X-59

ARMY AIR FORCES
Muroc Flight Test Base
History

In 1941 General H. H. ARNOLD returned from England after viewing the flight of a British Jet Plane. He contacted Lt Col Keirn and sent him to England to study the principles of the plane and return to the United States. Lt Col Keirn was to select a company to build Whittle engines. General Electric Co was selected due to experience in manufacturing turbo-superchargers. Technical Staff of Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio was ordered to select a company to design and build the first jet propelled airplane. Lt Col. D. J. Keirn was appointed engine project officer and Lt Col. R. P. Swofford was appointed airplane project officer.

Col B. W. CHIDLAW and Lt Col. R. P. SWOFFORD in February 1942, made an extended trip by airplane throughout the Western United States and Canada in search of a suitable site for a small base at which the project could be flown in secrecy, the requirements were that it be isolated from a populated area, afford the best in flying terrain and weather, and be reasonably close to the railroad and highway facilities. The final choice narrowed down to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah or Rogers Dry Lake at Muroc, California. Since during their stop at Utah the Salt Flats had enough water accumulated on them to make flying impossible at that time, Muroc was selected. Preliminary arrangements were made with the Commanding Officer at Muroc Bombing and Gunnery Range, Major Glen L. Arbogast, for the assignment of that portion of the lake north of the railroad tracks to the Materiel Command for their exclusive use. 2nd Lt R. L. Kimbrough of the Buildings and Grounds Section of Wright Field made necessary arrangements through Washington with the Office, Chief of Engineers for the necessary construction of hangar space, quarters and appurtenant facilities to establish the experimental station at Muroc.

On April 15, 1942 2nd Lt M. J. Dodd was appointed by Wright Field to proceed to Muroc to supervise preparation and to take charge of Materiel Center Flight Test Site and equipment pertaining thereto.

The base was scheduled to start flight operation on 1 July 1942 but due to unforseen delays the Base wasn't ready until 15 September 1942.

The first airplane arrived 21 September 1942 and erection was begun immediately. Ground tests were begun on 26 September 1942 and the first flight, by R. M. Stanley, was made 1 October 1942.

On 31 December 1942 the 477th Base Hq & AB Sq (Rs) was activated per G. O. No. 26 Hq, Matl Comd Dated 31 December 1942, with H G Chapman Capt A C Commanding and a cadre of thirteen (13) enlisted men were assigned that date. On 20 February the cadre was moved to the Army Air Field Muroc, California and were attached to the 950th Guard Squadron for Rations and Quarters, and Administration. On 19 April 1943 the organization moved to the Materiel Command Flight Test Base. Strength: 47 enlisted men and 3 Officers.