



The One and Only Rattlesnake Bomber Base: Pyote Army Airfield in World War II

Thomas E. Alexander

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In a remote corner of West Texas in 1942, the dreaded western diamondback rattlesnake was awarded the unique distinction of having a mighty airfield named in its honor. Although the installation originally bore the official title of Pyote Army Airfield, the massive quantity of serpents encountered during the construction of the base quickly earned it the nickname of "The Rattlesnake Bomber Base." For the thousands of military men and women who served on the airfield and the additional thousands of civilians who worked there, what is now only a ghostly ruin will always be a vibrant and undying monument to a brief time when men and snakes and giant silvery bombers all came together on the West Texas desert to share a legendary chapter of American history. *The One and Only Rattlesnake Bomber Base* tells the story of what happened when an American bomber base aptly named for a serpent arose, Brigadoon-like, from the sun-baked caliche desert located just east of the fabled Pecos River and just west of nearly every place else. Although the huge airfield was eventually to sprawl over nearly three thousand acres of Texas hardscrabble, its important and colorful history should by no means be considered merely a regional wartime episode. What happened at Pyote, Texas, before, during, and after World War II represents instead a microcosm of what took place all across the North American continent.

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