

# — Biggs Field — Quite a History

Soon after World War I, the Army Air Service, a branch of the Army Signal Corps, established an airfield east of Ft. Bliss' main post (known today as the 2400 area). The first airfield was a sandy leveled area where planes took off in any direction they liked, according to which way the wind blew.

The first unit to be assigned to the field was the 12th Air Squadron flying De Havilland DH-4 Biplanes which patrolled the border areas in order to counter the raids on desolate West Texas ranches during the post-Pancho Villa days. This activity was phased out during the 1920s.

The airfield then became part of a group of Army Air Corps fields located throughout Southwest Texas. These were used as a basis for transient military aircraft and consisted of no more than bladed grass areas.

Several years later the airstrip was moved north of the original sight. It was given the name Biggs Army Air Field in honor of James "Buster" Biggs an El Paso World

War I fighter pilot. Biggs died during World War I when his engine failed on take-off for a combat mission.

The first permanent structure on Biggs Army Air Field was a steel hanger for blimps. The hanger stood as a landmark until 1958 when it was razed. Other military aircraft used the field as a refueling stopover.

The first expansion took place during pre-World War II days. A control tower and larger hanger were under construction when Ft. Bliss began holding maneuvers in the desert. At that time a Piper Cub was loaned to the government on an experimental basis. It was used in maneuvers as a courier plane and later, became the famed *Grasshopper* of World War II. About this time Biggs expanded to the point where runways were added and base housing and offices were constructed as America prepared for the war.

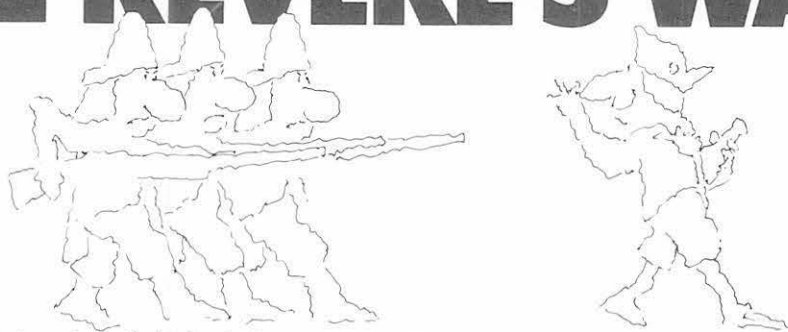
In 1948 Congress separated the Army and Air Force making the field Biggs Air Force Base. In



**James "Buster" Biggs, a World War I fighter pilot—for whom the field was named.**

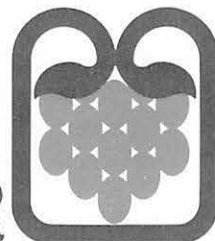
(Photos courtesy of Bruce Bissonette)

## PAUL REVERE'S WALK.



In April 1775 in America's fight for independence, a little known event took place during the milestone battle of Lexington/Concord. Paul Revere was captured by the British who immediately commandeered his horse. After the battle, a released Revere was forced to walk. Upon reaching home, the patriot's feet were sore but his spirits uncommonly high. Not only had the Americans carried the field, but, it seems, the government then in power in their haste to steal his horse had overlooked a bottle of vintage wine which Paul retained and used to good advantage.

205 years later El Paso's patriots are still fighting the good fight what with taxes, inflation, and what all. Thank God that in their hurry to devalue our money and collect their taxes (stealing our horse, so to speak), the government is still overlooking our vintage wines which are available (at least until the mistake is discovered) in wonderful variety at the Vintage Year on Shadow Mountain.



### THE VINTAGE YEAR

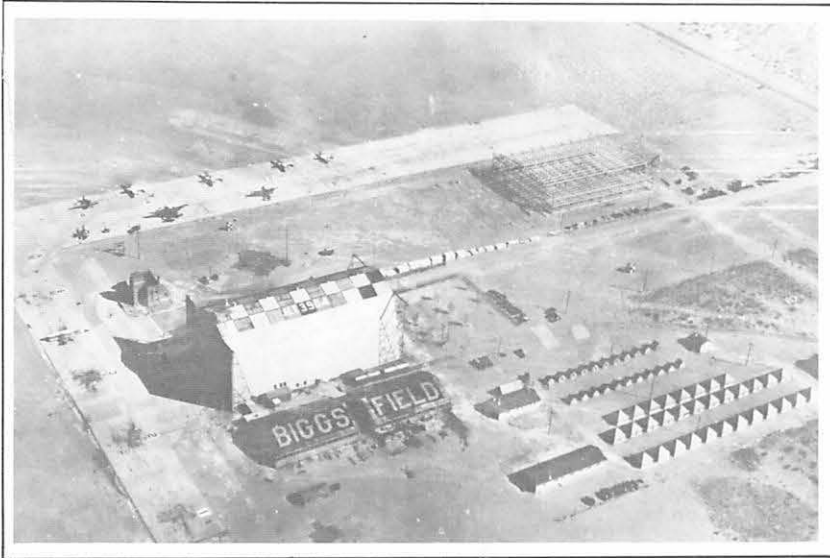
255 SHADOW MOUNTAIN · EL PASO, TEXAS 79912 · 915/581-WINE

1965, during a major military cut back, the base was ordered to close along with others in the United States. Many of the B-52's were flown to the military aircraft storage depot at Davis-Monthan in Tucson, Arizona. Two such B-52's are still in repose at that boneyard. They are named "City of El Paso" and "Ciudad Juarez." With the abandonment of the base, the field reverted to Army ownership and again was designated Biggs Army Air Field.

Soon after World War II, the Strategic Air Command serving the 8th Air Force, with such famed aircraft as B-29's, B-50's, C-97's, C-124's, B-47's and B-52's, made Biggs its flying base.

The airfield today serves as an operational base for the aviation section at Ft. Bliss and the home of the Army's 3rd Cavalry, maintaining a large fleet of combat helicopters.

**ept**



Biggs Field began to grow and expand with the onset of a possible second World War. A larger hanger and control tower were under construction.



L-13 observation liaison aircraft used Biggs Air Field for refueling stopover.

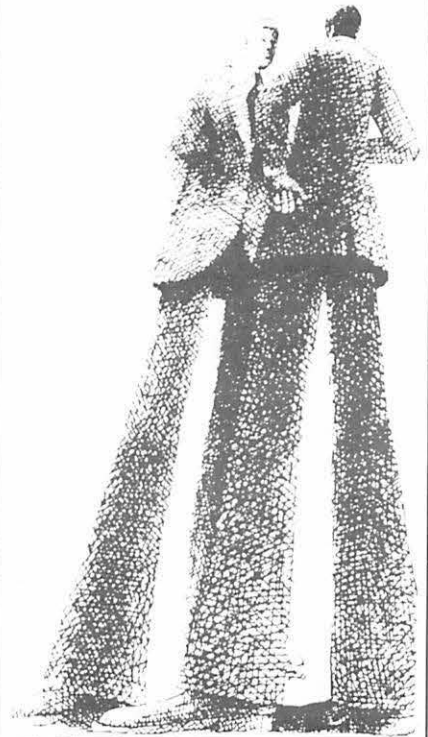
FINANCIAL FUEL FROM HELLER™

## Tell us your company's cash requirements. We'll tell you how to meet them.

In over a half-century of financing industrial and commercial firms, it's likely we've seen many situations like yours.

So it's likely that we can show you how to obtain Heller funds for your individual needs today. And tomorrow.

Call us. Usually we can tell during our first discussion whether Heller Financing is the answer. And if it isn't, we'll suggest some alternatives. That's how we do business. Call Barry Cook for a confidential appointment.



**HELLER**   
Financial Services

SECURED LENDERS PROVIDING FINANCING FOR ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE, INVENTORY, MACHINERY / EQUIPMENT, REAL ESTATE AND OTHER COMMERCIAL REQUIREMENTS.

**Walter E. Heller Western**

FIRST CITY NATIONAL  
BANK BLDG.  
300 E. Main, Suite 1140  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
(915) 532-5988

# Biggs Field Organized to Aid In Villa Border Skirmishes

El Paso's first military flying field was organized to help handle the skirmishes along the Mexican-U.S. border when Pancho Villa and his troops were active. A plane refueled there in 1916 after the Columbus, N.M., raid.

Regular use of the field dates from June 17, 1919. The airmen cooperated with cavalrymen on the ground in their operations. All were part of the Army.

**THE AIRFIELD**, which later moved about two and a half miles north to its present location, was officially named

in 1925 after Lt. James B. (Buster) Biggs, a native El Pasoan who was killed in a plane crash at Beltrain, France, in October, 1918.

When the Army had a cut-back in funds, in 1926 the 12th Observation Squadron was moved to San Antonio. The flying field was not needed for military purposes, but since the City didn't have an airport yet, it became a service facility for transient military and civilian aircraft.

**THE SITE** continued to be a refueling stop until 1939

when another service was added; a two target unit was formed at Biggs to support a new antiaircraft battalion at Ft. Bliss. Further expansion came in 1940 with National Guard mobilization at the base.

A \$10 million construction program began in 1941 with the advent of World War II and busier days for the air field. During the war hundreds of crews for B17s B24s and B29s were trained at Biggs. Following the birth of the Air Force as a separate armed service in 1947, Biggs became an Air Force Base on Feb. 1, 1948.