

DESCRIPTION AND WORTH OF AIR SERVICE INFORMATION CIRCULARS

by

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Near the end of World War I the Air Service Engineering Department at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio became a somewhat well organized establishment for the research and development of military aircraft and equipment. This centralization was sorely needed. The various wartime committees, including the Bolling Committee and French and British military missions had recommended the production of certain types of aircraft for training, bombardment, observation, and pursuit and U.S. manufacturers went on an all-out program to produce airplanes. But there was a dearth of real technical information on combat types and equipment. The Engineering Department at McCook Field became the center of development, and has remained such to this day as the modern Wright Air Development Center.

As with any technical organization, reports began to be formulated and flow out to materiel officers. As America's experience grew in the supply and operation of combat aircraft, our own types were brought forth and new items of equipment were invented. By the end of the war the Engineering Department had many projects under way. After the war, when foreign and enemy equipment was brought to McCook Field for evaluation, there was a considerable expansion of effort which continued well into the 1920's. Specifications for the latest in combat airplanes were developed which led to the purchase, ultimately, of aircraft equal to the best.

On January 3, 1920 the War Department published Orders No. 1, which stated, in part:

1. Effective January 15, 1920, the following publications of the Air Service will be discontinued.
 - (a) Information Circulars issued by Engineering Division, McCook Field.
 - (b) Reports of Sections of Engineering Division, McCook Field.
 - (c) Progress Reports issued by Engineering Division, McCook Field.
2. Subject matter issued heretofore in the above mentioned publications will hereafter be issued from the office of the Director of the Air Service under the designation "Air Service Information Circulars". These Information Circulars will be issued as necessity for same arises, and will be numbered serially...
3. When it is desired to have information distributed to the Air Service by Information Circular, the subject matter will be prepared by the office or individual and submitted to the Chief, Information Group, office of the Director of the Air Service, with a memorandum requesting publication. Care will be taken that the information is authentic, and that the technical points involved are correct in every detail. Responsibility for correctness...rests with the office or individual requesting publication.
4. ...
5. ...

By Direction of the Director of Air Service

Wm. F. Pearson,
Colonel, A.S.A.
Administrative Executive

The first Circular to be issued came out on January 16, 1920 and went on to elaborate on the A.S.I.C.'s:

"Officers of the Air Service are invited to forward to this office such matter as they deem advisable and necessary to be published to the Air Service at large for its information and guidance..."

The Air Service at that time had considerably less formality than any present day military establishment would allow. But then, this was a new arm of warfare, and much information was needed. And the benefit of experience of the officers who had had combat experience was very desirable. Indeed, not many officers had stayed on in the Air Service who had actually served in front line squadrons; there weren't many to begin with.

A.S.I.C. No. 1 also gave a brief resume' of the previous aeronautical information bulletins. These have become very rare; the author has seen very few, although there must exist a complete set somewhere, perhaps in the National Archives or the Library of Congress. It stated:

"... A series of similar but less ambitious aeronautical information bulletins were begun in June, 1918 by the Intelligence Section, Airplane Division, Office of the Chief Signal Officer, and terminated with Bulletin 1214, Sept. 4, 1918. No complete index has ever been published to these prior bulletins, which may now be considered more or less obsolete.

These Circulars will also carry on a line of work similar to that conducted by the information section, A.E.F., which published 324 numbers of an "Air Service Bulletin". Indexes were published to all of these up to No. 303".

The invitation to officers to submit information led to the publication of data on many subjects, and a great many of these were historically important. A few of the more interesting titles are:

- No.6 TENTATIVE LIST OF DECORATIONS AWARDED U.S. ARMY AIR SERVICE, A.E.F.
- No.7 ENEMY AIRCRAFT DESTROYED BY THE U.S. ARMY AIR SERVICE, A.E.F.
- No.21 AERONAUTICAL BOOK AND MAGAZINE LIST
- No.37 PERFORMANCE TEST OF U.S. X.B.1.-A WITH 300 H.P. HISPANO-SUIZA ENGINE
- No.40 PERFORMANCE TEST OF THOMAS-MORSE M.B.3 WITH 300 H.P. HISPANO-SUIZA ENG.
- No.58 AERIAL BOMBARDMENT MANUAL, PART 5, OPERATIONS (SERVICE SQUADRONS)
- No.69 AIR SERVICE RESERVE OFFICERS
- No.71 PERFORMANCE TEST OF FOKKER D.VII WITH LIBERTY SIX ENGINE
- No.119 CATALOG OF MOTION PICTURE FILMS AND LANTERN SLIDES
- No.180 FINAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE AIR SERVICE, A.E.F., TO THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Many of the authors of the A.S.I.C.'s have since become famous, as Leigh Wade of Round-the-World fame, Jimmy Doelittle, St. Clair Streett (now Maj.Gen'l, Ret'd), etc. The Circulars were many at first, but tapered off in later years. All those up to No. 566 (July 1926) were Air Service, No. 567 and subsequent were called Air Corps Information Circulars. The last one that the author has record of is No. 709 published on March 1, 1937. A nearly complete set was given to the Durand Aeronautical Museum, 7660 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, by the California Institute of Technology. These have been catalogued as to content, photographs, persons, etc., eliminating much of the purely technical non-historical type of information. Should sufficient interest arise among the membership for this information it may be published later as a special research report. Information leading to the acquisition of the missing numbers of the A.C.I.S.'s or A.S.I.C.'s will be well rewarded.