

# The History of Piper-Fuller Airport

By Jack Phillips

According to old maps, the original Piper-Fuller Flying Field was located north of where 22<sup>nd</sup> avenue north is now, extending north to Tyrone Blvd at 30<sup>th</sup> avenue, and west of the Seaboard Rail Road tracks to 78<sup>th</sup> street. The Seaboard Rail Tracks are now the Pinellas trail. The Airport was located next to the north end of the Jungle Golf Course. Two of the holes on the golf course, #10 and #11, were located where 22<sup>nd</sup> avenue north is now, and right in front of the Piper-Fuller Airport at that time. R. L. Piper was from Tyrone, Pennsylvania, a name that applies to sections of our city.

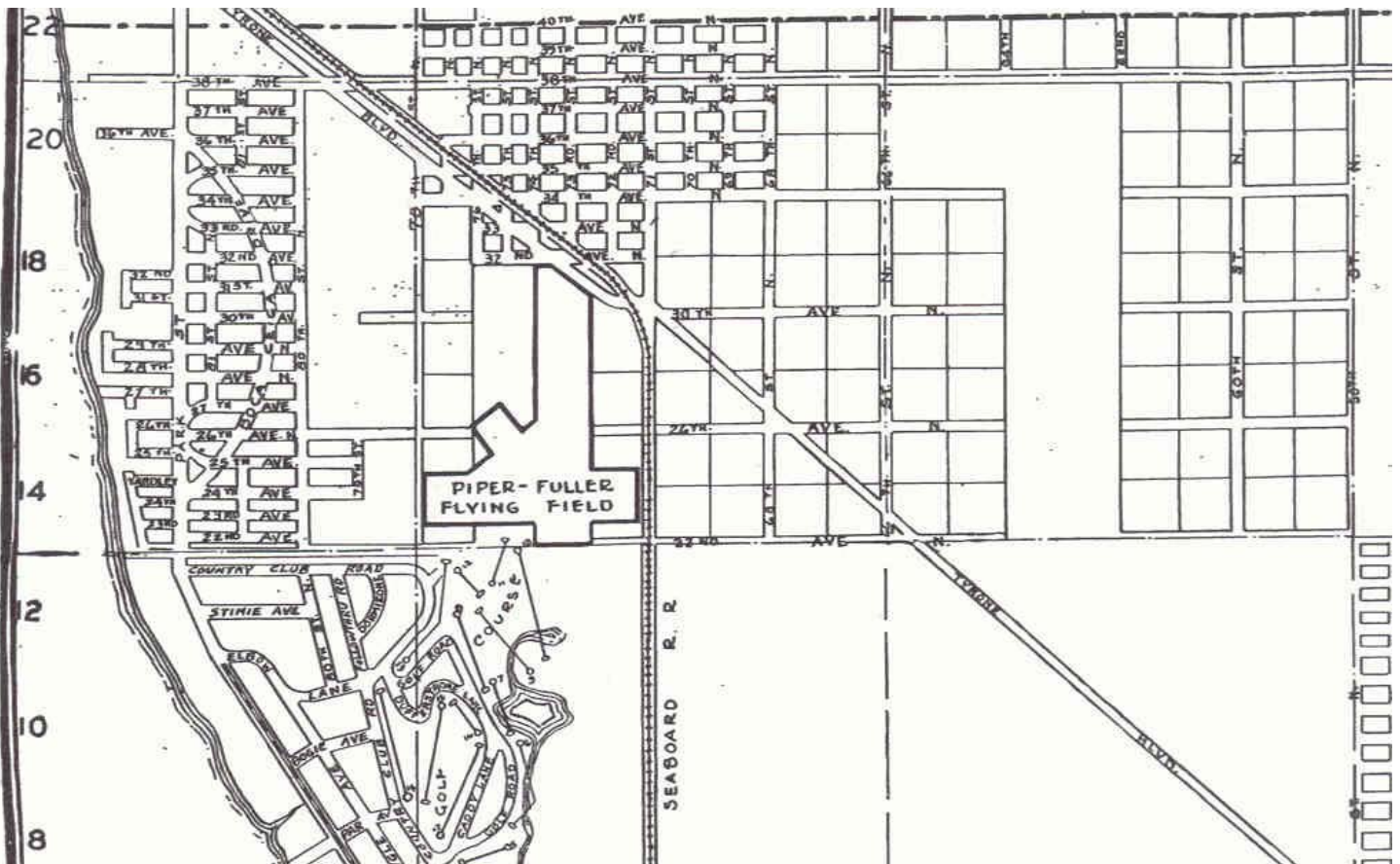
The Jungle Golf Course was located between fifth avenue and 22<sup>nd</sup> avenue north, and ran from Park Street to 74<sup>th</sup> street. The golf course was formally opened on January 1, 1916. The old Club House is now the Farragut Academy. The original club was known as the St. Petersburg Country Club. In 1924, the Allen-Fuller Company purchased the property and renamed it the Jungle Club.

According to the book "Mangroves to Major League," by Mayor Rick Baker, the Piper-Fuller Flying Field was built around 1926 and was the first airfield in St. Petersburg and the third in the state; it was followed by the Grand Central Airport at Weedon Island in 1929 which was later called Sky Harbor Airport. Albert Whitted Airport also followed in 1929. The book also states that in 1943 about 10,000 Army trainees were camped out at the Piper-Fuller Flying Field and the Jungle Golf Course.

Piper-Fuller airfield was a very colorful airport in its time. It originally consisted of 32 acres. It was the scene of early air meets. Once, General Clair Chenault, and an Air Corps flying team put on an air show there. It is rumored that it was used by bootleggers during the prohibition years. During the war, primary trainers used Piper-Fuller Field.

According to the St. Petersburg Times, on September 23, 1941, the City of St. Petersburg authorized the purchase of the airport and additional land. It was listed as 220 acres; options obtained covered 140 acres for actual landing surfaces, 30 acres for future extension or shops, 10 acres for hangers, 10 acres for parking, and 30 acres north of Tyrone Boulevard for which no use had yet been designated. The cost was \$7,133.14. According to the article filed with the city council, the airport would provide a north-south runway 2,780 feet long and a northeast-south-west runway 3,330 feet. It stated that the entire surface of the field was fairly smooth but needed mowing. Remember that in that time many airports were of a grass surface.

Another article in the St. Petersburg Times, dated December 17, 1941, stated a provision for a major extension of Piper-Fuller airport was made through the city council's authorization to the city manager to purchase an additional 80 acres of property adjoining the recently acquired Field for \$1,000. Negotiations were also underway to purchase an additional 40 acres to provide an east-west runway. According to the maps I have seen these additions to the Field extended it west to 80<sup>th</sup> Street and



north to Tyrone Blvd. Thus Walter Fuller Park was part of the old airport.

Fighter Squadron, a combat training unit of the 337<sup>th</sup> fighter Group (Third Army Air Force), based P-40's and later, P-51's there for the duration of World War II.

With the start of World War II, just months after the city purchased the airport, private aviation came to a halt and Albert Whitted Airport was already established with good approaches over water; it had hangers and paved runways. Piper-Fuller was a grass field and could not compete with other more improved airports even though it was used for primary training. World War II started on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and the Government began to construct airfields to train pilots. Construction of what we know as the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport, at its present site, started earlier in March 1941, and at that time was named Pinellas Army Airfield. After Pearl Harbor, this airfield was used as a military flight-training base. The 304<sup>th</sup>

In 1960, with the Piper-Fuller Airport abandoned, the city decided to use most of the old airport property for a park. A contest was run by the Council of Neighborhood Associations and the Times to name the Park. The awards for the contest were to be made May 30<sup>th</sup> at the Jungle Terrace Civic Association Clubhouse, on the northeast corner of 80<sup>th</sup> St. and 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave. North. Yes, we did have a clubhouse at that location along with a ball field and playground. The Jungle Terrace Civic Association was as active then in determining the usage of this valuable land as it is now.

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**LEFT.** The map on the left represents our area as it was around 1930. Piper Fuller Flying Field occupies the area that the industrial park is in now. Note the golf course just south of 22nd avenue. Also note the area west of Park Street between 29th and 38th Avenue was not completely developed.

**RIGHT.** This map represents our neighborhood as it looked around 1960. The Jungle Terrace Civic Association Club House was located at the corner of 33rd Avenue and 80th Street. On this map it is in the upper left corner of the area marked "A".



Jack Phillips

