

The 1st Aero Sqdn., U.S.A.S.



By JOHN R. WELLS and JAMES J. SLOAN

John R. Wells submitted the photographs shown on these pages, showing the enlisted men of the 1st Aero Squadron. The photo above was taken at Julvecourt on Nov. 12, 1918, that same day as the photograph of the officers of the Sqdn shown on Page 228 of *JOURNAL*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (Fall 1968). The Salmsons had been moved farther apart to accomodate the larger group of men.

A fairly complete roster of the enlisted personnel is available, but indications of names and faces by position in the picture is needed, and anyone with such information is invited to write to the Editor.

The lower photograph was taken in August 1919, upon return of the Squadron to the States, at Mineola, Long Island. Here again, identification of faces and position are required. The inscription on the negative states: "Just back from France and Germany, the 1st Aero Squadron, Capt. P.R. Babcock, Com'd'g. The only regular Army Squadron in the A.E.F." The 1st Aero Sqdn. was to settle at Camp Mills, later Mitchell Field and remain there until Oct. 1940. During its peacetime period the Squadron took part in many maneuvers and also the demonstration bombing of the battleships conducted by Gen. Mitchell.





Lt. William P. Erwin (left) ace of 1st Aero Squadron with 9 e.a. was later lost at sea in a fruitless search during the Dole Race to Hawaii in 1927. (At right) Lt., later Capt. Arthur J. Coyle, C.O. of 1st Aero Squadron from May to October 1918.



During World War I, 1st Aero had more men assigned to its rolls than any other comparable air unit. Of the 135 officer pilots and observers assigned there were 38 on duty with the Squadron at November 11, 1918, and 25 had been lost through flying accidents, killed in action, or wounded and not returned to duty.

The rest, 71 in all, were transferred to other units between February and October because of their experience with the Squadron. Lt. Arthur J. Coyle was promoted to captain and became C.O. of the Obs. Group, 1st Corps. Capt. Oliver P. Echols went to the staff of the Obs. Group (and still later, in WWII, became head of the Northrop Corp.) Capt. Joseph T. McNarney went to the 91st Aero Sqdn, later became its C.O. (and in WWII, head of the giant Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corp.) Lt. Stephen Noyes went to command the 12th Aero Sqdn. Lt. John G. Winant went to 8th Aero, (later became Ambassador to the Court of St. James during Pres. Roosevelt's term). Still others went to staff assignments as the Air Service expanded in the latter months of the War, as well as to form experienced cadres of new squadrons.

1st Aero went overseas in August 1917. There was a long period, from August 1917 to February 1918 when there were no machines available, then a period of training at the observers school until it moved to Ourches in April.

A further long period ensued, during which there was the Squadron's first aerial combat on April 12th, until July, on the relatively quiet Front at Ourches. Finally it was moved into position at Saints to take part in the Chateau-Thierry offensive, the first of America's drives toward Germany. From then until the Armistice the Squadron was on almost continuous duty over the lines on observation duties.

Among the first group of officers assigned to aerial combat duty in U.S. Air Service units were Lts. C.H. Styles, P.D. Meyers, S.W. Thompson, and Bradley Saunders. The unique story of Lt. Cassius Styles was related in the *JOURNAL*, Vol. 9, (1964). Lt. Paul D. Meyers became C.O. of the 1st Aero Sqdn. after Capt. Coyle was promoted. Lt. Bradley Saunders went to the 135th Aero Sqdn, later became its C.O. And, Lt. Stephen W. Thompson became the first officer of the A.E.F. to shoot down an enemy aircraft, on February 5th, 1918. This remarkable account was likewise given in the *JOURNAL*, Vol. 9 (1964), and has been more recently brought up to date in the *Cross & Cockade Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 1968).

