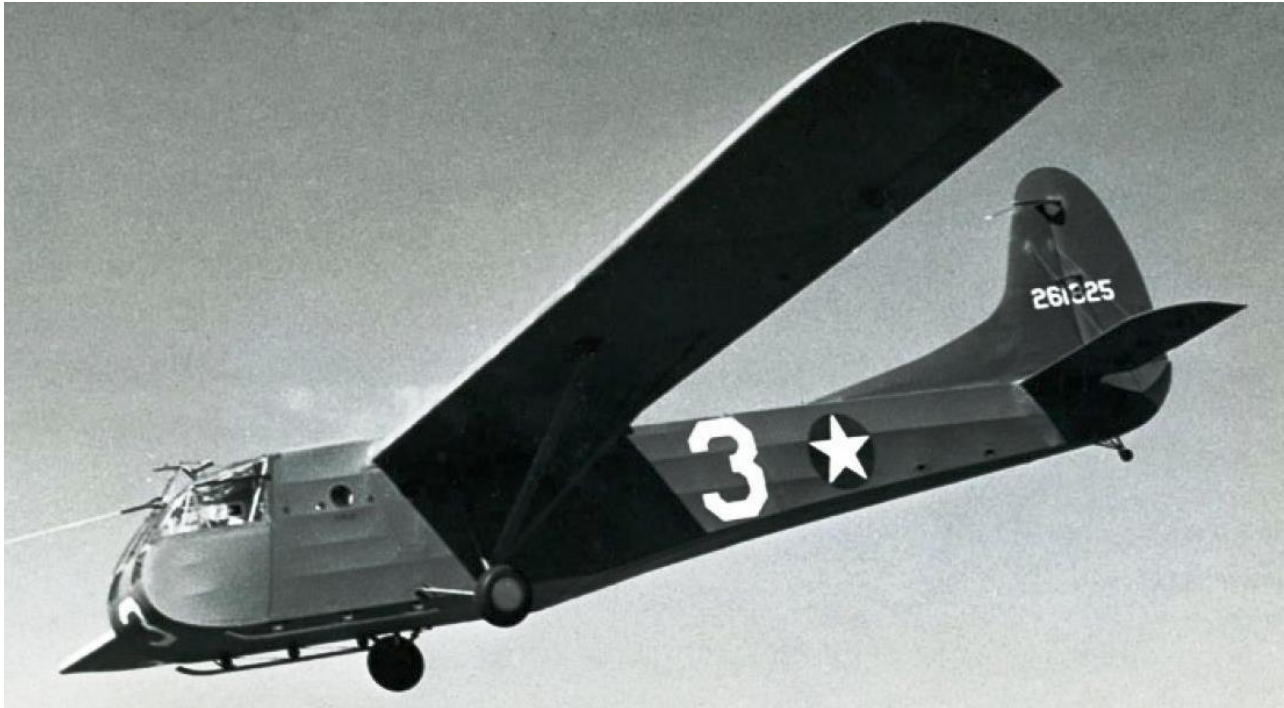


Requiem for a Glider Pilot



Waco CG-4A Glider descending

By Dave Trojan, dtrojan60@gmail.com My Remembrance Project,
<https://aircraftwrecks.com/pages/dave%20trojan%20mrp/mrp.htm>

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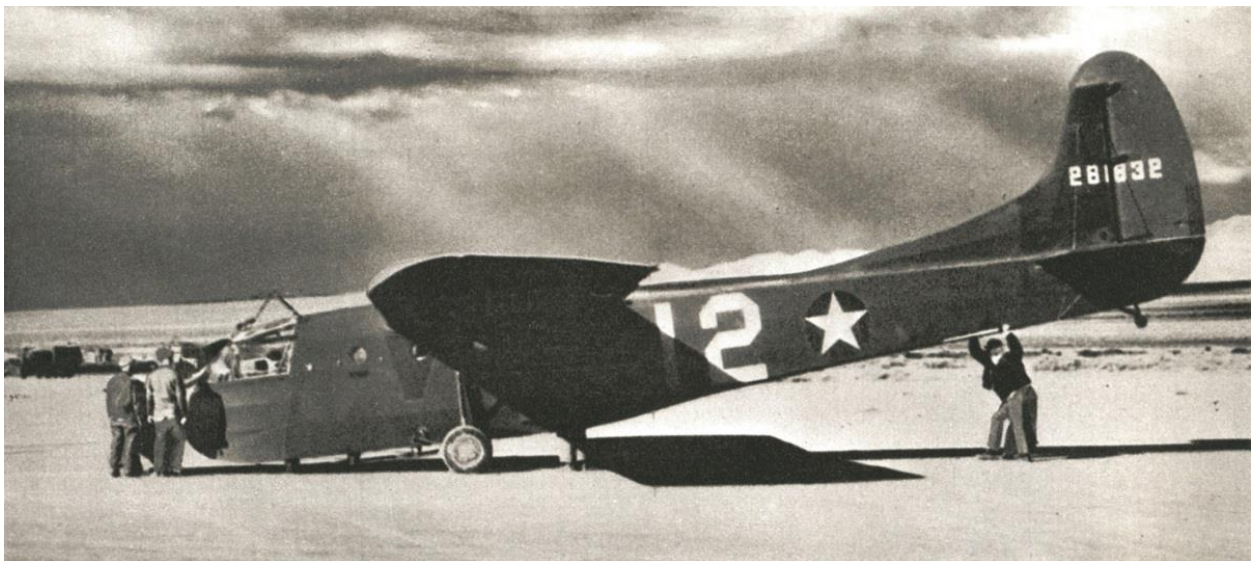
During World War II, remote airstrips in the Mojave Desert were transformed into busy training facilities for some of America's first Waco CG-4A glider pilots. The airstrips today are mostly abandoned and the men who trained there almost forgotten. Almost 75 years after the accident, a dedicated group set out to a remote part of the Mojave Desert to find a Waco CG-4A glider crash site in remembrance of one glider pilot who was killed during training.

Designed by the Waco Aircraft Company, the CG-4A glider was the most widely used troop/cargo glider of World War II. Constructed of fabric-covered wood and metal tubing, the CG-4A was crewed by a pilot and copilot. Weighing 2,400 pounds and having an 83-foot wingspan, the glider was ungainly, but robust. It could carry 13 troops and their equipment or a jeep, a quarter-ton truck or a 75mm howitzer loaded through the upward-hinged nose section. The boxy-looking gliders were designed to slip silently behind enemy lines and deliver a cargo of soldiers and equipment. With no power, armor, or any means to evade attackers, military gliders were often called "flying coffins." The unarmed gliders were only kept aloft by a 3/4-inch tow rope, the prevailing winds, and the guts of the two men piloting the craft.

The wide-open spaces of the Mojave Desert were considered ideal for glider training. Victorville Army Air Field (VAAF) in the Mojave Desert was used for training on the Waco CG-4A glider beginning in late 1942. At Victorville AAF, the Waco CG-4A glider pilots trained in the art of flying with an emphasis on towing techniques, precision landing proficiency and night flying. The gliders at Victorville AAF were pulled aloft by the Douglas C-47 Skytrain cargo aircraft.



A Douglas C-47 tows a CG-4A glider aloft to begin a training exercise at Victorville Army Air Field, on March 5, 1943, from the collection of Mark Landis



CG-4A glider on the runway at Victorville AAF from the collection of Mark Landis



Unloading a jeep from glider at Victorville AAF from the collection of Mark Landis

Nearby El Mirage Dry Lake, about 18 miles northwest of Victorville, was pressed into service as a landing strip to ease the overcrowded runways at Victorville. The dry lake was developed into Mirage Auxiliary Airfield and was built in a triangle shape with four paved runways on the dry lake bed. The dry lake was a wide flat area which was ideal for the training of Waco CG-4A glider pilots. Glider pilots received their basic training at Victorville and then went to the Mirage Dry Lake for advanced glider training and to practice landing techniques especially at night.



Waco CG-4A Glider undergoing training at Mirage Dry Lake, photo courtesy California Military Department

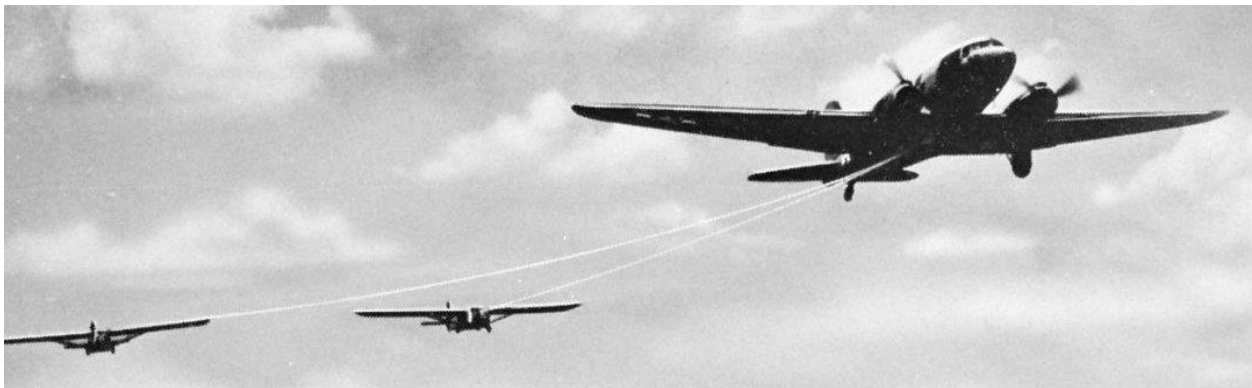
Victorville AAF graduated its first class of glider pilots in December 1942. All the graduates from the initial class were retained at VAAF as instructors for future classes because the glider program was so new. The graduated pilots received silver wings emblazoned with a "G" designation for glider pilots. As the extreme hazards of the glider program became apparent, the pilots frequently claimed that the "G" stood for "Guts."



Glider pilot wings

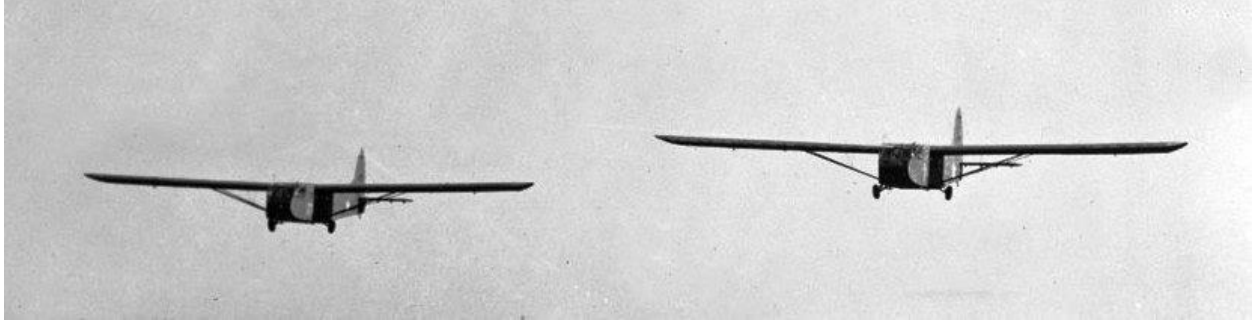
The training program at Victorville and Mirage airfields was not without risks and accidents. On January 31st 1943, An Army Air Force C-53 Skytrooper transport s/n 42-15537 out of Victorville AAF was towing Waco CG-4A glider s/n 42-46327 when the two aircraft hit sudden turbulence between Piru and Castaic California. The instability of the glider at the end of the tow cable ripped the tail section off the Douglas aircraft. Three aviators in the rear fuselage of the C-53 were hurled out into space. Although they managed to parachute to safety, they sustained major injuries. The three other crew members in the forward section of the C-53 went down with the plane and were killed. The two crew members inside the glider bailed out and sustained only minor injuries. More information about this accident can be found at this link:

<https://scvhistory.com/scvhistory/marylynnwinkler1943.htm>



Waco CG-4A gliders taking off, USAF photo

Less than two weeks later on February 12th 1943 CG-4A glider, s/n 42-78940, assigned to the 517 Basic Flight Training School at Victorville, crashed four miles north of Mirage Dry Lake California. The mission for that day was to take pictures of glider training. Four tow planes with gliders flew over Victorville AAF at 3,000 feet for pictures. Then four more tow planes with gliders took off on routine training flights and assembled in formation to fly over the field for more photographs. The second set of planes took up positions in echelon stepped up to the right. The gliders hooked to the number one and two tow planes in the echelon were noted as practically abreast. The air was reported as rough and the gliders had some difficulty maintaining position. The pilot of the number one glider, S/Sgt Englebrook, with a little over 13 hours of total flight training in the CG-4A, said that he had no visual contact with the gliders on his right side and that he could only see the tow ships.

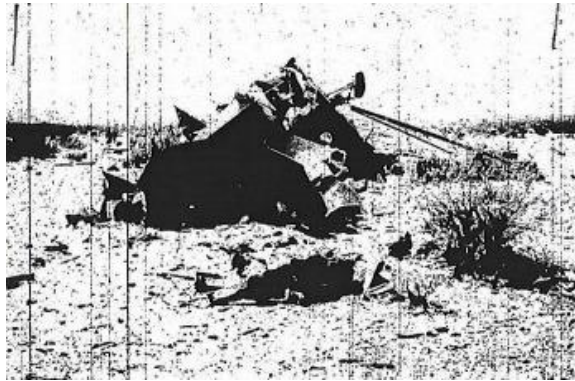
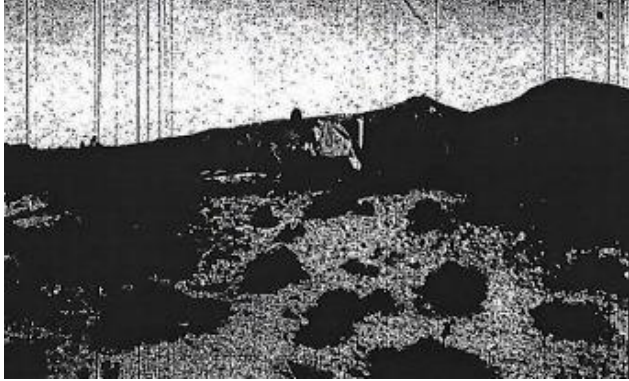


Waco CG-4A gliders in flight side by side, USAF photo

Suddenly the pilot of the number two glider on the right saw number one glider on the left slide towards him. He immediately pulled to the right, but the wings of the gliders collided, damaging the wing tip and aileron of the number one glider. Both gliders were immediately cut loose from their tow aircraft and attempted to land. The number two glider landed safely at the field, but the number one glider went completely out of control.

As the glider plummeted toward the earth, pilot S/Sgt Donald Englebrook and co-pilot S/Sgt Roy Eden fought their way back to the door with much difficulty. Just as pilot S/Sgt Donald Englebrook crawled to within reach of the door, the glider lurched forward and started spinning. At that same moment, S/Sgt Roy Eden lost his grip and slid towards the front of the glider. S/Sgt Donald Englebrook was able to grab hold of a bar, kick the door open with his foot and jump out. Unfortunately, S/Sgt Roy Eden never made it out of the glider before it crashed into the ground. After landing S/Sgt Donald Englebrook went over to the crumpled wreckage and found his co-pilot, S/Sgt Roy Kenneth Eden dead. He then waited at the crash site for rescue. According to the official accident report, supervisory personnel were given 80% responsibility for the accident. The pilots involved in the collision were each given 10% responsibility.

Almost 75 years later, a group of intrepid explorers, and myself, from Project Remembrance, set out in search of the CG-4A glider crash site near Mirage Dry Lake California. We were equipped with copies of the official accident report that contained original photographs of the crash site. The photos led the group to a remote area and a systemic search was conducted in the desert terrain. Finding anything after so long ago from an aircraft that was mostly constructed of wood was going to be very challenging. However, the original photos from the official accident report lined up with the terrain we were searching in.



Photos from the official accident report



Team members searching the desert for the CG-4A crash site.

After searching for a while, we first found a few pieces of aged wood which obviously looked out of place in the bleak desert. Next a few small scraps of metal and aircraft hardware were found confirming that we were most likely in the correct area. Several of the artifacts looked like they came from a glider. One piece looked like it came from the bezel of a flight instrument. Further searching turned up a small data plate. The inscription on the data plate could barely be read, but it was determined to be from the CG-4A glider.



Artifacts found at the CG-4A glider crash site.

We had found the crash site of CG-4A glider serial number 42-78940. It was amazing finding identifiable artifacts from the CG-4A glider from so long ago. All the artifacts were gathered into a small pile and left near one of the few bushes in the desolate terrain. Before leaving, a flag was placed at the crash site as a memorial. We had accomplished our mission of finding the location where S/Sgt Roy Kenneth Eden gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country. He was among the many unsung heroes of World War II who trained and flew on the Waco CG-4A glider. May he rest in peace.

Roy Kenneth Eden was born 14 May 1908 in Arkansas. He was 34 years old at the time of his death. He is buried in the Belmont Memorial Park, Fresno, CA, plot 3-424-6. Find a Grave Memorial ID 143300243,

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/143300243/roy-kenneth-eden>

I leave you with this, REQUIEM FOR AN AIRFIELD by Bill Berle written about Mirage Airfield

*Gone is the panic - the struggle in which it was born
gone are the machines and the men
And though it lives on in a peaceful time
it slowly fights a losing battle for life
Without a sound
Stand on the fading, dying runways - walk among the dead metal bones
and you become very sad
A thousand ghosts are making plans to fight
a war only remembered
The creaking wood of buildings has somehow remained
against the forces bent on erasing their existence
Their doors and rafters cry for help
to the trees and the ears of those who do not listen - the end is near
Yet this place has only yesterday breathed of life
of the sights and sounds that made it special
A new era brought new machines, but the same breed of souls
and ironically it once again did as it was born to do
making pilots out of men
It sparkled with the love and reverence it deserved
and they came here, to challenge the sky
and ride the razor edge of sanity
in machines that whispered back at the ghosts
But now again it lies dying
not of age and wind, but loneliness
The world incessantly gnaws at its border
and the souls who care cannot look without tears
But I have been here, to this magic place
before it is ended
I have felt the emotion of its spirit, and mine has become stronger
It has given me a gift, and let me learn
and it can therefore never die . . . but
if only El Mirage could talk.*