



Army Air Forces

Thunderbird Field



Military Corner

Thunderbird Field was a military airfield in Glendale, Arizona, used for contract primary flight training of Allied pilots during World War II.

Created in part by actor James Stewart, the field became part of the United States Army Air Forces training establishment just prior to American entry into the war and was re-designated Thunderbird Field #1 after establishment of Thunderbird Field#2 at nearby Scottsdale, on 22 June 1942. Thunderbird # 1 is located 25 miles from central Phoenix, AZ.

After the conclusion on World War II, the property was sold as surplus for educational purposes, eventually becoming Thunderbird School of Global Management, a post-graduate business school. In November 2018 the property was transferred to Arizona Christian University. ACU now operates its undergraduate liberal arts university on the site. Acclaimed Television Producer Gerry Anderson names Thunderbird Field as the inspiration for the naming of the television show Thunderbirds as his brother, Lionel, had written to him some years prior, saying he'd been stationed there.

Thunderbird Field began in 1939 as a collaborative project by Hollywood agent and producer Leland Hayward, former Air Service pilot John H. "Jack" Connelly, and Life magazine photographer John Swope, founders of Southwest Airways. Backed by investors that included James Stewart, singer-actor Hoagy Carmichael, Cary Grant, Henry Fonda, Robert Taylor, and Margaret Sullavan, construction of the pilot training facility near Glendale, Arizona, began on 2 January 1941, and was completed in three months. The site, was laid out by artist Millard Sheets to resemble (from the air) an etching of a mythical Ancestral Puebloan Thunderbird. They started Southwest Airways, which issued three covers with the Thunderbird logo on them.

