

1 AAF LIAISON TRAINING DETACHMENT

MISSION

LINEAGE

1 AAF Liaison Training Detachment

STATIONS

Denton, TX

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

AT-6

AT-10

AT-17

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Harte Flying Service, Denton, TX

In 1939 the Civilian Aeronautics Authority and the North Texas State Teachers College, now the University of North Texas, began a pilot training program at "College Field" near Loop 288 and North Locust Street, admitting 19-to-26-year-old men in good physical condition after a year of college classes. The program shifted to military pilot training when World War II began.

In January 1942, the city used \$65,000 in bond money to purchase 217 acres from Western & Southern Life Insurance Co. They purchased 417 additional acres a few days later from C.P. Price.

George Harte and his wife, Beatrice Lee, relocated their St. Louis glider school to Denton under an Army-Air Force contract. After purchasing land near College Field, the Hartes expanded runways, built airplane hangars and combined their names to make Hartlee Field. Present-day Hartlee Field Road used to be the main road between Aubrey and Denton.

On Sept. 22, 1942, Hartlee Field opened as a World War II cadet flight training academy with two grass turf runways and a third landing strip. A year later, Harte's Flying Service was one of 11 centers contracted to train Army glider pilots, training more than 4,000 World War II pilots for the 17th Glider Training Detachment. Cadets lived in NTSTC's Chilton Hall.

After Germans used gliders to claim a decisive but costly victory in May 1941 in Fort Eben-Emael in Belgium, Americans declared glider development a wartime emergency. Because proven aircraft manufacturers considered gliders too risky, the Waco Aircraft Co. in Troy, Michigan, developed the only glider prototype.

Most of the 13,909 Waco gliders were built at the Michigan Ford Motor Co. The 3,900-pound CG-4A had a lightweight skeleton and a honeycomb plywood floor capable of carrying 4,100 pounds, typically a pilot, co-pilot and 13 infantry paratroopers, who were never issued parachutes, or a jeep and four passengers. After a Douglas C-47 tow plane got the engineless glider into the air, a skilled pilot could land it within a few hundred feet in the right conditions. Gliders were nicknamed flying coffins because so many crashed.

The 17th Airborne Glider detachment activated in April 1943. Its biggest role was in Operation Varsity over the Rhine river at Wesel, Germany, on March 24, 1945. Varsity was the largest single-day airborne operation, the first time that planes towed two gliders apiece, and the deadliest operation, with 1,100 deaths in one day.

As the glider pilot program phased out toward the end of World War II, Harte began training observer pilots. Gliders were a brief but pivotal part of military aviation history before they were eventually replaced with helicopters.

After WWII, Hartlee Field converted to a private airfield for flight instruction. George Voss helped license more than 2,500 pilots. Walker Jagoe retained his Hartlee Field hangar space.

Denton Municipal Airport opened at its present site west of Denton in 1947 with a concrete runway for private and commercial air traffic. The National Guard unit was stationed at Hartlee Field until about 1955, when the armory was built on Prairie Street and Interstate 35. College Field became the southern end of the 1960 Nike Missile Base.

Many flight instructors and students returned annually to Hartlee Field for reunions. Hartlee Field has always been the rural northeastern edge of Denton.

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 9 Dec 2013
Updated: 30 May 2022

Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.