

FORGOTTEN LEGACIES: THE U.S. GLIDER PILOT TRAINING PROGRAM AND LAMESA  
FIELD, TEXAS, DURING WORLD WAR II

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Rapidly initiated at the national, regional, and local levels, the American glider pilot training program came about due to a perceived need after successful German operations at the outset of World War II. Although the national program successfully produced the required number of pilots to facilitate combat operations, numerous changes and improvisation came to characterize the program. Like other American military initiatives in the twentieth century, the War Department applied massive amounts of effort, dollars, and time to a program that proved to be short-lived in duration because it was quickly discarded when new technologies appeared. At the local level, the real loser was Lamesa, Texas. Bearing the brunt of these changes by military decision makers, the citizens of Lamesa saw their hard-fought efforts to secure an airfield fall quickly by the wayside in the wake of changing national defense priorities. As generations continue to pass and memories gradually fade, it is important to document and understand the relationship between this military platform that saw limited action and a small Texas town that had a similarly short period of significance to train the pilots who flew the aircraft.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Civilian Aviation Authority (CAA)  
Defense Plant Corporation (DPC)  
European Theater of Operations (ETO)  
Farm Security Administration (FSA)  
Gulf Coast Training Center (GCTC)  
Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO)  
Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC)  
Troop Carrier Command (TCC)  
United States Air Force (USAF)  
United States Army Air Corps (USAAC)  
United States Army Air Force (USAAF)  
United States Army Air Force Flying Training Command (USAAFFTC)  
United States Army Air Service (USAAS)  
United States Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAFHRA)  
War Assets Administration (WAA)  
War Assets Commission (WAC)  
Works Progress Administration (WPA)

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Limited Understandings

Fort Eben-Emael sits along the Albert Canal at the intersection of the Belgian, Dutch, and German borders. In 1940, this fortress served as a key cog in the Belgian and French defenses against Nazi German aggression. Likewise, the *Wehrmacht* needed to capture the fortress to facilitate its *blitzkrieg* in the west. Defended by high-powered artillery in concrete casemates, scores of machine guns, and over 1,200 defenders, the fortress received the general classification of “impregnable.” The German High Command estimated that a ground assault on Eben-Emael would cost 6,000 lives and that a siege would take upwards of six months to capture the position. Seeking an alternative to this costly scenario, 78 German *Fallschirmjäger* from the 7<sup>th</sup> *Flieger-Division* landed in gliders on 10 May 1940 on top of the fortress and surprised the Belgian defenders. Using flamethrowers and demolition charges, the glider-borne infantrymen pinned down the defenders and allowed the main advance of the *Wehrmacht* to arrive and secure the fortification.<sup>1</sup> This brazen assault not only made the static defenses so prevalent from the previous Great War further obsolete, but introduced a new platform onto the modern battlefield: the military glider.

Recognizing the importance of this new military technology and its potential uses in the upcoming conflict, in February 1941 United States Army Air Corps (USAAC) Major

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Mrazek, *The Glider War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 21-2; Gerard M. Devlin, *Silent Wings: The Story of the Glider Pilots of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 34-35.

General Henry “Hap” Arnold stated, “In view of certain information received from abroad, a study should be initiated on developing a glider that could be towed by an aircraft.”<sup>2</sup>

Caught ill-prepared by this advance in military equipment and tactics, the USAAC began a crash-course program to understand, equip, train, and implement gliders for combat during World War II. The resulting training program underwent a series of rapid overhauls, modifications, and changes until an acceptable model became established and subsequently implemented. Required to rapidly expand from a pre-war total of zero militarily trained glider pilots, the USAAC eventually totaled over 6,000 trained pilots by the end of World War II. However, critics of the program dispute this number, questioning the proficiency of those glider pilots who entered and graduated from the various phases of the national glider training program. The glider program underwent significant changes from its initial inception to its final standardized curriculum, and critics see its hurried origins, shortcomings in planning, and deficiencies in training as indicative of a systemic failure of the United States glider force during World War II.

As a result of these perceived failures in training, the wartime contributions of the gliders—and their pilots—do not receive the attention they deserve from modern historians. Although gliders played a vital role in airborne operations in both the European and Pacific Theaters of Operation, gliders are often viewed as an afterthought, the “other” airborne delivery platform—compared to parachute infantry—of World War II and so their contributions are, therefore, marginalized.

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<sup>2</sup> United States Army Air Force, *United States Army Air Force Historical Study No. 47: Development and Procurement of Gliders in the Army Air Forces* (Washington, DC: Army Air Force Historical Office, 1946), 5.

In fact, the glider pilots who conducted airborne operations in Italy, France, Holland, Germany, and Burma stand as a testament to the national training program administered by the United States Army Air Force (USAAF).<sup>3</sup> A synchronized, national effort to mobilize, equip, and train men rapidly in a new technology just emerging on the modern battlefield, the glider pilot training program served as a direct response to the German demonstration of glider capabilities in locations such as Belgium, Greece, and Crete. The United States' program's unique ability to develop and deploy a vast pool of glider pilots to different combat theaters enabled various commanders to employ new and evolving tactics and strategies in response to local threats. The structure of the program itself served as the foundation for this capability, producing an over-abundance of trained glider pilots in relatively short order.

In order to facilitate the massive training endeavor that became the U.S. glider pilot training program, the War Department needed to create a vast infrastructure of aircraft, personnel, and training locations. Changing guidance from higher headquarters required the rapid approval, execution, and termination of contracts for planes and bases. Although the program should be characterized as an overall success due to its ability to produce the required number of pilots to support combat operations, it left in its wake a trail of discarded aircraft designs, human frustrations, and community heartbreak.

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<sup>3</sup> The United States Army Air Service, United States Army Air Corps, and United States Army Air Force all essentially refer to the same organization. Established in May 1918 by executive order of President Woodrow Wilson, the Air Service was formally established by legislation in 1920. The Air Service was renamed the Army Air Corps in 1926 due to the interwar power struggle between military aviation advocates and those military leaders who saw aviation as a supporting effort of the traditional branches of infantry and artillery. The Army Air Corps served as the immediate predecessor to the United States Army Air Force. This change in designation and administrative oversight occurred on 20 June 1941. All mentions in this paper will follow the aforementioned dates in regards to naming conventions.

As American aviation—both civilian and military—continued to grow in significance during the post-World War I environment, local civic leaders explored all available avenues to secure airfields in order to propel their communities further into the twentieth century. With the crippling effects of the Great Depression, opportunities and additional revenue made available by the growth in aviation technology offered potential economic relief to battered communities across the nation. Government contracts stood at the forefront of these efforts due to the dependable sources of income in the forms of construction, maintenance, and soldiers' salaries that would be infused into the local economy. Many believed that acquiring a military airfield could guarantee the future of a town or city. In order to secure these coveted contracts and associated benefits, local leaders went to extraordinary lengths forming committees, courting military officials, and peppering Congressmen with inquiries.

The town of Lamesa, Texas—approximately 6,000 citizens in 1940—was no different than many other small American towns vying for these limited opportunities. Following the German invasion of France in May 1940, the leaders of Lamesa saw a potential economic benefit in the war clouds building across the globe and potential American involvement in the future conflict. As such, the community launched a nearly two-year endeavor to secure a military airfield for the city of Lamesa. Leveraging the contacts of Congressman George Mahon (D-19), civic leadership explored all possible avenues to be selected as a location for further military expansion. Community leaders gave presentations to USAAC officials based out of Randolph Field, San Antonio. Meetings took place with local Works Progress Administration (WPA) bureaucrats. Citizens raised pleas to the Civilian Aviation Authority (CAA).

With the selection of Lamesa in the spring of 1942 as the home of one of the glider training bases rapidly appearing across the nation, the town's dreams had apparently come true. With the opening of Lamesa Field in June 1942, the community experienced the benefits squarely associated with the United States' war effort. Trainees flowed into the small west Texas town. Construction crews built hangars and administrative facilities. Gliders soared on the thermals above the crops of cotton and oil fields that had previously dominated the region.

But just as quickly as the marriage of Lamesa and the military began, the honeymoon ended. As the directives of the glider program continued to evolve, the USAAF deemed the airfield at Lamesa unnecessary. In February 1943, the contract glider school closed. Although the military later repurposed the airfield for a variety of functions, the community already began to experience the beginning of the end with its relationship to the military. The promise of what could have been remained unfulfilled.

### Historiography

The historiography of gliders is relatively limited in both nature and scope compared to other niches within the history of World War II. Much of the general airborne literature of the war tends to favor the coverage of parachute infantry and its combat role in Europe. Likewise, a majority of the published works on gliders during World War II follows this same trend and focuses on its combat role. In regard to the national glider training program itself, J. Norman Grim's *To Fly the Gentle Giants* stands alone in devoting

an entire book to the topic of the national glider pilot training program.<sup>4</sup> While containing extensive primary source research, Grim's work is not scholarly in nature as it fails to advocate and support a specific thesis in regard to the program. Instead, he uses the program as a vehicle to briefly examine and explore—through brief anecdotes by individuals and news stories—the various training locations of the glider pilots. Although providing these brief glimpses into the daily training regimens and spectacular events that occurred at these specific locations, he does not adequately analyze the capabilities, capacities, and the quantity of men trained within the various timeframes of the program. This failure to properly examine the training program that developed and prepared glider pilots for their combat roles allows for its casual dismissal and marginalization in both public and scholarly opinion.

Perhaps the most influential literature in shaping the perception of the glider's role in combat was written by one man: Cornelius Ryan. *The Longest Day* and *A Bridge Too Far* both dramatically recreate major Allied operations that included heavy airborne components.<sup>5</sup> Because both books later became major motion pictures, airborne operations—with gliders forming one component—continued to gain popular attention

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<sup>4</sup> J. Norman Grim, *To Fly the Gentle Giants: The Training of U.S. WWII Glider Pilots* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959); Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). A journalist by trade, Ryan gained fame through his retelling of significant events during World War II. *The Longest Day* and its examination of Operation OVERLORD was made into a major motion picture in 1962, grossing over \$50,000,000 at the box office. The ensemble cast included John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Henry Fonda, and Robert Wagner amongst many others. A similar formula was applied to *A Bridge Too Far* and Operation MARKET GARDEN's 1977 transition to the silver screen again making more than \$50,000,000 at the box office. Of course this was in part because another all-star ensemble cast was hired, including Sean Connery, Michael Caine, Gene Hackman, Anthony Hopkins, and Robert Redford amongst many other notable actors.

and appeal. In the wake of Ryan's works, a new wave of interest in glider operations during World War II manifested itself through a series of publications that are now generally considered the baseline works on the subject.

The first of such publications, James Mrazek's *The Glider War* serves as a general overview of the combatants and their application of gliders in combat.<sup>6</sup> Mrazek's book provides a generally accepted account of glider combat operations during World War II. Examining German, British, Soviet, and American combat operations, the author continually praises the advances made by the Germans in design and employment and roundly chastises Allied—specifically American—efforts. Characterizing the American efforts as “conservative,” Mrazek argues that “[bumbling] so horribly from the beginning to the end” offset the numerical superiority maintained by the American-led Allies.<sup>7</sup> Published in 1977, Milton Dank's *The Glider Gang* draws upon the memories of ex-pilots and other airborne veterans to serve as the foundation for his examination of glider combat operations.<sup>8</sup> Focusing solely on American and British glider operations in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), Dank attempts to trace the origins of the force “conceived in error”, the “long and painful period of gestation” of training and opposition by senior commanders to employ this unconventional force, and that was ultimately “delivered at the wrong place at the wrong time” behind the lines of the Hitler's Fortress Europe.<sup>9</sup> Tracing the American glider force from its inception, Gerard Devlin's *Silent Wings* explores all

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<sup>6</sup> Mrazek, *The Glider War*, 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> Milton Dank, *The Glider Gang: An Eyewitness History of World War II Glider Combat* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

aspects of the new technology and its application on the modern battlefield.<sup>10</sup> Arguably the most comprehensive work on the subject from the American perspective, Devlin's work is the authoritative source, the final word on all aspects of the glider program. For about a decade after the publication of *Silent Wings* in 1985, additional works appeared on the employment of gliders in combat during World War II, but all generally failed to challenge or change the perception of the program than these three writers forged in the late 1970's to mid 1980's.

In 1994, Michael Doubler's *Closing With the Enemy* laid the foundation for a new understating, and generated controversy regarding the American glider program during World War II.<sup>11</sup> Attributing the U.S. Army's success in the ETO during World War II to the soldiers' ability to adapt and overcome in the face of a superior enemy armed with better equipment, this same rationale and thesis soon appeared in relation to the American glider program. Ill-trained, unprepared for the rigors of combat, and flying inadequate aircraft, American glider pilots only achieved their success through their own sheer will and ability to adapt in the face of challenging systems. Classifying the overall program as a product of a corrupt and inefficient system, Janet Bednarek's "The American Combat Glider Program" posits that the glider program operated in the absence of clear guidance and coherent direction.<sup>12</sup> Taking Mrazek's previous characterization of the American lack of willingness

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<sup>10</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, xi.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Doubler, *Closing With the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Janet R. Daly Bednarek, "The American Combat Glider Program, 1941-1947: 'Damned Fool Idea,'" *Air Power History* 43, no.4 (Winter 1996): 38. For additional perspectives on those who support Doubler's thesis and apply it to the American glider program, see Annemarie Monique Mousseau-Taylor's master's thesis "The Boys in the CG-4As: A Critical Analysis on the United States Glider Pilots' Combat Role in the World War II European Theater of Operations," (M.A. Thesis, California State University, 1990). In her thesis,

to implement its numerically superior force, Bednarek does not see it as an absolute that the United States would be able to expand its glider program rapidly enough to eventually achieve superiority in men and equipment. Instead, this lack of direction at the highest ranks of Army Air Corps leadership resulted in a dysfunctional program that was only successful through the heroic efforts of the Waco Company and its production of the CG-4A glider, along with the ill-trained men who flew them.

Little scholarship currently exists on the procurement of airfields for glider training. Much of the secondary literature on military airfield procurement instead focuses on the interwar period following World War I. Jerold Brown's *Where Eagles Land* and Edwin Rutkowski's *The Politics of Military Aviation Procurement* are two examples.<sup>13</sup> Examining the military's relationship with the bureaucratic process of Washington, these works explore the military's proposed expansion of aviation assets during the period and the resulting frustrations and limitations it encountered. Janet Bednarek's *America's Airports* not only studies the military aspect of military airfield procurement, but also places it within the larger context of civilian efforts to obtain airfields for local communities.<sup>14</sup> Utilizing different agencies such as the WPA and CAA, the author examines the various avenues available to help secure these valuable commodities in a time of technological growth and economic depression.

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Mousseau-Taylor argues that the national training program failed to adequately prepare its pilots for actions as infantrymen upon landing in combat. As a result, the pilots were forced to adapt to their surroundings as infantrymen thrust into combat and relied on a combination of personnel skill and luck to survive.

<sup>13</sup> Jerold E. Brown, *Where Eagles Land: Planning and Development of U.S. Army Airfields, 1910-1941* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Edwin H. Rutkowski, *The Politics of Military Aviation Procurement, 1926-1934* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966).

<sup>14</sup> Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

At the regional level, recent scholarship has focused on reinvigorating interest in former military installations that are largely now forgotten. Specifically, Thomas Alexander has produced works on both Texas military history in general and the Army Air Force in Texas during World War II. While his general works usually contain a chapter or two focusing on an airfield, Alexander's *The Stars Were Big and Bright* and *The Wings of Change* solely focus on the state's relationship with the Air Force and the training that occurred at specific bases.<sup>15</sup> Selecting various bases across the state, Alexander provides a brief history of the bases and the training that occurred at each location. Lacking an overall argument, his works still provide greater awareness of the roles that these small Texas towns played in the United States' efforts during World War II and to serve as a call for further research and preservation efforts. After writing several works on the topic, Alexander remains focused on larger military airfields and ones that stayed open for longer periods of time. Additionally, he maintains an affinity for power pilot training locations, encompassing better-known aircraft of different fighter and bomber varieties.

Similar to Alexander's oversight, the limited histories of Lamesa, Texas, also fail to acknowledge the presence of Lamesa Airfield and its role in training glider pilots. Tracing the origins and development of Dawson County, Leona Gelin's thesis "Organization and Development of Dawson County to 1917" fails to cover the necessary time period of the

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas E. Alexander, *Echoes of Glory: Historic Military Sites Across Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015); Alexander, *Faded Glory: A Century of Forgotten Military Sites, Then and Now* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012); Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: The United States Army Air Forces and Texas During World War II* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2000); Alexander, *The Wings of Change: The Army Air Force Experience in Texas During World War II* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2003).

airfield.<sup>16</sup> Building on Gelin's initial work and drawing on the experiences and memories of the townspeople of Lamesa, M. C. Lindsey's *The Trail of Years in Dawson County, Texas* is the sole comprehensive study of the region. Although covering up to 1950, the work fails to mention the airfield and its role during World War II.<sup>17</sup>

Lamesa Field supported glider training for a short seven months and remained open for just over two years, nearly the same amount of time the community spent lobbying to acquire the airfield, but its history has been largely swept away in the dust and tumbleweed that haunt the now-vacant location. Many of the people who presently live in Lamesa do not know of the existence of an airfield nine miles north of town that once served as the hub of activity within the city. Likewise, the glider's appearance on the battlefield was equally short-lived. Although achieving operational success, the rapid march of military technology quickly replaced gliders. Troops in Korea and Vietnam conducted drops and insertions by helicopters. Military commanders were now able to plan the transport of troops behind enemy lines with surgical precision, no longer dependent on tow planes and the controlled, sometimes crashed, landings of gliders.

Rapidly initiated at the national, regional, and local levels, the American glider pilot training program came about due to a perceived need after successful German operations at the outset of World War II. Although the United States' program successfully produced the required number of pilots to facilitate combat operations, numerous changes and improvisation came to characterize the program. Like other American military initiatives in the twentieth century, the War Department applied massive amounts of effort, dollars,

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<sup>16</sup> Leona Marguerite Gelin, "Organization and Development of Dawson County" (M.A. Thesis, Texas Technological College, 1937).

<sup>17</sup> M. C. Lindsey, *The Trail of Years in Dawson County, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: John Wallace Press, 1957).

and time to a program that proved to be short-lived in duration because it was quickly discarded when new technologies appeared. At the local level, the real loser was Lamesa, Texas. Bearing the brunt of these changes by military decision makers, the citizens of Lamesa saw their hard-fought efforts to secure an airfield fall quickly by the wayside in the wake of changing national defense priorities. As generations continue to pass and memories gradually fade, it is important to document and understand the relationship between this military platform that saw limited action and a small Texas town that had a similarly short period of significance to train the pilots who flew the aircraft. Their stories are one and the same.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE AMERICAN GLIDER PILOT TRAINING PROGRAM

#### Initial Beginnings

Mankind's dream and desire for flight are not new phenomena. Leonardo Da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, and the Wright brothers represent but a few of the many people that theorized, designed, and experimented on various flying machines, seeking the ability to defy the laws of nature. Likewise, individuals attempted to develop and apply military doctrine to these innovative machines. As aerial technology transitioned from the balloon to the airplane, so too did the focus shift from gliding to powered flight. Although the turn of the twentieth century saw "soaring clubs" gain prominence amongst glider enthusiasts, the successful flight of the *Kitty Hawk* turned the public's attention to powered flight. As war clouds gathered over Europe in the early twentieth century, attention turned to developing faster, stronger, and more powerful aircraft, as well as exploring new uses for them. The fragile, defenseless aircraft present at the beginning of World War I soon gave way to aircraft armed for combat. Nimble reconnaissance planes, fast fighter aircraft, and large bombers now dotted the skies above the trench lines. The warring nations rapidly increased their aircraft inventories in an attempt to break the stalemate of trench warfare that came to characterize much of the war. Increasingly armed with various configurations of machine guns and bombs, these aircraft introduced death from the sky and unequivocally altered the modern battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard M. Devlin, *Silent Wings: The Story of the Glider Pilots of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 1-8.

With the end of the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles altered the future of all the conflict's participants, including their efforts in post-war aviation technology. Bearing the brunt of the conditions of the Treaty, defeated Germany saw its post-war military capabilities not just limited, but almost destroyed. Specifically, Article 198 stated:

The armed forces of Germany must not include any military or naval air forces. Germany may, during a period not extending beyond 1 October 1919, maintain a maximum number of 100 seaplanes or flying boats, which shall be exclusively employed in searching for submarine mines, shall be furnished with the necessary equipment for this purpose, and shall in no case carry arms, munitions, bombs of any nature whatever...No dirigible shall be kept.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, the German military lost more than 14,000 aircraft and 25,000 engines.

Thousands of former bomber and fighter pilots found themselves grounded. The army (*Reichsheer*) and navy (*Reichsmarine*) saw their formations reduced to skeletal sizes. The harsh terms of the Treaty offered the perception of a broken Germany and a toothless military barely capable of providing for its own defense.<sup>3</sup>

### Sport Flying

Clearly the Treaty of Versailles forbade the military's use of aircraft and zeppelins in the newly created Weimar Republic. However, no mention of gliders appeared in the document. Seizing on this loophole, German pilots developed great proficiency in soaring, a skill that would serve them well in the following years. As gliders and soaring continued to gain popularity in post-war Germany, new technologies soon emerged. With the arrival of the *Zögling*—"student" or "pupil"—platform, pilots now sat on a central skid and utilized

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<sup>2</sup> "Treaty of Versailles," 28 June 1919 (New Haven, CT: Lillian Goldman Law Library, Avalon Project)[database online]; available from <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partv.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Lynch, *Silent Skies: The Glider War, 1939-1945* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2008), 5.

foot and hand controls to direct the craft.<sup>4</sup> Channeling this newfound popularity in the sport, in 1920 Oskar Ursinius—editor of *Flugsport* (Sport Flying)—announced the first national soaring competition to be held that summer at Mount Wasserkuppe. With its hosting of the national competition and weather conducive to soaring, Wasserkuppe and the surrounding region became the cradle of German glider development.<sup>5</sup>

Showcasing glider innovations and pilot capabilities, the event helped to cement soaring as one of the most popular sports in Germany. The following year, 1921, Frederic Harth rode the thermals rising up the mountains, stunning the crowds and further demonstrating the possibilities of motorless flight. Willi Messerschmitt—a young man later famously associated with aircraft design—assisted Harth in developing and building the flying machine that defied nature. These increasingly impressive demonstrations of soaring capabilities opened up all different kinds of possibilities for powerless flight, gliders, and their future on the world stage.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, the glider culture so prominent in Germany following the First World War did not see the same success in the United States. With gliders generally marginalized by the popularity of powered aircraft, barnstorming stunts, distance flights, and aerial racing dominated American perceptions of aerial capabilities. By 1930, however, gliding began to gain acceptance as a legitimate means of both flight and sport. With the first national glider competition held in Elmira, New York, during the same year, soaring began to migrate to America's mainstream culture; by 1932, nearly every state had a glider or soaring club, further speaking to the sport's rise in attention. Weathering the negative

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<sup>4</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10-11; Lynch, *Silent Skies*, 6; James E. Mrazek, *Airborne Combat: The Glider War/Fighting Gliders of WWII* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2011), 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 12-13; Lynch, *Silent Skies*, 6.

effects of the Great Depression, the nascent American interest in soaring continued to flourish gradually, primarily due to its relatively inexpensive nature. Supporting literature soon appeared in local bookstores and newsstands as the public began to take notice of this increasingly popular sport. Combining basic principles of flight with stories detailing the thrill of soaring, these books served as basic primers for those interested in joining the growing ranks of gliding enthusiasts.<sup>7</sup> Copying the German model of a national organization provided umbrella leadership to clubs across the country, but maintaining national attention on the fledgling sport also became an imperative in order to ensure its survival. The resulting solution included numerous feats of glider prowess—endurance, distance, altitude, etc.—as American soaring enthusiasts attempted to best records previously held by more experienced German and Russian flyers.<sup>8</sup>

### American Rejection

Although glider popularity continued to grow within the civilian population of the United States, the same could not be said for its potential military application. The USAAC found itself in a post-World War I dilemma in the form of Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell. An aggressive proponent of airpower, the outspoken officer firmly believed in the potential for decisive victory to be brought about by coordinated airstrikes against positions previously thought impregnable, populations, and instruments of war. With the air arm of the military firmly invested in the development of aircraft and pilots to implement these theories, motorless flight received little to no attention, even within a

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of such works see Malcolm Ross’s *Sailing the Skies: Gliding and Soaring* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1931) and Lewin B. Barringer’s *Flight Without Power: The Art of Gliding and Soaring* (New York: Pitman Publishing, 1940).

<sup>8</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 24-26.

training capacity. Aware of the growing rise in popularity of soaring, the USAAC conducted a study in 1929 to determine the potential usefulness of gliders within the military. The resulting decision curtailed enthusiasm for potential use, stating: "It is not believed that any good purpose would be served by introducing the use of gliding in the Army flying schools. The objective of the Army flying schools is to train pilots to fly military airplanes. These planes are high powered and no beneficial result would ensue from training our student pilots in gliding."<sup>9</sup> While this view may be considered shortsighted, it became the "party line" within the American military establishment for more than the next decade.

Extended an invitation to the national glider meet at Elmira in 1930, the Assistant Secretary of War replied that "there exists no appropriation whereby an officer on the active list could be dispatched to a duty such as you mention."<sup>10</sup> Providing further context to the decision not to attend the national glider meet, the following year the Secretary of War stated, "It is considered that the military value of glider flying is negligible, and that the expenditure of time and funds required to teach the art is not warranted."<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the government barred active duty servicemen from participating in soaring competitions while off duty. On 28 December 1931, the Adjutant General issued a letter stating, "Except on specific permission from the War Department, Army personnel are prohibited from participating in any form of glider flying in other than Government-owned aircraft."<sup>12</sup> Even as late as 1938, the War Department remained unconvinced of the military value of the

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<sup>9</sup> United States Army Air Force Historical Office (USAAFHO), *United States Army Air Force Historical Study No. 1: The Glider Pilot Training Program: 1941-1943* (Washington, DC: Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence Historical Division, 1943), 1.

<sup>10</sup> United States Army Air Force Historical Office (USAAFHO), *United States Army Air Force Historical Study No. 47: Development and Procurement of Gliders in the Army Air Forces*, (Washington, DC: United States Army Air Force Historical Office, 1946), 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 2.

glider. Once again approached about the possibility of using gliders in a military capacity, rejection soon followed, as “the plan of your suggested method of towing gliders as practical weapons is not of sufficient military value to warrant further consideration and development.”<sup>13</sup> However, with the outbreak of World War II and the discovery of the German use of gliders as military delivery systems, the United States reversed its position and sought to immediately rectify its lack of gliders, trained pilots, and force deployment capabilities.

### German Rearmament

The Germans recognized gliders and soaring as more than simply an enjoyable sport, and to them the military applications—as both a training and delivery platform—became readily apparent. Hermann Göring, World War I fighter ace and future head of the *Luftwaffe*, stated:

Our whole future is in the air. And it is by air power that we are going to recapture the German empire. To accomplish this we will do three things. First, we will teach gliding as a sport to all our young men. Then we will build up commercial aviation. Finally, we will create the skeleton of a military air force. When the time comes, we will put all three together—and the German empire will be reborn.<sup>14</sup>

Backed by Adolf Hitler and the newly installed National Socialist German Workers’ party—or Nazi party—Göring received control of the newly formed Ministry of Aviation in 1933. In 1934, under Göring’s direction, the government placed all civilian glider clubs under the control of the *Deutsche Luftsport Verbund*, a newly formed component of the Ministry of Aviation. The *Nationalsozialistisches Flieger-Korps*—the National Socialist Flying Corps, or

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<sup>13</sup> USAAFHO, *Development and Procurement of Gliders in the Army Air Forces*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Edward V. Rickenbacker, *Seven Came Through* (New York: Doubleday, 1943), 104.

NSFK—supplied aircraft and facilities in order to assist those who wished to soar but did not have the financial means.<sup>15</sup> A sport once used for enjoyment and recreation transitioned to a tool for military training, rigidly controlled and state-supported, to produce pilots for future *Luftwaffe* formations. The German glider association had over 60,000 members in 1932; by 1939, the number rose to over 300,000 glider pilots. This growing number of sport enthusiasts, hobbyists, and military trainees would serve as the foundation for the growing *Luftwaffe*.<sup>16</sup>

With Hitler's blatant rejection of the conditions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, theoretical plans had to be turned into practical realities. Then-Major Kurt Student—himself a trained glider pilot—had been serving in the *Fliegerzentrale*—Central Flying Office—since 1920. In that capacity, he had the unenviable task of training and equipping a notional German Air Force specifically banned by the Treaty of Versailles. Following several tours of duty in various staff assignments, now-Colonel Student became the Director of Air Technical Training Schools in 1932, once again squarely in the middle of the German military aviation rearmament efforts. Responsible for developing and arranging an ever-increasing number of flying schools for new pilots, he became consumed with implementing effective doctrine, while at the same time exploring all avenues for potential new applications of warfare. Not limited merely to training plans and course curriculums, his work encompassed all aspects of airplane technology, equipment, and weaponry. It was this role that led Student to the Soviet Union to observe Russian airmobile operations near Kiev in 1935. During these maneuvers, Soviet forces utilized

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<sup>15</sup> Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 29; Lynch, *Silent Skies*, 6.

glider and parachute-borne infantry to effectively secure objectives behind “enemy” positions.<sup>17</sup>

Although multiple countries had experimented with parachute infantry as early as World War I, Student immediately seized upon the viability of delivering soldiers by glider on a mass scale. Commanders were no longer a slave to the unpredictable winds that often scattered parachuting troops across a wide drop zone; gliders offered the ability to silently “bring their full fire and striking power to bear immediately after landing.”<sup>18</sup> Creating a delivery platform to validate Student’s ideas, the *Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Segelflug*—DFS or German Gliding Research Institute—began testing of the DFS 230 in 1937. Promoted to major general and given command of the 7<sup>th</sup> *Flieger-Division* in 1938, the military high command gave Student a free hand to develop and implement German airborne doctrine. While the primary role of glider and parachute troops centered on surprise and speed, Student foresaw their role as something greater than air-transported commandos or demolition squads in tactical support to an army formation. He envisioned an independent force, transported by its own aircraft and maintained by its own logistical and support elements.<sup>19</sup> Experimenting with continued advances in weaponry and aviation, he continued to enforce the highest standards of training.

Quickly confirming his theories, Student’s *Fallschirmjäger* turned the ambitious airborne concept proposed just a few years earlier into a practical reality, often “in the face of the ignorance and indifference of our own [German] arch-conservative military

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<sup>17</sup> Roger Edwards, *German Airborne Troops, 1936-45* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 146; Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Center of Military History, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1989), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *German Airborne Troops*, 67-69, 146; Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 31; Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 14.

establishment.”<sup>20</sup> Employed at Fort Eben-Emael during the *Blitzkrieg* of 1940, gliders quickly demonstrated their value on the battlefield and allowed “German airborne forces [to achieve] military success that caused the world to gasp.”<sup>21</sup> In response to this new technology, opposing nations believed they now had to develop their own glider and parachute forces to counter German formations.

In order to deliver their glider-borne cargos of troops and supplies, German glider pilots underwent a rigorous training program. Although the majority of the men possessed previous experience as civilian glider pilots, Student established a series of military schools to formalize and standardize training. Located at Rossitten in East Prussia, Dörnberg near Kassel, and Sylt in Westerland, these schools taught the fundamentals of military aviation and introduced the pilots to airborne doctrine and the skills that would be necessary in combat. Upon their graduation from training, pilots received assignments to transport squadrons. Based at Hildesheim near Hanover, the men practiced making spot landings, similar to the rooftop landings employed at Eben-Emael. Additionally, pilots received instruction on blind flying at a subordinate location near Braunschweig-Waggum.<sup>22</sup> With the majority of German glider pilots having extensive pre-war experience in soaring techniques, Student and his officers modified their training curriculum in order to take advantage of existing proficiencies and instead emphasized the skills necessary for specialized missions.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Edwards, *German Airborne Troops*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr., *Hitler's Legions: The German Army Order of Battle, World War II* (New York: Stein and Day, 1985), 421-22; Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 30-36; Edwards, *German Airborne Troops*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *German Airborne Troops*, 51-52.

With the German airborne seizure of Crete in May 1941, any doubt about the role of gliders in modern combat quickly disappeared. Following up on his initial airborne successes of the previous year, Student orchestrated the assault on the island by utilizing all of Germany's available airborne delivery platforms. Combining parachute drops, gliders, and air transport, Student's XI *Fliegerkorps* committed itself to a twelve-day struggle for the island. Although the initial assault contained all the indications of potential failure, Allied blunders facilitated the establishment of a German foothold. Eventually achieving its objective and securing Crete, Student's *Fallschirmjäger* did so at a tremendous cost in human life. Of the 13,000 German troops that assaulted the island, 5,140 had been either killed or wounded in action. The *Luftwaffe* also sustained large losses in aircraft; almost 200 Ju-52 transport aircraft were destroyed.<sup>23</sup> Although gliders made an important contribution to the ultimate success of the operation, their roles were by no means as decisive as the previous success at Fort Eben-Emael. In light of these losses in both men and material, Student called Crete "the graveyard of German airborne" and Hitler vowed to never again commit a full-scale airborne assault. Unaware of the German casualty figures, American planners saw the assault on Crete as a logical operational progression from the surgical strike in Belgium; this only fueled the desire to develop and expand American airborne and glider capabilities for future employment on the battlefield.<sup>24</sup>

#### Realization and Production

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<sup>23</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Prior to the German airborne assault of Crete, the USAAC began to realize the potential military application of the glider. In order to be utilized in future combat, the USAAC needed to develop and produce a military glider, as well as train a contingent of men to pilot the craft. Major General Henry “Hap” Arnold, Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, directed the formal initiation of the glider program on 25 February 1941, emphasizing the need for a glider capable of “transporting personnel and material and seizing objectives that cannot normally be reached by conventional ground units.”<sup>25</sup> Additional specifications for consideration included the need for the glider to be able to carry either troops or cargo. Cargo could range from a jeep to an anti-tank gun or ammunition and medicine. Troops would be transported at the squad level, twelve to fifteen fully equipped soldiers with associated weaponry. Each glider needed to function as a self-contained combat team or supply depot. Laying out these requirements, Arnold required initial considerations and recommendations to be submitted no later than 1 April.<sup>26</sup> With this ultimatum in hand, the USAAC began to develop a training program and platform to enable future American glider combat operations.

Attempting to rectify its dearth of glider inventory, the USAAC began to develop and acquire gliders in parallel efforts. The Corps purchased commercial civilian gliders and soaring platforms while, at the same time, awarding government contracts to companies to produce military aircraft capable of being deployed into combat. And with that, the American glider program grew at a tremendous pace, furiously trying to develop gliders that could compete in a war that America had yet to officially enter. While effective in

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<sup>25</sup> Major General Arnold to Major General Brett, 25 February 1941, United States Army Air Force Flying Training Command (USAAFFTC), Microfilm Reel A2276, United States Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

<sup>26</sup> USAAF, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 4.

quickly acquiring glider platforms to test on and train with, these stopgap measures served to produce a ragtag fleet of aircraft in desperate need of standardization.

Emerging from the contracting nightmare initiated by the hurried desire to design and mass-produce a glider for combat operations, the USAAC selected the CG-4A as the primary American glider of the war. Devised by the Waco Aircraft Company of Troy, Ohio, the CG-4A “Waco” entered into service in June 1942. When it was declared acceptable on 20 June 1942, the USAAC found its solution for a reliable, easily manufactured combat glider. Essentially an enlarged version of Waco’s initial design—the CG-3A—the CG-4A design accommodated General Arnold’s directive for American gliders to be capable of transporting jeeps and light artillery pieces to support glider-borne infantrymen. In addition to a crew of a pilot and co-pilot, a payload of either a jeep with three crewmembers, one M3A1 75-mm howitzer plus a crew of three, or thirteen fully equipped soldiers could be placed in the back of the final version of the CG-4A.<sup>27</sup>

In the course of the war, American industry produced 13,909 CG-4As to meet operational and training requirements. Although designed by Waco, the USAAC entered into additional contracts in order to meet production demands. Capitalizing on its manufacturing capabilities, the Ford Motor Company produced 4,190 of the aircraft, making it the largest glider manufacturer of the war. The Northwestern Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Waco Company built 1,509 and 1,075 gliders respectively, making them the second and third largest producers. In order to assist in glider production, the government outsourced the remaining requirements to other companies to

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<sup>27</sup> James E. Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 361-367; USAAFHO, *Development and Procurement of Gliders in the Army Air Force*, 25.

produce smaller numbers of the gliders. On average, each CG-4A cost the government \$18,800 to produce.<sup>28</sup>

### Initial American Training

As the USAAC began to undergo the process of developing a standardized glider platform, it realized the parallel, and equally rapid, need to train pilots to fly the aircraft. From 1 to 23 June 1941, the initial phase of glider pilot training occurred in the USAAC. Training in Elmira, New York, and Lockport, Illinois, twelve pilots received instruction in the fundamentals of soaring. Gradually increasing in altitude, pilots focused on “spot” landings and accuracy approaches. Practicing both towed flying and their individual soaring techniques, the classes culminated with a long distance flight, validating their previous instruction. Additional training consisted of understanding the duties of a ground supervisor, to include use and care of equipment, instructor roles, and the responsibilities of the tow pilot in facilitating glider training.<sup>29</sup> Although training in civilian sport sailplanes, these pilots were the first in the USAAC to undergo formalized glider training. These men would serve as part of the subsequent cadre for the later iterations of the military’s own training program.

To expand upon the success of its initial training, the USAAF began to develop plans for future training. Factoring in the time necessary to produce a trained pool of pilots for future combat operations, the planners developed a program that would utilize both military and civilian instructors and institutions in order to maximize the number of

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<sup>28</sup> Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 374; USAAFHO, *Development and Procurement of Gliders in the Army Air Force*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 5; Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 117, Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 48.

adequately trained pilots. Building on this preliminary planning and curriculum development, the “true” beginning of the national glider pilot training program is the 7 July 1941 “Directive for Glider Training,” ordering the training of 150 officer-pilots in preparation for future assignments as glider instructors.<sup>30</sup> Realizing that the current, and future, training programs could not be solely supported at the Elmira location, proposals for additional training sites soon began to flood the desks of USAAF planners and congressmen alike. The “150 Officer-Pilot Program” saw trainee classes divided between Elmira, New York, and Twenty-Nine Palms, California, with the majority of individuals receiving their training at the California location.<sup>31</sup> The thirty-hour, four-week course completed by these pilots would come to serve as the foundational course that the future training program would implement. With the successful completion of the group on 30 April 1942, the USAAF established its initial glider training cadre.

Although these initial efforts laid the foundation of the American glider effort, the idea of such pilots remained foreign in the minds of many within the USAAF. In an interwar period dominated by power pilots and strategic bombing theorists, the various departments remained hesitant to assume responsibility for the fledgling program.<sup>32</sup> In order to rectify this confusion, General Arnold summoned Lewin Barringer in October 1941 to oversee the further development of the American glider effort. Arnold commissioned Barringer, a pre-war authority on soaring and gliders, as a major and assigned him to the

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<sup>30</sup> Major General Arnold to Brigadier General Spaatz, 7 July 1941, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>31</sup> Recognizing the need to maximize training days, the military began to explore locations in the South and West that had more mild winters and offered more favorable year-round flying conditions than offered in New York. See USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> David E. Johnson, *Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 153.

Office of the Director of Air Support where he oversaw all matters concerning military gliders. Due to the efforts of Barringer and his staff, the American glider program began to take shape. The resulting torrent of new directives on training and personnel would put the program to the test early and often.<sup>33</sup>

### Expansion and Miscalculation

Attempting to develop doctrine in conjunction with the implementation of modern weaponry on the battlefield, the USAAF and the Army's infantry branch calculated the necessary number of glider pilots required to transport a still-forming airborne division into combat. The resulting requirement produced the "1,000 Program" and the demand for such a number of trained glider pilots.<sup>34</sup> Making the assumption that all of its pilots would be trained power pilots and likely already graduates of an USAAF flying school, the associated training course followed the previous model of a four-week program. The plan called for four training locations for primary training and one school for advanced glider training. Only at the advanced location would night flying and the actual carrying of ground troops occur.<sup>35</sup>

With the attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent declarations of war by both Germany and Japan, almost all entities of United States military power pilot training

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<sup>33</sup> John A. McQuillen, "American Military Gliders in World War II in Europe" (Ph Diss., Saint Louis University, 1975), 121; Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 118-119.

<sup>34</sup> The 1,000-man quota was calculated on the estimate that approximately 75% of the personnel and equipment of the average triangular division of 14,000 could be carried in gliders and the remaining 25% by the tow planes. Therefore, 1,000 gliders and 292 transport planes would be required. It was expected that one-half of the gliders would be the eight-seat glider and the remainder the 15-seat glider. See USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

vehemently opposed losing their pilots to the glider program. As a result, planners made modifications to the original criteria, instead allowing for volunteers to have completed similar civilian training. Formally implemented on 19 February 1942, the schedule called for the graduation of the 1,000 trained glider pilots by 1 January 1943. Although the program soon expanded and made the requirement for 1,000 trained pilots obsolete, the planning and policies established during this formative experience would remain part of the core training principles of the glider program. Prioritizing previous flying experience, regardless of military rank, the USAAF turned to unconventional methods in order to compete not only with the other services, but also the power pilot programs within the USAAF itself.<sup>36</sup>

Although the plan for the “1,000 Program” appeared in paper form, training efforts never formally materialized. While awaiting the completion of training by the original 150 glider pilot instructors in the spring of 1942, Arnold initiated a study to more than triple the glider program. With the onset of the war, the United States’ military rapidly expanded, and the glider program proved to be no exception. On 26 March, Arnold stated to the Chief of the Air Staff, “In any action involving airborne troops, the use of gliders must be considered and in all probability they will be required.”<sup>37</sup> The resulting decision to increase the size of the glider program called for a total of 300 two-place, 500 nine-place, and 3,700 fifteen-place gliders to be procured by 1 July 1943.<sup>38</sup> The resulting decision to expand the number of gliders required a corresponding increase in trained pilots, thus the need to expand the training program to the new “4,200 Program.”

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

While expanding the requirement for pilots, planners condensed the timeline for training. The glider procurement timeline demanded that the 4,200 pilots be trained no later than 1 July 1943. However, the order came down for 2,000 pilots to be trained by 1 January 1943. With a current trained cadre of approximately 150 glider pilots, this order appeared daunting in nature.<sup>39</sup> Once again the USAAF reacted to this increase in demand by changing the pilot requirement, most notably requiring glider trainees to be enlisted graduates of USAAF advanced flying schools. Military officials deemed advanced pilot graduates necessary due to the night and instrument flying requirements for glider pilots, the same requirements being taught in advanced power schools. In addition, glider pilots at all stations needed to be prepared to act as tow pilots; therefore, pilots already having a power background appeared to be essential.<sup>40</sup>

Procurement of personnel began immediately, with the first training class commencing on 13 April 1942.<sup>41</sup> To accommodate this increase in pilot production, the military established three additional civilian elementary schools—in addition to Twenty-Nine Palms—between 1 May and 1 June 1942. The training program remained the previously established four-week course, devoting thirty hours to flying and seventy-two hours to ground training in the fundamentals of glider operations.<sup>42</sup> With the implementation of the “4,200 Program,” the American glider program began to produce trained pilots for future combat operations.

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<sup>39</sup> Lieutenant General Arnold to Major General Yount, 1 April 1942, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>40</sup> Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 119-120.

<sup>41</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

A little over a month later, the USAAF decided to expand the glider program once again. It was clear that the diversion of 4,200 enlisted pilots would seriously hamper the production of fighter and bomber pilots, programs of higher priority. As such, planners once again revised the minimum requirements for trainee glider pilots. Candidates were now required to be between eighteen and thirty-two years of age and graduates of a secondary pilot course. Additionally, they were required to be a civilian-rated power pilot or a previous glider pilot with thirty hours of civilian training or 200 flights.<sup>43</sup>

The United States Army Air Force Flying Training Command (USAAFFTC) received directions on 8 May 1942 that it had to train 3,000 glider pilots by 1 September 1942, and a total of 6,000 by the end of the year, 31 December 1942.<sup>44</sup> Trainees were to be given forty-six hours of instruction in various airframes ranging from Piper Cub-type aircraft to fifteen-place gliders; this training was to be accomplished within a six-week period.<sup>45</sup> Immediately recognizing the enormous amount of facilities required to achieve the desired amount of trained pilots, the USAAFFTC contracted for an additional eighteen civilian schools, to facilitate training. Powered aircraft of the Piper Cub-variety were acquired and utilized to train on "landings with the ignition off, both night and day, and to be qualified to service these airplanes in the field."<sup>46</sup> As new trainees began to flood these hurriedly constructed training locations, the USAAFFTC quickly realized that the demanded productivity outstripped the men and material available for training.

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<sup>43</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 16; Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 120.

<sup>44</sup> Lieutenant General Arnold to Major General Yount, 8 May 1942, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 18-20.

Between 8 May and 18 July 1942, the effect of the “6,000 Program” resulted in a series of significant changes that ultimately shaped the final training model. Changes once again occurred to the qualifications for prospective pilots. Regulations now only required trainees to hold a CAA certificate or be a former CAA pilot whose license had not been invalidated for more than two years. Additionally, the large amounts of necessary training—combined with the short amount of time to produce a large number of trained glider pilots—required commanders and planners at various levels to reconsider the feasibility of the demands placed upon the program. Increased numbers of trainees awaiting instruction at locations capable of training only a few hundred men at a time created “pools” of men awaiting placement in future classes. Reports of cases of lax discipline and low morale increased exponentially. Furthermore, the realization of the need for preparing pilots for their likely role in combat became more pronounced.<sup>47</sup> Faced with these challenges, the USAAF began yet another series of revisions to alleviate the stresses placed upon the glider program. Expectations—from the national to the local, from training commands to combatant commanders—had to be realistically managed. Pilots could only be trained so fast.

### Revisions and Reduction

The 18 July 1942 revision served as an immediate indication of the more realistic expectations placed on the program. It halved the training objective to a new requirement of 1,500 glider pilots trained by 26 September 1942 and an additional 1,500 pilots by 31 December of the same year. Subsequent glider pilot production in 1943 would continue at

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<sup>47</sup> Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 120; Devlin *Silent Wings*, 60-61.

the rate of an additional 1,000 pilots a month.<sup>48</sup> With the immediate demand for pilots satiated, the USAAFFTC and its subordinate units took time to reevaluate the training model and began to implement necessary changes to improve the overall training program. With the hurried initial implementation of the training program, planners had given little thought to a formal curriculum. Because the civilian instructors possessed the necessary knowledge and expertise on gliders and soaring, the military allowed initial curriculums to be developed at the discretion of individual instructors. As a result, training had the potential to differ greatly among locations, thus resulting in a non-uniformly trained force. The period of reorganization allowed for standardization across locations to occur. Recognizing that instruction in soaring and the riding of thermal currents was likely of little use in combat, increased repetitions in towing and landing replaced superfluous modules of training. Emphasis on a systematic progression of training allowed pilots to build their proficiencies on previously taught principles.<sup>49</sup> This time of consideration provided by the revision would prove beneficial in light of the next round of pending guidance.

Less than a month later, the 10 August 1942 revision called for the startling increase of the training objective to 7,800 glider pilots trained by 1 March 1943 instead of the 6,000 planned for by the previous revision.<sup>50</sup> By the end of September, the USAAFFTC realized that it could not attain this quota, regardless of the amount of changes made to course durations or the flow of students through various programs. The availability of training platforms and tow planes would serve as the ultimate determining factor in the ability to

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<sup>48</sup> Air Force Director of Individual Training to Commanding General, USAAFFTC, 18 July 1942, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>49</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 32-38.

<sup>50</sup> Air Force Director of Individual Training to Commanding General, USAAFFTC, 10 August 1942, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

produce trained glider pilots. Competing with the expansion of various aviation commands located in the continental United States and overseas, the USAAFFTC—of which the glider training program belonged—suffered a shortage of aircraft in proportion to the demand of trained pilots. However, after it brought this fact to light, yet another revision soon emerged.<sup>51</sup>

The 30 September 1942 revision to the glider training program served to address multiple issues. A study initiated by Headquarters, USAAF, revealed that pilot production far exceeded projected tactical demands. Combined with the shortage of aircraft and the “pooling” of trainees, the decision to reduce the training objective seemed not only reasonable, but also necessary. As a result, this revision reduced the number of pilots produced by 1 March 1943 to 4,000 with a continued rate of 400 a month to provide a total of 8,000 pilots by 31 December 1943.<sup>52</sup> Although the reduction of the required number of trained pilots alleviated some concerns within the program, the issues of the availability of gliders and tow planes remained. When the CG-4A gliders began to arrive at the newly created advanced training locations, the discovery of a failure in the tail assembly grounded the aircraft, an additional obstacle and delay to the program. Likewise, although the USAAF promised dedicated tow plane support, competing requirements in training and combat operations precluded an immediate increase in aircraft to facilitate training.<sup>53</sup>

The 1 December 1942 revision would prove to be the most influential modification to the program to date. By further reducing the training objective to 2,035 pilots by 1 March 1943, the graduation rate was to be brought into conformity with the number of

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<sup>51</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 39-44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

gliders and tow planes available to the USAAFFTC. Moreover, graduation rates could now fluctuate based upon the number of aircraft available for training at a given time.<sup>54</sup> No longer caught up in the fervor of expansion, the USAAF and USAAFFTC had finally reached a realistic agreement on the feasibility of providing trained pilots in relation to projected combat needs.

With the likelihood of Allied airborne operations looming, this time period saw a growing need to define the combat mission of the glider pilot. During the hurried origins of the program, planners only considered instructing the trainees in glider flight, not what would occur after a glider pilot landed his aircraft behind enemy lines. Initial plans called for the fundamentals of combat to be taught upon a student's arrival to his operational unit. Recognizing their previous oversight, planners now sought to introduce initial combat training into the glider pilots' curriculum. In fact, subsequent publications urged pilots to pay attention to such training. *United States Army Air Force Manual 50-17* urged, "The ground combat training you receive is to enable you to defend yourself until you can be evacuated for another mission. Your primary responsibility is flying. Your secondary duty, since it is not always feasible to evacuate you immediately upon landing, is to fight as a ground soldier with the airborne troops you have transported."<sup>55</sup> The "pools" of trainees awaiting the next stage of their respective glider training proved to be fertile ground to introduce such training. Instructors stressed basic military tactics, weapons familiarization

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<sup>54</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> United States Army Air Force, *United States Army Air Force Manual No. 50-17: Pilot Training Manual for the CG-4A Glider* (Washington, DC: Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff Training, 1945), 5.

and physical training. Classes in judo, field stripping and firing of weapons, and first aid began to fill training schedules of previously unemployed groups of glider pilots.<sup>56</sup>

The final revision of the glider program related to the expansion of the USAAF as a whole. Recognizing that the previous two years of growth had been to “take full advantage of all the airplanes that we could build and all the personnel that we could train,” Lieutenant General Arnold realized that he had reached “a saturation point in the size of the Air Force that we could raise.”<sup>57</sup> With pilot production now in line with aircraft manufacturing, the need to liquidate superfluous pilots became necessary. As a result, the Director of Individual Training issued the final revision of the glider training program on 18 February 1943. Planners placed the final quota for 1943 at 3,418 glider pilots. After March, production was not to exceed 250 graduates a month; in total, the number of trained glider pilots would approach over 6,500 individuals by the end of 1944. With 5,500 excess trainees now in various phases of training, the military increased elimination rates to cull the now swollen ranks. Glider pilots had the opportunity to receive additional training opportunities due to the increased time now available to produce future glider pilots.<sup>58</sup> Finally taking into account all entities involved in the execution of the glider training program, the USAAF reached a consensus on the numbers of aircraft in production, individuals undergoing pilot training, and the upcoming requirements for deploying units. A program previously characterized by rapid change and limited time now appeared to be

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<sup>56</sup> Commanding General, USAAFFTC, to Commanding General, Army Air Force West Coast Training Center, 12 January 1943, USAAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>57</sup> “Saturation Point of the Air Power of the United States,” Henry H. Arnold Papers, Microfilm Reel 28177, USAFHRA.

<sup>58</sup> USAAFHO, *The Glider Pilot Training Program*, 61.

a well-coordinated machine accounting for the various aspects of a national training program.

### Cost of Success

In a country where the sport of soaring lagged far behind its European counterparts, the USAAF entered World War II with a trained glider pilot population of zero. Bound by the Treaty of Versailles, the German military in the interwar period seized upon the glider's training value and began to consider its potential military application. Harnessing the large number of civilian glider pilots under the oversight of the Nazi regime, militarization and rearmament only hastened German infatuation with the glider and increased its potential value on the battlefield. Employed with mixed operational and tactical results in Belgium and Crete, Germany shifted its focus from glider employment by the end of 1941. However, at the same time, the United States' military came to appreciate the potential uses of the glider on the modern battlefield; the USAAF just needed to produce pilots rapidly in order to fly these platforms into combat.

Beginning with initial inquiries in both training and production in February 1941, the resulting expansion of the American glider pilot program illustrates a success, rather than the failure many perceive it to be. Just over a year from its nascent beginnings and shortly after the United States' official entry into the war, the first production requirements of trained pilots arrived. Armed with little to no training infrastructure in curriculum, instructors, and aircraft, the USAAFFTC continued to face increased demands for the throughput of trained glider pilots in shorter and shorter periods of time. While understandable in light of the potential need to employ gliders in combat operations, these demands failed to align with the capabilities of the

aircraft manufacturers in producing the CG-4A and the Troop Carrier Command (TCC) tasked with employing the glider in combat.

Although initially characterized by unrealistic quotas imparted on the training program, the situation steadily improved following 18 July 1942. Higher headquarters began to recognize the need to standardize its curriculum across multiple civilian contracted training fields. Superfluous training ended. Dedicated tow plane support arrived to facilitate training operations. Trainees waiting to be placed in their next class received opportunity training on tasks beneficial in combat in their role as potential infantrymen following landing. While these initiatives illustrate the learning nature of the organization, the most beneficial revision was the alignment of the multiple entities that had vested interests in the glider pilot program. Synchronizing pilot training with aircraft production, the USAAF could now provide realistic forecasts for the training of glider pilots to the TCC and combatant commanders to plan future operations.

In light of this newfound synchronization of efforts, the glider program in February 1943 began to cull its ranks and reduce the numbers of students within the training program. Growing in size from zero to a force numbering in the thousands, the glider pilot training program was like nothing else seen or experienced by the USAAF during World War II. Overcoming shortages in doctrine, training locations, aircraft, and instructors, the program underwent a series of maturations and revisions in a relatively short period. However, within a six-month period from February to July 1942, the establishment of much of the groundwork for the future success in the training of American glider pilots occurred. Regardless of the initial struggles experienced by the program during inception and expansion, the resulting effort successfully produced a more than adequate number of trained glider pilots to enable future Allied airborne combat operations.

After completing their glider pilot training, the “bastards that no one wanted” were prepared to assist in the quest for an Allied victory.<sup>59</sup>

Although a success at the national level, these same efforts produced a distinctly different result at the local, civilian level. The rapid revisions that characterized American glider efforts in 1942 and 1943 had far reaching second and third order effects in the communities where training bases rapidly appeared. Just as quickly as bases sprang up to support increased numbers of trainees during the initial stages of glider training, they just as swiftly closed or transitioned to other roles. We can view this incomplete legacy in one remote Texas town that experienced the highs and lows of being associated with the American glider pilot program.

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<sup>59</sup> Mrazek, *Airborne Combat*, 115.

## CHAPTER 3

### LAMESA'S QUEST FOR AN AIRFIELD

#### Interwar Government Bureaucracy

In the wake of the demonstrated significance and future application of airpower as witnessed in the First World War, the nascent United States Army Air Service (USAAS) found itself fighting for survival and expansion. The recently ended war had necessitated the rapid construction of military airfields across the nation to train pilots for overseas assignments. With the signing of an armistice with the Central Powers in November 1918, the recently created USAAS sought to retain its bases within the United States and to expand its efforts and capabilities in order to prepare for a future conflict.<sup>1</sup>

A series of plans in 1913, 1919, and 1926 advanced by American airpower advocates sought to codify and enhance the expansion of airfields and facilities in support of American military aviation development. However, none of these plans were able to achieve their desired objectives. These efforts across parts of three decades demonstrate the inherent complexities and difficulties faced by the USAAS. The 1913 plan failed to gain the support of the War Department and Congress. The end of World War I derailed the 1919 plan due to Congress's desire to reduce the size of the military following the end of hostilities. Although the 1926 plan greatly improved current military aviation facilities, the coming of the Great Depression and increasing costs prevented the attainment of the original revitalization and expansion objectives. From 1933 onward, Air Corps planners

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<sup>1</sup> Jerold E. Brown, *Where Eagles Land: Planning and Development of U.S. Army Airfields, 1910-1941* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 139.

failed to codify a comprehensive program to develop additional and modernize existing ground facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, planners struggled to modify existing proposals to meet the changing technical advances in aviation technology, to account for local and national political demands, and to align with the current doctrine and role of military aviation. The problem was that the rapid advancement of aviation technology quickly outstripped the capabilities of existing facilities. As aircraft continued to grow in size and abilities, so too did the corresponding requirements for airfields (i.e. length of runways, maintenance facilities, control towers, hanger size, etc.). Existing facilities—regardless of capabilities in light of advancing technological demands—had become integral parts of local communities and economies, thus increasing the problems of moving or closing such installations. Recognizing the benefits of such installations, additional communities soon began to lobby for selection of future locations. As a result, national defense requirements assumed a secondary role to political considerations and demands during the interwar period.<sup>3</sup>

With the outbreak of the Second World War and American involvement in the conflict increasingly likely, growing political support for national defense produced large sums of money for the rapid implantation of existing military plans. However, USAAC planners had failed to produce established site selection procedures, preapproved lists of potential airfields for construction pending the release of funds, and a clear vision of growth based upon the development of supporting facilities. As a result, the development and expansion of American military aviation ground facilities greatly lagged behind those

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, *Where Eagles Land*, 139; Edwin H. Rutkowski, *The Politics of Military Aviation Procurement, 1926-1934*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), 215-217.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *Where Eagles Land*, 140; Rutkowski, *The Politics of Military Aviation Procurement*, 226-227.

of other belligerent nations when the United States officially entered World War II.<sup>4</sup> This was the situation that faced the town of Lamesa, Texas, local Congressman George Mahon, and aerial instructor John H. Wilson of Lockport, Illinois in the years leading up to the American involvement in World War II.

On 10 April 1942, the USAAFFTC approached Wilson about the possibility of entering into a contract to train glider pilots. A logical candidate for selection, Wilson had extensive previous experience in both the aviation and aeronautical fields. Completing his first solo flight in 1922, Wilson became fixated with aviation. From 1922 to 1932, he served in a variety of administrative and maintenance positions in the aircraft industry. In September 1932, Wilson took a job at the Lewis School of Aeronautics in Lockport, Illinois. Working his way up through the ranks of the institution, he became superintendent of the flight school in 1940, overseeing all flight, mechanical, messing, and housing aspects of the school. At the time the government approached Wilson, the school comprised ninety-two flight students, forty airframe and engine mechanic students, and twenty-five aeronautical engineer students.<sup>5</sup>

Upon assuming control of the Lewis School of Aeronautics, Wilson had opened an associated motorless flight school under the name of the Lewis-Frankfort School of Soaring. One of the few commercial soaring schools operating in the United States at the time, it was a natural choice for the Army Air Corps to train one of the first groups of military glider pilots. Having trained six Army pilots in June 1941, the school subsequently trained eight

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Where Eagles Land*, 140-141; Rutkowski, *The Politics of Military Aviation Procurement*, 228-231.

<sup>5</sup> Historical Program 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment, 1 June 1942 to 1 January 1943, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, Lamesa, Texas, Appendix III-1, 1, Microfilm Reel A2521, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAAFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

Marine glider pilots in November 1941. These previous government contracts served as the basis for Wilson's selection to establish a dedicated training location capable of an increased production of glider pilots in support of the ongoing war effort. On 10 May 1942, he signed a contract for the training of glider pilots in the Gulf Coast Training area of the USAAFFTC.

Wilson's selection of Lamesa, Texas, as the location of his school served as the culmination of nearly two years of efforts of the citizens of the town to secure a coveted military airfield.<sup>6</sup> On 1 June 1940, Sam Richardson, Dr. J.D. Burleson, and Raymond Lee Johns of Lamesa wrote Congressman Mahon to inform him of the town's desire to be considered for the establishment of a new air base to be located in West Texas. In their application, the leaders of Lamesa emphasized the central geographic location of the town. In close proximity to the major cities of Midland, Big Springs, and Lubbock, Lamesa had a perfect combination of suitable weather, terrain, and location for the establishment of a future military airfield.<sup>7</sup>

### Cattle, Cotton, and Wind Currents

Rural in location and economically dependent on agriculture, pre-war Lamesa in many ways reflected the general trends and mannerisms of many small Texas towns prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Local communities were close knit. Most Texans lived on farms or ranches and in small towns. Family was of the utmost importance. School schedules revolved around harvest time. The distribution of information occurred through

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Lamesa Chamber of Commerce to Congressman George Mahon, 1 June 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC), Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

word of mouth, the newspaper, or the limited amounts of radios available. Churches and local civic organizations formed the backbone of towns and cities. At the time, only one in five Texans owned an automobile, one in ten a telephone, and one in six a radio. The Great Depression had threatened to, and in most cases did, significantly alter the traditional patterns of life. Attempting to transition to the demands of the twentieth century in the face of increased economic difficulties, Texans were desperate for financial capital and interest to propel them into the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

The settlers who founded Lamesa in 1903 were fascinated by the tabletop flatness of the surrounding land and named their newly developed frontier settlement accordingly. Annexing the nearby town of Stemmons in 1905, Lamesa became the county seat of Dawson County the same year. Agriculture and ranching dominated the local economy. While cattle ranching was the first industry to occupy the open ranges of the West Texas prairie, cotton was introduced to the region in 1903. Growing successfully in the arid conditions of the region, the crop offered additional economic potential for Lamesa's citizens. At first, cotton farmers lacked the capability to transport their goods to market, but the much-anticipated arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in August 1910 secured the town's immediate future.<sup>9</sup>

As Lamesa continued to grow and expand, additional local businesses and organizations sprang up. Multiple banks, hotels, schools, retail shops, the county courthouse, and churches of different denominations formed the heart of the community in

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas E. Alexander, *The Stars Were Big and Bright: The United States Army Air Forces and Texas During World War II* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2000), 6-8; Texas Historical Commission, *Texas in World War II: United by Duty, Honor, and the Fight for Freedom* (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 2005), 4.

<sup>9</sup> M. C. Lindsey, *The Trail of Years in Dawson County, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: John Wallace Press, 1957), 18-22.

and around the town square and the immediate vicinity. From a population of 1,188 in 1920, the town grew in size to 6,038 citizens by 1940.<sup>10</sup> In 1929, the Douthitt Engineering Company of Chicago, Illinois, built a powdered milk plant in Lamesa. The West Texas Dairy Products Company bought milk from local producers and then distributed the powdered milk across the Southwest via railroad. However, the Great Depression and drought from 1932 to 1934 caused viable milk cows to be in short supply, thus necessitating the plant's closure. In the spring of 1940 with war clouds looming, the Henningsen Corporation of New York purchased the old plant and transformed the location to produce dried eggs. Becoming the world's largest such facility, the plant served as the primary provider of dried eggs to the United States military and its Lend Lease recipients.<sup>11</sup> Employing over 400 personnel, the plant produced two train cars of powdered eggs and nearly 300,000 eggs a week for the war effort.<sup>12</sup>

Although considered extreme by some people, the weather of West Texas proved well suited to soaring and gliding. The combination of dry, warm weather and large differentials in day and nighttime temperatures served as key ingredients in the basics of motorless flight. At night, the temperatures of both the ground and air lower. In the mornings, as the temperature rises, the ground heats up more quickly than the air. As a result, the air surrounding the ground warms more rapidly than the air higher up. Thus, as the warm air progressively rises, upward air currents called "thermals" are created, an

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Matt McCall to Congressman George Mahon, 5 April 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

essential tool for gliding.<sup>13</sup> According to climate data, temperature variations for Lamesa average between thirty to forty degrees between day and night temperatures, more than fulfilling the conditions to create the necessary “thermals” for glider flight.<sup>14</sup>

The dry climate of the South Plains also served to create an excellent environment for soaring. With minimal low clouds and little precipitation, the generally clear skies create desirable conditions for glider pilots. With precipitation averages of two inches or less a month, flight operations could occur with little to no interruption due to weather.<sup>15</sup> This unique climate and location also produced a terrain well suited for flight operations. Generous amounts of flat land with little to no vegetation offered the potential for natural locations to conduct emergency landings without the need to invest additional resources in creating additional landing strips.

Much like the period before the arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1910, Lamesa found itself in need of new, closer connections to the region, state, and nation. The airplane offered the ideal solution to access the remote West Texas community. Yet, even in light of the natural advantages found in the region for aviation in general and soaring more specifically, the town of Lamesa had to undertake an arduous and dedicated campaign to secure federal funding to establish an airfield. The correspondence between local citizens, officials in Lamesa and Dawson County, and Congressman Mahon help to recreate the devoted efforts of all these people and groups to bring an airfield to the local community.

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<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Ross, *Sailing the Skies: Gliding and Soaring* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1931), 157-183.

<sup>14</sup> Leona Marguerite Gelin, “Organization and Development of Dawson County to 1917,” (M.A. Thesis, Texas Technological College, 1937), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2-4; Lindsey, *The Trail of Years in Dawson County, Texas*, 98.

### Initial Attempts and Growing Frustrations

Starting in June 1940, Lamesa's initial attempts to acquire an airfield were routed through Major W.F. Long, head of the Dallas aviation school. Training enlisted men of the USAAC, Major Long gave these men primary training courses in flight. Although pilots at the time were officers, the USAAC provided basic flight instruction to select enlisted personnel in order to establish a pool of individuals in case of the outbreak of war and the need to expand the existing pool of trained pilots. Due to the success of Major Long's efforts, the USAAC ordered him to expand his efforts, thus necessitating the search for new locations. However, in order to control his operations, Major Long wanted any new location to be within 50-75 miles of his existing location in Dallas. In addition, the USAAC opposed any primary training location over 2,000 feet in elevation, due to perceived difficulties in flight operations. Due to its distance from Dallas—over 300 miles—and elevation—over 3,000 feet—Lamesa did not meet the strict requirements imposed by the USAAC and Major Long.<sup>16</sup>

Not to be dissuaded by this initial rejection, Raymond Lee Johns, manager of the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce, immediately responded to Congressman Mahon to ask about the availability of federal funds to help build a local airport. Citing planes seeking landing locations on a nearly daily basis, the development of the oil industry in West Texas, and the potential for the rapid expansion of military airfields in light of world events, Johns emphasized the “eagerness of our city and county governments to support an airport

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<sup>16</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Judge W.M. Yates, 4 June 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC; Congressman George Mahon to Mayor W.L. Marr, 5 June 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

program” and characterized the efforts of Lamesa and its leadership as “determined to have an airport as soon as possible.”<sup>17</sup>

Inquiring in Washington, DC on behalf of his constituents in Lamesa, Congressman Mahon identified the WPA as a potential avenue for further exploration in an effort to secure an airport for the region. Mahon directed the Lamesa leadership to J. O. Jones, District Manager of the WPA in Lubbock, in order to get additional information on local ongoing and planned projects. In addition, Mahon mentioned the fact that a recent appropriation bill had just passed Congress that authorized \$25,000,000 in aid for the development of airports important in national defense plans. Under WPA guidelines, local communities were responsible for raising twenty-five to thirty percent of funds necessary for project completion, with the WPA contributing the remaining seventy to seventy-five percent of funds. This new appropriation referenced by Mahon would be used to supplement the local contribution required by the WPA. However, in order to be eligible for this assistance, the War Department had to certify that such a project was a necessary requirement in support of the national defense.<sup>18</sup>

As the summer months progressed, local officials in Lamesa gained little traction in their quest for an airfield. The WPA district office in Lubbock failed to take a significant interest in the project and provided noncommittal possibilities for its future and for follow-up conversations. Attempting to restart momentum on the project, Johns again engaged Congressman Mahon on 29 August 1940 in an effort to identify additional avenues of funding and other parties who may have an interest in the creation of an airfield in the

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<sup>17</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 15 June 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>18</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 22 June 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

region.<sup>19</sup> In his response to Johns, Mahon identified two additional courses of action to the previously discussed WPA. Disclosing ongoing debate in the House of Representatives, Mahon revealed the possibility of future legislation authorizing the CAA \$125,000,000 for airport construction. However, he did not see this as a viable option for the Lamesa bid due to the uncertainty of the final outcome of the bill and its associated timeline for debate and potential approval. In addition to the CAA, Mahon suggested that Johns and Lamesa officials discuss their plan with Major General H. J. Brees, commander of the Army's Eighth Corps Area headquartered at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.<sup>20</sup>

Seizing on this new information provided by Congressman Mahon, the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce established a local national defense council in September 1940. The leadership of Lamesa saw the creation of such a committee as a way to reinforce its intentions to support the regional expansion of national defense industries. Drawn from the leading citizens of the town, the committee's creation is a telling indication of the local population's understanding of ongoing world events and the likelihood of future conflict. In addition, this official structure demonstrates the great lengths that local communities were willing to go in order to secure government funding and national defense industries.<sup>21</sup> Attempting to formalize their quest to secure an airfield still further, the same meeting saw the Chamber of Commerce form a committee to investigate possible sites within the county for a potential landing strip. Although optimally preferring a military airfield and its

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 29 August 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>20</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 30 August 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 24 September 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

associated revenue, by this point the citizens of Lamesa sought any avenue of bringing an airfield to their small town.<sup>22</sup>

In response to Lamesa's establishment of a local national defense committee and continued quest to secure an airfield, Mahon provided the officials of Lamesa with material that explained legislation in regards to airport improvement throughout the nation that had been recently passed by the House of Representatives. However, at the same time, he warned that he "[did] not think the program offer[ed] any immediate possibilities to Lamesa, but...that there might be some possibilities for [Lamesa] at a future time." Specifically, he noted that "at the present, only the airports of top-notch national defense significance will receive much consideration" under this new legislation.<sup>23</sup> Concerning Lamesa's case, the USAAC had maintained an auxiliary landing field in the neighboring city of Midland for the past decade. As such, Mahon speculated that first priority in the region would go to upgrading the existing Midland location versus the military establishing a new airfield nearby.<sup>24</sup>

Acknowledging Mahon's continued support in the town's quest to secure an airfield, Johns conceded that for all the local efforts "we are getting along very slowly on our airport program here and have accomplished very little actual results."<sup>25</sup> Meetings with various civilian agencies had occurred. Proposals had gone to various military officials. Local national defense committees had formed. But all these efforts had produced little tangible

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<sup>22</sup> "Appoint Committee to Recommend Possible Site for Field," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 19 September 1940.

<sup>23</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 25 September 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 30 September 1940, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

results to a community in need of an airfield. Closing his latest letter to Mahon, Johns stated, "I hope that we shall be able soon to put ours in a class with those towns having airports. The longer we remain without one, the farther behind the times we shall be."<sup>26</sup>

### Rumors and False Hopes

When the House of Representatives approved CAA legislation and funding, Congressman Mahon remembered his constituents in Lamesa and their desire to secure a new airfield. As such, he recommended that Lamesa be allotted \$172,116 in order to build the desired facility. Because this was required to be within five miles of Lamesa and consisting of between 200 to 320 acres, H. M. Smith—the CAA representative from Fort Worth—believed that Lamesa had a viable chance to secure the funding. However, the bill ultimately failed to pass the Senate, thus denying the much-needed funds to Lamesa.<sup>27</sup>

As the year 1941 commenced, new hope arose in regards to the prospect of Lamesa securing an airfield. Specifically, a report began to circulate that Lamesa was being considered as a location for a military air-training field. Writing Congressman Mahon on 29 January 1941, Johns asked that he use his position to determine if there was any truth to the rumor. Additionally, Johns informed Mahon that the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce had written to the National Association of Manufacturers to obtain information about future industrial and manufacturing concerns that could potentially locate in the area.<sup>28</sup>

In response to Johns' inquiry, Mahon was unable to get confirmation on the rumor from the War Department. As a result, he deemed the rumor unfortunately unfounded.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Committee Asks Bids for Airport," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 3 October 1940.

<sup>28</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 29 January 1941, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

Specifically, he cited the area's altitude—nearly 3,000 feet as opposed to the preferred 2,000 feet or less—as the primary condition for rejection by the USAAC of other local proposals. Additionally, Mahon urged Johns to not put too much faith in the possibilities of locating new industrial and manufacturing establishments in the region. Citing examples from recent years, he acknowledged the various proposals that had been discussed for the region, but that little true progress had been made, with little new industry to show.<sup>29</sup>

Not two days after Mahon's dismissal of the rumor of Lamesa receiving an USAAC training field, Johns sent a telegram to Mahon to ask for clarification on the potential for a 30,000 man military cantonment to be located in West Texas and the requirements for a location to support such an endeavor.<sup>30</sup> Mahon immediately responded to Johns' telegram with a telegram of his own, informing the Lamesa city manager that rumors had indeed begun to swirl in the national capital in regards to potential new military cantonments in the Southwest; however, War Department officials could give little help to the specifics for future inspections of possible sites. Mahon once again recommended that Johns and Lamesa officials reengage the Army's Eighth Corps Area commander, now Major General Richard Donovan.<sup>31</sup>

Following up his initial telegram from the previous day, Mahon wrote Johns on 8 February 1941 to give a full accounting of the current situation. While confirming the War Department's reluctance to release specifics about future inspections in the area, Mahon disclosed that members of Congress from throughout the Southwest had received

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<sup>29</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 5 February 1941, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>30</sup> Raymond Lee Johns to Congressman George Mahon, 7 February 1941, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>31</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 7 February 1941, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

telegrams from their districts the previous day requesting information in regard to the same rumor. In addition to confirming that there seemed to be some truth to this rumor, Mahon exhorted Johns to consider fully the enormous requirements on a location and town to support a cantonment of the rumored size. He cited the availability of both land and water as his two primary concerns for Lamesa to be considered for such an installation. Due to its location and climate, Mahon expressed serious concerns about Lamesa's ability to provide the needed water. In addition, with the ongoing oil boom in the region, residents would likely be unwilling to part with their land at reduced rates—the going government rate was \$1 per acre per year—in order to provide the estimated 80,000 acres required for such a large base. Additional facilities and utilities concessions would also likely have to be arranged as part of a city's bid to secure a military installation. Upon consideration of these facts, should the local officials wish for Lamesa to be considered for a cantonment, Mahon urged that a formal proposal be presented to Major General Donovan; likewise, Mahon wished to be informed if this came to fruition in order that he might also write Donovan in order to request favorable consideration of Lamesa's application.<sup>32</sup>

By March 1941, the rumors of a military aerial training field arriving in the South Plains area consumed much of the local news. Land requirements for the potential field were large, with one tract of land required to be no less than 640 acres and two others no less than 250 acres respectively. With the proposed base to support Army primary flight training, the plan of operation called for the facility to support 320 fliers. Maintenance, instructor, and administrative personnel requirements were believed to total around sixty-

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<sup>32</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Raymond Lee Johns, 8 February 1941, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

five, bringing the base total to almost 400 individuals. With an estimated cost of \$200,000 to construct, the contract would serve as a much needed boost to the local economy. In addition, the student fliers would be paid \$75 per month. Once the airfield was established, civic leaders estimated a local payroll ranging between \$50,000 and \$65,000 monthly.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, the rumors did indeed prove to be true, and the actual plans exceeded the initial projections of size, scope, and impact. Although considered for selection, Lamesa ultimately lost out to nearby Midland. Following its selection on 13 June 1941, the USAAC began immediate plans for an advanced, twin-engine flying and bombardment school. Utilizing the existing airfield at Midland, an additional 1,030 acres of land were acquired in order to create twenty-three bomb ranges. In total, the military built 204 buildings and structures on the base and over 8,000 cadets graduated from the location.<sup>34</sup>

Following the selection of Midland, the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce immediately sought consideration for future civilian and military airfield opportunities. The town dispatched a committee to Fort Worth and Dallas to meet with ranchers and businessmen who owned large tracts of land in Dawson County in order to determine the feasibility of acquiring such parcels. The leaders of the town saw this preemptive undertaking as necessary so that they could be better postured to rapidly respond to proposed government contracts in the region. Additionally, town officials prepared a new

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<sup>33</sup> "Air Training Base Sites are Inspected but No Location Yet Announced," *Dawson County Courier*, 20 March 1941; "Air School is Still Question Mark," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 23 March 1941.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas E. Alexander, *The Wings of Change: The Army Air Force Experience in Texas During World War II* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2003), 147-150.

presentation and delivered it to the USAAC Gulf Coast Training Center (GCTC) in San Antonio in order to inquire about additional opportunities.<sup>35</sup>

Although persistently exploring courses of action to secure their airfield, the leaders of Lamesa continued to see few results. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 dramatically altered the course of events both nationally and regionally. With the rapid expansion of the military now necessary, additional training locations moved to the forefront of the minds of individuals in both Washington, DC and in Lamesa, Texas. Writing Congressman Mahon, Mrs. John Allen Jr. of Lamesa suggested the use of the recently completed migratory worker camp just to the east of town. As an agrarian based community, migratory labor camps housed the influx of workers who came for harvest season. Mrs. Allen believed that such a facility offered “the nucleus for a great prospective airfield.”<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, the events of Pearl Harbor reinvigorated the leaders of Lamesa to once again engage military leadership about the feasibility of the town acquiring a training base. A. B. Davis—manager of the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce—offered assistance to the leaders of Lamesa in engaging USAAC leadership at Randolph Field in San Antonio. Having secured an USAAC advanced flying school for Lubbock the previous summer, he served as a

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<sup>35</sup> Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors, 17 June 1941, Lamesa Chamber of Commerce, 63, Microfilm Reel L228, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC), Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. John Allen Jr. to Congressman George Mahon, 19 January 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

valuable asset to Lamesa's committee in navigating the relationships of the military chain of command.<sup>37</sup>

### A Dream Realized

By the end of April 1942, Lamesa's efforts of the past two years to secure an airfield appeared to be coming to fruition. After initial contact with the War Department on 10 April 1942 about the possibility of opening a glider training school, John H. Wilson found himself in Lamesa two weeks later to examine the terrain as a potential option for his location. On Friday, 24 April 1942, Wilson inspected a proposed site north of the town and expressed his satisfaction with the location. Following his ground inspection, he conducted an aerial survey of the proposed site and surrounding region in order to confirm his initial assessment. Following his inspection, Wilson met with Mayor Charnell Jobe in order to discuss the requirements of the base and its potential impact on the local economy and population.<sup>38</sup>

If given the necessary land and provided with temporary housing accommodations, Wilson believed he would be ready to start operations within ten days of signing his contract with the government. He estimated it would take sixty days to establish the \$200,000 airfield and associated facilities. Rumors speculated that approximately 120 students would be assigned to the location upon its opening, with the potential to increase

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<sup>37</sup> A. B. Davis to Judge M. C. Lindsey, 19 February 1942, Lubbock Chamber of Commerce Records, 1919-1991 and undated, Box 311, Folder 3, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC), Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

<sup>38</sup> "Acquisition of Land Seems to be Final Step," *Dawson County Courier*, 27 April 1942.

to upwards of 200 students. This number would be further increased through the presence of additional instructors, mechanics, and administrative personnel to facilitate training.<sup>39</sup>

A week later on 7 May 1942, M. C. Lindsey—chairman of the Chamber of Commerce aviation committee—outlined the details regarding acquiring the needed 640-acre tract of land and two tracts of 320 acres to finalize the acquisition of the glider school. The land selected north of town was known as “Judge Wright’s land,” owned by Judge and Mrs. G. G. Wright of Fort Worth. Lindsey explained that the land would be obtained by lease, if possible, or by outright purchase—by bond—if necessary. The committee planned to get a five-year lease at one dollar a year, renewable at the end of that period, with an option to buy anytime during the five-year period. Assuming that the acquisition of the land would not be an issue, engineers from the War Department had arrived in Lamesa the previous day to begin conducting a survey of the proposed location and to prepare for future construction.<sup>40</sup>

However, just as it appeared inevitable that Lamesa would finally acquire the airfield it had sought for so long, land acquisition proved to be a problem. Some local leaders sought alternative measures to expedite the acquisition process. On Friday, 9 May 1942, the day prior to the formal signing of the contract for the Wright property, the Dawson County Commissioners’ Court and the City Commission of Lamesa met and decided to enter condemnation proceedings on behalf of the county and town against the owners and lessors of the land selected for the proposed airfield location. Once the condemnation proceedings were filed along the proper channels, Wilson was satisfied that the land would

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Acquiring Land is Only Obstacle Hindering Progress of Project,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 7 May 1942.

indeed be acquired. He met with Mayor Jobe on 10 May 1942 and formalized the signing of the contract to open his training location in Lamesa. He still believed that operations would begin on or about 1 June 1942 and that initial construction would be completed around 1 July 1942.<sup>41</sup>

Desperate to avoid condemnation proceedings, the associated legal process, and uncertain timelines, other leaders of Lamesa and Dawson County engaged in aggressive negotiations with the owners of the land. Having initially hoped to lease the necessary land at the rate of one dollar a year, the leadership now looked to purchase the land outright in order to expedite the process of acquiring the airfield that it so desperately desired. On Monday, 18 May 1942, an agreement was struck between the town of Lamesa, Dawson County, the Wrights, and the Texas Company, who held a mineral lease to the land. The committee purchased the 640-acre tract of land necessary for the main airfield at a price of twenty dollars per acre, and leased the two 320-acre tracts necessary for auxiliary and emergency fields for five years at a rate of fifty cents per acre with an option for renewing for another five years.<sup>42</sup> In the purchasing agreement, the town furnished sixty percent of the purchase price, while the county assumed the remaining forty percent.<sup>43</sup>

Although not a crippling figure, the money committed by both the town and county in support of acquiring the airfield is a telling indication of local support for the project. Having worked for the better part of two years to acquire an airfield, either civil or military,

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<sup>41</sup> "Mass Meeting Friday Decides Legal Course," *Dawson County Courier*, 11 May 1942.

<sup>42</sup> The 640 acres were purchased for \$12,800 in 1942. Adjusted for current inflation, the purchase price is nearly \$200,000 in 2016. Likewise, the yearly lease price of \$320 in 1942 equals nearly \$5,000 at the present time.

<sup>43</sup> "Terms Reached with Land Owners Monday Morning," *Dawson County Courier*, 18 May 1942.

the dream now appeared within reach. Neither property rights nor land acquisition would stand in the way. Local officials believed that the presence of such a facility would open Lamesa to regional and national economic opportunities. Commerce would be able to more easily reach the small farm community. The associated government contract and military payroll would bring in additional funds in the form of construction, retail, and demands for additional services. Agriculture and oil would no longer be the primary drivers of the local economy.

Immediately upon acquiring the necessary land, efforts to clear and prepare the ground for construction commenced. The government awarded the Victor J. Nelson Company of California the construction contract for the airfield. However, they would not be able to commence formal construction efforts until 16 June 1942.<sup>44</sup> In order to meet Wilson's projection of commencing operations by 1 June, a crew of seventy-five local grubbers served as the primary means of initial preparation. Without the aid of industrial construction equipment, the men conducted preliminary clearing efforts by hand. Mesquite bushes, barbed-wire fences, and prairie dogs served as the primary impediments to initial construction.<sup>45</sup>

Lamesa's efforts had finally paid off. The town had secured an airfield, successfully navigating national and local politics. The growing demands for national defense requirements had succeeded in penetrating the nebulous nature of interwar military planning to procure a tangible training facility. The promise of additional economic capital

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<sup>44</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 3, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA.

<sup>45</sup> "Large Crew is Rapidly Clearing Brush From Site," *Dawson County Courier*, 21 May 1942; J. Norman Grim, *To Fly the Gentle Giants: The Training of U.S. WWII Glider Pilots* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 64.

in the form of government construction dollars and military pilot salaries would soon flow into the town and surrounding county. Lamesa would be further catapulted into the twentieth century with the arrival of its airfield. The potential for additional economic benefits was clear, with the airfield connecting the remote town to other regional and national resources. All that was left was the arrival of aircraft, instructors, trainees, and the supporting infrastructure.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPROVISATION IN SUPPORT OF DAILY OPERATIONS

#### A Rough Start

True to his word, Wilson's glider school opened in Lamesa, Texas, on 1 June 1942. Construction plans called for the school to consist of two hangars, an administrative building, two sixty-four-man apartment-type barracks, one thirty-two-man apartment barrack, a mess hall, a canteen and recreation building, a hospital, a classroom building, and a gatehouse. However, a delay in the contract prevented construction from beginning on time. Additionally, no sailplanes or gliders had arrived in Lamesa by the scheduled beginning of the first class. At the same time, USAAF officials expected the school to begin training pilots as soon as possible. Faced with these circumstances, Wilson took the first of many "temporary" measures to ensure that training began as originally scheduled; indeed, improvisation came to characterize much of the next seven months of glider training and operations at the Lamesa Airfield.<sup>1</sup>

The first class of students—Class 42-10 consisting of twelve men—arrived on 1 June 1942, and began the ground school curriculum the following day. Because the construction of buildings at the recently cleared airfield still had not begun, Wilson rented the Ford garage in Lamesa to serve as his temporary headquarters and maintenance facility. Needing classrooms for the ground school training portion of his course, Wilson secured

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<sup>1</sup> Historical Program 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment, 1 June 1942 to 1 January 1943, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, Lamesa, Texas, Appendix III-1, 2, Microfilm Reel A2521, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAAFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL

the use of Lamesa High School as a provisional solution while local students were out for the summer. Until a more permanent answer for the housing of students and instructors could be found, local citizens opened their homes to the military and civilian personnel arriving in Lamesa. Utilizing the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and Lions Club, Wilson found temporary quarters for the men initially assigned to the schoolhouse.<sup>2</sup> Although the tasks seemed large in nature and they had short notification for deadlines, civilian contractors, military personnel, and local citizens worked hand in hand in order to ensure the success of the new training location.

Arriving on 1 June 1942 with the men of Class 42-10, First Lieutenant Walter S. Power assumed command of the 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment at Lamesa Field, the military component to the civilian contractors employed by the John Wilson Flying School co-located at the airfield. One medical officer, four USAAF officers, and seven enlisted men also arrived with Powers to bring the initial military contingent to thirteen men. As Wilson and Powers worked side by side to get the new training site finished and operating, the arrival of the school's first two sailplanes further complicated the logistical, administrative, and maintenance issues faced by the personnel of the fledgling location.<sup>3</sup>

On 10 June 1942, two sailplanes arrived in Lamesa from the Frankfort Sailplane Company, and they were followed by the arrival of two additional planes on 17 June 1942. With the arrival of these aircraft, Class 42-10 commenced flight training. However, without permanent structures being available at the airfield, Wilson and Power had to deal with the question of what to do with the aircraft following the completion of daily training. Not

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-1, 2-3, 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 7.

willing to risk its valuable aircraft to the whims of the volatile Texas weather and also not having the manpower necessary to secure the aircraft on site, the leadership had no other choice but to transport the aircraft to and from the airfield on a daily basis. Disassembled at night following the completion of training, the sailplanes were loaded on the backs of flatbed trailers and transported the nine miles back to the Ford garage for necessary maintenance. The next morning, the sailplanes would once again be returned to the airfield and be reassembled prior to the arrival of the instructors and pilots for pre-flight inspections and necessary flight training.<sup>4</sup>

Although having to endure the growing pains of attending a school still being constructed, Class 42-10 received its required training on the ground and in the air and graduated on 4 July 1942. After the successful graduation of the first twelve men from the Lamesa glider school, additional trainees began to flow into the city and airfield at a substantially faster pace. The arrival of Class 42-12 on 6 July 1942 began a period of rapid growth for the school as students began to arrive on a weekly basis. Additionally, class sizes continued to grow as the USAAF increased the desired productivity of the glider program at a national level. Class 42-17 arrived in Lamesa on 10 August 1942 and consisted of forty-one men, over three times larger than the first graduating class.<sup>5</sup>

As class sizes continued to grow, so too did the pressure on Wilson and Power to improvise and adapt to the ever-changing local situation. Construction finally commenced on the facilities of the airfield on 18 June 1942. However, estimations for completion ranged depending on the facility. The building contractor estimated that the housing facilities would be completed on or about 20 September 1942, while the other facilities of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-1, 3.

the airfield would be “substantially complete” by approximately 1 October 1942.<sup>6</sup> Unable to depend on the timely completion of the buildings on the airfield, Wilson continued to requisition local establishments to board his students. All hotels and boarding houses in Lamesa overflowed with trainee pilots and instructors. Eventually this solution, too, proved inadequate to meet temporary lodging demands.<sup>7</sup>

An additionally pressing issue for the school centered on the amount of available aircraft, or lack thereof. With no American glider force present in the pre-war military, the rapid expansion of the glider force created a strain on industrial production. In order to compensate, the War Department authorized the acquisition of civilian gliders to supplement the nascent military aerial fleet. This truth applied also in Lamesa. The availability of training aircraft drove the training schedule. Yet, even in light of all these difficulties, training continued, students graduated, and “improvisation” and “adaptability” remained the unofficial slogans of the school.<sup>8</sup>

### The Civilian Instructors Arrive

With the lack of a trained cadre of USAAF glider pilots to serve as instructors at his new training location, Wilson turned to his pre-war civilian associates to fill this critical requirement. A “colorful aggregation of civilian instructors,” these individuals had previous experience in building, designing, flying, and towing gliders.<sup>9</sup> Hurriedly contacted

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-2, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-1, 3.

<sup>8</sup> United States Army Air Force Historical Office (USAAFHO), *United States Army Air Force Historical Study No. 1: The Glider Pilot Training Program: 1941-1943* (Washington, DC: Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence Historical Division, 1943), 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Bess Stephenson, “Pioneers of Gliding are Instructors at Lamesa,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 14 July 1942.

and collected from across the nation, the instructors made their way to west Texas to offer their assistance and expertise to the United States' war effort and its new endeavor in military aviation. The primary onus for teaching and training fell upon the shoulders of these men and women.

Recruiting from his staff at the Lewis School of Aeronautics in Lockport, Illinois, Wilson invited Arthur Hoffman to Lamesa to serve as his chief of flight operations. Hoffman managed the motley assortment of aircraft and lack of proper facilities in order to ensure the military pilots gained the necessary proficiencies in gliding techniques. Although only twenty-seven years of age at the time of his selection, Hoffman already had more than eleven years of experience in gliders, having completed his first solo glider flight at the age of sixteen. While living in New York, his fascination for aircraft manifested itself in sport gliding when he joined the "Air Hoppers"—the oldest glider club in the United States. Learning from American glider experts like Pete Smith and Lewin Barringer, Hoffman obtained his silver "C", the symbol of an international glider license and tremendous soaring ability. One of only forty men in the United States to obtain the decoration prior to the outbreak of the war, he gained this achievement by soaring to an altitude of over 30,000 feet, remaining in the air for over five hours, traveling a distance of thirty miles, and returning to land where he commenced his flight.<sup>10</sup> Hoffman's qualifications made him a clear choice for the position.

Robert Blaine—the superintendent of maintenance at the school—received his advanced glider education overseas from the Germans, then the world leaders in glider technology. Having previously built and flown his own glider in 1930 while a junior at the

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<sup>10</sup> "Art Hoffman: Wearer of the Silver 'C' Instructs Glider Pilots at Lamesa," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 20 August 1942.

University of Illinois, Blaine was the university's choice to be an exchange student in Germany, studying study aeronautical design and principles of flight. Selecting the University of Göttingen, Blaine studied at the leading aerodynamic research institute in Germany. While at the university, he spent the majority of his time interacting with members of various flying clubs. During the time of his exchange program, Germany had over 2,000 collegiate glider clubs, averaging nearly fifty members per chapter. Taking their knowledge with him, Blaine subsequently served as a leader in the formation and organization of American glider clubs. Similar to Blaine, Charles Wood—the school's chief tow pilot—also had first-hand European training in gliders. Becoming enamored with the sport, he went to Europe and went through two complete courses in Poland in 1934 and 1935.<sup>11</sup> Having learned firsthand from the pre-war masters of motorless flight, these instructors transferred this invaluable knowledge to their students.

As American pre-war interest in gliding grew, the demand for a national competition likewise increased. Elmira, New York, hosted the contest, and became the hub of glider activity and knowledge within the States. Two instructors who served at Lamesa had significant ties to Elmira. Maurice Waters managed the national competition for several years, and so he was able to pick the brains of the best American and foreign pilots who competed for the United States crown. Instructor Albert Hastings previously ran the glider school at Elmira—arguably the finest in the nation—for five years. Furthermore, he won the United States' glider championships in both 1930 and 1931.<sup>12</sup>

Established in 1937, the XYZ Glider Club of Michigan was another prominent pre-war soaring club in the nation and thus a source for Wilson. Requested by Wilson to come

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<sup>11</sup> Stephenson, "Pioneers of Gliding are Instructors at Lamesa."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

to Lamesa to serve as head ground school instructor, Lawrence Montgomery—president of the XYZ Club—packed up his wife and three-year-old daughter and moved to West Texas to serve his country.<sup>13</sup> While hardly uncommon for a family to accompany an instructor, the Montgomery's' situation proved different; Helen, Lawrence's wife, had also secured an instructor job at Lamesa. Holding two women's gliding records in the United States, she had flown at an altitude of 4,185 feet and had also established an endurance record of seven hours and twenty-two minutes.<sup>14</sup>

In total, the Lamesa glider school would retain a cadre of nearly twenty instructors to facilitate training, operations, and maintenance. Drawn from across the nation, these individuals served as the pioneers of the pre-war American glider community. Since they possessed experience and skills that few in the nation held, the government demanded that these men and women transfer their knowledge to their pupils in a condensed two-week period. Beyond this limited timeframe for teaching, the instructors also had to modify their lesson plans continuously in the face of inadequate facilities and aircraft.

### The USAAF Administrative Element

Having contracted Wilson to oversee the construction of the airfield and provide instruction to the new trainees, the USAAF dispatched personnel to Lamesa to facilitate administrative functions in support of Wilson's operations. Although tasked with assisting Wilson, the presence of these soldiers served as a point of friction between civilian and uniformed personnel alike. Having previously run and maintained his own glider school,

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<sup>13</sup> P.R. Howland, "Detroit and the Glider Program," *Mid-West Aviation and Yachting* 11, no. 2 (July 1943): 17.

<sup>14</sup> Stephenson, "Pioneers of Gliding are Instructors at Lamesa."

Wilson chafed at the oversight and perceived meddling of the USAAF in his daily training and flight operations. Wilson demonstrated his displeasure with the arrangement at every opportunity, further exacerbating the already strained relationship.<sup>15</sup>

Assigned to work alongside the prickly contractor, First Lieutenant Power assumed command of the 28th Glider Training Detachment on 1 June 1942. Previously a power pilot, Power took part in the USAAF's initial inquiry in to motorless flight, having completed glider training in Elmira in June 1941. Transferred from Randolph Field, San Antonio, Power seemed a logical candidate to oversee Army operations at the glider school.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to Power, First Lieutenant James Mesita also arrived in Lamesa being one of the few trained glider pilots in the USAAF inventory. Assigned as the detachment's operations officer, he assumed responsibility for facilitating flight operations and ground school training. Assigned as Commandant of Students, First Lieutenant James Garrison anticipated that his unique, previous military experience would serve him well. A Texas National Guard officer, Garrison—a field artillery officer—had been previously assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 131<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Regiment. Known as the “Lost Battalion,” the Japanese captured the majority of the unit in the Dutch East Indies in March 1942. Desiring to serve in the USAAF, Garrison requested a transfer to Kelly Field prior to the unit's departure to the Pacific in November 1941. Based on his previous field artillery

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<sup>15</sup> “Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of Board of Officers Appointed to Investigate and Report Facts in Dispute Concerning the Manner of Performance of the Contract W535ac-28989 Between the United States of America and John H. Wilson for the Operation of Glider School at Lamesa, Texas,” 498-503, United States Army Air Force Flying Training Command (USAAFFTC), Microfilm Reel A2276, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAFHRA).

<sup>16</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 9, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA; Stephenson, “Pioneers of Gliding are Instructors at Lamesa,” 14 July 1942.

experience, the military selected him to help organize the aerial gunnery school at Harlingen. Although desiring to see combat, Garrison's ability to build up a training location and oversee students offered considerable value to the war effort, as seen in his assignment to Lamesa.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to flight operations personnel, an adjutant, supply officer, and post surgeon also received assignments to the detachment to assist in essential support and administrative functions. Likewise, enlisted men arrived at the airfield as members of the permanent party in order to facilitate daily tasks. Although limited in number, these soldiers assumed a wide variety of duties to support the military element in its various functions and responsibilities. Medics operated daily "sick call" to diagnose and treat minor ailments. Sergeants operated Link Trainers—early versions of flight simulators—to support the ground school curriculum. Clerks processed paperwork of incoming and outgoing personnel. Truck and jeep drivers transported students, instructors, and aircraft to and from the airfield. At its peak, the USAAF element totaled more than sixty men permanently assigned to support civilian-contracted training at the installation.<sup>18</sup>

### The Training Curriculum

Serving as an elementary training location, Lamesa Field enabled students to become proficient in glider principles, maintenance, and flight techniques. Graduates of Lamesa were qualified to operate gliders in the various types of towed and soaring flight—

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<sup>17</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 9, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA; Stephenson, "Pioneers of Gliding are Instructors at Lamesa"; "Lamesa Field Commandant was Originally with 131<sup>st</sup> Battalion Now Lost in War," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 20 August 1942.

<sup>18</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 9, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA.

both day and night—and to execute glider services in a field environment. Following graduation, students attended advanced training at another location in order to master their skills prior to overseas assignment in support of combat operations.<sup>19</sup>

Although needing to meet numerous training objectives, the timetable provided by USAAF headquarters provided the instructors with only two weeks per class. Originally four weeks in length, higher headquarters' desire for a rapid increase in the number of trained glider pilots resulted in the training time being compressed by a full two weeks. Instructors did not drop any curriculum from their training, but rather condensed their already planned lessons in the given timeframe.<sup>20</sup>

The first component of instruction for each class consisted of ground school. Taught in a classroom environment, this phase of training entailed classes in different subjects. Courses in meteorology, glider characteristics, flying techniques, communication, maintenance, simulator exercises, and physical training comprised the first week of training and totaled thirty hours of instruction. Following the satisfactory completion of ground school, students transitioned to the second phase of training, actual glider flight.<sup>21</sup>

Also thirty hours in length, the flying portion of training built upon the skills learned during the ground school phase and allowed students to put into practice their newly learned skills. The initial introduction to flight training consisted of two hours of dual flight time with an instructor in order to familiarize the student with the particular type of glider that he would pilot during subsequent flights. Four hours of dual time and ten hours of solo time spent on precision landings, approaches, slips, spins, stalls, use of spoilers, and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Appendix IV-7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

turns followed the initial introduction. Having conducted these basic maneuvers, trainees transitioned to flying in less than optimal daytime conditions. Two hours of simulator instrument training prepared students for inclement weather and night operations. Navigation training consisted of two hours flying with an instructor and four hours of individual flight. The final phase of flight training culminated with night operations, consisting of two hours of dual and four hours of solo flight. Relying on instrumental navigation, students practiced strange field landings—their first introduction to the subsequent advanced training that would prepare them for future combat operations.<sup>22</sup>

Condensed in nature, the program left little room for error or change. As a result, any maintenance issue or inclement weather threatened to derail training, specifically in the flight phase. In addition to the number of certified instructors, the principal point of contention between the civilian and military elements centered on the availability of tow aircraft. Although towed operations comprised but a few minutes of each flight, the gliders' obvious lack of self-propulsion required tow planes to take part in every training flight. During the initial weeks of training conducted at Lamesa, instructors utilized a winch mounted to the back of a truck to compensate for an adequate number of tow planes. Hooking the gliders up to the winch's cable, the truck would accelerate, thereby pulling the glider into the air. While an effective, temporary substitution for the lack of power planes, the winch system failed to provide a suitable replication for the characteristics of towed flight. As a result, Wilson insisted on only using tow planes for flight operations. In addition to performing maintenance on the gliders, the tow planes required intensive

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 19-20, Appendix IV-1.

attention. Due to the sustained nature of flight operations and heavy tow loads, tow plane engines required replacement on a frequent basis.<sup>23</sup>

Even in light of these difficulties, training continued at a rapid pace and attempted to make up for any shortcomings of the trainees. Although the trainees possessed a basic understanding of gliders prior to their arrival at the location, the primary complaint of the instructors at Lamesa centered on the lapse in time between the initial phase of pre-glider training and the students' arrival at their new location. Under these circumstances, skills previously learned inevitably degraded and required retraining. As a result, various classes in the ground school phase required additional instruction in certain courses, causing less time to be spent on other subjects than previously planned. In addition, the availability of tow planes and pilots led to training schedules being modified to accomplish student throughput.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, training varied on a daily basis. Although based on a prescribed curriculum, instructors modified the schedule based upon weather and the maintenance status of tow planes and gliders. When weather and other conditions permitted, students were called from the ground school so that they might get the required number of flying hours.<sup>25</sup> Faced with these challenges, the instructors adapted and improvised, keeping their classes on schedule and graduating a class every two weeks.

#### A Motley Crew of Aircraft

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24-27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Having only recently expressed its interest in developing a glider capability, the USAAF did not yet possess enough military gliders to facilitate training across multiple locations. As a result, contractors purchased civilian gliders to enable training. Schools conducting the same phase of elementary glider training did not initially possess the same inventory of aircraft; availability trumped uniformity. These same problems plagued the Lamesa location. With the government only able to originally deliver four Frankfort Cinema II gliders, the need for additional aircraft forced Wilson to explore additional avenues to acquire further gliders to facilitate training.

Leveraging his pre-war contacts and the hiring of Montgomery, Wilson contracted for the acquisition of all of the gliders from the Detroit Soaring Club.<sup>26</sup> Now possessing eight gliders, he believed the Lamesa location possessed an adequate number of aircraft to conduct flight training. Ranging from a rare ABC sailplane to several heavier Schweizer TG-3s and the government provided Cinema II's, Wilson, Arthur Hoffman, and the instructors arranged flight operations and training schedules in order to make with the best use of the motley collection of aircraft.<sup>27</sup>

Because they were generally single-seat soaring ships, the military training occurring at Lamesa did not suit many of the available training aircraft. Sleek, graceful, and designed to be operated by an experienced pilot, some of these aircraft did not offer the ability to place two pilots—a trainee and instructor—in the cockpit, thus relegating them to only solo flight training. In addition, these aircraft were far easier to maneuver in comparison to the Waco CG-4A, the American military's primary glider. During one of the

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<sup>26</sup> J. Norman Grim, *To Fly the Gentle Giants: The Training of U.S. WWII Glider Pilots* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 65.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

first training flights launched from Lamesa, Hoffman and student Captain W. D. McCulla maintained an altitude of 14,000 feet and flew to Lubbock, sixty-five miles north of the school.<sup>28</sup> Although a mobile maintenance unit from Duncan Field in San Antonio arrived and conducted modifications to the sailplanes to better enable training, the instructors still sought additional means to replicate the characteristics of the gliders their students would fly in combat.

Heeding the input provided by its glider instructors, the USAAF attempted to rapidly field training aircraft that could replicate the flight characteristics of the large CG-4A. Unable to develop, contract, and produce a glider model in a hasty manner, the USAAF utilized aircraft manufacturers Taylorcraft and Aeronca—both already under government contract—to modify existing military aircraft designs for glider training. As a result, the Taylorcraft TG-6—a variation of the already approved L-2—and the Aeronca TG-5—an offshoot of the popular Defender—soon appeared in the USAAF inventory. Eventually making their way to Lamesa, these aircraft arrived at the end of August 1942, finally putting an end to the improvisation of aircraft and standardizing the school's fleet.<sup>29</sup>

Albeit produced by different companies, both the TG-5 and TG-6 shared similar characteristics. Enlarged fins and spoilers improved gliding capabilities. Designers added a third row of seats to compensate for the most significant change from the standard versions of the aircraft: the removal of the engine. The previously employed collection of civilian gliders originally had been designed for sport flying. As such, pilots could easily ride thermals to prolong periods of flight, achieve higher altitudes, and travel greater

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<sup>28</sup> "Two Successful Glider Flights Made; Foundations Laid for Buildings at Lamesa Field," *Dawson County Courier*, 25 June 1942.

<sup>29</sup> Grim, *To Fly The Gentile Giants*, 67-69.

distances. The engineless TG-5s and 6s replicated the heavier characteristics of the CG-4A; “In the Waco (CG-4A)...you could tell when you cut (released) the old tow line—you were coming down. There was no extending your flight too far [away from the runway],” stated Hoffman.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to standardizing the students’ training aircraft, flight operations gradually improved with the arrival of dedicated tow planes. No longer reliant on the winch system of improvised tows, Stinson L-1As and Vultee BT-13s now pulled the gliders into flight. Equipped with noisy, powerful radial engines, these planes proved capable of towing up to three gliders at a time, further simplifying flight operations and maximizing training time.<sup>31</sup>

Surviving the initial period of improvisation, aircraft at Lamesa Field slowly became more uniform in composition and capable of enabling required training. This standardization of aircraft simplified training schedules and streamlined maintenance requirements. However, the increased number of students that the USAAF sent to Lamesa Field in each succeeding class counteracted any gains made by Wilson, Power, and their personnel in improving the overall situation at the airfield. One headache merely replaced another.

### Civilian Interaction

Having worked for more than two years to secure an airfield and military contract, the citizens of Lamesa graciously opened their homes and town to support the endeavors of the glider school. Initially arriving in Lamesa with little in the way of facilities to support

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

the opening of his training location, Wilson worked with civic leaders to secure temporary locations for housing, training, maintenance, and administrative functions. Delays in airfield construction necessitated these arrangements to be extended in some cases. In addition, local citizens explored different ways to support the students and permanent party personnel assigned to the base. The resulting efforts further increased the bonds between the community and the airfield they had long sought.

Given the Ford garage to serve as the temporary headquarters and maintenance facility for the glider school, Wilson received permission from the property's owner to make any necessary modifications—regardless of how long the glider men expected to stay—in order to further expand the school's capabilities. Removing machinery and supplies, the men of the school transformed maintenance bays that previously serviced cars to being capable of conducting maintenance on various glider platforms. Personnel erected plywood partitions to create offices for military and civilian leadership. Clerks and typists occupied a newly created workspace.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to local businesses, the civilians and civic organizations of the town opened their doors to the newly arrived soldiers and instructors. A local chapter of the United Service Organization opened in the Presbyterian Church recreation building. The members of the community donated tables, reading lamps, radios, books, stationary, and a ping-pong table to the endeavor in order to help the civilian and military personnel of the base relax when possible.<sup>33</sup> On Tuesdays and Thursdays, hostesses monitored the building,

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<sup>32</sup> "Glider School Now Occupies Entire Building," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 16 July 1942.

<sup>33</sup> "Local Soldiers to Soon Have USO Recreation Bldg.," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 30 July 1942.

thereby allowing soldiers to bring local girls to the building.<sup>34</sup> The Lamesa Chamber of Commerce facilitated a standing offer for soldiers at the base to have Sunday dinner in the houses of local families. The soldiers could be picked up at the glider school headquarters around 10:30 each Sunday morning; additionally, this pickup time enabled the flight students to attend local church services if they so desired.<sup>35</sup> By November 1942, the program had become part of the weekly routine of both the residents of the town and students at the base. On 22 November 1942, fifty-one students attended either Sunday dinner or supper in the homes of the citizens of Lamesa.<sup>36</sup>

Continuing to strengthen the town's relationship to the glider school, leading citizens extended trainees and permanent personnel invitations to parties and dances on a regular basis. More formal in nature, the Lamesa Country Club entertained the students one Saturday evening in early August 1942. Hostesses provided their finest linens and silverware. Fresh cut crepe myrtle decorated the tables. A large crystal punch bowl served as the centerpiece of the room. Attended by over eighty guests, the evening featured entertainment consisting of singing, dancing, and magic tricks.<sup>37</sup> Although differing interpretations may exist on the "formal" nature of the party, the event nonetheless demonstrates the local population's desire to make the military personnel stationed in remote west Texas feel appreciated. Likewise, the personnel at the base attempted to be a part of the local community.

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<sup>34</sup> "Recreation Room Being Used by Glider Students," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 20 August 1942.

<sup>35</sup> "Ask a Soldier to Your Home for Sunday Dinner," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 30 July 1942.

<sup>36</sup> "Fifty-One Glider Students Asked to Homes on Sunday," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 23 November 1942.

<sup>37</sup> "Enlisted Men of Glider School Honored With Formal Dance Saturday," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 3 August 1942.

Forming a team from instructors and administrative personnel, the soldiers and civilians from the airfield started a softball league in Lamesa. Technical Sergeant Raymond Fain not only managed the glider school team, but also oversaw the organization of the league. A former minor league baseball player, Fain saw the league as a way to not only continue to play a game he loved, but to share it with local citizens.<sup>38</sup> Comprised of five teams, the league served as an informal meeting place for soldiers, farmers, glider instructors, and businessmen to interact on a casual level.

Additionally, the rapid influx of male instructors and students to the remote West Texas town prompted a natural reaction from many of the local girls. Although many relationships lasted only the two weeks of a student being in Lamesa for training, some became more serious in nature. Arriving from Chicago as twenty-seven year old bachelor, instructor Hoffman became smitten with a young woman who managed the local Montgomery Ward. Stealing away over a weekend with fellow instructor John Novak as his groomsman, he married Miss Maureen Meyers on 9 November 1942 in Wickenburg, Arizona. Arriving back in Lamesa, the couple announced their marriage at a Thanksgiving party two weeks later.<sup>39</sup>

Establishing a reciprocal relationship, both the town and glider school benefited from their close association. Although initially formed out of necessity, the population of Lamesa did not feel burdened by the rapid arrival of men and material. Having sought an airfield and government contract for such a long period of time, they instead welcomed the personnel of the base. Likewise, the students, instructors, and military permanent party of

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<sup>38</sup> "Army Glider School Organize Softball; Start City League," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 3 August 1942.

<sup>39</sup> "Thanksgiving Party Scene of Announcement of Maureen Meyers-Arthur Hoffman Marriage," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 3 December 1942.

Lamesa Field appreciated the generosity shown by the local population, especially in light of the increasing housing shortage due to construction delays at the airfield.

### Construction, Shortages, and Delays

Awarded the contract for the construction of Lamesa Field, the Victor J. Nelson Company of California broke ground on 18 June 1942. Initial estimates called for construction of the new airfield and its facilities to be completed near the end of June. The nearly three-week delay in starting threatened to push completion into early September.<sup>40</sup> Although lacking hangers, dedicated maintenance facilities, and administrative offices, the instructors and military personnel made due with improvised solutions. Trucks hauled gliders to and from the airfield every day. The Ford garage in Lamesa became the headquarters for all glider activity. Ground classes occurred in the high school and various community buildings around town. While most of the issues had at minimum a viable temporary solution, the absence of dedicated housing for permanent party members and students alike served as the greatest threat to the school's nascent training operations.

With a pre-war population of around 6,000 citizens, Lamesa did not possess the capabilities to handle a rapid influx of people. Recognizing this fact, Mayor Charnell Jobe wired Congressman George H. Mahon on 27 May 1942, a week prior to the activation of the school. Describing the town's housing facilities as "overtaxed" and the situation "acute," Jobe began to search for alternative means to relieve the expected housing crisis. His

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<sup>40</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 3, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA.

potential solution would be both unorthodox and brilliant: the requisitioning of a newly constructed migratory worker camp on the outskirts of Lamesa.<sup>41</sup>

Once again advocating for his constituents, Congressman Mahon met with elements of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in Washington, DC, in order gain traction on the proposal. Favorably impressed, the Washington office stipulated that final arrangements would be handled at the regional level between glider school officials, Lamesa civic leaders, and the Amarillo FSA office.<sup>42</sup> However, similar to the earlier efforts to contact various government agency officials to acquire an airfield, the efforts of Lamesa officials to contact Mr. Jesse B. Gilmer—the head of the Amarillo FSA office—failed on multiple occasions.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, instructors, students, and administrative personnel rented out the limited number of available houses in town and filled every available hotel and boarding house. As the summer progressed, these temporary measures soon appeared to be no longer viable as the training effort expanded and additional instructors and students arrived in Lamesa.

Writing on 21 July 1942 to inform civic leadership on the now desperate nature of the housing crisis, Wilson and Lieutenant Power advised that the worker's camp offered the only immediate and viable solution to relieve the shortage of houses. Without a resolution, the glider school would not have accommodations for its next class of students, due to arrive 8 August—just over two weeks away.<sup>44</sup> Reaching out to a lobbyist located in

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<sup>41</sup> Mayor Charnell Jobe to Congressman George Mahon, 27 May 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>42</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Mayor Charnell Jobe, 28 May 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Matt McCall to Congressman George Mahon, 30 July 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>44</sup> First Lieutenant Walter Powell to President, Lamesa Chamber of Commerce, 21 July 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC; John Wilson to

Washington, DC, the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce urged. S. L. Forrest to contact Congressman Mahon in order to convey the severity of the issue and need for an immediate answer to the problem.<sup>45</sup>

Calling on Mahon, Forrest learned that the Congressman was out of town on a War Department inspection trip. Upon hearing the plight of the housing situation in Lamesa, Mahon's secretary, George Witten, took the necessary measures to secure a meeting with the FSA in order to determine the viability of the proposal. Reluctant to release the entire camp to the glider school, the FSA agreed to turn over twenty-five single-family homes at the Lamesa Farm Worker's Community for use by the military.<sup>46</sup> After gaining final approval from the FSA regional office in Amarillo just prior to the arrival of the next class, the glider students moved to the worker's camp, thereby freeing up enough lodging in town for instructors and USAAF personnel assigned to Lamesa Field.<sup>47</sup>

Once finally completed and occupied at the beginning of October 1942, Lamesa Field offered a glimpse at the realization of the hard work put in by the civic leadership for the past two years to secure a military airfield for the community. On entering the installation, an individual passed through a gatehouse and had an immediate view of the entire airfield. Directly in front of the gatehouse stood a wishing well and flagpole to greet visitors. Passing the well and flagpole, the grass parade ground served to divide the north and south portions of the installation. To the south of the parade field—moving from west to east—

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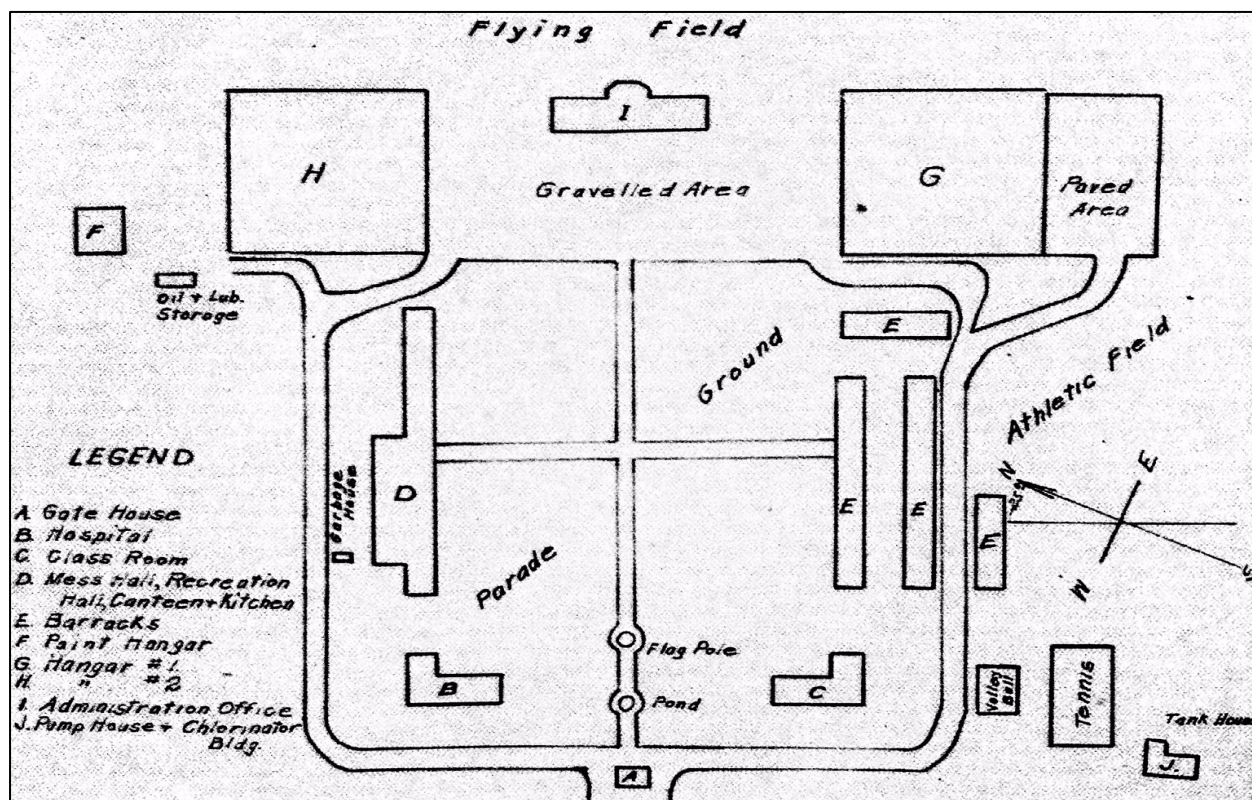
First Lieutenant Walter Powell, 21 July 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>45</sup> Mayor Charnell Jobe to S. L. Forrest, 27 July 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>46</sup> George Witten to Mrs. Matt McCall, 29 July 1942, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>47</sup> Historical Program, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, 5, Microfilm Reel A2521, USAFHRA.

stood the ground school classroom, three barracks capable of housing 160 men, and hanger #1. On the north side of the installation—moving from west to east—stood a small medical clinic, the mess hall, a recreation room, a paint hanger and hanger #2. To the east of the parade field stood the administrative building, which also served as the control tower for flight operations. All buildings were of wood construction with a green asphalt roof, except the hangars, which had metal roofing. Directly to the east of the administrative building, the main runway ran north and south.<sup>48</sup> Finally, Lamesa had its coveted airfield. Likewise, Wilson at last had a training location with appropriate equipment that he could call his own.



Map 1. Lamesa Field<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Appendix VIII-3.

However, the occupation of the barracks by students, combined with the approach of winter, revealed two serious problems in the construction of the installation: inadequate amounts of heat and potable water. Because arrangements had not been made to consistently and sufficiently warm the barracks, students ran the continual risk of illness. Additionally, the piping used in construction could not support the amount of chemicals needed to chlorinate the well water supplied to the base. As a result, all potable water had to be brought by truck from Lamesa and chlorinated upon arrival.<sup>50</sup> Yet, in light of these facts and the associated negative sanitation reports, training continued. Having adapted and improvised in the face of obstacles before, Wilson believed that these too could be easily overcome.<sup>51</sup>

### Deteriorating Relationships

With construction of the base nearing an end and many of the issues that plagued the school during its initial inception settled, the 28th Army Air Force Glider Training Detachment underwent a change of command. Having received orders to another glider training detachment, First Lieutenant Power relinquished command to First Lieutenant Mesita—previously the detachment’s operations officer—on 8 September 1942.<sup>52</sup> With Power’s departure, the working relationship between the commander of the military element and the civilian contractor in charge of training and instructors also left. Having endured many of the same struggles brought about by establishing a base, Power and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Appendix III-4, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11.

Wilson had developed an acceptable working relationship based on mutual, albeit sometimes begrudging, respect.

Although arrogant and outspoken, Wilson needed Power to leverage official government and military channels for resources. Likewise, Power utilized the contractor's considerable girth and mouth to get things done at the local level and help transform a grassy field into a functioning training location. Having accepted their roles in this game of give and take, both men focused their efforts on the development of the field and the training of the students.<sup>53</sup>

Having taken over for Power, Lieutenant Mesita did not possess the same qualities as his predecessor and immediately quarreled with his civilian counterpart. Equally as quick-tempered, Mesita failed to channel Wilson's words and behavior towards more productive endeavors; instead, he lashed back at the contractor. This clash of personalities within the school's leadership, combined with the heating and water issues in the newly constructed airfield barracks, laid the foundations for the subsequent actions that would bring about the end of glider training at Lamesa Field.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of Board of Officers Appointed to Investigate and Report Facts in Dispute Concerning the Manner of Performance of the Contract W535ac-28989 Between the United States of America and John H. Wilson for the Operation of Glider School at Lamesa, Texas," January 1943, pg. 498-505, USAFFTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF LAMESA FIELD

#### “Temporary” Relocation, Rumors, and Closure

As the citizens of Lamesa awoke on the morning of 6 December 1942, many—if any—did not realize the events that had transpired at Lamesa Field during the prior days. Many assumed this day would be similar to the previous: tow planes and gliders soaring across the sky, Army personnel in town to attend a meeting or event, and civilian contract instructors’ families shopping in the local community. Instead, silence greeted the citizens of Lamesa. Visitors to the base found the gates locked. It seemed as if the military had miraculously vanished overnight.

No one knew if the cessation of glider training at Lamesa would be temporary or permanent, nor the circumstances surrounding the closure. Some speculated that the USAAF no longer needed gliders. Others thought a pending Allied invasion of Europe would soon commence, thus requiring all available pilots to facilitate airborne operations. Concern amongst local merchants grew as a key cog in the economy suddenly went missing.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of nearly two years of effort by the local leadership to secure an airfield and military contract appeared to be over in six months.

On 17 December 1942, the citizens of Lamesa finally received word of the status of the base and its personnel. First Lieutenant James Garrison—Commandant of Students and the school’s Public Affairs Officer—announced in the newspaper that “active operations at

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<sup>1</sup> “Glider Students Temporarily at Big Spring,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 17 December 1942.

the Lamesa Glider School have been temporarily halted, with glider students being moved to Big Spring for lack of water and fuel.”<sup>2</sup> Expressing optimism in the temporary nature of the move, Garrison stated that the detachment hoped to be back in Lamesa “in the near future to continue training.” Lamesa’s citizens also learned that some of the civilian contractors remained at the base to work through certain business matters relating to training operations. Additionally, a rumor began to circulate that Army officials from Randolph Field in San Antonio and Washington, DC would arrive in Lamesa to discuss the future of the base.<sup>3</sup>

In light of this newly divulged information, a fresh round of town gossip and speculation emerged. Perhaps a water main had broken at the base. Maybe the limited amounts of fuel available due to rationing could not keep up with demands. Some believed the cooling temperatures and imminent arrival of winter necessitated the transfer of trainees until the structures at Lamesa could be improved. Another group thought the base would never reopen again. Others thought the potential arrival of delegations from higher headquarters signaled something more ominous.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, Army or civilian contract personnel released no additional public statements on the matter. The citizens of Lamesa had to wait and wonder about the future of their relationship with the military.

Nearly a month later, the first word about the personnel assigned to Lamesa once again appeared. Much of the USAAF leadership element received new assignments and transferred to other locations. This group of key personnel included the commander, commandant of cadets, and detachment adjutant. Additionally, the newspaper reported

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

that the glider students “temporarily” housed at Big Spring had returned to Lamesa Field and that training would resume immediately.<sup>5</sup> Although slightly disrupting both the military training regimen and the community’s relationship with the base, it appeared that “business as usual” had resumed in the west Texas town. Once again, gliders dotted the skies above the oil fields and crops of cotton that surrounded Lamesa.

However, one week later, alarming news about the airfield rocked the community. A federal grand jury indicted Victor J. Nelson, the contractor selected by the Defense Plant Corporation (DPC) to build the Lamesa glider school. Charged with participating in fraud in excess of \$27,000, Nelson and eleven of his associates had allegedly committed their crimes during the construction of both the Lamesa project and the Plosser-Price Air Academy in Sweetwater, Texas. In light of this disclosure, many citizens of Lamesa decided the fraud allegations against the contractor had been a driving factor in the slow progress of the construction of the field and the lack of water and heat that had temporarily shut down the school. Although shocking in nature, this information answered—in many individuals’ minds—the questions that lingered about the construction of the airfield, disruptions in training, and the presence of military officials conducting inspections and inquiries on the base.<sup>6</sup>

On 18 February 1943, a headline in the *Dawson County Courier* screamed, “Glider School Reported Closed.”<sup>7</sup> Although no one knew if this closure would be similar to the last and thus temporary in nature, many feared for the worst. Reports of civilian contractors

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<sup>5</sup> “Six Officers at Glider School Been Transferred,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 14 January 1943.

<sup>6</sup> “V. Nelson Charged with Fraud in Construction of Lamesa Field School,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 21 January 1943.

<sup>7</sup> “Glider School Reported Closed,” *Dawson County Courier*, 18 February 1943.

making preparations to leave emerged. Some instructors began to “seek greener pastures.”<sup>8</sup> Saved from closure in spite of construction improprieties and training obstacles, it appeared that training at Lamesa had just returned to normal only to once again be disrupted. However, many did not know that this disruption would be permanent and that there was nothing that the personnel serving on the base or leaders in the local community could have done to change the outcome.

On 19 February 1943, the USAAF announced the suspension of the elementary stage of glider pilot training. The elementary courses had done their job. Multiple locations from across the nation effectively churned out class after class of glider pilots ready to continue their soaring education in the subsequent stage of their training, advanced school. Having already graduated more pilots than could be accommodated in planned advanced training courses, the War Department and USAAF saw no need to continue this phase of training. Instead, some elementary training locations would be converted to advanced sites, while others would be permanently closed.<sup>9</sup> Local citizens would once again be required to lobby for airfields and government contracts.

### Contractor Corruption

With the termination of elementary glider pilot training at the national level, the government ended its contract with John H. Wilson and his glider school at Lamesa Field. Hostility between the USAAF and Wilson had been palpable for an extended period of time, ensuring that the contract would end sooner than later. Throughout the existence of Lamesa Field, Wilson and his civilians rarely saw eye to eye with the leadership of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “Preliminary Glider Training is Halted,” *The Lamesa Reporter*, 22 February 1943.

USAAF's 28th Glider Training Detachment. As a result, tension between both parties often ensued, only broken by the common desire and need to train glider pilots. The temporary closure of the base in December 1942 brought the matter to a head. Although many of Lamesa's population speculated that the corruption charges filed against the construction contractor prompted the military delegations' appearance in Lamesa in late 1942, these visitors were instead launching an investigation into Wilson and his ability to fulfill the contract that he signed with the government.<sup>10</sup>

In the process of producing a nearly 500-page internal inquiry into Wilson's handling of the contract, the members of the committee examined all aspects of training, maintenance, personnel, and operations at the Lamesa location. Although an Army officer acting in a supervisory capacity oversaw Lamesa Field, the board identified the primary responsibility for all actions at the base fell under the auspices of the contractor due to the nature of the agreement signed with the government. As a result, all such failures fell squarely on the shoulders of Wilson.<sup>11</sup>

At the outset of its findings, the board recognized the fact that the hurried nature of the glider program did not do Wilson any favors during the initial establishment of the school. Specifically, the board concurred with the contractor's complaint about the aircraft provided for training. With gliders and tow planes assigned to Lamesa as available, the resulting collection of aircraft proved difficult to maintain. Arriving in different conditions,

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<sup>10</sup> "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of Board of Officers Appointed to Investigate and Report Facts in Dispute Concerning the Manner of Performance of the Contract W535ac-28989 Between the United States of America and John H. Wilson for the Operation of Glider School at Lamesa, Texas," 498-505, United States Army Air Force Flying Training Command (USAAFFTC), Microfilm Reel A2276, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAFHRA).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

these aircraft often had to be repaired prior to being employed as training craft. Additionally, their varied construction and composition required a greater bench stock of spare parts to be present, thus increasing initial costs to the contractor. Likewise, the arrival of glider pilot trainees prior to the construction of the airfield's facilities increased the burden on Wilson to secure adequate lodging for his students.<sup>12</sup>

However, the board also recognized the fact that this circumstance allowed Wilson to profit greatly. The additional money provided by the government to assist in securing temporary housing for the trainees allowed Wilson to pocket the difference between the actual cost of lodging and the amount provided by the government. Additionally, out of a necessity to begin training, the government did not postpone the start of the contract until the completion of facilities, something well within its right in the initial document. Instead, it paid Wilson to facilitate training just over a month after his initial signature, allowing money to begin immediately flowing into his wallet.<sup>13</sup>

While acknowledging the timeline enforced by the USAAF, the board found that Wilson's personality and attitude served as the root cause for most of the issues found at the Lamesa training site. One of the few men to run commercial glider training schools prior to the war, the contractor brought an inflated sense of entitlement and self-worth with him to West Texas. He believed he possessed experience and expertise that no one else on the base possessed. The civilian instructors had been selected by Wilson and were his employees, thus creating a natural allegiance. The board identified the contractor's influence in creating an atmosphere of civilian versus military that fostered hostility between all parties at the location. Additionally, Wilson believed himself untouchable from

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 498-499.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 498.

repercussion. Bypassing his direct chain of command and higher headquarters at the GCTC, Wilson communicated directly with his pre-war associates now located in Washington, DC, and Randolph Field, San Antonio. Telling his own version of ongoing events in Lamesa, he gained support for his beliefs from command elements that outranked his nominal chain of command. Emboldened by this perceived backing, Wilson continued to operate as he saw fit, regardless of orders or training guidelines.<sup>14</sup>

While some considered the negative portrayal of the relationship between Wilson and the USAAF as unfounded and biased, the findings of the board produced concrete examples of the contractor's failure to follow the guidelines of the agreement he signed with the government. First and foremost, Wilson's inability to provide adequate facilities for the personnel of the base directly resulted in the temporary closure of the base in December 1942. Conducting a special inspection of the glider school, members of the GCTC's medical staff found appalling conditions at the site upon their arrival on 4 December 1942. The fuel supply line at the airfield had broken the week prior, leaving the school without the ability to heat buildings or cook food. The base's shoddy construction by a corrupt contractor left it below state safety standards, thus necessitating additional funds—money that Wilson did not have—to bring it up to code and be fixed. Unable and unwilling to afford such a solution, Wilson arranged for students to be transported into town to eat at local restaurants and shower at the local high school. Trainees had received two showers at maximum over the past nine days. Temperatures in the barracks rooms averaged 45° Fahrenheit. During its entire time of operation, the school did not possess potable running water. Local well water proved unsafe to drink. Wilson improvised by

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 498-499.

transporting water from the city to the base. Hauled in ten gallon milk cans, this limited amount of safe water often ran out by evening, thus forcing students to limit personal hygiene activities or risk using the non-potable well water.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the lack of heat and water, the inspection also discovered that the base lacked an operational telephone since its opening in June 1942. All telephone calls had to be placed in town, nine miles away. In the event of a training accident, fire, or medical emergency, the school possessed no way of notifying first responders about the severity of the situation. In light of these identified health and safety risks, the inspection team recommended the temporary closure of Lamesa's training location until conditions could be remedied and brought up to standard.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the findings provided by the special inspection of the glider school, the board also disclosed additional irregularities and improprieties surrounding Wilson's tenure as contractor of the school. Employees transported unauthorized civilians in government-contracted aircraft. Wilson permitted tow planes and gliders unsuitable for flying to be operated in order to ensure training requirements were met. Instructors failed to note aircraft defects and observe maintenance procedures. Additionally, the board found evidence of Wilson manipulating training schedules and flight operations in order to increase flying hours, thus incurring greater associated costs to the government, and profits to the contractor.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Historical Program 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment, 1 June 1942 to 1 January 1943, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, Lamesa, Texas, Appendix III-3, 1-2, Microfilm Reel A2521, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAAFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of Board of Officers Appointed to Investigate and Report Facts in Dispute Concerning the Manner of Performance of the

In light of numerous findings of the investigation, the board recommended the termination of the government's contract with Wilson. Citing the "irregularities and discrepancies existing within his organization" and inability to "understand his obligations under his contract and to cope with the problems presented by the contract," the board believed that the continuation of the contract would "seriously and unduly jeopardize the well-being of the military personnel [being trained]" and serve as "an unnecessary waste of Government money."<sup>18</sup>

Few citizens of Lamesa could have suspected the deep-seated issues that wracked the tiny base. The findings of the investigation—combined with the eventual restructuring of the glider pilot training program—appeared to serve as the end of Lamesa's airfield and contract with the military. Forced to once again fight for their airfield, the citizens of Lamesa lobbied for consideration for future military aviation endeavors and its associated benefits to the community.

### Fighting for the Airfield

Prior to any announcement about the potential closure of the glider training program at Lamesa Field, local leaders considered the town's future in regards to aviation. On 6 January 1943, the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce heard a report from instructors at the glider school on the feasibility of opening a municipal airport in the community. Separate from the glider field, the intent of this airfield centered on private aviation. Having their own planes located and stored elsewhere, the glider instructors saw the

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Contract W535ac-28989 Between the United States of America and John H. Wilson for the Operation of Glider School at Lamesa, Texas," 499-503, USAAF FTC, Microfilm Reel A2276, USAFHRA.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 504.

creation of a municipal airport in Lamesa as a vehicle to enable their private flying endeavors. With aerial crop dusting techniques being introduced to farmers prior to the start of the war, some civic leaders and farmers believed a municipal airport could benefit local agriculture efforts. To jumpstart the acquisition of the necessary land and construction material, the instructors raised \$1000 to be put towards the associated costs; in return, they requested Lamesa to provide an additional \$1100 to cover the remaining expenses.<sup>19</sup>

However, before any substantial progress on the proposal occurred, the closure of the glider base occurred. The civilian instructors departed for other assignments at bases scattered across the country. With the exodus of instructors, local momentum for the creation of a municipal airfield ground to a halt. Instead all civic energies focused on reacquiring a defense contract centered on the now vacant Lamesa Field.

Upon notification of the closure of the glider training school, the leaders of Lamesa once again turned to Congressman Mahon to assist in navigating the murky waters of defense contracting. On the advice of Mahon, Mayor Jobe, communicated with Colonel K. P. McNaughton—USAAFFTC—on the town's concern over the closure of the base and requested an interview on the matter. Failing to secure a meeting with the USAAFFTC, Mrs. Matt McCall, manager of the Lamesa Chamber of Commerce, wrote Mahon to ask for his assistance in gathering further knowledge on the subject.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Aviation Committee Meeting, 6 January 1943, Lamesa Chamber of Commerce, 63, Microfilm Reel L228, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC), Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Matt McCall to Congressman George Mahon, 9 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library (SWC), Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

Inquiring within the USAAFFTC, Mahon received a vague, but potentially favorable, response from Colonel McNaughton. Although not promising anything and admitting that the status of the field remained undetermined, McNaughton commented that he felt “certain, however, that [the] facilities will be utilized in our training program.”<sup>21</sup> Passing on the news to his constituents, Mahon wrote to Mayor Jobe, Mrs. McCall, and Judge Kilmer B. Corbin on the latest information from the USAAFFTC.<sup>22</sup> Armed with this news, the leadership of Lamesa continued its efforts to ensure that military training would once again return to the town.

Operating a liaison pilot training school in Plainview, 100 miles north of Lamesa, W. Clent Breedlove had an interest in utilizing Lamesa Field. An aviator in the First World War, he participated in post-war tests conducted by General Billy Mitchell to determine the feasibility of airpower. Leaving the military and returning to west Texas, Breedlove opened a commercial flight school in Lubbock. Lobbying for government funding, he secured contracts in Lubbock and Plainview to operate both power and glider training schools. With the restructuring of the glider training program, he transitioned the Plainview location from a glider school to training Army liaison pilots. However, he viewed the facilities at Lamesa as better suited than Plainview for this new endeavor. Contacting the USAAFFTC, Breedlove expressed his interest in moving his operations to Lamesa. Meeting with DPC and USAAFFTC officials on 29 March 1943, Breedlove finalized the details of the

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<sup>21</sup> Colonel K. P. McNaughton to Congressman George Mahon, 11 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>22</sup> Congressman George Mahon to Mrs. Matt McCall, 12 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC; Congressman George Mahon to Mayor Charnell Jobe, 12 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC; Congressman George Mahon to Judge Kilmer Corbin, 12 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

transition.<sup>23</sup> On 8 April 1943, *The Lamesa Reporter* announced that Lamesa Field would once again be utilized in a military capacity and be reopened shortly.<sup>24</sup>

### Liaison Pilot Training

Over the next week, Breedlove and his staff transitioned their training operations to Lamesa; on 16 April 1943, training commenced.<sup>25</sup> Flying light civilian aircraft painted olive drab, these aviators were trained to fill a variety of roles. Originally envisioned to ferry messengers and high ranking officers, liaison pilots soon found themselves serving as artillery spotters, conducting reconnaissance missions in front of Allied armored spearheads, and landing Office of Strategic Services agents behind enemy lines. Civilian pilots, many of whom had trained in the Civilian Pilot Training Program prior to the start of war, were thrust into uniform, given hurried training, and declared military pilots.<sup>26</sup>

Operating a much larger training school than the previous glider operation, the liaison training school employed nearly 150 civilians serving in a variety of positions, ranging from flight instructors to maintenance personnel and administrative staff. In addition to the civilians, an Army element oversaw the contract school, similar to the model employed during glider training. Designated the 3rd Liaison Training Detachment, the military personnel consisted of eight officers and ten enlisted men. In addition to the permanent party of the school, the school had the capacity to train up to 180 trainees at

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<sup>23</sup> Brigadier General B. E. Meyers to W. Clent Breedlove, 24 March 1943, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 2, SWC.

<sup>24</sup> "Clent Breedlove Will Take Over Lamesa Field, Will Operate Advanced Liaison Training School," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 8 April 1943.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Neil F. Rogers, "World War II Liaison Aviation in the United States Armed Forces" (Ph Diss., Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, 1992), ii-iii.

any one time. With training taking six weeks to complete, new classes of sixty men each arrived every two weeks to Lamesa to begin their training.<sup>27</sup>

Showcasing the training now being conducted at Lamesa Field, Breedlove and local leaders staged an "Open Post" day on 13 June 1942 for the citizens of Dawson County. Highlighting improvements to the existing facilities, trainees and permanent personnel escorted visitors around the post. Instructors performed demonstrations of the techniques being taught at the school. The high school band provided music and local civic organizations assisted in providing refreshments.<sup>28</sup> Seeing a thriving training operation just miles outside of town, the local citizens of Lamesa once again became reassured of the viability of their airfield and its importance in the war effort.

For the next six months, liaison pilot training occurred at Lamesa Field without any incidents. Piper Cubs conducting "touch and go" landings on highways and in fields to simulate landings behind enemy lines now replaced the gliders that had previously silently soared above the cotton fields. Trainees used the pump jacks that dotted the ground to practiced map reading for artillery spotting. In many ways, the town seamlessly resumed its relationship with the base. Citizens once again welcomed soldiers into their homes for meals. Instructors rented houses in town and their families became part of the community. The townspeople celebrated holidays with the soldiers separated from their families.<sup>29</sup>

As the year 1944 dawned, however, Lamesa once again received news of the pending closure of its airfield. On 20 January 1944, the citizens of Lamesa received

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<sup>27</sup> "Clent Breedlove Will Take Over Lamesa Field, Will Operate Advanced Liaison Training School."

<sup>28</sup> "Open Post Sunday Afternoon, June 13; Gates Open from 2:00 to 5:00," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 9 June 1943.

<sup>29</sup> "Thanksgiving Party Entertainment at USO Given By Miss Ernestine Gamble," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 2 December 1943.

notification that operations at the airfield would terminate in one month, on 20 February 1944. The pilots presently at Lamesa would be trained, with no additional personnel arriving.<sup>30</sup> Similar to the glider program, the USAAF realized that it now possessed a sufficient number of liaison pilots and could restructure its program to reduce production. As a result, Lamesa Field found itself once again on the list for closure. Having gained advanced notification of the pending announcement, Mayor Jobe and Breedlove reached out to Congressman Mahon once more to request assistance for another military assignment.<sup>31</sup>

With little traction being gained from the USAAFFTC in securing the promise of a future military assignment, local citizens began to develop other ideas for the future use of the airfield. One proposal advocated the use of the buildings for a consolidated school district for the small farming communities surrounding Lamesa.<sup>32</sup> Another suggestion recommended the training base be turned over to the town for use as a municipal airfield for the region.<sup>33</sup> Embroiled in a world war, both the DPC and the USAAF could offer little clear guidance on the future of the Lamesa location. Still under contract to the DPC, the facilities could be temporarily leased back to the local community. However, if the war effort deemed it necessary to re-occupy the property for government purposes, the

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<sup>30</sup> "Liaison Training Program to Terminate Feb. 20," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 20 January 1944.

<sup>31</sup> Mayor Charnell Jobe to Congressman George Mahon, 10 January 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>32</sup> J. L. Chiles to Congressman George Mahon, 10 March 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>33</sup> Owen Taylor to Congressman George Mahon, 24 March 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

temporary contracts could be canceled with a thirty-day notification and returned to for War Department use.<sup>34</sup>

### Government Surplus

Prior to the citizens of Lamesa producing a codified plan for the use of the vacant airfield, the DPC once again found a use for the location. Turned over to the War Assets Commission (WAC), Lamesa Field transformed into a giant government surplus store for war assets no longer being used. As military technology rapidly improved, new weapons and machines appeared in the hands of soldiers, resulting in the gradual phasing out of older models. Operating on the mass-quantity scale of a world war and supporting other nations through the Lend Lease program, the United States rapidly developed a surplus inventory of outdated technology. Although likely only receiving pennies back on every dollar initially spent, the government decided to sell what items it could back to local consumers. Due to its central location in relation to surrounding installations, the WAC selected Lamesa to serve as its regional aircraft surplus center.<sup>35</sup>

Reopened on 1 September 1944, Lamesa Field once again possessed the hustle and bustle—though somewhat more subdued—of a military installation. Employing between twenty-five and thirty maintenance technicians at any one time, military aircraft arrived at the base by aircraft type.<sup>36</sup> Upon landing, maintenance personnel removed any military

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<sup>34</sup> Sam Husbands to Congressman George Mahon, 18 March 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC; General H. H. Arnold to Congressman George Mahon, 25 March 1944, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>35</sup> "Lamesa Field to Open Soon as Sales Center for Surplus Aircraft," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 7 August 1944.

<sup>36</sup> "Lamesa Field to Open Around 1<sup>st</sup> of September," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 31 August 1944.

capabilities the planes may have possessed, rendered them safe for civilian use, and prepared the aircraft for sale to the general public.

Fighter trainers arrived from Lubbock Army Airfield and Sweetwater's Avenger Field. Twin-engine platforms from Midland Army Airfield and Big Spring Army Airfield thundered to a stop on Lamesa's unimproved runway. As the end of the war grew near, the planes that arrived in Lamesa were no longer training aircraft, but rather fighters and bombers, many with their armament still mounted. Although technically still under military contract, entrance requirements at the base slackened considerably. Local boys rode their bikes on to the base to search for "war treasures." Contractors gave them empty bandoliers and shell casings. Some looked the other way as youngsters rummaged through dumpsters and piles of equipment. As the sun set, the boys rode back to their homes on their bikes, laden down with their findings. Discarded bits of cloth magically transformed into splendid uniforms. The "war games" of the children of Lamesa turned into epic affairs replete with military equipment, only further enhanced by their vivid imaginations.<sup>37</sup>

With the official cessation of hostilities and the end of the Second World War, the citizens of Lamesa soon realized that the airfield would not serve as a surplus center forever. Only so many planes could be sold, pieces of equipment salvaged, and excess offloaded. Local community leaders once again began to explore ways to repurpose the airfield for the region's benefit. The Lamesa Chamber of Commerce considered the location's buildings to relieve the town's acute housing shortage. With the influx of personnel from the glider field and the Henningsen egg plant and little additional housing being constructed during the war due to material rationing, returning Dawson County

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Smith, interview by author, Lamesa, Texas, 20 August 2015.

veterans found few options for housing.<sup>38</sup> Another proposal reconsidered the need for a municipal airfield, which led to the idea of the existing facility being turned over to the town following its use by the government.<sup>39</sup> Deciding that the base would best serve as an airport for the town, the civic leadership began the process of preparing the community for its new airfield. However, once again, government bureaucracy hindered local plans; and, as always, Lamesa turned to Congressman Mahon to inquire and assist on behalf of his constituents.

### The End of an Era

With the promise of being able to utilize Lamesa Field for commercial aviation, local leaders began to search for carriers willing to add the small town to their existing routes. Pioneer Airlines—a regional airline servicing Texas and New Mexico—agreed to include Lamesa in its routes across West Texas. Citizens from Lamesa could soon rapidly travel and do business in locations like Albuquerque and Santa Fe in New Mexico, as well as metropolitan Texas cities such as Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Austin. The War Assets Administration (WAA) and CAA just needed to complete the necessary paperwork to declare the airfield as war surplus and return it to the town's possession.<sup>40</sup>

After Lamesa Field was declared war surplus on 18 November 1946, Pioneer Airlines received its permit to commence operations pending the completion of necessary

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<sup>38</sup> "Release of Lamesa Field Sought for Vets Housing," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 14 February 1946.

<sup>39</sup> "Lamesa to Obtain Use of Lamesa Field for Municipal Airport," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 22 April 1946.

<sup>40</sup> The War Assets Corporation became the War Assets Administration on 25 March 1946.

government paperwork to return the base to the town.<sup>41</sup> Based on experience in dealing with previous government installations being transitioned to commercial use, Pioneer did not plan to begin service into Lamesa until the middle of February 1947.<sup>42</sup> However, the WAA did not view the Lamesa location as a priority and failed to process the required paperwork. The resulting delay threatened to derail the opening of Pioneer's service into Lamesa.

Contacting the WAA on behalf of the civic leaders of Lamesa, Congressman Mahon pushed the government agency for adjudication of the matter. Acknowledging Mahon's request, the WAA dispatched final disposition instructions to its regional office in Dallas on 5 February 1947; on 7 February 1947, the government terminated its lease of Lamesa Field and transferred the surrounding acreage and facilities to the town of Lamesa for public airport purposes under the provisions of the WAA.<sup>43</sup> On 17 February 1947, Pioneer held a small ceremony to commemorate the beginning of commercial airline service in and out of Lamesa.<sup>44</sup> The efforts that began in the summer of 1940 had come full circle. Having first secured a War Department contract and now commercial airline service, the leadership and civilians of Lamesa believed their vision had been finally realized.

Yet, like all the previous aviation endeavors proposed for Lamesa, this one too suddenly ended. On 11 September 1947, Pioneer ended its seven months of service to Lamesa's airfield. Also providing service to surrounding cities such as Odessa, Big Spring,

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<sup>41</sup> "Lamesa Field Declared Surplus," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 18 November 1946; "Airline Issued Permit," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 28 November 1946.

<sup>42</sup> "Pioneer Will Initiate Service Middle of Next Month," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 9 January 1947.

<sup>43</sup> "City to Take Over Lamesa Field from WAA on 2/7," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 3 February; C. F. Robinson to Congressman George Mahon, 5 February 1947, George H. Mahon Papers, 1887-1986, Box 135, Folder 3, SWC.

<sup>44</sup> "Pioneer Inaugural Ceremony Today," *The Lamesa Reporter*, 17 February 1947.

and Lubbock, the airline no longer found it economically viable to continue to stop in a small farming community like Lamesa.<sup>45</sup> Although local officials attempted to muster additional commercial aviation interest in Lamesa, their efforts met abject failure. The dream had finally died, never again to be resurrected.

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<sup>45</sup> "Pioneer Airlines Discontinues Flights to Lamesa Airport," *The Odessa American*, 11 September 1947.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Putting Training to Use

Having successfully navigated the various locations, training platforms, and curriculum of the glider pilot training program, pilots dispersed across the nation and oceans to various units during World War II. Now equipped with a robust TCC capable of enabling airborne operations—both by parachute and glider—Allied planners began to explore potential locations for employment in combat. Based upon terrain, threat, and force composition, the ETO served as the primary location for glider operations.

Supporting British airborne efforts during Operation LADBROOKE and the invasion of Sicily on 9 July 1943, a small number of American glider pilots assisted British glider pilots in flying CG-4As to insert British glider infantry elements to secure a canal crossing. Although less than thirty in number, these American pilots reported back to headquarters their lessons learned during the mission. The pilots taking part in the mission stressed the importance of clearly designated landing zones in order to ensure the adequate massing of glider-borne combat troops. These principles were of even more importance in combat due to the large concentration of gliders assigned to each landing zone. Incorporating these observations, USAAF leadership ensured that landing zone identification and

controlled landings were reinforced in the glider pilot training program. These efforts would prove beneficial in the subsequent invasion of France.<sup>1</sup>

In support of Operation OVERLORD and the invasion of France, American glider pilots participated in the initial stages of Operation NEPTUNE during the night of 5-6 June 1944. Landing large elements of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions behind German lines, American glider pilots played a significant role in securing critical objectives enabling the overall success of the mission. Although glider pilots suffered many of their casualties during the initial assault phase of the operation, Allied planners nonetheless effectively utilized the gliders in a subsequent supporting role to dispatch reinforcements and supplies to the initial airborne elements still engaged in combat. Encompassing six separate missions, 509 gliders landed in France as part of the overall operation. Of the 1018 glider pilots who arrived at the landing zones, fifty-seven were dead or missing following the conclusion of the operation. Yet these men and machines had made incredible contributions to the success of the mission. Some 3937 infantrymen disembarked via glider, and 95 pieces of artillery comprised of howitzers and anti-tank guns landed in the back of CG-4As, contributing much needed direct and indirect fire support. Additionally, 238 tons of cargo—including ammunition, food, and medicine—reached soldiers otherwise cut off from their traditional supply lines.<sup>2</sup> Characterizing the airborne component of NEPTUNE as a successful operation, American commanders and planners saw continued potential for the employment of the glider in combat.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Dank, *The Glider Gang: An Eyewitness History of World War II Glider Combat* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, 1977), 72-73; Clay Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II* (Garden City, NY: Dial Press, 1985), 107.

<sup>2</sup> United States Air Force Historical Division (USAFHD), *United States Air Force Historical Studies No. 97: Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*. (Washington, DC: United States Air Force Historical Division, 1956), 225.

Attempting to hasten the end of the war, Allied planners envisioned a final offensive through Holland, a crossing of the Rhine, and subsequent occupation of the Ruhr district. This was an ambitious plan in nature, and glider forces would be at the spearhead of the advance. This operation would be conducted solely during the daytime, the first such glider operation since the catastrophic German assault in Crete three year earlier. Initially launched on 17 September 1944, Operation MARKET-GARDEN continued for the next two weeks. All told, 1618 gliders took place in the operation. These planes landed 10,374 troops, 140 pieces of artillery, 710 jeeps, and 1600 tons of supplies. In the effort to achieve these results, 114 American glider pilots were killed, wounded or captured.<sup>3</sup> Unable to affect a linkup between armored and airborne forces, the overambitious goals of MARKET-GARDEN resulted in abject failure. Attempting to end the war in one masterstroke, the promises of airborne insertion once again demonstrated their limitations. Although producing yeomen results in successful missions flown, glider pilots could only carry so much cargo or manpower in the limited capacity of the CG-4A.

Although a small contribution, gliders and their brave pilots played a vital role during the heroic defense of Bastogne in late December 1944. Flying to the relief of the encircled 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, eleven gliders of the IX TCC took off on 23 December 1944, evaded German detection, and successfully landed in the vicinity of Bastogne. These gliders brought with them much needed medicine, litters, and—most importantly—surgeons to assist in the treatment of the wounded. The following day, an additional fifty gliders attempted to reach Bastogne. Because thirty-five successfully reached their

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 226-227.

objective, a total of 106,291 pounds of medical supplies were delivered to the desperate defenders and enabled their prolonged resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Once again attempting to bring about the end of the war, Allied planners turned to the airborne and glider forces to assist in establishing a foothold behind enemy lines. Launched on 24 March 1945, Operation VARSITY facilitated the crossing of the Rhine River and the opening of northern Germany for invasion. Successfully landing 883 gliders in occupied Germany, American glider pilots continued their impressive contributions to the war effort. Sustaining 194 pilot casualties, they delivered 4810 troops, 43 artillery pieces, 350 jeeps, and 1036 tons of cargo.<sup>5</sup> Demonstrating their commitment to airborne and glider operations within the ETO to the end of the war, Allied commanders continued to utilize and value gliders and their pilots for the variety of roles they could assume on the battlefield. Augmenting parachute infantry, gliders proved quite capable in both initial combat roles and in delivering extra troops, heavy weapons, vehicles, and additionally needed supplies to friendly forces engaged behind enemy lines.

Although predominantly utilized in the ETO, American glider pilots did serve with distinction in the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) as well. Supporting Allied forces under British Major General Orde Wingate, American glider pilots assisted in providing an air component capable of infiltration, evacuation, and resupply. Consisting of a hand-selected 100 pilots, these individuals arrived in Burma in 1944 to facilitate Chindit operations behind the Japanese frontlines. Launched on 5 March 1944, Operation THURSDAY called for a concentrated effort to cut enemy supply and communication lines.

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<sup>4</sup> Gerard M. Devlin, *Silent Wings: The Saga of the U.S. Army and Marine Combat Glider Pilots During World War II* (New York: Saint Martin's Press. 1985), 289-299.

<sup>5</sup> USAFHD, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 228-229.

Limited in airborne capabilities, Wingate utilized his gliders to form a foothold for the establishment of an airfield that could facilitate larger aircraft. Landing in small clearings in the middle of the jungle, the American glider pilots overcame the adverse conditions of terrain and climate to successfully achieve their mission. Less than a day after arriving, the initial entry force flown in by the intrepid glider pilots opened an operational airfield. In the following six days, 9052 troops, 175 ponies, 1183 mules, and 254 tons of supplies arrived deep—nearly 150 miles—behind the Japanese front lines.<sup>6</sup> While this is the only employment of gliders in the PTO, the skill demonstrated by American glider pilots in Burma demonstrated the utility of the glider even outside of its standard employment in large airborne operations in the ETO.

Yet, despite some significant achievements, following the conclusion of World War II, the military glider disappeared from the modern battlefield nearly as rapidly as it had appeared. Essentially, the helicopter replaced the glider in the military's inventory. More effective and efficient than the glider, the helicopter proved well suited in inserting troops behind enemy lines. Yet even with the glider's rapid disappearance, the American glider pilot training program proved successful in producing a more than adequate number of pilots to allow these operations to be planned and executed.

In both public perception and historical scholarship, American glider pilots remain a second-class citizen—the “bastards no one wanted.”<sup>7</sup> Drawn from pilots who failed out of flight training on other platforms and civilians who possessed the smallest amounts of pre-war flight qualifications, they, as well as the men they carried into combat, are often

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<sup>6</sup> Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 144-153.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Mrazek, *The Glider War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 129.

forgotten in comparison to the more glamorous parachute infantry. Often seen as achieving its successes only after being employed in combat, a negative connotation nonetheless remains affixed to the American glider program. However, the American glider program stands alone amongst USAAF programs due to the unique nature of its creation and development. In stark contrast to the fighters, bombers, and transports that comprised the pre-World War II American aircraft inventory, the *Luftwaffe's* introduction of the platform at Eben-Emael in 1940 ushered in the limited age of the military glider. Unlike most other programs and platforms that grew under the careful planning and nurturing of relative peace in the 1920's and 1930's, the glider program lacked the foundation for rapid growth. Caught up in the massive expansion efforts following the United States' entry into war, the glider program—an essentially experimental program born out of military necessity—quickly grew both in size and scope.

Employed in combat operations with various degrees of success, glider pilots nonetheless made meaningful contributions at the tactical and operational levels of war. Transporting men, supplies, and vehicles behind enemy lines, glider pilots enabled combat commanders to expand the possibilities of troop deployments on the battlefield in the pursuit for decisive victory. Allowing footholds in fortified positions to be established, the courageous efforts of the glider pilots helped open the door for the eventual defeat of fascism and Allied victory. Sustaining approximately five percent casualties in each combat operation, glider pilots earned the respect of the men they carried into battle and the commanders who ordered them to execute these missions behind enemy lines. Worn by the relatively small number of 6,000 men, the glider pilot's wings emblazoned with the letter "G" truly did stand for "Guts".

## A Product of Wartime Necessity

Of the 6,000 men who received their glider pilot wings, 509 received their elementary glider training at Lamesa Field—nearly ten percent of the total force.<sup>8</sup> A microcosm of the glider training program, and the American war effort itself, Lamesa's airfield and the surrounding community experienced firsthand the changing directions and guidance by decision makers, both political and military, at all levels. Born out of a perceived necessity, sustained by improvisation, rocked by scandal, repurposed multiple times, and unceremoniously ended, the history and lessons learned of Lamesa Field have long been swept away by the West Texas winds.

Attempting to secure funding for a local airfield, it took Lamesa's leadership nearly two years to finally receive government approval. Having explored all avenues and leveraged all contacts, the town's eventual selection as a glider training school offered the opportunity of promise and excitement, much as American military planners envisioned the glider's appearance on the battlefield.

Similar to the structure of the national program, improvisation and rapid change characterized early training efforts and administrative functions as John Wilson attempted to get his glider school up and running in Lamesa. Civilian glider pilots contracted from across the country arrived in Lamesa to serve as instructors. Military personnel provided loose, local oversight. An assortment of civilian aircraft—some not even gliders—served as training platforms. Flying hours took precedence over maintenance. Construction of the

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<sup>8</sup> Historical Program 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment, 1 June 1942 to 1 January 1943, 28th Army Air Forces Glider Training Detachment, Lamesa Field, Lamesa, Texas, Appendix III-6, 1, Microfilm Reel A2521, United States Army Air Force Historical Research Agency (USAAFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

base facilities took longer than initially planned. The citizens of Lamesa became immersed in the culture provided by the base and continually gave of themselves in order to support the troops. Trainees transitioned from boarding houses to local hotels to a government migratory worker camp to finally barracks, albeit without appropriate heat and water. The suspicion of mismanagement tainted the location.

However, unlike the national glider pilot training program, Lamesa Field could not overcome its obstacles. As the USAAF restructured the glider program, the findings of corruption, negligence, and undue risk that were present at the airfield in Lamesa made the military's decision to close the base relatively simple. Determined to maintain its airfield and association with a government contract, civic leaders once again demonstrated the necessary resolve to advocate for the repurposing of the facilities.

Assuming various roles ranging from liaison pilot training to a surplus center to commercial aviation, Lamesa Field ultimately proved incapable of sustained success in the face of outside influences. Much like one of its primary training locations, neither too could the role of the glider in combat survive the pressures of public criticism, shifts in military doctrine, and technological advancement. Rapidly established in reaction to a perceived necessity on the battlefields of World War II, changing doctrine and technology soon ruled the glider obsolete, regardless of the pleas of its advocates. For all their successes in training and on the battlefield, American glider pilots and their planes have largely been deleted from the annals of history, similarly to many of the locations they once inhabited.

Still shaped by the practices and experiences of World War II, today's American military continues to expand its facilities, increase its manpower, and introduce new technologies on the battlefield in response to crises as they emerge throughout the world.

Following the end of conflict, the ranks are reduced, locations abandoned, and platforms discarded as no longer financially or technically viable. With little change in sight, America's military will continue to waste dollars and manpower in an effort to quickly respond to perceived threats. Underfunded and without enough manpower, the military services will once again have to rely on their talent for improvisation.

Although successful in the short term, this model is unsustainable and fails to survive immediate necessity. Even in light of their numerous accomplishments, the long-term promises of the American glider pilot program and Lamesa Field remained unfulfilled. These entities offer a telling reminder of the forgotten legacies of the men, aircraft, and communities who contribute so much in support of the American military and its pursuit of victory, only to be marginalized in the records of history.

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