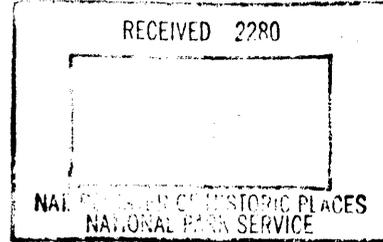


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Lewistown Satellite Airfield Historic District  
other name/site number: Lewistown Airdrome; Lewistown Airport

## 2. Location

street & number: U.S. Highway 87 not for publication: NA  
city/town: Lewistown vicinity: X  
state: Montana code: MT county: Fergus code: 027 zip code: 59457

## 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.

*Mark F. Gamber*  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date: 1/20/2000

Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency or bureau (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

\* Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

*Paul R. Ferguson*

3/8/00

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

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**5. Classification**

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<b>Ownership of Property:</b> public-local	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<b>Category of Property:</b> district	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<b>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:</b> NA	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u> building(s)
<b>Name of related multiple property listing:</b> NA	___	___ sites
	___	___ structures
	___	___ objects
	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u> TOTAL

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions:**

DEFENSE/air facility

**Current Functions:**

TRANSPORTATION/air-related

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification:**

OTHER: World War II Temporary Buildings

**Materials:**

foundation: concrete  
walls: corrugated metal  
roof: corrugated metal  
other: brick

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**Narrative Description**

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The Lewistown Satellite Air Field Historic District is located along U.S. Highway 87 about one mile southwest of Lewistown, Montana. The Airfield sits on level ground before the highway drops down into the town. It now serves as the Lewistown/Fergus County Airport. The Historic District is located in the northwest corner of the airport and includes the five buildings associated with the flight apron functions of the air field during its period of significance. Within the boundaries of the district only one building has been removed since the period of significance: a Guard House located just to the southeast of the Bombsight Storage building. Three, newer buildings exist within the district's boundaries.

**Bombsight Storage Building** or Original Building No. 16, Serial Building No. 36 (contributing building)

The Bombsight Storage Building is a one-story, shed roofed building constructed of poured concrete. The building is divided into two vaults measuring 13 feet by 11 feet and 5 feet 10 inches by 6 feet 6 inches. The vaults are accessed by wide, wood doors constructed of vertical boards. Behind the wood door to the larger vault is a steel door with a combination lock. Metal grills above the door and in the rear wall of the building provide ventilation between the concrete ceiling and wood shed roof. A wood electrical pole is attached to one side of the building and enameled metal lights are located on both sides.

The Bombsight Storage Building was originally surrounded by a 6 foot 9 inch high, seven-strand barbed wire fence placed 20 feet from each side of the building. A small sentry box (Original Building No. 24, Serial Building No. 42) guarded the double gates. The fence and sentry box are no longer present.

**Hangar** or Original Building No. 19, Serial Building No. 37 (contributing building)

The original plans for the hangar are dated October 9, 1942. These plans were designed to accommodate smaller planes than those that were eventually assigned to Lewistown. Modified plans dated October 22, 1942 increased both the height and length of the hangar. Even

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Areas of Significance: Military

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1942-43

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1942

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Howard R. Green Company, Architects and Engineers/Askevold & Rudd and S. Birch and Sons

## Narrative Statement of Significance

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### Statement of Significance

The Lewistown Satellite Airfield Historic District is eminently eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. For its associations with the nation's and the U.S. Army Air Corps' military buildup during World War II, the district is significant on a national level. The Airfield was one of four facilities originally constructed for the U.S. Army Air Corps in Montana to train squadrons in navigation of the B-17 Flying Fortress and use of the top secret Norden Bombsight. The Norden bombsight was an advanced technology closely guarded by the Allied forces, and was considered a strategic weapon in its day. Today, the bombsight storage shelter at the Lewistown airfield is the only identified Norden Bombsight building still remaining in the United States. As the U.S. Department of Defense systematically removes World War II "temporary" buildings under its control, these buildings become increasingly rare and gain additional significance for their representation of this important period in the nation's history.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*"They are our B-17s!"* That was the attitude held by the people of Central Montana in the dark days of World War II toward the planes and air crews that operated out of the Lewistown Satellite Airfield for the Great Falls Air Base.

World War II came to Montana in earnest in 1942. The war was not going well for the Allies, and bombers and trained crews were desperately needed. An army air corps was established with Great Falls as its headquarters. Four training squadrons were included, one each in Great Falls, Cut Bank, Glasgow, and Lewistown.

Construction of the Lewistown Airfield began in July 1942. It was activated in October, and on November 28, the first B-17s piloted by the 49th Bombardment Squadron roared over Main Street with bomb bays open, circled over town, and landed at the newly built airfield. Almost 1,000 GIs were stationed at the base and were taken into the hearts of the townspeople.

Squadrons would fly into Lewistown for one to three months of training in the open skies of Montana. The air crews would train day and night in all kinds of weather. Training combined navigation, bombing and gunnery practice, with familiarizing crews with all aspects of the B-17, each learning the jobs of other crew members of the plane. They would fly to "targets" in Montana, Washington, or Minnesota.

One building at the Lewistown Airfield kept under 24-hour guard was the Norden Bombsight building. There, the top-secret Norden bombsight was stored. Lewistown's B-17 crews would train with the bombsight, after which it was carefully removed and returned under guard from the building. The building on the Lewistown Satellite Airfield is the only identified Norden bombsight building still standing in the United States, according to the U.S. Air Force.

The crews that trained in Lewistown would, when finished, fly directly to the air war in Europe. Many of these young men --- who worked at the airfield and danced with local girls on the weekends, who made friends around town, who married local girls --- never came home. Casualties among the bomber squadrons were terribly high, and the need for new crews unrelenting.

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction by LeRoy Musik and Dave Byerly, Lewistown, March 1999.

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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See continuation sheet

### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other -- Specify Repository:

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 5.5 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing  
A 12 617100 5211340

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): W ½, SW ¼ of Section 20 and NE¼, SE¼, SE¼ of Section 21, T15N, R18E, M.P.M.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The Lewistown Satellite Air Field Historic District boundary is a rectangle measuring 905 feet by 250 feet. The boundary begins at the intersection of Fifth Street and Apron Drive, then proceeds northeast down the middle of Apron Drive 905 feet, then southeast 250 feet to the middle of A Avenue, then southwest down the middle of A Avenue to Fifth Street, then northwest down the middle of Fifth Street to the point of beginning.

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### Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the six historic buildings associated with the flight line functions of the Lewistown Air Field during its period of significance. Other buildings associated with the cantonment were not evaluated as part of this nomination, and may be added at a later date.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title: Lon Johnson  
organization: State Historic Preservation Office  
street & number: 1410 Eighth Avenue  
city or town: Helena state: MT  
date: March 30, 1999  
telephone: 406-444-7742  
zip code: 59620

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### Property Owner

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name/title: Lewistown City-County Airport Board  
street & number: c/o Mike Isaacs, Lewistown Airport  
city or town: Lewistown state: MT  
telephone: 406-538-3264  
zip code: 59457

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though the plans are only two weeks apart, construction was apparently well under way by the time the modified plans were executed. For example, they reference "present footings" and call for a "concrete wash on top of exposed portion of columns."

The hangar is a large rectangular building with a bowstring arch truss roof. The building measures 161 feet by 158 feet 5 inches. This measurement includes a full-length shed roofed structure across the back of the building. The exterior walls are 35 feet high and the roof rises to just over 57 feet at the center of the trusses. Concrete columns, spaced at 20 feet on center, comprise the hangar's basic structural system; they carry the roof trusses. The space between columns is infilled with wood framing. Siding and roofing are of corrugated metal.

The front facade of the hangar (northwest) is dominated by the bowstring truss and pocket doors. At either end of the trusses are poured concrete pockets for the two "horn" doors that spanned the full front of the hangar. One original door remains; the other has been removed and the opening filled with siding and a smaller overhead door. Two control towers, one at each end, partially sat on the concrete door pockets; they are no longer extant.

The sides (northeast and southwest) of the hangar are divided into six bays created by the concrete buttresses supporting the columns. The first bay from the front is poured concrete, while the remaining five bays are filled with windows. Each bay contains four sets of nine over nine, double-hung sash units topped with six light transoms. A concrete beam above the windows spans between the columns. Above the concrete beam are four more sets of nine over nine sash. A single pedestrian door is located in the final window opening on each side. All of these windows are now boarded over except for the lower sash on the northeast side. Window openings on the main hangar's southeast (rear) side above the concrete beam vary in the number of sash, but all are twelve light sash topped with nine light sash. The rear wing of the building is lined with a band of six over six double-hung sash. Also on this wing are a triplet grouping of longer six over six double hung sash which originally opened into an office, and a single and double pair of six-light/three paneled doors. A new overhead garage door is now located in the location of two former windows. Another new overhead garage door is located on the southwest side of the wing. Two 64-foot-tall brick chimneys rise from the back wall of the hangar.

The hangar's bowstring trusses were made on-site. The plans called for the contractors to first lay out the trusses using random length 2x6 lumber, then assemble them so the web members could be fitted in place and the connection holes bored. The trusses were then disassembled, the connector grooves cut, and the wood pieces glued and spiked together.

The hangar retains good integrity. The removal of the control towers and one pocket door has changed the appearance of the front of the building. The front opening, even without the door, still reads as a large opening. Many of the original windows are now blocked, but the historic windows remain behind the blocking.

**Operations Building** or Original Building No. 13, Serial Building No. 33 and  
**Alert Building** or Original Building No. 24, Serial Building No. 57 (contributing building)<sup>1</sup>

The Operations Building is a one-story gable roofed building. The building measures 100 feet by 20 feet. As part of the original construction documents, a 56 feet by 20 feet Alert Building was attached to the middle of the rear of the building, creating a T-plan. Also, a matching 30-foot-long addition was added to the southwest end of the front building shortly after or during construction. The building is roofed and sided with corrugated metal. It rests on a concrete slab. Two small shed-roofed vestibules project from the northwest side and

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<sup>1</sup>(Note the original building number for the Alert Building conflicts with the Bombsight Storage Building's number. The "Building Legend" for the Air Field did not assign a separate number to the Alert Building.)

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one from the southeast side. Windows in the front and ends of the building are wood, four-light, hopper sash. Windows on the rear of the Operations Building and in the Alert Building are a combination of wood, four-light, hopper sash and rectangular, wood, two-light hopper sash. The latter are placed near the eave line. Wood louvers are located in two of the gable end. Plywood now covers the doors; the back door is original. Five brick chimneys rise from the roof.

**Integrity:** Modifications to the building since its construction are primarily limited to the roofing and siding materials. Many of the windows have been boarded over, but the historic windows remain intact. The greatest loss of integrity has occurred at the northeast end of the Operations building where a rolling garage door has been installed.

**Armament Building** or Original Building No. 15, Serial Building No. 35 (contributing building)

The Armament Building is a one-story gable roofed building. The building measures 100 feet by 20 feet with a 12 feet 6 inch by 16 feet boiler room projecting from the rear. The building is roofed and sided with corrugated metal. It rests on a concrete slab. Two small shed roofed vestibules project from the southeast side and two from the northwest side. Windows in the building are wood, four-light, hopper sash, except in the boiler room which has a pair of one-over-one double-hung sash. Doors are five paneled, again, except for the boiler room which has a pair of one-light/three panel doors. Rectangular wood louvers are found in the gable ends. A massive, freestanding brick chimney is located just behind the building. Plywood now covers the doors.

**Crew Chief Building** or Original Building No. 14, Serial Building No. 34 (contributing building)

The Crew Chief Building is a one-story gable roofed building. The building measures 100 feet by 20 feet. The building is roofed and sided with corrugated metal. It rests on a concrete slab. Two small shed roofed vestibules project from the northwest side. Windows in the building are wood, four-light, hopper sash. Rectangular wood louvers are found in the gable ends. Four brick chimneys project from the roof. Plywood now covers the doors.

**Underground Storage Vault** or Original Building No. 27 (contributing building)

An underground vented storage vault is located southeast from the rear corner of the Operations Building. The vault measures 11 x 17.

**Garage/Shop** (non-contributing building)

The garage is a one-story gable roofed building. It was moved from an unknown location after the district's period of significance, sometime in the mid-1980s. It is located just to the rear of the northeast end of the Operations Building. The building is sided and roofed with corrugated metal. A pair of swinging doors is located in one end. Windows are six-over-six double-hung sash. This is an original building to the Airfield.

**Fuel Storage Building** (non-contributing building)

The fuel storage building is a concrete masonry unit standing just to rear of northeast end of the Operations Building, beside the Garage. Built in the mid-1980s, it is currently scheduled for demolition.

**Storage Building** (non-contributing building)

Gable roofed, standing seam building located just to rear of Alert Building wing.

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## **Lewistown Airfield Historic District Integrity**

The Lewistown Airfield Historic District retains excellent integrity. The Airfield buildings on the flight line appear much as they did during their period of significance. Although changes in exterior siding and roofing materials on individual buildings have affected design, materials and workmanship, their form and detailing is evident. Overall, the design of the airfield's environment and the relationship of the buildings to each other are evident. The location, feeling, association, and setting of the Airfield have changed little since the period of significance. The district is located at a functioning airport and the historic hangar still dominates the setting as it did during the period of significance. The newer buildings at the site and within the historic district are small in scale.

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The Lewistown Airfield operated for 12 months, and was then deactivated.

## Great Falls Air Base

During the dark days of World War II after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the allies sustained major defeats around the world. The United States Congress responded with massive defense appropriations. Included in the appropriations was \$200 million for airport development across the country. Plans called for the construction of 164 new airports and improvements to 266 existing facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Great Falls had been considered for an army air base in 1940, when an army inspection group explored the area for a suitable base site. The group found a location just east of the city and thought it ideal for a bomber base to protect coastal cities from air attack. Another inspection group arrived in 1941, and U.S. Senators Wheeler and Murray and the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce heavily lobbied them to select the Great Falls location. Shortly after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, a citizens' group from Great Falls traveled to Washington, D.C. to push for a base. Confirmation of Great Falls' selection came in April 1942, when the two senators announced the War Department would spend \$3 million dollars constructing an air base under the supervision of the Fort Peck District of the Army Corps of Engineers. The final project cost was soon estimated to be nearer \$10 million.<sup>3</sup>

Construction began immediately, and continued around the clock until completion in December 1942. The new base included barracks and mess hall facilities, hangars, and support facilities for the inspection and maintenance of aircraft.<sup>4</sup> Concurrent with the construction in Great Falls, the U.S. Army Air Corps planned and built satellite airfields in Cut Bank, Glasgow, and Lewistown.

## Lewistown Satellite Airfield

Rumors that a satellite airfield would be built at Lewistown reached that community soon after selection of the Great Falls location. Although no formal announcement was made until the end of July, by the middle of June 1942, the City of Lewistown was putting its municipal airport affairs in order. The county agreed to assume equal responsibility for the airport, and management of the facility's affairs came under a three-member commission. The new commission immediately paid off the indebtedness owed 17 local business men and firms who had provided funds to light the runways in 1939. A visit from CAA and army engineers in mid-July fueled speculation about the Lewistown airport's future. Finally at the end of July, R.H. Johnson, representing the Howard R. Green Company, Architects and Engineers of Cedar Rapids Iowa, announced development work would begin at the airport. Citing government censorship requests, Johnson only confirmed that the army planned to build a hangar and a number of barracks. The newspaper quoted him as saying, "Our job is to get the hangar and barracks built as quickly as possible and get out of here." The airport commission immediately turned control of the airport over to the United States of America for the term of the war.<sup>5</sup>

The War Department issued the first contracts for airfield development less than a week later. On August 6, it announced that S. Birch and Sons Construction Company of Great Falls would undertake site work, including grading, excavating, drainage, paving and boundary

<sup>2</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, May 25, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> "Historical Context for Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana," Prepared for 341 CES/CEVP, Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana by CH2MHill. December 31, 1997; *Lewistown Democrat-News*, May 6, 1942 and May 25, 1942.

<sup>4</sup> "Historical Context for Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana."

<sup>5</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, May 25, June 16, and July 3, 13, 29, 31, 1942

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fences at a price of between \$1 million and \$5 million. Askevold & Rudd, also of Great Falls, received a contract to construct temporary frame buildings at Lewistown and Cutbank at a cost of between \$100,000 and \$500,000. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assigned staff from its Fort Peck office to oversee the construction projects.<sup>6</sup>

The extent of the U.S. Army's plans at Lewistown remained a secret. The on-site engineers informed the local newspaper that all news releases would come out of Fort Peck, and censorship regulations prohibited them from providing information. All private and commercial airline flights to Lewistown were halted in late August. Warned against "any extended mention of [the Army's] activities," the *Lewistown Democrat-News* did occasionally report on construction work visible from the highway in front of the airfield. The paper mentioned the raising of "huge roof trusses atop the immense concrete hangar" in October, and that heavy equipment also was visible working all over the airfield grounds. The arrival of a shipment of army cots fueled speculation about the size of the unit to be stationed at the airfield.<sup>7</sup>

The Army finally granted a local newspaper reporter a tour of the airfield in mid-October. The reporter inspected a completed barracks, the hospital, and the mess hall. He concluded "that the boys who will inhabit this little settlement on the hill will be comfortable to the Nth degree." The tour ended with a look at the hangar, but "no intimate questions were asked, as this is wartime, but take it from this reporter, all may be proud of what Lieutenant Sommers [the construction superintendent] and his crew are doing on the hill."<sup>8</sup>

By November 1, 1942, the Army Air Corps had accepted the completed Lewistown Satellite Airfield. Captain George W. Darnell was placed in command of the field, and the first 100 Army Air Corpsmen had arrived at the airfield. A full force of between 800 and 1,000 men would eventually be stationed in Lewistown.

The Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri River Division of Engineering, provided the local newspaper with a description of the "magnitude of the army's engineering accomplishment at [the] Lewistown Airdrome and on similar projects over [the] area." From the beginning of construction in August until the Army Air Corps acceptance of the airfield three months later, the contractors completed what in fact was a small city. The army had constructed in two to three months what under ordinary circumstances would have taken a year to build. Water, sewer, and electrical systems to supply the airfield were planned and installed, and to stay on schedule, for example, during the paving of runways, 150 train carloads of material were required each day. The Division of Engineering described its construction program as the "battleground of the homefront" and employees worked under the motto of "Make no decisions that will not speed to a successful and efficient [sic] end, the job you are assigned."<sup>9</sup>

The most prominent building constructed at the Lewistown Airfield was the B-17 Hangar. This building measured 120 feet by 161 feet; the center of the roof rose to 57 feet. Besides the hangar and airfield runways, the airfield included over 50 wood frame buildings with gable roofs that served as a base of operations and military training, as well as serving the needs of the men, and airfield runways. These included: fourteen 34-bed barracks, mess halls, a commissary and a recreation hall. Warehouses, storage and supply buildings, magazines, and miscellaneous special purpose buildings made up the remainder of the airfield.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, August 7 and 20, 1942.

<sup>7</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, August 20, 25 and October 8, 17, 1942.

<sup>8</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, October 18, 1942.

<sup>9</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, November 16, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Architectural and Engineering drawings for the Lewistown Satellite Airfield, Howard R. Green Co., Archts & Engr's, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. On file at the Lewistown Airport.

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## Mission of the Lewistown Satellite Airfield

The Lewistown Satellite Airfield in coordination with the main Army Air Corps base at Great Falls and the other satellite airfields at Glasgow and Cutbank trained crews to operate the B-17, often referred to as the "flying fortress." A spokesman for the Army's Second Air Force command said that, "The crews at the four fields will be engaged in regular training flights to check on the accuracy of navigators and to promote teamwork among the crews. Much of their time will be devoted to practice bombing." The dispersed airfields permitted simulation of conditions in combat zones. One person compared flying over Central Montana with its lack of clearly identifiable landmarks to flying over blacked out England. Another Army spokesman explained that, "Many of the flights will be in precise formation, simulating battle conditions, when ships must be so spaced as to cover one another with guns." The skies over central Montana were filled with B-17s flying between the airfields, partaking in bombing practice, and testing long-range navigation skills.<sup>11</sup>

In December 1942, Major General Robert Olds, commanding officer of the Second Air Force, laid out the precise purposes of the airfields:

1. Take men individually trained in the delicate art of bombing and weld them into a combat team that works as one man. Particular stress is laid on the ability of this united team to take a four-engine bomber to any target within maximum range, day or night, fair weather or foul, over land or sea, bomb the objective successfully and present the maximum defensive fire power necessary to ward off attacks by enemy pursuits enroute.
2. The organization and training of heavy bomber squadrons and groups is next in line and here special stress is laid on the close coordination of members of combat crew teams to produce essential mass tactics.
3. The trained and organized groups are given a finishing period of training from dispersed airdromes in close simulation of actual conditions encountered in each of the many combat theaters in which American air forces are operating in the second World war today.<sup>12</sup>

No matter how the Army defined the mission of the Lewistown Satellite Airfield, a corporal stationed at the airfield and writing for the "Lewistown Airdrome Flashes", a column that appeared irregularly in the local newspaper, stated it most succinctly: "This is a place where we will learn to work together, play together, live together, fight together, and if necessary die together."<sup>13</sup>

Despite the secrecy and censorship surrounding activities at the Lewistown Airfield, the Army did publicize and mark off the practice bombing ranges. Public safety was an issue here, since the planes used live ammunition and bombs. By the end of 1942, the Army Air Corps had provided exact legal descriptions for two ranges in Chouteau County and one in Blaine County. The different ranges provided varied bombing and gunnery simulations. For example, the range in Blaine County was used for practicing the high altitude precision bombing that had proven successful in Germany. The range in northern Chouteau County served as a gunnery range. Two lines of Japanese "Zero Plane" silhouettes served as targets for strafing practice.<sup>14</sup>

The crews that trained in Lewistown would, when finished, fly directly to the air war in Europe. Casualties among the bomber squadrons were terribly high, and the need for new crews unrelenting. For example, the United States lost 59 aircraft on August 17, 1943 in a raid

<sup>11</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, November 15, 1942.

<sup>12</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, December 17, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, November 15, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, November 26, and December 11, 1942.

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over Africa. Then in October, another 60 B-17s were lost while attempting to bomb a ball-bearing plant in Germany. In lives and dollars, the latter represented 600 men and \$20 million in planes.<sup>15</sup>

Routine training flights over Central Montana also experienced their casualties. The first of these occurred on December 30, 1942 when a B-17 crashed and burned near the small town of Musselshell. All eleven crew members perished. Another crash in September 1943 claimed ten more men.<sup>16</sup>

## Boeing B-17 - The Flying Fortress

The U.S. Army Air Force flew the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress throughout World War II. First produced in 1935, the B-17 appeared in various models, each more heavily armed, as the war progressed. The British Royal Air Force took delivery in 1941 on the first B-17s to see combat. The United States carried out its first bombing raids with B-17Es on August 17, 1942. The B-17 served in every World War II combat zone, but was best known for its bombing of German industrial targets. The B-17Es carried 4,000 pounds of bombs, under the control of the bombardier who rode behind plexiglass in the blunt nose of the plane.

Construction of the B-17 hangar at Lewistown was well underway when modifications to the plans were made to accommodate a larger version of the plane. The revised construction documents added thirty-eight feet to the overall length of the building and eight feet to the height.<sup>17</sup>

## Norden Bombsight<sup>18</sup>

The Army Air Corps in Lewistown trained its pilots in the use of the Norden bombsight. Through the 1930s and into the first years of World War II, the War Department considered the Norden bombsight, a synchronous stabilized bomb-aiming device, "the foundation for American's precision bombing doctrine." At Lewistown, the bombsight was kept in a small double-compartment concrete building accessed through bank vault doors. Barbed wire encircled the building and a sentry guarded the gate 24 hours a day.

The Norden bombsight was a mechanical analog computer designed to determine the exact moment bombs needed to be released in order to hit their target. The 50-pound bombsight contained over 2,000 precision parts---a collection of gyros, motors, gears, mirrors, and levers---that reportedly could "put bombs in a pickle barrel."

Accuracy of the bombsight was solely dependent upon the bombardier's ability to set it properly. Some of the information, like speed, altitude, temperature, barometric pressure, and the bomb "curve" were calculated ahead of time using mathematical tables, and then again as the plane approached its target. In the final seconds before the bombs were dropped, the bombardier had to make sure the bombsight was level, that the plane was headed in the same direction as the sight, and make final adjustments to synchronize the sight with the speed of the plane. One author suggested that the bombardier "must use his fingers as skillfully as though he were playing a violin." The bombsight was connected with an automatic pilot that took control of the plane during the final seconds before the bomb was released.

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<sup>15</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, October 14, 1943

<sup>16</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, December 31, 1942 and September 3, 1943.

<sup>17</sup> Architectural and Engineering drawings for the Lewistown Satellite Airfield, Howard R. Green Co., Arcts & Engr's, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. On file at the Lewistown Airport.

<sup>18</sup> Most of the information on the Norden Bombsight, including the quotes, is from: Don Sherman, "The Secret Weapon," *Air & Space Magazine*, March 15, 1999.

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Crouched in the plexiglass nose of the aircraft, bombardiers had the worst seat in the house. Breathing pure oxygen in temperatures of 40 below, their ears ringing with thousands of horsepower generated by hundreds of pistons, they had to adjust their bombsights--wearing silk gloves so their fingers wouldn't freeze onto the frigid metal--even as their airplanes flew through thick flak and withstood attack from enemy fighters. On their shoulders weighted the responsibility for the success of the entire mission.

### **Presence of the Army Air Corps in Lewistown**

The war personally touched everyone in the United States. The people on the home front donated money to war bond drives, metal to scrap drives, and fat to kitchen fat drives. Keys, knives, and dogs were also requested by the military. Restrictions on food, tires, and gasoline called for sacrifice on everyone's part. In Lewistown, monthly, the community gathered to send-off those men answering the unrelenting draft calls, first for men 20 and above, then 18 and 19 year olds, and then married men with children. At these informal gatherings, the local Elks Club band provided music consisting of military marches and patriotic numbers. The front page of the newspaper carried nothing but war news; inside were the obituaries of the men killed in action.

It is no wonder then, that with thousands of their own sons and daughters serving in the military, the people of Lewistown opened their hearts to the men stationed at the Airfield. Soon after opening of the base, citizens formed a "Camp and Hospital Council" and sought donations of furniture for two clubrooms at the Airfield. A local Servicemen's Center provided entertainment funded by donation drives lead my mother's of servicemen. The weekly dances sponsored by this organization proved highly successful. Local women registered as dancing partners and entertainers, and shortly dubbed themselves the "bomba-dears." In December, eight of ten marriage licenses issued by Fergus County were to soldiers stationed at the base; two of these soldiers married local women.

Soldiers from the Airfield participated in a wide variety of other activities in Lewistown. The Great Falls army dance band played at public dances, basketball teams from the field played each other and teams from the Great Falls base in the local civic center and also Fergus County High School teams, and service men took part in the city's annual Labor Day golf tournament. As the local newspaper stated, "... our citizens heartily welcome [the servicemen] and are extremely proud to have them here."<sup>19</sup>

The Lewistown Satellite Airfield operated for 12 months, and then deactivated. The facility was declared surplus in October 1944. In February 1947, the airfield was returned to the City of Lewistown and Fergus County. It has been operated as a municipal airport ever since.

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<sup>19</sup> *Lewistown Democrat-News*, November 1, 1942; January 2, 13, 20, 26 and September 4, 1943.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 00000162

Date Listed: 3/8/2000

Lewistown Satellite Airfield

Historic District

Fergus

MT

Property Name

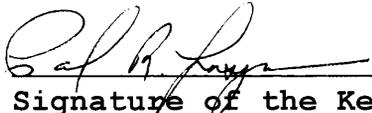
County

State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

3/8/2000  
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

**Level of Significance:**

**The submission is a nomination for a property that meets the criteria at the state level.** [While associated with important national themes, the current nomination fails to justify the Lewiston Airfield district at the national level of significance. The appropriate comparative context established in the nomination is state significance. In addition, statements made in the nomination regarding the nonexistence of other Norden Bombsight vaults should be qualified. Known facilities do exist in at least one other State--Nebraska--where extensive WWII bomber training airfields were developed and operated during the war. For more information and context regarding satellite airfields and the Norden sites see: *Multiple Significant Relic Components of US Army Air Fields in Nebraska MPS.*]

These revisions were confirmed with the MT SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)