



Experience the Birthplace of Aviation!

A non-profit corporation in partnership with the National Park Service to promote Aviation Heritage in the Dayton region

Visit the historical sites that tell of man's conquest of the air.

"The Flight Log" -

AVIATION TRAIL MAIL

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Aviation Trail Visitor Center • Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center • Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

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Print Version

MARCH 2020 ISSUE

03/24/2020

This "Flight Log" highlights some of the stories and events featured on the Aviation Trail website: AviationTrailInc.org

Site Closures in March

Status of Aviation Trail sites regarding visitors during the COVID-19 precautions:

As indicated in the "Flight Log" issue emailed on March 17, there are many facility closings due to the COVID-19 virus threat. Since the date of that mailing, more closings have been announced. A list of sites on the Aviation Trail is posted on the the "Aviation Blog" page of the Aviation Trail website, <https://www.aviationtrailinc.org/post/covid-19-closure-updates>, where it will be updated as changes are made.

Since things can change on a **day-to-day basis**, it is recommended that visitors contact the individual sites directly before making plans to visit. The website and phone information for each site is available on the Aviation Trail website "Trail Sites" page, <https://www.aviationtrailinc.org/copy-of-trail-sites>, and on the Aviation Trail brochure, which can be downloaded from that page.

This list is current as of March 23. Status is subject to change on a day-to-day basis. Before traveling to a site on the Aviation Trail, please verify that site's status by contacting that site (see above). For sites that are open, refer to their individual websites for days and hours.



March in Aviation History

March 19, 1910

The Wright Brothers opened the first Wright Flying School in Montgomery, Alabama.

At a time when, just seven years after their successful flight at Kittyhawk, North Carolina, competition from other airplane manufacturers was challenging the Wright's share of the aviation market. Their solution was to promote their business with traveling flying exhibitions that they hoped to begin in June of 2010. They needed trained pilots for this - pilots who could teach customers how to fly. In order to be able to fly in the early spring, they would need better flying conditions than the weather in their Dayton home would offer. In February of 1910 Wilbur had traveled to the South searching for a

(...Wright Flying School - continued from previous column)

suitable spring training location. After visiting sites in Florida, and Georgia, he ended up in Montgomery Alabama, where they were offered free use of some land, a barn for a hangar, and transportation to and from the field, which was on flat terrain in a mild climate.

This became the site of their first flight school in this country (they had previously given some flight lessons in Europe), and the first U.S. civilian flying school. Students were taught the principles of flying, including take-offs, balancing, turns, and landings. The school was intended to run through the end of May, but after mechanical problems and weather issues, the Wright's returned to Ohio with two of their five students. Their first student, Walter Brookins, who was the first graduate of the school and a childhood friend of the Wrights, stayed on with two others to take over training and run the school until May 27. Brookins also made the first heavier-than-air night flights during this time. The Army's air service later took over the site in World War I and in 1922 it became "Maxwell Field," named in honor of Lt. William C. Maxwell, an Alabamian killed in an aircraft accident in the Philippines. It is now known as Maxwell Air Force Base.



Sign at Maxwell AFB

With the onset of milder weather in May, the Wright Flying School relocated to Huffman Prairie Flying Field near Dayton, where the Wrights had developed practical aviation in 1904 and 1905 and where their company tested its airplanes. Among the many aviation notables trained at the Wright Flying School, was a trainee at Huffman Prairie, 1st Lt. Henry "Hap" Arnold, an aviation pioneer who later became commander of the 8th Air Force in World War II and General of the Army and General of the Air Force. Besides the Dayton and the Alabama schools, the Wrights also had schools in Augusta, Georgia, and Long Island, NY. The Wright Flying School was operated by the Wright Company from 1910 to 1916 and trained 119 individuals to fly Wright airplanes.

For much more on this story, plus more photos, see these links:

<http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1364>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wright_Flying_School

<https://www.al.com/life/2019/09/wright-brothers-operated-nations-first-flight-school-in-alabama.html>



(Wright Flying School - continued in next column...)

This Month in Parachute History

Operation Varsity, March 24, 1945

Seventy Five years ago, on March 24, 1945, the First Allied Airborne Army's assault, code named "Operation Varsity", was launched on the east bank of the Rhine in northern Germany. By March 1945, the Allied armies had advanced into Germany and had reached the Rhine, a formidable natural obstacle to the Allied advance. Breaching this obstacle would allow the Allies to advance into northern Germany and on to Berlin. Operation Varsity was held in support of "Operation Plunder", the amphibious assault by the 21st Army Group that crossed the river on March 23.



Operation Varsity consisted of dropping two divisions from U.S. XVIII Airborne Corps (the British 6th Airborne Division and the U.S. 17th Airborne Division) to capture key territory and to generally disrupt German defenses to aid the advance of Allied ground forces.

The airlift consisted of 541 transport aircraft containing airborne troops, and a further 1,050 troop-carriers towing 1,350 troop filled gliders (about 900 of which were WACO CG-4A gliders*). In the early hours of March 24, the planes took off from airbases in England and France and began to rendezvous over Brussels, before turning northeast for the Rhine



17TH Airborne Patch

dropping zones. The mass of aircraft stretched more than 200 miles in the air and was protected by over 200 fighters from the U.S. Ninth Air Force and the Royal Air Force. At 10 am the troops began landing in the drop zones, just thirteen hours after the Allied ground assault began. The combination of the two divisions in one lift made this the largest single day airborne drop in history.

(... Operation Varsity continued from previous column)

By the end of the day the first bridge was built across the Rhine, and within days there were twelve bridges suitable for heavy armor, and the Allies were advancing further into Germany. The speed with which the two airborne divisions landed their troops had a significant effect on the successful outcome of the operation. The casualties for the airborne units were quite heavy, although lighter than had been expected. By nightfall of 24 March, the two divisions had suffered around 2700 killed or wounded out of 16,870 personnel who took part in the operation. About 3,500 German POW's were taken. Aircraft losses were also high, especially with the gliders. But by diverting German attention away from Operation



Paratroopers board a C-46 Commando transport during Operation Varsity.

Plunder, Operation Varsity had helped protect the troops creating a

bridgehead across the Rhine, and facilitated the breach of the Rhine, and speeding up the Allied advancement.



C-47s and WACO CG-4A gliders before take-off

For more extensive reading, check these interesting links:

<https://armyhistory.org/operation-varsity-the-last-airborne-deployment-of-world-war-ii/>

<https://www.airforcemag.com/article/valor-operation-varsity/>

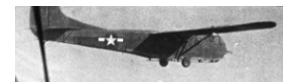
<https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/10-important-facts-about-operation-varsity.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Varsity

*<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2019/01/21/the-birdmen-of-varsity/>

*The last link shown is a fascinating look at the glider pilots in an article written by Christopher Warner, whose great uncle was a glider pilot in Operation Varsity, flying a WACO CG4A.

(He mistakenly refers to WACO as being in Troy, Indiana, instead of Ohio, but it is still a great article. Historic WACO Field and Airplane Museum is Site #11 on the Aviation Trail: www.wacoairmuseum.org)



CG-4A Waco glider



Parachutes in the News
PRESENTED BY THE AVIATION TRAIL PARACHUTE MUSEUM





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_____ \$30 Individual

_____ \$150 Supporting

_____ Other- I am a life member and would like to make an additional contribution

_____ \$40 Family

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(*May be paid in three annual payments of \$500 per year, mail in only)

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Please apply my donation to:

Membership Fund

Preservation Fund*

Wilbear Fund**

* Donations will be designated to promote and preserve historical aviation sites in the Dayton Region.

** Donations will be designated to promote and preserve the "Wilbear Wright" teddy bear program that promotes the Aviation Trail and its partner sites.

Check enclosed. Make payable to: Aviation Trail, Inc.

Mail to Aviation Trail, Inc. / PO Box 633 / Wright Brothers Station / Dayton, OH 45409

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Online credit card payments may be made from our website at www.aviationtrailinc.org.

Select the "Memberships -Donations-Reservations button from the top menu. Secure payments are made through PayPal.

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