

THE JARRETT MUSEUM OF WORLD WAR I AVIATION

by

Colonel G. B. Jarrett

I have gotten so many inquiries about the fleet of World War I aircraft which I once owned that I should tell the fraternity of old airplane enthusiasts about them. Many years of collecting had been endured before I understood the story connected with these aircraft.

Starting in 1915 I began collecting war trophies, with a pair of tunic buttons sent me by a friend, then with the French Army at Verdun. As the troops came home in 1919 I collected all the souvenirs I could get, some by gift, others by outright purchase. By the mid-Twenties I had a vast collection. About 1927 I was awarded a splendid collection of machine guns from Raritan Arsenal under the Dominion Act. Among them was a pair which intrigued me, since they seemed mates, and had been modified from ground to aircraft type.

I realized these were British. In the same batch were a number of other types of French and U.S. pattern. These guns gave me the introduction to the technical side of the War in the Air. During the next few years I located and acquired all the variations of machine guns which had been carried into the air and sought out aircraft upon which I wanted to show these guns, how mounted and how used. Gradually a store of data and photographs was accumulated concerning the story of aerial combat. I never ceased to wonder how the intrepid aviator mustered the courage to take his fragile machine into the air and then throw it into violent maneuvers while a machine gun chattered around him. But the machine gun made air combat possible.

In the Thirties World War I aircraft were easier to find than they are today. I established my Museum of World War History on the Steel Pier in Atlantic City in 1930, where it remained for ten years. In the summer of 1931 I acquired a Thomas-Morse Scout. It was flown in to the Atlantic City Airport, dismantled and re-rigged in my display complete with a 1917 Marlin machine gun. A guard on the Pier told me that Clarence Chamberlin had operated an airplane sales service at Hasbrouck Heights. I wrote, and learned that he had a Sopwith "Camel" in a barn at Jersey City (and well nigh blew a fuse). Within the week the "Camel" became a focal point of the Museum. On it were mounted that pair of British Vickers guns I had gotten from Raritan Arsenal.

Later I wrote Roy Brown, in Toronto, for permission to refinish this "Camel" as his had been at the time he shot down the German, von Richthofen. This he gave me, with an autographed photo of himself beside the "Camel" which he flew on that day in April, 1918. Since Brown was standing in such a manner as to partly obscure the fuselage markings I never knew his craft carried two vertical squadron stripes immediately aft of the roundel. I found that out for sure only very recently and for years I had had but one stripe on the "Camel".

With the acquisition of the "Camel", and due to its significance in history, I sought a Fokker Triplane because of von Richthofen's death in one. None being available I decided to build a replica. Through friends I secured some excellent data and after several months I had a replica Triplane, finished in a fire-engine red as von R.'s machine had been, and marked Fl-102/17. I labeled it as a replica but

the public refused to believe me and all summer long I was patching over torn out bits of fabric. It had two original Jenny wheels (actually excellent matches for Triplane wheels), a pair of genuine Spandau guns and a cowling reqorked from a Thomas-Morse cowl. Only part of the rotary engine was made, the three lower cylinders which showed at the bottom of the cowl. The propellor was from a French Gnome engine. Actually, I never liked any sort of replica among my genuine specimens. I retained the Triplane for three years and then broke it up. It had served its purpose and had attracted much attention.

In the Thirties I had a special job in the motion picture industry which necessitated my being in Hollywood each Spring. The lure of Hollywood for pilots and their World War I Crates was always great. Various epics of the air, starting with Paramount's "Wings" in 1926 drew them to the film capitol. "Wings" had featured Dick Grace, the most reckless, and yet the most realistic flier of his day. He cracked up several original Spad VII's and Fokker D.VII's in this first air thriller.

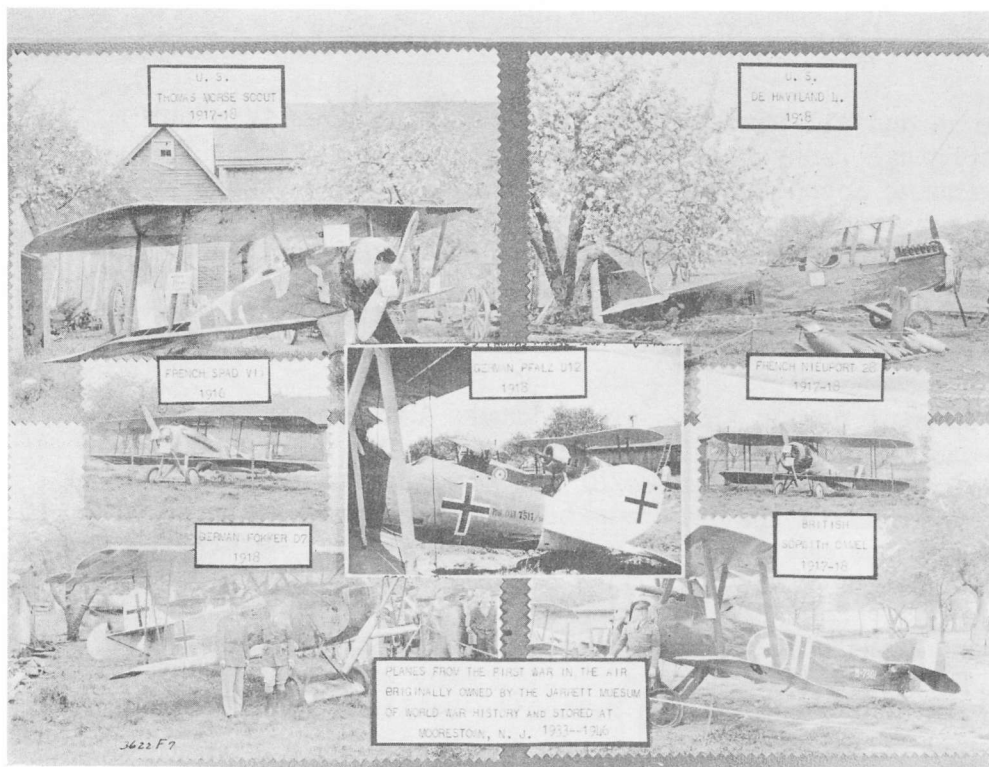
Hollywood sported an unusual character, too, Arigo Balboni, who operated a second hand parts business. To his junk yard there drifted many bits and pieces of aircraft with a tie on history's queer antics. In Balboni's hallowed yard I found the remains of a Spad VII he had obtained from Paramount and which had been in "Wings". I bought it, but quickly shipped it to my Museum, and during the next few months rebuilt it into an excellent display piece. It was refinished in the original colors of a famous French Ace, of Guynemer's "Vieux Charles". The original "Vieux Charles" still hangs after all these years in the Invalides Museum in Paris, where it was brought shortly after he was killed in action. Guynemer had several Spad VII's marked "Vieux Charles"; the last one mounted a 37 mm gun and in this he was killed. He was believed hit by an artillery shell over Poelcapelle, Belgium for his body was never found.

Shortly after the Spad I located a Nieuport 28, then in Florida. I went after it in a truck and hauled it back to the Museum. Although complete it was in dreadful condition. To it I assigned the markings of Edwin C. "Ted" Parsons, then living in Hollywood. He was the only member of the Lafayette Escadrille whom I knew and he had flown both Spads and Nieuports, always silver in color. His initials, ECP were located aft of the Indian head insignia of the Escadrille. His permission to paint it thus was readily given.

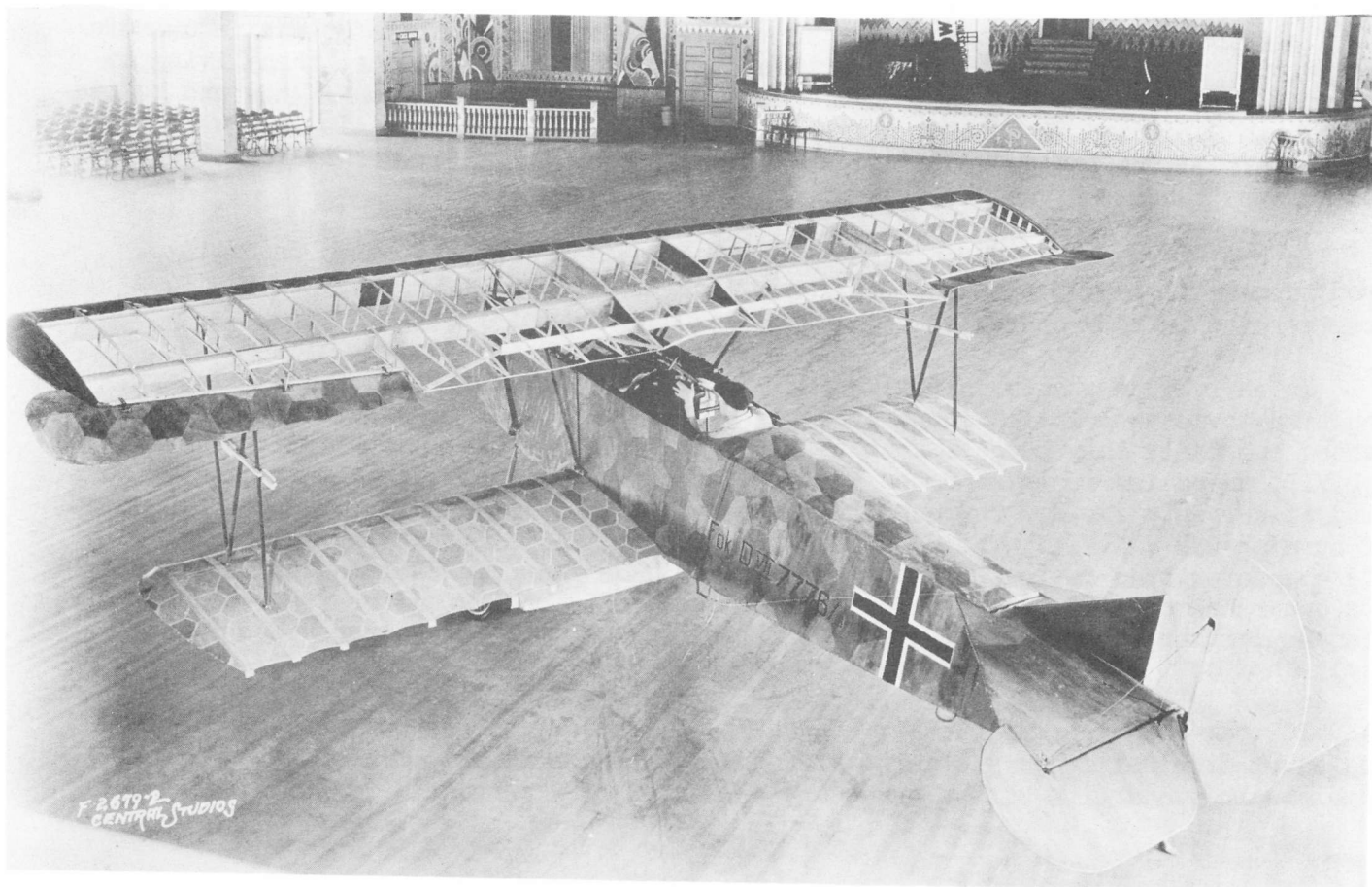
Later I acquired a DH4 at a scrap sale at Raritan Arsenal, quite incomplete. From then until 1939 I obtained bits and pieces for it but my reentry into active Army service in 1939 prevented completion and assembly of it.

In early 1936, while in Hollywood, Garland Lincoln, my friend and a pilot of longtime movie association found a Fokker D.VII. Since the boys out there knew I wanted one badly they had all kept their "eyes peeled". Garland told me he knew of a D.VII, where is, as is, and how is for a mere few dollars. We went in his car to find it out in a field. There on its nose and looking like a pile of rubbish in need of burning was a D.VII. The identification was by the tail standing in the air with its characteristic design. I took it. It had once flown in "Hell's Angels". Later its owner had swapped the Mercedes engine for an OX5, modifying the frame accordingly. Then he further embarrassed the poor D.VII by making it a two-seater. His faulty design had cost him his life some days prior to my purchase of it.

It took me a year to rebuild the D.VII. I managed to get permission to buy copies of original factory drawings through my friends at Wright Field. While not complete they did give me the necessary and critical dimensions. Rebuilding it was



THE JARRETT MUSEUM OF WORLD WAR I AVIATION contained replica and original aircraft, and armament of all types. Shown above are the 'planes on display at Morristown, N.J. in '39. COL. G.B. JARRETT, right, is now Director of the Ordnance Museum, Aberdeen, Md., collects movies and color slides of WWI aircraft. THE FOKKER D.VII, below, less engine, was built from scratch except for the fuselage rear half. The "Camel" was recently rebuilt by Ned Kensinger of Peoria, Ill., and flown in exhibitions around the U.S. by Frank Tallman.



one of my most fascinating museum jobs, and was thrilled to see it take shape as the months went along. I was really put to on this as there was welding and sheet metal work as well as wood and fabric. During the years of searching I found a friend in Karl Ort, of York, Pa. He operated an airplane parts service and I was able to get from him the materials peculiar to the restoration job, and even genuine parts. From him I got the faired tubing necessary for the landing gear and struts. I managed to match the original German size and shape so closely that one could not tell the difference.

The fabric was a stickler. German practice in the latter part of the War was to print the fabric in camouflage pattern before installation. I dyed many yards of fabric by hand in the same pattern and then clear doped it after covering the airframe. The effect was nearly perfect. The finished D.VII was wonderful, an outstanding and treasured possession, even though only a display piece.

The next year I unearthed an Avro 504K, the trainer on which so many R.F.C. men learned to fly. I was in very poor shape and I never did get to rebuild it. Also, that same year I acquired a Spad VII and a Pfalz D.XII. The Spad had many more original pieces than the first one that I felt I could use both to produce a good one. The Pfalz I commenced work on at once. It was very complete; the engine still had the Fokker interrupter gear. The prop was broken, but repairable for display.

The Pfalz had been in several movies and still bore the black and white paint of "Dawn Patrol". This was scrubbed off, disclosing the original brownish dope, not the U.S. olive drab of WWI. Its fabrication date was November 1918 and whether this machine had gotten to a combat mission would likely never be known. At the time I bought this one another was available, and was bought by Buck Kennel, a Paramount property man. He was an ardent antique plane enthusiast and pilot, and he bought it to rebuild and fly. Joe Aiken, a sound engineer at Fox studios and another aviation fan, helped Kennel as I did. We got the Pfalz flyable in the Spring of 1939 and Aiken and I filmed it in the air, in color. Today this is a treasured film in my collection.

During the summer of 1939 I located a Jenny in North Jersey and was about to go get it when War again broke out in Europe. The plans went into "mothballs". I don't know whatever happened to the Jenny. That Fall I built additional sheds and racked up the wings and tail surfaces of all of my planes. The fuselages were also hoisted off the ground and covered. The machine guns were all greased up and stored and I thus hoped to preserve my treasures until after the War when I might one day again enjoy them.

History and time intervened and I did not see the collection again until 1946. Weather and time had taken its toll; leaks developed in the roofing and the wood and fabric was severely damaged. It was a sad reunion. I was then in charge of the Aberdeen Proving Ground and bought a place near there. The next two years were spent in evaluating the collection and deciding which items could be brought to Maryland. The DH4 and Spad were so bad then that I burnt them. The Thomas-Morse Scout and the Avro 504K were sold to Thompson Products Co. of Cleveland. The Thomas-Morse has been refurbished and is on display there, while the Avro is in a warehouse.

I brought the Fokker, the other Spad VII, the Nieuport 28, "Camel" and Pfalz to Maryland. Later the Fokker had to be junked. Shelter had to be provided for all of these and both time and building materials became very dear after the War. In 1948 I added an ME 109 and between 1947 and 1950 attempted to rebuild the four remaining WWI craft. The "Camel" and Nieuport were completed well enough to display but they were

no longer the lovely things they had once been. I had more repair work than I could now accomplish and I didn't have time enough even to arrest decay.

Finally I made the hard decision; I would sell off the Jarrett Museum of World War History, and commenced doing so. It was a problem to get anyone to pay the freight bill for a free gift, let alone pay for the item. Frank Tallman, out in Illinois, bought the Spad, "Camel", Nieuport and Pfalz, and to him goes a great deal of credit for having the "Camel" rebuilt. He now flies it. Many other pieces in my museum had to be eventually reduced to scrap and sold for junk. I couldn't even give it away. This was the fate of the ME 109, which weighed over a ton.

I hated to see this vast collection gradually melt away. Particularly was I sorry to see the airplanes go. I think the reader will agree that these were my most treasured pieces. The War in the Air holds a special place in the imagination. However, aerial warfare would not have been possible had not the machine gun been carried into the blue.

I did retain my still photo and motion picture collection, and I am delighted to show these to anyone. I have made into slides several hundreds of photographs of WWI aircraft around airdromes, on the flight line, singly for identification, and so forth. These are all colored. There are also many slides showing details of mountings of machine guns, bombs and other armament.

After years of searching for genuine motion picture footage it is now possible to edit some really informative reels on famous WWI fliers and their aircraft. In this regard I have been aided very materially by Major Kimbrough S. Brown. He deserves special credit for finding, in Germany, some rare and precious footage on von Richthofen and some priceless Triplane flying sequences. He recovered these during a tour of duty in Germany after WWII, despite the almost lost interest in things of WWI. We have put together a forty-five minute film on von Richthofen, nearly every inch edited from genuine World War I films, which is historically and technically accurate. We are very proud to show this film on request.

SEVERSKY PHOTO PAGE

One of the most interesting and beautiful "civilian" planes ever built was the civil version of the P-35. Several of these are shown on the opposite page, as well as some additional types. Perhaps these photos will stimulate some member to write a complete history of these types for the Journal.

1. Jimmy Doolittle's SEV-PS, c/n 42, built in 1937. Wright Cyclone R-1820-G (850).
2. Unknown model, NR-1390. Details requested.
3. SEV-3M re-built, listed as both 1-X-P and 11-X, c/n 2. P&W Wasp (900). Placed fourth in 1937 Bendix Race piloted by Frank Sinclair. Photo shows Bendix start.
4. Jacquelin Cochran's AP-7, c/n 145, winner of 1938 Bendix. Note landing gear.
5. Same aircraft in 1939 with new inward-folding gear. Dropped out of 1939 Bendix.
6. Frank Fuller's SEV-S2, c/n 43, P&W Wasp R-1830-SC-8 (1200). 1st in 1937 Bendix, 2nd in 1938 Bendix, 1st in 1939 Bendix.
7. Model NF-1 "Navy Fighter One", Wright R-1820-22 (950). Tested in Sept 1937, max speed 267 at 15,200'. Note carrier arrester gear hook. Not purchased by Navy.
8. Rare photo of Fuller's SEV-S2 painted up for movie TEST PILOT. Note purposeful marking out of lettering on cowl and registration change to "R-23655".