



◀ **Says Who? Why Good Citation Matters
(and Why It's Easier Than You Think)**

Page 224

◀ **Mixed Signals**

Page 230

◀ **Alabama Online Dispute
Resolution**

Page 233

◀ **Birmingham School of Law –
Prominent Female Graduates**

Page 237

◀ **Lessons of the Boll Weevil:
A Story of Prosperity from
Bugs to Flying Machines**

Page 240

◀ **Alabama Lawyers Hall of Fame**

Page 246



Aviator mural in downtown Enterprise that visually tells the story of the Army installation from its beginnings in 1942 as Camp Rucker to today with Fort Rucker as the Army Aviation Center of Excellence

LESSONS OF THE BOLL WEEVIL: A Story of Prosperity from Bugs to Flying Machines

By M. Dale Marsh



Piper "The Pilot" Weevil greets visitors to the Enterprise Municipal Airport.

Note: This is the follow-up article from "Lessons of the Boll Weevil: A Story of Prosperity" published in the July 2017 issue of *The Alabama Lawyer*.

This article discusses the founding and development of Fort Rucker, Alabama and its contribution to the prosperity of Enterprise and the entire Wiregrass region. It recognizes the vision of local, state, and national leaders who championed the development of a military base in southeast Alabama, which is now known as the

United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker.

The diversification from cotton land to peanut production was a great economic boom for Enterprise and the Wiregrass from 1917 to the present; however, the second chapter of her growth is the story of events which occurred "over the farms" and has since



helped to provide for the national security of the United States. Large flying machines, which looked much like giant grasshoppers, began to fill the skies above Enterprise and the Wiregrass area in 1954, and thankfully this recent piece of military technology, called the helicopter, brought a new kind of prosperity to the region. Army Aviation began its flight training program at Fort Rucker in 1954, and later all Army helicopter and Warrant Officer training was moved to Fort Rucker.

Prior to 1935, the cities of Enterprise and Ozark jointly worked on a program to promote the taking of “sub-marginal agricultural lands” out of production, and the program called for the federal government to buy out large tracts of poor farming land. The program was eventually funded and some 35,000 acres were selected West of Ozark – which was nicknamed the “Bear Farm” by locals because

they jokingly said that the U.S. was going to “grow bears” on the sub-marginal lands. This was the first step in acquiring the lands which would later become known as Camp Rucker during World War II. In 1941, the War Department approved the project and built an infantry training camp on the “Bear Farm” property. The project called for the acquisition of 30,000 more acres to be purchased in Coffee County near Enterprise and Elba. On May 1, 1942, the camp was accepted, and Camp Rucker began operations as a U.S. Army installation. Thousands of soldiers were trained there prior to heading to Europe to fight in World War II. Following the end of World War II, Camp Rucker closed and all soldiers were transferred to Ft. Benning or to other posts, and the facilities were “moth-balled.”

When the Korean War broke out, Camp Rucker was reactivated in August 1950. When it ended,

Army personnel were transferred out, and the camp was again moth-balled.

Local leaders continued to seek War Department support for a permanent military post at Camp Rucker, and in June 1954, a group of Army aviators selected Camp Rucker as the new home of the Army Aviation School.¹ In 1955, Camp Rucker was renamed Fort Rucker.² All Army and Air Force helicopter pilots are now trained at Fort Rucker, and the post serves as a training facility for helicopter pilots for many of our NATO, South American, and Middle East allies. The helicopter has played an integral role in the United States’ efforts in the war on terrorism, ushering in a new era of battlefield technology and military tactics.

Fort Rucker, named the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence in 2008, serves as headquarters for U.S. Army Aviation and develops, coordinates, and deploys Aviation Operations, training, and



Restored Huey helicopter and Wall of Freedom at Johnny Henderson Park in Enterprise

doctrine. Fort Rucker is composed of 63,000 acres of land, mainly in Dale and Coffee counties. Fort Rucker has provided Enterprise and the Wiregrass³ with economic stability and growth. Upwards of 23,146 Enterprise and Wiregrass area residents work on Fort Rucker as flight instructors, helicopter maintenance technicians, in other Department of the Army positions, or in positions working for government contractors conducting business with the Army at Fort Rucker.

Are there Fort Rucker aviation lessons for lawyers? Yes, lawyers, like the pioneer aviators of Enterprise, must have the insight to be aware of the need for change in their everyday practice in order to obtain a more prosperous legal career future. Lawyers must continue to be visionaries, hardworking, courageous, creative, willing to reconsider our viewpoints, willing to take calculated risks, demonstrate the continued will to win and succeed, and above all, persevere. ▲


Endnotes

1. *Claybank Memories, A History of Dale County, Alabama* by Judge Val McGee, pages 111, 130-134, 142, 146-147.
2. The DOD congressional commission, charged to develop a plan for renaming military bases, has recently recommended that the name of Fort Rucker be changed to Fort Novosel, after former Enterprise resident and Chief Warrant Officer Michael Novosel, a Medal of Honor recipient who served in both WWII and Vietnam.
3. The Wiregrass is loosely composed of Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston counties. Its name is derived from wiregrass, a native grass that grew among the tall longleaf pines covering the area and is peculiar to this region.

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Dale Marsh, a 1974 graduate of the University of Alabama School of Law, is a civil trial lawyer in his 48th year of practice in Enterprise, where he has practiced since 1974. Marsh is licensed in Alabama and admitted to practice in the Northern and Middle District Courts of Alabama, the 11th Circuit, and the United States Supreme Court.



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