England AFB’s Growth Traced

By Blanche Pace

England Air Force Base, the home of the 401st Fighter Wing, is the pride of Tactical Air Command and its history reads like a chapter from Genesis.

Its embryonic days trace back to 1939 when Ester Field used it as an emergency air strip; later it became Alexandria Army Air Base, an auxiliary to Pollock Air Field.

During World War II it became a B-17 combat crew training school and before the close of the war in the South Pacific it had begun training B-17 crews for duty in the South Pacific.

From a brief history of the base culled from the 1962 Directory and guide we are told it was used by the city of Alexandria as a municipal airport starting in 1946.

The base was reactivated in 1950 and called Alexandria Air Force Base, assigned to the Tactical Air Command with headquarters at Langley AFB, Va.

The first wing assigned here was the 137th Fighter-Bomber Wing, an Air National Guard unit composed of personnel from surrounding states. It was equipped with F-84 jet fighters which were assigned to the European Theatre in 1952.

Became Permanent Installation

The 366th Fighter-Bomber Wing was the first regular Air Force unit to be permanently assigned to this installation and was joined by the 401st Fighter-Bomber Wing in January, 1954. November, 1954 saw Alexandria Air Force Base designated as a permanent Air Force installation.

New Wing Added

This month the base is again enlarged by the arrival of the 3rd Fighter Wing which with the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing forms the 4461st Division. The 3rd Fighter Wing, from the Far East, will eventually bring the number of men on base to approx. 4300 by June.

The annual payroll, now over 112 million, is expected to climb to $20 million. The base also includes 2200 children, of which 1560 are of school age. The fighting personnel is composed of four squadrons of F-100’s, the 612th, 613th, 614th and 615th. There are also C-123 support aircraft and rescue helicopters.

The base division is a potential segment of TAC’s Composite Air Strike Force, versatile and highly mobile. It contains all the elements for offensive air operations and can be tailored to meet any situation. In a matter of hours the CASF can be combat-ready in any part of the world. It is a deterrent to local wars as was recently demonstrated in Iran and Taiwan.

England AFB is fully equipped with F-100 Super Sabre jets. An example of tactical fighter range with in-flight refueling was the flight of F-100 Super Sabre jets non-stop from London to Los Angeles in May 1967. The distance was 6,170 miles covered in slightly more than 14 hours.

England AFB is a beautiful little city in itself. It’s lovely homes, well kept lawns, swimming pools, recreation halls, neat little shops, church and hospital facilities presents a model little town. Still its housing does not begin to meet the needs for its thousands of officers and men and it would be difficult to estimate the millions of dollars it annually pours into the life stream of Alexandria.

Probably there is no business house or professional group which has not experienced the impact of its trade. Its present plan of construction program involving a cost of $24 million, which Congressman Gilis W. Long and Col. R. V. Travis have been instrumental in securing for the base, will give work to many idle as well as aiding our Base in its defense program.

Perhaps one of the most pleasing results of the proximity of the Base has been the close rapport of its people with the citizens of Alexandria and Pineville. That good old southern hospitality has endeared the city and its people to the newcomers. The fact that so many elect to retire here attests to their desire to pull down roots and call it home.