

AIRCRAFT HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

Part 1 - Pre-War

by

William T. Larkins

Although some of the pre-war National Guard Observation Squadrons claim their unit history dates back to active duty during World War I, this article will start with the dates officially given as the initial Federal Recognition of the unit after World War I, and covers the 21 units in operation up to 1941.

Under this definition the first National Guard air unit to organize was the 109th Observation Squadron, 34th Division, at St. Paul, Minnesota. Four more squadrons were formed in that same year; Maryland, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Indiana. Although the units had been extended Federal Recognition no flying equipment was issued to them pending the erection of suitable housing facilities for the care of government property. In the operation of National Guard units the States furnish the airdrome and hangar facilities, while the Federal Government furnishes the planes and allied technical equipment and provides pay for the Federal caretaker mechanics and all personnel in the units.

During 1922 nine aircraft were authorized for each squadron, with normally half the planes being replaced each year. The units were initially equipped with Curtiss "Jenny" training planes furnished as a free issue from wartime stock by the Regular Army, with the Air Corps being reimbursed in the sum of \$2,000 for each airplane issue to meet the cost of reconditioning the equipment. These types seem to have covered all models from the JN-4D through the JN-6H and JNS-1. The operation of this type extended through 1927 when all aircraft of this type were ordered salvaged as of the 1st of September.

Some of the historical romance of this struggling new organization has been captured in the following fascinating paragraph from the Air Corps News Letter; "It was April, 1925, that brought the thrill of thrills to the 116th Observation Squadron (Washington N.G.). The flying armada, three newly overhauled "Jennies" rumbled into Spokane in one box car. The "Jennies" arrived completely dis-assembled, some bogey to a crew that knew little, if anything more than the fact that the motor and tail skid went on opposite ends of the airplane. Long days followed in which parts were tried here and there to determine where they best fit. Finally, the "Jennies" were moved to the line for test flights by Capt. Easterbrook. They really flew, and Spokane was certain it had an Air Force!

Other "Jennies" followed, and soon the 116th Observation Squadron welded itself into a smooth-running organization. It was a sorry day when orders came, grounding all airplanes unless the personnel wore parachutes. Parachutes had never been issued, and couldn't have been used even if they had been issued. Next came orders requiring that the upper wings of the "Jennies" be redesigned so as to permit the pilots to bail out, and then came the parachutes."

By 1926 the situation had reached a critical stage. In addition to the practical exhaustion of the stock of JN's, training was impeded by the lack of suitable equipment since the JN was not suitable for carrying machine guns, radio, and photo equipment etc. Finally 14 Douglas O-2C's were placed on order.

Before the delivery of these first 14 service airplanes ordered could be completed this type developed certain defects which caused the Chief of the Air Corps to recommend that additional airplanes of this type not be procured for the National Guard. No other observation plane was available for issue or manufacture for the N.G. until January 1927 when the Chief of the Air Corps recommended the procurement of the Curtiss O-11 for issue to the National Guard as standard service equipment. Funds were immediately transferred for the purchase of 35 airplanes of this type with deliveries to begin in September 1927. The National Guard had well over 100 JN's in good condition but as they were a wooden airplane, and thus more dangerous, all were ordered scrapped. At the end of June 1927 the aircraft status was; 14 service observation aircraft delivered to units; 35 of same being built for delivery in 1927; 46 Consolidated PT-1's on order with delivery to begin in July 1927; and 104 JNS airplanes, all to be salvaged.

All National Guard training was directed toward the development of a well rounded observation unit. Missions such as would be performed in war in artillery observation, infantry contact and liaison, and aerial photography, using radio and other means of communication, are performed under conditions approaching as nearly as possible those to be encountered in actual service. These units also towed targets for AA fire and training AA crews in tracking.

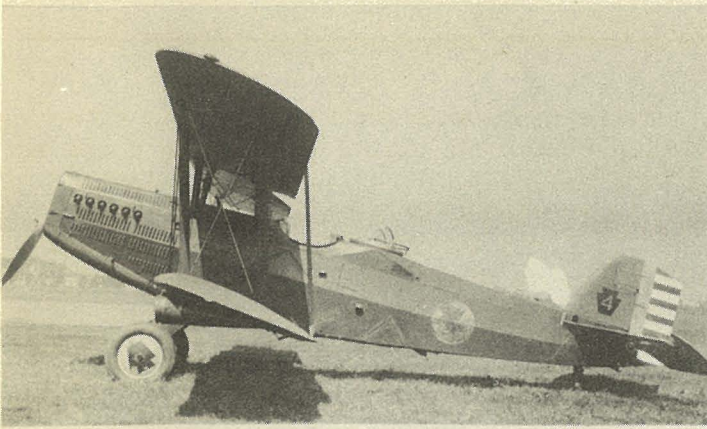
By July 1928 the National Guard was well equipped for the first time to fulfill this mission. Each squadron was equipped with three observation types and five trainers. There were 18 squadrons by this time (see Table 2). The PT-1 was found not ideally suited to the National Guard so the Consolidated O-17 was specially designed to meet their requirements. A total of 120 aircraft were in operation.

In 1930 the allocation was revised to five observation, one basic trainer, and two primary trainers, to each of the 19 squadrons. The Douglas O-38 was introduced in 1931 and gradually replaced the Douglas O-2H's. In addition to 40 O-2H's bought for the N.G., 20 O-2K's were also purchased, with most of these being later modified into BT-1 basic trainers by removing the observers machine gun mount etc., and rebuilding the cockpit area into a dual control trainer. (See photo of this general type on page 29)

In 1934 the title of Militia Bureau was changed to National Guard Bureau, and 53 of the newest and best aircraft of the National Guard were turned over to the Air Corps to assist in carrying the mail. National Guard aerodromes were also used in this famous operation. During 1936 the Douglas O-46A parasol wing successor to the O-43A (eight of which were used by the Texas N.G.) entered the service, and in February 1937 contracts were let for 45 North American O-47A's. This fat three-place observation plane was ordered in quantity as the standard aircraft for all units of the National Guard and 143 were finally built.

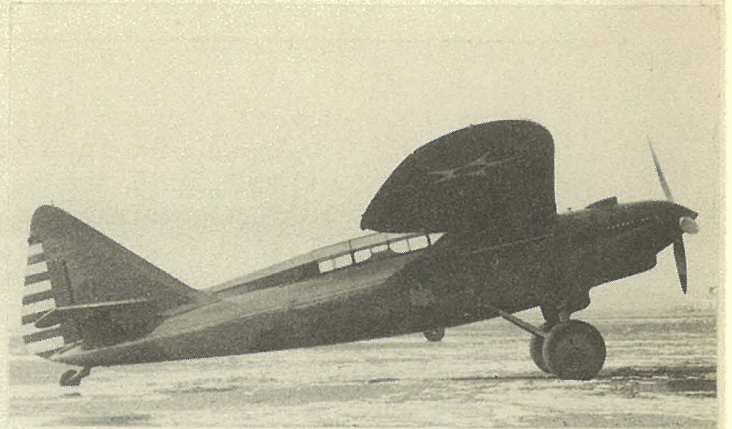
The term "National Guard Air Corps" came into being in 1939 and the authorized status was 10 aircraft per squadron. In 1940 there were 21 squadrons, with Rhode Island and Miss. coming in last, and contracts were let for the purchase of 90 Curtiss O-52's and 87 Stinson O-49's. Delivery was expected in 1941 but due to a change in manufacturing priority brought about by the European War no O-52's were delivered to the National Guard, and only a few O-49's had reached N.G. units by June 30, 1941.

It is interesting to note that Pursuit Units for the National Guard had been planned as far back as July 1940, but the demands elsewhere for aircraft and pilots prevented these plans from being carried out. The realization of the importance of reserve fighter units had been appreciated then, however, and shows the groundwork



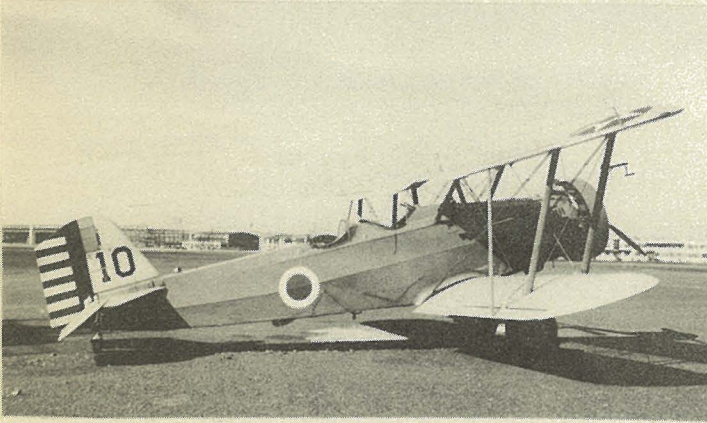
1. Douglas O-2H (PENNSYLVANIA)

Larkins



2. Douglas O-31B (MILITIA BUREAU)

Larkins



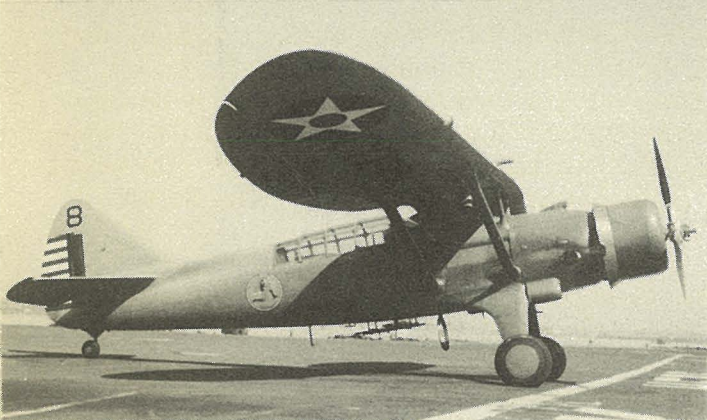
3. Douglas O-38 (OHIO)

H.Levy



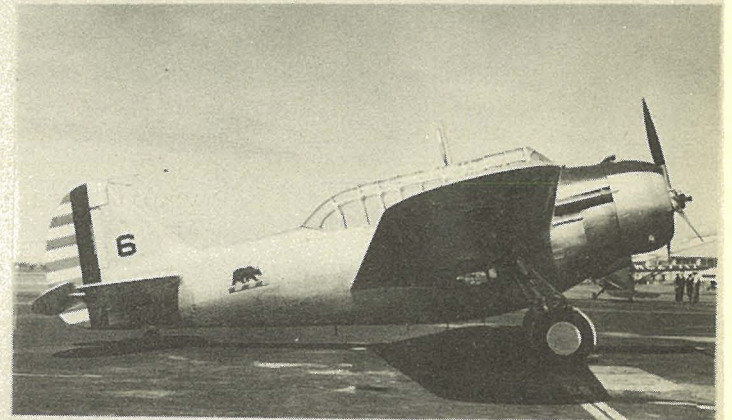
4. Douglas O-38E (MISSOURI)

110th Photo Sq



5. Douglas O-46A (CONNECTICUT)

H.Levy



6. North American O-47B (CALIFORNIA)

Larkins



7. 105th (TENN.)

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8. 102nd (N.Y.)

Larkins



9. 118th (CONN.)

J.Williams

for the post-war Air National Guard development. Much of this planning was done by the National Guard Bureau, formerly called the Militia Bureau, in Washington, D.C. The Bureau maintained and operated individual aircraft with their special insignia on the side (see O-31B photo, page 29), including the one and only Douglas O-31B, Douglas O-38D, and Lockheed YLC-37 "Electra".

The following list gives every known type flown by the National Guard, derived from all available sources. If any member knows of any additions to this list please send them to the editor so that they may be published. The DH-4, SE-5, and Sperry Messenger are planes that were loaned "for shorter or longer periods" during 1925, by the Militia Bureau to the Connecticut National Guard. The O-31B went to the Illinois National Guard following their summer camp in 1935.

Table 1. National Guard Aircraft Types (1921-1941)

Consolidated TW-3, PT-1, PT-3
 Consolidated XO-17, O-17
 Curtiss JN-4, JN-4D, JN-4H, JN-6H, JNS-1
 Curtiss O-11
 Curtiss XO-12 (118th Observation Sqdn.)
 DeHavilland DH-4
 Douglas O-2C, O-2H, O-2K, BT-1
 Douglas O-25A
 Douglas YO-31B
 Douglas O-38, O-38A, O-38B, O-38D, O-38E
 Douglas O-43A (111th Obs Sqdn.)
 Douglas O-46A
 Lockheed YLC-37
 North American BC-1A
 North American O-47A, O-47B
 Northrop A-17A (1 only, probably N.G. Bureau)
 Stinson O-49
 S.E. 5 (Probably Eberhardt)
 Sperry "Messenger"
 Thomas-Morse O-19B

The following is a list of the Squadrons, Divisions, Location, and date of Federal Recognition, of all pre-war units. Each had a photographic and attached medical section. 20 were assigned to Infantry Divisions, one to 7th Corps HQ.

Table 2. National Guard Squadrons (1921-1941)

109	34	Holman Municipal Airport, St. Paul, Minnesota	Jan 17, 1921
104	29	Logan Field, Baltimore, Maryland	Jun 29, 1921
101	26	Boston Airport, Boston, Massachusetts	Nov 18, 1921
105	30	Sky Harbor, Murfreesboro, Tennessee	Dec 4, 1921
113	38	Stout Field, Indianapolis, Indiana	Aug 1, 1921
106	31	Roberts Field, Birmingham, Alabama	Jan 21, 1922
102	27	Miller Field, New Dorp, Staten Island, New York	Nov 4, 1922
110	35	Lambert-St. Louis Municipal, Robertson, Missouri	Jun 23, 1923
120	45	Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado	Jun 27, 1923
111	36	Houston Airport, Houston, Texas	Jun 29, 1923
118	43	Brainard Field, Hartford, Connecticut	Nov 1, 1923
115	40	Griffith Park, Los Angeles, California	Jun 16, 1924
103	28	Philadelphia Airport, Pennsylvania	Jun 27, 1924

Table 2 Continued:

116	41	Felts Field, Spokane, Washington	Aug 6, 1924
154	*	Little Rock Airport, Little Rock, Arkansas * 7th Corps	Oct 24, 1925
107	32	Wayne County Airport, Romulus, Michigan	May 7, 1926
112	37	Cleveland Municipal Airport, Ohio	Jun 20, 1927
108	33	Chicago Municipal Airport, Chicago, Illinois	Jul 1, 1927
119	44	Newark Airport, Newark, New Jersey	Jan 1, 1930
153		Meridan, Mississippi	Sep 27, 1939
152		Hillsgrove, Rhode Island	Oct 13, 1939

One of the most valuable and interesting subjects in connection with the National Guard history is the personal insignia of each Squadron. These were usually painted on the side of the fuselage and serve as the only identification of the Squadron Number, or State, in most photographs. The name of the state was also carried on the underside of the wing, usually the left wing, but in some cases the wording "U.S. ARMY" had not been removed and the wing re-painted.

Three of these insignias are shown on Page 29 to demonstrate their usefulness. We hope to be able to present a full set of these in a future issue of the Journal, done as drawings, but some insignias are still missing. The following two tables will give as much information as is at hand at the moment.

Table 3. National Guard Squadron Insignia (Official description from the Official National Guard Register. Units not listed did not have any insignia listed which would indicate that they had not been officially approved even though they may be in use.)

1. ALABAMA, 106th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 17 August 1929. "A shield divided per chevron reversed or and azure, in base two lion's jantes erased in saltire of the first." (The crest of the Birmingham family, the squadron city, is a pair of lion's paws crossed as indicated. The color combination is that of the Air Corps.)
2. ARKANSAS, 154th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 16 May 1931. "On a white diamond, short axis vertical, an Arkansas Indian warrior in full cry, war paint and two feathers, proper within a bordure of blue bearing twenty-five mullets of the first." (Diamond shape is from the state flag denoting Arkansas as the only diamond-bearing State in the Union; twenty-five mullets indicate it was the twenty-fifth State admitted to the Union.)
3. CALIFORNIA, 115th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 26 December 1929. "On a wreath or and gules the setting sun behind a grizzly bear passant on a grassy field all proper." (California, the Sunset State. The grizzly bear was on the flag of the California Republic. The original white settlement within the state was of Spanish origin and the twists of the wreath are accordingly gold and red.) See Fig. 6, Page 29.
4. CONNECTICUT, 118th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 9 August 1928. "On a bezant a representation of a Connecticut colonial secretary running with the Colony's charter in his left hand proper (hat, coat, and breeches blue; hair, vest, shoes, and stockings black), all encircled with a black amulet broken at the top with white spots, similar to the International code letters F.E.A.

Connecticut Continued: (The emblem represents the Connecticut colonial secretary making haste with the Colony's charter to secrete it in the oak tree, since known as the Charter Oak, to prevent its seizure by the British. It is emblematical of safety, speed, and integrity. The code letters stand for Faithful and Alert.) See Figs 5 and 9, Page 29.

5. MASSACHUSETTS, 101st Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 18 November 1924. "A blue disk edged with gold behind a sea gull in flight." (The circle of blue symbolically represents the blue waters of Boston Harbor which nearly surround the Boston airport, the home station of the Squadron. It also represents the blue skies of Massachusetts the territory covered by the squadron in the air. The gold circle denotes the golden opportunities of the squadron for development, and the white sea gull, a bird of keen vision, superimposed upon the whole denotes the ability of the organization as an observation squadron to observe all activities that take place within sight.)

6. MICHIGAN, 107th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 16 April 1929. "On a disk divided per fess debased argent and sable, outlined of the second, a rising sun from the sinister side of the partition line, over all bendwise the shoulder sleeve insignia of the 32nd Division (a red arrow "having shot through a line") all proper." (No explanation)

7. MISSOURI, 110th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 30 June 1931. "On and over a golden orange rectangle two telescopes saltirewise, small ends up, ultramarine blue, over all a goggled mule head proper." (The colors are those of the Air Corps, the telescopes denote the observation duties, and the mule is the traditional animal of the State of Missouri.) See Fig. 4, Page 29, through the courtesy of Ralph I. Brown.

8. NEW JERSEY, 119th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 6 May 1930. "Two blue figure 4's, back to back, on a golden orange circular background within a blue border." (The shoulder sleeve insignia of the 44th Division.

9. PENNSYLVANIA, 103rd Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 10 April 1931. "On a hurte a Pegasus salient or." (Air Corps colors. It is said that Pegasus flew of his own accord to the stables of Zeus, whose thunder-chariot he has ever since drawn.)

10. WASHINGTON, 116th Obs Sq. Fuselage device approved 6 July 1931. "An ace of spades proper pierced by a stiletto bend sinisterwise, blade and guard gold, handle blue."

Table 4. National Guard Squadron Insignia (Unofficial description)

1. ILLINOIS, 108th. Orange cross on a circular blue background.
2. NEW YORK, 102nd. Monkey with earphones sitting on a cloud. See Fig 8, P 29
3. TENNESSEE, 105th. Rider and rearing horse on cloud, with three stars, on circular background. See Fig. 7, Page 29.
4. TEXAS, 111th. Yellow and orange star on a blue field in circle surrounded by a white and black stripe. Ace of diamonds one half sunk in center of star into outline of the State of Texas.
5. OHIO, 112th. Large orange circle inside of white circle. See Fig. 3, Pg 29.

Continued on page 40. <