



RICHARDS-GEBAUR

Tale of the Kansas City Heroes

For 37 years, Missouri was home to a major facility named Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base, near Kansas City. USAF in 1994 shut it down—an action that somewhat dimmed the public's memory of two brave military aviators for whom the base was named.

The pair were Kansas City natives. They were born 35 years apart and died on opposite sides of the world. Both were decorated war heroes. The first went east to France and died in World War I. The second went west to Asia; he fell in the Korean War.

One part of the base's name referred to 1st Lt. John Francisco Richards II, a US Air Service pilot. Richards, scion of a prominent Kansas City family, graduated from Yale in mid-1917, shortly after the US declared war on Imperial Germany.

Despite his wealth and social standing, Richards enlisted in the US Army, hoping for "aerial work." He got his wish. He attended ground school at San Marcos, Texas, and flight school at Chanute Field, Ill. By August 1917, he was in France. He trained at Tours, Avord, and Issoudun, and became a first lieutenant on Nov. 20, 1917.

Richards fought in air battles at the Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne. On Sept. 26, 1918—the first day of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive—Richards crossed German lines on a dangerous surveillance mission. His worn-out Salmson 2A2 biplane was shot down and he was killed. His body was found near Varennes.

Richards received the Silver Star, awarded posthumously, for gallantry in the World War.

The second part of the base's name honored Lt. Col. Arthur William Gebaur Jr., a USAF F-84 fighter pilot in the Korean War. Gebaur was shot down on his 99th mission and was listed as Missing in Action but he was eventually presumed dead.

Gebaur in 1936 graduated from Kansas City's Northeast High School, where he was active in the Reserve Officer Training Corps. He became a career Air Force officer and deployed to Korea with the 7th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 49th Fighter-Bomber Wing.

On Aug. 29, 1952, Gebaur led a series of ground attacks on communist positions. During one bomb run, Gebaur's fighter was hit by an 85 mm explosive shell. He pressed on and bombed his original target, then turned and spotted eight quadruple .50-cal gun positions. He re-attacked and silenced the guns, but his fighter crashed.

Gebaur was awarded, posthumously, the Distinguished Service Cross (Air Force) "for extraordinary heroism" on that day.

These two Kansas City heroes were forever linked when on April 27, 1957, USAF bestowed the name Richards-Gebaur on the old Grandview Air Force Base in Missouri. In its early years, the base was home to F-102 Delta Daggers. In 1980, control passed to the Air Force Reserve, which ran the base until 1994.

Today, the base is being redeveloped by the city of Kansas City and a private Chicago firm.

JOHN FRANCISCO RICHARDS II

Born: July 31, 1884, Kansas City, Mo.
Died: Sept. 26, 1918, Varennes, France
College: Yale University
Occupation: US military officer
Service: United States Army Air Service
Main Era: World War I
Years Active: 1917-18
Combat: Western Front
Final Grade: 1st Lieutenant
Honors: Silver Star, posthumous

ARTHUR WILLIAM GEBAUR JR.

Born: Feb. 22, 1919, Kansas City, Mo.
Died: Aug. 29, 1952 (MIA, presumed dead), North Korea
Occupation: US military officer
Service: United States Air Force
Main Era: Korean War
Years Active: 1941-52
Combat: Korean Peninsula
Final Grade: Lieutenant Colonel
Honors: Distinguished Service Cross, posthumous

RICHARDS-GEBAUR AFB

State: Missouri
Nearest City: Kansas City
Area: 2.25 sq mi / 1,440 acres
Status: Closed
Opened: (as Grandview Airport) 1941
Acquired: (by USAF) January 1952
Renamed: Grandview AFB, Oct. 1, 1952
Renamed: Richards-Gebaur AFB, April 27, 1957
Renamed: Richards-Gebaur ARS, Oct. 1, 1980
Closed: June 12, 1994
Current owner: Private developer
Former owners: Troop Carrier Command, Continental Air Forces, Air/Aerospace Defense Command, Air Force Communications Service, Military Airlift Command, Air Force Reserve

1. John Francisco Richards II 2. Arthur William Gebaur Jr. 3. C-124 lands at R-G AFB, mid-1960s. 4. F-106 being armed at Richards-Gebaur AFB in 1967.

File photo: USAF photo; USAF photo