

Did you know there used to be an RAF camp on the Wirral? Opened in 1940, RAF West Kirby was a basic training camp to train new recruits in the Royal Air Force



Map of base and surrounding area



Hut ready for inspection



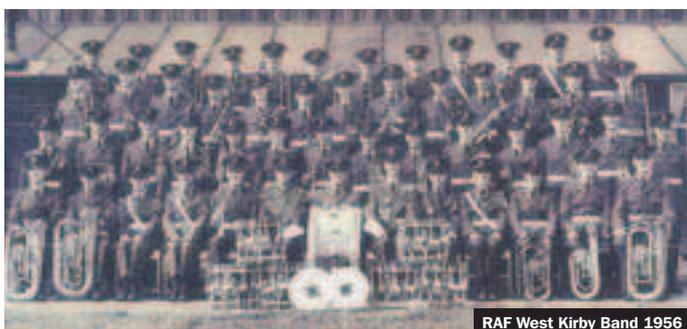
Main entrance to base

The Royal Air Force (RAF) is the aerial warfare service branch of the British Armed Forces. Formed on 1 April 1918, it is the oldest independent air force in the world. The RAF has taken a significant role in British military history, playing a large part in the Second World War as well as in more recent conflicts.

The RAF Camp at West Kirby existed from 1940 until 1960. According to official records the final passing out parade took place on 20 December 1957. Since then the camp has passed into oblivion and the area is now a mix of farm land and Country Park.

The camp was actually located three miles from West Kirby, the entrance was on Saughall Massie Road, almost opposite Oldfield Lane. It was set up at the beginning of the Second World War as a basic training camp to train new recruits in the Royal Air Force. It was the very first base for most personnel, most of whom were newly called up in the rank of AC2 (the very lowest rank in the RAF) for their two years' National Service in the British armed forces, known in the vernacular as a "square bashing camp".

In excess of 150,000 young men passed through the camp, either en route to foreign parts in its early days as a transit camp, or as recruits to be trained by the various drill instructors. There was of course also a core of permanent staff to cater for all the various needs of those young men. Recruits normally spent a period of eight weeks on their training at West Kirby before being posted on to their 'trade training' camp elsewhere in the United Kingdom.



RAF West Kirby Band 1956



Off-duty troops trying to keep warm in 1956

At RAF West Kirby, the men were given their initial training on their first entry into RAF, which included first learning of parade ground drill with rifles, intensive physical fitness training, training in ground combat and defence under Non Commissioned Officers of the RAF Regiment and some education about the RAF and its history. While undergoing basic training at West Kirby, their accommodation was in wooden barrack huts, each one housing about 20 men.

Because West Kirby was a basic training camp with no airfield, discipline was very much stricter than in any normal RAF operational or trade training camp.

In 1960 the camp was demolished and the land converted back into farming fields. A dedication plaque was installed where the camp entrance used to be in 2006.

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In addition to the School of Recruit Training, RAF West Kirby included a second unit, the General Hospital. This hospital was not intended solely for the needs of this station. It had accommodation for about 200 and drew its patients from RAF units throughout the country.