

Paton Field Centennial Moment – July

Founding of the Kent State Flight Program

As WWII was ending, Kent State began planning for a future with aviation. In September 1945, Andrew Paton was hired to develop an aeronautics curriculum including flight training. Previously, Paton had been a ground instructor for the university's Civil Pilot Training Program (CPTP), and he used that experience as the foundation for the post-war curriculum. The program would mirror that of the CPTP, except that now flying would be at the university's airport. Ground instruction was provided by faculty on campus, while flight training was offered by the Van Deveres—first Rudy's Akron Airways and then Ray's Repair and Sales Depot. To minimize flight training costs, many students elected to take instruction from the KSU Flying Club.

When the courses became available in 1946, students could for the first time earn their private pilot license for college credit. The aeronautics faculty was bolstered in the 1950s with the addition of two faculty members. Peder Otterson, a former Minnesota CPTP graduate/instructor and certified powerplant mechanic, joined in 1953. Marshall Garrett, who first learned to fly at Stow Field, came to Kent State in 1955 as a certified airframe inspector mechanic. These two men spearheaded a student project to restore a Waco biplane which was a huge point of pride for the program.



Restored Waco, 1955. Courtesy of Peder Otterson

As the program matured, Paton saw limits to its further development. The biggest hurdle was, that as contractor, Van Devere controlled airport operations and restricted university access to its own buildings. Additionally, all flight instruction was being handled by parties other than the university. Andrew Paton envisioned a future where the airport would be an educational facility and flight training would be done by university instructors. He advocated for creating a formal flight program at Kent State up to his untimely death in early 1964. His vision was later endorsed by the university which also renamed the airport in his honor. Garrett developed the master plan in 1965 for KSU to take over its flight training.

The first flight instructor hired was Leonard Mack in 1965. Mack was also an FAA examiner and executive pilot for university administrators. Richard "Dick" Schwabe was hired in the summer of 1966 as the lead flight instructor for the new program. Schwabe had been both student and instructor in the KSU CPTP, flown "the Hump" during the war, and then became a public school teacher. He returned to Kent State to run the program where his aviation career had begun. The Kent State flight program began

on September 28, 1966. For the first time, students were taught both on the ground and in the air by Kent State instructors.

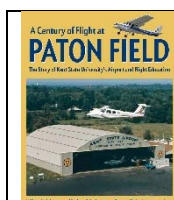


Courtesy of Kent State University Special Collections and Archives

The flight program we see today dates back as 1939 when KSU participated in the CPTP. During the decades that followed, Andrew Paton, Peder Otterson, Marshall Garrett, Leonard Mack, and Dick Schwabe worked with a common vision that the best pilots came from a program that provided every aspect of their training. In a 1974 letter to Otterson, Schwabe stated his involvement with the program “has been one which has made me proud to be a part of, and I assure you that I will do all I can to maintain its position as one of the four best university flight programs in the nation.”

DID YOU KNOW?

Until 1966, university access to airport buildings was restricted by its contractor who controlled airport operations. This forced the KSU Flying Club to disassemble its airplanes at the airport to transport them to campus in order to perform any significant maintenance. Once the required work was completed, the process was reversed, returning the airplanes to the airport in pieces then reassembling them for flight.



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