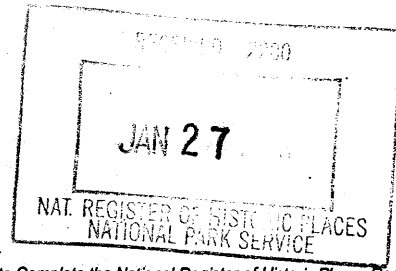


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Fairmont Army Airfield
Other names/site number FM00-028

2. Location

Street & number _____ Not for publication
City or town Fairmont Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Fillmore Code 059 Zip code 68354

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Lawrence Sommer 1/21/03
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 see continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 see continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 3.11.03

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Fairmont Army Air Field

Name of Property

Fillmore, Nebraska

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
6	6	Buildings
1		Sites
8	5	Structures
1		Objects
16	11	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DEFENSE-air facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION-air related

AGRICULTURE-agricultural field/storage

COMMERCE/TRADE-business

DOMESTIC-single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER-aircraft hangars

OTHER-runways & taxiways

OTHER-apron

OTHER-water tower

OTHER-oil storage and pump house

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Concrete

Walls asbestos, concrete, brick

Roof Metal, asphalt

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B Removed from its original location.
C A birthplace or a grave.
D A cemetery.
E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F A commemorative property.
G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
Previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
Designated a National Historic Landmark
Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MILITARY

Period of Significance

1942-1945

Significant Dates

1942

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Primary location for additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local Government
University
X Other
Name of repository: Fillmore County Historical Society

Fairmont Army Air Field

Name of Property

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property @ 1,827

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	14	618840	4494740	C	14	621360	4495600
B	14	620320	4495580	D	14	621360	4495000

[x] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See attached map

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bill Callahan

organization Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

date 10/22/02

street & number 1500 R Street, Box 82554

telephone 402/471-4788

city or town Lincoln

state NE

zip code 68501-2554

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Nebraska Department of Aeronautics, et al (see continuation sheet)

street & number 3431 Aviation Rd. Ste. 150 (and see cont. sheet)

telephone 402/471-2371

city or town Lincoln

state NE

zip code 68501-2088

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Fairmont Army Air Field

Name of Property

Fillmore, Nebraska

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The Fairmont Army Air Field is located in north-central Fillmore county Nebraska (2000 Pop. 6,634), approximately two miles south of Fairmont and three miles northeast of Geneva, the Fillmore county seat. Fillmore county is located in southeast Nebraska approximately sixty miles west and south of the state capital, Lincoln. This part of Nebraska is characterized by flat, relatively treeless plains, and the landscape is dominated by row-crop agriculture.

When constructed, the Fairmont Army Airfield was approximately 1,877 irregularly shaped acres, carved out of what were once agricultural fields. The nominated property is approximately 1,827 irregularly shaped acres (see USGS map). Roughly five-hundred acres of the 1,827 are occupied by all of the contributing and non-contributing buildings, structures and an object, as well as the intervening ground between extant structures. This intervening ground, combined with the greater than 1,300 remaining acres historically associated with the Fairmont Army Airfield is considered a contributing site.

Approximately 50 acres of the most northeastern portion of the historic Airfield have been excluded from this nomination. This area is occupied by a number of non-historic agricultural and related structures. This nomination does not include four relatively minor buildings formerly associated with the airfield which are located within the excluded approximately 50 acre area. These buildings have all been physically altered or have deteriorated beyond recognition and have also been separated visually from the core of the airfield by modern intrusions.

Excluding the aforementioned approximately 50 acres, the boundary of the nominated property coincides with the irregularly-shaped boundary of the historic Fairmont Army Air Field. Although the boundaries are very irregular, the westernmost boundary follows U.S. Highway 81 (which in this area is located on a section line) for one mile and the easternmost boundary, precisely two miles east of U.S. 81, follows a section-line county road for just over one mile. The most northern and most southern boundaries are on half-section lines precisely two miles apart.

The nominated portion of the former Airfield consists of six contributing buildings: one small oil-storage building, one small pump house and four very large World War Two (hereinafter WWII) bomber aircraft hangars; one contributing object: a fire hydrant; eight contributing structures consisting of three runways, two taxiways, two aprons and a water tower; and one contributing site: the historically open ground surrounding the extant facility and including the area between runways and taxiways. The contributing site also includes a contiguous, approximately twenty-acre area containing a number of ruins and foundations centered around the water tower. With the exception of the area containing the water tower and foundations, the remainder of the contributing site is currently in row-crop agricultural use or grassy areas which are part of the Fairmont State Airfield.

There are six non-contributing buildings scattered around within the boundaries of the property: four modern metal hangars, one office/warehouse and the private residence of the airport manager. There five non-contributing structures within the boundary of the property: three modern non-contributing grain bins and two non-contributing gravel access roads. These roads do not follow any historic transportation pattern on the Airfield; that is they have been imposed on the historic landscape, so are considered non-contributing. The ratio of contributing-to-non-contributing properties for this nomination is misleading. The immense scale of several of the contributing features, especially the runways, taxiways, aprons, hangars and the associated site, overwhelm the small-scale non-contributing features.

Three 6,965x150 foot concrete runways were constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Fairmont Army Airfield on north/south, northeast/southwest and northwest/southeast orientations. These runways and their associated taxiways form a right triangle with legs over a mile long (see maps and Photo 1). Approximately four-hundred acres of open ground is located between the legs of the triangle and between the taxiways and runways. The apex of the triangle

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Fairmont Army Air Field

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points nearly due west, and the hypotenuse runs nearly due north-south. The following description of the facility begins at the northern angle of the triangle, and continues roughly counter-clockwise around the property.

The NE/SW runway is virtually intact from WWII, down to faint paint markings in the centerline. An accompanying taxiway runs roughly parallel to the northwest of this runway. The taxiway is located roughly six-hundred feet from the runway at its northeastern end, and roughly eight-hundred feet from the runway at the southwest end. The taxiway is virtually intact from 1945, and is still connected to the northeastern end of the runway with a roughly six-hundred foot section of concrete. (see photos 1, 2 and 4) The runway and taxiway are not connected at the southwestern end of the runway, as the last few hundred feet of the runway have been removed. Two small gravel access roads, each considered non-contributing, virtually bisect this runway and taxiway. One road approaches from the west, the other from the north. The west road provides access to Highway 81, and dead-ends at the current Fairmont State Airfield facility (photo 5). The north road accesses a county road and dead-ends at its intersection with the Highway 81 access. A small, non-contributing privately-owned metal warehouse/office is located on the runway itself at the terminus of the north access road (photo 6).

The NW/SE runway has had a section, roughly 15%, of its most northwestern length removed (photo 1). The south-eastern most 3011' x 60' of this runway are currently used by the Fairmont state airport as runways 30 and 12, and has been resurfaced.¹ The remainder of this runway is closed to air traffic. This runway does not have an associated parallel taxiway, as depending on wind conditions either of the other two taxiways could serve it. The active portion of the runway is, indeed, still served by the north/south taxiway (photo 7). The northwestern end of this runway, and the southwestern end of the NE/SW runway and its associated taxiway create the right angle of the Fairmont Airfield.

Several hundred feet have been removed from both ends of the N/S runway which, together with its associated taxiway and aprons, create the hypotenuse of the Fairmont Airfield triangle (maps and photo 1). All of the remaining 4,300' of this runway, called runway 35 and 17, is active, and for this reason the runway has been resurfaced. The associated taxiway for 35/17 runs parallel to it, and is located roughly four-hundred feet west of the runway. This taxiway has been resurfaced and is otherwise basically intact, however its historic connections to runway 35/17 have been severed due to the shortening of the runway itself. Two modern asphalt connections have been constructed to accommodate current air traffic. On the east side of the taxiway, a series of nine depressions currently surrounded by rebar and concrete rubble are visible. These depressions, in three groups of three, are the remnants of hardstands, where heavy bomber aircraft could be tied down or parked. Five or six of these remnants are just visible in photo 1, and are visible on the USGS map. These remnants of the hardstands add to an overall sense of place at the Airfield

An enormous, roughly forty-acre concrete apron is located on the north-eastern end of the N/S taxiway (maps, and photos 1, 9 & 10). The apron is roughly 2,600 feet long and three-hundred feet wide on a north-south axis. Three modern non-contributing grain bins are located off the south-eastern edge of the apron. A small, asbestos-sided contributing pump house is located just south and slightly west of the grain bins, across an access road in a grassy area. A WWII era fire hydrant is located just north and west of the pump house, also in the grassy area. The hydrant is considered a contributing object. A small, brick oil storage building is located just east of the bins. The access road continues eastward toward the water tower, about one-hundred yards east of the oil storage building. The water tower is a cylindrical, concrete structure seven or eight stories high. Faint paint bands are still visible on the tower, which is pictured in photo 8. The tower is located on a strip of land owned by the Department of Aeronautics which is not in agricultural production.

¹ Active runways are named by their corresponding compass points, so that each stretch of concrete is actually two runways. For example, a runway that runs precisely N-S would be runway 36 and 18 for 360° and 180°

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Fairmont Army Air Field

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On a clear, warm day in August 2002, a formation of four single-engine Stearman biplanes flew over five visitors at the Fairmont (Nebraska) State Airfield and Industrial Park. If they were looking, the Stearman pilots saw an astonishing sight. There, in the middle of thousands of acres of corn and milo are the outlines of an immense airport. The pilots would have seen huge hangars, acres of concrete, and runways and taxiways thousands of feet longer than any ordinary small-town airport. Had they looked closely, they would have seen a tall, concrete water tower. And had they been particularly observant, the pilots of these four historic aircraft could have spied the outlines of an even larger facility. They could see outlines of roads and building foundations radiating outward from today's Fairmont airport, some of which even today are visible to a ground-bound observer. As the Stearman flew on, the sound of their four radial engines became echoes, echoes perhaps of the mighty sound of four-engined B-24 and B-29 bombers that roared by the dozens over this very ground nearly sixty years before.

The Beginning

Although World War II began for the United States in December of 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Department of War had been preparing for war for several years. By the summer of 1940, the Army Air Corps planned for an enormous expansion of combat aircraft training facilities. By September 1940, the President's Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense had begun collecting information about potential sites for locating air training facilities throughout the Midwest.²

Construction of Army Air Force (the Army Air Corps became the Army Air Forces in June, 1941) training fields were part of a truly massive construction program by and on behalf of the U.S. military just before and during WWII. Immense facilities sprang up within weeks where none before existed. These facilities were located all over the United States. Thrown in among the army and navy training facilities, shipyards, jeep, bomber and tank factories were ammunition plants, ordinance depots and Army Air Force (AAF) training facilities. These facilities were located throughout the central section of the country, and were among the physically largest of the World War II facilities, often requiring the requisition of thousands and even tens of thousands of acres of agricultural land.

Nebraska was home to its share of WWII facilities. A short, incomplete list of the largest includes the Naval Ammunition Depot outside Hastings, Sioux Ordnance Depot outside Sidney, Cornhusker Army Ammunition Plant outside Grand Island, Meade Army Ammunition Plant in Saunders county, Atlanta and Ft. Robinson prisoner of war camps, the Glenn L. Martin Bomber Plant at Crook Field (now Offutt Air Force Base), and an even dozen Army Air Force training airfields.

A number of factors dictated where the AAF would locate any given training airfield. Climate, topography, population, access to railroads, distance from coasts and ease of land acquisition all came into play. In Nebraska, the efforts of powerful U.S. Senator George Norris from McCook were also instrumental.³ In the end, Army Air Fields in Nebraska were located at Ainsworth, Alliance, Bruning, Fairmont, Fort Crook (Offutt Air Force Base), Grand Island, Harvard, Kearney, Lincoln, McCook, Scottsbluff and Scribner. Three airfields were located in Iowa, five in South Dakota, two in Wyoming, eleven in Colorado and twenty-seven in Kansas.⁴

² Robert Hurst, "Nebraska Army Airfields, A Pictorial Review," *Nebraska History*, Summer/Fall, 1995, P.129.

³ Lawrence Larsen, "The Alliance Army Air Base Case." *Nebraska History*, Fall, 1986. P. 239

⁴ Lou Thole, *Forgotten Fields of America, Vol. II: World War II Bases and Training, Then and Now*. (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co, Inc. 1999) Pp. 161-8.

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Fairmont Army Air Field

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A number of foundations are located on this strip of land, which add to an overall sense of place at the Airfield. This roughly twenty acre parcel is bounded by a county section line road on the east, and is further defined by an access road on the north. This access road proceeds eastward from the section line road. This humble east-west access road once served as the main entrance to the Fairmont Army Air Field. The section line road continues northward approximately one-half mile to a another west-bound access road which once served as a secondary access to the Airfield. Both access roads intersect with a north-south road which runs behind the historic hangars. The approximately 77 acre area between these four access roads, now in agricultural production, once contained the Airfield barracks and other support buildings. The excluded 50 acres is due north of the secondary access road, west of the county section road. (maps, photo 1).

Turning west to the apron, four modern, relatively modest non-contributing metal hangars are arranged in a C shape on the west-central portion of the apron. The open end of the C faces west, providing access to the active runways (maps, photo 1).

On the east edge of the apron, arranged as if for review, are three huge, nearly identical wood-frame WWII-era hangars, oriented on an east-west axis. These heavy bomber hangars dwarf the metal modern hangars, and are each three stories tall and measure nearly two hundred feet in length. The accordion-style main doors for each hangar are located on their west façades facing the apron. These doors each measure 160' in width, and are a full two stories tall. The doors open on a track into tidy, though large, pockets located on both sides. The hangar roofs are arched, and long bays flank the north and south sides of the hangars. The bays contain a series of regular doors. Shed-style "dormers" are located between the roof of the bays and the arched roof. A notch is noticeable at the top center of each main door. These notches, now covered over but visible, allowed for much larger aircraft to be brought into the hangars than that for which they were designed. All of the hangars have been sided in asbestos, and have been re-roofed over time. The most southern and northern hangars have metal roofs; the center hangar has an asphalt-membrane roof.

Neither the siding nor roofing material diminish the overall integrity of the hangars, which is generally good. The hangars have been converted for use as grain-storage facilities, however, and to that end buttresses have been added to the east and west ends of the northernmost hangar. These buttresses appear to have been added right over original material, including the main door, which is clearly visible behind the buttresses on the west end. In any event, the addition of the buttresses is not sufficiently obtrusive to consider this hangar non-contributing. Indeed, the conversion of these buildings to grain-storage is why they remain extant. The interiors of all three hangars are open spaces, impressively and completely open due to massive wooden, arched roof-trusses which negate any need for upright support.

A small, one-story non-contributing private residence is located between the northern and center hangars of this group of three hangars. This is the residence of the airport manager. This residence is just visible in the center of photo 9, just to the left (south) of the middle hangar of the south hangar group.

On the north end of the forty-acre apron a short taxiway leads to a smaller but still quite impressive concrete apron. This apron is roughly eight acres, and measures roughly 400' x 275' on an east-west axis. Another WWII hangar is located on the northeast corner of this apron (photos 16-21). This hangar is larger yet than the three located just south. Although nearly identical in every other respect, including the notches above the hangar doors, this hangar is oriented on a north-south axis, and has main doors located on both the north and south ends. This hangar has also been converted to grain storage use. The north-west corner of this apron connects to the northeast end of the closed NE/SE runway and taxiway, completing our counter-clockwise tour of the facility.

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Fairmont Army Air Field

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The Fairmont Army Air Field was a heavy bombardment training facility. WWII was the first time in history that strategic aerial bombing of enemy military and industrial facilities was attempted in any significant way. With a few important exceptions airplanes were a largely untested and, in some quarters, controversial weapon of war. Much of the controversy over the airplane as weapon centered on whether strategic bombing was an effective means of waging war. However, many authorities in the United States military observed the effectiveness of air power in Germany's role in the Spanish Civil War and in the Japanese subjugation of much of China. These observations led to the urgent development of many very effective types of military aircraft, and none more so than the heavy bomber.

Four-engined bomber aircraft such as the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and the Consolidated Vultee B-24 Liberator were largely experimental weapon systems prior to World War Two (hereinafter WWII). Technologies that allowed these (for the time) behemoths to fly thousands of miles and strike enemy targets with remarkable precision were cutting edge. Consider that in 1941 passenger airlines were in their infancy, and that heavier-than-air powered flight had been invented less than forty years before. Strategic bombing tactics (which included flying in large formations), navigation systems, targeting systems, high-altitude survival mechanisms, support systems and, of course, simply learning to fly the aircraft as part of a crew were all components of a vast, untested and unproven strategic combat system. Millions of very young men often with no more than a high school education were trained in this system from 1941 to 1945 and were expected to master all the new technologies and tactics within a few weeks and perform in the most difficult, stressful and deadly conditions. It was within this training system that places like the Fairmont Army Air Field excelled and, quite literally, helped win WWII.

The crews of bomber aircraft learned the basics of their trade in locations other than Fairmont. By the time air crews arrived at Fairmont, they had received the appropriate basic training in navigation, gunnery, bombardiering, and, of course, flying. Air fields such as Fairmont were "advanced training" facilities, places where the men who were to go into combat were checked out in the actual aircraft they would fly, and to practice formation flying and long distance navigation, two of the primary components of strategic bombing tactics. Extant resources at Fairmont include most of three nearly seven-thousand foot runways and their associated taxiways and aprons¹², constructed to handle large, heavily laden aircraft, as well as the foundations of celestial navigation training facilities. These foundations, located behind the southern group of extant hangars, are unique in that they reflect the round, planetarium-style buildings in which celestial navigation training was accomplished. Bomber crews were gathered into Squadrons, which were further gathered into Groups. Groups were then shipped off to specific Air Forces, and each Air Force served in a specific war zone. At Fairmont, training was at the Squadron and Group level.

Each Bombardment Group included its own support staff which trained along with the air crews: ground crew (mechanics, etc.), medical and clerical personnel, cooks, etc. The first full group to train at Fairmont, the 451st Bombardment Group, completed their training at Fairmont and proceeded to the European theater, where it participated in the strategic bombing campaign of Axis forces as part of the USAAF 15th Air Force.¹³ Bombardment groups at Fairmont were made up of three or four squadrons, and each squadron included anywhere from 10-20 aircraft. Numbers varied continuously. In all, seven Bombardment Groups trained at Fairmont: the 485th, 451st, 504th, 15th, 98th, 467th, and 489th. The training schedules of

¹² U.S. Army Air Forces Airport Directory Volume 2, P. 18. As built, the three runways were just under 7,000 feet long. Portions of two of the original runways-17/35 and 12/30-are active runways for the Fairmont State Airfield. However, these two have had roughly half their length closed, though most of the original concrete remains on the closed section of 12/30, and about 2/3rds remains on 17/35. 17/35 has also been largely asphalted over the concrete. The third runway, originally the NE/SW runway, is closed to air traffic, though virtually all of the historic concrete remains.

¹³ Thole, Fairmont Army Air Field P. 24.

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The immensity of scale and rapidity of completion of WWII facilities nationwide is very difficult to overstate. All over the nation, land was acquired for the construction of industrial, military and support facilities meant to train and arm a vast armed force necessary to fight a land, sea and air war on two fronts. The construction of Air Corps air fields illustrate the spectacular feat of construction and organization on the American home front. In 1939, the Army Air Corps had seventeen air fields in all of the United States. By late 1945, the AAF had nearly *eight hundred* airfields in the continental United States.⁵ Many of these airfields were immense. Alliance Army Airfield in Nebraska provides an example of this phenomenon. Alliance, the largest air field built in Nebraska, checked in at over 31,000 acres (with over 4200 acres "finished"), nearly 800 buildings and with four 9,000 foot runways.⁶ This enormous facility required a construction crew of over 5,000, and was open for business in six months. The rest of Nebraska's Air Fields ranged from 1,700 acres (Harvard) to 3,000 acres (Lincoln).⁷

AAF airfields in Nebraska were utilized for a number of different training activities. Generally speaking, the twelve airfields fell into two broad groups. The first group acted as satellite bases for larger airfields. The second group were independent airfields comprised of more complete facilities and tended to be larger than the satellite bases. Ainsworth, Harvard, Scottsbluff and Scribner were satellite fields for larger airfields in, respectively, Rapids City (SD), Kearney (NE), Alliance, (NE) and Sioux City (IA). The McCook Airfield began as a satellite base, but was eventually designated an independent facility. Fairmont was built as a satellite base for the Topeka (KS) Army Air Field.⁸ In 1943, however, Fairmont was also designated an individual facility.

Training at the Fairmont Army Air Field

Construction at the Fairmont Army Air Field began on September 16, 1942, and was largely completed by the end of November that same year. Construction of the Field was overseen by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, specifically by Major Bert Burgwin. Construction of the Airfields at Bruning and Harvard began at about the same time, and were also overseen by Major Burgwin.⁹ The completed Fairmont Army Air Field covered nearly 2,000 acres, included two hundred seventy-five buildings and structures, and could accommodate over 3,700 personnel.¹⁰ The first significant number of trainees arrived at the airfield in January 1943, when the base was ready for operation. Training began in earnest in September 1943 when the 451st Bombardment Group began training at the field.¹¹ Over the next two years, thousands of air crews and their support staff trained in B-24 and B-29 aircraft, and saw service in both the Pacific and European theaters of war.

⁵ Scott Murdock, "The Use in 1995 of World War II Army Air Fields in the United States" (Master's Thesis, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Master of Aeronautical Science, Barksdale Air Force Base Resident Center) April, 1997. Ch. 2, P.1

⁶ Gloria Clark, World War II Prairie Invasion P.16. The Alliance Army Air Field was a training facility for airborne troops (paratroopers), glider and glider tow pilots, which presumably accounts for its exceptional scale.

⁷ Barbara Kooiman, "Aviation Development in Nebraska Final Survey Report-Phase I" (Lincoln, Nebraska. Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office September, 2000) Pp. 23-48, and; U.S. Army Air Force: Airport Directory, Continental United States. (Washington, D.C. Aeronautical Chart Service, Army Air Forces, March 1945) Volume 2, P. 18.

⁸ Greg Miller, Relic Components of Army Air Fields in Nebraska Multiple Property Document, (Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, November, 1992) Sec. E, Pp. 3-6.

⁹ Jane Graff, Fillmore County, a Pictorial History (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company 1999) P. 88.

¹⁰ Miller, Relic Components of Army Air Fields in Nebraska, Sec. E, Pp. 3 &4

¹¹ Lou Thole, Fairmont Army Air Field Then and Now *United States Air Force Museum Friends Bulletin*. Vol. 12, No. 1 Spring, 1989. Pp. 23-24.

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each Group usually overlapped, though there were apparently never more than two Groups training at Fairmont at the same time.¹⁴

Training strategies at Fairmont were fluid as training techniques and war needs changed and as technology evolved. When Fairmont opened, the air and ground crews trained in Consolidated Vultee B-24 Liberator bombers. The B-24 was the most ubiquitous bomber in the AAF's inventory. The B-24 could carry more payload, and fly further and faster than its more famous cousin, the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. The B-24's unusual twin-tail design and downright graceful articulated wing made the Liberator a distinctive sight in the Nebraska skies. However, a significant change in technology at Fairmont came in March 1944. On that date, the 504th Bombardment Group arrived at Fairmont Army Air Field. The 504th were to train in the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, a true technological marvel.

The B-29 was pressurized, nearly 150 miles per hour faster, could fly over 5,000 feet higher, 1,600 miles farther and carry seven thousand more pounds of bombs than the B-24.¹⁵ The B-29 was so much larger than the B-24 that it had a physical impact on Fairmont Army Airfield that may still be seen. All four extant hangers at Fairmont have distinctive cut-outs at the top of their immense main doors. These cut-outs allowed for the B-29's very tall single tail to enter the hanger. In fact, each hanger could only receive one B-29 at a time, as opposed to two B-24's. Five of the seven groups that trained at Fairmont trained in B-29's. In the early part of this effort, the aircrews trained for the B-29 using B-17's. The B-17, another Boeing aircraft, had similar control systems and flight characteristics as the B-29. The B-17's were used due to the relative scarcity of the new Superfortress.¹⁶

The AAF had decided not to use the B-29 in the European Theater. The relative scarcity of the new bomber made diluting its numbers problematic in terms of applying effective strategic bombing techniques. This, coupled with the B-29's long range and heavy payload made it uniquely useful in the Pacific theater. There, the B-29 was used to fly the enormous distances necessary in that theater, and especially to attack the Japanese home islands. And though it was not designed with this specific purpose in mind, the Superfortress could be modified to carry the atom bomb, the newest, deadliest weapon in a war that could already claim to be the bloodiest in history.

The B-29 that carried the atomic bomb to Hiroshima, the *Enola Gay*, was built at the Martin Bomber plant at Fort Crook Army Air Field in Bellevue Nebraska, about 125 miles from Fairmont. In fact both of the atomic bombers (the other was called *Bock's Car*) in WWII were built at Fort Crook, and were further modified there to carry atomic weapons. Although the *Enola Gay* itself was never at Fairmont, the future commander of the *Enola Gay* on her Hiroshima mission, Lt. Colonel Paul Tibbits, personally visited Fairmont Army Airfield in September, 1944. Colonel Tibbits had more test hours in B-29's than any other pilot in the AAF,¹⁷ and during this visit he selected certain members of the 383rd Squadron of the 504th Group, which was training with B-29's. These men went on to form part of the 509th Composite Group: the team that flew the atom bomb missions to Japan.¹⁸ It is unknown at this time whether any of the crewmen from Fairmont actually flew one of the atomic missions, however given the significance of the 509th Composite Group's place in history, any crewman in that Group who trained at Fairmont could defensibly be considered among the best in their field.

¹⁴ Kooiman, P. 31, and Thole, Fairmont Army Air Field, P. 48

¹⁵ <http://www.boeing.com/companyoffices/history/boeing/b29.html>, and http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/air_power/ap8.htm

¹⁶ Thole, Fairmont Army Airfield, P.25. There were over 18,000 Liberators and nearly 13,000 B-17's built during WWII. There were less than 3,000 B-29s built. See sources at footnote 15 and http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/air_power/ap16.htm

¹⁷ <http://www.theenolagay.com>. This is Col. Tibbits home page.

¹⁸ Ibid, and; Thole, Fairmont Army Airfield, P. 26.

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Fairmont as home

Fairmont Army Airfield served as a temporary posting for those men training to actually fly combat missions and for those who would support them in the field. However, the base was a more permanent home to thousands of military personnel who actually trained these men, and the medical and other support personnel who supported *them*. Combined, the trainees and training personnel would often near four thousand in number at any given time. Given that all of Fillmore County had a population of only 11,417 in 1940¹⁹, there was an unavoidable effect on the civilian population of Fairmont and Fillmore county.

One of the most immediate and profound effects, especially on those families concerned, was the requisition/purchase of nearly two thousand acres of privately owned farmland. This process and its ramifications has great potential for further study, including oral histories. This is especially true when considered along other large-scale WWII acquisitions across Nebraska. In any event, the necessary displacement of tens of thousands of acres of farm and ranch land across the nation for the construction of WWII facilities is a seldom discussed topic, and one that had and continues to have an effect on the economy and history of Fillmore County.

The Fairmont Army Airfield had a significant effect on the local communities nearby, especially the closest communities of Fairmont and Geneva. The Geneva USO opened in the Geneva Auditorium in May, 1943. The USO provided a place for Airfield personnel to socialize and recreate off-base. Open from 6PM daily (and Sunday afternoons) until midnight, the USO was an opportunity for the young military men to meet members of the community. The USO was staffed by volunteers who could help also arrange visits from out-of-town family and friends, and who would also serve as chaperones for young women who attended Friday night dances at the Airfield's service club. The USO itself hosted dances on Monday nights, which often saw attendance surpass 3,000.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, a number of service men met and eventually married local women while serving at Fairmont. Many of these couples settled down in the area and raised families. The impact of this phenomenon alone (with appropriate demographic research) is probably sufficiently significant to justify consideration of the Airfield for National Register status.

As at any other military town, housing was very tight in Fairmont and Geneva during the years the Airfield was constructed and in operation. During the Fairmont Airfield's construction, housing was at a premium, and the communities struggled to provide it. Hotels were continuously full, and a Geneva grocery store was converted into a dormitory. Barracks were constructed outside of Geneva, and a trailer camp was erected on the county fairground. Inflation caused by demand made housing prices skyrocket. The housing predicament got no better after the base was operational. The Geneva barracks were converted to married housing for Airfield personnel, and visiting friends and family of Airfield personnel were often forced to stay with local families.²¹

Locals claim that the Fairmont Airfield hospital was the largest in Nebraska at the time. With 350 beds in 1943, this claim may have merit. The Airfield's hospital was somewhat of a regional military hospital that served the Bruning and Harvard airfields, as well as Fairmont. Bruning was approximately twenty miles from Fairmont, Harvard only about twenty-five. The hospital also had a great impact on the local civilian population, as it serviced their needs and employed many local civilians as well. Many local children were born at the Fairmont Airfield hospital during the war.

¹⁹ Nebraska Blue Book, (Lincoln, NE. Clerk of the Legislature, 1994-95 ed). P. 808.

²⁰ Thole, Fairmont Army Airfield, Pp 26-27.

²¹ Graff, P. 90.

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Local people were employed in construction during the building of the Airfield, and after the base opened, local civilians were employed by or provided services for the Airfield. Clerks, typists, farmers, retailers and, of course, hoteliers benefited by the placement of the Airfield in Fairmont. For example, in late December 1942, the Airfield ordered over 21,000 quarts of milk from the Fairmont Creamery Company at fourteen cents per quart.²² In many respects, these activities show in microcosm how war-related employment and construction helped pull the United States out of the Great Depression.

The End

The last "rookie" bomber group to train at Fairmont was the 16th Bombardment Group, which was stationed there from August 1944 to March 1945. In May and July 1945, the 98th, 467th and 489th Bomber Groups came to Fairmont to train. These groups had previously flown B-24's and were assigned to Fairmont to re-train in the B-29. The war ended before these group's training was completed, and on September 27th 1945 the AAF announced that Fairmont Army Air Field would go on inactive status as of October 31, 1945.²³ In September of 1946, the Airfield was declared surplus. It had been offered locally for use as a municipal airport for one dollar, but the town of Geneva believed the costs associated with maintaining such an airport (most of the buildings were still extant) were prohibitive.²⁴ After it was declared surplus, most of the Airfield's smaller frame buildings were dismantled and sold for scrap, and most of the open ground was sold for farm use, reverting back to its pre-1942 use. However, most of the Airfield was taken over by the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics in 1946 and is still operates as a state airport. Some of the land Aeronautics owns is leased for agricultural and other uses.

Army Airfields in Nebraska

In order to be considered a good candidate for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a property must be significant and retain sufficient physical integrity to convey that significance. This applies to historic districts and sites as well as individual properties. Alone among Nebraska's former WWII Army Air Fields, Fairmont has a unique combination of physical integrity and historic significance conveyed by a related collection of buildings and structures which all derive their significance from WWII. This significance is conveyed by Fairmont's historic integrity, especially of location, setting feeling and association.

In a 1991-92 survey of all twelve former Army Air Fields, the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (NESHPO) produced a National Register Multiple Property Document (MPD) entitled *Relic Components of Army Air Fields in Nebraska*. This survey and MPD found there were no airfields with sufficient physical integrity to be considered good candidates for the National Register as historic districts due to an overall lack of historic integrity. However, the survey and MPD did find a number of types of individual properties that could be considered eligible for the Register, and one (a Norden bomb-sight vault at the former McCook AAF) was listed in the Register. In 2000, in association with the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics, the NESHPO re-evaluated all twelve airfields. This survey found that much that had been surveyed less than ten years before had been lost. The 2000 survey once again found a number of individual property types that should be considered good candidates for listing in the Register. It also found that the former Fairmont Army Air field had sufficient physical integrity to be considered a good candidate for the Register as an historic district.

Two major factors support this new conclusion. First among these is the almost total lack of WWII-era physical integrity of the remaining eleven air fields, even from 1992. Currently, six municipal or county airports utilize much of the spaces

²² Ibid, P. 90.

²³ Thole, Fairmont Army Airfield, P.28

²⁴ Ibid, P. 28.

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historically associated with Army Air Fields: Ainsworth, Alliance, Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln (which served as a major Air Force Base until 1966) and Scottsbluff. At all of these facilities, the vast majority of WWII era buildings, and all or most of the primary buildings and structures have been removed, and in most cases a large number of new facilities have been constructed.

The Nebraska Department of Aeronautics owns former Army Air Fields at four sites: Bruning, Fairmont, Harvard and Scribner. The former field at Bruning is closed to air traffic and is leased to a cattle feedlot. The airfield at Harvard operates as an airport, but has had most of the concrete runways and taxiways removed, and only one hangar is extant. Although much of the runways and taxiways at Scribner remain, and it too operates as an airport (as well as a National Hot Rod Association -sanctioned drag-racing strip) there are virtually no other WWII resources extant.

For decades in private ownership, current ownership of the former Airfield at McCook is in dispute between a private owner and the City of McCook. The former McCook Airfield still retains all five of the former large hangars associated with the base, but they have not been maintained since the end of the war and are in poor condition. Additionally, there remain only remnants of runways, taxiways, aprons and other associated facilities at McCook. Finally, the integrity of feeling, setting and association of the McCook field is very poor. Many volunteer trees have sprung up where the main concentration of buildings was located. Agricultural fields draw right up to the remaining hangars, providing very little to a sense of place, at least in relation to a WWII airfield. In a real sense, all that remains at McCook to identify it as a former Army Air field are the five hangars.

The former Ft. Crook Army Air Field has operated as Offutt Air Force Base since the late 1940's. In addition to a 19th century historic district already listed in the National Register, the Martin Bomber Plant remains extant at Offutt in a much-altered state. Several other individually significant WWII-related buildings remain at Offutt. However, Offutt now more accurately reflects a more recent, albeit very significant history related to the Cold War due primarily to its role as the site of the Strategic Air Command's global headquarters.

The second major factor resulting in the reassessment of Fairmont as a National Register-eligible historic district is the overwhelming significance of these facilities. At the time the '91-'92 survey was completed, many properties associated with the former airfields were less than fifty years old. In the intervening ten years, a new appreciation and understanding of the significance of these facilities has developed. Of course, the significance of WWII in Nebraska and national history has always been understood. However, the assessment and evaluation of the significance of lesser known properties such as Fairmont has grown with time (re-enforcing, once again, the pertinence of the National Register fifty-year assessment rule).

There is no question that, at minimum, local significance may be argued for all twelve former Airfields. All Nebraska airfields had a profound impact on the community in which they were located. Indeed, the significant impact of all twelve Airfields on the state as a whole can be argued with little effort. It is at least possible that as many as three former Nebraska airfields may, with further research, be considered to have had even broader significance. Alliance Army Air Field, as a primary, final training field for paratroops and glider pilots may give it wider significance. Ft. Crook's place as the home of the Martin Bomber Plant and all that implies certainly places it in rare company. And Fairmont Airfield's role in the story of the 509th Composite Group's history may also give it greater significance.

Local, state or national significance notwithstanding, there is no argument that Allied force's air superiority contributed greatly to the successful outcome of WWII. In every case where Allied victories took place, tactical air superiority was a vital component to that victory. Tactical superiority included "softening up" enemy positions with air power, utilizing both heavy and medium bombers. Although some still argue the relative efficacy of strategic bombing, there is no doubt that

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the Nebraska prairie. And in June 1996, with no imagination, one could hear the drone of both a B-24 and a B-29 taxiing past and then, with a deafening roar, launching themselves once again into the Nebraska sky. These very real images reflected an exceptionally significant sense of place at Fairmont that is no longer possible at any other of Nebraska's former Army Air Fields.

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strategic bombing crippled the Axis power's ability to wage war. In any case, it is clear that the men and machines trained at Nebraska airfields were key elements in an immense global strategy that won the second World War. Before training facilities such as Fairmont were opened, no one knew for sure whether strategic and tactical heavy bombing techniques would be effective, or even work under combat conditions. Indeed, strategic bombing tactics changed significantly over the course of the war, and these changes in tactics were all implemented at facilities such as Fairmont.

When assessing a property's integrity for the National Register, the relative rarity and significance of a property should be taken into account. The former Fairmont Army Air Field represents a rare collection of very significant properties. Unique among Nebraska's former airfields, the Fairmont facility retains excellent integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. The remaining buildings and structures associated with the airfield retain good integrity of design, materials and workmanship. Although the majority of support structures associated with the Airfield are gone, the major, character-defining features of the airfield remain.

There is no question that the loss of a great majority of the buildings associated with the Fairmont Air Field have adversely affected the overall integrity of the historic property. However, considering the broad context of the significant story told by extant resources, the missing elements are secondary to the overall historic purpose and mission of the Air Field. The Airfield's mission was to train men in the relatively new and relatively untested technologies and tactics of heavy bombardment combat.

The great majority of concrete remaining from all three runways and associated taxiways and aprons remain at Fairmont, and in their original configuration, which is unique among former Nebraska Army Air Fields. The four largest hangars, replete with B-29 tail cut-outs, remain in their original location and have been maintained with new roofs and basic maintenance, and have individually retained all seven aspects of their integrity. The large concrete water tower which served the Airfield also remains. The tower stands sentinel over the foundations of the hospital, celestial navigation buildings and other facilities which contribute to the Airfield's most remarkable aspect of its historic integrity: its sense of feeling, setting and association. Unlike any other former airfield, Fairmont retains virtually all of these three aspects of integrity. Finally, Fairmont's extant resources reflect the core mission of the Airfield, and why it is significant.

The core of what makes an airfield and airfield, or any airport, for that matter, remains at Fairmont. Airports of any kind need lots of open space, lots of space to park the aircraft, and lots of runway to take off and land on. They also need a sheltered space for maintenance. A B-24 needed almost three and one-half hours of maintenance for every hour in operation, a B-29 almost four and one-half.²⁵ A cursory glance at many modern rural airports illustrates this point. Many rural airports consist of nothing but a small hangar or two and a long turf runway. The extant built environment at Fairmont reflects the key elements to training in the sophisticated, technically advanced and vital milieu of heavy bombardment strategies and tactics during WWII.

In June 1996, no one had to imagine what a B-24, B-17 or B-29 looked or sounded like as it landed at Fairmont. In that year and month, over 18,000 people gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Army Air Field. Among the events was the visit of several WWII era aircraft, chief among them a B-24 Liberator and *Fifi*, the only B-29 Superfortress that still flies. For these people, standing in the middle of many acres of concrete, it was not difficult to look back at the hangars and imagine a squadron of B-24s lined up, awaiting maintenance or the next training flight. A quick look to the right or left, and one could, and still can, see thousands of feet of unusually broad runway, extending off into

²⁵ Thole, Fairmont Army Air Field P. 26

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- General Paul Tibbitts home page <http://www.theenolagay.com>.
- U.S. Air Force http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/air_power/ap8.htm
- U.S. Air Force http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/air_power/ap16.htm

Other

A large collection of semi-catalogued primary and secondary documents may be found at the Fillmore County Historical Society, 600 6th Ave., Fairmont, NE 68354

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Additional UTM references

All Zone 14

E. E 621920 N 4495020

F. E 621980 N 4493200

G. E 621600 N 4492370

H. E 620400 N 4492350

I. E 618860 N 4493130

Verbal Boundary Description-See attached USGS map

Boundary Justification-The nominated property consists of the area historically associated with the Fairmont Army Air Field, with the exception of an approximately 50 acres from the northeastern section which lacks historic integrity.

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Additional Documentation

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Photo one
Fairmont State Airfield (former Fairmont Army Air Field)-azimuth view
Fillmore County Nebraska
Nebraska Department of Aeronautics

August 29, 2000

The following information pertains to all remaining photographs, 2-21:

Fairmont Army Air Field
Fillmore County, NE
Photographs by Stacy Stupka-Burda -Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office
August 28, 2002.
Negatives located at the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, NE

2. Taxiway & north hangar, view SE
3. North end NE/SW runway & 3 south hangars, view to SE
4. Taxiway N end NE/SW runway, view NW
5. NE/SW runway (L), access road from US 81 (R), view NE
6. NE/SW runway, non-contributing office/warehouse, view S
7. Runway 12, view NW
8. Water tower, view E
9. 3 south hangars (R), 2 N/C hangars (L), S Apron, view NE
10. Southern hangars, view SE
11. Middle hangar, south group, view NE
12. North hangar, south group, view NE
13. North hangar (L), north hangar, south group (R), view NE
14. E facades, south hangars, south group & access road, view N
15. E facades, south hangar group, view W--from county section line road
16. N hangar - S façade, view NE
17. N hangar - N facades, view SW
18. N hangar - B 29 tail cut out above door N façade, view SW
19. N hangar, N door, view E
20. N hangar, interior, view S
21. Boundary marker remnant

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Property owners

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Property Owners, continued:

J & G Anderson, 1103 Rd. G, Fairmont, NE 68354

Samuel G. and Melanie J. Boon 1010 I St., Fairmont, NE 68354

Investment Four c/o Vern Johnson 939 F St., Geneva, NE 68361-2535

Richard Manning, 1022 J St., Geneva, NE 68361

Jeff C. and Cindy A. Moyle, 18 Air Base Rd. Fairmont, NE 68354

Reinsch Farms Inc., c/o Lavina Reinsch, 1817 F St., Geneva, NE 68361

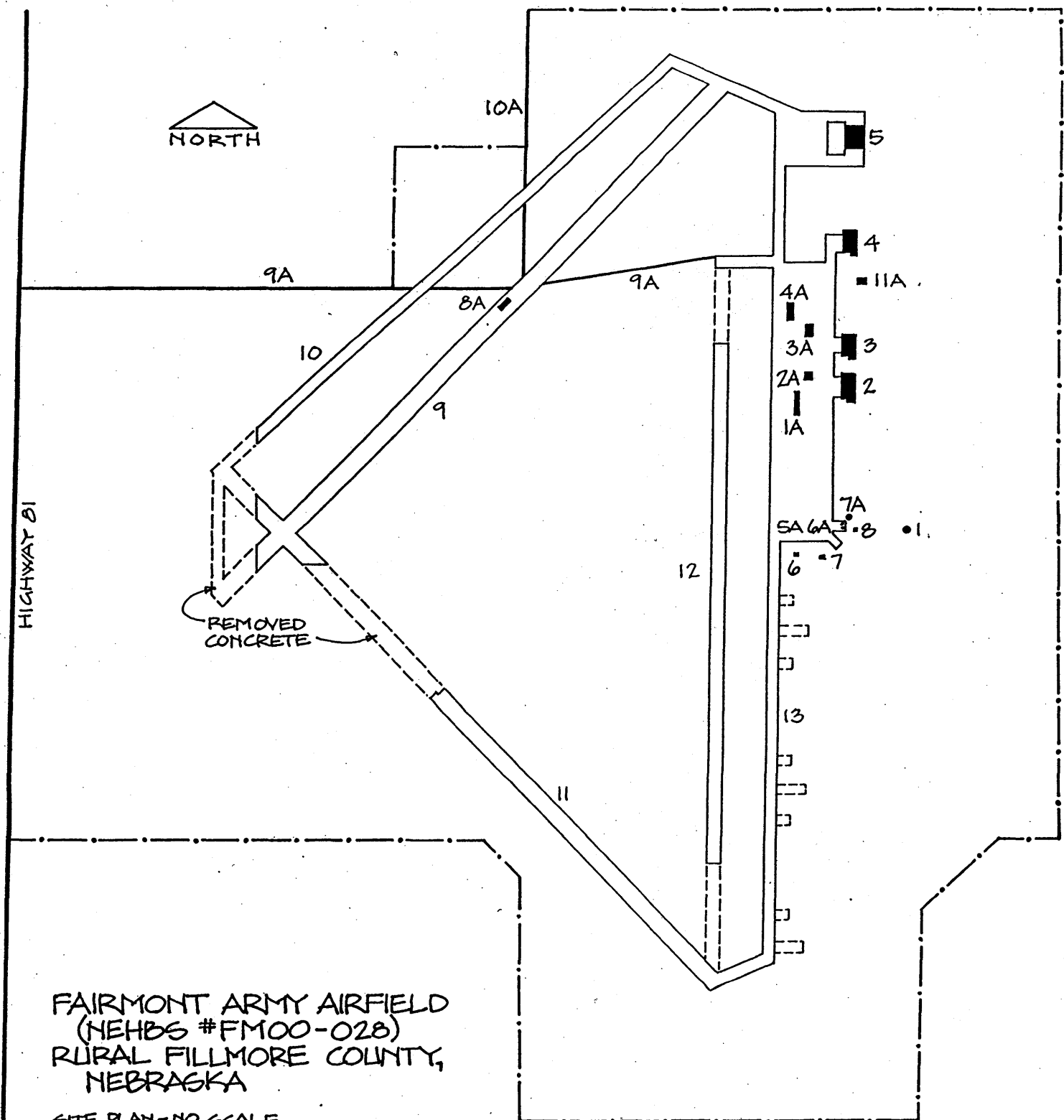
Lowell H. & James L. Stephenson, 1509 Rd. I, Fairmont, NE 68354

Jason Tatro, 1320 Rd. J, Geneva, NE 68361

John L. Taylor Jr., 1606 Rd. 15, Geneva, NE 68361

Beth M. Wilkins, C/o Geneva State Bank P.O. Box 313, Geneva, NE 68361-0313

Hugh G. Wilkins, P..O. Box 313, Geneva, NE 68361-0313



KEY - CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

- 1. WATER TANK
- 2. -S. HANGERS
- 6. HYDRANT
- 7. PUMP HOUSE
- 8. OIL STORAGE
- 9. NE/SW RUNWAY
- 10. NE/SW TAXIWAY
- 11. NW/SE RUNWAY
- 12. N/S RUNWAY
- 13. N/S TAXIWAY

NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

- 1A.-4A. HANGERS
- 5A.-7A. GRAIN BINS
- 8A. OFFICE / LANEHOUSE
- 9A.-10A. ACCESS ROADS
- 11A. RESIDENCE