The Diamond on the Ridge

By Ed Ralston

This ridge, today known as "Huntington Ridge", had no known name before land developers dubbed it as such. I had previously written about how this ridge was part of the land owned by Will McMurray's Twin Springs Dairy operations[1] and that evidence suggested that the name "Twin Springs" came from two springs that originated on this property.

But the ridge **held another secret**, one revealed in a 1951 aerial photograph of the area.

Figure 1: *Note the distinct* ***diamond area*** *cleared out atop this ridge. The diamond was almost as long as a football field and contained about 0.8 acres.*



Why a Diamond?

From an agricultural standpoint, clearing a diamond-shaped area on top of a ridge would seem to have little practical application. It was at the highest elevation of the steep, inaccessible ridge. Even if clearing this area would have been of some benefit, why make it a geometrically perfect diamond shape?

[1] *The Spring Box at Huntington Ridge*, https://docs.google.com/document/d/19vkUbpn2j8eRO-TFwfTqIvFmUxE6tG1EVK--BmZzwM/edit?usp=sharing

But, if it was not done for farming operations, **what other purpose** would such a clearing serve? The answer is found in the details on early topographic maps.

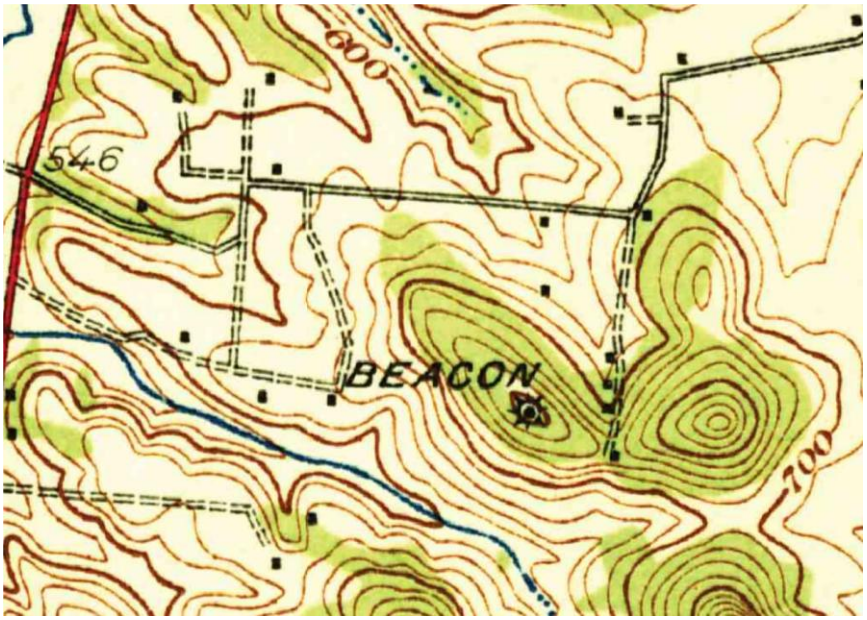


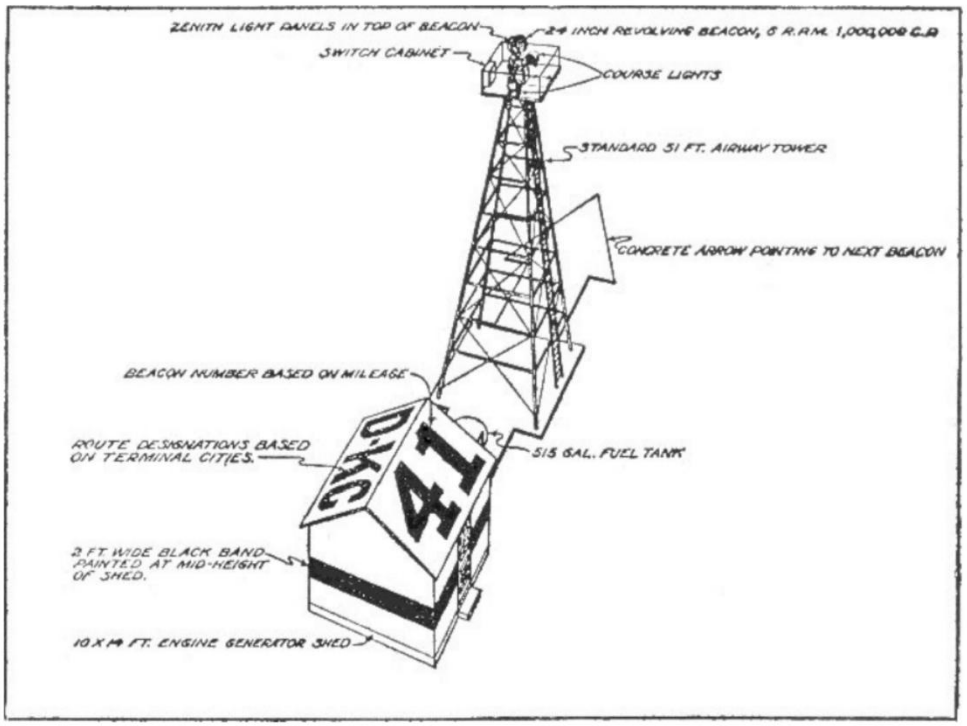
Figure 2: *1932 topographic map of the area south of McMurray Drive. A* ***beacon*** *is indicated at the top of the ridge west of Amalie Drive, site of present-day Huntington Ridge. The beacon was located at the highest elevation of the ridge on which such an installation could be made.*

The beacon on the map **aligns with the diamond on the aerial,** but that still does not explain the **rhombus pattern**.

A Unique Shape

Unlike the concrete arrows and steel towers commonly associated with early airway beacons, the **diamond-shaped clearing at this location appears to have been an unusual feature**. I have found no comparable example in the historical materials examined for this study.

Figure 3: *Typical Department of Commerce beacon installation*



A typical beacon site relied on a giant yellow concrete arrow to direct pilots along the course during daylight hours.

Airway beacons were generally mounted on steel towers approximately 50 feet tall, with taller towers used where conditions required. Tower height and site elevation helped provide visibility above surrounding terrain and vegetation. Although

some clearing would have been necessary for construction and maintenance, there is no indication that a large, geometrically shaped clearing was a standard requirement. [2]

What then was the significance of a **giant diamond at the top of this ridge**? The answer to that question requires a look into aviation of the era.

Nashville's Aviation History

Early Nashville Airfields

- **Hampton Field** (1917–1921): A 2,000-foot grass strip in Green Hills and Nashville's first airfield.[3]
- **Blackwood Field** (1921–1928): Located in Hermitage along Shute Lane, it hosted Nashville's first airmail flights in 1924. It closed because its distance from downtown and unpaved roads made access difficult.[4]
- **McConnell Field** (1927–1937): Built on 131 acres in Sylvan Park to provide a centralized hub close to town. It became Nashville's first municipal airport, launching scheduled airmail and passenger flights on **December 1, 1928**.[5]
- **Sky Harbor Airport** (1929–1937): Located southeast of the city along the Old Nashville (Dixie) Highway in Rutherford County, it served as Nashville's primary regional airline hub for early carriers like American Airlines and Eastern Air Lines until Berry Field (now BNA) opened in 1937.[6]

Airmail to Nashville

To support early airmail, the U.S. Post Office built a coast-to-coast "Highway of Light" navigation system using 50-to-70-foot steel towers topped with multi-million candlepower rotating beacons for night flying, anchored by 70-foot bright yellow concrete arrows at their bases for daytime tracking.[7] Spaced 10 to 25 miles apart, these beacons guided pilots along designated flight paths. Interstate Airlines launched the **Chicago-to-Atlanta airmail** route (C.A.M. 30) through Nashville's **McConnell Field** on **December 1, 1928**, though the route's full beacon network took another year to complete, officially lighting up for night operations on **December 1, 1929**.[8]

Twenty-two consecutively numbered beacons were installed between Atlanta's Candler Field and Nashville's McConnell Field, with **Beacon No. 22** being the last before **McConnell Field**. This was the beacon on Huntington Ridge.

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[2] *Federal Aviation Administration, "The Foundation," FAA Historical Photo Album*, https://www.faa.gov/about/history/photo_album/foundation

[3] The Historical Marker Database, *First Airfield*, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=248833

[4] The Historical Marker Database, *Blackwood Field*, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147683

[5] The Historical Marker Database, *McConnell Field*, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147168

[6] History of Rutherford County, *Sky Harbor Airport*, https://rutherfordtnhistory.org/sky-harbor-made-aviation-history/

[7] *The "Highway of Light" That Guided Early Planes Across America*, https://paleofuture.com/blog/2013/11/18/the-highway-of-light-that-guided-early-planes-across-america

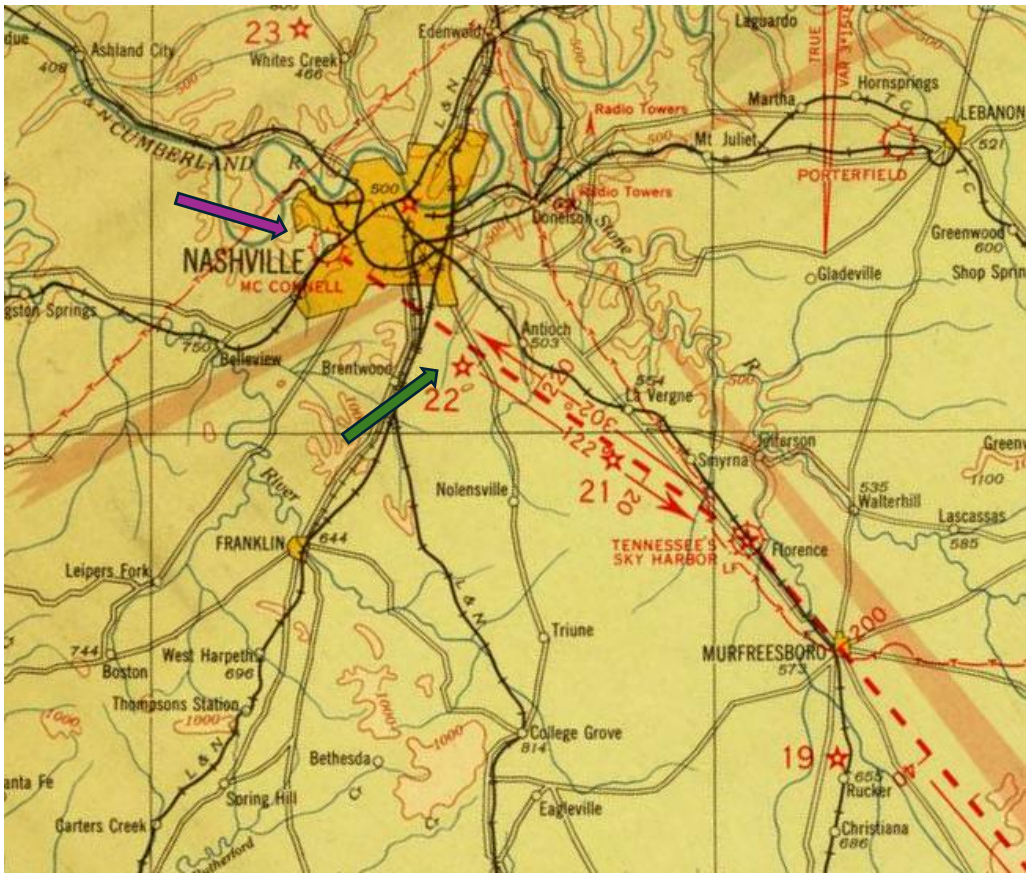
[8] *Night Air Mail to Start First of Month*, Nashville Tennessean, November 16, 1929, p.6.

Installed in the **summer of 1929**,[9-13] **Beacon No. 22** was strategically positioned to help pilots align their final approach to McConnell Field.

To map these concrete arrows and rotating beacons, the Department of Commerce issued official Airway Maps detailing coordinates and flight paths. Airway Map No. 143 (Atlanta to Nashville, 1931)[14] illustrates the route between **Atlanta's Candler Field** and **Nashville's McConnell Field**, as well as Nashville's regional hub, **Sky Harbor** near Murfreesboro. These numbered beacons formed the primary visual guidance system before radio navigation became widely established.

Figure 4: *Northern portion of a 1931* ***Atlanta to Nashville*** *strip map. These folding maps were carried by pilots to show specific, main flight corridors and air routes.*

The arrows on the ground would always point to the next higher beacon number.[15] So, beacon number 21's arrow pointed to beacon 22, and, since it was the last beacon before the airport, **beacon 22** (green arrow) **pointed to McConnell Field** (purple arrow).

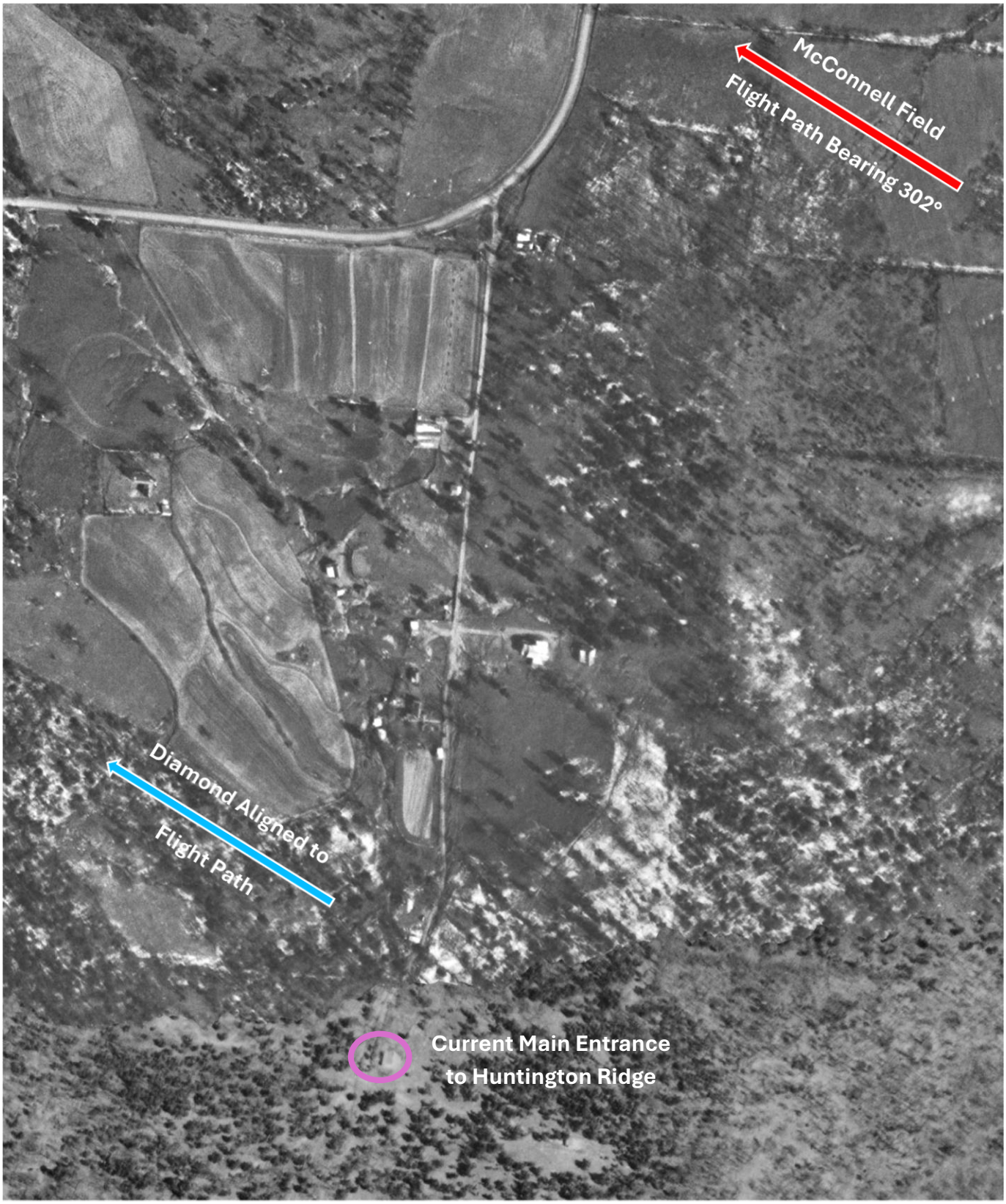


But what was the significance of this **unique diamond-shaped site clearing of Beacon 22?**

Figure 5: *Segment of a 1951 aerial photo of this property. Note that the diamond cut (near the bottom of the*

[9] *Survey Made for Beacon Light Sites*, Nashville Banner, November 11, 1928, p.13.
[10] *Beacons Will Aid Night Mail Fliers*, News Journal, May 18, 1929, p.1.
[11] *Interstate Gives Details of Plans for Night Flying*, News Journal, August 17, 1929, p.1.
[12] Department of Commerce, *Air Commerce Bulletin*, August 1, 1929, p. 14.
[13] Department of Commerce, *Air Commerce Bulletin*, September 15, 1929, p. 7.
[14] *Strip Map No. 143, 1931, Atlanta GA to Nashville TN,* https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3701pm.gct00064/?sp=180&st=image&r=-0.189,2.978,0.751,0.305,0
[15] The True Story Behind Those Giant Concrete Arrows, https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-true-story-behind-those-giant-concrete-arrows

image) appears to align with the flight path to McConnell. The purple oval is the current location of main entrance to Huntington Ridge Townhouses.



Positioned roughly three-quarters of a mile off the official flight path and cut into the wooded ridge, the high-contrast geometry of this clearing **could have given approaching airmail pilots an unmistakable long-range daytime marker** long before the steel tower or concrete arrow came into sight.

Figure 6: *Illustrative reconstruction of how the beacon site and diamond-shaped clearing might have appeared to a pilot flying northwest toward McConnell Field. The reconstruction is based on historical maps, aerial photography, and typical Department of Commerce beacon installations; the precise appearance of the Huntington Ridge installation has not been documented.*



Although the installation was completed earlier in 1929, regular nighttime airmail operations did not begin until December 1 of that year.

***Figure 7**: Beacon location superimposed on modern aerial. The tower would have been positioned approximately on the street behind 441 Huntington Ridge Drive.*



Short-lived History

The late 1920s and 1930s marked the "**Golden Age of Aviation**," an era of rapid technological progress in both aircraft design and navigation. By the mid-1930s the size of airplanes had quickly outgrown McConnell Field's short runways, prompting larger commercial carriers to shift operations to Sky Harbor Airport in Murfreesboro. To secure a permanent, centralized municipal airport, Nashville acquired 340 acres along Murfreesboro Pike in 1935. **Berry Field officially opened on June 12, 1937**, and all passenger and airmail flights moved there.[16] **McConnell Field was officially closed in 1937**[17] and the land was later used for McCabe Golf Course.[18]

According to flight maps, Beacon 22 was renumbered to Beacon 21 sometime between October 1936[19] and February 1937[20]. The renumbering may have resulted from the

[16] "*Nretrospect: A Look at the History of Nashville's Airport*", https://www.nfocusmagazine.com/people-places/nretrospect-a-look-at-the-history-of-nashville-s-airport/article_e2d8b798-3e76-11ed-b9c5-437dc3cdf868.html
[17] "*A Chronology of Nashville Airports",* https://nashvillehistoricalnewsletter.com/tag/mcconnell-field/
[18] The Historical Marker Database, *McConnell Field*, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147168
[19] Sectional aeronautical charts, Nashville, October 1936. (Numbered 22)
[20] Sectional aeronautical charts, Chattanooga, February 1937. (Numbered 21, and no beacon shown at Sky Harbor)

removal of Beacon No. 20 at Sky Harbor Field, followed by the renumbering of subsequent beacons to maintain a continuous sequence.

Decommissioning

With the opening of Berry Field, the flight path from Atlanta to Nashville no longer passed this ridge, so Beacon 22/21 was no longer needed. It was last shown on an Airways Sectional map in September 1938. The March 1939 map showed no beacon at this location. So, the beacon remained in service for less than 10 years.

When these beacon sites were decommissioned, it was typical for the steel tower, generator equipment, and shed to be dismantled and salvaged, leaving only the ground-level concrete foundations behind.

Figure 8: *An example of a concrete airway arrow still visible on the ground today in Wyoming.*[21]



However, by the time the 1951 aerial photo was made, all visible traces of the beacon were gone, leaving only the diamond-shaped clearing where it had been installed. Here are three possible reasons why no pads or arrow are seen:

[21] "*Wyoming's Huge Arrows That Guided 1920s Airmail Repainted Original Bright Yellow*", https://cowboystatedaily.com/2026/10/31/wyoming-aviation-group-repainting-yellow-arrows-that-guided-1920s-airmail-pilots/

1. **Removal or Destruction After Decommission**

   The concrete arrow and tower foundations may have been removed or buried when the beacon was decommissioned, possibly at the request of the property owner.

2. **Natural Concealment (More Probable)**

   In the twelve years between the site's abandonment and the 1951 photograph, the concrete arrow slab and footings were likely obscured by natural growth. Because federal airway arrows were poured nearly flush with the surrounding grade, a decade of falling leaves, accumulating topsoil, and plant growth could easily cover the concrete, rendering it invisible in aerial photography. The covered concrete would have been destroyed during 1970s development.

3. **No Arrow Was Ever Installed (Alternative Theory)**

   The Department of Commerce airway engineers maintained the authority to omit the arrow based on local topography.[22] So, the diamond shape may have been used as a **replacement for the arrow** due to distance from the flight path. They may have relied entirely on the 0.8-acre diamond-shaped clearing to guide pilots rather than a ground-level concrete slab.

Conclusion

The diamond-shaped clearing visible in the 1951 aerial photograph is a surviving photographic reminder of a largely forgotten chapter in Nashville's aviation history. Historical maps establish that an airway beacon occupied this ridge during the early years of airmail service, and successive navigation charts trace its operation through the changing aviation network of the 1930s.

The unusual geometry of the clearing and its apparent alignment with the flight corridor suggest that it served as an additional daytime navigational reference for approaching pilots, or perhaps as a replacement for the concrete arrow.

The beacon itself disappeared as Nashville's aviation facilities evolved, and the subsequent development of Huntington Ridge erased the visible traces of the installation. What remains is a distinctive feature preserved in historical aerial photography, offering a glimpse into a small but fascinating chapter of Nashville's aviation heritage.

[22] 7 Myths About the Lighted Airways, https://thesurveystation.com/assets/docs/publications/7-Myths-About-the-Lighted-Airways.pdf.

The Diamond on the Ridge

On a ridge where shadows fall a giant diamond marking lay,
Soon erased ‘neath modern sprawl that swept it into yesterday.

When early airmen scanned the dark across a silent southern night,
Looking for a glowing mark—a highway built of flickering light.

Or daring pilots scanned by day, across the sunlit hills below,
For anything to point the way—like arrows in the morning’s glow.

A diamond carved to aid their flight along the early airways made,
Is now a phantom, faint and light, on vintage photos framed in gray.