An Air Force historical report gives further details of the history of Wright Field.

Norton Field, Columbus, OH

39.97 North / 82.88 West (South of Port Columbus Airport, OH)

According to the Fall 2000 "OH Aviation News" (via Billy Spiropoulos),

the genesis of Norton Field began with the formation of the Aero Club of Columbus,

shortly after the end of the First World War.

After the first convention of Associated Aero Clubs of Ohio in 1920,

various members set about the serious business of getting an airfield established in the Columbus area.

A 100-acre property was located & a 10 year lease was secured from Jim Lamp & paid for by the Pure Oil Company.

This property was then provided to the War Department.

For $1 a year as the community’s part of the deal,

Norton Field was equipped by the War Department with 2 steel hangars, a fueling dock & a beacon light on a tower.

Regulations stated an Army field must be named after a deceased flyer.

An outstanding local person eminently fit the need for the name.

Fred Norton was an outstanding Ohio State University student athlete

who had gone on to become a member of the 27th "Eagle" Pursuit Squadron in France,

and was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross & the French Croix de Guerre with Palm.
Thus, Norton Field was named for this heroic pilot who was also the first Ohio State graduate to be killed in the war.

Norton Field was dedicated on 6/30/23.

The Army furnished aircraft to establish the 108th Observation Squadron, to be used by Army pilots.

Although the squadron was administered under Ft. Hayes

It also accommodated any civilian flying activities that adhered to the Army’s regulations.

The Aero Club secured a WW1 surplus barrack from Ft. Hayes purchased for $1

to later be refurbished for use as a clubhouse.

The Army was experimenting in establishing model airways (a scheduled military air service over established air routes)

and the ability to conduct operations at night.

Thus the 1st Lighted Airway (which later became the model for the airways system of the US)

was established with beacon lights between McCook & Norton Fields.

The experiments were flown regularly to perfect aviation lighting systems & night flying.

Experiments in aerial photography at night were also conducted.

Over the succeeding 6 years, many prominent pilots utilized this airfield

including Jimmy Doolittle, Charles Lindbergh, and the Wright Brothers.

In 1928, a Columbus native & Ohio State University student Curtis LeMay obtained a commission in the Army

and while awaiting his application to Army flight school took unofficial instructional flights at Norton Field.

He went on to flight training in the fall of 1928 as a National Guard Officer

and after graduation was recommissioned as an Army Pursuit Pilot at Selfridge Field.

While there he arranged to return to serve at Norton Field as Assistant Engineering & Operations Officer

in order to complete his final quarter at Ohio State.

He later went on to fame as the Cold War commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

Charles Lindbergh returned to Norton Field on May 29 1928

as a Technical Advisor for Transcontinental Air Transport in surveying a cross country train-plane route.

He found the field to be too small for TAT’s needs

and recommended the city find a larger facility adjacent to the railroad tracks.

This brought about the construction of Port Columbus in 1929.

In 1929 the Army set up & conducted a large scale mock war maneuver

of Red & Blue Army & Air Forces between the cities of Dayton & Columbus.

Between May 15th & 25th air fleets composing more than 200 aircraft (the largest up to this date)

were based at Wilbur Wright Field & Norton Field,

and were employed in mock air warfare in this maneuver.
The Army remained at Norton Field for 2 more years until relocating to larger facilities at Port Columbus in June 1931, effectively abandoning Norton Field.

Harold Distelhorst came to the rescue of Norton Field in October 1931 & took over the operation.
In so doing he promoted & hosted such aviation activities as Air Carnivals, Air Shows, Air Races and several times did emergency medical flights in the romantic years of civil aviation.

Distelhorst kept vigorous activity at the airport until the Denton family of Northway Cab Company took control in 1936.

The Denton family & Herb Stump set up the Mid West Aviation Corporation, which operated Norton Field through the WW2 days.

The earliest depiction which has been located of Norton Field was an undated aerial view from The Airport Directory Company's 1937 Airport Directory (courtesy of Bob Rambo).
It depicted the field as a square grass field with 2 buildings at the northwest corner.

The Airport Directory Company's 1937 Airport Directory (courtesy of Bob Rambo) described Norton Field as consisting of a 2,250' x 2,000' rectangular sod field. A single hangar was said to be in the northwest corner, with "Norton Field" painted on the roof.

An advertisement for Norton Field from The Airport Directory Company's 1937 Airport Directory (courtesy of Bob Rambo).

Norton Field was depicted as a commercial airport on the June 1939 Huntington Sectional Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).
Norton Field was depicted as a commercial airport on the 1941 Regional Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).

An aerial view looking north at Norton Field from The Airport Directory Company's 1941 Airport Directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).

The field was described as a 100 acres square sod field.

A hangar was said to have "Norton Field Midwest Aviation Corp." painted on the roof.

During the Second World War, Norton Field conducted a very active training program,
under the government sponsored War Training Service & Civilian Pilot Training programs,
utilizing a large fleet of training aircraft.

These government programs provided an introduction to the regular Army & Navy pilot training programs.
A circa 1941-42 photo (courtesy of Mark Hess) of Carl McGary, instructor at Norton Field, in front of a Piper Cub with students Walter Beaver, Keith Fields, Bernard Hatch, and Bob Chew.

A WW2-era photo of a collection of training planes in front of the hangar of Midwest Aviation Corporation at Norton Field, along with the taxicabs of the Northway Cab Company also owned by the Denton family.
Norton Field was described by the April 1944 US Army/Navy Directory of Airfields (courtesy of Ken Mercer) as having a 2,800' unpaved runway, and it was listed as conducting Army flight operations.

Parks Aircraft Company purchased the Norton Field property from the Lamp family in 1944.

A 1945 view of several Pipers in front of the Norton Field control tower & hangar (courtesy of the Whitehall Historical Society).
An aerial view of Norton Field from the Haire Publishing Company's 1945 Airport Directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).

The directory described Norton Field as having a 2,200' x 2,000' sod field, with a single hangar.

The manager was listed as Herman Swingle, and the operator was listed as the Northway Flying Service.

The Denton family moved their operation from Norton to their new field in 1947.

After the move Norton Field continued to be used for the operations of H. R. "Dutch" Swingle (who operated a flight training school) and Vern Acheson of the Columbus Aircraft & Sales Company.

The last photo which has been located showing Norton Field in operation was a 1949 aerial view of several aircraft parked next to the Norton Field hangar (courtesy of the OH Historical Society).

The date of closure of Norton Field has not been determined, but the airfield property was sold to become a housing subdivision on 11/16/1949.

A 1957 aerial view showed housing covering the site of Norton Field.

The control tower reportedly survived longer than the rest of the airfield buildings, but the last remaining original Norton Field building was demolished in December, 1979.
The original role of the site of Norton Field has been somewhat remembered, as the 1994 USGS topo map depicted a "Norton Field Playground" at the location of the former airfield, and some of the residential streets on the site have names including "Norton Lane", "Rickenbacker Avenue", "Langley Avenue", and Wright Avenue.

The 1994 USGS aerial photo showed that the site of Norton Field had been covered by a housing development, and not a trace of the airport remained visible.

The Ohio Bicentennial Commission dedicated a Norton Field Historical Marker at the site on June 24, 2000.

A 2004 photo by Christopher Trott of the Norton Field historical plaque.