

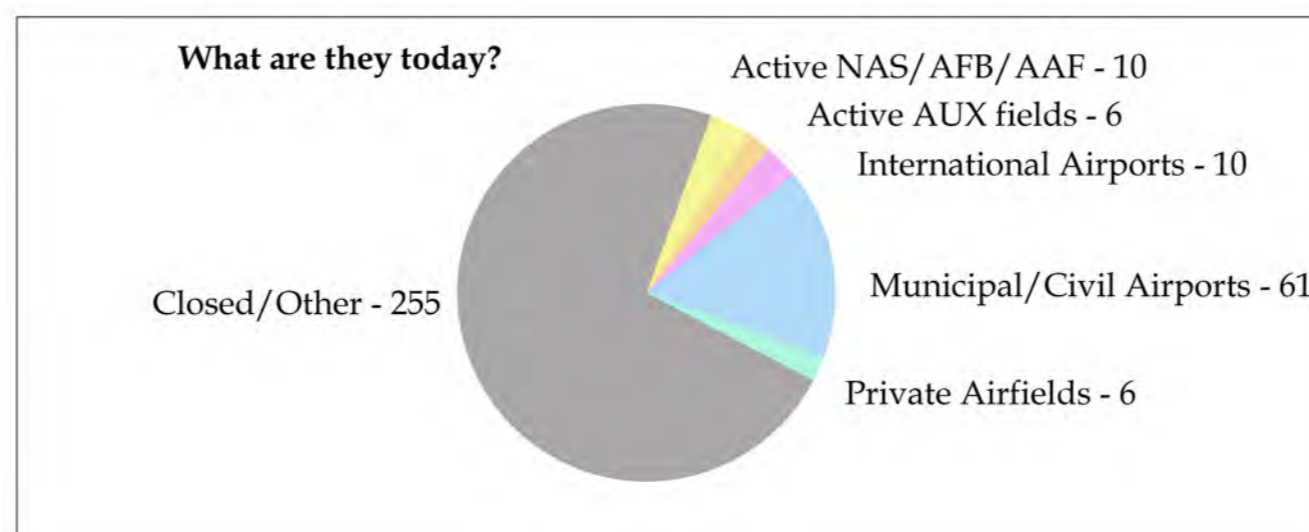
# Military Airfields of Texas

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**Introduction:** Aviation progressed a great deal during World War II. The need for pilots and large spaces in which to train and practice meant that airfields all over the country were hurriedly being developed. Texas was an ideal state to build these airfields because of its size and year-round flying conditions. With the conclusion of the war, however, most of these spaces became surplus property. My interest is in what happened to these sites after their purpose had been fulfilled, and how their specific geography is represented today.



Pyote AFB has been used for car racing, a not uncommon re-use of airfield space.



The ramp at Marfa AAF.

**Research:** This poster focuses on Texas because in total there were over 2,000 airfields throughout the United States in use by the military during the war years. I began my research as a photographer pursuing an MFA. While I do shoot from commercial flights, most of my aerial work is done in small, high-wing airplanes. This enables me to get closer to the sites and spend as much time as I want around them. The use of Google maps has been invaluable to my research, as it enables me to see the current conditions of the fields and allow me to plan a shoot. From there I started voraciously reading from the National Air and Space Museum's archives. There are many aviation enthusiasts who share their knowledge online, in the form of websites and blogs. It has been a slow process piecing together the stories of each field, and my research is far from complete.

**Findings:** The airfields ranged in size from massive installations with three or more runways and extensive facilities to simple, turf fields with only a few facilities. The larger installations were often self-contained environments that offered everything one could desire in terms of amenities and comfort. Many of the military airfields have become international and municipal airports, and some remain Air Force Bases and Naval Air Stations. The airfields with turf runways have all but disappeared. There are dozens of closed and abandoned fields that act as quiet monuments to war, hidden from sight unless seen from above. Although they haven't been in use in over sixty years, their imprints are still clearly recognizable. Some airfields have become industrial parks, mixing the landscape of the airfield with new, diverse activity. It was curiously and sensibly common to use the runways and flight lines as racetracks, and many fields have this history of post-war use. One field is currently home to a prison, while another has become a unique housing community, with homes built directly on runways. Counting every field in Texas, including the many auxiliary fields - which provided great opportunities for touch-and-go training - the total number of military airfields in Texas during World War II numbered nearly 350.



The skeleton of Hitchcock NAS - after Hurricane Ike in 2008 the remnants of this blimp hangar have all but disappeared. This photo is from 2007.



Chase Field NAS has recently been re-born as an airfield, although much of the land has been converted into a prison.



Orange Grove Naval Auxiliary Field. The hangars are in decent condition, but nature has certainly begun to take over.



Pyote AFB has a shell of a hangar on its massive site.

**Conclusion:** The military airfields of Texas remain an important part of aviation history and are monuments to war and military history in their own right. My research continues to document these spaces. The active airfields remain vital in their facilitation of flight while the closed fields continue to shift, slowly deteriorating and turning back to nature. Because of the size of Texas there is not nearly as great a need for the redevelopment of the closed airfields as in smaller states. These sites are allowed to remain as physical pieces of our collective history, quiet monuments to the past. While it is difficult to fully appreciate the size and layout of these airfields from the ground, once one changes her perspective and lifts above the ground (in flight, and now with satellite imagery) the imprint of the airfield is unmistakable, and beautiful.

Matagorda Peninsula AAF is now an avant-garde housing community, with modest homes scattered all over the runways and flight line.



It's business as usual at Dallas Love Field.



Matagorda AFB was active until 1975. Today it is a wildlife refuge.



The runways at Matagorda AFB are in decent condition

Aloe AAF was active from 1942-1945. Today much of the field is an industrial park, and you can clearly see the highway running through it.



Can you find the former airfield?



An auxiliary field to Fanin AFB



Marfa AAF was in use from 1942-1945. Although the buildings have all been removed, one can still see a distinctive layout from above.