

SILENT WINGS MUSEUM: Newsletter

The Legacy of the World War II Glider Pilots



**Vol. 20 No. 1
Fall 2020**

GENERAL INFORMATION

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DIRECTIONS

DRIVING: NORTH LUBBOCK, I-27 AT EXIT 9. THE MUSEUM IS LOCATED IN THE HISTORIC OLD AIRPORT TERMINAL BUILDING JUST TWO BLOCKS EAST OF I-27. LOOK FOR THE SILVER "G" WINGS ON THE TOWER ABOVE THE ENTRANCE.

FLYING: THE MUSEUM IS ACCESSIBLE BY CAR FROM THE AIRPORT TERMINAL. THE MUSEUM IS ADJACENT TO AND WITHIN EASY WALKING DISTANCE OF LUBBOCK AERO, FBO AT LUBBOCK PRESTON SMITH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. GPS COORDINATES FOR THE MUSEUM ARE: N 33° 39.467' W 101° 49.911'

ADMISSION FEES

GENERAL ADMISSION	\$10.00
SENIOR CITIZENS (60+)	\$8.00
CHILDREN (AGES 7-17)	\$5.00
STUDENTS (W/ COLLEGE ID)	\$5.00
CHILDREN (6 & UNDER W/ FAMILY)	FREE
MUSEUM MEMBERS	FREE
ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY	FREE

MUSEUM HOURS

TUESDAY - SATURDAY	10 AM - 5 PM
SUNDAY	1 PM - 5 PM

CALL FOR HOLIDAY HOURS

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AROUND THE MUSEUM

Bravery under Oppression

Sharon McCullar, Curator

Risking their lives, Dutch Resistance members hid Allied troops, provided food, clothing, and transportation on their journey out of Holland, and actively resisted their German occupiers. Strong bonds formed between glider pilots and their rescuers.

Flight Officer George Brennan was hidden in a Dutch maternity hospital for several weeks disguised as an injured, and very pregnant, woman. He was smuggled out of the hospital when his wounds were partially healed but before he was due to “deliver.”

Flight Officer Robert F. Hills recalled that he and his buddies received a hot stew from a Dutch farmer while they were in the combat zone.

Dutch Resistance Memorial Cross

After the 35th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands in 1980, a Royal Decree created the Dutch Resistance Memorial Cross medal.

Since its creation, approximately 15,000 persons recognized as members of the Dutch Resistance during World War II have received the award.

The colors of the ribbon flanked by black borders represent the red, white, and blue of the Dutch flag and orange, the national color of the Netherlands.

The horizontal arms of the cross bear the words “De Tyranny Verdryven” “To Expel Tyranny.” This is a line in the Dutch National Anthem.



Silent Wings Museum Artifact: FIC 2001-91-1

AROUND THE MUSEUM

Aid and Comfort on the Road to Brussels



Mr. and Mrs. W.A. Tack lived near Eindhoven on the highway towards Brussels.

They fed and housed Flight Officers Jack Merrick, John Boersig, and John J. Lang as they made their way to Brussels on September 20, 1944.

The Tacks, their glider pilot guests, and one unidentified man paused for a picture.

Able Helpers in the Landing Zones

A Dutch Resistance fighter with rifle slung over his shoulder helped to unload Flight Officer Charles Henry's glider "My Tyke" near Graves, Holland. Henry took this photo minutes after landing on September 23, 1944.



Silent Wings Museum Image: 2018-11-269

AROUND THE MUSEUM

Silent Wings Museum Remembers D-Day Virtually

Dorothy Svgdik, Education and Volunteer Coordinator

The Silent Wings Museum remembered the 76th anniversary of D-Day on June 6th with our first ever virtual program! Due to the precautions set by the State of Texas and the City of Lubbock a virtual event was the best way to honor the anniversary in a safe manner.

The annual commemoration of D-Day honors the sacrifices made by Allied forces during the Normandy Invasion to gain a critical foothold on French soil. More than 500 gliders were deployed into Normandy beginning in the wee hours of June 6th and continuing into June 7th, carrying desperately needed supplies, troops, and vehicles to secure strategic areas inland and resupply the Allied ground forces.

It was exciting to reimagine our much-beloved D-Day programming for a virtual audience. Typically, the Museum is brimming with guests who are exploring the galleries, catching a documentary screening in the theater, chatting with living history interpreters, and ogling the vintage aircraft that fly in for the occasion. It was an interesting challenge to convey the amplitude of enthusiasm through social media posts!



Normandy Invasion Imminent

This newly assembled CG-4A receives its invasion stripes just prior to Operation Neptune.

Silent Wings Museum Image: 2018-11-251

It was important to us at the Museum to work with some of our long-time partners as we developed our virtual programming. D-Day at the Silent Wings Museum would not have been the same without them! With the help of our community partners, we were able to put together a day chock full of videos, posts, and online activities all about D-Day. We interspersed historic footage and images from our collection with living history presentations, all the while encouraging our social media followers to share their family's D-Day stories with us.

Virtual program attendees left incredible comments on our posts and we were able to have lovely conversations with our social media followers. It was thrilling to share all of the incredible content we put together and to hear from folks who were tuning in from all over the country!

You can visit our Facebook page (@SilentWingsMuseum) or our Youtube page (@Buddy Holly Center / Silent Wings Museum) to watch videos from our Virtual D-Day 2020 event.

NATIONAL WWII GLIDER PILOTS COMMITTEE COMMITTEE REPORTS

NATIONAL REUNION CHAIR REPORT

50TH ANNUAL REUNION
NATIONAL WWII GLIDER PILOT COMMITTEE
WILL BE HELD IN LUBBOCK, TX

Dates are October 7,8,9, and 10, 2021
The hotel has been confirmed
MCM Elegante Hotel & Suites
Lubbock, TX

I hope all of you may have heard by now that the Executive Council had a virtual meeting in late May and decided to postpone the 50th Annual Reunion this year. There were too many questions about holding a large scale event this fall and whether we would have sufficient participation even if we did.

From the way things look at the time of this writing, I can say we made the right choice. I have reserved the MCM Elegante Hotel in Lubbock for October of 2021 at the same time I cancelled the booking for this year, so all of our plans remain exactly the same, just a year later.

Updates may be found at:
www.ww2gp.org/reunion
or on our Facebook page
www.facebook.com/WW2GliderPilots/

Mary Roemer, National Reunion Chair

NATIONAL CHAIR REPORT

We're living through some strange times. Our trip to Wesel, Germany, for the 75th Anniversary of Operation Varsity canceled; the 94th Flight Training Squadron (FTS), USAFA, G-Wings ceremony curtailed; our Lubbock reunion postponed. I miss the personal contact with members but I have also made a personal commitment to not let it get me down.

In that vein, as our normal routine has seemingly come to a crawl, another opportunity has opened up. We have more time. The Executive Council has been in email contact, addressing issues related to the change in the status of our organization that still seem to be cropping up, implementing some planned projects and planning new ones.

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Current projects include a roster of members that will be accessible by member sign in to the website. This will not only facilitate communication between members, but also will be a window into the vast resource that resides in our membership.

Congratulations to Lt Colonel Matt Humphries on his assumption of command of the 94th Flying Training Squadron. I had an opportunity to meet Col Humphries last year and know he will be an enthusiastic supporter of our interaction with the 94th.

I would also like to thank the outgoing commander, Lt Col Doug Witmer for his support. Those of you that had an opportunity to talk with Col Witmer at our last reunion in Lubbock know how committed he was to expose the cadets of the 94th to their legacy. He will be missed.

Speaking of the 94th, I would like to introduce our latest addition to the Executive Council, the Liaison to the 94th Flying Training Squadron. This position will be held by both, Lt Col Jeremy Lushnat, USAF (Ret) who was the Commander of the 94th and Lt Col. Paul Roberts, USAF (Ret.) who was the Action Officer for the 94th. They served for the academic years 2016-17.

Both were instrumental in re-establishing the connection with the NWWIIGPC and have always been dedicated to passing on the legacy of the 94th WWII Glider Pilot history to the Cadets. Lt. Col. Paul Roberts reached out to George Theis (who promptly handed it off to Patricia) in 2016 to re-establish the relationship between the 94th. Jeremy retired in 2018 and promptly joined our organization.

I could not be more pleased that they have accepted this position, working together again to make a strong relationship with the 94th. I would like to thank Patricia for all of her hard work in establishing this position. She did an amazing job in an arena she was not entirely familiar with and, while she can take great satisfaction in what she accomplished, she joins me in thanking Jeremy and Paul for accepting the position.

As always, find our latest news on the website, <https://www.ww2gp.org/> and Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/WW2GliderPilots/>.

R Bruce Overman, National Chair

NATIONAL SECRETARY REPORT

The strength of our National WWII Glider Pilots Committee resides with our members who have committed to support us by joining our Committee. Although no longer a veteran organization we are still made up of WWII Glider Pilots, Troop Carrier crews, spouses as well as veterans who have served or are currently serving, family members, neighbors, friends, researchers, historians, and authors. We are all dedicated to maintaining the history of the WWII Glider Pilots and WWII Troop Carriers.

We need YOU to renew or become a member and express your commitment to our mission to provide and preserve Glider Pilot and Troop Carrier information in order to perpetuate the memory of those men, their service to country, and to keep alive the knowledge of the relatively unknown glider program of WWII.

A reminder to renew your 2020 dues was mailed recently. Dues cover January to December and include receiving the quarterly Silent Wings Museum e-newsletter. Back issues of the Silent Wings Museum newsletter are available at www.silentwingmuseum.com.

Your membership helps to preserve the Silent Wings Museum, Troop Carrier history and keep our Committee viable so that we can continue to support valuable on-going activities such as education; memorials; website and database hosting, and to continue to have a strong reunion conference attendance.

You may also pay your dues for 2020 online by visiting our website and going to Join / Renew <https://ww2gp.org/membership> Login requires that we have a current email, phone number, and your member number.

The next dues reminder will be sent in January 2021 for those with whom we have email addresses. To help us save money and go paperless contact me with your email address or verify that we have your correct address before January.

Please contact me at claudia.coggin@gmail.com.

Claudia Coggin, National Secretary

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FROM THE NATIONAL WING COMMANDER'S DESK

I recently had an email from Natalie Paterson, who works as a film producer for digital online platforms (NJ Advance Media). She wanted to use some of the footage from one of our videos on the glider pilots' website that shows the glider pickup process. Surprisingly, she was not doing a video on WWII glider snatches but a video on a flying banner advertising company. As it turned out, this company which was started shortly after the war uses the glider pickup process to pick up advertising banners. The founder and owner of the company, Paramount Air Service Aerial Advertising, was glider pilot Andre Tomalino.



He graduated from glider flight school in January 1945 Class 45-3. He was assigned as an instructor, probably at Laurinburg Maxton since all others were either closed or in the process of closing.

He did not stay in the military but he loved to fly and bought a surplus Army Air Force bi-plane and took the knowledge he had learned of the glider pick up process and applied it to the air banner business. Andre's daughter, Barbara Tomalino, now owns and operates the business that has been operating since the 1940s and is the oldest air banner advertising company.

Glad to know that the air pick up process is still in operation today. View the banner pick up video on youtube at <https://youtu.be/YOxKIg9jhxE>

Charlie Day, as you may know, is the technical adviser to the glider pilots' website. We are both working on getting information added about all those big and little stories and refuting the misinformation. It's slow going. A few we have recently added: the process of the double tow snatch; the information about the CG-15A, the real story behind the paratrooper jumping from the C-47 and CG-4A glider at the same time.

We are also working on a timeline page with links to that particular information on the site.

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You can help us out, also, by checking the bio-file <https://ww2gp.org/personnel/> If you are a WWII veteran or your WWII relative's photo is not in the limited section of the website for the biographical files please contact me, patricia.a.overman@gmail.com or anyone on the research team, nww2gpert@gmail.com with a copy. For information on offering original photos to the Silent Wings Museum please contact the Curator, Sharon McCullar.

If you would like to join the NWWIIGPC it is easy to do with our online registration and membership renewals payment system <https://ww2gp.org/membership/>

The online roster is not up yet, but may be available by the time this is published. The address will be <https://ww2gp.org/membership/roster.php> and only those who requested to be on the roster will be listed and only those members listed in the roster will be able to access the roster.

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THE MOST TRAVELED MEN OF THE WAR

Patricia Overman

If anyone in Troop Carrier got to see the world during the War it was glider pilots and glider mechanics. I came across a photo in the 15th Troop Carrier Squadron war diaries while I was doing some research. I thought it would be perfect for the Glider Pilots Troop Carrier website. We talk about the glider pilots frequently being on detached service (DS) to other Groups throughout the war.

They were not alone, and frequently when the glider pilots of a Troop Carrier Group were transferred to another TC Group so were the glider mechanics. In the diaries of the 88th Troop Carrier historical document it was mentioned that in February 1945 when the 438th moved from Greenham Common, England, to Prosnes, France, their glider pilots and glider mechanics were detached and sent to three different TC Groups. Two reasons: the 438th were not towing glider in the next combat mission and the airfield was too small to handle the C-47s and all the gliders they had accumulated over the year they had been in England (the gliders followed along too). This was not uncommon throughout the war.

I was also re-reading Gale Ammerman's book, *An American Glider Pilot's Story*, and he had this to say about the 81st Troop Glider Mechanics when he and Joseph Graves were sent to Troy, Ohio, to pick up a new CG-4A glider from the WACO Company:

...I was always just a little more apprehensive when I had to fly a glider the 81st glider mechanics had not had a chance to examine. A graduate airplane mechanic myself, I was fully aware of the level of competence of the 81st glider mechanics, but more importantly I was aware of the fact that they cared about their responsibilities and did their job in a completely professional manner.

Thanks to all those Crew Chiefs and mechanics who kept things running smoothly even under very difficult conditions.

Stay safe!

Patricia Overman, National Wing Commander

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This is a photo of the 15th Troop Carrier Squadron Glider Mechanics. In 1945, the Operations Officer agreed that they were frequently on detached service and wrote this in the historical diary:

The most-traveled men of the outfit - the glider mechanics - were photographed one day recently when outside influences had left their rans practically untouched - all but six of the boys were on hand to look at the bird.

The glider sliders have pulled DS on every hole from d'Jerba to Chipping Ongar - most of the time DS being spent as detail-material for other units.



NWWIIGPC Image

Pictured are:

(rear) Zahringer, Alfredson, Mason, Bryant, Wojnar, Dunaway, Daniels, Wacaser, Matthews.
(front) Hauser, Pufont, Efron, Palo, Cavacini, Nichols.

Missing are:

Sergeant's Moffitt, White, McKinney, Meacham and Corporals Berry and Glasscock.

Prepared by Thomas A Davis, 2nd Lt., 15th TCS

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LEON B SPENCER RESEARCH TEAM REPORT

The Difficulties of Research

2nd Lt Willard Allen Acree departed the USA on June 01, 1944 and arrived in the European Theater of Operation (ETO) on June 13, 1944 according to his Military Record and Report of Separation. His record in our database showed that he had flown Holland. The records also show he was assigned to the 34th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS), 315th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) on June 14, 1944 and that is where his story diverges. While the 315th was in England, they were stationed at Spanhoe until February of '45. We know that the 315th did not fly glider missions, not one, during the entire war, so, he had to be on detach service; sent to another Group to fly Market. I had located the record where Willard Allen Acree was awarded the AIR MEDAL for the HOLLAND mission but that did not give us the Squadron he was attached to during Holland, only his parent squadron. There is no consistency in the Army Air Force's reporting of the awards. Sometime the award is listed in the parent squadron, or under the squadron where he was on detached service, or in some cases both or the information is missing.

As Patricia mentioned in her report, these men were moved around a lot. We have some who are listed as being assigned to four different squadrons during the War. Not knowing where a Glider Pilot was sent on detached service has always been a problem. We rely on past research information, the knowledge we have of other transfers. The common practice, but not always, was for the Group to send their GPs to a Group within their Wing, however, this is not always the case. Recently, in a diary of a squadron under the 52nd Wing, a General Order was made to transfer men from that squadron who had learned to fly the Horsa glider to the 53rd Wing. This was in May of 1944 so no doubt this was for Normandy. Even though it was possible to be transferred outside the Wing it was not common so we start searching the Groups in the parent Wing.

Since there was no other information in 2nd Lt. Acree's record, we needed to go through all the reports in the 52nd Wing for each Group; 61st TC Group, 313th TCG, 314th TCG, and the 316th TCG. There are four squadrons in each Group and each squadron file consists of 2000 to 5000 pages.

Patricia started with the 61st action reports and went on to the 313th while I was looking through the awards reports and the historical data from Maxwell for each Group. We were lucky that we had his separation paper, as provided by his daughter, Gabriella Acree Helleck, so I only had to skim to the date of August, September and October, 1944, to see if his name was on any transfer orders.

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It would have been a matter of time when we would have found him, but luckily Hans was able to shorten the search when he returned from vacation and emailed that 1st Lt. Acree flew from Cottesmore, England, on the 23rd of September. He was able to inform the family that Acree was a 1st Lt. (meaning he had been promoted before Market), the Glider Chalk number of the glider and supplied the narrative of Lt Acree's interrogation report.

Patricia checked the serials and found that the 316th left from Cottesmore in two serials (<https://www.ww2gp.org/holland/lifts.php>) on the 23rd so now it was just a matter of going to the 316th and going through those reports. Patricia found him in the 37th Troop Carrier Squadron reports. Knowing the squadron allowed us to do more research and we were able to fill in Lt. Acree's record.

This is a perfect example of the difficulty of locating records and the Research Team working together to resolve the story of just one glider pilot's war history.

We have a new researcher on the team, Richard Chancellor. He resides in England and has had an interest in troop carrier research for the last twenty years. He has been focusing on the 313th Troop Carrier Group for the last sixteen years and brings a wealth of knowledge to our team. Welcome Richard.

Gary Stripling, LBSRT Project Manager

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN'S REPORT

Dear friends, I hardly know where to start. My words in the last newsletter seem to be reflecting what we are still experiencing. But I do know, now that it is August, with three additional months of confinement, uncertainty and the increased spread of the virus; it all seems without an end. Fatigue from isolation, worry and not much good news is taking a toll on all of us.

With the approach of a new school year, the questions of safety for children and teachers is heightened. We have a daughter who teaches first grade and will be teaching a new group of first graders online with Zoom. I can not even imagine how hard that will be for her, the new first graders and their parents. Imagine not being able to meet your new teacher in person or your classmates. Our grandchildren who are teenagers, whose life is their friends, are so missing the social interaction without school. Zooming is just not the same.

It seemed almost surreal the other day in the grocery store to see everyone in a mask, even the children. I was glad to see all the masks but had to wonder – is this our new normal? Not being able to see each other's smiles or just hearing their muffled words left a feeling of something missing. And those who are deaf and read lips are totally at a loss.

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I repeat that my prayers are for those who continue to work; the truck and delivery drivers (where would we be without Amazon?), the health care workers who to struggle with over whelming numbers of patients in some areas, the police and fire departments and the grocery workers. I pray especially for all those in nursing or retirement homes who are strictly quarantined with no visitors at all. Their loneliness is so very hard to endure.

I pray for success in the search for a vaccine. I hope that we can continue to support those who have lost their jobs and maybe their place to live. We are a strong, innovative, hard working and compassionate people and we will make it through.

To all reading this: stay safe, be kind to yourself and those around you. Know that we will joyfully greet each other at our next reunion with renewed enthusiasm.

Susan Pinter
Chaplain

94TH FLYING TRAINING SQUADRON REPORT

USAFA Soaring. This summer the 94th Flying Training Squadron has continued with soaring operations, even in the midst of COVID-19. We have put extra measures in place to ensure the safety of our students and staff that include wearing masks, maintaining social distancing to the max extent possible, cleaning the sailplanes between each crew's use, and minimizing the amount of people in one room.

None of these measures have slowed us down though! We have continued to teach and graduate our new class of glider pilot instructors from the Class of 2022 and spent the summer months exposing new students from the Class of 2023 in the Introduction to Soaring course.



Newly checked instructor pilots from the Class of 2022.

We will select the new group of students to upgrade to instructors from this introduction course. We expect to continue operations as the school year begins in August to keep the USAFA soaring program alive for years to come!

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Students from AM-251: Introduction to Soaring. Some of these students will become the next generation of glider pilot instructors when they undergo the upgrade program during the 2020-2021 academic year.

C1C Spencer Brown and C1C Sierra DeHart

NATIONAL WWII GLIDER PILOTS COMMITTEE ARTICLES

COLLECTORS PHOTO

The photo below is related to ongoing research efforts. This image is related to Holland/Operation Market, which this year marks its 76th anniversary.



The photo is a Signal Corps Photo obtained by Hans den Brok from the National Archives. It is associated with research done by Hans den Brok. This photo has been published by many researchers, but no one has ever identified the glider pilot. In the photo the glider pilot is standing by himself to the right of the photograph. He may be contemplating the fact that he is flying without a copilot.

He is Flight Officer Clement M. Lancaster, 83rd Troop Carrier Squadron, 437th Troop Carrier Group. The others in the photograph are members of the Combat Assignment Team of the 162nd Signal Photo Company, attached to the 101st Airborne Division. Standing is T/5 George R. Jones with technicians Gerard and Sothern, tow motion picture cameramen flanking him. Squatting in front is the jeep driver of Division Headquarters. The date is 17 September, 1944.

What is further interesting about this photo is that the glider, tail #42-56176, never made it to the Landing Zone. It was Chalk #4, Serial A-19, and here is what was reported by F/O Lancaster in his report:

Flying #4 glider, I noticed tail flutter immediately after take-off. Airborne personnel informed me that the fuselage on the underside of the glider was ripping off. I hung on in hope that it wouldn't

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tear completely off. As we were circling the field from which we took off, the fuselage began to rip again and with about 2/3 of the under fuselage gone, I cut and landed on my home field, as close as possible to some empty gliders. We switched our load (one jeep and five men) to another glider and took off. We caught up with our formation by the time we reached the Channel. The rest of the trip was uneventful except for anti-aircraft fire.

To view a digital version of this photo go to fall 2020 Photo: <https://ww2gp.org/newsletters/collectorsPhoto.php>

The Beginning of Special Operations: Colonel Phillip G. Cochran and the 1st Air Commando Group

By Colonel Mark C. Vlahos, USAF – RET
Research Assistant Leon B. Spencer Research Team

Phillip Gerald Cochran was an officer in the USAAF during World War II. Although he was a fighter pilot, he developed many tactical air combat, air transport (both C-47 and gliders) and air assault techniques during the war, particularly in Burma operations as a co-commander of the 1st Air Commando Group with Colonel John R. Alison.

This Group was the precursor to modern day Special Operations, now a Major Command in the USAF.



Colonel Phillip G. Cochran
Photo Courtesy of USAF
Archives

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I first came across the name Phillip G. Cochran while researching and writing my next book I hope to publish: *Leading the Way to Victory a History of the 60th Troop Carrier Group 1940 – 1945*.

On the night of November 7 – 8, 1942, thirty-nine C-47s of 60th Troop Carrier Group (60th TCG) carried 550 paratroopers of the 2/509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (2/509th PIR) on the first combat airdrop in U.S. Military History as part of the initial Invasion of North Africa; code name Operation TORCH. Nearly two months later, on the night of December 26, 1942, three C-47s of the 60th TCG were again carrying 30 paratroopers and 1500 pounds of TNT on a secret mission to destroy a railroad bridge 90 miles behind enemy lines in Tunisia. Flying as an extra crew member and guide on the lead C-47 was P-40 fighter pilot Lieutenant Colonel Phillip G. Cochran. Just a few nights prior, Lt. Col. Cochran unsuccessfully tried to bomb the same railroad bridge. Flying 50 to 100 feet above the deck, the three blacked out C-47s flew undetected through German lines to their objective area. While the drop mission was successful and put the paratroopers within a few miles of the bridge, the raiders did not accomplish their mission before being discovered by Arabs and Germans. Many of the raiders were captured, a few killed and a few more escaped back to Allied lines.

A colorful individual and natural leader, the exploits of Cochran as a fighter pilot were already well known in North Africa and he was mentioned in press reports. While leading the 58th Fighter Squadron flying out of Thelepte, Cochran dropped and skipped a 500 pound bomb directly into German Headquarters at the Hotel Splendida in Kairouan, Tunisia. Lieutenant Colonel Cochran destroyed enemy telegraph wires by flying over them with a lead weight on the end of his P-40, a tactic he employed later in Burma as well.

In May 1943 Cochran returned to the United States with a Silver Star, A Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters and numerous other medals pinned to his chest. He was given the job of training three new P-47 Fighter Groups being formed and was ready to take command of one and head to Europe again. Now a Colonel, three months later both he and his friend fighter pilot John R. Alison were summoned to report to General H. H. “Hap” Arnold, the Chief of Staff of the USAAF to receive news of their next assignments (both were already slated for Fighter Groups heading to Europe.) All the two Colonels knew was that they were being considered for something vague that nobody could talk about. Both were thinking “What the hell have we done?” Before they met with General Arnold, General Hoyt Vandenberg, Arnold’s Deputy met with the two and let them in on the little bit he knew about what General Arnold had in mind.

Unknown to both of the two Colonels, Arnold had hand-picked the two as candidates to lead a new type of Air Combat Unit known only as Project 9. In fact Project 9 was in such an infancy stage (all in General Arnold’s vision) that no table of organization or equipment even existed for the unit! Cochran reported in first and before General Arnold even said a word, the “Sierra Hotel”

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Fighter Pilot bluntly told the Chief “I don’t want any part of it.”ⁱ Without showing any emotion, Arnold asked him to state the reasons for his position. Cochran replied that he had a lot of combat experience, was already slated to go to England and that Europe was where the action was. He did not want to be sent to “some doggone offshoot, side-alley fight over some jungle in Burma that doesn’t mean a damn thing.”ⁱⁱ

At this point General Arnold halted Cochran’s rant with “I don’t know what kind of Air Force office I’m running here when guys come in and tell me they are not going to do something!”ⁱⁱⁱ This quieted Cochran down and the meeting continued on. Still trying to get out of the command assignment that Arnold had not fully explained, Cochran mentioned Allison and assured the general he was the right man for the job. Arnold then let the Colonel know that he did not need his advice to make a proper decision and told him to “get out of here” and that he would let him know his future assignment tomorrow. Colonel John R. Alison reported in to General Arnold next with similar complaints and that Colonel Cochran was best slated for the job so he could go on to a fighter group in Europe – the best job in the Air Forces. After calming him down too, Arnold told him to report back tomorrow.

The next day, two dejected fighter pilots commiserated about their fate as they waited in the outer office of General “Hap” Arnold. Both men were still determined to get out of whatever Arnold was going to offer them. Soon they were called in with Arnold were Generals Hoyt Vandenberg and Barney M. Giles Chief of the Air Staff. General Arnold opened the meeting by saying “Boys I’ve got big jobs for you.” Arnold then went on to educate the two colonels on the organization they would lead. A most unique organization that did not spring from a USAAF need, but rather a British requirement – an air unit to support the Long Range Penetration Groups (LRPG) of British General Orde C. Wingate.

Neither Cochran nor Alison had even heard of Wingate and were not aware of his exploits deep behind Japanese lines. As Arnold explained the concept he began by describing the use of L-5 aircraft (small liaison aircraft) to support ground troops deep in the jungle behind enemy lines. As soon as he heard L-5, Alison blurted out: “if you’re going to give me L-5s, you don’t need me, I am a fighter pilot.” Cochran interjected on his friend’s behalf “He did not mean that.” Arnold leaned back in his chair and continued on saying the L-5 was just a starting point and he envisioned a much-larger group, but that they would need to design it. Arnold explained his vision which included the air group spear-heading the assault, not just supporting it – “go over and steal the show” he stated. The men were impressed with Arnold’s vision and passion and soon were on board with the idea, and the rest is history. Arnold told the two men to study Wingate, find out what he needs and that anything the two Colonels wanted was priority One.

Even though most histories mentioned the two were co-commanders, right from the start, the two men had an agreement that Cochran was the Commander and Allison his Deputy. The two men

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thought so much alike essentially they were of one mind. Cochran flew to England to meet with Wingate and asked him what he needed, while Allison stayed behind to handle to obtain men and equipment. Wingate told Cochran of the secret plan to take back Burma and that he needed Cochran to be able to airlift out casualties from small cleared landing strips, air drop supplies and ammunition, provide air transport for heavier equipment and execute close air support missions for his light and mobile forces. Up to this point in the war, Wingate's LRPGs (Chindits) would ingress into Burma behind enemy lines with donkeys carrying their supplies and ammunition. It would take a month to move his force a couple of hundred miles inland through heavy jungle and by the time the men got to their objective area they were tired and short on supplies. Wingate's tactics included small raids on Japanese installations and forces and then his force would melt back into the jungle before the Japanese could react. At this point, Cochran said to Wingate, "How about if we flew your men, supplies and ammunition to their objective area in gliders in one hour instead of having them walk 30 days to get there?" Wingate looked at him incredulously.

After speaking with Wingate, Cochran flew back to the States and created his shopping list for General Arnold to build his new air group: Thirteen C-47s, twelve UC-64As, one hundred CG-4As, One hundred L-1s/L-5s, six YR-4Bs and thirty P-47s. Also, he needed all of this equipment delivered to India to form, stage and train his new Air Commando Group. On October 4, 1943 the War Department authorized the manning of the "Provisional Air Commando Force" consisting of 87 officers, 75 flight officers and 361 enlisted men.^{iv} [Note: Cochran received P-51As instead of P-47s and later seventy-five TG-5 training gliders and twelve B-25H medium bombers were added. This diverse group of aircraft in one unit was ahead of its time; think of the capability contained in a modern carrier strike group!] Later, in March 1944, the Group would officially be designated the 1st Air Commando Group (1st ACG).

Cochran and Alison worked hard recruiting high-caliber personnel to fill out key staff and section leaders in the group. The C-47 section was commanded by Major William T. Cherry, Jr. with Capt. Jacob P. Sartz his deputy. The C-47 section included Capt. Richard E. Cole who flew as Jimmy Doolittle's co-pilot during the Tokyo raid. Selected for command of the CG-4A Glider Section was Capt. William H. Taylor, Jr. a soft-spoken Mississippian who had conducted experimental jungle landings with CG-4A gliders in Panama.^v The new section commanders were then charged with recruiting high-caliber personnel for their sections. Two days after being selected himself, Glider Section Commander Capt. William H. Taylor traveled to Bowman Field, Louisville, Kentucky to recruit personnel.

Over the next couple of days he personally selected 75 glider pilots and 15 glider mechanics. One of the glider pilots Taylor recruited was F/O John L. Coogan aka Jackie Coogan film star and ex-husband of Betty Grable. Stops at Sheppard Field, TX and Maxton Field, NC netted an additional 10 glider mechanics for the section. One week after visiting Bowman Field, Taylor organized the volunteer glider pilots into four flights. Headquarters flight was placed in command of Capt.

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Vincent Rose, First Flight under Lt. Donald E. Seese, Second Flight under Lt. James Siever, and third Flight under F/O Thomas Martin.^{vi} All of these men were told to report to Seymour Johnson Field, Goldsboro, NC to begin training.

Upon arrival in NC, the glider pilots were issued paratroop uniforms and USMC jungle boots. Next all were put through a grueling 6-week long commando course that included hand-to-hand combat, 25-mile marches with full gear and training in all infantry weapons. With limited training time in the States before the group shipped out overseas to India, Taylor focused training on using the automatic tow device, the double tow and flying in the low tow position. Taylor believed the double tow was the most efficient use of the transport-glider combination; he also preferred to use a low-tow position for the gliders. Taylor's reasons for this included that it was much easier for the glider pilot to see the tug by looking up than by looking down, where the tow plane could be obscured by the ground. Also, the flames from the C-47's exhaust stacks helped give a relative position of the glider to the tug, easier to see at night looking up.

By early November 1943, the entire 1st ACG was enroute to Karachi, India. The unit's C-47s were the only group aircraft to fly to India, the rest were either deck loaded on escort carriers or shipped in crates. Upon arriving in India, the glider section was then sent to Barrakpore Field, north of Calcutta to uncrate and assemble their gliders. Captain Taylor attacked this task vigorously. The first test flight of a newly assembled CG-4A took place on December 1, 1943 and by December 18, all 30 of the first shipment of gliders was assembled. Taylor's men eventually assembled one hundred CG-4As and twenty-five TG-5s.

The next phase of training consisted of intensive night glider flying and full loaded landings. The tow planes would approach the landing zone at 200 feet at a speed of 110 mph. When the gliders received a signal light that they were 4,660 feet from the midpoint of a cross marked out with five smudge pots, the glider pilots would release then make a standard approach at 70 mph. Included in this phase was snatching by low flying C-47s in total darkness.

This dangerous training was nearly suicidal. The C-47s used the two white lights attached to the top of the two 24-foot tall poles holding the tow cable strung across and a series of red lights on the ground, the three rear red lights (behind the poles) upon the same horizontal plane, and the first red light (in front of the poles) in the same longitudinal plane with the middle red light in the horizontal plane.

At General Wingate's request, a CG-4A glider was rigged to carry three mules on a test flight and landing. To everyone's surprise the animals walked off the glider without any struggle—Wingate was now a believer in gliders.

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Air Commandos practice C-47 glider pickup in India

Photo Courtesy of U.S. National Archives



Poles with tow rope attached being set up for a night “snatch”

Photo Courtesy of NWWIIGPC

The American Air Commandos would see their first action in February 1944. American P-51 Mustangs and B-25 Mitchells flew daily missions attacking airfields, railroad yards, river traffic, bridges and storage areas in Burma. British columns had already entered Burma and were pressing the Japanese on the ground. Meanwhile, the transport and glider force continued extensive night training for a major operation that would kick off soon; night snatches were accomplished and night double tows were made.

Tragedy struck on the night of February 15, 1944 during one such double tow night training mission. First Lieutenant Kenneth L. Wells was piloting a CG-4A in the low tow position. With him was co-pilot F/O Bishop Parrott and crew chief Cpl. Robert D. Kinney and four Chindits. Something caused Wells' glider to slide into the glider of 1st Lt. Donald E. Seese. A loud “crunch” could be heard as the gliders tangled, then Wells' glider fell out of control. All were killed as the glider spun into the ground. Luckily 1st Lt. Seese with help from co-pilot F/O Troy C. Shaw was able to land the glider safely despite losing much of the trailing edge of the right wing.^{vii}

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The First Air Commando Force, commanded by Col. Philip J. Cochran. U.S. Army Air Forces. The Commandoes transported the troops to Maj. Gen. Orde Charles Wingate's British command to the field where the ground forces were able to begin operations against the enemy.

Troops commanded by Gen. Wingate were landed some 200 miles east of Imphal. The glider is on tow 8,000 ft. in the sky over the Chiba Hills, which form a natural barrier between Japanese and Allied territory.

The first combat glider mission into Burma was flown on February 28, 1944. Flight Officer John H. Price, Jr. and F/O John E. Gotham piloted a glider carrying a 16-man Chindit patrol. [Note: The author found many instances of gliders being overloaded while writing this article.]

The patrol's mission was to conduct a diversionary action near Minsin and to destroy a nearby radio station. The ground was rougher than it appeared from the air, upon landing the glider hit a trench, the landing gear broke off and a wing was heavily damaged.

Pilot Price was slightly injured as were the Chindits. The patrol completed its mission successfully and the two glider pilots with the injured Chindits were instructed to head back to Lalaghat.



John Price
Photo Courtesy of son Chris Price

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Soon enough, the ground forces of Wingate and the air forces of Cochran had their chance to prove their concept in combat. Operation THURSDAY began on March 5, 1944, when the first C-47 launched from India towing two overloaded gliders filled with Wingate's troops, equipment, and supplies.

In the lead pathfinder short tow glider was Major William A. Taylor; piloting the glider on his left (long tow) was Lieutenant Neal J. Blush. A total of 26 transports towing gliders comprised the first wave. The gliders, carrying from 500 to 700 pounds of excess weight, strained the C-47 tow planes and ropes and caused significant problems. With eight of the first wave of C-47s each losing a glider, Colonel Cochran decided to limit one glider to each remaining transport. This decision allowed the air commandos to successfully deliver Wingate's initial and succeeding forces to the jungle clearings over 200 miles behind Japanese lines in Burma. Additional C-47s from the 27th TCS and 315th TCS also supported this effort.

During the first day the strip, designated "Broadway," was improved so transport, glider, and liaison aircraft could land safely. They brought supplies, equipment and reinforcements, and evacuated the injured. A second strip, opened by glider assault, relieved congestion at Broadway. Airlift inserted almost 10,000 men, well over 1,000 mules, and approximately 250 tons of supplies. Casualties from the high-risk, untested concept, including missing, were less than 150, and for the first time in military history aircraft evacuated all killed, wounded, and sick from behind enemy lines.

The air commandos also protected the British ground forces by harassing the Japanese. This harassment, conducted by P-51s and B-25s equipped with a 75mm cannon in the nose and 12 .50 caliber machine guns, included bombing bridges, strafing and bombing parked aircraft, air-to-air combat, and destroying the communications, transportation, and military infrastructure. Although Cochran's and Allison's men were air commandos from the beginning, the 1st ACG was officially constituted on March 25 and activated on March 29, 1944. The 1st ACG continued to support British forces in Burma through April in an impressive manner.

Air commando gliders continued to play an important role in supporting British forces with supplies and equipment for building additional airstrips in Japanese-held Burma. Although glider losses had been high in the initial stages of Operation THURSDAY with landings in rough and unimproved clearings, casualties had been surprisingly light. Without gliders the invasion could not have succeeded. In contrast, the C-47s had a remarkable accident-free record. They flew almost 95% of their missions at night on instruments over hazardous terrain, utilizing short, rough landing strips deep behind enemy lines. Yet these pilots sustained no casualties and lost only one C-47. It struck a water buffalo during a night landing.

The air commandos of World War II pushed American airpower into a new dimension and

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established a number of firsts in our military history. The 1st Air Commando Group inactivated after World War II, on November 3, 1945, and was disestablished by the Air Force on October 8, 1948. However, these groups laid the foundation and paved the way future USAF Special Operations.



A jeep is loaded into a glider for
Operation THURSDAY
Photo Courtesy of USAF Archives



A double tow element headed for Burma in
Operation THURSDAY
Photo Courtesy of U.S. National Archives

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End Notes

i U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview with Colonel Phillip G. Cochran, #K239.0512-876, 20-21 October 1975

ii Ibid.

iii Ibid.

iv William T. Y'Blood, Air Commandos against Japan Allied Special Operations in World War II Burma, p. 33 citing AFHRA Reel No. 1674, frames 1262-1266.

v Gerard M. Devlin, Silent Wings The Story of Glider Pilots of World War II, p. 138.

Ibid.

vi William T. Y'Blood, Air Commandos against Japan Allied Special Operations in World War II Burma, p. 82 citing JICA Reel No. 1449, frame 2312.

vii Operation THURSDAY USAF Fact Sheet, published July 8, 2008



American Glider pilots on the LZ in Burma
Photo courtesy of U.S. National Archives

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8/20/1921-10/31/2018
64 TCG
Glider Pilot

Howard L. Meeker
Cincinnati, OH
5/11/1925-1/12/2018
64 TCG /18 TCS

George D. Mehling
Anderson, IN
10/25/1922-11/10/2019
440 TCG /95TSC
Power Pilot

Eugene M. Noble
Tulsa, OK
1/30/1922-1/30/2019
440 TCG/95 TCS Power Pilot

Hillary H. Osborn Jr
Bushnell, FL
11/13/1921-3/4/2019
61 TCG/53 TCS

Robert W. Hendricks
Sachse, TX
1918-8/23/2019
432 TCG/75TCS

Stephen Carl Miller, Jr
Los Angeles, CA
1/16/1921 - 8/3/2020
Glider Pilot & Flight Instructor

Margaret Whitfill
Louisville, KY
1935-1/12/2020
Wife of Michael E. Whitfill

Dorothy Prestwich
Waco, TX
12 28/1923-26/2016
Wife of Stanley Prestwich

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