



Army engineers lay down Marston strips to form a runway in primitive areas during WWII.

Marston lends name to important WWII tool

Because of a successful experiment in 1941, the Richmond County Community of Marston became famous during World War II.

Marston Matting has a Wikipedia website today among others. Wilson Moore donated a March 1942 issue of Popular Science to the Richmond County Historical Society with an article entitled "Short-Order Airports" made possible with Marston Matting.

A portable steel airplane landing mat (Pierced Steel Plank) was first installed and tested by the U.S. Army Air Corps at an airstrip site in Marston

during the 1941 massive Army maneuvers in the area.

It was a sectional structure 3,000 feet long and 150 feet wide, weighing 1,000 tons. Each interlocking 10-foot long perforated plank was 15 inches wide and ¼ inches thick and weighed 70 pounds.

If runways of Marston Matting were bombed, they could be quickly repaired.

"It was the year's greatest achievement in aviation," giving America local air superiority on battlefields in the Pacific and European Theaters of War, said Maj. Gen. Henry H. Arnold, commander, U.S. Army Air Corps.

Everywhere the mat was laid, Allied airpower was projected forward with speed. The American fleet did not have to depend entirely on carrier-borne aircraft advancing against the Japanese.

It was also used during the Korean War and in Vietnam. Examples of it are still used at some locations around the world. It has been adapted for civilian uses such as fencing, truck bed lining, making pig pens and foot bridges – even in Richmond County.

On October 30, 1941, the Richmond County Journal said of the first such field in Marston, "A big B-18 type Army Air Corps medium bomber settled down on the new field gently as a butterfly on a flower, writing another page in the history of aeronautics."

The landing strip in Marston contained 35,000 mats weighing 2,250,000 pounds in all.

Fifteen officers and 660 men transformed a pine tree nursery in Marston into a straight, level, practical landing field in just 11 days, working 24 hours a day, the Journal said. Laying the matting took 60 hours.

The runways could routinely accept punishment from airplanes weighing up to 60,000 pounds thumping down at speeds of 90 miles an hour.

In April 1989, the Air Force Magazine said, "During 1941-45, Marston mat created the footprint of global air power. Although not possessed of glamor or the mystique of 'breakthroughs,' Marston mat nevertheless ranks as one of the most subtle, versatile, and ultimately devastating 'secret weapons' of World War II."