

Leslie MacDill

(1889-1938)



Who was MacDill?

Leslie MacDill was an early pioneer in American military aviation, a veteran of World War I, and an Army air officer who distinguished himself in aviation development during peace time in the 1920s. He rose to the rank of colonel after becoming a member of the War Department general staff in 1935. Widely known and respected in the Air Corps, he died in a plane crash in 1938 in Washington, D.C. The Army Air Corps honored him in December 1939 by changing the name of a new base under construction near Tampa, Florida from Southeast Air Base to MacDill Field.



U.S. Enters
World War I

1916

Overseas Assignment: (Jan 1916 to May 1917)
Assigned to the 2nd Aero Squadron, on duty in the
Philippine Islands.



MacDill's passport
to Philippines

1917

Promotion: Captain in May 1917.

Prelude: Returned to the U.S. from the
Philippines, and was placed on temporary duty in
the Office of Chief Signal Officer, Washington, D.C.

American Expeditionary Forces: MacDill
organized the "Italian detachment" of American
aviation cadets who had volunteered to fight in
Europe; formed at Mineola, Long Island, N.Y. in
August 1917. Originally bound for Italy, problems
involving the unit's final destination forced him and
his unit to split up after their ship arrived in
England in October 1917. The aviators remained in
England, while MacDill went on to France. He
eventually filled a staff position as a materiel officer
for approximately seven months with the American
Expeditionary Forces before being reassigned.



MacDill in France
during World War I.

WWI ends
with Armistice

1918

World War I: MacDill commanded the aerial
gunnery school at St. Jean de Monts, France. His
responsibilities included building and organizing
the school, which taught weaponry of various
aircraft, including the Nieuport and Sopwith Camel
biplane fighters. He oversaw the school's
operations from May 1918 through the war's end.



Commander of
aerial gunnery at
St. Jean de Monts, France

Air Service
established in
Defense Act

1920

Post War: After returning home from Europe in
Feb 1919, he was assigned to the office of the
Director of Air Service in Washington, D.C. From
July-Sept 1920, he also served as a member of the
Air Service advisory board.

M.I.T.: He enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute
of Technology for Aeronautical Engineering in
1920 and received a Doctor of Science degree in
June 1922.



Promotion: Major in July 1920.

Coolidge becomes 30th President

Mitchell Trial begins in Washington, D.C.

Hoover elected 31st President

1922

Midwest Tour of Duty: In 1922, MacDill began an intermittent eight-year period of duty in the Dayton, Ohio area. He started as the assistant to the commanding officer at McCook Field, Ohio, which in the 1920s was the center for U.S. military aviation research and development.

Wedding: (Aug 1922) Married Marilla Augusta in Nova Scotia, Canada.



McCook Field, Ohio

1923

Chief Engineer: In June 1923, MacDill became the chief of the Engineering Division at McCook Field. During this time, he held this position – except for a few periods – until 1929.



Wind Tunnel from McCook Field

1925

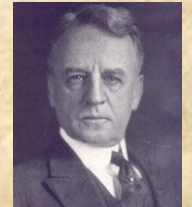
Morrow Board: (Sept to Nov) MacDill served as a technical adviser for the President's Aircraft Board, also known as the Morrow Board, in Washington, D.C. President Calvin Coolidge had created the board to reshape aviation policy and minimize the public and political damage created by the trial of General Billy Mitchell, who had publicly pressed for an independent air force. The Morrow Board began hearings on Sept 21, 1925 and produced their final report by the end of November. The board advocated the establishment of an Air Corps within the Army and a five-year program of major expansion for the Air Corps.



Trial of General Billy Mitchell

1926

Experimental Engineer: MacDill became the chief of the Experimental Engineering Section. His work included research and development work. The types of equipment ranged from airplanes, engines, propellers, armament, instruments, cameras, radio equipment, and engine accessories.



Dwight W. Morrow

1927
1928

Wright Field: In 1927, he assumed an additional duty as chief of the Procurement Section when the Engineering Division (later re-designated as the Materiel Division) moved from McCook Field to the new Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio.

From 1928 to summer 1930, MacDill held several executive posts simultaneously at Wright Field. By 1928, his position titles included base commander.



Major MacDill



Wright Field, Ohio

Stock Market
Crash ignites
Great Depression

1929
1930

Chief of Air Corps Office: (Sept 2, 1930)
MacDill reported for duty in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps (Major General James Fechet) in Washington, D.C.



Chief of Air Corps
Major General
James Fechet

Roosevelt
elected
32nd President

1932
1933

More Aircraft: (May 1933) MacDill was loaned to the War Plans Division to assist Air Corps efforts to press Congress for more aircraft. He helped produce a proposal that would have completed a five-year plan to expand the Army Air Corps at \$42 million. In the end, President Roosevelt, unconvinced, approved only \$15 million for military aviation, to be split, equally between the Army and the Navy. In 1939, FDR changed course.



MacDill in later years

1934

War College I: (Fall 1933 to June 1934)
Attended Army War College in Washington, D.C.

1935

War College II: (Fall 1934 to June 1935)
Attended Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island.



Naval War College

Roosevelt wins
2nd term as
President

1936

Promotion: Lieutenant Colonel in Aug 1935.

Promotion: Colonel in Aug 1936.

1938

Death: (Nov 9, 1938) Piloting a basic combat training plane (BC-1) Colonel MacDill crashed three minutes after takeoff from Bolling Field, on a Washington, D.C. street. Both the Colonel, and the mechanic aboard with him, Private Joseph G. Gloxner, perished in the crash. Engine failure was assessed as the cause of the accident.

Funeral: (Nov 12, 1938) Funeral services were conducted for Colonel MacDill. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. His final resting place was next to Major General Oscar Westover, Chief of the Air Corps from 1935 until his death in 1938, also from a plane crash.



MacDill plane crash site in
Washington, D.C. in 1938

FDR calls for
expansion of
air services

Aftermath: (Nov 14, 1938) Ironically, five days after MacDill's death, the overall effort to improve the Air Corps – to which he had contributed – began to develop. At a secret meeting in the White House, President Roosevelt outlined a new program to his top military brass. He surprised those present by speaking in terms of a major expansion for the Air Corps. Major General Henry H. Arnold later described the event as a “Magna Carta” for the air service.



Leslie MacDill's gravesite
in Arlington National
Cemetery.

**World War II
begins for U.S.**



1938

New Base: (Nov 30, 1938) Secretary of War Harry Woodring announced the selection of MacDill's name by a board of Air Corps officers, for the future air base under construction in Tampa, Florida.



Official portrait of Colonel MacDill.

1941

MacDill Field: (Apr 16, 1941) The Army Air Corps dedicated its new base in Tampa as MacDill Field. Among the honored guests are Colonel MacDill's family: his wife, Marilla Augusta; older daughter, Katherine Rose; a younger daughter, Rose; and brother, Wilfred E. MacDill from Monmouth, Illinois.



MacDill family at base dedication in 1941.

War Games and War: (Dec 1-3, 1941) The new MacDill Field hosted a major war game exercise that featured a large-scale air raid and an amphibious assault. Four days later, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, launching the U.S. into World War II. During this time, MacDill Field became a primary base for training the crews of bomber planes, primarily the B-17 and B-26.



Aerial gunnery training at MacDill Field during World War II.