

# Pickles, jets, and books, outlining the

By Kathleen Heraghty and Jim Fitzroy

The H.J. Heinz Company farmed it- grew some of their famous pickles on it. During the First World War the government stored some of its ordnance on it. As the Army Air Corps took it over, bi-planes and observation balloons graced its grounds. The Air Corps became the Air Force and the simple flying field eventually grew to accomodate jets;

The gently rolling acreage had become the sprawling Olmsted Air Force base. Then in 1964 a decision was made that led to the land's present incarnation as the Capitol Campus of the Pennsylvania State University.

On October 3, 1966, eighteen students and 8 full-time faculty members quietly took over the Olmsted Air Force Base. The students made up the first class of Capitol Campus. All were transfers from University Park or other commonwealth campuses studying in Humanities and the Social Sciences.

In its second year the Middletown campus had its first full class. There were 513 full and part-time students enrolled in the fall term. The 1967-1968 academic year also introduced programs in elementary education, engineering technology, and business administration.

According to the Middletown Press and Journal in 1966, the Air Force still had a few dozen personnel on hand. The airmen attended campus functions and often ate in the dining hall, by then being run by the university.

Male students lived in Wrisberg Hall and on the third floor of the



Even before the Air Force, the Heinz Company used the land for farming.

Church Hall. Airmen were housed on the lower floors there as late as May, 1968. Female students lived in the former Bachelor Officer's Quarters, which are now the University Apartments.

From the original 513 students, the campus has grown to 2,463 enrolled for 1983-1984.

In 1917, the Heinz people were operating a truck farm and growing a variety of vegetables. Part of this land was then aquired by the government for the Middletown Air Depot.

The Depot began as a single warehouse next to the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks. This and later structures were occupied by the Ordnance Department.

Planes had been flying out of the Depot since 1918, according to Harold Hickernell, former public relations director for the Olmsted base, though it wasn't until 1922 that the Army Air Corps actually took over the land to use in their growing defence role.

The name of the facility was changed in 1923 to Olmsted Field, in memory of First Lieutenant

Robert S. Olmsted who, at the time of his death, was assigned to the depot as an engineer. He was killed during the Gordon Bennett International Balloon Races in the Netherlands, when lightning struck the balloon he was piloting for the Army.

Aircraft repair facilities were installed in 1925 and, in 1927 the landing field was enlarged to handle the various types of crafts then being flown, including the hot air balloons anchored in the mooring rings on the flying field. The new runway was exceptionally strong because iron slag had been used in building it and in reclaiming the existing marshland, according to a retired civilian worker from the Olmsted time.

Former Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, on November 19, 1964, gave the official announcement that Olmsted Air Force Base would be closed down.

In response to local opposition, McNamara said, "These decisions are absolutely, unequivocally, without qualification, irrevocable, unless some new evidence is brought to our attention, and the chances of that are damn small."

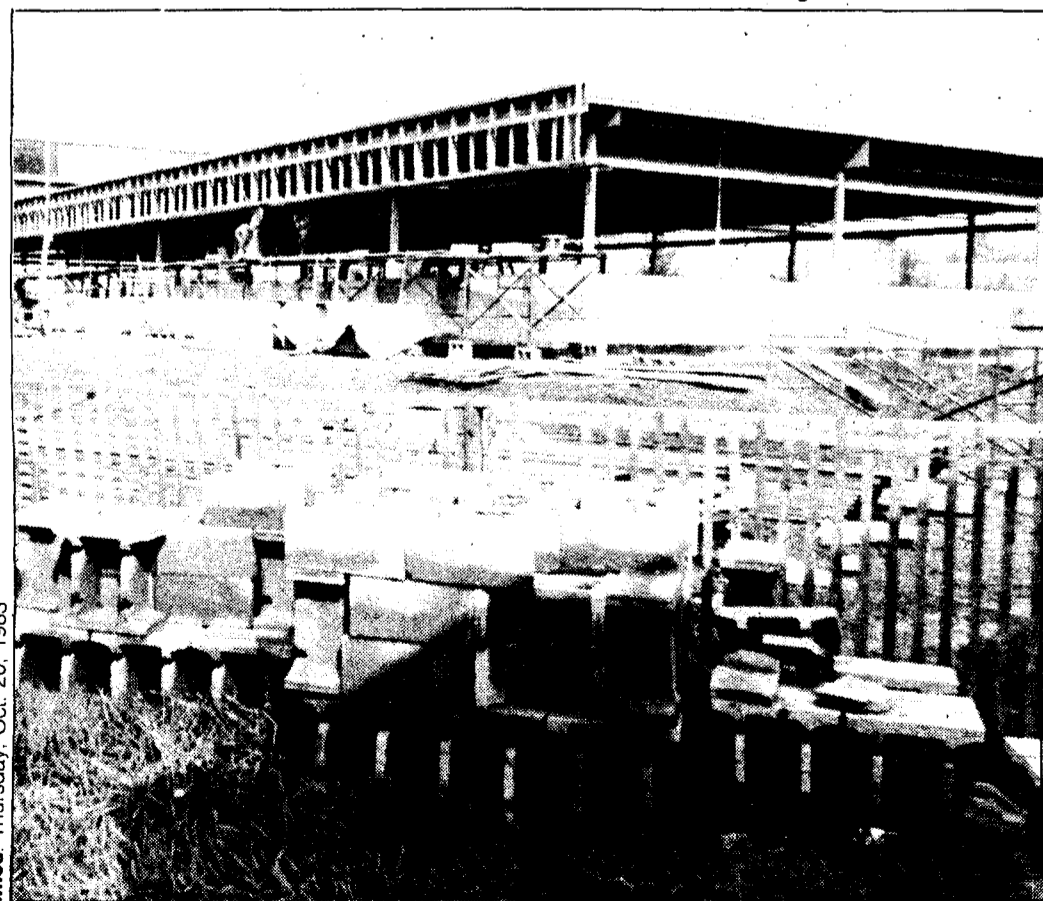
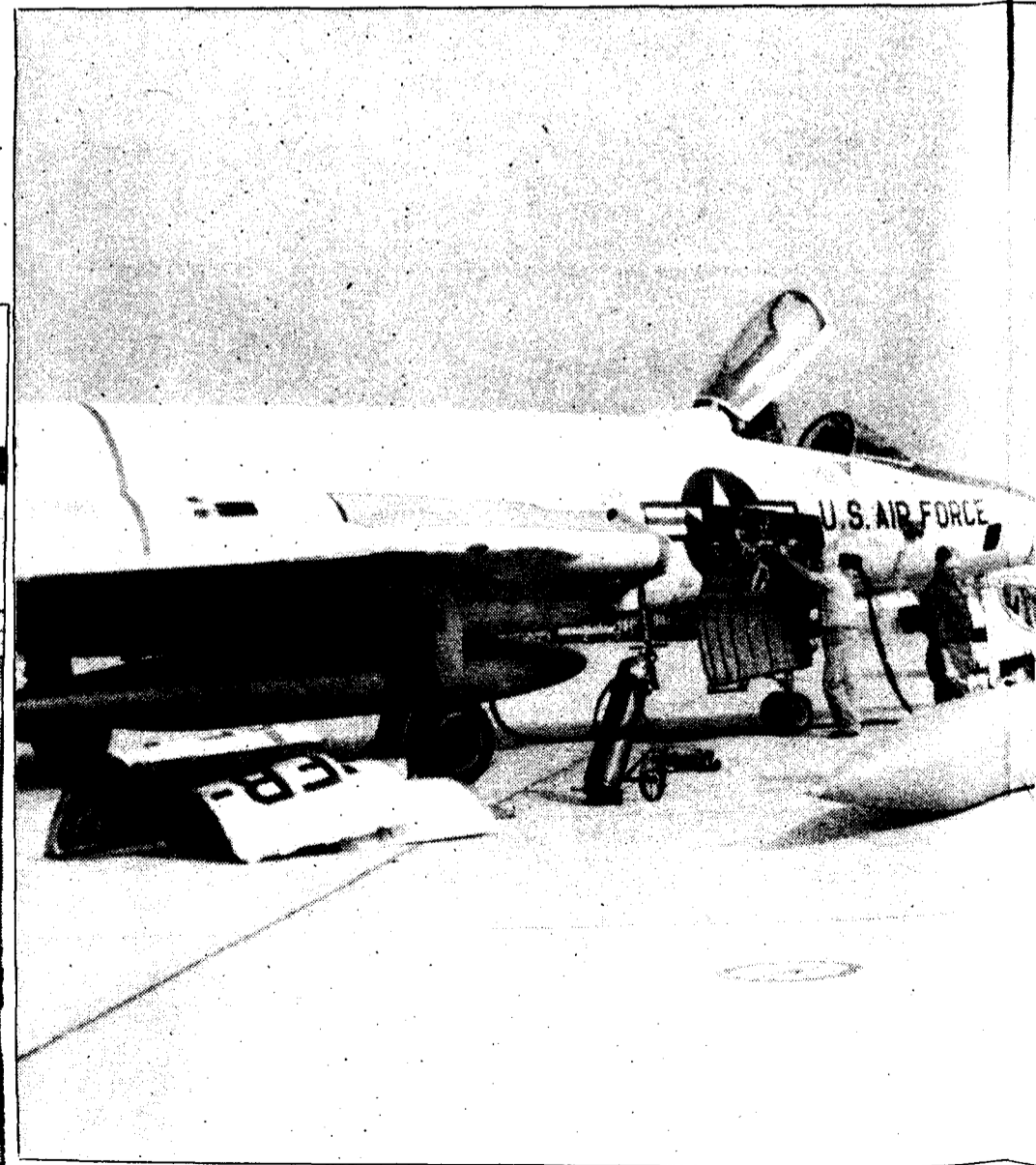


Photo by Jeffrey G. Shatzer

One of the ongoing adaptations to the complex is the construction of the \$2 million Science and Technology Building.



According to a former Air Force employee, this F-101 was the last aircraft to be Over base on August 9, 1965