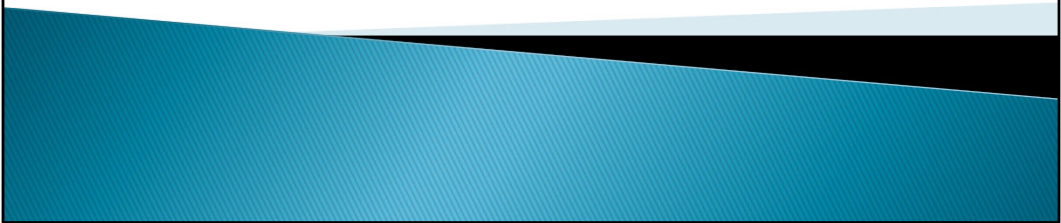


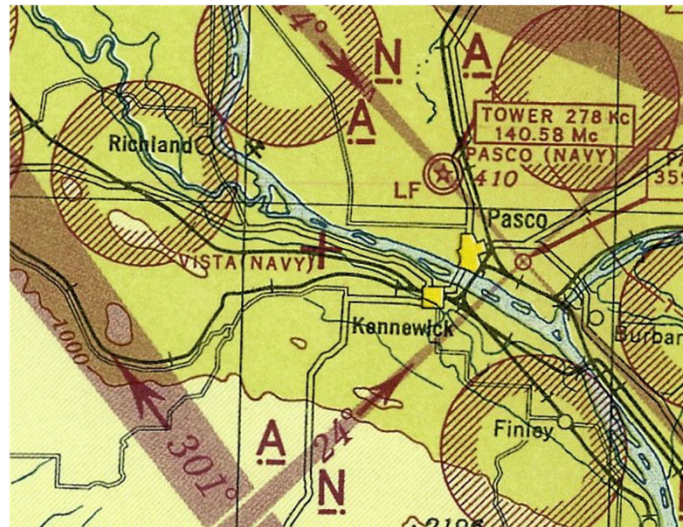


VISTA**FIELD**

A Historical Perspective



Vista Field, as depicted on the November 1944 Spokane Sectional Chart.



In 1942 the Kennewick Irrigation District (KID) acquired land in the area of what is now Vista Field. In the same year the KID transferred some of the land to the City of Kennewick for a municipal airport. The United States Government leased the facility from the city and the U.S. Navy used the site for an auxiliary airfield during World War II [associated with Naval Air Station in Pasco].”

According to its FAA Airport/Facility Directory data, Vista Field was activated in September 1944.

The earliest depiction of Vista Field was on the November 1944 Spokane Sectional Chart. It is depicted as “Vista (Navy)” an auxiliary airfield.

Pilots who would be soon making bombing runs and flying from aircraft carriers fighting the Japanese learned their craft flying from Pasco and Vista Field and made thousands of bombing runs in the White Bluffs area north of Pasco. To this day, farmers still occasionally find old bombs and munitions in their fields left over from WWII (most of them were dummy bombs that didn't carry a full explosive charge, just enough to scatter white paint or flour and show if they hit the target).

This United States Geological Survey aerial photo is believed to be the earliest photo of Vista Field and was taken on June 8th, 1948.

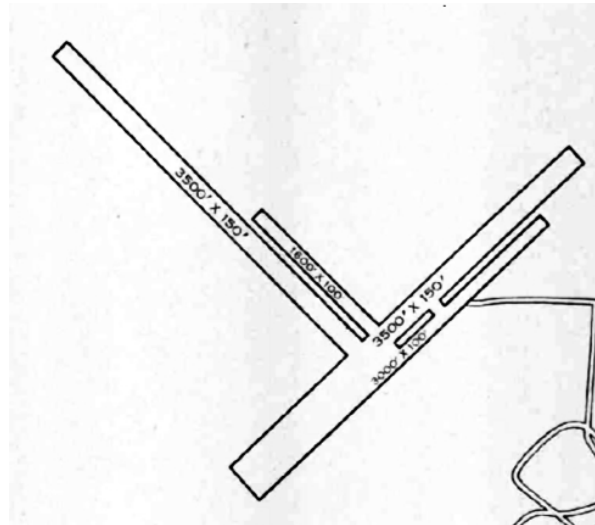


This photo from 1948 depicts Vista Field as having a total of three paved runways. A ramp and 5 single-engine aircraft were visible on the southeast side, and an arch-roof hangar sat on the northeast side. Both runways had markings on them, which remained from the field's Navy use. The “U” shaped dotted runway markings represent the runway markings of an aircraft carrier.

Those markings were used by Navy pilots to practice taking off and landing from the carriers they would be flying from in the Pacific.

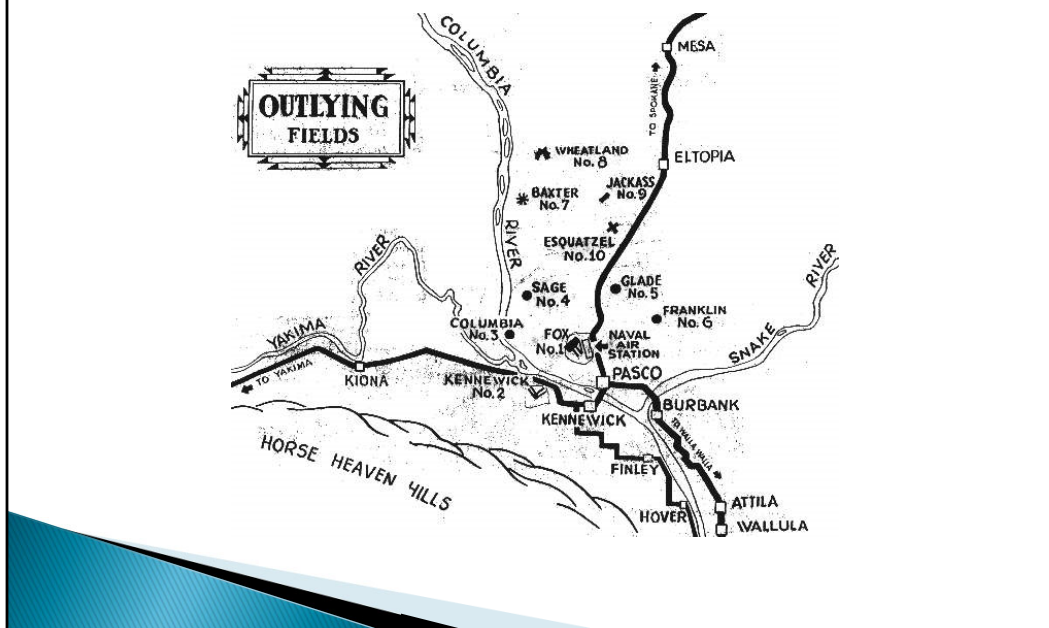
A catapult had even been installed to allow aircraft to practice taking off from a very limited amount of space.

**Pasco Naval Air Station Auxiliary (Vista Outlying Field)
as depicted in the 1945 AAF Airfield Directory**



The 1945 Army Air Forces Airfield Directory described “Pasco Naval Air Station Auxiliary (Vista Outlying Field)” as having 3 asphalt runways, with the longest being the 3,500' northeast/southwest strip. The field was listed as owned by the U.S. Government, and operated by the Navy.

World War II era map showing the Pasco Naval Air Station. Vista Field is referred to as “No. 2”



At the time the field was used during WWII, most of western Kennewick was undeveloped, with hundreds of acres of open land.

During training flights from the Pasco Naval Air Station and Vista Field, farmers, ranchers and orchardists in the surroundings of the Tri-Cities became accustomed to seeing training runs and simulated bombings over their lands. Most often, flour in fake bombs rather than explosives displayed the success of bombing runs. Names like “Bombing Range Road” were said to have come out of these training flights.

Because of the open land and clear weather east of the Cascades, over 260,000 flight hours were logged during primary training. Only two other Navy training fields located in Pensacola, Florida and Corpus Christi, Texas, logged more flight hours.

Naval aviators began their training with bi-planes.



According to the Pasco Aviation Museum, naval aviators began their training on bi-planes. The Boeing Stearman trainer was simple to operate and relatively easy to fly.

The Boeing Stearman trainer at the Pasco Naval Air Station.



The Stearman had dual controls that allowed an instructor to guide the student through maneuvers.

Dress inspection held on the flight line at Pasco Naval Air Station.



Training of each cadets included 84 hours of flying time, 38 of which were dual instruction.

Stages were designated "A" though "F". Stage "A" was primary instruction, at the end of 12 hours of this stage the cadet either soloed or was sent to San Diego for re-classification. Total of 1,878 cadets were graduated. There were 568 failures. That's a 27% failure rate.

Naval Cadet training stages

- ▶ Stage “A” was primary
- ▶ Stage “B” was solo practice
- ▶ Stage “C” was acrobatics
- ▶ Stage “D” was a review of all preceding stages
- ▶ Stage “E” was formation flying
- ▶ Stage “F” was night flying

Stage “B” was solo practice

Stage “C” was acrobatics

Stage “D” was a review of all preceding stages

Stage “E” was formation flying

Stage “F” was night flying

Those cadets who qualified, most likely, received orders for Corpus Christi, Texas, where they were given advanced training... eventually emerging with wings as Ensigns.

Grumman F6F Hellcat



More advanced trainers like the Grumman F4F Wildcat (introduced in 1940) followed by the Grumman F6F Hellcat (introduced in 1943) were used at the Pasco Naval Air Station and Vista Field. These carrier-based aircraft were produced to counter the Japanese Mitsubishi A6M Zero. The Wildcat and Hellcat were difficult for the Imperial Japanese pilots to tell apart. The Wildcat only had 1200 horse power engine compared to the Hellcat's 2,000 hp. Max speed went from 320 mph to 380 mph and climb rate increased from 2,700 feet per minute to 3,500 feet per minute.

Gordon "Red" Pryce and his Grumman F6F Hellcat



These new advances meant your first encounter with the Hellcat was usually your last encounter. The Japanese Zero did well against the Wildcat but was no match for the F6F Hellcat.

The Hellcat achieved an amazing 19:1 kill ratio, downing 5,156 enemy aircraft in just two years, accounting for 75 percent of the Navy's aerial victories during the war.

**The TBF (Grumman) and TBM (General Motors)
Avenger.**



The TBF (Grumman) and the TBM (General Motors) Avenger was a carrier-based torpedo bomber that was used to train pilots at the Pasco Naval Air Station and Vista Field.

Avengers with folded wings at Pasco Naval Air Station.



The Avenger first saw action during the Battle of Midway. It became the most effective and widely used torpedo bomber of World War II,

TBF Avenger



sharing credit for sinking the super-battleships Yamato (ya-ma-toe) and Musashi (moo-ah-she) and credited for sinking 30 submarines.

Little known fact:

“Barbara” was the name of the TBM Avenger flown by then future president of the United States: George H.W. Bush.



That concludes the presentation. As you can see Vista Field played a very important role in training pilots for their duties in World War II. The training planes started with the easy to fly Stearman. The more advanced Wildcat and Hellcats along with the Avenger were added shortly after. Vista Field's close proximity to the Pasco Naval Air Station and its aircraft carrier catapult and runway markings made it invaluable in preparing and training our pilots being sent to war.