



About

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The Patuxent River (known as "Pax River") Naval Air Station Complex stretches across 25 miles of shoreline at the mouth of the Patuxent River, overlooking the picturesque Chesapeake Bay, 65 miles southeast of Washington DC and 90 miles south of Baltimore. The Complex supports naval aviation operations by researching, developing, testing and evaluating aircraft, aircraft components and related products. The facilities are also used by foreign governments, academic institutions and private industry for similar projects.



[Click on the photo above to expand in a new window.](#)

NAWC Patuxent River continues to serve as the Navy's principal research, development, test, evaluation, engineering and fleet support activity for naval aircraft, engines, avionics, aircraft support systems and ship/shore/air operations. This is also the testing facility for the new V-22 Osprey. In addition, the installation hosts the Navy Test Pilot School, and both NAS Patuxent River and the nearby OLF Webster host Unmanned Aerial Vehicle operations, all of which regularly use the installation's airspace complex. An additional mission is the detachment of the very high priority TACAMO mission (VQ-4 Det).

The Complex covers approximately 6,500 acres at the station itself with an additional 850 acres at the Webster Field Annex, located about 13 miles southwest of the station in St. Inigoes, Maryland. The Patuxent River complex encompasses five acres at Point Lookout, the southern most tip of St. Mary's County. Of this acreage, the federal government acquired roughly 7,500 acres through eminent domain, inheriting a considerable inventory of pre-historic and historic resources.

Situated on a peninsula between the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay, NAS Patuxent River is located on 6,400 acres (26 km²) of what was once prime farmland, consisting of several large farms, Mattapany, Susquehanna, and Cedar Point, as well as numerous tenant and sharecropper properties and a few clusters of vacation homes. The Cedar Point community included several churches, a post office, and a gas station. Some of the old homes now serve as quarters for Navy personnel stationed there.

In 1937, the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics sought to consolidate aviation test programs, previously being conducted at several stations, including Dahlgren and Norfolk, Virginia, the Washington Navy Yard, and Naval Air Station Anacostia in Washington, D.C., and the Naval Aircraft Factory in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cedar Point was selected due to its remote location on the coastline, well removed from air traffic congestion, with ample space for weapons testing.

The onset of American involvement in World War II spurred establishment of the new air station. Rear Admiral John Towers, Chief of Bureau of Aeronautics, requested approval and authorization to begin construction on 22 December 1941. Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, gave approval on 7 January 1942 and construction began on 4 April 1942. Residents had about a month, until 1 March 1942, to relocate as the federal government purchased all the land at a cost of \$712,287 for 6,412 acres (26 km²).

A lack of transportation in Saint Mary's County led the Navy to revitalize a Pennsylvania Railroad branchline from Brandywine, to

Mechanicsville, Maryland and build an extension south from Mechanicsville to the air station in 1944. Known as the U.S. Government Railroad, the rail line was steam-powered and operated south of Brandywine for exclusive official use until 1954, when it ceased operation. A highway extension to the new air station was required by the project-250,000 tons of material were transported by either truck or water routes during a year of construction.

Employing some 7,000 at its peak of construction, the area had very Gold Rush "boom town" feel as local residents were joined by workers from all over the country, eager to get on the high-paying jobs on station.

The Marines take charge on 20 October 1942, U.S. Marines first arrived and took over security. More than 2,200 workers were arrested during a ten month period as the Marines conducted finger-printing and background checks. During construction, housing needs far outstripped supply and barracks were built for workers on the station and, later, several housing areas were erected off station for workers and their families in Lexington Park, formerly Jarboesville, and named in honor of the CV-2, the Navy's third commissioned aircraft carrier, lost during the Battle of the Coral Sea on 8 May 1942.

The station was formally commissioned "U.S. Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Maryland" on April 1, 1943. The unofficial name had been Cedar Point or the Naval Air Station at Cedar Point, but officials were concerned about possible confusion with the Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, so the new facility was named for the adjacent river.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Navy's Base Realignment and Closure measures have migrated research and testing facilities for both rotary and fixed-wing aircraft to NAS Patuxent River from decommissioned bases. The complex now hosts over 17,000 people, including active-duty service members, civil-service employees, defense contractor employees, and military dependents. NAS Patuxent River is home to the Naval Air Systems Command Headquarters, the Air Test Wing Atlantic, and the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division Commands.



The facility has one of the biggest airfields on the East Coast with a 2-1/2 mile long main runway. In addition to Navy Commands that research, test and develop naval air equipment, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIRSYSCOM) headquarters moved to NAS Patuxent in 1996. Other building occupants include the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School, New Housing Welcome Center, the Propulsion System Evaluation Facility (PSEF), and two huge buildings called the North Engineering and South Engineering site.

St. Mary's County, home of Patuxent River NAS, lies at the confluence of the Potomac River, the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay, approximately one hour's drive south of Washington, D.C. The population of the county is estimated at 85,000. The major highways in the St. Mary's County are Maryland Routes 4, 5, and 235, which are linked to highways U.S. 301 and I-95. The area provides great opportunities for boating, fishing, sailing, and crabbing.

St. Mary's County is a treasure trove of colonial history and unspoiled wetlands. Leonard Calvert and his group of colonists landed on the shores of St. Clement's Island on March 25, 1634. Two days later, they sailed the ARK and the DOVE down the St. Mary's River to establish St. Mary's City. Established in 1637, St. Mary's County became known as the Mother County of Maryland. This was the first colony to practice religious tolerance and the first to have peaceful relation with the native Indians. St. Mary's County was the site of Maryland's first capital and the first site to place an African-American person in a governmental position, as well as the site of the first request for women's right to vote. St. Mary's County has 25 listings in the National Register of Historical Places.

References

NAS Patuxent River, Globalsecurity.org <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/patuxent-river.htm>

Work in Patuxent River, MD <http://www.somdjobs.com/>

Naval Air Systems Command Headquarters, Strategic Planning Division, "The History of Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland", undated, but circa 2000.

FAA Airport Master Record for NHK (Form 5010 PDF) <http://www.gcr1.com/5010web/airport.cfm?Site=NHK>

External links

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) <http://www.navair.navy.mil/> Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division <http://www.nawcad.navy.mil/> FAA Airport Diagram (PDF) (see attachment) NAS Patuxent River at WikiMapia <http://wikimapia.org/#y=38.285981&x=-76.411781&z=13&l=0&m=h&v=2>

Resources for this U.S. military airport:

AirNav airport information for KNHK <http://www.airnav.com/airport/KNHK>

ASN accident history for NHK <http://aviation-safety.net/database/airport/airport.php?id=NHK>

NOAA/NWS latest weather observations <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/data/obhistory/KNHK.html>

SkyVector aeronautical chart for KNHK <http://skyvector.com/#24-23-2-3130-2313>

