



California State Military Department
**The California State Military
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Historic California Posts
Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Santa Rosa
**(Naval Outlying Field, Cotati; Naval Outlying Field, Little River;
Naval Outlying Field, Santa Rosa)**

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Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Santa Rosa

by M.L. Shettle, Jr.

In 1942, the Navy traveled to Sonoma County, northwest of San Francisco Bay, and purchased property to build a main station and an OLF. Construction of the proposed NAAS began in November 1942, near the small town of Cotati, eight miles south of Santa Rosa. The next month, work began on an OLF 2.5 miles southwest of Santa Rosa. When drainage problems were encountered at Cotati, the Navy reversed the plans developing Santa Rosa as the main station and Cotati as the OLF. NAAS Santa Rosa commissioned on June 29, 1943, an auxiliary of [Alameda](#).

Beginning on August 6, the station's first tenant, CASU 13, arrived for training prior to embarking for the South Pacific. CASU 13, departed on September 20, and four days later, CASU 18 arrived. CASU 18's stay lasted less than a month when it also departed. On October 20, CASU 36 commissioned and was permanently based at the station to support the carrier squadrons present. For the next few months, several squadrons were aboard including VT-2, VB-2, VB-11, VF-28, and VC-4.

Starting in January 1944, the first of three shore based support squadrons arrived for several months of operational training. These squadrons, VB-301, VB-302, and VB-303, operated SBDs -- the last one departed May 3. CAG 6, reformed at Alameda in April, transferred to Santa Rosa on May 10, and conducted operational training for the next six months. About the same time, an expansion program doubled the station's aircraft capacity. In September, the first unit of CAG 5, VT-5, came aboard. After CAG 6 left in November, CAG 5's remaining squadrons, VF-5 and VB-5, transferred in. The next two months, Marine fighter squadrons VMF-452 and VMF-214, assigned to CAG 5, joined the air group at Santa Rosa for training. CAG 5, along with the Marine squadrons, embarked on the *Franklin*.

February 8, 1945. CAG 19 replaced CAG 5 later in February with a new VBF bomber/fighter squadron of F6Fs. VF-19 received the Navy's first F8F Bearcats in May. The war ended before

the Bearcats reached the combat area. Santa Rosa finished out the war with CAG 11's and VBF-151 aboard.

Santa Rosa's 498 acres had two 7,000 x 200-ft. concrete runways plus a catapult and arresting gear system. Total Navy investment in the facility topped \$4.5 million. In a rather mundane matter, the Navy sold hay cut on the property in May 1945 for \$51. The station had two OLFs -- Cotati and Little River OLF in Mendocino County to the north. The Navy leased the airport at Little River in January 1945, as an emergency field for the numerous flights between Santa Rosa and the rocket training station at [Arcata](#).

Santa Rosa's status changed from an NAAS to an OLF of Alameda in 1947. The station saw renewed activity during the Korean War by ADs, F4Us, and F9Fs. Following the Korean War, the Navy deeded the facility to the City of Santa Rosa. The airport was known as the Santa Rosa Air Center and remained open until 1993. In 1996, the property was in the hands of developers. The airfield at Cotati is also no longer in existence -- the property is occupied by a K-Mart and industry. During the war, the Army developed Santa Rosa's existing municipal airport, seven miles northwest, as an Army Air Field. Today, that airfield, Sonoma County, serves as Santa Rosa's municipal airport.

Copied with the permission of the author from [United States Naval Air Stations of World War II](#).

Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Santa Rosa

by Paul Freeman

This base was built during World War II as an outlying airfield for Alameda NAS. According to the 2003 issue of the Journal of the Sonoma County Historical Society (courtesy of Tom Thompson), the airfield opened in 1943, after being built on the old Leddy tract.

The 1944 US Army/Navy Directory of Airfields (courtesy of Ken Mercer) described "NAAS, Santa Rosa" as having a 7,000' hard-surface runway. As constructed by the Navy, the airfield consisted of two paved 7,000' runways, taxiways, ramps, hangars & other buildings.

During World War II, a total of 21 squadrons received their final training in fighters, bombers, and torpedo planes at NAAS Santa Rosa.

"Santa Rosa (Navy)" was still depicted as a Navy airfield on the 1946 Sectional Chart (courtesy of Dann Shively).

Santa Rosa was evidently relinquished by the Navy at some point between 1946-49. It was depicted as a civil airfield, "Santa Rosa", on the 1949 Sacramento Sectional Chart (according to Chris Kennedy), and described as having a 7,000' hard-surface runway.

Santa Rosa was reactivated by the Navy for Korean War duty in 1951. According to Gene Stone (who was stationed at Santa Rosa in 1951), the Navy established a fleet service squadron (FASRON 10) at Santa Rosa in 1951 for the sole purpose of assisting Carrier Air Group 2 in their preparations to go to Korea. The station was closed sometime after FASRON 10 departed in 1952.

The airfield apparently then went through a period of abandonment, as it was not depicted at all on the 1957 Sacramento Sectional Chart (according to Chris Kennedy), and was labeled "Abandoned airport" on the 1961 Sectional Chart (courtesy of Dann Shively).

At some point between 1961-67, Santa Rosa was reopened (once again) as a civilian airport, Santa Rosa Air Center (O01). Santa Rosa Air Center was depicted on the 1967 Sacramento Sectional Chart (courtesy of John Voss) with a single 7,000' concrete runway.

Santa Rosa Air Center closed in 1991, having been replaced by the Sonoma County Airport, located further out of town to the northwest.

USGS aerial photo 1997, after the field had been closed & partially redeveloped.

Jonathan Westerling toured the site of the former airfield in 2003. His observations: "The Santa Rosa Air Center is quickly on its way into history. The entire area is fenced off & marked 'private'. Only two buildings of note still stand, one is the old maintenance hangar (falling down) and the other is the old Air Service Reserve Center which is a much newer building, but has been abandoned."

"Over the eastern half of the East/West runway, several business parks have been constructed using the old runway as parking lots. At the intersection of the runways, many, many houses have been built.

As a reminder of the many takeoffs & landings that happened here, the streets of the subdivision have names like Orville, Doolittle, Yeager, Quimby and Earhart."

"Runway 16 is intact & in good condition for several thousand feet, and the threshold markings are still quite evident. Also intact is the western end of the field, though only a thousand or so feet of concrete remain there." "Runway 34 has been broken up, and the concrete piled up into a large mound of rubble near the apron. Overlooking the site from the top of this mound, it is easy to envision the aviation glory of the past, and the buildings of the future."

John Hess recalled, "As a fledgling flight instructor in 1969, how well I remember the old fields. It really sickens me to see the construction at the Santa Rosa Air Center. I made a thousand landings there at least

Extracted with permission from [Abandoned and Little Known Airfields](#)

Naval Outlying Field, Cotati

by Paul Freeman

The Navy acquired a 217 acre parcel in Cotati in 1943-44, for the purpose of establishing a satellite airfield for the use of Alameda NAS.

It was labeled "Cotati (Navy)" on the 1943 Sacramento Sectional Chart (according to Chris Kennedy).

According to a 1944 General Layout Map of the Cotati Air Facility, the field contained runways, a control tower, fire & crash truck garage, gasoline & oil storage, a small arms magazine, and a machine gun range.

The 1944 US Army/Navy Directory of Airfields (courtesy of Ken Mercer) described "Cotati OLF, Navy" as having a 3,900' runway.

The types of aircraft or operations conducted at Cotati during WW2 are unknown.

On the 1948 Sacramento Sectional Chart (courtesy of John Voss), Cotati was still depicted as an active Navy Field, with the largest runway being listed as a 4,000' paved strip. It was still labeled "Cotati (Navy)" on the 1949 Sacramento Sectional Chart (according to Chris Kennedy).

A 1949 Memorandum from the Commander, Naval Air Bases, 11th & 12th Naval District states that Cotati was in inactive status. The arable lands were under a lease for agricultural purposes, and the Sonoma County Peace Officers' Association used the rifle range under a permit.

The 1950 USGS topo map (courtesy of John Voss) depicted "Cotati Naval Auxiliary Air Station (Inactive)" as having two 4,000' paved runways, one oriented east/west, and the other northwest/southeast, each with parallel taxiways. A small paved ramp area was on the southeast side of the airfield. There did not appear to be any hangars depicted on the map, just one very small building along the side of the ramp.

In 1953, the Cotati airfield property was suggested as a location for Sonoma State College, but this was not persued.

Cotati NOLF was reported excess in 1956. It was not depicted at all on the 1957 Sacramento Sectional Chart (according to Chris Kennedy). In 1957, the California Research Corporation requested a license covering the use of the Cotati runways for road testing purposes. The lease was approved for a period of one year from 1957-58.

Another lease permitted the City of Santa Rosa to use the former Navy runways for drag

racing.

According to Chad Murray, a longtime resident remembered that "When the strip was closed down, the neighbor at the end of [Airport Road] turned the old facility into a drag strip & would collect \$ for entrance."

Drag racing historian Bret Kepner confirmed that Cotati was one of the true "originals" in drag racing. He also said that drag racing occurred on the former Cotati runways as early as 1952, and that the runways were "bumpy as hell"!

Apparently, the Cotati airfield saw at least some unofficial reuse as a civil airfield. Hugh Coddling, current owner of the Cotati property (as of 1999), recalled that he used to fly his small plane into the former landing field in the 1950s while it was being utilized for drag racing & road testing.

The property was conveyed by the federal government to a private party in 1958.

On the 1961 Sectional Chart (courtesy of Dann Shively) and the 1967 Sacramento Sectional Chart (courtesy of John Voss), the airfield at Cotati was no longer depicted at all.

In the spring of 1968, developer Hugh Coddling offered to sell the 80 acre site to the County for development as the South County Airport, but the County Board of Supervisors would not even consider the proposal.

John Voss visited the site of NOLF Cotati in 1985, and at least some portion of the runway pavement still existed at that point.

As of 1999, the property is still owned by Coddling Enterprises, a property management company. The property consists of Ranch Verde Mobile Home Park to the north, theater, bank, restaurants, office buildings & retail stores to the south & an apartment complex to the east.

The site of Cotati NOLF is located at the present-day intersection of Rohnert Park Expressway & Labath Avenue. The former airport access road is still there, appropriately named "Airport Road".

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