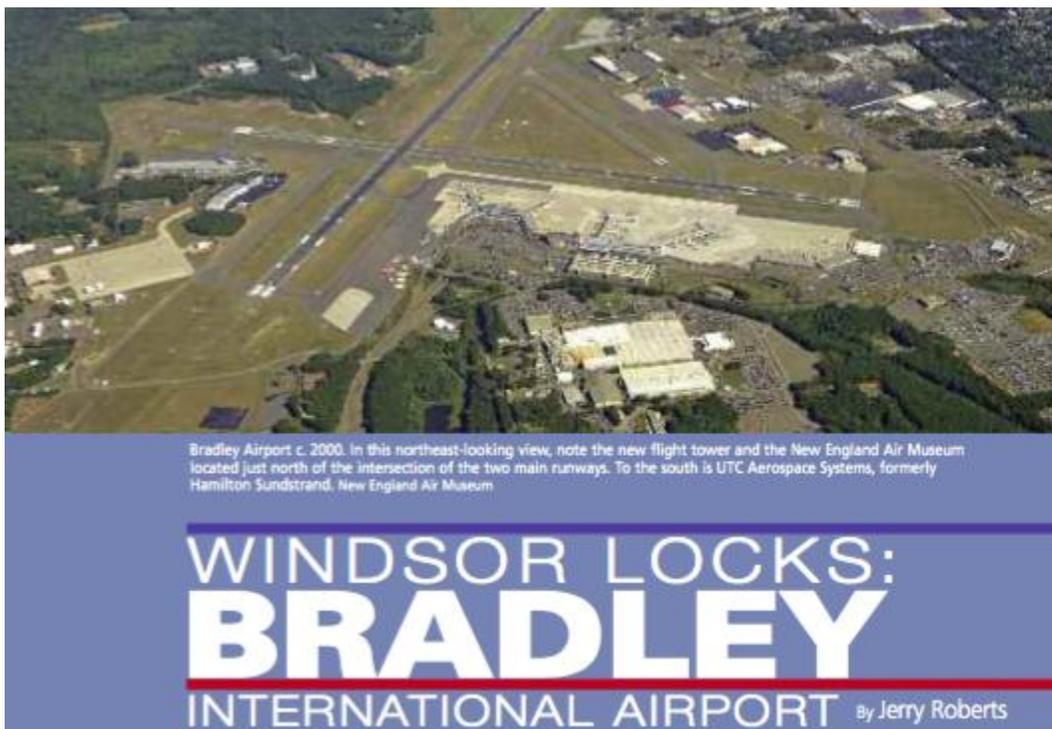


## Connecticut's International Airport



The summer of 1940 was a difficult one in the United States. Europe was at war. Americans were worried. The U.S. government wanted to protect Connecticut and the rest of New England.

Connecticut was home to important businesses. Colt's Manufacturing made guns. Pratt & Whitney built aircraft engines. Hartford was also home to the country's largest insurance companies. If the United States were to be attacked, Connecticut could be a target.

The U.S. Army wanted to turn Hartford's Brainard Airfield into a military base. It was the largest airport in Connecticut. But it was right next to the Connecticut River. It would be difficult to make it bigger.

There was plenty of flat farmland near Windsor Locks. In January 1941, the state purchased 1,681 acres of tobacco fields. Congress gave \$2.6 million to start building Windsor Locks Air Base.

Other large air bases were built in Long Island, New York, New Hampshire, and Maine. Smaller fields were created in New Haven, Bridgeport, Groton,



left: Murphy Terminal nears completion, 1951. New England Air Museum



left: The new commercial passenger terminal just after its completion in 1951. At the time it was the most modern facility in the nation. New England Air Museum



above: The arrival side of Murphy Terminal in the early 1950s after it was expanded in 1957. Its distinctive brick was later sheathed with aluminum. New England Air Museum



left: An American Airlines Convair 240 at the gate, Murphy Terminal, 1952. New England Air Museum

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and East Hartford, Connecticut. Together they could defend New England under the army's first air force.

On March 7, 1941 construction began. More than 1,800 people worked around the clock. The air base was built in only five months.

This air base was different from all of the others. It had the first airfield built to be invisible from the air. Farmland surrounded the airfield. The runways were painted to look like fields and country roads. In fact, pilots sometimes had trouble finding it

even when they were flying right over it!

By August, the air base was finished. Second Lieutenant Eugene Bradley was stationed there. He was from Oklahoma. He had been in Connecticut three days. He went on a practice flight. He crashed when taking a sharp turn. In his honor, the base was renamed Army Air Base, Bradley Field.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The United States joined World War II. The air base was ready. The pilots stationed in Windsor Locks were sent to Africa and Italy.



During World War II the air base was camouflaged to blend into the countryside. New England Air Museum



In 1947 the airport began scheduled passenger service using the old WWII hangars and flight tower. New England Air Museum



A row of P-47 Thunderbolts stands in front of the main WWII hangar and flight tower. The original Bradley Air Museum (now New England Air Museum) was located here and in a field adjacent to Route 75. New England Air Museum

The air base became a training base for new army pilots. It was also used as a prisoner of war camp. It held German prisoners.

After the war, Bradley Field became a commercial airport. Today, the airport covers 2,432 acres of land. It's like a city or town. It has its own roads, fire department, hotels, restaurants, and shops. More than 18,000 people work there. Seven different airlines fly their planes in and out of the airport.

Each year more than six million people use this airport to fly across the country. The Connecticut Air National Guard and Army Air National Guard still have their

bases there, too.

Bradley International Airport has a short but rich history. Each time you see a plane flying overhead, think about this history. Remember the people who built the airbase in only five months. Remember Second Lieutenant Bradley, the brave man the airport is named after. Think about the men who trained there before heading to war.



To learn more about the history of Bradley International Airport visit the New England Air Museum. This museum has more than 100 aircraft and thousands of other interesting objects. They have special days when you can climb into the cockpit of some of their airplanes to see what it was like to fly them!

New England Air Museum  
 36 Perimeter Road, Windsor Locks  
 neam.org, 860-623-3305

**Captions:** All photos are from “Windsor Locks: Bradley International Airport,” Connecticut Explored, Summer 2016.

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