**NAS Willow Grove**

**Location**

NAS Willow Grove is an air station located approximately 20 miles north of Philadelphia on Route 611 in Horsham Township, Montgomery County. The main gate of NAS Willow Grove fronts Route 611, which runs south four miles to the Pa turnpike.

[View Larger Map](https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=embed&hl=en&geocode=&q=Willow+Grove+Nas+Jrb,+Willow+Grove,+PA&aq=2&oq=willow+grove+nas&sll=32.576226,-86.680736&sspn=6.996533,13.656006&t=h&ie=UTF8&hq=Willow+Grove+Nas+Jrb,+Willow+Grove,+PA&ll=40.200314,-75.150003&spn=0.016389,0.053558&z=14&iwloc=A)

**Mission**

The mission of NAS Willow Grove was to provide, train and maintain a ready reserve force. In 1994 the base was redesignated a Joint Reserve Base to more accurately reflect our status. In addition to the Navy, the Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, and Pa National Guard reside here.

**History**

In 1926, when many people were afraid of airplanes and most considered flying a daredevil sport, aviation pioneer Harold F. Pitcairn bought a large section of farmland north of Philadelphia. That farmland today is Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, Pennsylvania.

From 1926 to 1942, Pitcairn developed, built, tested and flew many different aircraft — most notably the Mailwing and Autogiro. During his lifetime, Harold Pitcairn and his associates pursued a dream of developing “The Safe Aircraft.” Their vision and innovation have had a profound and lasting impact on American aviation. Harold Pitcairn was the 14th recipient of the highest award in American aviation, the Collier Trophy, which was awarded by President Herbert Hoover. Three Pitcairn aircraft are on display in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. His achievements were recently recognized by his induction into the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

In 1927, when Pitcairn won the U.S. Postal Service contract to carry the overnight mail between New York and Atlanta, he designed the Mailwing. Faster, safer, and more efficient than any other aircraft on the market, the Mailwing was immediately bought as standard equipment by many other airlines. Pilots loved the aircraft because of its reliability and ease of handling. When crashes did occur, pilots were often able to walk away with minor injuries due to the Mailwing’s rugged construction.

A series of tragic accidents, coupled with changes in government regulations, induced Pitcairn to sell his fledgling air mail business to Eastern Air Transport — which would eventually become Eastern Airlines. Although the durable Mailwings would continue to carry the mail for several more years, the era of the single-engine, open-cockpit, mail-only plane would soon end.

Final closure of NAS JRB Willow Grove occurred on September 15, 2011. The Pennsylvania Air National Guard is expected to take custody, and the facility will be designated Willow Grove Air National Guard Base. A handful of National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers will remain, and the Air Force will maintain administrative offices on the property.