

## Story of Goddard Airport

Stanford University was activated in many ways after the 1906 Earthquake including reconstructing many of its buildings, creating much needed faculty housing and engagement in new fields of technology. One of those new fields was aviation. In 1918 the Palo Alto Times Newspaper's headline reads, "An airplane Passes Over Palo Alto." Within the story it describes the plane as a "...monster craft capable of going more than 100 miles per hour." Stanford was creating the Palo Alto School of Aviation that was run by Norman A. Goddard. Stanford University had enough land to build an airport for him on its own land. One fear driven concern for the residents was that the runway was positioned between two schools, Escondido school and Palo Alto High. The second fear was that a landing plane had to skim over the roofs of houses located in College Terrace. The third was its noise generation. Technology had created a huge change in the resident's lives.

A prominent group of Palo Alto residents, whose last names were Campbell, Hoge, Lesley, Hobart, Morrell, Smith and Bixby took action in 1923. A petition was presented to the City Council asking Stanford University to move their site. Concurrently, they got the U.S. Commerce Department to approve the Embarcadero site that is today's Palo Alto Municipal Airport. But Stanford University was reluctant to acquiesce; they liked the convenience of the location. The US Military recognized how important aircraft was becoming in the world and wanted to encourage development and not to curtail it. They backed continuance of the air strip's location.

To give the reader a sense of the magnitude of the issue, I refer to the following photograph taken from the cockpit of a plane about to land at Goddard Airport in the early 1930's.



**Figure 2.** The village of College Terrace is directly below. The camera was facing a northern direction. The left most-vertical street is Oberlin. Princeton and Cornell Streets are next in order. Stanford Ave defines the separation between College Terrace and Goddard Airport. The landing strip begins at the end of the block contingent with Princeton and Cornell Streets and Stanford Ave and runs through a coppice of trees about 2200 feet away. (*The trees were obviously cleared in that area to make room for the landing strip.*) Following its trajectory another 1100, a knowledgeable observer can identify Palo Alto High School and the Football Stadium, top center.

To better describe the site of Goddard Airport, observe Figure 3 on the following page.



**Figure 3.** The landing strip (red rectangle representing the runway) is shown superimposed on a post WWII (1948) aerial photograph of the area. It's shown extending from Stanford Ave through a grove of trees and ending in a clearing about the size of the infield inside Stanford University's Football Stadium. In the 14 years between the time the photo was taken and closing the Airport (1934), the trees that had been cleared had not noticeably grown back.

The residents persisted but were further hampered in 1929 when the Federal Aviation Administration rated Stanford University as "Aviation Ground School Number 1." The citizens tried still another approach. In 1934 they filed a lawsuit to force the airport to move off Stanford Land because of the noise level. They won and all the residents of Palo Alto were very pleased. By this time, College Terrace had been incorporated into the City of Palo Alto. Change happened and the citizens responded successfully.