

The Aviation Tradition at Texas Tech

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A Texas Tech student and aviation enthusiast behind the Administration Building

Texas Tech University was founded during the infancy of aviation, and the two grew to maturity simultaneously. In the 1920s, while educators busily built a campus and established a curriculum for the fledgling university, the skies overhead echoed the drone of an increasing number of propeller planes as barnstormers and early commercial pilots introduced aviation to West Texas. Tech officials quickly recognized the growing importance of aviation, and the university rarely lost an opportunity to embrace the new technology.

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh publicly demonstrated aviation's remarkable advances when he accomplished the first solo Trans-Atlantic flight. In that year, Texas Tech's Board of Regents began to discuss the need for an aeronautics curriculum. Interest in aviation remained high on campus.

In 1933, Amelia Earhart lectured in Lubbock at the invitation of the university. However, little actual progress was made toward developing an aviation curriculum until 1939, when the mechanical engineering department offered a course in Vocational Flight Training. Soon afterward, the university became one of the first 13 in the nation to initiate the Civilian Pilot Training Program under the auspices of the Civil Aeronautics Administration. More than 5,000 students enrolled in the program. Renowned local aviator Clent Breedlove oversaw the training. His enthusiasm for flying, as well as his experience as a barnstormer, military aviator under Gen. Billy Mitchell, Lubbock Muni-

Clent Breedlove and Doyle Jackson.

cipal Airport manager and promoter, and his close friendship with Texas Tech, made him the ideal instructor.

The demand for pilots, navigators and bombardiers during World War II created a sense of urgency that culminated in the establishment of the 309th College Training Detachment at Texas Tech in 1943. Tech President Clifford Jones, who strongly espoused the university's role as a facility for military training, joined other Lubbock area dignitaries in helping Air Corps Gen. C. Brant locate a site for Lubbock Army Air Field. While construction rapidly progressed on the new military base, another facility, the South Plains Army Air Field, was created for the purpose of glider training.

Meanwhile, Texas Tech continued to provide much of the aviation manpower for the war effort. Fiske Hanley was one of many trainees who saw combat action. In 1944, he left campus for basic training as an Air Force Aviation Cadet only 12 hours after graduating from the mechanical engineering department's aeronautical engineering program. In early 1945, he was serving as a flight engineer on a seventh bombing raid over Japan when his B-29 was shot down. Hanley was captured and spent the remain-

der of the war on half POW rations as an accused war criminal slated for execution. After liberation he returned to Texas and pursued a long career designing Cold War-era military aircraft.

Aviation enthusiasm in West Texas continued unabated after the war and entered the realm of space flight in the 1960s. In November 1969, Alan Bean, from the panhandle town of Wheeler, stood on the moon as a member of the second lunar expedition, following the original moon landing by only four months. By the 1980s, interest in space exploration focused on the Space Shuttle program. Again, Red Raiders joined other West Texans in making a major impact.

Bernard Harris, M.D., graduated with a doctorate in medicine from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in 1982. After completing a residency at the Mayo Clinic in 1985 and a National Research Council Fellowship at NASA's Ames Research Center in 1987, he joined Johnson Space Center as a clinical scientist and flight surgeon before becoming an astronaut in July 1991. As mission specialist aboard the shuttle Columbia in April-May 1993 and payload commander aboard the shuttle Discovery in February 1995, he logged more than 438 hours in space, became the first African-American to walk in space and a member of the first American crew to dock with the Russian Space Station, Mir. He served on the Texas Tech Board of Regents at the time.

Others have continued the tradition. Upon receiving a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering and completing the Air Force ROTC program at Tech in 1980, Rick D. Husband pursued a distinguished career as an air force pilot, test pilot and instructor before reporting to Johnson Space Center for astronaut training in 1995. Four years later, he piloted the shuttle Discovery on the first mission to dock with the International Space Station. He joined Lubbock Coronado High School graduate William McCool and five others on the shuttle Columbia's final mission, which met its tragic end Feb. 1, 2003. As grievous as was the loss, it could not overshadow the outstanding contributions of the Columbia crew or the many Texas Techs who have joined a multitude of others in furthering the progress of aviation. ■

