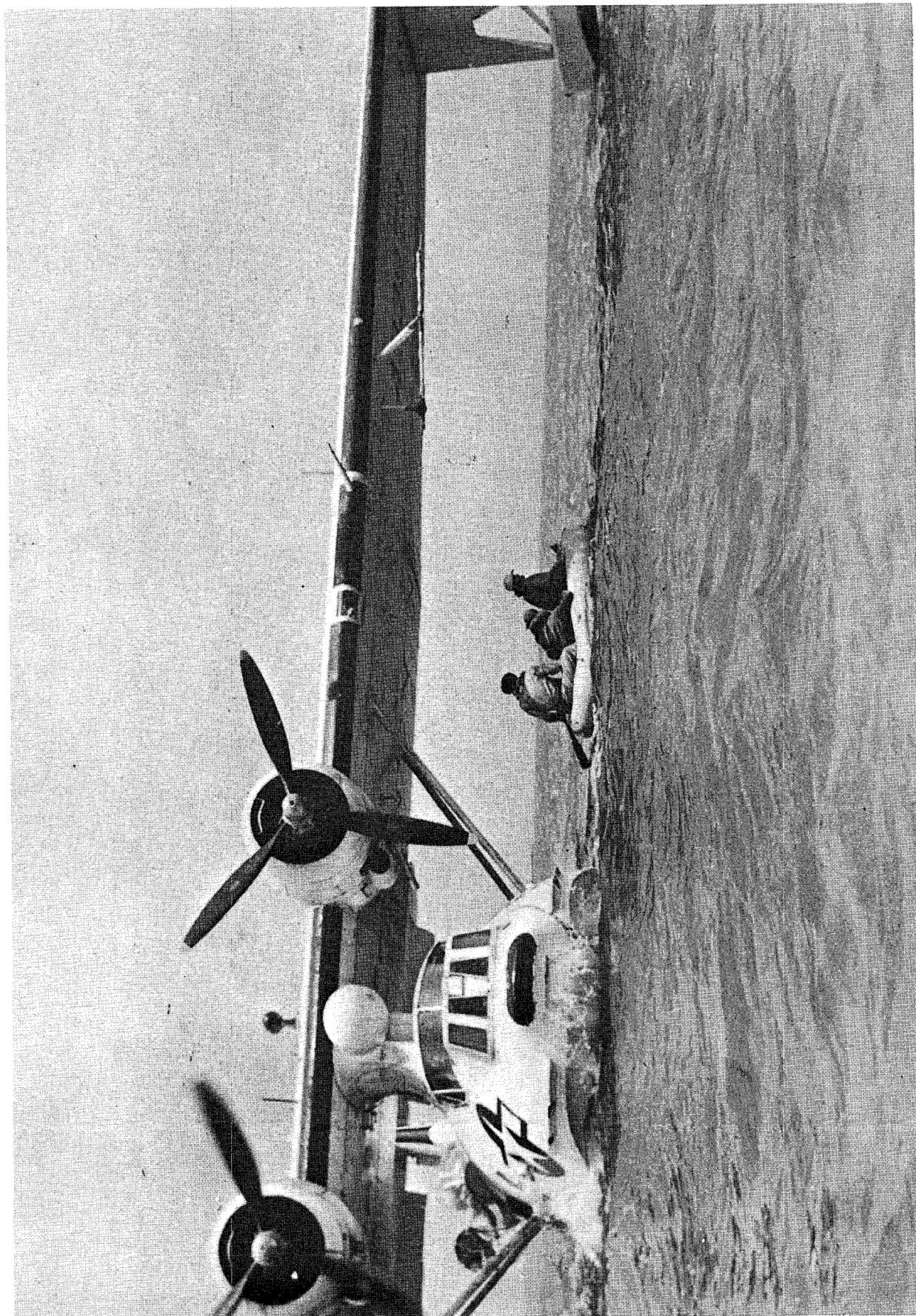
This dummy plane was used in the camouflage area to teach the use of decoys.



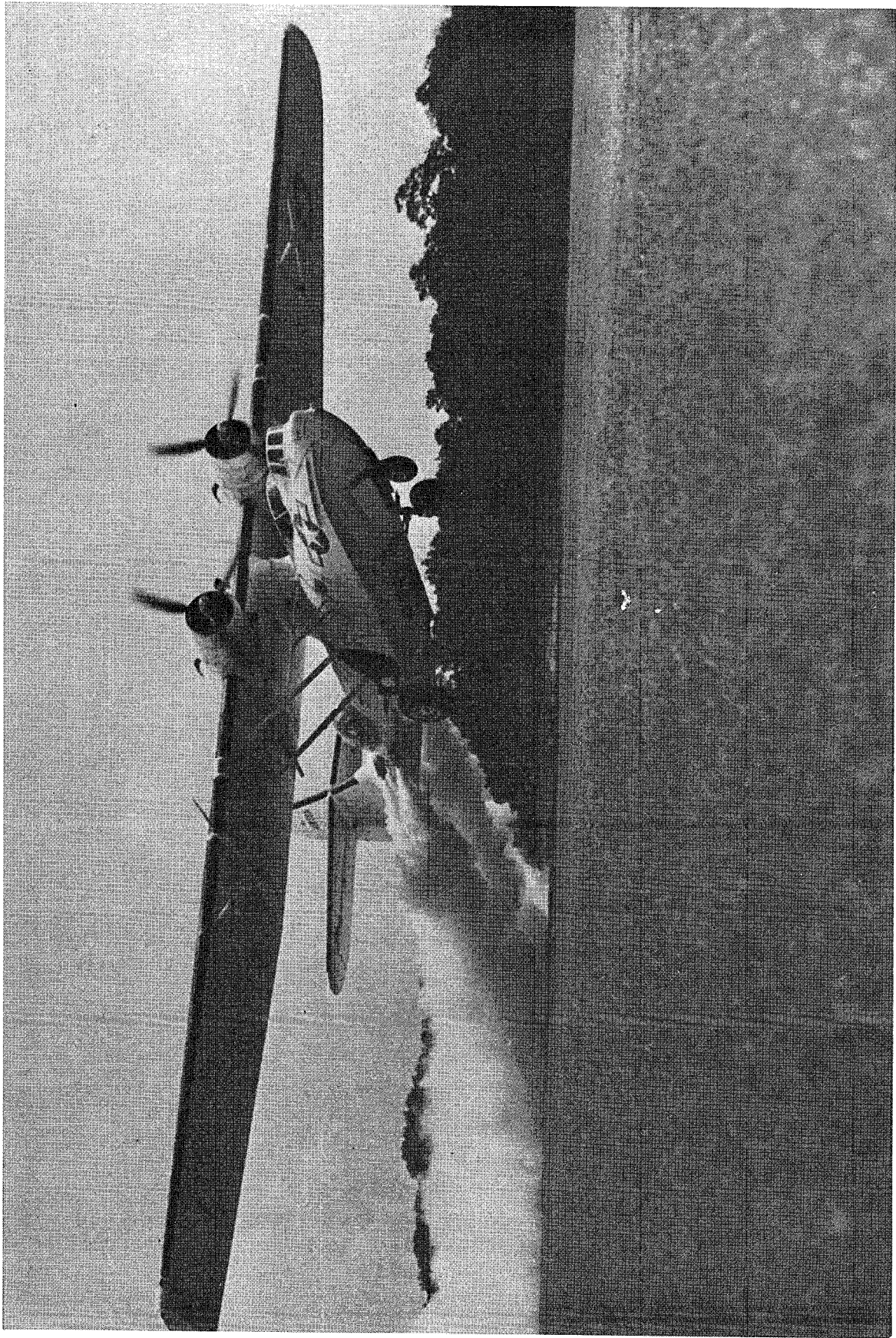
In 1943, troops performed gas mask drills in the chemical warfare instruction area of Keesler Field.



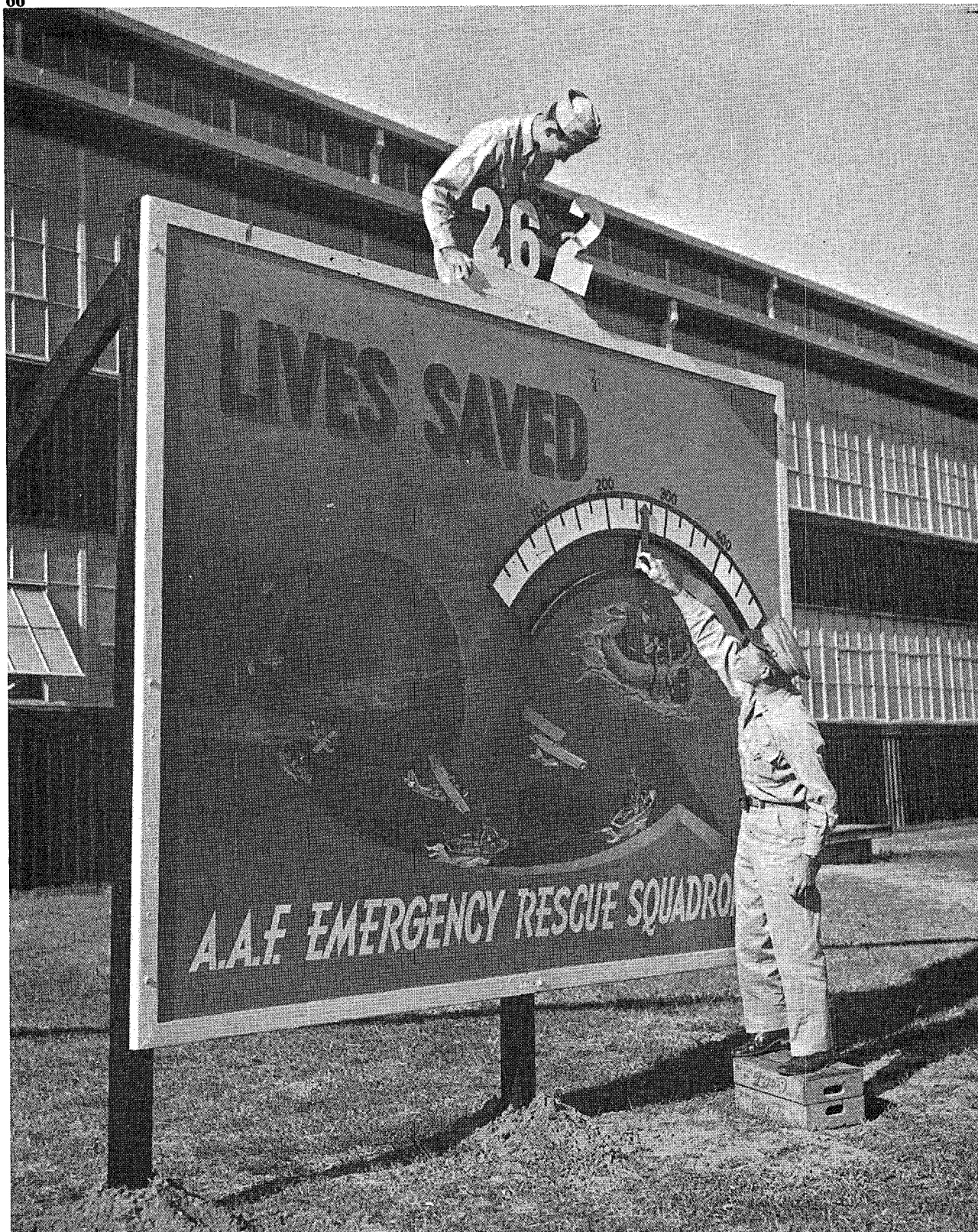
Late in 1944, a replica of a German farmhouse was built in the camouflage training area of the Basic Training Center. Several "booby traps" were placed in the room and trainees were instructed to find them. The curtains on the back wall covered a motion picture screen on which was projected a film about booby traps. The film completed the two-hour lecture-demonstration period presented during the advanced basic training course.



A simulated rescue of three standard crewmen in a lifeboat. During 1945, the Consolidated OA-10A, based at the Air-Sea Rescue School at Keesler Field, conducted training flights almost daily over the Gulf of Mexico.



A familiar sight in 1945 was a rocket assisted take-off of an OA-10A Air-Sea Rescue plane.



The training of air crews in air-sea rescue operations began at Keesler Field on 1 April 1944. On 31 July 1944 the 2121st Army Air Force Base Unit, which had been activated at Keesler Field on 7 April 1944 was deactivated, and the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit became responsible for both air and marine training by the Emergency Rescue School. A sign erected in front of Hangar No. 1 recorded the number of men who were rescued overseas by the two Emergency Squadrons.

The Aircraft Inspection II Branch was the final section of the Technical School. In many ways instruction in the practice maintenance exercises was similar to the training in Inspection I. The aircraft, however, were larger multi-engine types with the comprehensive 50-hour maintenance inspection as the primary subject.⁴¹

Graduation Field Test. This branch was added to the curriculum of the Technical School in January 1943 and remained in operation until June 1944. It was responsible for the realistic simulation of actual working conditions at an advance air base. The training was developed because frequent reports from the combat areas pointed to a greater need for student mechanics training to meet adverse field conditions. The site of the Graduation Field Test Branch was a wooded area at the extreme southwest corner of the base, directly across the landing field from the hangar line. The test area was not intended to become a permanent fixture. Training personnel realized that if it became too well established, each new class would be denied the opportunity to work on field construction operations because they would have been completed by previous classes. It was also impossible to move the site of the graduation field test as frequently as necessary because only one location on Keesler Field had the characteristic terrain for that type of training environment.⁴²

The greatest problem in the activation of the Graduation Field Test Branch was its construction. The area was so low that only a limited amount of firm ground could be found to support the airplanes. Fortunately, it was not necessary to drain off the surface water as this had already been done by the Malaria Control Department. The low places were filled in, however, and crude roads were constructed throughout the fields test site. The roads were corduroy type (logs laid parallel across the roadway and then covered with dirt). Aside from the roadway and aircraft placements, students erected all the tents; dug latrines and slit trenches; constructed the office and maintenance building; and installed all camouflage protection. The work was accomplished by aircraft maintenance students who worked under field conditions and were limited to the use of tools found at an advance air base in an operational combat area.⁴³

Sanitation problems were naturally encountered in an area of this type. The drinking water was first supplied to the site from Biloxi city water mains, but because the supply did not always meet the Army's sanitation standards, the practice was stopped. Potable water was then supplied with lister bags. The construction of the pit latrine was also a problem because of the limited number of sufficiently high and dry locations.⁴⁴

Before 1 June 1943, the students, housed in their respective squadron areas, marched to the field test area for each shift operation. They ate two meals at the main mess halls; the midshift meal was served at the field area in a temporary mess hall. It was the only conventional structure at the training site. The food was prepared at a base mess hall and transported to the area where the students ate from their field mess kits.⁴⁵

Students in technical training had a more liberal pass policy than the recruits in basic training. Until May 1942 students could receive both 24-hour and 3-day passes. Regulation changes kept student passes to a minimum and a 3-day pass was issued only for an extreme emergency. Passes to visit friends and relatives were not issued to students.⁴⁶

In November 1942, students received a new incentive to strive for higher grades. Extra pass privileges were extended to those with grade averages of 90 and above. The privileges included weekend leave and an excuse from certain study periods.⁴⁷

Assignment of Graduates

When the airplane mechanics graduated they were assigned to Army Air Force units. During the early months of 1942 there were only two options for school graduates. The majority were assigned to flying fields in the United States for duty with operational aircraft squadrons. There, they worked under the supervision of experienced airplane mechanics before they received orders for overseas service. The highest qualified students of each graduating class were retained at Keesler as enlisted instructors.⁴⁸

Plans finalized at AAFTTC Headquarters early in the spring of 1942 caused graduates of airplane mechanics courses to receive post graduate instruction at various airplane and engine factories. The augmented factory

training program was developed to make sure a continuous flow of qualified mechanics was available to maintain and repair Air Force fighters and bombers. Graduates selected for the factory schools received instruction on the specific airplane type and flying equipment they were slated to maintain. The students studied under expert engineers and technicians who were familiar with the aircraft.⁴⁹

Graduates with the physical qualifications for flying status could apply for an aerial gunnery school. The aircrew gunnery training offered several advantages to an airplane mechanic graduate. While in training he was placed on flying status with a fifty percent increase in base pay. Upon completion of the aerial gunnery course, he was promoted to the grade of staff sergeant and awarded the combat crew badge.⁵⁰

Specialized B-24 Mechanic Training

In the fall of 1942, the Technical School began to specialize in maintenance training for heavy bombardment airplanes. Although the quality of airplane mechanic instruction on Keesler gave the graduates a basic knowledge of general airplane mechanics, they were sent to other schools for specialized training in the maintenance of a specific warplane such as the B-25, P-51, B-17, etc. As early as April 1942, it had become apparent that under the current system the schools could not produce mechanics for the field as rapidly as necessary. After several headquarters conferences that addressed the problem, AAFTTC decided each technical school would specialize in maintenance training for a single airplane category. For this reason, all Army airplanes were divided into five major categories: heavy bombardment or four-engine transports; medium bombardment or two-engine transports; light or dive bombardment; pursuit (liquid cooled engines); and pursuit (air cooled engines).⁵¹

In May 1942, AAFTTC informed the Technical School that as soon as equipment became available Keesler Field would specialize in maintenance training on heavy bombardment planes. This change did not solve the basic problem because the two heavy bombers, the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and the Consolidated B-24 Liberator were not alike in structure, power plant, or armament. Consequently, if one Technical School was to train mechanics for both B-17 and B-24 maintenance, the desired specialization would still not result. Despite this problem, equipment was sought during the summer to train mechanics for both types of heavy bombers. The greatest need was to obtain complete airplanes for use in the inspection branches. Based on 450 students per shift, and 20 students per airplane, 23 airplanes were needed in each inspection branch. This was the optimum number. To provide adequate instruction, the minimum number of airplanes needed per branch was 13. With the limited number of planes, school administrators realized it would be necessary to assign 35 students to each.⁵²

Finally, on 27 August 1942, Keesler received a telegram from Headquarters, AAFTTC, that ordered the school to specialize only in B-24 instruction. The B-24 was an eight-man, high altitude, long-range bomber. A high-wing monoplane with four radial engines and twin tail fins and rudders, it was equipped with a retractable tricycle landing gear.⁵³

When instruction in the new specialized course began on 19 October, school personnel found when instruction was limited to one type of airplane, it was possible to decrease the number of classroom days. The new course could now be completed in 96 days instead of the 110 days previously needed. The 14-day saving greatly increased the number of qualified mechanic graduates. New schedules consisted of 12 eight-day periods of instruction, one for each branch. In the main, the type of instruction was not changed. Each branch taught the same maintenance subjects; they were merely converted to instruction on the B-24 heavy bomber.⁵⁴

AM School Receives a Famous B-24

The retirement site for the famous B-24 Liberator "Blue Streak," was Keesler Field's AMS where it became a student trainer. The "Blue Streak" had flown 110 missions and 300,000 miles over Germany, Italy, Rumania, Greece, Austria, Africa, and Sicily. Her combat crews sank a Nazi freighter off Crete, blew up a tanker at Candia, and sent a destroyer to the bottom of Suda Bay. They shot down 23 German and Italian fighters, dropped half a million pounds of high explosives, won the distinguished unit badge and individual decorations for gallantry in action. Yet, with all her battles in enemy skies, not a man in all of her crews was wounded. As part of the oldest

bombardment group* overseas, the history and achievements of the distinguished aircraft were inscribed on her fuselage. The "Blue Streak" was the first USAAF bomber:

to bomb the European continent.

over Ploesti (high altitude).

to hit the Italian fleet.

over Naples.

on a Rome raid.

over Ploesti (low level).

over Weiner-Neustadt.

of a heavy bombardment type to be based on the European continent.

Under her wing was inscribed, "This old veteran returned from one combat raid with both wings, a rudder and an engine so badly shot up as a result of enemy action that they had to be replaced. There have been nineteen engines installed on this plane because of enemy action."⁵⁵

B-32 Maintenance Training

Instruction in a new training course, one for B-32 mechanics, began at the Technical School on 23 October 1944. Few details were published because the aircraft, known as the Dominator, was a "mystery plane" insofar as most military authorities were concerned. The possibility that it would soon join the Pacific-based B-29s in bombing Japan made it imperative for mechanics to be trained quickly. The new bomber was manufactured by the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Company. The new Keesler training course was designed to absorb superior graduate students from the general airplane mechanics course. Students with overseas service who scored high on their screening test were also enrolled in the specialized 36-day course.⁵⁶

On 23 June 1945, higher headquarters directed the B-32 Airplane Mechanics course to be discontinued when the current student enrollment was graduated. They further directed that students would no longer be entered in the course. The last B-32 specialist class graduated on 1 August 1945.⁵⁷

B-29 Maintenance Training

On 24 July 1945, a letter from AAF Training Command (AAFTC)** headquarters addressed a requirement from Western Technical Training Command headquarters, to convert the 13-week Keesler Primary mechanics training, (which was intended to train men on various types of airplanes), to specialized mechanic training on the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. The Training Command directed the transition to be accomplished as rapidly as practical. The older training equipment (both airplanes and mock-ups) was identified to be displaced first, with the newer equipment (A-26, B-25, P-47, P-51, P-80, C-46, C-54 and C-82 aircraft) to be retained until enough B-29s and related instructional equipment became available. By 4 August (10 days after V-J Day), 10 B-29s were on hand to complete the number required. Seven were placed in the inspection branch of the Technical School, two were used by the structures branch, and one was used jointly by students in the propellers, instruments, fuel systems, and electrical systems branch.⁵⁸

*514th Bombardment Squadron, 376th Bombardment Group — airplane serial number 41-11613

**The AAFTC was inactivated in July 1943 and its personnel and equipment assigned to the new organization, the Army Air Forces Training Command.

FOREIGN STUDENTS IN TECHNICAL TRAINING

The first foreign students who arrived at Keesler were trained under the provisions of the Lend-Lease Act.* They were 13 Chinese engineering students accompanied by an administrative officer as their interpreter. The class arrived on 26 November 1943 from Santa Ana, California, to attend the Technical School's regular 112-day Airplane mechanics course. Although all of the students were officers, they were scheduled to take the Airplane Mechanics course for enlisted men which dealt primarily with first echelon repair on the B-24 bomber. The first group of Chinese officers was under the command of Captain Hau Shu-Lin. Linguistic difficulties were largely overcome through the efforts of the men and their interpreter, 1st Lt Yang Chi-Shu. A second contingent of eight Chinese officers reported to Keesler on 1 March 1944. The first enlisted group of 12 Chinese students, composed of second (or technical) sergeants, arrived for training on 17 April 1944.⁵⁹

The Chinese officers were housed in the bachelor officer quarters. Enlisted Chinese students were attached to the 411th TSS for rations, quarters, and supervision.⁶⁰

Expenses incident to the training of Chinese officers were charged to the Chinese Government under Lend-Lease requisitions. They were paid as 2 monthly allowance for quarters, clothing, and subsistence directly from the Headquarters of the Chinese Training Detachment at Douglas, Arizona. The regular pay of the officers was deposited in a bank in China for the use by their families or for retention until they returned to their homeland. All Chinese enlisted personnel, regardless of their rank, received \$50 per month.⁶¹

In addition to the primary or basic airplane engine course and the B-24 course, other specialized courses were taught for the B-25 and B-26 medium bombers, and the C-46 cargo plane. When the Chinese students completed the basic course, they were sent to the advanced course or to gunnery or factory school, or to other specialized AAF training.⁶²

No material changes in the instruction for the Chinese students were considered necessary because they attended standard courses with their own interpreters. The majority of students were from the interior of China and spoke the Mandarin dialect.⁶³

The first group of Chinese officers graduated with a class average of 3.75 on 6 April 1944. The second group began training 6 March 1944 and graduated on 13 July 1944 with a class average of 4.42. The first three classes averaged 4.00 which placed them in the first quartile of achievement.⁶⁴

French and Brazilian students arrived in 1944. During 1945, five enlisted men of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron and three classes of Chilean officers were graduated. The Chileans were not trained under the Lend-Lease Act, but at the request of their government with no expense to the US Government. In June 1945, 160 Chinese and 81 French students were enrolled in aircraft mechanics training.⁶⁵

ARMY AIR FORCES EMERGENCY RESCUE SCHOOL

The training of air crews in air-sea rescue operations began at Keesler Field on 1 April 1944, when the Provisional Army Air Forces Rescue Training School (which was established at Gulfport Field, Gulfport, Mississippi, on 16 March 1944), transferred to Keesler Field. From 1 April, rescue training activities were directed from the school's headquarters in Hangar No. 1 at Keesler, although marine training continued at Gulfport Field and at the East Pier in Gulfport.⁶⁶

On 7 April 1944, the 1063rd Basic Flying Training Squadron and the 1007th Quartermaster Rescue Boat (Aviation), the principal components of the Provisional Rescue School headquarters, were disbanded by order of Headquarters, Army Air Forces Eastern Flying Training Command. All personnel of both units were transferred to the jurisdiction of the 2121st Army Air Forces Base Unit (Emergency Rescue School [ERS]), which was established at Keesler Field under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Flying Training Command. The 2121st Base Unit was autonomous and operated independent of Keesler and Gulfport Fields, as a station of the Third Air Force. This arrangement, however, was not conducive to the effective and satisfactory completion of the 2121st Base

*An Act passed by Congress (put into effect on 11 March 1941) that empowered the President to provide war material, supplies and services to those countries whose defense he deemed vital to the defense of the US.

Unit's mission. The provisional status of the school continued until 9 June 1944, when an announcement confirmed that an ERS was established at Keesler Field under the control of the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, and the jurisdiction of the Commanding General, AAFTC.⁶⁷

This arrangement continued until the 2121st Base Unit was inactivated on 31 July 1944, when all equipment and personnel were transferred to the control of the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit. At the same time, the Army Air Forces ERS, formerly operated by the deactivated 2121st Base Unit, was transferred to the control of the Western Technical Command, Denver, Colorado. The transfer was accomplished without a change of station. Thereafter, Keesler Field was directly responsible for the administration and operation of the ERS. On 3 August 1944, Major Robert L. Rizon was assigned as director of air-sea rescue training.⁶⁸

The airplanes of the ERS were soon a familiar sight to Keesler military personnel. They were OA-10A's, the AAF designation for the Catalina flying boats. The ERS surface craft were power-packed, 63 and 85-foot, special-built emergency rescue boats. With the combination of air and surface craft based at Keesler Field, the AAF produced manpower for the broadest air-sea rescue program ever undertaken.⁶⁹

Airplane and boat crews received twelve weeks of individual training during which they learned small boat management at sea and during inclement weather. They were taught how to swim, row, sail, and improvise survival measures on the open water, and how to repair masts and sails in simulated shipwrecks without the use of tools. After they became proficient in the individual specialties, they boarded boats for six weeks of training as a complete crew.⁷⁰

Before they were assigned to the school, the OA-10A pilots received ten weeks of flying training at a special course conducted at the Pensacola Naval Air Station, Florida. Enlisted flight engineers also received six weeks of special training there. Other personnel came to the ERS directly from their AAF assignments.⁷¹

Upon graduation from the ERS, aircrews were assigned to various theatres of AAF operations. The Air Forces that operated in the Pacific war zone had already formed independent Air-Sea rescue Commands or Groups, i.e., the organization of the Fifth Air Force in the Southwest Pacific included a Bomber Command, Fighter Command, and Air-Sea Rescue Group.⁷²

The importance of the ERS mission stimulated a need for immediate expansion and a stepped-up training program at Keesler Field gave it high priority. The expanded program included:

1. Dredging of Back Bay to provide an adequate water landing area for flying boats.
2. Construction of a beaching ramp at Back Bay for flying boats.
3. Construction of squadron buildings to house two training squadrons.
4. Modifications to hangars that already housed many of the ERS office departments, classrooms and maintenance shops.
5. Construction of a parachute drying tower for the huge 45-foot parachutes used to drop the A-1 airborne lifeboats from B-17 Flying Fortresses.
6. Construction of range facilities for gunnery training, which included a skeet range.⁷³

The beaching ramp was sufficiently complete by 30 July 1945 to permit several landings and safe beaching of OA-10A aircraft in August. The balance of the construction project was seventy-five percent complete on 24 August 1945. All construction work, which included the new buildings for the ERS's ground training program then underway, ended when Japan surrendered.⁷⁴

The continuation of ERS training appeared highly uncertain after V-J Day. However, a telegram received on 21 August 1945 from the Commanding General of Western Technical Training Command directed all phases of the rescue training and redeployment programs to proceed. It was clearly evident, however, that much of the training would probably be curtailed a few weeks after the message was received.⁷⁵

CHAPTER III

ENTERTAINMENT

&



MORALE

Chapter III

ENTERTAINMENT AND MORALE

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS AT KEESLER

Special efforts made Christmas Eve, 1941, a memorable occasion for the men and women of Keesler Field. For many it was their first Christmas away from home. To enliven the holiday festivities, the athletic and recreation department arranged quality entertainment programs for the troops. Through an arrangement with the Works Program Administration (WPA) recreation project in Biloxi, many soldiers were invited by the citizens of Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, Bay St Louis, Handsboro, Lyman and Ocean Springs to spend Christmas in their homes. The children of officers stationed on the field attended a Christmas party at the Officers' Club. A large Christmas tree, provided by Louis Braun, Mayor of Biloxi, was decorated by the Military Maids, a Biloxi civic organization. It formed the center lighted area on the flight line's new aircraft warm-up apron, where another Christmas party was held. A holiday tableau was presented on a stage built for the occasion, with Chaplain Kenneth M. Gearhart as narrator. The Keesler Choir, directed by Chaplains A. A. J. Zellner and Ralph Osborn, led the gathering with Christmas carols. A dance followed on a 200 square foot section of the apron reserved for the event. To the enjoyment of the servicemen, several hundred young ladies from the surrounding communities were invited to the festivities.¹

Football was introduced to Keesler Field on Christmas Day, 1941, when the Keesler Eleven met the East All-Star team on the base parade grounds. The game was believed to be the first contest on any Army post during WW II by a team composed of college men. With only four days to train a football team to meet the All-Stars, 2Lt A. M. Klum (Assistant in the Athletic and Recreation Department) gathered the best players from various squadrons and prepared them for the event. There were approximately 800 spectators—officers and men—all of whom were impressed by the spirit and sportsmanship of the Keesler Eleven. The game lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes, and was played under intercollegiate football rules with the modification that no time out was allowed by either team except for injuries. The Eastern team was composed of some of the nation's most versatile football players: All-Americans Bruce Westfall of Michigan and Bill Dudley of Virginia (coached by Andy Kerr, Colgate); Bernie Bierman, Minnesota; and Dick Hanley, Northwestern. They scored seven touchdowns against the Keesler team which, though soundly beaten, won the praise of Quade Jones, Manager of the All-Stars. The strong support of Keesler personnel resulted in plans to organize a team for the fall of 1942, not only to play other service teams, but to meet the outstanding college football teams of the nation as well.²

AIR FORCE BAND

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Second Air Force Band, then known as the Air Force Band, had an authorized strength of twenty-eight men. It was composed of 1Lt Aubrey M. Foltz, Commanding Officer, the original cadre of three men, and other assigned personnel who were detailed on special duty from other squadrons. Although some instruments were received from the War Department, equipment was so scarce that until 9 January 1942 waste paper baskets were used as drums.³

Band members were obtained through voluntary application and selected primarily on the basis of their musical ability. Many of the musicians who were accepted had been associated with leading bands and orchestras.⁴

The bandleader selected a musician, other than the assistant bandleader, to act as drum major. He was chosen for his military bearing, knowledge of band formations and troop movements, skill with the baton, and the execution of signals. Bandsmen were authorized rank commensurate with their soldierly qualities and musical proficiency. Although their many musical activities often required them to work until midnight, the band members stood reveille, cleaned their barracks, policed the squadron area, and performed all the duties of a soldier in addition to their band assignments. The men were taught precision marching and facing and column movements for an hour each day. Unless called upon to perform at a musical function, they spent most of the day in practice and arranging at Recreation Hall No. 1.⁵

On 13 May 1942, an increase in band strength from twenty-eight to forty-eight men was authorized. On 1 June 1942, a twenty-eight-piece drum and bugle corps was formed by the drum major, Corporal William H. James. The Air Force Band was granted permission to increase its strength to seventy-nine men on 17 June 1942 and the authorized drum and bugle corps strength was established at thirty-one. On 17 June 1942, five bands, three dance orchestras, a polka and schottische* band, in addition to the drum and bugle corps, were active on Keesler Field. All had sprung directly from the Second Air Force Band and several of the members served in more than one of the smaller organizations.⁶

AL JOLSON AND ANN MILLER

Under the auspices of the United Service Organization (USO) Camp Shows Inc., Al Jolson, 53, who introduced "Mammy" to the world in "The Jazz Singer," the first talking picture produced in Hollywood, arrived in Biloxi on 31 January 1942, as the cinema city's ambassador of goodwill to Keesler Field.⁷

Jolson was accompanied by Capt John Carlton of the Fourth Corps Area Morale Section and Martin Fried, Jolson's manager for fifteen years. The Hollywood idol presented two complete "All-Jolson" shows.

Ann Miller, dancer of stage and screen, and Clarence Stroud, member of the Stroud Twins comedy team, together with the supporting troupe of "Happy Go Lucky," entertained capacity crowds at Keesler Field's Theater No. 1. The musical comedy revue was held on 2 February 1942 with attendance restricted to military personnel. Miss Miller donated her services to the USO Camp Shows Inc., entertainment program and Keesler Field was the second stop on her tour.⁹

BOB HOPE'S 'VICTORY CARAVAN' VISITS KEESLER

More than 10,000 air mechanics and soldiers stationed at Keesler Field crowded into one of the double hangars on 20 May 1942 to enjoy motion picture and radio comedians Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna, with Miss Frances Langford, radio and screen vocalist, in a special "Victory Caravan" show. The hundreds of soldiers who arrived before 1700 to see the show, which began at 2015 hours, formed one of the largest crowds ever assembled on the base. The Keesler appearance was part of Hope's coast-to-coast tour of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps camps.¹⁰

Hope and his troupe arrived at Keesler Field from New Orleans, Louisiana, in time to make a brief tour of the field before the show. The performers were amazed by the size of the base. They were accompanied on the tour by Capt Harry D. Kurtz, Public Relations Officer, who had arranged for the show with Robert Stephenson, Hope's manager.¹¹

Hope, already well known for his humorous interpretation of a soldier "Caught in the Draft," had the soldiers laughing for almost an hour with descriptions of his trips throughout the nation and the plight of civilians "caught in the sugar rationing program." He was at his best with his impromptu comic patter.¹²

The well-known Hope jokes, directed at his movie partner, Bing Crosby, were used during this program. Hope modestly described Crosby as a man "who has so much money stashed away that he doesn't pay income tax—he just asks the government how much it needs."¹³

Jerry Colonna sang several songs for which he was noted and Miss Langford won strong applause for her sentimental renditions of "You Made Me Love You" and "Night and Day." She was applauded to three encores.¹⁴

Shortly before the show, Hope was surprised to meet his nephew, Private Milton Hope. He grabbed Private Hope in his arms and gave him a bear hug, then turned to Frances Langford and Jerry Colonna and said, "Look, my nephew Milt!" The meeting occurred suddenly, because Hope, who had seen his nephew six weeks earlier in Cleveland, Ohio, had no idea he was in the Army—and did not expect to find him at Keesler Field. Private Hope

*A form of round dance in 2/4 time, similar to the polka but with a slower tempo.

waited inside the hanger's "stage door" and was immediately recognized by the visiting comedian when he stepped through the door.¹⁵

TRAPP FAMILY SINGERS

The Trapp Family appeared at Keesler Field on 7 February 1943 in one of more than a hundred concerts they performed during their fourth American tour. Under the auspices of the Special Services Department, they appeared at Theater No. 1 in a program of ancient, religious and folk melodies. With their recital of vocal music, they also presented various ensemble demonstrations with the recorder, spinet and viola da gamba. The singing members of the family were the Baroness von Trapp, her sons, Rupert and Werner, and daughters, Agatha, Joanna, Hedwig, Maria and Martina. They were accompanied by their Director, the Reverend Doctor Wasner. All had fled from the mountain country of Austria when Hitler invaded their homeland in 1938. They arrived in the United States in 1939.¹⁶

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION JOE LOUIS

To a capacity crowd in Hangar No. 5, Sgt Joe Louis, the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, appeared in a Keesler Field exhibition match on 21 December 1943. His sparring partner was First Sergeant George S. Nicholson, veteran New York heavyweight puncher. The exhibition also included a clash between two of the greatest welterweights of the era, Corporal Walker Smith (better known as Sugar Ray Robinson) and Private George J. (Jackie) Wilson. Wilson was the former World Welterweight champion and Robinson was listed as a title claimant. In addition, the Post Athletic Department staged four feature bouts to complete the ring card.¹⁷

Before the exhibition bout, the champion, with his entourage, visited the station hospital and addressed an overflow crowd in the Red Cross Recreation room. Later, he visited bed patients in three hospital wards.¹⁸

'KEESLER FIELD CALLING'

Keesler Field went on the air 7 May 1942 with the first of a series of 15-minute radio programs, titled: "Keesler Field Calling." The programs, broadcast weekly, were presented over station WGCM in Gulfport and featured vocal and instrumental selections by Keesler soldiers. The first presentation featured Shubert's "Ave Maria" by Private David Saxon, a violinist of the post Air Force Band. He was accompanied by Private First Class Harry Churchill, pianist, of the field entertainment staff. In recognition of Mother's Day, Private First Class William McMichael of the field entertainment staff sang, "Mother of Mine."¹⁹

Another broadcast called "Service with a Smile," made its debut three weeks after the start of "Keesler Field Calling." The broadcast originated from the Keesler Field service club on 21 May 1942 and was the first Keesler program broadcast directly from the field. A brief message from Colonel Goolrick, broadcast to counteract the enemy's propaganda efforts, paid tribute to those individuals fighting for truth on the airwaves. This was followed with Private Robert Michelson, who was in Belgium when the British evacuated the beaches at Dunkirk. He gave a graphic eyewitness account of the famous withdrawal.²⁰

Shortly after the first "Service with a Smile" broadcast over New Orleans radio station WWL, a national advertising agency informed WWL radio that they were already producing a program of the same name which was sponsored by a large candy company. The name of the Keesler program was changed to "Free for All," under which the program soon received national recognition. The series was received throughout the United States except for a few locations west of the Rocky Mountains.²¹

On 3 June 1942, more than a thousand officers and men attended the first performance of "Free for All," broadcast remotely from theater No. 1 over radio station WWL. The radio shows featured the Air Force Dance Band with several popular tunes, an impersonation of a short wave Berlin propaganda broadcast, an interview with three soldiers who escaped from German invasion forces, and a medley of songs from Jerome Kern's Broadway production of "Showboat."²³

Eleven days after the surrender of Japan, and after three and a half years of continuous broadcasting, "Free for All" presented its final radio show. Colonel T. S. Voss, Keesler Field's Commanding Officer, said in a letter to the general manager of radio station WWL that the "Free for All" program had been "of special service to the Army in general and to Keesler in particular." He concluded his comment with the statement that WWL had proved itself a friend of Keesler Field, and he thanked the radio station on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who passed through the base during the war.²³

SIMULATED RESCUE ON ARMY HOUR BROADCAST

The National Broadcasting Company's "Army Hour" was the first of a military-oriented series of network radio programs. The program on 18 March 1945 informed the nation of the AAFTC's activities at Keesler Field and was broadcast from the Keesler Field operations control tower. The scenario involved a staged emergency situation during which a simulated distress message was received from a crew adrift on a life raft. One of the announcers, flying overhead in a B-17, described how the survivors were found. He explained how a smoke bomb was dropped from the bomber to make certain of wind direction and how navigational computations pinpointed the crew and directed the rescue airplane to the life raft. Finally, the narrator described the release of a 27-foot boat, dropped from an altitude of 1500 feet, complete with its three 48-foot parachutes. Following the in-flight rescue description from the B-17, a second announcer in a launch on the Gulf of Mexico, followed the boat's descent. He explained how the parachutes acted as sea-anchors, and described the survival equipment carried in the rescue boat. After a brief conversation with the rescued men, the announcer summarized the vital part rescue squadrons played in the AAF mission.²⁵

SHIP ISLAND RECREATION

A health and recreation center was established on property owned by the US Public Health Service at Ship Island to expand the recreation facilities for Keesler Field personnel. The island, ten miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, was previously used as a Quarantine Station. A two-story headquarters building was erected there in 1901.²⁵

The recreation center began operation, for both commissioned and enlisted personnel, on 14 August 1944. The area was arranged in two sections with a large water tank as a dividing marker. Two buildings and the adjacent territory to the west of the water tank were reserved for commissioned personnel; two buildings and the surrounding area to the east were reserved for use by enlisted members.²⁶

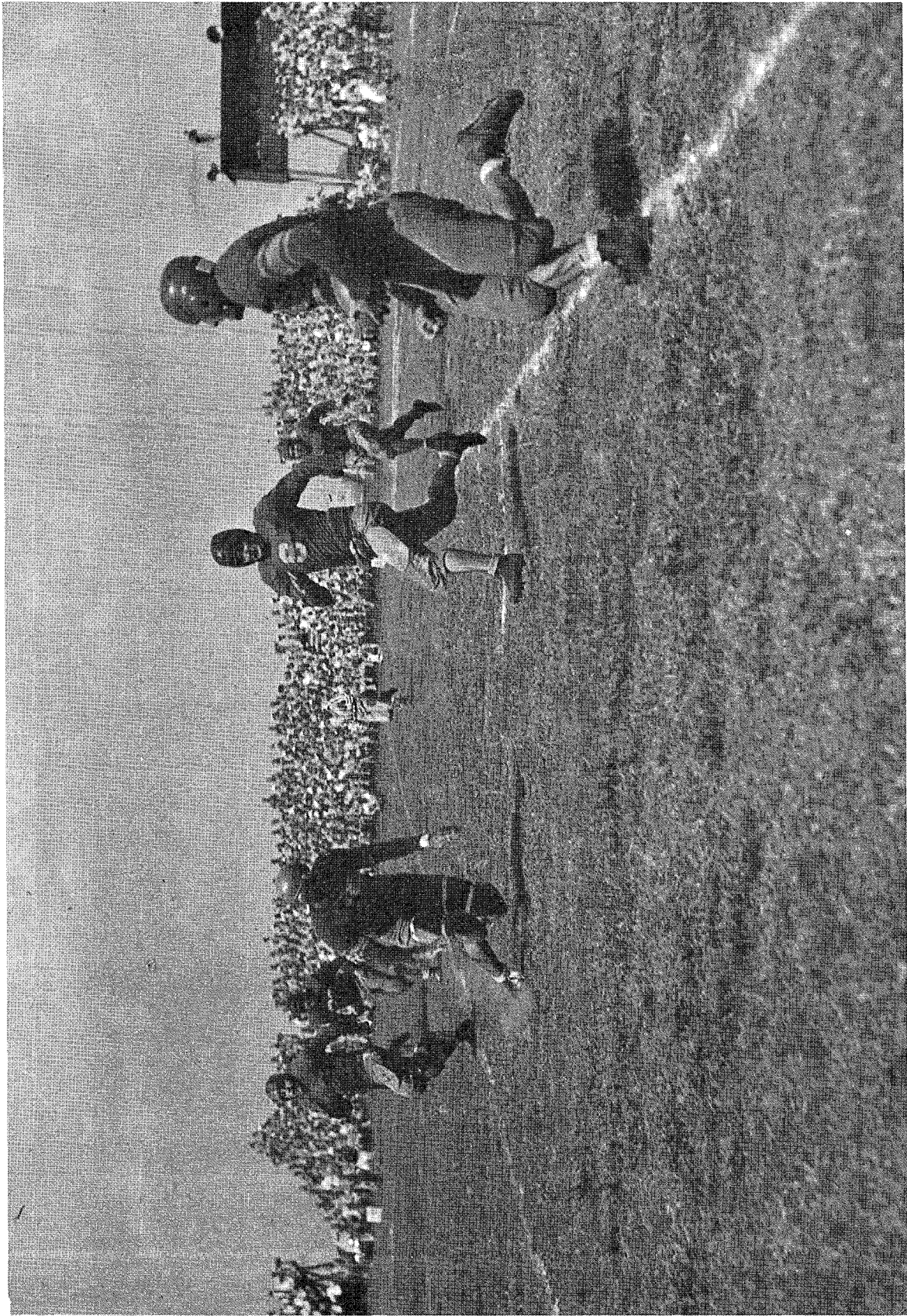
Each Keesler Field section was allotted two full days at the enlisted center once a month, during which sixty personnel were accommodated. A total of 1,320 enlisted personnel used the facilities every month, except when prevented by adverse weather.²⁷

Regulations and rules were kept to a minimum, and there were few requirements for visiting personnel to meet. A visiting soldier was required to bring one barracks bag, two sheets and one pillow case (because it was not feasible to issue them at the island), one blanket, a complete toilet kit, swimming trunks and a mosquito bar. Meals were served at scheduled times and there was a 2200 hours curfew.²⁸

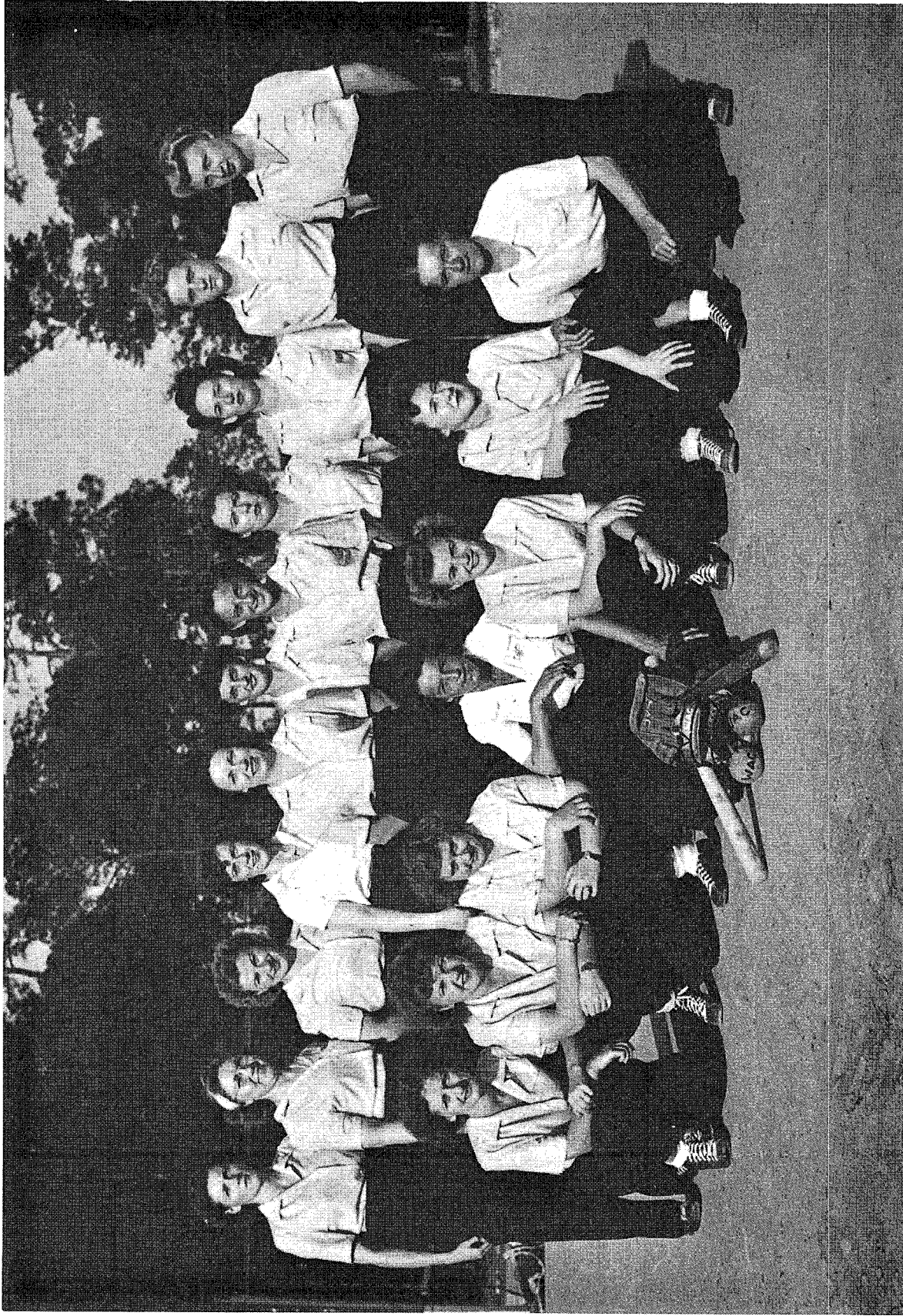
The area had a fine expanse of white sand beach for swimmers. Approximately forty skiffs were transferred from the Back Bay recreational site to the island for those who enjoyed fishing. The boat trip to and from the island required an hour and a half each way and was made on the *Volunteer*, a ferry that operated from the USO pier in Biloxi. Keesler's section commanders decided which men would be selected to visit the island. Their decisions were generally based on the soldier's military qualities and favorable service records.²⁹

DEDICATED MEN

The men of Keesler Field wrote an open letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was dated 17 December 1941 and appeared in the *Keesler News* and local papers. The letter summed up their resolute spirit. They wrote:



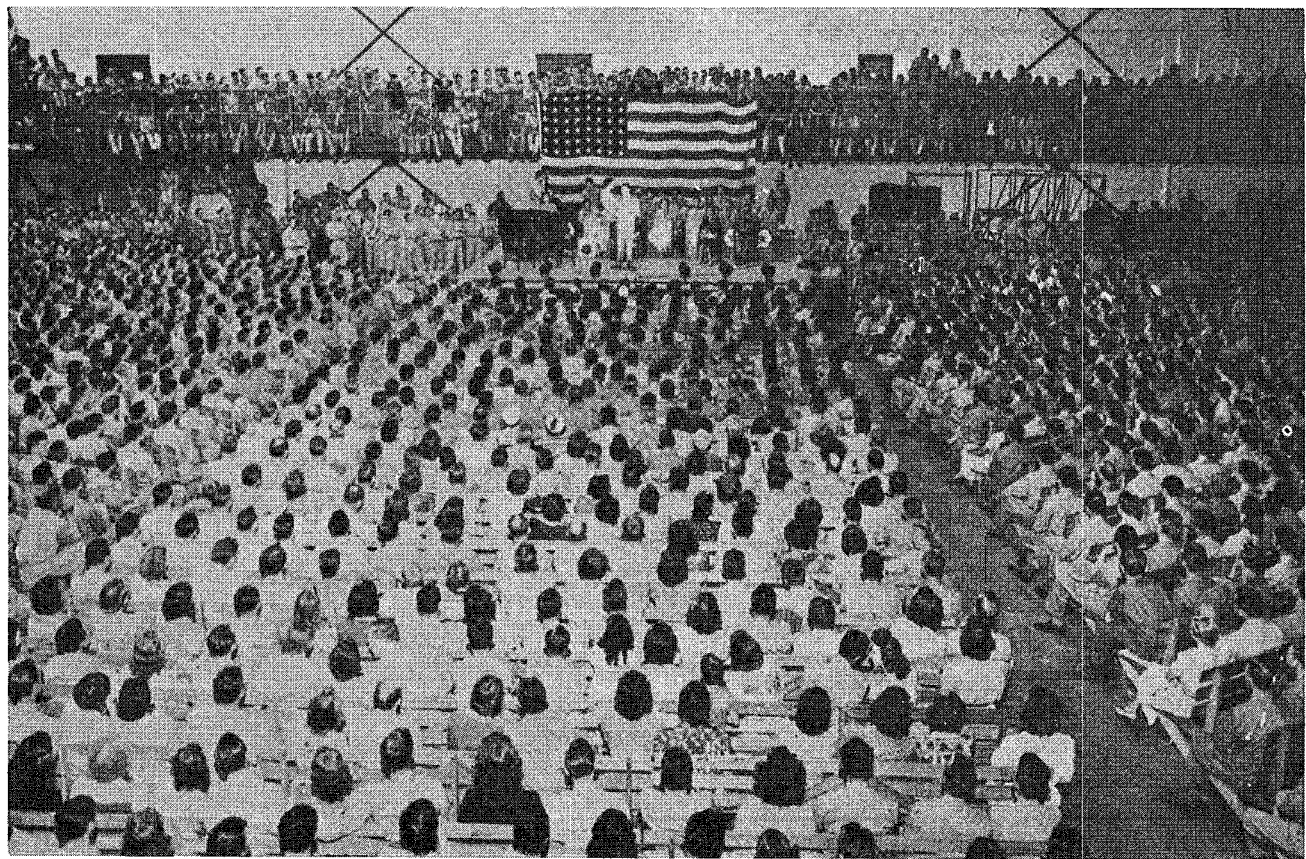
2nd Lt Earl Graves (Keesler Field) is about to take a player of the Algiers, Louisiana Naval Base team during the opening game on 24 September 1944. In the background are the north stands and the press box from which a play-by-play description of each game at Keesler Field was broadcast.



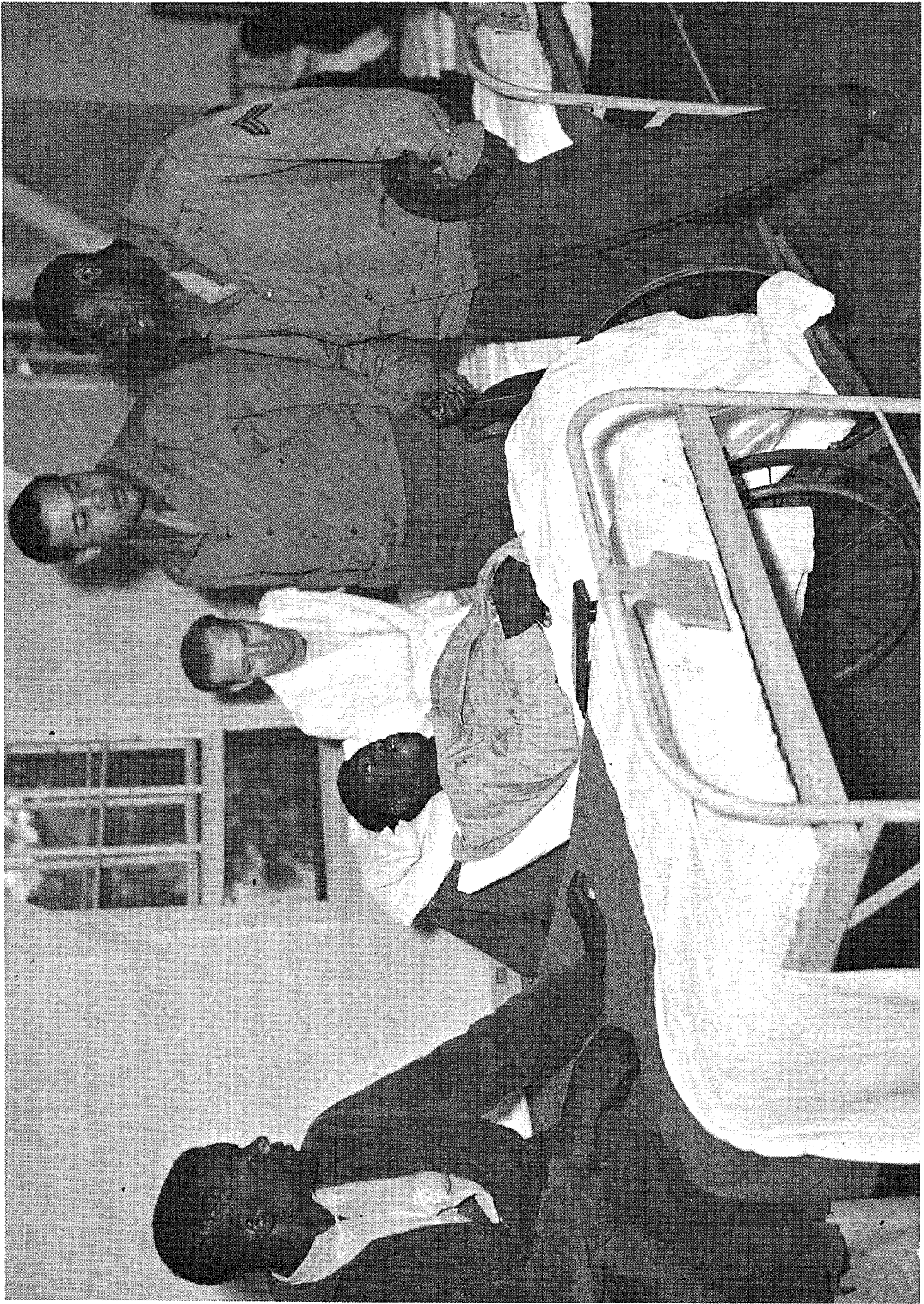
At no time in the history of Keesler Field was an athletic program carried on more extensively than during the first six months of 1945. The WAC softball team competed not only in a women's softball league but also played against male teams.



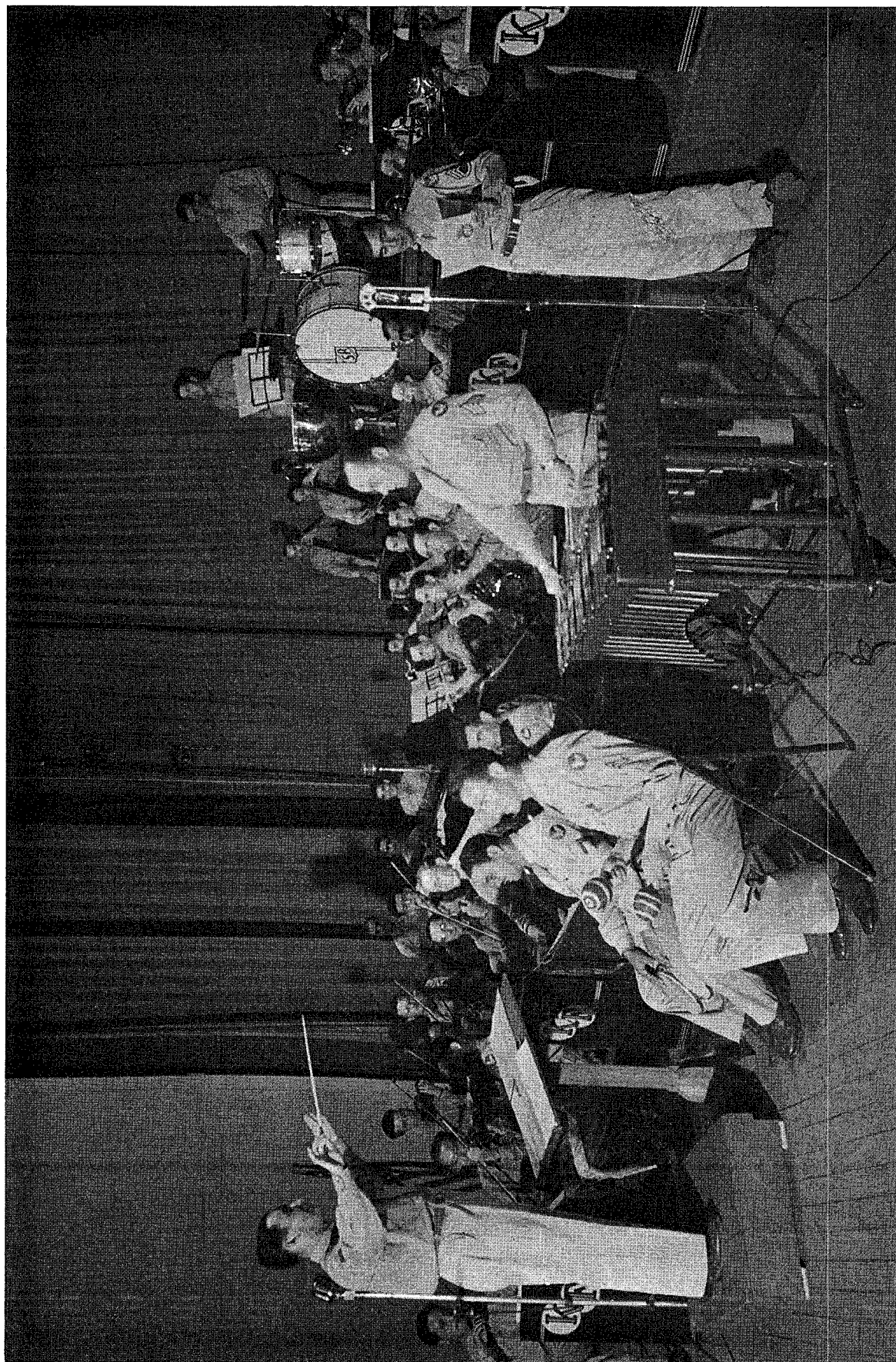
Dancer Ann Miller was one of the many top name performers to entertain Keesler soldiers.



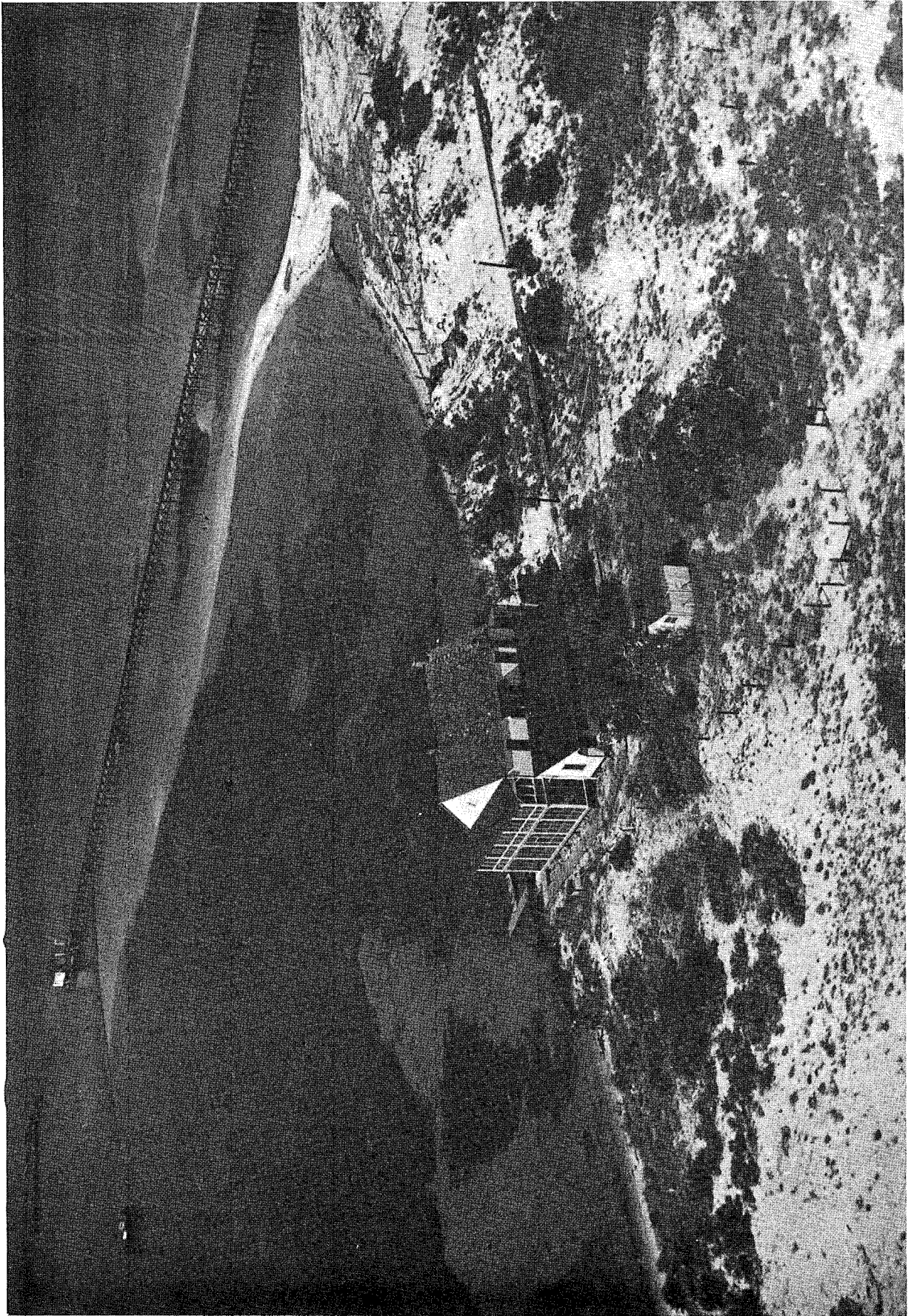
On 20 May 1942, Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, and Frances Langford gave a show before 10,000 men in a Keesler Field hangar.



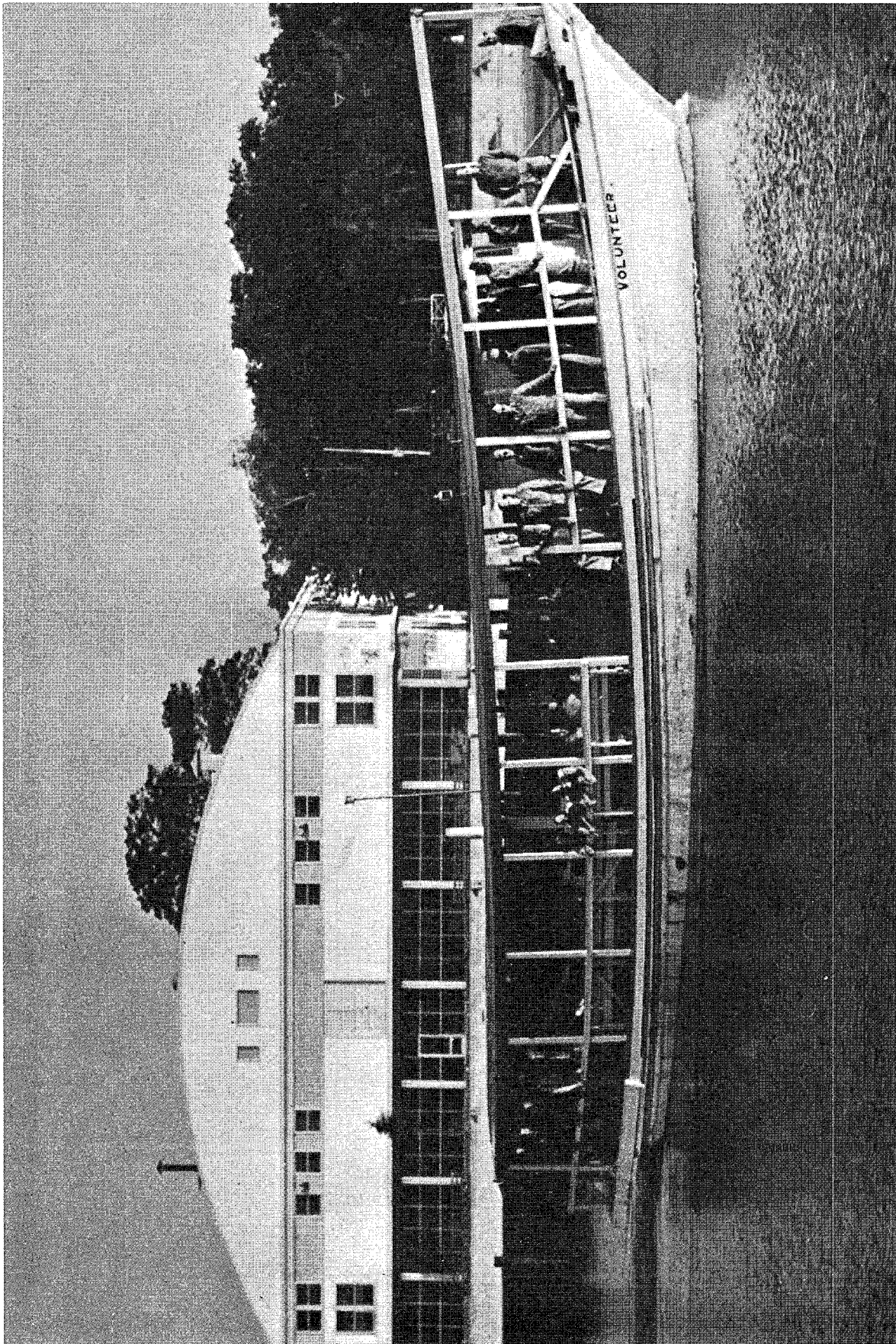
World's heavyweight boxing champion, Joe Louis (second from right), visited Keesler Hospital patients in 1943.



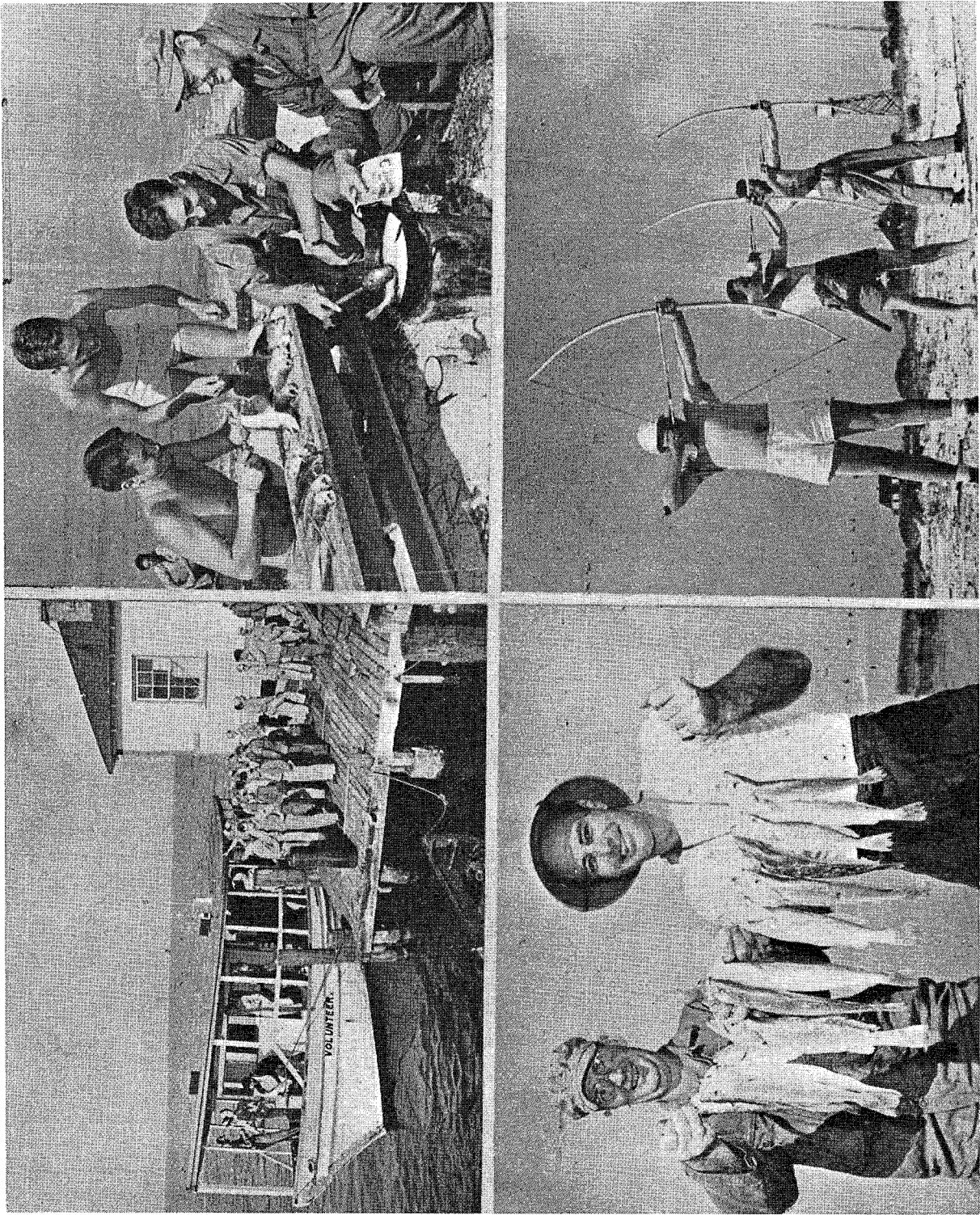
Probably the most widely known show of local origin was the Keesler radio program "Free for All." The musical extravaganza was carried over WWL, New Orleans, from the stage of Theatre 2 (later Andrews Theatre). Cpl Jack Pollack conducted the base band, and SSgt Don Barber was the announcer.



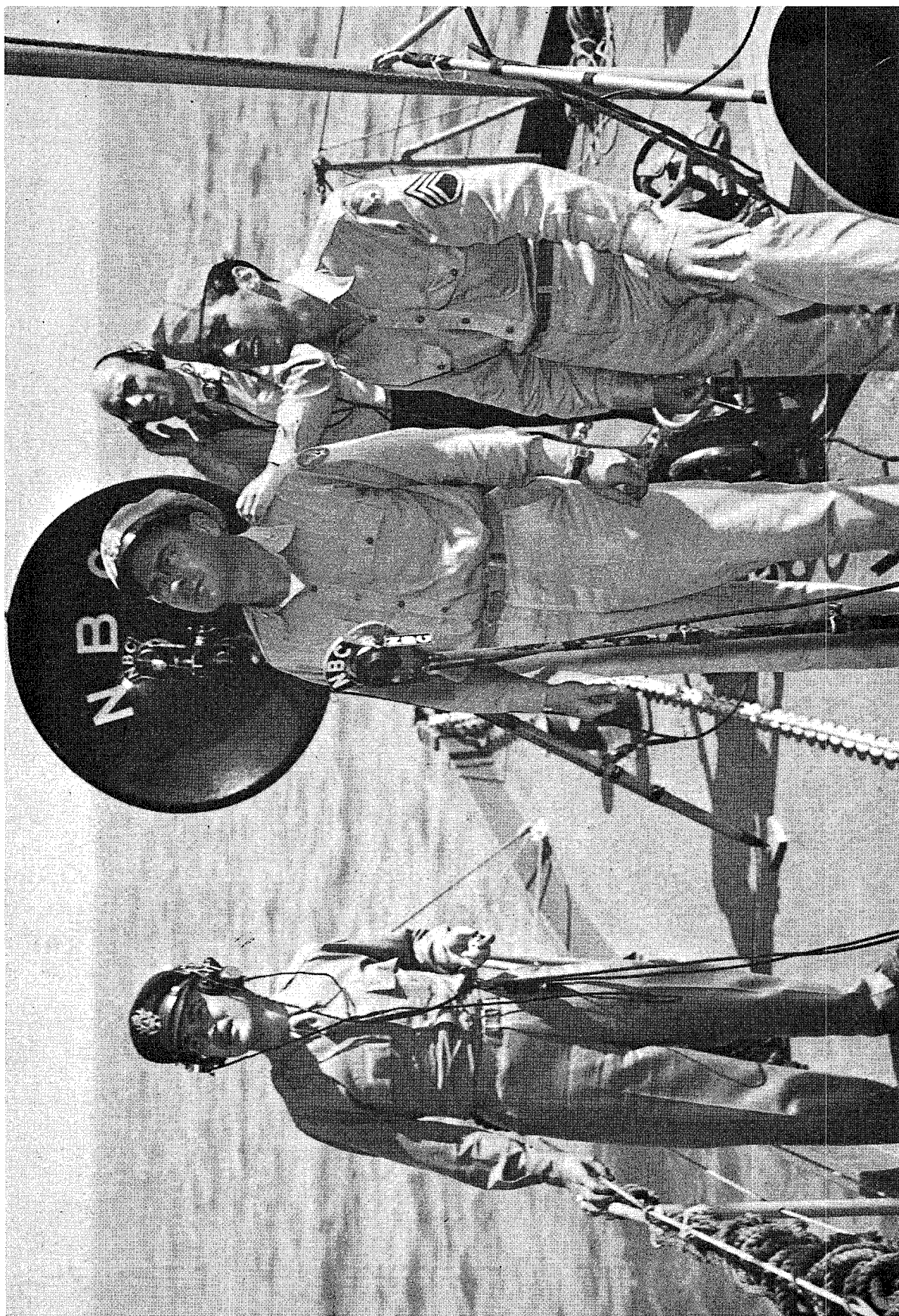
An aerial view of Ship Island two years before it opened as a recreational facility. The structure was the Quarantine Station that later became the recreational center for Keesler personnel.



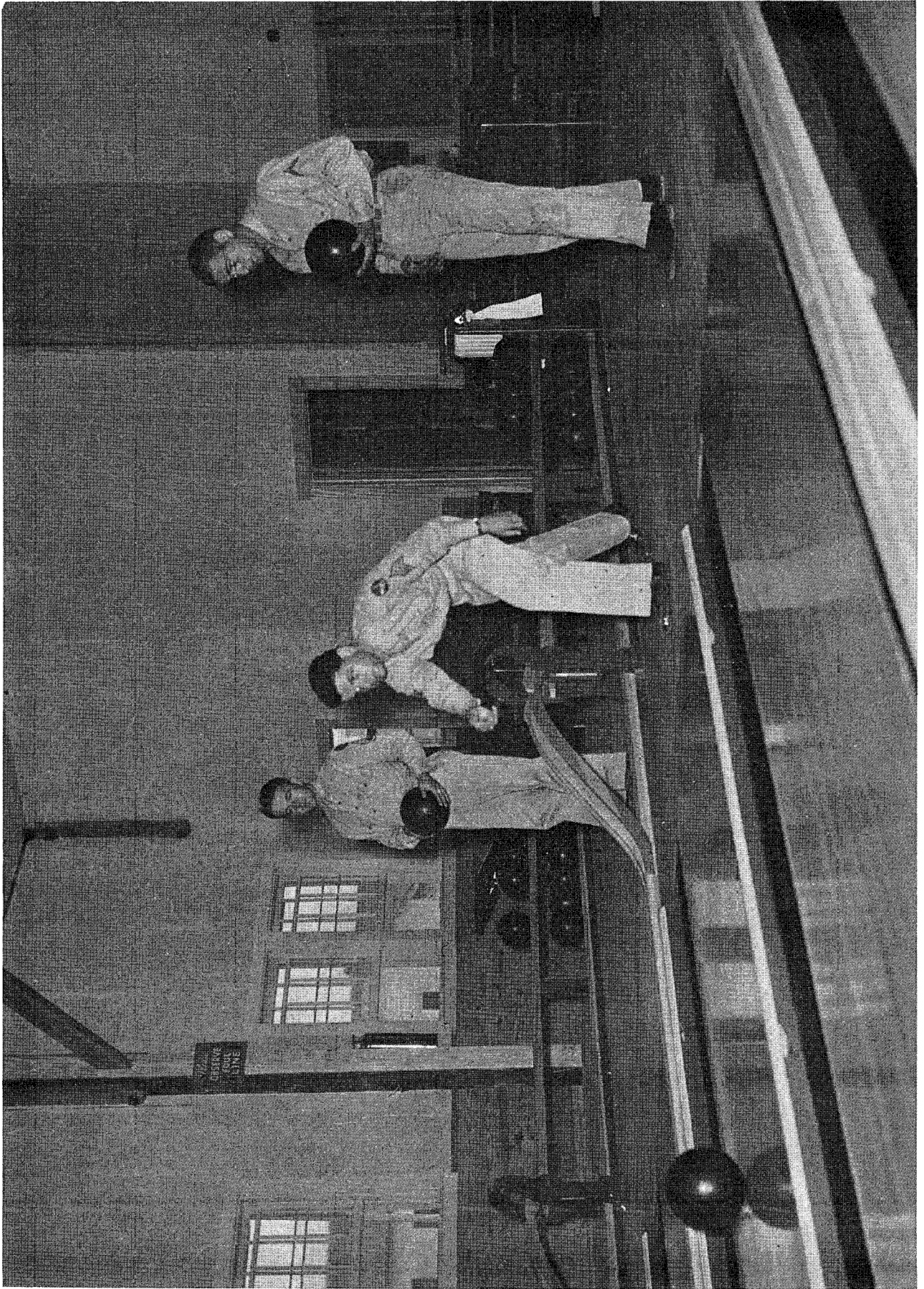
On 14 August 1944, a new recreational center was opened for use by the military personnel of Keesler Field. It was located on Ship Island, in the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 12 miles from Biloxi. The "Volunteer," a charter boat, shuttled military personnel from Biloxi to the island.



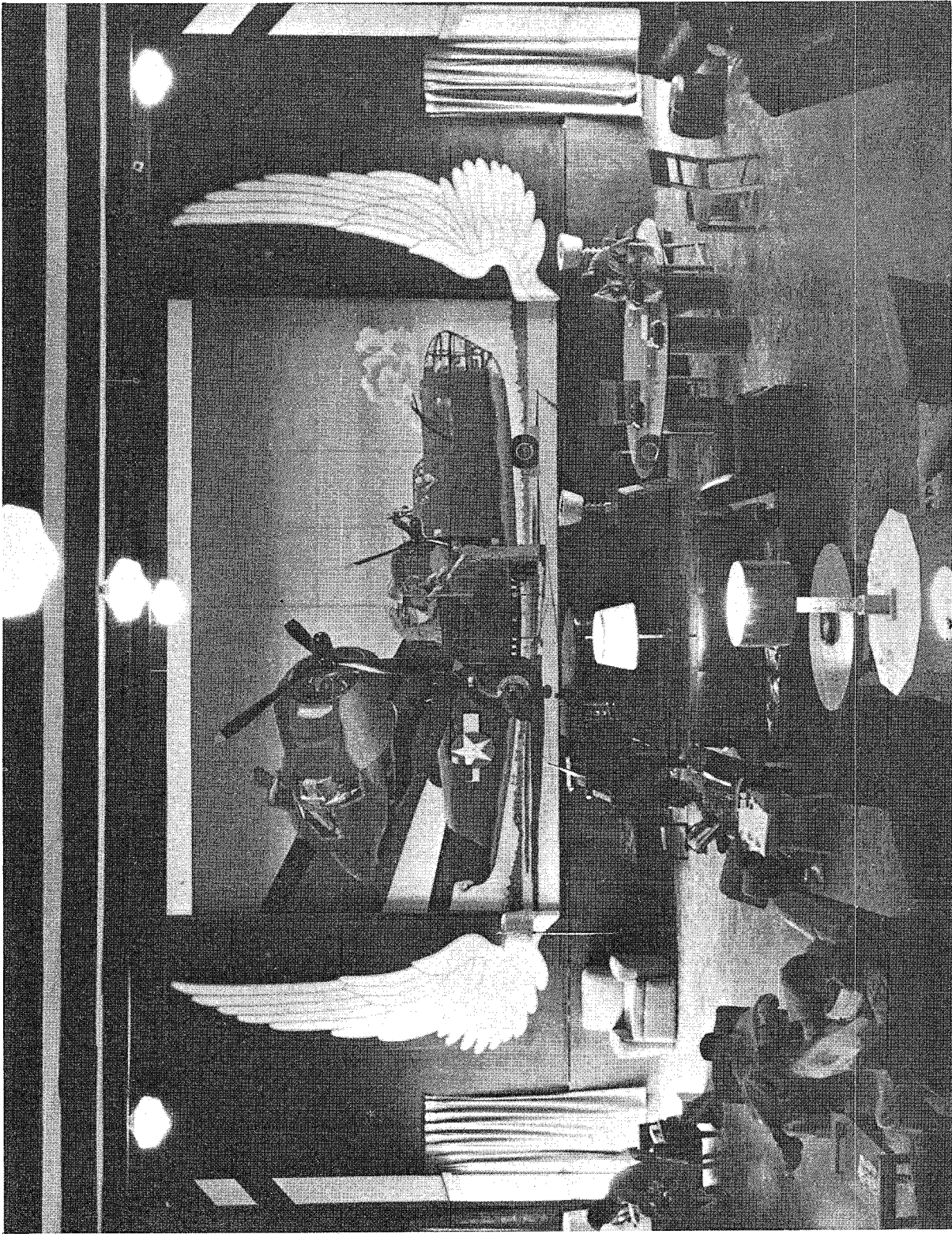
Fishing was the favorite sport at Keesler's Ship Island recreation Center although swimming and other outdoor activities had their ardent devotees.



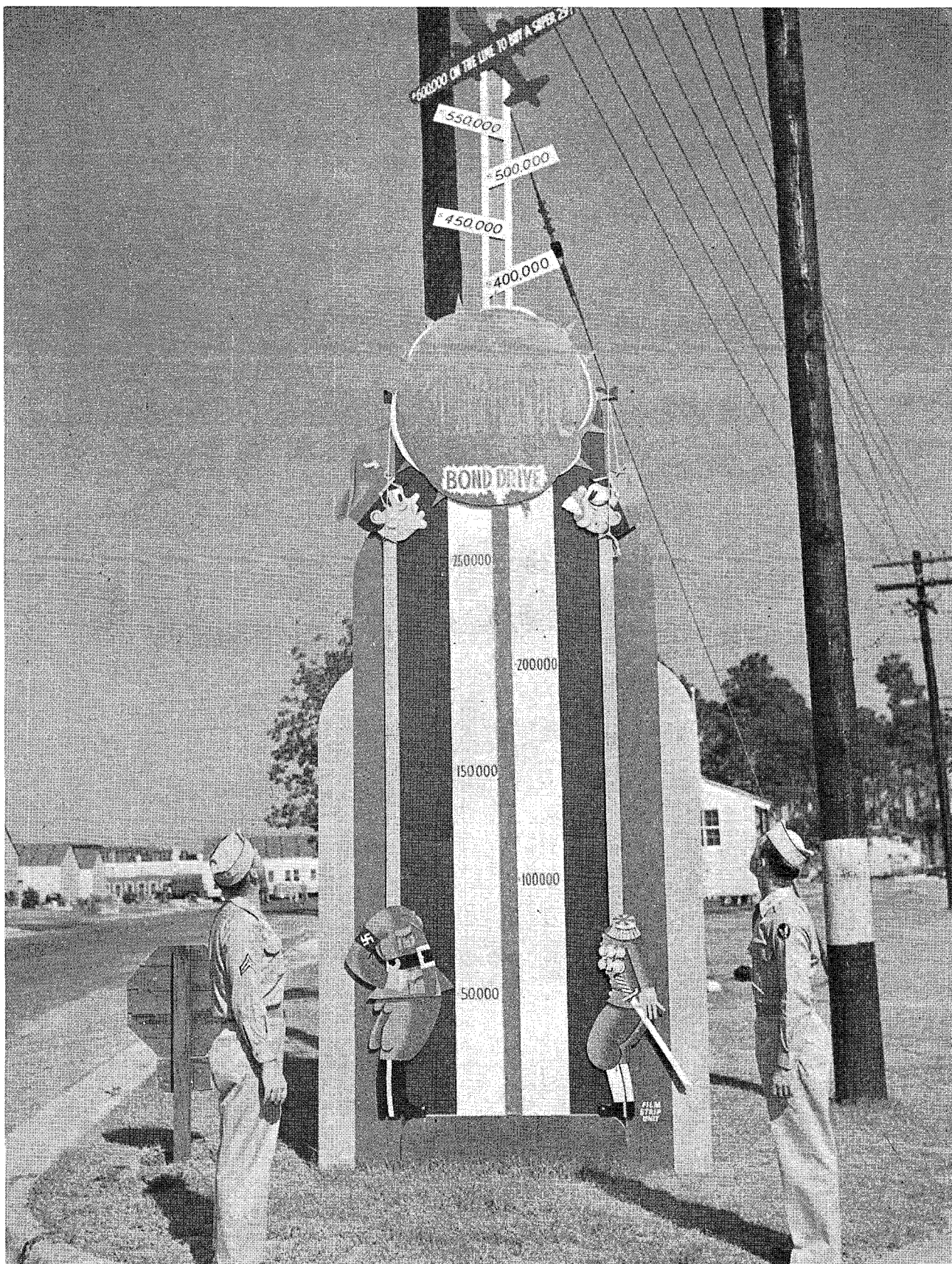
On 18 March 1945, the "Army Hour" broadcasted a simulated air-sea rescue operation. The parachute drop of the airborne lifeboat, "Yalta," in the Mississippi Sound was described during a nationwide broadcast over the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) network.



Keesler's first bowling alley opened in 1943.



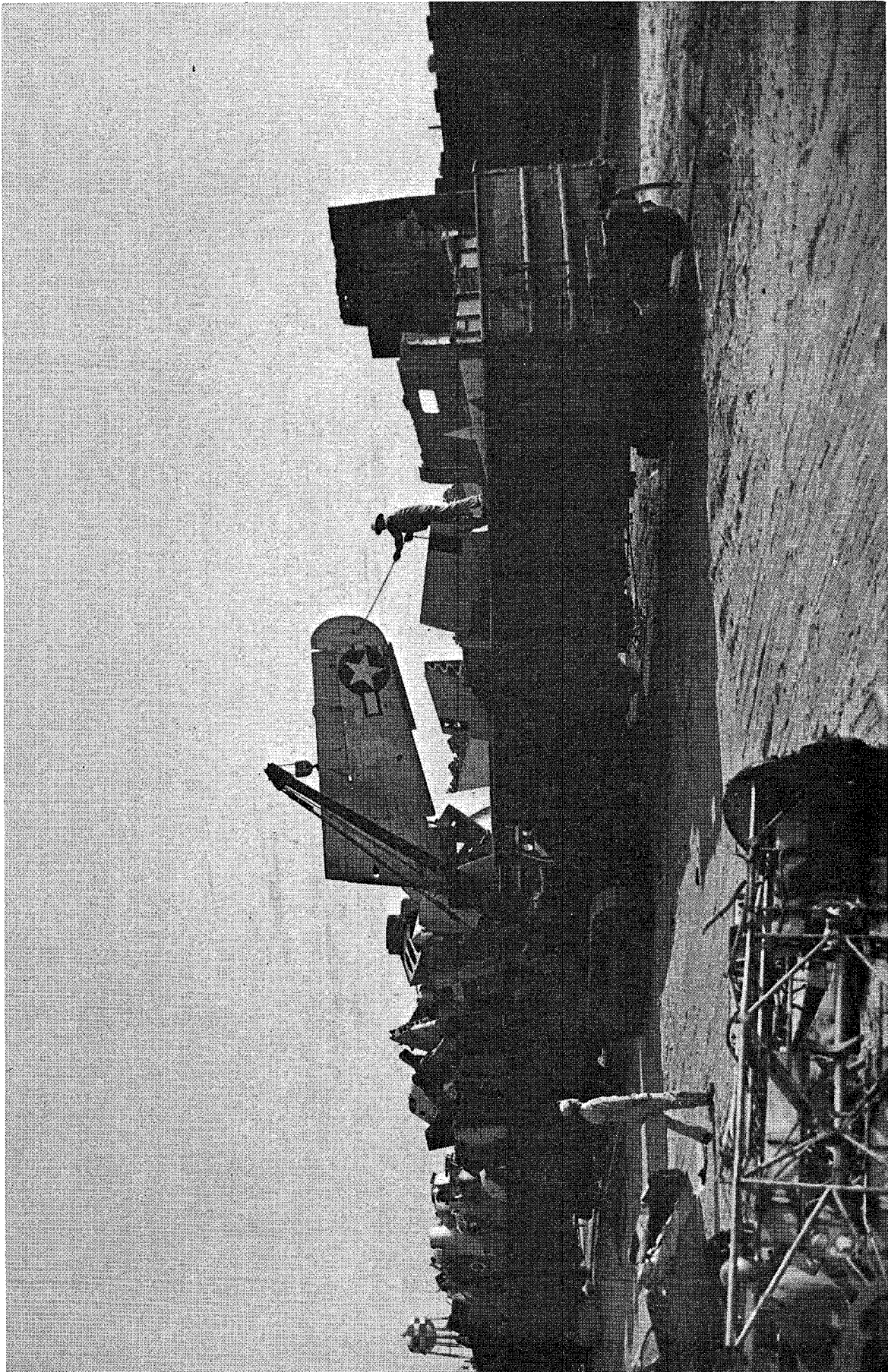
An example of the "soldier art" found in many of the recreational facilities on Keesler Field. The striking murals were painted by talented Keesler soldiers.



Keesler Field's Fifth War Bond Drive closed on 31 July 1944. Although the original quota was \$300,000, the amount subscribed was well over \$1,300,000. The Personal Affairs department directed the campaign and used this meter to measure the war bond purchases by Keesler personnel.



The amount of paper salvaged per week increased during the spring of 1945. Close attention was paid by all squadron commanders to the salvage operations of their units.



Throughout the war years, a consistent effort was maintained at Keesler Field to salvage all possible material. In one week, during the spring of 1945, eight railway cars were loaded with reclaimed materials. Three of these cars contained scrap aluminum.



An orientation map of the European and Mediterranean War theaters was painted on the waiting room wall of Keesler Field's classification interviewing section.

Dear Mr. President,

A lot of us, a year ago, might have done a lot of griping about service in the Army. We were slightly confused.

But we want you to know that December 8, 1941 is an important date to us.

Flag-waving, bands playing, the cheering of mobs and the enthusiasm of our friends. It is fine. We appreciate it all.

But we want you to know that we realize there's more to the service than that.

We are determined, we are down to earth, set for business. We want to do our part. And we will. Mr. President, we'll turn out the best Airplane Mechanics any field ever did at any time.

We also want to thank you sir, to a man, for the Selective Service Act. We thank God we have had training.

How well is remembered the year 1918.

We know that Private Joe, 1941 variety, has had complete training. He is ready, willing, eager for action to save this country which has opened its heart, its soul, its very life to us.

We are happy that Private Joe, 1941 variety, has an opportunity to earn a chance to prove his birthright.

We KNOW we'll win.³⁰

Theodore Bilbo, a US Senator from Mississippi, responded to the dedication expressed by the Keesler Field men. In a letter received by the *Keesler Field News* he wrote:

My dear Friends,

Your letter to President Roosevelt has just been received. You are 100 percent. More power to you!

Your spirit will whip the h___ out of Hitler, Mussolini and the dirty little Japs. I know you will stay on the job until the victory is won.³¹

EPIDEMICS

A scarlet fever epidemic began at Keesler Field on or about 1 December 1944. By 16 February 1945, seventy-nine cases had been admitted to the base hospital.³²

To compound the problems caused by the most serious scarlet fever cases, a streptococcal sore throat epidemic broke out in early February 1945. From its onset, the epidemic was highly serious. Forty-five men were admitted to the hospital during the week that began on 10 February. The following week, thirteen additional cases were admitted. From 24 February to 3 March, fifteen more men who suffered from the infection were admitted for hospital confinement.³³

On 3 March 1945, Keesler medical officers adopted—and stringently enforced—some precautions. All unseasoned incoming troops and enlisted reserve corps (ERC) personnel were placed in a working quarantine area during their entire Keesler training period (thirty-five days). During the quarantine period, the troops received a

daily physical inspection by a medical officer. All cases of upper respiratory infection were hospitalized. All mild catarrhal throat infections (simple red throat), without febrile* symptoms, were cultured. Positive infections were hospitalized. Wood floors of buildings occupied by troops or used as garrison assembly places were oiled. All blankets used by troops were treated with a special oil to reduce the spread of infection. All troops who departed the station were tested at least 48 hours prior to shipment. Those that tested negative were shipped; those that tested positive were held at Keesler subject to the direction of the station surgeon in charge of isolation. Steps were taken to eliminate unnecessary assemblies, and to properly ventilate the barracks and mess halls. Precautions were taken to prevent troops from becoming chilled during unseasonable weather. The spread of dust from sweepings was controlled.³⁴

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

The Keesler Field medical and legal department directed a firm and relentless program to control the spread of venereal disease among military personnel. It began during September 1944.³⁵

The venereal disease rate (as per 1000 troops per annum) increased from 17 in June 1944 to 21 in July, and to 28 in August. Medical officers indicated that while the increase could have been attributed, in part, to a seasonal trend and a change in the composition of personnel on station during those months, the venereal disease rate at Keesler Field rose noticeably above the average rate for the entire Western Technical Training Command. In July, the rate for the entire command was 18.9; in August it was 18.2.³⁷

Medical investigations revealed that a considerable number of the cases were contracted in the community. In August, 18 cases were contracted locally by white soldiers and 9 cases were contracted by black soldiers.³⁷

On 14 August, a representative of the Federal Social Security Agency (Vice Control Section) visited Keesler. The following day, in the office of the Mayor of Biloxi, the Biloxi chief of police assigned two plain clothes officers to vice control duty. The men were assisted by a vice operator from the United States Public Health Service and the Keesler military police. They were directed by the mayor and the chief of police to arrest prostitutes, street walkers and any women whose social behavior toward soldiers was questionable.³⁸

The provost marshal of Keesler Field reported that during the week prior to 19 August 1944 the Biloxi police arrested twenty women for prostitution. Approximately seventy-five percent of them were infected. The Keesler Field venereal disease control officer agreed to inform the Biloxi police as to the time and place sexual contact had occurred and data taken from the venereal disease case files were reported to him. As part of the active vice control program in Biloxi, Keesler Field headquarters directed all sections to make mechanical and chemical prophylactic kits available free of charge to enlisted personnel.³⁹

SURRENDER DAY PROGRAM

With the news of the Japanese surrender, a three-day celebration was declared for all field personnel. A special victory show, presented by professional entertainers, was held at Keesler's outdoor theater. Mobile entertainment units provided musical and comedy shows to all squadrons. Each master of ceremonies was assigned by the Special Services office. Free beer was provided for all military personnel and a special Surrender Dance was held in the NCO Club. Professional entertainers appeared in a floor show during intermission. Special Services estimated the quantity of free beer consumed on the field during the victory celebration was equal to one days' output of a large brewery.⁴⁰

MORALE DIFFICULTIES

Shortly after the end of the war, the personnel services officer judged the morale of Keesler Field personnel to be very low. The first widespread national newspaper publicity about the separation of military personnel led men to believe they were qualified for separation and would soon return home. As a result, most personnel lost interest in their work. To compound the problem, an additional workload was placed on permanent party enlisted

*Of, or characterized by fever.

personnel because of the manpower shortage. This factor, coupled with the widespread newspaper publicity on separations, caused difficulties in personnel management.⁴¹

A second factor in the reduced morale was the expansion plan for off-duty entertainment and athletic programs. More of this was planned because of the end of hostilities. Unfortunately, however, the number of men assigned to the personnel services department was markedly reduced during this adjustment period. The unexpected reduction in the services department, instead of an expected expansion, tended to diminish troop morale.⁴²

The third factor that affected morale was a universal view among the men that their continued training was no longer required. This opinion was especially strong among technical school students. During late August 1945, the combined effect of these factors reduced the morale of Keesler Field personnel to a seriously low point.⁴³

EPILOGUE

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced America into World War II as a nation seriously unprepared for global conflict. With victory somewhere in the future, dozens of army camps and air bases throughout the United States were rushed to completion. At Keesler Field, 11,000 soldiers were already in training at the still unfinished military base. The installation expanded steadily throughout the war years until, on V-J Day, its population exceeded 34,000 soldiers and civilians. Those who saw the humble beginning of "Air Corps Station No. 8," and sensed it was destined to play a major role in America's war effort, saw the vision fulfilled. Throughout the world, where heavy bombers took the war to the enemy, thousands of Keesler-trained mechanics were there to "keep 'em flying." But, although Americans everywhere breathed a sigh of relief when the war ended, Keesler mechanic trainees were unable to lay down their wrenches. It would take months for the complete transition from war to peace. Then too, Keesler was destined to remain a permanent part of America's military defense. Few realized then that the Army air base would soon become part of an autonomous air force, and change its mission to one that would usher a new concept into military tactics—electronic warfare.

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**FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER I**

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37. See note above.

38. Ltr, Office of Provost Marshal, Keesler Field to Commanding Officer, Keesler Field, subj: Venereal Disease Problem in Biloxi MS, 19 Aug 44; *History of Keesler Field*, 1 Sep 44 - 31 Oct 44, pp 212-314; Sanitary reports, Station Surgeon to Commanding Officer, Keesler Field, Sep - Oct 44.

39. See note above.

40. *History of Keesler Field*, 1 Jul 45 - 31 Aug 45, p 162.

41. *History of Keesler Field*, 1 Jul 45 - 31 Aug 45, pp 166-167.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

APPENDIX I
KEESLER FIELD COMMANDERS

Arthur W. Brock, Jr.

Date of Birth: Unknown
 Place of Birth: Ingersol, Canada
 Date of Death: 16 September 1961; Fort Wayne, Indiana

Education: University of Michigan, 1914
 Officers Training Camp, 1917
 Air Corps Engineering School, 1923
 Observation Course, Advanced Flying School, 1928
 Army Industrial College, 1934

Entered Service: 1914

Commissions:	2Lt	November 1917
	1Lt	Unknown
	Capt	Unknown
	Maj	Unknown
	Lt Col	November 1940
	Col	Jul 1941

Assignments:	1914-1915	Captain of Co. 1, New Mexico National Guard.
	1916-1917	With General Pershing in Mexico as Commanding Officer of Truck Train No. 45.
	Nov 1917	Officer Training Camp, Leon Springs, Texas.
	1918	Gerstner Field, Lake Charles, Louisiana; Commandant of Flying Cadets.
	1919-1922	McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio, Finance Officer and Adjutant.
	1922-1923	Air Corps Engineering School.
	1923-1927	Washington, D.C., Budget Officer and Chief of Finance Section.
	1928-1930	Graduated Advanced Flying School Kelly Field, Texas, transferred Camp Nichols, Manila to command the 29th Bombardment Squadron.
	1930-1934	Returned to Washington as Executive of Buildings and Grounds Division.
	1934-1939	Graduated from Army Industrial College, transferred to Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, Adjutant and Assistant Executive of Material Division.
	Jul 1939-Jun 1941	Executive Officer to Brigadier General Rush B. Lincoln, Chanute Field, Illinois.
	Jul 1941-15 Apr 1942	Commander, Keesler Field, Mississippi.
	May 1941-Retirement	Place unknown.

Robert E. M. Goolrick

Date of Birth: 9 June 1886
 Place of Birth: Fredericksburg, Virginia
 Date of Death: 13 November 1946; Biloxi, Mississippi

Education: Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1907
 Air Service Primary Flying School, 1921
 Air Service Observation School, 1921
 Air Corps Tactical School, 1927

Entered Service: 5 October 1908

Commissions:	2Lt	5 October 1908
	1Lt	2 December 1910
	Capt	1 July 1916
	Maj	1 July 1920
	Lt Col	24 May 1933
	Col	1 December 1927

Assignments:	Oct 1908-Jul 1920	Coast Artillery Corps.
	Oct 1917-Jan 1919	Served in France commanding 1st Anti-Aircraft Artillery.
	Jul 1920-Mar 1921	Air Service Primary Flying School, Carlstrom Field, Arcadia, Florida.
	Apr 1921-Dec 1921	Air Service Observation School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.
	Jan 1922-Jul 1923	Commander, Air Service Troops, Pope Field, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.
	Aug 1923-Sep 1926	Assigned 17th Composite Group, Wheeler Field, Hawaii.
	Oct 1926-Jun 1927	Air Corps Tactical School, Langley Field, Virginia.
	Jul 1927-Jul 1928	Additional courses at Command and Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.
	Jul 1928-Jul 1931	Commanding Officer, 2nd Cavalry Division Aviation, Fort Riley, Kansas.
	Aug 1931-May 1935	Commander, Wright Field, Ohio.
	Jun 1935-Jul 1938	Wing Executive Officer and Commander, Barksdale Field, Louisiana.
	Aug 1938-Nov 1939	Air Officer, Fifth Corps Area, Fort Hayes, Ohio.
	Dec 1939-Jul 1940	Commander, Moffett Field, California.
	Aug 1940-Feb 1942	Commander, Air Corps troops, Fort Lewis, Washington.
	Apr 1942-Apr 1945	Commander, Keesler Field, Mississippi.
	May 1945	Transferred 78th Training Wing, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, San Antonio, Texas. Retired Coral Gables, Florida.

Thomas S. Voss

Date of Birth: 11 Dec 1892
 Place of Birth: Walnut Cove, North Carolina
 Date of Death: 10 October 1948

Education: Graduated Walnut Cove High School, 1911

Entered Service: 1911

Commissions:	2Lt	30 June 1917
	1Lt	15 January 1918
	Capt	23 September 1918
	Maj	August 1934
	Lt Col	8 August 1936
	Col	16 November 1940
Assignments:	Jan 1918	Duty at Kelly Field, Texas; Mather Field, California, as executive officer; Langley Field, Virginia, as adjutant.
	1923-1926	Commanding Officer, 24th Pursuit Squadron.
	1926-1928	Instructor, organized reserves, at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
	1928-1931	Assistant Commandant, Air Corps Technical School, Chanute Field.
	Early 1931-1931	Instructor, Indiana National Guard, Air Corps, Indianapolis.
	1931-1935	Commanding Officer, 40th Bombardment Squadron, Kelly Field, Texas.
	1936-1938	Commander, 6th Composite Group, Nichols Field, Philippines.
	1939-1940	Executive Officer, Maxwell Field, Alabama.
	Sep 1940-Sep 1943	Commanding Officer, Orlando Air Base, Florida, 25th Air Base Group.
	Sep 1943-Feb 1945	Commanding Officer, First Advanced Air Depot Area Command, British Isles.
	Feb 1945-Apr 1945	Orlando Redistribution Center.
	1 May 1945-2 Oct 1945	Keesler Field Commander — then retirement.

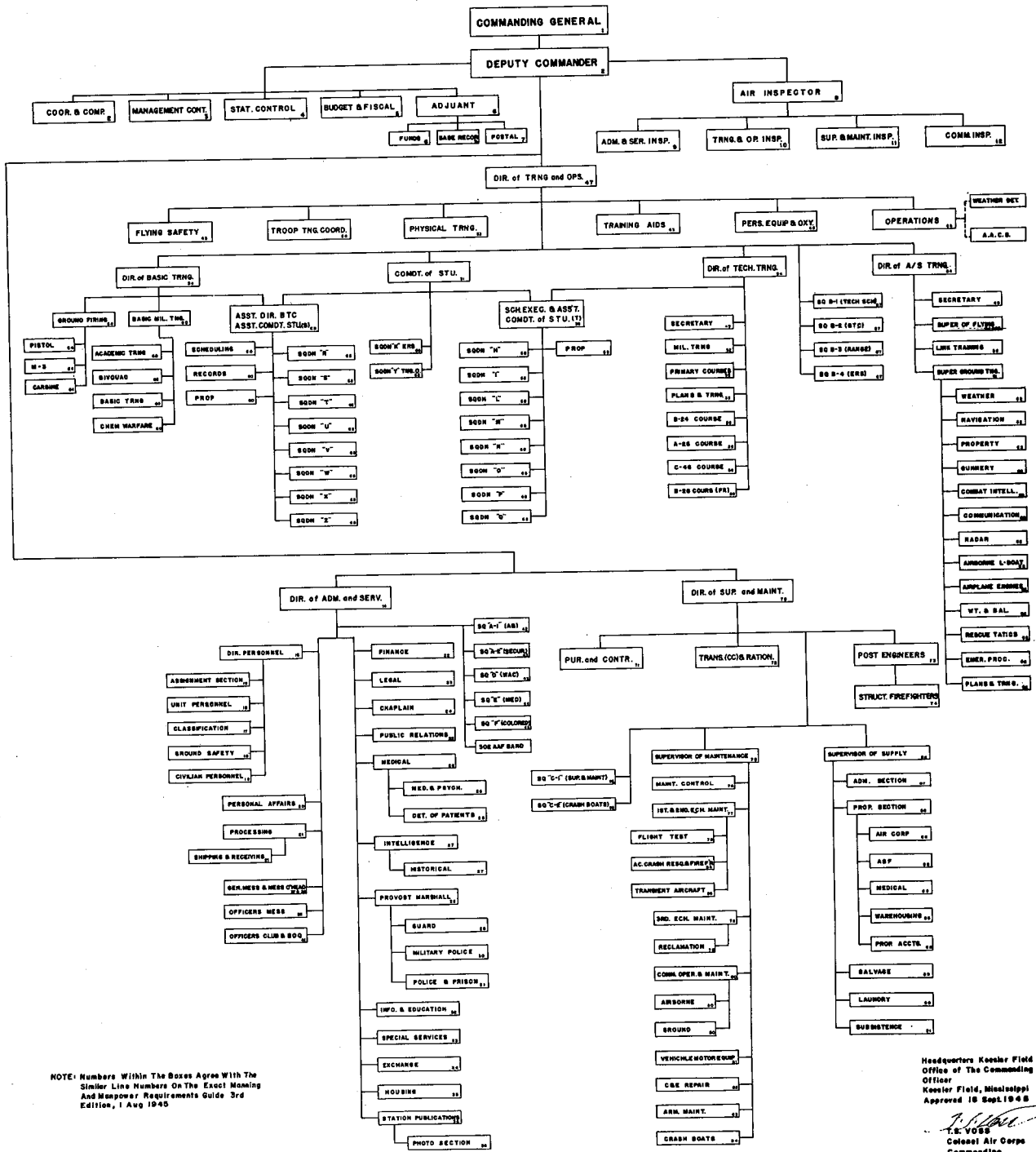
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APPENDIX II

KEESLER FIELD FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION CHART



APPENDIX III

TOTAL MILITARY STRENGTH FIGURES DECEMBER 1941 TO AUGUST 1945

December	1941	18,347	January	1944	30,503
January	1942	22,619	February	1944	29,306
February	1942	25,127	March	1944	27,788
March	1942	30,274	April	1944	28,420
April	1942	27,454	May	1944	32,058
May	1942	30,315	June	1944	30,828
June	1942	38,355	July	1944	25,164
July	1942	38,813	August	1944	20,671
August	1942	29,551	September	1944	21,747
September	1942	32,161	October	1944	18,719
October	1942	26,133	November	1944	21,002
November	1942	25,711	December	1944	23,218
December	1942	26,885			
January	1943	26,565	January	1945	26,880
February	1943	38,143	February	1945	31,110
March	1943	41,145	March	1945	33,408
April	1943	39,646	April	1945	29,936
May	1943	32,770	May	1945	25,102
June	1943	31,078	June	1945	26,239
July	1943	38,300	July	1945	31,362
August	1943	37,468	August	1945	32,400
September	1943	36,396			
October	1943	37,782			
November	1943	37,529			
December	1943	34,147			

CIVILIAN PERSONNEL STRENGTH FIGURES

December	1941	389	September	1944	2,316
January	1942	600	October	1944	2,256
October	1942	582	November	1944	2,224
December	1942	2,048	December	1944	2,200
July	1943	2,322	January	1945	2,163
January	1944	2,391	February	1945	2,181
February	1944	2,389	March	1945	2,172
March	1944	2,354	April	1945	2,103
April	1944	2,572	May	1945	2,082
May	1944	2,522	June	1945	2,027
June	1944	2,392	July	1945	2,040
July	1944	2,323	August	1945	2,050
August	1944	2,316			

APPENDIX III (Con't)

FOREIGN STUDENTS

April	1944	241
May	1944	272
June	1944	283
July	1944	262
August	1944	150
September	1944	94
October	1944	134
November	1944	135

December	1944	155
March	1945	92
April	1945	130
May	1945	145
June	1945	145
July	1945	246
August	1945	218

Source: Keesler Field Histories, 1941-1945

APPENDIX IV
Major Construction on Keesler Field 1942 - 1943

Project	Est Cost	Work Started	Completed	Contractor
Construction of 2000-man mess hall and bowling alleys	109,601.00	6 Apr 42	21 Jul 42	Stanley W. Newman Co., New York, New York
Construction of gas instruction building	4,000.00	20 Aug 42	15 Sep 42	Stanley W. Newman Co., New York, New York
Construction of runways and taxiways	1,129,475.35	13 Apr 42	31 Jul 42	C. C. Moore Const Co., Panama City, Florida
Construction of compass swinging base	14,100.00	4 Sep 42	15 Sep 42	C. C. Moore Const Co., Panama City, Florida
Surfacing of streets	21,947.00	21 Apr 42	31 May 42	Barber Bros Co., Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Installation of ventilation fans in nine 2000-man mess halls	3,78.00	5 May 42	5 Jun 42	Sears Roebuck & Co., Gulfport, Mississippi
Construction of laundry	168,393.58	8 May 42	3 Aug 42	F. L. Sray Const Co., Mobile, Alabama
Construction of extension to warm-up apron	204,690.55	12 May 42	31 Oct 42	Barber Bros Co., Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Construction of AC oil storage and distribution system	27,685.36	21 May 42	19 Aug 42	Dye & Mullings, Columbia, Mississippi
Additional temporary construction and air base defense troop housing	1,071,699.25	13 Jun 42	22 Sep 42	Plowder & Roberts, Columbia, South Carolina
Relocation of power line	30,983.75	29 Jun 42	27 Aug 42	Brignae-Bun Electric Co., New Orleans, Louisiana
Expansion to sewage treatment plant	234,580.00	29 Jun 42	5 Jan 43	Capital Const. Co., Atlanta, Georgia
Construction of base engineering shop	154,739.01	30 Jun 42	30 Nov 42	Henry A. Ivey, Decatur, Georgia
Construction of one academic building	142,150.00	3 Sep 42	5 Jan 43	Henry A. Ivey, Decatur, Georgia
Aircraft engine operations building	213,921.00	29 Sep 42	15 Jan 43	Henry A. Ivey, Decatur, Georgia
Conversion of tent camp	346,708.00	21 Oct 42	30 Jan 43	Perry-Flint Const Co., Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Construction of housing, messing and recreational facilities for WAACs	75,055.14	22 Oct 42	29 Mar 43	Henry A. Ivey, Decatur, Georgia
Addition to present AC gas distribution system	9,100.00	2 Nov 42	31 Dec 42	Aqua System Inc; New York, New York
Night lighting	14,235.00	10 Nov 42	15 Jan 43	J. R. Hime, Electric Co., Palm Beach, Florida
Electrical work for hutments	6,206.00	2 Dec 42	20 Jan 43	Airways Elec Inc., Decatur, Georgia
Construction of one academic building	73,892.49	22 Dec 42	28 Feb 43	Stanley W. Newman Co., New York, New York

Source: History of Keesler Field, 15 December 1943

APPENDIX V OTHER TRAINING ACTIVITIES

BASE WEATHER SCHOOL

A Base Weather School for the training of weather observers was activated at Keesler Field on 1 March 1942. Instructors and students were on detached service from the Fourth Weather Squadron, Maxwell Field, Alabama. On an average, eight weeks of training were required to complete the course. During the latter part of the course, students spent a short orientation period in the base weather station.

RADIO OPERATOR SCHOOL

A Radio Operators school was opened in the post communications office at Keesler Field in May 1942, under the direction of a detachment from the Fourth Airways Command, Maxwell Field, Alabama. The length of the basic radio operators school term was 15 weeks and the advanced radio operators school course lasted 4 to 6 weeks, depending on the extent of the students' previous experience and training.

COOKS AND BAKERS SCHOOL

The Cooks and Bakers School at Keesler Field, organized by the Fourth Service Command, opened 23 December 1941. The first class numbered 100 men in the 3-month course. Post graduate courses were also given for butchers and bakers.

APPENDIX VI
AAFTC
Morale Singing Program
Keesler Field Songbook
July 1943

Foreword

To the Men of Keesler Field:

This book was prepared with the thought in mind that "A Singing Army is a Winning Army!" Music has been a motivating force to winning armies down through the pages of history, and will continue to herald victories forever.

Nothing could be more pertinent or more appropriate to the foreword of such a book as this than the words of President Roosevelt himself: "The inspiration of great music can help inspire a fervor for the spiritual values of life and thus strengthen democracy against those forces which would subjugate and enthrall mankind. Because music knows no barriers of languages; because it recognizes no impediment to free intercommunication; because it speaks a universal tongue, music can make us all more vividly aware of that common humanity which is ours and which shall one day unite the nations of the world in one great brotherhood."

Songs of an inspiring nature have been included in this book as an aid to the men who came to and go from Keesler Field. Sing, men, as you march, work and fly.

Colonel Robert E. M. Goolrick
Commanding Officer
Keesler Field, Mississippi

THE ARMY AIR CORPS SONG

Verse:

Here's a toast to the host of those who
 love the vastness of the sky;
 To a friend we will send a message of
 his brother men who fly.
 We drink to those who gave their all of old.
 Then down we roar to score the rainbow's
 pot of gold.
 A toast to the host of men who boast,
 the Army Air Corps.

Chorus:

Off we go into the wild blue yonder,
 Climbing high into the sun;
 Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,
 At 'em boys, give 'er the gun!
 Down we dive spouting our flame from under
 Off with one helluva roar!
 We live in fame or go down in flame; Hey!
 Nothing will stop the Army Air Corps!

REVEILLE

Oh, how I hate to get up in the morning,
 Oh, how I like to remain in bed.
 But the hardest part of all
 Is to hear the bugler call:
 You gotta get up! You gotta get up!
 You gotta get up this morning.

Someday I'm going to murder the bugler.
 Someday they are going to find him dead.
 I'll amputate his Reveille and step upon
 him heavily
 And spend the rest of my life in bed.

GLOSSARY

AAF	Army Air Force
AAFTC	Army Air Force Training Command
AAFTTC	Army Air Force Technical Training Command
ABG	Air Base Group
AC	Aircraft
AMS	Airplane Mechanics School
BOQ	Bachelor Officers Quarters
BTC	Basic Training Center
CWS	Chemical Warfare Service
D-Day	A day established to launch an operation; specifically June 6, 1944, at which time the Allies began the invasion of Europe during WWII.
EM	Enlisted members
ERC	Enlisted reserve corps
ERS	Emergency Rescue School
ETO	European Theater of Operations
KP	Kitchen Police
LST	Landing Ship Tank
MP	Military Police
NAS	Naval Air Station
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
PX	Post Exchange
TTS	Technical School Squadron
USO	United Service Organization
V-E Day	Victory over Europe – 8 May 1945
V-J Day	Victory over Japan – 14 August 1945
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
WAC	Women's Army Corps
WPA	Works Program Administration

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The principal sources of information used to research and write this monograph were: unit histories of Keesler Field, June 1941 to September 1945; microfilm files, *Biloxi Daily Herald*; Keesler Field publications and pamphlets, *The US Army in World War II – The Technical Services: Corps of Engineers and Organizing for War*; *History of the Chemical Warfare Service in World War II*, 1 July 1940 to 15 August 1945; Newsletters: Puka-Puka Parade, January to April 1980; archival materials, James Stevens, President of the Mississippi Historical Society; and letters of John Borelli. Interviews with Howard M. Blomberg, Richard E. Florea, Col (Ret) James W. Lovell, USA; Torrance Sneed, Lewis A. Rotundo, and Maurus Elder were of special value.

