

Taken from the History of the 38th Troop Carrier Squadron

14 February 1942 to 14 April 1944

Air Force Historical Research Agency A0974

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Research on Glider Pilot Michael Murphy

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The "Arnold Maneuver"

The climax of the experimental period came when the demonstration, later known as the "Arnold Maneuver," was held on 4 and 5 August 1943. An article in the Laurinburg-Maxton AAB newspaper, The Slipstream of 11 August 1943, gives an account of the demonstration and the effect it had on observers:

"Invasions" and operations in which the gliders took part during the two-day demonstration would seem impossible to the layman who did not witness them.

The motorless craft poured hundreds of troops, pieces of artillery, jeeps, machine guns and engineering equipment silently out of the skies into "hostile" territory. Trees, gullies, bushes and rough farmland offered little or no hindrance. A wing tip or so was brushed off here and there -- but the attacking troops tumbled out safe, grim-faced and firing at "enemy" installations in surrounding woodland.

39. Interview No. 17, Capt Flood.

In the first public demonstration of a new Allied aerial weapon -- surprise night attack by airborne troops -- six big troop-carrying gliders swooped silently out of a black sky last Wednesday night to a perfect landing.

Released by their tow planes eight miles from the attack area, the big fabric-and-plywood carriers whispered through the Carolina night to land in close formation without even so much as a scratched wing tip.

Trained military observers expressed amazement at the eerie precision of the maneuver. As each ship hit the ground, its complement of 15 fully-equipped infantrymen slid out and silently headed for pre-arranged stations in the surrounding wooded area.

It was almost impossible to see the gliders in the air, even at less than 300 feet, despite a brilliant background of stars. When everything was absolutely quiet, a soft purr could be heard as the air rushed through the glider rigging.

After their long glide, the craft had only the dim glimmer of a handkerchief-shrouded flashlight to indicate where the landing should be made. In actual warfare, it was explained, this assistance could be given by paratroopers preceding the glider attack, or even by our fifth columnists in enemy lands.

Only a light rumbling noise -- as if someone were pushing a wheelbarrow across rough ground -- announced each night landing. Once or twice the armed troopers were among the observers before their landed glider was spotted.

A stunt staged Tuesday night for the benefit of General Arnold was repeated on the succeeding night to cap the demonstration. The base band -- 11 members of it -- went up in the glider that was to be the last to land.

At 5,000 feet over the field, the band struck up "Coming In On a Wing and a Prayer" and, as the glider slowly spiraled down, followed that with "The Army Air Corps" and "Blue Skies."

The glider remained invisible, and the observers -- who weren't let in on the stunt beforehand -- had their mouths open in awe. The music seemed to come from the stars. "Sounds like a parade up there -- of angels," one trooper remarked.

Just as the glider was about to land among scattered timber which could have ripped it to pieces, the band concluded its aerial concert with "What the Hell do We Care."

Ranking officers emphasized the value of the surprise element involved in the night glider attack, and paid tribute to the ability of the glider pilots.

"The thing that particularly impresses me," said General Arnold, "is that these young pilots can do this sort of thing just as well as the older, more experienced fliers."

One pilot, who modestly withheld his name, said it wasn't such a hard job. "You just sort of come in on your imagination," he explained.

During the first day of the program, the 38th Troop Carrier Squadron landed 22 fully-loaded gliders on "Maxbase," hypothetical enemy headquarters, and within five minutes the wooded, rough terrain was surrounded by infantry, artillery and equipment carrying jeeps which the gliders belched out almost at the instant they landed on pre-designated spots.

Nor was water an insurmountable hazard for the glider troops. The ability of the CG-4A standard 15-place glider to be set down in emergency in a lake, river or even on the ocean was demonstrated when the squadron, commanded by Maj. Mike Murphy, world champion stunt flier before the war, landed an infantry group in Lee's Mill pond, near the base.

This demonstration was made more realistic when the glider landed roughly and sank quickly to its wings. But the troops, their carbines slung over their shoulders and "Mac West" life jackets on their backs, emerged as an effective fighting team after swimming ashore.

That, it was pointed out, is the mission of the glider -- to land its human cargo or equipment in enemy territory in good fighting condition with only secondary concern for the beating taken by the glider.

"Seven days from now," Major Murphy asserted in discussing night landings, "we could put 600 gliders down in a field with possibly 70 per cent injury to aircraft and 5 per cent injury to personnel. We're not planning safe and smooth landings. We're getting the men in."

Just about everything was airborne here during the two-day demonstration. Upon arrival of many by plane from Washington, D.C., they found luncheon waiting. It had preceded them to the field in a glider named the "Gourmet," personally brought in from a nearby mess hall by Capt. Leigh Hunt, base mess officer, who with his men arrived in full battle dress. The lunch they delivered was a field lunch, brought in as it would be in an airborne invasion.

Participating in the demonstration, in addition to Major Murphy's squadron, with its gliders and glider pilots and its C-47 and C-53 cargo and troop carrying planes which tow the gliders, were airborne troops from Camp Mackall, N.C.

Before returning to his Washington headquarters, General Arnold summarized the entire program with: "Gentlemen, this demonstration speaks for itself."⁴⁰

The "Arnold Maneuver" was largely responsible for developing renewed interest in the use of the glider for tactical operations. Many high-ranking officers of the Army Air Forces and the Army Ground Forces who attended the "Arnold Maneuver" had been skeptical about the value of the glider for tactical purposes. There is no doubt that the effectiveness and efficiency which were developed during the experimental period and demonstrated on 4 and 5 August 1943 turned the tide in favor of an expanded program of advanced training in the tactical use of the glider.⁴¹

Tribute to a Leader

The success of the experimental work and the "Arnold Maneuver" is a tribute to the ability and enthusiasm of Major Murphy as a pilot, teacher, and leader. His unquestioned skill as a pilot of all types of aircraft and his highly persuasive personality were combined with unlimited energy.⁴² The high degree of interest and enthusiasm which he developed among the glider pilots who worked with him during the experimental period was certainly the animating force which brought Troop Carrier glider training to a high point of effectiveness and proficiency.⁴³