

On a Wing



Sailplane and glider manufacturer William Hawley Bowlus began designing this flying wing glider, the XCG-16, in February 1942. It was a departure from the usual single-fuselage design of American gliders and introduced a twin boom. An early test flight of a full-scale model proved disastrous when it became unbalanced from weighted bags that were not tied down—the pilot and several passengers were killed.

Despite this, Hawley's General Airborne Transport Co. received a contract in November 1943. The first glider was delivered six months late and at three times the cost estimate. The front of its wing opened like jaws, with the bottom swinging down to rest on the ground as a ramp. It could carry 42 troops or two howitzers. It had retractable landing gear, a 91.8-foot wingspan, and weighed 9,500 pounds empty.

Testing at Clinton AAF, Ohio, and Orlando, Fla., revealed several shortcomings, such as inadequate crash protection, insufficient personnel exits, and restricted pilot visibility. The Army Air Forces terminated the contract in November 1944.