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100Years March Field - March Air Reserve Base - California

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The story of March Field - located in Riverside County, approx fifty miles east of Los Angeles - began at a time when the United States was rushing to build up its military forces in anticipation of an entry into World War I. News from the front in Europe to those at home had not been good as it explained the horror and boundless human misery associated with stalemated trench warfare.

Several European news sources reported significant German efforts at this time to build a fleet of flying machines that could well alter the nature of modern warfare and possibly carry the war to the skies. At this time, the War Department announced its intentions to build several new military installations. The Army wasted no time in establishing a new airfield. Sergeant Charles E. Garlick, who had landed at Alessandro Field in a "Jenny" in November 1917, was selected to lead the advance contingent of four men to the new base from Rockwell Field.

On March 20, 1918, Alessandro Flying Training Field became March Field, named in honor of Second Lieutenant Peyton C. March, Jr., son of the Army Chief of Staff, who had been killed in a flying accident in Texas the previous month. By late April 1918, enough progress had been made in the construction of the new field to allow the arrival of the first troops. On May 15 when the first JN-4D "Jenny" took off, March Field seemed to have come into its own as a training installation. In 1921, the decision had been made to phase down all activities at the new base in accordance with sharply reduced military budgets.

In April 1923, March Field closed its doors with one sergeant left in charge. March Field remained quiet for only a short time. In July 1926, Congress created the Army Air Corps and approved the Army's five-year plan which called for an expansion in pilot training and the activation of tactical units. Accordingly, funds were appropriated for the reopening of March Field in March of 1927. In 1931, March Field became an operational base, bringing the Condor B-2 and Keystone B-4 bombers to March. The attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 quickly brought March Field back into the business of training aircrews.

After the war, March reverted to its operational role and became a Tactical Air Command base. The main unit, the famed 1st Fighter Wing, brought the first jet aircraft, the F-80, to the base. In 1949, March became a part of the relatively new Strategic Air Command. From 1949 to 1953, the B-29 Super fortresses dominated the flightline at March Air Force Base. The March wing converted from the huge propeller-driven B-29s to the sleek B-47 jet bombers and their supporting tankers, the KC-97s. In 1960, the

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first Reserve unit was assigned to March, flying C-119s. The end of the 1960s saw March Air Force Base preparing to exchange its B-47s and KC-97s for updated bombers and tankers.

Increasing international tensions in Europe and elsewhere by September 16, 1963, brought March its first B-52B bomber. Soon 15 more of the giant bombers appeared on the flightline along with new KC-135 jet "Stratotankers“, both would dominate the skies for the next two decades. The last B-52 was retired on November 9, 1982, and the 22nd Bombardment Wing, which played a key role in March´s long history, would become an air refueling wing with the new KC-10 tanker. Air refueling for March Air Force Base had entered a new age.

Air refueling for March Air Force Base had entered a new age. The California Air National Guard also arrived in 1982, bringing with them the F-4C's. On April 1, 1996, March officially became March Air Reserve Base. In 2005, the wing retired its C-141 fleet. A year later, the wing began to receive its eight C-17s. Today March is the home of nine C-17 Globemaster, which absolve more than 8000 flying hours / year and 14 KC-135 Stratotankers with around 7000 flying hours / year.

The museum was founded in 1979 as March Air Force Base Museum. It moved to a new location at the base's former commissary shop, where it reopened to the public in 1981. The museum moved again in 1993 to its current location west of the runway along Interstate 215. Originally operated by the Air Force, the museum's operation was transferred to a nonprofit organization in 1996. The March Field Air Museum displays nearly 80 historic aircraft spanning nearly 100 years of aviation history. 10 are inside and the rest kept outside where you can walk around to your hearts content.

The March Field Airfest, also known as Thunder Over the Empire, is a air show that is held every two years at March. This year they celebrated hundred years March Air Reserve Base with a centennial Air Show took place on weekend 7th and 8th of april. The event attracted thousands of aviation fans to see flying exhibitions like the famous DC-3 or lots of historical Warbirs, military demonstrations with KC-135, C-17, several Fighter Aircraft and a Flyby of the rare B-2.

Also the visitors and enthusiats had a good chance to walk through the static display to explore many rare planes and helicopters of the US Air Force, Army, Navy or even the Customs and Border Protection. Everything with rank and fame – from the small T-38 from Beale to the huge B-52 and C-5 Galaxy, which fondly nicknamed BUFF and FRED. After a fatal crash near Nellis Air Force Base during a training Flight for it`s March Demonstration, killed one of it`s Pilots, the March Field Airfest did not feature an apperiance from the Thunderbirds. The missing man formation, performed by four Warbirds including the P-38, was

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part of the show to honor Thunderbirds Pilot Major Del Bagno.

From the dusty stubble that once was Alessandro Flying Strip to today, March, for more than 90 years, has been a key element in the advancement of aviation and in the growth of the modern Air Force. As the Air Force restructures and prepares for new challenges, March seems destined to remain as an important base for the air operations of tomorrow.

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