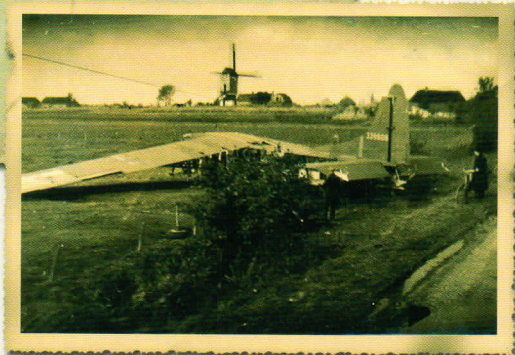


“You had to fly the glider at the right spot up over the airplane. Otherwise, the airplane had trouble,” Mr. Wilmer explained. “You could fly a glider from any angle. You could actually fly it right underneath the airplane if you wanted to, but you had to use too much force to keep yourself down there.”

*Holland - Sept 24, 1944
This boy had a wee bit of a
hard landing - but no one
was even scratched.*



A crippled glider rests in a field after a rough but successful landing. The inscription on back of the photo reads: "Holland - Sept. 24, 1944 - This boy had a wee bit of a hard landing - but no one was even scratched."

Military man

Mr. Wilmer began his military career in 1939 as an artilleryman. In 1941, he applied for enlisted flying school and started training three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was halfway through enlisted flying school in 1942 when the program was scraped, causing him to go to glider school where he received several phases of unique training.

“We had three schools that we went to and then we finally added a fourth school,” Mr. Wilmer explained. “The first school was what we called ‘Dead Stick.’ We’d take a little light aircraft up to about 5,000 feet and turn the switch off and start falling while windmilling.

“After a while, we got to the point where we’d set up a spot, and you’d have to hit that spot from all different angles. We had to do that at nighttime, too.”

The next school the trainees were sent to was one where they learned to fly small sailplanes, which hold two to three people. Once the pilots mastered these planes, they were then sent to heavy glider school.

“We’d get about 30 hours in Dead Stick and about 30 hours in the small glider school,” Mr. Wilmer explained. “We’d get about 15 hours at the heavy glider school.

“Then they added a tactical school in which we got

the nuts and bolts of flying over barricades and barriers. The hard things about flying I was taught in that school.”

After his training was complete, Mr. Wilmer was sent to Europe in 1945 where he flew as a second lieutenant in the 87th Squadron of the 438th TC Gp. He then returned to the U.S. and was reassigned to the 314th Squadron of the 349th TC Gp. At Bergstrom Field in Austin, Texas, Mr. Wilmer became the pharmacist for the base hospital and managed the baseball team. Mr. Wilmer flew his last glider on Armed Forces Day 1946 at an air show in Memphis, Tenn., and still considers himself to be enlisted.

“I’ve never received a formal discharge,” he said. “I’m still in the Reserves.”

Leading a cause

Since his days as a glider pilot, Mr. Wilmer has worked as a salesman for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Encyclopedia Britannica, Airkem and the Schering Drug Corp. He is currently married to Mary, his wife of 14 years whom he met in Tucson while attending a reunion for retired glider pilots. He has one son from a previous marriage and two grandchildren.

Nowadays at age 86, Mr. Wilmer is not only an enthusiastic and involved member of the National World War II Glider Pilots Association, he is a columnist for a monthly airborne newspaper, a curator of glider pilot film archives and a collector of WWII glider pilot memorabilia.

Mr. Wilmer is always eager to share his glider pilot experiences. He gladly accepts invitations to visit schools, veterans groups, and other associations in order to enlighten others about the history of glider pilots.

Through his hard work and dedication, he hopes others will see just how important and special glider pilots are to American history.

“The glider pilot of World War II was an uncut diamond for the Army air corps and for the most part never perceived,” he said. “(The Army) had a treasure in their uncommon men who could live at the brink or edge without falling apart.”

The unarmed, engineless, American Waco CG-4A transport glider (pictured at right) landed behind enemy lines and spearheaded all the major invasions of WWII.

