

# Stuttgart Army Airfield: A Photo Essay

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Stuttgart was approved in May 1942 by the War Department for an Army Air Forces training facility, to encompass 2,682 acres seven miles north of town.<sup>1</sup> Officials decided on Stuttgart after realizing the prairie environment was perfect for air field operations. There was little clearing to be done, plus the hardpan soil provided a firm foundation for runways. Army contractors plowed the rice fields under and laid four 5,000-foot concrete runways in short order. Also built were two chapels, an officers' club, NCO club, two consolidated messes, a post exchange, recreation building, post theatre, and several hangars. Auxiliary fields were built at Almyra, Carlisle, Hazen Roe, and Stuttgart. A rail spur was built to the base from the Rock Island Railroad. Work had begun in June and the base was activated August 15, 1942 with facilities for 6,000 personnel. Commanding officer Col. Edgar R. Todd began an advanced twin-engine flying school on that date, but by October 1 found himself heading the first advanced glider training school in the US.<sup>2</sup>

Basic glider training had begun in Columbus, Ohio, and Mobile, Alabama, but it was determined that the program should be moved to a location with more conducive weather. Stuttgart was chosen for its nearly year-round flying conditions and the obstruction-free prairie land. For several months the airfield would be home to pioneering work in a new phase of modern warfare, using the Waco CG-4A Hadrian glider for flight training. The large gliders soaring silently overhead became a familiar sight all over the Grand Prairie. Glider students were divided into two classes based on previous flying experience. The Hadrians carried thirteen troops or an equivalent weight in vehicles. Advanced glider training at Stuttgart Army Air Field was discontinued in May 1943. The last graduates were transferred to Lubbock, Texas. The Army Air Forces cited the success of the program's progress, from elementary and basic levels to advanced levels, as the reason for closing glider classes at Stuttgart as well as those held at Little Rock's Adams Field.<sup>3</sup> However, it was known that the region's high humidity created problems with the adhesive glue used in the gliders' construction, causing many to crash in area rice fields.

The prime location of Stuttgart's field was still valuable to the Army Air Forces, so it was retained and reverted back to its use as an advanced twin-engine school. The Cessna AT-17 Bobcat and Beech AT-10 Wichita were used in this phase of training at Stuttgart. German and Italian prisoners of war were housed at the base, and assisted area farmers with harvest.<sup>4</sup> Twin-engine flight training ended January 31, 1945. The Third Air Force assumed administration of the field on Feb. 1, 1945 for Air-Ground Coordination Training. Stuttgart Army Air Field closed August 5, 1946. The War Assets Administration transferred the land to the City of Stuttgart in

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<sup>1</sup> "Stuttgart Awarded Airport Training Field," *Stuttgart Daily Leader and Arkansawyer*, May 12, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> From a booklet published by the Public Relations Office, Stuttgart Army Air Field, March 16, 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Morris, "Stuttgart Remembers WWII," *Stuttgart Daily Leader*, Nov. 9, 2012

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January 1949, for use as a municipal airport, with the government reserving the right to repossess the property in case of a national emergency. Some 100 housing units were given to Stuttgart for use as rental properties for ex-service personnel. Many of these are still standing in the city. Today Stuttgart Municipal Airport is one of the busiest airports in Arkansas.



Piper Cubs and Waco Hadrian gliders are prominent in this snowy 1942 scene of a review of enlisted men. Below—A base housing area is depicted. Many such structures would be moved into Stuttgart following the war.



## GRAND PRAIRIE HISTORICAL BULLETIN



Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold (third from left) visits Stuttgart Army Airfield, December 1942.  
Below—Airbase personnel queue up for a movie on a snowy December 1942 day.



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Commanding officer's quarters at Stuttgart Army Airfield. Below—View from the weather observation checkpoint, looking northwest. Twin-engine Cessna AT-17 Bobcat trainers are visible on the ramp.





Airbase chapel. Below—Control tower. *Photos courtesy Air Force Heritage Research Agency.*





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Stuttgart Army Airfield, April 1943, from a wartime Army Air Forces directory. Below—this aerial view of Almyra Airport clearly shows the original runway patterns from the SAAF auxiliary airfield. *Courtesy of Glenn Mosenthin.*



The author thanks the Air Force Heritage Research Agency for the rare 1942 photos of SAAF.