

# Air force base to campus: history of PSH

By Herbert Smith  
Staff Reporter  
hjs135@psu.edu

Penn State University's branch in Middletown has been open since 1967. However, the land the school sits on has a rich history dating back nearly a century.

Part of the land became an

army base during the Spanish-American War and in 1917, land was broken on the Army Air Corps field, which later became Olmsted Air Force Base. During World War I, the land served as a training facility. In 1960, the Olmsted building, a 189,000 square foot facility, was built and served as an administrative

building. The Swatara building served as the infirmary for the base, while the Mechanical Building served as the machine shop, where parts for aircraft were made and repaired. Meanwhile, aircrafts were repaired in the Capital Business Park. The former student housing buildings, known as Meade Heights, originally housed married officers. Two resident halls, named Church and Wrisberg after two pilots killed in 1960 in a plane crash in York County, served as dormitories for the soldiers. After Penn State took over the land, the two halls served as housing for the students until Meade Heights was renovated. Church Hall was later renovated and became the Institute for State and Regional Affairs and the centers for Survey Research, Economic Research and Training, and others. Nine other buildings also stood on the campus that no longer do.

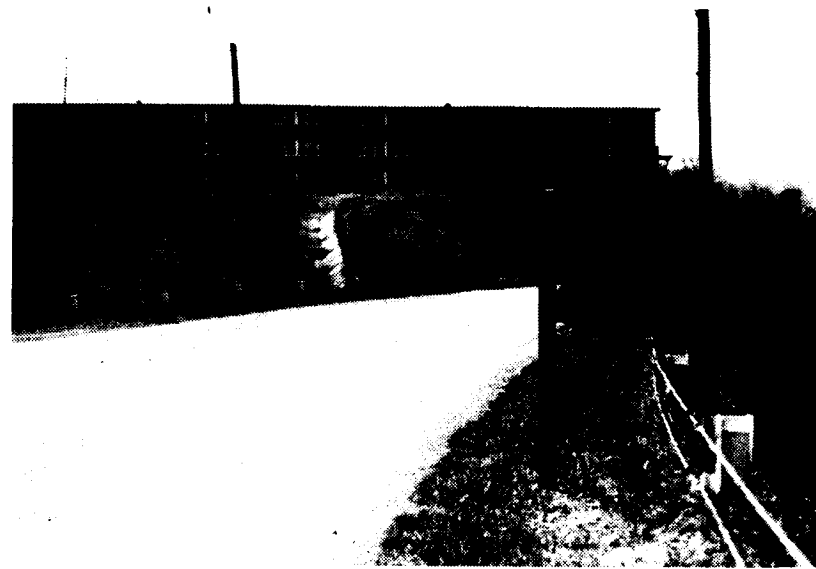
The base also served in an emergency evacuation process for the President of the United States during the Cold War. In case of a nuclear attack, a helicopter would have left Olmsted and flown to Washington to pick up the president and then flown him to a secret underground location.

Across Rt. 230 from the current campus sits Harrisburg International Airport. The airport

was also part of Olmsted; troops were trained there and of course, military aircrafts could land there. When the base closed, the airport could have been destroyed. However, the airport's long runway made it ideal for commercial flights and so the HIA was born.

The Olmsted Air Force base and the Olmsted building are both named for First Lieutenant Robert Sanford Olmsted. Olmsted served in the Engineering section of the Balloon and Airship Division of the Army Air Service. He also served in the Army as a balloon pilot. Olmsted was killed in Nistlerode, Holland on September 23, 1923. He was participating in the 12th Gordon Bennett International Balloon Race when his balloon was struck by lightning. Olmsted Field was named in his honor on October 20, 1923.

In the 1960s, as the United States fell deeper into the Vietnam War, many bases were closed so the extra funding could be used for the war effort. In 1964, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that Olmsted Air Force Base was one of the bases on the list to be closed. Middletown depended on the base economically and its closing promised to put a strain on the town. Former Gov. William Scranton approached Penn



Photos courtesy of PSH Library Special Collections

The side of campus that is used today for offices originally housed PSH's dining hall, residence halls and student center.

State about possibly opening a campus on the available land. Penn State agreed and purchased the 215 acre property for \$1. The first class at Penn State Harrisburg arrived in 1967, and consisted of 12 students and seven faculty members, all of whom lived in on-campus housing.

During the Hurricane Agnes flood in June 1972, the campus helped victims of the flood by setting up trailers in the current library parking lot for those who lost their homes. The trailers remained for over a month until the citizens found alternate housing. Penn State also assisted

during the Three Mile Island Disaster in 1979. Besides being used as an evacuation site, hearings on the accident were held in the Capital Union Building.

PSH has a nice mixture of new and old buildings that dot its vast landscape. While the land hasn't been a base for nearly 40 years and most of the buildings that remain from that time have new names, the Army's print on this campus remains. It just takes a closer look to see it.

For more information on the history of Penn State Harrisburg, visit the library's special collections room, which contains many historical items of interest.



The first class of PSH graduated in 1968. The class included 11 social science majors and one humanities major. All of the graduates were from Middletown and nearby communities.

## XGI honors veterans: past, present and future

By Kelly Nagurny  
Assistant Editor  
kxn163@psu.edu

Veterans, students, faculty, staff and community members recently gathered at PSH on Veterans Day to honor members of the military who serve and have served the country. The ceremony was sponsored and organized by Chi Gamma Iota (XGI), PSH's veteran fraternity.

The crowd looked on respectfully as XGI President Chris Kramm and guest speaker Colonel Steven M. Graham spoke about the history and importance of Veterans Day.

"Today we are gathered here to focus on service-to remember all who have served to protect our freedom. As a former soldier, I understand the importance of freedom and the sacrifice that must be made to maintain it," said Kramm. "This is why I feel it

is important to take time to recognize our nation's military veterans. They secured our freedom in the past, just as those currently serving in the Armed Forces protect it today."

Col. Graham, a senior military officer currently studying at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, was the featured speaker of the ceremony. Graham spoke about the importance of showing gratitude to those who serve, have served and will serve in the U.S. armed services. These servicepeople, he said, volunteer to serve the country with honor and courage. "They have sought neither fortune nor fame. A simple love of country and liberty compelled them to serve this great nation of ours," said Graham.

Veterans Day was originally known as Armistice Day and signified a celebration of world peace and the end of World War

I. In 1954, Congress renamed the day Veterans Day, although the purpose remained the same.

Over 120 service members are currently enrolled as students at PSH and many members of the faculty and staff are veterans, said Kramm. "By hosting a ceremony at PSH, we provide an opportunity for them to be recognized and to recognize their comrades," he said.

Veterans Day is also a time to honor those who have lost their lives while serving and the families of the victims, said Graham. According to Graham, over 425,000 Americans have been killed in combat situations. "Behind each of these deaths lies an American family in mourning."

Today, said Graham, veterans continue to contribute to their communities even after they have served. They serve as emergency medical surgeons,

pilots, police officers and firefighters. "...it is not just job skills they bring to our communities. They also bring their commitment, their work ethic, their sense of fair play, and their willingness to act as members of a team.

According to Kramm, XGI is the oldest fraternity at Penn State Harrisburg and began in 1968. The fraternity is composed of veterans, activity duty military members, reserves, members of the National Guard and ROTC. XGI's main purpose is to aid service members in making the transition between service and college. It also participates in many community and social activities. For more information on XGI, contact Chris Kramm at [clk133@psu.edu](mailto:clk133@psu.edu).

"To all our veterans, we have a simple yet heartfelt message--thank you--all of you, for your service," said Graham.



Photo by Kelly Nagurny/Capital Times

Col. Steven Graham recently spoke at PSH about Veterans Day as part of an XGI ceremony.

## PURE VALUE.

Scion's "Pure Price" purchase experience means No haggle. No hassle.

Vehicle starts well equipped. You can accessorize (or not). Simple, straightforward menu pricing.

31 MPG City  
35 MPG Hwy

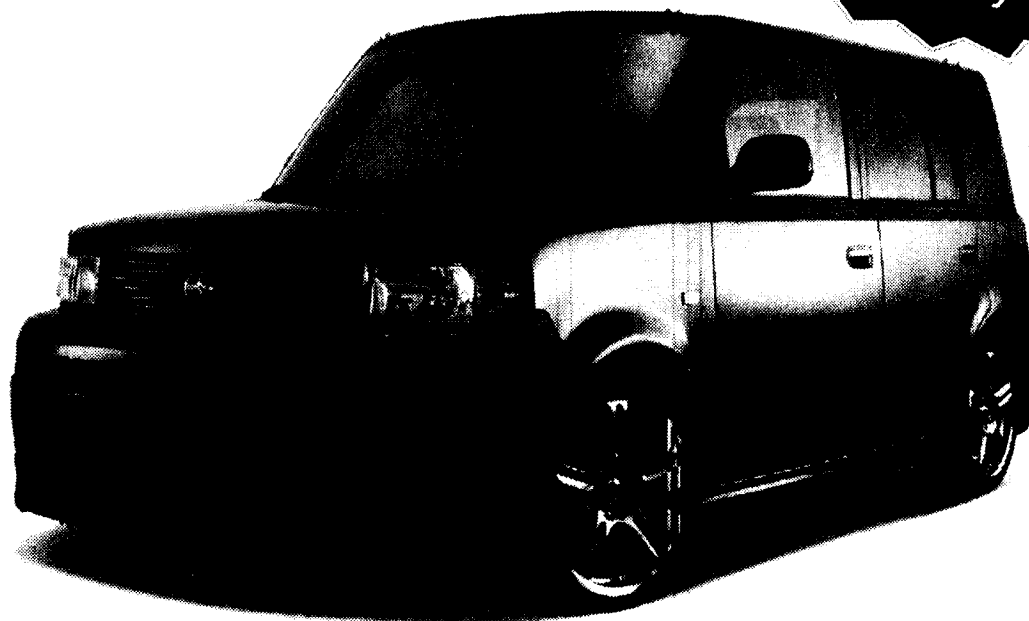
Price starting at

**xB \$14,195\*** Price as shown **\$16,070**

Standard

features include:

160-watt Pioneer CD stereo with six speakers, including two tweeters and Scion Sound Processing / MP3 capable and XM satellite ready / Air conditioner / Choice of three wheel cover designs / Anti-lock brakes / Power windows, door locks, and outside mirrors / 5-year, 60,000-mile Powertrain warranty†



Locate your nearest Scion Dealer at [Scion.com](http://Scion.com) or call 1-866-70-SCION.

\*MSRP includes delivery processing and handling fee. Excludes taxes, title, license and optional equipment. Actual dealer price may vary. TRD USA, Inc. (Toyota Racing Development), an aftermarket performance parts company, markets a line of parts through some Scion dealers. These aftermarket parts are not Genuine Scion parts, and cannot be utilized for Scion warranty replacement. TRD parts are warranted by TRD, not Scion. Note that certain aftermarket equipment may not be street legal in all states and may impact your vehicle's performance or safety. †EPA Estimates for xB manual 5-speed. Your mileage may vary. See your Scion dealer for additional details on the Scion limited warranty. © 2004 Scion and the Scion logo are trademarks of Toyota Motor Corporation and Toyota is a registered trademark of Toyota Motor Corporation. For more information, call 866-70-SCION (866-707-2466) or visit [scion.com](http://scion.com).



what moves you  
[scion.com](http://scion.com)