

Flying By in the Hayward Skies: The Hayward Airport

Even though Hayward is close to three major airports – San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland – Hayward is an important stop for some pilots. The Hayward Executive Airport is a hub for everything from charter flights to traffic monitoring, medical transport to courier service. Today the airport serves radio and television stations, businesses, and those interested in flying for fun. While the airport is used for a variety of commercial enterprises today it was originally built as a tool for fighting the Japanese during World War II.

As early as 1929, the city of Hayward recognized how important air travel could be to the community. While rumors of establishing an airport were heard here and there, there was no actual movement to build one. Oakland was in the process of building their own airport at the time and the effort to do something similar in a much smaller community like Hayward was probably a little intimidating. But, Hayward's postmaster Harry Bradford did see to it that a marker for the city was placed on the roof of a building in town to provide a navigation point to pilots flying over town. Bradford received a letter from Harry Guggenheim of the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics thanking Bradford for seeing to it that the marker was placed.

Finally in 1939, the city of Hayward acquired tomato fields at Hesperian and Russell Road near Russell City with plans for constructing a municipal airport. But the U.S. entered into World War II before those plans moved forward. In 1942, the US Army took control of the property and constructed Hayward Army Air Field. The spot was a good location for the Army because it was close to other military bases in the greater San Francisco Bay Area and well situated for flight operations to protect the West Coast from potential attack.

Army engineers quickly laid down two runways and a variety of buildings, sheds and barracks. The first Army Air Corps began moving into the new airfield in August 1943 to get ready for the arrival of the fighters, the first group being the 355th Fighter Squadron. Primarily the squadron was responsible for training pilots for combat and to protect the Golden Gate Bridge from aerial attack. Remember, in those early years of the war, the communities located closest to the coast all feared an aerial attack from Japan. The 344th, 362nd, and 394th Fighter Squadrons were all stationed at the airfield at one point. These squadrons primarily flew in P-38 planes, but the 355th also flew the awesome Bell P9 Aircobra.



Aerial view of the airport as it looked early on in its history

Also in the 1940s, the Civil Air Patrol trained at the airfield. The Civil Air Patrol is a volunteer organization that trains people in emergency air services, aerospace education, and a youth cadet program.

After the end of the war, the airfield was declared surplus by the US Army in 1946. In April of 1947, the airfield was quitclaimed by the federal government, and 690 acres, along with buildings and equipment, were handed over to the City of Hayward at no cost. The airfield was renamed Hayward Municipal Airport, and an air show was held to celebrate the transfer of the airport to the city.



Air show with people lined up to look at planes, c. 1945

Also in 1946, the California Air National Guard moved to Hayward on some of the land adjoining the airport. The CANG remained at the Hayward Airport until 1980, when it was moved to Moffett Field.

In January 1959, a Federal Aviation Administration air traffic control tower was commissioned. A few months later in July construction of an administration building and the tower began. In 1962 the Hayward City Council adopted the first Airport Layout and Land Use Plan, and in 1963 entered into an agreement with Airport Investors & Developers, Inc. of Hayward to run the airport. That same year the name of the airport was changed to Hayward Air Terminal.

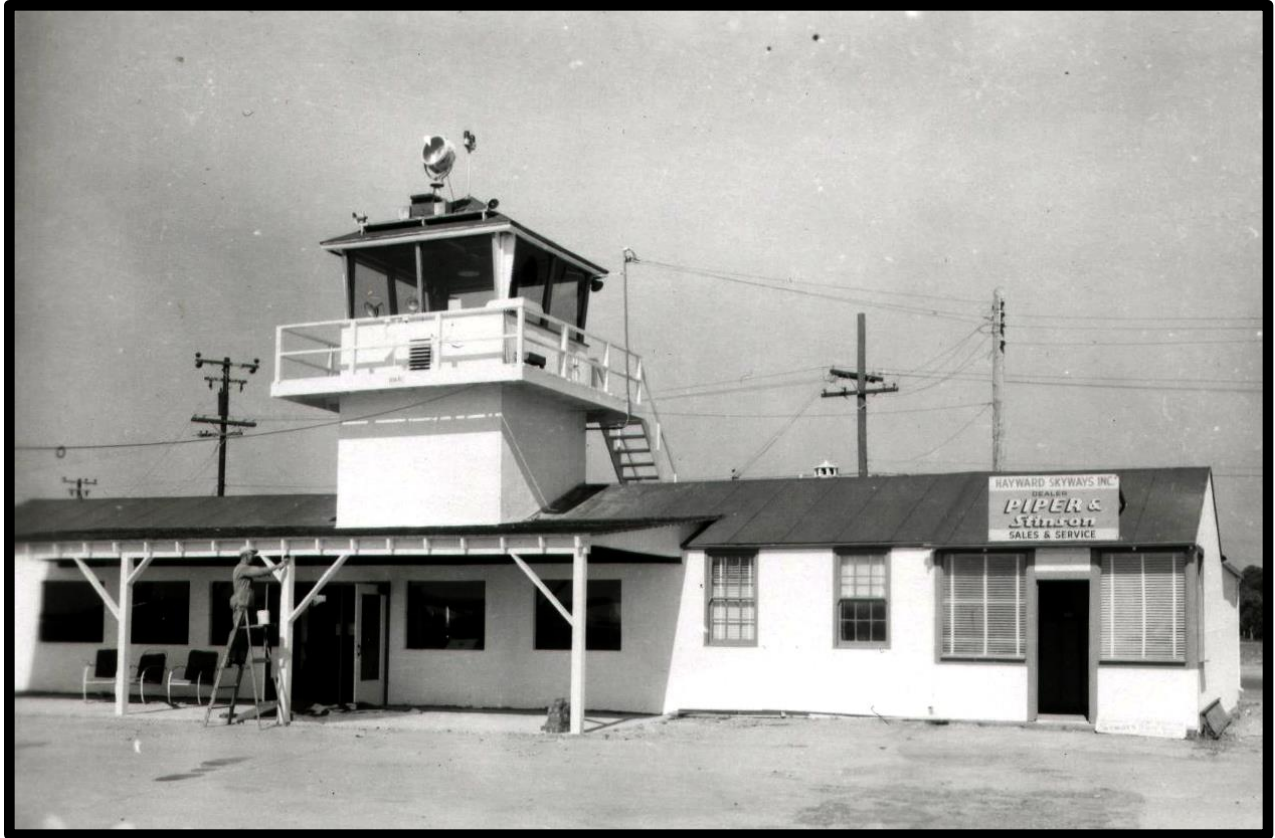


Photo of the first air traffic control tower, c. 1950

The late 1960s and into the 1970s was the most prosperous time in the airport's history. In 1968 new hangars were built and the runway was reconstructed and extended from 1800 to 3100 feet. In 1970, the city again took over management of the airport. Eight years later, the airport hit its peak of over 420,000 operations, at that time the sixth busiest in the country.

In 1993, the airport celebrated its 50th anniversary, and in 1999 the airport was renamed the Hayward Executive Airport. Today the airport continues to serve small planes in the Bay Area, and send up planes to fly by in Hayward's skies.