

Chapman Field History

Chapman Field Park is a historic site known for its ties to both World War I and World War II. It was named after Victor Chapman, the first American pilot to die in World War I. Chapman was serving in the heroic French Lafayette Escadrille composed of volunteer American pilots when he was killed-in-action in aerial combat over Verdun on June 24, 1916.

During World War I, the U.S. military used some of the property of what is now Chapman Field Park as a site for aerial gunnery practice, while other parts of the land were leased by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to cultivate tropical plants and trees, including some of the first rubber and mango trees in the United States.

The property's use as a military base grew at the onset of World War II when it was converted into a flight training field run by the Aviatix of the Women's Air Service Pilots (WASPS). Under the direction of renowned Florida aviator Jacqueline Cochran, the WASPs trained male Navy and Army cadet pilots. The women's war contributions went largely unrecognized until 1977 when they won official Veteran status. During the early 2000s, U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Miami advocated for awarding the WASPs a Congressional Gold Medal, which they ultimately won in 2009. The Park's historical exhibits include a Florida Historical Marker which was installed at the park in April 2024.