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History of the Ottumwa Regional Airport

by Tess Hedrick

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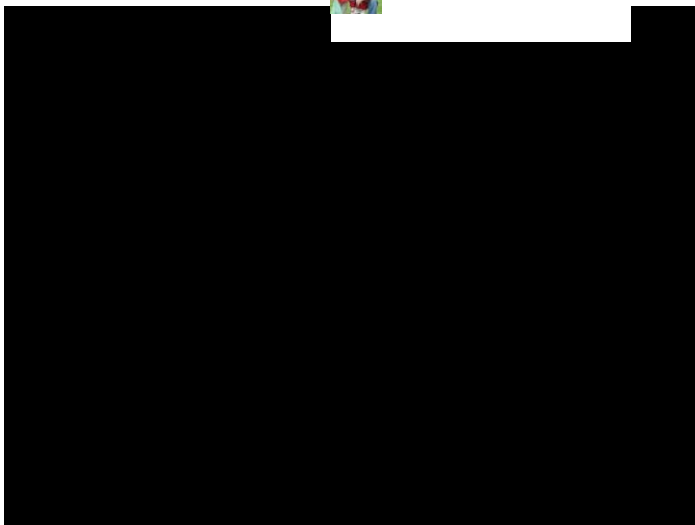
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OTTUMWA, IOWA -- The Ottumwa Regional Airport has been a staple in Ottumwa for more than 50 years and it has a rich history that some may not know about.

"It was actually one of the busiest training bases of WWII and all the ground that you see out here – the ramp and taxi ways and stuff – it was one big, huge control tower. They averaged a thousand hours of flight a day. So a lot of training. And then airplanes going from east coast to west coast – larger, more advanced aircrafts – would stop here overnight to get fuel on their way across the country," said Steve Black, Ottumwa Flying Service.



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The Navy built the space as a primary training base in the early 1940's. Former President Richard Nixon was even stationed there for two months.

In 1947, the city of Ottumwa purchased the facilities from the Navy. Along with the airport, the city developed an industrial park that is now adjacent to it.

"There were about 60 buildings here and some of the buildings are still standing. Most of them have been torn down but the ones that are standing, some of them have been modified and this one is under restoration right now," said Elsie May Cofer, historian and author.

Black said what a lot of people don't know is that the airport is not costing taxpayers anything.

"A lot of people will say, 'Well they're spending money out there. I'd like to get my potholes fixed on my street.' The airport kind of generates its own revenue so there is no tax property tax dollars that are coming in out here," said Black.

Black added that the airport is an important, vital asset to economic development.

"It's no different than the trains or the highway system. You have to have a decent airport to be able for people to come and go," said Black.

Another interesting fact about the naval training base is that more than 600,000 flight hours were logged while it was a base.

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