



SHEPPARD

The First Casualty

He never wore the uniform and never commanded forces, but Morris Sheppard left his mark on America's military. USAF's largest training base bears his name. There's more to his story, however.

John Morris Sheppard was born May 28, 1875, on a Texas farm. His rise in life appeared foreordained. He was a direct descendant, through his mother, of Robert Morris, a Founding Father and signer of the Declaration of Independence. His father was—in order—the local district attorney, a state judge, and member of Congress.

Sheppard took law degrees from the University of Texas and Yale. In 1902, the young Texas attorney, a Democrat, was elected to the House. In 1913, he won a hard-fought race for the US Senate to fill the vacancy after the death of his father.

In Washington, Sheppard stood out. He was five feet four inches tall. He was a student of literature who penned a 35-volume work on Shakespeare. He was close to William Jennings Bryan, the silver-tongued, three-time presidential candidate. The Texan was himself one of the most entertaining speakers of his day.

Sheppard was a Senate success. Early on, he became a trusted ally of President Woodrow Wilson. Later, he successfully pushed for progressive rural credit, child labor, and antitrust laws. He was an ardent backer of women's suffrage (and foe of desegregation). In the mid-1930s, Sheppard was key to much New Deal legislation.

Sheppard is best known for two wildly divergent achievements.

First, he became "the Father of Prohibition." A strident supporter of the temperance movement, Sheppard penned the 18th Amendment banning production, transportation, and sale of alcohol. He proposed it in 1917. By 1919, it was law of the land. He assisted Rep. Andrew J. Volstead with writing the Volstead Act, providing an enforcement mechanism.

Widely seen as a disaster, Prohibition was scrapped in 1933. Five times, Sheppard tried and failed to make America dry again.

Second, Sheppard led the preparation of US forces for World War II. In the period 1933-41, the Texan was chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, a post from which he inveighed against isolationism and military weakness—well before Pearl Harbor.

Sheppard, allied with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, worked to expand defense spending—for the Air Corps, especially—and generate more and better training of US troops. With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, he led efforts to pass the Selective Training and Service Act and legislation authorizing Lend-Lease.

Less than one month after his Lend-Lease success, Sheppard suffered a brain hemorrhage, possibly from overwork. He died April 9, 1941. Gen. Douglas MacArthur offered accolades to Sheppard as a warrior, calling him "the first casualty of World War II."

The senator's legacy, Sheppard Air Force Base near Wichita Falls, Texas, is

MORRIS SHEPPARD

Born: May 28, 1875, Wheatville, Texas

Died: April 9, 1941, Washington, D.C.

College: University of Texas (B.A., law), Yale University (law)

Military Service: None

Occupation: Attorney, Congressman, Senator

Political Party: Democrat

Offices: US House, 1902-13; US Senate, 1913-41

Honors: Chairman, Military Affairs Committee 1933-41

Famous Friends: William Jennings Bryant, Gen.

Douglas MacArthur

Famous Relatives: Robert Morris (signer of the Declaration of Independence); grandsons Connie Mack III (US Senator), Morris S. Arnold (federal judge), Richard S. Arnold (federal judge),

Buried: Texarkana, Texas

SHEPPARD AFB

State: Texas

Nearest City: Wichita Falls

Area: 6.3 sq mi / 4,032 acres

Status: Open, operational

Opened: (as Sheppard Field) June 14, 1941

Inactivated: Aug. 31, 1946

Acquired: (by Army) April 30, 1947

Required: (by USAF) Aug. 1, 1948

Renamed: (Sheppard AFB) Aug. 15, 1948

Former Owners: Air Training Command, Strategic Air Command

Current Owner: Air Education and Training Command

1/ Sen. Morris Sheppard, circa 1930s. 2/ Aircraft mechanic trainees at Sheppard Field during World War II. 3/ Sheppard (r) and Ralph "Tall Cowboy" Madsen, a seven-foot-six-inch actor, on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

the most diverse base in Air Education and Training Command. The 82nd Training Wing provides specialized technical training for airmen. The 80th Flying Training Wing hosts the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program for NATO combat pilots.