

Additional Information

about Gordon K. Wahl's training and service.

- Flight Instruction Chronology & Training Planes
- Life Saving Accident
- Training Command/ Fourth Air Force
- Air Fields (where Wahl trained)

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• Flight Instruction Chronology & Training Planes

The photographs contained in this history are in chronological order and coincide with the order in which a pilot was trained. The road to becoming a pilot involved several phases:

- **Preflight:** Where physical tests, written tests, etc. were administered
- **Primary:** Where one learned to fly small, single-engine planes like the (Primary Trainer) PT-19.
- **Basic:** Where one learned to fly at night, on instruments and in formation.
- **Advanced:** Where one learned to fly the twin engine (Advanced Trainer) AT-17, more instrument flying, and night cross country.

It should be noted that over 50% of those interested in becoming pilots "washed out" at the **preflight** level and were generally sent to the infantry at that point. Each level had perimeters to be met within a given amount of time and the possibility of "washing out" was constant.

If one washed out at the Primary level, or above, the option of becoming a pilot was eliminated but, going to navigation, bombardier, or gunnery school were still possibilities.

Wahl did his **Primary** training at Rankin Field, Tulare California; **Basic** at Minter Field near Bakersfield, CA; and **Advanced** at Marfa Army Air Field Advanced Flying School in Texas.

The principle training aircraft was the Consolidated Volte Valiant, affectionately known as the "Volte Vibrator;" the Cessna UC-78 Bobcat, also known as the "Bamboo Bomber;" and the advanced trainer twin-engine Cessna. Other aircraft one might have seen on the field during WWII include the AT-6 Texan trainer, B-25 Mitchell twin-engine bomber, and the P-38 Lightning.

• Life Saving Accident

Three weeks before Wahl was to have graduated from advanced air school, he and another airman, crashed the Cessna UC-78 they were flying in the Texas desert. The plane hit the ground at 140 mph (neither was able to eject) Gordon suffered three broken vertebrae and shoulder - among other injuries. The residual affects restricted his service to state side duty for the remainder of the war. The incident turned out to be rather serendipitous, however. He was to have been dispatched with a group of men who flew B24s over the Ploesti oil fields in Romania. The Ploesti oil refinery raids were famous for the number of airmen who did not return. Wahl says ninety percent of those planes were "knocked out of the air." The black chunk of metal on the right side (in photo 4a) is an engine.

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Cessna UC-78B Bobcat

Type of plane Wahl crashed into the ground at 140 mph.

Dubbed the "Bamboo Bomber" by the pilots who flew them, the UC-78 was a military version of the commercial Cessna T-50 light transport. Cessna first produced the wood and tubular steel, fabric-covered T-50 in 1939 for the civilian market. In 1940 the U.S. Army Air Corps ordered them under the designation AT-8 as multiengine advanced trainers. In 1942 the U.S. Army Air Forces adopted the Bobcat as a light personnel transport and designated those delivered after Jan. 1, 1943, as UC-78s. By the end of **World War II**, Cessna produced more than 4,600 Bobcats for the USAF.

BASIC INFORMATION FROM WAHL'S November 15, 1943
ACCIDENT REPORT (See photos 4a & 4b to view accident aftermath -
what was left of the plane Wahl flew into the ground.)

INQUIRY NUMBER: 15-431115-21
DATE: November 15, 1943
AIRCRAFT: UC-78B
SERIAL NUMBER: 42-71793
CREW MEMBER: Gordon K Wahl
LOCATION: 4 miles W of Marfa, TX
REMARKS: Flew into ground
TOTAL PAGES OF REPORT: 8

Record of accident is listed as
existing on films kept by the following:

Accident Reports
1322 West Main Street
Millville, NJ 08332 USA
EMAIL: mike@accident-report.com

• Training Command/ Fourth Air Force

After Wahl recovered from his injuries, he was assigned to the Fourth Air Force as an instructor for the training of pilots. The Fourth covered the Southwest Air District (CA, NV, AZ, NM, OK, TX). It was formed in the U.S. during WWII to provide air defense and combat training for personnel of newly formed units ie. Continental Air Forces, Air Defense Command, and Continental Air Command.

WWII Air Districts

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1st Air Force - Northeast Air District, **2nd Air Force** - Northwest Air District,
3rd Air Force - Southeast Air District, **4th Air Force** - Southwest Air District

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Formed in the United States during World War II to provide air defense and combat training for the personnel of newly formed units, the Fourth Air Force was assigned, in turn, to Continental Air Forces, Air Defense Command, and

Continental Air Command before inactivating in 1960. The Fourth Air Force served in the air defense program, 1966-1969 and became part of the Reserve program in 1976.

Lineage

Established as Southwest Air District on October 19, 1940. Activated on December 18, 1940 at March Field, California, initially assigned to General Headquarters Air Force, then to Western Defense Command, O.S. Army. Moved to Riverside, California, in January 1941. Redesignated 4th Air Force on April 9, 1941. Moved to Hamilton Field, California, on December 7, 1941, and to San Francisco, California, in January 1942. Redesignated Fourth Air Force on September 18, 1942. Assigned to Army Air Forces on September 16, 1943, to Continental Air Forces on April 16, 1945, and to Air Defense Command on March 21, 1946. Moved to Hamilton Field (later, AFB), California, in June 1946. Assigned to Continental Air Command on December 1, 1948. Discontinued, and inactivated, on September 1, 1960. Activated on January 20, 1966, and assigned to Air (later, Aerospace) Defense Command. Organized on April 1, 1966 at Hamilton AFB, California. Inactivated on September 30, 1969. Redesignated Fourth Air Force (Reserve) on September 24, 1976. Activated on October 8, 1976, at McClellan AFB, California, and assigned to Air Force Reserve (later, Air Force Reserve Command). Redesignated Fourth Air Force on December 1, 1985. Moved to March ARB, California, effective April 1, 1998.

- Air Fields (where Wahl trained)

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Rankin Field, Tulare California

Tex Rankin was president of the Hollywood Motion Picture Pilots Association in 1940 when he signed a War Department contract to open a school to train O.S. Army pilots. First flights began the following February at Mefford Field, on the outskirts of Tulare, CA.

Construction work on Rankin Field, 6 miles east, began the same month &

finished in late spring. To build the school the residents of the city of Tulare raised \$300,000 to help defray the costs of procuring the land & initial construction of the buildings.

The Rankin Aeronautical Academy accepted its first class of cadets in 1941. Rankin Field became one of the 62 civilian owned flying schools in the US, which collectively taught 1.4 million WW2 Army pilots to fly.

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Minter Field

near Bakersfield, California

Although officially dedicated on Saturday, February 7, 1942, operations on Minter Field actually began in June of 1941 as a small guard unit. By early August 1941, multiple units began moving onto the field and construction of wooden buildings to house them accelerated.

By October 1941, the field, named in honor of local resident W.W.II veteran First Lieutenant Hugh C. Minter, had been established as a branch of the Sacramento Air Depot.

By July of 1942, Minter Field had become the largest training base of its type on the West Coast, with nine additional auxiliary landing fields in the valley. During the course of the War, more than 11,000 Army Air Corps Cadets graduated from Minter Field, deploying around the world to fly in all theaters of operations.

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Marfa Army Air Field, Marfa Texas

Marfa Army Air Field began in 1942, when the War Department selected the Marfa area as a site for training United States Army Air Corps pilots. The advanced training site provided an intermediate step from single-engine to multiengine planes (in the Cessna AT17).

The first cadets arrived on December 5, 1942, and entered flight training two days later. Members of this class completed their courses by February 12, 1943, and received their silver wings. A class completed training each month until the final graduation in May 1945.

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Barracks Types. Theater of Operations, Marfa Army Air Field, Tex.

The airfield at Marfa consisted of a total of six asphalt runways (up to 7,500' long), with an extensive network of taxi ways & ramps. Adjacent to the airfield to the north was an extensive street grid, with a large number of buildings (eventually totaling nearly 250 buildings), including a hospital, barracks, chapel, theater, mess halls, control tower, and hangars. The initial construction at Marfa cost a total of over \$6 million.