

CONQUISTADORES TO ROUGH RIDERS S.A.'S MILITARY ROOTS RUN DEEP

By Sig Christenson and David Anthony Richelieu
Express-News Staff Writers

San Antonio was a military mecca long before it mushroomed from a dusty frontier town into the nation's eighth-largest city.

It was home to soldiers of various stripes well before its most famous military milestone, the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, and was a base of operations for the armies of at least five countries.

On the cusp of the new millennium, past - as always in the Alamo City - is also prologue.

Today, 71,000 civilian and service personnel at five bases and two military hospitals pump \$4.6 billion a year into the city, serving at once as a center of gravity for San Antonio's culture and economy.

"That's a lot of money, that's a lot of jobs," said local businessman and civic leader Bob Bomer, a former chairman of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

"You look at people active in the community in a variety of causes and you're going to find lots of either active or former military personnel, or their dependents," said Mayor Howard Peak, a one-time soldier. "They just get involved."

A downsized military makes the services' future here uncertain, especially given the impending closure of Kelly AFB and the loss of nearly 10,000 skilled civilian aircraft workers there in 2001.

But the rich tapestry that is San Antonio's history is secure.

CONQUISTADORES AND THE ALAMO

The city's military roots predate the Revolutionary War, starting with Spanish conquistadores. In 1691, a military and religious entourage from Monclova led by new Texas Gov. Domingo Teran de los Rios and Franciscan missionary Father Damian Massanet put San Antonio into the pages of written history.

After the vast desert they crossed blossomed into lush hills, tall trees and cool fresh streams, Teran wrote in his

diary on June 13 that it was "fine country - broad plains, the most beautiful in New Spain." Within three years, all settlers from the 1691 expedition who hadn't died from the harsh conditions or been killed by not-so-friendly natives had fled.

Father Antonio Olivares passed through the area in 1709 and named San Pedro Creek then returned in 1718 and founded Mission San Antonio de Valero. From that point on, European settlers had a continuous presence in San Antonio.

The city recognizes Mission San Antonio's founding as its birthday. But during that expedition, Martin de Alarcon, the new governor of Coahuila y Texas, established the Presidio of San Antonio before Olivares founded Mission San Antonio.

The mission got its famous nickname from the military when a flying company (mounted cavalry) of Spanish troops arrived in 1803 from San Juan y San Carlos de las Parras del Alamo and moved into the mostly vacant mission.

They nicknamed their new post "El Alamo" after their hometown.

The presidio was on Military Plaza, the site of city hall and the Spanish Governor's Palace was actually the house of the commandant of the presidio.

Then, in 1775, the viceroy decreed that the commandant of the presidio of San Antonio shall also perform the duties of the civilian governor of Texas and that San Antonio shall be the capital of Texas.

It remained the capital until 1821, when Spain recognized Mexico's independence.

There were battles in San Antonio streets and at Main Plaza in 1835, setting the stage for 1836, when Santa Anna marched his Army of Mexico here and made San Fernando Church a lookout.

The ensuing 13-day siege at the Alamo became history.

After Texas became a state in 1845, the Army leased the Alamo church for use as a quartermaster depot and carried out extensive repairs to the roofless ruins.

It was between 1848 and 1850 during the Army's long stay at the Alamo that the signature baroque parapet or roofline appeared.

The heroes of the Alamo wouldn't be the last famed soldiers to make their mark in San Antonio. Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee was stationed here with the Army from 1856-61. He was local commander

for a time, was a charter member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church and dedicated Sunday school teacher.

Lee was run out of town by secessionists when he swore loyalty to his home state, saying he goes as Virginia goes, which at the time was still the Union.

Other military figures serving here included Gens. Douglas MacArthur and his father, Arthur MacArthur, John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, Jimmy Doolittle of the "Tokyo Raiders," Billy Mitchell, Hap Arnold, C.L. Chennault of "Flying Tigers" fame, Curtis R. LeMay and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

On Feb. 18, 1861, in ceremonies on Main Plaza, Maj. Gen. David Twiggs quietly surrendered all U.S. troops and materiel in Texas to secessionist forces led by Maj. Ben McCulloch. It was one of the largest early Union setbacks.

The U.S. Army's attachment to the Alamo resumed when federal troops returned to San Antonio after the Civil War.

A formal proposal for a permanent Army post was made in 1870. But Secretary of War W.W. Belknap illegally held up funding until 1875, and resigned the next year when faced with impeachment proceedings that were linked to his refusal to fund congressional appropriations for the post.

Before the century ended, the Spanish-American War would etch a new chapter in San Antonio's military history.

In 1898, Col. Leonard Wood and Lt. Theodore Roosevelt arrived in San Antonio to train "Rough Riders" recruited from across the country to fight in Cuba.

Teddy and the "swells" from Ivy League schools frequented the downtown Menger Hotel bar. Some claimed Roosevelt recruited inebriated bar patrons like a pirate captain kidnapping crew members, but it never happened.

A few months later, after more training in Florida, the Rough Riders charged up San Juan Hill and into history, launching Roosevelt on his way to the presidency.

FORT SAM'S RICH PAST

Fort Sam Houston opened in 1890 and was named for Gen. Sam Houston, who led troops at the Battle of San Jacinto that won independence for Texas.

Much of San Antonio's military history was written at Fort Sam.

It was on Fort Sam's MacArthur Field on March 2, 1910, that Lt. Benjamin D. Foulois successfully flew Signal Corps Aeroplane No. 1, a 1909 Wright Bros. Flyer biplane shipped here in parts by train and assembled by soldiers on the post.

Fort Sam has billed it the first flight of a military aircraft, a milestone that marked the birth of what is now the U.S. Air Force.

Foulois suggested wheels replace the catapult skids for smoother takeoffs and landings. Since he had been tossed around a bit, Foulois fashioned a leather strap from a trunk to hold himself securely in place on his next flight on Aeroplane No. 1.

The first airplane seat belt wasn't his only invention. Foulois pioneered the use of radios in planes, and also played a key role in the development of Kelly AFB.

It was the poor performance of underpowered aircraft flown by the Fort Sam-based 1st Aero Squadron during Pershing's "Punitive Expedition" in 1916 to hunt down the revolutionary Pancho Villa in Mexico that prompted Congress to earmark the then-unprecedented sum of \$13 million for military aeronautics.

Ordered to find a site for a new training field, Foulois picked a 700-acre triangular tract next to the Missouri-Pacific railroad tracks on the southeast side, bounded by Leon Creek to the west and south, and Frio Road to the north.

Work on the first concrete and steel hangars at the new base started March 27, 1917, and flying began the next month at Aviation Camp, later renamed Kelly Field in honor of pilot George Maurice Kelly.

Kelly perished on May 10, 1911, at Fort Sam's parade grounds, becoming the first American to die in a military plane crash.

The flying at Fort Sam created Kelly and three other bases: Brooks, Lackland and Randolph. It also drew one of the city's most famous aviators, Charles A. Lindbergh, to South Texas.

San Antonians knew Lindbergh because he flew his own plane to San Antonio in 1924 to learn to fly "military style."

He was the top pilot in his Brooks Field class, but nearly was killed nine days before graduation.

Lindbergh managed to bail out of his crippled craft and reach the ground safely, thanks to a newfangled gadget called the parachute.

Eisenhower, the future president, arrived here in 1915, a young lieutenant fresh out of West Point whose promise as a football player known as the "Kansas cyclone" ended with an injury in a game against Tufts University.

Shortly after arriving at Fort Sam, Eisenhower met and fell in love with Mamie Dowd of Denver and married, living on post.

Eisenhower's interest in football landed him land a job coaching high school kids at Peacock Military Academy. A local Catholic college, St. Louis University - now St. Mary's University - later asked Eisenhower to coach a squad that had lost every game for five straight seasons by scores of as much as 80-0.

Eisenhower accepted the challenge and St. Louis ended its season 5-1-1. The priests were so delighted they threw a victory dinner.

Kelly AFB has stood for decades as a symbol of San Antonio's deep military ties and a source of upward mobility for Hispanics in the Alamo City.

It became the town's biggest employer - boasting a work force of 25,000 military and civilian employees and a \$721 million payroll in 1989 - and was recognized for its maintenance of jet engines and massive C-5 cargo jets. In 1995, Kelly was ordered to close. The base now employs fewer than 9,000 federal civil service workers and will close in 2001.

The Greater Kelly Development Corp. has lured the Boeing Co., among others, to the sprawling facility in hopes of transforming the base into an industrial park.

Brooks AFB, which helped develop the capsule that carried the monkey Sam into space on Dec. 4, 1959, is known today for developing such computerized training tools as "intelligent" tutors.

It also was the site for President John F. Kennedy's last official act.

One day before his assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, the young president dedicated four buildings on the base. The chest-high wooden podium he used still stands in Hangar 9, the only remaining World War I structure of its kind.

FUTURE OF 'MILITARY CITY'

Today, as city leaders work with the Air Force to cut costs at Brooks in hopes of saving the base, the 12th Flying Training Wing at Randolph is ramping up training of instructor pilots and navigators.

The man who oversees training there and elsewhere in the Air Force himself stands tall among the city's many historic figures.

Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, commander of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph, is the nation's seventh African-American four-star general.

A Vietnam veteran, he also was a pilot with the Air Force's Thunderbirds and is praised by test pilot and retired Gen. Chuck Yeager as a pilot with the "right stuff."

But if the soft-spoken Newton shrugs off such praise, he doesn't dismiss the Alamo City's long love affair with the military.

"I don't know if I would call it a crossroad, but it certainly is a gathering place for many military leaders," Newton said of the city. "And I see no letting up in sight."

"I think this will always be a place, both from the military person's standpoint as well as from the citizens of San Antonio, there will be this wonderful relationship as we continue in the future," he continued. "And the new millennium, will, I think, bring that more to the forefront."