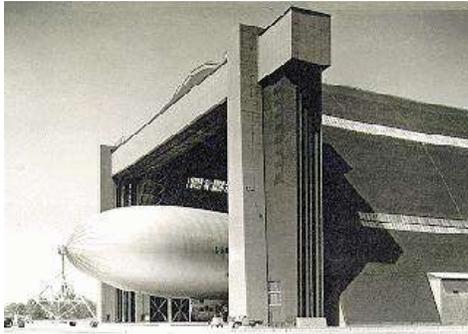


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U. S. Naval Air Station (LTA) Weeksville



In 1941 only one lighter-than-air station existed, Lakehurst, NJ, and with the approach of war in Europe the United States began to take a serious look at its defensive capabilities. High on the list was anti-submarine patrolling of the coast and harbors. At this time the best vehicle to do this was the blimp. In the age before helicopters the blimp had the capability to hover, and fly slowly for extended periods, and carry sensors and armament to protect shipping off the coast.

On July 3, 1941 the Congress passed a bill to authorize construction of facilities to house and support 48 airships. Previous to this a survey was done to select the best locations for these bases. Weeksville North Carolina was selected because of it's proximity to the large Navy presence in Norfolk and because it was midway down the east coast of the United States and blimps operating from here could cover the Hampton Roads, Cape Hatteras area.



On August 6, 1941 construction was started on what was to become Weeksville Naval Air Station (LTA). The original contract called for the construction of a steel hangar, helium storage and service, barracks for 228 men and 50 officers, power plant, landing mat, and a mobile mooring mast. Then in July of 1942 an additional contract was awarded to construct a second all wood hangar (that was the largest wooden structure in the world, until it burned down in 1995) and additional housing and facilities to support the increase in base size. Weeksville N.A.S. was commissioned on April 1, 1942 with operations starting on June 8, 1942 making Weeksville the first LTA facility in operation on the east coast since the facility at Lakehurst NJ was built.



At its completion Weeksville covered 822 acres, had 10 miles of railroad tracks, hangar space for 12 Navy "K" ships , housing for 700 enlisted men and 150 officers, and cost over six million dollars. The second hangar was completed on July 15, 1943 and was the first wooden hangar built of the seventeen on order. Airship squadron ZP-14 was established here on June 1, 1942 starting operations from the Coast Guard base until June 8th when it moved down the road to its new home.



During World War II operations continued escorting ships and performing search and rescue missions until June 10, 1944 when ZP-14 was replaced by ZP-24 with ZP-14 being transferred to North Africa, making the first trans-Atlantic flights by blimps. In this period several airships were lost, all to operational accidents, but none to enemy action. To testify to the effectiveness of the blimps, before they started operations at Weeksville, one ship every other day was lost to submarines off the North Carolina coast, after the start of operations this dropped to one every two and one half months.