On February 7, 1941, Sioux Falls officials learn that their city would be given "prime consideration" the location for a 15,000-man radio and communications school. Confirmation of Sioux Falls as the site i the school was completed by March, with the city delivering title to the Municipal Airport and 1500 additional acres. The land purchases were proceeding rapid and by the April 3 deadline, only 9.46 acres remain to be acquired in an area extending from Covell Lake to the Municipal Airport. Besides the forthcoming economic benefits, the honor accompanying the community's selection was considerable, and patriotic duty made it imperative to comply as expeditiously as possible with whatever the military requested.

Once the land acquisition was completed, construction contracts were signed to provide for the building of barracks and other structures, roads, railroad facilities, a sewage plant, an electrical substation and of extending of runways. In addition, the Big Sioux would now be rechanneled to make the extension of the runway possible. Since the mammoth undertaking could not be dealt with by one company, six of them joined form the Sioux Syndicate, including Sioux Falls Construction Company.

All of this activity demanded workers, and the sudden availability of jobs caused a dramatic shift in the local employment outlook. For three months, crews worked twenty-four hours a day. All employable labor went to the base. WPA road-building projects end abruptly as the base absorbed every available man People came from everywhere for jobs — jobs long needed. Whatever the job, workers were relieved to working again, and the influx of people into the community was an economic jolt that reverberated everywhere. Despite the mud caused by the the rains, work progressed, and the first building were ready in mid-June. It had taken more than 5000 workers to assure that the Sioux Falls Radio Technical Training School could open July 6, 1942.

Construction of the base was a phenomenal accoi plishment. Besides the rows of tar paper-covered frame barracks, 17 miles of streets, 30 miles of sewer a water and 6.8 miles of fence had been installed, favorite pastime of local residents was driving to the airport to watch the planes land, but wartime restrictions were encroaching on this pleasure and the curious public soon found the base off-limits.

As construction progressed, public attention was directed more and more to personnel, especially the soldiers, whose arrival was anticipated with mixed reactions, ranging from unrestrained, unmitigated economic expectation and prideful patriotic duty to fear that "every girl in town would be pregnant."

The anticipation was short-lived. Even before construction was completed, the processing of military orders took place that would bring thousands of soldiers into Sioux Falls, from all parts of the nation, riding the crowded troop trains. Boarding a train at an embarkation point in Florida was Lt. Sid Epstein, little knowing that he was heading for Sioux Falls where he would meet his future wife and become a businessman in an environment far different from the New Jersey which had been his home.

Single file, these cars of Epstein's troop train moved out of Florida, disengaging two or three cars at each military installation. As each destination was reached, sealed orders were opened that specified the next stop. Lt. Epstein speculated, as two or three cars were disengaged here and two or three there, about where he might be headed. Perhaps Washington or Oregon, he reasoned from the direction the train was headed. Finally, only three cars remained, as the train stopped in the middle of the Middle West at a small town he had never heard of, Worthington, Minnesota. He found that the spring rains had been unusually heavy, so it was several days before the fresh recruits could continue to their final destination, the newly-formed Radio Technical Training School at Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The newly-arrived soldiers and the people of Sioux Falls were equally curious about each other. There was no denying that, although Sioux Falls wasn't exactly cosmopolitan and there wasn't much to do with a day off, at least the people were friendly. Walking down the street, soldiers were often stopped by local drivers who offered them a tour of the community, and most likely, dinner at home afterwards.

Locals first noticed that many soldiers didn't talk like anyone they had ever heard before. Instead of the familiar Norwegian brogue, there were the dialects and accents of New York, New Jersey and Boston. Many people in South Dakota were unfamiliar with anyone in the East. They didn't have relatives there, and visiting relatives was about the only reason that people did travel. Now, locals met Easterners en masse and brought them into their homes.

As the number of newcomers in the community escalated, a housing crisis developed. The shortage that was first created by the arrival of the construction workers was exacerbated as it became apparent that the war would not end quickly, and more and more soldier wives began making the trek to Sioux Falls. The search was not only for houses but for single rooms or large rooms that could be divided. It was more than a need for a "decent" place to stay; it was the pressing need for "any place," whether it be a partitioned-off dining room or an unfinished basement.

The search became more and more desperate. Even with the rent ceiling established, it was absolutely a provider's market. A wife would "pay anything to be here" because there was no assurance about where the husband might be tomorrow or when they might see each other again. Checking the advertisements was only the beginning. Housing often became a door-to-door search for someone who might have a room. For a wife alone, or for a wife and small child, the search for housing, following the long monotonous bus or train ride, was frustrating and strange. Efforts by the government to provide housing and assist people in partitioning off rooms in their homes did help. Because of the severity of the shortage, virtually every home was introduced on a personal basis to at least a few of the soldiers and their families.

If the social impact of the base was easily visible, so was the economic impact that began with construction and persisted during the 3'/z years the base operated. Eighteen hundred civilians found jobs at the base itself and dozens of restaurants and bars opened and flourished. Laundries added more workers; cabs and buses were deluged with riders. Soldiers had their "Sunday" off each week on a rotating basis that kept businesses from being overrun.

As the war continued, it drained more and more men from the local work force, and shortages of consumer goods were soon felt. Sugar and gas rationing began; the speed limit in 1942 was reduced to 35 miles per hour to “save rubber." One resident, spotted traveling at 70 miles per hour west of Miller, was warned in a conspicuous news column that he would have difficulty getting "tires and tubes" if he should ever thange jobs. Shoes were rationed at three pairs a year, with resoling and repairing done to insure longevity.

Women's roles in the economy were changing as they assumed jobs that had been exclusively male. They went to work at Morrells, at Sioux Steel, and the city saw the first woman reading gas meters. As the shortage of workers grew, soldiers, on their day off at the base, found work at Morrells and were paid at the end of each day.

As the number of soldiers doubled and tripled, entertainment, of necessity, became more and more organized. Dancing and music and movies were about the only type of entertainment available, as many forms of leisure activity, such as bowling, had not been popularized. Soldiers welcomed anything that got them away from the army life, away from the food, away from the smell of the barracks, away from thoughts of what might happen after training was completed.
Dancing went on everywhere — at the USO's, on base, at hotels, and the Arkota was holding dances every day with two on Sunday. It was a patriotic duty to see that the soldiers had dancing partners; area towns would entertain on a given night, bringing food and young women. Soldiers went to Canton or Dell Rapids or Humboldt as invitations poured in from these communities and others that wanted to host the Sioux Falls' soldiers. Nearly every family had a son or brother or husband in the war, and the attitude was that locals should show hospitality of the kind they hoped their own friends and family would receive elsewhere. "Nothing is too good for our boys" was both a philosophical and practical approach.

People from other areas of the country brought new ideas about music and dancing with them; there were bands from the base and local groups as well. Many bands had folded when their members were drafted, and the bands that did remain were often musicians who were classified 4-F. "All-Girl" bands also became popular.

Beginning at the dances, contact between locals and soldiers continued in the homes. The USO's down-town and several places at the airbase kept lists of solidiers who would like to be invited to dinner. Mothers Would call and invite half a dozen men for dinner and, when friendships developed, to come on their days off or to stay overnight. For the soldiers, going to church nearly always a sure way to get invited for a Sunday dinner.

As the number of soldiers increased, so did the number of marriages. Those issuing licenses required proof of age and warned couples to be "absolutely sure." Often, the hopeful bride-to-be would complete the rms necessary for a marriage license and the prospective groom could come and "sign" on his day off. The number of filled-out licenses that were never signed by willing grooms was a clog in the bureaucracy, confusing the records and the record keepers. Public health became a concern on and off base. The fear of venereal disease was one of the first health problems addressed after the announcement of the Sioux Falls site selection. Women suspected of being carriers were at first placed in jail. But later, under the supervision of a matron, moved to apartments owned by the city, to reduce the stigma and make treatment more acceptable. The soldiers were constantly urged to take precautions off base, and prophylactics were distributed by the thousands.

Advances, generally, were being made in medical treatment and the "latest wonder" was brought from Washington in November of 1943. The miracle arrived in glass bottles filled with a brownish-yellow powder, packed in dry ice to keep the substance from decomposing. The package was stamped "Air-express, government — hold plane if re-icing is necessary." For the first time, penicillin was saving a life in Sioux Falls.

As early as 1939, the location of a Veterans' Hospital in Eastern South Dakota was being discussed. During the war, Sioux Falls was chosen as the site with the air-base hospital to be given first consideration. Chosen instead was former Columbia College, a Catholic school, which was providing for the expansion of air-base medical facilities until it became the Veterans Administration Hospital after the war.

No matter what was happening in civilian life, the classes went on at the Radio School with numbers reaching peak strength of over 27,000 soldiers at one time. For awhile, classes went on twenty-four hours a day in three rotating shifts, where soldiers became familiar with the three types of radios used in aircraft and learned International Morse Code. The training initially lasted 18 weeks but was lengthened to 26 weeks by 1945. Soldiers who were able to pass practical tests in actual flights went on to further training in other parts of the country.

Those passing the tests became radio-operator-mechanics or "ROMs" as they were soon called. By late 1944, it had been estimated that half of the ROMs in Europe had been trained in Sioux Falls. Because of the type of training required, many of those who came to the airbase were college educated or had technical skills before entering the military. The end of the war with Germany resulted in a drastic cut in the need for radio operators, as what had been a demand became a surplus.

The Sioux Falls Army Technical School officially closed on May 31,1945. On June 1, it became the Sioux Falls Army Air Field, a redeployment center for men moving from Europe to the Pacific and the continuing war with Japan. Shortly thereafter, it became a separation point as soldiers became civilians. In three months, a total of 48,738 men came and went while another 10,000 were awaiting separation by the end of September. On December 31, 1945, the Army Air Field was officially deactivated and the property reverted to the City of Sioux Falls.

After deactivation, the base was dismantled with a rapidity nearly equal to that with which it had been built; the 950 structures were razed or were soon put to new uses. The War Assets Administration sold 455 surplus structures to private buyers, with many becoming school buildings and veterans' housing.

Schools paid five percent of what was considered fair value by the government, and many school districts and colleges took advantage of the offer, with buildings going to Augustana, Sioux Falls College. South Dakota State University and Freeman Junior College. A former mess hall provided lumber for a new church at 19th and Grange. One airbase chapel became the Our

Savior's Lutheran Church at 28th Street and Summit Avenue, and St. Mary's Catholic Parish purchased another.

Among the most visible of the airbase buildings in Sioux Falls today are the Elmwood Community Hall, several homes on Kiwanis Avenue just south of West 12th Street, and the frame buildings at Augustana and Sioux Falls College. An even larger number exist in the Industrial Park, and the Parks and Recreation building just off Russell Street is another base building. Less identifiable is the home one block off Phillips Avenue on East 35th Street which was the first home in that neighborhood. The list is much longer, and buildings exist in surrounding states as well as South Dakota.

Another visible contribution of the base was the Terrace Park Swimming Pool built in 1944, with the army providing the labor and civilians being allowed to use the pool only after deactivation of the base. The physical impact on the north side of Sioux Falls was tremendous as the city acquired land that would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, to acquire in peace time. The imprint of the base is seen on the shape of Joe Foss Field, the Industrial Park and the entire area from Covell Lake to beyond the Arena.

The non-physical elements are more difficult to trace. Hundreds of area residents married airbase personnel, who made their home in the area after the war, bringing with them an urban rather than a rural background. Because of the base, Sioux Falls was now known to millions of people who had never heard of it before, and the people in South Dakota had friends and relatives in places like Boston, New York and Chicago.

After the opening of the base with the dull, military designation — The Sioux Falls Technical Training School — the city was never again the isolated agricultural-based community that it had been. The base made its indelible economic and social impact, stimulating growth and change.